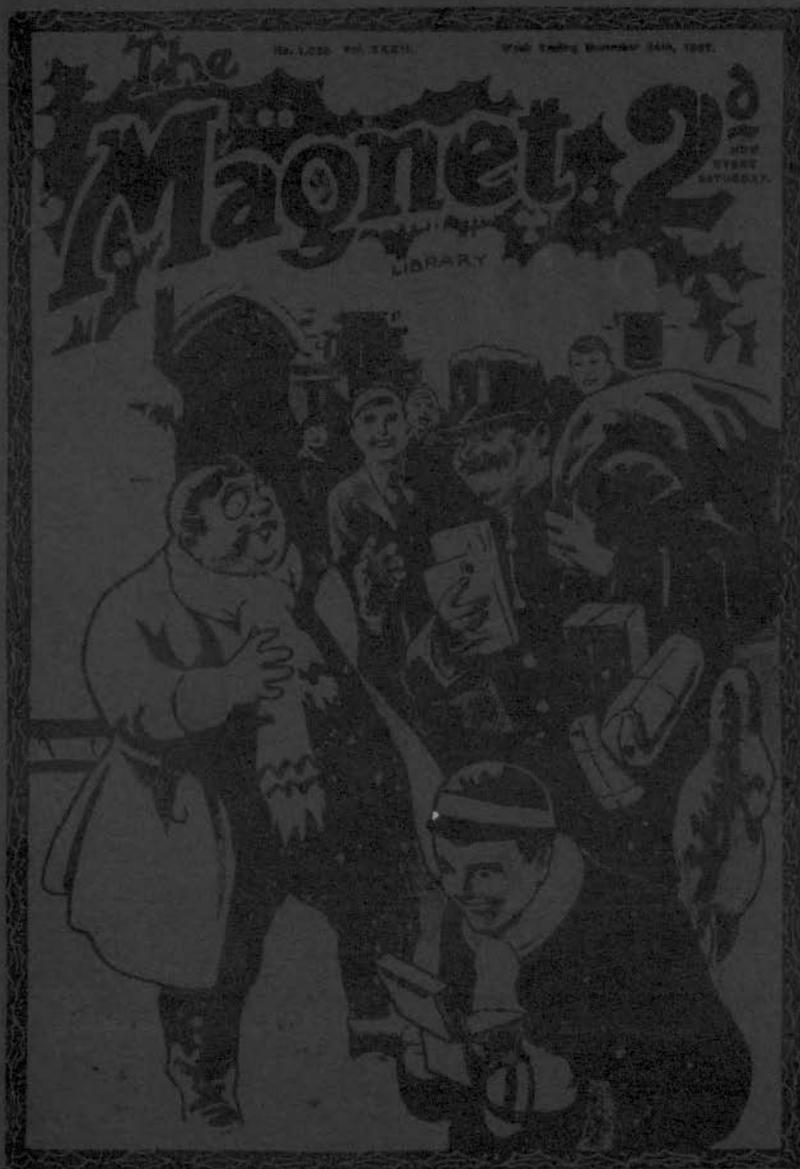


STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 57

No. 660

DECEMBER 2003



BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT ARRIVES!



SALUTE TO AN OLD HOLIDAY ANNUAL

by Ted Baldock



Your looks may be dog-eared and battered,
Your leaves may be loose in its case,
Small defects, does this really matter?
Does this for a moment debase?
A book is a gem whatever its state,
Be it held together with gum.
It's a treasure to come to, soon and late,
For always there's something new.
Take heart, old tome you will always be,
Despite your battered state,
Worth your weight in gold to me,
'Pon this there is no debate.
A friend in need is a friend indeed,
And this you will always be.
What'ere fate holds, what'ere the need,
You will be 'true blue' to me.
Through storm and stress you've done your best
To keep my spirits high
For many years my path you've blazed
And now I set you by,
A place of honour on my shelf
Be yours for years to come.
A tattered volume - but what wealth,
A legend you've become.



STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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W.H. GANDER

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Once again I have the great pleasure of presenting to you an issue of the C.D. which celebrates the Christmas and New Year seasons, with all their promise of warmth and renewal.

I feel that the contents of our magazine aptly echo the spirit of good-will, as well as plenty of appropriate festive fun. Our contributors, as always, have produced a lovely variety of articles, stories and picture which convey the essence of our wide-ranging hobby. Our warm thanks are due to them and, of course, to all who have contributed features throughout the year.

I would also like to thank Mandy, and the staff at Quacks, our printers, for their continuing and willing work on our behalf. To all the C.D.'s loyal readers and supporters I also send my sincere thanks and appreciation. Perhaps I can take this opportunity to say how much I enjoy receiving your many letters (and, at this time, your

Christmas cards and greetings) even though I am not able to acknowledge each one personally.

To you and your families I send the age-old but ever-new greetings:

**A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY, PEACEFUL AND
PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR**

Mary Cadogan



SOME BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS...

Bookshops in the run-up to Christmas are bulging with new and enticing volumes. I would like to draw your attention to one or two publications which are likely to be of special interest to C.D. readers.

Sadly, Gerald Campion, who portrayed Billy Bunter so brilliantly on TV and in the theatre, died last year. He had, a year or so earlier, lent me some of his lively and intriguing autobiographical memoirs. I am now very happy to announce that Gerald's widow, Susan, has allowed Norman Wright to publish extracts from these, edited by me, in a very attractive booklet entitled *Gerald Campion: The Man Who Was Bunter*. An order form for this is tucked into this issue of the C.D., and I feel that many readers would enjoy having a copy as part of their Christmas reading. But *do* order early, as this is a limited edition!

Throughout the year those extremely enterprising and dedicated publishers, *Girls Gone By*, have been producing a fine range of nostalgic reprints. Their recent list includes books by my ever-favourite hard-back girls story writer, Dorita Fairlie Bruce: *The Girls of St. Bride's*, *Nancy at St. Bride's*, *That Boarding School Girl* and *The New Girl and Nancy*. They have also republished titles by Elsie Oxenham and Elinor Brent-Dyer and now, to my *great* pleasure, a revised reprint of *You're a Brick, Angela!* by Pat Craig and myself. This has the bonus of a new introduction by us, and *many* more pictures than the previous editions. (See pages 28 to 31 of this C.D. for a full review, with details of the address from which you can order this and any other titles from *Girls Gone By Publishers*)

M.C.





CHRISTMAS STORIES - A REVISITING

by Laurence Price

"There are not many places that I find it more agreeable to revisit, when I am in an idle mood, than some places to which I have never been. For, my acquaintance with those spots is of such long standing, and has ripened an intimacy of so affectionate a nature, that I take a particular interest in assuring myself that they are unchanged."

With these opening words from "Nurse's Stories", one of his more gruesome seasonal tales, Charles Dickens surely sums up perfectly the great appeal of returning to our favourite old books and stories; and what better time than Christmas to return to our seasonal favourites in, as the popular song reminds us, this 'most wonderful time of the year' when 'there'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago.'

It is now one hundred and sixty years since Charles Dickens' immortal Christmas classic *A Christmas Carol* was first published; the date was 19 December 1843. William Thackeray said, "Who can listen to objections regarding such a book? It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness." Writing in 1871, the novelist Margaret Oliphant recalled that this matchless fable of moral renewal "moved us all in those days as it had been a new gospel." It is the best Christmas story of all and compliments the Greatest Christmas Story of All; for as Dickens reminded us in the pages of his lovely Christmas fable "*it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.*"

There is so much to enjoy in this wonderful book that it is very difficult to select a passage, or passages; does one choose Scrooge himself, or Bob Cratchit and his lovely family - should one centre on Tiny Tim, or on one or all of the Three Spirits, or on the cast of supporting characters from the Ghost Marley to the jovial Fëzziwig? But one passage comes to mind where Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present are eavesdropping on the Cratchits and, of course, Tiny Tim, as they eat their meagre Christmas dinner, an object lesson for us all in dealing with poverty and hardship with joy and humility.

"Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought the goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course - and in truth it was something like it in that house. Mrs Cratchit made the gravy...hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour. Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce; Martha dusted the hotplates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table...At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs Cratchit, looking slowly all along the



... Mrs. Cratchit entered flushed, but smiling proudly - with the pudding, like a speckled cannon ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half a quarter of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

"A Christmas Carol"

illustrated by the American artist Sol Eytinge, Jr. (1833-1905)
for an 1868 edition of the book.

carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose...Eked out by apple sauce and mashed potatoes... it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family...Mrs Cratchit left the room alone - too nervous to bear witness - to take the pudding up, and bring it in...

Hallo! A great deal of steam! A smell like a washing day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastry-cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding!...Mrs Cratchit entered - flushed, but smiling proudly - with the pudding, like a speckled cannon ball, so hard and

firm, blazing in half a quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck in the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding Bob Cratchit said—Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been a flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing...

Then Bob proposed:-

“A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God Bless us!” Which all the family re-echoed.

“God bless us every one!” said Tiny Tim, the last of all...

“Spirit,” said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, “tell me if Tiny Tim will live.”

“I see a vacant seat,” replied the Ghost, “in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future the child will die... What, then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.”

We move on now to the closing years of the nineteenth century, to No. 221b Baker Street and the extraordinary case of *The Blue Carbuncle*. This story appeared in the January 1892 edition of the *Strand Magazine* and was later collected in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* of the same year, written, of course, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But let his Doctor Watson set the scene for us.

“I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach upon the right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable hard felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several places. A lens and a forceps lying upon the seat of the chair suggested that the hat had been suspended in this manner for the purpose of examination...”

So the scene is set and Holmes explains to Watson that the aforementioned bowler hat *“arrived upon Christmas morning, in company with a good fat goose, which is, I have no doubt, roasting at this moment in front of Peterson’s fire...”*

It transpires that Peterson, the commissionaire, had come by the goose at four o’clock on Christmas morning on the corner of Goodge Street when a man, wearing the bowler hat now in the possession of Holmes, was waylaid by some roughs. He was also carrying a large white goose. On seeing Peterson, in uniform approaching, and mistaking him for a policeman, both the roughs and the man had run off, leaving the hat and the goose behind. While Holmes is cleverly explaining to Watson all about the likely identity of the owner of the hat from traces of hair, stains and wear on it,

Peterson bursts in - he has found a precious stone in the crop of the roast goose - the recently stolen blue carbuncle belonging to the Countess of Morcar. Holmes reads a recent newspaper report; he quickly concludes from it that an innocent man has been arrested for the crime.

Holmes, accompanied by Watson is soon on the trail which takes him across London to Covent Garden Market in pursuit of Christmas geese! It all, of course, proves to be anything but a wild goose chase and using his sleuthing skills he soon has the thief, James Ryder, at his mercy in the sitting-room at Baker Street; and it is for Holmes' mercy that the repentant Ryder begs:-

"For God's sake, have mercy!" he shrieked. "Think of my father! Of my mother! It would break their hearts. I never went wrong before! I never will again. I swear it. I'll swear it on the Bible. Oh, don't bring it into court! For Christ's sake, don't!"

...There was a long silence, broken only by his heavy breathing, and by the measured tapping of Sherlock Holmes' finger-tips upon the edge of the table. Then my friend rose, and threw open the door.

"Get out!" said he.

"What, sir! Oh, Heaven bless you!"

"No more words. Get out!"

And no more words were needed. There was a rush, a clatter upon the stairs, the bang of a door, and the crisp rattle of running footfalls from the street.

"After all, Watson," said Holmes, reaching up his hand for his clay pipe... "I suppose I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again. He is too terribly frightened. Send him to gaol now, and you will make him a gaolbird for life. Besides, it is the season for forgiveness. Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward. If you will have the goodness to touch the bell, Doctor, we will begin another investigation, in which also a bird will be the chief feature."

On now, to Edwardian times. On 8 October 1908 another classic book was published - *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame. It is a book I think we largely associate with river banks and long, hot lazy summer days and with the adventures of Ratty and Mole and the irascible Toad and the wonderful illustrations of E.H. Shepard. Yet the book does move through the seasons and perhaps one of the most lovely chapters in the one entitled "Dolce Domum". Christmas is a time for homecoming and it is in this chapter that Mole, after spending many happy months in the company of the Rat, suddenly picks up the scent of home and is drawn back there. It is mid-December - Yule-time.

Arriving back at "Mole-End" they find it cold and deserted - after all, Mole had walked out of it on a whim months before when he had become fed up spring-cleaning! The practical Rat soon has a blazing fire going and finds some provisions for them to eat a simple supper. Then they hear the sound of scuffling small feet on the gravel of the forecourt outside and the confused murmur of tiny voices.

"What's up?" inquired the Rat, pausing in his labours.

"I think it must be the field-mice," replied the Mole, with a touch of pride in his manner, "They go round carol-singing regularly at this time of year. They're quite an institution in these parts. And they never pass me over - they come to Mole End last of all; and I used to give them hot drinks, and supper too sometimes, when I could afford it. It will be like old times to hear them again."

"Let's have a look at them!" cried the Rat, jumping up and running to the door.

It was a pretty sight, and a seasonable one, that met their eyes when they flung the door open. In the fore-court, lit by the dim rays of a horn lantern, some eight or ten little field-mice stood in a semi-circle, red worsted comforters round their throats, their fore-paws thrust deep into their pockets, their feet jiggling for warmth...one of the elder ones that carried a lantern was just saying, "Now then, one, two, three!" and forthwith their shrill little voices uprose on the air, singing one of the old-time carols that their forefathers composed in fields that were fallow and held by frost, or when snow-bound in chimney corners, and handed down to be sung in the miry street to lamp-lit windows at Yule-time."

The carol is sung and then "the voices ceased, the singers, bashful but smiling, exchanged sidelong glances, and silence succeeded - but for a moment only. Then, from up above and far away, down the tunnel they had so lately travelled was borne to their ears in a faint musical hum the sound of distant bells ringing a joyful and



"The Wind in the Willows"
illustrated by E.H. Shepard

clangorous peal."

When Charles Dickens went on his famous lecture tours to America he would read from *A Christmas Carol* and so Americans would experience a flavour of an English Christmas, whether it be a lavish party given by Mr Fezziwig or the frugal repast of the Cratchit family. So we temporarily leave these shores for a taste of a unique Christmas as experienced by the 'Red Indian' conservationist, Grey Owl, in the Canadian wilderness as he recounted in the chapter "How We Made Christmas" in *Pilgrims of the Wild* in 1934.

"On Christmas Eve all was ready. But there was one thing missing; Anahareo decided that the beavers were to have a Christmas Tree...Anahareo took axe and snowshoes and went out into the starry Christmas night.

She was gone a little longer than I expected, and on looking out I saw her standing in rapt attention, listening. I asked her what she heard.

"Listen." She spoke softly. "Hear the Christmas Bells," and pointed upwards.

I listened. A light breeze had sprung up and was flowing, humming in the pine tops far above; whispering at first then swelling louder in low undulating waves of sound, and sinking to a murmur; ascending to a deep strong wavering note, fading again to a whisper. The carillons of the Pine trees; our Christmas Bells."

From the Canadian wilderness then to the more genteel world of Mrs Miniver, Mrs Miniver was created by Joyce Maxtone Graham, alias 'Jan Struther' who was a writer of poems and witty essays for *Punch*. Peter Fleming, whose brother was Ian Fleming, commissioned Jan Struther to write Mrs Miniver pieces to brighten up the Court Page of *The Times*. The pieces were published as a book *Mrs Miniver* just after the outbreak of war in October 1939. This extract comes from the chapter simply entitled "Christmas Shopping".

"...she slipped out of the shop. There was a raw wind; sleety rain was beginning to fall, blurring the lamplight; the pavements were seal-sleek; it was settling down into one of those nasty wet evenings which the exiled Londoner longs for with a quite unbearable nostalgia.

She tumbled all her parcels into the back of the car, slid, happy but exhausted, into the driving seat, and set off for home ...

Getting home was evidently going to be a long job. The usual six o' clock home-going stream was in spate with Christmas crowds, and Oxford Street was a solid jam. It was her own fault, she had to admit, as she sat back and waited for the light to change. Every year the same thing happened. At the beginning of November she made up her mind that this time, for once, she would get her Christmas shopping done early. She went as far as writing out a list- and there, for several weeks, the matter rested. At intervals she tries to pretend that Christmas Day fell on the 5th of December, or alternatively, that all her friends and relations lived in South Africa and that she had to catch an early mail; but it was no use—Mrs Miniver knew perfectly well that Christmas was not until the 25th of December, and that all the people on her list lived in England."

In 1941, during the darkest days of the Second World War, that quintessentially English romance, James Hilton's *Random Harvest* was published. The following year it was made into one of the most successful and fondly remembered films of the war years and starred Ronald Colman as Charles Rainier/Smithy and the lovely Greer Garson as Paula Ridgeway. Although both book and film exploited the loss of memory (twice) of Charles Rainier/Smithy and the love of "both" of them by Paula Ridgeway the film adaptation was very different in matters of detail from the novel. In the novel the Christmas of 1919 is the prelude to Smithy's tragic loss of memory when that part of his life with Paula will be lost to him for years to come. Smithy and Paula have recently married; the parson who has married them, Blampied, is also their friend and as Christmas approaches he has good news for Smithy who has taken up writing; he has a friend in Liverpool who is interested in Smithy's writing and after Christmas Smithy will travel there. Smithy and Paula are living in London.

"...the idea occurred to them to celebrate by doing things they had been nervous of for so long – a regular evening out... They went first to the Holborn Empire to see Little Tich, then for supper to an Italian restaurant in Soho. When they emerged, still with a couple of hours until train time, he saw a hansom cab swinging along Coventry Street, temptingly out of place on a cold December night, but for that very reason he waved to it, telling the man to take them anywhere, just for the ride. Under the windy sky the blaze of Christmas still sparkled in the shops as they drove away, jingling north and west along Regent Street, through Hanover Square and past Selfridge's to Baker Street, with ghosts of Londoners stepping out of their tall houses ("And if I mistake not, my dear Watson, here is our client just arriving"), bidding then godspeed into the future; and because they both had faith in that future they were drenched in a sort of wild ecstasy, and had the cabby drive them round and round Regent's Park while they talked and laughed and whistled to the parrots every time they passed the Zoo.

Those were the happy moments."

The poet, Laurie Lee, was born in the little village of Slad in the Cotswold Hills of Gloucestershire in 1914; his first, and best, volume of autobiography *Cider with Rosie* was published in 1959 which recounted his childhood years in the Cotswolds. Here is how he remembered Christmas as a boy and as one of 'that generation which, by chance, saw the end of a thousand years' life.' ... 'of white roads, rutted by hooves and cartwheels, innocent of oil and petrol'.

"Later, towards Christmas, there was heavy snow, which raised the roads to the top of the hedges. There were millions of tons of the lovely stuff, plastic, pure, all-purpose, which nobody owned, which one could carve or tunnel, eat, or just throw about. It covered the hills and cut off the villages, but nobody thought of rescues; for there was hay in the barns and flour in the kitchens, the women baked bread, the cattle were fed and sheltered - we'd been cut off before, after all.

The week before Christmas, when snow seemed to lie thickest, was the moment for carol-singing; and when I think back to those nights it is to the crunch of snow

and to the lights of the lanterns on it. Carol-singing in my village was a special tithe for the boys, the girls had little to do with it. Like hay-making, black-berrying, stone-clearing and wishing-people-a-happy-Easter, it was one of our seasonal perks..."

"We were the Church Choir—For a year we had praised the Lord out of key, and as a reward for this service - on top of the Outing - we now had the right to visit all the big houses, to sing our carols and collect our tribute—we climbed up to Joseph's farm. Sheltered by trees, warm on its bed of snow, it seemed always to be like this. As always it was late; as always this was our final call..."

Everything was quiet; everywhere there was the faint crackling silence of the winter night. We started singing, and we were all moved by the words and the sudden trueness of our voices. Pure, very clear, and breathless we sang:

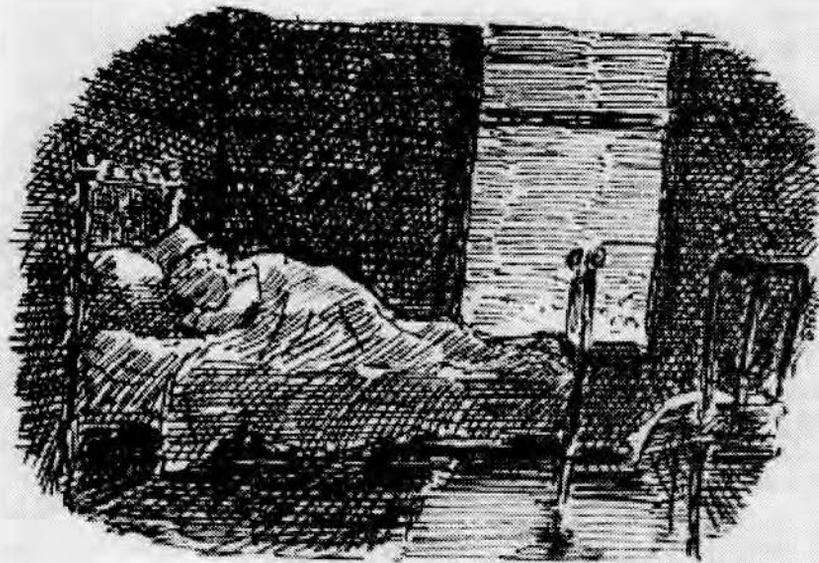
*As Joseph was a walking
He heard an angel sing;
"This night shall be the birth-time
Of Christ the Heavenly King.*

*He neither shall be homed
In Housen nor in hall,
Nor in place of paradise
But in an ox's stall..."*

And 2,000 Christmases became real to us then; the houses, the halls, the places of paradise had all been visited; the stars were bright to guide the Kings through the snow; and across the farmyard we could hear the beasts in the field. We were given roast apples and hot mince-pies, in our nostrils were spices like myrrh, and in our wooden box, as we headed back for the village, there were golden gifts for all."

This article began with an anniversary and it ends with another, perhaps sadder one. Fifty year ago, on 9 November 1953, the great Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas died. I love his poetry and his prose and his great play for voices. *Under Milk Wood*, completed and performed just before his death in 1953. But I love most of all his short stories about his childhood; Dylan Thomas, in my view, caught the lost innocence, the nostalgia, and the joys and regrets of childhood the best of all. And next to the Nativity, and *A Christmas Carol*, "A Child's Christmas in Wales" is my favourite Christmas story of all.

It had an interesting genesis and is compounded from two earlier stories, "Memories of Christmas" first broadcast for BBC Wales Children's Hour on 16 December 1945 and published in *The Listener* on 20 December 1945, and a "Conversation for Christmas" for *Picture Post* on 27 December 1947. Then, in 1950, during his first visit to America, the classic text, an amalgamation of the above two pieces was published in *Harper's Bazaar* in December 1950. This wonderful story has since been published in its own right in various illustrated editions; my personal



"A Child's Christmas in Wales" illustrated by EDWARD ARDIZZONE for 1978 edition.
"...I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept."

favourite is the 1978 edition illustrated in colour by Edward Ardizzone. To finish this selection of Christmases past, here is how Dylan Thomas remembered the Swansea Christmases of his boyhood:

"One Christmas was so much like another, in those years around the sea-town corner now and out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep, that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six.

All the Christmases roll down toward the two-tongued sea, like a cold and headlong moon bundling down the sky that was our street; and they stop at the rim of the ice-edged, fish-freezing waves, and I plunge my hands in the snow and bring out whatever I can find...

Years and years and years ago, when I was a boy, when there were wolves in Wales—when we rode the daft and happy hills bareback, it snowed and it snowed. But here a small boy says: 'It snowed last year, too. I made a snowman and my brother knocked it down and I knocked my brother down and then we had tea.'

'But that was not the same snow,' I say. 'Our snow was not only shaken from whitewash buckets down the sky, it came shawling out of the ground and swam and drifted out of the arms and bodies of the trees: snow grew overnight on the roofs of the houses like a pure and grandfather moss, minutely white-ivied the walls and settled on the postman, opening the gate, like a dumb, numb thunderstorm of white, torn Christmas cards...

"There were the Useful Presents:..."

'Go on to the Useless Present.'

'Bags of moist and many-coloured jelly babies and a folded flag and a false nose and a tram-conductor's cap and a machine that punched tickets and rang a bell; never a catapult; once, by mistake that no one could explain, a little hatchet...'

'Hardboileds, toffee, fudge and allsorts, crunches, cracknels, humbugs, glaciers, marzipan, and butterwelsh for the Welsh. And troops of bright tin soldiers who, if they could not fight, could always run. And Snakes-and-Families and Happy Ladders. And Easy Hobbi-Games for Little Engineers, complete with instructions..Oh, easy for Leonardo!' ...

'Always on Christmas night there was music. An uncle played the fiddle, a cousin sang 'Cherry Ripe', and another uncle sang 'Drake's Drum.' It was very warm in the little house.

Auntie Hannah, who had got on to the parsnip wine, sang a song about Bleeding Hearts and Death, and then another in which she said her heart was like a Bird's Nest; and then everybody laughed again; and then I went to bed. Looking through my bedroom window, out into the moonlight and the unending smoke-coloured snow, I could see the lights in the windows of all the houses on our hill and hear the music rising from them up the long, steadily falling night. I turned the gas down, I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept."



THREE MUSICAL MEMORIES

by Reg Cox



I left school early in 1931 and was articled to a Chartered Accountant for five years.

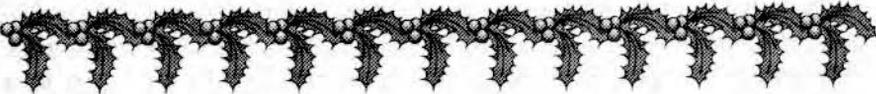
Each Friday afternoon I had tea in a cafe (6d), and then spent the evening at the local cinema (9d). It was upstairs over a draper's shop, but it became, for me, an Aladdin's Cave, giving me new and wonderful experiences of drama, westerns, musicals and epics, and some early thrillers like *Dracula* and *The Invisible Man*.

I was captivated by the silent *Ben Hur*, and particularly by the haunting refrain which I have never forgotten. I wrote to a film magazine to ask what this tune was, and the answer came back *Liszt's Les Preludes*. Whenever I remember this music I am warped back to that small but magic little cinema in Ross on Wye.

In 1936 my articles finished, and I became a student in Bristol, where I read Theology. It was a custom for each year to have a special party, usually a visit to the

cinema, followed by a study meal which the Owl of the Remove would have enjoyed! The film we went to see in 1936 was *Rose Marie* with Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy. Again I was captivated by a tune which I have never forgotten. The song was the *Indian Love Call*, and coupled with the scenery it enthralled me. Happily I can hear it now whenever I like, as I have a video of that film first seen and heard so long ago.

My third memory is of an early Musical made in 1929 which I saw in 1932. Once again, I was captivated, this time by three tunes: *I'm a dreamer, aren't we all?* (I was!) sung by Janet Gaynor; *If I had a talking picture of you*, sung by Charles Farrell, and a comedy duet, *You'll find me picking petals off a daisy*. Again, I can be transported back to a very happy and so simple a life in those far-off days. This film I can also see on a video, and I remember with much gratitude that small but, for me, magic window, opening on to new, and totally enthralling, experiences.



WANTED: The Schoolgirls' Own (weekly magazine). Schoolgirl's Own Library first series - Morcove stories - Nos. 36, 46, 58, 77, 85, 91, 92, 103, 109, 121, 127, 133, 145, 151, 163, 169, 178, 184, 191, 192, 201, 209, 219, 220, 243, 244, 259, 279, 295, 307, 319, 342, 355, 367, 379, 403, 439, 463, 471, 487, 499, 507, 515, 521, 529, 537, 546, 563, 579, 587, 595, 611, 615, 617, 623, 627, 635, 639, 643, 669. SYLVIA READ, 8 Goline Court, Hillman 6168, Western Australia. Tel: +61 8 9527 3534. Email: diamond2@iinet.net.au

WANTED: Collectors' Digest monthlies 1-200. Also 500-600. Collectors' Digest Annuals, most years. P. GALVIN, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks, S75 2DT. Tel: 01226 295613.





CHRISTMAS EVE TERROR AT CEDAR CREEK by Ray Hopkins



The Christmas Eve Mission Hall dance, as always hosted by the young-at-heart Mr. and Mrs. Smiley, is an end-of-year event after school closes always looked forward to by the boys and girls of Cedar Creek School and other young folks who live in the Thompson Valley. Too far to travel to the big city of Vancouver this was a small celebration of simpler, probably happier country folks. Because of the vast distances between the various farmsteads, neighbours with large sleighs were always pleased to pick up their school friends from the out-lying areas. Walking was not possible and, in any case, the heavy snowfall would have made slogging along in deep drifts not so much fun as a jolly, breezy ride behind galloping steeds.

Frank Richards from England, his future literary career not looming very large in the sights at the moment, is living with his Uncle at the Lawless Ranch just outside Thompson. His energetic cousin Bob Lawless, a great practical joker and jollier-up of people in general, is concentrating on the long journey to the other side of Thompson to pick up Tom and Molly Lawrence, school chums, in a large sleigh which is destined to carry more than the two who leave the Lawless ranch. They intend to pick up Vere Beauclerc, the remittance man's son, on the way back from the Lawrence's but Vere is waiting for them near the small cabin, the home of the Beauclercs which they have to pass on the way. The small cabin is rather overcrowded at the moment due to another visitor from England, Vere's cousin Algy who has evidently been schooled in the same atmosphere as Arthur Augustus as he sports a monocle, has brought over a topper and smart evening clothes with which he intends to pop the eyes of the youngsters at the mission dance. Whether he also has trouble with his "r's" will only become known later when he makes his entrance into this narrative.

"The Thompson River, frozen fast and hard as iron, was left on the right, and the sleigh bells jingled cheerily through the main street of Thompson, past the "Press" newspaper office, the Occidental Hotel, Gunten's multiple store and the Red Dog." The latter, a saloon where disreputables of the town congregated for drinks and card games which emptied their pockets, was not a place near where the Cedar Creek chums would linger.

Following a track that only Bob Lawless knew was there - he couldn't see it blanketed in heavy snow - the three horses, hot and steaming, finally pulled up at the Lawrence farmstead. Tom and Molly Lawrence were already at the door swathed in furs and Molly's friend Kate Dawson was with them. Frank Richards handed out rugs to the new passengers. Old Mr. Lawrence waved them off not forgetting the customary warning to drive carefully. The travellers had already received the same admonition from the fathers of Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc. Why did grownups have to be so windy, Bob wonders? It isn't as if the snow is not expected every year and always at Christmas. In fact, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas in the Pacific Northwest without lots of the white stuff.

As the sleigh returned along Thompson's main street, the snowfall became much heavier. Bob Lawless urged the three hard-worked horses to a speedier gallop and almost collided with a wildly waving figure. It was their Cedar Creek fat chum Chunky Todgers begging a lift and armed, as always, with a large bag of eatables. "There's refreshments at the mission dance, you fat clam," Bob tells him. Like another fat boy we all know and love, Chunky has his reply ready. "It's nearly an hour since I ate anything. It's only a ham and some corncakes, a pudding, some sausages and things."

As they glided along by the frozen Thompson River "thick clouds were blotting out the stars. It was pretty clear that there was a heavy snowfall coming on." But Bob wasn't worried. It was only three miles further to the mission hall. He speeded up the horses again. Suddenly, out of the mist behind them, a cloaked horseman, looking eerily like an old-time highwayman, appeared. Frank Richards thought he might have been using the sleigh as a guide through the track covering the downfall of snow, but the horseman quickly caught up with them, produced a gun and shouted at Bob Lawless to stop or he would drop their lead horse. Vere Beauclerc recognised the man as one of the drunken no-goods who patronised the Red Dog Saloon. "It's Keno Kit", he told Bob Lawless. "Are you going to stop?" Bob's answer was to lash the horses to speed them up. The horseman was left behind. Bob said he'd probably run out of dollars and wanted more booze and thought a stickup would be a quick way to become solvent. If he stopped for the horseman they'd be liable to be left in the snow while Keno Kit rode off with the sleigh which he could sell and return to the Red Dog to continue celebrating Christmas in his own sleazy fashion. The fact that they were children would make no difference to him. The dollar sign blinded his eyes to any feelings of conscience.

The ruffian speeds up and again rides beside the sleigh. As he raises his revolver to aim at Bob, the boy lashes out at him with his whip. Keno Kit's horse stumbles in the snow throwing him to the ground. They were less than a mile from the Beauclerc cabin but the ruffian wasn't to be deterred. He jumped up, aimed his gun, and the lead horse "plunged wildly into the drift, dragging the other horses down with him. The next instant the sleigh was on its side and the occupants were rolling in the snow."

Keno Kit quickly catches up with the travellers in the sleigh with his revolver at the ready. But he wasn't prepared for the sudden disabling blow he received full-face from Chunky's bottle of peppermint flung with unerring aim by Frank Richards which knocked him off his horse. The over-turning of the sleigh scattered the contents of Chunky's grub bag far and wide but they would be needed later that night. While Bob Lawless was seeing to the fallen horses, Tom Lawrence, Vere, Chunky and Frank flung themselves on top of Keno Kit forcing him right into the snow. Tom tore the ruffian's revolver out of his hand and struck Keno Kit's head with the butt. Keno Kit gave up there and then and begged for mercy. "You never gave us any", growled Tom. But they let him regain his feet and watched him as he disappeared into the mist in search of his horse.

When they righted the sleigh and comforted Molly and Kate who were upset and trembling, it was found that one of the runners was smashed. They were actually only about a mile from the Beauclerc cabin but which direction it was in they had no hope

A "HOLD-UP" IN THE FROZEN WEST!



Brought Down!

of discovering and had no possibility of further riding in the sleigh. "The whole sky was blotted out not snow was coming down in great masses, and piling up around the sleigh and the horses. The injured horse, already at the point of death, was covered with it." It would be impossible to get anywhere on foot so they decided that all they could do was to shelter inside the overturned sleigh. They wrapped Molly and Kate in rugs. The two remaining horses, shivering and whimpering, are covered with cloths as much as possible. "They were snow-bound on the open plain, and if help was long delayed, it was the shadow of death that hung over them. For the Cedar Creek party there was nothing to do but to wait - and hope!"

During the night the blizzard lessens and only light snow was falling when Bob Lawless awoke the next morning. The two horses had succumbed to the extreme cold and were no longer to be seen: frozen to death and hidden beneath the snow. Christmas morning and they should all be climbing out of their beds and greeting their families with joyful shouts. Merry Christmas! But the discovery of Chunky's food parcels cheered them up. Chunky voted they eat the lot to keep up their strength. But Bob Lawless decided that they should retain half as rations for later in the day in case they hadn't been rescued. Another night in the wilds with nothing to put in their empty insides could turn out to be serious.

It was still early morning and visibility was poor. Startlingly, out of the mist there came the sound of a rifle shot - and then another after they all shouted "Help!" in unison. Vere Beauclerc withdrew Keno Kit's revolver from his pocket and shot off the two remaining cartridges. The sound of sleigh bells, faint at first, came nearer and soon the marooned boys and girls could see the dark shape of a large sleigh pulled by two steaming horses. There was only one occupant of the sleigh - a fresh faced youth with a monocle, a very English accent and every "r" in place. "Hello, you fellows!" shouted Cousin Algermon Beauclerc. "Glad to see you! Merry Christmas, by gad!"

Bob Lawless threw his head back and laughed with amusement and relief. "Saved by a blessed tenderfoot. Never knew he could even handle a sleigh, by gum!" "Your pater's out in a sleigh, Bob, and the cattlemen are searchin', and my Uncle Beauclerc is with them and Old Man Lawrence as well. No end of a big fuss. I offered my services, and what do you think they said? Better stay at home and keep my feet warm! You can drive if you like. These gees are a bit skittish and they've made my arms ache."

And so the Christmas Eve nightmare was over at last and the Cedar Creek chums did have a cheery Christmas Day celebration after all at the Lawless Ranch with plenty of dances to follow the welcome delicious grub. Chunky Todgers, as was his wont, continued filling his capacious interior while the dancers whirled about him.

Adapted from "Snow Bound" by Martin Clifford printed in the 1926 Greyfriars *Holiday Annual*. The illustration is by Robert Strange. This story previously appeared in the weekly *Boys' Friend* (2nd series) 968, 27/12/1919)





The Lord's Lair by Mark Caldicott

In his battle against the Circle of Terror, it has taken Nelson Lee and Nipper some time to discover that the High Lord of the Circle, the man who had always appeared in a yellow mask, is their old enemy, Professor Cyrus Zingrave. The next problem for Lee in his campaign to destroy the Circle is to discover where the Professor, and consequently the Circle, has his headquarters. Lee has, in fact, tricked his way into Zingrave's hideout but, through bad luck, during his escape is so battered and confused that he has only a general idea of the house's location.

The clue to this puzzle arrives from an unexpected quarter when Lee is asked to investigate the disappearance of Lady Marjorie, a pretty young lady who lives with, and looks after, her father, the Earl of Elsington, whose failing sight makes his life difficult without her help ("The Abduction of Lady Marjorie", *Nelson Lee Library*, OS 113, 04-Aug-17).

It is Lord Elsington who relates to Lee how Lady Marjorie has disappeared on the way home from a visit to Banham Towers, home of Mr Wellesley Drex. Lady Marjorie had asked to stop at a department store, which she had entered but not returned to the car. The department store had been searched, but Lady Marjorie had vanished.

Lee's interest increased significantly when the earl went on to relate how he had then received a demand from the Circle of Terror, demanding that he agree to give orders for one of his ships to divert its course, depositing the cargo, bound for Buenos Aires, to Iguasco, a port on the Brazilian coast in return for the safe release of the earl's daughter.

Lee, of course, agrees to take on the case. Questioning the earl and his chauffeur carefully, and taking into account Lord Elsington's poor vision, the detective reaches the startling conclusion that Lady Marjorie never left Banham Towers at all. An impostor had taken the journey home and had visited the department store; therein to shed her disguise and escape undetected.

Through process of further reasoning, Lee draws an even more surprising conclusion that, given the Circle's involvement and the general location of Banham Towers, this is the house from which Lee escaped, that it is therefore Zingrave's hideout and that Drex is none other than Zingrave himself.

In order to take a closer look without arousing suspicion Lee and Tinker tour the area disguised as itinerant tinkers, mending leaking pots and pans. We discover that

Lee was entirely justified in his suspicion that Lady Marjorie is a prisoner at Banham Towers. She is held in a room which has been disguised to resemble a room in a small country cottage, the idea being supported by her "wardress", who tells her this is the case. The intention is that when she is released she will not know that her capture has any connection with Drex. Zingrave converses with Lady Marjorie wearing his yellow mask and disguising his voice.

Zingrave's subterfuge unravels, however, when he is testing his new invention, a silent revolver, in the grounds of the Towers. A stray bullet penetrates the main water pipe in the attic and floods the room where Lady Marjorie is being held. She is blindfolded, and moved to a cellar, where she is gagged, roped to the wall and left to herself.

Fate moves against Zingrave and in favour of Nelson Lee and Nipper when Zingrave sends his man to seek out the tinkers to mend the leaking pipe. Lee is able to confirm to himself by various features he had memorised from his previous blindfolded journey, that the Towers was indeed the place he had suspected it to be. This, then, was where he had last encountered the Professor.

Furthermore, it happens that Lee and Nipper hold a conversation regarding the plumbing job in hand within earshot of the grating in Lady Marjorie's cellar. She cannot shout, of course, but is able to improvise a catapult to fire through the grille a message wrapped around a piece of brick.

Nipper finds the message and the pair celebrate the justification of Lee's theory. They leave when they have completed the repair, realising that Lady Marjorie may soon be moved from her cellar and that swift action should be taken to rescue her. They enlist the help of Inspector Lennard and approach the house during the hours of darkness by boat along the river, calculating that this would be the easiest form of escape once they have released the girl.

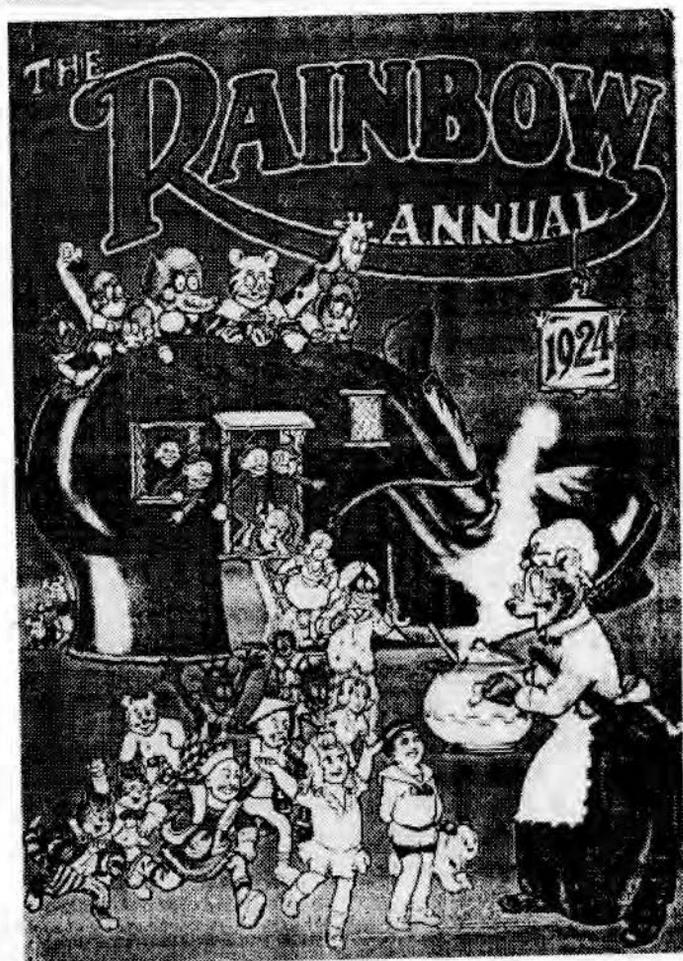
Indeed they arrive in the nick of time, as Lady Marjorie is being escorted back to her original prison quarters. This works in favour of the detectives, who are able to overpower the men who are escorting her and set her free. The party escape, as planned, along the river.

When Inspector Lennard, accompanied by Nelson Lee, Nipper and a force of police, raids Banham Towers, he finds it deserted. There is no sign of Zingrave or his men, or any evidence of the business of the Circle of Terror. Nelson Lee examines the safe, only to find that it has been booby-trapped with a time bomb. Only Lee's vigilance saves the day and gives the party time to escape. This escape is only just in time, as the bomb explodes and reduces Banham Towers to rubble.

This is another victory for Nelson Lee, since he has once again demonstrated how he is a thorn in the side of the Circle of Terror. However, at the end of the adventure the detective is no nearer trapping the High Lord in his lair than he was before he started on the affair of Lady Marjorie's abduction.



THE LAND OF NEVER-GROW-OLD





CRABBE'S PRACTICE A TWICE-TOLD TALE



by Derek Hinrich

Time hangs heavily on the hands of a young doctor in a new practice as he waits for patients. So Arthur Conan Doyle discovered and he turned increasingly to writing to supplement or to provide his income as he no doubt found, like Dr Watson, that a practice "which was never very absorbing" is unlikely to be a lucrative one. Doyle was a natural story teller and, as a schoolboy, had held the dormitories of Hodder and Stonyhurst enthralled with his inventions. He had already had a story published in *Chambers's Journal* in 1879 while still engaged in the lengthy process of qualifying as a doctor. Now he began to write a steady stream of short fiction. These pieces appeared, often anonymously, in a number of journals - *London Society*, *Temple Bar*, *All The Year Round*, *Cassell's Saturday Journal*, *Blackwood's*, and *the Cornhill*. Some of these stories he performed sold outright to the editors of these papers and a few years later, after he became successful, some came back to haunt him, in an opportunistic collection of his juvenilia by one editor to whom he had sold them. When he was unable to place a tale elsewhere, his court of last resort was *The Boy's Own Paper* in which several early tales also appeared.

A few years ago I had the chance to acquire a bound volume of *The Boy's Own Paper* for 1885. My interest was quickened by the knowledge that some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's early stories had appeared in this publication, and sure enough in the Christmas Number for that year, I found "Crabbe's Practice" by A Conan Doyle MB CM, "the Author of 'An Exciting Christmas Eve, etc.'".

"Crabbe's Practice" is a humorous story and tells how the fairly recently-qualified Dr Crabbe at last establishes the foundations, by rather unorthodox means, of a successful practice in a provincial English city with the assistance of a friend, who is the narrator of the tale. Conan Doyle's early partner, the extraordinary Dr George Turnavine Budd, is plainly the inspiration for Dr Crabbe (as it has been suggested he was, in whole or in part, for various other characters of Doyle's, Professors Moriarty and Challenger amongst them). The stratagem by which Crabbe effects his exit from an over-crowded political meeting which leads to his first meeting with the narrator is a triumph of eccentric lateral thinking which sounds to be pure Budd. Crabbe, becoming bored with the proceedings and unable to leave because of the press of bodies, begins to heckle the platform violently until he is ejected by the stewards, being virtually passed out of the hall over the heads of the crowd.

On the other hand, the precarious early days of his own practice in Southsea may have suggested the main thrust of the story to young Doctor Conan Doyle as a piece of wishful thinking. How does a new doctor establish himself in a practice if he cannot advertise? Did not Conan Doyle himself pass anonymous paragraphs to a local Southsea paper about a runaway horse and carriage fortuitously stopped outside

his door and the providential assistance he was able to render to the driver and passengers?

An arranged "accident" to a third party in front of a crowd and an inspired (in both senses of the word) display of medical assistance by a passing doctor was the sort of stroke one might well imagine Crabbe-Budd devising.

"Crabbe's Practice" was apparently not included by Conan Doyle in any of his collections of short stories until he regrouped them in the 'twenties. According to the introduction to John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green's *Unknown Conan Doyle Uncollected Stories*, it was in fact the only one of his early stories that appeared in the *BOP* which he did eventually republish.

"Crabbe's Practice" took up approximately three pages of the *BOP*'s Christmas issue, printed in double columns in quite small type. In my copy of *The Conan Doyle Stories*, where it appears as the last of *The Tales of Medical Life*, it occupies fourteen and a half pages. I wondered idly how many pages of the omnibus matched a page of the *BOP*, so I took the Murray edition down to see.

As I did so, I had a considerable surprise. There were marked differences between the two texts. It appears that when Sir Arthur collected "Crabbe's Practice" he substantially re-wrote it, so that there are now in effect two "Crabbes", the *BOP* or Ur-Crabbe, and the mature version. The latter is naturally more polished, as one would expect after Conan Doyle's forty years' experience of his craft. But while they are essentially the same story there are, as I said, notable differences between the two.

For example, the Ur-Crabbe begins, "John Waterhouse Crabbe was a man of ready resource and great originality of mind. When I first met him he was a medical student at Edinburgh University, and had distinguished himself in the classes..." While the later version has the more urbane opening, "I wonder how many men remember Tom Waterhouse Crabbe, student of medicine of this city. He was a man whom it was not easy to forget if you had once come across him..."

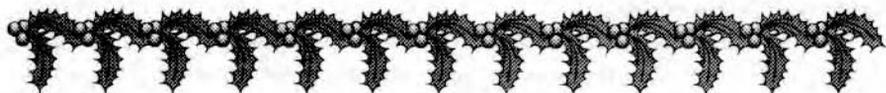
The Defoe-like style of the earlier version would, however, no doubt have been more suited to the *BOP* which was then but six years old. It must be remembered that the *BOP* was the child of The Religious Tract Society and at that time the editor was invigilated upon by a panel of evangelical clergymen who believed *The Paper* should be devoted to works of an improving nature and who only grudgingly and reluctantly accepted the need of fiction of a humorous or adventurous sort to sugar the pill.

In the Ur-Crabbe the narrator is called Hudson, in Crabbe he is Barton (Dr Jack Barton, not Dr Hill Barton: that was the alias of another Doylian narrator, Watson in "The Illustrious Client"). When Crabbe needs help in the earlier version he invites Hudson to come and stay with him and his wife at "Bridport": in the later it is Mrs Crabbe who writes inviting Barton to "Brisport" (I wonder if Conan Doyle meant "Brisport" all along and the *BOP* printers misread it: it seems likely from the text). There are other embellishments as the story proceeds.

There is one point in both versions which intrigues me. I know medicine had advanced some way beyond the four humours stage by this time, but was the

stimulation of the moribund by electric stimulation a recognised treatment in 1885 or was Conan Doyle here, as with his warnings of the danger to Britain of unrestricted submarine warfare and proposals for the “tin hat” for soldiers, in advance of his time in suggesting a galvanic shock as a kind of defibrillator?

The existence of two separate versions must surely make “Crabbe’s Practice” unique amongst Sir Arthur’s published works (though the earlier version is probably fairly hard to find now) but possession of both does furnish a fascinating insight into the development of Conan Doyle as a writer and a contrast between the apprentice and the master.



REG ANDREWS’ WRITES:

December 2003 will mark the 39th anniversary of my receiving this remarkable publication, the *C.D.* I feel that I am no longer a ‘New Boy’!!

I notice that there is no full reply in the September issue to Arthur Edwards’ query in the June issue re Fullwood’s reformation in the Nelson Lee. This was narrated in OS 537-541 in 1925. The seeds of this reform had been scattered during the previous series, “In Search of Pearls in the South Seas”, OS 529-536, especially in No.532, where Clive Russell saved Fullwood’s life in the lagoon of “Paradise Island”.

However, as critics in the past have stated, the speed with which this reform took place must have surprised many contemporary readers, Fullwood from the start of the saga having been one of the most ‘caddish’ of cads!

As far as I can make out, after this series ended, Fullwood became just a mundane character in a somewhat overcrowded cast. His place was taken by Bernard Forrest, who managed to become an even greater rogue than “Fully” had ever been!

I take the view of most of the old-time commentators that the character who repented his ways usually became much less interesting in his new guise, Levison of St Jim’s being a good example. Thank goodness that Frank Richards retained a bad streak in Herbert Vernon-Smith. He did, of course, soften his characteristics somewhat, but in the penultimate Magnet series - Mr Lamb - Smithy was at his brilliant best!





A DAY IN THE COTSWOLDS

by
Bill Bradford



Years ago we spent many happy days in areas abundant with good second-hand bookshops. Alas, most of these have now vanished and I am reluctant to waste a day, and petrol, to find a mere couple of interesting shops. However, there is still one region that I find worthwhile.

About 30 years ago my Head Office was in Worcester, and following the sudden death of the General Manager I was obliged to commute there daily for some weeks. This was some 108 miles each way and, with only a short stretch of the M40 then open, it was about a three-hour journey. Despite some lovely countryside, it became somewhat boring, hence I varied my route (from West London) and discovered all the towns I shall shortly mention. These contain some eleven dealers, or did on my last visit a year ago. I shall not name the shops but a good bookshop guide and/or Yellow Pages will facilitate your search. They are all in smallish towns and easy to find. As my needs are now fairly limited I shall not specifically recommend any, as many excellent shops can yield me nothing yet be of great interest to others.

Once in the area, no town is far from the next. It takes me some 70 miles to get into the locality but only about 60 to cover the various ports of call. The countryside is delightful and the towns small and really picturesque and fascinating. You may not return with a car load of 'wants' BUT I am sure you would find it a most enjoyable day. Avoid Wednesday which is early closing in some places.

Via the M40 and A40, my first stop is Burford. The only prospect is largely antique books, but there is a really good tearoom on the other side of the road. Leave on A424 and after some 8 miles turn left to Bourton on Water. A pretty town, spoilt by a multitude of tourists so parking is difficult. There are at least two dealers here.

Retracing tracks, carry on the A424 to Stow on the Wold, a most interesting locality with two medium size shops, near to one another. Leave on the A424 (Evesham) which eventually joins the A44, which takes you to Broadway where there was one small shop. I usually bypass this as it is a haven for coach trips! On reaching Evesham there is a worthwhile shop as you enter the town, well before the river bridge. Last time we carried on to Pershore but one of the two dealers had closed and I shall not bother again. It is not far on to Worcester, but I have not been there for many years as it is easy to get lost in a complicated traffic system.

Returning on the A44 at the top of Broadway Hill, to the left, the B4081 to Chipping Camden, which I consider to be the most attractive town of the area. There is only one bookshop there, but as I once found *Dixon Hawke Casebook No2* there, I inevitably return. Back to the A44, leading to Moreton in Marsh, which may still have a small possibility. Thence on to Chipping Norton, with two shops which could

be the most productive of the day – plus some nice tearooms. Next, proceed to the junction with the A3400 and a choice of Oxford or Stratford upon Avon.

I cannot promise any great ‘finds’ but I think you will have a most enjoyable day.



Chums from Another School

by Bob Marsh

Most, if not all, readers of *C.D.* have read and know well the ‘Famous Five’ of Greyfriars who along with Billy Bunter and the rest of the Remove have entertained us over many years. We can also add to the Greyfriars company the excellent pairings of Tom Merry and the lads of St. Jim’s, Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood and Nipper, Handforth and Fatty Little of St. Frank’s, all of whom are admirable companies who between them have been a source of laughter for all school story fans the world over for many years.

The Chums I wish to mention are from another school which, while not being so famous as the preceding establishments, has a lot to offer any enthusiast. These stories are, I think, the equal of any Boy’s school stories for companionship, adventure, sporting prowess, and fun. The school I am talking about is called SLAPTON and the books I am recommending are the TEDDY LESTER series by John Finnemore. There are six ‘Teddy Lester’ books in the series:

1. Three School Chums
2. His First Term
3. Teddy Lester’s Chums
4. Teddy Lester’s Schooldays
5. Teddy Lester in the Fifth
6. Teddy Lester, Captain of Cricket

As far as I can ascertain the series was first published by Chambers, though the Latimer House Editions published in 1949, with a further edition in 1953, are probably the easier to find.

The books are a pleasure for any reader like myself who, though a fan of the school story genre, likes a good sporting contest in his story, Slapton School between the usual school japes and conspiracies has titanic struggles at Rugged and Cricket with the local Oakwood sides. Naturally Teddy Lester is a first class sportsman and with his chums is always to the fore in these matches. There are also the Slapton School Inter House Cross Country and Boxing matches involving our hero in all sorts of scrapes and adventures. I find the vivid and accurate descriptions of the Rugged and Cricket matches are excellent and always enhance the main stories. Teddy is of

course a 'sportsman' in every sense of the word and, as always, a Champion for honour. He makes sure that good wins through in the end as it always should.

Of course Teddy our hero is not alone in Slapton and has a talented and eccentric group of friends as he progresses through the school and the six books. His main friends are Ito Nagao, the diminutive 'Jap' as he is known (not PC of course!), and Jimmy West (The Bat) who is everything Teddy is not. This of course makes for great friendships, Teddy the 'Sport' as always the Champion of the underdog involved in great struggles against prejudice, bullying and jealousy. All the components for good sustaining school stories of the highest calibre.

The one thing that I cannot shed much light on is the history or background of the author of these excellent books, John Finnemore, I have other school stories by him but not biographical information. I am sure however that there will be *C.D.* readers who have read the books and will perhaps be able to shed some light on this. I know I do not have to encourage *C.D.* readers to explore new areas of reading but if you have not tried the 'Teddy Lester' books all I can do is recommend them without reserve and hope they give as much pleasure to new readers as they have given to me.



BOOK REVIEW

From Dennis L. Bird

"YOU'RE A BRICK, ANGELA! THE GIRLS' STORY 1839-1985."
BY MARY CADOGAN AND PATRICIA CRAIG. GIRLS-GONE-BY PUBLISHERS. 463 PAGES. ISBN 1-904417-12-4.

In 1976 my eye was caught by a drawing in "The Guardian" – a drawing that stirred memories of 40 years earlier. It depicted the girl detective Valerie Drew and her sagacious Alsatian Flash, and it illustrated a review of a new book with the intriguing title "You're a Brick, Angela!"

I had read about Valerie Drew when I was a boy of 8 and my older sister let me read her weekly papers. Now Valerie was mentioned in a book which surveyed the history of schoolgirl fiction over a century and a half.

On a whim, I wrote to one of the authors

A Surprise for Tom Merry & Co.



– Mary Cadogan. The result was an invitation to visit her at her home in Beckenham; that began a friendship which has lasted ever since. Eventually I became an occasional contributor to her “Collectors’ Digest” magazine.

In 1986 Mary and her co-author Patricia Craig published an up-dated version, and now that enterprising duo Clarissa Cridland and Anne Mackie-Hunter (as *Girls Gone By* Publishers) have re-issued it in a new paperback format.

It is good to see this classic work with its sprightly new cover. The two authors work so well together that it is hard to tell who wrote what – but it is a fairly safe bet that Mary concentrated on the magazines and weeklies and Patricia on the books. (*Editor’s Note: A perceptive, but not completely accurate assessment of how we arranged the writing of the chapters!!*)

They cast their net wide, as explained in the original introduction: “This is basically a study of girls’ fiction, but we have included a number of books not written specifically for girls. The William stories from the start appealed equally to children of both sexes, and this is true also of the ‘adventure’ stories discussed” – such as those by Arthur Ransome, Mary Evelyn Atkinson, Malcolm Saville.

An immense amount of research has gone into this delightful book. It is scholarly without being dry; on the contrary, it is full of gentle humour. It sweeps majestically from Charlotte Yonge in the 1850s to the *Grange Hill* books of the 1980s. Due acknowledgement is given to that greatest of English novelists “George Eliot” (Marian Evans), whose characters Hetty Sorrel, Dorothea Brookes and Gwendolen Harleth showed what independent spirits girls could be even in Victorian times.

The book’s title has an echo of the doyenne of schoolgirl fiction, Angela Brazil, who gets a chapter to herself. The “Big Three” of the 1930s (Elinor Brent-Dyer, Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elsie Oxenham) are examined in depth, but there is also room for less well-known writers such as Bessie Marchant and Mary Treadgold (whose 1941 Carnegie Medal winner “*We Couldn’t Leave Dinah*” is a fascinating picture of Anglo-



*Girls' Own Paper Cover, December 1940
featuring a W.R.N.S. Officer*

THE "WHITE QUEEN" from MORCOVE

By *Marjorie Stanton*



German relations when the Channel Islands were invaded). Space is given to Captain W.E. Johns's improbable heroine "Worrals" (WAAFs did not fly fighters and shoot down Germans!), and also to the much more credible ferry pilot Marise Duncan created by "Dorothy Carter" (Mrs. Eileen Heming).

The story papers are given their due, from the "School Friend" of 1919 to "Bunty" in the 1970s. It was those papers of course, which recorded the annals of such notable schools as Cliff House and Morcove.

The final chapter "Into the Eighties" chronicles the changes in our society from the charming

innocence of the 1930s to the grim social realism of today.

I have greatly enjoyed the opportunity to re-read this vivacious book, and would only record one mild disagreement with the authors. They write disparagingly of 14-year-old Pamela Brown's theatre novel "The Swish of the Curtain" (1941): "persistent tonelessness," "characterisation of the most rudimentary." Not so! I find it brilliant, especially from so young a writer, with each character clearly defined – sharp-tongued Lyn, humorous "Bulldog," dreamy Sandra, impish maddy. I think it is a masterpiece!

One of the most rewarding features of the new "Angela" is its illustrations, some of which are reproduced here. The first edition had only 13; now there are 78. There is a different picture of Valerie Drew, and the other detectives Noel Raymond (my boyhood hero) and June Gaynor make their appearance. Among well-known artists included are D.L. Mays, C.E. Brock, Evelyn Flinders, Leonard Shields, Clifford Webb



*Purple with fury, the General advanced on them.
Thomas Henry illustrates William the Bold (frontispiece)*

("Swallowdale"), Harold Jones (the Locketts), Stuart Tresilian (Mary Treadgold), and "Just William's" Thomas Henry.

If you enjoy "Collectors' Digest," you need this book!

(The book can be ordered direct from *Girls Gone By* at 4 Rock Terrace, Coleford, Bath, Somerset, BA3 5NF. The price of £13.99 includes postage and packing.)



A POLPELLY CHRISTMAS

by Frances M. Blake



Although generally agreed that the best Wharton Lodge Christmas stories are supreme, another Christmas series can certainly be recommended. Polpelly has all the elements of Frank Richards' happiest ideas and descriptions of the festive season, including the essential ghost, icy weather and howling winds, an enemy within, even secret passages and search for a lost treasure. While the unusual isolation makes the snowbound setting all the more eerie. Magnets 1452-1455 tell of the Famous Five, Vernon-Smith, Redwing, and the inevitable Billy Bunter spending 1935 Christmas in a haunted Elizabethan house, looking for gold from an Armada galleon wrecked off the lonely Cornish coast.

An exciting lead-in to the story occurs during the last days of term. Smithy's father has arranged for his son and guests to stay at old Polpelly House over the Christmas period in order to keep an eye on his property. Of course Bunter manages to get invited too, thanks to his inadvertent rescue of the Bounder from a mysterious Italian, Count Zero.

Bunter had chanced upon Smithy tied up and left in a hut amid snowbound fields. There then follow some very typical exchanges between a wildly complaining Bunter and an irritated and impatient Bounder as they make their escape with the armed Italian in hot pursuit.

"I say, Smithy," Bunter was squeaking- "I say, don't you go without me!

I say__"

"Shut up, dolt!"

Smithy ran back to the fat Owl, grasped him by a podgy hand, and started running. Behind the old Army hut was an enclosure in a barbed wire fence, beyond that, open pasture-land, white with snow, ridged with snowy hedges. Smithy forced a way through two long strands of wire, and dragged the Owl of the Remove after him.

"Wow! Howled Bunter.

“Quick!”

“I’m scratched___”

“Fool!”

“Beast!”

Vernon-Smith tore on, dragging the panting fat Owl. He had to be out of sight – if he could – before the kidnapper got after him. He had not forgotten the automatic.

The fields, thick with snow, were hard going. Knee-deep, the Bounder plunged on, and dragged Bunter after him, with an iron grasp on the podgy arm. Bunter struggled and stumbled and slipped, gasping spasmodically for breath.

“Urrrrgh!” he gurgled.

“Buck up!” hissed the Bounder.

“Gurrrgh!”

Bunter floundered almost helplessly.

And so Bunter is tricked into joining the Bounder’s guests for what he fondly thinks will be a glorious London season “and all the shows”, instead of in reality roughing it in an ancient mansion in a completely isolated spot.

“I say, Smithy, I suppose the car is coming for us. Bit of a squeeze with so many. Never mind, I can rough it. I suppose you’ll be taking your evening clobber, Wharton. I may want to borrow it.”

“You won’t want evening clobber where we’re going, Bunter,” grinned the Bounder. “Sea-boots and oilskins would be nearer the mark.”

Bunter blinked at him.

“Eh, we’re going home with you, Smithy!” he said. “Wharrer you mean? I suppose we shall keep up some style in Courtman Square?”

“We’re not going anywhere near Courtman Square. We’re going to a place called Polpelly, on the coast of Devonshire,” said Vernon-Smith. “It’s an old deserted Tudor mansion, miles from everywhere, in a coomb-sea on one side, rocks on the other. No theatre within thirty miles; no cars, and no road for a car, if there was a car.”

“He, he, he!”

“No servants, except one deaf old man who’s acted as caretaker since my father bought the place years ago.”

“He, he, he!”

“If there’s snow at Christmas, we may be snowbound, and cut off from everything and everybody.”

“He, he, he!”

An interesting addition to the party is old John Redwing, Tom’s honest seafaring father, who goes ahead to Polpelly where the only other occupant - apart from the ghost! - is ‘Old Dan’!’, rather deaf and peg-legged, who acts as cook. Up until arrival, Bunter still believes that he is going to a millionaire’s residence in the country, if not to Courtman Square.



"Oh really, Smithy - I'm getting a bit sick of that yarn!" said the Owl of the Remove peevishly. "I say, is your father there?"

"No fear!" The Bounder laughed at the idea of the millionaire camping for Christmas at Polpelly. "Redwing's father is, though!"

"Gammon!" snapped Bunter. "A tough old tarry-breeks of a sailorman at a country-house party - rats!"

"You can kick him out of the car, Reddy, if you like", said Vernon-Smith.

Two chapters give space to The Magnet's customary jollities at Christmas-tide, as the whole party enjoy the festive events. Outside the weather worsens. But the cheery atmosphere within could well be a celebration at Wharton Lodge, even to the familiar sight of Billy Bunter cushioned in an armchair with his after-dinner pile of refreshments which include 'a plate of tarts, a bag of doughnuts, a little hill of oranges, and a small mountain of rosy apples; a plate of nuts, a plate of almonds, a plate of muscatels, and several other things. He rather looked as if he was expecting Polpelly House to be besieged, and had laid in supplies for the winter!'

A new feature of a Magnet Christmas is the sing-song concert with Wharton at the piano. One song is a parody of the Owl of the Remove, sung with gusto by Bob Cherry and introduced by Harry Wharton:

"The fame of W.G. Bunter has spread far beyond the walls of Greyfriars School. Is there a far corner of our far-flung Empire where the name of Bunter is unknown, and where the population is unaware of the fact that he is expecting a postal order?"

One of the verses runs:

"My postal order hasn't come!
Don't you think it's rather rum?

Now don't you start walking,
While a chap's talking!
Stop, I say!
Don't walk away!
I say - I SAY, YOU FELLOWS!"

Alas, the fat Owl is not at all amused.

Where is the handsome athletic fellow, with polished, fascinating manners - one of the finest fellows going, such as Bunter knew himself to be!

Bunter himself squeaks out the Harrow School Song — although unknown to him the Bounder has just rewritten the famous words, so that Bunter 'sings':

"Forty years on, growing fatter fatter,
Short in the wind, but quite long in the tongue;
Feeble of brain, full of long-winded chatter-
Who would believe that we ever were young?
Still we remember the glories of footer;
We charged and we barged, or we fancy we did!
Still we remember the House and the Tooter,
And how we backed Blazer each way for a quid!"

[I understand that Les Rowley particularly enjoyed this version.]

Suddenly the mood changes for the next chapter is titled 'The Face at the Window', since danger, as well as mystery and suspense, plays a major part in the series. Despite humour and witty dialogue, there are many dramatic incidents before the golden treasure is finally discovered. Such as when John Redwing and Vernon-Smith both see the 'spectre' for the first time; the funny but sinister occasion when Bunter gets drugged by a pie; adventures in an underground sea cave; several disappearances, and the midnight hour when Smithy traps 'the ghost'.

Magnet 1454's delightful cover is captioned "They'll think it was the cat!" Billy Bunter stands in the kitchen pantry in pyjamas, at a very late hour, gazing beatifically at shelves of best Christmas fare, the maligned cat by his feet - but of course Bunter's nocturnal prowlings turn out for the best.

If only there was room here for the pie! It's a brilliantly written episode in the story, so just a short extract:

Bob Cherry bent over the sleeping beauty and roared into his ear: "DINNER!"

That word ought to have awakened Bunter.
To his fat ears it was the sweetest word in the language...

His fat head and fat face came out of the pie dish, both adorned with fragments of crust and dripping juice; rich juice dropped from his spectacles, but his

eyes did not open...

"They meant to drug the lot of us!" said Harry Wharton in a low voice.

In the final number (1455) there are more real-life encounters with Count Zero and his assistant Beppo than scenes with 'the ghost'. And once again it's Bunter's timely emergence from the pantry that saves the Greyfriars juniors from capture or worse.

Near to the end the Bounder's ruthless streak is very apparent when he doesn't hesitate to shoot and wound Count Zero in the leg, but yet perhaps untypically merciful at the very end by giving the crippled man an unexpected word.

"Your game's up, old bean!" he said.

"My father will be here today to take charge of the treasure, and we're getting out of Polpelly. You can't do any more harm - and you've had a hard knock; and if you like to beat it, beat it while the going's good. Catch on?"

And so all's well that ends well. The Polpelly series has been both thrilling and amusing, mixing masterful characterisation, dialogue interplay and atmospheric details in a very special way to entertain the reader.



"Hi-GANG!"

by Terry Jones



I was most interested to read Eric Hammond's interesting article about British radio entertainment during World War 2 in the September 2003 *Collector's Digest*. He certainly gave us a very comprehensive coverage of the major shows that kept us happy in those dark days.

But one he did omit was next in popularity to I.T.M.A. It was "Hi-Gang!", starring the American married couple Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels, with the brilliant comedian, Vic Oliver, who was an Austrian aristocrat.

Ben was famous for his role in the 1930 Hollywood block-buster *Hell's Angels*, in which he starred with Jean Harlow. Bebe was a famous singer and musical comedy star who married Ben in 1930. She was the star of *Rio-Rita* in 1929 and *42nd Street* in 1933 where she sang *You're Getting to be a habit with me* whilst acting as the spoilt leading lady.

Vic Oliver was an excellent concert-pianist and violinist but hammed it up on the violin, playing like Jack Benny did. He married Winston Churchill's daughter, Sarah, in 1936.

At 6p.m. on Sunday, 26th May 1940 a fanfare of brass from the large orchestra was

Front row: Vic Oliver, Bebe Daniels, Ben Lyon



followed by Ben Lyon shouting "Hi-Gang!" and the 'live' audience yelling back "Hi-Ben!" This was followed by the terrific Orchestra, directed by Jay Wilbur, playing "I'm just wild about Harry" then fading back as the announcement was made "Coming to you from the heart of London". The show was alive, the only one being broadcast in London. It was a terrific boost for the rest of the country and the forces serving overseas because the Nazis had claimed that London lay in ruins due to the bombing by the Luftwaffe.

"Hi-Gang" was a completely new format based on the American shows where everybody insulted each other! At first the B.B.C. didn't like it but we teenagers loved it. It was very much like the Jack Benny and Bob Hope radio shows.

The B.B.C. had allowed for six shows but such was the popularity that by the sixth it ran on every week for a year up to 18th May 1941, broadcast from the Paris Theatre, Lower Regent Street, and came back time and again, right up to 1949.

Ben Lyon was always the one who took the most insults. Sample:- Vic Oliver to Ben "I bet if Lady Godiva rode in here now, you'd be raving about the horse". But Ben got his revenge by calling Vic Oliver "The Old Vic".

The musical interludes were given over to numbers by the Jay Wilbur Orchestra with singers Sam Browne and the Greene Sisters. Bebe sang a new song every week.

One was a terrific hit. It was *The White Cliffs of Dover*.

Because of their Hollywood years, Ben and Bebe got the big names to record messages from America. Cary Grant, Dorothy Lamour, Judy Garland, Tyrone Power and Ginger Rogers were just a few of those we were thrilled to hear coming over this B.B.C. programme.

Also big British stars appeared in person. Laurence Olivier, Jack Warner, Stanley Holloway, Robert Donat, Ivor Novello, Geraldo and Carroll Gibbons are just a few names of those who were guest artistes. They all took part in the general insulting and leg-pulling, very much like the guests in the Morecombe and Wise shows many years later on T.V.

When we elderly ones listen to present-day pathetic comedy shows on T.V. and radio and wonder when we should smile, let alone laugh, I'm sure the voice of Ben Lyon shouting "Hi-Gang!" once more would make us very happy indeed and remind us that, once upon a time, Radio was King.



MY FAVOURITE CHRISTMAS PRESENT

by Eric Hammond



I recently overheard someone asking another what his favourite Christmas present was. I never heard the reply, but later it made me ponder. It had seemed an easy question but upon reflection I was not so sure. Applying the query to myself, I realised it would need some thought. I quickly reached the conclusion that my favourite was likely to come from childhood. That is not to say that I have not received gifts in adulthood that have pleased me, but they certainly did not have the impact that occurred when young. So I make my choice from the enchanting days of yesteryear.

How many of us can forget the magic and excitement of Christmas. The longing for it to arrive and the joy of expectation. The early to bed Christmas Eve, with the promise that the long awaited visitation of Father Christmas will seem to happen that much quicker. We needed no second bidding. Then awakening very early, realising what day it was and looking to see if HE had been. The great thrill at seeing one's pillow cases brimming over at the bottom of the bed. This utter bliss can only be repeated when one is adult and sees the wonder in the eyes of his own children.

The Olde English Christmas, or our conception of it, was invented by Charles Dickens in the middle 1800s. He gave a picture of Christmas that perhaps never existed. The goose for dinner, now replaced by turkey, the groaning festive board, with its Christmas puddings, the mince-pies, the fruit and roast chestnuts, the sweets,

that all the following day made us wish we had not eaten so well! The carol singers, the family gathering and party games. The decorations, the log fire, the Christmas tree, underneath which were the adult presents, and outside the obligatory snow, with a robin on the sill looking in. These were all part and parcel of the vision that was Dickens's.

Change is an inevitability we have to accept, but it is not always welcome. Christmas in some ways has been taken out of our hands. It is professional and certainly commercial. Our shopping centres are, to some extent, taken over and decorated by the municipal authorities. Sometimes beautiful and often brash. Our modest efforts long ago had their own simple charm. I am afraid we have to accept some of the risks of progress. However, the message of Christmas is still very welcome. Peace and goodwill make an ideal that we mortals can only try to attain. At Christmas, we are at least a little more aware of its need.

My early years are vague, and the memories somewhat muddled, but as I grew older, beyond the age of seven I suppose, I can vividly recall the utter joy of finding my presents and the surprises they caused. I can also remember the great disappointment caused by a "friend" when he confirmed a slowly dawning doubt I had about the existence of Father Christmas. My parents' explanations about his nocturnal activities were becoming more and more difficult to accept. Although I now knew the truth, the illusion continued, with no objections from me, as I had a brother seven years my junior. So the Christmas morning finding of presents was still explained away as the generosity of Father Christmas for several years after I had seen the light!

Christmas was very important to my family. Both parents were keen to follow the traditional family celebrations. Although times must have been hard for them in the mid 1930s, as they were for most working class families, we always had a memorable and happy festivity. My brother and I were well-fed and well-clothed, not knowing of the struggle involved. We always received more than we expected or deserved at Christmas. Reflection is often sad, as one seldom appreciated or knew what our now departed parents did for us.

Before telling of my favourite present, I can recollect many that made my final choice difficult. I will never forget the wonder of seeing a gleaming, brand new, blue bicycle waiting at the bottom of my bed, together with my other gifts. I could not wait to try it out. Even before breakfast I was riding it in the garden, but alas not too successfully. In my excitement my judgement failed me. I fell off and gashed my knee. My first concern was for my bike which luckily was not even scratched. I limped home with the bike and then enjoyed the attention I received over my honourable wound. It was washed tenderly and the all-healing tin of Germolene was produced and applied and then my knee was bandaged. It was tight enough for me to have a genuine limp. I really enjoyed that injury and wore the signs like a badge of courage.

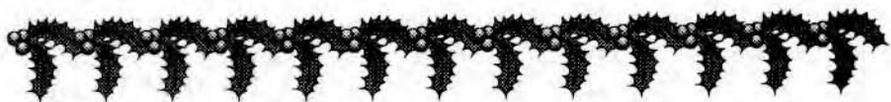
Other presents given over the years were a wooden fort and the necessary lead soldiers. Another time it was a wooden farmyard, with a pond formed by a mirror, plus all the appropriate lead occupants, including the farmer and his wife. When I was a

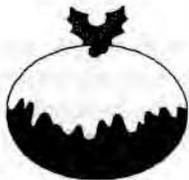
little older I received an air-gun. I was very proud of this, although it was low-powered. In fact, I never remember firing it much, but it was perfect and envied in our games of Cowboys and Indians. Beside these main presents I always had every year several annuals connected to my beloved comics; also jig-saw puzzles, games and a host of items that were the life-blood of boys of my tender years.

My favourite present came with Christmas 1938. This was the one I have never forgotten and that still gives me pleasure. Strangely enough it was not a gift from my parents or family. It was given by a friend's mother to my parents so that I should receive it on Christmas morning. It was given because my friend had been in hospital before Christmas for the removal of an offending appendix, and subsequently stayed in hospital for over two weeks. (Now, you can be out on the same day as the operation.) While recovering, this friend was only allowed two visits a week of a half-hour duration. His parents left his younger brother in my mother's charge while they visited. My present was a thank you for mother's help.

That present, my all time favourite, happened to be the *Boys' Cinema Annual* for 1939. When I saw it I thought it wonderful. I had been a reader of the weekly *Boy's Cinema* storypaper for some time, but this was my first annual. The 1939 annual had, arguably, the most outstanding cover of the whole series. It showed the immortal Errol Flynn in his role of Robin Hood drawing his bow and resolutely aiming it, while being watched in the background by his Merry Men. It was an evocative and breathtaking cover for a boy of ten. It still works for an old man of 75! I read it from cover to cover several times. Apart from the main story, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, it retold seven other films, including the unforgettable *The Prisoner of Zenda*. It contained many full-page photographs of the stars of the day, and many articles about the film industry and its celebrities. I thought the whole annual wonderful.

Sadly my copy was lost over the years, but never forgotten. It was a few years ago that I managed to replace my old favourite. It prompted me to try and collect the whole series of annuals. It was a long and enjoyable quest, but was rewarded with success. I was pleased in achieving my aim, but without hesitation I can say that my original favourite still retains its no. 1 position!





SMITHY'S CHRISTMAS JAPE

by Margery Woods



"Look, you chaps!" Bob Cherry's fist thumped the table in Study 1. "We've got to fettle Bunter somehow or other."

"Echo answers how," grumbled Johnny Bull.

"The echofulness is truly beyond doubt," agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "From Christmas the preposterous Bunter must be extricated."

"Hear hear!" Heads turned expectantly towards the captain of the Remove.

"Well don't all look at me!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Our combined brains have been trying to fettle Bunter for yonks."

"He he he!" A familiar cackle entered the opening door and the nearest object to Bob's hand—a Latin dictionary—flew across the study. "Ouch—beasts!" The figure at the door ducked into the study, ignoring yells of "OUT!"

"Caught you!" the Bounder grinned. "How's my impersonation of the Bunter cackle?"

"Inviting the boot, you idiot." Wharton's tone changed. "What can we do for you, Smithy?"

"Nix." The Bounder lounged against the bookcase. "Just called to tell you Marjorie just rang to confirm that all's settled for Christmas. The girls will be with us at the Abbey."

"Oh, great." The boys' faces brightened, then sobered. "We've just been talking about this," said Wharton, "and how marvellous it would be if we could just manage one glorious Christmas, or cruise, or whatever without that fat scrounging guzzler latching onto us every time."

"Well," the Bounder straightened and shrugged. "My offer to supply a reliable hit man still stands."

Wharton frowned, still never entirely certain of when Smithy was joking or serious. Smithy remained po-faced and glanced at his watch. "Better finish prep. See you."

"Us too," sighed the Famous Five. "But mind—" said Wharton to the departing backs of Smithy, Bull, Cherry and the Nabob, "we need ideas, fast. So get thinking."

But ideas failed to come. Every method seemed to have been tried already and failed. Bunter never failed to turn up like the proverbial bad penny, and some fate, cruel or provident, depending on from which side you viewed it, inevitably turned up as well—in Bunter's favour. Bunter crashed into ghosts, causing instant spectral demolition, or managed to collar nocturnal raiders while bent on his own particular raiding activities, and thus stayed on in style for the rest of the holiday, triumphantly and totally immune to resigned adult disapproval, the boys' frowns, and the haughty disdain of supercilious butlers.

Breaking up day neared without a solution in sight. Meanwhile Bunter daily

assured Smithy and the Famous Five of the great sacrifice he was making in order to bestow his superlative presence on them, in spite of the fabulous celebration he would miss at Bunter Court.

"Why doesn't he ever go there?" muttered Johnny Bull.

And of course there were all the exciting invites he was turning down from Greyfriars fellows; Lord Mauleverer was very upset, as were Wibley with his theatre party, Coker's Aunt Judy, even Shamus Murphy and his Poets Society. In fact, it seemed that everyone from the Head himself to Mrs Mimble of the Tuck Shop was possessed of a consuming desire to have Bunter grace their festive table.

Despair and resignation set in by three days before end of term, then suddenly Smithy burst into Study 1, triumph written all over his face. "I've got it!" he cried, grabbing the last mince pie on the study tea table. "I've got it!"

"Well out with it," exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Don't keep us in suspense."

Smithy crammed the last bite of mince pie into mouth and shook his head. "I can't tell you."

"You can't——" Five boys rose and advanced on the grinning Bounder with obvious intent.

"No——" Smithy backed away, reaching to slam the study door shut. "I can't. Walls have ears. All you need to do is trust me. My scheme will work, but you have to promise to follow my lead whatever happens and play Bunter along about the fun in store at the Abbey, and the grub——don't forget to lay it on thick about the grub."

The chums looked at one another. Disbelief, curiosity, hope flitted across their faces. Smithy said impatiently, "Well, are you with me? Or do we just cart Bunter along with us and make the best of it?"

"Is it legal?" asked Wharton suspiciously.

"Totally. My word of honour."

Wharton hesitated, knowing of old the ruthless streak in the Bounder's character. Even during his reformed spells it was still there, liable to break out when Smithy was crossed. Still, Wharton reflected, there were five of them, well able to put a stop to any plans to dump Bunter out in the wilds somewhere. But that had to be balanced against the endless aggravation they'd all had to put up with from Bunter. Wharton nodded. "Okay, Smithy, we'll take your word for it. Right, lads?"

And so it was decided. Blind Man's Buff—Or rather Blind Man's Bunter. Only Smithy knew.

* * * * *

As ever, the Bounder's plans appeared well organised.

Transport arrived promptly on breaking-up day and the chums could scarcely keep straight faces at the Bounder's obsequious display of hostly attention to Bunter and the stowing aboard of Bunter's rather meagre luggage, which would doubtless be augmented by raids on the wardrobes of the chums and Smithy. Bunter never had a qualm over slitting the back of a waistcoat to make it reach round his capacious girth. The chums still had doubts about the success of Smithy's plan. However, they

had promised to play along with it and could only await developments.

The big limousine turned north-west, eating up the miles, and soon Bunter was demanding they stop for a break.

"Not needed, old bean," smiled the Bounder and reached down for the large wicker hamper that lay on the carpet by his feet. Bunter's eyes glistened at the sight of the array of goodies within. Wharton and Nugent looked round from their seat in front and eyed each other; what was the Bounder up to?

No such doubt troubled Bunter. He piled into a large steak pie, sampled the salmon sandwiches, crammed down a few mince pies and a couple of large shives of fruit cake, toyed with a chicken leg and three or four hard-boiled eggs and made no attempt to resist a succulent cheese flan. But there was still a corner vacant in his inner man and half a dozen sausage rolls and the rest of the fruit cake cured that deficiency, all washed down with a couple of cans of Coke. Bunter sighed, oblivious to the trails of crumbs and eggshells down his waistcoat and on the immaculate carpeting of the car. Bunter settled himself more comfortably, to the detriment of Smithy and the Nabob on either side of him. But even at normal times Bunter really required two seats to himself; after the cargo he'd just taken on board he could have done with three. Smithy's face wore a suppressed grin, one that held a suspicion of evil. Bunter would be asleep at any moment...

The car had left Kent behind and was well to the north of Surrey. Bunter stirred, blinked sleepily at the window, then started up. He dug an elbow into Smithy's ribs. "Your driver's gone the wrong way. Tell him."

Smithy glanced out at the rows of villas and semis typical of the ribbon development of the twenties and thirties as they reached out of the capital. Smithy dislodged the elbow none too gently.

"We're nearly there, old chap. Quaint names they called their homes." He peered at the passing gateways as the car slowed. "San Souci—wonder where they got that one from. Manor Garth, The Cedars, Albany! Wow! We're right in the heart of Surrey Commuter Land. And here we are! Home, Bunter!" Smithy cried. "Bunter Court!"

"Taint!" Bunter yelled. "You've come the wrong way."

"Afraid not, Fatso. Out you get."

The car had slid smoothly into the short drive of Bunter Villa.

"This ain't Bunter Court!" Bunter shrieked, but the chums were scrambling out and lending helping hands to Smithy as he hauled the Fat Owl out of the car.

"But I'm not supposed to be here," spluttered Bunter. "Sammy's gone-with his pal and Bessie's with the girls."

"And here we are. Here!" chortled Smithy.

The chauffeur was handing out the luggage and the front door of Bunter Villa had opened to reveal a plump motherly figure, shock and surprise written over her face. The boys were watching Smithy for the next cue and followed as he went towards Mrs. Bunter. He said politely: "Mrs Bunter? How kind of you let your son invite us here for Christmas. My name's Vernon-Smith. May I introduce you to Billy's other friends? This Harry Wharton, and this is—".

"No, Mother!" Bunter pushed his way to his mother's side. "The driver came the wrong way. And the beasts wouldn't tell him. I told you, Smithy. You know I did."

Bob Cherry was trying desperately to contain his mirth at the audacity of Smithy's plan, now revealed. But he felt sorry for Mrs Bunter. She looked really worried. Then they heard a car door slam and heavy feet pounding up the drive. Bowler hat, furled umbrella, pinstripes and briefcase; the stock uniform of the something-in-the-city commuters.

"What's going on here?" roared Mr Bunter. "William! What are you doing here?"

"I—I didn't know, Father. I thought—"

Smithy stepped forward wearing his most innocent and puzzled expression. "I'm sorry, sir. I don't understand. Bunter has been telling us so much about the wonderful Christmas planned here. We thought he invited us."

"Bunter's always talking about his wonderful home," put in Harry.

"B-b-but Father, I didn't—I thought—" Bunter started to stammer.

"Be quiet, you stupid boy," snarled Mr Bunter. He turned to the chums. "My son had no right to issue any invitations. We have a houseful of family coming here. You can't stay here."

Mrs Bunter was hovering, a protective arm about her favourite offspring. "I'm sure it's just a misunderstanding, dear. Perhaps we ought to go inside for coffee." She, if no-one else, was aware of a couple of interested neighbours pausing at the gate.

"No," said Smithy hastily. "We don't want to intrude. We—"

"We've misunderstood what Billy said," broke in Wharton. "We're so sorry—we'll go now."

"Oh yes." Bunter broke away from his mother's embrace. "We'll go now..."

"Get inside," gritted Mr Bunter. "I'll deal with you later." He turned to the boys. "If you don't mind. I understand you may have been misled and we'll say no more about it. I trust you can make other arrangements with your people."

"Oh, yes, sir," they said in unison. "Goodbye, sir, and Mrs Bunter."

They piled back quickly into the car, the well-primed chauffeur having already put back the bags he'd removed. The last glimpse they had of Bunter 'Court' was of a fat face alternating between expressions of fury and despair.

"Whew!" sighed Smithy. "We couldn't have played that out much longer."

"Congrats!" said Harry. "We never thought you'd make it."

"Christmas without Bunter," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Yes." Smithy was a happy man. "To think. We've escaped from Bunter."
But had they.....?

(See the sequel on page 58)





As Christmas approaches each year, my thoughts go back to earlier yuletides. Surely taking a prominent place among the many joys of the season were the mini Christmas series complete with the Christmas numbers, which appeared primarily in our favourite companion weekly story papers.

Speaking of the *Magnet* and *Gem*, arguments among collectors and devotees will always wax strongly as to what was the greatest – or, perhaps more to the point, their favourite series.

I have already written of my favourite in a previous article, namely Polpelly – but running very close is Cavandale Abbey. A note of personal involvement here may be of interest. When Howard Baker started the *Magnet* facsimiles I wrote thanking him and asked if he could possibly consider reprinting Cavandale in the not too distant future. Greatly to my joy he wrote thanking me for my suggestion and said he would give it thought; as collectors may remember quite early in the list of the facsimiles, Cavandale was issued. The “Bumper Christmas Number”, the first one in the four-part series, was entitled, “Billy Bunter’s Christmas”. The cover was a splendid example of Yuletide art, which had the snow-dripping title set on a background of holly, while the picture depicted the fat owl, in a colourful dressing-gown, sitting in an armchair with a servant removing his shoes prior to installing a pair of slippers. His chair is next to a table already set for dinner. A portly butler, directing three servants carrying food-laden trays, completes the scene. It bears the sub-title “Billy Bunter does it in style!”

The inside illustrations had the usual sprigs of holly at the corners; there were also songs, a full page of them for the reader to sing at his or her Xmas party. The words Christmassy, and with a Greyfriars flavour, were set to well-known tunes. Not to be left out, as it were, the Editor in his page, besides whetting appetites with details of the following week’s story, explained a couple of conjuring tricks, which could be used by the reader at a party.

The story starts with our prize porpoise trying his usual tricks to land himself on one of his school fellows for the Christmas vacation. His final recourse – the Famous Five – fails, and so Bunter finds himself bound for all the glories of “Bunter Court” – sorry, I mean Bunter Villa! Having spent his fare-money on comestibles, he has to bilk the railway company by hiding under the set of a first class railway compartment.

It is this otherwise empty carriage that Lord Cavandale, owner of the famous race-horse, Maharaja, chooses to occupy. The train has actually started on its journey, when the carriage door is thrown open and a man just makes it! He addresses Lord Cavandale with a husky, "Close shave sir!" His Lordship replies with a not very encouraging "Quite!" Bunter sees the late-comer's check trouser ends and boots, which for ten minutes or so have been close to his little fat nose – suddenly move and then hears a sudden thud, a cry and a fall! Before Bunter's terrified eyes the peer is on the floor of the carriage with the owner of the check trousers – a thick set stocky man – holding him down with his left hand while his right is in the air gripping a life-preserver, about to crack his skull!

From somewhere under the layers of Fat, the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove summons up enough pluck to grasp the man's arm with both hands and pull it back over his head, forcing him to drop the loaded club.

Although 'check trousers' turns and strikes him, Bunter, obeying Lord Cavandale's cry, manages to pull the communication cord. The assailant realises that the game for the moment is up, tears open the carriage door and jumps out of the train!

Lord Cavandale, full of gratitude, albeit a trifle reluctantly, agrees to let Bunter spend the Christmas vacation at his sumptuous abode, Cavandale Abbey! He travels the rest of the way by car, now accompanied by Bunter, and the fat owl again saves the peer's life, when the same miscreant fires on them.

Bunter performs a similar service for the third time when returning from Wharton Lodge – (he was as usual travelling light and, needing evening clothes, had borrowed some of Wharton's). The car skidded on the icy road and ended up in a ditch, causing the fat owl to take a short cut through the Abbey grounds on foot. Coming up behind the same man about to fire at the peer who was standing, together with his "friend" Captain Lankester, on the terrace, Bunter spoils his aim by crashing a snowball on the back of his neck!

When Bunter wants his 'old pals' to come and protect him (he fears the peer's enemies will now turn on him) the peer approves; both Wharton's Uncle, Colonel Wharton, and Major Cherry, Bob Cherry's father, had served with him in Flanders during the First World War. In the course of a tour of the Abbey, the peer is showing two of the juniors the picture-gallery, when Bunter arrives and slips on the polished floor, pulling Lord Cavandale over, making the hidden sniper's bullet miss its target again. Once more his "lucky mascot" had saved the peer's life! The stories have all the ingredients we look for in a Christmas series – snow, an old mansion with secret passages, a ghost, crackling log fires – in fact all the trimmings. These, coupled with all the old adverts for the various annuals, the Hornby, Meccano, Erector and the Bowman model displays, all guaranteed to warm our story paper collectors' hearts.

I have always thought that this particular series had a bonus in that there were two separate mysteries for our old friend Ferrers Locke to solve. Lord Cavandale had engaged the private detective when he realised that the official police weren't quite up to unravelling the identity of whoever was seeking his life (not knowing there were actually two different criminals, both with the same goal in mind).

The first turned out to be the peer's supposed friend, Captain Lankester. Hopelessly in debt his only hope was a withdrawal of Maharaja (the peer's horse). It should be explained that both the villains and, in Captain Lankester's case, his creditors, had all backed the Black Prince who would be the winner of the Lantham Thousand if only Maharaja were out of the race. He'd employed the ruffian whom Bunter on three occasions had forestalled to make this happen; if Lord Cavandale was done away with, the horse would automatically be scratched.

Even though he'd apprehended both the hireling and his employer, Locke soon made it known that he considered the second mystery assailant far more dangerous.

The peer's secretary, having access to all the ancient black letter documents relating to the history of Cavandale Abbey, had unearthed plans, etc. concerning the secret sliding-panels leading to the hidden passages, without disclosing the discovery to his master. This had permitted him to play ghost and snipe at the peer from unforeseen places. His objective for his master's demise was shared with the captain, the only difference being that he was a genuine librarian and antiquary, who would have used the money to further his love for books and the ancient histories (apart from the plans of the secret passages). Among the documents, he reckoned he'd found a parchment that had been inscribed by the hand of the Venerable Bede himself.

The graphic art make-up of the second story in the series was a little disappointing. To start with, the cover was very plain. They forgot to put the dripping snow on the title; in fact the only snow as inside on the first page's title "The Mystery of Cavandale Abbey". If one looks at the inside illustrations, it seems to me that spaces were left at the corners of most of the pictures for the traditional holly sprigs – but were left blank! The third instalment, "The Phantom of the Abbey", had the snow on both front and title page, and the sprigs of holly at the corner of the pictures. My only query is in the cover picture – it shows a staircase coming down to the floor and what looks like part of a fire-side fender in the front right-hand corner. I suppose it's meant to depict the hall at the Abbey, and shows Bunter being terrified by the phantom – yet in the story each time Bunter sees the ghost he is in one of the rooms.

The final story, "The Secret Sniper", is dated Jan. 3rd so we have no Christmas decorations – but shouldn't decorations remain in view until twelfth night? Nevertheless the tale is a grand finale to a jolly good series – one I have read and re-read many times. Whether you've read it or not - read it now – I guarantee it will put you in the right mood for the festive season.

Once again may I add a very big thank you to that grand old man Frank Richards! For me Christmas just wasn't Christmas without one of his wonderful seasonable series – it still isn't! Each year I re-read them!

- | | | |
|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| No. 1, 191 | Dec 13 th 1930 | Billy Bunter's Christmas! |
| No. 1, 192 | Dec 20 th 1930 | The Mystery of Cavandale Abbey! |
| No. 1, 193 | Dec 27 th 1930 | The Phantom of the Abbey! |
| No. 1, 194 | Jan 3 rd 1931 | The Secret Sniper! |





THE BEST TIME WAS CHRISTMAS



In which BRIAN DOYLE takes an inconsequential but memorable random ramble through a few of his personal reminiscences of Christmas, dogs, Frank Richards, books and aunts. Everyone must have mixed recollections like these. The following have jogged Brian's nostalgia buds – hope they may jog a few of yours too...

The best time was Christmas.

And the week leading up to it was the best time of the year. Especially when you were ten. Even if there was a war on.

Christmas – like celibacy – leaves a lot to be desired, especially when you're older. It rarely lives up to expectations – those 'great expectations' as Mr. Dickens succinctly put it – when you're grown up. But those expectations more often bore fruit when you were, say, between six and sixteen (we were slower to grow up in the 1930s and 1940s). The delicious anticipation was everything – actual fulfilment is rather like the famous glass of wine – half-empty or half-full, depending upon whether you are a pessimist or an optimist. For me, the Christmas tree was half-full – with the fairy at the top forever beautiful and always attainable.

My own childhood (indeed my early life up to the age of 18) was spent in a neat, three-bedroomed, then-modern semi-detached house in Abbey Wood, near Woolwich, in South-East London, a hundred yards from the local tram and trolley-bus stop, and a few minutes walk from the glorious and large Bostall Woods, where I roamed happily and quite adventurously throughout the Second World War years, picking bluebells in the Spring, avoiding stinging-nettles in the Summer, gathering blackberries in the Autumn and tobogganing and snowballing in the winter. I also climbed trees, dug huge holes in a sand-pit, went on treasure-trails, had the occasional fight with another boy named Harry Everest (for some reason we hated one another and I can't recall exactly why!) and generally raced around and hung around the vast woods, which seemed to go on for miles.

You never seem to hear or read about Bostall Woods these days, but they formed the main back-drop and setting for much of my boyhood. When I was about 10, I longed to have a big dog to accompany me on my exploits in the woods, racing with me, barking joyously, and waiting patiently with wagging tail as I climbed my favourite trees. But my mother had a small and over-pampered Pekinese named Susan. Its pedigree name was 'San Toy' but my other thought that was a bit of a mouthful and anglicised it to the Blyton-esque Susan (never to be shortened to 'Sue'). Susan and I didn't get on. She was snappy, not very friendly and became wheezy and short-of-breath after slowly waddling along for a few yards. 'Peke rush-hour' was a stranger to her. Not the ideal companion for a somewhat scruffy lad intent on careering rumbustiously through thick woods and sand-pits. What I wanted

as a real dog. A DOG. A proper one who would romp and roll jubilantly, and faithfully fetch sticks and balls, and splash about in streams and come at once when I called him and protect me loyally if I was in trouble from the occasional gangs of unpleasant boys looking for bother. Susan didn't really measure up to any of these qualifications. She was really a lady's lap-dog.

So I solved my canine problem by regularly 'borrowing' suitable dogs. Our next-door-but-one neighbour, a plump and amiable widow named Mrs. Hayman, wasn't really up to (or indeed interested in) taking her big, friendly and lively Airedale named Bruce out for walks, and readily accepted my offer to take him off her hands now and then for a nice, quiet walk. Around the corner lived Prince, a giant Alsatian who lived with a studious boy named Eric and his dull-seeming parents. Again, they agreed to my 'walking' Price (though, in truth, he often 'walked' me) for a few hours for a stroll in the woods.

So it was that I 'acquired' Bruce and Prince (but never together – that might have been too complicated) for some of my outings in Bostall Woods. Imagining myself to be 'Just William', and Bruce and Prince to be larger versions of 'Jumble', I sallied forth (and sometimes fifth) with an apple or two and a bottle of William's beloved liquorice-water, never quite 'meshing' to add the appropriate flavour or even colour, and I enjoyed many great times with 'my' faithful dogs. I even went to the woods during some of the Germans' daylight bombing raids, and Bruce nearly came to a sad and fiery end when he insisted upon chasing and retrieving a just-dropped incendiary-bomb. Fortunately he quickly dropped it and ran away yelping (as well he might) and was highly-suspicious of chasing sticks for quite some time afterwards.

But I digress. I was talking about Christmas, wasn't I?

Although my favourite *Magnet* had ceased publication in May, 1940, I still had my two small stacks of late-1930s-early-1940 issues (the first acquired from a boy at my prep-school for a penny each and the second rescued from a pile of 'salvage' next to a dustbin outside a local house) and around Christmas time I would return to a seasonal *Magnet* or two. As a late-comer to the paper, two of my favourite Yuletide series were the Reynham Castle one of 1938 and the Wharton Lodge (and Moat House) episodes in the long-running 'Lamb' series of 1939-40. The very last *Magnet* Christmas series, sadly. But how wonderful Herbert Vernon-Smith was throughout that marathon 16-issue series and how memorable was Frank Richards' writing. It was, I suppose, the first *Magnet* series I ever read and it holds a special place in my childhood reading memories (and, indeed, in my adult reading memories too!). I can still feel the crisp coldness of the snow lying around Wharton Lodge and the mysterious Moat House to this day...

The best time was Christmas.

Frank Richards' writing was an integral part of Christmas for so many of us who grew up in its era – and also for those who came to it later in life. And his writing was for all seasons. His writing was full of happiness, sunlight and rainbows, snowflakes and holly, blue skies and warmth even on the coldest day, hot chestnuts and fir-trees, white-crested blue seas, whiter-than-white flannelled chaps playing

cricket on the greenest pitches you ever saw, snow-covered cloisters, a comfortable sofa before a blazing-log fireplace, the smell of toasting crumpets and roasting coffee-beans (and if the boys didn't drink coffee, why didn't they?), the sound of laughter, the buzz of boyish conversation. Frank and his unique stories and characters and atmosphere lit up a room and a place, wherever it was and wherever you happened to be. Frank Richards (or whatever name he was using at any given moment) created his own world for himself and for us, his readers, his vast family, if you like. That world may have been fictional but it was almost tangible. The whole thing was tangible and intangible at one and the same time.

It is Frank Richards' own world originally and we, the readers, just live in it. And, as we read, we inhabit, we live in and walk in, that magical world of Greyfriars (or whatever your favourite school happens to be), as blazered, grey-flannelled, school-capped and youthful as the next schoolboy.

When you first read about his characters and saw them in your mind's eye, you knew they were going to be your friends (most of them) and perhaps your enemies too (some of them). But you accepted and embraced them all. Many of them, like other favourite characters from childhood, continue to live out their lives in your head...

What about a place for them (a country perhaps? No, too big. A town maybe? No, too small). Anyway, a place that's big enough, inhabited by all your favourite characters from books, comic-papers, plays, films, past loves, good friends, lost ones, family, people you've liked and admired, authors, artists, heroes, heroines, you fill in the blanks... What a place that would be. What love and laughter and talk and pleasures – "wot larks, Pip, old son!" as Joe Gargery might have said in Dickens' 'Great Expectations'. Now *there's* a Heaven I could believe in...

The best time was Christmas. And perhaps in that aforementioned Heaven, perhaps it could be Christmas Day every day? With a pleasantly-warm June summer's day thrown in every other day for good measure! But now we're being greedy...

Christmas began in our house a week or so before the great day, with the 'making of the chains'. Remember those coloured strips of paper that had to be inter-chained through each other and the ends stuck together? After a while you had a long paper chain of different colours. A couple of dozen of these would be hung decoratively across the sitting-room and hall-way. Together with a small decorated Christmas tree atop of the large Pye radio set and the expanding collection of Christmas cards on the mantelpiece and sideboard, things began to take on a seasonal appearance – especially when the cheerful coal and log fire was ablaze in the fireplace.

My mother would then make her traditional two decanters of home-made ginger-wine (every visitor was offered a glass, and delicious it was too) which stood either end of the large sideboard, together with a large bowl of fruit and one of assorted nuts.

Various friends and relatives of my parents would call in during the day and evening during Christmas week, usually bearing presents. My mother was the seventh and last child of her family and sooner or later my aunts Gladys, Florrie, Ethel and

Elsie and my uncles Alf and Bert, plus uncles by marriage Charlie and Frank, and 'honorary' uncles Len and Tom – (the 'boyfriends' of Gladys and Florrie!) would come. Some of the aunts had rather endearing 'quirks'.

Aunt Elsie was sweet and naïve and was convinced that a full orchestra complete with conductor would dutifully assemble in a BBC studio to play the music and signature tunes of the various plays, series and comedy shows on radio; in later years this belief extended to such series as 'Dick Barton-Special Agent' and 'The Archers'. 'But Aunt, they just use bits of records,' I would try to explain (this being before tapes). 'No, I don't think so, dear' she would contradict patiently, 'it just wouldn't sound as good if they played it on the gramophone.' Aunt Florrie (who always wore green) was similarly sure that, for the BBC radio news bulletins, the announcer (perhaps that nice Mr. Stuart Hibberd) would settle down comfortably in front of the microphone with a daily or evening newspaper and read out tit-bits of news that he thought might interest listeners!

I sadly never knew my maternal grandfather but he was a professional gentleman, and the family house in Crescent Road, Plumstead, bore a highly-polished brass plate by the front-door announcing the fact that he was a 'Tutor of the guitar, mandolin, banjo and ukulele'. Many of his young pupils later became members of various popular dance-bands of the '20s and '30s and one, Jackson, was later a very popular dance-band leader and later still presenter of the BBC radio programme 'Jack Jackson's Record Round-Up' which ran for many years from the late-1940s onwards.

My mother, Doris, was an avid reader of the early *Magnet* and *School Friend* and so was able to 'fill me in' about Greyfriars long before I even read about it. Her favourites were Vernon-Smith, Frank Nugent and Mr. Quelch, but she couldn't stand Bunter! She was a great novel reader and her favourite book was *The Shoreless Sea* by Mollie Panter-Downes, who had written it at 16 and had it published when she was 18 in 1924 (she had been born, curiously enough, a week before my mother in 1906). The hero and heroine of the tragic love story were Guy and Deirdre. My mother had set her heart on calling her child after this young heroine, but as the name wouldn't have exactly suited the lusty male infant she was landed with, she later named her house (in Abbey Wood) 'Deirdre' instead...

It's funny but it's at Christmastime that the memories of past times and past people often come flooding in. 'The ghosts of Christmas Past, as Mr. Dickens once memorably put it.

I recall one of the 'ghosts' from my childhood now. She was Mrs. Beard (who had one) and there was also Miss Food (who had two). I jest not. Mrs. B. ran a small local sweet shop in Plumstead; she was plump, elderly and comfortable-looking. Miss Foot was her equally middle-aged friend of many years standing. And Mrs. Beard did actually have a strangely, wispy but definite beard! Unfortunately for me, I couldn't keep a straight face when I came face-to-face (I can't say 'beard to beard' since I was only about nine at the time) with her. My mother would nudge me but I just couldn't stop grinning. Mrs. Beard never seemed to notice my bad manners – perhaps she was used to it, poor dear. 'Why doesn't she shave?' I used to ask my

mother urgently. 'Ladies don't shave,' she would hiss back, slightly affronted (this was in the late-1930s after all). Then one day the sweet shop was closed and the contents (all those delicious humbugs, pear-drops, liquorice shapes, cough candies and bars of 'Five Boys' chocolate) were cleared out and the shop changed hands. It became, I recall, a small ladies' hairdressers. But it came too late for Mrs. Beard...

Christmas was the best time. Especially for BBC radio. I was an avid listener, and apart from the wonderful daily 'Children's Hour' at 5 o'clock, I loved the comedy and variety shows. 'I.T.M.A.' ('It's That Man Again'), of course, with the great Tommy Handley and all those bizarre characters of his; 'Happidrome' (with 'Ramsbottom, and Enoch, and me' (Mr. Lovejoy) running a run-down theatre, 'Garrison Theatre' (with Jack Warner and his 'little gel', Joan Winters, who just happened to be the real-life daughter of Charlie Shadwell, the ever-present conductor of the BBC Variety Orchestra, which, my Aunt Elsie would have been delighted to know, actually *did* turn up and play live at every show!). There were also 'Old Mother Riley and her Daughter, Kitty' (with Lucan and Mcshane – actually husband and wife who were continually bickering in real-life and apparently hated one another), 'Hi, Gang!', with Ben Lyon, his wife Bebe Daniels (once a major star of the silent movies in Hollywood) and Vic Oliver (the first 'star' I ever met personally!) and many others. Later came a personal favourite, 'Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh' (with Richard Murdoch, Kenneth Home and Sam Costa running an RAF airfield). I always remember hearing the very last episode of 'Much-Binding' in 1954. At the end of the show, as the laughter and music and applause faded away, there was a short silent pause – then an old lady's sad little voice said: 'Oh, they've all gone...' Strangely moving.

BBC radio – the comedy, the plays, the serials, the variety shows, the music, the talks – did a lot, a whole lot, to help those of us, young or old, involved in one way or another, the Blitz, the flying-bombs, the V2 rockets, and everything else, to get through it all and to survive.

I once had the good luck to meet and enjoy a long chat with that great and popular comedian Robb Wilton when I was in my 'twenties. I told him how he had brightened many an hour for listeners during the war years (and after) with his comedy (remember his 'The Day War Broke Out...' routines?). He smiled and said: "Thank you, lad, that's very nice to hear, but to me it was just another BBC cheque for five guineas, really – it was work, a job, and very welcome too...!" Just a job for him, but several minutes of laughter and happiness for others.

At Christmas I always seem to catch up on my reading. Invariably fiction. As well as return journeys to Greyfriars, I like to re-read the occasional school story by Hylton Cleaver ('Mr. Dennett' of Greyminster), Gunby Hadath, Richard Bird, Michael Poole, Jeffrey Havelton. I like to re-read, for the umpteenth time, the best school story ever written (apart from Frank Richards, of course) which, in my opinion, is P.G. Wodehouse's early novel 'Mike'. I might also take down from the shelves such favourite humorous tales as 'Three Men in a Boat' and 'The Diary of a Nobody', or read two or three of those cosy but compelling stories (and always with a 'twist' in the tail) by A.J. Alan, originally told in the early days of BBC radio and later collected

in three books. Or I might go back to favourite childhood books such as Pamela Brown's 'The Swish of the Curtain', M.E. Atkinson's 'Crusoe Island' or 'Smugglers' Gap', one of Malcolm Saville's 'Lone Pine' stories, or E. Nesbit's 'The Enchanted Castle' or 'The Magic City', or RLS's 'Treasure Island', which never loses its own magic. And I haven't forgotten Richmal Crompton's immortal 'Just William' – there's always time for him...

But there are so very many books and stories and characters and adventures and happenings. The heroes and the villains, the good and the bad, the virtuous and the evil. 'The good end happily, the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means,' as Oscar Wilde said in 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. And what was that other quote? 'A hero is one who believes that all women are ladies. A villain one who believes that all ladies are women.' That was the American critic, George Jean Nathan. And we should also remember that fictional characters, never having lived, can never die. So that's all right then.

I sometimes browse over my large collection of books, often at Christmas. Not everyone appreciates the joys and pleasures of collecting and possessing – and reading – books. People's reaction to catching sight of just some of my books is usually to say, rather boringly: 'Goodness, have you read them all?' (Short answer: No. Not yet.) Another moronic reaction is: 'But why do you need all these books?' (Short answer: Because.) An elderly neighbour some years ago came out with: 'Ooh, you have a complete set then?' (There's no answer to that one.) Rather like one of my aforementioned dear aunts, who once said of me to a friend: 'Oh yes, Brian has a complete set of books, you know...!' For the record, I have around 30,000 books and many more magazines, etc. ('Do you dust them all?' No.)

Of course, the older you get, the more you have to remember – especially at Christmas. But older people are never bored, they're much too busy remembering... But, as the late and great American comedian, George Burns, (who lived to 100!) said: 'You can't help getting older. But you don't have to get old.' And the second thing about getting older is when your memory starts to go. I can't remember what the first things is...!

Christmas is a great memory-jogger – you sometimes shiver slightly in cold and remembrance. And occasionally your eyes start to fill up for some reason or another. The odd song or piece of music can do that. Every time I hear the old carol 'Good King Wenceslas' the memories of childhood – and later - begin to crowd in. Do you remember that Christmas when...

Christmas.

Yes, the best time *was* Christmas...





The Real Greyfriars

by Andrew Pitt



When I went with the London Club to visit John Wernham in Maidstone this summer, he made the point that to him St Jim's and Greyfriars seemed real; and when John Arlott visited 'Frank Richards' in Kingsgate he said of his host: 'He talked seriously about his work, with illuminating enthusiasm. It was clear that every one of his characters was real to him... He had the pride of the creator in this respect and he referred to them with friendly familiarity... I asked him if he had ever been to public school, but he was very evasive on this point... I came away with the impression... that he had never been to [one] and wished that he had and perhaps indeed really believed that he had, in his heart and mind, after all those years of writing.' The point is well made, for though perhaps 'Frank Richards' did not go to a public school, Charles Hamilton attended Greyfriars as Frank Nugent for over 50 years. I have often wondered why Charles Hamilton worked so hard (writing at least three stories a week before the War) and how he did it. Perhaps it was not work to him. He seems to have just sat down at the typewriter and tapped out his stories, seemingly without the mental agony/perspiration the rest of us would endure. He was describing the Greyfriars world as he saw it, in a sort of parallel universe to our own. I think it may have been a type of pleasant daydream to him. The Greyfriars landscape was quite constant as though it was a real place. Hamilton made very few slips in 50 years: events in stories many years before were recalled in later stories as if they happened last term. Hamilton remembered them as if they had really happened.

Have you ever arrived home from work and with joyful anticipation escaped into Hamilton's world, closing the door very firmly behind you? I have done that, but it is not the whole story. For Hamilton's world became an important part of my real life- it still is- and moreover his world is/was almost the real world. Entering his world is not like crossing into Namia through the back of the wardrobe, with its witch and talking lion. Hamilton's Britain was rather like our Britain; Kent of course, and Surrey, and Hampshire, and Sussex, and the River Thames-they were all there, and the Magnet also chronicled, as a background to its stories, Britain's story from 1908 to 1940. I am not surprised that Eric Fayne's favourite play was Noel Coward's *Cavalcade*, so much so that Eric wrote a charming story *Tom Merry's Cavalcade* about two families at different points in the social spectrum who went through all the British events of the Gem's run and who were united in their love of the Gem. Is it possible that Eric's teaching career and his hobby were completely separate worlds? I doubt it.

As some people write to Sherlock Holmes, it is said that some boys wrote with questions about Greyfriars to the Magnet editorial office as though it were a real school. It is a very special kind of fiction which induces such a reaction. Personally, I think most knew that Greyfriars was fictional but that they unconsciously phrased their questions as if it were real. Now I might write several articles in serious vein on the merits of Mr Quelch as a schoolmaster-after all he had a long career. Nobody in



the hobby would turn a hair. But if there were someone reading my analysis with no feeling for Hamilton's work, after a few sentences he might say to himself 'Does this fellow not realise that Mr Quelch is a fictional character; he never existed.' Equally, someone with no knowledge either of Greyfriars or of the nature of the Collectors' Digest might think from all this that it is a real school and a real schoolmaster I am writing about. In some ways it is.

There are readers, and there are readers. Some people cannot read; others rarely read. Others are what can be called 'the utilitarian brigade'. I once had a boss who was an accountant: he could see the point of books on accountancy, but was quite mystified about the purpose of other books. There are people who read regularly but who having read a book cannot see the point of re-reading it. Lastly there are the people who re-read particular books or particular authors: they even join clubs to meet people who like similar books. And they are people of all kinds: in the London Club we even have an accountant, Duncan Harper.

How real is Greyfriars? Not everyone shares our enthusiasm for Hamilton. Isabel Quigly in her survey of school stories, *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, referred to the 'gothic imaginings' of Frank Richards. To her the stories were not accurate portrayals of public school life. I am not sure that was Hamilton's aim. Let me in any case think of some of the unrealistic things: all that crime that happened near Greyfriars; it was usual to say a few years ago how impossible it was, but Britain has now caught up with the Greyfriars crime rate. Wibley's impersonations and Bunter's ventriloquism? Yes, but take out those stories and the canon is but lightly touched. The fact that Mr Quelch seems to teach most subjects? How vital to the stories is that? Dr Locke the Headmaster teaching the sixth form? I recently came across the fact that in 1923 Clifton College, the alma mater of Newbolt, took the progressive step of appointing a

scientist as headmaster-yes, he got a new science block-but the governors insisted that he teach classics to the sixth form as all his predecessors had. About 6 years ago, a number of news reports caught my eye. First the late broadcaster Desmond Wilcox publicly recalled the savage beatings he received from his old headmaster, but contemporaries maintained that the headmaster never did beat anyone (more on 'recall' later) but what interested me was that one contemporary at the school recalled excavating the ancient tunnel that ran from Cheltenham Grammar School to the parish church. Those secret tunnels were not so fantastic after all. Secondly, there was a story about a Gainsborough at Marlborough College - it reminded me of another story, at St Jim's, of the Mysterious X, though I accept that a Gainsborough is not a Rembrandt. And then there was a story of people who had been trapped in a sea cave- they survived to tell the tale by climbing on to a ledge. Life imitating Art? Let us go back to 1927 when Mr Vernon Smith is taking a holiday party to the South Seas. They have stopped off in Singapore and are looking at the new naval base being built. Let me quote Mr Vernon Smith's exact prescient words: 'You see, the next war, if it comes at all, will be in the air, so naturally they devise a naval base to meet it. But, bless you, they might have made it a cavalry barracks!' Those words, even 60 years after the fall of Singapore, are a very painful meeting with reality. Charles Hamilton as Minister of Education? No, Minister of Defence! Let me take the most outrageous story ever to be written for the Magnet, the Alonzo Strongman series with its phial of crimson liquid. That is not only a most entertaining series, and I accept it is fantasy, but there is something else. I have always liked Alonzo; he constantly has the best of intentions. It is no surprise that when Bunter gains superhuman strength, he is tyrannical, but Alonzo? Yet Alonzo does become autocratic; that tells the reader something: life is not as straightforward as you think. Some people would not be satisfied unless I actually took them to Greyfriars School and they could touch it. It is rather like saying that a political philosophy does not exist because you cannot touch it; it is only in a book. But that is a hint of the truth: Greyfriars is essentially an idea.

I mentioned the recall of old schooldays. Someone has set up a website where former pupils of my school write their reminiscences. I found it, and for an hour I was no longer aged 47; I was back at school as if 30 years had not gone by. But it did not all make comfortable reading. Some pupils were very negative about the school. There is something unbalanced about retaining petty grievances against one's schoolteachers for 30 years and especially giving vent to them in public. My view is that masters are like umpires- one cannot expect them to get it right all the time. What was the reality of the school I attended? There is not one reality. James Hilton says in his book *To You Mr Chips!* 'No two schools are alike, but more than that- a school with two hundred pupils is really two hundred schools, and among them, almost certainly, are somebody's long-remembered heaven and somebody else's hell.' Hilton also recalls the young man who was asked if he was educated at Eton: 'That is a matter of opinion,' he replied. Nobody says about *The Lord of the Rings*, 'It isn't realistic'. This brings us to the purpose and nature of fiction. It is unlikely that

academic researchers will ever reach the level of consciousness we have with this literature—we have an emotional attachment to it; it has become part of us. There are exceptions, such as Jeffrey Richards, whom I recently heard in a debate opposing the proposition that the UK Heritage industry presented a false view of history— a chocolate box, Merry Monarch, toff's view of history and a commercialised one at that. One woman from the audience said that she and her son had had a really good day out at the Robin Hood Experience in Nottingham. The proponents of the motion instantly derided her because of course Robin Hood did not exist, at least not as portrayed - exactly the point they were making. They are wrong. Robin Hood is a part of the literary history of this nation. It is a legend cherished by the English people for a very long time and that is because it has aspects which appeal so strongly to them. It teaches us that there are good and bad rulers, and it does not matter whether they are Kings, Princes, or Prime Ministers, that there are good and bad laws and it is proper to oppose bad law. It does tell us something about medieval society. If you want, you can see modern lessons in it, about the redistribution of wealth and communing with nature. It is fiction and yet it is not.

Now we come to why Greyfriars seems real to me, as to those other boys. I cannot take you to Greyfriars School though I could take you to a school somewhere with buildings similar to Greyfriars. And a master resembling Mr Quelch? Yes, I can show you one. Like quite a few state schools of the period, my school—a boys' school—imitated many of the traditions of a public school, some masters calling brothers 'Major' and 'Minor'; and the thought of addressing pupils by their Christian names would have been considered incredibly soppy; only suitable perhaps for girls' schools. Indeed, the school was a masculine environment: 'teachers' were 'masters': female teachers would have had to be called 'mistresses' which would have led to much sniggering. It all seems a long time ago. Things have now changed, and teachers and even head teachers are no longer 'sir', but 'Jim' and 'Kev'.

So it is without too much difficulty that I relate to Greyfriars, even though in full reality it was very different. I, like the Remove, did Latin, and the man who taught it me was as outstanding a teacher as Mr Quelch. I am not going to give you some affectionate old boy reminiscence. Nor, I stress, is it a complaint. This man's name was, well, let us call him 'the Don'. I do sometimes hear fond appreciations of Mr Quelch by Greyfriars devotees and I think, that is the adult talking. I do not think that the Remove liked Quelch. We are often told that he was 'a whale on duty', and that he was determined to 'drive the Latin language into reluctant heads right up to the bell'. Even in social situations the boys always felt awkward in his presence. You may have heard of the Latin tag 'Amor omnia vincit': ('Love conquers all'). But on the wall in my Latin master's classroom was an alternative philosophy 'Labor omnia vincit' ('Work conquers all') and of course that was Quelch's philosophy. The gimlet eye? The Don had 'eyes as keen as a sparrow-hawk' rather like Peter Dawson's *Sergeant Major on Parade*. And for seven years I faced the words almost every day 'You will go on, ...Pitt.' And on one occasion my response like Bunter was under my breath "'Oh lor'". For the fact was that I had been too busy - just like Bunter - the previous

night to prepare my translation and I had taken a flyer. It hardly mattered that, unlike Bunter, I did not generally do this but seven years is a long time. I had not got very far when the Don said 'You have not prepared this lesson, Pitt.' You may remember that Bunter then tried to invent all kinds of excuse: 'Oh no, sir, I wasn't sitting in the armchair during prep. Toddy will tell you: he saw me.' We had no Bunter in the form, though I was present on one memorable occasion when someone else, Bunter-like, explained to the Don that the dog had eaten his homework during the night. Also you will remember that Mr Quelch could quell a riot with a look. The following is not my anecdote but was written by someone of another generation 10 years after I left when the Don must have been almost at retirement. There had been a heavy fall of snow (Hamiltonian weather) and boys from my school were having a huge snowball fight with boys of another school at the bottom of the hill. A young ineffectual master had walked down to stop it, but was snowballed by both sides and had to retreat. A little later, down marched the Don. The participants fled the scene as he approached, and as the narrator points out, the boys from the other school fled too, even though they did not know who he was. It was just force of personality. I have met 'Mr Quelch'.

Books are not some objects we place on a shelf like ornaments. They are about ideas. And the idea of Greyfriars? (And in choosing Greyfriars, I would happily go to St Jim's or Rookwood.) Fred Inglis wrote in *The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction*, 'The school story, in all its extraordinary variety and vitality, is one of the biggest monuments in popular culture to the institution of friendship..... Tom Brown and Harry East, Stalky & Co, Bob Cherry, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, and some paces behind, Billy Bunter - "I say you fellows". The fact that so many of them are set in boarding schools has nothing much to do with class and the alleged wishfulness of the poor to go to posh schools, but has much more to do with removing parents from the story, and providing a structure which promises safety while making resistance attractive and understandable.'

I think Greyfriars exists. It is in your mind and mine.



**Warmest Congratulations from the C.D.
to Professor Jeffrey Richards who has just been
made a Doctor of Literature by Lancaster University.
This award recognises and honours his services to
literature over several decades.**



THE SEQUEL TO SMITHY'S CHRISTMAS JAPE!



by Margery Woods

Bunter sat in a draughty bus shelter and tried to think what to do next. He was tired, cold, hungry and miserable. And it was Christmas Eve. Worse, there was no-one to grumble to.

He'd had the most frightful time since those beasts had played that ghastly prank two days previously. His father had been furious, had refused to listen to Bunter's, for once truthful, explanations. He'd not even been allowed to stay the night in his own room. That was prepared for visitors; Bunter had spent a cramped uncomfortable night on the sitting room sofa. Then first thing the next morning his father had escorted him to the station, bought a ticket and seen him onto the train for Folkestone. And he'd had to carry a heavy bottle of wine for Uncle Carter. And only a measly fiver for his Christmas tip. At least his mother had managed furtively to slip a ten pound note into his pocket.

Yesterday had been awful. Uncle Carter had kept him slaving until midnight in the guesthouse, running messages, washing mountains of dishes, cleaning veg and peeling a mountain of potatoes. The chef kept yelling at him and the worst of all was seeing all that food going into the guests while all Bunter got was the left-over veg and one scraggy chicken leg. The last straw came this morning when all the bacon and eggs were finished, the left-over porridge was cold and lumpy, and Bunter's stomach was groaning a lament. He'd been sent out for a load of shopping after all the dishes were washed and told to be back not later than eleven.

Bunter, if not his stomach, finally cracked. He ordered the shopping and told them to deliver it, despite a delivery charge being tacked on to the total. He pocketed the change—he'd pay it back when his postal order came—and sought the Folkestone travel shop and got them to work out a travel itinerary and the cost. His money would just last out. Bunter, being Bunter, managed to lose the itinerary on the second leg of his bus journey across the south of England with the result he got off at the wrong stop on the third bus of the day. This cost time and additional money. He'd had to make do with one measly bun and a cup of tea instead of six buns. Now he was stuck. Stranded in Winchester with seventy-five pence and not a taxi available to try to bilk. A telephone kiosk had lost its directory and he had no idea of the Abbey phone number. All the shops had shut and, though there were Christmas lights everywhere, most of the shoppers had departed for home. Winchester felt lonely to a fat, hungry, stranded Bunter.

As he returned to the bus shelter a car drew up alongside and a light voice called to him. "Excuse me..."

Bunter paused, warily, as the window wound down and a young woman looked up at him. "Do you happen to have change of a pound?" she asked. "I'm lost and I

need to make a call hut the battery's gone in my mobile."

Bunter shook his head. "I haven't got a pound, only seventy-five pence."

"That'll do—you can have the pound." She sounded strained, handing over the pound and waiting while Bunter fished out his change. "Thank you so much—and would you do me a favour? Will you sit in the car for a few minutes while I phone? My little girl's asleep in the back—she's only two and a bit and if she wakes up and finds I'm gone she'll be scared."

Bunter didn't mind at all; the warmth of the car was bliss, and the sleeping tot in the back seat never stirred. The girl came back and opened the driver's door. "That's sorted, thank goodness, I'm staying with friends who've just moved down here and I missed the turning off the A33 and landed here instead. Now I've got to get through a maze of little un-numbered roads to—I say, are you all right, sonny? Do you live nearby?"

"No," Bunter wanted to stay in that warmth for ever and go to sleep. He told her and her response was instantly sympathetic. "Can I give you a lift? How do you get there?"

It sounded tempting but Bunter didn't know."

She frowned. "I don't know Thorne-le-Cross——listen, I'll ring my friends again and see if they know. Hang on."

Bunter was asleep when she came back. She laughed. "Wake up, you're in luck. It's about three miles before my friends' place. Now stay awake because you'll have to watch out for landmarks. Or I'll get lost in the maze."

It was truly a maze of winding country lanes, unlit and the time creeping on to midnight. Bunter stirred his fat intellect and managed to spot two landmark isolated farms and there was only one more to find. His new friend chattered on about her husband being held up at the last minute and saying he'd follow her down but he'd probably got there already with the big rocking-horse he'd had to collect from the maker for little Julie. "I think this must be Thorne-le-Cross," she said. "Yes, there's the parish church on the right. Oh, listen. They're singing and all the lights are on. It'll be the midnight service—it's Christmas Day; Oh, do let's go and peep in."

Not altogether willingly, Bunter rolled stiffly out of the car and remembered his manners to hold her door open while she reached in for Julie, who was blinking awake. "Had a lovely sleep, darling?" she whispered, hugging the child.

To the strains of the beloved old carol written in a hurry by Franz Gruber for his little church up in the mountains, a Christmas song that was to become virtually immortal, the little trio entered the church. Then the vicar gave the closing benediction and the congregation began to move towards the door. The girl whispered to Julie: "Time we found this Abbey and then get you safely to bed."

"I don't believe it!"

People stopped. Heads turned at that incredulous cry. Voices broke out and suddenly Bunter was surrounded toy his astonished form mates and the Cliff House girls.

"How did you get here?" Harry Wharton demanded.

"It's a long story," laughed Bunter's pretty Samaritan, whose name was also Julie. Explanations were launched into and Mr Vernon-Smith took charge. It turned out he knew the house Julie was bound for, and he insisted on leading the way in his own car to make sure she got there safely. Invitations were exchanged and the Bounder led the way to the Range Rover. He still looked astonished. "Trust Bunter to fall on his feet." Perhaps Smithy's conscience had stirred and he half regretted his Christmas jape. "Come on, old bean, I bet you're starving as usual."

By bedtime, arrayed in Wharton's pyjamas, a vest of Johnny Bull's, Frank Nugent's spare slippers and Smithy's dressing gown stretched over a well padded inner man, Bunter was beginning to feel human again.

"And mind you get some sweets and chocs or something for Julie and little Julie," Harry reminded him. "You'd have been in a council care home by now." Bunter shuddered and the boys laughed.

"Well," said Harry. "I suppose Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without Bunter." And for once they all agreed.



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A CHRISTMAS LETTER FROM THE 'OWL

(As dictated to Ted Baldock)

I say, all you fellows!

This is by the way of being a Christmas letter to you. To wish you well and all that. I shall be spending the holidays with my old friends, Harry Wharton and Co. at his uncle's little place. He insists on me being a member of the party and refuses to take any excuse. Only the other day he said to me, "Things get very dull at the Lodge if you are not there, Bunter, old fellow". So what can a chap do?

I am aware from previous experience that the Colonel and his sister depend upon me to 'set the tone', as it were. And I have been told that Wells, (the butler, you know) creates quite a stir among the staff below-stairs when he informs them that I will be staying over the holidays. John, the footman, in particular has been known to be quite moody if for any reason I should be unable to be present.

I sincerely hope that where ever you are spending the 'hols' the tuck will prove to be adequate and of the first quality. In short, a standard approaching that enjoyed at Bunter Court. Titled relations can be rather a bore upon occasions. They insist in making so much of me. But what can a fellow do? I suppose that popularity has its compensations. However, I must admit that the quieter and less opulent festivities at Wharton Lodge have much to commend them. And, to the credit of Wells, I must admit that he *does* recognise a gentleman when confronting one. He always pays particular attention to me when I am staying at the Lodge. In fact he seems never to take his eye off me, so assiduous is he regarding my comfort and wishes. Happily he is training John along the same lines. I must admit I like to see menials taking such an interest in the well-being of their betters.

Bessie, my sister has just informed me that the telephone has been buzzing away and I am wanted. It will probably be D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, or old Mauly trying to assert renewed pressure on me to cancel any arrangements I may have and come to spend Christmas with them, so I must be brief.

Once more, where ever you are, and whatever maybe your immediate prospects, have a jolly good Yuletide, and whatever you may fail to do, see to it that you pay more than your usual attention to the good comestibles which are available at this time of the year.

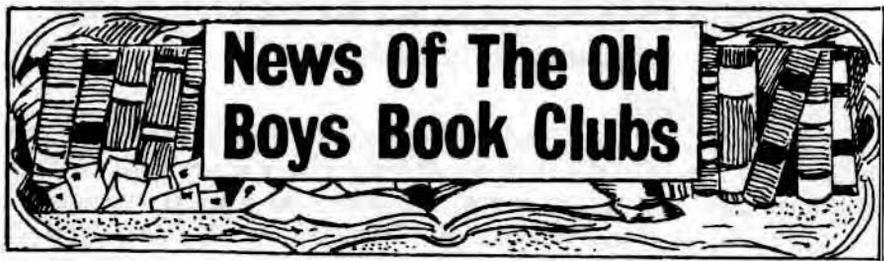
I must stop now, you chaps. I have just heard that Mrs. Mimble has made a fresh batch of mince pies - and I am rather peckish.

Best wishes from your long-time chum W.G. Bunter.

P.S. Among the many handsome presents which I am sure will be coming my way there should be a postal order which, for some reason unknown, is somewhat over due.

P.P.S. We shall all be drinking your health and well-being with foaming glasses of Mrs. Mimble's best ginger beer on Christmas Day, a supply of which has been taken to Wharton Lodge.





SOUTH WEST O.B.B.C.

The Autumn Meeting, held on 28th September, was attended by 10 members.

Before proceedings commenced there were several items of special interest displayed. Tim Salisbury passed around a new book on the Life & Work of Alfred Bestall, well known as the 'Rupert' illustrator and also a mint Facsimile of the Knockout Comic No.2 from 1939. Andrew Pitt had brought along the Founders Bell of the London OBBC inscribed with the names of the founders, Len Packman and Bob Blythe, February 1948, and Laurence Price produced a copy of an article from the Times, 2nd Sept reporting that Starbucks now have Cafés in some Public Schools, commenting on how nicely it was reported with reference to Billy Bunter and the School Tuck Shops of yesteryear.

Tim then played a BBC recording of Gerald Campion recounting his career, especially the time when he was asked to play Billy Bunter for the TV series. A part he wasn't too keen to play, but with hindsight he realised that without 'Bunter' he would never have become so well known.

Una Hamilton Wright read from several copies of letters to children by her uncle (Charles Hamilton) illustrating what a marvellous rapport he had with them. She then recalled some of Charles Hamilton's anecdotes and also quoted from personal letters to her family.

It was now time for us all to dash to the Study for Tea - it truly gets better every time! (Wot no Sardines??)!!!!

Afterwards, Laurence gave a talk about Angela Brazil, with examples of her work taken from "Angela Brazil - A Schoolgirl Ethic" & "Madcap of the School". He then read extracts from "Random Harvest" by James Hilton, commenting that this wonderful story illustrates so vividly how the course of our lives can be changed by chance events.

Andrew Pitt then gave a most interesting talk entitled "You Will Go On Bunter". He recalled some of his own schooldays and related to us why Greyfriars seems so real to him (and of course to so many other enthusiasts). We have not quoted any extracts from this as those present urged Andrew to submit the article for publication in the "Digest".

The meeting concluded with another talk by Laurence on the part Bransby Williams played in the film of the 1930's "Song of the Road" and a short resumé of Bransby Williams' life and career.

REG AND MAUREEN ANDREWS

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Members gathered at the Duston village home of Howard Corn for our June 2003 meeting. Howard talked about his visit to BBC Written Archives at Caversham to obtain some of Charles Chilton's Riders of the Range scripts dating from 1949 to 1953. From these he obtained interesting facts not repeated when the Eagle began to carry the stories in 1950. Howard showed several related videos involving Chilton. Later Paul Wilkins provided us with a twenty-question quiz concerning real cowboys.

Howard mentioned the links between toys and comics, with particular reference to diecast model scale vehicles.

ADRIAN PERKINS

LONDON O.B.B.C.

The Annual Luncheon of the London O.B.B.C. was held at the Brentnham Club Privale on 14th September 2003. Guests Of Honour were: Our President John Wernham, Gail Roots, Una Hamilton Wright and Penny Tweedie. As usual, the Brentnham Club proved to be a pleasant and welcoming venue for our traditional get together. The weather was splendid: dazzling sun, with people playing tennis on the courts outside. It could almost have been the middle of summer... in the world of Greyfriars, it would have been an excellent day for a surreptitious jaunt over to Popper Island, or for pitching Coker into the river.

A fine menu card had been produced by our esteemed President, and the meal was very good. After the meal, following a brief introduction by Chairman Andrew Pitt, John Wernham made his customary remarks and observations, mentioning a newspaper article about Frank Richards, and the superiority of the Greyfriars stories over the much-maligned "Eric, Or Little By Little", before leading members in The Loyal Toast.

Frances Mary Blake proposed the Toast To The Guests; and Una Hamilton Wright responded likening our annual event to "a family Sunday lunch, when you let the dining table out as far as you can". Roger Coombes led the Toast To The Club, after entertainingly describing the often convoluted process of explaining to friends exactly what the "London Old Boys' Book Club" is all about, and who's in it. No, indeed, the members are not all "old men". Just the majority!

Grateful thanks were extended to Derek and Jessie for organising another excellent social occasion, which seemed to be greatly enjoyed by all those present. Afterwards as is the tradition, members congregated at Bill Bradford's house for a welcome cup of tea, cakes and a chat.

The October meeting at Yateley in October was hosted by Ann Knott and Roger Coombes.

Roy Parsons gave a talk on W.W. Jacobs, Len Cooper spoke about the 1967 A.P. publication *The Best of the Magnet and Gem* and Andrew Pitt discussed *The Real Greyfriars*.

After the excellent tea, Chairman Andrew Pitt provided a quiz covering old books, films and songs. Then Bill Bradford spoke about John Hunter, who wrote under a variety of pen-names. The meeting finished with Bill's traditional *Memory Lane* dip into the Club's history.

VIC PRATT

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