

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS'

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DIGEST

VOL 53
No 636



H.W.



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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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As I write my last editorial of the twentieth century I find myself wondering whether our founding Editor, Herbert Leckenby, or his successor, Eric Fayne, would have expected the C.D. to go marching on into the new millennium! Their efforts did so much to make possible this remarkable achievement - and also, of course, the support of our loyal contributors and readers has breathed continuing life into our magazine. I thank you all for your long lasting interest and help which, combined with the efforts of Alison, Freda and all the staff at Quacks, our printers, perpetuates the C.D. (which one reader calls the 'monthly miracle').

The Annual is now nearly completed and among its not-yet-trailed contents are a lovely seasonable Cliff House mystery by Margery Woods, another of Bob Whiter's celebrated quizzes, a look at popular comics by Tony Glynn and some memories of childhood and adolescence from Terry Jones. Betty and Johnny Hopton have contributed an intriguing article about their passion for aspects of

THE SCHOOLGIRLS 1923 OWN ANNUAL



Enid Blyton's work, and Peter McCall takes us on a journey into the Greyfriars environs, both physical and imaginative.

If you have not yet ordered your copy of the Annual there is still time to do so by writing to me and enclosing your remittance of £12 if you live in the U.K. or £13 if the Annual is to be sent overseas (postage and packing are included in these prices).

This is a time for remembering absent friends, particularly Les Rowley and Alan Stewart, long-standing contributors to the C.D. and members of the London O.B.B.C. who have recently passed away. We shall always think of them with affection and gratitude.

Let us hope that the new millennium will bring hope and blessings to our world. I send to all of you my warmest greetings for a right Merry Christmas and a Happy, Fulfilling and Peaceful New Century.

MARY CADOGAN



LES ROWLEY: A TRIBUTE

By Roger Jenkins

Les Rowley was in the Diplomatic Service, and when on home leave he used to attend meetings of the London Club. My first contact with him was a letter from Tokyo in 1956 asking me to send him by registered airmail two dozen *Schoolboys' Owns* from the Club library for him to read on the way home by boat. He donated the Greyfriars Cup, a handsome silver trophy, awarded annually to the Club that made the best group of Hamiltonian imitations. When he retired, he became a regular attender, and was Chairman more than once. He had a photographic memory of many Greyfriars series, and could quote amusing extracts verbatim. His love of Greyfriars was exemplified in many *CD Annual* articles over the years, admired by countless readers.

I got to know Les quite well, because we had a number of touring holidays every year over two decades, and his dry humour made him an amusing companion. Unfortunately, a hearing difficulty in recent years caused him to give up attending meetings, though he never lost his interest. Nevertheless it was a great shock to learn of his demise, and we must all feel the force of John Donne's dictum: "No man is an island. Every man's death diminishes me."

GRAHAM BRUTON REMEMBERS

ALAN STEWART

It is with much sadness that I write these few notes on Alan Stewart.

I first met Alan around 1969 when he was attending some meetings of the London Club. A few years were to go by before he returned. This, I learned, was because of Alan's job, from which by then he had retired. That job was being a member of the dance band on various Cunard liners. Alan worked for many years for Cunard, on such notable ships as the *Queen Mary* and the *Coronia*. Indeed, he met his wife-to-be, Myra, on one such cruise when she was a passenger.

Alan's interest in our hobby stemmed back at least four decades and he had a fine collection of *Magnets* from the vintage era. For the past twenty years or so, Alan and Myra have been regular stalwarts of the London O.B.B.C., rarely missing a meeting. It has always been one of the highlights of these meetings to talk to Alan whose natural warmth and friendliness have always been to the fore. Quite the humorist, and with that soft-spoken Scottish accent, he will be much missed by all his friends. However, we must be thankful for all the lovely memories that he has left behind. Our love and sympathy go out to Myra.

CHRISTMAS CAROLLING

A Seasonal Look at a Book, by Brian Doyle

There is one book I read in the month of December every year; it's a little personal tradition I've kept up ever since I was a schoolboy. Others may well do the same. And Christmas just wouldn't be the same without it. Indeed, it has contributed more to the Christmas Season in Britain (and the United States) than any other story. It is as much a part of the December 25th tradition as plum pudding, turkey, holly, mistletoe, crackers, Christmas trees, seasonal greeting cards, going to church, gaily-wrapped gifts, Christmas Annuals, playing board-games and cards, and special editions of comic-papers (with all those evocative snow-topped titles). It is, of course, Charles Dickens' warm hearted classic story *A Christmas Carol*.



Scrooge's third Visitor

The Life of Our Lord. And remember Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* - as well as all those other memorable characters: Ebenezer Scrooge (the miser who turns into a magical uncle), Bob Cratchit, the Fezziwigs, Jacob Marley's Ghost, and the Three 'Spirits'.

As well as being a wonderful author who created many of the world's most famous brilliant and popular novels - and hundreds of unique and memorable characters - Dickens was a clever writer. Take those famous opening words of *A Christmas Carol*: "Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that." Who could not continue reading to find out more about the late Mr. Marley, and indeed about the manner of his passing? Who could resist the curiosity of finding out what happened next....?

The story of *A Christmas Carol* is far too well-known to repeat here. But the reason that I re-read it every year just before Yuletide is because (apart from telling a good story,

and a gripping one) it truly revives and recreates the feeling and the spirit of Christmas for us - and in us. It's never the same feeling that we had as children, of course, with that added anticipatory excitement of presents, good food, parties and other special things to come (not to mention, if we were lucky, the snow and snowmen and snowballs, and the pantomimes and carols, and the special Christmassy programmes on radio and television). But it does send a tingle or two down the spine and often brings the pricking behind the eyes and the lump in the throat when remembering past festivities and people and loves.

Christmas, as we get that little bit older with the passing of the years, is about nostalgia and memories, of things said to us, said by us, and things even left unspoken. I have only to hear that beautiful old carol 'Away in a Manger' to remember how I went around the neighbouring streets of my home in Abbey Wood, South East London, on a one-boy (aged 10) mission singing carols (correction: one carol, that one, because it happened to be the one I knew the words to!) to raise money after I had lost two half-crowns (25p) and desperately needed that (to me, then) magnificent sum to buy (a) a packet of six coloured handkerchiefs (with embroidered edges) for my Mother's present, and (b) a packet of 20 'Gold Flake' (his favourite brand) cigarettes for my Father.

It was pitch-dark (this was black-out, 1940), cold, windy, quiet (for once there had been no air raid warning siren) and promising snow. I pulled my cap down over my ears, tightened my woollen scarf, pulled my gloves on tighter, and tried to look angelic and friendly as I warbled 'Away in a Manger' in what I considered to be a reasonably-good boyish treble. I warmly wished everyone a 'Merry Christmas' as they opened the front door and was greeted in a variety of ways I won't detail here. I even did my little act outside the small 'Moakes' factory two streets away (they made and sold ice-cream in the summer and hot, freshly-made crumpets in the winter) and was rewarded (by the burly Mr. Moakes himself) with a small bag of steaming-hot crumpets, which went down well when I eventually arrived home.

I managed to raise 1/4d (7p) mostly from nice, elderly ladies. Not nearly enough for the hankies and cigs. But, luckily, My Uncle Len dropped in that evening and gave me 5/- exactly - it was, as they say, manna from Heaven, and the day was saved. As I sat by the warm coal-fire, eating my free crumpets (with added butter), helped down with a mug of Ovaltine, I listened to a variety show on BBC Radio ('Elsie and Doris Waters' complaining humorously about their horrible neighbour 'Old Mrs. Butler'). My Mother popped her head round the door: "It's just started snowing, 'she announced brightly, 'It'll be thick tomorrow!" I smiled as I stroked our white cat, Twink, who had just come in from an evening stroll (you couldn't see any snow on him, of course - it was a sort of camouflage, I supposed). My Father had just arrived home with a copy of *Funny Wonder* comic for me. Things were all right. And it would be Christmas Day the day after tomorrow.

I digress, I'm afraid. But then *A Christmas Carol* tends to do that to you. Read a couple of pages and you're away on a trip to the past. A page or two of the book is rather like E. Nesbit's *Amulet* (in her famous story *The Story of the Amulet*) - you touch the latter or read the former and off you go, whizzing back into the past.... As Scrooge says at the end of the book: "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future."

A Christmas Carol was published in December, 1843 and Dickens finished it in about six weeks. Not bad going when you consider that he was writing *Martin Chuzzlewit* at the same time (presumably going feverishly from one to the other, as the fancy took him, rather like a dog with two bones). He was apparently very excited about his new Christmas story. "I wept and laughed, and wept again, and excited myself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition, and thinking whereof, I walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all sober folks had gone to bed...." he wrote to a friend at the time.

Dickens loved Christmas, a time of the year he called "a good time, a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of other people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys."

There have been more stage and screen versions of *A Christmas Carol* than any other Dickens story. There were a dozen or so silent film adaptations, starting in 1908, featuring such actors as Seymour Hicks, Russell Thorndike (later to write all those fine novels about 'Dr. Syn') and Bransby Williams as Scrooge. Later sound films included Seymour Hicks (again!), Reginald Owen, Alastair Sim (superb), George C. Scott, and Albert Finney (in a marvellous large-scale musical version, composed by Leslie Bricusse, which was one of the best British films ever made). In 1988 there was *Scrooged*, in which the story was 'updated' and had the 'Scrooge-figure' the President of a New York TV company in modern times! There was *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, with Michael Caine as an unlikely Scrooge surrounded by all those 'muppet-puppets', *Mickey's Christmas Carol*, a half-hour Disney cartoon, with Mickey Mouse in the lead, and another cartoon version from UPI - *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*. Not forgetting Donald Duck's uncle as 'Scrooge McDuck' and - wait for this! - an all-black version with Gregory Hines as a tap-dancing Scrooge....

That's not to mention the countless stage, TV and radio productions. Plus the many 'pirated' versions of the book, which made Dickens very angry and led to litigation. The original book sold well: 6,000 copies at the then-high price of 5 shillings (complete with four coloured illustrations by John Leech), by Christmas Eve, 1843, with many more sold subsequently. As Dickens said: "A most prodigious success - the greatest, I think, I have ever achieved."

As Tiny Tim said: "God bless us, every one!"

And if you want a Christmas toast, how about this one from Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*: "Reflect upon your present blessings.... not your past misfortunes....fill your glass again, with a merry face and contented heart. Our life on it, but your Christmas shall be merry and your New Year a happy one!"



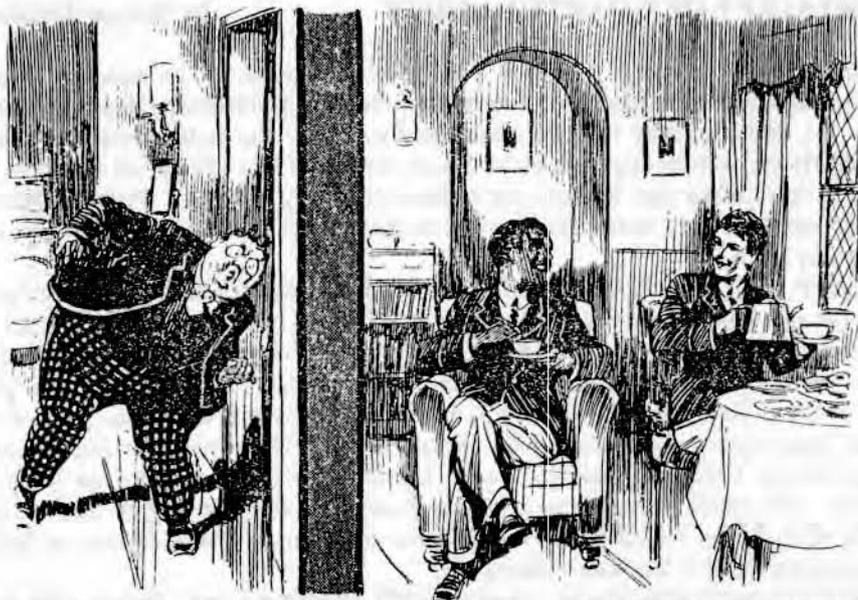
An engraving in the *Illustrated London News* showing Dickens giving a public reading in March 1870

Wharton lodge possessed a special atmosphere that could not be matched at any other home in the Hamiltonian saga. Tom Merry's home at Huckleberry Heath, presided over by the dithering Miss Fawcett, could hardly provide the right atmosphere, and Eastwood House, with its large number of guests, was more like a hotel, all the more so because both relatives and servants were themselves very sketchy. Perhaps Jimmy Silver's home, the Priory, came nearest to the comforts of Wharton Lodge, but it was not featured very often.

Wharton Lodge, on the other hand, was presided over by two well-identifiable people, Colonel Wharton and his sister Miss Amy Wharton. It had a memorable butler in Wells, and a page-boy Thomas. The Famous Five had separate bedrooms, and Wharton had his own den, which gave the impression of cosiness without excessive size. The Hall had its own vast fireplace and decorations, and all these details added up to provide an indelible impression on the reader's mind. It was the only home where members of staff were invited for Christmas, both Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch being there on separate occasions. Of course, Bunter was a regular guest, and who can forget that classic occasion when Bunter informed Wells that he was conferring a special favour on Wells by allowing the butler to lend him some money?

There is a special attractiveness about the 1933 Christmas series. Bunter Villa was closed, and the two boys went to Uncle George's house. Mr. George Bunter was repeatedly incensed by reports of items missing from the pantry. Bunter telephoned Wharton Lodge to say he could put up with the fatheaded old fossil, Colonel Wharton, only to discover he was speaking to Colonel Wharton himself. He turned round to tell





"I wonder if that fat idiot Bunter has got home?" said Harry Wharton. "I hate kicking out even that fat fozzler at this time of the year." "The misadventure will not be a terrific calamity," said Hurree Singh. On the other side of the bed-room door Billy Bunter heard every word.

Sammy he would have to put up with stingy old codger after all, only to see that the stingy old codger had overheard that remark, and Bunter was sent packing. This must be the only Christmas when Bunter had no roof over his head, and was pushed out into the cold, cold snow.

Bunter's only recourse was to camp out in the attic at Wharton Lodge, accessible by the outside staircase to Wharton's den. He appropriated some food, and took the blankets and hot-water bottle from Inky's den. Inky blamed Wharton, and later Thomas was suspected. Bunter, draped in a sheet, made nocturnal excursions to the pantry, and other things, apart from food, were missing. Wharton's books gradually disappeared, and the sale price enabled Bunter to expend the money on food, which disappeared as quickly as the books.

Part of the fun consisted in misunderstandings, people staying up to catch the ghost, and Bunter's luck in being so elusive. Undoubtedly the heavy snow made Wharton Lodge even more attractive, and of course there was an outside villain. The usual Christmas Dance took place in the Hall, and Hazeldene brought a number of Cliff House girls. Mauleverer also came as well as Fish, who calculated that he could eat more food than the cost of his railway ticket. Naturally, Christmas would not have been Christmas without Bunter, and unpleasant as he could be at times, we always expected to see him do full justice to the seasonable food, and we should never have wished it otherwise.





YULETIDE OVERTURES

by Reg Hardinge

When John Graves, Yvonne Cartier's uncle, invited Sexton Blake and Tinker to his place at Wingfield for Christmas it was the opening salvo in a most eventful festive season. Yvonne was having a house party, and Graves, wishing to invite a personage with whom Blake had crossed swords many times, suggested that a truce should be observed over the holiday period. Yvonne's consent to this was needed, of course, and Blake and Graves approached her at her flat in Queen Anne's Gate and her agreement obtained. Laughing softly her roguish eyes of violet hue studied Blake intently.

At Abbey Towers not far from Horsham in Sussex, lived Professor Andrew Butterfield, a scientist of high repute, who was none other than Huxton Rymer, and known as the "Doc" in certain sections of the underworld. Mary Trent, once a housemaid at Abbey Towers, was now his secretary and partner. A close bond existed between them. It was Rymer and his soulmate Mary that John Graves had in mind when his idea of a truce was broached, and Rymer had no hesitation in accepting the terms.

A couple of years earlier, Hermann (Klein) an associate of Rymer's had been arrested and jailed for attempting to poison a mare named Princess Molly, Graves's entry for the Winford Handicap. Now out of prison, Klein had approached Rymer for help in his rehabilitation and was asking for his support in his plan of revenge against Graves and Blake who had been responsible for getting him sentenced. But apart from giving him some money, Rymer refrained from joining him in his vengeance-seeking scheme. Subsequently however, Rymer had seen him in animated conversation with George Marsden Plummer, who had been presumed dead by everyone, killed by a death ray in his last encounter with Sexton Blake.

Yvonne's party of twenty guests started assembling at Wingfield on Christmas Eve. John Graves was out riding with some of them when a shot was fired at him as he entered a small plantation of pines. There was a hole in his cap, and a .45 calibre bullet was found embedded in a pine trunk.

Blake and Tinker were the last to arrive. On the drive up to the house, with Tinker at the wheel of the Grey Panther, a dog-faced ape dropped from some overhanging branches into the driving seat, and launched a vicious attack on Tinker, clawing and biting him on the forehead and body. Then the ape turned its attention to Blake, biting and lacerating his left hand. Grasping a spanner in his right hand, Blake rained several blows on the animal, smashing its skull. The Grey Panther went off the road and up a bank before halting, narrowly avoiding a tree that had been deliberately felled and was lying across the road.

£4,000 in ONE Prize. (See Inside)

THE UNION JACK 2ND

Special Xmas Number.



**SEXTON
BLAKE'S
XMAS
TRUCE**

HUXTON RYMER, Mlle. YVONNE & SEXTON BLAKE
in a Long COMPLETE Christmasy Detective Story.

No. 1,105.

EVERY THURSDAY

December 13th, 1924.

Yvonne made an elegant hostess presiding at the Christmas Eve Dinner, resplendent in a superb frock and adorned with a scintillating emerald pendant that Blake had given her sometime before. The merry dinner was followed by dancing, bridge and mah jong. Graves, Yvonne, Blake and Tinker withdrew from the proceedings to discuss the implications of the two attacks that had occurred. Blake suspected that Rymer had broken his promise and was responsible for the two incidents.

Then Plummer and Klein, with a score of gunmen backing them, launched their attack on Wingfield. Their object was to help themselves to the valuables of the guests as well as to kill Graves, Yvonne, Blake and Tinker. Stout resistance was provided by all the male guests, armed from the gun room, including Huxton Rymer and Yvonne's chauffeur. The arrival of the police put a stop to the battle. Klein was amongst the dead. Plummer had disappeared, but numerous arrests were made. A bullet had furrowed Tinker's head.

Blake was sorry that he had distrusted Huxton Rymer. There were handshakes all round. Rymer told Blake he was glad though, that Plummer had got away. Honour among thieves!

G.H. Teed, the author of 'Sexton Blake's Xmas Truce' (UJ no. 1108), who was born in Canada, was regarded by most as the very best teller of Sexton Blake tales. His prodigious output between 1912 and 1939 was published mainly in the 'Union Jack', 'Sexton Blake Library', 'Detective Weekly', and also in 'The Thriller'. He certainly excelled in his female characterisations pertaining to the Blake Saga. Apart from Yvonne and Mary Trent he created June Severance, Vali Mata-Vali, Nirvana, Marie Galante, and Roxane.

The CD does it again!

It was with vain hope that I advertised in the CD last month for a copy of *Flying Aces* - published on the other side of the Atlantic well over sixty years ago.

Within three days reader Geoff Kay kindly gave me a lead, and in less than a week I had two copies in my very grateful hands. How's that for pulling power?

ALEX CADOGAN

WANTED: Pre-War boys' comics/story papers, Xmas issues in particular. Can offer exchanges if preferred, e.g. Nelson Lee Lib. O/S, N/S, Champions, Penny Populars, S.B.L. 2nd, 3rd series, various other items. KEN TOWNSEND, 7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY DE65 6EA. PHONE 01283-703305





CHRISTMAS AT TRAVIS DENE

It is Christmas Eve. A huge party of revellers from St. Frank's and Moor View School arrive at Travis Dene, the Handforths' ancestral home ("The Ghost of Travis Dene", *Nelson Lee Library*, 1st New Series No. 188, 7-Dec-29).

'The coaches pulled up on the wide, snow smothered drive. The great main door of the mansion was standing wide open, and there was a vision of brilliant lights and colourful decorations. A huge log fire could be seen blazing and glowing in the vast fireplace of the great hall.'

This was Christmas as it should be!

A wonderful evening is had by all. Dinner is "The merriest meal imaginable."

'The great banqueting hall at Travis Dene was practically filled, and the air was soon ringing with laughter and talk. There were brilliant lights, gay decorations - and plenty to eat. And yet the decision to spend Christmas at Travis Dene had been a last-minute decision, the culmination of events which had commenced only two days earlier.'

The unusually fierce snowstorm which greets the Remove fellows as they come out of the Bannington Palladium takes them by surprise ("Handforth's Girl Chum", *Nelson Lee Library*, 1st New Series No. 187, 30-Nov-29). A variety of means of transport had been employed to get them there - bicycles, motor cycles and Handforth's Austin Seven. All struggled back through the gusting snow drifts. At the railway bridge Montie Tregellis-West and Watson are alarmed at the amount of snow on the railway tracks. Disaster is imminent as a train speeds towards them. Handforth tries to warn the driver by waving a bicycle lamp but the train speeds on into the snow. The locomotive is derailed by the snow and clatters along the sleepers, coming to a sudden stop. The luggage van is wrecked, but the passenger coaches are unharmed. The boys go to the rescue of the passengers and Nipper is surprised to discover that one of the travellers is Eileen Dare, an old friend of his and of Nelson Lee.

Back in the days before Nelson Lee moved to St Frank's he and Nipper had joined forces with Eileen to avenge the death of her father and to destroy a criminal organisation called the Combine. Eileen had proved herself to be a very brave and able detective and had from time to time acted as Nelson Lee's female assistant. Handforth did not immediately recognise her. "I knew I'd seen her somewhere, but she looks different. Fashions, I suppose." In fact Handforth had spent some time with Eileen aboard the steam yacht *Adventurer* during St. Frank's first adventure with Lord Dorriemore during

1918. We are now in 1929 and ladies' fashions have indeed changed dramatically although Handforth and the other fellows of St Frank's are, of course, frozen in time.

Eileen Dare is accompanied by a "child of perhaps twelve - a really sweet little girl with a pleasant face and curly hair" whom she introduces as her niece Molly Dare. Eileen and Molly scramble to safety and accompany the boys to St. Frank's. It is not made clear why, although apparently the Christmas holiday has commenced, everyone is still at school.



Thrills galore in this magnificent long complete special Christmas yarn of the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 183 OUT ON WEDNESDAY December 7th, 1929.

had by Willy & Co. and all goes well until Molly's solo sledding effort ends with her in a snowdrift. She is laughing and unhurt as she gets to her feet but when she sees a scar-faced man peering at her through the hedge she runs in a panic which takes her onto the frozen river. Willy bravely dives to her rescue and all is well. Willy remembers that one of the men who spoke to him has a scar on his face.

The further result of Teddy Long's indiscretion is that an attempt is made to kidnap Molly that night. Nelson Lee is on hand to prevent the kidnap. He covers the kidnapers with a revolver, but is taken by surprise when one of the men throws a phial of knock-out

Willy Handforth, informed of the arrival of Molly, pronounces his disdain of girls. As a result his chums engineer a meeting with Molly and contrary to his own intentions he is attracted to her. She forgets her bag and Willy volunteers to take it to her room, where he inadvertently overhears Molly explaining how frightened she is that "those horrid men will find me and try to..." The rest is lost but Willy realises that Molly is at St. Frank's to seek sanctuary. His suspicions are heightened when, next day, on his way to the village he is beckoned by two men in a large saloon car. They ask him the whereabouts of Eileen Dare and Molly. Willy is cagey and tell them nothing, but on returning to St. Frank's tells Nelson Lee. Lee refuses to tell Willy what is behind this and swears him to secrecy. What is unknown to either, however, is that Teddy Long has also met with the two men and told them everything they wanted to know.

Willy decides to set himself up as Molly's personal guard. He invites her tobogganing. A wonderful time is

gas at his face. While Lee lies unconscious Molly is taken. It is a good thing, therefore, that Willy Handforth has mounted his own lookout, for he witnesses the misfortunes of Nelson Lee from an upstairs window and set out in pursuit of the kidnappers. His rescue bid is successful when, having put the sedated Molly into the back of the saloon car, the men move to the front of the car. Willy sneaks into the back while they are occupied and takes the girls from the car. Lee, having come to his senses, find Willy carrying Molly to safety. Willy suggests that Molly should be removed to a secret place and suggests that Travis Dene, where the Handforths will be celebrating Christmas, would be the ideal place.

Sir Edward Handforth readily falls in with the plan and arrives that evening to discuss the arrangements. Sir Edward urges Edward Oswald and Willy to invite all the friends they want to a Christmas gathering at the Handforth ancestral home. Nelson Lee and Eileen Dare are included in the invitations, of course. What is not known is that one of Molly's enemies has stationed himself on the roof of the apartment where the plans are being discussed and has lowered down a microphone in the chimney by which he has overheard the whole thing. Despite all efforts, therefore, Molly's secret transfer to Travis Dene is no secret at all.

The problem for Edward Oswald is that he is unhappy at the thought of having all Willy's friends at Travis Dene. In order to deter as many third formers as he can, he warns them to beware of the ghost of Travis Dene - the ghost of a Roundhead, Handforth tells them, who had died a prisoner in the cellars. "A horrible figure, with ragged clothes, matted hair and long whiskers - going along with clanking chains."

To his disgust, Handforth's efforts fail to deter the third formers and so a great number of Removites, fourth formers and third formers arrive at Travis Dene, not to mention a party of Moor View girls.

The Christmas Eve party comes to an end, and it is time for bed. Handforth, Church and McClure are sharing a bedroom with Nipper, Watson and Tregellis-West. They hear a peculiar thudding noise. Eventually Handforth decides to investigate, believing he has heard someone prowling around the house. Opening the bedroom door he looks out into the corridor.

Handforth suddenly gave a start. He blinked. He felt his heart beating more rapidly. Something had just appeared in the patch of moonlight at the far end of the corridor - something silent and almost shapeless. And it seemed to Handforth's excited imagination that this thing had long matted hair and straggling whiskers. "Great Scott!" he breathed hoarsely.

Handforth's exclamation brings the others out into the corridor. For a brief second the figure is caught in the light from Travers' torch and revealed as "a drably-clothed old man, with rusted iron chains hanging from his wrist. His hair was matted, and his beard, in a similar condition, reached almost to his knees. The face itself was white - white with the pallor of death." Handforth's ghost, conjured up for the first time the day before, and entirely out of his imagination, has come to haunt them. Handforth scents trickery. He dashes after the ghost which disappears through a door at the far end of the corridor - into a room occupied by Ellen, one of the maidservants. They hear a scream from inside the room and, entering, find Ellen apparently in hysterics. She describes how the ghost has materialised through the door and then disappeared again. The Remove are puzzled, but

in spite of the evidence still don't believe there is such a thing as a ghost. They set up a vigil which eventually pays off when the ghost reappears, and turns out to be ... no, you guess that one or else read the story for yourself. Anyway, the whole thing is part of a plot to seize Molly and once again her enemies are foiled. Willy sets himself up once again as Molly's personal guard. He keeps watch outside her door, only to be found asleep next morning, overcome by the cold of the draughty corridor.

And so it is Christmas Day. The sun shines on a snow-covered landscape and the guests prepare for a day of winter sports. "This was Christmas after the old style - Christmas as it really ought to be." The sport takes the form of a snowball fight - girls versus boys. The day is followed by a lively Christmas party and eventually bed-time. After the previous night's experience Willy has to promise to go to bed. It is Jimmy Potts who, kept awake by an injury accidentally sustained during the snowball fight, sees a figure creeping downstairs carrying a heavy burden. Potts sets off in pursuit, raising the alarm and forcing the man to drop his burden and flee. The abandoned bundle is indeed Molly Dare.

Boxing Day evening is celebrated with a dance. ("The Peril of the Haunted Room", *Nelson Lee Library*, 1st New Series No. 189, 14-Dec-29). Edward Oswald has laid claim to all dances with Irene Manners as his natural right. Irene, Church and McClure have decided to teach him a lesson and Irene is dancing alternately with the two, cutting out Handforth. Handforth decides he has had enough and drags Church and McClure away to the library for a stern warning. The discussion is conducted with Handforth's fists and Church, staggering back from a blow, trips over the carpet and crashes into the wooden panelling. Somehow this triggers a hidden catch, and the panel slides back to reveal a hidden passage. The three decide to explore the passage, closing the panel behind them. They reach a room in which they discover a skeleton seated at a table, obviously hundreds of years old. The passage carries on beyond this room for some distance and, just as they believe they are about to reach the open, they are set upon by Molly Dare's enemies and imprisoned in a dungeon.

Irene notices their absence and asks Nipper to look for them. Despite the best efforts of Nelson Lee and the others Handforth & Co. cannot be found. The rucked library carpet suggest that something odd had taken place. Nipper and Travers spend the night in the library and, just before dawn, hear scratching sounds from the other side of the panel. Nipper goes into the corridor to investigate and when he returns to the library Travers has also disappeared - and Nipper himself is suddenly overcome, collapsing on the library floor where he is later discovered by Nelson Lee.

Travers has been captured and joins Handforth & Co. The next fellow to disappear is Willy Handforth, though this time it is of Willy's own volition. Exploring, he sees Molly's enemies enter the ruins of an old wing which had once been part of Travis Dene itself. Willy follows and discovers the whereabouts of Travis, Handforth & Co. He sets fire to some straw to trick the enemy into leaving the tunnel so that the fellows can be rescued. While Willy is successful in smoking out the men, the fire backtracks along the straw and threatens Handforth & Co. Willy bravely dashes through the fire to effect a rescue. The two men who are Molly's enemies escape via the secret panel in the library.

Their sudden appearance in the library takes Nelson Lee and Sir Edward by surprise and the men are able to make their escape, seizing Molly Dare on the way out. Their car is



in a back lane ready for a swift escape. In a move which several years later would be repeated by Rurik Voegler's men in their pursuit of Norman Conquest, Lee drives straight across the lawns of the mansion and through the hedges to cut off their escape.

Unlike Conquest's pursuers, Lee is successful and Molly's kidnappers are cut off by this manoeuvre. They are captured and Molly is safe at last. The truth is revealed. Molly is not Eileen's niece but is an orphan who is prey to confidence men who have seen a way to make money from her kidnap. The Christmas party can carry on in peace and a wonderful time is had by all.

So concludes another Nelson Lee Christmas series, with the usual ingredients mixed in a different way. It is not the greatest of his yuletide efforts but, nevertheless, as usual, the series provides entertaining and enjoyable reading in the inimitable Brooks style. We have Christmas at a country house, ghosts, secret passages and skeletons, and a tale told in a gripping style. Yet, in the end, the explanation of the mystery does not really account for the events that have taken place. This is unusual in an ESB story since however far-fetched the events he usually provides a fairly convincing explanation. There was also an odd editorial decision with the 1929 Christmas series in that the "Bumper Christmas Number" appeared on December 7th. Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that once again the *Nelson Lee* was in circulation difficulties and the editor was at that moment preparing to re-launch the paper into the Second New Series in mid January 1930.

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.



SAFE IN NUTWOOD?

by Laurence Price

When the pressures of late twentieth century living seem to be too much to bear, and especially when the latest acts of murder or violence are announced on the news, I quite often ask myself why real life can't be more like it is in Nutwood.

Yes, why can't life be like the one Rupert and his pals enjoy in the peaceful, timeless, Arcadian Nutwood? There has never been war, or mention of war. In the 1940s there were no call-up papers for Mr. Bear, not even a stint of duty in the Home Guard nor any unwelcome visits by parachute from scheming Nazi spies. Life continued safe and unchanged in dear old Nutwood.

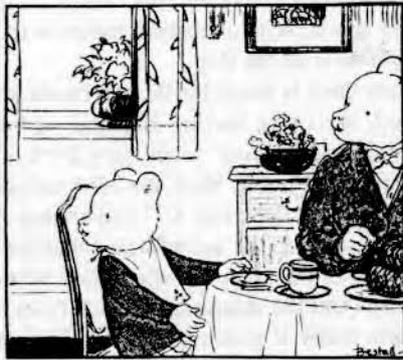
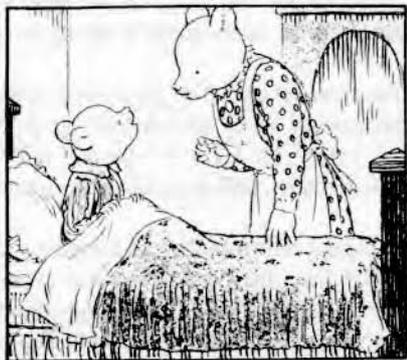
But then as I thought a little more I realised that this idyllic and romanticised idea about Nutwood and its environs denies the very essence of the character of Rupert Bear and his chums - they have adventures. They have excitement. They face very real dangers and trials together.

Certainly, safe middle class values are evident in the stories, which I am not seeking to deny or criticise. Politeness and good manners prevail. Nutwood homes are solid and comfortable and caring parents, relatives and friends live in them. And there is safety in the timeless setting, timeless in the sense it is forever rooted in a twenties and thirties England - note the style of dress, the motor cars, the aeroplanes and amazing autogyros and the wonderful inventions of the eccentric Professor, all the product ultimately of Mary Tourtel's and Alfred Bestall's fertile imagination.

But adventure with a capital 'A' is at the heart of Rupert. Nutwood is not, after all, quite the safe, even dull, place of popular memory, composed of long, lazy summer days or sharp, snowy winter nights where life carries on in a comfortable, regulated way.

I thought it was time to look again at one of my all-time favourite Rupert stories of my childhood, from the aptly titled *More Adventures of Rupert* of 1953. The adventure I have chosen is "Rupert, Algy and the Cannibals", which had first appeared in the *Daily Express* from 10th May 1936 until 11th July 1936 and then in the 1936 *The New Adventures of Rupert* annual. It is, however, in the full colour 1953 annual version that I know it best.

The day begins conventionally enough at breakfast time in Rupert's home in Nutwood. The breakfast things are laid out, the teapot is under the cosy, and Mr. and Mrs. Bear look on expectantly as Rupert enters the room, to find a parcel, wrapped in brown



paper and string, waiting for him. Tugging off the string and opening the box within, Rupert sees it is a topping present from Uncle Bruno - a cricket set, and cricket is his favourite game. That's it then, the stage is set for a traditional game of cricket in the English summer sun.

Algy Pug calls and off they go together for a game, and they are soon joined by Bill Badger, Edward Trunk, Podgy Pig and Rex Rabbit. They look around the surrounding farmland for a good, flat pitch. Finding a suitable one they play happily together for an hour. Then they hear an old countryman calling to them, who is holding a fine carthorse by the reins. They think he sounds angry and they hope they've not trespassed.

But no, the old man has come with a message from the boys of the next village, who would like to play a game of cricket with Rupert and his pals if they'll go there. Rupert runs and takes his new cricket gear home, then he and his five chums scramble onto the horse and are led over the common by the old man to the next village. They have left the safe environs of Nutwood.

The playing field is next to a factory. The two captains toss a coin and the village boys are soon batting, with Rupert and chums fielding and Podgy bowling. One of the village boys hits a ball so hard it whizzes past Rupert and Algy and goes straight through an open door marked 'No Admittance' and into the factory.

Rupert and Algy decide they must, nevertheless, retrieve it as they'll 'only be there a minute'. Fatal words indeed. The ball is quickly found by an open wooden crate, with some straw inside, marked X37. Rupert throws the ball back but Algy is curious and perches on the top of the crate, watching the machinery working. A man in overalls approaches and they must hide, Algy inside the crate, Rupert behind it. The man nails up the crate but Rupert, in hiding, doesn't realise that until too late, by which time Algy is securely packed and ready for unwilling shipment! Rupert runs to tell the man, but the man doesn't listen and angrily throws Rupert out for trespassing and locks the factory door.

Rupert tells the others what has happened, but despite some concerted banging on the door there is no response. They run to the main entrance, just in time to see a lorry leaving, with crate X37 at the rear. Rupert chases the rapidly speeding lorry and is lucky to catch a dangling rope and hold on, Indiana Jones style. He hangs on desperately until the lorry approaches the docks of an unnamed town, where he falls off. A friendly cat, however, guides him to the quay, where crate X37 is being loaded onto a big liner. He finds the ship's officers but, once more, is not believed. He sits alone on the quay as the sun goes down. With a crescent moon in the night sky, he later climbs a strong mooring rope until he is on the ship.

Then there is much hustle and bustle and the crew set sail. Not only has Rupert left Nutwood, he is now leaving England, and all because of a lost cricket ball. He finds an open hatch and, peering down, sees three officers below. He leans too far and falls onto the table in their midst. Well, the officers have to listen now, and soon he is being assisted by two sailors to find crate X37 and release Algy.

The re-united pair are informed that the ship cannot return to England and they are to set to work in the kitchens where they befriend Old Jake, the cook. Then one evening a storm rises and the chums are thrown from their bunks with a crash. Jake finds them and tells them water is pouring into the ship and that they must leave the wreck. But as he

says this a huge wave washes them all overboard. Rupert sees the ship sink as he and Algy hold on to a floating grating. There is no sign of Jake. They come to a rocky island but cannot find food. A bird tells them of a fruit tree but it only contains a prickly, pear-like fruit which is bitter to the taste. Algy ends up in horrid pain and it looks as if they may starve to death.

Then they see smoke. It is Jake - who has made a fire, found tinned food from another wreck and built a shelter. This is typical of that happy moment in many a classic adventure story when there is hope and temporary respite from hardship.

Rupert finds a telescope and they espy another island, with palm trees, which looks fertile. Together they build a raft and sail across, although they are menaced by great sharks on the way. They land and meet a friendly baby chimpanzee who climbs the trees and throws them down a shower of coconuts, bananas and other fruits. "My! This is my idea of an adventure!" cries Algy. Then a parrot informs them that there 'are other white men' on the island who have been bound and captured by cruel cannibal natives, and the parrot leads the way to them. Unknown to the little party a fierce looking native has heard them talking and watches their progress. They come to a clearing in the trees and there are the crew of the ship, securely tied up to posts, with their captors dancing around them, shouting and waving spears. The parrot wisely flies off at this point.

Suddenly, they are attacked themselves by the natives and old Jake and Algy are caught. Rupert runs off, tripping over a root and just missing a spear that is hurled at him: he makes good his escape.

What can Rupert do to save his friends? Fortunately, he meets up with the chimp and the parrot again. They hit on a wild plan to visit the King of the Snakes. He is truly enormous - like an Anaconda in size. The snakes are mortal enemies of the cannibals and it is decided that they will frighten them off but leave the white men alone. Rupert leads the charge and this is shown in one of Bestall's marvellous double panels, showing the natives in full flight, one shinning up a tree.

All is well; Algy, Jake and the others are soon released, and Rupert is fêted as the hero, although he modestly points out that it is the wise old parrot that should be thanked. The rest of the ship's crew have survived by launching a large boat to the island. After some searching Rupert & Co. find it again and they sail out to sea, hoping for rescue, but well provided with fruit for the voyage. The chimp and parrot decide to go with them. After two days a steamer comes into view and at last they sail for England, and for Nutwood.

How does the story end? Are there angry parents? Concerned villagers? Policemen and search parties? A waiting press and cameramen?

No. This is the ending!

On landing, Jake insists on seeing Rupert and Algy home, and Mrs. Bear arranges a great tea-party to celebrate their return. Jake and the chimp and the parrot all want to talk at once about the wonderful adventure. Rupert's Mother and Father are very proud when they hear how the little bear led the snakes to rescue their friends from cannibals. "And to think it all started with a cricket match!" laughs Algy.

To paraphrase Algy once more, "My! This is my idea of an adventure!"

(Pictures are Copyright Daily Express)

SAVED BY SANTA CLAUS

by Ray Hopkins

The Rio Kid, a late invention of Charles Hamilton, had an introductory successful run in the *Popular* from 1928 to 1930. The character's real name was never divulged by the author, which emphasised the mystery and aloneness of the boy outlaw in the wilds of Texas. Hamilton used for this Western series the new by-line of Ralph Redway. The following tale appeared in *Popular* 570, 28 Dec 1929, under the title of "The Rio Kid's Christmas Gift."



Young Tom Harrigan, driving his buckboard through the heavy snow in a frosty pinewood, pulled up sharply when a six-gun Colt was levelled at him by a horseman. The youthful face he recognised as the wanted boy outlaw, the Rio Kid. His surprise, knowing he had no large bankroll that would be worth stealing, was further increased by the Kid's demand that he loan him his Santa Claus outfit that he had rented from Kelly's store earlier that day. How could he have known about that?

Tom, while standing at the busy counter in Kelly's store at Sun Dance town, felt crowded and turned to find himself staring at the dark features and thick-moustached figure about his own height and build. It was a young Mexican who muttered "Scuse, Senor." The counter was packed with other locals picking up costumes for rental to wear at the fancy dress hop that was to be held that very evening at Lester Leigh's ranch in Sun Dance county, Texas. Harrigan had chosen to go as Santa Claus and he was lucky in that he was the only one who had elected to wear that costume as Kelly's store had only the one to rent. The Kid tells Tom he had been underneath the dark skin and thick moustache.

Tom, with his whip, makes an abortive attempt to remove the Kid's Colt. This only results in his losing consciousness from a blow by said six-gun and he awakens to find himself bound hand and foot. "When I'm through at the Sun Dance ranch you can have your outfit back again. I guess I'd hate to hurt a good little man like you." Tom finds himself in a small, snow-covered hut in the pinewood, a banked-up fire blazing away, wrapped in a thick bearskin rug, "his hands bound, a gag in his mouth, and his feet lashed to a peg in the ground, making escape impossible." The Kid tells him he'll be back that same night to release him after he's taken care of his business at the Sun Dance ranch.

Meanwhile, back at Lester Leigh's ranch, ranchers and their families from thirty miles around, were arriving in their "buggies, and rigs and even chuck wagons." Single horsemen rode in "thickly cloaked" against the biting wind and falling snow.

Jeff Heenan, Sheriff of Sun Dance, watched with Leigh through the large window that faced the open gates. His warning was that the Rio Kid had threatened to "come here at Christmas and shoot you up in your own ranch." The Rio Kid always keeps his word but, with six deputies as well as the sheriff, all with bulges under their coats, signifying that shootin' irons were at hand, the Kid would be hard put to do any shooting before he was shot himself. A fancy dress outfit theoretically should not be able to conceal the youthful features and trim build which were well known to Sheriff Heenan and his deputies. But they never thought of the screening facial hair and large circumference required of a Santa Claus impersonator.

The Rio Kid had not threatened the life of Lester Leigh for fun. Sheriff Heenan considered the wealthy rancher to be a double-crosser who deserved all he got, but he had to protect him nevertheless. Besides, he didn't want to be the cause of the Rio Kid's death if he could help it. Lester Leigh had brought the ranch from Stenson, an old pardner of the Kid's. The Kid had been surprised to find Leigh in residence and completely taken in by the wealthy rancher's friendly overtures in inviting him to stay over Christmas, not knowing that, soon after, one of Leigh's men was high tailing it to Sun Dance town to alert Sheriff Heenan that the boy outlaw was at the ranch and could be captured. The sheriff despised the rancher for "his treachery in assuming a face of friendship and hospitality while he was planning the boy outlaw's capture or death," and he guessed that "the Kid is worth a whole team of ornery, double-crossing guys like Lester Leigh." But he had to be on hand to prevent the inevitable tragedy if the two should come to grips that yuletide evening.

Sheriff Heenan, waiting at the gate for the last of the arrivals, recognises the buckboard and chestnut horse as Young Tom Harrigan's, and the driver, dressed in his hat and sheepskin coat, its thick collar pulled close around the driver's face to protect him from the wind and snow, waved at the Sheriff as he went to close the gate behind the buckboard. Heenan told his deputies to still keep a sharp lookout for the Rio Kid. The boy outlaw would be bound to try to enter the ranch.

The dance was being held in the great barn reached from the ranch house by a short walkway. The ranchers, their wives and daughters had changed into their costumes in the ranch house and then made their way quickly along the covered walkway. The fiddlers in the band were already sending their jolly strains to further hasten the steps of the guests. "The great space for dancing was crowded with figures in strange costumes - Indian chiefs, Mexican vaqueros, Spanish cavaliers, pirates and brigands." Among them Lester Leigh observed the figure clad as Santa Claus. Sheriff Heenan tells him that it is Young Tom Harrigan. He had seen him in Kelly's store that day renting the Santa Claus costume. He turns down Leigh's offer of a drink in the ranch house saying he must keep an eye out for the Kid. The rancher returns to the ranch house to say good-night to his small daughter, Pet. Half-past eight is that little critter's bedtime. The figure in the scarlet hood and cloak of Santa Claus follows him along the covered walkway. They go into the living room and Leigh prepares to give his guest a drink but Santa Claus shakes his head and asks him if he thinks the Rio Kid isn't going to turn up after all. Leigh waves a deprecating airy hand with a smile. But the smile is quickly replaced by a terrified expression as Santa Claus pulls a six-gun from his cloak and Leigh realises that he is facing not Young Tom Harrigan but the boy outlaw himself. "You double-crossed me, you pizen skunk - you ain't fit to live!" "The eyes that look over the levelled barrel glinted mercilessly."

There is a sound at the door and through it comes the voice of Leigh's little girl, Pet. Leigh begs the gunman to wait until she has gone away so she won't hear the gunshot. The child's footsteps are heard retreating along the passage. The Kid replaces the Colt beneath his cloak and, warning Leigh not to move an inch, leaves the room. As he overtakes Pet he tells her to go back to the living room and there she will find a gift he has left her. The little girl gasps with astonishment. "But you're not really Santa Claus?" The figure dressed in crimson assures her that he is.

Young Tom Harrigan, his costume, buckboard and horse restored to him, drives back to his ranch. Despite his alertness, Sheriff Heenan had missed the arrival and departure of the boy outlaw. The Rio Kid himself, "glad from the bottom of his wild heart, that a child's voice has stayed the hand of vengeance, and that he had left his enemy his life," rode the snow trails on his grey mustang Side-Kicker, away from Sun Dance.



The Rio Kid swung round at the sound of a timid tap on the door and the voice of a little girl saying: "Are you in there, daddy?"

FELLOW COLLECTORS

I am still trying to hunt down the following original Magnets in good and complete condition. Can anyone help? Bound volumes containing any of these would be considered.

13 15 19 20 40 75 79 80 82 87 90 97 101

104 109 113 114 116 120 124 126 134 135

136 140 141 142 143 144 169 180 207 215

217 224 226 293 415 419 424 449 652 776

Your reasonable prices paid or I have many original spare Magnets and Holiday Annuals (of all years) in good condition and would offer generous exchange terms if preferred - I am deferring sales until later.

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BOOKS



REVIEWED by MARY CADOGAN

With Christmas in mind my choice this month is expectedly nostalgic. I've been enjoying *Nightmare for Dr. Morelle* by Ernest Dudley, which in fact is a 'talking book' - a four-cassette recording of the unabridged original text of the 1960 book. I love being read to, and Garard Green does the job well. The playing time is approximately 5½ hours and plenty of sleuthing thrills are provided.

Gerard Green carries us along with the astute, acerbic Dr. Morelle (and his generally patient and unruffleable secretary, Miss Frayle) as they help Interpol to unravel and destroy an international drugs racket. I don't want to reveal the many twists and turns of the plot: suffice it to say that anyone who enjoyed the adventures of Dr. Morelle and Miss Frayle on their long-ago BBC radio broadcast programmes will be glad to renew their acquaintance in *Nightmare for Dr. Morelle*. (For details of purchase price and library availability please contact the publishers, Chivers Audio Books, Windsor Bridge Road, Bath BA2 3AX. Telephone: 01225 335336)

I've also been reading *Walt Disney and Europe* by Robin Allen (published by John Libbey & Co. Ltd.) This is a big and beautifully illustrated account of the role played by European stories and mythology in the Disney industry. Also, of course, in full-length animated features such as *Snow White*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Pinocchio*, *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The Jungle Book* the work of European artists has been seminal. This book is full of fascinating insights and its narrative (an extension of a Doctoral Thesis), though packed with facts and detail, is extremely readable. It would, however, be worth buying for the pictures alone! There are 48 quarto sized pages in full colour and its 300 or so text pages are lavishly illustrated in black-and-white line and half-tone.

Amongst the influences described and pictured are those of Ernest Grisct, Arthur Rackham, Richard Doyle, Gustaf Tenggren, John Waterhouse, Kay Nielson, Caspar David Friedrich and Charles Folkard - and this names only some of the artists who are represented. As well as pictures by them there are many fine examples of drawings and settings by the Disney artists. The influence of European architecture (from Chatsworth House to Segovia Castle and various cathedrals) is also adeptly covered.

Robin Allan has wisely concentrated his studies mainly on the classic animated films which were produced under Walt Disney's personal supervision. As Brian Sibley in his Introduction to the book says: 'The insights to be found in these pages offer a new and vital perspective to an understanding and appreciation of that American - and, it can now be said, *European* institution known as Walt Disney'.

This book will appeal to anyone interested in fairy-tale, folklore, film animation and the visual arts. It is issued in both a hardback and a paperback (card-covered) version, priced respectively at £40.00 and £22.50. The paperback is sturdy and finely enough produced to satisfy connoisseurs.

BRITISH DANCE BANDS Published by "THIS ENGLAND" at £14.95 Reviewed by Ernest Holman.

I suppose those days now known as the Dance Band Days lasted for about thirty years - from the early Twenties until the early fifties. Those were the times when so many such bands could be heard on the wireless and on wax 78s - and could also be seen in music halls and on cinema stages.

For some years now, *This England* quarterly magazine has been issuing cassette albums of these bands and now, as a grand wind-up to the series, have produced this most excellent book. The front and back covers are resplendent with very good sketches of the various band leaders (taken, if memory serves me right, from a pre-war collection of cigarette cards). Straight away, at the beginning of the book, one finds the entire list of bands, together with their signature tunes. (One or two leaders had signature tunes that they never appear to have recorded.) In all, there are detailed descriptions of 36 bands. There is also room for briefer details about many 'secondary' bands, and this information I found very full. Many bands that I had perhaps seen but once or twice - often at seaside bandstands - all come into these pages. No one is left out, as far as my memory goes back, even if some band leaders only warrant a brief mention.

I would not attempt to criticise such a brilliant book, but would add one or two regrets on bands that did not rate as much as one cassette - i.e. Mrs. Jack Hylton (mostly on records sold at sixpence by Woolworths) also Ivy Benson's Ladies Band might have appeared in an album. In particular, the one band that I felt *did* deserve a double album was the Jay Wilbur outfit. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the beauties of this publication.

Photographs there are in abundance - one in particular became a most interesting one. There is a photograph taken on Henry Hall's seventieth birthday, with him seated at the piano. Ranged all round him are many band leaders (all somewhat older themselves now) raising a toast to Henry. Of them all, only one of those leaders still survives. Edmundo Ros is close to his nineties now and lives serenely on foreign shores - possibly fortified by all that partaking of 'an awful lot of coffee in Brazil'.

Many of the bands' noted vocalists come in for special mention, as well as appearing in many photographs and, above all, there is an excellent line drawing by Sheriffs, for many years the artist who drew so frequently in the Radio Times of those days. This sketch includes very good caricature likenesses to more than a dozen famous singers.

British Dance Bands is a book that belongs to a favoured spot in the bookcases and shelves - I find I am constantly referring to it. It was Eric Fayne who said, of Frank

Richards, that we shall never see his like again. So, too, here - we shall never see the likes of those Dance Band days again. Fortunately, their recordings live on, and now they are all helped in Memory Lane by this publication.



NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS



NORTHERN O.B.B.C. SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Darrell Swift paid a second visit to Christchurch, New Zealand, during September.

Eleven local old boys' papers enthusiasts enjoyed the hospitality of Don and Hazel Reed at their home to meet Darrell and discuss many aspects of the hobby on which we, in the far distant antipodes, lack information. Biggles, Jennings, the *Champion*, the Amalgamated Press, and Thomsons were just a few of the many subjects on which we had questions. Darrell was a delightful mine of information.

We suggested that the meeting should be regarded as a meeting of the Northern O.B.B.C., thereby becoming the most southerly meeting of that Club - indeed, probably the most southerly meeting of so many enthusiasts in the world. An historical occasion! We thank the Northern O.B.B.C. for the all too brief loan of Darrell.

By way of introduction may we give a very brief background to Christchurch, New Zealand. Christchurch is the second largest city in New Zealand - about 300,000 population. It was founded by English immigrants in 1850. Its main streets denote the devotion the city has to its English founders [Hereford, Gloucester, Lichfield and Worcester Streets, Oxford and Cambridge Terraces and, yes, we do have a Leeds Street,



in honour of Darrell!! - and a suburb of Beckenham, in honour of our Editor!!]. The city is well known for its gardens, electronics industry, and Canterbury lamb which originated in the agricultural area surrounding Christchurch. Canterbury province is also the home of New Zealand's Prime Minister, Mrs. Jenny Shipley.

Of course, when we see the sun, which we do frequently under the clear blue skies of Christchurch, we know that is North whereas all you other O.B.B.C. members look to the South for the sun.

Christchurch has a sister city relationship with Christchurch, England, and we see evidence of that relationship in gifts that the English city has given to our city over the years.

We hope that Darrell will return for further visits as we always enjoy receiving additional background information about the hobby, which he is well qualified to bring to us. We would love to meet any other hobbyists who may visit "down under".

Meantime, many thanks to Don and Hazel Reed for their hospitality and particularly a marvellous "dormitory" supper.

Darrell suggested that as a New Zealander, I should adopt a nom-de-plume of Tom Brown but perhaps on this occasion your scribe will sign off as Ron Gillatt, Honorary Secretary of the Northern O.B.B.C., Southern Hemisphere Division.

SOUTH WESTERN O.B.B.C.

A small but enthusiastic group met together at the Uphill home of Tim Salisbury for the Autumn meeting on Sunday, 10 October 1999. Una Hamilton-Wright presented "No Laughing Matter" which was centred around Frank Richards's autobiography in which "a cheerful tone" used by the author ensured that "everything was seen through rose-tinted spectacles" and skirted over any details of a difficult childhood. But then this was the biography of Frank Richards and *not* of his creator, Charles Hamilton!

Laurence Price then followed this most interesting talk with a reading from the *Magnet* of 15 February 1908 in which Bunter made his first appearance.

After the usual excellent tea provided by Mrs. Salisbury a discussion followed on Mary Tourtel, the creator of Rupert Bear, together with some recent photographs of her birthplace and final resting place in Canterbury. A reading from *The Time Machine* and its weighty considerations of the possibility of time travel and a Fourth Dimension completed the afternoon.

Laurence Price

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Most of this month's meeting was taken over by the A.G.M. All the Club's official posts were filled without too much argument. The major item for discussion was next year's celebrations, not for the Millennium, but for the 50th Anniversary of the Northern Old Boys' Book Club. There were many interesting suggestions which will be followed up in the next few months. Watch this space for further updates. Harry Blowers, one of our longest serving members, recollected our past 20th, 25th and 40th Anniversary functions.

After the serious business was over, Geoffrey Good entertained us all with one of his Greyfriars readings, this time from *Magnet 1651* 'Every Bullet has its Billet'. We all went home with smiles on our faces.

Paul Galvin

LONDON O.B.B.C.

The Chingford Horticultural Society Hall was packed for the November meeting of the London O.B.B.C.

Special guest speaker Jenny Hammerton of British Pathé brought along an entertaining assortment of choice clips from the archives, providing some rare glimpses of the silver screen stars of yesteryear. Hitchcock, Bergman, Pickford, Fairbanks, Dors . . . they were all there! (And the wonderful Al Bowly . . . Ed.)

The cinematic theme continued with a film quiz presented by Roy Parsons. Roger Jenkins then returned to more traditional territory with an entertaining reading from *The Magnet*.

Vic Pratt



December Into The Millennium

by The Chums - and Margery Woods

"Bessie! Leave those mince pies in peace and tell us about your most memorable Christmas."

The chums were gathered round a deliciously seasonable log fire at Holly Hall, the home of Barbara Redfern and scene of several jolly holiday visits by the Cliff House fourth formers. As ever, it had been a wondrous Christmas of festive fun, games, and glorious food; best of all, sharing and giving. Now they were in an unusually introspective mood, waiting to welcome the most exciting New Year of their lives.

Candlelight cast a soft glow on the beautifully decorated old hall and the flushed faces of the seven girls in their attractive party frocks. Babs herself and her study mates, Mabel Lynn and plump Bessie Bunter, and those close chums from No. 7, boisterous Clara Trevlyn, Marjorie Hazeldene, and the elegant Jemima Carstairs. The seventh girl was their chum from the circus, Janet Jordan, and from a distance came the sound of noisy revelry from Babs' young sister Doris and her friends who were being allowed to stay up late for this very special occasion. But the older girls were more relaxed in mood and it was Marjorie Hazeldene who had suddenly embarked on a reminiscent survey of past Christmasses.

"Come on, Fatima." Clara dug ungentle fingers into Bessie's plump ribs. "Tell us about your favourite ghost!"

"Ha ha ha!" Bessie's encounters with spectral inhabitants were legion.

Bessie frowned, but was secretly quite pleased to find herself the centre of attention and her words awaited. "Well," she said, rather self-consciously, "I don't want to boast, you know, but naturally my most memorable Christmasses have been at Bunter Court. It is so - so -"

"Highly imaginary?" suggested Clara.

Bessie's snub little nose rose in disdain. "Of course you girls couldn't possibly imagine it. So magnificent I kik - can't describe it. All the feasting . . ."

"Not fasting?" broke in the irrepressible Clara.

". . . the flunkeys bringing in great platters of fabulous food," Bessie said firmly. "Vast turkeys, hams, stuffing and . . ."

"Stuffing being your operative word?"

"And the giant Christmas tree loaded with precious gifts?"

"Poking through the roof of Bunter Villa?" grinned Clara.

"It must have been draughty for the fairy on the top!"

Again Bessie elevated a haughty nose. "All our titled relations brought sumptuous presents. I got a platinum gold watch studded with diamonds and rubies and . . ."

"And then you woke up!"

Bessie glowered. "I'm not going to tell you any more. You're only jealous, Clara Trevlyn."

Babs, ever the peacemaker and tactful hostess, calmed her own face with some difficulty, frowned at Clara, and offered a large box of luxury chocolates to soothe the fat one's hurt feelings. "What about you, Janet?" she asked.

Their circus chum smiled. "I can't be impartial, I'm afraid. I have to vote for Robin's Roost with Aunt Anice."

"Oh, yes!" they chorused as excited memories came flooding back. "That was a wonderful Christmas. The grotto, and Gunda Lal, and poor little Audrey imprisoned in that dungeon, even though we did get lost in London and met enough spooks to please even Bessie."

"And when Clara bashed her oar right through the White Monk." Marjorie shuddered visibly.

"Yes, we're unanimous," cried Janet. "Ten stars for Robin's Roost!"

"But what about our Christmas with Leila's film folks," said Mabs. "Wonder how she's enjoying Christmas in the good old USA."

"That was super too. All those fantastic set pieces. It was like being in a film . . . the house of a hundred surprises."

"And we were able to help Hope, the dancer," said Marjorie. "Ten stars for that one, too."

Then Mabs sat up excitedly. "But remember the funny ones. When we first went to Delma Castle and we were dressing up, and Bessie disguised herself as Felix the Cat, and blacked her face, and she tripped up and landed in an armchair! But it was already occupied!"

"Yes," Jemima sighed, "by our most difficult guest, who strongly disapproved of young hoydens and put a damper on all our celebrations."

"But he forgave us when he fell through the ice and we saved him from a watery grave," Clara reminded her.

"That was the Christmas we saw the ghost of Delma Castle and Clara found that old book about the ghostly monk. It referred to him as an ascetic and Bessie here thought that an ascetic was what the dentist gives you before he pulls your tooth out."

Chuckles all round - except from Bessie.

"But who has forgotten what was nearly our worst Christmas of all," said Mabs in sepulchral tones.

"You mean the time when Bessie was dishing out invites galore to stay at her uncle's . . ."

". . . and we got to the wrong house!"

"Gelden park!" Babs closed her eyes in pretend horror. "It was like a reformatory. The Holiday Home for Schoolgirls. Miss Turner ran it like a reformatory, except that you had to pay."

"And the rations!" Mabs giggled. "Bessie didn't know what had hit her. And the old besom thought we were runaways and locked us in. It just shows that we should never believe Bessie's tales of the fabulous Bunter wealth."

"That's not f-fair," protested the fat one. "We fuf-found the missing will for Alice and her mum and made them rich, and my uncle had bought Gelden Park only we got to the wrong part."

"Not 'alf," muttered Clara.

"Do you remember our first Christmas here?" asked Babs wistfully. "When Bessie gatecrashed, complete with parrot."

"Gatecrashed?" Jemima's eyebrows went up quizzically.

"It was before you came to Cliff House, Jimmy. You started at Morcove. Remember?"

Jemima gave a languid sigh. "The old brainbox is getting so frightfully vague these days, y'know. Is this true, Fatima?"

"We hadn't got to know her terribly well," Babs broke in hurriedly, stemming Bessie's indignant protest. "It was quite an eventful Christmas, that one. Doris adopted a stray dog, and Bessie went in search of her usual midnight snack and bumped into a suit of armour . . . literally."

"And then she started seeing ghosts," Clara jeered. "I don't know how she finds them all. She must have a personal line to the supernatural. Trouble is, I'm not sure who is the most scared when they meet; Bessie or the ghost!"

"But it was a very special Christmas for me because Uncle Rupert came home and his long past quarrel with Daddy was ended. And he saved Doris's life when she was being very naughty," Babs sighed. "Yes, that was a very special time for all the family."

"So was that Christmas with you, Mabs, but in a different way," said Marjorie. Then she turned in surprise as Clara began to chortle. "What's so funny about our Christmas at Lynn's Folly?"

"Oh, not Lynn's Folly," Clara said hastily. "It was when we first arrived and - and - " Clara's words were punctuated with laughter - "Bess here mistook Mabs's father for the butler."

Mabs chuckled. "I thought Dad took it very well, but that was nothing to the shock he had when he found Bessie's missing locket in his Christmas pudding. And all she was worried about was in case he had bitten all the diamonds and rubies and pearls it was studded with."

"What are you all smirking at?" Bessie returned to her chair with a suitably topped up plate of assorted sustenance.

Clara groaned. "She's feeding her face again! I don't know where she puts it."

Bessie sniffed. "I've got to keep my strength up for this millennium lark, you know."

"Oh yes, Fatima. You'll be meeting the ghost of Old Father Time any minute now!" said Mabs dramatically. "He'll materialise through that panelling with his scythe and all the ghosts of centuries past will parade after him!"

Bessie's hand froze on her slice of Christmas cake. "What gig-gig-ghosts? You never tut-told me Holly Hall is haunted by a pip-parade of ghosts! You ..."

"Mabs is just teasing you," Babs reassured the fat duffer.

"All the same," Babs' eyes were thoughtful as she gazed into the glowing embers of the fire, "this is the greatest time of all for the ghosts of the past. Not just our Christmasses but of two thousand Christmasses. All the hopes and prayers, and the joys and sorrows of all those people down the centuries who have shared their memories and dreams by a fireside, just as we are now, and trying to imagine the scene at the close of the next millennium."

"No, we can't encompass that future, or even imagine what the world will be like in a thousand years' time," Jemima said with unusual seriousness. "Although one thing is predictable."

They stared at Jemima's wise-owl expression. "What?"

"Bessie's postal order still won't have arrived!"

Bessie, whose chomping had silenced while her fat brain tried to cotton on to what Babs had been saying, cottoned on to this and glared. Then a soft voice broke in on their musings.

Mrs Redfern looked down on the young philosophers. "We are in a serious mood, aren't we? It's almost time. Daddy's just switched on the radio for Big Ben."

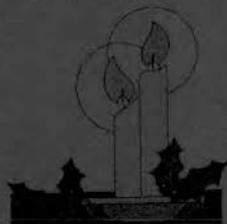
They trooped after Mrs Redfern into the big sitting room, filled now with the excited chatter of Doris and her friends against the background radio sound of the revellers in London. Suddenly Babs stretched out her hands.

"Let's join hands in a long line and take one step forward just as the first stroke is going to chime. Then for a split second we'll have one foot still behind in the 20th century and one forward in the 21st!"

There was much laughter as the entire party entered wholeheartedly into Babs' little fantasy and the sonorous strokes of the nation's wonderful old clock boomed its historic message. There were one or two tears mingling with the cries of "Happy New Year!" while everyone tried to kiss everyone else at the same time. A dramatic knocking at the front door heralded the arrival of Uncle Rupert, official First Foot, and the toasts began. Then the telephone rang its summons - all the way from New York with Leila Carroll's excited greeting, almost as though she were just in the next room. "We've got five hours to wait - you hundred-year-old ancients!" she laughed and everyone tried to call their greetings over Babs' shoulder as she held the receiver.

Babs felt a lump come into her throat. Suddenly the light over the big Crib seemed to grow brighter, and atop the Christmas tree the dainty fairy stretched out her wand and a shower of magic fell upon the happy scene.

At least Babs was positive it did. Millennium 2000 had arrived for Cliff House. What might it hold for them all?



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