

The Story Paper
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

FEBRUARY 1998

VOL.52

No.614

90TH Anniversary of the



Frank Richards



THE FIRST 'MAGNET' (1908)



THE LAST 'MAGNET' (1940)

Bob
Whiter



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NINETY JOYOUS YEARS

As I mentioned last month, we are now celebrating ninety years of that most popular of all boys' papers, the *Magnet*, as well as fifty years of the London Old Boys Book Club. I am delighted to be able to include, in this February number of the C.D., articles to mark these events from long-standing club members Roger Jenkins, John Wernham and Brian Doyle, together with our cover illustration provided by Bob Whiter who, I believe, is the only founder-member still with us.

I have, as you will see, used earlier C.D. pictures of Charles Hamilton, Charles Henry Chapman and Charles Maurice Down. (It is intriguing that all three shared the same first name.) C.M. Down, of course, was Editor of the *Gem* and *Magnet* from 1921 until the papers ended in 1939 and 1940 respectively. Charles Hamilton always spoke warmly of their harmonious association. When they first met, Hamilton described Down as 'a very elegant and beautifully mannered young gentleman who was a sub-editor', and, apparently, it was on him that Gussy was moulded.

What a debt we owe to all those who were involved over the decades in the production of the *Magnet*! Although probably none of them realized the long-lasting appeal it would have, it seems that they all much enjoyed and put a high value on their work for this paper. This perhaps is why the *Magnet*, even when we read old and shabby copies many years after its original publication, seems always to sparkle and entice.

For many of us as children the *Magnet* was a constant companion, enjoyed equally when read on high summer days or by cosy fires in the depths of winter. The Greyfriars characters and stories reflected the seasons, just as they reflected our own dreams, hopes and fears. Charles Hamilton gave us an abundance of friends and role-models, and it is a special joy that we have not outgrown these. His story-spinning skills were so remarkable, and his insights so keen, that as adults we find the world of Greyfriars possibly even more enchanting than it was to us as children.

The Old Boys Book Clubs were originally inspired and have been bonded together by people's love for several of the old papers - but there is no doubt that *Magnet* enthusiasts have always formed a major part of the Clubs' memberships. Some part of that paper's warmth, magic and friendliness has, it seems, been absorbed and perpetuated by the Clubs. May these groups survive for at least another half-century!

MARY CADOGAN

THE MAGNET AND ME

by John Wernham

Eighty years ago there was no radio, television or compact discs. It was wartime and there were no school prizes, no sweets, chocolates or other sugared delights. Food and fuel were limited and life was real, earnest, not to say chilly or even hungry. But there was one weekly respite from this rather cheerless catalogue, a joyful invitation into the pages of the *Magnet* and into a world which still managed to retain a hint of more placid times. Of course, there stories were topical and there were plenty of German spies and returning heroes from the war front.

Early memories began with *The House on the Heath*, a story of snow, a mysterious house, spies and all the Double Number fare that filled an eight-year-old with enough awe, thrills and absorption to last a life-time. But, there is another atmosphere that has never been erased from the ancient mind that can still revel in those early days when the sun is shining, the River Sark is sparkling and certain illegal picnickers are busy avoiding discovery on 'Popper's Island', while Bunter, of course, is 'chomping' his way through somebody's tuck basket, in some grassy nook. Even to ponder a little on this simple scenario is enough to eliminate all those eighty years.

Of the many characters who peopled the Greyfriars scene the Redwing/Vernon-Smith series made a deep impression which, together with the 'Judge Jeffrey' stories made the highlights in those early Blue and White cover days. It is not the custom to style the work of Frank Richards as escapism and yet the poor boy is so uptight and the rich boy is so decadent that the young reader is already playing Redwing and getting it right within the hallowed walls of Greyfriars, besides winning hands down, in the last round, against the evils of the rich man's son.

Rebellion is also high on the list, particularly when a strange master disturbed the good old Greyfriars equilibrium in which nobody ever did any work (except chaps like Mark Linley) and there was plenty of time left over for Quelch and Prout to sniff at each other.

Escapism, however, is short-lived, providing only a brief respite from the stress of the day, while the Redwing brand of escapism gives permanent relief, losing nothing with the passing of time and needing only the occasional renewal, as and when required. So, let us think about Bunter and 'Old Popper', Smithy scowling at Reddy in the Study and Jeffrey getting his just desserts, just to forget our troubles meanwhile.

There is a story related by Frank Richards concerning a young man lying in bed acutely ill and depressed. Some kind soul then brought along a pile of old *Magnets* to read, whereupon the depression was banished and the illness reduced. After reading the account, Frank said that he sat very still and silent for a long period! Eighty . . . ninety years ago? The magic is there for all time.



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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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OCTOBER, 1955



MR. MAURICE DOWN, LAST EDITOR OF THE GEM & MAGNET.
DRAWN SPECIALLY FOR THE C.D. BY MR. C. H. CHAPMAN.



Chapman's picture of Charles Hamilton and some of his characters, drawn for the Charles Hamilton memorial number of the C.D. (February 1962)



Chapman's portraits of himself as a young man in 1905, and at the age of 90.



MAGNET MEMORIES

by Roger Jenkins

Since ninety years have elapsed since the first *Magnet* was published, anyone who can remember reading it in February 1908 must now be a nonagenarian. The wonder is that, despite the paper's demise in 1940, there is still a large number of people who continue to rank the *Magnet* as their favourite boys' paper. All this amply justifies Charles Hamilton's decision never to write down to his readers, for not only did he raise their standards but he also retained an adult readership.

Nothing could illustrate this better than the way in which the *Magnet* affected my life as a boy. Reading was the family recreation, and on a winter evening we all sat round a coal fire pursuing our favoured occupation under a flickering gas-lamp. An occasional wireless programme was listened to, but Greyfriars ruled supreme. We were friendly with the local newsagent who allowed us to purchase the *Magnet* on the day before publication, and I was duly despatched to obtain our advance copy. With particularly exciting stories, my father used to tear off the first page, when read, and thus the *Magnet* was passed round, page by page in order of seniority. When I told Charles Hamilton about this in 1951, he wrote to me as follows: "I was very greatly amused by your description of the dissection of the old *Magnet* during the Stacey series. I should certainly have been very pleased at the time, could I have known that the series had such eager readers."

The newsagent had weekly papers on a sale or return basis, but the monthly libraries had a much longer shelf life. My own delight was to expend fourpence on a Schoolboys' Own Library and to see a huge pile of brightly-coloured blue-edged issues brought down from the shelf for my delectation. These monthly issues were my own property, and thus escaped the mutilation that befell the *Magnet* in our house. For years I kept these monthly issues, and thus became acquainted time and time again with the classics of a golden age: such series as Lancaster, Brander, Courtfield Cracksman, Mauleverer Towers, Valentine, and many others. Cuts and omissions they had in plenty, as we now know, but what remained was pure magic.

What was the source of the magic? It was certainly not the moral code (or what Charles Hamilton once expressed to me as "the pill in the jam"). It was undoubtedly the perfectly realised world, a close community of boys who stood together against adversity and, even more importantly, a world where right and justice always prevailed in the end. This did not mean that our heroes were perfect and always remained unscathed. To quote from another letter Charles Hamilton wrote to me: "Everyone, I suppose, has known a fellow who has a slight tendency to sulk, and mistakes it for righteousness. This tendency can be cured if taken early enough: and it seems to me that Wharton's little weaknesses might be more instructive than the complete goodness which, I fear, generally fails to ring the bell." This long letter, incidentally, was mainly an analysis of the basis on which the Stacey series came to be written.

It seems very likely that this weakness in Wharton's character was at the very core of the fascination of the *Magnet*. The younger reader was probably interested in the antics of Bunter, and of course in the early 'thirties he was at his best. Oddly enough, Vernon-Smith had an elusive attractiveness at this time, before he became hard and ruthless: compare the first South Seas series with the later Texas, Bertie Vernon, and Blackrock Island series.

This famous trio of characters of Wharton, Vernon-Smith, and Bunter became a fulcrum on which to balance many a fine *Magnet* story.

Equally riveting were the Greyfriars masters. Mr Quelch commanded the greatest respect from the Remove, but Mr Prout and poor Monsieur Charpentier became well-known to the reader. Occasionally we might get a short scene between two masters, but personal details were few and far between, since the masters existed mainly as adults seen through the eyes of the schoolboys. Even when Dr Locke and Mr Quelch came to stay at Wharton Lodge, their characters were never enlarged upon: they remained exactly as they were depicted at Greyfriars. Looking back to my own schooldays, I know we judged the masters by the discipline they kept and their knowledge of their subjects. Even as a prefect, when I was entitled to the dubious privilege of an occasional lunch with the headmaster (when dessert apples had to be peeled and cut with a knife and fork but never touched by hand) I never came to know him more than I did when in the classroom.

Greyfriars seemed to be based on the old regime of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, when the Master could marry but all the other academic staff had to remain as bachelors. What sort of holiday life the Greyfriars masters possessed was never really examined by Charles Hamilton. Presumably, if the boys were not at school, the masters ceased to exist.

Occasionally, of course, a master might fall ill, but this was merely a device to introduce a temporary master who was not what he seemed. Again, if the story line demanded it, we discovered that Mr Quelch was a saving man who had at the back of his mind an ambition to run a school of his own, and when he was dismissed in the High Oaks series, that building was one which he considered might be suitable for his purpose. Mr Prout, we were told, had been a mighty hunter of grizzly bears, but this was merely the necessary background to explain why he had rifles on his study walls, and in an emergency he would seize one of his loaded firearms and inadvertently point it at Mr Quelch.

I count it my good fortune that I read the *Magnet* as it came out during my own schooldays, and that I later wrote many letters to Charles Hamilton during the 1940s and 1950s, receiving detailed replies to each. His letters showed clearly how his mind worked, the purpose he had in creating certain characters, and the moral basis of many of his stories. This all culminated in an afternoon visit during which I asked many questions and wished I had asked many more. Certainly I never imagined that the magic of my *Magnet* reading would ever lead me to talk to the author himself.

Haec olim meminisse juvabit

NOSTALGIA IS WHAT IT USED TO BE AT THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS - EVEN AFTER FIFTY YEARS . . . !

says Brian Doyle

In the February, 1948, issue of the *Collectors' Digest*, Herbert Leckenby wrote in his Editorial: "Here is something of great interest to collectors. Mr Blythe tells me he is arranging to have monthly meetings, probably on Sundays, for those in the London area. It is intended to have discussions, auctions, exchanges, etc. - so there's another step forward in the praiseworthy idea of getting the members of the Clan to meet each other . . ."

It was indeed - a small step for man, but a giant step for collectors and readers of old boys' (and girls') papers and magazines.

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Old Boys' Book Club falls on February 29th, 1998 - or it should do. But, as it happens, there is no February 29th this year, it not being a Leap Year. Honouring the old premise "Look before you Leap", the official Anniversary should therefore fall, presumably, on Sunday, March 1st, that being the day after February 28th, which is appropriate - if you see what I mean. (Wake up at the back there!)

That very first historic meeting was held at 27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, in South-East London, the home of Len Packman (who was co-founder of the Club with Bob Blythe) and his wife, Josie. There were nine people present, including Ben Whiter (who was to serve as Secretary for so many years), his brother Bob and his then-wife Eileen, Frank Keeling, Jim Parrott, and Julian Herman. Eric Fayne and Charlie Wright attended the second meeting, when the occasion also marked the reunion of Ben and Charlie who had been school-fellows and hadn't met for 30 years! Len was the first Chairman (a position he held for many years), Bob Whiter became Treasurer, and Charlie acted as annual Auditor. Dear old Bob Whiter, still one of the nicest chaps in the world, is the sole survivor of that happy band and, although he lives in Los Angeles these days, still manages to get over for the occasional meeting every couple of years or so.

The rest, as they say, is history, and anyone who possesses the Commemorative illustrated menu for the Silver Jubilee Luncheon, held at the Rembrandt Hotel, London, in February, 1973, can read more of the story of the original London Old Boys' Book Club - the First of the Few.

Speaking personally, I attended my own first meeting of the Club on December 20th, 1959 - the Christmas Meeting - held at Bob and Eileen Whiter's home in Lordship Lane, Wood Green, London, known for the occasion as 'Cherry Place'. I had been told about the Club by Frank Vernon Lay (then Chairman) when I visited his house at Whetstone to purchase some *Magnets* and *Holiday Annuals* in response to an ad. he had placed in *Exchange and Mart*. He suggested, during a long chat, that I attend the next meeting of the Club (which I had never heard of until then).

I duly turned up - feeling rather like a character in A.E.W. Mason's well-known novel *The House in Lordship Lane* - and was cordially greeted by the host, Bob Whiter, with the cheerful and breezy words "Hullo, old chap, come on in, Major Cherry's expecting you!" I climbed the stairs to a warm and welcoming first floor room, decked with Christmas decorations, thronged with friendly people, and Bob introduced me around. Ben Whiter, I remember, said: "Oh, Mr Doyle, is it? We'll have to call you Conan." And he did for all the many years after that I knew him. Then Don Webster took me in hand and told me all about the Club and who was who and what was what.

I see from Newsletter No. 89, for that occasion, that there were 28 members present. It's sad to note that a dozen are no longer with us and there were other names I don't recognize. But Roger Jenkins and Eric Fayne were there, as were Roy Parsons and Win Morss, not forgetting George Sewell, later to become a well-known actor, of course.

There were quizzes galore, rewarded with prizes, one of which was a fine tuck hamper sent all the way from Hanover, Germany, by Les Rowley; it was won by Eric Fayne. Len Packman gave a Christmas reading. And final arrangements were confirmed for a party of 56 to visit the Victoria Palace in London to see *Billy Bunter Flies East*, starring Gerald Campion as the Fat Owl.

I finally left my very first OBBC meeting in a warm and cheery glow, having had a smashing time and made lots of new friends. I've been a regular attender ever since.

I suppose the Club has changed somewhat over the years. In the earlier days I recall that much of the animated discussion centred on the writings of Charles Hamilton and his wonderful characters, of his great schools, Greyfriars and St. Jim's, of *The Magnet* and *The Gem*, and these topics were often the subject of talks. The same went, in a slightly lesser degree, for Edwy Searles Brooks, St. Frank's and 'Nelson Lee', and for 'Sexton Blake' and his host of authors.

Today, apart from occasional readings, these are more rare, with attention also paid to other writers and publications: and characters and, indeed, to popular novels and films of the past. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Or doesn't it really matter, so long as the old books and papers are talked about and remembered with affection and nostalgia? Someone once quipped: "Nostalgia isn't what it used to be". Ah, but it is at the OBBC, where memories are truly worth remembering and treasuring.

I'm very glad I joined the London Old Boys' Book Club way back in 1959 - it was the beginning of 38 years of enjoyable and delightful and absorbing association with the hobby and of meeting so many nice people.

Happy Anniversary OBBC!



BLACK, WHITE AND GRAY Part Two - Joy Shall Be In Heaven

by Mark Caldicott

Augustus Hart, the bounder who is determined to reform, is proving to be an excellent cricketer. Of course, if you are a bounder then you are not interested in sport, so Hart has not played before. Having begun to practise and work at the game he discovers that he has been missing out.

Nipper, as cricket captain, recognises Hart's developing skills, and, when an opportunity presents itself, picks him for the game against Hazlehurst School. What Nipper doesn't know is that Hazlehurst is Hart's former school, and that Hart, not anxious to meet with fellows who knew him in his former life, and who regard him with extreme repugnance, has made himself scarce by going for a bicycle ride.

Fate has yet another dirty trick up its sleeve to test Hart. He is struck by lightning and falls into a ditch. A passing motor-cyclist tries to revive him with brandy, which spills over Hart's shirt, and, unable to revive him, goes for medical help. While he is away he is discovered by Doyle and Griffith who draw the inevitable conclusion from his dazed state and smell of alcohol that he is drunk. They assist him to St. Frank's where he is spotted by Mr Pagett, who reports his "drunkenness" immediately to the Headmaster, Dr Stafford.

Once again, Hart is trapped in his past, for it is easier to believe that a former bounder has returned to his old ways than look for other explanations.

When Dr Brett arrives, accompanied by the motor-cyclist, the mystery is cleared up, and Hart is exonerated again.

There is one final, and almost fatal, obstacle in Hart's path to renewal, and this takes the form of Fullwood. A letter from Hart's father falls into Fullwood's hands, and in it is revealed that Hart's full name is Augustus Hart-Hyde, and that he was expelled from Hazlehurst because he was "a young blackguard, a gambler, and a thief". Fullwood threatens to reveal Hart's past, but Hart kicks him out of his study. Fullwood then tries to frame Hart for theft - knowing that is why he was expelled previously - but Nipper foils this plot. Finally Fullwood takes advantage of a telephone call from Hart's father to engineer a deception by which Hart's father is convinced that his son has been misleading him, and that he has not really changed his ways. Sir Gilbert Hart-Hyde packs his son into the train to take him away from St. Frank's, closing his ears to all his son's attempts to explain. In desperation Augustus jumps from the train to return to St. Frank's to clear his name.

His first task, however, is to catch up with Fullwood in the gymnasium and to give him the thrashing he deserves. By the time the rest of the school have reached the gymnasium to see what the fuss is about, Fullwood is lying on the floor in a battered state. He accuses Hart of attacking him with an Indian club and an impromptu trial takes place. Things are looking bad for Hart once again when Nipper arrives on the scene. Fullwood is unaware that Nipper knows all the details of Fullwood's dastardly plot to discredit Hart in his father's eyes. Nipper challenges Fullwood to admit to the truth. The alternative is that Nipper reports the plot to Dr Stafford.

Under this threat Fullwood confesses the truth - and it happens that Sir Gilbert has returned to St. Frank's just in time to hear the full truth.

"My boy!" he exclaimed gently.

"I - I'm awfully sorry, dad -" began Hart.

"No, you must not say that!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert. "I treated you badly, Augustus. You have kept your word in every possible manner; and yet I was ready to believe the worst at the slightest provocation. I am glad to see that you treated the boy Fullwood as he richly deserves. But you gave me a terrible fright when I found you were not in the train. That was rather cruel of you, my boy."

"But I had to get back to St. Frank's, pater - I simply had to," said Hart. "It was the only way of getting at the truth of things. I wired along the line -"

"Yes, I know," said his father. "That is why I am here."

"I don't want you to tell the head about Fullwood, dad," went on Hart. "He's been punished by me, and I think it'll be enough. Did you hear the crowd? They all know about Hazlehurst, and yet they cheered me."

Sir Gilbert patted his son's shoulder.

"That is because you are worth cheering," he said softly. "You were sinful, Augustus, and you mended your ways. A fellow who has always been good is praiseworthy; but a fellow who has reformed, and who sticks to the right path, is to be praised even more. You have redeemed your honour, my dear boy."

Here, in these last words, we catch the high tone of morality of the school stories which appear at this time. The battle between good and evil is here clearly delineated between the characteristics of the bounder - a checklist of evils comprising smoking, gambling, drinking, cheating, lying, and rejecting sport - and the decent fellows who abhor all of these.

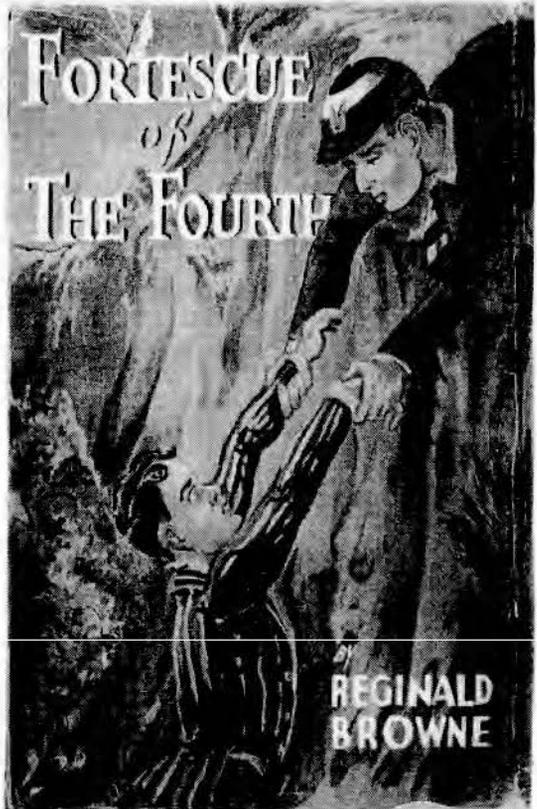
However, there is a higher value placed on the sinner who repents. All evil ways have to be renounced in one sweep - there is never a slow transition from bounder to gentleman. Hart's reformation takes the form of wiping the slate clean.

Sir Gilbert's final speech paraphrases the words in the parable of the lost sheep:

Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just persons, which need no repentance.

But I do not believe that Brooks is consciously attempting to instil Christian principles into his young reader. Rather, he is reflecting the moral tone of a society still reeling from the First World War, a war which challenged the seeming indestructibility of Victorian Britain, and consequently desperately trying to regain those certainties.

Evidence for this view is the fact that when the story was rewritten as *Fortescue of the Fourth* in 1945, under the pen-name of Reginald Browne, this passage is significantly changed. There is no trace of the heavy moralising - no mention at all of the greater value of the repentant sinner. In between 1919 and 1943 the world has changed, and Brooks' style has changed with it. Britain is still involved in another war - but the reaction of the country is different. There is the promise of more equality, less class division. Therefore while such speeches seem quite in character in the early St. Frank's milieu, they do not fit into that of the Whitelands stories. The story of Reggie Fortescue is the same story with the same struggles, and with the same moral values, but with the morality given a lighter touch. Moralising involves a paternal class preaching to the inferior classes - people in egalitarian societies are not supposed to preach at each other.





MY FIRST RAZOR BLADE

by John Bridgwater

A fellow's first shave can be quite a momentous occasion, especially if you happen to be a very dark chap subject to a "4 o'clock shadow" like me. I had not seriously considered shaving when the *Union Jack* ceased publication. However, the arrival of *Detective Weekly* No. 2 with a brand new, wrapped razor blade affixed to its front cover put the idea in my mind that perhaps I ought to start examining my chin. After all, if the editor of *Detective Weekly* thought a razor blade a suitable gift for his readers, and I was one of that privileged number, maybe I was being a bit slack in not considering the matter seriously. A minute examination of the affected parts soon put my mind at rest on that score so I stored the blade in the wallet I had received with *DW* No. 1.

I was not particularly thrilled with the free wallet. It was so small. The disappointment was due to the illustration in the last *Union Jack* showing playing cards and notes inserted in pockets of the wallet. I had not realised the cards were of the miniature variety, and the notes shown in the illustration were "Monopoly money". It is not difficult to imagine the sort of wallet I expected. Wallet disappointment was compounded by the *DW* contents, the *Sexton Blake's Brother* series. At that age I did not like it. Years later I re-read the series with a kinder eye. It was not until No. 5 that I started to warm towards the new paper. It was with No. 38, with Gwyn Evans' letter of apology for non-appearance and the King Crook stories followed by the Christmas Circus and Donald Stuart's *Crimson Snow* that I became a confirmed fan of *DW* which I remain to this day.

This little story goes to prove that first impressions should not be allowed to put you off, no matter how disappointing they are. I am sure the *DW* editor did not set out to make the impression on his readers that his efforts made on me. But then, I did love the dear old *UJ* more than somewhat. An almost impossible act to follow in the circumstances!

That first shave? Oh, that was not until at least two years later. I kept the razor blade in the wallet for a few weeks, then Dad used it.

WANTED: Howard Bakers, £4 d/w £7 slipcase.

W.E. Johns 1st editions, all magazines, *Modern Boys*, ephemera, books in d/w published by John Hamilton.

Bunter, Jennings, Blyton, Saville 1sts in d/w.

Can offer other hobby related items.

P. Galvin, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks S75 2DT.



THE TEN MINUTE SERIES: DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR TRAYLE by Bill Lofts

I don't know who originated the idea of having readers solve the mystery in a detective story, but what a splendid idea it was. Would-be future Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake enthusiasts had a chance to show their skill in solving the mystery. The author sometimes inserted the answer at the end of the story, so that the reader would not cheat by having a quick look beforehand. Other times on another page in the comic.

The white coloured *The Joker* had a series featuring Detective-Inspector Trayle, entitled 'Ten Minute Mystery'. His cases usually involved burglary. This one appeared only a few issues before the *Joker's* end through paper shortages of war-time. Later with the coming of the picture-strip in the 1950s, the same idea was used but this time with visual clues.



TEN-MINUTE MYSTERY

Here is a short complete story, telling how Detective Paul Trayle, solved a crime. Can you find the clue that helped him do it? The solution is printed upside down at the end of the story.



DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR TRAYLE picked his way carefully across a network of hoses on the lawn of a big private house, and stepped up to the chief of the local fire brigade, to whom he introduced himself.

"I'm glad you came so soon, inspector," the fire chief said. "You see, I suspect that this fire was not accidental. I have reason to believe that it was started for the purpose of getting rid of the old man who owns this house."

"Why do you think that?" Trayle asked. "Because when my men got into the house they found the door of his bedroom locked," the chief said. "We broke it down and found him fast asleep in bed. He must have had a strong sleeping draught, because he's still asleep, in spite of all he's been through."

"Strange!" Trayle murmured. "Who else was in the house?"

"Only a servant, and the owner's nephew, Ronald Smears," the chief said. "It was the servant who called us when he discovered the fire. When we arrived we found Smears wandering round in a daze. He said he'd been knocked-out by someone and locked in a second-floor

room. When he came to and found out the place was on fire he managed to climb out of a window and slid down a rope of sheets

to the ground. Trayle lit a cigarette thoughtfully. "Which window did he say he climbed from?" he asked.

The fire chief took him round the house and pointed to a window on the second floor. A rope of knotted sheets still hung from it, showing how Smears had escaped, but Trayle noticed that it ended a good twenty feet from the ground.

"I think I'll see Smears," he said. "Where is he now?"

"I'll take you to him," the chief volunteered, throwing an appreciative glance at the wide flower bed against the side of the house. "I'm glad my men didn't damage those flowers," he added.

"Perhaps they like flowers," Trayle smiled, also glancing at the neat, well-kept beds. "Old man Smears must have a good gardener to keep the place so beautifully. Well, let's get along to young Smears."

They found Ronald Smears resting in an undamaged room on the ground floor. When questioned by Trayle, he repeated what the fire chief had already told the

"So you made your escape by climbing down the rope of sheets," Trayle said, when he had ended. "But I noticed that the rope didn't stretch right to the ground. In your dazed condition you might have fallen from the end and hurt yourself badly."

"Not me." Smears smiled weakly. "I wasn't so far gone not to see that. I just let go the rope and dropped. I landed with a bit of a bump, but didn't hurt myself."

"Luckily for you," Trayle remarked. "But I don't believe your story. What really happened is this. You drugged your uncle, hoping to get rid of him for some reason, locked him in, then rigged up that rope of sheets. Then you also locked that room and set fire to the house, after which you hid in a safe place, waiting for the servant to go for the fire brigade. When they arrived, you pretended that you yourself had been attacked. That's the truth, isn't it?"

Smears confessed that Trayle was right. Why did Trayle disbelieve his story?

Trayle suspicious of his whole story, and the fact he lied was enough to make not drop from the rope, as he said, and well kept. That proved Smears had Trayle saw that the flower beds were neat and caused some damage. But 10 yards feet would land amidst the Therefore, anyone dropping from a height A wide flower bed ran beside the house.

The Joker, 20th April 1940

Cliff House Annals

THOSE BAD, BEAUTIFUL GIRLS!

by Margery Woods

Part 2: Rosa Rodworth

Lydia Crossendale and her acolytes might well have been known as the vanity girls of Cliff House. For vanity threatened to become their besetting sin and the root of most of their malicious mischief. But the flip side of vanity can be rooted in envy. Lydia was both vain and envious, because if stripped of all the helpful devices of cosmetics and fine feathers Lydia was not a natural beauty; she had to make the most of herself when endeavouring to queen it in the glamour stakes and thus was born her intense envy of girls who had a natural attractiveness which had no need of artificial enhancement. But in the Fourth's little coterie of vanity was one girl who did possess a striking beauty: Rosa Rodworth.



Rosa Rodworth

If one attempts to put together a picture of her from various descriptions in the stories in which she features a girl of sultry beauty and tempestuous personality appears. Rosa did not need the enhancements with which Lydia strove to present an attractive appearance, yet despite this Rosa was clothes-mad, unable to resist adding yet another acquisition to a wardrobe well-stocked with finery for all occasions, especially dancing. The dresses had to be models . . . to have appeared at a function in a similar dress to one worn by another girl would have been sheer degradation for Rosa . . . and they had to be fashioned from luxury fabrics. No artificial silk, rayon or cheap man-made fibres for Rosa. Her frocks had to be of pure silk, softest chiffon or finest cashmere for the vain and elegant Rosa. Fortunately she had a rich and indulgent father who kept his spoilt, beautiful daughter well endowed with the wherewithal to indulge her expensive tastes. Rosa would never arrive on the first day of term wearing last term's outfit, even school uniform. She was a fervent customer at the dress shops in Courtfield and at Madam Judith's, the dressmaker, where she ran up large bills on whatever new fashion whim of the moment took her fancy, carelessly confident that the well of plenty would never run dry. But this pleasant state of affairs was not always so . . .

In one of Rosa's early stories (*Schoolgirl* 148) Rosa was described as not being rich, although her pocket money was quite generous. But in the course of this story Rosa's father becomes a millionaire by discovering a goldmine. This sets the background for future stories when Rosa is able to splash seemingly unlimited funds around. During *Why Rosa Wasn't Popular* her father returns to England bound on the acquiring of a title, and Rosa is instructed to cultivate impoverished Lucy Faraday, the Quiet Mouse of the Fourth, because Lucy has very wealthy and influential relations in the area. One of them is a Cabinet Minister, exactly the kind of contact Mr Rodworth is seeking. So Rosa lets it be known round the school that she is no longer associating with Lydia's Smart Set and starts

cultivating Lucy. She throws a lavish tea party to which she invites all who matter in the Fourth and now her character begins to show in a more unpleasant light as she tells the story behind this display of wealth.

She comes over as boastful and patronising, although she does not realise how hurtful it sounds when she speaks of the poverty of Marjorie Hazeldene and Lucy, and assures them both that they need only come to her if they need anything. This ostentatious offer disgusts the girls and they leave the party. Rosa is left with Lucy, wondering why her generous display of philanthropy seems to have gone wrong. Lucy, however, is still drawn by Rosa's apparent desire for her friendship and the lure of clothes and money offered by Rosa. This, sadly, betrays the weakness in Lucy's own character.

Rosa, in her growing desire for limelight, has no difficulty in persuading Lucy to give up her part in the new play Mabel Lynn is producing, which is to be performed at Farrar Hall, home of the Cabinet Minister and Lucy's wealthy relations, who, incidentally, have little time for Lucy. But to appear there in the play seems a perfect opportunity for Rosa to set about furthering her father's instructions.

Prior to the performance Lucy takes Rosa to meet her cousin Daphne, daughter of the Cabinet Minister, and Rosa finds a character even more patronising and supercilious than herself. But Rosa ignores this in her anxiety to become a social somebody. The magnificence of Farrar Hall is awe-inspiring and Rosa's first reaction is to invite Daphne to visit Rodworth Towers during the holidays. Rosa is like a naive child in arms, believing that her new-found riches are all that is needed to take her into aristocratic circles. But the Faradays are not impressed by Rosa and Lady Faraday tells Daphne that she is not to extend any further invitations to this unsuitable girl, who is not the type they wish to entertain.

Rosa overhears this autocratic instruction yet still believes she can gain acceptance and that Lucy is the key to this. But Lucy is beginning to rebel and suddenly decides she has had enough of Rosa's charity. Also, she is desperate to get on with her swotting for the scholarship exam. Rosa is furious, and the worst of her nature surfaces again at this threat to her plans. She tells Lucy she can be a very bad enemy and will make Lucy's life a misery if Lucy lets her down.

This enmity takes Rosa straight back into Lydia's fold, where she co-opts the Smart Set cronies into tormenting Lucy at every opportunity, making it impossible for her to concentrate on her work for the exam. Finally, Rosa takes Lucy's exam notes and hides them, promising their return if Lucy does as she is told. Lucy has to give in and agrees to take Rosa to Farrar Hall, even though she knows neither of them will be welcome. There, Rosa picks up a valuable lorgnette which is reputed to have belonged to Queen Anne, and launches into an impromptu impression of a very haughtily dowager. Lady Faraday walks into the room at that moment and Rosa accidentally breaks the precious heirloom. There is



"ROSA," gasped Lucy, "surely you're not using—" "Lipstick?" Rosa laughed lightly. "Yes, what of it?" It seemed that Rosa's success in the beauty competition had gone to her head.

an unpleasant scene which ends any chance of Rosa getting an introduction to the Cabinet Minister and of Lucy getting her notes back.

But on her despairing return to Cliff House Lucy is overjoyed to find that Barbara Redfern has found the exam notes, purely by chance, in the music room, where Rosa had hidden them. Babs then offers Lucy the haven of Study No 4 in which to work in peace. Rosa is foiled for the moment then makes one final spiteful attempt to ruin the play. But this fails.

Rosa is depicted at her very worst in this story and it is discernible in the writing that her character is still at the formative stage. By the time of *Rosa Rodworth's Chance* (*Schoolgirl* 272) Rosa has acquired her nickname of the Stormy Petrel and is described in an editorial preview as: "The girl whose mind nobody can read, whose quick, volatile nature responds in completely unexpected ways to the forces with which its owner comes into contact". The editor goes on to say: "A character for whom most of Miss Richards' readers have a 'sneaking' liking".

Rosa is now more formed, still rich, still spoilt, still trying to buy popularity and discovering that life at Cliff House doesn't quite work that way. But the better part of her nature is emerging and she is full of enthusiasm when she is offered the role of Cleopatra in the Fourth's latest dramatic offering, a role for which she is ideally suited with her rich vivid colouring, dark hair and strong personality. (A role, incidentally, that she was to play at least twice in the Fourth's theatrical efforts.) She is finding friendship with Babs and Co. and is now a very happy girl.

This, however, could not be said of Lydia. All her trouble-making efforts are now directed towards the girl she had considered to be her special property in the Smart Set. It doesn't take the jealous Lydia long to get Rosa into Miss Bullivant's black books, and inevitably this leads to a return of Rosa's old rebelliousness which culminates in a head-on confrontation with the acid maths mistress. The Bull calls Rosa the worst girl in the school and bars her from taking part in the play. It is with relish that Rosa sets about living up to this reputation during this lively and dramatic three-part series, which is greatly stirred and not gently shaken by the malicious machinations of Lydia.

After a disgraceful episode involving no less than Mr Lorrimer, the Mayor of Courtfield, and his daughter which makes newspaper headlines, the balloon goes up at Cliff House. Miss Primrose threatens to punish the entire school if the culprits do not own up.

Rosa's conscience begins to nag. She owns up but will not implicate Lydia, whose bright idea the whole dreadful prank had been, and invents a fictitious companion, with which Miss Primrose has to be content. Rosa spends three days in solitary, with gatings and impots right to the end of term to look forward to. But the worst blow comes from her father when he visits her and tells her that his latest business deal depended on Mr Lorrimer. Rosa's misdeed has threatened to bring about her father's ruin.

This is the series that tempers the character of Rosa and makes her a fascinating "boundress" whose good and bad will always war within her. In the final story, *Will Rosa Win Through?* the answer is a triumphant yes! Rosa does everything she can to undo the mischief, and thanks to the staunch support of Babs and Co., who stand by her all the way, she manages to clear her name with Mr Lorrimer and expose the treachery of Lydia.

So Rosa at last reaches the pinnacle of the popularity for which she had so long yearned. She has a great success in the play, and is basking at last in the admiration of the Fourth.

Rosa has reformed. But for how long?

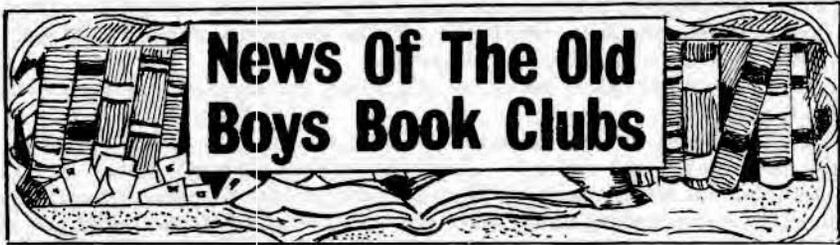
Although Rosa had several series featuring her during the nine years of Cliff House in *The Schoolgirl* she still did not really achieve the stardom she undoubtedly deserved, while Lydia, too unlikeable a character ever to have much appeal, was limited to very occasional appearances. It was obvious that Rosa had great acting talent, but perhaps John Wheway,

the Hilda Richards of that time, decided that too much Rosa might diminish the importance of Mabel Lynn, accepted as the theatrical leader of Cliff House stage productions.

And Rosa and Lydia were both doomed to be overshadowed by the star who waited in the wings during those early days of Cliff House in the thirties, a newcomer whose impact, once she stepped on the Cliff House stage, would relegate all challengers to the outer fringes of the limelight, and she would achieve this seemingly without any effort by either herself or her author. She would personify the role of the wilful, beautiful bounderess and win countless hearts as she stormed into the Cliff House saga.

Cliff House was due for a shock!

(*Rosa is shown in a characteristic situation on page 32.*)



NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

The first meeting of a new year is always busy and our January gathering was no exception. Subscriptions were paid and the 12 present eagerly browsed through the new programme.

We then welcomed Geoffrey Chaplin, our guest speaker, who delighted all with his talk about *The Boy's Own*. The index for the volume 1881/2 revealed such interesting items as, Taming Baboons, Explosive Spiders and how to make them, and Indian Clubs and how to use them.

After refreshments Geoffrey Good read the following advert from the *Fridale Gazette*: Lonely Form Master in a public school desires to meet a kindred soul . . . acquaintance with a view to marriage . . . Henry Quelch, School House, Greyfriars. What followed was another excellent reading from *The Magnet* No. 407. **Paul Galvin**

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Thirty-three people were in attendance for the January A.G.M. at the spacious home of Chris and Suzanne Harper in Loughton.

The London O.B.B.C. continues to thrive, as was confirmed by the Treasurer's Report: the Hamilton Library report demonstrated the fact that The Master's works are as popular as ever: 2,565 *Magnets* were borrowed in 1997.

Thanks were extended to club officers, particularly Norman Wright, relinquishing the Treasurer's office after 10 years of excellent service. Filling his shoes will be Derek Hinrich. The new Chairman will be Alan Pratt. Yours truly has agreed to stick at it for another year as Secretary!

A packed programme featured an interesting talk on hobby memorabilia presented by Rosemary Beenham (ably assisted by Terry Beenham) centring on Blakian and Holmesian artefacts, old and new.

Brian Doyle presented a characteristically comprehensive overview of the career of the Armchair Detective, Ernest Dudley, who will be with us for the March meeting. Marie Scofield entertained us with extracts from her personal selection of Desert Island Books.

Peter Mahony demonstrated his extensive knowledge of Greyfriars characters as he talked about the Great Men of the School, The Sixth.

The next meeting will take place at the Chingford Horticultural Society Hall on February 8th. Please telephone Tony and Audrey Potts on 0181-529-1317 to confirm your attendance, at least a week in advance.

Vic Pratt

BOUND TO BE LOVED **A Matter of Self-Preservation**

by Brian Sayer

Unlike magnificent Cleopatra, boys' papers are far from ageless and time can certainly weary them. Nevertheless, it is still astonishing to unwrap a parcel and find, for example, a 1919 *Popular* in fine condition. Other papers can be less fortunate, bearing the rents and rips of reading and the ravages of rusting staples.

That verbal warning bell in the lists of sellers, *fair reading copy*, can mean a tattered and tape-banded tale.

When a schoolboy in the now far-off Fifties I discovered that it was possible to buy *Magnets* from dealers and collectors advertising in *Exchange and Mart*. In youthful ignorance I sent one dealer a large bundle of inherited pre-war *Wizards*, *Triumphs*, *Blakes* and other now over-priced papers for which, in return, I received *Magnets* in varying states of preservation.

I recall being disappointed and surprised because the *Magnets* had the later salmon covers, having anticipated the charming colours of the 1930s to match the few I had. However, I was delighted to have more Frank Richards yarns in any state and was then not concerned about an obvious love of sticky brown parcel tape!

My happy introduction to *Collectors' Digest* came much later - in September 1966 through Tom Porter, of the Midland Club. I answered an advertisement by him and we remained in contact thereafter.

He was most helpful to a novice collector. I once asked him if he advised having my *Magnets* and *Gems* bound. His answer was that binding was probably the best method of safe-keeping the much-loved papers.

In more recent times, I asked one of the most prominent dealers in our hobby about binding. He replied that, in his experience, bound volumes were not easy to sell and that sometimes it was necessary to split them.

The reason, I would guess, is that most collectors are looking for single issues to complete collections. Tom once told me that he had a number of duplicates because he had to buy runs to obtain just one issue.

I suppose it all depends on whether one wants to part with the papers at some time. Even then, bound volumes of, for example, the *Strand Magazine*, have a market.

I went ahead and had several of my *Magnets* and *Gems* bound in the half-year volumes as indicated by the Roman numerals on the covers.

I am surprised that even seasoned collectors sometimes stray from the clearly identified volumes markings. It seems odd to run past December into February. And it is a pity to insert a facsimile.

A beautifully-bound series may be acceptable but that can leave odds and there may be other stories left incomplete.

I am happy with my red-covered, gold-titled volumes. I believe the papers are safe and, a big plus point, more accessible than having to delve through a pile of magazines in a box.

In all the years of joyful reading of *Collectors' Digest* I recall only one article dealing the subject of restoring the papers for binding. Even if binding is ruled out, it seems better to have the papers in a reasonable condition.

In the next few months, I shall venture forth and pass on tips from my own labours. Yes, labours! Restoration is certainly time-consuming but I find it a happy part of the hobby. Other collectors may wince at my methods. I hope they wait until the conclusion before throwing bricks or, more hopefully, passing on their own advice and experience. **To be continued.**

LET'S GO DUTCH by Dawn Marler

That Dutch Holiday of Surprises, by Elise Probyn (J.E. McKibbin), is not just a great read, I actually gleaned something from the story. Mixed in with a really good mystery I had a glimpse of Holland: the countryside, noted for its flatness and the numerous windmills; the canal system and the thrill of travelling on a barge; and the way the Dutch people dressed and lived. Above all I was fascinated with Mrs Golz, the proprietress of the little café called 'the Hotel Bizenkorf', which means 'Beehive', the roof of which was even carved in the shape of a beehive. Mrs Golz was famous for her



Honey Cakes. Reading about them in the story made my mouth water, they seemed to be so delicious. After finishing the story I immediately searched among my cookery books to see if I could find a recipe for similar cakes, if not the real thing. I found just one recipe in my many books, and 'hey-presto', it would appear to be the real thing: 'Dutch Honey Cakes'. This surely is the recipe that made Mrs Golz so famous. Here is the recipe in case other readers find it difficult to find.

DUTCH HONEY CAKES.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 4 oz SR flour | 2 oz soft brown sugar |
| 1 teaspoon ground ginger | 1 egg, beaten |
| ½ teaspoon baking powder | 2 tablespoons milk |
| ¼ teaspoon salt | ½ oz flaked almonds |
| 3 oz butter | |
| 6 tablespoons clear honey | |

Sift the flour, ginger, baking powder and salt together into a bowl and rub in the butter until mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add the honey, sugar, egg, and milk (beat the milk and egg thoroughly for about 2 minutes, until the mixture is smooth and creamy). Stir all the ingredients together. Turn the mixture into a greased and lined 7 inch square cake tin, sprinkle the almonds evenly over the top. Bake in a pre-heated oven 180°C (350°F), Gas Mark 4, for 30 minutes, or until firm to the touch. Turn out and cool on a wire rack.

Serve lightly spread with butter, if liked. This recipe makes 15 slices, to make more use double the quantity. Try them, I have since reading the story, and they are 'delicious'. A real taste of Holland in your own home.

The mystery in the story is centred on a pair of tulip-bulb bowls in the shape of Dutch clogs, one of which contains the secret of how to grow black tulips. Four youngsters, Dick, Susan, Tess and Jan become involved in the mystery. They are loyal friends of a girl called Zella who was under the guardianship of the villain Mr van Hagel and his wife, who were also after the secret. It is a gripping story from cover to cover.

SO, HORACE PHILLIPS, AND WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN 1913?

by Ray Hopkins

Once safely secured in his permanent position as "fly on the wall" reporter at Morcove School in 1921, the larger world of the boys' weeklies appears to have become lost to yet another writing phenomenon of the Amalgamated Press, Horace Phillips. Not too widely known to most of us, except under his Marjorie Stanton pen-name, his own name does not turn up that frequently in references to his earlier work as he was apparently over forty years of age when recruited as the Morcove Saga chronicler.

In the British Library Catalogues he has only one entry under his real name, *The Army Chaplain's Sin* (1916), the only publishing details being given as No. 1 of *The Companion Library*. The Lofts/Adley compilation of *Boys' Friend Library* titles reveal only four listings between 1912 and 1919: *The Worst House at Ravenshill* (No. 210), *The Worst Fellow at Burnside* (No. 247), *The Honour of a Scout* (No. 309) and *Cast Out by the School* (No. 453), one each reprinted from *Boys' Herald* and *Cheer Boys Cheer*, and two from *Boys' Journal*.

So it was of considerable interest to encounter his name in an issue of *Cheer Boys Cheer* (No. 33, 4 Jan 1913) as the author of a serial with the title of *The Boy Breadwinner*, with "A Great New Story of Life's Handicap" as a sub-heading and beneath the title illustration a formidable threat: "These scoundrels have stolen my brains, they have left us to beg for bread. But let them beware, MY TIME WILL COME!" Crumbs, as my Dad would say. Life in this instalment is not going to be all that cheery but it makes for exciting reading.

He who has had his brains stolen is one Jim Carden, a young mechanic who has invented a new type of motor engine. But when he presents his employer with the idea he is told that the German manager, Carl Richel, has already submitted the same invention and he is sacked on suspicion of stealing another's idea. That is what has gone before. Now read on!

Lured to London by a false cry for help in a letter from his boss's nephew, Harry Redwin, who has left his uncle's employment to throw in his lot with Jim, he surprisingly meets Harry at the junction halfway to join the London Express. Harry is hastening back to Jim with twenty-two pounds badly needed in their business, which Harry received from doing "some big pot a service" in London. He confirms the letter summoning Jim was not

written by him and both boys fear it is a ploy to get Jim away from his family so that Richel can wreak some vengeance on them while they are without Jim's protection. His orphaned family consists of his sister Hetty, a schoolboy brother Bob, and little Jacky who is crippled.

Arrived back at Milton at almost midnight they see unusually crowded streets and a crimson glow in the sky towards which fire engines are racing. It is Jim's home and he is told, "It is burning from floor to roof!"

Jim and Harry arrive at the fire, see that Bob is safely out of harm's way and immediately plunge through the front door to emerge carrying the senseless Hetty and Jacky. Carl Richel, watching in the darkness, grits his teeth with chagrin knowing his plan to burn down the Cardens' house to ruin Jim's chances has failed. He returns to his lodgings in fear of being discovered as the writer of the false message to Jim from Harry as well as being the arsonist. Richel's "black heart seethed with rage" when he later discovers that Harry's car containing Jim's new invention has been saved from the flames and is now in a new home let to him by a widower which contains a motor-garage the boys can use as their new business premises. Richel approaches the garage, a small revolver reposing in his pocket, and, finding nobody there, goes inside. Jim comes upon him there and knocks Richel to the ground, finally kicking him through the open door as the villain reaches for the gun. And there we are told there will be "another grand instalment next Tuesday". 'T'were ever thus!

In 1913, Horace Phillips was the Editor of *Cheer Boys Cheer* and was adding his own compositions to the paper's programme while in complete charge of the paper's contents. This may have begun a tradition with other A.P. editor/authors, the best known early example of this being John Nix Pentelow whilst Editor of *The Gem*. During a brief spell as Editor of *The Schoolgirls' Own*, C.E. St. John Pearce wrote a serial and a series of shorts as Ada Crundall, both of which were reprinted in the *SGOL*. C. Eaton Fearn, while Editor of *Girls' Crystal*, wrote many serials using the bylines Gail Western and Sylvia McRae, also using the name of Herbert MacRae when he wrote for *The Champion*. Stewart Pride, who edited the Third Series of *The School Friend* in the 1950s, included stories of his own as Dorothy Page and Joy Nesbit.

The Lofts/Adley compendium of boys' story authors informs that another of Phillips' pen-names is Walter Hope, a name new to many of us who are interested in such shenanigans of deviousness. This byline appears in this same issue of *Cheer Boys Cheer*, a totally different type of story altogether to the serial instalment recounted above, thus showing writing versatility that this author was capable of even as far back as the pre-World War One period. It is entitled *The Football Feast*, and commences with the blurb: "A Really Laughable Complete Story of Schoolboy Plotters and How They Were Paid Out".

Jack Brooks and his Co. are convinced that they have unwittingly swallowed a drug after a final score of 6-3 and a feeling that there are "gramophones playing in their heads" as they leave the field. The school Doctor confirms at once by turning back Jack's eyelids that he has indeed been the victim of some kind of drug plot. As the team of Fulson's House they played are the "fattest, laziest lot of gluttons" it is obvious who administered in secret the drug that caused the Ross House team to lose. And it could only have been swallowed by the Rossites in lemonade provided by old Waffles, an amiable drunk whose barrow contains soft drinks on footer days at the school. Brooks and Co. force a confession out of Waffles after he emerges, reeling, from his nightly imbibing at the Pig and Blanket. They appear before him garbed in long nightshirts with luminously painted goblin masks. Waffles, before fainting with fright, confesses he added powder to the lemonade

and was paid by a Fulsonite for doing it. When he regains consciousness at midnight he wakes up the Superintendent of the local temperance league to sign the pledge!

Dr Dyson prepares a noisome concoction for Brooks to take his revenge on Sly, Hogge and the other Fulsonites. They are to have a celebratory feed, the centrepiece of which is a magnificent fruit pie. The Ross House juniors remove the tasty fruit filling and replace it with an old football bladder, half inflated and filled with the Doctor's noxious liquid. When the feed commences, Brooks and Co. lock the Fulson House juniors in so that when Sly cuts into the pie and the burst bladder releases the smell of dead cats and rotten fish, they throw open the window for air, exits being denied them by the locked door, and are promptly met with a cry of "Fire" and receive in their faces eggs, apples, potatoes and onions. Thus an unpleasant reward for a mean trick and final victory to the Rossites who steal the rest of the feed while the Fulson crew are miserably engaged in the lavatory.

The lightness of touch of this story compared to the approach in the first story, which is that of Victorian melodrama, is remarkable. Both of these approaches can be discerned in Horace Phillips' long-running series about Morcove School and in particular in the several holiday series laid in Turania, where the intrepid Fourth-Formers are confronted by more than one slimy foreign villain.

FRANK NUGENT - MAN OR MILKSOP?

by Peter Mahony

In the valuable opinion of William George Bunter, Frank Nugent was a "milksoy". As Bunter's opinion on any topic was highly suspect, it is natural to assume that his estimate of Nugent is wildly wrong. But is it? An examination of Nugent's career shows some disturbing features.

The dictionary defines a milksoy as "an effeminate, spiritless fellow". Nugent, for all his weaknesses, could not be described as either - in his better moments. As the only member of the Famous Five attending Greyfriars School at the start of the *Magnet*, Nugent could have been expected to 'star' in the stories regularly. At first, he did, but gradually his role dwindled, so that in later yarns he was mostly a 'bit' player.

In the very first *Magnet*, Nugent's major traits emerged. He was cheerful, tolerant, good-tempered and showed a strain of mischievous humour which lightened the early stories (especially needed to balance Harry Wharton's petulant ill-temper). Also, in the first *Magnet*, Nugent's physical weakness was exposed - a drawback which caused a number of difficulties as the saga progressed. His lack of stamina provided another contrast to Wharton's stubborn endurance (shades of Tom Brown and Arthur in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*). Basically, that was Nugent's role at Greyfriars - to set off Wharton's dominant qualities, which led to success and trouble in about equal measure, with gentler, sensible attitudes. There was almost an element of the 'patient wife' supporting and enduring a 'volatile husband' in the Nugent/Wharton relationship - an element which became more pronounced as the series progressed.

Of course, Nugent's friendship for Wharton originally arose from a sense of obligation. In *Magnet* No. 1 they met on the train to Greyfriars and Wharton's surly manner provoked Nugent into plain speaking. Terms like "Mammy's own boy" and "airs and graces" and "we'll soon knock the sullenness out of you" led to blows. Wharton floored Nugent - despite Frank's claim that "there isn't a fellow in the Remove I can't lick into a cocked hat!" (I wonder what George Bulstrode would have thought of that piece of brag?) Nugent, more used to rough-and-tumble, recovered and vanquished Wharton. Sulky resentment followed.

Later, Nugent took the Friardale cab to the school - Wharton wouldn't share and walked. An accident on the bridge over the Sark smashed the cab and projected Nugent into the river. Wharton, walking behind, saw the crash and dived to the rescue. At great risk to himself, he saved Nugent and from then onwards Frank was sympathetically inclined towards the misfit new boy.

Nugent's early efforts to assist Wharton were rebuffed, but when Harry tried to run away from Greyfriars Frank's intervention produced unexpected results. A footpad tried to rob Wharton, and Nugent's rescue attempt ended with him lying stunned in the road. The river rescue had been repaid and the remorseful Wharton was glad to become firm friends with Nugent. Under Frank's tolerant guidance, Harry learned the Greyfriars ropes and soon settled into a major place in the Remove.

In the subsequent early stories, Nugent played a leading role. He was good-humoured, witty and ready for practical joking - not unlike Monty Lowther at St. Jim's. As the "Famous Four" assembled - Bob Cherry arrived in Magnet No. 3 and Hurree Singh in No. 6 - Nugent's leadership gradually fell away; first into equality with Wharton and Cherry; then, as their personalities developed, into a tacit, cheerful supporting role. Once Wharton was established as Form Captain, Nugent's part became simply that of a supporter.

With Wharton and Cherry around, things certainly happened. Nugent, amused by their antics, often went along for the ride without protesting too much. This easy-going attitude occasionally landed him in difficulties. A scouting competition against Dick Trumper & Co. required the 'Friars to get a man through Courtfield's 'lines' unchallenged. Bob Cherry's bright idea was to dress Nugent as a girl and win the contest by subterfuge. Frank made some feeble protests, but the domineering Bob had his way. Dressed in blouse, gym-slip and velour hat, Frank, with a few touches of make-up, made a 'ripping girl'. (An early testimony to the soft good looks which may have contributed to Bunter's 'milkstop' jibe.)

To his chagrin, Nugent was nearly swept into a Cliff House 'crocodile' led by Miss Primrose. Escaping that lurid fate, he eventually found himself being 'escorted' through the 'lines' by Dick Trumper. The disguise had proved effective, but Nugent was tarred with the feminine brush for the future. Skinner, Bunter & Co. were never short of a 'girlie' jibe when they wanted to rouse Nugent's ire.

For nearly two years, the easy-going, humorous Nugent prevailed - always ready to back his chums; quick to see the funny side of things; able to reclaim Wharton from his occasional tantrums; and, with ready wit, to poke fun at Bunter, Bulstrode and all the other 'heavies' of the Greyfriars scene. Then, in *Magnet* 100 Dicky Nugent arrived - and Frank was never happy-go-lucky again.

Dicky, about three years younger than Frank, was an absolute pain in the neck. The spoilt darling of Mrs Nugent (perhaps that's how Frank recognised the similar signs in Wharton in *Magnet* No. 1), Dicky was a thorough young rascal. He alienated the Second Form; indulged in blackguardism with Bulstrode & Co; defied Frank's attempts to put him straight; fell foul of George Wingate, who justly punished him; and took cowardly revenge by hurling a stone at the school captain, stunning him. Up for the sack, Nugent Minor faced disgrace; and Nugent Major knew that their father would blame him for not 'looking after Dicky'. An appeal to Wingate by Frank saved Dicky's bacon; the injured senior interceded with Dr Locke and Master Richard had a flogging instead.

From this point, Frank Nugent carried a burden: his character became more subdued and serious. Dicky settled down in the Second; but he was always cheeky, rebellious, and prone to 'break out' as a 'rorty boy'. Often, when Frank had relaxed into something approaching his old self, Dicky would 'rock the boat', creating problems for his major and his major's friends. Frank's troubles were the Co.'s, up to a point; but differences of

opinion would occur about how to handle Dicky. Nugent tended to be defensive and indulgent about his minor: the rest of the Famous Five - particularly Johnny Bull - were sceptical about Dicky being 'misunderstood'. Wharton, Cherry and Inky regarded Nugent Minor as a young rascal, but tactfully refrained from saying so: Bull believed in saying what he thought. Consequently, there were occasional rifts in the Co. because Frank resented adverse comments about Dicky.

Resentment was a trait in Nugent's character that would surface from time to time. Usually, he kept himself well in control, but sometimes he could be caught 'on the raw'. In *Magnet* 106, Nugent was quite 'pushy' about the 'Mark Antony' role in *Julius Caesar*. He wrangled with Cherry and Wharton about it and, when Marjorie Hazeldene was proposed for the 'Portia' part, Nugent was quite ungallant about her. "It's no good saying a girl can do things like a boy. They can't."

The upshot of these male chauvinist utterings was a row with Peter Hazeldene, who undertook that his sister would "let you see a specimen of her acting". Nugent made some more disparaging remarks: "You can never depend upon girls keeping appointments". Then he became concerned at the possibility of his criticisms being relayed to Marjorie.

He was even more disconcerted when his 'Aunt Matilda' paid him a visit. Of course, it was Marjorie in disguise and Nugent had a fearful time - rather like Tom Merry enduring the attentions of Miss Priscilla Fawcett. The dénouement was a relief to Nugent, who had begun to believe that he really had an Aunt Matilda! Frank, because of his innate tolerance, took the joke well, but he was inclined to blame Hazeldene for 'setting him up'.

A couple of further episodes involved Nugent in a 'dramatic' background. In *Magnet* 235 *Spoofing the School*, Frank masqueraded as a Hindu palmist. Telling fortunes of schoolmates was easy - and amusing. Home-truths are never very palatable! Unfortunately, Mr Quelch came upon the 'entertainment' and Nugent tried to bluff it out by reading Quelch's palm! Quelch saw through the disguise and the Famous Four had to refund entrance money to the duped customers. Nugent's fake fakir was almost his last major escapade as a practical joker - a searing experience was awaiting him.

In *Magnet* 245, *For His Mother's Sake*, poor Frank had to grow up in a hurry. The Nugents, père and mère, had a serious tiff. Mrs Nugent wrote to Frank, asking him to "bring Dicky" to her at Friardale Station at 5 o'clock that evening. Full of foreboding, Frank met his mother - Master Dicky was 'too busy' and refused to come - to find that she had 'left' Mr Nugent.

There had been a 'terrible scene' before a servant. (Actually, the row was over burnt bacon and kidneys for Mr Nugent's breakfast. Mrs Nugent refused to discharge the cook; each decided the other was "unreasonable".) Frank's mother was going to leave but she had to take darling Dicky with her - because "he needed her". (Dicky eventually went with his mother because she promised to buy him a pony - but that's neither here nor there.)

Having seen his mother at her most foolish - and heartless - Frank was soon confronted by an irate father, whose posturing was equally ridiculous. Mother had told Frank that she could part with him because "you do not need my care as Dicky does"; Father blamed Frank for allowing her to take Dicky away. Poor old Nugent was definitely 'piggy-in-the-middle' of this domestic fracas.

Master Dicky complicated matters further by leaving his mother and returning to Greyfriars. Mrs Nugent was distraught; Mr Nugent was still on the 'high horse'; Dicky was determined not to be "cried over" any more; poor Frank was the only real adult in the family! He tried to give Dicky good advice - it was rejected; he suggested to his father that perhaps he should "say he was sorry" - and got a dusty answer.

In the meantime, Bunter had pried out the story and regaled the Remove with the details. Vernon-Smith, Bolsover & Co. planned a 'performance' of 'The Grass-Widow', specially written by the Bounder as a skit on the Nugent family's troubles. Coker gave Vernon-Smith a thrashing and Wharton & Co. ragged the actors, so the show did not take place. Nevertheless, the episode had a humiliating effect on Frank.

As a result of all these pressures, Nugent decided to leave Greyfriars and give moral support to his mother. On his journey the train crashed and he was badly injured. Over his hospital bed, the estranged parents became reconciled. Frank was ill for some time and, though pleased that the family was still intact, he never quite recovered his old carefree attitude to life. The serious streak in his character - which was later to become almost a 'mother hen complex' - came uppermost, and he rarely took the lead in any of the Famous Five's escapades. His main preoccupations were Dicky and Harry Wharton - both of whom caused him grave concern from time to time.

Frank, at various times, fell out with Vernon-Smith, Eric Carlow (a new character), Jack Drake and even Harry Wharton over Dicky. He inherited his mother's indulgent streak, always assuming that Dicky was being wronged, led astray, or misunderstood. Yet, in *Magnet* 339, Nugent had a clear demonstration of Master Richard's sinful traits.

Dicky had been gambling with Ponsonby & Co. He signed an I.O.U. for £5 and then asked Frank for the cash to redeem it. Frank refused, went to Highcliffe, and thrashed Pon with a riding whip in full view of Mr Mobbs. Inevitably, Mobbs made a fuss at Greyfriars and Frank was publicly flogged. Brother Richard took the view that it served Frank right for "meddling". Frank, seething at this, gave Dicky a thrashing too - Wharton had to intervene to prevent it going too far.

The I.O.U. problem remained. Dicky solved it by robbing Frank's desk of the Remove cricket funds. Nugent discovered the loss, guessed who was responsible, and took the blame on his own shoulders. The Famous Five kept it dark, but Nugent's stock with his friends took a dive. Frank decided that he would have to leave Greyfriars and admit to his father that he was an embezzler. All so that Dicky's reputation should stay untarnished and their mother should not be ashamed of her darling!

Fortunately, Wun Lung had seen Dicky steal the money. He watched him pay Ponsonby; then, after Dicky had gone, he ragged the Highcliffe knut. In the tussle, the wily Chinee contrived to rob Pon of the fiver, unnoticed. The money was restored to Nugent - Wun Lung had 'found' it! - and all was calm and bright. A remorseful Dicky promised to "keep straight" - until, of course, the next time. Poor old Frank!

Nugent's next 'personal problem' came in *Magnet* 409, *Harry Wharton & Co.'s Pantomime*. This theme of 'calf-love' was worked by Hamilton several times. Darrell of St. Jim's, George Wingate, Bob Lawless of Cedar Creek, Lord Mauleverer, Monty Lowther of St. Jim's and probably one or two others, all distinguished themselves by 'falling' for opera singers, actresses, film-stars etc. This time it was Nugent's turn.

The Co. became involved with helping to stage a war-time (W.W.I.) pantomime. Conchita, playing the Fairy Queen in *Puss-in-Boots*, became the object to Frank's affection. He laboured under the delusion that she was about seventeen - not too old to be beyond his reach! Conchita, taken with the "little fellow with the blue eyes and the pink face", graciously allowed Frank to go shopping with her. He returned elated - and awfully smitten.

The casting of the pantomime had put Wharton in the role of the Marquis, playing opposite Conchita. Frank, in a minor part as a courtier, started envying his chum. Then, during the first performance, he realised that Conchita and Mr Bodger, the stage manager,

had a 'thing' going. It so distressed Nugent that he missed a vital cue and some embarrassing 'ad-libbing' had to be done.

Conchita, a clever woman, divined the cause of the lapse. In a delicate chapter, she revealed her true age - 37 - not much younger than Frank's own mother. Nugent's intelligence made him realise how foolish he had been - the dream was broken. Pulling himself together, Frank reverted to his schoolboy persona - his 'Romeoing' became a thing of the past. Nevertheless, the episode had shown a further facet of Nugent's sensitive nature.

There was an easy-going weakness in Frank which sometimes landed him in trouble. Despite the lesson of Dicky's theft of the Club funds, Nugent allowed himself to be 'persuaded' by Sidney Snoop to 'lend' him the money until 'the end of the week'. Of course, Snoop did not repay; Frank endured agonies of conscience rather like Tom Merry's when Tom helped Gerald Cutts in a similar way. Unlike Tom, Nugent had not the resource to solve his problem; he was saved only by the anonymous intervention of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

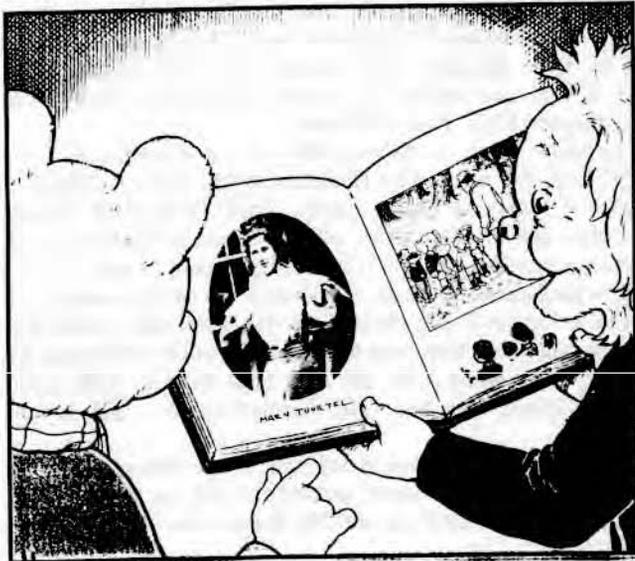
All of which goes to show that Nugent had changed from a carefree schoolboy to a rather care-worn young adult during the *Magnet's* first decade. His later 'lead' roles were all of a sombre nature - Dicky's dilemmas; omission from the Remove teams; rifts with Harry Wharton; squabbles with Johnny Bull and Smithy - and even one or two harrowing physical experiences. The 'later Nugent' will be the subject of next month's article.

BOOK CHOICE

by Mary Cadogan

RUPERT: The Rupert Bear Dossier, by Brian Stewart, designed by Howard Smith (Hawk Books £17.95)

Mary Tourtel created the Daily Express's little bear hero in 1920 and his popularity, almost 80 years on, seems to know no bounds. This Dossier is a most comprehensive tribute to Rupert, to all those other colourful characters in his engaging world - and to



almost every real-life person who has helped to perpetuate this. It is truly a bumper book, bursting with beautifully reproduced colour pictures which vividly convey every aspect of Rupert's multi-faceted saga. The history of his creation and background, and the compelling Nutwood ethos are discussed: what is particularly appealing about this Dossier, however, is the biographical and career information it provides about the artists, editors, writers and production

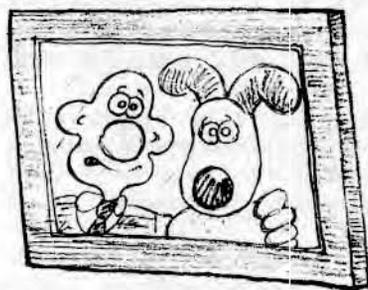
teams over the decades.

Mary Tourtel (lovely early pictures of her which I had never seen before), Alfred Bestall and John Harrold, Rupert's main illustrators, are rightly 'starred', but it is satisfying too to have photographs and descriptions of lesser known associates - the colourists, production managers, and so on. Rupert Bear is surely one of the fictional folk-heroes of our century. None of his fans will want to be without this book, and even people who have not yet succumbed to his spell might find this Dossier intriguing.

(In case of difficulty in obtaining it from bookshops it is available from Hawk Books Direct, 27 Sanders Road, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 4NL, Tel: 01933 443862.)



WALLACE & GROMIT: A Close Shave - Storyboard Collection, edited by Brian Sibley (BBC Publications £16.99)



Another treasure from the inspired pen of Brian Sibley, who as a writer and broadcaster has added so much to our wealth of popular culture. The combination of his lively, informative text and those wonderful Ardmán Animation pictures is a potent mix. There is much more visual material than just the story-board picture-strip of the film *A Close Shave*, by the way, but to see and read the story-board is a fascinating process for anyone with an interest in film animation - and of course in that likeable man-and-his-dog pair, Wallace and Gromit. Like Rupert Bear,

they seem set for immortality. This book perceptively explores the personalities of these tiny plasticene but larger-than-life characters. I particularly like one of the comments about them from their conceiver, Nick Park: "Gromit" [the doggy one of the duo, of course] "is more complex than Wallace. Even though he says less, he says more. Wallace lives on the surface - he sees cheese, he wants to eat: Wallace is in the moment. Gromit, however, carries the past with him all the time and worries about the future and is, in that sense, more human."

FORUM

From Anthony E.L. Cook, High Wycombe:

With regard to the suggestion in the January CD that newer readers request reprints of previously published material, I can understand their requirements and find such a suggestion a good one as so much first class material has been appearing over the years. I do feel, however, that the regular CD should continue to contain new material for surely this is what we all look forward to with some relish. Perhaps some of the best of the old might be reproduced in a special section in our Annual? This would mean a bigger edition, no doubt more expensive. If readers knew in advance that this was the case, however, no doubt all of us could put that little more aside through the year. Otherwise a special publication, say once a year, might fill the gap.

From J.E.M., Brighton:

Congratulations on the January Digest - I especially enjoyed Brian Doyle's latest instalment of *Yesterday's Heroes*.

On the possibility of reprinted material raised in your editorial, I am most strongly in favour. Naturally, my first preference would be for Blakian items; there was, for example, some interesting material by Walter Webb, back in the fifties, I think, though I have none of it to hand. But there is much outside this area that might usefully be republished, e.g. some of Bill Lofts' valuable contributions, especially on less usual subjects like the 'Penny' Blacks (*Chips, Jester, Comic Cuts et al*). And, of course, Hamiltonians will have their own agenda. (Did anyone ever do a piece on *Bubbles* - my first comic well over 70 years ago?) In any case, keep up the brilliant work!

From Roy Whiskin, Cambridge:

I was very interested to read in the January C.D. about your meetings with the splendid Frank Muir. Frank, of course, has associations with the Isle of Thanet which he details in his recent autobiography *A Kentish Lad*. He was born in his grandmother's pub in Ramsgate and went to school in Broadstairs and Ramsgate where he attended my old grammar school, Chatham House - (Sir) Edward Heath was a senior pupil at the school when Frank was there.

Frank apparently liked the *Champion* but says that his favourite boys' paper was the *Magnet*. He also mentions that his first appearance on the stage was in a talent contest on Broadstairs beach conducted by 'Uncle Mack' who accompanied him on his banjo. Uncle Mack was J.H. Summerson who entertained the public for over 50 years from 1895 to 1948 with his minstrel concerts on Broadstairs Pier. I was taken to see Uncle Mack first after the war. There is a memorial to him on Broadstairs sea-front. I'm sure Frank Richards would have known Uncle Mack. I wonder if readers know of any stories written by Charles Hamilton that involve minstrel troupes or concert parties?

From Colin Cole, Palmers Green:

I refer to Margery Wood's articles concerning Vernon-Smith, the 'Bounder' of the Greyfriars Remove. Although I thoroughly enjoyed the articles, I am in hearty agreement with the views of both John Lewis and Naveed Haque.

Vernon-Smith was created and developed by Charles Hamilton from 1910 onwards (*Magnet* No. 119). It is interesting to trace this development of the 'Bounder', his 'ups' and 'downs', and to note how different he is in 1940 and indeed in post-war books as compared to those far-off 1910 days. I think it is essential to confine the study of this development to the writings of Charles Hamilton, principally because he created Vernon-Smith and such a study is more consistent. Hamilton knew his character as nobody else did. The sub-writers, whoever they are, will always differ from Hamilton slightly and, further, they will differ among themselves No, Margery, I do not think you should have included consideration of sub-writing works

From Martin Waters, Wellingborough:

I have been enjoying Margery Woods' series on Herbert Vernon-Smith, and I was rather surprised at the tone of some of the comments in 'Forum'. I was pleased that you published Mrs Woods' very well-reasoned reply to these remarks. I'm sure that sub-stories were not as good as the 'real' Charles Hamilton, but how do we know that they were inferior until a proper assessment has been made?

From Des O'Leary, Loughborough:

How nice to see the January C.D. cover with its smiling young faces! A cheery start to the New Year. The star item as far as I was concerned was Brian Doyle on Dr Morelle ... The reminiscences on Evelyn Flinders and Frank Muir were touching too.

Did you see Barbara Kelly's letter in the *Sunday Times* recently after someone claimed *Bedtime With Braden* was ahead of *Take It From Here* as a precursor of radio humour? She revealed that Muir and Norden had written the scripts for Braden, too, but had insisted on remaining anonymous. What talent Frank Muir had, and seemingly what a thoroughly pleasant man!

I was interested in Margery Woods' reply to criticisms of using 'sub' stories in her Vernon-Smith saga! I think she is quite right to think that a full account of the Bounder's career had to include non-Hamilton stories and, as a late-comer to Greyfriars, I thoroughly enjoyed her articles.

From John Geal, Hampton:

My thanks for another splendid year of the C.D. I don't know how you find the time to do it: a monthly schedule is a killer!

Sad to hear of the death of Evelyn Flinders - another sad loss and a break with the past. I look forward to the write-up of her.

MARY ANN'S AUSTRALIANS

The Australian Tour of 1909, by Peter Mahony (one of the C.D.'s regular contributors)

England won the first test, but lost the rubber; the Australians were at odds with their board of control; England's selectors were confused and fickle; Bunter and the Magnet were one year old.

This, the only full account of a fascinating tour, features photographs never before seen in a single volume.

A number of signed copies are available from the author at £6.95 (including post & packing) C.W.O.

Peter Mahony, 12 Riefeld Road, Eltham, London SE9 2QA (0181-850-9316)

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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