

*The*  
**COLLECTOR'S  
DIGEST**

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April 1949.  
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# 'I SAY, you chaps!'

## Here's Billy Bunter Again

**I SAY, you fellows! Look here!**

It has been a day of days for me. At Islington Central Library—which you might think would be a bit of sledge—I have run across all our old chums.

Harry Wharton and Tom Merry were there. And D'Arcy "Weally!" and Bob Cherry "Hullo, hullo, hullo!" and Bunter, looking as fat as ever but no wider. The cads were as cadish and the members of the Eleven just as clean-living as when we knew them—20, 30 years ago!

Who would have thought, when we went adventuring with a paper-backed book hidden in a Latin grammar, that those joyous things would become collectors' pieces in glass cases!

\* \* \*

Some stout fellows called the London Old Boys' Book Club have put on this show and, if you are the sort of chap I think you are, you must see it.

There is a section for Victorian "Bloods," full of the lurid adventures of Jack Harkaway, the "Dick Barton" of his day. Tough stuff, this—with plenty of blood and beating-up.

But for those of us in the middle years the attraction is actually to recognize some of the covers of the Sexton Blake or Nelson Lee stories, or of the "Mason" or "Gem."

Rightly, of course, there is a big section devoted to the works of the industrialists and their inventors. Mr Charles H. Johnson, whom we knew under such names as Frank Richardson or Martin Clifford,

I tell like an old boy walking over more across the ground at Greenwich or St. John's—with a difference. Instead of sailing, as I'm afraid happens in real life, the old place is not what it was. I found the old place exactly as it was.

\* \* \*

There they all were, in the odd dignity of their glass cases—"The Murder to the Rescue," "Coker on the Warpath"—Christmas numbers with snow clinging to the title lettering.

Great literature? Maybe not. But certainly literature of glorious memory.

Chaps like us, of course, permit ourselves only a sidelong glance at such things as "The Schoolgirl's Own," but they are there, too.

And who dare say that these grand stories ever did us any harm? One modern writer has even criticised them on ideological grounds as being of bourgeois tendency.

To which we, who know better, can only echo Billy Bunter's: "Yah!"

Leslie Ayre

More Publicity: London Evening News, 23rd March, 1949.

## Wanted:

UNION JACKS: No's: 803, 804, 806, 807, 814, 817, 819-822, 825, 827-829, 832, 834, 835, 839, 858, 865, 867, 868, 870, 882, 883, 886, 888, 889, 892, 894-897, 909, 911, 915-917, 921, 923, 927, 928, 931, 938-942, 947, 951, 958, 959, 961, 962, 964, 969, 971, 972, 982, 984, 999, 1004, 1009.

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Rhiwbina, Cardiff, S. Wales.



(Vol.2) No.28

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APRIL 1949

Next Issue May

Editor, Miscellaneous Section

Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,

C/o Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Thanks a Lot Judging by the bouquets, the March issue seems to have hit the high spots. Well, it certainly did provide plenty of reading again. That letter from Frank Richards came along after the Letter Box had been made up, but so full of news was it that we simply had to get it in somehow, even if it meant the expense of four more pages.

As for our great scoop, the "Maxwell Scott Diaries", it has been a real treat to read the comments, especially from the old timers, who read his stirring stories by gaslight or the aid of cottage lamp when the century was young. In this issue you will see our colleague Jack Wood has got properly into his stride, and there are any number of interesting revelations to come. This month's instalment gives you a good illustration of Maxwell Scott's painstaking and conscientious methods. And they used

to call authors for boys like him, Hack-writers!

"The C.D. on the alert again" was what someone had to say after reading our remarks on the gentleman who got Women's Worlds confused with Sexton Blake Libraries. Yes, we think we can say the March issue was worth reading.

For Your Ears John F. Buckland, a member of our circle, has been commissioned by the B.B.C. to write the music for their production, Henry V, on the air, April 23rd. Make a note of the date.

Looking Ahead I am not going to calculate how many shopping days there are to Christmas, but there is an important event which takes place about that time which is already giving me much food for thought - the publication of the Annual. Already we have received orders, and any amount of suggestions. All these will have our careful consideration, so continue to send them along. It is clear that it is imperative that there must be a "Collector's Who's Who" again. That it seems must be an Annual event, just like the appearance of Debrett's Peerage and Whitaker's Almanac. It will probably be on the same lines as this year's with the addition of many new names.

Someone said to me the other day that they thought the artists never got the credit they deserved. I agree, so how about an Artist's Who's Who on the lines of that of the authors? The Author's Who's Who was so popular, by the way, that we have had numerous requests for more. Okay! if you give us short biographies of your own particular favourites, please send along. No. 3 has to be better than No. 2. Phew!!

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More Limelight A week or two ago the News-Chronicle devoted half of one of its centre pages to a very interesting article "In Defence of Our Comics" with reproductions of front pages of Chips and Comic Cuts of yesteryear. A day or two later a couple of letters, recalling popular serials, were published.

Then, as will be seen here, Bunter has been in the headlines again. Further, after the sixth round cup-ties, John Macadam of the "Daily Express" made use of him to get an effective heading to a report of one of the games.

# 'BROADCAST BUNTER'—BRAILLE

## PLEA TO THE B.B.C.

FROM Leeds to the B.B.C. has gone a Braille plea for a "Radio Yarrow" programme.

Mr. and Mrs. W. P. Sawyer, of Tarncliffe, Goole, both almost blind and relying mainly on their wire-les set for entertainment, have sent a Braille letter to the B.B.C. requesting a radio series featuring the Greyfriars boys—the Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton, Lord Marleybone, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gang of the Gem and Magnet era.

Fifty-year-old Mr. Sawyer is still an avid "young" follower of the adventures at Greyfriars—through the medium of literature ostensibly purchased for his 14-year-old son, Willfred.

### Trip to lost youth

Mr. Sawyer's regard for "Harry Wharton and Co." is such that he is

a pen friend of Frank Richards, author of their adventures, who readily agreed two years ago to write a special series for publication in Braille at the request of Mr. Sawyer.

I think his latest idea for a broadcast series is worth backing. I'm sure that there are thousands of old fans of the Greyfriars gang who'd like a radio trip back to the days of their lost youth.

Yes indeed, Bunter has passed into the English language as surely as Felstaff and Mr. Pickwick. As for his postal order, it's as famous as Betty Greble's - er - nether limbs, Bernard Shew's post-cards, or Winston Churchill's cigars. And that reminds me of a little story. Not long ago an optimist sent a postal-order for one shilling to someone most of you know with a request for "one dozen Magnets, not too many of the later numbers". The p.o. was returned to him with a good-humoured suggestion that he send it to Billy Bunter!

And that's enough from me for this month.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

**WANTED:** Early Issues of Gem, Magnet, Pluck, Dreadnought. A few Magnets and Gems for disposal and Red-covered Magnets for Exchange only. - Eric Fayne, 23 Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey.

**WANTED URGENTLY:** Gems No's 356, 358, 359 and 375. Top prices paid. Leonard Packman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

**WANTED:** Aldine Publications, Turpins, Duvals, Robin Hoods, etc. E. R. Lendy, 4 Nuneston Road, Dagenham, Essex.

**EXCHANGE:** Offers, Detective Weekly 1-50; Sexton Blakes, others. Wanted, Boys' Friend Libraries, Ferrers Lord, etc. H.J.H. Bartlett Peas Hill, Shipton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset.

LEAVES FROM THE DIARIES OF MAXWELL SCOTTContinuity by John F. Wood

## II

To whom did Maxwell Scott owe much of his inspiration? Who was "Stain Cortley"? How did Maxwell Scott choose his non-de-plume? And the name of his famous detective? How was the rival Sexton Blake built up into world-wide fame, and why?

With these queries I ended my first dip into the diaries of Maxwell Scott. This month I provide the answers as revealed in the notes of the famous author himself, or in the words of his son.

The chief literary influence to which Dr. Staniforth was indebted was undoubtedly that of Conan Doyle. He was a great admirer of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and the fact of their being written by a fellow medical man increased their interest for him. The use made by Conan Doyle of medical technicalities in fiction showed him the possibilities of this kind of plot, and his earliest stories were often based on professional themes and had a doctor for a hero. An example of this period is the Dr. Waterhouse series he wrote in Sheffield.

When he entered the realms of boys' fiction, therefore, it was natural that the idea should occur to him of doing in this field what Doyle had done for another class of reader - popularise the theme of detection. It may well be, as he himself remarked, half-seriously, that but for his own imitation of the Holmes idea in his Nelson Lee yarns for the popular Press, Holmes would not have been so popular and so fruitful a basis for future writers of this type of fiction for boys.



Scott's earlier work was all written under the name of Stain Cortley as a result of a letter being so addressed to him by a correspondent who found the usual difficulty in deciphering a doctor's handwriting and signature. When he began to write for boys' papers, however, he adopted the more familiar pseudonym of Maxwell Scott - a compound of his wife's maiden name of Maxwell, and that of an old friend, Mr. Scott, who had recently died. He had a fancy that this particular rhythm of syllables was a mascot for him, and it is noticeable that he never departed from it in the names of his heroes. His four detective heroes all follow this theme - Nelson Lee (Harmsworth publications), Kenyon Ford and Vernon Reed (C. Arthur Pearson) and Martin Dale (Chums) - as does also his main rival and imitator, Sexton Blake, not to mention Dixon Hawke, Dixon Brett, Ferrers Locke, and others.

The name Nelson Lee was invented on the spur of the moment, and without any idea of the importance it was afterwards to have. It was due to the accident that he had recently noticed the names of a Mr. Nelson and a Mr. Lee, both strangers to him, amongst the various letters and circulars in his morning mail.

The time came, however, when there were disagreements between Scott and Harmsworth's over the remuneration for the stories. Scott felt that as he could rarely leave his work for London, and was consequently out of regular touch with the financial side of the papers for which he wrote, that advantage was sometimes taken of this to keep him in the dark about current rates of pay.

It was a disagreeable surprise to learn one day from his friend H. St. John Cooper that Cooper was being paid more for stories which Cooper admitted were no better box-office draws than the Nelson Lee series. He was, therefore, not willing to agree to the firm's desire to print Nelson Lee yarns from other pens, while the firm were naturally anxious to feature as many stories of their most popular character as possible.

When Scott refused to surrender the copyright in his own stories, Harmsworth retaliated by building up Sexton Blake who, over a number of years had appeared occasionally in the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Union Jack and Marvel, mainly in complete stories. The penny Union Jack took him over permanently. Tinker became a rival to Nipper and Pedro the bloodhound was introduced. An army of authors was set to turning out the stories by the dozen not only in this

country but also in America, where Harmsworth had syndicated rights. Nevertheless, Maxwell Scott, playing a lone hand, succeeded in keeping his own detective a very formidable rival to Blake for several more years.

Towards the end of his life when his own illness and the illness of his wife made it impossible to carry on his literary work, Scott sold the copyright of the Lee characters to Harmsworth's, who were contemplating the re-issue of them in the form of the Nelson Lee Library, which did, indeed, continue for many years.

It is worth mentioning that in all his stories Scott insisted on the complete accuracy of every detail. If Nelson Lee took a 9.17 train from London to Manchester, or sailed from Liverpool by the Aquitania on the 27th of January and arrived in New York on Thursday the 1st February, or stayed at the Galle Face hotel in Colombo, it may be taken as certain that every one of these facts had been laboriously ferreted out from the actual railway and steamship timetables current at the time.

He never took a liberty with facts, however trivial, and would write for guide books and travel folders from places as distant as Japan so that his street names, hotel names, sailings, etc., might be absolutely authentic. And this for a public of lads, even if it did add to the trouble of authorship and slow down his output. He always felt, that he would not believe in his own characters if he knew that they were doing things that could not be done by a real person.

The construction of a detective story and the deduction from ingenious clues were a form of intellectual exercise which appealed to his scientifically trained mind. He admired, and often criticised, the construction of the Sherlock Holmes stories from this angle. He took, in fact, to the writing of detective stories from the same motives that attract other people to crossword puzzles; though in writing for boys' papers the intellectual side of detection had to be subordinated to the more sensationally adventurous side.

He wrote of Army life so well, although he had never been inside a barracks in his life, that soldiers more than once wrote to him and asked if he had been in their regiments as they claimed to recognise so many touches of local colour. He wrote of Navy



life though he had never been on board a warship. He wrote many football stories, but never played, and never saw a professional game in his life. He wrote, too, of prison life, though he had never been inside a gaol. Yet all his stories were convincing because they were all the product of special research and reading. He was a subscriber to Mudie's library, and used to send the librarian an order for boxes of books on whatever subject he wished to write. Then he would study every book and make copious notes before starting his story.

His school stories did not start until he had a son of his own at a boarding school, and had thus established some personal connection with the life he wished to describe. "St. Ninian's" was not a portrait of Charterhouse, his own son's school, but it is probably true that he would not have begun to write about life at a great public school unless he had been encouraged by his acquaintance with Charterhouse and his possession of a son to whom he could turn for verification of doubtful details.

Maxwell Scott travelled in France and Germany, and also to Gibraltar and Tangier, but that was the extent of his personal knowledge of the foreign countries which played so large a part in Nelson Lee's adventures.

He wrote for nobody except Harmsworth, Pearson and Cassell, the last-named only for "Chums" when it was under the editorship of Newman Flower. Most of his work appeared in the Boy's Friend when the great Hamilton Edwards was the editor: certainly the most important Lee serials of his best period were printed in that paper.

How did Maxwell Scott come to forsake his earlier style of writing in favour of boys' fiction? How much did he receive for his first story of this kind, "The Phantom Dwarf"? When was Nelson Lee first introduced, and how much did the author receive for this masterpiece? For the answers read next month's instalment, in which actual extracts from Maxwell Scott's diaries will be quoted.

(Continued)

—oOo—

WANTED: Lesser-known publications, 1900-1915; Sale, "Greyfriars Herald", 18, complete. Offers? 19 "Play Pictorial" vols. 1909-1924. 1s. each. E.V. Hughes, "Caswell", 25, Hillboro Road, Bognor Regis, Sussex.

(Note: With this interesting - and amusing - article we welcome an old friend back to our pages. - H.L.)

"BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED"

By Henry Steele.

There is no doubt that the old "Penny Dreadfuls" and "Bloods" possessed one great attraction, the illustrations. These were often weird and wonderful, but take them away and the story would lose half its charm. The reader of those days probably accepted those pictures with a blind faith and perhaps failed to notice the discrepancies with which they often abounded.

In many of Lloyds' publications the early pictures would depict the correct period, say, the 17th Century, but towards the end : Victorian top hats and frock coats would creep in.

In a story of the Middle Ages, "The Heads of the Headless", a man wearing evening dress is shown! The last illustration to "The King of the Poppas" (Young Briton", 1873) shows two men fighting a duel in a room, a third man is holding one of them back. In the story this episode takes place on the open prairie and there is no third man. In "War to the Knife" (Boy's Standard, 1889) we get four different periods. The tale is placed in the 18th Century, but the opening pictures show costumes of the 15th Century. Later on, those of James I, then Charles II and finally the 18th Century.

A story is told of an Editor who, while in Paris, bought up a set of wood blocks which had been used to illustrate the works of Dumas. When he returned to Fleet Street he commissioned an author to write a story round these pictures. The result was "The Imprisoned Heir" (Boys' Standard). They were very fine drawings and completely put the others in the shade. It was remarkable how well they suited the story, or perhaps I should say, how well the story suited the pictures.

As a boy, I was very fascinated by a story called "The Tyrants of the School" (Boys of the Empire, Vols 1 & 2). I must admit that I was not then as critical over the pictures as I am now. They were certainly unique and I have not come across any other tale illustrated in the same way. The schoolboys wore ordinary modern dress (1889) but older characters were attired in 18th Century costumes. This is to some extent explained by saying

that these men were members of a society called "The Reformers", but mention is made of the King, and that would take the period back to William IV. In that case the boys' dress would be all wrong. In "Paul Clifford" (pub. Lloyd 1853) some of the illustrations are 18th Century, some Victorian and one shows a Crusader on horseback.

In "Giant Jack" (Boys' Standard) one of the characters is a timid little tailor called "Snip"; he is clean-shaven and a weakling. In one of the illustrations he is shown as a thick-set man with a full beard and wrestling with a wild bull.

In the old days the Publishers seemed to have no compunction in using illustrations from other sources. In a story "The Sword and the Treasure" (New Boys' Paper, 1886) two pictures were taken from "The Three Musketeers", one from "Viscount de Bragelonne", and one from "Twenty Years After". They evidently had a partiality for Dumas.

One can only conclude that the copyright law must have been somewhat slack.

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IF YOU HAVE A COLLECTION of old Boys' Books for sale or part collection for sale, fair prices given. Consult William Martin, 93 Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10, Willesden 4474.

MAGNETS TWO FOR ONE! I will Exchange Two Magnets (Similar Period) for any one of following Nos.— 966 - 970 - 984 - 1038 - 1122 - 1123 - 1124 - 1125. J. Walsh, 345 Stanley Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool, 20.

FOR SALE 53 blue and white Gems between 600 and 767, 1/- each. 100 blue and red Gems between 777 and 1180, 9d. each. Also 150 Gems wanted between 650 and 990. 5/- for Magnet 903 "Sports Week at Grayfriars". E. B. Flinders, Roseview, Gosmore Road, Nr. Hitchin, Herts.

Extract from a reader's letter. "The response to my advertisement was topping. I sold every one of the Gems I offered in next to no time."

**Advertise in the C.D. It brings results.**

"MY GREYFRIARS LORE"By R. H. Hunter

So much has already been written and said about Charles Hamilton's celebrated schoolboy characters (to say nothing of his many "aliases") that I would hardly dare attempt to emulate or improve in any way upon the expressed judgment of the many keen critics before me. C.D. readers - particularly those of the Hamilton group - may however, be interested in a brief review of my introduction to - and subsequently lengthy acquaintance with - the Greyfriars stories and will, no doubt, bear patiently with me whilst I sprinkle the pages of C.D. with my own particular brand of nostalgia.

My very first introduction to Greyfriars (also Rookwood and St. Jims) was via the medium of early "Holiday Annuals" which I used to receive each year at Christmas time during the period of the early and middle 1920's. I am a little vague as to actual dates or chronological order of stories and am quoting purely from memory at this juncture, but I remember quite clearly that of the three schools, Greyfriars captured my imagination from the very start. Of these early stories I remember very vividly "Fighting for his Honour" (featuring a detestable new boy named Heath and reprinted - as I discovered many years later - from two early "Magnets") - also a story dealing with the remarkable wanderings of Billy Bunter and featuring "social calls" by the fat Owl at St. Jims and Rookwood. I cannot accurately name the title of this story but think it was something like "The Wandering Schoolboy". Then also do I recall "The Form Master's Substitute" (Wibley versus Ponsonby & Co.) and a novel, rather "Faustish" story introducing one Parkinson of the Remove. Parkinson, a weedy rabbit at sports (and whom I venture to assert has never been heard of before or since as a Removeite) aspired to win glory on the football field. How he succeeded in doing so (and ran up a cricket score in a Remove football match) in return for signing away his soul (in blood) to "The Man in the Grey Coat" is delightfully told and well remembered in this yarn. If memory serves well, the title was "Lucky for Parkinson" and old readers will undoubtedly agree that, as things turned out, it was indeed lucky for the would-be Steve Bloomer. Perhaps I may divert for a brief moment by pondering on the possibility that this last mentioned

story was not a genuine Charles Hamilton effort. Somehow - and allowing for the fact that I read this story at an early age - I hardly think it was other than a genuine C.H. effort. I seem to remember that it was too good to have been written by a substitute writer.

From the foregoing it will be seen that I received a thorough grounding in my Greyfriars lore at quite an early age and at the time I purchased my first orange-covered "Magnet" was ripe for more and more stories. The first "Magnet" I purchased was No.858 "The Parting of the Ways" (July 1924), the first of a short "Smithy and Redwing" series, and although I cannot recall that I immediately became a "regular-week-by-week-without-fail" reader, I do know that not long afterwards I became a confirmed "Magnet" devotee and seldom - very seldom - missed an issue. It would be round about the Summer of 1925 when my interest approached top gear and I remember clearly the youthful eagerness with which I followed the adventures of my newly-found chums in the "Bunter Court" series (Summer 1925) and the "Wingete v. Loder" series (Autumn and early Winter 1925). Of the latter series, the final tale "Loder's Last Chance" (No.931) captured my imagination to the N'th degree and this number is still one of the most prized in my collection.

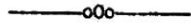
During the years that followed (and as a schoolboy myself) I drank deeply of the Greyfriars elixir of youth, and although I am inclined to agree with the previously expressed views of Roger Jenkins concerning the actual literary superiority of later stories (early and middle 1930's) I may be pardoned for retaining my own affection - and some preference - for those stories which appeared a few years previous to the very best period. The period in question - and for the purpose of this article I will reckon it as round about 1924 to 1928 - contained so many fine series that it is difficult to name any particular runs, but I may say that my own personal preference and affection is tied up a good deal with that prolonged glimpse of Vernon-Smith in his most "Boulderish" mood which we were treated to in 1927. Readers will recall that this period commenced with the "Dallas" series (March 1927) and carried through with the "South Seas Cruise" series of the Summer of 1927. The wonderful character paintings in the "De Coste" series of 1928 also made a deep impression on my schoolboy mind and this series remains one of my very top

favourites, being - in my opinion - of even higher literary merit than many of the later stories.

I freely acknowledge, of course, that my affection for the stories of the period indicated has probably been very much coloured by the fact that they were read at a more impressionable age than later stories, but I think it is pretty generally agreed that this must always be so. Moreover, my appreciation of later stories has never been impaired or in any way lessened by the retention of special affections for some of the earlier stories. I have in fact always been a keen observer - and keenly appreciative - of the high literary quality of the stories from 1931 or 1932 to around 1936. Here again it is extremely difficult to select any particular runs for special mention, but if I mention two of my own "specials" I doubt whether any murmurs of disapproval would be heard. The two series which I would thus honour are the monumental "Wherton v Quelch" series (1932) and the "Stacey" series (1935) - two absolute top-notchers. All of which, however, causes me to hark back to the commencement of this article in which I asserted that so many keen judges of Charles Hamilton's work have already written on this subject that I could not seriously attempt to add much concerning the high quality of his amazing output.

At a later date I may perhaps write at greater length concerning the authenticity of many aspects and features which were incorporated into the stories, this being a hall mark of Charles Hamilton's work which always made a very deep impression on me. I have often marvelled at the painstaking attention to detail which was so characteristic of the Greyfriars series - particularly those dealing with the numerous holiday travel adventures of the last 15 years or so - whilst the philosophies of life and human virtues, so often expressed by the author through his stories, were seldom wrong.

As indicated, I hope to write more of this aspect at some later date.



Say to yourself, "Let's see!  
Is my sub. to the C.D. due?"

REPORT ON THE MEETING HELD AT  
12 ASHBURNHAM PLACE, GREENWICH, S. E.10

Despite the inclement weather there was a good muster at genial Charlie Wright's home on Sunday March 6th last. We were all pleased to see our popular chairman after his indisposition of last month. The meeting opened at 5 p.m. and after the members had agreed to delete the second paragraph of section B, rule 3, the minutes of the previous meeting were read and duly signed. Correspondence was read and discussed, especially one from Herbert Leckenby re a Mr. Poynter. Full details of the matter contained therein will be found in the March issue of the C.D. Another letter about the forthcoming serial in the C.D. about Yorkshire's gift to fiction, the late Maxwell Scott, was loudly acclaimed by all, especially the Nelson Lee fans.



The treasurer then gave details of the club's sound financial position.

The forthcoming exhibition at the Central Library, Islington, was then discussed, the dates being opening Monday March 14th, closing Saturday April 9th. Mr. Robert Blythe was congratulated on his good work in connection with the exhibition. Bill Martin, Herbert Leckenby, and other good friends have loaned a feast of good old boys' books and members were treated to a preview which was greatly enjoyed. Our worthy chairman then stated that an exhibition at the Camberwell Public library was contemplated. It is to be hoped that new members will be attracted to the Club from the results of these exhibitions.

The monthly exchange and mart have by now become practically exhausted; it was proposed by R. Whiter and seconded by R. Blythe that we approached Bill Martin for a supply of books each month on approval for sale to members. This was agreed to unanimously and R. Blythe undertook to visit Bill Martin in connection with this matter,

The chairman then announced a gift to the club by the brothers Whiter - a rubber stamp and a printer's block of the club's badge. A hearty vote of thanks was given to the afore-said gentlemen, and it was agreed to order a supply of stationery for members' use, particularly the postal ones.

The next meeting was fixed for Sunday April 3rd at a venue to be decided later. This will be communicated to all members later on. The meeting closed at 7-40 p.m.

An alphabetical quiz then followed and the letters of the "Magnet" were used. The result was John Geal first, Miss P.Pluck second and Len Peckman and Frank Keeling joint third. One and all greatly enjoyed this novel competition.

Attendance: Mr. and Mrs. Len Peckman, Eleenor Peckman, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Keeling, Robert Blythe, John Geal, Ian Whitmore, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Wright, Miss P. Pluck, Robert and Ben Whiter.

BENJAMIN G. WHITER,  
Hon. Sec.

#### OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

President:- Frank Richards, Esq.

#### List of Members

Messrs. L. Peckman (Hon. Chairman), R. Blythe, M. Bond,  
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Mrs. E. Whiter.

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# The Nelson Lee Column

Conducted by Robert Blythe,  
81 Alsen Road, Holloway, London, N.7.

In the letter written to me by Mr. Webb, of Birmingham, that I promised to refer to, is the following paragraph - "No.2 was by the author of the Plummer yarns - not by G.H.Teed, as, although the letter wrote the later G.M.P. stories, it was not until the year 1923 that he began doing so. Either Mark Osborne, who is accepted as the original creator of Plummer, or Mark Darren, who I feel sure wrote a few stories about the same character previous to his death in the first world war, was the writer of this particular number."

If Mr. Webb is correct in his assertions, then it seems that we must revise our lists considerably. I should be interested to hear from anyone who can throw additional light on this authorship question.

While on this subject of authorship, it occurred to me that some of you may know the authors of No's 3,5,6,9,10,18. There is no mention in these books of other stories by the same author, as was usual in the early Nelson Lee's, so that if any of you have ideas on the subject, I should be pleased to hear them. At least it should cause some controversy, even if nothing definite was proved.

A question from Ben Whiter this month is a lot easier to answer than that of last month. He wants to know who was the school porter. Depends upon what period you are referring to, Ben. In the early stories it was Warren, a crusty individual, but later it was Josh Cuttle, a definite "character".

A further list of the series this month brings us well over half way in the Old Series. As follows:-

- No. 275-283 Intro. Dick Goodwin, the Schollboy Inventor
- " 284-293 Intr. Solomon Levi
- " 294-304 Intro. Ernest Lawrence and Mr. Smaile Fox as Housemaster.

- No. 305-311 Adventures in Mordania Among the Tergossa  
 " 312-319 Cricketing series intro. Jerry Dodd  
 " 320-327 Adventures on Justin B. Farmin's Ranch in Montana  
 " 328-335 Football Series. Featuring Reggie Pitt and his efforts to save his home  
 " 336-348 The Madness of Dr. Stafford and the Communist School  
 " 349-357 St. Franks Cadets on Willards Island  
 (No.352 introduces Archie Glenythorne)

And so to this month's list of titles.

- No. 131 The Hold-up of the 8.15 Mail  
 " 132 The Mystery Schoolboy  
 " 133 The Case of the Japanese Schoolboy  
 " 134 The Mystery of Mocr Quarry  
 " 135 The Secret Menace  
 " 136 The Mystery of the Unstamped Letter  
 " 137 The Flooded School  
 " 138 The Bosuns' Predicament  
 " 139 Lost at Sea  
 " 140 A Dread Secret  
 " 141 A Terrible Lesson  
 " 142 A Mystery of the Night  
 " 143 The Sign of the Purple Circle  
 " 144 The Lighthouse Prisoners  
 " 145 The Secret Mission  
 " 146 The Circle's Vengeance  
 " 147 The Clue of the Fancy Vest  
 " 148 The New Housemaster  
 " 149 Hunter the Hun  
 " 150 The Remove in Revolt

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WANTED: any back-dated copies for reference Collectors' Digest, Collector's Miscellany, "Parks" Vanity Fair. "Parks". State quantity and Price Required. William Martin, 93 Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London N.W.10, Willesden 4474.



Memories

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Very many thanks for the March "Collectors' Digest", which I have read with extreme interest and shall send on to my sisters, who I am sure will be no less interested.

The cover, with its reproduction of one of the old "Boys' Reslms" that were once such a familiar feature of my father's study (they used to be about in heaps), brings back many memories

19, III, 1949.

J. H. M. STANFORTH

+ + + +

Bouquet!

22nd March, 1949.

Dear Sir,

I have pleasure in enclosing cheque for 13/-d for renewal of subscription to COLLECTORS' DIGEST, which I trust is correct for 12 issues.

I have been very interested in recent numbers, and think your magazine is admirably edited.

Yours sincerely,  
CHARLES SKILTON  
(Charles Skilton, Ltd.)

+ + + +

No! Frank Richards was NOT Prosper Howard!

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

March 24th, 1949.

Many thanks for the C.D., more than up to the mark this time.

Just at the moment I am writing a Christmas story of Tom Merry. Perhaps you may like to see the copy of the "Mandeville News" which I enclose.

I found Leonard Packman's letter in the C.D. about "Prosper Howard" very interesting. I have of course often been asked questions about this before. But I don't think that I can clear up the "mystery". I did not write, and have never read, anything about "Teddy Bexter". But certainly I did write the "School Under Canvas", which I naturally expected to appear as written by "Martin Clifford"; Rylcombe Grammar School being an appendage of St. Jim's. Actually it did appear under the name of Prosper Howard, for reasons known only to Hinton, then editor; and considerably to my surprise. Later on, when I saw Hinton again, I asked about this, and he told me, with his usual besmiling smile, that the idea was to give a spot of "life" to a Rylcombe series in another paper. I never looked at that series, and don't know what it was like; but Hinton's idea apparently was that a Martin Clifford story appearing under Prosper Howard's name would give that gentleman a leg-up -- which was flattering though irritating to me, and must have been irritating without being flattering to Mr. Howard! But I never, so far as I know, met Mr. Prosper Howard, or knew what his real name was -- only that it wasn't Charles Hamilton! I seem to remember that Hinton played this juggling trick with some other stories written by me, but don't at the moment recall the details. That is all, I think, that I can contribute towards the elucidation of the "mystery".

With kindest regards,

Always yours,

FRANK RICHARDS.

(Note.- The A.P. did some queer things, didn't they? To solve all these authorship questions several Sexton Blakes would be required. How about G. R. Samways, one of the Magnet, Gem substitute writers as the author of the Gordon Gay Empire Library stories? - H.L.)

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More Favourite Stories

3 Montgomery Drive, Sheffield 7.

March 12/49.

Dear Editor,

The six stories which gave me the most pleasure in my boyhood -



(Note. - The following account of an earlier Book Club will interest all our readers, but, as will be gathered from Mr. Medcraft's second paragraph, the motive of the one run by the enterprising Mr. Wilson 40 years ago was rather different to that of the one now active in London. - H.L.)

### THE 'ORIGINAL OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

By John Medcraft

The Old Boys' Book Club, so ably organised and controlled by London members of our circle for the benefit and social intercourse of all interested in modern boys' papers, is now firmly established and the monthly reports of its activities are perused by the majority of the members of our clan.

But, contrary to general belief, it is not the first of its kind for, about 40 years ago the late J.J. Wilson, a Londoner resident in Liverpool, started the original Old Boys' Book Club. No high ideals inspired the formation for the Club was merely a cloak for a book trading venture, genuine enough as such, but controlled and officered solely by Jimmy Wilson himself.

The firm of Edwin J. Brett had recently closed down and their remainders were flooding the market, reviving interest in the old Victorian boys' papers. Taking tide at the flood, Wilson purchased large quantities, marked them with the familiar rubber stamp of the Old Boys' Book Club and listed them under this heading to the many collectors and sentimentlists whose interests had swakened. When the huge remainder stocks of Hogarth House were released a few years later, Wilson bought extensively and resold via the Old Boys' Book Club. He used to point proudly to his fine Liverpool house and declare that it was bought out of the profits on the Brett and Hogarth House remainders and here I am convinced he spoke truly.

From his boyhood in London, Wilson loved the old Victorian penny dreadfuls and boys' journals and his knowledge of them was unsurpassed. On this subject he was a frequent correspondent to Northern newspapers, the Collector's Miscellany and many other amateur magazines up to his death in 1932. But original ideas of the extent of literary licence allied to a peculiar sense of humour minimised the value of much of his writing for, adept at drawing the long bow, his many interesting articles on the subject

were usually a blend of fact and fiction in about equal proportions, Notwithstanding the many genuine fierce and fantastic titles from which to choose, Wilson delighted in inventing others to the detriment of fact and the confusion of later students of the lore of the penny dreadful. Even the late Montague Summers' authoritative work, "Gothic Bibliography", contains examples of the inventiveness of Jimmy Wilson.

Today there can be no collection of Victorian boys' journals and romances, however small, that does not include at least one item marked with the once familiar rubber stamp of the original Old Boys' Book Club.

### THE "PURPLE" PERIOD

By Leonard Peckham

The year? - 1917. My age? - twelve. "Magnet", "Gem", "Nelson Lee", "Boy's Friend", "Union Jack" and "Penny Populer", a different paper every day - sometimes two - from Monday to Friday. But wait; something even better than that, - Saturday "Bookhunting"! Yes, a tour of the local second-hand book shops New Cross. Two shops - "Magnets" and "Gems" two a penny - plenty of them. Under the counter, (populer then as now) Red "M's" and Green "G's".

Choumert Road, Peckham. Mr. & Mrs. Hammond's stall. Anything you like, particularly "Boy's Friend & Library" (1d each) "M", "G", "P.P.", "N.L.", "U.J." etc. 3 for a penny. The stall is still there and I see Mrs. Hammond regularly even now. Alas, I don't see the old favourites! Then on to Upland Road and Underhill Road, East Dulwich, Forest Hill, Brixton and Sydenham. Ah yes, Sydenham. I remember! - Whit-Sunday - Gothic raid, - Whit-Monday - walk via Sydenham to Bromley Woods. - Second-hand bookshop - in the window - green Gems and red Magnets 1d each. Pocket money? - 1/-. Twenty-four lovely books - walk to Bromley - hungry but happy all day. That night in bed - gloating over my treasures - Marvellous! Alas, these shops have all disappeared, every one. Mrs. Hammond's stall the only link left with 1917. Thirty-two years she has known me, and even now - as then - knows my first to last favourite paper, backwards. Happy, happy "Purple" period.



All Correspondence to  
H.M.Bond, 10 Erw Wen, Rhiwbina, Cardiff.

#### THE ROUND TABLE

Thanks to Wilfred Derwen we have a new Blakiana heading this month. What do you think of it? I particularly like the miniature U.J. in the centre of the sketch and the addition of Tinker and Pedro in the heading scene is most welcome as I think you will all agree. We are pleased to welcome Mr. Ben Whiter to our pages this month. Ben has been doing a lot of work in the Blake field of late and I think we can expect more interesting items from him in future issues. I am always pleased to have articles both long and short as I told you the other month, but they are especially welcome when they are from new contributors. More please! I see that the March issues of the S.B.L. are by Messrs. Tyrer and Drummond. Quite a change to have two of the newcomers in one month, and both are excellent stories. I am told on good authority that more copies of the S.B.L. will be available this month owing to the increase in paper supplies. Now is your chance to introduce Blake to all those young readers you know. Buy 'em copies and send for presents. We MUST try and create a new "Golden Age" for our favourite. It's up to us all to do our bit in this respect. I have already interested some twelve or more lads in the S.B.L. and they are most enthusiastic. The A.P. have just decided to introduce the "Oracle" and "Miracle" Libraries once again. If this can be done we



might yet have that new Blake weekly we all dream about. And how about a line to the B.B.C. asking for a Blake play or serial? I see that Messrs. Charles Skilton are issuing a circular letter to Bunter fans to send a card to the B.B.C. telling them that they would like a Bunter broadcast, so why not do the same for Blake? After all, we have been treated to so many second rate radio sleuths that a bit of boost for Blake would not be amiss.

Cheerio for now,  
H. MAURICE BOND.

SEXTON BLAKE'S GOLDEN AGE

A new article by Rex Dolphin

Part II

Enough of criticism, now to praise. So well-knit a team were the Blake authors that it is difficult to give pride of place to any one. But among the best surely was Robert Murray who wrote throughout the Golden Age and may almost be said to have started it. The original "Confederation" series (some dozen stories in all) were running in "The Union Jack" at the start of the decade; and they were reprinted in full, with slight modernisation at the end. The series was also later elongated and ran for many years till about 1927, but these stories did not seem to equal the excellence of the original dozen. This was Robert Murray's chief contribution to the Blake saga, and a fine job it was. The Confederation stories were, however, chiefly adventure and not detective stories. Next in merit among Murray's work, Maurice Bond places the Dr. Satire series. My own preference is the Paul Cynos series for its superior credibility and human touch.

Another who had been a Blake writer for some years at the outset of the decade was Cecil Hayter, creator of "Spots" loosely and Lobsangu. Sometime I think he was the best Blake author of them all. Then, on reflection, I realise he did not write any detective stories at all. They were pure adventure. Hayter had a delightful easy-to-read style. He was a master of natural dialogue and was excellent at handling subsidiary characters. He had the human touch. And above all, his backgrounds were superb. Hayter's trips into the African interior were and are a joy to me. I'm with him on a real expedition every time. I can read a Hayter

story several times without growing tired of it. But I read it for atmosphere, background and style. The plot doesn't matter.

Like Heyter, in that they wrote adventure and travel rather than detective stories were George Hamilton Teed and William Murray Graydon. Teed's backgrounds were, like Heyter's, vivid and authentic; and his characters Ruxton Tymar, Wu Ling, Mademoiselles Yvonne and Roxane with many others, were a mainstay of the Blake magazines during most of the decade. Teed's happiest background was perhaps the Chinese scene, and his stories of Sexton Blake in Manchuria (U.J. 1494, 1495 and 1497) deserve special mention. His story "The Victim Of Black Magic" (S.B.L. 2nd series No. 134) ranks among my favourite Blake stories of all time. Teed was also one of the very few authors who dared to give Blake a love-interest - not too happy an experiment. William Murray Graydon was a prolific writer during the early part of the decade. His stories were "complete" in that new characters were used in each. His style was melodramatic, his plots workmanlike but undistinguished; but somehow he injected atmosphere into his stories and I read them with interest and occasional fascination. He had a large variety of backgrounds at his disposal. Teed and Graydon, it seemed, had between them visited most spots on this earth.

With Rex Hardinge and Coutts Brisbane we have another pair of travellers with much in common. Each was mainly concerned with Africa and India; each wrote in addition to travel tales, many excellent detective stories. Hardinge's "The Men I Killed" (D.W. No. 20) is probably the best single story in all Blake lore. Hardinge, who for a time took over Heyter's Losely and Lebangu, is still writing Blake, but without the inspiration he once had.

(To be continued)

#### RESEARCH

By Benjamin Whiter

Compiling a research on that famous detective of boy's and old boy's literature, Sexton Blake, is well nigh a gigantic task. When the idea of research of old boy's story papers was mooted by Robert Blythe, the Nelson Lee expert, at one of the meetings of the London Old Boys' Book Club recently, it was agreed to leave

out the famous Baker Street sleuth. Later on, when I was in a pensive and thoughtful mood I came to the conclusion that it was not right to neglect Blake, and so I volunteered to do the research at a subsequent meeting of the Club. With all the issued numbers of "The Story Paper Collector" and a good many issues of "The Collectors' Digest" to help me, together with some retentive knowledge of my own, I made a start on the undertaken task. Jotting down information on pieces of paper, later on to be transferred into a small index notebook, I have made considerable headway. Under the letter A, I wrote the 99 known authors in alphabetical order, thanks to Herbert Leckenby's article in an issue of the SPC. This was followed by other items and every letter of the alphabet has an entry under it terminating with Zenith the Albin c. It has been great fun and one Saturday night I burnt the midnight oil, writing up data sitting up in bed. The subject is unlimited, from the authorities on Sexton Blake who have contributed to the C.D. and S.P.C., to the serial which ran in the B.B.C. programme "Lucky Dip" which was broadcast on Thursday afternoons and evenings during one of the pre-war years. Reading up all the articles and data will no doubt prove to be very valuable at the forthcoming exhibition of old boys' story papers of yesteryear at the Islington Public Library, London, when I hope Blake will be in the forefront of the questions that will be asked and answered, thanks to the research that I have indulged in during the past few weeks.

Next Month: "Sexton Blake and the First World War" by H.M. Bond.

Coming Soon! "Sexton Blake and the Second World War" by H.M. Bond.

From the London Evening News, 28.3.49  
According to Reveille the Broadcast is on 12th April Home Service

## Spot for St. Jim's and Greyfriars

I AM not, I find, alone in my affection for those grand school stories of Billy Bunter and the rest of them. Radio men are taking notice of them, now a busy freelance, has done a radio version, for broadcast, of the recently published "Boys Will Be Boys," which deals with all types of boys' stories. And Ted Kavanagh is thinking over what should be a fascinating series. He is wondering whether it would be more suited to sound or television, but since the appearance of these characters is so sharp to our minds, I personally plan to buy for sound.

## THE SEXTON BLANK LIBRARY - 1923

## Third Series 87 - 120

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| 87. The Loot Of France                       | Arthur Pearson.    |
| 88. The Sword Of Vengeance                   | Gilbert Chatter.   |
| 89. The Case Of The Deserted War Bride       | John Hunter.       |
| 90. The Riddle Of The Quaking Dam.           | Anthony Pearson.   |
| 91. The House On The Hill                    | John Bramwell.     |
| 92. Under Police Observation                 | Gilbert Chatter.   |
| 93. The Great Airport Rocket                 | John Hunter.       |
| 94. At 50 M.P.H.                             | John Bramwell.     |
| 95. The Tallyman's Fate                      | Lewis Jackson.     |
| 96. The Case Of The Stolen Evidence          | Anthony Pearson.   |
| 97. The Man From Arnhem                      | Lewis Jackson.     |
| 98. The Blackmailed Refugee                  | Anthony Pearson.   |
| 99. The House In The Wood                    | Gilbert Chatter.   |
| 100. The Riddle Of The Money Case            | John Bramwell.     |
| 101. The Trail Of The Five Red Herringe.     | Lewis Jackson.     |
| 102. Sergeant Gray's Crime                   | John Hunter.       |
| 103. The Case Of The Noble Countess Diamonds | Stanton Hope.      |
| 104. The Riddle Of The Missing Wreckage.     | Geo. E. Rochester. |
| 105. The Case Of The Spanish Legation        | Anthony Pearson.   |
| 106. The Riddle Of The Working Engine.       | Lewis Jackson.     |
| 107. The Mystery Of The Red Station          | John Hunter.       |
| 108. On Compassionate Leave                  | Lewis Jackson.     |
| 109. The Secret Of The Sands                 | Walter Tress.      |
| 110. The Mystery Of The Unfinished Ship      | Gilbert Chatter.   |

★ Featuring the character Petty Officer  
 Joe Hunter and his "raggie" Artillery  
 Miss O'Ellen.

WANTED:- Magnets 1925-1929; Penny Papers, Greyfriars Herald.  
 C. Hanson, 30 St. Margaret's Road, Wansted Park, London, E.12.