STORY PAPER FEBRUARY 1996

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 50 No. 590

LINES FOR ALONZO

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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Founded in 1941 by
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COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

S.P.C.D. Edited and Published 1959 - January 1987 by Eric Fayne

VOL. 50 **No. 590** **FEBRUARY 1996** **Price £1.20**

YOUR LETTERS

I mentioned in my last editorial that many readers had expressed appreciation of our Annual, and now I would like to thank all of you who have written since then with kind comments on our yearly bumper volume. I am sure that all contributors will join me in feeling pleased that we have once again produced a book of strong appeal. I am also grateful for letters regarding the C.D.'s half century which will be celebrated later this year. Many of your reflections and comments will be published when the great day comes, and meanwhile I look forward to receiving more letters from C.D. readers, whose loyalty and support is truly remarkable. (By the way I still have a few spare copies of the Annual if anyone would like to order one now. The price, including postage, is £9.80 for readers in the U.K. and £11.00 for those living abroad.)

OLD HEROES IN NEW GUISES

Our book and story-paper heroes are constantly being revivified by the media. Opinions may vary on the success of their transpositions from the printed page to radio, stage, screen or recording but we can all take pleasure in

the fact that they are frequently undergoing these processes of re-discovery, and hopefully thus reaching new audiences - who might eventually be guided to the books and papers in which characters such as Bunter, William, Norman Conquest and Sexton Blake have their more natural habitat.

In our December issue we reviewed the latest excellent readings on cassette by Martin Jarvis of Greyfriars and William adventures. In this February C.D. Norman Wright and Roy Whiskin report respectively on Conquest and Blake adaptations by the media.

Happy reading - and listening and viewing!

MARY CADOGAN

* *

REMAINDERS --- AND REWARDS!

by Margery Woods

When did you first meet our beloved chums of Greyfriars? Or William? Or the merry girls of Morcove and Cliff House, and many many others?

Most of us began with a particular story-paper or comic, as I did, and swapped with school chums, often changing our allegiance as often as we changed our taste in most childish things until our tastes began to form and govern much of what we would choose in adulthood. Very often the economics of the home did not allow for a lot of scope in mind-changing or experimentation; a garment, for instance, had to be worn until it had earned the outlay on it, and impulse buys that proved to be bad buys were not encouraged, at least on Tyneside, where the reaction was unlikely to be sympathetic: "You wanted it, so you'll have to wear it/use it/eat it and put up with it," would be the retort to the moaner. But just occasionally fate and fortune produce opportunity that can lay the foundation for the life-long joy to be found in the world of reading.

All was not coal and grime and belching factory chimneys on Tyneside, where I spent my childhood. We had good libraries, albeit tailored to the classical tastes of the teachers and librarians who were just as autocratic in their decisions regarding what was suitable reading matter for children as they are today, although for somewhat differing reasons. Comics and the popular story-papers would be instantly confiscated and suggestions along the lines of something improving, like Shakespeare, would be substituted. But that fate was kind to me!

Only some twelve or so miles away were several of the finest stretches of coastline in the country, with seaside resorts that could hold their own with the best for natural beauty and amenities. Alas, they lacked one thing; they could not be relied on to provide hot sunshine on tap and gentle balmy breezes --- they face the cold, rough unfriendly North Sea. But the Tynesiders were always a tough breed, they'd had to be, and come Race Week, the annual holiday during the last week in June, the junior populace hauled its elders coastwards in search of a day of castle-building, crab hunting, whining for another penny for a go on the shuggy boats, pushing one another into pools, trying to sneak into the concert party afternoon show without paying, perhaps being sick from the seaside diet of ice-cream, fish and chips, rock, pop, baked soused herring hot from the fish shop, oranges and chocolate. All these were well shaken and stirred on the shuggy boat, until the natural outcome occurred but was no source of concern while the wonderful day flashed by and the long exodus up to the station began. This dragged in its wake great stalks of seaweed, and buckets filled with an assortment of unfortunate and decomposing denizens from the shoreline, many of which I'm sad to confess ended up as unwelcome gifts from the seaside for the long-suffering staff of LNER. (They must have dreaded Race Week!) Those

trains, incidentally, were electric, ran on a circular route from Newcastle, were painted and upholstered in pale blue, cream and biscuit, and were a great deal cleaner than those of today, even when they served a predominately working class area which included many slum districts. The stations were all kept as neat as new pins, with flower baskets, attractive flower beds, and bright fresh paintwork. One station in particular, Tynemouth, was a gem of fine wrought iron work in traceries like swathes of lace between slender columns which bore their hanging baskets of flowers, all beneath the high, elegant canopies of glass.

But besides the heritage of Victorian and Edwardian railway architecture, the pierrots, the bright blue sea and all the magic ingredients of the seaside, there awaited another bonus, one which was to introduce me to the hitherto unguessed at treasures of the remainders world.

Remaindered books are a term familiar to all book addicts today, but in childhood I'd never heard of this kind of book-selling, until I discover its possibilities at Whitley Bay during the thirties.

The resort had --- doubtless still has --- a two tier promenade, the top carrying the main coast road with its hotels and tall guest houses, while the lower prom was well organised with a long row of shops, cafés, toilets, a place to collect hot water to make your own tea on the beach, and other useful places for holidaymakers. These included a fascinating shop where they made rock and demonstrated how the letters were put in. Two of those shops became my favourite ports of call, in fact they soon began to outweigh all the other seaside delights on my personal rating scale. The shop at one end was like a newsagent, but no ordinary one. The papers and comics and magazines it sold were all publications of the C. Arthur Pearson Press; the "rival" establishment at the opposite end devoted its stock to that of The Amalgamated Press. Children who purchased a comic or story-paper were rewarded with a lucky bag which contained a novelty and a strip of candy and a back number of a book, while adults treating themselves to *Answers* or *Titbits* or whatever, walked away smiling with a free copy of *The Happy Mag*, or *Wide World*, or something in the romance line. There were so many magazines available at that time to suit all ages.

I soon became addicted and gave up the shuggy boats, ice cream, donkey rides and sweets, conserving every penny of pocket money and savings for collecting all this wonderful reading matter. My father, an avid bookworm himself, was putty in my hands, and usually by the end of the week, when we would perhaps have managed three or four trips to the coast, we had bought virtually

every publication out that week and collected a fine array of magazines. At the A.P. shop I had no problem in wheedling the owner into allowing me to inspect the contents of the lucky bags so that I didn't acquire any duplicates, and here I got my very first collection of *Schoolboys' Own Libraries, Boys' Friend Libraries* and *Sexton Blake*, as well as other tempting items from the adult magazines arrayed in piles along the counter. I still have three of those original *S.O.L.s* of Greyfriars, which led me to start taking the *Magnet*, and I can still remember my incredulity when my mother seized with enthusiasm on a St. Jim's library, which she read with great joy, and I learned that she had adored Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and could reel off all the names of the *Gem* boys.

One summer Dad and I managed to collect the entire year's issue of the *Happy Mag* and the *Sunny Mag*. These brought my introduction to William and the beginning of a life-long love of this endearing character. There were no dull moments when the long dark nights came. Our hoard would be brought out and peace would reign in front of a real fire while the only sound would be that of a rustle of sweet paper or a sudden outburst of mirth, the cause of which then had to be shared.

I never discovered whether these shops held a kind of franchise or whether the firms themselves rented the properties and put a salesman in each. Nor did I ever discover if they were duplicated at other resorts around the country. Did Blackpool, Southend, and other places have them? Sadly, the war brought an end to this joy, as it ended so many of the things which we had, perhaps, taken for granted. I shall always remember those days with great affection. They brought me a wonderful range of papers and books I should never have been able to afford and so might never have known, because the war destroyed their future. But it made me a great customer in years to come of the printed word; most of all, it led eventually to the discovery that I wasn't alone in retaining this special magic that the great authors of our childhood had wrought, and today, all those years on, there are all the readers of C.D. still remembering, and sharing.

(The illustration is used by courtesy of Macmillan and the Thomas Henry Fisher estate.)

* *

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* *

THE DARK CONTINENT

by Reg Hardinge

This epithet was conferred upon Africa from earliest times because until the late 19th century little or nothing was known about its hinterland.

The publication of "King Solomon's Mines" in 1885 by Sir Henry Rider Haggard did something towards drawing the curtain and informing people about this wild, extremely fascinating and beautiful country. Haggard had lived and worked in Natal and the Transvaal, and his novels - 14 in all - dealing with the adventures of Allan Quatermain, Umbopa and others bore the stamp of authenticity.

Edgar Wallace followed suit in 1909 with the first of a series of short stories for the "Weekly Tale-Teller", laid in West Africa and revolving round the administrative work of Commissioner Sanders, aided by Bones (Lt. Augustus Tibbets) and also featuring an African tribal monarch named Bosambo. These stories were subsequently collected and published in a total of 11 novels. It is worth mentioning too that the 1933 film version of "King Kong" was based on a story written by Wallace in collaboration with Merion Cooper, an executive writer for R.K.O. The film was only completed after Wallace's death in 1932.

Edgar Rice Burroughs was the creator of Tarzan, A.K.A. John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, who was reared by apes in the African Jungle. The first of these tales, which ran into 24 novels, appeared in 1912 and was called "Tarzan of the Apes".

The "Union Jack" used West Africa as the setting for a series written by Cecil Goodenough Hayter, and involving Sexton Blake and Tinker in the perils and danger provided by this vast territory. The first of these was "The Slave Market" (UJ No. 171) which was published on 19th January 1907, thus preceding Edgar Wallace's "Sanders of the River" by two years, and so demolishing the assumption by some that the character Sir Richard Losely was based on Sanders.

Sir Richard Losely was the main figure in the new series, and, as his Majesty's Governor of Musardu and the Bambarra Hinterlands, wielded great power and authority over his domain. When the notorious slave trader El Blanco, or the White Death, as he was commonly known, with a raiding party of Arabs overran the small settlement at Musardu, butchering the handful of black troops who resisted them, Sir Richard, badly wounded, was captured and carried off to the slavers' well-fortified stronghold situated in the delta of the Rio de Oro on the Ivory Coast.

The Colonial Office had asked Blake to go to Africa to locate and rescue Sir Richard, and he and Tinker, disguised as natives, and accompanied by Pedro, were soon in the vicinity of the slave camp. Unfortunately though, Tinker was captured and held with Sir Richard in the Slave Compound.

Lobango was a Nubian Prince and Chief of the Etbia, a man of magnificent physique with great shoulder muscles: he had thick hair and carried a bronzed spear. He had been the servant of a white man in the Kaffir people's country. Then he joined El Blanco's Soldiery, witnessed the ill-treatment of Sir Richard at the stronghold and became determined to help him. Lobangu deserted his post as sentry, and carrying a message from

Sir Richard describing his predicament and asking for aid, he made for the Hinterland, eventually encountering Blake and Pedro.

Blake and Lobangu penetrated the Slave Camp and successfully rescue Sir Richard and Tinker. Sir Richard with his big, stalwart form stood a good six foot-four on his bare soles. The great muscles rippled under his skin, and he was cruelly scarred in many places. Blake recalled that when he was a very small, peculiar boy, he was a fag and in trouble at St. Ermin's. Then it was that an upper school chap called Dicky Losely, otherwise "Spots", pulled him through it. Sir Richard remembered that they used to call Blake "Blackamore" then.

C.G. Hayter died in 1922, but the saga of Losely and Lobangu continued to be written for the "Union Jack", first by Stanley Gordon Shaw, then by John W. Wheway, and finally by Rex Hardinge. It is curious that in "The Legion of the Lost" (U.J. 1291) G.H. Teed made a brief reference to Sir Richard Losely.

Blake smiled as his strange visitor addressed Pedro, but he said no word as the two stood eyeing one another. He had great faith in Pedro's judgment, and he wished to see what the animal would do.

The illustrations, quite superb, are the handiwork of Fred Bennett.

* *

DOCTOR MESSINA by Bill Lofts

Doctor Messina was only one of the detective creations of author Alec George Pearson, who poured out hundreds of stories around the turn of the century. Dr. Julian Messina was a world famous scientist nicknamed 'The Prince of Detectives'. There was certainly nothing modest about him for he claimed to be the most wonderful inquiry and scientific expert the world had ever known. He appeared mainly in serials, including 'The Secrets of Paris' in the semi-comic of Jester and Wonder in 1904.

Pearson could be said to be something of a mystery man, as the only personal items about him came from G.R. Samways who told me that he saw him at odd times in Portsmouth (though not known personally) when he was in lodgings and working there. He was also believed to be an ex-naval man, and had probably died by the nineteen-twenties.

Pearson also wrote about Stanley Dare - the boy detective, Royston Gower, Herbert Trackett, Dr. Nevada and Sexton Blake.

* *

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Conquest at the BBC
by Norman Wright

It took the B.B.C. almost sixty years to discover Norman Conquest; but now that he has made his radio debut was it really worth the wait? Some months ago three Saint novels were adapted for Radio 4 as one hour plays and, as can be imagined, such a short length gave little time for character development. It is not, therefore, difficult to imagine the pace at which the plots had to develop when in December two of Brooks' pre-war Norman Conquest novels were turned into plays each lasting only a shade over forty minutes! There was a time when no self respecting radio producer would have dreamt of turning a full length novel into anything less than an hour and a half play, and it was virtually the norm for adventure novels to be turned into serials of six or eight half hour episodes but these days it seems that short is beautiful.

The first Conquest story to be dramatised in the *Thriller Playhouse* series was "Conquest Marches On", first published in 1939 and based on three stories that had appeared in *The Thriller* during 1938. This is one of Brooks' best Conquest stories but it does have a full and complex plot that just could not be adequately tackled in forty two minutes. The result was that only the bare bones of the plot was used and the word breathless hardly describes the speed at which the production moved! To give the adapter his due the 1930s flavour of the original was well captured but as I listened I wondered what listeners who were not familiar with the main characters would make of it.

The role of Norman Conquest was taken by Christopher Cazenove and he certainly put life into the character though one couldn't help feeling that he sounded rather too old for the role. After all, the Conquest of the early books was only in his twenties - Cazenove made him sound well into his forties. Bonnie Langford, on the other hand, made a believable Joy Everard and Richard Davies was just right as Chief Inspector Williams; though the lack of time for plot development and the need to keep the story moving resulted in his character being a little too pliable to Conquest will.

The second dramatised story was "Blonde For Danger", first published in 1943. This was a far better choice for a short dramatisation as a lot of the action takes place while Conquest is driving the Midnight Special, a high powered truck. As with the first story there is plenty of action and the producer seems to have gone all out to recreate a sort of Dick Barton approach with over-emthasised fist fights etc. In fact 'over the top' is a phrase that sums up all the segment in the *Thriller Playhouse* series. Not that I think this is a bad thing and I infinitely prefer it to the drab 'pseudo-reality' sort of plays

that we all too often get these days. Perhaps this series heralds a return to the sort of drama productions that I am sure many of us would love to see return to our radios. If this is the case it is a rather sudden change on the part of the B.B.C. as only two years ago David Ashford and myself adapted a Sexton Blake story into a radio play format and tried a number of radio producers with the idea. Without exception they said that the whole idea was 'too old-fashioned' and smacked of Paul Temple. Perhaps the pendulum has now swung back and the B.B.C. is beginning to realise that there are a substantial number of listeners who enjoy the 'old fashioned' type of thriller play. *Thriller Playhouse* was not an 'in house' production but was produced for the B.B.C. by Mr. Punch Productions. All I can say is more power to their elbows. If the series was a success one can only hope that further adaptations of Brooks' thrillers; both Conquest and Ironsides will follow. If ESB enthusiasts who read *Collectors Digest* were to write to the B.B.C. expressing their enthusiasm for the plays the 'powers that be' may even consider finding a longer time slot for any future plays.

For the record details of the two plays are as follows:
"Conquest Marches On" broadcast at 2pm on Wednesday 13th December 1995.
Norman Conquest.....Christopher Cazenove
Joy Everard.....Bonnie Langford
Chief Inspector Williams.....Richard Davies
Mandeville Livingstone.....Colin Spaul
The Voice..... Jack Klaff
Mary Langford..... Hetty Baynes
Other parts played by Gavin Muir, Steve Hodson and Richard Tate.
Music by Robert Rigby
A Mr. Punch production

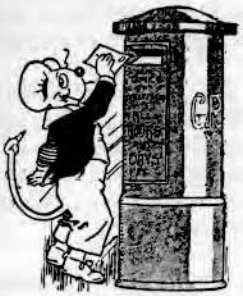
"Blonde For Danger" Broadcast at 2pm on 20th December 1995
Norman Conquest.....Christopher Cazenove
Joy Everard.....Bonnie Langford
Chief Inspector Williams.....Richard Davies
Mandeville Livingstone.....Colin Spaul
JJPace.....Bill Nighy
Other parts played by Alice Arnold, Shaun Prendergast, Anthony Jackson and Ali Hames.
Music by Robert Rigby
A Mr. Punch production.

SEXTON BLAKE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

ROY WHISKIN has sent us information about this 'festive detective mystery for the whole family' by Eileen Ryan which was produced over the Christmas period at Ipswich. I wonder if any C.D. readers managed to see it? (Of course many of us who remember 1940 thought then that only a miracle could save us from the night and murky doings of the Nazis. Now we have a clue about what upset Hitler's apple-cart: it was, of course, Sexton Blake! See extract from programme blurb below.)

> *Orford. 1940. Threat of invasion. Careless talk costs lives.*
> *Sexton Blake, the chisel-jawed hero of a thousand Boy's Own-style action stories, finds wartime Orford buzzing with secrets. Mysterious lights are seen on the island. Clandestine meetings are held in the castle. Something is definitely amiss. Something which needs brilliant detective skills.*
> *Will our dashing hero get to the bottom of this decidedly fishy plot? Can the villagers of Orford help Sexton find the recipe for success? There's only one way to find out...*

* *



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From GERALD FISHMAN (U.S.A.): I do not normally contribute much, if anything, to *Collectors' Digest*, although I used to. However, I would just like to take this opportunity to say thanks to all the fellow subscribers for their contributions to the C.D. without which we would indeed spend a long and tiresome year. In so doing, may I take the privilege of wishing Mr. Eric Fayne all the best, and to his successor, Mary Cadogan, what can I say? Words would not do justice to your enthusiasm, integrity and devotion to the 'faithful' such as me. God bless you, and keep you and yours.
(Editor's comment: How tremendously kind is Mr. Fishman. I cannot live up to his praise but to him and so many other supportive readers I feel warm gratitude for such appreciation.)

From TONY GLYNN: Did you see the "Guardian" obituary on the illustrator, Rene Cloke, only a few days ago? I seem to have been encountering her work all my life - in fact, that was certainly the case for she died at 90 and was working before I was born.

A quiet and shy lady, it seems, she never married, never ventured far from the London home she shared with her brother and sister and was at her most contented when producing her children's illustrations. It restores my faith in human nature to know there are still some such peaceful souls, happily rejoicing in their gifts, in the midst of today's horrors.

A Rene Cloke illustration for Alice in Wonderland

From Arthur F.G. EDWARDS: Donald V. Campbell (p. 3, No. 589), drew attention to connections between the Children's Hour and books and, although the Toytown of S.G. Hulme Beaman was the only feature covered in detail, he drew attention to others and a number of personalities. I suggest that there was one major omission, although I must put on record that I am remembering broadcasts of the early 1930s when I first listened to Children's Hour. This from 1931 when we acquired our first valve wireless (a Lissen Skyscraper 3), a crystal set having long been discarded.

A series (the episodes of which I looked forward to as much as Toytown) was based on the historical stories of L. du Garde Peach. I am sure they were published in book form but I cannot remember the titles. They ran for several years and I seem to remember that Richard Goulden played the main characters.

I have a strong recollection that when I first 'listened in' there was a third favourite feature. This covered the adventures of a character named 'Pamona' (that might not be the right spelling but was how it came across). This one did not run anything like as long as Toytown or the historical one, and all I can remember about it is the name... I have no idea whether or not any of the Pamona stories were published in book form. Has any club member a better memory of the Children's Hour of those early years than me?

From DAVID BALL: I liked the item by Horace Dilley called *Never Go Back*, and I think there is something to be said for not returning to our old schools. I remember mine, St. Mary Redcliffe Endowed Boys' School (non-fee paying), which I left in 1937, as a marvellous seat of learning with the emphasis on literature and the classics. The teacher would, for instance, read *Oliver Twist* to us from cover to cover and explain in detail the phraseology of Victorian times. All this perhaps explains why I enjoy reading the stories of school life in the *Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee*, etc. You can picture us as schoolboys learning the poem 'Cargoes' and then walking during our lunch break down around the docks where stevedores were busy loading and discharging their cargoes. One didn't need much imagination when one read on the side of the ship its name and foreign origins. The world was much more settled when I was at school, and truancy was almost unknown as the school attendance officer would come in to check the register. When my brother and I (the two youngest of eight) both had chicken-pox and were confined to bed in the attic we discovered a number of *Magnet's* and *Modern Boys*. What a find!

From CLARICE HARDING: Thanks to all concerned for the lovely Annual which I enjoyed very much. I always look forward to a Margery Woods story and her 'Jemima Solves a Christmas Mystery' was her usual treat. I also had lots of enjoyment from Dennis Bird's 'A Study in Contrasts' and in seeing again Tommy Twinkle from *Playbox*!

From MARK TAHA: I write this after reading the Annual on Christmas Day - as usual! With reference to Les Rowley's comment on page 4, I've never heard of a Courtfield Grammar School: surely Les means Courtfield County Council School? Nor did I believe that Highcliffe was actually in Courtfield. I agree with Roger Jenkins (page 22), Ratty would certainly not have forgiven or forgotten... On the contrary he'd have got his own back as soon as he could - and an unscrupulous or spiteful master can always find an excuse. Also I found Dr. Chisholm a far more convincing Head than the 'too good to be true' calm and serene Drs. Locke and Holmes. A man in authority being quick-tempered, stubborn and pig-headed is all too realistic!

From RAY HOPKINS: A few lines to show my appreciation for the delightful read you provided us with over the Christmas Hols with the CD Annual.

I was most amused by the revenge on the Library Dictator in Marion Waters' story in the Dec SPCD. Wouldn't we all have been pleased to pass out rough treatment to those who, in years past, have done such stupid things to the children's library book shelves.

I was fascinated by the article on Grey Owl, an author I have never come across on second hand bookshelves. An incredible manufactured life for someone who started life in Hastings and became a Red Indian, as they were called in my youth. It amused me, too, to remember the time I became a member of the Pottowatamee tribe temporarily, a name I suspect not to exist in reality which I borrowed from the 1940 Rodgers and Hart film "Too

Many Girls" (I see Hart spelled it Potawotamie, or so I have it in my notes). While in the Newnited States Navy I seemed to come across an inordinate number of shipmates who proudly proclaimed themselves to be "Part Indian". I received some incredulous stares when I too, riposted with "I am, too!" So I had to make up a story to answer the inevitable questions that followed: My grandfather had come over to England with Buffalo Bill's Rodeo Company and stayed and that's how I was a quarter Potawotamie. I got a chuckle out of it at the time and it was pointed out to me that yes, indeed, you DO have an Indian nose and it sure is Red, to which my reply was, "You do all the drinking and I get the red nose!" The comical wisecrack was very popular in those days. I'm glad I lived through them.

Les Rowley's Memoir was, as always, a joy to read and my push into "stories to read" as they are called nowadays was very similar to Les's with Pip, Squeak and Wilfred in Dad's Daily Mirror (he'd have a fit could he see how his sober 20's paper has transformed itself into a 1990's version of the 1890's US Police Gazette), through FAIRYLAND TALES and THE SUNBEAM to eventually plonk me down in the middle of St. Jim's where I've remained ever since...

I, too, was an enthusiastic Meccano engineer in short trousers but always regretted not being able to build some of the majestic items in the Manual because my red and green holed pieces wouldn't stretch that far. In KwikSave earlier his week I observed with a chuckle a small boy rummaging through a bin of UGLY (yes) plastic figurines of Sci-Fi characters (left-overs) and waving one at his mother saying, "Buy this one for me, Mum. I promise I'll be good." I don't remember ever saying anything like this to my Dad. Possibly he had me trained that I was GOOD as a matter of course and I know he never refused me a new Penny Exercise Book when I needed one to write in, for even in those days I was a "budding author". In fact, I still am, but guess I shall have to wait until my "next life" to attack this ambition more seriously. I burned all those old exercise books (I was surprised to find how many there were - wherever did I find the time?) when I was doing a turnout of childish things in the 1930s. I often wonder how they would read now.

Derek Hinrich's article on one of the lesser characters (in the Sherlock Holmes stories) was of interest. Neither he, nor his creator portrays him as a "buffoon" in which persona he often appears in the many filmed versions of the Doyle stories, where he is often used as "comic relief" and as a sounding board for wisecracks by the great detective. Come to think of it, dear old Dr. Watson is often portrayed in that insulting fashion, one has only to think of Nigel Bruce humphing and pumphing away through the non-Doyle dialogue in the Rathbone series. But one can't resist just having "one more look" at them for other remembered jewels that turn up in them.

Margery Woods ruined (temporarily) my reading of her latest Jemima adventure by quoting as her first line that carol to which the girls of Beckenham High had added the second line "Old Mother Simpson's pinched our King!" I laugh out loud every time I think of this, reported by a graduate, now grown up, at an OBBC meeting. One is grateful for these little bits of knowledge that cause an inevitable lightening of the heart when encountered.

(Editor's Note: Ray is of course referring to me when he mentions the Edward/Mrs. Simpson jingle. I still haven't found anyone who remembers more than the first two lines of that 'revised' version of the carol.)

THAT SAILOR/DETECTIVE MYSTERY

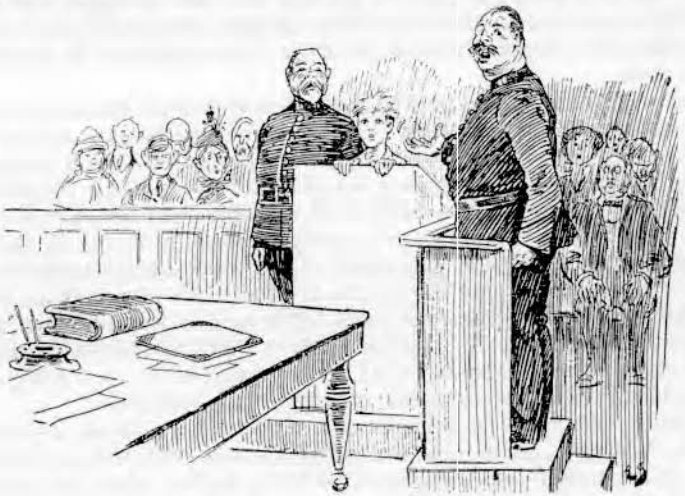
Reg Hardinge has now provided us with the explanation (as given by the Editor of *Butterfly* on 15.7.1939) of how the mystery mentioned last month was solved:

Now, then, you budding young detectives, did you guess what it was that caused Detective Tom Main to suspect Harrap?

Well, this is how Harrap gave himself away.

"I knew you were lying when you said you had been out on deck," Tom told him, "because it was raining hard, and you were quite dry. If you had looked out of your cabin porthole, like I did, you would have seen that it was raining!"

Reg comments: "I am doubtful whether the illustrator for The Sailor Detective was Leonard Shields. I think, perhaps it is the work of Ernest Ibbetson, but I am open to correction. I enclose an example of his work from the 1921 Holiday Annual which, when compared with the Butterfly illustration shows a striking similarity in style."



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IVAN WEBSTER

An appreciation by Chris Brettell

Ivan Webster, who died suddenly on December 12th at the age of 79, was one of the stalwarts of the hobby. For many years he served as treasurer of the Midland Club. An easy job in the years of plenty, he never failed to reach into his own pocket to keep the Club afloat in the recent lean years.

He loved the works of Frank Richards and his enthusiasm knew no bounds. He willingly shared his time, his knowledge and use of his collection with those who expressed an interest. It was through Ivan that my own participation in the Midland Club came about. I saw him on a regional evening news programme and, some time later, told him of my own interest. Before I knew it I was invited to borrow anything I wanted, taken along to the club Christmas party, introduced to the Collectors' Digest and the rest is history.

He was a lovely, warm, generous and gentle man. Deeply religious, he worked tirelessly for the local Methodist Church he attended all his life. He had a wicked sense of humour and a never ending stream of bad jokes. Truly, despite his years, he remained a

schoolboy at heart. No wonder he read The Magnet every night in bed and was rediscovering William with great vigour in the last few months. He will be greatly missed.

Geoff Lardner adds:

You may remember Ivan from your visits to the Midland Club, of which he had been Treasurer for more than twenty years. He was white haired, very hard of hearing and walked arthritically. He was also one of the great enthusiasts for the hobby.

He was into the Army very early in the war and, until its demise, had his copy of the Magnet sent to him every week. He was not quite a founder member of the Midland Club, but was in it soon after its formation in the 1950s. He was very nearly the last of the really long standing members; one other is, as far as I know, still alive.

He was directly responsible for my joining the club. Although I had discovered the Howard Baker reprints, I was totally unaware of the existence of Old Boys' Book Clubs until, one evening in February, 1974, there appeared on "Midlands Today", the BBC 1 regional news programme, a chap wearing a school cap and displaying a copy of the Magnet. It was Ivan, being interviewed as a result of an article on the hobby he had written in the local press. The minute he finished I was on the phone to the studio and spoke to him there and then. I found that he lived about two miles from me, bordering the playing field of the Grammar School I was about to take over and convert into a Sixth Form College. (Just up the road from the Library in which we held our meetings.)

We became firm friends. Like so many followers of the hobby, he was a kindly, totally decent man, who will be sadly missed.

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HAMILTON'S 'GUINEA PIGS' by Peter Mahony

Part Two: The New Firm

At St. Jim's, the theme received a different treatment. Though the Saints had their share of cads, snobs and bullies, the College ethos was a good deal better than that of the Greyfriars Remove. Dr. Holmes ran a stricter regime than the dreamier Dr. Locke and the grosser displays of bad behaviour were stepped on - hard! The masters and prefects were much more effective than those at Greyfriars (where Quelch and Wingate were almost alone in applying firm discipline). Additionally, Tom Merry and George Figgins kept a tight grip on the 'bad lads' in their respective houses. Public opinion among St. Jim's juniors was usually a more effective deterrent against excessive ragging than it was in the Greyfriars Remove.

It was into this well-regulated, tolerant environment that Hamilton introduced not one but three scholarship boys. Dick Redfern, Leslie Owen and Edgar Lawrence were County Council Schoolboys, admitted to St. Jim's on scholarships (1912). All three were confident and capable - particularly Redfern. They were enrolled in the New House - much to the disgust of Horace Ratcliff. Instead of enduring humiliation at the hands of their school fellows, Redfern & Co. had to put up with petty persecution from 'Ratty' - a typical Hamilton variation.

Redfern was of a different calibre from Linley and Penfold. He was quite ready to defy Ratcliff - in a later yarn, when Ratty put the New House on 'short commons' to enforce discipline, Redfern led the hungry Fourth Formers to Rylcombe, hosted a much-needed 'blow-out', and had the bill sent to Mr. Ratcliff!

This flair for leadership brought Redfern into early conflict with Figgins, the great chief of the New House juniors. A stand-up fight of Homeric quality was gradually going

Redfern's way when the prefects stopped it. The rivalry from then onwards was keen, but scrupulously fair on both sides. The New Firm had quickly established themselves as *bona fide* Saints.

Almost the only display of prejudice against them involved the school games. Tom Merry & Co. loftily assumed that Council School products could not play 'real cricket'. (This is not an uncommon assumption among the 'better' schools. I can recall an occasion when my own school - a South London Grammar - took on a local Boys' Club. The club, all poor working-class lads who could not afford 'whites', inflicted an innings defeat on the school. This chastening of my cocky schoolmates afforded me great amusement - especially as they had ignored my warnings about the quality of the Club's players!) Anyway, Redfern & Co. asked for a trial in the St. Jim's XI and were refused it - with a great deal of condescension. Of course, they wangled their way into the side, but then deliberately performed ineptly at practice so that Tom Merry & Co. suffered agonies anticipating a colossal defeat. Redfern then took a century off Gordon Gay & Co. ('coals of fire' for his untrusting team-mates), and from that time onwards became a regular stalwart of the Junior XIs.

The New Firm's one real experience of schoolboy snobbery - apart from some fatuous insults from Baggy Trimble - was at the hands of Ralph Reckness Cardew. New to St. Jim's, Cardew splashed out on a 'house-warming' in Study No. 9, where he was taking up residence with Sidney Clive and the reformed Ernest Levison. Levison invited Redfern & Co., along with a host of others, Cardew impudently queried their presence, making it clear that the New Firm were unworthy of his exalted acquaintance. At Greyfriars he would have found plenty of toadying support. At St. Jim's, he was virtually ostracised. Redfern & Co. walked out of the feast; so did everybody else. Cardew made amends later, but the episode showed how completely St. Jim's had accepted and valued their scholarship boys. Full marks to Tom Merry & Co!

ROOKWOOD'S ROUGH DIAMOND

In March 1916, Hamilton introduced his last important scholarship boy. Tom Rawson was clever, burly and as tough as nails. He was billeted in Study No. 5 of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood with two arrant snobs, Cecil Townsend and Harold Topham. Horrified that the new boy was the son of a jobbing carpenter, Towny and Toppy set out to make life difficult for him. Unfortunately for them, Rawson turned out to be the reverse of sensitive and diffident. Although he suffered some early ragging when the 'Giddy Goats' attacked him in numbers, Rawson soon showed that he was capable of looking after himself. The raggers destroyed his school books. Linley, in a similar situation, was thoroughly miserable. Not Rawson! He calmly impounded Townsend's and Topham's text books and proposed to keep them until they bought replacements for him. When the precious pair objected, he knocked their heads together!

From that point onwards, Townsend and Topham were on the run. Rawson, impervious to their petty insults, stopped them from smoking in the study and chucked them out when they persisted in interrupting his swotting. Poor Topham seriously considered asking his parents to take him away from Rookwood - a subtle reversal of the Linley/Skinner clash at Greyfriars!

Rawson, of course, was basically decent, even though a bit rough and ready. Jimmy Silver & Co. befriended him and he quickly became a pillar of the school teams. A very dependable goal-keeper and a distinctly useful all-rounder at cricket, Rawson made quite a difference to the rather light-weight Rookwood XIs. Like Redfern at St. Jim's, he was confident and competent, though he lacked 'Reddy's' flair for leadership.

Most of the time, Rawson was quiet and studious. He had money worries: on a famous occasion Jimmy Silver deliberately made a mess of an examination for a £30 prize

so that Rawson could win it. Withdrawing from the exam would have been too obvious; Jimmy preserved Rawson's pride by scoring less marks. Rawson may have suspected, but honour was satisfied.

Rawson's drastic treatment of his study-mates remained a feature of the Rookwood saga. He routed Adolphus Smythe and a whole gang of 'Giddy Goats' by wielding a dangerous poker. If Townsend and Topham got on his nerves, he would lock them out of the study. When they demanded that he should change to other quarters, they were tersely told to 'charge out yourselves'. This forthright attitude offended their delicate sensitivities and the 'nutty' pair found themselves treading very carefully in the presence of their formidable study-mate. Role reversal with a vengeance!

Thus did Hamilton run the full gamut of the 'working-class verses gentry' theme. The crowning embarrassment for Townsend was the discovery that his father, Major Townsend, had fought in the Great War with Private Rawson, Tom's brother, under his command. Major Townsend met the Rawsons' father at a Rookwood visitors' Day and they got on famously. Poor Cecil! It really did seem that he and Topham were made to suffer by Hamilton in atonement for Bulstrode & Co.'s persecution of Mark Linley. Rawson's treatment of the hapless pair became more and more drastic until it bordered on bullying. No one had any sympathy for Towny and Toppy, but their comfortable existence at Rookwood had gone, never to return.

DAUBENY'S DUPE

Hamilton had one final variation up his sleeve. In his St. Winifred's stories (Greyfriars Herald, 1919-20), Jack Drake's fallen fortunes required him to capture the Founder's Scholarship. His chief rival was Frank Estcourt, a hard-up student, whose need was as great as Drake's. Estcourt, less clever than Drake, tried to bridge the gap by extra study. He overdid it and went stale.

Enter Vernon Daubeny (a villain in the Cecil Ponsonby mode). 'Daub' detested Drake. He went to work on Estcourt's fears and persuaded the boy to slip Drake a "Micky Finn" on the morning of the exam. Daubeny provided the drug; Estcourt would have the opportunity.

After a desperate struggle with his conscience, Estcourt threw the drug in the river - and came second to Drake in the exam. One's sympathies were all with Estcourt; Drake really was a bit of a feckless waster at this time. The school broke up for Christmas: Estcourt left, with his scholastic career in ruins. Drake arrived home to find that his father had recovered the family's financial position. His conscience had been troubling him about Estcourt: he persuaded his father to let him resign the scholarship in Estcourt's favour.

This was the breakthrough for Drake. Selfish, indolent behaviour had been replaced by a sense of purpose. He returned to St. Winifred's and soon ousted the rascally Daubeny from the Junior captaincy. The self-reliant Drake, who later became Ferrers Locke's assistant, had emerged through adversity and hardship.

So, there they are, Hamilton's working-class scholars. All of them were conscientious students; most of them could anticipate professional careers. Linley may well have become a doctor: Redfern had his eyes set on journalism. Owen and Lawrence could have gone for accountancy or, perhaps, the law. Penfold may have settled for photography, setting up business in Courtfield. Rawson could have trained for teaching - I could imagine him dispensing tough discipline in a London elementary school. All of them enhanced Hamilton's stories because each had different qualities to display.

Two final thoughts about Dick Redfern.

1) Why did Hamilton not relate him to Barbara of Cliff House? Both were excellently strong characters, similar enough to be brother and sister. First cousins, at least, with Barbara's parents being the wealthy side of the family.

2) What price Redfern as a professional sportsman? As a batsman, he was in the Tom Merry/Talbot class - surely a potential county cricketer, and without any inhibitions about being paid to play. He could also have proved a solid half-back in a First Division side - Andy Ducat of Surrey and Aston Villa springs to mind.

What do readers think? Letters to the Editor, please.

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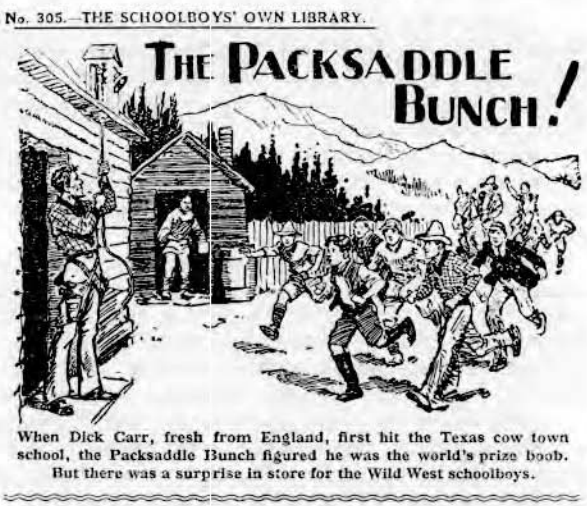
ROLL ON THURSDAY!

by Bill Bradford

As a lad, in the 1930s, my sole hobby and main preoccupation was with boy's papers, books and similar publications. Of these, my greatest interest was in the monthly libraries. At this time almost all those published by the Amalgamated Press were available on the first Thursday of each month at 4 pence each and, by then, each consisted of 96 pages.

The SCHOOLBOYS OWN LIBRARY, which comprised 411 issues between 1925-1940, increased from 2 to 3 monthly issues from October 1936 and ranged between stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and St. Frank's. On a much smaller scale we also encountered Grimslade, Packsaddle, Cedar Creek and High Coombe, plus stories by Michael Poole and Geo. E. Rochester. For several years I purchased every S.O.L. on publication. I must admit that then, if available, I read the St. Frank's story first, probably because my preference was for thrills and adventure yarns, in which E.S. Brooks excelled.



When Dick Carr, fresh from England, first hit the Texas cow town school, the Packsaddle Bunch figured he was the world's prize boob. But there was a surprise in store for the Wild West schoolboys.

The BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY (2nd Series) produced 724 issues between 1925-1940, at the rate of 4 titles per month. Like the S.O.L.'s, these were mainly reprints from earlier A.P. papers, but the time lag was such that I never recalled reading the story before. There was a wonderful selection of authors and the attractive covers were designed for mugs like me. I always bought stories of the Rio Kid, Ken King and Captain Justice, plus historical and flying tales. In the mid 1930's I had only just discovered the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY (2nd Series) which yielded 744 issues between 1925-1940, also with 4 per month. Not being familiar with the authors, I fear that I was greatly influenced by the striking and descriptive covers. What a lot Eric Parker had to answer for!

My newsagents were a Mrs. Badger and her son Jack. Now, after nearly 60 years, I can still recall their welcoming smiles. On a shelf in front of the counter there would be a stack of back numbers from all these monthly Libraries, which I regularly thumbed through in case I had missed anything. If you waited long enough these were usually reduced to 2 pence. As examples of these 3 Libraries, here are the titles which appeared on 6th June 1935:

SOL No 245	DOWN WITH THE TYRANT	The Brander rebellion at Greyfriars	
	246 THE SECRET OF LONE PINE	Tom Merry & Co. in British Columbia	
BFL No 481	THE MILLION DOLLAR ISLAND	Ken King of the Islands	by Charles Hamilton
	482 THE MYSTERY MAN OF MAYFAIR	A Gentleman Cracksman	by Warder Lynk
	483 THE SUN CHIEF	Redskins at War	by John Brearley
	484 SHIPWRECK KELLY	Adventures in New Guinea	by Arthur S. Hardy
SBL No 481	THE COTTAGE OF TERROR	Mystery in the Countryside	by Donald Stuart
	482 CASE OF THE MISSING SHIPS	An Ocean Conspiracy	by Stanton Hope
	483 SECRET OF THE GOLDEN LOCKEY	Granite Grant and Mlle Julie	by Pierre Quiroule
	484 THE BOOKMAKERS CRIME	Foul play at the Derby	by A.S. Hardy

At the same time, A.P. were publishing the CHAMPION LIBRARY, only 2 per month and mainly reprints from the weekly Champion or Triumph. Also 4 pence but only 64 pages. Rarely did I buy a copy as there were too many sporting stories and it seemed poor value against the 96 page Libraries.

There were other A.P. Libraries but of these I only recall the SCHOOLGIRLS OWN. Although never purchasing it, I was known to read copies belonging to my pal's sister.

I also had a spell of reading the DIXON HAWKE LIBRARY, only obtainable at a small back-street newsagent. Published by D.C. Thomson at 4 pence, between 1919-1941 (576 issues) these began with 100 pages, then 120. From August 1935 this contained 160 pages, with 2 complete stories in each. Publishing dates were erratic and unreliable. Generally 2 issues a fortnight but reduced to only 1 towards the end.

You are probably wondering how I could afford all these purchases at a time when the average pocket money was about a shilling (12 old pence) a week? Well, alas, my parents were separated and each gave me half a crown (30 pence) weekly. Guilty consciences?? As I never cared much for sweets all available cash went to newsagents. From memory, I averaged some 7 library issues each month plus 4 weekly papers, then costing 2 pence each. Any unexpected cash went the same way and by 1939 I had a goodly collection, but, like so many others, I returned from the services in 1945 to find most had gone for wartime salvage. The few survivors are amongst my most treasured possessions, today.

Many of you 'youngsters' will have read and enjoyed some of these Libraries in more recent days, but you will never know the thrill and delight of acquiring them on publication, at a time before T.V. and with little provision for us on the radio. Conkers, marbles or Yo-Yo's were not a 'big deal'. Can you doubt how important and exciting was the first Thursday in the month!

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CHARLES HAMILTON GOES WEST

by Alan Pratt

Well, dear readers, I have finally done it!

I wavered, I hesitated, I started it (several times) screwed up the paper and threw it away. I didn't want to offend nor did I wish to appear uncharitable to Una Hamilton-Wright who kindly allowed her uncle's letters to appear in SPCD. On top of that I realise that, in terms of SPCD readers at least, I must be in a tiny, tiny minority.

But --- I just can't let Charles Hamilton's comments on westerns (SPCD 585) go unchallenged any longer.

Please allow me however to make one thing clear at the outset. I love Hamilton's school stories and, in that field, I consider him to be second to none. He wrote with great panache and style. The pages of The Magnet, The Gem *et al* were a rich source of adventure (comic and dramatic) and he created wonderful, immortal characters. But then, we all know that already: I am, as they say, preaching to the converted. It is about his westerns that I want to comment.

You see, I've been a cowboy enthusiast for as long as I can remember and, when you read steadily over a longish period you tend to sort the wheat from the chaff as it were. There were great western writers and good ones. There were also a good many "utility" writes who handled the genre competently. In my humble opinion Charles Hamilton did not fall into any of these categories because his western yarns rank with some of the poorest I have read. They are generally dull, slow and unbelievable: they also contain large dollops of some of the most atrocious western "dialect" ever to hit the printed page.

So why all this vitriol and vituperation? Well, to be honest, I would have kept my opinion to myself had it not been for the Old Master's cavalier dismissal of westerns as something of little consequence, to be churned out without any real concentration or effort and dumped upon a (supposedly) undemanding readership.

Just look at what he says! In the letter to his sister he asks why anyone should conduct a tram for a living when he could be a best selling western author. Indeed so dismissive is he of the entire genre that one can only believe that he had no liking for or understanding of what it was all about. He cites the many "bloods" available as a source of reference for would be writers yet puts together a hackneyed plot line presumably to show how little is actually required. This, in itself, is paradoxical because those same "bloods", whilst not to be considered great literature, were frequently both exciting and atmospheric. qualities sadly lacking in the turgid tales of the Rio Kid.

Then there is that little glossary of western terms. Hamilton pointed out that the use of such "lingo" was quite safe in that it did not have any lasting effects. It would have been better, perhaps, if he had not included it at all as many of the terms were obvious in their meaning whilst others were either unlikely or, in some cases, downright wrong. A "critter", he says, is a horse. Well yes but since "critter" is a derivation of the word creature it can equally be applied to any living thing including, of course, man himself. A "cinch", we are told, is a bargain. Not so. A cinch is a saddle girth but it is also an expression used to mean something easy to achieve as in "with Black Jake's map, it'll be a cinch to find the lost gold mine!" I can only assume he confused cinch with clinch as in "to clinch a bargain". I could go on.

Your editor recently asked me what I so disliked about the Rio Kid stories. On prolonged reflection I think I most dislike their "English-ness". And before you grab for paper and pen I am not saying there is anything wrong with being English, merely that the Hamilton stories are so obviously unauthentic. One of my favourite western writers, Oliver Strange, apparently wrote his full-blooded and lively Sudden adventures whilst munching cucumber sandwiches on his lawn at Twickenham. It can be done! There were also a fair number of competent British western writers working on the old boys' papers.

In conclusion, let me re-emphasise that I shall be a fan of the Great Man's school stories until the end of my days but I could not in all conscience recommend the Rio Kid Yarns to anyone except, perhaps, as a potential cure for insomnia.

Charles Hamilton said he could write westerns in his sleep. Perhaps, after all, this is not so far from the truth!

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FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON TOD SLAUGHTER

by J. Ashley

Reading Larry Morley's article on Tod Slaughter in the Christmas Annual evoked a few memories.

In the mid to late nineteen twenties, Tod Slaughter was the resident Actor Manager at the Hammersmith Palace Theatre, King Street, W.6. Here he staged *Maria Marten, It's Never Too Late To Mend, Under Two Flags, The Face at the Window* and of course *Sweeney Todd The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.*

I went with my Mother and Father to a late performance of Sweeney Todd. In those days Tod Slaughter played the dashing naval hero and Lew Lake the comic relief while Bob Morris was the Demon Barber.

The Second Act opened with the stage bisected horizontally. The upper part towards the flies depicted the barbers shop complete with revolving chair. The lower scene was of the cellars and Mrs. Lovett's oven.

A customer entered the shop, was placed in the chair, where Sweeney duly 'polished him off'. Sweeney then pulled the lever, and chair and victim revolved for the victim to be ejected. But this time he was trapped by his leg and suspended in mid air. Bob Morris frantically 'ad libbed', pulled the lever, hit the chair but all to no avail. Eventually the 'Corpse' passed a comment and the curtains were hurriedly closed.

Tod Slaughter came out in front of the curtains and apologised for the technical hitch. He told a few stories and gave a monologue. He was followed by Lew Lake, a very good song and dance man, who went into his routine. This was followed by Tod Slaughter and eventually the show was recommenced.

I know we left the theatre nearly an hour late and I remember my Mother commenting on keeping me out so late at night. I, of course, thought it was great. My Father was acquainted with Tod Slaughter and when the Palace closed (to-reopen as a Talkie Cinema) the Props Manager gave me a scimitar and a cutlass as souvenirs of the Palace Theatre.

During the Second World War whilst I was serving in the Army my Father gave them to salvage, together with my old boys' books. Both swords and books were irreplaceable.

I have indeed fond memories of Tod Slaughter.

* *

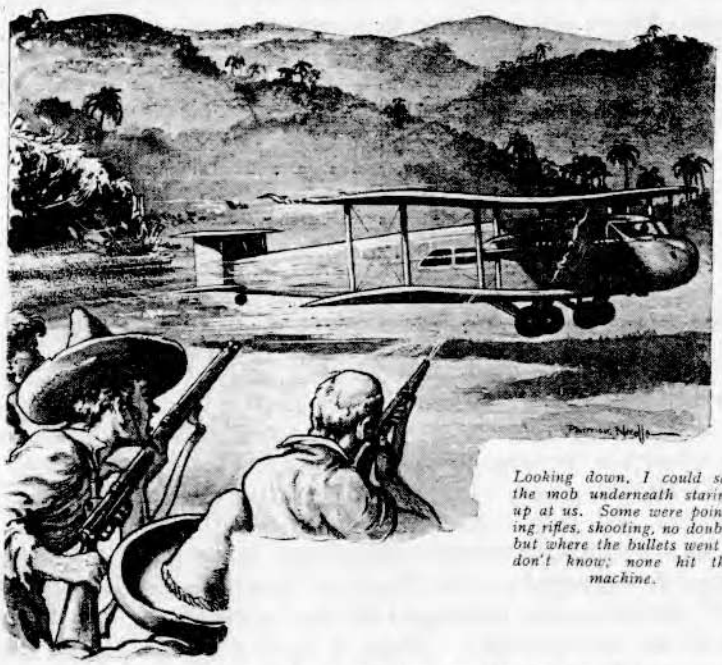
Patrick Nicolle 1907 to 1995
An appreciation by Norman Wright
Part One: The Early Years

I first met Pat Nicolle in the mid 1970s when David Ashford and I visited his Mill Hill home. At the time Pat was drawing for *Look and Learn* but his work had been familiar to me since my boyhood in the mid 1950s when I had revelled in his Robin Hood strips in *Sun* and later in *Thriller Comics Library*, and the adventures of "Ginger Tom" in *Knockout*. He was the first artist whose work I could instantly recognise and it was quite early on that I learnt his name. This came about when I discovered one of the Puffin Picture books, entitled "A Book of Armour", in the class library at school. I studied the book and compared its illustrations with the Robin Hood strips from *Thriller Comics Library* and decided that the same hand was responsible for both. This fact was confirmed soon afterwards when I was given a copy of "The Pictorial History Book" as a birthday present and found inside illustrations signed by Pat Nicolle. There was no mistaking the style; my favourite Robin Hood strips, "Book of Armour" and many illustrations in "The Pictorial History Book" were all the work of the same artist. My keen boyhood interest in swashbuckling adventure strips led me to seek out and collect all the Nicolle strips that the constraints of pocket money would allow and I soon found out that the artist was quite prolific. It was only in later life that I fully appreciated just how much work he had produced over the years!

David and I visited Pat on numerous occasions over the next twenty years and the artist was always happy to answer our questions regarding his early life and work. He had been born in Hampstead, London in November 1907 and while still a fairly young child the family moved to Birmingham, as Pat put it: "hopefully to make their fortune". They returned to London in 1921. In the intervening years Pat's Father had served in the First World War and the family had not made a fortune!

According to Pat he was good at two things while at school: drawing and playing rugby football. After leaving school he had an assortment of jobs but he always knew he wanted to draw and throughout this five year period 'in the wilderness' he continually worked at his drawing technique. His opportunity to draw for a living came by way of an advertisement he found in the *Daily Telegraph* when he was nineteen years old. A popular woodworking magazine wanted an assistant artist-contributor. Pat applied and got the job - a wage of two pounds a week for writing articles and doing drawings. He stayed with the magazine for eight years by which time his salary had risen to four pounds ten shillings. But he wanted to do more than draw

diagrams of how to build chairs and tables and during his limited free time he had kept busy with freelance work for a variety of magazines. During the mid and late 1930s much of this work was for Odhams, particularly for their *Modern Wonder* magazine, but work from his pen can be found in many other publications including *Boys Own paper*, for which he drew many internal illustrations and at least one cover, and *Flying,* wherein he provided the illustrations to one of W.E.Johns' Steeley stories. Another W.E.Johns related item from his brush and painted at about this time was the cover and one of the internal plates for the "Modern Boy's Book of Pirates".



Looking down, I could see the mob underneath staring up at us. Some were pointing rifles, shooting, no doubt, but where the bullets went I don't know; none hit the machine.

By the time Pat was called up for the army he had built up a good reputation and was receiving all the freelance work he could cope with. During the War he served with Number Five Company - Royal Engineers and later with the Ninety Three Company - Royal Engineers. He was the company artist and one of his artistic jobs was to decorate the Officers Mess with a fresco depicting the history of England. Pat told David and myself tales of his army life; he was something of a rebel at heart and hated petty-tyrants and red tape. He got into trouble at one time for keeping his artist's materials in with his kit instead of in the Company Office (where he thought they would get stolen).

When he was demobbed Pat was eager to get back to drawing, but the paper shortage made things a bit difficult. After seeing a book in

the Puffin Picture Book series he approached the publishers with the idea of writing and illustrating a book for the series on arms and armour. They liked the idea and Pat produced "A Book of Armour", but the paper shortage resulted in the book's publication being postponed. One job that he did undertake in the years just after the Second World War, was for the Thames Publishing Co., a prolific publisher of children's books. For them Pat produced all the illustrations for a large format book of Robin Hood adventures entitled, "Robin Hood and His Merry Men", this included eight colour plates, a wrap-around dust jacket and eighty black and white line drawings. Robin Hood stories were popular at the time and the book remained in print for many years. Later editions only contained four coloured plates, and an even later edition was reduced in size to a standard novel format and contained only the black and white illustrations. It was this book which indirectly led to a change of course for Pat's work.

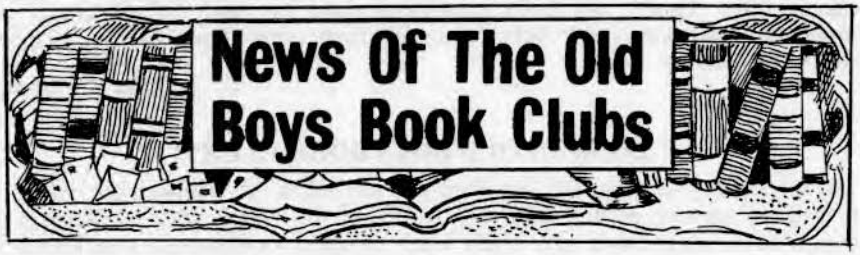
(To be continued)

Bob Whiter adds this tribute:

I was saddened to read Norman Wright's account of the death of Patrick Nicolle in the C.D. Forum. I knew Pat very well in the nineteen fifties, when we were both members of the "Arms & Armour Society"; his particular collecting interest at the time being, as he called them, German Pots (helmets to armour). He was a very nice man, always full of fun. He gave me every encouragement and help regarding my artwork (I had a page on pistols published in the Knockout Annual around that time). I remember how proud he was when they brought out his "Book on Armour" - now a collectors' item! We society members were privileged to view some of the original drawings. He once told me that the editor - I think it was for the Knockout comic - kept on to him to do his strips all on one large sheet, and he in reply said it was awkward to reach to the top of the board, so he persisted in drawing the illustrations on narrow strips of cards.

When his feature on the "Story of Armour" appeared in "Look & Learn", I carefully detached it from each of the successive issues and kept it as a separate whole for reference. Collectors may recall apart from his numerous strips and illustrations that Pat supplied the cover drawing and a fine inside plate for the Modern Boys Book of Pirates.

* *



NORTHERN OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB REPORT

A warm welcome on a mild January evening was given to the eighteen assembled and we were delighted to have with us a new member Alyson Leslie who lives in Scotland but will visit us whenever she can.

Various newspaper articles concerning William were circulated and news of a one-woman show about the life of Richmal Crompton, to be produced very soon. Keith Normington had recently written to the Club from his winter home in Thailand. Congratulations were extended to Nandu and Lisa Thalange on the birth of their son.

A discussion took place concerning the Club's contribution to the proposed book celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Collectors' Digest. A number of people agreed to undertake "projects", including our own rhymester, Keith Atkinson.

Paul Galvin's presentation on "Radio Comedy" brought back many happy memories - which can still be relived on cassette tape. The literary context was brought in as Paul referred to books and articles concerning the programmes.

Mark Caldicott then gave us an insight into how he went about producing the third updated "E.S.B. Bibliography" originally produced by Bob Blythe. Mark's detective work in visiting the British Library and then finding the actual house occupied by E.S.B. was entertaining in itself.

Our next meeting is 10th February with Richard Burgon speaking on Harold Avery, and Chris Scholey on Herlock Sholmes. March 9th will feature "The Floating Double Bed and All That" from Daniel Hanson - surely the youngest full time book dealer in the country.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

We met at the home of Vic Hearn for the traditional format December meeting.

After our usual short business meeting we began with Vic's thoughtful and well presented musical quiz, which essentially concerned the acts of music hall artists - many actually missing that era by decades!! - which were preserved on records.

Members short contributions began with Roy Whiskin giving an analysis of the contents (including the adverts!) of Christmas issues of papers and comics: a 1918 *Chums*, a 1939 *Girls' Own Paper*, a 1944 *Girls' Crystal* and a 1969 *Lion and Eagle*.

Howard Corn once more provided a timely introduction to the one item that typifies the season, describing the Norwich confectioner Tom Smith and his creation, Crackers. Adrian Perkins spoke briefly about the S.F. world of Space Kingley, which was described in just three early-nineteen fifties annuals, and now responsible for his high-ranking amongst fictional British spacemen such as Dan Dare and Jet Morgan.

Tony Cowley gave us an introduction to the concluding scenes of the film *It's a Wonderful Life*. Finally, Bill Lofts reminisced about the (and his) Christmas comic paintings and illustrations, particularly those magnificent covers from Fleetway in the early decades of this century.

ADRIAN PERKINS

LONDON OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

At the January meeting, Bill Bradford was elected as the chairman for 1996. Alan Pratt read an amusing extract from The Riddle of the Tramp with 10 Watches from Champion 1615. Brian Doyle gave a talk which he called An Obsession with Words up to the age of 16 - reminiscences of books and magazines and comics which Brian had read in his youth. Graham Bruton conducted his quiz on the Gem and Magnet. The February meeting will be on Sunday, 11th at Chingford Horticultural Hall.

SUZANNE HARPER

* *

SOME MINI-BOOKS

By Mary Cadogan

I don't know how or where I acquired them but I have in my collection several intriguing small books which were issued to promote specific products. These three-inch by four-inch 18 page booklets provide entertaining stories and are well produced with full colour covers and pictures. J & J Colman seemed to be particularly active in this field. Their 'commercials' do not interfere with the story texts although slogans and pictures praising Colman's Mustard, Colman's Starch, Robinson's "Patent" Barley and Robinson's "Patent" Groats crop up on several pages. Children must have greatly enjoyed these publications which I would guess were issued in the early 1920s. I wonder if any C.D. readers can give more specific information about them? For example, did children or their parents pick them up free from shop counters? Or were they perhaps consolation prizes in colouring or other competitions?

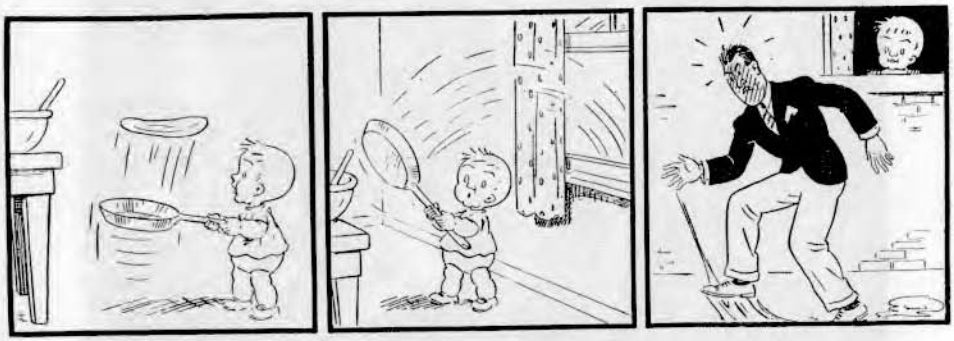
REACHES THE HIGHEST POINT OF QUALITY

I was particularly struck by one called THE WONDER whose child hero and heroine have the distinctly odd names of Hoblin and Twinkles. In this story a somewhat motherly fairy whisks the children away from their bedroom to see the Wonder that is 'living pictures of the greatest things that have happened for ages' - in fact, the Great War. They are transported to the court of Kaiser Wilhelm, 'the mighty king who makes war with the world', to the refugee columns in France and Belgium, to the battlefields and to the victory celebrations in London at the end of the war. It is a strange combination of fairy

magic and solemn events, but a 'Splendid Messenger' (presumably an Angel) hovers protectively over every scene and, with the children's fairy friend, projects an atmosphere of cosy security. Appropriately, at the end of this tale of patriotic idealism, we find a full page picture of a Union Jack, carrying the name of COLMAN'S MUSTARD on its cross of St. George, with a caption underneath proclaiming this to be 'The National Condiment'.

JOAN AND THE PIXIES, a more conventional tale of pixie-helpers and pixie-mischief-makers, expresses a similar mood of over-all warmth and well-being.

Still in the world of small things, I wonder how many C.D. readers remember a childhood favourite of mine from the *Daily Mail* in the 1930s and early '40s? His name was Nipper, and Brian White was the ingenious artist who managed so engagingly to convey this very young boy's exploits.



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* *

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298.	The Boy with a Bad Name	F.R.	363.	Nelson Lee's Come-back	E.S.B.
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300.	The Mystery Master of St. Frank's	E.S.B.	365.	The Boy Who Came Back	M.C.
301.	Bunter of Bunter Court	F.R.	366.	The St. Frank's Cadets	E.S.B.
302.	Raising the Wind	M.C.	367.	Billy Bunter's Cruise	F.R.
303.	The Schoolmaster Spy	E.S.B.	368.	Rookwood Calling	O.C.
304.	Goodbye to Bunter Court	F.R.	369.	Hidden Gold	E.S.B.
305.	The Packsaddle Bunch	F.R.	370.	The Greyfriars Tourists	F.R.
306.	The St. Frank's Explorers	E.S.B.	371.	Asking for the Sack	C.H.
307.	Coker the Champion Chump	F.R.	372.	Yellow Menace	E.S.B.
308.	Jimmy Silver Resigns	O.C.	373.	The Fighting Form-Master	F.R.
309.	The Lost Land	E.S.B.	375.	The Fiends of Fu Chow	E.S.B.
311.	The Boy who Wanted the Sack	M.C.	376.	The Greyfriars Hikers	F.R.
312.	The Battle of the Giants	E.S.B.	377.	The School Squadron	E.R.
313.	The Boy Who Knew Too Much	F.R.	378.	The Schoolboy Crusoes	E.S.B.
314.	The Schoolboy Airman	M.C.	379.	The Kidnapped Hiker	F.R.
315.	The Kidnapped Schoolboy	E.S.B.	380.	The Rookwood Raggers	O.C.
316.	The Boy from the Underworld	F.R.	381.	The Cannibal Invaders	E.S.B.
318.	The Schoolboy Inventor	E.S.B.	382.	The Secret of the "Holiday Annual"	F.R.
320.	A Lion at St. Jim's	M.C.	383.	The Great Grundy	M.C.
322.	The Terror of the Form	F.R.	384.	The Island of Terror	E.S.B.
324.	The Schoolboy House-Breakers	E.S.B.	385.	The Tough Guy of Greyfriars	F.R.
325.	Bold, Bad Bunter	F.R.	386.	Put to the Test	M.C.
326.	Garry Manner's Feud	M.C.	387.	The Secret World	E.S.B.
328.	Detective Bunter	F.R.	388.	The Schoolboy Samson	F.R.
329.	The Rebellion at Packsaddle	F.R.	389.	Rival Guys of Rookwood	O.C.
331.	The Downfall of Harry Wharton	F.R.	390.	War in the New World	E.S.B.
332.	The Mystery of Holly Lodge	M.C.	391.	The Mystery of Wharton Lodge	F.R.
334.	Harry Wharton Declares War	F.R.	393.	The Ghost of Somerton Abbey	E.S.B.
336.	The St. Frank's Castaways	E.S.B.	394.	A Dupe of the Underworld	F.R.
337.	The Worst Boy at Greyfriars	F.R.	395.	A Gunman at St. Jim's	M.C.
338.	The Price of Loyalty	M.C.	396.	Petticoat Rule at St. Frank's	E.S.B.
339.	The Terror of the Tagosa	E.S.B.	397.	The Schoolboy Forger	F.R.
340.	Nobody's Pal	F.R.	399.	Rebellion at St. Frank's	E.S.B.
341.	On Fighting Terms	O.C.	400.	The Boy with a Past	F.R.
342.	The Demon Cricketer	E.S.B.	401.	Cock o' the Walk	M.C.
343.	Harry Wharton & Co's African Adventure	F.R.	402.	The Rebels' Victory	E.S.B.
344.	The Saving of Selby	M.C.	403.	The Man from the Sky	F.R.
345.	The Schoolboy Test-Match Player	E.S.B.	404.	The Secret of the Silver Box	F.R.
346.	The Slave Trader's Vengeance	F.R.	405.	The St. Frank's Caravanners	E.S.B.
347.	Chums on the Open Road	O.C.	406.	Southward-Ho!	F.R.
348.	The Mystery of Roaring Z Ranch	E.S.B.	407.	The Mystery of Study No. 1	F.R.
349.	The Schoolboy Slaves	F.R.	408.	The Touring School	E.S.B.
350.	Grundy Takes the Lead	M.C.	409.	The Lure of the Golden Scarab	F.R.
351.	The Valley of Gold	E.S.B.	410.	Hidden Loot	F.R.
352.	The Boot-boy's Lucky Break	F.R.	411.	The St. Frank's Tourists	E.S.B.

SEMPTER IDEM

by Ted Baldock

Come Mrs. Mimble hurry do
I have a sinking feeling,
For dinner we had watery stew
It really had me reeling.
Old Quelchy said t'was very good.
He took a second plate,
Good 'tuck' he never understood
For me - a dreadful fate.
So hurry with those jam tarts please
Don't keep a fellow waiting,
I'm feeling wobbly at the knees
And I'm not over stating.
In Smithy's study, what a sight,
The cupboard door stands open,
Within the shelves, oh what delight,
The 'tuck' is now bespoken.
Buns there are, with cakes and pie
With ginger ale and 'pop'.
Enough to make a fellow sigh
Should he devour the lot.
A melon and a monstrous pine,
With grapes and apples too,
It matters little they're not mine,
I'll sample them for you.

Editor: Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 6PY.
Printed by Quacks Printers, 7 Grape Lane, Petergate, York, YO1 2HU. Tel. 635967.