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THE EDITOR'S CHAT



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

1993 seems to be racing to its end, and the Festive Season is almost upon us. I take this opportunity to wish C.D. readers a really Happy Christmas and a Peaceful, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

My thanks go out to all of you for your great loyalty and support, and I trust that you will enjoy this Christmas edition of the C.D. which, I feel, warmly conveys the spirit of the season. I am grateful

to all our contributors and particularly appreciative of Henry Webb's fine cover picture, and Una Hamilton Wright's fascinating memories of the real-life Christmasses spent by her celebrated uncle, Charles Hamilton.

OUR ANNUAL

The Annual is now complete so those of you who have ordered it should receive your copies very soon. It is indeed a bumper-bundle of good things, many of which I have already 'trailed'. Further attractions are a feature by Brian Doyle about stage, screen, radio and T.V. presentations of public-school stories; a seasonable article by Margery Woods about John Wheway's 1930s Cliff House Christmas tales; an account of the Chalet School saga by

Clarissa Cridland and of *Impish Impostors* at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood by Peter Mahony. My own contribution deals with a Christmas which I spent in India some years ago. It features several of our favourite papers and characters. (The Annual can still be ordered - at £9.00 for the U.K. and £10 for overseas: both prices include postage.)

SEXTON BLAKE CENTENARY

I have received many letters expressing appreciation of our November Blake 'special'. However, my attention has been drawn to an omission. The *Answers to the Blakian Quiz* missed out the identity of the arrowed figure in the centre picture of J.E.M.'s quiz. This was, of course, Zenith the Abino.

GOOD NEWS FROM HAWK BOOKS

I am happy to announce that Hawk Books have produced splendid facsimile reproductions of 4 more Bunter Books: *Billy Bunter's Christmas Party*, *Billy Bunter's Bodyguard*, *Billy Bunter's Beanfeast* and *Billy Bunter Butts In*. Another of their excellent Dan Dare volumes, *The Phantom Fleet*, will be available very shortly. These enterprising publishers are also issuing a Hamper (which would greatly delight the Fat Owl). This contains - as well as wonderfully mouth-watering Christmas 'comestibles' - a copy of *Billy Bunter's Christmas Party*. What a treat for the Festive Season! (Full details of all the above, plus other books and 'spin-offs', are available from Hawk Books, Suite 309, Canalot Studios, 222 Kensal Road, London, W10 5BN.)


Again - I wish you all a WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

MARY CADOGAN

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CHRISTMAS AND THE NELSON LEE

by E. Grant -McPherson

70 years ago, almost to the day, the Cover Picture of this issue graced the bookstalls of our youth. Who can deny that this typified as little else could the real spirit of Christmas, toys, plum pudding, snow and real fun, unlike unfortunately, the present day attitude of so many folk.

However let us forget dull care and read on and, I hope, enjoy the adventures of Fatty Little of the St. Frank's Remove, at Christmastide, as retailed by Reginald Pitt, also of the Remove.

GRAND SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER!



No. 446.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

December 22, 1923.

FATTY IN FRIGHTFUL-LAND



An Amazing Story of Strange Happenings on Christmas Eve
By Reginald Pitt.

ONCE upon a time Fatty Little started to walk back to St. Frank's from Bannington.

That sounds a pretty poor beginning to a story, but I can't help it. All fairy stories begin like that. I know it doesn't seem to fit in, in this case, but there it is.

As I said before, once upon a time Fatty Little started to walk back to St. Frank's. He had been doing his Christmas shopping in Bannington, and was carrying all the things he had bought back to the College.

It's all quite absurd because as a matter of fact, Fatty Little goes home for the Christmas holidays like the rest of us. But you see this is just a fairy story.

He had bought a huge turkey, a couple of great puddings as big as his head, dozens of jam tarts, some boxes of sardines, a few tins of condensed milk, fifty sausages, three dozen sausage-rolls and a number of bottles of ginger beer. Also two loaves of bread, a pound of butter and two pots of jam.

That's absurd too, because Fatty Little could never have been able to pay for such a lot of food all at once. And even if he had he would never have been able to carry it. But I can't help that. This is my fairy story and there it is.

Fatty was staggering along the road to the College, bowed down under the weight of all these good things. It was evening, and quite dark. As he walked he whistled to keep up his spirits, and occasionally—about every half a minute or so—he ate a jam tart or a sausage to keep up his spirits.

It was a snowy, cold, dark, real old-fashioned Christmas, and the stars shone brightly overhead like they do in stories. And suddenly as he walked Fatty noticed light in front of him a hill.

Fatty's eyes goggled with surprise and he swallowed the jam tart he was eating.

For as a rule there was no hill between him and St. Frank's.

"Gug-gug-golly!" Fatty muttered, "I shall never get up that!"

A second after he had spoken he had reached the top! It was utterly amazing. And more amazing things followed. For it suddenly became broad daylight and Fatty saw in front of him a huge dark wood.

He took a few steps and immediately he was right in the middle of the great dark wood! There were trees all round him and he could only see a few yards ahead. Mechanically Fatty began munching a couple of tarts and stared about him.

"Ooooo! Wooooop!" he suddenly shouted.

He had received a very sharp pinch in the calf of one of his legs. It was immediately followed by more pinches. Both his legs were pinched and Fatty hopped into the air with the pain.

"Yar-goo! Wow!" he roared.

Then he looked down towards the ground and he yelled even louder.

For he saw swarming about the ground hundreds of tiny little pigmies. They had pointed ears and horrible expressions on their little faces. And they were all engaged in biting and pinching his fat legs. Some of them even hit with small sticks. It gave him such a start to see them that he dropped all the tuck he was carrying except a big bag of cream puffs and jam tarts.

"Gug-gug-gug great pup-pup-pup-pup-cakes!" he bellowed trying to hop out of the way of the little creatures who were still pinching and biting him.

But he could not get out of their way and his eyes goggled with fright. He started to run vaguely down between the trees but he had not taken more than a few steps when he fell over. There he lay, sprawled upon the ground and the

St Frank's Magazine

pigmies started biting him and plucking him and pulling his hair and ears.

"O pup-pup-pup-please dud-dud-dud-don't do it!" Fatty wailed. "Oh, help me. Hellup!"

As he cried out, he heard quick footsteps approaching, and he sat up and looked round. A most extraordinary figure was coming. It was the size of a boy but was covered in soft feathers and had a beak like a bird. But stranger still it wore an eyeglass.

"Hellup me!" pleaded Fatty. "Do the rescue stunt and all that rot so to speak," spoke the queer apparition, and flapped its wings. "Save the jolly old ship as it were. Dashed awk and all that, if I may say so. I mean to say, where am I and what not?"

"Why it's Ar-ar-archie!" stuttered Fatty Little, and managed to scramble to his feet.

"Absolutely old fruit," replied the other. Fatty stared at the Removite and his eyes nearly fell out of his head. But Archie was smiling as though he enjoyed looking like a bird.

"I'm bewitched and what not," he explained. "A jolly old magician did this so to say. Turned me into a sparrow and all that. Absolutely!"

Fatty was going to reply when he saw that all the little pigmies had run away. They had taken with them all his tuck

except the bag of tarts which he still held in his hand.

"But what are we to do?" he asked. "It's awful! All my tuck's gone."

Archie did not reply. Instead, he suddenly flapped his wings. And in an instant he had flown on to the branch of a tree from where he began to whistle. Then he flapped his wings again and disappeared up into the sky.

Fatty ate a tart and mopped his brow. It was too frightful. He could not understand it. The only thing to do seemed to be to try and find a way out of the wood. He walked along as quickly as he could, when suddenly he heard a terrific noise as if an army of men were rushing towards him through the trees. The next moment Fatty stood still trembling with alarm. For straight ahead came the strangest animal he had ever seen.

It was a great big monster with a terrific head and a body like a great alligator. Out of its mouth and nose came fire and smoke. It was, in fact, a dragon!

And round its neck was strung a large open box of cigarettes!

Upon its back were three St. Frank's juniors. The next moment Fatty recognised that they were Fullwood and Co.

"Gug-gug-good heavens!" gasped Fatty, in terror.

He could say no more. For the dragon reared up above him and then caught him up quickly and put him on his back in front of the other juniors.

"Now you're going to get it," he heard Fullwood remark.

"You're going to be taken to the dragon's lair and be eaten! He does that with all boys he meets. He lives on schoolboys. He has them for breakfast!"

"How do you know?" asked Fatty.

"Because he's eaten us," returned Fullwood, and Gulliver and Bell roared with laughter as though it was a joke.

Before Fatty could reply, they had reached the dragon's lair. It was quite empty. And the floor was covered with cigarette ends. The dragon sat down on the floor and lighted a huge cigarette. Fullwood and Co. climbed off his back and lighted one each.



It was a great big monster, with a terrific head and a body like a great alligator. Out of its mouth and nose came fire and smoke! It was, in fact, a dragon!

Poor Fatty did not know what to do. Fullwood offered him a cigarette and a box of matches. Fatty never smoked. But he struck a match.

Hey presto!

There was a sudden explosion and the dragon turned into a ball of green fire! Fatty did not wait to see what became of Fully and Co. He dashed outside faster than he had ever run in his life. He did not stop running till he saw in front of him a great cavern under a rock. He approached cautiously and peered in.

An extraordinary sight met his eyes. The cave contained three people. One was a great giant who sat on a small chunk of



The cave contained three people. One was a great giant, with a huge club, the others were two tiny dwarfs, no bigger than tablespoons.

rock and nearly filled the cave. In his hand was a huge club. The others were two tiny dwarfs no bigger than tablespoons.

But the weirdest part of all was that all three were dressed in Eton suits. The giant had quite grown out of his, and his legs and arms stuck out of sleeves and trousers ludicrously, while the two dwarfs had had to roll up their sleeves and trouser legs to make them fit. One of the dwarfs was cleaning a huge boot, which evidently belong to the giant. The other was at work with an old broom.

"My—my hat!" roared the giant in a voice of thunder. "Are you never going to get that boot ready? I never saw such a chap. Call yourself a friend!"

"All right Handy," came a little squeak of a voice.

Fatty's eyes goggled again. For he realized that the three figures were those of Handforth and Co! And on the rough wall was chalked STUDY D. It was utterly weird. Fatty swallowed three more tarts and then went into the cavern.

"What on earth are you chaps doing?" he gasped.

The giant Handforth leapt to his feet, waving his club.

"Don't ask potty questions," he roared. "We didn't do this. Any idiot could see what's happened. We've been bewitched. It's just like Church and McClure to get so tiny they can't help me to get away."

"It isn't our fault," bleated Church, throwing down Handy's boot: "We didn't ask to get bewitched. And, after all, you're big enough to carry us away from here."

"Where am I to carry you to?" asked Handy. "Tell me that."

"Anyway, you brought us here," put in McClure. "So you ought to get us away."

"Just like you two," Handforth replied bitterly. "You get yourself into a silly hole like this and expect me to get you out of it. Oh, it's all right for you two," he added. "You're so small that you can live on a grain of wheat a day. But what about me. I'm starving. And every time I stand up I hit my head on the roof—wow, yaroo!"

As he spoke there came a terrific crash. Once more Handy had hit the ceiling with his head. He sat down hastily and rubbed the top of his cranium tenderly.

Just then there was the sound of footsteps rushing towards the cavern. And into the room poured a number of juniors headed by Nelson Lee, who wore a fez and was waving a fishing rod.

"Boys!" he shouted. "We've killed the dragon and we're going to toast him for tea."

Even as he spoke he rushed at Fatty and caught him on the end of his fishing-rod. The hook fastened in his coat collar. Fatty shut his eyes. He felt himself swung through the air. Then with a thud he landed on something soft. When he opened his eyes it was to see the familiar surroundings of the Remove Dormitory! And he was lying on his own bed!

Thus ended his Christmas Eve in Frightful Land!

THE END.

Christmas, snow and Wharton Lodge are - more or less - synonymous. They come together like pieces of a very familiar jig-saw. Something would be very much amiss with our world were this not so.

We are aware from years of experience in these matters that Bunter will not be invited to Wharton Lodge for the Christmas festivities. It is more likely that he will have been warned of dire consequences should he presume to show his fat features within miles of the Lodge. We are also aware that these threats will have rather less effect upon Bunter's plans than water coursing from the back of a swan. The Owl will be present. It is a curious yet very true fact that the 'hols' would be anything but a success without his podgy presence. "You may depend upon me you fellows..." How often have we heard this confident assurance? The turning down of invitations from titled relations is a matter rather lighter than air where Bunter's 'old pals' are concerned.

Colonel Wharton will snort, fume and absolutely refuse to sanction any arrangement that includes Bunter. He will issue fearful threats, all of which will be turned gently and skilfully aside by Harry Wharton's Aunt Amy. This gentle lady will remind the fiery Colonel that the season of good will is at hand. She may even call to his reluctant mind the story of the small child who was 'taken in' at this season so long ago. And, of course, the Colonel with seeming reluctance and something less than enthusiasm will yield the point, thus leaving the field clear for Billy Bunter.



Wells, the butler, bent over the fat Junior and shook him by the shoulder. "Your taxi, sir." "Groogh! Beast!" grunted Bunter. "I—I beg your pardon, sir!"

We know that Wells, that doyen of butlers, upon news of the imminent arrival of the Owl will sigh and utter some rather un-butler-like imprecations (beneath his breath of course), Wells being far too well trained to display any outward signs of annoyance in the course of his duties, even under stress. He will instruct the staff below stairs to conduct themselves as one should towards a guest of Colonel Wharton. A special warning will be the lot of John the footman who has been known in the past to so far forget himself and his situation as to express audibly his feelings concerning Bunter. Record has it that upon one infamous occasion he actually kicked Bunter, upon which celebrated happening he was, in strictest confidence, congratulated by Wells who, no doubt, would dearly love to have added his own polished footwear to the kicking.

It is quite possible that the village store in Wharton Magna will become aware that a guest with an unusual appetite has arrived at the Lodge by the much increased size of the usual Christmas order. This information will quickly percolate throughout the

village and certain aged members of the little community will nod their heads and realise that William George Bunter has arrived once more to spend the festive season with the Colonel.

.....

Christmas Eve, and Wells is making his last round, seeing that all is secure for the night. That no door has been left 'on the latch', no window unfastened and no light left burning. His portly figure moves softly along the passages and through the silent rooms, his own gigantic shadow solemnly bobbing behind him until, finally satisfied, he betakes himself to his own comfortable quarters.

A distant rumbling, as of the mutterings of a coming storm, proceeds from that area in which is situated Bunter's bed chamber; the Fat Owl having done splendid justice to the ample foodstuffs throughout the day is now paying equally gallant homage to the sleepy God Morpheus. It could be that a fellow might experience certain pangs which, together with the memory of handsome confections left untouched downstairs, might well disturb the closest embraces of the great deity. What would Christmas be without a marauding Bunter on the trail of 'Tuck'. Will be on his nocturnal visit to the kitchen regions encounter a shadowy figure in one of the passages? And, if so, upon what business in the dead of night will this strange personage be engaged?

One may assume that whoever it is, he will not, like Bunter, be suffering the pangs of hunger. More sinister will be his purposes. However dastardly these may prove, we know he will be thwarted at last, largely through the activities of Billy Bunter.

Another crucial question. Will the ice on the pond hold for skating? But of course! Did it not always snow and freeze in those happy days in the traditional Dickensian manner? Bunter would be able to exhibit his expertise - which was indeed quite original - on the ice to everyone's pleasure and amusement.

These and countless other fascinating questions were answered in those wonderful Christmas numbers of long ago. With what eagerness and impatience did we await their appearance. With what avidity did we devour the contents. Where today is their equivalent?

One sees again the groaning board surrounded by smiling faces. Even Colonel Wharton looks jolly, though frequently he bends a severe glance in Bunter's direction. The Owl himself is in the seventh heaven of delight as he beams upon the well-laden table. In the background, beyond the portly and attentive Wells and the busy John at the side-table, a glimpse may be had of falling snow beyond the latticed window. This is a 'Magnet' Christmas. All is well at Wharton Lodge.

There is an aspect distinctly Edwardian - even Victorian - about a Wharton Lodge Christmas. The Colonel certainly makes no concessions to changing modes or fashions. He remains the same bluff old military warrior we first met so many years ago. While Aunt Amy, his sister, is as firmly rooted in an earlier, more gentle age (Jane Austen and Mrs. Gaskell would have been perfectly at home in her company) as are the venerable old oaks in the parkland outside. It is this continuity which one finds so reassuring as, year by year, the Greyfriars fellows return to the familiar setting where nothing seems to change.

In a modern and un-sure age, it is good to return each Christmas to this haven of stability; to find everything and everyone as they were last year, and a decade or more ago. Time and change have no relevance here.



"Knock-out Comic" is a much maligned publication amongst Greyfriars enthusiasts who eye it with suspicion as the comic paper that absorbed their favourite paper's comic - Billy Bunter. Yet it was a landmark publication and under the editorship of Leonard Matthews it became one of the greatest comics of the 1940s and 1950s. Its Christmas issues may not have had quite the amount of snow on their covers that festooned Beano and Dandy, but they do reflect the high quality of the comics content down the years.

The Grand Xmas Number of "Knock-Out" for its first Christmas issue, published in 1939, did have plenty of snow and "Deed a Day Danny", the comic's cover character, was busy trying to do his weekly good deed by delivering presents to a group of orphans. As usual his plans never quite worked out as he expected, but with the quirky twists of fate - and storyline - that prevailed in his weekly escapades everything worked out well in the end and the final frame depicted everyone having a super Christmas with Danny's scout master presenting him with his usual 'good deed' medal. Danny was still doing good deeds in the comic over a decade later, his success and durability due to the splendid artwork of Hugh McNeill, a much under-rated illustrator.

Pages 2 and 3 related the exploits of Billy Bunter as drawn by Frank Minnitt. This was not the Bunter of Charles Hamilton, still going strong in the "Magnet", but a much more slapstick version with a limited cast and a lot more laughs. Here Bunter was boiling an enormous Christmas pudding, a much favoured Xmas occupation of the Owl's down the years in the pages of "Knock-Out". Unfortunately Quelch regarded the monster concoction as rather too rich for the remove and placed Wharton's football inside so that when Bunter attempted to eat it there was an enormous explosion and the whole lot was spread over the landscape. But Christmas in comics was always a time of feasting and Quelch inevitably invited Bunter to a giant feed with other members of the remove. Minnitt's work crops up later in that first Christmas issue, firstly in "Kiddo and the Boy King" and later in "Ali Barber". He may not have been C.H.Chapman or Leonard Shields but his work is bursting with humour, and love him or loathe him he helped to keep Bunter alive for a generation of children who had never heard of the "Magnet".

Another long-standing favourite appeared on pages 14 and 15 when we could join "Sexton Blake on Secret Service". In addition to Blake and Tinker the episode also featured Mrs. Bardell, filling her usual role of provider of creature comforts. The durable duo were in the thick of it following a secret code that led them to a barbers shop. The final frame had them disappearing as the floor their chairs were on descended like a lift. Other characters who were to enjoy long runs in the comic and who were also full of Christmas spirit and festive cheer included "Our Ernie", another McNeill character and "Stonehenge Kit -The Ancient Brit." Like all comics of the period a good proportion of pages still contained text stories with

GRAND XMAS NUMBER!
 THE
KNOCK-OUT
 COMIC
 EVERY WEDNESDAY



(THE FIRST CHRISTMAS ISSUE OF "KNOCKOUT", December 16th 1939)

spot illustrations. Amongst them could be found the work of Eric Parker and Derek Eyles. Both artists had long been associated with Amalgamated Press publications and they continued to contribute to the comic for most of its run. The following year's Christmas found the line up of characters virtually the same. Sexton Blake was still on Secret Service, battling against the Hooded Stranger, an adversary first encountered in "Knock-Out" number one. While "Our Happy Vakkies" caused chaos in a large frame picture that took up the best part of page nine. On page eleven "Tough Tod and Happy Annie" were depicted pushing a pile of snow on to the head of Mr. Stiggins, their long term pursuer. Tod and Annie continued in the comic for years, first in text stories and later in picture strip form. They were pursued throughout their "Knock-Out" career by the evil Stiggins who wanted to carry them back to his orphanage. One would have thought that he would have had better things to do with his time than chase after two runaways year in year out!! Pages 6 and 7 recounted the Christmas exploits of "Patsy and Tim" drawn by Eric Parker. Over the years Parker was to draw a seemingly endless stream of fine adventure strips for the comic, but "Patsy and Tim" was one of the few humorous strips he contributed and it is full of charm and laughter.

The autumn of 1940 saw the publication of the First "Knock-Out Fun Book", an extremely rare publication that, I am sorry to say, is not in my collection. Throughout the decade the "Fun Book" carried extra long strips and stories featuring all of the regular weekly comic characters.

Rushing ahead to 1943 found both Danny and Our Ernie helping Father Christmas while "Stonehenge Kit" had had his space reduced to half a page. Blake and Tinker were STILL on Secret Service in a wonderful contraption named the Rolling Sphere while "Our Happy Vakkies" had been replaced by "Its The Gremlins", those mischievous imps who caused all the mishaps. Eric Parker was in fine form with "Peter The Whaler", one of his earlier adventure strips that clearly demonstrated his ability to capture to perfection almost any historical period or setting. Parker also provided the spot illustration for another long running series, "Mickey's Pal the Wizard". As usual Bunter was on the track of grub, this time with Jones Minor, an odd looking character who tended to replace the regular Greyfriars boys in the Minnitt strips.

Christmas 1946 still had Blake and Tinker in the Rolling Sphere and most of the regular characters up to their usual yuletide antics. The Parker adventure strip was "Westward Ho!" one of the best in the entire series. The familiar name of George E. Rochester was to be found on page 10. Rochester contributed many stories to "Knockout" and one of his "Chums" characters, "The Flying Beetle", was adapted as a comic strip for an issue of the "Knockout Fun Books". Later Rochester created Harold Hare for the comic. Harold went on to achieve star status in a comic of his own in the 1960s.

The following year found one of Parker's rare ventures into a truly SF strip, "Nick and Nan and Stainless Stan". An earlier strip for the comic drawn by Parker featured a character that looked suspiciously like Dr Who - and who could travel through time! But by and large Parker stuck to historical strips. Sexton Blake had left his Rolling Sphere and was now adventuring in the Flying Disc, but the comic's page count had been reduced from 16 to 12 and Blake's adventures, together with those of Bunter, had been reduced to one page.

1948 was a bumper Christmas issue. The page count was back up to 16 and inside was a wealth of good material. A splendid adventure strip version of "Adventures of Marco Polo", drawn by Michael Hubbard graced pages 2 and 3 and further inside that great artist, Septimus Scott, had an episode of one of his "Captain Flame" pirate adventure strips. "Tod and Annie" had found a Christmas refuge with Toby Print who related to them the story of Dickens' "Christmas Carol", beautifully drawn by Hugh McNeill. The strip was later reprinted in a "Knockout Fun Book" in the early 1950s. With all this wealth of adventure strip Billy Bunter and Sexton Blake still had to remain content with one page each.

1949 was an equally good Christmas issue, the highlight being an early episode of "Breed of the Brudenels" a masterwork of adventure strip art by H.M.Brock that was later reprinted in "Thriller Comics". Sexton Blake's adventures were back up to two pages and that old work-horse of the Amalgamated Press, John Hunter, was represented with a serial entitled "Gold From Colorado". Readers were probably sad to see that "Deed a Day Danny" had been replaced on the cover by "Mike". Those lucky enough to find the "Knockout Fun Book" in their Christmas

stocking that year would have met the "Rio Kid", Ralph Redway's creation from "Modern Boy", though whether or not the strips were adapted from "Modern Boy" stories or strips I am unable to say. Derek Eyles contributed an eight page adventure strip version of "Hereward the Wake" that was later adapted as a Robin Hood adventure and reprinted in "Thriller Comics". Eyles was one of a handful of illustrators who was as much at home drawing adventure strips as he was providing full page illustrations for books and magazines. Another noticeable feature of that year's "Fun Book" was an early Harold Hare adventure. Although no by-line was attached to the tale it was almost certainly written by Rochester.

The first Xmas "Knockout" of the new decade had all the old regulars plus a two-colour "Buffalo Bill" strip by Parker and a new "Captain Flame" adventure by Sep. Scott. Sexton Blake was fighting the "Hidden Enemy" and Billy Bunter and Jones Minor were still making do with one page. A John Hunter story, "The Lawless Lands" had spot illustrations by Pat Nicolle, an artist whose work had been fairly prolific in such pre-war magazines as "Air Stories" and "Flying" as well as in sporadic forays into BOP. Pat had provided the cover illustration and one of the plates for W.E.Johns' "Modern Boy's Book of Pirates". In "Knockout" he established himself as an adventure strip artist of great skill whose knowledge of armour and all things medieval gave his strips an added degree of realism. Later he became one of the mainstays of "Look and Learn". His best remembered "Knockout" work is probably "Ginger Tom", a long running medieval adventure strip.

By mid 1950s "Knockout" had undergone a number of changes. The text content of the comic had been reduced to one page and although some of the old faithfuls were still to be found tucked away inside the comic they had been superseded in prominence by a number of new characters and the Xmas issue for 1956 looked very different from that of 1950. The cover featured "Davy Crocket" and inside "Hopalong Cassidy", "Johnnie Wingco" and "Space Family Rollinson" had replaced the more traditional historical adventure strips. "Ginger Tom" still battled on with sword and pitch fork but the 1950s were very much the years of the six-shooter and the space pistol. By the end of the decade only Bunter remained of the old brigade and, true to form, the Fat Owl had almost taken over the comic. It was titled "Billy Bunter's Knockout" and his comic adventure occupied almost a quarter of the comic's twenty pages. The rest of its pages were made up almost entirely of western and war strips with just one historical adventure, "Captain Careless", a reprint of a Claude Duval strip, to hark back to the comic's former days when it had seemed to be chock full of fine historical strips. "Knockout" continued until 1963, when it was taken over by "Valiant", but my collection of Christmas issues lacks those for the comic's last few years; I am sure I could have added them to my collection, but by the early 1960s the comic had lost most of the magic of its early years and those last few Christmas issues would have been sad reminders of the former glories lost to the six-gun and the Spitfire.

WANTED: By private collector seeking to complete own boyhood collection, bound volumes, runs or single issues, Rover,- Hotspur, Adventure, Wizard, before 1946. Skipper and Champion of any age. Annuals for all the above also sought. If you have been considering selling you can be assured that these are not being acquired for re-sale, and will be treasured and enjoyed. DAVE HARDWICK, 41 High Street, Skellingthorpe, Lincoln, LN6 5TS. Tel. 0522 682511.

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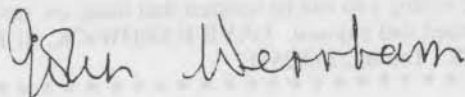
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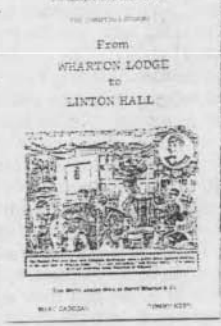
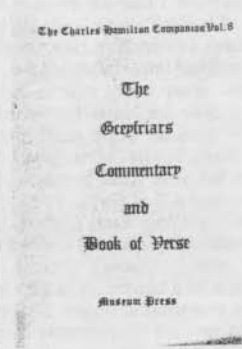
Dear Member and C.D. Reader,

Way back in 1972 there was published the first issue of the Charles Hamilton Companion. A history of the Gem and Magnet by Roger Jenkins and Eric Fayne it proved to be such a success that others were soon to follow. The Greyfriars Characters by John Wernham and Mary Cadogan. The Centenary Edition for which there were many famous authors. Rookwood came next again written by well-known authors. Then the Gem Story also by John Wernham and Mary Cadogan succeeded by the Greyfriars Commentary and Book of Verse and finally the splendid issue for Christmas From Wharton Lodge to Linton Hall prepared by Mary Cadogan and Tommy Keen. Lastly we have three reprints, The Housemaster's Homecoming, the Mysterious 'X' and Tom Merry and Co.

Copies are still available at £8.00 including P&P (£1.50) except the reprints which are available for £5.00 including P&P. Every collector and Hamilton enthusiast should have a copy on his bookshelf.

Yours as ever,





WANTED: GEMs: 154,155,160,169,170,173,186,193,195,196,199,204,205,217,231, 286,290,294,295,344,355. To complete a set. Condition unimportant - even without covers! Your price paid. Write: W. LOFTS, 56 Sheringham House, Lisson Street, London, NW1 5NY.



GWYN EVANS - XMAS STORIES

by W.O.G. Lofts

Whenever I hear the mention of Xmas stories, my mind instantly turns to three great writers. The immortal Charles Dickens - who in my opinion had no equal. Our own Charles Hamilton whom no doubt many others will applaud. But the third would be Gwyn Evans, an extremely talented and popular author in the Sexton Blake field prior to the Second World War. Charles Dickens by all accounts loved Christmas, when every year he held a big family gathering at his home near Portsmouth, as well as presiding over the Xmas festivities, when he liked nothing better than to join in the fun and games especially with his many grandchildren. Charles Hamilton so I am told, usually spent Xmas with his young sister's family, when not at Rose Lawn, when obviously he enjoyed the festive season. Gwyn Evans on the other hand, according to his wife, started his Christmas period on 1st December with more than the usual run of parties in Chelsea of the Bohemian kind but, at home, he greatly enjoyed like any other parent playing Santa Claus to his young daughter Patricia.

Charles Hamilton and Gwyn Evans were writing in the same era, when their styles were curiously of the same mould, extremely pleasant to read in a flowing kind, the characters seemingly alive to the reader - the essence of a born story teller - though in real life both were poles apart if one will excuse the pun. Hamilton was short in stature, whilst Evans was well over six feet tall and thin as a bean-pole. Hamilton, one could say, led an extremely modest, quiet life after his early travels - quite content to read, compile Latin cross-words, listen to classical music, enjoy Miss Edith Hood's cooking, as well as churn out his school stories. Evans on the other hand was an extremely colourful figure, whose exploits were to say the least unusual. Bohemian parties and other events that one can find recorded in many a writer's reminiscences of Fleet Street. As a consequence he was often behind schedule with his writings, which made him fall out with editors, but such was his popularity and demand that many had to swallow their pride and put up with his unreliability. One of the editors was Harold William Twyman of The Union Jack, and it was he who had the idea of letting Gwyn Evans write a special Xmas story for his paper. To say that his tale was a great success would be putting it mildly, and Twyman earmarked him to pen the Xmas stories for future years as well as dubbing him the 'Charles Dickens' of The Union Jack.

Somehow Gwyn had the knack of putting over his Yuletide scene far better than any other writer in the Blake field in his descriptions of Xmas at Baker Street, with holly and mistletoe draped round the consulting room usually with Blake sitting in his favourite saddlebag arm-chair; Miss Bardell bringing in the steaming large turkey, plus the exchange of presents, when our favourite detective usually got a new dressing gown; the humour of Mrs. Bardell, with her malapropism expressions such as wishing Blake 'the condiments of the season'. The titles of his Xmas stories were 1210 'Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Eve' (where she was kidnapped and taken to a Mansion complete with a Xmas ghost); 1260 'The Affair of the Black Carol' (where Splash Page suggests to Blake that they should dress up as Dickens characters, and how they travelled to a Manor by stage coach with the tooting of horns); 1313 'The Crime of the Christmas Tree' (where the tree did commit the crime in an ingenious way); 1365 'The Mistletoe Milk Mystery!'; 1417 'The Man Who Hated Christmas', and 1521 'The Masked Carollers' - but above all in the true spirit of Xmas Blake anonymously gave gifts to those wives and families of men he had put behind bars.

Gwyn Evans died in 1938 aged only 39, but his memory is still with us, so the toast this Xmas is to his immortal stories. Long may they be remembered!

(Editor's Note: This seasonable article is reprinted from an earlier Collectors' Digest.)

All Charles Hamilton's readers have reacted joyfully to his descriptions of Christmas, infected with the warmth, the sparkle, the atmosphere of plenty, of goodies unlimited. Wharton Lodge, to many, hosted ideal Christmasses - the model to be aimed at - Christmas as it was meant to be. What was the inspiration for those traditional holly-clad, snowbound Yuletides? Did they derive from the author's childhood, shrouded in poverty? Did they owe their origin to happier times when he was a young, successful author able to provide magnificent Christmasses himself. Was there a model in his earlier experiences to which he could turn? Or was their glory entirely created in his own vivid imagination with not a shred of fact to support them?

Christmas is a time of belonging, yet where did Charles Hamilton belong? To a family that showed no signs of prospering until after the father had died. Did he enjoy those impoverished Christmasses of his youth, where presents were made and not bought, cheap but enhanced by the youthful skills of the Hamilton brothers and sisters? All the children were artistic and creative to differing degrees. They could all draw and paint and they used to work sitting round a circular table with a brilliant oil table-lamp shining in the centre of it. Books and Christmas presents survive to this day with exquisitely lettered inscriptions 'To Dolly with love from Charley' - books about the early explorers, or the natural world, a Hans Anderson fairy story. Did those deprived children enjoy their Christmas - the answer is 'yes'.

Not far from the centre of Ealing where the Hamiltons lived, their mother's brother Stephen Trinder had a house on Ealing Green; even now it is still a pretty road, but in the 1880s and 1890s it was charming enough to inspire a Christmas card. Uncle Steve was well-to-do, a successful entrepreneur with many business interests in the 'village', as Ealing used to be called. He lived with his eldest married sister and kept an eye on his other sisters and his nephews and nieces. Once a week he drove over to see the Hamiltons and distribute tips to the children. When the boys were old enough to start out in life he was to offer them jobs in his various businesses. Being a religious man he naturally made Christmas a high point in the year, and being a teetotaler he made it a genuinely merry occasion with no forced jollity stimulated by the bottle. I think Uncle Steve contributed the warmth, if not the sparkle, to Wharton Lodge.

From the late 1880s another Christmas venue beckoned the author and his family. Charles's overbearing father had died and the family was free to socialise. His mother's sister Annie, who was married with four sons slightly younger than the Hamiltons, started giving hearty Christmas parties, attended by plenty of young people. Entertainment consisted of party games and music. Cards were provided for elderly aunts and a spinster cousin played with the young children. Charles and sister Dolly were popular at these gatherings and a new dimension was added to Charles' social life. The food provided by Aunt Annie was magnificent and it is possible that she contributed to one of the facets of Billy Bunter. Certainly her Christmas parties provided the food and the cheer at Wharton Lodge.

By the turn of the century the Hamiltons were living much more comfortably at Mill Hill Park, Acton, a pretty suburb in those days. Charles had enjoyed his 21st birthday party there in 1897, and Christmas at home assumed a happier and more normal aspect. Charles was selling all the stories he could write and was the main stay of his mother's household. He had also given his mother a solemn undertaking that he would always look after Dolly whose extremely poor sight had given her family much anxiety about her future. The fourth member of the household was Charles' younger brother Douglas who was beginning to fail in health and who would shortly die of tuberculosis. Charles looked back to that period with nostalgia - he was very fond of the younger members of the family, and the older ones who were inclined to bossiness had all left home. Douglas contributed his elegance to Lord Mauleverer and his fashion sense to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Charles was overwhelmed when Douglas died and so his recollection of those early grown-up Christmasses at home were tinged with sadness. He learned that not only did one share joy at Christmas but grief as well.

Charles' mother remarried and he and Dolly shared a service flat at 7 Dorset Square near Baker Street. Brother and sister now started their travels together and many Christmasses were spent abroad. He particularly enjoyed Christmas at Nice at the Villa Louise Pauline. There he excelled himself at amateur theatricals. He also found that he was more at home abroad than in England and wanted to make his life there. But I suspect that underneath the gaiety there was a wistful yearning for the good times at home and the company of old friends and relations. In one story Harry Wharton is on his own at Christmas and he muses sadly about the familiar faces he is missing, and one can hear the author voicing his own thoughts. Except in his stories, and to his sister Dolly, Charles Hamilton never admitted to being unhappy or having any sad feelings. He was extremely quiet about his feelings and one has to search his writing for internal evidence of how his emotions ticked.

After my mother married, Charles joined the newly-weds to make a threesome and there were further Christmasses abroad which they all enjoyed immensely. They often talked about Christmas in Venice - a place not usually inviting at that time of the year, noted for its cold and mists in winter, the warmth of their company masking the chill of the background.

The first World War brought this idyll to an end. Charles' mother had died about a year previously and deep depression engulfed him. Wartime Christmases had a character all their own, people strained to produce 'Christmas as usual' and enjoyed trying to compensate for the shortages.

When I appeared on the scene in the twenties the signal was given to Charles that he now had the opportunity to emulate his own Uncle Steve and play the generous bachelor uncle - but with one marked difference - the recipient of the generosity was one small niece rather than the myriads of nieces and nephews who enjoyed Uncle Steve's bounty. Uncle Charles lived with us during most of my childhood, and Christmas was always a terrific occasion. He pulled out all the stops. He was running his very own Wharton Lodge even though it was my parents' house. We always had a large Christmas Party on the first Saturday after Christmas with games and music which went on far into the night. Dolly had inherited her aunt Annie's party-giving abilities. On Christmas Day itself we always had unmarried cousins to visit and usually stay. Spinster friends left unmarried by the recent War were glad to come and share our Christmas, and Uncle Charles enjoyed dispensing hospitality and entertainment to so many deserving but deprived people. Needless to say, the possession of a bachelor brother made my mother very popular with her friends....

Charles did not become a complete recluse until I was about six or seven. When I was four I was taken to the Pantomime for the first time. I was immediately 'hooked'. Uncle and mother both took me and I treasure those memories of being taken out to such entertainments by my uncle because soon the lights would go out round him and he would become afraid of going out in public. It seemed to me such a pity that he cut himself off from such delights. I remember him taking me up to Selfridges and buying me an enormous teddybear - bigger than I was - when I was three. This was for the first Christmas we spent in my parents' London house. In taking me to the Pantomime Uncle Charley was reliving a pleasurable experience of his own youth. The one enlivening event in his early Christmases was the annual trip to the Pantomime when the Hamilton children were taken there by their brother-in-law, Walter Barraclough. Walter was about ten years older than Charles' eldest sister, Maud, whom he had married, and Maud was about eleven years older than Charles, so that Walter, a very kind man and very fond of children, seemed more like an uncle to the little Hamiltons than a brother. Charles always spoke kindly of Walter and never forgot his contribution to Christmas.

After Charles had settled in Thanet he formed the habit of coming up to London to spend Christmas with us and usually stayed at least a month. The Second World War destroyed this pleasant arrangement. He and other coast-dwellers were ordered off the coast for the duration of hostilities and he found a little house in the Hampstead Garden Suburb, meanwhile we were in Cheltenham whither we had moved just before the war. The best Uncle could do for Christmas was a long trunk call but it was a pale shadow of real contact.

After the war he came to hate Christmas because he felt too old and tired to celebrate and too nervous even to go out. He had to content himself with happy Christmases remembered and their recollection made him feel even more frustrated. He would grow bitter and blame it on the east wind. Fortunately none of this seeped into his writing, he was able to recreate those early festivities as often as he wished. But it does seem a cruel irony of fate that the man who described so much Christmas happiness should die on Christmas Eve in the bleak midwinter....

WE MAY NOT BE DRESSED TO KILL, BUT IT KEEPS US WARM ON COLD NIGHTS!

by Marion Waters

I was very interested in the article by J.E.M. in the August 'C.D.' which dealt with ladies who wore close fitting black costumes for their secret work.

Back in 1987 I made my first attempt at writing my own 'Silent Three' stories, initially to entertain a girl of 12, who enjoyed 'old fashioned stories'. Since that time I have written five full length novels, a dozen short stories and various smaller items on the adventures of Betty, Joan and Peggy; about half a million words in all. The project has not been without its problems, it is not always easy to write about someone else's characters. One has to try and place oneself in the 'mind' of the original author as it were. I am not very good at creating original material, I usually rely upon others to suggest the outline for a story, then I build up the adventure from these basic facts. Many of the suggestions I have received over the years are for stories with a slightly more 'abrasive' flavour than the originals. Such schemes do not fit in well with the rather elusive atmosphere of the original 'Silent Three' material. Coupled with this is

the fact that Betty, Joan and Peggy, like many fictional heroines, are perhaps a little bit 'too nice to be true'.

I therefore set out to create my own fictional hooded group, and I intended to make them totally different in both character and appearance from all the other schoolgirl hooded groups which had flourished in AP girls' fiction since the 1930s. Over twenty years ago I was asked to write some romantic stories to entertain a lady who was terminally ill. The lady requested some stories rather more intellectually demanding than 'Mills and Boon', but less full-blooded than other authors such as Anya Seaton. The result was a character named 'Heather Eastwood', a young woman who worked in the public library in a West Riding mill town. Heather and her friends were all based on girls whom I had known during my own schooldays. In addition to romance, the stories contained an element of problem-solving.

Heather and her friends were thus moved back to their own schooldays in the 1950s, and the fictional 'Sowerby Bridge Girls' High School' became the first non-boarding school to boast a hooded secret society. I was also determined to make the appearance of the clandestine group totally different from the long, hooded robes which were the standard form of dress for AP secret societies.

I had read a wide variety of juvenile fiction during my own schooldays some forty years ago, and later I was able to re-read some of my old favourites in the British Library, or at the Newspaper Library at Colindale.

A number of stories set in medieval England featured villains who wore black doublet and hose, together with a long black hood with just two eye slits. Robin Hood dealt with a rival group of outlaws who wore this type of costume in the course of his adventures in the 'Sun' in 1949. A mysterious hooded archer wore a garb of this type in one of the 'Horse that Jack built' serials in the 'Beano' back in 1954. The actress Joan Greenwood wore a 'Black Cat' costume, obviously inspired by ballet attire in a French made film in 1952. The most useful example from my re-reading of the old stories was featured in the weekly 'Girl' in 1958. The schoolgirl detectives, Wendy and Jinx, tackle a girl burglar known as the 'Maggie'. This girl crook wore a most attractive costume -- black tracksuit, gym shoes and a hood which completely covered her head apart from two slits for her eyes.

Heather and her friends were rapidly equipped with costumes based on that worn by the 'Maggie' -- black tracksuits, comfortable footwear, gloves, together with hoods

With special Seasonable Greetings to ERIC FAYNE, I am re-printing below some of his favourite lines. (M.C.)

**"Whatever else is lost among the years
Let us keep Christmas -
Its meaning never ends....
Whatever doubts assail us, or what fears -
Let us hold close this day -
remembering friends."**

1. 'Robin Hood' tackles a mysterious black clad hooded figure during the course of his adventures in the comic 'Sun' in 1949.



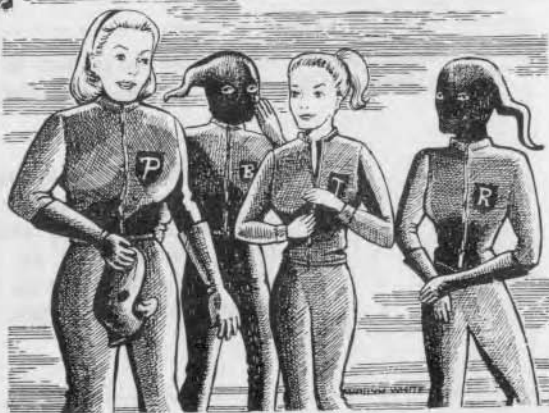
10—Jack took his finger from the button and the saddle sank to its normal position. A jerk on the reins and the Horse was charging forward again before the Archer could fit another shaft to his bow. The man sprang to a collection of barrels outside a nearby tavern. With quick thrusts of his feet, he sent several of the barrels rolling down the street towards the Horse.

2. Jack and his mechanical horse confront the mysterious Hooded Archer in a story published in the comic 'Beano' during 1954.



3. Wendy and Jinx, the schoolgirl detectives tackle a girl burglar known as the 'Maggie' during an adventure in 'Girl' weekly in 1958.

4. Heather Eastwood and her friends as young women c.1962

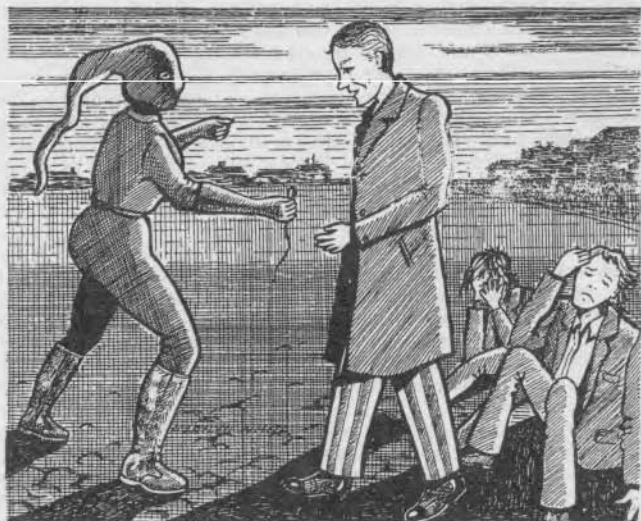


with just two eye slits. This form of dress has remained standard from 1957 to the present time, the only variation being that the girls' winter footwear has been gradually updated to take account of changing fashions. Most of the adventures take place on cold winter nights, and you can't sort out the snobs and trouble-makers if your feet are cold! Heather, being a confirmed spinster, remains the leader of the group. As her school friends grow up and become married women, their places are taken by various cousins, nieces and even daughters.

Although Heather's earliest adventures take place during her school days, most of the stories have an adult background. A charming selection of snobs, bullies and trouble makers are dealt with, rather than true criminals. A moderate amount of violence is used, but the intention is to 'show up' and expose the villains rather than to inflict physical pain. A corrupt councillor drenched in dirty water, or the vicar's crooked wife left bound and gagged in the church crypt are typical. With reference to JEM's remarks on 'dressed to kill', one wonders what Heather would do if a child sex-pervert or a dealer in child pornography fell into her hands! Perhaps such matters are best left undescribed.

Over the years Heather has encountered many interesting people in the course of her adventures -- Mr. Quelch, Miss Bullivant, Jemima Carstairs, Bessie Bunter, Valerie Drew, not to mention the Silent Three. In an adventure set in more recent times she helped to rescue an adult Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from a gang of 'muggers'.

Heather and her friends regard their hooded costumes as being fun to wear, as well as keeping them warm on cold winter nights. However their sinister attire, which resembles the dress of a medieval executioner or torturer, really puts the 'fear of God' into their opponents. I have seen a lot of the less pleasant side of life, and speaking from personal experience I can state that criminals and other types of bullies and twisters are a weak, cowardly lot. The appearance of a group of hooded, black-clad women would instil far more terror into such people than a bunch of USMC Leathernecks, a company of Fallschirmjager, or any other real life 'heavies'.



Heather returns Gussy's monocle after rescuing him from two thugs. C. 1975.

BRANDS FROM THE BURNING PART 6

by Peter Mahony

Cardew was soon at odds with Tom Merry again. He dodged swimming practice; then plunged into the river to save a drowning dog; returned, exhausted to find Tom on the warpath; made no explanation; took a licking; then made Tom look bad for hammering a worn-out 'hero'. Later he 'conned' Tom into a Channel-swim attempt. Tom failed, but his guts in sticking to the task made an impression on Cardew. Begrudgingly, he conceded: "He's not a bad sort, though a bit of a fool!" The caustic Levison promptly delivered a home truth: "If you were a thousandth part as good a sort, you'd do!"

If Cardew had a 'good angel', it was Levison. Unable to control his own whims, Cardew respected Levison for his ability to resist temptations to which he had previously succumbed. (Cardew must have often felt like a heavy drinker marvelling at the success of a rehabilitated alcoholic!) Probably it was this respect which led Cardew to allow 'Dandy Jim,' Carson to abduct him in mistake for Levison. Carson, one of Mr. 'Poker Jack' Levison's old cronies was on the make. Between them Levison and Cardew thwarted him, and Cardew took the lead in contriving Carson's escape - to avoid 'scandal' for the Levisons.

Cardew's next venture was another good deed. The unspeakable Trimble 'acquired' some counterfeit tenners. He swanked and spent profligately. To save a scandal Cardew spent £20 of his own to redeem the 'stumers' and save Baggy from the law's clutches. This abhorrence of 'scandal' and humiliation made Cardew fair game for Lowther and other jaspers. It gave rise to the "Cardew Cup".

Slacking, as usual, Cardew let the school down by lodging a match. Despised, rather than chastised he tried to restore his reputation by putting up a Cup for football competition. Lord Reckness was ill and Lord Lilburne refused to stump up the necessary. Cardew rather than face the humiliation of cancelling the tournament, pawned his watch to raise the wind. After some of his usual shilly-shallying, he turned out for Levison's team. They lost in the Final to Tom Merry's side - another wedge between Cardew and Tom.

The casual Cardew was to the fore when Oliver Lynn, the schoolboy 'Pug' came to St. Jim's. To amuse in an idle moment, Cardew took up the rough-and-ready Lynn, only to drop him again when the amusement palled. The offended Lynn treated him to some unpleasantly plain speaking and then piled 'coals of fire' on his head by routing a bunch of thugs who were molesting Ethel Cleveland. (Cardew had tried to protect her and failed ingloriously.) Cardew tried to make it up afterwards, but was deservedly rebuffed. Hamilton was again stressing his theme that mobility of soul does not necessarily go with 'soft woods and aristocratic manners'. Like the more refined Tom Merry, Lynn was twice the man that Cardew could ever be - and Cardew, in a moment of cynical appraisal, acknowledged the fact.

The apex of Cardew's school career had now arrived. In a magnificent series (Gems 824 - 831), he challenged and temporarily usurped Tom Merry's position. It started over Cardew dodging football practice. Kildare reprimanded Tom for letting Cardew dodge; then Cardew made Kildare look foolish by appealing to Mr. Railton (He had been taking extra 'toot' with Monsieur Morny at the relevant time!) Tom was not fooled, however, and Cardew's next misdemeanour collected him a hiding from the Junior committee. Burning with resentment, Cardew resolved to bring Tom down. By a series of wangles, Cardew contrives to become House captain; then by deliberately clashing with Tom at every opportunity he forces Tom to resign the Junior captaincy. Despite a sequence of typical escapades - breaking detention, picking unsuitable players, antagonising erstwhile supporters - Cardew pulled off football victories when he most needed them. After a rocky start, his position was still intact when the term ended.

During the Christmas holidays. Tom and Cardew, with many others, were guests at Eastwood House. Cardew carried on making trouble; when Tom checked him, he plotted with a local 'rough' to way lay Tom and injure him. By mistake, Levison got the beating. Wally D'Arcy discovered the plot and Cardew had to leave Eastwood House in a hurry.

Back at St. Jim's he challenged Tom to a fight - "away from the school". He then arranged with Racke to do the dirty work which had failed during the holidays. While waiting for Tom to arrive, Cardew thought better of it. He sent Racke packing, but then fell foul of Cutts of the Fifth, whom, in a separate episode, he had duly offended. Cutts was giving Cardew a sound thrashing when Tom appeared and came to the rescue. In a terrific scrap Tom defeated Cutts while the helpless Cardew could only watch. Impressed by his rival's chivalry, Cardew had a change of heart. His conduct of the captaincy became more and more slipshod. Eventually, a new election was called and Cardew settled the issue by voting for Tom. His reign of 'in glory' was over.

After that, Cardew's appearances reverted to the old pattern. There was the usual slacking at games; the occasional outbreaks of 'blagging'; the odd appearance on the side of the angels. But he was never so important again; and he never reformed. Too much money; too little moral fibre; too restless to pursue a steady course - these were insuperable drawbacks. His wit was always amusing; his brains were keen, but under-used; his 'good' moments were often decisive factors in settling difficult issues - but he was always a 'curate's egg'. In his own words: a reformed Cardew would be "like Satan rebukin' sin."

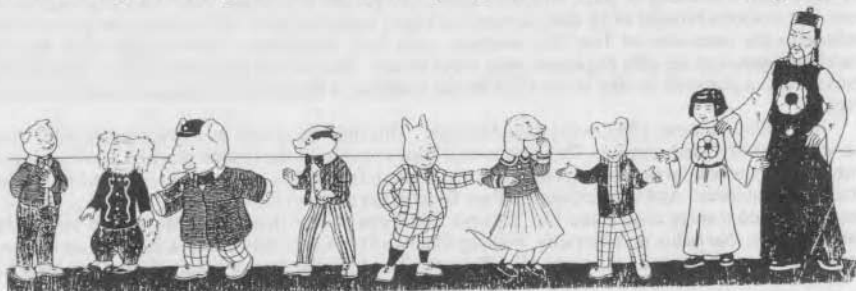
(Next month: Hazeldene)



Billed as a musical play and presented at the Wimbledon Theatre in February this year 'Rupert and the Green Dragon' was written and directed by David Wood, who was also responsible for its script, music and lyrics.

The story was related by Rupert Bear at the Nutwood School Concert, assisted by his friends Bill Badger, Podgy Pig, Pong Ping, Tiger Lily and her father the Chinese Conjuror, Algy Pug, Edward Trunk, and Ottoline, a new female character who played the piano. Mr. and Mrs. Bear and Doctor Chimp were also involved. Appropriate costumes and animal masks were worn by the cast, and the mixture of songs, dancing and jokes was very much like a pantomime, with good triumphing over evil in the end.

When Nutwood was frozen, Rupert and three of his friends travelled skywards with the Snowbird to consult the clerk of the weather about the unseasonable weather, meeting the cloud cuckoos on the way. Eventually they encountered the wicked Zita the Ice Maid, a fugitive from the frozen north who wanted to freeze the world. Finally with the help of the friendly Green Dragon, and the flames emitted by him, Zita was overcome and her grandiose plan thwarted. So Spring arrived and all Nutwood rejoiced.



SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE AUTHORS. John W. Wheway - His Christmas Stories by Margery Woods.

From first world war brutality to the warm innocence of the Cliff House chums; from mud and rivalry on the soccer field to the glamorous prowess of Diana Royston-Clarke on the ice rink; from the fight for survival in the frozen north to the cosy safety of the log fires and festive boards at Christmas Castle or Mistletoe Manor.

John Wheway encompassed them all, with the deceptive ease and fluency of the gifted writer.

He wrote vividly, particularly in his war stories, with the clarity of observation of one who had been through the furnace of war, and just as vividly of a wolf-dog in the bitter fight for survival in one of the world's most hostile climates. Possibly Wheway had been influenced by Jack London, but in his early writing there is almost a sense of exorcism, of the memory of the carnage that must have haunted those who saw and suffered the horrors of the Somme, or Passchendaele. A short story in CHAMPION ANNUAL 1933, ALLIES IN ARMS must have revived old memories for the fathers of the sons who received this annual in their Christmas sock. An earlier CHAMPION ANNUAL, 1926, holds the story WOLF OF THE WILD which demonstrates Wheway's ability to conjure up not only a depiction in the mind's eye of the setting, but also a feeling of the atmosphere. He takes you there.

The first issue of a brand new A.P. boys' paper, PLUCK, made its debut on October 28th, 1922 and introduced in its editorial: 'Mr. John Wheway is one of the youngest of my staff of contributors--he is still in his early twenties --yet he has earned himself an enviable reputation as a writer of sporting stories which combine real life interest with technical accuracy. That is probably because Mr. Wheway is himself a sportsman of no mean ability who lives for sport and has earned laurels in the footer field and in the boxing ring before taking to his pen. FAME OR FAILURE, his latest, is a great story, and one which I'm sure will prove immensely popular.'

It must have proved so, for very soon Wheway followed with a tale of boxing for the Star Library feature in PLUCK'S centre pages, with the byline: Prince of the Ring! by a Prince of the Pen.

Already Wheway had developed the appealing human interest side which when coupled with his flair for pace and action produced a flow of stories which surely amply fulfilled the prediction in that first editorial in PLUCK.

By the end of the twenties Wheway was also contributing to the girls papers, and in 1932 he took over the Cliff House saga in THE SCHOOLGIRL, a niche he was to make particularly his own, not least from the holiday angle.

There had always been holiday stories in all A.P.'s comics and storypapers; Easter, Summer, and of course Christmas. But no author previously, apart from Frank Richards, had brought the Christmas celebrations of a group of scholars to quite such a fine art. The first Cliff House Christmas series from Wheway was, as the Americans might have termed it, a wow.

BABS AND CO'S MAGIC CHRISTMAS transported the chums to an Eastern wonderland magically transported to Essex, the English residence of an Egyptian Boy, and Wheway simply let his imagination run rip in this new challenge to his pen. The chums goggled at towering lotus pillars carved with the kings and deities of an almost forgotten religion, a blue ceiling that winked with stars, a floor which held radiance from floodlights beneath it, and that was only the start! There was the Tomb Room, modelled on that of Tutankhamen, a garden with a swimming pool of perfumed water, heated, naturally, and statues of sacred animals reflected in its depths. Not forgetting The Hall of Two Thousand Years, a room of utmost mystery barred to all during the holidays. The inner man--or rather the inner Bessie--was not forgotten. After a conducted tour of the kitchens and the mountains of glorious food, Bessie said seriously: "You know, I think I'm going to like this place."

Reading the fantastic word pictures of Luxor Hall one feels that Wheway had another talent never developed, that of theatrical designer. Nothing was missed in this series. The girls found that Santa had left them each a stocking of gifts, which included two golden sovereigns, later on Christmas Day there were vast crackers brought in by dark-skinned servants, cascading gifts galore upon the guests, a kind of prelude to the ceremony of Tree that evening, with fairy attendants whose wands were tipped with sparkling lights, and the gifts dispensed were sheer luxury. Interwoven with this positive orgy of sybaritic festivity was a plot well worthy of the Cliff House tradition, with plenty of excitement and fun as well as drama.

The following year, 1933, was just as fantastic. This time the chums were transported into Christmas past as guests of Clara's family. This was a well kept secret until the chums reached a Dorset inn where everything they had brought excepting gifts was to be left and they were to change into fresh clothing which awaited them. And what clothing! Pure Dickensian down to the last dainty bow on a satin slipper. Outside waited a stage coach, and Mr. Trevlyn told them at last; that Christmas was to be a truly old-fashioned one. No radio, no electricity, nothing that wasn't in Christmas Castle a hundred years ago. Nor were the chums disappointed, especially Bessie! The baronial board groaned, the log fires blazed,

lamplight gleamed on pewter and old weaponry, and the wine flowed. A tactful veil was drawn on the opinions the servants may have had when called upon to cope with kitchen equipment one hundred years old! And the pattern of Christmasses to come was formed. Of course there was a ghost. And of course Bessie saw things in the dark and screamed "Ghost!" Not surprising when there was a haunted tower. And there was the requisite waif whose woeful mystery the chums had to solve, with the Red Crusader and Mad Meredith, the Highway man thrown in for good measure. This was certainly an enchanted Christmas!

1934 brought the London Christmas, at Robin's Roost, an ancient inn newly acquired and renovated by Janet Jordan's Aunt Janice. This was the scene of Clara's famous encounter with the White Monk, when in the Grotto he appears to walk upon the water and the gallant Tomboy cleaves him from head to foot with an oar. A somewhat nerve-shattering experience, but definitely one to encore when Clara walks right through the ghostly white figure. Here were hidden chambers, secret ways to delight the hearts of the most ardent secret-passage lovers, and two more waifs to be taken under the protective wing of Babs.

These three series were, for many readers, the cream of Wheway's eight sets of Cliff House Christmas stories. In 1935 the girls celebrated the festive season in London again, this time with Leila Carroll's uncle and aunt, Lord and Lady Sutherland, and a right royal round of fun and games it proved. When the reader learns that Lord Sutherland has risen to the rank of peer through the theatrical profession he or she knows that if nothing else, it will be a spectacular Christmas. And so it was, from the moment that Leila pressed the door bell and the doors flew open to a fanfare of trumpets welcoming the chums to a Christmas was definitely Hollywood style. This time the waif is Hope Caraway, a dancer, and the villainess her show-biz rival who manages to implicate Babs and throw a shadow over the seasonal joy. But not for long!

A Fine Complete Story of Yuletide Festivity and Mystery, Featuring
the Chums of Cliff House



BABS & Co's Christmas Revels

Mistletoe Manor was the setting for Wheway's Christmas offering of 1936, the home of Barbara Redfern's grandfather, General Redfern, whose temper is somewhat testy. If this Christmas was a little less spectacular its mystery was a exciting as ever. There is a Silent Tower and it holds a captive, even though this ancient tower in the grounds of the manor has neither entrance or exit...

Bonnie Scotland welcomed the chums a year later, to Glengowrie, the ancient home of Jean Cartright's grandfather. Here Jemima is featured, at her most enigmatic, but the readers knew that when Jemima was being inscrutable her mind was busily at work solving the Glengowrie mystery and bringing about the reunion between long estranged father and daughter. There were two separate stories this year, the second one featured Leila and introduced Lister Cattermole, Jean's half-brother who did not exactly attain high standing in the Laird's estimation. A fake detective and Leila's need to keep her activities secret even from her chums helped to weave this seasonable tale of stolen heirlooms and lots of Christmas cheer amid the lavish snow of the Highlands.

In 1938 Pellaby Castle Hotel in Cornwall, owned by Clara's Aunt Grace, provided the scope for an unpleasant visitor, who, for a governess, seemed to wield a great deal of influence with her employer and makes life a misery for the young girl in her charge. But, as we all know, Babs and Co were never the girls to stand by and watch injustice being done. Wheway never neglected characterization of the minor characters and there is a little gem in this story, the irascible Mr. Blair and his jigsaw puzzle, which seems

fated never to be completed. There is a surprise outcome when the unfortunate Dorothy is reunited with the twin sister she did not know existed and the villain of the piece is foiled.

The second Pellaby Castle Christmas story again was a complete, and introduced the Whitechester girls, long-time rivals of Cliff House, and a Whitechester spoof ghost, which seemed to invoke a real one. Tomboy Clara goes into attack on the Whitechester spoofer and finds herself in an unknown part of the castle, with a cold hand on her neck and an icy breath on her cheek, and a disappearing room. Of course no one believes her, until later she follows a ghostly beckoning figure and finds the mysterious room has returned! Throw in the suspicious newcomers, Selma and her Uncle Charles, a packet of missing bonds and a missing grandfather, stir in plum pudding in copious quantities, Bessie Bunter, and a pillow fight, and you have another great Cliff House Christmas adventure.

Sadly, one year on, we were at war. Once again Clara was the hostess at Trevlyn Towers. Romance was in the air during the first story of this last Christmas series. The girls feel specially involved because they all admire Berry, a racing driver and ex Cliff House girl herself, and her fiance is the brother of their own Dulcia Fairbrother, head girl of the school. When, inevitably, the romance is threatened, Marjorie Hazeldene is the gentle leader in the restoring to happiness of the lovers. The strange rider, Mystery Mask, rode in for the second story, to bring a blush and a kiss to Babs at the end, and the third Christmas adventure brought chills and thrills in **THE MYSTERY OF THE TOLLING BELL** and introduced the requisite persecuted waif. The last holiday story of all, at New Year 1940, featured Diana Royston-Clarke in an ice gala drama which sparked off the old antagonism between her and Babs. Babs won, naturally, in this conflict, and yet, in one of Wheway's clever, bitter-sweet ending which often characterized his stories of the Firebrand, Diana ended on a note of triumph.

Diana is said to have been John Wheway's favourite creation, and certainly her stories all held the electrical charge of a vivid character. So perhaps it was fitting that the last of the Cliff House Christmas adventures should feature her, at the passing of an era in schoolgirl fiction that many still regret and remember with great affection. John W. Wheway; a Prince of the Pen. And the King of the Cliff House Christmasses!

A Very, Very, Merry Christmas with Barbara Redfern & Co.



Christmas Day
at
Christmas Castle!

By Hilda Richards

Admirers of Hamiltoniana will argue endlessly about the relative merits of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, but there is one aspect of the Magnet that everyone admits is unsurpassed, and that is its series at Christmas time.

I may be expressing a purely personal opinion in confessing to being less than enthusiastic about Lochmuir (1923) and Polpelly (1935). There was something too bleak and inhospitable about these draughty old buildings, both giving the impression of being practically uninhabited. Equally, the Christmas at sea with Compton (1936) was also lacking in the warmth and comfort that the reader had come to expect. Furthermore, although Fisher T. Fish was accustomed to spending Christmas around Greyfriars, it was not very seasonable for the Famous Five to do just that when Coker was kidnapped (1926) and when Redwing suffered the same fate two years later. Finally, despite the fact that Hilton Hall (1934) was a country mansion, its situation on Dartmoor and the chase for an escaped convict both combined to cast a dark shadow over what should have been a festive occasion.

It was of course the Wharton Lodge Christmas series that were so superb. They had just the right combination of cosiness with comfort, with a cast of well-beloved permanent residents, like the incomparable butler, Wells. There were too many Wharton Lodge series to explore in detail, but every single one was welcome. I find it hard to forget the Courtfield Cracksman (1929) and Bunter the Stowaway (1932). Another pleasing feature was the appearance of Dr. Locke or Mr. Quelch as an honoured guest, though Bunter did not always honour them as he should. Bunter did play a special part in the Cavandale Abbey series (1930) and the Reynham Castle series (1937), and these two series, though not set at Wharton Lodge, do inspire a special affection, perhaps because the sight of a pig in clover can be regarded with tolerance at Christmas.



Illustration by Bob Whiter

There is one series that stands in a class of its own, and that is the Mauleverer Towers series (1933). The first number, Magnet 1244, is unique in having tiny pictures to decorate the beginning of each chapter. The Towers was larger than Wharton Lodge, but the fact that the Famous Five were guests of a fellow Removite helped to establish the right atmosphere of warmth and happiness. The arrival of Bunter in a taxi he could not pay for is one of the all-time classics. How he jumped out of the taxi in the driveway of the Towers, and fell through the snow into a secret entrance was not only hilarious but of vital importance in the later development of the plot. All in all, there was some glorious fun as well as a serious aspect, and there can be no doubt that this was one of these really great series. It may well be that we do not have snow every Christmas in real life, as they seemed to experience in the Magnet, but the festive atmosphere and the sheer zest and youthful merriment depicted makes this Christmas series of very special enjoyment at this season of the year. Long may these famous stories be treasured!

REMEMBERING THE RAINBOW.....

In which BRIAN DOYLE recalls and discusses one of the most magical, successful and affectionately remembered children's Christmas plays of all time.

To anyone over the age of 45, "Where the Rainbow Ends" must surely be a familiar title. And what an evocative, heart-warming, magical title it is. Every time I read those four simple words, or hear them spoken, a tingle goes down my spine; indeed, it's probably my own favourite title of all time. Apart from anything else, it constituted my very first visit to a theatre. I was one of a coach-party of 'Mixed Infants' from Bostall Lane School, in Abbey Wood, South-East London, in the Autumn of 1938, and was transported to the Holborn Empire, on the other side of London, where I sat entranced as I watched, amidst the heady scent of oranges and peppermints and juvenile perspiration, the enchantments and excitements, the terrors and wonders of this famous Christmas play for children.

I should like to tell the unusual, and indeed remarkable, story of "Where the Rainbow Ends" and of the many, later-famous people associated with it. It is a story never really told before, to my knowledge, and has taken many weeks of research to uncover.

Perhaps I should begin, for the benefit of those who don't know about it, by saying that this children's play with music was produced in London almost every Christmas from 1911 until 1958 (missing only seven years), a total of 42 annual revivals (plus a final London suburban production in 1959), as well as many provincial tours. It's a record second only to the great "Peter Pan" for the number of yearly Christmas revivals (and that started seven years earlier anyway!) It became a British Institution, seen by more than six million people in the theatre, a best-selling children's book, and a breeding-ground for stars of the future, over fifty, who made their original debuts in the play (and not forgetting established stars who appeared in it too). It is more than a Footnote in the History of the English Theatre; it is surely a glowing and inspiring little Chapter.

"Where the Rainbow Ends", a modern 'Fairy Play' by Clifford Mills and John Ramsey, tells of the eternal fight between Good and Evil. The former is exemplified by St. George, the Patron Saint of England, and a group of four children and their brave little lion cub; the latter is represented by the Dragon King and his followers, plus a particularly wicked Aunt and Uncle, and a few other assorted nasty creatures.

The story tells of Rosamund and Crispian Carey (aged about 14 and 15), and their friends, Jim Blunders, 15 and his sister, Betty, 11; the two boys are Naval Cadets at Osborne College, very British and patriotic and loyal to their King and country; the period is 1911, when the British Empire was still great and upon which the sun never set (as the saying went). The parents of Rosamund and Crispian have been lost at sea and presumed dead and they are living with their dreaded Uncle Joseph Flint and Aunt Matilda, who treat them very badly, as does their spiteful page-boy, William. Their only solace, apart from each other, is their loveable lion cub, Cubby, who goes everywhere with them.

Rosamund finds a magical book in the library, 'The Rainbow Book' which says that all lost ones can be found in the Land Where the Rainbow Ends. She also discovers a magic carpet (complete with genie) who obligingly takes the four children (and, of course, Cubby) to the edge of the terrible Dragon Woods.

They are pursued by their evil Uncle and Aunt, and a M. Bertrand, a French business acquaintance of theirs, who is not really bad, but who just becomes caught up in events.

The courageous children go through a series of terrifying and memorable adventures and encounter many strange creatures and people (including the one who always sticks in my own mind, 'The Slacker', an English youth who has succumbed to Dragon ways and tries to tempt the children to stay there with him and become 'half-dragons' like him; he was bathed in an eerie green light on the stage and was not easily forgotten). As they try to reach Rainbow Land they are helped from time to time by the wonderful St. George of England, who appears when they really need him. In the end they reach the Dragon King's castle, where St. George has an epic sword fight to the death with the cunning monster. And then the children arrive at the Land Where the Rainbow Ends 'which some call Heart's Content, where Heaven kisses Earth and where all Lost Ones are found' - the Land where hopes are fulfilled and where dreams come true..... And, of course, where they find their parents ship-wrecked, but alive and well.

If all this sounds very sentimental and over-patriotic and more than a little cloying to today's tastes, then it's quite true, it is! But..... on the stage it was all put across so well and with such gusto, and indeed, fervour, and with the youthful audiences cheering the heroes and booing the villains so enthusiastically, that the whole thing really worked. At the end the entire audience, children and grown-ups, were on their feet and shouting 'St. George! St. George! St. George for Merrie England!' together with the children on-stage. At curtain-fall, apparently the theatre assumed the appearance and atmosphere of a religious meeting, with 'Patriotism' being the key word for all present. The curtain often rose again for children from the audience to go up on-stage to meet St. George in person! It was quite a night and one that most children would never forget.....

That's Where the Rainbow Ended. But where did the Rainbow begin?

It really all began in 1911.....the year of the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary.... the year of the launching of the ill-fated 'Titanic'.....the year of the famous Siege of Sidney Street..... the year of a record sunshine summer (384 hours at Eastbourne alone)..... the year of 'The Rainbow'.....

'Where the Rainbow Ends' was written by Mrs. Clifford Mills (a rather mysterious lady about whom nothing seems to be known, except that she wrote and published occasional magazine stories, and that she originally told the 'Rainbow' story to her sick little daughter Evelyn - later Mrs. Shillington) and John Ramsey, a pseudonym which hid the identity of up-and-coming 24-year-old actor, Reginald Owen, who was a friend of Mrs. Mills. Owen knew a leading actor-manager-producer of the day, Charles Hawtrely (no, not that one!) and took the play to him, suggesting that he (Owen) should play St. George, and his beautiful actress-wife, Lydia Billbrooke, might play Mrs. Carey, the children's lost mother - a small but effective role. Owen also put forward the name of a friend of his, a rising young composer named Roger Quilter, to write the incidental music.

Hawtrely was impressed with the play and with the enthusiastic young Owen's persuasiveness, and eventually agreed to produce it himself at London's Savoy Theatre, in December, 1911.

But all those 40 children playing fairies and animals and dragons and dancing around everywhere! Hawtrely wouldn't be much good at handling them, he thought to himself. Who could he get to take that side of things off his hands while he got on with the main job of producing and directing the leading actors and actresses? Hawtrely pondered. Then he remembered a woman named Italia Conti who had recently trained children for another show. What about her? She was contacted and agreed to take on the task. And that is how Miss Conti, whose future career was to become so inextricably bound up with 'Rainbow' was first introduced to the play.

'Where the Rainbow Ends' opened at the Savoy Theatre (home of Gilbert and Sullivan for so many years) on December 21st, 1911. The original Rosamund was Esmé Wynne (in later years to become a successful novelist named Esmé Wynne-Tyson). Crispian was Philip Tonge (who moved to America



some years later, where he became a busy actor in films and on the New York stage; in 1952 he played a supporting role in the Danny Kay film "Hans Christian Anderson"). Jim Blunders (who never made any) was Sidney Sherwood (sadly to be killed in the Trenches in World War One). William, the nasty little page-boy (seen only in Scene One) was none other than a 12-year old Noel Coward, in only his second stage appearance. More of him later. An appealing little character called Will of the Wisp was played and danced by a pretty little thing called Mavis Yorke, who all but stole the show (as well as hundreds of schoolboy hearts in the audience). Playing a Fairy, and understudying Esmé Wynne, was little Hermoine Gingold, who later became Hermoine Gingold!

And what of co-author and St. George himself, Reginald Owen? He subsequently became quite a big film star and, after moving to Hollywood in 1929, appeared in many films, including "Random Harvest", "Mrs. Miniver", "National Velvet", "The Three Musketeers" and "Mary Poppins" (remember him as the eccentric retired naval Admiral who lived next-door to the children?) He also held, and still holds, I think, a unique motion picture record, being the only actor in movie history to play both Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson (in two different films, of course!) He was Watson to Clive Brooks' Holmes in "Sherlock Holmes" in 1932, and was Holmes himself in "A Study in Scarlet" in 1933 (when *his* Watson was the unlikely-named Warburton Gamble, who sadly failed to find overnight fame in Tinsel Town). Owen died in 1972, at the age of 85, only a few months after appearing on Broadway in the musical "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum". Most cinemagoers will remember him as a plump, often moustachioed actor with a rich, fruity voice - he was frequently Hollywood's idea of the typical upper-class Englishman - which brings us back to St. George! But, of course, at the time of "Rainbow" he was only 24 and a handsome, golden-haired god-like figure, and he made a dashing and athletic St. George. And it must be remembered that without his help and enthusiasm and contacts, "Rainbow" might never have seen the light of day.

After the First Night of "Where the Rainbow Ends", the National Press reviews were unanimously good. "...the children's play we have been waiting for.....a triumph", "...the most fascinating children's play we have ever seen....a serious rival to 'Peter Pan'....., "Enchanting...", "Thrilling....", "Amusing..." and "Beautiful..." are just a few samples. Little Mavis Yorke was described as 'joyous', 'exquisite' and 'a special triumph'.

Impressed by all this, the Germans - and remember this was late 1911 - realised the usefulness of so patriotic a theme and attempted to buy the rights for production in the Fatherland. Their idea, apparently, was to turn St. George into a German Saint and the symbolic lion club into a German eagle. Their offer received a polite but firm refusal.....

Roger Quilter's (1877-1953) lilting music came in for favourable mentions in the press too. As well as being heard as incidental music during the play, it was also danced to on several occasions, especially by 'the Spirit of the Lake' and 'Will of the Wisp'. The music is still heard occasionally today and was indeed broadcast on BBC Radio 3 only a few months ago. It is usually played as the "Orchestral Suite from 'Where the Rainbow Ends'" in 5 Movements: 1. Rainbow Land. 2. Will of the Wisp. 3. Rosamund. 4. Fairy Frolic. 5. Goblin Forest. It is Quilter's second best-known piece, his most popular being 'The Children's Overture' (1914), based on old nursery rhyme tunes; it was this that began BBC Radio transmissions at 6.30 every morning for many years during the 1950s and 1960s. (Remember, it included all those catchy variations on 'Boys and Girls come Out to Play'?)

The credit at the foot of the programme for that First Night (and for many more) read: "Dances arranged and children trained by Miss Italia Conti". She decided to make the training of children for the stage her life's work and the famous Italia Conti Stage School was born in 1912 (it is still going strong today 81 years later, though it is now called, rather grandly, the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts and is situated near the Barbican in the City of London).

Charles Hawtrey produced "Rainbow" for its second year, in 1912, this time at the Garrick Theatre, with the cast virtually unchanged. Noel Coward was again William, but he later confessed that he had had strong ambitions to play the leading boy, Crispian. He was reaching for the stars even then.

Shortly before this production, in 1912, Mrs. Clifford Mills had written and published the book-version of "Where the Rainbow Ends"; published by Hodder and Stoughton in London and originally unillustrated, it had been reprinted no fewer than 16 times up to 1941. The same publishers brought out two magnificent 'gift' editions a few years later (undated but probably around the 1920s), both in large formats (one 'annual' size, one rather smaller with 10 colour plates and 14 black-and-white illustrations by Leo Bates. Unusually, another publisher, Harraps, published a 'new revised edition' in 1932, reprinted in 1951, 1954, 1957 and 1961; this had 15 chapter-heading illustrations by Honor C. Appleton, plus a frontispiece photograph of a scene from a stage production 'St. George storms the Dragon King's castle'. The play is still in print and available from Samuel French Ltd; this is the 'revised version' by the daughter of Clifford Mills, Mrs. Evelyn Shillington, published in 1951.

Back to the "Rainbow" play. The third season was again at the Garrick, in 1913, and there were at least three names destined for future success in the cast. Brian Aherne, later a leading Hollywood film star in the 1930s, '40s and '50s (as well as being married to Joan Fontaine for a while) made his stage debut as

a 'spirit of the woods', also being a pupil at the Conti stage school. Crispian was played by Harold French, later a well-known director of many British films during the same period; and the nasty Uncle Joseph was Roland Pertwee, subsequently a playwright and screenwriter of note, who co-wrote such films as "A Yank at Oxford", "The Four Just Men" and "The Spy in Black", and whose most famous play was "Pink String and Sealing Wax" (also filmed). He was also the father of actor Jon Pertwee and writer Michael Pertwee.

By the 1914 season, producer Charles Hawtrey was becoming a little tired of "Rainbow" and he leased the production rights for that Christmas to Tom Arnold (later of circus and ice-show fame) who put it on at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, followed by a short tour. I have no record of the cast.

In the 1915 production, Noel Coward was back in the cast (after a break - to be in "Peter Pan"), this time in the showy role of 'the Slacker' who, after his scene with Crispian and Jim, disappears into the dark dragon woods, laughing hysterically. Coward loved playing this part, sent appropriate shivers through his young audiences, and never failed to receive a long round of applause as he made his exit from the stage.

In later years, then a world-famous star, playwright and wit, Coward retained happy memories of his three seasons in "Rainbow", referring to them several times in his autobiographies and diaries. He went to see the play in London in January, 1952, for instance, remarking: "It was poignantly nostalgic going slap-back over 40 years and remembering the lines and the music. It was not badly done and the story still holds." And in a diary entry for September, 1953, he said: ".....life is short and, as the Genie said in 'Where the Rainbow Ends', we have far to travel....." He also kept up his friendship with Esmé Wynne, the original Rosamund, for many years, and, for a shorter period, with Philip Tonge, the first Crispian (who, he later confessed in an autobiography, first told him the facts of life!).

There was no production of "Rainbow" in 1917 (due, perhaps, to wartime difficulties). But in 1918, at the Apollo Theatre, another future star made his debut: this time it was Roger Livesey, in the role of Cubby, the lion cub; he was 13 at the time (Livesey, not Cubby). St. George that year was another distinguished actor-director of the future, Henry Kendall.

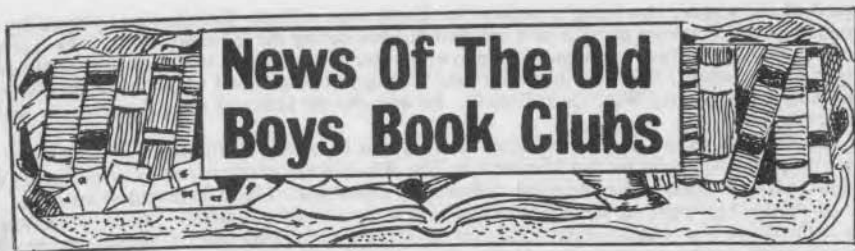
In the 1919 production Leslie Woodgate made his bow as a dragon; BBC Radio listeners (and indeed music-lovers generally) with long memories, may recall Woodgate as an eminent chorus conductor and the resident conductor of the BBC Chorus for many years from the 1930s to the 1950s. Woodgate often used to conduct the orchestra for performances of "Rainbow" during those later years (as did Roger Quilter himself on special occasions). Woodgate named his son Crispian, after the leading boy-hero of "Rainbow" and he subsequently became an actor with the Old Vic Company, before turning to photography (I met Crispian several times myself during the 1970s, when the used to visit the sets of films I was working on to take special photographs). Woodgate's young niece, Florence, danced in some of the "Rainbow" productions too.

Adele Dixon made her debut as an Elf in the 1921 production, later playing 'Fairy Starlight' in the 1923 show. Miss Dixon was a very busy and versatile actress and musical comedy star in the 1930s, but perhaps her main claim to fame was that she virtually opened the official BBC Television Service in 1936, singing a song called 'Television' ('Here's looking at you, looking at me...'); I'm sure most people have seen the historical clips from that landmark opening TV show.....

In 1921, the rights to "Rainbow" were leased by the famous Kirby theatrical family, well-known for supplying their 'flying' apparatus and 'wires' to such shows as 'Peter Pan', in which people were required to 'fly'. There was even a witch who had to 'fly' in "Rainbow". It was the Kirbys, during their time with the play, who went ahead with a suggested project to make "Rainbow" into a film (silent, of course) in 1921. Italia Conti supplied the children, including the now-15-year-old Roger Livesey, who repeated his stirring performance on all-fours as Cubby. I can find no further casting details, though I glean from Denis Gifford's book 'British Cinema' that the director was one Lisle Lestock. It was a British film, with interior scenes shot in studios at Catford, in South London, and location sequences at Torquay, in Devon (mainly on beaches and in coves and woods). I gather that Miss Conti took little interest in this film version, her only real passion being the theatre (perhaps that is why I can find no record of "Rainbow" ever being produced as a sound film, or even on radio or television!).

(To be concluded)

FOR SALE IN GOOD CONDITION. Museum Press - The Mysterious X. £6.00.
(Martin Clifford) The Housemaster's Homecoming £6.00 (HB) The Gem No. 12 £5.00.
Yaroh! Gyles Brandreth £6.50. (Hawk) Big Fat Bunter Book £8.00. (Hawk) Complete
Casebook of Herlock Sholmes £8.00. (D.C. Thomson) Golden Years Adventure Stories
£7.50. Postage extra. S.A.E. please. Eric Sheppard, 1 Forge Close, Bampton,
Bridlington, YO15 1LX.



LONDON OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

Twenty one members assembled at the Eltham home of Dorothy and Peter Mahony on 10th October. Peter induced our memories to some hard work with his two quizzes. First, a middle name quiz with characters from Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood and St. Frank's, and then a showbiz name connection quiz with characters from the same schools.

Brian Doyle's talk was *Remembering the Rainbow*, based on the book and play by Mrs. Clifford Mills of *Where the Rainbow ends*, which was followed by some animated discussion.

SUZANNE HARPER

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

We met in October at the Duston, Northampton home of member Howard Corn.

After our usual short business, Howard gave us a talk about D.C. Thomson's *Topper* comic since its inception in February 1953. It is still being published today. Physically larger than all the other comics of the period it mixed adventure strips with "funnies", besides including an educational centrespread and a backpage 'Classics Illustrated' type strip. The major creation for this comic was 'Beryl-the-Peril', incidentally from the pen of the "Denis-the-Menace" creator.

Amazingly the comic also included several syndicated strips from America. A later Thomson paper, *Beezer*, was amalgamated with the *Topper*.

Later Paul Wilkins presented a video of *TV Hell*, a segment of a BBC 2 evening broadcast. As expected, the pop music programme examples were truly dire.

ADRIAN PERKINS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A warm welcome was given to the 10 members present at our November A.G.M.

All our officials were re-elected en bloc with the exception of catering which will now be the responsibility of Keith Normingham. The accounts were presented, and subscriptions will remain unchanged for another year.

The new facsimile Rupert books were on show, as well as a new Biggles book designed for the collector, and a leaflet from Hawk Books depicting a Bunter Christmas Hamper which was a new innovation in our hobby. Margaret brought along some of her celebrated and delicious parkin which had been baked in her new oven in the new home, she and Keith have moved into. After refreshments, Geoffrey read a piece from "The Magnet" - "Bunter the Cavalier" - hilarious!

Next meeting: Our informal Christmas Party on 11th December: we meet from 5.30 p.m. A very happy Christmas from all at Northern Club.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

MAGNETS WANTED

Condition VG (no sellotaping,
no guillotining)

G. Good, 147 Thornes Road, Wakefield,
West Yorkshire WF2 8QN.

Telephone 0924 378273

43	115	186	226	253	755	888
48	135	204	227	256	784	897
51	138	207	229	257	816	931
60	139	210	230	395	826	958
64	140	215	231	396	841	984
91	143	217	232	455	842	985
95	145	219	233	460	862	986
104	147	220	237	642	874	989
108	148	221	238	652	876	
110	156	223	239	748	877	
112	169	225	245	751	878	

A CHRISTMAS TREAT

Illustration by
J. Louis Smyth
(from "Wonderland Annual" 1923)



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