

STORY PAPER

# COLLECTORS'

# DIGEST

VOL 49

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DECEMBER 1995





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# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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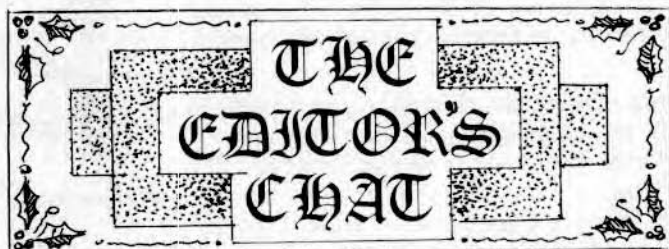
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## SEASONABLE DELIGHTS

Once again I have the very great pleasure of presenting you with a Christmas issue of the C.D. - an enlarged one this month.

From your many letters I gather that our magazine is as warmly appreciated as ever, and I would like to thank all of you who have already sent me seasonal greetings. Although I am not able to reply individually to all your cards and letters I hope you will understand how happy I am to receive these.

Our Annual is, once again, a splendid volume - full of nostalgic, entertaining and serious comment on a very wide range of books, papers and comics. It includes something for everyone, I feel. I have already 'trailed' most of its contents but should add that there are two intriguing vintage Sexton Blake items, as well as a learned treatise on **COKER'S CONDITION** by Nandu Thalange and Donald Campbell.

If you have not already ordered your Annual there is still time to do so, but I would be glad to have orders just as soon as possible please. (The costs,

including postage and packing, are £9.80 for U.K. readers and £11.00 for those living overseas.)

This Christmas has brought a delicious crop of publications which are of special interest to collectors (see my CHRISTMAS ROUND-UP on pages 18 and 20). It is good that so many authors and publishers appreciate the quality of the books and papers which gave us pleasure in the past, and which still have something vital to offer to readers today.

It only remains for me to send you the greeting which is on everyone's lips during this festive season, but which remains always resilient and sincere.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY, PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL.

MARY CADOGAN

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### A CHRISTMAS GREETING FROM FRANK RICHARDS

*Una Hamilton Wright has kindly provided us with this text of her Uncle's broadcast on the BBC World Services at the end of the 1940s. Its warmth and depth of feeling still speak to us today, almost 50 years on.*



*Charles Hamilton*

Once more, Christmas. There is, I suppose, no other word in the language that means so much to all of us. What it means to my unimportant self I'm going to tell you.

I've seen many a Christmas --- snowy, in my own country, sunny, in warm southern lands: merry Christmasses in the good old days, War Christmasses of anxiety for absent friends. But it was always Christmas: with a brightening of faces and a lightening of hearts. A small boy asked me once whether, really and truly, I'd had seventy Christmasses. He could remember only four or five, and seventy seemed to him an unimaginable number. Well, to tell the truth --- a thing I often do! --- I've had more than seventy. I don't quite remember the first two or three - but all that I remember seem to have been worth having. With Christmas we generally associate the adjective "merry": and I think we may truly say of our Christmasses, "the more the merrier".

What a jolly time Christmas was in the eighteen-eighties! Most of you won't remember, perhaps! Looking back, every Christmas in those days seems to have been all brightness and merriment: with ruddy faces and friendly voices, -- snow on the roof, frost on the trees, ice on the river, holly on the walls, the log fire crackling and glowing, the bells ringing sweet music from afar. No doubt there may have been spots of bother even in those happy old days. But one doesn't recall them: and doesn't want to!

Christmas nowadays doesn't seem, perhaps, quite what it was sixty or seventy years ago. But that, no doubt, is only one of the fancies of age! I remember my great-grandmother, who was born in 1790, saying, when I was a small boy, that Christmas wasn't what it had been in her young days!

To me, Christmas in the eighteen-eighties was just gorgeous. I don't think I should care much now for enormous puddings or unlimited mince-pies; but they are a fragrant memory. The Dickens Christmas was still a reality then. Its spirit survives. There are still music and light and laughter, and young hearts to rejoice. If one's own face has grown lined, and one's own eyes dim, the past can be recaptured in the sight of ruddy cheeks and bright eyes, and the sound of happy young voices. And how the years fall away, when the Christmas carol floats in from the December dusk, telling us once more of the First Noel and the Herald Angels.

For fifty years or so, this season of the year was largely associated in my mind with Christmas Numbers. Our plump friend, Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School, had no fewer than thirty-three Christmasses, while still in the Lower Fourth Form --- which I think must be rather a record.

Every one of them was a genuine old merry Christmas, with turkey and pudding complete, and often a ghost thrown in. Those were the days of Christmas Double Numbers, before paper-shortages were invented. I always had a cheery, elated feeling when the time came round for a new Christmas Number. I just loved writing them.

Greyfriars School would break up, once more, for the holidays. Billy Bunter would include himself in some cheery party. He would adopt his usual encircling policy towards the turkey, the pudding, and the other good things; and would feel afterwards that the eleventh helping had been, perhaps, a mistake! There would be skating, and dancing, and holly and mistletoe, snow and snowballs, the ruddy glow of the firelight, the chime of Christmas bells --- in a word, one's own happy boyhood over again in the form of fiction.

Old readers often write to me that they specially liked the Christmas Numbers, which pleases me mightily, for I always liked them myself. I think I missed them more than anything else, when the war put Greyfriars School and its happy inhabitants under a temporary eclipse.

This present Christnastide is a particularly happy one for me, for it heralds the return of Billy Bunter and the rest of the Greyfriars crowd. Many old readers in Australia and other places overseas have written to me, since the war ended, asking when Billy Bunter will be seen again. Now I am happy to be able to tell them that he is coming: not in weekly numbers as of old, but in volumes of book length, written by the old boy who now has the pleasure of telling you about it, with pictures by Mr. Macdonald, who used to draw for Gem and Magnet. Volume One will be followed by more --- and more --- and more --- in fact, by as many as the public will stand. We live in times of shortage, but from next year onwards there will be no shortage, at all events, of Billy Bunter. Which looks, to me, quite a happy prospect. I hope a few of my hearers will agree.

So my present Christmas is one of happy anticipation. Old fellows in the seventies live a good deal in the past: but I've always had a way of looking forward, rather than backward: and just can't help it. I'm even making plans for Billy Bunter to enjoy another run of thirty-three years! Why not? I've definitely made up my mind to last just so long as my readers want me to writer, and if I don't live up to this, it won't be my fault!

May I conclude upon a more serious note? Even the author of Billy Bunter has his serious moments.

At Christmas, we greet old friends, and forgive old foes: and forget our little differences and disputes. The toughest of us feels the genial influence of the season. Even Mr. Scrooge softens: even Mr. Gradgrind forgets his hard facts for a space. Peace and good will find their way into all hearts. For a time at least, it becomes clear to us, that this world is not, as it may sometimes seem, a jungle of warring interests, but the home of a large family, who should strive, with God's help, to make one another happy.

To me, Christmas, in early days, meant largely holidays and festivities. In later days it meant largely Christmas Numbers. But it always meant something much more than these little things.

It meant a renewing and strengthening of the faith that is our guide in youth, and our consolation and hope in age. The older I grow, the nearer to the end of earthly things, the deeper and firmer is my belief and trust in Him, in Whose Name we keep our yearly festival. These are days of doubt --- even of unbelief: dark shadows on troubled minds. Christmas, with its reminder of the coming of the Child of Bethlehem, helps to drive those spectral shadows away, and to confirm faith and hope. Helps us to understand, and to believe, that we are all the children of an all-loving Father. For as long as we celebrate Christmas, we shall remember the Divine Message that came to lighten the world's darkness, and we shall go on our way with renewed faith, and hope, and charity. That is how *I* see Christmas --- and that is what it chiefly means to *me*.

Good-bye!

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### **Announcing *The Just William Society***

The *Just William Society* was officially inaugurated at the Annual William Meeting in April. The president is Richmal Ashbee, and the editors of the twice-yearly magazine are your very own Mary Cadogan, and children's author and 'William' specialist David Schutte.

**The first issue is due out before Christmas!**

UK adult membership is £7, child (under 16) £5, overseas £10.

To join, please send your full name, address (and date of birth if under 16) and crossed cheque/P.O. (made payable to *The Just William Society*) to:

**The Just William Society Treasurer,**

**c/o Black Cat Bookshop, 36-39 Silver Arcade, LEICESTER LE1 5FB**

The inimitable William Brown was really sadly misjudged by many people --- people in authority, that is. For at heart William believed firmly in so many things we treasure in our hearts; like giving true homage to the seasonal events that milestone our lives; Christmas, and remembering loved ones' anniversaries, especially birthdays (his own) and those other things they were always on about; education in essential matters like preserving the countryside and the wonders of nature. (He'd always been very conscientious about stag beetles and the preservation of old barns.) And he was a firm believer in the importance of spending money to keep the vital economy of the country from collapsing, and children's rights had to be protected, particularly where tyrannical farm masters and unreasonable parents and elder siblings were concerned. And of course he was always anxious to help others.

How many readers, both juvenile and adult, must have experienced twinges of *déjà vu* while vicariously sharing William's well meant attempts to solve other people's problems? How they too at some time or another had set out with the most conscientious will in the world to bring much needed succour to the afflicted, only to succeed in bringing down the vials of wrath upon their own heads?

Take the business of the holly, for instance.

The vicar's wife should really have known better than to entrust the Outlaws with the task of gathering the holly for the church Christmas decorations. But with an epidemic of mumps among her reliable helpers she really had little choice. So William and his trusty band, wearing expressions of earnest piety pinned to their faces, collected the vicarage wheelbarrow and set forth with the best of intentions on a holly gathering expedition that somehow turned into a glorious morning of adventure in the woods, managing to be deaf to murmurs about holly from Douglas --- Douglas being the nearest apology for a conscience that the Outlaws possessed --- until they got involved with an eccentric professor who had an assignation with a visitor from Mars. It was unfortunate that William, in his role as an Arab Chief, attired in an old sheet and a bath towel round his head, had taken up a position of command in a splendid old oak, and equally unfortunate that the professor's mathematical calculations had indicated that the meeting place with the Martian was to be right under that tree.

The only thing William could do was to play along with the situation, while the endeavours of the professor not to corrupt in any way this wondrous manifestation of an alien civilisation were sadly misplaced. However, William quite enjoyed being the guest of honour at the professor's house, partaking of the sandwiches, biscuits and other refreshments offered by the hospitable professor, who was eager to note the dietary tastes of Martians. Of course William soon became bored with being a Martian and made his escape, but not before his Outlaws had raised a furore over his disappearance. Needless to say, the vicar's wife did not get her holly.

Sadly, people never seemed to learn where William was concerned. One Christmas Mrs. Lane decided that the season of goodwill was the ideal time to end once and for all the feud between her son Hubert and William. Mrs. Lane had the solution all worked out in The Christmas Truce: the boys should invite each other to their Christmas parties. Mrs. Brown was a little uncertain but decided to go along with this bright idea, and she had that most touching of a mother's failings; a belief in William's better nature.

William was horror-stricken. But suddenly Mrs. Brown was firm; the boys must bury the hatchet. An edict that met with the unequivocal response from her son; the only place he wanted to bury the hatchet was in Hubert Lane's head! It was not an auspicious omen!

The first round went to the Hubert Laneites when their crafty and nauseating behaviour at William's party helped them to pay off quite a few old scores and made the innocent Mrs. Brown believe that perhaps it was going to work after all. But the final round went to William, whose counter-espionage before Hubert's party paid a marvellous dividend. Somehow, the gifts that were drawn from a genial Santa's sack of presents hadn't been labelled quite as Hubert had intended. William and his Outlaws received the glorious and luxurious gifts meant for Hubert and his cronies while received the cheap, tatty presents intended for the Outlaws. William, crafty as ever, made sure there could be no mistake about it all by hastening to Mrs. Lane with effusive thanks and admiration of the superb gifts.

#### WILLIAM'S HAPPY DAYS



BATES CALLED OUT THE NAMES ONE BY ONE. THE FIRST WAS WILLIAM.

#### THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE



IT WAS THE MOST MAGNIFICENT MOUTH ORGAN THAT HE HAD EVER SEEN. THE HUBERT LANEITES STARED IN HORROR AND AMAZEMENT.

One felt a moment of trepidation for the hapless Mr. Bates, the Lane's gardener who had been instructed to play the role of Father Christmas, and who would almost certainly become the recipient of Hubert's wrath when the jubilant guests departed brandishing their magnificent electric torch, glorious mouth organ, fountain pen and deluxe penknife. The reader could rejoice, however, assured of many more stimulating battles to come between Hubert Lane and the ever resourceful William.

Of course no Christmas pantomime could be complete without William in the audience. His brother Robert, who should have known better, found himself inveigled into taking William to the local pantomime where William fell wildly in love with Princess Goldilocks. In one of those delightful coincidences beloved by author and reader alike, Goldilocks happened to be staying at an hotel in Marleigh. William's



incomparable nerve and ingenuity soon got him into the hotel, where the disasters that inevitably pursue William through life, duly followed him there. But alas, William had forgotten a previous encounter with the beautiful golden-haired character, the time when he had actually landed the part of one of the bears. He had not been impressed with the somewhat rotund Goldilocks, nor the whinging Fairy Queen who had toothache, nor the rest of the company who were making a film of the pantomime, but he had fallen in love with his costume and when the going got a bit too fraught he chose the safest path of discretion and decided to be a bear in the woods. It was sheer bliss, until the head of his costume jammed firmly on his head and refused to come off. Hunger drove him to seek his mother, giving several ladies threatening heart attacks at the mothers' meeting, starting a panic at the village pub, and meeting Goldilocks who was sympathetic but not much help, until finally Mr. Brown arrived on the scene to sort things out. But William hadn't been in love then; now he was beginning to suffer the pangs he had long despised in his brother and sister.

The Cedar Hotel at Marleigh was complete with a gigantic porter who did not daunt William in the least. William simply said he'd come to see someone, and conjured the name, Mr. Medway, out of the air.

Another delightful coincidence; there was a Mr. Medway staying at the hotel, and he was expecting a young nephew called Trevor, whom he had not seen for several years.

There followed a hilarious exchange between William and "Uncle" Medway during which William had to respond to enquiries about Trevor's mother, Pongo --- not a dog as William first surmised but Trevor's baby brother --- and Lucy --- who happened to be the dog. The advent of the real Trevor brought this fraught meeting to an abrupt end. William flees.

The Cedar Hotel must have wondered what had hit it by the time William had experimented with the automatic lift, found Princess Goldilocks' room where he meets with a decidedly bad-tempered reception from his heroine when he emerges from her costume basket, and with cries of "Stop thief!" has to make another flight from the perils of the Cedar Hotel. Suddenly home and tea seem very attractive and love an extremely overrated state of mind.

The restrictions of wartime did not entirely daunt William. With his usual resilience he decides to sell his toy soldiers in order to raise cash and then hunt for a present for his mother. Alas, he is taken in by a young rogue who promises to get him a good price for the soldiers. The young rogue does not specify who is going to benefit from the good price, and when the youth fails to return William sets out in search of him. On the bus he spots the familiar shopping bag he'd borrowed from his mother but it is now in the possession of Mrs. Monks, the vicar's wife. William is quite appalled but quite convinced that the outwardly respectable lady is part of a criminal gang, probably with that young rogue. It is no problem for William to detach the bag from Mrs. Monks and make his way home, where he discovers the bag now contains a Christmas cake, some table napkins and other seasonal trimmings. A born adaptor, William makes the best of it and presents his mother with bag and contents.

Mrs. Brown is delighted. The War Working Party is meeting at her house that afternoon and the tea problem is solved. William is missing when the row breaks out about missing shopping bags and stolen Christmas cakes and rightful owners. William is hauled in to shed possible light on the mystery and is quite adamant that Mrs. Monks stole his toy soldiers. Hysterics! The cue for the arrival of Aunt Florence, bearing a shopping bag which Mrs. Monks claims as hers, and now containing William's toy

soldiers, sold to Aunt Florence by a charming youth who was raising money for the Red Cross. The charming young rogue had also sold Mrs. Monks a bag --- his family were so poor...

William found this unbearably tedious. His mother had got her present and he'd got his tin soldiers back...

But the cream of William's Christmas anarchy is to be found in the tales involving Mr. Solomon, the Superintendent of the Sunday School.

Mr. Solomon's devotion to his Sunday School was equalled only by his devotion to William's sister Ethel. For this, Mr. Solomon suffered William's unwilling presence in his Sunday School. When Christmas came round he cautiously asked Mrs. Brown if she would prefer that William did not join the Sunday school carollers.

A wiser Mr. Solomon might have phrased this question differently, perhaps not asked it at all and trusted in fate to keep William as far away as possible from a Christmas carol expedition on Christmas Eve. William was deeply hurt when his mother said with a trace of doubt that he would be quite orderly, wouldn't he?

The parents of Ginger, Douglas and Henry had also had less than tactful doubts expressed to them by Mr. Solomon regarding the participation of their sons in the Christmas carol party, and received similar reactions from their all-innocent offspring.

They were all so docile during the singing practices that Mr. Solomon became yet more apprehensive; it wasn't normal. And all of Mr. Solomon's forebodings came to full fruition on the night of the Waits. But how was he to know that the Outlaws were bound on revenge on certain relations who were going to insult their nephews with rotten Christmas presents like boring history books, and that the carol expedition was a heaven sent opportunity?

Outside Uncle George's house the Outlaws let loose their worst possible din, in which the rest of the Sunday School songsters were perfectly happy to assist. Eventually Uncle George was beaten. A plea for books for their library brought the despised *Kings and Queens of England* flying from the window. Threats of calling the police followed as the Outlaws made for their next victim, Douglas's Aunt Jane. More of the kind of anarchy inseparable from the Outlaws followed, then on to Uncle Charles, where he too was parted from the unsuitable Christmas presented planned for William.

By now the night was hideous with the cacophony of the enthusiastic carollers who were really enjoying themselves. They had long since lost Mr. Solomon who, glimpsing an arm of the law approaching purposefully, had fled homewards to have a quiet nervous breakdown.

So it was not to be wondered at when Mr. Solomon coldly refused to allow William to join the band he proposed to form at the Sunday School. Moreover he was now on his way to William's house to complain to William's parents about the disgraceful events of Christmas Eve.

He is unmoved when William points out how awkward it was for them when Mr. Solomon got lost in the dark during the carol singing. That William was so unalarmed by his visit to the Brown's house should have warned Mr. Solomon that Mr. and Mrs. Brown were not at home.

But Ethel was. Being temporarily at a loose end she entertained the smitten Mr. Solomon to tea, and Mr. Solomon was lost. He quite forgot that he was supposed to be at the Christmas parties of the Old Folks and the Mixed Infants by five o'clock.

Under the spell of Ethel's magic he agrees to send William to collect the Santa outfit, the Pied Piper costume, the large sack of presents for the Old Folks and the small sack of presents for the Mixed Infants and take them to the Curate with a request that he

help Mr. Solomon with these duties. William agrees with alacrity. But he sees no need to burden the Curate with these duties when he, William, is quite able to perform them and in doing so impress Mr. Solomon with his suitability to be a trumpeter in the Sunday School band.

William obeys all the instructions except one. He doesn't see why the Old Folks should have a bigger sack of presents than the Mixed Infants, so he exchanges them. It is only when he is dishing out little toy boats, garish picture books and paintboxes to indignant octogenarians that it occurs to him he might have made a mistake. Being William, he pushes on, suspecting that as the Pied Piper he would be distributing packets of tea and tobacco to outraged Mixed Infants. But ever master of adapting to the unforeseen, William improvises and leads them out into the unknown in the best Pied Piper tradition.

Mr. Solomon never really recovers from that dreadful denouement when the massed force of mothers seeking their lost ewe lambs run Mr. Solomon to earth where he is still drowning in Ethel's blue-eyed gaze, and when William refuses to give up his hostages until Mr. Solomon promises to allow the Outlaws to join the band.

As for the hostages, they were having a great time playing at warfare in the Brown's garage using tea and tobacco for ammunition, led by Johnnie, the largest and healthiest of the Mixed Infants whose horrified mother pursued him through life with his chest protector and was about to discover her frail little precious chewing tobacco and enjoying it.

There was only one band practice, after which Mr. Solomon abandoned all hope and retired for a rest cure. Only the iron-strong and steely-willed could ever cope with William's Christmas Anarchy.

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**N.B.** For more about William's anarchy see Mary Cadogan's delightful book, *The William Companion*. M.W.

**(Editor's Note:** We are grateful to Macmillan and the Thomas Henry fisher estate for permission to use Thomas Henry's illustrations.)

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**DENNIS HILLIARD has sent a further tribute to the Allisons:**

The insertion in the October C.D. of news of the death of Myra Allison prompts me to pass on my own memories.

I was a postal member of the Northern Club until the regular arrival of Howard Baker reprints made it impossible for me to keep up with the amount of reading material on hand. I knew something of the immense kindness and helpfulness shown by Gerry and Myra Allison, and on two occasions I was able to make short visits to their Menston home, whilst returning from some prison or the other - part of my duties as Probation Officer. They were both warm and welcoming people and I can vividly recall visits to the attic room in which Gerry stored the library. Myra often told me that the Greyfriars Hikers series (one of my favourites) accompanied them on their honeymoon, and certainly their joint contribution to the hobby was a unique one. Both spent hours removing rusting staples from S.O.L.s and even copying longhand the

text of hard-to-obtain volumes. They did all this whilst preserving an interest in all around them. Some hobbyists developed an acquisitive attitude and 'their books' were held as a peculiar treasure not to be shared by others. Gerry and Myra were not collectors but they preserved and distributed items precious to them which reminded them of an era fast passing away but whose memories were fond and joyful.

I just want to say a last 'thank you'.

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## STILL AT LARGE

by J.E.M.

It is odd, when you think about it, that some of Sexton Blake's most famous adversaries were never brought to book. By contrast, that other Baker Street sleuth was always a match for the most dangerous wrong-doer; even his arch-foe, the master criminal Moriarty, finally got his comeuppance in a Swiss waterfall.

But consider just a few of Blake's failures. Zenith the Albino is an outstanding example. Despite thwarting many of his nefarious schemes, Blake was unable to put him behind bars (or in the condemned cell, for Zenith was a murderer in the days of capital punishment). From time to time, there were hints of a final reckoning - but it never came. The irresistible force simply went on meeting the immovable object. Of course, like many of the Saga's star crooks, Zenith had his redeeming points. Not only chivalrous, he regularly dispatched some of the nastier specimens of the underworld, usually with the aid of that famous swordstick. Still, he *was* a criminal and a dangerous ruthless one at that.

Then there was Rupert Waldo, the Superman with Robin Hood instincts. Blake even had a soft spot for him and, on more than one occasion, let him get away with the spoils. It is true that, like Zenith, Waldo was helpful to Blake in putting down some most unattractive villains - after helping himself to their cash, of course, most of which (naturally!) went to deserving charities. Nevertheless, he too was a lawbreaker who always got away with it.

There were other and nastier rogues with whom Blake trussed like Dr. Huxton Rymer and Leon Kestrel, both of whom still roam free. Blake also took on world-wide conspiracies like the Criminals' Confederation and the

oriental Brotherhood of The Yellow Beetle. Such groupings are not easily destroyed, whatever happens to their leaders. It is easy to imagine successors to the evil Mr. Reece and the sinister Wu Ling.

Nor must we forget the ladies: Mesdemoiselles Yvonne and Roxane, Vali Mata-Vali, June Severance and the savage, sexy Marie Galante, to name but a few, were all involved in breaking the law. None ever saw the inside of a jail.

In short, for such a famous crime-buster, Sexton Blake left a fairly large number of unclosed files. Readers sometimes complained about this state of affairs though, to be honest, most of us enjoyed the never-ending pursuit, as happy to run with the hares as to hunt with the hounds. In any case, we always felt that Blake *could* have brought many of the miscreants to justice if he had wished. Had he and his chroniclers reflected that one day the great Life would end, every last villain - and villainess - would surely have paid in full for their misdeeds.

Meanwhile, in our memories and imagination, the game is still afoot. In fact, I personally sometimes feel that the Blakian Super Rogues would be right at home in the present-day world - in fact as well as fantasy. Zenith, for example, who once carried out a daring bank raid with the aid of X-Ray spectacles and a gadget that immobilised all vehicles but his own, would certainly be more than able to cope with our high-tech society. Yvonne, Roxane and the rest would obviously be members of the modern jet-set, while Waldo's Robin Hood activities might be more welcome than ever. The Yellow Beetle Brotherhood would be impatiently awaiting the British hand-over of Hong Kong to mainland China, and as for global crime syndicates like the Criminals' Confederation, what has changed? And so our list could be extended.

Perhaps, in different guises and under different names all these Blakian villains *are* still with us? But, if so, where - oh where - is Blake himself to frustrate their knavish tricks.....?

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**WANTED:** ENID BLYTON, W.E. JOHNS, CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers and ALL ephemera related to these authors. ANY original artwork related to Bunter, Blyton, Biggles, Eagle or other British comics and boys papers. ALL Boys Friend Libraries by W.E. Johns and Rochester. Many "Thriller" issues and first editions in wrappers by Charteris required. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel. 01923 232383.

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## PITT'S CHRISTMAS PLAY AT DORRIE'S

by Ray Hopkins

It seemed like a good idea to stage a play that Reggie Pitt had written, not only because it was his first and would make him feel good, but it might also help to keep that obstreperous character Handforth in line and stop him continually punching Fullwood and Co., Armstrong and Merrell whenever he came across them. Lord Dorrimore had out of a sense of kindness also invited some of the Remove trouble-makers to his Christmas party at Dorrimore Hall, to get as many as possible of the Removites away from the unpleasant atmosphere that had prevailed at St. Frank's the previous term. Dr. Stafford, the usually kindly old Head, had appeared to be suffering from some mysterious malady that on occasion would turn him into a raving madman and Nelson Lee had to take over the reins until the Head calmed down.

Nelson Lee knew that Dr. Stafford's mad fits were brought on by the introduction of a foreign drug into his throat tablets and realises the only possible perpetrator must be the Science Master, Mr. Hugh Trenton. His hand is held, however, because he knows that Trenton himself is the catspaw for even more powerful criminals whose plans are to undermine the whole fabric of English life by installing their own adherents as headmasters into public schools (three others have already been affected) and instil into the boys wrong ideas leading to the eventual downfall of England!

Pitt's play, "The Secret of Mill Cottage", is a thriller in which the main characters are called Handforth, Nipper and Tregellis-West and, as played by themselves, are three strangers who come upon an apparently empty cottage one stormy night and go inside for shelter. In order to provide something different, Nipper suggests that he play Handforth and Handforth play him. This can only result in added laughter from the audience because it is inevitable that Handforth will step out of the role sometimes, owing to his quick temper, and become himself. Two Handforths for the price of one, as it were. Reggie Pitt, proud of his play, objects to this, saying it will interfere with its serious intent.

The continuous heavy snowfall keeps the boys indoors and they are able to concentrate on learning their parts and the play is performed on Boxing Day in the big baronial hall, a stage having been erected and Dorrie having spared no expense to give the whole place the appearance of a theatre.

Handforth is annoyed because he says Nipper is caricaturing him rather than portraying him as he really is, so that, during the actual performance, he has a tendency to drift away from the script and interject his own comments inevitably commencing with his well-known catchphrase "By George!" He objects because Nipper roars out his lines with special emphasis on the rude expletive "Rats!" At one point, incensed by the audience's roar of laughter at some piece of perfect mimicry of himself on the part of Nipper, he strides off to the side of the stage and succeeds in dislodging the flimsy scenery. This envelops him and brings the play to a halt.

But the show must go on and the canvas set of one side of the cottage is re-erected and the curtains swing aside. Walter Church, playing the role of Mrs. Willis, has been waiting all this time for his cue secreted in a big travelling trunk and is feeling more than a little angry with Handforth. So when he steps out and faints into Nipper's (Handforth's) arms he barks at Handforth not to clutch him so fiercely and, oh dear, a serious error this, he accuses Handforth of messing up the play. Handforth pushes him away in a fury and punches the 'poor old lady' directly in the face. Not nice for Churchy but a supreme comic moment for the audience who go off into howls of mirth.

And here, E.S. Brooks effectively replaces a scene of very high comedy by one of dramatic intensity by the sudden bursting into this hilarious atmosphere of a drug-crazed Dr. Stafford, in his very worst Edward Hyde persona. He scatters the audience of juniors and throws a music stand at Handforth who has dared to remonstrate with him. He has "provided the sensation of the evening" and brings to a close all the festivities.

Dr. Stafford had been dozing over a book in the library when a mysterious figure in a black cloak with a wide-brimmed hat hiding his face had come in through the French windows and dripped three drops of a dark liquid into the Head's wine-glass. Mr. Trenton had successfully pursued his victim from St. Frank's and found him vulnerable.

The above incidents are re-told from SOL 357, "The Christmas Rebels," 1 Dec 1938, reprinted from a 1921 Old Series NELSON LEE LIBRARY original.

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## THE MAN WHO DIDN'T



A reminder (from Bob Whiter) not to forget to order the Annual!



**No. 249 - Magnet No. 47 - "Home for the Holidays"**

by Roger M. Jenkins

The Christmas story in Magnet 47 is of special interest since it is the first Yuletide holiday spent at Wharton Lodge. The issue is dated January, 2nd 1909, but it must be borne in mind that in earlier days there was a good deal of laxity about the publication date of seasonal stories.

There was of course a heavy fall of snow, and the Removites were ambushed by snowballs thrown by Temple & Co. just as they were leaving for the holidays. The holiday party was noteworthy, in that Bunter had been invited, and also Wun Lung, a recent arrival in the stories (just as Fisher T. Fish was invited at a later date when he was a new boy). In addition to the Famous Four - Bull not having yet arrived - there was Hazeldene and his sister Marjorie, who walked between Wharton and her brother, much to Bob Cherry's annoyance. At Wharton Lodge the lake was frozen, and some amusing skating episodes took place. Less congenial was the shooting party to pot rabbits, and winter hardly seemed the season for this kind of sport anyway.

Undeniably, there was a sinister background to this story. A menacing beggar named Purkiss and a poacher called Seth Ives crossed the juniors' paths. Further encounters were to come, including a systematic poaching gang operating on Colonel Wharton's estate. The dramatic events involved confrontation with this gang and their eventual capture.

This is a Wharton Lodge story that later readers of the Magnet might find somewhat odd. The juniors all slept in one huge room, like the dormitory at Greyfriars. Even Colonel Wharton was a different person - "The old Colonel's kind face beamed as though he felt himself a boy again". This is hardly the gruff Colonel who might turn irascible, especially by the antics of Bunter in the nineteen-thirties. Harry Wharton's aunt was merely called Miss Wharton, and the butler was not even mentioned, though Harper the head gamekeeper was referred to by name. There is a good deal of fascinating detail from Edwardian days: the juniors took a brake to the railway station, and on the train a food hamper was delivered to their compartment by special arrangement, half-way through their journey. Perhaps the greatest disappointment, however, was the fact that Christmas itself was mentioned in a short paragraph, with no details of decorations, festivities or Christmas fare, that were all to represent the hallmark of the later Christmas series in the Magnet with concomitant goodwill and laughter. The general impression of Magnet 47 is merely that of a winter holiday without any celebrations, but on the other hand perhaps it is asking too much to expect perfection so early in the career of the Magnet.

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Distinguished British author Sir Kingsley Amis sadly died recently. An unexpected name to be found in the pages of 'SPCD' you may think. But I'm reminded of the time I enjoyed a marvellous 2-hour lunch with him.

I was working as Publicist on that great motion picture STAR WARS, based at Elstree Studios, just outside London, in that hot Summer of 1976. There was a strict 'no publicity' ruling during the shooting, but I managed to persuade writer-director George Lucas that it might be useful to invite Kingsley Amis down for a visit (I knew of the author's keen interest in science-fiction and that he wrote at that time for the OBSERVER newspaper and that he might well 'hold' any article he may write until nearer the time of the film's opening in London).

Lucas agreed and I wrote to Amis (then unknighthed). He rang me and said he would very much like to come down to Elstree. I arranged a day and a car and he duly arrived in my office, sporting a relaxed and affable demeanour and an umbrella. I took him on to the set for an hour, then to the studio restaurant, where we were joined by George Lucas. Amis chatted animatedly with Lucas, then the latter had to leave for the set.

It was then for the second hour of the lunch (and a second bottle of port. Amis's favourite tittle), that I really came to know Amis - and I soon realised that he was, partially at any rate, 'one of us'. He had loved reading school stories as a boy, especially those by Hylton Cleaver (my own favourite). When I began reminding him of Mr. Dennett, that memorable if eccentric Housemaster at Greyminster, he became quite excited that anyone, as well as himself, should even know of him. When I modestly ventured that I had written a long article on Mr. Dennett for the "Collectors' Digest Annual" he said he'd love to read it. He also confided that he had loved the books of Percy F. Westerman in his youth. And remembered reading 'The Wizard' regularly. When he said he had been at the City of London School, Talbot Baines Reed's old school, we were well away, discussing Reed's great pioneering school tales.

I eventually escorted Kingsley Amis (after another visit to the movie set) to his car at about 4.30 p.m. He was in high spirits and still clutching his tightly-furled umbrella. "Why," I asked him politely, "do you carry a broolly during a heat-wave," He chuckled and answered: "It's just a prop, old boy. just a prop - something to lean on, you know...." Then he was away with a cheery grin and a wave.

I sent him a copy of my piece on Mr. Dennett and he wrote and said he'd enjoyed it very much and that it had revived memories he had forgotten he'd had. He also said he hadn't really thought very much of what he'd seen of STAR WARS and did not think it would amount to much. 'Sorry and all that', he wrote, 'but we had a good lunch, didn't we?' We had indeed.

He never wrote anything about STAR WARS. When it eventually became the most successful film of all time ( a record it held for about 5 years, until it was succeeded by 'E.T.') I wondered what he thought of it all. But I never found out. For I never met Kingsley Amis again. But "Lucky Jim" is still one of my favourite novels. And, although most of the recent massive Obituaries described him as 'curmudgonly and irascible and bad-tempered', I certainly didn't find him so. He was charming and witty, funny and enthusiastic.

Don't always believe what you read in the Obituaries.

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We have received a fine selection of books and spoken-word cassettes to enhance the delights of this Christmas season, both for our own reading and listening, and as presents to friends and relatives. I would strongly advise you to buy, beg or borrow before any of the items mentioned below sell out!

### THE MASK OF COMEDY: COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES HAMILTON - Edited by Una Hamilton Wright.

This collection provides fresh and fascinating insights into Charles Hamilton's wonderfully creative mind. The poems are wide-ranging - from satire and parodies through Latin translations of popular songs to verses written for his family's private magazine. Snatches of Bunter and the world of school are included for good measure. As Una Hamilton Wright points out in her introduction, much of the poetry is, at least on the surface, comical. However, it is underpinned by Hamilton's serious social comment, his rejection of hypocrisy and the concern which he felt for his fellow beings. **THE MASK OF COMEDY** is available from the publisher, Happy Hours, 37 Tinchill Lane, Leeds, LS16 6BU at £12.50 plus £1.00 for postage.

### THE JENNINGS COMPANION by David Bathurst

About a year ago many of us enjoyed David Bathurst's book **SIX OF THE BEST**, and his present volume is equally satisfying. Anthony Buckeridge's stories about Jennings fill a unique place in the school story genre, forming a bridge between the 1920s and '30s heyday and today's mixed-sex comprehensive school tales. Jennings has survived since his creation in the late 1940s with unusual resilience, and this **COMPANION** is not only a fitting tribute to his author but a most useful guide to the books. It contains a foreword by Anthony Buckeridge followed by sections on the background to the books, complete listings of Jennings publications and broadcasts, profiles of all the leading characters and an A to Z of all the themes and characters featured in the stories. There are also illustrations of the original dustjackets as well as further pictures from the books, a lively selection of quotations, and information about the availability of various editions for the collector. **THE JENNINGS COMPANION** is truly a *tour de force* for which we can be grateful. It can be ordered from Romansmead Publication, 46 Mosse Gardens, Fishbourne, Chichester PO19 3PQ for £6.99, which includes p. & p. Cheques should be made payable to the author, David Bathurst.

### THE JENNINGS COMPANION

BY DAVID BATHURST



*The corridor was a mass of waving arms and legs*

## **OSTEOPATHY** by John Wernham

This publication from the President of the London O.B.B.C. covers a far greater range of subjects than its title suggests. It *is* concerned with the theory and practice of osteopathy, and with the achievements of the Maidstone Clinic and college of osteopathy which was founded by the author, who is still its guiding light. However, it is also a book of personal reminiscences about John Wernham's life, and the things and interests which have intrigued him over the decades. Needless to say, Greyfriars comes in for worthy mention, in both words and pictures: The author's wartime experiences in East Africa also make lively reading, as do the many references to his childhood and early days. Rich in illustrative material (from cigarette cards, old trains and buses to vintage photographs of London and other locations) this book contains much to interest hobbyists and collectors. It can be ordered from The Museum Press, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8RT for £11.50, which includes p.&p.

## **MISSELTHTWAITE: THE SEQUEL TO THE SECRET GARDEN** by Susan Moody (Hodder & Stoughton £14.99)

I am always dubious about sequels 'by other hands' to favourite books, although this seems to be very much in vogue since the success last year of Susan Hill's follow-up to Daphne Du Maurier's REBECCA (MRS. DE WINTER, pub. Sinclair-Stevenson) and Emma Tennant's two sequels to Jane Austen's PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (PEMBERLEY and AN UNEQUAL MARRIAGE, pub. Hodder & Stoughton). Frances Hodgson Burnett's THE SECRET GARDEN is one of the finest children's books ever written. It is the story of Mary, a spoiled, poor-little-rich-girl who 'finds herself' through rehabilitating a secret garden with the help of her sickly, fearful cousin Colin (who, like Mary, opens up to life through 'the magic of growing things') and of Dickon, a robust country boy who puts the two children from the big house into touch with reality. Now Susan Moody, a well-known crime and mystery writer, has taken the story of Mary, Colin and Dickon into adult life. MISSELTHTWAITE is a courageous attempt to trace what might have happened in their close, triangular friendship; it is something of a guessing game at first - will Mary marry Colin, or Dickon, to each of whom she is bound by long-lasting ties of love, or is she wilful enough to abandon them both for someone else? The intricacies of their loves and friendships are persuasively conveyed from the early part of this century up to the period of the Second World War. Mary, Colin and Dickon are, as in the original, intriguing characters and MISSELTHTWAITE is a good read in its own right. Whether or not it recalls the delights of THE SECRET GARDEN is for the individual reader to decide.

## **JUST WILLIAM - AND WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER.**

Richmal Crompton's William is very much to the fore this Christmas. As well as starring in six televised dramatisations during November and December, he celebrates his perennial appeal in several publications from Macmillan. JUST WILLIAM AT CHRISTMAS (£9.99) contains reprints of ten of William's seasonable exploits. It is a perfect volume to keep handy when the joys of eating and socializing during the festive season begin to pall. Another volume of reprints is MORE JUST WILLIAM AS SEEN ON TV, which comprises the six stories used in the current BBC television series. For good measure Macmillan have also re-issued paperbacks of MORE WILLIAM, WILLIAM AGAIN, and WILLIAM THE FOURTH which not only contain Thomas

Henry pictures inside but carry reproductions of his original and gorgeous covers (each at £3.99).

Perhaps I can also mention here that my own JUST WILLIAM THROUGH THE AGES, published last year in hardback, is now available in paperback, also from Macmillan, at £8.99. It traces the changing social background of the stories and describes William's adventures in words and, of course, in Thomas Henry's very engaging coloured and black and white illustrations.

A special delight for the Christmas season is HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, a double-cassette recording by Martin Jarvis, who brilliantly puts across the spirit of the stories. His earlier JUST WILLIAM cassettes have been extremely popular, of course, and HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, which is based on the book WHAT'S WRONG WITH CIVILIZASHUN, is likely to have the same appeal. To remind everyone, these particular episodes were not taken from the series of William books but from pieces 'by William' in various magazines which, until, a year or so ago, had been uncollected.

And last, but very far from being least, to round off this Christmas selection of goodies, I must recommend Martin Jarvis's latest double-cassette reading, which is entitled BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL. From the book of the same name, it provides an hour of two of happy listening and nostalgia. It is Martin Jarvis's first Greyfriars tape - and I hope that it will not be his last. What joy to be regaled by him with Just William, or with the Greyfriars chums - even when one is temporarily tied to the kitchen while performing those lesser rites of Christmas, such as potato-peeling and Brussels sprouts washing! HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS and BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL are both distributed by CSA Telltapes and should be available from all good record and book shops at £7.99 each. In case of difficulty they can be obtained direct from CSA Telltapes at 101 Chamberlayne Road, London, NW10 3ND at £8.49, which includes postage and packing.

Happy Christmas reading - and listening - to you all!



'The Browns' house started as a mansion with stables and summer house, finally shrinking to a suburban semi. The cook, housemaid and gardener of the Twenties are replaced by a daily. The war years take their toll: Monster Humbug sweets shoot up in price and decline in suckability. Then the air-raid warden is pensioned off and television begins to take over from vicarage tea parties . . . Mary

Cadogan has provided a lively survey of the changing times of the Home Counties tearaway. This is the book for adults who dare not reread the original tales, even though they were first written for adults - for fear of what the neighbours may think. The illustrations alone make it deserving of its place on the bookshelf.'

*Daily Telegraph*

*Just William Through the Ages is the indispensable companion for anyone who has ever read and loved Richmal Crompton's classic stories*

The days into December had started to roll by. One or two Christmas cards had already made their appearance, although they were difficult to find amongst the normal batch of unwanted advertising material and the few bills.

It so happened that, one morning, I had an extra heavy mail delivery, which I picked up with little enthusiasm. I sifted idly through the letters, when my eyes alighted upon an envelope, which to say the least of it, was a little bit different from the rest. It intrigued me and I grabbed a knife (still showing the traces of marmalade) when my attention was arrested by a caricature on the flap. Headed "Popper Court", the drawing was of Sir Hilton Popper of unblest memory. Excitedly I pulled out the card. "Sir Herbert Vernon Smith requests the pleasure of the company of Horace Dilley to an 'old boys' reunion at the Cross Keys....." Smithy! 'Twas way back in 1940 that I last saw him. "Come on the 22nd, and stay the night".

What memories were stirred! Seemed inviting enough .....and yet.... I dithered for a day or two but at last nostalgia took over. And so it was at the crack of dawn that I set off from Biggleswade Station.

As I sat and mused in the railway carriage, all sorts of memories came flooding back. Who would be there? What would they look like after 50 or more years? What had they been doing? My mind boggled.

After a deal of changing en route, I arrived at last at Friardale Station. It looked much the same as when I last saw it. Only a sprinkling of people around.... most looked disinterested and bored. I picked up my case and made my way to the Cross Keys Hotel. Some of it looked familiar but it had been modernised and extended. My steps were slow as I walked to the door and went in. Somehow I felt rather lost. I had a bit of an uneasy feeling.

"Hellow, old chap." There was a voice in the distance. I glanced around and there was the unmistakable figure of Harold Skinner. Thin, weedy with an irritating grin upon his face, which was more reminiscent of a sneer. "You're still about then?" he added, in a tone which seemed to suggest he wished I wasn't. He preferred a limp hand which I had to accept. Whilst it felt like a bit of wet fish, I sensed that there were claws at the end.

"Welcome" said Skinner, "I manage this joint for Smithy. I beg your pardon, Sir Herbert."

I didn't show much warmth. There and then, I would like to have given him the referee's red card and made his nose the same colour. But I checked my thoughts...after all it was a time of peace and good will.

The hotel was alive with faces. I had to look at some of the chaps a time or two before I could give them a name. But most I knew at first glance.

After drinks, Smithy had put on a super banquet. It had all the stamp of the Vernon Smith showmanship. There were goodies of all sorts.... nothing by way of expense had been spared. Pretty waitresses flitted here and there. Bunter was there, and whilst his age had somewhat reduced his eating capabilities (but not his figure) he did more than adequate justice to the vast array of comestibles. He paused little to make conversation with Johnny Bull to his right and Horace Coker to his left. I pondered why Coker had been added to the guest list.... but there, Smithy was always an unpredictable character.

I sat next to Peter Todd and Harry Wharton. Peter told me that Bunter had remained unmarried. He had courted the attention of a wealthy widow, but, despite his

own assessment of being a "ladies' man", he had failed to make the catch. It appears that Bunter had drifted from place to place. His desire to do an honest day's work had never really come to fruition. Some of his exploits had landed him on the wrong side of the law, and his Greyfriars cunning and luck had often deserted him.

On two or three occasions he had been given a rest from public view. During one of his trials, he called the learned judge a "beast" and that had not helped his cause. I was told that Bessie had made a walk to the altar in her late teens. However, it was not one of those marriages made in heaven, and it soon ended. She was reasonably well off having been left quite a bit of money by one of her titled "relations". Sammy had turned out the best of the Bunters. He had successfully run a little café business with his wife and they were now retired.

It was a delight to be sitting next to Harry Wharton. Harry had had a long and distinguished army career and he was still known as "Colonel". He had outwitted Bob Cherry and married Marjorie Hazeldene.

It was such a pleasure to see so many of the old boys. Mark Linley had entered Parliament and had held a ministerial post with considerable distinction. Sir Hurree Singh had been outstanding in diplomatic circles. I glanced across at Cecil Ponsoyby... he looked just as shady and malicious as he did more than fifty years ago. One of the highlights was to have George Wingate there..... looking every bit a gentleman. A disappointment was the absence of Lord Mauleverer. He was spending a lot of time these days sleeping in the House of the Lords.

The evening drifted on. Each of us had his own story to tell. Bunter caught me in an off moment and borrowed £20. He said that his tailor was pressing for some money on account. He was expecting a cheque from Bessie and he was sure it would arrive in the morning before I departed. I later found out that his tailor was none other than "Gerald Loder".

Breakfast next morning was late. Most of us followed Bunter's example and had a lie-in. My train was due to leave just after lunch. What better way to spend the morning than have a look around a few of the old haunts? Alas, Friardale village was quite a let-down. So much had been altered. New housing estates had sprung up and quite a few of the old land-marks had been consigned to history. Uncle Clegg's was still a general store, but Penfold's shop was now a Turf Accountants operated by none other than Gerald Loder. Joyce, the Woodcutter's had now become a large sawmill. The Boat House was still there with a modern look. The "Three Fishers" looked very much the same as of yore. A chap lolled around outside who seemed to be a replica of Mr. Joey Banks. It was nice to see the wind-mill near to Giles' farm. I eyed Popper Court, which apparently was now owned by Smithy.....I wondered if it was still out of bounds. I came to Greyfriars School. I hesitated. Could I pluck up enough courage to have a look inside? With faltering steps, I made my way to the main entrance. The lodge was there..... but no sigh of Gosling. A number of Greyfriars lads were milling around. Few had any interest in me. But my faith was restored as one young lad came up and enquired if he could do anything for me? I told him that I was an old boy of the School..... I would love to have a look around.

"Hang on, sir" he said "Let me ask one of the Masters". Permission was given and inside I went. I wanted to see my old study. It was no longer there. It had disappeared, but its memories remained. I longed to meet up with Henry Samuel Quelch or old Pompous, Paul Prout, but of course they were nowhere to be seen. There were two or three of the teaching profession but they had long hair and some facial adornment. Oh dear, what would Henry have thought? The more I wandered around, the more I had a

sinking feeling. The hockey and sports field was now a car part. The tuck shop was still there, but no Jessie Mimble. I felt a sense of suffocation.... I wanted to get out. Where was Trotter to show me the way? No Trotter.... Lunch was good..... I bid farewell to my host and to the old boys, and I was on my way.

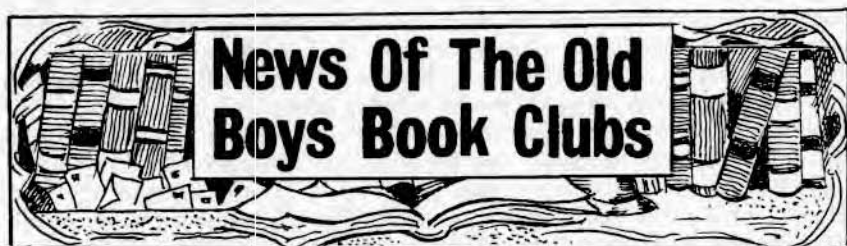
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It was now Christmas Eve.... ten o'clock had just struck. "It's time for bed, dear" said my wife. "You get off" I replied. "I've been away and I have a bit of catching up to do with my reading. I won't be long."

No sooner had the door closed than I went to my personal cupboard. I found a couple of bumper issues of Christmas "Magnets". My eyes lighted up as I began to read. I threw another log on the fire. Soon I was at Wharton Lodge. There I was skating on the lake. Funny..... I have never skated in my life. Snow had begun to fall in the December gloom. Goody, we can have a snow fight tomorrow. The enveloping dusk called us inside. The wind wailed amongst the trees and whistled around the roofs and chimney stacks. I started..... I heard clanging chains and ghost-like, nerve-tingling groans. It was all so eerie and uncanny. I shivered and began to feel cold. A creaking door was opening. I tried to rouse myself. It was my wife. "You must come to bed dear" she said. She glanced at the copies of the fallen "Magnet" lying on the floor and smiled knowingly. "It has started to snow" she said.... "it's almost a blizzard. Can you hear the moaning wind? You must come to bed. Our grandfather clock has just struck twelve."

I pulled myself to my feet. The fire had burnt itself out. "A happy Christmas dear" greeted my wife. I looked down at the "Magnets". I felt pretty certain it was going to be.

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### NORTHERN O.B.B.C. REPORT

On a very inclement autumn evening, twelve members were welcomed to the Club's A.G.M.

All present officials agreed and were individually appointed to stand for a further year. Richard Burgon - one of our youngest members - agreed to take on the responsibility of catering manager.

A lengthy discussion then took place on the Club's future policy and the programme for the forthcoming year for which a number of speakers have been invited. The Club accounts are very healthy, mainly from the sale of the library and a generous

bequest from Peter Plowman. It was agreed that subscriptions be held for a further year.

After refreshments, Geoffrey Good gave us a sermon on "resurrection" - that is, resurrection of THE MAGNET. He showed us some very early copies which had been in a terrible condition and which no collector would consider worthwhile to retain. However, extensive renovation had been done professionally (and at a cost) and we were amazed at the remarkable change. Another of Geoffrey's superb readings followed, this time, from Magnet 1110, the subject being jam tarts. Need more be said?

Our next meeting is on 9th December, our informal Christmas party to which we invite guests. One of the items for our 13th January 1996 meeting will be Mark Caldicott presenting "Researching E.S.B."

Copies of our next year's programme will be available soon and may be obtained from Darrell Swift, 37 Tinshill Lane, Leeds, LS16 6BU.

Our regular venue is S.P.C.K. Cafe at Holy Trinity church, Boar Lane in the centre of Leeds. We are less than five minutes' walk from the main railway station and we use the side entrance adjacent to "C. & A.". Parking available at our venue.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

### **SOUTH-WESTERN CLUB**

Bill Lofts, as usual, was in the chair for the Autumn gathering at 20 Uphill Road, Weston-Super-Mare, on Sunday, September 17th. With him were Leslie Bailey, Una and Brian Hamilton-Wright, E. Grant McPherson, Geoff Lardner, Laurence Price and our host, Tim Salisbury.

Bill opened with a wide-ranging talk which traced the development of children's books and papers from 1659 to the present day. Of particular interest were two copies, from 1832 and 1833, of The Penny magazine for Boys and Girls, the very first children's periodical.

Una then told us of some of the real people, many of them family members, on whose personalities, usually in combination, her uncle modelled some of his most celebrated characters. An interesting theory was that close observation of the family's many cats may well have helped to inspire Bunter's total selfishness.

Mac recalled for us one of his favourite Nelson Lee stories, telling of Handforth's adventures with an Austin 7 given to him by a doting aunt.

Geoff read three of his favourite poems from the Holiday Annual, two of them parodies of Longfellow's "Excelsior" and the third Dick Penfold's will.

Finally, Laurence spoke on Jules Verne, and in particular of some recent translations. Most of us had not been aware that the original translations, mainly by W.H.D. Kingston, were altered and added to in order to make them more politically acceptable in Victorian Britain (Verne was strongly anti-imperialist). In the process much of the quality of the writing, including a good deal of underlying humour, was lost. The new translations, published by the O.U.P. were vastly superior and much truer to his genius.

It had been an unusually wide-ranging meeting and full of interest. The pleasure of the day had been completed, as always, by the generous hospitality of Tim's parents.

The date of the next meeting is yet to be arranged.

GEOFF LARDNER



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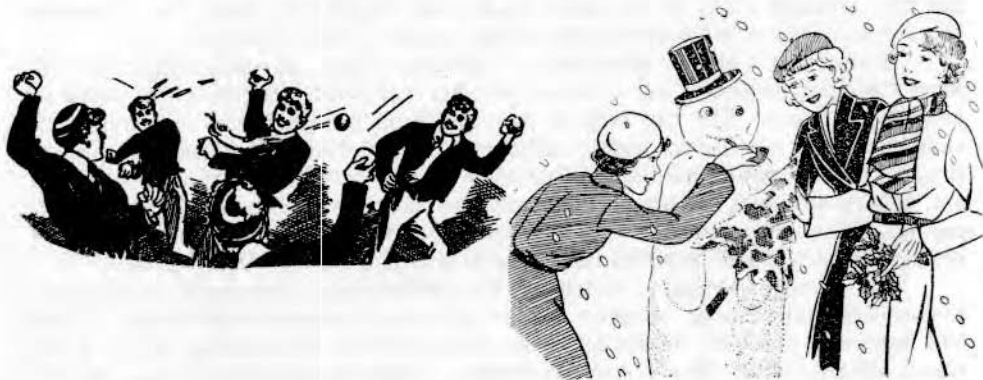
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## THE CHILDREN'S BOOK EXPERT

By Marion Waters (with illustrations by Marilyn White)

During the autumn of 1995 the library department of the West Yorkshire County Council appointed a new official to oversee the juvenile reading material housed on the shelves of the public libraries under their control. The new appointment was not greeted with any great enthusiasm by the existing members of the library staff. The field of juvenile literature appeared to have attracted more than its fair share of cranks during the past thirty years, and the library shelves had witnessed a number of 'purges' intended to remove so-called unsuitable books from the reach of young readers.

The Children's Book Officer was a young woman named Tansor Habbergam, a woman of unkempt appearance and radical opinions. She descended on the libraries and swiftly removed every copy of Biggles, William, Billy Bunter, the Chalet School, the Abbey girls, the works of Enid Blyton, and all the other traditional children's books upon which she could lay her hands.

News of these activities soon reached the ears of the staff in the public library in Sowerby Bridge, a dismal looking town in the heart of the Calder Valley. The official in charge of Sowerby Bridge library was a woman named Heather Eastwood, a tall broad lady with fair hair who had spent her entire working life in the library service since she had left school almost forty years earlier. Heather was a tough, no-nonsense sort of person, who did her best with limited resources, and was generally well respected by both her staff and the library's borrowers. She had never been particularly interested in juvenile literature as a child, but during her service with the library had become increasingly interested in children's books. She was aware that there was a serious lack of good, modern children's books, and that, although many of the earlier books were slightly out-dated, they provided honest entertainment and promoted wholesome values to youthful readers.

Heather was a regular subscriber to 'Collectors Digest', she was acquainted with Mary Cadogan, Bill Lofts and a number of other well known figures in the world of juvenile literature. She had been at pains to build up the library's collection of children's books by visiting jumble sales, auctions and house clearances. Copies of Biggles, William and the various girls' school books had been purchased and put to good use, as well as copies of Howard Baker reprints and bound volumes of the old story-papers. These items were all classed as 'reserve stock': they were kept out of sight of prying officials but were available on request to both juvenile and adult readers.

One Monday morning in November, Tansor Habbergam descended on the public library in Sowerby Bridge. Heather and her staff were forewarned and ready. All the 'old-fashioned' children's books had been removed from their hiding places in the branch libraries under Miss Eastwood's control. Tansor ranged far and wide, but she could find not a single copy of the 'elitist' children's books that she was seeking.



"What do the brats round here read?" she asked of Heather.

"The younger children enjoy 'Flashman' and I believe that some of the older ones like the works of Leo Kessler", replied the librarian. Heather was a most impressive looking woman. She was tall and carefully groomed and her clothes and accessories were -- for a woman of average means --- the finest that money could buy. She could easily have been mistaken for the headmistress of a rather traditional girls' private school, Miss Primrose and Miss Sommerfield would have strongly approved. Tansor detested her on sight.

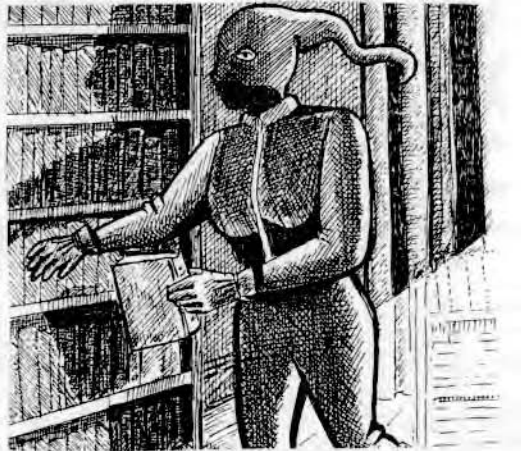
Ms. Habbergam spent several day storming round the library and its branches. She felt sure that Heather maintained a secret store of old-fashioned books, but was unable to find them. In her turn Heather became increasingly curious about Tansor Habbergam. The woman was unmarried, she did not like children and, despite her degree in English literature, her knowledge of books and their authors was limited, to say the least. Heather was amazed to learn that Tansor had never heard of Winifred Holtby and her novel 'South riding'. It appeared too that she had never heard of Charles Hamilton, and was not aware of Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, Dimsie, Worralls, and a host of other popular children's characters. Heather decided that it was time to do a little investigating.

On a dark winter evening she drove her ancient Morris Minor to the vicinity of Ms. Habbergam's home which was a detached house in a very select area. Heather was accompanied by her niece, Helen, who lived with her aunt in the village of Ripponden, near Sowerby Bridge. The librarian knew that Tansor was attending a conference that evening, and that her home would be unoccupied.

Heather and Helen found a sheltered spot at the rear of the house and removed their coats to reveal snug-fitting, black tracksuits which were both practical and comfortable.

Quickly they drew on long black hoods which completely covered their heads except for two slits for their eyes. It was a style of costume that Heather and her friends had worn for secret activity ever since they had been schoolgirls over forty years ago. These outfits provided total concealment as well as keeping the wearers warm on cold winter nights. They also had a rather fearsome aspect, guaranteed to 'put the wind up' any evil doer they might encounter in the course of their adventures.

The two women quietly approached the back of the house. Their dark clothing made them almost invisible in the darkness and their rubber soled footwear enabled them to move without the slightest sound. While Helen kept watch Heather soon gained entry. The librarian moved with great care, not wishing the householder to know that she had had a visitor. Using a shaded torch Heather carefully searched the house. She soon learned that Tansor came from an affluent background, a fact which did not really surprise her. She quickly realized too that the 'book expert' owned an expensive car, took

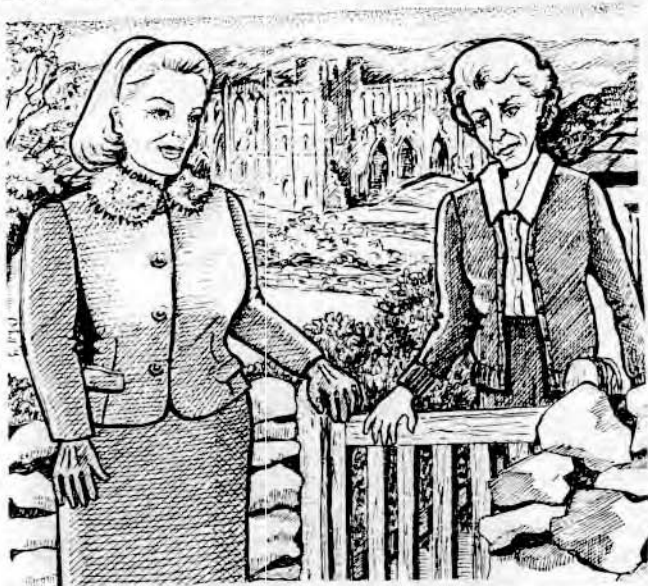


foreign holidays, patronized gourmet restaurants and possessed a wine-cellar that would have done credit to an average pub. Beneath her mask, Heather's face was puzzled: library staff were not well paid, how did Tansor afford all this luxury?

The dark figure then made her way down to the cellar beneath the house. It was a cold, dark place. Heather could feel the icy stone floor through the crepe soles of her long winter boots. The cellar was stacked with children's books, all carefully gathered into collections by author or subject matter. She carefully examined the books, which were obviously library stock, though all traces of their origin had been carefully removed. Long years in the public service had made her cynically alert -- what were the books doing in Tansor's home and what was she planning to do with them? Heather was well aware of the high prices commanded by old children's books: was Tansor planning to sell them for her own gain? A feeling of disgust swept through Heather, who could not abide any form of dishonesty.

Quickly she left the house, carefully removing all traces of her unauthorised visit. In the rear garden she rejoined her niece. The two women hurriedly left the vicinity and when they had reached a safe place they removed their hoods and covered their tracksuits with their coats. Helen's face was grim as Heather related what she had discovered.

From then on, Heather took pains to have Ms. Habbergam followed wherever she went. However, although the librarian was certain that the stolen library books were being sold for private profit, she should uncover no proof of this.



At the beginning of December, Heather travelled to Rievaulx Abbey in the former North Riding of Yorkshire. She was accompanied by Mrs. Whiteley, a friend who enjoyed visiting the abbey ruins which held fond memories of her late husband. While her companion walked round the old abbey, Heather made her way to the village and the cottage of Miss Jenkinson, a retired lady who supplemented her pension by dealing in old girls' books and story-papers. Heather was able to purchase a few copies of the post-war series of the 'Schoolgirls Own Library' for her own collection, together with several old school stories for the library collection. While she was enjoying a large mug of tea, Miss Jenkinson gave her some most interesting news.

"We had a right 'odd bod' here last week trying to sell a large collection of children's books. She looked like a refugee from a junk shop, and I'm sure that the books were ex library stock. I wouldn't touch them", Heather became very interested

indeed. It soon became obvious that the woman in question was Tansor Habbergam, and she was attempting to dispose of the library books for her own profit.

"She may pretend to despise Enid Blyton and Richmal Crompton", said Heather to herself, "but she uses their books to feather her own nest".

Heather continued her observation of the book thief, but without much success. She then received a phone call from Miss Jenkinson, who had access to the dealers' 'grapevine'. It would appear that Tansor Habbergam was selling books to a Mrs. Hinchcliffe, who lived in a small town on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border. Heather had never encountered this dealer, but it was possible that she was acting as an intermediary. The librarian began to lay her own plans.

One evening after dark, Tansor drove to the home of Mrs. Ethel Hinchcliffe, a rather silly, affected and over-dressed woman. She welcomed Tansor and then they began to unload the stolen books from Tansor's car. Suddenly a stern voice said: "Hold it, right there". The two crooks spun round and their blood froze.

A tall figure stood facing them, clad in a snug fitting black tracksuit and a long dark hood which almost totally covered her head, and holding a Walther pistol in her black gloved hand. The two crooks were escorted at pistol point into the house, where the cringing Mrs. Hinchcliffe was made to indicate all the stolen books in her collection. Any hesitation was rewarded by a jab from the pistol (which was only a replica, though the two crooks were unaware of this). Despite her fears Tansor realized that the hooded figure was a woman, a very large person, but female, none the less.

By this time other black clad, hooded women had appeared from the shadows. They proceeded to gather up all the stolen books and load them into their van. It was a lengthy task, and meanwhile Tansor and Mrs. Hinchcliffe had been tightly bound and placed on the floor. Tansor was still defiant. "I know who you are, Heather Eastwood, despite that stupid costume. When I get free, I shall make it really hot for you. The bosses in the library will learn all about your little game".

Heather's eyes gleamed coldly through the slits in her hood. "The library authorities are already aware", she replied quietly. One of the other mystery figures removed her hood, so that her face could clearly be seen. Tansor went very pale when she recognized the stern features of Mrs. Margaret Hilda Fletcher, a county councillor and a member of the library committee. Tansor writhed in her bonds as the older woman, with a look of withering scorn, said, "I am pleased that we have witnessed your dishonesty at first hand. We have recovered a vast number of stolen books, and I'm sure that when Heather's friends search your home they will recover many more. If I do not receive your immediate resignation, I shall ask the chief librarian to institute criminal proceedings for theft".

Meanwhile Heather had skilfully gagged the two cringing women. "A good clean duster", she chuckled. "Much too good for the likes of you."

The van was loaded, then the hooded women climbed aboard. There was scornful laughter as the two helpless crooks were left bound and gagged. Most of the 'hooded helpers' were members of the library staff who had been forced to endure Tansor's rudeness in the past weeks.

Heather rode with Mrs. Fletcher in her car which followed the van. "Well, we've exposed two crooks and recovered a vast number of books", chuckled the lady councillor.

"That should help to ease the burden on the rate-payers", replied Heather. "I must dress up more often", laughed the older woman. "I haven't enjoyed myself so much for years."

*(All characters and events in this story are fictitious.)*

# FORUM

## **NAVIGATING BRADDOCK! - a reply to replies by Donald V. Campbell:**

What a delightful hornet's nest I have stirred up with my temerity in writing about Braddock - airman extraordinaire. But I did say that I loved him - warts and all. Yes, as Colin Morgan suggests, my source for the article was the book "I Flew With Braddock" but I had already read of him in the earlier days of his first incarnation in the Thomson papers. It is my loss then not to have followed him through to his 435th adventure in or close to space.

My perceptions of Braddock in the article were - mainly - as an older reader but I must confess that Braddock's blatant banishments of bully-boys were always treasured by me as a child reader of his exploits. I have to say though that the hero-worshipping of George Bourne got in my way even then. Perhaps I prefer to make my own mind up about heroes and heroines rather than have an intermediary - at least Bunny Manders is suspicious and even dismissive of Raffles at times. Dornford Yates' narrators however have that slithery sycophancy that I believe I can detect in George Bourne.

**FROM RAY HOPKINS:** Referring to Jack Adrian's DO YOU KNOW? article in the October SPCD there is *only one* entry in the British Library Catalogue under WHEELWRIGHT (Jere Hungerford) which is:

The Gray Captain (a novel), 1955. I suppose it's possible this may be the basis for the THRILLER COMICS "The Strong Room". Only a comparison of the two publications could tell. But the title of the earlier Wheelwright TC "Draw Near to Battle" sounds more likely to have a character known as The Gray Captain. Good hunting for someone!

**FROM NORMAN WRIGHT:** I enjoyed Jack Adrian's piece in the October C.D. I have always regarded Pat Nicolle as one of my own favourite strip illustrators and it was good to see that a frame from one of his Robin Hood strips was used to illustrate the review of "Lightning Swords! Smoking Pistols!" in the same issue of *Collectors Digest*. I have known Pat Nicolle for the past fifteen years or so and frequently visited him at his Mill Hill cottage home. Unfortunately he is now not a well man and has recently moved in with his son and daughter-in-law in Leicestershire.

I think Jack Adrian might like to know that *Jack Nicolle* was, in fact, Pat Nicolle's brother. Pat was very proud of his brother's work and a large landscape painting by Jack had a prominent position in Pat's sitting room at Mill Hill. After reading Jack Adrian's piece I spoke to Leonard Matthews regarding the authorship of *The Strong Room*. Leonard assures me that both *The Strong Room* and *Draw Near to Battle* were the work of American writer Jere Wheelright. Both books were published in the U.S.A. and Leonard came across them shortly after the war when looking for possible American titles to publish in this country as paperbacks. The paperback idea never came off but he liked the two Wheelright stories and later used them in *Thriller Comics*.

Keep looking Jack - there must be copies of those two books out there somewhere!!

*(Editor's Note: Sadly, since writing this, Norman Wright has informed me that Pat Nicolle has died. A full obituary will appear soon in the C.D.)*

**FROM RANDY COX:** Since writing my letter about the Cleek stories I have learned that THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, published in the US in 1915 was originally serialised in *Cassell's Saturday Journal* in 1911 as "The Return of the man with 40

Faces; or, Cleek of Scotland Yard" so it is more likely to have been written solely by Hanshew himself with no assistance by his wife or daughter.

**FROM COLIN PARTIS:** Just a few comments on recent C.D.s. Re. FORUM in September, on the subject of Reg Wootton who drew Sporting Sam in the *Sunday Express*, he also drew the character Sporty on the back page of *Knockout* for some years. Sporty looked just like Sporting Sam, but had a tall friend called Sidney who was always getting into trouble. Re. Roy Whiskin's query in the October C.D., I can assure him that the E.S. Brooks who wrote *Historic Boys* is not the E.S.B. of Nelson Lee fame, but a much earlier writer. OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES in the November issue mentioned pork butchers. My Stepmother had three uncles who were pork butchers, and these businesses have been carried on; there are at least four pork butchers in Grimsby to this day that I know of. Finally I am sure that C.D. readers will agree with me that it is a great cheek on the part of the author Michael Crichton to have called his sequel to *Jurassic Park* 'The Lost World!' Hasn't he sufficient intellect to think of a title of his own instead of lifting one from the far superior work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, also on the subject of dinosaurs, without even an acknowledgement.

**FROM LARRY MORLEY:** In his article LONG HEADED LATIMER in the OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES series, Len Hawkey mentions pork dripping which is now practically unobtainable in the London area. This brings back many memoirs of my boyhood days. It was part of our staple diet in the area where I was brought up - the East Midlands; Derbyshire to be exact. I remember going to the local butchers with a basin in my hand. You needed a basin to collect the delicious jelly and gravy. You got a spoon and mixed it into the dripping itself. In those dark, pitiless Derbyshire winters it was a relief indeed to have this: smothered with salt and pepper it was food for the gods.

The late novelist Jack Trevor Story used to motor down to butchers in Cambridge every Friday to get his week's supply. This was in the glory days when he was fairly affluent with his film scripts and TV work, living near Hampstead Heath at the time and driving a Packard Drop Head Coupé (petrol consumption at about ten miles to the gallon). According to his GOOD DRIPPING GUIDE it cost him about £1.50 a pound for the dripping and this was in the 1960s. (All this talk about dripping is making me feel hungry. I will ring up my sister and ask her to bring me a couple of pounds the next time she comes to London!)

\*\*\*\*\*  
**GEMS OF HAMILTONIA From John Geal. No. 20 Mr. Prout  
MAGNET No. 1411**

(Prout goes to Coker's study, looking for an impot that was overdue. Caffyn had laid a booby trap for Coker in the study.)

"His eyes fell on a stack of impot paper on the table. He walked across the study, to look at the stack on the table.

Then it happened! Had Coker walked into that room there was no doubt that he would have walked into Caffyn's cord and taken a tumble before he saw it there. Coker could be absolutely depended on to walk into any trap.

But Prout was even more surely doomed than Coker. Years had added to the experience and wisdom of Mr. Prout. They had also added to his girth.

It was a long time since Prout had seen his knees. Prout's waist was ample. Below his waist, he was constructed rather on the lines of a well-filled balloon.

Whenever Prout stood, he hid quite a considerable portion of the globe he inhabited. Prout, who could not see his knees, could still less see his feet, and still less the cord that stretched taut just in front of his feet.

His majestic roll would have carried him across to the lines on the table, but for the interposition of Caffyn's cord. As it was, Prout's plump ankle caught on that cord. He pitched forward.

In his younger days when, according to what he told the other beaks in the Common-room, Prout had been a great athlete, no doubt Prout would have recovered his balance before he crashed. At the actual moment, however, Prout didn't. Once he started to hurl forward his weight did the rest. Once sixteen stone had lost their gravity, they were not to be trifled with.

Prout crashed!

He gave a startled, horrified, amazed gasp as he went. He had time for only one gasp. Then his plump nose hit Coker's carpet.

Thud! - A novelist would have called it a sickening thud. There was no doubt that it was sickening to Prout.

He gurgled.

The study floor almost shook as he banged on it. His plump hands, his plumper waistcoat, flopped hard. His nose tapped. It was rather a hard tap.

Indeed Prout had cause to be thankful that Aunt Judith had sent her beloved Horace a nice thick carpet for his study. That tap on hard oak would certainly have done more damage.

It did damage enough, as it was. There was a spurt of claret from Prout's nose. He lay and gurgled. His mortar-board fell off, revealing the bald spot which Prout always tried to guard jealously from the public eye."

-----

### Postscript.

I could go on - but with this Gem of Hamiltonia (No. 20) I conclude this series from the Magnet. Any series should not outstay its welcome. I hope the extracts have rekindled a desire of Magnet enthusiasts to delve again into the stories, and helped Non Magnet readers of the Collector's Digest to appreciate something of what we devotees find so endearing about the works of Frank Richards.

I have enjoyed searching out these Magnet pieces and at the same time re-reading whole sections from whence they came, so that compiling the series gave me much pleasure. If only a small part of that pleasure has transferred, through the Collectors Digest, to you the reader, then it was well worth the effort.

J.G.

*(Editor's Note: Far from outstaying its welcome, this Series of 'Gems', begun by Mr. Geal, has proved so popular that other contributors have submitted items to enable it to continue.)*

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Hilda Richards

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