STORY PAPER Collectors' Digest

VOLUME 46 No. 543 MARCH 1992

I have far too many MAGNETS and GEMS, also POPULARS in fair reading condition, some minus front covers. **Special offer: 100 assorted, my selection for only £30!!** Can include NELSON LEES at same price.

BOYS HERALDS, REALMS, BOYS FRIEND WEEKLY in good condition. Please state wants, £1.50 each. Fair - £1 each. LOTS of post war Thomsons, ADVENTURE, ROVER, WIZARD, HOTSPUR late 1940s, £1.50: 1950s £1 each. Also TOPPER, BEEZER, BUSTER. Most of Thomson comics including BEANO and DANDY - these are dearer.

HOWARD BAKER BOOKS - all in print: Omnibus volumes, Magnets, Book Clubs:- MAGNET omnibus volumes including some miscellaneous and Book Club in second hand first class condition: Magnet vols. £8: Book Clubs £9. Also NEW copies.

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A few new items: these include NUGGET WEEKLY, DIXON HAWKE LIBRARY, S.B.L.s 1st, 2nd and 3rd series, BEANOS - two fine volumes 1746-1797, SCOUT - three vols. original Pearson covers 1920, 1921, 1950.

ENJOY AND INVEST! Old Boys Books and Comics are much in the limelight these days. I have kept price increases to a low minimum as you will notice by comparisons. Good collections always bought at good prices. I work on a very small mark up but a big turnover! Still spending over £1000 per week and more.

THOUSANDS of pre-war and post-war boys papers and comics - try me! Good postal service. Visitors most welcome **by appointment**, AFTERNOONS including weekends. You won't be disappointed! No phoning, please, before 2 p.m.

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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The Editor's Chat

REQUESTS, RESPONSES AND TRIBUTES

I am pleased to be able to inform readers that I have now received several interesting articles in response to my recent request for items about Sexton Blake. (Please note: more Nelson Lee features are now required!)

E.H. Gibbs's request in last month's C.D. for some articles about comics produced a rapid response from Ray Holmes who has sent me pieces on those great favourites, Film Fun (published in this issue)_ and Radio Fun (which will appear soon). Barry McCann's question about 'The Hawk' and Uggles was answered by two readers. Robert Kirkpatrick wrote: "'The Hawk' (otherwise known as Falconer) and Uggles (a bulldog) appeared in George Mills' story of prep school life MEREDITH AND CO., which was first published by the Oxford University Press in 1933. A sequel, KING WILLOW, published by George C. Harrap & Co., appeared in 1938. Both titles were reprinted in the 1950s." John Townsend added the following to these details: "The dog actually belonged to Percy Oliphant Naylor Gathorne Ogilvie ('Pongo') - a fat and spoilt new boy (nine years old) befriended by 'The Hawk'."

Our cover drawing this month is not only a tribute to St. Jim's but to my predecessor, Eric Fayne, to whom Bob Whiter wishes to dedicate his picture.

As we know, Eric's great enthusiasm for St. Jim's has prompted many excellent articles about Tom Merry's Alma Mater - and we hope that there are still many more to come!

As a tribute to those fine artists, father and son George and Terry Wakefield (mentioned of course in Ray Holmes' Film Fun article), I am re-using as a heading for our Reviews feature the Laurel and Hardy picture which Terry specially drew for the C.D.

Thanks to the responsiveness of a new C.D. reader, I have acquired a copy of the 1941 POPULAR BOOK OF GIRLS' STORIES, which contains two Valerie Drew tales as well as several other treasures. This means that if I can now obtain the 1936 POPULAR BOOK OF GIRLS' STORIES, my collection of the A.P. girls' annuals will be complete. So - I live in hopes that one of you, either now or at sometime in the future, may be able to find and offer me a copy of this bright and beautiful annual!

Happy reading,
MARY CADOGAN

* *

THE HEADMASTER'S SECRET BY REX HARDINGE

by Ian H. Godden

I wonder if the many readers of the Sexton Blake Library have ever thought about why there are hardly any stories with a school setting? I wonder if there was any sort of directive to SBL writers from the editors at Amalgamated Press to steer clear of school settings because these were the staple of some of their best-selling papers. Whatever the reason, Rex Hardinge's 'The Headmaster's Secret', No. 242, Third Series is unusual because it is a murder mystery with a school setting. It came out in 1951 long after the demise of the school story papers.

Dr. Harrison is Head of Weston School in Sussex and is devoted t it and its well-being. The school is doing well in all respects but the Head is un unhappy man because he has entered into matrimony, for a second time, to a much younger woman who soon comes to despise her husband, his school and everything to do with it. Every night she drives out in her sports car to a nearby gambling club where she regularly loses money. One night the Head finds his wife in the garage, murdered, and allows his daughter from his first

marriage to persuade him to avoid scandal by throwing the body in the river instead of informing the police.

What neither Harrison nor his daughter knows is that the murder has been witnessed by a twelve year old boy who has got out of a school window with a view to running away. The murderer renders the boy unconscious, and that's the last we hear of him for some time. The boy's father, an eminent scientist, thinks he's been kidnapped by enemy agents and calls in Sexton Blake and Tinker to try and find him. They arrive at the school, and soon find themselves investigating a murder as well as a disappearance.

Writing of Rex Hardinge in *Sexton Blake Wins*, Jack Adrian says, "occasionally, on one of those perfect days when all the creative gears seem to mesh, he would hit on a story, and a fresh approach, calculated to appeal to even the most jaded of editors." This is a good description of what has happened here, for Hardinge has produced an unusual and well-written story which holds the attention of the reader right to the exciting end. As well as plenty of action, Hardinge gives us a good account of the school, and a cross-section of its pupils and their activities from Dalton, the responsible Head Boy, to Cargill and Wheatley, a pair of slackers more interested in looking for mischief than working.

* *

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE FREE

by Leslie S. Laskey

"We must rise in a body and cast out this system once and for all. Yes, my friends, we must rise! Rise - rise! Comrades and sufferers, it is our duty to place our strength upon the side of justice. Meek submission to this brutal regime will do us no good." The words of Timothy Tucker, of the St. Frank's Remove, as he addressed a gathering of his form-fellows from his position on a piece of ornamental stonework in the corner of the Triangle.

There was a whiff of rebellion in the air at St. Frank's. The normally kindly headmaster, Dr. Stafford, had lately become subject to sudden fits of terrifying rage. He had inflicted brutal punishments. He had banned the playing of football and chopped down the goal-posts. In addition, he had cancelled all half-holidays and bullied his teaching staff.

Eventually rebellion did break out. Rebels occupied the Ancient House just before the end of the Christmas holidays and barricaded themselves in. They demanded the dismissal of the headmaster, and also that of Nelson Lee who appeared still to be supporting Dr. Stafford. Nipper and his friends had remained loyal to the Head, for

they knew that Nelson Lee believed that Dr. Stafford was the victim of a plot. Lee suspected that the Head was somehow being drugged and that the new young science master, Hugh Trenton, was involved in the plot. The rebels were led by Armstrong of the Remove who decided to adopt the plan of the young visionary, Timothy Tucker, for a New Order at St. Frank's.

This story was first published in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY during the winter of 1921/22. The Bolshevik Revolution had taken place in Russia only four years earlier. In Great Britain the membership of the Fabian Society had been growing. The General Election which was held in December 1918, just a few weeks after the Armistice, had returned seventy-four Labour members to Parliament, the largest representation they had so far achieved. In West End clubs members discussed uneasily what might happen if these Socialists ever attained power. It was against this uncertain political background that Edwy Searles Brooks had written the "Trenton" Series, otherwise known as the "Communist School" Series.

Timothy Tucker's scheme involved the formation of a Schoolboys' Union to be called The Brotherhood of the Free. The school was to be run by a Supreme Council presided over by Tucker and consisting of Armstrong and several seniors. Shop stewards were to be appointed and to be termed "classroom stewards". The masters, who had been tricked into believing that the Head had given his permission for this experiment, were to be allowed to teach only on the strict understanding that the Union had total control over the running of the school.

It was Nelson Lee's opinion that the Rebels were best left to their own devices for the time being. Any attempt to remove them by force would have attracted unwelcome publicity for St. Frank's. Lee was convinced that "T.T.'s" New Order would soon collapse and that the Rebels would, as a result, learn a valuable lesson.

As it turned out, Lee's prediction was soon proved to have been a very shrewd one.

The members of the Brotherhood had not previously enjoyed the measure of freedom which the new regime permitted them and, of course, some of them abused it. T.T. promptly established a Tribunal which could order corporal punishment for offenders. Kenmore and Grayson of the Sixth were only too willing to administer the punishments.

When the entire domestic staff of the Ancient House walked out, in protest against the dictatorial manner of the supreme Council, the situation in the House quickly became chaotic. In a state of mounting discontent, T.T.'s Union members began to revolt against their new masters in the Supreme Council. The bullies in the Council, bypassing the Tribunal, responded by attacking a group of dissidents, under cover of darkness, and thrashing them. In a desperate attempt to regain control, they were resorting to sheer terrorism. As the Brotherhood's authority collapsed, a state of anarchy developed.

The Rebels could not take any more. Armstrong led a deputation to Nelson Lee to bag a return to normality. The Brotherhood of the Free was finished. There was now neither brotherhood nor freedom.

The Rebels had learned the hard way that the abuse of freedom leads, eventually, to repression - and the loss of freedom. The net result, in their case, had been a new tyranny that was even worse than the one from which they had lately escaped.

Nelson Lee, meanwhile, had tracked down the two men who were behind the plot to get rid of Dr. Stafford and have him replaced by Mr. Trenton, whose task then would have been to brainwash his pupils with undesirable doctrines. The final exposure of Hugh Trenton, by Nelson Lee, before the eyes of the entire school assembly, was a piece of school drama of a high order.

My knowledge of the St. Frank's saga is limited to those early stories which were reprinted in the SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY between 1936 and 1940. I bought most of them as they were published. I think that the story of Hugh Trenton and the Brotherhood of the Free was probably the best of them all.

* *

SEDLEY SHARPE THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE

by W.O.G. Lofts

During his writing career, Charles Hamilton created a number of detectives. Easily the most famous to Magnet readers were Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake, his assistant, covered by me in this series (June 1991).

There were others, of course, including Len Lex the schoolboy detective in Modern Boy, as well as a short lived schoolboy sleuth of the name of Dalton Hawke in the early Gem.

Charles Hamilton, with pride, claimed to have invented the schoolboy detective. True there had been boy detectives long before he started his writing career (such as Tinker and Nipper, assistants to Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee) but not in a school setting and background.

NO. 8.—THE SECRET OF THE STUDY.

One of his schoolboy sleuths who may be completely new to C.D. readers was Sedley Sharpe, whom he wrote about for the Trapps Holmes papers prior to his Magnet days. The first story appeared in the comic/boys paper *Smiles* in late 1906; then for some reason they switched to *Funny Cuts.*

Son of Inspector Sharpe, Sedley had curly hair, and a pair of grey eyes that had a glance as keen as a razor. When he was on a case, he was steady and experienced as the most clever Scotland Yard detective. When a schoolboy, however, there was no merrier or more lighthearted pupil at Chumley School.

The stories were set at the school, as well as outside it, with detection in the traditional style of Jack Drake. Indeed in one of his early cases of eight instalments he went to another school of St. Winifred's to solve a mystery. The stories obviously were very popular, as Charles Hamilton continued them for over three years till at least 1910, when probably the increasing demands for his services at Amalgamated Press made him sever his connection with Trapps Holmes Ltd.

The stories were anonymous, but there is absolutely no question that they were penned by Charles Hamilton: the style, names of some characters (Mr. Lathom a Master, plus an Inspector Snoop) and finally the initials C.H. at the end of one yarn. It is also interesting to note that the title of the last in the series set at St. Winifred's has a familiar ring: the title is 'The Secret of the Study'.

* *

THE WAR IS OVER and "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" IS BACK!

by Eric Fayne

Recently we have browsed over "The Greyfriars Herald" when it appeared in the shops as a separate entity. It had disappeared after a brief run of 18 weeks, the final issue being dated mid-March 1916.

It was a genuine victim of the acute paper shortage, caused by the war. That much is proved by the fact that it was back again fairly soon after the war ended and things were slowly getting back to normal. Also, it is obvious from that fact that the little paper had been a reasonable success during its short life.

The great charm of the original publication, as I mentioned before, was that it truly gave the impression of being a real school magazine.

I'm sure that those of us, who were little lads at the time, were very happy when the announcement came that the G.H. was coming back. I daresay we wondered whether it would be very much as before - of smaller format than the Magnet and Gem, and printed entirely in black on white.

The first issue of the "new series" was dated November 1st 1919, and would have been in the shops in the last week of October. Originally costing a halfpenny, the price was now three-halfpence, in line with most other papers for boys then. It now had a coloured cover - red and blue on white paper. The format was now the same as the Magnet and Gem. It comprised 20 pages. It had a good deal of charm on its own account, but it had lost the original charm of seeming to be a real school mag. Under the heading "The Boys' Pictorial" there were 2 pages of topical photographs. And readers were invited to send in their snapshots for consideration for publication in these pages.

The EDITORIAL was still there, written by Harry Wharton. It was surrounded by pictures of 13 different boy characters in the Hamilton tales. All look alike. You can pick out Bunter from his fatness and Gussy from his unlikely monocle.

Wharton starts off: Who said that the War killed "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD"? The War, and the consequent shortage of paper, certainly checked our gay career; but here we are again, bouncing up with the resilience of an India-rubber ball!

On another page Dick Penfold, the Greyfriars poet, starts off his poem with:

Now the war is dead and done with
And Peace returns to reign,
We'll scatter sparks of fun with
Our little Mag again!
The paper shortage over
And all restrictions past,
Our readers are in clover,
We've reappeared at last!

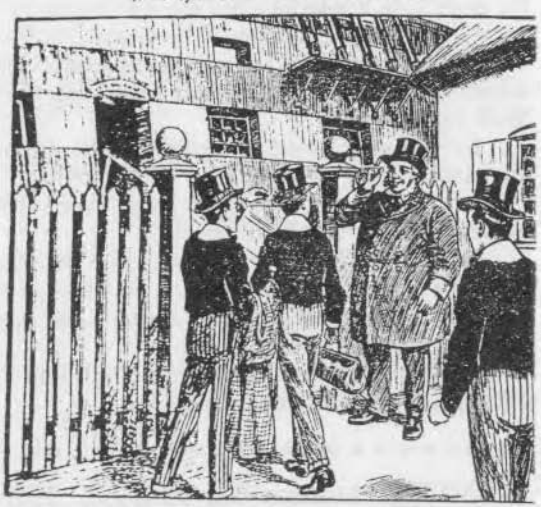
Frank Nugent contributes Our Weekly Cartoon. Somebody else weighs in with "My Weekly Interview", the subjects being various characters from the schools. "The Greyfriars Police Court" is a weekly item from someone unnamed. There are a couple of short stories of Greyfriars by Bob Cherry and Monty Newland respectively.

The Tuck Hamper competition is back with an increased number of prizes, but whereas previously it always featured on the front cover, it now appears on the back cover.

Surprisingly, one favourite series from the earlier years is not there. One searched in vain for the stories of Herlock Sholmes, by Peter Todd. Their omission seems a strange oversight on the part of the Editor, for their earlier popularity was never in doubt.

There is a serial, "The Red Man's Trail", a stirring serial story dealing with adventures among Redskins, by Mr Paul Pontifex Prout.

The main attraction destroys any illusion that this might actually be a real school magazine. It is "Jack Drake's Resolve", the first long complete school story of a Grand New Series specially contributed by Owen Conquest, author of the Famous Rookwood School Stories. We could hardly believe that a famous professional author would contribute a long story each week to a school magazine. So the charm of the original illusion had been lost.



These were, of course, the stories of the Benbow. They have received very little attention in C.D. as the years have gone by. Jack Drake, the main character, was at first of the Smart Set led by Daubeny - a Mornington or Vernon-Smith type of character.

Drake's father lost all his wealth in the first tale - so Daubeny had no further use for Drake, who now has to win a scholarship to stay on at St. Winifred's. But there is a new boy, Rodney - and Drake and Rodney become firm pals.

It was found that the foundations of St. Winifred's were unsafe, so the school was transferred to a sailing ship, the Benbow, on the river.

The characters tend to come from the Hamilton stock pile. For instance, Tucky Toodles, the inevitable fat boy, is very, very familiar. All the same, these yarns are immensely readable, like all Hamilton stories. They continued attractively for 32 weeks. Nothing particularly outstanding, plotwise, but no doubt pleasing us all. I cannot recall that these Benbow tales were ever reprinted, which is surprising when so much reprinting was done down the years.

Then, with the 33rd story, the Benbow was refitted, rather unbelievably, and the school sailed away for the West Indies. And the West Indies series carried on for quite a while, so that school stories now became adventure tales. I, personally, lost interest when that happened. To some extent.

With No. 25 a second serial started. "Held to Ransom" a tale of Gordon Pyke, the Mystery Detective, by George Wingate. So there were now two non-school serials running. Maybe a trend was beginning to emerge. And Mr. Prout weighs in with a new serial "The Crimson Arrow", a story of Buffalo Bill.

With No. 33, however, there is a welcome announcement. A new series of Herlock Sholmes and Dr. Jotson, by Peter Todd. I have no doubt that readers had been writing in to the Ed. The first tale is "The Case of the Missing Cricketer".

But, by now, the trend is obvious. Adventure is replacing school life, slowly but surely.

A few thoughts occur to the student of the old papers. In the early years of the century school stories had grown in popularity. A number of early popular writers on school life come to mind. Names like Talbot Baines Reed, Hylton Cleaver, Gunby Hadath, P.G. Wodehouse, Richard Bird, Desmond Coke, and others - and they were followed by Charles Hamilton, the greatest of them all, whose Martin Clifford, with his Tom Merry, swept the younger generation into a way of reading and a way of life which was to dominate the juvenile market for many years to come.

In 1919 "The Greyfriars Herald" was introduced as "The New School Story Paper for Boys". Is it possible that the A.P. began to wonder whether the demand for school stories was fading? Slowly "The Greyfriars Herald" became an adventure story paper. Two adventure serials took up a good deal of space, and the Benbow series of charming school tales became an adventure saga when the Benbow went off for a long spell in the West Indies.

So! We lads noted something a little ominous. "The Greyfriars Herald", without any reason being given, became "The Greyfriars Boys' Herald," toward the end of 1920.

And, before very long, the magic word "Greyfriars" was dropped entirely and the paper was now "The Boys' Herald."

In the old "Herald" of the war years the absence of commercial advertisements had aided the imagination in regarding the paper as a genuine school mag. When the paper came back there were plenty of these. A full page devoted to Wrigley's Spearmint - and the like. And lots of smaller ads.

Maybe, in a future browsing, we will find out exactly what happened as this lovely old paper drew to its last farewell.

* *

WANTED: Modern Boy 324, 335, 337, 338, 339. Any reasonable price paid. ROY PARSONS, 'Foinaven', Church Hollow, West Winterslow, Salisbury, SP5 1SX.

* *

ETHEL TALBOT 1888 - 1976 "FREE LANCE WOMAN"

by John Beck

Not much is known about Ethel Talbot, who was a prolific writer of schoolgirl stories from 1918 to the late 1930s, contributing short yarns to many of the popular Annuals and Bumper books of the day as well as writing full length novels. Although her name is familiar to collectors of girls' story books of the period, very little information about her exists. Recently unearthed documents and photographs from her estate fill in some details of her early life which I hope will be of interest to readers of her tales.

Ethel Talbot at 20

Ethel Talbot was born on 25th February 1888. Her father, who had connections in the literary field, encouraged her writing talent and turned her into a minor infant prodigy. By the time she reached her teens she had written quite a few short children's stories and many poems. In 1902 her father, W.W. Talbot, sent samples of her work to a number of publishers and editors and received guarded enthusiasm in reply. Clement Shorter, a director of the prestigious "Sphere" and "Tatler" commented on the poems shown to him. "They are unquestionably very remarkable for a child of thirteen".

Many such supportive replies from these early contacts encouraged Ethel in her writings and she persevered with poetry, meeting with considerable success and payment for publication in a variety of magazines. In 1911 she records in a letter:- "Laurence Gilman wrote from Harper's Weekly that they had accepted *Wardens of the Wall.* The agreement came from Swift in duplicate and I signed his and returned it, and Harper's sent a cheque for £2-9-2d for *At Closing Time.* Good! That must have been longer than I remembered." Such successes eventually resulted in the publication of her first book, *London Windows* in 1912. Published by Stephen Swift & Co Ltd., Ten John St., Adelphi, the book features twenty-six poems inspired by the city of her birth.

It is not easy piecing together Ethel's early life from the papers that have survived, but fortunately she started to write her own story, possibly for future publication but more likely just for her own interest. She entitled it *Free Lance Woman.*

> "I was supposed to take up shorthand and typing when I left school - but when it came to the point, my parents could not face letting me go; and as I had a secret dread that I should never master the mysterious shorthand symbols, I was well content to stay on at home and write my verses and essays and entries for literary competitions. When I was fifteen, a fairy-story of mine was published and my father went to see the editor and bought the original sketches of the two pretty illustrations and had them framed. He bought me a second-hand Blickenaderfer, that long obsolete kind of typewriter which was inked by a little sponge with a hole through it, instead of a ribbon. I used to type a number of poems and then peddle them round the editorial offices. Sometimes I really saw editors and sub-editors and a fair proportion

of my verse was accepted. I always had the good fortune to make a certain appeal. I often had letters from strangers about my work, sometimes because they wanted to set verses to music, and made several friendships in this way. One day I received an unusually long and interesting letter praising a poem of mine and enclosing one of his own, from a lonely American in London. We invited him to tea. Of course I was watching behind the window curtains and I fell in love at first sight: he was very handsome and his large blue eyes betrayed the poet. He was surprised to find his emotional poetess only a little girl, and his real interest was in my father. They discussed for hours on every subject under the sun, while I listened with rapt attention. Then he would read us his new poems and stories. A few months later he returned to America. But we corresponded regularly and the friendship deepened....."

And there, tantalisingly, the story ends; the next and other pages are lost. Interestingly there are two handwritten notations in the margin probably appended by Clara Rohn, Ethel Talbot's dear friend and adopted sister who lived with her in later years, "A true story of Ethel and how she met George Herman Scheffauer whom she then married." and "This is Ethel's real story, her dear father was like that and so was the meeting with her later husband, Herman."

Ethel Talbot
(aged about 35)

Herman Scheffauer, of German descent, was described in a 1910 magazine as a Californian poet and critic. He was an active member of a Californian community of authors, poets, artists and playwrights though when he first contacted the Talbots he was working out of the University Settlement, New York. Ethel and Herman married in June 1912 (I think) after a passionate and sensitive courtship often carried out at a distance with regular exchanges of letters and poems.

They settled in London, eventually at Shooters Hill, where Herman was gainfully employed translating books. The March 1913 issue of "Bookman" identifies publishers Heinemann as shortly issuing Herman Scheffauer translations of Rosa Mayreder's *The Woman Problem* and Heine's *Atta Troll* which is due to feature new colour illustrations by Willy Pogany. Also noted is the promise of a new book *Visions and Vanities* by Mrs Scheffauer, "a poet of fine achievement who as

Ethel Talbot is a well known contributor the magazines and best known as the author of *London Windows."* Herman, who became a leading light in a circle of avant-garde German artists and authors, wrote the first book in English on German Expressionism entitled *The New Vision of German Arts* published in New York in 1924.

Documentary evidence of Ethel Talbot's later life is sparse but we do know she wrote prolifically in the school/guide story field from 1918 to 1939, probably from financial necessity. These contributions were short stories to a variety of girls' Annuals of the 1920s/30s as well as about one hundred full length novels. She also collaborated with her friend Clara in the translation of Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* into German, this being published in 1934 by Frederick Warne. It would appear that her published poetry contributions reduced over this period though William Kupe of Berlin did publish another of her books, *New Alters*, in 1921. It featured twenty-six poems, many of which were inspired by the stark memories of the suffering experienced in the recent Great War. Why an English lady should wish to publish such a book in the land of the vanquished foe is a mystery, but no doubt this was influenced by her husband, Herman.

On the domestic front, Ethel and Herman were blessed after a few years of marriage with a daughter, Fiona, who appears to have been an only child. Family photographs would indicate she was brought up in a happy atmosphere, enjoying fun in the garden as well as tobogganing in the snow abroad. Herman is believed to have met a violent death in mysterious circumstances, falling from a window in Germany just before the start of the Second World War. One can well imagine him being an outspoken critic of the political leadership at that time. What eventually happened to Fiona is not known, but she did marry and have a daughter, Camilla. Ethel remained at the Shooters Hill address until her death in 1976.

There are very few books or other literary contributions to children's literature from Ethel's typewriter after the Second World War though she did still write to some extent. An occasional poem or greetings card couplet can be identified to this period but I doubt whether these were ever commercially published. An article submitted to the editor of *The Penguin Classics* on Faust in 1948 was rejected, as unfortunately the editor (E.V. Rich) had already accepted another version by Philip Wayne for the series.

Although I am not a qualified critic, much of her early published poetry appears to me to read well today. The same can also be said of many of the hundred or so other poems I have, most of which were probably never published. It would perhaps be a fitting testimonial to an unsung, near forgotten, but major contributor to children's literature of the Twentieth Century that one of these be reproduced to finalise this brief and incomplete Biography. Date of writing unknown, it is entitled simply *Visions:*

There is a little Fairy House
On the corner of the Heath
With sloping roof, tall chimney pots
And smooth green grass beneath.

The birch, that is a fairy tree
Sheds down its golden leaves
Swallows, that are the birds of love,
Build nests beneath the eaves.

I do not know who walks at dawn
To tend the irises,
Or gathers in wide bowls of grey
Primroses and heartease.

I do not know who waits at eve
For one to come from town,
With fluttering hair and fairy eyes
Of deep and pixie brown.

And then the little fairy house
Says to itself - All's right -
And settles like a sleepy cat
To enjoy the velvet night.

Ethel Talbot Scheffauer

(My thanks to "Sherlock" Bill Lofts for establishing dates of birth and death, to Mike Banwell of Baskerville Books, Tunbridge Wells for the archive material, and Bill Heywood of Welling, Kent for filling in some of the gaps.

Editor's Note: As mentioned earlier, I am delighted to have this biographical study of Ethel Talbot. As my own tribute to this talented author, I include below part of a critical essay which I wrote some time ago about her stories for young people.

For most of the 1920s and 1930s Ethel Talbot was remarkably prolific as a writer of juvenile poetry and prose. She covered a wide range of themes and skilfully adapted her style for different age groups. As E. Talbot she wrote several school and adventure stories for boys in *Chums, Little Folks,* and the *Boys' Own Paper,* but she is best known for her full-length school and Girl Guide novels for girls.

Her achievements are somewhat overshadowed by more celebrated writers of the period (Brazil, Bruce, etc) and she never succeeded in creating characters who became as popular as theirs. Nevertheless, she wrote with similar zest and, at times, rather more imagination. Many of Talbot's stories are spiced with touches of magic and fantasy that are associated with symbolic places or objects like the old, protective tower in *Carol's Second Term* and the shepherdess tapestry that dominates the school hall in *Patricia, Prefect.* She is possibly the only "schoolgirl" author who managed successfully to combine the disparate themes of down-to-earth school routines and elusive woodland magic ("The Girl Who Found the Fairies" in *Little Folks,* 1919).

In keeping with the traditions of the genre her heroines are usually "blade straight", "gamey", "comradey", and passionately concerned with *esprit de corps* and the honour of their schools. (The greatest compliment one Talbot girl can "gulp" out to another in her more emotional moments is "You're Chads!" or "You're Cyprians!") However, Talbot also considers the problems of the talented, artistic individualist forced by the confines of school life into prolonged uncongenial associations with ordinary or "philistine" girls. With more frankness than other school story writers, too, in *Patricia, Prefect* she explores in depth the even trickier subject of a really intense relationship between a senior and a junior girl.

Her Girl Guide stories contain the expected excitements and demonstrations of adolescent pluck - spy-spotting while picking sphagnum moss on the moors during the First World War, for example, in "Luck" (*British Girls' Annual, 1919*). But as well as conveying the expansive spirit of the early days of the movement, she produced some entertaining vignettes of over-enthusiastic tenderfoots whose approach to the business of Guiding was bizarrely removed from that of Baden-Powell.

Despite her versatility and occasionally challenging approach. Ethel Talbot is now remembered mainly for her conventional school stories about energetic chums who

enjoy experiencing "the extreme joy of aching muscles after a topping afternoon's hockey," and who wholesomely follow this up by dancing fox-trots and Charlestons to gramophone accompaniments in the gym!

* *

FILM FUN by Ray Holmes

FILM FUN was a comic in the true sense of the word. The characters were drawn from the top funny men and women of the screen. If their star waned it would be goodbye from the black and white pages. Only the best was good enough for FILM FUN.

Published by the Amalgamated Press, the first issue appeared on January 17th, 1920. Starting life at three-halfpence the price rose to twopence after a few weeks and remained so for 20 years, though to keep the value for money, the number of pages increased from 20 to 24.

Given free with the first issue was a photograph of Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, followed in successive weeks with plates of Harold Lloyd, Larry Semon and Marie Osborne.

These characters were, of course, featured in the paper at the time, and their antics were brought to an avid readership by such famous comic artists as George Wakefield, Harry Parlett and Tom Radford. Film Fun's first editor was Fredrick Cordwell.

The paper was an instant success and over the years swallowed such famous titles as Picture Fun, Kinema Comic and Film Picture Stories.

Film Fun's most famous characters, Laurel and Hardy, didn't arrive in the paper until November 8th, 1930, at that time in the centre-spread. They were soon to oust comedian Joe E. Brown from the front and back pages.

There they remained until the comic's close on September 8th, 1962. Drawn by George Wakefield and later by his son Terry, they *were* Film Fun.

Their support over the years included Jackie Coogan, Lupino Lane, Buster Keaton, Shirley Temple and Max Miller: so one could go on to George Formby, Abbott and Costello, Peter Sellers, Old Mother Riley, and many, many more.

If it was considered that support for the comic needed gingering up, there were some excellent free gifts given. These included masks of Snub Pollard, Charlie Chaplin and Ford Sterling, a pocket camera and a pair of Harold Lloyd spectacles.

In the 1930s there were metal framed colour photos of Loretta Young, Buck Jones and Clark Gable. Later there was a Laurel and Hardy Book of Wisecracks and a George Formby Song-Book.

Film Fun survived the paper shortage of the 1939-45 war, though with the size cut to 16 pages and the price increased to 3d.

Sadly, the changing world demanded its style to conform and, though Stan and Ollie soldiered on, the new features failed to keep pace with the postwar comics being launched.

It was with sadness that Eddie the Happy Editor said in number 2225: "So Long, Folks". But this time there was not to be, "See You Next Week".

* *

LEVISON'S LAST MATCH
PART III (Conclusion)

by Peter Mahony

It was just after six when Levison left Daphne's flat and emerged into Gray's Inn Road. The early denizens of "Jackie's Snacks" looked in surprise at the man in crumpled evening-dress who slouched in and ordered breakfast. Levison hardly noticed them. Several rashers, a couple of eggs and some hot sweet tea acted like a tonic. He sat, sipping his third cuppa, and put in some hard thinking. Somehow, he had to wangle his way out of the loss of his Test career. He would never be able to sustain his life-style on his county pay. He had already had a sizeable benefit - long since squandered. Perhaps he might persuade the committee to grant him another, but it would be virtually his last resource.

By seven-fifteen, he had thought of a possible solution. Once the main idea had occurred to him, his agile brain quickly sketched in the details. It would all depend on what he could organise before the day's play commenced. He paid his bill and left the café. There was a jaunty spring in his step as he headed for King's Cross Underground Station.

He was among the earliest arrivals at the Oval. The stewards at the gate eyed him curiously when he presented himself. Levison winked comically and murmured: "Don't give me away, boys. I've got enough trouble with this hangover. As far as you're concerned, you didn't see me arrive." He jingled some coins in his trousers' pocket. "Have a drink with me later - after I've worked it off on the Aussies."

There was a general laugh. Levison made his way to the dressing-room, where he showered and shaved. He was changed ready for action by nine o'clock. Selecting a bat, he wandered down to the ground-staff room, collected a couple of surprised apprentices and led them out to the nets.

For the next forty five minutes, he put in some intensive batting practice.

Gradually, other players arrived. Lorimer, a surprised look on his face, appeared just before ten.

"What's all this, Lev? Are you expecting a knock today?"

"Seeing we've lost our best bat, I thought I'd better get my eye in. We're going to need as many runs as we can scrounge. Are you going to have a knock?"

"That's what I came for. What are these bowlers like?"

"They're probably a bit tired. I've had them out here since nine. Would you like me to give you a few? I could do with a loosener."

"Oh! Yes! If you like."

Lorimer went into the net, decidedly puzzled. An obliging Levison, ready to put in some hard practice, was a novel experience. He was even more surprised when Levison's first delivery pitched half-way down and reached him on the third bounce.

"Pitch 'em up, Lev. We're not playing skittles, you know. " Levison smiled grimly.

"Sorry about that, Stan. I'll try again."

The next one was fizzing yorker, aimed at Lorimer's left foot. It crashed fairly on the vice-captain's toe, setting him hopping frantically on one leg. It was a contrite and apologetic Levison who assisted him back to the pavilion.

At eleven o'clock, Levison led England into the field. Harry Noble, 53 not out overnight, lasted only three balls. Levison's fourth, a wicked leg-break, ripped out the off stump. All out for 240, Australia needed some early wickets.

They didn't get them. By mid-afternoon, England were well past 150 with only one man out. The new ball then caused some trouble and at tea-time they had slumped to 190 for 4. Another wicket fell immediately on the resumption and Levison came to join young Foster at the wickets. There were no further disasters. Levison was in high fettle. Apart from his resumption of the captaincy, he had discovered the card-school pot, still intact, in the pocket of yesterday's soiled trousers. Solvent again - however temporarily - he proceeded to show that he could bat as well as bowl. He began with a boundary and then farmed the bowling to protect Foster who had started shakily. At five thirty England took the lead; by six fifteen the stand was worth 100; at close of play the score had reached 322 - Foster 73; Levison 57.

It was about an hour later when Levison left the dressing-room. The rest of the team were long gone. As he descended the stairs, Stangate's voice floated from the committee room:

"I don't agree. I'll admit he's making a very good fist of this match, but leading a touring side is another matter altogether..."

Someone closed the door, cutting off the conversation. Levison stood thinking, a morose look on his hard features. Slowly, it was replaced by a calculating grin. He ran lightly downstairs into the evening twilight and hailed a taxi. With money in his pocket, Levison preferred to do things in style.

"Fleet Street!"

Next morning, the sports pages of several leading tabloids carried columns on a "Levison for the West Indies" theme. The 'Comet' was particularly loquacious on the topic. As he read the effusions of Reg Jordan, cricket correspondent, Levison reflected

cynically on the wisdom of hanging on to old I.O.U's. It had been during the previous winter's tour of New Zealand that he had taken Jordan for a 'monkey' at five card stud. It would take a great deal of strength on the part of the selectors to resist Jordan's "Levison for Captain!" demands. If it came off, it would be £500 well sacrificed.

When play resumed, Levison hung around at the crease long enough to see Foster well-set. Then he indulged in some indiscriminate use of the long-handle. After adding 20 to his overnight score, he fell to a catch at long-on. Young Foster completed a splendid debut century before running out of partners. England's 387 gave them a lead of 147.

Australia's second innings began at one o'clock. At lunch they were 15 for 1 - Conroy, bowled Levison,3.

The afternoon session was tensely fought. Levison delivered three overs without further success; then he gave the bulk of the bowling to Blount and Shepherd, the off-spinner. By three-thirty, the lead had been cut to 70. Levison took over from Blount at the pavilion end, lengthened his normal run and bowled three overs as fast as any he had ever bowled. Immediately, he achieved the breakthrough, 'Squiff' Field, 47 not out, snicking an outswinger to Tommy Dodd, the keeper. Then, with the last delivery of his third over, he trapped the new man l.b.w. The cheers were still resounding when Levison took his sweater and retired to the slips.

At tea, Australia had lurched to 122 for 4 - Gay 53 not out. During the interval, Levison had a short chat with Jackie Foster. The young batsman was also a purveyor of gentle leg breaks and googlies - usually against the tail-enders of county cricket. He looked dubious as he listened to his skipper.

"Well, if you want me to, I'll have a go. But supposing they tonk me around..."

"Leave me to worry about that. Just do as I told you. Lob them up high in the sun and see what happens. If it's going to work at all, it'll be in your first couple of overs."

There was a buzz of surprise around the ground when, on the resumption, Foster bowled from the Vauxhall End. An erratic first over gave Australia 12 easy runs - all to Gay. Blount bowled tightly from the Pavilion end - then Foster had another go. His first ball went for a colossal six over deep square-leg. Levison, breathing hard, pointed vehemently towards the sky. Foster, a desperate look on his face, tossed the next one out of the back of his hand - right up in the sun. Gay, sensing another six, advanced to smite - and lost sight of it. Tommy Dodd whipped off the bails with the Australian opener half-way down the wicket. Foster was taken off at the end of the over. Levison himself replaced Blount. With two fresh batsmen at the wickets, he staked everything on a ferocious burst. In four overs he accounted for three more wickets - all bowled. At the other end, Shepherd bagged an l.b.w. Suddenly, Australia was 145 for 9 - still 2 behind. Levison had visions of an innings victory.

In the event, England didn't quite make it. Australia's last pair scratched together 25 and England required 24 to win. The opening pair hit off the runs comfortably; the Ashes were retained; the crowd roared for Levison. Two days later, after another spate of Press articles, the veteran was summoned to Lord's and offered the captaincy of the West Indies tour.

As he left the Committee room after a protracted but successful discussion about his 'differential', Levison winked at the bust of W.G. Grace.

"Old Man," he murmured, "in your day the wages of sin were high. Now, - I'm glad to say - they're absolutely astronomical."

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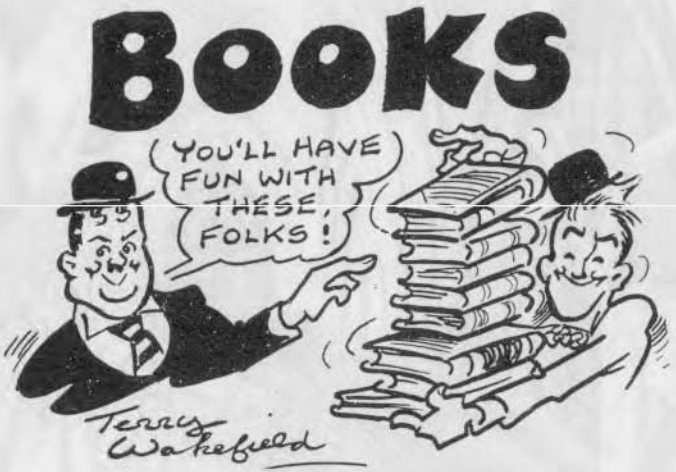

THE SILENT THREE AND THE CRUSADER'S SWORD By Marion Waters (Privately published, and available direct from the author at 'Ryburn', 11 Abbots Way, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 2AF at £5, which includes postage). Reviewed by Mary Cadogan

This attractive 48-page book is a collection of three stories by Marion Waters - a frequent C.D. contributor - about Betty Roland, Joan Derwent and Peggy West, the intrepid and determined schoolgirls who make up the secret society known as the Silent Three. This trio, of course, was originally featured in the 1950 Schoolfriend in a glowingly addictive picture-strip, drawn by Evelyn Flinders. There is little doubt that the Silent Three's adventures then and for several subsequent years contributed largely to the paper's success. The strips of this fetching group of hooded helpers and mystery solvers were later drawn by different artists, and Betty, Joan and Peggy were feature in at least on A.P. text story.

An indication of their resilience is this successful transposition from one format to another. Marion Waters' present chronicles of their exploits are ' a jolly good read ' rather than picture-strip adventures, although the stories also carry some mood-setting illustrations by Marilyn White. One of these is reproduced here - and, as a tribute to the original artist, an early Silent Three picture is also shown.

The stories in the book are *The Silent Three and the Crusader's Sword, The Silent Three and a Christmas Mystery* (an expanded version of the tale which was published in the 1989 C.D. Annual) and *The Silent Three in Wensleydale.* I enjoyed them all, and particularly the first named, which has an intriguing historical background as well as old churches, mediæval knight-effigies

Illustration by Evelyn Flinders

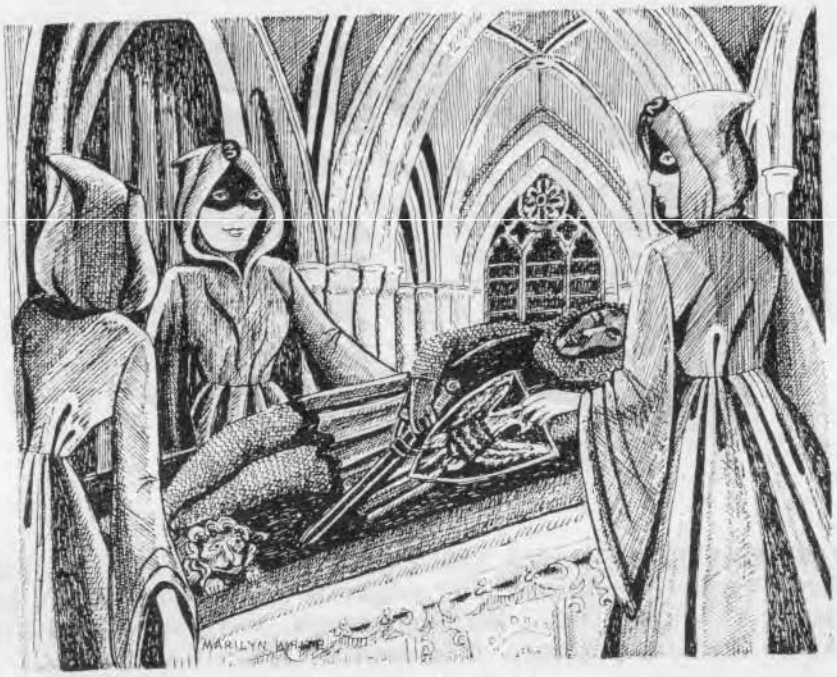

Illustration by Marilyn White

and other atmospheric props. Real life settings - Corfe Castle and Wensleydale, for example - add colour and spice to the stories, which will appeal enormously to admirers of the Silent Three and enthusiasts for secret society mystery adventures.

LESTRADE AND THE MAGPIE by M.J. Trow (Constable, 1991). Reviewed by Mark Taha

M.J. Trow's tenth Lestrade book is set in 1920, with a retired Lestrade coming out of retirement off his own bat. His daughter's fiancé's been found murdered - after being reported missing, believed killed three years earlier. Lestrade naturally, with the assistance of his daughter, investigates. Equally naturally they find themselves involved with more murders, a lot of intrigue, (for instance, over the Russian crown jewels) obstruction from Lestrade's old colleagues, undercover secret agents - the usual, in fact. To put it succinctly - it's a good idea that doesn't come off.

As usual, real-life characters appear (Shaw, Churchill, Allenby, Curzon, Collins, Princess Anastasia) along with some appalling jokes. (The only good one, in my view, is when Lestrade's daughter tells him "You are Sherlock Holmes and I am Dr. Watson" and his outraged reply is "... wash out your mouth with soap!") Mr Trow would do better to cut down on the jokes and stick to being the fairly serious detective story writer he was in his first books. Turning Lestrade into a hero was a good idea, but it seems to be wearing thin.

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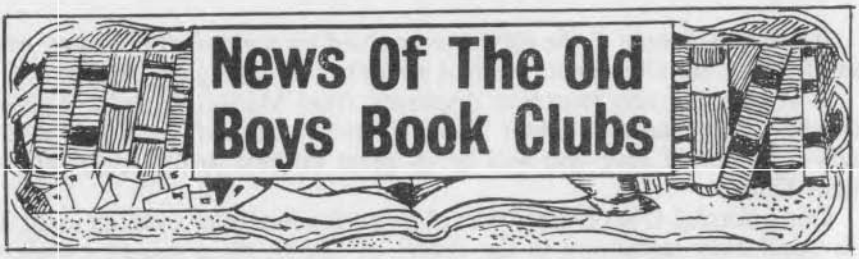

LONDON O.B.B.C.

The February meeting was held at St. Luke's House in Kew, and there was a good attendance. Our Chairman, Alan Pratt, suggested and it was agreed that an introductory leaflet for new members should be prepared. Norman Wright mentioned that a new magazine, *Comic Collector,* was soon to be produced by the publishers of the regrettably short-lived *Books, Maps and Prints*.

Bill Bradford led a lively discussion on the rival merits of Thomson's Big 5 (Adventure, Rover, Hotspur, Wizard and Skipper) and the A.P.'s publications, taking the year 1934 as his reference point. Brian Doyle read from Dylan Thomas' short semi-autobiographical story "The Fight" and Mark Taha gave us one of his challenging quizzes, covering such diverse areas as Charles Hamilton, other literature, films and even Coronation Street!

The next meeting on 8th March will be at the Ealing Liberal Centre.

SUZANNE HARPER

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

The first meeting of 1992 took place at the Cambridge home of Adrian Perkins. Among other matters the Business Meeting discussed this June's Anniversary meeting to be held at the Willingham home of our Secretary, Tony Cowley.

Adrian recounted the tale of his obsession with the 1968 cult film, '2002, A Space Odyssey', using his 24-year accumulation of relevant books, articles film-posters and stills. The concept belongs with Arthur C. Clarke, who in 1949-50 worked with Frank Hampson on the initial Dan Dare script. Later, Keith Hodkinson provided Part 6 of 'Science Fiction in the Cinema'. Perhaps the most impressive films of this genre considered were those of producer George Pal, with his 'Destination Moon' and 'War of the Worlds'.

ADRIAN PERKINS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A warm welcome to the eleven assembled on a pleasant February evening was given by our Chairman: we had a number of apologies for absence.

A very interesting item was displayed from Marion Waters. This was a pastiche of the famous 'Silent Three' stories. Beautifully illustrated, it is really a labour of love and will be of great interest to the followers of the 'Silent Three'.

Our informal Club Dinner was planned for Saturday evening 28th March at a small cosy restaurant in the centre of Leeds, three minutes walk away from our Club premises. A warm invitation to all O.B.B.C. members is extended and further details may be obtained from Darrell Swift, 37, Tinshill Lane, Leeds LS16 6BU.

Our author/playwright member Willis Hall had unfortunately to cancel his presentation for the evening owing to a recent accident and he will speak to us in May. Darrell stood in and spoke about facsimiles of paintings, furniture and books over the years. A sample of hobby facsimiles was shown. He said that although there was no attempt to defraud, the celebrated reprint of Magnet Number 1 had caused much confusion over the years. Congratulations were extended to Hawk Books on their excellent reprints of the Bunter Books.

After refreshments, Geoffrey also stood in by reading a hilarious piece from Magnet 407 of 1915 - "The Jape of the Season": Mr Quelch being the victim of well intending females!

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

Editor's Note: The Cambridge Club have asked me to publish an amended version (below) of the report they originally submitted, which appeared in the January 1992 C.D.:

Our December 1991 Meeting took place at the home of our chairman Vic Hearn, who also delivered the main contribution of the afternoon, a detailed and unusual historical presentation. 'The Battle of Stalingrad". This reflected Vic's own keen interest in history that stems from reading a serial story of the English Civil War in 'Puck' and other similar features in 'Champion' during the 1930s. The remainder of the afternoon's programme consisted of members' individual contributions, many having a seasonal flavour: Keith Hodkinson showed video clips from two films starring Peter Sellers and Norman Wisdom. Tony Cowley played an extract of vintage Christmas Hancock. Roy Whiskin also gave a reading - his choice was from Volume 46 issue of The Captain. Howard Corn discussed some recently discovered foreign Eagles - these contained materials from many of the Hulton juveniles, not from only the title paper. Significantly, for most members, Paul Wilkins discussed several books which were around at past Christmases in the Fifties and which one might well have received as presents.

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CLIFF HOUSE ANNALS

by Margery Woods

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JEMIMA

To select one special year in the schooldays of Jemima Carstairs is not easy; she had quite a few special years during the long run of the Cliff House saga.

Her arrival on the scene has already been well documented. Suffice to mention that she sampled Morcove's ambience briefly - for four weeks to be exact - in the November of 1925 before arriving with a certain impact on the Cliff House Christmas holiday scene in the December of that same year. The chums were spending the festive season with Clara, at her new home, and none of them except Katie Smith, whose parents had formerly owned the house, had met the elegant, monocled, most unlikely looking schoolgirl by the name of Jemima Carstairs until she walked in the door that exciting Christmas at Moorlands House. Unfortunately, at that precise moment, Bessie was descending the bannister at what seemed like the speed of an express train, only to discover she had no brakes, and so the slim and elegant form of Jemima provided the braking barrier. This moment of Cliff House history is recorded on the cover of the SCHOOL FRIEND Christmas Number (New series 42, December 19th 1925), and it is perhaps equally unfortunate that the illustration depicts the impact of Bessie on poor Jemima against a magnificent staircase setting which shows two quite large carved animals crowning the newel posts, full stops, so to speak at the foot of each bannister. No wonder poor Bessie wailed.

There were several sorties in which our heroine played important rôles, including a Christmas series at Jemima's home in Yorkshire, Delma Castle, in 1927, before Jemima tangled with the formidable Miss Bullivant in a major series (192-194 SCHOOL FRIEND Nov. 1928) which dealt with the antics of a mysterious japer and had unhappy consequences for the Chums. Helen Stone, who was not a girl of sweetness and light, had her study wrecked, Katie Smith saw a spook in the quad, Miss Bullivant lost her keys and was collared unceremoniously by Clara in the belief she had caught the japer, Bessie played the fool, as usual, and Jemima got the blame for everything.

Miss Bullivant hated Jemima, and lost no time in having poor Jimmy, and the even more hated monocle, locked up in detention before the dread sentence of expulsion fell on that innocent and elegantly shingled red-brown head.

At this time (before the advent of Marcelle Biquet and Leila Carroll) Jemima and Clara shared a study with Marjorie Hazeldine and were very close friends. Tomboy Clara went all emotional when she heard of the doom befalling Jemima and declared rebelliously that if Jimmy was going she was going too. They would find a new school somewhere, hopefully one minus the genus Bullivant. But Miss Primrose and Stella Stone, the school captain, had other ideas and Clara was locked up. Jemima departed, apparently quite meekly, to catch her train, but as readers knew, Jemima at her meekest is Jemima at her most astute. She takes a room in the village, commences some detective work, aided by Babs and Co and soon the real culprits are unmasked. (A couple of village girls with a grudge against the school.) Jemima and Clara are restored to official favour and everyone heaved large Spartan sighs of relief; to have lost Jemima would have been unthinkable!

The following year saw the demise of SCHOOL FRIEND and the appearance of THE SCHOOLGIRL. Cliff House temporarily lost its starring role, and apart from two serials, it was three years before the school was restored to its rightful place as the magazine's leading feature and the creation of its chronicles put into the capable hands of John Wheway. From 1935 onwards Jemima played more and more exciting rôles in the

adventures of the Chums. 1935 saw the siege of Delma Castle, which followed the Robins Roost Christmas series, and the summer saw the serial JEMIMA IN COMMAND begin its run. As far as I know, only one other Cliff House girl had her own feature serial quite independent of the Cliff House stories, this was Diana Royston-Clarke in DIANA THE GOOD TIME GIRL, which had run a few months previously. JEMIMA IN COMMAND showed this unusual girl in a different setting altogether, endeavouring to become domesticated in order to care for two invalids and two small children. There was also the inevitable skulduggery to deal with (the authors never let their heroines have too easy a time!) **and** the village store to run! But Jemima coped superbly and solved all problems with her customary panache.

WHAT a shock it is to the undomesticated Jemima when she finds herself in charge of a village shop, looking after two children, and nursing two invalids! But the elegant and monocled "Jimmy" hides a heart of gold beneath a flippant exterior. She will strain every effort to make a success of her self-appointed task.

by Hilda Richards

In 1937 Jemima took the lead in no less than six adventures when she lent her grey cells to the solving of THE RIDDLE OF THE WRECK, discovering the identity of THE MIDNIGHT PROWLER OF CLIFF HOUSE, thwarting the enemy of THEIR PRINCESS GUEST IN PERIL and unravelling the plots against the hapless victims in JEMIMA'S CHRISTMAS SECRET, JUST LIKE JEMIMA and THE RETURN OF THE MARRIED MISTRESS.

In 1938 she vanished during the story of MYSTERY HOUSE OF THE MOORS, although not for long, and fell under suspicion in JEMIMA UNDER SUSPICION, again, not for too long, and was accused of playing ghost in THE HAUNTED STUDIO. No wonder in SCHOOLGIRL 480 THEY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND JEMIMA.

In issue 504, a rather curious thing happened. Not in the story itself, THE SPLIT IN STUDY 3, but in a certain aspect of it. A new girl, Lorna, shares this study with Leila and Marcelle, who are very good friends, and proceeds, for reasons of her own, to

break up this friendship. Normally, Jemima has her happy abode in this study but during this story is away on special leave. And isn't the reason obvious? Jemima had to be got out of the way or this story could never have happened. For could any Cliff House devotee imagine Jemima allowing a newcomer to wreak such havoc? Had Jemima been there Lorna, the trouble-maker, wouldn't have lasted five minutes in Study 3 let alone a whole week.

Jemima is a fascinating instance of a character brilliantly created by one author, L.E. Ransome, fully fleshed out and totally convincing, and then later given renewed life and vitality by a second author, John Wheway. The transition was almost seamless, and any slight changes skilfully imperceptible. No easy matter, for Mr Ransome had formed so perfect a characterisation that any author less skilled than Mr Wheway might well have decided that this was too hard an act to follow. Of all the characters in the Cliff House stories Jemima is (arguably!) the most intriguing and the most complex. An article could be filled with her quotes! In today's language of extravagant superlatives the word 'unique' is often carelessly used, but it can certainly be applied to Jemima Carstairs. In the realm of schoolgirl fiction she is just that: unique.

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

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The 1st XI. Faces the Camera!

DEATH OF AN OLD FRIEND

by Brian Doyle

Donald Webster was a veteran of over 40 years in the Old Boys Book Club world. He founded the Merseyside Branch in Liverpool, with Frank Case and Jim Walsh way back in September, 1951, and was Chairman for many years until he moved to the London area. The Club's youngest founder-member was his son Peter, then a keen reader of the older papers too, and an inveterate winner of quizzes; indeed, more than once the father-and-son team of Don and Peter, jointly set quizzes for Merseyside members.

Don was a keen and knowledgeable St. Jim's man and an admirer of practically all Hamiltoniana, plus some of the Blake saga. As far back as November 1951, at a meeting of the Merseyside Club, he was enthusiastically taking up the cudgels on behalf of St. Jim's in a famous 'Greyfriars versus St. Jim's debate.

He spent most of his working life as a Civil Servant, and was also prominent in his local Liberal Party affairs. He loved cricket and was a member of both Surrey and Middlesex County Cricket Clubs; well into his 80's he often braved the journeys by public transport from his home in Kew to the Oval or Lord's. We met occasionally at Lord's and spent many an enjoyable hour watching the game from the Pavilion.

Don was proud of his son Peter's distinguished Army career. After training at the R.M.A., Sandhurst, Peter is today a Lt. Colonel.

I first met Don at my very first meeting of the London OBBC, At Christmas 1959, at Bob Whiter's home in Wood Green. He kindly took me 'under his wing' and introduced me around. It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted for more than 30 years. I know that I - and many others - will miss him very much and remember him always and our sympathies go out to his wife, Elsie, and son, Peter. In the words of the title of a biography of one of his favourite cricketers, Don Bradman - 'Brightly Fades the Don'.....

* *

ANOTHER RÔLE FOR BIGGLES

by Jennifer Schofield

Biggles - Secret Agent. The words have ring to them, and the promise of adventure - and of course, they form the title of a book in the Biggles series. But how much did Biggles really have to do with the Secret Service? Von Stalhein always regarded him as an Intelligence Agent in spite of Biggles' protests, and the airman ran through a number of aliases as time passed: Captain Leopold Brunow, Sven Hendrik, J.A. Bensil, Biggs, Holmes and Ted Walls.

The first time that the airman assumed another name and an identity to go with it was certainly for the purposes of espionage. He "hated and loathed" spying but it was his duty to do so, as Major Raymond pointed out to him when the ideal circumstances arose. In "Biggles Flies East" (1935), a First World War Story, the young officer was on leave in London when an enemy agent mistook him for Captain Leopold Brunow, who had recently been "cashiered" and expelled from the RFC. Biggles, as Brunow, was recruited by German Intelligence, and sent to the headquarters of the Service at Zabala in Palestine, to serve under Count von Faubourg.

Two German squadrons were stationed at Zabala, and Biggles found that the flying officers had much in common with their British counterparts. When they returned from a raid, laughing and talking over the battle, he realized he had seen it all before, in an RFC mess: "only the uniforms and the machines with the sinister Maltese crosses were

different." He felt so akin to the airmen that he risked his own life without hesitation to rescue a German pilot, when their aircraft was shot down in the desert.

Yet in spite of himself, Biggles proved to be a first-class double agent, working successfully for Major Raymond on the one hand and impressing the Count so much on the other that he recommended him for the Iron Cross. The airman needed all his wits about him, for it was on this mission that he first encountered Hauptmann Erich von Stalhein, the brilliant, suave Intelligence Officer who was to become his deadly adversary for nearly half a century.

Thrill follows thrill throughout the tale, and the end of the book leaves the reader anxious for more tales in this genre. But "Biggles - Secret Agent" (1940), although a splendid adventure, has little to do with spying. Biggles, together with Algy Lacey and Ginger Hebblethwaite, set off at the behest of Colonel Raymond for a small European country dominated by Germany, to seek for a missing scientist. although Biggles and Ginger were to pose as tourists, the airman insisted that false names and passports would only "complicate matters", and when Ginger suggested that they used disguises, his chief deplored such melodrama.

"We're not experts at that sort of thing. I should probably forget my wig and leave it on the dressing table, or drop my false whiskers in the soup, or something equally daft. My feeling is that all these tricks are out of date. They belong to spy books of the last generation..."

However, Biggles did decide to take a "Foreign Office pigeon" with him, to ensure that a vital report would reach London, and this gives the story an authentic feeling of undercover work. Many years later, after the Second World War, von Stalhein revealed that a promising young spy in France in 1918 had faced potential disaster, when her carrier pigeon was killed by a cat; fortunately, when she met an impressionable RFC officer, the resourceful girl realized that he would serve her purpose just as well. And so Marie Janis tricked James Bigglesworth into agreeing to act as her messenger, and the pair of them lost their hearts for ever.

It may well seem to us now that pigeon post belongs to "spy books of the last generation" - but readers may be interested in a curious detail I came across in a book entitled "The RAF in Action", published in December, 1940. A photograph shows a crewman with bird and basket aboard a plane, and the caption reads, "Homing pigeons are carried in case of a forced landing and breakdown of wireless..."

Biggles's left fist shot out and took him in the pit of the stomach

"Sven Hendrik" of the Luftwaffe

But to return to Biggles and his various rôles. He was fully involved in espionage activities for the second time in "Biggles Defies the Swastika" (1941) when Colonel Raymond asked him to go to Norway soon after the outbreak of the Second World War. If the Nazis were to invade this country British troops would be sent to counter-attack, and Biggles' task was to find out what airbases would be available. He was provided with papers to show that he was "Sven Hendrik", a Norwegian subject who had lived many years in Canada. He had just completed his mission when the German invasion took place, and Fate offered him another "golden opportunity" to serve his country. He had joined a flying club near Oslo, and now, together with a number of Norwegian traitors, he was granted a commission in the enemy air force.

Biggles escaped into Sweden in hot haste, but inevitably Colonel Raymond persuaded him to return to Norway as a secret agent. The airman was not proof against his subtle arguments: "My dear Bigglesworth, you yourself have seen what Germany is doing in Norway ..." he pointed out from England over the telephone, "There's black treachery for you, if you like. We've got to fight the enemy with his own weapons, if only for the sake of the Norwegians."

The airman dutifully became a member of the Luftwaffe and soon "a full blown Gestapo agent" as well. His subsequent adventures were a breathtaking as ever, and at times had an almost surrealist quality, for he was asked to hunt for himself. But von Stalhein was soon deeply suspicious of Hendrik, who admitted to having met Bigglesworth in Canada, and who proved strangely elusive when the German tried to interview him.

Biggles was as relieved as ever when his clandestine operations in Norway came to an end, and although Air Commodore Raymond continued to give him unusual assignments for the rest of his life, the airman never became a spy again. As chief of the Air Police in the Post-War Period, he was sometimes involved in Intelligence work rather than in criminal cases, but now if he adopted an alias it was in the course of his normal duties.

In the short story "The Case of the Unregistered Operator", included in "Biggles Air Detective" (1952), Biggles enacted the part of a crooked bank employee, imprisoned for embezzlement, in order to catch a gang flying villains abroad. He actually spent a night in jail before being released, after having apparently served a long sentence. "The Governor held out a hand. "I hope, after this you'll go straight," he said loudly, the corners of his mouth twitching..." The ruse worked, for the Air detective was approached by the organisation he was after, but why he decided to call himself "J.A. Bensil" defies speculation. When he joined the Foreign Legion together with Ginger in "Biggles Foreign Legionnaire" (1954), in order to foil an international conspiracy, the two friends became simply "Biggs" and "Hepple".

Biggles acted as a decoy again in a masterly tale, "The Case of the Secret Inquisitors", in the collection of short stories "Biggles' Chinese Puzzle" (1955). This time he became a scientist to attract the attention of some kidnappers, and when the Air Commodore pointed out that he would need a name, the airman replied with a smile, "What about one in the approved tradition? I suggest Mr Holmes..." the new Sherlock was in due course, seized, drugged and abducted by aeroplane. A doctor asked him if he suffered from air sickness, and received a negative reply. Finally, in "Biggles on the Home Front" (1957) "Ted Walls", just out of Pentonville, came into being to aid investigations into jewel robberies in London.

Biggles evidently enjoyed his years as an Air Detective and his occasional changes of name and personality were in keeping with his practical and pragmatic approach to

problems. What he detested about genuine espionage work was the necessity to live a lie amongst people whom he regarded as his peers. It was one thing to trick villains and another to deceive friendly fellow airmen. In "Biggles Defies the Swastika" he felt compelled to say to a German Officer, who denounced him as a spy" "It would be futile to deny it but if I am, it is by force of circumstances and not as a result of any desire on my part. Actually, like you, I am a pilot..." And, having defeated his adversary in a hand to hand struggle and appropriated his Dornier, Biggles promised him that after the war he would stand him a dinner at the Aero Club.

Yet the airman had a genuine admiration for many Secret Service personnel, if not for the Brass Hats in charge. In "The Carrier" in "The Camels Are Coming (1932), he rescued a British spy whom Colonel Raymond had abandoned to his fate. The situation was mirrored in 1952 in "The Case of the Wounded Agent", collected in "Biggles Air Detective", when Biggles saved an operative at his last gasp, although Raymond was only interested in the papers the man was carrying. The contemptible characters in espionage were the traitors, like Leopold Brunow, who betrayed their own countries.

It was von Stalhein, after the years of enmity were over, who pointed out to Biggles that spying was an honourable profession. King George V himself had said so and, according to the monarch, "the spy is the greatest of soldiers. If he is detested it is because he is most feared." But the airman had no need of this reminder. His contacts with the world of Intelligence had begun in the First World War and one personal experience from that time would remain with him always.

In "Fog", a short story in "The Camels are Coming", set in 1918, Biggles found himself stranded behind the enemy lines in almost zero visibility. In his efforts to ascertain his whereabouts he strayed from his Camel and could not find it again in the pea-soup vapour. Then a French peasant, dirty and unshaven, addressed him in English, with an educated accent. The spy guided Biggles to his plane and asked him to take an urgent report back to British Intelligence "in case I am taken before I can loose a carrier pigeon."

The airmen wanted to take the agent home with him on the wing of the aircraft but "2742" had to remain at his post. A swift handshake, and Biggles was on his way, this thoughts racing: "God! ... What some people have to do! I wouldn't have that fellow's job for a million a year and a thousand VC's..."

In spite of Biggles' heartfelt cry, "I am not a professional spy, I am a pilot!", readers of the splendid tales in question can only be glad that when called upon to emulate 2742, he invariably responded with all his courage, ingenuity, steadfastness and generosity of spirit.

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THE MAGNET'S GOLDEN AGE?

by Ian Scales

Throughout the history of the Collector's Digest there has been a considerable amount of speculation over degrees of quality which occurred in various periods of The Magnet's history. It appears to be that the period between 1930 and 1935 is considered as the peak of Charles Hamilton's writing skill. As a reader who has discovered the Magnet through the Howard Baker reprints, I have therefore in the past tended to concentrate upon getting the relevant volumes from this period, whilst almost ignoring the post 1935 era. This was probably due to some, possibly quite unintentional, negative comments which have summed up this era. Having now read many of the Magnets which surround the so called "Golden Era" of 1930-35, I find that I want to challenge some of the assumptions which have been made.

To start with, I find it astonishing that the middle to late 1920s aren't treated with as much acclaim as the early 1930s. When reading such stories as the Carboy series from 1928, one is instantly struck by the easy style of Frank Richards' writing and his use of the major characters. The way in which Quelch deals with Carboy's mischievous nature and the means by which Carboy manipulates the snobbish elements in the Remove in order to get out of Coventry are outstanding. The depth of character within 1928 is immense, and provides us with a classic range of stories including Whiffles Circus, Da Costa versus Harry Wharton, the High Oaks rebellion, and so on. Surely any "Golden Era" would have started around here. Even looking back to 1927 we find the excellent South Seas and Paul Dallas series.

Of course, the early 1930's *were* exceptional, and perhaps this jaundices the view taken towards the shifting style of the final years. I feel that one major difference towards the end of the Magnet was that, instead of a series which gradually built up to a gripping climax, there tended to be a series of climactic points within the series which left a bit of an anti-climax. One case in point is the Carter series which appeared to end rather disinterestedly though there are moments of brilliance within the actual story. However, having recently read the final Soames series which appeared in 1940, I find very little repetition and the story progresses extremely competently towards a satisfactory climax. Indeed, I found the author's treatment of Soames' character to be highly entertaining, and I am somehow much more aware of the close friendship between the Famous Five. Their characters appear to mature throughout the later years and their friendship is even stronger, which has added immensely to my enjoyment of this era.

It is true that some stories from the later years were a little hackneyed - such as the Compton series, but there are those which I have enjoyed less than others in each era - such as the 1932 Egyptian saga and the Crum series from 1928. Each period in the Magnet's history has its own charms and this adds to the pleasure of darting around from year to year with the Howard Baker volumes. As I move on to reading the earlier stories from the Red Magnets, I look forward to discovering yet more aspects of Charles Hamilton's bountiful writing skills.

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AUTHOR IDENTIFIED

The article on Superintendent Flagg and 'Know-All' Newall, published in the December 1991 C.D., is Ian Godden.

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READERS' LETTERS

Regrettably there is no room this month for our POSTBAG feature, but next month a selection from many interesting recent letters will be included.

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WANTED: Greyfriars Book Club. Volume No. 1 'The Worst Boy at Greyfriars', No. 2 'Loder for Captain', No. 3 'The Making of Harry Wharton', No. 4 'Harry Wharton & Co. in India', and No. 6 'Paul Dallas at Greyfriars'. Must be in fine to very good condition. State your price please.
W.L. BAWDEN, 14 Highland Park, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 2EX.

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Editor's Note:

To mark the fortieth anniversary of Queen Elizabeth the Second's coming to the throne, I thought that C.D. readers would enjoy seeing this long-ago cover picture of 'the little Princesses'.

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