STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 51 NO. 602 FEBRUARY 1997

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

VOL. 51 No. 602 FEBRUARY 1997 Price £1.25

The Editor's Chat

THE GEM - NINETY YEARS ON

Next month marks the 90th anniversary of The Gem and, of course, as I mentioned in our last issue, the C.D. will be celebrating this landmark throughout 1997. I have already received several appropriate features, but look forward to further contributions from Gem enthusiasts amongst our readers. There is no doubt that, overall, The Magnet is the favourite of the Hamilton papers (we might safely say, of all story-papers) but nevertheless St. Jim's still comes first with a number of people. In particular, the character of Tom Merry inspires great and lasting loyalty: he is both a strong role model and the friend everyone would like to have.

The St. Jim's picture on our back-cover this month is, as you will see, not by one of the Gem's usual artists. It was drawn by Evelyn Flinders, a lady whose illustrative talents were mainly used by the Amalgamated Press in the girls' papers, but who loved the Gem and would, I understand, rather have portrayed the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. than those of the heroines of the Schoolgirls' Weekly, the School Friend, etc., despite the appeal of their exploits. Miss Flinders gave me one or two of her St. Jim's pictures, but for the fine example which we publish this month I am indebted to Bob Whiter (one of our star illustrators himself) who sent it to me recently.

THE GARDENS AND FANTASIES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

I feel sure that readers will be intrigued by Donald V. Campbell's series of articles, beginning this month, on juvenile stories of which gardens are integral elements. It seems a far cry, perhaps, from the natural-ness of the garden to the fantasy aspect of films - but several articles recently submitted to me suggest the potency of the cinema too as an influence on our childhood reading. Bill Lofts' Film Fun articles are in response to many requests from readers for more information about that popular comic, and Reg Hardinge looks at another movie-based paper, The Kinema Comic, in OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES this month. I recall that, as a child of the 1930s, the regular highspots of my week were visits to the cinema (in particular to see Laurel and Hardy, Shirley Temple, Gary Cooper, Robert Donat, Leslie Howard and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers) and receiving my story-paper, The Schoolgirl - as well, of course, as illicitly appropriating my brother's Magnet whenever I could!

OUR ANNUAL

From your extremely enthusiastic letters I gather that our Annual has again struck the right note. Many readers who have expressed appreciation suggest that it is still 'the best ever' and that 'Christmas would not be Christmas without it'. Once more I should like to thank all contributors and C.D. readers for supporting the Annual. Bringing it out each year is a big undertaking, but your warm response makes this worthwhile. (I still have a few copies left which can be supplied at £10 for UK readers and £11.50 to those living abroad, postage and packing included.)

FAREWELL TO A GOOD FRIEND

It is with great sadness that I have to report the sudden and very unexpected passing on Christmas Eve of John Trendler, who had brought into being and been the Editor of the magazine *Biggles & Co.* Those of us who knew John have suffered both a personal loss and the loss of a colleague whose dedication to books, juvenile literature and, especially, to the works of W.E. Johns was resilient and creative. A full tribute to him by Norman Wright, his friend over many years, appears in this issue of the C.D.

MARY CADOGAN

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THE WONDERFUL GARDENS

By Donald V Campbell

1. E. Nesbit

Gardens.

Small gardens, large gardens, magic gardens, secret gardens, wonderful gardens, used and unused and misused gardens.

The nature of most if not all of these is that the idea of garden is accessible to all of us. We have one - if we have an allotment we might even have two. If neither of these is available we will have perhaps a window-box or house plants. We visit them. We admire or curse the one belonging to our neighbour or friend (or enemy).

Ours is too big, or too small or too full of weeds or has too many bushes or whatever. Perhaps we lose ourselves in our gardens regardless of their size or style. And that is what we do or did as children. How many of us have tried (and possibly failed) to build a tree house or a snug hideaway in a shrubbery? What secret or magic hunting grounds did these places become for even a short time in our lives?

Is this the reason then why such distinguished authors have used the garden as a stepping stone to mystery or adventure? Frances Hodgson Burnett springs immediately to mind with her children's classic "The Secret Garden" (1911). But, before her, Edith Nesbit had produced "The Wonderful Garden" (1910) which has tones in it that are also struck in Burnett's book. Doubtful if plagiarism comes into it. Long after her came "Tom's Midnight Garden" (1958) by Philippa Pearce. Much earlier, of course, Lewis Carroll makes use of gardens in the Alice stories and here he follows in the tradition of Victorian writers utilizing gardens as meeting places and metaphors.

Whatever the provenance or the style or the way of these gardens they form a cadre of books to give us pause and cause for thought.

This then is the start to a short series of articles on the garden in children's books. It will not claim to be complete but it will include those books which appeal to me and which

seem to position the garden so centrally to the plot. I must start with my favourite, but make the point that it in no way overshadows the strength or interest of the others in this series of observations. The favourite then? *The Wonderful Garden* by E. Nesbit.

Nesbit was a remarkable writer of the most perspicacious ideas about children. She (as exemplified, one supposes, by *The Railway Children,* which is probably a semi-autobiographical book) very responsibly brought up a large family of children, and in her stories brothers and sisters have similarly grouped adventures. She had a splendid awareness of the frailties and the strengths of youngsters and, even if they are biographical sketches of her own, she pens them with gusto, compassion and outstanding. Many of us are parents who are still failing to understand the offsprung or the offspring! She understood the workings of the child mind and was supreme in articulating it on the page.

But this is supposed to be about books. "The Wonderful Garden" then. It was my good fortune to read this in the original serialized version - so beautifully illustrated by H.R. Millar - that appeared for the first time in the Strand Magazine for 1910/11. I say "good fortune" because, in this form, it does so much to categorize and illuminate the excitement and wonder that the Edwardian child would have had in reading the monthly magazine and waiting for the next issue. It tells us much about the success of many kinds of serialization - from Dickens through to modern-day television.

"THERE WERE SO MANY FULLY-BLOWN ROSES THAT IT WAS EASY ENOUGH TO FILL THE THREE FRILLED LINEN PILLOW-CASES."

Nesbit was continually serialized in the Strand, with the good fortune to have the talented Harold R. Millar - (1869 - c1940) as illustrator. He was so capable of capturing the child in stasis with his flowing and exciting pen and ink drawings. Research for this series has produced a previously unknown to me snippet of information from the biography of E. Nesbit (Benn, 1933) which I am glad to say reinforces my position vis-à-vis Millar and his work for Nesbit - a collaboration which stretched across thirteen years:

> *"There will be few ready to dispute H.R. Millar's pre-eminence as the interpreter of her invention. He fulfilled to something near perfection the exacting demands she made upon him; one has only to compare the books containing his pictures with those in which the work of other draughtsmen was used, to perceive at once how much more clearly he understood her requirements. She herself shared this view, and was*

so surprised at the skill with which he expressed the very essence of her ideas that she frequently insisted that there must be some form of telepathy between them. Mr Millar was not of this opinion ..."

For us, today, there is the additional bonus of being able to see the characters in what was to Millar MODERN dress but what to us is an additional glimpse of social history. "The Wonderful Garden" is simply a tale of modern-day (i.e.1910) magic, and childlike hopes. The ages of the children are never stated but we can assume something like: Caroline (14), Charles (12) and Charlotte (10).

The Three Cs are invited by great uncle Charles to spend the summer holidays with him at his home somewhere in Kent. Nesbit's sense of timing is a touch loose here as this holiday must last the order of nine weeks but we shall let that pass. The characters are quickly drawn, and we see Caroline as a dreamer yet practical and strong. Charles is a "typical" boy but pulled along by his sisters and sometimes a touch weepy. Charlotte is rather like Phyllis in "The Railway Children" in that she gets flummoxed with words and ideas but tries hard to get them right. [Charlotte suggests that finding the second magic book (which will please uncle greatly) is an "eyesore". What she means to say is "a sight for sore eyes".]

For her birthday Caroline is given a small book called "The Language of Flowers", and we are aware immediately that this is going to have some importance. Off to Uncle's they travel (alone by railway!) They come across a boy (Rupert) of Charles' age who is in the charge of a somewhat forbidding adult whom Charlotte dubs "THE MURDSTONE MAN" (after David Copperfield's misbegotten step-father). The children rub up a short acquaintance that leads Rupert to run away to them in due course.

At Uncle's they discover a stern housekeeper (or is she?), a friendly stable hand/ coachman, and of course Uncle. He introduces them to their ancestress (Lady Eleanor depicted in a portrait) who was drowned for a witch; and to his work on magic, "A Brief Consideration of the Psychological and Physiological Part Played by Suggestion in So-Called Magic". We thus find that the children and the uncle are interested in magic. The scene is set for the enchantment that is to come.

Without telling too much of the tale - and I urge you to read it if you can find a copy - I can say that it revolves around the Three Cs and their magic, Lady Eleanor and her magic and (in the end) Uncle and his magic. Spells and potions abound and strange happenings fortify the children's belief that they can make spells, and that magic does work if you believe hard enough.

I suppose that it is a soft-centred tale but it is well characterized and has pleasant twists and turns, scary happenings in a secret passage and with an escaped leopard, and a rather modern event in the "weekenders" attempting to take over pretty cottages in the village. Steam trains are de-rigeuer and "The Murdstone Man" turns up more than once to give the children heartache and confusion:

At a quarter past twelve the four children, very hot, and rather tired, reached a level crossing .....

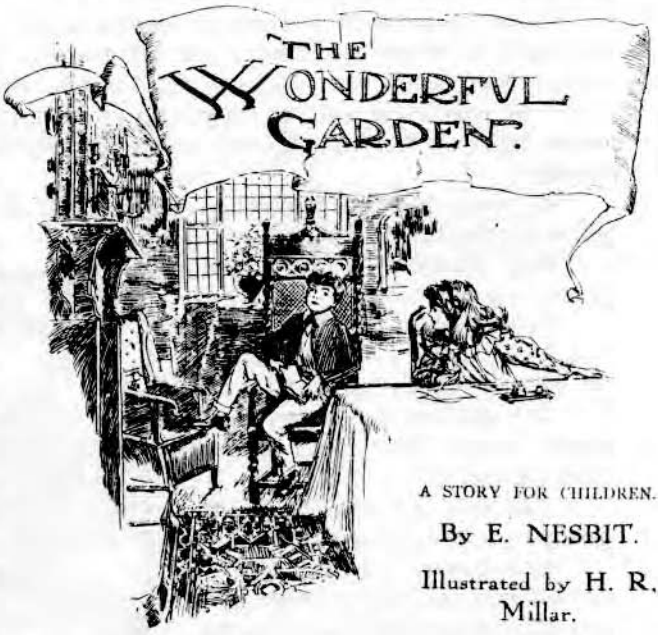
..... the four children met the little crowd from the train halfway. There were two women with baskets; a man with a bandy legged dog; and a girl with a large band-box partly hidden by brown paper, and - the four children were face to face with him before they knew that there was anyone coming from the train whom they had rather

not be face to face with - the Murdstone Man himself. He was not a yard from them. Rupert threw up his head and backed a little as if he expected to be hit. The Three Cs breathed a deep concerted "Oh!" and trembled on the edge of what might be going to happen. No one knew what Mr. Murdstone's powers might be. Could he seize on Rupert and take him away? Could he call the police? Anything seemed possible in that terrible instant when they were confronted, suddenly and beyond hope of retreat, with the hated master.

It is interesting to speculate on the acceptance by a publisher today of work that could include sixty-word sentences akin to the passage above. Nesbit does not use unnecessary or overlong words but she expected that her young readers were literate.

The writing of E. Nesbit, I suppose, needs little introduction, and a number of her books have been dramatized on radio and television and (notably) filmed by Lionel Jefferies *(The Railway Children)*. But this tale is a gem and even though it has been passed over for more famous books it has a fascinating power to please and baffle and excite.

The garden? It is wonderful and it is hidden. The flowers grow straight and strong and it has its own powers that the children tap into. All the flowers of the "Language of Flowers" and the herbal dictionary grow in it together with "The Flowers of Heart's Desire" that bring the whole to a most satisfactory conclusion. Gardens have a new magic and mystery once "The Wonderful Garden" has been imbibed - and imbibed is the correct word as potions and decoctions are needed to provide the magic that the children seek so diligently.



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THE FILE ON VERNON-SMITH by Margery Woods

Part 3 INFLUENCES

The foppish dandy of that memorable debut at Greyfriars changed more quickly than he realised. Vanity and sheer determination not to be outshone in any respect made him take to the sportsfield --- when it suited his whim of the moment, especially if Marjorie Hazeldene was likely to put in an appearance --- and what had been described as his weedy build soon developed into a much more powerful frame.

Those early days could be likened to the proverbial swings and roundabouts. Despite his temper, his selfishness, his arrogance and his deep resentment of Harry Wharton the

sportsmanship, fairplay and sheer decency of the best section of the Remove were beginning to evoke the long submerged better part of Vernon-Smith's character and this in turn subtly began to reveal to him the true nature of the cronies who had always been in his circle. Punishment, though, still came when he refused to conform, and usually it was well deserved. But sooner or later black sheep get the blame on the odd occasions when they are innocent, as happened the time when Smithy was caught on Popper's Island, trespassing, according to the choleric Sir Hilton Popper, of the Greyfriars' Governing Board. Actually the island was common land but Sir Hilton claimed it was part of his estate and lost no time in haranguing the Head about any boy caught invading his property. Smithy got caned and a detention which brought all his defiance back in full force.

For once he has the sympathy of the Remove but Harry's protests are of no avail when the furious Bounder announces he is cutting detention and going for a sail. That the weather is ominous does not deter him any more than Harry's attempts to dissuade him once he has made a decision.

The weather fulfils all its omens and soon the Bounder and his boat are in trouble, the sail ripping to ribbons in the fierce gale and the harsh reefs lying in wait beneath the turbulent water as the boat tosses like a cockleshell. The storm reaches its peak and it seems that nothing can save the crippled boat from disaster and its owner from almost certain death on the rocks beneath the towering Hawkscliff against which the surf thundered.

Meanwhile, back at the school, a small exchange of dialogue reflects the degree to which the Bounder is beginning to be accepted.

"Poor old Smithy," mumbled Bob. "He was a good sort."

"Poor old chap." Wharton rose from the tea table. "I - I don't want any tea. I think it would choke me."

"The samefulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh huskily. "Poor old Smithy!"

"And we'd got to be such jolly good pals, too!" said Nugent.

Frank Richards was well aware of how the belief in someone's death could strip away all past differences and allow people to see only the best in the deceased's character.

But despite the school's belief the Bounder was not yet quite dead. When it seemed that the storm was about to best his courage he heard a voice hailing him above the roar of the wind and he saw a figure scrambling down the great cliff onto the sunken ledge below. The figure is a boy about his own age, agile,

Redwing to the rescue !

intrepid and fearless, who against all odds and the ferocious elements succeeds in rescuing the half-drowned Bounder and getting him up the cliff to safety.

And so began the strange and sometimes stormy friendship between Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing.

At the very outset the differences in their attitudes are drawn, even as certain similarities in their natures are noticed. Both are strong boys. Both have iron wills, are stubborn and determined in all their decisions, but each shows these traits in different ways. Redwing makes up his mind and keeps to it quietly but none-the-less firmly while Smithy, when denied, resorts to bluster and temper, always with the belief that his money can buy anything. Yet Smithy can be kind, can appreciate and respect goodness in another, and sometimes truths newly recognised, as illustrated in his exchanges with his rescuer as they battle their way up the stark gale-swept cliff to the roadside above.

Redwing's father had been lost at sea two years previously, and now Tom is penniless, about to leave Hawkescliff to seek work. The Bounder is appalled. Perhaps this is the first time in his young life that he realises what poverty can mean. He protests. His father is a millionaire. He'll do anything his son asks. Tom should be at school. (The discovery that Tom studies Latin for the joy of it appals the Bounder almost as much as his discovery of his rescuer's poor circumstances.) Smithy declares that he will be Tom's friend for life. He will see him through, stand by him always. And here Smithy learns another salutary lesson about life and the character of others. Tom says flatly he did not rescue Vernon-Smith for reward; he would have done it for anyone. Although Smithy had not meant his offer exactly this way he realises that Tom had taken it as an offer of recompense and was wounded by it.

Later, after his return to Greyfriars, chilled, exhausted, and ill, where his father waits in desperate anxiety and everyone seems to have given him up for dead, Smithy is laid up in the school sanatorium and unable to get his rescuer out of his head. He begs his father to find Tom Redwing wherever he has gone. Mr Vernon-Smith agrees readily.

Meanwhile a new twist has taken over the plot.

Sir Hilton Popper is greatly put out by a communication he has received regarding the son of an old acquaintance. This boy is now orphaned and Sir Hilton feels obliged to take care of the boy's education. But he does not wish even to see the boy nor offer him a home at Popper Court. He will place the boy, Leonard Clavering, at Greyfriars, after which Leonard can realise his ambition to join the army.

Then comes the coincidence without which a story ceases to be a story. Tom Redwing, on the train towards his quest for work, meets Leonard Clavering en route for Greyfriars, where he has no desire whatsoever to take up residence. He has already attempted to join the army and been summarily dismissed as under age. But he is determined to try again. And so, probably for the first time in his life, Tom gives way to the temptation offered by his train companion; he will go to Greyfriars as Leonard Clavering, safe in the knowledge that Leonard's guardian has never seen him, nor has Dr. Locke, for Leonard has just arrived from Chile, and Tom can benefit by the education he has always yearned for while the self-willed and confident Leonard seeks his own special goal.

But there is one person at Greyfriars who knows Tom!

Redwing/Clavering is met at the station by Wharton and Cherry and accepted at Greyfriars without question, while the real Leonard Clavering has reached Canterbury and got himself enrolled in His Majesty's Army. For a while, everyone is happy!

The continuation of the story depends on Smith's illness being prolonged for a while, enforcing his sojourn in the sanny, thus giving Redwing a respite in which to cope with the ploy of deception, constantly having to remember that he hasn't spent much of his life in the surrounding area and that South America is his old stamping ground. Much swotting of geography as well as Latin seems to be indicated. The chums do become a bit puzzled over the new boy's nervousness, especially when the inevitable suggestion arises that he go and visit the invalid in the san. But this can't be avoided for ever, and the day dawns of Smithy's return to the Remove fold and a celebration tea for him in Study Number One. Redwing/ Clavering turns down an invitation to join them, causing a sense of huffiness for a moment, but fate brings the Bounder on the scene, to look unbelievingly at the boy in the quad, the boy his father is still searching for, a boy who gazes in horror at him. There is no time for explanations as the chums crowd round and Smithy is drawn away to the celebration and stunned by hearing Tom Redwing addressed as Leonard Clavering and apparently now a pupil at Greyfriars and an accepted pal of the Remove. How? Why?

This series continued strongly with Tom Redwing on very thin ice and the Bounder still puzzled but determined to stand by his rescuer even though all he seems to receive in return is the cold shoulder, while quite a few of the Remove are now sensing the strange undercurrents. There are several incidents, the worn book of Horace with Tom's initials sets the Snoop, Skinner and Stott brigade on the trail, and then the evil Ponsonby of Highcliffe enters the fray with vicious intent after Clavering/Redwing gave him a whacking.

Ponsonby, at times one of the Bounder's cronies in vice, has recognised Redwing and threatens to expose him as a cheat and impostor. It is here we meet Bounder the Hero, with a vengeance. He challenges Ponsonby and tells him that Redwing once saved his life and suggests that Ponsonby forgets his threats against Redwing.

This meets only a sneering refusal. Smithy remains cold and quiet as he warns Ponsonby he will be his enemy. Anyone with any sense might have given this some thought, but Ponsonby didn't, to his cost. That night Smithy broke bounds and went to the Cross Keys in search of Jerry Hawke, one-time acquaintance during the Bounder's murkier days. From Jerry he buys an IOU of Ponsonby's, evidence enough to get the Highcliffe rotter well and truly expelled. Now the Bounder has the whip hand and he does not hesitate to use it when Ponsonby swaggers into Greyfriars next day, hell bent on creating a scene to live in memory for years. But he leaves, cursing, savage and defeated, and yet again the danger to Tom Redwing is averted.

The Clavering impersonation continued for another three stories but was overshadowed by the controversial story by John Nix Pentelow in which Arthur Courtney died.

This affected Vernon-Smith intensely for it was he who unwittingly sent Courtney to his death by rousing him to follow the chums on their mission in search of a forged cheque. But it was the night of an air raid when the Cross Keys was hit by an incendiary, and had this most tragic outcome.

The character of Vernon-Smith was still being forged in the steel of life.

(To be continued)

FASCINATION LEADS TO AN INTRIGUING CHAIN OF EVENTS

by Ray Hopkins

(Conclusion)

Fate is about to step in and appear to be on Snipe's side for once. The following day at St. Frank's there is to be a special exam - designed by Dr. Stafford to drag the boys' minds from the "Sports Mad" spring they are wading through. This exam will keep them off the sports field and in their studies cramming - he hopes! By chance, Bernard Forrest is waiting to be attended to by Mr. Crowell who is preparing the questions for the Remove. Forrest, reading upside down, realises what the list is but fails to detect what subject is involved. He sees in which drawer of his bureau Mr. Crowell locks the papers. Forrest, though not involved in the sports, through indifference, has nevertheless not been doing the extra studying that the exam should have entailed and wishes for some miraculous event to take place so that he could learn the name of the particular subject.

The unhappy and desperate Snipe turns out to be a possible solution to Forrest's dilemma. He tells Snipe that the exam papers are in the top left-hand drawer of Mr. Crowell's bureau and all Snipe has to do is to copy out the questions and he (Forrest) will hand him the five pounds. Snipe, turning to jelly at the thought of being caught red-handed and facing the sack, nevertheless agrees to this heartless proposition, at the same time regretting that he will never be able to resell the £5 gold watch for more than £3. An unworthy thought that would no doubt pass through the mind of the only slightly less disagreeable Fisher T. Fish of Greyfriars!

Like Fishy, Snipe is also possessed of a large bunch of keys which he has amassed for no better reason than that they may come in handy sometime, and enable him to obtain entrance to somewhere to which he is unauthorised. As in this case, they do, and he has the drawer open and the list of questions removed and copied, with the questions in his hand and about to be placed back in the drawer, when the door is flung open and Edward Oswald Handforth enters holding a torch battery which Mr. Crowell had requested him to bring back from Bellton. Handforth tears the papers from Snipe's hands, recognises immediately what they are, and just misses Snipe's shoulder as that weak-willed youth makes his getaway through the open study window. Handforth follows him, the exam questions still clutched in his hand but, when he has one leg across the window-sill, the door is again flung open and in marches Mr. Crowell!

He had not obtained even a glimpse of the departing Snipe, but immediately observed his open bureau drawer and the papers still in Handforth's hand. He commands Handforth not to move when E.O. tells him he'll be back in a minute. Handforth, in any case, in accordance with the schoolboys' then rules of conduct (no longer a fact of life) that one shall not sneak, realises that he cannot explain why he wants to leave briefly and then return, and so cannot explain why the exam questions are in his hand. Mr. Crowell, for his part, is so upset that he should find one whom he considers the most trust-worthy boy in his form capable of such a heinous crime as stealing with the object of cheating, that he sits the boy down in an effort to find some other motive for Handforth's action. Handforth denies that he opened the bureau drawer but further than this he will not go. His denial only sounds like a mitigating lie; the fact that he has the questions in his hand seems to mean that he intended to use them as a crib, which he also denies.

Mr. Crowell takes Handforth to Dr. Stafford and the Headmaster promptly incarcerates him in the punishment room. When Church and McClure hear of this they know it can mean only one thing: Handforth is lined up for expulsion. But what has he done? Only half an hour previously they had left him to deliver Mr. Crowell's torch battery while they got tea ready in the study. Handforth Minor - the redoubtable Willy, ever looking on the bright side - says he will sort it all out with Mr. Crowell, and Handy will be released right away. No problem! (There never is with Willy.)

Willy, who has the enviable reputation of being able to charm form masters into grinning affability, is unable to persuade Mr. Crowell to allow him to visit his major, so he climbs up the ivy and speaks to Handy through the bars on the punishment window. His major tells him right away that he was chasing Snipe when he was caught with the exam papers (Willy had guessed Forrest - another one with a bad reputation) and makes his brother promise not to give Snipe away. Willy astutely realises that Snipe was not stealing the papers for his own gain - he's in the Fourth Form, not the Remove, so Mr. Crowell's questions would be no use to him. Therefore, he must have been doing the dirty work, definitely for pay, for others, and probably for Forrest and Co.

Meanwhile, Snipe has delivered the copied exam questions to Forrest and Co., who are delighted to know that they can pass the exam easily now they know the subject is history and that they have all the relevant questions to hand. Snipe receives the £5, and races off to the Bannington jeweller's even though it is nowhere near the deadline of seven o'clock. He has a feeling that when Forrest and Co. hear that Handforth is to be expelled for having the exam questions, their first thought will be that Mr. Crowell will inevitably change the questions, if not the subject (as indeed he does - to geography!). But they don't know this until they go in to take the examination! And Snipe foresees that he will be set upon by Forrest and the money taken from him if he retains it even a minute longer than he has to.

The Bannington jeweller is startled to be presented with the money from Snipe and, again showing himself to be a much nicer man than Snipe deserves, tells the boy to return the money to those from whom he borrowed it. No, he has no intention of telling the police but hopes his leniency will deter the trembling schoolboy from any further lapses into dishonesty. Snipe, overjoyed at his good luck as he pedals back to St. Frank's, realises that he has five pounds for his own use (to loan and charge interest to the needy). He knows that he cannot be implicated in the stealing of the exam papers, for Handforth will not sneak, and it will be good riddance as the generous Snipe had always hated him! What he doesn't realise is that Willy has his name and is on his track for causing the expulsion of his major!

Willy frightens Snipe considerably by waylaying him on the way back to St. Frank's on a quiet country road. Willy, in fact, pulls Snipe off his bicycle and says in a menacing kind of way, that he wants a quiet word with him in a neighbouring field. Snipe, terrified of the smaller youngster, collapses in trembling fear while Willy tells him everything he has figured out about the exam questions, why he copied them out and who paid him so to do. Snipe is so spineless that Willy can't bring himself to chastise him as he had intended and lets him crawl away, regretting he has been unable to drag a confession from him. But a piece of paper has fallen from Snipe's pocket which, when unfolded, proves to be a discarded sheet, in Snipe's handwriting, of some of the exam questions. This is the proof that Willy needs.

Snipe screams for help when Willy, ably backed by Church and McClure, confronts him in his study in the East House. Using the clever charm that is part of his nature, Willy talks quietly, informing him that he will have Handforth's disgrace on his conscience for the rest of his time at St. Frank's. He says that the Head won't expel Snipe because he was stealing a the behest of someone else, and <u>that</u> someone's name need not be mentioned.

Handy has kept mum and not given Snipe away. Why doesn't Snipe show everyone that he has a long-hidden spark of decency, and clear his conscience and earn the admiration of those who despise him. Snipe bursts into tears and, with Willy murmuring encouragement agrees to go to Dr. Stafford and confess. Church and McClure look in admiration at Willy, not believing it would be possible that a youngster could wring such a change in the cowardly Snipe. On the way to the Head, they encounter Mr. Crowell in the Triangle who is astounded at what Snipe tells him. His confession completely exonerates Handforth, explaining that he (Snipe) was the guilty party whom Willy's major was chasing through the open window. Mr. Crowell hurries him off to Dr. Stafford and Snipe confirms to the Head everything he has told Mr. Crowell. Without mentioning Forrest's name he informs the Head that he was bribed to steal the exam questions and was paid five pounds. Dr. Stafford demands the money and states that it will be given to a deserving charity.

Mr. Crowell is told he may release Handforth immediately without a stain on his character! Snipe will be given a heavy flogging and Mr. Crowell must prepare a new set of questions. Forrest and Co. Receive a nasty shock when, having boned up on the history questions supplied by their catspaw, Mr. Crowell announces that the subject of the examination will be geography! The master discerns the extreme dismay on the faces of Forrest and Co. which confirms his suspicion that they had been the instigators of the theft of the history questions. After a review of their answers, Mr. Crowell sends for them, and orders them to long periods of detention where they will be forced to study hard to make up for their poor performance. He completes the "lesson" by making their hands extremely painful for several hours after the worst caning they have ever endured.
(Retold from NELSON LEE LIBRARY, New Series No. 8, 26 June 1926, entitled "Handforth Gets the Sack".)

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BLAKIANA

Editor's Note: The pictures below have been taken from the excellent 1994 publication by Norman Wright and David Ashford entitled SEXTON BLAKE: A CELEBRATION OF THE GREAT DETECTIVE. This book is a wonderful companion to the saga, providing comprehensive information about who's who and what's what in the stories, and about its authors and artists. I am including these pictures in this month's C.D. with a reminder that I am urgently in need now of new and original Blake contributions - so please let me hear from the super-sleuth's many admirers.

It is still possible to order a copy of Norman and David's book: details are as follows: Orders should be sent to THE MUSEUM PRESS, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent, with the appropriate remittance.

Costs are: For U.K. orders £12.00

For anywhere else in the world by surface mail £15.00

By Airmail:
For European countries other than U.K. £15.50
For U.S.A. and Canada £16.00
For Australia and New Zealand £17.00
All prices of course include postage and packing.

Illustrations by Arthur Jones
for *Union Jack* 529

"I am sorry, mademoiselle, but I cannot permit it. You might fall into their clutches yourself, and—well, I—, I—" For once in his life, Blake was at a loss for words.

Sexton Blake brings his wonderful brain into play, probing and delving for an explanation of Lady Sybil's disappearance.

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BARRINGTON CLIVE by Reg Hardinge

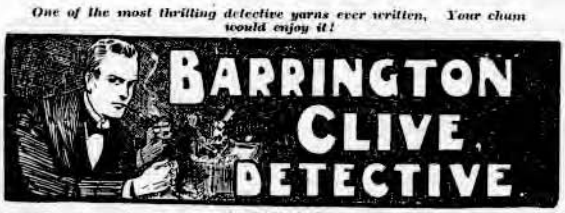
Bill Lofts' contribution to the OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES section (C.D., December 1996) reminded me that in the mid-twenties THE KINEMA COMIC ran a regular feature recording the various problems which the great inquiry agent Barrington Clive had solved.

Clive, one of the richest men in the whole of England, a millionaire in fact, had no need to work for a living. His powers of detection were utilised solely for his own pleasure. At his office in Plane Tree Square, Bloomsbury, in London, was his collection of souvenirs from various cases of his that had been satisfactorily concluded, which he called his Black Museum.

One of Clive's major triumphs was the recovery of the priceless jewellery-heirlooms belonging to Sir Andrew Anderson which had disappeared. Another was 'The New Submarine Plans Adventure', when he foiled the attempts of foreign agents to purloin a model submarine which was being developed by a British inventor for the Admiralty. He had caught a clerk in the inventor's office photographing the plans relating to the revolutionary submarine, and acquired the camera as a relic for his Black Museum.

Among other things, one of Clive's great delights was the sport of rod and line, particularly salmon fishing.

Perhaps Mr. Lofts can enlighten us as to the link between 'Barrington Clive, "The Detective"' of THE KINEMA COMIC and 'The Ace of Tecs' of the SURPRISE?



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THE MYSTERY OF ROCKCLIFFE, OR, A CASE FOR VICTOR DRAGO, Part 1.

By Brian Mowbray

The first two numbers of the Schoolgirl's Own Library concern a school called Rockcliffe, which had never been heard of before or since. It has been discovered that they were written by Horace Phillips, whose works are doubtless familiar to you. These are not stated to be new stories, but their source has never been found. I shall summarise the plots of these two stories and then reveal where they originally appeared.

No. 1 "The Schoolgirl Outcast". The story opens in Study 10 of the 4th Form at Rockcliffe School. The three girls in the study are Hilda Noble, leader of the form, Milly Masters, her friend, and the fat and unpleasant Tubby Potts. Tubby has heard that a rich new girl is entering the form and goes to the station to meet her. Two new girls are there, May Pendleton, a poor scholarship girl, and the wealthy and snobbish Phillida Tempest. Their fathers were in business together, Mr Pendleton went broke and Mr Tempest ended up richer. May and Phillida are put in the same study, much to Phillida's annoyance. It is rumoured that May's father is a convict and a well-meaning attempt to right this by Tubby makes things worse. May accidentally spills ink on Phillida's expensive clothes and is considered to have done so out of spite.

May gets a letter from her mother telling her that her family needs £10 for medical treatment for her younger sister, or she will die. Tubby burns Phillida's hockey stick by mistake and drops that girl's purse behind a box. May is considered to have burnt the stick and stolen the purse and is shunned by most of the form. May breaks school rules by pawning her possessions to raise the £10. Tubby sees the money and tells everybody; it is then generally considered that May took it from Phillida's purse. She is thrown out of her study and no other girls will let the suspected thief in their studies except Hilda and Milly of Study 10.

May is given lines for throwing balls of paper around the Form-room. She accidentally picks up the answers to a test and is caught with them by a mistress. Phillida holds a feast to celebrate the forthcoming expulsion of May, but only Bella and Zena, her toadies, attend.

That night the School catches fire. May saves Phillida's life, they are reconciled as are their fathers. Phillida's purse is found.

Does this summary ring any bells? If not, on to the second.

No. 2 "The Rockcliffe Rebels". Miss Ingram, the benign Headmistress of Rockcliffe, goes away. Her temporary replacement is Miss Medlar who starts by making the 4th Form carry her bags from the station to the school, where they discover that she has abolished supper and goes on to make the pupils get up an hour earlier, play no games and do more drill instead. She forbids them to go to the village, and institutes censorship of their letters home. While trying to spy on the girls Miss Medlar is accidentally locked in the tool-shed. She gates the school for the rest of the term. She finds that one of her notices has fallen down and been trampled on and seizes the nearest girl, May Pendleton, and starts caning her. Her form-mates rescue her and plan a strike.

At midnight the 4th move from their dormitory to the clock tower. Miss Medlar and a gardener attack the rebel stronghold, but are defeated. That night Hilda takes food from the school. Tubby's greed accidentally foils a night attack by Miss Medlar when she drops a jampot on the acting Headmistress's head. Bella and Zena betray a sortie to the village, three girls are captured, but rescued by Hilda. Next, five girls make another expedition to obtain food. They are chased by two unpleasant prefects. May falls in a river and is rescued by Phillida.

Another attack is made on the tower and in the middle of this assault Miss Ingram returns. She pardons the rebels and sends Miss Medlar packing.

Next month I shall explain where the stories originally appeared.

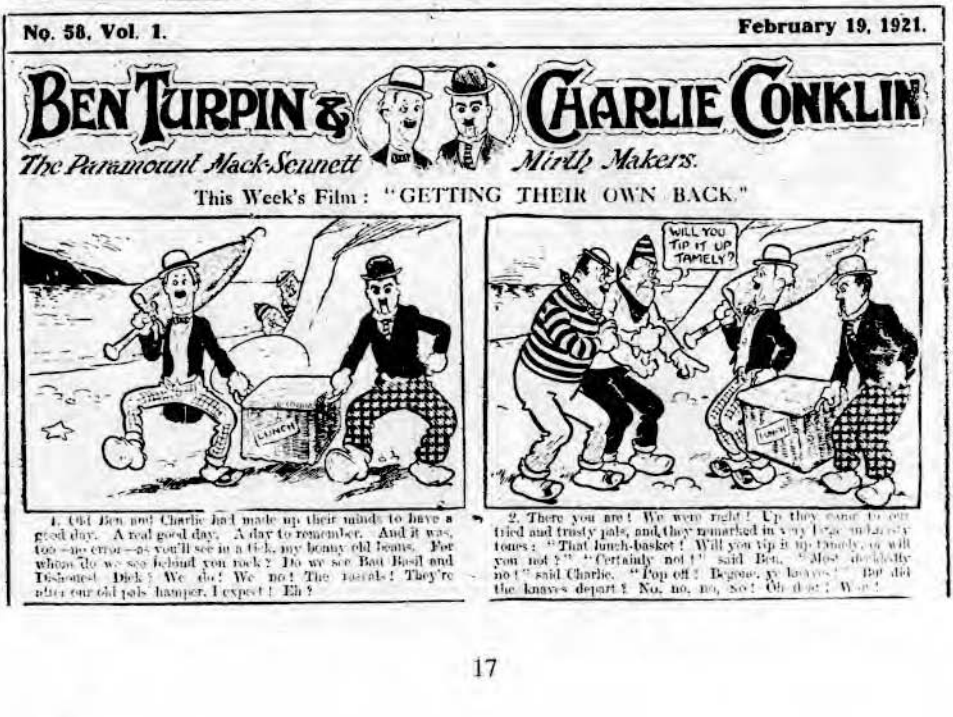
(To be continued).

FILM FUN by Bill Lofts

Part One

Magazines that contain film material have always been widely collected. Film Fun, which first appeared on the 17th January 1920, was no exception. Since that date, copies of Film Fun have always been in great demand, as they are fairly scarce. Dealers of second-hand magazines will readily confirm that they are classed as gilt-edged concerns.

The story behind Film Fun makes fascinating reading, its creation and enormous success being due to its creator, Fred George Cordwell. He was born at Elephant and Castle with a silver spoon in his mouth, his father being a lawyer. Attending the famous Dulwich College, he claimed that one of his schoolboy chums was none other than P.G. Wodehouse. Curiously he always preferred to mix socially with the 'lower' classes. Cafes and Public Houses, rather than posh restaurants or Mayfair wine bars, attracted him. Jellied eels, pie and mash, shrimps and winkles were his diet, not forgetting cockles and whelks, plus pease-pudding and faggots. Cordwell was also an avid and enthusiastic music-hall fan, as well as attending the cinema several times a week.



1. Old Ben and Charlie had made up their minds to have a good day. A real good day. A day to remember. And it was, too—no error—as you'll see in a tick, my bonny old beans. For whom do we see behind you rock? Do we see Bad Basil and Dishonest Dick? We do! We no! The rascals! They're after our old pals hamper, I expect! Eh?

2. There you are! We were right! Up they came to our tried and trusty pals, and they remarked in very large and lusty tones: "That lunch-basket! Will you tip it up tamely, or will you not?" "Certainly not!" said Ben. "Most decidedly no!" said Charlie. "Pop off! Begone, ye knaves!" But did the knaves depart? No, no, no, sir! Oh dear! Woe!

FILM FUN 3d

No. 1,396. Every Tuesday. October 19th, 1946.

LAUREL & HARDY

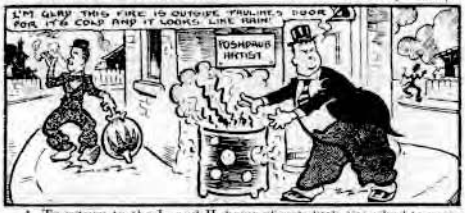
Arrest For Olly and "A-Rest" for Stan

This Week : "THE FAT'S IN THE FIRE!"

Hallo Folks Poshdaub was a famous artist, and his daughter, Pauline, was a real oil-painting. Olly donned his best suit to meet Pauline. "You get the shopping," he tootled. "Get the fats, and don't let them slip your memory."

2. Olly then donned his best smile, second best topper, the other being at the wash, and then toddled forth to keep his appointment. Stan was doing a bit of overtime with his thinking apparatus and decided that the weather looked inclement, so he took Olly's gamp.

3. His fat-featured, corpulent friend had warned him not to get the shopping wet, so our little lump of laughture told the shopkeeper to drop the parcels in the umbergamp. It was a very clever idea of our Stan's, but I am afraid it did not turn out quite as he expected.



4. To return to the L. and H. home of rest, little Stan had to pass the residence of Poshdaub and his daughter, and here Olly could be seen on the waiting list. He was glad of the fire some workmen had left, but he was dubious about the weather as it looked like rain.

5. When our chubby-featured friend observed Stan waltzing along with a gamp—his gamp—he took it for granted Stan had used his brains for once and brought the umbrella. He grabbed it, then told Stan to hop it at once as he did not want Pauline to see him.

6. Stan did not have a chance to explain. It was just the same as usual. By his overbearing manner, Olly simply overawed his little chum. Stan knew just what was going to happen to those fats beside the hot fire, but he knew Olly would not listen if he told him. Olly observed Julian Jumpupp's arrival with mixed, nasty feelings.

7. Julian was his rival, and he wanted to outsmart him. It was unfortunate that the Clerk of the Weather ruled that it would start raining at that tick. For Olly put up the gamp to keep the dew off his topper, and had a very sticky time from then on. For the fats, melted by the heat, poured all over his coat. *(Continued on page 16.)*

Soon after leaving school he had started as junior sub-editor at Amalgamated Press, and by 1916 had worked his way up to being a full-fledged editor with several comic papers under his control. In the comic 'Merry and Bright' he had featured in picture strip form famous vaudeville stars of the day, including George Robey, Nellie Wallace, Little Tich and T.E. Dunville.

At the end of the First World War in 1918, A.P. Directors had instructed editors to think up novel ideas for new publications, which would also give jobs for staff members returning from the forces. One editor, Reg. Eves, had thought up having a sister for Billy Bunter, to be called Bessie, so the famous girls' paper The School Friend was born, the sales of this eventually outstripping those of The Magnet.

Fred Cordwell, remembering the success of his music-hall characters, had the great idea of a weekly paper devoted entirely to the movie comedians, and for their young enthusiasts. Millions of people were then attending the cinema several times a week. For the masses of the working class, many warm and entertaining hours could be spent there for just a few coppers.

Also about this time, Amalgamated Press had bought out the titles from the rival comic firm of Trapps Holmes. One of their popular publications was Picture Fun, so Cordwell just substituted the word 'Film' and the new popular title was created. Actually the idea of having movie comedians in comic strip form was not entirely new. It probably originated in America, but in 1916 the comic Funny Wonder in Britain featured Charlie Chaplin on its front page. It was always a bone of contention by Cordwell that he could never persuade the powers-that-be to have Chaplin transferred to Film Fun. Richard Chance, the editor, was too astute to let his greatest asset depart from his Funny Wonder. The suggestion of the new film paper was accepted by Directors, who at that time realised that anything connected with films was a very positive proposition. Boys' Cinema, Girls' Cinema, Picturegoer, Passing Show and Film Weekly, to name just a few, were top selling papers for a great many years.

The first issue of Film Fun, dated January 17th 1920, was priced 1½d. Printed in half-tabloid in black and white, and with its strips interspersed with stories, it consisted of 20 pages. Its main stars were Winkle (Harold Lloyd), Lawrence Semon, Baby Marie Osborne, Mack Swain, Montgomery and Rock, Ben Turpin, Charlie Conklin, Slim Summerville, and James Aubrey.

It was mainly based on the formula of Merry & Bright, using the same contributors and artists. It is not to be wondered at that most had originated from the East End and were cockneys. Even Cordwell himself in appearance was a sort of comic character. Very large, with balding head, he wore a bowler hat, spats, and extremely large flower in his button hole. He also had a large fruity laugh, when highly amused at the humorous contributions of his contributors.

So much had Fred Cordwell mixed with the 'man of the street' that he had full knowledge of his tastes and humour. He was able to put this knowledge to good effect during his long editorship of the paper.

Apart from contributing a great deal in the way of stories, and humorous pieces, he was also the first of several 'Happy Eddies' - the jovial editor. Cordwell loved to pose for the staff artists and photographers so that he could appear in the pages of Film Fun, not only as himself, but in various disguises as villains in the serious stories. One such character was Professor Lewdroc - his name spelt backwards, but without the final 'l'.

Film Fun had sold so well, that within a couple of months a companion paper was introduced, 'Kinema Comic' on April 24th 1920, which was almost a carbon copy of Film Fun. Its main characters included Fatty Arbuckle, Chester Conklin, Mabel Normand, Ford

Sterling (of Keystone Cops fame), Jack Cooper, Lloyd Hamilton, Polly Moran and Louise Fazenda.

Fatty Arbuckle in 1920 was a top ranking star. In fact they had given away a free plate of him with No. 1 Film Fun, as well as running a serial story of his schooldays reputed to have been penned by him - but actually written by Cordwell! Most unfortunately, not long after, Arbuckle was involved in a serious court case in America where a girl died during a party. Although Arbuckle was found not guilty, it ruined his film career. It also ended his appearances in Kinema Comic from which he was hastily dropped, and the serial of his schooldays was changed to those of Larry Semon.

The main policy of Film Fun was to be always topical with its stars. As one star faded, he was replaced by another. The comic's sales were increasing all the time. The price had increased from 1½d to 2d after the first year; that remained constant for a number of years. One can, by examining back numbers of Film Fun, chart the rise and fall of many comedians such as Grock the Clown, Charlie Murray, Wesley Barry, Jackie Coogan and Gale Henry. Easily the most popular film characters to appear in Film Fun were that great team of Laurel and Hardy. They started in No. 564, dated November 8th 1930, in the middle pages. Actually they had appeared earlier on in another Amalgamated Press publication, 'The Realm of Fun and Fiction', drawn by Reg Carter.

In 1934 Laurel and Hardy were promoted to the front page of Film Fun, where they remained for twenty-three years until the death of Oliver Hardy in 1957. In all they appeared in 1,410 adventures, mainly drawn by George William Wakefield who was easily the most prolific artist of Film Fun.

"Billy" Wakefield, a big man, curiously like Cordwell in his appearance, was born in the Hoxton area of London. Before becoming an artist he had been an excellent heavy-weight boxer of the fairground booths, once fighting the then heavy-weight champion of England. Despite his large hands, he could draw beautiful dainty figures, boys with cherub faces and shapely girls. He also illustrated the Jimmy Silver & Co. Rookwood stories in the large green 'Boys' Friend' penned by Frank Richards as 'Owen Conquest', and many collectors particularly remember Wakefield for this aspect of his work.

Wakefield could get a perfect likeness of any film star. Often he started off a strip, then let other artists continue it by simply copying his style.

Other artists through the years included Tom Radford, Harry Parlett, Alex Akerbladh, W. Radford, A. Pease, Bert Brown, Norman Ward and Terry Wakefield, the son of "Billy" Wakefield. J.H. Valda drew mainly the cowboy picture stories, with Joss Walker producing the gangster ones.

(To be continued)

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A FIFTH FORM PHENOMENON by Ted Baldock

All schools have their characters, fellows with original attributes who stand out from the ordinary 'ruck'. Greyfriars would seem to have been unusually well endowed in this respect. Several schools might have their Cokers in some form or another, but surely Horace Coker of the fifth form at Greyfriars holds a unique place in the annals.

Coker: a block-headed yet endearing character who with his crassness, self assertion and unconscious humour has provided us with so many hours of happy reading during our boyhood - and beyond.

Poor Potter and Greene, who have the doubtful pleasure of sharing the same study, are his long suffering henchmen. What forbearance and patience they displayed (if one excepts the odd occasion for they were only human!) until they decided that enough was enough and rounded upon their vocal, self-appointed leader and dealt with him in summary fashion.

Horace Coker. A name to bring portentous frowns to the brow of authority, especially to that of Mr Prout who had the misfortune of being his form-master. Part of Prout's reason for existing was to attempt to instil as well as he was able some modicum of knowledge into Coker's singularly unreceptive head (an awe-inspiring task).

But are there not two sides to every situation - to every fellow? Coker was a 'one off' character who possessed many sterling qualities, not least among which was loyalty. Loyalty to his school, to his friends and to his task-master Mr Prout. "Don't ever let me catch you slanging my form master Greeny, or you either, Potter."

Coker always referred to Mr Prout as being his own personal property. On these occasions Potter and Greene displayed an admirably diplomatic silence, although their feelings may have been tumultuous enough. They reserved their pent up emotions with saint-like fortitude.

Horace Coker possessed the saving grace of an abiding affection for his Aunt Judith, a dear lady of indeterminate years. She could have stepped straight from the pages of 'Cranford' rather than the Magnet, making no concessions whatever to the passage of time - or fashion. Therein perhaps lay much of her charm. She could have been a direct descendant of Miss Betsy Trotwood, or Miss Pross, so similar are the characteristics of these ladies.

Seldom appearing in the Greyfriars stories, she is frequently referred to in glowing terms by Potter and Greene in the context of her magnificent tuck hampers (in size and quality quite worthy of Chunkleys' best). It may be safely conjectured that Billy Bunter would willingly have exchanged several 'titled relations' for an Aunt Judy. Coker's fondness for his aunt was unshakeable and limitless.

Supremely confident in his ability to resolve any problem, Horace was of course ignorant of the fact that he possessed less commonsense than most fellows. He certainly never learned from experience! From his 'short way with fags' to the not infrequent castigation of his two bosom pals, the great Horace was a verbose monument of contradictions - and none the less likeable for that.

News of the arrival of well stocked food hampers would travel swiftly through the school, and the finely tuned ear of William George Bunter was usually the first to become cognisant that 'tuck' was in the offing. That it was another fellow's 'tuck', which therefore should have been sacrosanct, was a trifle as light as, indeed lighter than, air in the fat Owl's moral code. It was Bunter's bounden duty to ascertain the whereabouts of such hampers, the quality and extent of the contents - and to appropriate to himself an ample selection of the same.

Not unnaturally Coker became incensed at these predatory raids upon his property, and Bunter received, in consequence, plenty of kicks. Sadly, however, no amount of kicking could replace a pineapple, a cherry cake or a bag of eclairs, these delicacies having taken unto themselves wings were gone for ever from their real owner.

Happily, unlike these foodstuffs, Horace Coker remains with us, as obtuse and fat-headed - but as decent as ever. Pope in his 'Essay on Criticism' has wisely said that 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. Yet in our long island story have not a few fools achieved great heights of **heroism** and even occasionally wisdom by so doing.

Surely there must always be hope for the 'fool' of the Greyfriars Fifth!

The winding Sark on a summer day,
What memories does it hold?
As from the shady banks we gaze
With friends both new and old.
Here comes old Coker with his pals
Long suffering as of yore

Upon their faces dismay dwells
For Coker's rowing's poor.
Clouds of spray come flying down
As Horace thrashes on,
Despite his chums' portentous frowns,
A sight to linger on.
Poor Potter's quite beside himself
And Greene is little better,
Were it not for Coker's wealth
His head I'm sure they'd batter.
As it is, they sit and fume,
Quite silently of course,
If Coker heard t'would be their doom
He'd hurl them out with force.
All this 'neath the gleaming sun
Of a glorious Kentish day,
Thus do fellows have their fun,
It is the Greyfriars way.

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YESTERDAY'S HEROES

In the third article of his series about popular fictional characters of yesteryear - best-sellers in their day and still fondly remembered by people today - BRIAN DOYLE recalls the notable success of P.C. Wren's very British hero Beau Geste, and his two loyal brothers, Digby and John, and the 'new' genre of romantic adventure novels set amidst the outwardly-glamorous but in reality tough and cruel French Foreign Legion, and of the films that followed ....

'The love of a man for a woman waxes and wanes like the moon, but the love of brother for brother is steadfast as the stars and endures like the word of the prophet'.

(Ancient Arabian Proverb).

The above words do not, curiously enough, appear in P.C. Wren's famous novel "Beau Geste", but were written for the beginning of the 1926 (and later the 1939) film versions of the story. Was the proverb a genuine Arabian one, or was it dreamed up by the Hollywood scriptwriter, Robert Carson, who wrote the screenplay for the earlier film? Nobody seems to know for certain, but it looks authentic and fits the story perfectly, so I suppose it doesn't really matter ....

"Beau Geste" is such a well-known story that everyone is surely familiar with it. The three upper-crust brothers, the theft of a priceless sapphire known as 'The Blue Water' from the family country home in England, the flight of the brothers, individually, for the best of motives, their reunion in the infamous French Foreign Legion, their adventures, their brutal conflict with the sadistic Colour-Sergeant Lejaune, and the tale's classic denouement.

And what a denouement! It's the one that begins the book (and the films), of course and is probably one of the most memorable and bizarre in the history of popular fiction (and of movies too) ....

A contingent of Legionnaires arrives at Fort Zinderneuf, a remote Foreign Legion outpost in the Sahara Desert, in North Africa. All is quiet. All is deserted. But at every embrasure in the fort's walls stands an armed Legionnaire, rifle at the ready and aimed at

any approaching enemy. But when investigations are made, it is discovered that every man is dead. Nothing stirs. The dead guard the dead. Then, suddenly, a shot rings out - and soon the whole fort is consumed by flames.

Then comes the long flashback telling of the events that led to this uncanny happening - and we meet the three Geste brothers. There is Michael (known as 'Beau' because of his 'remarkable physical beauty, mental brilliance and general distinction'), there is his twin brother Digby (known as 'Small Geste'), and there is their younger brother, John (known, of course, as 'Very Small Geste'). Digby and John are the two strings to Michael's 'Beau'....

The three Gestes were at Eton together and tend to live by the public school code, especially the qualities of honour, duty, loyalty and self-sacrifice. They are probably what Harry Wharton of Greyfriars School grew up to be. The brothers three are devoted and close to one another. The trio go through their adventures together rather like public school prefects out on a spree and talk in much the same way. But their hearts are in the right place, they are light-hearted, but also brave and courageous (and, of course, handsome and attractive). Some twenty years later, had they all survived and not aged, they might well have been Spitfire or Hurricane pilots in the Battle of Britain.

Percival Christopher Wren, who created the likeable heroes - and obviously a 'fellow of infinite Gestes' (as Hamlet didn't quite say when describing Yorick) - was, by all accounts, rather like his own creations.

He was a reticent man and you will look in vain for his basic details in "Who's Who" and similar reference works. But, in fact, Major Wren (as he later became) was born in 1885, in Devonshire, and was a descendant of Sir Christopher Wren. He graduated from Oxford University with an M.A. degree, and then followed his father's advice to 'look at life through as many windows as possible'. He travelled widely and wandered the world as tramp, schoolmaster, farm-labourer, navvy, costermonger in London's East End markets, explorer and soldier. He served in the French Foreign Legion (but no one has ever apparently unearthed precisely just when and where and under what circumstances); he also served as a trooper in a British Cavalry Regiment, and lived in India for ten years, holding varous educational posts there (including that of Director of Public Education in Bombay) and wrote textbooks for use in Indian schools. In 1914-15 he was a Captain in the Indian Army Reserve, serving in East Africa, being invalided out with the rank of major in 1917. He then settled down in London to concentrate upon his writing career.

When anyone complained to him that his stories were extravagant, impossible or far-fetched, he simply replied: "They're true!" In one of his books he wrote of a woman who had served, as a man, in the Foreign Legion, for several years, even being promoted to Sergeant. When some people raised an eyebrow (or two) he produced evidence of an actual real-life case of this happening. Wren looked like the hero of one of his own books, with a cavalry moustache, monocle, clean-cut jaw and aquiline nose, and he was tall, erect and distinguished - the archetypal retired British officer and gentleman. 'Beau' Wren himself perhaps .... !

Wren wrote 38 books: 28 novels and 10 books of short stories. His first book was "Dew and Mildew", comprising stories set in India and published in 1912. "Beau Geste" was his eighth book and appeared in 1924. It was an immediate success with public and critics alike, and received 'raves' from most newspapers and magazines. It was also praised as being the first novel to depict day-to-day life in the French Foreign Legion. But it wasn't.

"Under Two Flags" by the curiously-named Ouida (pronounced 'Weeda') (Louise de la Ramée) had been published way back in 1867 and was all about the adventures of an English Corporal in the Foreign Legion. This was a big-seller in its time and was filmed

three times, so people had a rough idea of what life in the Legion was like long before "Beau Geste" appeared on the scene.

This is not to belittle "Beau Geste". Wren's book popularized the Legion as a backdrop to exciting adventures and he also wrote many other books and stories about the subject, so virtually creating the 'modern' genre of Foreign Legion tales. But Ouida's novel was, so far as I know, the first in its field (or desert).

The French Foreign Legion, for those interested (maybe you've even thought at some time of running away from it all and joining up? No questions are asked, you can use any name you like - but you have to sign on for a minimum period of five years) was founded in 1831, with the blessing of King Louis Philippe of France; it was called the Legion Étrangere (the latter word means 'foreign'), a cosmopolitan force by which France held secure her territories in North and West Africa. It was born in Paris and cradled in Sidi-Bel-Abbes. It is still going strong today.

"Beau Geste" is one of the great and perennial best-selling novels of all time. By the 40th Anniversary of its first publication, in 1964, it had reached 50 editions. It has never been out-of-print and it was a best-seller in America too. There is at least one paperback edition in print today and it was recently included in a classic anthology ('Five Classic Adventure Stories' Oxford Un. Press, 1995). In 1927 a special 'De Luxe' illustrated edition, limited to 1,000 copies and each signed by Wren, was published; it had a frontispiece portrait of Wren and was appropriately bound in the colours of the Legion.

P.C. Wren wrote other Foreign Legion books featuring the Gestes (chiefly about John, the surviving brother); these were "Beau Sabreur" (1926), "Beau Ideal" (1928), "Good Gestes" (1929) (short stories), and "Spanish Main" (1935) (this has also appeared as "Desert Heritage").

Wren also wrote a series about another hero: Sinclair Dysert (alias Sir Sinclair Noel Brody Dysert, R.N.) better-known as 'Sinbad' (because of his initials and his family Naval background). He also saw service in the Legion. The books about him were "Action and Passion" (1933), "Sinbad the Soldier" (1935) and "The Fort in the Jungle" (1936).

Other authors wrote books set in the Foreigh Legion. There was, for instance, "Tarzan and the Foreign Legion" by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1947). A mysterious author named A. Samper wrote a series of five Legion novels. George E. Rochester wrote a serial for "The Magnet" in 1930, titled "For the Glory of the Legion" (later republished in book-form as "Sons of the Legion" in 1948). There were four Foreign Legion serials in "Chums" between 1928 and 1935. And Geoffrey Bond, who had written a series of strip-picture stories for "Eagle" between 1952-61 (artist: Martin Aitchison) about 'Sergeant Luck of the Foreign Legion', wrote them up as boys' adventure books, beginning in 1956.

The first motion picture version of "Beau Geste" came in 1926 and was, of course, a silent. It was in black-and-white, with colour sequences (highly unusual then), had a screenplay by Robert Carson (later a well-known novelist) and was directed by Herbert Brenon. Beau was Ronald Colman, Digby was Neil Hamilton, John was Ralph Forbes, and Sergent Lejaune was Noah Beery; two of the Legionnaires were William Powell and Victor McLaglen. The posters read: 'Hard lives, quick deaths, undying love!' and it cost over a million dollars - a fortune in those days. P.C. Wren was said to be delighted with it, especially the casting of the three brothers. The desert locations were at Buttercup Valley, near Yuma, in Arizona.

The second - and most famous - screen version of "Beau Geste" came in 1939. It was directed by William A. Wellman (himself an ex-Legionnaire) from a screenplay by Paul Schofield. Beau was played by Gary Cooper, Digby by Robert Preston, John by Ray Milland, and the evil Sergeant Markoff (his name was changed from Lejaune to avoid offending the French - don't ask, I couldn't figure it out either!) by Brian Donlevy. In the Legionnaire ranks were such stalwarts as Broderick Crawford, Albert Dekker and J. Carroll

Naish, with lovely Susan Hayward wasted as the girl who waited back in England. In the early part of the story, Beau as a child was played by 12-year-old Donald O'Connor (who once told me, with a grin, when I had the pleasure of lunching with him at Pinewood Studios a few years ago: "That was one of the very rare pictures in which I didn't dance!"). Donlevy received a 'Best Supporting Actor' Oscar Nomination for his memorable portrayal of the Sergeant, but, in the event, lost out to Thomas Mitchell, for his performance in "Stagecoach". One of Markoff's classic - and typical - lines in the film was: "Keep shooting, you scum! You'll get a chance yet to die with your boots on!"

The posters for the 1939 film read: 'Three against the world, Brothers and Soldiers All!' The locations were again in the sand dunes outside Yuma, Arizona, but this time a new Fort Zinderneuf was built. A lot of hard-drinking went on, apparently, during the location shooting, and some of the cast and crew ended up in Yuma Jail! Sandstorms also held up filming several times. This picture was a scene-by-scene remake of the 1926 version.

There's not much to be said about the third and most recent screen version of "Beau Geste". This was released in 1966 and written and directed by Douglas Heyes. Guy Stockwell was Beau (who was an American stockbroker!) with Doug McClure as John Geste and the bald-pated Telly Savalas as the sadistic Sergeant (this time, for some inscrutable reason, named Dagineau). There was no Digby to be seen. And, would you believe, Beau survives at the end! It was also everyone back to Buttercup Valley, Yuma, for the third time, for the desert locations. This was an inferior, poorly-reviewed picture with, everyone agreed, too much violence. There were no women, no 'Blue Water' sapphire sequence in England, and the film did away with any romantic aspects of the story. This was a case of stretching the 'Beau' to the limit, I'm afraid; there was more 'Boo' than 'Beau'

GARY COOPER AS BEAU

to this one, sadly, and the only 'Geste' it received from public and critics alike was one of disgust.

There was a silent film version of "Beau Sabreur", with Gary Cooper, in 1928, and a film of "Beau Ideal" in 1931. And in 1936 came the third screen version of Ouida's "Under Two Flags", the original novel that really started the whole Foreign Legion thing off; it starred Ronald Colman as an Englishman in the Legion, rather unsuitably named Bertie Cecil. It cost over two million dollars - a colossal sum back in the 1930s.

There were many other Foreign Legion motion pictures over the years, but I'll mention only four, briefly: Laurel and Hardy in "Beau Chumps" ("Beau Hunks" in the U.S.A.) (1931); "Abbot and Costello in the Foreign Legion" (1950); "Follow That Camel" (a 'Carry On' comedy, with Phil Silvers as the nasty Sergeant) (1967); and "The Last Remake of 'Beau Geste'" (1977) (this was written and directed by, and co-starred, Marty Feldman, and was a crazy, farcical spoof, with Michael York as Beau, Feldman as Digby, Peter Ustinov as the sadistic Sergeant, and such people as Spike Milligan, Terry-Thomas, Irene Handl, Roy Kinnear, Trevor Howard and Ann-Margret popping up here and there. At one point, Digby is seen (through trick photography) conversing with Gary Cooper's Beau in the desert - but it turns out to be a mirage .... But then this picture itself was like one long mirage, though quite funny in places).

There was a classic BBC Television serial of "Beau Geste", shown in eight 30-minute episodes, in 1982, in which Benedict Taylor was Beau, with the desert scenes being filmed this time (not in good old Yuma, Arizona) but in a disused sandpit and quarry in Wareham, Dorset. It was quite good, but the trouble was that everyone looked so young, especially Benedict Taylor, who seemed as though he should have been in the Remove Form at Greyfriars rather than in middling form, rather unconvincingly brandishing a brand-new-looking rifle at Fort Zinderneuf ....

There was a famous, or perhaps infamous, stage production of "Beau Geste" at His Majesty's Theatre, London, in 1929. It starred the young Laurence Olivier as Beau, Jack Hawkins as John, and Robin Irvine as Digby, with Edmund Willard as the Sergeant. It was produced by Basil Dean on a vast scale with a cast of 120 (including a whole regiment of Legionnaires, who were drilled daily by a genuine RSM), five huge sets, plus lots of noisy action; there was much enthusiastic firing of rifles, a Maxim machine-gun doing like-wise, fights, shouting and screaming, and a spectacular climactic fire at Fort Zinderneuf. On the first night (which ran for over four hours) an on-duty fireman became alarmed by all this and in an excess of efficiency rang down the safety curtain. By the time it was raised to enable the cast to take their bows, practically all the audience had left the theatre. It was a famous theatrical disaster and ran for four weeks.

In 1947, there was a marvellous, marathon BBC radio serial of "Beau Geste" which ran for ten weeks. I remember it vividly and it was the talk of all the boys at my school. Barry Morse was Beau, the role of Sergeant Lejaune was shared (for some reason) between two actors, Gilbert Davis and Richard Williams, and it was produced by Martyn C. Webster, famous for his productions of the 'Paul Temple' mystery serials. There was a more recent 'Beau' broadcast as a BBC radio serial in 1994, when 'Beau' was played by David Lumsden.

P.C. Wren, though one of the most popular adventure novelists of his generation, was not perhaps the best writer of English prose. Clichés abound, I'm afraid, and the Geste brothers talk rather like senior public schoolboys discussing the latest inter-House cricket match. ("Don't be a silly ass, old chap" says Digby memorably to a tough, uncouth fellow-Legionnaire - who stares at him uncomprehendingly, and not surprisingly - at one point.) People tend to 'stare wide-eyed' and 'open-mouthed' at one another, to 'recoil in terror' and say things 'savagely' and 'menacingly' and so on. But Wren knew how to tell a story

and his writing was fast-moving, colourful and full of action, which was what his readers wanted - and expected.

Wren was a bit of a snob too. "Breed is a remarkable thing, even more distinctive than race" he says in "The Wages of Virtue" (1913). Men are often referred to as 'cads', 'swine' or 'bullies'. "Why couldn't they stand up and fight like gentlemen under Queensbury Rules," asks a character plaintively at one point. But P.C. Wren made a fortune, so who am I to dare to criticize his writing style!

P.C. WREN

Wren died, after a long illness, in 1941. Sadly, there was no 'Viking Funeral' for him (if you know the story of "Beau Geste" you will know what this somewhat cryptic remark means ....)

"Beau Geste" (1930 version) was shown on TV some months ago. Two days later, the media reported that a contingent of French Legionnaires had been sent to quell a riot in Tahiti over the controversial French atomic bomb tests. The French Foreign Legion was going into action yet again, in 1995. I can just imagine the ghost of Beau Geste urging his brothers along: "Come on, chaps, dash it all, we don't want to miss all the fun - and keep an eye on Lejaune, the unspeakable cad's just got to pull his socks up - what!"

(Next in the series: 'Raffles'.)

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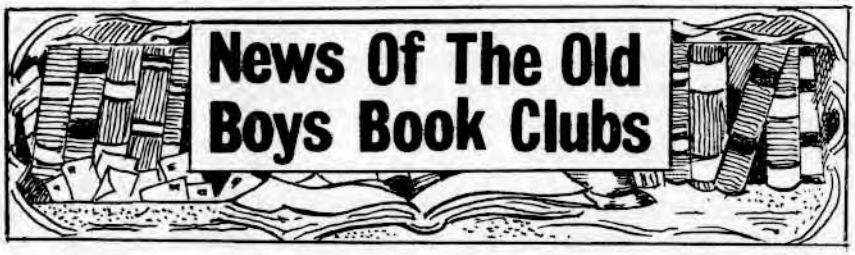

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Eleven members were made welcome at our first meeting of the new year. New programmes were distributed and studied and it was agreed that 1997 should be an interesting year. A group of members made arrangements to go to The Grand Theatre Leeds to see Famous Five, the Musical in February.

Our first item of the evening was 'Bookshops Of My Youth' by Darrell Swift. This tour around some long forgotten establishments stirred the memories of all our Leeds based members. After refreshments Paul Galvin presented 'W.E. Johns Today'. This was a look at some of his collecting experiences over the last ten years.

Paul Galvin

LONDON O.B.B.C.

The A.G.M. was held at Loughton on Sunday 12th January and attended by 22 members, despite 'flu' casualties. Reports from officers and librarians indicated a satisfactory year of achievement and a healthy financial position. Overall membership had

increased as had attendance at meetings. The C.D. Jubilee Luncheon and two buffet luncheons had been most successful, also the guest speakers from outside our ranks.

The new Chairman is Duncan Harper, the Secretary is Vic Pratt. Norman Wright agreed to remain Treasurer for one year more. Librarians as hitherto.

The programme opened with a discourse from Bill Lofts on Leslie Charteris, whom he knew personally over many years. This was accompanied by a display of sundry items of memorabilia from Bill's 'treasures' bag. After the usual 'Harper study spread' Norman gave us a fascinating insight into 'The Lone Ranger' saga, covering Radio, TV & Film, illustrated by video snippets. Suzanne and Chris were warmly thanked for their hospitality, and a particular tribute was made to Suzanne for her many years of effort on our behalf as Secretary. Next meeting: at Chingford on 9th February. Please advise Audrey Potts if attending.

Bill Bradford

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Obituary: John Trendler

John Trendler has been one of my closest friends for many years since we spoke to each other by chance when he responded to an advert of mine offering some Biggles books for sale. Within a couple of minutes of starting the telephone conversation I realised that here was a collector as enthusiastic as myself and as he only lived a five minutes car ride away he suggested he pop over to take a look at the books I had for sale and also to see my own collection of Biggles books. By the time John left I felt I had known him for years.

John's interests were very wide, ranging from vintage cars to vintage bottles and a host of other things in between including old time radio shows, Dads Army, vintage comedy, Dan Dare and old newspapers. John was a real magpie and hated to throw away anything that might come in handy or eventually become collectable.

John's greatest interest was in the works of W.E.Johns and in this field his enthusiasm was boundless and his knowledge second to none. He collected the works of W.E. Johns in both book form and in magazine serialisations and built up extensive files on all the various editions and reprints. His interest was not only in obtaining copies of all W.E.Johns' work but also in building up as much information as he could on the publishing history of each story and book. John and I made a number of trips to the Bodleian Library gathering information on the obscure Johns' titles and sorting out first editions from reprints. John was particularly keen to promote W.E.Johns' more obscure novels and in 1994 John and I published a deluxe limited edition of "Mossyface", the scarcest of all W.E.Johns' novels.

In October 1989 John edited the first issue of "Biggles and Co. The W.E.Johns Quarterly". Although the magazine had a small editorial team, John was the driving force behind it and in recent years he has put it together virtually single handed. Like everything he did John wanted "Biggles and Co." to be a really first class production and from the first issue he had the

vision to insist that the magazine should have a full colour cover. The quarterly was a great success and over the years the magazine has gone from strength to strength and now has a circulation of over four hundred.

John will probably be best remembered by many people for the memorable Biggles Days he organised where collectors could share their enthusiasm with others, listen to entertaining talks and presentations, and have a thoroughly enjoyable time. It was John's sheer enthusiasm that made the days so successful and I know that many readers of this magazine and members of the various Old Boys' Book Clubs attended the meetings and subscribed to "Biggles and Co" magazine.

During the W.E.Johns Centenary year in 1993, John was involved in numerous events related to the author. A number of these took place in Hertford, the birthplace of W.E.Johns, and it was while helping with an exhibition at the Hertford Museum that John met his future wife, Andrea. The couple were married in September 1993.

It came as a very great shock to all of John's family and friends when he died suddenly on Christmas Eve aged only 53. He was a very good husband, father and friend. He will be sorely missed.

Norman Wright

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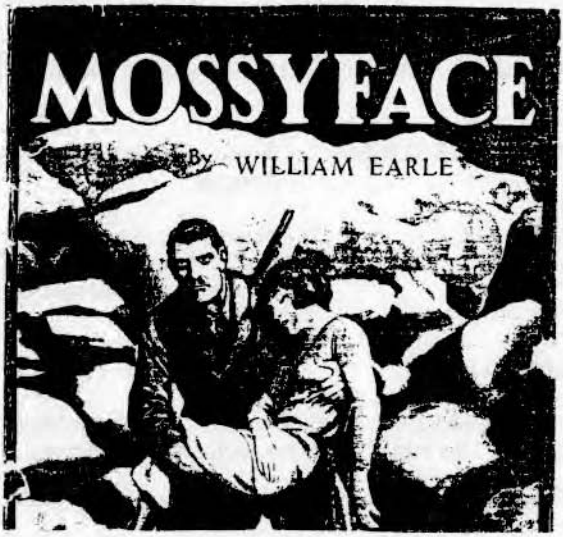
BIGGLES & CO

THE W.E. JOHNS QUARTERLY



FOR YOU - AND YOUR FRIENDS

Hawk Books have issued three sets of full colour postcards featuring pictures from our favourite papers. There are six cards in each set, plus a black-and-white 'heading' one; the quality is excellent and, as well as wanting to send these with greetings and messages to friends, C.D. readers will probably want to keep copies for themselves. Details are as follows:

GREYFRIARS CHRISTMAS SERIES -	mostly taken from colour pages in the Holiday Annuals
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DAN DARE COLLECTORS SET -	from the 'Eagle' comic

These cards can be obtained from Hawk Books, 43 Stapledon Road, Orton Southgate, Peterborough, PE2 6TD. The cost is £4.50 for each set, plus postage.

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Marie Scofield, 3 Hunters Way, Springfield, Chelmsford, CM1 6FL. Tel: 01245-460416.

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Five pounds paid for a copy of the rules of the game "Up For The Cup", which was given away with the Thomson paper "Adventure" on March 10th 1934. Contact Ben Bligh, Tel. No: 0161-483-7627.

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Wanted: All pre-war Sexton Blake Libraries. **All** Boys Friend Libraries. All comics/papers etc with stories by W.E. Johns, Leslie Charteris & Enid Blyton. Original artwork from Magnet, Gem, Sexton Blake Library etc. also wanted. I will pay £150.00 for original Magnet, cover artwork, £75.00 for original Sexton Blake Library cover artwork. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 EASTBURY ROAD, WATFORD, WD1 4JL. Tel: 01923 23283.

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Wanted: Schoolgirls' Own Library (first series-all numbers, second series 1-230) Schoolboys' Own Library (all issues) Schoolgirls' Picture Library (1-100). ALISON AINSWORTH, 82 SHAKESPEARE CRES, FRASER ACT 2615 AUSTRALIA.

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Wanted: 'With Frederick the Great in Silesia' by G.A. Henty. Good price paid for a copy in good condition. M. Waters, 11 Abbots Way, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. NN8 2AF.

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URGENTLY REQUIRED: The Ranger 1st Series (1931/33) No's 72, 105, 115. The Ranger 2nd Series (1933/35) No. 42. The Thriller (1929/1940) No's 65, 114, 442, 454, 464. Good prices paid. Contact Bill Bradford, 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing London W5 3XP. Tel. 0181-579-4670.

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