STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 58 No. 665 APRIL 2005

"THE REFORMATION OF BESSIE BUNTER!"

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

In his January 1987 Editorial, Eric Fayne announced that he was giving up the editorship of the C.D. and that I would be taking over. He said that he felt he was 'dancing with tears in his eyes', and I now have similar feelings.

Sadly, after eighteen years of editing and producing the magazine, I have come to the point where I have to give it up. This is for a variety of reasons - family, personal, the declining of my energy with the passing years, and the inevitably increasing unit production costs of a small magazine. There are still many things I want to achieve before time completely runs out for me, and, as readers and contributors will understand, compiling, editing, sending out and collecting subscriptions for the C.D. has been a major demand upon my time and energies.

The COLLECTORS' DIGEST, as a regular publication, will therefore end with this present issue. It seems to be coming to something of a natural demise in that, despite several approaches on my part, no suitable person appears willing and able to take it on. I deeply appreciate that its ending will leave a gap in our lives, but there are now many ways in which the old boys books' collecting circles operate. There are the Clubs based in London, Leeds, Cambridge and Weston-super-Mare; also the Friars Club.

Many of these, as well as holding meetings, are producing Newsletters, etc. There are also now a number of excellent internet sites dealing extensively with the hobby.

I shall be in contact, by the end of May, with everyone who has money outstanding on his or her subscription. All this money will, of course, be refunded.

It is possible that, in the future, I will produce occasional publications (C.D. Specials etc.) relating to the hobby. **Please let me know, in writing, if you would like me to keep your name and address on my mailing list so that you could be notified of these.**

I must stress how rewarding it has been to produce the C.D. over these many years. I know that I have been privileged to do this work - to have dealt with articles about the old papers which we love, and been in touch with such a splendid and supportive band of readers and contributors.

It is very sad to feel that I can no longer continue the magazine which has drawn us together, but I hope you will understand that time and circumstances change all things. There are, as I have mentioned, other ways in which our hobby is celebrated and maintained, and I hope that you will be able to be in contact with these. At a personal level I shall, of course, continue to support the Clubs of which I am a member, and to enjoy their warmth and comradeship.

I would like to convey my sincere thanks to Mandy, Michael and others at Quacks, who have typed and printed the C.D. for so many decades.

Lastly, may you all - dear C.D. subscribers - be blessed with good health and fortune, now and in the future.

With my thanks for your long-standing support, and with warm and affectionate wishes.

Mary Cadogan

* *

THE TRANSFORMATION OF BESSIE BUNTER

by

Margery Woods

Long before Cliff House came into its own as an independent school with its own leading feature story in a new magazine devoted to schoolgirl readers Frank Richards had introduced the character of Bessie Bunter, sister to the famous William George, in THE MAGNET with several characters of Cliff House School as an adjunct to his main school creation, Greyfriars. Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn proved very popular with both boy and girl readers and several years later Amalgamated Press decided to launch THE SCHOOL FRIEND, aimed at a schoolgirl readership, which would feature Cliff House. Bessie of course would be one of the leading lights, and naturally, as a Bunter she would have most of the characteristics of her very famous brother.

Unfortunately in a new venture no-one foresaw that the girl readers would not be happy with a fat, unlovable, greedy and lazy girl portrayed as a figure of fun. The very first mention of her advent at Cliff House sparked doubts in Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn when they went to meet her at the station. Clara sniffed:

"Billy Bunter's sister. I only hope she isn't coming into our Form—if she's anything like her brother."

Marjorie was a little more optimistic. "She may not be like her brother at all."

But she was, exactly like her brother, fulfilling Clara's prophecy that she would be, like him "fat, shiny and conceited." And she had a parrot, a fat green parrot with an evil red eye, who promptly bit Clara when she tried to help Bessie with the cage. As Bessie looked out of the train window, imperiously demanding a porter open the door and see to her luggage, Clara expressed a wish that the train would start and carry the newcomer on to Redclyffe where there was a boys' school that would suit her much better.

This line, perhaps, gave the first clue as to how Bessie might prove unsuitable for Cliff House. And the A. P. had to think of the ratings for a new magazine—or however they termed pleasing circulation figures in 1919. And the illustrations didn't exactly help Bessie. They presented her in very unfeminine pictures that were almost caricatures. So Bessie had to be moderated.

Frank Richards made the first step towards making Bessie a little more appealing in issue three when Miss Bullivant gave Marjorie a shopping list of goodies to collect for her. Babs and Mabs took over this errand but left the parcel on the Common Room table while they went in search of the acid-tempered Bull. Bessie, true to form, found the parcel and could not resist sampling it. Unfortunately Bessie's sampling usually continued until nothing was left to sample. Babs and Mabs returned, viewed the tuck desolation in horror and the Bull walked in. Bessie, covered in jam as

A SHOCK FOR MISS BULLIVANT! Bess! A stream of liquid shot up and caught the Bull in the face. "Gug-gug-good gracious!" she gasped, springing back. "Bessie! Turn that bottle away! It is smothering me!"

well as guilt dived under the table. And palpitated there while Babs and Mabs got the blame.

Then Bessie emerged, with her usual excuses: It was the cat! The Bull shrieked disbelief. It was the dog! yelled Bessie, and received the shaking of her life from the furious mistress, along with many home truths about her character and dire threats. Babs and Mabs had quietly vanished and Bessie, after an enforced wash to remove the jammy evidence from her person, was seized by her study mates and told she was not the little fat horror she pretended to be. She had saved them a licking, and they rewarded her with a bag of jam tarts.

This was the beginning of Bessie being accepted into the Study Four coterie. She would still be irritating, a fibber, and a menace to any tuck left within her reach. But she was on her way through two decades of Cliff House history and her character improved, subtly smoothed and influenced by the sociability of Cliff House.

Of all the schools in fiction surely Cliff House was scripted by the most authors and it says a great deal for A.P.'s team of writers that the school and its great

cast of characters jelled together as coherently as it did. At least seven authors produced Bessie Bunter stories, and there were possibly more. Certainly Horace Phillips, creator of the famous Morcove, wrote a number of Cliff House tales after Frank Richards returned to the boys' papers but I've been unable to identify any particular story he may have written featuring Bessie. Following Richards and Phillips came R.S. Kirkham.

He was a master of mirth, although he could produce drama as well as the next. One of his best Bessie tales came late in THE SCHOOL FRIEND when he described THE REFORMATION OF BESSIE BUNTER.

One hot summer day Bessie had fallen foul of Miss Bullivant and been given detention. Bessie was hot and thirsty and longing for cool delicious ginger beer at Aunty Jones. That Miss Bullivant was attempting to install important mathematical knowledge into Bessie's fat brain simply didn't register. Just the thought of some silly man shovelling two tons, eleven hundredweights of sand in eighty-five minutes baffled the thirsty duffer. Unfortunately Miss Bullivant wanted to know how long it would take the sand shoveller to move the whole quantity of sand. Worse was to come. Bessie was confronted by the man who could plant two hundred and ten peas in an hour and a quarter, and, even worse, a leaky tank that could lose five quarts of water in ten minutes....

After this Miss Bullivant needed a break to recover her sanity and left the form room. Bessie decided to chance sneaking out to the Tuck Shop to collect ginger beer, which was sold out, but lemonade would do. Bessie got back just before the Bull and was opening one of the six bottles she'd brought back. Bessie had to hide the bottle under her desk and keep her thumb on the fizzy contents. Bessie's luck was out; the Bull came to the desk and Bessie was caught. The predictable happened; the lemonade exploded out of the bottle and the Bull got a shower. The six bottles were confiscated, three hundred lines replaced them, and Bessie was still suffering agonies of thirst.

But the Fates suddenly decided to be kind to Bessie. She was summoned—quaking—to Miss Primrose's study and told that Aunt Rebecca wished to take her niece on a seaside holiday for company. That is if the Head permitted.

Alas, there was a catch. Bessie's good behaviour had to warrant the holiday, and the Bull's report of the afternoon's happening brought the knell of doom. Bessie had to behave impeccably for a week before Miss Primrose gave her consent.

There was nothing else for it; Bessie had to reform. And cope again with the stupid man who shovelled sand, planted peas, and presumably repaired leaking water tanks in record time.

This hilarious story catalogued Bessie's many attempts to reform, do good turns and win approval, and every one went wrong or ended in disaster. After devastating Miss Primrose's perfect garden in an attempt to mow the lawn, Bessie despaired, until the chums decided a picnic by the river was indicated. They laid on a special feed to cheer Bessie, after which she got into the boat and fell asleep, unaware that the painter was loose and the boat drifting away. Kind fate brought the

Bull on the river, capsized her boat and sent her cries for help straight in Bessie's direction. Bessie managed to rescue her enemy, haul her into the boat while the girls were also rushing to the rescue, and earned heartfelt thanks from both the Bull and Miss Primrose. All was forgiven, Miss Bullivant even ordered a taxi for her the next morning, and the longed for holiday was on. Bessie was duly reformed! But as Clara said: How long would it last?

It was in this story that Bessie, perhaps for the first time in her life, actually imagined the effects of her misdeeds on others and considered their feelings instead of her own.

L. E. Ransome also portrayed Bessie with his own inimitable humour and elan. He was able to blend Bunter humour with disaster in tales of tragi-comedy. One particular example was in the second series of THE SCHOOL FRIEND. The title was WHEN BESSIE BOUGHT A CAR.

Bessie was in high glee; her remittance had arrived; A cheque for ten pounds from her Aunt Rebecca, one of the fabled rich Bunter clan. By this time Bessie's greed (in the sense that she took as her right the sharing or use of the other girls' possessions, treats and tuck) had mellowed. Apart from tuck, she was no longer expectant of being waited on hand and foot as in early days. Generosity was emerging in her nature and she wanted to bestow gifts or treats on them whenever she possessed the means of doing this.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND

A SUPERB LONG COMPLETE TALE OF THE GIRLS OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL.

When BESSIE Bought A CAR!

By HILDA RICHARDS.

So overcome with joy is Bessie when a remittance arrives unexpectedly that she persuades herself that her wealth is limitless. Several girls there are who are only too anxious to foster this delusion, and the results for Bessie are such that her real friends are forced to come hurriedly to her rescue.

But there was a snag. Jemima Carstairs, at present trying to coach Bessie in French, at the request of Miss Primrose, frowned at the cheque. The writing was not clear and the written amount did not agree. Bessie's cheque could be for only one pound. It would have to be verified. Consulted, Miss Mathews, the Fourth's mistress, was puzzled and doubted the validity of the cheque. Despite this Bessie was determined to cash it and have a spending spree. In this she was egged on by the meanies of the form, Marcia Loftus and Gwen Cook, who bore Bessie away, with Freda Foote along for a bit of fun and a feed at Bessie's expense. Meanwhile, Jemima was telephoning Bessie's Aunt Rebecca and being advised to tell Bessie to return the cheque, and another meanie, Helen Stone, had managed to lock Babs and Co in their study. By the time Babs got free, to set off in pursuit of Bessie before she tried to cash the cheque, Bessie and her new friends, having found the bank closed, had decided to hire a car for a drive—until they spotted an ancient car for sale in the garage and suggested Bessie buy it. Fired by mental pictures of herself queening it at the wheel while treating her friends to a spin, Bessie purchased the old wreck for four pounds. The cheque was accepted without question, cash change given, a shopping spree began while the car was "got ready" for her.

The return to Cliff House in the car, driven by the garage man and then taken over by Clara Trevlyn, was worthy of an old Laurel and Hardy comedy, ending up demolishing the fence of Miss Primrose's garden.

Clara was in trouble, and Bessie was even deeper in the mire, especially when told that she'd have to pay back the nine pounds when the bank refused to pay out the balance.

"Fraud, Bessie!"

"Did you alter it, Bessie?"

Babs and Co rallied round her, wondering how they could raise the money if needed. Then they decided to have an auction, and return the gifts Bessie had bought for them in the hopes that the shop would refund the cost (of course Marcia and Co refused to do this). The auction produced six pounds and Bessie broke down and wept when she found her own sold possessions waiting for her in the study, all returned by the buyers. This gesture showed how far Bessie had come in character from the unliked newcomer who'd arrived. And then once again the fates were kind.

That evening one of the school governors called on Miss Primrose and spotted the old crock where Piper had tried to push it out of sight. The governor advanced on it with sighs of delighted recognition. "Faithful old friend," he exclaimed, adding he would like to enter it in a commemorative run of old cars. He bought it and Bessie got her money back—after Primmy deducted the cost of repairing her fence!

Actually, Bessie did quite well out of that little episode.

In July 1929 THE SCHOOL FRIEND ceased publication as such and reappeared the following week in new guise as THE SCHOOLGIRL. In the latter time of THE SCHOOL FRIEND Cliff House had been relegated —if that is a permitted word—to supporting story at the rear of the magazine while other bright characters took lead stories and usually the cover. Sadly, this did not change in the new version of the

magazine and Cliff House featured as two serials, both by L. E. Ransome, and then vanished for two years before being revived, this time as the lead story.

The star of this opening story was Elizabeth Gertrude Bunter herself, naturally. BESSIE BUNTER'S SPECTRE, penned by yet another 'Hilda Richards', this time author N. Williams. He still depicted her as "the fattest, the plainest and the biggest duffer at Cliff House." But Bessie begins to differ a little as Barbara Redfern tells a story in the dorm about the monk of Cliff House when it was a monastery. The legend recounts how Benedict loved the Squire's daughter and mourned her death so badly he too passed away and was said to haunt the old building. This account, incidentally, laid a good foundation which future stories could utilise. Bessie, who later would become petrified at the merest hint of ghosts, dismissed this as rot and sneaked out down to Clara's study after Clara's jam tarts. There she disturbs an intruder and shrieks "Ghosts" which brings the girls rushing to the scene. Supposedly expiring on the floor, Bessie turns maudlin, sighing: "Remember me to the old folks at home. I passed out looking for the ghost." The arrival of Miss Bullivant causes Bessie's instant recovery.

When food goes missing from studies, postal orders fail to turn up and Aunty Jones refuses her tuck on tick, Bessie is blamed or teased. So throughout the story of Janet Jordan's disappearance, the ghost in the crypt, circus involvement and a mystery girl, all Bessie's character traits, style of dialogue and eternal hunger are set before the reader and outline the patterns for future stories of the legendary fat girl of Cliff House for a new generation of readers of THE SCHOOLGIRL.

N. Williams encompassed this with consummate ease yet his name fails to turn up again in any of my research into Cliff House history. Was this possibly a composite effort by the regular team to set the style for this revival of Cliff House?

After this a new Hilda Richards came in the person of John Wheway, already a prolific writers of boys' stories in other magazines. He was to write most of the Cliff House stories during the next nine years until war closed THE SCHOOLGIRL. He introduced new characters, developed relationships and situations with more emotion and made the mistresses more vulnerable to real-life problems. He excelled in Christmas stories and brought schoolgirl conflict to a fine art.

His first(?) full length Bessie tale BESSIE BUNTER'S PERIL began in similar vein to N. Williams' with Bessie in the money. A ten shilling note was burning a hole in her pocket when she was accosted by a swarthy pair of foreigners who accuse her of stealing a key from them. They turn up everywhere, virtually assault Barbara and Mabel when they try to protect Bessie, haunt Cliff House and annoy Miss Primrose. Meanwhile, Bessie's Aunt Annie has sent Bessie a ten-shilling note and asked her to visit her in Sarmouth where she is staying. Bessie is afraid to leave the school, so Babs and Mabs visit Aunt Annie to explain Bessie's absence and find a martinet lady who refuses to believe the story and demands Bessie visits her in person. So the chums decide to disguise Bessie and hire a taxi.

In the distance they see a girl who looks very like Bessie, which of course suggests mistaken identity. Wheway sets a great pace and both drama and comedy in the car

journey with Bessie dressed like Charley's Aunt in the dickey of a right old bone-shaker taxi. There has been a landslide on the coast road near an old house whose owner had recently died and it is here the car hits trouble, the dickey gives way and deposits Bessie in the road. The foreign pair emerge from the house and grab Bessie as the car jolts away with non- working brakes.

But Cliff House is soon to the rescue, with the girl resembling Bessie (who is the niece of the deceased owner and is trying to guard the jewels he has left in a safe). The foreign pair are arrested, Aunt Annie apologises for not believing Bessie and for her rudeness to Babs. She lays on a super tea and all is well again in Bessie's world. It is interesting to compare this early Wheway with his last Bessie story in 1939 BESSIE BUNTER LEAVES CLIFF HOUSE, which begins with great news for Bessie. The rich Bunters turn up at last and are going to carry Bessie off to Australia and a life of luxury. But when it comes to the actual time of goodbye Bessie is in floods of tears as she realises she doesn't want to leave Cliff House at all. Fortunately for Bessie there is an enemy, exposed by Babs, and the Australian trip falls through. This story is tenderly told and Bessie's heartbreak very touching.

Yet another Hilda Richards, Cecil Gravely, wrote a tale of Bessie in which her generosity brings trouble for her after she receives a registered envelope containing fifty pounds which has no covering note. Bessie promptly goes on the spend and then gives thirty pounds to some young friends who are very poor and facing eviction from their home. By the time she returns to school a solicitor has turned up, declares the money is stolen and demands she returns it. Too late, of course, and a great deal of trouble causes Bessie to run away in terror. However, the Bunter luck turns and, in the sorting out of the mystery and an exciting climax a treasure is found in the cliff-edge garden of the kindly fisherman who had rescued Bessie during a dreadful storm. Bessie receives fifty pounds from the treasurer and is able to repay the original fifty she should not have received.

There are many Cliff House stories whose authors have not been identified, probably most of these tales are by the authors already known but whose records were lost over the years. And there were many stories featuring Bessie whose author-identities are not known. But all of them contributed to the character development of the fat girl who became as famous to schoolgirl readers as her brother was to their brothers. All were entertaining, some excelled in Bessie's comedy element, others in the troubles she got into purely by her own stubborn foolishness. Perhaps Wheway treated her more kindly, stressing her better qualities without losing her ability to amuse and gradually inviting sympathy instead of scorn when she got into scrapes.

And there was one other author, Stanley Austin, who wrote several Bessie adventures. Like Wheway, he was sympathetic even while he wrote with great pace and a page-turning skill that carried the reader along, anxious to discover how Bessie got out of her latest escapade, and like Wheway, he had the ability to tug at the heartstrings of young schoolgirl readers. Perhaps of all the Cliff House authors he summed up the transformation of Bessie Bunter in the following excerpt from BESSIE THE REBEL.

A Grand Long Complete Story you will always remember. It stars that most famous of all schoolgirls, Bessie Bunter.

BESSIE BUNTER *Leaves* CLIFF HOUSE!

Bessie Bunter was not one of the leaders of the form by any means. But she was, nevertheless, the best known and one of the best-loved girls in it. She was laughed at; she was derided and teased. But her innocent, artless good nature, her simple, confiding disposition and her warm, lovable personality won her friends everywhere. They forgot her many faults, they overlooked her peculiar ways, they loved her because of her heart of gold.

Bessie Bunter, written to steal into the hearts of schoolgirls, could not have a better epitaph.

The illustration on the left is by G.M. Dodshon and the one on the right is by T.E. Laidler. There is a marked difference between Dodshon's version of Bessie (in the 1920s *School Friend* and Laidler's in the 1930s *Schoolgirl*.)

* *

The Locum Tenens

Dr. Locke carefully took out his watch, opened the chased cover and checked the time. Almost to the second the clock in the tower commenced to chime. The headmaster of Greyfriars School closed the watch and restored it to his waistcoat pocket.

He looked over the seated sixth formers, most of whom, without him speaking, had already closed their books and were putting them away in their desks. Dr. Locke had been expounding the beauties of Thucydides, but sad to relate, very few of the seniors would have expressed sorrow that the class had ended. It was Wednesday which meant a free afternoon and most of the class were already looking forward to either a session at the nets or a pull up the Sark; the river near the college. Break time had shown what a topping day it was; one to be spent out of doors.

"Some of you are studying for the Hogben Scholarship Exam," the Head reminded the class as he deposited the book he'd been using in his desk and closed the lid.

"May I suggest that overworking can be fatal and that you spend today's free time out in the open air - to use an old cliché - blow away the cobwebs!" He paused.

"Before we dismiss" he went on, "we have a temporary replacement for Mr. Lascelles arriving this afternoon and I think it would be nice if one of you could meet him at the station. I would ask one of my staff but, as you know, we are holding a masters' conference this afternoon." He paused and looked round the class. "I expect he'll be arriving by three-forty-five at Courtfield and he might not have been told about changing for Friardale or the way across the common, should he decide to walk."

"I'll be glad to sir, I have a roll of film at the chemist and I had intended to pick it up this afternoon." The speaker was John Dashwood. Dashwood hadn't been at

Greyfriars very long and was hoping to graduate to one of the varsities, preferably Cambridge; for this reason he had been cramming for the aforesaid scholarship. Recently he had taken up photography, not only as a hobby but with the idea of earning a little remuneration. When not studying, he could often be seen on Courtfield common, snapping birds and other wild life sometimes encountered there. He'd won the camera in a competition that had been held in a popular magazine. His splendid photograph of Friardale Bridge had been printed in the local newspapers. Unfortunately he hadn't fully mastered the art of developing his own pictures; his request to Carne, the prefect, who dabbled in film processing, to show or at least give him some help, had been met with a sneer. Dashwood wasn't one of the Smart Set and Carne, along with Loder, and to a lesser degree Walker, tended to look down on the sixth former who was trying to make his own way; his father had died on the Somme and his mother hadn't had an easy time of it. Only by a lot of sacrifice had she been able to send him to Greyfriars.

"I am much obliged, Dashwood," responded the Headmaster. "I know Mr. Kinross will be grateful to have you there to meet him, perhaps you might explain the reason for neither me nor one of my staff art being able to."

Mr. Lascelles, the popular games and maths master was in the sanitarium recovering from a blow from a cricket ball. With the kindness of his heart he had agreed to let Coker the champion ass of the fifth form, show him how well he could bowl! The result? Disaster! Indeed he was lucky not to have had a fractured skull!

Dr. Locke had had no recourse but to phone Legget and Teggers, the London Scholastic Agency, for a locum. Luckily they had a sports master on the books and he was due to arrive that afternoon.

After lunch, with his camera and a pair of binoculars slung (in their cases) over his shoulder, Dashwood set off for Courtfield. Instead of following the towpath along the river, he skirted the Popper Court estate which gave him a wide view of the common.

This would still give him time perhaps to observe and even photograph a curlew; reports had been received that this particular bird had been sighted in the vicinity. "I mustn't spend too much time, it wouldn't do for the new master to find nobody waiting to meet him!" But, he further mulled, sniffing the light breeze that was dancing across the common - the headmaster was right - the fresh air felt like a tonic after all the "sapping" he had been doing lately. Unfortunately John Dashwood wasn't a brilliant scholar, studying did not come easy to him; he had to rely on dogged determination to achieve any success in the scholastic field. His musings were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a car speeding towards him and causing him to jump back from the road he was about to cross. With a roar the car bustled past - the driver seeming oblivious to the startled and shaken senior. "Road Hog!" he muttered stooping to retrieve his cap which had flown from his head in his leap to safety. The car vanished in a cloud of dust! He stared after it for a few seconds before proceeding along the road. Checking his watch, he found he still had a little time to spare and, realizing he was almost adjacent to the Friar's Oak, he resolved to climb the mighty

tree. This would give him a good view of the common and with a bit of luck provide the source for some good photography.

Using the numerous projecting knobs which adorned the massive trunk, the active senior was able to reach a suitable vantage point. Sitting astride a couple of branches, he un-slung his binoculars and surveyed the common lying in front of him. He allowed his eyes to travel up the road the car had taken. A slight gasp escaped his lips when he spotted the car which had nearly hit him standing motionless in the road on the outskirts of Courtfield. The figure of a man bending over what appeared to be a human form lying on the ground. "Perhaps I can be of some assistance" thought Dashwood.

Replacing the binoculars in their case the active senior slithered down the tree - disregarding the numerous projections - and set off along the road. Whether he could be of any help he didn't know, but in any case he could but try; and his destination after all was Courtfield.

He soon realized that the speed with which the car had been travelling had taken it much further than he had estimated; the 'binos' had also given or had helped to give a false distance.

Whatever the reason, he arrived at the Courtfield railway station without seeing any sign of the injured man or the car! Slightly puzzled he gave most of his thoughts to his original intention, i.e., collecting his developed roll of film and meeting the locum.

The three forty-five would take about another fifteen minutes before entering the station-just enough time for Dashwood to pick up his snaps - the chemist shop was only just round the comer. With the film safely collected and paid for, he bought a platform ticket, sat down on one of the seats and perused his prints. Before long with the rattle and hiss of steam the train drew into the station. Rising to his feet he gazed expectantly, as the carriage doors opened, at the few passengers and an elderly clergyman, the latter no doubt on his way to visit the Rev. Lamb – but nobody who even looked like a school teacher! "Perhaps he missed his train" thought the sixth former. He groaned - if he had to wait for the next train, it would be cutting it short. By the time he escorted him to the school, even by the Friardale train - there wouldn't be much time left for photography on the common! But he had promised his headmaster; and he waited! Two more trains came and went, but no Mr. Kinross! Finally after chatting for a short time with Mr. Wagstaff, the stationmaster, he made his way back to the school, not a little annoyed; an afternoon wasted!

On arriving at the college he repaired to the headmaster's study. He knocked on the door and, on entering, found the headmaster in conversation with another gentleman who, although Dashwood to the best of his knowledge had never met, seemed to have something about him vaguely familiar.

"Ah Dashwood," said Dr. Locke, "this is Mr. Kinross. He tells me he came by an earlier train and walked across the common. You must have just missed him."

Dashwood corrugated his brow. He turned to the Head's companion and asked him with a politeness that he wasn't feeling, "Which way did you come. Sir?"

"I walked along the road that skirts that plantation. I think it's Popper Court," answered the man, "but I stopped a couple of times to admire the scenery."

"Mr. Kinross has also been admiring my Rembrandt," broke in the Head with a wave of his hand towards the framed picture by the Dutch master hanging on the wall of his study. Dashwood couldn't help noticing the look of suppressed excitement that flashed over the man's face as they both turned, following the Head's gesture.

"Mr. Kinross first noticed the very good copy in Big Hall when I was giving him a tour of the school," continued the Head, "but I left the *pièce de resistance* - the genuine one until the last."

After a few more pleasantries, the Head requested Dashwood to find Wingate, captain of the School and send him to his study; Dashwood took his leave, still wondering a little about the new master - what was there about him that made him feel somewhat suspicious? On making his way to the Sixth Form passage, he encountered Sykes, who on being questioned as to Wingate's whereabouts, told the sixth former to try the prefect's room.

Not being a prefect Dashwood halted outside the sacred apartment and glanced inside. Seeing the captain of the school in conversation with Gwynne, Tom North and some of the other members of the first eleven, he hesitated to interrupt, but Wingate seeing him, called out. "Did you want anyone old chap?"

"Yes, Wingate, the Head would like to see you."

"Thanks old man - I expect it's about the Hogben Scholarship Exam papers," said the captain, and excusing himself from his friends, he joined Dashwood in the passage

"WHEN I WAS GIVING HIM A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL" CONTINUED THE HEAD—

before making his way on his own to the head's study.

"Oh, Wingate, I want you as captain and head of the games to meet Mr. Kinross, who will be acting as games and maths master during Mr. Lascelle's absence."

Wingate was a little surprised when he shook hands with the locum - it was like grasping a fish! The same feeling came over him when he tried to engage the man in games talk - the man kept trying to switch to other subjects!

The headmaster's voice broke in on his thoughts. "By the way, Wingate, there's another matter that I'd like you to help me with." He pointed to a small pile of papers lying on the table in a half opened file - "Those are the Hogben Scholarship Exam papers". The head paused, "I've only just found out that the key to this study door is missing. So I would like you to act as guard - it's not that I don't trust any of the competitors, but I'd rather not take any chances - and don't worry about your preparation," he added.

"Oh, certainly sir, I'll be very happy to oblige," said Wingate - not at all sorry to miss doing preparation for one night.

"I've asked Mr. Kebble to make up a bed in here for you, so, would you go and have some supper and report back as soon as you can."

"Very good sir - I'll be back as soon as possible." So saying, Wingate quitted the study and went in search of some supper.

A look of pride crossed the kind old face of the head as the door closed behind him. "A fine young man,' he said turning to the locum. "I agree sir," smiled his companion, "And Dr. Locke" he continued, "as I have no immediate duties, perhaps you'll allow me to offer my services - I'm a very light sleeper, and the room you've allotted me is only a few doors along the passage -I can sleep in the armchairs and leave the door open."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Kinross, but I couldn't possible impose on you."

"No trouble. I can assure you Headmaster - after the welcome you've given me, it's the least I can do!" And so it was arranged.

John Dashwood was sitting in his study. The sixth former was in a disturbed state of mind. Try as he may he couldn't dismiss the distrust he felt for the replacement master. What was it about him that made him feel so uncomfortable? His thoughts went back over the day's events. Suddenly in his mind's eye he could see the car driver bending over the recumbent figure – that was it! Even at that distance viewed through the binos there was no mistaking the cut and colour of the man's suit! The driver and the so-called Mr. Kinross were one and the same! Another thought struck him - the last time he'd submitted some photographs to the local paper, Mr. Penrose, the editor, had been talking to one of his reporters about the exploits of a successful picture thief in the general neighbourhood. Finally he recalled the man's face when he was looking at the head's Rembrandt. Acting on an impulse, he jumped to his feet and, going to the study cupboard, he sorted out a large leather map case; tucking it under his arm he made his way to Mr. Quelch's study.

Although Mr. Quelch was the lower fourth (the Remove) form master - he was in many ways Dr. Locke's right hand man. The head entrusted him among other things with the keys of the doors of various rooms and places; this included Big Hall. Dashwood knocked on the door and in response to the form master's rather terse "come in," entered the study.

Mr. Quelch's somewhat severe countenance softened when he saw who it was. Although Dashwood had only been at Greyfriars a short time, and was a sixth former to boot, he was the sort of fellow one couldn't help liking. "How may I help you Dashwood?" he asked, albeit feeling a little surprised.

"So sorry to trouble you sir, I'm not sure - but I may have left something in Big Hall this morning and I wondered if I could have a loan of the key to check it out?"

"Certainly my boy," the Remove master said with a smile. He rose from his desk, and crossing over to a wooden panel selected a medium-sized key from the selection hanging there. Handing it to the sixth former he cautioned him to return it as soon as possible. Thanking the form master, Dashwood's next port of call, as it were, was Big Hall. He was able to enter it, after unlocking the door, without having to answer any questions; the same situation obtained on his leaving. Still carrying his map case he made his way to study N° 1 in the Remove passage. Knocking and entering Dashwood again received a kindly welcome. Like Mr. Quelch before him, Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, was a little puzzled – sixth formers weren't exactly frequent visitors to Remove studies! But even so - the little he'd had to do with Dashwood had made him like the senior. (Wharton's uncle. Colonel Wharton had served with Dashwood's father on the Somme and had told him how he'd given his life saving one of his men.) Dashwood came directly to the point. "Isn't there a chap in your form who can ventriloquise and imitate other people's voices?"

Harry Wharton stared at his visitor. "Why yes, Billy Bunter can - he's a past master at it!"

"Do you think you could get him in here Wharton?" Seeing the surprised look still on the Remove Captain's face, the sixth former continued. "What I'm going to ask him to do is for no silly schoolboy prank, but for a matter of the utmost importance!" Wharton studied Dashwood's serious face before saying, "That's good enough for me!" Going to the door, he opened it, and looking back over his shoulder, said - "I'll fetch him."

Minutes later a fat voice was heard approaching study No 1. The door opened to admit the fat form and flabby features of William George Bunter, whose tufted hair style and glasses gave rise to his famous nickname, 'the owl of Remove'!

"Where's the feed?" he demanded in a disappointed tone, standing in the doorway and blinking round the study. Harry Wharton pushed him into the room and closed the door. Billy Bunter suddenly caught sight of Dashwood. "Oh! Is the feed going to be held in your study?" His eyes glistened at the thought of a sixth form feed.

"Never mind the feed, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "Dashwood wants you to do a spot of ventriloquism."

"Well I don't know - I'm very busy," began the fat owl.

Dashwood ruthlessly interrupted him. "If you do what I ask, I'll stand you a feed afterwards." Although the senior wasn't exactly rolling in money, his credit was good with Mrs. Mimble.

"I think I'd rather have the feed first. It will – er - give me encouragement to perform well."

"Nothing doing, you fat bounder, you'll do the job first or I'll find someone else!" So saying Dashwood turned towards the door.

"Oh, all right." grumbled Bunter, "What is it you want me to do?"

Making sure the door was closed, Dashwood looked at Wharton and once again reiterated what he had already assured him, that this was a serious affair. If he was correct in his suspicions - and providing things went as planned - it could save the school and headmaster a lot of money and heartache!

Turning to Bunter, he said, "Let me hear you imitate Dr. Locke's voice coming from outside in the passage."

Blinking at the senior through his large glasses, Bunker gave a fat little cough. Almost at once the Oxford accents of Dr. Locke came distinctively through the door. "How dare you ask Bunter to imitate my voice Dashwood?" The sixth former stared at the door in amazement for a second or so before tearing it open and gazing at an empty passage!

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter.

Dashwood, with a look of amazement, came back into the study and closed the door. "I would never have believed it if I hadn't heard it!" he gasped.

"Want to hear some more of my wonderful ventriloquism?" grinned the fat junior. "No, I'm satisfied you young ass - although it beats me how you can do it - now this is what I want you to do" answered the sixth former in a lowered voice, perhaps still not believing that the head wasn't outside the study. "I know Mr. Prout is visiting Sir Hilton Popper, so we can use his telephone. I want you to phone Dr. Locke's study and tell Wingate, using the head's voice, to go to Gosling's lodge right away – say that some one has locked him in and you want his assistance. If he asks about the exam papers, tell him not to worry."

"Well, I don't know," started to mumble Bunter.

"Now there's nothing to be scared at. I have it written down on this card - it's as safe as houses and if it all goes according to plan you'll get a commendation on top of the feed!" Dashwood hastily assured the fat owl. He looked at Wharton's doubtful face and smiled. "I assure you young'un it's all square and above board, and you'll understand everything this time tomorrow." He thought deeply for a moment before adding, "In the meantime I must impress upon both of you not to breathe a word to anyone."

"You don't have to worry about me, Dashwood," said Harry Wharton looking the senior straight in the eye, "and Bunter will be too frightened of the consequences!"

"OK". And, so saying, the sixth former opened the door and led Bunter in the direction of the master's corridor. Tiptoeing past the closed doors (Mr. Kinross had

gone to tea and his door was also closed) they reached Mr. Prout's study. To make sure, Dashwood knocked on the fifth form master's portal quietly and on receiving no response, opened it and quickly entered, drawing the fat junior with him. Giving him a small sheet of white card inscribed with the message he lifted the receiver and dialled the head's study number.

After his usual atmospherics Bunter gave once again an amazing rendition of the stately head's clear dulcet tones, the receiver clamped to a fat ear. Without waiting for the head prefect's reply, Bunter hastily replaced the telephone on its cradle. With a fat wink he turned to his companion and said, "Now how about the feed?"

"You fat bounder, wait until we hear Wingate leave the passage!" There was a sound of a door opening and slamming and hurried footsteps passing the door and receding down the corridor - then all was quiet! "Now," said Dashwood cautiously opening the door and peering out. "Off you go quietly - go to the tuckshop. I've told Mrs. Mimble." Obviously Dashwood had been sure of his man! Few juniors could resist the thought of a feed and, although the sixth former wasn't rolling in filthy lucre, his credit at the tuckshop was good.

No sooner was Bunter safely off the scene than Dashwood, carrying his map case, sped along, albeit on tiptoe, to the head's study. Whatever he did inside took all of two minutes, but his look of contentment was short lived! Just as he was cautiously leaving, Mr. Capper, the upper form teacher came out of his study and observing the sixth former said with some surprise and knowing the head was absent, "Dashwood you shouldn't be in the head's study - you being a contender for the Hogben Scholarship Exam - I'm afraid I shall have to report you!"

"Very well sir, you must do as you think best" said Dashwood, quietly walking on down the passage in the direction of Big Hall. On the way he passed Mr. Kinross going back to his study after his tea break. The locum nodded to him, at the same time giving him a strange look. With a pained expression Mr. Capper hardly noticed the locum and walked along to Mr. Twigg's study, knocked and entered - he'd promised the second form master a game of chess after tea.

"Oh my hat", ejaculated Wingate in surprised horror. The captain of the school was feeling sore to start with, obeying, as he thought, the head's command. He had rushed out of the house across the quad and arrived at the porter's lodge to find the summons all a hoax! The Greyfriar's porter was sitting outside his front door contentedly smoking his pipe and enjoying a rest before lock-up. The head master was nowhere in sight! It was only after talking to the Gosling that Wingate suddenly remembered the exam papers! Was that the reason he'd been tricked out of the head's study? Leaving Gosling with his, "Wot I sez is this 'ere!", the head prefect hurried back to the head's study - if only he hadn't wasted time talking to the porter. One or two fellows were very unceremoniously elbowed out of the way and several called out to him, including Mr. Hacker – but, like the idle wind, he regarded them not. Finally he arrived back at the head's study and throwing open the door focused his

eyes on the folder containing the exam papers. There they were still on the table untouched! His feelings of relief were cut short as his eyes travelled around the study and alighted on the wall where the head's Rembrandt normally hung. Now only the frame was hanging - of the picture only a few tufts of torn canvas remained! Hence Wingate's exclamation of horror! Rushing to the telephone he frantically dialled the Head's private number.

Within a short space of time Dr. Locke appeared and with a haggard face heard Wingate's tale of woe. "How on earth could you have thought it was me, Wingate?" questioned the head. "I just don't understand it!" His further remarks were cut short by a knock on the door. With a surprised note of annoyance the Head managed a not too convincingly inviting "Come in." The door opened to admit the troubled features of Mr. Capper.

"I hate to have to make a report concerning a sixth form boy.... Headmaster," the upper fourth master broke off as he noticed the cut out remains. Mr. Capper was fresh from his chess game - having reached a stale-mate as it were. He was glad to use the reporting as an excuse to leave. Now he too was filled with dismay! "Bless my soul - surely not - I can't believe it!" he almost stuttered. "So that's why he was carrying that map case - but why in heaven's name did he have to cut the picture out? He could just as easily slipped the whole picture, frame as well, into the case."

Wingate and Dr. Locke both looked at the form master, stupefied. The Headmaster finally found his voice, "What on earth are you talking about, Capper?" he exclaimed in an irritated voice. Rather shakily the form master told of seeing Dashwood leave the head's study with a map case under his arm.

"Bless my soul," exclaimed the head - "and I was worried about the exam papers!"

Dr. Locke went on to tell Mr. Capper about the mysterious voice that had lured Wingate away. Still in a very perturbed state of mind Dr. Locke pressed his bell for Trotter the page.

Then a sudden thought struck the headmaster and he turned to the upper fourth master. "My dear fellow", he said, "would you have the kindness to ask Mr. Quelch to step in here?"

"Certainly, Headmaster", replied Mr. Capper, albeit a little puzzled.

"Ah, my dear Quelch." The kind old head greeted the remove master warmly. Mr. Quelch was not only his right hand man, but his old and valued friend. "I hope I haven't interrupted anything important?"

"Not at all, sir", replied the remove master. "I am entirely at your service."

The headmaster adjusted his glasses before saying, "Isn't there a boy in your form that has the doubtful gift of imitating other people's voices?"

Mr. Quelch frowned, "I'm afraid that description fits only one boy," He answered grimly, "and that boy is Bunter!"

Any further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the page.

"Ah, Trotter, would you please find Dashwood of my form and Bunter of the Remove and have them report to me at once!"

Fred Trotter hurried away. It wasn't too long before Dashwood made his

appearance - he stood before the three masters a little pale, but fully possessed. But before Dr. Locke could even begin to question him a protesting voice was heard coming along the passage. "It wasn't me - besides I wasn't there."

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Wingate could hardly keep a straight face as he opened the door to admit the fat face and form of William George Bunter. "Come in Bunter," said the Head.

"I say sir, I never did it," squealed the fat owl.

"What didn't you do Bunter?" asked the Head.

"Whatever somebody else did."

Mr. Quelch broke in, "I'm sorry to say sir, but this boy is incredibly stupid."

"Oh really, sir, you must mean one of the other chaps!"

"As you are used to this boy's strange behaviour, perhaps you will do me the favour of questioning him." broke in the Head.

"Certainly, Sir. Now Bunter, did you, earlier this afternoon, imitate Dr. Locke's voice on the telephone?"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped the fat owl, his knees knocking together. Suddenly he caught sight of Dashwood standing there. He called out to the senior, "It's all your fault, you beast. You asked me to do it!"

By this time Dashwood had caught sight of the empty frame with the torn fragments. Ignoring Bunter he asked the head to send for the new games and maths master.

"What has Mr. Kinross to do with this, Dashwood?" said the Head severely.

"If my suspicions are correct - more than you can imagine - but please do as I ask. I'll explain later."

Something in the senior's demeanour caused the head to acquiesce and he nodded to Wingate. The captain of the school left the study in search of the locum.

Dashwood spoke again, "I take it, sir, you think your Rembrandt has been stolen, hence all this questioning."

Mr. Capper, who had remained quiet during most of the coming and goings, now addressed Dashwood, "You surely won't deny I saw you leaving this study earlier carrying a large map case will you? I thought you'd entered to cheat by reading the questions of the exam papers," he continued, "but now we all know your real reason!"

Just at that moment Wingate re-entered the study without knocking - a strange look on his face. "Excuse me, sir," he said addressing the Head, "but Mr. Kinross has left the school carrying his suitcase - Gosline says a taxi picked him up outside."

The three masters were thunderstruck on hearing Wingate's statement.

Now it was Dashwood's turn again! "Dr. Locke, Mr. Quelch, Mr. Capper and you, Wingate, will you have the kindness to follow me?"

Something in the sixth former's tone and the look in his face caused the little group to comply with his request. Although not invited, Bunter, his eyes gleaming behind his large spectacles, full of curiosity, brought up the rear. Dashwood led the way down stairs and along the corridor that led to Big Hall.

Arriving at the great oaken door he slipped his hand into his pocket and, producing the key, opened it with a flourish.

Leading the little party in he halted and with a dramatic gesture he pointed to a picture on the wall and in ringing tones cried, "Dr. Locke, Sir, there is your Rembrandt."

The Head dashed forward, followed by Mr. Quelch and Mr. Capper, to examine the picture. "Here, sir." Mr. Quelch handed Dr. Locke a pocket magnifying glass.

The kind old face of the Head became wreathed in smiles at the end of his examination. There was no doubt in his mind - this was his Rembrandt! He turned to Dashwood "My dear boy how can I ever thank you?" he said shaking the senior's hand warmly. "I had no proof" said Dashwood, no real proof. But I was pretty certain that man was a crook, so I let him steal the fake after I'd switched the picture. I didn't even know you had the exam papers in your study, I assure you. My only thought was for the safety of your picture!"

Mr. Quelch and Mr. Capper, both with amazement in their faces, also voiced their congratulations, whilst Wingate, in spite of their and the Head's presence, chuckled and patted him on the back. "Bravo! You ought to become a partner to Dr. Locke's cousin - the famous detective - Ferrers Locke."

Any further discussion was halted by the arrival of Trotter, the page. "Courtfield Hospital on the phone, sir," he announced. Dr. Locke rustled away to the nearest telephone.

It was, of course, concerning the real Mr. Kinross. Apparently he had been brought in unconscious by a man who had told the hospital authorities that he'd found him lying by the roadside. The man however, had regained his senses much quicker than the bogus locum had anticipated, and, although the picture-thief had removed and pocketed all identification, the patient was able to state his name and profession.

Dr. Locke gave the hospital all the details as he knew them - the hospital in turn said they would get in touch with Legget & Teggers.

Mr. Quelch, who had, along with Mr. Capper and Wingate, followed the head, eager to hear all the details, touched Dr. Locke's arm as he replaced the telephone on its cradle. "Would you like me to phone Inspector Grimes? He may still have time to apprehend the miscreant."

Dr. Locke shot a grateful glance at his friend - at that moment all he wanted was to get back to his beloved picture! "My dear Quelch, I would be most grateful."

It is nice to relate that Dashwood won the scholarship and from all accounts he is doing well at the varsity. Before he left Greyfriars, Wingate was the main organizer of a splendid going away party for him. Those who graced the festive board included Dr. Locke, Mr. Quelch and even Billy Bunter, which event, coming after the tuckshop treat that Dashwood had provided, really made the fat owl feel that life after all was worth living!

The bogus locum-tenens? It is nice to report that he was apprehended trying to board one of the channel steamers - still unaware that the 'Rembrandt' he was carrying wasn't the genuine article - he had hoped to dispose of the picture to a 'fence' in France.

* *

LIBRARY CHAT by Derek Ford

Last year Fleetway published "Opening Sentences to Famous Novels"; Peter Hanger came up with "Gems of Hamiltonia" in the last "C.D." Both recalled my recent re-reading of "The Case of the Sexton Blake Bust".

Seventy-nine years ago this month *Union Jack* 1169 commenced: "Smashed! "echoed Sexton Blake, looking up with quick dismay into the pale, rather haggard face of the man before him."…..Blake was in the studio of Cedric Barker in Wolford Court. A letter from France had told him that his portrait in clay of M. Mussolini ("The man who put a hatchet through the picture of Bismarck") had been thrown from its pedestal. A second disaster had happened at the photographers where his 'Ballerina" had been knocked over by the maid.

Leaving the studio, from a patch of deep shade, a small sharp Indian tomahawk is thrown at him. "From a concealed clip inside his sleeve he allowed a short length of thick rubber to slip down into his hand and gripped it lightly as he walked." A search revealed nothing. "Blake strode on quickly along the lane, hailing a taxi as soon as he emerged into civilisation".

Back at Baker Street he is told by Mrs. Bardell that his clay bust is smashed: "It can't be mended with fish-glue. It's smashed to hatoms". Just after six, Bessie went upstairs to lay for dinner and there it was, lying smashed in the fireplace. Tinker had gone out for the paper.

A cleaner then discovers the body of a dead woman with a small pistol lying nearby at the studio. The pistol is initialled "C.B." and Cedric Barker is missing. And lying on the floor, broken in three pieces, the marble bust of Blake.

A flight from Croydon to Paris where Blake learns from Barker's teacher, Pere Luduc, who "only etched now when he was depressed, and he was only depressed when he was completely sober" – that Barker when 'stonnybrok' gave up his work to dance in the cabarets. Partnered by Nita Verlieff at the Blue Cabaret – now lying pitifully still in a London mortuary.

Blake goes on to find the caretaker of the studio, Monteuil, and charges him with smashing the bust of Mussolini. He has been bribed by Nita against Parker for leaving her.

"He found London baked hard by frost, grey and sullen" when he returned. Baker Street maid Bessie had flown – another tool of Nita. But Tinker has tracked her down.

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Now there is a consultation with Inspector Harker and Blake is given permission to examine Barker's studio, which Inspector Galloway, no friend at Scotland Yard, has so far forbade him. There he finds a bullet in the wainscot: "His grey eyes were dancing – his whole features seemed to have lighted up": the bullet! from that pistol. The constable on guard witnesses the find in his notebook.

A shot at the bust of Blake, shadowed on the blind, had ricocheted and killed Nita Mason, Mr. Andrews, confirmed that, in France, he had seen marble work split by a fragment of shell, just like the bust had split.

From the telephone post from which the shot was fired, Blake follows the faint imprints of crepe rubber, to a small pool of blood, where a man had been knocked down by a car and taken to hospital.

There he finds dying Jake Withers, a half-caste whom Blake had rounded up for attacking a white woman in Oklahoma. Then Inspector Galloway catches up with Blake and surprises him with: "The bird's netted. Cedric Barker was taken at Salisbury this morning, and we hold his written confession."

'Barrister' Blake visits Barker at Highbury Prison, where Barker is under the impression that he shot Nita in the studio, but soon Blake convinces him of his mistake with his reconstruction of the crime, and the confession that he got from Jake Withers.

In court, Inspector Galloway's case is soon lost to Blake's reconstruction, and Barker's murder charge is withdrawn, and he is discharged.

"And now, upon the mantelshelf in Sexton Blake's consulting room, there stands an exquisite piece of modelling – a small bust of himself in clay expresses the genius of a young sculptor whose work, by general consent, will one day be priceless".

The tightly printed editorial page offered the 3/6 bust of Blake for buying six copies of the *Union Jack* (one for yourself and five friends) and sending a signed coupon from each to the Editor. If you were a fan from Malta there was the extra postage of 1/3, from India 2/0, from New Zealand 2/3, Australia 2/4, and Argentina 3/-. One wonders if promotions today would include busts of both Blake and Tinker, a Corgi die cast Grey Panther – and *Mrs Bardell's Cookery Book*.

"Vincent Rydon was dead" opened the first case-book of Anthony Parsons in January 1951. Rydon, an eccentric millionaire, had been stuffing 3,842 diamonds in "prancers" – those bronze spelter Marly horses that once decorated every mantelpiece. It was to compensate his partner from the rich Mazunga Mine where he believed his partner had been killed in falling down the mine shaft. But he survived and recovered, although at the cost of his memory. Rydon finds him in London many years later. I think Parker enjoyed it, too, for his cover is from page 61. A splendid start for the SBL in 1951.

Finally, two commemoratives this year are the Spring 1905 return of Sherlock Holmes from his 'death' in 1891, in *The Strand* and the earliest recorded use of the word 'whodunnit', 75 years ago.

* *

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MORE BRIEF ENCOUNTERS
by BRIAN DOYLE

BOB MONKHOUSE: I first met Bob Monkhouse via the Royal Mail in 1952 when I was working at Woolwich Public Library in South London, a mere lad of 21 and had dreams of becoming a comedy scriptwriter. I had read that Monkhouse, though only two years older than me, was on the look-out for new writers to enrol in his busy agency which he ran with his comedy partner Denis Goodwin. He was also established as one of Britain's top comedians. Purely 'on spec' I sent him half-a-dozen 6-minute "stand-up" comedians' scripts tailored to such stars of the time as Charlie Chester, Richard Murdoch and Ted Ray, together with a covering letter introducing myself. A month or so later I received my scripts back with a letter from the great man. But – and he had obviously been to some trouble – the scripts had been meticulously 'marked' and annotated with such comments as 'This is terrible' and 'Noah wrote this in the Ark on a particularly stormy night' and 'This one is so ancient it has a certain period charm' and 'Oucchh!' and 'How could you?. They weren't all like this; occasionally there would be 'Very good' or 'Not bad' or 'This is a new one – I think' or 'This one actually made me smile – I think!' Interspersed with the remarks were clever little cartoon-like sketches of people laughing or, more often crying. I still have those scripts and they form a sort of historic Monkhouse archive (not to say Doyle archive!) The two-page letter was a short course in comedy scriptwriting plus a few jokes. There was a P.S. which read 'Sorry, chum, but you did ask for it!' The P.P.S. read 'Thanks for taking the trouble to send the scripts – and wishing you the best of luck in your comedy (?) career.' I wrote back and thanked him and rather went off the idea of comedy scriptwriting after that.....

I subsequently met Bob Monkhouse in 1957 when I happened to be in the studio audience for an episode of his TV 'sitcom' series 'My Pal Bob', but I didn't mention my scripts. Two years later I was working on a film at MGM British Studios at Elstree, where Monkhouse was starring in a British comedy film called 'Dentist in the Chair', all about student-dentists. I met him again and we got chatting one lunchtime in the bar. He was charming and nice and funny and we got along very well. But that was Bob– he seemed to get along with everyone. I always seemed to be bumping into Bob after that – at the studios, at various movie function, at Premiers, especially when I was Press Office at Columbia Pictures in London – and I always made sure he was sent invitations – and I remember his telling me about his incredible collection of old movie comedy stars and films, both silent and sound; he made them the basis of a popular TV series called 'Mad Movies', which you may recall. We had several long chats – but I never reminded him of the comedy scripts I had sent to him all those years earlier – I didn't want to embarrass either of us.....

EMLYN WILLIAMS: He shared the same birthday as me (November 26th), though he was born 25 years earlier. When I interviewed him in his dressing-room at London's

Globe Theatre (now the Gielgud theatre) in the mid-1950s for my show business column in a South London newspaper, he told me he was feeling lonely. The reason was that he was starring in his famous one-man show of readings from Charles Dickens (well he didn't really **read** them – he acted them, every role, brilliantly). 'When you're in a one-man show like this there's no one to chat to or gossip with or argue with!' he said with a wry smile. (He later performed his one-man show of the works of Dylan Thomas, which I thought was even better than his Dickens production.)

Williams had always been a great idol of mine, ever since I saw him in his own play 'The Morning Star' (also at the Globe) with my parents in 1942 – it was my first visit to a 'straight' play ever and made a big impression, especially as it dealt with an ordinary London family's experience during the Blitz on the Capital in 1940. I told Williams about his landmark event in my young life and he said seriously (I think) that he was honoured to have been my first introduction to British drama! Williams, of course, was one of Britain's most distinguished playwrights, as well as actors, and wrote such plays as 'Night Must Fall', 'The Corn is Green', 'The Light of Heart' and 'The Wind of Heaven'. His was an amazing story. Born in poor circumstances in a coal-mining town in Wales, he didn't speak a word of English until he was eight, then eventually won a scholarship to Oxford and won his degree. He tells something of this story in his play 'The Corn is Green' (which was filmed and televised) and in one of the best autobiographies ever written, 'George' (his actual first name). Before I left his dressing-room I remarked on a large six-foot high folding screen standing in one corner – it was covered in blood-curdling and actual newspaper headlines cut from the 'News of the World'. 'It's fun, so long as you weren't there at the time – and I think Dickens might have enjoyed it,' he said. 'Happy Birthday in November!' He called after he said goodbye. 'And to you too, sir,' I replied. I often wondered in later years why he was never honoured with a knighthood. Funnily enough one of his later plays, which I saw at the First Night, titled 'Accolade', dealt with the subject of a famous writer who was about to be knighted but, in the event, wasn't. It must have been a subject close to his heart. And the fiction turned out to be fact.

JACK NICHOLSON: In 1974 I was working as Publicist on Ken Russell's film of the controversial 'rock-opera' TOMMY, written by Pete Townsend and starring him and his pop-group 'The Who'. The whole thing was, as they say, 'sung-through', i.e. there was no spoken dialogue it was singing and music throughout. A unique production then, with a cast which included Ann-Margaret (who later received a 'best Actress' Oscar Nomination for her performance), Oliver Reed, Robert Powell, Paul Nicholas, and such 'pop' luminaries as Elton John, Eric Clapton and Tina Turner. The title-role was played (and sung) by Roger Daltrey (lead-singer with 'The Who' and, who considering he had never acted before, gave a remarkable performance). One weekend we were due to shoot scenes on location at a disused old hospital at Harefield. When I arrived my stills photographer met me and said conspiratorially: 'There's been a bit of late-casting – Jack Nicholson's playing the Specialist.'

At one point in the story, Tommy, who was deaf, dumb and blind (don't ask) is taken to see a Specialist for a possible cure, by his mother (Ann-Margaret). Wow! Jack Nicholson was then, as now, one of the biggest movie stars in the world, famous for such pictures as 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' (for which he won a 'Best Actor' Oscar), 'Easy Rider', 'Chinatown', 'Five Easy Pieces' and 'The Shining'. Apparently he was just filming for two days over the weekend, before dashing back to Hollywood. I decided to get my necessary interview with him as soon as possible and found his dressing-room in a remote upstairs corridor of the ex-hospital. I knocked at the door and a voice called out 'Come in.' I entered and at first could see nobody. Then, in a corner, I saw a figure in a track-suit balanced upside-down against a wall. 'Mr. Nicholson?' I ventured in my best upside-down voice. 'Sure thing' said the figure and I introduced myself. I explained my presence and he said, sure, he had time for a chat, as long as I didn't mind him remaining upside-down. No problem, I assured him and sat on the floor beside him and did my interview. He liked to practise his yoga exercises whenever and wherever he could, he explained with an upside-down grin. He was appearing in 'Tommy' because he'd always liked the piece, liked the money, and wanted to work with Ken Russell, the director.

At the end of our chat, he came 'down to earth', as it were, stood upright, gave me a grin that had won him a million feminine fans (and probably a few male ones too) throughout the world, and shook hands. He was charming and helpful. In front of the cameras he did his scenes perfectly and the first 'Take' would have been fine – but Ken Russell, being Ken Russell, insisted, as he always did, on shooting four or five (I did five pictures with Russell and had come to know his methods by now!). In Nicholson's last scene he had to kiss Ann-Margaret on the lips and hold it until Russell called 'Cut!' Russell did the old directors' gag of not calling 'Cut!! And let the camera roll as Nicholson and Ann-Margaret continued their kiss. The seconds ticked by with the unit trying to suppress their laughter. Eventually, Nicholson intoned out of the corner of his mouth as the kiss continued (in a quote from a very old movie business joke): 'Ready when you are, Mr. De Mille!' The whole crew exploded into laughter and applause – and that was the end of the great Jack Nicholson's brief stint on 'Tommy'. And he had made a big hit with cast and crew alike with the unanimous verdict: 'You're All Right, Jack!'.....

EDMUND CRISPIN: I knew him as Bruce Montgomery, which was his real name, but under his 'Crispin' pseudonym he wrote a series of superlative light and witty detective stories in the 1940s and early-1950s – only nine titles in all, but this was a case of quality not quantity. His stories featured an amateur detective who was an English Professor at Oxford University, Gervase Fen, and I think that his best, and probably best-known, book was 'The Moving Toyshop' (1946) in which a toyshop in Oxford, the scene of a crime, literally disappeared overnight! His books appeared originally encased in those once-famous bright-yellow Gollancz jackets and subsequently in the familiar green Penguin paperbacked editions. Other popular titles of his included 'The Case of the Gilded Fly' and 'Frequent Hearses'. For Montgomery, his detective

stories, elegant and urbane like the man himself, were really a spare-time relaxation. His real job was music, as composer, conductor and organist. He wrote the music for many British films of the 1950s, including several of the 'Doctor' and 'Carry On' productions. In 1961 he wrote the screenplay (and of course composed the music!) For a British comedy called 'Raining the Wind', about the misadventures of a group of students at a London music academy (it was virtually a 'Carry On' picture, made by that team and starring such familiar faces as James Robertson Justice, Leslie Phillips and Kenneth Williams). Its most memorable sequence featured a full symphony orchestra being conducted by Williams, for a final exam. The orchestra members disliked Williams and deliberately played the classical piece faster and faster until chaos ensued.

I first met Montgomery when he was engaged to compose the score for the first film I did as solo publicist in 1957, Rank's 'The Heart of a Child' (about a small boy and his adventures in the Austrian Tyrol with a huge St. Bernard dog). I lunched with Montgomery and the film's director, Clive Donner and we got along famously. Montgomery invited me along to the recording session at Denham Studios; it was the first such session I had been to and I found it fascinating. The music was played and recorded in front of a large screen showing the appropriate section of the film and was done in portions lasting anything from 30 seconds to 3 minutes. Then the music would be played back as the film sequence was. The great Muir Mathieson, doyen of British film music recording, conducted and Montgomery's music was beautiful and remains one of my favourites to this day. After the session I asked Bruce if he could let me have a tape of his score. He did even better and sent me the two 'master-discs' of the entire score from start to finish. He represented the boy with a clarinet and the dog by a tuba, but the best part, to me, was the lush, sweeping main theme played by full orchestra, especially the strings. 'More like the crashing seas and full-sailed galleons of a pirate movie,' I once remarked to Bruce. 'Go with whatever the music suggests to you, dear chap;' he smiled. 'Just enjoy the image....' I met Bruce Montgomery several times after that, since he was often at Pinewood Studios, where I was based at that period and he was unfailingly cheerful and friendly and bow-tied. He lived in Devon and died there in 1978. If you haven't read his books, do try one sometime. Like the man, they're well worth knowing....

KENNETH MORE: Although I never worked as Publicist on a film with Kenneth More, I came to know him during my first 3½ years at Pinewood Studios because, being a leading Rank contract actor, he was always around. The Publicist who usually worked on his pictures was a colleague and friend named Bob Herrington, whose office was next to mine in the unique 'clock' arrangement I have described before, wherein eight offices housing a Publicist and secretary led off a circular lobby, where actors, actresses, directors and so on were forever coming and going. I had already met More several times so when he called to see Bob, only to find he was out, he would breeze into my office saying 'Well and how are things in the Doyle empire today?' and hinting that a cup of coffee wouldn't go astray. He would plump

himself down in the armchair I kept for visitors and chat away happily about movies, world events and topics in general. He was rather like the character, Ambrose, he played so well in that lovely film 'Genevieve', about vintage cars on the annual run to Brighton. He played it so well because he was really playing, and being, himself! He always seemed cheerful and affable and friendly – and he was a fine actor too.

I remember that his latest film 'Reach for the Sky', in which he played so brilliantly the legless air ace Douglas Bader, had just opened, and I told him that his performance had moved me to tears in at least three scenes. He grinned and thanked me and shouted exuberantly 'That's it, Brian, old lad, get a reaction, that's the thing, get a bloody reaction from 'em – laughter or tears – that's the stuff!' He was full of funny stories and anecdotes too, and could be a bit of a prankster when it so moved him. I recall that when I arrived a trifle late at the annual charity opening of the Battersea Pleasure Gardens and Fun Fair, in London (we Publicists always chipped in with our time to help organise things) Kenny was making a speech of welcome from the stage where guest stars were often introduced during the occasion. He spotted me and announced to the two thousand or so people watching: 'Well, ladies and gentlemen, we can really go ahead with the opening now because Mr. Brian Doyle, of the Rank Publicity Department, has now arrived, better late than never – so let's give him a big hand!' The crowd duly applauded, not having a clue who I was, and I had to cover my blushes and wave at the audience. 'Thanks a bunch, Kenny,' I said to More later, and he said with a mock bow 'Any time, old boy – I like to give credit where it's due!' He was making a picture at Pinewood called 'The Sheriff of Fractured Jaw' and he came over to me in the bar one lunchtime and introduced me to his co-star who was none other than Jayne Mansfield, whom some readers may remember as the dazzling blonde with the amazing vital statistics. 'Brian, this is Jayne and this is Mansfield' he grinned. I refrained from making the obvious joke and said it was a pleasure to meet her. 'Likewise,' said the pneumatic Miss M. Kenny told me alter that because she used that word quite a lot, it had caught on around the cast and crew of the picture, who used it constantly! I lost touch with Kenny More after I left Pinewood Studios, but continued to enjoy his work in such productions as TV's 'The Forsyte Saga' and 'Father Brown'. I always thought he should have been honoured with a Knighthood, like his erstwhile Pinewood colleague, Dirk Bogarde, but sadly it never happened. When he died some years ago he was missed by many people who knew him personally or just up there on the screen. He was rather larger than life and often a lot more` cheerful. More or less? Definitely More.....

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THE IMPORTANCE OF DALLAS
Magnets 997-1004
by Frances-M. Blake

Early in 1927 the Editor's Page of the *Magnet*, in a message headed "The Bounder", informed:

> This week's mail brings an extraordinary number of requests from *MAGNET* readers for a Vernon-Smith series of Greyfriars stories. And, strangely enough, each of my correspondents who refers to this character wants to see him again as he was in the "old days" – the days when he really earned the name of the Bounder. The notion is a good one. Mr. Richards and I have talked it over, and my correspondents can now look forward to a return of the old Vernon-Smith very shortly.

From 1914 a rather strange Bounder of Greyfriars had existed, especially as depicted by the substitute writers during 1914-1926, that long period when the Bounder was usually either not on the scene or very much reformed, even if aspects of his strong character did remain. Frank Richards had come to the aid of the *Magnet* in 1917 with *"The Fall of the Bounder"*, a 4-part series, and again with three series in 1918, all dealing with Vernon-Smith and his first and only pal, Tom Redwing. But the 'subs' were far too numerous until 1926. And so, on 26th March 1927, began the story of Paul Dallas in the Greyfriars Remove.

The first few chapters of *Magnet* 997, so expertly written, set the atmosphere for the dramatic, indeed tragic, events of the eight numbers.

It is not really the thought of his father's millions that causes Smithy's violent hatred of newcomer Paul Dallas but a fierce jealousy as he imagines losing his father's affections to 'The Interloper'.

> By gad, I never thought the old man could be so soft! I never supposed that he was sentimental! I never believed that he cared a ha'penny for any living being in the world – excepting myself!"

These are the words of an only son who has always been spoilt and indulged by his self-made multi-millionaire father, and significantly he has no mother. I suspect that she, the aristocratic Vernon, died in childbirth. [See article by ANON, in *The Friars' Chronicles* 33]

Paul Dallas was one of the best temporary juniors ever to come to Greyfriars – and he met Herbert Vernon-Smith at his worst. Mr. Vernon-Smith has informed his son that he has "practically adopted him [Dallas] as a son" and "I want you to treat him as a brother". He had taken Paul away from his charity school and sent him to Greyfriars in order to repay an old money debt to the boy's long missing father. Presumably Dallas was not adopted in the legal sense, although quite possibly Samuel Vernon-Smith intended to make such arrangements. Yet he did not value Paul a sixpence compared to his own son – unfortunately a fact that Herbert blindly refused to admit.

So when the Bounder utterly refuses to realise that Dallas means him no harm, he suffers severely for his bitterly mistaken belief. Smithy receives punishments from Mr. Quelch and the prefects, and his father's deepest anger is incurred. He is badly beaten in fights with an unwilling Dallas and thrown out of the football and the cricket teams, resulting in Form lickings and raggings. He is then left alone at the school over the Easter Holidays by his irate father who takes Paul on a Continental holiday instead. Next term Smithy is almost expelled but just escapes with a public flogging, after which he is barred by the whole Form (an Ishmael). The worst blow is the loss of his only friend Tom Redwing which is caused by his own fault. Throughout the whole story, Smithy's emotions are mostly a mixture of rage and misery.

It is always (an irrational?) jealousy rather than fear of losing any of his inheritance that fuels Vernon-Smith's antagonism towards Dallas, for as Wharton says:

> "Smithy is very fond of his father. I don't believe he cares a rap for anybody else. But he thinks whole worlds of his father." [M.1002]

His father's anger now is like a prequel to that shown in the famous Smedley series of 1934. Such anger and assessment of his son's character is quite new for both of them.

> "You have a bad and bitter temper, Herbert, and you are capable of many things that other boys of your age are not capable of...." And "No, you rather

glory in your faults, I think!" said his father. [M.1002]

Half-way through the series Tom Redwing is driven out of Greyfriars and resigns his scholarship for good (or so it seems) because Vernon-Smith has made yet another mistake and thinks Redwing has betrayed him to his father.

> And at the moment he felt that he hated Redwing more than he hated Paul Dallas. Hatred was a feeling to which Herbert Vernon-Smith had grown very accustomed to of late. [M.1000]

A terrible scene in the Rag follows. Too late the Bounder realises his dreadful error but his best and only friend steadily refuses to stay on at the school. He argues with Redwing in vain.

> "There's a rotten streak in me," said the Bounder bitterly. "The fellows here didn't call me the Bounder for nothing. I'm the son of a purse-proud, self-made man, and I've got it in my blood. You always knew that." [M.1000]

Redwing is forgiving but quietly steadfast that he must go, even when Smithy says he will humbly apologise to him before all the fellows who had heard his taunts.

> "Will you cut out all you've said, and stay at Greyfriars?" demanded the Bounder harshly.
> "I can't!"
> "That settles it, then!"
> And without another word or look at his lost friend, the Bounder of Greyfriars tramped away. [M.1000]

In the new term the Bounder's vendetta continues with an actual crime when he cunningly plants false evidence against Dallas to get him expelled and only the unexpected intervention of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, proves that Paul is innocent and Vernon-Smith guilty.

Later he is at his lowest ebb after a very severe Form ragging for yet another trick against his 'enemy'.

> No one came to the study – even Skinner kept away – and the Bounder, as he sat aching and dizzy, in solitude and misery, felt that he was at the end of his tether. The thought was in his mind of writing to his father to ask to be taken away from Greyfriars. But of that thought, of going, defeated, disgraced, and leaving his enemy in possession of the field, a blaze came into his eyes. He shook his head. His indomitable spirit was still unconquered.....[M.1003]

At last Mr. Dallas returns from the wilds of South America and as Paul happily chooses to return there with his wonderful father even Smithy has to acknowledge his terrible mistakes, when all too late. Although the two shake hands in farewell Vernon-Smith is left

with only the bitter knowledge that his evil, suspicious temper had led him from one false step to another – that he had wronged a fellow who had never wished him harm – that he had lost the respect and comradeship of his Form-fellows for nothing. Darker and darker the Bounder's face grew..... [M.1004]

Herbert Vernon-Smith was re-created in the Dallas series. His good qualities surfaced afterwards, but the bad was always there and could easily take over. He now returned to his old 'bad' habits but yet remained a first-class sportsman. His uncontrolled temper and indeed 'tantrums' were famous in the Remove. Yet while wild and headstrong, arrogant and self-willed, reckless and rebellious to all authority, he was also cool and careless, courageous and without hypocrisy. In the ensuing years would come a number of great series and single stories too with the Bounder of Greyfriars. There were no more reforms, but he could still show the occasional quixotic sense of generosity or his own type of honour.

The Dallas Series has another importance because it marked the coming to an end of so many substitute writers in the *Magnet*. Before Dallas there had been some 294 (1909-1927). After Dallas there were only 16 in the five years to 1931 (M.1220 the last), after which 'the real' Frank Richards wrote them all.

One more asset were the illustrations by newcomer artist Leonard Shields, who had begun in the India series of 1926 and then became, with C.H. Chapman, the main artist of *The Magnet*. It seems that Shields' own favourite Greyfriars character was Herbert Vernon-Smith (whom he first drew in the substitute M.972), so he draws the Bounder with a special skill and feeling in this Dallas story, never to be bettered.

[Reprinted from *The Friars' Chronicles* No.94, by kind permission of its Editor, Peter McCall]

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Don't forget to read the important announcement on pages 3 and 4

The Quiet Time
by Ted Baldock

That part of the day approaching the meridian
When the pulsating and feverish rhythm of life
Slows down and a certain tranquillity predominates

The Head's garden seemed a very peaceful and desirable place on that warm summer afternoon, drowsing in dappled shadow. So thought Mr. Mimble as he rose and stretched his back after removing a few venturesome weeds which had, with much audacity, rooted themselves in the gravel of the main pathway. Life was pleasant in the Head's garden, surrounded by fragrant rose bushes, grey old buildings and magnificent trees, together with a brief respite from his official duties at the tuckshop for an hour or so.

Mrs. Mimble, the residing genius of that important establishment was in the habit – also long established – of taking a well earned siesta in the afternoon to recharge her batteries, as it were, to deal with the teatime rush of customers.

All the fellows were in class, imbibing knowledge from the members of Dr. Locke's staff, at least all of them should have been thus engaged. But, this being a far from perfect world, there were certain cases where, sadly, this was not the case. To list the delinquents of one form, the Remove, as an example, Billy Bunter, Lord Mauleverer, Vernon Smith, Skinner and Stott, despite the eagle eye of Mr. Quelch, were otherwise engaged. Two of the aforementioned were nodding on the verge of slumber. Bunter and Lord Mauleverer were leagues away from the realms of ancient Greece where at that moment they should have been engaged. Outside, for the moment, peace and solitude reigned in the quadrangle and on the playing field. Even the incessant cawing of the rooks high up in the old elms sounded mooted and less raucous.

From the direction of the fifth form room came a continuous booming, rising and falling as Mr. Prout proceeded with the instruction of his form. It would seem a fairly reasonable analogy to compare the Albatross, so permanently affixed to the 'Old man of the sea', with Horace Coker's relationship with his form master, 'Old Pompous'. Mr. Prout was bedevilled, as was the 'Old Man' neither being able to rid themselves of what appeared to by their nemesis. It is true that there did exist a possibility, very vague and small, yet it must be recorded, that one day Coker might be 'kicked' up into the sixth form. This chance seems so remote and hardly worth considering. It also raises the important question should such a miracle – or disaster – occur. Consider the point. What on earth would Potter and Green do? How would they manage without the guiding genius of their leader?

From the Second form room came a continuous babble of sound as Mr. Twigg was waging his daily battle to maintain some degree of order among the young heroes of that form.

At the far end of the spectrum, Trotter the page according to his usual custom,

has retired to the little room assigned to him, and for a brief hour escaped from the far-seeing and vigilant eye of Mrs. Keble into the dark and thrilling world of Sexton Blake, his all time favourite detective, it being his chief ambition one day to emulate him. The dark and murky alleyways and courts of London's Chinatown exert a powerful fascination and influence over him. Through much reading and study of this dark and mysterious world, Trotter has become quite an expert upon all things 'Blakeian'. The high point of his dreams and aspirations is to be called in by Scotland Yard to assist in the unravelling of strange activities in the eastern reaches of London, the docklands where anything, almost, could happen.

In his Lodge following a lunch which included a glass or two of 'Amber Glory', Gosling is slumbering in an ancient basket-chair which creaks ominously at the smallest movement (this ancient piece of furniture having been acquired from a sixth form study following the occupant's departure to Oxbridge).

It is warm and his door is open. Quiet familiar sound floated in as did the odd insect. A Bumble bee was, with much interest and deep humming, examining the dregs in the now empty glass, unwashed as yet, at Gosling's elbow. On the mantle his clock is ticking away the slow hours of early afternoon. It is at this time of the day that Greyfriars most nearly assumes the monastic aura which for centuries it has enjoyed.

Soon, all too soon it would awaken. Already anxious eyes were watching the slow moving hands of the clocks in the form rooms. Soon sound and chaos would erupt, the clatter of hurrying feet, shouting and laughter, and pent-up emotions, unused to lengthy concentration, would be released in studies and corridors. Fellows would be rushing up and down the broad stairways, familiar voices would be heard demanding attention from Billy Bunter's squeak of, 'I say, you fellows.....' to the loud tones emanating from the fifth form landing to appraise all and sundry that Horace Cocker was abroad, demanding to be heard.

Booming as of distant thunder would be heard from the direction of Masters common room, accompanied by mild tones and a barely heard twittering, obviously from Mr. Twigg. Impatient enquiries are being made as to the whereabouts of the current copy of the 'Times'. The school, boys, masters and staff are in the process of coming to life once more, all awaiting the call to tea.

This is an anxious time for the Owl of the remove. Tea is in the offing – but with whom? It was his habit at this crucial hour to station himself in the vicinity of the tuckshop and assess (unbeknown by the owners) the relative size of the various packages being borne away to the different studies. Upon the result of this important survey depended which victim or victims would be approached and subjected to the Bunter 'charm'.

One had to be extremely careful at this critical stage not to be observed. Billy Bunter was steeped in experience at this brand of surveillance. His large spectacles missed very little. It has been alleged that he was able to detect from the shape and size of a package just what it was likely to contain. A fellow had to exercise much care, because fellows tended to become rather vocal and threatening when approached

upon this delicate matter. During his long and fatuous career as a tea-seeker he had met with many and various repulses, not a few of a very physical nature. More often than otherwise, frugality was the prevailing situation in his own study which he shared with Peter Todd and Tom Dutton. Sardines and Marge were the usual items at teatime. This, for the fastidious Owl with his aristocratic tastes, was simply not good enough!

On not a few occasions in his long career as a marauder, Bunter has been caught in *flagrante delicto* in other fellows' studies, for which the penalty had been paid swiftly and painfully through the medium of boots, cushions, heavy textbooks and canes, official and otherwise, in fact any portable article immediately available to the outraged owner of the study. Yet, despite such physical action, the fact of *Meum et Tuum* seemed never to penetrate his fat head. The immediate effects of retribution soon eased a little, and it was the old and fatuous Owl once more – and 'Business as Usual'.

So does the school awaken once more to the tea time hour. From quiet form – rooms come the joyous sounds of release. Activity and raised voices are heard. Silence is shattered by the clatter and rush of feet. The quiet time is over for another day. Mr. Mimble, with a sigh, replaces his tools in the garden-shed and prepares to leave the tranquil and flowery retreat of the Head's garden to prepare himself for sterner and more hectic duties in the tuckshop. Gosling grunts and bestirs himself, throwing aside the copy of the *Friardale Gazette* with which he was wont to cover his ancient head as a protection from the stray exploratory insect. Trotter, the page, with much reluctance, puts aside the copy of Sexton Blake with a pronounced sigh, very akin to that of Mr. Mimble, just at that thrilling point when the great man is about to unmask the villain. Stern duty and the world of harsh reality beckoned. Again Trotter sighed and prepared to leave his little sanctum, his retreat from the busy world of fetching and carrying.

Once more the playing fields are dotted with white-clad figure. The quadrangle presents an animated scene, fellows strolling, others engaged in more active pursuits. Mr. Quelch is viewing the scene from his study window, his habitually acid features appearing less formidable in the late afternoon sunshine. His thoughts dwell upon how fortunate he was that his life had been cast in such pleasant surroundings, together with such stalwart and loyal colleagues, even though there did occur, from time to time, such pinpricks and disagreements as will inevitably arise between elderly gentlemen in the confined environment of a public school

His eye alighted upon the plump figure of Mr. Prout proceeding sedately along Masters walk with Mr. Hacker, their gowns billowing behind them as they paced. He caught the sound of a distant boom, a familiar sound, that of the Fifth form master expounding, no doubt, on some obscure theory which, quite possibly Mr. Hacker was prepared to riddle with holes, so soon as he could break in upon the booming.

The Remove master was acutely aware of the timeless atmosphere of the scene before him. He was aware of the all-pervading feeling of permanence of an enclosed world of which he was an integral part. Great events, many glorious and many tragic,

had evolved – were evolving in that other world beyond the gates of Greyfriars. In the general scheme of unfolding events these have meant very little to the school.

As he stood at his window ruminating, his normally acid features mellowed to a degree not often seen by his colleagues or the boys, as he watched the animated scene before him. In that moment he experienced the feeling that everything, quite naturally, was falling into its pre-ordained place. Life was good, it would be good tomorrow and the day after – on and on, each with its quiet time into the unforeseeable future. The ancient heart of Greyfriars would continue to beat strongly, accelerating once more into its normal rhythm. Familiar voices would be heard. The fatuous squeak of Billy Bunter, 'I say, you fellows...' The shouts, the roars and the laughter, together with a diversity of other well-recognised sounds. Greyfriars moves forward – all is well.

* *

O.B.B. Collector Dan O'Herlihy dies At 85

Dan O'Herlihy - almost certainly the only Hollywood movie star to boast complete bound volume sets of *The Magnet* and *The Gem* on his library shelves - has died at his home in Malibu, California at the age of 85.

I remember the late Bill Lofts telling me that O'Herlihy was a keen collector of many of the old boys' papers and magazines, both British and American, over many years, and that he was especially fond of the old Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories. It was, in fact, Lofts who helped the actor build up his collection with Bill placing ads. in the *C.D.* asking for the last few elusive numbers that O'Herlihy was seeking to complete his sets.

Dan O'Herlihy was born in Ireland and, after appearing in a few British films in the 1940s (including the classic *Odd Man Out*, starring James Mason) he went to the States and joined Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre Company. He made his first big impact in the title-role of Luis Bunel's film *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1954), for which he received a 'Best Actor' Oscar Nomination. He gave a remarkable performance, which I well recall, and it is a film that seems to be unjustly overlooked these days.

He co-starred in many films over the years and never gave a bad performance. His early blond good looks later turned to distinguished grey, then white haired appearances, but he never lost his rich, deep Irish brogue (unless his role demanded it). His later pictures included *Robocop* and John Huston's *The Dead* and he also turned up in guest appearances in such TV shows as *Murder, She Wrote* and *Twin Peaks*.

Bill Lofts once told me that O'Herlihy liked the old *Magnet* and *Gem* yarns because of a 'cosy mixture of nostalgia, escapism and fun.

Brian Doyle

* *

THANK YOU TOM, THANK YOU HARRY

by Arthur F.G. Edwards

I am a life-long non-smoker, not once have I had a single puff on a cigarette, a cigar, a pipe, or any other form of smoking. With considerable justification I can attribute my long life at least partly to the Terrible Three, led by Tom Merry, and the Famous Five led by Harry Wharton. In the last few weeks of 1928 I persuaded my Father to substitute the *Gem* for the *Adventure*, and a week or two later, the *Magnet* for the *Rover*. This before I was nine, and well before boys of my age were tempted to smoke, even if they could afford to, and very few could.

From that early age I accepted Tom and Harry's philosophy that smoking by boys was wrong, it affected your wind and made you less fit to play football.

Others in my immediate circle of friends left school at fourteen and went to work, so had some pocket money from their earnings. I stayed at grammar school until the July after I was sixteen and did not start earning until early August. I then earned slightly more than others in my age group, but had to work longer hours than some, in an environment in which smoking was forbidden. I could have ignored the rule, as did other work-mates of my age, but by then I had no desire to smoke, and other things to spend my money on.

There was temptation, the coach/manager of my youth football and cricket teams regularly handed round cigarettes which were readily accepted and enhanced his popularity. To be fair, that I was a non smoker, the only one in the team, was accepted without comment, no pressure was applied.

My Father, Uncles and male family friends all smoked. Although Dad generally made his own, he did buy enough packets for me to build up a good collection of cigarette cards. Then in the 1930s, Wills put cards in their Gold Flake packets in the form of playing cards. Complete 'packs' could be exchanged for gifts. Dad must have smoked an awful lot because I still have a card table, one or two packs of cards, a book covering all popular card games and a bezique set he collected.

However, I would not have been accepted by either Tom or Harry into their circle, as from an early age I enjoyed card playing. I went to whist drives by the time I was ten, and, when I had money, gambled on cards, but only because I won more than I lost.

* *

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A CORNSTALK FROM OZ

by Ray Hopkins

Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins and their Co's, waiting on the platform at Rylcombe Station for the train bringing a new Australian junior to St. Jim's, are unaware that he has already arrived and is standing with his back to them working the chocolate machine. He is amused by their comments on himself and unrecognised by them because he is dressed in regulation Etons and they are expecting a youth dressed in free-and-easy fashion. A sombrero perhaps, with big boots and a wide belt, suggests Manners. The others aren't sure about the sombrero.

Eyebrows shoot skywards and mouths drop open as they watch a quaint pair emerge from the station parcels office. A boy in Etons with a kangaroo's arm through his own, the animal obliging him by carrying his bag. Not a scene observed at a country railway station every day. The juniors quickly realise they are having their legs pulled and recognise the boy being the one on the platform when they arrived.

Harry Noble, the new junior, has a breezy way of addressing them as 'kids' and tells them he has been treated well "since I landed in the old country". He refers to England as a "nice little place", and agrees enthusiastically when Lowther somewhat sarcastically suggests that backyards in Melbourne would be as big as England. The tame kangaroo, bound for a private zoo, is returned to its keeper in the parcels office.

Noble has a sturdy build and a broad chest for his fifteen years which gives him a cramped look inside his slightly tight Etons. He has enjoyed meeting the three Co's and they were all in friendly converse by the time they reach the gates of St. Jim's. Noble discovers that not all the juniors have the same friendly attitude. Gore, the bully of the Shell, guesses the stranger is the new Australian junior, observes that he is shorter than himself and gives his brief cruel smile before homing in on his prey. "Fancy having a giddy bushranger (highwayman) at St. Jim's!" sneers Gore. "You fellows had better lock up your trunks." Noble calls him a rotten outsider, a cad and a worm and Gore surges forward, like a tank, guns blazing. But he is in for a shock and gets a bully's comeuppance. The new boys knocks Gore's clenched fists aside and the bully finds himself on his back and seeing "more stars than there are in heaven" (as MGM advertised in their early talkie days!).

The Cornstalk, just one of the names Noble is given, though welcomed as a friend in all the studies tenanted by the junior Co's, finds the welcoming expression turning into gritted teeth when Mr. Railton, because of a shortage of study space due to a rare influx of new boys (Noble being the third) assigns him first to Shell Study 10. Though only three in number, Tom Merry and his two chums invite Noble to leave, Lowther even attempting to throw him through the open door, only to find himself in the passage instead. Manners and Merry follow Monty in the throwing-out process but Kangaroo is still inside the study when Mr. Railton arrives to see what all the noise is about.

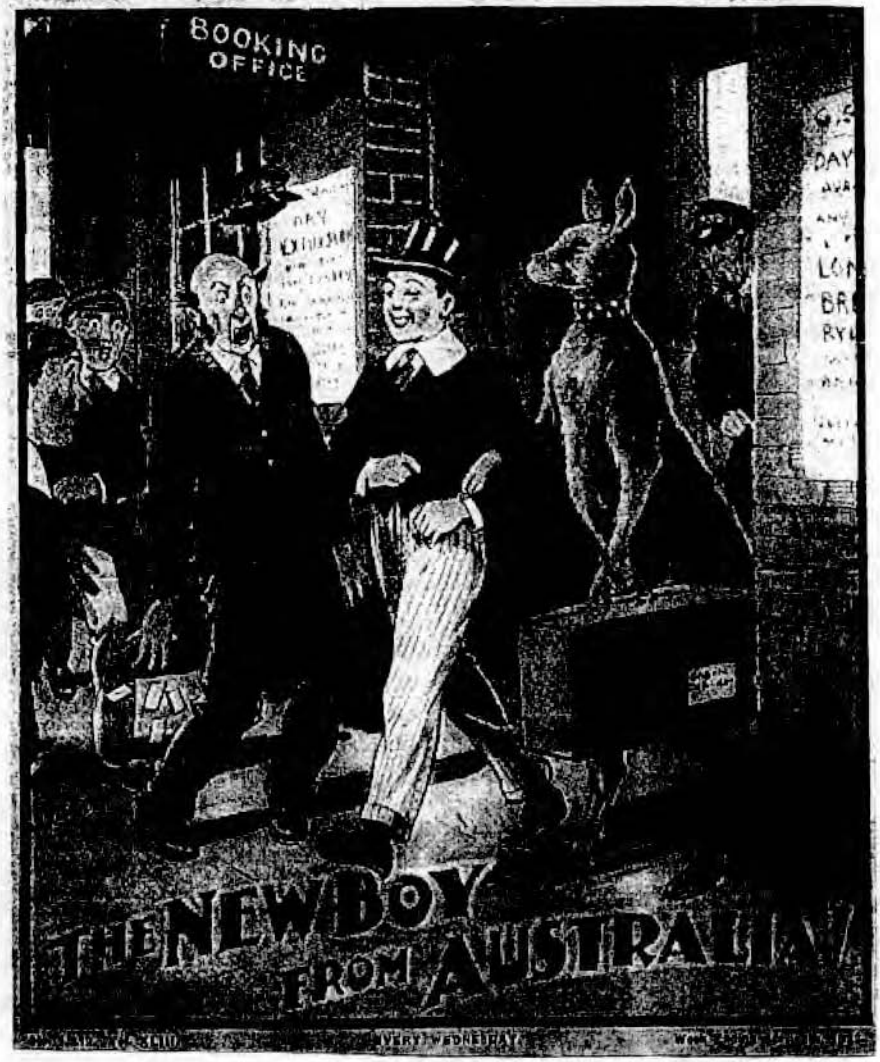
Study 6 in the Fourth already houses four juniors, but Mr. Railton presents them

"THE COMING OF 'KANGAROO'!" THIS WEEK'S RIPPING LONG COMPLETE YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S!

CONTINUOUS VARIETY! YOUR FAVOURITE STARS - TOM MERRY & Co INSIDE!

The GEM

2d



with a fifth.. Here, another insuperable problem raises itself. On no less than three previous occasions the immaculate one (Gussy - who else?) has had minor run-ins with Noble, not realising that he is the new boy from down under. Gussy had been unable to go to Rylcombe Station due to a disastrous collision with Taggles and a bucket of whitewash. When Blake and Co. indicate what they are going to do to the new assignee to Study 6, Gussy demurs. "I cannot agwee to anythin' that might be considered diswespectful to a wepwesentative of Bwitain beyond the beastlay seas, you know. I shall give him a wight hearty welcome - to dwaw closah the bonds of Empah." When his eye alights on Noble, D'Arcy gulps, forgives him on the spot for past disrespect and welcomes him as the fifth member of Study 6.

Mr. Railton has not known to which form to assign Noble because Dr. Holmes has been away from St. Jim's and only he knows whether the Cornstalk will eventually come to rest in the Fourth or the Shell. Age and size-wise he fits the pattern of the Shell rather than the Fourth, but his not knowing has been the reason for Mr. Railton's rather arbitrary shuttling of him back and forth. Also it gave Martin Clifford a chance to give his readers some fun-filled episodes.

The Head, upon his return gave, as it were, Kangaroo to the Shell, thus causing sighs of relief to be heaved by the four Fourth form inmates of Study 6. Dr. Holmes also decreed that, because of the increased number of new boys, a new study should be created at the end of the Shell passage out of a larger room which was empty except for boxes. When emptied and decorated, Noble thought he was in luck to have a study as large as Tom Merry's all to himself. But he wasn't allowed to be king of the castle for long.

Mr. Railton tells Noble he is to have three studymates: Dane, Glyn and Smithers. "Not if I can help it," Noble thinks and proceeds with a grin to produce a deterrent. An acetylene lamp "loaded with common carbide of calcium, not lit but with water added, would cause a nasty smell. It was like unto drains in the worst possible state of repair, only more so". This awful contraption he puts out of sight behind the valence at the bottom of the armchair. The new junior chuckles and awaits the arrival - and hurried departure, he hopes - of his new studymates.

Smithers is the first to appear. He wrinkles his nose as he encounters the smell of drains. Smithers opens a window and waves a scented handkerchief about, but the smell persists. After a few caustic remarks, received by Noble with faked astonishment, he returns to his old quarters, Mr. Railton having informed the three prospective candidates to the new study that they could stay where they were if they wished.

Noble is doing a congratulatory jig when the next junior arrives. This is Bernard Glyn, the clever boy inventor from Liverpool. Glyn also sniffs at the horrible smell, realises what is causing it, and divines why the Cornstalk has produced it. He roars with laughter and calls Kangaroo an "artful Dodger". He agrees that it would be nice to keep the number of occupants down to two and promises to keep mum when Clifton Dane presents himself. The latter is described as a "handsome, dark complexioned Canadian who is half Red Indian", (an interesting fact your reporter had never come across before in all his years at St. Jim's). Life in the wide and (wild?) outdoors has

given him a keen sense of smell. He, too, roars with laughter, makes a beeline for the acetylene lamps, turns it off and puts it outside on the window sill. Then the three regard one another, grin and decide they like what they see, and Kangaroo thinks he couldn't have done better had he chosen his new studymates himself. They make a pact to call themselves "The New Firm" and pledge to combat whenever possible the other two reigning Co's of the School House, Tom Merry's and Jack Blake's.

(The above events can be found in *Gem* 69 and 70, June 1909. They were reprinted in *Gem* 1312 and 1313, April 1933.)

* *

'NICE CUP OF TEA' - ON ENGLISHNESS. Tradition And Nostalgia

George Orwell

by Laurence Price

In his 1941 essay "England Your England", written in the aftermath of Dunkirk and which begins with this memorable sentence, 'As I write, highly civilised human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me...' George Orwell, in his own inimitable style pondered on what it was to be English in those dark days. One English characteristic he picked up on was 'the addiction to hobbies and spare-time occupations, the *privateness* of English life. We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossword-puzzle fans. All the culture that is most truly native centres around things which even when they are communal are not official - the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'.' Perhaps, just perhaps, if he had written this essay after 1946 he might have mentioned 'and Old Boys Book Clubs'.

Orwell is probably most well known to most OBBC members for another controversial essay, 'Boys' Weeklies' and its notorious criticism of the *Gem* and *Magnet* and other boys' weeklies.

Orwell is, and always was, a difficult writer to pigeonhole or to classify and was sometimes seemingly quite another man hiding behind this famous pseudonym. Extracts from 'his' entry in the Dictionary of National Biography summarise these paradoxes as well as any:

'Blair, Eric Arthur (1903-1950) - author, known under the pseudonym of George Orwell...(had a)...character that combined adventurousness with a love of peaceful country pursuits, so his mind was both libertarian and tradition-loving, but these divergent and sometimes confusing tendencies were fixed together by a passionate

generosity and love of justice which illuminates his best work with a flash of genius... His polemical writing was virile and fearlessly honest, although not without an occasional touch of extravagance and perversity...it is in his literary essays, on Dickens and Kipling for example that the more conservative and traditional aspects of his thought are seen at their best.'

Certain keywords in that entry surely sum up the paradox that was Eric Arthur Blair-cum-George Orwell, tradition-loving and conservative. Also extravagance and perversity. However hard Orwell tried to propagate his individual and dogged form of Socialism, he could not entirely disregard his alter-ego, Eric Blair, born in India in 1903 and educated at Eton. From 1922 to 1928, as Blair, he served in Burma in the Indian Imperial Police. For the next two years he worked in Paris and then came to England as a schoolteacher, later working in a book shop. In 1937 he went to Spain to fight for the Republicans and was wounded. Most or all of these experiences found their way into his writing, as George Orwell, as 'fact' in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1937) or in works of fiction such as *Burmese Days* (1934) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936).

During World War II he was a member of the Home Guard and worked for the Indian Service section of the BBC Overseas Service. From 1943 he worked for the *Tribune* and the *Observer*. For the latter he was a special correspondent in France and Germany at the close of the war. *Animal Farm* followed in August 1945, and while living on the remote island of Jura after the war he wrote *1984* which was published in 1949. He died in London on 21 January 1950, having recently married his second wife, Sonia Brownell, from his hospital bed where he lay terminally ill. His first wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, had died in 1945 and shortly before her death they had adopted a son, Richard, to whom he was a devoted father.

It was his younger formative years that he fought so hard to deny but eventually found nearly impossible to excise. The years in India, at Eton, in the Indian Imperial Police - Empire, public school ritual and 'tradition'.

In 1939, *Coming Up for Air* was published, Orwell's story of an H.G. Wells-like 'little man' and possibly the most enjoyable of all his novels. He wrote this most nostalgic of all his stories while convalescing in Morocco in 1938 following a bout of recurring TB. In this book Orwell most successfully explored the nature of nostalgia (with all its attendant dangers) - it would not be Orwell if the book does not end in disillusion, or, at the very least, coming to terms with reality. But the passages where the protagonist, George 'Fatty' Bowling, looks back, with some affection on his childhood (the turn of the last century) and England as it then was, or, perhaps more accurately , how he saw and remembered it and wished it to be, are deeply nostalgic.

'I'm back in Lower Binfield, and the year's 1900. Beside the horse-trough in the market-place the carrier's horse is having its nose-bag. At the sweet-shop on the corner Mother Wheeler is weighing out a Ha'porth of brandy balls. Lady Rampling's carriage is driving by, with the tiger sitting behind in his pipeclayed breeches with his arms folded—The recruiting-sergeant in his scarlet jacket, tight blue overalls and pillbox hat, is strutting up and down twisting his moustache—Vicky's at Windsor,

God's in heaven...

Is it gone for ever? I'm not certain. But I tell you it was a good world to live in. I belong to it. So do you.'

Memories of sweet-shops 'where you could buy things worth having for a farthing in those days...' Yard long Farthing Everlastings that couldn't be finished in half an hour, sugar mice and sugar pigs, eight for an old penny, liquorice pistols and a prize packet which contained several different types of sweets, a gold ring and a whistle, all for a penny and so on. A Penny Monster, a huge bottle, holding more than a quart of fizzy lemonade.

George watching his mother rolling pastry, her thick, pink, strong forearms mottled with flour. Enormous meals always ready on the tick - boiled beef and dumplings, roast beef and Yorkshire, boiled mutton and capers, pig's head, apple pie, spotted dog and jam roly-poly - with grace before and after.

And 'on Sunday afternoons, the only time when (father) took things easy, he'd settle down by the parlour fireplace to what he called a 'good read' at the Sunday paper. His favourite paper was the *People* - Mother preferred the *News of the World*, which she considered had more murders in it. I can see them now. A Sunday afternoon - summer, of course, always summer - a smell of roast pork and greens still floating in the air, and mother on one side of the fireplace, starting off to read the latest murder but gradually falling asleep with her mouth open, and Father on the other, in slippers and spectacles, working his way slowly through yards of smudgy print—and myself under the table with the *BOP*, making believe that the tablecloth is a tent.'

Secret fishing in forbidden or hidden ponds and lakes, one full of giant carp. 'Sometimes in the summer holidays I went—for a whole day, with my fishing-rod and a copy of *Chums* or *Union Jack* or something, and a hunk of bread and cheese which Mother had wrapped for me.'

Pure nostalgia - and there is plenty more of this, including a wonderful passage on the tedium, mystery and sheer bewilderment of church-going as a young child, fill the earlier pages of *Coming Up for Air*. The mood changes when George Bowling returns to Lower Binfield on a whim, now fat and forty-five only to find that the Lower Binfield of his childhood has gone forever. But those earlier passages are written with such a passion and intensity that one cannot help feeling that perhaps this really was the England Orwell cared for and missed too.

And to return to his essays. "England Your England" first. Orwell wrote 'When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air. Even in the first few minutes dozens of small things conspire to give you this feeling. The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener—It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar boxes. It has a flavour of its own. Moreover it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past—it is a land where the bus conductors are good-tempered and the policeman carry no revolvers—'

The essay carries much strident criticism of the then pervading status quo but

parts of the essay such as those just quoted seem steeped in nostalgia and longing and tradition for a now lost pastoral and gentler England. If only the England of today were even as Orwell described it in 1941!

And what of 'That Essay' - that supposed attack on 'Boys' Weeklies'? Where did George Orwell, or Eric Blair, really stand in this issue? In 2003, an excellent biography on Orwell by Gordon Bowker was published. On pages 259-60, Bowker has this to say about the 'Boys' Weeklies' saga, in a biography which successfully explores the often paradoxical and contradictory nature of Orwell.

'His essay on 'Boys' Weeklies' is also born of affection. Here he is back in the Mr Pollyish world of small newsagents, with their newspapers, sweets, cigarettes and 'vilely printed twopenny papers'. Among the boys' comics on sale, he focused mainly on his old favourites, the *Gem* and the *Magnet*...the politics, observed Orwell were pre-1914 Conservative—the papers were 'cheerfully patriotic'... the clock had stopped in 1910 (as perhaps it had for Orwell's George Bowling). Britannia rules the waves, and no-one has heard of slumps, booms, unemployment, dictatorships, purges or concentration camps. He thought... that youngsters were being pumped full of out-dated Conservative ideals...

Orwell was clearly torn when it came to childhood friends like the *Gem* and the *Magnet*. They conveyed a reactionary philosophy which he considered harmful to children, yet through them he could also relive his idyllic childhood years'.

Bowker recounts a story that at the beginning of 1941, on a country walk, Orwell ran down a railway cutting, placed a penny on the line, and, after a train had passed over it, retrieved the flattened penny, beaming with delight. This was the Blair side of his personality who still enjoyed the company of Bob Cherry and the Famous Five.

I think Orwell grossly overestimated the so-called political impact of Greyfriars *et al*; his personal attitude towards them might itself be termed reactionary. A reaction perhaps to the guilty pleasure that Eric Blair might still have gained from them? The work of Frank Richards is, in my view, today eminently more readable than some of the dated thrill-a-minute hack work he quoted from the *Wizard*, and his main criticisms of the boys' weeklies school stories are what makes them remain so enjoyable and of so much interest to this day; and still attract the remarkable loyalty typical of the quoted letter from 'a lady from Salisbury' who had taken the *Magnet* from the start and still followed the adventures of Harry Wharton and Co. with rapt interest, as did her two daughters.

I like and admire much of the writing of the author who called himself George Orwell as I also like the writing of the author who wrote under many pseudonyms but most famously as Frank Richards; and I think the true Orwell was as nostalgic and fond of England as the rest of us. Perhaps one day there may be a literary society formed to study the life and work of George Orwell and may it thrive as well as the Old Boys' Book Club as it approaches its sixtieth anniversary!

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LET'S READ THAT AGAIN

by Brian Sayer

Mystery Man at St Jim's and Mr "X" Unmasked!
Gem Library 1,438-9, September 7/14, 1935

This pair of stories appeared when the reprints of earlier stories in the history of The Gem were in full flow. My invaluable Adley and Lofts *Gem Index* tells me that the tales first appeared in 1912, numbered 247-8, when their titles were *Baffled!* and *Caught Red-handed!*

Because of the reprints policy, the boys of St Jim's failed to grow up like the heroes of Greyfriars.

Charles Hamilton's writing skills had improved over the years. Greyfriars tales in *The Magnet* running at the same time had more bite and the humour was usually cleverer and honed more sharply than the repeated tales of St Jim's.

Over at The Gem there was a bygone innocence but the stories seemed too often to rely on stretched-out japes and tedious Gussy love stories. And surely the lads of the Thirties became bored by stories about the incredible abilities of St Jim's boys to masquerade as girls!

Therefore, a double edition mystery crime series must have been welcome after tales of juniors in dresses and Bernard Glyn's improbable inventions.

The mini-series opens with slimy School House fourth-former Percy Mellish announcing, rather boldly, that he will join a party visiting Glyn's nearby home because his cousin is staying with the schoolboy inventor's millionaire father.

The cousin is a captain in the Army and completely unlike black sheep Mellish in that he is handsome, sporting and popular with everyone he meets.

Tom Merry & Co have not been long at Glyn House when a robbery is discovered. A solid gold statuette of a Chinese mandarin has disappeared.

In its place is a card with an "X" inscribed in red ink. Mr Glyn tells his son that a clever thief has been carrying out robberies in wealthy homes, each time leaving behind a similar card.

Amazingly, the thief announces the time and date when he will commit a crime.

While discussing the theft, the boys mention that their headmaster is the proud possessor of a painting by Rembrandt.

Dr Holmes enjoys gazing at the small painting that hangs on a wall of his study.

Captain Mellish, who says he is "a bit of a connoisseur in pictures", tells the boys that their headmaster should guard his treasure because "X" will be likely know about it.

Captain Mellish visits St Jim's to see his cousin and agrees to play for the junior team against the Fifth.

(This was a bit of weird plotting. Furthermore, unless the Captain, was about 30, and unusually short he must have looked incongruous in a side of 14 and 15-year-olds.)

Unmasked! The cover of the second in the 1935 Mr X double series in The Gem

While at the school he visits the head to warn him to look after his valuable painting.

Captain Mellish tells Dr Holmes and Housemaster Mr Railton that he had been staying at the home of Lord Westwood when "X" sent a telegram announcing that he would steal valuable bonds.

The captain and others "sat up all night with pokers and things" round the safe where the bonds were kept - but they were still stolen.

As the soldier predicted, Dr Holmes received a phone call from a man with a metallic voice announcing a date when he would steal the Rembrandt.

The story spreads and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wants to "sit up" to protect the painting. Captain Mellish plays for Tom Merry's side against the Fifth. No prizes for guessing which team wins.

Readers are told that "all the Fifth were invited to tea in Tom Merry's study and a great many others fellows as well."

Martin Clifford admits there was not room for half of them and that they flowed into the passage.

Even so, just like the Tardis in Dr Who, junior studies seem amazingly spacious when readers are told the names of boys who cram into them for spreads. The funds to feed healthy young appetites must have been lavish too.

"Look!" gasped the Head huskily, pointing. Every eye turned upon the picture. There was a cry of amazement. The frame was empty! A knife had slashed round the picture, and the canvas had been separated from the frame. X, the mystery cracksman, had kept his word!

The guest of honour, Captain Mellish, stays to stand guard over the Rembrandt along with the Head, Mr Railton, school captain Kildare and Inspector Skeat. Police are on watch outside the college. The boys are in bed but keen to know what is happening. The clock ticks on and tensions rise.

Captain Mellish hears a sound outside the Head's study. He springs into the passage, his revolver ready. At the stroke of midnight there is gunshot. The passage light goes out. Another shot is heard and then the sound of window glass shattering.

A man glimpsed by the captain has jumped into the quad and escaped. There is a smear of blood on the young army man's cheek - "the merest scratch" says the captain bravely.

The blaze of excitement is soon over - but the head's Rembrandt has vanished, cut from its frame.

In the next episode, "X" announces a second strike at Glyn House. However, Ferrers Locke, the great detective, has been called in.

When Mr Locke needs a little assistance he calls on the services of "detective" Gussy.

A young reader of these Gems in the Thirties would have been dimmer than a Toc H lamp not to have soon realised the identity of the elusive "X".

However, because Charles Hamilton's characters were regular players he had little scope for Agatha Christie style puzzles.

Nevertheless, this is a well-constructed double-story, which builds carefully and expertly to the climatic unmasking of the audacious crook. It's certainly worth reading again.

Editor's Note: It is interesting that the *Gem* stories of the Head's Rembrandt has inspired both Mr. Sayer's article and Bob Whiter's story, The Locum Tenens (elsewhere in this issue).

* *

Vitae Lampada

by Andrew Pitt

There are a variety of interests in the OBBC. There are members who like detective stories and some seem to like almost any kind of detective story. I like some but not others. But then I like almost any kind of school story. It is rightly said that school stories did not actually begin with Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, but that was the book that raised the genre in the national consciousness. Those books of all kinds on my shelves which could be called 'Old Boys' Books' generally have something in common: most of them are second-hand; they belonged to boys long ago and they have survived because those boys thought something of them, and I think something of them too. This connection with our past is somehow important to me. When I was aged 5 in 1960 and therefore first really conscious of the world, the last glimpses of an older world were visible: although we lived in a very industrial area, the milk was still delivered by horse and cart, and there were 240d in £ (note the 'd' after the 240), and even in the 1960s there were plenty of Victorian pennies in circulation, going right back to the 1860s. My grandmother was a Victorian: she was aged 14 in 1900, and it might have been the 1960s but her attitudes and her house reflected an earlier time. They say 'the past is a foreign country', but it has never been so for me, and nor are its books. I live in the present age, but to me, past and present are not strangers. The past is 'all our yesterdays' (to borrow another phrase), yours and mine, part of our culture, a common understanding between us, through many generations; and we hand on that culture- or at least the things we like about it- our enthusiasms, as best as we are able, and 'like runners pass on the torch of life'.

The recent TV production *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was a travesty but it is standard treatment by scriptwriters that any book be made 'relevant' to today, that is to their agenda; I suppose it's a bit like passing a volume of my beloved *Magnets* to Ofsted and asking for an opinion of Greyfriars. But these rewriters of *Tom Brown* even managed to bring an abortion into the story, the motive for which can only be contrived sensationalism. This practice of altering storylines is becoming worse and it offends me when a book I respect is treated with disrespect. Such care is taken with the authenticity of the sets and the clothes, yet the book itself can be disregarded. Unlike Charles Hamilton's Greyfriars, *Tom Brown* is about an actual school and to an extent about actual people. There is a good deal of fact in it, but even fiction should be true to its time. Mysteriously, the programme invented the death of George Arthur and portrayed at length a mawkish funeral. The survival and eventual flourishing of Arthur is a main theme of the book. I know books don't say things anymore as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* says; for instance near the end of the book, as sixth formers Tom Brown and Arthur are discussing cricket: Tom Brown says, 'It's more than a game, it's an institution.' To which Arthur replies, 'Yes, the birthright of British boys old and young, as habeas corpus and trial by jury are of British men.' Curiously, habeas corpus, which deals with the right not to be detained without trial, and trial by jury are

very important current political issues; it's interesting to note that a book as deep in the 19th Century as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* expresses ideas then taken for granted. All I ask is to let the past speak to us with its own voice.

I can read any school story from *Tom Brown* to Buckeridge and there are a hundred in between. Where does Charles Hamilton fit in? I tend to divide my interest into (1) 'Charles Hamilton' and (2) 'others'. Doing that is not to create a Hamiltonian first division and an 'others' second division. Hamilton is my favourite school storywriter but his stories are unlike any others: he created his own universe which you enter when you start reading his stories. His stories are immensely readable; when we read an extract at the OBBC, we need hardly any explanation of the plot, yet this could be a small part of the seventh *Magnet* in an eight-week series. Someone said that Hamilton wasn't just the best in his field; he was the field. I don't go as far as that. *Tom Brown* and *Stalky* are great achievements, but of a different kind.

In any enthusiasm there are always degrees of enthusiast. There are many who as boys read the *Magnet*, or in the 1950s and early 1960s the yellow hardbacks, who really enjoyed those stories. They would not however think of reading Hamilton's works now. They have either lost their enthusiasm or it has become at best merely a nostalgic glow of their childhood in the memory. We are often accused of nostalgia, with the implication that these books are not worthy of adult attention; but most books adults read have no greater intellectual level than Hamilton's works. Let me however disappoint some of you now. I have a number of *Dandy* and *Beano Annuals* from my childhood: I cannot now see what I saw in them. It's only nostalgia that I keep them; but that's not the reason for my Hamilton collection, almost all of which I acquired as an adult. True believers in the genius of Hamilton are in fact a relatively small band, and self-electing. It is something which is very personal. Some books speak to me and others don't. It must have been very gratifying for some father in the 1920s or 1930s when his son brought home a copy of the *Magnet* or *Gem* and he himself had been a reader of those papers years before. 'The good old *Magnet*' the father would say, 'still going strong'. How reassuring it was that some things stay the same no matter what. 'Mind if I have read of it, son? After you of course!' says some rather pleased father. But I must dispel this cosy world. Many fathers must also have introduced the Magnet or Gem to their sons and been disappointed at the reaction. How many fathers have, alas, found that their sons don't have the same enthusiasms as they do- there are exceptions- and that nothing can get them interested. But we must try.

It is not only Thomas Hughes who has suffered from substitute authors- TV scriptwriters or otherwise. The majority of Hamiltonians generally do not like substitute stories. Why do we feel so strongly? Many Hamiltonians have an almost religious-like fervour about their enthusiasm. Very strict Hamiltonians might even take the view that it is a contradiction to call yourself a Hamiltonian and to like the substitute stories. We can afford to be generous at this distance: we are grateful to the substitute writers for keeping the show on the road, if genuine Hamilton copy was not available-I think we can go that far- in the sense the *Magnet* was a commercial

enterprise which had to appear every week and it was necessary that it be sustained, in order that the genuine works, when available, could appear.

It has been pointed out that Charles Hamilton produced many potboilers and surely, some people say, a few of the substitute stories are therefore passable. In the end it is not necessarily about exactly how close the substitute came to a genuine tale. It is something more. It is that Greyfriars or St Jim's tales written by others are not the true history of those schools. I have the same feeling when I read Sherlock Holmes pastiches. Revelation of Greyfriars only occurred to one man, its creator, Charles Hamilton. He said that Greyfriars seemed real to him; and when he wrote about it, the stories simply flowed, and somehow that witness-like revelation transmitted itself into the story and to the reader. He created that universe and it was very personal to him. That personal connection comes through to the reader. Eric Fayne said that he could tell at a young age which was genuine and which substitute, and by and large when the records were checked, he was right, despite some editorial interference after the stories left Hamilton's typewriter. The fact that Eric had this ability is shown by his badgering of the Amalgamated Press to reprint genuine stories in the *Gem* rather than continue substitutes. Hamilton's flow was prolific. Even a writer who spends months/years reworking his writing to get to the finished work still needs a flow of ideas and spontaneity of promising but raw material. When he has his ideas, he can write, but when he doesn't, he can't write. That never happened to Charles Hamilton. He was special. Could you imagine Hamilton ringing up the editor of the *Magnet* and saying, 'Sorry old chap, can't produce anything this week: I've got writer's block'.

I may not have Eric's remarkable understanding of Hamilton's work and you may say that if no one told me, I wouldn't know in many cases that I wasn't reading genuine Hamilton, but I say that I would then think Hamilton a lesser writer. No one could satisfactorily replicate Hamilton's work, which is why he kept his place in the *Magnet* and *Gem*. The substitutes had a harder task than they realised because they would always be compared with Hamilton at his best. One substitute writer is particularly interesting: George Samways; and at a recent OBBC meeting an old letter from Samways was read out in which he said how upset he was that the efforts of the substitute writers were scorned by 'critics'. The greatest of all the critics was Charles Hamilton himself and I suspect that it was that which hurt Samways the most. H W Twyman, another staff man at the Amalgamated Press, recalled his own and George Samways's days together as boys at the same school. He remembered Samways as a boy sitting perched on a window-sill reading aloud every day one of the old Red *Magnets* to a group of twenty schoolmates all listening attentively. He says that Samways was a thoroughgoing fan of Frank Richards. But he says 'At our school the *Magnet* was an evil thing and forbidden....Had [a] master chanced to catch Samways red-handed, not only with the evil contraband in his possession but actually reading it aloud to an unsullied audience, the devotee of Harry Wharton and Co. would have been awarded a public, cold-blooded punishment of a severity quite unthinkable in these more tender times.' So we can say of Samways that he was a Hamiltonian.

Other substitute writers might have seen their writing as just a job of work, but for Samways it was surely something for which he had a strong enthusiasm. Nevertheless he wrote the story *The Sunday Crusaders*. It was *Magnet* no. 400. In the story Dr Locke has decreed that the boys will attend 3 services in Chapel every Sunday. Skinner objects, but other boys are more compliant. Frank Nugent observes that it isn't as though there is anything else to do like footer. Skinner then says that he thinks footer should be allowed on Sundays. This is so outrageous that many boys turn against him. The Remove divides on the argument. Mark Linley joins the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, SPCK - a real organisation, because he is much impressed with its missionary work, among the mill hands in Lancashire. And Skinner goes on to form the Pagans, and even Peter Todd joins. It is 1915 and Peter Todd says, 'Christianity has proved a failure. Look at this war. You're not going to tell me that such awful carnage could obtain in a Christian world.' 'Then you're an Atheist?' asks Harry Wharton, aghast. Toddy says that he is. Later Skinner tries to get Vernon-Smith involved but Smithy says 'I know I used to be a downright rotter and a rank outsider; but I've had the sense to realise my folly and to go straight'. Nevertheless the Pagans seek to gang up on Smithy, but Smithy defeats them by simply saying, 'I'll sneak!' You can see how in character this story is! It's not just the theme of the story we can object to. The story has a complicated ending in which Skinner has an accident doing a brave thing- again you can see how in character this is. As a result we are told that Harold Skinner hangs between life and death in the school sanatorium, but is sufficiently conscious to repent to the Head. We are told that it seems impossible the boy would live and the Head cannot decide whether to contact Skinner's parents. He decides not to.

Dr Locke then delivers an impressive sermon, taking for his text (I quote) 'that grand passage from the 142nd Psalm "I cried unto thee 0 Lord." I said, "Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry, for I am brought very low"'. And we are told that when the sermon was over, few eyes were dry. I should think so too. Charles Hamilton himself said, 'Religion in a work of fiction is out of place. Either it looks like humbug, or it makes the rest of the story seem silly. Especially in boys' stories it should be avoided.' Hamilton is speaking for himself and for his time. And in respect of *The Sunday Crusaders*, he is right. It is entertaining but for the wrong reasons. To be fair to Samways, Hamilton himself wrote a story in the *Gem* about a deeply moving sermon from the Head in 1910, with religious accompaniments in the rest of the story, about Lumley-Lumley, who lies dying in the school sanatorium. We are told that he does die. But the next week he is discovered to be only in a trance. Surely a mistake on Hamilton's part; and when Bulstrode's brother died in the *Magnet* next year Hamilton didn't ladle out the religion- there's one reference to the Angel of Death and that's it. Hamilton did sometimes refer to Prayers in the morning but before or after the event. Chapel is rarely mentioned in genuine Hamilton stories. Religion is a theme that cannot be used at all satisfactorily. It is a very personal matter, even if that wasn't so for the Victorians. Social convention at the time Hamilton was writing did restrict Sunday activities. If the type of story he

wanted to write couldn't be written using Sundays, Hamilton wasn't going to write one. *Tom Brown* was at a different time, and Hamilton's stories were of a different kind. So far as I can remember, Sundays at Greyfriars don't exist in the genuine stories. It is always dangerous to say this since I have not reread all genuine Hamilton *Magnets* in order to write this piece, but I can only recall one instance in a genuine tale which has something happening on a Sunday and that is a famous one in 1924, where Bunter in an interview with the Head says that he would rather be expelled and perhaps go to a better school than be flogged. There is no question however of that flogging actually taking place on a Sunday; he must be patient and wait for Monday. The reason for the interview occurring on Sunday is to serve the plot. The long drawn out prospect of the flogging becomes too much for Bunter and he goes into hiding.

It may be of course that it was the effect of Dr Locke's sermons that influenced the Bounder to reform a little. But I doubt it. I suspect that one of my favourite characters would have had quite cynical views on religion; after all, he had cynical views on most subjects. But again social convention means to Hamilton that Smithy cannot be allowed to express those views, and if not, then the subject is better avoided since it would be out of character for him to say anything else. Not least, some father in the 1930s says to his son, 'Put that *Magnet* down, lad, you'll be late for Sunday School'. And his son in reply says, 'I don't want to go anymore, dad; religion's all rot'. I can't see the *Magnet* having a future if Smithy is permitted to say that. And then what would happen in Chapel? Could it be allowed that Skinner puts a drawing pin under Bunter as he sits down to listen to Dr Locke's sermon? I don't think so. So if it can't be used in the plot, there is no point in portraying it. There can be no horseplay on Sundays. How many times does Gussy come out of the House wearing his immaculate topper and something happens to that topper? Sometimes it takes the plot forward, often it doesn't, but I never tire of reading such scenes. But it can't happen on a Sunday.

I have asserted that it is not nostalgia that we like these stories as adults. But there are differences in reading the stories as an adult and as a child. In the 1930s the Magnet suggested that its readership considered the most popular character to be Bob Cherry. It may be an editorial invention, but I would quite understand why he was the most popular. Bob has a very sunny disposition, and is liked by everyone. Why then is he not the Remove's choice as Captain of the Form? The answer is because the Remove doesn't choose its own captain; Charles Hamilton does. In the 1950s the CD asked almost the same question of *CD* readers. Their favourite of all Hamilton's characters, including Tom Merry, was Harry Wharton. Harry as we know is not perfect. I love it when Skinner, who can be sharp at times, says 'His Highness has got his back up'. So what is it about Harry Wharton that makes him captain? It is not clear whether Quelch's head boy and the form captain can be separate. Hamilton is a little free on this subject depending on the story he is writing. There are also stories where footer and cricket captains are separately elected, but for the most part the Captain of the Form, Wharton, Temple, Hobson, etc leads the sports teams. So

why is Harry Wharton captain? Take cricket, and cricket, I remind you, is more than a game. Both Harry and Bob have great natural ability at cricket. But Harry is the better cricketer. Why? Because he thinks about the game. Thinking is not Bob's long suit. Boys may choose Bob as their favourite, but people of experience will choose Harry.

And what am I doing thinking in this detail about some old stories that most people have forgotten? Such is the power of this fictional creation that it provokes me to think about them. This age has many good things: the ages we look back on in these books don't have email and central heating. But it's an unromantic age. A year or so ago *Lloyds List*, the shipping journal, announced that any ship would no longer be referred to as 'she' as had been the case for over 250 years, but in future would be an 'it'. So much for the Romance of the Sea. George Eliot began her book *Felix Holt* with these words, set at the same time as *Tom Brown:*

> *FIVE-AND-THIRTY years ago the glory had not yet departed from the old coach-roads; the great roadside inns were still brilliant with well-polished tankards, the smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of.....ostlers; the mail still announced itself by the merry notes of the horn; the hedge-cutter or the rick-thatcher might still know the exact hour by the unfailing yet otherwise meteoric apparition of the .....Tally-ho or the .....Independent; in those days there were pocket boroughs, a Birmingham unrepresented in Parliament.... unrepealed corn laws, three-and-sixpenny letters, a brawny and many-breeding pauperism, and other departed evils; but there were some pleasant things too, which have also departed. ..... you have not the best of it in all things. The elderly man has his enviable memories, and not the least of them is the memory of a long journey in mid-spring or autumn on the outside of a stage-coach. Posterity may be shot, like a bullet through a tube, by atmospheric pressure from Winchester to Newcastle: that is a fine result to have among our hopes; but the slow old-fashioned way of getting from one end of our country to the other is the better thing to have in the memory.*

A romantic picture; and where there are stage-coaches, there are highwaymen. Yes, in our world Dick Turpin and Black Bess still gallop the Great North Road, and Robin Hood still fights for freedom against tyranny, and 'Yaroooooh!' still echoes down the Remove passage.

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Bookshelf

***No Motive for Murder* by Captain W.E. Johns. Published by Norman Wright, 2004. Review by Jennifer Schofield.**

No motive - or plenty of motives? Captain W.E. Johns begins his murder story in the style of an elegant "whodunnit", with a plethora of suspects who may or may not have a compelling reason to murder Peter Est in Paris in the Fifties. As Norman Wright points out, this book is very different in style from the rip-roaring, rather jolly, full-blooded carnage of *The Unknown Quantity*, Johns's previous thriller published in 1940. We are in the post-war world of a more reflective type of tale, and the exciting and tantalizing twists and turns, the deceptive clues, and the well-drawn and intriguing characters resemble Francis Durbridge at his wily best.

A letter from the grave, written by his brother Peter just before he was killed, takes Tony West to Paris to investigate and avenge (where have we met this opening before?) and for a few chapters the reader is happily entertained by the young man's impressions of the people who knew Peter, including the charming, young, innocent art student, Colette. Tony's dawning love for her is delightfully portrayed; thus might Biggles have behaved to Marie if he had met her when he was aged twenty-nine, and not nineteen. (Peter reminds me a bit of Steeley!).

But suddenly there is a change in seriousness and tempo; the mention of Nazi war crimes sends a shudder through the text, and soon the action switches from Paris to La Sologne, that desolate wilderness of forests, lakes and swamps, just south of Orleans, strange and savage, "a place of silence, with always the smell of decay and rotting leaves..." Tragedy has marked it too, for many graves indicate the last resting places of members of the French Resistance, murdered by the Germans in the war. Johns readers do not need to be reminded of his feeling for this region and how it has inspired some of his most effective writing.

The murder mystery is entertaining but at the same time it has depth and real feeling. It is a "must" for all Johns enthusiasts, and illustrates the professionalism and range of this amazing author.

(Reprinted from *Biggles Flies Again*, January 2005 issue, with permission from its Editor, Jennifer Schofield.)

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DEATH OF DICKY LUPINO, YOUNG STAR OF THE FIRST 'WILLIAM' FILM

Richard 'Dicky' Lupino, who played the title-role in the very first 'William' film, 'Just William' in 1939, has died at the age of 75.

The film was made in England, by Associated British Pictures, and also featured Fred Emney as Mr. Brown. William's 'outlaws' were played by Roddy McDowall (in only his second film out of many), Peter Miles and Norman Robinson. It was directed by Graham Cutts.

'Dicky' (he was later known as Richard) was born on October 29, 1929, in Hollywood, USA, and was a member of the famous English theatrical family, the Lupinos. He was the son of actor Wallance Lupino, his uncle was the actor and comedian Lupino Lane, who starred in the original London production of the celebrated musical show 'Me and My Girl' in 1937. A cousin was the Hollywood actress and director, Ida Lupino.

After his debut as 'William', he studied at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and appeared with repertory companies in Britain, before going to America. He later served in the medical corps with the U.S. Army in Korea and went on to appear in many American TV plays and series, including 'The Phil Silvers Show' (William Meets Bilko?!). He appeared in stage productions and in several Hollywood films. He also wrote TV scripts with Ida Lupino.

Lupino died on February 9, 2005, aged 75.

'Dicky' Lupino was generally considered to be somewhat too plump and 'Chunky' to be the perfect William, but he turned in a satisfactory performance, as far as I recall, though I saw the film just once when I was nine. Over the years, for some reason, I have always remembered 'Fred Emney's fruity voice admonishing his son, sitting at the breakfast table: 'Sit up, boy, you're not rowing a boat...!'

Brian Doyle

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Editor: Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 6PY
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