

# The STORY PAPER **Collectors'** **Digest**



VOL. 46

No. 550

OCTOBER 1992

THE FIRST PUBLISHED  
PORTRAIT OF  
SEXTON BLAKE  
(UNION JACK  
4<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1894)  
ACCORDING  
TO SEXTON  
BLAKE ANNUAL  
OF 1941.



96p

THEN & NOW

Bob White 92



# FLIPS PAGES



(INCORPORATING NORMAN SHAW)  
ROBIN OSBORNE, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON SE19 2HZ  
PHONE (BETWEEN 11 A.M. - 10 P.M.) 081-771 0541

Hi People,

Varied selection of goodies on offer this month:-

1. Many loose issues of TRIUMPH in basically very good condition (some staple rust) £3. each.
2. Bound volume of TRIUMPH Jan-June 1938 £80.
3. GEM - bound volumes - all uniform -
 

581 - 620	(29/3 - 27.12.19)	£110
621 - 646 (Jan - June 1920)		£ 80
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8. 2000 A.D. - many copies (would you believe, 30,000 - no kidding!) available - please advise wants.
9. Lots more goodies to hand, including recent comics like VICTOR, NEW HOTSPUR, BATTLE, WARLORD, SMASH, POW, WHAM, WHIZZER & CHIPS, COR, WHOOPEE, MONSTER FUN, BUZZ, TOPPER, BEEZER, TV COMIC, and many others. Please advise requirements.

That's it for now, except to say that Norman sends his best wishes to all his old customers. Have fun! Callers always welcome, but please make an appointment as I sometimes have to be out and I would hate you to have a wasted journey.

BRITISH AND AMERICAN COMICS, STORY PAPERS, ANNUALS, NEWSPAPER COMIC SECTIONS, DAILY STRIPS, PULP MAGAZINES, GAG AND EDITORIAL CARTOONS, HUMOUR MAGAZINES AND ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR  
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W.H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST  
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## ANNUALS AGAIN

The books illustrated here are very special for me, because they were the first schoolgirls' annuals that I ever owned. I started to read THE SCHOOLGIRL in 1936 and, when these Annuals (dated 1937) were advertised in it, I longed to own them all. In fact my Christmas stocking brought me only the SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL - and I had to wait for three or four months after then to be given the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUAL. (This was by then available at a cheaper 'remaindered' price than its original six shillings.) It wasn't until I became an adult collector that I acquired the 1937 GOLDEN ANNUAL FOR

GIRLS and POPULAR BOOK OF GIRLS STORIES - and what nostalgic joy and satisfaction it was then to be able to put together on my shelves all these four books!

I sincerely hope that this year's C.D. ANNUAL will give you all as much pleasure as the Annuals of our childhood provided. As promised last month, I now 'trail' some of its contents. Roger Jenkins has written with his usual verve and expertise about the early days of Jack Blake and Tom Merry at Clavering and St. Jim's: Ted Baldock has provided more of his colourful Greyfriars vignettes: Norman Wright vividly describes the wonderful range of badges, club-membership certificates and other memorabilia given away in the old comics and papers: John Beck has written a warmly appreciative article in celebration of the Centenary (in December) of the Rupert artist, A.E. Bestall, and Ray Hopkins contributes an interesting feature about the MODERN BOY ANNUAL. Seasonable touches are given by Susan Chambers who looks at the Christmas delights of GIRL, by Ted Baldock with his 'Yuletide Vision' of Wharton Lodge, by Ray Holmes who recalls the Christmas numbers of some of our favourite comics, and by myself in an article on the Victorian magazine, THE CHILDREN'S FRIEND. There is, of course, much, much more which I will outline in the November and December C.D.s.

Just to remind you - if you have not yet ordered your copy of the Annual - that it costs £8.90 (including postage to any address in the British Isles) and £10.00 (if posted overseas by surface mail).

With warmest greetings to you all.

MARY CADOGAN

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BLAKIANA BRIC-A-BRAC

by BOB WHITER

As Bill Lofts mentions in his and the late Derek Adley's book, 'The Men Behind Boys' Fiction - "with fresh data coming in all the time", it is not always easy to present correct facts and dates.

This is particularly the case with the so called first portrait and story of Sexton Blake. According to the Sexton Blake Annual of 1941 and also The Valiant Book of TV's Sexton Blake, Fleetway Publications Ltd. 1968, both of which reprinted both picture and story, the original date was 4th May, 1894 and the publication "Union Jack".

Most experts have for sometime given the first story's date and paper in which it appeared as 20th December 1893. The story was entitled "The Missing Millionaire", the author Harry Blyth. Those early stories remind me a little of "The Musgrave Ritual" in that neither Holmes nor Blake had met his assistant. Looking back, one cannot but wonder at the difference between the Blake of those earlier days and the famous sleuth of the present. No famous Rolls Royce car named Grey Panther, no faithful bloodhound named Pedro, no saddle-back chair, no landlady called Mrs Bardell and, as previously stated, no Tinker. As with several well known characters, Sexton Blake developed over the years. From merely a private detective, he became the celebrated all-round scientific investigator. One of the reasons for this is, of course, that so many different authors wrote about him. I believe the latest count shows over a hundred, with each writer adding some little characteristic or facet to the detectives image. This also included creating new characters for the Blakiana stage. Thus we have William Murray Graydon responsible for Martha Bardell (prior to this, S.B.'s landlady had been a Mrs. Gaffrey.)

Gwyn Evans and Gilbert Chester are two authors who added charm to Mrs. Bardell: Gwyn Evans even giving her a sister, namely Mary Ann Cluppins. Both ladies were to feature in some fine Christmas stories.

Then we mustn't forget the artists! Although nowhere near the same number as the different authors, there have been quite a few artists over the years. Who was the best? This naturally must to a large extent depend on one's own personal opinion. My preference is and always has been Eric Parker. It was he who also sculptured the famous S.B. bust. I remember a certain Australian collector and correspondent writing and offering me a bust many years ago. He apologised that unfortunately it was in two pieces, but he had heard I was handy at fixing things. He sent it and I repaired it - the head had been broken off at the neck. I was telling Eric Parker about this, soon afterwards at one of the Old Boys Book Club meetings, and he laughed. Apparently when he made the bust, he hadn't made the plaster or clay thick enough. When he set the bust down, the head sagged forward and nearly fell off! Mr. Parker told me that he quickly straightened it and stuck his pencil down through the top of it head and into the body part. This strengthened the whole bust. I think it was at the same meeting that he drew a quick sketch of S.B. in my brother Ben's autograph book. I know how "Uncle Ben" treasured that contribution. Eric Parker's artistic rendition of Blake was no doubt inspired to a certain degree by Sidney Paget's later illustrations of Sherlock Holmes. Paget's interpretation was also the basis for artists A. Gilbert and Frank Wiles, who had turns in depicting the resident of 221B Baker Street, following Paget's demise.

Returning to Blake's assistant, Tinker, according to Reginald Cox, he first came on the scene in the penny series of the "Union Jack," No. 53, October 15th, 1904. He apparently was preceded by a Chinese We-wee, by a strange waif named Griff, and by Wallace Lorrimer. Sherlock Holmes had a brother, who although very obese, possessed an even great power of deduction than the immortal sleuth himself Mycroft Holmes held a most commanding position in the government -in fact most of the time he *was* the government! But Nigel Blake was an out and out waster. It was Dr. Berkeley Blake's dream that his two sons should practice medicine and join him in Harley Street. That Sexton became a detective didn't upset his father too much, as he made such a success of his chosen career. It was left to Nigel to fulfil his parents' ambition, but he failed in his examinations and turned into a ne'er-do-well, who even abandoned his own wife and child. By a cruel trick of fate the boy grew up to become a policeman; he set off one day to arrest a forger named Pardue. This man turned out to be his own father! The

upshot of it all was that for once Sexton Blake found himself on the wrong side of the law, when he aided and hid his brother. He finally found a place for the wayward Nigel in a private home in Buckinghamshire.

Seeing the article "A Great Double" by R. Harding in the November 1991 C.D. (I loved the play-bill and photograph of Arthur Wontner) reminds me of Reginald Cox again. In his "The Sexton Blake File" he mentions meeting Wontner in his dressing-room, some years after the Sexton Blake play. On being asked about the Donald Stuart, Blake play, Wontner replied. "Blake, Blake? All I remember just now about playing Blake was the trouble we had with that bloodhound. Just couldn't get him to do a blessed thing! Most docile!"

I seemed to remember the property master having similar troubles with the Snake when they made a play of "The Speckled Band."

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## THE VENGEANCE OF TITUS ALEXIS      by LESLIE S. LASKEY

There have been many pupils in school fiction who have attained varying degrees of unpopularity with their fellows. Some have been sneaks or toadies, some have been bullies, while others were simply reckless breakers of school rules. None, possibly, has ever become so very unpopular and, subsequently, absolutely detested as was Titus Alexis who spent a - fortunately - short time in the Remove Form at St. Frank's.

Alexis was a Greek. From the day of his arrival at the school he displayed an arrogant aloofness towards his formfellows. He was placed in Study M with the Duke of Somerton and de Valerie, both of whom initially made attempts to be friendly with the new junior. Alexis was so ungracious and unpleasant that even the good tempered Somerton eventually fell out with him. During a study quarrel Somerton and de Valerie were totally shocked when Alexis drew a knife and very nearly stabbed Somerton in the shoulder. Alexis did apologise, rather ungraciously, claiming that Somerton had provoked him.

The Greek boy conveyed the impression that he thoroughly disliked St. Frank's and all its inmates. He angered several of his form-fellows when he addressed them by the offensive term, "English pig-boys". He became steadily more disliked until he was virtually shunned.

Ultimately Alexis committed an act of such gravity, an act so horrifying and destructive, that it had far-reaching consequences for every person at St. Frank's.

These dramatic events were related in No. 221 (Old Series) of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY and later reprinted in No. 279 of the SCHOOLBOY'S OWN LIBRARY.

A display of evil temper soon landed Alexis in trouble with his house-master. He had been struck in the chest by a cricket ball hit by a Third Form junior. It was not a very hard impact but the Greek boy's reaction was to pick up the ball and hurl it

savagely at the younger boy, hitting him a cruel blow on the head which completely stunned him for a time and caused a nasty laceration. When Alexis displayed no remorse whatever an angry Nipper knocked him down. Nelson Lee chanced to arrive on the scene at that moment. When he discovered what had occurred he took Alexis to his study to punish him, the Greek boy shouting and struggling in a fury as he went. In the study he attempted to throw a book at Nelson Lee before he was eventually caned. Afterwards he told Lee that he would be "made to pay", a threat which the house-master contemptuously ignored.

Alexis inveigled Fullwood and Co. into taking part in what seemed to be just a "rag" on Nipper. Wary at first of having anything to do with this odd Greek boy, Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell were soon impressed by the artfulness of the scheme by which Alexis proposed to lure Nipper to a vault in the old ruins where he could be ambushed, tied up, and then painted and glued. The plot worked perfectly. Fullwood eventually told Nipper's friends where they could find their missing leader. Unknown to Fullwood and Co., Alexis had returned alone to the vault and inflicted a savage beating on the helpless Nipper. Following the Remove captain's release Mr. Crowell came to hear of the matter, which he investigated further. Even Fullwood was shocked to learn of the Greek boy's cowardly attack on Nipper, and he and his alarmed cronies hurriedly owned up to their own part in the proceedings.

This time Alexis was sentenced to a Head's flogging. Again he fought to avoid his punishment, resisting like a wild animal. He shouted at the astonished and angry Dr. Stafford that he had come to St. Frank's to be educated and not to be knocked about by brutal schoolmasters. After his punishment he threatened the Head with revenge, just as he had threatened Nelson Lee.

Alexis was now placed in a small, remote study, on his own, to keep him away from his form-fellows as much as possible. Dr. Stafford communicated with the boy's parents, requesting them to remove their son from the school immediately. By this time Alexis was so disliked and feared that some Third Form juniors would run away when the sullen-faced Greek with the gleaming black eyes approached them. On occasions Alexis was observed gesticulating and muttering to himself. Nipper remarked to Nelson Lee that most of the fellows believed Alexis to be mad. Lee considered that he was not mad but that his mind was consumed with hatred. Everybody was glad to know that he would soon be gone.

However, Alexis had not done his worst at St. Frank's even yet.

A few nights later the College House was gutted by fire. A wakeful Nipper noticed the glow of the flames from his dormitory window and raised the alarm. He recalled that Alexis had been seen prowling about near the College House a night or two

No. 279.—THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY.

## The GREAT FIRE at ST-FRANK'S!

by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



A thrill-packed story of NELSON LEE, NIPPER and the Chums of St. Frank's, telling of a new boy's malicious act of revenge and its amazing consequences.

(Narrated throughout by NIPPER himself.)

earlier, and he immediately suspected that the Greek boy had something to do with this fire. The blaze, which had started in the cellars, was extraordinarily fierce, and it was spreading upwards into the ground-floor rooms with terrifying speed. Fortunately all the inmates of the College House were quickly marshalled out to safety in the Triangle, and all were accounted for.

Titus Alexis had entered the College House cellars through a grating, and he had started the fire with a quantity of petrol.

At the height of this nightmare scene there came another shock when the figure of Alexis was suddenly spotted on the roof of the burning building, clinging to a chimney-stack. When a fireman tried to reach him he threatened to throw himself into the flames if he was touched. Nelson Lee told the fireman to keep talking to Alexis to hold his attention. Meanwhile Lee dashed into the Head's house and went out on to its roof. A gap of just a few feet separated the building from the college House, and the firemen were working desperately to prevent the fire from spreading to the Head's house. The house-masor made the hazardous jump on to the gently sloping roof of the burning building. He reached the now demented Greek boy and grabbed him. After a brief struggle the boy suddenly went quite limp. He had fainted. The fireman carried him down the ladder and Nelson Lee followed.

The morning light revealed the College House to be a blackened shell, but the Head's house had been saved. Titus Alexis was gone from St. Frank's. Confusion reigned as the College House boys were somehow accommodated in the Ancient House.

The School Governors arrived for urgent consultations with Dr. Stafford. Eventually the Head announced that the entire school would be vacating the premises for the rest of the term while the College House was rebuilt. A temporary home had been found in central London, in Holborn, in a building which had formerly been a school and which was at present vacant.

When St. Frank's returned to Sussex, at last, there came the morning when the Remove once again took their old places in the familiar form-room.

Nobody missed the company of Titus Alexis but it would be a long time before that strange Greek boy was forgotten.

This cannot be regarded as a pleasant tale: it centres on an exceedingly unpleasant character. It is a story of stark drama.

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### Your Editor says—



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

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**FREDDIE BROWNE & JIM FANSHAW**

by **IAN GODDEN**

As many CD readers will know, Michael Poole was a prolific writer for the boys' papers, and also wrote many hardcover school stories. He was a very good writer indeed and some of his best work is to be found in his series of Freddie Browne books which were published by Oxford University Press in the late thirties and early forties.

The series begins with **BROWNE'S FIRST CASE**, in which a lad named Jim Fanshaw has to leave Croxton School because his father, who works for an insurance company is before the court charged, wrongly with being implicated in a fraud in which valuables sent by the company's Transit Office have been stolen. Fanshaw goes to work as a clerk for a company which has offices in the same building as the insurance company. Here he meets a fellow clerk, a responsible young man named Freddie Browne and in the chapter called "Detectives In The Making" they join forces to solve the mystery for which Jim's father was dismissed from the company. They do this successfully in a most enjoyable story and are thus launched on their careers as solvers of problems.

The two investigators, having cleared the name of Jim's father in the first book are, on the strength of that, offered employment by another insurance company, where they work in the Investigations Office of the Claims Department. Their boss is Dexter Bell who plays a leading role in the stories as a guide and helper. Bell's wisdom nicely balances the enthusiasm of the two young investigators.

The second in the series, **BROWNE FOLLOWS THE CLUE**, and the third, **THE MISSING BANK MANAGER**, really establish the reputations of Browne and Fanshaw so that when we come to the next book we find them being treated with a good deal of respect by the official police in the persons of Insp. Carter and Sgt. Verity with whom they work in each of their cases.

In **MYSTERY AT MERRILEES** they all combine forces in the investigation of the murder of a disagreeable business man and the odd behaviour of the film actor Leo Kremlin, who successfully plays villains, and no wonder when we finally learn the truth about him!

Browne and Fanshaw are splendid young fellows and any boys reading this series could do a lot worse than to model their lives on their many admirable qualities.

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## TRAPPED!

by JOHN BUCKLE

To the *Wonder Book of Comics* (published by Odhams apparently over forty years ago) Enid Blyton, Captain W.E. Johns and Frank Richards contributed a short story each; all three featured a trap, and two included a trap in the very title itself.

On "An Adventurous Evening" a small boy and girl lie hidden in their uncle's car, trapped there by jewel thieves who have seized it after a smash-and-grab raid. The two children eventually escape from the car, the boy having substituted a pocketful of chestnuts for the stolen jewellery, which they take to the nearest police station. The crooks are caught and the young hero and heroine appropriately rewarded.

"Biggles Bait the Trap" by luring as decoy a gang of airbourne jewel thieves into an ambush prepared for them in the refreshment room of a French airfield, where his pursuers are trapped in the very act of trapping him.

"Billy Bunter's Booby Trap" descends on his classmate Vernon-Smith in revenge for his kicking that gluttonous schoolboy. Bunter, however, inadvertently reveals to him his own responsibility for the trap and flees from his wrathful victim with the latter wielding a cricket stump on his ample person.

This triple inclusion constitutes a remarkable assemblage of a trio of phenomenally popular children's writers, each associated with such a different range of juvenile readership and thematic milieu. All three, however, employ a common theme of double entrapment: the trapper is trapped - hoist by his own petard. In all three tales there is a neat yet appropriate twist to the plot.

"I've taken the jewels," Bob whispers to his companion Jean. "I've got them all in my pocket! I'm putting some little chestnuts into the bag instead!" "Look here!" one crook shouts out later. "There's no jewels in this bag. Only chestnuts! Must be in the wrong bag." When the police eventually "surrounded them nicely and roped them all in... they were quarrelling about *who* had got the jewels!"



## Biggles baits the trap

BY CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

"Open der case and make sure der pearls are in it," rasps one crook to Biggles; but "Biggles shook his head sadly." "If it's the Rajah's pearls you're looking for you're on the he wrong track," he says. "Where are they?" his adversary demands after finding the case empty. "In the strong room at the Savoy Hotel, London, I imagine by this time," replies Biggles calmly. "At my suggestion the pearls were put in another bag before this pretty blue case left the machine."

Biggles, of course, is not the only character to bait his trap. Bob replaces the stolen jewels with the gathered chestnuts; and the consequent dispute between the crooks over the identity of the current possessor of the haul delays their dispersal and ensures their capture. Enid Blyton's plot is in fact as neat as Captain Johns' and as subtle. Unlike Johns', however, it does not depend on keeping the reader in ignorance of the true situation until the very end. It is only when the trap baited by Biggles is eventually sprung that the reader appreciates like Air Constable Hebblethwaite the full extent of his leader's preparation of it.

"Ginger amazed turned round and saw that a man whom he had taken to be a priest was standing up, a smoking revolver in his hand and a monocle in his eye. Ginger gasped as he recognised Air Constable Bertie Lissie. The mechanic was also on his feet, pistol at the ready. Ginger recognised Algy Lacey." (Both priest and mechanic were disguised well-known members of Biggles' team.) "The handcuffs clicked. Biggles whistled. A French inspector of police, followed by several gendarms, bustled in. 'Here are your men, monsieur,' said Biggles."

Experienced readers of Biggles' exploits might have expected Lissie and Lacey to turn up eventually in support of their leader and Hebblethwaite and would therefore tend to accept as quite predictable their appearance at such a climax. Experienced readers of Bunter's escapades might also expect his plans to misfire and any booby trap set by him to recoil on his own head.

"Grinning the fat Owl of the Remove stepped down from the chair. The booby trap was ready now ... All that remained was for Bunter to get safely off the scene before the Bounder of the Remove of Greyfriars came in..." for "Bunter ... was bright enough to realise that it was wiser not to be in the offing when Smithy received the leather bucket, the Latin dictionary, the *Selection of English Verse* and Hall and Knight's *Algebra* on his devoted head!"

The schemer is not bright enough, however, to see who is in the offing before saying, "If the silly ass does not come in soon, somebody else may barge into the booby trap and I shall have had all my trouble for nothing." Unknown to Bunter the silly ass has already barged into the booby trap and now hears the impatient trapper trap himself into indiscreet confession.

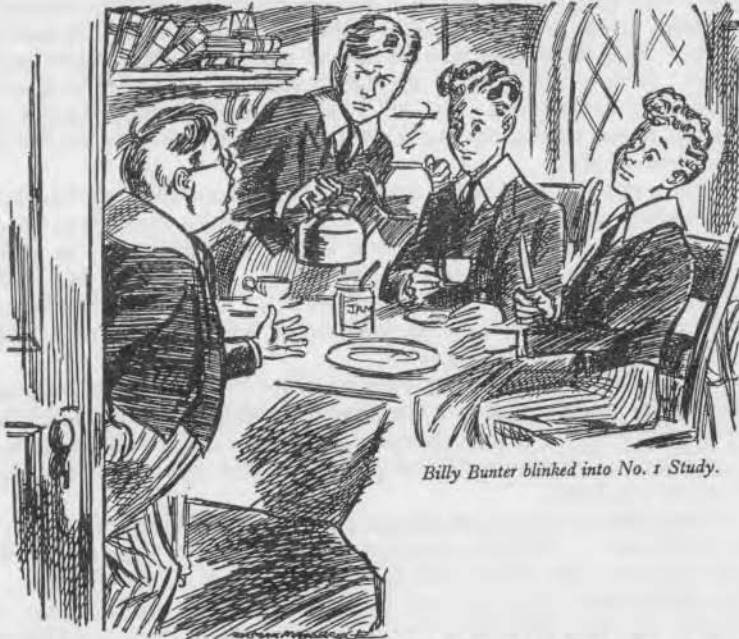
In fact the crooks in the other two stories have also had all their trouble for nothing. As with Bunter their indiscretion has trapped them. Bunter is vindictive: they are greedy; but all the villains concerned lack the foresight and self-restraint to escape the consequences of their misdeeds. The scales of justice are redressed: right prevails over wrong.

Characterisation is weakest in Enid Blyton's story and strongest in Captain Johns'. Bob and Jean are the merest cyphers; Bunter is the flattest caricature. The adventurous evening spent by the former, however, does illustrate both an ethical truth and a banal platitude: all that glitters is not gold.

"Look at that ring," says Bob. "It's marked three hundred and fifty pounds!" "I'd hate to wear something that was worth so much," says Jean, "let's go and hunt for chestnuts." Chestnuts can be eaten; rings can only be worn. In the story chestnuts can

and do replace rings and bring criminals to justice, but for a reward "the jeweller whose jewels they had saved presented Bob and Jean with a wristwatch each. They are very proud of them, indeed," the writer assures us. Chestnuts are edible, but watches last longer and are more useful to children than jewels. Their dishonest greed brings the villains only chestnuts and prison. Their honest heroism brings Bob and Jean a wristwatch each. The jewels remain the jeweller's.

BILLY BUNTER'S BOOBY-TRAP



*Billy Bunter blinked into No. 1 Study.*

Bob and Jean bait their trap with chestnuts. Biggles baits his with an empty pearl case. Enid Blyton's villains actually manage to seize their loot. Captain Johns' villains never do. Enid Blyton's villains never discover (at least while they hold them) the passengers whom they have inadvertently trapped in the car that they have seized for their escape. Captain Johns' villains, however, know whom they are pursuing and for what they are pursuing him. In neither story is the villains' trap successfully closed - the hero's trap is successfully sprung instead. In each story the booty becomes the bait.

In Frank Richards' story on the other hand the booby trap works with painful results for its contriver. Vernon-Smith walks into one trap; Bunter talks himself into another. One schoolboy tries to trap another with anonymity and impunity - and fails. Bunter fails to get away with his booby trap and worsens his own plight in consequence.

Richards' tale is, of course, humorous; the other two are to be taken more seriously. Yet all three should be taken seriously as models of plot structure and as examples of clear, concise exposition and coherent explanation. In all the quotations made there is scarcely a wasted word or a purposeless phrase. Each story develops naturally and logically, and each character remains more or less true to form throughout.



## An Adventurous Evening

BY ENID BLYTON

Each story is deftly rounded off, the wheel comes full circle, and poetic justice prevails. The trapper traps himself through his own trap. Although so similar in theme, each tale in itself is so different in characterisation and narration as to earn its own place together with its two counterparts in the same *Wonder Book of Comics*. That is their highest common merit and individual achievement.

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### MEMORIES

by Horace Dilley

Way back in the late 1920s, the old Langford Council School, near Biggleswade in Bedfordshire, was far removed from Greyfriars in location, in size and in practically every other aspect as well.

It was a gaunt, single story building, typical of the Victorian age, with bricks of a dark brown texture and a roof of tiles. The large windows, set some distance from the ground (no doubt to prevent us from looking out and allowing our minds to wander) towered skywards. It was a primitive building, entered through the boys' cloakroom, leading to a central classroom, to which we first progressed when we left the primary school immediately opposite across the road. To the left was a slightly larger classroom, which was the next to go to. This was fronted by a separate store room where all the school books and papers and other equipment were housed. To the right hand side of the central class room, was a much bigger one from which two classes were operated. These saw us through to the time we were 14 years of age, when we left school at the end of the term. The girls' cloakroom was in front.

Heating was from a combustion stove, which invariably gave out foul fumes, and was enclosed by a steel guard. If you were allowed to sit in the front of the class, not too far from the stove, you kept reasonably warm. If you were at the back, you were often "Perished with cold". The playground was in two sections, enclosed by a three foot wall to the front and one side, separating the roads. To the other side, was someone's garden and, to the rear, a 6 foot high wall, enclosing the Parish Church and the Church-yard. The school bell, in the mornings and in the afternoons was rung for about 5 minutes, calling us to school.

It will be seen that Greyfriars had little or nothing in common with Langford Council School. Or had it? You see, the "Magnet" was very much a part of our school life. A number of the boys (and some of the girls too) Purchased the "Magnet" week by week. These were passed around the school to those scholars who perhaps couldn't afford to buy it, or others who were wont to spend their "Saturday pennies" in a more riotous way. The imaginations of our youth were vivid. In my latter school days, I became "head boy" and fancied myself as another Harry Wharton. There was a lad of the Bunter type to whom the head teacher often referred as being "A big, fat, lazy chap". There was another boy, a bit of a blade, crafty and cunning, who liked the odd smoke (usually in the primitive toilets across the playground) who seemed to us to be another Skinner. One of the older lads, a bit of a bully, reminded us of Gerald Loder.

A weedy looking boy, who toadied to him, we regarded as the "fag" of the older lad. Another boy showed the arrogance and waywardness of "the Bounder".

During the last period on a Friday afternoon, sometimes we were allowed to play football or cricket. "Little side" was, in fact, the meadow of a dairyman, situated not too far from the school, where cow-pats were prominent and it was not unknown for us to take samples home.

The headmaster and the other teachers had no studies. Their desks were in front of the classes. Hanging from a front bookcase in the headmaster's class, was the inevitable cane. However, there were not a lot of delinquents ... we were reasonably well behaved! I never recall anyone having "six". Mere often it was one on each hand. The Headmaster's threat always was "If you don't behave yourselves, I'll warm your jackets". How unlike Greyfriars it all was. And yet the magic carpet often took us there. Our Headmaster was a kindly man although he had no mortar board or gown to wear. We had no Henry Samuel Quelch or Paul "Pompous" Prout. We would wander around Greyfriars in our imaginations. We would tip-toe past Study No. 1. and listen to Harry Wharton and Co. discussing football. We would come across Billy Bunter a few studies hence, his bent form with one ear listening in at the keyhole. Not too far away, we could spy the Bounder, his foot raised to make contact with Bunter's ample rear. Mr. Hacker gave us a sour look. We wandered around at length... it was as if it was by magic. The gathering dusk of the evening brought us up with a jerk. Lights were beginning to pierce the gloom. We pulled up our coat collars... it had become a little bit chilly in the corridors, and so we stole away. At the gate, Gosling eyed us with more than a little curiosity. Our pocket money was very limited, but we fished in our pockets and brought out a copper or two for the ever ready paw of the old porter. It seemed as if we were handing over tots of whiskey instead of coins. The old porter's face lit up. He raised his gnarled hand in acknowledgement.

Slowly, we passed out of the gates. It was as if a "Magnet" was keeping us there. We wandered down the lane and soon we were back home. Even in our later years, now and again, we trudge along to Greyfriars... The old school at Langford was demolished some 20 or more years ago. We were saddened to see it go. As with Greyfriars, it has precious and fragrant memories. Memories which will be with us, until time for us is no more.

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**GO WEST WITH MARSHALL GROVER** by **ALAN PRATT**

To many western enthusiasts in the U.K. the name of Marshall Grover means little or nothing.

This is hardly surprising if one considers that until very recently none of his works was published here, and the limited number of titles now available appear in large print library editions only. Yet Grover is something of a writing phenomenon.

He is, after all the only Australian to have westerns published in the United States of America. He has also clocked-up an amazing 700 plus short western novels and is still going strong at the rate of 20 to 30 titles a year. Perhaps most remarkably of all, he has made absolutely no concession to the modern demand for violent "realism" but continues to entertain in an indefatigably cheerful style more reminiscent of the boys' story papers of yesteryear.

Born Leonard Meares in Sydney in 1921, Grover spent much of his childhood in a local cinema revelling in the exploits of the cowboy heroes of the silver screen. His love

for the genre continued in adulthood, and in 1955 his first western novel "Trouble Town" was published, in his native Australia, by Cleveland. Further titles appeared in quick succession and with his tenth "Drift", he introduced two characters who were to provide the mainstay of most of what followed. Larry (Valentine) and Stretch (Emerson) are two drifting Texans, the scourge of bad guys everywhere but a thorn in the sides of law enforcers because of their uncommon ability to land in trouble. Despite the large number of Larry & Stretch titles that followed "Drift", Grover has never felt the need for cross-referring any one book to others. Each adventure is complete in its own right and is probably better for it.

Superficially, there would appear to be little to distinguish this series from those of other authors of the same type of story. Larry is the good looking one, the thinking man, brave and constant. Stretch is tall and stringy, prepared at all times to rely on his companion's judgement and very much the comic half of the partnership. A typical 'B' western duo in fact. What lifts Grover's work above that of his competitors is his flair for characterisation and the rich vein of humour which flows through each title. Like Charles Dickens, Grover seemingly creates new, fully rounded characters at will, often, it would seem, for no real reason other than the sheer enjoyment of doing so. There is atmosphere to a degree, there is action a-plenty, but overriding everything else are the people; their fears, their hopes and their idiosyncrasies. All types of humanity are represented here, clothed in the guise of western characters, and there is little evidence of deterioration in the thirty odd years that Grover has writing.



His other main series characters are Big Jim (Rand) and his pint-sized Mexican sidekick Benito Espana. Rand first appeared in 1964 in "The Night McLennan Died". A rugged ex-cavalry sergeant, he sets out on the trail of Jenner, the tinhorn gambler who shot and killed his brother. Jim is tough and a little stern and he tolerates rather than enjoys the company of Benito, a grotesque and dislikeable character with a penchant for picking pockets and singing tunelessly to his own guitar accompaniment, because he once, inadvertently saved his life. Jenner's trail leads the intrepid Jim into many and varied adventures before the evil gambler is finally brought to account in "Gunfight at Doone's Well" seventy-two novels later in 1971.

Rand's adventures (minus Benito) have continued since then with Jim having settled down as a rancher and facing all manner of obstacles to a quiet life. The Big Jim titles are generally a little more sombre in tone than those featuring Larry & Stretch, but are of an equally high standard.

To start a collection of Grover titles is easy, yet paradoxically, difficult. Easy, because there are so many titles to find. Difficult because the collector is hunting for paperbacks imported from Australia or indeed, the USA, where Larry & Stretch are known as Larry & Streak, Big Jim is Nevada Jim and Grover himself is billed as Marshall McCoy. yet they do turn up - in secondhand shops, charity shops and car boot sales. And they are cheap, often selling for 30p or less.

To anyone who enjoyed rousing tales of cowboy adventure and mourned their passing, may I suggest that you hit the Grover trail and find out just what you've been missing. Grover is more than a prolific writer, he is a very good one and the interest that surrounded the publication of his 700th book would lead me to believe that he will, one day, be very collectable.

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## **A BRIEF GUIDE TO CLIFF HOUSE-AND-GREYFRIARS!-- SLANG-SPEAK** by MARGERY WOODS

Life at Cliff House held many qualities. Fun, sport, leisure activities, drama, mystery---even a modicum of education!--- and long spells of highly emotional stress as supercharged as in any adult's novel of passion and intrigue. Life rarely became peaceful for more than a few words on the page and one anti-quality was totally lacking, that of boredom as our favourite characters fought their fierce battles of partisanship within those cloistered old walls of erudition.

But situations fraught with conflict need suitably expressive dialogue to convey them with conviction to the reader, in language with which he or she can identify. This seems to present a certain amount of difficulty to some authors today, particularly to the script writers of violence and "real life." In fact, at times their vocabulary of descriptive language and its construction seems sadly limited, to the extent of causing the more discerning reader and viewer to wonder where these writers studied their English, and perhaps to reflect that Frank Richards and Co had forgotten more than some of today's writers ever knew.

Our storypaper authors had to work for their pennies within a rigid framework of taboos laid down by the policy makers at A.P. All drama, anguish and hatred had to be expressed without one hint of a word that could not be uttered over afternoon tea to the most innocent of maiden aunts. Bad language was obviously very high on the list of taboos issued to aspiring storypaper writers, and blasphemy not even to be thought of, let alone indulged in by even the most foully villainous of characters.



As we all realise, whenever we give vent to derogatory exclamations that we are in effect swearing but managing to express our disgust at life or people without resorting to the handful of very overworked oaths usually omitted from, or classed as obscene or vulgar in, dictionaries.

And so the colourful slangy exclamations of the chums solved the problem of what could they say when things went wrong.

"My hat!"

"Oh my giddy aunt!"

"Oh my sainted aunt!"

"Oh heck!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Golly!"

"Oh gosh!"

"Oh gad!"

"Rabbits!"

"Oh stuff!"

"Jumping Jehosaphat!"

And rats, and dash it, and all the wonderful repertoire of Frank Richards---the yaroops and yarooos, the crikeys and jimineys, and the glorious alliterative insults: the blithering, benighted bloated bandersnatches; the pie-eyed, pernicious porpoises; the fat, frabjous, footling fools...

It is doubtful if Bunter's villainy could ever invoke such colourful, imaginative language in playgrounds today. The limits of imagination would be bounded by four letters...

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## CHARLES HAMILTON'S USE OF CERTAIN WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS (as understood by C.V. Cole).

*Sporty*: Person who probably drinks, gambles and smokes.

*Wire*: Telegram.

*"Rod in pickle"*: Kept in reserve.

*Spooney*: "Soft" person; possibly weak; this is a matter of perception, though.

*Banknotes*: From 1928. Issued by The Bank of England.

*Currency notes*: Issued by The Treasury during and after World War One (1914-1918)

*"New Rich"*: People normally rich through business rather than through an Aristocrat's inheritance.

*High Jinx*: Messing around (Possibly very active joking).

*Ingress*: Gain entry.

*Coign of vantage*: Clear view - from a special point.

*"Sporting the oak"*: Keeping the door shut.

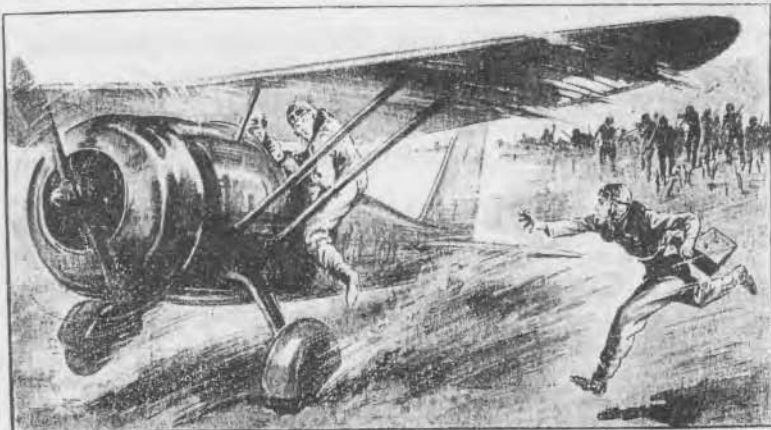
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## FRONT LINE CAMERA - A LITTLE E.S.B. MYSTERY SOLVED. by NORMAN WRIGHT.

Amongst a batch of recently acquired "Thrillers" I found number 588, "Front Line Camera Man," by Berkeley Gray, pseudonym of the indefatigable Edwy Searles Brooks. I knew of the story from Bob Blythe's invaluable reference work, "The Nelson Lee Library a complete guide and bibliography of the writings of Edwy Searles Brooks" (my copy of which is so well thumbed, through constant use, that it is in danger of falling into fragments), and had always assumed that, like the other 'Berkeley Gray' stories Brooks contributed to the paper, it was a tale of Norman Conquest. A quick perusal of the cover and opening paragraph proved that in jumping to this conclusion I had been in error and I flipped open Bob's bibliography to the relevant pages to have another check. Under the section devoted to "The Thriller" the story is not marked as having been used in a Norman Conquest novel; but in the page listing the Berkeley Gray novels published by Collins "Thriller" number 588 is clearly down as having been used as part of "Thank you Mr. Conquest" (a novel not in my collection), published in 1941. Obviously the matter needed further investigation and I settled down to read "Front Line Camera Man" from cover to cover.

The story got off to a rip-roaring start with the heroes caught up in a dog-fight between Hurricanes and Messerschmitts. The events appear even more hair-raising when it is revealed that their close proximity to the hail of lead is in order to take newsreel footage for a news-hungry world, and the 'front line camera men' are undertaking their hazardous mission in an unarmed training aircraft 'borrowed' from a French squadron. No, the dare-devil adventurers are not Norman Conquest and Joy Everard, but a pair of young American newsreel men named Bill Martin and Ambrose Mimms.

As in so much of Brooks' vast output the emphasis is firmly on action with little time wasted on characterisation. The adventure rattles along from one hazardous situation to another with little time for the reader to become bored. The story is built around two incidents concerning Bill and Ambrose and their unscrupulous arch-rivals Tiger O'Donnell and 'Jeepers' Smith, seasoned newsreel men who resent the youngsters working along the same sector of the War zone, and who use any trick, however mean or below the belt, to secure the best war footage for their company.



Tiger O'Donnell's ancient aeroplane skidded wildly as the American news-reel man swung it round upon the ground. Bill and Ambrose raced for it with German bullets singing round their heads!

At the end of the 'dog-fight' filming sequence Bill and Ambrose are shot down over the German side of the lines and, expecting the Germans to shoot first and ask questions later, fear for their lives. In a seemingly un-characteristic action Tiger and 'Jeepers' rescue the pair in the beaten up old Cyclone. It is only after they have returned to their base that Bill finds their precious negative is missing and realises the motive behind Tiger's rescue.

The second half of the story relates how the pair set out to get an even bigger news story by infiltrating behind the German lines. They discover a fleet of cunningly concealed giant tanks, and film them through a hole in the thatched roof of a ruined cottage. But they find they have bitten off more than they can chew when the Germans discover their activities and turn more than a little nasty. In a desperate bid for freedom the two cinematographers set fire to the cottage in which they are hiding and escape in one of the giant tanks. After one or two close calls, including rescuing Tiger and 'Jeepers', they return home with a newsreel and a captured enemy 'super' tank.

As I read the second part of the story I had a vague feeling that I had read it all before, and not in the pages of the "Thriller". It must have been in one of Brooks' hardbacked books and the wartime setting limited the field. It was not long before I pulled "Six Feet of Dynamite" from one of my shelves. I had not read the book for many years so it was a question of flicking through the chapters looking for a clue. I had reached the halfway point when there it was: the hidden camera, the giant tanks, the cottage with the hole in its thatch etc. Retaining great chunks of the text intact Brooks had neatly re-written it as chapters eleven, twelve and thirteen of the book, substituting Norman Conquest and 'Spots' Page for Bill Martin and Ambrose Mimms.

Returning to Bob's bibliography I found I had pencilled in a note next to "Six Feet of Dynamite" suggesting that at least part of the story was probably re-written from "One Man Blitzkrieg", the story by Berkeley Gray advertised in the last issue of the "Thriller" but which was never published. I seem to remember that I made a note of it after reading one of Bob's articles that appeared in C.D. many years ago. Bob was probably correct in his surmise that part of the 1942 novel was re-written from the 'missing' "Thriller", but as Brooks was not a writer to waste any of his magazine stories I was not surprised to find "Front Line Camera Man" used in "Six Feet of Dynamite". I have no annotated my copy of the bibliography with the facts and suggest that other Norman Conquest enthusiasts might like to do the same.

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**MEMORIES OF THE EAGLE** by **LAWRENCE PRICE**

My most fond memories of the world of comics relate to "Eagle", which I read from the mid to late fifties and until the early sixties. Dandy, Beano, Beezer, Topper and Knockout were also read, but none of these compared with the beautifully produced Eagle, with its distinctive bright red panel and proud flying eagle, and, of course, Dan Dare. I tried Lion, Tiger and Rover too, but I did not like these comics at all, which I suppose were the last of the old school of traditional boys comics.

Dan Dare was always the high spot and each week one waited, with eager anticipation, to see if the Pilot of the Future could escape the clutches of his arch-enemy, the Mekon, or of his villainous henchmen, the renegade Treens. His batman, the Yorkshireman, Digby, was the ideal jovial and

somewhat inept partner, although quite capable, at times, of extricating Dan Dare from some potentially fatal situation. Sir Hubert Guest was the equally ideal father figure of authority. The spaceship I remember the best was the marvellous red Zylbat, given to Dare by the grateful inhabitants of the planet Zyl, and which was quite unlike the usual rocket-like spaceships of the fifties. I remember being very upset when it was blown up and Dan Dare returned to pilot more conventional spaceships again.

The memory and nostalgia do, however, play funny tricks and when I recently saw the sixties Eagles which featured the Zylbat, the drawings were not quite as good as I had remembered them. This was almost certainly because the great Dan Dare artist, Frank Hampson, had finished with the strip by then, and the draughtsmanship was not so good.

The Dan Dare strip was taken over by Frank Bellamy in 1960, who controversially changed Hampson's Space Fleet designs, upsetting many Dan Dare aficionados. Don Harley and Bruce Cornwell took over for 1960/61, and Keith Watson from 1962, who successfully returned the strip to Hampson's original form.

The Hampson-created Space Fleet HQ, a believable inhabited Venus and numerous other exotic alien locations, deep space itself and the wonderful craft that voyaged in it - all these were the result of his gifted pen and imagination. His working methods were incredible - complete sets were made up, as were painstakingly constructed scale models of the spacecraft; scenes and actions were acted out by his suitably sci-fi costumed team of artists and helpers, including members of his own family. Sir Hubert was based on his father, Robert 'Pop' Hampson; his son, Peter was the model for the boy, Flamer Spry, and there was unquestionably something of himself in Dan Dare. Two members of Hampson's team played roles - Don Harley was Digby and the attractive Greta Tomlinson was Professor Jocelyn Peabody. Anyone might find himself masked and kitted up as a Treen, Phant or Kruel.

Hampson's last great work for Eagle was The Road of Courage, his illustrated Life of Christ, which ran from 1960 until Spring 1961. There were one or two flights of fancy, such as the boy Jesus, meeting the future murderer, Barabbas, in the place of whom Christ would eventually die on the Cross, and A Centurion who looked remarkably like Dan Dare. It was, nevertheless, most compelling, and meticulously researched, including a visit to the Holy Land, taking photographs, and visiting numerous libraries and museums. Frank Hampson was a perfectionist, and he and his studio were not cost effective, even in the halcyon days of the fifties. This in part, led him to sever connection with Eagle in 1961.

Other highlights were Luck of the Legion, being the adventures of Sergeant Luck of the French Foreign Legion, with his compatriots, Corporals Trenet and Bimberg, the latter an aimable, overweight buffoon - almost a Bunter character! Together these 'infidels' gave the local Arabs or natives a pretty hard time. Riders of the Range featured cowboy, Jeff Arnold, in white

Dan Dare, Sergeant Luck and Jeff Arnold all had one thing in common. They were all heroes of the old school, upright, highly moral and true.

Another favourite, in complete contrast, was the humorous strip, Harris Tweed.

The centre spreads, shared with Luck of the Legion, of detailed cutaway drawings of the very latest inventions and innovations were also enjoyed - the all-new hovercraft, the revolutionary Mini, jet airliner, modern ship, satellite and so on. When we consider the cost of living of today, and inflation, this quality comic remained a constant 4½d from the mid fifties until 1960, rising then to only 5d. It had begun life in April 1950 costing 3d.



Eagle finally died in 1969, although by this time it was only a shadow of its former self.

Magnet and Gem readers may still deeply regret the passing of their favourite boys papers, but at least those papers did not have to suffer the indignity that befell the Eagle. The Eagle name was revived in 1982 and in my opinion, a more odious publication bearing that once proud name could not be imagined. The new comic was the antithesis of everything good that the original Eagle had stood for, incorporating many of the worst aspects of the selfish eighties. In turn compassionless, violent and banal, with 'justice' seemingly only ever handed out in a brutal vigilante style, this travesty of the great original is best unlamented and forgotten. Even the 'new' Dan Dare was the insipid grandson of the great original Dare.

Not even this sad rebirth, however, can diminish the impact of and the respect due to the Eagle in its great years of the fifties and the early sixties, or the great debt that is due to Frank Hampson during that period.

**(Editor's Note:** I wonder what readers think of the very recent new Eagle, which seems to reflect some of the glories of the original.)

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**WANTED:** ENID BLYTON, WE. JOHNS, CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers and ALL ephemera related to these authors. ANY original artwork related to Bunter, Blyton, Biggles, Eagle or other British comics and boys papers. ALL Boys Friend Libraries by W.E. Johns and Rochester. Many "Thriller" issues and first editions in wrappers by Charteris required. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel. 0923 232383.

## BOOK REVIEWS

by MARY CADOGAN

*Girl's Own Guide* by E. Honor Ward (Published by A & B Whitworth, 17 Hill Street, Colne, Lancs, and available from them by mail at £11.00, which includes postage.)

This is a wonderfully useful index of all the fiction which appeared in the GIRL'S OWN PAPER from 1880 to 1941, covering its several heydays though not the years of its eventual decline. My only criticism of it is that it doesn't take in the whole of the Second World War period, and the long run in the magazine of Worrals stories by W.E. Johns. Many collections would have appreciated this information in detail, but only the first of the serials featuring the intrepid teenage aviatrix is included.



The index is arranged in two parts - the first in order of Authors by Surname and the second a list of Story Titles in alphabetical order. It is extremely satisfying to be able to find out exactly when, say, Frances Cowen, Baroness Orczy, L.M. Montgomery or Dorothy Carter wrote stories for this long-lasting and popular magazine. A wide range of pictures from the G.O.P. enhances the attractions of this well researched publication.

*A World of Girls* by Rosemary Auchmuty (Published by The Women's Press at £8.99.)

This interesting paperback is a serious analysis of the Abbey books by Elsie Oxenham, the Chalet School stories by Elinor Brent-Dyer, the Dimsie, Nancy and Spingdate books of Dorita Fairlie Bruce, and the boarding school tales of Enid Blyton. The author's approach is sympathetic and affectionate; she clearly demonstrates that the girls' school story, far from being defunct, provides strong role models and positive values for young readers. There are times when I would have appreciated a touch more humour in her narrative, and some pictures to illustrate it (great opportunities are lost here). However, A WORLD OF GIRLS has a nostalgically attractive cover which does full justice to its ever-appealing subject.

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**WANTED:** Greyfriars Book Club volume No. 1 The Worst Boy at Greyfriars' and volume No. 4 'Harry Wharton & Co. in India'. Must be in fine to very good condition. State your price please. **FOR SALE:** Greyfriars Press 'Magnet' volumes Nos. 10,11,21,24,25,52, - and Greyfriars Book Club No. 13. Write for details. W.L. Bawden, 14 Highland Park, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 2EX.

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**Captain W.E. Johns  
1893-1968  
Centenary Celebrations**

Plans are well advanced for some exciting events to mark the Centenary of Captain W.E. Johns next year, and details will be given in future issues of the CD. Meanwhile, however, Biggles and Worrals fans might like to note in their diaries that there will be celebrations in Hertford, Johns' birthplace, on the anniversary of his birthday, Friday, 5th February, 1993, when an exhibition featuring his work opens there.

On the following day, Saturday, 6th February, there will be a Centenary Luncheon at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, and the Centenary Committee hopes that as many of you as possible would like to attend!

Details of Centenary events can be obtained from Jennifer Schofield, Chairman, the Captain W.E. Johns Centenary Committee (address as in the boxed advertisement).

**THE CAPTAIN W.E. JOHNS CENTENARY LUNCHEON**

Saturday, 6th February, 1993

at

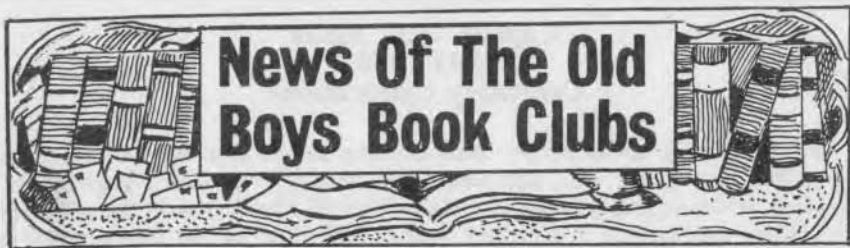
**THE RAF CLUB, PICCADILLY**  
12.30 for 1.00 p.m.

Distinguished Guest Speakers

Tickets £25 each, to include wine and a souvenir menu

**SPACE IS LIMITED - BOOK NOW TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT**

Please send your application for the number of tickets you require to Mrs. J. Schofield, 33 Scotts Lane, Shortlands, Bromley, Kent, BR2 0LT. Cheques should be made payable to the Captain W.E. Johns Centenary Committee. Please give the names of any friends coming with whom you would like to sit.



## News Of The Old Boys Book Clubs

### NORTHERN O.B.B.C. REPORT

At our September meeting a warm welcome was given to the twelve members present. There were a number of apologies for absence.

Arrangements were made for our lunch to be held in Wakefield on 10th October with honoured guests Mary Cadogan and Anthony Buckeridge with Willis Hall in attendance. Comment was made on recent press reports of the BBC's turning down a Bunter T.V. series claiming he would be seen as "stoutist and racist". Members wondered if the B.B.C. would now look at their other transmissions to see which could offend and embarrass. In this light, Keith Atkinson reported that it was intended to publish more of Enid Blyton's "Famous Five" stories, with updated language and social comments.

Margaret Atkinson reported her find - a café in Filey on the east coast called "Bunter's Last Fling"! David Bradley reported that "Victor" would soon cease publication. A discussion was then held on the writer Percy F. Westerman, whose works are becoming more collectable. It is often the case that a writer appears to have little following and then suddenly becomes very popular.

Our main item was "With Great Pleasure". Joan Colman brought along a selection of her favourite reading material, including works by the local Edith Simpson, John Dickson Carr, Arthur Marshall (reminiscing on the contents of a girl's Christmas stocking in the 1950s) and P.G. Wodehouse (a former President of the Northern Club). Geoffrey Good read hilarious pieces from Jerome K. Jerome's "Three Men in a Boat" and Uncle Podger's attempt to hang a picture, resulting in the virtual demolishing of the wall!

JOHN BULL JUNIOR

### CAMBRIDGE CLUB

For our first meeting in the 1992/93 season the September gathering was held at the Duston, Northampton home of Howard Corn.

After a short business meeting we listened to a talk from Howard about how the media - since the Fifties - had treated some distant but well - publicised murder cases. He used audio-and videotape examples to demonstrate exactly how accurately (or otherwise) these murder cases had been represented: fictional and factual characters and locations, and the detective investigation that followed were reported.

Later Keith Hodkinson gave an audiotape presentation which was a musical quiz that he had devised featuring music from the cinema. Sad for me to relate, our visitor,



John Wortan (the co-editor of Eagle Times), beat the Club members hollow with correct answers (Beginners Luck!!).

ADRIAN PERKINS

### LONDON OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

Thirteen members attended the meeting at Roy and Gwen Parsons' home near Salisbury on Sunday, 13th September. Members discussed the current crop of newspaper articles about Bunter not returning to the television screen.

Roy held a musical quiz, too hard! The winner scored 5 out of 15. This was followed by a delicious feast from Gwen. This was followed by Norman's quiz on a wide range of old boys' books, and a reading from Alan Pratt from *According to Jennings*.

The next meeting will be on Sunday, 10th October at Ealing Liberal Centre; bring your own tea. This will be our last meeting here, it's being sold.

SUSANNE HARPER

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LANCE SALWAY (Sherborne): Many thanks for another excellent C.D. I don't suppose you'd consider bringing it out fortnightly....?!

As regards P. Simonsen's request for information about Nancy Breary, I enclose a copy of the back jacket flap blurb on my copy of JUNIOR CAPTAIN. I'm a Breary fan too - her books are variable in quality but when she's on top form, GIVE A FORM A BAD NAME and THE IMPOSSIBLE PREFECT, for instance, she writes with a wit and flair that is unique among girls' school story writers. I'd like to know more about her, too, so I hope you get a good response to your plea for information.

*From dust-jacket blurb of JUNIOR CAPTAIN (1950s reprint):*

'Nancy Breary is widely known as the author of school stories. Her characters are lively and amusing and, she says, 'develop as I write.' She started writing when she was seven and had her first book published during the war. She attributes her love of literature to the English mistress at her school near Dorking.

Miss Breary was born in Brixham, Devon, and has been a keen sailor all her life. She has lived in Canada, in Rye in Sussex, and has recently moved to a house near Bath.'

**RAY HOPKINS (Oadby):** I searched through all the sources for anything about Nancy Breary but drew a blank except for the listing in the British Library Catalogue which is as Bill Lofts says in the September C.D. First story pub. in 1943, final one in 1961 though, out of all the 26 titles listed, there were only six reprints and none after 1960, which evidently jimmied the author up to provide the final one in 1961. I was intrigued by Bill's mention of E.L. McKeag in connection with NB stories it would have been kinder for us later researchers for him to have used his Eileen McKeay nom-de-plume with which we are all familiar. I have a hardback by him which is not listed in the BL Cat. So if Bill comes up with more McKeag information it would be nice to be able to read it.

**LEN HAWKEY (Leigh-on-Sea):** I thought the September C.D. was a really fine one. I should especially like to thank John Bridgewater (& Jack Adrian) for the "Capstan" items. John's painstaking research - as with his unravelling, a year or so back, of the Marcus Max/Sexton Blake saga - is always rewarding, and although the name of Rex Hardinge was, of course, familiar, I knew nothing of his "Capstan" connection. Although, on balance, John discounts the idea that Hardinge might have been "inspired" by Rex Stout when creating Hilary Brayne for "Detective Weekly", he could well have been right in the first place. Well before it appeared in book form, the initial Nero Wolfe story was serialised in *The Saturday Evening Post* during 1934, at least a year before Brayne's debut. The *S.E.P.* was readily available from any bookstall over here at that time: indeed, I believe a "European" edition was published concurrently with the U.S.A. issue. Even so, it would still have made Hardinge "quick off the mark". Several Nero Wolfe stories were filmed in Hollywood, in the late '30s, Edward Arnold played him first, and then Walter Connelly - both "well-rounded" actors.

Re. the "Chums in Council" heading - my old friend Eric Fayne is incorrect in attributing this to Wakefield, in his lovely nostalgic article on the "Dreadnought". It is in fact the work of Philip Hayward, one of the neglected stalwarts of the old Amalgamated Press. He frequently "stood in" for the regulars of St. Jim's, Greyfriars, Rookwood (especially), Cedar Creek and the "Bombay Castle" yarns, although his best work was probably in the children's comics and annuals, where he excelled in picture strips of the "Rob the Rover" sort.

**MARION WATERS (Wellingborough):** I am gathering material for a factual book entitled 'The Silent Three Companion' which lists all the published material on the adventures of Betty, Joan and Peggy, including the various reprints and reissues of their exploits. The book will include information on the authors and artists who prepared the stories. Although Miss Evelyn Flinders is the best known artist to depict the intrepid trio, many other artists also drew the girls including Valerie Gaskell, Peter Kay and Bob Bunkin.

Valerie Gaskell is best remembered as the artist for the long running serial 'The Cruising Merrymakers' in 'Girls Crystal', but she also did some work for 'School Friend' and its annuals during the 1950s. I believe that she drew the 'Silent Three' stories for the annual for 1956, 1957, 1958 and 1960. I cannot be absolutely certain of this, as a number of artists attempted to copy the style used by Miss Flinders when depicting the Silent Three, and the results are often unlike their usual style.

I understand that Miss Gaskell later married, some of her later work is signed 'V.D.M.' Does anyone know the lady's married name, or indeed have any other information about this long standing illustrator of AP girls' stories?

**BRIAN DOYLE (Putney):** Nice to see Dennis Bird's piece on Arthur Ransome. In 1973 I worked as Publicity Director on the EMI feature film version of *SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS*, which was shot entirely in the Lake District on the authentic locations of the books. There is a small plaque on a tree in the middle of Peel Island (the 'Wildcat Island' of the books) on Coniston Water, commemorating Ransome. Whilst working in the area for the nine weeks location schedule I briefly met Ransome's widow, Evgenia (*not* Eugenia), then a somewhat daunting old lady who seemed fiercely protective of her late-husband's books (she was very critical of a TV serial based on *SWALLOWS*, produced in the early-1960s and did not want our film to go down the same path). It didn't, and was a delightful film, still often shown on TV. Virginia McKenna played Mother and Ronald Fraser was a memorable if eccentric Uncle Jim. I remember that she mentioned the fact, in passing, that the early *SWALLOWS* books were great favourites of the then Princess Elizabeth (now H.M. the Queen) and Princess Margaret, who were both keen Sea Scouts at the time.

**ERNEST HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea):** I was naturally interested in the letters of Les Rowley and Brian Doyle, on Edgar Wallace. The Omnibus referred to is very good value indeed - as it happens I have six of the nine titles, otherwise I would quickly be after it.

I think Brian may have misunderstood a part of my article, perhaps because of lack of clarity on my part. When I mentioned many Wodehouses and no Wallaces on book shelves, I was referring to the shops selling current publications. When I inferred that there were not many of 'them' about, I was not referring to books, but to second-hand book SHOPS.

Brian points out that there are many copies of Wallace books around in such places. Right! Unfortunately, they are mostly of the familiar titles (Sanders, Twister, Calendar, Frightened Lady, etc.) My local second-hand shop has many Wallaces, but all of the well-known titles, and often more than one copy. In fact, over the months, these volumes just stay unpurchased. The monthly Magazine mentioned by Brian has, in fact, provided me with several Wallace sources, where the rarer titles crop up from time to time.

The Edgar Wallace Society is still in existence, under the able handling of Penelope Wallace, Edgar's daughter. In 1990, this lady asked, through the press, for letters, documents, information regarding her father - I gathered she was engaged in producing a Biography. I hope this shortly comes to fruition; apart from a short, 'factionalised' biog. by Wallace himself, the only others of note are the Bibliography of Wallace from our own Bill Lofts and Derek Adley and a 1930's detailed life of Wallace by Margaret Lane (at one time, I believe, Edgar's daughter-in-law).

Thank goodness for Collectors' Digest. Here we are enabled to 'voice' viewpoints, information, criticism, etc. on such matters as the above.

**DENNIS BIRD (Shoreham):** In my note in the September "C.D." about the cover pictures for the new Biggles paperback editions, I mentioned a "notable error" in the depiction of a Sopwith Camel with a gun on the upper wing. Mr. Martin Waters - who like me has spent years in the RAF - writes to tell me that some Camels *were* fitted with

a Lewis gun on the top mainplane. And he is quite right! I find that J.M. Bruce in his definitive book "British Aeroplanes 1914-18" says that "The Home Defence version of the F.1 Camel had two Lewis machine-guns above the centre-section." Also the Royal Navy had some Camels with a single Lewis on the top plane. You learn something new every day!

**Editor's Note:** Bob Whiter, from California, has also written to point out this fact. He says: "A trip to the Imperial War Museum, where Lieutenant S.D. Culley's Camel is on view, will prove this. Culley shot down Zeppelin L53 in August 1918 during daytime. It was also found when night flying against Gotha Bombers, that the Vickers mounted over the engine gave "muzzle glare" that tended to blind the pilot. Hence the top wing mounted Lewis. Although not on the top wing - in "The bomber" (*The Camels are Coming*) Biggles tells of mounting a Lewis gun to fire upwards through his centre section.

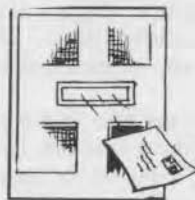
**NAVEED HAQUE (Canada):** It was good to see the other 'Famous Five' on the cover of the September C.D. As a kid, I used to imagine that the term 'famous five' had been copied by Frank Richards from those other group of characters evolved by Enid Blyton. I know better now!

**C.H. CHURCHHILL (Exmouth):** In Eric Fayne's excellent article in the September C.D. he mentions the warship name of Dreadnought and says the name has seemed to have disappeared from the Navy. This is so. However, I can add a little information on the subject. In 1906 the Admiralty became rather alarmed by the massive build up of the German navy under the Kaiser who was a nephew of our King, Edward VII. In answer to this threat the First Lord of the Admiralty, Admiral Sir John Fisher, instigated the plan of building a super warship to counter the threat. It was to be the most powerful warship afloat, with 10 12" guns of which 8 could fire on either side at the same time. Quite revolutionary at that time.

The ship was launched on February, 10th, 1906 and the total cost was to be three million pounds. (One wonders what it would cost today). It was to be named H.M.S. Dreadnought. As a lad I can remember about this but, as Eric says, the name seems to have been forgotten. I do not know whether any other similar ships were built or only this one.

The only naval battle of note in that war was the Battle of Jutland which proved indecisive. Actually we lost more ships than the Germans but they fled back to port and never came out again till the end of the war. They relied on submarines for sea fighting.

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# The Pillow Fight!

(With apologies to "Casabianca.")

By DICK PENFOLD

THE boy stood boldly by the bed,  
Whence all but he had bunked;  
And pillows smote him on the head,  
But none could say he funked.

Defiant and upright he stood  
As born to rule the dorm.  
A junior of heroic blood,  
A proud, though child-like form.

The pillows buzzed—he would not go  
Without his skipper's word;  
That skipper, who had gone below,  
His voice no longer heard.

He call'd aloud: "Say, Wharton, say,  
If yet my task is done?"  
But Wharton had gone forth to slay  
The Fifth, and have some fun.

"Speak, Wharton!" once again he cried,  
"If I my task may close."  
But pillows fast and fierce replied  
And caught him on the nose!

Upon his brow he felt them smite  
And on his waving hair;  
"My hat!" he murmured. "What a night!  
It makes a chap despair!"

He shouted yet once more aloud,  
"Oh, skipper! Must I stay?"  
And then towards his bed the crowd  
With one accord made way.

They placed him in a blanket, then,  
And sent him hurtling high;  
He wondered what would happen when  
He hit the giddy sky!

Then came a burst of thunder-sound,  
The reinforcements come!  
And as they swiftly buzzed around  
The enemy stood dumb!

With pillows, bolsters, even boots  
They smite the foe full sore;  
Until at length the latter scoots,  
And all is peace once more!



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