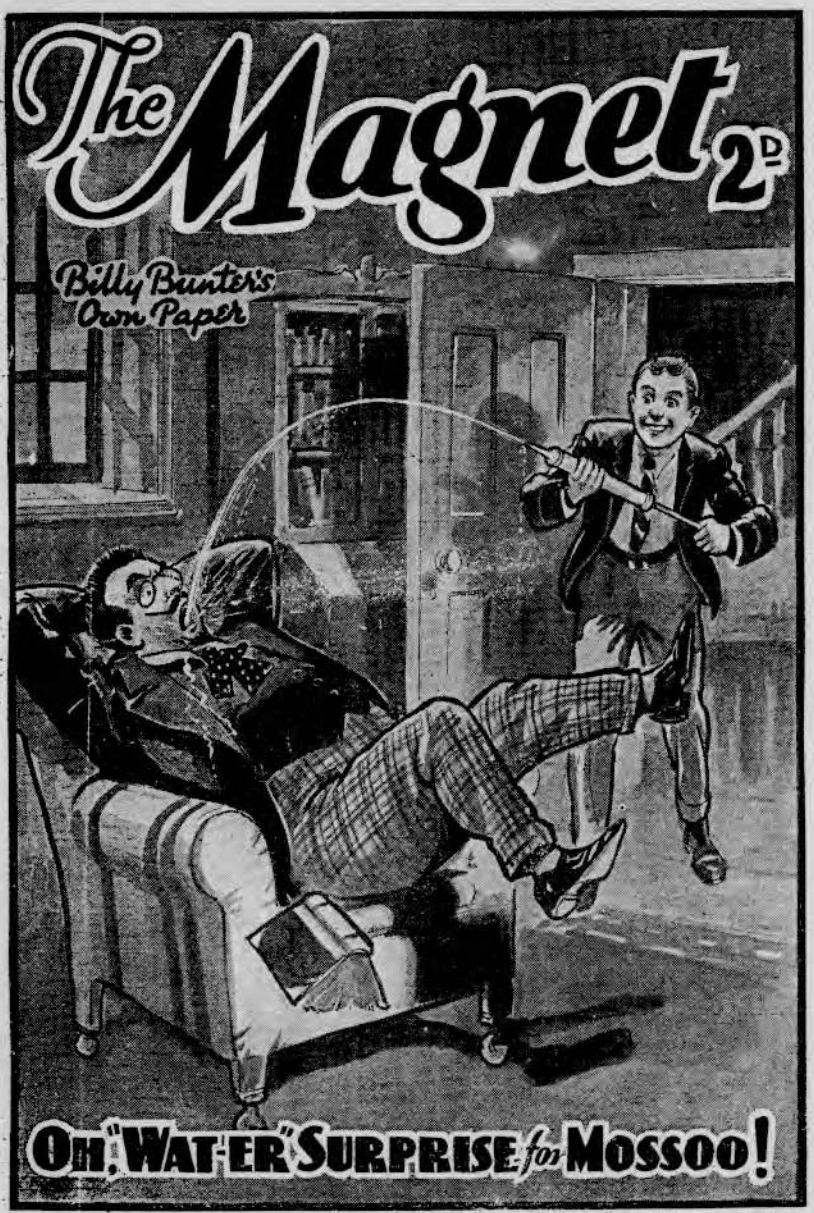
STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST
VOL. 55 No. 651 SEPTEMBER 2001



The Northern Old Boys' Book Club

Presents its Annual Lunch at **The Ascot Grange Hotel,** Headingley, Leeds - on Saturday, 13th October, 2001.

Guest Speaker after lunch:

Professor Jeffrey Richards of Lancaster University
Whose subject will be: *Lancashire Stars of Screen and Radio*

The meeting will take place after lunch at the hotel and not at our usual evening venue in the centreof Leeds.
For the evening, it is proposed that those who wish to do so, may attend the world famous *Leeds City Varieties* to see ***The Good Old Days***

Further information from: Darrell Swift, 37, Tinshill Lane, Leeds LS16 6BU
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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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THE EDITOR'S CHAT

Richmal Crompton and William: I have organised a small Richmal Crompton exhibition at a local library (Southborough Lane, the branch nearest to Richmal's Bromley Common Home) which will run from September 18th for four weeks. It is primarily for children and I shall be speaking there about Richmal and William to classes from local schools as well as to parents and teachers. There are to be competitions for children for which Macmillan are generously giving prizes.

C.D. readers may like to know that, to coincide with the exhibition, the Lilburne Press asked me to write the text for a 32-page booklet *Richmal Crompton and her Bromley Connections*. This has a coloured card cover and a wealth of photographs. It will retail at £4.95 but the publisher will make it available to C.D. readers at the special concessionary price of £3.95, which will also include postage and packing, so long as they mention the *Collectors' Digest* when ordering. The address is Lilburne Press, 1 Dover House, Maple Road, London SE20 8EN.

Christmas Publications: We all know that Frank Richards was a prolific letter writer and I have a collection of letters that he sent over a period of several years to a fan who became a friend. Around Christmas-time, to mark the 40th anniversary of Frank Richards' passing on December 24th, the Museum Press will publish this collection of extremely interesting, sometimes amusing and sometimes touching letters. The next issue of the C.D. will contain full details and an order form. Una Hamilton Wright has written an introduction for this book.

This Year's Annual: We are now in that season of anticipating our Christmas Annual and, as you will see, an order form is enclosed in this issue. It is very helpful to me and to the printer to receive orders early and your co-operation in this would be much appreciated. Further contributions are also required – especially some which are not too lengthy! Please let me have these as soon as possible – by the third week in October at the latest!

Happy reading, MARY CADOGAN

* *

THE DISCOVERY OF CHARLES H. CHAPMAN

by Bob Whiter

They weren't quite the same as the good old *Magnet*, or for that matter the reprints in the monthly *Schoolboys' Own Library* – not to mention the good old *Holiday Annual* – how we used to look forward to that at Christmas time!

But they were still good, and they helped to fill the void that seven years without "Billy Bunter's Own Paper" had left. I am of course referring to the Bunter Books that were first published by Charles Skilton. There was really only one thing that was wrong. Whereas nobody could argue that R.J. Macdonald wasn't a good illustrator – he was – especially when drawing

the masters and boys of St. Jim's; indeed Eric Fayne used to say nobody could draw a boy in Etons as well as old Mac. – but – Let's face it, he just wasn't right for Greyfriars!

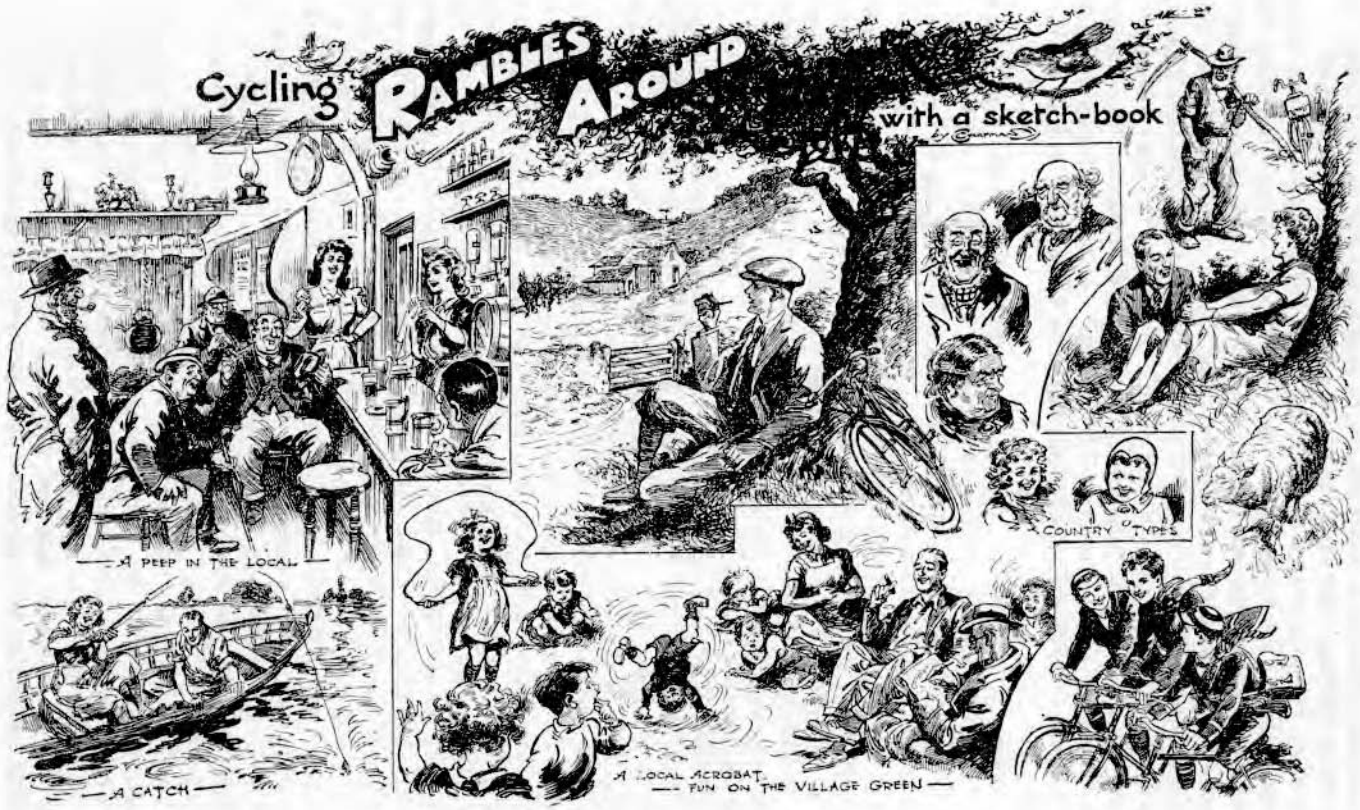
For one thing, he never seemed to get Bunter's hair right; especially when viewed from the rear: example - the colour plate in the 1938 *Holiday Annual* illustrating "The Holiday Annual Beano". It looks as though Bunter is wearing a wig! But what could be done? Leonard Shields, arguably one of the best of the old A.P. artists, had died in 1945, and C.H. Chapman possibly the most well known illustrator of the Greyfriars saga, was also assumed to have "shuffled off this mortal coil". In view of this last remark, I was agreeably surprised to find a set of line drawings occupying half a page of "The Bicycle", a magazine I took in regularly, together with "cycling". As most collectors probably know, my trade was a bicycle-maker and it behoved me to keep abreast with all the latest developments.

I kept looking at the drawings, although not signed, I was certain they were by "Chappie". Could it be that the editor had found some old drawings and used them? I determined to find out and wrote a letter to Mr. Began the editor; he like a good soul forwarded it to Mr. Chapman. To my great joy in a few days, I received the first of many letters from the artist himself. He said that although 70 years old he was still an ardent cyclist. I did not more, and sent him copies of the *Collector's Digest* – he really sounded interested and before long he invited me to come and see him. He stated he was free on Saturdays – so I had to find someone to take care of my business. I was lucky and found an old friend who agreed to help me out. Feeling very excited and with a song in my heart, I boarded the train to Caversham.

What a wonderful welcome this dapper little man gave me. The walls of his house were hung with landscapes and characters from Dickens. He was very happy to be remembered by so many people. I told him he had to attend one of our Old Boys' Book Club meetings, as so many collectors would love to meet him.

He was also very patient – I really bombarded him with questions. I learned he and Leonard Shields had been very close and he showed me many original drawings from the *Magnet*, both cover and inside illustrations – these were some I had difficulty in telling who the artist was. It turned out that sometimes "Chappie" would finish an unfinished drawing by Shields. My cup really ran over when he gave me some drawings to take away – how I wish I had them now. Before leaving the U.K. for the U.S., I gave them to several friends – several of whom have now departed – I often wonder who has them now. While we were talking, one of his sisters brought us in tea and cakes – talk about tea in Study No. 1! As soon as I reached home, I wrote to Charles Skilton and informed him, that Charles Chapman was still alive and would love to illustrate the Bunter Books. It was another day to be marked with a stone, when on the 17th June 1951, I met "Chappie" at Paddington Station and accompanied him to my house in Wood Green in time for the book club meeting. It was a joy to see the look on the club members' faces as I took them up to the room where the meeting was to be held – and introduced them to him.

As a memento, he drew a picture of Harry Wharton on the flyleaf of my 1929 *Holiday Annual*, it's one of my most treasured possessions. Whenever he could "Chappie" would attend the meetings, the venues including Brighton, Woodingdean and Surbiton. At another meeting at my house I borrowed a blackboard (or should I say chalkboard) from my old school. Complete with easel, "Chappie" stood there and as the members called out their favourite characters, he drew them! I realised later that I should



From "The Bicycle" 1950.

have provided a large sheaf of paper for him to have drawn on – the drawings could have been saved – as it was he rubbed out each preceding drawing to make space for the next. The members at the meetings would sit enthralled when this wonderful old man would regale us all with the reminiscences. How he'd had his first drawing, professionally speaking, accepted by *The Captain* in 1900.

This was followed with regular contributions to *Chips, Comic Cuts, Jester, Penny Pictorial* and *Boys' Friend.* Later on his work appeared in the *Daily Graphic, The Scout, Big Budget, Marvel, Pluck, Boys Herald, B.O.P.* and *Chums* and of course *Aly Sloper.* But 1911 was the year he really remembered, as this was when he joined the staff of the *Magnet* and he always reckoned the following years were among his happiest. These lasted until, as he put it "The great blow" came on June 14th, 1940 – I was given a month's holiday, and said goodbye to all my friends at the *Magnet* office, including Maurice Down, R.J. Macdonald, Len Shields, Hedley O'Mant and the others with whom I had worked so happily for so long.

Although he is no longer with us, I am sure he will always be remembered, apart from being an English gentleman, also for the great joy his artistry gave to the many thousands to whom he was, with the possible exception of Len Shields, THE *Magnet* artist.

THE ILLUSTRATOR

To
'Chapman'
from
Frank Richards

When the workshop is ordered and still
And the dust of the craftsman at rest;
May some generous soul find a will
To seek and value his best.

From the struggles and hopes that deceived
And the wonders he quite meant to do;
From the glories he nearly achieved
And the big dreams that nearly came true.

If, in vain, as time sweeps all away
And no laurel from all his work springs,
Then 'tis enough should a kindly soul say
He tried to draw suitable things.

* *

I REMEMBER

by Bill Bradford

I remember the BOYS CINEMA published by Amalgamated Press, every Tuesday, priced 2d. from 13.12.1919 till 18.5.1940, a total of 1063 issues, initially of 32 pages, reduced to 28 on 27.7.1935 and to only 24 by 1940, final issues down to 20 pages. For many years it contained 2 complete stories of current films on release, plus 1 or 2 that were serialised, usually 'B' Westerns. All were well illustrated by 'stills' and the covers were very eye-catching and an indication to the main featured film.

As a boy my love of the cinema was second only to that of my weekly boys' papers. Most of you cannot visualise a life without TV but I assure you that 'movies' played a vital part in the lives of my generation. I can just about recall the last of the 'silents', including a belated showing of 'THE GOLD RUSH', and a very early talkie about a murder on a cruise liner. I can recall where I saw it (LIDO-W.Ealing) but not the actual title.

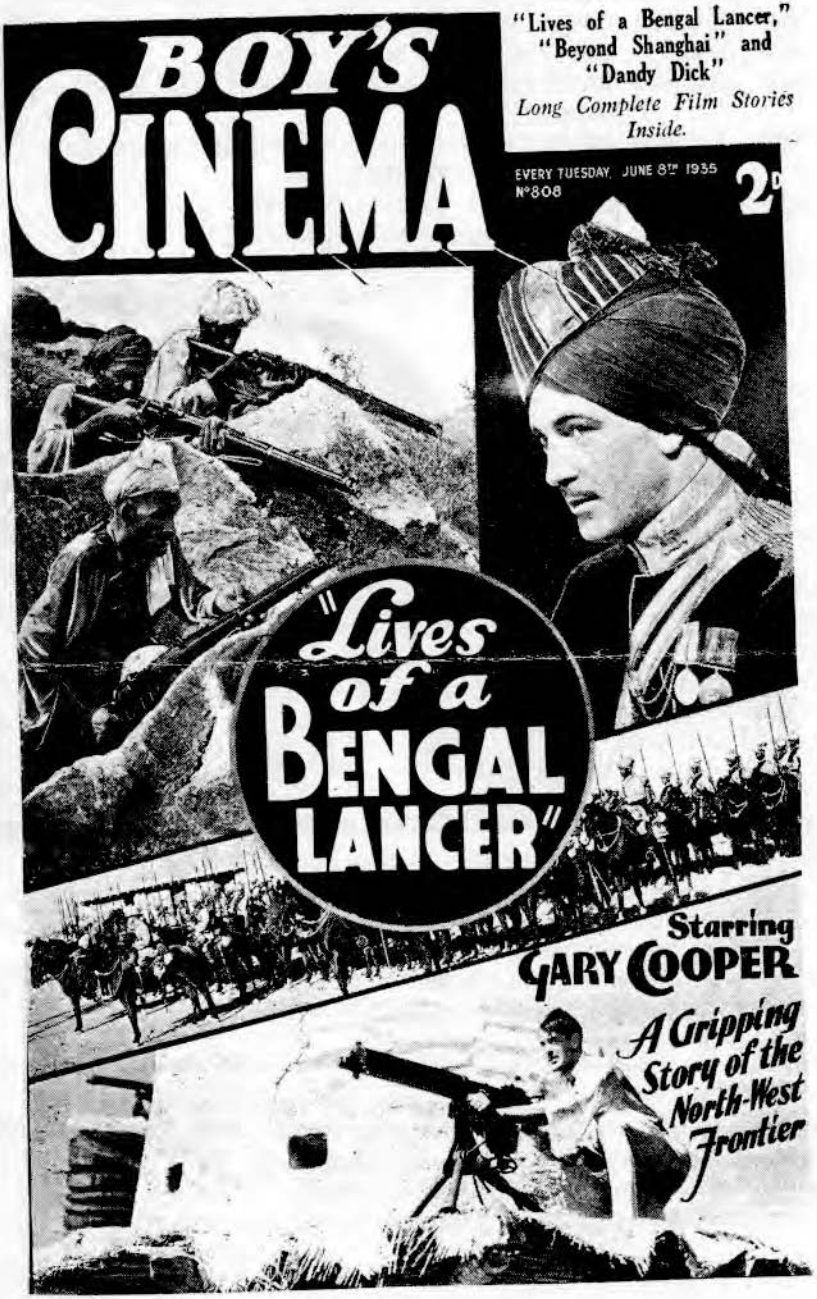
In the 1930s I probably went to the 'flicks' about twice a week. We had 6 cinemas in Ealing, notably an Odeon, an ABC(Associated British Cinemas). The admission for kids was sixpence, that is about 2½p current coinage. The main problem was in finding an adult to take you in, if it was an 'A' film for which you needed to be 16.

Sometime in the mid 1930s I discovered BOYS CINEMA which I only bought if I had particularly enjoyed the main featured film. Of the few copies I bought none have survived but in recent years I have purchased such issues as I have come across, unfortunately nothing prior to 1935. Most reference books seem to completely ignore BOYS CINEMA, apart from the Lofts/Adley OLD BOYS BOOKS. It may have been aimed at a slightly older schoolboy (12-15) but it was definitely a boys paper, so why the omissions in many lists?

Anyway this item is not as informative as one might have wished but I will try and give you a taste from the few issues I possess. It would take too long to list the entire contents of each so I will just indicate the main featured film plus stars, the latter being our main reason for choosing the film.

(2)

No	804	11.5.1935	SANDERS OF THE RIVER (Leslie Banks & Paul Robeson)
	806	8.6.1935	LIVES OF A BENGAL LANCER (Gary Cooper & Franchot Tone)
	812	6.7.1935	DEVIL DOGS OF THE AIR (James Cagney & Pat O'Brien)
	820	31.8 1935	THE PEOPLE'S ENEMY (Preston Foster & Melvyn Douglas)
	822	14.9.1935	MURDER IN THE FLEET. (Robert Taylor)
	823	21.9.1935	G MEN (James Cagney)
	824	28.9.1935	FRONT PAGE WOMAN (Bette Davis & George Brent)
	829	2.11.1935	BOYS WILL BE BOYS (Will Hay). Plus pocket microscope & first of 7 photographic plates.
	831	16.11.1935	CHINA SEAS (Clark Gable & Wallace Beery)
	833	30.11.1935	THE NITWITS (Wheeler & Woolsey)
	835	14.12.1935	THE ARIZONIAN (Richard Dix)


BOY'S
CINEMA
"Lives of a Bengal Lancer,"
"Beyond Shanghai" and
"Dandy Dick"
Long Complete Film Stories
Inside.
EVERY TUESDAY. JUNE 8th 1935
N°808
2D
"Lives of a BENGAL LANCER"
Starring
GARY COOPER
A Gripping Story of the North-West Frontier

859	30. 5.1936	A TALE OF TWO CITIES (Ronald Colman)
885	28.11.1936	THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (Randolph Scott)
900	13. 3.1937	FIRE OVER ENGLAND (Laurence Olivier & Vivien Leigh)
904	10.4.1937	GOOD MORNING BOYS (Will Hay)
1061	13.4.1940	BAND WAGON (ARTHUR ASKEY & RICHARD MURDOCH)
1064	4.5.1940	DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK (Henry Fonda & CLAUDETTE COLBERT)
1035	14.10.1940	BEAU GESTE (GARY COOPER) (Now incorporating MODERN BOY)
1066	18.5.1940	CONTRABAND (Conrad Veidt) LAST ISSUE

I suppose this contribution would be incomplete without reference to BOYS CINEMA ANNUALS, also published by Amalgamated Press between 1932-1939 at 3/6d. These consisted of 160 pages of usually 8 film stories, numerous articles and photo plates of the stars. All are now highly collectable, especially 1939 with the Errol Flynn version of ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD featured on the cover and 14 pages of the story, with memorable film pictures within. This is followed by 4 pages devoted to the life and films of Flynn. This annual was resurrected after the war, not listed by Lofts/Adley but I have the annuals for 1947-1951, still 160 pages, initially at 7/6d but 1951 at 6/6d.

I regret that my knowledge of this publication is so limited but hope some of the film titles and stars may bring happy memories to fellow 'wrinklies'.

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SECRET SOCIETIES, PHANTOMS AND GHOSTS IN THE *SGOL*, *COMPANION PAPERS* AND *ANNUALS* OF THE 1950s

by Dawn Marler

Secret Societies, Phantoms and Ghosts in the *SGOLs* and their companion papers and annuals are of the Gothic genre but, they were not only Gothic, they also had about them strong hints of the detective genre, which has a number of avenues.

The detective theme was there throughout these publications and some of these stories were reissued later in the *SGPL* and the *Princess and School Friend Picture Libraries*. They were written during the Golden Era of the Detective and Mystery stories: the solving of a mystery, a wrong being put right, and the finding of the truth. Many authors were climbing aboard the Detective bandwagon during this time such as Agatha Christie, Patricia Wentworth, Margery Allingham, and numerous others, Agatha Christie being the Queen of them all. However, it is not of the Detective genre itself that I want to talk, although I shall be touching on it. It is the Secret Societies and the Phantom stories that are my main consideration here. Why were they formed by their creators? What was their aim and purpose?

The Amalgamated Press introduced these Societies into their popular Girls' fiction at a very early stage. The first one appeared in the earlier *School Friend* during the 1920s, in the third form at Cliff House School, this could have been just an experiment because they did not appear again in the *School Friend* nor the *Schoolgirl* until the early 1930s when Barbara Redfern and her friends formed the "Society of Justice" for the purpose of combat

with the headmistress who was a tyrant. They made and donned long dark robes and hoods, like the robes of a Monk, with masks covering the upper part of their faces, so hiding their identification.

Another Secret Society appeared in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* during the 1930s, known as the "Silent Six". Their aim was to deal with unpleasant characters rather than the true criminal. They, like Barbara and Co., wore the dark robes, hoods and masks; they looked rather sinister, and certainly Gothic; this was their aim and purpose, to put real fear into the trouble makers, and they certainly did. On one occasion, Valerie Drew, the well known girl detective, joined the "Silent Six" and worked with them to clear another girl of blame. This was in "Valerie Leads the Silent Six". This seems to be the only time a detective was involved with the Secret Societies.

There were a number of other stories involving Secret Societies in the first series of the *School Friend*' in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* and *Girls' Crystal*. Two such stories appeared in the *Schoolgirls' Own* in 1935 and 1936: "The Morcove Secret Society", but not a very nice group; they were a vindictive group displaying an unpleasant side in the Fourth Form at Morcove School. The other story, "The Crimson Shadows", was really a re-run of the "Silent Six" stories from the *Schoolgirls' Weekly*.

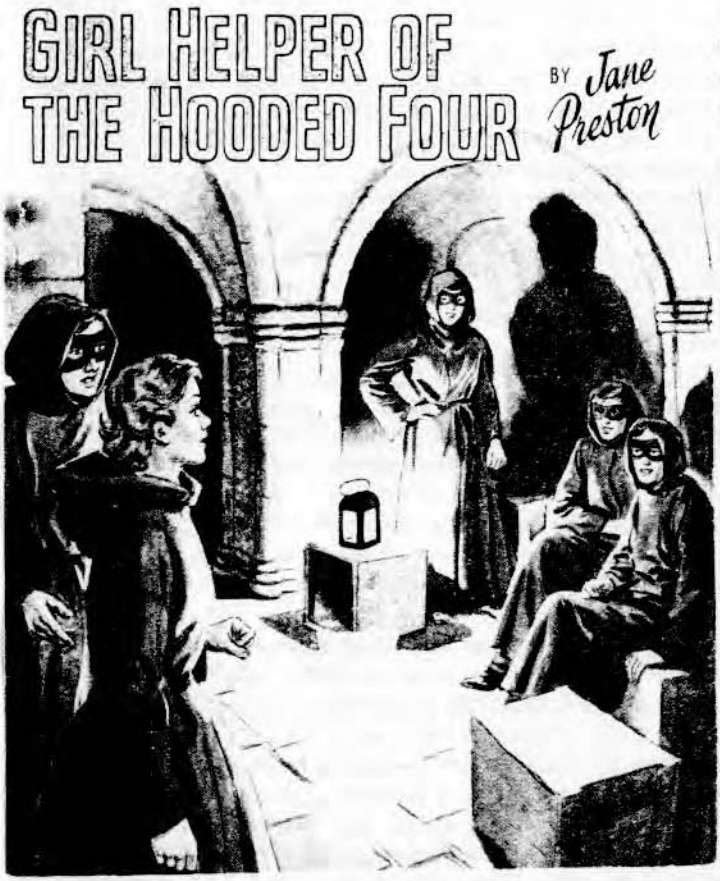
The most famous secret society formed within the pages of the *School Friend* and the *School Friend Annual* during the 1950s was the Silent Three, a Schoolgirl Society. The stories were told in picture-strips, with one story in prose form. Behind each story lay a moral: a wrong put right and the real culprit brought to justice. The Society was first formed at St. Kit's School where the three girls were pupils, Betty Roland being No. 1, and the founder of the group; her two chums, Joan and Peggy, were Nos. 2 and 3 respectively. It was the start of a new term. The previous term Betty had been expelled for theft on the evidence of Cynthia, a prefect. Betty knew that she had been wrongfully accused and with the help of her friends she was going to prove her innocence and expose the crooked prefect. It was because of this that the "Silent Three" was founded. Through their success their fame gradually grew and they had numerous adventures in many places after St. Kit's. There were similarities in each of their cases, yet each case was different in the motives of the crook or crooks, clues and situations. In each case the culprit was exposed and the innocent victim's name cleared. (The trio who created the Silent Three were the *School Friend's* Editor, Stewart Pride, author Horace (Enid) Boyton and artist Evelyn Flinders.)

The founding of the "Silent Three" began the trend in the post war girls' papers for "The Secret Three and the Masked Cavalier", by Sheila Austin (Stanley Austin), *SGOL* No. 192; and "Three Make a Vow", by Elise Probyn (J.E. McKibbin) *SGOL* No. 345; Phantom and Ghost stories.

"The Secret Three and the Masked Cavalier", which first appeared in the *Girls' Crystal* in 1952, was a more basic story. This Secret society was formed to fight the unknown enemy who was threatening their own Pageant-Play. This Society was formed at Abbotsreed School for one purpose only. They did not appear again nor were they found anywhere else. The same may be said for two other secret societies: "Thee Make a Vow", they called themselves the "Hooded Helpers". They were involved in a similar case that, more than once, had faced the Silent Three; to right a grievous wrong, to see justice done, and to prove the innocence of their friend. Here there is a similarity to the Silent Three's first case at St. Kit's. "Secret Friends of the Speedgirl", by Gail Western

(C. Eaton Fearn), *SGOL* No. 44; *CG* 1938, was another similar Secret Society story. Three girls called themselves the "Secret Three", to help their speedgirl friend to smash Esther's reign of terror, and to see justice done. Not unlike the cases dealt with by the "Silent Three", but this "Secret Three" were not heard about again.

Phantom stories appeared in the *SGOL*, some originating in the *Girls' Crystal*, this also applied to the Ghosts and phantoms. These very often worked alone, although chums would help, either with or without a disguise. In the "Followers of the Phantom Rebel" (*SGOL* 33; *GC* 1942), the two girls who helped the Phantom also donned the hooded robes and masks provided by their leader for the purpose of disguise. They looked like the "Silent Three" and the "Secret Three" and "Hooded Helpers". Their aim and purpose was the same: a young mistress had been wrongfully dismissed from her post; she returns to the vicinity of the school to prove her innocence and to expose the real criminal with the help of the girls who believed in her. "The Phantom Girl of Manor School" (*SGOL* 209); "The Mystery Girl of Study 13" (*SGOL* 279, a Manorcliffe School story); "Secret Leader of the Rebel Four" (*SGOL* 1; *GC* 1938), "The Fourth Grey Ghost" (*SGOL* 103); and "The Elusive Grey Ghost" (*SGOL* 109; *SGOL* 21); in these stories the cases have a similar theme and the hooded robes and masks are worn.



The slight variation in this theme is where a girl assists a boys' Secret Society, such as in "Her Pact with the Secret Two" (*SGOL* 77; *GC* 1943); "The Fourth Grey Ghost", "The Elusive Grey Ghost", and "The Warning of the Phantom Watcher" (*SGOL* 99; *GC* 1945). Again, each story is similar in aim and purpose, in that a wrong is put right, the real criminal exposed and justice done; in each were the familiar hooded robes and

masks.

There were other forms of disguise; for example, a girl using a scarlet cloak: "Their Helper in the Scarlet Cloak", by Enid Boyten (H.E. Boyten); it appeared in the *Girls; Crystal* 2 Feb. 1946; a story of an expelled sixth former who returns in secret to clear her name. Then there was "The Girl in the Crimson Cloak", by Penelope Desmond (Desmond Pride); it first appeared in the *School Friend* in 1951 as a serial; it was reprinted in the *SGOL* (No. 144), and later it reappeared in the *SGPL* (No. 46). In this story there is a slight variation: the girl who dressed in the crimson cloak and plumed hat was Noreen Nibson, the new assistant Matron at Greychurch School. On her first day she had discovered this crimson cloak and plumed hat in a secret passage, and with their aid she was able to help the Fourth Form to expose the unpopular Prefect, Laura Marsh, who was trying to ruin their play. The girls had no clue to the identity of the girl in the crimson cloak, which shows the success of the disguise.

In "The Girl Ghost of Falcon Castle" a girl reporter was investigating a mystery at the castle, and circumstances had forced her at times to disguise herself as a ghost, which was supposed to haunt the castle. The disguise was a velvet cloak in a dark scarlet shade made in one with a velvet hood, and with it a pair of old fashioned shoes. The ghost was reputed to be that of Rosaland Penhale – the heiress of Falcon Castle – who died one hundred years before the story was written. She wore a velvet cloak and hood, the same as the one the girl reporter was to wear to take the part of the ghost while doing her investigations in the castle. The girl reporter was employed by a mysterious lame girl, so in a way she was taking on the part of a detective.

In each story the criminal, whether a crooked Prefect or a Mistress, had a motive; there has to be a motive in every crime. The roots of a motive may be traced far back, say into a family history, or be triggered off by another event some time previously. There are hints of this in the works of Agatha Christie and Patricia Wentworth, but they are more prominent in more recent works of Colin Dextor's "Inspector Morse" series. This is especially so in the works of W.J. Burley's "Wycliffe" series, most of which are set in Cornwall: in "Wycliffe and the Redhead", Wycliffe, the detective, became increasingly disturbed by a case which grew more and more complicated as he explored many dark and murky secrets of the post; and in "Wycliffe and the Circle of Death", Wycliffe was trying to unravel these secrets. In Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes we have the same: in "The Valley of Fear" and "A Study in Scarlet". Both had the motives originally in the past; one originated in the United States and the other in the Great Alsali Plain. The same may be found in the stories we have considered so far, but no-where more prominent than in the cases solved by the "Silent Three", and a good example of this is in "The Silent Three at St. Kit's".

The story opens at the beginning of a new term. Betty Roland had been expelled the previous term, so somewhere in the past of that term, if not before, challenging had events begun to take place. At some time Cynthia, the Head Prefect, and her father must have heard a rumour about a sunken ship off the coast near the school and near the vicinity of a ruined lighthouse. This ship was reputed to have a treasure trove on board. Her father decided to do some deep sea diving in search of it, but they wanted to keep their activity a secret from any authority. Cynthia being at the school, near the place, was a great asset to her father while he was searching. Then Betty had become suspicious that Cynthia was caught up in some shady business and in league with someone else. Betty had continued

with her sleuthing and, probably, was getting close to finding out. Fearful of what Betty might discover Cynthia arranged a series of thefts (done by herself). Then, through faked evidence, Betty was accused of these thefts and wrongfully expelled. It was Betty's sleuthing that gave Cynthia the motive to have her removed from the school. This, in turn, gave Betty the motive to return to the neighbourhood in the disguise of a hooded robe and mask. With the help of her two chums the Secret Society, known as the "Silent Three" was founded. They succeeded in exposing Cynthia and her father for the crooks that they were, in illegally salvaging Gold Bullion from the sunken ship, a treasure trove that rightfully belonged to the nation. This was the purpose of the "Silent Three", to fight wrong and injustice going back somewhere into the past.

The actions of the "Silent Three" in this case and their many other cases, and the cases of "The Secret Three", the "Hooded Helpers" and those disguised as Phantoms and ghosts, are within the detective genre. By definition they set out to uncover and expose the criminal; they were just within the realms of Police detection as far as tracking down and sleuthing was concerned. "The "Silent Three" were ahead in this field.

However, there were other Secret Societies that were well outside the realm of this detective genre; Societies who had a motive of their own: that of being vindictive. "Her Feud with the Secret Three", by Sheila Austin (Stanley Austin), which appeared in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* (Oct. 10th 1936 to Jan. 23rd 1937), is a story of a girl's conflict with a vindictive type of Society, in other words, a Society who worked against the girl. In "Daphne's Feud with the Phantom Four" (*SGOL* 20; *GC* 1939): a new girl, Daphne Moreton, at Seacliffe College was made a sports leader on her very first day at the college; naturally she was thrilled until she realized that a mysterious Secret Society was working against her; a case of victimization by a group at a rival school who were competing against the college; the group wanted their school to win, they had seen Daphne in action, she was good, too good for their liking so they set out to victimize her, to put her off. "Diana and the Elusive Five" (*SGOL* 59; *GC* 1942); another story with a vindictive Secret Society. In each of these stories the Secret Societies donned hooded robes and masks. "Dulcie and the Hooded Pirates" (*SGOL* 156; *GC* 1951), a story of a girl's adventures at the Island Holiday Camp which was threatened by a Secret Society, a group wearing the

all too familiar garb but calling themselves the "Hooded Pirates". Again a vindictive Society.

The adventures, or cases, of the Silent Three were carried over into the *School Friend Annual* from 1952 to 1958; but, the well-known robes and masks were used in other stories in the *GC* and *SF* papers and their respective annuals. Some of the stories were in prose and others in picture strips, either as a serial or complete stories, in which Secret Societies and individuals were disguised as ghosts or phantoms, either for vindictive purposes, or to right wrong and injustice, or for just personal reasons. There were those within the Detective genre and some which were outside, these mainly being the vindictive type.

Having made a survey of the Secret Societies and Phantom stories let us now consider what had influenced and inspired the authors to write this type of exciting genre.

The detective element in the stories may be traced back to their distant ancestor (in the nineteenth century) and first lady detective in detective fiction, that lady being Mrs. Paschal who made her debut in "The Experiences of a Lady Detective", in the righting of a wrong and the solving of an intriguing mystery. However, the authors were not only following the line of Mrs. Paschal, they were also influenced by other Gothic writers.

The catch-penny Newgate stories had many writers of ability, such as Wilkinson (1816), Knapp and Baldwin (1824) along with Rev. John Villette himself. The influence of these writers were far-reaching. Many of the contemporary Gothic writers drew details and even plots from their stories; crime and detective writers who followed in later generations turned eagerly to their pages, and their illustrations in the search for inspiration and details. This also applied to some of the contributors of Sexton Blake stories and the authors who wrote for the popular girls papers and other works of the time which included the Gothic genre. There is nothing more Gothic than ancient priory ruins, crypts, secret passages, old desolate mills and light-houses, and silent hooded figures that drifted among them in a disguise to enable them to fight for justice and truth.

* *

BOOKS BY PETER MAHONY

Mary Ann's Australians is the first full account of the Australian Cricket Tour of England in 1909, which was led by Montague Alfred Noble (hence the title).

Death at the Arsenal is a fast-moving World War 2 Murder Mystery full of intrigue and espionage – plus an old-fashioned heroine. Compelling reading from beginning to end.

Both books are being sold at rock bottom prices to clear the remaining stock. They are a snip at £5.50 each (which includes postage and packing) and can be obtained by writing to Dorothy, Peter's widow at

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LORD DORRIMORE – DRAFT DODGER

by Arthur F.G. Edwards

Although I never missed a copy of either the Magnet or the Gem from the end of 1928 until they ceased publication, for a variety of reasons, I only read Nelson Lees that I got by 'swapping'. Of stories of the three schools involved, my assessment can be summarised thus: those in the *Gem* show St. Jim's are entirely believable, although some characters were exaggerated. Those in the *Magnet* which covered Greyfriars stretched my credulity to the limit and sometimes went beyond the bounds of credibility. Even as a schoolboy, I never doubted that the adventures of Nipper & Co., covered in the Nelson Lee, were the figment of a vivid imagination.

As I had everything that Howard Baker had published I started to collect Nelson Lees, and now have about half those that were published, some from each of the four series, but inevitably there are numerous gaps in the collection. This means that there are few stories in my collection, covered by a complete run, and I have to select my reading accordingly.

Some time ago I wrote an article headed 'A White Feather for Lord Dorrimore'. This followed my reading of the 'Captain Burton's Question' series from *N.L.* Old Series 158 onwards. In summary I pointed out that, in 1918, the Great War was at its height, yet Dorrimore, with Nelson Lee and Umlosi, went off in a voyage to the South Seas, ignoring the possibility of attack by U Boats or surface raiders, taking schoolboys with them. Beyond that, three experienced Merchant Navy skippers were involved, at a time when such men were badly needed in our war effort. I suggested that Nelson Lee may have been excused military service so that he could be used in counter-espionage, that his colour would have militated against Umlosi getting a commission and he may have been too proud to serve in the ranks. However, I could see no reason why the Lord Dorrimore was not in the King's uniform, even though he had somehow lost a finger. One of my uncles, who today would be classified as 'partly sighted', and could not be allowed anywhere near a rifle, was called up. It seemed to me that Dorrimore was depicted as embarking on the voyage to avoid military service. Whether this was in Edwy Searles Books' mind, or whether Brooks chose to ignore a World War I, was unsure.

A few days ago, looking through my collection, I came across Double Length No.130, 'The Phantom of Tregellis Castle', dated 1 December 1917. In it Nelson Lee says 'Lord Dorrimore was really one of the most reckless fellows I ever knew... Dorrie loved a scrap, for he hated nothing worse than a coward.' Of Lee's attacker Dorrimore says "White-livered skunks – that's what they were". Surely either a case of the 'pot calling

the kettle black', or E.S.B. had chosen to ignore the war. The former view was enforced when Dorrie urges Lee to go to Africa with him.

However, there is reference to the shortage of petrol, and later when Dorrimore was driving his car at great speed with two great headlights switched on he 'expressed supreme contempt to all regulations'. Finally we are told that although 'Merania succeeded in keeping out of the conflict which had engulfed Europe'... 'it was all in favour of the allies'. Thus it is shown beyond doubt that Brooks had not chosen to ignore the war, and therefore the noble Lord Dorrimore went to great lengths to avoid serving his country.

He did not just fail to volunteer, he positively sought to avoid military service and somehow succeeded. The Military Service Act of 1916 made all men between the ages of 18 and 40 liable for military service, in 1918 the upper age was raised to fifty. Men engaged in work of national importance could be excused military service, and Nelson Lee may have been in that category, and Umlosi outside the terms of the Act, not being a British citizen. But going on a cruise to the South Seas did nothing for the war effort. I do not know the noble Lord's age but I always imagined him as under 40, I cannot believe he was over fifty. Whatever he did before August 1914, or after November 1918, between those dates he earned a cluster of white feathers.

SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON EDWY SEARLES BROOK'S AND THE NELSON LEE

by Arthur F.G. Edwards

I recently read more issues of the magazine in which there were complete stories. In one of them a car chase through the back streets of the East End is described. I have previously mentioned ESB's knowledge of the main route out of London to Essex, but it appears that he knew much more about the east side of the Metropolis than that. He even knew where the nearest police station along the route was located.

On the down side I found his use of reports by his characters, generally Nipper, strange, the mixture of Oratio Recta and Oratio Obliqua, off-putting. Was the intention to persuade readers that Nelson Lee, Nipper et al, were alive and well. Who even in the early 1920s, was that gullible? That caused me to consider 'Who were the publishers aiming the Lee at, who did Brooks expect to read his stories'? In WWI issues, not only of the Lee, but also the *Magnet* and *Gem*, I had seen photographs of readers, many in uniform, so some adults read the magazines but were they the intended clientele, or were they accustomed to reading material discarded by younger brothers? I know that my Father read the *Magnet* and *Gem* until he became a full-time soldier in August 1914 at the age of twenty. He would have been about fourteen when the Magnet was first published.

What of my school friends, did they read the *Nelson Lee*? The answer is 'No' although reading was a favourite pastime. By the age of nine, in class, we were reading classics such as *Masterman Ready, Midshipman Easy, Coral Island* and *Children of the New Forest*. I suggest it was much easier to empathise with the Beverleys than the boys of St. Frank's.

It came to me that advertisers would know best. Surely they would place adverts in papers which would be read by potential customers. There was no marked difference

between adverts in the Lee and in the *Magnet* or *Gem*. In retrospect it seems to me that the adverts were aimed at an older age group, and a more affluent one, than I expected. Gramophones were regularly featured. One cost 12/6 a month at a time when a boy of fourteen earned that much a week. What use would a gramophone have been without records? Readers could send off for instruction on how to be taller, to stop stammering, or blushing, to straighten curly hair or condition it, even to control their nerves. If you were between eighteen and twenty-five you learned how to join the Royal Navy. However, the pièce de resistance was headed RHEUMATISM CURED AFTER FORTY YEARS' SUFFERING. An 89 year old man tells how he was cured in a few days, by taking the (advertised) medicine. Some adverts might have been aimed at a younger element, e.g. stamps, pocket knives, mouth organs, even dolls.

My conclusions are that the Amalgamated Press accepted adverts from anyone willing to pay, and that advertisers did not know who bought the Lee but assumed that many were young male adults with some spare cash. They may have been right. But who read it? It seems there was no upper age limit, but would I have bought it (if I had the money) under eight, definitely not, at nine or ten, I doubt it. From about thirteen, very likely. Now as a very senior citizen I am a devotee.

* *

THE CASE OF THE ABDUCTED INVENTOR — by Ray Hopkins

As the doomed ferry starts to break up on the rocks off the Hook of Holland, Sexton Blake saves the life of the man he will recognise later as the main protagonist in his fight to save an important invention for the safety of England. He little knows that he will meet this man later in a gruelling contest where he will have to fight for his life. He thanks the man for telling him that his assistant is already safely ashore, not knowing that it is this man and his three accomplices who have left Tinker below decks on the sinking ship and there is no possibility that his young helper will be able to escape.

When is unable to find Tinker ashore, Blake realises he has been deceived. A local fisherman guides him to the spot ashore nearest to the ferry, only two hundred yards offshore and slowly breaking up. Blake dives into the mountainous seas. Thirty buffeted and breathless minutes later he climbs aboard with the help of an overhanging rope. A gargantuan task awaits him. Where in the companionways and other passenger spaces is Tinker to be found? After the open areas he begins to concentrate on the cabins. The movement of the vessel as the large waves crash against its side increases the feeling of panic, Blake had ceased calling Tinker's name by this time. Only the mechanical throwing

open of the cabin doors as he reached them, and the possibility that Tinker was still alive kept him going.

Finally, almost to the end of the port-side cabins he gasped with relief followed by a sickly feeling of terror as he noted Tinker's white face and closed eyes above the tightly fitting gag in his mouth. Untying the boy, he carried him, staggering from side to side, to the deck. He looked toward shore and was rewarded by the sight of waving arms and a rocket being fired toward the ship. The rocket contained a line on which Blake hauled after securing it to a mast. The rescuers on shore attached a block and tackle to the line and finally a sling into which Blake tied Tinker. In twenty minutes they were both safely ashore. Blake turned to see the last of the steamer as it broke into two sections and vanished beneath the waves.

Blake's quest is to locate the whereabouts of Alf Beaumont, a skilled mechanic employed at the Woolwich Arsenal who had completed a military invention of supreme importance in the event of a future war. The specifications stated. "A combination of the Nordenfeidt and Gatling guns will be able to discharge a couple of thousand rounds of bullets a minute. In this way, whilst gaining the rapid firing qualities of the Gatling, it will retain the Nordenfeldt's present accuracy of fire from a moving platform." Incredibly, this invention, is turned down by the Arsenal authorities and, beyond the bounds of reason, the gifted mechanic is discharged.

Beaumont is approached by a representative of a German munitions firm who has been shown a copy of the specifications by a spy working at the Arsenal. Beaumont agrees to work for the German firm and leaves, but nothing has been heard from him since, and the firm, when investigated by Blake, is found to be non-existent.

Tinker, disguised as a ragamuffin, follows the German firm's representative and sees him enter a dilapidated building in Rotherhithe. Tinker ingeniously enters the house through a trapdoor in the roof. Listening at a door on the jar he discovers the identity of the leader of the plotters. Bad luck overtakes him when a gust of wind forces the door open and the plotters get a good look at the eavesdropper, recognising him again on the steamer they capture Tinker and render him *hors de combat.*

Once in Germany, Beaumont changes his mind. He refuses the Germans' offer, belatedly discovering that the firm is non-existent. Upon his refusal and stating he is returning home, the mechanic is kidnapped and locked in a heavily-guarded workshop where he is forced to build a model of his invention. By this time it has been found by his captors that the specifications copied by the Arsenal spy were deliberately left incomplete, Beaumont had memorised the final steps which, without them, would make it useless to his captors.

Blake makes an urgent visit to Berlin where he is greeted warmly as an old friend by Kaiser Wilhelm, the German monarch himself! The Kaiser's features darken, however, when Blake explains the reason for his visit. His eyes flash with anger when Blake informs him that the ringleader of the gang which has stolen the plans of the invention, kidnapped the inventor and almost caused the death of Blake's assistant is a personal friend of the Kaiser, one Count Von Wildenfeldt. Wihelm insists that Blake confront the Count with his accusations. The Count protests that he knows nothing of what Blake speaks and has, in fact, only just returned from a diplomatic visit to Russia, Blake accuses nim of being a liar. Von Wildenfeldt counters by saying that he has a Doppelganger who must be the person Blake is referring to. Blake tells the Kaiser that the Count's excuses

only make him a greater scoundrel, the monarch decrees that the Count's honour must be avenged by Blake's participation in a duel.

The duel is arranged for the following day at the Tivoli Bomisch near Berlin. The Count arranges with one of his companions to drop a cloak behind Blake as he backs away so that he will trip and the Count will be enabled to make the death plunge. But Blake manages to miss the cloak. In fact, Blake gets the upper hand and his rapier goes through the Count's shirt. But the blade breaks in two as it encounters a coat of mail protecting the Count's chest. Blake is seized by the Count's accomplices as the lights go out.

Tinker, watching from a gallery above, is joined by a stranger in a long, black cloak, with his features masked by a wide-brimmed hat. He urges the boy to join him in rescuing Blake. But they are too late. When they reach the hall below, all the participants in the duel have vanished. A oar is disappearing in the distance when they run outside.

The stranger pushes Tinker into a large car parked nearby and orders the driver to follow the first car. He remains behind but tells the driver to wire him at Berlin. Many miles later, achieving a speed of eighty miles an hour, the two cars are racing parallel to one another. Both are open tourers and Tinker, who has brought along a rapier from the duel leans over and nicks Von Wildenfeldt's shoulder. As he does so, Tinker spots Blake bound and gagged on the floor of the other car. The Count recognises the boy he thought was drowned and fires at him. But the bullet misses Tinker. As the car swerves, the Count fires again at one of the tyres. Tinker's car skids and falls on to its side. The other car races off leaving Tinker unharmed. But the stranger's driver has broken his leg. He seems to know where Von Wildenfeldt is going and directs Tinker three miles hence where he will find the fortress of Ansbronn, surrounded by a moat. Send a wire to Berlin and request medical aid for me when you arrive at an inn, the driver says. Tinker leaves post-haste.

Scouting along the moat lapping at the towering walls of the fortress, Tinker observes a handkerchief being waved from one of the turrets. Blake has seen the boy and uses this method to claim his attention. Tinker climbs a tall tree and commences to exchange messages with Blake using a system they had practiced before between them, "the handkerchief now fluttering from side to side, now dipping, now pausing for a moment". Blake asks Tinker to return at midnight with a rope.

Blake catches a ball of twine thrown by Tinker and then pays it out so that his assistant can attach the rope to it. Blake climbs down the rope and into the moat. As he prepares to help his employer from the water, Tinker is gripped from behind, his face forced to the ground so that he cannot cry out. Still under restraint, he finds that Blake has been made prisoner by German soldiers and Tinker himself is being held by the stranger at the duel. His gasp as he recognises his captor as the Kaiser himself is returned by the monarch's grim smile,

The German ruler orders his soldiers to conduct the two prisoners to the castle, when Blake asks for an explanation the Kaiser extends his sympathy for the cowardly treatment he received at the Count's hands which he had himself observed. "You will face Count Von Wildenfeldt again and I will be there to see that you get fair play on this occasion," the Kaiser promises,

Inside the fortress, Von Wildenfeldt and his cronies are discussing how they are going to treat Beaumont if he refuses to complete the invention to his secret specifications, in addition, they are rubbing their hands at the thought of the revenge they will enact upon

Tinker when he falls into their grasp. They know now that he is Blake's assistant and it is the outcome of his action in discovering the Count's identity, when he eavesdropped at the house in Rotherhithe, that they are still facing problems with Beaumont. They have Blake and will capture the boy when he makes the expected attempt to rescue his master.

The door of the chamber is flung open and their monarch, attired in full military uniform, orders Blake and Tinker to confront the Count. The Kaiser addresses the cowering Von Wildenfeldt. "Fearing to fight and risk your life, you came to the duel wearing hidden armour; and, knowing that I would never forgive cowardice, you arranged a plan by which Mr. Blake should be overpowered and carried hither. I sent this lad yonder here after you in my motor, and I have heard what occurred on the road. You must make reparation to me for the insult. You must fight this duel again."

The Count finds his rapier flying from his fingers and expects the death thrust. But Blake darts to the door, calls to Tinker and the pair vanish, locking the door behind them. when the outraged Kaiser and the plotters are able released to get themselves released by German soldiers, the two refugees are nowhere to be found. They had returned to the turret where Blake had been imprisoned, slid down the rope into the moat and escaped into the surrounding forest. Word reaches the Kaiser that the motor in which he had hastened from Berlin upon receipt of his driver's wire is missing and undoubtedly Blake and the boy are now speeding away in it.

In the small German town of Straulangen the British Consul, Captain Wilfred Mason, is visited by a tall, dishevelled stranger he presumes to be a stranded sailor in need of help to get back to England. But the masking beard, when removed, reveals a face well-known to him. Sexton Blake informs Capt. Mason that the kidnapped inventor, Alf Beaumont, is being held a prisoner in the large foundry works two miles away from Straulangen, and forced to complete his invention. If he is persuaded against his will to do this, it will be lost forever to England. Tinker, who has been overlooking events at the munitions factory, arrives and informs them that he has pinpointed the building where Beaumont is being held prisoner and has even climbed up to a window to observe him. heavily guarded, as he works on a strange-looking gun. "It's for all the world like a Nordenfeldt, except that he hitches a box on and off behind."

Tinker guides Blake to the building and leads him to the vantage point he had located earlier, but this time the shed is crowded with more than just workmen. There are men in uniform and others that look like high-ranking officials. As they stare through the window, the throng stands to attention. The Kaiser, in full uniform, strides in! The window is ajar and Blake hears the Kaiser being informed that the gun is completed and is ready to be tested.

The Kaiser, surrounded by officials and officers, approaches the mechanic with a smile. But they are transfixed as Beaumont, pale and still, states he was made a prisoner so that "Germany might be the greater by a cowardly robbery of my invention. I tell you that sooner than surrender this invention I would blow you all out of the world. This gun is loaded. If I pull the trigger not one before it will live."

The Kaiser does not believe the gun is loaded and orders him to be overpowered. But Beaumont, with a hoarse cry, raises "a gigantic iron maul" and crashes it on the gun, "The box behind the gun smashed into a hundred splinters. There was a deafening report, bullets rattled like hail around the shed", which was plunged into complete darkness as the lights failed, incredibly no one was hurt by the bullets because the force of Beaumont's

blow caused the gun's muzzle to angle up to the roof of the shed. But a fire is soon raging. The Kaiser and his entourage, observing it from a safe position outside, believe that the inventor has perished inside the building.

After the explosion, and while the smoke and confusion mask their movements, Blake and Tinker drop down into the shed and pull Beaumont from the conflagration. "In this appalling and frenzied excitement," Blake explains to the other two they will not be noticed. By a roundabout route they reach the British Consulate. Blake warns Capt. Mason to prepare for squalls.

The Kaiser arrives at the Consulate. He had believed all along that the gun conversion had been an entirely German invention but when he discovered that its only perfect completion relied on the skill of an English mechanic to make it work properly, he realised that what Blake had told him was the truth. He is delighted to find Beaumont not dead after all and congratulates him on his clever work. To Blake he is grateful for pinpointing those close to him who would have precipitated him into war with England. His gratitude extends to the providing of a special train to take the English contingent to the seaport whence they will return home.

The above exciting series of adventures appears in BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY, 1st Series No. 27, published anonymously in October 1907, under the prosaic title of "A Woolwich Arsenal Mystery." Lofts/Adley revealed the author to have been E. J. Gannon who wrote three other Blake stories in this early series, the final one appearing in December 1908.

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Greyfriars Vignettes
by Ted Baldock

THE ENIGMA OF THE FIFTH

> Coker had been looking thoughtful. He had been silent, since they sat down to tea. Potter and Greene hoped that he would keep it up. Silence never seemed so golden, to Potter and Greene, as when Horace Coker wasn't talking.
>
> F. Richards, *Billy Bunter's Postal Order*

If there is one fellow at Greyfriars school who labours under an exaggerated sense of his own importance, that man must surely be Horace Coker of the fifth form.

Many write him off – understandably so – as a self-opinionated ass, a dunderhead of the first water, one possessed of no tact whatsoever. All of which are elements of truth if we are to believe all we read of his activities.

Yet, is it not true that the largest mountains of dross contain within their inmost recesses certain veins of pure gold to be discovered only by diligent searching which have previously been hidden away wholly unsuspected. This gold reveals itself under certain circumstances, showing itself on the most unlikely occasions.

One situation in which Coker would – and frequently did – display the gilt-edged side of his character would surely be in a 'tight corner'. Should one be assailed, as is not at all improbable in this progressive age, he would be worth his weight in that precious metal. we read with amusement of those ham-like fists and the flailing style of his attacking methods. Although quite unorthodox, surely they would be invaluable in certain situations.

Coker and crassness have ever been synonymous, yet, curiously enough he is a warm and likeable ass. Such beings do exist and the type is certainly exemplified in the burly fifth former. It argues much for Potter and Greene that they, not only because of their fondness of 'Hampers', stick to Coker in spite of the frequent abuse he heaps upon them.

That his Aunt Judy would, as becomes a dear and gentle lady of another age, disapprove of such tactics is natural. But in a world of hard practical politics Coker may be seen as a friend indeed. The Greyfriars fifth form would be dull – even colourless – without him. Mr. Prout, his form-master could well dissolve into a mediocre and run-of-the-mill character.

A dunderhead, yes, but one of Coker's chief virtues is that of loyalty, at times perhaps a little misplaced – but always genuine. Loyalty to his school, to his form and, surprisingly for all the 'flak' he received, to his form-master and to his inimitable guardian Aunt Judy who represented a species of cornucopia from which all manner of good things emanated, not the least among which were the regular and ever popular hampers so revered by his two friends Potter and Greene.

Is there not much that is endearing in such characteristics. A fool Coker may sometimes be, but he is of that particular breed, the 'true blue' variety.

On many occasions Horace Coker has sought to demonstrate his 'short way with fags' and, sadly for him, as many times has the unexpected (for him) occurred. History merely repeats itself. Every graspable part of his burly person would be duly seized and a dishevelled, heaving figure would be borne aloft and conveyed with thrashing limbs to the brink of – for example – the ditch alongside Friardale Lane or an oozey patch on the banks of the Sark. It would be a murky ditch sadly in need of clearing of a multitude of brambles, sharply stinging nettles, and sundry other thorny specimens which hide from view a far from salubrious residue of mud, the stirring of which would create a frightful atmosphere.

"You fatheads, getting in a fellow's way!" roared Coker. "Don't stop me—I'm in a hurry!" As Coker scrambled up, he planted a foot on Gwynne's neck, and rested a heavy hand on Wingate's face. But Horace was not in a mood to notice these trifles.

Into this malodorous amalgam, struggling fiercely the unfortunate fifth-former would be hurled to emerge a moment or so later in what may only be described as a dreadful state, temporarily incapacitated, yet as unbowed as ever. All of which demonstrates quite clearly that among Horace Coker's many doubtful characteristics is a bull-headed aggressiveness which manifesting itself in any other fellow would be quite intolerable. It is so much a part of the great Horace that were it missing he would appear a lesser person. The fifth form without the presence of Horace Coker may be likened to a circus minus a clown – its star turn. Mr. Prout would surely boom with less resonance if the chief object for his verbal thunderings were missing. Life would lose a certain piquancy, Potter and Greene – who knows – could well emerge as totally different characters from hitherto.

It cannot sincerely be said that Coker's rugged features enhance the perennial charm of Greyfriars, but were they missing something would be lost in terms of excitement and laughter. 'Inanity thy name is Coker.' In his case it is elevated almost to a virtue.

Looking back over the years and considering the endless Homeric battles waged with certain members of the Remove in which his 'short way' is so originally exemplified, we may better assess his true value to the quality of life at Greyfriars.

A parting glimpse of this likeable paragon of foolishness. One may recall a wonderful summer series of tales involving Horace Coker and Co. on a cycling holiday. After much argument, chiefly on Coker's side, they took the road which the great man was convinced was right, and they then proceeded to take a series of wrong roads on their tour. Coker lacked skills in the map – reading line. Potter and Greene – wise in their generation – maintained a diplomatic silence (was not old Coker footing all the expenses?) as they wearily followed the figure of their leader plunging into the sunset.

TREADING SOFTLY

The corridors are silent now.
The studies quiet and dim.

There is an uneasy and expectant aura about a great building, in this case a school, when it is empty and devoid of youthful humanity. The silence is too intense. The vistas of corridors, staircases and landings usually so animated with hurrying and noisy figures are all now deserted, left, day long, to the slow moving rays of sunlight. For the time being life and movement have departed from the old pile. It has happened many times before. Then, after a period, another term boisterous with movement brings all to life once more. Time moves on and history is in the making.

It is towards late evening during the summer vacation. Let us make our way down the passage to that renowned apartment of learning – the Remove form-room. The heat and dust of battle has settled, as it were. The teaching day is over and silence reigns except for small and far off sounds, muted by distance, emanating from the studies, for, although it is the 'Vac', sounds will persist. Here is the battlefield, here the proving ground, the testing place for the acquisition of knowledge.

Here can be sent the old, time-worn desks with their deeply incised initials, the work of generations of fellows who have sat here and imbibed knowledge. Even before the days of Henry Samuel Quelch, his predecessors have, no doubt, upon occasion, wielded the ash with expertise similar to his, and caused clouds of dust – and roars – to arise from the unfortunate recipients.

On a desk lid towards the rear of the room the curious eye may see the initials W.G.B. somewhat inexpertly executed, while close by, upon another desk, carved in firm and clear cut characters are the initials H.V.S. These are but two examples of many which add lustre to this dim old compartment of learning.

A large globe, rather a cumbersome piece of equipment, stands in the corner, having long out-lived its original use but still displaying splashes of red over much of its surface reflecting a more spacious and adventurous age. Like so many other artefacts at Greyfriars it is a reminder of a romantic past.

Here, late on a summer evening in the gathering dusk, the activities of the day, both within and out on the playing fields, are terminated. All is still in the form room and corridors. Stand quietly and listen and the probability is that you will catch faint echoes of many things. Voices that commence and as quickly break off unfinished. Doors and desk

lids that bang loudly and yet are strangely muted. Ghostly fragments of conversation linger in these old form-rooms.
"Wharton, you will pro ..."
"Vernon Smith take a hund ..."
"Bend over Bunter ..."
"Yaroooooh..."

Sounds of lamentation are sure to linger. The old form-room has known long periods of quiet and peaceful tuition, but, especially on warm summer afternoons, it is sad to record that at least two members of the Remove have fallen not unwillingly to the subtle charms of Morpheus.

One is Lord Mauleverer, always on the best of terms with that sleepy deity, and the other is William George Bunter, whose fat head nods and sags in an alarming manner, much to the amusement and delight of Harold Skinner sitting hard by.

Mr. Quelch, also a little under the influence of the balmy air and possibly the satisfying effects of a good lunch, is nevertheless always responsive to the call of duty. He ploughs bravely on, re-creating the life, times and writing of P. Vergilius Maro with expertise which few other classics masters can emulate. While his sharp mind is totally immersed in its favourite subject, he may fail to detect the two sleeping beauties. This state of affairs must however be very temporary; one can be quite sure that soon this situation will change abruptly. Then echoes of sounds of a frantic and agonised nature will be added to the vast cloud of sounds which permeate this historic old form room.

Here Mark Linley and other fellows with similarly studious natures have experienced the elation of success on being informed by a congratulatory Mr. Quelch that they have won certain scholarships and prizes. Surely at such moments something of the celebratory aura of the occasion must vibrate into the atmosphere to linger and later manifest itself, even some forty years on!

Conversely, the announcement of a failure to achieve some objective, occasioning a sharp sense of disappointment will perhaps also release into the atmosphere its particular emotion. In such a way the old form-room may be said to possess a 'life' and history all its own – the shared experience of countless fellows over the years.

Thus does one begin to appreciate and understand more clearly the dedication and monumental patience of Mr. Quelch in his ardent pursuit of facts and events from the colourful past for inclusion in his Magnum Opus, 'The History of Greyfriars'. Should he manage to capture some fleeting but colourful glimpses within the covers of his book, no one, master or pupil at the school, or in the academic world beyond, will feel that his prolonged and patient efforts have been in vain.

* *

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THE SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL – A SURVEY

by Margery Woods

The month of September 1926 marked a special date in the Cliff House calendar, and perhaps for the many schoolgirl readers of the weekly SCHOOL FRIEND magazine, for it brought the first edition of a new, beautiful book, THE SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL for the coming year, 1927.

Did those youthful devotees cheer when they learned that Cliff House School and its popular crowd of pupils at last had their own Annual, instead of having to make do with what the SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN ANNUAL, already established since 1923, would allot to their favourites. And did the loyal fans of Morcove also cheer because they now had their Annual to themselves---and they could write to the Editor and tell him what stories they liked best---which apparently they did. Of course it was more than likely that those who could manage to wheedle both annuals out of their families at Christmas did so in happy expectations of Christmas morning.

The latest addition to Amalgamated Press's stable proved a winner. Wisely the editorial policy did not make any attempt to produce an Annual that was different. The format had already proved itself for four years with the companion volume. The tried and tested short story team provided the entertaining mix of drama, humour and adventure as in the two weekly papers, only on a rather grander scale. But a closer study of the two annuals would show subtle differences in the new arrival. The SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN ANNUAL was actually smaller in page content; 224 pages: The new SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL outstripped it with 288pp. A whole fifty-four extra, and the same price! Besides this there were four sepia photogravure plates and three colour plates.

However, this generosity ended in 1931 when the pages fell to 216. Mysteriously the volume seemed just as fat and just as heavy, until a closer examination revealed thicker paper, although still of the smooth quality type which endured until the mid-thirties when many of the annuals succumbed to the thick white paper that seemed to have a distant relationship to a cardboard-like blotting paper. The senior sister annual maintained its original complement of pages right up to the onset of the Second World War years and the paper shortage.

But it could not be denied that the pre-war SCHOOL FRIEND Annuals had a certain class about them. The covers featured a cream or beige background with a shaped illustration silhouetted against it and a more subtle colour tone. This matt finish rather than a high shine, while very attractive, did not wear quite so well nor was it proof against dustmarks, whereas the shiny boards of most of the children's annuals could be very gently sponged and come up shining again.

The books were rich with stories and articles, many humorous, about the Cliff House girls and information about the school itself, and as in the companion annual the charming vignettes ended each story and article.

On the story side the new annual was rather light on mystery and did not seem as strong on emotional drama as the SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN ANNUAL. Perhaps this was intentional, and the long Cliff House story, *The Band and The Bandits*, was as appealing as ever. Bessie contributed a lesson on how to write stories, while Marjorie Hazeldene told readers how to restore straw hats and there were hints on many subjects including theatre,

acting, cookery, etiquette (this one sadly missing from today's curriculums), games and much more. And there was one story with a Christmas flavour, though set on the last day of term.

THE MADCAP'S CHRISTMAS STOCKING, by Renee Frazer, brought in a popular favourite from the weekly paper; Tess Everton of Templedene School. Tess and her friends decide to hang up their stockings on the last night of term to hold the little gifts made by the girls to each other. Mildred is elected to wake up very early and fill the stockings. Great amusement is caused by Vera's stocking, which is at least eight feet long and composed of old stockings of varied hues stitched together. Bessie Bunter would have approved of this idea, as doubtless would the readers who usually made sure their own outsize stocking or sacks or pillowcases were all tucked away in readiness for Christmas Eve. Tess and her chums had also clubbed together to buy a watch for the Adder---their form mistress Miss Addington --- and Mildred was to slip silently into the Adder's bedroom to hang up this special stocking. But someone else was up late that pre Christmas Eve to make mischief.

There had been a great deal of trouble stirred up that term between the Fourth and Fifth Forms, and the mistresses were beginning to get stroppy. Tess had her suspicions that the Fourth's bad girl, Lydia, and a Fifth Form girl, Rhoda, had a malicious desire to stir up the strife. Lydia owed money to Rhoda and thus had to do Rhoda's bidding, which this particular night entailed sneaking out after Mildred and then taking Tess's little pet monkey, Peter, along to the Adder's bedroom and chaining him up there with a Christmas card from the girls. Next morning it seemed this mean trick had been successful when an irate summons from the Head brought the girls rushing, except Tess, who had also been abroad during the night. Calmly she went to Miss Addington's room, where poor Peter was still chained up and gave him an order. First he produced a gift-wrapped packet which he offered to the Adder, and then a piece of paper, which the now calm mistress read with surprise, then anger. It was a confession, signed by Lydia, of her misdeeds, which Rhoda had extracted from Lydia, as a sort of I.O.U. for the purpose of moral blackmail. Tess had overheard an incriminating conversation between Lydia and Rhoda and had been able to get hold of the confession. The Head was not in a Christmassy spirit when she dealt with the two culprits. As for the famous long stocking of Vera's, it was filled with large, exciting looking gift boxes, each of which contained a slip of paper saying she would find these useful for keeping things in. But her real Christmas present was there right down in the foot.

There was also a ghost story, of the light-hearted variety, about a girl and her conceited boy cousin who doesn't think much of girls---until playing ghost with the intention of scaring her he meets a burglar who pinches his ghost costume and locks him in a cupboard. The conceited boy cousin's humiliation is completed when the girl and her chum catch the burglar ghost and rescue 'Master Conceit'. But because it is Christmas they reassure him understandingly and he decides that perhaps girls are okay after all.

The long Cliff House story centres on a special effort to raise funds for the local hospital. Babs and the chums have great ideas for a fancy dress ball, but Marcia the Mean listens in and tells the Fifth, offering the idea to them as though it was her own, much to the disappointment of the chums when they discovered that the Fifth immediately approached Miss Primrose with the plan and were given the go-ahead. The story plot is solid, with the Fifth planning to have their own band, unaware of Clara's idea for a certain

little substitution. She is unaware that the same idea has occurred to the villains, who smell choice pickings from the important bigwigs at the function, and the vanity of Augusta adding to the drama when she has persuaded her father to allow her to wear a very precious heirloom that night, which, of course, she manages to lose. But the chums sort it all out in their own inimitable way and the festivities resume. All are happy---except the villains in their police cell and Marcia, who does not like happy endings unless they suit her!

The new annual had a great send-off in the Editor's column in SCHOOL FRIEND and there was a two-page spread of it with the two companion annuals (*Schoolgirls' Own Annual* and the *Golden Annual*).

But there was a hiatus for Cliff House a few years later as the thirties dawned. The SCHOOL FRIEND magazine folded in 1929, to be replaced by THE SCHOOLGIRL. Cliff House did appear in the first issue with the serial, THEIR FEUD AT SCHOOL, but it could not be said it was presented exactly in a starring capacity. A second serial followed a few months later, THEIR SECRET QUARREL AT SCHOOL. Then Cliff House vanished altogether for nearly three years in both the magazine and the Annual. And then it returned as lead feature in THE SCHOOLGIRL of April 2nd 1932 in a long

BESSIE BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS BOX

A School Comedy in One Act, Introducing the Famous Cliff House Fourth Form

BY HILDA RICHARDS

complete story entitled BESSIE BUNTER'S SPECTRE by a new "Hilda Richards", John Wheway, who for several years had contributed many stories to THE SCHOOLGIRL and other publications under various pseudonyms. Cliff House took off with a brilliant new lease of life, and returned to the Annual in 1935.

By then Laidler, one of A.P.'s top artists, was creating some of the most charming depictions of schoolgirls in fiction. Four of the Annuals during the thirties were fronted by his Cliff House girls and his Christmas illustrations were superb.

And then the clouds began to appear on the horizon.

The 1940 Annual carried five stories of Cliff House, and the Laidler cover depicted the chums and their mini menagerie of pets being arranged for a photograph by Clara Trevlyn. Perhaps it was a farewell omen of .the dark days that lay ahead. For the 1940 edition would be on sale in the first week of September 1939 and would have gone into preparation and to press months before the outbreak of war.

There were only nine stories in that edition. The five at Cliff House were: *Backed Up By Babs*; *Dolores' Good Turn; Her Captain and Friend*; *When Bessie' s Cake Was Cut*; and *Jemima Plays A Lone Hand.*

When the 1941 Annual appeared the following year THE SCHOOLGIRL, along with many of its A.P. contemporaries, had vanished in the paper shortage. The five Cliff House tales in the 1941 edition were entitled: *The Quest Of Study No 4*; *Mabs' Film Star Masquerade*; *When Jimmy played Ghost*; *Championed By Duffer Bessie*; and *All To Save The Rebel.*

It was to prove the farewell to Cliff House and its beloved chums. Come 1942 the Editor's letter announced that this was an all school-story Annual, but sadly Cliff House was not among them. At least three of the stories were by the school's erstwhile author, Wheway, under pseudonyms, along with old favourites Hilary Marlow (R. Kirkham), Margery Marriott (L.R. Swainson) and newer names, Gail Western (C. E. Fearn) and Daphne Grayson (G. Gravely) of THE CRUISING MERRYMAKERS fame.

In 1943 The Editor announced that his all school-story Annual the previous year had been such a success he was repeating it, confident that never before had such a fine team of girls' school stories written together in one volume. (Presumably Oxford, Collins, Dean, Blackie and Co. could all put that in their pipes and smoke it!) Meanwhile, THE GIRLS' CRYSTAL, the only schoolgirls paper of A.P. to soldier on through the war years, had launched its own annual in 1940 and generously advertised the SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL and THE SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN ANNUAL as "Books to Brighten Up The Black-out."

I have often wondered why the Cliff House stories, and Morcove too, for that matter, were dropped from the annuals. After all, even though the weekly papers associated with them were no longer published new readers were entering the buying market each year and would have accepted the two famous schools automatically, until the fade out of boarding school fiction in later years when the pop scene revolutionised children's fiction. And the editor's "finest team" of authors were quite skilled enough to keep their work updated with changing social fashion.

However, come 1944 things did change. The paper shortage was really biting fiercely. The SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN ANNUAL had gone, along with THE GOLDEN ANNUAL FOR GIRLS (which did not carry a school association but consisted of short stories written by the same team) and THE POPULAR BOOK OF GIRL'S STORIES, the

annual of the SCHOOLGIRL'S WEEKLY, of Valerie Drew fame; all had vanished from the bookshop shelves.

The two surviving annuals, SCHOOL FRIEND and GIRL'S CRYSTAL, ran continuously until well into the seventies, possibly even later, but would be unrecognisable to the long ago readers of the original SCHOOL FRIEND magazine launched in 1919. But 1944 certainly heralded changes. The new format was very slim but in size nearer to the A4 paper standard of much later. The covers were bold and vivid, gym slips were beginning to vanish as school uniform, though blazers-were still much worn Fashions and hairstyles were still youthfully feminine, not echoing the hard military square shoulders of women's wartime fashion, and the artists were allowed to hint that teenage schoolgirls did actually have bosoms, a fact of nature sternly restricted in earlier years by A.P.'s editorial policy. The author friends of old still kept the flag flying the old tried and tested formula, albeit always in modern style; Ida Melbourne, Hazel Armitage, Rhoda Fleming, Elise Probyn, Renee Frazer and Daphne Grayson. In the edition of 1945 Anne Gilmore (John Wheway) moved story-telling right up to reality, and to occupied Norway, with a school story entitled *Norweena and the Fugitive Commando.*

Blondheim School by a fiord, now had a German headmistress whose pet pupil was Magda Frisch, German, arrogant, and enemy, and a prefect, who considered herself the champion swimmer of the school and was determined to win a race between herself and Norweena, the school's own champion swimmer, to decide who would represent the school in the forthcoming Town Water Sports. Magda is another Connie Jackson, only worse, the only false note is in the description of her appearance as dark with brown eyes. This of course is an understandable choice by the author, for the heroine, a Norwegian,

had to be blonde and pretty. But Magda comes over as a born Aryan of the Nazi super-race, flaxen and blue-eyed. The story slips into pure wartime heroism when Norweena discovers a wounded British Commando officer hidden in a cave. She aids him, bringing food and wound dressings, and promises to win the race to an island in the fiord where a vital package is hidden which the Commando must find and then meet up with an undercover boatman who will take him out to a rendezvous with a British sub.

Magda is spying and suspicious, and tries to prevent Norweena entering the race, but Norweena manages to escape from the school penitentiary and lock in her enemy when Magda comes to gloat. Norweena succeeds in her quest, wins the race, finds the package and gives it to the Commando but at great cost to herself. She is allowed to represent the school at the water sports, but Magda has passed on her suspicions to the Nazis, and Norweena is locked up to await the visit of the Gauleiter who will get the truth out of her. She tries not to give way to fear and watches the sea from her cell window, until she sees the faint, pre-arranged signal of light the Commando has promised to show once he has reached comparative safety.

The chemistry between girl and soldier is well done, and the ending isn't fudged. The girl knows she will probably be tortured but is determined she will never tell the truth of her part in the Commando's escape. For she has helped her country, and that is all that matters.

Throughout the forties the schoolgirl approach to the stories lessened. Sport, riding, boating, skating, foreign locations, and dance predominated, although the basic formula and moral sense still remained. More boys were featured, co-ed schools appeared, though the odd phantom still flitted in and out of secret panels and secret societies still thrived. Then in 1952 came the major change that altered the schoolgirl story-papers and annuals, possibly for ever. The picture strips began and threatened to take over the traditional prose method of story-telling.

It was really only a return to the old comic book style, except that the picture strips in the old time comics were meant to encourage children to move on to reading as well as amusing them. The stories in the annual became more frivolous and much shorter. In 1956 the picture stories were in full colour, shades of the tuppence coloured days of *Puck, Rainbow* and *Sunbeam*, except that the old comics carried blocks of printed captions beneath each picture. Now the American influence took over with balloon captions and the occasional small printed, very encapsulated blurb to explain plots.

The ballet craze had got going Young ballerinas pirouetted and swanned through the picture scripts to banish the villains, and achieve a final triumph. . . ."Maureen and her friends performed a graceful tableau in the moonlight---in that garden of dreams come true"....

1956 brought a further innovation; full colour endpapers back and front which opened out a single vivid illustration. One depicted a sports day; the other showed a circus parade. 1957 front endpapers showed a well-drawn ballet—studio setting in which the placement and alignment of the dancers' feet and bodies were very good, in a way that many artists do not always get right, no matter how skilled in other aspects. The anatomical training of a dancer's body is highly specialised and takes the skill of a Degas to portray accurately.

The SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL had come a long way from its advent in 1927. Its style and content in the fifties and sixties would probably prove disappointing to the adult

ex-reader browsing through a copy of that time in moments of nostalgia as she recalled her own schooldays with Barbara Redfern and Co, or Betty Barton of Morcove. They were part of many youngsters' childhoods and tend to grow more golden through the mists of time. Yet today's adult reader, perhaps discovering a fifties annual in a book sale, would almost certainly browse through it with a light of remembered pleasure in her eyes. A copy of a SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL circa 1930 might evoke interest but no reader identification.

It might, however, should she buy the older annual, surprise her if she dipped into the pages of stories published long before she was born. For there was a secret hidden in those early stories, the magic of Cliff House, Morcove and Greyfriars. The authors of those school stories were very special. They knew how to steal into the reader's heart---and to stay there.

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THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME
The History of the Picture Strip in the D.C. Thomson 'Big Five'
Part 3 - The Hotspur 1949-1952 by Ray Moore

From its inception in Sept 1933 until the end of the 1940's 'Hotspur' happily abjured the inclusion of adventure strips within its pages. Its menu of text stories being invariably ensconced behind a bright single picture cover, more often than not drawn by Thomson staff artist **James 'Peem' Walker** and usually advertising the exploits of the inhabitants of Red Circle School.

Indeed it's actually quite difficult to pinpoint exactly when the first true picture strip did appear in 'Hotspur' as the answer depends on what your definition of a picture strip happens to be. For instance on the cover of No 536 in Feb 1946 six panels were devoted to Red Circle's Jeep Jones and his attempts at conjuring. Was this a picture strip?

Similarly were the nine panel covers of Nos 577 and 643 drawn by **James Malcolm** and **'Peem' Walker** respectively and featuring Red Circle newcomer Reckless Ralph Desmond in the former and Mr Smugg as 'the dim detective' in the latter, were these genuine picture strips or merely fragmented picture preludes to text stories within? Personally I think the latter.

For me the first genuine picture strips to appear in 'Hotspur', and both, as it turned out, drawn by the ubiquitous **'Peem' Walker** were two 'spot the clue' type 'Red-Coat Detective' strips starring mountie Sgt Rock on the covers of issues 647 and 685, the second being a seasonal tale for Xmas 1949 titled 'The Santa Claus Clue'.

These 'tec-teasers' apart 'Hotspur's major investment in the picture strip began the following year with the picture serial 'Big Axe'(723-736). This being the story of a Canadian lumberjack named 'Big Axe' Nolan and his search for, of all things, yet another mountie. This time one who has been abducted by the masked Mystery Rider.

The pleasing artwork for this series was provided by one of the Thomson art depts younger members **Pete Sutherland** and it was also he who drew the papers next picture serial 'Tommy Gunn and Trigger' (737-750) about a boy on the run from a 19th century orphanage who befriends a bull terrier. The strip itself being a picture version of an earlier 'Hotspur' prose story 'Tiger Cobb and Slasher'.

This practice of reviving characters or storylines that had already proven popular in the text format as picture strips was to be a pretty regular occurrence and another old 'Hotspur' favourite 'The Iron Teacher' was the subject of the next strip to be published (751-759) with **Jack Gordon** providing the art. In this strip old steelribs leaves the classroom behind to go on a cattle drive where he helps a G-Man guard a beef herd from a gang of rustlers.

Pete Sutherland brought an end to his, short, four year tenure as a member of the D.C. Thomson Meadowside art dept by drawing the first ten issues of the next 'Hotspur' picture strip 'Captain Zoom - The Ace of Space'(760-787) with **'Peem' Walker** providing the art for the remainder. Zoom and his assistant were space travellers in the far future patrolling the cosmos in their atomic powered land, sea and air machine the Zipp and tussling with the interplanetary villain Rask. A decade earlier Thomson's 'Skipper' had featured a more contemporary Captain Zoom dubbed 'The Birdman of the R.A.F'. Given their similar flying skills it's just possible that the 'Skipper' Zoom was an ancestor of the 'Hotspur' version but only a DNA test would tell for sure!

Up to this point all of 'Hotspur's picture serials had been printed prominently on the front, back, or front and back covers of the paper and had followed each other sequentially one at a time, but then, with 'Johnny Jett - the Super Boy' (782-802) 'Hotspur' editor **Jack Mackersie** decided to double his paper's picture strip content by also including a strip on the inside pages.

The storyline of 'Johnny Jett' was that Thomson editorial favourite, the unusual pupil sent to an ordinary school. The unusual pupil in this instance being a boy taught amazing skills while shipwrecked for ten years on a remote island with a brilliant scientist. What makes this strip of particular interest is that it was drawn by **Dudley Watkins** and is the only original adventure strip that the great artist drew for any of the Thomson boy's papers.

Following hot on the atomic heels of Captain Zoom 'Hotspur's next cover strip was 'The Iron Men of the Sea'(788-799) drawn by **'Peem' Walker** in which deep sea diver Bill Storm tracks down a gang of under water crooks clad in armoured suits.

Then, remarkably, in the week following the arrival of the Iron Men 'Hotspur's picture strip content received a further two-page boost when 'Leatherface' (789-812), illustrated by **Jack Glass**, rode into town. The hero of the title being U.S. Marshal Steve Cody who hides his identity behind a leather mask.

Interestingly both 'The Iron Men of the Sea' and 'Leatherface' owed their origins to 'Skipper' in the 1930's as did 'Hotspur's' next cover strip 'Karga the Clutcher' (800-810) again drawn by **'Peem' Walker**. In the pages of 'Skipper' Karga had donned his electrified metal gauntlet to aid the, sometimes less than appreciative, boys in blue at Scotland Yard while here in 'Hotspur' he is a British secret service agent topically helping to fight the Chinese spymaster the Red Mandarin and his minions during the Korean war. The plundering of the old 'Skipper' story files for the scripts for these 'Hotspur' strips and others that would follow being easy to understand when you know that 'Hotspur' editor **Jack Mackersie** had himself been chief sub-editor on 'Skipper' under editor **Andy Hunter** in the last years of the paper's life.

When the two-page Johnny Jett strip ended in 802 it was replaced by the single-page 'Torgoth the Axeman (803-815) illustrated by **Jack Glass** and again based on another 'Skipper' original 'The Red Axeman'. In this strip Torgoth, the champion warrior of Norway, has the task of protecting the heir to the Norwegian throne, young Prince Olaf, from the evil machinations of his wicked and ambitious uncle as well as helping him obtain the Norwegian symbol of kingship, the Golden Helmet.

After so many story adaptations courtesy of 'Skipper' the next 'Hotspur' cover strip 'The Avenging Eye'(811-819) with art provided by **Jack Gordon** had strictly home-grown origins in that it was a picture version of an earlier 'Hotspur' story titled 'The Evil Eye' in which a New York crook named Zed invents the bizarre device of the title. The 'Eye' being capable of producing three different types of ray, blue to paralyse, green to hypnotize both men and animals and red to destroy wood, metal or stone. Zed being

content to use his remarkable contraption to do nothing more than hypnotize private detective Ted McGuire in order to implicate him in a crime.

The next two strips to appear, separated as they were by both space and time, had little in common except that they were both drawn by freelance artists. The first 'Long Gun - Fighter of the Red Frontier'(813-824) drawn by **Ron Embleton** and the second 'Lost Boys on the Winking Planet (816-827) drawn by one-time Thomson staff artist, but a freelance since the war, **Jock McCail.**

Colonial America provided the setting for the Long Gun Strip as the hero of the title tried to win the trust and support of the Iriquois Indian tribes by setting out to win the ten scarlet feathers sacred to the Iriquois nation. A far cry from the mission undertaken by the 'winking planet' alien Darien who comes to Earth to kidnap a class of British schoolboys in order to train them to carry out a vital mission on his home planet.

The next 'Hotspur' cover strip had one of those androgynous scripts that could just as easily have graced the pages of a girls paper had the young hero been replaced by a young heroine. It was a tale of the 'sawdust ring' titled 'The Secret of the Circus Kid' (820-833) and was the fourth cover serial to be drawn by **'Peem' Walker.** In it a young orphan named Tim, accompanied by his Shetland pony Tinker, escapes the clutches of his cruel gypsy guardian by literally running away to the circus. The boy having some slight memories of having lived under the big-top when he was very small.

Not only does it smack of damning with faint praise but the adventures of 'the best liked school inspector in the world' hardly sounds like the most exciting premise for a picture strip but nonetheless such was the byline appended to 'Great Big Benn' (825-851) the first strip drawn for 'Hotspur' by **Bill Holroyd** and with stories derived, in part at least, from the adventures of 'Skipper's 'Mustard Smith'. In Benn's defence it should be noted that he was a troubleshooting school inspector U.S. style with a stamping ground that stretched from the snowy wastes of Alaska to Ohio and who was just as at home catching crooks as truants. And he was certainly more amenable than 'Hotspur's original cartoon strip 'truant catcher' Mr Silas Snatcher who had started in the papers first issue in 1933 drawn by **Allan Morley.**

The 'Skipper' story files were once again opened up to provide the basis for the next 'Hotspur' strip which like 'Great Big Benn' was also set in the U.S.A. This time though it was the America of the Old West and an episode in the life of 'Gunsmoke Jones' (828-841). In this tale plainsman Gunsmoke Jones is hired as a wagon-train boss and finds he must protect his charges from a gang who steal and ransack wagons looking for concealed objects that collectively map the whereabouts of a hidden goldmine. The art for this strip being nicely provided by an up and coming Thomson staff artist by the name of **Ron Smith** this being his first, but certainly not his last, work in this vein for the paper.

When the 'secret' of the circus kid was finally revealed **'Peem' Walker** weighed in again to illustrate the very next cover strip 'Dirk the King's Dog Boy' (834-851). Already having featured in several 'Hotspur' prose stories since the war Dirk, squire and dog-boy to Richard I has, for his first outing in pictures, the task of accompanying his master incognito from Northumberland to London after the king's ship runs aground off the Northumbrian coast.

Then, as 1952 drew to a close, we were whisked back to the U.S.A. one last time to patrol the Diego City beat of rookie motorcycle cop Steve Lucas in a strip titled 'Cyclone Steve'(842-855) one of only two picture strips drawn for 'Hotspur' by comic strip and girls

adventure strip artist **Robert MacGillivray**. The eager hero trying to apprehend Diego City's arch-villain 'The Finger' not aware that he is cahoots with Officer Snyder the city's corrupt Chief of Police.

Next time it'll be on into 1953 and 'All aboard!' for a trip on 'The Iron Road to Dixie' and the second half of our history of the 'Hotspur' picture strip.

(Illustrations are copyright D.C. Thomson)

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RIPPING YARNS REMEMBERED

by John Hammond

I can still recall the thrill of discovering the stories of H.G. Wells. The first one I encountered, at the age of thirteen, was *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, in one of those nice old Penguin editions priced at one shilling. This was soon followed by *The War of the Worlds, The Time Machine* and *The First Men in the Moon*. These stories, originally published more than a century ago, have now achieved "classic" status. They have stood the test of time because they are well written and are filled with that sense of wonder which was Wells' hallmark. Who can ever forget the description of the lunardawn in *The First Men in the Moon*, the Time Traveller's arrival in the distant future in *The Time Machine*, or the unscrewing of the Martian cylinder in *The War of the Worlds?*

Close on the heels of the scientific romances I discovered Wells' short stories and was soon revelling in 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', 'The Sea Raiders', 'The Crystal Egg' and – my especial favourite – 'Aepyornis Island', which tells the story of a man who hatches out the egg of an extinct bird on a desert island. These wonderful short stories, 84 in all, have now been collected together in one thick volume – modesty forbids me to mention the name of the editor!

One of the best exercises in the Wells' manner I have ever read is *The Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham. This vividly written account of a plague of intelligent plants which threaten mankind is portrayed with total conviction and holds the reader's attention from the first page to the last.

Turning to yarns which are usually categorised as "thrillers", a really well written one is *Panther's Moon* by Victor Canning. This is an exciting tale of a chase in the Swiss Alps involving a secret microfilm hidden inside the collar of a panther on the loose. It was competently filmed in 1950 under the title *Spy Hunt* and starred Howard Duff.

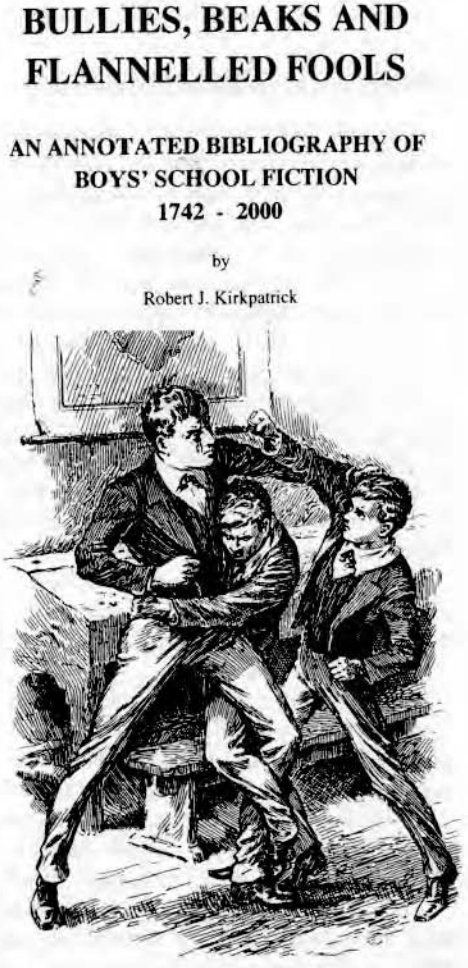
To me the test of a good yarn is to ask myself the question: do I ever wish to read this story again? The stories of John Buchan, R.L. Stevenson, H.G. Wells and the other authors I have mentioned pass this test with flying colours.

They will continue to be read and enjoyed by generations yet to come because – unlike the over-hyped "best sellers" of today – they possess literary and imaginative qualities which have an enduring appeal. Above all, these authors could tell a rattling good tale and knew how to engage the sympathy and interest of the reader.

* *

BOOK REVIEW

'BULLIES, BEAKS AND FLANNELLED FOOLS': An Annotated Bibliography of Boys' School Fiction, 1742-2000. By Robert J. Kirkpatrick. Published by (and obtainable from) the Author, at 6, Osterley Park View Road, London, W.7 2HH. Price: £13.95 plus £1.55 postage and packing – total: £15.50.
Reviewed by Brian Doyle



In the January, 1991 issue of the 'Story Paper Collectors' Digest', I wrote a lengthy and enthusiastic review of Robert J. Kirkpatrick's book, published in 1990 and the first-ever comprehensive Bibliography of boys' school fiction from 1742 up to 1990. As I said at the time, it was an outstanding and unique contribution to the field of juvenile literature research and was packed with fascinating and useful information, dealing with 3,750 boys' school stories and their authors.

Now, ten years of additional information and newly discovered school stories later, Mr. Kirkpatrick has published a Second Edition, revised, enlarged and up-dated, and my enthusiasm remains unwaned but also enlarged. This new book will be as welcome as a whole day's holiday on a summer's day during term-time – welcome not especially to schoolboys but to readers (past and present) and collectors of boys' school stories (and by 'stories' we mean 'novels' and 'books' here, not short stories). 'Adult' novels with a school setting are covered, not just boys' tales. And this time there is also a short section listing relevant post-1900 girls' stories set in co-educational schools – you can't keep the lads out of it! Did you know, incidentally, while we touch on this field, that Enid Blyton's 'Naughtiest Girl in the School' books have been 'continued' in a series by Anne Digby (best-known for her girls' school stories about Tebizon School), or that Sylvia Little's long series of stories set at Castle School (a 'co-ed.' boarding school in Devon) and published in the 1940s and

1950s, were actually written by prolific boys' author Eric Leyland (well-known for his boys' school stories set at 'Abbey School')?

Robert Kirkpatrick – Britain's only dealer in second-hand boys' school stories, by the way, whose regular annotated catalogues are a joy to read and a 'must' for anyone wanting to identify and track down a half-remembered, half-loved school yarn from their youth – has excelled himself even more this time around. For a start, the new book is nearly three times as long as the original edition (337 pages as compared to 120 pages). There are several new sections, including those on the many and varied editions of Thomas Hughes' 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' (more than 200 are listed, in English editions alone!); The Real Schools Behind the Fiction (Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury and Marlborough figure largely here, and its interesting to know that R.F. Delderfield's marvellous public school novel (and later memorable TV series) 'To Serve Then All My Days' was inspired by Delderfield's own school, West Buckland, in Devon (though location filming for the TV series was done at Milton Abbey School, Dorset); a detailed Filmography, detailed check-lists on Bunter and Jennings plays on TV, as well as on publishers and illustrators (H.M. Brock easily tops the list here, illustrating nearly 80 boys' school novels with T.M.R. Whitwell and J.H. Hartley notching up 30-odd as well); and much-expanded sections on Charles Hamilton and 'Pocket Libraries', not to mention 'Crime', 'Penny Dreadfuls', 'Anthologies' and much else.

Mr. Kirkpatrick also contributes a fascinating historical introduction dealing with boys' school stories over the past 250 years. And 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' was *not* the first in the field, as many people think; there were around 70 school yarns published before that book appeared in 1857. Favourite authors in the genre pop up from the pages as you browse through – Gunby Hadath, Hylton Cleaver, Richard Bird, Talbot Baines Reed, Harold Avery, R.A.H. Goodyear, Michael Poole, Jeffrey Havilton, Warren Bell, Anthony Buckeridge et al. And, naturally, Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks are there too, at the Head of the Table, so to speak.

Last year, Robert Kirkpatrick wrote the monumental 'Encyclopaedia of Boys' School Stories', detailing the careers and works of practically every boys' school story author you can think of. It was a mega-achievement. If you have both these books about boys' school fiction, you have everything you could possibly want to know about the genre.

Incidentally, I'm pleased to see that Mr. Kirkpatrick noted my small criticism of the original edition, when I pointed out that there was no General Index. Now he gives us a comprehensive index covering both titles and authors and occupying fifty pages.

It's good to hail this hugely-expanded, brand-new edition of Mr. Kirkpatrick's magnus opus. In case anyone wonders, 'Flannelled Fool' comes from Kipling's 1902 poem 'The Islanders' – 'Flannelled fool at the wicket and the muddied oafs at the goals.' The phrase is presumably used to spotlight the obsession all English public schools have with sport. Bullies, though decreasing, are sadly still with us, as are the also decreasing 'beaks' (masters).

Robert Kirkpatrick is neither a bully, a beak or (so far as I know) a flannelled fool – but he doesn't half know a lot about boys' school stories and their authors.

'The Happiest Days'? Read all about them (the fictional ones, anyway) in this marvellous and invaluable new book…

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DEREK MARSDEN WRITES:

I am enjoying Ray Moore's series on the picture strips in THE BIG FIVE but I need to take issue with him over his assumption that THE HOTSPUR was in danger of being closed down when the paper shortage became acute enough in the early months of the war to bring about the demise of THE SKIPPER, in 1941. It must have been tempting for him to base his judgement on a 'last in, first out' scenario, especially as both THE SKIPPER (1930) and THE HOTSPUR (1933) were the 'new kids on the block' and each was experimental in its own way. However, the decision-makers at DC Thomson and Co. would have been more influenced by the popularity of the various papers, as this was clearly what affected their profit margins. There is no question in my mind that the least appealing of the five was THE SKIPPER, as Ray asserts, but its rivals for the chop, if indeed there were any, must surely have been ADVENTURE and THE ROVER. With sales approaching a million per week THE WIZARD could never have been remotely vulnerable.

THE HOTSPUR was an exciting new concept, most of its serials being set within school environments of myriad types all over the world, and this format appealed enormously to youngsterss in the late Thirties. It was the same size as THE WIZARD and THE SKIPPER but with a far more vibrant coloured cover and a modern feel, with major characters like Scrapper Corrigan, The Big Stiff and The Smasher along with grand stories such as *Jimmy The Snooper, The Last Rocket To Venus* and *Reckless Men Of 'Q' Squadron*. Even without taking into account the fascinating tales about Red Circle School or the quality supplements that it gave to its readers THE HOTSPUR was obviously justifying its existence.

On the other hand ADVENTURE had underachieved more than once since its first appearance in 1921. It had become quite drab during the late Twenties but reinvented itself in 1931 as THE NEW ADVENTURE and over the next couple of years started to please with stories like *Zero The Silent, Erik The Viking* and *King Of The Jungle*. It fell away again though during its second coming as ADVENTURE, despite always being underpinned by Dixon Hawke who was supported through the mid-Thirties by Solo Solomon and Calamity Dan. However, between 1937 and 1940 its story output became stronger with tales like *Keeper Of The Dread Sword, Trained To Ruin The Rangers* and *The Slippery Slink*, while major characters like Strang the Terrible and Hambone Hawkins helped to increase its fan base. If ADVENTURE was under threat it almost certainly owed its survival to its recent steady improvement, its perceived importance as a pioneer, and the fact that it was to reach the significant milestone of 1,000 issues at the end of 1940.

A case could also have been made out for killing off THE ROVER. It had spent years ploughing a steady but unspectacular furrow. Early characters like Invisible Dick and Telegraph Tim returned often enough to establish a rapport with the readership and their example was followed in the next decade by The Black Sapper, Cast-Iron Bill and Hawkeye, but there was less of an effort made by the editorial staff of THE ROVER to establish a wide range of fictional chums than was the case with THE WIZARD, or even ADVENTURE, so the link between the reader and the characters via the Editor was much more tenuous. The emphasis in THE ROVER was more on individual serials and from time to time this policy did produce excellent tales like *Boss Of The Everglades, Hawke*

Of The Dales, The Dinosaur Comes Alive and *Jimmy Johnson's Grockle*. If THE ROVER was under threat it would probably have been the general overall dependability of its stories which saved it, particularly those in areas like Science Fiction, Football and War.

It must by now be clear that there was an inevitability about the death of THE SKIPPER and there are several reasons why it was doomed. Ray is quite right to focus on the dearth of really memorable protagonists but there were other reasons. Its coloured cover, in particular the masthead, was less attractive than all the others except possibly THE ROVER, and the quality of its best stories rarely reached the same heights as any of its rivals' successes. The initial impact of THE SKIPPER was due to its widespread use of photographs of life, action and adventure worldwide but this policy seems to have backfired because readers saw this initiative as a barely-concealed attempt to educate them further in their leisure time. It was to be the late Thirties though before the Editor started to withdraw them and essentially replace them over time with an extra serial or two. They had all but disappeared by the beginning of 1938 but this rescue attempt was really far too late. There was also a predictability about the prizes for its competitions - stamps, stamps and more stamps, not forgetting the albums to put them in or the articles about them. This type of blanket coverage will undoubtedly have attracted stamp collectors but it must eventually have repelled a significant percentage of those who were not. The remaining aficionados may have been optimistic on reading in the last issue (544 : Feb. 1941) that they could "...look forward to the day when it reappears.", but they might not have been quite so convinced when they read the various top-of-page comments, as they were all about wills! No tears need to be shed over its failure to reappear after the war. In any case some of its more memorable characters like Karga the Clutcher and Leatherface made a bee-line for THE HOTSPUR, Dixie Kidd and Whizz-Bang Bob inspired the creation of Cannonball Kidd (1946-1952) while Napper the Scrapper was a major influence in that of Napper Todd (1952-1955), both of whom became fixtures (excuse pun!) in THE HOTSPUR. However, it could well be that the demise of THE SKIPPER was not just due to what the Editor put into that first issue in 1930 but to what he left out. It was the only one of THE BIG FIVE to kick off without a football story.

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

LONDON O.B.B.C.

In June Chairman Norman Wright welcomed members to the first meeting at the Yateley W.I. Hall, arranged by Roger Coombes and Ann. The meeting had the special theme of the life and works of Edwy Searles Brooks and over the course of the afternoon a fascinating portrait emerged of the man and his writings. Norman Wright presented two Brooks "Collectors' Items", the 1917 issue of the *Nelson Lee Library* which featured the first St. Frank's story, and *Mr Mortimer Gets the Jitters*, the first Norman Conquest thriller. Alan Pratt then spoke about another of Brooks' creations, surly detective Bill "Ironsides" Cromwell. Graham Bruton presented an extremely tricky quiz about St. Frank's prepared by Phil Griffiths, our Brooks Librarian who sadly could not be present on this occasion.

After the splendid tea prepared by Ann and Roger, Ray Hopkins spoke about one of Brooks' visits to the London O.B.B.C. in 1963. Chris Harper read selections from Brooks' correspondence, and Norman read a paper entitled "E.S.B. - Mainly His Later Works" which charted the course of Brooks' literary career after the demise of the Nelson Lee Library. Excellent stuff to close a fine meeting.

Another new venue was used for our July meeting: Graham Bruton was our host at the Thai Experience Restaurant, West Byfleet.

Roger Jenkins, who has run the Hamiltonian Library for many years with great helpfulness and efficiency, announced that he would soon be retiring as custodian of this Library. His work has been deeply appreciated, and plans must now be made for the future running of this popular library.

There was a special presentation by our guest speaker, Richard Lancelyn Green, on Raffles and his creator, E.W. Hornung. Mr. Green proved to be as great an authority on this as on the works of Conan Doyle, in which field his knowledge is celebrated. His comprehensive examination of the exploits of the "Gentleman Cracksman" was thorough and lively. His talk, entitled "Inlaws and Outlaws" referred to Hornung's literary creations and to the man himself, who was married to Conan Doyle's sister. Raffles, of course, was one of the great cricketers of his time but, seeking greater excitement, he turned to a life of crime. Wasn't being a great cricketer enough? This was a fascinating presentation which stimulated much discussion.

After the excellent tea provided by Graham and Jessie, Your Humble Narrator presented a quiz on detectives, investigators, crime-fighters and pulp heroes. Norman Wright's monthly "Collector's Item" focused on Raffles' appearance in a 1933 issue of the *Thriller* and 'Raffles v. Sexton Blake' in S.B.L. 577, published in 1937.

Roger Coombes provided a very entertaining investigation of "The Adventures of P.C. 49" in wireless transmissions during the 1940s, and finally Norman read one of Hamilton's 'Herlock Sholmes' pastiches written in the pen-name of Peter Todd from a 1915 edition of the Greyfriars Herald.

VIC PRATT

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

We met at the Duston (Northampton) home of Howard Corn for our June gathering.

Howard talked to us about his large collection of badges from the 1950s. He mentioned exactly how he had come across each one half a century ago. Initial contact was usually made via editorial matter or advertisements in the children's papers, although national newspapers also played their part in helping Howard to acquire his collection... Almost all of the badges displayed were emblems of club membership, and Howard commented on the usefulness of a youngster belonging to one of these groups. He also mentioned the school playground pride generated by being in possession of one of these insignia.

Later Paul Wilkins played quizmaster for another brain-numbing game that we have come to expect from him. This time the subject was superheroes on the screen and in the scripts.

ADRIAN PERKINS

'THE JENNINGS REPORT'

Forty-five people attended the Jennings Meeting on Saturday 16th June at the White Hart Hotel in Lewes, organised by the indefatigable Darrell Swift. Attendees came many miles, with Florian Faust over from Germany again. This literary meeting is special because the celebrated author Anthony Buckeridge, of course, is present!

Brian Sibley, speaking without any need for notes, gave the meeting a superb start with his reflections on Jennings. It was an exceptional talk, tremendously well received. Val Biro (also without notes because he did not realise he was due to give a talk!) then conjured up those sunny afternoons fifty years ago when he listened to Jennings on the wireless. He has recently contributed an introduction, artwork and illustrations to the latest volume of Jennings Plays published by David Schutte.

David Bathurst gave us the history of Bracebridge School, the opposition in so many school matches. Either it moved frequently or Anthony Buckeridge had not been consistent! Mark Ford attending his first meeting spoke with much affection about his love of the Jennings stories. Tim Buckeridge, Anthony's son, then told us of the various incidents in real life which Anthony had used to create the funny situations in the stories (which are about to be republished).

Roland Jaggard then examined the assembled 'Form Three' on the stories: not surprisingly David Bathurst and David Schutte were top of the form. Peter Hicks outlined the interesting publishing history of Rex Milligan. Jonathan Cooper is a master at a prep school and arrived, by kind permission of the 'Archbeako', just in time to deliver his talk on crazes which periodically sweep through schools such as Linbury Court.

The whole meeting was a real tonic not least for Anthony Buckeridge, who not feeling too well at the start, rounded it off with one of his marvellous readings. As I drove away, on the radio was a review of the new Oxford English Dictionary. The expression 'Doh!' has been included due to its use by Homer Simpson (whoever he is) but compilers have traced it back to Mr Wilkins, and Buckeridge is given the attribution.

P.S. Anthony's portrait is to be included in a London exhibition of the 100 most influential children's writers.

ANDREW PITT

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

At our June meeting Paula Johnson spoke on "Reformed Characters" in our favourite school stories. She looked at those such as Talbot (the "Toff") and the bad habits of Ernest Levison and the "Bounder". In many ways, the Bounder never really reformed – he often got back into his bad ways. Paula looked at Courtney and referred us to "Rivals and Chums", the splendid tales of Highcliffe that everyone should read if copies could be obtained. Paula did great research into these and other characters and thanks were extended to her.

After refreshments, Darrell spoke about "Poor Dear Esmé" – the school story by A.M. Burrage. This story is hilarious and a classic in its own right. It concerns a boy who is given the name of Esmé (also a boy's name as well as a girl's) and goes to a girls' boarding school pretending to be a girl, to save his uncle from ruin. There is no hint of any unsavoury or distasteful events – just good humour. Bill Lofts mentioned this story in the 1994 C.D. Annual. It is a difficult book to obtain, but well worth the read if you can obtain a copy.

In July we paid a special welcome to Jonathan Cooper, a classics master at a boys' boarding school in Oxford. Jonathan is a keen attender or the annual Jennings Meetings. We were also pleased to have Richard Burgon with us on vacation from university at Cambridge. Jonathan spoke to us about Jennings and Linbury Court – how he had enjoyed the stories as a boy.

This gave us the opportunity to ask him about real life boarding school and how his educational establishment compared to that of Jennings and Darbishire. When it came to Greyfriars, that bore no relation to a boarding school – but we admitted, that plots may have been more sparse, otherwise!

Keith Atkinson read from "College Days" which seemed very appropriate after what Jonathan had said. Richard read some poetry from the Leeds poet Tony Harrison. Amusing, some was very poignant. Chris Scholey quoted from "The History of Mr. Polly" by H.G. Wells, and Harry Blowers read the letter he had recently sent to Derek Marsden of Liverpool. Derek had been to our May meeting and had spoken about the Thomson papers. Harry had been looking for a Thomson book for many years and Derek had kindly sent him a copy.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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FORUM

From TERRY BEENHAM:

You may recall that some long time ago I wrote to you about Halstead and E.S. Brooks.

Well, I wrote certainly twice maybe three times to the town information centre about E.S. Brooks but, sadly, never had an acknowledgement or reply of any kind from them. I have therefore concluded that they have no interest at all in gathering any data about him. It's a bit disappointing but I have now dropped the matter.

The work that you do in editing the SPCD is much appreciated by all of us who are subscribers. There is no other magazine quite like it.

From DES O'LEARY:

The last C.D. contained an excellently varied selection of articles. I was most interested, naturally, in Brian Doyle's article on 'Jaggers' stories in *Modern Boy* and his comments on J.F.C. Westerman, the author. (Lofts and Adley certainly had no doubt that these stories were his.)

I have been interested for years in the 'airman/detective' figure which goes back beyond the 1930s. There is no doubt about the relationship of J.F.C. and Percy F. Westerman. They were father and son as I've been told by relatives, as well as seeing documentary proof. I don't know what exact rank J.F.C. had, it could have been Major, but he was certainly an officer in World War 2, was wounded and, while convalescing or just afterwards, succeeded his father as Commodore of the Reeliffe Yacht Club at Wareham. I don't think that Percy's having written a book about 'Leslie Dexter, Cadet' in 1930 has any relevance to J.F.C.'s book 'Peter Garnet, Cadet'. P.F.W. liked following his

heroes, particularly in his sea sagas of the Golden Line, through their careers from Cadet to Captain. He started that in 1923.

The Jaggers stories certainly ante-dated Biggles, as did P.F.W.'s 'Standish of the Air Police' in 1935. Even before that was Rowland Walker's 'Captain McBlaid of the Air Police' in 1932. And I bet there were more.

I also particularly liked in the last issue Ray Moore's piece on strips in the *Skipper* and *Wizard*. What an expert that man is! The revelation by Betty Hopton that Nelson Lee had *two* wards, Una Hamilton Wright's letting us in on how her uncle helped with her Latin, and asked for details on how her girls' school functioned were also much appreciated.

Your publication of book reviews, adverts, etc. I approve whole-heartedly. These are very useful to us 'in the Provinces' so that we do not miss something we would like to read.

From BETTY HOPTON:

Some time ago a letter from Mr. Partis appeared in the C.D. Mr. Partis mentioned a new Bi-monthly magazine which was called *Sherlock Holmes the Detective Magazine*. I haven't been able to trace it in any newsagent. Perhaps other C.D. readers would also like to know the details. I wonder if Mr. Partis could give some details, e.g. the publisher's name.

There was no address, or I would have written to ask him; it does sound most intriguing.

From JOHN HAMMOND:

Can any reader give me any information regarding C. Bernard Rutley, who wrote a series of books for boys including *Explosion Island* and *The Boys of St. Bidolphs?* Rutley also contributed to numerous anthologies for children in the 1930s.

He is not mentioned in the usual reference books and I would be interested to know more about him. *Explosion Island* is a rattling good yarn in the vein of Charles Gilson.

From RAY MOORE:

In the last issue I really enjoyed Des O'Leary's piece and the article by Margery Woods on 'The Schoolgirls' Own Annual'. Given that so many of the old A.P. papers had a fascination with printing "ghost" stories, are there any examples in *Magnet, Gem* or any of the girls' papers where one of these Yuletide spectres turned out to be exactly that, and not a spy, thief, smuggler or whatever? I'd be interested to know.

From ANDREW PITT:

May I say how much I enjoy the vignettes of Greyfriars by Ted Baldock. Everything about the atmosphere of Greyfriars that I love is captured. Often there is an apt quotation, which is an encouragement to seek it out, and the verse is good too. What is life without a bit of sentiment? These pieces summon up the old school exactly as I remember it (which is remarkable for a place that doesn't exist). It is this picture in our minds that binds us all together. I was much taken with a sentence in an introduction t a new edition of George Orwell's essays that English is not so much a place, more an idea. The same could be said for Greyfriars.

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FROM THE LONE PINE TO THE HOLY GRAIL

BOOK REVIEWS
by MARY CADOGAN

Books sent recently to me for review cover a wide range of subjects and interests, from love of the English countryside to Arthurian adventure, and from prep-school exploits to the fantasies of a new-look Peter Pan.

***BEYOND THE LONE PINE* by Mark O'Hanlon** is the first, long-awaited biography of that extremely popular author, Malcolm Saville. Many C.D. readers will know and love his Lone Pine country adventure books which cross the generations in their appeal. This biography is partly a study of Malcolm's life and partly a detailed account of his literary achievements – not only in the famous Lone Pine series but in his many other works from those for young children to his 'teenage' books about the celebrated sleuth, Marston Baines.

It includes useful bibliographical listings and many attractive photographs and illustrations. For many readers its appeal will be that of potent nostalgia, but *Beyond the Lone Pine* is a book which deserves a place on the shelves of anyone who has an interest in twentieth-century children's literature.

Mark O'Hanlon, who is Co-Founder and Secretary of the Malcolm Saville Society, has published this biography to mark the centenary of Malcolm's birth. Priced at £17.99, it is available from Mark at 10 Bilford Road, Worcester, WR3 8QA.

***JENNINGS JOINS THE SEARCH PARTY* by Anthony Buckeridge** is the third volume of Jennings radio plays which were originally broadcast in BBc Children's Hour. Val Biro has contributed wonderfully lively pictures and written an introduction, and the book

includes the bonus of several letters written (ostensibly) by Jennings to Children's Hour producer, David Davis, as a prelude to each of the plays. David would read the letters over the air as 'trailers' and these are now published for the first time.

The plays have been written with Anthony's usual flair and gift for comedy, and Jennings fans should waste no time in snapping up this third volume of plays for their collections.

Two versions can be bought from the publisher, David Schutte at 119 Sussex Road, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 4LB. He offers copies signed by both Anthony Buckeridge and Val Biro at £25.00 (there are only 100 copies of these signed books). Unsigned copies are available at £12.00. (In each case the books are *post free* to C.D. readers if the C.D. is mentioned when ordering.)

***WHAT KATY DID* by Susan Coolidge (Illustrated by Priscilla Lamont) £12.99: *THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN* by George Macdonald (illustrated by Nick Walton) £12.99. *PETER PAN* by James Barrie (Illustrated by Greg Becker) £12.99: *KIDNAPPED* by Robert Louis Stevenson (Illustrated by L'uboslav Pal'o) £13.99.** All published by Antique Collectors Club, 5 Church Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1DS and available from bookshops.

These titles, of course, come under the heading of 'long-known and much-loved'. Here, however, we have new presentations of these children's classics with lots of illustrations in full colour which, though still conveying the books' original periods, manage also to have contemporary appeal. These finely produced volumes are not only children's stories but family books which many adults as well as juveniles will relish. *What Katy Did, The Princess and the Goblin* and *Kidnapped* carry introductions by some of today's distinguished children's authors – Jacqueline Wilson, Joan Aiken and Michael Morpurgo, respectively. These are perceptive, informative and helpful both in drawing attentions to occasional slightly jarring attitudes in the original texts, and in providing general contexts for the stories. In accordance with tradition, some royalties from the sales of *Peter Pan* are given to the "Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity". With Christmas not so far away, these could be lovely gift books.

***THE SEEING STONE* and *AT THE CROSSING-PLACES:* both by Kevin Crossley-Holland, published by Orion.**

Kevin Crossley-Holland is one of our best-known re-tellers of Bardic tales and myths and legends. These two volumes are the first in his Arthurian trilogy which combines two time-periods, moving from Camelot's traditionally vague time-scale to the year 1200 when another Arthur (de Caldicot) finds his life echoing that of his royal and celebrated namesake. As the two periods blend and blur we find tremendous atmosphere, excitement and an overall sense of power and meaning. Arthur's contact with the time of the Grail quest comes through his magical Seeing Stone: he is a young hero who will appeal not only to children but to older readers who appreciate high adventure and idealism. *The Seeing Stone* is now available in paperback at £5.99, and the newly issued *At the Crossing-Places* is in hardback at £10.00. Available from bookshops.

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THE TWO FACED SKIPPER OF THE ROARERS

By Alan Pratt

To my mind, one of the most under-rated of boys' authors was the prolific Frank S. Pepper. When Pepper died (in, I think, 1989 although I am ready to be corrected) at least two national
newspapers carried obituaries. This was not, however, in recognition of the many thousands of words penned for boys' papers - notably The Champion - but rather to honour the man who had created the most famous comic strip footballer of all time, Roy of the Rovers. I think there is little doubt that, without Roy, Pepper's death would have passed largely unnoticed, a great pity when one considers just how good a storyteller he was.

Readers of The Champion will probably know that the long running series of adventures of Rockfist Rogan, the Boxing Airman were written by Pepper under the pen-name Hal Wilton, but might not be aware that he was responsible also for the many and varied sporting serials attributed to John Marshall. These included some first-rate soccer stories - including Danny of the Dazzlers, a sort of textual prototype of Roy of the Rovers - and also tales of ice-hockey, cricket and speedway.

Pepper was, however, too good a writer to simply rely on descriptions of sporting events to carry his stories along. Certainly the sporting thrills were there in abundance, but usually against a background of mystery and intrigue that kept the reader ever eager for the following week's developments. An excellent example of this type of story is The Two Faced Skipper of the Roarers which ran for 21 episodes from April 2nd to August 20th 1949. The titular skipper, one Streak Stanton, is the captain of a British speedway team touring the United States, primarily to demonstrate the excellence of the British Leo-Rocket motor bikes. This involves a series of matches against the very best U.S. and Australian opposition and, as if this were not enough, the Roarers find themselves up against a criminal organisation called The Fixers(led by a mysterious individual known only as XYZ) which is determined to ensure that the British plans are scuppered.

Streak, himself, is also a pretty strange character. Whilst he does everything possible to help the Roarers win their matches, he consorts freely with gangsters and hoodlums, lies openly to his team-mates and the police and has more than a passing knowledge of the seediest clubs and dives. Incident follows upon incident, there are exciting sequences in mean city streets and, by contrast, a spooky old ghost-town in the desert and the bad guys always seem to be just one step ahead. The reader is thus left to wonder just who the traitor in the team is. In true whodunit style, red herrings are littered around to be picked up or discarded. We learn, for example, that Lucky Chance is an inveterate gambler and apparently in trouble with local hoods. Lugubrious Happy Henshaw always seems to turn up unexpectedly at the crime scene and Streak's own behaviour is often inexplicable. Just who is trying to do the Roarers down and, even more intriguingly, who is XYZ?

This story moves at a cracking pace and one does not have to be a motor cyclist - past or present- to enjoy Pepper's descriptions of the speedway matches. They are first-class, redolent of the odour of burning rubber and the cinder track and always with an overwhelming feeling that the reader is sharing in a real sporting occasion.

Indeed, with yams like this one, it is not hard to see why The Champion attracted a substantial readership over a period of around 30 years. No-one should underestimate, however, the enormous contribution made by Frank Pepper to its continued success as the top sports weekly.

He was, quite simply, a class act.

* *

THE FULL MISS READ
by
IRIS HOLMAN

I was very interested to come on Elizabeth Cooksey's piece about the many delightful stories by Miss Read. I, too, have all the Fairacre and Thrush Green Books.

The spoken word tapes by June Whitfield are, of course, abridged versions, occupying two Cassettes. All the stories are, however, available in completely unabridged versions; some are contained in four cassettes, but for the main part they occupy a six cassette volume.

They are all available for borrowing from most Public Libraries and if not to hand at the time can be reserved quite easily.

There are various readers but, for the greater part they are very well portrayed by the late Gwen Watford.

If, like me, you wish to own these volumes, they retail at about £15 for the six-cassette stories and can be purchased from the Audio Book Collection, Windsor Bridge Road, Bath, BA1 3QZ or there is a Freephone Number on 0800 136 919.

All the books are readable frequently and the same procedure can be adopted with the many Tape Volumes.

The last story of all was set in Fairacre, entitled 'A Peaceful Retirement'. This is what is now being enjoyed by the authoress. It is a selfish dream that I have, though – one final visit to Thrush Green.

* *

RETURN TO GLORY
by
ERNEST HOLMAN

A few years ago I wrote an article for the CD concerning the exploits of a junior cricket team, calling itself Glory Gardens. Six stories had appeared at the time and I concluded the article with the hope that more would be forthcoming. It was not to be, however, for some while.

It was with great pleasure that, listening to the Tea Time Books talk in Test Match Special, I learned the fact that two new books had now been published in this series.

The seventh story in the series is entitled 'Down the Wicket' and in it we learn that a supermarket is to be built on the local club ground where the matches take place. The team's clown, wicket-keeper Frankie, however has his own way of dealing with the situation and – believe it or not – is able to contact the supermarket owner – a cricket fan – and, lo and behold, the boss comes up with an artificial pitch on their old Glory Gardens Recreation Ground.

The eighth book is entitled 'The Glory Ashes', although throughout the story the contest with a visiting Australian school team is referred to as Ohbert's Ashes. The oaf of the team had, on (of all things) his website, contacted and fixed up a visit from Down Under.

The one-day and Test Match series are very well portrayed, resulting at the end of the personal appearance of the Aussie's team favourite, Shane Warne. As usual, there is a certain amount of banter between the players. Who wins? Well, that's not for me to say- but it is as close a finish as the 2001 Men's Singles final at Wimbledon.

All these eight books are on sale at most booksellers at £3.99 each. Now it remains, once gain, to hope for more stories. After all, an earlier visit to the West Indies ended in a promise to send a team to the Old Country. Also, surely, Glory Gardens must now take themselves Down Under. Here's hoping!

* *

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MUSHROOM MYSTERIES

by DEREK FORD

How interested I was to read about John Hammond's purchases of those flimsy wartime thrillers at Woolworths – and I recollect some market stalls. It must be the first mention they have had since they disappeared into obscurity. They had a passing phase in our readings to better things but they are still part of our mis-spent youths and now have, as John writes, a "certain period charm". Incidentally, the "novelties" were from the well-remembered Ellisdon catalogue, not forgetting the Ventrilo and the Five Block Puzzle, which I was never able to solve.

Those war-time thrillers were poor value for our pocket money. Better value, for twopence, were *Answers* and *Weekly News* with their stories and articles, and the Mellifont, Penguin and SBL series, to name only three, selling at sixpence. Yet these crime "pamphlets" still filled some want during the paper shortage.

If any C.D. reader now feels further interest in this byway, I could be the pioneer to his interest. Although there must have been a score of publishers and numerous titles I do not think the British Library would be able to help you find them.

So here goes, from my small stock of them. I remember F.W. Gumley, in a blue stripe series, but I now have no example. There seemed two main publishers: Everybody's Books (Strothers Bookshop Ltd) and The Mitre Press. As the former used a Mitre cover of a skull and hooded figures, they may have been associated. Everybody's small glossy paper books with coloured covers of 50 pages or so contained short and long-short stories, priced at ninepence. The authors included Eugene Ascher, Sidney Denham, Michael (Nervy) Hervey, Arthur Armstrong, Preston Yorke, and Justin Atholl. Common to them all was a want ad. for paper-covered fiction and magazines, including the SBL, for which they offered half the published price. None were numbered all were tightly printed and of a larger size. They advertise Everybody's Books, The Spring Anthology of Verse, which you were invited to contribute to, and the Genealogical Quarterly. They were also publishers of athletic books. Using the same authors as Everybody's, there were the additional Cecil Bishop, Douglas Newton, Edmund Snell, and once a cheeky filler by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Then I have three small sixpenny books published by Pocket Editions with a Monomark address. All with a different coloured cover of a frightened lady and a hatted skull. Very short stories by Penny Street and Philip Claxton Williams, the author of Mr. Hoyland, master of deduction and dating the story to 1941 – in 32 pages. There is an ad. for "Your Verdict Is?: Ten solve it yourself mystery stories" by Aida Reubens for 1s 3d. I wonder if this was a Woolworth's purchase.

I have odd copies of little note with the exception of 'Murder Medley' by Michael Hervey, for one shilling and containing eight tales, and listing 25 Hervey titles etc, etc, and 'Vivian Morgan's First Case' by Frederick Curtis (9d) in which M.B. Books, Gloucester, have had to print the book on white and pink paper.

And still in the thriller byways, have you ever come across a *Popular Detective Stories* series, selling at 4½d and published by Popular Fiction, Deacon Street, London. They are unnumbered with a coloured cover like the SBL, only smaller in size. Four of the five I have are by Jack Kelso and one by John Braydon. Five pages of 'good health' ads. sponsor the issues. There was also a *Popular Schoolgirls' Stories* series.

Another byway is the post-war school story series. I accumulated oddments from over the years, which appeared and vanished like the mushrooms of my title. For sixpence I once purchased a Junior Pyramid Book entitled 'A Menace to the School' by Michael Drew, and that was it. Four *Mascot Series* by Frank Richards I bought for 4½d each, then there were no more. Six Charkeys School Stories by J. Ashton Freeman are listed, but I have only two. Then the Mitre Press came up with a Harcourt School series by N. Wesley Firth, of which I have four titles to remember it by for a total of two shillings. Then I have three copies of *Arrow Schoolboy* Series by Leonard Walters featuring St. Hal's, and number one of *Boy's Arrow*, all published by Martin and Reid. Can any mushroom collector tell me more?

Finally, in 'Last Boat to Folly Bridge' by Eric Hiscock the author tells how he contacted Frank Richards for a profile in *Collector's Pie* during World War Two, when he found that the author's house near the coast in Kent had been commandeered by the Army, and he was said to be down to smoking tea-leaves in his beloved pipe. The Profile in Pie brought him an offer from the editor, Leonard Russell, that he should dream-up another school, and soon there was a stream of yarns about Carcroft School. Leaving me with my final question, were these ever published in book form?

* *

FAR AWAY AND LONG AGO
by Ted Baldock

Across the fields of yesterday
He sometimes comes to me,
A little lad just back from play,
The lad I used to be.
T.S. Jones

The graduation from the world of the *Rainbow* and *Puck* to that of the *Magnet* and *Gem* occurred when I was ten or eleven years of age. It was about this time that horizons began to broaden, yet it was not by any means a complete alienation. Still retained was a warm affection and loyalty to those lovely old coloured comics which gave so many hours of pleasure.

But Harry Wharton and Co. and of course Billy Bunter were waiting in the wings to weave their magic spell and I was by no means an unwilling victim and participant in imagination in their japes and adventures.

But the 'Owl' gradually and inexorably gained the ascendancy, I was committed. Yet one never loses sight, or the remembrance, of earlier loves. They retain their lustre as lights shining upon the way.

Also remembered from the golden time is Arthur Mee's *Children's Newspaper* which was ever present among our favourites. For some inexplicable reason I always felt rather 'grown up' when reading this paper.

At this stage regularly each week, I believe it was Friday, I would be sent to the local newsagent clutching four (old) pennies in my hand wherewith to purchase those two senior papers – so it appeared to me – *Chums* and *All Sports*. Not for myself, I being

considered far too young to appreciate – or even understand – their literary value, according to my elder brother.

On the way home however I never failed to take a peep into *Chums* to see what was going forward. By so doing I was transgressing a sacred and immutable law reiterated over my juvenile head, being warned of consequences unpleasant in the extreme.

How well one recalls those exciting and well executed cover illustrations by Paul Hardy, Stanley L. Wood and Fred Bennet, Hardy being particularly adept with pirate and highwayman subjects, sea battles, walking the plank and coach holdups on lonely stretches of road. All had an urgency and excitement for the young reader.

Perhaps I was rather young to appreciate fully the text accompanying those illustrations at the time, but nothing would stop me, not even the dire threats of my senior, from enjoying these illicit glimpses on the way home.

Already in those early days I considered *Chums* to be a worthy rival to the *Boys' Own Paper* which also found its way regularly into our home.

The writings of Alfred Judd, S. Andrew Wood and Harold Avery were, as yet for me, all waiting in the splendid future. Those authors were producing stories which were destined to give endless pleasure to so many readers.

I recall some years ago looking at copies of *Chums*. They were in near mint condition having been carefully preserved and hidden away in an attic for more than sixty years. It was some years previous to this that I was wont to live dangerously and 'look at the pictures' on the way home.

What visions and memories were stirred by those old copies! What pictures in the fire were conjured at seeing them once more! Yet perhaps it is not so very strange. They appeared as fresh and inviting as on their debut so long ago.

When one views certain contemporaries today who appear to have left boyhood long ago, I feel grateful to a kindly providence which has enable me to retain so many of my youthful attitudes in outlook and interest.

R.H. Stoddard in his 'Flight of Youth' sounds a somewhat sombre note which, perhaps, could be interpreted as a warning:

There are gains for all our losses,
  There are balms for all our pain,
But when youth, the dream departs,
  It take something from our hearts,
And it never comes again.

Those days of 'Far away and Long ago' possess a certain indefinable quality, a charm, which to those who derive pleasure in recalling them have a unique magic and romance.

Old story papers telling of wild adventures in distant climes, stories of school rivalries and mystery, of fierce battles on the playing field. All live vividly for those happy readers who still carry youth in their hearts. These echoes will always persist.

Harry Wharton and Co. will always be decent fellows. Herbert Vernon Smith will never, despite many fine qualities, be really 'true blue', and William George Bunter will always remain a fat ass in glimmering spectacles. Will the 21st century produce a gallery of characters remotely as good as those well loved heroes of the 'other years'?

* *

REVERIE
by
TED BALDOCK

Greyfriars ways and school time days
Seem very far away
Yet the one thought with me stays
T'was but the other day
When Bunter used his artful tricks,
Bob Cherry with his roar
And Skinner in another fix,
with laughs and japes galore.
I see again the old school quad,
The buildings grey and old,
The luscious green of 'Big Side' sward,
What tales these could have told.
The fading light, the match near won,
Long shadows o'er the scene,
The lurid light of setting sun,
the things that might have been.
All this comes drifting back to me
As I dream by my fire,
I've youth once more, again I see
My world of heart's desire.

* *

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA from Peter Hanger

Mr. Purkiss, as he tramped by the bridle-path in Redclyffe Wood looked as if he was in want of some luck. He wore a shabby old overcoat that was too large for him, evidently having been made for a man half as big again as Smudge. His boots were ancient, and held more or less together by twisted wire. His hat would have made a dust-heap look unusually shabby. His countenance indicated that he could not afford the use of soap. His fingers indicated that a nail-brush was far beyond his means.

Only in one respect did Mr. Purkiss appear to spend money. There was an aroma clinging to him of mingled beer and tobacco, which showed that, somehow or other, Mr. Purkiss was able to obtain the unnecessaries, if not the necessaries of life. MAGNET 1659

"Don't talk any more, Bunter! This is a meeting of the Remove Dramatic society. You shouldn't have come in this study! Go to some other study!"

"I'm going to be sacked, very likely!" howled Bunter. "Think your rotten play matters, you chump?"

"You being sacked won't make any difference – you're not in the cast," said Wibley. "One fellow won't be missed from the audience. That's all right." MAGNET 1652

A couple of hours had elapsed since the Owl of the Remove had transferred the contents of Coker's hamper to his own capacious inside. Bunter was not exactly hungry again yet. But he was getting that way. Certainly he had no idea of missing tea at teatime. An extra meal between meals did not make Bunter desire to miss the regular ones, by any means. MAGNET 1155

continued...

"Oh, don't be an as! Think you can pull my leg?" grunted Billy Bunter. "You fellows know, same as I do, that he's a little beast! What did he give me those lines for? He made out that I was eating toffee in class! I told him I hadn't any toffee about me! He couldn't take a fellow's word. As good as calling a chap a liar, you know. Then he made me turn out my pocket, and I had to chuck the toffee in the waste-basket!"

Billy Bunter breathed indignation.

Not only had he had his word doubted, which was insulting; but he had had to part with the toffee, which was worse.

MAGNET 1672

.....I was thinking of having a motor-car out on Saturday afternoon..."

Potter and Greene brightened up.

"Not at all a bad idea," said Potter heartily.

"Jolly good, I think!"

"I was going to ask you fellows if you'd care for a run---"

"Good man!"

"And a bit of a feed somewhere along the coast ---"

"Tip-top!"

"But now it will have to be off," continued Coker.

"Eh?"

"I shan't order the car, after all."

"Coker, old chap," said Potter, with a mingling of dignity and cordial friendliness that was quite touching, and, at the same time, noble – "Coker, I hope you're not annoyed by a few careless remarks a fellow may have made at a time when he'd come in hungry for tea? I admit that I spoke rather crudely."

"Not in the best taste, your remarks, Potter," said Greene, shaking his head. I thought so at the time."

"You backed him up!" exclaimed Coker, warmly.

"D – d – did I?"

"Yes, you did."

"I – I was rather hungry, and – and I own up that I was cross," said Greene, with manly frankness. I own up to that, Coker. A fellow can't say more."

Horace Coker's brow cleared. All was calm and bright once more in Coker's study.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you fellows own up in this many way," he said. A chap need never mind owning up when he's in the wrong. I should if I was ever in the wrong."

"You never are, old fellow!"

"Yes, that's true; I'M speaking generally. I admit I was annoyed at what you said; but, after all, we're chums!" said Coker. "Let's forget all about it."

"Spoken like a real sportsman, Coker," exclaimed Greene, with great admiration.

"What I like about you, old fellow – what makes you so popular – is that sporting instinct of yours."

"Just what I was going to say!" remarked Potter.

Coker smiled genially.

"Well, it's all right, then!" he said. And he sat down to his work again.

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance.

"And – and on Saturday ---" murmured Potter.

"The – the car ---" remarked Greene.

"Oh, that's off, as I said," replied Coker, without looking up.

"Eh?"

"Off!"

"Yes, I expect to be busy on Saturday afternoon, you know, answering the chaps who will weight in with replies to my advertisement."

"Wha – a – at?"

"That was what I was going to mention when you fellows interrupted me with your very frank and straightforward apology," said Coker. "I'm glad you did it – it makes me think better of you."

And Coker went on with his prep.

MAGNET 597

The chums of the Remove were sauntering at their ease, but Bunter was a slow walker. He could have beaten a snail, but perhaps, only an old, tired snail.

MAGNET 1480