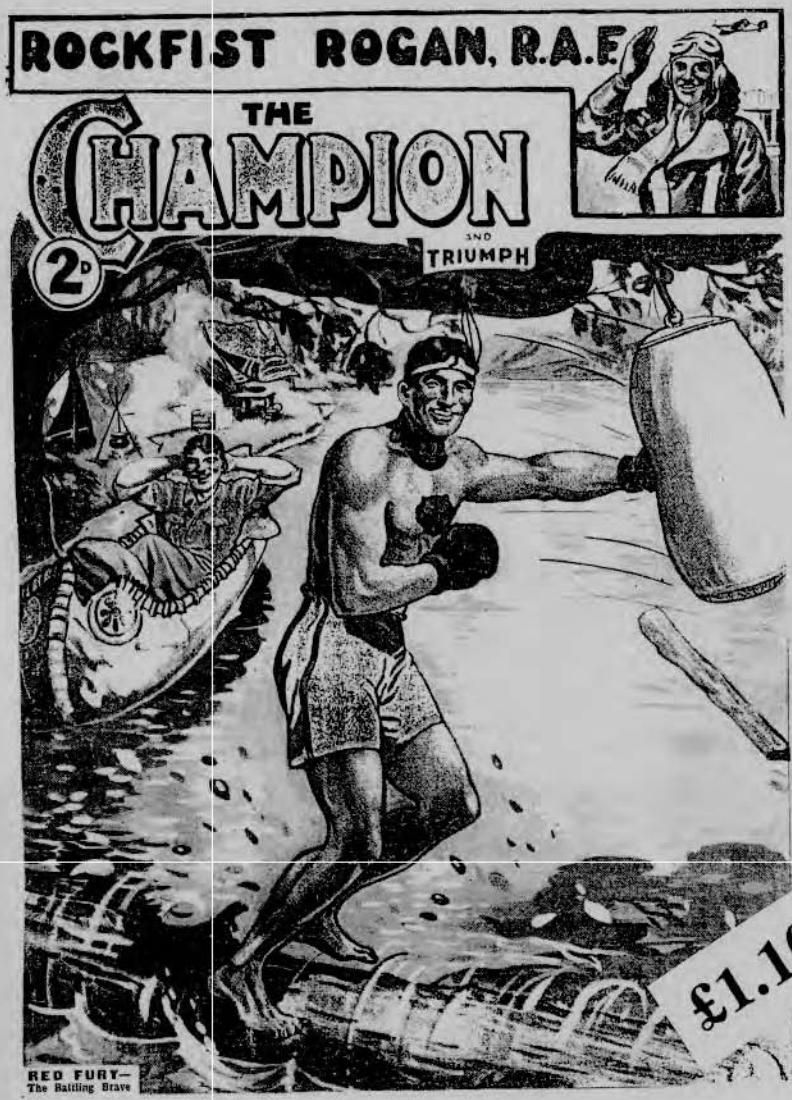
STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 49 No. 581 MAY 1995



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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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FIFTY YEARS ON

This month we are marking the 50th anniversary of the ending of the war in Europe, and for those of us who are old enough to remember the original VE Day there are bound to be many compelling memories of both personal and public events.

Over recent weeks I have been re-reading some of the children's books and papers which were published between 1939 and 1945. These range from the anarchically comic to the deeply moving and - rather like the popular songs of the period - provide instant recall of the atmosphere of those difficult, sombre, frightening yet strangely stimulating and uplifting times.

Generally speaking, in what has been dubbed 'The People's War' because of the strong community involvement on 'the Home Front', children's patriotism was intense and uncomplicated. Older boys and girls were enthusiastically endeavouring to

participate in the war effort by acting as messengers to the Home Guard and ARP, collecting salvage, giving voluntary aid to the Red Cross, 'Digging for Victory' and learning to 'Make Do and Mend'. As well as these factual pursuits, they often cherished fantasies about catching Nazi spies or successfully resisting Hitler's crack paratroopers if and when these set foot on our shores.

All these activities and aspirations are reflected in contemporaneous children's stories, but almost certainly the most popular theme in the early fiction of the war was evacuation. Kitty Barne struck a realistic note in her *Visitors from London* and set the mould for many other evacuation tales which tackled differences between the cheerful - or whining - Cockney visitors and their rural hosts: "It's a bit of all right, the country is. I never bin before." Richmal Crompton, however, who gave us several highly entertaining wartime vignettes, dealt iconoclastically with town and country distinctions when William, temporarily posing as an evacuee from London, asks moronically "What's grass?" The comic *Knockout* featured a similarly irreverent, long-running illustrated feature called 'Our Happy Vaccies'. P.L. Travers, best known of course for her Mary Poppins books, wrote *I Go By Sea, I Go By Land*, a touching account of the evacuation to America of two English children, James and Sabrina. She vividly conveys the excitements and apprehensions of crossing the Atlantic in convoy with U-Boats spotted in the area, and with the radio bringing news of heavy air-raids on England where the children's parents have had to remain. James and Sabrina's sense of fear, as they overhear snatches of adult conversation about the worsening war situation is potently described - but so too is their delight in their new life once they reach the safety and satisfactions of the U.S.A.: "...you can get strawberries and cream in America all the year round instead of only in June....You can't wonder the Americans are proud of their country."

Like Richmal Crompton's William, Evadne Price's Jane provided us with plenty of laughs as she and her chums experimented with messy supposed ARP rituals and battled with Horace ('Orris'), a horrible evacuee who swore vigorously, put field-mice in the cooking and hung the voluminous knickers of Jane's 'Nana' all over the village. As we all know so well, the *Magnet* ended in the fairly early days of the conflict, but Charles Hamilton gave us one or two wartime gems in the Eastcliffe Lodge series when Wibley has to impersonate a British intelligence agent to hide the fact that he is away, operating in 'Hunland'. In a May 1940 issue, on the roof of the Lodge a 'spy of the Gestapo' is signalling to enemy planes. When the bombing starts the juniors make tracks for the cellar, but Bunter remains in bed, snoring off his latest gargantuan meal. Harry Wharton has to awaken the irascible Fat Owl and help him to find his respirator:

"'Lend me a hand!" howled Bunter.... "I ain't going to be gassed and slaughtered and murdered just to please you!"

"Here it is!" exclaimed Harry, grabbing the gas mask container from a table.

"T'ain't in that!" gasped Bunter. "I keep toffee in that!'"

" You want me to be bombed, and gassed, and blown to bits, you beast ! " howled Bunter. " If you kick me again, I'll—yaroop ! " Half-dressed, the fat junior rolled out into the gallery, with the help of Harry Wharton's foot.

Ridicule of difficult or menacing situations, of course, helped to alleviate children's fears of air-raids or invasion, and the *Dandy* and *Beano* comics quickly adapted outrageous caricature and slapstick farce to the needs of the time. The *Dandy* featured a strip about Hitler and Goering, 'Adolf and Hermie, The Nasty Nazis' portraying them as obsessed with the search for food, '"I have der pain in der breadbasket"', while the *Beano* focussed on Mussolini, 'Musso the Wop, He's a Big-a-da Flop!' Desperate Dan, Lord Snooty and Pansy Potter also resolutely helped the war effort, week after week after week.

It seemed as if all our childhood heroes were bursting to do their bit, from engagingly anthropomorphic animals (such as the little bear heroine in *Mary Plain lends a Paw*) to the earnest schoolgirls of Angela Brazil, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elinor Brent-Dyer, and the intrepid aviators of W.E. Johns and Hal Wilton (whose Rockfist Rogan put the Germans down with panache in the *Champion*). Then there were the more serious Boy Scout and Girl Guide stories, and tales of refugees from occupied Europe. We cannot forget the super-men, plucky schoolboys and sturdy animals (like Busty's Brainy Baboon) who kept up a constant if far-fetched onslaught against the 'Jerries' and the 'Japs' in *Wizard, Hotspur, Adventure, Skipper* and *Rover*. Most memorable amongst these was Wilson the Wonder Athlete who threw his guts and gusto into the war effort by enlisting in the Royal Air Force.

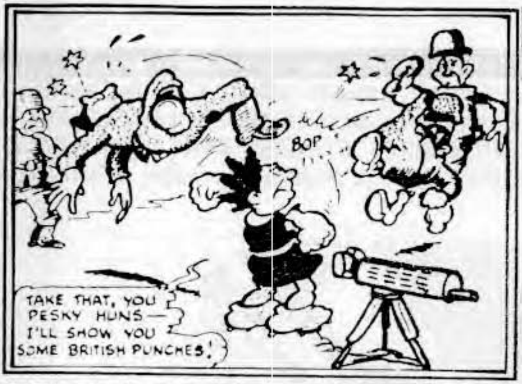
And so we could go on - and on - and on. What treasures we have in the books and papers of those turbulent years.

Turning again to the question asked in the C.D. by Mark Taha about what we read when our favourite weeklies folded during the war, I have been re-reading the two papers which I began to read after the *Schoolgirl* ended on 18th May, 1940. It advised its readers henceforth to take the *Girls' Crystal* with which the *Schoolgirl* would be incorporated, and I did so - expecting to find in its pages at least one story about the Cliff House characters. Sadly, however although the *Girls' Crystal* of 1st June began to

include under its cover heading the words 'And The Schoolgirl', it did not devote even a paragraph to the heroines of my favourite but demised paper. It simply continued to run its own regular features. These, written by authors from the Amalgamated Press stable with whom I was familiar, offered some comfort, especially Peter Langley's Noel Raymond adventures and Daphne Grayson's stories of The Cruising Merrymakers.

Nevertheless it seems strange that the *Girls' Crystal* didn't even carry the closing chapters of the thrilling serial about Valerie Drew, the Girl Detective, which we had been following in the *Schoolgirl* for many weeks. This was starkly abandoned: just another casualty of the war, I suppose. With so much anguish and drama all around, the A.P. editors, struggling to maintain their publishing empire despite acute paper shortages, were unlikely to realise how traumatic to a young reader the sudden cut-off a weekly paper could be.

I also began to read the monthly *Girl's Own Paper* which offered a wide range of attractions in fiction, factual articles and illustrated features. Its star turn, of course, was W.E. Johns' *Worrals of the WAAF* - about whom I have written glowingly on other occasions in the C.D. Captain Johns' contributions to the juvenile fiction of the Second



World War are further explored in this issue of the C.D. by his biographer Jennifer Schofield.

Appropriately I will end this Fifty Years On editorial by wishing you all *'Soft landings! And no dud engines.'*

MARY CADOGAN

* *

MABEL AND JOYCE AND ANNE AND FRIENDS.
Part 2: **by Donald V. Campbell**

Muriel Gill appears regularly in the Odhams books. She has an angularity of style that can be picked out at a page's length. Her cross-hatching and intensity of line are matched with a charm that never fails to please. The poem "The River Gods' Song" has a smashing little girl, in the most dark depths of water, balanced by a delicate hint of orchids, of grass, and of trees. Superb! The water actually moves! (THE GOLDEN GIFT BOOK). In THE FAVOURITE WONDER BOOK (my personal favourite) she produces a quite grown-up fairy, a young girl, moonlight and more densely-black water set off by flowers. The title to the picture goes like this:

"Any flower she wished to see she had only to look for, and she was sure to find it."

There is an intriguing mystery about the Odhams' "annuals". The same editors - Crossland & Parrish - appear in some Collins "annuals" after the second world war. (The Odhams' books mentioned in this article were all published circa 1930-1940.) But in my small collection I have THE CHILDREN'S WONDER BOOK (Collins). This updated publication has work in it by D.C. Eyles (a prolific artist) that is both signed and dated (apparently 1933 or 1935).

"The dun he fell at a water-course—in a woeful heap fell he."

However, attached to the book is an original BOOK TOKEN (1958) which is twenty years later than the Eyles picture date. As Book Tokens were not available for second hand items this means that the volume was first bought and sold in 1958. It is unlikely that it could have been on the shelves for twenty years or more. In any case the book looks and feels like a later re-incarnation. The token is inscribed: "To dear Susan, December, 1958." So, what does it mean? Perhaps a more historically inclined collector could fill in the gaps for us?

THE MODERN BOOK FOR BOYS is also a Wm. Collins publication. Packed full of the old artists it appears to date from the late fifties as well. Did Odhams' publish it earlier and then pass the rights on to Collins? *Wasn't there been an American radio series called "I love a mystery?"*

To return to the illustrators. All those mentioned have clear, identifiable stylistic features that give them their uniqueness and character. Dorothea Braby, for the wonderful story of "The Blue Rose" in THE FAVOURITE WONDER BOOK, produces the most elegant of pictures. This artist makes striking use of pen and ink. Bold strokes

abound. The Chinese story is wonderfully supported by her line drawings. Line drawings that are packed with character and interest.

These female artists are just a few of those noted for their quality of line and expression. They stand out. They are worth remembering and praising and celebrating.

He saw a slight figure beckoning to him

* *

ESB IN THE MAGNET

by Mark Caldicott

Part Three - 1916-17 - Classic ESB, but is it Greyfriars?

By 1916, ESB's writing career had taken off. He was now writing regularly for Nelson Lee, and was also busy in the Sexton Blake field. Work was now plentiful enough that he had no need to write stories masquerading under the pen of others. Only four more of his sub stories appeared in the Magnet, three of them in 1916, but these last stories are well up to the high standard Brooks was achieving for the Magnet.

"False Evidence" (Magnet 427, 15/4/16, no facsimile) relates how Bob Cherry and his chums, on the way back from collecting a parcel, encounter Ponsonby and Co. After the ensuing altercation the parcel is left forgotten in a hedge, and the necessity of its recovery causes Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull to break bounds. Whilst on this mission they tangle with Snoop and Stott, who are bullying a small child, and in the course of the argument a button is torn from Cherry's coat. When Snoop and Stott are almost discovered by Mr. Quelch they foolishly knock him to the ground under cover of darkness, and somehow Mr. Quelch gets possession of Bob Cherry's button. Mr. Quelch is having an unlucky night, for, having recovered, he pauses in the road to light his pipe,

and is in imminent danger of being killed by a motor-cycle and sidecar. Only Johnny Bull's warning shout prevents a fatal accident, but nevertheless Mr. Quelch is knocked unconscious. Cherry and Bull chase the motor cyclist to seek his help but discover that he is already on a mission of mercy. Thus when together they retrace their steps to Mr. Quelch and find he is no longer lying where he was, they assume he has recovered, and the motor cyclist continues on his way. Mr. Quelch's recovery is only temporary, and he is discovered elsewhere still badly concussed. The button is discovered in his hand, and Snoop and Stott give false evidence against Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull. The Head assumes they have attacked Mr. Quelch and the sack looms.

The theme of the innocent schoolboy facing dishonour because of circumstantial evidence and/or false witness of a cad is one of the standard themes of school stories, particularly reminiscent of ESB's Gem contributions. He always handles such themes very well, and this story is up to his usual standard.

In "The Great Bat Mystery" (Magnet 448, 9/916, no facsimile), Squiff acquires a second-hand cricket bat. The quality of the bat is such that he is the envy of his chums. However, the bat is being sought by the extremely persistent Mr. Braxton, who, after trying unsuccessfully to buy the bat, decides to steal it. However, he succeeds only in making away with Vernon-Smith's bat which is discovered in pieces some distance away. Mr. Braxton's attempts become more frantic and threatening. Another attempt is made after a Match between Greyfriars and St. Jim's in which Squiff uses his new bat to great effect giving a narrow victory to Greyfriars. A mix up in bats results in Squiff's new bat ending up in Tom Merry's cricket bag and Mr. Braxton waylays the small boy who is taking the bat from the railway station to Greyfriars. Squiff and Co. intervene in time to prevent the theft, and eventually the truth is discovered.

As with some of the other Magnet stories, ESB thought highly enough of this tale to borrow the general idea for "The Mystery of the Blue Volume" (NLL 1st 125, 27/10/17). This means that three in a row of the initial run of St. Franks' stories (when they were still reminiscences in Nipper's Notebook of that sixth months they spent at St. Franks'!) were rewrites of these Magnet sub stories.

The last offering for 1916 is "The Mystery of Mauly" (Magnet 451, 30/9/16, no facsimile), in which circumstances conspire so that Lord Mauleverer and his identical but rakish cousin Aubrey Spencer exchange places. Mauly, in Aubrey's place at Abbeyside school is facing the sack. He is publicly flogged and expelled. But then through an act of great bravery risks his life to rescue an Abbeyside master. He is reinstated and greeted as a hero. Aubrey Spencer, at Greyfriars, beats Loder at cards, defeats Johnny Bull in a fight, out swims Wharton and Co. and engineers the defeat of Highcliffe School at cricket. Thus both in their own way has enhanced the name of the other when they resume their former lives.

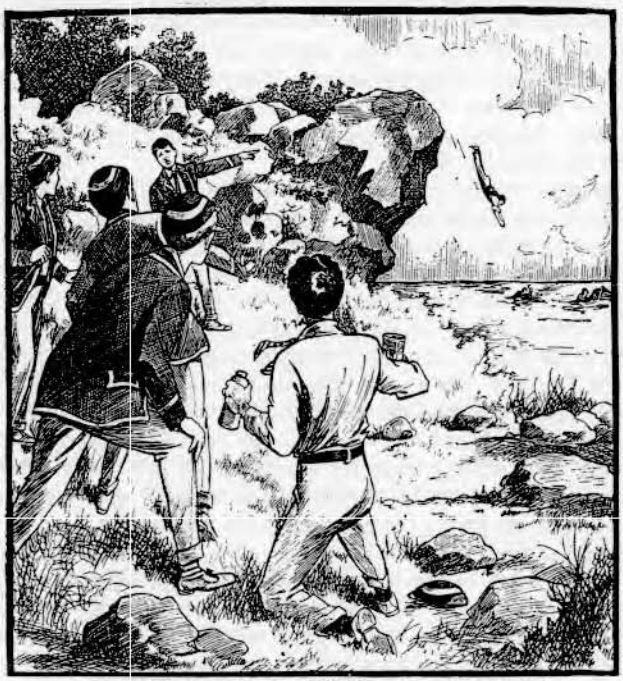
It is nearly a year before the ESB's next, and final, contribution to the Magnet comes with "On the Wrong Track" (Magnet 495, 4/8/17, GBC 93). Wibley is rescued from certain death by the heroic action of a stranger. The stranger reveals himself to be Roland Smale, a private detective on holiday. Things are not as they seem, however, and the boys are faced with a test of their loyalty to the stranger when Ferrers Locke becomes involved. Wibley repays his debt to the stranger in an all-action sequence.

All four of the last ESB Magnet stories make enjoyable reading for followers of ESB. They are full of action, with themes which are not only original, but also show variety. They are classic ESB, but are they Greyfriars? How do they fare as Frank Richards' stories?

I want to make some comparisons, but have at the outset to acknowledge that although I read the occasional Greyfriars story, my friends in the Northern OBBC are infinitely more qualified to comment on Charles Hamilton than I. My comments from here on, therefore, are going to be classed as heresy based on ignorance, because it would seem to me that ESB's efforts compare very well with the Hamilton stories being written at this time.

For me 1913-17 is not a golden age of the Magnet. The stories are self contained episodes written in fairly stilted fashion. The magnificent comedy and irony of some of the later stories where, in the longer series, Hamilton was able to spread himself out, to give himself the space to entertain us like a Balzac or a Dickens is not evident in these relatively early efforts. ESB, too, is better painting on a larger canvas, and he had, in many ways, to limit his own capacities in order to conform with the limitations of the Magnet house style at that time. Within these limitations he did a very good job, and I would be willing to bet that quite a few readers in 1914 onwards, unaware of the existence of sub writers, would have thought "Frank Richards" was providing a better than average yarn when an ESB story appeared.

Brooks was a professional writer who did his homework. This is evident in the fact that he successfully captures the characteristics of each of Hamilton's characters. Without realising it Eric Fayne confirms this back in CD 500 when, reviewing the Howard Baker reprint of ESB's "The Mystic Circle", he wrote "The...yarn is a sub effort, probably by the young Samways." It was certainly ESB, therefore when Mr. Fayne goes on to remark: "It is probable that Samways came nearest in understudying the famous creator of the characters", he was inadvertently complementing ESB.



A DIVE TO THE RESCUE!

Brooks never forced Hamilton's creations to act at all out of character. He took good care of them, and never distorted them to fit his storylines. The stories he constructed always hinged on personality traits already established by Hamilton.

Reading the ESB Magnets has been a most enjoyable experience, and one which I recommend to others. Hidden in these neglected pages are some treasures awaiting discovery. Abandon your prejudices and dig in!

* *

BILL AND BIGGLES DO THEIR BIT! by Jennifer Schofield

Those two heroic veterans of World War I, Major James Bigglesworth and his creator, Captain W.E. Johns, both successfully "did their bit" for Britain in World War II, each making a vital contribution to the national war effort, although in very different ways.

Bill Johns was born in 1893 and was too old to rejoin the RAF, but although Biggles represented "the spirit of the Royal Flying Corps" in the first stories in which he appeared and made his mark as the daring, deadly pilot of a Sopwith Camel, he was only nineteen when World War I ended in 1918. In 1939 he was able to step forward with confidence at his second call to arms, for "his step was light and his figure slim, almost boyish...." However, his bearing was now "that of a man of experience" for, as he said to his friends, "We do at least know something about the job - I mean, war flying - and that gives us an advantage over those who don't...." True words for Douglas Bader, for one, has left it on record that he acquired invaluable skills in aerial combat by studying the tactics of the aces of World War I.

The story of Biggles in World War II begins at a cracking pace. In "Biggles in the Baltic" (published in 1940) no sooner has Biggles heard on the wireless that war has been declared than the telephone rings, and he and his comrades are summoned to the Air Ministry to be given a secret assignment. They are sent to form an RAF squadron at a hidden base on an island in the Baltic, in order to bomb military objectives on the German mainland. Biggles is the Squadron Leader with Ginger and Algy as pilots and Flight Sergeant Smyth as mechanic.

The comrades' dangerous mission is made almost suicidal by the presence of their arch-enemy, Erich von Stalhein, of the German Intelligence Service, at Kiel. Yet in spite of this the Fab Four (if you count Smyth) succeed in destroying an ammunition dump and marine store, disrupting German communications and so delaying the deployment of forces from Poland to the Western front, and wreaking havoc on enemy shipping. Their efforts are crowned by the capture of the latest German naval code.

"Biggles in the Baltic" is as spell-binding a story as ever, and it was followed by "Biggles Sees It Through" (1941) and "Biggles Defies the Swastika" (1941), which also feature desperate duels between the airmen and their implacable foe. But although all three tales follow a familiar formula they are far more than the mixture as before. All of these adventures are stirring tracts for the times, for Johns refers boldly to history in the making, and his young readers could not fail to thrill with vicarious pride as their favourite hero played his part in the great events of the day.

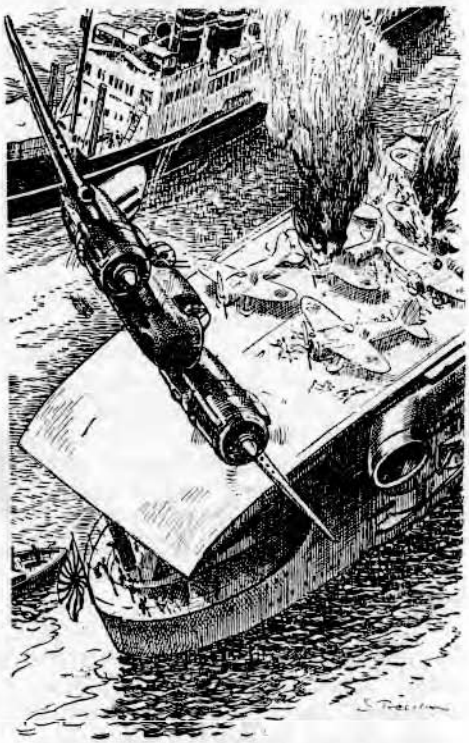
In "Biggles in the Baltic", on September 6th, 1939, the airman leads a raid on an ammunition dump, south of the Kiel Canal in Northern Germany. In fact, the RAF really did raid the area on that date, bombing German war-ships at the entrance of the Canal; after his own successful sortie Biggles hears on his radio of the RAF attack and realizes that his squadron played an important part in a carefully planned operation.

On 30th November, 1939, Russia invaded Finland, and "Biggles Sees It Through" relates the adventures of Biggles, Algy and Ginger in this conflict. Having obtained leave from the Air Ministry, they join an International Squadron to fight for Finland against the Soviet Union, but are soon involved in a hazardous attempt to obtain some scientific papers for Britain concerning experiments "that might well revolutionize the whole business of aircraft construction." They fall foul of von Stalhein, who is working for the Russians, and only escape with the papers through the intervention of Flight Sergeant Smyth, who reveals, for the only time, his ability to pilot a plane. As the heroes make their gateway in a flying-boat the troops below stop firing and start cheering - peace has been declared. This dates the scene to 12th March, 1940.

"Biggles Sees It Through" is an excellent read and also an interesting reminder of a now almost forgotten theatre of war. Although Biggles and his friends were acting on their own initiative in fighting for Finland, they were reflecting the sympathy felt in Britain at the time for the victim of aggression, and Britain and France both had plans to send help to Finland if the war with Russia had continued.

"Biggles Defies the Swastika" is perhaps the most adult emotionally of the three books we are considering, for it is set in Norway at the time of the German invasion, and we are given a vivid and unforgettable picture of a country in turmoil. The Germans' surprise attack on the 9th April, 1940, was an overwhelming blow to the Norwegians: Oslo was captured and the invading troops marched north to unite with another German contingent at Narvik. The British Navy inflicted heavy losses on the German Navy at Narvik on the 10th and 13th of April, and Biggles, who was temporarily in Norway on behalf of the Secret Service, took a hand in the action. When the British fleet arrived he flew over it in a Dornier, braving an inferno of anti-aircraft fire, and dropped his cigarette case, containing a sketch map of the enemy naval positions, onto the deck of the leading destroyer.

Yet despite all the realities of modern warfare, Biggles still retains his RFC chivalry in "Biggles Defies the Swastika", and when he has to overpower an enemy officer and commandeer his plane, he actually apologises to him and offers to stand him a dinner at the Royal Aero Club after the war! The story as a a whole has some lighter touches, for at one point, circumstances force Biggles to



Flame-shot smoke leapt up in several places.

(Biggles in Borneo)

become a double agent, whereupon he is ordered to hunt for himself!

Another oddity is that the airman is actually in two places at once - or rather, three - as we are told that before he came to Norway he commanded a special squadron in France, and that he came to the country nearly two months before the invasion on 9th April..... Yet on 12th March and for at least some weeks before that he was in Finland. But this carelessness on Johns part does not matter in the least - for it is a small price to pay for the magnificent lavishness of his imagination and the breadth of his material.

What may concern us a little is a problem which for once Bill Johns could not surmount. In "Spitfire Parade" (1941) Biggles fights in the Battle of Britain, commanding 666 Squadron at Rawlham, Kent. Algy, Ginger and Flight Sergeant Smyth are now reinforced by a number of pilots with colourful characters, and their Squadron Leader inspires his men with all his customary flair, while playing a leading role himself in the conflict and accounting for many a Dornier, Heinkel or Messerschmitt. But unfortunately, as Bill was no longer in the Service, he could not write about the RAF's finest hour with inside knowledge. With typical resourcefulness, he turned to some World War I stories in "Biggles in France" which at that time had never appeared in book form, and simply updated them. The Spitfires were Sopwith Camels in disguise, and although the tales still have a sparkle, there is a lack of authenticity about this book!

But "Biggles' Squadron" itself was a splendid invention, and Bill went on to write four books about their corporate activities: "Biggles Sweeps the Desert" (1942), "Biggles in Borneo" (1943), "Biggles in the Orient" (1945) and "Biggles Delivers the Goods" (1946). Biggles, Algy and Ginger continue to dominate the stories but the newcomers add vitality and freshness, and Flight Lieutenant Lord Bertie Lissie, the "silly ass" with an upper class voice and a monocle, turns out to be "a devil with a Spitfire and a wizard with a gun", an enormous asset to the rest of the series.

Gallant old Flight Sergeant Smyth drops out for ever, alas! after "Biggles Sweeps the Desert."

In all the Biggles Squadron books, the airman and his command perform signal services for their country, "sweeping" the Libyan desert free of German planes attacking Allied lines of communication in the first book, and flying to the Far East to wage war on the Japanese in the others. Once more, as the fighting intensified in this part of the world, Johns kept his young readers in

"I've got an idea what's happened to him," said Biggles grimly. "Flight-sergeant, check up my compass, will you, and report to me in the mess tent."

(Biggles Sweeps the Desert)

touch with contemporary events, introducing real matters of concern in the stories. Japan entered the war in December 1941, made her infamous attack on Pearl Harbour in 1942, and by mid-1944 controlled Indo-China, the East Indies, Malaya, Burma and thousands of Pacific Islands - an area of six million square miles.

The Chinese army led by Chiang Kai-shek were fighting the Japanese in Southern China, and depended on supplies from America. The Burma road could not be used, and equipment was transported from India to Chungking by air over the 14,000 foot mountains between Bengal and Szechuan. In "Biggles in the Orient" (1945) Biggles' Squadron was sent to India to combat a threat to this precious route, and ultimately destroyed a fiendishly cunning secret weapon.

All in all, Biggles "did his bit" for Britain in World War II with all his old bravery, skill and panache. As well as flying, fighting and proving himself to be a charismatic leader, he undertook various undercover activities, one of the most perilous being a mission to rescue an Italian Princess from Southern France in the ominously titled "Biggles 'Fails to Return"' (1943).

Bill served his country again too, in less obvious fashion, because he was no longer in the Service, but the effect of what he did defies estimation. Besides working for the ARP as a fire-watcher and digging for victory like many other civilians, he kept up national morale with his amazing output of Biggles books; he created the intrepid "Worrals of the WAAF" to encourage recruiting to the WAAF and to inspire girls with a splendid new role model; he related the exploits of Captain Lorrington King, better known as "Gimlet", as a tribute to the Commandos; he was always ready to share his own RFC expertise and lecture to young cadets.

But Bill Johns' real work for the war effort was already done by 1939, for by inspiring generations of boys and girls to become air-minded he ensured that young men and women were ready to fly for Britain when the call came. As Mary Cadogan said in her speech at the Captain W.E. Johns Centenary Luncheon at the RAF Club in 1993, it might well be that if it hadn't been for Johns' Biggles, we might not have won the Battle of Britain.

Bill and Biggles together helped to bring about that sorely strived for, magnificently achieved "V for Victory!" in May, 1945.

* *

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BOOK REVIEWS

by Mary Cadogan

HOLMES AND WATSON: A Study in Friendship by June Thomson *(Constable £15.99)*

In addition to being well known for her own crime novels, June Thomson has produced three collections of Sherlock Holmes pastiche stories. Her latest contribution to the Holmes canon is indeed a welcome event. This attractive and meticulously charted account of the 46 year friendship between the great detective and his ever loyal assistant draws resolutely from facts given in the books. However, when gaps in these *are* filled from other sources of information or from speculation, this is made clear.

As the author says in her introduction, 'Any attempt to write a biography of Holmes and Watson is fraught with problems. Not only is the canon itself immense, amounting approximately to 700,000 words, but Sherlockian commentators have, over the years, written many thousand more words about it and around it....'. In spite of the difficulties, she has done an excellent job. HOLMES AND WATSON is likely to have a wide appeal to detective-story enthusiasts.

THE OXFORD BOOK OF SCHOOLDAYS, Edited by Patricia Craig. *(O.U.P. £7.99)*

It is good news that this bumper and appealing book is now available in paperback. Its hardback version was of course reviewed in detail last year in the C.D. by Brian Doyle. Its intriguing contents cover both real and fictional schooldays, and it has become a permanent addition to my stack of bedside books. In what other volume does Shakespeare rub shoulders with Billy Bunter and Just William, or Jane Austen with Lewis Carroll, Winston Churchill and Talbot Baines Reed? A 'must' for anyone's collection!

* *

MORCOVE MUSINGS

No. 4 of an occasional series **by Dennis L. Bird**

Horace Phillips ("Marjorie Stanton") had begun what was to prove a long-running series of stories about Morcove school in the first issue of "The Schoolgirls' Own," dated February 5th, 1921. Working-class Betty Barton from Lancashire, whose mother was a charwoman, had suddenly found herself whisked from her Council school to the exclusive girls' public school at Morcove in Devon - the result of her generous uncle's return after making his fortune in Canada.

The first long instalment ended with Betty in despair when she found herself the target of spiteful, snobbish remarks from her new form-mates when they learned that she did not have rich parents like theirs. In the second episode ("For Another's Wrong," February 12th, 1921) it seemed briefly as though she had found a friend - but at first things went from bad to worse. Two of the girls tried to trick Betty into subscribing money to "charity": to provide soap for Council school girls (in other words, herself).

Phillips was now introducing some of the characters who were to feature in the series for many years. One of these two charming japers was Ella Elgood, later to be one of "the three Es" with Eva Merrick and Etta Hargrove - girls who were not really bad at heart but who were always easily led by bad company.

The author also aired some of his stereotyped phrases which,as time went by, readers might find either endearing or annoying. Any merriment was always greeted "Ha, ha, ha!" - never two "ha's" or four, but three. Any incredulity was indicated by "Wha-a-a-at!" (four "a"s).

Poor Betty's suffering was increased when she was set upon and dressed up in a sack-apron with a pail tied to her waist. "Brooms and brushes were forced into her hands," and a big notice hung round her neck: "Member of the Royal Society of Scrubbers!!!" The three exclamation marks did not of course relate to the present-day meaning of the word - they merely emphasised the humble cleaning duties of Betty's mother. This joke went too far, and came to the notice of the Form's junior mistress Miss Ruth Redgrave. She took pity on Betty, and confided that she understood the Lancashire girl's predicament. She too, it turned out, came from a background of poverty, and was looked down on by the staff in a similar way. Betty suspected that Miss Redgrave was concealing a dark, sad secret - a hint that was to be followed up in later stories. As with the cinema and nowadays TV, Horace Phillips believed in the technique of the "trailer".

The one brief gleam of hope for Betty came when a girl came to her study with a message, and let slip that she had worries of her own. She was "a thin-faced girl, with pale lips and colourless eyebrows. Betty had already marked her out as a very quiet girl... Betty's hard life in the past had made her ever ready with sympathy." Soon she was offering the hand of friendship - and more than friendship. She generously gave 30 shillings (£1.50 - a large sum then) to settle her form-mate's debt.

The response was fulsome. "Oh, how can I ever repay you for this?... If ever I can help you - be a true friend to you - I will!... How could I fail you at any time, Betty?"

But the girl's name was Ursula Wade - and for the next 17 years Horace Phillips' readers were to associate that name with all that was mean, deceitful, and dishonest. She never reformed. It is a mystery why she was never expelled.

All too soon, Betty found that her new "friend" was false. An attempt was made to steal money from Ella Elgood's money-box. Suspicion fell on Betty, and Ursula - the real culprit - failed to clear her name. Betty was accordingly marched off to the Form-mistress's room, and readers met another personality who was to play a large part in Morcove's future. "An impressive, aristocratic figure was Miss Massingham, in her stately black dress, and with her head of snow-white hair. Gold-rimmed glasses were in keeping with her distinguished looks; but, when the best had been said of her, she seemed rather a cold, statuesque being."

No. 2 of a Grand New Series of Long Complete School Stories, introducing Betty Barton, the Girl from the Council School. Every reader of this story is certain to fall in love with Betty.

FOR ANOTHER'S WRONG!

BY

MARJORIE STANTON.

The "evidence" against Betty was purely circumstantial, so there was not much that Miss Massingham could do. However, she made it very clear that she did not believe Miss Redgrave's plea that Betty was perhaps shielding someone else. Such noble feelings could only come from girls from "fine families whose chivalry is traditional." So Betty was sent back to her class with a cloud over her head and a bitter feeling in her heart. "She was fated to remain the unhappy victim of treachery and malice....and all this without ever finding one true friend to turn to in one's troubles!"

Horace Phillips knew how to tear at his young readers' heart-strings. (Will Betty ever be happy at Morcove? Will she one day find a true friend to share her joys and sorrows? Look out for further Morcove Musings!)

ACCUSED OF THEFT! "She can't answer!" exclaimed Judith Grandways, glaring at Betty. "Look at her white face—look at the misery in her eyes! She is the thief!"

* *

WORDS AND TERMS USED IN THE RIO KID STORIES

Part 1. **by Bob Whiter**

In his very fine article on the Rio Kid which appeared twice in the C.D. Annual (1952 and 1987) my old friend Eric Fayne justly praises those truly wonderful stories about the boy outlaw. Eric wonders how Charles Hamilton (Ralph Redway) ever found the time to soak himself in Western Lore and atmosphere. I fully agree and can only add that our dear author certainly did his homework well!

My grandfather owned a corn exchange and obtained the contract to feed all the livestock in the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show when it toured the U.K. My father as a boy was taken to meet the great showman and the accompanying Indians, including Red Shirt the Sioux chieftain. From an early age I was told all about the Deadwood stage being chased by Indians, my father no mean artist, illustrating his remarks with thrilling pictures. This started a love for the old West that has persisted until this day. In those days I never dreamed I would actually visit some of the places mentioned in the stories. In this article I have tried to show the origins of the terms, places, etc. which are found in the Rio Kid sagas. Oh I know you will find omissions -- due to the problem of space I have tried to keep the list down, using only those I have considered to be the most important, I only hope you will enjoy browsing through them as much as I have in presenting them. One thing I would like to say about any of the stories (not only those featuring the Rio Kid) that featured Americans. Just because our transatlantic cousins don't use a certain phrase, saying or word now, doesn't mean they never did!

When I first came to the states over thirty years ago, a very popular saying was "Holy Cow!" One never hears it used these days. Twenty years ago I was visiting June Lake near Yosemite national Park and got into conversation with two chaps from the Southern States. One of them in reply to a remark by the other, exclaimed, "By the Great Horned Toad!". He pronounced it 'horn-ed.' I almost said, "How are you, Kid?"

It will be noticed the great influence the Mexican/Spanish Vaqueros had on the American cowboy in the south western U.S. Not only in the vocabulary, but also in dress and kit. Even the work 'Buckaroo' is a corruption of the Spanish word vaquero. In Spanish the letter V is often pronounced as a soft B, so it is easy to see how the transformation took place.

Abyss -- A bottomless depth, a very deep crack in the earth. (Late Latin abyssus) (Greek abysso a - without + byssos bottom)

Syn. 1. Chasm

Alkali -- Any base or hydroxide that is soluble in water, neutralizes acids and forms salts with them, and turns red litmus blue: Lye and ammonia are two common alkalis. Western U.S. a region abounding in alkali. (Middle French alcali: Arabic al-gali the ashes of saltworth dust)

Arroyo -- 1. South Western U.S. the dry bed of a stream; gully. 2. a small river (American, English: Spanish arroyo: Latin arrugia: mine shaft)

Barranca -- South Western U.S. 1. A deep ravine or gorge with very steep sides. 2. A bank or bluff with very steep sides (American English: Spanish barranca, barranco; origin uncertain)

Brazos -- pronounced Brazus, is a river in Texas. It rises in the north-central plains of the state and flows southeast for about 870 miles. It empties into the Gulf of Mexico at Freeport. Also the area surrounding the river.

Bronc, Broncho or Bronco -- A pony of the western U.S. Usually wild or only half-tamed. Bronco (Spanish, rough (as words) rude)
Bulldoze -- Informal U.S. frighten by violence or threats. Originally to flog severally, a beating, literally a dose for a bull.
Cabeza -- The human head (Spanish, Latin: caput, -itis)
Calaboose -- U.S. slang. A jail prison: (Spanish calabozo; origin uncertain)
Cayuse -- Western U.S. an Indian pony. The Cayuse Indian tribe of northeastern Oregon who originally bred them.
Chaparral -- (In the south-western U.S.) a dense, often thorny, thicket, of low bushy vegetation, frequently including small evergreen oak, probably a Basque word.
Chaparajos -- Strong leather or other material (i.e. on the northern ranges where winter temperatures can abide, woolly "chaps" were popular, such as angora Goatskin, sheep and even bearskin) (trousers without a seat and worn over the other trousers, to protect the legs against chaparral, cactus etc.) Variant of chaparral, usually pronounced SHAPS which reflects a Mexican dialectal pronunciation in which (SH) regularly replaces standard Spanish (CH).
Chasm -- A deep opening or crack in the earth. (Latin chasma: Greek chasma)
Chewing the rag -- U.S. slang to talk at length.
Cicada -- a locust or harvest fly, having two pairs of transparent wings. the males produce a shrilling humming sound in hot dry weather (Latin cicada)
Cinch -- U.S. 1. A strong girth for fastening a saddle or pack on a horse. 2. Informal, a firm hold or grip. 3. Slang, sometimes sure and easy; dead certainty. (Spanish cincha: Latin cinctus girdle: cingere bind)
Colt -- Inventor Samuel Colt (1814-1862) usually refers to the 1873 Frontier model pistol which came in several calibres, .45 being the most well known. However, the .44 was also very popular as the same ammunition fitted the .44 calibre Winchester. Sam Colt did not live to see this the most famous pistol bearing his name. (Also came in various barrel lengths).
Cottonwood -- 1. American poplars having light cottonlike tufts of down at the base of their small seeds. 2. The light soft wood of any of these trees.
Cougar -- the U.S. mountain lion also know as the U.S. (panther) puma, catamount, painter. French cougar (probably influenced by Jaguar).
Coyote -- A small wolf living in central and western U.S. It is noted for its loud howling at night time. Mexican Spanish Nahualtl coyot.
Critter -- U.S. dialect, a creature, animal.
Cuss -- U.S. informal, 1. a curse. 2. an odd or troublesome person or animal. Variant of curse.
Flap-jacks -- U.S. pancakes or griddle cakes.
Fosick, Australian -- To search for gold in crevices and washing places.
Doggone -- U.S. slang adj. dammed; darned.
Draw -- U.S. a gully or ravine (noun). As a verb to pull one's pistol from its holster.
Fandango -- A lively Spanish dance in three-quarter time. Spanish Fandango, perhaps (Portuguese fado)
Gall -- Old English, boldness, impudence effrontery. Chief Gall of the Hunkpapa Sioux fought at the Little Big Horn.
Galoot -- U.S. slang. An awkward or uncouth person. Also galloot.
Gat -- U.S. slang. A revolver or semi-auto pistol. Originally short for Gatling gun.
Geck -- A dupe (obsolete)

Gee whiz or whizz -- U.S. informal, an exclamation of delight or surprise. (My U.S. sister-in-law used it constantly.)
Gink -- U.S. slang, a fellow, person.
Goob -- Probably short for goober or goober pea, southern U.S. informal, the peanut.
Great Horned Toad-- A small, harmless lizard with a broad, flat body, short tail and many spines. Also used as an exclamation.
Gulch -- U.S. a deep narrow ravine with steep sides, especially one marking the course of a stream or torrent; a small gorge, syn. gully.
Hombre -- 1. Southwestern U.S. man. 2. U.S. slang, a robust fellow; he-man, especially a character in a western state. Spanish hombre, man)
Horn in -- To enter without invitation.
Huecas -- *Huecas* - Refers to the Hueco Mountains just north east of E. Paso, which is situated on the Rio Grande.
Jacal -- A native Mexican house or hut whose walls consist of rows of thin vertical poles filled in and plastered with mud. Mexican Spanish jacal, (Nahuatl xacalli)
Lasso -- see *riata*
Loco -- Spanish, loco insane, probably from the disease caused by eating locoweed, a plant of the western U.S. that affects the brain of horses, sheep and other grazing animals that eat it.
Locoweed -- belongs to various herbs of the pea family.
Mesquite -- A deep-rooted shrub like tree of the pea family, that often grows in dense clumps or thickets in the South Western United States and Mexico (Mexican Spanish Mezquite) (Nahuati mizquite)
Mosey, moseyed, moseying -- U.S. slang, to move along or away slowly, origin uncertain.
Mustang -- A small, wild or half-wild horse of the U.S. plains descended from Spanish stock. Spanish Mestengo untamed, (literally) of the Mesta association of graziers who divided strays or unclaimed animals (Latin miscere to mix).
Neck-tie party -- U.S. slang, a lynching by hanging with rope (Charles Lynch, a planter of Virginia who drew up a vigilante compact with his neighbors in 1700s, i.e. Lynchlaw, putting an accused person to death without a lawful trial.)
Paint, painted horse -- U.S. informal, a piebald or particoloured horse: "I ride an old paint", cowboy song. (Spanish pinto).
Panhandle -- U.S. a narrow strip of land projecting like a handle, as a state or territory extending between two others as with Texas and Oklahoma. Used as a verb it means to beg, especially in the streets, using a pan receptacle for collecting the money.
Pard -- U.S. slang, partner or friend, short for pardner, variant of partner.
Paesear -- Southwestern U.S. slang, A walk; promenade; airing (Spanish paesear: to promenade).

(To be concluded)

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BESSIE BUNTER BOUNCED BACK

by Dawn Marler

Bessie Bunter was well known in the inter-war years as the lovable duffer of Cliff House School. The school was of course created in 1909 by Charles Hamilton and at first was an adjunct to the Greyfriars scene in the Magnet with emphasis on the characters of Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn. It was sometime later that Cliff House School became a separate establishment. There were many girl readers of the Magnet who were enjoying the adventures of the central character, Billy Bunter. It was through his great popularity with readers that his sister, who was to become known as Bessie Bunter, was born. Very soon after her introduction into the Magnet in 1919 Cliff House really became a school in its own right.

With the establishment of the new weekly paper *School Friend* Greyfriars was separated from the Cliff House scene and the girls' school developed its own vivid identity. Female readers were able to enjoy the adventures of the central characters, Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn, Barbara Redfern and of course Bessie Bunter, without the male presence.

In 'The School Friend' No. 1 (May 17 1919) Majorie Hazeldene and Co. and Cliff House were prominent. Also featured was the arrival of Bessie Bunter as a new girl to Cliff House, and it would appear that she was going to be received with mixed feelings in Study No. 4.

'"....Billy Bunter's sister - Bessie Bunter of that ilk." Said Clara with a sniff. "I only hope she isn't coming into our form - if she's anything like her brother. And I'm sure she will be...."

"And we shall have to make the best of it." Said Majorie.'

Billy Bunter was obviously well known to the girls.

Bessie Bunter arrived at Cliff House School. She was short, plump, short-sighted, with mousy hair, which she sometimes wore in plaits. She was found to have many failings: she also had many moods, and being conceited was one of them. She believed erroneously that she was one of the prettiest girls at the school. Bessie was a duffer. Although she would tell you that she was one of the cleverest girls ever born, her position in class was bottom. She was also a 'funk' although she would have had you believe otherwise. Bessie told 'fibs'; she had a weakness for other people's tuck and was not above borrowing money so as to obtain more food. Her pocket-money allowance was sixpence a week. In those days sixpence was quite a lot of money, but it never seemed to go far for Bessie in spite of the fact that her allowance was supplemented from time to time by remittances from her Aunt Anne.

The list of her failings is admittedly formidable; yet it was those weaknesses which had made her so lovable at the school. No one was ever deceived by the fables of Bessie Bunter, except herself, although no one could have been really angry with the lovable duffer.

Bessie's failings were balanced by some virtues. She became a loyal friend to her study-mates. Animals and children adored her. She was always ready with a helping hand to others and she never retained the faintest spark of malice.

She was the best cook in the Junior school not surprisingly as she was so fond of food, she had many hobbies, but never got very far with any of them.

She was the longest survivor of Hamilton's schoolgirls, but the characteristics that had been so acceptable in Billy Bunter did not have the same effect in a female character. Bessie had to be mellowed, and the Cliff House "Fatima", "Rolypoly-skins", or "Dumpling" (as she was nicknamed) was modified by the authors who came after Hamilton until Bessie had become the loyal and lovable personality of the 1930s *Schoolgirl.*

Cliff House School with its central characters had also appeared in the *Schoolgirls' Own Library* during the 1920s, 1930s, and in 1940, as well as in the pre-second World War *School Friend Annuals*, and early *Schoolgirls' Own Annuals.*

The Cliff House School stories and Bessie's adventures had ended in May 1940 because of the acute paper shortage in the Second World War. However, Cliff House rose again from the ashes and was updated as Manorcliff School in the second series of the Schoolgirls' Own Library (post-war). Bessie was resurrected in a much more mild form, in the character of Dolly Potter, who was the lovable duffer of the Fourth Form at Manorcliff. (These stories were written by John Wheway (as 'Hazel Armitage') and he had of course written most of the 1930s Cliff House tales in the Schoolgirl.)

Barbara Redfern of Cliff House was transmuted into Jill Waring of Manorcliff, Captain of the Junior School. Both girls, respectively, were well liked fellow-pupils and mistresses, and each had all the qualities that made a good leader. Both were quiet, resolute, firm, just, and willing to listen. They were never too busy to see any school-mate, and were eager to help. Barbara's great ambition was to be an artist, and Jill also loved painting and sketching. Clara Trevlyn, Cliff House's Junior sports-captain, was next to Barbara the leading light of the Fourth. She was revivified as Jane Heatherly, Captain of Junior School Sports at Manorcliff. Jane shared Clara's blunt honesty but was less boyish and boisterous.

The third member of Manorcliff's Study 4 was of course a derivative of Bessie Bunter, in the form of Dolly Potter. How did these two characters compare?

Dolly was thin, plain and rather pale, unlike Bessie who was short and plump. The other similarities were strong. Both were short-sighted and bespectacled with mousy-fair hair; both were amiable but often rather stupid Bessie was conceited about her looks and Dolly, 'though an awful duffer', was

also in a harmless way, incuraby vain; she fondly imagined that she was beautiful and could win any schoolgirl beauty competition. Like Bessie, she had loved her food and was not above borrowing money, very often with the good intention of providing tea for her study chums. Dolly, like Bessie, thought that she was one of the cleverest girls in the school, and, also like Bessie, she would frequently panic and behave funkishly.

At least one other rose from the ashes. Miss Bullivant, the expert in maths and Senior Mistress of Cliff House School, inspired the character of Miss Ironside Senior Mistress of Manorcliff.

Miss Bullivant was unprepossessing in looks and temperament. Thin, with iron grey hair and very strict, she was never wittingly unfair. Similarly Miss Ironside, appeared harsh and unbending, but she was respected for her sense of justice. Just as Miss Bullivant had a warm spot in her heart for Babs and Co. in spite of her discouragement of them at times, Miss Ironside often responded kindly to Jill Waring and Co. Neither Mistress was as black as she was perhaps painted.

Editor's Note: Bessie Bunter underwent several incarnations. As well as inspiring Dolly Potter of Manorcliff, she was the inspiration for John Wheway's plump schoolgirl character, Tilly Tuffin, in *Princess* during the early 1960s . In her own name and original character Bessie was, of course, revived by Charles Harnilton in the 1949 hardback, *Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School*, recently reissued by Hawk Books. Fatter and more of a buffoon than ever she was in the stories, she had a long run in the post Second World War Comics (drawn first by Cecil Orr and then by Arthur Martin), starting in 1963 in *Schoolfriend*, transferring to *June* in 1965 and later to *Tammy* in which she continued her comic capers until the early 1980s.

* *

THE SCHOOL CAP
by ROGER JENKINS

Alan Pratt's article on School Cap brought back so many memories that I started examining 1953 copies of the Collectors' Digest. Herbert Leckenby, the editor, stated that some people thought Basil Storey was Samways, but it turned out that the author was only in his thirties and had once edited a speedway magazine and was then speedway correspondent of the Daily Express, a curious background for a writer of school stories.

Herbert Leckenby noted that with No. 2 the School Cap changed size and publishers. He considered that Rockcliffe was a mixture of Greyfriars and St. Frank's and he forecast that the paper would fold up with No. 6 though in fact it lasted until No. 10. This particular story created quite a furore, in that it related how one boy telephoned the local department store, Walkleys, and ordered tuck in his form-master's name, an obvious crib from Magnet 996, the only one to be twice reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library. Charles Hamilton noted the CD comments on the resemblance, and his literary agents wrote to Herbert, asking for the name and address of the publishers of School Cap, facts which I have verified from old correspondence, since this titbit was never published in the CD. Whether lack of readers or the actions of the literary agents caused School Cap to fold up is a matter for conjecture. As Herbert said to me, plots are being stolen all the time, and I now think that as the A.P. owned the copyright on Magnet 996 it is even more puzzling.

The last words should be left to Herbert Leckenby: "And so, alas, there is another interment in the graveyard of boys' weeklies."

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN," HE SHOUTED ABOVE THE UPROAR, "WILL YOU KINDLY SHUT UP AND LISTEN TO ME. I'M GOING TO TELL YOU HOW TO WIN THE WAR."

Hallo, the boys mean to grow more food—but just see what they are planting. jam, sardines and baked potatoes! Mrs. Bruin is so cross and Joey is afraid she will plant her cane now and grow some more!

Your Editor says...

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

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THE TRIBULATIONS OF AN EDITOR. Part 4. by BILL LOFTS

Demobbed around 1919, Jack Lewis resumed his writing, now in another medium, The Sexton Blake Library. All authors have their ups and downs in writing stories, and Jack Lewis was no exception. Writing a Master Mummer story resulted in one of the worst moments in his literary career. Experts on Leon Kestrel will know that he had a vendetta against the profiteers, and in one story wrote a blackmail letter to one of them. Some very foolish reader actually copied this letter, and sent it to a Peer of the Realm. The writer was soon traced, and charged with blackmail. It eventually came out that he had got the idea from a Sexton Blake story published by Amalgamated Press Ltd.

This was given the worst possible publicity in Court, which of course was followed up by top authorities of the firm, when severe reprimands were the order of the day. The blackmailing youth was eventually let off with a severe caution on the understanding that he would not read such 'pernicious literature' again. More tribulations for the editor! Jack Lewis took a long break from the Blake field. Possibly another explanation to Derek Hinrich's query. It was far easier to write the simple stories in the children's comics without any comeback!

On the bright side, however, probably his greatest success, came late in life in the fifties. He was asked by the Rank Organisation (Gaumont British) to prepare a story line for a children's serial film for the Saturday morning shows. This was filmed in Southern Rhodesia. The title was 'The Snakeskin Belt' - Jack Lewis getting the idea for this from an old Blake author named Norman Goddard (better known to readers as 'Mark Darren', creator of the tales of Inspector Spearing who featured with Blake in the early days). Goddard was a colourful character nearly always dressed in cowboy clothes because of his great love for Western stories. He also never failed to wear a snakeskin belt, as a sort of talisman. This belt always fascinated Jack Lewis but if Goddard wore the belt whilst serving as an officer during the First World War it didn't bring him luck. Unfortunately he was killed in 1917. The film was shown all over the Odeon circuit, including the Odeon at Brighton, where Lewis was then living, having moved out of the London area around 1939. (It has always been to me surprising how many authors and editors who lived on The Sussex Coast or the area of Essex in the Southend area.)

Although not on the staff of Amalgamated Press, Jack Lewis still turned out for the Fleetway cricket eleven, where he was a more than useful player in the Colin Milburn build, a photograph of him later in life shows his strong resemblance to that great actor, Sydney Greenstreet. His large figure was reputed to be a familiar sight in the areas of Newhaven and Brighton. I wonder how many people knew that here was a man who provided generations of readers with his fine stories in all types of magazines and comics. He died at Brighton in 1956.

A great admirer of the artist T. Cuneo, Jack Lewis was most thrilled when he learned that his picture story was to be illustrated by him. This was entitled 'The Purple Cloak' and was about highwaymen.

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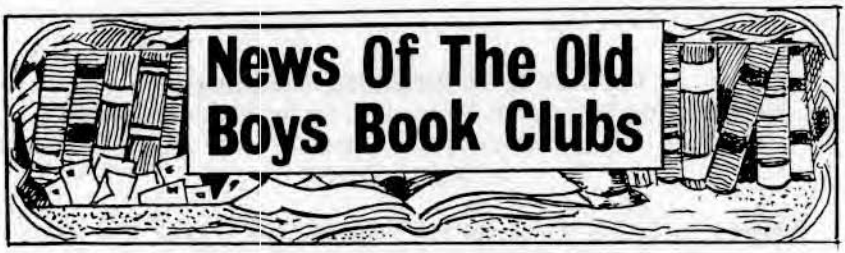

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A warm welcome was given to the assembled Company and we were pleased to have associate members with us from County Durham.

Because of an accident, Paul Galvin was unable to attend so his talk on "Radio Comedy" had to be postponed for a later date.

Donald Campbell's subject was "Collector's Pie". He gave some excerpts from radio theme tunes and snippets of the programmes associated with them. We were familiar with Paul Temple, Toy Town, Dick Barton. Donald conveyed his enthusiasm for radio drama to which he had listened from the 1940s. We were then shown a selection of books, often featuring line illustrations, in which he was particularly illustrated, including excellent examples of old copies of "Radio Times", showing the changes in its artwork over the years. An excellent presentation, with plenty of visual aids!

Our May 13th meeting will include "Beatrix Potter" from Eleanor Caldicott and "Norman Conquest" from Mark Caldicott. On June 10th we shall have our informal break and barbecue at the home of our Secretary, in Wakefield.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our April meeting was held at the Willingham village home of Keith Hodkinson. We listened to Bill Lofts talk upon the subject of 'The Saint and Leslie Charteris' and this was an expansion of a talk helped delivered some five years previously concerning The Gentleman Crook. After a brief resumé of the author's life, Bill mentioned the initial appearance in 1926 of the character in the Thriller magazine, and how he developed over the next five decades: the Simon Templar films and TV appearances - encompassing the George Sanders films and Roger Moore's 120 television episodes - and the vast merchandising programme during the fifties and sixties.

Later Keith considered the role played by film trailers, especially those for some now famous films for both the Silent and Talkies era. Keith demonstrated by showing trailers for films including a Valentino Silent, 'Gone with the Wind', 'Ben Hur', 'Zulu' and 'In the steps of the fisherman'.

ADRIAN PERKINS

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The Case of the Perplexing Pen-Names

An Index to the 3rd and 5th series of the Sexton Blake Library and a Guide to their Authors.

by Steve Holland

Published by CADS, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex, SS7 1PA. Price £3.50 post free. Cheques payable to G.H.Bradley.

While many Blake collectors will agree that the 'golden age' of the *Sexton Blake Library* came to an end around 1940 there is a growing interest in the stories published in the third and fifth series; particularly those from the 'New Look' era, beginning in 1956.

By the mid 1950s the *Sexton Blake Library* was in a sorry state with lifeless stagnant stories. William Howard Baker took over as editor and shook new life into the library. He up-dated the Blake set-up and brought in a new band of writers. At the time the changes were viewed with very mixed feelings by *Collectors Digest* readers, but in retrospect the New Look not only prolonged the life of the *Sexton Blake Library* but also added some very worthwhile titles to the library; indeed, I know of some Blake collectors who consider the New Look era the best in the entire SBL's run.

One of the problems for collectors has always been the mystery surrounding the true authorship of many of the titles published under the various SBL 'house names' of Desmond Reid, W.A.Ballinger and Richard Williams. In "The Case of the Perplexing Pen-Names", Steve Holland clarifies the situation with a lengthy introduction followed by an index of all the authors who contributed to the 3rd and 5th series together with an alphabetical listing of all the stories they penned. The Index is cross-referenced making it easy to trace the authorship of any specific Reid/Ballinger/Williams titles. For example, the first Desmond Reid title listed is "The Abductors", and the researcher can quickly ascertain that the story came from the pen of Christopher Lowder. Flick a few pages and find Lowder in the index to discover that "The Abductors" was his only SBL contribution.

Although most of the Blake information in this Index can be found in the indispensable "Sexton Blake Catalogue" (recently up-dated and reprinted by Duncan Harper) Steve Holland's Index is a must for collectors with a specific interest in the work of authors who contributed to the New Look Blake. In addition to the Index of Blake stories Steve

also lists titles published by Press Editorial Syndicate, a number of which were re-writes of Blake stories with the names of the central characters changed. "The Case of the Perplexing Pen-Names" is easy to use and, as with all of Steve Holland's publications, factually reliable.

Reviewed by Norman Wright

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WRITE TO: David Bradley/Paul Galvin, c/o 19 St. Helen's Gardens, Leeds LS16 8BT. Tel. 0113 267 8020 or 01226 295613.

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