

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 58

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BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER!



BILLY BUNYER DOES IT IN STYLE!

By SIR JIM KRIVIL

Guest Author

New Ending Chapter 137, 138



A Merry Xmas
to all C.D. readers

(Bob Whiter)

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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Christmas is upon us again, with all the glowing memories that this festive season evokes. It is, of course, a time for remembering old friends, from real life - and those characters we loved so much in the story-papers we read, week by week by week.

Mr Gerald Livesey, from New Zealand, has asked me to name my favourite characters. He tells me that his are Herbert Vernon-Smith, Pam Willoughby, Paula Creel and Marjorie Hazeldene.

I don't have to rack my brains to answer his question: for many years mine have been Bob Cherry and the Bounder, from Greyfriars, and Clara Trevlyn and Jemima Carstairs from Cliff House. However, as time goes by I have to say that Mr Quelch creeps higher and higher up the list of my favourites.

This is a time also to remember with gratitude departed friends in our hobby, especially Herbert Leckenby and Eric Fayne, my predecessor Editors of the C.D., and notable members of the Clubs such as the O.B.B.C. Founders, Len Packman and Bob Blythe, and researchers like Bill Lofts who did so much to make information available to collectors all over the world.

Christmas too is the time for me to convey warm thanks to the many contributors of articles for the magazine. I am often astounded by the flow of material

which still comes to me.

Thanks are again due to Mandy, Richard and the staff at Quacks, our printers, for all their help now and in past years.

Most of all I want to thank all C.D. subscribers.

Your wonderful loyalty and encouragement are always deeply appreciated. I send to you my most sincere wishes for

ARIGHT MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND A PEACEFUL, PROSPEROUS AND HAPPY

NEW YEAR

Mary Cadogan

(The fine pictorial greetings on pages 28 to 31 have been compiled by Margery Woods.)



THE PHANTOM WILL MATERIALISE AGAIN in two MIST FILLED VOLUMES in the spring of 2005. SUCCESS! I had a marvellous response to my advert for episodes from *The Phantom of Cursitor Fields* and *The Return of the Phantom Series*. Thank you. Special thanks to Bill Bradford, John Bridgewater, Cedric Groombridge, Ray Moor and John Nicholls for their help and encouragement. *RON HIBBERT.*

FOR SALE: 4 Nipper Annuals, published by The Daily Mail 1936, 1939, 1940, and 1 undated. £18 each. Has any reader got any of those American Detective and Mystery Pulp magazines published in the 1930s and 1940s. If so please send details. BEN BLIGH, 55 Arundel Avenue, Hazel Grove, Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 5LD. Tel. 0161 483 7627.



PAUL TEMPLE AND THE GREYFRIARS MYSTERY CHRISTMAS PARTY AFFAIR



By Donald V Campbell

"Brr Brrr." The telephone in Paul Temple's drawing room buzzed insistently.

"I'll get it Steve!" said Paul, adding in his irritable fashion, "Where the devil is Charlie?"

"Out shopping for Christmas darling" smiled the ever patient Steve.

"Christmas!" snapped Temple, "I wish..." The sentence remained unfinished. He turned back to the telephone. Picking it up he said "Paul Temple here. Who is that calling?" There was a pause and then Paul said "Dr Locke? Yes, yes I'll hang on." Temple turned to his listening wife. "Do you know a Dr Locke, Steve?"

"No. Who do you suppose he is?" trilled the ebullient yet graceful Steve.

Paul Temple refrained from replying and spoke once again into the mouthpiece. "Yes Dr Locke, this is Paul Temple. What can I do for you?" There was a significant pause until, at last, Paul interjected with a questioning "I see?" and then, "Missing for how long? All the finest comestibles?" and then again the ruminative "I see."

Eventually Temple replaced the telephone after saying "Yes I shall be at Greyfriars tomorrow morning Dr Locke. I take it you have no objection to my wife accompanying me? Good. You have my word on it - I will investigate this incomprehensible affair for you. Goodbye."

"That must have been Dr Locke" murmured Steve thoughtfully.

"Yes" came the terse reply.

"What did he want Paul and who is he in any event?"

"He does not participate in any event Steve. He is far too old a gentleman to be riding horses."

Steve was slightly miffed at this sharp reply but continued gallantly with "Shall we go to Greyfriars tomorrow? Where and what is Greyfriars?"

"Mmmm!" Temple was in a non-communicative and careful mood, "Mmmm" he muttered again. "We must get packed. See to it Steve. Charlie can help you. We might be away for a few days and there is also my novel to think about."

"But Paul, you said that it was finished."

"I'm afraid I fibbed a little bit darling."

Paul Temple threw an eloquent glance over his shoulder as he left the room. "Chapter one Steve! Chapter one!" Behind him the door banged shut.

* * * * *

"Come along Charlie. It will take Steve and myself a couple of hours to get to Greyfriars. Put the luggage into the car quickly will you?"

"Yes Mr T." Charlie was ever eloquent with his master.

"Not that one!" snapped Paul. "The heavy one."

"Okey dokey Mr T" smiled Charlie with amusement.

"And I don't want to see you in that awful suit again – you are paid enough in these serials to look the part."

"Yes sir" came the crisp reply.

* * * * *

"How much longer darling?" asked Steve as their great coupé thundered along the snow-covered Kent roads, its chained wheels biting firmly into the surface.

"Nearly there" riposted Temple to her innocent query. "Look there beyond the river."

"Oh!" breathed the breathless and excited Steve. "Greyfriars the famous public school."

As the long grey tourer rolled down the hill towards the venerable pile that was Greyfriars School, there came a furious honking behind them. Steve looked back anxiously and then cried out in dismay to her husband "Paul! Paul, look out! That car is trying to get past."

Temple was struggling in desperation with the wheel "By Timothy, there's something wrong with the steering" he gritted. "It's too narrow for passing here. Steve! Stay where you are."

The black limousine pulled alongside and swung over – forcing Temple's car off the road. There was a roaring of engine as Paul's car skidded through a flurry of snow and ice into the hedge. Turning over, almost balletically, it sank upside down into the deep snow-filled ditch. As the black car shot away down the road there came an eerie cackling from inside it, both menacing and jeering.

* * * * *

Six cheery voices could be heard coming around the corner. The boys were happily exchanging snowballs and insults with youthful vigour. They were startled into silence as the Famous Five saw the damaged car upside down in the ditch.

"I say you chaps, lend a hand, there are people inside."

"Righto" came the instant response, there was no rift in the lute here.

A languid voice lazily queried "Drat it Wharton, how can I help? Can't get my togs in a mess, can I dear boy?"

Johnny Bull called out to Mauly in his slight northern brogue "Go and get a doctor then, do something useful can't you?"

At the car Hurree Singh was struggling with a door handle. "The usefulness is mightily urgent and to be construed immediately" said the dusky nabob as the door creaked open in his hands.

* * * * *

"Your boys are to be highly commended" said the revived Paul Temple to Dr Locke in the latter's study where Paul and Steve were sipping freshly made tea.

"My dear sir! I cannot urge on you sufficiently the pleasure that the staff and the

school will take in your recovery and your prompt attention to our little problem.”

“No problem is too small for Paul Temple” smiled the novelist-detective. “Now to your immediate needs. Who knew of my imminent and eminent visit?”

“Why Mr Temple, the whole school knew. I announced your coming to staff and boys this morning.”

Paul hesitated only a fraction of a second before saying “I see.” He paused reflectively before continuing. “That means the murderous attack on Steve and myself could have been attempted by...”

“...Anyone” completed Steve for her husband.

“I see” mused Paul thoughtfully, “I must interview the masters.”

“Of course my dear sir” said the kindly old gentleman “with whom would you like to begin?”

Paul was insistent that it must be the intuitively inclined and imaginative form master, Mr Quelch.”

“But I have banished Mr Quelch to Popper’s Island in the most suspicious and inauspicious circumstances. His Latin and Greek bon-mots have been inadequate recently and I feared something was weighing heavily on him.” In the background Steve whispered “Must have been the missing cakes and pies.”

Dr Locke continued by suggesting “Perhaps you could hire a motor boat from the boatyard my dear detective.”

“Not so dear as all that” laughed Paul enigmatically.

* * * * *

The motor boat *Water Lily II* chugged slowly along the river, cutting an unsteady path through the glistening ice towards the island known as Popper’s. Steve, in her winsome way, asked Temple if he was close to solving the mystery.

“Of course I am Steve but you know how I hate direct and pertinent questions in the middle of an investigation.”

“Oh Paul!” Steve shook her curls with a slightly roguish air.

“Steve all I can say is that the...”

But he suddenly stopped short as, from a little distance behind them, there came the ugly braying of a pleasure steamer’s klaxon.

“Steve! Stay where you are” shouted Paul. “We are being run down, yet look – the steamer is empty, there is no one aboard.”

The great steamer bore down on them with an ugly finality...

* * * * *

“Paul, Paul darling, speak to me.”

The anguished voice of Steve was joined by that of the anxious form master, Mr Quelch.

“Come along, my boy, wake up, you are safe on Popper’s Island.”

“Paul, Oh Paul it’s me Steve, your wife. Please wake up.”

As Temple slowly came round he was aware that the pieces were falling neatly into place, that the Greyfriars mystery was about to be solved. He struggled to sit up

and, as he did so, he wittily quipped in Latin to the bemused teacher. Steve pulled off her coat and wrapped it around Paul's shivering shoulders.

"Wait!" he commanded. "Listen."

"What's the matter Paul?"

"Your coat! It's ticking!"

"But coats don't tick!" said Steve.

"My dear sir" began Mr Quelch but Paul was not listening. He leapt up and with Steve screaming in dismay in the background – it was a coat by Chanel – he threw it far out into the river. There was an incredible explosion and, as the water sprayed over them in icy cascades, the river disgorged its mystery. On the surface there appeared, in myriad numbers and diverse quantities, cakes and pastries, jam tarts and doughnuts, sausage rolls and pork pies, treacle puddings and lardy cake, Eccles and Chorley cakes in profusion, with cream horns and vanilla slices followed by ginger beer and pop bottles – all floating down the river, released from their secret cache. From the bushes came an agonised howling and a blubbing that eventually turned into recognisable words.

"Wh... wh, whoops! Yarooogh, wh...wha..what's happening?"

From his hiding place rolled a tearful and noisy schoolboy.

"What a delightful little fellow" breathed the delighted Steve. "What are you doing here, my roly-poly chap?"

Paul interrupted any further noise from the boy and the soothing sounds from his wife. "Take that fat porker away Mr Quelch, if you please."

Mr Quelch obliged.

* * * * *

"My dear, dear sir." Dr Locke was waxing his most fulsome. "How can we ever thank you enough?"

"Very simply" replied the satisfied detective who had consumed many cakes and pies from the river hoard, "very simply" he repeated.

"Do tell us darling" said the radiant Steve, gazing up with limpid eyes into his strong face.

"Very simply Dr Locke, your vanishing cakes could only have been purloined by a fat schoolboy – fat boys are always the culprits when such goodies go missing. Every great detective knows this – even Ferrers Locke!"

Dr Holmes interjected with "But I thought that Mr Quelch..."

"Ha!" was the sharp rejoinder from Paul Temple. "You were seriously mistaken in thinking that such an ascetic and skinny individual should have been a suspect, and therefore banished to Popper's Island."

Temple was by now in full flood. "You see I knew from the footprints that..."

"Footprints!" snapped Steve "You never mentioned footprints!"

Paul studied her for a moment and then quietly said "I see."

"Please explain more Mr Temple" pleaded the confused and grey haired old headmaster.

The detective-novelist came slowly out of his reverie. "Certainly Dr Locke. First there was the car that forced us off the road, then there was the rescue by your gallant lads and finally there was the empty pleasure steamer. Each of these events had a meaning and a place in the puzzle."

"But I don't understand" said Steve.

"Mmmm" Temple was again his enigmatic self "you never do understand when we get to this point in our mysterious affairs Steve."

He moved to the door and said firmly "Steve, tell Sir Graham Forbes that I am working on my novel. Get Charlie to bring me my typewriter. I shall be on Popper's Island." The door closed silently behind him.

Dr Locke was bemused. "What about the Greyfriar's Christmas party" he asked Steve. She laughed merrily and told the venerable headmaster that it was just a misleading clue and that, in any case, this was a Christmas Special and Christmas stories were a vital necessity in Christmas Specials.

Dr Locke forgot himself so much as to splutter "But Mr Temple can't do this to us!"

"Oh yes he can Dr Locke" laughed Steve "Oh yes he can."

(Should you wish to experience the *real* Paul Temple adventures, some of these are available on BBC Radio Cassettes and Audio-books.)



A FIRESIDE MUSE

Ted Baldock

Our revels now are ended. Those our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air.



Shakespeare. The Tempest.

A raw January afternoon with a hint of rain against the windows without.

Within there is a cheerfully burning fire in a shadowy room, beside which stands an old, yet extremely comfortable looking armchair, more than a little dilapidated and sagging through much sterling service. Another similar chair stands in the study of Paul Pontifex Prout, master of the fifth form at Greyfriars School. It is a chair faithful in the long service of exuding warmth, comfort and ease through many years. An old and valued favourite, a chair of character – no less.

The scene is set, the room is darkening, the chair is occupied. A pair of carpet slippers are extended to the blaze. Thoughts and memories are falling into place – a coherent pattern.

The occupant of the chair is approaching that mysterious hinterland 'twixt waking

and sleeping when all things seem possible, when adventure and romance are never far distant. Prout might dream of his early bear-shooting exploits.

For us too the early days predominate. Our pictures in the fire show those legendary heroes Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars School. Here too is the youth of the bullet head and large spectacles – and perpetual impecuniosity, William George Bunter whose “I say, you fellows!” is echoing yet along the corridors of time and in the memories of countless old ‘Magnet’ readers.

It required a very special ability to create the world of Greyfriars and people it with such a wealth of characters. Frank Richards was the unassuming and modest author who achieved this undoubted miracle.

Many older readers will have fond memories of those angular figures in Eton jackets – so like figures in an out-fitter’s catalogue, I always thought – which illustrated the old blue and white Magnets. They may also recall the disquiet generated by a change of garb – a bow to the dictates of fashion no doubt – when blazers were adopted in the early ‘thirties. All of which is now history, and as such pleasant to dwell upon.

Those early days were rather special when one recalls the pleasure and endless happy hours spent pouring over the weekly ‘Magnet’ and ‘Gem’, and the inspiration we derived from their characters and stories.

For instance, the friendship between Tom, Redwing and Herbert Vernon Smith was in many ways a unique relationship. The happy merging of two conflicting opposites. Yet deep abiding loyalty and affection existed between these two Greyfriars fellows.

Redwing, son of a seafaring father, at Greyfriars solely upon his merit as a good and persevering scholar, was by nature tranquil and ‘true blue’ in the finest interpretation of that term. Always ready to forgive and forget the many transgressions of his friend, and never nursing a grudge.

By contrast, Vernon Smith, a strange unpredictable mixture of good and waywardness, could at times be intolerant to a degree. He was never happier than when he was scoring points against the established authority, yet possessed of one great redeeming feature, that of always at the end of the day ‘turning up trumps’ and doing the right thing.

Strange fellow travellers those, but a bond of comradeship existed between them that the conflicting circumstances of life could never erode.

The imposing house in Portman Square and the fisherman’s cottage at Hawkscliff to the level gaze compliment each other. The smoke which issues from the chimneys of the elegant mansion is no more – or less – pungent than that which curls up from the tiny chimney of the cottage at Hawkscliff...

The fire falls in upon itself sending up little flickers of flame. The mood changes. New thoughts, or rather old ones drift into the orbit of the occupant of the armchair...

It has been affirmed often enough that deep in the heart of every man there lurks the shadow of the eternal boy.

Those among us who were initiated early into the great realm of boys’ literature,

especially the world of Greyfriars and St. Jim in the first half of the last century, have much cause to consider ourselves fortunate.

The 'twenties and 'thirties were a special time. We seemed to be living on the threshold of great events, many of them not a little sinister. But for the young there were in a splendid collection of weekly and monthly papers gleams of light which kept our spirits remarkably buoyant.

However advanced and supposedly superior the advantages enjoyed by the youth of the present day, I would suggest that the influence of these old papers, which were our companions through youth to maturity, were in many ways more commendable and rewarding – and far less complicated.

In the world of Greyfriars the official Ash did figure rather prominently. The administering of 'six' on the bags, although painful, was not considered an indignity as the majority of the recipients realised full well such chastisement was deserved. One called the tune and was quite prepared to pay the piper if detected.

There exists a very different attitude today. In the 'dog days' the done thing was to bite on the bullet and take one's 'gruel' like a man. Any other conduct would be received with very short shift at Greyfriars...

Quite plainly, in the centre of the glowing embers of our fire, we see a copy of one of those wonderful Christmas numbers of the 'Magnet' to which we looked forward with such excitement. Many things, quite important events with the passing of the years, are forgotten but not this particular issue.

I see that front cover now. An old dark house showing no light in its windows. It is being surveyed by six fellows, Harry Wharton and Co. and Billy Bunter, from the gates. They have been stranded by the train in which they were returning home becoming snowbound and unable to proceed. It is an exciting picture, full of promise of mystery and thrills to come. It is 1916 and the story centres on an escaped German prisoner, a spy from a camp near Greyfriars. Ludwig Wolff, a fearsome looking Prussian with spiky up-turned moustache and cigar, was to find worthy opponents in the Famous Five – even in the fat Owl. Another character, Crawley, a somewhat sinister figure, is in league with Wolf. For me it was one of Frank Richards' best stories to date. There were they all, quite distinctly pictured in the glowing fire. The cheery faces of the Greyfriars fellows, and the scowling visages of the 'baddies', the dark house, the air of mystery and excitement all ready to enhance the beguiling hour – once more....

The fire crackles and flares up brightly for a moment and there, in the centre of the blaze very clearly are the rugged features of Horace Coker of the fifth form. He is standing in his study at Greyfriars with an expressive look of perplexity and annoyance equally blended into a heavy frown, which clearly spelt trouble for someone in the near future, most likely Potter and Green, the great man's study-mates.

Had he not instructed them to be in attendance in the study where he had a communication to make? The royal command had somehow been misinterpreted! Here was Coker, but there was no sign of Potter or Green. Those two stalwarts appeared to be missing, they were certainly not in the study in response to the

THE GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF



instructions of their leader.

When Coker saw fit to issue an order – as he only too frequently did – he liked to see it attended to smartly, with no hesitation - or excuse. For some reason strange to him, Potter and Green seemed to resent this attitude, this assumption of authority. As argument was of little use with the great Horace they usually just made themselves scarce for the time being.

Coker's doting Aunt Judy, a lady of very firm principles and ideas firmly rooted in the nineteenth-century, could never be convinced that her nephew was adequately nourished at Greyfriars. As a result there was a regular supply of splendid hampers always on hand. Coker's study was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey.

Potter and Green, both of whom recognised a 'good thing' when confronted with it, were heroically prepared to suffer and tolerate the dictatorial methods of the great Horace to insure a place at the rich man's table.

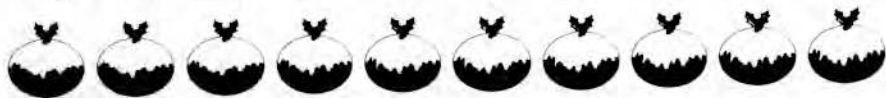
There were times, however, when their loyalty was tried to its limits, hence the periodical 'vanishing'. Loyalty would seem to have certain limits. Now clearly there was trouble looming. Trouble which would require all their not inconsiderable diplomacy to side-step while still appearing to retain a loyal front.

It is comforting to reflect that, throughout the many stormy scenes in the past caused by this disloyalty, Potter and Green have survived to tell the tale and, surprisingly enough, have remained 'true' (according to their lights) to old Horace...

The light is suddenly switched on and the room is immediately flooded with the present-time, pictures in the fire and musings have fled.

The reclining figure in the armchair stirs, the fabric of his thoughts disintegrated in a moment. The fire burns as cheerily as ever making comfortable little sounds as the ashes settle into new formations – but the visions have vanished.

There is movement and certain cheery sounds emanating from the vicinity of the kitchen, indicating that tea, that most pleasant and civilised of repasts, is in the offing. At such moments one must confess to a certain affinity with Billy Bunter.



FOR SALE: 1961-62 Knockout, 25 copies, £2 each. 8 early Lion, reading only, 75p each. Offer for 2 rare items, Old Boys Book Collector 1952, numbers 1 and 2. Postage at cost. A. MATHESON, 31 Old Drive, West Gills, Scrabster, Caithness, KW14 7SE.

SEASONS GREETINGS to all Hobby friends from Naveed Haque in Canada.
Long may the writings of Frank Richards flourish and give us good cheer.



ANNUALS AND THE 'AUSTERITY EFFECT'



By Gordon Bramham

The austerity years, forever associated with World War 2 and its aftermath had a debilitating effect on children's annuals. Stringent war preparations, rationing and recycling of materials, the inevitable degradation of the infrastructure and the curtailment of manufacturing all combined to give considerable problems in book printing, publishing and distribution. This resulted in steadily decreasing print runs and a lower standard of quality control.

It is therefore interesting to consider how 'key annuals' were affected during the 'nadir' years 1940 – 1949 and to compare them during this period, both to each other and to themselves at their peak of quality. A cross section of the most popular annuals (assessed retrospectively) can be analysed to detail the 'austerity effects'.

The annuals which survived the war in terms of popularity did so for various reasons, not least of all because the brilliant artwork and humorous concepts were well in tune with the times. The Disney characters were so well marketed via films, ephemera, books and domestic life in general that any publisher with the appropriate licensing agreements had a 'head start'. Therefore it is of no surprise that Dean & Son (publishers from London) marketed successfully through the war and well beyond. *The Mickey Mouse Annual*. Similarly, Collins with *Donald Duck Annual* and various other characters. Dean & Son was also on firm ground with Mabel Lucie Attwell's superb artwork and their rights to publish the *Mabel Lucie Attwell Annual* from 1934 onwards. (Partridge had originally published them from 1922.) Therefore this annual also had a 'head start'.

D.C. Thomson & Leng from Dundee had for many years marketed successful titles that produced the 'long term survivors'. *Dandy*, *Beano*, *Broons* and *Oor Wullie* annuals were a 'new breed', a revolution in brash, anarchic (for the time) humour, and packed with comic strips exploiting every juvenile fantasy and escapades – they were in short, mischievous! They still adorn the Christmas bookstores as *Dandy* this coming season will notch up annual No. 66! (with the others close behind).

Somewhat less successful but still highly significant were Amalgamated Press with titles such as *Film Fun*, *Radio Fun* and *Knockout Fun Book*. All these survived the 1940s and 1950s but not the 1960s. They were tied to the media stars of the time but also had significant well-known characters such as Billy Bunter. Changes in fashion allied to a new TV/Pop culture anticipated their eventual demise.

The newspaper publishers had a vast array of characters, many now consigned to the 'dustbin of history', i.e. Teddy Tail, Bobby Bear, Pip Squeak and Wilfred, Oojah – just to mention a few. Each had an annual but their humour even by the war was dated, being rooted in earlier decades. It was left to Rupert Bear to 'fly the banner' for long term survival, not only of the war years but the 20th century! In 2004 Rupert's adventures are still anticipated in annual form, i.e. soon to be No.69. Rupert's success

THE MAGIC-BEANO BOOK



had been largely due to the 'modernisation' of the character by Alfred Bestall in 1935, so by the war years the 'Bestall Rupert & Friends', like the *Dandy* and *Beano* characters, were ready to head the 'new wave' of cartoons for what later came to be known as the 'baby boom' generation.

Such was the impact of all the 'new' D.C. Thomson and Express characters that this impact carried them through the following five decades and beyond. This was unprecedented! Nonetheless the 'war economy years' still provided a considerable barrier to be surmounted and the toll taken on the production quality of these annuals was significant. Dean & Son produced a wonderful *Mickey Mouse Annual* in 1930, chunky with a gorgeous pictorial spine and

boards, four dazzling colour plates and pages of black and white comic strips (just like a portable silent cinema show)! By 1940 the paper quality was very poor, prone to brittleness, edge chipping with only one coloured plate – and that was reprinted from the 1935 annual! In 1941 matters became worse with dreadfully embrowned brittle paper, reprinted strips with another recycled frontispiece from 1934. By 1944 even the pictorial spine had vanished – things were never the same, even in the 1950s and beyond. In a parallel sense the Lucie Atwell annual suffered and by 1939 also had lower grade paper and a loss of 3 colour plates, and by 1942 even the pictorial spine had gone. Matters improved in 1948 with a slimmer book and pictorial spine and in 1949 it became all colour – but this did not really compensate!

D.C. Thomson, never the custodian of high quality paper stocks, did produce a superb, chunky *Dandy Monster Comic Annual* in 1939. Fabulous humour on the covers, eye-catching mirth on the spine and jammed with laughter-inducing comic strips – even the paper quality was passable (just). The following year the first *Beano Book* kept the second *Dandy* company with the same chunky format. This was not to last! By the mid 1940s the construction became terribly fragile, much slimmer, the spine plain lettered and the paper thin and highly acidic. These annuals by now had a built in obsolescence – ready to be read, loved, re-read umpteen times and then.....yes, recycled for the war effort!. These annuals retained their tremendous

appeal for decades (they still do), but that brilliant early format was lost forever.

Collins had produced an excellent chunky but compact *Donald Duck Annual* in 1938 with gorgeous wrap round boards and good quality paper. By 1939 it was even thicker but with a reduction in paper quality. Quality diminished steadily and in 1942 the *Donald Duck Annual* had become the size of a large pocket notebook with very poor, almost tissue-like paper and one third of the thickness of the original – not to mention umpteen reprinted strips from earlier annuals.

Amalgamated Press managed rather better. The first *Film Fun Annual* in 1938 was a quality production, superb paper, sound cloth binding, some strips, good stories and a marvellous front board. Standards were maintained through 1939 and 1940, but by 1941 paper quality diminished and by the mid 1940s the annual bore little resemblance to the first one; it was thinner, more fragile, with poorer paper and less sturdy boards – it too had become disposable! A similar story applied to *Radio Fun* (but less so), while the *Knockout Fun 1942* with its overflexible thinner boards had a hard job holding the contents.

The economy drives and shortages were indeed causing havoc with quality and even the mighty *Daily Express* publications suffered. The *Rupert Annual*, to its eternal credit, maintained reasonably good quality paper throughout the 1940s but there were some hiccoughs. *The Rupert Annuals* of 1940 and 1941 reached a peak of perfection. They were not too chunky but an 'elegant size', all stunning colour and plenty of anomalous shades tints and tones, with fully coloured boards and pictorial spines, but then in 1942 – a shock!

That year there appeared a soft backed, very slim, utilitarian book – more like a thick magazine with stark endpapers. For 3/6d one had a very disposable item! The redeeming factor of course was the excellent artwork, colouring and storytelling, but compared with all the earlier *Rupert Annuals* it was certainly austere. This pattern continued and by 1948 the soft covers had become, in some productions, even flimsier, and there were hints of sections of slightly poorer quality paper, by now stapled in. The *Daily Express* did redeem itself by 1950 and produced a higher quality annual with decorative endpapers, hard covers with a superb matt finish. However once again the most appealing formats from 1940 and 1941 had been abandoned!

Having reviewed the 'austerity effects' on these key annuals, the question of its legacy arises. This 'effect' lasted from the late 1940s to 1950, and the ramifications changed forever the fashion, style, format and attitude relating to children's annuals. Some annuals were extinguished, i.e. *Chips*, *Butterfly*, *Triumph*, *Funny Wonder* etc. Some were wounded, i.e. *Hotspur*, *Wizard*, *Bonzo*, *Bobby Bear* etc. Some were more resilient, i.e. *Film Fun*, *Radio Fun*, *Knockout*, *Girls Crystal*, but the real champions which trail blazed, then adapted to further changes, were *Dandy*, *Beano*, *Broons*, *Oor Wullie* and *Rupert*. The Disney characters got 'subsumed' into later annuals and Lucie Atwell books are continually being reprinted, but it must be mentioned that the *Lucie Atwell Annual* lasted from 1922 to 1974!

Post war style and format became combined in bigger, sleeker, slimmer laminated books conforming to display criteria and modern reprographics via computer

technology. Gone were the very ornate covers, decorative end-papers, cloth bindings, profusion of colour plates either 'bound in' or 'tipped in', with elaborate printing and letter headings which dominated the pre-war children's books. It can now be seen that the 1940s were indeed a watershed dividing the 'craft based' production from the current 'electronic based' techniques.

The 'austerity years' demonstrated that it was possible to produce books, still with mass appeal, quickly and cheaply and above all **economically!** This philosophy, combined with today's technology, has resulted in a vast array of interchangeable, homogeneous annuals, slick but lacking in character (with of course one or two notable exceptions) and often over-sophisticated and 'politically correct'.

What is it then about these very basic utilitarian annuals from the 1940s that can fascinate the collector? The answer must be threefold. Some of them are very scarce and in near fine condition, rare! (and expensive). To possess some of these items in nice condition is to wonder how they survived as such. These books exhibit the triumph of illustrative style, comical genius and originality over packaging and presentation; the reverse is the case for so many currently issued annuals. So if any of you own a nice copy of a 1942 comic annual, treasure it – and if it is fine, cherish it.



BRIAN DOYLE'S BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

(Continued)



BESSIE LOVE: When I flew out to Almeria in Spain in 1971 to work as Publicist on my first and only Western (MGM's *Catlow*, starring Yul Brynner, Richard Crenna, Leonard Nimoy and Dahlia Lavi, and directed by Sam Wanamaker) I little knew that I was to meet and work with a lady whose astonishing career was almost as old as the film industry itself. Playing a small but effective part was Bessie Love, then in her early-70s and as charming and sprightly as they come. I had several fascinating chats with Bessie as movie cowboys often circled around us, and she told me that she had made her screen bow while still a schoolgirl at Los Angeles High School in 1915 – she was an extra in the great D.W. Griffith's famous landmark picture *The Birth of a Nation*. Within a year she was co-starring opposite Douglas Fairbanks and William S. Hart and appeared in many silent films, including a small but key role in Griffith's *Intolerance*. 'You sometimes became what they called a 'star' quite quickly in those far-off days, if you were any good and passably pretty,' laughed Bessie. She appeared in both small and big parts in over 70 films up to 1930 and then many more. In 1925 she danced 'The Charleston' for the first time on the screen in *The King of Main Street*. She received an Oscar Nomination for her song-and-dance role in *Broadway Melody* in 1929. 'Bessie,' I told her, 'you're a walking history of the movie business.' 'At least

I'm still walking, dear' she rejoined. She later settled in London from 1935 and appeared in numerous British films, as well as in stage, TV and radio productions. She was even in an 007 Bond film, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in 1969. And also in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – 'But I wasn't Lady Chatterley's Love' giggled Bessie. I asked her about the old silent days. 'Thing were much more hectic and faster then – true there were no lines to learn or speak, but you had to act with your face and your body. As they said, actions spoke louder than words. And the stories were so much simpler. I was in one called 'Deserted at the Alter' – and that title tells you everything, doesn't it?' When I last saw Bessie Love she was sitting in a stagecoach chatting with Leonard Nimoy – better-known as 'Mr. Spock' in the original 'Star Trek' TV series. 'The Birth of a Nation' to 'Star Trek' – that's quite a span. Bessie was one of the true – and great – movie originals and it was a privilege to meet her. She died in 1986 at the age of 88.

Actor William S. Hart directs 'The Aryan'



Seventeen-year-old newcomer Bessie Love co-stars with Hart in his new film

JAMES HERRIOT: I met and came to know Alf Wight when I worked on the film *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet* in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales in 1975. I had just been in hot and dusty Morocco on John Huston's *The Man Who Would Be King* for four months and the wonderful clean bracing air of Yorkshire, and the 9-week location

there, were very welcome. Alf Wight? That was the real name of James Herriot, best-selling author of all those marvellous books about the life of a young veterinary surgeon in Yorkshire from the 1930s onwards. You'll remember the very successful TV series *All Creatures Great and Small* which ran for years, and also perhaps the first feature film of the same title, which starred Simon Ward. 'My' film had John Alderton as Herriot, with a marvellous cast of well-known British supporting actors. Alf (as he preferred to be known) told me he had worked as a busy vet for about 25 years before he even thought of writing his experiences down. His first book *If Only They Could Talk* was published in 1970, followed by more. 'I wrote them all (and still do) on the kitchen table with the radio or television blaring away and people coming and going' Alf told me. 'I don't think I could write if it was too quiet!' He told me he got his pen-name from a popular footballer of his youth and the James 'just seemed to fit in nicely'. Did he always want to be a vet? 'I'd always loved animals, especially dogs, and I had a lovely Irish setter,' he told me. But the vet thing came after I read an article in the *Meccano Magazine* on 'Being a vet as a career'. What it was doing that particular magazine I didn't know, but I became interested.' And when, not long afterwards, the Principal of the Glasgow Veterinary College came to give a talk at his school (Alf grew up in Glasgow) he was really hooked and duly studied at the college. 'Do you know it takes longer to qualify as a vet than it does as a doctor,' Alf said. (At least it did in those days...!) Alf was still working as a busy vet in the Yorkshire town of Thirsk when I knew him and he continued for many years afterwards, I believe. When my wife, Jo, visited me for a few days on location, Alf invited us to dinner at his house and we were joined by John Alderton (one of the nicest actors in the business, by the way) and other actors in the cast. His wife and daughter also there and it was a lovely evening. The film unit was based, incidentally, in the old Yorkshire town of Richmond, and shooting took place in many nearby locations. Alf (or 'James Herriot') died a few years ago and he is sadly missed, but his many books will live on, as will my own warm and happy memories of the man himself.....

VAN JOHNSON: You don't hear much about him these days (after all he is 88), but in the 1940s and 1950s he and his freckled face, reddish-blond hair and blue-eyes starred in around 70 movies, usually romantic comedies and musicals, including *Easy to Love*, *Easy to Wed*, *The Thrill of It All* and *Ziegfeld Follies*. The girls went wild for his easy-going, innocent charm and boy-next-door looks and he was one of MGM's biggest stars. He also occasionally was brave enough to try his hand at serious, dramatic roles in such pictures as *The Cain Mutiny* and *The End of the Affair*. He also appeared in Broadway shows and plays. I met him when he was in London starring on the West End stage in the musical *The Music Man*, and very good he was too. That was about 40 years ago when the freckles were still there and he looked good. He was very affable and chatty. 'Is it true that you always wear red socks?' I asked, remembering something I had read about him somewhere. 'No, that's a complete and utter lie - I don't know how that ugly rumour started,' he said looking mock-angry. Then he lifted a trouser-leg to display a bright red sock. He grinned and explained that he happened to be wearing a pair of red socks when he successfully auditioned

for his first really worthwhile film role. 'They brought me luck and I decided then and there to wear red socks always for good luck.' 'It worked!' I said. And he clapped me around the shoulders and said: 'You're right – darned right – it **did** work....!'

GEORGE COULOURIS: Manchester-born (in 1903) actor who went to Hollywood in the 1930s and made his name under the auspices of the great Orson Welles, first in the latter's famous Mercury Theatre of the Air Company (taking part in the controversial and infamous radio production of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* which persuaded a large slice of the American listening public that an alien invasion was actually taking place) and then co-starring (as Walter Parks) in Welles' classic film *Citizen Kane*, which many critics consider the best picture ever made. He later appeared in scores of films, in America and Britain. He often played an eccentric, slightly-crazy-looking character with wild staring eyes-which is just how he came over in real life! I did two films with him and he finds a place in my *Brief Encounters* series because he was the only actor



George Coulouris

(apart from Peter Cushing, Dan O'Herlihy and Frank Pettingel) who read and collected the old boys' papers such as *Magnet*, *Gem* and *Chums*. 'Fine reading, excellent stuff, nothing like 'em today' he would enthuse, staring at me wildly on the movie set. 'Which was your favourite paper, George?' I would ask, and he would be off extolling the virtues of *The Magnet*, a particular joy. He told me he had a big stack of them. 'But, of course, as I move round so much doing acting jobs all over the world, I can't take 'em with me as bedside reading – far too bulky...' I told him about the *SOLs* and the 'Bunter books' which he might find more portable. 'That's a good idea, boy' he said, 'I must invest in a few of those'. He always called me (and others) 'boy'. He was mildly eccentric, often talking aloud to himself – a habit which didn't endear him to assistant directors trying to maintain silence during a 'take' on the set. When I was on a film called *The Final Programme* at Elstree Studios, he was actually sent off the set for refusing to remain quiet during filming. 'They all think they're Mr. Quelch', he muttered to me with a wink. One of the 'old school' was George; he would have been at home in one of the old Victorian melodrama companies. He would have made a great 'Sweeney Todd'. I wonder if he ever worked with Tod Slaughter...!

JACKIE COOPER: If you're a veteran movie-buff like me, or love watching the really old films on TV, you'll know who young Jackie Cooper was. He made his film debut at 3 and then appeared in several 'Our Gang' children's pictures. Throughout the 1930s he was one of Hollywood's busiest and most popular child-stars. There was Shirley Temple and there was Jackie Cooper. A little way behind came Freddie Bartholomew and one or two others, including Jackie Coogan. But it was Jackie

Cooper with his co-starring lower lip (sometimes aggressively thrust forward, sometimes trembling with emotion) who was the leading lad of the times. He received an Oscar nomination when he was 9 for a picture called *Skippy*, he was a memorable Jim Hawkins to Wallace Beery's Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* in 1934. Other notable movies including *The Champ* (1931), *The Bowery* (1933) and *Boy of the Streets* (1937). Jackie Cooper came to London to play the newspaper editor in the quartet of *Superman* films made here in the late-1970s/early-1980s and I was lunching in the Pinewood Studios restaurant one day with the publicist for the studios Norman Martlew, when a dapper, friendly man of around 50 stopped at our table and introduced himself. 'Hi, I'm Jackie Cooper and I believe you're the man I want to talk to, sir - in charge of the publicity for the studios, right?' he said to my companion. Norman confirmed this, introduced me and invited Cooper to join us for lunch, which he did. It was a fascinating hour as Norman (a fellow movie-buff) and I got him talking about the 'old days' when he was a child star. 'The trouble was that I didn't really have much of a normal childhood,' he said ruefully. 'It was work, work and then more work, from early morning to early evening, then home for a meal and bed. But I guess I enjoyed it all and met some really nice people. Shirley Temple was a great friend and we went to a few movie premiers together!' We gathered that Jackie was still acting in films and on TV and was also producing and directing TV episodes. 'It's a nice change to sit behind the cameras and tell other people what to do!' he grinned. As I was working on a film at the studios and Jackie was doing *Superman* we often bumped into one another and he was always friendly and chatty. He's still around in America, I believe and must be well over 80 now. But to me he'll always be young Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*...!

LESLIE SARONY: When I was working on the James Herriot 'vet' film *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet* on location in Yorkshire in 1975, a name caught my eye on the latest sheet of castings - in a two-day job playing the role of an old farmer was one Leslie Sarony. That name will only ring bells, I think, with people over 70 or so. Sarony was a comedian, singer, dancer and composer and quite a big star of stage, radio and records for many years in the first half of the 20th century. I grew up with his voice singing comic songs on old 78rpm records that I played constantly on my parents' old wind-up gramophone during the 2nd World War years when I was a child. I particularly liked three of his catchy songs (which he wrote and sang): *I Lift Up My Finger and I Say Tweet, Tweet, Jollity Farm* and *Ain't I Grant to be Blooming Well Dead*, which I played regularly and at varying speeds, just for fun. As well as being a solo act and busy song-writer, Sarony was also one-half of a popular double-act called 'The Two Leslie' in which he partnered Leslie Holmes. I met Sarony in the hotel bar just after he had arrived for his film work and invited him to dinner. We sat and enjoyed a marvellous two-hour meal, with wine, and Sarony reminisced about his long career. 'It's been a good life but a tough one too,' he sighed. 'Six shows a day at times at different theatres, racing across town to be on stage on time and writing a couple of hundred comedy songs, which I sang and usually recorded, so the money rolled in all right.' He told me he had started stage life as a 14-year-old schoolboy in

1911 at the London Hippodrome in an act called 'Park's Eton Boys'. 'We came on in top hats and those Eton collars and sang and danced and messed about. But it was fun and it was better than school, which I had just left!' 'What happened to 'the Two Leslies'?' I asked (I had often heard them on BBC radio variety shows in the early 1940s). 'Oh, we broke up in 1946 when Holmes decided he wanted a proper job and went to work for the *News of the World* as Publicity Manager', snorted Sarony. I gathered from his tone that the parting had not been entirely amicable. 'Nowadays I'm a sort of character actor,' said Sarony. 'I pop up now and again on TV and in films, you know. And I still write the occasional funny song. It's all in my blood, you see.' He was nearing 80 and living in a small flat in Streatham in South-West London. Leslie Sarony did his small role in the film satisfactorily and I saw him as he was leaving the hotel a couple of days later. It's been very nice, Brian – it's great to meet an old fan now and again. Good luck to you, lad.' And, with a wink, he was off. At our dinner, he had sung a bit of *I Lift Up My Finger and I saw Tweet, Tweet*, which had been a huge hit in its day. I can still hear his cheerful, slightly-nasal voice now – after all, I had grown up with his songs. He was part of my education. Tweet, tweet...



Jackie Cooper in *Skippy*, his greatest success, and in the television series *Hennessey*



THE FAIR FAY WRAY HAS FADED AWAY

by Ernest Holman

One of the few remaining legendary figures of the early 'Talkie' days has, in her 97th year, passed away. No matter what role she subsequently played, Fay Wray was always fated to be recalled as the sweetheart of King Kong. The film was made by RKO and there had, at that time, never been anything like it. The trick photography alone was a remarkable tribute to the film makers.

Merian C. Cooper who masterminded the whole production, told Fay Wray that her next leading man would be the tallest and most powerful member of the cast. Fay had visions of Cary Grant or Clark Gable!

Kong was a marvellous creation by the backroom boys - despite its fearsome appearance in the film, the model was actually only about 18 inches high. Who can forget the scenes of Fay, held gently but firmly, in the hands of her captor. One reviewer at the time described Fay Wray as the *Scream* sensation of the year! Fay herself never forgot the film for a moment, whatever later parts she played, because when she got round to given her name to her Autobiography, the book came out under the title of *On The Other Hand!*

Fay continued in film after film, often of course in 'horror' films and such like. She appeared on radio and television at times. One of her most unusual roles was to be included in a distinguished cast for Julius Caesar.

I am quite sure that I was not the only one who, on reading the news, heaved a heart-felt sigh at the passing of the fair Fay Wray.



BOOK REVIEW



"The Battle of Britain," by Roy Conyers Nesbit (Sutton Publishing Ltd, £14.99)

Countless books have been published on the Battle of Britain; this large-format paperback is one of the best. Its author, Roy Conyers Nesbit, has first-hand knowledge of the Royal Air Force in World War II: he was a navigator on Beaufighters. Since the war, he has written many well-respected books, including a history of the RAF, and also *Failed to Return*, a fascinating study of famous last flights by such people as Amy Johnson, Rudolf Hess, and Glenn Miller.

His book on the momentous summer of 1940 is profusely illustrated with some 240 photographs, many of them unfamiliar, some from the German side. Of particular interest are several of the "Rafwaffe" - captured German aircraft flown in RAF markings. There is a rare shot of a crashed Fiat BR.20 Cicogna - for Mussolini's Regia Aeronautica made an inglorious raid along-side their Nazi comrades. Another depicts a Junkers 87 Stuka in an absolutely vertical dive over Chichester; you can almost hear the terrifying screamers on the undercarriage legs.

There are also maps, paintings, and posters. Due space is given to the Home Front and the reactions of the British people.

The book begins, rightly, with a biographical chapter on the architect of victory, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh (later Lord) Dowding, Commander-in-chief of Fighter Command since 1936. It was his meticulous planning that ensured we had modern fighters like the Spitfire and Hurricane, and the Chain Home radar system without which we would have lost the battle. Dowding's subsequent dismissal was scandalous - contrived by his enemies in the Air Ministry.

Mr Conyers Nesbit gives a succinct and objective account of the "Big Wings" controversy between two of Dowding's group commanders - Air Vice- Marshal Keith Park of No 11 Group at Uxbridge and AVM Trafford Leigh-Mallory of No. 12 Group in the Midlands. Park's strategy was for pairs of squadrons to intercept the German bombers at the earliest possible moment. Leigh-Mallory, at the instigation of Squadron Leader Douglas Bader, wanted to build up a Big Wing of five squadrons (some 60 fighters). As Mr Conyers Nesbit puts it, "It is obvious...that a wing of five squadrons...is capable of shooting down more enemy aircraft... However, it is also evident that such a wing could miss much of the enemy force if the latter split...and made for several targets. It is also clear that if the wing took longer to assemble, as it usually did" (about 20 minutes) "it might miss the enemy altogether". It was all a matter of objectives. If the aim was to shoot down as many bombers as possible, probably after they had bombed their targets, then the Big Wing would be effective. But if the bombers were to be attacked before dropping their loads, thus saving many civilian lives, then Park was right. And he was.

Perhaps the chief criticism of Dowding is that he rather stood aloof from this dispute. Some writers feel he should have been firmer in support of Park.

The later history of the two warring group commanders is interesting. Park, like Dowding, was sacked, and his rival Leigh-Mallory took over No 11 Group. Four years later, in 1944, Leigh-Mallory was promoted to command the RAF in the Far East; or the way to take up his appointment, his aircraft flew into a mountain and he was killed. Twenty years earlier, his brother George Leigh-Mallory had died on another mountain - Everest. And who took over the Far East appointment? Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park.

Near the end of this book is the sonnet *High Flight*, by Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, RCAF. It is a fitting epitome of *The Few*.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on silver-laughtered wings...
I've chased the shouting wind along and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...
And while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high unsurpassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

Dennis L. Bird, Squadron Leader, RAF retired

A GREYFRIARS/ST JIM'S INTERNET DISCUSSION GROUP



By John Graham-Leigh

The "Billy Bunter" discussion group on Yahoo! Was set up in 2000 and now has 149 members. There are over 5000 messages in the archives, many of which make fascinating reading, and there have been discussions ranging from "Who was the most unpopular Greyfriars character?" to political correctness. Despite the group's title it's concerned with any and all of Charles Hamilton's work - St Jim's has recently been featured as prominently as Greyfriars.

The group is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BillyBunter/> and all are welcome to join.

To give you the flavour, here's part of a recent discussion, which I started.

THE GEM REPRINTS

In *The History of the Gem and Magnet*, Eric Fayne deplored the abridging of many of the 1911-1914 *Gems* when they were reprinted in the 1930s. He especially commented on *Bought Honours*, which was reprinted as *The Cheat* in 1935 - "The Editor should have had his head examined". *Bought Honours* was Eric's favourite Gem story.

I have just read many of these stories for the first time, all of them in the abridged versions. A few of them seem to end rather abruptly, but in general they're excellent and bear comparison even with *The Magnet* stories of the mid-1930s. *The Cheat* is a first-rate tale: I'd like to give a summary here.

Gussy decides that he's going to enter for the Greek Medal, which involves a very difficult Classical Greek examination. He's encouraged by the fact that no-one is allowed to win the medal twice and the best Greek scholars, such as Kildare, Darrell and Kerr, have won it previously and are thus debarred from sitting the exam. Unfortunately Gussy knows no Greek at all. Everyone treats Gussy's entry as a joke but Lord Eastwood promises his hopeful son £20 (equivalent to about £500 in today's money) if he wins the medal.

Ernest Levison has been away from the school through feigning illness to escape expulsion for a particularly nasty escapade. He's fully capable of winning the Greek medal but says that, as there's no money attached to it the effort isn't worth his while. He pals up with Gussy by pretending to have reformed, and offers to coach him in Greek. Gussy manfully struggles to learn, but when Kerr helpfully presents him with last year's paper he recognises that it is beyond him. Levison points out how ridiculous Gussy will look if he either withdraws or sits the exam and gets no marks, and offers to sit the exam in his stead! Gussy is appalled at first, but Levison cleverly plays on his gullibility and gets him to agree (this part of the story is very convincingly done - that Levison is a crafty blighter). Levison stresses that he stands to gain nothing: he will do all the hard work out of pure friendship for Gussy. He duly sits the exam in

Gussy's place.

By the time the results are to be announced Gussy has realised what a low trick it is. When the Head announces that he has won the medal, Gussy is covered with confusion; only his belief that Levison has acted out of friendship stops him confessing on the spot - he will not get his "friend" into trouble. He tells Levison that he won't accept the promised £20 from his father. Levison then drops the mask, points out that Gussy will be expelled if the imposture is known and demands the £20 as the price of his silence.

Levison's demand is counter-productive. Gussy realises Levison's true motives and confesses to the Head; Gussy is pardoned, Levison is flogged and sent to Coventry, and Langton (whose paper was second in the exam) gets the medal.

Now, I thought this a really excellent story, so well-written that the rather far-fetched plot is thoroughly convincing. The scene in which Levison's cleverness over-reaches itself and the innocent but honourable Gussy feels himself released from the claims of friendship is as good as anything Charles Hamilton ever wrote. It's difficult to see how the original *Bought Honours* could have been better. Perhaps Eric Fayne being thoroughly familiar with the original, could not help viewing any abridgement as a loss. I do agree, though that *Bought Honours* was a much better title than *The Cheat*.

Possibly someone who has both versions could let us have their opinion.

Reply from Michael Bailey, the proud possessor of a complete run of *The Gem*

Well I think I'm the someone referred to!

Basically it seems to be a case of gentle shrinkage. There are two whole chapters cut. At the beginning Gussy drops his pile of Greek books and is helped to pick them up. In the original there is a whole chapter where he dropped them on Mr Railton and is called to account for it. Later on a whole chapter where Tom Merry questions Levison and his motives is cut. Other chapters are gently pruned.

What is proved by John's email is that perhaps the editor of the Gem in 1935 was correct as it didn't spoil the appreciation of a wonderful story. The supporting programme in the Gem at the time was the "Packsaddle" cowboy tales by the original Hamilton. So no doubt he was pleased at the cuts as he would have been paid for Packsaddle but NOT the reprinted Gem as he never got any further payment for reprinted material! Considering the extent of reprints done by the Amalgamated Pros. it showed how he really, really could have benefited from a business manager.





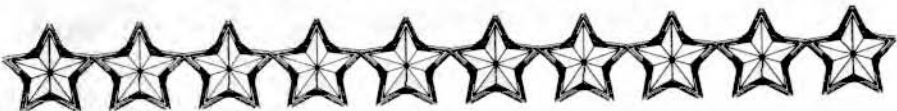
YOUTH

by Ted Baldock

He doth not lack an almanac
Whose youth is in his soul.

Holmes. Remember

When I was young I thought it fun
To stay up late at night,
And watch the moon sail o'er the sky
And see the stars so bright.
But now I'm old, and feel the cold,
I'd rather stay in bed.
A story sad, it must be told,
'Tis natural be it said.
I have my dreams, do not we all?
Adventures soon and late
Who has not heard the clarion call,
No cause here for debate.
In youth I viewed horizons blue,
My gaze was fixed afar,
I missed the treasures 'neath my nose,
The warmth, the love - the rose.
It is the common lot of most,
Through history be it traced,
A careless happy youthful host,
But would we this displace?
Thus will we tread the golden way
Once more with youthful hearts,
We'll live again just for today
And play our natural parts.
Old Greyfriars school will live once more,
And in our hearts we know
In our minds t'will rise and soar
As in the long ago.
We'll hear the old familiar roar
As shades go rushing past
The cheering from Bigside restores
A legend - may it last.



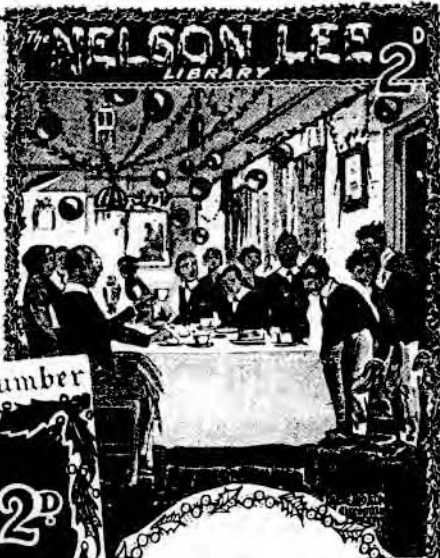
Christmas Greetings

To Editor Mary
and all at C.D.
with love from
your Ekums.

THE BRUIN BOYS ENJOY THEIR CHRISTMAS PUDDING!



What times the Bruin Boys did have at Christmas! Mrs. Bruin made a huge pudding, and it was a delicious one, too! Never before have they had such a fine feast, and I think that they all ought to be very good boys, and keep out of mischief now, don't you? You should have heard the cheers when Tim brought the pudding in!



Grand Christmas - Week Number



The Editor of
The "Nelson Lee"
Sends
Christmas Greetings
To All His
Readers
At Home and Abroad.



The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN

Christmas Greetings

To all our BD Readers
from
Cliff House
and
Morocco.



BABS & CO'S OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

by Hilda Richards

A Grand
Seasonable
Story of the
Early Adventures
of BARBARA REDFERN
& CO
the ever popular chums
of CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL

2.12.37

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY
No 613



No. 1.—HARRY WHARTON.



This week: FRANK NUGENT.



Horace James Ocker.



HERBERT VERNON SMITH.



and
all at

No. 3.—JOHNNY BULL.



Greyfriars

No. 2.—BOB CHERRY



BY LIBRARY.—No. 672.



GEMS OF HAMILTONIA

by Pete Hanger

"I shall not punish you, Wharton. I shall leave you to your own conscience in this matter!" said Mr. Quelch majestically.

Wharton looked extremely serious, but inwardly he could not help feeling that his conscience would be able to stand the strain. Really and truly, beating the Shell at Soccer was a much more important matter than Mr. Quelch's nephew, or all his nephews and nieces lumped together; or, indeed, all his relations to the thirtieth or fortieth generation.

MAGNET 994

"Strong-fellow wind, my word!" murmured Koko, the brown boat-swain of the Dawn; and he hunched himself over the wheel, his head bent, his mop of dark hair blowing out.

Ken King, King of the islands - the boy skipper and owner - held on to a stay, and stared through the murk.

It was sunset - if the sun could have been seen. But between the tossing, pitching ketch, and the sunset, black battalions of clouds had mustered. An hour ago bright sunshine had been streaming from a blue sky; the Pacific only ruffled by a breeze. Now all was deeply dusky, and the wind was blowing great guns.

For long days the Dawn had been becalmed in the lagoon at Luta. Now the storm had come after the calm. And he could have wished that his ketch was still at anchor in the sheltered lagoon. But he was seventy long sea miles from Luta, and the Pacific raged and roared round him.

With plenty of sea room, he would not have feared the Pacific at its wildest. But his brows were knitted with an anxious pucker as the ketch drove through heavying waters. Under the inky black-clouds that almost touched the sea stretched the long, low sandbank that was called the Whale's Back. How near, he did not know, and he could see nothing but wave-crests that tossed and foamed in the night-like gloom.

The Hiva-Oa crew were all on deck - holding on. The Dawn pitched almost like a cork on the wild sea, and the most active Kanaka could not have crossed the deck without a hold. Kit Hudson, the mate of the Dawn, loomed through the gloom, joining his shipmate. He put his head close to shout, in the roar of the wind:

"We'll clear it, Ken!"

"Ay, ay, I reckon we'll clear it, But --" The wind carried away the rest of his words.

BFL 666

"I don't think you ought to be mean when I'm trying to do you a favour. But suppose we say five shillings, then? You place five shillings in my hands --"

"And you take it for a walk to Mrs. Mible's --"

MAGNET 91

"He ought to be put to the torture!" declared Vernon-Smith. "We'll read out to him a dozen eloquent speeches from the last House of Commons' debate. We can take on the job in turns, so that we don't perish, too."

MAGNET 541

"Ought to be boiled in oil!" said Bob gravely. "In fact, boiling in oil would be too easy! Hanging would be too good! He ought to be shut up in the House of Commons and made to listen to the speeches for hours on end till he perished in anguish!"

MAGNET 558

... "Prout's an old donkey - he doesn't know when he's got a really good pupil under him. He makes no end of mistakes, especially in spelling! He actually put two g's in 'agglomerate' today. It was no good my objecting - he had to have his way!"

MAGNET 572

... Nobody was likely to suspect that William George Bunter had had a brain-wave, because they were very doubtful indeed whether he had any brains.

MAGNET 689

Billy Bunter, as a rule, dodged the football-ground as though it were a plague spot. In the finest of weather he never played if he could help it. Strenuous exercise had never appealed to Bunter. Given freedom of choice, Bunter would have limited his exercise to a gentle walk to and from the tuckshop.

MAGNET 874

He rolled down the corridor in the depths of woe. Billy Bunter was fairly up against it now; and the universe seemed to him a dismal place, quiet unworthy of William George Bunter's presence in it.

MAGNET 874



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ROBERT KIRKPATRICK'S ANNUALS and ANTHOLOGIES LIST

(Continued)

Schoolboys Book	Juvenile Productions	
Schoolboys Bumper Book	Collins	1941/1948
Schoolboys Jolly Book		
Schoolboys Jolly Bumper Book	Collins	1941/1948
Schoolboys Stories	Collins	1929/1930
Schoolboys Stories	Children's Press	1940
Schoolboys Stories	Collins	1936-1939
Schoolboys Stories	McCorquodale & Co.	
Schoolboys Story Book	John F. Shaw	1937
Schoolboys Story Book	Sunshine Press	
Schoolboys Story Book	David Morgan Ltd.	
Schoolboys Story Book	Children's Press	
Schoolboys Story Book	Selfridges	(3 issues?)
Schoolboys Story Book	New Century Press	1935
Schoolboys Story Book	Dean & Sons	1934
Schoolboys Story Bumper	Collins	
Schoolboys Treasure Book	Collins	1936
School Sports Stories for Boys	(publisher not given)	1938
Scramble	Gerald G. Swan	1948-1951
Skipper Book for Boys	D.C. Thompson	1932-1942/1948
Sparkling Book for Boys	Juvenile Productions	1938
Speed Book for Boys	D.C. Thomson	1937-38
Splendid Book for Boys	O.U.P.	1931
Splendid Book for Boys	Collins	1957-1958
Splendid Yams for Boys	Birn Brothers	
Sports Stories for Boys	Hamlyn	1970
Stirring Boys Stories	Children's Press	
Stories for Boys	Birn Brothers	1935-1939
Stories for Boys	Blackie & Son	1948
Stories for Boys	Dean & Son	
Stories for Boys	McCorquodale & Co.	
Stories for Boys	Sunshine Press	
Stories for Boys	Venturebooks	1948
Stories for Schoolboys	Juvenile Productions	
Stories for Schoolboys	T. Nelson & Sons	1936
Stories of Adventure	Collins	1904

Stories of Adventure for Boys	Shoe Lane Pub. Co.	
Stories of Daring	Collins	
Storyland for Boys	F. Warne & Co.	1929
Supreme Book for Boys	Dean & Son	1964
Thrilling Adventure Stories	Children's Press	
Thrilling Boys Stories	Collins	1936
Thrilling Stories for Boys	Blackie & Son	1938
Thrilling Tales for Boys	T. Nelson & Sons	1944
Tiger Annual	AP/Fleetway/IPC	1957-1981
Told to the Boys	T. Nelson & Sons	
"Top-All" Book for Boys	F. Warne & Co.	1943
Top Hole Stories of school and Adventure for Boys	Epworth Press	1928
Triumph Adventure Book	Collins	
Triumph Annual	Amalgamated Press	1937-1941
Triumph Book for Boys	Collins	1937
Twenty-six Adventure Stories for Boys	"B.O.P." Office	1925
Twenty-six Good Stories for Boys	"B.O.P." Office	1926
Twenty-six Radio Stories for Boys	"B.O.P." Office	1931
Twenty-six Sports Stories for Boys	"B.O.P." Office	
Valiant Annual	FleetwayAPC	1964-
Victor Book for Boys	D.C. Thompson	1964-
Victory Adventure Book	Collins	
Victory Book for Boys	Juvenile Productions	1937
Warne's Happy Book for Boys	F. Warne & Co.	1929
Warne's Pleasure Book for Boys	Frederick Warne & Co.	1926-1929
Warne's Wide World Story Book for Boys	F. Warne & Co.	1937
Whim and Wonder - Stories for Schoolboys	A. Wheaton & Co.	1938
Whiteley's Schoolboys' Story Book	William Whiteley	
Wizard Book for Boys	D.C. Thomson	1936-1942/49
Wizard Holiday Book for Boys	D.C. Thomson	1938-1939
Wonder Book of Daring Deeds	Ward Lock	1937/1949
World's Best Boys Annual	Allied Newspapers	1926-1937
Yarns for Boys	Blackie & Son	1948
Yarns for Boys	McCorquodale	1934
Young England	Pilgrim Press/S.S.U.	1880-1937
Young Scotland	Pilgrim Press	1905-1972



Books/annuals containing exclusively genre fiction - e.g. flying stories, historical stories etc. - not included



A DICKENS OF A CHRISTMAS!

The first Christmas 'Bullseye'

by Ray Moore



If ever evidence were needed to support the theory that, in literary terms, Charles Dickens invented the traditional Christmas then that AP paper of indeterminate audience appeal *The Bullseye*, in the shape of its first Christmas number, could certainly be arranged as an exhibit in defence of the proposition. Its Christmas offerings may not have been of the Pickwickian Dingley Dell sort but the shade of Ebenezer Scrooge certainly permeated its tales of Yuletide redemption played out in stark, sombre surroundings. The festive season was the ideal time to display the paper's stock admixture of the eerie and the occasionally cloyingly sentimental.

Running to a total of 183 issues between Jan 1931 and July 1934 *The Bullseye* was edited by Fred Cordwell (1886-1949), a man with not only a great fondness for Dickens but also the melodramatic 'penny bloods' of his youth. His predilections, which he passed on to his team of writers, gave many of the stories published in the paper a distinctly pre World War I, not to say positively Victorian tone. This atmosphere was further enhanced by the fact that some of the scripts, and indeed a number of the illustrations used in the paper, had been lifted wholesale from the pages of an earlier paper, primarily aimed at girls and young women, titled *Fun and Fiction* which had run for 124 issues between Oct 1911 and Feb 1914.

As well as the usual editor's page, 'Chat Chuckles and Chaff', and the page of jokes featuring the cross-talk double act Willie and Wally *The Bullseye Backchat Boys* in its 28 pages, the *Bullseye's* first Christmas number No. 49 (26/12/31) gave its readers five Christmas stories complete in themselves and one convoluted pot-boiler of a serial, 'Branded for Life', with no reference to the holiday season.

Of the five completes only one, 'Outwitted', featuring 'Mortimer Hood – Millionaire Detective', which concerned itself with a jewel theft perpetrated by someone passing himself off as the detective in a country manor, didn't have a redemptive aspect. The rest certainly did.

The first of these, and to my mind the best story in the bunch, was 'The Vanishing Inn' featuring a character newly arrived in the pages of *Bullseye*, Octavius Kay, in a series titled 'Meet O Kay the Bullseye Special Commissioner'. Kay was described by editor Cordwell as a 'world wanderer' who had recently been retained by the paper to investigate all manner of strange and unusual cases. The readers belief in Kay's realness was further strengthened by the signed photograph that accompanied his adventures every week. A concession on vanity on Kay's part, given the covert nature of his type of employment, that would seem rather rash and self defeating if he had actually existed. No doubt 'Kay' was actually a member of the editorial staff press-ganged into having his photo taken by editor Cordwell, a man

OUR SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

THE

Bullseye

XMAS NUMBER

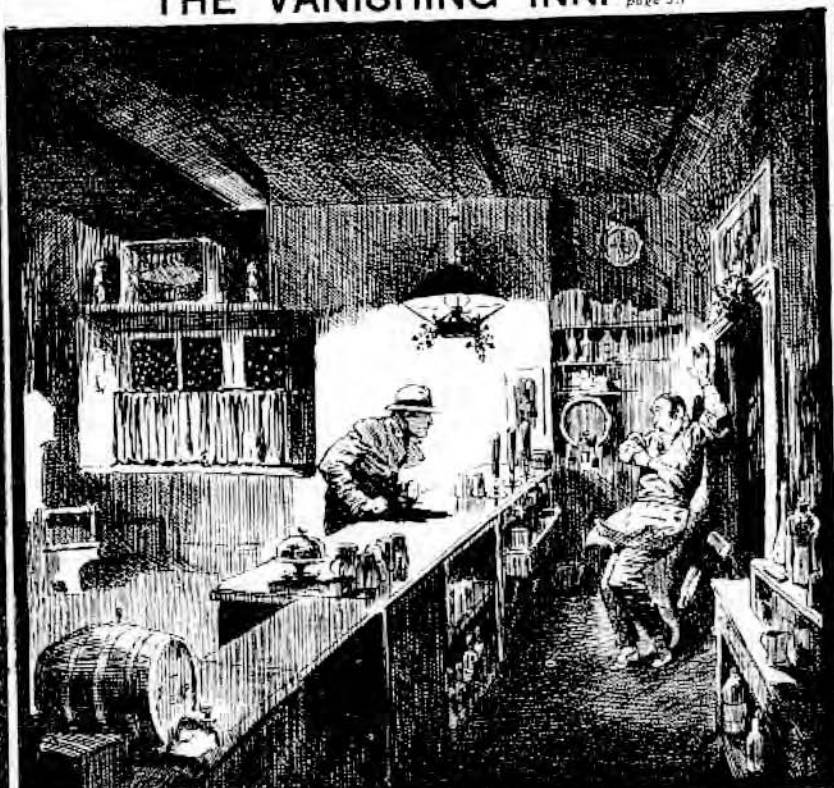
Every
Friday

No. 49. Vol. 2

Week Ending December 26th, 1931

TWOPENCE

THE VANISHING INN. (See page 3.)



The colour went out of the man's face as though it had been wiped away with a sponge. His eyes started, and he reeled back, lifting his hands as if to ward off the form of his visitor. His lips moved voicelessly, but at last words came in a mumbling whisper. "It's the ghost!" he muttered shakily. "I knew it would come this Christmas! Mercy—have mercy on me!" (See page 3.)

who throughout his editorial career wasn't loath himself to appearing in front of the camera and doubling up for some fictional creation, a gallery of characters that would even include a later *Bullseye* regular Warder Blake, who would give the readers 'My Recollections of Prison Life'.

'The Vanishing Inn' is satisfying on a number of levels, not least in its descriptive power of the snowstorm that brings Kay to the door of a remote inn in the wilds of Devonshire one Christmas Eve, while the central mystery of how within a few hours the inn can turn from a perfectly habitable hostelry to a crumbling ruin, plainly derelict for many years, is well handled. Like Scrooge, someone in the story, despite his past misdeeds, is much in need of a second chance and thanks to Kay this is what he gets, and as a result five lonely people aren't so lonely any more.

Next up was a series that had run since the paper began, 'The House of Thrills', and its Christmas tale was called 'The Spectral Manor'. The central premise behind this series was that a vastly wealthy adventurer named John Pentonville, crippled after being mauled by a lion, had holed himself up in a decaying pile called Gaunt House in one of London's less salubrious districts. To still get his fix of excitement, even if only vicariously, he advertised that he would give the sum of £100 to anyone who could tell him a story that would thrill him from beginning to end.

Like a lot of the heroes in the *Bullseye* stories Pentonville was a peculiar bod whose fancies you just had to accept. There was never any logic as to why he shut himself away in this cobweb infested mansion when he could at least have had the place cleaned or, better still, bought himself a nicer place to begin with. You always felt that there was something monkish and hair shirtish about him and that he was making some personal restitution for some undisclosed crime or sin of omission that he felt he was guilty of. This was nowhere more evident than when he 'celebrated' Christmas.

This particular Christmas we find it is dinner-time in Gaunt House but Pentonville has no groaning board to tuck into. In fact, he has no Christmas dinner at all, apparently because he has been so busy making sure the poor of the district all have a good feed that he has forgotten to order any grub for himself.

Thankfully Pentonville is saved from going without entirely when the local vicar brings him round a share of his Yuletide fare and, as he eats it, he is regaled by the vicar's tale of 'The Spectral Manor!', a redemptive story of the power of love in which the old clergyman tells how he carried out a marriage service on a Christmas Eve many years before: a wedding that brought to an end the bitter dispute between two feuding families and ended the curse placed on the family seat of one of them.

A tale nicely rounded off by a sub-plot in which Pentonville and the vicar discover a kettle filled with gold sovereigns hidden behind the wainscoting, no doubt by the builder and original owner of the house, Miser Burch. This Pentonville immediately hands over to the vicar to do more good in the parish. The denouement of the story sees Pentonville agreeing to come along to the orphanage Christmas party and dress up as Santa Claus for the children.



The two shrouded figures entered the premises with *Cefrio Versatile*. "Your way lies up those stairs!" came from one of them. "Go to your daughter whom you turned from your house three long and weary years ago, who has suffered so much since and who is calling for you now." With upraised arm, the figure pointed commandingly up the stairs.

Then came 'The Convict's Christmas' in the series 'Secrets of Stonemoor'. This straddled a number of Dickensian conventions including an early scene that was more than a little reminiscent of the 'Please sir, I want some more' interchange in *Oliver Twist* excepting the fact that here Oliver is actually an eighteenth-century highwayman by the name of Fly-by-Night-Nick in prison for his misdeeds and the workhouse gruel ladler is the prison governor.

In this story Nick, as Christmas Day will be soon approaching, leads a deputation to the governors office to ask for more food to supplement their meagre rations when the day arrives. As you might expect this request only sees the hard-hearted governor cut the rations even more and Nick sent to solitary confinement for his cheek. The young highwayman however escapes. As the story unfolds he and his cronies try to collect enough cash from committing highway robbery, on those they deem can afford it, to buy enough provisions to supply all inmates of the prison with a fine spread on Christmas Day. With the help of the local mayor, who has an unexplained soft spot for the highwayman, the food is delivered to the prisoners on

the due date. When he sees the inmates enjoying their feast the prison governor has a remarkable Scrooge-like change of heart and promises never to mistreat his charges again. An unlikely turn of events that is only matched by the, surely law-defying, free pardon Nick is given for his past misdeeds.

The final complete in the issue was part of 'The Sign of the Crimson Dagger' story strand, and had the sort of title that would have graced many a woman's cautionary tale of the Victorian period, 'The Girl who Trusted Him'. Sure evidence, if such were needed, that *The Bullseye*, despite its later classification, was certainly not a magazine designed exclusively for the boy's paper market.

The Sign of the Crimson Dagger were a rich and powerful secret society who used their wealth and influence to seek out injustice and right wrongs. The wrong to be righted in this instance was a wealthy financier's rejection of his daughter, a rejection which three years previously had seen her disinherited when she had been self-willed enough to marry one of his own humble employees much against his wishes. The match, in the interim, had seen the birth of a son and the descent into ill-health for the young mother as she and her husband had struggled to make ends meet in a world where her father, unbeknownst to them, had blocked every job opportunity that his despised son-in-law had tried to put his hand to.

As with most of their cases we are given no hint as to how this set of circumstances has come to the notice of the Crimson Dagger group but their solution is effective nonetheless. After they call a doctor to tend to the young woman's needs, a couple of the members, decked out in their usual hooded tunics to hide their identity, go round to the financier's place of business and force him to accompany them to his daughter and son-in-law's dismal abode. Then, as might be expected, on seeing his daughter and his new grandson, the financier's heart melts and, in no time, all are reconciled as his daughter recovers her strength in the bosom of the family home, and his son-in-law is made a partner in the firm.

And so there we have it, Christmas à la *Bullseye* and Fred Cordwell, a season steeped in the Yuletide traditions of Dickens and a bygone age, old fashioned and reassuring, just how Fred Cordwell liked it and how many of us still like it too. And as for Fred Cordwell as an editor, whether of *Bullseye* or *Film Fun*, where he shared many a Christmas feast with such comical charges as Laurel and Hardy in the guise of Eddie the Happy Editor, it could perhaps be said that, like Ebenezer Scrooge after his ghostly visitations, 'he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge'.



CLIFF HOUSE CHRISTMAS

"Do you feel like a stroll, Marjorie?" asked Clara restlessly. Marjorie Hazeldene looked up from the book that she had been reading, sitting comfortably in the armchair beside the study fire, which issued forth a comforting heat, and looked at the Tomboy of the Fourth, as she paced restlessly up and down the study. "Feeling restless, Clara dear", she enquired kindly, looking at her chum sympathetically. "I am a bit", admitted Clara Trevlyn, sighing. "It's this frowsting in the study, now that there's no more games before Christmas: a girl could do with a decent run out to work off the energy!"

Marjorie smiled at her, and closed her book. "Don't fret, dear: I was thinking of going for a walk before tea, before it gets dark. I've arranged to meet Harry, Frankie, and Hurree down at Uncle Clegg's for tea to give them their presents, and knew you'd like to come along."

"What, no Bob!" exclaimed Clara with interest, chuckling at her chum, as she reddened slightly.

"Bob has to represent Greyfriars at the Athletics Championships. I knew he'd be disappointed not to see us", sighed Marjorie, lowering her eyes, not meeting her friend's amused look.

"Not the only one, eh, old bean?" laughed Clara, smiling down at her friend. "I don't know how Bob's going to survive this. Is this why Johnny's with him to keep a stiff upper lip?"

"Johnny's taking part as well, dear," replied Marjorie, quietly meeting her chum's look.

"A chance for Wharton then!" smiled Clara, knowing how at one time Harry Wharton had been very friendly with Marjorie, but had stepped into the background when the good-natured Bob had obviously become smitten with Marjorie's charms.

"Harry and Bob are good friends",



Marjorie Hazeldene.



Clara Trevlyn

replied Marjorie patiently, while Clara's eyes danced mischievously at her.

"As you will, old bean. I suppose we'd better not keep the dear chaps waiting", the tomboy said, glancing out at the gleaming white of the quadrangle below.

"What book were you reading, Marjorie?" enquired Clara, as the two Cliff House girls walked along the path trodden out in the snow, which lay piled to the side.

"One about the meaning of Christmas: the old legends and customs", said Marjorie in her sweet way, looking seriously at her chum with her brown eyes.

"Hum! All right for the Padre; but do you think there's anything in them", asked Clara quizzically, giving her friend a long, more serious look than usual.

"I think so", murmured Marjorie. "I believe there's a meaning behind it all", she said, sweeping her long brown wavy hair to one side with a gloved hand.

"Maybe", said Clara thoughtfully, "But nowadays it seems so old-fashioned, when there's chaps flying to Africa". The tomboy strode out athletically beside her chum, her cheeks red with the exercise in the crisp clean air.

"Well, there's a robin for you — one legend anyway!", she exclaimed, pointing at one, sitting on a nearby bush, head cocked to one side with his crimson breast, observing them enquiringly.

"So he is", smiled Marjorie softly, not wishing to frighten the little bird. Clara strode on, her fur-lined boots crunching in the snow, warm winter coat covering her woollen skirt, scarf in the Cliff House colours wrapped round her neck, her tawny hair gleaming in the bright wintry sunshine. Marjorie beside her, smiled as her chum unconsciously revealed more of her reflective nature than she realised. "How like Clara", she thought affectionately, warming to her once more, as they walked on.

"When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel...!", sang out Clara enthusiastically, as she caught sight of Old Joyce the Woodcutter, coming out of a thicket, bearing a large bundle of brushwood he'd just gathered. "We're doing well, Marjorie!" she exclaimed cheerfully. "There's another for you!"

"We're in luck, Clara", agreed Marjorie, waving to Old Joyce, who was tramping up through the snow to greet them.

"Hello, Miss Marjorie, Miss Clara. How be you keeping? Well, I hopes", he enquired, his ruddy veined cheeks redder than ever, warm in his old heavy overcoat. "Hello, Santa! Where's your reindeer?" asked Clara loudly, joyously.

"If you means Old Samuel, he be grazing just yonder, Miss", replied Joyce, indicating his grey donkey, who was patiently browsing at some grass by a nearby holly bush.

"How are you, Joyce?" asked Marjorie quietly.

"Just fine, miss, and all the better for seeing you!" he replied heartily, drawn as everybody was to Marjorie's sweet nature. Clara in her turn smiled.

"Well, you take care now, Missies" said Joyce. "I hear there's a gypsy camp hereabouts in the woods; and they don't be no company for the likes of you". His

old country face was serious for a while.

"We'll take care, Joyce", pronounced Clara, smiling broadly. "But *they'd* better be warned about *us!*"

"Be that as it may, I'll be wishing you a Happy Christmas", he said raising a gloved hand in salute, and going on his way with his load.

"Happy Christmas!" chorused Marjorie and Clara, waving back to him.

"One more to you, Marjorie, old fruit", observed Clara, laughing. "And here's another, I think", smiled Marjorie, gently humming 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night' and indicating a sturdy shepherd in an adjacent field, gaitered legs up to his knees in snow, a crook in one hand, a lamb slung over his shoulder.

"Oh, the poor wee thing!", exclaimed Clara, whose soft heart where animals were concerned was a byword in the Fourth Form corridor.

"He'll be warm soon", said Marjorie gently, looking at her chum's face. "The shepherd's taking him to his mother over by that fold. They'll be warm in the straw."

"Oh I hope so", said Clara impulsively, touched by the scene, her features serious.

"What's this next sign, an angel?" exclaimed Clara, as a ragged figure ran towards them desperately through the snow in bare feet, clad only in an old ragged flimsy dress. She looked a couple of years younger than the Fourth formers themselves.

"She seems like one of Joyce's gypsies", said Marjorie with a concerned look. "She doesn't look dangerous to me", announced Clara wonderingly.

"Please, Miss: help me!" pleaded the waiflike figure, her dark hair in tangles round her white face. "It's me brother: he's getting cold, and there's no fire for him", she broke off weeping. Marjorie instinctively put a comforting arm round her, and said quietly, "It's all right; we'll help you now; where's your brother?"

"Overby in yon bar, Miss. Our wagon's lost a wheel, and me dad's away trying to get it fixed. Me man's trying to get some food from one of the farms", she gasped out, shoulders heaving.

Marjorie, worried by her half frozen state, sought to reassure her, "Don't worry, kiddy; where's this barn?"

"That's right; we'll help you, young 'un", pronounced Clara in her forthright way, slipping her own scarf round the shivering waif's neck, and wrapping her coat snugly round her shoulders.

"Clara, dear: be careful: you'll catch cold!" exclaimed Marjorie, anxiously, knowing her warm hearted chum.

"It's all right, old top: I'm warm as toast, and still got the lining on me. This poor little soul's frozen."

Knowing her sporting chum, Marjorie reflected, she was probably right. Taking the waif's frozen hand, she let her self be lead through the maze of snow-laden bushes; her footprints clearly embedded in the deep, glittering, frosty, crust. The wind blew coldly across the chill, furrowed, field, and a few flakes drifted in the dusky grey sky.

"We'd better hurry, old thing! I believe it's going to snow again", announced Clara, shaking her head impatiently. The barn turned out to be little more than a byre, standing gloomily on its own, illuminated only by the surrounding gleaming snow, its thatched roof starkly black against the wintry sky, where already one or two stars were starting to twinkle in the gaps in the clouds.

"There's the Pole Star", announced Clara, observing the bright shining star, which seemed almost to hang overhead above them, a burning orb in the heavens. They entered the dusky barn.

"Oh Clara!" gasped Marjorie. "Marjorie, old chum!" replied Clara, clutching her chum's arm, equally affected by the sight that greeted them. In the dusk of the barn, a babe which could only have been weeks old, was lying warmly wrapped in a blanket, in the metal barred feeding trough, where the animals would feed on the hay. Kneeling beside it was the family's donkey, surveying them with large brown moist kind eyes, with his rough grey coat steaming in the atmosphere. Close by on the straw was the gypsies' collie dog, who crept towards them, growling slightly at the sight of the two strangers. The young waif put a reassuring hand on his shaggy black and white neck. The two Cliff House girls clung together for a moment, hardly able to believe the sight.

"Clara, it's like a crib scene", sighed Marjorie.

"It is, old dear", agreed Clara shakily, her usual boyish manner briefly deserting her.

"The fire's gone out, Miss, and I couldn't light it again", exclaimed their young charge, pointing to the wood fire that had gone out. "The poor wee mite must be getting cold!" announced Marjorie, taking her coat off, and tenderly wrapping it around the small form. The baby smiled quietly up at the reassuring sound of her voice, as Marjorie gently cradled him in her arms, murmuring "Now, now...". Clara felt a lump in her throat, as she viewed Marjorie's maternal manner, and suddenly seemed to see her chum as she would be some day. She blinked her eyes, and muttered gruffly "I'd better look for some more wood. Have you any matches?".

"Here in my pocket, Clara dear", said Marjorie absentmindedly, rocking her small charge with comforting motions, as his older sister stood by, reassured at the scene.

"Hello, hello, hello!" rang out a voice from the doorway, as a sturdy, flaxen haired figure appeared, flanked by two others in grey coats with school caps. One seemed to be shivering slightly in spite of the scarf wrapped round his dusky neck.

"We Three Kings of Orient are..." murmured Clara weakly, shaken in turn by their appearance.

"The giftfulness is terrific, esteemed Miss Clara" announced Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, indicating the brown wrapped packages they were bearing. "And this must be the ridiculous stable, with the worthy boychild", he continued inscrutably, his dark eyes gleaming, surveying the scene: Marjorie with her light blue Cliff House scarf wrapped round her shoulders like a shawl, having temporarily covered her head with it when she had taken her coat off.

"Marjorie: are you all right?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, impulsively striding forward

with his long legs, concern all over his face. "Bob, I'm glad to see you" she replied, smiling warmly at him. "This poor kiddy needs a warm fire, and there's no wood."

"Don't worry, Marjorie: we'll see to that" he exclaimed, with his generous warm hearted nature, anxious to help his girl chum. "Come on, chaps!" he said, turning to his companions.

Frank Nugent, too, had been gazing at the scene unfolding before him. Inky stood smiling quietly to himself. Nugent turned to Clara with a puzzled expression on his face.

"I know, Frankie" she said weakly. "I feel the same. It's like a story out of a book... Where's the bold Wharton?" she enquired in something like her old manner.

"Stood in for Bob: he's crocked his knee" explained Frank Nugent still looking at the scene.

"The crockfullness is terrific; but the fortunateness is a deep pitcher to a long well" grinned Hurree Singh, delighting in the scene. "We will leave the beautiful Marjorie and Clara to attend to the benighted infant, while we manfully gather up the wondrous fuel, as the good English carol would have it?"

"God rest you Merry Gentlemen" sang Clara cheerfully, recovering herself.

"Good Christian Men rejoice" she thought, as Bob turned away from Marjorie, his face bright.

"Oh, I hope so" she murmured.

(Editor's Note: This contribution has been in my files for some time: regretfully it is unsigned and I have no record of its author. Will he, or she, please contact me so that the correct attribution may be made in our next issue.)



FOR SALE: HB15 Tracy series, Holiday Annual 1983, Blue 1953, Mauritius 1953, Banishing of Bunter 1958. All mint at £6 each.
H. BLOWERS, 25 Churchfield Road, Rothwell, Leeds.

Season's Greetings to all followers of Greyfriars, and to Mary, our esteemed editor.
Best wishes to you all. MAURICE O'CONNELL, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland.



THE OLD STEAM RADIO



by Gordon Hudson

Occasionally someone implying an object is old-fashioned describes it as being like an old steam radio. We can, depending on our own point of view, take that as being on the one hand nostalgic or on the other as derisive. Either way this might bring back to mind, at least for older persons, the days of the battery wireless set powered by both dry batteries and accumulators.

However, what has this to do with our interest in the old papers?

Well it really relates to the hobby pages that appeared from time to time in our magazines. Soccer hints, bee keeping, stamp collecting, etc. Almost every type of interest appeared at some time, some relating to outdoor activities and some relating to indoor hobbies.

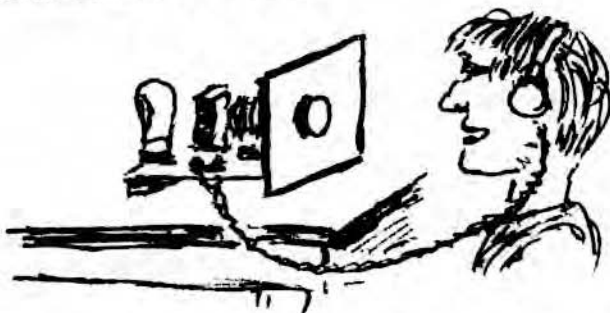
I was reminded of this a while ago when I pulled out my copy of the first Tom Merry's Annual, which was a Christmas present in 1949.

As well as the school stories by Charles Hamilton, there were a number of articles on football, cricket, speedway racing, secret codes, etc., and not least one entitled "Having Fun with Radio" by Rex Dolphin. He was of course better known later as the Sexton Blake author.

In his article, Rex Dolphin encouraged readers to construct a radio, first a crystal set and then a razor-blade set.

Anyway, with the help of my father, I put together a crystal set which, although not very good, did at least work. My father was an electrician who repaired wirelesses as a sideline, and as he had a very inventive mind, nothing stayed simple for very long. The crystal was removed. With the addition of a small front panel, coil, tuning condenser and valve, it became a one-valve set. There was no speaker, so it still needed the headphones. And many hours of fun followed.

The set is now up in the loft where it has been for many years. Perhaps, someday, I might get it down and see if it still works!





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PAGE THREE DETECTIVE

by Derek Ford



Unlike in my article on Colwyn Dane of the *Champion* in C.D. 12/02, I do not know when Kenton Steel took up his investigations in *Comic Cuts*. Seven frail copies of the paper from 1912 reveal that it was "Martin Steel and his 12 Girl Detectives" who were then in charge. One week Dora and he investigate a balloon which falls in the village of Little Dippleton with a dead man in the basket – shot through the back. A different girl's name was used each time and I wonder if when twelve names were used, the series finished. Also advertised were three other A.P. 'tecs: number one of the *Dreadnought* was to contain Martin Track, assisted by his dwarf assistant, Grip; Puck had Val Fox, the ventriloquist 'tec; and George Gale, the flying 'tec, was in *Chips*. There was also a serial with Derrick Yorke as Chief of "The River Police".

So it was very fast forward to 1946 when I first started reading Steel's fortnightly cases, to his final one in 1953, then weekly, when *Cuts* was amalgamated with *Knockout*. Like Colwyn Dane, even when he's not consulting a client he walks into a case from the start. Usually there are only three or four characters in his cases.

I found that Mrs. Tarver, who regularly did the cleaning of his rooms and others in the building, had been given the wrong bag at the railway left luggage office: a bag full of packets of new pound notes, all with the same serial numbers. Nutty Brown was his young assistant (1948) for only one case and he takes no part in it. And explored a secret passage in a library and one under a bird-bath in school grounds.

There were also the clues of the dropped wig and the bracelet in the Christmas snow ball: the stolen Rembrandt found rolled in the shop blind, topically, on November 5, a missing necklace attached to a rocket stick, and the crook who drove a car with a blond dummy by his side. And why was Darkie Logan, last seen at the Old Bailey by Steel, posing as a pavement artist?

Times were so different for Steel, I read, "Pulling out a police whistle, he blew shrill blasts on it. In a few minutes two policemen came stumbling into the cellar, and an arrest was made." And, when he spots a crook at a station, "Plonking down half-a-crown he asked for one of the stations he had noticed the crook was for, there was excess of 1/9 to pay."

But it was now 1951 and time for a change: "Biff! Bam! Wham! Steel swung a ham-like fist which lifted the crook clean off the vehicle and sent him sprawling on his back on the ground. Then a pile-driving blow under the jaw and the crook lay still." And a new description: "A rugged, square jaw which could obviously take some hard knocks, topped by wiry fair hair, and, most noticeable of all, his eyes. Icy blue, calculating eyes that seemed to bore right through a man and penetrate his thought."

The "new" Kenton Steel is soon working with the Special Branch. Scotland Yard, and his cases now take him abroad. In South America he helps in a revolution and finds the president being charged by a bull which he shoots. In Switzerland he catches up with Gratz who has stolen an Italian old master painting and hidden it in a hollow ski-stick. He is just in time to stop it being flown over the frontier in a model plane. It is forbidden to climb the Eiffel Tower but Steel does just that to save it from being blown up by a parachute bomb. In Africa he arrests trader Parsons for ivory poaching. In Calcutta he quickly restores the missing emerald to the temple idol. In Vienna he rescues a Foreign Office Official from the Russian section, and in America is involved in a kidnap case.

He is not idle at home, investigating a new jacket he has bought, made from stolen cloth. He finds himself tied up, with a bomb on his chest, at the festival of Britain site; then a rack in a Chamber of Horrors to foil an attempt to steal the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London. Why has the right lapel of an elderly man he finds on the downs been cut off his suit? And to stop an American gunman escaping from Mulberry Castle with the gold ring that once belonged to the Emperor of Turkey he drops the ancient portucullis then dons a suit of armour to capture him.

An historic *Cuts* was 2994 (11/4/53) when Steel acquires an assistant – youthful Midge Preston, with A-levels with a catapult and at judo – in "The Case of the Missing Lorgnettes". For saving President Grudin of Borgnavia from being assassinated, using an effigy from Tussaud's, they view the Coronation of the Queen from the Embassy.

Steel is compelled to do a bank robbery or never see Midge again, and to float the proceeds down the Thames, but dons a frogman's outfit to outwit the kidnapers. And in the final case (12/9/53) of cheques forged on stolen paper, Midge is taken hostage.

The A.P. never credited authorship to their *Cuts* detective and with the demise of the old firm I suppose we shall never know. So I hope that the foregoing will serve as some small tribute to the industry of the writers.





FRANCIS GERARD

by Bill Bradford



Best known as a writer of adult crime fiction, but as five of his books were serialised in 'THE THRILLER' which Lofts and Adley classify as a boys paper, I feel this justifies his inclusion in this publication. I first read Gerard before the war in the very excellent Cherry Tree paperbacks (priced sixpence, with a substantial dust cover) and he has been one of my favourite authors ever since.

Most of his books are very difficult to find, except for THE MIND OF JOHN MEREDITH. I only recently completed my collection with *Emerald Embassy* part of Eric Lawrence's great library.

Of all the authors I have ever investigated there is a minimum of information on Gerard's personal history, he seems to have been a very private person!

Of all the authors I have ever investigated there is a minimum of information on Gerard's personal history, he seems to have been a very private person!

Born in London in 1905, his father was French and his mother of Irish Scottish ancestry. Much of his childhood was spent in France, on his return to England he appears to have become a dealer in precious stones. His first book 'THE SCARLET BEAST', a historical story of Hannibal and Carthage, was published in 1934. In 1936 he started a steady output of crime stories, published by Rich & Cowan. At least five of these were serialised in THE THRILLER, usually within a few months after initial publication. This paper, more than any other, introduced and established several future popular crime writers over the years.

He joined the Essex Regiment in 1939 and as a Major spent two years in Malta, on the General Staff, during the siege and blitz of that island. This is described in absorbing detail in 'MALTA Magnificent' published by Cassell in 1943.

After the war, disillusioned by the Labour Government, he emigrated to South Africa, with his second wife, Anne and baby son, Francis. En route, because of a violent storm, their flying boat crash landed in harbour at Augusta, Sicily, where they were rescued after 1½ hours. Settling in Natal, they never considered returning to Britain. Raising two more children, Gerard took great interest in the political situation, seeing things from both Black and White sides. In a long letter to Dr. Malan, the South African Prime Minister, he expressed his hatred of Communism, to which S.A. was very vulnerable, but implored a move for greater understanding between all parties. Gerard died sometime in the early 1960s, still a comparatively young man. Of his 28 books, 3 were historical, 3 featured Sanders of the River, written with the approval of the Wallace family (he was a great fan of Edgar Wallace) and his Sanders stories are hard to tell from those of the Master. Of the remaining 20, mainly crime, with elements of adventure, 18 featured John Meredith initially of Scotland Yard, later British Intelligence.

All his stories are fast moving and the characters well developed. I must admit to a preference for those written before 1940 and my quest was far flung, from a junk

THE JUSTICE OF SANDERS



FRANCIS GÉRARD

from the immortal characters created by EDGAR WALLACE

shop in Banbury to a back street bookshop in Kelso. Any now available are quite pricey, several being re-published by Holt & Co in the U.S.A.

One last mystery, *THE SECRET OF THE SAPPHIRE* is listed in several post-war books, but nobody has ever seen a copy and it is not included in Hubin's bibliography of crime. Have you a clue? If you are still reading, indulge me while I introduce you to (or refresh your memory of) John Meredith, Gerard's outstanding character.

Born in India at the end of the 19th century, his Mother died when he was only 7 years of age, and he was largely raised by Yussaf Khan, the family servant, a former sergeant of Sepoy Police. His Father, Captain Rupert Meredith, appears in several of the stories. John served in Flanders during the Great War and his batman, Hobbs, was to become his valet in peacetime. He joins Scotland Yard and, when we first meet him, holds the rank of Detective Inspector. His Sergeant is Matthew Beef, a pronounced Cockney. Sir Charles Hudson, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, becomes a friend and appears in many adventures. A loyal colleague is an Inspector Bradford.

In the first story Meredith meets Juanita del Val from Buenos Aires. They eventually marry and have a son, Rupert. Promoted to Superintendent he is transferred to Intelligence, under Sir Hector Mcallister, whom he ultimately succeeds. During the War, he serves undercover in Europe in a vital mission, so secret we never learn of its nature. He suffers greatly and returns a shadow of his former self to learn his wife and son have been killed by a V1. He receives a knighthood and eventually is a Brigadier and Head of Combined Intelligence. Yussaf Khan is killed defending him. He meets and marries Jill Conway, a widow with a small son, John, known as Duck. The last book in the Meredith saga is *BARE BODKIN*, published by Macdonald in 1951 (this was his post-war publisher).

1934	The Scarlet Beast	Ivor Nicholson & Watson
1936	Concrete Castle (M)	Rich & Cowan
1936	The Black Emperor (M)	"
1936	Number 1 2 3 (M)	"
1936	Dictatorship of the Dove (M)	"
1937	Fatal Friday (M)	"
1937	Red Rope (M)	"
1937	Secret Sceptre (M)	"
1938	Golden Guilt (M)	"
1938	The Prince of Paradise (M)	"
1938	Return of Sanders of the River	"
1939	Emerald Embassy (M)	"
1939	Wotan's Wedge (M)	"
1940	The Law of the River (Sanders)	"
1943	Malta Magnificent (Gerard at War)	Cassell
1946	The Mind of John Meredith (M)	Macdonald
1947	Socercer Shaft (M)	"
1948	Prisoner of the Pyramid (M)	"
1948	Flight into Fear (M)	"

RED ROPE

The chief constable held a piece of red silk rope in his hands. "Ever seen this before?" he asked.



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OF THE YARD
in a
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SUPER-MYSTERY
by
FRANCIS
GERARD

16-7-36

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JOHN MEREDITH of the YARD
AT HIS BEST!

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1950	Transparent Traitor (M)	"
1950	Promise of the phoenix (M)	"
1951	Bare Bodkin (M)	"
1951	Envoy of the Emperor	"
1951	The Justice of Sanders	Rich & Cowan
1951	Springbox Rampant (Gerard in S. Africa)	Frederick Muller
1952	Mark of the Moon	Macdonald
1952	Sinister Secret	"

Several of these were re-printed by TOM STACEY in the 1970s

Cherry Tree Books (Paperback)

No. 22	April 1938	Fatal Friday	
No. 26	June 1938	Number 1 2 3	
No. 32	Sep 1938	The Black Emperor	
No. 36	Dec 1938	The Dictatorship of the Dove	
No. 41	Jan 1939	Red Rope)
No. 45	Apr 1939	Secret Sceptre) All priced
No. 74	May 1940	Golden Guilt) at 6p
No. 86	Jul 1940	The Prince of Paradise	
No. 95	Aug 1940	Emerald Embassy	
No. 103	Nov 1940	The Black Emperor	Reissue

Arrow Books (Associate RICH & COWAN) Paperback 2/-

1950s The Justice of Sanders

The Thriller

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No. 388	11.7.36	Concrete Castle	
No. 389	18.7.36	Number 1 2 3	Serial to 395, 5.9.36
No. 396	5.9.36	"	
No. 429	24.4.37	The Dictatorship of the Dove	
No. 430	1.5.37	" "	
No. 431	8.5.37	Red Rope	Serial to 439, 3.7.37
No. 439	3.7.37	"	
No. 439	3.7.37	Barney Starabo Throws a Party	
No. 445	14.8.37	Sensation at the Rectory	
No. 455	23.10.37	A Private War	
No. 547	29.7.39	Golden Guilt	Serial to 556 7.10.39



CLASSICS FOR CHRISTMAS

by MARY CADOGAN



For many people Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas without a dip into the seasonable works of Charles Dickens - particularly, of course, *A Christmas Carol*. CSA WORD have just reissued Martin Jarvis's wonderful cassette recordings of this truly timeless book together with his readings of *Nicholas Nickleby* and - my favourite of all Dickens' novels - *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Each book occupies two cassettes, and the three titles come in separate packs in a slip-case containing them all. (The trilogy costs £19.99 but each title can be obtained separately at £10.99, and orders should be sent to CSA WORD, 6a Archway Mews, London SW15 2PE.)

No-one needs to be reminded of the plot of *A Christmas Carol* and it is sufficient to say that Martin Jarvis compellingly brings out the warmth and wit of the story. This recording will make a fine background to Christmas pursuits such as making the mince-pies or stuffing the turkey: equally in the run-up to the great day, it strikes an exuberantly anticipatory note when listened to in bed, or in one's favourite armchair.

I have to confess that I have never actually read *Nicholas Nickleby* so the recording of this is something of a revelation. I knew that the story would be both moving and dramatic but was surprised to discover its comic touches, which Martin brings out with relish. It is, of course, in part a school story and therefore very likely to appeal to readers of the C.D.

The presentation of *A Tale of Two Cities* is masterly. All the powerful moments are there, from 'Recalled to Life' to Sydney Carton's unforgettable last words. For me this recording made a long-favourite book spring to new life - and it also provided memories of high-spots in the 1935 Ronald Colman and 1958 Dirk Bogarde filmed versions of the story.

Another look at an old favourite came with a gorgeous reprint of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Chrysalis Children's Books £16.99). This is a sumptuous, large-page edition, with full colour illustrations by Michael Foreman (whose influence as an illustrator of children's books has been compared with that of Arthur Rackham). Foreman explains in a postscriptorial note that *his* Alice is based on the appearance of the *real* Alice (Alice Liddell, the small girl who inspired the original story) rather than the Tenniel version of Lewis Carroll's resilient heroine. He gives Wonderland a new, exciting and vibrant look.





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A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR A NAUGHTY BOY



By Ray Hopkins

Ogden of the Greystones' Fourth Form was one of the funniest story-tellers we had to entertain us in the tuckshop. This is one he told us about what happened last Christmas. He always calls me "Old Sobersides," so my retelling is probably less funny but may be more exciting. If you're not nodding off by the end, let me know.

Sir Peter Cardale's ancestor built Cardale Manor in the fourteen hundreds and Cardales have lived there ever since. Sadly, Sir Peter could no longer afford to keep the old place going. Fiercely independent, he turned down offers of help, including a most generous one from Ogden's Uncle George. "I wouldn't dream of it," Sir Peter said, "but please come and enjoy what will be the very last Christmas celebration ever to be held at the Manor by my family." Uncle George and Ogden duly made their way to Cardale Manor and were looking forward to a happy time with the guests assembled by Sir Peter: a jolly English bunch of County types, with the exception of two who stuck out like sore thumbs. Ogden wondered why an earth Sir Peter had invited them to this very English gathering.

Mr. Rosenkrantz was a very, very rich businessman who had made his millions "out East." He was accompanied by his son. Both had swarthy complexions and midnight black, straight hair. Ogden took less than two minutes to classify them as rude and inconsiderate. Mr. Rosenkrantz' cigar smoke was blown willy-nilly into the face of any guest who happened to be speaking to him. His son padded softly about listening in to other people's conversations. Ogden was convinced there was no way they could ever be friends.

"Dis is my tear liddle poy Napoleon," said Mr. Rosenkrantz, patting his overweight son on the head. "Ve call 'im Leon for short." He pronounced it "Layon" and Ogden couldn't resist muttering, "I'd like to lay one on the blighter myself." His son, pulling a face, ducked away from his adoring parent's hand, "Und 'ere's a nize liddle English poy for you to play with". Napoleon was a head taller and probably two years older than Ogden. Junior threw a brief glance of contempt at Ogden and snorted, "I'm not gonna play with a softy like him". Ogden turned red and clenched his fists. Uncle George cleared his throat loudly. Ogden thought, "I'll softy him before Christmas is over." But what were these square pegs doing at such a very English (old wealth; gracefully polite) gathering? Mr. Rosenkrantz *et fils* were to be the future owners of Cardale Manor; Ogden cringed at the thought. Uncle George silently mouthed an anguished, "Heaven help us all!"

Sir Peter Cardale told Uncle George that he wanted this final Christmas to be a really memorable one for all the village children. "There'll be games, a glorious spread, all jellies and cakes and creamy things youngsters like. And to finish up I want Father Christmas to come down the chimney with a sackful of gifts." Sir Peter

asked Uncle George if, as a great favour, he would agree to be the scarlet-clad old gentleman. There was a sardonic snort behind him and Napoleon's voice said, "Who was he ever father to? Where we come from he's called Saint Nick. I guess you know who Old Nick was! Anyway, he's too fat to come down the chimney." It was Uncle George's cheeks that turned red then. He did a spot of fist clenching, too. Sir Peter said, "Your father wants you," and swung the rude boy to where his father was enveloping a captive audience in acrid smoke. Ogden was about to hasten Leon on his way by taking a run and raising his foot for a swift kick. Uncle George just grabbed him in time. "You're not too fat, George. There's tons of room. Have a look. I've had the chimney thoroughly cleaned so you shouldn't be too dusty when you emerge," said Sir Peter.

Ogden and Uncle George climbed on to the roof through a trapdoor in one of the attics and let down a long, strong rope which Uncle George slid down, waiting in the chimney piece for Ogden to follow. When Ogden finally appeared, he said, "I was just having a look at the little iron door in the chimney at the back." "How odd," said Uncle George, "I didn't spot it. We'd ask Sir Peter where it leads to." However, there wasn't time for it then.

The party began with a bang. All the children had arrived and were enjoying the games Sir Peter had lined up for them. Ogden joined in though he was a bit older than most of the village children. Napoleon couldn't resist trying to dampen the jolly atmosphere with sneering comments as to the children's games in general and Ogden's participation in particular. Ogden gritted his teeth and mentally saved up more quick kicks and punches he intended to land on Leon when Uncle George and Mr. Rosenkrantz were looking the other way.

Sir Peter suddenly called a halt to the festivities and told the enthralled children that Father Christmas's aeroplane had landed on the roof and he would shortly be coming down the chimney. The large fireplace had paper and sticks placed beneath several small logs. Sir Peter intended that, as soon as the scarlet-clad visitor appeared, the fire would be lit outlining him as he swung the sack off his shoulder. Sir Peter had turned off all the chimney lights to make Father Christmas's entrance look as mysterious as possible. Even though all eyes were on the fireplace as sounds could be heard from above, a dark figure darted forward. A petrol lighter clicked. "Next instant as the tiny flame was applied to the paper and sticks, a tongue of crackling flame leapt upward, accompanied by a billowing cloud of smoke which crept up the chimney." Father Christmas, coughing and blinded by the smoke, fell on top of the logs which fortunately rolled him quickly out of the fireplace and on to the hearth.

The Rosenkrantz pair were doubled up with mirth and the village children, frightened at first by the flames and smoke, began to think it was all part of the fun. "I didn't see who lit the fire," Sir Peter said to Uncle George, "but the way that unpleasant boy is killing himself, I think it must have been him. He needs a good hiding." "Don't spoil the party," Uncle George said. "I'm not hurt and the kids really enjoyed the entrance. Let's give out the presents."

This jolly exercise was again spoiled by the Rosenkrantz duo. Uncle George

Napoleon
 1815 The cracker a vicious jerk.
 The result was stunning. He and his
 father let out frenzied howls and sprang
 into the air.



was going to make Leon wait until some of the children village children had been given their gifts, but the rude boy kept calling out, "Where's my present?" and finally whined, "Dad, he's not going to give me one." Father Christmas said, "No presents for naughty boys this time," and shook his sack which certainly appeared empty. Napoleon's father threatened, "I'll make a row if my little Layon don't get a present. He's a good little poy, ain't it." Sir Peter frowned and wondered what on earth he was doing letting his beloved old family home fall into the hands of these awful people. "Too late. The sack's empty," said Father Christmas. Ogden, who had slipped something into it said, "There's just the one left." "Oh, so there is," said Uncle George, pretending surprise. "A lovely Christmas cracker." "That ain't a present," shouted Mr. Rosenkrantz. "There may be a lovely surprise inside," said Ogden. "Pull it and see."

The greedy father and son gripped each end. "Next instant, and letting out the most awful howls and yells, the pair of them began to prance frenziedly about the room, leaping and bounding and executing the most weird contortions imaginable." The village children laughed and clapped thinking this was all part of the entertainment for their benefit. Uncle George, Ogden and Sir Peter also laughed, delighted to see the Rosenkrantz' being made uncomfortable themselves after all the unpleasantness they had caused.

"It's a trick cracker," Ogden told Sir Peter and Uncle George. "There's a powerful electric battery inside it and when you pull it you get the dickens of a shock. You can't leave go of the thing until you stop pulling. It serves 'em jolly well right for being so horrible." Finally, Ogden decided that father and son had had enough of a

lesson. He grabbed the cracker in the middle and shouted at them to stop pulling. Both collapsed on the floor, covered in perspiration and were ushered upstairs to their rooms by the servants. They flung themselves on their beds and were seen no more. The Christmas party continued unabated downstairs.

When Rosenkrantz and his son came downstairs in the evening, the party was over, the village children had gone, and Ogden had been sent to bed. Sir Peter had hoped that the noxious couple would partake of a little light refreshment in their rooms instead of wanting a large meal with the remainder of his adult guests, but it was not to be. Despite their tiring athletic activities with the Christmas cracker, their greed could not be contained when the glorious smells of the roast turkey, roast goose, plum puddings and mince pies wafted up to their rooms. Sir Peter sighed when they bounded into the large dining room. The meal was not to be the peaceful, well-mannered one that Sir Peter had envisaged. Mr. Rosenkrantz told his host to relish his meal as it would be his last Christmas dinner at the Manor. "I shall be at the head of the table next year," he gloated. Sir Peter had not told his other guests that he was disposing of the Manor and had, in fact, intended to break it more gently to them as they departed.

Sir Peter told them sadly that, had it not been for the mysterious disappearance of one of his ancestors with the Cardale fortune, neither treasure chest nor owner having been seen since one Christmas five three hundred years ago, he would never have had to sell up. Sir Gervais Cardale, aged and tired, had decided to end his days as a monk, first distributing his fortune among the poor and needy. At this point, Mr. Rosenkrantz interrupted by snorting loudly and referred to Sir Gervais as a silly idiot. "Sir Gervais," continued Sir Peter, "sat in this very room, his fortune in a chest on this very table, awaiting the arrival of the indigent. Unfortunately, a band of armed robbers arrived at the Manor first. Servants tried to prevent them from entering this room but to no avail and the door was smashed open. But the room was empty! The table was bare. Sir Gervais and the chest had gone, nobody knew where. Down the centuries this has been the big Cardale mystery. Mr. Rosenkrantz: "e pinched it. Damn fool if 'e didn't." Uncle George interjected, "Perhaps, you know, he never actually left this room but secreted himself somewhere. Perhaps his spirit is still somewhere here in this room. Perhaps he is trying to get word to you where the fortune can be found." Napoleon threw a contemptuous look at Uncle George and his father cried, "Vot rubbish. Ain't no such thing as spirits."

Uncle George smiled a secret smile, left the table and stood before a full-length painting of a handsome knight. "I believe this is Sir Gervais, isn't it, Sir Peter?" He tapped the painting as he spoke. Faintly to the ears of everyone in the room had come a ghostly sort of tap as though in answer to that of Uncle George's. "Did you do that?" Sir Peter asked in amazement. Uncle George shook his head and tapped the picture again. In response, there came an answering tap. The company looked at one another, white-faced and askance. Mr. Rosenkrantz turned pale, his face wet with cold sweat, and with what then transpired, he fled howling from the dining room, his son clinging to his coat-tails and blubbing in panic. Uncle George grinned as the

front door of the Manor crashed behind the terrified couple,

Uncle George had run his hand slowly down the old oak panelling by the side of the picture. "Suddenly there came a click, picture and panel slid silently to one side, and there stood the armoured and knightly figure of the long-dead Sir Gervais exactly as he appeared in the picture." The seated company were transfixed with fright but Uncle George smiled at the shocked Sir Peter and beckoned to the ghostly figure of Sir Gervais. The latter lifted its visor to reveal the laughing young face of Ogden. Uncle George told Sir Peter of the mysterious door in the chimney found by him and Ogden that morning as they rehearsed the arrival of Father Christmas. The door opened, on to a secret room built behind the chimney. Its other entrance was behind the picture. "And you won't have to sell the Manor to anybody. The chest containing the fortune is in the secret room. It's all yours as is the Manor forever. There's a letter as well saying Sir Gervais would return from the Monastery to share it with the poor and needy, but something must have prevented him."

Sir Peter, his tearful eyes revealing only part of the heaving emotions these events must have coursed through his body, held out both his hands and gripped those of the smiling Ogden and Uncle George. "Thank you, thank you, dear friends. This Christmas present surpasses them ail, past and present." He sat down and reached for his handkerchief. His nose needed blowing! The others assembled couldn't resist a cheer. Ogden looked pensive. "Pity I never got to kick liddle Napoleon," he said with regret.

(Adapted from a Christmas "Told-in-the-Tuckshop" tale by George E. Rochester, writing as John Beresford, in MODERN BOY (New Series) No. 44, 17 December 1938, entitled, "The Ghost of Good Sir Gervais." Brian Doyle informs me via his splendid "WHO'S WHO," that the initials E.S. on the accompanying illustration are not those of the earlier CHUMS' illustrator Ernest Smythe who signed his work with his full name. Another example of the E.S. illustrator's fine comic work can be found in C.D. CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 2003, on page 60. If any reader is aware of the identify of this E.S., a note addressed to the C.D. Forum Section would be greatly appreciated.)



**Don't forget to order your
CHRISTMAS SPECIAL - £6.50
*without delay***



FORUM

From JOHN BRIDGWATER: On Sunday evening, 3rd October, ITV gave us an unexpected echo from the past. I wonder how many of our OBB fraternity also saw this programme? It was the first of a new series of *Rosemary and Thyme* (the lady gardening detectives). 10 names from the Sexton Blake saga were used for characters in the *Memory of Water* story. George Marsden Plummer, Huxton Rymer, and Rupert Waldo all turned up as convicts helping the gardeners with Couatts as the Warder in charge of them. All quite appropriate allocation of names. The other six names were borrowed from Blake authors:- Gwynne Evans, George Hamilton Teed, Warwick Jardine, Rob Murray, Gilbert Chester - I cannot remember the type of character they were given to but Donald Stuart was a police constable. It would seem that the author of the script, Stephen Gallagher, was pretty well acquainted with the Blake saga. I have looked for other names from the past in subsequent broadcasts of the *Rosemary and Thyme* series but if any are there I have not read the books they came from. I wonder if anyone else has spotted any?

From BRIAN DOYLE: I wonder if anyone else noticed the extraordinary 'in-joke' perpetrated in the cast of the episode of TV's *Rosemary and Thyme* (the one about two lady gardener-detectives played by Felicity Kendall and Pam Ferris) that went out on Sunday, October 3rd? Not very many, I'll bet!

Most of the cast had the names of Sexton Blake authors or characters! They included George Hamilton Teed, George Marsden Plummer, Warwick Hardine, Robert Murray, Gilbert Chester, Donald Stuart, E. Brook (no 's'), Couatts (a policeman), Martin Fraser, Rupert Waldo and Gwynne Evans (a lady!) - plus a real-life criminal of the past (factual) - Huxton Rymer. How about that for literary practical joking!

The writer of the episode, Stephen Gallagher, must surely be a Blake fan...
A new case for Sexton Blake here, perhaps...?

From GORDON HUDSON: The Index of *Detective Weekly* shows for no. 249, 27 Nov 1937, a supporting short story *Easy Money* (Readers Own Stories) by one Reginald Dolphin. Does anyone know whether this was the later Sexton Blake author Rex Dolphin or perhaps a relative of his?

I am at present convalescing after an operation and this has given me the opportunity to read through a batch of very old Collectors Digest which I recently acquired. I saw that over the years a number of subscribers and article writers were professional writers and had books professionally published, not least of course being Frank Richards and also Rex Dolphin. Out of simple curiosity it has set me wondering whether any current subscribers besides your goodself have had books professionally published.

(Editor's Note: I can think of half a dozen, straight away - and I'm sure we have many more professional writers in our collecting circle.)



SOME READING - AND LISTENING - FOR CHRISTMAS

by Mary Cadogan

***Christmas on the Home Front* by Mike Brown (£14.99) and *The Home Front* by Emma Crocker (£19.99)**

Both these books are published by Sutton. Probably because 2005 (the 50th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War) will soon be upon us, we are being provided with a variety of books marking the achievements of civilians, as well as members of the services, between 1939 and 1945.

Christmas on the Home Front is a delightful compilation of photographs and pictures which cover separately each Christmas of the war - six in all, of course. As well as the splendidly evocative pictures of events, celebrities, advertisements, cartoons, sheet music, cookery and 'Do It Yourself' tips, there is a lively and informative text which reminds us how differently we celebrated each of these Christmases. The mood of every one of these was affected, not only by air-raids, rationing and other Home Front vicissitudes, but by what was happening on the military front in so many theatres of war.

The book begins with a quotation from a Ministry of Information film *Christmas under Fire* (1940):

The nation has made a resolve that, war or no war, the children of England will not be cheated out of the one day they look forward to all year. So, as far as possible, this will be an old-fashioned Christmas in England, at least for the children.

As a child growing up during the war (I was 11 when it started and 17 when it ended) I have happy memories of Christmases then. This book conveys both that warm spirit and many poignant touches. It is a treasure-trove of atmospheric narrative and pictures, from the *Daily Mirror* Jane cartoon strip and listings of films of the period (*Dumbo*, *Hi Gang*, *Hatter's Castle*, etc.) to those sometimes astoundingly inventive wartime recipes, and tips on how to make toys when these were in drastically short supply. The importance of 'the wireless' in our lives then is also fully recognized from ITMA to King George VI's moving and uplifting Christmas messages including perhaps his most famous quotation:

...I feel that we may all find a message of encouragement in the lines which, in my closing words, I would like to say to you: 'I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way."' May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all.

Emma Crocker's *The Home Front in Photographs* is another well-planned pictorial journey through those tempestuous wartime years. The author succeeds in offering

'a general overview of the main themes of the Second World War'. These themes range from Industry, Agriculture, the Blitz and Civil Defence to Food, Fashion and Furnishings, Entertainment, and the experiences of children - and animals - on the Home Front. As Emma Crocker points out, the photographs used are those collected by the Ministry of Information during the war and they speak - very vividly - for themselves. However, her short linking texts and expanded picture-captions also work very well. This is a big and beautiful book which I think many C.D. readers will enjoy.

**THE FOLLOWING BOOKS CAN BE ORDERED FROM
GIRLS GONE BY PUBLISHERS, 4 Rock Terrace, Coleford, Bath,
Somerset BA43 5NF. Tel: 01373 812705**

***No Boats on Bannermere* by Geoffrey Trease (£9.99)**

When the demand for boarding-school stories began to decline after the end of the Second World War, the break with old traditions could soon be seen in Geoffrey Trease's Black Banner books. *No Boats on Bannermere* (1949) reflected the expansive, post-war mood. It skilfully introduced the flavours of outdoor and mystery adventure into a day-school setting and provided an intelligent perspective on contemporary issues. The background is the Lake District and echoes of Arthur Ransome are psychological as well as physical. The adolescent participants matured during the course of the five-book series. Schools were grammar rather than comprehensive, and they were sexually segregated, but there was lively and realistic joint activity between boys and girls.

There were flashes of feminism too, although generally leadership is firmly foisted on the boys.

This ground-breaking series was apparently inspired by Geoffrey Trease's daughter Jocelyn's request 'for a modern story' for a change from his much celebrated historical fiction. Jocelyn has written a very interesting foreword to this new edition explaining, amongst other things, how her father blended fact with fiction in each book. There is also an introduction by Sally Dore, and an extract from the second volume of Geoffrey Trease's autobiography *Laughter at the Door*. This describes how he gave talks to school children in the years following the war, and how their response to these also helped to inspire the Bannermere books.

Further nostalgic delights from *Girls Gone By* are *The Blakes Come to Melling* by Margaret Briggs and *The Girls of Friar's Rise* by Gwendoline Courtney (at £9.99 each).

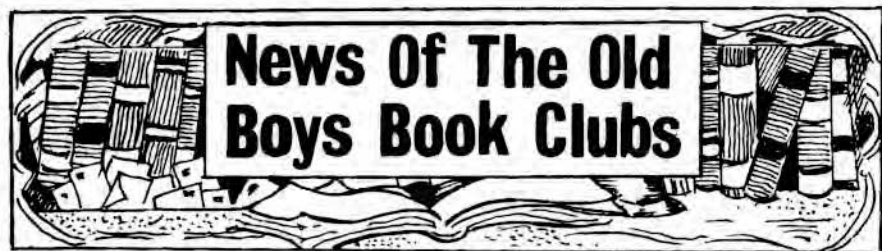
Margaret Briggs in the 2004 Foreword to her 1951 story explains how she 'didn't want a school-only story', but to include home life as well and relationships between brothers and sisters (with touches from her own reading of *The Secret Garden* and *Little Women* thrown in for good measure).

Gwendoline Courtney's *The Girls of Friar's Rise* (1952) is similarly a 'family book' which describes what happens when a group of sisters encounters a young ex-

R.A.F. man who is ill and alone in a bleak cottage near their Devonshire home. They determine to look after him: this is a summer adventure but its sense of warmth and well-being makes it a good read for Christmas.

***The Third Man* read by Martin Jarvis (published by CSA WORD, at 6a Archway Mews, London SE15 2PE. Tel: 020 88710220.**

Christmas is also, of course, a time for the mystery story, and Martin Jarvis's complete and unabridged reading of Graham Greene's *The Third Man* provides us with a splendid example of this. On two compact discs it runs for over 3 hours, and intrigue and suspense never let up. Many of us who have read the book and been fascinated by the 1950s film will appreciate becoming re-acquainted with this powerful story through Martin's reading. Images and the atmosphere of Vienna in the immediate post-war period spring from the pages (or rather the CDs) as hauntingly as the cinema evocations (theme tune and all!). A glorious treat to listen to after the turkey and plum pudding, or whenever one escapes from family festivities to one's room for peace and quiet.



SOUTH WESTERN OBBC

The Autumn meeting took place on Sunday, 3 October 2005, an unusually wet and blustery day but spirits were not dampened by the stormy weather.

Una Hamilton Wright talked aptly about memories of her "Uncle, the Comforter." He developed his storytelling skills to comfort his little sister, Dolly, and similarly later read stories to Una at bedtime when she was a little girl and used to treat her childhood illnesses with sweets galore! Charles Hamilton could not bear suffering in any form whether to humans or animals and was a great carer to his family. Una told us many other anecdotes about his caring and kindness in her very interesting talk.

Laurence Price then reminisced about memories of the *Eagle* comic and annuals but especially focused on the outstanding artwork of Frank Hampson and on his hard working team and his demanding working methods, often requiring work by all into the early hours to meet tough deadlines.

Andrew Pitt then regaled us with the humour and musical talents of the Western Brothers, Kenneth and George, who were actually cousins, who worked in cabaret and in music hall from 1925 onwards. They appeared as upper crust, former public school boys with affected drawls, monocles and evening dress who specialised in songs with double

entendres. "Old School Tie" (1934) was their most well-known song, with references to Hitler, Gandhi and Gloria Swanson and they later enjoyed wartime success and the occasional ban from the BBC!

An excellent tea followed as always provided by Tim Salisbury's mum, and there was so much congenial chat it only left time for one more talk afterwards when Andrew Pitt talked about "E. Nesbit - Her Life and Works". Probably most well known for *The Railway Children*, Andrew said his personal favourite of her books was *The Treasure Seekers* which followed her favoured theme of children overcoming difficulties in genteel poverty. *Laurence Price*

THE CAMBRIDGE CLUB

The Cambridge Club met at the home of Adrian Perkins on November 7th and, after business and arrangements over the Christmas meeting and those following, Clive O'Dell presented a quiz on the 'Eagle' character, 'Dan Dare' concentrating mainly on the 'Man From Nowhere' story. All but two of the members did quite well but the Chairman and the Secretary were both floored by it all. After a marvellous tea by Mrs Perkins members settled down to part two of Clive's video presentation of 'TV Western Heroes' so the day concluded in the company of 'Rawhide', 'Maverick', 'Cheyenne' and many others. As we still didn't finish the video we presume part three will be before us in the near future! The meeting closed at 6 pm.

Keith Hodkinson

LONDON OBBC

We assembled at the Chingford Horticultural Society Hall for another of Audrey and Tony Potts' grand Luncheon meetings. After our splendid and leisurely meal we were presented by Chairman Len Cooper with a multi-media extravaganza of cuttings, pictures and articles culled from the Club's scrapbook covering many decades. Then Norman Wright provided an entertaining quiz about old Story Papers. His Collector's Item was S.O.L. number 1 from 1925, a reprinted Magnet tale entitled *The Fall of the Fifth*.

Mary Cadogan gave the news that her biography of Richmal Crompton has now been recorded, unabridged, by Martin Jarvis for a B.B.C. Audiobook to be released next May. Andy Boot gave us another instalment of his W. Howard Baker researches regarding the 'de-Blaked Blakes' which were issued in later years as pulpy paperbacks. He promised a new edition of the Sexton Blake catalogue for next year.

Alan Pratt then presented a quiz on topics ranging from detective stories through books and papers to comics, and finally Bill Bradford gave us the Memory Lane reading from the Club's November 1984 meeting Newsletter.

Vic Pratt

NORTHERN OBBC

Our October Luncheon was held at High Hall Inn, Leeds, after which we made our way to the Methodist Church nearby for our meeting and the Darrell Swift Memorial Lectures.

The first speaker was Gillian Baverstock who spoke about dreams, and dream-imaging. Her interesting and wide-ranging talk covered her own dreams, and those associated with Lewis Carroll's Alice, and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, as well as the dream-imaging of Coleridge and Dickens. Gillian also referred to the idetic imaging of her mother Enid Blyton, and of Charles Hamilton.

Richard Burgon, our second speaker, discussed the perennially intriguing Robin Hood. He began by quoting from 'The Lytell Geste of Robin Hode' (c1400) and pointed out that the stories meant different things to different people at various times in the saga's history.

Geoffrey Good





The Sexton Blake Library



The Sexton Blake Library belonging to the London Old Boys Book Club is now re-opened for business...

Owned and collected over many years by the LOBBC, the library features Blake in his many incarnations. With titles hard to find for those without extensive collections, the library aims to fill those gaps in your Blake reading.

In stock, we have many items from the following: -

Union Jack (extensive runs)

Detective Weekly (virtually complete)

The Thriller (virtually complete)



Sexton Blake Library 1st series (incomplete), 2nd series (incomplete to no.400, extensive runs after this), 3rd series (virtually complete), 4th series (virtually complete), 5th series (extensive runs)

Miscellaneous reprints, audio and video recordings

A new catalogue is in preparation, rates for loan and postage are available on request. Until the catalogue is complete, please send wants and queries to: -

Andy Boot, 77 Tamar Square, Woodford Green, Essex IG8 0EB.

or e-mail at: pulphackuk@yahoo.co.uk

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