

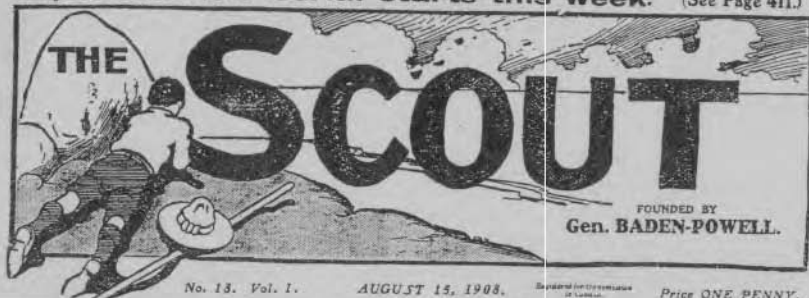
STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 47

No. 554

FEBRUARY 1993

Splendid New Serial Starts this Week. (See Page 411.)



For a furious moment they struggled together on the swaying platform while the long train thundered westward. Next moment the train went swinging round a curve. The lurch swung Tom and his enemy heavily against the gate. With a crack the pailock gave; the gate flew open, and instantly they were gone. (See the new serial, "Strong-hand Saxon," on page 411.)

£1



FLIPS PAGES



(INCORPORATING NORMAN SHAW)

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

Many thanks to all of you for the numerous letters of condolence received pursuant to the announcement of Norman Shaws' death. It will, I know, be a long time before we can fully accept that he has gone - he always seemed to be as constant and imperishable as the next day. His legend will tho' be more permanent than mere human flesh.

Life, with all its vicissitudes must continue and there are some stark facts that have to be faced. One of these is the level of debt run up by Norman and the requirement of his estate for money. Discussions are continuing with the estate but it may be impossible to avoid the sale of "Alladin's Cave." If this does happen a vast quantity of stock will have to be liquidated and Flip will have to relocate. Unsettling prospects both of them. Pessimism, though, is not what I am best at and I am hopeful that a mutually advantageous solution can be thrashed out. It avails nothing, though, to adopt an ostrich stance and the worst-case scenario must be considered. Readers of this illustrious journal will, of course, be kept clued-up.

Enough despondency for one month - now for the sales pitch. New items this month for your delectation and consideration are:-

PENNY PICTORIAL - JUL /DEC 1913 (9 ISSUES HAVE BLAKE YARNS - FILE COPIES)	20.00
UNION JACK - JUL/DEC 1930	85.00
THRILLER - 383/411 (29 ISSUES)	95.00
DETECTIVE WEEKLY - JAN/JUN 1937	85.00
BEANO - 1956/59 SMALL BATCH AVAILABLE - CONTACT FOR DETAILS	
YOUNG MARVELMAN ANNUAL - FIRST ISSUE GENERALLY GOOD CONDITION BUT TEAR ON BACK COVER	45.00
MARVELMAN ANNUAL - FIRST ISSUE FINE CONDITION	55.00

That's all for now people - lots more next month.

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

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FAREWELL TO AN OLD FRIEND

A sad 'stop press' insert with the January C.D. announced the passing of Norman Shaw, who had for many decades been both a dealer *par excellence* in old boys' books and papers and a friend to numberless collectors. It is difficult to imagine the hobby without him. He would always take time and trouble over one's requests, and provide courteous and speedy service. I was often amazed when, after telephoning him in hopes that somewhere in his vast stocks he just might have some item which continued to elude me, I would receive it from him the very next day, beautifully packed and labelled.

I was fortunate in living fairly close to his Crystal Palace 'Aladdin's Cave'. Particularly when I first began to collect, his book-filled home drew me again and again to make a personal visit - sometimes in search of papers or Annuals to complete runs, and sometimes for the pleasure of simply browsing, and chatting to Norman. (Needless to say, one never came away empty-handed!)

In a world where 'market values' rule increasingly and where certain people - outside of our circle - have been unscrupulous in inflating prices or offering shabby deals, Norman remained a shining light - always fair, honest

and generous with his customers. He was liked and respected by us all. I have received tributes to him from many C.D. readers, some of which are reproduced elsewhere in this issue.

ANOTHER GOODBYE

I am sorry too to have to report that Mr. H. Heath of Bexhill-on-Sea also passed away recently. He had been a C.D. reader and contributor for many years, and our January issue included his recent thoughts on the re-launch of the Biggles books. I had in hand another article from him about the boys of St. Winifred's and the Benbow, characters for whom he had an especially soft spot. As a tribute to Mr. Heath I have published this (*A Fifty-Year-Old Mystery*) in our February C.D.

As time goes on we often have to reflect with sadness and affection on absent friends. It is, however, a joy to know that new readers, collectors and contributors continue to join our hobby and C.D. ranks.

With best wishes to you all.

MARY CADOGAN



TINKER AND TOPPER

by John Bridgwater

Sexton Blake is usually thought of as having only one assistant. However, way back in the days of the SBL first series (around 1920) there were times when he had two. It started with SBL first series No. 107, "The Branded Spy" by Oliver Merland. At first Topper is an 'Artful Dodger' in appearance, being described as a "... grotesque imp... he wore a pair of boots which were not only falling to pieces but were so much too large for him. He had a boy's figure, but he wore a man's coat which was so long as to cover him completely and leave some of the tail over to trail on the wet and mud-stained pavement. He had a man's battered silk hat on his head tilted back at such an acute angle that it was a marvel how it stuck on. But the face under the battered hat was undoubtedly a boy's face, extremely dirty, sharp, and cheeky, and with a pair of small and twinkling eyes which glittered with a quite uncommon greenish tint. He was deputy or caretaker of the lodging house... He was known as Topper, though whether because this was his lawful name, or on account of his headgear, was unknown."

Topper saves Blake from falling through a trap door into a flooded tunnel but falls in himself. Blake has to dive in to save him. Topper offers himself for service with Blake and is taken to Russia to help with a case on which Blake is engaged at the time, Tinker not being available. They are involved in life and death adventures in the

Kremlin dungeons and secret passages, one of which caves in on them. Their opponents are a dastardly Russian spy, treacherous Bolshevics and Red Guards.

Topper first meets Tinker after the Russian operation when Tinker returns from the case which kept him out of those proceedings. Topper is thin and worn; he also limps badly, all as a result of his Russian experiences. "Topper stood whistling on the landing ... another boy came up the stairs ... a boy with an alert air and a pair of very keen eyes. "Hulloa!" he ejaculated ... "Hulloa yourself!" rejoined Topper. "I know you" said the other boy. "You're the chap who's been to Russia with Mr. Sexton Blake, having an exciting time and enjoying yourself". "I know you" said Topper "You're the celebrated Tinker. You was out of London lookin' after another case for Mr. Blake, so you couldn't go to Russia with us. Still, we didn't make such a bad job of it by ourselves..." Tinker regarded him steadily, but not in an unfriendly way. "Look here", he said "I've had a letter from Mr. Blake, telling me all about you and I'm willing to admit that you've behaved jolly well. But I'm the right-hand man - or boy - of Mr. Sexton Blake, and I don't feel inclined to let myself be cut out. What I want to know is this. Are you thinking of setting up as a rival to me?" "Shouldn't think of such a thing", protested Topper. "Why, look at all your experience, an' me only a beginner! But mightn't we both help Mr. Blake in a case some day - an' help each other while doin' it? You give me a leg up, an' I'll give you a leg up!" "Right!" said Tinker. They shook hands cordially."

Blake sends Topper to a boarding school, having decided to have him educated, and uses him on cases during the holidays. Tinker and Topper engage in wordy sparring contests but are good friends for all that ... " ...with no thought of being rivals."

Topper appears in SBL first series No. 129. "The Case of the Nameless Man" and No. 342 "The Case of Larachi the Lascar". The same author also wrote No. 281 "The Face in the Film" but I have been unable to check whether Topper appears in that story.



"WHAT TERRIBLE WEATHER"

by C.H. Churchill

As I write this, in December, the rain is lashing down outside and the wind is blowing a gale, the clouds are black and threatening and the outlook is very gloomy. All this makes me think about the weather as described by E.S. Brooks at St. Frank's roundabout this time of the year. He was always seasonal, shall we say, as regards Christmastime and holidaytime and produced stories accordingly featuring the weather. In January or February he often gave us stories of floods, rain, ice and snow. There were several series about floods: "Fill dyke February" happens in real life as well, as we all know.

Turning to St. Frank's, we were regaled with a number of floods. In January 1918 we had three stories about the coming of Tom Burton, Nos. 137/139 old small series.

Floods were about when Nipper met him at the station. On their way home, to put it mildly, Tom Burton managed to save Nelson Lee from death by rescuing him from the floodwaters. Too complicated a story for me to deal with here. Then in 1919 in the Colonel Clinton stories there was ice about. In one story Sergeant Donnell, Clinton's aide, knocked one of the juniors into the frozen river and he fell through the ice. All was well, however, as the unfortunate lad was rescued by the other juniors. This was nearly a tragedy.

Twelve months later we had the Singleton series. In No. 246 the school taken over by Singleton to be, as he thought, a rival school to St. Frank's was inundated by rain and floods and eventually collapsed into the water, luckily with no tragic consequences.

We now jump to 1922. Here was another flood, and as a result the boys made a camp on Willards Island. This resulted in the famous Lee No. 352 in March entitled "The Coming of Archie." Archie, of course became one of the most popular characters in the N.L.L.

I do not think there were any more "flood" series in the later new series Lees except the famous one known as "Handforth's Ark" series. It is so many years since I read it that I cannot recall much about it except for the fact that it was the last time that Nipper's little dog, Boz, was mentioned. When Nipper first purchased Boz from a sailor on the *Wanderer*, Lord Dorrimore's yacht, this little spaniel was often featured in stories but gradually disappeared from sight, one might say. He did crop up again in the Ezra Quirk series helping William Napoleon Browne to put over a "magical" trick.

Cannot remember any more stormy weather in the Lee so will close and have a look out of the window to see if the rain has stopped.



"This is very strange," Mr. Brown," said Philippe softly.
 "It is not nearly strange," another Philippe, but disconcerting," he replied
 grantly. "Much as I hate the thought, I am compelled to fear that we are
 facing an outbreak of the marabout's disposition."



CAISTOWE LIGHTHOUSE

Shown on some high cliffs of a promontory overlooking the bay, Caistowe Lighthouse is a well-known landmark on this part of the South Coast. It can be seen from a long way out at sea, and it is the first sight of Caistowe the famous look for when returning from a cruise.



SOLO MALCOLM AND OLD NICK BOGARDUS

by Ian Godden

When W. Murdoch Duncan graduated from writing for *THE THRILLER* to writing books he was so prolific that he was obliged to use a number of pen-names. Under the Neill Graham name he wrote 45 books and all, except half a dozen early titles, featured a private detective called Solo Malcolm, so-called because he was a lone wolf type.

Malcolm, like most Duncan heroes, was a big man, six feet three inches and sixteen stones, and had been in the army, then a pro-wrestler in U.S.A. and Canada, then a policeman and, finally, a private investigator with seedy rooms at 13 Hillary Court, then, when business picked up a little, at 19 Adrian Walk where his office is described as, "a flash job and no mistake" (*MURDER RINGS THE BELL*).

Despite his calling, Malcolm is a man of upright principles "I was brought up a Presbyterian", and takes only one in five cases offered to him no matter how hard up he is; he won't handle divorce, for example, so he has a constant battle to make ends meet.

Malcolm likes his pipe, whisky in moderation and food, and one of the delights of the series is the frequent descriptions of meals eaten: the breakfasts at his lodgings run by a Mrs. Ollyrod, widow of a policeman, and most other meals at a pub run by his friend, Choice Charlie Bendall, a character who spends all his spare time reading paperbacks: "He buys all the newest ones and keeps them stacked up there at his hand" (*SAY IT WITH MURDER*).

When Solo Malcolm is working on a case he generally does so in tandem with the police and mostly works with Old Nick Bogardus of D.H.Q., "a big fat guy with plenty of muscle on him yet. He's on the home stretch now but in his day Old Nick was one of the toughest cops in London" (*PLAY IT SOLO*). Old Nick is a cop of the old school, a breed to be found frequently in Murdoch Duncan's numerous books. He bears a strong resemblance to Supt. Flagg in the John Cassells series both being big, old, tough and very smart. In his office Nick is always eating; fruit-and-nut chocolate, cakes, sweets, nuts, biscuits or fruit. One way and another there's a lot about food in Duncan's books.

Solo Malcolm is a compassionate man, like all of the heroes in Duncan's books, and this is demonstrated in *SAY IT WITH MURDER*, for example, where he obtains a fee of five hundred pounds from a wealthy client and gives it all to a lady who runs a teashop, which has failed, and lacks money to support a sick husband. At this time Malcolm is flat broke and is existing on Choice Charlie's charity. That's the way he is, a kind man and a tough investigator.

FUN IN THE FOURTH - JOLLY SCHOOL TALES

by W.O.G. Lofts

One of my most recent discoveries was a short run of school stories in the pink comic 'Chips'. I found them fascinating in more ways than one, as I could not help feeling that they had a strong link with Greyfriars. Entitled *Fun in the Fourth - Jolly School Tales* they commenced on November 24th 1924 and ran to September 12th 1925, roughly a total of 42 issues. The stories were told by 'Smith Minor', whilst the artist was the popular Leonard Shields in his Greyfriars style, the Headmaster looking like the twin brother of Mr. Quelch, with the amusing name of 'Dicky Bird' - which was the name of a character in the Will Hay stories of Bendover in the 'Pilot' a decade later penned by Charles Hamilton.



Another amazing thing is that the school was never named, nor any locality mentioned in all the episodes I have perused. The main character was nicknamed 'Buster' and the opening words of the initial story were:

'Most fellows can stow away plenty of tuck, but I reckon old Buster could beat them all.'

The stories also included many mentions of postal orders arriving, as well as what I term Greyfriars jargon with such expressions as 'My sainted Aunt', 'My Hat' and so on. At odd times, whether printer's errors, or sub-editor's sloppy subbing, the name of 'Buster' reads 'Bunter'. Was the series a parody of Greyfriars? Or were these originally Greyfriars stories, hastily changed to a no-name school, with Bunter altered to Buster?

The stories were of the slapstick type, reminding one of the substitute writers, but then I know for a fact they were not by G.R. Samways, for in an interview and listed Bibliography he never named them. W.E. Stanton Hope, another substitute writer, did pen many stories in the comic field, but then in a Bibliography of his work in Australia likewise never mentioned them in his listings.

'Smith Minor' was, according to some sources, an actual member of the Remove, being the second



"Which of you boys took this tin from the kitchen?"

of three brothers, one sharing No. 8 Study with Elliott. Like Ninian Elliott, Treluce, Trevor, and several others he never played any part in the stories, being just a name to make up the numbers. Whether he was a genuine 'Frank Richards' character originally is debatable.

Lastly, whether it was a coincidence or not, at the bottom of the page in an early story is an advert for the 1925 Holiday Annual!

CUT AND THRUST

by R. Hardinge

With the execution of King Charles I in January 1649, England became a republic under Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector. The Commonwealth was soon at war with one of her greatest commercial rivals - Holland, and between 1652 and 1654 a struggle developed for supremacy in the Channel. Several fierce engagements were fought between the rival English and Dutch fleets led by Admirals Blake and Van Tromp respectively. It was against this background that Draycot M. Dell's serial *Sons O' The Sword* was penned.

The first instalment of this enthralling tale appeared in the issue of 'The Champion' of September 15, 1923, and opened with the clash of swords between two vastly different opponents who were complete strangers to one another. Miles Grenville, a mere stripling of sixteen, was matched against Civil War veteran Simon Death, a man of gigantic stature who wore a faded beaver hat that sported a long jaunty red feather, buff coloured breeches, brown hose and buckled shoes. A much dented breastplate protected his chest, and his sword in its scabbard dangled from the sash round his waist. It was, perhaps, one of Prince Rupert's disbanded force who had seen action against the Cromwellian Army at the battles of Naseby, Marston Moor or Chalgrove Field.

Young Miles gave a good account of himself against his experienced adversary, and the bout eventually ended with honours even. Simon admitted that he had deliberately provoked him into the fight in order to test his courage and mettle. There were no hard feeling son either side. As a matter of fact the two became comrades in the stirring adventures that faced them.

Draycot M. Dell was a spinner of yarns with historical backgrounds. He wrote for various Boys' Papers as a serial specialist. He made his name with *Drake's Drum*, perhaps his best effort, which was written for 'Young Britain', and was subsequently published in book form by Jarrolds. His gripping style of writing exuded action and

The Champion magazine cover features a central illustration of two knights on horseback jousting. The title 'THE CHAMPION' is prominently displayed in a stylized font. Below the title, it says 'Mystery-Adventure-Sport' and 'The TIP-TOP STORY WEEKLY'. A large headline reads 'Sons o' the Sword!' with 'A FINE NEW SERIAL BY DRAYCOT M. DELL' underneath. Other text on the cover includes '1000 PRIZE Fascinating Sports Competition Inside', 'The Best on the Bookstalls!', and a list of articles: 'MIRAL BLAKE', 'THE SAN YEMO', 'THE ROAD', 'AT NASEBY', 'THE BIG TEN', 'ANTON BIL', 'SAMITE DICK'S LADY FLOT', and 'NEW ARTICLES'.

excitement. *The Outlaw of the Sea* was another of his very fine tales that started in the initial issue of 'Young Britain'.

HUMOUR AND OUR HOBBY: PART I

by Eric Hammond

To attempt writing a piece about humour is fraught with difficulty. The pitfalls and dangers are obvious. At best, it may interest a few, and at worst annoy many. Its treatment must of necessity be subjective. With so many types and shades of humour, so many interpretations and so many personal likes and dislikes, objectivity becomes impossible. One man's meat is another's poison.

Frank Muir, no mean humorist, in his introduction to "The Oxford Book of Humorous Prose" says ... "that all theories about comedy are right but none of them is completely right". My feelings exactly; I can only state my own views about the humour within the hobby, and hope that some will strike a note of acceptance. I use the word hobby in its widest sense, taking in comics and books read in our younger years and later years, plus our story book papers.

I suppose my favourite authors in the golden years of the story paper were Charles Hamilton in his various guises, the Sexton Blake writers and Richmal Crompton. The latter was not recognised in the story paper field but she was and has remained a favourite from that time. My reading included many other authors, well known and anonymous, but not as much as the above. When I put aside my boyhood interests, to return decades later, I went to read many adult authors, some of whom were supreme in the field of humour. More of them anon.

To deal with Frank Richards' humorous writings fully, would take several volumes, so I will only be scratching the surface. At this juncture I fear many readers will part company with my observations, and agree to differ. I never felt that Billy Bunter was a great comedy character and I still feel the same. A great creation I will grant, and without his intervention many plots would have floundered, but his ability to make me laugh was not great. I was obviously amused by his antics many times, but the joy was often tempered with annoyance. His character was drawn very much larger than life, and therefore did not really ring true. His many howlers in spelling and construing, I did not find very amusing. I thought that Richards' really great comic character at Greyfriars was undoubtedly Horace Coker. My readings of St Jim's were so much less, I feel unable to pass any judgements.

My favourite humorous piece penned by Richards was the hilarious picnic at Popper Court, when Bolsover was persuaded to make out he was Coker. The climax, when the real Coker makes an entrance, is a masterpiece. The resulting chaos was comedy writing at its best. Coker was the supreme personification of the lovable, if irritating, idiot. Another of Richards' characters, often used to provide elements of humour, was the deaf boy Tom Dutton. Even as a not very prescient boy, I always felt slightly uncomfortable that a boy's disability was used as a foil for humour. Tom Dutton was a flawed creation, because apart from the obvious cruelty of the humour, I never felt it realistic that a boy as deaf as he appeared to be would be able, or even allowed, to attend a public school. A boy who misheard shouted conversation at close quarters would hardly hear any academic instruction in a classroom. One of Frank Richards' very few poor creations.

Where Richards really came into his own in the comedy field was in his writings about the major and minor everyday and intellectual abrasions between the masters and

even sometimes with the venerable head, Dr Locke. Mr Prout was an extremely well rounded character whose very pomposity created moments of high humour, in the Dickens tradition. The interplay between Quelch, Prout and Hacker provided many magic moments. Richards' adult characters were often well-observed and provided deft insights into the human condition.

In "The Oxford Book of Humorous Prose", the example of Frank Richards' humorous writing is an excerpt from one of the post-war Bunter books. It shows Bunter in his usual prevaricating and cowardly light. I did not find it very funny.

Although I read many books of the Sexton Blake saga, I cannot recall many instances of high or even low comedy. Again, I will bow to the more knowledgeable experts in the field. I admit to Mrs Bardell often giving me a smile, but no other amusing character jumps to mind.

My reading of the Nelson Lee stories is confined to a few I have read in recent years, so I am in no position to make any useful observations. The same would apply to the adventures of Biggles and Co. I also read occasionally stories in the D C Thomson big five, but nothing of comic note jumps to mind.

(I am sure many readers will not agree with these remarks.)

(To Be Continued...)

THE CASE OF THE EXPANDING WAISTCOAT (A Blexton Sake Story)*

by Barrie Stark

"Well, that's that." The Cook wiped her hands and stood back from the table to admire the splendid Christmas pudding she had made.

"What do you think of that, then?" asked Cook of the Butler, turning to him with just a touch of admiration and affection.

"My dear ... h'm." The Butler hurriedly changed his words in mid-sentence as he saw the interested glances of the kitchen maid, and the page focus on him and Cook. "H'm; ah; a... Well, Cook. I always do say that you make lovely puddings, and I have to say also, that this one is really the best I've ever seen... and the biggest."

Cook purred. I like that, she thought. What a lovely man he is. Collecting her thoughts and actions together, she took the pudding and put it on the Aga stove to steam away for eight hours or more.

Some time later when the pudding was ready, she removed it from the stove, placing it on the table under a protective cover of muslin.

Sedately, but inexorably, the clock loudly ticked away the minutes and hours: ten, ten-thirty, eleven, eleven-thirty - MIDNIGHT.

All was still; all was quiet but for the clock as it repeated its somnolent tones. Tick toc, Tick toc. Ti...

A floorboard creaked. The bulky figure quietly opened the door and moved stealthily into the kitchen.

THE EXPANDING WAISTCOAT HAD ARRIVED!

(What happens next, and who is the mysterious Expanding Waistcoat?)

*NOTE - Blexton Sake does not appear in this story, owing to a previous engagement.

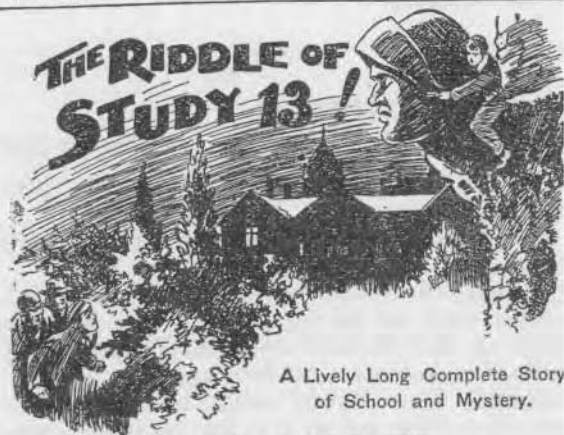
SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE AUTHORS This Month: A Tribute to John W. Bobin

by Margery Woods

John W. Bobin, aka Victor Nelson, Mark Osborne, John Ascott, Adelle Ascott and Gertrude Nelson, was a popular member of what might be called A.P.'s A Team... those authors who were able to write with great facility for both the boys' and the girls' storypapers, ranging through adventure, mystery, sport, detection, and school tales. Perhaps Bobin did not have the wonderful gift of words and touch of genius possessed by Charles Hamilton, whose every word fell into exactly the right place and flowed with a rhythm that was a joy to read, nor did he go for the more emotional and melodramatic style favoured by Horace Phillips and Draycot M. Dell. Instead he went for pace, excitement and action which took the reader along with him, over rapidly turning pages, through long and inventive serials, most of which were reprinted in library format. Under the name of Mark Osborne he penned many Sexton Blake stories, and as John Ascott his tales of school and adventure. One of these was **THE RIDDLE OF STUDY 13** (Boys' Friend Library, New Series, 176).

No. 176—THE BOYS' FRIEND COMPLETE LIBRARY.

The Foremost Monthly Magazine of Sporting, Mystery, and Adventure Stories.



A Lively Long Complete Story
of School and Mystery.

By JOHN ASCOTT.

which was a crude form of invisible ink, directing Hal to seek vast wealth at Grey Towers School. So, using the £200 legacy as fees, Hal and his friends become pupils at Grey Towers.

The enemy is the man with the scar, and, as in the tradition of school stories of this period, the working-class boy immediately falls foul of the evil Philip Mears, sixth form prefect, before he even reaches the school. Mears, of course, is the son of the man with the scar, and thus the old cleft-stick ploy of the villain in authority, able to thwart every move of the young hero, is exploited throughout this lively tale of schoolboy adventure, in a school with all the favourite ingredients of secret places, ivy for climbing, old castle ruins and tall towers for falling from, besides the rammers, old ships' figure heads from Uncle Saul's sailing days, wherein might be found the secret Hal seeks. For Uncle Saul had once owned Grey Towers, before selling it to be used as a school. One can't help reflecting that the old sea master must have become somewhat senile in his old age to sell

It opens like all the best school yarns, setting a riddle for the young hero, a lad called Hal Farraday, whose Uncle Saul, formerly a master mariner, has just died aged almost a hundred, leaving £200 to Hal and a broken message with the solicitor who has brought Hal the news. "Tell Hal... invisible... warm milk."

Hal and his pals, Tich and Jumbo (whose names describe them), have just been paid off at the factory, leaving them free to pursue the mystery of Uncle Saul's dying words and the torn sheet of paper in the old desk aboard the houseboat which had been Saul's last home. The words, of course, refer to a secret message written in milk,

Hal to seek vast wealth at Grey Towers School. So, using the £200 legacy as fees, Hal and his friends become pupils at Grey Towers.

his home for use as a school, in view of the predilections of storypaper schoolboys and girls for ferreting out every nook and cranny that might hold mystery. But still the wealth is not at Grey Towers, only the final clue which has survived the years until the advent of Hal, the rightful heir. And again, one wonders at the old man's strange reasoning in simply leaving directions for the finder to proceed to the local bank where the fortune is deposited, a collection of wondrous pearls. Why not simply leave a legal document with his solicitor, to be read to the heir? But had he done so there would have been no story!

Bobin was also a regular contributor to the annuals.

THE CHAMPION ANNUAL featured a variety of settings in its Bobin stories down the years, from dark steamy Africa in 1926 to the Wild West in 1932. The 1928 Annual held a detective tale entitled: THE THREE SAFES MYSTERY. In this, Kit Carew, boy assistant to Derek Fox, the famous investigator, does much of the solving of the mystery of the three blown safes. The first two are the cover for the cracking of the third, which houses a top-secret formula for a new and deadly poison gas combined with a new and deadly explosive. This story is typical of its era and the influence of Holmes is still strong, with the author's detective disguising himself...



A Breathless Story of Detective Adventure

BY JOHN ASCOTT

"A quarter of an hour later a most disreputable-looking loafer, with one eye covered with a black shade, and a stubby growth of whisker upon his chin and lips, passed from the dressing room into the consulting room, puffing at the stump of a clay pipe which was held upside down between his blackened teeth... "Good-bye, Kit," said the "loafer" as he passed from the room."

Bobin could certainly conjure up some unusual ideas.

In THE ELEPHANT OF FORTUNE we find the two intrepid Massey brothers filming in darkest Central Africa and being charged by a vast elephant with three ears. After shooting it (no conservation laws in those days) they discover that the third ear is an age-blackened plate which has been stapled to one of the fabled elephant's ears. On the plate is scratched a message about a fabled lost city, Thor, signed by Benjamin Massey, a great explorer, in 1815, who is none other than the ancestor of the two boys. The moral of this tale would seem to be, if you are going to have a coincidence make it

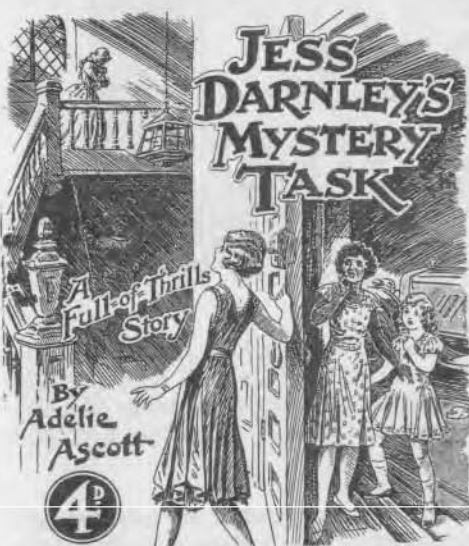
a whopper! The story gallops along in Bobin's inimitable style, having the boys doped by a rascally film director, tied to a tree on the bank of a crocodile pool, beset by pygmies and a witchdoctor, and of course at regular intervals by the rascally film director and his henchmen, until they reach the lost city of Thor, beating the rascally film director to it by minutes, and just having time to stuff their pockets with precious jewels before the earth shudders, roars and opens to engulf the lost city for ever... and with rough justice engulfing the villains as well. Stirring stuff!

Turning to the girls' papers - Bobin had serials in all the major issues; SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN, SCHOOLGIRL'S WEEKLY, and SCHOOL FRIEND. Under the pseudonym of Gertrude Nelson he turned his pen to a wide variety of settings: oriental in THEIR PROBLEM IN THE MYSTIC EAST; outdoor adventure in RIVALRS OF THE VELDT; a "Crusoe" tale in CASTAWAYS OF MYSTERY ISLAND; to homebased farm stories in THE MYSTERY OF DEEPMARSH FARM and THE MYSTERY OF MILL RACE FARM, this last being one of the stories in which he endeavoured to add a stronger feminine emotional appeal than in some of his more action-orientated adventure stories. There were also school stories: HER SHADOWED SCHOOLDAYS, JOAN ELVERTON'S HOLIDAY QUEST and THE SCHOOLGIRL HEADMISTRESS among many more and a couple of sea stories, A VOYAGE TO FORTUNE and DIANA'S VOYAGE OF THRILLS.

Despite his prolific output under the pseudonyms already mentioned, he adopted the name Adelle Ascott for a series of mysteries: JESS DARNLEY'S MYSTERY TASK; THE MYSTERY OF MARJORIE WARE and THE SCHOLARSHIP CO., while he was building up to his two greatest successes.

In the early 1930s he introduced The Silent Six, one of the most popular secret societies in girls' fiction, THE QUEST OF THE SILENT SIX and THE SILENT SIX UNDER CANVAS must have inspired countless small aspirants all over the country to gather in attics, sheds and barns to concoct secret codes, passwords and mystic rites, while risking fire with candles and parental wrath by borrowing whatever came to hand from the domestic furnishing cupboards that could be utilised as the all important robes.

But the most famous and memorable of Bobin's creations must be the girl detective, Valerie Drew and her faithful Alsatian, Flash, she of the violet eyes, beautiful red-gold hair and superb analytic skills. There was even at least one special occasion when Bobin combined Valerie and the Silent Six in a complete story entitled VALERIE LEADS THE SILENT SIX. Here Valerie is sent for by the head mistress to trap the



The Schoolgirls' Own Library No 401

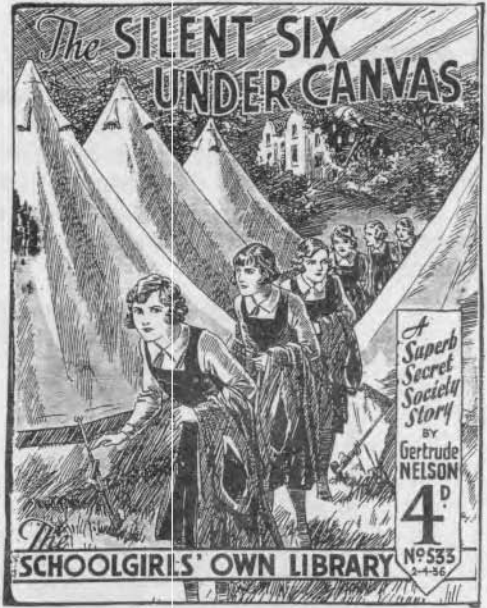
Silent Six, who, according to the head, have defied authority for far too long, and have also broken a valuable statue. Valerie, of course, takes a few minutes flat to discover the six culprits, to their dismay until Valerie allies herself with them to discover the real

malefactors. Bobin set a marvellous scene full of atmosphere. This was one of his gifts, making the reader feel he or she was really there, surely the best of all reader-identification ploys. Young readers of a more enquiring turn of mind must have wondered about the author credits; why was Adelle Ascott pinching Gertrude Nelson's characters? Not to mention why the usually infallible Miss Valerie Drew as actually admitting at the story's close that: "I'm afraid they're (The Silent Six) too elusive even for me to catch, Miss Spence. But as they are innocent, it makes all the difference, doesn't it?"

Perhaps these were among Valerie's last words from Bobin as this story appeared in SCHOOLGIRLS WEEKLY of April 13th, 1935, the month of his death.

His premature death was a great loss to schoolboy and schoolgirl fiction. Who knows how many more Silent Six tales of intrigue would have emerged into print? And how many more Valerie mysteries written with his particular flair would have been left to us as he developed this very special character? Indeed, Valerie became so popular during the two short years Bobin was writing her stories that after his death other writers had to take over the character and continued to do so until the demise of the storypapers themselves.

Who would dare say they were better...?



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



**VALERIE
LEADS THE
SILENT SIX**

By
**Adelle
ASCOTT**

Illustrated
by
C. PERCIVAL

A FIFTY-YEAR-OLD MYSTERY

by H. Heath

I was very interested in Peter Mahony's article on "The Benbow Stories" in the November issue of the C.D.

Jack Drake and Dick Rodney have been firm favourites of mine since I first met them in those *Gem* issues of 1938/39.

I certainly agree that the Benbow/St. Winifred's school stories were superior to those written concerning the voyage to and subsequent adventures in the West Indies.

TO SAVE FROM EXPULSION THE FELLOW HE HATES—OR SHARE HIS FATE! JACK DRAKE'S ENEMY HAS TO CHOOSE!



"You've got to see Gentleman Smith and stop him coming here," said Drake steadily. "If you don't, Gasbeny, you stand up to the Head with me to-morrow—we sink or swim together!"

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP!

By Owen Conquest.

When Charles Hamilton transferred both Drake and Rodney, the two main characters at St. Winifred's, to Greyfriars, I was at the time greatly disappointed and also mystified.

During the passing of over fifty years since the transfer was made, my feelings have hardly changed; time has been no healer in this particular instance. Indeed, a few years ago I was moved to write a short story covering the permanent return of Dick Rodney to the newly built St. Winifred's and this appeared in C.D. 505 (Jan. '89) and C.D. 506 (Feb. '89).

Once the Greyfriars stories in the *Gem* had ended, there were indeed a few loose ends left behind. When did Jack Drake become Ferrers Locke's assistant and under what circumstances did this come about? Why did Charles Hamilton eventually drop Drake and Rodney from the Greyfriars Remove? And why, oh why, did he transfer them to Greyfriars in the first place?

It sounds like a case for none other than Ferrers Locke to investigate. It could even be beyond his powers!

GETTING THEIR OWN BACK

By Geoff Lardner

The first time I heard, on the television news, the name of the current German Foreign Minister, Herr Kinkel, I burst out laughing. Even now, though I've become accustomed to it, I smile when I hear it. Why? Because of the 1933 Holiday Annual!

I got this for Christmas, 1932, and it was the first of five similarly acquired. One of the stories in it was, "Getting Their Own Back", by Owen Conquest. When I read it I laughed till my sides hurt. The other day I got it out and read it again, and still I laughed. Now any story that can cause an elderly gent to chuckle, sixty years after it first tickled his fancy, has to have genuine comic qualities. This one could be criticised for its strongly racist humour but that doesn't stop it being funny.

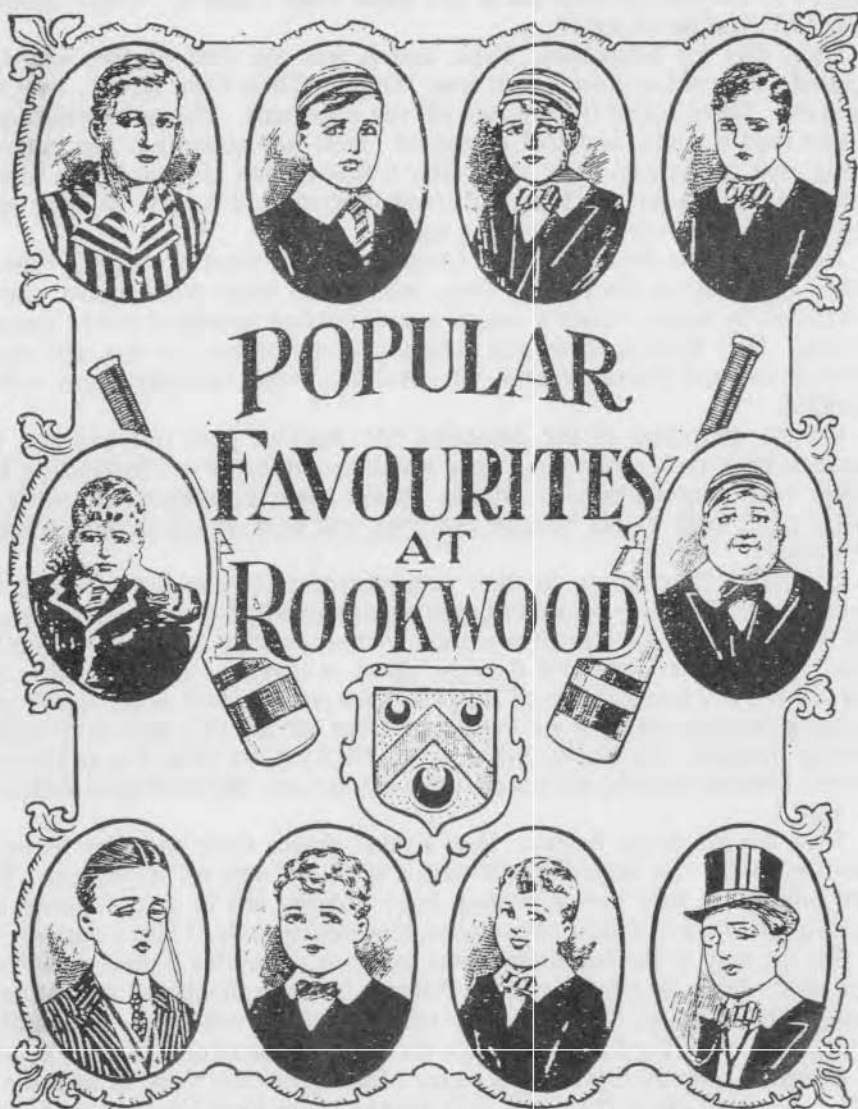
Herr Kinkel is the Rookwood German Master, fond of singing German songs. This offends the Fistical Four, who gather under his window and are entertained by Jimmy Silver's inserting a discordant squeak at every pause in the song. Herr Kinkel, somewhat naturally, is not pleased by this and reports the four to their Form Master, Mr. Bootles, who rewards them with a detention.

On the afternoon of the detention Mr. Bootles goes out and the four decide to bunk from detention. They are thwarted, however, by finding Herr Kinkel, as Newcome puts it: "sitting by the passage window, smoking his beastly pipe, keeping his beastly eye open and reading his beastly German newspapers!"

Gloomily, they return to their detention but are cheered when, a few minutes later, Bulkeley looks in to tell them that Mr. Bootles left a message with him to release them from detention when they have each done a hundred lines. This is soon done and they are about to leave when they realise that Herr Kinkel, not being aware of Bulkeley's message, is still at his sentry post. Knowing that he will try to prevent them from leaving they decide to make a dash for freedom. As Jimmy Silver says: "He'll call us back, but as he's only a rotten Modern master, we needn't take any notice. He can't give orders on this side."

Now the fun really begins. Herr Kinkel chases them and they leave the school grounds. He arms himself with a stick and sets off in pursuit. They have previously told him that they have ordered tea in a farmhouse and, realising that he will follow them there, they decide to lead him a dance.

On the way to the farmhouse they encounter Pankley, Putter and Poole, their rivals from Bagshot School. After a brisk exchange of compliments Jimmy Silver annoys his friends by telling them to run away. Grumbling, they agree. The Bagshot trio follow them to the farmhouse where, to their astonishment, Jimmy Silver, as a peace offering, invites them to join the tea party. They all enjoy their tea until Jimmy spots Herr Kinkel through the window, approaching the farm "with the light and graceful motion of an elephant or a rhinoceros." Inviting the Bagshot boys to finish off the tea, as they themselves have to go, the Four slip out of the back door and creep



Reading from left to right: George Bulkeley, Oliver Loring, Jimmy Silver, Arthur Edward Lovell, Algy Silver, Tubby Muffin, Adolphus Smythe, Teddy Grace, Tommy Dodd, Val. Mornington.

round to the window to watch the short-sighted and by now thoroughly enraged Herr Kinkel charge in and lay about him with his stick.

Delighted at having scored off two enemies, as it were, they set off again, with the indefatigable Kinkel persisting in the pursuit.

"Gum pack mit you!" he roars. "I preaks efery pone in your pody, isn't it."

"Not good enough," murmurs Jimmy Silver. "Do you chaps want efery pone in your podies proken?"

And so it goes on. They adjust a plank bridge so that he falls in the stream but still he persists. In Coombe village, "the sight of a fat German, hatless, squelching with water, and daubed with mud, with wet hair plastered round his crown" attracted a jeering mob of urchins who followed him to the school.

Silver & Co., feigning terror, rush to Mr. Bootles' study and beg for protection. There follows one of Charles Hamilton's classic dialogues between masters, at the end of which Mr. Bootles sends the boys away with this marvellous speech:

"You may go, my boys. Herr Kinkel will not touch you. If he should do so, you are under my protection. But dismiss from your minds your fear that Herr Kinkel is insane. He is only excited - very excited. Foreigners are not so self-controlled as English people, that is all. But Herr Kinkel is sane - quite sane."

I have often thought that, when Charles Hamilton was at his best, his humorous writing was on a par with that of the master himself, the great P.G. Wodehouse, and I would put forward this story as one of my principal pieces of evidence.

When it comes to dating it, there are one or two puzzling features. Years ago, the late Tom Porter told me that it was a reprint from an early Boy's Friend, but I have never been able to discover which one. Certainly Herr Kinkel had disappeared from Rookwood by the time the 1921 Holiday Annual appeared, towards the end of 1920. This contained lists of masters and boys of the three schools, and the Rookwood German Master was named as Arthur Flinders, M.A.

But the first Rookwood story appeared in Boy's Friend No. 715, sated 20th February, 1915. Therefore the Herr Kinkel story appeared either during or immediately following the First World War, when anti-German feeling ran rampant through the country. This would account for the totally unsympathetic portrayal of Kinkel as a German stereotype of the period: nasty, vicious, cunning, stiffly disciplined, totally devoid of any sense of humour but all the same a figure of derision. But there is nothing to suggest that the story was set in wartime. Indeed it is virtually certain that a real life Herr Kinkel would have been either interned or deported in 1914, and no school, real or fictional, would have employed a German during the period. So, when was it written, when was it published and at what time was it set? I'd like to know, but it's not half so important as the fact that it makes me laugh. And laugh. And laugh.

SCHOOL MEMORIES

by Ted Baldock

We'll honour yet the School we knew,
The best School of all:
We'll honour yet the rule we knew,
Till the last bell call.

For, working days or holidays,
And glad or melancholy days,
They were the great and jolly days,
At the best School of all.

H. Newbolt

I much enjoyed "Memories" by Horace Dilley in the October C.D. which stirred a few deeply hidden pictures in my own mind.

Our school was not a particularly old establishment, being inaugurated in 1908 as a memorial to a certain Mr. Morley, a benefactor of some note in our area. It consisted of six forms, although oddly enough I have no recollection of a first form. The chief and most vividly remembered feature was the long, dim corridor with doors on either side where the form-rooms were situated. Sober green was the predominating colour of these doors and the walls. It seemed to us boys that it was intended encourage a grave and solemn air of study; the success of this 'ploy' was doubtful in many cases - my own not excluded.

The corridor which gave access to the form-rooms was lit by small, widely spaced gas-jets which in winter burned noisily with a naked flame hissing and spluttering, while giving minimal illumination and creating many deep shadows. Along this "Via Dolorosa" at four o'clock in the afternoon would come the Headmaster, hands clasped behind his back, to collect up the doleful figures standing in the deep recesses of the form-room doors, these unfortunates having been ordered to await him. I can, after the vicissitudes of a longish life, still picture the dismal "tail" trailing along after the Head on the way back to his study. There we recounted (more or less truthfully - any other method paid very poor dividends indeed) our sins of omission, and received appropriate punishment for our deviations from the straight and narrow.

It was possible on dark winter afternoons to avoid detection by crouching well back in the recesses, thereby delaying the course of justice for a short period. 'Three' from a Quelch-like cane was the usual infliction administered on 'bags', the recipient touching his toes the while. For more heinous crimes an official 'six' was awarded: I must add that these were laid on somewhat less heavily than a 'three' which was considered rather decent of the Head. No malice or hard feelings were evident at these whackings which we knew in our hearts to be thoroughly deserved. Having called the tune we were quite prepared to pay the piper. The Head's reputation and popularity never suffered by these punishments. Nor were any complaints forthcoming from a boy's parents. Perhaps they knew us too well anyway.

As at Mr. Dilley's school our form-room windows were placed high up in the walls, effectively excluding all possibility of a fellow gazing out during class. This must have been a subtle Victorian idea - not a bad one either - quite unlike the glass-house erections of today which allow all the distractions of a busy world to be studied in detail. The ceilings of our form-rooms were very lofty with heavy timber beams. These were

liberally decorated with skilfully made darts constructed with pen-knibs, some of which were suspended above throughout my entire school life.

School was divided into three 'Houses', Homerton, Cavendish and Granta, each having their distinctive colours, yellow, blue and red respectively. Each house had a system of prefects, a high dignity to which I was quite unable to aspire. The competitive inter-house spirit was very evident on the playing field, as house almost literally battled with house for the honour of having its colours draped from a large shield which hung in the corridor for the current year, thus proclaiming it 'Cock House' at 'the best school of all'.



KEN HUMPHREYS (Nottingham): I would be grateful if you would draw the attention of CD readers to a record I am producing. There are two songs featured:

1. THE GREYFRIARS SONG
2. HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH

The lead singer is Robert Young, a fine pop/ballad singer with backing from the superb Southwell Minster choir and the Bestwood Male Voice Choir. Further details will be released shortly.

MATT. R. THOMPSON (Co. Durham): (BILLY BUNTER AND THE CROOKED CAPTAIN.) *Is this the longest speech ever spoken by Huree Jamset Ram Singh?* "The samefulness in my own absurd case is not great. You are aware that there has been a deep and prosperous scheme to blacken the character of our execrable chum Wharton and to drive him from this ridiculous school in disgrace. We do not know the reason; but there must have been a reason for the ludicrous rascality of Captain Marker. Now, at the time when Captain Marker desires the preposterous Wharton to be found guilty of bad conduct, Colonel Wharton tells him that it is very important to be of eminently good conduct. Two and two adffully united make four, my esteemed chums. We shall learn from the esteemed Colonel what Captain Marker's game is."

Usually, Huree Singh's comments are very brief.

ENID NELSON-WARD (Trinidad): Do you have any information about Dorothea Moore? I remember how popular her books were when I was a

school-girl. I believe she was an invalid and spent much of her life lying on a couch but wrote the most exciting stories. I don't think she was ever a boarding school girl herself!

Editor's Notes: I have some information about and a picture of Dorothea Moore, and would like a forthcoming C.D. to contain a feature on her. Have any readers details or comments to offer on her life and work?

RON GARDNER (Leamington Spa): Recently, I brought two or three copies of the 'Dick Turpin Library', which would appear to be from the period of the 1920s. On the back cover of one of these was an advertisement for a magazine that I'd never heard of previously. It was called 'The Crusoe Magazine' and was described as being 'brimful of cheery stories of adventure, sport, humour and mystery. There is a special section, "The Bosun's Cabin", dealing with hobbies and recreations, and plenty of jokes and illustrations. It's the very magazine you've been wanting and costs only sevenpence. Look out every month for its bright picture cover and the magic word "Crusoe" that will open for you a realm of wonderful and long-denied adventure.'

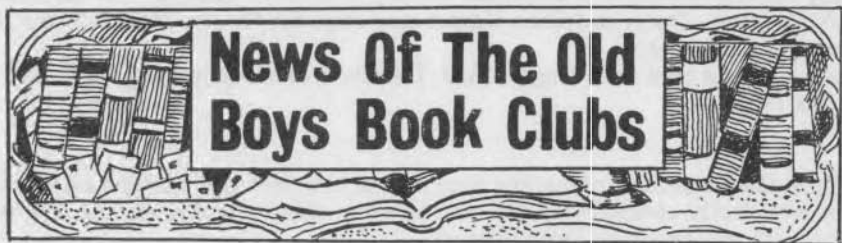
One could well imagine the writer of the above journeying to California in the 1930s and doing very well for himself as a publicity agent at one of the big Hollywood Studios!

DAVID BALL (Melksham): The last I heard of the author G.R. Samways he was aged 93 and living in Dursley, Gloucestershire. Has anyone some more up to date news of him?

RICHARD WATSON (Lancashire): My interest is in books by John Finnemore and F.A. Michael Webster, both school and adventure stories. I have been trying to find out more about the author John Finnemore without much success. Can C.D. readers tell me when and where he was born, and died, and give any background information?

I first started reading of Teddy Lester and Co., whilst at school in Ilford, Essex, in the 1950s, the Latimer House editions, and have only started collecting the more colourful Chambers editions 1910/1920 in recent years. Wilson of the Wizard was a particular favourite then and I have been trying unsuccessfully to obtain the paper-back book published in 1962 of his exploits. Happy days!

BOB ACRAMAN (Stevenage): Regarding John Lewis' letter in the November C.D. - 2nd paragraph - he and other readers may be interested to know that an article of mine in support of Mr. Bunter appeared in the C.D. Annual 1975, page 109, and Howard Baker and several other readers warmly congratulated me at the time, saying that they too thought he was deserving of more credit. If John Lewis or any other reader would like a copy of this article, and sends me a s.a.e. I will let him have one. (35 Park View, Stevenage, Herts., SG2 8PS.)



SOUTH WESTERN CLUB

The Autumn Meeting on September 20th, with Bill Lofts in the chair, attracted nine members.

Bill gave two talks, to open and close the meeting respectively. The first dealt with some of the history of the Bunter strip which ran for forty years in the Knockout comic following the demise of the Magnet, and the second with some early stories by subsequently famous authors, which Bill had come across in the course of his researches.

In between, W. Grant Macpherson gave us once again a sample from his encyclopædic knowledge of Nelson Lee and St Frank's, the undersigned spoke on the Boy's Own Paper, and we were regaled with one of Tim's mother's sumptuous teas. A splendid meeting, enjoyed by all.

The next will be the 1993 Spring meeting, at 20, Uphill Road, Weston-Super-Mare, on Sunday, May 9th. GEOFF LARDNER

THE MIDLAND CLUB

So many members were unable to attend that the Autumn meeting appeared at one stage to be an endangered species, but it the end eight of us made it and were very glad that we did. The small number was conducive to a relaxed, informal atmosphere in which we greatly enjoyed Una Hamilton Wright's account of her Uncle Charley's stories for young children, yet another facet of the great man's talent. Yours truly added a piece on Rookwood and Ivan and Mrs Webster fed us splendidly. Altogether it made a most successful afternoon.

We look forward to an equally successful but we hope more populous gathering for the Spring meeting on Saturday, April 24th, at the usual venue, the Blackheath Public Library in Sandwell. Bill Lofts will be the principal speaker. GEOFF LARDNER

LONDON OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

The Christmas meeting at Bill Bradford's home in Ealing was attended by 27 members who were treated to a delicious Christmas tea, which included mince pies and Christmas cake.

Brian Doyle recited two monologues - "And yet I don't know" and "Albert and the Lion". There was a pseudonym quiz prepared by Bill Bradford and a name the actor and film from Mark Taha.

Roy Parsons presented a Christmas reading from the Nelson Lee Library called Dorrie's Christmas Party, and Chris Harper read from the Sexton Blake Library, The Christmas Circus Mystery.

Roger Jenkins read from Magnet 1350, The Ghost of Wharton Lodge published for Christmas 1933.

The A.G.M. and January meeting were held at Loughton and attended by 16. Roy Parsons was elected chairman for 1993 and all other officers were re-elected with Alan Pratt automatically becoming vice-chairman.

Bill Lofts talked about Sax Rohmer and about Howard Baker's stock of books, especially Bunters. Eric Lawrence read an article from the Isle of Thanet gazette - "Thanet life and times of enigma who create Billy Bunter". There was a general hobby quiz presented by Norman, and the meeting closed with thanks to Alan for his hard work as chairman in 1992.

The next meeting is on Sunday, 14th February at the Chingford Horticultural Hall.
SUZANNE HARPER

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

The first meeting of 1993 saw an attendance of 10, with a number of apologies. We were sorry to hear that Mark Caldicott could still not be with us as a result of his recent accident.

We had learned of the death of Harold Truscott in October. Harold was a prominent member of our Club when he was lecturing in Yorkshire until his retirement and return to Kent about ten years ago. He was a keen musician, composer and writer, and hobby fan. We were also saddened to hear of the death of Norman Shaw. This is now the end of an era. Darrell gave a report on a recent visit to Hawk Books where a number of projects are taking place, and also to Robin Osborne who has taken over Norman's business. We wish Robin all the very best.

Margaret Atkinson presented "Greyfriars Characters". We were each given a copy of a story Margaret had written in which characters - some known and some a little obscure - had their hidden names. An ingenious piece of work from Margaret which caused lots of laughter, and certainly there was evidence of cribbing! Keith Atkinson got the highest score but we took him at his word when he said there was no collusion with Margaret.

Refreshments saw members tucking into home made scones and jam from Joan - verdict: delicious! Also, we cut the cake held over from Christmas. The decorating had been so good it had been taken away for photographing before being devoured.

Paul then gave us a run down on the various events taking place to mark the centenary of the birth of W.E. Johns. One thing came out of this: Northern Club was very much instrumental in promoting the works of Johns in the founding of the W.E. Johns' Meetings in Leeds, following the success of the founding of the now legendary William Meetings, also in Leeds. Northern Club members are proud that two such institutions stemmed from the same room in which we were meeting that very evening.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

THE DEMISE OF THE GEM AND THE MAGNET

By Roger M. Jenkins

The Gem met its end in a very orderly and dignified fashion. No. 1663, the last number of the Silverson series, was also the last issue of the Gem, dated December 30th 1939. The reader was informed, in a middle spread, that next week's Triumph would be twice as long as the current Gem and the front cover pictured was billed as a war story, showing Monsieur Morny attacking Herr Schneider. It had in fact been dredged up from a Gem story published in the previous war, and the St Jim's stories continued long enough to give the old Gem readers a chance to get hooked on the Triumph itself.

Charles Hamilton used to blame the paper shortage for the demise of the Gem and the Magnet. The Gem collapsed before Hitler invaded Norway and cut off most of our paper supply, and its ending was due solely to low circulation. The new stories for the Gem were started far too late to allow it a reasonable chance to increase its readership to a viable level. The Magnet did enough grow thinner in 1940 and there is no doubt that it was affected by the wartime restrictions, but its ending in May 1940 was not caused directly by the war at all.

I vividly recall the day when I went to collect Magnet 1683 from Smith's railway station bookstall. The manager remarked in an off-hand manner that it was the last number of the Magnet and, coming as I did from a second generation of Magnet readers, I could hardly believe it. When I saw the advertisement about the next week's issue, I took my copy back and showed it to the manager. He patiently leafed through a series of slips, presumably all dealing with discontinued publications, and confirmed his original assertion. Of course, I could not credit it, and went to a number of other newsagents the following week, in an attempt to buy "The Battle of the Beaks". They searched their stocks and confessed they could not find the current number of the Magnet: obviously, they were not so well-informed as Smith's. Eventually, I had to accept the unwelcome truth.

Why did the Magnet meet its end so differently from the Gem? The answer seems to be that Charles Hamilton was feeling the pinch now that his income from the Gem had ceased, and he thought the A.P. were not paying him enough for the Magnet stories. Accordingly to that end he withheld copy in the middle of the series (including "The Battle of the Beaks") in the belief that the A.P. would see reason. No doubt they would have done in the 1920s and, possibly, in the 1930s, but the author had hopelessly miscalculated on this occasion. With newsprint now in short supply, the publishers were not going to be held to ransom over a publication with a declining readership that would probably have been closed down fairly soon anyway. So, having no more Magnet copy in hand, they forthwith ended publication of the Magnet and summarily dismissed both editor and artists. During the mid-1950s, when Charles Hamilton allowed OBBC members to visit him, he often used to say, in talking about the end of the Magnet, "I was a fool." What a pity that such a famous paper should meet such an inglorious end.

WANTED: NELSON LEE OLD SERIES 1 to 127 incl. Bound volumes preferred. A good price will be offered. Alternatively, if preferred, a part exchange can be negotiated with S.B.L.'s, U.J.'s, MAGNETS, etc. Terry Beenham, 20 Longshots Close, Broomfield, Chelmsford, CM1 5DX.

OPPENHEIM, OR WAS IT OPPENHEIMER, SIR?

by Donald V. Campbell

Most bookshops, when quietly asked for second-hand E Phillips Oppenheim books, respond by giving a blank stare or suggesting - "Oh! That atom bomb chap!" Oppy, as he was known, certainly did not build the atom bomb but he caused a few literary explosions and some sexual excitement on the side. All of this despite being born in 1866 and, in the second world war, avoiding capture and internment by the Germans, and living till 1943. His books began in 1887 with *Expiation* and his last published work was *Mr Mirakel* in the year of his death.

He rivalled Edgar Wallace and produced some 150 books and countless short stories that appeared in "*Strand*", "*Windsor*", "*Pearsons*", and similar magazines. It has been said that if you read Oppy you did not read Wallace - and vice-versa. I do not know how much truth there is in this but Oppy's books fly along easily with complicated plots and unlikely happenings. Wallace, on the other hand, often allowed the plot to obscure meaning - perhaps because of his multiple dictation techniques? Despite their popularity in the 20s and 30s both authors seem rather dated now but Wallace appears less so.

Oppenheim was rooted into a past that perhaps never existed in the way that he envisaged - a past of Victorian/Edwardian society at the turn of the century. This "vintage" feel was to appear in almost every story that he produced. He was reprinted into the sixties with two books taking pride of place - *The Inevitable Millionaires* and *A Millionaire of Yesterday* - he was rather taken with wealth. But he did make, and keep, fortunes from his writing and his stock market speculations. The stock market crash affected him not at all because he almost always took his own advice, spurning the professionals.

His books are worth a read because they evoke a climate of manners and opinion and times that have long gone. Despite his own, countless affairs his stories could be placed safely on convent bookshelves or given as Sunday School prizes - nothing risqué ever appeared in an Oppy book. Yet his yacht, moored near Monte Carlo, was nicknamed "the floating double-bed".

He was rather prophetic and, long before World War I, warned of the "German Menace". His strangest book is "*The Quest for Winter Sunshine*" (1928) a small book on travel around and about the French Riviera which he knew in its hey-day. He still imagined it, when writing the book, to be unchanged since his first visits at the turn of the century.

Probably his best book (on the German menace after-the-event) is "*The Great Impersonation*" (1920). Recently this was brilliantly dramatised and broadcast on Radio 4. He sometimes placed women in lead rôles and although some experts suggest he was not at his best with female characters, I take an opposite view - try "*Advice Ltd*" or "*Ask Miss Mott*" or even "*Jeanne of the Marshes*" - this last has an exquisite colour frontispiece in the American edition. He produced thirty nine volumes of short stories which are an easy

read. Often they were of the linked character variety ("*Jennerton & Co*", "*The Exploits of Pudgy Pete*") but many collections have a mixed and varied content. His contributions to the magazines mentioned were continuous and numerous, but not all his short stories were published in book form so there are still uncollected gems to be found in the old magazines printed between 1900 and 1920.

E. Phillips Oppenheim, in the end, became the victim of his own nostalgic retrospection yet, seen as a joyous early 20th century romp, his stories take some beating.

A select short list:

THE GREAT IMPERSONATION
THE INEVITABLE MILLIONAIRES
CONSPIRATORS
ANNA THE ADVENTUROUS
THE CURIOUS HAPPENINGS TO THE ROOKE LEGATEES
GENERAL BESSERLEY'S PUZZLE BOX
A PULPIT IN THE GRILL ROOM
THE MILLION POUND DEPOSIT

SOME TRIBUTES TO NORMAN SHAW

From Leslie Laskey, Brighton: I was saddened to learn of the death of Norman Shaw. It was a pleasure to do business with him. He was always so fair and, indeed, generous. He always found time for a chat with his customers. Visits to "Aladdin's Cave" were invariably enjoyable and worthwhile.

From Brian Doyle, Putney: I was very sorry to hear of the death of Norman Shaw. I knew him from 1960 and he was a fine and fair gentleman. He will be much missed.

From Reg Hardinge, Wimbledon: Sorry to learn about Norman Shaw's demise. He was a real character: I always found him helpful and affable in my dealings with him.

From Douglas Morgan, Bromley, Kent: It was sad to learn that Norman Shaw had died so soon after his retirement. I first met Norman in the mid-1970s when I became interested in the Howard Baker publications. I always found him courteous, friendly and very fair in his dealings. I soon looked on him, not simply as a book-dealer, but as a friend. It was always a delight to visit him in what he aptly called his "Aladdin's Cave". And I shall always be grateful to Norman for introducing me to the "Collector's Digest" and "C.D. Annual", both a source of continuing pleasure. I am sure Norman will be very sadly missed by all the readers of "Collector's Digest" who knew him.

NOT A RATTLING GOOD YARN?

by Alan Pratt

The Rustlers of Rattlesnake Valley is, I believe, Capt. W.E. Johns' only western novel.

Published by Nelson in 1948 and priced at seven shillings and sixpence, the dustwrapper depicts two spindly cowboys atop equally fragile horses riding through a forest of Saguaro cacti. Various other species are to be seen in the coloured frontispiece, together with unlikely rock formations and blobby human figures. The artist, in each instance, is Drake Brookshaw and there are no other illustrations.

The story itself is a familiar one to western enthusiasts. A delicate English boy, Tony Somerville, being "weak in the chest" is sent to Arizona in the hope "that the dry air on the range might do for the kid what the London doctors couldn't do". On the O-Bar-0 ranch he makes friends with another fifteen year old, Pash Moore, Pash being short for Apache Creek where he was "found" as a baby by Old Daddy Moore.

It soon becomes apparent to Tony that all is not well on the range. Cattle are rustled and mysteriously disappear, there is friction with a neighbouring ranch and a notorious villain, Two-Gun Grundle (no less) has been seen in the vicinity. The two boys decide to track down the rustlers themselves and, in doing so, encounter a number of hair-raising adventures. There are chases, gunfights, rock slides and volcanoes and Tony (he of the "weak chest" rides a bucking steer in the mist of a cattle stampede, brawls with a knife-wielding Mexican and leads Pash to safety via "unscalable" cliffs when the baddies set fire to the valley!

A slight female interest is maintained through Sally, Daddy Moore's daughter, frequently referred to (by Pash) as "a real swell kid". Sally helps the two boys escape from the evil Grundle and shows great pluck when subsequently captured herself. Of course all ends well with the youngsters safe and Tony now a true Westerner, feeling fitter than could be believed possible. Two-Gun Grundle has gone to meet his maker as have the other bad guys, notably Durango, a sadistic Mexican who speaks like Chico Marx ("C'mon boss, let's makka da fineesh;" "we putta da brand on 'em, huh?" "Keepa da hands up", etc., etc.)

One cannot fault Johns for the amount of action crammed in to the 230-odd pages. He clearly set out to produce a good old-fashioned adventure story and, as usual, succeeded. Unfortunately (for this reader at least) this is marred by the artificiality of his "wild west" and the stereotypical characters. His west is one in which people shoot first and think afterwards - if at all! Tex Bradley, a cowboy much admired by young Pash, is introduced as a sort of adult hero figure. He pops up periodically, wipes out a few villains when the going gets tough for the boys and clearly sees this as part of any routine day.

For a few seconds he gazed at his fallen foe, smoke drifting from his hips. Then he turned, and, rolling a cigarette, came strolling back to where the others were waiting.

"Good work, Tex" grunted the boss,
" Nothin' to it," returned the cowboy casually.

And despite the fact that utter lawlessness prevails throughout, this is not the "old west". Although we are not told when the story is set, it may, perhaps, be inferred from the fact that Tony has flown in an aeroplane before coming to Arizona! Things may have calmed down a bit since 1948, but it certainly wasn't like that when I visited last year.

Rustlers of Rattlesnake Valley is, I am told, quite a hard book to find and it is, of course, something of a curio within Johns' prolific output. It seems strangely out of place also with other Nelson volumes advertised on the back of the dustwrapper. These include "The Master Thinkers" by Professor Harvey-Gibson, "Let's Look at the Bible" by Canon Redlich and "The Story of Petrol" by C. Webber. A mixed bag indeed!

As a collector myself I realise that this volume is a "must" for every Johns completist. Wearing my other hat as a western enthusiast I must say I am not sorry that the good Captain restricted his western output to one volume!

Or did he?... One of the most fascinating aspects of the hobby is that one can so easily be proved wrong. Does someone out there have a crumpled copy of - say - "Return to Rattlesnake Valley" or even "Biggles Flies to Rattlesnake Valley"?

Answers, please, on a postcard...

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.

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A VISION OF THE FUTURE!



THE Greyfriars boys are Peter Pans,
They keep their youth eternally ;
And this is good, for old age would
Distress us most infernally !
Picture Bob Cherry, white of hair,
A bent old man in a hired bath-chair !



Just picture Bunter with a beard,
And greater in rotundity ;
Talking of buns to grown-up sons,
And lecturing with profundity
On how to bake a rabbit-pie,
And what to eat, and when, and why !



Can you imagine Vernon-Smith
A grey old man in goggles ?
Or " Doctor Brown," in a Head's long gown ?
Imagination boggles !
And what if Wharton were to say :
" You chaps, I'm ninety-nine to-day !"

Coker, on reaching seventy-five,
Would sell his motor-bicycle ;
Wrinkled and bent, he'd crawl through Kent
Upon a creaking tricycle.
And Potter and Greene, for old times' sake,
Would hobble on crutches in his wake !



On Old Boys' Day, what sights and scenes
At Greyfriars we would witness !
Bent, bearded men, would gather then,
And talk of their unfitness.
Russell's rheumatics, Nugent's gout
Are topics we should hear about !!



" Grow old along with me," says one
(I think the bard was Browning),
But Greyfriars clans are Peter Pans,
And Father Time's fierce frowning
Will never take from them, in truth,
The secret of perpetual youth !

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HILL BILLY, SLOW DOWN!

by Keith Atkinson

Lounging and lurking and company shirking
Bunter in cycle shed seeking a ride.
Smith's in detention and he need not mention
The fact that he's borrowed his bike on the side.
Saddle seems high, but of work he is shy,
Which is why Bunter's own bike is never in use.
Wobbling wildly (that's putting it mildly),
Bunter through gates heading off on the loose.
Pedalling spasmodically, never methodically,
Hitting and missing and catching a rut.
Jiggling and jolting and nigh somersaulting,
Stretching for pedal and missing his foot.
Miraculous recovery, then making discovery,
The brakes are not working, as bike flies downhill
Faster and faster and courting disaster,
Rocking and reeling and feeling quite ill.
Whizzing and wobbling like a fat frantic goblin,
Openmouthed, pop-eyed, and screeching with fear.
Practically flying and feeling like dying,
Suddenly seeing that duckpond is near.
Squawking and quacking, as speed is not slacking,
Splashing and gurgling, soft squelching thud,
Wild waving water, and ducks dodging slaughter,
Yelling yaroooh's and malodorous mud.
Gargling guggles and spasmodic struggles,
Gouging out mud, spouting tadpoles and frogs.
Slipping and slithering, dredging and dithering,
Wailing, and wringing wet water from togs.
Quick catching of cold, severe sneezing untold,
Sad crawling and tottering back to the school.
Rapid recovery at Smithy's discovery
Of battered up bike in a deep muddy pool.
Rough retribution is Smithy's solution
Evincing in Bunter a drastic dislike.
Rudely awaking the perils of taking
And wrecking and ruining another man's bike.
Ranting and roaring and bumping and boring
And chasing and thumping and booting supreme.
Regretting and rueing of dastardly doing,
Weeping and wailing in continuous theme.



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