

STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST  
AUTUMN/WINTER SPECIAL 2007

*The*  
**SCHOOLGIRL**  
2<sup>D</sup> Association  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"  
No. 545, Vol. 21,  
Week Ending  
JANUARY 6TH, 1940  
EVERY SATURDAY



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UPON "SNOWGIRL" BESSIE!

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Week Ending December 24th, 1927.

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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST



## AUTUMN/WINTER SPECIAL 2007

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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### The Editor's Chat



Once again the season of warmth and goodwill is almost upon us as Christmas with its many joys draws near.

We have a further cause for celebration: February 2008 marks the centenary of the *Magnet*, and of Frank Richards's most well-known characters, Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter. Roger Jenkins, a doyen of the saga, shares with us in this issue of the C.D. his reflections on Greyfriars as its centenary approaches.

No-one - and perhaps least of all Frank Richards - knew in February 1908 just what delights were then being unleashed for young readers, and for future generations. I feel sure that the centenary will be celebrated not only in gatherings of enthusiasts in the Old Boys Book Clubs but in the media. The current (November) issue of *This England* magazine carries an article by me to mark the event. Gyles Brandreth is writing a celebratory programme to be transmitted towards the end of January 2008 on BBC Radio Four. This will include contributions from myself and other enthusiasts. I do hope that all C.D. readers will listen to this broadcast. Of course, as February approaches, there will surely be more media features to mark the centenary.

By any standards Frank Richards's achievements are remarkable. We can truly say that Billy Bunter, a character created so long ago for what was considered to be a very ephemeral paper, has virtually remained in print for a hundred years. He, and Greyfriars, began in the halfpenny *Magnet*; when the paper ended in 1940 they continued in *Knockout* and *Valiant*, and in the Bunter books and Howard Baker facsimiles. Since these ended Martin Jarvis's readings on cassettes and CDs have been produced. Of course, since 1946 Greyfriars has continued to live and flourish in the pages of the *Collectors' Digest*, and in his long history, Bunter has also been a star of stage and small-screen TV presentations.

It is fitting that as Christmas approaches our thoughts should be with Greyfriars



and its creator who passed away on Christmas Eve in 1961. The joys of the Christmas season are celebrated in this issue of our magazine which carries my ever resilient wish that all readers will have a truly MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.

*May Cadogan*

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## A FOND FAREWELL

Sadly I have to inform readers that this issue of the Collectors' Digest will be its last. It has had a long run and a great history from its inception by Herbert Leckenby in 1946, through the years of Eric Fayne's editorship and, I hope, of mine.

I have now occupied the editorial chair for almost 21 years and it has been a privilege to do so. However, I shall be celebrating my 80th birthday in 2008 and, regretfully, I have to accept that the time has come for me to make choices about how I spend my writing (and reading) time because I have several cherished projects which I must now concentrate on completing. Also I require more time for my family and friends, and other interests.

As many readers will know, our energy levels decrease as time goes on, and I now feel unable to keep the CD and some other writing assignments going. I am very glad that the magazine has continued long enough to celebrate the centenary of the *Magnet*. Hopefully the Greyfriars ethos will still flourish in the various Old Boys Book Clubs, and the internet chat rooms. I do hope that C.D. readers will link



up with these, and I give below various contact addresses.

**I will still produce occasional hobby-related publications about which I will inform C.D. readers.** I want to thank you all for your support and friendship. No editor could have wished for more loyalty and encouragement. I must also thank our contributors for their wonderful input. Over the years many fine articles and pictures have been featured in our magazine - and to name contributors individually would be invidious. My warmest thanks go to you all. I would also like to express my appreciation of the help given over all these years by Mandy and the other staff members of Quacks, our printers.

To all of you I send my very sincere best wishes. The C.D. is ending - but the wonderful stories that have inspired it will live on in other formats, and in our personal memories.

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##### **Cambridge Club**

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Cambridge CB1 6NQ

##### **Northern Old Boys Book Club**

Rev Father Geoffrey Good  
147 Thornes Road  
Wakefield  
West Yorkshire WF2 8QN

##### **The Friars Club**

(This club publishes a regular journal to which I sometimes contribute. The Editor informs me that it will now widen its scope to feature the work of other boys' writers as well as Charles Hamilton.)

Dr Peter McCall  
47 The Terrace  
Wokingham  
Berks RG40 1BE

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# THOUGHTS ON GREYFRIARS

by Roger Jenkins

It seems strange to me that the *Magnet* was founded nearly a century ago. I remember reading the *Magnet* as a boy, and in that sense I sometimes wonder how old I am and yet how young I feel. I recall Charles Hamilton saying that the Greyfriars stories depict not life as it is but life as it ought to be. It is an ideal world but full of characters of all types, and opportunities for tension abound. There is always a strong moral challenge.

I have always been fascinated by the character of Billy Bunter. In red *Magnet* days he was a slightly plump youth with glasses, and he could be found cooking on a study fire for Wharton and others. His catchphrase was "I'm sincerely sorry." At that time he was just a minor character. Alonzo Todd was the freakish character. Later on, Bunter became more prominent, but the change was not for the better. I have always been uneasy about a story specially written for the 1923 Holiday Annual entitled "A Shadow over Greyfriars." There was a series of cricket matches played at Greyfriars with teams from Rookwood and St. Jim's there. Bunter was in a spiteful mood, removing articles from jackets in the changing room with a view to arousing mutual suspicion.

This was of course written in 1922 but the specially written story for the 1925 annual is a distinct improvement. Mr. Bunter had enjoyed unusually good fortune on the Stock Exchange and he founded the Bunter Cup, and it was a condition that Billy Bunter should play in all matches. This was more in the spirit of comedy, and this continued in the *Magnet* with DEAF BUNTER, BLIND BUNTER, LAME BUNTER, and so on. There was a strong element of humour in that Bunter always contrived to blame others for his disabilities. Bunter's longest starring role was the Bunter Court series. How he brought Bunter Court to life and live on the edge of a precipice, with respectable guests, is highly fascinating.

Charles Hamilton told me, when I visited him, that the whole structure demanded a number of coincidences, and all the time he felt he was treading on thin ice. The astonishing fact was that no one felt an iota of sympathy with the main character. Charles Hamilton was always fascinated by caravans and circuses. It is significant that final change in Bunter's character came about in the Whiffles series. Mr Whiffles was like Bunter, except for a flourishing head of hair and a luxurious moustache and beard. When Bunter broke detention and came across the bald Mr. Whiffles bathing, it was quite a provident escape to dress up as Mr. Whiffles, and then he went on to run the circus himself. This might not seem to be anything special, but for the first time readers began to empathise with Bunter, to hope that he would get away with his outrageous pranks. Of course he was never an ideal character, but he never ceased to be amusing thereafter.

When Charles Hamilton's Famous Five appeared in the Bunter books after the war, he was challenged by Enid Blyton who claimed she invented the name. She was told that he had used the title since the second decade of the century. After that she



*Bunter in 1908, and in his 1920s and '30s heyday*

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*Scenes from the first and the last Magnet*

quietly backed down. They were originally the Famous Four as Johnny Bull was a latecomer. Wharton and Nugent fought on the train but Bob Cherry was usually good-natured and Hurree Singh came from the Aliens School. When everything had settled down, Johnny Bull arrived with his accordion. I have always considered Johnny Bull to be the least interesting member of the group. He is stolid and there is no pleasure in the words "I told you so".

There were two series about Wharton the rebel. In the first series he actually did what he was accused of, but in the second series he was suspected without cause, though his temper did not help. The Stacey series was the finest of the three, and the other members of the Famous Five stood by him. Charles Hamilton wrote to me saying that, though Wharton had fits of temper, he was good at heart and that always pulled him through.

The other members of the Famous Five did not play such large parts, but the episode when Bob Cherry was forced to study for a scholarship was well-presented. A few less important characters were featured, notably Fisher T. Fish, whose father took boys to Hollywood to make a silent film about English public school life, and then he took a lease of Portercliffe Hall to seek for hidden treasure.

I could never believe the Wibley stories when he masqueraded as real people - Monsieur Charpentier, Mr Quelch seated, and Sir William Bird. These sorts of disguises are incredible, because the shape of the head, the colour of the eyes, and the height and shape of the body - all must make disguises of real people unbelievable. Even when he was expelled and came back as a new boy Popper, he remained unrecognised by the other Removites, which is practically impossible. He wore a wig and a changed complexion, and so how could he go to bed in the dormitory in a wig and fail to wash in public?

Two more characters certainly deserve mention. The first is Lord Mauleverer. Originally, he was too lazy to be believable, but he was developed, and though he allowed Wharton to use him in the first rebel series, he certainly came to his senses, and afterwards he possessed a kind of perspicacity that allowed him to see into the truth of complex situations. The Mauleverer Towers series is memorable, and Bunter as an uninvited guest made it hilarious.

The other character, Vernon-Smith, had a home in the West End of London, which was appropriate for a millionaire. In early days he tried to get all the Famous Five expelled one by one, but Bob Cherry's Barring-Out eventually brought the truth to light. Later on, although the Bounder still kept breaking bounds and visiting the Three Fishers, he became less unpleasant, and there were even acts of generosity, and I recall how he helped Wharton in the Stacey series. The Dallas series showed him up badly because he resented his father helping Paul Dallas. Perhaps the most memorable is the Smedley series, when the temporary form-master kept trying to get Vernon-Smith expelled. It turned out that Smedley was Lucius Teggers who would inherit the Vernon-Smith fortune if the Bounder was expelled.

I have always had a sneaking regard for Skinner, especially as he reminds me of a boy I once knew at school, amusing but in a rather unpleasant manner. When

Carboy tried to put one over Mr. Quelch, a number of Removites listened at the door. When Mr Quelch began caning him, they started counting. Skinner said that when he was small, his governess took him by the hand and said "Twice Six is Twelve". When Bunter was hawking a tray of articles up and down the Remove passage, he approached Skinner as a last resort. Each time Bunter mentioned an article, Skinner said "Put it on the table." When all the articles were on the table, Bunter beamed until Skinner got hold of the tablecloth and tilted the whole lot on the floor and told Bunter to take them away as they wanted to have tea.

Foreign holidays I always found strange. The best of them, generally reckoned to be the Sahara series, the India series, the South Seas series and the China series, were all well researched, I know for a fact, because I saw many travel books in Charles Hamilton's library after his death, and the marks inside these books clearly indicated the details he intended to make use of. Nevertheless it always seemed slightly unreal that the schoolboys should find their way into foreign adventures.

Greyfriars could boast some of the most well-described members of staff. Dr. Locke was more than a remote figure. In the Stacey series, he always weighed the evidence and found it wanting. Anyone who has read many *Magnets* in the last 15 years of its run would not deny that Mr. Quelch was a figure of some complexity. I always remember when Mr. Quelch was returning to Greyfriars after an absence. He got out at Courtfield station like a warhorse sniffing the battle from afar. My other favourite is Mr. Prout, that plump elderly gentleman full of his own importance but so often disappointed. How amusing it was when Prout was sleeping by the open window of his study when Bunter was being pursued for having purloined a paper bag of jam tarts. When Nemesis loomed, Bunter threw the bag through the open window. Prout awoke to find jam tarts all over his face, Bunter later approached Prout to ask if he could have the rest of the jam tarts back, and generously added that he didn't mind if Prout had eaten some of them. Prout remarked that he didn't usually punish boys in other forms, but this time he would make an exception. I always thought it a pity Prout was once headmaster, as his character ceased to be amusing.

These reminiscences are mainly about characters. In the *Magnet* Charles Hamilton developed his main characters (and many subsidiary ones as well) so that once a theme was decided upon it was an opportunity for each one to appear at his best or worst as the case may be. Much as I like Rookwood and St. Jim's, neither of them can hold a candle to the *Magnet*, with its greater range of characters, its long series and single numbers, and the sense of intimacy provided by numerous Wharton Lodge episodes. The Rookwood stories were, alas, short and the Gem with its two houses and three centres of interest lacked a single point for the reader to focus upon. The *Magnet* worked much better with a single form as its basis, and the hero, Harry Wharton, with his slight fault of temper, giving the *Magnet* its final touch of quality.







# CHRISTMAS VIGNETTES

by Ted Baldock



## GREETINGS FROM BILLY BUNTER

Greetings, you fellows, another Yuletide looming. How quickly time slides by, except of course that period between meals when a chap tends to get a little peckish.

As usual I have had to disappoint quite a number of fellows, all keen, many in fact insisting, that I spend the Christmas holiday with them at their homes. I suppose this is one of the penalties one has to pay for being so popular. Old Mauly was quite cut up when I had to refuse his invitation to stay with him at the Towers. I do not like turning fellows down, but what is one to do when so many demands are made on a fellow? Towards the end of the I term was actually approached by George Wingate, captain of the school no less, asking if I would care to spend a few days with him and his chums Gwynne and Sykes at his home. This was an honour indeed. Regretfully I had to turn him down, telling him of my many other commitments. He understood of course but he was very, very disappointed

I shall be staying at Wharton Lodge with my old pals. I just cannot let them down. Old Colonel Wharton would be very upset should I fail to be with the party at the Lodge. I know from past experience that Wells, the butler looks forward to seeing me, as does that footman fellow, John. One cannot of course please everyone, but I insist upon being with Harry and his friends at Wharton Lodge. I would not wish to spoil their festive season by being absent.

May I wish you all the jolliest of Christmases with unlimited supplied of tuck always at hand.

Best wishes from your long time friend,

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER.

P S The Mater has asked me to convey her greetings and hopes you will all have a really jolly Christmas and she adds that she is in no way surprised at the popularity I enjoy among my friends at Greyfriars. Modesty forbids me from enlarging further. Everyone in the school is aware that I am far from being a boastful fellow, quite the opposite in fact. I am always trying to play down my obvious superiority. There is however one point upon which I do boast and for which I make no apology whatever. I possess the best Mater in the world. She understands a fellow and knows how to feed him.

By the way, we here at Wharton Lodge will on Christmas Day raise brimming bumpers to all you fellows and will think of you tucking in and responding in the traditional Greyfriars style.

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NOTE: The 'Owl's' original spelling, with which we are well acquainted, has been replaced by a more recognisable form, thus rendering (hopefully) its perusal a little less arduous.

## CONTINUITY

This is familiar, I know this place, I have been here before.

*My song I troll out, for Christmas stout,  
The hearty, the true, and the bold;  
A bumper I drain, with might and main  
Give three cheers for Christmas old.*

Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*

One Christmas fades, another looms. Such is the inevitable march of time. The ghosts of all our yesterdays march with us along the broad highway, a diverse throng. There is much laughter, there are thoughtful moments. Christmas brings all the threads together into one harmonious whole.

"Good night, Bunter,"

"Good night, Sir."

"Sleep well, my boy."

"I say, Sir."

Mr. Quelch paused "Yes, Bunter, what is it?"

"I say...." The Owl was clearly concerned about something. "I say, do you think there is anything in that tale Colonel Wharton was speaking about tonight, is there really a ghost here?" Mr Quelch's reply was emphatic. "No, Bunter, do not dwell upon such



"I say, you girls," said Billy Bunter, "I've got a sprig of mistletoe here!"

an idea. The Colonel was merely entertaining us with a Christmas story, nothing more. Go to bed now and think no more about it," and he added once more "sleep well", after which he passed on down the dimly lit passage to his own room.

The occasional murmurs endemic in an old house, creaking in ancient wainscots, shuffling footsteps beyond the door - the product of an over lively imagination. The continual soft sighing of the wind rustling the ivy at the window. The last mince pie has been consumed, the last chocolate cream crunched. Billy Bunter is replete - for the day. Tomorrow, well tomorrow is another day, another beginning. Who can tell what joys and thrills it may bring?

Harry Wharton and Co. have retired to their respective bedrooms. Colonel Wharton has finished his last cigar; Aunt Amy has retired long since. Wells has made his last round of the house assuring himself that all is well before seeking his comfortable quarters. John, the footman has made one last, quite abortive, attempt to salute Mary as she passed under the mistletoe in the hall and received a sharp slap for his audacity, to be followed immediately by a swift 'peck' on his other cheek before she disappeared into her room, leaving John a prey to the most confusing emotions,

The kitchen regions are quiet now, the activities of the day are over and Wells is sitting minus his jacket in his own compartment by a cheerful fire perusing a day old copy of the 'Times' passed on to him by Colonel Wharton. It is a moment of well earned relaxation for him, although should the call come he would immediately be on parade again. A thoughtful Aunt Amy has so arranged matters precluding this happening too often.

Outside it is bleak indeed. A bitter east wind carrying snow is sweeping over the park emphasising the warmth and comfort within doors. How may such scenes has Wharton Lodge witnessed in its long history?

Harsh weather without, warmth and comfort within Gathered round a blazing fire in the hall are all our long-time friends: Harry Wharton and Co., heroes of countless adventures both at Greyfriars and in the wider world beyond; bronzed old Colonel Wharton; Mr. Quelch, master of the Greyfriars remove, spending his customary few days there over Christmas; William George Bunter, smiling from one fat ear to the other, is in his element, the world is wagging much to his approval at the moment, tuck is on hand in limitless supplies. Harry Wharton's Aunt Amy, smiling on the company, happy to see so many cheery fellows. In the background the imperturbable and portly Wells hovers, smiling his approval.

In the shadowy background there lingers another presence benignly surveying the jolly scene; the author and founder of it all. There are his children, this is his world.

There may be a ghost, indeed there may be several spectres in residence at Wharton Lodge plying their haunting activities. Ancient foundations hold a particular attraction for apparitions. But such is the humour and jollity of the guests gathered round the fire at this happy time that it must generate feelings of acute discouragement for ghosts who find that all their chain rattling, hollow groaning,

wainscot scraping and distant door banging is having so little impact upon the merry party. No self respecting ghost can possibly be expected to appreciate such lack of reaction.

An intriguing question may be posed. Could it be that a spectre is nothing more than the result of a piece of undigested food, or the too intent perusal of some lurid fiction before retiring? It is a nice theory

The genuine wraith, should he or she exist, would surely be outraged with the suggestion so mundane. Even more so with us whose feet are firmly planted in reality. One may imagine the reception of a ghost, be it real or fake, should it have the temerity to practise its haunting skills on Henry Samuel Quelch. That intrepid gentleman had no time whatsoever for apparitions or 'things that go bump in the night'. He had a very sound strategy for dealing with such occurrences. He would reach for his ash walking stick - a formidable weapon - and place it ready to hand, flex a sinewy wrist, adjust his spectacles and, facing the door, would sit and await developments Woe to the unfortunate spectre. It is almost certain to awaken echoes far and wide with groans and wails of a very genuine nature.

We, together with Mr Quelch and Mr Prout and doubtless other members of the teaching staff at Greyfriars, experience from time to time vague aches and twinges, particularly when the weather tends to be damp. Old time will have his due. But a kindly providence has bestowed something of far greater importance. In our hearts we possess that which may take its place among the greatest treasures of all, the spirit of eternal youth. This we share with our long time friends, not excluding crusty Gosling, at Greyfriars School.

We leave them, a jolly company gathered round the fire at Wharton Lodge celebrating one more Christmas which may be regarded as an exact illustration of many such occasions in years gone by. The scene is timeless as are the characters involved.

One last word from Billy Bunter: "I say, you fellows, this is better than dinner at Greyfriars isn't it? I say, Wells, I'll have another slice of that turkey. Ow, look here Bull, keep your feet to yourself."

## PERMANENCE

If there were dreams to sell,  
Merry and sad to tell,  
And the crier rang the bell,  
What would you buy?

(T. Lowell Beddoes, *Dream Pedlary*)

Looking back on certain aspects of the past has a peculiar fascination for those who make time to pause and reflect in this high speed here-and-now.

Familiar shadows rise once more and old heroes come into focus, characters whose adventures held us spellbound in that long gone era.

It is almost a century now since Harry Wharton leapt at and attempted to capture Ludwig Wolf, a German spy seeking to escape over the old cloister wall at Greyfriars. On that bitter December day the Famous Five had been disporting themselves in the snow bound quadrangle when this event occurred in 'The House on the Heath'.

Much water has flowed beneath old Courtfield Bridge since that opening incident. World War I was just gathering momentum. Spy fever was rampant. Greyfriars was not exempt from the general atmosphere of alertness.

Herr Gans, the German master at Greyfriars at this time, was not exempt from embarrassment and, although a very popular figure with the boys and masters alike, he was subjected to vigorous scrutiny in those early days of the war when the slightest untoward behaviour was viewed with suspicion and reported to the authorities.

An illustration of the incident in that long ago Christmas number of the *Magnet* depicts Harry Wharton in the gloomy and snowy scene. On this occasion Harry Wharton failed to capture Wolf. Thus was a great Christmas adventure set in motion. The Famous Five were to meet up again with the German spy, as was Billy Bunter who was destined to play a major role in this splendid Christmas story.

Eventually, of course, Ludwig Wolf was cornered and captured, no small thanks to the Owl of the Remove who, with seeming inevitability, is in the right place at the critical moment.

At this early stage in his career Billy Bunter had a long, long fictional journey stretching before him during which he was to bring laughter and amusement to millions of readers.

Who could have foreseen that the greater part of a century later we would be recalling and enthusing over these same heroes of Greyfriars? Proof indeed, should any be needed, that the world of school created by Charles Hamilton was something unique, that contained within itself an element of timelessness.

In 1914 the enemy at the gate was Kaiser Wilhelm II, with his dreams of world dominion. In 1939 the Austrian born Adolf Hitler and his coterie of thugs sought to dominate for much the same reason. Today it seems to be a certain disintegration of standards, of morals and old established values - perhaps the greatest enemy of all.

Throughout a long and turbulent period there was always, week by week, that doyen of papers, the *Magnet* which stood out from a welter of other story papers in very special manner chronicling the adventures of - among many fine characters - William George Bunter. He may be happily described as nothing short of a phenomenon, whose large spectacles glimmered through the 'twenties and 'thirties rather like a permanent North star. How we should have fared without his fatuous activities during that period of unrest one cannot imagine - life would certainly have lacked much, and in consequence been far duller.

Together with the *Strand* and *Windsor* magazines and *Punch* the *Magnet* may be regarded as a solid bulwark during those long and uncertain years in the first half of the twentieth century. The Greyfriars ethos may be seen as representing a standard to be emulated from which nothing but good could accrue.

Looking back one may recall those wonderful gleams of sunshine which

periodically evolved. The river series, the hiking and camping series, and adventures in the great world beyond the gates of Greyfriars, the South seas, China, Brazil and India. These were memorable milestones in a fascinating journey which happily can be retraced again and again, possibly with an ever greater degree of appreciation.

Bacon has suggested that some books are to be tasted, other to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. So it is for the initiated *Magnet* reader, he may return ever and anon and always find something new - such are the enduring joys of the Greyfriars stories.

Where are they now, the boys I knew  
    In schooldays happy time,  
Would I could the bond renew  
    Could I but find a sign.  
The merry click of bat on ball  
    The roar along the 'touch'.  
What jolly memories these recall  
    Our days were made of such.  
The green-ness of the playing field,  
    Long shadows by the elms.  
Athwart my memory gently steals.  
    Those other happy realms.  
Faint on the breeze, long drawn the cheers  
    From many a hard fought game.  
They seem to echo down the years.  
    The song is just the same.  
Do you remember, can you recall  
    The Sark on a summer day,  
The fleeting shadows along the bank  
    As the gentle willows sway.  
Old Coker plunging with his pole  
    Determined to the last,  
While his two friends sad glances stole  
    Both wish the 'voyage' past.  
In the silent movements of a dream  
    I see the crowd of fellows,  
In the old and so familiar scene,  
    Of Greyfriars - grey and mellow.







## Conan Doyle and Sexton Blake For the Defence

by Derek Hinrich

One evening in May I watched a BBC television programme about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's investigations into two gross miscarriages of justice: the Edalji Case, and that of Oscar Slater. Whilst Sir Arthur's championing of Mr George Edalji in the Great Wyrley horse-maiming case and of Oscar Slater in the still-unresolved Gilchrist murder are well known to his admirers, they are probably not aware of the efforts of Mr Sexton Blake on behalf of Oscar Slater, or rather, I should say, on behalf of Otto Slade.

Miss Marion Gilchrist, an 83 year-old spinster was brutally murdered in her first-floor flat at 15 Queen's Terrace, Glasgow, on the evening of 21st December, 1908, in the ten minutes or so between her maid going out for an evening paper and returning with it. A neighbour, Mr Arthur Adams, who occupied the flat beneath Miss Gilchrist's, heard noises from her flat and, as previously promised to the nervous old lady, went to investigate. He knocked but got no response and returned to his flat but on hearing further disturbance he went upstairs again. As he stood on the landing, Miss Gilchrist's maid returned. She unlocked the door and together they entered the flat. As they did so a man walked out of the flat and then slipped quietly downstairs and away. The maid, who appeared to know the man, let him pass, a few minutes later they found Miss Gilchrist brutally murdered.

The Glasgow police were not without worthwhile leads to follow but they wilfully sidetracked their investigation on the thinnest possible grounds to pursue a shady German pimp who called himself Oscar Slater and presently, after his extradition from the USA, succeeded in obtaining a conviction against him for the murder. He was sentenced to death but received a last-minute reprieve. The case against him and his conviction was widely seen as a travesty of justice and an intermittent but vigorous campaign for the re-opening of the case soon began. Conan Doyle took up the cudgels on Slater's behalf in 1912 but it was not until 1927 after prolonged agitation by Conan Doyle and other parties that Slater was released and £6000 compensation grudgingly paid to him.

I have given the barest of bare descriptions of this case. A full account may be found in Peter Costello's *Conan Doyle Detective* which I have had the pleasure of

reading since watching the television programme in May (and on which some of that programme was based). In his book Mr Costello reveals for the first time the name of the person whom Conan Doyle suspected of being involved in the murder together with reasons why Mr Costello believes the Scottish establishment of the day closed ranks to protect him.

After seeing the programme, however, I turned to my collection of *Union Jacks* - "Sexton Blake's Own Paper" - and in particular to the issue of September 22nd 1928 which contained a story I had not read hitherto, by Gwyn Evans entitled. *Who Was The Man on the Stairs?*

Gwyn Evans' stories were amongst the most popular contributions to the saga of the Other Great Baker Street Detective during his golden age in the 'twenties and 'thirties of the last century. Evans was the son of a Welsh Methodist clergyman and was the subject of a strict and puritanical upbringing. In response he became a mercurial bohemian type who appears at times to have worked to drink. Money ran through his fingers like water. He was possessed of a vivid and fertile imagination which provided him with brilliant plot devices for his fiction, but he was careless and slapdash in execution. His short stories are his best work: with novels he tended to lose interest or patience as the book progressed. Over two hundred authors contributed to the saga of Sexton Blake and so, one might say, there were many Blakes. Gwyn Evans' Blake was the most Holmesian of them.

For instance, a little earlier that same year in a story entitled *Poison*, set in rural Essex, Blake observes to his assistant Tinker, "You're apt to be too romantic, young 'un. While admitting the beauty of this scene, I don't agree that the country's quite so idyllic as it looks. I have often thought that there are darker deeds committed by evil men in lovely cottages and remote farms than even in a Limehouse slum. Think of the opportunities for cruelty and torture unchecked by police surveillance a man has in the country. I have long held that there are far darker mysteries and unsuspected crimes in a remote village than in a large town..." Sherlock Holmes, musing on a similar theme in *The Copper Beeches* ("You look at these scattered houses and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation, and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there... It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside") would have been at one with him.

Evans' Blake when confronted with a problem had a propensity to don an old red dressing gown, curl up in his favourite "saddlebag" armchair, and smoke quantities of pipe tobacco. In a most ingenious story in 1932 he solved an abstruse mystery by observing the depth that parsley had sunk into butter upon a summer's day (how this compared to Holmes's solution of the "dreadful business of the Abernethy family" from a similar circumstance we shall never know since Watson never told us). I like to think that this tale was conceived as a tribute to Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes.

*Who Was The Man on the Stairs?* Is a story in two parts. The first deals with

the murder in Edinburgh in 1908 of an elderly lady, Miss Susan Gilbertson, and the subsequent wrongful conviction for the crime on dubious evidence of a man named Otto Slade whose sentence of death is commuted to life imprisonment at the last moment. Apart from the change of venue from Glasgow to Edinburgh; the minimal changes in the names of the participants; and a touch of fiction to enable the plot to develop, this first part is virtually a straightforward account of the Gilchrist murder.

The second is set twenty years later and begins with a press baron, Lord Faversham, commissioning Sexton Blake to conduct a fresh investigation of the Gilbertson murder as part of a campaign being run by his papers following Otto Slade's release on completion of his sentence.

Sexton Blake accomplishes his task after some rather melodramatic events, including an attempt upon his life by the real murderer who is presently revealed to the public (though we have been privy to his secret since Part One) as Dr John Bleakman, the son of the judge who presided at Slade's trial, and who as a ne'er-do-well medical student, had been the boy friend of Miss Gilbertson's maid who had recognised him as he passed her on the night of the murder. He had hitherto bought her silence by threatening to denounce her as his accessory before the fact if he was taken.

Following Blake's investigations an appeal is allowed and he denounces Bleakman in open court. Bleakman then commits suicide with potassium cyanide in the public gallery.

*Who was the Man on the Stairs* is a neat little attempt to extract a story from the day's headlines. I also wonder if it is anything of a *roman à clef*. The name of Conan Doyle's suspect was never mentioned until Mr Costello's book was published in 1991 as *The Real World of Sherlock Holmes* (I have an American paperback edition with a slightly different title as I indicated earlier). The suspect was a well-connected doctor who, although not related, was loosely referred to as Miss Gilchrist's nephew. His name was Francis James Charteris.

I read somewhere once that many foreign correspondents and other journalists take to spy and other fiction to tell, at least in part, stories and events they cannot publish as fact. Was there anything of this about Gwyn Evans' tale, or was the suggestion of a well-connected doctor just a lucky guess?

**(Editor's Note:** This article was originally written for *The Torr*, the journal of the Wet Country Sherlock Holmes Society.)

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## Library Chat

by Derek Ford

There was another valuation of Sexton Blake papers - "No scum could quell the rock-fisted sleuth" - in the January *Book Collector*.

I wonder who the new readers are? The very old boys are, sadly, no longer with

us. We old boys, apprenticed to the SBL from 1940 to 1956, are now a little thin on the ground. And the new boys of Howard Baker's hybrid SBL would find little interest in the real Sexton Blake.

The first edition 1915 SBL *The Yellow Tiger* is valued at £65 to £75. It never ceases to amaze me that anyone would pay £3,800 for a first edition of Agatha Christie's 1928 *The Mystery of the Blue Train* when, for a few pound at W.H. Smith's, one can be reading the same story today. I must also note an 1897 copy of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* selling for £25.60 - interestingly inscribed to Henry A. Blyth.

I recently read *The Feathered Serpent* by Edgar Wallace (who died in 1932) - the 'reporter's idea of heaven was to wear plus fours seven days a week' - one of the 56 titles re-published by the House of Stratus. Oh, that some publisher would print a selection from Anthony Parsons' contribution of over 100 to the SBL. Stratus had a plan to affix a series of black plaques at the scenes of fictional murders, an idea the A.P. never thought of. But then Fleetway never let Howard Baker edit *Sexton Blake's Clues to Slimming*.

That splendid 1948 book *Boys Will Be Boys* by the late E.S. Turner contains a chapter "Fifty-five years of Sexton Blake". Specially mentioned is Walter Tyrer's 1946 *The Mystery of Three Demobbed Men* in which an Eastern drug is mixed into an old-fashioned headache powder with the result of a wave of minor crimes in Lancashire and a murder for Sexton Blake to investigate. Tyrer could lumber Blake with some tedious cases, and for an s.a.e. I will let you have a list of numbers to avoid. He contributed his first case-book in 1943, *The Mystery of Squadron X* (53). His job in a glasshouse is recalled in *The Secret of the Sands* (109).

Finally, a quote from Peter Robinson's 2005 *Strange Affair*, appropriate to Venner moaning to Blake: "What with DNA, computers, Internet, mobiles and CCTV there's hardly any need for the humble 'tec any more. We're dinosaurs, or fast going that way." And there is news of a helpline for fans of Harry Potter because two important characters in J.K. Rowling's saga die in her seventh and last book. Pity no-one got round to the stress to us old SBL enthusiasts in 1955 when Howard Baker wrote his first SBL with the prophetic title *Without Warning*.

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## Something Dark in Central Europe, and a Word or Two on Rejuvenation

by Derek Hinrich

I suppose it all began with Horace Walpole and the gothic novel. *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* created the impression of Southern and Eastern Europe as lands of mystery and adventure, beginning in the Appenines and encompassing also the Black Forest (courtesy of the Brothers Grimm), but otherwise moving steadily eastwards. For it was to the Carpathian fastnesses of Transylvania

that that rising young solicitor, Jonathan Harker, was summoned to receive the instructions of Count Dracula and found himself as the saying goes, once bitten, twice shy. But one does not have to travel quite that far to find adventure in this part of the world. If you change trains in Dresden you may presently, like Rudolph Rassendyll, repair by way of Zenda and Hofbau to Strelsau and the highest adventure of all. Leaving Ruritania and travelling further towards the - where? - the borders of Imperial Russia or the Balkans, perhaps, you will find yourself presently in Kravonia, another eastern realm described by Anthony Hope, where by a set of curious chances the former kitchen maid from Essex, Sophy Grouch, became the death-bed wife of King Sergius.

These were nineteenth century events but between the World Wars, too. Eastern Europe offered much of concern. Richard Chandos and Jonah Mansell found plenty to occupy them in Austria and adjacent territory (until Domford Yates moved to Pau, and their scene of operations changed to the Pyrenees and the Dordogne), while the post-Versailles Hapsburg successor state of Serbovia, nestling between Austria and Yugoslavia, presented in 1927 an extremely acute problem for Baker Street and Scotland Yard when it was discovered that its reigning monarch, King Karl, was in fact under the *nom de crime* of The Ace, the head of an international criminal gang of eight, known as the Double Four (that domino being their "calling card"), and, as a sovereign prince, beyond the reach of the law, that is until red revolution erupted in Serbovia...

So it is not surprising that, when Professor Presbury, in his *folie d'amour* sought dubious aids to rejuvenation, he should have done so from an obscure scientist named Lowenstein of Prague. His name appears late in the adventure, at its denouement, but what a ring to it, it has, *Lowenstein of Prague!* Prague, too, was the home of that unfortunate poor student, Baldwin, who sold his reflection (and his soul) to the devil for a fortune in gold, so Prague might be considered as a place where gothic evil might thrive. Baldwin's bargain was, of course, a Faustian one but, as Baldwin was a young man, it did not contain any element of rejuvenation.

We know at once that the shadowy Herr Lowenstein is a bad 'un, another in the long list of scientists who seek to play tricks with nature. With the exceptions of the douce Dr Jekyll and Mr Griffin, these gentry generally appear to be of middle-european origin, beginning with Viktor Frankenstein. Rejuvenation, if achievable is possibly a step on the way to immortality, but prolonging life without rejuvenation would invite the fate of the Struldbrugs of Luggnag in *Gulliver*: immortality without eternal vigour, strength and intellect. Herr Lowenstein, apparently attempted to create his elixir as a serum for injection extracted from the glands from various monkeys or apes. In this he was a fore-runner of the experiments of Serge Voronoff in Switzerland between the world wars involving the grafting of animal glands, especially those of monkeys into ageing human bodies. But would such a treatment perhaps merely strengthen the body but leave the ageing of the mind unaffected? I read a bizarre story once concerning a famous author, long since dead, who underwent such an operation in old age and who, one might say, suffered "Struldbrug" effects.



Aldous Huxley, I believe, has someone in one of his novels undergo such a series of injections which - taken to their logical conclusion - turn him into a pre-natal ape.

But if Herr Lowenstein had but known it, his work had already been surpassed by "The Man in Half Moon Street", but this was not revealed until 1938. Despite his sobriquet. The Man in Half Moon Street came originally from Breslau (Central Europe again, you see) and, as far as my memory serves (for I have neither read Barre Lyndon's play nor seen the later Hollywood film for many years), had first managed to prolong his life-span by an operation to transplant or exchange glands with another male some time in the 1870s. The experiment has been repeated successfully on another occasion - successfully as far as The Man was concerned: unfortunately, however, the other party on each occasion died... And so in 1938, it is time for another transplant, but The Man's colleague who had operated in the past is now too old to do so alone. There is consequently now difficulty in both finding a suitable subject and a surgeon to help in the experiment. Somehow Scotland Yard has become interested in the Man. There are fingerprints on file from the 1870s from Breslau where it all began (which suggests the Breslau police were thirty years in advance of the Yard). And Anno Domini kicks in like a supercharger....

Voronoff's experiments inspired yet other fiction and again there were ripples in Baker Street in 1928. Sherlock Holmes was now in his middle seventies and long established in his Sussex cottage but he must have nodded approvingly at the manner in which Sexton Blake dealt with the problem of the King of Serbovia, already referred to, and the cases of the Rejuvenation Club, and of the millionaire, Rupert Bendigo. While *The Adventure of The Creeping Man* merely demonstrated the desperate folly of a fond and foolish old man, these matters showed the depths of wickedness of which men are capable.

The Rejuvenation Club was an international consortium of elderly multimillionaires who conceived in a sort of Nietzschean-inspired megalomania that their talents were of such value that the prolongation of their own lives was of such moment that each was worth that of a young man. They therefore proposed to put into practice the work of Professor Metchnikoff which "entailed the injection of a horse or other animal with finely-minced atoms of human organs such as heart, brain, liver, kidney, etc., when serums can be drawn off in the course of a few weeks capable of acting on these organs." To this end the Club has engaged the services of a suitably sinister Eurasian doctor who has been busily engaged in the kidnapping and incarceration of young men in the ratio of one per millionaire to provide the raw material for the serum doses. The required number is completed by the capture of Blake - who has been investigating the disappearance of one of the young men - and his assistant, Tinker. In the nick of time, however, they escape with their fellow prisoners, and blow up the laboratory, thus saving the members of the Club from the most expensive nine o'clock walk in history, not to mention charges of conspiracy.

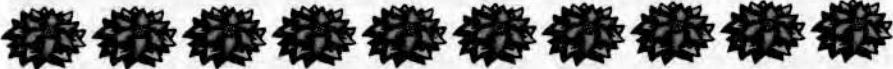
In the case of Rupert Bendigo rejuvenation proved a mirage. He was a millionaire who had apparently been successfully restored to youngish manhood by an experimental operation or series of injections affecting the pineal gland. Blake



became involved because of some shady investments by Bendigo which had aroused concerns in Whitehall. The case had nothing to do with successful experiments in rejuvenation but was in fact a daring conspiracy involving personation, fraud, and imprisonment. It was not a mad wife who was imprisoned in a turret, but Bendigo himself while a younger cousin, who bore a strong resemblance to him as a young man, took his place complicit with Bendigo's physician (who spread word of the successful operation) and Bendigo's personal servant. It was a tricky problem but with the assistance of a young lady transvestite, Julia Fortune, an agent of MI 5, Blake and Tinker eventually crack it.

What colourful stories, what colourful characters! But it is good to know that after Mr Holmes' retirement there was still in England a detective capable of dealing with such wickedness. May there always be one!

(This article was originally written for the Sherlock Holmes Society of London.)



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## A Christmas of Peril for Tom Merry and Co.

by Ray Hopkins



The Terrible Three would never want to remember that particular Christmas. It began on Wayland Common: the man in black who levelled a gun at them; the frightened rabbit of a man with the second firearm; the face at the window; the horror of hearing the wicked voice saying, "The police will not serve my turn. His life is what I want."

It was to have begun so differently, so cheerily, at Laurel Villa, when Tom Merry and Co. travelled to Huckleberry Heath. The joyous moment when her "darling Tommy" would be enveloped in Miss Fawcett's black rustling bombazine and smothered in loving kisses while Lowther and Manners stood watching, mouths tightly clamped to prevent the shriek of laughter which was longing to burst out. That night, the angry face of the man in black at the window which apprised Tom Merry of the fact that the Terrible Three were being menaced for a reason they could not fathom.

Just before St. Jim's broke up for the Christmas hols they had found themselves lost in the darkness of a storm on Wayland Common and had been confronted by a man with a gun uttering the name "Beaumont." He had hurriedly restored the gun to his pocket when he realised they were schoolboys. He excused himself by saying he thought they might be footpads. He tells them he is looking for a friend in a red caravan. Tom Merry, thinking of the deadly weapon the man had flourished, doubted the man could be a friend. After they part the schoolboys come across the caravan and the frightened occupant. He tells them that his name is indeed Beaumont, and turns white when they say that he is being searched for by someone carrying a gun. They guide the man to the Wayland Road, having discovered their bearings. He refuses their offer to let them lead him to the Wayland Police Station. They wonder why Beaumont evidently does not want to complain to the police that he is being menaced by a man with a gun.

To the consternation of the chums of the Shell, they see the man in black again at Wayland Junction. He travels on the train that they board to Huckleberry Heath and follows them to Laurel Villa. Evidently the man assumes some connection between Beaumont and Tom Merry and Co. and believes that he will eventually be guided to his quarry if he keeps the St. Jim's Juniors in his sights.

During their stay at Laurel Villa and a scaring a pre-Christmas party at which Jack Blake and Co., Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison are present, the angry face of the man in black is seen at the window scanning the faces of all who are in view. "I wonder why he thinks there is some connection between us and his quarry?" Tom said. They would not know the answer to this puzzling question until they saw Cardew at Eastwood House. But first the Terrible Three had to make their second port of call at the home of Monty Lowther's uncle.

The chums spotted the man with the firearm again as they left the station for Holly Lodge. He had evidently kept them under close observation and intended to follow them where ever they went. The Co. come upon him later quite by chance; he is staring out to sea at a low-lying piece of land known as Hermit's Rock. Lowther tells them there is a small untenanted bungalow on the rock. It is possible to walk out there when the tide is out. A thin trail of smoke is discernable coming from the bungalow. Is it possible that the fugitive Beaumont is hiding in the lone bungalow on Hermit's Rock? The chums of the Shell decide to walk out to the rock at the next low tide and see for themselves, making sure that the man in black is nowhere in the vicinity when they do.

The rock is no more than a hundred yards from the shore. The occupant incredibly is indeed the runaway Beaumont. A fatal chance had led the man in black in the right direction. Undoubtedly he would follow in the footsteps of the Terrible Three, confront Beaumont and shoot him dead! "They little dreamed of the wild and terrible Christmastide that was before them."

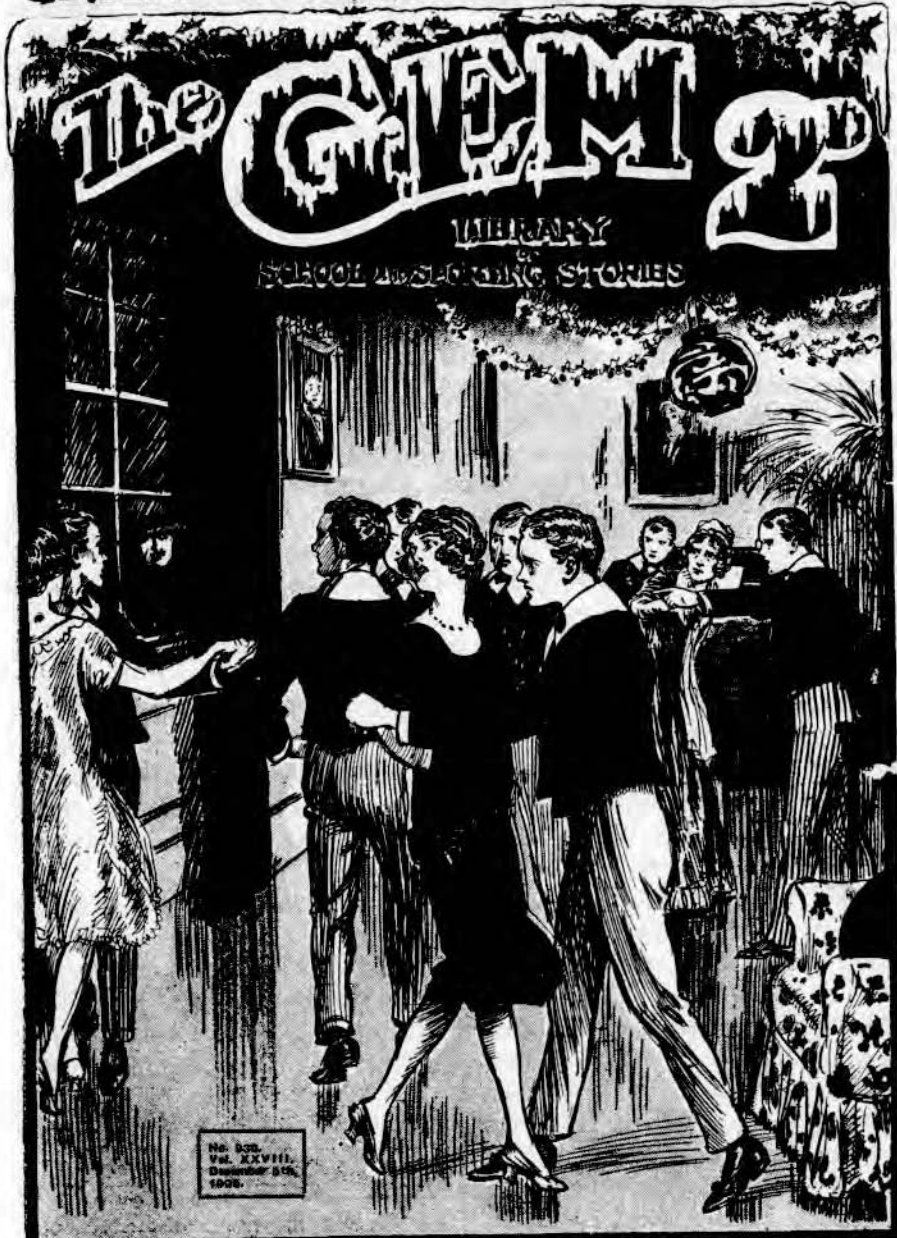
The chums decide to leave Holly Lodge during the night to warn Beaumont. At three o'clock they leave their warm beds and make for Hermit's Rock. But the man in black is on the lookout for them and confronts them on the way threatening to shoot them if they don't reveal the hiding place of Beaumont. The three juniors remain silent and stare him down until he lowers the gun. He disappears into the trees. The chums return to Holly Lodge by a roundabout route in case they are being tracked.

The following day they are due to leave Holly Lodge for Eastwood House, Gussy's home, for the Christmas get-together with Jack Blake and Co. The man in black observes their leaving and they watch carefully to see that he doesn't get on their train. They formulate a plan whereby they will get off at the next stop, return by a circuitous route, and make their way to see Beaumont and warn him that the man in black is still on his trail. They have to wait an hour for the tide to go out far enough so that they can walk to the rock. They see nothing of the shadower and conclude that this time they will be successful.

There is no answer to their urgent knocking. Beaumont's abject terror forbids him to let them in but they shout through the door that they have put the other man off the scent. The runaway has turned into a worn creature since they last saw him. Tom and his chums feel pity for him but there is a vast feeling of revulsion building up inside them and they want to get away from him as quickly as possible. They urge Beaumont to put himself under the protection of the police. From his evasive replies they realise that he wants no contact with the police whatever. They wonder if he is also a fugitive from the police? They are puzzled but beginning to see that there must be a very strong reason for the man in black's relentless pursuit of Beaumont.

A cry of terror bursts from him at a loud and, in view of what they have told him, totally unexpected knock at the door. The strong voice of the other man causes another gasp of fright. "It is he - Paul Jocelyn! I am a dead man! Help me! Stand by me!"

**GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER!**



**WHOSE IS THE FACE AT THE WINDOW ?**

Jocelyn attempts to force an entrance both at the front door and round the back at the door at the end of the passage. He shouts that he knows Beaumont is within. A large piece of jagged rock will soon demolish the door and they will come face to face, and the pursuer will exact summary vengeance on the cowering rat that he knows Beaumont to be. When Jocelyn's footsteps are heard returning with the implement, Beaumont slides back a small spyhole panel in the front door. He pulls a revolver from his pocket and fires through the spyhole. The chums, frozen with horror, hear the loud cry of pain from without and the assailant's receding footsteps. "Good heavens!" breathed Manners "How is this going to end?" Tom Merry picks up the revolver as it falls from Beaumont's nerveless fingers.

Jocelyn runs to the back of the bungalow, fires several shots, then smashes a rock against the door until there is a split in it. As he peers through it, Tom Merry steps closer to the door so that the man can see him. Jocelyn starts back with a startled cry, "Dear God, I had no idea you boys were inside. It couldn't have been you who fired at me. Beaumont must be there. You are trying to defend a thief with stolen goods on his hands. He won't have told you, I know, but he is a solicitor. All I had in the world was under his control while I was away on active service. He spent my money and that of others - wasted it in reckless speculation. He has thousands of pounds that do not belong to him, either with him or in some hiding place." Tom said, "If he has done what you say, call in the police." Jocelyn's answer struck cold chills deep in the stomachs of all three boys. "The police will not serve my purpose. His life is what I want'." Tom said, "We are prepared to risk our lives to prevent a crime!"

Jocelyn stoops and Tom sees the rock in his hand with which he intends to smash in the door. "If you come any closer I shall fire," shouts Tom. "I mean it, Mr. Jocelyn." The man came closer to the door. The jagged rock crashed against it. The split widened. Tom Merry raised the gun to the split. "God forgive me," he cried as he fired at Jocelyn's left arm.

The man fell back with a cry, clutching his arm. Tom saw the blood running through his fingers. He threw one agonized look at Tom and turned his back on the bungalow. Tom watched him go. He quickly wiped away the tears that suddenly blurred his vision before he turned and faced his fellow prisoners. "I've wounded him and he's bleeding," was all he could manage to say.

Beaumont closes himself in the bedroom for the night while the boys rest as best they can in the kitchen, wrapped in blankets. "Good Lord," said Lowther. "I forgot. It's Christmas Eve. Gussy will be wondering what has happened to us but he'll think we're still at Holly Lodge and my Uncle will think we're safely at Eastwood House." "We've done rather well actually," said Manners. "Saved the lives of two men, in a way. Jocelyn would have killed Beaumont if he could have got at him and he'd have wound up with a hangman's noose around his neck for his crime." But Jocelyn was to make another attack before the day was out.

He returns before nightfall, his arm bandaged and in a sling. He tells Tom through the slit in the door, "I respect you for what you have done for that wretch but I have brought materials with me and I intend to set fire to the bungalow whether



you are inside or not. I shall stop at nothing to kill him." Tom tells the others not to worry. Though built of wood, the bungalow drenched with rain, snow and sleet must be damp right through and will not burn easily.

The man in black piled torn branches and brambles against the door. Then came a familiar smell that brought a horrified gasp to the lips of the prisoners. "That's petrol," said Lowther. "Now we ARE done for." The flames that shot up outside lit up the frightened faces of Tom Merry and Co. Tom persuaded the cringing Beaumont to leave the bedroom and join them in the kitchen. The door was locked and barricaded. They waited for the sound of Jocelyn's voice. When the front door burned down he would be bound to come into the passage and contrive to come face to face with them.

They heard his hurried footfalls in the passage outside. "I have an axe with me and I intend to smash through the wall." Tom Merry answered him with a loud cry. "If you do, I will shoot at you again. I still have Beaumont's revolver." "Then you must take the consequences," replied Jocelyn. "I have another can of petrol and will burn you all to death." "Think what you are doing," shouted Tom. "You will be a murderer, worse than this miserable devil you are hunting." Beaumont moaned as he heard Tom's words. "Save me," he mumbled. Lowther and Manners glared at their fellow prisoner, their feelings making them want to strike the cringing creature.

The sound of splashing against the kitchen door and along the passage wall came from outside and the chums knew that when a match was struck, the whole wall would burst into flames. They would be cremated.

The kitchen was like a furnace. Smoke and flames burst through the thin passage wall and crept up to the ceiling. Tom Merry sprang to the window, tearing it open and pushing out the shutter which covered it. "Don't leave me to burn to death," cried Beaumont. Tom rounded on him. "Save yourself, you selfish old devil. Come outside and help me subdue Jocelyn." Tom Merry rolled headlong out of the window, closely followed by Manners and Lowther. "At last," Jocelyn shouted in triumph. Beaumont backed away from the kitchen window when Jocelyn aimed his gun and shot at him. But the three boys were upon him. They clung to him and were tossed about like dogs holding on to a wild animal. Beaumont fell from the window and collapsed on the ground. He lay there panting and moaning. Jocelyn flung off the boys and looked around for his firearm which Tom Merry had knocked from his hand.

There were sudden shouts, a rush of many footsteps and the blast of a police whistle. Tom Merry lay back on the ground, closed his eyes and murmured. "Thank God! The police!" Paul Jocelyn was groping in the grass for his revolver when the hand of a police-inspector grasped him by the shoulder. With a cry of rage Jocelyn leaped away. In the darkness of this terrible Christmas Eve the man in black escaped them and was gone. He was seen no more. That which Harry Manners had said earlier had come true. Two men had been saved from death. But one was to pay the price of his misdeeds,

Monty Lowther was helped to his feet by his uncle. "D'Arcy phoned from



Eastwood House that you had not arrived there. Then I learned that you had left the train and I feared some terrible accident. For twelve hours this countryside has been searched for you. What does this mad adventure mean?"

Rufus Beaumont, huddled in the grass, is pounced upon by the police-inspector. "He is the absconding solicitor. We have been searching for him for the past several weeks. He has embezzled thousands of pounds and committed half a dozen forgeries in the process." Beaumont has nothing to say. He is taken away by the police. When they all return to Holly Lodge, Tom Merry is pleased to hear from Gussy that his guardian, Miss Fawcett, has arrived safely at Eastwood House for their late Christmas festivities.

The following morning, when the Shell juniors reach Eastwood House, Cardew explains the puzzling fact about why Jocelyn believed Beaumont was connected in some way with St. Jim's. Cardew's uncle, Lord Lilburn, also his guardian, had the unfeeling habit, Cardew considered, of transmitting his nephew's pocket money through his solicitor, Rufus Beaumont, rather than sending it himself. "Very poor system," commented Cardew. "Lazy old devil! Jocelyn must have seen an envelope addressed to St. Jim's on Beaumont's desk when he visited his office "And the sight of that envelope," concluded Lowther, "resulted in two men nearly being killed and a building being burned to the ground. I wouldn't mind seeing all that in a film at the Courtfield Hippodrome some time." Manners sniffed. You can go by yourself to see that one!" Gussy was heard to concur, "Yaas wathah!"

(The above events can be read in full in GEM Nos. 930-931, December 1925)



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## “Drinking” at Greyfriars

by Frances M. Blake

All the ‘bad hats’ at Greyfriars smoked and gambled, but a select few indulged in alcohol as well. There was a ‘fast set’ in the Sixth led by the bullying prefect Carberry, who in early *Magnet* years would drink either in the privacy of their studies or in the pubs outside the school – the Cross Keys with its ‘stuffy atmosphere reeking with the fumes of tobacco and spirits’ or The Three Fishers (formerly the Waterside Inn), ‘the most disreputable haunt in the county’. In *Magnet* 46 Carberry sent Levison of the Remove to the village to bring him a bottle of whisky for a study party with his friends (Datchett and Hacker in those days), and in *Magnet* 66 he was drinking whisky and smoking with his cronies who included Loder for the first time. Meanwhile the new Sixth-former, the Greek Ionides, kept liqueurs in his study cupboard – a more fastidious taste for such a dandy.

Carberry suffered a hang-over one morning after drinking whisky and water and smoking cheap cigarettes with his group. ‘His eyes were red and tired’ and he had a headache which certainly did not improve his savage temper. The juniors were not sorry when he was expelled for a plot against young Dicky Nugent, after an afternoon of drinking, smoking and playing cards in the pub. It had been standard knowledge in the Remove that he and his set would be drinking. As Bunter blurted out in front of the Head and the Remove in 1908, “I knew all along that if Carberry got hold of the brandy we should never see it again. I know he drinks whisky as a rule, but a fellow who drinks whisky will drink brandy”.

Carberry gave his own view on drink when he told his friends over whisky, sliced lemons and hot water: “Jolly good stuff. Puts life into you. It’s just what you want on a cold night like this. Wingate likes a trot round the Close to warm his feet... I prefer this stuff.”

Following his expulsion on the unrelated matter, Loder was made a prefect and was known to ‘sometimes’ drink whisky and water, usually with another prefect, Carne. Loder’s drinking was quite brazen in front of a gag, as when there was brandy on the table he ordered, “Get the drinks mixed, young Nugent. Not too much soda for me”. Actual drinking in the Sixth was not reported later on but the implication was that this continued until at least the First World War.

Perhaps strangely, it would seem that the fifteen-year-old Vernon-Smith of the Remove drank a lot more than the seniors. In the early years ‘the taste of champagne was more familiar to him than ginger-beer’. His notorious arrival, drunk, at Greyfriars in May 1910, which shocked and angered the whole school, set a pattern for his career in Red Cover *Magnets*. The Bounder of Greyfriars (as Bulstrode nicknamed him on that first day) brought bottles of champagne with him in his box, but these ended up being poured on his head and clothes by Bulstrode & Co.

He was given a hard lesson by the Remove in *Magnets* 119 and 120 but never gave up any of his ‘man of the world’ habits. Indeed he drew the weak Hazel into



*Vernon-Smith smokes a cheroot in the Rag on his first evening at Greyfriars*

some of them. As when he took Hazel at night to a drinking and gambling den run by Cobb and Banks on the 'haunted island'. 'There were bottles and glasses on the table... Both of them had full glasses in front of them.' The toast was drunk by all (except Hazel) and a game of draw-poker began, only to be violently ended when the Removites, led by Harry Wharton, waded in. (Vernon-Smith had shown himself as Hazel's evil angel soon after his Greyfriars arrival, when he influenced Hazel to lose his money at a casino abroad, while himself being quite *au fait* in such surroundings.)

A year after his arrival, Vernon-Smith more than startled Coker of the Fifth when questioned about a special feast the Bounder was preparing to celebrate mistakenly his winning a large cash prize exam of the school. Coker discovered the party was to be held at the Cross Keys, starting at 11 p.m., with gourmet dishes, card playing, and of course plenty of champagne – Hiedsieck and Moet Chandon. Coker's honest reaction was clear. "You ought to be kicked out of the school – and you're not sixteen yet. What will you be at twenty, when you go to Oxford?" The Bounder sneered but Coker responded with a humiliating smacking and left saying, "I feel as if I were interviewing a convict in a cell." The party never took place as Wingate came to the

dormitory and Mark Linley was the eventual winner. Of course Vernon-Smith could have afforded the £50, had he wished, but he was fed up with the postponed project. However, Wharton was correct in thinking that even the most reckless outsiders in the Remove stopped short of drinking spirituous liquors, with the exception, perhaps, of the Bounder of Greyfriars, and Bob Cherry spoke of Vernon-Smith 'in an atmosphere of brandy and water'.

This was provided in *Magnet* 181 when Vernon-Smith was brought before his Headmaster who thundered: "The Friardale policeman found you the worse for drink in the village this evening, at an hour too when you were supposed to be within gates. You were seen intoxicated, sir! PC Tozer brought you here. You slept like a brute for hours after you were brought in." Expulsion (one of many!) naturally followed, but soon he was drinking with his father over dinner at the Courtfield Arms Hotel. The champagne was potent and Vernon-Smith talked freely of his escapades. He 'walked a little unsteadily to the car'. No wonder he could truthfully say to the Remove that his pater let him do what he liked 'at home', and boasted that he drank champagne when a 'nipper', and could drink his father under the table before he was fourteen.

Drinking to excess, however, nearly caused his death in *Magnet* 194 (1911) and he was only saved by the bravery of Dick Penfold, the Friardale cobbler's son. Hopelessly intoxicated after an afternoon visit to the pub, Vernon-Smith fell off a wooden bridge and would have drowned in the Sark.

In 1912 his drinking was still part of his smoking and gambling vices. Harry Wharton & Co. went with Lord Mauleverer and Mark Linley to Blackpool by train for the Bank Holiday and encountered the Bounder and Bolsover. In a revealing scene in the restaurant Vernon-Smith maliciously eggs on his pal to drink from the bottles of champagne ordered from a wary waiter. Poor Bolsover is quite unused to hard drink and soon becomes confused by hallucinations, then is truculent. The still clear-headed Bounder settles the bill correctly, gives a five-shilling tip, and abandons his helpless companion. It is left to Mark Linley to watch over Bolsover while he sleeps off the effects and then get him a wash and a meal. Many weeks later Bolsover remembered that kindness.

During the famous "Top Dog" series of 1912, Vernon-Smith invited Bulstrode and Bolsover to celebrate his triumph and said "Ginger beer is for the fags". He produced a whisky bottle from the locked cupboard. Bulstrode refused but Bolsover pretended to sip. The Bounder was in fine fettle. Unfortunately a disgruntled Bunter used his ventriloquism through the locked door to put on the voice of Quelch and demand entry. In utter dismay the two panicked, but the Bounder swept bottle and glasses away and smashed a 15/- bottle of eau de cologne to dispel the whisky fumes. He also had bullseyes to hide the smell on their breath. Of course Quelch knew nothing about it.

Throughout, Vernon-Smith enjoyed the best cheroots and cigarettes, even his currant wine was most select and expensive as Bunter was delighted to discover. Bunter also knew in 1913 that Vernon-Smith kept a bottle and a box of cigars in

his locker. Yet sometimes Smithy paid for his sins. At the end of 1913 he returned to the Remove dorm after a wild night out at the Cross Keys. An acute hang-over is very accurately described! 'The Bounder's face was flushed, his eyes glittering unnaturally'. Wharton could see he had been drinking. 'And he began to undress with unsteady hands'. Next morning 'with dull and heavy eyes. His head was aching; he had a dry, parched tongue and his sight was dizzy'. "He looks awfully green and yellow today", said Bob Cherry. And although looking better later, he was still 'pale and sickly-looking, and there were dark rings under his eyes'.

While there were no explicit tales of the Sixth and alcohol in later years – though one can assume it still went on – the Bounder did still have drinking scenes sporadically. *Magnet* 367, "The Last Plunge" with the Bounder half-hearted in drinking was the last for some time as the substitute writers preferred a reformed and therefore dull character. Much later, in *Magnet* 858 (1924), the Bounder was hopelessly unfit for a cricket match and it must be implied that he had had a night's drinking [viz. some English cricketers today?]. At Christmas that same year he took Wharton to his father's villa on the French Riviera where Ponsonby & Co. joined them for dinner. 'There was champagne on the table... All four young rascals drank'. (Wharton ignored the scorn and drank lemonade.)

Another, more serious, episode occurs in the Chicago visit during the Hollywood series of 1929. Smithy foolishly goes with a new-found companion (a swindler) to an illegal night-club in Prohibition days. The man pours champagne liberally for his young – and rich – 'friend', but Smithy has the sense only to sip slowly in such surroundings. Suddenly the Club is raided by the cops and the Bounder is arrested, handcuffed and put in a prison van with others. He has to spend the night in a police cell before an annoyed Mr. Fish bails him out and pays the fine – Smithy having lost all his money in the Club. For one Smithy was suitably chastened.

In the *Magnets* of the 1930s there are suggestions or actual tellings of times when Smithy still has a drink or more of champagne. But those Red Cover stories are evoked perhaps in *Magnet* 1223 of 1931 when Smithy has been expelled for breaking detention to play in the Highcliffe cricket match, and he says bitterly to Redwing, 'They couldn't come down on me harder if they'd found me moppin' up whisky and soda at the Cross Keys.'

Those were days he would have known.







## A Few Thoughts on The Holiday Annual

by Norman Wright



The "Greyfriars Holiday Annual" is one of the best loved of all the Christmas annuals published between the wars. Its yellow cover became a sought after favourite in the Christmas stockings of two generations of children.

In the course of its life it underwent a few minor title changes, starting off with its





*Leonard Shields' first illustration of Greyfriars (from the 1920 Holiday Annual)*

first issue for 1920 as "The Holiday Annual For Boys and Girls", the following year it became "The Greyfriars Holiday Annuals for Boys and Girls", a title it retained until its penultimate issue in 1940, when it became "The Greyfriars Holiday Annual for Boys" a title it kept for its final issue dated 1941.

The Holiday Annual ran for twenty two years, its issues dated 1920 to 1941. Most collectors consider the first nine Holiday Annuals to be the finest. From 1920 to 1928 it boasted 360 pleasure packed pages, chock full of good things. In 1929

the format changed and for the last 13 years of its run it became a slightly inferior publication. During these latter years it looked to be a bigger volume but this was an illusion, a slight of hand instigated by the publishers and brought about by a change in the paper used. From 1929 until 1941 the pages of the Holiday Annual resembled cardboard, aesthetically far less pleasing to handle and read than the thinner, more manageable pages of the earlier issues. The annuals for 1929 to 1941 may look twice as fat as those published between 1920 and 1928 but the page count is considerably less. In fact there are approximately one third fewer pages in the later, fatter annuals than in the earlier, thinner issues.

So what does the Holiday Annual contain? The fact that it was the Greyfriars Holiday Annual obviously meant that Charles Hamilton dominated the content. It invariably contained stories of the three main schools; Greyfriars, St Jims and Rookwood. Sometimes other Hamilton schools and characters were included: Cedar Creek in four issues (1924, 1938, 1939, 1941), Ken King in one issue (1934), The Rio Kid in three issues (1937, 1938, 1941), Packsaddle once (1937) and Oakshot once (1941).

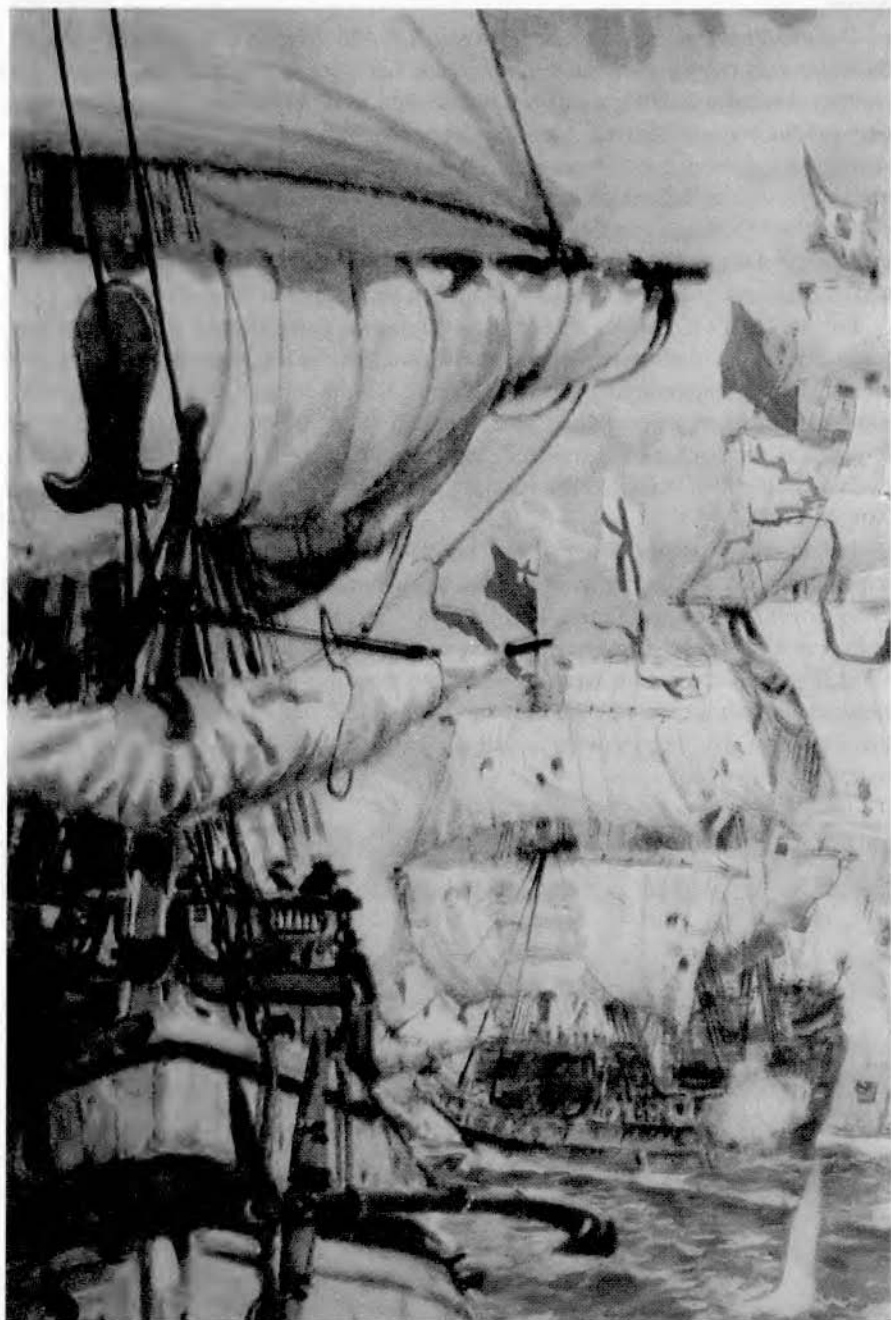
There were also many non-Hamilton stories and these ranged from school stories by the likes of Michael Poole and P.G. Wodehouse, to full-blooded historical adventure yarns of pirates, cavaliers and Robin Hood. There were also more up to date stories featuring racing cars, aircraft, etc. etc.

Many of the Hamilton school stories were reprints from old issues of Magnet, Gem and Boys Friend, but occasionally - particularly in the early issues - there were new, long stories, specially written for the Holiday Annual by Hamilton and when this happened it was invariably billed as such: 'this story specially written for the Holiday Annual by...'

A few of the early issues reprinted complete '3 story series' from the Gem, these included a Toff story in the 1922 issue and a South Sea treasure hunting story featuring St. Jims in the issue for 1924. This predominance of Tom Merry stories in the early issue would perhaps indicate that during the early and mid nineteen-twenties the Gem was more popular than the Magnet.

The early issues, with their greater page count, found room for many 'extras' that helped to build up the Greyfriars, Rookwood and St Jims myths. There were picture maps of the districts around the schools, features on the studies, the pupils and the masters etc. etc. There were also some superb sepia plates by E.E. Briscoe on incidents from the early history of the three schools: "The Great Fire at St. Jim's in the reign of George III" being a typical example.

Other space fillers found predominantly in the early issues were the many rhymes, and short fictional pieces featuring the three schools. Those were not written by Hamilton but probably penned by Samways and Pentelow. Love them or loathe them these short ditties served to build a sense of reality around the schools, encouraging readers to suspend their disbelief and, for the time they were reading at least, imagine that Greyfriars, St Jims and Rookwood were actual places and Harry Wharton, Tom Merry, Jimmy Silver and the rest of Hamilton's creations, were real flesh and blood

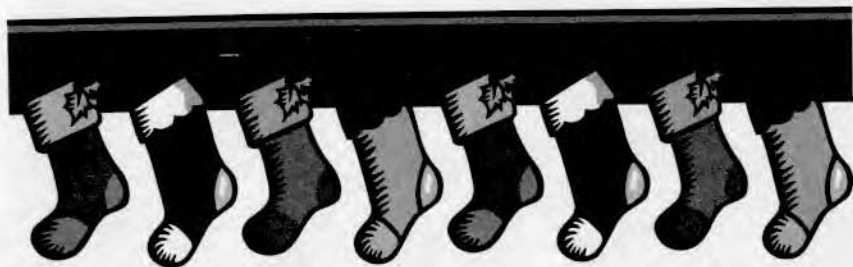


beings.

I've mentioned the E.E. Briscoe sepia plates, but another joy of the Holiday Annual throughout its run were the full colour plates that were found in all the issues. The Holiday Annual was always a classy publication when it came to illustrations. Not only did the 'regular' artists - Shields, Chapman, Macdonald - contribute but other Amalgamated Press artists were roped in to contribute illustrations. The first issue was dominated by Warwick Reynolds, a fine artist who contributed a splendid cover, a full colour frontispiece and many internal black and white illustrations. Over the years Serge Drigin, W.E. Johns, Roland Davies and many others contributed plates and illustrations making the Holiday Annual a joy to browse through.

For me the 1927 issue is a very special issue as, some twenty years ago, I was fortunate enough to obtain the original artwork of one of the plates in that particular annual. It is a watercolour painting by Serge Drigin entitled "One Against Fifty-Three" that accompanies a short piece entitled "Sons O' Devon" by Philip Hardy. It pictures Sir Richard Grenville's ship, *The Revenge*, battling it out against overwhelming Spanish odds. The painting was later used in "Billy Bunter's Holiday Annual 1967".

Drigin was a prolific artist whose familiar 'SD' monogram crops up in story papers, annuals and periodicals put out by a number of publishers. He painted every cover for Newnes' flying 'pulp' *Air Stories*, and for their short lived *Fantasy* pulp. For Pearson he drew many covers and internal illustrations for *Scoops*, the short lived science fiction weekly. He was a versatile illustrator even turning his hand to adventure comic strips. But for all his large output my favourite remains that excellent painting showing a gallant British ship fighting to the end against overwhelming odds.







## A Favourite Crime at Christmas



by Derek Hinrich

The classic English murder story requires a smallish group of suspects in a closed and, if possible, temporarily isolated, community. This is presumably why Americans find them “cosy”: they must find murder so reassuring. I know a curious hamlet on Dartmoor which perfectly fits these requirements (all I need is a plot, time, and patience).

A few years ago some American members of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society clubbed together to write such a story (it was supposed to be a novel by Harriet Vane, the future Lady Peter Wimsey: at any rate they used the putative title of a book others mentioned in one of Sayers’ novels). Their “novel”, set in a Hollywood England of the ‘30s and 40s, involved floods cutting everybody, in a converted water-mill, off from the rest of the country. I understand that they took it in turns to write the chapters without, however, any consultation between themselves as to the plot: and presently it all got so complex and tortuous that it foundered because the only way it could go forward was by a “with one bound Jack was free” sort of device.

Certainly “The Next Move” which ran for fourteen weeks in 1932 and ‘33 in *The Union Jack* where the authorship was shared by G.H. Teed, Gwyn Evans, Robert Murray, and Anthony Skene, and where the authors were expected to contrive difficulties for each other, was a better effort. This was, however, definitely not a “cosy”.

But the enclosed and isolated setting is indeed ideal for a Christmas crime. The snow at Christmas in British crime fiction far exceeds its actual incidence. It is always thick in Gwyn Evans’s Christmas stories which I have enjoyed, every one.

To my mind, though, the perfect version of a Christmas Crime is Cyril Hare’s *An English Murder*. This is an urbane and witty confection, an understated drawing-room comedy of manners (frequently bad), which is a delight from first to last.

It is set in me isolated stately home of Lord Warbeck in me county of “Markshire” (which is possibly Surrey). It is probably 1949 and the country is in the iron grip of post-war austerity, a cold winter, and a Labour government. Nowhere is apparently colder than the ancient pile of Warbeck Hall as the Christmas house party gathers.

The host, Lord Warbeck, is a prematurely aged invalid, near to death, who spends much of his time in bed, rising late and retiring early. It is his wish to have what he expects to be his last Christmas in the company of those nearest and dearest to him. The assembling guests include his son, Robert, the leader of a neo-fascist splinter group; Lord Warbeck’s cousin, Sir Julius, who is the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer; Lady Camilla Prendergast, a distant relation by marriage of Lord Warbeck and a former girl friend of his son; and a Mrs Carstairs, the daughter of the rector of Warbeck, the wife of the Chancellor’s number two, who virtually grew up in the family. Also in attendance, beside the butler, Briggs, and a sadly attenuated

domestic staff, are Sir Julius's Special Branch detective and a distinguished central European emigré academic. Doctor Bottwink, who has been resident at Warbeck while engaged for some time past on research work on the Warbeck papers in the Warbeck Hall monument room. He is especially interested in documents relating to the early part of the reign of George III.

Briggs's daughter is also in Warbeck Hall at her father's instance, as she has a particular matter she wishes to raise with the son of the house. It develops that they have been secretly married, and she is anxious for the match to be made public.

The snow begins to fall on the 23rd December. The last of the guests to arrive experience considerable difficulty in the latter stages of their journeys. The blizzard continues throughout Christmas Eve. By nightfall the old house is isolated by deep drifts and telephone and power lines are down. The guests soon find themselves at odds with each other and the atmosphere is generally uncomfortable, as well as cold and damp - except in those few rooms in the old house where fires are lit. Lord Warbeck's son, Robert, is generally unpleasant, and particularly offensive to Sir Julius, with whom he is locked in mutual loathing.

Dinner on Christmas Eve is at first a sombre affair, but as the wine flows, the company gradually relax. At midnight Robert Warbeck broaches champagne, and says he has an announcement to make. He drains his glass and falls dead. Someone has added potassium cyanide to it.

Here then is the classic English Murder of the title. A few suspects isolated by the elements in an old house with a murderer amongst them, and a good few motives, too. There is soon another death, that of the old Lord; and then another.

The Special Branch man must now revert, without assistance, to criminal investigation.

At hand, however, to assist him, eventually, is Dr. Bottwink, through whose eyes we have seen some of the action. The doctor is a wandering scholar who has suffered much in post—Versailles Europe following the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which he was initially a subject. He is a student of English constitutional history and, in the present, a keen but detached observer of the English and their customs, which he views with great interest. From his objective standpoint he is presently able to offer an explanation of the strange events of the Warbeck house party.

It is a story written with great charm and civilised wit. It is, as I said, a drawing-room comedy murder and a perfect example of a quintessentially English Murder. I do urge you to read it, if you have not already done so.



# Henry Samuel Quelch and Paul Pontefex Prout being Two Gentlemen of Yesteryear

by Ted Baldock

In arguing, too, the person owned his skill. For e'en though  
vanquished, he could argue still.

*Goldsmith. The Deserted Village*

A friend should bear his friend's infirmities.

*Shakespeare. Julius Caesar*

Forsaking the common room on this unusually mild autumn day, sedately pacing back and forth along masters' walk beneath the old elm were the two senior masters, one tall and angular and possessing an exceedingly sharp eye, the other short and rotund whose mellow boom was well known and constantly heard in the precincts of Greyfriars. They were discussing - many may have classified it as arguing - the literary merits of the giants of ancient Greece, a subject in which they were both deeply versed.

"Really, Quelch."

"Really, Prout."

On another occasion Mr. Hacker smiled sourly as he heard the voices of his two colleagues raised in acrimonious dispute. Between the masters of the remove and fifth forms at Greyfriars these exchanges were not uncommon. They were in fact, despite the long friendship existing between them, remarkably frequent. Prout was booming.

"A boy was observed, sir, by Gosling. A boy of your form, sir, the boy Vernon Smith surreptitiously scaling the wall in the cloisters. With the obvious intention of breaking bounds, sir, after lock up."

Mr. Prout was getting into his stride, as it were, growing purple and beginning to swell almost visibly.

"Unprecedented conduct, sir, unparalleled. Really, sir, such conduct cannot be allowed to continue. Discipline must be maintained, the boy must be punished. I feel duty bound, sir, in the present circumstances, to speak to Dr. Locke. Such conduct cannot be allowed to continue."

It was at this point that the acid tones of Mr. Quelch broke in upon the fifth form master's eloquence. "Would it not be better, sir, and certainly more desirable, if you confine yourself to the problems of your own form and leave the affairs of other forms to their respective masters."

The remove master's tone could have been well described as pure acid. One could almost feel sorry for old 'pompous' as he took the full impact of the remove master's tirade.



"What - what," he blustered. "Do I hear aright, sir, are my ears deceiving me?" He broke off, completely deflated. He rose with such dignity as he was able to muster and swept from the remove master's study.

It says much for the integrity of these two gentlemen that an hour later the dust of battle had settled and a due sense of proportion been reached, their dignity was once more in the ascendant. There would come a tap on the remove master's door and the portly form of Mr. Prout, so lately convulsed with outraged dignity, would enter.

"I have returned, Quelch, I have come, sir. I have come to apologize."

Quickly Mr. Quelch raised his hand, exclaiming, "Stop, Prout, stop my dear fellow, come in and sit down. Allow me to finish these last few papers then I suggest we take a glass of sherry together and put aside old unhappy differences." Thus would it be, a beaming Prout booming his approval as he settles himself in Mr. Quelch's armchair, raising his glass. "Here's to you, my dear fellow."

Had the marble bust of Socrates which stood on the top of Mr. Quelch's bookcase become suddenly endowed with animation and the power of speech, probably he would have smiled benignly upon the two masters below and approved the happy return of their old relationship. All of which was incomprehensible to Mr. Hacker in the sourness of his habitual nature. He would just be unable to understand how two gentlemen of mature years could at one moment be crossing swords and thirsting for each other's blood, as it were, and the next clasping hands and taking sherry together. It was an unfathomable mystery to the sardonic fifth form master.

Let us take a final glimpse at these two old warriors - for such they are - as they make their way down the dusky avenue of Friardale Lane at the commencement of one of their traditional walks. The long lean figure of the remove master and his short plump companion Mr. Prout. Quelch swinging his ash walking stick, striding military

fashion, shoulders erect, with Prout trotting alongside. Their shadows glancing on the ancient tree boles as they proceed down the lane en route for the breezy heights of Courtfield common with the comforting anticipation of Abernethy biscuits (the remove master's favourite brand) at Chunkleys. These are never requested; they always appear together with the teapot, etc. - which says much for the service at Chunkleys.

As they walk the sun is slowly sinking in the west in a blaze of glory. One more perfect day in the great cycle of time. We may catch fragments of speech as our two masters move through the shadows.

"As I was saying, Quelch, I cannot agree with your proposition regarding ...."

"But surely, my dear Prout, do I not state on page twelve that...."

The voices become smaller and finally die away down Friardale Lane and we are left with the gentle sougning of the wind through the leafy branches of the old oak trees lining that ancient way. We are left with our thoughts, our dreams - and so much more.

As the seasons wax and wane  
While term follows term  
Greyfriars always will remain  
A Mecca where to learn  
Values which are tried and known  
How to play the game  
Where traditions strong have grown  
And always been the same.





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During the last couple of years I've worked fairly steadily at turning out amateurishly produced Reprints of BULLSEYE Serials about spectral highwaymen. It's probably aged me, and I am 84. My wife has been telling me, since we were in our 70s, that I'm old enough to know better and I'm beginning to think that she might be right. BUT, despite the strain of reprinting stories from 80 year old TWO PENNY BLOODS, there's one more I'd like to have a go at. And that is THE ACE OF TECS series in THE SURPRISE (5/3/1932-11/11/33) I have photocopies of the episodes from Nos. 1 to 29, but I am short of Nos. 14,17,18, 19 and 22. AND, I don't know how many episodes there were after no.29. Not very many I should think. Can anyone who reads this tell me the number of THE SURPRISE in which the series ended and help me to obtain the missing parts? IF I could get my hands on all the episodes I would reprint THE ACE OF TECS and make it my Printing & Publishing Swan Song. Thank You.



## FROM OUR YOUNGEST CONTRIBUTOR

*Norman Rotenberg, a longstanding CD supporter, writes as follows:*

"I introduced my Grandson to Bunter when he was seven years old; He is now 13 and is a Boarder at Bradfield College, Reading. He had to produce a Composition. The Opening line was Statutory "Quintus was hurrying home from the forum with a Basketful of Stuffed dormice when he came face to face with a boy who could have been his twin" Enclosed is Jeremy's Effort."

*I feel that CD readers will enjoy reading Bunter's Almost Lucky Day, by a twenty-first century writer, almost a hundred years on from the first ever Greyfriars story. (M.C.)*

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### Bunter's Almost Lucky Day

by Jeremy Ousey

"Quintus was hurrying home from the forum with a basketful of stuffed dormice when he came face to face with a boy who could have been his twin." Cherry confidently translated. "Fantastic translation Cherry! Carry on Bunter." Said Mr. Quelch "When he saw this thing he fainted at the dog and the dog turned on a light..." Bunter started.

"No! No! No! You've got it all wrong. Did you even do the prep I set you?" Mr. Quelch rapped.

"Er, no sir, I mean, yes sir, I mean, how are you doing, the back still holding up sir? I saw all that lifting that you were doing yesterday: that was quite something!" Bunter spluttered, thinking quickly on his feet.

"I asked you a question Bunter. Did you do the prep I set you or not? You know what, don't answer that. Would you mind coming to the front of the classroom and bending over that chair?" Mr Quelch requested.

The chair that Mr Quelch requested the rather plump figure of William George Bunter to stand over, was a wooden chair that had a green leather backing to it and had witnessed the suffering of many of Mr Quelch's pupil's.

Yes, he did mind, but slowly and unwillingly Bunter obeyed the orders that were given to him. He approached the chair, bent over it, closed his eyes and braced himself. However, just at that very moment as he was preparing himself for the worst, the bell for break-time sounded. Never before had the saying "Saved by the bell" been quite so appropriate as it was at that precise moment. With the greatest reluctance on Mr Quelch's part, due to the fact this was the third time Bunter had "forgot-ten" to do his prep, he dismissed the boy with a warning and a threat of a hundred lines and eight of the best if he ever "forgot" to do his prep again!

\*\*\*

Of course for Bunter, break time was yet another opportunity to eat. This often meant begging or, more commonly, stealing!

"Hello Cherry, how's it going? Great translation you did there today, real impressive stuff!"

"What do you want now? If it's tuck you're after, you can get stuffed. That is if you could possibly fit anymore inside that already overly-filled jacket of yours!"

"Ass! Actually, I was wondering if I could borrow a quid, you know, after all the favours I've done for you..."

"What in the world could you have ever possibly done for me, other than making my pockets lighter - which is a favour I can most certainly do without!"

"Well you know, er, well, er, anyway can I have that quid or not?"

"NOT!"

And with that the end of break time bell went.

\* \* \*

"Come on Bunter? What's taking so long?"

Bunter was typically making his way towards his double physical education lesson as slowly as he could possibly get away with. After all, hauling his huge bulk around the four mile run and heaven knows how many squat-thrusts etc, was not his idea of fun.

"Come on you lazy maggot," Mr Lascelles shouted at Bunter who was well aware that the boy was deliberately taking his time getting to PE (in the vague hope of missing the run, and as much of whatever else he had to do as possible). "How long does it take?" asked an exasperated Mr. Lascelles.

"Hello sir, how much did I miss, did I miss the run?"

"No, no, no! Of course not! I wouldn't want you to miss out on your favourite part of the lesson. As a special concession, rather than doing your least favourite activity, water polo, (which actually happened to be Bunter's favourite!) I've especially tailored an IDEAL lesson just for you; a six mile run, sixty squat thrusts, forty press-ups and another sixty squat thrusts, plus I'll even let you have a go on the climbing wall!" Mr Lascelles said with an evil and contented smile.

"Ohhhhhhh poo!" Bunter was almost passing out at the mere thought of it alone.

"Better get started. Don't want you to miss out on all these wonderful activities. Oh, and if you finish early, come and see me, I'll find something else for you to do!"

"No problem Sir!" said Bunter, desperately thinking of an excuse to get out of this one but without any luck, He grudgingly set off on his "fun" six mile run!

He was barely halfway round the first lap, when there was a huge kerfuffle in the distance and one of the boys running towards the coach screaming "Sir, Sir, Wharton's down, I think he's broken something." Mr Lascelles was instantly distracted by the screaming boy and ran over to the incident.

Clearly, this was no false alarm. No matter what was said about Mr. Lascelles, it was definitely one of his strengths sorting people out to make sure that the boys got Trivet comfortable and sorted.

Meanwhile for Bunter this was an opportunity not to be missed. The lesson was clearly over for him and he skulked away towards the changing rooms knowing it was unlikely he was going to be missed. Once again Bunter got away with his laziness. By means of celebration his podgy hand crammed into his tight shorts pocket and pulled out a rather unappetisingly squished doughnut he'd been saving for his 'reward' after his exercises.

\* \* \*

It was getting towards the end of one of those fantastic summer days where everything had pretty much gone Bunter's way. The final hurdle was getting through prep. Seated right at the back of the room and as far away from the teacher as possible, he now used this time not to study, as he should have done, but to wind down and relax from his taxing day. Whilst everyone else was busily beavering away with their homework he surreptitiously dipped his hand into his jacket pocket and carefully groped for what he was looking for. Scanning the room from left to right with his eyes to see if anyone was watching, he carefully and skilfully pulled out his little treasure. A gold clad chocolate eclair. His mouth was watering in anticipation. Hands on his lap, his fingers deftly pulled the wrapper apart, making sure that he cleared his throat to cover the noise of the rustling wrapper. So far so good, nobody noticed, he quickly popped the sweet into his mouth. Only it was too quickly in fact. The sweet jumped right to the back of his throat, down his gullet and he started to cough, splutter and choke. So much for trying not to get caught out... looks like Bunter's luck had just run out!





## SOME CHRISTMASSES IN 'THE SCHOOLGIRL'



by Mary Cadogan

For the first two or three years of the SCHOOLGIRL'S run there were no Cliff House Christmas adventures, because the long feature stories of Babs & Co. did not begin to appear in this paper until 1932. From then on they were the paper's undoubted stars, occupying the front cover and main story. Every Christmas from 1932 onwards was a feast of fun, with plenty of suspense thrown in. John Wheway as 'Hilda Richards' pressed all his considerable skills into action to create atmospheric, old-time Christmases, and he was most ably backed up by T.E. Laidler, the SCHOOLGIRL'S regular Cliff House artist. (Laidler's pictures of the chums were far more stylish and pretty than those by Dodshon in the SCHOOL FRIEND.)

Space does not permit detailed reference to every one of these Christmas series, so I am featuring just three of them. However, in passing, mention should also be made of the 1933 Christmas series (nos. 229 to 232) in which Babs & Co. stay at a place called Christmas Castle where the owners (yes, a family whose surname *is* Christmas!) arrange a nineteenth-century house-party, in which Christmas is celebrated 'as it was a hundred years ago: Old-fashioned games; Victorian costumes; all the romance of the nineteenth century today ...'. The Cliff House girls look particularly fetching in Victorian garb, *and* of course they discover and unravel the strange cypher which saves the amiable Christmas family from being dispossessed by the baddies of the piece.

The themes of saving their host family from being defrauded or disinherited, and of helping some 'underdog', usually a girl of about the same age as themselves) were regular Christmas standbys. Reading the SCHOOLGIRL as a child, of course, one was not aware of this recurrence of motifs; every Christmas story seemed utterly enthralling and unique. One way in which John Wheway rang the seasonable changes was to focus on a different Cliff House heroine in each story of a series. Thus, for example, when the chums spend their 1937 Christmas in the Highlands at the home of Jean Cartwright (the 'lanky Scottish junior'), Jemima Carstairs is the star in the first story, Leila Carroll in the second, and tomboy Clara Trevlyn in the third. But Highland continuity is maintained by heather, hauntings and holly, plus lashing of snow, swirling bagpipes and various tartan trimmings.

The first Cliff House yuletide series in the SCHOOLGIRL is *Babs & Co's Magic Christmas* (nos. 178-180). Magic it certainly is, in terms of wonder and imagination - though there is nothing gossamery or airy-fairy about it. Our heroines of the Fourth Form are invited to stay at Luxor Hall as the guests of Andros Bey, a fabulously wealthy Egyptian Prince and his teenage daughter Naida. When they arrive, the interior of Luxor Hall turns out to be something almost straight out of the *Arabian Nights*, 'with towering lotus pillars concealing soft, subdued lights, and carved with



# Babs & Co's Cryptogram Clue!



What a wonderful Christmas this has been for Babs & Co. Christmas as it was a hundred years ago—complete with Christmas mystery! But Babs & Co. love a mystery, and in this, the one surrounding little Olive, they find one after their own hearts—one that requires their every effort to solve. And what happiness that solution brings!

By Hilda Richards



IN a body the chums whirled into the corridor, where an amazing sight met their gaze. For on the floor sprawled Lord Sutherland, his Santa Claus disguise dishevelled. "The ghost!" he cried. "After it!"

brightly coloured kings and deities of an almost forgotten religion', supporting a blue ceiling in which wink golden stars. "There are shining, glass-like parquet floors; walls carved and painted with scenes from ancient Egypt; hidden floodlights; gold inlaid furniture - in fact, sufficient dazzle to make the normally prosaic Janet Jordan (studymate of Marjorie and Clara) pronounce Luxor Hall to be 'just like Fairyland'. But as well as being full of oriental splendours, this mansion of Andros Bey's has the bonus of some old English charm. It is buried in the heart of the countryside (which in turn is buried under several feet of Christmassy snow) and there are lakes in the grounds nicely frozen over for skating.

Of course there are 'soft-footed servants, like the genii of Aladdin's lamp' constantly at the girls' elbows, ready to dispense food, drink and whatever else they might require Bessie - just as wholeheartedly as her brother Billy might do - makes good use of this amenity. There is an indoor (marbled and mosaic) swimming pool for athletic types like Clara; a Christmas tree so high that when 'Father Christmas' (actually Jemima's father, Colonel Carstairs) hands out its presents he has to scale an enormous ladder, and - to complete the seasonable atmosphere - a 'ghost'. This is not as Jemima sagely remarks, a common or garden spectre like 'the jolly old knight who clanks around at Christmas at Delma Castle' (her home), but a young princess from ancient Egypt called Nut Hapi. One is inevitably impelled to dub this restless spook 'Not Happy' - and to believe that John Wheway was enjoying some tongue-in-cheek oriental fantasy with this particular character, who makes up part of the trio of 'the most wonderful mummies in the world' - King Micerti, Queen Minni-Hapi and of course herself, Princess Nut Hapi, who have found resting-places far from the Valley of the Kings in Andros Bey's palatial English country hide-away.

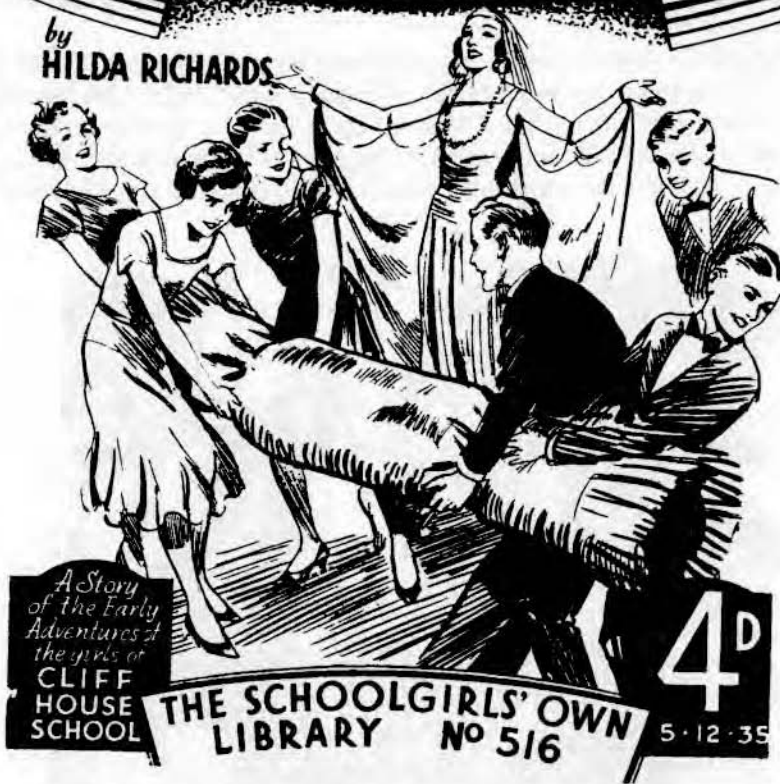
Babs & Co, befriend Nilos Rosetta, a young dancer employed by Andros Bey to add sparkle to the festivities. She soon sniffs out a plot most foul and fearful. Achmed Ben, the ancient and spellbinding oral story-teller, and various members of the Arabian orchestra are conniving to kidnap the Princess Naida. Suddenly every one of the Nubian servants waving palm leaf fans over the perspiring Bessie becomes suspect. Andros Bey will, however, hear no wrong of Achmed Ben, who manages to disgrace Rosetta, and have her dismissed. The onus of vindicating her, and of outwitting the gang of thieves and thugs falls on to Babs & Co. who, after some hairy exploits, triumph with their usual pluck and panache.

It is a splendid series, and despite the overall atmosphere of exotic oriental intrigue, traditional Christmas trappings are not neglected. There is a carol-singing episode (girlish voices ringing across the snows) that is pure joy; there are loving, lingering descriptions of the girls' party dresses, with Bessie, incidentally, just like Billy, borrowing clothes from her chums. At one point she bursts the seams of a dress of Mabel's, which leads to a switch of costumes that foils one of the kidnapping attempts. There are mouth-watering descriptions of the gifts that the magnificent Christmas tree yields up to the chums - Clara, for example, receives a rowing-machine, Jemima 'a slender malacca cane with a solid gold knob', and Marjorie 'an ebony and ivory, silver initialled needlework box'. A magic series, indeed!

A very different holiday was the one the girls spent in London in 1935 (nos.

# BABS & CO'S MAGIC CHRISTMAS

by  
**HILDA RICHARDS**



A Story  
of the Early  
Adventures of  
the girls of  
**CLIFF  
HOUSE  
SCHOOL**

**THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN  
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335/6). Leila Carroll, a member of the chummery from the good old U.S. of A., is the daughter of a Hollywood film-producer and, not un-naturally, her friends and relations are somewhat glossy. Her uncle and aunt are Lord and Lady Sutherland, and it is to their Mayfair mansion that Babs & Co. are invited. Again they take under their wing a young girl who is in less favoured circumstances than themselves. Hope Caraway is employed over the Christmas hols as 'mistress of ceremonies' at Sutherland House. She is poor, but has the advantage of being able 'to dance like a Pavlova, and sing like Grace Moore'. She is an aspiring actress whom Lord Sutherland, an immensely successful theatrical impressario, plans to star in his next production.

Needless to say, villainy lurks behind the holly and high-jinks. A rival actress

(disguised as the housemaid) who nearly got the leading part, is determined to discredit Hope - and thereby take over her place in the play. Hope is hiding her frail and fugitive-from-justice mother in the basement of Sutherland House; the lady, of course, is innocent, but circumstantial evidence suggests that she has appropriated several thousand pounds of her employer's money. To keep the house-guests off the trail, Hope has occasionally to neglect her duties; her rival capitalises on this, and makes it appear that Hope is scaring the guests by playing ghost, and performing certain acts of destruction.

Babs & Co. come to Hope's rescue time and again. Ultimately, thanks to their efforts and ingenuity - as Charles Hamilton might have said - all is calm and bright: And of course Christmassy. Once again the chums are in a lustrous setting; Lord Sutherland carries his gift for theatrical presentation - what he calls his 'showman's vulgarity' - over into the seasonable celebrations. His mansion is large enough to



**WITH** a sudden gasp Jemima dived towards something which had slipped from her pocket to the floor. No wonder the chums were amazed. For it was the key they had all been seeking—and Jemima had had it all the time!

include an indoor 'forest of Christmas trees', long corridors decorated as fairy-grottoes and Ali Baba's caves (complete with waxwork thieves). At the drop of a hat, or the snap of a cracker, professional entertainers leap into action, and the chums are treated to all-singing, dancing and laughter-making floor shows.

The last Christmas of all in the SCHOOLGIRL was the wartime one of 1939. *Christmas Romance at Trevlyn Towers* (no. 543) was memorable on other counts, too. It launched the new style cover - an austerity one, in fact, because for the first time in its history the paper lost the orange tones that had always contributed to the glowing warmth of its covers. From now until its demise in May 1940 the SCHOOLGIRL'S cover was plain blue and white. Nevertheless T. E. Laidler's artistic skills still made this Christmas number overflow with appropriate atmosphere and charm. It was fitting too that this last of all the Cliff House Christmases should be spent at Trevlyn Towers - as from the early 1920s Clara's various homes had been happy holiday settings.

The romantic touches are unusual, though the characters concerned are familiar in the saga. Dick Fairbrother (more dashing than ever now in R. A. F. uniform) is the brother of Dulcia Fairbrother, Cliff House's popular Captain who replaced Stella Stone when the latter left school to take up veterinary studies). The object of Dick's affections is Madcap Berry Osborne, 'one-time Cliff House girl, and now a racing speed star'. Dick, Berry and Babs & Co. are planning many festivities for the local evacuee children, and all is gaiety and goodwill - until Berry suddenly starts doing a disappearing act whenever she is urgently needed to organize the parties and celebrations. She refuses to tell Dick or the girls where she rushes off to, and, adding insult to injury, she makes these mysterious trips in Dick's high-powered car (he is also a motor-racing driver by profession).

Misunderstanding piles upon misunderstanding; Babs & Co., of course, try to protect Berry from Dick's wrath, and to bring the lovers back together. At last the mystery is solved - Berry has been helping Dick's sister, Dulcia, who as a result of a luggage mix-up at a main-line station is in danger of being charged with the theft of a case of jewellery! Berry's mad dashes around the countryside have been to return the case of jewellery - but first she and Dulcia have had to locate the right owner from a list of addresses they found in the case. When they have done this, and established Dulcia's innocence, Dulcia comes to Trevlyn Towers and explains all. It would have been much easier all round if only Berry had confided in Dick and the Cliff House chums in the first place. But she didn't - because Dulcia had not wanted Dick to be worried - and, in any case, had she done so, there would have been no story!

So the romance is very much on again, with Dick and Berry announcing their engagement and helping Babs & Co. to give some superb entertainments for the evacuee children. Although no-one at the time knew that this was to be the last Christmas of the SCHOOLGIRL, it seems in retrospect as if John Wheway was determined to make it last as long as possible - *Christmas Romance at Trevlyn Towers* filled only one issue but numbers 544, 545 and 546 all had yuletide settings. Each is a separate adventure - with Babs & Co. bringing Christmas cheer to a crabby, Scrooge-



This Long Complete Christmas Holiday Story of the famous chums of Cliff House School stars that incomparable character, Diana Royston-Clarke.

## DIANA-Queen of the Ice Rink!



This Long Complete Seasonable story of the Cliff House chums on holiday is one you'll remember for a long, long time. In it you will meet once again two most popular and delightful characters.

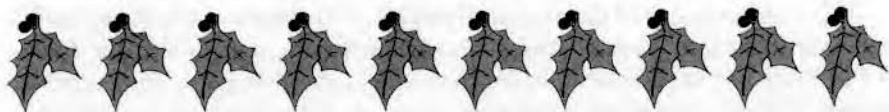


## Christmas Romance at Trevlyn Towers!

like neighbour of the Trevlyns, getting involved with a mystery 'highwayman', saving yet another teenage girl from losing her inheritance and, finally, being sent off, at Mr. Trevlyn's expense, on a ski-ing holiday in Derbyshire. (It had originally been his plan to finish off the girls' vacation with a trip to Switzerland, but, of course, the war had made this impossible.)

In Derbyshire they tangle with a form-mate and fellow-guest at the hotel - the wayward, rich, imperious, platinum-haired Diana Royston-Clarke, who is known as 'the Fire-brand of the Fourth'. She is determined not only to queen it on the ski-slopes but to win the forthcoming skating competition by putting her greatest rival, Babs, out of this event.

Diana is an intriguing character (John Wheway's favourite) who dilates her nostrils and cries 'Yoicks!' in moments of ecstasy, anger or even mild irritation. Like Vernon-Smith at Greyfriars she has her good points, but esprit de corps is not among them, and she is her own worst enemy. In the end, naturally, the decency of the chums triumphs over Diana's dark and devious designs - but she looks splendid in her expensive ski-ing and skating garb, and adds colour and charisma to this last in the long line of wonderful Cliff House Christmases.



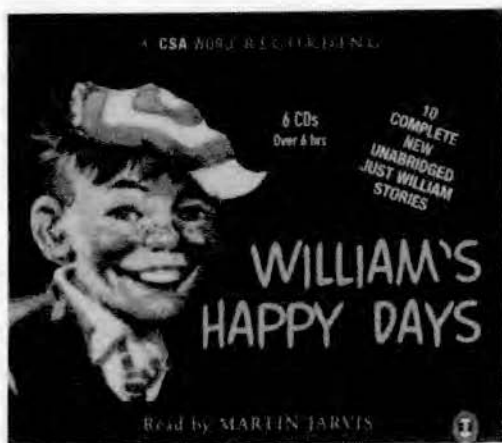
## With Christmas in Mind

by Mary Cadogan

CSA Telltapes have come up with some "goodies" which are specially appealing as Christmas approaches and we are in the mood to treat friends and family, and ourselves, to something that is warmly entertaining.

Martin Jarvis's reading of ten unabridged Just William Stories on to CDs (6 hours of pleasurable listening) and of 5 unabridged Jimmy stories by Richmal Crompton are available at £19.99 and £10.00 respectively.

Also, to reinforce the nostalgic mood of the season they have issued Charles Dickens much-loved *A Christmas Carol* in a book plus C.D. package. The book gives us Dickens's resilient text, and the CD features a recording of a 1938 CBS Radio presentation. This was made by



the famous Mercury Theatre Company, and it stars Orson Welles (as Scrooge and narrator) and Joseph Cotton.

Another attractive book and CD package from CSA Telltapes is Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*: on the CD the story is narrated by Hugh Laurie (currently celebrated as the star of Channel Five's series, *House*). Each of these 2 packages costs £19.99 but the unabridged books are selling on their own at £12.99.

Full details can be obtained from CSA Telltapes, 6a Archway Mews, London, SW15 2PE, telephone 020 8871 0220.

Happy reading and listening!



## Morcove Puts Things Right

by Mary Cadogan

This is not only one of the most spellbinding of the Morcove Christmas series, but it boasts some of Leonard Shields's most attractive illustrations of Betty Barton & Co. Every picture is beautifully designed and, as the girls are so often depicted in party dresses - even when scouring the snow-covered grounds for an on-the-run convict - they look particularly fetching. (This series, of course, comes early on in the Morcove saga, before any of the girls have gone in for bobbing or shingling, and Shields makes the most of their long-tressed coiffures in his pictures.)

The girls cut it fine to catch their train from nearby Barncombe Station to Hillchurch Manor, where they are to spend the holidays with Madge Minden's aunt, and her cousin Kyra. So they take a short cut through the woods. In the town, newspaper placards have blazoned the news that a convict has escaped from the local prison on the moor, and in the woods the girls briefly encounter the fugitive. He seems to be following them - because it soon becomes apparent that he is lurking in the grounds of Hillchurch Manor. The girls are torn between doing their civic duty of helping to get the convict re-arrested, and pity for the poor, hunted creature who is out in the Christmassy - but nevertheless cold, cold - snow!

Their compassion is further extended to Miss Lillian Sands, Kyra's somewhat elderly-looking governess. Kyra is spoiled, and utterly contemptible in her leering, bullying treatment of Miss Sands. Obviously Kyra, although so closely related to the impeccable Madge, has had a very different up-bringing from her cousin. Horace Phillips puts this down to the fact that Kyra's mother has been far too engrossed with her books and writing (she is an author), to pay much heed to her daughter's character. This seems a tough indictment of literary ladies from a literary gent whose alter ego was, of course, that of a female writer - Marjorie Stanton.

The chums befriend the downtrodden governess: "I'm wather fond of Miss Sands, y'know," Paula remarked. "I wegard her as a wippin' governess for Kyra,

# The Girls' Own



2p

## What the Footprints Told!

A dramatic incident from the splendid long complete Christmas story in this issue

and my only wegwet is that Kyrwa tweats her with such gwass wudeness." Betty begins to realize that Miss Sands has more on her mind than her charge's chivvying and unpleasant behaviour; she is in some way linked to the convict. When the girls surprise the fugitive in the grounds, he gets away, but they find the hat he is wearing, which is marked 'L.S.' - the initials of Miss Sands. Then, when Kyra tries to

# The Schoolgirl's Own



2<sup>d</sup>

"GIVE ME THAT PHOTOGRAPH!"

A dramatic incident from the long complete tale of Betty Barton & Co. contained in this issue.

grab a photograph over which the governess is having a quiet weep, Betty retrieves it - and observes that, though taken a long time ago, it is a portrait of the man who is on the run. He turns out eventually to be Miss Sands's brother. Betty saves him several times from recapture by a strangely disguised man, staying in the house, who the girls decide is a detective. (Actually he is the villain of the piece, the swindler



of whose crimes Miss Sands's brother has been wrongly accused and convicted. The escaped convict is now trying desperately to prove his own innocence, and to place the blame where it belongs.)

Hillchurch Manor is a wonderful setting for a Christmas holiday, and for hiding a fugitive. It is riddled with secret passages, and concealed doors in the old, oak panelled corridors. Eventually Betty has to bring Madge into the secret of the convict's true identity, and the girls contrive to keep the police off the trail, until Sands finds the crucial piece of paper that clears him and puts the real culprit in the clink:

The story has several high-spots of suspense. When, for example, Polly dresses up as Father Christmas, another mysterious Santa figure seems to materialise. In a game of Hide-and-Seek, the blindfolded Paula catches someone and stretches out her hand to identify her prisoner by touch – but finds her fingers resting 'not on the smooth cheek of one of her friends, but on the rough, unshaven cheek of a man!'. Horrors! Or - as Paula, the shocked discoverer of the intruder, might say - HOW-WOWS!

A touching thread that runs through this excellent series is the girls' very real concern for Miss Sands. This is illustrated by the care with which they select and wrap a Christmas gift ('a well-made leather writing case') for her:

'Tess, the artist of the party, found pen and ink, and, in a delightful manner, drew holly and robins all round the edge of the card. Then, with great care, she printed a really warm Christmas message from the Morcove girls.'

Needless to say, the governess is deeply moved, and the affection of the chums contributes greatly to her Christmas happiness.



**HAD SHE A SECRET ?** "You're thinking lost—I understand," said Betty Barton, holding the frail figure of the governess lightly. "I'm sorry I butted in like this, only I—I thought I heard voices!"



**WAS IT THE TRUTH ?** "It must have been the convict," said Polly. Miss Sands started, then laughed in a strained manner. "It was not the convict! It was I!" she said.

\*\*\*\*\*

# A Collector's Item: The School under Canvas

By Norman Wright

By 1912 the Amalgamated Press was beginning to realise what an asset they had in Charles Hamilton. Even at that early stage in his career, some years before he commenced writing tales of Rookwood or Cedar Creek, and a decade before his talents contributed the 'Rio Kid' and 'Ken King' to the AP coffers, his golden touch must have been apparent. He was already writing his weekly Greyfriars and St. Jims stories and editors seem to have been continually pressing him for more and more copy. There were serials: 'Football Fortune' and 'King Cricket' for *Boys Realm*, stories, of 'St. Kits' and 'St. Winifreds' for *Pluck*, 'Cousin Ethel's Schooldays' for *The Empire Library* and so on. He was a freelance and the AP's aim seems to have been to keep him fully occupied so that he had no time to write for other publishers - although it has to be said that the AP had quite a strangle hold on boys papers at that time. D.C. Thomson didn't really start to compete in the field until 1921 when they launched *Adventure* and other publishers of boys' weeklies were rather minor and small fry.

What I find interesting is that Hamilton's golden touch seems to have worked irrespective of the name he cared to write under. If 'Frank Richards' and 'Martin Clifford' stories were so popular one would have expected editors to stick to those names when Hamilton wrote other tales - what these days would be called 'marketing the Frank Richards and Martin Clifford brand'. But this wasn't always the case. And one story that was a case in point was "The School Under Canvas" featuring Gordon Gay and Co. and Frank Monk & Co. of the Rylcombe Grammar School. These characters were already familiar to *Gem* and *Magnet* readers; indeed Rylcombe was situated close to St. Jims and a friendly rivalry was well established. Writing in the memorial edition of "The Autobiography of Frank Richards", Eric Fayne tells us that Hamilton fully expected "The School Under Canvas" to be published under the Martin Clifford pen-name, but that for some unfathomable reason the editor invented the name Prosper Howard for the story.

"The School Under Canvas" first saw light of day in *The Gem* in 1912 where it was serialised over 19 weeks. It was then reprinted in book form a year later in number 235 of *The Boys Friend Library* in August, 1913. This was a period when the *Boys Friend Library* was 120 pages long and gave the reader a good long read for his three- pence.

The story concerns Dr. Monk's idea of moving the school to the Essex coast for the summer term. The boys would live under canvas and lessons would take place in a large marquee. The good headmaster saw it as a healthy option for the summer months. The idea was greeted with great enthusiasm by all except the German master Herr Hentzel.

Once the boys have been relocated on the Essex coast the story becomes more dramatic. Herr Hentzel, a very stereotypical German, is gradually revealed to be a

No. 235.—"THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY.

# THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!

A SPLendid TALE OF GORDON CAY & CO.  
By PROSPER HOWARD.



3<sup>D.</sup>

spy, co-ordinating the gathering of information on British coastal inlets and possible landing places for the German navy for what is seen as an impending war.

One of the main characters in the story is a French junior named Gustave Blanc, or Mont Blong as the boys quickly re-christen him. It is Blanc who sets out to thwart Hentzel's plans. At first Gordon Gay and Co. are sceptical at Blanc's insinuations but gradually they realise the truth and it becomes a battle of wits between the juniors and the wily German master while they gather the evidence needed to put a stop to his schemes.

There is a hard edge to the story with the German and his cohorts shown to be totally ruthless. With such implacable enemies the reader can relish all the more times when the juniors manage to gain the upper hand. This is particularly so when Gay and Co. are captured by the crew of a German tramp steamer. The juniors manage to turn the tables on the German captain. They tie him up and hold his own revolver to his head - quite tough stuff.

Some of Hamilton's own political feelings come through via the mouthpiece of Gustave Blanc who turns out to be a schoolboy working for the French Secret Service - well, lots do, don't they!! Blanc tells Gay and Co. that the British Government is sleeping and ought to wake up to the spying activity that is taking place on its own coast.

All is resolved by the end. Blanc manages to purloin the information, photographs and maps gathered by Hertzal and send it safely to the British authorities. The German master and his cronies are rounded up and, eventually, the school returns to Rylcombe.

The "The School Under Canvas" is well written showing a maturity not always present in Hamilton's writing from this early period. It is a tightly plotted yarn with little repetition. There is no fat boy, plenty of action and some nice plot twists. Gordon Gay is a tough, wiry character hailing from Australia. The reader quickly takes a liking to Gustave Blanc with his peculiar way of speaking English: calling Gay and Co. his 'shums' etc. This picturesque manner of speech is, however, totally false, as he is able to speak perfect English and German as well as French but for his undercover work of observing the German master he has to pretend to be an ordinary scholar.

Other stories of Rylcombe Grammar School appeared, published in The Empire Library, but Hamilton always insisted that the only story he wrote under the Prosper Howard pen-name was "The School Under Canvas",





When the fairy lamps are lighted, and the dancers are excited  
As across the ball-room floor they wheel and whirl;  
When the mistletoe and holly both combine to make things jolly,  
And your partner is a gay and charming girl.  
When the whole wide world rejoices, and the sound of merry voices  
Gives the "knock-out" to depression and to care;  
Life is good, and life is joyous, and there's nothing to annoy us,  
For the Christmas spirit's reigning everywhere!

When the snowflakes fall with lightness in an avalanche of whiteness,  
And a magic carpet covers all the earth;  
When the air is keen and nipping, then a snowflake's simply ripping,  
And you pelt the rival force for all you're worth!  
When you slip and slide and slither, and you care not how or whither,  
And the snowballs in their volleys whiz and zip;  
It's a wonderful sensation, and you're filled with animation,  
For the Christmas spirit has you in its grip!

When the wintry winds are howling, and the midnight ghost is prowling,  
And his chains are clanking grimly in the gloom,  
He will not dismay or daunt you; he will strive in vain to haunt you,  
For you'll slumber safe and soundly in your room.  
When his weird unearthly wailing proves distinctly unavailing,  
And he cannot startle schoolboys from their sleep,  
He will say, "There's nothin' doin'; I must haunt some ancient ruin,"  
And to fresh domains the Christmas Ghost will creep.

When the dawn is slowly gleaming, Billy Bunter lies a-dreaming  
Of the dinner he'll consume on Christmas Day;  
Of the turkey he will swallow, and the rich plum-duff to follow,  
And the dainties and the tarts in grand array.  
Overnight he hung his stocking; but the sequel will be shocking,  
For Santa Claus will surely pass him by.  
When he wakes up with the linnet, he will cry, "There's nothing in it!  
What a fearfully unlucky chap am I!"

When the Christmas bells are ringing, and the Christmas waits are singing,  
And the trumpeters salute the happy morn,  
Then the heart of man is merry, and the hearts of schoolboys, very,  
And we feel devoutly thankful we were born!  
For there's sparkle, and there's magic, and there's nothing that is tragic  
On the maddest, merriest morning of the year.  
Then away with care and sadness, and with universal gladness  
We will hail the happy season that is here!





## THE SNOW-FIGHT

The snow lies deep at Gosling's door,  
 And he is almost weeping;  
 The more he sweeps it up, the more  
 The snow itself comes sweeping!  
 Then Gosling blames the Weather Clerk  
 For causing all the trouble:  
 "Although I've swept from dawn till dark  
 The fall is nearly double!"

But happy schoolboys love the snow;  
 We fairly revel in it!  
 And while the wintry winds do blow  
 We're busy every minute,  
 Kneading our snowballs into shape,  
 And rushing into action;  
 A stirring snow-fight is a jape  
 Which yields full satisfaction.

The Upper Fourth and the Remove  
 Are waging war with fervour;  
 And very sturdy foes we prove,  
 Delighting each observer.  
 Volleys of snowballs fill the air,  
 Crashing upon our foemen;  
 Till they retreat in wild despair,  
 Looking as white as snowmen!

Uttering war-cries loud and shrill,  
 And joining forces neatly,  
 We hurl our snowballs with a will,  
 Routing the foe completely!  
 And Gosling, lingering at his lodge,  
 With visage melancholy,  
 Is just one tick too late to dodge  
 Our last triumphant volley!



TOM MERRY

HARRY WHARTON & CO. are the FINEST CHUMS YOU COULD MEET!  
(Make their acquaintance in the grand school year book.)

The Magnet 2<sup>d</sup>





# CHRISTMAS AT HAWKSCLIFFE

by Leslie Rowley



Herbert Vernon-Smith threw the half-finished cigarette into the study grate and scowled after it as it was consumed by the glowing coals that radiated comfort into the shadowy room. Outside, the dark of the winter's evening had all but fallen, bringing with it a fresh scattering of snow to the already blanketed window ledge. Redwing would soon be coming up for tea, but the Bounder made no move to get things ready. The ample supplies remained in the cupboard; the table was unladen; and the kettle still needed filling from the tap in the Remove passage. Smithy had other things on his mind!

The Christmas holidays were due to begin, and the studies and corridors were alive with the excited chatter of fellows planning for that most festive of occasions. Redwing, his pal, was due to join his father at Hawkscliffe, old John Redwing having safely brought his lugger home from a long stay in Northern waters. Smithy, too, had been looking forward to a re-union with Mr. Vernon-Smith, but that busy man was on the other side of the world, negotiating an important business deal, and would be away well into the New Year. Before he had gone he had told his son that he was welcome to invite a party of his friends to the house in Portman Square for the vacation, and Smithy had been giving the matter some urgent consideration. When he had made that offer, Mr. Vernon-Smith had in mind a party of Greyfriars men of such impeccable characters like Harry Wharton and his friends; what his son had in mind was a party of much different calibre! Painting the town red in the company of such as Pon and Co. from Highcliffe held more appeal for the Bounder than mixing with fellows from his own form and with whom he had recently been at loggerheads.

His first impulse had been to give Ponsonby a ring on Quelch's phone - that gentleman having gone on a visit to the vicarage in Friardale - but he had hesitated as the shadows grew longer and the wintry afternoon advanced into the evening. He had resisted that impulse without really knowing the reason why, yet he had resisted! He stirred himself from the armchair and switched on the light. As he did so, there came the sound of footsteps in the passage outside and the door was thrown open and Redwing came into the study. The Bounder regarded his study mate with a cynical smile.

"Glad you've come up, Reddy, I've got something to ask you. For once I'm following Bunter's shining example and scrounging an Invitation for the hols. Do you think that you and your pater could put up with my company? Don't be afraid to turn me down, but if you can see your way clear ..."

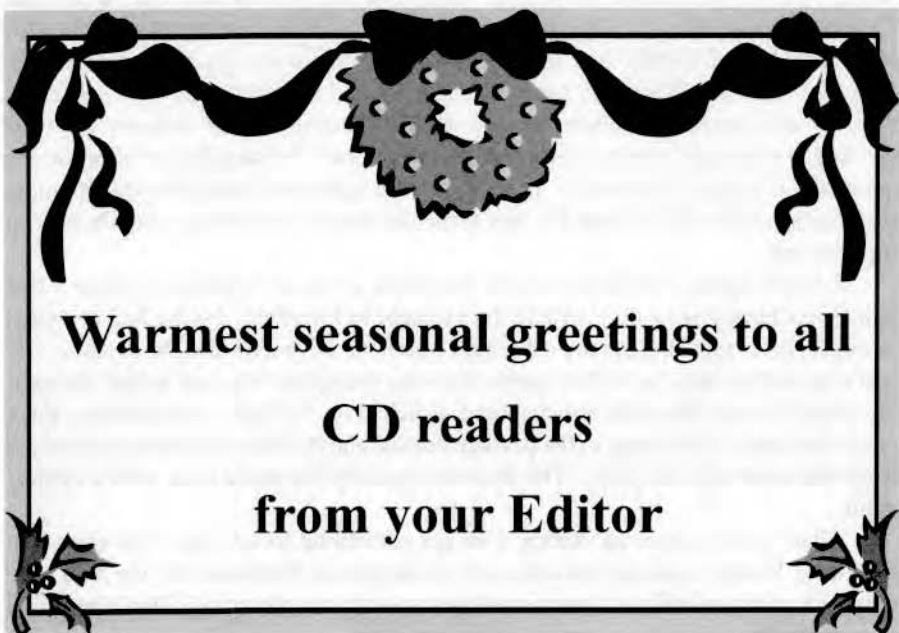
The radiant look on Redwing's face gave him his answer but, if he was still in doubt, his friend's words soon banished it.

"Of course there will be room for you, and of course you'll be welcome. But are you sure that you want to come? Christmas at Hawscliffe will be different from Christmas in town. If you really mean it, Smithy..."

"We'll talk about it after tea," replied the Bounder, "but seeing it's the season of goodwill toward all men, I thought we would have a study spread. Kill the fatted calf and that sort of thing. So, if you get the things ready, I'll go and rope in Wharton and his pals. Let's hope that Bunter doesn't feature on the programme!"

As he made his way along the Remove passage, a smile on his face and a cheery whistle on his lips and with his mind looking beyond the forthcoming spread, he felt that there was going to be a Merry Christmas for him - a very Merry Christmas indeed.

**(Editor's Note:** I feel that CD readers will be glad to have this memory of Les Rowley who contributed so many fine articles to our magazine.)



# The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2<sup>d</sup>



Moreover's  
Merry  
Christmas  
Eve!

A happy moment  
from this week's  
long complete  
story of Betty  
Barton & Co. on  
holiday.



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