

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS

DIGEST

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FLIPS PAGES



(INCORPORATING NORMAN SHAW)
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Hi People.

Hope that this finds you as it leaves me - in the pink! Many of you have written to Norman Shaw wishing him well on his retirement, and he wants to express his thanks for all the nice letters and cards although, unfortunately, he is unable to do so individually. Please, therefore, consider yourselves duly thanked.

SOME NICE ITEMS TO HAND AND NOW OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME:

1. NELSON LEE MONSTER LIBRARY, numbers 1 - 19 (complete set), generally very good condition but some magi-tape repair to spines - £190.
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As always, callers are very welcome (there is really too much stock to do it justice in a single page) but please make an appointment!

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

By the time you receive this number of the C.D. the Season of Good Will should be almost upon us. As always, I send warmest greetings to all readers, and my thanks for your loyal and untiring support of our much loved and long lived magazine. I think with pleasure of subscribers and contributors everywhere, and thank you for all your cards and kind wishes. May you have a truly Merry Christmas and a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

At this time, of course, we also remember absent friends - Herbert Leckenby, the founder of the C.D., Bob Blythe and Len Packman, who started the first Old Boys Book Club - and many others who down the years have done so much for the hobby but are sadly now no longer with us. Let us recall them in our Christmas toasts, and also the authors, artists and editors who built the old papers which gave so many of us not only delight and entertainment but standards and values.

GREAT WORKS

We are indeed fortunate in the legacy of wonderful stories which has come to us through the MAGNET, GEM, NELSON LEE and the Sexton Blake papers. These tales have been charted in various books and published lists which are invaluable to collectors and researchers.

Now - for the first time - we are able to offer similarly detailed lists of stories from the girls' papers. Elsewhere in this edition of the C.D. you will find an announcement of lists prepared by various enthusiasts which encompass every single Cliff House and Morcove story, every Noel Raymond and Valerie Drew adventure, and the titles, dates and authors of all the monthly SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARIES.

I am sure that many of us will be deeply grateful to Bill Lofts, Derek Adley, Ray Hopkins, Arthur Southway and Dennis Bird who have laboured long and hard in the preparation of these lists. If you wish to receive copies, please order now, while these are available. As you will see from the prices quoted, the production of the lists is not a profit-making enterprise but an attempt inexpensively to provide valuable and much sought information.

THE C.D. ANNUAL

Orders have, as always, flowed steadily in. There is, however, still time to order a copy of this bumper and beautiful volume if you have not already done so. To remind you - the price, including postage and packing, is £8.90 in the U.K. and £10 overseas. I have already 'trailed' several of the Annual's contents, and there is a great deal more. I think I can truly say that there is something for everyone, whatever his or her particular collecting interests might be.

Many readers write and say that their Christmas begins when they receive the C.D. Annual. Certainly during the many years when I read the issues so ably edited by Eric Fayne I had the same feeling and it gives me great satisfaction to retain this tradition.

May Christmas joys surround you all!

MARY CADOGAN

WANTED: ENID BLYTON, W.E. 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.

Nelson Lee Column

GOOD CHEER AT CHRISTMAS

by C.H. Churchill

The old saying that "Christmas comes but once a year and when it comes it brings good cheer" very aptly describes the stories offered to us in the Nelson Lee Library. As any regular reader would agree, Edwy Searles Brooks always excelled at Christmastime in providing us with a splendid Christmas story or a short series of seasonable tales.

In the C.D. in December 1991 I mentioned that my favourite Christmas story was that in N.L.L. No. 130 "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle". I also favoured, I said, "The Schoolboy Santa Claus" in No. 446 in 1923. I would now like to point out that No. 394 in Dec. 1922 "The Ghost of Somerton Abbey" was also a first class Christmas story. The Duke of Somerton had his fifteenth birthday then, and there was a "locked room" episode like that supposed one at Glamis Castle in real life. This room was only supposed to be entered by the heir to the title on that birthday. It occurs to me that if this tale was true and the room not entered for years, when it was entered the cobwebs must have been terrific!! However, I seem to remember reading somewhere that the Glamis Castle thing was not really true. Anyway, here at Somerton Abbey we never learnt what the young duke saw in the room. We had other things. Fatty Little being hungry one night wandered downstairs in search of "grub" and found some but then could not find the way back to the bedroom, and got lost. He wandered around and "found" the ghost. Nipper and Co. managed to rescue him and after a ghost hunt it was found that the apparition was only a former employee escaping from prison.

Another good yarn was "The Christmas Plot" in No. 290 in December 1920. This was in the middle of the Solomom Levi series. Here we had a festive Christmas story with ice-skating and partying, etc. Solly and his father were guests here, and Mr. Levi was kidnapped by Webb and Ryan in the middle of the skating. These two were trying to stop the Levi family from proceeding with plans to build a cinema

No. 321.-THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY.

The GHOST of BANNINGTON GRANGE!

BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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Told by NIPPER of the St. Frank's Remove.

in Bannington. Webb owned the existing cinema there, a poor place showing poor films. With the aid of Nelson Lee and the boys the plot was frustrated and came to nought. It all made another jolly good Christmas read.

There were many more good Christmassy stories to come in the good old N.L.L. before it came to its untimely end (which I always say was due to bad editorial policy).

My very best wishes to all who may have waded through all this: a Happy Xmas, and prosperity for 1993.



WALDO AT CHRISTMAS!

by D.J. O'Leary

Sexton Blake has been rather a peripheral figure in my interest in our hobby until lately. I had read, as a boy, some of the SBL stories with enjoyment and even one or two SEXTON BLAKE ANNUALS. Later I acquired the two Howard Baker volumes, CRIME AT CHRISTMAS and THE PLAGUE OF THE ONION-MEN. Still, UNION JACK and Waldo the Wonderman did not register strongly among my interests until, earlier this year, I happened to come across a dusty pile of UNION JACKS in a second-hand bookshop in Nottingham.

What really caught my eye was the top issue. The striking cover by Eric Parker showed an incandescent figure in medieval armour in front of a snow-covered mansion. The title, "The Flaming Spectre of Cloome, a Xmas Story of Waldo the Wonder-Man", clinched it for me. What better than a traditional Christmas ghost story with Sexton Blake to guarantee detective action?

As the story opens, Blake and Tinker are on their way to Cloome Chase with Lord Cloome's last Christmas there in his ancient ancestral home. Bankruptcy looms over him, and already many parts of the house are in ruins. But his lordship is determined to keep up the centuries-old tradition of a grand Christmas house-party, even if it is to be the last!

When nearly at their destination, Blake has to brake the Grey Panther sharply to avoid an unconscious form in the middle of the road. This proves to be a man-servant from the Chase who, on being revived, talks in horror of "the Flaming Spectre" which he has seen and even touched. Blake is puzzled over the man's state: "it seemed strange that such a huge, muscular man should collapse so utterly."

However, they take the servant to the Chase where, as they enter the old house, they encounter a cheery sight. "Although there was no electric light installed, the hall was brilliant with innumerable candles, and the flickering blaze of a huge log-fire cast a warm, cheery glow over the scene. The deep-mullioned windows and the oak-panelled walls, the stately furniture, massive and age-old, the holly and other decorations - all this

made up a picture which caused a thrill of pleasure to pulse through the newcomers. It was to be a really old-fashioned Christmas!" Lord Cloome tells them the legend of the Flaming Spectre, the ghost of a murdered crusader who had sworn to haunt Cloome Chase.

Yuletide over Xmas best with the U.J.



The elegance of the assembled guests seems inappropriate in the surrounding marks of ruin and decay. The sparkling jewellery and fashionable gowns of the ladies witnessed his lordship's desire to make his last Christmas at Cloome worthy of past tradition. Among them the two suitors for the daughter of the house form a noticeable contrast. The young Lord Reginald Hammerton (well-bred but poor) and Colonel Marchmont (wealthy but middle-aged and portly) are rivals for Lady Diana's hand but, despite her obvious preference for the handsome Lord Reginald, it seems certain that she will obey her father's wishes and save Cloome Chase by marriage to the rich colonel.

Excitement interrupts the Christmas Eve dance when the colonel claims to have seen the Flaming Spectre from the terrace. The guests are sceptical, but Blake surprises Tinker by asking about the footman Powell who has already attracted the detective's interest in some way that his assistant does not understand.

But at that moment the spectre appears outside the hall, covered in flames and

sparks. "If this is trickery," murmurs Blake, "it is the most remarkable piece of work I have ever seen." He and Tinker race after the figure but, to Tinker's amazement, the Spectre out-runs them and vanishes into empty space! But to Tinker's marvelling remark "There's not a man living who could have done it", Blake dreamily replies; "Except one, young'un - except one!"

Incident now follows on incident, as the Great Detective sees the hand of Waldo in all this and points out that the guests' jewellery alone is worth thousands, a tempting prize for him. Investigation of the ruined North Wing reveals secret passages and hidden panels galore. But when they corner Waldo in a concealed chamber, they find him a real handful! "Waldo commenced to literally spurt fire from every inch of his person! Hissing, sizzling blue sparks jumped out of him, as though he had suddenly become a giant electric dynamo... With a laugh, Waldo reached out a hand and touched Tinker. In a flash Tinker was enveloped in a blue flame - a flame which shivered and literally outlined him in fire. He seemed to freeze stiff and, a cry on his lips, he dropped to the floor like a log." Blake follows him into unconsciousness and they both recover to find themselves confined in a smooth-sided pit.

When they manage to escape, thanks to Blake's strength and agility, the story's plot continues to twist and turn. We learn of the secret sorrow of Lord Cloome's vanished

son, whom his father suspects of having stolen the family's priceless heirlooms. Colonel Marchmont not only reveals his inherent decency by renouncing his proposed marriage with the unwilling Lady Diana, but stumbles across the missing heirloom jewels, not only thus saving the Cloome estate but rescuing the honour of the family and of the scapegrace son. Waldo is unmasked in the unlikely person of the portly colonel and the saviour of Lord Cloome's long-lost son, and the suspicious Powell, the footman, (my own pet suspect!) as a Scotland Yard inspector sent to safeguard the guests' jewels!

"I don't know what to do with you, Waldo", smiled Sexton Blake.

"Crooks have hearts, Blake, the same as other people."

"... But at Cloome Chase, whatever Waldo's nefarious activities, they would never cease to regard him with feelings of warmth and gratitude. For a criminal, Rupert Waldo, was a strange mixture indeed!"

No story is perfect and some might cavil at the "gothic" elements of the narrative; a ruined mansion with hidden treasure and a maze of secret passages; the unhappy noble lord with a disgraced son; a harassed young beauty with a well-born but impoverished suitor.

And what about Waldo's electrical trickery, which is not commented upon when he is unmasked? Even though Blake had claimed that "the Wonderman had a weapon of incalculable power... it was imperative that... this electrical marvel be wrested from him."

Yet what do all these reservations matter? We have here, it seems to me, a wonderful Christmas story. Happiness restored to a grieving father; young love triumphing over adversity; a clever but chivalrous criminal thwarted, and our hero, magnanimous in his success, offering forgiveness and reconciliation.

What could better sum up the spirit of the season!

FOR SALE: Howard Baker Facsimiles all have D.W.s: The Mystery of Wharton Lodge, The Greyfriars Adventurers, The Greyfriars Hikers, Courtfield Cracksman Series; also numbers 2,3,4,6,7,10,36,43,61,67,75,15. H.B. Holiday Annuals 1920, 1925, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981. The World of Frank Richards. Skilton's B. Bunter and the Blue Mauritius - 1st, this has no d.w. Collectors editions G.B.C. numbers 13,17,23,28. All with slip covers. Nos. 18 and 27 no covers.

Offers to:

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By
ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 244 - Magnet No. 996 - "Billy Bunter's Brainstorm"

Most of the really memorable Greyfriars stories were in the form of Magnet series, but very occasionally a classic tale would be written in an individual number, and it would be difficult to find another single Magnet story that has achieved quite as much fame as the issue in 1927 entitled "Billy Bunter's Brainstorm".

Mr. Quelch's nephew Roger had been at Greyfriars in the two preceding weeks, and it was his visit that caused Mr. Quelch to telephone to Chunkley's stores in Courtfield for a consignment of tuck so that he could provide a handsome tea for his nephew and a few Removites as well. Bunter was now seized with the idea of telephoning to Chunkley's in Mr. Quelch's name and ordering a huge supply of mouth-watering items, to be left in the form-master's study during his absence. Bunter planned to remove them before he returned, leaving Quelch to argue about the account with Chunkley's when it was sent in at a later date. Unfortunately Mr. Quelch returned earlier than Bunter expected, and was amazed at the mountain of food-stuffs in his study.

So far the sequence of events was perfectly straightforward, but the story took a bizarre twist when Bunter remembered a newspaper story about an American banker who had run amok, murdering people in his bank; it was held that he had undergone a brainstorm and, after expensive treatment, he would be fit enough to resume his position. Bunter's attempt to imitate the symptoms certainly frightened some of the Removites, but the appearance of Mr. Quelch effected a dramatic cure.

No. 996 was the only Magnet story to achieve the distinction of being twice reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library, but years later it achieved quite another claim to fame altogether. After the war, an attempt was made to revive the school story with a weekly paper called the School Cap. After a few weeks it featured a story about a fat schoolboy who telephoned for tuck in his form-master's name. When Charles Hamilton got to know of this, he wrote a sharp letter to the publishers. The paper folded up soon afterwards. This might have been inevitable anyway, but it may be that the accusation of plagiarism was the finishing touch.

ONCE AGAIN AVAILABLE

The Charles Hamilton Companion Vol. 7

THE CHRISTMAS STORIES: FROM WHARTON LODGE TO LINTON HALL

Share the Christmas revels of the Greyfriars,
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The Famous Five were busy with Christmas decorations when a glowing figure appeared suddenly at the open door of Wharton Lodge. "—I say, you fellows," said Buster hastily, "I've looked it in to say something rather important to Wharton!"

FOR SALE:

- Mrs. G. Bilski, 4 Sheepfold Lane, Amersham, Bucks. Post extra. Payment on receipt.
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- SCHOOLGIRLS PICTURE LIB.** £3.00 each. 18, 293.

Do you remember?

CLIFF HOUSE

VALERIE DREW

MORCOVE

NOEL RAYMOND

"THE YELLOW BOOKS"
(The Schoolgirls' Own Libraries)



Famous names from the girls' papers of pre-war years! Complete lists are now available of all these stories, and of the Schoolgirls' Own Library which ran from 1922 to 1963, as shown below:



CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL AND MORCOVE SCHOOL:
a study by W.O.G. Lofts and Derek Adley, listing all the stories and discussing them (83 pages) **£6.00**

NOEL RAYMOND: The debonair detective who featured in the "Girls' Crystal" from 1935 to 1951, listed by Dennis L. Bird (14 Pages) **£1.20**

VALERIE DREW: The girl detective of the "Schoolgirls' Weekly" and "The Schoolgirl" from 1933 to 1940, listed by Ray Hopkins and typed by D.L. Bird (6 pages) **60p**

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY: Books issued monthly between 1922 and 1963 (First series 1922 to 1940, with yellow and black covers, and second series 1946 to 1963 with coloured covers), listed by Arthur J. Southway and Ray Hopkins and typed by D.L. Bird (26 pages) **£2.00**

If you would like one or more these lists, please write to:



Mr. Dennis L. Bird
37 The Avenue
Shoreham-by-Sea
West Sussex BN43 5GJ



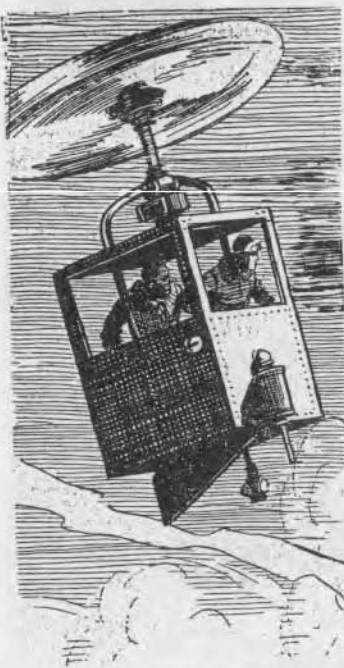
enclosing a cheque for the appropriate amount made out to
D.L. Bird

All prices shown include postage and packing.

SOME D.C. THOMSON ANNUALS (3): Adventureland 1935 (Part 2)

by D.J. O'Leary

As usual, I find two of the stories particularly memorable. First, "The Cloud That Cleared Jim Palmer". Here we have a typical "science fiction" device, so frequent in Thomson publications. Captain Q's helicopter is indeed amazing. The "Hoverer" consisted of a metal platform which was supported by a U-shaped framework below which a propeller revolved parallel with the ground. An electric motor of extraordinary power for its size caused this propeller to spin at thousands of revolutions per minute, and a special storage battery supplied the power without adding much to the weight. By changing the angle of the propeller Captain Q could make his machine hover in mid-air, perfectly still, or race across the skies at 400 miles an hour.



This marvellous machine can also generate a "black-out" cloud which conceals Captain Q from sight while he frees an innocent man from Dartmoor and captures two crooks whom he forces to admit their guilt before a kidnapped judge. The cheeky Captain even descends on a power-station to re-charge his battery and, not surprisingly, causes a fire-alarm in a hotel where he lands in his smoke-cloud to order breakfast for his captives!

Real fodder for a boy's day-dreams! And Captain Q is another one of the Thomson "Bolshie" or "anti-authority" heroes who are always at odds with orthodox society and insist on doing things in their own way. We are told that he had been at one time "the most feared outlaw in the world. Of recent years he had reformed and was now on the side of law and order, although he still retained his queer ideas of going about things and had no hesitation about law-breaking if it served his ends." He clears the name of Jim Palmer because the crooked financier who had framed Jim had also embezzled some of the Captain's money.

In his "flying-suit and close-fitting crash-helmet" he makes me think of another ruthless adventurer in his amazing machine: one of Thomson's great dare-devils, the Black Sapper.

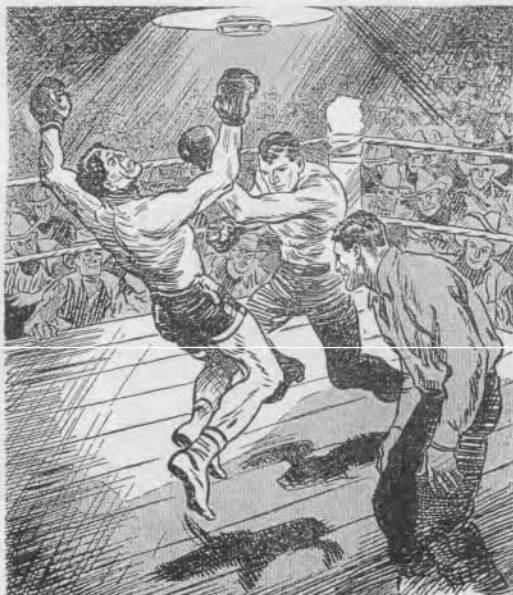
From 1929 this mysterious figure has been appearing in Thomson publications, dressed in his tight-fitting black costume and helmet and using his marvellous earth-boring machine, the Earthworm, to pursue a career of crime. Later he, too, changed from robbing banks to supporting law and order, but still keeping his insolence and irritability. The great interests I find in this story are the illustrations. The heavily-shaded black and white drawings seem to me very reminiscent of Eric Parker. They certainly stand out from the other illustrations in the annual which, in my opinion, are of mediocre standard.

My second choice of outstanding story is "Best Foot Forward" by Crawford Kaye. Champion boxer Bud Denver accidentally kills his sparring partner, or so he thinks, when the latter tries to rob him. He flees "out west" where he works on a struggling ranch. When young Billy, the son of the rancher, sends a photo of Bud to a New York newspaper competition, consternation strikes the boxer. Although his features have

changed, he knows that the "southpaw" style he has adopted in Billy's photo will stir the memories of his many fans. He decides to vanish again, but decides to stay one more day and try to win the thousand dollars the ranch desperately needs to pay its mortgage. He will have to last ten rounds against a brutal professional boxer who is much heavier but, of course, much inferior in skill. But also at the match, Bud sees with horror, is a New York detective friend attracted by the newspaper photo and, so he thinks, obviously come to arrest him.

He has only one chance to deceive his friend, and he takes it. When the bell sounds for the start of the fight he takes up the orthodox boxing stance of a **right-hand** fighter. His skill helps him handle his opponent initially but, as the rounds pass, he realises that he cannot survive against his strong opponent. Unless he boxes in his natural style he will soon be knocked out.

He makes his decision. When the next round starts he falls into his usual "southpaw" stance, with right foot forward. He now wins easily and the thousand dollars is his. He has chosen his friends and their need for money over his own freedom. To his astonishment, however, his detective friend tells him that the real murderers have confessed and Bud has been cleared. He has saved the ranch, and can now resume his boxing career.



Bud whipped his left across, and Bull Brent went down with a crash.

This story made a vivid impression on me and I was struck later by similarities with a film I happened to see on T.V. some years ago. This John Garfield picture had a generally similar plot, as far as I can remember, but since it was made in 1939 it could not have directly influenced this annual's stories. However, according to "Halliwell's Film Guide" (8th Edition), the Garfield film was a remake of an earlier one. So, if not derived from Garfield's "They Made A Criminal", maybe it was this 1933 production of "The Life of Jimmy Dolan" with Douglas Fairbanks Jnr. which provided inspiration for "Crawford Kaye".

(To be continued next month)

WANTED: Greyfriars Book Club volume No. 1 'The Worst Boy at Greyfriars', and 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.

Margery Woods describes CHRISTMAS WITH VALERIE...

The recipe for a storypaper Christmas special was really quite short. Vital ingredients invariably included house-parties in old country manors/inns/priories/even castles, along with a suitable apparition, a dash of ancient ruins, seasoning of eerie incidents, and of course the villain, who doubled with the apparition. Mix with the occasional unpleasant guest, serve with trimmings of holly, logfires, the waits, and the traditional comestibles, and the end product could keep the reader pleasantly happy for hours.

SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER. A magnificent LONG COMPLETE Girl Detective story, featuring world-famous VALERIE DREW, and her clever Assistant, Flath, in their thrilling efforts to solve the amazing mystery of—



Valerie Drew, the girl Detective, however, did not seem to be very well served with Christmas adventures during the sadly short few years of her storypaper career. The Annual of the SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY, THE POPULAR BOOK OF GIRLS' STORIES, had only two seasonal stories, VALERIE'S CHRISTMAS MYSTERY in 1934, and VALERIE'S CHRISTMAS PUZZLE in the 1935 volume. The rest were either holiday settings or mysteries unrelated to any particular season. The magazine offered THE CASE OF THE BURGLER CHRISTMAS TREE, FATHER CHRISTMAS

VALERIE and SHE CAME BACK AT CHRISTMAS. There was also THE WHISPERING MONK, in the Christmas number of 1936. This was a typical example of the genre, with all the ingredients except the food!

Valerie is invited to a house party at the home of her friend, Gloria, a home that must have been of considerable size to allow the entertaining of "a dozen or more old friends while around them flitted an endless array of Maid Marions, Japanese girls, Little Lord Fauntleroy's, Boadiceas, soldiers, sailors, Cavaliers, Roundheads, Hawaiian Islanders, Harlequins and Columbines..." and many more.

The mystery begins without delay when Gloria goes to gather mistletoe, all dressed up in her fancy dress, at nearby Ringholme Abbey, and returns to collapse on the doorstep, having been attacked by a strange monk who whispered that she was stealing the abbey mistletoe. At this point of the story one can't help reflecting on Valerie's strength as she picks up her friend and carries her to her bedroom --- presumably upstairs. Not a strong silent hero in sight, apparently. Later it emerges that the abbey monks in olden times sold their mistletoe in aid of the poor and one particular friar could speak only in whispers. Soon two guests have mistletoe stolen from their rooms.

Also, the young hostess, Daphne, sister of Gloria, has had a valuable pearl necklace stolen, for which theft she seems to suspect her young sister. Also, a typed note turns up, with the usual threats of doom and gloom, which baffles Valerie --- only for moments! --- when she discovers it has been typed on her own machine. But, it has fingerprints, and by the organisation of a clever game Valerie succeeds in getting the fingerprints of every guest in the house, not one of which, naturally, matches the one on the note.

It is cue time now for the Whispering Monk to appear and reclaim his missing mistletoe. Cue for Flash to take action, only to have a vase hurled at him, resulting in valiant Alsatian blood being spilled. Now Valerie's own blood is up and she sets off to the ruins of Ringholme Abbey to track down the villain.

There follow all the beloved old clichés; the footprints, the jagged walls covered with moss and cobwebs, the hundred or more broken steps leading up to the high landing, and the sudden drop down to abysmal depths. Then the voices of the plotters, and Valerie's fall, to be suspended by her hands over the abyss below, fingers slipping...

Cut to Flash, left on guard elsewhere but worried. His encounter with the plotters, whom he sends crashing down the steps, but not, alas, the abyss, and then his dramatic rescue of his beloved mistress, who, incidentally, is still in her Bo Peep fancy dress.

Back to the house, where Valerie loses no time in proving that the butler did it. Flash has his revenge when he brings down the culprit, and the truth emerges of how he had stolen the pearls and had to hide them until he was able to get them out of the house. His ingenious method of concealment --- each pearl hidden in a mistletoe berry! Unfortunately his special loot-stuffed mistletoe became mixed up with that decorating the rest of the house.

And so the party at Lamorna was able to begin enjoying its Christmas festivities --- thanks to the brilliance of Valerie Drew, and her faithful assistant, Flash!

.....AND WITH FLASH

Flash knew it was going to be an awful Christmas.

He had known it from first thing that morning, when the dreaded signs of packing appeared and his adored Valerie seemed remote and very busy. He watched the procession of bags and his big basket being loaded into the car, noted all the signs of the flat being closed up, all without any of the joyous atmosphere of togetherness that characterised their jaunts into mystery. At last Valerie came to him, her violet eyes just a little bit stern.

"Now you've got to behave yourself, old chap. You know I'd take you if I could. But I promised ages ago I'd spend Christmas with Amy and Rick and little Julie, and how could we know that a very unfriendly Alsatian would rush up and knock her down in the street."

"Grrrh!" Flash did not like the sound of this at all.

"And so she's terrified of big dogs now." Valerie shook her red-gold head sadly. "Poor little mite, she doesn't realise that most dogs love to play with kiddies, and you are the cleverest, most sagacious of them all. Oh, darling Flash--I wish we had a mutual language. Try to understand." She put her arms round his thick furry ruff and hugged him close.

Slightly mollified, Flash got into the car and settled down for the drive. He hadn't quite followed what that was all about, but he knew when he wasn't wanted! Quite how awful it would be was revealed when Valerie drove along the country lane to an old cottage with lots of other buildings behind it, and a pleasant-faced girl with rosy cheeks

came out to meet them. Valerie didn't open the rear door immediately. She said, "Stay, Flash," as she got out herself and spoke to the girl. Then she let him out, clipping his leash to his collar and, horror of horrors!--handing it to this stranger.

"Don't worry," she was saying, "he'll be fine with us. We're the best kennels in the country, you know."

"Yes you were highly recommended." Valerie turned to Flash. "Now be good. This is Cara. She's going to look after you for a couple of days, and I'm only ten minutes walk away, so I'll be coming to see you tomorrow first thing." She gave him the special ear tickle, and he knew she hated parting from him. So why bother? Why leave him here? But she was getting into the car and this strange girl was drawing on his lead.

Dolefully he obeyed, until the whole horror of the thing dawned on his doggy mind. She was taking him down this path, past a whole lot of other dogs, all in separate compartments, all of them kicking up a disgusting racket, and she was opening the wire door to one of the compartments. Jumping bones and dog biscuits! She expected him, Flash, investigator partner of the famous girl detective, Valerie Drew, to go into a cage! A cage!

Flash's howls of rage silenced all the inhabitants for a second, until, recognising a fellow victim of human inhumanity to the dog world, they set up a chorus of agreement that could surely be heard in the next county. In the midst of this, more expert than Flash realised, Cara had unclipped his lead and thrust him into the cage!--The Cage!--before he knew what she was about.

It was a most dreadful Christmas Eve.

The cage was sheltered, the sleeping part warm and dry and clean. There was a place behind like a large tennis court, netted around as high as Blackpool Tower---or so it appeared to Flash when surveying the means of escape---where they could exercise and play, and the grub was first-rate, the only redeeming feature, thought Flash, after a sleepless night. The old spaniel next door snuffled and wheezed and snored, the boxer across the way must have had nightmares, and the French poodle farther along seemed to be suffering from a broken heart; broken something, Flash decided unsympathetically, but not its neck! He had to get out!

But Valerie was coming, the bright sun light dancing on her red-gold hair, her eyes searching eagerly for him, her steps printing the crisp snow that had fallen through the night. Flash tried every wile in his repertoire, to no avail. Val knew them all, and after a fond embrace of his doggy head, departed back to the home of the child who hated dogs, But Flash had not given up.

The little kennel maid who brought food to the prisoners thought she knew dogs; but she did not know Flash. Nor did she know that Flash at his docile was at his most crafty. He fawned round her when she brought his special Christmas Day dinner.

He rubbed his head against her. He nuzzled her hand. He tried to rest his jowl against her knee, all in a disgraceful charade of guile that would have had Valerie helpless with mirth, had she been there to see it. The little maid, unwary with the spirit of Christmas, was quite beguiled. "Oh, you are a darling," she told him. "If only the rest were like you." The last word hiccuped into a gasp as Flash seized his opportunity. With a speed that lived up to his name he was past her, out of the screen door, along the passage, up onto a bin at the end, and over the fence in a lithe, soaring leap. The drive and freedom lay before him, and his beloved mistress's footprints still clear in the crisp snow. A field and two stiles later Flash was on a country lane. Here his tracking skills were needed, for quite a number of walkers had taken to the crisp fine outdoors that

morning. For a moment he thought he'd lost her, then he picked up the trail again, soon to reach the closed gates of a big country house that stood well back from the road.

The gate was securely fastened with the high springing side clasp that snapped shut immediately. The average door handle was child's play to Flash, but this was a bit more difficult. After several abortive attempts, he considered other means. The wall was a high one, minus any handy points of take-off, and there was no other gate that he could see. The next door house seemed to be secured with Fort Knox in mind, with the added complication of a couple of Rotweilers bouncing about with their owner on the terrace. Flash returned to the place where Valerie should be, and saw a man walking along the road towards him. Flash huddled himself against the gate and turned the full battery of poor-doggy-shut-out-appeal on the stranger. He gave a soft yelp, looked at the gate, and back at the man. The man hesitated, a little doubtful. Flash performed one capering circle and stood up at the gate, looking over his shoulder at the man. His sagacious brown eyes said the rest.

The man reached for the gate latch. "There you are old chap. Home you go."

Flash thanked him with a delighted whoof and sped up the drive. There was Valerie's car standing at the side of the house, and there were the Christmas lights around the two big windows at the front. And there was the front door, open. Flash sped joyfully across the snow, one thought only in his mind, to reach his adored mistress. Then suddenly a blur of scarlet movement caught his eye, to be followed by a terrified child's cry.

Flash stopped. Under the snow lay wide lawns, their borders of small shrubs and perennials resting after their summer display of colour and now iced with a fretwork of snow - blossoms. At the centre of the lawn a small child had fallen face down in the snow, its scarlet track suit already sinking from view in the soft white blanket. Suddenly the cries choked into silence and the scarlet disappeared. Flash veered left, with great bounds that took him to the edge of the lily pool, almost unseen beneath a mantle of ice topped with innocent looking snow. A man appeared at the door of the house, a woman screamed, and Valerie rushed out. But they were still too far away.

Flash seized the folds of scarlet in powerful jaws, struggling to find footholds as he dragged at the sodden material. He heaved frantically and the small body began to come clear of water and snow. Flash gave another gargantuan tug, and the little figure was safe, sprawled in the snow, as the three adults came scrambling and slithering across the thick snow. Valerie reached the child first, and turned her over, to pummel between her shoulder blades in case she had inhaled water. But she was breathing, and Valerie gathered her up into her arms and stumbled hurriedly towards the house.

"Let me take her!" Rick reached out for his daughter, and Amy cried: "Is she---is she all right?"

"I think so---Flash got her out so quickly," Valerie said.

"Thank God he was there!" Rick's face was distraught as he shouldered the door open. "She could have drowned in those few moments it took us to get to her."

"I said we should have filled that pool in till she's older," sobbed Amy. "I didn't even know she'd gone outside."

The next hour passed in a flurry of getting Julie into a warm bath and warm clothes, inquests and warm drinks, and the arrival of Cara in some anxiety as to the whereabouts of her missing charge - she'd never lost a dog yet and she didn't mean to start now - and finally the meeting of the small casualty and her rescuer.

"Come on, Julie," said her mother, "he is a very clever and good dog. He's just saved your life. He'd never hurt you."

Julie, rosy-cheeked now and recovering rapidly from her scare, looked at the big Alsatian and held out an uncertain hand. Flash knew of old what was expected and solemnly offered up one paw.

Julie was delighted and Flash had to perform this exchange of civilities several times. Across the hall recriminations were still going on as to who had left the door open and not noticed the three-year-old run out, and that a child could drown in a few inches of water, apart from the icy ducking. Cara, who had stood by during all this, announced she had better get back and she would take Flash and make sure he didn't escape a second time.

"Take him back!" exclaimed Rick. "After the way he saved our daughter! I think not! He's going to have the biggest bone and best biscuits I can find. Where is he, by the way?"

Valerie smiled. "I think he's curing Julie of her fear of dogs." She pointed.

Through the open door of the sitting room they could see the big Christmas tree. Under it sat Julie, now a bright, animated little figure in her cosy scarlet dressing gown. She had discovered the Santa Claus robes which her father intended donning at the party next day and she was draping Flash in them. The hood didn't want to stay in place over Flash's big pointed ears and he looked decidedly rakish under the lop-sided folds. But these did not prevent his seeing the chocolates Julie was feeding him from an open box on the floor, nor his gracious acceptance of them as just reward. Valerie was smiling, Rick was smiling, Amy was smiling, and Cara was sort of fading out of the door.

Altogether, prospects were beginning to look up.

Flash accepted another chocolate that happened to be filled with Kirsch liqueur and avoided Valerie's admonishing gaze.

It was going to be a great Christmas, after all!



NANCY BREARY

By Sue Sims (Co-Editor of Folly Magazine)

I've been following up various clues on Nancy Breary and have come up with a scoop - her sister is still alive, and living near Rye. I went to visit her two weeks ago, and we talked for about two hours. She's in her middle eighties now, but her mind is still sharp, and her memory excellent. Breary herself died three years ago, and, even more tragic for the researcher, the house she shared with her sister was gutted by a disastrous fire three months ago, and almost all the papers and most of the books were destroyed. I've been kicking myself for not trying to trace her earlier. However, I've got a fair amount of information.

Nancy Breary was born in Brixham, Devon, on March 7th, 1907. The family moved to Clapham Park, where her younger sister, Gretchen, was born in 1908, and thence to Streatham, where a brother, Gerald, was born in 1913. The two sisters went to kindergarten, and then on to Kingsdown, a boarding school in Dorking, Surrey. When she left school, Nancy was going to take up domestic science, but was spotted by the manager of a dressmaker's establishment in Bond Street and became a mannequin - she was tall and blonde and very pretty. She'd always written for her own and her sister's amusement, and was persuaded to submit a book to George Newnes - this was Give a Form a Bad Name (1943), an amazingly witty and mature production for a first (published) novel. She continued to write and to run the house (her mother had died when Nancy was much younger) during and after the war, until her father died, when she and Gretchen (who was an artist and made her living illustrating books) set up house in Rye in Sussex. In the late fifties they visited Canada and liked it so much that they stayed there for five years. The Mystery of the Motels (1958) was based on that extended stay. They returned to England in the early sixties, and settled in Winchelsea; Nancy didn't write any more school stories after The Fourth was Fun for Philippa (1961), though she did attempt one adult novel in the middle seventies, which was turned down. She lived in Winchelsea until her death (of a stroke) on December 8th 1988.

As you can see, she wasn't a pseudonym, and especially not E.L. McKeag - who was E.L. McKeag, actually?

(Editor's Note: We are delighted to have this information from Sue Sims, and thank C.D. reader Jack Nicholls for putting us in touch with her.)

WANTED: 'Collins Magazine for Boys and Girls': December 1950; January, September, October, November, December 1952. 'Young Elizabethan': November 1955; February, April, June 1956; March, May, July 1957. Lance Salway, 4 Westbridge Park, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 6AW.

WANTED: Adventure, 1218, 1253, 1265, 1267, 1268, 1269, 1286, 1287, 1288, 1289, 1290, 1291, 1292, 1293, 1294, 1295, 1296, 1297, 1298, 1299, 1300, 1301, 1302, 1303. VERY GOOD CONDITION PLEASE

FOR SALE: About 230 Sols: send for list. John Gibbs, 2 Wells Cottage, Eastcombe, Bishops Lydeard. Taunton, Somerset, TA4 3HU. Tel. 0823 432 998.

THE CENTENARY OF CAPTAIN W.E. JOHNS 1993

CALENDAR

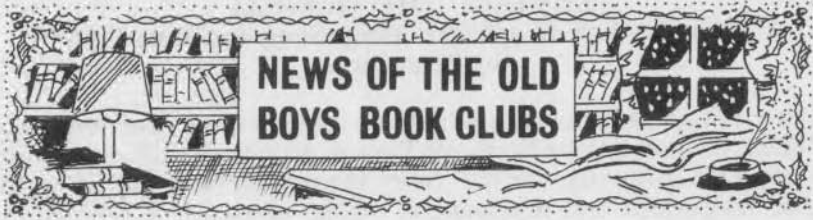
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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Saturday, 30th January -
8th May | BIGGLES COMES HOME, the Captain W.E. Johns Exhibition at the Hertford Museum. |
| Wednesday, 3rd February | The Captain W.E. Johns Exhibition opens at the R.A.F. Museum, Hendon. |
| Friday, 4th February | Birthday celebrations at Hertford, including the unveiling of a plaque on Johns' childhood home at 11 a.m., followed by a reception given by the Mayor and a luncheon at the Old Hertfordians Rugby Club. Full details from Ms. Andrea George, Senior Curator, Hertford Museum, 18 Bull Plain, Hertford, SG14 1DT. Please send SAE. Tel: 0992 582686. |
| Saturday, 6th February | The Captain W.E. Johns Centenary Luncheon, at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, at 12.30 for 1.00 p.m. Tickets £25 each, including wine and a souvenir menu, from Mrs. J. Schofield. Address below. |
| Saturday, 6th February | Social meeting with members of the International Biggles Association from Holland at the Ibis Hotel, Heathrow, from 6.00 p.m. onwards. |
| Saturday, 20th March | The Centenary <i>Biggles & Co</i> Meeting at Hertford. |
| Sunday, 1st August | BIGGLES FLIES AGAIN! at the Shuttleworth Collection Air Display. |
| Saturday, 23rd October | The Centenary <i>Captain W.E. Johns Meeting</i> , Nottingham. |

Everyone is very welcome at all events!

For further information, please contact Mrs. J. Schofield, Chairman of the Captain W.E. Johns Centenary Committee, 33 Scotts Lane, Shortlands, Bromley, Kent, BR2 0LT. Please send SAE, Tel. 081 466 5583.

WANTED: Magnet number 818. HUDSON, 29 Carnoustie, Ouston, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham (091 4105673)

HOWARD BAKER volume 18 (only 45 published) for sale or exchange. Make me an offer. JOHN BECK, 29 Mill Road, Lewes, Sussex, BN7 2RU.



LONDON OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

The November meeting held at Chingford was attended by 19 enthusiasts, including new member Peter Mahony.

The meeting started with Wyn's monetary nostalgia quiz with cockney rhymes and slang and 'plays upon words'. Norman talked about the non Biggles books written by W.E. Johns, reading some amusing extracts. This was followed by a delicious feast prepared by Audrey. After tea, Roy presented his 'Quote, unquote' quiz from the Magnet, Alan then questioned Roger about his reading history starting from boyhood to the present day.

The Christmas meeting will be on Sunday, 13th December at the Ealing home of Bill Bradford.

SUZANNE HARPER

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

With a number of apologies, we had eleven at our November A.G.M. All officials were voted to continue as before, except that Alan Harris will now be responsible for refreshments. The Club accounts were accepted and as the club is in quite a good financial position subscriptions will be the same for the coming twelve months - the sixth successive year. However, Associate Membership will be re-instated with a reduced subscription level.

We discussed the club's future and our programme for the coming year. We hope to have more guest speakers. Our October luncheon was a great success.

We received a report on the W.E. Johns Meeting recently held in Nottingham and on the forthcoming centenary celebrations. A report in a local newspaper from our Secretary making comment on the B.B.C.'s attitude to Greyfriars was widely applauded.

After refreshments - with some splendid home-made parkin made by Margaret - we concluded our business meeting on a light note: a superb reading by Geoffrey from Magnet 1536 "Spoofing the School".

Our next meeting is our Christmas Party on 12th December to which all are welcome (commencing 5.30 p.m.). A very happy Christmas from all at Northern Club.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

BUNTER! THE MUSICAL
A Look-Back at Greyfriars' Only Song-and-Dance Show
by Brian Doyle

I have always been rather surprised that the Greyfriars stage musical show **BUNTER!**, produced at the Northcott Theatre, Exeter in 1988, never received much coverage in the pages of the "Story Paper Collectors' Digest" or indeed in other magazines and newspapers. This, after all, was a huge and expensive tribute to both Frank Richards and his most famous and popular characters. A literally unique event. Not in the **LES MISERABLES** or **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** class perhaps, but nevertheless a remarkable and notable event. But, apart from a brief two-line mention in a London **OBBC Report** and a Review in the September 1988 "SPCD", the rest was silence. Until now...

Billy Bunter had been seen on London's West End stage, of course, in a series of Christmas productions written by the late Maurice McLoughlin and produced by City Stage Productions from 1958 onwards. There were six of these and they were, for the record: **BILLY BUNTER'S MYSTERY CHRISTMAS** (1958), **BILLY BUNTER FLIES EAST** (1959), **BILLY BUNTER'S SWISS ROLL** (1960), **BILLY BUNTER SHIPWRECKED** (1961), **BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS CIRCUS** (1962) and **BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC** (1963). Gerald Campion (BBC TV's Bunter) appeared in the first ones, with Peter Bridgement donning the Fat Owl's specs and checked-trousers for the later productions.

Everyone knows about the long-running Bunter TV series, no doubt, which began in 1952, and we musn't forget (whilst we're on the subject of Bunter in the media) the 90-minute BBC radio play, broadcast in its Saturday Night Theatre slot on December 13th, 1986; **BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY** (radio's first-ever Greyfriars play) featured Hugh Thomas as Bunter; it was repeated on December 15th, but has not been heard since.

But now was to come a full-scale musical based on Bunter's exploits! Was it possible? Was it feasible? The mind tended to boggle a little.

Back in the mid-1960s, I had started to write the 'book and lyrics' for such a show titled **YAROOH!** and working with a composer-friend (who is now a leading TV director) and was blessed with the ownership of a grand piano. I had even obtained the necessary permissions and royalty agreements from Fleetway. But after a few months our enthusiasm waned (trying to find unusual words that rhymed with Bunter, Quelch, Mauleverer and Locke loses its attractions after a while - though Hurree Janset Ram Singh was fairly easy, believe it or not) and the project was never completed.

But Billy Bunter as the star of a big musical show certainly had its fascinations and possibilities. Just think of previously-missed opportunities. Bunter could certainly have sung "Food, Glorious Food" in **OLIVER!** And "I'm in Love With a Wonderful Pie" in **SOUTH PACIFIC**. How about "Billy's Bustin' Out All Over" in **CAROUSEL**? Or "With a Little Bit of

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PRESENTS

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**WORLD
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BUNTER!



JUNE 21 - JULY 16

Directed by **JOHN JUDD**
Musical Direction & Arrangements by **PAUL KNIGHT**
Choreography by **GILLIAN GREGORY**
Design by **KIT SURREY**
Lighting by **MARK DOUBLEDAY**

PRODUCTION SUPPORTED BY



Book & Lyrics by
JOHN JUDD
Music by
PAUL KNIGHT

Based on Billy Bunter
Created by **FRANK RICHARDS**

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with

PATSY ROWLANDS
and a spiffing cast
PHILIP DAY
BILL DEAMER
ELENA FERRARI
JOHN GRIFFITHS
CRISPIN HARRIS
JOHN HART DYKE
JOHN HOGG
BRUCE MORRISON
DAVID ROSE
DAVID TIMSON (as the Fat Owl)
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Tuck" in MY FAIR LADY? Or "You Can't Get a Man With a Bun" in ANNIE GET YOUR GUN? Or "My Tart Belongs to Daddy" in the show with the same title? And surely there must have been a suitable number in such appetizing shows as LITTLE (TUCK) SHOP OF HORRORS, THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER, CHEW, CHIN, CHOW, or SUGAR BABIES?

But enough of all this whimsicality - or we'll end up with a show called PUNTER!

The first most people heard of the brand-new show called BUNTER! was in a small paragraph in Baz Bamigboye's weekly show business column in the "Daily Mail" of April 25th 1987, in which he announced that John Judd and Paul Knight had beaten Andrew Lloyd Webber to the rights to produce a Bunter musical and that it would appear on the London stage at the end of that year.

Nothing more was heard until a large display ad. appeared in "The Stage" newspaper on March 3rd 1988; headed BUNTER! it announced an Open Audition for the role of Hurree Janset Ram Singh and invited Asian actors (minimum age 17) to attend at the London Welsh Trust Ltd. in London's Gray's Inn Road, on Friday, March 4th at 10 a.m. bringing along a song and tap shoes! Evidently things were moving...

Next came a small item in "The Stage" on June 2nd, announcing that David Timson would play the title-role in BUNTER! which would open at the Northcott Theatre, Exeter, on June 21st 1988. On June 16th, in the same paper came full details of the show.

Book and lyrics were by John Judd, who would also direct, and the music was by Paul Knight, who would also be musical director. The choreographer would be Gillian Gregory (who won a U.S. Broadway 'Tony' Award for her work on ME AND MY GIRL, and who also did the London production of that show, as well as many other shows and films). The designer was Kit Surrey. Top of the bill in the cast was well-known British character and comedy actress (and veteran of nine CARRY ON films) Patsy Rowlands in the much-expanded role of Mrs. Kebble, the Greyfriars matron and housekeeper.

In an interview in "The Stage" (which happily appeared to be quite pro-BUNTER! also running a picture of Timson sharing a plateful of sticky doughnuts with Judd and Knight), John Judd, an ex-London policeman, but primarily-known in recent years as an actor, often seen as 'baddies' in such TV shows as THE PROFESSIONALS, THE SWEENEY and MINDER, and who played Blind Pew in the musical version of TREASURE ISLAND, explained that he had been thinking of writing a musical version of the Bunter saga for over ten years. There had been copyright problems. Then he found that someone at the BBC had let an option lapse. "Several of us finished up chasing the rights, including some well-known theatre people, but I eventually bought them at the end of 1986," he said.

Finding financial backers and theatres presented problems. One said he might be interested in putting the show on if Judd could cast some of the stars of the television soap EASTENDERS in it! Another saw it solely as a "Kids'

show". Another thought the whole project "a bit dated". Much of its appeal, of course, was to the nostalgic, and none the worse for that, as well as to the young and the young-at-heart.

Judd had set the show in 1934 and based it loosely on the well-known Smedley Series in "The Magnet". Before actually writing it he had acquired a pile of Howard Baker "Magnet" Reprints, and then met the late Maurice Hall, well-known collector and later a biographer of Frank Richards (Charles Hamilton), who advised him on various details (and subsequently wrote the programme notes).

After several set-backs in his search to find backers for the show (to combine with his own production company, John Robert Williams Productions) he eventually wound up with George Roman, the Artistic Director of the Northcott Theatre, Exeter, who proved to be a thoroughly professional and ideal partner.

More than a 1,000 plump young lads turned up to audition for the title-role of Billy Bunter in the show, before David Timson was finally cast. He came to the all-singing, all-dancing, all-eating - and, of course, all-acting - part with a wealth of experience behind him. He was an ex-member of the BBC Radio Drama Company (making over 300 broadcasts), had done a wide variety of theatre work all over Britain, and had many TV appearances to his credit. He had also played the key role of Jim Hawkins in a musical version of TREASURE ISLAND, at the New London Theatre in the West End, and later had a 2-year run in the London hi-tech rock musical TIME at the Dominion Theatre.

"David was not incredibly fat," said John Judd, "but he had a tubby face and we padded out his waist to 60 inches!"

Timson said he based his portrayal of Bunter largely on the original illustrations and upon Frank Richards' writings. "They are so full of description that is really the only way to play it," he said at the time. "And I think you have to play, too, what the audience expects, because people's visual image of him is so strong."

Two dozen boys were recruited locally from the Exeter area to appear as various 'background' schoolboys and, in all, a company of 15 actors would play 20 key characters. A small band would be conducted by Paul Knight, the composer himself (not an orchestra as, sadly, there would be no strings.)

For the record again, Harry Wharton would be played by Philip Day, Cherry by Bill Deamer, Nugent by John Hogg, Bull by Michael Winser and Singh by Michael J. Urwin. Quelch was John Griffiths, Dr. Locke was David Rose and Bessie Bunter was Elena Ferrari (who also doubled, curiously enough, as Mrs. Mumble!).

(To be Continued)

In the previous two December issues of the Digest I have spoken of the Christmas treats found within the pages of Magnet and Gem. But as a boy in my pre-teen years Christmas just would not have been Christmas without the Beano and, to a lesser extent, the Dandy. They were my Magnet and Gem at a time when, as far as I was concerned, Beano had been there since the beginning of time. My first Christmas Beano comic was no 805, for the week commencing 21st December 1957. Good old Biffo the Bear was there on the cover in what was a typical comedy of errors. He was allowed to chop down just one Xmas tree and was determined to pick a really super one. First his axe is too blunt and he receives a showering of snow as the dull edge comes into contact with the trunk. When the axe is sharpened the head flies off the snicks off the tiniest tree in the forest. He is just about to launch his attack on a prime specimen when the keeper comes along and insists that he takes away the tiny one felled by accident. "I said only one" reiterates the keeper, and poor Biffo has to endure Buster's rage when he arrives home with his runtish offering. Such gentle humour would seem well out of place in the Beano of 1992, when the emphasis is firmly on action. But back in 1957 we laughed.

Inside the comic there was a mix of festive and non-seasonal strips. Little Plum, the redskin creation of Leo Baxendale, enjoyed his Christmas party in the company of a family of bears after wearing a bearskin to a fancy dress party, while further on in the comic the Bash Street Kids made sure that their teacher was fit to act as Santa at their party, and Minnie the Minx used an unwanted knitting set to smuggle a field-gun out of the local army camp. On the back page Dennis the menace, a favourite of mine, used the cottonwool from an unwanted present to disguise himself as a snowman and create havoc. Needless to say the Menace ended up receiving his usual slippers, Christmas issue or not!!

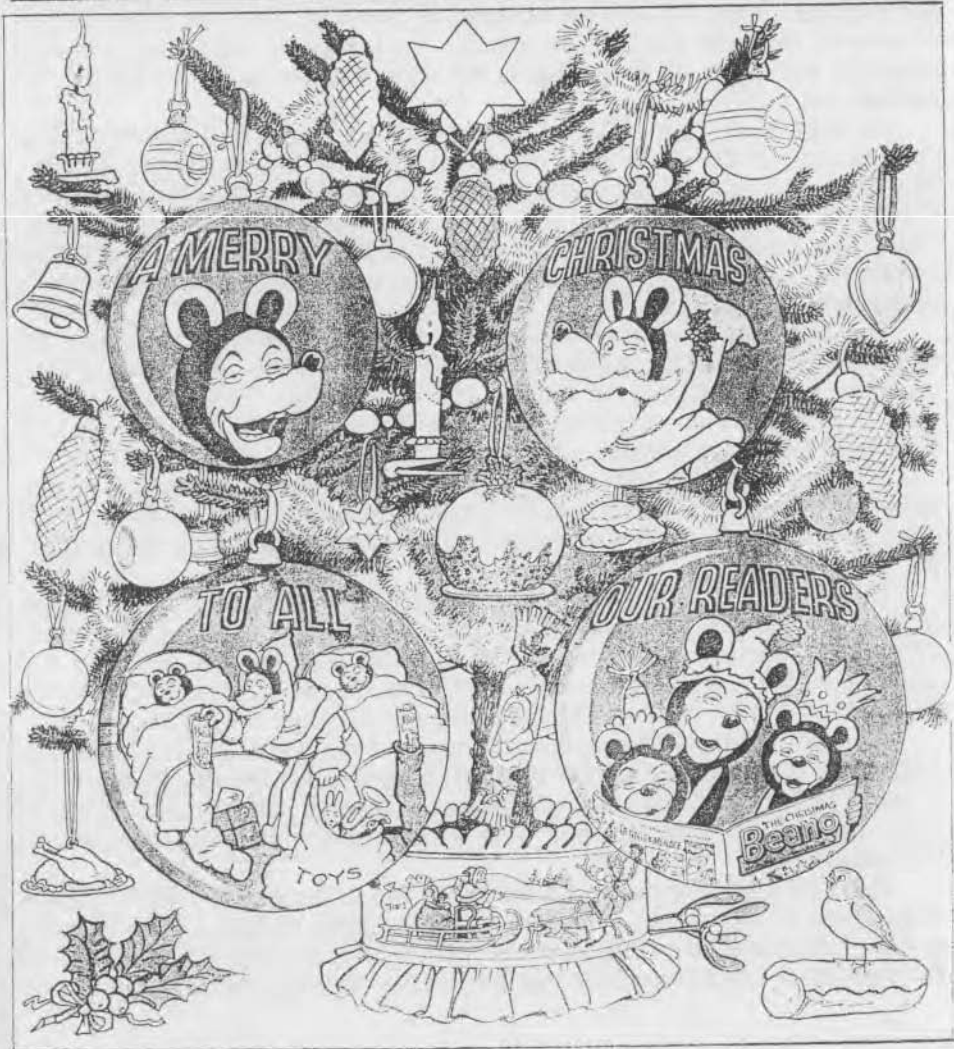
The Beano Book that found its way into my pillow-case that Christmas brimmed with action and laughs. All of the old pals from the weekly were there: Dennis, Roger the Dodger, Biffo, Prince Whoopee and the other laughter makers, together with the adventure strips that were so much part of Beano at that time. Jimmy and His Magic Patch, superbly drawn by Dudley Watkins, was there at the start of the book to get things off to an exciting beginning. He found himself back in the time of King Alfred and with the aid of his trusty delivery bike was able to help the Saxon king overcome some rather nasty Danes. Later in the book he found himself in Ancient Egypt foiling tomb robbers and at the back entered the fantasy world of Ali Baba and the forty thieves. Throughout the annual there were other thrills to be had with Young Davy Crocket, The Shipwrecked Circus, Jack Flash and many others. The end-papers of that particular annual were a treat in themselves. At the front they showed the Bash Street Kids at ten past nine in the morning. They all snored soundly asleep while their long suffering teacher tried to waken them for lessons. At the back the Kids were all ready

THE CHRISTMAS Beano

EVERY THURSDAY

No. 1275—DEC. 24th, 1966

3p



for the bell at four o'clock while poor old teacher slept soundly, worn out with trying to get some work out of them. As a teacher myself in later years I was to know that feeling only too well!

The best of those late 1950s Beano Books was, as far as I was concerned as a boy, the issue for 1959. I remember the moment I first set eyes on it, in a corner shop window in Birmingham, where we had gone to visit a relative. It was all I could do to wait until December 25th to see if Santa had remembered to drop me a copy. Relief. There it was, with the usual bunch on the cover, waiting to give me piles of chortle filled hours. My original copy was so well read that it eventually fell apart and it was years before I managed to find another copy. Looking through it now I still think it has a great appeal. True, the artwork of some of the strips lacks the visual impact of some of the work found in the annual's predecessors; but for me it is pure nostalgia and as we all know that is the strongest motive for collecting old annuals and comics.

Pulling out my file of Xmas comics marked 'Beano and Dandy', I flick through some of the issues that I never read as a boy. My earliest is for 1945. Big Eggo, the ostrich, was the cover star in those days and that particular Christmas he was having a little difficulty with a large Xmas pudding. Unlike the Xmas issue for 1957, every one of the strips in 1945 was festive and on the back page was a Christmas game, entitled Jinko, featuring many of the comic's characters.

The following year saw another snow-covered issue. Inside the Shipwrecked Circus folk enjoyed Christmas on their island while Tom Thumb rescued a toy maker from the clutches of an evil baron. Both strips were the work of Watkins who completed his Christmas hat-trick inside the comic with a splendid Lord Snooty page.

Two years later, in 1949, Big Eggo had been replaced by Biffo, who was enjoying his second Christmas as the comic's cover character. This is, in my opinion, a poor issue as few of the great Thomson artists contributed strips to it.

Throughout the 1950s and '60s there was invariably snow and a slap up feed on the front of the comic. One of the best covers was that gracing the 1966 issue. There was no adventure of Biffo the Bear; instead the cover was taken up with a single large picture of a Christmas tree decorated with scenes from Biffo's Christmas, and a Merry Christmas message to readers.

Forward into the 1970s, and on the cover of the issue for 22nd December 1973 Biffo is holding a party for the Bash Street, Kids. Perhaps he knew that it would be his last Christmas as cover star of the comic before his back page rival, Dennis the Menace, took over in September 1974 in time for the Christmas issue.

The final Christmas issue I have in my file is the one for 1989. Dennis sings carols on the covers, Biffo puts up his stocking, and Roger is still trying to dodge decorating the Christmas tree. All in all it is a bright issue full of all the traditional Christmas cheer that has been a hallmark of the Beano down

the years. Which probably just goes to show that things don't really change, at least not in the magical world of story papers and comics,



As Vernon-Smith reached the steps, Billy Bunter let fly with the snowball. Whiz! Plop! The snowball smashed on the back of the Bounder's head, and he stumbled forward, slipped on the top step, and shot downwards, his arms and legs thrashing wildly as he went. "He, he, he!" came from the window that framed Billy Bunter's fat face. "Serve the beast right! He, he, he!"



Jokes, riddles, and catches to try on the family and your chums when you're all in merry Christmas mood.

"Did I tell you the story about the greasy pole?"

When they say "No," you reply: "Well, I'm afraid you couldn't grasp it if I did!"—and then you hastily skip away!

Said the new Christmas postman to little girl: "Does this parcel belong here, missy? I've been along the street from end to end, and I can't find a house named 'Fragile'!"

WILFRED'S

1924 ANNUAL 1924



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