

1991

1991

COLLECTORS

1991

DIGEST

1991



ANNUAL

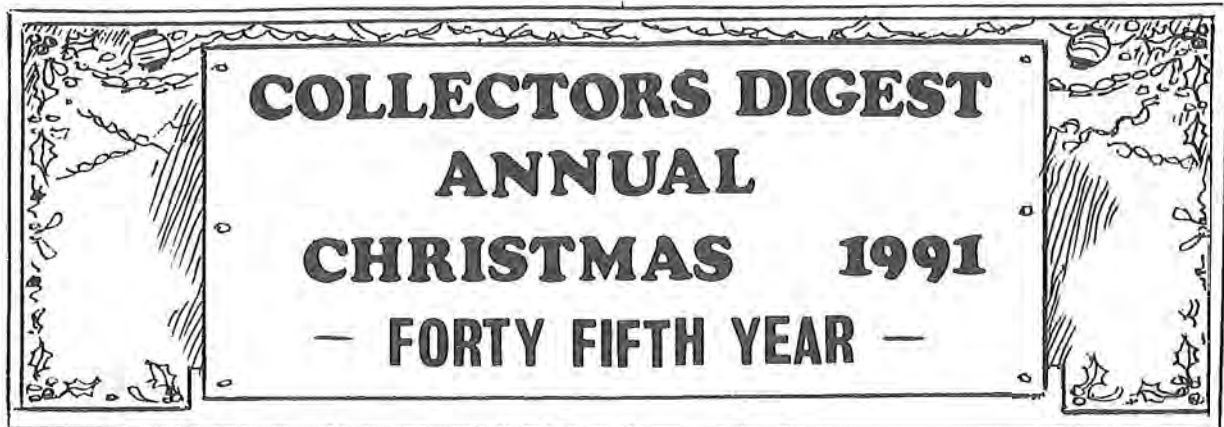


1991

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Happy Xmas



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FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

Once again I have the pleasure of offering you another Annual which, I feel sure, will bring into your homes the true warmth and joy of Christmas, and the spirit of the old papers which we love so much.

As you can see from the heading at the top of this page, this is our 45th Annual - yet still the articles and illustrations come pouring in, and we never run out of things to say about our favourite characters and stories. That they continue to live so resiliently through the pages of the C.D. and its Annual is a tribute to the authors, artists and editors who brought them into being so many years ago. The world was then in many ways very different from what it is today, but the standards and values which they embodied remain undimmed.

This Annual, of course, owes its existence to a dedicated band of contributors to whom I am deeply grateful. I would particularly like to thank Henry Webb for his splendid cover illustration and headings, and Irene Wakefield for providing us with another of her husband Terry's wonderfully exuberant pictures. Thanks are also due to the co-operative staff at Quacks Printers (York Duplicating) for their helpfulness with both the Annual and the monthly paper. I am indebted to my predecessor, Eric Fayne, for the fine traditions he built up in the C.D., which I endeavour to uphold, and I am, as ever, grateful to all of you for your loyal support, kind seasonable greetings and ever appreciative letters.

May God Bless You All - and bring to you and yours a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Peaceful and Prosperous New Year.

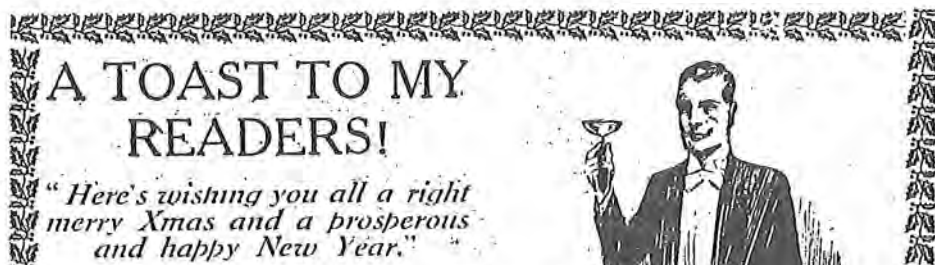
Mary Cadogan

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Probably the most eagerly awaited issues of the old papers were those wonderful Christmas numbers, so it comes as something of a surprise to discover that one of them did not produce a special issue for the festive season every year. This is not to say that Christmas was ignored altogether but *The Thriller* did little more than send its readers a Christmas card for most of its run. Whilst the other papers had special covers with lots of snow, holly and crackers, etc., with further decorations of the same inside with paper chains, trees, puddings, mince-pies and, of course, a turkey, *The Thriller* had the same sort of cover as throughout the rest of the year. Inside the only concession to Christmas was a special border of holly round the Editor's letter with a seasonable illustration above it.



For the first Christmas of the run, No. 46 of 21.12.29 contained the story "Gang War" by J.G. Brandon. We knew this was the Christmas issue because the Editor's letter had a border of holly and was headed "A Toast to my Readers! - Here's wishing you all a right merry Xmas and a prosperous and happy New Year". The accompanying illustration showed the Editor in dinner jacket, glass in hand, toasting his readers. On a table before him was a Christmas pudding, a bottle of wine, a cracker and a dish of fruit. The letter commenced:

"As Editor of our wonder paper, *The Thriller*, this is the first opportunity I have had of conveying my heartiest Christmas greetings to my countless friends and readers all over the world, and I sincerely hope that I shall have many more chances of doing this in future years. From its very first number nearly a year ago, *The Thriller* has broken all records, and now, on its first Xmas, it stands alone in the forefront of all other weekly periodicals... Once more wishing you all the best through the festive season..."

In the following issue, No. 47, containing Robert Murray's story "The Decoy", the Editor makes further reference to Christmas in his letter:- "Now that Christmas is in full swing I am sure you are making the best of this happy festival and I trust that *The Thriller* will take its part in the general excitement in giving you that big thrill which will help you to appreciate the lighter side so much more..."

The next year in No. 98 of 20.12.30, the story by L.C. Douthwaite had a more seasonable title, "The Ghost House", though there was no sign of Christmas on the cover. However, the Editor's letter was bordered by larger holly leaves with berries, and he is joined in a drink at his table by Santa Claus and a very sinister looking, unshaven individual with an automatic pistol on the table in front of him. Also on the table the Christmas fare of last year has been replaced by a box of cigarettes and an ash tray. The letter is headed "A Right Royal Xmas - Here's wishing you all every happiness, prosperity and the merriest yuletide of your life". The letter begins with:-

"This is *The Thriller's* second Christmas and it is with the greatest pride and gratification that I take this opportunity of thanking you all for the magnificent and enthusiastic support which you have all given me since the commencement of this paper. This is the one time of the year when Thrillerites all over the world are united in toasting their favourite paper, a toast which, as Editor of *The Thriller*, I return with every heartiness. My best wishes to you all, and may you continue to enjoy our paper for many years to come."



The Thriller's third Christmas was, if anything, rather less festive than before. In No. 149 of 12.12.31 the story was "The House on the Creek" by Ladbroke Black. The Editor's letter border of holly had shrunk to the small leaves of 1929 and the heading reduced to "A Happy Christmas to You All". Not even a special illustration. Mr. Editor sits with his back to his readers at his desk busily reading and taking no notice of us at all. However, he does write that it "is *The Thriller's* third Xmas" and he extends his heartiest wishes not only to old readers "but all those who have joined the ranks of enthusiastic followers of the paper during the last year. Despite trade depressions etc., *The Thriller* has gone ahead and holds the lead as the principal and most popular 2d weekly... Anyway here's wishing you all the best of good cheer and a right royal time this Yuletide". If the date were not known it could have been written this year it is so topical!

The fourth Christmas brought No. 203 of 24.12.32. "Murder at the Mill" by J.G. Brandon (who graced the first Christmas) was the story and the Editor used those small holly leaves once again around his letter. A simple heading "a Happy Christmas to All Readers" sufficed once more and the letter says *The Thriller* is "going stronger than ever!". It continues about "the time of good will and happy memories ... thank all my readers for their enthusiastic support ... wish them a right royal time ... also thank all those who have sent the astonishing number of personal cards which pile over the desk before me..."

The fifth Christmas offering to readers, in 1933, was "The Riddle of the Rocks" by David Whitelaw in No. 254 of 16.12.33. The small holly leaves seem to have become the regular decoration for the Editor's letter. The heading, however, was far more intriguing than the commonplace greetings used before:- "X Marks the Spot".

"X stands for Xmas, time of good cheer - and, too, marks the spot that means death and cold fear. About the last thing which most of us think about at Christmastime, the gayest, friendliest festivity of the year, is crime and brutal murder. When Raffles and his inseparable partner Bunny Manders drove into Piccadilly on a certain memorable evening only a few short hours before the most astounding Christmas of their adventurous lives and threaded their car through the happy, parcel-laden crowds... he was soon to realise that the big Xmas notices displayed in large letters in the shop windows were to have a significance which was to remind him that X marked the spot for a number of people that festive season. "Raffles' Christmas Coup", the latest story of this famous gentleman cracksman, by Barry Perowne, is the finest Christmas present I can possibly give you..."

A Christmas story at last! It appeared in No. 255 of 23.12.33. The cover shows Raffles and three other people around a police constable lying on the pavement in a snow-storm. *The Thriller's* first Christmassy front cover. The Editors letter contains a heading "A Very Merry Christmas" with a small holly bordered panel for the greeting:- "This is my



COUP
CHRISTMAS
RAFFLES

THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

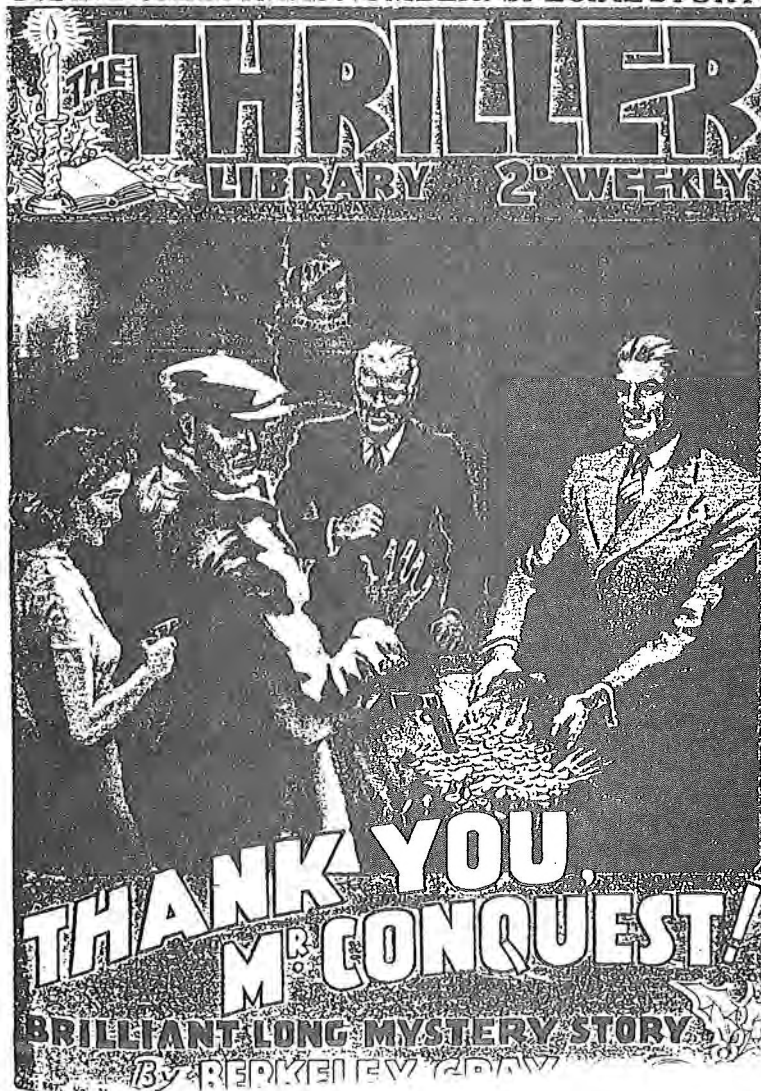


By Robert Pennington

wish to all my thousands of readers ... the fourth Christmas... my pleasure to express... very sincere greetings... gratifying to know... the number... continues to increase", and so on.

The sixth Christmas had a suitably titled story, "The Ghost of Rufus Manners" by Gerald Verner, with three page corners decorated with sprigs of holly, in No. 307 of 22.12.34. The Editor enjoying a pipe at his desk is surrounded with the larger holly leaf border. The letter has become the "Editorial Chat" and is headed by "The Compliments of the Season". The greeting is printed in Gothic lettering beneath his picture. This year he included his staff in the greetings to readers - "...with the greatest pleasure ... the Editor and his staff ... wish every reader ... the happiest of holidays", and, of course, the usual "right royal time". This panel may possibly be a year late in arrival at the printers as it specifically mentions that the greetings are for *The Thriller's* fifth Christmas. But the Editor also got it wrong last year! However, "we have made a special effort, too, to see that *The Thriller* does its share in contributing towards the happy occasion". In No. 308 of 29.12.34 Capt. Dack turns over a new leaf in "The Voyage of Terror" by John Hunter, and The Saint is on the war-path in "The Treasure of Turks Lane" by Leslie Charteris. A bumper number indeed but not a Christmas double number with only 24 pages.

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER! SPECIAL STORY!



The year 1935 saw *The Thriller's* seventh Christmas. Anthony Parsons contributed "The House of Bakry Bey" to No. 359 of 21.12.35. The Editor had splashed out with a brand-new large size holly leaf border with lots of berries. A pipe smoking picture headed the return to the letter format. "My Dear Readers" are wished a Merry Christmas and "all those good things you wish for yourselves." He suggests that "we forget all our worries, political and otherwise... but when you have finished with the jollifications and feel too tired to do anything else except sit down - well that's where *The Thriller* comes in to entertain you ... So in the hectic round of seasonable shopping don't forget *The Thriller* or you may be sorry". The following issue did carry a border of the small holly leaves but no mention of Christmas.

"The Double Crosser" by Anthony Skene appeared in No. 411 of 19.12.36 for the eighth Christmas. The

Editor's letter was now spread over two columns printed in enlarged type with a strip of holly leaves top and bottom. The greeting "...wishing you all a Very Happy Christmas. If you can't have all the good things you would like, I sincerely hope you will get far more than you anticipate..." comes from authors, artists and staff this year. The next two issues also include the two strips of holly top and bottom.

In No. 464 of 25.12.37 the Editor has but one strip of holly at the top of his letter. The greeting is the same as last year with the addition "Prosperity is in the air, and I sincerely hope you will all get a good slice of it during the festive season". The ninth Christmas also gave the next week's story title a border of holly on the back page.

The tenth Christmas of *The Thriller* run saw the story "A G-Man Comes to Town" by Walter Edwards in No. 516 of 24.12.38. This issue had holly leaves round five small panels of titles, announcements, etc. as well as the Editor's letter. He wishes his readers "A Merry Christmas" and "The Compliments of the Season" continuing:- "Well here we are again - Christmas on top of us! How time flies! But what does it matter if you can keep young?" followed by the same wishes as in previous years. Holly bordered panels and strips appeared the following week also.

The eleventh and last Christmas was the best Christmas of all because, wonder of wonders, at last *The Thriller* had produced a "Grand Christmas Number!" No. 567 of 16.12.39 had a special Christmassy cover with sprigs of holly and a candle lighting the pages of a book too. The story "Thank You Mr. Conquest", with "Trouble came at Christmas..." beneath the title, was written by Berkeley Gray. The Editor was on holiday this Christmas - there was no letter to his readers - but the greeting panel of "...A Merry Christmas" with his small holly leaf border showed he was still thinking of us. The next week's issue completely ignored Christmas. Dated 23.12.39 too! But No. 569 of 30.12.39 carried the story "Happy Christmas Crooks" by Berkeley Gray. The cover was headed "35,000 words of Merry Christmas!".

So at long last *The Thriller* did get around to having a special Christmas number. Sadly the run ended five months later, but, had it continued, who knows what splendid Christmas numbers it may have produced having at last mastered the trick of producing two specially Christmassy issues in three weeks. I wonder if the Editor being on holiday had anything to do with it?



A Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year to Collectors everywhere especially to Eric and Mary, Editors, Collectors Digest, past and present from
STUART WHITEHEAD, HYTHE.

Greetings to all Old Boys' Book Collectors from
THE WHITERS - BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

Sincere Wishes for Xmas and the New Year to you all.
JIM COOK

Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to London O.B.B.C. and Friends everywhere.
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GREYFRIARS VIGNETTES

BY EDWARD BALDOCK.



THE IMPOSITION - A GREYFRIARS LEGEND

Yuletide has always been the traditional time for self-respecting ghosts and spectres to perform their disturbing rites, although I believe there are some dedicated wraiths who operate throughout the year irrespective of the season, drifting through closed doors and solid walls with a fine impartiality, the while clanking chains and groaning with equal fervour.

The following little vignette is strictly not a ghost story at all, yet would seem to fit well into the Yuletide spirit. Its further relevance lies in the fact that it is a Greyfriars legend. It is not unusual that such an ancient foundation should accumulate around itself over the centuries a fund of stories and legends - the authenticity of many, perhaps, a trifle suspect: hearsay passed down orally, being enriched in the process and not a little elaborated upon. But this little 'legend' possesses certain documentary evidence to bolster its authenticity, although it has been virtually lost to all but the most meticulous researcher. Even Henry Samuel Quelch, that keenest of students, does not refer to it in his celebrated history. In some deep recess hidden away in the voluminous archives of the Grey Friars lies the dismal record of a junior boy (whose name has been carefully obliterated from the original record) who obeyed the injunctions of his Form Master only too literally - with tragic results. This episode has now assumed the status of a legend. Without reference to the scanty records, it would be difficult to 'date' this unfortunate incident. Handed down with the tale is a reference to stage coaches leaving the village of Friardale for the greater world beyond, which might suggest a period in either the Seventeenth or Eighteenth centuries (a somewhat wide area of conjecture).

The legend runs thus. At the termination of a certain Winter term, on the last afternoon in fact, when all the boys - and Masters - were looking forward with varying degrees of anticipation to the Christmas holiday, a certain youth in a lower form (the equivalent of the later-day Remove) committed some minor infringement of the school 'Laws' which were more harshly observed in those days. He was severely reprimanded by his Form Master and in addition was given an imposition of no less than five hundred lines - this on the last day of term - "I must obey the injunctions and behests of my Form Master". The boy was further ordered to remain at his desk in the Form-room until being dismissed by the Master. Our junior, a rather timid youth, had - perforce - imbibed the gospel of discipline together with all the fearful consequences of failing to do so from infancy, being lectured constantly by a stern yet kindly parent who saw success in life only through blind adherence to obedience. Thus did he develop an equally unquestioning acquiescence to the commands of his seniors, which proved to be his undoing.

This youth, having no great predilection for corporal infliction, which was nothing if not drastic in those far off days (six from Mr. Quelch scientifically 'laid on' in later times being, by comparison, a mere bagatelle) decided to obey his Father's injunctions to the letter (to the parent's eternal sorrow). In terms of discipline these were harsh days at Greyfriars and other Public Schools, it being enforced with the strictest severity under the impression that it was to the boys' ultimate benefit, that it stiffened their characters. "Makes men of them you know", was the generally accepted concept.

Remaining behind after his class-mates had joyfully closed their books for the last time and boisterously left the form-room, he toiled at his lines in the gathering gloom of the wintry afternoon while listening to the distant sounds of laughter and the chatter of fellows

busily packing their trunks and bags, preparatory to leaving the following morning for the holidays.

The noise and bustle gradually abated, and finally the house became silent as the boys and then the Masters retired to bed. And still our hapless junior remained at his desk awaiting the order of dismissal. The simple, yet appalling, fact was that the Master, in the hustle of Term's end, had completely forgotten the boy he had bidden to await him in the Form-room. (Masters are but human and do indeed have lapses of memory at times.) Thus it was that the boy, now extremely hungry and not a little frightened, remained as instructed at his post. Through the long still watches of the night while cold shafts of moonlight moved imperceptibly over the empty desks and along the wall, the boy sat crouched in the shadows, cold, tearful and beginning to become not a little panic-stricken. He was certainly quite forgotten by his Form fellows, but determined still to carry out his Master's final instructions: to remain until he was dismissed.

This unfortunate lad's parents were both sojoined in India, the far side of the world in those days. His Father held a not unimportant post with 'John Company', and was in the process of accumulating for himself a considerable fortune by private trading aside from official business, such being the happy custom before 'John' was absorbed into the Crown. Thus our poor Greyfriars fellow usually spent his vacations with a distant, and not over accommodating, Uncle in Yorkshire, on those occasions when he did not stay on at Greyfriars under the care of a kindly yet much occupied housekeeper. His nonappearance at his Uncles' 'place' was not unduly commented upon or thought about. Therein lay the seeds of tragedy.

The school buildings slowly emptied the following day as contingents of fellows left by a series of coaches to points where other stages would be taken to the four corners of the country. Our Form-master, together with the rest of the staff, had packed his bag, smoked a last pipe, raked out his fire, closed his study door and left with (unhappy man) a clear conscience, thinking he had done his bounden duty for yet another term, although in fact he was leaving a member of his form still crouching at his desk awaiting the word of release. At last the great school building was silent, as silent as an empty house can be, with all doors locked, and at the close of the short Winter's day it soon became lost in deep shadows and darkness.

Thenceforth nothing is recorded of this strange situation until after the Christmas holidays and well into the month of January, when term commenced once more. A day or so before this, the porter proceeded on his rounds, unlocking the various classrooms and dormitories in readiness for the influx of boys for the new term. He was horrified when, upon opening a Form-room door he saw sitting yet at his desk a skeletal cadaver with its skull resting on bony hands. Before it lying on the desk were a few sheets of curling paper containing the fatal 'Impot'. He had received his final dismissal with a vengeance.

Thus ends this sombre glimpse into the past, an old, unhappy incident recorded for posterity by an unknown hand. The archives render no further details. It may be well to let the gathering dust of time obliterate the incident. Perhaps there is a moral to this sad little tale - I am not sure.

* * * * *

REWARDS FOR FORTITUDE

It was warm, there was no doubt about that. It was high summer and Friardale Lane shimmered in the intense heat of a still August afternoon. Harry Wharton and Co. and William George Bunter moved leisurely along, the Co. discussing the chances of Kent against Hampshire in the coming County cricket match, and Bunter, as was his wont, rolling *en route* for Friardale and Uncle Clegg's little store where were to be found those cooling delights so welcome on a warm afternoon.

There were other arrivals, or rather permanent residents, who lost no time introducing themselves to Bunter; indeed they welcomed him as one would a long lost brother. Not the faintest suggestion of a breeze stirred the leafage of the ancient overhanging elms. In the humid shade beneath the trees there were, disporting themselves, myriads of flies, many of which were large and persistent. This was evident by the swirling effect they made as they formed a pernicious halo round Billy Bunter's perspiring fat head, clouding his features in

a mist of humming and buzzing activity, paying particular attention to his fat ears and nose. Flies of all species had long held a predilection for Bunter's person and usually paid assiduous attention to these two outstanding features. It was unpleasant, in fact it was quite maddening on a warm afternoon, but it remained a sad and seemingly permanent fact of life.

In their buzzing and gyratory activities they seemed not to pay much attention to the other fellows. Perhaps it had something to do with the almost ever present traces of jam and doughnut crumbs to be found adhering to Bunter's fat countenance and waistcoat; traces of previous meals and snacks. Small details these, but pointers to the Owl's popularity with the insect world along Friardale Lane and the tow-path on warm humid days. They seemed to look forward to his advent - indeed they appeared to anticipate him, one might almost imagine them celebrating his distant appearance by massing in ever thicker clouds in order to give him a truly royal welcome - especially on hot and humid days.



Bunter swatted, slapped, grunted, groaned, and finally panted, "I say you fellows can't you do something about these beastly flies?" Bob Cherry, a few paces ahead, paused and mopped his brow. He too was warm, he too was being assailed by clouds of flies, be it noted, however, of far less density than those assaulting the Owl.

"Now you fellows", he said in mock-severe tones which brought the other members of the Co. to a halt. "Didn't I remind you to be sure and bring along a fly-whisk apiece to keep Bunter comfortable. It's jolly selfish and thoughtless of you I think..."

Bunter grunted. "Beasts, I say, Oh Lor!" Which seemed to have remarkable little effect on the swirling masses round his head. His podgy ears seemed to hold an irresistible attraction for all the winged insect population in the immediate vicinity of Friardale Lane. They hovered lovingly in black clouds around those protruding appendages, ever and anon sailing gracefully in to settle for a moment, and frequently staying long enough to sample their texture, much to the Owl's exasperation as he slapped and groaned along behind Harry Wharton and Co. It may have been that the grey area behind Bunter's ears did not receive the ablutionary attentions which ought to have been their due - who knows? Be that as it may, with the prospect of cooling drinks and sticky comestibles in the offing the Owl was nothing if not a sticker himself. In sober fact, in this respect he almost out-rivalled his winged tormentors.

Iced lemonade, cakes and jam-tarts at Uncle Clegg's in Friardale were the spur. For such riches and rewards, especially as the other fellows were paying, Bunter would have braved all the less pleasant aspects of the Brazilian jungle, with those of Java and Sumatra thrown in. It was beastly, it was not what a gentleman should be called upon to endure, but it was worth the effort. The vision of little tables beneath the shade of the tree outside the village store kept Bunter going with the true spirit and tenacity of the old pioneers. One could lounge quietly and imbibe iced drinks, and watch the world of Friardale go by in voluptuous comfort. The odd village worthy, a smocked ancient or so and, adding dignity to the scene, the spectacle of P.C. Tozer, the local arm of the law, resplendent in tightly buttoned uniform as decreed by an unrelenting officialdom. Perspiring freely, yet efficient to the last degree, giving no concessions whatsoever to the prevailing climatic conditions.

It would be pleasant. Bunter would relax his weary, fat, little limbs and for the nonce forget the winged plagues of Friardale Lane - until the return journey. His philosophy had ever been 'live today' let tomorrow see to itself. It had been rather horrendous attaining the 'gates of paradise' but, once there, lemonade and succulent provender made it all worth while. What if Horace Coker, together with Potter and Green did occupy the adjacent table. It was a free country - but was it? Judging from the loud and imperious tones emanating from Coker it would appear that this particular spot of the green isles was the sole property of the Greyfriars Fifth Form, democracy being blown to the four winds at its noble behest. However, the five stalwart and sturdy fellows accompanying Billy Bunter bade fair to preserve the status quo successfully, although poor Uncle Clegg (as ever the outsider falling victim to much of the 'flak') was the recipient of certain concise and measured remarks as to whom he should allocate his tables.



There passed vaguely through the minds of the Co. the interesting question: who presented the greater perniciousness to their creature comfort that balmy afternoon - Coker of the Fifth or the Flies of Friardale Lane? It seemed likely to be a close run thing.

UNCHANGING WORLD

Visualize a cold and windswept quadrangle with an icy rain beating on the windows of those Form-rooms and studies facing the prevailing elements. The old elms, as yet retaining a few reluctant leaves, are tossing and creaking as though protesting against such treatment. The seats surrounding their ancient trunks are empty, damp and uninviting. The gravel path along Masters walk, scene of so many philosophical and learned conversations in the dog-days, is draughty and deserted - bleak in the extreme. Mr. Prout has exchanged Masters Walk for the more comfortable confines of the Common-Room on the 'floor' for his continuing pontifications (together with a glass of good sherry and a biscuit). Mr. Quelch is, no doubt, warming his angular limbs by a glowing fire in his study, perusing,

for a delightful ten minutes or so, his favourite Virgil, in the original text, of course, or, happiest of occupations, conning over the preparatory notes for the latest chapter of his monumental work, the 'History of Greyfriars'.

Gosling's Lodge by the gate presents a very sealed appearance. The door is fast shut, and the windows tightly closed and curtained; flickers of light on the walls of his tiny parlour would suggest that he has a goodly fire ablaze, for do not ancient joints give untoward twinges and spasms in this damp and insalubrious weather? Anyone entering this cosy sanctum from the icy outside would become aware immediately of an all pervading aroma of spirits.

Here is Greyfriars on a murky, grey Autumn afternoon.

Harry Wharton's study, No. 1, in the Remove passage presents a cheerful enough appearance. The fire is falling in upon itself in a warm glow. The table, book-stewn, is awaiting its complement of fellows for 'prep'. At the moment the Famous Five are seated round the fire discussing by-gone battles on the soccer field, and the Rookwood match which is in the offing. Strategies are being formulated and complicated moves planned, all with the intention of thwarting Jimmy Silver and Co. from achieving their accustomed stride on the great day. The study door opens without the preliminary courtesy of a knock, and a pair of large spectacles glimmer in. For a moment the football spell is broken.

"I say you fellows..."

"Roll away barrel."

Bunter's reaction to this polite request is to enter the study and close the door.

"Beasts, I say have you heard old Quelchy has..."

Long experience has taught the Famous Five that the shortest and most efficient way of dealing with such a situation is to give the fat Owl his head and then to hurl him forth, helping him along with a lunging boot (or two), a cushion, or, if handy, a half loaf of bread.

Here is a scene picked at random and instantly recognised. It has occurred countless times over the years, and hopefully will continue to perpetuate itself far into the future. It is of such stuff that 'Magnet' dreams are made. It is couched in language we would expect to hear from fellows dealing with a contemporary of Bunter's calibre; it holds all the attributes of being developed, with humour, into good clean adventure bearing none of the horrific undertones so unhappily present in much of today's 'enlightened' entertainment.

A comforting and satisfying picture, warm and secure with an atmosphere of solid permanency. Within, calm. Without, the elements having their undisputed sway. There may be a great deal less than perfection in that old world, but there are also many 'pockets' of extreme well-being also. The world of Greyfriars represents to us - the observing and discriminating few - a haven of suspended tranquillity, also in no small degree, of earthy commonsense. When we recall that this most desirable of worlds, together with its unforgettable characters, was ours for the princely sum of two-pence per week, I think we may, without reservation, regard ourselves as very fortunate beings indeed. Where, in this 'wonderful' present day with all its alleged 'advantages' and its supposed superiority over the 'old days', may we find such reading facilities as were available to the young people until the advent of the second world war.

After then, 'progress' saw fit to terminate the sources of much of our reading enjoyment. Even so, continuity is not impossible if one is determined to keep alive (*Dum vita super est ene est*) that old world of youthful fiction and adventure. It may yet continue and flourish in the hearts of those who retain some elements of romance. As A. Conan Doyle so aptly put it:

"To the boy who's half a man,
And the man who's half a boy."



Mr. Quelch at work on his famous "History of Greyfriars."

Another World

Come, let us sing of famous men
Of famous journals too.
Try to recall an era when
Our heroes were 'True-blue'.
The 'Magnet', 'Gem' and 'B.O.P.',
The 'Union Jack' and 'Chums',
Were quite the best we all agreed
'Neath cold or tropic suns.
In shady Kentish lanes we'll seek,
And we are sure to find
Someone who will of Greyfriars speak,
An 'Old-boy' of our kind.
Down Friardale lane to the rippling Sark,
Along the tow-path spinning,
The 'Famous Five' out for a 'lark',
At Coker's plight are grinning.
These shades are from another age
Pale shadows 'neath the sun,
Yet by them our own age we gauge,
Our grey-days and our fun.
I see in retrospect once more
The works of Andrew Wood,
And memories flood back by the score
Of exploits strange - yet good.
Great stories of the Spanish Main,
What tales of derring-do,
Enhancing good old England's fame
On land and ocean blue.
Here Henty's stand in serried ranks,
Each book in epic vein,
And let us give him our best thanks,
Long may his memory reign.
These joys are planted in the past,
By them our thoughts were founded.
They are traditions which will last
In them our hearts are grounded.
Thus in our age we're young again
Our minds are fresh and green,
In early joys our youth regain,
These things we 'Boys' have seen.

(E. BALDOCK)



The World of William

By JEFFREY RICHARDS



(Editor's Note: This is a transcript, provided by Professor Jeffrey Richards, of the talk he broadcast on B.B.C. Radio Three last year. We are delighted to have the opportunity of publishing it.)

For Williamites the world over, 1990 has been a year of celebration. It is the centenary of the birth - on the 15th November 1890 in Bury, Lancashire - of Richmal Crompton Lamburn, who, writing as Richmal Crompton, created one of the mythic figures of popular literature - William Brown or Just William.

The celebrations have been extensive and impressive - an exhibition at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood and the unveiling of a statue of the character that her publishers called "the most popular boy in fiction", a short season of William films at the National Film theatre, a BBC Radio Cassette featuring Martin Jarvis' splendid readings and a busy programme of publishing, including a facsimile reprint of the original "Just William" book, a vastly informative and authoritative "William Companion" edited by Mary Cadogan and a collection of some of William's hitherto uncollected philosophical musings from the pages of "The Happy Magazine".

It all constitutes an enormous outpouring of affection and admiration for both the author and her creation, whose appeal is as fresh and undimmed now as it was when he first burst upon an unsuspecting world in 1919.

Richmal Crompton succeeded in mastering the short story form and in 38 volumes over 50 years she developed a distinctive and self-contained universe, through which to comment on society, the family, childhood and human nature. Her work is best described as "social comedy" and she occupies a position socially and culturally that is midway between P.G. Wodehouse and Frank Richards. The Wodehouse world encompassed West End Clubland and the country house weekend; the Richards' world centred on the timeless, ritualized life of the boys' public school. Miss Crompton's world was essentially suburbia, the world that she observed from windows of the Glebe, Bromley, the house she built from the profits generated by her famous creation. There was a commuting father who was "something in the city", a placid mother who when she was not darning, participated in the social rituals of suburbia; and a comfortable house, The Hollies, serviced in pre-war years by two maids, a cook and a gardener, but reduced after the war like many a middle class household to a daily help. Round the corner were the Lilacs, the Laurels, the Firs, the Laburnums and Beech View.

But the three worlds overlap. All three are located in the mythified, undifferentiated Home Counties and feature a common cast of supporting characters: choleric retired generals, do-gooding vicars, absent-minded professors, domineering cooks and assorted spinsters with bees in their bonnets and bats in their belfries: the dogloving, the boyhating, the busybody, the scatterbrain, the shortsighted, the longwinded. But there is more. Like Bertie Wooster, William is troubled by aunts. He also has to put up with a soppy elder brother Robert who is forever mooning about some girl or other, and a sister Ethel who has all the brisk, no nonsense superiority of a true Wodehouse "gel". Similarly, William is the leader of an archetypal boy gang, the Outlaws, Ginger, Douglas, Henry and Jumble the Dog, serving perhaps as a junior version of Harry Wharton and the Famous Five of Greyfriars, though William operates almost totally outside school.

The stories frequently deploy those old standbys of comedy - the misunderstanding, the coincidence and mistaken identity. But they unfold against the lovingly evoked



suburban world of regular meals and formal visits, garden fetes and flower shows, of good works and improving activities. The world of William is above all a world of societies, in which the middle classes expend their energies, their enthusiasms and their spare time - ranging from the Amateur Dramatic Society, the Literary Society, the Archaeological Society, the Debating Society, the League of Nations Society to the Brass Rubbing Club, the Flower Arranging Club, the Residents Association, the Women's Institute, The Church Lads Brigade, the League of Perfect Health, the Cricket Club, the Tennis Club, the Bowls Club and the Rugby Club. They are all observed with an amused affection by Miss Crompton but she extracts endless and rather more merciless fun at the expense of faddists, cranks, proselytizing enthusiasts who allow their hobbies to take them over and who seek to convert the rest of society to their beliefs - so the wilder fringes of such groups as vegetarians, birdlovers, spirit-

ualists, total abstainers, literary bohemians, self-sufficiency advocates and fresh air fiends all suffer from the fascinating attention of William.

People often think of the world of William as being a timeless interwar period but while William and his family never changed, their environment did as Miss Crompton faithfully reflected the cultural changes over the 50 years of her writing life. William lived

on to the age of television, moon rockets and pop singers. But one of the most fertile sources of inspiration was the Second World War. To read the wartime Williams is to be transported back to the suburban Home Front, but a home front observed from a child's eye view, just as John Boorman observed it in his autobiographical film "Hope and Glory". For the Outlaws the war is fun, a glorious adventure providing new heroes and new experiences. Evacuation, for instance, is seen in Miss Crompton's words as "a matter of games, entertainment, unlimited food of unusual kinds and a



glorious crumbling of the whole fabric of discipline". William, as anxious as anyone to do his bit, creates predictable mayhem against a convincing background of digging for victory, holidays at home, salvage collection, the Spitfire Fund, clothing coupons, evacuees, the black out, A.R.P., land girls, the Home Guard, and the Brains Trust, all the reference

points of a past era perfectly preserved for posterity as they were occurring. Ethel joins the A.T.S., Mrs. Brown is in her element with "Make Do and Mend" and Suburbia rallies round, diverting its energies to the national effort.

But at the centre of Miss Crompton's universe stands William himself, inspired in part perhaps by Booth Tarkington's Penrod, in part by Miss Crompton's brother Jack and later her nephew Tommy and in part by her own understanding of the child mentality. She gave her own summing up of his character in an article written in 1962:

'He has been called "the bad boy of fiction" but he is not so black as he is painted. His insatiable curiosity may put the refrigerator out of action, immobilize the Hoover and fuse the electric lights but it is the spirit of the inventor and pioneer that inspires his work of destruction. He explores unknown stretches of country, plunging into ditches, climbing trees and doing battle with his enemies and comes home a sight to break his mother's heart, but his courage and initiative are the stuff of which heroes are made. He has sudden impulses to "help" his family. He "helps" to wash up and leaves a trail of broken crockery in his wake, he "helps" to bring in the coal covering face, hands and the kitchen floor; he "helps" bring in the deck chairs becoming inextricably entangled with each, he puts in a spot of gardening and no-one can ever use the secateurs again. It is not always easy to remember how laudable his intentions were... There is a theory that, on our way from the cradle to the grave, we pass through all the stages of evolution, and the boy of eleven is at the stage of the savage - loyal to his tribe, ruthless to his foes, governed by mysterious taboos, an enemy of civilisation and all its meaningless conventions. He dislikes little girls, not only because he considers them to belong to an inferior order of being but also because he suspects them of being allies of the civilisation that threatens his liberty. But beneath his tough exterior, he is sensitive, generous and affectionate, though he has, too, a pride that makes him conceal these qualities. You can hurt him desperately by a careless word, but you will never know that you have done so. Moreover, despite his outrageous appearance and behaviour, he has a strong sense of dignity that you affront at your peril.'

Her psychological observation is acute and this coupled with her infallible comic sense, her fertile invention and her precise use of language enabled her to explore this multi-faceted character for 50 years. Writing originally for an adult magazine, she soon also captured a devoted youthful following both male and female. Children recognised in William either a kindred soul or a wish fulfilment figure; parents could relate strongly to the mayhem and embarrassment caused. But above all, to civilised society as a whole, William represented the ultimate free spirit. His preferred occupations - pirate, smuggler, highwayman, Red Indian, his gang (The Outlaws), his natural habitat - the woods, the fields, the lanes, the gardens, the Old Barn - are all part of the same deep-rooted nostalgia for pre-industrial, pre-adult innocence which has inspired the centuries-old idealisations of Robin Hood and Dick Turpin. It is the life of freedom, freedom from restraint and responsibility, from the humdrum cares of everyday life and from the darker drives and psychological complexities of adulthood, but most of all living for the moment, enjoying life to the full under the greenwood tree or out on the open road. Miss Crompton summed it up effortlessly and economically when she wrote: "What'll we do this morning" said Ginger. It was sunny. It was holiday time. They had each other and a dog. Boyhood could not wish for more. The whole world lay before them', or even more succinctly "Everything had gone wrong today. Everything might go wrong tomorrow. But bullseyes still remained."

William's basic philosophy is outlined in his essay "What's Wrong with Civilizashun" from the collection newly introduced by Mary Cadogan, indefatigable keeper of the Crompton flame: "Civilzashun's all wrong and nothing will ever be right till we go back to bein' savages". William's recipe for happiness is thus: to live in a cave rather than a house, to catch and cook and eat your own food, not to worry about the polite rigmarole of good manners or washing your hands before meals or eating with a knife and fork or wearing a collar and tie and certainly not wasting the best years of your life in school: "Learning things that wouldn't be any use to me even if I did learn them when I might be going out with a club, dressed in skins an' fighting everyone I met an' chasin' prehistoric animals over rocks". And as for modern inventions, William thought them vastly overrated: printing (because it produced books you are made to read), telephones (which enable people to ring up and complain to your father about your behaviour) and

photography (which involves you being scrubbed and dressed up and forced to smile inanely).

He lived his philosophy to the full, in his defiance of all the rules of good appearance and good behaviour. "Truculent" is an adjective frequently applied to William. Miss Crompton was well served by her illustrator, Thomas Henry, who illustrated 33 of the books before his death in 1962. He created the visual image of William as indelibly as Sidney Paget did that of Sherlock Holmes or C.H. Chapman that of the other William, William George Bunter, the fat owl of the Greyfriars Remove. Tousled hair, hands in pocket, shoelaces undone, socks hanging down, tie askew, collar sticking up, face grubby, blazer crumpled, cap on the back of head, William was a walking defiance of all the canons of tidiness, the despair of mothers and teachers everywhere.

This was matched by his hostility to school and his contempt for booklearning, which was very low in his order of priorities. When, during the war, they heard of the Beveridge report, William and his chums drew up the Outlaws report which fully expressed their worldview: a 6 point plan which involved having as much holidays as school, no afternoon school, sixpence a week pocket money, no Latin, French or Arithmetic, unlimited free supplies of ice cream, bananas and cream buns, no punishments and staying up as late as you like. The anti-intellectualism gave rise to plenty of the schoolboy howlers that William Brown shared with William Bunter and which gave their creators such amusement, William for instance insisting that Guy Fawkes tried to blow up the Crystal Palace. But when he did fasten on a piece of historical information, this could form the basis of an entire story, as for instance the cumulatively hilarious tale of William and the Outlaws deciding to live like St. Francis and the Franciscans. They call themselves Williamcans, don dressing gowns, call each other St. William, St. Ginger, St. Douglas and St. Henry and try to preach to Brother Cows and Sister Hens before disillusionment sets in.

But this demonstrates conclusively that William's actions always had their own internal logic and were often governed by a strong sense of justice, as for instance, when William is irritated by a local birdlover's plans for Bird Week and delivers himself of a characteristic monologue:

'Birds! I'm jus' about sick of the fuss people make abut birds. Callin' em feathered friends an' suchlike. I jolly well don't see where the friend part comes in. You can't have any cherries in summer 'cause the birds have got 'em all, nor raspberries, nor any peas, nor any gooseberries. An' then they call 'em feathered friends an' such like. A nice fuss they make when we start pinchin' their fruit, but it's alright when a bird does it. Oh, yes, a bird can do jolly well what it likes without anyone sayin' anythin' to it but feathered friend an' suchlike. Talk about gratitude! Feed 'em all winter on coconuts an' crumbs and then soon as we've got a bit of something to eat ourselves they start pinchin' it. Seems to me people'll stand anythin' from a bird jus' cause it's got feathers. Givin' it drinks an' what not. Bird baths and tables an' suchlike. They'll start puttin' out bird chairs for 'em to sit on next an' bird beds for 'em to sleep in. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if they do, the way they carry on. Look at rats. No-one makes a fuss of rats. Jus' cause they've got no feathers and can't fly an' sing an' carry on like birds. Why shunt they have rat baths an' rat tables in their gardens same as they have bird baths an' bird tables? It's not fair, an' I've a jolly good mind to start on rats myself, just to show 'em. They're as good as birds any day.'

So William organises Rat Week with astonishing consequences. But it is the unfairness to rats that stirs him to action and it is this hatred of injustice and desire to right wrongs that leads him also into his consistent bids to puncture pomposity, to deflate self-importance, to undermine tyranny and to expose artifice.

William's distinctive character is counterpointed by alternative models of boyishness: sappy sentimentalized little boys like Anthony Martin, a wicked parody of A.A. Milne's



Christopher Robin, whose mother makes up rhymes about him like "Anthony Martin is doing his sums", or snooty knowalls who parade their booklearning and are often called Claude, or most seriously William's arch rivals Hubert Lane and the Hubert Laneites, sneaks, cheats and pretended goody-goodyes, always trying to do down William and the Outlaws. It is also underscored by the presence of girls which involves William in the eternal battle of the sexes. William clashes regularly with the army of dotty spinsters in the community, but most of all he has to resist the blandishments, tyranny and unboyishness of girls, who in William's view are "soppy and batty and stuck up and stupid - they can't play fair or talk sense". The ultimate incarnation of female guile and interference is the pretty, frilly, lisping 6 year old Violet Elizabeth Bott, who has brought blackmail to a fine art with her unanswerable gambit: "I'll thcream and thcream till I'm thick. And I can".

But what of William's creator? Richmal Crompton would seem to be the antithesis of her creation. A devout Anglican and life-long conservative, a feminist and an intellectual, she was a Classics teacher in Bromley until polio forced her premature retirement in 1923. It left her lame in her right leg but ensured that she devoted the rest of her life to writing. She seems an unlikely candidate to have created the unruly anti-intellectual specimen of eternal boyhood. But what she shared with her creation was an imaginative inner life. William lived in a world of his own imagination, fighting bandits, taming lions, capturing castles, peopling the quiet lanes and orderly back gardens of his home village with all the fantastic adventures and characters dear to someone whose chief reading was sensational fiction like *Ralph the Reckless* and *The Quest of Captain Terrible*.

Although her omnivorous reading was more respectable, Dickens, Trollope, Hardy, Austen, she too lived in a world of her own imagination. She never married, claiming never to have been in love, and described herself as "the last surviving example of the Victorian professional aunt". The two excellent biographies of Miss Crompton by Kay Williams and Mary Cadogan, which neatly complement each other and are essential reading, mine her adult novels for evidence on her attitudes and relationships. But perhaps the key to her is her shyness. No-one who has not experienced it can fully comprehend the agonies of shyness. But it has some compensations. It can stimulate the imagination, allowing the shy person to develop his or her inner world whose destiny they can control and where they can be whatever they wish. It also makes bearable the solitariness which comes with shyness but which is also an essential part of the writer's life. In this, as in so much, Richmal Crompton resembles Frank Richards, whose work she admired. Both earned their livings as professional writers, both loved the classics, both remained unmarried, both had a sense of humour, a love of language and above all a vivid and fertile imagination. Perhaps too both remained at heart essentially the shy, bookish children who had turned to writing in their own childhoods as a means of escape.



What they also shared was the fact that they never wrote down to children. One of the most heartening things about the continuing popularity of the William Books is their language. Unlike the present-day world which sanctions abridgements of children's classics and re-writes books to eliminate difficult words, Miss Crompton used a rich vocabulary which assumed that if a child did not understand a word he would look it up or ask its meaning, thus enriching his own linguistic store. Intellectual subtlety and linguistic aspiration rather than crude lowest common denominator populism characterise her stories where, just to take a few examples at random, children can find such words as epicurean, orthography, basilisk, caustic, domicile, variegated, execrate, decontamination, pariah, temporize, insolvency and finesse.

Curiously like Conan Doyle who wanted to be judged by his historical novels

rather than Sherlock Holmes, Miss Crompton regarded William as less significant than her adult novels, the 41 family sagas and romances that she turned out between 1923 and 1960 and which are now totally forgotten. It is perhaps the inevitable desire of a writer to be taken seriously in a world in which humour or genre fiction are seen as somehow less intellectually worthy than angst-ridden examinations of the human condition. But in the long run perhaps what really counts is the creation of myth for it is the myths which live in the imagination. Miss Crompton can rest secure in the knowledge that she created the definitive 11 year old boy, sufficiently realistic to be recognisable but also stylized into a universal archetype, able to take his place in the great gallery of archetypes that people our collective memory.

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all, especially to Mary Cadogan and Norman Shaw.

D. BLAKE, THAMES DITTON



BRIEF ENCOUNTER

(or THE CASE OF the TWO BLAKES) I

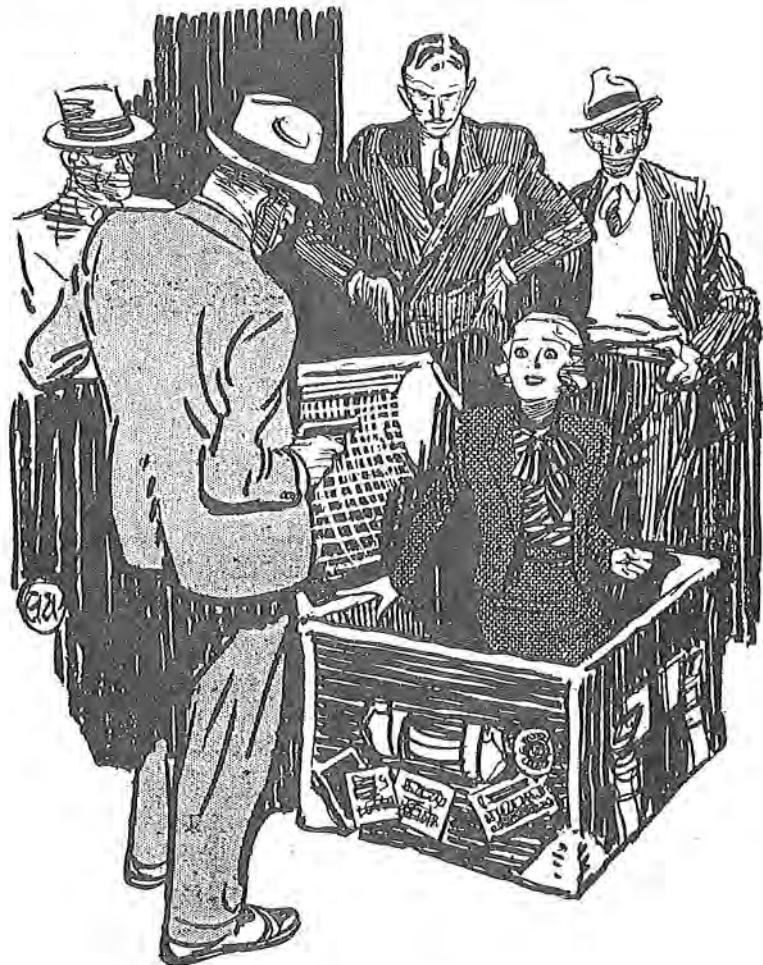
BY J.E.M.



Sexton Blake's involvement with the fair sex needs only the briefest summary here. Even the most casual Blakian must be familiar with at least some of his "leading ladies". Most prominent of these, perhaps, if not the earliest, was Mlle Yvonne Cartier, variously ally and opponent of the law and always the adventuress. Originally devoted to avenging her father and retrieving the family fortune (or something of that sort), she first appeared in the UNION JACK (No. 485) in 1913. She survived until 1926, making her final appearance - and sharing the honours - with Nirvana, a young dancer to whom the youthful Tinker lost his heart. In a way, Yvonne can be said to have reappeared in 1930 when Mlle Roxane Harfield made her bow. Roxane possessed so many of Yvonne's characteristics that she is generally regarded by Blakians as her reincarnation under a new name.

During this period, other memorable ladies crossed Blake's path: dazzling damsels like Olga Nasmyth ("Girl of Destiny"); the exotic and deadly Marie Galante; the mysterious June Severence (whose fate we never learned, since the series in which she appeared was never properly wound up), the melancholy Miss Death; Julia Fortune of the famous Zenith connection; Vali Mata-Vali, another exotic figure and accomplice of the criminal Marsden Plummer; Mary Trent, ally and girl-friend of the infamous Dr. Huxton Rymer, and one or two others. All these ladies appeared either sporadically over the years, like Vali and Trent or in short complete series like Miss Death and Olga Nasmyth.

But, in the various publications devoted to him - UNION JACK, SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY and DETECTIVE WEEKLY - Blake encountered dozens, if not scores of ladies who appeared only once in the saga. Such, for example, were Biwi the Indian girl, Nin Khi from Indo-China, and Farina whom Blake saved from the horrors of the harem - and all becoming devoted to our detective who could easily have started his own harem from an army of such females. Mercially, Blake left them behind; it was probably just as well that so many of their ilk were met in distant parts.



Astra per ardua

Perhaps the most intriguing "brief encounter", however, was featured in DETECTIVE WEEKLY (no. 24), August 5, 1933, when Blake met the glamorous Astra Savine, though her name sounds more like that of a flashy automobile. The story of *The Decoy*, by Gilbert Chester, ends with the promise that Mlle Savine and Blake will form a permanent liaison (which, in those days, meant marriage), earlier incidents having made clear their irresistible attraction for each other. But, wait a minute, can this be true? Blake committed at last? Well, yes and no. You see, in this particular case there are TWO Blakes... Oh, no, not another brother to cause problems as Nigel Blake did in the opening issues of the DW? No, this is a very different affair.



The light of the match showed him four men sprawled on the floor, and in a chair, bound and gagged, the girl Astra Savine.

Blake (or is it?) to the rescue

There is this man, Hinton, who is Blake's exact double, the veritable spitting image as they say, being used as a decoy in a pretty suspenseful adventure. This takes both men, as well as Astra herself, Tinker, various European cops and villains - including one very unusual crook, half-gangster half-lawyer - across Europe (stopover Brussels) to a Balkan country called Pannonia. Here, the populace divides between French and German speakers. For example, a Pannonian police official curses in German ("Himmel!"), while the ravishing Astra, also a Pannonian, speaks French. When "Blake" rescues her from a fate that is death, she coos at him, "Mais vous êtes magnifique!" But, of course, her saviour is not Blake but his double, Hinton. Blake himself is keeping well in the background at this stage. It may be very clear to him what is really going on but, at least until the end, it is not always clear to the reader. Still, that's what a mystery story is all about. As for poor Astra, she really doesn't know her ... well, Blake from her Hinton. In the words of a cockney character, addressed to the real Sexton Blake, "If she sees the two of you together, the poor girl won't know which bloke she's bin an' fallen for!"

As we know, Blake has met all kinds of women, rich, poor, noble, criminal, European, Asiatic, American - you name it - who generally share only two characteristics: ravishing beauty and a tendency to become infatuated with Sexton himself. There are, of course, one or two exceptions. They tend to be pretty ruthless types, usually the partners of male villains. A typical example is Fifette Bierce, accomplice of Leon Kestrel, the man of a thousand faces and none his own. Fifette obviously wouldn't waste time on Sexton Blake when she shares the company of a man who can look like anybody at the drop of a

hat - or, at any rate, with a touch or two of grease-paint. After all, if she ever did take a shine to Blake, Kestrel could always act the part for her, at least until she tired and yearned for a different face. There are also what might be called the Cinderella figures among Blake's female encounters. Like the delicious young Elsa von Kravitch (daughter of the evil Baron von Kravitch, a very nasty man indeed), such ladies come to regard our sleuth as a sort of Dutch uncle or father figure.

But the case involving Astra Savine is surely unique in the Blakian annals. Astra herself is neither a ruthless self-seeker nor a helpless wallflower (though, as the illustrations show, she does get herself into some pretty right corners). A bright, courageous young lady, she plays an important part in bringing the baddies to book. Even so, it is somewhat surprising that Blake finds her such an admirable creature when you reflect that she doesn't even know which manifestation of him she is attracted to. Perhaps he is just relived that his double is going to take her off his hands. Just the same, if Mr. and Mrs. Hinton took up residence anywhere near Baker Street, all kinds of problems could arise. Friends or acquaintances of the real Blake might have occasion to ask him, "Who was that lady we saw you with last night?" You know the sort of thing...



Christmas Greetings and Best Wishes for the New Year to Madam Editor, Eric, Chris, Norman, Laurie, Les, Bill, Mac, and all hobby friends. Still Wanted: C.D. Annuals 1947, 1948, 1953. Still some OBBs left to sell. SAE for list.
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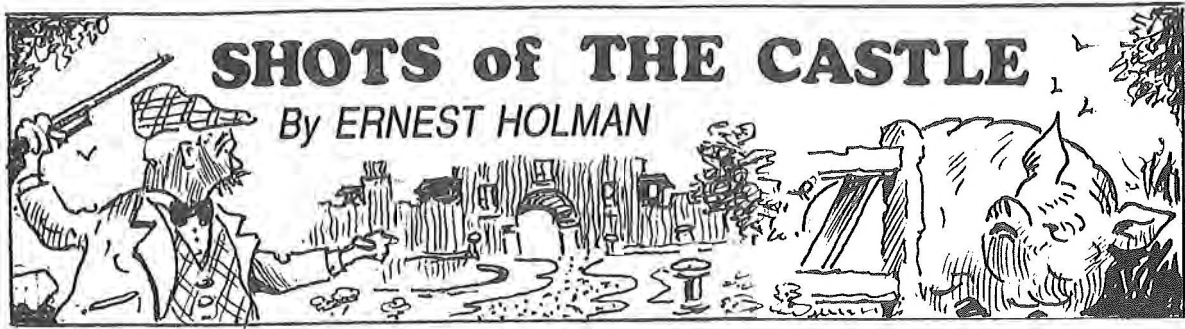
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 BECKS OF LEWES AND POLEGATE



Intrigue; blackmail; violence; released inhibitions; bodily harm; remorse; in fact, wrong-doing in many of its meanings. No, it does not apply to a Television production; it happened - hold on to your seats - at Blandings Castle!

At one time, it began to look as if all the traditions and concepts of Blandings were going by the board. The full drama was never revealed - only a light-hearted version as a longish 'short', contained in a publication entitled 'Lord Emsworth and Others'. Within the pages were several famous characters qualifying for the description of 'others' - but the very lawlessness that raised its ugly head certainly contained its own quota of 'others'.

The inception - if, to quote Bertie Wooster, inception is the word I want - the inception, then, would seem to have been the arrival of young George to spend his school summer holidays at the family domain. To be truthful, however, the real culprit was the misguided individual who presented twelve-year old George with an airgun!

George was the son of Lord Bosham, who in his turn was the son of Clarence, Earl of Emsworth. The youngster's arrival coincided with a period when the dreamy Peer was at peace. Sometimes things went wrong in his Garden of Eden - when the Empress, that superb pig, failed to eat her daily quota of calories; when his younger son, Frederick, was visiting the Castle; above all, when he dreamed that his ex-Secretary, Rupert Baxter, was back at the Castle.

It is, therefore, understandable that Lord Emsworth, tottering at his base, beheld the spectacle of Baxter talking with Lady Constance, and allowed his glasses to fall from his nose and his mouth to remain wide open in disbelief!

Clarence's sister was not long in referring to his attitude towards Mr. Baxter as that of a 'stuck pig'. From which point, the plot began to thicken. Baxter, once more touring Britain on his motor cycle, had 'happened' to be near Blandings and had 'dropped in'. Connie felt the opportunity was ideal. Baxter was at present 'between jobs' and had agreed to become Tutor to young George. George, decided her Ladyship, needed discipline - he had already done much damage to the Castle windows with his airgun. Lord Emsworth remembered a good one and opined that the boy needed a mother's care.

It was to be the task of Clarence to break the news to the lad. It took a little time to give the boy the news but eventually an unbelieving grandson made his feelings felt. "A Tutor? A ter - ewe - ter! Spang bang in the middle of the summer holidays." All to no avail, and George was handed over into the clutches of the Efficient Baxter. There was only one thing left for poor Clarence to do - retire to the Library and sooth his disturbed body and mind with a Chapter from Whiffle on 'The Care of Pigs'.

Not, however, for long was the good man allowed to recover - in burst sister Connie with the news that Clarence's niece, Jane, had been found kissing a young man in the Summer House. Lord Emsworth shook his head sadly, offering the view that they should have been outside in the sunshine. Eventually, he recalled that the young man in question was to be made Land Agent for the Estate, so that he could marry Jane. Lady Constance would have none of it and Clarence meekly agreed to cancel the offer of the appointment.

Jane's response to the news was even more emphatic than earlier remarks by young George. "Worm!" she said to her Uncle. "Miserable, crawling, gelatine-backed Worm!" The one-sided conversation developed fully, with an occasional bleat from Uncle. Finally, left to himself, the ruins of a once-happy Peer weighed up the situation. A punished grandson, the presence for goodness knew how long of Rupert Baxter, an outspoken and very much moved niece. What next, he asked himself!

Into the Library came Beech, the Castle Butler; in one hand, he carried an airgun, in the other a silver salva containing a box of ammunition. Close at his heels arrived Lady Constance, together with her explanation. Clarence was to take custody of the incriminating objects. Why? Why, because George had shot Mr. Baxter!

"Good", was the immediate remark of her brother, adding as quickly as he was capable, "Gracious!" Much to Lady Constance's annoyance, a diversion then occurred, during which the Head of the Household and his butler fell to discussing their own far-off youth and their adventures with an airgun. Even when Beech had been peremptorily dismissed by her Ladyship, Lord Emsworth went on to recall the time - also far-off - when their sister, Julia, had shot the Governess with an airgun. Fortunately, he added, in those days women wore bustles. Lady Constance was not amused! Clarence had to take charge of the offensive weapon and reprimand George in no uncertain terms.

It took some little time before the message - vaguely - was handed to George by a reluctant grandparent. George, on the whole, took it pretty well - "Okay, big boy" was his attitude. When the lad had departed, his Lordship felt he wished to do something to take his mind off of the present unhappy atmosphere. Absently, he picked up the airgun, thinking back to those distant days of airgun possession, when he, too, had lived in Arcady. Unthinkingly he pulled the trigger, and a near-by bust of Aristotle fell in fragments.

That did it - the killer instinct was aroused in him. Glancing from the window, he saw Rupert Baxter bending over outside, in order to pick up something. A moment later, Baxter was shooting into the air with a loud cry; Clarence put down the gun and settled himself down to Whiffle's book once more.

The resultant investigation by Baxter, Connie and his Lordship failed to solve the matter. As the gun had not left the Library, Baxter's view that George had again pressed the trigger counted for nothing. Clarence was quite certain that what had happened was that his ex-Secretary had been stung by a wasp! Later, Connie tried hard to put the crime on to the shoulders of her brother - but the wasp theory held good with him, plus the fact that it was pretty well known that Baxter had always been potty!

It was obviously useless to remain in the Library - no peace at all. Leaving the gun, Clarence made his way to the near-by writing room. There he encountered his niece, Jane, who wanted a word with him. "Can't stop", she was told; to which she replied "Oh, yes, you can, old sureshot!" Clarence found indeed that he could stop!

Clarence, that thoroughly shaken member of the Lords, sagged into a chair in the writing room and gaped at his niece. "You saw me?" was all he could gasp. "You - aren't going to tell my sister, are you?"

In a crisis, youth has one trump card to seize when offered. Blackmail, plain and simple. A direct letter appointment to the post of Land Agent for Jane's summer house Romeo, enabling them to marry - that was the price to be paid. When the proceedings had been completed, Jane took possession of the letter and, on leaving, kissed her Uncle affectionately upon his head. On that particular head, the hairs seemed to their owner to be standing on end. Saved, of course - but what would Connie say? He had little time to conjecture, however, as a movement outside the open window caught his eye, and Rupert Baxter rose from the seat outside!

Jane's act of achievement was soon to be accompanied by another equally-presented ultimatum. The outcome was obvious - Baxter would be very happy to resume his post as Lord Emsworth's Secretary. Again left to himself, Clarence's heart became bowed down below its Plimsoll line. He was left in the position of recalling that a tangled web was weaved when the art of deception came into play. What a harvest - the Peer's unhappy sowing had produced nothing but rogue plants!

Once again Beech entered - bearing a short, sharp note that Rupert Baxter would not be taking up the post offered, after all - and had decided to leave the Castle. Clarence could make nothing of the communication and, in fact, did not really know whether he was on his base or his apex! A remark from Beech passed unheeded, so bewildered was he.

The shadow over Blandings began to darken even more when sister Connie entered. Apprehensively, she wanted to know what message or statement had been made to her brother - not, however, by Baxter - but by Beech. It was then that realisation dawned and

Lord Emsworth gasped out the fact that Beech had just handed in his Notice! He was then startled to hear a sob proceed from her Ladyship.

Out it all came - Connie had taken up the airgun and recalled her own irresponsible youth. It had been she, not Sister Julia, who had been guilty of shooting the Governess. She had taken the gun outside and, urged on by she knew not what, had seen Beech sitting a few feet away in a deck chair - and she had shot at him!

The outlook, according to the terrified woman, was terrible. Beech would spread the story all over the County - and surrounding shires. He must not do so. He must be stopped - he must not leave - he must be given double wages. Clarence, alone, would have to reason with the Butler.

Thus it was that the Blue Bird sang as the now wide-awake Earl took up his option. He told his sister about the Land Agent appointment and the subsequent marriage. He felt sure she would agree that he had done the right thing. A crest-fallen Connie had no course but to do so. Right, then - now for Beech - and the formidable Lord Emsworth strode towards the Butler's pantry.

Taxed with the matter of his resignation, Beech assured his Lordship that he had no alternative but to take such a step. For Heaven's sake why, was Clarence's uttered thought - and then he had the surprise of his life when the Butler, handed possession of the airgun by her Ladyship, revealed that he had - yes, indeed - shot Mr. Baxter!

Another matter solved, causing the abrupt pending departure of Baxter. What, though, of the incident when his sister had shot Beech? Beech shook his head, and pointed out that such a situation had not occurred. Lady Constance had been near to the butler and, whilst holding the gun, had accidentally discharged the same. He had not been hit at all, the shot had merely caused him to jump and his deck chair to collapse, after which, her Ladyship had passed the gun to his safe keeping. Lord Emsworth sneered to himself - his sister couldn't hit a sitting butler from a distance of a few yards!

It was not very long before Beech's resignation was washed out - whether by the offer of higher wages was never revealed. Lord Emsworth picked up the air gun that Beech had laid aside in his Pantry and smirked. He had retained the old touch, at any rate. Or - had he? Into his mind came the thought that, perhaps after all, his shot at Baxter earlier had been a lucky one. His confidence began to fade a little - now he would never know.

A stuttering, spluttering noise from outside the pantry window came from the stable yard. Quite a fair distance away, thought Clarence, as he saw Baxter with his motor bike, about to depart the Castle. The ex-Secretary was already seated and bending low over the handlebars. It had to be now or never! From the open window the airgun projected, a soft pop, a howl from the bending rider and then - regardless of all matters other than to get away as quickly as possible - Rupert Baxter faded rapidly from the scene. Yes, quite a distance away he had been, and Lord Emsworth laid down George's airgun.

There it was then - the murky clouds had departed from Blandings, never to return. Lawlessness was a thing of the past - in fact, it was simply and solely once again, good old Blandings!

By Jove, though - it had been a jolly close thing!



I always love Xmas, / except when it's here. / There's always the thought, / you've to wait one more year. / Grab it everyone!

JOHNNY BURSLEM

Christmas Greetings all readers, with special thanks to the Editor and all who contribute to the 'Digest' throughout the year.

REG ANDREWS, LAVERSTOCK, SALISBURY

The MAGIC of UNCLE OOJAH

by Len Hawkey



Many Happy Returns of the Day,
May each one be joyous and merry;
With love from your little friend Don,
Uncle Oojah and Snooker and Jerry.

Amalgamated Press, and "Home Notes" from Pearsons were undoubtedly the most popular. The latter had "The Roundabout", four pages for Children edited by Auntie Hilda, the former had "The Playbox" (a title they were going to make good use of in later years), presided over by Aunt Molly.

Jolly Jumbo and his Menagerie Friends - drawn by the little-known G. Sydney - were in "Home Notes", while "Home Chat" employed Mabel F. Taylor, a popular illustrator in children's books, for "Jungle Jinks" (clearly, with hindsight, the forerunner of the "Bruin Boys"). Their four nursery pages often also included stories of a little black boy, Epaminondas, and even today I can clearly remember my father, still in uniform on leave from the Army, reading some of these to me. The illustrations - which I didn't realise then - were by Joyce Brisley, later of "Milly-Molly-Mandy" fame. Ah, they were happy days, with Epaminondas and his Mammy, although my poor old Dad would probably be indicted for promoting racial prejudice if he were able to read those harmless stories to anyone nowadays!

During the Great War, and after, the daily newspapers followed the numerous ladies magazines by introducing a children's "corner". The Daily Mail was probably the first, with Charles Folkard's "Teddy Tail" in 1915. "Uncle Oojah" started in the Daily Sketch early in 1919, soon followed by "Pip & Squeak" in the Mirror, and "Rupert Bear" in the express. I'm pretty sure Ernest Aris contributed a fluffy-tailed rabbit to the News Chronicle, but I can't recall its name. Before long, at least on Saturdays, these children's sections became a miniature paper, in themselves. In this field, the Sketch just pipped the Mirror to the post, starting "The Oojah Sketch" only a week or two before the rival "Pip & Squeak" supplement. The Daily Mirror had the last laugh I suppose, as Pip, Squeak & Wilfred outstayed Oojah; and the Mirror itself - for better or worse - is alive today, whereas the Sketch perished twenty years ago.

THE BEGINNINGS

Anyone in this day and age who has much contact with children may well feel that the Victorian axiom that they "should be seen, but not heard", had a lot going for it. My Grandparents certainly subscribed to this belief, as did my parents, albeit to a lesser degree. Provided they suffered no personal inconvenience from them, the Victorians were none the less devoted to their offspring, and, unless they were very poor, catered for their needs in every way: what better means of keeping them quiet, then, than a plentiful supply of books.

Aided partly by the advances in printing processes, publishers produced children's periodicals as never before, most of them admittedly of a "morally uplifting" type. The output of adult reading matter had also increased - a number of women's magazines were launched in the last decade or so of the 19th century, and these usually incorporated a few pages for the nursery occupants. "Home Chat" from the

It was against this background, principally of a fight for circulation supremacy, that the children's newspaper supplements started, and by the 1930s several dailies incorporated a whole "comic", much as some do today. And thus, amongst many other "stars", Uncle Oojah was born.

THE CREATORS

How Flo Lancaster, who wrote the stories, and Thomas Maybank, who illustrated them, first came together - or indeed how Hultons were inspired to employ them, we shall probably never know. Prior to 1919 they had been very successful in their own fields - and possibly knew each other, as both had contributed for some years to Ward Lock's "Wonder Book Annuals".

Flo Lancaster must have been middle-aged when the War ended - her full name was Mrs. Ellen Wallis Lancaster, an established writer of articles, stories and poems for many magazines, mainly women's and children's, since the turn of the century. In fact she is said to have had at least one play produced around 1900, but the writer has found no record of this. Her style was somewhat in the Nesbit mould - in other words, she never wrote down to a young audience, but credited children with as lively an imagination as she herself possessed. And like Nesbit, although she was at her best as a children's author, she probably aspired to "higher" things (judging, at least, from some of her poetry). Maybank, too, was a well-known professional artist. Born in 1866, real name Hector Thomas Maybank Webb, he was already in his 50s when first called upon to depict Oojahland. Following the school of Doyle and Furniss, he excelled in illustrating fairies, imps, goblins, and children. Even his many full-page cartoons in "Punch" assumed this style, so that his work fitted Flo Lancaster's tales admirably. They were, like Oojah and his companions, made for each other!

THE CHARACTERS

Each day, from the 18th February 1919 on, Maybank supplied a drawing - roughly 4" x 3", and around it, "L" shaped, was Flo Lancaster's text. The stories were generally in serial form, lasting four weeks or so, i.e. approx. 24 instalments. In this, they differed from the Pip & Squeak strip in the Mirror, which told, more or less, a separate story each day. As a child, fortunate that my parents took the Daily Sketch, I couldn't wait to grab the paper each morning to find out what had happened.

Uncle Oojah, King of Oojahland, was an absent-minded, loveable old pachyderm - possibly a little ironic "dig" by the writer, seeing that supposedly "elephants never forget". Although rather gullible, he had the ability - by standing on his head, and twisting round three times (while any onlookers did "a shut-eye"), to perform a "magic". Hence, whatever he wished, came to pass. As drawn at first by Maybank, he was a big-eared African elephant, which probably accounted for the nick-name "Flip-Flap". As time passed, this name fell out of use, and indeed the artist softened Oojah's image - his ears became smaller and less prominent, and his shape as a whole more "rounded". Normally, for some unexplained reason, he wore striped pajamas, although he could dress in more befitting style, when occasion demanded.

In 1919, the initial story tells how Oojah discovers Don playing in a suburban garden, and entices him away with promises of wonderful adventures. The "Sparrow Imp" accompanies them, but he, like the "Raven-Bogie", a less pleasant bird they met in Oojahland, both disappeared after the first few stories. On the sea-girt shores of Flip-Flap's kingdom, in the Adventure of the Pygmy Pirates, they cross swords with the wicked King Hulabaloo. They get the better of the pirates, and in leaving take with them his little black "kitten-cat", Snooker. Thus was formed the trio around whom all the earlier tales were written.

Don, with his fair hair "bobbed" in the style of the early 1920s usually wore a white jacket and short trousers, while Snooker sported only a large pair of woolly bedsocks. In the same way as Maybank refined his illustrations, Flo Lancaster developed her characters, and indeed, the stories. Quite a multitude of Oojahland inhabitants were created, but like the boys in Charles Hamilton's schools, some appeared regularly, others only from time to time. Of the former, Jerrywangle, Flip-Flap's precocious and mischievous nephew was the most prominent - his brother, Jimmy, along with Pa and Ma Wangle (respectively

brother and sister-in-law to Oojah) only popped up occasionally - brother Wangle was eternally hard-up and miserable. Another relation was Lady Eliza, a formidable spinster elephant, who had matrimonial eyes on the elusive Flip-Flap. She always wore a "Mrs. Gamp" outfit, complete with large bonnet and umbrella - she used the latter to hand out many a beating, especially on poor Jerrywangle.

1920



The Great Oojah smiled broadly.

Other "regulars" were Lord & Lady Lion, with their offspring, Laddie & Lassie; Pa Piggins, Prime Minister of Oojahland, with his family (they lived in Pigland Villa, Applesauce Gardens); General Gorilla, in charge of the Gorilla Guards (and the Brass-Button Army); Rabby Bunnitt, Snooker's great friend; Doctor Dromerday, his nurse, Mother Kangaroo, along with the Pelican Police, the Monkey Mechanics, and the Starling Scouts. There were many others, of course, and a number of "itinerant" characters, such as the "Travelling Tiger", "Woeful Walrus", "King Dingo" (from the neighbouring country), and two of Oojah's only enemies, "Fuzzy Fox" and the "Crying Crocodile". Most prominent of all was probably the "Wonderman" - Professor Furdistan Foozle - a name Oojah could seldom get right. He looked like a skinny Guy Fawkes, was a somewhat crazy inventor, and figured in a number of adventures.

The only permanent addition to the residents of the great Palace of Oojahland was a small baby bear. No parents were in evidence when it was found, so Flip Flap adopted her, and after a competition, won by Jerrywangle, she was named Binky. From her little frock, plus a sash round the waist, I always believed Binky to be feminine, but as later stories refer to "him", I must have been wrong! Mother Monkey, like Mother Kangaroo, a trained nurse, was employed to help raise her.

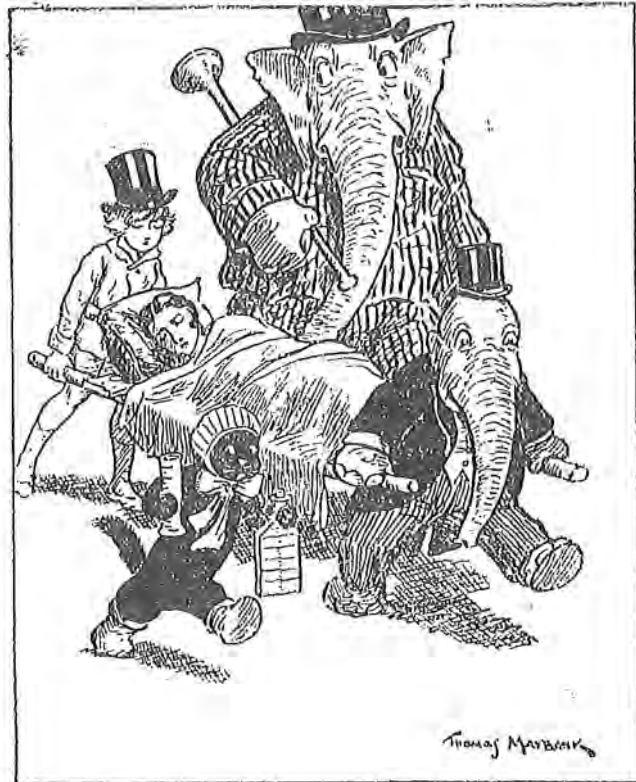
Other characters came and went. Skippy Squirrel, Billy Beavers of the Beaver Builders, the Royal Glow-worms (whose job was to light up the palace gardens at night), Drummer Donkey, Mr. Apothecary Stork, etc. Oojahland was well populated! Strangely, man's "best friends", the dog and the horse, were, to the best of the writer's knowledge, scarcely mentioned - perhaps, because of their allegiance to humankind, they were "persona non grata" in Oojahland!

THE LOCALE

The topography of Oojah's Kingdom was never clearly defined. Devotees in their hundreds seem to have spent long hours trying to map out precisely the environs of Greyfriars, St. Frank's, etc. - and many other imaginary countrysides have been mapped for us by their creators, from Baum's 'Land of Oz', to Tolkien's 'Middle-Earth'. But I cannot trace that, at any time, Flo Lancaster supplied a map. From the stories, over two decades or so, we can piece together a rough idea. For one thing, Oojahland has a coastline - a bit "south-sea islandish" - with palms and sandy beaches, and rocky cliffs behind. Presumably also, a harbour, as along these shores the "Pigmy Pirates" operate,

preying on merchant ships. It was here that Snooker was found. The Wide Wet-Water River, Oojahland's main waterway would doubtless run into this sea, passing through Oojah City, Wangletown, and other places mentioned from time to time in the text. Beyond, there are the great Stoney Mountains - it is from these that Flip-Flap obtains most of the materials to build his famous Tower of Oojahland (1923 Annual). There is also a railway, where on one occasion the companions find Jerry, when he has carried off Baby Binky. This runs, amongst other places, to Wangletown, where Brother Wangle and his family reside. To the east lies Dingoland, ruled by King Dingo - this can be deduced, as when he visits Flip-Flap, he comes in through the eastern Gate. Between the Wide Wet-Water River and the mountains, lies the Blue Forest, in which Binky was abandoned (1924 Annual). These main features are clear enough, but overall Flo Lancaster seems to prefer leaving Oojahland to her readers' imagination. As depicted by Maybank (more so than by Talintyre, who took over in the 1930s) the backgrounds are "olde English" - and human beings pop up at times, mingling with the anthropomorphic animals. In the writing, the conversation especially, and in the drawings, there is a rather endearing "timelessness". Anyway, as so many of Flip-Flap's adventures take him away from Oojahland itself, it probably doesn't really matter.

1924



THEY ALL DRESSED UP AS DOCTORS.

THE STORIES

On October 8th 1921, over two and a half years since the Oojah stories started, the Daily Sketch launched a Saturday 4-page "Oojah Sketch", which, as well as the serial-installment and other features, included a 4-panel Oojah adventure, drawn by Thomas Maybank.

The writer has not been able to consult the issues of the Daily Sketch itself, but happily, virtually all the Oojah material in the various annuals, especially those published by Hultons (later Allied Newspapers) was taken from that paper, and, of course, the Oojah Sketch. Not all the stories could be crammed into the annuals, nor was everything kept in chronological order. One story, for instance, had Flip-Flap performing a "magic" causing his entire palace, plus occupants, to fly off round the world. "Uncle Oojah's Flying Palace" also enabled Flo Lancaster to give her young readers a gentle geography lesson. This was one story that was never reprinted. The first 1919 adventures appeared again in the 1920 and 1921 "Once Upon a Time" Annuals. These came into the bookshops in September 1919 and 1920 respectively, two long serials in each lovely volume. They were doubtless intended as Hulton's challenge to the A.P.'s "Playbox" Annual, as they were exactly the same size, with the same number of pages and plates, and printed on similar good-quality paper. The finding of Don, and rescue of Snooker were in the first Annual, while in the second were "Flip-Flap in Wangletown" and "The Wonderman", introducing Oojah's "Wangle" relatives, and the amazing - and sometimes dangerous - Professor Foozle.

The initial "Oojah Annual" appeared in 1922, and was quite a modest affair, only 100 pages, including a good deal of non-Oojah material. It did however, reprint the very first 4-panel "strip" from the Oojah Sketch. Running intermittently through its pages was "Flip-

Flap's Wonderground", in which a "magic" takes the old elephant and his companions to Elizabethan London. That same year an almost complementary adventure appeared in Hulton's "Joy Book" Annual, which had replaced "Once Upon a Time". This was another reprint from the Daily Sketch - "Flip-Flap in London Town". This time it was, however, the London of the 1920s.

The four subsequent Annuals were larger, over 200 pages each, with lots of excellent coloured plates by Maybank, "strips" from the Oojah Sketch, and stories such as "The Tower of Oojahland" (1923), "Oojah's Baby", recounting the discovery of Binky (1924), "Uncle Oojah's Funnymoon" (1925) and in 1926 "Oojah's Treasure Trunk", which for some reason was also the title of that year's Annual. In all these books there were plenty of stories, poems and pictures by other contributors. Amongst these were many well-known names - Fay Inchfawn, Leslie Oyler, E.L. Roberts, Edith Nesbit herself, Hilda Cowham, Mabel Lucie Attwell, A.E. Bestall, Ernest Aris and, most prolific of all, Peter Fraser. Stylish and adept, in the lineage of Aldin, Lawson Wood and Studdy, Fraser (possibly the only first-class illustrator to be born in the Shetlands?) has been woefully neglected over the years.

Even allowing for some occasional repetition, Flo Lancaster's task was no sinecure. She had to produce something like 300 little chapters each year - quite apart from any other work she did - and she accomplished this for nigh on two decades! Although her readers were mainly very young children, she adroitly avoided any condescension, and coupled her own whimsical sense of humour with as much incident and excitement as possible. As with all good serials, she used every short instalment both to carry the tale forward and leave her readers wanting to know what was going to happen the next day.

Given that he had the text to work from, Maybank's part was perhaps less difficult, but, including the Oojah Sketch panels, he had to produce between 10 and 12 illustrations each week, on top of any work for the Annual or other publications. It was no mean feat for author and artist, over so long a period, to keep the stories fresh and topical, visiting many lands, real and imaginary, and sometimes incorporating current events - such as a Royal "happening" or the great Empire Exhibition, as they occurred.

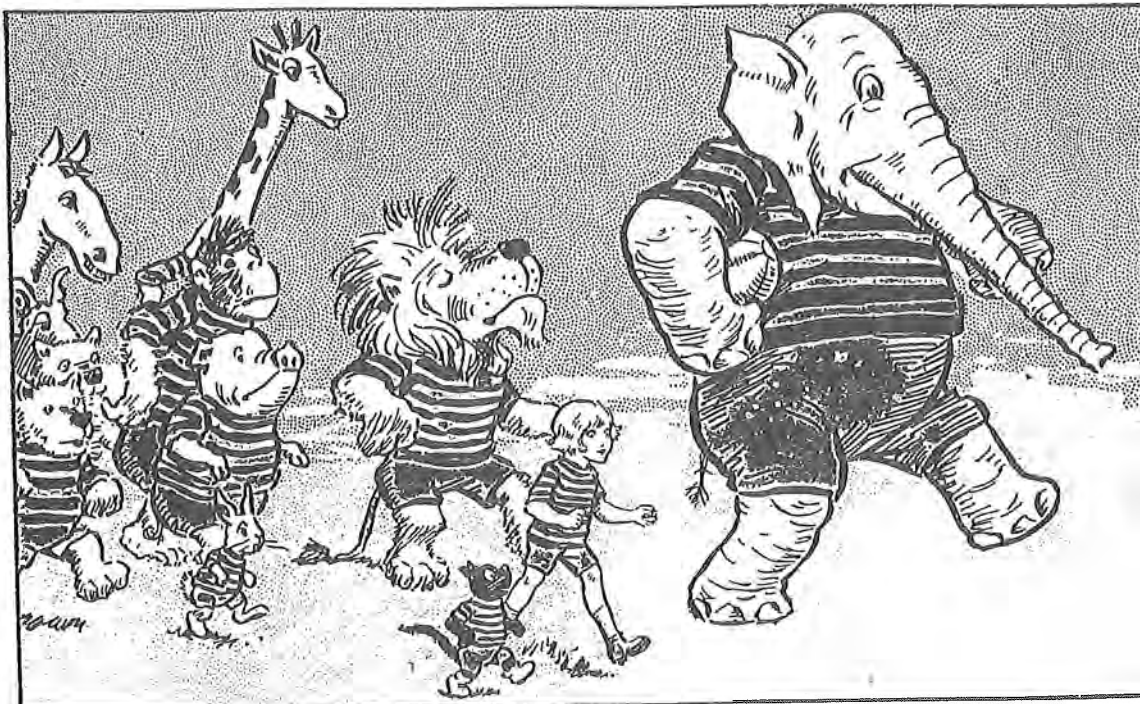
"The Donjeroo Hotel", "Oojah's Happy Island" and "The Christmas Castle" were amongst other stories reprinted from the daily issues, plus Flip-Flap among Red Indians, in "Oojah's White Wigwam" and the story of "The Three Kings" - nothing Biblical, of course, but recounting how King Dingo is deposed by the Crying Crocodile. The latter has cunningly won over the dwarves who populate Dingo's Kingdom. Dingo appeals to Oojah, who marches on Dingoland with his Brass Button Army and Gorilla Guards. The Crying Crocodile is defeated, and Pa Piggons usurps the throne. This is an equally cunning counter-ruse, as the valiant porker has been told to make himself as unpopular as possible, and before long the dwarves are clamouring for Dingo to be restored. Which, of course, he is.

Lancaster's characters were soon well-rounded and clearly delineated, appealing to children with amusing and harmless exclamations, such as Snooker's "Oh my suffering bedsocks!", and Oojah bumbling away about "magics", "forgettories", and being "scarified". His favourite expression was "Jimmy-ninnikins!" On the other hand, Foozle spoke in a very pedantic way, while King Dingo was given a foreign accent, always getting his word order back to front. Thus the style of life in Oojahland, in the late 1920s seemed as settled, and steady and permanent, as in Britain itself at that time.

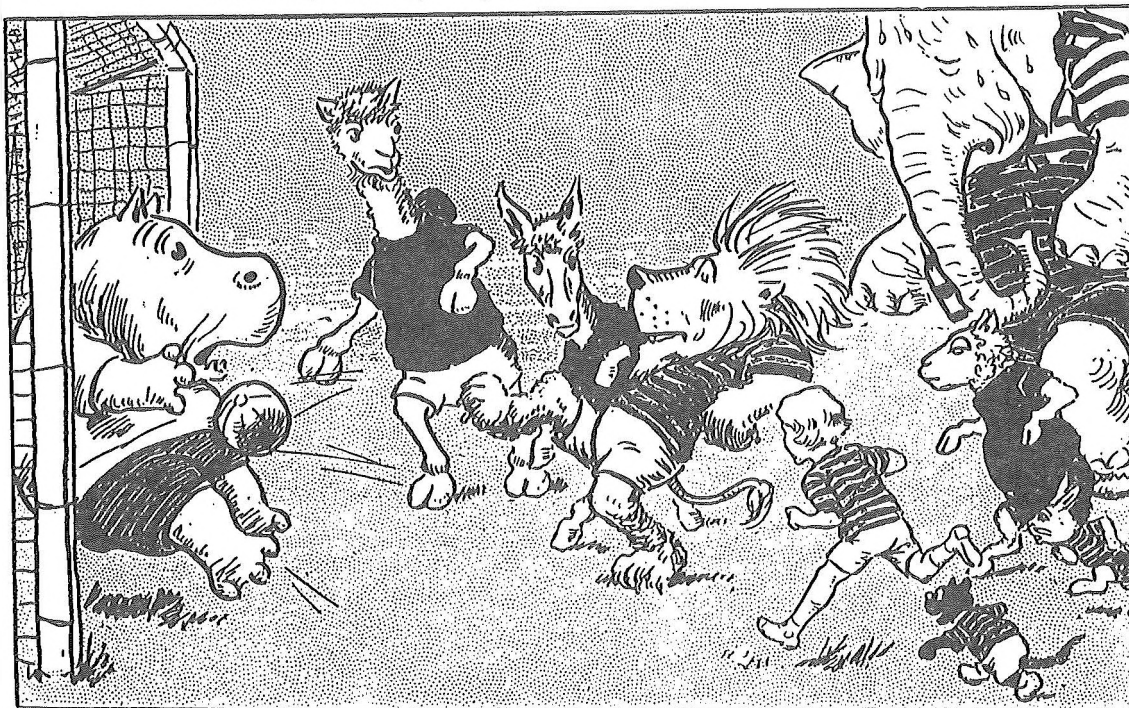
DURATION

To capitalise on the growing success of their "Oojah" venture, Hultons started a children's club, the "Donjeroo's" (much on the lines of the rival Pip, Squeak & Wilfred Club - the "Gugnuncs"). Children cut out coupons to join, enjoyed certain privileges, and were sent a special card on their birthday. On the back was a charming, if sentimental, verse by Wilhelmina Stitch, a popular "people's poet" of the day. Yet the run of what one may feel to be the "genuine" Oojah Annuals, and for that matter the "genuine" illustrations in the Daily Sketch, ended in 1929, when "the gardener in white" took Hector Thomas Maybank Webb from this world. Flo Lancaster carried on with her stories, but things were really never the same again. Eventually Maybank's drawings were exhausted, even in the Annuals. These had already altered in size and presentation. From 1927 Hulton's called

A FOOTBALL MATCH IN OOJAHLAND



Flip-Flap decided to have a grand football match, and one Saturday he led his team, nervous, but hopeful, out on the ground to play.



When the game began, Lord Lion ran along with the ball and scored the first goal very easily, taking the goalkeeper quite by surprise.

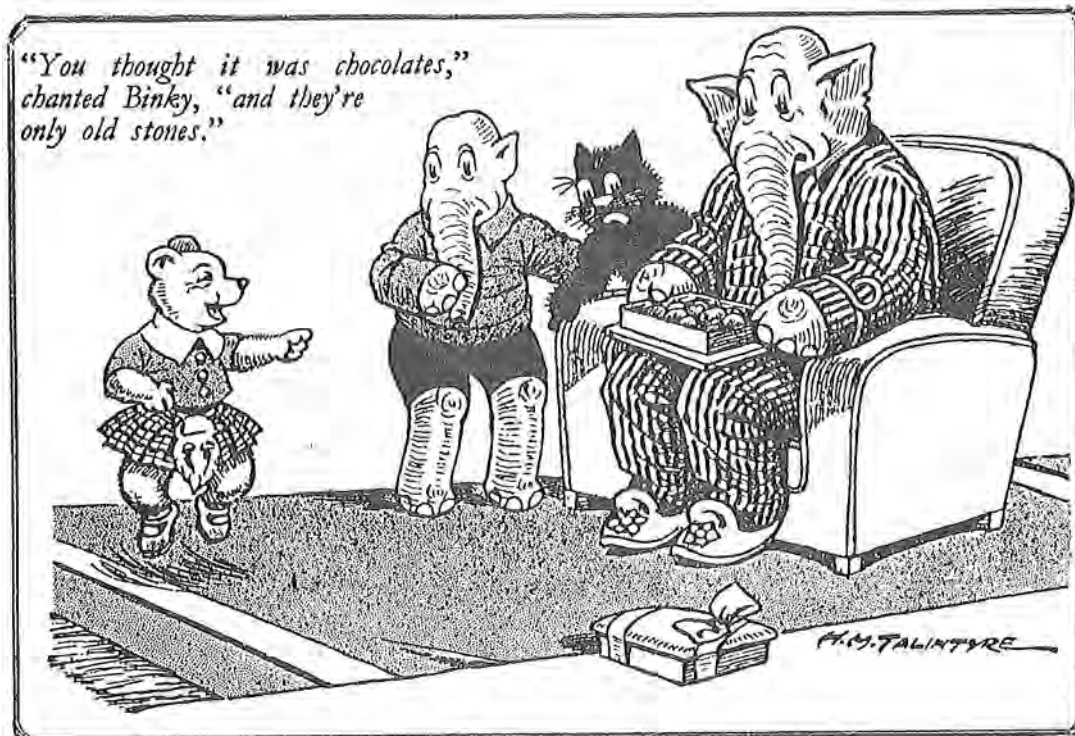
From The Oojah Annual 1922 (in which we see, amongst others, Lord Lion, Drummer Donkey, General Gorilla, Pa Piggins, Rabby Bunnitt, Laddie Lion and Doctor Dromedary)

them "Oojah's Big Annual", a complete misnomer, as although thick, they were much smaller in size and content, printed on cardboard-like paper, which was useless for reproducing artwork of any sort.

Nevertheless, these continued to around 1935, the issue for that year being illustrated by H.M. Talintyre. In the meantime, different artists - mostly **indifferent** - had taken up Maybank's work, the best of these J.H. Lunn. His work went back to before the 1914-1918 War, appearing in other Hulton publications, as well as the Penny Pictorial, Chums, and latterly, The Gaiety Magazine. Except for a few years at the commencement of the Second World War, Talintyre was to remain almost the only "Oojah" illustrator until the early 1950s. In the last "Big" Annual, he illustrated "Oojah's White Wigwam", but the dark, smudgy, small, pictures scarcely did him justice. Much better were those in the first 4 "Oojah Annuals" produced by Collins from 1937 on. Flo Lancaster supplied the text, inevitably, and the art-work was first-class. All these book contained Oojah material only, and for some strange reason, Don had been dropped completely. In fact he seems to have been written out several years earlier, and the writer seems to recall that in one story, not reprinted from the Daily Sketch, he had gone home to his real parents. He reappeared, on a visit, in "Oojah's Christmas Castle (1934) and joined his old friends permanently again in the early 1950s.

As for Talintyre - in an excellent survey of the Oojahland Saga which Will Costain wrote for "Golden Fun" in 1983, he says he feels these Collins issues, with Talintyre's pictures, were the best Annuals of the lot. They are indeed very nice books, except the issues for 1940 and 1941 (they ran only until 1942) when Talintyre was absent, and some truly awful artists were employed. Comparison with Maybank is, however, invidious. Even if one disregards all his other work, Maybanks was a brilliant and gifted craftsman. Talintyre, on the other hand, while doing a commendable job, was merely a good, "journeyman" illustrator, and in saying this I do not mean to denigrate his efforts.

1947



For a few years, Uncle Oojah "disappeared". One assumes Hultons (Allied Newspapers) had surrendered their copyright, as after the Collins issues, in 1947 the London firm of Peter Pitkin issued the first of 4 or 5 "Oojah Annuals", - slimmish volumes, of 100 pages each, rather like the original annual of 1922, except that virtually all the contents were by Flo Lancaster, and pictures by Talintyre. They had quite a sprinkling of two-colour pages, but no coloured plates, other than a frontispiece. The main Oojah story ran at intervals through each book, as in all past annuals. Whether they were

"rewrites" or original tales, is uncertain. The writer recalls one story from the 1920s when a desperate Lady Eliza, with the help of Fuzzy Fox and the treacherous Crying Crocodile, kidnaps poor flip-Flap, so they may have been a little of each.

The Pitkin annuals ceased around 1951, but elephants are noted for their longevity and it seems that in the mid-1950s Basil Reynolds, then Editor of the newly launched children's comic "Jack & Jill", was approached by a somewhat shabby and elderly gentleman, who turned out to be H.M. Talintyre. As a result a series called "Jerry, Don & Snooker" ran in the magazine for some time, and we are told the text was supplied by Flo Lancaster. If true, this is pretty remarkable as at that date she must have been well into her 70s. How long this feature in "Jack & Jill" lasted, the writer doesn't know, but, alas, it seems to have marked the end of the Oojah Saga.

FINALE

Going back to the 1930s, Flip-Flap and his friends had appeared for only two publishers, apart from Hulton and Collins. In 1938, Frederick Warne started a series of small hard cover books, priced one shilling each, "Uncle Oojah's Travels". Only two seem to have been published - "Uncle Oojah's Ostrich Farm" and "The Princess of Persia", both taken, with Maybank's delightful illustrations, from issues of the "Daily Sketch". This was only 2 or 3 years after the last "Big Annual", so that Hulton's appear to have been very hasty in releasing their copyright. One wonders why? Another, insoluble mystery!

Five years earlier, in 1933, Hodder & Stoughton had produced a really lovely volume for charity - "The Princess Elizabeth Gift Book". The foreword was by our present Queen, who was then only 9 years old. Amongst those who donated their services, in both prose and poems were Kipling, J.M. Barrie, John Galsworthy, Hugh Walpole, Compton Mackenzie and others. There were also stories from the creators of Mickey Mouse, Rupert Bear, Teddy Tail, Pip, Squeak & Wilfred, and, not least, Uncle Oojah. In this august company was an 11-page original story "Uncle Oojah's Little Princess" - actually Binky in disguise! - written, naturally by Flo Lancaster, plus pictures, including a colour-plate, from Talintyre. So the King of Oojahland could justifiably have claimed to exist "By Royal Appointment"!

Amongst the volume's many felicities is a unique 2-page spread of photographs of the contributors - as children. Flo Lancaster is there, as is H.S. Foxwell (but for Teddy Tail, as Tiger Tim was surprisingly not included).

Since Oojahland was created, over 70 years have passed away, and it is over 30 years since it last appeared in print. Maybank has gone, and so, by now, must Lancaster and Talintyre also. We must conclude, albeit sadly, that we have said farewell to Flip-Flap, his companions, and subjects. They gave great pleasure to many children over the years, and I hope their story has been worth the telling. Requiescat in pace, Uncle Oojah.

ENVOI

His cherished palace, once supreme
No more by any eye is seen.
No footsteps pass, where briars tangle,
No Snooker, Don, or Jerrywangle -
For there is nobody to care,
No voice in hall, no step on stair,
So well the years their secret keep
Of Oojahland, long lost in sleep.





Over the years I have been asked several times which is my favourite 'Magnet' series, a query that I have never had difficulty or hesitation in answering. It surprises most people to learn that it is the Slim Jim, or Mr. Lamb, whichever your prefer, stories of 1939/1940.

I am aware that it is not a highly thought of series, by the majority of Frank Richards fans. It has been said, with some justification, that it was far too long and repetitious. It was indeed very lengthy, stretching from numbers 1660 to 1675, December 9th 1939 until March 23rd 1940, when it finally concluded. Sixteen weeks. I think I am right in saying the only other series that lasted as long was 'The Hollywood Series' of 1929. I am always open to correction.

The reason for esteeming it so highly is mainly, if I am honest, nostalgia. Does this colour my judgement? I suppose it must! The Slim Jim stories were my very first series in the 'Magnet', being a latecomer to the Greyfriars scene. Alas, the Magnet was almost at the end of its run, but I was happily unaware of this at the time. When its life was prematurely and suddenly cut short a few weeks later, my feelings were the same as those of countless others.

Although this was my first series, I had already read a few singles, and particularly liked number 1651, 'Condemned Without Evidence', featuring Vernon-Smith. His character made an immediate appeal. A rebel against authority, courageous, daring and deep down decent. Reading, much later, the story involving his sacrifice for Wingate's brother, confirmed my early assessment of Smithy. Never a goody-goody, like some of the Remove characters, his sometimes sulky and moody phases made him for me more human, more realistic and therefore more believable.

Even at the tender age of eleven I soon realised that the Famous Five were not very realistic characters. It was impossible to model one's self upon them, as the likelihood of near perfection was not a desirable objective, at least, not at the school I was attending.

Modelling ones self upon Herbert Vernon-Smith held out far more exciting prospects. Giving in to temptation as he often did, was a natural inclination. In fiction he was always able to wriggle out of the consequences. I found in real life this was not so. My friends and acquaintances were not as loyal as their Greyfriars counterparts. Playing the game was not a golden rule. The teachers were often beasts, but not always like Mr. Quelch, just beasts. I quickly found that fiction and fact had little in common.

However, Vernon-Smith became and remains my favourite Greyfriars character. He is closely followed by Lord Mauleverer and Mr. Quelch. All immortals, finely created by the master.

All three played major roles in the Slim Jim series. Mr. Quelch's was a negative one, but essential to the plot. Mauly was only a bit player, but how finely drawn. Also almost all the other main characters on the Greyfriars stage were worked into the plot, giving me, in particular, a fine introduction to their ways and idiosyncrasies.

Being fairly new to the "Magnet" I found the whole story fascinating. The loyalties, the cads, the teachers and the school minions and the way all of these were used to extend, and, dare I say it, pad the series. I was a little annoyed, not being used to the device, of being often left in suspense at the end of a chapter only to find that the next chapter started in a totally different area. This device is now used regularly on TV soaps.

The series is too well known for me to bother with any kind of synopsis. Suffice to say that the whole point was to discover and apprehend the burglar known to one and all as Slim Jim, who was carrying out a very successful series of burglaries in the vicinity of Greyfriars. It took sixteen weeks for his identity to be revealed, although we, the readers

knew it immediately. I remember thinking even then that public school boys and teachers were not over endowed with intelligence! What I had deduced easily escaped them for sixteen weeks.



Several episodes stick in my memory and I never tire of reading them again and again. The situation where a stuffed bulldog was introduced into the Remove classroom, and made to sound real with the help of Bunter's ventriloquism. The ultimate blame rightly attaching to Fisher T. Fish, and the just punishment for his greed. Totally unbelievable episode, but hilariously funny.

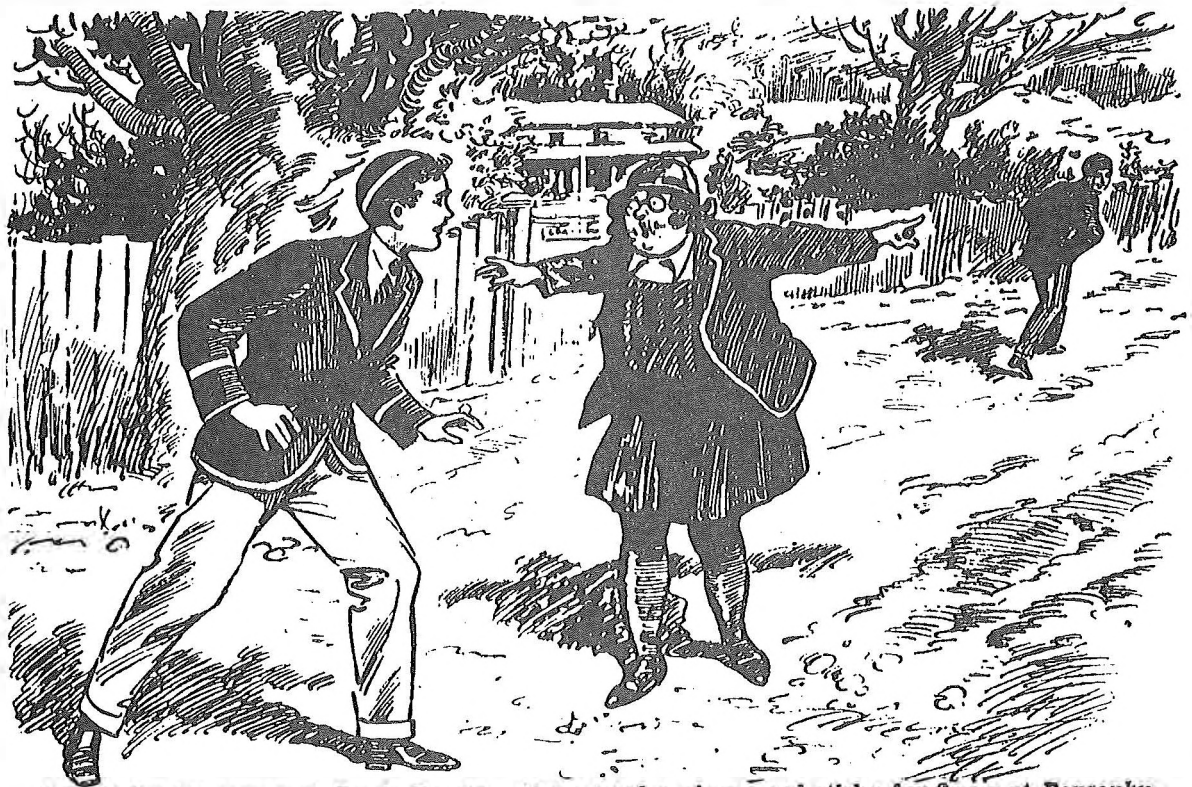
The lovely sequence where Lord Mauleverer and Bessie Bunter are involved with Ponsonby and Co. and Nobby Parker at the cliff top bungalow. What a perfect advertisement Mauly was for the nobility! Who can forget his reaction and bearing, when accused by Mr. Lamb of breaking into his desk. A delightful character.

Whiz! Vernon-Smith flung the school-book and caught Mr. Lamb on the side of the face. The art master tottered and lost his balance. "He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter. "Watch him bump!"

The interaction between Ferrers Locke, the detective and the Head's relative, and Vernon-Smith throughout the series, is finely drawn. We were aware that Locke was onto the identity of Slim Jim, as we were, but felt the frustration of his caution and slowness.

There were many situations where Bunter was essential to the plot, and great use was made of him. But he was never one of my favourites. Another classic episode was when Wibley made up as the missing Mr. Quelch, and caned Bunter while sitting down. A gem of comedy writing. The other players on the Greyfriars stage were cleverly woven into the plot. Coker and his study mates, Fisher T. Fish, Loder, Price, Wingate, Ponsonby and Co., Mr. Prout, Gosling, and, of course, the Famous Five. Frank Richards had a genius for bringing in numerous characters naturally to enhance and help smooth the plot along.

If his plots were not always new or original, at least his large cast of players was superlative. No matter what the subject or story, they carried it along. Not always believable but always eminently entertaining. The massive interplay between them all over that far away sixteen weeks made this my most memorable series. I am forever grateful.



"My toffee!" screamed Bessie Bunter. She pointed a plump and sticky forefinger at Ponsonby, who was strolling away. "That brute took it away from me!" "Oh!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.



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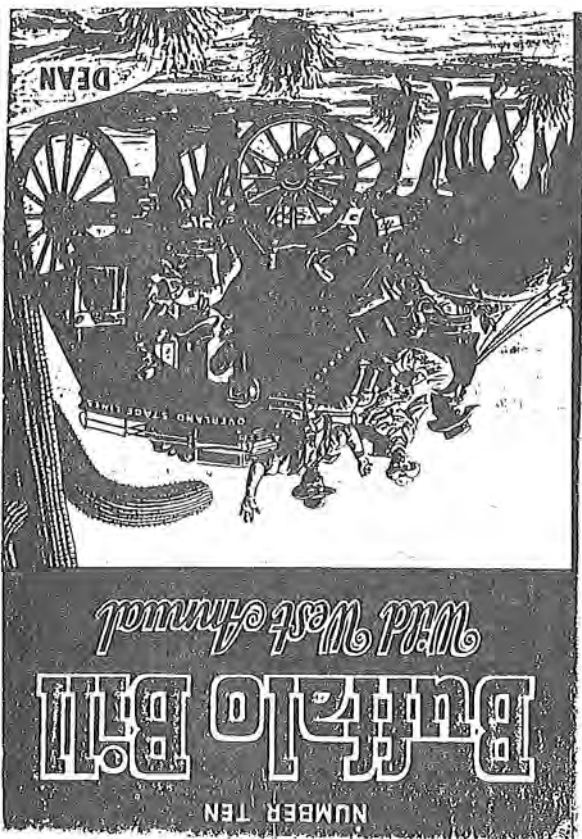


In 1950 the prospects for Britain's future looked much brighter than in the immediate postwar years of rationing and austerity. The Festival of Britain was held on London's South Bank in 1951, and Sir John Hunt led the successful attempt to scale Everest in 1953, also the year of the new Queen's coronation. For many of us in short trousers a new Elizabethan age appeared to have dawned. This, at least, was the image presented to British boys by the Revd. Marcus Morris, editor of the *Eagle*, first published by Hulton Press on 14 April 1950 as an antidote to American horror comics. (*The Boy's Own Paper* was similarly published by the Religious Tract Society in 1879 as an alternative to the penny dreadful.) The *Eagle* contained picture strips of Dan Dare, Pilot of the future, drawn, of course, by Frank Hampson, but also immortalised such characters as PC 49, Harris Tweed, Jeff Arnold and Luke, Storm Nelson, Waldorf and Cecil, Tommy Walls and Luck of the Legion. Readers of the SPCD will not need reminding of how innovative, glossy and exciting the *Eagle* was when it first appeared. Yet a story paper recommended by teachers and parents lacked that element of 'forbidden pleasure' associated with one's own schoolboy discoveries at the local newsagents.

The hard-cover Christmas comic annual is a peculiarly British phenomenon which has no parallel in America. I have been collecting children's or, more properly, boys' annuals from the 1950s in a modest way for some years, acquiring about fifty in all. Like so many, I got my start in this hobby when, returning as a student during the vacation, I discovered that my mother had thrown out my precious collection of boyhood annuals. As soon as I had some disposable income, I decided to recreate what had been lost from scratch by searching through second-hand bookshops. Unlike one American collector of dime novels, I did not expect to find the originals with my own childhood signature on them! When I started collecting, about ten years ago, copies of *Eagle* or *Express* annuals could still be obtained at jumble sales for a mere 20p or 40p but recent years have seen a sharp escalation in prices. Presumably male collectors now in their forties can afford to indulge a nostalgia for the 1950s. Hence early *Eagle* annuals, fast disappearing in good condition, get priced in double figures, whereas shelves of *Girl* and *School Friend* annuals remain unsold. The current Dan Dare craze has also raised the prices of 1950s spin-offs featuring that lantern-jawed hero but his original *Eagle* adventures have been lavishly reprinted by both Dragon's Dream and Hawk Books.

Down-market of the splendidly produced *Eagle* were such boys' papers as *Lion*, whose annuals ran from 1954, and *Tiger*, from 1957. The latter contained 'Rockfist Rogan' (taken from *The Champion*) and 'Roy of the Rovers', probably the most popular sporting strip in the history of comics. Among the 1950s comic favourites, then at peak circulation, which issued annuals were the perennial D.C. Thomson weeklies *Beano* and *Dandy* (for the marvellous Dudley Watkins), also the Amalgamated Press *Radio Fun*, *TV Fun*, *Film Fun*, *Knockout*, *Topper* and, only in annual form, the *Okay Adventure Annual* (1956-58), a recycled American strip collection usually purchased at Woolworths. I have excluded from my own collecting such 1930s and 1940s Thomson books for boys as *The Rover Book*, *The Hotspur Book* and *The Wizard Book* but it may be worth mentioning that the first postwar annual to be published by Thomson was Jack Prout's *Black Bob - The Dandy Wonder Dog* (1950).

The patient collector of British boys' annuals can still find bargains at £3 or so, as I did recently ferreting among the children's literature sections of the many second-hand



bookshops in Hay-on-Wye and, just outside, Judith Gardner's Children's Bookshop. A visit in July to Worthing's estimable Steyne Bookshop in Sussex also unearthed some bargains, including a 1951 *Film Fun Annual* for only £4.95 and a 1960 *Tiger Annual* for £2.50. The wonderfully authentic T.V. Boardman *Buffalo Bill Wild West Annual* (1949-1961), with its characteristic woodcut-style Denis McLoughlin illustrations of stories by Arthur Groom and Rex James, can still be found without too much effort and represents good value at £3-£5. The ready availability of some annuals over others presumably represents a measure of their Christmas-time popularity. Charles Chilton's Western annual *Riders of the Range* (1956-1962), featuring Jeff Arnold, can also be purchased at modest prices, although I favour the early volumes produced in special arrangement with *Eagle* by the well-named Juvenile Productions Ltd. The TV Western boom of the 1950s also encouraged often rather crudely-drawn annuals for 'Cheyenne', 'Lone Ranger', 'Rawhide', 'Maverick', 'Wagon Train', 'Roy Rogers', 'Circus Boy', et. al., plus numerous other variations on the theme of the Wild West.

Children must have delighted in such items in my collection as a 1956 *Chicks' Own Annual* (only 40p;), a 1947 *Tiger Tim's* (how did that get in there?) and a 1952 *Jimpy*, the *Daily Mirror's* imaginative cartoon character drawn by Hugh McClelland. As a boy in the 1950s I had a soft spot for the *Thriller Comics Library* and *Cowboy Comics* ('64 pages of exciting, action-packed adventures, two every month price 8d. each'). Their Amalgamated Press annuals, featuring Robin Hood, Billy the Kid and Kit Carson, can still be found, vigorously illustrated by master draughtsman D.C. Eyles. Another favourite *The Knockout Fun Book* (1941-1962) is currently increasing in value, largely owing to its inclusion of Sexton Blake and the Billy Bunter comic strips of Frank Minnitt. I also became a cinema addict in the 1950s, assisted by 'the very own annual of the juvenile filmgoer', *The Boys' and Girls' Cinema Clubs Annual*, edited by Robert Moss.

I hope the above gives some sense of the pleasure to be gained from collecting in this area and of the wide variety of 1950s annuals that can still be found in some, but not all, children's sections of second-hand bookshops. On the other hand, I hope I have not encouraged dealers who read the SPCD to put up their prices, on the assumption that there is a ready market of affluent collectors eager to purchase 1950s annuals in almost any tattered condition. Prices already fluctuate between £3-£10, and early *Beano* or *Eagle* annuals, plus rare items like the first oblong *Topper Book* (1955), are priced in an altogether silly range. The end result of such an inflationary pricing policy is to make it impossible for ordinary members of the public to purchase annuals, restricting them to collectors like myself or to rich American libraries. This has already happened to 'Biggles' and 'William' first editions, to G.A. Henty first editions and to Express *Rupert* annuals. Dealers would probably respond that if this is what the market will bear then so be it, they are not in business for their health, after all. Fair enough but spare a thought for many a grey-haired collector, clutching Driff's Guide, seeking to recreate his youth, searching for a relatively inexpensive 1950s annual. (P.S. I am in the market for *Eagle* annual No. 2 at a reasonable price.)

References: Denis Gifford, *The Best of Eagle Annual, 1951-1959*, Webb & Bower, 1989, £14.95; Alan Clark, *The Children's Annual: A History and Collector's Guide*, Boxtree, 1988, £16.95; Mike Higgs, *The Big Fat Bunter Book*, Hawk Books, 1989, £9.95.



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Reflections on My Collection

By R. T. RUDD.



(Editor's Note: These reflections are extracts from a longer work by Mr. Rudd.)

My collection of pre-war British boy's magazines caused both pleasure and confusion among friends and mere acquaintances alike. One of the magazines that I had read avidly as a youth was "Modern Boy". It mainly featured adventure tales as distinct from the "Magnet" and several other magazines whose stories were centred on fictional public schools. These featured the same cast of characters issue after issue, year after year. In the case of the "Magnet" and "Gem", it was generation after generation of readers.

Serials were the order of the day in "Modern Boy" with each episode leaving the young reader on tenterhooks as the hero of a story was left stewing in a cannibal's pot or plunging toward his doom as he was being borne to earth by a parachute that didn't open. As always, some dastardly villain had tampered with it. Pearl White's "Pauline's Perils" were mere amusing peccadillos by comparison.

Captain Justice and his friends made a regular appearance in "Modern Boy". The emphasis was on yarns that always had very obvious science fiction overtones. Justice himself and his scientific side kick, Professor Flaznagel, were never reluctant to invent futuristic things like television, space ships, radar and radio controllable robots. They also had to contend with 20th century pirates, mad scientists, and invaders from outer space. In almost every series of stories there were threats to not only themselves but to the entire world. In those cases the world's continuation always depended on Captain Justice and his crew (there were several teenage boys on the team of about the same age as the bulk of the readers) frustrating the bad guys, or villains, as they were referred to in that genre of literature.

It was a huge robot invented and manipulated by one in the succession of Captain Justice's enemies that might well have cost the life of one of my West Vancouver neighbours.

The setting was Hallowe'en. My two daughters had that year, for the first time, decided they were too old for tricking and treating.. All Hallow's eve proceeded and various small goblins, witches et al arrived at the door for their goodies...

Some of the smaller types materializing on our front stoop were accompanied by a parent or two. Such was the case with Nancy, the four year old from up the street. She arrived with her father in tow. The street, like most in hilly West Vancouver, was very steep. It was obvious that Nancy's dad was feeling the strain as well as the heat on the uncommonly warm night for Vancouver in October. Having on occasion imbibed a flagon or two with the neighbour, I surmised the offer of something long and cold with some restoration value added thereto would not be ungraciously refused. I also felt the wear and tear from several hours of exclaiming enthusiastically over every witch and goblin that arrived at my front door had earned me some liquid compensation.

The two young ladies who were permanent residents in the house were delighted to have themselves volunteered to escort Nancy the rest of the way up the street. I, being of a suspicious bent of mind, suspected they were pleased to be able to have an excuse to get out and see some of the local Hallowe'en night action without sacrificing their new found maturity.

Over a convivial gin and tonic my neighbour and I agreed it was terrible the way kids today read comic books and watched T.V. rather than immersing themselves in good literature. "Even the literature I read as a kid," I pontificated, "had great literary merit. And

many of the magazines I read were written for youngsters. I still read the occasional copy from my collection of pre-war boy's magazines."

The neighbour's eyes sparkled. I had touched a nostalgic nerve.

"What I'd give to be able to read once again a Captain Justice story from the 'Modern Boy!'" he exclaimed. "I was about ten years old and I read it every week. I forget most of what was in them but Captain Justice was my hero. When I close my eyes I can still see a cover which showed a huge robot coming out of the ocean on its way to try and destroy Justice Island where the good Captain and his crew made their headquarters."

I excused myself, repaired to the library where my collection was catalogued and filed, and fished out the very copy of the magazine he was becoming maudlin about. I knew it must have been the one that was still such a vivid memory in my neighbour's mind. I returned to the living room and handed it to my guest. "Is this the cover and issue for the Captain Justice story you are thinking of" I asked genially.

Nancy's father nearly had a heart attack on the spot as he held in his hand a copy of the magazine he had thought about, on and off. and dreamed about, for some forty years, even, he told me, over another gin and tonic, during the retreat from Dunkirk. Had I known that my guest also had a heart problem I would never have shocked him by producing, like a genie from a West Vancouver bottle, a specific copy of a boys' magazine published in England that many years before.

Anyway, my neighbour did survive the shock to his system and on future meetings he regarded me with new respect and not a little awe...

I often thought of Billy Bunter and his school mates during the war and post war years, always hoping that some day I might come across a few copies of the 'Magnet' in some second hand book or magazine store. Subsequently I discovered there remained a world-wide cult of collector devotees who, in addition to the 'Magnet', collected, traded, bought and sold nearly all of the pre-war English boys' magazines and annuals like "Chums" and the "Boys Own Annual". Ultimately I became an avid collector myself, and eventually ended up with a most complete and varied collection.

I began my collection through talking with one of my colleagues, Les Holroyd, a Canadian who was married to Beth, a young Scots lass. I had several times mentioned to Les and Beth how much I yearned to see one or more of the magazines which were purchased weekly and without fail, and read from cover to cover in my youth. Beth wrote her parents, still living in Scotland, asking them to keep an eye open in second-hand book and magazine stores for any copies which might turn up. They did much better than that! They bought a copy of 'Exchange and Mart' which ran someone's advertisement saying they had some six years of the "Magnet" in fair to excellent condition for sale -- published in the period 1932-1938 -- which were just the years of my devotion to them. The parents advised Les and Beth that they had contacted the inserter of the advertisement re. a possible sale, and a hold had been put on their disposal awaiting final word from far away Canada.

When Les, then working as our regional P.R. manager out of Toronto, received the wire from Scotland about the availability of the 'Magnets', he was chagrined to discover that I was far away on a trip to Kemano. The Kemano Power House was equipped with a Teletype machine and, of course, there was a teletype machine in our Toronto office...

When a teletype arrived for me at the Kemano Power Station saying that there were some 300 "Magnets" available if I wanted them, the teletype operator on duty at the time could only imagine that the reference was to some new fangled equipment being considered for the Powerhouse. He wondered if that guy from head office who was in camp that week had plans to experiment with some kind of new technology in which Magnets would replace the traditional water wheel and generator for the production of electrical energy from falling water!





Which boys' author, famous for his stories of air adventure, served in the R.A.F. in the first World War, and had his flying hero serialised in the *Modern Boy* in the 'thirties and later join a newly established Air Police? W.E. Johns might well be your answer.

But if I add that the author I have in mind was better known for his sea adventures, and published his first flying story in 1912, then the answer is obviously someone else!

Percy F. Westerman (1876-1959) was a prolific writer for boys and, indeed, was voted in a newspaper poll of the late 'thirties the most popular boys' author in Britain. From *A LAD OF GRIT* (1909) to *MISTAKEN IDENTITY* (1959) he poured out a flood of exciting yarns, nearly 200 of them.

Although best remembered for his stories which featured boats and the sea - his own life-long passion - he tried his hand at many types of traditional boys' fiction. Henty was his model for the historical stories which were his initial efforts but soon his delight in the new technological developments of the twentieth century became increasingly apparent. Before and during World War I he introduced submarines and aircraft in to his stories, for example *THE FLYING SUBMARINE* (1912), *THE RIVAL SUBMARINES* (1913), *THE DREADNOUGHT OF THE AIR* (1914) and *THE SECRET BATTLEPLANE* (1916).

In 1918 he "wangled" himself into the R.A.F. where he worked, despite his very poor eye-sight, as a navigation instructor. (By the way, the patriotic P.F.W. managed to serve in the Home Guard in the Second World War despite his age and visual deficiencies!).

A number of themes provided the background to his stories: the sea, treasure hunting, espionage, war, sea-scouting and, finally, flying.

In the midst of his prolific output, it may be that he noticed the immense success that W.E. Johns' *Biggles* was gaining in a series of flying stories featuring the same characters. In one of his offerings for 1932 Westerman produced *THE AMIR'S RUBY*. Here we meet for the first time Colin Standish, Westerman's "Biggles". He is a senior pilot with Far Eastern Airways based at Bere Regis, Dorset. He is a lean, athletic Yorkshireman in his early twenties, a keen boxer, who, with his friend, Don Grey, flies the big bi-plane airliners on routes across Europe and the East.

In his first adventure, Standish is sent by Sir Rugglestone Corton to bring back to England the Atar-il-Kilk ruby from Bhakistan. With Don Grey and loyal mechanic Jack Metcalfe he defeats the attempts of the Down'em Gang and the villainous Malagrotto of the Egyptian Kafshirbin Gang to steal the jewel. On his successful return however, Standish finds that they have been carrying a decoy jewel!

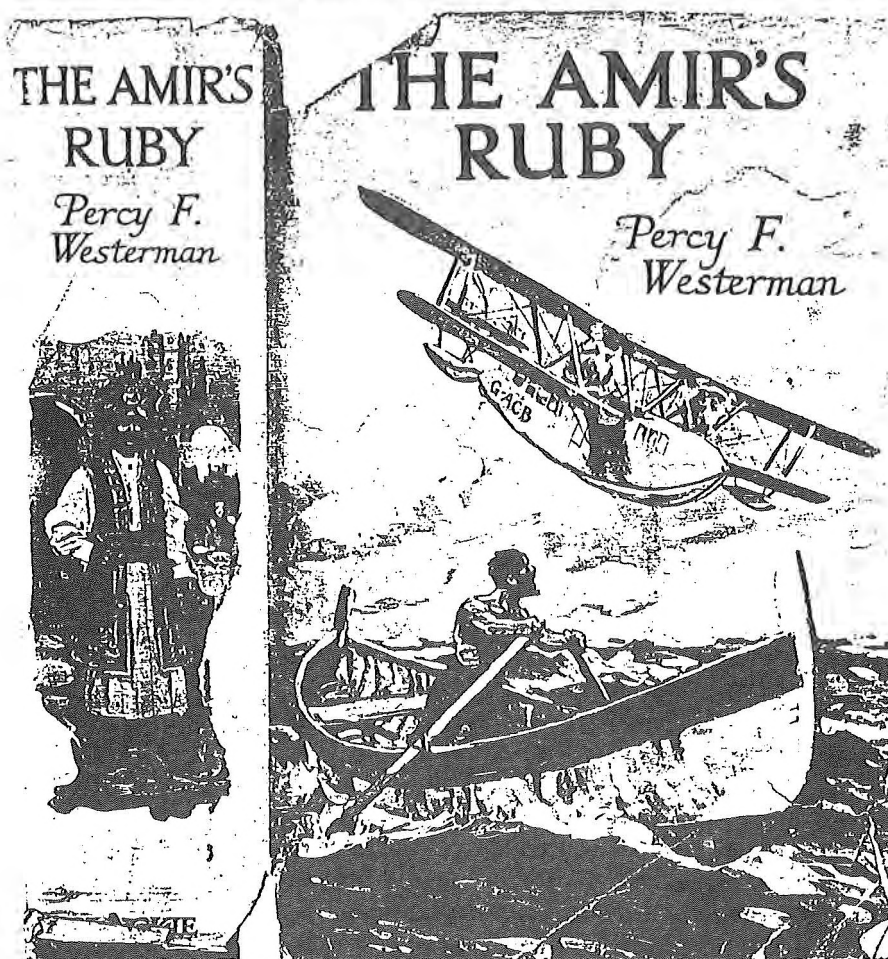
In the next story, *THE WESTOW TALISMAN* (1934), he is asked to fly a family talisman out to the Sudan where the estranged son of Sir Francis Westow is busy in archaeological exploration. Again Standish, Grey and Metcalfe frustrate the efforts of the remnants of the Down'em Gang and finally see the end of the evil Malagrotto. The talisman heals the breach between father and son.

In a conclusion reminiscent of *THE AMIR'S RUBY*, it turns out that Sir Francis had sent only a duplicate talisman. "But it did the trick!" he exults. He is, however, corrected by Jack Metcalfe, who had seen Noel Westow walk away from their plane with "a tall good-looking girl ... apparently oblivious to everything and everyone except themselves."

"Nay, but Ah reckon as you're wrong there, your lordship!" said Metcalfe, with typical Yorkshire bluntness. "It wur yon lass, tha' knows!"

"You are right", agreed his lordship soberly. "She is the talisman that counted!"

P.F.W. must now have seen the rich possibilities in Standish and, in a move which long anticipated Biggles' appearance as SERGEANT BIGGLESWORTH C.I.D. (1946), he gives us STANDISH OF THE AIR POLICE (1935).



The concept of air detectives, private or official, was not new by any means. I think immediately of Curtis Carr in the first issues of the CHAMPION storypaper in 1922 and Rowland Walker's CAPTAIN MCBLAID OF THE AIRPOLICE (1932), and there were many others. The linking of air and crime adventures, two of the most popular "genres" of the years between the World Wars, had been seen as an obvious development by many authors. But to P.F.W. must go the credit for creating a well-thought-out aerial police force, organised in a convincing way and ready to face all the dangers and routine work that the ordinary "copper" encounters. Standish and his colleagues tackle, at one time or another, smuggling, fishing supervision, espionage, traffic control, air gangsters from the U.S.A., burglary and mountain rescue. All this was much more similar to what a real air police force might have to cope with than a constant succession of air piracy cases!

In this first story, Standish is invited by Sir Rugglestone Corton to join the newly established Royal Air Constabulary. Standish's old employer in the adventure of the Amir's ruby offers him and Don Grey three year commissions as sub-inspectors in the new force. No doubt, he would also have asked for the services of mechanic Jack Metcalfe but, thanks to Sir Francis Westow's generosity, Jack is now owner of a small garage near Scarborough. Standish and Grey decide after careful consideration to accept the offer. After a stiff medical examination, ("the medical standard set by the R.A.C. was stricter than that required for the Brigade of Guards"), they are sent to Hawkscar Aerodrome, the North Eastern base of the Air Police, which is "situated between Flamborough Head and Scarborough, about three miles from the sea".

So far everything has been conventional and realistic. But P.F.W. had a fondness, especially when he dealt with flying machines, for imagining technical details and innovations which often lent a "science fiction" element to his writings. The Royal Air Constabulary, for example, flies monoplanes with highly cambered wings, each of which

curves back through nearly a quarter of a circle. But a mysterious tube about three feet in length proves to be a projector for a ray which can paralyse internal combustion engines by neutralizing the magneto. Standish quickly points out that diesel powered engines like those of Far Eastern's long distance aircraft would not be affected. However, such aeroplanes are rare and do not present a serious problem.

The R.A.C.'s own planes were unaffected by any such ray because they were powered by "motonol", a powder "which resembled flour in weight and consistency, but was of a dark grey colour. Exposed to air it was non-inflammable but once it was drawn into the cylinders by the suction of the inlet valves, it became under compression a powerful explosive".

Each plane is also equipped with a "stop-signal apparatus... showing green, amber and red lights... any aircraft seeing this signal was to proceed at once to the nearest landing ground..."

Standish is soon in action against the powerful Moss gang, engaged in smuggling arms and drugs across the North Sea. Our hero flies to Bremen and, after a desperate return flight to Yorkshire hanging on to the criminals' bi-plane, he gives damning evidence at the gang's trial. He has the satisfaction of being awarded the newly instituted Distinguished Service decoration and is promoted to Inspector; and he hears from the dock one of the convicted gang, who has escaped a sentence for murder thanks to Standish's straight-forward and truthful evidence, pay him "the best tribute that Colin had ever received: 'Although you're a blooming air cop, you're a sportsman, sir!'"

In his second R.A.C. adventure, *RINGED BY FIRE* (1936), he is sent with Grey to Dorset to investigate a rash of suspicious heath fires. Flying "incognito" in a civilian aircraft, they are forced down by bogus Air Police using a magneto-neutralizer. Although they soon overcome their opponents, they realize that there is more to this affair than some possibly accidental fires. Using his old aerodrome at Bere Regis as a base, Standish is struck by the marked deterioration of his former boss, Truscott. But he has other things on his mind. With the help of Denis Day, a fourteen year old pupil at Swanage Grammar School, Standish triumphs over the smuggling gang responsible for the heath fires and brings them to justice. When Truscott is found to be in league with the crooks and dismissed from his post, Colin is offered the job of Managing Director of Far Eastern Airways. However, he refuses the offer and returns to Yorkshire and Hawkscar.

This story, interestingly, was serialised in the *Modern Boy* in April 1935, immediately following "Winged Menace" by W.E. Johns (which appeared in book form as *THE BLACK PERIL* in 1935).

In *STANDISH GETS HIS MAN* (1938) American gangsters fly the Atlantic and boastfully set out to show the violent superiority of American "know-how" in the field of crime! But Mike Doran and Toni Pergelli find the British Police and the Royal Air Constabulary tougher to handle than they had expected. When Pergelli is killed in London, after a thrilling chase by Standish and R.A.C. planes from several bases, the fugitive Doran tries to take revenge on Standish. He even stays in disguise as a paying guest in the family of Jack Metcalfe, near Hawkscar and his hated enemy. But the American gangsters do not find the British police 'an easy touch'.

Standish, fresh from a dangerous rescue mission in the wintry hills of North Yorkshire, is now engaged in testing a new type of aircraft for the R.A.C. ... "the first of a new type of helicopter intended primarily for the control of crowds from the air. By means of amplified loudspeakers the observer could give directions to the congested traffic and also assist the police on point duty... like the rest of the R.A.C. machines [it] was not petrol driven, but relied upon her propulsion by means of a spirit non-inflammable except under high pressure, ignition being made by the electrical heating of platinum rods projecting into each of the cylinder heads." (It might be noted here that P.F.W. used the word "helicopter" when what is shown on book-jackets and illustrations and clearly described is what is usually called an "autogyro". This is true in both pre-war and post-war books.)

But our hero has not seen the last of foreign gangsters. In *STANDISH LOSES HIS MAN* (1939) his opponent once again is an American, and when he receives threatening letters and, more seriously, Jack Metcalfe vanishes from his garage, it is obvious that "Quick-draw" Jake Jefferson is out to revenge Mike Doran.

Jack is imprisoned on Dubh Mor, a remote island in the Hebrides. Once a secret submarine base for the Germans in the first World War, it even has electricity provided by tidal-powered turbines.

It seems that, as well as revenge, Jake is involved in the smuggling of arms on to the island. Strangely, the arms and ammunition are incompatible and therefore useless. It turns out later that these arms have been supplied by "a certain European Power" in an attempt "to alarm the British public into the belief that the arms were intended for a Red insurrection in this country... The blame would be thrown upon the Bolsheviks, and the natural sequence would be a wave of public opinion against the proposed 'rapprochement' (between Britain and Soviet Russia)". Apparently, P.F.W., like all but a few, was becoming increasingly aware of the approaching World War.

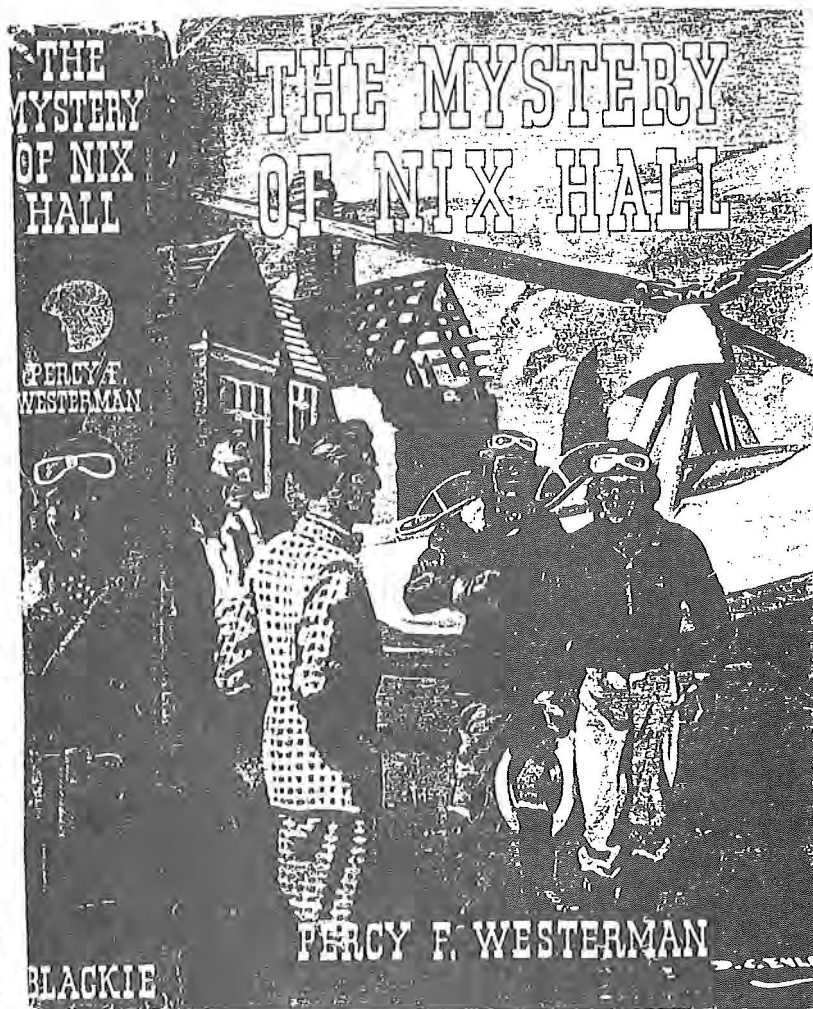
STANDISH PULLS IT OFF (1940) shows us a rapidly darkening political atmosphere. Obviously written before the outbreak of war in 1939, Standish is faced with "Verdonian" spies who are seeking the secrets of a vast new underground base beneath Westerdale Moor. Britain's re-armament is wholly applauded by him (and, no doubt P.F.W.!).

The officer who gives Grey and Standish a demonstration of the new aerial torpedo which Westerdale can fire, says afterwards: "If that had been the real thing, there would be a nasty mess in the centre of a certain European capital in fifty minutes from now! Pretty awful!... But if the worst comes to the worst, I suppose it'll have to be. Better for the population of a big town to be wiped out in a second than to be bombed in the old-fashioned way, piecemeal and with plenty of time to think it over". (Interestingly, the radio-powered aerial torpedo had figured in a previous book, WINGED NIGHT (1937). Also, the anti-magneto ray is now called the Z ray, while the R.A.F. is said to possess a ZZ ray which can ignite any explosive substance or liquid at a range of up

to five miles. Similarly named Z and ZZ rays were featured in P.F.W.'s excellent "science fiction" story, THE WAR OF THE WIRELESS WAVES (1923). As well as being a great lover of coincidence, our author was fond of using internal references to previous stories and re-using favourite characters again and again!)

Standish manages to recapture the escaped Verdonian, and the last book in the series in which Standish plays the principal part and which bears his name in the title, is STANDISH HOLDS ON (1941).

In this story, once again Standish is involved with American gangsters, forming part of a secret anarchist organisation, the Karamoni. They are engaged in every sort of world disruption at the behest of a Wall Street speculator in international stocks and shares.

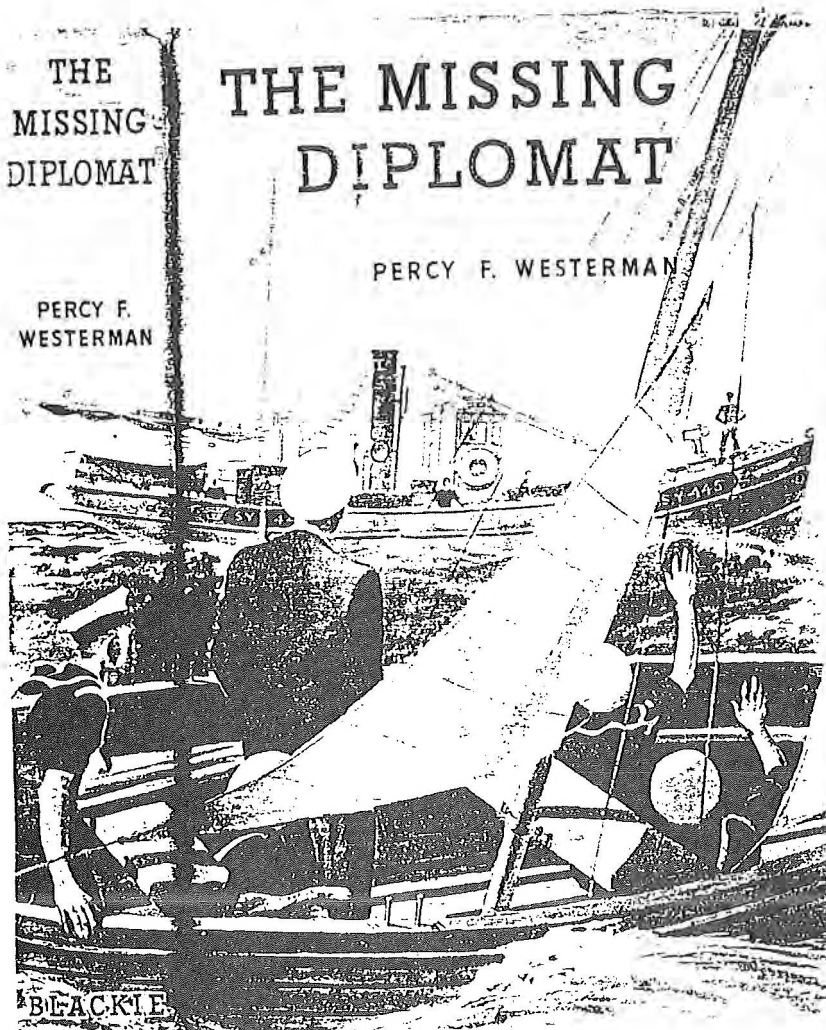


Accidentally stumbling across the gang in their secret base in an abandoned Cornish copper mine, Standish is injected with a mind-numbing drug which makes him totally submissive to their orders. Taken on board their submarine and on a piratical cruise through the Mediterranean, Colin gradually and secretly recovers from the drug and, seizing his chance, uses the submarine's seaplane to deliver the leader, Devilinos, to justice. Once again, oddly in a book published in 1941, World War Two is not in progress. Like some other PFW stories, for example SECRET FLIGHT (1942), it seems that STANDISH HOLDS ON was "pre-war stock"!

In the post-war books Standish's name is no longer in the titles and he cedes the foreground to new and younger characters.

In BEYOND THE BURMA ROAD (1949) we meet Keith Standish, orphaned by the Japanese in war-time Malaya. Applying for a rather mysteriously described job based in the Far East, he is asked about his famous uncle Colin. We are told that Colin Standish was working for the Secret Service in Tokyo when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, was imprisoned and later became a victim of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. (However, as the story develops, he turns up again, alive and well!)

Keith's mission is to travel to the remote state of Haitung, on the borders of Burma. The rightful Lord, or "Dalan", has vanished and his successor in London, who has British support, will only be accepted by his people if he has possession of the sacred "Haitung Ruby". And Haitung is important to Britain because it has uranium deposits! Keith must go and bring back the jewel to establish the position of the new Dalan. His Uncle, of course, co-operates.



Now comes a new stage in the Standish "saga" when he has returned to the Air Constabulary and, realistically for a man of his age and experience, he is described in the next adventure as "a tall erect man in his mid-forties with a deeply lined face, aged by his four years of captivity in Haitung and having served more than twenty (sic) years in the Air Police". Perhaps P.F.W. felt that new and younger blood was needed.

In any case, in THE MYSTERY OF NIX HALL (1950) we do not encounter Standish for some time. First we meet Bernard Bradfield and Philip Preston, two young pilots working for Inter-British Airways at Bere regis, who later meet Standish, who helps them when they are caught up in a strange burglary conspiracy.

Standish, as well as being older seems a lonelier figure now. It comes out that Don Grey, his best friend, has died heroically in the War and been awarded a posthumous V.C.

In *THE MISSING DIPLOMAT* (1953), the last Standish appearance as far as I know, Sub-Inspectors Bradfield and Preston, now serving in the R.A.C. at Hawkscar, go on leave to spend a holiday on a remote Scottish island. They foil a kidnap plot, hatched by Iron Curtain agents, through the help of a troop of sea-scouts. P.F.W. lovingly describes the scouts' boats, the 'Tern' and the 'Curlew': "twenty-seven foot ex-service Montagu whalers".

This is the last book I know of in which Standish appears. How, then, can we assess the achievement of P.F.W. in the creation and development of his air-hero and what conclusions can we draw from a consideration of the reasons for Biggles' pride of place in the public's consciousness?

What about this as a description of Colin Standish?

"...fearless but modest, efficient and resolute in what he undertook...". It fits, doesn't it? In fact, it is W.E. Johns on Biggles! (See *BY JOVE, BIGGLES!* (1981), the excellent biography of Johns by Peter Berresford Ellis and Piers Williams.) Perhaps every hero of British boys' fiction would conform to such a characterization. We have to add strength and fitness (Standish was a first-class boxer and had the stubborn strength to fly across the North Sea clinging on to the adversaries' aircraft in one of his adventures): also chivalry and truthfulness. Thus we can see that he possesses all the standard heroic qualities.

Characteristics less usual in some heroes are common sense and practicality. When he is invited to join the Royal Air Constabulary, Standish gives the proposal shrewd consideration, especially on the financial side, before he accepts. He is after all, a Yorkshireman!

And how does Westerman compare with Johns as creator of an aviator-hero? Both men were born in the nineteenth century and shared some at least of the attitudes of pre-1914 generations. Certainly both were patriotic and P.F.W.'s imperialism was always unquestioned and aggressive. Because he was older than Johns and was spared direct experience of the slaughter of World War I through his visual deficiencies. P.F.W.'s views on race and the British Empire remained perhaps more old-fashioned and unmodified than we would like.

His great passion in life was the sea and sailing. He had hoped to join the Royal Navy when it was at the height of its glory and prestige. Since the Navy was Britain's guarantee of security and independence, it was not surprising that he took a keen interest in developments in a new frontier where Britain would need also to be strong - the air. Aircraft gave him, as well, scope to express his interest in possible advances which science might bring.

With his poor eyesight, he could never have been a pilot yet he used his brief experience in the R.A.F. to write one of his best books, *WINNING HIS WINGS* (1919). An account of the training and entry into service of a young pilot, it is singled out as "...[pointing] the way forward for other writers". (See "Imperialists of the air-flying stories 1900-1950" by Dennis Butts in *IMPERIALISM AND JUVENILE LITERATURE* edited by Jeffrey Richards, Manchester University Press 1989.)

Biggles has two great advantages: his author was a combat-pilot whose experience gave him the background to start off his hero with some superb and thrilling stories. During the 1930s, while Johns concentrated on Biggles, P.F.W. continued his varied output of land and sea adventures.

After the first two Standish stories, in Bhakistan and the Sudan, the setting, in contrast to Biggles' adventures, is firmly in Britain. Less exotic perhaps but, read today, the Air Police's operations in Yorkshire, Dorset and Scotland - so accurately pin-pointed and described that you can follow them easily on an ordnance survey map - show us a society where new developments like tourism and the motor-car are changing people's lives for ever. The Royal Air Constabulary, too, is convincingly depicted in organisation and background.

One factor which certainly gave Biggles an "edge" over Standish was that Johns gave him a set of likeable chums who became as familiar as their leader. Algy, Ginger and Lord Bertie provide contrast and variety and multiply possible plots for their creator. It is a pity that Standish had no such colourful companions.

Whether Standish could have been developed further by P.F.W. is difficult to decide. The schoolboy who was so useful in RINGED BY FIRE, Denis Day, might have become a promising assistant but, considering the problems of finding realistic pretexts for removing a fourteen-year-old boy from school to assist the Air Police on a regular basis, it was no doubt wise to feature Denis just this once.

One could imagine Bernard Bradfield and Philip Preston continuing their adventures, with Standish acting as a sort of "father figure" in the background but perhaps P.F.W. was losing interest. During World War Two he had concentrated on Alan Carr, John Cloche and other leading characters. If THE MISSING DIPLOMAT was the last Standish story, then the seventy-seven-year-old author, with only a dozen or so more books to be written, may be forgiven for having had enough of Colin Standish.

So how to sum up? For the reader, Westerman's and Johns's heroes were friendly rivals in a contest in which Biggles has won the lasting esteem of the public. Nevertheless, Colin Standish was a worthy adversary, equally giving an example to boys of courage, tenacity and patriotism.

Johns was the specialist, using his own experience with exemplary concentration. Percy F. Westerman was the all-rounder with his dazzling variety. Once again the specialist won.



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IN

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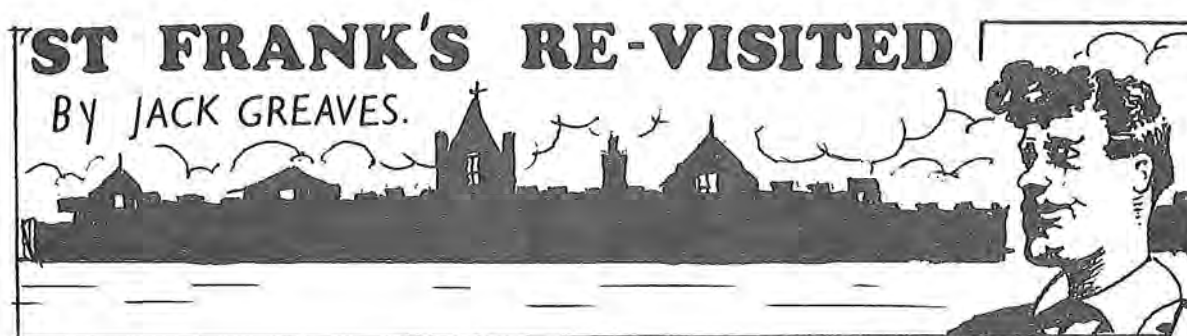
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In the Collectors Digest No. 519 of March 1990, the late and much missed Nelson Lee enthusiast, Jim Sutcliffe, wrote an interesting article about the pets owned by Handforth of the third form.

I have decided to continue with this theme opening it up to bring in quite a number of other animals which E.S. Brooks mentions in the Old Series.

PEDRO (226)

This was Sexton Blake's faithful bloodhound, and it was on the premises in Baker Street when Nipper called to discuss the disappearance of Tregellis-West and Nelson Lee while the school was based in London.

SPITFIRE (322)

This was the name of a horse on the ROARING Z ranch in Montana, USA, where the St. Frank's holiday party were staying. Nelson Lee surprised some of the ranch-cowboys by "breaking in" this magnificent specimen of horse-flesh, as they didn't think it would be possible for him to do so.

ROSCOE (392)

Roscoe was a parrot, at The Cedars, the home of Dr. Ryland Grimes, situated about half-way between Caistowe and Bellton. Willy Handforth had become friendly with the Doctor after going to his aid when he had fallen down a ravine.

LUCIFER (465)

Professor Onion's Colossal Circus and Menagerie were appearing in the Helmford, Bannington and Caistowe areas, and Lucifer was a lion who was described as being harmless and as old as Methuselah.

PINK BEAUTY (337)

Handforth had written a story which he hoped would be published in "Nipper's Magazine", which was due to make its first appearance on Wednesday, 23rd November, 1921. The story related to Jack Plunderer, a highwayman and Pink Beauty was his horse.

HETTIE (514)

Hettie, the pig, had belonged to a farmer named David Biggles living in the area around Godalming. It had been knocked down and killed by a car driven by Felix Spottiswood, an acquaintance of Archie Glenthorn's brother, Bertie.

WILLIAM (190)

William was mentioned in conversation between Colonel Clinton (the new housemaster of the College House) and his colleague, Hardy, from Stowe Lodge, when they met at St. Frank's, during a dark evening, near the school wall. They were talking about poison gas, and Clinton remarked "By the way, did you try the stuff on William?". "Yes, Sir, he died within 10 minutes."

Probably William was a cat, rabbit or guinea pig (we shall never know).

PETER (457)

Peter was Irene Manners' Irish Terrier which had been bought for her by her father. Only a puppy, it was cruelly treated by two workmen employed by Mr. William K. Smith, the American millionaire, and eventually shot by him.

JACKO (516)

Jacko was the name of the monkey which accompanied Carlo, a travelling street organist who called in at St. Frank's and took up his "busking" position alongside the Triangle.

HINDENBURG (259)

Hindenburg was a large bear who had escaped from Caistowe Station when one or two coaches were derailed, and his cage broke open. Nipper and Co., Fatty Little and Trotwood were returning to the school after seeing a cricket match in Bannington when contact was made with the escaped bear, who chased Fatty Little up a telegraph pole. The other lads had to throw pebbles up at Hindenburg to make him come down.

JACKY (261)

Jacky was a curly black and white little dog belonging to Edith Kirby, who had recently eloped and married.

Edith was Handforth's elder sister, aged 21. She was staying at Greyhurst Cottage in Edgemore. Because of her elopement, she was there under an assumed name, but her husband was really Mr. Clement Heath, the new Remove form master.

BESS (464)

This was the name of Tessa Love's horse, on which she performed numerous excellent stunts and tricks while appearing in Professor Onion's Colossal Circus and Menagerie. Tessa later became a pupil at the Moor View School.

BUD (312)

Jerry Dodd, the new Australian boy in the Remove Form at St. Frank's had brought over with him his pet chestnut pony, Bud. Jerry thought the world of him and there was a perfect understanding between them. Bud had been taught loads of tricks during the five years they had been together.

FRISKY BESS (320)

This was the name of a magnificent chestnut horse which looked quite docile and calm, and it belonged on the Montana ranch known as The Roaring Z, owned by Mr. James Farman.

Handforth in his usual manner, started boasting that he could ride anything on four legs, and the cowboys dressed him up in the appropriate clobber and placed him on the saddle. However, Frisky Bess wasn't as docile as she looked, and when Handy caught her with the spur, she soon threw him by leaping in the air like a cat.

ESWIT (448)

Eswit was a serval cat, peculiar to Africa. It had a glossy yellow coat covered with black spots, rather like a small leopard. It belonged to Dr. Karnak, the newly-appointed science-master of St. Frank's.

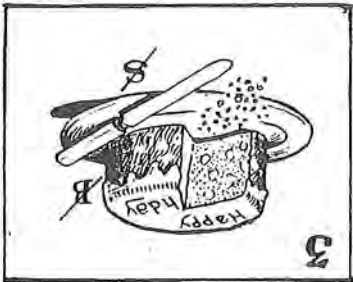
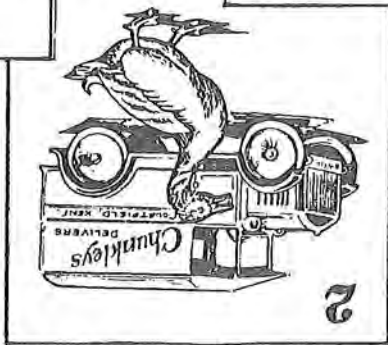
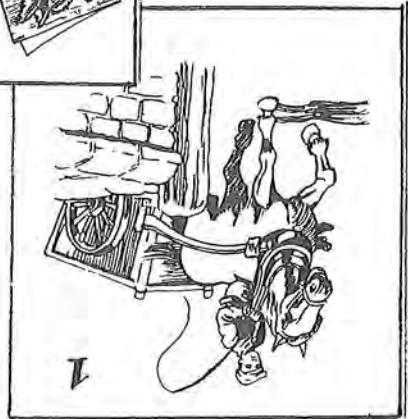
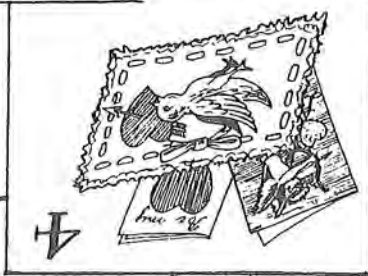
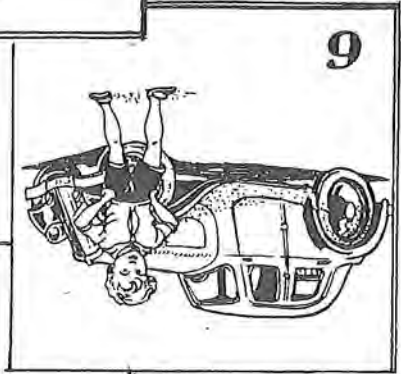
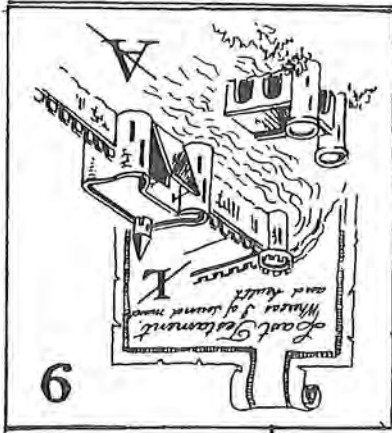
GRUMPY (321)

Handforth and Co. came in contact with a huge grizzly bear when they were exploring the area of the Roaring Z ranch.

The juniors were terrified and ran off. They climbed rapidly up a tree and the bear sat waiting for them. Later they found out that Grumpy was in fact tame, having been trained by some of the cowhands attached to the ranch.



ANSWERS ON PAGE 97



characters

Greyfriars

Guess these temporary

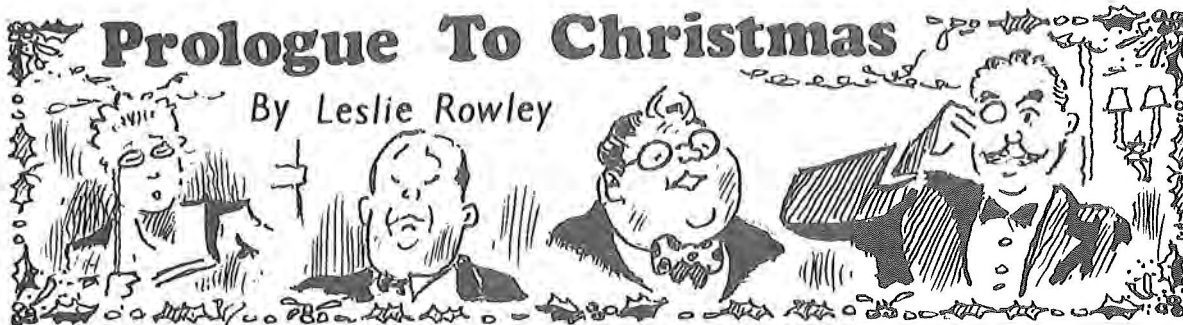


By BOB WHITER



Prologue To Christmas

By Leslie Rowley



Christmas was a season of happiness that was heartily endorsed by Colonel Wharton and Aunt Amy. They liked to see young people enjoy themselves and preparations toward this end had been put into effect long before the snow lay thick upon branch and bough or formed a feathery blanket over field and meadow. Crisp whiteness now touched with magic the ledge of every window and casement, every roof and chimney pot of Wharton Lodge. Tomorrow would bring Harry and Hurree Singh home for the holidays, and a few days later they would be joined by Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull. Parties were planned for Boxing Day and New Year's Eve to which other Greyfriars men and their friends from Cliff House were invited.

The preparations had, therefore, been varied and extensive. Huge Christmas puddings, with their aroma of brandy and spice, awaited steaming, and a giant turkey was destined soon to take pride of place at the festive table. There was to be a veritable mountain of mince pies on which a dusting of caster sugar would rest like a delicate touch of frost. On the sideboards, bowls of sweets and boxes of chocolates, biscuits, dates, figs, and crystalised fruits, would await the delectation of those who might still have room to spare. At teatime there would be the cake - a masterpiece - its dark fruit hidden by layers of marzipan and white icing. There would be other good things to eat and exciting crackers to pull.

As the arrangements progressed, Colonel Wharton looked upon the work of others and found it good. Wells and Thomas had toiled well, and reports from Aunt Amy indicated that the labours of the kitchen were equally commendable. There was something else that the Colonel found good, and that was Harry's list of guests. He had noticed with great pleasure the names that featured on that list. He had noted, with even greater pleasure, a name that did not appear thereon. It was possible that there were those who would regret the absence from a guest list of the name of W.G. Bunter. Colonel Wharton was not of this school of thought. His experience of Bunter had not been a joyous one. At previous Christmas gatherings, Bunter's behaviour had taxed his patience, together with that of his sister, the other guests, and the staff, to the limit. Cook had reported raids on the larder, and Thomas had been kept busy carrying numerous foodstuffs to Bunter's room. Bunter had taken his breakfast late and his lunch early, not managing to bridge the gap without recourse to substantial snacks. Bunter had plundered the wardrobes of Harry and his friends - with disastrous results on the items thus looted. He had had to remind Bunter of the excellent properties of soap and water and had been tempted to box the fat ears on more than one occasion.

Yes! The Colonel was pleased that Bunter did not feature on that guest list. Yet - in the innermost recesses of his military mind - there lingered some faint doubt. He poured himself a glass of sherry and, as he tilted the glass to his lips, he trusted that faint doubt was groundless.

Bunter did not bother to knock on the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove passage. The scent of frying sosses, like the scent of battle to the warhorse of old, had assailed his fat nostrils and a fat grunt had announced his arrival anyway.

The study was crammed, for Harry Wharton & Co. were celebrating the end of term with a feast worthy of the gods to which many of their friends had been invited. Frank Nugent was busy with a frying pan at the study fire. Bob Cherry was slicing bread for toast, Johnny Bull was uncorking bottles of pop while Wharton and Hurree Singh were

unpacking the load of good things from the tuck shop. It was a scene of youthful high spirits that would have gladdened the eyes of all but the most wretched. Accommodation that had been limited in the beginning was now crammed to the limit. Herbert Vernon-Smith shared an orange crate with Redwing. Peter Todd was perched precariously on a three legged stool. Four were squeezed together on the ottoman in the window, whilst others wedged in where they could, taking their food like horses, standing up. There wasn't space for anyone else, let alone a person like Bunter but, if there had been all the space in the universe, Bunter's presence would have been superfluous just the same.

"I say, you fellows, make room for a chap."

The appeal went unheeded. People seldom heeded Bunter when they were enjoying themselves, which was rather a mystery to Bunter himself. But, where grub was concerned Bunter was a trier. He had managed to get a fat foot in the doorway and then a fat arm which allowed him poke the chap in the front in the ribs. Unfortunately for Bunter that fellow was Bolsover, and the next moment Bunter found himself on his back in the Remove passage as the study door slammed to, shutting him off from the feast within.

The fat Owl picked himself up, hissed "Beasts" at the closed door, and made his way further along the corridor. He had managed to spot the Bounder in Wharton's study and, it followed, the Bounder could not be in his own. A few minutes later, esconced in Smithy's comfortable chair, Bunter was travelling at rapid speed through a box of chocolate creams with all the enjoyment of those who, in olden times, had found balm in Gilead. A greasy paw extracted a copy of the Holiday Annual from the bookcase to read as the contents of the box got beautifully less and the consumer got stickier and stickier by degrees, until the supply was finished. It was when he was replacing the book that Bunter noticed the packet of cigarettes that had been concealed behind it. A fat smirk joined the traces of chocolate and cream that adorned the fat countenance as Bunter lit an expensive smoke from an ember in the study fire.

* * * * *

Henry Samuel Quelch frowned. With the approach of the festive season, many schoolmasters would have relaxed the academic features a bit. But the many did not have Herbert Vernon-Smith in their charge and it was of that boy in his form that the Remove master was thinking. He was waiting for the Bounder to deliver an imposition that had been awarded for insolence, and the delivery was now long overdue.

Mr. Quelch was a fair man and recognised that on the last day before a holiday a certain licence was to be permitted in the celebration thereof. If it had been the case of his Head Boy - or indeed any other boy but Vernon-Smith - forgetting his lines Quelch was prepared to overlook the matter. During the term that was about to close, Vernon-Smith's sins had seemed as many as the sands on the sea-shore. Quelch found it difficult to compute the number of offences occasioned by the worst boy in the form. Insubordination, a disregard for the truth, breaking bounds, smoking in the Cloisters and a visit to "The Cross Keys" that had merited expulsion but which, with his fantastic luck, Smithy had managed to avoid. It was natural, therefore, that Mr. Quelch should deem it his bounden duty to ensure that the wayward were brought to heel. It was just possible that other reasons influenced his decision to seek out the guilty and administer a suitable punishment that had nothing to do with the festive season. Earlier that afternoon he had returned from a long walk across Courtfield Common. He had been tired when he had turned in the school gateway - tired and frozen. The bitter wind from the North-east had found a vulnerable point in the Quelchilian bone structure and he had been anxious to reach the comfort of his study fire. Then Prout had happened, detaining him in Elm Walk with anecdotes of when he, Prout, had been up at Oxford. Quelch had eventually managed to get away with the old excuse that he had papers to mark. "Papers to mark - on the last day of term?" Prout had been both hurt and sarcastic in that repartee and had left Quelch feeling that he had been found economic with the truth. Of course it would be unfair to think that Mr. Quelch should intend that Smithy should pay Scot and lot for the happenings. Nevertheless, it was with an almost convulsive grip on his cane that Quelch quitted his study and headed for the Remove passage. Coker, who saw him whisk up the staircase, nodded his head in approval. Coker had a short way with fags himself and approved of whoppings all round as far as the Remove were concerned.

As he reached the Remove passage Quelch became aware of excessive noises from No. 1 study. He also became aware of a strong smell of tobacco emanating from a study halfway along the passage, and that smell was accompanied by harrowing sounds of distress. Every picture tells a story, at the Remove master discovered when he pushed open the door of Study No. 4. The empty box labelled 'chocolate creams', a discarded packet and several cigarette ends in the grate all carried their message but, most poignant of all, was the slumped figure in the armchair and the hideous green hue on the woebegone face from which groans of pain gave utterance.

Quelch relaxed the intensive grip on the cane. Bunter was in no condition to receive a whopping, much as he deserved one. Bunter was suffering enough and the sooner he came under the care of the house dame the better. Quelch retraced his steps and knocked on the door of Study No. 1.

"Come in, fathead!"

Mr. Quelch opened the door in response to that invitation, and his appearance reduced the noise to a silence as though it had been cut with a knife.

"S-s-sorry, sir. I thought it was one of the fellows."

"Wharton, kindly accompany Bunter to Mrs. Kebble's room. He is ill and, if she thinks it necessary, Dr. Pillbury should be summoned." There was a glitter in the gimlet eye as the Remove master turned to the Bounder. "Vernon-Smith, you will follow me. Bunter has been smoking in your study, doubtless the cigarettes concerned belong to you, but you will be given a chance to explain yourself before I take you to your headmaster."

The Bounder wriggled uncomfortably. Quelch had laid it on pretty heavy, proving that even he could be generous at Christmastime. By tradition it should have been 'six' but, for once, Quelch had departed from tradition and had made it twelve. The master of the Remove fully subscribed to the maxim 'to spare the rod is to spoil the child'. The rod had not been spared on this occasion and the infliction had carried with it dire threats as to whether Vernon-Smith would survive the next term if he did not alter his ways. Another sentence of expulsion was unlikely to be commuted to a flogging as it had in the past.

The 'imperial jaw', even the chastisement that had accompanied it was like so much water off a duck's back to the Bounder, but the narrow escape that he had recently had from the sack had left an impression. His father was away from home - conducting a business deal on the other side of the globe - and Smithy had toyed with the idea of inviting some of the Highcliffe fellows to Courtman Square with the view of 'painting the town red'. Now, as he waited for Reddy to come in, he was having second thoughts. Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and the other knuts would welcome the opportunity but, on reflection, the Bounder doubted whether he would welcome them. As Reddy opened the study door, Smithy's mind was suddenly made up.

"Glad you've come up Reddy, I've got something to ask you. For once I'm following Bunter's shining example and scrounging an invitation for the hols. Do you think that you and your pater could put up with my company? Don't be afraid to turn me down, but if you can see your way clear..."

The radiant look on Redwing's face gave him his answer but, if Smithy was still in doubt, his friend's next words soon banished it.

"Of course there will be room for you, and of course you'll be welcome. But are you sure that you want to come? Christmas at Hawkscliffe will be difference from Christmas in town. But, if you really mean it Smithy."

"Quelchy has done his best to make me see the error of my ways, Reddy", he gave another reminiscent wriggle. "From now on I seek uplifting company like yours and that of Mr. Redwing. What's the advice the old poetic johnny gives us? "The noble nature of his friend, led him to virtue in the end". I'm counting on you and your pater, Reddy, for one of the most enjoyable Christmasses I've ever had."

Outside, the dark of night had fallen, bringing with it a fresh scattering of snow to the already blanketed window ledge.

"I have been in touch with your father Bunter, and have informed him that it is Dr. Pillbury's opinion that you are not well enough to travel by train. Rather reluctantly, Mr. Bunter has agreed to collect you by car and he has asked me to remind you and your brother that you will be expected to return to him the money already advanced for your journey. Your father is also aware of Dr. Pillbury's recommendation that you observe a limited diet so that you may recover from the effects of your customary gluttony. I am pleased to say that Mr. Bunter is in full agreement with the doctor's advice."

"But sir, Wharton's expecting me at his place for the hols. I can't let him down..."

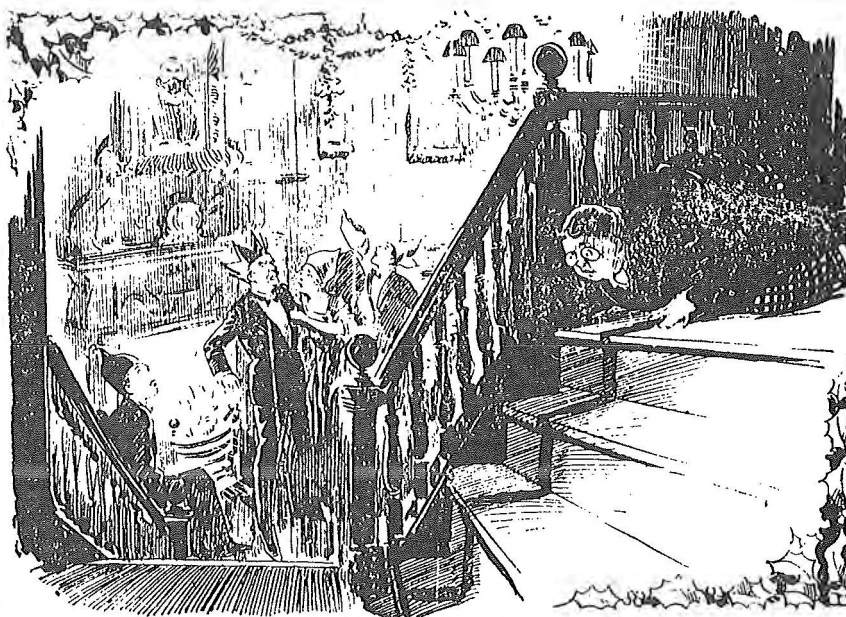
"In which case, I am afraid that Wharton will have to brace himself and overcome his disappointment - if any." There was more than a suspicion of sarcasm in Quelch's words. "I will inform Wharton of the matter and will commiserate with him on your behalf."

It was not often that Quelch allowed his features to relax into a smile, but this seemed to be one of those rare occasions, for something faintly resembling a crusty grin creased his features as he left behind a forlorn and sorrowing Bunter.

"Thank ye kindly, sir." William Gosling's gnarled features showed their appreciation of the substantial tip that Lord Mauleverer had bestowed upon him. Gosling on the last day of term was a vastly different creature from the Gosling who slammed the gates in a fellow's face if he was a little late for lock-up. Quick to report a man for some minor infraction of school rules during term, Gosling could be just as quick at wishing a fellow a happy Christmas when there was the likelihood of a tip at break-up time.

Lord Mauleverer settled back in his lordship's limousine, having shaken hands with most of his schoolfellows. If his lordship missed the sight of Bunter's considerable appearance he made no comment. Mauly had heard that Billy and his minor Sammy were to be collected by their pater. That was all to the good. On other occasions Bunter had materialised just as the schoolboy earl had been about to leave for the hols and Mauly had found it almost too much fag to get rid of his form-fellow. Today, his lordship could safely close his eyes in repose as his uniformed chauffeur quietly toiled the luxurious Rolls through the school gates into Friardale Lane. In a way, Bunter, by his absence, had made this a wonderful day, not only for Lord Mauleverer but for others as well.

"I look forward very much to your stay here, Mr. Quelch, and I will arrange for the car to meet your train at Wimford station at three o'clock on Christmas Eve. I am sure that my nephew and his friends will be as pleased as my sister and myself that you will be with us at this time of the year. Before I go, could I ask your advice as to the boy, Bunter? He does not feature on Harry's list of guests but it has been our experience on previous years, that Bunter has turned up unexpectedly..."



Colonel Wharton was telling the story of the ghost that haunted Wharton Lodge when there came the sound of a long, horrible, hair-raising groan. "What—what—what was that?" ejaculated Miss Wharton, her face turning quite pale. The party, naturally, was unaware that Bunter, the ventriloquist, was at work on the landing above!

"I quite understand", Mr. Quelch replied, with sympathy and understanding. "Pray allow me to put your mind at rest on the matter, Colonel Wharton. Bunter recently so over-indulged himself that he was ill and, on Dr. Pillbury's recommendation, has been placed on a restricted diet which his father has agreed to supervise. I have some hope that the boy will benefit from this attention. In any case, Colonel, I can assure you that Bunter will be spending the holidays at his home."

"Thank you so much for your assurance that the young rasc--- I mean, Bunter, need not be expected at the Lodge. I hope that his absence will not lessen your own enjoyment of your holiday with us."

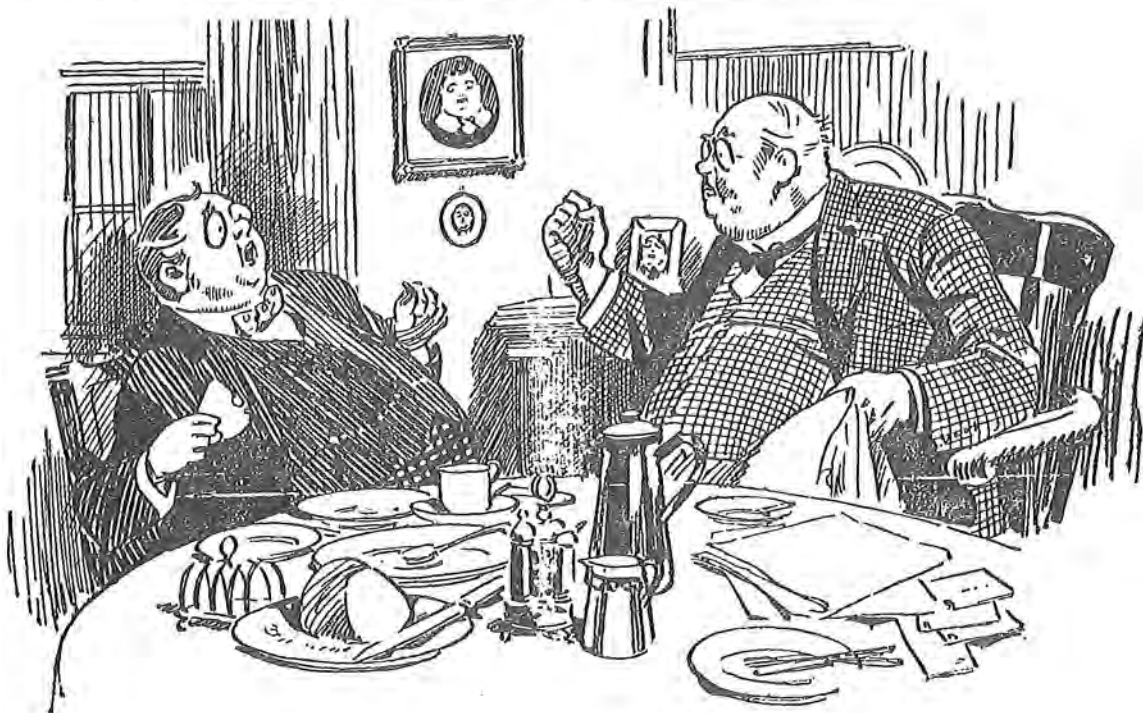
There was a sardonic smile on the Remove master's face as he replaced the telephone receiver. Far from Bunter's absence lessening his own enjoyment it would increase it tremendously. Quelch had more than enough of Bunter during term. A spot of Bunter-free leisure was not only desirable but necessary and he hoped that Bunter's pater would keep a strict eye on his son until it was time for the next term to begin.

At the other end of the Colonel Wharton had received Mr. Quelch's assurances with relief. It would give him the opportunity of telling the story of the ghost of Wharton Lodge as his guests sat round the great fireplace on Christmas Eve. He had tried to tell that story on two previous occasions but had had the telling spoiled by Bunter, on one occurrence by a yawn and on the other by a groan. The Colonel hoped that it was now a case of third time lucky, and he sat down at his desk to refresh his memory of that event in his family history when the ghostly cavalier came to seek his revenge.

Bunter gazed indignantly at the solitary slice of dry toast that lay before him and felt that life was more than he could bear.

"Abstinence is good for you, William", observed Mr. Bunter as he speared a portion of his sixth egg on to his seventh rasher of bacon. "But we may be able to relax your diet a little on Christmas Day."

The doleful countenance of his son brightened at this promising news. Though not as sumptuous as the festive board at Wharton Lodge, the grub at home was not to be sneezed at, especially after the period of fasting that he had endured.



"There is no reason" Mr. Bunter continued consolingly, "why you should not be allowed a mince pie together with a small portion of pudding, so long as you stay clear of such extremities as chocolates and sweets. Your mother has suggested to me that you should now have butter on your toast but, much as I value her concern, I feel that it would

be a retrograde step. After all, William", Mr. Bunter paused, not to let his opinion sink in, but because his mouth was full with hot buttered toast to which he had added a liberal helping of marmalade, "one doesn't want to return to the gluttonous habit of old, does one?".

Billy Bunter groaned. His father had referred to 'a mince pie' and 'a small portion of pudding' in the singular, whereas he was accustomed very much to the plural in such matters. Such diminutive sustenance was of no use to Bunter, who liked to take on such cargo in bulk. His father now rated as second only to Quelch as a 'beast'. Brother Sammy and sister Bessie, to whom he had appealed for succour in his present dilemma, had failed him miserably.

It would not have been so bad had Billy been in funds, but his father had insisted on the travel money being returned, and Bunter was in his usual stony state. Raising the wind was out of the question - he already owed Bessie five shillings from term-time, and Sammy could not be relied upon to cash a non-existent postal order from a non-existent rich relation.

He had had better luck when he had appealed to his mother and been rewarded with a portion of one of his favourite dishes - steak and kidney pie - and, for a few brief moments, he had rejoiced. The next time he had visited the kitchen he had found his father there, sampling hot mince pies. Bunter would also have liked to take part in the tasting; in fact it was doubtful if any pies would have remained had he done so. He was given no opportunity, and was evicted with the kitchen door locked once he was on the outside.

Those beasts at Wharton Lodge would be sitting down to unrestricted grub, not worrying themselves about a pal whose every crumb was counted. It was time, Bunter felt, that they were reminded of his existence. They were bound to rally round a fellow in such dire circumstances. Wimford was not all that far from Reigate, on the branch line from Elmwood Junction so only one change was necessary. There was the question of the fare, but Bunter had no thought for such trifles. True, travelling under a seat could be uncomfortable, dusty, and hot, but Bunter had had experience of this form of illicit transit.

He left a note for his mother, expended his last penny on a platform ticket at Reigate station and caught a train that stopped at Elmwood. Luggage was no encumbrance as Bunter took none with him, but accommodation was available in an empty first class compartment and Bunter travelled in the comfort to which he thought he was accustomed. At Elmwood, however, there was a problem in the shape of an inspector who was checking tickets. Bunter took refuge behind a collection of milk churns until the officious beast, the inspection over, made for the station buffet, there to seek refreshment denied to the fat Owl himself.

The chance was too good to be missed and, leaving his temporary refuge, he made his way across the footbridge to the platform where the local train waited for passengers to Wimford. With an impatient grunt, Bunter settled himself comfortably in a corner and speculated whether he would arrive at Wharton Lodge in time for a tea which, he intended, would last until supper. His speculation was suddenly interrupted by the arrival of another passenger and he turned to face the intruder. Then ...

"Bunter! What are you doing here?" Mr. Quelch's words were uttered in a tone that indicated a sad lack of pleasure, as he gazed in surprise at that promising member of his form. Completely taken unawares, Bunter could only stare back in silence.

"I think I understand, Bunter. This train only calls at Wimford and you are making your way to Wharton Lodge."

"Y-y-yes, sir. Wharton has asked me for the hols. Pleaded with me not to disappoint his uncle and Miss Wharton. Said that Christmas would not be the same without me!"

"How dare you tell such untruths, Bunter. If I had a cane with me I would punish you for uttering them."

Bunter was glad that there was no cane to hand. The look on Quelch's speaking countenance indicated that it would have been put to strenuous use.

Mr. Quelch re-opened the carriage door and dropped the bag he was carrying out on to the platform. The next moment a bony grip fastened on a fat collar and Bunter was urged out of the carriage. Maintaining his hold on Bunter, the form-master recovered his luggage and together they proceeded to the footbridge that led back to the mainline

platform. It was there that they encountered the recently refreshed ticket inspector. The man looked askance as the two approached.

"This boy", Mr. Quelch informed the man, "I have reason to believe, has absented himself from his home in Reigate. His father's name is Mr. Samuel William Bunter of Bunter Villa in that town and I would suggest that you get in touch with him by telephone."

The inspector looked at Bunter. He was obviously not impressed by what he saw.

"Ticket", he demanded tersely.

"Give the inspector your ticket, Bunter, and do not keep me waiting. I have no wish to miss the connection to Wimford."

Hesitatingly, William George surrendered the platform ticket had had obtained at Reigate. The man scrutinised the small piece of pasteboard with interest.

"Bilk", he said contemptuously. "Bilk", he repeated. "Right sir, I'll take charge of this young shaver. He will be put on the Reigate train in charge of the guard, and handed over there to his father on payment of cash due to the railway. Who may I ask, are you sir?"

"My name is Quelch, and I am the boy's schoolmaster, and came across him on the train that is shortly due to leave for Wimford. You may contact me at Wharton Lodge, Wimford, where I shall be spending the Christmas with Colonel Wharton."

The name of a well-known local magistrate carried conviction, and without further question Bunter's fat person was transferred to the custody of a very unfeeling railwayman. Mr. Quelch, picked up his bag, retraced his steps to where the train was still waiting. Barely had he sat down before the train was on its way.

The master of the Remove settled himself contentedly in his seat. How felicitous his encounter with Bunter had been. With minimum of inconvenience and no delay at all he had managed to circumvent what would have been a personal embarrassment to him - Bunter's turning up at Wharton Lodge after he, Quelch, had given the Colonel assurances to the contrary. Assurances he had given as a man of honour and a Master of Arts. Yes, Mr. Quelch was both satisfied and confident when he reached Wharton Lodge.

Colonel Wharton went to his repose that night a very relieved man. The soldier in him appreciated the tactics Mr. Quelch had employed in meeting the crisis that had passed. Now he would be able to recite, without let or hindrance, without interruption by groan or snore, the story of the avenging cavalier.

Harry Wharton and the nabob had greeted Mr. Quelch with warm respect rather than ebullient enthusiasm. But Mr. Quelch was a man of tact, and had brought with him a book of classical verse that would accord him refuge when exciting entertainment prevailed. Meanwhile the two Removites looked forward to the arrival of their friends and the most happiest of Christmasses.

There was, perhaps, less cause for rejoicing when Mr. Bunter collected his eldest son from the custody of the railway authorities at Reigate state. There was the bill, the very big bill, that Mr. Bunter had to settle on the spot. Far from welcoming the fat prodigal's return by killing the fatted calf, Mr. Bunter prophesied all kinds of rationing for the wayward youth. Mrs. Bunter made a different kind of fuss at the return of Billy, lavishing on him lots of good things to eat, and seeking from Mr. Bunter a promise that the days of dieting for William were over. And Mr. Bunter, being a mere man, knew better than to ignore such a contract if he, too, was to enjoy a Merry Christmas.

THE END

[All seems set for a Bunterless Christmas at Wharton Lodge, but is it too good to be true? Will the Colonel really be able to tell the story of the family ghost? How will Mr. Quelch enjoy his Christmas? Be sure to read next week's exciting story "The Ghost of Wharton Lodge" in the greatly enlarged Christmas number of your favourite story paper. To avoid disappointment place an order with your newsagent NOW! - Ed.]



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Edward Radcliffe Garth Russell Evans was born in 1881 and joined the Royal Navy in 1897. Not a prolific or famous author, he is perhaps best known for historic reasons.

As second in command of Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole, he was the last person to see the explorer alive, an account of which eventually appeared as a book, and was serialised in "CHUMS" of 1929/30.

On 20th April, 1917, a German flotilla of six destroyers appeared off Dover and was attacked by the British destroyers "Broke" and "Swift", the former commanded by Evans, then a captain. After repelling boarders, losing steam and sustaining 57 casualties (a high percentage of a destroyer's crew), sinking one enemy ship and badly damaging another, the "Broke" was towed into Dover Harbour, and Evans awarded the D.S.O. Thus Evans of the "Broke" became part of Naval History.

by REAR-ADMIRAL E.R.G.R. EVANS C.B., D.S.O., R.N



Galleons o' Death

At a later date, while commanding H.M.S. Carlisle, he received a gold medal from Lloyd's of London for saving the lives of several hundred Chinese from a wrecked steamer during a terrific storm. His life is not well documented, but about this time he was Commander In Chief of the Australian squadron and promoted to Rear Admiral. As an author, in "Chums" of 1928/29 he wrote "From Coronel to Falkland", a story based on the defeat of Admiral Craddock at Coronel in 1914, and the retribution by Admiral Sturges at the Falkland Islands.

In "Chums" 1930/31 we have "Keeping the Seas", the story of the "Broke" and the Dover patrol, followed by "Galleons of Death" in "Chums" 1933/34 and "Captain Sinister Sails Again" in the 1941 volume.

In published book form I have traced:
 South With Scott (Collins)
 The Mystery of The Polar Star

The Adventures of Peter
 Ghosts of The Scarlet Fleet (Jarrols 1932)
 The Exile (Warne 1933)
 The Treasure Trail (Collins - by Evans & Draycot M. Dell)
 For The White Cockade (Collins)
 The Ghostly Galleon (Bodley Head 1933)
 Spanish Death (Jarrols 1933)
 To Sweep The Spanish Main (Harrap 1934)
 Noel Howard, Midshipman (Warne 1934)

"The Ghostly Galleon" originally appeared in "Chums" of 1933/34 as "Galleons of Death". There was a little known author, one Paul Corydon, who also wrote historical sea stories. In "Chums" in the 1929/30 volume he was credited with "To Sweep the Spanish Main", subsequently published by Harrap in 1934 and attributed to Evans! In "Chums" 1931/32 there appeared "Barracuda" by Corydon, which was published by Jarrols in 1932 as "Ghosts of the scarlet Fleet" allegedly by Evans.



As the smoke of war drifted away, and as the light of a new day broadened, burned out hulks and drifting craft captured vessels and broken spars, told their own story.

In "Galleons of Death" ("Chums" 1933/34) and "Spanish Death" (Jarrols 1933) we encounter many characters previously created by Paul Corydon. And even ships retain the same names! Further to confuse the issue, Draycot M. Dell in "Chums" of 1935/36 wrote "Ghosts of The Spanish Main" and many of the characters and settings have a Corydon-Evans ring about them. In addition, Dell, writing as Piers Anson, introduces some familiar names in "Blake of the Whip Hand" in 1932. "For the White Cockade" (Evans hardback) turns up as "Loyal to Prince Charles" in BFL (2nd/No. 184), and although anonymous, Bill Lofts credits this to Dell, and I'm sure he is right. Having read (and re-read) most of the stories mentioned, and others by Dell, who was Editor of "Chums" from 1926 to 1939, my conclusion is that Draycot M. Dell was Paul Corydon and was also responsible for the Pirate stories by Evans, although the latter was undoubtedly the source of the Scott, Broke and Falkland accounts.

As a matter of interest, Evans dedicated "Spanish Death" to Draycot M. Dell, "whose friendship and interest has prompted me to place my pen at his disposal and evolve, with his help, several boys' stories of sea adventure."

I suspect this co-operation has much in common with that of Charles Hamilton and Sir Alan Cobham in creating "King of the Islands" for Modern Boy!! When I was a boy and these stories appeared, Rear Admiral Evans was still a heroic figure. Anyway, regardless of true authorship, I can recommend these stories as worthy of the pen of Samuel Walkey, indeed, as Paul Hardy did many of these later illustrations they have much in common.



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Best Wishes to all O.B.B.C. members, and special thanks to Bill Bradford and the Sexton Blake and Hamilton Librarians.

LARRY MORLEY

Seasonal Greetings to all. Wanted some Magnets and post war Bunter hardbacks.
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Season's Greetings to all readers especially Mary Cadogan, Roger Jenkins, Joe Marston and Laurie Sutton. Wanted to complete collection: C.D. monthlies 1, 2, 3, 3D, 14, 15, 16 and 17, and Annuals 1947, 1949 and 1959 - can anyone help, please!! Also S.O.L.s - most prior to 270, plus 272, 278, 284, 290, 296, 299, 308, and 317.

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



The joys of life, or at least those that seem to linger in the memory, invariably come from the simple things. A touch of imagination and an old cardboard container could be converted into a spaceship, a pirate galleon full of gold or any of a hundred and one things. How many times as children did we find the box more appealing than the expensive gift inside? As a boy my toys were more often than not piled up in a heap outside of the large wooden chest in which I was supposed to keep them, while I crouched inside re-enacting the exploits of one or other of my heroes. That well worn toybox was worth more to me than all of its contents.

The same thing applied to books. The beautifully illustrated volumes languished on the shelves while the comic annuals were read to pieces. I was almost word perfect on every strip in my Beano books. I knew every exploit of Dennis the Menace. Yet it was years before I got round to reading "Treasure Island" and the like. They stayed put in the bookcase, wrapped in their clean jackets, unloved. For all of their durable bindings they did not offer that certain something that made them indispensable to a young boy.

Looking back on childhood the simple things stand out. Who can forget standing in the sweetshop with a few pence to spend? Did we blow it all on a bar of chocolate? Not likely. Such dainty delicacies were for older sisters and only came our way as gifts from aunts and such like. When we had those copper coins and the choice, we wanted something less parentally approved. Like William Brown we wanted our money's worth. Sweet shops now seem almost devoid of those multi-coloured, mouth watering mixtures that had such an aromatic appeal. I expect we would be told that such delights filled us with flavouring and colouring and goodness knows what else. They were certainly addictive! Chews and shrimps and all manner of licorice shapes - and value for money at four for one penny. As I write I can bring to mind, like some instant playback of my childhood, the smell and taste of Palm Toffee bars. Those slabs of sandwiched toffee were always high on my list when I had the necessary funds. I ruined my teeth on Palm toffee bars! Each and every chunk of black filling is a memento of toffee chewing days and careless teeth cleaning!

Free gifts were another favourite, and memories of them linger. I remember buying an early "Beezer" and 'banging' my way home with the free cracker tucked away inside. That particular gift was a great favourite with the editor of "Beezer" and whenever he gave something away in the comic it was invariably a cracker, though often given some other fancy name. The 'gift' consisted of a square of card folded corner to corner, with a triangle of brown paper glued along two edges. The paper was folded inside the card and when the free end of the card was held above the head and brought down sharply air pressure forced the brown paper out with a BANG! In 1958 it was called 'Baby Crockett's Rocket'. I still have mine and it makes an acceptable noise, even in 1991, though by and large it has now been retired from active service and only makes the occasional guest appearance! From the collector's point of view such noise-making devices are now very difficult to find. They were usually used to extinction then thrown on the open fire to enjoy a Viking funeral. Even more short lived were the sweets that sometimes featured as free gifts. Strips of toffee were well to the fore in the free sweet stakes. The trouble always seemed to be removing the paper which adhered with the power of the strongest super glue known to mankind. But we were hardy creatures, and a quantity of paper taken with toffee seemed to do us no harm and was usually gone well before the comic was read. Cards were always popular and figured frequently. There was an amazing variety of subjects, with everything from castles to cowboys and sports to spacemen. As an extra bonus the first

issue with free cards usually gave away an album to stick them in. How many of those albums started off with neatly pasted pictures only to be forgotten when the novelty wore off?

I did not keep many of the free gifts I collected as a boy, but in recent years I have gathered together a collection of those that I had and many others from the years before I was reading comics. Spreading them out before me I am amazed at their sheer variety.

An unusual gift was the diary given with the short lived, "Boys Broadcast". The 64 paged book was packed with information - 'Useful Knots', 'How to be Comfortable in Camp', 'If your Motor Fails to run Properly', etc. etc. With such chunky gifts it is no wonder that the paper had such a short run.

"Modern Boy" was always up to date with its stories and it is not surprising that its free gifts tried to keep ahead of the time. "The Modern Boy Album of Up to Date Aeroplanes", given away in January 1930, was a splendid little booklet into which aviation minded readers could gum full colour illustrations of aircraft that were also given with the paper. A series of gifts I have long looked for - in vain - are the metal model planes given away with the paper. A series of metal model trains were also given away on another occasion. Metal gifts were not only found in "Modern Boy". "Magnet" gave away a series of metal car badges, and these are now prized items amongst car enthusiasts.

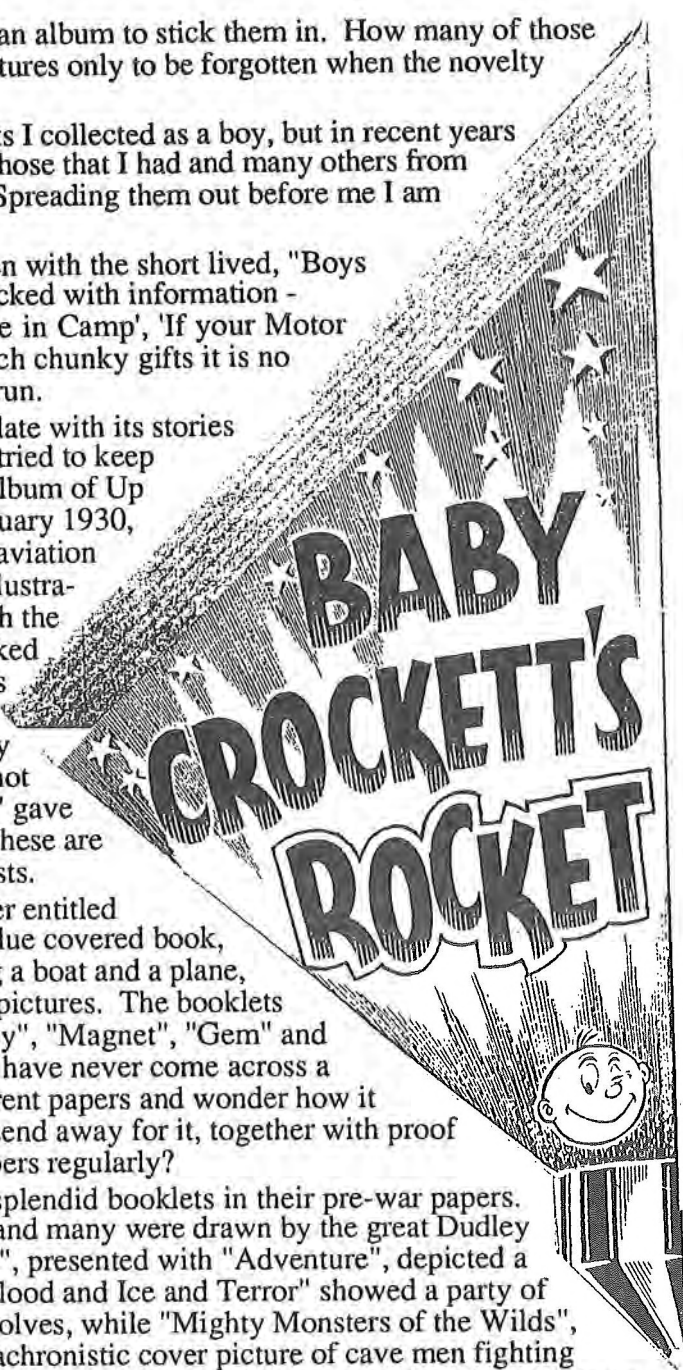
I recently came across a card folder entitled "The Big Four Picture Album". This blue covered book, printed in yellow with a scene depicting a boat and a plane, contained four albums of full coloured pictures. The booklets had been given away with "Modern Boy", "Magnet", "Gem" and "Ranger" - the 'Big Four' of the title. I have never come across a card album to hold booklets from different papers and wonder how it was obtained. Perhaps readers had to send away for it, together with proof that they had indeed bought all four papers regularly?

D.C. Thomson gave away some splendid booklets in their pre-war papers. They invariably had full colour covers and many were drawn by the great Dudley Watkins. "Savage and Deadly Hunters", presented with "Adventure", depicted a native at grips with a lion. "Treks of Blood and Ice and Terror" showed a party of arctic explorers beating off attacking wolves, while "Mighty Monsters of the Wilds", presented with "The Rover", had an anachronistic cover picture of cave men fighting off a stegosaurus. But it was not all blood and guts from Thomsons. "Spadgers Monster Collection of Spoofs", presented with "Wizard", offered readers a selection of tricks they could try out on their friends. The cover of the album had a cartoon strip of the Spadger's Island characters.

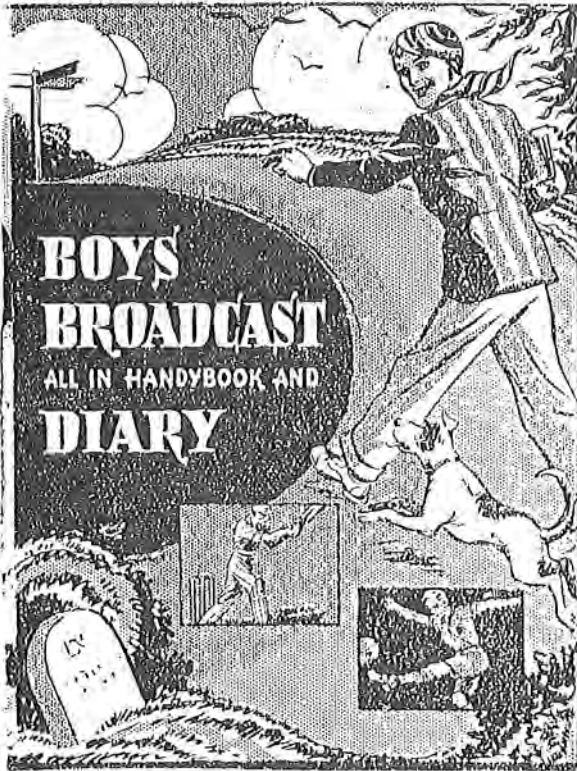
Some of the Thomson booklets were very small. The "Thrill -U- Library", "Vest Pocket Library" and "Trick -M- Library" series were only 2 inches square, yet despite their small size they are very interesting. Another small fry was "The Rover Handy Album", only 2 inches by 4 inches, but printed in full colour throughout. The same size, but lacking the full colour, was "The Who's Who of Aeroplanes", given with "Skipper".

"Art plates" were always popular. "Marvels of Modern Engineering" were given away with the "Magnet" in 1933. A special folder to hold all 12 of them was given away with the first one.

My favourite type of free gift are the tiny comics that were sometimes given away. Those from the 1930s are now difficult to find and I have yet to add them to my collection. But I have a few of the later ones. "The Wizard Midget Comic" offered readers 32 pages of fun including "The Truth About Wilson" and "Limp Along Leslie". I am very fond of a



**BABY
CROCKETT'S
ROCKET**



souvenir given with "Bunty". "The Girl of the Islands" is a complete 28 page reprint of an adventure strip that had previously run in "Bunty". It is a pity that not more booklets containing complete strips were given away. Sometimes free gifts were not always what they seemed. "Mighty Midget Comic", given away with "Knockout" during the 1950s was formed from the centre pages of the comic. The reader had to remove, cut and fold the pages to form his or her own booklet. Such 'free' comics always seemed to be against the spirit of the 'free gift' system and I hardly ever bothered doing the necessary folding and cutting required. If the editor couldn't be bothered why should I, was my motto. "The Young Adventurers Pocket book of Space Travel" from "Mickey Mouse weekly" was a similar cut and fold job, but at least it was in full colour, and on a subject that appealed to me - outer space.

Another collection of interesting giveaways that I like consists of the inserts that advertised a new comic or paper. A splendid one informing readers of "Magic Comic" was given with "Womans Way" in July 1939. I have others advertising "Scoops", "Beezer", "Bunty" and several more - they all invariably mentioned the free gifts that were to be given with the first half dozen or so issues.

Another collection of interesting giveaways that I like consists of the inserts that advertised a new comic or paper. A



Well that's about it; a look at just some of the many free giveaways. Time for supper now; perhaps I'll have some Corn Falkes. Now another cupboard is full of all the plastic figures, etc. etc., that I collected as a boy from cereal packets... but that's another story.



TOM REDWING the Sailorman's Son

by Roger Jenkins



Tom Redwing was practically the last regular character to arrive at Greyfriars, and his first contact, appropriately enough, was with Vernon-Smith who had foolishly embarked upon a stormy sea in his own sailing dinghy. Redwing shinned down the great Hawkscliff rock and managed to pull the Bounder out of the sea as his boat crashed on the rocks. Redwing explained that his father had been drowned when his ship was submarined, a grim reminder that the first World War was still in progress when Magnet 517 "In Another's Place" first saw the light of day.

It is possible to detect a little of Charles Hamilton himself in the character of Redwing, who taught himself Latin and studied Euclid at evening school. There was an added irony in that Redwing wanted an education he could not have, whereas many public schoolboys were having an education they did not really want. This dilemma was resolved for two boys when Redwing met Clavering on a train. Clavering was big for his age and without a real friend or relative in the world. He wanted to join the army and offered Redwing his place at Greyfriars, and the exchange was effected to their mutual satisfaction.

The first Redwing series was the finest to appear in the Magnet till that time, and part of this superiority is to be found in the atmosphere of plot and counter-plot, for the masquerade continued until 522 (with a substitute story printed, rather oddly, in 520) and when the Bounder came out of the sanatorium he supported Redwing even though no explanation was given for the change of name. Vernon-Smith was the only one who could match Ponsonby for ruthlessness and so, when the cad of Highcliffe was about to denounce Redwing, the Bounder bought Ponsonby's IOU's from Jerry Hawke in order to spike his guns. Eventually, the scheme foundered, as was inevitable, and Redwing, too proud to accept charity from the Bounder, left Greyfriars.

It is difficult to be certain whether Charles Hamilton originally intended Redwing to be a one-off character for a particular series or not. Another series about him was, however, published in 530-3. Mr. Vernon-Smith was persuaded to found a Greyfriars scholarship anonymously in memory of Old Boys who had fallen in the war. It was of course won by Redwing, despite attempts by Skinner and Ponsonby to thwart him. His position at the school now appeared to be secure. In No. 543, the unexpected re-appearance of his father who had survived the sinking of his ship, after all, helped to fill in his background. It now seemed that Redwing had become an established character.

Skinner's vituperative hostility to Redwing was based on his conviction that he had lost Vernon-Smith's friendship because of the newcomer. At this time, Skinner shared Study 4 with Vernon-Smith, and Redwing shared No. 11 with Snoop and Stott. The third Redwing series in Nos. 553-556 was quite the most impressive of the three. The Bounder wanted Skinner to move out and make room for Redwing, but Skinner refused adamantly until a most complicated piece of trickery forced the exchange. When Redwing knew of the plot he refused to move in and, when he discovered that Mr. Vernon-Smith had founded the scholarship for his special benefit, he decided to resign it. The ill-assorted friendship between them looked like ending, but by giving the impression that his father had lost all his money Smithy persuaded his father of Redwing's disinterested loyalty and at the same time won back Redwing's friendship. The status quo remained for about a decade.

Skinner's enmity towards Redwing was inveterate and it lasted long after he had abandoned No. 4 Study. At the beginning of the series in magnet 613-5 Skinner & Co. played ill-natured tricks on Redwing whilst he was studying Greek, and when he attempted to forestall any repetition he flung a cushion at the next knocker on the door, and it turned

out to be Mr. Quelch, which earned him a detention on the afternoon of the Highcliffe match. The Bounder gave him a false message telling him that the detention was rescinded, and Skinner exacerbated the situation by telephoning Mr. Quelch from Highcliffe. The friendship between Redwing and Vernon-Smith was not merely ill-assorted in monetary terms but in character as well. Redwing's quiet moral firmness and the Bounder's unscrupulousness made the combination of the two boys both unusual and at times explosive, and the feud between the two in Magnets 858-60 was hardly unexpected.

The final and inevitable rupture came in the celebrated Dallas series of 1927 (Magnets 997-1004) when the Bounder caused Redwing to give up once and for all the scholarship Mr. Vernon-Smith had founded nine years earlier. Dallas was the orphan son of a friend of Mr. Vernon-Smith's and Mr. Dallas had lent the Bounder's father one thousand pounds many years earlier, which saved Mr. Vernon-Smith from ruin. Dallas was sent to Greyfriars, but the Bounder saw him as a rival who wanted to deprive him of his inheritance. Redwing's position became intolerable, and when in No. 1000 Vernon-Smith mistakenly thought Redwing had acted against him he taunted Redwing with accepting his father's scholarship. Redwing was adamant in his decision to leave Greyfriars, and refused to change his mind even when Smithy later apologised for his mistake:

"The fact is I am here on your father's bounty - much more so than Dallas - very much more so. You know that your father has money that was lent to him by Dallas's father, to pay his expenses. Nothing of the kind in my case. You've groused a good deal because your father did not like me, and was irritated by your friendship with a mere nobody. Suppose he had liked me - treated me with kindness - I can see now that you'd have been jealous at once. You'd have hated me for it. You'd have treated me as you've treated Dallas. It was only your father's disliking me and disapproving of me that saved me from that. I can see it now."

At the end of the Spring Term, the Bounder's best friend had left Greyfriars and he himself was spending the holiday at the school while Dallas went home with his father. The following term, Skinner moved back into Study 4, and the wheel had come full circle.

How to get Redwing back to Greyfriars was a problem that must have beset the mind of Charles Hamilton. In Magnet 1015 Redwing was back at Hawkscliff and the Bounder broke detention to go over to see him, but no resolution of the problem could be seen. The answer became apparent in No. 1017, the beginning of the South Seas series when Ben Dance, a one-legged sailor (shades of 'Treasure Island' indeed!) brought Redwing a treasure chart from his uncle who had died in the South Seas. Ben Dance was hotly pursued by Xerio Silva, a half-caste, and more was to be seen of these two characters. Mr. Vernon-Smith placed no value on the chart, though his valet Soames seemed interested. Nevertheless, the Bounder's father had business in Malaysia and had no objection to the juniors searching for treasure if they wished. After many adventures in a background which might well have featured King of the Islands, the pearls were found, and Redwing returned to Greyfriars, this time paying his own fees. Mr. Vernon-Smith arranged the sale of the pearls, but he did not omit to deduct the cost of the vessel that the juniors were sailing around in, and which foundered. Redwing returned to Greyfriars in Magnet 1034, the first of the Bright series, and was at odds with Bright over his cruelty to animals, but after this issue he played little part in the series.

Although Redwing was now possessed of a small fortune, he still regarded the cottage at Hawkscliff as his home, and his father still worked as a seaman. It was this village that was the setting of the Phantom of the Cave series in No.s 1087-9, when the 1928 Christmas was most unseasonably spent in the area after he had been kidnapped by Soames and held in one of the caves round the Shoulder, in an attempt to regain the fortune he had lost. On his first appearance, Soames had been a splendidly drawn character, quite at home in the South Seas islands, but now he was mainly a shadow of his former self, almost degenerating into a Hamiltonian stock villain. As usual, he escaped capture, leaving him free to turn up again.

By the time of the next rather unseasonable Christmas series, the Polpelly adventure in Magnets 1452-5, Redwing was refusing to spend Christmas with the Bounder, because his father was coming home from sea. Rather curiously, Redwing said:

"I'm not rich like you, Smithy."

which might be true in a comparative sense but, as Soames had wanted only £10,000 of the Redwing fortune in 1928, it is a matter of a puzzling nature why Redwing considered

himself not to be rich, when he owned what was a small fortune in those days. It may be that the unity of the Magnet stories was beginning to show small cracks by the year 1935. Incidentally, Redwing's father played quite a big part in the Polpelly series, his first Magnet appearance for 1000 weeks! Vernon-Smith persuaded John Redwing to join them in the sure knowledge that Tom would then accompany him on the holiday.

Stories about doubles who are not identical twins always start with a basic improbability, and when they are so similar in appearance that one can be mistaken for the other credulity is strained to the uttermost. This happened in the case of Tom Merry's double, Clavering, who took his place, and with Wally Bunter who took his cousin Billy's place at Greyfriars, by mutual agreement on this occasion. Harry Wharton's double, Stacey, was a cause of trouble because Stacey's misdeeds were often attributed to Wharton, but Vernon-Smith's double, Bertie Vernon, was in fact the innocent party who was often blamed for the Bounder's troubles. Half-way through the series, Vernon left Greyfriars and the Bounder was kidnapped, after which Vernon returned posing as Vernon-Smith, the object of course being to inherit the Vernon-Smith fortune, though to do Vernon justice he did not know of this plan in advance. It was at this point that Redwing alone became suspicious, and he referred to a fictitious incident in the last holidays that Vernon did not deny, and as a result Redwing was later kidnapped as well. The fact that only Redwing was suspicious is again most unlikely, since Vernon could have no knowledge of the past, and could have been tripped up on numerous occasions. Nevertheless, there was always plenty of good reading in a series of this kind, and this is an appropriate place to conclude the brief review of Redwing's career, with this 1939 series in Magnets 1631-42.

Poor boys at the Hamiltonian schools were introduced, it is suspected, mainly to appeal to those readers whose own family fortunes were precarious, but such creations were not always successful. Mark Linley arrived dressed in outrageous clothes, appropriate for a mill hand, though this was toned down later, and there were not many readers who knew much about Penfold, the local cobbler's son. At St. Jim's, Lawrence, Owen, and Redfern made a splash on their arrival but then faded from the scene, whilst Brooke was quite colourless.

Redwing was on quite a different footing. Because of his friendship with a major character, he remained reasonably to the fore, and his qualities of courage, honesty, and quiet independence made him more believable than all the other characters with humble origins. Furthermore, because his home was near Greyfriars, his background became clear and familiar to the reader. Although his character remained constant, various attributes changed over the years. In early days, Redwing was a great scholar, entering for school prizes, and he was generally in the junior eleven. As time went by, these abilities seemed to fade away, and he became little more than a foil for Vernon-Smith, the faithful pal who would sometimes speak the blunt truth with the privilege of an old friend. There were various ups and downs in their long friendship, but it had a solid basis and always survived these vicissitudes. Of all the minor characters in the Greyfriars Remove, none featured more consistently and successfully than Tom Redwing, the sailorman's son.



CHRISTMAS!
There's magic in the word. It is once conjured up visions of plump turkeys, plum puddings, mince pies, crackles, mistletoe, holly, and blazing log fires. And if the Clerk of the Weather is in good humour we may get snow. How jolly that will be! It would be ripping to have one of the old-time Christmases, with snow-covered fields and frozen ponds. But alas, the aforementioned Clerk of the Weather is such a treacherous old goat that he will possibly serve up a heat wave! You never can tell.

Christmas is not here yet, but the spirit of Christmas was in the air before we left for Paris. St. Jim's was about to break up for the vacation and everybody was in a jolly humour. Even Mr. Ratcliff, the sour, ill-humoured master of the New House, actually smiled the day before we went away. I saw him myself, and I wish I had had a camera handy. It was the only time Ratty had been known to smile this term! A snapshot of Ratty's smiling visage would indeed be a rare curiosity. And Knox of the Sixth was smiling, too! As a rule Knox goes about with a fierce, forbidding frown. Jove of old is celebrated for his frown, but he would have to play second fiddle to Knox. However, the bully of the Sixth was simply stretched in smiles the morning we left, and he went so far as to wish 'me a happy Christmas in Paris! Good old Knox! I had always thought he was drained dry of the milk of human kindness, and I'm pleased to find this is not so.

Furthermore and moreover—as the lawyers say—I saw Taggles, the porter, smiling. In the ordinary course of events you will find Taggles grinning and grinning and sniggering and sniggering. But Taggles, like everybody else, was infected with the spirit of Christmas. Doubtless he had visions of receiving numerous tips on breaking-up day. It's a wonderful thing, this Christmas spirit. It changes pessimists into optimists, and growlers into sunbeams, and selfish people into Good Samaritans. I really don't know what we should do without Christmas, with its dances and carols, its romps and revets, and its language of happy laughter. If only peace on earth and good will towards all men prevailed not only at Christmas-time, but all the year round, what a jolly world it would be! People wouldn't need to look forward to the millennium. It would be already here!

To my loyal reader-cumms all over the world let me echo the same old wish in the same old way:

"A Right Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year!"

Our Captain

An Appreciation of Betty Barton, by Pam Willoughby

I THINK that perhaps Betty's own famous phrase: "We'll manage!" sums up her character better than any words of mine can do.

In that single simple expression there is revealed all that Betty stands for as captain of our Form at Morcove School. "We'll manage . . ."

Once upon a time it had to be "I'll manage!" That was when Betty was fighting the battle of her life—alone, without a friend to turn to in her need. Those days are long since past but the strength of purpose and the indomitable courage which enabled her to win through that time of crisis are still as strong as ever.

Why is it that Betty Barton makes such an ideal captain? Why is it that she has retained for so long, unchallenged, her position as the most popular and successful Form captain at Morcove? There are others more brilliant at games and in class; there are girls with more daring, with more vivid personalities, with more spectacular records—the sort who might be expected to lead the Form. Yet none of these has ever ousted Betty from her leadership.

The reason is because of Betty's strength of character. There is a quiet efficiency about her methods of dealing with Form matters which, in the long run, counts for far more than spectacular brilliance on the games field or in the class-room.

In Betty, too, one sees a girl with a fine sense of fairplay. This counts as a great deal in the life of the Form, for whereas many girls in Betty's position might be tempted to take advantage of obvious privileges, Betty never does so. In all things she is fair-minded and unselfish.

Her special chums of Study 12 know this and respect her for it. Never has Betty been known to show favouritism, though at times she may have been strongly tempted to do so. In matters connected with the Form she treats her own intimate friends in the same way that she deals



Betty Barton

with those for whom she might not be expected to show much regard.

The Form first; the welfare of the Form and of the school before all personal considerations. That is Betty's guiding principle and one from which she has never wavered.

Betty likes nothing better than to forget that she is the captain. When the need arises and the ship is in danger then Betty is at the helm. But at other times she prefers to be "just one of us," never in any way exerting her authority or letting her position make her a "wet blanket."

Betty has no outstanding brilliance in any particular walk of school life. But she is a good all-rounder, with a fine sense of the team spirit.

Above all, Betty has the wisdom to realise her limitations. She knows that she is

not a first-class games player, like Polly, so she invariably enlists the aid of the Madcap where arrangements for games are concerned. It is the same with other things, too; Betty pursues a wise policy of always consulting the expert, while retaining the right to have the final word.

Betty is essentially "homely." Of course, it is very natural considering that in her early life she had practically to take charge of the home. And this trait stands her in good stead, for whereas some Form captains might be always out and about, seeking selfish pleasures with a few chosen cronies, Betty prefers the simple joys of school life.

She is always accessible, always there to turn to, a willing listener and a wise councillor, as many a girl in the Form has cause to remember.

Betty is proud of her Lancashire origin, nor is she ashamed of the fact that once she attended a Council school. For Betty is wise enough to know that her early life, hard as it was, taught her to be strong in adversity—to bear and forbear.



Thanks, St. Frank's, For the Memory!

(JIM COOK wrote the following article for the Diamond Jubilee of the Nelson Lee Library in 1975. In re-printing it in this year's Annual, we are at his request DEDICATING it to the late BEN WHITER who so much appreciated it.)

Sixty years on and nothing has changed. Bellton village, the River Stowe and Bannington High Street still echo to the boys of St. Frank's as they pass through.

On bicycle, on foot and perhaps in Handy's Morris Minor, our schoolboy heroes still make that last minute rush before old Josh Cuttle, the school porter, slams the big gates at Call Over.

Tea in Hall but mostly in the studies. Crisp toast and freshly made tea and then prep. Soon the juniors retire to their bedrooms and another day at St. Frank's has ended.

The first rising bell heralds the dawn. It is time for the birds nesting in the old elm trees in the Triangle to seek their worms and for the boys to listen for the final peal.

Many of us have experienced déjà vu - the feeling that a situation has occurred before. Today, many incidents and situations that happened at St. Frank's as we celebrate our Diamond Jubilee, re-appear before us in our everyday life to remind us so vividly of past events.

Cricket on Little Side; the winning goal on Big Side. The fading light of a November afternoon, the raw mist spreading over the playing fields - but the sun shining gloriously on the River Stowe as the boys in white flannels glide their little boats along the placid water.

Yuletide approaches; visions of snow and festive gatherings. The old school is deserted. Only the ghosts walk the corridors and Bellton Lane has a white carpet that leads untrod on to the Moor View School for Young Ladies.

Thanks for the memory, St. Frank's!



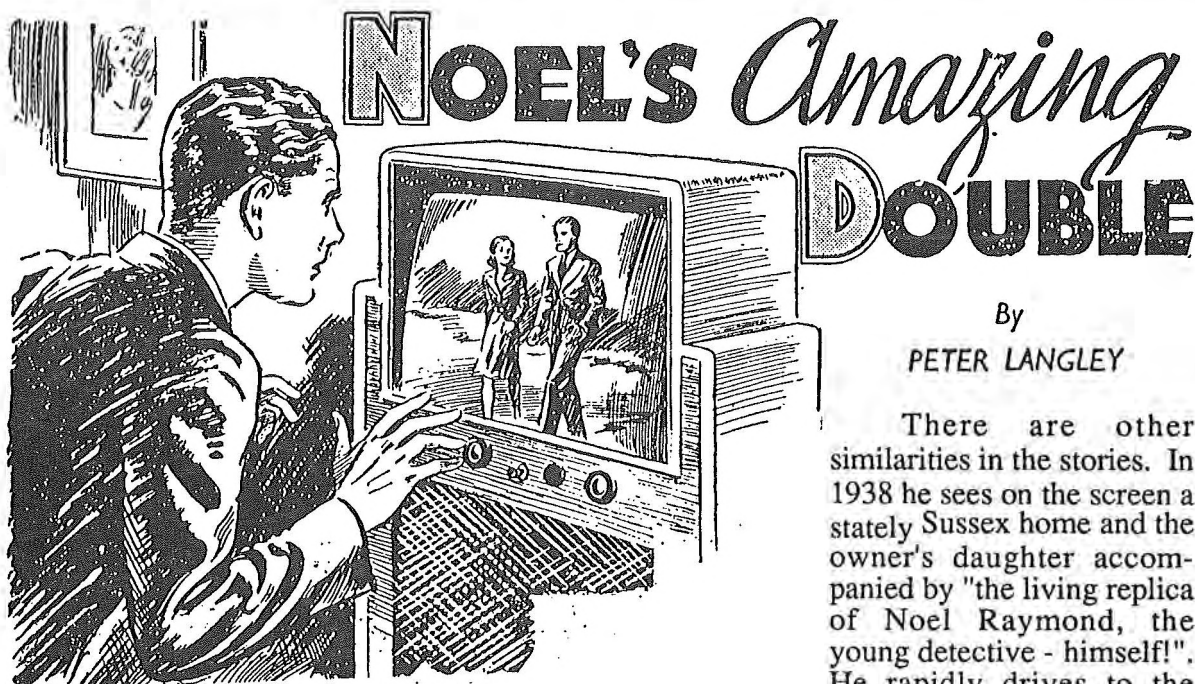


"SEEING DOUBLE"

BY Dennis L. Bird.

Thanks to Mary Cadogan, I recently acquired two Noel Raymond stories from either end of that illustrious detective's career: "Noel's Amazing Double" (dated 10 December 1938) and "The Mystery Girl They Televised" (24 February 1951).

Both have features in common. Both begin with Noel at home watching television. Nothing unusual about that in 1951 - but in 1938 not many people were "looking in", for the BBC did not start regular transmissions until November 1936. However, two years later Noel's London flat was graced by "the magnificent television set he had recently installed".



NOEL'S *Amazing* DOUBLE

By

PETER LANGLEY

There are other similarities in the stories. In 1938 he sees on the screen a stately Sussex home and the owner's daughter accompanied by "the living replica of Noel Raymond, the young detective - himself!". He rapidly drives to the house, and soon he and the impostor are merrily

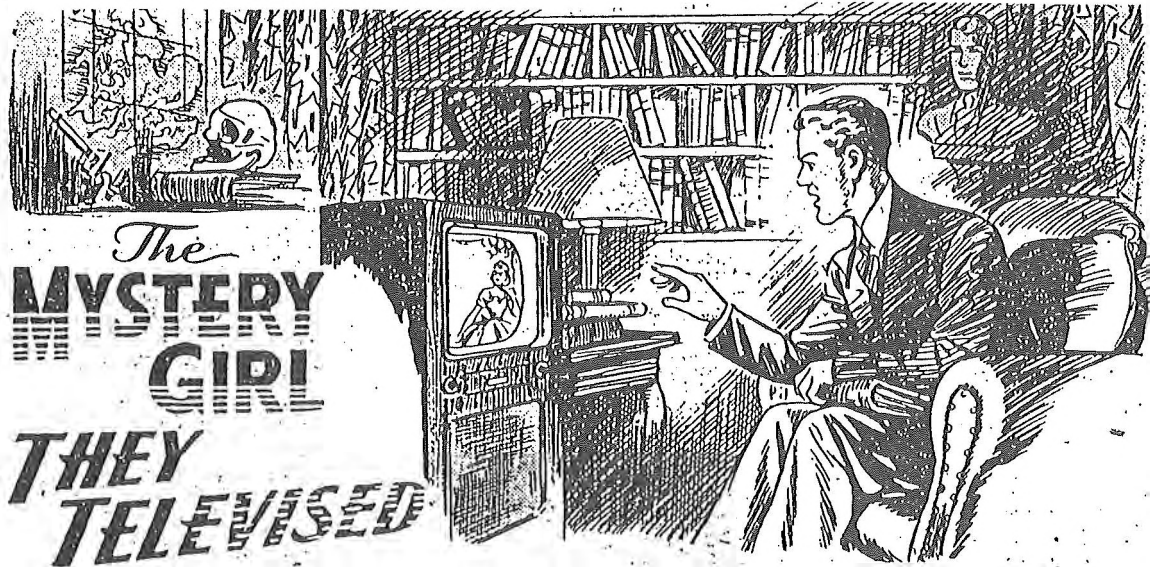
SEEN IN THE TELEVISION SET

impersonating one another to everyone's bewilderment. It turns out that the other Noel is "an ex-actor and crook, a master of disguise" who is after some valuables and never realised that TV would give his game away.

By the time of the 1951 story, Noel had gone into partnership with his niece June Gaynor, and when he tunes in this time, it is June that he sees, at the coming-of-age ball of an American *débutante*. As June is supposed to be away on holiday, he is puzzled when the TV commentator describes her as the "alert young secretary". He drives down - to Kent this time - and meets June, who says she is on an important case. "She drew away from him... Noel regarded her rather anxiously. He had never known her to behave like this. Her grey eyes held an almost reckless gleam."

He soon realises that she is not June, but decides not to denounce her until he knows what she is up to. Jewels are stolen, and there are further complications when the real June arrives. At last the girl crook is handed over to justice; we never learn who she is, or by what quirk of genetics she so resembles June as to deceive even her uncle at first glance.

These two stories set me thinking about the possibility of two people existing who are so exactly alike that one can pass for the other. The idea goes back a long way in literature - more than 2,000 years. The ancient Roman dramatist *Titus Maccius Plautus* (circa 254-184 BC) wrote a play, "The Menaechmi", about long-lost identical twin brothers who are eventually reunited after many adventures in which they are frequently mistaken for each other. *William Shakespeare* (1564-1616) improved on the idea in "The Comedy of Errors" in 1594, in which Antipholus of Ephesus and his servant Dromio find that they both have exact counterparts (in fact twins) in Syracuse.



By PETER LANGLEY

Still one of the best literary instances of impersonation is in the novels of a Victorian barrister, *Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins* (1863-1933), who wrote under the name "*Anthony Hope*". One day in 1893, having just won a case, he was walking home from court when the word "Ruritania" came into his mind, as a name for a land of romantic adventure (from Latin roots meaning "a rural land"). On this same walk, he happened to pass first one man and then another who were so alike that the basic idea for "The Prisoner of Zenda" came to him. He started to write it the very next day; it was completed in a month, and published in 1894.

It is one of the most popular stories in light literature, and has inspired several films - most notably in 1937, with Ronald Colman, Madeleine Carroll, Sir C. Aubrey Smith, David Niven, and Douglas Fairbanks Junior in the main roles. An exact re-make was filmed in 1952, even using the same script, with Stewart Granger, Deborah Kerr, Louis Calhern, Robert Coote, and James Mason.

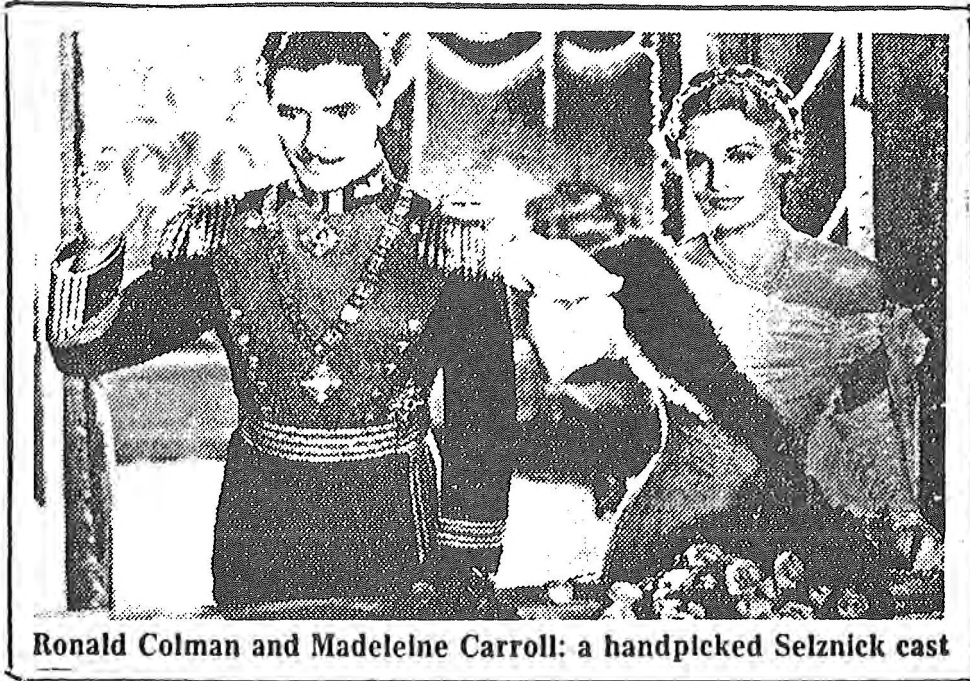
Anthony Hope's story is so well known that it needs only the briefest summary. The new King of Ruritania, Rudolf V, is about to be crowned; he is a dissipated fellow who is too drunk (actually drugged) to get to his own Coronation. His place is taken by a visiting Englishman, Rudolf Rassendyll, who through an accident of heredity is an exact double of the monarch. (His great-great-great-grandmother Amelia had got up to no good in 1733 with the then Ruritanian Crown Prince.) Michael, Duke of Strelsau, hopes to seize the throne, and keeps the real King prisoner in the castle of Zenda. Rassendyll and the Royal aides Colonel Sapt and Fritz von Tarlenheim come to the rescue; Michael is killed, and Rudolf V is able to begin his reign.

The impersonation is really quite plausible. In those days, Royalty were remote from the people, and only a small circle of courtiers would know what the King was really like. Most of these know of the imposture - Fritz and Sapt, whose idea it was, and the treacherous half-brother Michael and his henchmen. The latter keep quiet, for they can hardly say in public "This is not the King, because we kidnapped the King".

The chief complication is the King's fair cousin Princess Flavia - for she and Rassendyll fall in love. She had never liked the real Rudolf, and had scarcely seen him since childhood. She therefore has no suspicion that Rassendyll is not what he seems. When she finally learns the truth, she reveals that it is the Englishman she loves: "It was

always you - never the King!" But as a Royal Elphberg she knows her duty. She must marry the King and never see her lover again.

Or so she thinks. In the sequel "Rupert of Hentzau" (1898), Rassendyll is forced by circumstance to resume his imposture. Then Rupert - one of the late Duke Michael's men - kills the King. Rassendyll is faced with the impossible dilemma: should he stay on, a charlatan ever in fear of exposure, living with another man's wife? Or should he take a strict moral line and leave Ruritania and his beloved Queen Flavia? The decision is made for him by an assassin's bullet, and he is buried in Strelsau with an emotive Latin inscription on his tomb: "To Rudolf, who reigned lately in this city, and reigns for ever in her heart. - Flavia Regina".



Ronald Colman and Madeleine Carroll: a handpleked Selznick cast

As Fritz von Tarlenheim wrote afterwards: "As a King, Rudolf Rassendyll had died, as a King let him lie. At a mighty price our task had been made easy. Many might have questioned the living, none questioned the dead."

Although "Rupert of Hentzau" has inconsistencies and improbabilities, I have always found it a strangely moving book ever since I first read it as an impressionable 12-year-old in 1943. Yet it has never attained the popularity of "The Prisoner of Zenda"; so far as I know it has never been seen in the cinema, and there has only once (in 1964) been a TV version.

One of the most incredible substitutions comes in the famous 1914 novel "The 39 Steps" by *John Buchan, first Lord Tweedsmuir* (1875-1940). This fine adventure yarn features Richard Hannay in single-handed combat with the sinister Black Stone gang of Balkan terrorists. There is a crucial meeting of the British Chiefs of Staff, attended by the First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord Alloa, "the man, they say, that made the modern British Navy". (An accurate description of the real-life holder of the office at the time, Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg - father of Earl Mountbatten.)

The unconvincing episode has Hannay seeing "Lord Alloa" leaving the meeting and realising he is one of the Black Stone - the real admiral turns out to be unwell at home. Readers are asked to believe that the other Service chiefs, who had probably known Lord Alloa from schooldays, had sat round the table together and not recognised the disguise. In Sir Bernard Ingham's favourite phrase, "Bunkum and balderdash!".

"The 39 Steps" was later (1935) one of Sir Alfred Hitchcock's best-known films, with Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll (the future Queen Flavia). "Hitch" wisely omitted the whole business of Lord Alloa.

An unusual variant of "seeing double" is in the novel "Brat Farrar: A Mystery" (1949) by "Josephine Tey" (*Elizabeth MacKintosh, alias "Gordon Daviot"*) (1896-1952). Simon Ashby is almost 21, and will inherit a great estate. He once had a twin brother Patrick, who disappeared when they were 13. Now Simon's family consists only of his twin sisters and his Aunt Bee.

And then suddenly Patrick turns up again. But is it Patrick? The girls and the aunt have no doubt. Only Simon refuses to believe it.

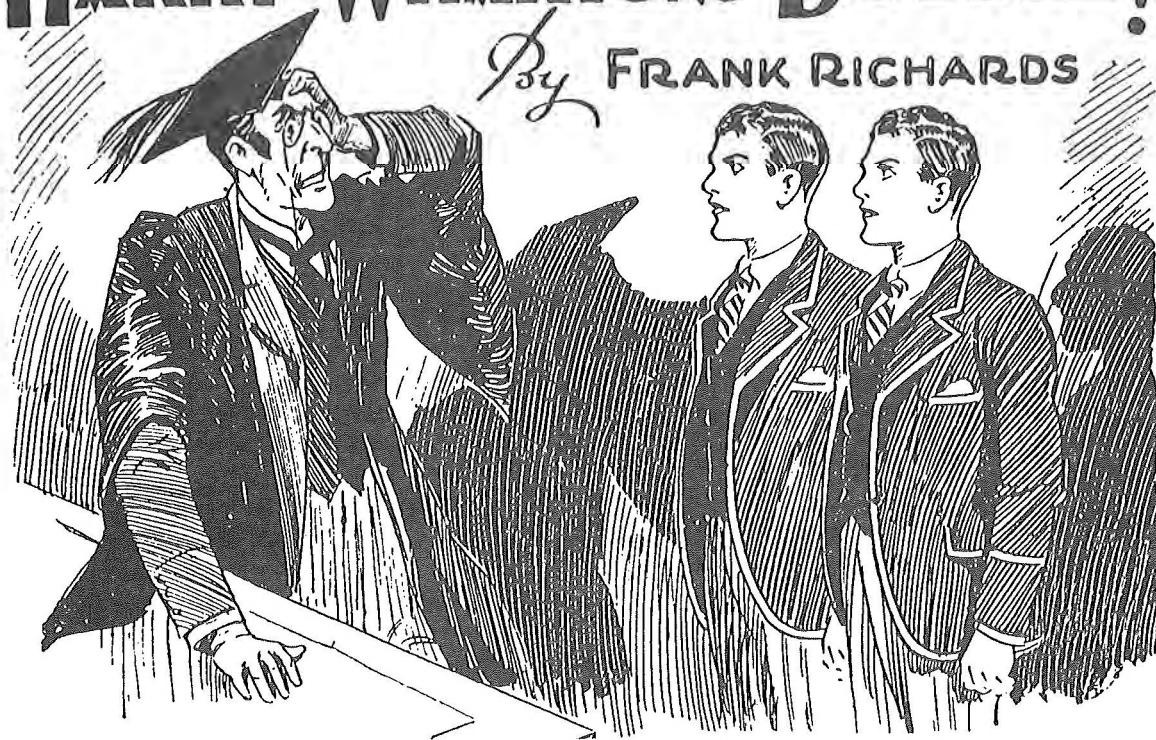
The book is beautifully written, like all this author's work ("The Franchise Affair", "The Daughter of Time", the play "Richard of Bordeaux" which helped launch Sir John Gielgud on his career). But it has one fatal flaw: we are told right from the start that "Patrick" is really an orphan adventurer, Bartholomew ("Brat") Farrar. The story would have been so much more suspenseful if we had not known this. As it is, the principal surprise comes near the end, when we learn why Simon is not taken in. He **knows** Brat is not Patrick - because seven years ago Simon had murdered his twin and hidden the body.

The final twist is that Brat may be the illegitimate son of a ne'er-do-well Ashby uncle. Perhaps he is "family" after all.

A SENSATIONAL COMPLETE SCHOOL-ADVENTURE STORY YOU'LL ENJOY!

HARRY WHARTON'S DOUBLE!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Did the "lookalikes" plot attract the Amalgamated Press authors for the weekly papers? Indeed it did. From 18 May to 3 August 1935, "The Magnet" published a series of 12 Greyfriars stories by "Frank Richards" (*Charles Hamilton*) (1876-1961).

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Harry Wharton's Double | 7. The Black Sheep |
| 2. Rivals of the Remove | 8. A Traitor to his Side |
| 3. Harry Wharton's Enemy | 9. A Dangerous Double |
| 4. The Hero of the Hour | 10. Standing by Smithy |
| 5. Who Shall Be Captain? | 11. Saved from the Sack |
| 6. Harry Wharton's Triumph | 12. Harry Wharton Wins Through |

They are included in Volumes 16 and 17 of Howard Baker's "Magnet" reprints.

The saga begins at Wharton Lodge; Harry, to his surprise, finds another boy in his room. "There seemed something familiar in the rather handsome features... It did not occur to Wharton at the moment that the resemblance was to himself." As Hurree Jamset Ram Singh says later: "The likefulness is preposterous!".

The newcomer is Ralph Stacey, a distant relative - and he is to go to Greyfriars for the new term. He is a fine cricketer but an insufferable swank. Harry does not like him, but his uncle Colonel James Wharton wants the boys to be friends.

That is not how things work out. At Greyfriars, Stacey soon shows that though he may look like Harry, his character is much less pleasant. For the next twelve weeks, Frank Richards rings the changes with his plots. Sometimes Stacey's machinations actually prove helpful - but more often he brings disaster. Harry resigns as the Remove's captain of cricket, and is dismissed as the Form's head boy. Stacey, of course, is appointed instead. Some of the escapades turn on identification - is it Wharton? is it Stacey? - and Harry is usually given the benefit of the doubt. But a false accusation of theft almost leads to his expulsion - until, in "Saved from the Sack", Billy Bunter inadvertently reveals that it is all a misunderstanding.

Finally, Stacey goes too far. He gets into disreputable company, out of bounds at the notorious Three Fishers inn; he is exposed, and ordered to leave Greyfriars. But he has the last word: his father has just found a new and lucrative job running a racing stables near Paris, and Ralph goes to an exciting new life.

* * * * *

Not far away from Greyfriars, the girls of Cliff House School were also troubled by a question of identity. "Not the Mabs They Knew" was No. 559 in the Schoolgirls' Own Library (1 October 1936), by "Hilda Richards" (John Whewey). A new term is beginning, and Mabel Lynn has totally changed her character. She kicks Bessie Bunter's Pekinese, she chums up with unsuitable characters like Rosa Rodworth and Lydia Crossendale, and she spurns her dearest friend Barbara Redfern. Early on, we readers are let into the secret. Mabs is ill at home; the letters telling Cliff House of this have been purloined by Mabs' scapegrace cousin May Lynn, who audaciously takes her place at the school.

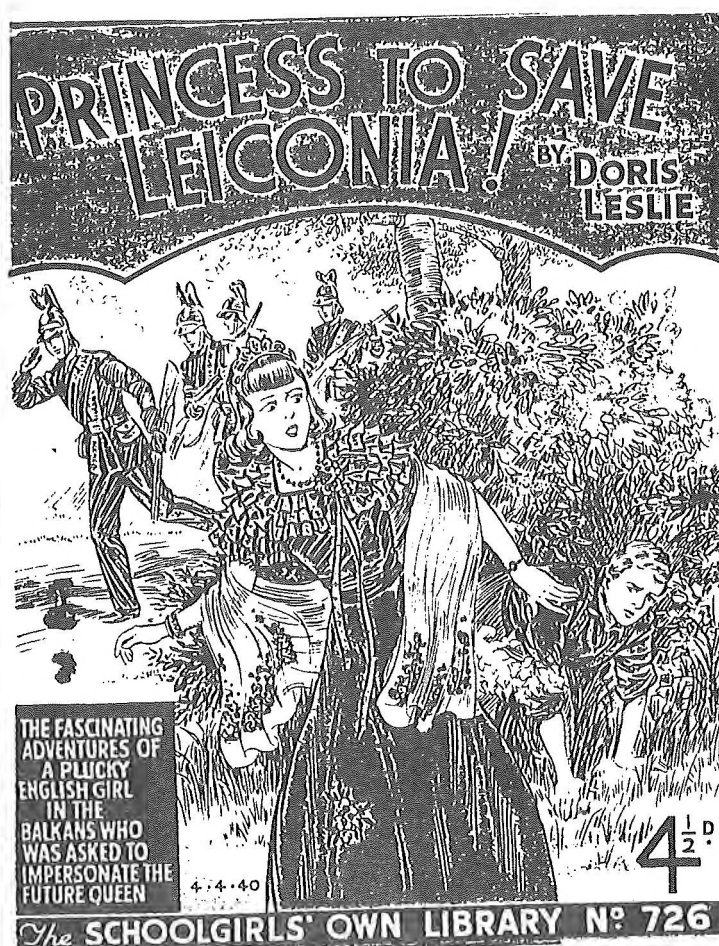
This is one of the oddest Cliff House stories. To start with, there is no direct mention of the cousins being doubles. It is just taken for granted that everyone assumes May is Mabs. Not until the 37th page out of 95 is there a reference to "Her pretty face very much like the face of that Mabel Lynn whose place she had so artfully usurped". Even then, the phrase is only "very much like" - yet all Mabs' friends are instantly taken in.

Then there is a surprising *volte face* in the story line. For two-thirds of the book May goes her unscrupulous way, even descending to theft. Then on page 64 she confesses to Barbara that "I'm not the girl you think I am! I'm not Mabel Lynn - there!". The real Mabs returns, recovered, and the rest of the book concerns their efforts to save May - who by now is wanted by the police. May redeems herself with a plucky clifftop rescue of Lydia, and she finally makes good. A rather unsatisfying tale!

Another SGOL book - No. 726 dated 4 April 1940 - concerns an English girl who takes the place of a Balkans princess. "Doris Leslie" must have taken some inspiration from Anthony Hope in writing "Princess to Save Leiconia", but the plot-line is entirely original. Pamela Courtney works for a Leiconian dressmaker; she delivers a frock to the Royal palace for Princess Sonia Alexandrine - who mysteriously asks the blonde Pamela to put on the dress and a black wig. Elderly Prince Alphonse enters and talks to Pam as though she is his royal niece. He has been completely deceived by the likeness which Sonia had noticed so quickly.

A daring plan is then hatched with the Prince's agreement. Pam will temporarily become Princess while Sonia goes to America to seek financial aid for her impoverished country. This is all rather feeble, for if Sonia goes incognito, she will have no negotiating status - and if she is received as Princess, everyone will know that the girl back in Leiconia is a fake.

However, the plot goes ahead. No one suspects Pam, not even the Princess's personal maid, nor her other uncle the scheming Grand Duke Bernard, who wants to foment revolution and take over the country. There is a tricky moment when the Grand Duke suspects that Pam's hair is not her own, but a few minutes' work with a bottle of dye solves that, and when her hair is pulled there are real tears in her eyes. Princess Sonia then returns with a very favourable financial agreement, and everyone is happy - except the Grand Duke.



"Valerie Drew's Double" appeared in the "Schoolgirls' Weekly" dated 1 September 1934, by "Adelie Ascott" (John William Bobin) (1889-1935). He was near his premature death, and the tale is not one of his best. The attractive girl detective Valerie Drew, she of the red-gold hair and violet eyes, is being driven past her own Kensington house when she sees at the gate "a girl so like Valerie that she could have passed for her anywhere... And at her side stood an Alsatian dog that was the living image of Flash". Valerie sees another girl, obviously a client, hand over a grip-bag to the impostor - but by the time Valerie has managed to get back home, everyone has vanished.

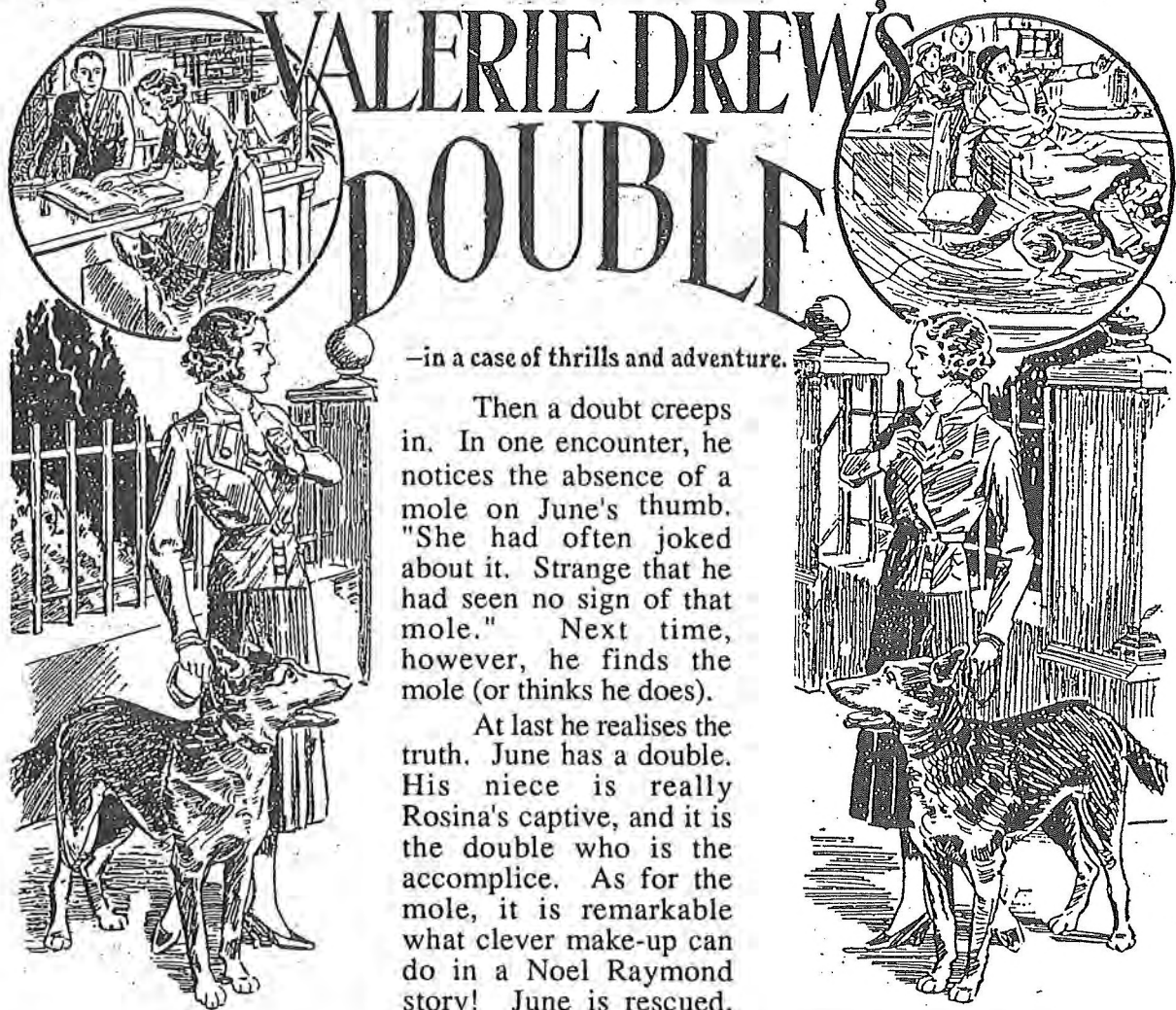
The improbable plot turns on the chance of the miscreant, Cynthia Clarkson, overhearing a Canadian miner and his daughter arranging to leave a bag of gold-dust with Valerie for safe keeping. Cynthia had then made herself up to look like the girl detective (so was not a real double), and had even gone to the trouble of buying an Alsatian similar to Flash. A likely story!

That seems to have been Valerie Drew's only encounter with an impersonator of herself. The theme does not seem to have been much used by the writers of the schoolgirl story papers - with one exception. It seems to have had a perpetual fascination for the "Girls' Crystal" author "Peter Langley" (Ronald Fleming - also known as "René Frazer" and "Rhoda Fleming"). His two most memorable creations, the private detectives Noel Raymond and June Gaynor, suffered a plague of doubles throughout their careers. This article began with two such cases.

A series of nine stories at the outbreak of war (5 August to 30 September 1939, reprinted 8 May to 3 July 1943) featured uncle, niece, and the jewel thief Rosina Fontaine.

Week by week the story line is quite cleverly developed. June, on her own, meets Rosina for the first time, and is enchanted by the girl crook's charm. She becomes convinced that Rosina has been misjudged. Soon, she seems to be working with her. Case after case finds Noel fighting a double battle. "He had failed. He had been beaten - thanks to the treachery of his own niece."

COMPLETE This Week. Enthralling Girl Detective Story, introducing Valerie, Flash, and—



-in a case of thrills and adventure.

Then a doubt creeps in. In one encounter, he notices the absence of a mole on June's thumb. "She had often joked about it. Strange that he had seen no sign of that mole." Next time, however, he finds the mole (or thinks he does).

At last he realises the truth. June has a double. His niece is really Rosina's captive, and it is the double who is the accomplice. As for the mole, it is remarkable what clever make-up can do in a Noel Raymond story! June is rescued, and prison awaits Rosina

and the imposter - who is never named or explained. Was she the same girl who featured in the 1951 case already discussed.

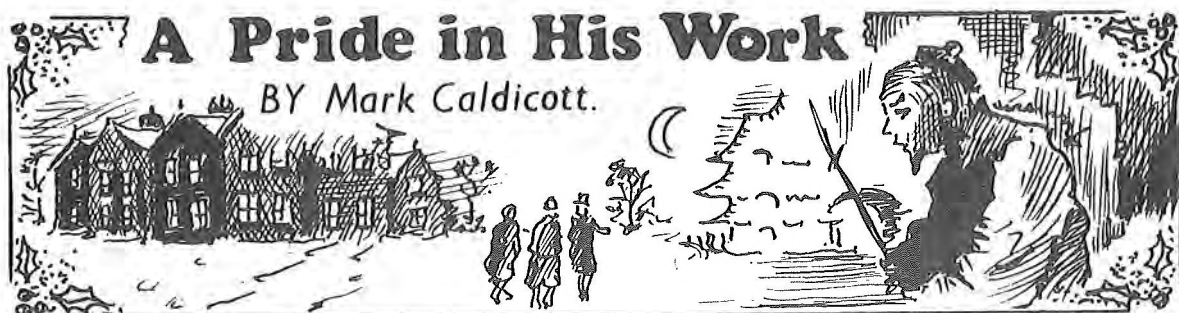
Peter Langley's other "lookalike" stories are too numerous to describe in detail. There are two quite different ones both called "The Bogus Noel Raymond" (17 October 1942 and 12 April 1947). June is again the victim in "The Girl Detective's Double" (8 June 1946), and there is also "June and the Fake Detective" (18 October 1947). Most extraordinary of all is the 14-installment serial "Detective June's Strangest Case" (4 February to 6 May, 1950). This calls for a very unwilling "suspension of disbelief" on my part, for we are asked to accept that both June (now her uncle's partner) and the valet Parker live and work together with a Noel who is not Noel - and she suspects nothing for quite half the story!

How credible are these tales of substitution? Is it really possible for someone to take another's place, to be seen and talked with regularly, without being detected? Most plausible are those instances (like "Brat Farrar") where there has been a long time-lag, and a vanished child supposedly returns as an adult. And perhaps identical twins can pull off a

few tricks. "The Independent" newspaper published an interesting article on 4 June 1991 about two Londoners, Keith and Clive Owen. The reporter wrote: "I turned around and saw a man. Next to him was - the same man. The two wore identical suits, shirts and ties... They were Tweedledum and Tweedledee in London EC2."

Also just believable are instances where someone pretends to be a public figure with the active connivance of the people most concerned - "The Prisoner of Zenda", or in real life the actor Lieutenant Meyrick Clifton-Jame's impersonation of General Montgomery in North Africa in 1943, to mislead German Intelligence.

For more intimate deceptions, I think the trick could only work for a very short time, and then only if there is a very close blood relationship. But the idea has given rise to many entertaining stories over the past century, and we can only be grateful to their authors even if we cannot wholly believe them.



'The Whispering Peril (NLL, 2nd New Series, 98) is the first of ESB's four-episode Christmas series for the 1931 season.

Sir Jimmy Potts, the Boot-Boy Baronet, is visited by his Uncle Ben. Having made his fortune in China, Uncle Ben is now resident in that country, but is paying a visit to his relations at home. Unfortunately his life is being threatened by mysterious Chinamen who, when Nelson Lee becomes involved, kidnap the great detective, now headmaster of St. Frank's, and plunge his unconscious body over a cliff in his own car.

Not surprisingly, Lee survives this attack on his life, but allows all except Nipper to believe that he is missing, presumed dead. The Christmas festivities, overshadowed by Lee's disappearance, move to Travis Dene, the Handforth residence. But the mysterious Chinamen follow, to cause further mischief. This episode concludes with a ghostly apparition so frightening to Jimmy Potts that nervous illness threatens.

Where is Nelson Lee? What will happen next?

I introduce this story for a particular reason, apart from the usual one of sharing with other readers my enjoyment of it. In my previous contributions I have tried to express the sense of pure enjoyment I have constantly experienced in the reading of stories by ESB: this time I want to ask an objective question. Shorn of its relationship to our youth, to our nostalgic past, is there anything about the work of E.S. Brooks which deserves a permanent memory in writing's hall of fame?

Considering that this is one of the later St. Frank's stories, when Nelson Lee Library sales had slumped and editor Harold May had departed, and when ESB's attentions must already have been turning towards other publications, the quality of the story is still high.

In common with many other ESB devotees, I am the possessor of an original typescript of an ESB story. In my case the story is the above-mentioned episode. This manuscript not only displays the qualities of industriousness, but also that of wonderful craftsmanship. Considering that ESB made no preliminary drafts, but composed in his head and then dictated his stories, the text is remarkably free from alterations. In the fifty

pages of script there are a dozen corrections of minor typing errors and two textual changes. The latter occur in Chapter 9 where the phrase 'his faith grew strong' was changed to 'his brain started working again' and in the following paragraph 'And then, suddenly, he caught his breath in' becomes 'And then he tensed, catching his breath in'. As the sum total of revision to a first draft that is remarkable.

The reverse of Page 1 of the manuscript is date-stamped 21 Oct 1931 as is the reverse of Page 8. The reverse of Page 50 is date-stamped 22 Oct 1931. That Nelson Lee story took about a day to write. This level of output sustained a steady income in a business where stories were produced at a fixed rate per 1000 words. The result is that phenomenal total output of over 36 million published words. Compared to the other high output writers - John Creasey and Charles Hamilton - there is a consistency of quality in plotting, invention and pure storytelling which in my view gives it a higher status in terms of craftsmanship. John Creasey did not think out the structure of his plots before setting out to write, and the result is that, though his stories are quite readable, it is difficult later to recall what any of them were about. Charles Hamilton's stories are more memorable, but his plots are perhaps less inventive and, it has been observed, there is a hint of padding out his wordcount with repetitive conversation. In comparison I believe that ESB gave his stories everything he'd got. They were fully plotted, highly inventive, and without padding.

The story appeared on 5th December 1931. This shows that ESB worked well in advance of publication - another indication of a craftsman at work. With such well produced and clean copy, those compositors who put together the microscopic typeface used in NLL must have appreciated him, as his son Lionel Brooks has remarked. But the artists who had to produce the illustrations for his stories must have been especially grateful not to have to rush their creations. The evidence is that ESB always worked well in hand like this; thus we are blessed with an unbroken run of ESB St. Frank's stories. No substitute writers were required to bail him out; and in this respect he steals the honours from the great Charles Hamilton, who occasionally let his publishers down. ESB was almost certainly never in the position of Charles Dickens who, it is said, was once standing in a stationer's shop at Broadstairs when he overheard a lady asking for the latest number of David Copperfield. When the shopkeeper informed her it would be out at the end of the month, Dickens went into a state of panic, since he had not even begun to write it.

The essence of ESB's craft is the invention of a plot which will transport the reader through a set of twists and turns to a satisfactory conclusion, held throughout by the magnetism of his style. Everything is turned towards this single aim of carrying the reader through the adventure. There is no attempt to make philosophical, political or moralistic points. There is no time for the writer's own problems or personal angst. True this results in characters without psychological depth, but this has to be so as everything is subsumed into the story with an unsurpassed purity of purpose.

This purity of purpose is made possible by the fact that ESB was a writer without pretention. The evidence is that he took a pride in his work, but not that he ever let an artistic ego rule. He was a truly professional storyteller.

This leads me to a theory. One of the disappointments of St. Frank's devotees, and particularly those not particularly attached to ESB's other writing, is that when the St. Frank's stories started to fall from popularity he turned his hand to something different, seemingly without regret. Once he had ceased to write about St. Frank's he was never tempted to return. While Charles Hamilton made the transition to books by maintaining an attachment to Greyfriars, ESB made that transition by way of the detective story strand of his storytelling. When St. Frank's followers wrote to ESB, and when ESB contributed to CD on the topic of St. Frank's, it was always to say that the world had moved on, and to urge followers to look at his latest efforts. In the CD he tells us that much as he enjoyed the company of Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth and the others, these stories are no longer a paying proposition, and urges us to seek out his Norman Conquest and Ironsides books instead. Now it has been said that as ESB became a detective novelist he became ashamed of his story-paper past, and wished to disown it. My view is the opposite - that because ESB was a craftsman, and a writer without pretensions, he concentrated on the task in hand - putting everything he had into maintaining the quality of his current task without trying to recapture the past. Year after year he wrote truly excellent St. Frank's and Sexton Blake stories. When that market dried up he wrote truly excellent detective and thriller novels.

When his admirers wrote to him he wanted to enthuse them about his current activities rather than dwell on the past.

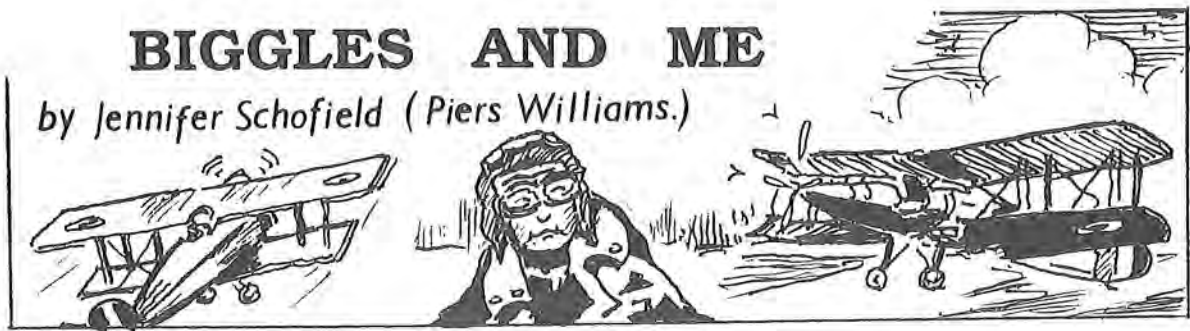
For myself, although I reserve my soft spot for the Norman Conquest series, nevertheless it is the totality I admire. I can read with equal enthusiasm the early Nelson Lee stories, St. Frank's, Sexton Blake, Whitelands, Ironsides...

If at one end of the spectrum of creative literature there is poetry, then at the other end is ESB with his fellow craftsmen. If an author of outstanding artistic merit is worthy of note, so is an author who devoted his life to outstanding invention and craftsmanship. Literature should address a full spectrum, and one end is as important as the other. In the changing fashions of literary criticism I hope that ESB and the other craftsmen of literature one day they will get the recognition they have long deserved.



BIGGLES AND ME

by Jennifer Schofield (Piers Williams.)



I was about to jump down happily onto an innocent-seeming stretch of sand when I pulled myself up with a jerk. I remembered - only just in time! - what had happened to Biggles when he acted rashly on a similar occasion. As he leapt lightly on the sand 'there was an unpleasant squelch and he sank into it over the ankles. At the same time the ground seemed to quiver and press tightly round his feet.' *Quicksand!*

Fortunately the quick-thinking airman was able to grab an overhanging branch and haul himself out of the death-trap, but I might not have been so lucky. True, Biggles' adventure took place on Elephant Island off the Malay Peninsula and I had been about to step upon a beach in Sussex, but the principle was the same...

I wonder whether other adult Biggles fans find that vivid incidents from their childhood reading spring vividly to mind - and I also wonder how their lifelong addiction to Captain W.E. Johns began. When I first met Biggles as a child, I had no idea that I had formed a lasting passion - I just read all the books I could because they were the most exciting ones I knew, and for me it all started with Worrals.

I felt personally involved at once, for I was growing up in the 1940's, when the war had to be won at all costs. In 'Worrals of the WAAF' I discovered a marvellous girl, not ten years older than myself, who was at one moment shooting down Luftwaffe planes from the sky above me and at another battling with German spies in the familiar English countryside. As well as being breathtakingly thrilling, the tale had a compelling immediacy and practicality. When Worrals was on the run from the Nazis with a vital plan of the enemy espionage system, she addressed the document to her boy friend in the RAF and dropped it in a village post-box. How cool, how clever and how possible! I could have done that.

Inevitably Worrals led on to Biggles, and I cycled to the public library twice daily in case any of the books were 'in'. On one red letter day there were two! Each of Captain Johns' series for children was so popular that the shelf devoted to his works was usually bare, and I could hardly believe my luck. I raced home to telephone my best friend, and soon she and I were devouring the pages together. (Girls were amongst Johns' keenest fans and he received many letters from them. When I asked a woman friend and

contemporary if she too had read Biggles in her youth she replied, with some surprise, 'What else was there to read?'

At last, or, as Johns would say, as was only to be expected, shades of adulthood closed in, but although I lost direct contact with the airman for a while, subtle influences were at work. For instance, as well as a reluctance to jump onto virgin sand, I found I also had a compulsion to become a strong swimmer. Readers may be able to place the following conversation:

'Well, ten minutes ago you were wanting something to happen,' remarked Algy quietly to Biggles. 'You've got your wish.'

'So it seems,' agreed Biggles evenly. 'But this, I need hardly say, is rather more than I bargained for. How far do you reckon we are from land?'

'Ten miles.'

'I should say rather less. There was a haze on the water.'

'Can we make it do you think?' inquired Ginger.

'Lifebelts ought to keep us afloat for twenty-four hours. There is no tide in the Mediterranean, but if the current is favourable we ought to reach Spain...'



The doomed ship slid forward like a great fish submerging

This careful assessment of the situation gains immeasurably when you know that it takes place actually in the sea, close to the spot where the ship on which the airmen have been travelling has plunged to its watery doom in a sheet of flame, a victim of the Spanish Civil War. The discussion over, Biggles leads his friends safely to the shore, striking out with his steady breast stroke, but for hours they have to swim quietly through the lonely scene, 'the only sound the gentle surging of the water around their bodies.'

Although we are told that Biggles, Algy and Ginger were able to rest now and then by floating in their life-belts, this adventure is very impressive and the calm way the task is tackled is more impressive still. Biggles and Algy may have been taught to swim at their public schools but where did Ginger acquire his expertise? At the municipal baths at Smettleworth? Whatever the truth of the matter, this heroic journey in 'Biggles in Spain' has made me develop my own aquatic powers, for if I should ever find it necessary to swim ten miles I could not bear to let Biggles down.

However, when I met my hero again it was not at a shipwreck but in a junk-shop. I picked up a copy of 'Biggles - Pioneer Air Fighter' to see if the old magic still worked and found, to my amazement, that here was a brilliant and authentic account of life in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War. When I was a girl I had read the Thirties adventure stories and the Second World War books as they came out but the RFC tales had puzzled me - now they were a new dimension.

As I turned to Captain W. E. Johns once more, reading and collecting his books, I had all the pleasure of rediscovering past delights and exploring new fields, for besides the First World War series to be truly appreciated there were all the Air Police stories published after I had grown up.

Although I found the series uneven in quality, I still realized what an extraordinary feat of imagination and staying power the tales represent, and at best the stories equal John's finest creations. The last battle of wills between Biggles and Von Stalhein set amidst the chill and sombre atmosphere of Sakhalin is unforgettable.

But it was to the amazing adventures I had loved before that I turned most eagerly. What was the secret of Johns' spell for boys and girls? I feel that all adult fans who first encountered Biggles in childhood must sometimes ask themselves this question, and the answer is always personal and subjective. There are so many reasons for the appeal of the stories - excitement, pace, charismatic characters, humour, fascinating settings, the charm of the style - the list is endless. In my case, all these aspects of the books entranced me but another feature made a special impression.

In 'Biggles Flies South' Ginger, Algy and an Egyptian friend, Kadar, find themselves imprisoned by the descendants of an ancient Roman Army at the Lost Oasis, knowing that Biggles has been led away to be sacrificed to the sacred crocodile. Kadar accepts this appalling calamity with fatalism - "It is the will of God; it will be as he decides." However, neither Algy nor Ginger was inclined to argue about it, but had it been possible to do anything they would certainly have done it, for their experience indicated that it was unreasonable to expect God to help anyone who made no attempt to help himself.'

John very rarely mentions religion, but the practical approach to life described in this short passage brings into the open the underlying philosophy of the whole series. I found this comment on God deeply satisfying as a child, for it reinforced my own ideas, and I warmed to Biggles' cheerful pragmatism and his habit of solving difficult problems by tackling them head on.

Sometimes, of course, he was ingenious, no time more so than when he confronted that dreadful crocodile. Singing 'Rule Britannia!' in an unmelodious baritone to astonish and distract his captors, he succeeded in digging up some cans of petrol from his own secret cache, and throwing one of them into the crocodile's mouth. The creature's yellow teeth sank into the thin metal 'as a fork goes into a ripe pear', the petrol gushing out. The airman took out his automatic, fired straight into the open jaws and in the ensuing conflagration made his escape to the tombs of the dead... But even this fantastic episode illustrates Biggles' belief that 'there's always a way if you can find it.'

Stoic as he was when death appeared inevitable ("Don't worry, you fellows," he said quietly, "it will soon be over.") his indomitable spirit



Biggles took his automatic from under his arm, and fired into the open jaws

usually meant that he could save the situation himself, otherwise one of his team would be on hand ('Algy to the rescue', 'Ginger Takes the War-path'). Occasionally, although he hated using brute force, he would resort to his fists to resolve a difficulty and it was from Biggles that I learnt that morality depends on circumstances. As a British agent in occupied Norway it was permissible to punch a Nazi agent in the stomach, and even right to steal a Storm-trooper's motor-cycle.

I was very fortunate that my renewed interest in all Johns' works and in the writer himself eventually resulted in my becoming co-author of 'By Jove, Biggles! The Life of Captain W. E. Johns', first published in 1981. The more I found out about Bill Johns' own experiences in the RFC and about the early days of war flying in general, the more I understood and valued Biggles, the Camel pilot. In exploring his creator's delightful and ebullient personality and the different periods of his life I found that I was beginning to see the stories with a new depth. There were many correspondences between fact and fiction, and both Johns and Biggles found that in even the most serious situations, humour might not be far away. The Captain made one spirited attempt to escape from a prisoner-of-war camp in the First World War which ended with his getting stuck in a lavatory window. The American sergeant with whom he was trying to escape made every effort to push him on his way, unaware that a German sentry had appeared outside the building and was swiping at Johns with his bayonet. Biggles was in a humiliating position in 'Biggles and Co' when his antique rifle failed to fire, but the scene changed to pure farce when it went off unexpectedly, 'with the roar of a bursting bomb rather than a small-arms cartridge', startling von Stalhein into losing his balance and turning head over heels backwards, and creating general pandemonium.

So - now I can enjoy each of the four main eras of Biggles' stories - the tales of the two World Wars, the Thirties adventures and the Air Police series - with 96 titles on my shelves. I know something of the background of the books and sometimes I almost feel as if I have shaken hands with their author. We can all survey the world of Biggles, analyse, compare and record. But do we 'murder to dissect'? Can we ever 'recapture the first fine careless rapture' we felt when we read a Biggles story as a child? Or ever recover the emotions stirred up on first beholding a new, unread Biggles book on the shelf? Feelings that can only be compared to those of the airman and his friends when they peered through a hole in a temple wall to see all the golden treasure of the Incas spread before them. All of it. (Flight Sergeant Smyth said that it looked like money for jam.)

Yes we can! Sometimes when we read - or reread - a story the momentum carries us joyously along and we become children once more discovering an El Dorado of treasure. Sometimes too, an everyday occurrence, a walk on fresh sand perhaps, or a vigorous swim, will bring back a nostalgic memory. Any of you who have ever found yourself on a summer's day mysteriously impelled to hold up a hand towards the sun, and squinting through your fingers have searched the sky for those tiny specks that are in reality Hun machines, will know just what I mean.



No. 9, 197.

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SPOTLIGHT ON SOME SECRET SOCIETIES

By MARY CADOGAN
and MARION
WATERS



MARY CADOGAN:

The hooded helper or secret society theme turned out to be an extraordinarily potent one in the Amalgamated Press's schoolgirl papers over several decades. Much of the credit for this must be given to the Sexton Blake writer, John William Bobin, who as 'Gertrude Nelson' created the first really charismatic clandestine group, the Silent Six, in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* during the early 1930s. In the same paper, of course, as 'Adelie Ascott' he produced the resiliently appealing girl detective Valerie Drew and her magnificently intelligent Alsatian assistant, Flash.

Valerie's adventures began in number 533 (7/1/1933), and for number 651 (13/4/1935) Bobin - or his editor - had the bright idea of bringing together Highcroft School's righting-of-wrongs sextet and the young but seasoned female sleuth. (This was the only time that such a meeting occurred; Bobin died at the early age of 45 just four days before this story was published. The last of his Valerie Drew tales appeared in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* in number 653 (27/4/1935). For some time after that her exploits were published anonymously, and later in the name of 'Isobel Norton'.)

The story 'Valerie Leads the Silent Six', published under the Adelie Ascott by-line, opens with Miss Spence, Highcroft's Headmistress, sending for the detective and seeking her help in ending the 'escapades' of the Silent Six whose members have 'for a very long time defied all authority in this school... They have now been responsible for something too heinous to be tolerated or overlooked'.

The Head goes on to explain that the Silent Six have broken a beautiful and extremely valuable Italian statue in the garden of Major Fortescue, who is one of the School Governors. His home and grounds adjoin those of the school, and, on the night when the damage was done, a long-robed and cowed figure was seen to be 'running frantically' away from the broken statue.

The girl's garb immediately suggested to the Head that the culprit must be one of the Silent Six. Valerie (by intuition) and the *Schoolgirls' Weekly's* readers (from previous knowledge of the stalwart Six) knew better! The girls of that Secret Society would never have done anything dishonourable and, if one of them **had** broken the statue accidentally, she would have owned up, even at the expense of blowing the anonymity of the group.

Most of Valerie's investigations there seem to take place at night, and the author makes good use of nocturnal atmosphere and suspense: 'The clock of Highcroft School chimed the hour. A disturbed bat flitted eerily round the tower... A moon glimmered fitfully from a cloudy sky, throwing the black mass of the school buildings into silhouette. A faint wind disturbed the trees...'



"Miss Drew," said the headmistress, her voice grim and determined, "I have sent for you to catch the Silent Six!"

In fact, Valerie doesn't have to stretch her deductive skills too tautly in order to discover the Silent Six's secret hideout. She sees an 'uncanny' hooded and robed figure darting through the woodland at the edge of the school grounds: 'Jingo! One of the Silent Six! What a stroke of luck' she breathes, and, 'her pulses thrilling and her violet eyes bright and excited', she trails her quarry to an oak-panelled room in a ruined manor house in the wood.

Enthralling LONG COMPLETE Valerie Drew Story, dealing with the thrilling things which happen when—



THE CELEBRATED GIRL DETECTIVE
—sent to trap the Silent Six—
LEADS THEM INTO ADVENTURE!

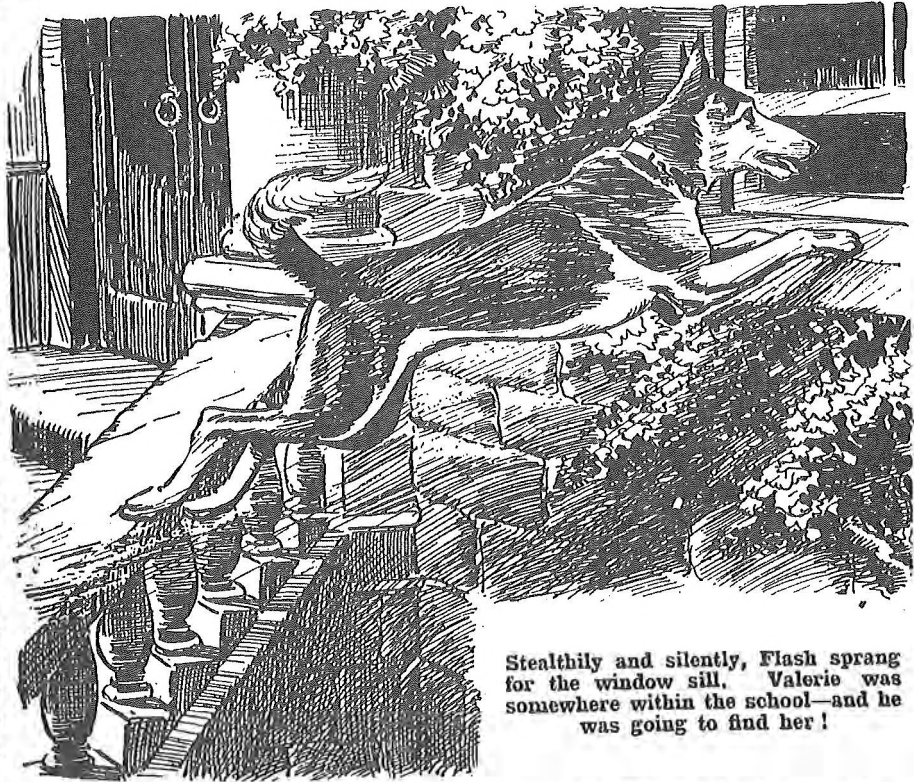
Here the Silent Six conduct their meetings with solemnity, and all the appropriate trappings. Their candlelight confab. is abruptly disturbed by Valerie's sudden entrance as she drops into 'the hitherto secret meeting-place' through a window. In 'utter consternation' the Six try to escape (concealed passages, crypts and stairways are never far away in secret society stories!) but are stopped in their tracks by the reasonable tone of Valerie's questions. She makes it clear that she believes in their innocence, and intends temporarily to become one of their number so that she can more easily pursue her investigations. Naturally gratification and relief are felt by the six strangely assorted members. Shirley Carew, 'the fair-haired and madcap leader of the group' had founded it 'to cleanse Highcroft of sneaking and injustice on the part of the prefects'. Her colleagues are Inez Lawton, Pam White, the twins Margaret and Dolly Downer, and 'the flaxen-haired, rather dumpy Dutch girl, Gretchen van Houten', whose severely fractured English ('und ve thought dot you vere going to put der tin hat on things for us, aind't it?') would surely have provided a disastrously strong clue to her identity should anyone in authority come within earshot of the group.

Valerie dons a spare robe and hood, and takes the oath of allegiance: 'I, Valerie Drew, do solemnly vow to observe the mottoes and rules of the Silent Six ... Each for all. All for each. Nothing too good for Highcroft!'

But where, you may ask, while all these rites are going on, is Flash? Valerie has, in fact, left him in the temporary - but inept - care of the school porter at his lodge, because she knows that if the inmates of the school see her with the Alsatian they will guess that she is Valerie Drew, the famous detective, and the baddy or baddies will be put on guard.

Flash, of course, takes a dim view of being separated from his beloved mistress. 'Humph!' (he thinks in his characteristic, half-human way) 'I wonder what's she's up to!'

While the porter dozes, Flash chews through his leash, grips the handle of the door between his teeth and opens it (an easy matter for this multi-talented canine). Unfortunately he is not at first helpful to Valerie and the Silent Six. His enthusiastic intervention almost causes Gretchen to be caught, in her incriminating robes, by Major Fortescue. Later, however, the girl detective's doggy helper comes into his own. When Valerie and the Six have been trapped



Stealthily and silently, Flash sprang for the window sill. Valerie was somewhere within the school—and he was going to find her!

and shut up in the tower, Flash responds to Valerie's rescue call: 'He looked up at the door. His eyes were bright with intelligence. He saw the bolt, rose on his hind legs, and seized it between his teeth. Flash tugged and strained at it ... the bolt shot back.'

(This kind of canine behaviour was very thrilling to me when I first read the Valerie Drew stories. None of our family dogs was particularly responsive to training. Once let off their leads they were more likely to dash off over the horizon than to obey injunctions to sit, or come to heel. Flash was a revelation. Not only was he astoundingly sensitive to Valerie's wishes, and physically able to carry these out, but he could weigh up complex situations, make accurate human-character assessments and, indeed, solve mysteries on his own!)

Once he releases his mistress from the tower, all is calm and bright. She has already worked out the identity of the statue-breaker who has discredited the secret society. It is Laura Norton, a prefect, who is in the habit of taking a short cut across Major Fortescue's grounds on her surreptitious nocturnal visits to the local Palais de Danse!

Valerie persuades Laura to confess to Miss Spence, and the story ends rather tamely with the girl sleuth explaining that the Silent Six have 'got away': 'I'm afraid they're too elusive even for me to catch, Miss Spence. But as they are innocent, it makes all the difference, doesn't it?'

Apparently it does, and the Head is content to allow the high-minded hooded helpers to continue their activities unmolested within the school precincts.

Despite the weakness and predictability of the plot, 'Valerie Leads the Silent Six' is intriguing on many counts. First, of course, there is the coming together of these two popular casts - Valerie Drew and Flash, and Shirley, Gretchen, Inez, Pam and the twins. Then Flash's contribution to the tale provides many satisfying moments, Valerie manages as always to be crisply charismatic, and - as a bonus- there are delightful pictures of the robed and hooded girls by C. Percival, who was at this time the regular Valerie Drew artist, though not the usual Silent Six illustrator. The early adventures of the secret society were drawn by B. Hutchinson; later S.H. Chapman took over. I think Percival was the best of these three artists in conveying the charm and robustness of the Silent Six, even though, for him, this assignment was a 'one off'. He also did his expectedly excellent job with his depiction of Valerie and Flash.



The torch lit up the darkness . . . The Silent Six moved forward on the path to a new adventure—with Valerie Drew leading the way!

The secret society strand in schoolgirl fiction became a genre within a genre. I feel sure that one day someone (probably that connoisseur of the post-war Silent Three, Marion Waters) will provide an exhaustive index of all these secret society stories, and write a bumper book on them. Meanwhile Marion has provided an interesting note about the appearances in the papers of these clandestine groups, to accompany my article.

MARION WATERS:

I do not know when the first secret society adventure appeared in schoolgirl fiction, but mysterious robed and hooded figures are probably as old as fiction itself.

The Amalgamated Press introduced such groups into its popular girls' fiction at a very early stage. In one of the early issues of the weekly *School Friend* during 1919, such a group appeared in the Third Form at Cliff House School. The girls in this secret group merely wore their dark coloured gym slips and black hoods, which covered their heads with two slits for their eyes. Another secret society appeared briefly during the early days of *School Friend*. The story was set in Canada, and the secret group was obviously

inspired by the Ku Klux Klan. The girls wore ankle length robes, with tall pointed hoods; ranks within the group were indicated by different coloured robes.

Secret societies did not appear again in the *School Friend* or the *Schoolgirl* until Babs and Co. formed the 'Society of Justice' in the early 1930s, to combat a tyrant headmistress. The girls wore the usual long dark robes and hoods, with masks covering the upper halves of their faces. The story was a good one, well up to the usual Cliff House standard. An amusing feature of the story is that of the eight girls who form the group, several have distinctive accents, an American girl (Leila), a French girl (Marcelle), a Scots girl (Jean) and, of course, Jemima Carstairs who has a most unusual style of speech. How on earth these girls managed to disguise their accents is beyond me! I don't think that any further secret societies appeared in the *Schoolgirl* from then until its demise in 1940.

Hooded groups had appeared elsewhere in A.P. girls' fiction during the 1920s, usually in the monthly *Schoolgirls' Own Library*. The girls wore the expected long dark robes and hoods. From my limited study of this period, it appears that most of these secret groups were of the 'vindictive' type, attempting to undermine the school, or to harass one of its scholars, in contrast to the usual 'good' secret society, where decent girls tackle bullies or thieves.

The first really noteworthy secret society of the inter war period, was the 'Silent Six' which appeared during the early 1930s in *Schoolgirls Weekly*.

In many ways this group of brave and kindly schoolgirls set the pattern for most future hooded groups. The Silent Six dealt with a variety of really unpleasant characters, mostly bullies, snobs and troublemakers, rather than true criminals. The stories are rather more violent than most schoolgirl fiction. Victims are bound and beaten. On one occasion a group of girls who have conspired to have an innocent girl expelled are threatened with being tarred and feathered unless they confess. The Silent Six in black robes and hoods looked distinctly sinister, which was part of their plan to instil fear into troublemakers. On one occasion, Valerie Drew, the popular girl detective joins with the Six and works with them to prove the group's innocence. Such 'tie ups' with different characters were a pleasing feature of the *Schoolgirls Weekly* during the 1930s.

Although Miss Evelyn Flinders had produced a good deal of artwork for *Schoolgirls Weekly* during the early 1930s, she devoted most of her efforts to home life and country stories, and did not illustrate the 'Silent Six' or other school stories. During the later '30s the *Schoolgirls Weekly* declined rapidly. Another hooded group (the 'Seven Who Kept Silent') appeared during the magazine's final months, being in essence a re-run of the earlier Silent Six stories.

Hooded groups did not usually appear in the weekly *Schoolgirls' Own*, though in the latter days of the publication, such a group did appear at Morcove School. This was of the 'vindictive' type, being composed of unpleasant girls opposed to Betty Barton and Co.

The schoolgirl secret society really came into its own in the pages of *Girls Crystal* during the later 1930s. This excellent weekly had commenced publication in 1935, and rapidly achieved a high standard. The paper's editor (C. Eaton Fearn writing as 'Gail Western') at first specialized in 'speed girl' stories, but in 1938 he began to write stories centred on robed and hooded groups, 'Secret Leader of the Rebel Four' being the first such story in 1938. This story was illustrated by Evelyn Flinders, whose work now started to appear regularly in this magazine. Miss Flinders produced striking work, her pictures conveyed not only mystery and drama, but also warmth and kindness.

A whole series of secret society adventures followed, mostly of the helpful type, but including some villainous ones. One notable story, 'Secret Friends of the Speed Girl', combined both motor racing and a secret society. Miss Flinders illustrated all these stories. Her hooded girls looked most attractive, with long flowing robes, graceful hoods and black masks which covered the upper halves of their faces. Membership was indicated by numbers, worn usually on the front of the hood, but occasionally on the breast. This style of robe remained standard for secret societies throughout the remainder of the AP's existence. However, the artist introduced subtle variations in style in the various stories: close observation will reveal that no two sets of robes are quite alike.

These stories from the later 1930s were all reprinted in the post-war series of the *Schoolgirls' Own Library*. Without Evelyn Flinders' attractive illustrations, these reprints seemed very dull indeed. An amusing feature of the pre-war stories was the often

unsuitable footwear that could be seen peeping from beneath the hems of the girls' robes. One pleasing epic, 'Followers of the Phantom Rebel', concerns a popular mistress who is wrongfully dismissed and returns in secret to form a clandestine hooded group with several girls from her old form. This lady's high heeled court shoes can clearly be seen beneath her robe, not really suitable for silent, or easy movement!

"PADDY and the GREY RIDER" One of the thrilling stories for schoolgirls, inside.
No. 287, Vol. 11. EVERY FRIDAY. Week Ending November 30th, 1940.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL²



THE VITAL ATLAS!
 Would the Followers of the Phantom Rebel be able to escape with it?
(A dramatic moment in Gill Western's grand school story.)

During the Second World War, *Girls Crystal* was the only girls' weekly to keep going. It shrank to a very small size, but maintained a high standard. Miss Flinders was then working as a carpenter in a munitions factory, and secret societies did not appear in the pages of the weekly during the war.

In the immediate post-war period, robed and hooded figures were popular in all types of fiction, both adult and juvenile. Characters such as Sexton Blake, Bulldog Drummond and 'The Saint' were confronted with a series of sinister figures, and the boys' papers were full of hooded characters, both good and bad. It was only natural that the girls' papers should follow this trend. During the later 1940s, secret societies appeared regularly in the monthly *Schoolgirls' Own Library*, and the stories featuring the 'Fourth Grey Ghost' started to appear in *Girls' Crystal*. This was among the most popular stories of this type. It was illustrated by Evelyn Flinders who had resumed work with AP after the war.

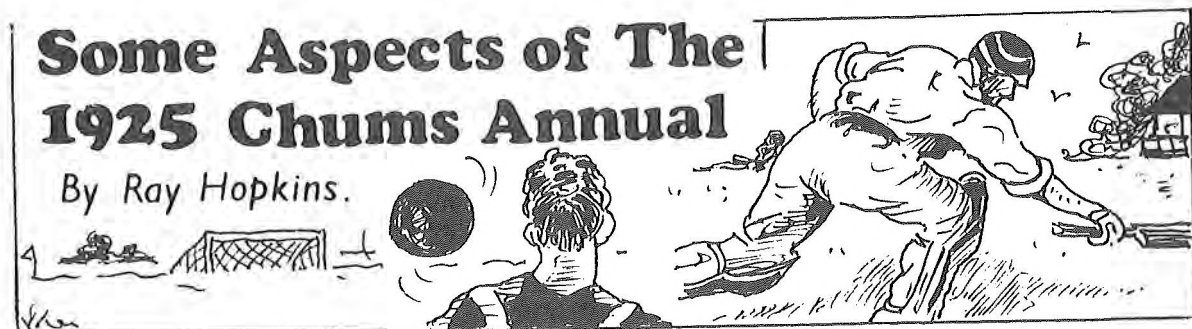
When the new picture-story weekly *School Friend* appeared in 1950, it was only natural that it should include a secret society story. This was the very popular 'Silent Three', drawn by Evelyn Flinders and written by Stuart Pride and Horace Boyton. The Silent Three stories were essentially developments of earlier AP schoolgirl fiction. The plots followed the traditional style, with heroines being wrongfully expelled or dismissed, and the three central figures being called upon to deal with a variety of ill-disposed sixth-formers and mistresses. The stories were beautifully illustrated, and believable in the sense that the Silent Three dealt with minor criminals, who could have been exposed by a group of capable teenage girls. There was an overall atmosphere of warmth and friendliness about these stories.

The Silent Three really belong to the 1950s, and the last story to be illustrated by Miss Flinders was published in 1957. Although the intrepid trio continued to appear during the 1960s and into the early 1970s, much of the later work was rather poor. An interesting feature of one of the last stories (published in 1967, and reprinted in the 1976 *School Friend Annual*) was a change of costume. The girls replaced their attractive, but cumbersome robes with reversible, hooded anoraks. These garments were in school colours on the outside and coloured dark green on the inside. When going into action, the Silent Three reversed their anoraks to form the basis of their disguise.

With the popularity of the Silent Three, few other secret society stories appeared in AP fiction during the period following 1950. The Silent Three stories were adapted and reprinted in the monthly *Schoolgirls' Own Library* and the *Schoolgirls' Picture Library*. One noteworthy new story appeared in the *SGOL* shortly before it ceased publication. This was entitled 'Three Make a Vow'. It was written by 'Elise Probyn' (John McKibbon). This story is similar to some of the later Silent Three epics, so it is possible that Mr. McKibbon may have written some of these too.

As far as I am aware, hooded secret societies did not appear in schoolgirl fiction from other publishers. I have no recollections of this type of story appearing in *Girl*. The only occasion when a hooded figure appeared in this weekly was when the girl detectives Wendy and Jinx tackled a female burglar known as the 'Magpie'. This girl wore a most practical disguise - black tracksuit, gym shoes, and a hood which completely covered her head apart from the two eye slits. This ensemble struck me as being a much more useful disguise than the long flowing robes worn by the Silent Three and all the other AP heroines. When the time came for me to create my own fictional hooded group (Heather Eastwood and her friends) I based their costume on that worn by the 'Magpie'.

Editor's Note: There were also some secret societies in hard-backed schoolgirl fiction, notably the Anti-Soppist League in Dorita Fairlie Bruce's *Dimsie* books, and the short-lived Society for the Suppression of Matron in 'The Princess of the Chalet School' by Elinor Brent-Dyer. However, in the books secret societies were never a fraction as popular as they were in the weekly papers - a reflection, perhaps, not only on the differing tastes of 'hard-backed' and 'periodical' readers, but on the appeal of the more plentiful illustrations in the weeklies.

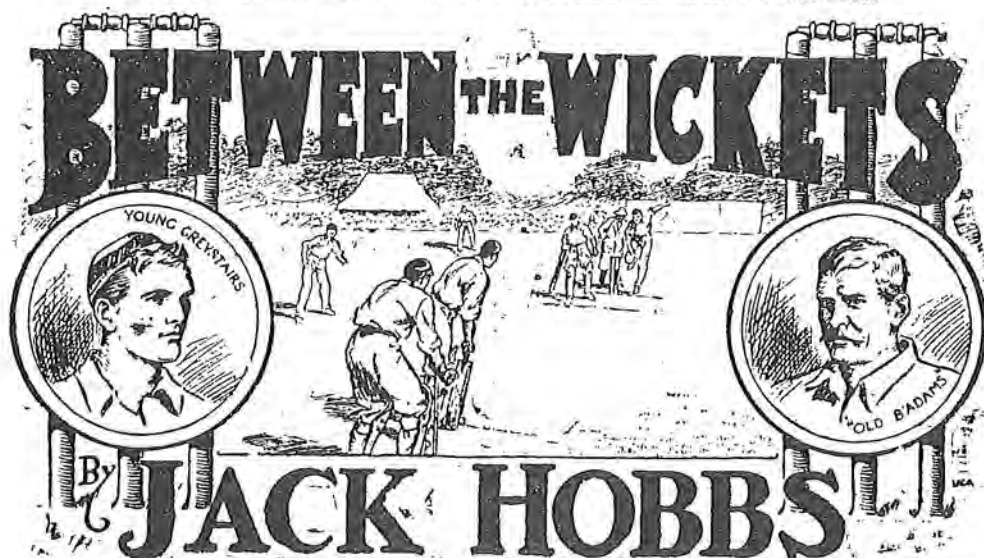


Mr. Webb's depiction of the H.M. Brock title illustration to the 1925 CHUMS on the cover of the November 1990 SPCD sent me scurrying back to the original. It is always a thrill to realise that snoozing peacefully up in the loft (or in a bookcase, if it's lucky) is something depicted, written about or commented on in one of our hobby journals or annuals, and one can immediately have the pleasure of handling the original so soon after reading about it. "I've got it", one yells exultantly, upsetting the neighbour's cat who is listening at one of the air bricks and causing yet another cup (one unable to be matched - ever) to crash from nerveless fingers into the kitchen sink. Yes, there it is indeed, the title illustration with Mr. Webb in close collaboration with Mr. H.M. Brock. I find there is another depiction of the same scene on page 823 where it is used as the title illustration to "A Complete Tale of treachery Defeated by Pluck and Enterprise", by H. Wedgewood Belfield entitled, "Wertheimer's Waterloo", which title makes me think of Joseph Conrad's character with a Germanic name and a threat of impending doom. I think I mean Axel Heyst in "Victory".

The Daddy and Mother who gave this great annual to Harry for Xmas 1925 would be surprised that his volume now lives in the East Midlands as their address was 1375 20th

Avenue East, Vancouver, B.C. and their phone number was Fair 48618. Harry's other names are Walter Thompson. This explains why the price inside the front cover which I evidently paid for it when it fell into my hands is shown as 75 cents. I have probably had this book some forty years now.

**The Sensation of the Year! Every Boy Should Read this Splendid New
and Original Serial by the World's Greatest Batsman**



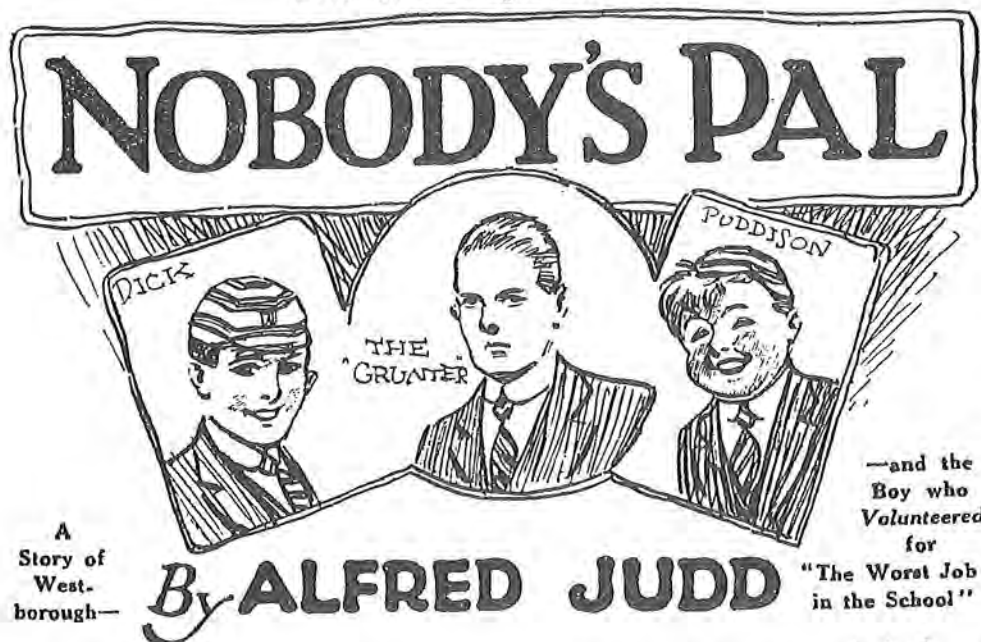
When I first went through it I couldn't believe my luck when I found that it contained a school/cricket serial entitled, "Between the Wickets", by one of my childhood sporting heroes: the great Jack Hobbs himself. I remember reading it for the first time and wondering why he had not written more. Then I found one of those sixpenny Readers' Library editions, bound in maroon with the inevitably aging dark brown pages, originally sold in Woolworths Stores. "The Test Match Surprise", by Jack Hobbs, was its title. But did he, in fact, really write this book? Bill Lofts in the SPCD revealed that the man who wrote the Jack Hobbs serial in the 1925 CHUMS was in reality Sydney Horler. So Jack probably didn't write the Readers' Library novel either. However, Clive Ellis in his DAILY TELEGRAPH column, "About Cricket", stated "Notable predecessors in the ranks of cricket fiction writers include C.B. Fry (A Mother's Son, 1907) and Jack Hobbs (The Test Match Surprise, 1926)." On my bookshelves I have Gilbert Jessop's, "Arthur Peck's Sacrifice. A Tale of Leckenham School" (1920). I wonder if this famous cricketer really wrote that one? Once one's suspicions are aroused, one queries everything!

But this was not the first time the wool had been pulled over my eyes. After joining the London OBBC I learned that the famed sportsman Sir Alan Cobham did not write the "Ken King of the Island" serial that started in Number One of THE MODERN BOY, and for which I was bought that particular new periodical. Charles Hamilton did that one. I still have my boyhood copy of BFL 293, dated 2-7-31, "Captain of Claverhouse", "a stunning yarn of school and cricket by Wally Hammond, England's famous Test Match cricketer", it says on the cover, which shows a splendid action shot drawn by Savile Lumley. Another disappointment was mine when, upon going through the Lofts/Adley, "Men Behind Boys' Fiction", I read that this story had been written by F.T. Bolton.

Returning to Sydney Horler, he also has a serial in the 1925 CHUMS under his own name called "The Football Funk". When this was published as a hardback by Blackie it was retitled "On the Ball. A Football Story". I have always been under the impression that when serials are issued in complete form, whether as a fourpenny library or in hardback, in all cases the same title is used. However, when the Alfred Judd serial, "Nobody's Pal", in the 1925 CHUMS was reprinted by Blackie in 1926, it was given the new title of "Forrester's Fag". In this story, Forrester is known as "The Grunter". In the CHUMS serial, the Grunter is called Fenderson. One wonders why this name change was

considered necessary? The schoolboys in "Nobody's Pal", and "The Football Funk", are pictured in both by Thomas Henry.

DOUBLE-LENGTH OPENING INSTALMENT of a Great New School Serial—The Very Best Story our Popular Author has Ever Written. Ask All Your Friends to Read This Instalment—They'll not Miss a Line of this Splendid Tale



Horler also wrote two other school stories: "School! School!" published by Partridge in 1925, and "That Fellow Hagan", published by Cassell in 1927. The same school is featured in each (Repington) but only one character appears in all three: Peter McTavity. Under this name he appears in the serial, "The Football Funk". However, the name has been changed to Peter McPhail in the reprint "On the Ball". One wonders why! Also, names of Houses are different and, apart from McTavity, none of the leading characters, boys or masters, appears in more than one book. Very odd, intriguing to spot and rather fun to read, but most puzzling! In 1930, Collins issued a slender volume under the title of "The Exploits of Peter", containing five short stories involving Peter McTavity. In this book he is resident at a school called St. Colstan's, "before passing to another place", the author says. One can become quite confused with the McTavity/McPhail saga one way or another.

Returning to the Jack Hobbs serial, "Between the Wickets", it would be interesting to know who was shown as the author when the story was reprinted in book form, if it ever was. The title too may have been changed. I didn't realise these confusing events could happen until I read this 1925 CHUMS Annual. While I was reading this serial, one instalment finished in the middle column on page 748. At the bottom of the third column by eye caught the following very, very familiar set of words: "like Rachel of old, they mourned and would not be comforted". I heard myself saying, "Hello, Charles Hamilton, I never knew you wrote for CHUMS". Now I don't want any of you to get excited and expect my revelations to appear in the next SPCD. They won't! The writer who used the expression was listed as Burleigh Carewe and the story was called "A New Firm at St. Botolph's". Brian Doyle's 1964 Who's Who, to which I refer very frequently for information, gave me the answer. The author's real name is Fred G. Cook who wrote sub stories in the MAGNET between 1919 and 1926. Later, while reading Richard Bird's "Change Over" on page 719, my eye was caught by a line on the previous page: "There were indications of stirring times at St. Botolph's". This reminded me very strongly of concluding sentences used by E.S. Brooks at the end of his Nelson Lee series to make sure you bought next week's issue. Another trip to Brian Doyle revealed that Fred Cook wrote sub stories for the Nelson Lee in 1921. Another example of "in the steps of the master".

While I was going through the 1925 CHUMS I came across some other interesting items. For instance, the Richard Bird serial referred to above, "Change Over", when published in book form was retitled, "Play the Game, Torbury". I discovered this when I checked Bird titles in the complete list that I had copied out of the British Museum Reading Room Catalogues. I also found that the Bird serial, "Barrett of Pullings", which appeared in BOP Vol. 50 (1927/28) was published in hardback in 1929 as "The Wharton Medal". Interestingly enough I had come across the hardback copy in the early 1960s - attracted to it because of the name - but turned it down because the cover was very badly damaged. I thought I would be bound to come across a better copy, but I never did and regretted having passed it up, not knowing, until I actually read it, that I already had a copy in serial form in one of my BOP's. There is also a Richard Bird serial in BOP Vol. 51 called "New Traditions: A Public School Story". When I began to read this I realized I had already read it as a hardback under the title of "Captain of Keynes", published by Blackie in 1930.

The 1925 CHUMS contains no Gunby Hadath serials but there are five short stories by him. One is called "The Hundredth Run". This sounded so familiar that I knew I had read it very recently. Sure enough I found it in "The Big Book of School Stories for Boys", published by Oxford University Press seven years later in 1932. The same incident used for the page 547 black and white illustration is used in a colour plate in the Oxford reprint, but by a different artist. "One of the Finest Stories of Cricket ever Written", says the title blurb. Makes one's mouth water just to think about it.

This annual is full of good things and there are those who will say that this remark could apply to every edition of CHUMS.



Bright, red holly berries nestling amidst shiny evergreen leaves; an orange-breasted brown-backed robin hopping and skimming across a bleak garden; carol singers' voices cleaving the frosty night air; bright candles lighting up a church at midnight; the joyous peal of bells on Christmas morn; a motley assortment of Christmas cards along the mantelpiece; festoons of coloured paper-chains strung along the walls adding gaiety and warmth to the living room; multi-coloured balloons and streamers suspended from the ceiling; the Christmas tree loaded with presents overflowing onto the floor; succulent slices of turkey garnished with crisp, braised celery; the blue flame of the plum pudding liberally soaked with brandy; delicious mince-pies that melt in one's mouth; the whiplash sound of a cracker being pulled; an assortment of paper crowns, caps and hats adorning the heads of the assembled company; walnuts, chestnuts and Brazil nuts - these are some of the images of Christmas that cast their spell over me at this time of the year.

Charles Dickens wrote about Christmas lovingly, amusingly, poignantly, and also dramatically. His description of the Pickwickians' stay at Farm Manor, Dingley Dell, for Christmas was perhaps his most enjoyable and humorous account of events during the festive season.

It was traditional for the Wardle family and their guests to assemble in the large kitchen on Christmas Eve. Earlier, Mr. Wardle, the master of the house had, as was customary, with his own hands suspended a huge branch of mistletoe from the centre of the ceiling. It was the occasion when 'Upstairs' mingled freely with 'Downstairs'. The ice was broken by the advances of the men to steal kisses from the females under the mystic bough. This gave rise to a scene of general confusion and most delightful struggling as the young ladies put up strong resistance to this approach. With cries of 'Don't!', the girls ran into corners, acting on the principle that the value of a salute was considerably enhanced if there was some difficulty in obtaining this. So, threatening and remonstrating the girls did everything but leave the room. Eventually, however, all resistance vanished, and, with a good grace, they submitted to being kissed. The Pickwickians kissed the females of their choice, whilst Mr. Wardle kissed Emma, the parlour-maid, and the other female servants. Under cover of these goings-on, Joe, the fat boy, surreptitiously helped himself to a particularly succulent mince-pie which he disposed of in double quick time.



Next, the ladies swarmed round Mr. Pickwick and, pulled this way and that, he was kissed on the chin, on the nose and on his spectacles by them. He was then blindfolded with a silk handkerchief and put through the mysteries of Blind Man's Buff, the game lasting for quite a time.

Everyone now being tired, the less strenuous pastime of Snapdragon was indulged in. Here the participants had to pluck red hot raisins from a pan, with many a burnt finger being sustained in the process, until all the raisins were gone.

Then the whole company, servants and all, sat down before a blazing log fire to partake of a substantial supper, with a huge bowl of Wassail in which hot apples were hissing and bubbling irresistibly. With two hours to go to midnight to usher Christmas in, the time was whiled away with forfeits and stories and a carol by Mr. Wardle.

Christmas at the Gargerys' residence amid the marshes of Kent in the vicinity of Rochester was in sharp contrast with the foregoing gaiety. The blithe bells summoned Pip and his brother-in-law, Joe, the blacksmith, to Church on Christmas morning. The vinegary Mrs. Joe stayed at home to put the finishing touches to dinner that was scheduled for half-past one. This consisted of a superb leg of pickled pork with greens and a pair of roasted stuffed fowls. A handsome mince pie had been made on the morning of the day before. The puddings, which Pip had stirred with a copper stick from seven to eight by the Dutch clock on Christmas Eve, was already on the boil. On these occasions the meal was

eaten in the kitchen, the company then adjourning to the parlour to partake of nuts and oranges and apples.

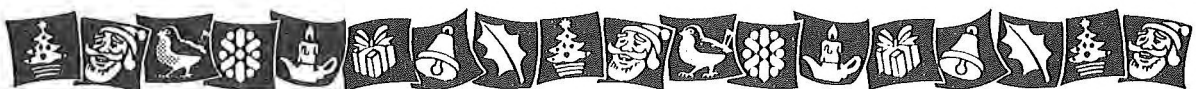
The guests started to arrive. Mr. Wopsle, the Church Clerk; Mr. Hubble, the wheelwright and his wife; Mr. Pumblechook, Joe's uncle, with his customary Christmas gifts of a bottle of sherry and a bottle of port wine.

Grace was said before the start of dinner by Mr. Wopsle with a most theatrical intonation, like the ghost in 'Hamlet' or a speech from 'Richard III'. The meal was rudely interrupted by the arrival of a party of soldiers with muskets. The sergeant in charge held a pair of handcuffs. He explained that the blacksmith's services were being sought to repair these because they were faulty and were needed for securing two convicts, who had escaped from the hulks, when they were recaptured.

It was a reformed Ebenezer Scrooge who awoke on Christmas morning to the joyous peals of Church bells. Putting his head out of the window, he hailed a passing boy, and with the promise of a substantial tip enjoined him to go to the poulterer's and buy the big prize turkey hanging up there, and have it brought to Scrooge for instructions on where to deliver it. That turkey 'never could have stood upon its legs... It would have snapped them short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing wax'. Scrooge ordered a cab to convey the bird to the residence of his clerk, Bob Cratchitt, in Camden Town.

Scrooge attended a church service in the morning, and in the afternoon went round to his nephew Fred's place: he mingled happily with all the guests including Topper who was courting Fred's plump sister-in-law. He had the time of his life: 'Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness', he enthused when it was all over.

Whether or not Prince Albert was responsible for the introduction of the Christmas Tree into this country from Germany, Charles Dickens must be credited with popularising Christmas through his seasonable books.



ANSWERS TO BOB WHITER'S GREYFRIARS CHARACTERS PUZZLE

- No. 1 *Arthur Carter*, relative of Bunter.
Form: Remove
Magnets 1561-1572 12 issue series. January 15th - April 2nd, 1938.
- No. 2 *Putman Van Duck*, American junior.
Form: Remove
Magnet 1468 at end of Brazilian series and then 1471-1478.
April 4th, 1936 then April 25th - June 13th, 1936.
- No. 3 *Henry Christopher Crum*, the Schoolboy Hypnotist.
Form: Remove
Magnets 1050, 1051 and 1052. March 31st - April 14th, 1928, 3 issue series.
- No. 4 *Jim Valentine*, Schoolboy Forger, known as Dick the Penman.
Form: Remove
Magnets 1297-1307. 24th December 1932 - 4th February 1933.
- No. 5 *Richard "Dick" Lancaster*, the Schoolboy Cracksman.
Form: Sixth
Magnets 1209-1219. April 18th to June 27th, 1931.
- No. 6 *Christopher Clarence Carboy*, "The Prince of Japers".
Form: Remove
Magnets 1078-1082, 5 issue series. October 13th - December 8th, 1928.
- No. 7 "*Jim*" *Warren*, cousin to James Warren.
Form: Fifth
Magnets 1440-1451, 12 issue series.
September 21st - December 7th, 1935.
- No. 8 *Valentine Compton*, the Schoolboy Smuggler.
Form: Fifth
Magnets 1499-1509, 1936, November 7th - January 16th, 1937.
- No. 9 *Eric Wilmot*, Mr. Hacker's nephew.
Form: Remove
Magnets 1457-1460 interrupted by Brazilian series, 1469-1470.
January 18th - February 8th, 1936; April 11th - April 18th, 1936.





"Come on, Bessie --- it's nearly four!"

Barbara Redfern, of the dancing blue eyes and chestnut curls, whirled into Study No. 4 of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School. Behind her crowded golden-haired Mabel Lynn and boisterous tomboy Clara Trevlyn, games captain of the Lower School. They stared at the open cupboard door behind which could be glimpsed the rotund curves of the fat duffer of the Fourth.

"Bessie!"

"I'm kik-coming." Reluctantly Bessie Bunter closed the cupboard door after a longing look into the interior.

"Has that fat guzzler been at the mince pies already?" exclaimed Clara, whose sharp eyes had not missed the tell-tale ring of crumbs round Bessie's plump mouth. "How many have you scoffed?"

"Only one, just to see if they are up Auntie Jones's standard", said Bessie defensively. "Anyway, I'd have had more than one if we'd been in for tea. Babs --- I don't see why we have to go down to tea in Hall when we've got Auntie Jones's first mince pies of the season."

"We have to", said Babs patiently, "because Primmy has called a special assembly today, over tea." Automatically she produced a tissue and brushed the evidence from Bessie's face.

"Yes, why, Babs?" asked Janet Jordan, who had just entered the study with gentle Marjorie Hazeldene and the elegant American junior, Leila Carroll.

"Search me", laughed Babs, having restored Bessie to a semblance of tidyness. "I only put the notice up. But Primmy said it was quite informal."

The girls frowned at one another. Miss Primrose, the stern but always just headmistress of Cliff House: informal!

Wild surmises flew from girl to girl as they scampered along the corridor. None of them could remember such an occasion; compulsory afternoon tea in the dining hall with the headmistress addressing the entire school. And with less than a week to go before breaking up for the Christmas hols. What on earth were they to hear?

Some looked timid, others somewhat apprehensive --- perhaps with a guilty conscience. But faces brightened as the girls streamed into the dining hall and saw the long tables held goodies not usually present during normal "last resort" teas. Besides the usual bread and butter and plain cake were heaped dishes of fat mince pies and rich dark slices of fruit cake.

"Can't we have special assembly every day?" Flora Cann whooped amid the delighted cries, and even the lordly Sixth, coming from afternoon school, of which they were missing at least a whole half-hour, smiled as they arranged themselves round the top table.

Miss Primrose entered only a few minutes later with Miss Charmant and the Bull and gave a slight smile at the cessation of eating as the girls looked anxiously the three mistresses.

"Finish your tea, girls", Primmy said graciously, "then the Second and Third formers may dismiss. Thank you." She accepted a cup of tea from one of the dining hall staff and talked rather earnestly until the younger children had finished and been marshalled away to their common room. Then she stood up, fingertips resting on the small table in front of her.

"As you know, girls, it is sometimes necessary for pupils to remain at school during holiday periods, when, of course, everything is done to ensure

that they spend as happy a time as possible. This year it has not been necessary for any girl to have to spend the Christmas vacation here."

Miss Primrose paused, looking at the wide-eyed, puzzled stares directed at her. Diana Royston-Clarke muttered under her breath: "Come on, Primmy, get on with it. We'll be into prep soon at this rate."

A slight smile relaxed the head mistress's stern features. "There is no need to look so apprehensive, girls. I have called this special assembly to make a request of you."

A soft sigh of relief rippled through the miscreants with secrets to hide, and Miss Primrose, who knew her girls far better than they ever suspected, smiled again. She said slowly and deliberately:

"For a very special reason, which you will hear more of later, I plan to keep the school open during the first week of the Christmas season."

"Christmas Day?" somebody exclaimed disbelievingly.

"From the 22nd, which is breaking up day, until the 29th", Primmy went on, "and I now wish you all to re-assess your present plans for the holidays, with a view to about twenty-five of you volunteering to remain here for that period."

Gasps escaped the assembled girls. Sixth Formers betrayed no less shock than the juniors of the Fourth. Several girls half rose to their feet, exclaiming protest and puzzlement.

Miss Primrose held up her hand. "I'm well aware that most of you will have finished your holiday arrangement. Also that your parents or guardians must be consulted. So, to save time and unnecessary upset, I shall ask any of you who are able to alter your plans and are willing to help me and the school to give your names to your form captains, preferably within the next twenty-four hours. Remember, this is entirely voluntary. I fully understand both your reluctance and the problems involved. Your form mistresses will ensure you have access to the school phones today and tomorrow. Now, go and think it over."

She turned away, pausing briefly to speak to Miss Charmant before she swept from the dining hall.

The big, cool green hall buzzed with chatter of speculation as the girls broke into groups, some clustering around Babs, others about Dulcia Fairbrother, the Captain of the school. But neither girl could satisfy the curious and startled demands for more information.

"I do think Primmy might have dropped at least a hint. I mean --- *Christmas at school!*"

"As if we don't see enough of the blessed place!"

"Don't get killed in the rush to volunteer!" This last jibe from a sneering Lydia Crossendale, who had been boasting for days about the fabulous Christmas she was going to spend at a certain famous stately home.

But Babs looked thoughtful, and a little concerned when prep was over and the girls were free until bedtime to enjoy their own pursuits. Gaily coloured cards were spread over the study table and carefully matched for suitability to their intended recipients. Bessie laboured over her present list, her brow deeply furrowed over the financial section. Mabs was intent on a letter to her parents, who were in France, and a deliciously spicy aroma of mince pies warming by the study fire made concentration difficult for at least one member of the Co.

Babs signed the last of her "school" cards, those to chums and favourite members of the staff, and busied herself making their supper-time cocoa. Supposing no-one volunteered for this strange school Christmas Primmy seemed to be organising. Certainly no-one had been along to Study 4 to hand in their name. But why should they? Babs poured the hot milk into the three mugs and stirred the mixtures thoughtfully. How could a Christmas at school, with its disciplinary associations, attract the girls? Even though Babs loved Cliff House with a fierce loyalty she could understand any girl's reluctance to partake in such a plan. Babs thought of her own festivities to come. Mabs and Bessie, along with Clara, Marjorie, Jemima and Jean Cartwright were to be her guests at Holly Hall, and on Christmas eve their boy chums from Friardale School, Jimmy Richmond, Ralph Lawrence, and Jean's half-brother, Lister Cattermole, would be joining the

merry house party. And yet ---

Suddenly Babs sprang up. Mabs and Bessie stared at her. She grabbed her small torch. "I'm going to see Primmy."

"But it's nearly bedtime. You can't!"

"I can --- she won't mind. I know."

"Famous last words!"

Unheeding, Babs raced down through the silent school. Most of the girls were cosily gathered either in studies or Common-rooms, and she met no-one as she snatched her coat from the eerily deserted cloak room and let herself out of the side door into the cold frosty night. A myriad of stars winked down on the deserted grounds as Babs hurried across the quad towards the headmistress's private house. Babs almost began to regret the impulse which had driven her forth into the night: she became acutely sensitive to her surroundings. Ancient stones, walls of time; what had they seen? What had they heard down the centuries since the Benedictines founded the place in medieval times? They seemed to whisper to her now, and she caught herself impatiently, quickening her step. Then almost immediately she froze.

Someone was there! Just ahead of her. A misty grey shape in the darkness, standing there before one of the windows. Babs blinked. She must be imagining things. She hesitated, then moved towards the dim shape. "Who's there?" she called, trying to force authority into her voice as logic told her that no mistress or member of staff would simply lurk there so silently.

She thought she heard a muffled exclamation, and then suddenly something heavy cannoned into her from behind. The totally unexpected attack sent her flying and her last glimpse as she fell to the ground was of two dim shapes dissolving into the darkness.

Chapter 2

"Barbara! Is that Barbara Redfern?"

The dazzling beam of a torchlight fell full into Babs' face as she began to pick herself up from the cold hard flagstones. Miss Bullivant, the acid-tempered mistress of the Third stood

glaring down accusingly at the dishevelled Fourth former.

"What are you doing outside at this time?" the Bull snapped. "And why are you grovelling around on the ground?"

"Somebody just knocked me over," Babs was groaning under her breath, not so much at the bruises she was collecting on her knee and elbow but at her lousy luck in being out at the same moment as the Bull. "Didn't you see them?" she demanded.

"I saw no-one. And you have not yet answered my question."

"I want to see Miss Primrose", said Babs steadily. "I'm on my way there now. And I did see somebody." She averted her face from the probing torch light, and the irate mistress had the grace to lower the dazzling beam. But her tone was distinctly disbelieving as she said:

"Very well, Barbara, if that is so I shall take you to the headmistress myself. And should your excuse prove false I shall have no option but to punish you. Now brush yourself down girl. You look most untidy."

Babs did as she was bid, thankful that the night was dry --- encountering an assailant, plus the Bull, was quite enough. In silence the Bull stalked at her side towards Miss Primrose's house. That august lady looked somewhat surprised, even more so when she heard Miss Bullivant's weighted side of the story. However, Primmy said briskly: "As it happens, I did want to see Barbara (she did not add that she had been about to send a prefect in search of her). Meanwhile, Miss Bullivant, would you be so kind as to telephone Piper and report possible intruders."

Babs found herself ushered into the headmistress's cosy sitting room, where a bright fire welcomed and plump chintzy armchairs invited relaxation. She unbuttoned her coat and said abruptly: "I'm sorry, Miss Primrose to interrupt your evening like this, but I'm worried -- about this Christmas here --- no-one has come to see me --- none of the Fourth, that is --- and I wondered", Babs hesitated, then encouraged by Miss Primrose's nod, went on: "I'm sure it must be important, or you wouldn't have called that assembly. And I --- I couldn't answer the questions the girls asked me, so", she bit her lip, then plunged on: "I



decided to come and ask you if you could ---"

"Tell you all about it?" Miss Primsie queried gently.

"Yes." With a sigh of relief that the roof was not about to fall on her after all, Babs sat down in the chair opposite the headmistress.

"Briefly, it concerns a lady, recently widowed, who has lived for many years in America. She is an extremely wealthy lady now, but early in her life she was very poor. She was born and spent her youth in Courtfield, in the poorest area of

the town, and worked as a scullery maid in one of the big town houses. Then at the very end of the war she met an American service-man, married him, and went to America, where, during the past forty-five years they built up a thriving business. When her husband died last year Mrs. Wyburn inherited everything. Having no children of her own and no close family left here, she was possessed by a sudden desire to realise an almost forgotten childhood dream."

Miss Primrose paused, and Babs saw her fine eyes had misted. She went

on quietly, almost as though she had forgotten the schoolgirl who now waited breathlessly.

"When Margaret Wyburn was a small girl she became fascinated by Cliff House. She used to watch the schoolgirls at sports and play, weave her own romantic fancies about their lives and background, and above all what it must be like to be part of the school. She admits freely being envious, but most of all she recalls one incident that filled her with a life-long desire to see the school again, and perhaps re-enter under very different circumstances from the time she speaks of. As you know, we always have a Christmas party just before we break up, this has been a tradition since before my time here. But there was a period during the war when the school was evacuated --- Kent was a somewhat dangerous area at that time. The school returned during the last year of the war, when Mrs. Wyburn was about fifteen years old, not really so long before she met her future husband and went across the ocean into the unknown when she only sixteen years old. That Christmas it was still difficult to get staff and one of our maids was acquainted with Mrs. Wyburn. This maid went down with flu' that Christmas and Mrs. Wyburn volunteered to come in her place to help serve and clear up after the party. The girls in their party dresses, the big tree that Sir Willis supplied, the warmth and the brightness, and above all the wonderful atmosphere that Cliff House possesses made an impression on Margaret --- who, after all, at that time was younger than many of our pupils --- she never forgot."

"And now she would like to visit Cliff House again, at Christmas", Babs said softly, her warm heart going out to the wistful youngster all those years ago who had little in a drab life --- except dreams.

Miss Primrose nodded. "I have already re-arranged my own plans and invited her to spend Christmas here, as my guest. But I suspect that there is something else she wants, something which with the best will in the world I can't give her."

"She wants to recapture that atmosphere", said Babs.

"For which I need my pupils."

Babs nodded, a sudden incredible insight telling her what that sad, once poor, now rich old lady longed for. "She wants a glimpse of what she could never have in her childhood. To sleep in a dorm, dine in Big Hall, share the jokes, the camaraderie, the laughter, even the tears..." Babs tailed off, hardly aware that she had spoken aloud.

"You are very perceptive, Barbara."

Babs shook her head. "But it isn't possible. It's all in the --- the wrong time scale. Oh, if only we could give her a simply lovely Christmas - she must be so lonely now."

"I'm afraid she is", agreed Miss Primrose sadly. "However, I shall do my best, even if my rather whimsical idea does not materialise." She rose to her feet. "Now, Barbara, I was about to send for you. Your mother telephoned me just before you arrived. She ---"

Babs whitened. "Is something wrong? Is Daddy ---?"

"No, your parents are perfectly well, but your mother has a problem she wishes to discuss with you." Miss Primrose indicated her own telephone on a small white table near the window. "You may ring her now, my dear."

With that the headmistress went from the room, leaving Babs staring somewhat fearfully at the telephone. Heart beating wildly, she dialled the number and felt relief at hearing her mother's calm, sensible voice. Yes, all was well at Holly Hall. Baby brother Reginald was into every mischief one could imagine. Effie was fine, chaos still reigned in the kitchen where the new cook was not as efficient as her promises had been. But Aunt Jane had fallen and fractured her hip. She would be out of hospital tomorrow but wouldn't be able to make the journey to Holly Hall for Christmas. She was devastated with disappointment and everyone near her was beginning to feel devastated too.

Babs could imagine this. She knew Aunt Jane, Daddy's older sister, of old.

"So you see, darling", continued Mrs. Redfern, "I shall have to try to spend at least a couple of days or so with her some time over the holiday, and probably take Doris with me. And of course Reggie too. Daddy will drive us down to Somerset and then come back. Now, Babs, this is the problem. Can

you cope? You'll have to look after your friends while I'm away, and see that the household routine runs reasonably smoothly. Do you think you can manage? Can I trust you?"

"Of course! Poor Aunt Jane." Babs sighed sympathetically. "How awful to have an accident just before Christmas."

"It's awful at any time", said Mrs. Redfern more sharply than she intended, "but the problems at this time of year are always more complicated somehow or other."

"But they needn't be!" Suddenly Babs knew exactly how everything could be solved, as if it was all meant to be this way. Almost incoherent with excitement she cried: "But it'll be all right! Listen! I've got to talk to Miss Primrose, then I'll ring you again, in a few minutes, and explain how it will all work out!"

By the time Babs had put down the phone and located the somewhat startled Miss Primrose she had it all worked out.

"Calm down, Barbara, please. Now tell me."

Babs took a deep breath. "We could stay --- at least eight of us could. Then both my parents could go and cheer up Aunt Jane. And then we could all be together for New Year. Oh --- there's only one snag", Babs rosy face sobered, "three of the boys from Friardale were joining our house party, and their parents have already made arrangements of their own."

"We could accommodate the boys. That does not present a problem. Miss Charmant has already offered to remain here for Christmas, and Professor Wallace said he would come and do whatever he could to help the festivities along."

Miss Primrose suddenly began to look much happier. "There is something else, connected with the school and Mrs. Wyburn, which is confidential at present, but which I will tell you, Barbara, and trust you to be discreet until the details are finalised. Mrs. Wyburn is planning to donate the finance to build a completely new science lab."

"A new science lab!" Babs breathed. "That would be wonderful."

It was a long time before sleep came to the captain of the Fourth that night. Her chums had received the news with

astonishment but remarkably good humour, and the story of Mrs. Wyburn had touched all their hearts. As soon as the news went round that Babs and Co. were staying for what was probably Cliff House's first Christmas house party, several girls came forward and said they had decided to give it a go. Some of them did not have exciting home plans to look forward to, because their parents were abroad, and the biggest surprise was Diana Royston-Clarke's announcement that they could count her in, too.

But the last thought in Babs' mind before sleep at last claimed her was that somehow they were going to make a Christmas that Mrs. Wyburn would cherish the memory of for ever.

Chapter 3

The next few days raced by. Lessons took a back seat and mistresses, aware of the project so dear to the heart of the headmistress turned an indulgent eye, for once. The big tree arrived, and with much heaving and groaning from Piper and the assistance of Boker was planted firmly in a large scarlet tub in Big Hall and the girls given permission to start the decking of it. Holly with scarlet berries and scarlet ribbons grew from every picture corner and crevice that would hold it, rainbow garlands swathed rafters and stairs, silver tinsel and sparkling baubles looped along the gallery over Big Hall, and almost everyone at the school helped in the making of a big Crib which was given the place of honour in Big Hall.

Babs' eyes were tender the morning she made a final adjustment to the blue robe of the Madonna and put the figure in place beside the cradle which held the Infant Jesus. No omen of ill entered her heart as she straightened and stepped back into the group of girls gathered about the Crib. Tiny Dolores Essenden of the Second Form had helped with some of the sewing, and she clutched Babs hand as she anxiously waited approval of her handiwork. Then:

"Barbara Redfern: there you are. The Head wants you. Immediately."

The vindictive tones of Connie Jackson were guaranteed to put a damper on anyone's happy mood. The girls fell silent as Babs stared at the unpleasant

prefect then moved obediently in the direction of the Head's study. It could only be something to do with the forthcoming holiday; she had done nothing at all to warrant Connie's bullying attitude. So it came as a shock to Babs when she entered the Head's study and saw the stern, accusing expression on Miss Primrose's face. The Head held out a newspaper, the local Courtfield Times.

"Are you responsible for this, Barbara?" she said coldly.

Babs saw the front page headline even before her hand grasped the paper. The great black letters flared their message: "CLIFF HOUSE BENEFACTOR. NEW LAB FOR FAMOUS SCHOOL. And a big photograph of a pleasant-faced woman wearing a polka-dotted scarf rather untidily tucked into the collar of her dark jacket.

Babs shook her head wordlessly, too shocked for a moment to defend herself.

"Well, Barbara. I'm waiting."

"I didn't give this story to the press. I swear it, Miss Primrose." Bewilderment chased shock from Babs' face. "I haven't even been to Courtfield since you told me about it. I haven't told anyone, not even Mabs. I--I don't understand it."

"A girl who answers to your description, though not in school colours, gave these details to the editor yesterday", Miss Primrose said grimly. "What am I to think?"

"I don't know", said poor Babs. "Lots of girls are my build, and have my colouring. Perhaps Mrs. Wyburn decided to tell the press herself."

"Mrs. Wyburn is very hurt and very angry. I telephoned her this morning, the moment I saw --- this", the Head's hand gesticulated angrily towards the paper Babs still held. "She is also disappointed because she had felt so happy at the prospect of coming to the school and meeting you all, and also she had been able to get in touch with a distant cousin, a young man who lives in London and has brought his sister to Courtfield. Mrs. Wyburn had almost given up hope of finding any of her own family left in the country. I do feel unhappy about this."

"So do I", Babs said miserably.

Miss Primrose sighed heavily. "I suppose I must take your word that you know nothing of this", she said at last. "You may go now."

All the joyful anticipation of the year's loveliest festival ebbed from Babs' heart as she went sadly to rejoin her chums.

Breaking up day seemed a very strange one at Cliff House. In a buzz of farewells, Christmas messages and excited toings and froings most of the school departed to their month-long break from lessons and discipline leaving about eighteen girls, two mistresses and a small nucleus of the domestic staff. Diana the Firebrand managed to reverse the process, naturally. She had received permission to go up to London the previous day, ostensibly to meet her father and collect her friend Margot Lantham, but in truth to indulge in a thoroughly sybaritic orgy of shopping at Harrods. She landed back at the height of the exodus, clad in a scarlet fine cashmere suit with an extremely short and extremely tight skirt and silvery kid boots which matched her shoulder bag. It was probably the only occasion in Diana's lifetime when she could get away with arriving at school in such blatantly adult fashionwear and she enjoyed every moment of the stir she caused.

But rules were banished. Within reasonable bounds of behaviour the girls could come and go as they pleased and there was no Miss Bullivant to see bannister sliding or the more exuberant releases of high spirits. Only Connie Jackson, who, much to everyone's disgust, volunteered to lend her presence to the festivities, added the threat of blight, but the girls knew her power now was nil, and Connie was going to suffer some enforced lip-biting before the Cliff House Christmas celebrations were over.

The guest of honour was due to arrive by car the following morning, from the Courtfield hotel where she had been staying since her return to England. The whole Cliff House party, with the exception of Diana, who had slept in and saw no reason to miss her breakfast, were assembled at the school's magnificent old entrance to welcome Mrs. Wyburn.

She stepped from her car, instantly recognisable from the newspaper photograph, and came rather shyly to take

the welcoming hand Miss Primrose extended. Her clothes were surprisingly simple, at least to some of the girls, who had imagined heaven knew what excesses of luxury as would befit an American millionaire's widow. She wore a dark blue jacket over a grey tailored skirt, plain little grey courtshoes and matching gloves. Closer inspection revealed that her silk scarf and luggage came from Gucci, otherwise she betrayed none the pretentiousness one might have expected. Her smile was friendly, if slightly diffident, and Babs was perhaps the only one present, apart from the Head, who discerned the lonely, hard-worked deprived child of all those years ago still present within the silver-haired, plump little lady who now turned back toward the car. For she was not alone.

A young man with dark thick hair and clean-shaven face had got out of the car and was unloading the luggage. He was casually attired in jeans and a leather bomber jacket, neither of which looked over clean, and the inevitable trainers encased his feet. But he seemed quiet enough, as did the blonde girl, also in jeans and a white anorak, who got out of the car. Mrs. Wyburn introduced them to the Head as her cousins - "Second or even third!" - Gerald Smythe, and his sister, Linda.

But it seemed that Gerald was not staying, not yet, for after a brief glance over the girls, a glance that looked rather like assessment, he ducked back into the car and drove off.

Miss Primrose took the guest into her house for coffee, but it was not long before she came over to the school and asked to be introduced to the girls. In deference to her wishes, she had been given Dulcia Fairbrother's study with its comfortable divan so that she would be sleeping within the school itself. Soon she was being given an informal tour of the school by the chums of the Fourth. She gazed solemnly at the ancient paintings and roll of honour. She admired the playing fields, the sports facilities, and the gym where she looked longingly at all the apparatus. She frowned slightly at the detention room, looked faintly critical at the science lab, cooed and laughed tenderly in Pets' House, and finally sank tiredly on Babs' bed in the Fourth Form dorm, then

kicked off her shoes and looked smilingly at the chums.

"Do you realise how lucky you are to be in this wonderful school?" she asked.

The initial awkwardness caused by awareness of the age barrier was fast vanishing. Their guest had a warm and friendly personality which made very very easy to be natural with.

"It's not all fun and midnight feasts and jolly romps, you know", laughed Mabs.

"We have to work jolly hard", said Janet.

"And mind our jolly old Spartan manners and all that jazz", said Jemima solemnly, adjusting her monocle.

Mrs. Wyburn stared for a moment, as newcomers frequently did when meeting the Eton-cropped elegant Jemima Carstairs. Then she laughed. "There has to be discipline, you know."

"And the food is never enough", said Bessie darkly. "Not to keep our strength up properly."

"Speak for yourself, Fattikins!" cried Clara. "Our Bess here, as you'll soon discover, eats enough to stuff a hungry hippo!"

"Ha ha ha!"

"But seriously", put in Diana, who was lounging inelegantly on the next bed, "You'd have hated being here after the novelty wore off."

Margaret Wyburn's face sobered. "I don't think so, my dear. I think I would have put up with anything to have been able to come to Cliff House.

There was a sad little silence, then Jemima said, "Tut tut --- you haven't met Connie yet. Or our esteemed Sarah Harrigan. Or the endless thorn in our tender flesh --- Miss Bullivant."

"You know", offered Marjorie Hazeldene, "you might be able to come to Cliff House next year. They may open the school during the summer vacation for special adult courses."

"Come and learn weaving and flower arrangement", said Diana scornfully. "You'd hate that too, Mrs. Wyburn."

"I'm afraid you're right, my dear, there is no way back."

Another sad little silence. Then Jemima cleared her throat. "Would you

like to see the studies?"

They trooped down to Study 4 where Bessie hastened to put on the kettle. Ten girls managed to cram in for a study tea, and the time simply flew. Margaret Wyburn murmured naughtily: "To hell with dieting --- I'm going to have one more mince pie." She sighed happily. "This is just as I always imagined school life would be. I can't thank you all enough, and your dear headmistress, for making it possible for me to be here. Oh, yes, while I remember, I want to give you my home address and I hope you'll all keep in touch. Now..." she looked vaguely round the crowded study, "where did I put my bag?" There was no sign of it, then she said, "I must have left it up in the dorm."

They all offered to go and fetch it, but it was Babs who raced up to the dorm, now empty of girls, and retrieved the bag.

Margaret Wyburn delved into it, drew out a couple of cards, then exclaimed sharply: "That's strange! I thought I ---"

"What's the matter?" asked Babs quickly.

"My travel wallet ... with my money and credit cards... It's gone!"

Chapter 5

A frantic search of the school failed to produce the missing wallet and its contents. Miss Primrose looked shattered, as well she might, and once again Babs endured a miserable grilling from the Head. If only she had not been the girl who actually handled the bag. Her luck seemed to be out with a vengeance this week.

"I must have dropped it somewhere", said Mrs. Wyburn. "Maybe I left it at the hotel."

"You didn't, Cousin Margaret", insisted the blonde girl, Linda, sharply. "I helped you pack. I know. I saw you put it in your bag." She looked accusingly at Babs, then back to the older woman. She put her arm round Mrs. Wyburn's shoulders. "You know, dearest, it wasn't a good idea to come here. Just sentimental and silly. Gerald said it wasn't a good idea, and he was

right. Listen", she added softly, "why don't we just go back to Courtfield. Tell the police about the theft. Then we'll take you home with us. We can make a lovely Christmas in London for you."

But Mrs. Wyburn looked unexpectedly mutinous. "No, I'm staying here. And we won't think about calling the police yet." She turned apologetically to Miss Primrose. "I'm so sorry this had to happen --- I don't blame you --- you've been so very kind. Perhaps if I had another look round..."

"Have we a problem? Can we help?"

New voices broke on the scene in Big Hall, and most of the girls groaned under their breath. The newcomers were the pompous Sir Willis Gregory, chairman of the Cliff House Governors Board, and Professor Grant Wallace, the expert on the school's history and local antiquities. He was a quiet, gentle serious man, liked by the girls when he was on his own, but Sir Willis could overpower anyone with his bombast and peppery temper. Now he advanced across the floor, formally offering his hand to Mrs. Wyburn. "May I be of assistance, ma'am? I gather something is amiss."

The girls could see that Mrs. Wyburn was not overly impressed by his haughty arrogance. She freed her hand and turned to his companion.

Later on, all the girls swore that that was the moment something sparked at the meeting with their shy professor, but to Mrs. Wyburn it was not exactly an auspicious moment to meet anyone. Sir Willis had turned to Miss Primrose and demanded to know what was happening. The Head could do nothing but tell him, whereupon he immediately decided that a full and proper search must be organised.

"That won't be necessary, Sir Willis!"

The smug voice of Connie Jackson rang through Big Hall as she advanced across the parquet. She held out a grey leather purse. "Is this what you've lost?"

Margaret Wyburn's face lit up. "Oh, you clever girl. You've found it for me. Thank you so much. Where had I left it?"

Connie smiled with supreme satisfaction. "You didn't leave it anywhere. I found it in one of the girls'

lockers."

If Connie had pitched a grenade into the school she could not have wrought a bigger shock. Ignoring the Head's startled exclamation, Connie looked directly at Babs.

"How could you rob a guest, Barbara Redfern? I'm appalled. What on earth made you do this?"

Gasps of amazement, of shock and disbelief escaped all those present. And of all of them, none was more astounded than Babs herself. The enormity of the accusation robbed her of speech. She could only shake her head disbelievingly. The Clara rushed to her side. "You can't accuse Babs of theft?" she said fiercely. "And what gives you the right, Connie, to go rooting through Babs locker?"

"I heard that a purse was missing, and I heard someone upstairs in the Fourth dorm, so I decided to investigate", said Connie, unabashed.

Uproar broke out. "Clara's right! Babs wouldn't steal anything. Go home, Connie! You're a spy and a sneak!"

Connie spluttered furiously. "How dare you? You'll all pay for this! You---"

"Silence!" Miss Primrose held up her hand. "Barbara, go to my study please. Sir Willis --- be so kind as to escort Mrs. Wyburn to my house. Girls, you had better go to your studies and remain there until the evening meal."

It was a grim and un-Christmaslike atmosphere that greeted the three boys from Friardale School when they arrived that evening. Jimmy Richmond was furious, and Babs could not have wished for a more loyal champion when he sat by her side at the evening feast.

It should have been a joyous occasion; the night before Christmas Eve, and for those of Bessie's inclination a culinary rehearsal for the grey day itself. But to poor Babs the roast chicken and trimmings followed by a rich apple and mince pie with cream tasted like sawdust.

The dining hall was bright with holly and decorations, and someone had set up a cassette deck from which the old loved Christmas melodies came forth. Mrs. Wyburn looked worried, although Professor Wallace seemed to have appointed himself escort in chief to her, and the Head looked strained, as well she might with Sir Willis sitting next to her.

Further down the big table sat Linda, who seemed to have struck up a friendship with Connie Jackson, while Gerald Smythe, who had arrived very late, was next to Miss Charmant.

"At least he's had the grace to put on a dark suit", muttered Leila, who like Jemima, had definite ideas of taste in both male and female fashion. Jemima opened her mouth to agree, but was distracted by a sharp nudge from Diana.

With a pained expression Jemima massaged her ribs tenderly. "Do pad your elbows, old Spartan", she grumbled. "Think of the strain my jolly old ribcage has to suffer at this time of year."

"Never mind your silly old ribs", hissed Diana. "I'm sure I've seen that bloke somewhere and I can't remember where."

"Which bloke?" Jemima could be deliberately perverse if she felt so inclined. "He's from London. It's rather a big place, old thing."

"Think I need telling! Be serious, Jimmy, I want to talk to you. When this is over the idiots are going to play Consequences or something and Sir Willis is going to give one of his pesky monologues. Can you get Clara and Ralph to take a turn outside without the others? We can't all vanish together."

Jemima, whose needle-sharp brain was already several steps ahead of the Firebrand, nodded lazily. It would not prove too difficult to escape into the darkness outside. Clara needed to walk Pluto, and Ralph Lawrence made an easy excuse.

"Well, so what's this all about?" Clara demanded when they reached the secluded area by the old Clock Tower. "What's going on?"

"Alas, fair conspirator, we don't know --- except that we think something is", said Jemima, not exactly lucidly.

"Such as?" asked Ralph, his devil-may-care features alert despite his lazy tones.

"One. Somebody knocks Babs flying in the quad --- and Babs does not see things that aren't there", said Diana. "Two. Some nutter leaks a story to the press which was supposed to be confidential. Again, Babs gets the blame. And three. The old dear loses her wealth, which is conveniently found in Babs'

locker."

"Well?" said Clara, trying to restrain Pluto, who disliked standing around while his mistress gossiped.

"I don't know", said Diana irritably. "I can't remember!"

"Of course", said Jemima dreamily. "It is always wealth!"

"Jimmy! Stop being so enigmatic. We're going to freeze."

"Mrs. Wyburn is rich, my infants", said Jemima airily. "And she has no infants of her own. Apparently no family. To assuage an odd little notion she's had in her topknot for decades she decides to blow some of it on Cliff House. Then suddenly, bingo! Long lost relations start turning up. But are they?"

"Long lost?" said Diana.

"Or relatives?" said Ralph."

"Got it in one", complimented Jemima.

"But what if we're wrong?" exclaimed Clara. "It could be all coincidence. Intruders slipped past Piper the night Babs got knocked over. Someone in the hotel could have got hold of the endowment story and talked. And maybe Mrs. Wyburn left her purse near Babs' bed and one of the maids put it away."

They considered this in silence, then Ralph said slowly: "If not, it means that someone is deliberately trying to discredit Cliff House so that she'll change her mind about the money. Which brings us back to the two long lost cousins. Would they benefit?"

"They're certainly trying to ingratiate themselves." Clara rubbed cold hands. "But we've nothing to go on, only surmise. We could be wrong", she repeated dolefully."

"But we're not!" Diana let out a triumphant yell. "I've remembered!"

"What?" They crowded eagerly round the excited Firebrand.

"When I was coming back on the train with Margot I went to get a couple of cups of tea. Those two were in the buffet car! I knew I'd seen him before somewhere. They were in front of me." Diana snapped her fingers. "I didn't recognise the Linda girl because she had on a rather snazzy suit, a bit gaudy" --- there was a faint curl to the Firebrand's lip --- "and she had her hair piled up on

top of her head, a lot of make-up, and very high heels --- it was the lack of height and the different hair and gear that didn't register when she got here---

"And you, of course, had slept in", taunted Clara.

"Diana ignored this. "I'm trying to remember what he was saying", she groaned, "but you know what it's like in a heaving train. But I know one thing. He isn't her brother."

"How do you know?"

"Because of the way he was nuzzling her ear, and his arm round her, their heads close together. Lovers", said Diana, "or maybe even married."

"Remember to note said lady's ring finger", murmured Jemima. "A wedding ring usually leaves a mark."

"And he said to her!" Diana broke in dramatically, "He said to her: 'We're going to be all right now, kid. Very soon.'"

Chapter 6

They decided to keep watch that night.

If their theory was sound, further pranks and mischief would be attempted. But there were no mysterious noises in the night, no alarms, nothing to disturb or frighten Mrs. Wyburn.

She appeared composed at breakfast and announced that she was going into Courtfield for some last minute Christmas shopping. Gerald and Linda insisted on accompanying her, and there seemed little the chums could do that Christmas Eve morning except wait and be as alert as possible.

Professor Wallace arrived soon after eleven and looked rather disappointed to find the lady guest among them missing. "At least no-one could accuse our Prof of being a fortune hunter", giggled Diana. "They say he's got pots."

"Yes --- the smashing kind, chump!"

Diana merely shrugged and returned to some last minute gift wrapping. The morning dragged past, lunch came and went, and the afternoon was spent in final preparations for the Christmas entertainment the girls had planned. A sketch by Janet and Jean, a hastily got up

one act playlet by Mabs. Music from Marjorie and Mabs, and a modern dance by Diana. Bessie would contribute some expert ventriloquism, and to round off the evening the cast would lead a sing-song of popular carols and old favourites, with Miss Charmant at the piano. By then the Eve would be almost over: tomorrow was Christmas Day.

By seven the chums were taut with nerves.

Every few minutes someone would whisper: "Anything to report? Anything happening?"

But the answer was always no. The adults were relaxing, Mrs. Wyburn looked radiant in a soft blue gown, Primmy was in her favourite silver grey, the Charmer a picture in rose silk, and the gentlemen looked distinguished in evening wear.

Out of consideration for the domestic staff the evening meal was a light one and put forward an hour. At half past seven the girls who were performing were dressed and made up, the guests had settled themselves comfortably, and the lights in Big Hall all lowered apart from those on the spacious dais under the gallery which did dual service as stage and concert platform.

The entertainment progressed. Janet fluffed a couple of lines, and Marjorie was palpably nervous in her duet with Mabs, but the chums gained confidence as they warmed up, and the audience was in indulgent mood. Item after item went over without mishap and the girls began to relax; it was going to be all right after all. And then without warning every light went out.

"What the---?"

"Ouch! I can't see!"

There was a frantic wail from Bessie who had managed to lose her spectacles and then a sudden, blood-curdling scream from somewhere above their heads.

Babs was groping her way desperately towards the emergency light switch at the side of the dais, near the door to the mistresses' Common-room. She could hear the audience exclaiming and shifting chairs, falling over one another in their efforts to find light. Babs questing fingers found the switch, which

was on an emergency circuit in case the main lights ever failed.

Dim and thin yellow light rewarded her efforts, and then someone cried out in frantic fear. In the hall girls were pointing up fearfully, and then Babs herself heard a strange swishing sound and someone said stupidly: "It's raining!"

It all happened so quickly. The emergency light revealed the ghostly monkish figure standing on the ancient carved gallery above the dais. But this could be no ghostly monk. This was flesh and blood, and it wielded a hosepipe!

Girls and guests scattered frantically to avoid the soaking spray. Sir Willis was bellowing for somebody to get the boulder, and Professor Wallace had hurried Mrs. Wyburn out of Big Hall, a way from the wildly indiscriminate water.

Babs and Jemima, with great presence of mind, had grabbed the heavy cloth off the big prop table and flung it over the piano. Then through the melee they heard Ralph Lawrence's voice ring out in triumph.

"We've got the rotter!"

Jimmy was there, wrestling the hosepipe from the robed figure and rushing to the nearest cloakroom where the source of the water was located. Clara rushed up to help, and the gallery became a hive of struggling figures. Numbers told, and the grey monk was unceremoniously dragged down onto the dais.

"Right! Let's have a look at you, chummy!" Ralph cried.

The hood was yanked away --- to reveal the snarling features of Gerald Smythe.

The girls' surmises had proved remarkably accurate.

Gerald and Linda Smythe were actually husband and wife. They were not related at all to Mrs. Wyburn. But Linda had a sister who lived in Courtfield and it was from her she had learned of Mrs. Wyburn's return from America, and her enquiries for any living relatives still in the area. The temptation to try to pass himself and his wife off as distant cousins had been too much for Gerald. Having succeeded in convincing Margaret Wyburn that he was indeed the nephew of one of her aunts, now dead, he was

not prepared to see her spend all that lovely wealth on a girls' boarding school he'd scarcely heard of.

And so the plan of discredit was hastily cobbled together. But Gerald Smythe was not very clever, and certainly no match for Diana and Jemima when they became curious and started to probe.

Because it was Christmas, Mrs. Wyburn refused to call the police, although Sir Willis was breathing fire and vengeance, forgivable really, in view of the water flooding Big Hall. But everyone set to willingly to mop up, and fortunately no real damage had been done, the precious oil paintings escaping any splashes.

Suddenly Christmas was in the air and the party was filled with joy. The

Friardale carollers arrived and were given refreshments round the gaily lit tree.

Only Babs was quiet and still a little subdued.

She went to look down at the Crib, thankful that at least all shadow of blame was now lifted from her character. She had stood there for several minutes when she sensed she was not alone. She looked up to see Miss Primrose standing there.

"I am sorry, Barbara, to have doubted you", the Head said softly. She leaned forward and gently kissed Babs on her cheek. "Now come, my dear and begin to enjoy our celebration."

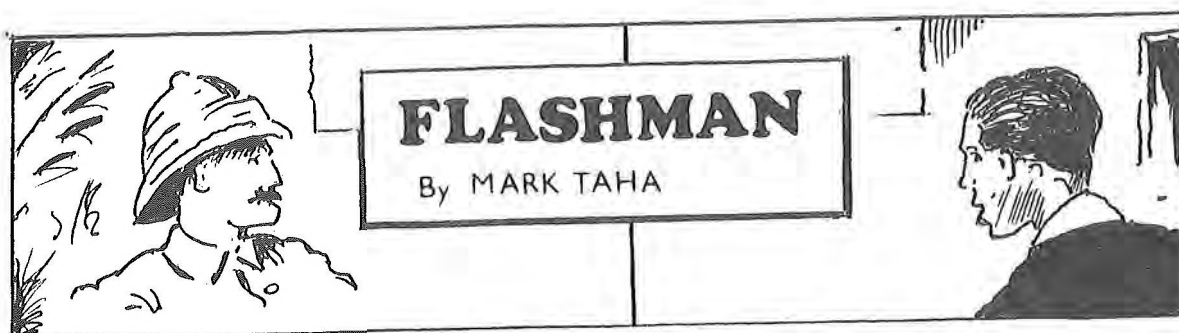
She drew Babs back into the warmth and gaiety round the tree where toasts were raised and drunk to the Christmas at Cliff House.

Christmas Thrills in Plenty in this Fine Tale of Barbara Redfern & Co. of Cliff House School on Holiday.



THAT Exciting CHRISTMAS DAY





This article is a labour of love - George MacDonald Fraser is my favourite living writer, Flashman my favourite character. His reviving the bully of "Tom Brown's Schooldays" and turning him into a totally undeserving hero, Brigadier-General Sir Harry Flashman, VC, Medal of Honor, Légion d'Honneur, etc., and a self-confessed scoundrel, liar, thief, coward, and toady, has given me hours of pleasure reading the adventures of this involuntary Victorian James Bond with a touch of Blackadder, always finding himself in action much against his wishes and constantly becoming a hero by a combination of luck and anything but pluck! Ironically, he's a man of genuine ability; apart from the aforementioned qualities (useful in undercover, political and diplomatic work) he also has natural talents for foreign languages ("master of disguise" is a cliché, but accurate), riding, fornication, (he outBonds Bond and has a talent for attracting generally beautiful women with an equal lust for power) and cricket and is a self-deprecating cynic whose opinion of the world at large is on a level with his opinion of himself. The difference between him and the likes of Bond is that they're brave men dedicated to the service of their country while he's an anything but brave man dedicated to the service of Harry Flashman!

Fraser is not only a fiction writer but a historical novelist; all the books are written in the first person and meticulously researched, with appendices and footnotes at the back. The whole premise is that General Flashman, now in his 80s, wrote his "official" memoirs "Dawns and Departures of a Soldier's Life" several decades before; now he's writing the truth and filling in the blanks. On his death in 1915, the memoirs were discovered, and his eminently respectable family (son a bishop, a sister-in-law married to a Rothschild) were unanimously opposed to publishing them. The manuscripts were discovered in a tea-chest in 1965 and the first of them published in 1969.

Mr. Fraser's coolly pretending that Flashman was a real person and involving him with real people and events in every book certainly fooled many people; half the American reviewers, not to mention me! I have embarrassing memories of trying to look up Flashman in the "Dictionary of National Biography" and of having used one of the books as the basis for a history essay at school. I got an A- for it, which may indicate something.

Every book follows the same pattern: Flashy wants to stay out of danger but finds himself, either by his own fault or someone else's believing his reputation, up to his neck in it. Not that the plots ever get monotonous - on the contrary, P.G. Wodehouse himself, said: "If there was ever a time when I felt that watcher-of-the-skies-when-a-new-planet stuff, it was when I read the first Flashman". Time and again, he's not only involved with history but helps to change it. Mr. Fraser also creates excellent fictional characters, some of whom deserve books of their own - and gives proof that truth is stranger than fiction. Nobody would dare invent some of his real-life characters. And, while one can hardly have liked Flashman after reading "Tom Brown's Schooldays" (although the character I disliked most was the nauseating Arthur), it's a different story in these books. Apart from it being impossible not to identify with someone who writes in the first person, you must feel sympathy for his always finding himself under the orders of dominating men and women with no way out - especially as many of them are at least partly mad!

He's also no respecter of persons; in one of his notes to the latest book, "Flashman and the Mountain of Light", Mr. Fraser describes his "attitude to his military superiors" as varying between affection, poisonous hatred, respect, contempt and amused anxiety. He states in the first book that "most officers are bad... the higher you go, the worse they get, myself included". I've always been rather surprised that he never got above Brigadier. Not only was he a Colonel at 31, but I honestly believe that Flashman, as a clever coward,

would have done a better job of commanding armies than most Generals I could mention. Indeed, one of the few Generals he respected was one of the few worthy of respect, Sir Colin Campbell.

As for politicians - our hero believed them to be beneath contempt. It's a toss-up whether he disliked Disraeli or Gladstone more. And his attitude towards British royalty was that Queen Victoria had a crush on him, Prince Albert was a prig and a "prying busybody", and Edward VII "Beastly Bertie", "the most vulgar man in Europe" (Flashman and the Tiger) and "an upper-class hooligan" (Flashman in the Great Game).

Looking at the books one by one, "Flashman" itself begins with his expulsion from Rugby (apparently, Hughes got it wrong - Speedicut ordered the beer). His father buys him a commission (after Flashy's seduced his mistress) in the Eleventh Light Dragoons, commanded by Lord Cardigan. Cardigan takes a liking to Flashman (footnote - "his judgement of men... was deplorable"), who does well on duty as one of the best horsemen in an elite regiment, and off it as a "plunger". Unfortunately, he does equally well with a fellow-officer's mistress; the eventual duel sees him emerge with credit after arranging for his opponent's gun to be unloaded. Posted to Scotland, he finds himself forced into a shotgun wedding after seducing his host's daughter Elspeth. Ironically, he eventually falls in love with her! On the one hand, she's blonde, beautiful, stupid, an heiress and besotted with him; on the other, is she entirely faithful? No one, even Flashman, ever knows.

The result of this is Flashy's being dispatched to India - Elspeth's father was a mill-owner, and Cardigan was of the snobs, snobby! There, our hero buys himself an Indian mistress, meets the Governor-General, and finds himself posted to Afghanistan as aide to General Elphinstone, who leads the Army into one of the worst disasters in British military history. Flashy, on the other hand, becomes a totally undeserved hero twice, and narrowly escapes death more than once; he returns home a hero.

This book sets the tone of the test - and it deserved all the praise it got. Flashman's encounters with real-life people include one of the "incredible-if-not-true", an Italian adventurer and border Governor named Avitabile. The descriptive passages for instance, of the Afghan retreat are brilliant and Flashman's part in history this time includes his becoming the mysterious third party who left the Kabul residency with the murdered Burnes brothers.

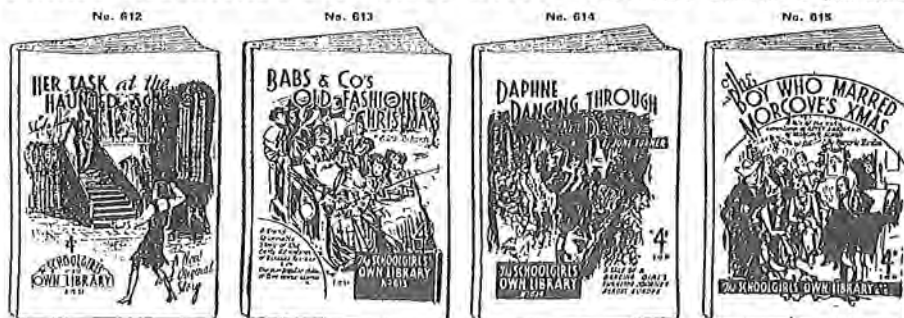


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Total	38	5	3
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	1	10	0
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	2	17	6
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Every Commoner is required to answer to his name at the usual hour of Prayers on the Evening of the Day named for his return:

Mr. *Spicer* is expected to appear on Wednesday Sept. 5.

It is requested, That Linen, and other Articles of Dress, be marked, not only with Initials, but with the whole of the Surname:

That no Bills may be discharged which are not included in this Account:

That a Quarters Notice may be given in case of a Commoner being removed from the School.

The Tradesmen's Bills are enclosed in a Cover, and sealed.

The Money is usually paid, on the return of the Commoner, either to Dr. Moberly; to Messrs. Deane and Littlehales, Bankers, Winchester; or to Messrs. Williams, Deacon, and Co. Bankers, 20, Birch Lane, London on account of Messrs. Deane and Co. for Dr. Moberly.

Winchester Aug. 8. 1838.

Dear Sir,

Your elder son has gone on quietly & regularly during the last half year. The younger one brings me very favourable reports from Mr. Wordsworth of his diligence & steadiness in School, & of his improvement in Scholarship. I shall look ^{not} without a little anxiety) to his steadiness of conduct next half year, when he is raised to the upper part of the School, & is left without his brother's direction.

I am dear Sir,

yours very faithfully

George Mobily

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George Mobily



A Christmas Number Every Schoolgirl Will Enjoy

No. 114, Vol. 5.

EVERY FRIDAY.

Week Ending December 25th, 1937.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL WEEKLY²



CHRISTMAS

No. 78.—OUR FIRST CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Week ending
Dec. 2, 1939.

THE NELSON LEE
MAGNIFICENT XMAS No. 2



CHRISTMAS MERIT

A SPECIAL DOUBLE LENGTH TALE OF NELSON LEE & NIPPER
INTRODUCING EILEEN DARE THE GIRL DETECTIVE, JIM THE PENMAN
PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE ET AL. SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THIS ISSUE

**LAUGH
THESE
OFF!**

—with Monty
Lowther.



Merry Christmas, Everybody! Even to the reader who says the only thing that is funny to him is why the Editor let's me write this stuff every week!

"What do you know about Turkey, D'Arcy minor?" asked Mr. Selby. "I like it!" replied Wally promptly.

Young Gibson says that when he grows up he is going to be a literary man. He'll write the "cracks" that go in Christmas crackers. A "resounding" success!

A reader asks if I would like the recipe for a Christmas cake two hundred years old. Do you want to bust my molars, old chap?

"Spare Wheel Thieves," runs a headline. I can't see why we should, even if it is nearly Christmas.

Try this, then: "Why did you butt your opponent, Gore?" asked Tom Merry, after Gore had been disqualified in the school boxing championship. "Well, the instructor told me to use my head!" explained Gore.

"How is it best to feel at Christmas?" inquires Blake. Rich!

News: I hear that at Christmas-time the guards on trains in Siam use bugles. In case of danger they simply blow the communication chord!

Kangaroo says they will be playing a special cricket match at Christmas in Sydney, wearing 1890 costumes. They used to wear "toppers" then, says Kangaroo. Of course, we still can't get on without bowlers.

Story: "Is this swimming pool deep?" asked the all-the-year swimmer of the park attendant. "Deep?" exclaimed the attendant. "I'll say it is! A fellow dived into it a few weeks ago and we saw no more of him. We got a wire later from Australia, asking us to send on his clothes!"

BY SPECIAL REQUEST: George Gore will not sing "Good King Wenceslas" at the school breaking-up concert.

Travelling this vac? I hear cannibals never eat anybody over thirty years of age. So take your birth certificate with you!

For Christmas parties: A snob is a chap who only wants to know the people who don't want to know him.

Here's to you, chaps—in foaming ginger-pop!



SCRAPBOOK



FOURTH-FORM RESOLUTIONS.

Here your Cliff House Chums tell you their New Year Resolutions!

BARBARA REDFERN.—The first resolution I made was to see that the members of the Fourth Form carry out theirs—the good ones at all events! It'll be "something accomplished" if I can force old Clara, for instance, to get out of bed at rising-bell every morning! Don't you agree? I'm afraid I didn't have time to make any more. I'm still busy trying to remember if I kept all last year's!

MABEL LYNN.—This year, I've made up my mind, the Fourth are going to produce that great variety show that I've wanted to do for years. I've got all the stuff worked out, and—what's that Babs? No, I know this isn't a lecture on acting—it's my New Year Resolution, and—well, perhaps it isn't exactly a resolution for myself—but for the Form! But it's the same thing, isn't it? (Not quite the same, Babs. But very praiseworthy for all that, Babs.)

CLARA TREVLIN.—Resolutions? Oh, well, as Babs says, I'm going to get up at rising-bell—or as near as doesn't matter—every morning. And then I shall do my daily dozen of that exercise where you go "full knees bend," and then fling your arms about in a circulatory motion, as Miss Keys says. (Memo.—Must consult friend Dictionary to discover just what she means by this!) Oh, yes, and I'm going to put old Bease through a course of slimming exercises. She needs 'em! (Howls of protest from Bease!)

BESSIE BUNTER.—Oh rrr-really, Clara, I call that quite uncalled-for on your pip-part. You know you're jealous of my splendid fuf-figure—what? Oh, my resolutions. Well, I'm gig-gig-going to see that I get enough to eat every dud-day. Miss Primrose is so jolly mean, you know, about fuf-food. And I'm going to put Clara and those other skinny gug-girls through a kik-cullinary course—to tut-teach them the true value of fuf-food, you know.

JEMIMA CARSTAIRS.—What have I resolved? Well, I'm jolly well going to chivy up that natty old tailor of mine with the new spring suiting, what? And I think the woolly old monocle-cord might be streamlined, don't you? I mean, one simply can't go about in these merry old ready-mades, can one?

MARJORIE HAZELDENE.—I really have made up my mind this year to get Clara's hair to sit down. It really is a disgrace! So I've bought one of those steel curry-combs, and I think I shall have to get some glue or something, and—(That's enough, thank you, Miss Hazeldene! You wait till—)

LEILA CARROLL.—Well, I guess I'm not too great on this resolution racket. I prefer the Fourth of July. But I sure am going to have a crack at a swell collection of radio-stars. You see, I've gotten a portrait of every film star, and until some new ones start a-twinkling, I must have something to do? (What's wrong with homework, Leila?)

MARCELLE BIQUET.—Moi? I am resolved to learn the English of the spoken. Already it is that I am much better. Mean my brother, Alphonse, we went to London, and they take us for English—until we speak. Ah, and I will teach that Bease Buntaire who is one fat podge to cook za French rock wiz ze abnona in film. But my biggest resolve is that I grow taller and taller—perhaps as tall as my friend Jean Cartwright. Who knows?



A Happy Christmas Letter

—from Hilda Richards.

THE SCHOOLGIRL Office,
Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
E.C.4.

My Dear Girls,—It's lovely to be writing a little letter to you at this most wonderful season of the year. You know just what I want to say to you all, don't you? And you know how very, very sincerely I mean it when I say

A VERY HAPPY AND LOVELY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!

If only I had space to convey as many good wishes as you, my dears, have sent to me! Your very precious cards and letters of good cheer have assured me in the loveliest way of a wonderfully happy time this Christmas. And I can only hope that for you, too, this will be the most perfect Christmas you have known.

My pet—Juno—and I are going away to the sea for a few days, where we shall have lovely scampers, and Juno, with her big paws, will do lots of digging. It looks to me as if I shall have to buy a new ball for the occasion, and put it in the toe of her Christmas stocking!

Again, I want to thank you all for your sweet wishes and charming thoughts of me. You do know that I shall think of you all most affectionately this Christmas, don't you?

Juno sends you lots of Christmas paw-shakes, tail-wags and snuffles, and I, my love.

HILDA RICHARDS.



MORCOVE'S
MERRY CHRISTMAS.
A happy moment in the
fine complete Morcove
story inside.

CHRISTMAS

I RAN into the Greyfriars Ghost outside the Remove Room last night—in fact, I ran through him before I noticed he was there. A deep groan apprised me of his presence.

"Tut-tut!" I said hastily. "I beg your pardon for running through you. I was in a bit of a hurry."

The ghost growled again. "What I see is this here," he replied. "You needn't apologise. I got used to being run through in my time. If I happened to lock the gates on some young nip in the Fifth after six o'clock, he'd like enough run me through with his sword when he got to—me, a man old enough to be his grandfather."

"Great Scott!" I cried. "Why, I thought you were the ghost of an Abbot!"

"A haddock?" prompted the spectre. "Look 'ere, you young nip, if you try to insult me, what I see is this here—I'll report yer!"

"Not a haddock—an Abbot! Aren't you the ghost of some plucky old Abbot who lived here in the year dot?"

"Not me! I was a porter, I was. My name was Hugh de Goshinge. It still is, as a matter of fact."

"But you're wearing a coat," I objected.

"That was because of me pipe," replied the ghost. "They weren't used to tobacco in the Good Old Days, so when I started smoking a pipe, the Abbot up and sez, sez he, 'If this man wants to turn 'imself into a chimney,' sez he, 'he must be fitted with a coat, because the wind do blow 'is smoke into our eyes something 'orrid.' So they clipped this 'ere coat on me coat."

"Was the Abbot strict with you?"

"He was that!" growled the ghost. "Many a time he's said to me: 'Goshinge, if I miss any more bottles of sweet wine out of the cellar,' he sez, 'I shall consider it my painful duty to give you the push."

Ghostly Gossip.



Our Special Reporter, TOM BROWN, has a few words with a Phantom.

And I sez, 'Say not so, for it wasn't me, but a young nip of a Friar named Bunter of the Remove.'"

"And did he believe you?"

"No, 'e did not," replied the ghost sadly. "He said I carried the evidence of my evil ways in my own nose, which ain'th like a braceus. I could 'ave told 'im that at any rate I didn't sneak off down to a low tavern called the Three Fishers, like some of the bretheren in the Remove."

I nodded sympathetically. "How did you become a ghost?" was my next question.

The spectre snorted. "Worked meself to a shadder and foded awry," he replied.

"Do you mean to tell me you never died?"

"Not me! There wasn't enough of me left to die, time 'e finished

me day's work. What with sweepin' and polishin' and ringin' the rials-bell and lockin' up at night, I never 'ad a minute to eat no steen. So when 'e wore out me flesh and blood and 'ad become a mere ghost, they said they'd pension me off. Well, I'm still 'musing this school, lookin' for me pension, and I ain't found it yet. You 'ave'n't seen it lyin' around nowhere, I suppose?"

"Evidently not. How long have you been haunting us now?"

"Three 'undred and fifty years," replied Goshinge's Ghost. "And between you and me, I'm gettin' a bit dis'artened. Seems to me I ain't gainin' to get that pension."

"Did you like your work at the monastery here?"

"No, I did not, except now and then, when one of the bretheren 'ad to be flogged. Then the Abbot would send for me and say: 'Take him up, Goshinge!' while he got busy with a birch-staff. The yells of the victims was music to me ears."

"I suppose you quite liked reporting the bretheren for being late?"

"Dooty bring dooty," replied the ghost. "I did. If a Friar tried to sneak in after lock-up, I reported 'im, and he got 100 lines of manuscript to write. Seemed 'im right. All Friars oughter 'ave been drowned at birth, that's what I sez."

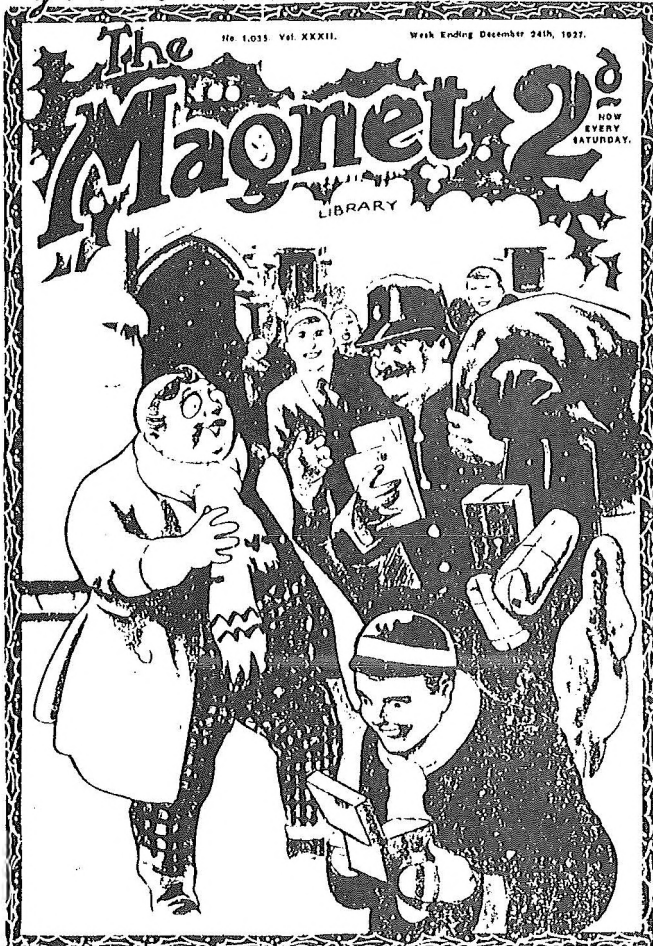
"From something in your conversation," I murmured, "I have an idea that William Gosling, our present porter, must be a relation. Were you his great-grandfather?"

"No?" shrilled the ghost indignantly. "Certainly not! Wat d'yer mean? He's MY great-grandfather! He took on the job when I foded off!"

At which I gave a start, and woke up to find myself to bed.

The ghost had vanished—probably to look for his pension. And if the ghost's great-grandfather reads these lines, I shall have 100 more to do when he reports me!

Grand Christmas Number!



BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT ARRIVES!

Greyfriars Greetings.

All through the Alphabet we go
To gather Greyfriars greetings,
And may their wishes cast a glow
On all your merry meetings.

ANGEL hopes you'll back a winner,
BUNTER hopes you won't get thinner,
CORER hopes you'll take the neighbours,
DESMOND says: "Here's luck begobbers!"
EAIL MAULEVERER hopes you'll sleep,
FISHY hopes you'll get things cheap,
GOSLING hopes the cops may 'drown you,"
HOBSON hopes that friends surround you,
INKY hopes no ills come near-fully,
JOHNNY BULL sends wishes cheerfully,
RIPPS has conjured up a greeting,
LINLEY hopes your luck wants beating,
MORGAN sends you luck, whatever,
NUGENT says: "The best time ever!"
OGILVY sends, "Auld Lang Syne!"
PENFOLD hopes your fun is fine,
QUELCHY sends his kind regards,
RAKE would like to send you cards,
SKINNER hopes your amotes are pleasant,
TODDY hopes you'll like each present,
UNCLE BENJAMIN says: "Quite!"
VERNON-SMITH hopes all is right,
WHARTON sends you all the best,
XMAS wishes from the veat,
YULETIDE greetings, kind and true,
ZESTFULLY they send to you!



No. 86. Vol. 4. Three-Hallence. Week Ending January 1st, 1921



SCRAPBOOK



THE GREYFRIARS CLUB first established by your Courtfield hosts (pictured above) in January 1977 to give more personal direct encouragement and feedback to the publishers of the beautiful reproductions of the MAGNET & GEM (and allied magazines) by means of club meetings at which members could personally meet the publisher and discuss further new reproductions and which club is now in its 15th YEAR OF QUARTERLY MEETINGS many of which have been attended by our late Hon. President Howard (Bill) Baker - have great pleasure in extending THE HEARTIEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to all hobby connoisseurs of goodwill and integrity everywhere, not forgetting Eric and Mary, our Editors of the C.D./A's, and in particular all those members who have written to your Chairman conveying their news and good wishes. We are looking forward to visiting some of the far-away members on the other side of the world at the end of this year and beginning of next, so look forward to seeing you J.H, J.B,D & H R,S,S, S.D when we arrive in Australasia (d.v).

The passing of our much loved President, William Howard Baker, brings to an end his long reign as a Supremo in our hobby after our own dearly loved Frank Richards, whose work he so faithfully reproduced in permanent form for all posterity. While reflecting on this, one cannot help but remember other of our members who have passed on and whose loyal support for both the reproductions and the club have meant so much to us - John Look whose letters to the Courtfield Newsletter were a joy to read; Eric Bristow who, despite his lameness seldom missed a meeting; Bob Blythe who was an enthusiast for many years and dear Len Berg (See pictures of them both in the Club's obituary to Howard Baker, centre pages CD No 532); Tom Porter was a really grand member who not only visited us at Ruislip many times but also, along with Jack Bellfield, welcomed ourselves and other Club members to the Midland Club; Esmond Kadish and his talented brother Norman, who painted the two pictures shown above - one of your Chairman in the 8th Army during the war, and the other of your Courtfield hostess - and who will be sadly missed.

However, support for our late President and his lovely reproductions are clearly now no longer required, as he has passed on and his wonderful reproductions are treasured in valued collections the world over. He has introduced thousands of new readers to our 'Frank's' stories and ensured that his writings will remain for all posterity to read and enjoy; many of these new readers have never bought, seen or read an original Magnet or Gem. Did you know that the Daily Mail (Oct 18th) reported that Hawk Books are now publishing facsimiles of Bunter novels and also that our P.M., John Major, as a youngster was an admiring reader of Frank Richards. Needless to say, all our Club members are welcome to visit us here at Kingsgate Castle by a simple telephone appointment - see centre pages January 1990 C.D No 529.

Work and travel now take up much of our time apart from a daily swim in the heated indoor swimming pool which we had installed in March this year, complete with a power jet at one end enabling us to swim a mile or more in a straight line! In July this year our youngest son, Robert, went to take up a post in Sydney Australia on a one year contract as a computer scientist; in August our eldest son, Reginald, got married to Margaret and in September our middle son, Roger, got married to Sheila. We are, of course, delighted to welcome two lovely girls into our family as daughters-in-law. In November we are setting off on an independently arranged tour around the world, visiting Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji (To see the homeland of Ken King & Dandy Peters at Suva), Hawaii and California (Los Angeles & San Francisco once again) en route. In Australia we shall visit the Great Barrier Reef before spending ten days over Christmas with Robert and also hope to visit Club members in Townsville, Rockhampton and Sydney.





BLACKIE'S CHILDREN'S ANNUAL

