



The Man Whose School Stories Delighted Two Generations of Children: Frank Richards at His Home in Kent
Frank Richards, who has written more schoolboy stories than any man alive, is visited by a neighbour's children at his house in Kingsgate, near Broadstairs. He shows them a drawing of his best-known character, Billy Bunter, the fat boy.

DO YOU REMEMBER BILLY BUNTER ?

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We pay a visit to Frank Richards, author of the *Gem* and *Magnet* school stories. For over 30 years he wrote without interruption about the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. The war brought the series to an end, but now, at the age of 70, he's started writing school yarns again.

Photographed by K. HUTTON and HAYWOOD MAGEE.

THE driver was about 35 years old. He looked a little gloomy.

"We're going to see Frank Richards," I told him.

"Frank Richards, who's he?"

"You know, the man who wrote those stories in the *Magnet*, Billy Bunter and the rest."

The gloom disappeared. "The old *Magnet*?"

Used to read that when I was a kid. Good Lord, I remember 'em' all, Billy Bunter, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull. Frank Richards, of course it was. Well, there's nobody writing stories like that now."

He was wrong there. There is somebody writing stories like that. Frank Richards is.

We drove to Kingsgate, a bungalow village a few miles from Broadstairs. There, living alone in a

typical small seaside villa called Roselawn, we found Frank Richards, who for over thirty years wrote the most popular school stories in the English language.

Frank Richards—his real name is Charles Hamilton and he has had about fifteen different pen-names, including Martin Clifford of *The Gem*, Hilda Richards of Bessie Bunter fame, Owen

Continued overleaf



Frank Richards Looks Again at His Famous Schoolboy Characters

As Frank Richards, he wrote the Greyfriars stories in the "Magnet." Bunter, Bob Cherry, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh were at Greyfriars. As Martin Clifford, he created St. Jim's for the "Gem." D'Arcy, Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther were at St. Jim's. As Hilda Richards he also wrote the Bessie Bunter stories.

Conquest and Winston Cardew—is now about seventy years old. He is very short-sighted, and has difficulty in moving about. He seldom leaves his house and most of his day is spent, in dressing-gown and black skull cap, in a corner of a room at work on a typewriter. A little lonely, almost cut off from the world, Frank Richards is still writing the vivid and boisterous type of school story on which two generations of pre-war-children grew up. His mind is fresh, lively and humorous and there is a young look in his eyes.

He started writing school stories six or seven years after Queen Victoria died. He wrote through three reigns and into the fourth, through the First World War and into the second. But in 1940, the *Magnet* and the *Gem* stopped publication and put an end to his most famous series—Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Billy Bunter, Cherry, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, D'Arcy, Merry, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, all the Peter Pans of the 2d. weeklies, vanished abruptly. Now, after six years, Frank Richards is writing again, and the same characters are reappearing. The names are different, but the

mixture is as before. The slang has changed a little, but the adventures go on.

Frank Richards' new stories, written for *Pie* magazine, are centred round Carcroft School, the 1946 version of Greyfriars. Billy Bunter, the unforgettable Owl of the Remove, reappears as Turkey Turk—still fat, fatuous, complacent, but without Bunter's glasses or his streak of meanness. (Richards who has the knack of speaking of his characters as if they were alive, says "Bunter was never a really nice boy." He hates wearing glasses himself, and the fact that Turkey doesn't wear them shows that he likes Turkey better than Bunter.) Bob Drake of Carcroft is Bob Cherry, Harry Compton is Harry Wharton, Dick Lee is Frank Nugent. But Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the cheerful Indian who spoke babu English at Greyfriars ("the cheerfulness is terrific") has disappeared, a silent tribute to Indian emancipation and the march of time.

As well as the Carcroft stories, Frank Richards is writing about Sparshott School in a series published by William Merrett, London, and Oakhurst and Ferndale School for the Sankey & Hudson

publications in Manchester. At Ferndale, by the way, is Cedric St. Leger, the present-day equivalent of D'Arcy, the dude of St. Jim's.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was reading the *Gem* and *Magnet* avidly, the slang was already behind the times. I knew that schools weren't really like that, and that schoolboys didn't really talk and behave like that. But I loved the stories, and so did nearly all my contemporaries. What did they have that inspired this loyalty?

They had an extraordinary inventiveness and verve. The adventures, the rags, the escapes, the simple but exciting plots, were complete and satisfying. They left no loose ends and introduced no complications. The characters were clean-cut and easily recognizable. What could Billy Bunter and Fatty Wynn be but the eternal stooges, or Gerald Loder but the bully, and Vernon Smith the bounder? What better name for an American boy than Putnam van Duck?



A Scene from Greyfriars
The Head has been drenched with ink by
Gerald Loder, of the Fifth.



The Classic Stodge of School Life: Billy Bunter of Greyfriars
Bunter, Owl of the Remove, was Frank Richards's most famous character. Fat, greedy, stupid, his life is a long story of comic mishaps.



He Never Gets Away with It

A typical Bunter disaster. Grasping a doughnut, he makes a rude remark about a master. At that instant, the master walks in.



With Illustrator R. J. Macdonald, Frank Richards Discusses Billy Bunter's Successor
R. J. Macdonald has been illustrating Richards's school stories for nearly 30 years, but they have only met twice. He is now drawing illustrations for Frank Richards's new series.

Above all, the world of the *Gem* and *Magnet* was a safe and comfortable world. There were no complications, like sex and religion and adolescent doubts. It was public-school life, not as it was but as it should be, a life of larks and adventures. The air might be filled with the "Ows" and "Yaroohs," the crashes and bumps and wallops which feature so frequently in every Frank Richards story, but no one ever got really hurt. There might be beatings, every prefect might be armed with an ash plant and masters frequently select with care their stoutest cane; but no one was really the worse for it, and we knew they would begin all over again the next week. Heads were smacked, bottoms kicked, and fags bullied as if Tom Brown and Young Woodley had never been heard of; but it was in the best of spirits, and no one ever trailed a complex because of it. It all came back in the end to the cosy atmosphere of hot toast in the study. It was deliberately escapist and completely successful.

It is easy to criticise this sort of writing, and many have attacked it. But Frank Richards, who has read most of his critics, says quite rightly that he did what he set out to do: give a lot of pleasure to a great many children. When you read his stories, they seem easy to imitate; but no one ever did succeed in imitating them—although he wrote them without a break for over thirty years, sixty million words of them.

And now, at seventy, he is writing them again. There are a few concessions to modernity, but even his new stories have a curiously dated flavour. They have, too, the amazing vitality and variety of incident which are Frank Richards's outstanding qualities. Old readers of his will recognize them with delight. But they may be too remote from the post-war schoolboy to ensure the same success with him as they had with his father and his older brothers. Frank Richards doesn't think so. "Boys don't change much," he says. It will be interesting to see if he is right.

SYDNEY JACOBSON.



Bunter, 1946 Version
Plum, drawn by R. J. Macdonald, is the fat boy in the new Sparshott School series.



A Scene from *St. Jim's*
Tom Merry finds D'Arcy, the dude,
collecting soot, destined for a master.



But He Always Tries Again
Bunter's appetite is big. His long-awaited
postal order never arrives.