STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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EASTER GREETINGS

As I write this editorial, Spring is literally 'bursting out all over'. This year's very early daffodils, hyacinths and crocuses seem to have survived the few sudden frosts which threatened them, and many flowering trees are now in full array. Every year one is moved by the promise of new and vital life in this Spring and Easter season. I send you all my warm Easter greetings, and I hope you will like the seasonable Teddy Tail pictures which a C.D. reader sent to me.

Like the Spring season, our ever-resilient C.D. constantly renews itself. As I have so often said before, there is no shortage of interesting contributions, and new facts and comments are constantly coming up about the old books and papers which we so much relish. Happily too I am now receiving more articles on Sexton Blake and on E.S. Brooks than in the past, and of course the Hamiltonian section of the C.D. remains vigorous, so that a good balance of articles can be published. It would be good to receive more items on the D.C. Thomson papers: whenever we are able to print one, I receive letters asking for more. There is also a strongly growing interest in the girls' papers.

I look forward to a brimming-over mail-bag of contributions!

Happy reading - and writing.

MARY CADOGAN

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A GREYFRIARS STALWART

by Ted Baldock

> Mr Prout stood staring after him, purple with indignation. It was not easy for him to believe his portly ears. He, Prout, master of the Fifth-form had been told to mind his own business, by the master of a junior form. Prout did not know how often other members of the staff had been tempted to tell him that very thing. Quelch, at long last, had fallen to the temptation, that was all. But to Prout it really seemed that it was time for the skies to fall.
>
> F. Richards. *Banishing of Billy Bunter.*

Paul Pontifex Prout, M.A., master of the Fifth-form at Greyfriars school. Disciplinarian extraordinary. One-time big game hunter (according to unimpeachable authority - himself). Epitome of rotundity and pomposity. To some a figure of fun, to many more a bore of the first water - *brutum fulmen* - but to the greater number of masters and boys at the school a decent, well meaning old boy. Rather given to the shooting of 'tall stories' perhaps, but at bottom a stalwart, dependable champion not only of his own boys in the Fifth form, but also of the traditions of the school at large.

A gentleman mellowed by long experience of endeavouring to direct boys in the right direction. Of imparting crumbs of knowledge to receptive minds (a pleasure this) and unreceptive ones (a tedious task). Expert in the practice of observing the changing shades of character in fellows as they pass through his hands and rub shoulders with a

wide spectrum of 'types' in the form-room and on the playing field. With a sure 'feel' of the precise moment to encourage or chide, or, in the case of fellows of Horace Coker's calibre, when to cry halt and, if need be, administer corporal punishment. When to deflate, and when, and to what degree, to praise.

Mr Prout, in common with his colleagues, has to be - as indeed he is - a master of all the arts of discrimination and tact, and possessed of Job-like patience (especially in dealing with Coker). If ever a master at a public school had the great misfortune of having an albatross firmly affixed round his neck - that gentleman's name is Paul Pontifex Prout.

In his younger days, so it is alleged, chiefly by Mr Prout himself, he was entitled to the sobriquet of 'Mighty Hunter' and cunning tracker, having hunted 'big game' in appropriate parts of the globe. Tigers in the jungles of Bengal, Jaguar in the upper reaches of the mighty Amazon river, great apes in the remote recesses of the African Congo. Prout, however, had a distinct penchant for the Canadian Rockies, those mountains where the intrepid seeker can find the grizzly bear. Mr Prout is only too willing, given the opportunity, of expounding to an interminable length on such encounters. In the now far distant days of his youth it would seem that nothing, however ferocious, in the animal kingdom was safe from the attentions of the mighty hunter Prout. Age, perhaps, and the passage of time have enhanced his memory and 'decked out' certain experiences - possibly quite humdrum at the time - in rather more romantic colours. Age has often been known so to deceive itself.

One of Mr Prout's little social foibles is the occasional invitation to certain privileged fellows of his form to take tea with him in his study, thus conferring upon them - in his own view - and hopefully those of his guests, condescension and honour.

Sadly, however, embarrassment is the prevailing emotion experienced by the 'victims' of Prout's largesse. Once entrapped in his study with tea under way 'Old Pompous' has the field to himself, and the solo boomings commence. On these occasions he invariably holds forth upon some of his wild and rather woolly adventures (most of which have been heard about by his captive audiences many times before).

Regretfully it has to be recorded that colleagues have been known to step swiftly into doorways, behind trees in the quad or round corners when they detect the Fifth form master in the offing. Garrulous by nature, poor Prout has the unenviable reputation of being a bore. Mr Quelch has been known quite suddenly to recall an appointment with the Head on his (Prout's) advent into the common room. Hastily folding his 'Times' (even in such a crisis the paper is meticulously folded) Quelch leaves with a well-simulated look of concern at having been so forgetful.

What sad little deceits are practised to avoid Prout's monologues! Mr Hacker, less tactful than Quelch, has been seen to put down his coffee cup with an untoward clatter and make for the door with undisguised haste and no apologies whatever in his determination to escape. Mr Twigg, the second-form master, is easier game for the hunter of grizzly bears; he is frequently cornered and subjected to the familiar fruity pontifications.

Such outpourings are likened by members of the Remove and other forms unto the rumblings of distant thunder, or the endless roaring of Niagara. Even so, Prout is not without some genuine popularity, principally in recognition of his loyalty and support of Dr Locke. He is also a sterling (almost fanatic) champion of any member of his own form (Horace Coker included, and surely this says a great deal for 'old Pompous') who by

chance or misfortune should fall under the displeasure of fellow masters: "Nonsense Quelch, my boys are quite above such conduct - perhaps some Remove juniors . . .": or "In this case Hacker, I can assure you that the Fifth form is above reproach sir . . ."

It is not beyond the bounds of probability that Dr Locke and Mr Quelch, long time friends beyond the form-rooms, enjoy between themselves some quiet and indulgent smiles at the antics of their portly colleague. Smiles combining tolerance and understanding: both fully realise Prout's value in the scholastic field, and what an asset he has been to Greyfriars over the years. What an unfillable void would result should he, for any reason, pass from the scene.

Each year with the coming of Spring, when the countryside assumes a fresher, more vibrant green, when the old elms in the quad display once more a light dressing of leaves, that hallowed precinct becomes attractive for strolling - and pontificating. Oft-times then is heard the booming cadence of the master of the Fifth form remorselessly assailing the ear of a colleague who has, unfortunately for himself, chosen the same time as Prout to stroll in search of a quiet moment between classes. The 'victim', with a distinctly hunted look, will gaze about quite desperately for an avenue of escape.

Poor Prout! "Ah, there is Capper looking for me, Prout. I promised . . ."

"Let him wait a little, Hacker - as I was saying, it is inconceivable that . . ."

Whatever his failings, Prout is a 'sticker'. Not easily will he allow a colleague to escape once he gets into his stride. Capper could wait. Whatever his business with Hacker it could not possibly be in any way more important than Prout's own communications.

And Mr Prout, of course, always found it difficult to understand the impatience of his colleagues both in common room and elsewhere.

An interesting fellow, a great traveller, an adventurer *par excellence* - according to himself. Why did other members of the staff seem always to be in a hurry to get away, just when he was 'warming' to his subject? It was a mystery to which Paul Pontifex Prout could find no plausible answer.

In the secluded scholastic world these keepers of youth reign supreme. Their occasional differences of views are not deep seated, but mere ripples in an otherwise calm and agreeable existence. They pass as swiftly as does an idle Spring breeze.

May their shadows, in particular the formidable one of Mr Prout, never cease to fall pleasantly across our path.

****

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THE WONDERFUL GARDENS — by Donald V Campbell

5. Noel Streatfeild

Before we begin on the book itself I must own up to something. I read Noel Streatfeild as a child. I listened to the dramatization of her most famous book - *Ballet Shoes* - on the Children's Hour. Yet even as little time ago as last week - that is the week before I bought an old edition of *The Painted Garden* - I thought her name was Noel Streatfield. Well it isn't and wasn't - the field part is truly spelt "feild". They say confession is good for the soul.

Noel Streatfeild's story - *The Painted Garden* - was first published in 1949 and was, I suppose, an antidote to the years of austerity that still bedevilled Great Britain. The idea of children holidaying for many months in America must have appeared magical to the reader of the time.

The thernes carried in her other books - theatre and ballet - are also presented here. Rachel, the eldest child, is a ballet dancer, Tim is a budding pianist, and Jane is, well, she is just Jane. And she loves dogs. There is conflict at the start because all three children are not pleased with the idea of a long "holiday" in America - as the "poor relations" staying with their Aunt Cora in Santa Monica. Their father has been ordered to the sun to aid his recovery from a serious nervous breakdown that mainly evidences itself in a form of "writer's block".

Rachel does not want to leave her ballet school because she has only just been selected for some stage performances. Tim does not want to go to America because of promised lessons from a great British concert pianist. Jane wants to stay at home because her dog - Chewing-gum - cannot go.

Of course they have to go and after some adventures along the way on the *Mauretania,* in New York and on *The Twentieth Century* across the American plains they arrive at Aunt Cora's. The centrepiece is the transition of the youngest girl (Jane). She has gravitated around the other two children rather as a satellite, with constant reminders that "We must do something for poor Jane" thrown at her like a well-used dog bone. The happy thing about what is, in most ways, a happy book is that the "runt" of the litter gets to "come good" but not at the expense of the others. What makes the book is that the transition is not easy for Jane and for a long time it looks as though the possibility of being a successful child film star (and a counterpart to her siblings) will collapse in on itself before she has got started.

Child film star? Yes! The children were originally told that to make their way in America pocket money has to be earned. Jane offers to walk a neighbour's dog. But the two men she talks to seem distracted and unable to concentrate on what she is saying. In

the end they tell her they will call and arrange something. Time passes and no call is made. Just as Jane is about to sit down and write a letter to Mr Bryan J Browne he calls. He is not wanting her to walk his dog after all. He wants her to test for a part in a new film. The film is to be *The Secret Garden*. Jane's surly manner and her innate drive have impressed him - she is just right for the part of Mary.

Rachel is not well pleased, as she thought that she might get into a film as a dancer.

Now, put baldly like this the plot and the parts played by the children might seem rather artificial. But the story has made them distinctly middle-class (were all "book" children from 1900 onwards into the sixties middle-class?). Their father is a writer and they carry with them a general housekeeper-cum-governess who helps out their mother. They have certain contacts in America anyway and what they lack in contacts they make up for in "get up and go". To begin with, Noel Streatfeild is convincing enough with her characters, and develops a plot line that has within it splendid possibilities.

All is not plain sailing for Jane and she comes up against a somewhat nasty character who plays Colin to her Mary. Maurice Tuesday is a nasty piece of goods and is sneaky withal. (A character with the name Thursday appears in another of Noel Streatfeild's books.)

One weakness in the book is in the unconvincing surnames given to (particularly) the American characters. Surnames such as Sneltzworther, Norstrums and Bettelheimer. They disrupt the otherwise easy flow of the book.

The Painted Garden is not an adventure in the usual sense of the word. But the holiday and the happenings to the children are adventures. They do make you want to know what happens next. There is though an overpowering sense of middle class-ness pervading the whole. This is more obvious than in the Nesbit books somehow. It may be because these "moderns" have piano and ballet lessons, and artistic parents and a governess-cum-general housekeeper. Or it may be the slightly coy air of self-satisfaction that wafts in and out of the story. Apart from the hateful character of Tuesday everyone is

good or at least quite good. Naughtiness is seen more in a tantrum or sharp words than in actual happening. One wishes for tin cans tied to the budgie's tail. I jest - there is no budgie! The point though is made.

There is also a certain "easiness" with which the children don their mantles as ballerinas or concert pianists or actresses - even though Jane does have a great struggle to get her Secret Garden part right. One can't quite see these children clambering over rocks or through trees and shrubs to achieve something in a sweat and in muck. A secret passage or a meeting with a leopard does not seem possible for them. Is it that they lack true inner resource?

But what about the link to *The Secret Garden*? It is twofold because the boy-actor David Doe is himself very like Dickon - he can charm the animals. He has his own natural magic. The name "Doe" has its obvious connections. Jane is just another Mary - sour and an impossibly self-willed child until she at last mellows and learns to act and does a good job. Where the book fails for today is in its sheer cosiness. Everything works out pat. And you know it is going to. There is insufficient tension in the story. Part of this is because the characters of the three children are underdeveloped and, despite changes and happenings, they remain uncertain figures in a not always believable landscape. Hollywood as viewed from photographs? The author presents film-making in the chronological order of the story of *The Secret Garden* and I think that even children from 1949 would have been able to understand that this is not the way it happens. In mitigation it must be said that the change that Jane goes through is matched to the changes that occur to the fictional Mary, and they occurred chronologically.

An example of the cosy niceness of the book is in the three chapters devoted to endless giving and receiving of gifts. - "Christmas", "Tim's Birthday", and "Goodbye to the Studio". All the gifts are well thought out and "right" for each recipient. Yuckk!

Having liked the idea of the book and having enjoyed the first three or four chapters it all went pear-shaped on me because I thought that the children were insufferable little prigs with too much talent - as ballet dancer, pianist and actress. Much better had they got their hands and clothes dirty from time to time and done something really naughty. It would be inconceivable that they could ever act as the young Edith Nesbit did - she threw firework crackers into the euphonium player's instrument at a brass band concert. Now that IS naughty!

(Illustrations to this article are by Shirley Hughes, from the Puffin edition of *The Painted Garden*.)

****

Does anyone have a collection of the **GEM 144 to 154** who would be willing to loan or copy the "Iron Island" serial pages for me? I have copies of most of the latter part of the serial (155 onwards) but would like to read the first episodes.

MARK CALDICOTT, 16 GREENSIDE, DENBY DALE, HUDDERSFIELD HD8 8SL.

****

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BLACK, WHITE AND GRAY **by Mark Caldicott**

Part Four - Albert Hughes' Good Idea

His shocking behaviour towards Augustus Hart is typical of Fullwood's participation in the life of St. Franks in the early stories. Ralph Leslie's evil schemes, and the trials and tribulations of his potential victims, are often the fulcrum of the story, running through and supporting the main plot. It is significant to note, therefore, how as time goes by this central role is eroded.

Let us jump from the Hart incident in 1919 to June 1924, and the arrival of Dr Beverley Stokes, the locum Headmaster who makes himself very popular by being "one of the boys" *(Nelson Lee Library,* OS 471 - 476). He is fortunate in having a young and very pretty wife, who is equally as popular, but who is addicted to a drug being peddled by an evil Chinaman. The effects of the drug, and Stokes' attempts to cope with his wife's strange drug-induced behaviour, result in Fullwood apparently witnessing the Headmaster's mistreatment of his wife ("The Mystery of the Head's Wife", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 473, 28-Jun-24). For a rotter like Ralph Leslie, of course, such knowledge must be taken advantage of.

In the old days Fullwood may have laid some dastardly plot which would run through the story. In this story, however, his actions provide only a single incident. Fullwood has been gambling, owes money, and is under threat of disclosure. The bounder decides to capitalise immediately by offering Stokes his silence in return for a fiver. Retribution, however, is swift. Dr Beverley Stokes reaches for his birch . . .

> "Before I give you the thrashing of your life, I'd like a word with you," explained Dr. Stokes, deadly calm. "Do you realise, Fullwood, precisely what your recent proposition amounts to?"
>
> "I - I thought you wanted that incident kept quiet, sir, and it was a good chance to get some cash!" faltered Ralph Leslie, thoroughly cowed by the Head's tone.
>
> "Good heavens! Then you actually know what you were proposing . . . blackmail, Fullwood, is the most atrocious - the most contemptible - the most unutterably vile crime under the face of the sun." . . .
>
> Fullwood was absolutely terrified, and he burst out sobbing like a child. He had been hauled before many masters in his time, and he had received many severe swishings - but no master had ever made him sob like this before.

And that is the end of Fullwood's mischief in this series of stories. St. Frank's school then departs for a summer adventure in the Sahara - - - minus Fullwood and his cronies.

The new term opens without Nipper or Nelson Lee. Their absence is temporary, but it coincides with one of the most unfortunate incidences in the history of the school when,

during a drunken orgy organised by Simon Kenmore of the Sixth, the death occurs of a fifth form reveller, Wallace. Fullwood and Co. are present at the incident, and, considering the national scandal which follows, and which threatens to bring about the closure of St. Frank's, it is surprising that all the revellers, Fullwood included, are not expelled. However, it is generally agreed that Fullwood and Co. "had been mere pawns in the tragic affair" ("The Scandal at St. Frank's, *Nelson Lee Library* OS 485, 20-Sep-24), evidence of Fullwood's increasingly minor role in the affairs of the school. A further example of immediate retribution comes when the Fourth, trying to generate funds to support the school through the financial crisis resulting from the withdrawal of its pupils following the scandal, disguise themselves as "The Chocolate Minstrels" and give a concert party in Bannington. When Fullwood and Co. are instrumental in revealing to the crowd that the performers are really the boys of St. Frank's (who are *persona non grata* in the town), the said crowd are ready to set upon the luckless performers. Smart work from Reggie Pitt (deputising for Nipper) results in Fullwood and Co. being seized, forcibly made up as minstrels and ejected into the street where they are deservedly chased and ragged by the crowd ("The Stigma of Shame", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 487, 20-Sep-24). One further comment can be made on this series. It introduces a newcomer, Clive Curtis, a bad lot who attaches himself to Fullwood. When Curtis hatches a plot to undermine the Fourth's success in regaining the good name of the school, Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, who in the early stories would have fallen in with any such despicable suggestion, now refuse to be party to the evil act. The plot is foiled, Curtis is revealed as the villain, and (unlike Fullwood, who has in the past perpetrated worse deeds, but has always been needed for the next story) is expelled.

In May 1925, in ESB's "Between Ourselves" column *(Nelson Lee Library* OS 517) there is the first inkling of a major change in the fortunes of Fullwood. Brooks writes:

> You make a bold suggestion, Albert Hughes. And you're not the first one to make it either; quite a number of other readers have written to me on the same subject. You want me to write a series in which Ralph Fullwood is reformed and converted into a decent chap. Well, there's certainly something in the idea. Fullwood isn't all bad, for he possesses plenty of pluck, and has his finer feelings if only they could be brought to the surface.

From this point on, things were obviously turning over in ESB's mind, for Fullwood and Co. fade almost completely from view. Only intermittent references to the nuts can be found. As a result of an explosion in Modern House, St. Frank's closes for the summer term and, rather than be dispersed, the Fourth become Boy Scouts and continue their schooling in a Scout camp. Given the normally cynical nature of the nuts, it is interesting to note that "to spend the rest of the term under canvas was a prospect which would appeal to everybody, even including such bounders as Fullwood and Co." ("The Scouts of St. Frank's", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 523, 13-Jun-25). And indeed there is no sign of mischief during the whole scouting series.

The scouting series leads into the summer holidays, and Lord Dorriemore once again offers to take a party aboard his steam yacht *The Wanderer*. Soon they have a mission, for they set off to the South Seas to seek justice on behalf of Mr Warner Russell, Dorriemore's recently-appointed steward, and Clive Russell, his son. Fullwood is included in the party,

but for once he is not accompanied by Gulliver, Bell or any of the other outsiders. This is to have a significant effect on him eventually, but at the beginning of the voyage he is his usual obnoxious self. Clive Russell, who had formerly been employed as a page boy on the ship, is allowed to become one of the guests. ("Adventure Bound", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 529, 25-Jul-25). This displeases Ralph Leslie, for not only is Clive Russell an upstart, he is also a foreigner!

With a plunge, he entered the water not three feet in front of the rising shark.

> "Common Canadian rotter!", said Fullwood disparagingly, as he watched William Napoleon Browne and Stevens in a conversation with Clive. "It's like his nerve to shove himself forward! He's only a page boy. An' his pater's only a steward!"

The absence of Fullwood's cronies is getting to him. No-one is willing to play cards or smoke with him. He can see the other fellows having a good time, and wants to join in, but to do so is below his dignity. Clive Russell tries to be pleasant to him:

> "They're getting some fun, I guess, anyway," remarked Clive.
>
> Fullwood stared.
>
> "Speaking to me?" he demanded curtly.
>
> "Sure, I . . ." Clive paused, and flushed slightly. "I was just saying that the folks seem to be enjoying themselves," he added.
>
> "Then you'd better address your remarks to someone else," said Fullwood, turning away. "I don't want any unpleasantness, Russell, but the less you say to me, the better. I'm rather particular about whom I mix with. That's straight isn't it?"
>
> Clive went very red.
>
> "I'm sorry!" he said, speaking quietly with difficulty. "I thought I was speaking to a gentleman. I guess I made a mistake."
>
> "Why, you confounded pauper!" roared Fullwood angrily, "if you talk to me like that I'll knock you down!"

But to Fullwood's consternation it is Russell who floors him first. And, to make things worse, Fullwood, under the threat of being cut by his fellows, is forced to apologise to Russell for his original insult: his hatred of the Canadian is thereby only increased ("The Wanderer's Quest", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 530, 01-Aug-25).

The party make camp on a coral isle. The absence of evil influences, and the atmosphere of the paradise island, are having an effect on Ralph Leslie.

> As the boat neared the beach, Nipper regarded Fullwood rather closely. The leader of Study A was looking different these days. He was bronzed, healthy, and that perpetual sneer of his was not quite so obvious. Constant association with a crowd of healthy fellows had brought about a subtle change. In decent company, Fullwood was behaving himself quite well.

Fullwood himself is not conscious of the change, and is making no effort of his own to mend his ways. The persistence of an old habit, the smoking of cigarettes, leads to a serious problem when a carelessly discarded cigarette end causes a raging fire which endangers the lives of the campers and acts as a beacon to their enemies ("The Isle of Coral", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 531, 08-Aug-25). And his enmity with Russell continues. The two meet again, and once again Fullwood hurls his insults. Again Clive Russell beats Fullwood to the punch. In retaliation Fullwood hurls himself at Russell and in the ensuing battle the bloodied Fullwood is knocked overboard - into the path of a shark. Regardless of his own safety, Russell dives into the sea and beats the shark with a golf stick while Fullwood manages to get out. Fullwood then pulls Russell clear of danger, and Russell thanks him! The full meaning of Russell's selfless act fills Fullwood with a feeling of self revulsion.

> His contempt for Clive Russell vanished. The fellow had saved his life, and he was obviously several kinds of a brick. And Fullwood stood gazing at his reflection in his cabin.
>
> "Gad!" he muttered disgustedly. "What a bally cad you are!"
>
> And for Ralph Leslie Fullwood to address himself in such terms was indeed an indication that he wasn't completely bad.
>
> ("The Pearl Hunters", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 532, 15-Aug-25).

The indelible impact of Clive Russell's brave act upon Fullwood's conscience becomes clear when, some days later, it is Clive's turn to encounter a deadly danger. This time it is a monster of the deep, a kind of giant octopus, which wraps its tentacles around the unfortunate Canadian. In the old days Fullwood would have turned tail and run in terror. But Clive Russell's own exemplary behaviour has so deeply moved him that he goes to Russell's aid. The octopus, seeing Fullwood as a better catch, releases Russell and seizes Fullwood. Only when Lee and Dorriemore attack the giant with distress rockets does it let go its hold, and Fullwood is saved, though much the worse for wear. Fullwood's heroic act is praised by his fellows, a new experience for the erstwhile cad ("The Demon of the Reef", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 535, 05-Sep-25).

And, homeward bound, Fullwood looks forward to the new term at St. Frank's.

"I've made up my mind that this term is going to be the best one I've ever spent in my life."

And there was something about his tone which caused Nipper to look at him sharply. The old Ralph Leslie wasn't so apparent as it had been. Fullwood was greatly changed these days.

Would he slip back into his old habits as soon as he rejoined his former associates?

("The Terror of the Pacific", *Nelson Lee Library* OS 536, 12-Sep-25).

Indeed, Fullwood is intent upon turning over a new leaf. But if Augustus Hart's attempts at reform were a sore trial, not the least because of the machinations of Fullwood himself, how much more so would be those of Ralph Leslie.

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SEXTON BLAKE PLAYING CARDS

by George Beal

As you may know, I am a collector of playing-cards (I am the editor of the bi-monthly magazine of the IPCS, the society concerned). My interest is in true playing-cards, that is, suited cards from anywhere in the world, but not including games packs, such as Happy Families and similar productions. Sometimes an oddity comes my way, such as the one of which I enclose some photostats for your perusal.

This does, in fact, meet my criteria! As you can see, it is based on Sexton Blake. It is all quite well-done, and the drawings are good. Unfortunately, none of the characters depicted (apart from Blake and Tinker) are genuine SB *personnae*. Still, I thought it might be of interest to the followers of the great and fictional detective.

The pack consists of 60 cars, printed in colour. There are five suits each of twelve cards (described rather boringly in the rules as 'groups'), using Squares, Circles, Crosses, Triangles and Handcuffs as suitmarks. Each suit has a Boss, but the other characters vary from suit to suit. The cards in each suit are given a value, from 120 downwards.

The fifth suit (of Handcuffs) has Sexton Blake as the top card, with Tinker second, and various policemen in the cards which follow. The game is played somewhat along the lines of simple whist, but with a permanent suit of trumps, i.e. the Handcuff suit. I haven't played the game. I rarely play cards myself, since I am much more interested in the historical side.

Regarding the SB pack, I think the firm which made it (Waddy) is now defunct. It may have been connected with Waddingtons, who don't make cards any more. In fact, *nobody* in Britain manufactures playing-cards nowadays. The pack would have been

infinitely more interesting if they had been genuine Blake characters drawn by my old friend Eric Parker, but I daresay copyright problems prevented that.

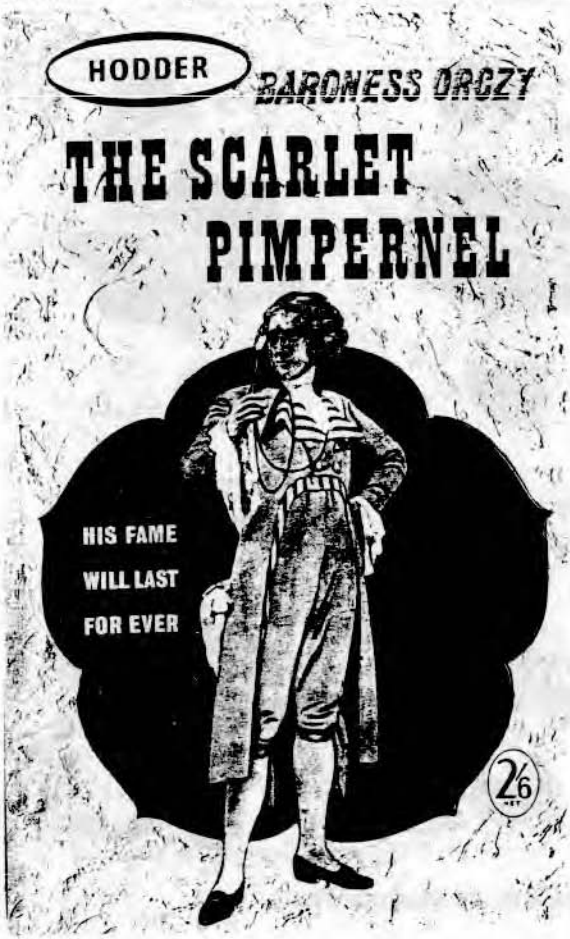
Nine of the cards are illustrated here.

YESTERDAY'S HEROES

In the latest of his series, BRIAN DOYLE takes a languid look at the lazy 18th century aristocratic baronet, Sir Percy Blakeney, whose foppish manner hid the identity of the steely, devil-may-care persona of the famous 'Scarlet Pimpernel' who, with his loyal followers, rescued nearly 1,000 potential victims of 'Madame Guillotine' during the French Revolution, the 'Reign of Terror' . . . .

'We seek him here, we seek him there,
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.
Is he in Heaven? Is he in Hell?
That demned elusive Pimpernel.'

The 'elusive Pimpernel' was, of course, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bt. who, in the English aristocratic society of the late-18th century, was known as the amiable, foppish, elegant and, at times, rather stupid - but very wealthy and well-connected - husband of the beautiful Lady Marguerite Blakeney, a former actress with the famous Comedie Français in Paris, and now the witty and glamorous hostess of many a dinner and ball at the Blakeneys' lavish house in Richmond, Surrey. She was also known as 'the cleverest woman in Europe'.



Sir Percy, of course, as everyone must surely know, was also, and secretly, the fearless and resourceful 'Scarlet Pimpernel', responsible, with a band of loyal friends, for rescuing so many French aristocrats - men, women and children - who had been condemned to execution by the terrible guillotine, during the French Revolution, known as the 'Reign of Terror' - sentenced to lose their heads for no crime other than being the well-born of France. The workers had risen up and gone mad with vengeful blood-lust.

'The Scarlet Pimpernel' became the hero of a dozen hugely best-selling books written by the

Baroness Orczy and published between 1905 and 1940. She wrote many other historical romance and adventure novels, but it was the Scarlet Pimpernel who was the perennial favourite. The odd thing is that one of the most famous fictional heroes of them all - 'the Englishman to end all Englishmen', as he was once called - was created by a Hungarian who couldn't speak a word of English until she was fifteen!

The Baroness Emmuska Orczy was born in 1865 in Tarna-Ors, Hungary, the only daughter of Baron Orczy, a well-known composer and conductor of the time. Her father was also musical director of the Opera House in Brussels and, as a child, Emmuska met such composers as Wagner, Liszt and Chopin. The Orczys were driven out of Hungary by peasant unrest and arrived in London in 1880. They lived in Wimpole Street (next to the famous Barretts) where Emmuska met Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and where her father taught the piano.

After receiving her education in Brussels and Paris, Emmuska Orczy (who had no ambitions in the musical field, but wanted to be an artist) studied painting at the Heatherley School of Art, in London (later she was to exhibit at least three of her paintings at London's Royal Academy). At Heatherley she met fellow-student Montagu Barstow, whom she later married. Soon after their marriage, the Barstows lived in Paris for a while and it was during this period that Orczy developed an interest in the French Revolution, reading many books on the subject, visiting appropriate places, and becoming thoroughly fascinated by this whole bloody episode in French history.

After returning to London, she wrote and edited some children's books of Hungarian fairy tales, also providing the illustrations. These were her first published books and she began writing seriously in 1900.

She first became known as a writer of unusual detective stories. Her long series of tales about 'The Old Man in the Corner' originally appeared in the 'Royal Magazine', illustrated by H.M. Brock, between 1901-04 and they subsequently appeared in collected form in the books *The Case of Miss Elliott* (1905), *The Old Man in the Corner* (1909) and *Unravelled Knots* (1925).

Later detective stories by Orczy included *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910) (about an early fictional female detective), *Castles in the Air* (1921) and *Skin O' My Tooth* (1928).

But, in 1902, came a strange incident that was to change Baroness Orczy's life and career. One chilly, misty evening, as she was waiting on the platform of London's Temple Underground Station, she suddenly noticed a weird figure - a tall, handsome, well-built man, dressed in exquisite clothes, holding up a spy-glass and speaking in a mocking, drawling voice and giving an occasional distinctive laugh, as he strolled confidently towards the other waiting passengers, where he suddenly seemed to vanish.

It must have been, as she later explained, a kind of quick, mental vision, but it stayed with her and made such a deep impression that she felt almost compelled to put the man into a story. She began writing it the next day and finished it in five weeks. She wrote it as a novel, and also thought it might make a good play. She called her book *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and began sending it to London publishers. A round dozen politely rejected it. Eventually one small publisher, Greening's, told Orczy he might be interested if she wrote it as a stage play and managed to have it produced. Then he might publish the book at the same time as the play opened in London.

She wrote the play, with her husband, Montagu Barstow, and after various trials and tribulations, it finally opened at the Theatre Royal Nottingham, in the autumn of 1903, presented by and starring two of Britain's most acclaimed theatre performers - Fred Terry and his wife, Julia Neilson. After further provincial productions, the play, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, opened at the New Theatre, London, in January 1905 (I will come to the full story of the theatre and film versions later). The novel of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was published on the day the play opened, as promised, by Greening and Co., who published the weekly magazine, *Play Pictorial* (they were later 'taken over' by Hodder and Stoughton, who subsequently published all Orczy's books).

After a slow start, the play became a sensational hit, as did the book. Baroness Orczy wrote a further ten novels about her hero: *I Will Repay* (1906), *The Elusive Pimpernel* (1908), *Eldorado* (1913), *Lord Tony's Wife* (1917), *The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1919), *The Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1922), *Sir Percy Hits Back* (1927), *The Way of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1933), *Sir Percy Leads the Band* (1936) and *Mam'zelle Guillotine* (1940). There was also a book of short stories, *The Adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1929), as well as other inter-connected novels about Sir Percy's ancestry, including *The Laughing Cavalier* (1914) (in which it was revealed that a forebear of Sir Percy was the original sitter for Franz Hals and his famous portrait of the aforesaid 'Laughing Cavalier'!) and *The First Sir Percy* (1920).

There was also *Pimpernel and Rosemary* (1924), a rather curious and complicated romance featuring Peter Blakeney, the great-grandson of Jack Blakeney, who was known as the 'Little Pimpernel' and who was Sir Percy's eldest son. The story is set in the early 1920s, when young Peter is also a cricket star and known as 'the finest cover-point England ever had'. He falls in love with a girl named Rosemary, but the wretched woman marries one Jasper, Lord Tarkington (a villain if ever I heard one) and they go on their honeymoon to Transylvania, of all places. As I said, a curious yarn; the reader keeps hoping that the ghost of the 'Scarlet Pimpernel' will come galloping in at some point, to rescue Rosemary from vampires or the wicked Jasper, or both, but, sadly, he never does.

There was, too, *The Scarlet Pimpernel Looks at the World* (1933), a book of essays. And, in addition, Orczy's publishers issued two massive Omnibuses: *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1930) containing four novels, and *The Gallant Scarlet Pimpernel* (1939), with another quartet of the books. Orczy was a busy and prolific author; she wrote 45 novels, 6 books of short stories, 6 plays, and 8 other books - 65 in all.

In 1938 came a real collectors' item: *The Gay Adventurer: Being the Biography of Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., known as 'The Scarlet Pimpernel', by John Blakeney, with an Introduction by Baroness Orczy.* Though it was never definitely established, this was thought to be written by Orczy's son, John (known as 'Jack') (though other rumours had it that the author was Orczy herself!) It could be described as 'fictionalized non-fiction' and is very well done, taking as its premise that Sir Percy was a real-life person.

The book describes how, after his adventures as 'the Scarlet Pimpernel', he transformed his beloved yacht 'The Daydream' into a private corvette; he then became acquainted with Nelson and had sea-faring adventures during the Napoleonic Wars, during which he destroyed two temporarily-abandoned French frigates, single-handed, by a miraculous stratagem. He finally dies, in 1823, in a drowning accident with his boat.

And what of Sir Percy Blakeney himself? What kind of a man is he? What kind of hero? (Though, of course, it isn't really Sir Percy who is the hero, but his other self, his better half - 'The Scarlet Pimpernel').

In her first novel about him, *The Scarlet Pimpernel,* Orczy describes him thus: "Tall above the average, even for an Englishman, broad-shouldered, massively built, he would have been called uncommonly good-looking, but for a certain lazy expression in his deep-set blue eyes, and that perpetual inane laugh, which seemed to disfigure his strong, clear-cut mouth". He was, in 1792, "a year or two on the right side of 30". He was the 6th Baronet, extremely wealthy, spoke fluent French, and was an intimate friend of the Prince of Wales. He was also, of course, blessed with the beautiful Marguerite as his wife.

Sir Percy hides beneath his languid, aristocratic, sometimes foolish manner and appearance, and his foppish behaviour, a will of iron, nerves of steel, quick wits, a lively imagination, great courage, and a genius for quick and brilliant disguises (a knack that he shares with Sherlock Holmes) and a dozen voices, and he and his brave 'league' whisk French 'aristos' from the deadly blade of the guillotine during the French Revolution, leaving in their place an impertinent little verse ('We seek him here . . .') whose 'signature' is a drawing of a little wild flower - the scarlet pimpernel . . .

It was during a holiday in Norway in 1902 that Orczy first noticed the pretty little wild flower, and she remembered it when she came to create her human 'Scarlet Pimpernel'. The scarlet pimpernel, in fact, is a small annual plant that can have scarlet, blue or white flowers, which close in cloudy or wet weather. It is of the primrose family and its name has been in use since the 15th century. Legend has it that if the scarlet pimpernel's flowers are found open, the weather will be fine.

Sir Percy formed the 'League of the Scarlet Pimpernel' in 1792 and it consisted of twenty young English aristocrats (fifteen of them were titled) - one to command, nineteen to obey. All were pledged to the one cause - 'to obey our Leader and rescue the innocent'. And this they did. It was said that the 'Scarlet Pimpernel' and his band of dare-devil young Regency 'bucks' eventually rescued nearly 1,000 people - men, women and children - from execution.

It was reputed that there was more than one 'escape agency' working on behalf of the French aristocrats during the Revolution (1789-94) in real life, and also some similar adventurers to the 'Scarlet Pimpernel' - such as the Baron de Batz, who even planned an abortive attempt to rescue King Louis the Sixteenth while on his way to the guillotine. But Orczy denied that her Pimpernel was based on anyone. 'Sir Percy is based on nobody', she one said. 'He is mine and mine only, just as I have given him to the world. He is my creation and he is pure fiction.'

And what a creation! Whether he is Hitting Back, Returning, Leading the Band, or merely being Elusive, Triumphant, Gallant, Having His Way, Being in League, or just having Adventures, Sir Percy is rattling good company. We remember his kissing his wife's footprints, throwing snuff in Chauvelin's eyes, wearing a gigantic highwayman's coat with five capes, or posing as a toothless, ragged old hag - and we rejoice. Let's face it, Sir Pimpernel is much more fun than Sir Percy, who often has to disguise hard-favour'd rage with fair nature (as Shakespeare's Henry V didn't quite put it) in order to maintain his own foppish pose in London and Richmond.

The Scarlet Pimpernel's arch-enemy and the villain in the stories is Chauvelin, and he was a real-life person (1766-1832). He was the Accredited Agent of the French Republican Government and responsible for sending many aristos to their deaths. He became Robespierre's Ambassador to London in 1972 and worked to secure England's neutrality. But when Louis the Sixteenth's execution became known it turned British public opinion against the French revolutionaries and Chauvelin was given eight days to leave England - and, even though there was no Scarlet Pimpernel around to throw snuff in his eyes, he went. In the stories, Chauvelin actually discovered that Sir Percy was also the Scarlet Pimpernel and he hated him and vowed to catch him and kill him. But his many attempts to entrap the Pimpernel came to nothing - though he did come close on more than one occasion . . .
(To be concluded)

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REFLECTIONS ON *WILD WEST WEEKLY* by Larry Morley

With reference to Bill Bradford's article on the *Wild West Weekly* (March C.D.), I would like to make a couple of comments. For the life of me I cannot understand why such a paper failed after a short run of two years.

Every other Hollywood 'B' movie was a western or cowboy film, as we called them. The 1930s were the golden age of cowboy stars - Buck Jones, Tim McCoy, Ken Maynard, Tom Tyler - and a minor star, John Wayne! The list was endless. With all this going for it you would think that *Wild West Weekly's* success would be a dead cert. It was an attractive looking paper with marvellous coloured covers and first-class illustrations inside. Maybe its large-sized format killed it off? *The Buzzer* met a similar fate.

Finally, some years ago I was working at Fulham Broadway. During a slack period I had a walk round the Broadway and came across a bookshop called 'The Constant Reader' (now closed). The shop had a basement where some building work was going on. Among the debris was a pile of coloured cover papers. Yes, you've guessed it! It was a complete run of *Wild West Weekly* in fairly good condition. I asked the rather bored-looking assistant "How much are the old papers?" "Fifty pence each" he replied, so I offered him £20 for the lot. I still enjoy reading the odd story in *Wild West Weekly*, particularly a serial called 'The Fatal 45' by James Ronald - a rattling good yarn as they used to say.

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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: 01923-232383.

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WANTED: Pre-War boys' comics/story papers, Xmas issues in particular. Can offer exchanges if preferred, e.g. Nelson Lees O/S, N/S, Penny Popular, Champions, S.B.L. 2nd, 3rd series. B.F.L. 1st and 2nd series, few others. KEN TOWNSEND, 7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY, DE65 6EA. Phone: 01283-703305.

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THOSE BAD, BEAUTIFUL GIRLS

by Margery Woods

Part 3 Diana Royston-Clarke

Most newcomers to boarding school arrive on the first day of term experiencing varying degrees of uncertainty; suddenly, so far from home, family and friends, to face a new way of life. What will it be like? Will the pupils be friendly? Will the food be dreary and the teachers likewise? Some will try to hide any betrayal of nerves, some will put on a bold face, some will be mute with shyness and a few will be crying their eyes out under the bedclothes that first night in the dorm. But there was no trace of nerves or uncertainty, least of all tears, about the dazzling girl who arrived at Cliff House School one sunlit November day with all the aplomb of a celebrity. Not for her the timorous advent as a nonentity amidst other nonentities on the first day of term.

She was handed out of a luxurious chauffeur-driven car (three thousand quid to threepence, estimated Jemima - not a bad price for a car in 1933) escorted by her father and Mr Redfern. She was tall, very pretty, fair of complexion and her eyes were large and violet-blue. Her slim figure was draped in a rich sable coat over a dress of pure silk. Bracelets of gold and a platinum wrist-watch graced her arms, and everything about her from the diamond clasp in the chic velvet fez atop her blonde hair to the dainty high-heeled shoes on her shapely feet breathed opulence and expensive taste. She wafted perfume, charm and bonhomie over the stunned members of the Fourth who waited to greet her; they had never had anyone quite like this vision at Cliff House.

Her name was Diana Royston-Clarke (she was very particular about that hyphen) and her father was a millionaire. He adored her to the point of weakness, seemingly only amused to be ordered about by this glorious creature he had fathered. At the time of Diana's arrival at Cliff House Mr Royston-Clarke had just put a quarter of a million into Mr Redfern's failing business, saving him from almost certain bankruptcy, and also saving the

livelihood of the five hundred workers Mr Redfern employed. For this Barbara Redfern was requested to look after Diana while she settled in at Cliff House. It seemed a small return for the good turn the millionaire had done for Babs' father, but on that fateful day she could not know just how great the cost of that return would prove. For Diana - who needed no looking after! - had been at Cliff House only a few hours before she decided it would be wonderful to be the leading light, looked up to like Babs, favoured and admired and with authority over all these girls who crowded round her with such obvious interest and admiration. So Diana's ambition was born, an ambition that was (temporarily) to cost Babs her captaincy and the friendship of many of the girls, even straining her relationship with some of her closest chums. But the promise had been made, the promise that caught her in the familiar cleft stick ploy which is one of the most potent emotional devices in the art of fiction. For Diana had no intention of obeying any rules and was devoid of any scruples when determined to get her own way.

MEET once again Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of the Fourth at Cliff House School—the girl who loves the limelight, whose dazzling but wayward personality makes her so very fascinating. In this new series her reckless behaviour brings her into dramatic conflict with Barbara Redfern & Co.

Diana had no problems in gaining instant popularity. She lavished hospitality and goodies on the Fourth and played the charming, fun-loving schoolgirl to perfection - with the guile of a woman ten years older. For in truth Diana was no schoolgirl. Fourteen years and eight months old in age, yes, but in all other respects Diana had left childhood and schoolgirl ways behind her before she ever arrived at Cliff House. Looks, style and panache she possessed in abundance, while her characterisation unashamedly owed quite a lot to at least two of the film idols of her time: the platinum blonde 'bombshell' impact of Jean Harlow and the sophistication and humour of Carole Lombard; the last-named, incidentally, was said to be Diana's favourite film start. More important, she also had brains, determination and great courage, all of which added up to a formidable personality. Wonderful to know when she was in benign mood; dangerous when she was crossed.

Her official biography describes her as London-born, no siblings, motherless, and thus rather spoilt. ('Rather' being a somewhat weak qualification; Diana was very spoilt!) Her temper is described as fiery, her nature ruthless in hatred but in her affections warm-hearted, generous and self-sacrificing. Her height is 5ft 1inch and her shoe size 3½. The rest of her vital statistics seem to be unavailable. Although at least one was very vital; on two occasions she superseded Barbara Redfern as captain of the Lower School during her stormy sojourn at Cliff House. And she wasted little time in setting about achieving that desired status.

The glamour she radiated soon drew Lydia and the Smart Set into her adoring coterie, while she proceeded to indulge in moral blackmail at Babs' expense if support of her whims was not forthcoming. After each rule-breaking escapade she never failed to remind Babs of how the Redfern family would suffer should her father ever decide to withdraw his financial support from Mr Redfern's failing business. The inference blatantly underlined that this could be the outcome were she, Diana, ever to voice her displeasure with Babs to the provider of that financial lifeline . . .

It has often been said that there are only two certainties in life: birth and death. Benjamin Franklin, more cynically, opted for death and taxes. But at Cliff House there was a third certainty; that scarcely a year would go by without some new contender or school tyrant attempting to oust Barbara Redfern from her captaincy. Some were new girls, others old enemies, some motivated by jealousy, or the desire for power, or vanity, and sometimes by the fact that Babs presented an obstacle to the realisation of some secret nefarious object. Diana was to be yet another in the ambitious procession.

Lydia had once succeeded in attaining the cherished honour. This was during Sarah Harrigan's brief reign of power in the school during one of the absences of normal authority. Alas for Lydia, Sarah didn't last very long and therefore neither did Lydia.

Back in earlier days there was Norma Crofton. She too had ambitions beyond her station, as the Victorians would have said. Her scheming was treacherous enough, though, and Babs lost the captaincy for a while.

Then there was Eleanor Storke. Eleanor was not a pleasant girl, and was another afflicted by minor delusions of grandeur. She was the recipient of unlimited supplies of pocket money from a doting uncle to whom she made careless boasts about her importance at school, including the careless fib that she was captain of her form. Doting Uncle Benjamin, who was safely ensconced in some remote corner of the empire, was so delighted he contributed considerable largesse as a reward for his niece's cleverness. This satisfactory state of affairs might have contributed indefinitely had Uncle Benjamin not decided suddenly to pay a visit to the old country. Eleanor suddenly found it an urgent necessity to become Form Captain. This necessity brought much trouble for Babs but fortunately the wise and wily Jemima Carstairs took a hand, getting herself elected. Eleanor was thwarted, her misdeeds brought to light, and Uncle Benjamin threatened to cut Eleanor out of his will should she ever again behave so badly. This dire threat concentrated Eleanor's conscience more efficiently than any other punishment would have done. Jemima immediately resigned and Babs was re-elected.

Connie Jackson was another threat to Babs, especially during the time she acquired great power during the tyrannical reign of her aunt, Miss Harper, who once deputised for Miss Primrose. Connie lost no time in demoting Babs, although Babs found herself in good company, that of Stella Stone, the school captain, who was also demoted to the ranks while Connie appointed her own toadies. But Connie didn't last long; the Fourth to a girl fought back . . .

There was also the bizarre business of the rival secret societies one eventful year. A long series featured the infamous Red Triangles, power seekers all, who set their sights on replacing Babs as form captain, Clara Trevlyn as sports captain and Mabel Lynn as leader of the dramatic society. It was quite possible that the Bull and Miss Primrose featured somewhere on their list of future aims. So Babs and Co. formed the Black Diamonds to attempt to unmask the Triangles. This storyline was interwoven with the advent of a new girl, the Hon. Beatrice Beverley. Beatrice had her good points - she was a brilliant hockey half-back, which delighted Clara Trevlyn - but she was too new to them all for the form to have sussed out her character and discovered the streak of snobbishness which would emerge shamefully in a later story. Thanks to the Red Triangles Babs was discredited, and Beatrice was elected as captain, which convinced the chums that Beatrice must be the main instigator of the Triangles. Beatrice's fortunes changed rapidly and she was on the brink of

expulsion before the Triangles were unmasked. Lydia and her cronies were in the thick of all the plotting but the leader was Marcia Loftus. Lydia, true to form when she realised that Nemesis loomed, quickly decided that confession was good for saving the skin when threatened and escaped with punishment. Marcia was expelled. This was the best thing that had happened for ages and was almost worth the suffering she'd caused. Beatrice, who had been elected by mistake, was allowed to remain form captain until the end of the term.

The only humorous aspect of the whole preposterous affair remained quite unrecognised. For what use would Marcia, Lydia, Nancy Bell, Frances Frost and Freda the Ferret have been as organisers of form activities or anything else that required ability and the willingness to work hard? Absolutely none at all.

The most wounding treachery to strike Babs was the arrival of the winsome, childishly enchanting Faith Ashton; a bad and very beautiful girl from Canada, although there was nothing childish about her malign campaign against Babs, all the more despicable because she was Babs' cousin. But then, the worst of enemies can be found in families as well as among strangers.

So they came and went, the procession of contenders, all with envy and greed simmering in their mean little hearts, some achieving their aim by their own means, others succeeding through the medium of a tyrant temporarily in power at Cliff House. Even Marjorie Hazeldene, the last girl ever to wish harm to Babs, once found herself the unwilling recipient of the captaincy during yet another of the tyrannical upheavals that seemed to shake the long-suffering foundations of the ancient school so frequently. The walls of Cliff House could tell many tales of oppression and ruthless schoolgirl perfidy.

But of them all none was ever the equal of Diana Royston-Clarke . . .

(To be continued . . . Alter egos? They never met, but together they could have formed the most explosive partnership in fiction.)

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BOUND TO BE LOVED

by Brian Sayer

Part 3: All Steamed Up

I wonder how many of us have stood over the spout of a steaming kettle, trying to remove sticky transparent tape from a prized *Magnet* or a *Gem*? By gum, it's a sticky business! Perhaps somewhere a scientific solution exists, or one is about to be invented, which will cause the glue to melt away.

Some of the transparent tapes will just pull off because of age. It is also possible to remove some tape by warming it with a domestic iron. After the tape has been removed a sticky residue can cause more annoyance and damage by adhering to other pages. This I counter by the use of talcum powder (use a cheap brand, naturally, and not the wife's *Givenchy* or the husband's *Paco Rabanne*). A dusting will mop up the stickiness and the excess can be easily brushed off. The powder will also lessen the browning of the glue a little.

The advance of the electric kettle means that most of us can no longer steam off tape in the way that WGB might have opened other fellows' letters.

I resort to other methods. I am a DIY fanatic and my equipment includes that excellent modern wall-papering aid, the steam-stripper. This appliance has attachments including a nozzle which emits a jet of steam. This, boys and girls, is drastic! I usually shut myself in the adjoining garage-workshop where steamed-up windows matter not. By use of the steamer nozzle, parcel and transparent tapes, gripped with tweezers, will eventually lift clean away. The glue will relinquish its grip better if the jet of steam is directed under the tape. The brown stains will remain and, alarmingly, the papers will be soaking wet!

Let's take a few paces back. This may well deserve to be filed under Screamingly Obvious, but first take one taped *Magnet, Nelson Lee* or *SOL* and remove the staples. In the *SOLs* they are usually badly rusted, so much so that the immediate area has been damaged. I use a small pair of long-nose pliers to remove the staples. In *SOLs* the rusty metal often breaks and bits have to be teased out. A pin can be used to push pieces through the paper. Some past 'repairer' may have gummed the folds together. The pages may have to be steamed apart and, beware, this can be difficult and cause more damage.

So back to the steamer with the dissected *The Phantom of the Towers, SOL* and *Gussy The Ventriloquist, Gem.* Lay out some newspapers as padding and start steaming. As the tape is removed, place the wet pages on more newspaper.

All done?

Time is Pressing.

Those sorrowful, soggy papers should not be left to dry out. An iron will be needed - and an old spare iron is preferable if domestic conflict is to be avoided. The iron will pick up glue, although, of course, it can be cleaned. Before the pages dry, place them one at a time, opened, double-page spread, on newspaper and press with the hot iron.

If no steamer is available, I can only suggest that boiling kettle! Readers may have other ideas. I have had some successes by brushing boiling water (a cupful in a microwave oven is quick and repeatable) over the taped area, with a stiff art brush. The hot bristles can be eased under the tape - but some tape will not shift this way. Tape can also be unstuck by pressing - with care - with a warm iron.

IMPORTANT: To avoid tearing, and, still worse, scorching the precious pages, press using one or two sheets of absorbent kitchen paper. A pressing session will use up a number of sheets so keep a roll handy. Do not fold the pressed pages back into double but pile carefully for the next phase.

(To be continued.)

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FORUM

From DES O'LEARY:

I heard you, Mary, and Professor Richards on Radio Four (long wave) in the *On These Days* slot. Very good too . . . I've been keeping an eye on these morning long wave programmes since the series on *Bunty* crept up on me. I missed recording an excellent discussion on this Thomson comic . . . Did any C.D. reader record these *Bunty* programmes?

Now to last month's C.D. The cover was striking. I'd never heard of *Wild West Weekly* and its illustrations certainly made a change from our usual hobby favourites. What a lot of meetings and conferences for hobbyists are on this year! Your review of the 'new' Wimsey and Biggles books is mouth-watering. As mentioned previously, I find the book reviews in C.D. most valuable, signalling things of interest. I must just say how much I agree with J.E.M.'s article on Sherlock Holmes. Am I the only one who finds him boring?

The date when Will Hay's 'Narkover' film was made was 1935. It was shown again in 1996 to re-create the opening of Loughborough's new cinema, the Empire (now 'Curzon') in 1936, when it was their first film. Narkover, of course, was the creation of 'Beachcomber' (J.B. Morton) of the *Daily Express*.

From ANDY BOOT:

According to *Good Morning Boys* (Ray Seaton and Roy Martin's biography of the great Will Hay) *Boys Will Be Boys* was both filmed and premiered in 1935. J.B. Morton was never keen on this adaptation of his Narkover (although as a fan of both, I love the pair of them), but it was the first Hay movie to use the schoolmaster character that had made his name on the halls. Despite the large number of movies made at the time, it seems to have been a common practice to 'revive' popular films at regular intervals, and as the *Good Morning Boys* movie was made in 1937, it's possible that *Boys Will Be Boys* was re-released to catch the growing Will Hay audience.

From J. ASHLEY:

Concerning the release of Will Hay's film *Boys Will Be Boys*, according to Leslie Halliwell's *Film Goers' Companion* the film was made in 1935.

I most certainly saw it well before 1938. Will Hay had made three films before *Boys Will Be Boys*. In *Those Were The Days* and *Dandy Dick*, he was more a victim of events. In *Radio Revue* he had a role which hardly registered with the public.

He part wrote the script of *Boys Will Be Boys*, and was famous on the music halls for his schoolmaster sketches. I should imagine that Gainsborough Studios, who made the film, wanted to cash in on his character as a schoolmaster. Incidentally this was the first film which depicted him as a hopelessly inefficient man who somehow succeeded in beating the villains.

I remember that when the film first was shown a publicity blurb showed Leslie Sarony as the Music Master. He in fact wrote the words and music of *'Up The Old Narkovians'*. Some of Beachcomber's readers objected to Hay being called Alec Smart in the film - when Beachcomber in his column named the character 'Smart Alec' which gave a completely different aspect to the character.

Will Hay averaged two films a year from 1936 to 1939, all of them released before the Second World War.

(Editor's Note: Mr Edwards' question about *Boys Will Be Boys* in last month's C.D. created much interest. Several other Narkover fans have written to me about this celebrated Will Hay film.)

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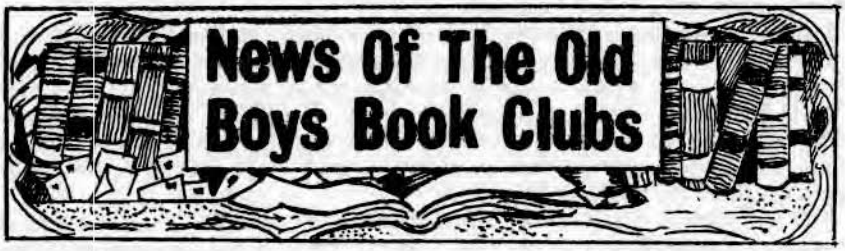

LONDON O.B.B.C.

There was barely room left to swing a cat as members gathered at the flat of Duncan Harper for the meeting in Acton on Sunday 8th March 1998. Fortunately for our feline friends' well-being, there were no cats available with which to test this thesis.

We were lucky enough to have a very special guest, Ernest Dudley: The Armchair Detective! Mr Dudley entertained us with a multitude of tales about his career, his creations (particularly Dr Morelle) and his enthusiasm for the traditional detective story. This was a popular topic which provoked much discussion.

The sprightly Mr Dudley stayed with us for the whole meeting, which also included various other intriguing and unusual items.

Bill Bradford gave us a nostalgic glimpse back to 1948 as he read a report of the very first London O.B.B.C. meeting fifty years ago.

Peter Mahony provided us with an extremely difficult Greyfriars quiz which had our finest Hamilton boffins struggling to reach double figures.

Derek Hinrich presented a paper on Invasion Literature entitled 'Ancestral Voices Prophesying War', which focused upon the alarmist fiction of the turn of the century, and referred to that historic moment when Sexton Blake encountered the Kaiser.

The next meeting will be at Mark Taha's flat in Ealing on 19th April. (See the newsletter for full details.) **Vic Pratt**

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

The March meeting passed very quickly for the fourteen members present because of two excellent presentations. Donald Campbell introduced us to the world of the enigmatic William Le Queux, known as a self-publicising genius. His interests included writing, travel, shooting, spying, broadcasting and digging for Roman artefacts in his own garden. Books including *The Hotel X* and *The Spies of the Kaiser* were published in many languages but he was once called 'the worst novelist in British history'! In the world of William Le Queux the edges between fact and fiction were blurred.

Are our hobby books classics? Was St. Frank's a grotesque parody of Greyfriars? Is there any merit in *The Greyfriars Prospectus* by Butcher? These topics were well and truly argued in Richard Burgon's presentation 'The House Votes', which proved very popular. As with politicians, sometimes the question was not answered, and we even argued about Richard's voting system. All very enjoyable. **Paul Galvin**

WILLIAM'S UXB

by Ernest Holman

It was a great day for the Outlaws - especially William - when Joan left the London Blitz behind and returned to the village. Joan, once William's next-door neighbour, had always been his one 'soft spot'. Eventual moves to other houses around, then away to school and, finally, leaving the area entirely, had been Joan's lot. Now, however, she was back with them (albeit with yet another change of surname, but still the same Joan) and forthwith entered into her role as the only female member ever admitted into the Outlaws. (Scream yourself shrill, Violet Elizabeth!).

Joan and her mother received the Outlaws welcomingly at Lilac Cottage and the little girl was soon entering into the varied capers of her beloved companions. As it would shortly be her birthday, a party was arranged (within the limitations of existing restrictions) and the Outlaws were eagerly awaiting the occasion. As Hubert Lane also happened to have his birthday at the same time, it was soon spread around that his affair would be up to previous peacetime standards. True or otherwise, much in the way of verbal exchanges took place between the rival factions.

This was related, mainly, to the claims of each party that Mr Leicester would attend their occasion, for the showing of his Mickey Mouse films. It was a great blow to them all when Mr Leicester, now assuming full-time duties as District Warden, let it be known that his Kinematograph was being put up for the emergency period of hostilities. Unhappily, Mr Leicester was not pleased with the placid nature of his duties - there was, he considered, no opportunity fo him to display his zeal and efficiency; in other words, he longed to be in action - if only some occasion would turn up.

It did - one night, instead of (as usual) passing overhead, an enemy bomber chose to release part of his load over the area. Most of it, fortunately, fell upon open ground but there was one fall just outside the gates of the Hall. The Botts were away, so Mr Leicester had no indignant Lady of the Hall to hover agitatingly around him. He went into things in a big way - the road was roped off, traffic diverted - and all houses in the immediate locality were evacuated. Miss Milton, prim, elderly and house-proud, took in Joan and her mother, who had to leave their cottage. Miss Milton would not hear of any party being held, much to the delight of Hubert Lane, whose home was unaffected. Mr Leicester, in his importance, could offer no hope of any immediate return to unoccupied homes. He spent a good deal of his time leaning over the barrier and gazing with unmodest pride at his unexploded bomb.

Joan was feeling the strain of living with Miss Milton far from enjoyable - and the additional and frequent taunts directed at Joan and the Outlaws by the Laneites put an extra damper on their activities. William, of course, was not prepared to accept this stalemate; as far as Joan's party was concerned, he assured her, he would "fix it". To Joan, as always, William was just wonderful!

The procedure to William was simple. The bomb would have to be removed - not only that but placed outside the house of the Lanes. As a result, Joan would have her party, Hubert wouldn't and - well, that was all there was to it!

Now came the main problem - how to set about it? No difficulty, so long as there was no-one about at the time and - quite a thought - that the bomb did not explode whilst being transferred. So, the hero set out, complete with his ancient and battered soap box on wheels. With a saucepan on his head for protection, plus a tin tray for use as a shield, William reckoned that the bomb could then do its worst!

There was no-one about at the site; he slipped into the hole, dug around the bomb with a spade and was soon loosening the earth into which it was embedded. He was intent upon his task until startled to hear a mighty shout to "COME BACK". There was the District Warden, looking over the barrier, his whole attitude that of being very unsure of things.

(There is, perhaps, a suggestion here that the Warden might have been a fore-runner to Bill Pertwee's Hodges in 'Dad's Army'.) William assured Mr Leicester that everything was being taken care of - if the bomb started exploding, the tray was available for protection. He did, however, point out that it was a "funny looking bomb". Mr Leicester gingerly joined him - and agreed that it was a peculiar type of bomb - large, completely round and of a grey hue.

In a moment they both knew what it really was - one of the stone objects from a column alongside the gates of the opposite Hall, dislodged during the bombing. The Warden turned slowly to William and remarked that there was no need for a lot of careless talk to get about concerning the matter. This meant, though, William told him, that Joan and her mother could return to their home and have their party, after all. Mr Leicester agreed but when William suggested that he came and gave his Kinematograph show, he was met with a downright refusal. William thought it was a pity - he reckoned that the show would make it easier for him to avoid spreading rumours! So - the show was on!

Mr Leicester had his brief moment of satisfaction, however - after informing Joan and her mother that the bomb had been 'disposed of' and they could go back to Lilac Cottage, he was informed that they were all very fortunate to have him as their Warden! So Joan had her birthday party, the Laneites ate humble pie when they heard of the Kinematograph show, and William was yet again told that he was "just wonderful".

"For", said Joan, "you had something to do with it, didn't you?" William agreed that he had had something to do with the affair - "just a bit". When, though, Joan begs to be told just what did happen, William - obviously weighing up the claims of Joan's adoration as well as his promise to the Warden - says that he will tell her everything, adding (with a wink) "after the War!"

Source: "William Carries On" republished by Macmillan 1988

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GEMS OF HAMILTONIA

from Pete Hanger

. . . Bunter had missed his supper! Except for some meringues he had found in Lord Mauleverer's study, and some biscuits he had unearthed in Smithy's, Bunter had had nothing since tea. And even tea had been frugal. There had been three eggs for tea in No. 7 study: and Toddy and Dutton with the selfishness Bunter knew only too well, had had one each, leaving only one for Bunter! *Billy Bunter's Bargain*

"Bob, old fellow . . ."

"Stony!" said Bob Cherry sadly.

"Eh? I didn't ask you whether you were stony, you fathead!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at Bob through his big spectacles. "Wharrer you mean?"

"Oh! You called me old fellow, so I thought I'd mention it," said Bob affably.

Magnet 1633

"Oh, no! The fact is - the - the fact - " Bunter paused, not quite certain, so far, what the fact was. Even an old hand like Bunter had to have a moment or two to make up a fib.

Magnet 1443

". . . Old Smith is always punctual - those city people are."

Bunter gave a sniff, as if punctuality was something for which he had a lofty contempt. Certainly he was not often guilty of it. *Magnet* 1641

Again Lovell wrinkled his brows. He was no whale at arithmetic. He had been known to get simple sums right. But it had not often happened. *Tom Merry's Own* 1951

He was, Wun had told them, an old-fashioned chinaman; nothing of the 'modern' chinaman about him. He lived in the past, when the Manchus reigned over the Flowery Land, and regarded all happenings of the last twenty years as a series of bad practical jokes - rather like some old gentlemen of Europe who cannot take quite seriously anything that has happened since the War. *Magnet* 1542

. . . The Head would be annoyed, if he heard of it, and it would not be much use for Gosling to explain that he had gone to sleep and forgotten the time! The Head was certain to take the view that it was up to the school porter to postpone his slumbers till the night.
Magnet 1541

"If it's Miss Bellew, I don't want her to see me!" exclaimed Bessie, coming to a halt. "She told me not to go out till I'd done my lines. If she sees me coming in, she'll guess I've been out - she's as sharp as a needle". *Magnet* 1617

Mr Prout mumbled dismally. Prout could not sleep.

At one in the morning, Prout was generally bound by slumber's chain. But the portly Prout had been sadly and badly shaken by that terrific punch on his plump chest in the afternoon. It had thoroughly disturbed Prout - shaken fore and aft, as it were. When Prout went to bed, his eyes refused to close.

On such occasions of sleeplessness Prout had a recourse; he would take a nip of whisky from a certain flask. Prout was really old enough to know better; but that was his recourse.
Magnet 1616

"It wasn't me, sir!" said Bunter, by way of beginning his defence. He did not yet know what was coming; but it seemed a safe opening. *Magnet* 1620

The drone went on;

"The member for Popping hoped that the Government would remember that their first and greatest duty was to concern themselves with the inhabitants of any country but their own - " . . . . "He hoped and trusted, that no British Statesman would ever forget what was due to foreign peoples as to waste a single thought upon the inhabitants of these islands - "
Magnet 1615

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25th. April 1998
10.30am to 5.00pm

Watersmeet Theatre
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"Well, here we are," greeted Biggles

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