

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST
AUTUMN/WINTER SPECIAL 2005



GREYFRIARS

by Ted Baldock

Years come and go while decades fade,
The passing of slow time,
Through vicissitudes of light and shade
There come from every clime
Memories of the old school yet
Of river scenes long past
Of happy days we'll not forget
Should time run out at last.
The grey old quad, the ancient elms,
Beyond, the playing fields.
In these quiet scholastic realms
The best of boyhood yields.
The towpath leading through the green
Of bosky summer trees,
Where Greyfriars blazers may be seen,
And pennants in the breeze.
The glittering Sark, fresh, cool and deep,
Scene of many a battle,
Where rowing men their fitness keep,
Where they their rivals baffle.
Slowly revolve the passing years
Term merging into term,
Encompassing youth's hopes and fears,
While they true manhood learn.



**Charles Hamilton
(Frank Richards)**

(Drawn for the C.D. by Colin Wyatt)

BOB CHERRY



HARRY WHARTON



COLLECTORS' DIGEST

AUTUMN/WINTER SPECIAL 2005

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

The Editor's Chat



In the words of the old song *Here We Are Again Happy As Can Be, All good pals and Jolly Good Company!* It is good to be writing to you all again and to produce this *Collectors' Digest Special*. (Hopefully too a further special will appear in the early spring of next year.)

This present edition strikes a seasonable autumnal note, with thoughts of Christmas not too far away. As always, I would like to express gratitude to our wonderful contributors who, I'm sure you will agree have produced a very attractive and varied range of items. Thanks are also due to Mandy and all the staff at Quacks, our print-

ers, who are always prepared to take time and trouble for the C.C.

With the approach of the end of the year it is a time to think of absent friends. You will see that this number includes obituary tributes to two of the C.D.'s very long-standing supporters - Harry Blowers, the "grandfather" of the northern OBBC, and Dennis Bird, whose articles have delighted CD readers over many years.

Bob Whiter recently sent me the photograph, reproduced here, of *Magnet* illustrator C.H. Chapman with my predecessor Editor of the C.D., Eric Fayne, two more absent friends who have done so much for our hobby.

I send to you all my warmest greetings - well in advance - for Christmas and the New Year.

Happy Browsing,
MARY CADOGAN



HARRY BLOWERS

A Tribute from Father Geoffrey Good

DOYEN OF THE Northern Club, Harry Blowers, died in early February at the age of 92.

He had been a member of many societies, as well as the Northern OBBC, including the Rothwell Historic Society.

Reader and lover of *The Magnet*, he was a recognized authority on Greyfriars School (and also St. Jim's).

He had at all times played a full and constructive part in the life of his community. He had been the prime mover in many worthwhile local projects - and he had been responsible for the erection of a flagpole on the tower of Rothwell Parish Church.

Great cyclist in his early days - when on less crowded roads than we have today a great 'sport' (for youngsters) was to cycle and hold on to the back (or side) of a lorry. Boys will be boys, and Harry was no exception. He almost came a cropper, fortunately survived, having learnt his lesson!

One might have referred to him as 'grandfather' of the Northern Club - he was greatly loved by all.

He had two sons, Alan and Eric. His funeral was attended by members of the OBBC and representatives of the various societies of which he had been a member.

**Don't forget to order your copy of the
forthcoming Spring 2006 CD Special
(order form enclosed).**

**I would be glad to receive articles, small ads
and wants lists for this well in advance of March,
the planned publication date
(the cost for small ads is still 4p a word.)**

M.C.

FRIENDS

'Nos duo turba, sumus'
We two are a multitude.

Ovid.

*Old friends are best. King James used to call for
his old shoes; they were easiest for his feet.*

J. Selden. Table Talk.

Paul Pontifex Prout, master of the fifth form at Greyfriars, stirred uneasily in his sleep. Enconced in an armchair before a cheery fire in masters common room, his plump legs were outstretched towards the blaze. His chubby hands were folded over his ample waistcoat, his head rested comfortably on a cushion and his mouth, slightly open, emitted occasional gurgles and contented grunts. Prout was at peace with the world - more or less. Elderly gentlemen caught in the act of napping during the day seldom present a very edifying spectacle, so it was with Mr. Prout. That he was enjoying himself there can be little doubt judging by the beatific expression on his fat features.

Some faint shadow of discord impinging upon his slumbers caused him to stir restlessly, otherwise all was well. Had he not bested Mr. Hacker upon a



"Caffyn is an unscrupulous young rascal!" boomed Prout. "And I am bound to say—yarooop! Whooo-hooop! Groooooogh!" The Fifth Form master broke off, with a fearful spluttering yell, as a bag of tar hurtled through the window and burst over his features. "Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

nice political point only that morning during 'Break'? Hacker had been acidity personified while conceding most ungraciously to his superior knowledge on this occasion. Had he not put little Mr. Twigg firmly in his place with a few well chosen fruity and telling phrases during lunch? Small wonder that he was feeling at peace with the world - his own particular little world of school.

Masters common room was empty, Prout had the facilities - including the fire - all to himself. Outside it was wintery. A keen east wind was sweeping round the quadrangle and tossing the branches of the old elms wildly, causing a few elderly rooks, long residents there, to protest feebly. It buffeted and made the windows rattle rampaging straight in from the North Sea. It carried all manner of warnings to gentlemen of Mr. Prout's vintage, and unhappily brought twinges and dismal aches to certain limbs and joints, playing havoc with his well being - and his humour. Possibly herein lay the cause of his subconscious stirrings, a dull anticipation of things that might lay ahead in the near future.

Prout grunted, when he heard the door being quietly opened. He did not move or open his eyes. A semblance of sleep he hoped would discourage any attempts at conversation, although he loved talking especially when he was holding forth himself. But this was not the moment. Care was indicated to simulate slumber. Had the situation been reversed Prout would have had no scruples in stirring anyone from slumber with his fruity booming. It was one of his less lovable characteristics. So he lay - or rather sat - 'doggo' and hoped that the intruder whoever he might be would observe his sleeping figure and gently retire, as indeed he should according to Prout.

Mr Quelch, for it was he, stood silently gazing down at the recumbent figure with a slight smile on his crusty features. Mr. Prout's spectacles had slipped far down his nose and really he did present a somewhat bizarre figure. Henry Samuel Quelch was a meticulous gentleman. Throughout his long career at university and later as master of the remove at Greyfriars he had been the epitome of precision. Discipline - as his form well knew - and method were deeply embedded in his character. Billy Bunter is perhaps the one person best qualified to vouch for his undoubted expertise in the scientific wielding of the 'Ash', his experience being of a much broader nature than other members of the form.

Now was the time for firmness and action.

"Bless my soul", Quelch murmured. "Really!" He gazed down at the inert figure of the fifth form master. Mr. Quelch was attired for walking. He was seeking Prout with the intention of taking him out onto the fresh windy spaces of Courtfield common for one of his celebrated walks. East winds held no terrors for the remove master although, being a prudent gentleman, he took great care to be warmly clad. Twinges were not entirely unknown even to his angular frame.

Having gazed at the recumbent figure for a few moments he reached forward with his stick and rattled it against the poker, seeking to stir the fifth form master into something akin to animation. Prout did stir and grunt, and with astute wily-ness conveyed to Mr. Quelch that he was indeed rousing himself from a deep slumber.

"Grooogh what, what, who..." he spluttered.



"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, **"Quelch and Prout are having a row!"** The next moment the window above opened and Mr. Quelch himself looked out. **"Take five hundred lines, Bunter!"** he cried angrily.

"Come, Prout, it is I, have you forgotten our walk?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"What - what, is that Quelch? Is that you sir, what do you want?"

A quarter of an hour later two figures, one angular and swinging a stick, the other rotund and heavily muffled, were to be observed striding down Friardale Lane *en route* for the breezy heights of Courtfield common. Perhaps it might be more correctly stated that one figure was striding and the other, at this early stage in the pilgrimage, was twinkling. Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout were colleagues and friends of many years standing, they had much in common although at times this was a little difficult to discern when listening to their sharp and frequently acid exchanges at which both, in their respective ways, were past-masters. At a far deeper level, however, they were firmly united in their love and loyalty to that school wherein both had spent the greater part of their adult lives.

There came a patter of running feet behind them and the two masters stepped aside to allow five panting fellows in running shorts to sweep by with a chorus of "Thank you, sir". Almost at once they had disappeared round a bend in the lane.

"My boys" said Mr. Quelch as they resumed their walk. "A healthy pursuit, running, Prout".

Mr. Prout did not exactly grant, but he was within an ace of doing so. Something in the tone and manner with which Mr. Quelch had intoned, "My boys ..." seemed to

touch a raw spot in his make-up and annoyed him intensely. But manfully he remained silent and the two masters resumed their walk discussing more weighty matters and certain views they intended to express at the forthcoming masters meeting. Then in the distance coming towards them appeared a solitary and slouching figure with shoulders hunched and hands driven deep in the pockets of his overcoat. As he approached, Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye, which had been fixed upon the figure ahead, glinted in recognition.

"A boy of your form, I believe Prout", he said.

"What - what, did you say my form, Quelch? Nonsense."

Mr. Prout's powers of recognition in no way equalled those of the remove master. He peered at the approaching figure. "It is a senior boy, Quelch, a sixth form boy I have no doubt - a rather slovenly fellow."

Mr. Quelch smiled grimly as he repeated, perhaps with a certain relish.

"It is a fifth form boy, Prout. It is I believe, the boy Price, is he not in your form, sir?" Mr. Prout purpled, "What - what! Nonsense", he snapped, highly chagrined at such an allegation. Suddenly he broke off and it dawned upon him - most unhappily - that it was indeed a fifth form boy. It was indeed Price.

Mr. Prout halted, swelling with indignation and wrath as Price was about to pass by apparently deep in thought. Judging from his expression his thoughts could hardly have been pleasant or cheery reflections. The fifth form master woke the echoes of Friardale lane with a familiar boom.

"PRICE, it is Price, is it not? Boy, do you not recognise your form master? Have you forgotten something?"

Price had scarcely noticed the two masters for his hand showed no sign of emerging from his coat pocket to give the customary salutation to his form master. Again the echoes were awakened by the fifth form master's boom. "Halt - halt, I say sir! - halt and explain this outrageous lack of respect."

Mr. Quelch the while stood silently by, observing the little drama enacted between master and pupil. He sighed. How well he knew his Prout. At last he broke in upon the fifth form master's pontifications. "Come, Prout, let us proceed. Deal with Price later there's a good fellow." Whether or not Prout liked being addressed as a 'good fellow' is problematical, sufficient to say he acquiesced. Price was ordered to report to him later that evening and sent upon his way with a premonitory nod. The two masters then proceeded on their walk.

Mr. Quelch was sorely tried at times by the bumptious attitudes and posturings of his colleague. Only by bravely - almost heroically - keeping his tongue firmly in his cheek and bearing in mind Shakespeare's wise adage, 'A friend should bear his friend's infirmities', did he manage to keep - more or less - an equilibrium between himself and the redoubtable Paul Pontifex Prout. That they were friends was indeed proved in the often stormy crucible of time.

Thus may we leave them for the moment, striding away together into the wintery sunset over the vast expanse of Courtfield Common. The one upright and of military aspect, swinging his stick. The other rolling and gesticulating. With the use of a little imagination may we not also see hovering above and around them their creator -

possibly himself not a little surprised at his creations and their longevity.

We may observe these two sterling characters as an integral part of the destinies of Greyfriars moving through the long story of the school, through the lights and shadows of many terms in a fictional establishment which has through time become almost a reality.

Often at the closing of the day
When shadows lengthen darkly down the lane
My memories tend to stir and wing away
To schooldays - and the old refrains.
The playing fields of old are clear once more
The roar along the touchline still I hear
With anxious eyes I view the present score
And know that victory for the school is near.



ROBERT MURRAY GRAYDON: Before The Criminals Confederation

by Derek Hinrich

My father, who had enjoyed his adventures as a youth, introduced me to Sexton Blake in 1937 when I was eight. He bought me SBL2/603, *The Victim of the Secret Service* by John G. Brandon (I discovered this when many years later I started collecting Blakes and I found that after forty years I could still remember the splendid Parker covers of the books I had had so many years before).

Through the accident of anno domini, I started to read Blake's adventures just at the end of his Golden Age. I enjoyed them in both *The Detective Weekly*, until it closed, and in the SBL and some of the Sexton Blake Annuals until my attention wandered at about fourteen and I did not return to them for forty years. When my interest revived, the first books I bought were the Howard Baker anthologies *Crime at Christmas* and *Sexton Blake - Star of Union Jack*. And so I made the belated acquaintance of the Criminals' Confederation. As my collection grew and I began to read some of the *Union Jacks* I had acquired, and while I sought completeness as

much as possible, I tried particularly to lay my hands on the saga of the Criminals' Confederation. I have, alas, not yet completely succeeded but I have a large part of it, all Robert Murray Graydon's later *UJ* work, and most of the *UJ* stories he wrote before he created the Criminals' Confederation. Recently I thought it might be interesting to read these to see if any development could be traced in his work. I have been doing this, happily filling the gaps in my collection by borrowing from the Club and, in one instance, from Bill Bradford.

Robert Murray Graydon's first Blake adventure appeared in *UJ* 675 of September 16th 1916 and was entitled "The Detective's Ordeal". Although the author had been writing stories for some time – two other, apparently non-Blake stories by him are mentioned on that *UJ*'s cover – the style seems a little stiff on this first outing. It is a neat tale, well plotted as one comes to expect from him. The atmosphere is highly melodramatic. Blake is framed for murder by an ex-convict, a famous but fraudulent society solicitor whom Blake had previously been instrumental in getting sent down for several years. The denouement takes place in the Number One Court at the Old Bailey on the last day of Blake's trial, where the villain, foiled at the eleventh hour by Tinker's evidence, shoots himself. It is a promising beginning.

Five weeks later the *UJ* published RM Graydon's second Blake story. It was an important one for it introduced readers to one of Blake's most delightful opponents. Dirk Dolland, alias the Bat, is an American citizen. He is a debonair insouciant young man of medium height and slim build, with regular features, yellow-blond hair and cornflower blue eyes, and is described as a gentleman cracksman, but he is more than a simple safecracker or burglar. As future stories develop he is discovered to be adept at every sort of non-violent crime – forgery, confidence trickery, impersonation. He has worked as a stage magician and is a master of sleight of hand and also of disguise to such an extent that he can sit for a day or two at the same dining table on shipboard as Blake at their seventh encounter, and not be recognised. He is an early type of William Vivian Butler's "durable desperado". He surely exhibits an early example of gangster chic by wearing a balaclava helmet during his first encounter with Blake. He also places Blake in a rather ambivalent position by saving his life on four occasions, three times from the attentions of less fastidious associates, and being wounded once himself on the fourth occasion at the hands of an agent of Mr. Reece, of whom, more later.

Although the Bat bulks large and progressively larger in Murray Graydon's stories, he is not the only criminal in these early tales. There are two spectacular villains.

In "The Bogus Detective" an American conman sets up in London as an enquiry agent and at first pulls off some spectacular coups that threaten Blake's position – until Blake unmasks the American's "wife" as a transvestite burglar who has carried out the crimes his "husband" solves.

Then there is John Venn, a criminal policeman even more sinister than the great George Marsden Plummer was at first. After all, Plummer to begin with merely wished to emulate Roger Baskerville (alias Vandeleur, Alias Stapleton) and murder his way to a title, in his case the earldom of Sevenoaks and a rentroll of £40,000 a year ("A



moderate income – such a one as a man might jog on with,” said the first earl of Durham). Venn, however, is much more of a Jonathan Wilde figure. As himself he is a rising star of the CID with a string of brilliant arrests behind him but under the *nom de crime* of “The Master” he is the organiser of a gang of thieves and forgers. As the Master he encourages their various acts, fences the proceeds of their crimes taking the while a substantial commission, and then when they are ripe for plucking, Detective Inspector Venn makes a spectacular arrest, a very “Wildean” character indeed. Venn has also created another persona for himself, that of a Hatton Garden Jeweller, who of course, disposes of the Master’s haul. He is a fascinating villain but he only appears twice. It always amazes me, though, how men like Venn – or Edgar Wallace’s Frog or other hidden masterminds – can hold

down one full-time job and yet have one or two others clandestinely on the side. When do they sleep?

In Venn’s second appearance, he and Dirk Dolland are the sole survivors of a transatlantic liner, *The Megantic*, which collides with a submerged iceberg, breaks its back, and sinks in a howling gale.

It is an interesting point but in all these early stories which were nearly all written between 1916 and 1918, the First World War never impinges once. Transatlantic liners cross the ocean with never a hint of convoys or raiders. There is no hint of such rationing as there was in that war, nor of a blackout against Zeppelins or Gothas. Sexton Blake stories of the war years with references to it abounded, but these appear in a sort of peacetime vacuum but there is no suggestion that these take place before the War. Jane Austen managed to write her complete works without once referring to the struggle with Napoleon and Robert Murray Graydon achieves a similar feat a hundred years on.

But, in the midst of all this, down Baker Street there comes stumping Robert Graydon’s greatest contribution to the saga of Sexton Blake, the stocky figure of Detective Inspector Coutts. He is instantly recognisable, but not yet quite as we came to know and love him. He has his trademark blue melton overcoat, blue referjacketed serge suit and bowler cocked belligerently over one eye. He is bluff,

blunt, loyal, fiery-tempered and impulsive and as brave as a bulldog; he has a taste for Blake's whisky and his cigars; but his hair and bristling moustache are black. At least they are when we first meet him. Later, he is clean-shaven. There is also some uncertainty about his name. In one story he walks into a police station and introduces himself to the local DDI. "Hallo, I'm Jim Coutts of the CID". In the next he is "John William Coutts". At sometime in the future his hair must turn ginger, and his Christian name become "George", but not yet.

Coutts' career is saved a little later by the Bat by a display of quite extraordinary quixotic gallantry, for Dirk Dolland allows himself to be arrested by Coutts after having successfully stolen a famous old master painting, the Danesby Murillo. Coutts has been suspended from duty, through the machinations of a jealous rival at the Yard, for alleged incompetence in failing to catch the Bat. The arrest saves Coutts' career and Dolland is sentenced to ten years and sent to the Moor. Certainly they do not come any whiter than Dirk Dolland, and, of course, it is not the last we shall hear of him, and, sure enough, four months into his sentence he stages a daring escape. This case is, incidentally, the first of three times in the saga that poor Coutts suffers the indignity of being suspended from duty. On two later occasions he is saved by Sexton Blake. Perhaps that is why it is so much later that Coutts becomes Chief Inspector, but surely no promotion could have been more overdue.

In another early story, "In Double Harness", two brothers severally retain Blake and Nelson Lee (then still in practice in the Gray's Inn road) to investigate their elder brother's murder. It is, I believe, the second time that they co-operate and it is almost like a light comedy to see them at work as the discoveries in the case appear to be nicely distributed to each in turn with both arriving at simultaneous and identical solutions.

Then Robert Murray Graydon wrote *SBL1/41, The Mysterious Mr Reece*, one of only four contributions he made to the Sexton Blake saga in the longer format. Mr Reece, the future evil genius of the Criminals' Confederation, is a most mysterious figure indeed. Blake is by no means sure at first that there is a Mr Reece. His only physical manifestation is in a number of messages written in a spidery hand on thin pieces of white card. He is only seen as a shadow upon a screen. When his headquarters is raided all that is found is a dismantled lay figure in a box and a telephonic loudspeaker system through which his voice – or a voice – was sent from a distance. It is possible that Mr Reece is only a name used to front a gang, any member of which might be Mr Reece on occasion. This is quite a novel idea, and the does-he-does he not-exist enigma is nicely maintained through several stories where only messages and assassins are what we see of Reece, while Blake ponders and, perhaps, the author makes up his mind. The shadow of Mr Reece infests these stories like a plague. Blake begins to believe he is real and senses his presence in an almost psychic manner at one moment.

I do think the "Mr" is a nice touch, so genteel for such a villain. The first three encounters are indeed concerned solely with attempts by Mr Reece, if he exists, to murder Sexton Blake: the first time in an attempt to pervert the course of justice by preventing Blake giving evidence in the trial on an associate of Reece's. In the other

two it is purely on the principle that is at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Dirk Dolland is more and more on the side of the angels here as he, too, has fallen foul of Mr Reece and begins to share an informal truce with Blake. In fact the contest for a time becomes almost quadrangular, until Dolland earns an informal pardon, as long as he keeps his nose clean, or his assistance in dealing with Reece, but before that Blake and Coutts are in partnership versus Reece, and Coutts is also after Dolland whom he believes in time-honoured phrase, "May assist him in his enquiries."

By the time of their fourth encounter, the matter is resolved. Mr Reece exists, First Tinker, then Blake encounters him. He was "...the most repulsive man that Tinker had ever set eyes on. And with one glance he knew that he stood in the presence of the greatest criminal the world had ever known – Mr Reece!

"It was a face the Tinker dreamt about for many weeks afterwards – pallid to the greyish hue of a corpse, wrinkled like the back of a spotted toad and with a head that was as bald as an egg, the cranial development sagging over the ears, and bulging out over the bony eyesockets, wherein were set two eyes that seemed to glow with the lustre of transparent green jade.

"Green as emeralds they were and a unwinking as those of an owl, and in their depths seemed to lurk the concentration of all that was evil, callous, malevolent, and cunning. The man's hands were like the claws of a bird, yellow as old ivory, and thin as a bunch of dried bones. His nose was shaped like the beak of a vulture, and seemed just as fleshless and as osseous, and the thin, cruel-lipped mouth beneath it was twisted in a continual sneer.

"...To guess the man's age was impossible – he might have been anything from eighty to a hundred and twenty, or even older. His skin looked like the dried skin of an Egyptian mummy, and his whole body may have been dead save for the wonderful light of mental virility and intelligence that glowed in the heart of the big unwinking eyes."

Not very prepossessing, what?

You will note that by this time Mr Reece has become "the greatest criminal the world had ever known". Blake does not actually say that. Unlike his old neighbour, Mr Sherlock Holmes, he has no need to talk up the villainy of his opponents to boost his own success. In this case, incidentally, Reece has organised a mini-crimewave of fourteen bank robberies and the mass circulation of counterfeit notes in a little over two weeks. His men have murdered one police constable and kidnapped sixteen others and Sir Henry Fairfax the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, whom they have all incarcerated in a makeshift prison in the basement of a warehouse in Southwark. Evidently Mr Reece doesn't do things by halves, though there is no indication of what he intends to do with his prisoners. They must have been a drain on the gang's manpower, if nothing else.

A little later Mr Reece is apparently drowned at sea. Of course he isn't. Reece is too good a character to throw away. Blakian master criminals have a habit, like Dracula and Frankenstein, *Pere et Monstre*, in Hollywood and Hammer, of being resuscitated. Reece's presence is still shadowy and more an emanation of evil rather than a firm character. Another problem is that if you are dealing with "the greatest criminal the

world has ever known” then he should really commit a crime of commensurate calibre, to loot the Bank of England, say, or steal the crown jewels – as Paramount made Moriarty do in the 1939 film *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Of course Reece had nearly got there in “The Vanished Police” with his robbery of fourteen banks in nearly as many days, and there I think lies the seed of Robert Murray Graydon’s great concept.

Reverse “the Vanished Police” and you have, six months later, “The Missing Crooks”. And where are the crooks going? Why, to join a new international organisation, The Criminals Confederation, and their Recruiting Sergeant is Mr Reece. Of course the greatest criminal the world has known is not likely to settle for the number two position for long and a great fight against the hydra-headed monster of the Confederation he controls lies happily ahead for Blake and Coutts in the years to come.

DOYLE’S WAR

2005 has seen the 60th anniversary of the ending of World War Two, so it has been a time for looking back on wartime days for some people – those old enough to remember them. BRIAN DOYLE was nearly 9 at the outbreak and, as he has written before, he happened to be in bed and reading ‘The Beano’ on that fateful Sunday morning, September 3rd, 1939 (and his mother’s birthday) when he heard Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s voice on the radio downstairs announcing that ‘this country is at war with Germany.’ Here, he reminisces about the days of bombs and blitzes, ‘doodle-bugs’ and V2s, explosions and flying glass, of noise and devastation, seen through the eyes of a child and schoolboy, of a ‘boy in the Blitz’

I came across my old schoolboy stamp collection recently. It had been gathering dust up in the loft for many years. Lovingly mounted in two leatherette loose-leaf albums, it was once my pride and joy. It brought back many memories. Especially one page devoted to South African stamps. My Aunt Elsie had friends there and used to present me regularly with the stamps from her letters and parcels from that country. (‘Oh yes, I specialize in South Africa, you know,’ I used to tell my schoolfriends airily. ‘Very interesting issues they have there....’ Anyway, this one page stood out from the rest. For one think it was a sort of dark-grey colour in comparison to all the other cream-coloured pages. A dirty, musty dark grey. Why was this? What could have caused this different colour. Then, all at once, I remembered. This was the dark-grey, the dirty grey of war....

It was in September, 1944, and I was sorting through my stamp collection on the small table in my bedroom at our house in Abbey-Wood, in South-East London. It was a hot, blue-skied late Summer’s day and I was proudly going through my South African page and checking on values in my Stanley Gibbons catalogue. On my bed,

I recall, there were several copies of 'The Magnet' (the 'Lamb' series, which I was re-reading). My parents were downstairs, my mother making tea and my father doing something in the back garden. It was mid-afternoon and a Saturday. Mr. Everett next door was mowing his lawn.

Suddenly, there was an enormous deafening, mind-shattering explosion, a rush of warm air, and the sound of our front-windows being blown out (yet again) and the crashing noise of our hall ceiling coming down (again). There were lots of crashing sounds and tinkling glass and things generally falling down. There were screams and shouts from outside. Someone was blowing a whistle, and bells from an ambulance or fire-engine could be heard. An acrid burning smell became noticeable. And an almost imperceptible cloud of dark grey smoke mixed with dust and tiny bits of grit wafted everywhere, both inside and outside the house, and settled all over. I began to cough and my eyes watered. I abandoned my stamp collection (still open at 'South Africa') and rushed downstairs. 'Are you all right?' my Mum and Dad and I asked one another all at once. Thank goodness we **were** all right (again).

(I should perhaps mention that the top 'Magnet' of the small pile on my bed suffered the same fate as my 'South Africa' stamps page, being covered with the same grimy grey explosion dust, almost obscuring the cover drawing showing Vernon-Smith riffling through Mr. Lamb's study desk – 'Smithy was being 'reckless' yet again. The dust proved to be irremovable, staying on that particular 'Magnet's cover (March, 1940) until I eventually sold it in the 1960s after acquiring a bound volume containing the issue. Remember that 1939 classic movie 'Dust Be My Destiny', starring John Garfield and Priscilla Lane (she probably was my very first film star 'crush' at the time)? Dust was indeed the destiny, as it turned out, of both my South African stamp page and that salmon-pink covered 'Magnet'....)

My parents and I had come through the main London Blitz (1940-41) and the recent flying-bombs (known as 'doodle-bugs'), and now the V2s, or 'rockets' were upon us. The trouble was that these gave no warning whatsoever of their approach. You could hear the German bombers overhead (following the air-raid sirens' warning) and the sound of their bombs whistling down and you could hear the flying bombs' 'motor-cycle engine' noise as they flew over, but the 'rockets' gave no warning. They just arrived.

After having a cup of tea (the answer to all wartime problems!) my father and I wandered up the road to see what exactly had happened. It was strewn almost ankle-deep with debris, rubble, broken glass and bits of plaster. A couple of streets away was Myra Street. Except that now it wasn't. The two short rows of terrace houses facing each other and just off Plumstead High Street had been almost completely destroyed; some showed the interiors of first floor bedrooms, with beds and chairs hanging precariously in mid-air. Smouldering wood lay smoking and occasional flames were springing up. It was a scene of complete devastation. Ambulances and fire-engines were already there, as were air raid wardens, policemen and others. I began to feel sick as I saw bloodstained figures being carried away on stretchers. A young girl covered from head to foot in white and grey dust sat on the pavement sobbing.



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Every Tuesday.

June 8th, 1946.



This Week: "L. AND H. TAKE A FRONT SEAT!"



Hallo, Folks It was a beautiful day, and Olly was looking forward to seeing the Victory procession. When he peeped out into the garden to see what Stan was doing, he saw him reclining in a deck-chair. Olly told Stan to get ready.

My father spoke to a warden he knew slightly. Then he told me what had happened. The V2 had made a direct hit on a house where the family and their friends were celebrating the wedding of their daughter. There were at least two dozen at the little reception and everyone had been very happy and jolly. Neighbours later said there had been the sounds of singing to the strains of a piano and much laughter and gaiety. We later heard, and read in the local newspaper, that virtually everyone there had been killed outright. There were no survivors. Not even anyone left to grieve.

All this had happened around 500 yards from our house, two streets away. 'What happened?' asked my mother when we arrived back home. 'It's a bloody shambles,' said my dad succinctly. 'And it's tragic. We should count our blessings.' 'Let's have a cup of tea,' suggested my mum briskly. And we did. Then I returned to my bedroom. I tried to blow the dirty-grey dust off my South African stamps page, but it wouldn't budge. And, as I said it's there to this day, over 60 years later. The dust, like the memories, won't go away.

That incident was, I think, our final bit of bomb damage from World War Two – damage that had begun with the start of the London Blitz in September, 1940, and which had continued night-after-night for many months. Immediately before that, of course, there had been the excitement of the Battle of Britain, when I had watched, fascinated, Spitfires and Hurricanes of the R.A.F. battling with German Messerschmitts in 'dog-fights' in the blue skies over London and South East England.

But back to the Blitz. We lived in Abbey Wood, about three miles from Woolwich, in South-East London and quite near the famous Royal Arsenal, which was a huge factory stretching for miles and which manufactures munitions – shells, bullets, guns and allied products used in war. The London Docks weren't too far away either. The German bombers aimed at these two sites as some of their prime targets and their bomb-aimers weren't all that accurate in their nasty work. They often missed their targets and hit the neighbouring residential areas of Woolwich, Plumstead and Abbey

Wood. Thank goodness we (the Doyles) didn't experience a direct hit but, because of bombs dropped in nearby roads, we had our ceilings down and our windows blown out half-a-dozen times from the force of the blast.

While our two white cats and small Pekinese dog didn't seem to be unduly put out by the noise and dust and disturbances, our canary was furious! Bill's cage on its special stand was blown across the room several times as the bird expressed his vocal disgust. My mother would stand his cage upright, tidy it, supply fresh seed and water and reassure him. Bill wouldn't have any of it and would rush from one end of his long perch to the other making small but vehement noises of protest. He could only be placated by someone putting on the wind-up gramophone a record of a popular tune called 'The Wedding of the Painted Doll'. For some reason, he loved to hear this and would practically 'dance' around his cage, hopping from one perch to another, chirping loudly and happily to himself and, of course, to us. 'That tune's like the "All Clear" siren to him,' my father would remark. Bill the Bird survived the war and its excitements and finally fell off his perch for the last time in the late-1940s.

The noise of the war was one of the worst things. The drone of the German bombers became a nightly routine and, aged 9 then 10, I could tell the difference between a Dornier (a low, rhythmic hum), the Heinkel (louder and more 'metallic' somehow) and the Junkers (a kind of menacing whine). The Messerschmitts, in their daytime battles with our British fighter-planes, were like angry wasps.

But worst of all (as far as the eardrums were concerned) were the sounds of the guns of the British anti-aircraft unit situated at the top of a small hill amidst the local Bostall Woods about half-a-mile from our house. They did a great job, of course, trying to shoot the enemy bombers down – but the noise! As the Germans came within reach, off the big guns would go, shattering and literally deafening. Sometimes they would continue their barrage for an hour or more, often mixed with the Bofors guns which were rather like a regular drum-beat (bee-doofa, bee-doofa, bee-doofa...).

Sometimes I would stand with my father in our front-porch, both of us wearing protective tin-hats, watching the scene: the myriad searchlights criss-crossing against the dark sky, often catching a silver 'barrage-balloon' in their beams, and occasionally a German bomber. Being so close to the 'ack-ack' guns meant there was a whole lot of shrapnel raining down (fragments of exploded shells). It would hit the house roofs like a storm of hot metal raindrops and it could be deadly dangerous to walk about in the streets. I remember a large piece of shrapnel landing squarely in the middle of the bird-bath that stood in the middle of our small front-garden. 'Lucky there wasn't a bird in it at the time' remarked my father tersely. The following day, of course, my friends and I would scour the streets and gardens for bits of shrapnel – it became the latest collecting 'craze' – but you had to handle it carefully as it could cause a nasty scratch or cut which might turn septic if you weren't cautious.

I naturally kept up with my favourite comic papers during the war years. And they all reflected the changing times we lived in. In 'Film-Fun' nobody seemed in the least surprised to find such American stars as Laurel and Hardy, Harold Lloyd, and Joe E. Brown serving in the British Army! But there they all were peeling potatoes in



the cookhouse, doing arms-drill and being shouted at by British Army sergeants. My friends and I never queried this, as far as I can recall – it was there in the comics so it must be all right....!

The war was echoed in many ways 'The Happy Vakkies' and their adventures featured in 'Knock-Out' and comprised a varied group of London children evacuated to the country. 'Desperate Dan' (of 'Dandy') of all people was in the Royal Navy in 1941, judging by his uniform. 'Big Hearted' Arthur Askey and 'Stinker' Richard Murdoch were arguing about the black-out in a 1939 'Radio Fun' and Tommy Handley of 'ITMA' fame was feuding with nasty German spy Funf in the same paper in 1940. 'Big Eggo' the loveable ostrich was 'doing his bit' (in uniform!) on the front of 'Beano', as were the tiny tots of 'Tiny Tots', where Tim and Tot appeared to be wearing miniature R.A.F. uniform. 'Constable Cuddlecook' was checking on the black-out in 'Jester' in 1939, and 'Deed-a-Day Danny' (the ever-helpful boy scout) was assisting A.R.P. wardens in 'Knock-Out'. And Mr. Churchill himself put in an appearance one day in 'Beano' personally to thank 'Lord Snooty and His Pals' for raising money towards the war effort.

The boys' story papers such as 'Hotspur', 'Wizard', 'Rover', 'Adventure' and 'Champion' also had their many heroes fight World War Two – on the Allies' side, of course! One of my favourites was 'Rockfist Rogan' of the R.A.F. in 'Champion', written by 'Hal Wilton' (actually the prolific Frank S. Pepper, later to create the popular 'Roy of the Rovers'). A special favourite Thomson paper, 'Skipper', was, sadly, an early casualty of war, as were, of course, 'Magnet' and 'Gem', but not before the Famous Five once watched a 'dog-fight' in the sky and Bunter became a 'Tuck-

hoarder'. German spies were also not unknown in the vicinity of Greyfriars School.

I also listened incessantly during the war to the BBC radio variety shows, plays and serials. I've written about these before so I won't go into details, except to mention such favourites as 'ITMA', 'Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh', 'Stand Easy', 'Waterlogged Spa', 'Music Hall', 'Garrison Theatre', 'Happidrome', 'Paul Temple', 'Norman and Henry Bones', 'Toytown', 'The Box of Delights', 'The Swish of the Curtain', 'Worzel Gummidge', 'The Magic Bedknob' and 'Mystery at Witchend' (Malcolm Saville's debut book and radio serial). I went to the cinema regularly too but, again, I've written about that subject before....! Sometimes, during a performance, an illuminated sign would go up above the screen saying 'The air raid warning has just been sounded.' But I don't recall anyone ever leaving the cinema because of this useful item of information.

Going back for a moment to the London Blitz. I remember once interviewing a well-known German movie star (in my job as a film publicist) about his life and career. 'Oh yes, I was in the Hitler Youth Movement,' he said with a grin, 'we all had to join when we reached a certain age in Germany.' He continued: 'Later I was a Luftwaffe bomber pilot and flew many times over England.' 'Dropping bombs?' I asked. 'Oh yes, I did that many times too – it was just part of my wartime job, you know.' 'Did you drop any on London?' 'Yes, Brian, many, I'm afraid – that was one of our targets, you understand – nothing personal,' he laughed. I'm afraid that I didn't laugh. But I remembered.

When V.E. Day finally arrived on May 8th, 1945, I joined in the celebrations with a will. I was now 14½ and, with my two best friends at the time, Dave and Bill, used to cycle around our area cheerfully 'gate-crashing' some of the many 'victory street parties' arranged for children and young people. We would arrive, park our bicycles and sit down at one of the long, paper-clothed tables groaning with cakes, sandwiches, ice-creams, jellies and drinks, and sit there happily tucking-in and chatting to new-found friends, until one of the adult organisers would pounce, shout 'Here, you don't live in this street, be off with you!' and chase us away. 'Sorry, sir, we thought it was a sort of general victory celebration' we would say as we cycled away in a hurry. Sometimes we 'did' half-a-dozen street parties in a day. Yes, I know it was perhaps a bit naughty, but to us teenagers (though the word was unknown then) it was just a light-hearted game and nobody really seemed to mind.

Which brings me to the giant tin of pineapple. All though the war years there had stood in our pantry at home, a very large tin – a sort of long tube about 18 inches tall, of pineapple rings. My mother had bought it just before the war and never got around to opening it. It was an incredible luxury item during the war, of course – pineapple, whether in rings, portions or chunks, was unobtainable during the period. One day, during the Blitz, I think it was, my mother said firmly: 'We'll eat it to celebrate the end of the war.' So the giant tin of pineapple stood, like a talisman, at the back of the pantry, for nearly six years. Then, on the Sunday following V.E. Day, my mother announced that the tin would be opened at tea-time. The three of us, joined by a visiting aunt and uncle, sat expectantly. My father wielded the tin-opener, the lid



BIG HEARTED ARTHUR ASKEY
(Radio Fun 1939)

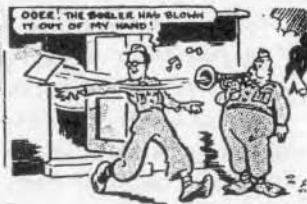


MR. CHURCHILL with LORD SNOOTY & Co.(in Beano)

Film Fun's American heroes in the British Army



Laurel and Hardy



Harold Lloyd

came off, and he peered into the depths of the tin. Then he began to laugh as he showed us the object of his mirth. The tin was completely EMPTY! We all laughed in a disappointed kind of way and discussed what might have happened. But the mystery was never solved – work it out for yourself. (We ended up by celebrating with tinned pears and evaporated milk – quite nice, but nothing like the elusive pineapple rings we had been anticipating so keenly.....)

I'll end as I began, with stamps. I'm reminded of the retired Army Major who started up a 'Stamp Club' for a group of us local schoolboys during the middle of the war. We used to meet at his house, about 15 minutes walk away from my own, and chat about our latest philatelic 'finds' and show one another our collections. Major Smith (I forget his actual name) was a nice chap with a moustache and a ruddy complexion. He gave us lemonade and cakes and occasionally spare stamps and showed his liking for us boys by putting his arm around our shoulders and patting our bare knees with a somewhat gnarled hand. He called us 'old chap' and 'old man', told us about his Army experiences, and talked about stamps, about which he obviously knew a lot. Then one day Major Smith's 'Stamp Club' seemed to stop and he disappeared. There was no reply at his house, which appeared to be empty and remained that way for quite a long time. A neighbour said she thought 'the Major' had gone away for a long holiday in the Isle of Wight. We were sorry and hoped he would keep up with his large stamp collection and would return one day. But he never did and in the end we stopped calling at his house. Another unsolved mystery.

And that prompts another thought. I really should get around to cleaning up that 'South African' page in my old stamp album. There must be some way of doing it properly. And cleaning off that dirty grey colour. On second thoughts I think I might keep it as it is. Just to remind me of that dirty grey Summer's day in 1944. It's best not to forget too much....



**To all my C.D. and Hobby friends
I send very best wishes for a
Merry Christmas and a
Peaceful, Prosperous and
Happy New Year**



Mary Cadogan

THE DOUBLE KIDNAPPING OF BILLY BUNTER

by Ray Hopkins

Billy Bunter kidnapped! Sensation in the Remove! The fat owl returns, dishevelled and grubby, with a wild and totally disbelieved tale of being accosted in Friardale Lane by a heavily-bearded man wearing an eye-patch who swung him bodily on to a handcart parked on the grass verge. A screwed-up rag was thrust into his mouth and tied in place by a cord. Covered by a grubby tarpaulin he was conveyed bumping and rolling until jerked to a halt. Bunter heard the crash of level-crossing gates closing and the sounds of car engines and horses hooves slowing down.

It had been foolish of his kidnapper to refrain from tying Bunter's ankles together. The fat junior pushed away the tarpaulin, swung himself off the handcart and tore back in the direction of Friardale. The kidnapper, observing the startled looks of the other drivers, ran, not after the fat junior, but in another direction, vanishing into the trees. When Bunter arrived at Friardale Station, (his reason for leaving school earlier that day), it was to find that his father was not there. This was curious as Mr. Bunter had phoned Dr. Locke asking for his son to meet him there. How fortunate for the kidnapper! It was almost as though he had known Bunter would be alone. But how could he?

A totally unprecedented event had occurred earlier in Courtfield. The bank had been robbed of one thousand pounds by a very dark-skinned man with black woolly hair. Smithy, enjoying a ginger beer nearby and alerted by the sound of a gunshot from inside the bank, had attempted to stop the pony pulling the Woodcutter Joyce's trap into which the thief had jumped. The trap had been left in readiness at the curb. Smithy received several nasty cuts from the whip wielded by the thief before he fell in the road. A frightened buzz emanated from observers as the trap disappeared down the High Street.

The Remove can hardly restrain their hilarity at the idea that anyone would want to kidnap Bunter but Mr. Quelch, doubtful as to Bunter's veracity at first, forbids him to leave the school until Inspector Grimes of the Courtfield Police has made a thorough search for the bearded man. Bunter, quaking with terror, observes the ban. Unfortunately, his resolve is overcome by his greed. Smithy's empty study, No.4 in the Remove, contains a bumper box of apples. One of the apples disappears down Bunter's gullet. The remainder of the dozen are transferred to his many pockets. Smithy is playing cricket but, having been caught out, is disgruntled enough to leave the field, and is climbing the stairs as Bunter prepares to descend. Very awkward! But Bunter is able to hide his bulging pockets behind the banisters until Smithy vanishes down the Remove passage.

Bunter hastens to a stone seat hidden in the trees close to the ivy-covered wall backing on to Friardale Lane. The remaining eleven succulent apples are barely bitten into when Smithy's angry voice reaches his ears. It gets closer and louder. Bunter,

forgetting he must not leave the school grounds on any account, climbs on the seat and drops on the country lane side of the wall. A rustling in the bushes makes him turn his head but he sees nothing except the darkness of a large sack as it is slipped over his head. Smithy is too late to hear his squeak of terror. Bunter really is kidnapped this time!

What a glorious prospect: no more vanished comestibles; no more requests for loans based on mythical postal orders; no more Latin construe gaffs (three cheers from Quelch!). Life in the Remove will be overcome by boredom.

In between the first and second kidnappings Bunter had passed some amazing information to Inspector Grimes regarding the Courtfield Bank thief. The fat owl, trying to catch up with Harry Wharton and Co. for tea at the Courtfield bunshop, thumbs a lift from a black man who is driving old Joyce's pony trap. The driver ignored Bunter's thumb but the pony's slow pace made it possible for him to jump on the back of the trap. But the driver felt the movement and did a "whip be'ind, guvnor." Bunter fell off the trap, shouted a word which one may not repeat in these days of political correctness, and was very frightened to observe the black driver, sometime later, approaching at a run where he had ensconced himself among the shady bushes, having decided that tea at the bunshop was too much fag. Thinking that the man was after him for what his schoolmaster would have termed an opprobrious epithet, Bunter clambered into a tree and then watched in amazement as the man, retrieving a suitcase from the bushes surrounding Bunter's tree, removed not only his hat and woolly mop of black hair, but also the dark stain which covered his face, neck and hands. The revelation was extraordinary, the white skin and fair hair totally unexpected. The clothes worn by the dark-skinned driver were packed into the suitcase and a shirt, tie, jacket and trousers now adorned the fair-haired man who looked like a neatly-dressed office worker. Bunter watched him, mouth still agape, as he vanished among the trees.

This information, when passed to Inspector Grimes, electrified him but made him feel that he was hardly likely to retrieve the thousand pounds still cosily reposing within the suitcase Bunter had seen being carried away by the cleverly disguised thief!

Another unusual happening occurred at the time when an Old Boy who had

BILLY BUNTER'S BODYGUARD



FRANK RICHARDS

been expelled for some unexplained act not referred to in the text, wrote to Dr. Locke enquiring if he might stay at the school for a day or so and enjoy revisiting his old haunts. Both the Head and Mr. Quelch, the expelled boy's form master, consider it odd that he would wish to return to the scene of his disgrace twenty years earlier, but can think of no reason to forbid the visit. But Captain Philpott, the Old Boy in question, is even more surprised, when the room he is assigned to sleep in during his short stay is "shipped," everything piled in the middle of the floor, including the bed. Philpott is exceedingly disturbed to discover that his suitcase, which he had pushed against the wall under the bed, was nowhere to be found in all the horrendous muddle. He leaves Greyfriars without staying one night, leaving a London phone number where he can be contacted when the suitcase is found.

So, it is quite a surprise for Mr. Quelch who has persuaded Mr. Prout to accompany him on a long walk and who desires a rest (Quelch doesn't) upon finding a holiday home near the seashore, to discover that the bungalow is occupied by none other than the Old Boy. This unexpected discovery was observed by the Famous Five and Smithy, cycling out of bounds, who had hidden themselves among the laurel bushes when the two school-masters hove into sight.

After the second kidnapping of Bunter from which he never came back, Smithy, remembered what they had seen and putting on his Sexton Blake hat, said that the holiday bungalow must be where the kidnapper was keeping the fat owl. Also – here Harry Wharton and Co. couldn't have been more shocked if he had lit a bomb under them – the kidnapper must be Captain Philpott. It was logical, for only a local man or someone who had previously lived in the area would have known about old Joyce the woodcutter and the fact that he rented out his pony trap. But did Philpott know that Bunter had seen him remove his disguise? Mr. Quelch had pointed out the fat owl to Philpott soon after he arrived as the boy who would be able to give Inspector Grimes a full description of the true appearance of the Courtfield bank robber. And that's why Philpott had to not let himself be seen by Bunter and had to keep the fat owl hidden until Philpott found his suitcase and he could make his getaway.

And, concluded the Bounder with some satisfaction, he knows where the suitcase is because he himself shoved it up the chimney after he finished shipping the room! And why did he ship Philpott's room? Smithy had inadvertently collided with Philpott while cycling in the woods in the middle of Courtfield Common in a particularly dark spot where the visibility was very poor in the late afternoon. Smithy took this awkward route because he was late getting back to school for callover. When he got up Philpott smacked Smithy about the head. Smithy swore he'd get him for that. This was two days before Philpott was due to visit Greyfriars. Smithy hadn't realised he was the Old Boy, otherwise he would have wondered why Philpott was wandering around near the school before his arrival date.

Only half believing Smithy's reasoning, the Famous Five accompanied him to the bungalow, found that the fat junior was indeed incarcerated there and took him back to Greyfriars. Bunter, in Quelch's study, saw Philpott for the first time and by his terrified remarks confirmed that he was indeed the bank robber.

Philpott, when his eye fell upon Bunter, knew the game was up and ran from Quelch's study and the school he had used as a base for continuing his criminal career which had been part of his nature even as a schoolboy. He got away, but Smithy convinced Inspector Grimes that he was indeed the wanted man by retrieving Philpott's suitcase from the chimney containing the stolen one thousand pounds. Inspector Grimes set the arresting wheels in motion.

(The above events are recounted more fully and in a slightly different sequence in "Billy Bunter's Bodyguard," Cassell Bunter Books No. 32, 1962.)

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS AT WHARTON LODGE

by
Ted Baldock

A wintery scene on a dim December afternoon. Wharton Lodge is on the verge of becoming snowbound. The leafless trees in the park are tossing bare branches in an agitated manner in the cutting east wind as though protesting against the bleak and freezing conditions. In the gathering gloom, although it is but a little after three o'clock, lights are beginning to appear in the windows of the Lodge, a cheerful and comforting sight to any unfortunate wayfarer who chances to be passing. Snow falling silently in large feathery flakes lies ever thicker upon the ground deadening the sound of footfalls. A dreary, cheerless but seasonal scene giving promise of a traditional Christmas.

Within the Lodge we find a very different scene. Warm, well-heated rooms and in the hall a splendid fire of logs is blazing in the wide grate. Term has ended at Greyfriars and Harry Wharton and Co. are already present. At this pre-tea period they are gathered round a cheerful blaze in Wharton's 'Den' discussing the forthcoming festivities. They are also congratulating themselves in having accomplished the extremely difficult task of putting Billy Bunter off the scent, as it were, and escaping the Owl whom they hoped would resort to the fabled delights of Bunter Court. Of course they were being over optimistic in such a supposition! The Owl was not to be disposed of by this initial rebuff. The game, so far as he was concerned, had only just begun. He was determined to be a member of the Wharton Lodge party. To this end he was prepared to sacrifice the delights of Bunter Court and the charming company of countless titled relations for the less opulent celebrations at Harry's home.

Also present at the Lodge, and at the moment comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair by the fire, is the familiar figure of Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch, master of the remove from at Greyfriars. It is his usual custom to spend a few days over Christmas with his old friend, Colonel Wharton, with whom he has much in common, the Colonel being a governor of Greyfriars.

THE MYSTERY OF WHARTON LODGE



Wells, the portly butler, is moving silently about attending to the many little aspects so necessary in the smooth running of his 'kingdom'. Wells has been informed that Billy Bunter will not be among the guests over the holidays, which intelligence has raised his spirits to what may be described as sublime heights. It is as though a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders. Little does he realise the full measure and depth of the wily Owl's artfulness. The gentle art of insinuation had little to teach Bunter...

The Owl had been warned before the end of term that should he present his fat person within a hundred miles or so of Wharton Lodge the consequences would be of a very dire and unpleasant nature. To all of which grim warnings Bunter paid no attention whatever. He knew his 'old pals' and he knew that Colonel Wharton, after a display of gruffness and disapproval, would relent and not close the door upon him. Upon this he had relied so many times in the past and it had never failed. Was it not Christmas? Would not the unexpected guest be welcome to share the hearth in a spirit worthy of the festive season.

It may be mentioned that it was mainly through the good offices of Harry Wharton's Aunt Amy, a gentle and understanding lady, that many delicate situations were successfully resolved. The inclusion of Billy Bunter being one of these little victories..... It must be recorded that he did 'turn up' and that he was not 'Turned Out'. He had, with the aid of Aunt Amy, worked the oracle, his one anxiety now being that the supply of foodstuffs should prove adequate, that they would last over the holidays. This being an aspect of the first importance, which in his view could not be emphasized too clearly.

Wells, whose responsibility it was, felt confident. He had placed a truly mammoth order for Christmas fare with the local shop in Wharton Magna, enough, he felt, able

to withstand a siege of at least six months should the necessity arise. Now with the advent of Billy Bunter he was assailed with doubts which were shared by the cook, who, like Wells, was only too well aware of Bunter's gargantuan appetite.

Picture the scene. It is very familiar, we have seen its like many times. The 'high spot' of Christmas day. The festive board is set and what a splendid sight it presents. Billy Bunter gazes upon it in rapturous delight. Even Wells and John the footman survey their work with satisfaction and approval in the knowledge that, together with many eager hands from the kitchen regions, they have accomplished this splendid display. Never was there such a goose, roasted to a turn: never such a noble pudding, even the generous sprig of holly with which it is surmounted looks edible!

The stage is set. The curtains are drawn, shutting out the inclement outdoor scene. The fire is blazing as only a Christmas fire should. Colonel Wharton, sitting at the head of the table, surveys the scene and grunts his approval. Mr. Quelch nods in agreement while his acid features twist into a smile many degrees less frosty than is normal. Harry Wharton and Co. are eager and ready to do full justice to the spread in true Greyfriars style. Needless to say, Billy Bunter can barely restrain himself, literally champing with impatience for the 'starting bell'.

Away with ghosts and grisly seasonal legends, mysterious tappings, creaking stairs and things that go bump in the dead of night, and the intrusive wraith which glides under the door, and all other noises of the night.

This is the precious moment which has been awaited with such anticipation. Let us set to and enjoy it.

But not before, says the quiet voice of Aunt Amy, giving a thought for those, whose numbers are unhappily legion, who lack the common necessities of life in a world of plenty. To recall also the great event of the first Christmas which occurred so long ago in a land which today is torn asunder by conflicting elements.

Now as we move away from this cheery festive scene perchance we may hear drifting faintly back a familiar squeak – "I say, you fellows, this is prime, may I have another slice of that goose?"

WANTED: 1994 CD Annual: to complete run from 1949.

A. MATHESON, 31 OLA DRIVE, SCRABSTER, CAITHNESS,
KW14 7JE.

A PENNY WORTH OF MAGIC

by Tony Glynn

WEDNESDAY was a special day for me in the summer of 1938, that last full year of peace. I have an abiding memory of myself running home from school in the late afternoon and making a stop at the newsagent's on the way. There, I would pick up my copy of *Chips*, the celebrated pink penn'orth of mirth, in newly minted freshness.

I might sneak a quick glance at the pleasures to be devoured at my leisure. *Weary Willie and Tired Tim*, on the front page, were having ongoing adventures in Africa, with a full share of wild beasts and cannibals. Inside, *Laurie and Trailer*, the secret service pair, were carrying out a mission involving a suitcase full of revolutionary inventions which, every week, provided their means of escape from their latest predicament. And there were *Ivor Klue* and *Homeless Hector*, the lost dog and *Pa Perkins and his son Percy*, among other long lasting performers. But the real pleasure would come after tea when I could lie on my bed, wallowing in the newest ration of magic, all for a penny.

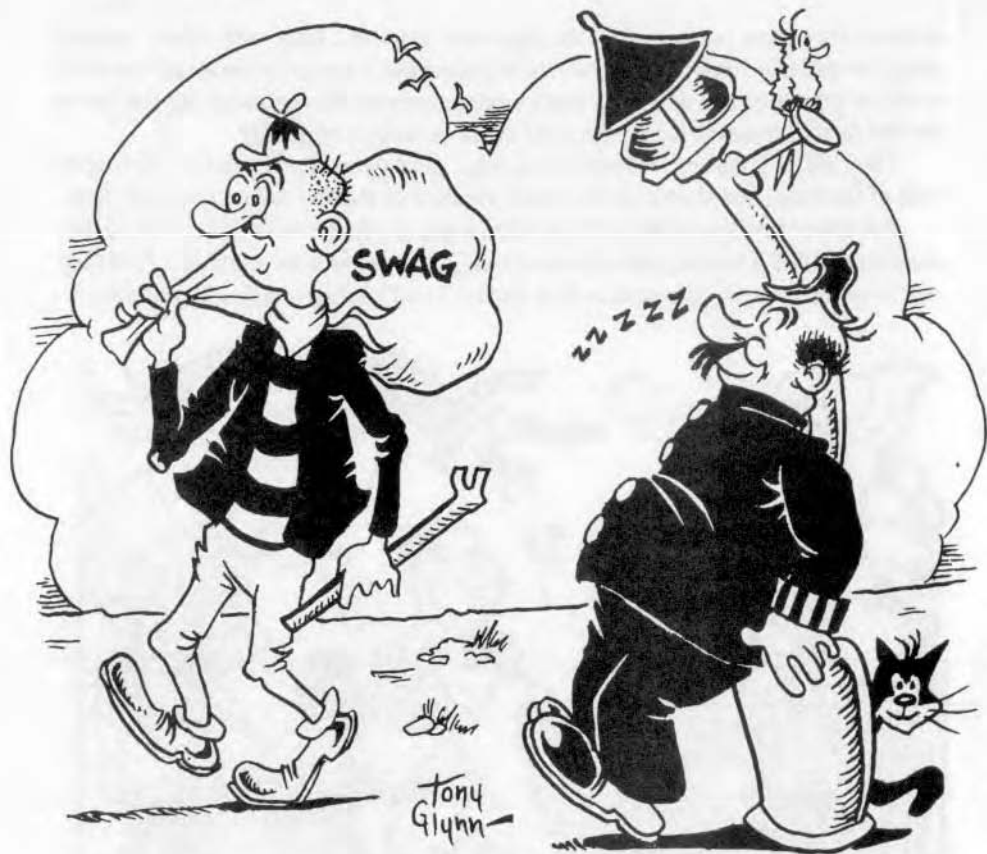
Not only was there the comic cast, there were the text stories through which I drank in the thrills. My favourites were *Captain Kerrigan*, the fighting skipper of a tramp steamer, and *Dane the Dog Detective*, the brainy great dane who more or less solved all the cases of his master, the sleuth Clive Markham.

Chips was my greatest favourite but I would plunge into with joys of other penny comics whenever I could come by them. Out of meagre pocket money, I almost always plumped for the penny comics. The twopenny ones with their bonus of bright colours were usually out of my reach. Beside, you could buy two penny comics for twopence.

I loved the penny comics with their touch of vulgarity, doubtless inspired by the music hall tradition which had not yet died. Each had its individual livery of tinted newsprint. The *Funny Wonder* and *Comic Cuts* were blue; the *Joker* was green and *Larks* shared its pinkness with *Chips*. Through their comic panels marched those wonderful stereotypes we loved so well: crusty schoolteachers; fat bobbies; burglars in striped jerseys and masks who carried bags marked "swag" in broad daylight; plump cooks and hordes of cheeky kids like *Dickie Duffer the Dunce* and the "nibs of *Casey Court*.

The superior string of penny comics came from the Amalgamated Press. There was a lesser stable domiciled in Bath, producing such titles as *The Dazzler*, *The Rattler*, and *The Rocket*. Even the *Ovaltineys' Own Comic*, given free with each title, did not enhance their appeal and, youngster though I was, I was aware of their inferiority.

I suppose a generation of children reared on video games and computers and the constantly alluring television set could never understand the huge pleasure imparted by my copy of chips when I retreated to my room after tea in 1938 – or do they perhaps share something of it from *Harry Potter*? Well, before *Harry Potter*, *Chips*



Those wonderful stereotypes

had the aptly named *Bob Tanner and His Magic Sixpence*, though he never started a cult and I don't suppose he made a packet for his unknown creator.

The creators of the goodies, both pictorial and textual, in all the penny comics of the AP must have worked round the clock to keep such as me happy. Week after week, they turned out their allocation of pen lines and wordage. "Charlie" Pease, the comic artist seemed to be in every one of them with a great quantity of material. I can remember Terry Wakefield, another prolific hand, saying that Pease was always late with his quota and no wonder. Terry himself did a substantial stint in the penny comic arena, though he is chiefly remembered for his *Film Fun* work among the twopennies.

I loved meeting Terry and other heroes of the AP comics such as the veteran Wally Robertson and Fred Robinson at the functions organised by the late Denis Gifford. I did not know their names when I sprawled on my bed in 1938, of course,

because they were not permitted to sign their work but they, and others, caused magic to spill from their inkpots. As a newspaperman, I was to become only too well aware of pressures and deadlines and I could appreciate how turning out the fun at the fun factory that was the AP entailed sweat as well as ingenuity.

They are all gone now, the rollicking titles, promising merriment for one copper coin of the realm and almost all the comic creators of that day have gone with them.

But I have precious little cache of titles some of which can take me back to that summer of 1938 when the old scheme of things was about to be shattered. And they still have their magic, as potent as *Bob Tanner's* and, perhaps, even *Harry Potter's*.



Readers may like to see again this picture of several comics heroes which Terry Wakefield drew for the C.D. some years ago.

CATCHING A RAT OR STARTING A HARE?

by Derek Hinrich



Of all the cases of Sherlock Holmes, mentioned but unrelated by Watson, two in particular have recurrently attracted the attention of students and of pasticheurs: the disappearance of Mr James Phillimore, “who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world”¹; and the case of the Giant Rat of Sumatra.

The Phillimore affair seems to be a variant of “the locked room mystery” so naturally it attracted the attention of Mr John Dickson Carr. Its fascination is readily understood. And it also appears to be, in principle, a mirror image of the mysterious sudden *appearance* out of the blue on Whit Monday May 26th 1828 in Nuremberg of Kaspar Hauser, “the child of Europe”, a story once recurrently dear to conspiracy theorists².

The Giant Rat is another matter. The date of the case is itself uncertain. It is brought to Holmes’s mind by a reference in a letter from a firm of solicitors at the outset of the problem of “The Sussex Vampire”. It appears to be one of those matters, “before your time, Watson”, besides being, “a story for which the world is not yet prepared”. This would suggest that the case probably occurred somewhere between 1878 (after the Musgrave Ritual) and 1881, when Holmes and Watson began to share the lodgings in Baker Street: one cannot be more definite than that. It apparently involved a ship, the *Matilda Briggs*, and that is all we know for certain. Of course ships are notoriously infested with rats, there are stories enough about that, and the possibility that Holmes was referring to the great Sumatran bamboo rat has also been suggested.

But why should the story be suppressed? As far as I can determine from De Waal’s *Universal Sherlock Holmes*, most suggestions concerning this case have been connected with rodents. A possible hypothesis is that since it is true that rats brought, or hastened the advent, of the Black Death to this country in August 1348, the threat may have existed, that the *Matilda Briggs* could have been bearing a similar deadly pestilence to these shores (perhaps, indeed, the dreaded and obscure Tapanuli fever from that part of north-western Sumatra). Such a threat did not

materialise but, if it had, there seems to be no reason why any account of such a hazard should not have been published.

I do not, however, believe that rats, or, rather, rats of this type are involved.

Sherlock Holmes was possessed of a dry and occasionally acerbic sense of humour and I suggest that we should look for another kind of rat entirely, and one which could, quite reasonably, by its actions lead to a situation of considerable delicacy where diplomacy might entail the suppression of any narrative by something like the rules currently affecting the disclosure of state documents at Kew.

I believe this case was one of those early affairs in which Sherlock Holmes was involved before his meeting with Watson and possibly one of those matters (as I have suggested elsewhere³) that was put in his way by his brother Mycroft.

Sumatra was then part of the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch governor would presumably have been assisted by a council that, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, would have been composed entirely of his senior subordinate officials (local chieftains might be consulted, but at that time any real form of local democracy would have been highly unlikely). In Dutch I believe a council is called a "Raad" and a council to a colonial governor might, I suppose, be known as the "Great Council", or "Groot Raad". The word "raad" or a variant of it is common to German, Dutch, and the Scandinavian languages. In German, a language, in which Holmes was apparently fluent, the word is "Rat" and such a body might be the "Grosse Rat", or in ironic half-translation (or a misunderstanding by Watson) the Giant Rat.

Now in what manner of matter concerning a (presumably) British vessel, the *Matilda Briggs*, might the Governor's Council of a Dutch colonial possession become embroiled in the late 'seventies of the nineteenth century?

It must be borne in mind that relations between the two countries and their respective East India companies had on occasion been quite tense, though latterly not approaching the virulence of the Amboyna Massacre of 1623. Moreover, between 1794 and 1814, the Netherlands, whether as the Batavian Republic or as the Napoleonic Kingdom of Holland, had been a French puppet state and its colonies, like those of France itself, had been regarded as legitimate prizes of war by Great Britain ("a policy of filching sugar islands", according to the government's radical Whig opponents at Westminster). In 1816 as part of the post-Waterloo settlement, Java had been returned to the Kingdom of the Netherlands (now under the House of Orange-Nassau) and in 1819, to avoid friction with the Dutch, Sir Stamford Raffles had persuaded "John Company" to transfer its trading post, Fort Marlborough, at Bencoolen, Sumatra, to Singapore, thus giving Holland a free hand in that island.

The late nineteenth century was the time of "the scramble for Africa". Great Britain, France, Italy, The King of the Belgians, and the new German *Kaiserreich*, were busily staking their claims and colouring the map of that continent. A similar competition in the establishment of colonies was proceeding in the Pacific amongst the islands of Polynesia and Micronesia, and in the securing of treaty ports and

concessions in China.

Cable communications in that part of the world were still incomplete. It was only fifteen years or so since the sensational case of the mutiny upon the *Flowery Land*. The southern seas were thus a place where maritime crimes could still flourish, which advances in communication have rendered rare today. One recently suppressed crime - slave trading - indeed gained a new lease of life for a time in the islands of the Pacific.

It may well be that some of the officers and crew of the *Matilda Briggs* (*Briggs* by name and brig by nature?) ran the gamut of maritime crime and were involved in mutiny, barratry, piracy, "blackbirding", and bottomry. Lloyds of London would certainly be exercised about such a catalogue of villainy (especially piracy, barratry and bottomry) and so would HMG be. An energetic special agent to assist the consular and naval staff on the spot could well be required. What better piece of work could the prime minister's right-hand man offer his brother?

Such a suggestion, however attractive, does not provide a reason for any involvement by the Dutch authorities, unless the *Matilda Briggs* was either apprehended by them or purchased by a Dutch concern as part of the act of bottomry I have posited. A further source of Dutch involvement at the highest level of government, both in the East Indies and, indeed, at The Hague must have existed, and one may be readily suggested.

As I have said, after 1819 the Dutch were the sole colonial power in Sumatra and they gradually extended their rule over the island throughout the nineteenth century. In 1873, however, they encountered ferocious resistance in the north of Sumatra from the Sultanate of Achin and became involved in a thirty-five years' war to subdue that state. This conflict eventually absorbed all the profit from the Dutch colonies and was also a heavy drain on the Netherlands' domestic exchequer.

The north of Sumatra is but a short voyage from Singapore and the island's coast no doubt has a number of inlets in which a sailing vessel might anchor. A cargo or two of Winchesters or Snyders and their appropriate ammunition would have been worth its weight in gold to the Sultan and yielded a nice profit to an enterprising mariner or his owners. Suppose, however, that after a voyage or two of this type, the *Matilda Briggs* was apprehended by the Dutch navy or even by one of Her Majesty's Ships. The Dutch would of course have been highly incensed by any gunrunning and HMG might well have acted to stop such actions under some legal pretext or other (possibly by use of the Foreign Enlistment Act?). These events would have occurred only a few years after the settlement of the *Alabama* claims⁴ and the memory of that case and the matter of the *Matilda Briggs* itself would undoubtedly have been sensitive. Secret negotiations to limit any damage would have been essential.

Secret diplomacy, however, would hardly be a matter in which Sherlock Holmes, at this early stage of his career would be likely to be involved, so his brief from his brother at this time could only refer to unravelling the criminal history of the *Matilda Briggs* and its crew to prepare for a prosecution.

I am afraid, however, that a search at Kew for details of the case will prove fruitless. In such a delicate matter, the Victorian "weeders" will have been ruthlessly active decades since, firm in the belief that the world could never be prepared for such a narrative.

¹ Another case of similar type, as no doubt Mr Holmes observed, is that of Benjamin Bathurst, a British diplomat returning home from Vienna at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. On the 25th November, 1809, he alighted from his carriage at a hostelry in Perleberg, Germany, walked round the horses and totally disappeared without trace. The presumption is that he was kidnapped and done away with by Napoleonic spies, but his valet and secretary who were with him swore they heard nothing. Many have reported upon this mystery, see, for instance, *Cornhill Magazine*, 55-279, *Historic Oddities* by the Rev. Sabine baring-Gould and *Lo!* By Charles Fort, 1931.

² Because some believed he was the rightful Crown Prince of Baden, kidnapped as a baby by conspirators and subsequently murdered by their agents following his escape from the cellar where he had been held since infancy. See, for instance, *Historical Mysteries* by Andrew Lang, 1904; *Stranger than Science* by Frank Edwards, 1959; and *Lo!* By Charles Fort, 1931.

³ In a paper which, at the time of writing (February, 2004), is awaiting publication in *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*.

⁴ Number 290 on the books of John Laird and Sons of Birkenhead was built to the order of the Confederate States of America. She sailed from Birkenhead, just escaping being impounded by the British Government after representations by the USA, and, after fitting out with her armament off the Azores, became the commerce raider, *CSS Alabama*, the most successful ship in Confederate service. She was eventually sunk by the *USS Kearsage* off Cherbourg on 19th June 1864. In 1871 neutral arbitration in Switzerland awarded the USA \$15,000,000 compensation against Great Britain.

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The Shape of Things to Come

The History of the picture strip in D C Thomson's 'Big Five'

Part 12 : Adventure 1958-1960

by Ray Moore

After having begun the previous December, the Mountie strip 'Ryan of the Redcoats' (1770-1782) illustrated by Ron Smith featured on the full colour covers of the paper for the first three months of 1959 before being replaced in turn by both 'Black Lightning' (1783-1803) and 'Sky Tigers' (1804-1821) the artist's final two strips for the paper.

In 'Black Lightning' a small British Infantry troop penetrate deep into Zulu territory in order to kidnap the charismatic chieftain Cetewayo as a means of bringing the Zulu War of 1879 to a speedy conclusion awhile in 'Sky Tigers' the setting is the Western Front during World War I where an RFC squadron must be rebuilt from scratch after being decimated by the technically superior Fokker biplanes of the German air force.

Neither 'Black Lightning' nor 'Sky Tigers' were based on previously printed material although 'Black Lightning' did borrow its title from a 'Hotspur' picture strip from 1954 with a wholly different plot. (See SPCD No 652)

In these final two strips Ron Smith took to using large front page splash panels for dramatic effect and after the meticulously rendered aerial dog-fights of 'Sky Tigers' it was something of a let down that they were followed by a couple of coloured 'Adventure' reprints from the early 1950s 'Happy Andy' (1822-1837) and 'Johnny Bull's Broadway Boys' (1838-1851).

Originally both of these strips in their entirety had been the work of Calder Jamieson but for its reprint run here 'Happy Andy' had its first episode redrawn by Ian Kennedy, but other than that, apart from a bit of name tinkering here and there, both strips remained fundamentally the same and owed their origins to the same source material as they had on their first printing. (See SPCD Nos 657 and 658).

Following on from Johnny Bull finally we come to 'Commando Jim' (1852-1874) excitingly drawn by Ian Kennedy, the last picture strip to feature in the pages of 'Adventure'. Neither a reprint nor based on any previous prose tale it told of how Lance-Corporal Jim Campbell became a member of a crack Commando unit and subsequently saw action in a series of dangerous missions including the raid on the French port of St. Nazaire in March 1942 and the Normandy landings in June 1944.

'Commando Jim' turned out to be an exciting picture strip swan song for the Thomson boys story paper that had published more picture strips than the other four of the 'Big Five' put together as four issues after the strip's conclusion and after 1878 editions, 'Adventure' was amalgamated with its companion paper 'Rover'.

So ends this history of the picture strip in the Thomson boys' story papers and for one final time I must make mention of the invaluable contribution that Derek Marsden's exhaustive research has made to this series. Thanks Derek.

Postscript: Recent research has revealed that four picture strips I originally credited to the artist John 'Jock' McCail in previous articles in this series were actually the work of George Blow. These strips were 'The Lost Boys on the Winking Planet' (Hotspur Nos 816-827), 'The Iron Road to Dixie' (Hotspur Nos 856-865), 'The Electric Shadow' (Adventure Nos 1413-1424) and 'The Marching Menace' (Adventure Nos 1498-1512).

The BIG STORY Is Coming! Turn To Page 5!



IN army jargon it was D-Day + 1. That meant the 7th of June, 1944, the day after the invasion of Europe by the Allies in World War II. Day in round the Salan bridge, Sergeant Jim Campbell, of the Commandos, and his men were waiting for reinforcements. But, as the morning mist cleared, German Tiger tanks roared up to the attack.

ADVENTURE

HEAD ON TARGET, LARSEN. DON'T MISS!

LOAD ANOTHER ROCKETS INTO THE MORTAR, DEERBY AT THE DOUBLE!

COMMANDO JIM

HE'S GOT GUNS. HE'S GOT MORE. BETTER TO TRY FOR BUCKS, FAT-HECK!

BLAST! THAT JERRY'S CANNON HAS BANGED! CAN HE STOP US? CHECK HIM OUT!

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

Picture © D C Thomson



Try guessing
this mixed
bag



By Bob Whiter

Answers on page 71

Dane the Dog Detective

by Derek Ford

Of the Saturday visit to the barber's shop when a boy, H.E. Bates wrote in his biography *The Vanished World* (1969): "I used to sit exhausting one by one the tattered pink copies of *Chips* and the tattered white copies of *Comic Cuts* until it was my turn... my turn to catch up with Clive Markham and Dane - like a grey shadow on steel springs, so quickly did he leap" - in *Chips* first fortnightly then weekly, from 1946 to 1953, when the paper disappeared into the new *TV Fun*, and Dane was no more (I have already recorded my consultations with Kenton Steel in *Cuts*). George Gale, the flying detective, was an early investigator in 1/2d. *Chips* about 1912, but I have no further details, and I do not know when Dane became a regular feature.

They operated from the town of Greyne with its dockland area, Clive's housekeeper was Mrs. Barton, and there is the old friend, Inspector Wales. Here Dane scents the phantom scarecrow of Gallows Field, rounds up the gang using homing pigeons to send stolen jewellery, finds the mine used to smuggle dutiable goods and



the torpedo fired from a submarine at sea with smuggled diamonds. Then there was the cigarette card clue and the weight-card reading 'A day of great disappointment' - that solved a diamond robbery. The hollow oak with an opening that led to an underground tunnel. Helicopters often feature and are useful for rescuing Dane from the roof of a burning building.

Winter finds the pair in the Scottish mountains, in the village of Circle's End, frightened by Mad Mary, the Witch of the Crags. They soon find that the villagers are being fooled by a skier wearing skis made of a transparent plastic material, invisible against the night sky, and appearing to be able to fly over the roof-tops. His ski-stick was disguised as the witch's broomstick, so that he seemed to be sitting on it. Five snowmen advertise an ice-show but Dane finds out it was the sixth who did the smash-and-grab raid.

A luminous rabbit is a clue to smugglers who are then scared by a luminous Dane; then Dane worries off the ropes around Clive's wrists and the case is over. When Dane finds a purple orchid in the park, Clive tucks the flower in his buttonhole, then buys a box of Jigsaw matches and is surprised to be asked two thousand pounds for

it by the match-seller. And it is fortunate for Dane that the clothes of a Guy Fawkes turn out to be those of a missing scientist.

Down by the river, Dane captures a stuffed South American fish... with a string of pearls tumbling out of its mouth. He also helps the angler who kept catching freshly soled and heeled boots from the river: 'Angler hooks old boots and nets a gang'.

Twice Dane has to recover Cleopatra's Crown stolen from Greyne Museum; then an oil painting disappears, and Dane discovers that the thief has hidden it away in a secret compartment of a stone idol, then he finds the painting hidden in a shop blind.

But Dane temporarily loses the scent when the thief swaps his shoes for a pair tied to the rear bumper of a car marked "Just Married". And he has difficulty in following the circus stilts man who stole a jewel-case, also the Armless Wonder who uses his toes to open a safe.

Then there are two final startling encounters for Dane: "What was the monstrous black thing, neither human or animal, they encountered, crashing its way through the woods to Cranham Hall? A stolen zoo gorilla dressed up in a thick suit of rubber, trained to respond to signals on a whistle too high-pitched for human ears to hear - and use its terrible strength to tip open the safe at the Hall." The grey figure that walked across the drawbridge of Beldray Castle then disappeared in a cloud of thick vapour as it stepped under the gateway." It turned out to be the vapour from liquid oxygen being used to melt down stolen valuables in the dungeons.



MY FAVOURITE MAGNET CHRISTMAS STORY

by Mary Cadogan



When I first came across the *Collectors' Digest* in December 1969 I had not been in touch with the *Magnet* since childhood. Like most of us, I cherished strong and glowing memories of the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co, including rollicking Christmas stories set in the warm and welcoming country homes of some of the Greyfriars juniors.

My relationship with the C.D., and all that this subsequently led to, began as a result of acquiring the Howard Baker facsimile Egypt series, which my husband had seen advertised in *Exchange and Mart* and mentioned to me. I sent off for this volume and when I received it a note was enclosed which drew attention to the C.D. and the Old Boys' Book Clubs.

After a short perusal of the Egypt series I realized that Frank Richards' stories were going to become as addictive to me as an adult as they had been during my girlhood, when I used to filch my brother's *Magnet* even before he realised that the newspaper delivery boy had thrust it through our letterbox!

I wasted no time in contacting Eric Fayne: we had a long and lovely chat over the

telephone about the *Magnet* and the *Gem*, and he sent me the current C.D. Annual, and the monthly number. The latter, which carried a cover drawing by Henry Webb of some of the St. Jim's boys stirring a Christmas pudding, was a revelation! Of course, I became an instant C.D. subscriber, and then a member of the London O.B.B.C. All this opened the door to many things for which I shall never fail to be grateful. Through the C.D. and the Clubs I began to write and talk about Frank Richards, and then about a wide range of children's literature which I had been stimulated to explore once again. This soon led to my writing, lecturing and broadcasting professionally – and, just as importantly, to making many good and lasting friendships with like-minded enthusiasts for the old papers, and all that they stand for.

Going back to my first conversation with Eric Fayne, this whetted my appetite, not only to revisit the Hamilton schools but to re-savour some of the Famous Five's Christmassy exploits. Something which Eric said really tantalized me. He spoke of reflecting on which series he would read again over the festive season, and of taking that volume from his shelves.

The image of Eric – and of other collectors – so doing stirred envy in my breast, because I then had no *Magnet* stories, apart from the Egypt series, in my possession. (Thank Heaven I am now richly surrounded by volumes of Hamilton's works!) I could only think how wonderful it must be to have the possibility of savouring such delights at will. It wasn't long, however, before I too started collecting and was able to gratify this longing to share Harry Wharton & Co's Yuletide adventures. These, and the Christmas stories of the chums of St Jim's, Cliff House and Morcove were eventually to prompt me to co-author with Tommy Keen the Museum Press publication *From Wharton Lodge to Linton Hall*. What a joy it was to research and write that book! In the process I became aware that, amongst so many gems, I had one absolute favourite Christmas story. This comprised numbers 1139 to 1142 (December 1929 to January 1930). (A close second was *The Mystery of Wharton Lodge* in *Magnets* 1349 to 1351, from December 1933 to January 1934.)

I am repeating here parts of CHRISTMAS AND THE COURTFIELD CRACKSMAN which I originally wrote for *From Wharton Lodge to Linton Hall* but I am including additional material.

Magnets 1139 to 1142 make up a short series within a long one, with Yuletide festivities sandwiched between adventures at Greyfriars that feature the activities of the celebrated Courtfield Cracksman. Of course he is also in the offing throughout the Christmas holiday, and his identity is never a mystery to the reader – but every episode of the series sparkles with appropriate warmth and hilarity, and crime never seems to sully the spirit of Christmas. In fact, the thread of the cracksman story running through the festive exploits adds a satisfying contrast of gravitas to the series. In *Magnet* 1140, for example, there is an intriguing exchange between Colonel Wharton and Barnes, the Headmaster's chauffeur. (Dr. Locke is staying at the Lodge for a few days.) Harry's uncle has recognized Barnes as Lieutenant Arthur Poynings, who, in Flanders during the Great War, 'was one of the most recklessly courageous junior officers in the Loamshire Regiment'.



Rolling silently across to the big wardrobe, Billy Bunter drew a key from his pocket. Swiftly he inserted it into the lock and turned it. Click! Wharton was a prisoner!

However, the Colonel also knows that, after the war, Poynings 'wrote another man's name to a cheque' and was subsequently sent to prison. Barnes tries to justify himself by saying:

"The War knocked all my prospects on the head, it left me with expensive tastes, an unsettled disposition, and nothing to do. A grateful country had no particular use for me when there was no longer demand for cannon fodder."

A moving exchange between the two men follows, and Colonel Wharton is anxious to give Barnes/Poynings every chance to make good, if it is true that his recent record has been a clean one. Alas, readers know that generally whenever Charles Hamilton calls someone 'Poynings' he is bound to be a dubious character. In Barnes' case this is a great pity: we would like to feel that the Head's chauffeur, despite his cracksman activities, might have been allowed to reform.

There are atmospheric high-jinks even before the juniors set out for Wharton Lodge, with Bunter persuading the Removites to contribute for a Christmas pudding – a seasonable gift for Mr. Quelch – which Skinner basely switches for a jack-in-the-box. This of course is hardly the form-master's idea of a joke, and Bunter – innocent for once – receives a severe licking. He is further discomfited a little later on when, on break-up day, Mauly gives him the slip, and then Harry and Inky plonk him forcefully down on to the platform of Courtfield station, so that he misses the train which whisks the other two juniors off *en route* for Wharton Lodge.

Apart from the 'mystery' of burglaries that take place over the holiday, the only theme of the Christmas stories is Bunter's determination to gatecrash the Wharton

Lodge party and Harry's equally strong resolution to keep him out. (Bunter flirts briefly with an attempt to wheedle an invitation from Coker, even putting his life in jeopardy by accepting a pillion-ride on the Fifth-former's motor-bike. But as Bunter's weight, according to Coker, wrecks the machine, the irritated senior's mood is hardly mellow enough to make him offer hospitality to a 'cheeky fag' like the Fat Owl.)

Some of Bunter's most hilarious Christmassy cavortings occur in this series: he chances his luck by arriving at Reigate station and 'phoning Wharton to demand a lift from there to the Lodge. Wharton retaliates by having the family chauffeur meet Bunter, drive him around till nightfall, and then deposit him outside the gates of Bunter Villa! After suffering a couple of days at his home, Billy tires of Sammy's unbrotherliness, Bessie's unsisterliness and his father's caustic speculation about why his elder son has not availed himself of the supposed invitation he has received to spend Christmas at Mauleverer Towers. Bunter returns to the getting-a-foot-inside-Wharton-Lodge fray. He meets with unexpected good fortune when, tramping wearily to the Lodge from the station, he thumbs a lift from a passing car. Its occupant is Dr. Locke – who, driven by Barnes, his new and somewhat mysterious chauffeur, is on his way to spend a few days with his good friend Colonel Wharton. The kindly Headmaster allows Bunter to travel with him, and, once installed at Wharton Lodge, despite occasional manoeuvres on Harry's part that almost make Bunter flee in fear or high dudgeon, the fattie of the Remove firmly stays. He is at his most unengaging – full of cussedness and condescension and cunning. (He even tries to borrow money from the butler, and yawns aloud when Colonel Wharton tells a ghost story.)

Harry and Inky's attempts to scare Billy away from Wharton Lodge include trying to frighten him with lurid descriptions of burglaries which take place in the neighbourhood. (The Courtfield Cracksman being on the spot is, of course, up to his usual tricks.) They also play ghost to scare Bunter off. This stratagem, however,



Billy Bunter unrolled the paper and revealed—a cake of soap bearing the inscription: PRICE THREEPENCE. "Heasts!" he roared angrily.



The enraged taxifan rolled Bunter across his knee, face downward, and the smacks that followed rang out like pistol shots!

goes awry for Wharton, and gives the Fat Owl a long moment of triumph. Hidden in Harry's bedroom, Bunter overhears him discussing the plan with the nabob. Harry will conceal himself in the wardrobe in Bunter's room and, daubed with luminous paint and dressed in a long robe, will leap out once Bunter is in bed, and terrify him out of his wits. Forewarned, Billy locks the wardrobe in which Harry is hiding – and gloats over the captain of the Remove who spends a chilly night in this makeshift prison. (Actually he is there for only two hours, but Harry feels that he has been incarcerated for almost the whole night before Hurree Singh realizes that something has gone wrong, and comes to release him.)

The rest of the Famous Five join Harry and Inky at Wharton Lodge; Bunter hits on a 'brilliant' scheme for feathering his own nest. Trading on the generosity of the Famous Five, he announces on Christmas Eve that he intends to give each of them a 'really decent Christmas present' – a gold watch for Nugent, a fur-lined coat for Hurree Singh, a gramophone for Johnny Bull, a new bike for Bob and skates for Harry! He mentions that there is one little snag – the cheque he will have to request from his pater for these purchases cannot arrive in time for Christmas, so his 'chums' will have to wait a little for their wonderful presents! Bunter, of course, hopes to receive glorious gifts from Wharton & Co., who, he feels sure, will be moved to tremendous generosity by his lavish – but empty – promises. It seems that his ruse has worked when Bob, silencing Bull's cynical comments, remarks that the least they can do is to 'play up and treat Bunter with the same generosity' that he is showing

them.

Bunter spends the rest of Christmas Eve in happy anticipation; the next morning his beauty-sleep is broken by the Co.'s hammering on his door, to present him with a very large parcel. It contains, they assure him, something he really wants, something he has wanted for a very long time, something he has needed badly. In fact, in Inky's words, they 'thinkfully opine' that there is nothing he needs 'more preposterously'. Touched, Bunter asks if the present is very expensive. Bob explains that all the fellows have gladly clubbed together for it; they are determined to give him something of the same value as the presents he will be giving them. However, they have actually spent a little more than this – to be precise, exactly threepence more! Intrigued, excited, envisaging tuck and all manner of delights, Bunter struggles with string, several layers of paper, cardboard and straw packing. At last – at long last – still watched happily by the Famous Five, he unearths the final, small package. 'Bunter's thoughts ran on gold watches, diamond pins, and such things.' But his present is not such a glittering prize; it is, as the heroes of the Remove have explained, worth exactly threepence more than the presents that Bunter will give to them; it is a small, simple, threepenny cake of soap!

The chapters describing Bunter's promise of great gifts, and the Famous Five's present to him, are two of the wittiest episodes in the *Magnet*. They represent Charles Hamilton's Christmas spell-binding at its very best and happiest.

Even after this joyous climax of the series, there are further gems. Bob Cherry disguises himself as 'Dr Robert' when Bunter is malingering, after falling through some thin ice while skating. Billy wants the whole household to wait upon him in his room, but after examining him the bogus doctor tells him he is seriously ill, and must eat nothing but a few slices of bread and a glass of water for several days! Unfortunately Bunter's shrieks and groans bring Colonel Wharton onto the scene, and the hoax has to end.

The chums move off to Cherry Place for the rest of the holidays, in secret, trading on the fact that Bunter is far too lazy to get up early enough to witness their departure. He is still determined to stick to them like glue and, guessing where they have gone, decides to follow them. Impecunious as ever, Bunter's only recourse is to travel to Bob's home by taxi, and to 'bilk' the driver. After the long journey from Surrey to Dorset, Bunter manages to hop out and evade the driver when they get near to Cherry Place. The taxi-man's subsequent search for Bunter, and the thrashing which he delivers when he finds the Fat Owl, make lively reading.

It is only after this that, at last, Harry Wharton & Co. shake Bunter off. Unaware that they have settled the outstanding fare, Billy is in dread of the taxi-driver calling the police. With discretion very much the better part of valour he makes the journey back to Bunter Villa, leaving the Famous Five a few joyously Bunter-less days before they return to Greyfriars to start the new term.....

I shall probably be re-reading this series again in the run-up to Christmas. If you have it in your collections, do dip into it again. With everything from farce and irony to drama and glowing Christmas cheer it offers rich rewards!

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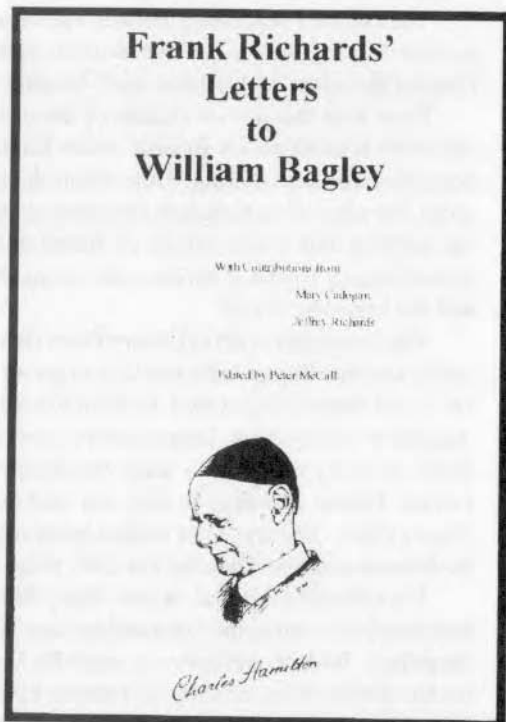
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BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT... EXPULSION!

by Margery Woods



Chapter 1



"Expelled!"

"BUNTER!"

"Never!"

"It's true." The Bounder of Greyfriars lounged in the doorway of Study No. 1 and grinned at the five open-mouthed expressions of the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton was the first to recover. "You're joking, Smithy."

Vernon-Smith shook his head. "I heard it from Skinner."

"Huh," growled Johnny Bull. "Skinner has keyhole amplifiers in his ears. He's even worse than Bunter."

"Remember when Wingate came in to see Quelchy just before class recessed," said Smithy, "and Quelchy was looking as black as fury and dismissed us..."

"Yes," broke in Wharton, "and he told Bunter to remain behind. We didn't stop to wonder because of the halfer and we wanted to get dinner and catch the one fifteen bus to Courtfield to do some Christmas shopping."

"We thought Bunter must have collected another impot," added Frank Nugent. "His third this week and he's been swearing blue murder about Quelchy, but expelled.... Now you've sprung your little joke, Smithy, so will you shut the door if you're coming or going before the fat frog smells our tea here."

"There'll be no fat frog for tea here any more." Smithy closed the door and took a seat at the well laden tea table. "I take it I'm invited," stretching out a hand for a slice of succulent veal and ham pie. He was obviously enjoying himself and in no hurry to enlighten the chums with the rest of his story.

"Don't I get a cup of char?" asked Smithy, drawing the plate of mince pies towards himself.

"When you tell us the gospel truth according to Skinner," retorted Bob Cherry, moving the mince pies out of Smithy's reach.

"Yes, the whyfulness and the whenfulness is of the essence, instant, now," said Hurree Jamsel Ram Singh. "The joke is over stretchified, old chum."

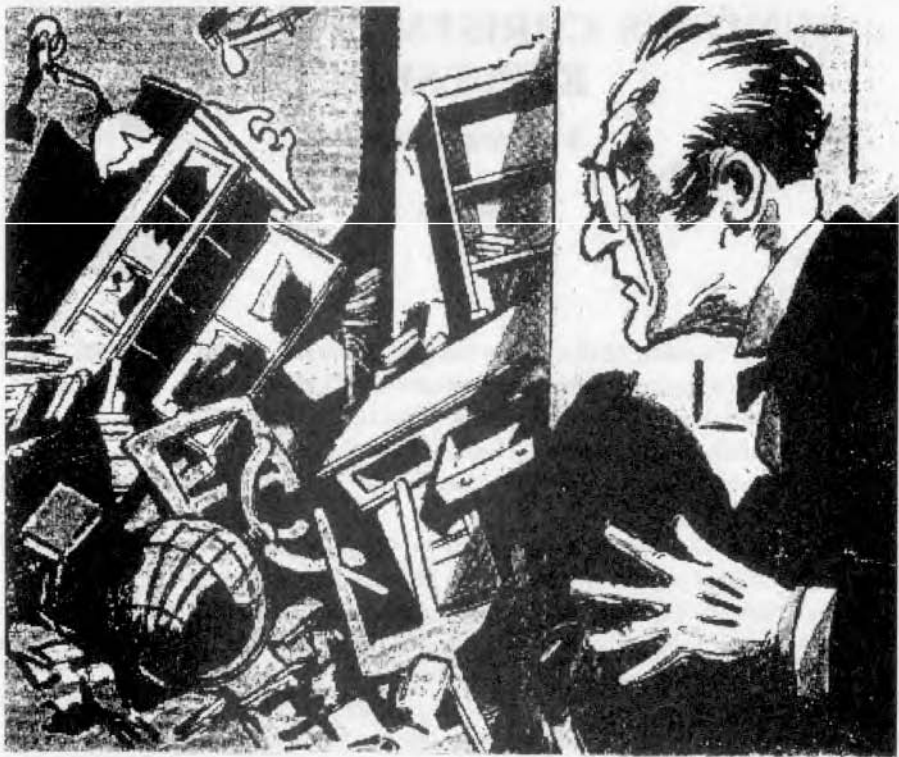
"Skinner says Wingate has to escorts Bunter to the station tomorrow and make sure he gets on the train, Nobody has seen Bunter since we left class this morning."

"And?" demanded Wharton.

"The whyfulness?" Smithy made a feint towards the mince pies and settled instead for a slice of best fruit cake. "Guess."

"Look, are you starving?" grunted Johnny Bull, "or playing silly Bunters? Where's the hamper you had yesterday?"

"Bunter raided it yesterday." The Bounder raised defensive arms as Bob jumped



up and said, "Let's sling him out...he's just having us on."

Wharton's expression had grown serious. "Stop fooling, Smithy. If it's true, why?"

"Because he shipped Quelch's study last night."

Five jaws ceased chewing. "How do you know?"

"It's round the school already. Apparently Skinner was doing his snooping act and heard Wingate talking to Gwynne, cancelling some arrangement they'd made for tomorrow because they had to see that Bunter shook the dust of Greyfriars off his fat feet for ever. But just as Wingate mentioned something about Prout seeing Bunter, Walker sneaked up and caught Skinner. Skinner got a couple of whops and was threatened by Walker that he'd get six more if he was caught hanging about in the Sixth Form passage again. Of course that broke up the chinwag between Wingate and Gwynne."

None of the Five was laughing now. Suddenly Wharton stood up.

"I'm going to see Wingate." "No," as Cherry and Nugent also stood up to join him, "I'll stand a better chance of getting past Walker or Loder if they're prowling."

Harry's luck was in. He encountered no officious prefects in the Sixth Form passage and Wingate's voice answered his knock. Harry entered and Wingate looked up impatiently from some papers he was studying. "Yes, Wharton, what is it?"

Normally Wingate, the popular school captain, was pleasant and approachable

but now he looked unsettled.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," Harry said, "but I've just heard about Bunter. Has he really been expelled?"

Wingate indicated a chair and Harry sat down, reading the truth in Wingate's face.

"I'd leave well alone, Wharton," said Wingate, "if you've any notion of putting up a defence of the young idiot. He's really overstepped the mark this time." Wingate paused and leaned back, tapping his pen on the table, then seemed to come to a decision. "You may as well hear the details as I know them. Bunter has shipped his form master's study, apparently for the revenge he's been boasting about planning for days."

"Yes," said Harry, "but Bunter always talks a load of garbage about getting his own back on Mr. Quelch. But when it comes to the point, I mean to a master, I think he backs off. And he certainly wasn't bragging about it in the dorm last night. Or this morning."

"Maybe not." Wingate looked grim. "But Mr Prout caught him in the act."

Harry gasped, and Wingate's mouth compressed. "Mr Quelch was out very late last night with the Head, at a mayoral dinner, and joined the Head for a nightcap when they returned. So the damage wasn't discovered until after one a.m. Quelch didn't want to raise the school at that time of night and the Head invited him back to his house to get some rest."

"Is it...very bad? The study?" Harry ventured.

"It's appalling," said Wingate. "Then this morning Mr Prout said he'd called at Mr Quelch's study last night to leave a message and found Bunter with ink all over the desk, books and papers on the floor and things upset."

Harry felt dismay. Bunter's hands had been heavily marked with ink that morning; as usual, Bunter's washing efforts were conspicuous by their absence.

Wingate went on: "Mr Prout had leave to depart a day early... his is joining a party on an expedition to the States and hopes to indulge in a spot of hunting. But he caught a later train because he wanted to explain to the Head and Mr Quelch exactly what had happened in the study when he disturbed Bunter."

And I bet that was preposterous and unparalleled, though Harry but wisely kept that thought to himself.

"The Head decided that Bunter must go, and I can't say I blame him." Wingate sighted. "Bunter has been an unmitigated nuisance in this school for far too long."

"Did Bunter admit it?"

"What do you think?" Wingate shrugged. "Of course he denied it. Said he'd never even thought of shipping Mr Quelch's study. He'd just finished his impot and taken it along to him, and because he wasn't there Bunter wanted to add his name to impot and when a knock came at the door and Mr Prout entered and called out. Bunter got a fright and accidentally upset the inkpot. He was trying to mop it up and shift the stuff on the desk out of the way."

Harry could not help thinking it sounded distinctly like Bunter. He asked, "Where

is Bunter now?"

"In the punishment room, locked in," Wingate said grimly. "The Head hasn't forgotten the last time Bunter was under sentence of expulsion. That caravan business. And Vernon-Smith blocking the boxroom chimney and then lighting a fire to smoke Bunter out of hiding in the loft. The entire school was in an uproar for days. No, the Head isn't risking that again. Bunter stays under lock and key until tomorrow when Gwynne and I...for our sins...have to see Bunter as far as Lantham then put him in charge of an inspector who will see him as far as Reigate where Bunter senior is to collect him."

Wingate did not look pleased and said with resignation, "Now, Wharton, I'm trying to catch up...I didn't bargain for being landed with all this business."

"I'm sorry I've interrupted." Harry stood up. "But thanks for explaining it all, Wingate, so that at least I can refute some of the wild rumours that will be buzzing round the school." Harry still hesitated. "Do you think I could see Bunter?"

"No." Wingate shook his head. "Visitors are forbidden, I'm afraid." Moving back to the table and his interrupted work, the school captain suddenly turned. "All right. I'll see what I can do, Christmas and all that... Come along after prep if you've got any and if poss. I'll take you along. I have to check on Bunter every time food is taken to him but you'll only have ten minutes, and no-one with you."

"Thanks, Wingate." Harry felt uncertain of the relief he experienced at the permission he'd received to see Bunter, of all people.

Smithy's reaction, however, was to be expected.

He gave a whoop of satisfaction. "Just think! Christmas without Bunter, without that fat guzzling bandersnatch muscling in on everything, annoying the staff, pestering the girls. Oh, I'm looking forward to the Abbey minus Bunter."

It was true and also understandable. Bunter had never been welcome at Wharton Lodge, nor at Smithy's home, where the chums were to spend Yuletide in the great official house-warming Smithy's father was throwing to celebrate completing the restoration of the ancient historic Abbey that was now the Vernon-Smith country home. And there they would meet their girl chums from Cliff House.

Yet despite this Harry sensed a shadow was being cast on Christmas by the downfall of Bunter, a shadow none of them would ever have visualised affecting them at the disappearance of the greediest, most irritating fat boy of Greyfriars.

Chapter 2

Wingate kept his promise and took Wharton to see Bunter late that evening.

The fat owl almost fell on the Remove Captain, imploring him to help and swearing that he'd never shipped Quelchy's study. Only spilt some ink and that was old Pompous's own fault for bursting in and frightening him, dropping his briefcase and pointing with horror, ordering Bunter to get out and do no more damage. The account almost echoed Wingate's own account, spliced with copious descriptions of old beasts and other Bunterish plays on the English language.



Harry felt helpless. There was so little he could say, yet there was something about the whole business that worried him. But Wingate was tapping his watch and with a promise that they would be able to say goodbye to Bunter next day Harry had to be content, leaving the once bold, bad and brave Bunter to his last lonely night at Greyfriars.

But his chums had little time for concern about Bunter. There were cards to written, the results of the afternoon's shopping spree to be wrapped, and as Harry added the gift tag to the embroidered handkerchiefs for his Aunt Amy he said suddenly: "Do you think we should have a whip round for Bunter?"

The reception to this idea was mixed. But for Bunter it worked two ways. Those who were imbibed with the spirit of Christmas charity agreed and were inclined to generosity, while others professed themselves so thankful to see the back of him that they contributed anyway. Mauly contributed a twenty; actually he had intended ten but pulled the wrong note from his wallet and found it much too exhausting to return the note and find a tenner. Smithy matched this, saying it was a small penalty for the prospect of Christmas without Bunter, and quite a few fivers mingled with silver, all helping to disguise the midget fivepence pieces, a couple of pesetas and an old Deutschmark that were Fisher T Fish's unwilling offering. Altogether there was nearly sixty pounds to speed the departure of Bunter, and as the Remove gathered to witness this sad event Harry felt yet again that something wasn't right somehow. But who

dare question the evidence of Prout? And, as the taxi appeared to collect Bunter and escort, Bob Cherry rushed round from the tuckshop. He pushed a large bag of jam and mince tarts into Bunter's hands and said, "Cheer up, old bean...these will sweeten the journey."

As Bunter stammered his surprise and thanks Harry was sure he detected tears behind the big giglamps, and then Wingate and Gwynne were shoving Bunter's shabby bag into the taxi and urging its unhappy owner inside. The last protest escaped as the taxi door slammed.

"I didn't do it! Only the ink! Prout must have done it!"

Then the taxi was gone and the chums faces grew serious. Bob Cherry was the first to voice the thought in Harry's mind. "Do you think there's doubt about all this?"

"I don't know," Wharton shook his head. "I've felt a doubt since yesterday but I just can't put my head round it."

"I can." The Bounder drew level as they moved back into the school. "From what you told me, and Bunter protesting just now, his protests don't vary. You know what he's like when we catch him raiding. Oh, it was the cat, or he'd disturbed a burglar, he'd thrown the intruder out of the window, or even he was never there. Always stupid excuses. But until now, saying Prout did it, he seems to have stuck to saying he's innocent."

"And he's different, sort of broken," put in Frank Nugent, "I've never seen Bunter like that before."

"Same here," said Harry. "But how does one go against Prout's evidence? It's damned Bunter."

They trooped into the last class of term. The following day was breaking-up and nobody felt any inclination to work. Even Mr. Quelch's black fury of the previous day seemed to have dissipated, leaving behind a resigned grimness as he set them a resumé of the term's work. Finally he wished them the compliments of the season, which they dutifully returned, and he dismissed them. But as the boys hurried out Wharton remained by his desk, held back by a sudden impulse.

Quelch shuffled papers together and glanced at his head boy, impatience in his frown. "Wharton, what is it?"

"I wonder..." Harry began to regret his impulse, then blurted out: "About your study, sir, Could we help? I mean, could a couple of us help you this afternoon? That is try to tidy up a bit...we've heard that it is in a dreadful mess."

Mr. Quelch remained so silent for such a time that Harry braced himself for the collapse of the skies about his head. Then Mr. Quelch's expression changed. "That is very thoughtful. Thank you, Wharton, but there is concern about the damage."

"We'd be very careful, sir."

"Very well." Mr. Quelch sighed. "You could gather up the books and put them back on the shelves. I rescued a few of my essential things yesterday as Dr. Locke has given me the governors' room until my study is put to rights, and I must confess I am not looking forward to such a wearisome task. Can I trust you with the key?"

"Of course, sir."

"You may tell Mrs Kebble you have my permission to be there."

Harry escaped, pleased that his offer had been accepted, and confided his idea to his chums, along with his secret motive behind the offer - to find a clue about what really happened."

"But we'd have heard if we've another shipper in the Remove."

"Would we?" Smithy sounded doubtful. "I suppose old Pompous saw all the ink mess and when he heard that the place had been done over he simply convinced Quelchy that Bunter was the culprit. And Quelchy would hardly disbelieve him."

"And after Bunter's bragging about what he was going to do to Quelchy to get how own back... I heard him say he was going to wish Quelch a happy Christmas."

"Half the school heard him," agreed Bob.

"I told you that Quelch is spending the hols at Wharton Lodge," said Harry. "I just don't like the idea of him being worried about it all."

"Quelch? That wily old bean." Smithy couldn't imagine it. "Well, where do we start? Don't forget he's visiting us with your Uncle and Aunt Amy as well. We don't want a wet blanket. It's bad enough having the gimlet eyes around during the hols."

"Let's go." Harry took the key out of his pocket, and mentally lined out a plan of action, dispatching Johnny and Inky to the tuck shop to organise tea, and Frank to raid Mrs Kebble's cupboards for dusters and a sweeper while he and Bob and Smithy surveyed what needed to be done in the study. None of them dreamed of the havoc that would meet their gaze when the door swung open.

Quelch owned rather a lot of books, probably at least two thousand, and every one had been ruthlessly yanked from the two walls of high bookcases. There were folders, paperbacks, journals and atlases. Desk drawers had pulled out and upturned on the carpet, a bronze horse and a bust of some famous Roman had been tipped from their pedestals... the famous Roman losing his nose in the fall, and other articles were scattered on the floor. Even the window curtains of heavy velour had not been spared, their old fashioned wooden rings sliding from the mahogany pole that hung drunkenly adrift from its bracket at one end.

"Jumping Jupiter! Gaspd Bob Cherry. "No wonder poor old Quelchy didn't fancy starting on this."

"Bunter didn't do this!" exclaimed Harry.

"Too much like hard work," said Smithy.

"Let's get the books back on the shelves," said Harry. "Try to keep subjects together—Quelchy can fine-sort at his leisure—and any damaged can go together on one shelf."

It took the boys over an hour to restore the books and replace Mr Quelch's treasures in the places that seemed most suitable. Johnny returned and with Smithy got the curtains up while Harry and Smithy cleared the scattered papers littering the carpet.

"Here's Bunter's impot," gurgled Smithy. "Listen to this. Eton is a school. It does not stand over the Straits of Messina. Three hundred times."

"Put it on the desk," chortled Bob Cherry. "I've found Prout's note." That went on the ink-stained desk. Then Harry's voice came from under the knee-hole. "Anyone recognise this?" He crawled out holding a silver topped pen, quite small and slim.

"Looks like a girl's," said Frank. "Can't see Mr Quelch using that."

"Better ask him," said Harry, and at that moment their form master walked in.

If his expression took on a familiar gimlet quality as he noticed one of the long-time banes of his form trying to reset his study clock he made no comment and looked round appreciatively.

"You've made quite a transformation, boys. Thank you very much for giving up your time." He sighed when shown the books that had suffered damage, glanced at his colleague's note and Bunter's impot and did not recognise the pen. "Take it, Wharton. You may be able to match it to part of this." Mr Quelch took a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to Harry. The boys crowded round. The cheap bit of lined paper held the message, part of which was written and part of which was formed by words cut out of newsprint:

To Mr Quelch. Have fun. We Wish you a happy Christmas.
The Well-wisher.

Wharton said: "The written words were not done with this pen. And we—we think Bunter couldn't have done all this."

Mr Quelch sank wearily into his desk chair. "Dr Locke has discussed this with me; the possibility that Bunter had an accomplice, who may even have been hiding when Mr Prout came into the room. It is very worrying. If so, the other culprit must be found."

Harry looked at his form master. "Sir, is there anyone you have upset or punished severely recently?"

"I too have considered that possibility, but no-one, apart from Bunter, comes to mind. However, if there is the slightest possibility that an injustice has been done the truth must be discovered, therefore should you hear anything pertinent to this matter you must tell me, feeling free for once from the unpardonable matter of sneaking."

"Yes, sir, we will," promised Wharton.

"Now you will want to be preparing for tomorrow." Mr Quelch's expression came to the nearest to a smile. "Again, I thank you, and may see you to exchange seasonal greetings in pleasanter mood. Oh," he paused, "is there any sign of my briefcase?"

None of the boys had noticed this, and assured him that they had thrown nothing away and left the waste-paper basket without emptying it.

When they left Mr Quelch's study Smithy was on edge with excitement. "Let's see that note," he cried, and gave a whistle. "I know where the printed bits came from. A racing paper—there's a horse called Well-wisher—it ran at Wapshot last week."

"Well," said Bob.

"I'm going to nose round the studies," said Smithy. "Who's game to help me, and who's game to go and search the bin for paper recycling?"

This idea was seized on instantly, and the search actually produced five copies of

the Racing Tipster. More disappointing, none had been cut into for word snippets. And the Bounder, who braved Loder's study, came within an ace of being caught. "But I'd chucked his fags in the fire in case he nabbed me," he chuckled. "Also, there's a horse called Happy Boy. Now Bunter might consider a visit to a bookie, or buying a racing paper, but he'd never get past the tuck shop if he had any cash. So..."

"The evidence is not quite as stacked against Bunter as old Pompous made out," added Bob.

"You know," said Smithy, with only a shade of his usual cynical tone, "maybe there's something in this good-deed-for-the-day philosophy."

But next morning the worst blow fell.

An empty, mud-stained dark leather briefcase was found in a nearby field by a farm hand and brought to Greyfriars in case it belonged there. Although an initial tab was missing Mr Quelch identified it as his property: a property that had contained a very precious possession: the manuscript of his History of Greyfriars.

Chapter 3

After the trauma and tribulations of the past week it was a relief to the boys to escape from Greyfriars to the inviting prospect of Christmas at the Abbey where their girl chums from Cliff House had already arrived. The Bounder's father was in jovial mood as he greeted them, adding a jocular warning not to expect too much—he was no longer a millionaire. "So no Oliver Twist acts!" he joked.

When they saw the splendours of the newly landscaped grounds they wondered if there could be an element of truth in Mr Vernon-Smith's greeting. Then Smithy confided that his father had had two offers from two trillionaires to buy the Abbey. Certainly Hurree was stirred to even greater heights of his wonderful version of the English language as the chums explored. Although it was winter late flowers still bloomed in beds fringing the winding paths and many shrubs had been chosen to highlight the walkways with russet and gold and scarlet, while the ruins stood starkly proud, free of the rubble that had surrounded them.

"It's all been made safe," Smithy told them, "and some archaeologists have been working during the summer discovering stuff."

"More treasure?" exclaimed Barbara Redfern eagerly.

"Not that kind," said the Bounder, "but they discovered an ancient underground stream that feeds that cistern. They said that parts of that originated in Roman times and it was utilised by the monks when the monastery was founded."

"Fascinating," murmured Jemima Carstairs, affixing her monocle more securely.

"Yes," broke in tomboy Clara Trevlyn, "we'll explore that—I've had an idea I think we should do it on Christmas Eve to help Marjorie kill her memories of that ghastly experience."

"A kind of exorcism," murmured Jemima.

Only Harry noticed Marjorie Hazeldene's face pale. "I'd rather not," she said in a low voice.

"But it's all quite safe," broke in a new feminine voice. It was Trish, also a guest

during that fateful Christmas. "It's all lit inside. We explored it yesterday." She drew closer to Bob, and the Bounder smirked with a memory.

Clara was not to be diverted. "It's like falling off a horse. If you don't get back on it you never ride again. Huh, don't tell me you're scared! Not after what you went through in Africa when you refused to leave your uncle because he was so ill."

"No, it's not that." Marjorie turned away and moved on to look at the outlines of an ancient herb garden.

The chums looked curiously after her, realising that she had worn a reserved, almost worried expression ever since they arrived. Harry said to Babs, "Is Marjorie all right? There's nothing wrong, is there?"

Babs shook her head. "I don't think so." But she too looked puzzled.

Frank said, "Perhaps she is a bit haunted by what happened here."

"I doubt it," Jemima said softly. "She's never mentioned it and she was as excited as all of us when we got the invite to the Abbey. No, this sort of mood only started a week or so ago.

"Well," said Smithy, who had been listening in, "I think we should checkmate the haunting theory. Leave it to me," he added confidently.

He waylaid Marjorie later that day and refused to be put off by her repeated refusal. "Listen, we'll guard you. If there is a ghastly spook waiting for you—like Jed—I'll slay him and carry you to safety." He watched for the faint weakening in her sweet face, and urged, "We'll bring Bob—if we can get him out of Trish's clutches."

At last Marjorie began to smile, recalling the lovelorn Trish that previous Christmas. "She certainly fancied Bob after she fell out with her boyfriend," Smithy went on, "she must have made it up with him because she is sporting an enormous diamond engagement ring. Or maybe it's a sugar daddy."

At last Marjorie began to laugh. "All right." She looked up at the Bounder and coloured a little. "Go on, you can tell the others."

Marjorie's expedition was planned for Christmas Eve, late. Meanwhile another day and a half remained and Mr Vernon-Smith had work for them. The big tree in the Great Hall was still to decorate, there were stacks of cards that arrived at every post and he wanted them suitably strung up to form additional decorations. There was holly and greenery to be brought in and they all needed at least one more shopping expedition. They staggered back to the Abbey laden with parcels and settled down for a big wrapping session. Swirls of coloured ribbon and sheets of gaily patterned paper soon spread over table and floor. Shading arms kept trying to mask what they were packing and giggles of "Don't dare look," sounded along the big table every so often. Someone had put a CD in the player and they sang along with the well-loved old favourite carols.

"Gosh, I'm exhausted," groaned Clara, sorting out gift tags from the now thoroughly mixed up jumble of Christmas on the table. Then she exclaimed annoyance, going through her pockets. "My pen's given out and I've lost my pencil. Anyone lend me one?"

"Here," Harry offered immediately, unclipping his pen, at least he thought he was

unclipping his pen but the slim silver pen from Mr Quelch's study came free with it and rolled across the table. Marjorie stared at it, almost in disbelief, and Clara grabbed it. "I seem to have seen this before."

"Take this one." He held out his own. "You can keep it, I've another upstairs." He retrieved the silver pen and dropped it in his jacket pocket. It was still possible evidence and he did not want to lose it. Nor did he want to recognise a trace of fear he was sure he'd glimpsed in Marjorie's face.

They gathered up their gifts and arranged them amid the heaps that were gathered around the big tub in which the tree stood. There was just time to wash and change for the Christmas Eve supper. Harry found his gaze returning to Marjorie where she was seated between Babs and Frank Nugent. Somehow he felt uneasiness clouding his mind, the same uneasiness he had experienced at Greyfriars. Impatiently he tried to shrug it off and join in the Christmas singsong with the other guests. He was anxious about his uncle and Aunt Amy, who with their guest, Mr Quelch, should have arrived by now. But traffic had probably been heavy and could have delayed them. He could not help feeling uneasy about the presence of his form master until Boxing Day. Although commonsense told him that Mr Quelch would never allow a personal matter to cause any disquiet on such a special celebration. Not for the first time Harry wished he had some of Smithy's self confidence. Smithy could face concern, or problems or embarrassment without turning a hair. He watched the Bounder now, helping Marjorie on with her jacket, playing at his protective best to escort her out on the trip to the ruins.

Two or three of the adults decided to tag along but gave up in the face of a bitterly cold wind bringing frost in its wake. Despite this the moon and the concealed lighting turned the landscaped grounds into a winter fairyland. They reached the ruins, with their new discreet notice-board with the English Heritage information.

Smithy guided Marjorie down the steps, now repaired and quite safe, and paused by the edge of the cistern that now gleamed a dark clear blue beneath the concealed lighting. Stone urns and pitchers of varying sizes were dotted around, perhaps unearthed or perhaps purchased by Mr Vernon-Smith whose determination to complete any project he took on was well known.

The cell doors at one side stood open, all barring one at the far end, and Babs said curiously, "What were these cells used for? Surely the monks didn't sleep down here."

"No, mein schatz," said Jemima, who was starting German, "they were used for storage. Being so cold, food and grain would keep better."

"I'd have thought stuff would go mouldy," sniffed Clara. "It's damp."

They had reached the one door that was closed. Marjorie shivered and half turned away. Instantly Smithy and Bob put out reassuring hands to the girl who had suffered so alarming an experience within. The bar still hung at the side but the latch rested on the sneck, to open from either outside or in.

"Come on," urged Clara, "you've got to open it yourself."

"No." Smithy did this and gently pushed the door open.

Hesitantly Marjorie obeyed, took two steps, then froze and gave a great gasp of shock. Smithy thrust past her, following by Bob, and a voice they'd never expected to hear there shouted:

"I'm not here! Gerroff you beasts! I'm not here!"

"Bunter!"

Bunter!

Chapter 4

Against the barrage of shock from the chums Bunter huddled back against the wall, trying to shrink on the self-same bench on which Marjorie had once spent twenty-four freezing hours before Smithy and Jemima had rescued her and restored her to peace and warmth. Now Marjorie gave a cry of distress and ran to the fat owl's side. "You must be frozen! How long have you been here?" Her warm, sympathetic hand touched his brow and hand as she spoke, much as had Smithy's before he'd carried her to safety.

Suddenly Bunter clung to her and she looked at the chums. "Well, come on! Whatever he's done or not done he can't stay here."

"No, he'll be hungry," grinned Bob."

"Bunter for Christmas—as ever!" said Smithy with a cynical gesture. "I don't know how he does it."

In the flurry of explanations Bunter was hauled up to the lobby, there warmed, fed, and settled by a fire. Smithy looked really worried. "I've got to find Larkin. For heaven's sake don't anybody tell Dad or anyone till I think what to do until Quelchy's gone." A few minutes later he returned with the usually imperturbable butler. He woke Bunter and said sharply, "Now, Bunter, you're to stay where Larkin tells you, understand. You mustn't come through among the guests or let them see you. Mr Quelch is staying here till Boxing Day. Okay? If you're seen you'll be pitched out to get back home as best you can."

Bunter nodded. All fight had gone out of him and his one desire was sleep, food and warmth.

"His explanations can wait," said Smithy. "Larkin will find somewhere in the servants' quarters until Quelchy's gone. Then I suppose I'll have to tell Dad. He'll be furious."

Fortunately most of the guests had gone to the Midnight Service and the startled chums retired and hoped for the best. Happily no night disturbances of a Bunterish nature disturbed their sleep and Christmas Day dawned bright and clear. At breakfast Mr Quelch appeared quite benign and his pupils relaxed a bit and Harry gave his aunt an affectionate greeting. As soon as they could escape Harry and Smithy and Marjorie went to see Bunter. Smithy thanked Larkin and discreetly handed him quite a plump envelope and a second one "For the staff, as you think fit," before Larkin took them to Bunter's quarters.

Bunter had quite a lot to say. Mainly of his disgust at the lack of sympathy received at home even from his mother, who usually defended her favourite child

against all adversity. But Mr Bunter's rage showed no sign of declining and the following day Bunter was dispatched to Uncle George's boarding house in Folkestone. Bunter had been there before and not enjoyed himself and now he had wealth he was going to join his chums at the Abbey.

"Since when have we been chums of Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull.

Of course the protests of innocence were related ad infinitum. He reminded them of his previous expulsion when he had been telling the truth and no one believed him. And he was found to be innocent. And no, he didn't have a silver pen and didn't know anyone that owned one.

Only Smithy this time noticed the flickers of concern and the sudden flush in Marjorie's cheeks as she heard this.

In response to further questioning Bunter said he'd arrived at the Abbey earlier the previous morning but some people had stared at him so he'd dodged into the ruins to keep out of sight until he'd had a chance to see his chums. So he'd decided to hang around until after dark in the hope of getting in and installing himself near reach of grub and warmth. But Bunter's eyes were closing again and the snores of longed for escape issuing from the jammy surround on his face.

"The sleeping beauty," said Smithy resignedly. "I've told Larkin to keep him stuffed and with a bit of luck that'll keep him from under our feet. Now I'm going to open some presents."

"Jolly good idea!" Clara led the scramble towards the tree and the bounty it sheltered. Harry found a new watch from his uncle, Babs a set of camel-hair brushes for her art work, Clara a new hockey-stick and Bessie the largest box of chocolates they'd ever seen. Mabs squealed over a new box of theatrical make-up and Jemima sighed with pleasure when she discovered a lap-top from her father. Marjorie unfolded a dress length of softest blue silk and Bob and Frank each received watches, and Hurree some CDs of his favourite sitar music. There were also small gifts to each other. Smithy, browsing through several books, remarked that so many of the chums had received gifts that meant work! Or games practice! Clara was waving her hockey-stick. And then the gong boomed out, summoning all to the great event of the day: The Feast.

And what a feast!

The long table in the Great Hall was almost sagging under the weight of festal fare. King Turkey took pride of place, amid the aromas of roast beef for those who didn't care for turkey. Three kinds of stuffing, tiny sausages in curls of bacon, roast potatoes and six creamed or sauced vegetables, mushrooms and cranberry sauce made a menu that should delight every taste. Bessie grew shiny and yet shinier, as though to make up for what her brother might be missing, and still her eyes widened with anticipation when the great round pudding alight with blue flames arrived. Capping all this were the cheese board, biscuits, glacé fruit, nuts and coffee or whatever imbibables the diners fancied. Outsize scarlet and gilt crackers made the final bang to set off a Christmas feast to equal any that Dickens might have evoked.

Afterwards a somnolent silence descended on the Abbey. Even the normal energies

of the chums surrendered to a certain stillness of movement. Only Bessie, settling happily, remembered her brother and murmured sleepily that she hoped Uncle George had given him plenty of dinner.

"I'm sure he will," Babs comforted.

"But he's mean, you know." Bessie's conscience seemed to be stirring to life. "Billy's got to go to work in some office. He won't be going back to school, you see."

The silence descended again. Everyone was too full even to talk, and then suddenly it was broken by a thunderous knocking at the outer door. Smithy stirred and lifted his feet off a footstool. "Now what?"

The sleepers and dozers awakened in some alarm and sat up. Mr Vernon-Smith heaved out of his armchair as Larkin entered and spoke to him in a low voice. But someone picked up one word from the discreet communication and one word ran round the startled guests in a crescendo.

"Police! It's the police!"

Smithy's father hurried from the hall. No one moved or spoke until he returned. His face was serious but he gestured to his guests. "Please don't worry. This doesn't concern anyone except my son."

In a shadowed corner at the far end of the Great Hall Harry's uncle and aunt and Mr Quelch betrayed concern as Smithy cried "What?" and sprang to his feet. His father came to him.

"Your school mate, Bunter, has run away. Missing since yesterday. The police are trying to contact places he might have visited. Wimbourne police have just tried your place," as Colonel Wharton approached. "We were the next on the list. But I've told them he isn't here and we've no idea where he might be. So please, folks, relax again."

Smithy groaned. "What do we do now? We—"

But he was interrupted by a desperate cry from Marjorie Hazeldine, "He is here. We—I saw him last night and we brought him in and hid him because...Oh, we must let them know. His parents must be frantic."

There was a confusion of voices. Mr Vernon-Smith turned on his son. "Where have you got that foolish boy?"

"In the servants' quarters." Smithy was furious. "I did it for the best, Dad. "We couldn't turn him out. I thought I was doing the right thing, because of the situation here. With Bunter having been expelled and Mr Quelch being here."

The Bounder's voice was desperate as he faced his angry father. "I got Larkin to fix him up and keep him quiet until after Boxing Day, then we could sort things out. Tell me what else I could have done?"

"We'd better phone the police first. You, my son, can have that job. Meanwhile, I suppose we'd better bring Bunter into the party. And Barbara," he turned in search of Babs, "can you ask Bunter's sister for their home phone number. We must let them know. And then," Mr Vernon-Smith managed a weak smile, "perhaps we can get back to our celebration."

He glanced at the group round Marjorie and decided one emotional upset was enough for him to deal with and moved to reassure his adult guests that all was being

taken care of. Smithy, after an anxious glance at Marjorie who was very upset, muttered, "Hang Bunter!" and caught sight of Larkin. Hastily Smithy grabbed him. "Let the police know Bunter's here, and my father says Bunter can join us." Then Smithy rushed back to his friends.

"What's wrong now?" he demanded.

"Calm down, Smithy," said Wharton, "Let Marjorie explain."

"It's Peter," she said miserably. "I hate to betray him, but I couldn't keep silent any longer."

"What's happened to him?" exclaimed Bob. "He seemed okay when we broke up."

"What's he done, you mean," said the Bounder savagely. "He's at the bottom of all this trouble."

"He—he got into debt very badly last month and borrowed from Ponsonby. Yes, he's taken up again with that set lately and—"

"Did he ship Quelch's study?" -Snapped Smithy. "The rotter, and let—" He stopped, aghast at the hurt on the gentle girl's face.

"I'm sorry—I didn't mean to snap but there's been so much upset through this."

"No," she whispered, "it wasn't quite like that. A few weeks ago your form master saw Ponsonby and those two unpleasant friends of coming out of that Fishers Inn and he reported them to Highcliffe's head-master. It was lucky that Peter had just slipped across that short cut to Greyfriars before they were spotted. Ponsonby was furious. He got a bit of a telling off but that was all, but he said it was no business of Quelch's what he did and he was going to do something about it."

"He had a point there," said Bob, though I hate to admit it."

"Anyway," Marjorie sighed, "Ponsonby offered to settle Peter's debt and write off what Peter owed him if he'd help them to get into Greyfriars one night when it was quiet, preferably when Mr Quelch was out. So that they could have a bit of fun in his study."

"Fun!" exploded Wharton. "Added to moral blackmail. And Bunter got expelled for it."

"I know," Marjorie said sadly, "I didn't know what to do. And that silver pen is actually mine. Peter borrowed it recently. Then he said he'd lost it. I think he was terrified in case he'd lost in Mr Quelch's study. But when I saw Bunter last night and remembered what it was like shut in there I couldn't help wanting to help him. And then the police getting involved. .. Oh, I wish Peter had never got mixed up with Ponsonby again."

"What on earth are we going to do?" said Nugent. "We can't very well split on Hazeldene."

They all looked at Wharton. At last he said: "I think we have to tell Quelch we know who was responsible."

"Yes, but he'll never settle for that," objected Bob.

"No. Hazeldene has to own up," said Smithy. "If we can't persuade him, I will make him"

"You see," interjected Harry, "there's another complication. They took Quelch's brief case, emptied it and threw it in a field. It was found and brought to Greyfriars in case one of the staff had lost it."

"And it contained a very important manuscript," Smithy broke in.

"He's been working on it for years. He must be terribly upset at the loss."

Marjorie was horrified. Her hands flew to her face. "What can we do? I don't think Peter will own up. He'd be too scared of Ponsonby to risk it. Actually he thought Ponsonby was over the top, but it's not fair that Bunter has to suffer."

"Even though Bunter once blackmailed you for money for something Peter was supposed to have done but hadn't." The Bounder's voice was sardonic. "Don't waste too much of your sympathy on Bunter."

"Yes, but Marjorie means principles," Bob Cherry retorted.

"Something you've been known to fall out with a few times."

"Now, children," Jemima entered the discussion, "let's not start personal arguments. I'm wondering..."

"Well out with it, Jimmy," urged Clara.

"Your esteemed Mr Quelch of the gimlet peepers: would you say he is a man of true justice, although a stern one?"

"I think so," said Harry.

"Supposing we tell him the whole story," suggested Jemima, "but not giving names," she added hastily, "simply that outsiders were involved, including one boy from Greyfriars. We say we shall induce that boy to confess and admit that weakness and fear led him into aiding others bent on vengeance, and that he is willing to pay for whatever damage was done."

"But Peter never has any money," sighed Marjorie."

"We could have another whip round," suggested Harry. "Only for Marjorie's sake, of course."

The Bounder raised despairing eyes heavenwards. "Bunter is already costing us a packet."

"No, I have some money saved," said Marjorie. "I'd give him that."

The Bounder's face softened. "Why did I never have a sister like you to haul me out of trouble?"

"Why didn't we all have a sister like you," exclaimed Bob and Frank and Harry in one voice.

"Sterling sentiments, old Spartans." Jemima looked approving. "But a decision is needed—pronto! Shall we ask the redoubtable Mr Quelch if we may converse with him, strictly off the record, of course. Yeas and nays, please."

Slowly seven hands went up. Three wavered uncertainly and Jemima said briskly: "Carried. Now let's plan our speech, which must be a turn by turn or he will link one person to the evidence."

"Yes," agreed Harry, "but keep Marjorie back. Quelch isn't known as the downey bird for nothing. So we each chip in."

So Harry went in search of the downey bird and made his request, conscious of

the curious eyes of his uncle and aunt. Under their surprised expressions Mr Quelch agreed and was led to the small sitting room where Smithy had assembled the chums.

After the "Off the record" plea, to which Mr Quelch nodded, the sorry tale of debt, moral blackmail, spite, vengeance and injustice was told. The chums held their breath.

The famous gimlet eyes surveyed each face in turn in the circle watching him so anxiously. At last he said: "Thank you for telling me. It must have taken a certain amount of courage to do so, and I believe you, having had some doubt myself about the whole matter." For a moment he paused, then continued in the same measured tone: "I take it you are referring to Ponsonby, Monson and Vavasour of Highcliffe School, and the boy from Greyfriars..." the gimlet gaze rested on the Bounder for a heart-stopping moment, then moved to the sweet but pale face of Marjorie...."your brother?"

She gasped and bowed her head.

"How did you guess, sir?" asked Wharton.

"From your question during the clean-up of my study as to whether I'd encountered anyone who might have a wish to harm me. I said no, then later remembered the Highcliffe boys in dissipated circumstances which I'd mentioned to Dr Voysey and then forgotten. Now, my dear!," He turned to Marjorie, "If your brother comes to me when term starts and owns up to his part in the matter and apologises I shall set him a strict imposition and say nothing more about it, mainly for your sake, because you have prevented a misjustice and set my mind free of suspicion,"

"Oh—thank you!" Marjorie looked as though she might spring up and embrace Mr Quelch but was restrained by the quick-witted Bounder catching her arm. She contented herself with her offer to contribute to any damages expense, to which Mr Quelch shook his head and Smithy said daringly: "We'll stick Julius Caesar's nose on for him."

"And Bunter will be brought back?" asked Harry.

"I shall arrange that," said Mr Quelch, "and as you suggested—" he stopped as a knock came at the door and Larkin entered.

"Ah, here you are, sir. You are required on the telephone. I'll put it through to the library next door."

Mr Quelch followed Larkin from the room and the chums gave great sighs of relief. "Won't it be great?" said Clara. "I always imagined him to be a holy terror."

"He is a holy terror, especially with the cane," said Smithy feelingly

"There speaks the voice of experience," jeered Bob."

"I half-expected him to identify me," said Smithy. "He—"

The door opened and Mr Quelch reappeared. Now he was actually smiling. "I thought I'd tell you," he said. "My call was from Mr Prout. He flies tomorrow and it seems he accidentally picked up my briefcase the night he found Bunter in my study. He only noticed this while completing his last minute packing. A friend will post it back to me at Greyfriars. He's not concerned at the loss of his own as it only contained a few brochures."

So the famous History of Greyfriars was safe after all.

Mr Quelch allowed himself another smile and wished them all more Christmas greetings and his thanks as he went to rejoin the Colonel and Aunt Amy.

"Well, shall we go and break the news to Bunter?" said Harry.

"Yes," seconded the Bounder. "Let's tell Bunter his Christmas present of expulsion has been returned to sender and Quelch is waiting for him with another one."

"Ha ha ha!

"And perhaps we can carry on with Christmas at last," added Smithy.

And right on cue came a querulous voice, and an indignant fat figure rolled in at the door way.

"I sus-say you chaps—I'm starving!"

Christmas was set to carry on as usual—complete with Bunter!



BOYS SCHOOL STORIES IN THE TIGER TIM COMICS AND ANNUALS

by MARY CADOGAN

Before I moved on in my childhood from the nursery comics to the MAGNET and SCHOOLGIRL, I was an ardent reader of TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY which my parents bought every week for my brother and myself. Also, whenever my limited pocket money, or swapping with friends, permitted I would devour RAINBOW and PLAYBOX, the other Tiger Tim (and/or Tiger Tilly) comics. And, at Christmas time, one or two of the associated Annuals (TIGER TIM'S, RAINBOW, PLAYBOX, MRS HIPPO'S and THE BRUIN BOYS) would become luscious and treasured gifts.

Although the Bruin Boys and the Hippo Girls were the undoubted stars of these publications, they all contained a feast of other delights, both pictorially and in text stories. Bonnie Bluebell, for example, the "fairy schoolgirl detective", whose exploits ran from the beginning of RAINBOW in 1914 to its end in 1956, is a never-to-be-forgotten cult character—from my early childhood, as was Pat the Pirate, whose daring adventures graced the back-page picture-stories of TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY during the 1930s.

These comics were presumably designed to appeal to children of different age-groups, so that they could be regarded as a good buy for most families. Primarily they were nursery comics, rich in picture-strips, but there were also longish narrative tales for older children. These were often attractively illustrated fairy-stories, or adventures with circus, the 'wild west', or pirate settings. Very regular themes were those in long-running serials of small boys or girls searching for lost parents or siblings: for example, 'I want my Mummy' or 'Where is my Daddy?'. All these plots constantly recurred throughout the comics in the 1920s, '30s, 40s and 50s and, if all other inspiration failed, the authors produced tales of child helpers of Robin Hood, which could always be relied upon to entertain.



Browsing recently through my collection of these comics and annuals I was struck by the fact that the annuals fairly regularly featured boys' boarding-school series. This prompted further riffling through my collection of the Tiger Tim publications in search of boys' school tales. My collection of these annuals and weeklies is far from complete - but it is large, and covers a wide range of them from number one of the RAINBOW and of PLAYBOX to the very last ever published edition of RAINBOW.

I found that, although the *Annuals* regularly published stories of Deepwell School for Boys (in TIGER TIM'S Annual) these did not appear in the comics. (Similarly, Croft School for Girls was also a frequent item in the TIGER TIM Annuals, but not in the comics.) The RAINBOW Annual featured, but gave little space to, St Olave's School for Boys. MRS HIPPO'S Annual, at a time when its stars were Tiger Tilly and the Hippo Girls, rather unexpectedly ran several stories about St Peter's School for Boys: it is surprising that this male educational establishment should be a fairly regular feature in a *girls'* annual.

Deepwell School series seems to have been the longest running and the most

developed. No authors' names are shown on any of the school stories mentioned in this article, but Deepwell tales had the bonus of a good, regular illustrator. Alas, he too remains anonymous, but there is something about his pictures which reminds me of Macdonald's St. Jim's illustrations in the GEM. This, of course, adds greatly to the appeal of the Deepwell stories.

The very occasional school tales in the comics, as distinct from those in the Annuals, were rarely text narratives. More generally they were in picture-strip format. School backgrounds didn't mean much in these - in fact, the settings sometimes would switch arbitrarily from school to more domestic surroundings. Although the school stories in the Annuals hardly come near to the standards of the Greyfriars story-telling, those of Deepwell, St Olave's and St Peter's are well worth reading.

Because Deepwell in TIGER TIM Annuals seems to have been the most popular of these schools I am focusing on it particularly in this article.

The 1925 Annual carries two Deepwell stories and several illustrations of its inmates. OLD MONEY BOX is set at the end of the Christmas term. The heroes of the saga, Jack Masters and Vic Johnson, are of prep. school age and in their short-trousered uniforms look young compared with the juniors of Charles Hamilton's stories. The 'baddie' is Harold Greme, a bully who constantly tries to put down Jack and Vic. At the beginning of the story he behaves arrogantly towards Granny Powter, who keeps the tuck-shop. Jack and Vic feel sorry for her, particularly as she wants to go to her daughter's home for the holiday but, as she has 'a big doctor's bill to pay', can't afford the fare, and so will have to remain at the school. The two chums organize a carol-singing party to help raise the cash for her railway ticket.

They sing outside the gloomy home of 'Old Moneybox' (Mr Musselwhite) who is reputed to be a miser. He is very ill, and, touched by their rendering of CHRISTIANS AWAKE and GOOD KING WENCESLAS gives them £1.00. They ask the school matron to visit and arrange appropriate medical care for him.

Granny Powter is thrilled with the money, which enables her to spend Christmas with her daughter instead of being alone. Mr. Musselwhite is so moved by the boys' kind action towards Granny that he begins to spend his money generously. He donates to Deepwell School new nets for their football goals. So in the best school story traditions the chums' good actions are rewarded.

In the same Annual the story HARD TIMES follows up the football theme. The school pitch is flooded so Jack, Vic and some of the other boys take a ball to a small paddock nearby for a pick-up game. Harold Greme jeers when shabby Harry Vincent does not want his coat used as an impromptu goal-post (because he is poor and this is his only coat).

The chums protect Harry from Greme's bullying, and he scores three 'ripping' goals. Mr Barrett, the sports master, then tells Harry that he must play for Deepwell on the following Saturday but should get new boots for the occasion as his are falling apart. Of course, Harry has to scratch, because his father can't afford to buy new boots for him. Greme is put into the-team in his place.

Later on, Jack and Vic learn from the school's tearful cook that, while the other

boys were playing football, Harry had come to say goodbye to her - he was going away 'for ever'.

Jack and Victor visit Glebe House, where Harry's family are living. It appears to be deserted, so they climb up the thick ivy to the only room which shows signs of life. During their climb they knock down some stone coping which crashes through the ground below, opening up a hitherto unknown cellar. In it is a sea-chest which had belonged to Harry's grandfather. This contains deeds and papers which establish Harry's father's ownership of Glebe House and other properties. The family are affluent again: 'And that was how a chance visit of the boys, inspired by sympathy and kindness, turned the tide of poverty which threatened to rob them of a chum, and brought prosperity and happiness to Mr and Mrs Vincent.'

In the 1926 TIGER TIM'S ANNUAL the two Deepwell stories are THE SECRET OF THE MILL and TUBBY'S HAMPER. (Hampers are a frequent feature of these tales and the illustrations to them. The idea of food - and plenty of it - is a popular one in the comics of the 1920s and '30s, possibly because many families then *were* hard-up, and children certainly didn't have too much pocket-money to spend on sweets and snacks.)

In THE SECRET OF THE MILL Vic Johnson's mother sends him two fishing rods - one for himself and one for Jack Masters. The two boys have become friendly with the school's 'little kitchen- maid', Peggy. Harold Greme & Co, of course, 'do not consider her good enough to speak to'.

Peggy's grandparents had owned 'the old watermill, down by Willow Stream'. (Peggy's parents seem to be non-existent). When Grandad suddenly died there was no money to keep Peggy and her grand-mother. Granny was taken away to a home and Peggy went to work in service at Deepwell School. She tells the boys that there are lots of fish, including trout, in the river near the Mill Pond. Harold jeers at the thought of them finding any fish by 'that dirty old mill' and tells Peggy, when she protests at the adjective, to 'go back to your greasy dishes'.

Peggy shows the chums a quiet pool near the edge of the stream, and The Dive - a shallow water-fall into a natural tunnel. Vic's rod gets whirled away towards the water-fall and, when the boys try to retrieve it, they have to follow a backwater into a cave leading out of the main tunnel. Here their punt bumps into a half-buried metal box which - inevitably! - contains rich treasures. These are the Last Will and Testament of Peggy's grandfather, and his hoard of sovereigns and banknotes. Everything is left to Peggy and her Granny who will now be able to refurbish the old mill and move back into it together. Vic and Jack are given permission to fish there as often as they wish, and Peggy promises to cook each catch for their tea!

One of Jack and Vic's close friends, Tubby (Marmaduke) Brown plays the leading role in TUBBY'S HAMPER. He collects a surprise hamper which has been left at the school gates for him, and arranges to share its contents with his chums as a dormitory feast that night. However, disappointingly these contents turn out to be only a collection of cabbages, carrots, turnips and thistles, plus a recipe for *Donkey's Food* to be served up 'cold in a dark dormitory after lights out to as many donkeys as turn

up.' It is another Harold Greme trick, of course.

To make up for the disappointment, Tubby requests and receives a real tuck hamper from his aunt. Jack arranges for the Greme-ites to find a decoy note saying that the feast will be held in the detention room. When Harold and his coterie go there, armed with pillows to steal the tuck, Jack and Vic lock them in, so that Tubby can entertain all the chums to a wonderful dorm feast in leisure and undisturbed peace.

Tubby comes across as a more genial version of Billy Bunter, and in some of the annuals there are full-page, or double page, pictures of him arranging feeds for himself and his chums. These pictures are captioned, but sometimes stand alone without a story.

Deepwell School continued to crop up in the TIGER TIM'S Annuals, even surviving the Second World War. In the 1947 Annual (published in 1946) the story, THE STAR TURN, is surprisingly long (six whole pages) considering the slimness of this almost end-of-the-war edition of the annual (only 96 pages compared with its pre-war format of 160).

The boys are helping to raise money for the village hall, and Colonel Briscoe of the Manor House has promised to give a present to the boy who comes up with the most original fund-raising idea.

Jack and Vic's Co now includes Nelson Binks (an inventor): Tubby is still part of the group but his name seems to have changed from Brown to Tibbits!

Their fund-raising ideas include Jack's (getting Ivy Collins, a famous pianist, who is staying nearby to give a concert), Tubby's (renovating an old ice-cream barrow and selling ices) and Nelson's rather startling one of borrowing for the day an old circus elephant, Josephine, from a nearby film-studio. (Vic's efforts to make money by painting people's portraits have ended prematurely, because portraying Harold Greme as a donkey so greatly upset their rival that 'he broke Vic's easel beyond repair'.)



"So you're Ivan Collinsky!" cried Dr. Beverley, suddenly snatching off the wig.

Nelson and the elephant, followed by Tubby and the ice-cream barrow, process through the town on the Gala Day but, unfortunately the lady pianist turns up on horseback, and is thrown by the horse whom the elephant frightens. Her wrist is temporarily damaged, so she is unable to play at the concert, for which she has been widely advertised as 'the Star Turn'. The elephant, in the melée of her encounter with the horse, has backed clumsily into Tubby's ice-cream barrow, and thoroughly broken it up. So it seems that Jack & Co are unlikely to win the Colonel's prize.

However, at Nelson's suggestion they change Ivy Collins's name on the posters around the town to 'Ivan Collinsky, the Russian Boy Pianist'. On the day of the concert, Vic Johnson, heavily disguised, takes his seat at the piano and electrifies his audience with the brilliance of his playing. But Harold Greme does a bit of snooping during the interval, and discovers a loudspeaker inside the piano, attached by concealed wire to a radiogram behind the curtain. He reports this to Dr Beverley, the Headmaster. Jack and 'Collinsky from Karkov' are summoned to his study. Colonel Briscoe is there to, and the whole plan is confessed. Dr Beverley (a dignified but genial Head who winks slyly at the Colonel while delivering judgement) allows 'Ivan' to continue with the concert on condition that, at the end, the audience is let into the secret.

So all is well. Deepwell School raises 'no less than £70 towards the new hall and Colonel Briscoe tells the concert audience that Nelson Binks, who masterminded the Ivansky scheme and set up the technology, is to receive the prize for the most original idea.

"What prize would you like, my boy?" the Colonel asked.

"I'd like a hamper, sir. Then I can share it with the others," said Nelson.

And that was what he had.

After six years of wartime food shortages, of course, a large tuck hamper must have seemed to readers to be a very special prize.

The last Deepwell story I have found in my collection is in the 1951 TIGER TIM'S Annual, but as mentioned earlier, my collection is not complete. In this tale, ENTER TWO PROFESSORS, the school is expecting a visit from Professor Irwin Potts, a notable archaeologist. Jack and Vic decide to play a trick on Harold Greme and his pal Cyril Parsons, who have offered to man Dr Beverley's telephone when he has to go out. The chums (rather unconvincingly from the illustrations) disguise themselves as Professors Potts and Tukes, wearing bald wigs, whiskers, spectacles, etc.

Harold and Cyril have to wait on the pseudo-professors, bringing them liberal supplies of cola and jam-puffs from the tuck-shop. Later, when Harold discovers that they have been duped, he contrives to lock Jack and Vic in one of the school cellars.

Dr Beverley arrives with the real Professor Potts in tow. While they are sorting some old coins in one of the classrooms they hear strange tappings from the wall beyond the fireplace. Professor Potts, examining a panelled recess there, decides it is 'very much like one of those old Elizabethan panels that slide back...'. He touches a concealed spring so that, of course, the panel does slide open. It reveals a very

dusty, cobweb-draped pair of schoolboys - Jack and Vic.

They explain that they have made their way up from the cellars after finding a secret opening. The Professor is thrilled and delighted, because the room revealed by the opened panel is full of old armour: 'Real medieval suits of mail. Gorgeous stuff...'. So gorgeous indeed that, although 'some were kept for the school museum, the rest were to be sold to collections' to realize enough money to build a long-wanted new gymnasium. 'Thanks to Johnson and Masters' says the Head. 'The joke has been a most successful one, after all.'

Those C.D. readers who have Annuals associated with Tiger Tim and the Bruin boys may like to dip into them to seek out further minor school story gems. And perhaps we should not forget that Tim, Jumbo, Bobbie Bruin, Willie Ostrich, Georgie Giraffe, Joey the Parrot, Jacko the monkey, Fido the dog, and 'fat-boy' Porky Pig were also always boarding-school inmates!

Answers to Bob Whiter's puzzle

1. Ferrers **Locke** Detective relative to Dr. Herbert Locke D.D.,M.A. Headmaster of Greyfriars.
2. William Walter **Dabney** Study No. 2 Greyfriars Upper Fourth Form.
3. **Smithson** Fourth Form Highcliffe.
4. Sergeant Benjamin **Kettle**
Proprietor of Rookwood's Tuck-shop
5. J. Jollywell **Lickham**
Master at St. Jim's, supposedly written about by Dicky Nugent
6. Dandy Peter **Parsons** - Rascally Skipper of the Sea Cat
(*Ken King of the Islands*)
7. Dr. **Sparshott** Headmaster of Grimslade School
8. Jim Dainty, pupil of Grimslade School (Stories appeared in *The Ranger*).

DENNIS BIRD

An obituary tribute from Mary Cadogan

Dennis was born on 10th November 1930 and he died on 30th July 2005. He was a very regular contributor to the *Collectors' Digest*, and loved to write about his many enthusiasms.

He is best known as a historian and archivist of ice-skating, and for the articles he wrote about this, as 'John Noel', for 25 years for the magazine *Skating World*. Also from 1959 until the late 1970s he was the ice-skating correspondent for *The Times*.

Dennis served in the R.A.F. for nearly twenty years, retiring with the rank of Squadron Leader in 1968. In 1973 he became Senior Lecturer at the Civil Service College on 'Parliament and Government' until he retired in 1991.

Dennis lived for most of his life at Shoreham-by-Sea. He is survived by his wife, Anne, and their two daughters. My personal memories of him are given below (originally written by me, at Anne Bird's request, to be read at Dennis's funeral).

My first book, *You're a Brick, Angela!*, (co-authored with Pat Craig) was published in 1976 and it dealt with the subject of popular and classic fiction for girls. I received a letter from Dennis very soon after the book appeared, asking if he could visit me.

When he arrived at our home, I was intrigued to find that this tall, impressive former RAF Officer shared my enthusiasm for children's stories of the 1930s and '40s - in particular for the colourful and long-running weekly paper *The Girls' Crystal*.

Dennis knew almost as much about that publication than I did, in spite of my extensive researches for the book. The bond forged by our mutual appreciation of a wide variety of children's literature grew with the years and was enhanced by other shared interests.

For both myself and my husband, Alex, Dennis became a wonderful and ever-helpful friend. We both looked forward to his visits to our home, sometimes on his own, and sometimes accompanied by the always supportive Anne. Dennis's visits usually began with his researching my vast collection of children's books for articles which he planned to write for my own magazine, and for other publications.

Once he had done his researches, he would discuss with Alex and myself our shared enthusiasms from Pre-Raphaelite paintings to Teddy Tail and Rupert Bear: from the poetry of Alfred Tennyson to *The Magnet* stories featuring Billy Bunter and the boys of Greyfriars School: from Victorian memorabilia to the joys of collecting Meccano and old cigarette cards.

His erudition and retentive memory were truly remarkable. What he knew, and his perceptive interpretation of such knowledge, constantly and satisfyingly illuminated our long lunch-time conversations. My husband and I (like many of Dennis's friends, I feel sure) often said that, were we to appear in the TV programme *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, Dennis would unreservedly be our chosen "phone-a-friend"!

And what a kind friend he was. Nothing was too much trouble for him. He helped me with researches into my family history and tried to locate one of my long-lost relatives. If ever I wanted information which he could not immediately provide, he

would without delay seek and find the answers for me. He was also for me and many other of his friends the best press-cutting agency one could ever had had. How diligently he combed all those newspapers and journals for information which he felt that I or my husband would like to have.

I was particularly grateful to Dennis for the help he gave me when I was researching and writing *Women with Wings*, my book about female flyers in fact and fiction. His knowledge of aviation and its history extended well beyond the highways into the minutiae of many fascinating byways. And his research input for the book I wrote after *Women with Wings* was almost equally extensive - surprisingly perhaps as that was *And then their Hearts Stood Still*, which dealt exclusively with romantic fiction!

Yes, Dennis was a many of very many parts. My husband and I deeply feel his loss: he considerably enriched our lives with his kindness, enthusiasm, knowledge and warm friendship. We shall never forget him.



As Prout jerked the mask from the face of the effigy, the light from his study window fell full upon a white and furious face, and jaws that chewed frantically on a handkerchief. "Loder!" said Prout, like a man in a dream. "Loder, of the Sixth Form! My head perfect! Loder!" "Crumbs!" gasped Trotter, the page.

Please to remember The fifth of November, Gun powder, treason and plot!

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