

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 47

No. 555

MARCH 1993

The TERROR of CEDAR CREEK! & The ST. WINIFRED'S ELECTION!
THIS WEEK'S BEST SCHOOL YARNS.

The GEM

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Just when you think things can get no worse they have a habit of doing just that. Last month I outlined the circumstances that may involve relocation, and this may still prove necessary. In addition my title to Norman's business is being questioned. I am, of course, taking legal guidance on this. Dispute is the last thing I want or anticipated, especially because Norman and I always had such a fine relationship of mutual trust and respect. There were never any problems between us.

I do have substantial stock of my own (including all items offered last month) but until this upsetting matter has been resolved I plan to suspend all operations. Rest assured though that I will rise again like the proverbial Phoenix from the ashes. I will keep you informed about my future trading, and meanwhile send good wishes to all my friends and customers, and ask for your patience and understanding.

ROBIN OSBORNE

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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From **Your Editor—To You!**



THE LAST HILDA RICHARDS

It is with great sadness that I have to report the passing of the prolific and popular author Eric Lyth Rosman who died at Putney on 17th January at the age of 92. In saying farewell to 'Pip' Rosman we are, so far as I know, bidding goodbye to the last remaining author who wrote under the Hilda Richards pen-name in *The School Friend* and *The Schoolgirl*. Mr. Rosman, of course, was also well known when writing for girls as L.E. Ransome, Elizabeth Chester, Ida Melbourne, Stella Stirling and Evelyn Day. As Tom Stirling he produced many stories for boys in the pre-Second-World-War *Champion* and post-war *Lion and Tiger*.

Pip was also a Frank Richard substitute writer, winning the Greyfriars Story Competition in 1915 and joining the staff of the Amalgamated Press in

1916 when he worked on the Magnet, Gem and Boys' Friend. He decided in 1921 to write on a free-lance basis (more profitable than remaining on the staff) and for a period shared an office in London with that other wonderful writer for both girls and boys, John Wheway - who also was 'Hilda Richards' for many years. Rosman wrote one or two Magnet stories but, from the early 1920s, begun to give more of his time to producing fiction for girls.

He took over the Cliff House stories in the mid-nineteen-twenties and gave them a strong identity plus a great deal of verve, drama and humour. His greatest fictional creation - the Eton-cropped, bemonocled and enigmatic Jemima Carstairs - became a long-running star in the Cliff House firmament but Rosman originally created her for Morcove School in *The Schoolgirls' Own* (when he deputized briefly for Horace Phillips as Marjorie Stanton). He preferred writing about his own characters and schools to producing the Cliff House tales and, in his view, John Wheway was a better Hilda Richards than himself. Rosman estimated that altogether he wrote somewhere between forty and fifty million words of published fiction. His memorable creations include Hilda Manners (for *The School Friend*), Happy Go Lucky Lulu and Gypsy Joy (for *The Schoolgirl*) and, for the post-war *Schoolfriend*, Trixie's Diary, *The Confessions of Mimi*, and *Babs and Cousin Bill*. Most of the splendidly inventive comic stories at which he excelled were written under the Ida Melbourne pseudonym: as Elizabeth Chester and Stella Stirling he created dramatic, adventurous shorts and serials.

His stories for boys were characterized by slightly slapstick humour or fantastic exploits. In the post-war period he also wrote adult stories for a variety of magazines from *Modern Woman* to *Escort*, and the BBC broadcast several of his amusing Uncle Bertram tales in their *Morning Story* series.

In the Second World War Rosman served in the Royal Air Force, mainly at H.Q. Bomber Command as Personal Staff Officer to Commander-in-chief, Marshal of the R.A.F., Sir Arthur Harris.

Many of us owe Pip Rosman our thanks for the hundreds of hours of entertainment which his lively and greatly varied stories provided. For me, there is a special personal debt. Bill Lofts sent him the article I wrote on Jemima Carstairs for the *Collectors' Digest Annual* in the early 1970s. Rosman liked what I had written about his charismatic fictional character and wrote asking to meet me. It was he who suggested that I should write a book about girls' stories - which of course I did when, with Patricia Craig, I co-authored *You're a Brick, Angela!* He gave me much encouragement along the way, both then and through all the years I knew him. It was a joy and a privilege to have been able to count this extremely talented author - whose work I'd read so avidly during my girlhood - among my friends.

We shall be hearing more about him and his stories later on in the C.D.
With good wishes to all readers.

MARY CADOGAN



*ERIC LYTH ROSMAN, PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1986
BY ALEX CADOGAN*



ESB AND WALDO

by Desmond O'Leary

In William Vivian Butler's entertaining 1973 book "THE DURABLE DESPERADOES - a critical study of some enduring heroes", we have an exceptionally comprehensive survey of the elegant and nonchalant outlaws of crime-fiction from Robin Hood through Raffles to the Saint.

What is unusual about Mr. Butler's approach is his refreshing readiness to include many authors and publications normally excluded in serious discussion of inter-war crime fiction. Not only "hard-back" novels such as those of Edgar Wallace and "Sapper" are treated seriously, but also the Sexton Blake stories and UNION JACK, and, especially, THE THRILLER. He pays warm tribute to that seminal editor, Monty Haydon, of the Fleetway Press. He quotes John Creasey's description of him as "mid-wife, one could almost say, to the whole Gentleman Outlaw genre".

Considering Edwy Searles Brooks' Waldo stories in the UNION JACK, Mr. Butler claims: "By 1929 Waldo is suddenly (after eleven years of existence) getting close to being top character on the Blake rota." He adds that it was in 1929 that Fleetway House started the companion paper to UNION JACK, the THRILLER, and this was the "virtual launching pad" of the 1930s Gentleman Outlaw genre. What gave them the idea? He asks what equipped the publishers to play so decisive a role in the development of the Desperado and suggests that the answer must partly lie in the decade or more which Sexton Blake readers had spent in the (increasingly tightening) "Grip of Waldo".

And when a scene in THE CONQUEST TOUCH (1948) author ESB writing as Berkley Gray (and featuring his own successful Desperado hero, Norman Conquest) proves to be "lifted" from "Village Vengeance", a 1934 UNION JACK featuring Waldo, it is plain that Conquest/Waldo should be seen as one continuing character.

Mr. Butler comments: "It can be said that Norman Conquest was Waldo the Wonderman, updated and groomed for stardom by the same editorial hand that had so brilliantly groomed the Saint..." - the hand, of course, of Monty Haydon of the THRILLER. He goes on to suggest that it is occasionally tempting to dismiss Norman Conquest as "a poor schoolboy's Simon Templar". However, he feels that without the long-running A.P. career of the Waldo/Conquest Laughing Desperado, there might have been no launching of the Saint.

Mr. Butler also points out that Waldo pre-dates Bulldog Drummond and that there are suggestive points of similarity between Conquest and James Bond. Both have numerical aliases, 1066 and 007, and are enthusiastic about mechanical gimmickry and undergo elaborate torture scenes. An early novel has Conquest turned into a gilded statue with the threat of death through pore-suffocation. Like one of the characters in GOLDFINGER..." it no longer appears quite so ridiculous that Bond may have had a touch of Norman ancestry", notes Mr. Butler.

It seems that Waldo and E.S. Brooks are more important figures in the world of thriller writing than I, for one, had ever imagined!

MORE ABOUT THOSE BLAKIAN LADIES ON FILM... by J.E.M.

Following my piece on this subject in January's Digest, Len Hawkey has kindly passed on this further information:

Magda Kun who played the part of Mlle Yvonne in the film *Meet Sexton Blake* (1944) had appeared in the West End stage back in 1939 - in the rôle of a young boy!

Jill Melford who starred as Paula Dane in *Murder at Site Three* (1959) recently appeared in one of the Inspector Frost episodes on television. Educated in America, Miss Melford is the daughter of actor and entertainer, the late Jack Melford.

We still seek information about Lorraine Grey who, nearly sixty years ago, played Mlle Roxane in *Sexton Blake and the Mademoiselle*.



NEW FOLLOWERS FOR NELSON LEE by Mark Caldicott

Nelson Lee went back to school recently

My daughter, Eleanor (aged 10), egged on by my wife, Joanna (old enough to know better), is given to friendly digs about "Dad reading his old comics again". One day she announced that her class were setting up their own "museum" for the term, and that she would like to borrow something old which her classmates would find interesting. "I'd like to take some of Daddy's old comics", she announced. I have several duplicate copies of the Nelson Lee Library, mainly of the 2nd New Series, and some of these were taken to school.

We were seated for the evening meal, and I asked the not unusual question: "What did you do at school today?". Instead of the usual "Nothing" or "Can't remember", Eleanor replied: "Some people in the class asked the teacher if she would read us a story from the Nelson Lee Library, and now it's our story-time book, and we think it's great".

The story in question was "The Man Who Vanished" (NLL 2nd NS 3), with Nelson Lee, Nipper and the newly formed Detective Academy battling again with their old enemy Professor Cyrus Zingrave and the League of the Green Triangle. The man who vanished is Sir Edward Handforth, Father of Edward Oswald and Willy Handforth. This latter pair soon get on the trail and track their father to the atmospheric Powell's Wharf in Rotherhithe, where they are captured, but not before dispatching a message for help to Nelson Lee, who wastes no time in coming to the rescue.

At the end of term the "museum pieces" were duly returned with, as far as I could see, not an extra mark upon them. Eleanor explained how the class teacher had been so fascinated with them that she had taken them home to show her own children.

Now the problem was that my son, Thomas (aged 6), obviously felt that something had happened which had highlighted his sister rather than himself. He said nothing at the time, but a day or two later, his bed-time story book came to an end, and we had to make the important decision what to read next. Thomas is a compulsive series-reader. We had moved from the Enid Blyton "Mystery" series, featuring Snubby, Roger, Diana, Miss Pepper and Loony the dog, and onto the more taxing Willard Price "Adventure" series. He was entranced by Hal and Roger Hunt, and their string of exotic excursions in search of animals for the zoos of the world, and I was surprised, therefore, when instead of requesting the next of the series (we had reached "Arctic Adventure"), he asked: "Would you read me a Nelson Lee story?"

Realising there was probably a doubtful motivation in this, I decided to treat the request warily, and because I was about to read it myself, chose to begin the Monster Library "Boy From The Bush" story, and see how it went. After some explanations ("What's a Remove?" "What's a public school?" "What's a jape?" "What does spoof mean?", etc.). Tom soon got the hang of it and settled into the story. At subsequent bedtimes I offered a change of reading, but we stayed with the "Boy From The Bush".

From the beginning of the story, with the entrance of the young Australian Jerry Dodd on his pony, Bud, I could sense that Tom was getting drawn into the story. Jerry has been instructed by his father to relinquish cricket, the game Jerry loves and plays so well, in order to pursue his studies. He tries to keep his cricketing prowess a secret, but is unable to resist the temptation to practise with the boys of River House and the secret is soon out.

Meanwhile we are introduced to Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge, the bungling detectives hired to keep Jerry safe from some mysterious members of a Hindu sect who for some unfathomable reason wish to get their hands on Jerry.

The story is a fine concoction of cricketing episodes, of comedy with Messrs Podge and Midge, and of excitement with Nelson Lee tackling the mysterious abductors from the East. Jerry Dodd's cricketing ability takes him further and further and eventually to a test match at Lords.

It is a long yarn, compiled as it is from NLL OS 312-319. It contains about twice the number of words as the usual book-length stories we had been used to. But there was no sign of a flagging of interest from Tom. He lived through each episode, practising the relevant facial expressions and providing his own sound effects, and it was wonderful to see how the story-telling ability of ESB could captivate one so young. The action is always so brisk, and the different themes of the story are so cleverly interwoven and sustained that the attention is held throughout. There is no literary pretension bogging the story down for youthful ears; the writing is pure unsullied adventure.

We finished the story in a surprisingly short time, and came the time to decide: What shall we read next? The answer, without the slightest hesitation was: More Nelson Lee please.

We had already had a conversation about why Nelson Lee was described as "the schoolmaster-detective", and I had explained that Nelson Lee had begun life as a detective, fighting with such foes as The League of the Green Triangle, Jim the Penman, the Combine (with Eileen Dare) and The Circle of Terror before fate had settled him in St. Frank's. Tom requested an episode from the detective era, and his interest focussed

in on "The Circle of Terror" (NLL OS 85). We are now working our way steadily forward from that point. At the time of writing we have reached "Nipper's Note Book" (NLL OS 96) and at the rate we are going, we shall soon be back at St. Frank's.

Here is proof of the lasting quality of the old story paper adventures. They were not forced upon the youngsters concerned, and the enthusiasm is genuine.

Yet there is an unresolved question in my mind as I read these stories, and as they are absorbed so readily by an innocent and impressionable mind. I see in them, from my position of (relative) maturity, only a celebration of something which seems to be lost now - the strong code of honourable behaviour, the revulsion against the "cad", the loyalty, bravery in the face of danger, and the sacrifice of oneself for anyone in difficulties, be it friend or enemy. These to me are positive values to pass on to the present generation.

However, I do realise that at the same time I am filtering out, in a way that a young person may not, those other values which also pervade these stories, and which are no longer acceptable: the innate superiority (usually covered by a false modesty) of the upper classes, with their patronising attitude towards foreigners and the lower orders; the archaic view of the role of women in society; the distorted view of war as a ripping adventure, etc. After all, the Amalgamated Press was a publishing organ of the great Alfred Harmsworth who recognised and quite blatantly used the power of the press for propaganda purposes.

Hopefully such fears are groundless. In the end these values, both positive and negative, have no lasting impression in the memory. It is the sense of excitement and adventure which remains. This being so, it would be a great pity if the stories were lost to this and later generations. Therefore, I shall echo the sentiments of the parallel experience of Ian Scales (CD 553) and "keep the flame burning".



MORE DOGGY DETECTIVES

by Reg Hardinge

I would like to elaborate on features of Mr. Hawkey's entertaining and well-researched article *The Great Canine Sleuth Show* (C.D. January 1993). The serial *My Dog Dane* which was published in CHIPS in 1938 was related by the dog's fictional owner

Clive Markham's Story of How He First Met DANE, the Dog Detective.



MY DOG DANE

by
CLIVE MARKHAM.



Clive Markham, a famous detective and aviator to boot. It is not very often that a tale is told in the first person but in this instance its use is most effective, emphasising the



Dane sped through the air and dropped into the escaping speedboat.

strong bond between animal and master. Briefly, Markham and Dane are close on the heels of XII and his crooked band who have succeeded in plundering a bullion train. The chase leads to an isolated inn on the shores of Black Water Lake, and the accompanying illustration depicts Dane's contribution to the dramatic events.

At the same time as *My Dog Dane*, CHIPS ran a comic strip entitled *Ivor Klue, The*

Great Detective, an example of which is shown here. The racy, piquant style humour contained in the narrative (which incidentally is another that is written in the first person) adds to the artist's flavour of fun. It is ironic that the aggressive Pongo unwittingly brings his master Big Bill to book.

CHIPS—THE FAMILY FUN PAPER

IVOR KLUE THE GREAT DETECTIVE



1. Dear Follow-up—I was looking for Big Bill a long time who was wanted, and I thought my luck was in when I bumped into him a other night. But he laughed, and said he'd see the day on me if I tried to get him.



2. Which made it awkward for me, as the dog was a fierce kind of hound. Then my marvellous brain got on the pump with a risky notion. 'I've know what I did! Why, use the shadow of a moggie on the fence.



3. "Take it" I harked. And that did it! Yes, the dog was daddled, and made a bound forward after the imaginary moggie. And so Bill was hanging on to the end, he got jerked over sideways, hitting the lamp-post!



4. Pongo thought his face a nasty one against the fence, which put him out of action, so I thought that Bill was as good as mine. But he was a tough guy, and not knocked out, after all. "You're for it!" he harked.



5. He turned back his sleeve in business-like look, and I thought it best to do a frank hand, after first harking Pongo's head to the fence. A good job, too!



6. For Pongo, having made a marvellous recovery, was junking after me. But he picked away a plank and it smote Bill a stranger that put him in a daze!

SOME COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS ON GREYFRIARS

by John Lewis

I have always assumed Chunkley's of Courtfield to be a high-class department store - a market-town variation of Harrods or Selfridges. However, in the Green Satchel series of 1932, in Magnet 1272 it is stated that Chunkley's are also in business as plumbers and glaziers, servicing Greyfriars in the latter capacity when broken window panes require replacing. Can any reader enlighten me as to whether this is unusual, or whether department stores in the 1930s offered such services?

In the HISTORY OF THE GEM AND MAGNET, Roger Jenkins noted that in Magnet 1394 Trotter, the Greyfriars House Page, was referred to as Tupper. It seems that Charles Hamilton occasionally had trouble designating Trotter as in Magnet 1046 he called him Toby!

In Magnet 46, which describes the sacking of Ernest Levison, it is stated that 'Mr. Quelch smoked a pipe himself.' Until I read this I had always considered Mr. Quelch to have been a non-smoker. Can any reader inform me whether there are any other Magnet references to Henry Samuel Quelch's partaking of tobacco - or otherwise?

I wonder if the following words, which occur in Magnet 168 (col. 2, page 11) are Charles Hamilton's sole reference to the fact that Greyfriars possessed water closets? '...But the architecture of Greyfriars came to his rescue. There was a lavatory not far from Mr. Quelch's study door ...Safely inside the lavatory he locked the door ...Alonzo's face glowed as he got back to the lavatory...'

From the pages of the Magnet it seems that at some time in the 'thirties the Bunter family moved from their detached residence in Reigate to a semi-detached house in the same locality, though they kept the name of Bunter Villa for their new abode. In December 1929 it is clearly stated, with reference to Bunter's home, that 'Even in the dimness there was something familiar in the look of that *detached* villa' (Magnet 1140, page 12). By January 1939, however, the Bunters had moved: 'Soames went back to the telephone and rang up the *semi-detached* villa which Billy Bunter called Bunter Court, but which was known locally by the less imposing title of Bunter Villa' (Magnet 1612, chapter 8). I wonder if the new property had a garage? The original house did not possess such a building: 'When Bunter got home, he found that it was what the estate agents call a desirable residence with room for a garage' (Magnet 1019, page 18).

I was intrigued by the Roger Jenkins article ('The Demise of the Gem and Magnet') in the January 1993 C.D. If his conclusion regarding the last days of the Magnet is correct, then it is a most logical explanation of why the paper terminated with such unseemly haste.

I would like to accept Mr. Jenkins' hypothesis that Hamilton withheld copy from his publishers in an attempt to boost his remuneration. However, I have a stumbling block in that all three books about his life assert that the four known written episodes - subsequent to 'The Shadow of the Sack' - had been received by the Amalgamated Press. The Magnet Companion also suggests that the publishers received these stories. It states that the title of 'The Meddler' (which should have been Magnet 1685) was changed by editorial decree to 'Bandy Bunter'.

In a general sense I think the humorous writing in most of the story-papers was of a poor standard. This contemporary judgement is not altogether fair. I realise that the reading matter under discussion was aimed at an audience of youngsters who were not in the position educationally to judge its merits, or, if they were, would not have wanted to. If it entertained in a harmless way then it fulfilled its purpose.

The comics of the time, and I am in the main referring to the pre-war and wartime days, did an excellent job. Their very longevity is proof of that. But it was the adventure strips that appealed to me. Strongheart the Wonder Dog, Tim McCoy, Buck Jones, Chang the Yellow Pirate and Get-your-man Gilligan, to name a few. I loved them all. Slap-stick has never been my favourite form of comedy, and in humorous picture strips this has to be the main ingredient. So comics did not provide much humour for me, which seems a contradiction in terms. The editorials, and the offiss-(sic) boy chat, and the almost inane chatter between two comic chums each week in most of the penny comics left me cold. This was an example of verbal slap-stick.

Having been very critical of these comics with hindsight, I admit to having loved them then and having a high regard for them now.

Now to mention one of my favourite authors, and an all time great humorous writer - the incomparable and magnificent Richmal Crompton and her one and only William. It would be invidious of me to try and choose a comic example from one of his escapades. I could literally think of dozens, and any one would be a gem of humorous writing. For me William is one of the great creations of literature, standing with pride alongside such immortals as Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Micawber, The Artful Dodger, Fagin, Jane Eyre, Heathcliff, Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, Raffles, Poirot, The Scarlet Pimpernel and many other giants of fiction. Miss Crompton created a peerless character and a timeless backdrop for his misadventures. William will be read and laughed at for countless years to come.

I have covered most of my youthful reading to which, as already mentioned, I returned in later years, as did many of us. Those years of Bunter, William, Biggles and all the others provided a firm foundation for a pursuit that has entertained me all my life, namely reading. Those early years introduced me to its joys and the knowledge obtained from it. These persuaded me to try other books and authors as the years advanced.

(To be concluded)

WANTED: Howard Baker Greyfriars Holiday Annuals for 1985 and 1986: Collectors Pie nos. 3,4 and 5: also Greyfriars Press GEM volumes nos. 8,11,18 and 19. Must be in very good condition. State your price please. W.L. BAWDEN, 14 HIGHLAND PARK, REDRUTH, CORNWALL, TR15 2EX.

SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE AUTHORS

This month: A Tribute to DRAYCOTT M. DELL

by Margery Woods

The most successful of formula writers are those who can work within the at times appalling restrictions of rules, taboos and rigid formats and yet add their own individual style, warmth and personality to the stories they create. One author in particular, who possessed this gift and a brilliant facility in writing storypaper fiction for boys and girls, was Draycott Montague Dell. Under his own name and the pseudonyms Piers Anson and Stephen Thompson he wrote tales on a great diversity of themes for several of the boys' papers, as well as editing CHUMS for some thirteen years.

A rewarding trawl through this popular magazine reveals expert editorial hands. Besides the requisite long and short completes and three serials, notes on sport and career advice to young hopefuls, there could also be found within the pages of CHUMS many interesting features on travel, naval and military anecdotes, hints, things to make, famous colleges, and at least one item each week of that which is sometimes unkindly termed snippets of useless information. There was also a book review column, and a thought-provoking piece entitled Chums' Parliament which presented a balanced for-and-against argument on controversial topics pertinent to school and youth.

But turning to his story-telling: in the CHAMPION ANNUAL of 1932 we find him heavily into the Dutchman legend with one of the rousing pirate tales he wrote for this annual, THE SPECTRE OF THE SEAS.

Captain Scarlett turned to his son. "Dirk," he said, with slow emphasis. "Vanderdecken's ship did not sink, she's sailing yet with a ghostly crew and a ghostly captain, and with her shrouds as white as crystal and her stern gallery as spectral as the rest. I know, for Barty told me, and it was that that blinded him, so he declared. He never saw again after he had seen the white ship and heard the strange songs coming to him over the lips of the waves as she passed from his sight, and took his vision away with her."

"A ghost ship!" Dirk's eyes were filled with amazement and, as he spoke, he saw his father nod.

"Aye," he answered. "A ghost ship --- Vanderdecken's dead because of his boast and that one he made to me, that promise to help me alive or dead, can never be kept..."

But it was! Later...

There, in all the pride of her sails, he saw a ship, and such a ship! She was white from her mizzen head to where her rail rose above the water, nor did she dip and fight as The Seamew was fighting against the storm.

Vanderdecken returns to pay his debt to Dirk's father as his ghostly craft leads the stricken Seamew through the dreadful storm to safety and then onwards to the island paradise that held Tarracon's Trove --- and peril for young Dirk at the mercy of the infamous Captain Flood. But Vanderdecken's unearthly vessel returns in yet another storm to lead Flood's ship to its doom on the reef and its pirate owner to the nemesis he so richly deserves.

Fans of CHAMPION ANNUAL had already met Dirk Scarlett in the 1930 issue when Dirk was an orphan sailing aboard The Barracuda and encountering another ghost ship, as well as a mysterious character known as Light o'the Lanterns, who proves to be Captain Trelawney of His Majesty's ship Royal Hawkins --- and also Dirk's father.

The chronology of names is somewhat haphazard as Dirk had appeared in 1926 as Dirk Frobisher in a pirate yarn in which captain Flood does his most dastardly and a lad named Will Scarlett is rescued from the clutches of the deep. The island is there, the treasure, naturally, and the rest of the essential elements.



The DARING OF DIRK FROBISHER

A Gripping Yarn of Adventure
in the Days of the Pirates

BY DRAYCOT M. DELL

Dell's sea and sailing stories flowed along with easy conviction, alive with the terms and style of the old-time salt-water genre that would not have disgraced a Hornblower. Whatever Dell turned his hand to he did with descriptive brilliance, pace and great panache. Yet compare the contrasts in his work when he turns to girls' fiction in the guise of Joan Inglesant.

THE MYSTERY VIOLINIST OF WEIRDSLEA (Schoolgirls' Weekly 14/4/34) featured the village of a hundred secrets, home of Helen Bourne who was rather different from most of Inglesant's heroines in that she was very much in control of her own fate as she solved the mystery of the strange girl violinist whose melody haunted the woods of Weirdslea in the dark of the night. Inglesant did several girls' stories round the woodland theme, introducing a gypsy heroine named Greta, who was also musical, and caravan dwellers who led a nomadic life of adventure in the countryside.

He did several circus stories, many school tales, mainly of mystery, two stories of Dulcie, of dreamboat dancing fame, and ranged through jungle and desert byways, just for a change, and on at least one occasion took his characters aboard THE TREASURE-

HUNTING SCHOOL-SHIP. He also published several early stories under the name Mary Ellen Shirley.

Most of the storypaper heroines --- and heroes --- went through hell and high water before gaining their rights and their happiness at the end, but Inglesant's heroines really suffered. Sold into slavery, plunged into jungle peril, captured by sinister beings of sundry nationalities, often from the east, even pressed into secret service at school. Long before today's whingeing over women's rights, the A.P. girls were tough and resourceful and got on with it, and certainly Inglesant's heroines were pushed to the point of exhaustion.

There are two unusual collector's items among Dell's works. One is FOSCA THE FOWLER, under his own name, and the other is BELLS OF MYSTERY, under his

HELEN BOURNE, OF WEIRDSLEA, RETURNS IN THIS ISSUE!

SCHOOLGIRLS

WEEKLY 2¢

No. 599. Vol. XXIV.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

April 14th, 1934.



See inside for the thrilling account of what happens when HELEN BOURNE FOLLOWS "THE MYSTERY VIOLINIST OF WEIRDSLEA!"

Inglesant pseudonym. These were hardback, annual sized books, illustrated by Glossop and published by Puzzle Books Ltd., of Garrick Street, 'Bells' featured Helen Bourne of Weirdslea, and 'Fosca' was a historical adventure set in the Fens. Besides being enjoyable stories each book came with a jigsaw puzzle to help solve the mystery, and a dedication. 'Bells' to Reginald Thompson Eves, and 'Fosca' to Ernest Mills Joyce, A.M. R.N.

Several of his stories in the libraries were originals. ON SECRET SERVICE AT SCHOOL was typical of these, where the narrative could flow without the ever present necessity of the cliff-hanging instalment ending.

Jean is sent to Highcliffe School which is suspected of being used as a cover for espionage. Inglesant fans could settle down to this with a delicious shudder of anticipatory excitement as, true to tradition, the author wastes no time before depositing Jean in darkness and swirling mist on a wild cliff road with the roar of the sea breaking on the rocks below, and a nightmare path to climb to the school. She is immediately accosted by a mysterious black-clad woman with icy hands and a rasping voice who bids her take a message to a girl named Zilla Frayle.

And so the scene is set yet again for skulduggery in hidden caverns, tunnels, a ghostly, eerie deserted old house, and the inevitable campaign to discredit Jean, before the final discovery of the submarine and the outwitting of the spry ring, who had assumed that a reputable girls' school would be a walkover as a perfect cover for their activities. But they had reckoned without Jean!

DAWN OF DERELICT CASTLE SGOL 561; HER PHANTOM FRIEND OF THE CAVES, SGOL 458 and JUST A MYSTERY MAN'S DAUGHTER SGOL 392, all belonged to the darkly nocturnal style that characterised many of Dell's tales. He possessed a creative fecundity that kept his stories racing at a cracking pace which rarely faltered, to the extent that occasionally time and logic slipped astray, but his gift for evoking scene, atmosphere and emotional identification with the principal character far outweighed the odd moments of doubt that a pause for analysis might cause.

He had a flair for names which suited his characters and planted them firmly into the reader's mind, and there was rarely any betrayal of 'tired' writing, even though his mantra word was undoubtedly 'keen!' He made his words work for their use and there was a certain beauty in his writing which was very appealing. Whatever he chose for theme and setting, even though the formula was there as designated by editorial policy, he imbued it all with fresh excitement and a promise to his readers which he never failed to keep. Select one of his books and you were in for a good read.

A superb story-teller.

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.

CHARLES HAMILTON'S USE OF WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS: PART 2 (AS UNDERSTOOD BY CHRISTOPHER AND COLIN COLE)

SHIPPING: A serious form of ragging.

A WHOPPER: A lie.

"PUNNY": The punishment room.

"NAME OF A NAME": M. Henri Charpentier (Mossoo) uses this expression; meaning, if it has a meaning, "Frustration and frustration". Mossoo probably cannot find the words exactly that befit his deep feelings. Usually connected to frustration with his class, e.g. Boys' ragging in lesson.

RORTY DOG: Someone who takes risks to enjoy himself; e.g. Breaking bounds, drinking, gambling.

BILK: Running-off and not paying for transport; e.g. from a taxi or a train.

KICKING OVER THE TRACES: Breaking the rules, visiting pubs, gambling, smoking.

JIGGER: Bicycle.

BAGGED: Taken, acquired.

"DOORSTEPS AND DISHWATER": Tea or supper served-up in the hall, i.e. watery tea and thick slices of bread.

"SOSSES": Sausages.

PROG: Food, tuck.

"SNAFFLED": To take, to bag.

IMPOT: An imposition; to write lines or a "book" as punishment.

"MUGGING-UP": Studying, swotting.

"GAMMON": Kidding, spinning a yarn, talking nonsense.

PREP: Preparation in the study for the lesson on the following day.

TO CUT: To leave or to be told to leave.

CALLING-OVER: Reading out the names in the hall to ensure all are present.

GATED: To be kept within confines of the school, usually as a punishment.

BAGS: Trousers.

"ON TOAST": To have a person at your mercy, or at a disadvantage.

PIE: The task will be easy.

"BUNKED": Sacked, expelled.

BLAGGING: Gambling, smoking, visiting pubs, acting as a bad boy.

A TICK: Person in a lower form.

ROOTING: Looking, searching.

TIFFIN: Midday meal/Lunch at School.

SWEEP: Chump, silly person.

"IN A ROYAL WAX": Very annoyed.

BLADE OR GAY BLADE: Someone who takes risks, breaking rules, and gambling, drinking, smoking. This may not always mean breaking rules, but person trying to enjoy life.

YELLOW STREAK (A RARE ONE): Dishonourable, contemptible; reference is made in "The Flip Series"; Howard Baker volume four; Magnet

1,253, page 10. This is also used to describe cowardice, but Wharton could not have used the word (on that occasion) in that sense. Also used in Howard Baker volume 9, 'Standard edition', Magnet 1405, page 4, in the cowardice sense.

THE EAGLE - Editor's Note: Several readers have written about this celebrated comic, so I am printing both Mr. Garrett's and Mr. Peatfield's articles.

MORE MEMORIES OF THE EAGLE

by Simon Garrett

The Editor's footnote to Lawrence Price's enjoyable Eagle article (CD 551) prompts a few thoughts.

The recent New Eagle has indeed offered a glimmer of hope to veteran fans. David Pugh's artwork on Dan Dare is worthy of the 1950s Golden Age. So is Keith Watson's (his intermittent contributions actually date back to Frank Hampson's time).

Unfortunately the recent storylines and scriptwriting don't begin to measure up. In the 1950s we could become thoroughly immersed in magnificent epics, often lasting well over a year and never less than eight months. There was time to establish atmosphere, time for proper characterisation, time for thoughtful interludes to punctuate the hectic action. There were pleasing embellishments. Officer/Ranker tensions were sometimes parodied by Dare and Digby, whilst the war of the sexes was expressed in sharp-edged



repartee between the martinet Hubert Guest and the feminist Jocelyn Peabody. Above all, the solidly convincing Service background lent credibility to dashing exploits on distant planets.

One looks in vain for such good things in the quick-fix Dare mini series of New Eagle, where rootless trouble-shooters hurtle in and out of improbable crises attended, as Mr. Price rightly notes, by a disastrous blend of brutality and banality. Even worse are the occasional displays of tedious moralising, reminiscent of certain Magnet sub-writers but eschewed by Charles Hamilton himself.

The original Eagle made no such mistake.

Dan Dare was originally styled "Chaplain of the Future". He lost the dog collar but not the moral scruple. Interplanet Space Fleet was a civil agency of the UN World Government and mounted arms only when absolutely necessary. Dan himself favoured a non-lethal gas pistol. He had no use for lies, treachery or alcohol. Yet the ethical message was mainly implicit, and painlessly worked into the thrilling adventures around the spaceways and on exotic worlds. The pill was well sugared. Dan's self-deprecating humour helped distance him from any lingering suspicion of priggishness.

The problem with reviving Dare is that the original strip started in 1950, was set in the period starting in 1995, and also incorporated a fairly detailed future history from 1965. Many of the predictions have come true, but inevitably others, like a Mars Base by 1988, have not. Again, some details, like women's fashions and Space Fleet's RAF-style slang (and moustaches!) remain firmly in the 1950s.

This is an occupational hazard of vintage science fiction, when real time catches up with the future calendar. Frank Hampson, who was his own scriptwriter in the early years, had a batting average as good as most. Anyway, for adult readers the anachronisms are part of the charm. For children however, a faithful Dare revival would be highly confusing, unless the saga was presented as an Alternative Earth which diverged from our own in 1965. New Eagle made no such attempt. They solved the problem by ignoring it. The new stories are in no way consistent with Hampson's chronology. Dan Dare today is an average 1990s hero with a few 1950s elements haphazardly inserted as a sop to the old fans.

In retrospect, Eagle seems to have been an unrepeatable phenomenon.

The formidable talents of Marcus Morris, Frank Hampson, Chad Varah and others came together at exactly the right time: paper restrictions were being relaxed, television offered little competition, and Britain was beginning to emerge from austerity. It has even been suggested that the national mood was propitious.

The founders of Eagle were both visionary idealists and shrewd marketing people - a rare and potent combination. Eagle is now remembered with nostalgic affection, but in 1950 Marcus Morris was not looking back to the great days of pre-war story papers. Instead he presided over the ultimate expression of the strip-cartoon medium. By the same reasoning, a latterday Morris would surely not look back to the great days of the strip cartoon, but would employ some electronic medium to convey the timeless message of decency and honour.

Meanwhile, New Eagle staggers on. It is now a monthly, and Dan Dare is supported only by 1980s reprints and by inferior versions of those marvellous exploded technical drawings (at no time has New Eagle used any other feature from the original). As Mr. Price points out, the Hampson studio system was not cost-effective even in the 1950s. It is unthinkable today, and this alone precludes a true rebirth of Dare.

The present impostor is by no means the first. The early New Eagle had the wimpish great great grandson of the genuine article, which at least

avoided any chronological problems. Later he became a super-hero, with magical powers. And back in 1977, 2000 AD comic had a brutalised version, re-born in the 22nd Century after many years in suspended animation. The visual quality has been widely variable, but even the fine work of Watson and Pugh is only a veneer that cannot disguise the inadequacy of the concepts.

Yet however degenerate the execution, the sheer persistence of the Dare name testifies to the impact of the original. Such is the legacy of Frank Hampson and those who backed him.

THE EAGLE REVISITED

by Peter Peatfield

The very interesting article *Memories of the Eagle* (C.D. October 1992) certainly brought back the memories as the EAGLE was the definitive comic for me in my youth; all other comics were just supporting features, B pictures compared to the big show, the golden-aged MAGNET of its day. Lawrence Price says that Frank Bellamy took over the Dan Dare strip in 1960 and controversially changed Hampson's Space Fleet designs. Actually Bellamy took over in August 1959 and, though he originally changed the look of Dan Dare, his drawings were altered on orders from the Editor, before they were published. Consequently his Dan Dare was similar to Hampson's - i.e., same uniforms, physical appearance, technical details etc. - and the changes, which weren't too drastic, came seven months later in March 1960. Frank Bellamy drew Dan Dare for just under a year until July 1960 when he started 'Fraser of Africa' and - except on a few occasions - only drew one page of Dan Dare a week.

Mr. Price also says Keith Watson successfully returned the strip of Hampson's original form in 1962, but when Watson took over Dan Dare had been moved to the inside, was in dreary black and white and almost unrecognizable. The difference between a well drawn coloured Dan Dare strip and the black and white version equalled the difference between Frank Richards at his best and a poor substitute writer.

I can vividly remember the beginning of the downfall of the EAGLE, that dreaded day when it advertised on the inside of the back page in big letters LOOK! A NEW EAGLE NEXT WEEK. There was also that other dangerous sign - free gifts were amongst the marvels promised for the next week. However, the advert certainly seduced me (poor deluded fool!) and I actually looked forward to the following issue, imagining it would be an improvement. My illusions were soon shattered; the next number showed that the glory that had been the EAGLE was no more. Its days of greatness had departed and for the paper's fans life was stale, flat and unprofitable. Better, perhaps, the MAGNET style swift demise than for a paper to suffer the lingering indignities which EAGLE had to put up with.

Our Editor asked what we think of the very recent NEW EAGLE. Well, I suspect the answer might 'not a lot' - if I could find a copy. I've looked in several newsagents, including W.H. Smiths and Martins, in a couple of towns and had no luck at all. I was told by one newsagent that they thought it had

merged with another comic but weren't sure of the name. Has the EAGLE undergone the final humiliation of disappearing without trace into another comic?

A NOTE FROM BRIAN DOYLE

I feel that some mention should be made in the SPCD of the new set of postage stamps issued by the Post Office on February 2nd this year (and on sale throughout the rest of the year, I understand).

The first Class stamps are in full colours, number ten in all, and depict such famous characters from children's literature as Just William, Rupert Bear, Long John Silver, Peter Rabbit, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Toad and Mole, and the Bash Street Kids, among others. The one nearest to our own hobby, I suppose, is the stamp showing Just William,



with a coy Violet-Elizabeth in the background; this was drawn by Paul Slater, 'after' Thomas Henry. Each stamp has the Queen's head in gold and the emblem '1st' in the top right-hand corner. A booklet containing all ten of the new stamps (plus a free selection of 'fun greetings stickers') costs £2.40 from any Post Office.

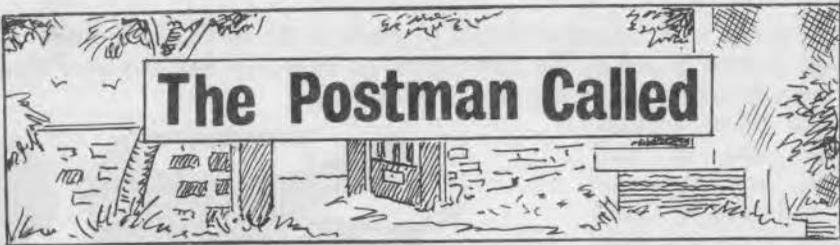
As I say, I thought this happy event should be drawn to the attention of readers who may not otherwise have noticed it. After all, it's not every year that our childhood favourites are immortalized by the Royal Mail (although, curiously enough, requests to honour Sherlock Holmes and Billy Bunter on commemorative stamps in their creators' respective Centenary years were turned down, more's the pity).

"Crumbs!" as William might well have said to himself with a certain amount of pride...

EDITOR'S NOTE: This book of stamps is a great nostalgic buy. I particularly liked the colourful stamps of Rupert Bear and William. For the latter, the Richmal Crompton Centenary Committee, of which I was

Convenor and Secretary, tried without success to get a stamp in 1990 (her Centenary year). I feel that our efforts have now been rewarded.

1993 is to be another great year for William. (Watch our pages for further announcements soon about Macmillan's plans for him.)



J.E.M. (Brighton): May I - belatedly I'm afraid - add my tribute to Norman Shaw and express profound regret at his passing. Like you, and so many others, I was the recipient of his unflinching courtesy and fairness over many years. He will be greatly missed.

Congratulations on Donald V. Campbell's excellent piece about E. Phillips Oppenheim. I was glad to see *The Million Pound Deposit* on Mr. Campbell's recommended list. It still makes a most exciting read 60-odd years after its first publication and introduces one of the most convincing and frightening villains to be found in the Thriller field.

Mr. Campbell's defence of Oppenheim's women characters is also well taken. In the novel referred to above, the apparently less appealing of the two principal females turns out to be both more complex and more convincing, even though she doesn't win the hero.

BRIAN DOYLE (Putney): Regarding reader Richard Watson's query (February issue) about author John Finnemore, I can only reiterate my own entry on him in my "Who's Who of Boys' Writers and Illustrators" publication (1964) and say that he is best-known for his stories about Teddy Lester and Co. of Slapton School, which originally ran in "Boys' Realm" in the early-1900s. They later appeared in six volumes in book-form - "Three School Chums", "His First Term", "Teddy Lester's Chums", "Teddy Lester's Schooldays", "Teddy Lester in the Fifth" and "Teddy Lester, Captain of Cricket". His historical story "The Black Galley" was one of the three serials which began in No. 1 of the "Boys' Realm" in 1902. He was very keen on Scouting and wrote a famous Scouting story, "The Wolf Patrol", published in 1908 and often reprinted. His several other books in this genre later included "A Boy Scout in the Balkans" (1913) and "A Boy Scout with the Russians" (1915). His many other books for boys included "Jack Haydon's Quest", "The Story of a Scout", "The Renegade" and "Red Men of the dusk". John Finnemore is not to be confused with **Joseph Finnemore**, who illustrated many boys' stories.

R.W. QUIBELL (Blackfield): P.G. Wodehouse in collaboration with William Townend had a long "Boys" story published in Chums of 1908 - No. 839 - Vol. 17. The

story was called *The Luck Stone* and was published under the pseudonym of Basil Windham. I've never been able to get hold of a copy; so keep an eye out for me please. (Even just a photo-copy of this story would be much appreciated.)

JOHN WARDLAW (Glasgow): The cover of one particular copy of *The Thriller* has lodged in my memory over the years. It was called *The Second Victim* by Leslie Charteris. If I am not mistaken the cover showed a man in a large house pulling back a crimson curtain to reveal the figure of another man behind it. There were also *The First Victim* and *The Third Victim* by the same author. Maybe one of the issues in the *Charteris Wanted* advertisement in C.D. 551 is *The Second Victim*.

BILL LOFTS (London): I greatly enjoyed Brian Doyle's two part series on the last Bunter Show at Exeter. So accurate in every detail as I knew it. There was a video showing the highlights owned by the late Maurice Hall that I once saw. My own feelings were a bit mixed about it. Whilst attempting to keep to the creator Frank Richards' ideals about Greyfriars. I feel it extremely unlikely he would ever have written about a love affair between Mr. Quelch and Mrs. Kepple! A sub-writer Yes. Later shares were on offer to finance the show in the West End, but my own financial advisers told me never to invest in such projects as it was always very risky.

In answer to another correspondent, Bill Baker did originally send copies of his Vols. to the Universities as by copyright Act, but after the first few, by some complications which are too long to go into, dropped them. It involved reprinted material not wanted by some.

I don't quite know where R.J. Holmes got his figures from on *The Gem's* 5,000 circulation in 1939. Official figures from A.P. records show it was then about 15,800. (Confirmed by a Director of Juvenile Publications, as well as Manager of printing works.) *Magnet* was much higher with an average of 41,660 copies sold weekly in the last six months of its life. Indeed some papers were much lower than this, such as the thirties short run *Pioneer*, *Startler*, *Pilot*, *Wild West Weekly*, *Buzzer*, *Surprise*, whilst *Children's Newspapers* never made any profit (sales so low for schools only). The low circulations were caused by dominance of D.C. Thomson papers. What could you do when *Wizard* sold 750,000 copies weekly in 1939? *What Boys and girls Read*, published cir. 1940, proved to be a real eye-opener as far as popularity of boys papers were concerned.

I much enjoyed Ian Godden's piece on Anthony Parsons, especially the stories set in India where he was a Captain in the Army - so authentic in every detail with the Urdu spot on. A fault he did have, however, was plot construction. In the last few chapters he was inclined to gabble the end with too much explanatory dialogue instead of letting the story run smoothly. According to John Hunter, who knew him, Parsons was an exceptionally tall man, who towered over everyone - he also was a great humourist with a wealth of anecdotes

DAPHNE COOPER (Shrewsbury): I am trying to track down an album/annual which I saw as a child in the early 30s and which had belonged to my mother in her childhood, so I suppose it must have been published in the late 19th or early 20th century. Unfortunately I don't know its title, editor or publisher. The only way I can identify it is by two of the stories which ran through it (interspersed with other material so I suppose it had originally appeared as separate serial issues). One of these was *A Handful of Rebels* (a family story about a group of children trying to resist, but later

succumbing to, a new governess). The other is the one I really want, but all I can remember is that the death of a dragonfly is somehow crucial and that a line-drawing of a dragonfly appears at the end of the story.

You see why I say it is an impossible request, but if your readers could help to identify it I could then see if anyone, anywhere has a copy for sale, and I should be most grateful.

EDWARD ALLATT (Cowley): Can any reader tell me the number and title of the stories from which the Nelson Lee pictures shown on page 6 of the February C.D. have been taken?

This issue is up to its usually high standard and I have to say that it is one of the best 'little magazines' that I have ever encountered.

R.T.A. NOONAN (Tunbridge Wells): You should know that finding SPCD was one of life's better happenings and the Annual was great.

M.R. THOMPSON (Chester-Le-Street): The only time I smile when making a cheque out is when I renew my C.D. subscription!

(Editor's Note: I am glad and grateful for these complimentary remarks about the C.D. So many of your letters are in this positive vein.)

DES O'LEARY (Loughborough): Congratulations on another superb Annual! Every article was interesting and enthralling.

My son, home on holiday, was particularly taken with the CAPTAIN JUSTICE article. "A secret base in the Atlantic, flying to the rescue around the globe, it's THUNDERBIRDS" he said! "Wonder if Gerry Anderson read MODERN BOY?"

As an ex-teacher I was taken by Peter Mahony's "academic review" of the great Hamilton schools. Full of interest. And the illustrations to Michael Rouse's TREASURED COMICS were a delight.

I always keep my C.D. Annual until Christmas Day and, despite having a beautiful copy of ADVENTURELAND 1936 purchased for Christmas, everything stopped until I'd read the Annual.

SALE: Annuals, Comics, Film Magazines, Williams, Biggles, Bunter Books (Skilton), Film Books (various), many items.

L. MORLEY, 76 St. Margarets Road, Hanwell, London, W7 2HF. Tel. 081 579 3143.

FOR SALE: Complete set of C.D. monthlies including early Who's Who editions and complete set of C.D. Annuals. Offers invited. MR. P. GALVIN, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks., SY7 2DT. Tel: 0226 295613.

BIGGLES - THE W.E. JOHNS CENTENARY by Norman Wright

The W.E. Johns Centenary Committee have been busy for almost three years planning events to mark the birth of W.E. Johns. As the centenary approached other organisations began to take an interest in the author and his enduring creations and, by the time January 1993 arrived, Johns and Biggles were on the verge of a renaissance.

"Biggles and the Long Haul", a BBC Radio 4 documentary produced by Neil Trevethick and presented by Martin Wainright, got the celebrations off to a good start. It was a well researched programme that offered a refreshingly balanced view of Johns and his work. The theory, put forward in the programme, by Professor Jeffrey Richards that Biggles was based in part on T.E. Lawrence received wide coverage in the press. Even if one disagrees with the idea (as 99% of the Biggles enthusiasts I have spoken to do) it did at least keep the media from pushing their old chestnut of Johns being a racist - a view that anyone with even a slight knowledge of his work will know to be unfounded.

The R.A.F. Museum at Hendon opened their exhibition on Tuesday, 2nd of February. "The Man Who Was Biggles" offered a good mix with some interesting exhibits including aircraft, artwork by Johns and others, a selection of books by the author and a continuous video showing a large selection of W.E. Johns' books. A goodly number of 'gentlemen (and ladies) of the press' were present and the event was generally reviewed favourably.

Friday the 5th February, the actual birthdate, was a bright chilly morning but that did not stop almost one hundred enthusiasts attending the bumper bundle of celebrations that Hertford had arranged as a tribute to one of their most famous 'sons'. The day began with a rousing recital given by the boys of Johns' old school. The brass band played splendidly, giving a truly professional performance of a number of pieces including one especially written for the occasion by the school's music master. After a short walk we all arrived at 41 Cowbridge, home of Johns for part of his childhood, where Mrs. Margaret Collins unveiled a blue plaque. There were such a lot of us viewing the event that for a time the traffic was brought to a standstill. Unfortunately the weather was too bad for the planned Fly Over by Johns' old squadron but, undeterred, we all trundled off to a reception given by the Mayor of Hertford where we were shown the mace and other pieces of local regalia. Next it was all aboard a special coach for lunch, where much discussion took place between mouthfuls. The noise and level of jollity were reminiscent of those squadron 'get togethers' often mentioned in the early Biggles stories - though this time there were no enemy air-raids to bring things to a halt!

After spending far longer than expected over lunch it was back to Hertford to look round the exhibition at the town's museum. And what a display it was! Every one of Johns' books was on display, together with photographs, paintings and many items of ephemera. This must be the most comprehensive exhibition ever on the author and just could not have been bettered. For the collector there were several special W.E. Johns/Biggles souvenirs, all bearing the "Biggles Comes Home to Hertford" logo. After such a busy day, although tired as we made our way home, we looked forward to the 'Biggling' that was to take place on the following day.

Those Johns' enthusiasts who lived close to Hertford attended the "Biggles Balloon Race" that began on the morning of Saturday, 6th of February. But most of us were making our way to London for the Centenary Luncheon, held at the R.A.F. Club in Piccadilly. Jenny Schofield 'chaired' this event. 132 enthusiasts gathered at the club and, after chatting, entered the ballroom for the luncheon. The food was good but the

highlights of the event were the guest speakers - Squadron Leader A.D.G. Gunby, R.A.F., Lord Grade, Mary Cadogan and Sir Peter Masfield. Each entertained and informed us in his or her own inimitable way. After lunch there was more enthusiastic conversation as everyone discussed the events of the day before a slow dispersal took place. Those with plenty of stamina made their way to the hotel where a party of Biggles enthusiasts from Holland were staying. There, I believe, they continued the celebrations until very late. I trained back to Watford feeling that W.E. Johns would have been well satisfied with the way he and his heroes had been remembered.

Editor's Note: Up-dates on the Centenary Celebrations will be included in the C.D. throughout this year.

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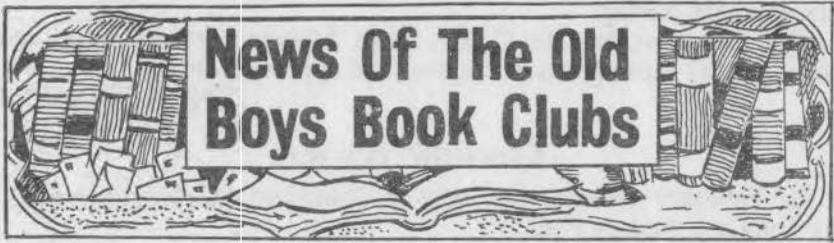
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CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our February gathering was at the home of member Adrian Perkins.

After a short business meeting we all had our grey cells tested with a Literature Quiz devised by Paul Wilkins. This involved locating the title and author of some twenty books, plays and poems from a brief quote, helped along by clues similar in nature to those used for crosswords. The items, from adult and juvenile literature, were all taken from popular classics of the genre and mostly from the 20th century.

Later we had Part 7 of Science Fiction in the Cinema, presented by Keith Hodgkinson. This selection of excerpts covered such gems as 'Forbidden Planet', 'First Men in the Moon', and 'Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea'.

ADRIAN PERKINS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A welcome was given by our Chairman to the fourteen present with a special welcome to our guest speaker and to Dr. Nadnu Thalnage from Bolton who hopefully would be with us on regular occasions.

We were having problems with our proposed Annual Club Dinner so a revised date of 17th April was suggested. David Bradley would make further enquiries. A set of the new greetings stamps featuring William, Rupert, The Bash Street Kids and other characters from juvenile fiction was on show with a set of matching postcards. It was noted regretfully that Greyfriars and Biggles were omitted.

Eric and Catherine Humphrey had produced a video of the visit to the Club of Mary Cadogan and Anthony Buckeridge and this was to be available through the Club library.

Our guest speaker was Mike Parsons and his subject, "The Sinking of 'The Titanic'". It proved a most fascinating talk with lots of facts and figures, plus a display of books, postcards, posters, plans of the ship and other items of interest. One fact none of us knew was that there is a "Titanic society" with various branches - the strongest being in the North West. Mike's talk was warmly appreciated by us all.

Refreshments were once again from the splendid range of samples of Joan's delicious baking.

Our own poet, and the C.D.'s, Keith Atkinson, presented six more of his new rhymes causing lots of laughter and appreciation.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

LONDON O.B.B.C.

The February meeting was held at Chingford Horticultural Hall, with hosts Tony and Audrey Potts.

There was discussion of various newspaper cuttings relating to the W.E. Johns Centenary, and Norman Wright gave an update on the various celebrations, including the exhibitions at Hertford and the R.A.F. Museum at Hendon. The Radio 4 programme in which Norman took part was also discussed with much interest. After the delicious refreshments, there was a chat by Roy Parsons about the Collectors' Digest. He looked especially at an early number (73) edited by Herbert Leckenby and the contents of this were compared with those of the C.D. today - forty years on. Roger Jenkins' puzzle on Greyfriars characters then took place, the winners being Roy, Alan Pratt, Norman, Peter Mahony, Bill Bradford and Les Rowley.

The next meeting will be on Sunday, 14th March at the home of Peter and Dorothy Mahony, 12 Riefield Road, Eltham, S.E.9. (Tel: 081 850 9316).

BLAKIAN: STOP PRESS

Editor's Note: I have received details about Jill Melford also from Brian Doyle and Reg Hardinge. Brian writes as follows:-

"I have, in fact, met Jill Melford three or four times at various film studios over the years, and very charming and attractive she was - tall, beautiful and (I think) red-headed. I speak in the past tense since I haven't seen her for several years, though I believe she did appear in a TV drama production or series back in the 1980s.

Jill Melford was the actress-daughter of the late Jack Melford, a well-known and very busy leading British supporting actor of stage, screen, TV and radio from the 'thirties onwards. Many veteran BBC radio listeners (including myself) probably remember him best for his eponymous leading role as British secret agent 'X.2.' in the drama series segment 'Calling X.2.' in the second series of "Monday Night at Eight" on BBC Radio 1941-42.

After being evacuated to America at the outbreak of World War Two, Jill became a dancer in Broadway shows in New York, and later modelled for the famous artist Petty. On returning to England, she appeared in several stage productions, and enjoyed an especially-long run in the successful West End production of the American hit comedy play "The Seven Year Itch", in which she starred with Brian Reece (BBC Radio's 'P.C.49') and Rosemary Harris. She appeared in many British films during the 1950s and 1960s, usually in glamorous

and/or 'sexy' roles. Her films included Will Any Gentleman?, Out of the Clouds, Murder By Proxy, The Constant Husband, Seven Waves Away and, of course, Murder at Site Three, the Blake movie in 1959. Jill also appeared in numerous TV productions and series, including Boyd, Q.C., Martin Kane, Charlie Chan, White Hunter and Sailor of Fortune (all these in the 1950s). She was married for a time to leading British actor John Standing (in private life Sir John Leon, Bt., so she was Lady Leon during this period). They were later divorced.

Sorry I can't help with Grey or Kun. I have heard of the latter, but never of the former, and neither appear in any of my very many books on the cinema.

Geoffrey Toone, who played Blake in Murder at Site Three, died a few years ago, I believe. Greta Gynt (Sexton Blake and the Hooded Terror) was, of course, a leading British film star for most of the 1940s (she was of Norwegian descent) and, I think, is still alive today, though no longer acting. She would be in her mid-70s now."

Reg gives us much the same information as Brian, and adds that 'the name Magda Kun does ring a gong. I think she was Viennese'.



OUR BOOKSHELVES

REVIEWS BY

MARY CADOGAN

(Picture by Terry Wakefield)

VIVA TREBIZON!

The thirteenth book in Anne Digby's splendid series of stories about Trebizon School has just been published in hardback by 'Straw Hat' at £8.99. Called SECRET LETTERS AT TREBIZON it is as zestful and well constructed as all the earlier books about this now famous fictional girls' boarding-school. Once again Anne Digby conveys touches of the traditional school story atmosphere as well as contemporary ideas and happenings. In this latest adventure the heroine, Rebecca Mason, is involved in taking her mock GCSE exams. She has convincingly matured, and gone from junior to senior forms as the series has progressed.

There are, as always, excitements and challenges - and a mystery which Rebecca and her chums tackle with their usual panache, although it is not solved until after their French exchange visit to Paris, where Rebecca meets her volatile penfriend, Emanuelle, who plays a pivotal part in the story.

Like Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elinor Brent-Dyer, the various 'Hilda Richards' and other giants of the genre, Anne Digby recreates the genuine flavour of schoolgirl aspirations and anguishes, friendships and rivalries. Her Trebizon stories span the so-called generation gap; they appeal to those of us who enjoyed the classic girls' boarding-school tales but, equally, they speak to today's young readers in an authentic and attractive voice.

At present SECRET LETTERS AT TREBIZON is available only in hardback but the first twelve books in the series can be obtained in Penguin paperbacks.

CHILDHOOD REVISITED

Another satisfying read is provided in A STROUD VALLEY CHILDHOOD by Terry Jones (Alan Sutton £6.99). Terry is well known in the Gloucestershire area for his local radio broadcasts, and known too for his interest in old boys books and papers. A STROUD VALLEY CHILDHOOD contains references to the GEM and the MAGNET - and many C.D. readers will empathize with his boyhood exploits which took place in the 1930s and are delightfully described. He deals with quintessential experiences of childhood (such as playing marbles and conkers, and going each week to the cinema) as well as teenage dances and other adventures. His reminiscences will not only have strong local appeal but will entertain a wide audience.

CLIFF HOUSE MAGAZINE



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By Stella Stone (Head Girl)

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Editor: Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 2PY.
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