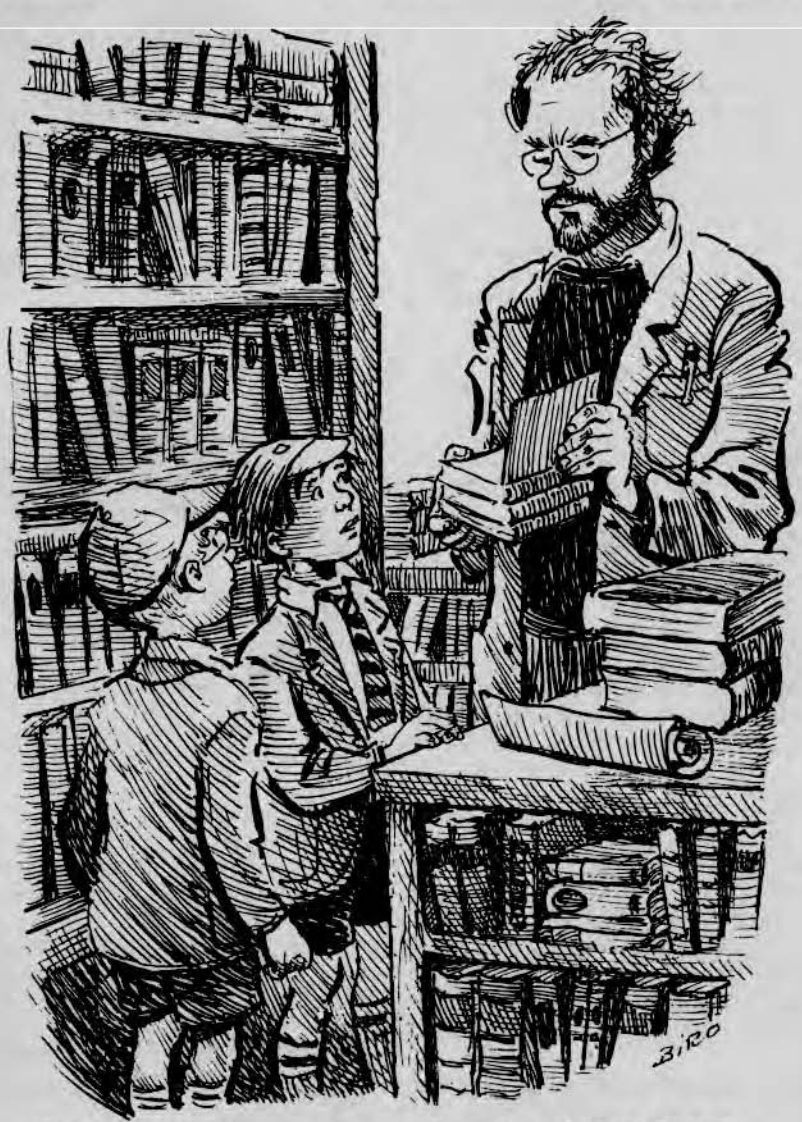
STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 54 **No. 644** **AUGUST 2000**



JENNINGS: We'll be quite pleased to take fifteen shillings for them. That's what you said they were worth.

MR. BARLOW: Ah, if you'd wanted to buy 'em they would be, but if you want to sell 'em – well, that's different, isn't it?

Our Incurable Interviewer Calls On

LORD MAULEVERER

(The slacker of the Greyfriars Remove.)

"THIS afternoon," said the Editor of the HOLIDAY ANNUAL, "you will oblige me by interviewing Lord Mauleverer, of the Greyfriars Remove."

I saluted smartly, rushed out into the street, got into the Ford-Rolls, hurtled madly through town and country to Greyfriars, tore up the School House stairs, and shot into Study No. 12, in the Remove passage.

"Lord Mauleverer in?" I inquired. "Ah! So you are taking your ease on the sofa, your lordship?"

Snore!

"I have come to interview you for the benefit of the readers of the HOLIDAY ANNUAL ——"

Snore!

"I know your time is valuable, and that you are an awfully busy sort of fellow——"

Snore!

"Possibly you would like to answer one or two questions, your lordship. Just so that I can be sure that you are fully awake, do you mind if I tweak your nose—like this?"

"Yoooooop! Ow! Oh, gad!"

"Awfully sorry, your lordship! Did I hurt you?"

"Yaas!"

"Careless of me! Now for the questions! First, would you care to tell the readers of the HOLIDAY ANNUAL your greatest ambition?"

"Yaas. To find a study where silly asses don't butt in on a man's forty winks!"

"'Hem! Second question: what sort of recreation does your lordship indulge in?"

"Sleep!"

"Your favourite place?"

"Ya-a-aw! Bed!"

"Your favourite author?"

Snore!

"No good! Nothing will wake up Mauly for more than two minutes at a time!" came a laughing voice from the doorway.

I turned round and recognised Sir Jimmy Vivian, the languid aristocrat's study-mate. Sir Jimmy shook his head when I explained my mission.

"That's all you'll get out of Mauly today, take it from me!" he said. "Why not give it up, and come with me for a snack in the tuck-shop and a trot round the School?"

It was an excellent suggestion, and under Sir Jimmy's wing I spent several very enjoyable hours "doing" Greyfriars.

It was quite late when I left the old School. On my way out, to my utter amazement, I saw Lord Mauleverer racing up the stairs as though he had suddenly received a powerful charge of electricity.

"Your lordship——" I cried.

But Mauly had already passed me like a flash.

"Can't stop, old bean!" he gasped. "It's bed-time!"

THE END

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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JENNINGS' HALF CENTURY

To mark the fact that the first Jennings book was published 50 years ago, this issue of the C.D. includes several features on the work of his distinguished creator, Anthony Buckeridge.

First of all, our cover picture is taken from one of Val Biro's engaging illustrations to the recently published second collection of Jennings radio plays (*Jennings Breaks the Record*) which we are reviewing this month. As well as conveying the lively and perceptive mood of the Jennings saga, this picture links neatly with our world of book-collecting, particularly as the book-seller who is portrayed strongly resembles one who is well-known to many of us! (I refer, of course, to David Schutte who, as well as searching for our elusive 'wants', is the author of the 'Naitabal' series of children's books and the publisher of the Jenning's radio plays.)

The first Jennings book appeared in 1950 but it was, in fact, 'on the wireless' in BBC *Children's Hour* that the Jennings adventures were actually launched as long ago as 1948. Since then, with his boarding-school stories of Jennings and day-school tales of Rex Milligan, Anthony Buckeridge has triumphantly carried the boys' school-story through the 20th and into the 21st century. It is excellent news (see Derek Ford's letter in our FORUM section) that all 24 of the Jennings books are to be republished.

Since 1997 an annual Jenning's Day has been organized by Darrell Swift of the Northern O.B.B.C. and a report by Andrew Pitt of this year's gathering is included in this issue of the C.D. Also we are happy to publish another article by that Jennings connoisseur, Jonathan Cooper, dealing this time with the importance of food in the books.

We are delighted that, at the London O.B.B.C.'s Annual Lunch next month, Anthony and his wife Eileen will be our special guests.

Several readers have written about Honours and Awards given (or, rather, *not* given) to children's authors (again, see our FORUM pages). As Des O'Leary stresses, even without formal honours, the work of popular writers such as Frank Richards, Enid Blyton, Anthony Buckeridge, Richmal Crompton and W.E. Johns will continue to live through their own merits, and the loyalty of readers. Bob Whiter's birthday tribute to Frank Richards in this issue certainly underlines this point which, I feel sure, is very much appreciated.

Our post-bag has recently included several tributes from readers to Denis Gifford and we hope to publish some of these next month.

Happy reading,

MARY CADOGAN

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MORE PRUNES? FOOD IN THE JENNINGS BOOKS

by Jonathan Cooper

Imagine the scene. A school dining room at lunchtime, boys in long lines at tables. Silence. A high pitched voice intones "Benedic, domine, nobis", and the meal begins. Masters stand behind bowls, poised to serve their contents. Then something unusual happened. The first boy on the furthermost table asks, politely but firmly, for a "clean plate". This means that he is refusing meat, and will serve himself vegetables alone. Then, much to the master's surprise, the exact same thing occurs when he offers lunch to the next boy in line, and the next, and the next. Indeed the scene is repeated on every other table in the room, and within minutes the hundred or so boys in the dining hall are tucking into a mid-day meal of boiled vegetables, leaving their bemused beaks staring at full bowls of rapidly congealing meat.

A scene from a Jennings book? No. Although he and his friends have strong views about "ghastly old boiled beef – we call it pink hippo", the episode I have just related occurred in the history of the school I now teach at, Summer Fields, as the Cat's Meat Rebellion, so called after the supposed constituency of the lukewarm, grey meat served every Monday in the inter-War years. Such open revolt is unusual, but negative and often seditious comments are passed daily about food in schools of every kind. However, in boarding schools, food is an essential part of the set up. Without it, the pupils would, quite simply, wither away. As we have seen, school food is often predictable, almost to the extent of being able to set one's calendar by it, whether it be cat's meat on Monday, pink hippo on Wednesday or even simply fish on Friday. There is a certain comfort in all this, but there can be traps. For instance, when the appropriately named Mrs. Cherry quits her job as Linbury Court's school cook, one would have been forgiven in thinking it was Friday *every* day; for her replacement, Mrs. Hackett, appears to specialist in fish fingers, *cold* fish fingers. Interestingly, the ensuing backlash is encouraged by a master, Mr. Hind.

Jennings and Darbishire take their time to rebel against school food. Towards the end of their first term, it is true, Darbishire composes the following masterful piece of verse, bidding a not particularly fond adieu to,

> Bullet-proof potatoes and bomb-proof hard-boiled eggs.
> And goodbye to cocoa made from Diesel dregs.

It is said that trouble often comes in small packages, and as far as Jennings is concerned, the foodstuff that provokes his ire and gets him into trouble could not be more diminutive. A prune is a plum preserved by drying, and having a black, wrinkled appearance. Prunes are not generally considered to be attractive to look at, but at Jennings' moment of crisis, they are the most desired things in the world.

One lunchtime, second portions of dessert are on offer, and Jennings is, inevitably, the last to be served. He has watched the masters accept large amounts of seconds, with Mr. Wilkins taking a particularly wolfish delight in gobbling down the crinkled offerings. By the time Matron comes to him, there are only two left, and these are, by any standards, miserable specimens. Jennings assumes the role of a Big Prune Hunter searching the African jungle for a rare genus known as the lesser-shrivelled prune. He proceeds to stalk the prune in its natural habitat, the shallows of a custard swamp, aided by Venables' pocket telescope. In an instant, the hunter becomes the hunted; Colonel Blashford-Snell becomes Oliver Twist. Like Oliver, Jennings wanted more, while the adults guzzled and gorged themselves. Like Oliver, he is punished for his rebellion by expulsion from a meal. He is not sold to a Mr. Sowerbury equivalent, although one can easily imagine the mayhem Jennings would cause as an Undertaker's mute. During his banishment, he catches a glimpse of what he mistakenly takes for masters' extra lunches; and this, in his eyes, widens the gap even further between boy and adult. However, those of us who have always suspected Mr. Wilkins of being an overgrown schoolboy at heart may find our theory supported by his unnatural greed for more prunes. Although eating school food every day of one's adult life, as well as one's childhood, is bound to have some effect!

Open revolt may be uncommon, but the boys' thoughts are never very far from food, as can be seen by their frequent comestible-based exclamations: "Lobsterous fun!" "Crystallised cheesecakes!" "Ozard eggs!" and "Radioactive suet pudding!"

Relief from school food does come, albeit infrequently and often in a bittersweet fashion. For instance, the boys' ill-fated plan to make "Irish stew" out of sausages and potatoes results in the accidental incineration of the concoction in the boiler room. Equally doomed is Jennings and Darbishire's attempt to fry some fish in cricket bat oil, which ends in a mini conflagration in the school's photographic dark room. Even when their own cooking is sanctioned, the chaps generally manage to bish it. At a school picnic, they only succeed in blowing the cooking stove to smithereens.

Happier occasions include the receiving of cakes and ice creams for services rendered and the enjoyment of teas at rival Bracebridge school, "Supersonic! That shepherds pie was the wizardest garbage I've tasted for months. I've had three refills". The boys may still believe *a la carte* to be "something on a trolley", but one imagines that, all in all, they did not have things too bad. From all the energy they display, they certainly do not seem to have been starved.

So, one may not instantly associate Jennings with foodstuffs, unlike some of his literary contemporaries: Billy Bunter and the rapidly emptying tuck basket, usually somebody else's; Desperate Dan and his Cow Pie, now visible once more after a temporary absence during the BSE crisis; and even the Famous Five, with their legendary picnics washed down by ginger beer. Yet, the image of Jennings examining a prune through a telescope would strike a chord with anyone who has endured that particularly British phenomenon: the school dinner.

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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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UNBOUND MAGNETS WANTED: 64 91 95 110 204 207 215 217 219 220 221 223 227 229 230 231 253. G. GOOD, Greyfriars, 147 Thornes Road, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF2 8QN. Tel: 01924-378273.

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It helps the C.D. if you advertise your "For Sales" and Wants in it. The rates are: 4p per word, £5 for a quarter page, £10 for a half page and £20 for a whole page.

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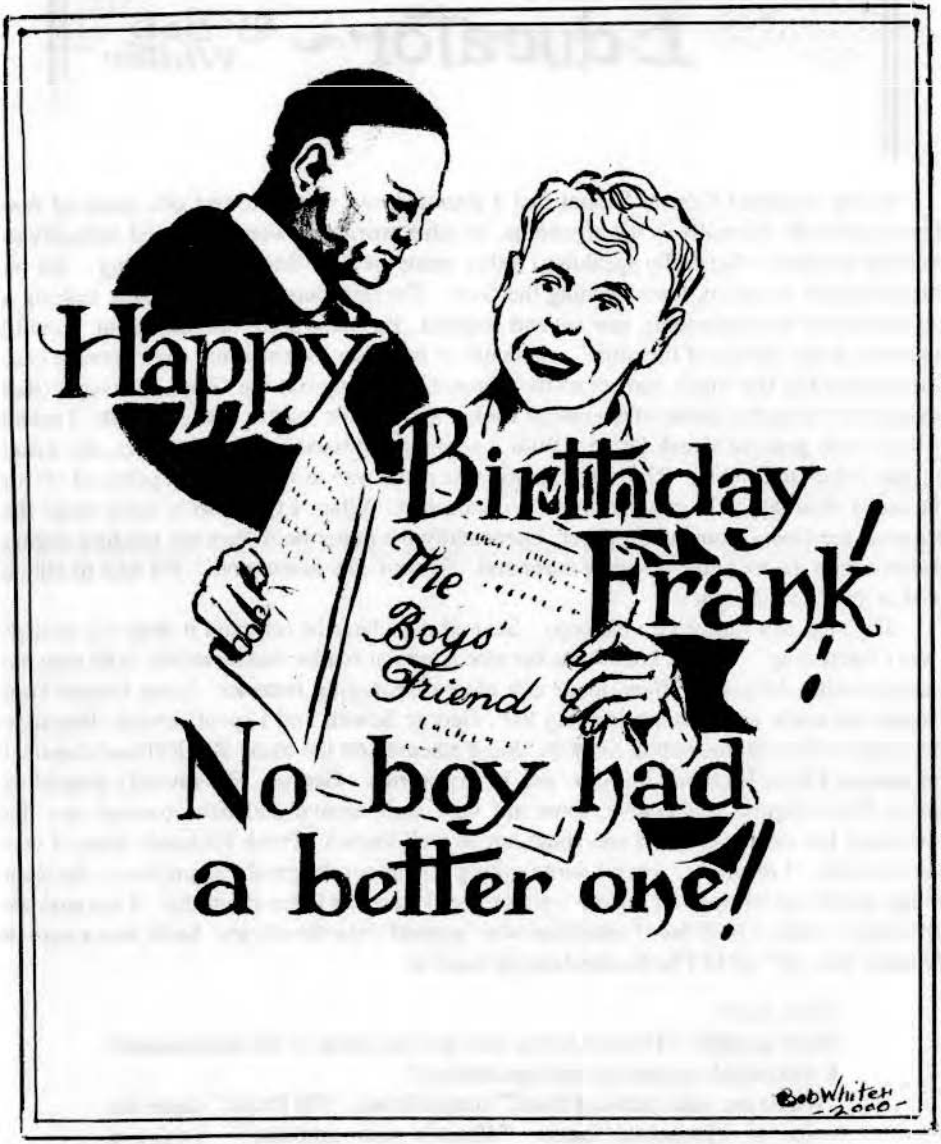
The MAGNET as an Educator~ by Bob Whiter

At the so-called Central School that I attended, we were allowed one hour of free time each week; normally in the afternoon. In other words we were permitted virtually to do what we liked. Generally speaking I either spent the time drawing or writing – but on this particular occasion, I was reading the *Gem*. The headmaster, Mr. Booker, making a casual tour of the classrooms, saw me and stopped. He made some remark about "I could do better in my choice of literature". A month or two later, Soames and the cigarette case series started in the Xmas number of the *Magnet*. Copying out the Greek message, (that was scratched on the inside of the case) I took it to the same master, during break. I asked if they were genuine Greek letters. With a slightly surprised look on his face, he wrote out the letters in English. The only alteration he made was to write 'ph' in place of 'f' for the word Friardale. He asked where I'd obtained it. When I told him it came from the *Magnet*, the *Gems'* companion-paper, incidentally the paper he'd seen me reading during the free time, he looked even more surprised. "Hrmm", he murmured. "I'd like to take a look at your, er – *Magnet'?*

The next day I gave him my copy. Several days later he returned it with the remark "Very interesting". I don't know if he became a regular reader, but he never, if he saw me reading either *Magnet* or *Gem*, made any more disparaging remarks. Long before Tom Hopperton made up his imposing 'tag list', George Sewell and I spent several Thursday half days at the various public libraries, doing research on the many Biblical and classical quotations Frank Richards loved to use in his stories. George, like myself, wanted to know their origins. Of course, some are very well known and have passed into the language, but there were, and are, some not so well known. Frank Richards himself was very helpful – I remember when I wrote asking him about the great Panjandrum – he went to the trouble of writing out Fooote's poem; I still have his letter about this. I am sure we all loved it when a little bit of education was 'popped' into the stories. Such was a case in *Magnet* Nov. 24th 1934 *The Brotherhood of Justice*:

> "Bow-bow!"
> Prout gurgled! That evidently was not the name of his interlocutor! It was simply a disrespectful-ejaculation'!
> "Where are you speaking from?" roared Prout. "Oh Prout!" came the voice in reproachful tones. "Where's your grammar? You're a master of a senior form – you're setting up as headmaster! Don't you know you mustn't end a sentence with a preposition? Is that the kind of thing you teach in the fifth?


Happy Birthday Frank!
The Boys' Friend
No boy had a better one!
Bob Whiten -2000-

Also from the same story we get a delightful little reference to what many consider to be the most beautiful poem in the English language:

> The beauties of Gray's famous *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* were quite lost on him. ... He was quite indifferent to the ploughman homeward plodding his weary way. He was thinking of the cake hidden in the box-room – lost to sight, but to memory dear"!

Returning to grammar, the three following examples have always given me a good chuckle!

> "I say you fellows, keep it dark you know," said Bunter airily. "It's the sack if a man's spotted – not that I'm afraid of the sack! I don't mind telling you that it was me!" "You mean 'it was I'" suggested Nugent. "I didn't mean it was you, Nugent". "Ha, ha, ha."
> "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at", said Bunter warmly. "Don't you get making out that it was you, Frank Nugent. You wouldn't have the nerve to ink Prout or any other Beak!"
> *Magnet June 16, 1934 – Thirteenth chapter.*

> "Who are you calling kids!" enquired Bob Cherry.
> "Whom dear boy, whom!" chided Hobson.
> "Don't you learn declensions in the Lower Fourth?"
> *Magnet 1086 , Dec 8th, 1928 – The Form-Masters' Feud*

and

> "I say you fellows," squeaked Billy Bunter "It's him!"
> Bunter was regardless of grammar.
> "Him!" repeated Harry Wharton.
> "Him ancient or modern?" asked Bob Cherry.
> "I say, it's him!"
> "If Quelch heard that old fat man, he would make you write out It is he a hundred times!" said Bob.
> *Magnet 1501 – Chapter 2*
> *The Schoolboy Smuggler, Nov. 21st, 1936*

Leaving grammar, how many times after Bunter's ridiculous, but hilarious blunders regarding poetry, works of literature, or famous events in history, were we given the correct line or poet, author or date; sometimes even with explanatory notes thrown in for good measure.

I first learned about peccaries, anacondas and maté tea when reading the South American series, featuring O Lobo, Dom Frulo, and our second meeting with Jim Valentine. As in other travel series, when the party stopped *en route* to their destination, at famous places, we were given interesting facts. I remember complimenting Frank Richards on his masterly handling of these points. His reply? "My dear boy, that was the pill in the jam."

Dear Frank Richards – we are constantly being reminded of some incident, happening or quotation from his stories. Only recently at a Sunday church service, the

vicar in his sermon, quoted from the *Corinthians* – "of the earth, earthy". I had to control myself. My thoughts immediately went to the person who walked into the booby trap and had a can of paint upset all over him and was "of the paint, painty!"

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THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY, SEXTON BLAKE, THE STRIKING SHADOW, AND SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS

by Derek Hinrich

Before publication of the Sexton Blake Library began in September 1915, the Boys' Friend Library issued the first Sexton Blake novels. 24 appeared in this format between 1907 and 1915. 14 of these were original stories; one was a reprint from the *Union Jack* and another was a conflation of two stories from that paper; while ten were reprints of serial stories which had appeared in various other story papers.

Following upon the creation of the Sexton Blake Library only one more Blake story appeared in the First Series of the Boys' Friend Library. This was *In The Hands of The Headhunters*, from a serial in the *Union Jack* by Cecil Hayter. The Second Series of *BFL* from June 1925 until its demise 15 years later (for its last few issues under the name of the Bullseye Library) published a number of Sexton Blake stories, but not always featuring Blake.

Three early First Series *BFL* adventures of Blake recounting his schooldays and time at Oxford were reprinted, and four early *SBL* First Series novels were reissued (despite anachronisms) in the 'thirties. Three other adventures based on serials which had appeared in the *Pilot* and the *Boys' Realm* were also published. All these duly featured Our Hero but some of his cases were now reprinted as the exploits of others. Thus three became adventures of Nelson Lee; ten were credited to that indeterminate relation of the headmaster of Greyfriars, Ferrers Locke; and four featured a new man, James Helliwell, late of Scotland Yard.

While authors of other stories were credited in the First Series of the *BFL*, the adventures of Sexton Blake, following the practice of the *Union Jack*, were published anonymously. In the *BFL* Second Series, however, all the reprints were given authors, generally the house name, "John Andrews", although those featuring James Helliwell were published as by "Barry Weston".

One of Ferrers Locke's cases, *BFL 2/258, The Striking Shadow*, of October 1930 derived from an anonymous Sexton Blake serial of the same name which appeared in the

Union Jack over several weeks in 1927. No suggestion as to authorship is given in the *Sexton Blake Index*, but in W.O.G. Lofts and D.J. Adley's *Origins of The Boys' Friend Library*, the *BFL* version is attributed to Hedley Scott, a pseudonym of Hedley O'Mant and the author of several Sexton Blake stories in the *SBL* Second Series. I have not read the *BFL* version of this story but I have read the *Union Jack* serial.

The story is concerned with the hunt for a daring and mysterious master criminal, the Striking Shadow, who has enjoyed a successful career for some ten years, always appearing to be one step ahead of the police, but once Sexton Blake interests himself in the affair the Striking Shadow's days are, naturally, numbered. The story has a tortuous plot (with a number of subplots to distract the eager reader), as may be seen from one of the (slightly amended) summaries for new readers before an episode (about halfway through the narrative):

"John Carteret, also known as John Blank a recently released convict, is seeking revenge under the orders of the Striking Shadow, on Mr. Montague, now a wealthy company promoter of Park Lane, but who, as Timothy Trail had betrayed him during an attempted escape from Dartmoor Prison for £10,000 – the cached proceeds of a robbery Carteret had been tricked and blackmailed into committing by the self-same Striking Shadow – and which the Striking Shadow wishes to recover, having also sworn to rob Montague of his health, wealth, and life.

"The first blow is the murder of Montague's secretary, Denver Street. This is followed by the attempted strangulation of Michael Moloney, an ex-convict. He is not killed, however, and is now in the care of the police.

"Sexton Blake, by reason of being engaged in finding the missing heir to the Framlingham millions, finds himself concerned in the case. Montague seeks police protection and Trenchard, a detective and one of Inspector Coutts' ablest subordinates, is installed as his valet at Notley Hall, Montague's country home.

"Carteret is now employed in London on clerical work by Captain Vereker, through the recommendation of Rosemary Lane, with whom Carteret is in love.

"Blake tracks the Shadow to Riverside House, and there is an encounter in the dark, after which the Shadow makes his escape.

"In the meantime, while Montague's partners, Sir Titus Brade, Mr. Truelove, and Captain Vereker are guests at Notley Hall, Montague receives a threatening message from the Shadow. Trenchard arrests Vereker on suspicion, and locks him in Montague's study. Verekey escapes, but no sooner has he gone than a masked figure enters the room through a sliding panel, only to start back as he finds Vereker vanished.

"Sexton Blake decides to stay at Notley Hall. On his first night there, another message is found in Montague's bedroom, and Trenchard sets off to see Coutts at the Yard, leaving Blake in charge...

"Later, Carteret is rescued from a policeman by an unknown man, who, after telling him to go straight home, drives off..." Now read on.

Plenty of mystery there, you see, of the School of Edgar Wallace.

One minor point which occurred to me as I read it was that this story was originally published in 1927. Lord Trenchard became Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in 1931. Would Coutts's assistant have been his namesake if the tale had been written four years later?

As I said earlier, the *BFL*, now the Bullseye Library, in its last days published in March, May, and June 1940, four de-Blaked stories in which his role was given to a new hero, James Helliwell, a former Scotland Yard man turned private detective, resident in Baker Street with a youthful assistant, and a Rolls Royce motorcar called the Grey Panther (sub-editing you see has been kept to a minimum: Helliwell has a friend at the Yard named Blamey who, in moments of stress, is called 'Coutts'). Three of these books, *The Sign of The Double Four, The King Crook,* and *The Phantom of Scotland Yard* are condensed versions of our old friend Gwyn Evans's *Union Jack* series about Blake's tussles with King Karl of Serbovia and with Mr. Mist the invisible man who steals the mace from the House of Commons.

Lofts and Adley were unable to identify the origin of the fourth, *The Mysterious Mr. Montague* but it is a reprint of *The Striking Shadow* bereft of most of its subplots. Whether the earlier *BFL* version was similarly shortened I do not know, but certainly I prefer the original serial version.

The story is quite enjoyable but it does involve a rather larger suspension of disbelief than the very best of Blake's adventures. The Striking Shadow himself has an extraordinary capacity to see and move with complete silence in pitch black darkness. Both Blake and Inspector Coutts display absolutely protean gifts of disguise on more than one occasion. It transpires, for instance, that Sexton Blake spends much of the case disguised as a former colonial official. His disguise consists solely of a false tan and an imitation scar through one eyebrow, and nobody, not even Coutts who has known him twenty years, recognises him! Now come on, now! Not even Coutts at his most ploddish could be that thick!

There are times when authors simply ask too much of their readers.

In another Sexton Blake adventure I read recently, Granite Grant when preparing for an encounter with the enemy, "slipped a service revolver into his jacket pocket". The service revolver then was the Webley and Scott "Pistol Revolver No 1 Mk 6,.455 inch calibre". It was over eleven inches long and weighed nearly two and a quarter pounds. I doubt if anyone could slip it into a jacket pocket. They certainly would not whip it out in a hurry, with the foresight blade and the hammer to snag on the lining.

With four issues of the *Sexton Blake Library* each month and 52 issues of the *Union Jack* or *Detective Weekly* each year, Sexton Blake in his heyday dealt with at least a hundred cases annually. In a considerable number of these his Rolls Royce, the Grey Panther, was damaged or tampered with. It is well he was so successful, for what could his motor insurance premium been like?

Sexton Blake, like many of his colleagues in thriller fiction was prone to be telephoned at a critical moment by someone who informs him, "The man you want is Aaargh-" and the phone goes dead. This happens so often to Blake and Paul Temple and others, that I sometimes think that perhaps we should hear a BBC announcement that, "Scotland Yard have issued a statement that they wish to interview a Mr. Aaargh, whom they believe may be able to assist them in their enquiries."

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I REMEMBER

by Bill Bradford

THE BOYS' WONDER LIBRARY, published by Amalgamated Press between 19th July 1932 – 21st July 1933, 2 issues every 4 weeks, totalling 24 in all. Containing 64 pages, sized 6½" x 4½", the covers were quite colourful and descriptive.

In the summer of 1932 we accompanied my father on a business trip to Oxford and while he was with a customer (anyone remember the Cadena Cafés?) Mother and I strolled around the back streets between the colleges. On entering a newsagent, probably at my instigation, I saw numbers 1 and 2 of THE BOYS WONDER LIBRARY. The first, THE SQUADRON OF DEATH by Geo E. Rochester, had a thrilling cover of aerial combat while the other, FOR THE GLORY OF THE LEGION, by Leslie Beresford, depicted a legionnaire locked in combat with an Arab. How could I resist temptation! Unfortunately both Libraries went to salvage during my wartime absence and I am still trying to replace them. Strangely enough this Library was rarely displayed for sale, not even in my local shop which stocked almost every monthly Library. I do not think I ever bought any other copies in the next year. I found a couple of numbers a few years ago. However, last month my good friend Norman Wright produced nine issues, so I now have half of the set, and, from adverts on and in the covers, some knowledge of all issues.

Most if not all stories are reprints from popular papers of that era, largely from CHUMS. There are only 6 that I cannot trace but they may have originally appeared under a different title. From such comparisons that I have been able to make, the library versions are considerably abridged from the original, to their detriment.

I cannot trace any previous listing of this library, so for the benefit of those like myself who seek that sort of information. I crave the indulgence of other readers. I note with pleasure that 5 issues were written by Geo. E. Rochester. Anyway, here goes:-

BOYS WONDER LIBRARY AMALGAMATED PRESS
10.7.1932 – 21.7.1933 Price 2d

1. The Squadron of Death	Geo. E. Rochester	Boys' Own Paper 1927/8
2. For Glory and the Legion	Leslie Beresford	Chums 1928/29
3. With Lawrence in Arabia	John Sylvester	Chums 1928/29
4. Outlaw of the Seas	Piers Anson (Draycott M. Dell)	
5. Volcano Gold	Eric Townsend	
6. The Making of a Man	A. Carney Allen	Chums 1928/29
7. On the Ball, Trojans	John Wheway	Chums 1929/30
8. The City Under the Sea	Anthony Thomas (R.H. Poole)	
9. The Ghost Ship	Rodney Holland	
10. The Speed Kings	John Hunter	Chums 1928/29
11. The Flaming Frontier	Robert Harding	Chums 1929/30
12. Get-His-Man-Keen	Earle Danesford	Chums 1931/32
13. Sons of the Legion	Alan Breck	Chums 1932/33
14. The Mystery Boy	John Holland	
15. To Sweep the Seas	Jack Maxwell (Ernest L. McKeag)	
16. Despot of the World	Geo E. Rochester	Boys Own Paper 1929/30
17. The Soccer Brothers	John Wheway	
18. Ghost Island	Earle Danesford	Chums 1929/30

19. Blake of the White Hand	Piers Anson	Chums Supp. 6.2.1932
20. The Little Trumpeter	C. Glabon Glover	Chums 1930/31
21. The Mug of St. Martins	Anthony Thomas	
22. The Iron Sky Pirates	Wingrove Wilson	
23. Captains of Claverhouse	John Grey	Modern Boy ?
24. The Air Patrol	Geo. E. Rochester	Nelson Lee 1st Series 96-109
25. The Vultures of Desolate Island	Geo. E. Rochester	Boys' Own Paper 1928/2
26. Shadow of the Guillotine	Geo. E. Rochester	Magnet 1122-1132

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IRON IN THE SOUL

by Mark Caldicott

Part One – The Iron Island

E.S. Brooks' serial *The Iron Island*, appearing in the *Gem* under name of Robert W. Comrade, is a remarkable work. Not only is it among the very earliest of his published stories, it is a massive undertaking – a weekly serial instalment of novelette proportions sustained for more than a year. Morover, it is, for such a young and inexperienced writer, a work of great maturity which stands up well to re-reading today. A study of the stories reveals how influential this first piece of work was for his subsequent writing. Characters and situations developed here shaped the future direction of his writing to a significant degree.

In 1949 ESB was the honoured guest of the London OBBC, and from his answers to questions, Bob Blythe put together the following account of the very beginnings of Brooks' writing career (*The Collector's Digest*, Vol. 3, No. 35, November 1949).

> Our story opens (to use a phrase beloved of novelists) in the summer of 1919 when a young man of 17 walked into the Amalgamated Press Offices for an interview with the editor of the Gem, Mr. Back. Mr. Back was expecting the author of a manuscript story called "The Iron Island" which had so impressed him that he had asked the author to make a call with a view to publishing it in subsequent issues of the "Gem". That young man was of course the author of the stories we admire so much, Edwy Searles Brooks. At first the editor thought he was one of his readers come to have a chat about the "Gem", and was greatly surprised to find that this was not the case. However, he quickly overcame his surprise and got down to business, with the result that the "Iron Island" was published as a serial in the "Gem" of 1910/11. At the same time Brooks was commissioned to write full length stories of St. Jim's and also to write for the Boys' Friend Library.

From this account, it would appear that the serial "The Iron Island" was an invention of Brooks' own, which he submitted as a manuscript for consideration. Shortly before his death in 1965, however, ESB told his story again, this time to Marjorie Norris in an interview for a radio programme. This time we have Brooks own words:

> The editor of the boy's Friend, a man named Marshall, wrote me a letter and said he would like to see me and that gave me a tremendous jump – I was only a boy then – and I remember when I went to his office – I came to London especially – I went to his office and sent my card up, and I was waiting in the office and he looked me up and down and he said "You're not Mr. Brooks? And I said "Yes". He said "I thought you were one of my readers". He couldn't believe... because I looked even younger than I was. I was about seventeen.

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TERMS: PAYMENT ON YOUR SATISFACTORY RECEIPT OF GOODS PLUS POSTAGE AT COST. 4 ROOMS OF STOCK. VISITORS MOST WELCOME BY APPOINTMENT. YOU WILL BE AMAZED

Obviously, Brooks, being so used to re-writing old plots, was not above doing so with his autobiographical accounts. There appears to be only one piece of actual consistency – i.e. that as a young boy of seventeen he visited the London offices of the Amalgamated Press. Unfortunately even this detail is inaccurate, for it has been established somewhere (unfortunately I cannot recall where – can anyone else?) that this historic meeting took place on 11 July 1910. If Brooks' birth date is 11 November 1889, he must have actually been 20 at the time. Anyway, he continues the 1965 version of his beginnings thus:

> He *[i.e. Marshall]* told me to go back home and write a story – 10,000 words – to see what I could do. Which I did. After a very few days he wrote and said it was quite all right but not what he wanted – which was a great disappointment, but, he said, don't be discouraged, do another one. I did another one, he liked it, he took it – published it.

Although we cannot be certain of the truth, it would appear that the 1965 version, though at a greater distance from the events, is the more accurate description. Since an ESB story did appear in *Boy's Friend Weekly* in November 1910 it is likely that it was indeed Marshall, the editor of *Boy's Friend Weekly*, rather than Back, the editor of *Boy's Friend Library*, that Brooks met on that day.

Moreover, it was almost certainly Marshall who was instrumental in introducing Brooks to his first real mentor, Percy Griffith, the editor of the *Gem*. It must have been Griffith not Back who initially commissioned ESB to write some St. Jim's stories. Furthermore, and significant to our theme, if, in 1949, Brooks gave the clear impression that he had arrived at his first meeting with the "Iron Island" series tucked under his arm, in 1965 he gave an entirely different, and far more plausible account of the origin of the stories. This is how Brooks tells it in the later account:

> The editor of the Gem was a most peculiar man named Griffith – I shall never forget him – bit of an eccentric. He wouldn't light a cigarette unless he had the name of the cigarette burn first. If he happened to light a cigarette the wrong way round he'd throw it away – most peculiar - and he was smoking constantly all the time and doodling all the time. He had writing pads in front of him all the time and he was making doodles all the time. Pictures, scrawls, all sorts of things. And he said to me one day "I've got an idea for a serial for the Gem about a man placed on an island somewhere in the Pacific marooned there by a gang of crooks and he's left there for ten years – alone on this island which is mostly made of iron and everything is iron and he's going to call the thing "The Iron Island". The strength of the island gets into him and makes him a tremendously strong man and he escapes and comes back to England and gets his revenge on all those who placed him there.

Clearly then, from Brooks' 1965 recollections, which I am more inclined to believe, the basic plot of the "Iron Island" serial was not his own but that of Percy Griffith.

The serial began to appear in the Gem on 12 November 1910, the day after Brooks' twenty-first birthday. On the 11 November 1910, therefore, ESB came of age as a man, and on the following day he came of age as a writer, for the Iron Island serial was certainly a baptism of fire for a newcomer to the trade. Griffith wanted 16,000 words a week for the serial – that is something like a 32-page novel every week. Moreover, since it was a serial, there was no room for easing off. The instalment had to be delivered

without fail. It was in reality the perfect apprenticeship for young writer of boys' stories and set the pace which Brooks maintained for most of his career.

The Iron Island centres on the adventures of Frank Kingston. Kingston is the assumed name of Philip Graydon, a young Englishman who inadvertently falls into a trap set for him by Lord Mount-Fannell, who is the leader of a society of criminals called "The Brotherhood of Iron". Graydon is tricked into becoming a member of this society without knowing its real nature. He tries to disentangle himself from their affairs, and states his intention of informing the police, but before he can do so and reveal the Brotherhood's true business, they renounce him as a traitor, kidnap him and maroon him on the Iron Island, an uncharted island in the Pacific.

Here Graydon would have spent the rest of his days had not a lucky chance brought to his aid a beautiful French actress, Dolores de las Mercedes. With the help of Dolores, Graydon escapes to England, and swears vengeance on the criminal origination who have robbed him of eight years of his life.

In order to prevent the Brotherhood discovering his existence and thus endangering his freedom again, he assumes the disguise and persona of Frank Kingston, outwardly a foolish, ineffectual and foppish fellow, a member of a gentleman's club whose membership is made up of "indolent dandies". The reality, however, is very different since the effect of being on an island with the magnetic forces of iron is that his faculties have been enhanced to a significant degree.

Dolores also has reason to adopt another name since her own persona is non grata with the French government. As Miss O'Brien, therefore, she throws in her lot with "Kingston" and the two of them work together, mounting a secret campaign against the evil Brotherhood. The character of Dolores is rather interesting in the fact that here, at the outset of his career Brooks, portrays a female with more maturity and worldliness than any later female charactisation I can recall. Brooks' heroines hereafter tend to have a kind of fresh, open innocence. While Dolores is undoubtedly beautiful, she is not characterised in this way. She is a woman, while all other Brooks females are girls. It was with his transition to more adult stories that ESB began to introduce "blonde bombshell" – type characters such as Nadina Borodin (in *Dare Devil Conquest*). This was about forty years after the appearance of Dolores de las Mercedes.

In the ensuing serial episodes, Kingston and Dolores take on the task of unmasking and bringing to justice the eminent figures of public life who are secretly members of the "inner council" of the Brotherhood.

In this, Brooks' first major piece of writing, then, we already have the idea of the superhuman hero, a man endowed with extraordinary gifts. The ideas was not Brooks' own, it seems, but it is a theme which persists throughout his work in ever developing form.

These are remarkably competent stories for a new and youthful writer. While they are, of course, framed in the formal approach found at that time, and do not yet have the lighter touch allowable in a later period, the stories are nevertheless absorbing and readable. As the series develops, so does the circle of allies who join Kingston in his battle against the Brotherhood of Iron.

****

THE UNFINISHED MAGNET SERIES – ONE OF THE BEST?

by Andrew Miles

Part Two

How would the conflict have finally been resolved? Along the lines of the traditional Greyfriars yarn, two broad scenarios are likely – a forced or an amicable settlement. In the events leading to either settlement we would see Price finally succeed in landing suspicion beyond doubt on Wharton. Wharton is again isolated from his chums as he walks along the tow path past the high paling fence of the Three Fishers. He might have business at Highcliffe; Bunter might have stolen his jigger to ride to Cliff House; perhaps he was detained by Head Boy business with Quelch and is now hurrying to meet the Co. who are teaing at the Bun shop. Ponsonby and Co. suddenly appear, rag Wharton 3-1 and cut, throwing his cap over the fence. Hacker spots him climbing over for it and follows through the gate which is a little further away. Price, about to jump the fence to leave the Three Fishers after a spree, spots Hacker and ducks out of sight. Terrified that he has been copped, he pelts Hacker with a turf from the overgrown bushes in the garden and makes his escape. Hacker espies Wharton looking for his cap and attempts to drag him back to Greyfriars. Wharton hooks his leg, up ends him and leaves the grounds bareheaded. Hacker finds the cap and returns triumphant to Greyfriars, gloatingly holding the material evidence, which he has sought for so long, of Wharton's bad hat proclivities. Wharton, up before the Beak, explains and his story is supported by Quelch. Dr. Locke, trusting of Quelch's judgement and well-disposed towards Wharton, is nevertheless forced to acknowledge Hacker's evidence. Wharton receives 24 hours grace while further inquiries are made...

This scenario better fits the existing plot elements than, for example, Price ragging or booby-trapping Hacker's study and leaving Wharton's engraved pen knife at the scene. Similarly, Hacker's study might be ragged by Price after lights out when Wharton is caught sneaking out of dorm for a rag on the Shell. Hacker accuses Wharton of breaking out, but Quelch points that he is still half-dressed. The Acid Drop does not believe that Wharton is innocent, and takes the matter to Dr. Locke; Quelch again stands by Wharton, the Beak rules in his favour and Hacker's bitterness towards Wharton increases still further. Both scenarios, however, lack the attempted linking of Wharton to blagging which is, I am sure, a recurring element.

The dénouement comes during the 24 hours reprieve. Unlike the Wharton of the various Downfall/Rebel series or the Bounder, the Wharton of this series is unlikely to refuse to be sacked; he does not bar himself out somewhere or bolt. In the forced settlement, Price is suspected by the Co. of turfing Hacker. Perhaps Bunter, sitting quietly under a tree and scoffing a large cake last seen in Smithy's study, sees him emerge from the pub and lets it be known; or the Fat Owl, dodging Coker in the Fifth Form passage, hides in Price's study and overhears Hilton accuse Price. He then blackmails Price until the Co. put a stop to it and force Price to own up. Hilton might have known that Price was "on" for the 3.30 at Wapshop and that he must have been at the Three Fishers that afternoon. Hilton, basically a good chap, cannot sit idly by and allow Wharton to be sacked. In either scenario, Price is compelled to own up. He is let off with a flogging because he claims that he was aiming the turf at Wharton for a lark and hit

Hacker by mistake. He had only entered the grounds at all to help Wharton find his cap! A thin story, but it gets him the benefit of the doubt. As in 1683, Prout is deeply suspicious of Price, but relieved that there will not be a sacking in his Form.

The forced solution is not entirely satisfactory because it does not really make *pax* between Wharton and Hacker. An amicable settlement sees both Hacker and Price end their hostility towards Wharton, perhaps because of some act of heroism. Hacker, on his way to meet Quelch returning from a grind, is shadowed by Price. Price slips ahead to upset a plank over a stream and plant evidence incriminating Wharton – his cap, perhaps. He falls in. Wharton arrives just in time to dive in and save him. Price is not such a low rotter as to feel ungrateful and confesses of his own volition to the turfing. In view of his severe cold and stint in sanny, he is forgiven. A few days later Wharton is again alone, perhaps having been visiting Cliff House. The Fat Owl has stolen his jigger, so he has walked while the Co. rode home. It is nearing blackout and he hears a cry for help in Oak Lane. He runs forward to find Hacker in the grasp of a tramp. A typical Hamiltonian tramp, he is dirty, smelling of spirits and wearing a battered bowler hat. Wharton pitches in and knocks the tramp to the ground. In the ensuing struggle the tramp knocks Wharton unconscious with a loaded stick and flees. Wharton comes to in sanny and finds a concerned and grateful Hacker addressing him as "my dear boy" and lauding his courage. Quelch enters to "my dear Quelch" and all is merry and bright. This is, I feel, a preferable ending. An apparent weakness in it might be that Greyfriars tramps do not usually emerge like a bolt from the blue; they tend to loiter about Courtfield Common for a few episodes while snapping up unconsidered trifles. Perhaps this tramp – with a name like 'Enry 'Uggins – featured in one of the missing titled stories, or was scheduled to appear in some episodes between *"Exit Bunter"* and the final instalment. The existing fragments give us no foreshadowing of what rapprochement might have been planned; it is conceivable that a heroic act would come out of the blue; in the 2nd Wharton Rebel series Wharton first plucks Loder from the Sark, then saves Quelch at high tide in Smugglers' Cave; each incident is unexpected.

In a less likely but feasible episode, Hacker might shadow Wharton in the Cloisters while Wharton is reading a letter from his Aunty Amy. Price is skulking nearby, enjoying a surreptitious smoke while he studies a racing paper. Prout's suspicions and occasional inspections have made his study an unsafe place for smoking or keeping literature for spotting winners. Suddenly there is an air raid and a bomb explodes next to the Cloister wall. Wharton saves both Hacker and Price from the debris and earns the gratitude of both simultaneously.

How would 1688ff have ranked in the *Magnet* canon? It would, I feel, have been a fine but not a classic series, with a strong emphasis on the school context – no cracksmen, air raids, Nazi spies, mysterious new boys, scheming relatives or criminal masters. There is a brief reference to rationing in 1683, but I do not think the War would have featured prominently except for a few such references. It would have been a very readable, traditional Greyfriars school yarn. I feel that the main weakness to the plot would have been the relatively strong position of Wharton. The Co. hold firm, Quelch stays on side and Loder apparently does not get involved deeply. Price and Hacker, nasty though they are, just aren't a match for a popular Wharton. Neither of them has the same ability as Quelch or Loder to make things hot for him. They are both unpopular with their peers,

have few redeeming qualities and are somewhat one-dimensional characters. Price is a smoky rotter, weedy, funky and a thorough bad hat. Even Loder, rotter though he is, holds the rank of Prefect and often plays in the School XI. Hacker is a spiteful, mean and snobbish man with no friends except the tolerant Capper. Ever suspicious, he is as stern as Quelch, but lacks his judgement and perspicacity. Fellows know where they stand with Quelch; even the Bounder freely admits that he is fair and downy. Hacker uses schoolmastering as a medium for the exercise of power rather than for the education of boys. He holds an MA, but his Classical knowledge is probably rusty. Quelch reads Horace and Euripides for pleasure and spends many happy hours in the School Library poring over ancient, black, Latin manuscripts. His *"History of Greyfriars"* will be a fine piece of scholarship when it is finally published.

The following excerpts from what is extant of series 1683ff show that, although the *Magnet* was about to expire, the quality of Hamilton's writing was as high as in the paper's heyday:

- With that the Acid Drop stalked away, deeply offended. Mr. Hacker never lost a chance of taking offence, so it was natural that chances often came his way. (*Magnet* 1683)
- The train was gone, the Greyfriars fellows and the Greyfriars masters were gone, and he walked out of a deserted station. As he tramped across Courtfield Common towards the school, his feelings were equally divided between a longing to tap Hacker's sharp nose and another longing to kick Billy Bunter all round the Greyfriars quad and back again. (*Magnet 1683)*
- "Don't burble! Give me the letter before I kick you round this study!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"I – I haven't got it" gasped Bunter. "I'd give it to you with pleasure if I had it. I was going to put it back on your table, with the other things, only Hacker took it –"

"Hacker!" howled Wharton.

"Yes! He saw it, and grabbed it! Mind, it's all right," added Bunter hastily. "I told him it wasn't yours – I mentioned your name specially."

"You unspeakable idiot –"

"Oh really, Wharton –" (*Magnet 1683)*

- Mr. Quelch did not speak; he sat looking at Harry Wharton, his gimlet eyes fixed on the flushed face. Those gimlet eyes were very keen. Hacker probably would have read guilt in that flushed face. But Henry Samuel Quelch was a wiser man than Hacker. (*Magnet* 1683).
- Wharton stood still looking at him, hardly realising that that spot of trouble, which had looked like turning out so terribly serious, was over. Quelch was already bending over a Latin paper – for the delectation of his Form the following day – and dipping his pen in the ink. Wharton stared at the top of his head. He found his voice at last. "Thank you, sir !" he stammered. He left the study. (*Magnet* 1683).
- On the other hand, Bunter had been whopped in class that morning, having had no time for prep the previous evening. This seemed to Billy Bunter fearfully unjust. A fellow couldn't sit in an armchair and eat butterscotch, and get on with his prep at the same time. No fellow could do two things at once. And Bunter had been busy in the armchair with butterscotch – with painful results in the morning! (*"Exit Bunter")*

- The Acid Drop frowned at the Co. He did not like those cheery juniors. He had no doubt that they were hand-in-glove with that young rascal, Wharton, who had given him so much trouble that term. Indeed he wondered, in his acidulated way, whether Wharton was up to something in these very moments, and whether that was why he was not with his friends. Whenever Mr. Hacker thought of Wharton of the Remove, it was with concentrated suspicion. (*"Exit Bunter"*)
- Harry Wharton did not wait. He went down the passage as if had been the cinder-path. He was out of the House, before Mr. Hacker was on his feet. And, when he was on his feet, Mr. Hacker was not feeling equal to further action. His was a bony gentleman, and his bones had hit Quelch's floor hard – he had an ache in every bone. The Acid Drop was left gurgling and rubbing aching places when Harry Wharton, flushed and breathless, joined his friends in the quad. (*"Exit Bunter"*).

(To be concluded)

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THE THIRTY NINE STEPS AND THE BROADSTAIRS CONNECTION

by Tony Cook

Part Two

"The Thirty Nine Steps" introduces us to Richard Hannay, a mining engineer from South Africa, and is the shortest of the four Richard Hannay novels. By the time one progresses to "The Three Hostages" we are in the company of Sir Richard Hannay, married with one son, Peter John, living at Fosse manor in the Cotswolds. The story line of "The Thirty Nine Steps", short though the book is, keeps up the suspense throughout, with a series of well thought out cameos culminating in Bradgate. It begins with Hannay, bored to tears with 'the old country' until he encounters a mysterious character named Scudder who has a deadly secret, the details contained in a small black book. Scudder is killed in Hannay's flat at Portland Place, London.

Hannay leaves London immediately for Scotland knowing that he could be arrested for murder, but also realising that other characters will stop at nothing to obtain the little black book. We follow his wanderings in Scotland and his close encounters with his enemies. He comes back to England where he is introduced, in a roundabout way, to Sir Walter Bullivant, Permanent Secretary to the Foreign Office. Cleared of a suggestion of murder he and Sir Walter's minions go on the trail of "The Black Stone" managing in the end to stop certain very important government secrets leaving our shores. Buchan did not always write about locations which can easily be found on any map. His locations for "the Thirty Nine Steps", however, are in the main, reasonably easy to follow. There are three main settings; the London sites are quite easily identified and still exist. The Scottish locations have been well researched and written up in an article, *"The Thirty Nine Steps" – Thoughts and suggestions on Richard Hannay's travels through Southern Scotland*, which was published in 'The John Buchan Journal', winter 1987. It was written by J.A. Patterson and W.M. Russell Paterson, the latter, until recently, having been the secretary to the John Buchan Society. This leaves us with JB and the Broadstairs connection.

Let us begin with the fact that the last chapter of the book was either completed while JB was at "St. Ronans" or, at least, all the facts were assimilated when he was there. Having traced local records through various stages, I feel that the house is one of a pair of semi-detached houses of Victorian vintage, gabled and numbered No. 71. The name has now disappeared and the house turned into flats. The house has three storeys and one can imagine JB having a good view of the sea and various happenings offshore throughout the day. The last chapter begins with Richard Hannay saying 'A pink and blue morning found me at Bradgate looking from The Griffin Hotel over a smooth sea to the lightship over the Cock sands, which seemed the size of a bell-buoy'. Bradgate and Bradstowe are the old names for Broadstairs, therefore the location is firmly fixed from the start. As far as the Griffin Hotel is concerned, the premier hotel in Broadstairs is The Royal Albion Hotel, established in 1905, and the only hotel of that calibre in the town. It is in a prominent position on the esplanade, its back rooms giving a first class view of the bay and right out to sea as far as the eye can see. From there one would certainly see the lightship which in 1913 was situated six miles offshore and flashed three times in quick succession with an eclipse of thirty six seconds. It would have been known in those days as the North Foreland light vessel, this having been confirmed by the UK Hyrographic Office at Taunton. It has since been replaced by electronic equipment. The Cock sands were undoubtedly the Goodwins. Next we come to Trafalgar Lodge, the house where the book ends with the capture of the Black Stone ring. This is certainly "St. Cuby" where Susan Buchan's cousin was staying. It is set above the cliff on the North Foreland, still a smart dwelling but again now turned into flats. Opposite the villa on the opposite side of the road above the cliff stands an iron gate leading down 101 concrete steps to a small private beach. It would appear that the original steps were wooden, and later replacements were metal, although the exact history is slightly obscure. It has been suggested that in Buchan's time there were 78 steps. Today, mainly due to local misuse, the gate is locked and the keys held by certain residents: after all they were, and still are, strictly private. The golf links, which Hannay mentions, are the Kingsgate links, some way from "St. Cuby" but very much in use today. The Ruff, I suggest, is behind the villas at Cliff Promenade at North Foreland Avenue. In other words, one or two of the locations in the book are used with justifiably artistic licence.

We are also told that Hannay went out fishing in a small boat in order to take a look at the yacht "Arreadnie". This is quite possible, for many small boats go out from Broadstairs and he could have gone out far enough to see such a craft of some 150 tons anchored offshore. From these facts comes the Broadstairs John Buchan Trail which, on a fine day, is interesting and informative. Starting at No. 71, Stone Road, on to "St. Cuby", down the steps (for I feel sure that permission would readily be granted) back along the bay to The Royal Albion Hotel.

In conclusion, I urge anyone who has not read "The Thirty Nine Steps" to do so, and then to read the other Hannay books, "Greenmantle", "Mr. Steadfast" and "The Three Hostages". I read recently that someone suggested that these books were outdated. Yes! perhaps, in very general terms, but they are some of the best books to come from the pen of an author who achieved much in many fields while finding the time to write books that have long been popular and which, I am sure, will last throughout the 21st century in the realms of classic literature.

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FORUM

From DEREK FORD:

DOTCOM... A paragraph in the *Times* told that Anthony Buckeridge – 88 on June 20th – was raring to dash off one more Jenning's book. But his publishers, Macmillan, had said that the genre was too dated for modern children. Later, however, he was signed up by Stratus to reissue all 24 of his Jennings books. On the subject of J.K. Rowling's OBE he is quoted as saying: "It's a bit over the top really, isn't it? When I was writing, honours didn't come into it. They were simply not given to children's authors." ...I never thought I would read E.C.R. Lorac's fourth novel *Death on the Oxford Road.* But I have, thanks to publishers Swallowtail's reprint. Lorac's 1933 first edition in mint condition (presumably uncut!) is quoted at £750 to £1,000 in a recent Book Collector bibliography. When I saw the "values" I thought of putting my few copies of the "old lady's" work in gilt frames and hanging them on the wall... Then I came across a story that a proof copy of the first Harry Potter book bought in a charity shop for 50p fetched £4,830 at auction. Published in 1997, the paperback proof was used to generate publicity and only 200 copies were thought to have been issued. You can't be very philosophical about that price... And there is no truth that the sales of HP sauce have boomed following Harry's initial success... D.C. Thomson should be dusting down their archives of story papers following all the hype. Paperbacks of Wilson and Tom Smith, to name only two, would, I am sure, appeal to a new generation of young readers... In America, Marvel and DC comic-book heroes have become subjects of films. Anthony Parsons' 1951 SBL case-book *The Millionaire's Nest Egg* would have made a cracking film. I wonder what your choice would have been... Sadly, the death of Michael Gilson, illustrator for the Eagle comic, was announced last month at the age of 81. He also wrote a successful series of boys' adventure stories... A Radio 4 week marked the 70th anniversary of the death of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in July 1930. SBL contributors in that month were S. Drew, L. Black, G.H. Teed, and M. Poole.

From BRIAN DOYLE:

I couldn't agree more with your editorial comments, and those of Derek Ford, in the July C.D., re Honours for children's authors.

The award of the OBE to J.K. Rowling is a joke. She's had enormous success with her first four Harry Potter books, of course, and congratulations to her. But an OBE already! As you say, it's so regrettable that Charles Hamilton, Richmal Crompton or Enid Blyton were never honoured, not to mention the splendid Anthony Buckeridge.

Children's writers and those who wrote some children's books among their adult titles, who were honoured have included: Noel Streatfield (OBE, 1983); Michael Bond (OBE, 1996); Arthur Ransome (CBE, 1953); Eric Linklater (CBE, 1954); Derek McCulloch ('Uncle Mac' and Director of BBC Children's Hour, 1938-50) (OBE, 1939); Walter De La Mare (OM, 1953, CG, 1948); John Masefield (Poet Laureate, 1930 until his death in 1967) (OM, 1935); Richard Hughes (OBE); and C.S. Lewis (Hon. Doctor of Divinity, St. Andrew's University).

P.G. Wodehouse didn't receive a Knighthood until 1975, when he was 93! And nothing before that...

Notable children's writers and artists who were *never* honoured include: E. Nesbit, Beatrix Potter, Malcolm Saville, Howard Spring, J.R.R. Tolkien, Elizabeth Goudge, Alison Uttley, A.A. Milne, Geoffrey Trease, Arthur Rackham, Kate Greenaway, E.H. Shepard, Edward Ardizzone, Randolph Caldecott and Leon Garfield.

Several people, including Sir Frederick Bowman, a distinguished member of the Merseyside OBBC (and a one-time boys' writer himself) tried to recommend an Honour for Charles Hamilton during the 1950s and after, without success. Even an attempt to get him – and Billy Bunter – on one of the recent postage-stamps depicting famous children's authors and their characters, met with no success.

Of course we must remember that some people aren't interested in accepting Honours and Awards, for personal and political reasons. I could (but won't!) name at least four well-known actors who have refused Knighthoods in recent years, because they weren't interested. And it's quite well-known that such authors as Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw and J.B Priestley also turned down knighthoods and peerages. There are doubtless others we don't know abut...and (according to his biography) Roald Dahl refused the offer of an OBE in the 1980s.

But it's about time that well-loved children's authors were honoured and officially appreciated and it's good that you have drawn attention to this matter in the 'SPCD'...

On another matter now, if I may, and that is Richard Hannay (who *did* get a knighthood!), and Buchan's 'The Thirty-Nine Steps', which Tony Cook wrote about so entertainingly in last month's C.D. Those original 39 wooden steps at Broadstairs, leading down through the cliffs to a private beach, have long-since been replaced by an iron staircase. When it was built, Buchan and his wife were sent a small block of wood purporting to be one of the old, original steps – it bore a small brass plate bearing the words 'The Thirty-Ninth Step'...

There are various other versions of how Buchan thought up 'the 39 steps' title, but I won't take up space by summarising them all here. Not even the one that there were (and are – just!) 39 steps leading up to the Royal Box at Wembley Stadium, which the players in the Cup Final climb to receive their medals and (if the winners!) the Cup. Or even the '39 Articles of Religion' from the 16th Century...

As Tony Cook says there have been three film versions of the story. Alfred Hitchcock's version in 1935 was written (or rather re-written) by Charles Bennett and Alma Reville (Hitchcock's wife) and ran for only 81 minutes. Hitchcock had originally wanted to make 'Greenmantle', another of Buchan's novels, but then had to settle on 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' due to budget reasons. Madeleine Carroll co-starred with Robert Donat, of course, and there were women in the later version (Taina Elg and Karen Dotrice) – but there were virtually no women in the book.

In that first cinematic version, the climactic scene in the theatre has 'Mr. Memory' (played by Wylie Watson) say: 'The Thirty-Nine Steps in an organisation of spies' (yet another explanation of the Steps!). His final words, before he dies in Donat's arms are: 'Thank you. I'm glad it's off my mind at last.' And they are the final words of the film...

The 1935 film departed from the original story more than once. It is said that John Buchan sat through the entire picture at the London premiere, explaining: 'I want to discover what happens in the end!'

The two later re-makes (1959, with Kenneth More, and 1978, with Robert Powell, who subsequently starred as Hannay in an excellent TV series of different Hannay

adventures) were both very entertaining and well-done. My personal favourite is the Kenneth More one, for various reasons I won't expound on here... but perhaps in a later C.D.?

From TED BALDOCK:

I have just received the July issue of the C.D. It is, as ever, top form. I particularly like the reproductions of the dear old papers we so enjoyed in our youth and I always scrutinize them for the date. That of the 'Schoolgirl' on last month's CD cover was an issue during 1935. That year is as clear – and near – to me as this morning's newspaper. Yet surely it was a part of some other dimension! I recall vividly those long, lovely carefree summer days of the mid-thirties when we were all so young and impressionable. When nothing seemed beyond our reach.

That it was a tumultuous decade with disturbing undertones and portents was sadly only too true. But to us youngsters it was a golden age, although I recall it being for myself and my friends not a terribly affluent time. Yet there was so much we could – and did – do with relatively little outlay. Also we were viewing life through the eyes of youth and perhaps saw only the brighter side of events.

Looking back one now sees just how important a part of our enjoyment of life came from the weekly papers we eagerly devoured.

For instance, what a debt we owe to Charles Hamilton. He was, many agree, producing his very best work at this time – and how we enjoyed and appreciated it. In the process of time, values change, but we can remain faithful and constant to those great writers of the early 20th century who – in my humble opinion – stand out even clearly than many contemporary authors.

From DES O'LEARY:

I was interested in your backing of Derek Ford's suggestion of awarding honours to famous children's writers. I am not sure that I agree. I do not think that the likes of Blyton, Richards, Crompton, Johns and Buckeridge would gain anything by it. Specific literary prizes, maybe. The Nobel Prize for literature is useful to reward various countries' favourite sons or daughters. But, when you look at the list of those prize-winners, you are often faced with a reaction of "who"? And while Britain would certainly boast a number of winners, (I have quoted to you before my German friends' envy and enjoyment of the great store of children's writing in English) frenzied disputes about distinguished Finnish or Moroccan or other authors would arise – a certainty in my opinion – and muddy the waters of real quality. The result would be chaotic.

If we settled for national awards, then the past record of knighthoods and O.B.E.s, not to mention lordships, would hardly inspire confidence. I think that the love of their readers and the passage of time will eventually sort out writers' real quality.

I remember Alan Clark of 'Golden Fun' trying to organize a campaign among his readers to demand an honour for Reg Parlett, that excellent comic artist. No result as far as I know, but it will make no difference in the long run, in my opinion. Much more valuable was Alan's contribution to honouring our writers and artists in his magazine and publications.

With a very quick 'skim' of the July C.D., I liked Brian Doyle's article on 'Little folks'. In common with Bill Bradford I do like to see information about publications or

authors about which I know little. Tony Cook on 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' caught my attention and I look forward to seeing further information in succeeding C.D.s (Wasn't there an error on page 30, however? Buchan could hardly sell the film rights in *1943* when Hitchcock's film was made in 1935.) And I always enjoy seeing anything by J.E.M.

As I implied earlier, the articles you publish – not to mention your books – are the true tribute to our great authors and artists, and they will supply future critics or historians with essential information and contemporary reactions and opinions.

From DARRELL SWIFT:

I think many of us would agree with our Editor's introduction to the July edition of the C.D. in that none of us is averse to awards being given to people.

The Harry Potter books are very popular, despite what some may wish to think. Despite criticisms, they are bringing the printed word to children who are reading again – and in many cases, adults too.

Still, for someone who has written only four of the books to receive an award is quite an achievement. Mary's comments that it appears a shame other authors have not received such an accolade is very relevant. Anthony Buckeridge, at 88 years of age, is still youthful in his outlook and has a very active mind. He is perhaps the only living author of our most popular childhood books, and as he has had the Jennings books translated into a number of languages – and Jennings films made in Norway – it seems fitting that he should receive an award. May I suggest that readers of the C.D. commend his name to Downing Street?

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MORE OBB LISTS COMPILED BY BRIAN DOYLE

Brian Doyle's personal choice of the ten best Boys' School Stories ever written (all hard-covers and excluding Charles Hamilton, E.S. Brooks and some adult novels):

MIKE (P.G. Wodehouse)
THE COMPLETE HUMAN BOY (Eden Phillpotts) (Omnibus ed. of 5 books)
THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE (Harold Avery)
THE SHORT TERM AT GREYMINSTER (Hylton Cleaver)
GRIM WORK AT BODLANDS (Gunby Hadath)
THE SECRET OF THE CODE (Gunby Hadath)
THE GLORY OF GREYSTONE (J.L. Roberts)
THE REASEDALE SCHOOL MYSTERY (David L. Smith)
YOUTH, YOUTH! (Desmond Coke) short stories
THE FIFTH FORM AT ST. DOMINIC'S (Talbot Baines Reed)

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NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Because of the launch of the latest Harry Potter Book and the National Love Dance Festival taking place in Leeds on our meeting day of 8th July, we had to cancel our get-together at Borders Bookshop in central Leeds. Geoffrey and Vera Good kindly let us use their home in Wakefield. Ten people attended and we were pleased to welcome Tristram Johnson making his first visit.

Joan spoke on the success of the Jennings Meeting held two weeks previously in Lewes, Sussex. We had 35 attending and were delighted to have Anthony Buckeridge (our Northern Club vice-president) and his wife Eileen as our guests. We have already planned our next meeting to be in Lewes, on 16th June, 2001.

Ten people will be having a pre-theatre dinner on Saturday, 12th July and then attending Leeds Grand Theatre for a play by Frances Durbridge.

Further plans were made for our Golden Jubilee Celebration to take place on Saturday, 14th October. We should be delighted to welcome members from other clubs.

After lots of chat and relaxation in Geoffrey's splendid library, we settled down to watch videos again loaned by John Wernham and, as a special treat, to view items sent to us by Gerald Campion.

Special thanks to Vera for the superb refreshments – we all left having enjoyed a splendid evening.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

LONDON O.B.B.C. REPORT

Loughton was the venue for the July meeting of the London O.B.B.C., for which a large number of members were in attendance.

A variety of entertainments were on offer. These included Derek Hinrich's paper on great smugglers of the past, "A Very Honest Thief", two audio quizzes from Roger Coombes, a comic and story-paper quiz from Norman Wright, Bill Bradford's ever-popular "Memory Lane" and Mary Cadogan's recording of "Distant Voices": favourite authors speaking about their work.

VIC PRATT

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JENNINGS BREAKS THE RECORD: SEVEN MORE PLAYS FOR RADIO by Anthony Buckeridge. Illustrated by Val Biro. Published by David Schutte, 119 Sussex Road, Petersfield, Hants., GU31 4LB. (£12.00 plus postage). Reviewed by Mary Cadogan

This second volume of Jennings radio plays, which were first produced on *Children's Hour* in the late 1940s, will be welcomed by collectors. Like the first volume (*Jennings Sounds the Alarm)* it offers plenty of wit and humour as well as dialogue which lifts naturalistically off the page. I particularly enjoyed 'Jennings and the Present for Matron' which shows Jennings and Derbishire in characteristic well-meaning but misfiring fashion anarchically fulfilling some cherished plans.

Every one of the plays provides nostalgic delights which are enhanced by Val Biro's full colour cover picture and his black and white line illustrations inside the book.

The cast-lists of the original radio productions are included, and it is good to be thus reminded of actors such as Wilfred Babbage, Laidman Browne, Preston Lockwood and Norman Shelley who played so great a part in the old days of radio drama. Each play is preceded by a letter supposedly written by Jennings to David Davis of *Children's Hour.* These letters were read on air by David as trailers for the plays.

Michael Crick has provided an informative introduction which stresses that, in addition to offering nostalgic satisfactions, these plays (and the Jennings stories) are relevant to the children of today. As he says: 'The tragedy is that only one or two of the original BBC recordings of these plays survive. Now at least with this book, and the previous volume compiled by David Schutte, they can again be brought to life, in classrooms and drama groups.' And, of course, in the imaginations of those who buy and read this excellent book...

REPORT BY ANDREW PITT OF THE JENNINGS MEETING held on 17th June at the White Hart Hotel, Lewes, Sussex

This was organized by Darrell Swift of the Northern Old Boys' Book Club who was his usual cheerful, efficient and colourful self. The meeting was well attended and Anthony and Eileen Buckeridge were, of course, the guests of honour whose presence was very much appreciated.

Jonathan Cooper gave a lively talk on *Food in the Jennings Books.* Darrell outlined his trip to New Zealand to meet Diamuid Jennings, the namesake of Anthony's celebrated character. David Bathurst gave an enjoyable reading entitled *Jennings Out of School.*

Florian Faust had come over from Germany just for the meeting. He had read the books in German and had later mastered them in English, in which the difficulties of translation were apparent. Jennings's awful puns in the English language are quite difficult to translate. Florian mentioned that in Germany there were not groups of nostalgic adults who remembered their childhood books. This seems a pity.

David Schutte played a recording of a radio play in which, apparently, a young Jeremy Clarkson appeared as one of the boys. The man next to me asked who was Jeremy Clarkson – a very proper view of the world!

Apart from Buckeridge himself, the unexpected star was Val Biro who has, of course, illustrated the two volumes of Jennings radio plays recently published by David

Schutte. Somehow I had not expected an illustrator to be so eloquent. Val is now more English than the English. He described some illustrations which Florian had brought from Germany as 'very continental'. He most movingly described how, after coming to this country at the age of seventeen, he had difficulty in working out the English: as his only saleable skill was drawing, he listened in the afternoons to the wireless as he worked, and among the programmes he heard were the Jennings radio plays. He commented that a nation's approach to life is often summed up in its humour. Val said many complimentary things about Anthony and his work.

Anthony then read an extract from one of the stories with great gusto. This was so much appreciated that Darrell asked if he would read another piece, which Anthony did, to the relish and delight of his audience.

At the end of the meeting we all sang 'Happy Birthday' to Anthony. After this excellent fourth Jennings Meeting, a further one is planned for June 2001.

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MEN OF YESTERYEAR by Ted Baldock

Oh small round, well-packed leathern ball.
Oh best of summer games.
What happy days we all recall,
What records fate acclaims.
Where now the bat with rubber grip
Which caused the fielders' gloom,
With bated breath the minutes slip,
They'll draw the wickets soon.
Where are the 'men' of yesteryear,
That stalwart, happy throng
Who faced the onslaught without fear
And proved the critics wrong?
Wingate with his forward drive,
Blundell with his 'cut'
We knew that Greyfriars would survive
As they bring up the 'ruck'.
High scores in those halcyon days
Were thick upon the ground,
To certain players memory strays,
Now, where may they be found?
Fighting battles o'er again,
Nursing ancient joints,
To this we come – can this be fame?
Here now we see the point.
For in our minds we live once more
The great – the glory days,
In doing so we touch the core
And act out Greyfriars ways.
The later years are marching by,
And limbo claims the days,
Those early times we'll not decry,
They shaped our life and ways.

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GEMS OF HAMILTONIA from Pete Hanger

Bunter liked the seaside! But he was not keen on bathing, or swimming, or boating, or cliff-climbing! Sitting in the grass on the cliffs and scoffing tuck from a well packed basket was Bunter's idea of a really enjoyable time at the seaside.

Even Bunter, of course, could not go on eating for ever – though he could keep it up for a remarkably long time. But he could generally go on as long as there was anything to eat. After that, a fellow could stretch himself in the grass with his hat over his face, and sleep. What more could any fellow want to make him completely happy at the seaside. *MAGNET* 1489

But Bunter's possessions in the financial line were limited to one penny; which was still in his possession because it was a French penny, and nobody would take it from Bunter as legal tender.

Bunter, in a burst of generosity, had nearly given that dix-centime piece to a blind beggar on one occasion – Bunter could be charitable. But he had prudently reflected that the French penny, though not legal tender, might be used in an automatic machine when no eye was upon him; and therefore it still reposed in his pocket. Swindling an automatic chocolate machine was not a matter to weighed heavily on Bunter's conscience – his fat conscience had much more serious matters than that to deal with, if it ever got active. *MAGNET* 1059

Harold had no eye for scenery. He was taking a rest – his career being one of successive rests.

Mr. Hinks was one of those men born with a natural disinclination to work. Under happier auspices he might have been a Cabinet Minister, or an ornament of the diplomatic Service. But, as a matter of sad fact, he was a tramp. *MAGNET* 1325

"I say you fellows, it's old Prout!" came Billy Bunter's squeak.

Mr. Prout gave a breathless grunt. 'Old Prout' was not a term applicable to him.

Besides being disrespectful, it was incorrect. Prout was not old. He had reached ripe years. Mentally and physically, he was ripe – fully ripe. But he was not old, perhaps a little over-ripe, but certainly not old. *MAGNET* 1237

If there was anything the Remove master disliked more than an interview with a parent, it was being rung up on the telephone by a parent. Parents, of course, were necessary evils in the life of a schoolmaster. They were a worry, but a worry that had to be tolerated somehow. Obviously, without parents, there would be no pupils, and without pupils a schoolmaster's occupation, like Othello's, would be gone – so parents had to be borne with as much equanimity as possible.

But Mr. Quelch's considered opinion was that there ought to be a limit. Parents ought to be satisfied with regular interviews and regular reports. They ought not to ring up a form master on the telephone. And even if parents did, uncles ought to draw the line. Parents were enough – if not too much. Uncles were entirely superfluous. Mr. Quelch's leisure hours were scanty. He had little time for parents. He had none at all for avuncular relatives. *MAGNET* 1135

...A rebel is generally a would-be tyrant, just as a tyrant is one who, in other circumstances, would be a rebel. The romantic rebel who seeks only to establish the reign of freedom and equality is an entertaining figure in fiction, but has very seldom existed outside fiction. Once in power the rebel has always been found a sterner tyrant than one born in the purple. *MAGNET* 1007

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