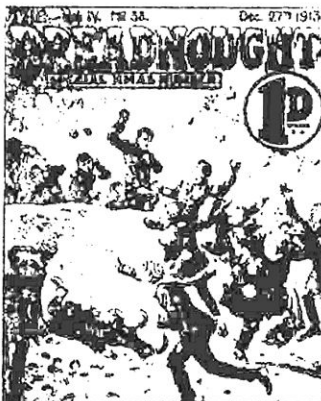


The
**COLLECTOR'S
DIGEST**

(Vol. 3) No. 31 : JULY 1949



THE MIDNIGHT SNOW FIGHT.

A FOLLOWING SEASONABLE PAGE OF THE BORN OF CLOUTIER
SCHOOL

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

The £1,000,000 Fat Boy

BILLY BUNTER'S COME-BACK

LET us take a stroll in the grounds of the old school.

Were you a Greyfriars, a St. Jim's or a Rookwood man? Most probably you followed the fortunes of all three, with just that extra bit of warmth on the side of Greyfriars.

But before we have another look at the old Quad or investigate the quality of the jam tarts in the tuckshop—where no doubt we shall observe, disappearing round the corner, a fat, tight-trousered figure with jam-smeared face—let us warm up with three little quiz questions.

Who were the Famous Five? Elementary, my dear chap. Who were Coker's study-mates? Not quite so simple. And when did Billy Bunter save? That's rather one for the connoisseur.



Questions like those (I'll give you the answers later) would be regarded as fairly straightforward by the members of the London Old Boys' Boor Club at their monthly Sunday afternoon meetings over tea and cakes at Wood Green.

It is when they fall to asking each other more obscure queries on the lore of those wonderful stories that you realise that it is, after all, a good many years since you left the old school and that your memory is not quite what you thought it was.

Out of the treasures they have assembled they will, by the way, be holding a quite ambitious exhibition in London in a few months' time—probably at Dulwich Library when bills repairs are completed.

Though to most of us Greyfriars holds prime place, with St. Jim's and Rookwood only slightly inferior contemporaries, that was not in fact the true order of things.

St. Jim's came first—and Tom Merry was not one of the original schoolboys. The first stories of that school appeared in a paper called *Pluck*. Then, in 1907, the *Quin* appeared, and in the third

number the same author, a certain Mr. Charles Hamilton, using the pen-name of "Marlin Clifford," began to write of Tom Merry's schooldays at Clavering College.

But Tom did not stay there long. He moved to St. Jim's, was later joined by Manners and Lowther—and so began the long series of adventures of the "Terrible Three" in the *Gem*.

Then, on February 15, 1908, there appeared the first issue of a new paper called the *Magnet*—18 pages,

with an orange cover, price one halfpenny. And in it was "The Making of Harry Wharton," written by the same Mr. Charles Hamilton, but this time under the pen-name of "Frank Richards"—a name that has become so much a part of him that to-day, in his 60th year, he prefers it to his own.

That first issue of the *Magnet* is one of the real collector's pieces. The Old Boys—and there are, by the way, Old Girls among them—study all aspects of boys' fiction. They will tell you, for instance, that they have been able to trace 89 different writers of the Sixteen Blake stories.

That may well be. But certain it is that all the stars—of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood—and many others, too—were the work of one man. And that man is Mr. Charles Hamilton, now living (but still not relaxing in a "fit" house in Perce-avenue, Kingsgate, Broadstairs.

What effect has the immense success Bunter had on the fortunes of its author?

"I estimate that Bunter has taken £1,000,000 from the reading public," says Frank Richards. "But only a small proportion of that has come to me. And in 1940, when the paper shortage sent Bunter to Coventry, my income dropped from £2,500 a year to nothing at all.

"But for the sympathetic understanding of the Income Tax authorities who had to listen to Billy's formula, to sales of procured postal orders, I should pro-



Remember the Owl of the Remote? He's now fortyish, but still going strong...

bably have had to do my writing in Brighton. Even then it was strange for an author who had been until then a comparatively 'lucky' man to have to adjust himself to living in a garret and smoking 'thin' snuff because he had no money to buy tobacco."



It takes more than a Hitler to give the permanent knock-out to such a figure as Billy Bunter. The war put an end to the publication of the *Gem* and *Magnet*—and the feeling is that the demand for their return is a nostalgic one from the older generation rather than from the youngsters of to-day—but Bunter still goes on in a strip drawn by Frank Minnitt in *Knock-out Comic*.

Quick Answers:

1. Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Merritt, Johnny Bull, Hurree Jemmett, Ram Singh.
2. *Pluck* and *Greens*.
3. *Cora Quack*, the master's niece.



(Vol.3) No.31.

Price 1s.1d.

Post Free

JULY 1949

Next Issue August

Editor, Miscellaneous Section
Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,
C/o Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

These Are the Days: More and more publicity - the "London Evening News"; the "Kent Messenger", "Yorkshire Evening News"; "Wood Green Observer", "South London Observer"; in addition a gibe in the "Sunday Pictorial" (see Hamiltonis); the return of Tom Merry; plans for Greyfriars on the stage; publishers accepting articles and stories from members of the clan; why, one can hardly keep pace with it all. So much so that we can only find room for extracts from the articles which have appeared in the public press.

Controversy: There's liveliness in the "Letter Box" this month also. Well, as I have said before, the C.D. provides an open forum so long as opinions are fair and straightforward and the writers have the courage to sign their names.

Where Eric Fayne's reproof is concerned, I was one of the culprits who compared Leonard Shields' work with C.H.Chapman's

to the detriment of the latter. Thinking it over, I must admit it was a little tactless, and out of place.

All right, Eric, I asked for it. And you did lay it on more lightly than Mr. Quelch would have done.

Something Like a Trip: On May 8th I received the June instalment of the "Maxwell Scott Diaries" from Jack Wood, posted a mile or so from my office. With it Jack enclosed a note. Said he, "By the time you receive this I shall be in Canada. The return trip is by way of New Zealand (I may drop in on Jack Murtagh here) and Australia. All being well I'll be back home May 29th."

Just like that, for all the world as if he was slipping off to the seaside for the week-end.

He was a day or two late getting back; all the same he circled the world much more quickly than Jules Verne's famous character - or Nelson Lee for that matter.

In a letter he says, "Since my return I have been re-reading some of the St. Franks Ship series and I find E.S. Brooks' description of places I also visited very accurate, allowing for the fact they were written twenty years ago."

And Another Traveller: On his way to Australia, more sedately and for a longer stay, is Joe Baguley. Here's an amusing par. from a letter written on the "Stratheden, before arriving at Port Said:- "Imagine my surprise to find in the passenger list a very familiar name - A.A. D'Arcy." I wonder if Mr. D'Arcy's father was a Gemite. Joe adds, "The Commander's name is Lee." Joe will feel at home.

Looking through the copy prepared for this number, it would appear it's going to be the liveliest C.D. yet, or, at least, that's the opinion of

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

P. S:

"Annual" Progress: Enclosed with this issue are the Questionnaire and Order Forms for the Annual. Where the former is concerned, I do beg of you to complete and return as soon as possible. Last year, despite our care, some names were omitted; in some cases it was our fault, in some our readers". Anyway, we do want everyone in this time.

You will note a slight variation where the groups are concerned. We want you to indicate your favourites in order of preference. This for easier reference.

And just a word to those whose names will be appearing for the first time - there are quite a lot of you, I am pleased to say. As when others first appeared I want to give details of your collection, why and how long you have been collecting, and anything else you think may be of interest to fellow collectors.

oOo

THE RETURN OF TOM MERRY

The "Gem" died nearly ten years ago. For a brief period the stories ran on in the "Triumph", then St. Jim's passed into the shadows. In the dark days when the Luftwaffe stalked abroad, the chances of the old school emerging again seemed very remote, but the faithful never lost hope. Their hopes were justified, for now, after a decade, the inimitable hand has been at work again, and a new term has started at ancient St. Jim's. All the figures are there as of yore - Jack Blake, who entered the Fourth as a new boy in 1906, takes his place - in the Fourth; D'Arcy who followed him a few weeks later is there as immaculate, teen-aged and lovable as ever; Tom Merry, Figgins and all the rest. Had they been ordinary mortals, they would have been writing to their grandsons there, but then, this is that magic corner of Sussex where time stands still, yet, paradoxically, the inhabitants keep pace with the world outside.

Yes, they are back and their adventures are told protected with stiff covers and attractive dust jacket. We have received reviews from a number of satisfied readers. We select two at random just as an example.

In that inimitable facile manner which is his, the author has woven a first class yarn around an excellent background and St. Jim's enthusiasts will find "Martin Clifford" at his very

best in this delightful story in which a number of our popular favourites play a prominent part.

The central characters are Figgins, the "one and only" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy (Gussy), and Mr. Ratcliff, but throughout the book we find others such as the three "Co's", Tom Merry & Co. Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co., well to the fore.

Lovers of Greyfriars and Rookwood will also enjoy reading this book in which we also meet Billy Bunter, the Famous Five, Smithy, etc., at the former school, and the Fistical Four, Mornington, the Modern Three, etc., at the latter.

Illustrated by that esteemed artist, friend Mr. Macdonald, with a frontispiece which is really superb in its design and colourings, it is well printed and has an attractive dust jacket depicting a scene from the story.

To sum up; an excellent story, well illustrated, with a feast of reading for "old boys" and modern youth alike, featuring all three of Mr. Hamilton's most famous schools.

It represents real good value at a most reasonable price, but I would, however, draw the publisher's attention to the fact that my copy has several loose leaves. No doubt this is just a fluke, but flukes like this do tend to detract from the pleasurable possession of such a fine book.

LEONARD PACKMAN.

Few would deny that Martin Clifford has well and truly rung the bell with his first story of the return of Tom Merry and his merry chums. It is a tip-top yarn to warm the hearts of the young and the not-so-young.

Mr. Clifford has re-captured the spirit of the Gem at its very best, and, in cleverly modifying the character of Mr. Ratcliff, he has given us just a little bit more than the Gem ever did. For Mr. Ratcliff, in the old days, was a grotesque and unnatural character, - a master in whom nobody could believe. But Mr. Ratcliff, between his stiff covers, though a hasty old martinet, is a real schoolmaster.

In renewing one's acquaintance with St. Jim's, one wonders whether, despite the ballyhoo over Billy Bunter, Mr. Hamilton ever invented greater characters than Tom Merry, the first of the really famous "weekly" schoolboys, and Gussy. The latter has been imitated a hundred times in thousands of stories, but one has only to read this new Tom Merry tale to realise that the one

and only Gussy has never been even remotely equalled.

The original St. Jim's characters were a fine, representative crowd, and I think that the Gem gained nothing by the introduction of Trimble and Grundy, who were poor imitations of the successful Bunter and Coker. I hope that during the recent war, Grundy went back to Redclyffe and Trimble returned to Trimble Hall, - to stay.

The coming Tom Merry Annual makes our mouths water with anticipation. It should be a feast for the Hamilton fans, though I wonder whether Carcroft has really sufficient supporters to merit inclusion. What a pity that the Rio Kid is not to ride the range again instead.

ERIC FAYNE.

FOR SALE: - 11 "Holiday Annuals" 1923, 1929, 1931-1939 - £4.4.0. 52 odd "Gems" from 978 to 1663 - £1.1.0. £5 the lot. Please write for list to J. Dyer, 84 Bensares Road, Plumstead, London, S.E.18.

WANTED TO BUY: Magnets No. 1002, 1010-1017, 1021, 1024, 1026, 1030, 1034, 1040, 1043, 1047, 1049, 1053, 1071, 1072, 1074, 1075, 1077, 1079, 1081, 1085, 1086, 1088²/1091, 1100, 1102, 1103, 1111, 1116, 1118, 1119, 1121, 1124, 1125, 1127, 1135, 1138, 1140, 1156, 1159, 1160, 1163, 1167-1170, 1181, 1182, 1184, 1186, 1187, 1189, 1191, 1192, 1196, 1221-1224, 1229, 1245, 1277, 1556. Robert Wilson, 484, Springburn Road, Glasgow, N.

ANTED URGENTLY: All back numbers of Collectors' Digest: Also Annuals. William Martin, 93 Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10.

WANTED: Aldine Publications, Turpins, Duvals, Robin Hoods, etc. E.R. Landy, 4 Nunceaton Road, Dagenham, Essex.

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

AN INEXPENSIVE HOBBY Collect specimen numbers of Victorian boys papers. I can supply Boys of England, Boys Standard, Boys Comic Journal, Boys of Empire, Young Englishmen, Boys World, Black Bear, Black Highwayman, Sweeney Todd, Blueskin, Tyburn Dick, Ching-Ching, Hargaway and hundreds more, 6/6 per dozen. Medcraft, 64 Woodland Road, Ilford.

Leaves from the Diaries of Maxwell ScottContinuity by John P Wood

V

Although the year 1900 ended on a note of optimism, the New Year's output was reduced owing to family troubles, including the illness and death of his brother, as well as a change in the affairs of Maxwell Scott's medical practice. In the last three months of the year, however, he tells us that he worked harder than ever at his writing and did what at one time he would have described as impossible: "I turned out 10,000 words a week, week after week, with the unfailing regularity of a machine. It came about in this way.

"My serial 'Birds of Prey' began to appear in the Boys Friend on June 12th, and continued to appear until Dec. 4. Towards the end of September the editor of the Big Budget wrote and asked me to write a detective serial for his paper. The instalments to be 5,000 words in length, and payment to be made at the rate of 27/6 per 1,000 — a big advance on anything I had received before. Now, if he had offered me this commission a few weeks earlier, it is quite possible that I might have declined it. It had cost me an infinity of labour to complete one instalment of 4,500 words a week, and I should never have dared to undertake to write another instalment a week.

"At the end of September, however, I was beginning to bring 'Birds of Prey' to an end (I was always a month or five weeks ahead of publishing day) and I decided that I should just be able to wind up 'Birds of Prey' and open the new serial for the Big Budget at the same time. So I wrote and accepted his offer.

"And almost by the next post came a letter from the editor of the Boys Friend saying the 'Birds of Prey' had been such a success that he wished me to follow it up 'without any break' with another detective serial, for which he offered me five guineas per instalment of 4,500 words instead of the previous four.

"And close on the heels of this came another letter from the editor of the Big Budget asking me if I would care to do a second

serial for him, also at the rate of 27/6 per 1,000.

"If I could have accepted all three commissions, I should have earned close upon £20 a week for the next four or five, or even six, months. But such a course was physically impossible. So I accepted two. I engaged to write a detective serial ('The Seven Stars') for the Big Budget, and to follow up 'Birds of Prey' with another detective serial ('The Silver Dwarf') in the Boys' Friend.

"I sent off the first instalment of 'The Seven Stars' (a double-length instalment of 10,000 words) on November 1st, and from then to the end of the year (and for many weeks thereafter) I ground out two instalments a week - first of 'The Seven Stars' and 'Birds of Prey'; and afterwards of 'The Seven Stars' and 'The Silver Dwarf'."

The following year, 1902, was also a much disturbed year for domestic reasons. His father died, a daughter was born, and his son left home for his first boarding school. In spite of these, and other incidents, his income from boys' stories exceeded previous records by over £100!

"When the year (1902) opened my two serials were still running - 'The Seven Stars' in the Big Budget and 'The Silver Dwarf' in the Boys' Friend. The last instalment of 'The Seven Stars' appeared on May 8th, the story having then been running 22 weeks. Nominally the 'Silver Dwarf' came to an end on March 19th (16 weeks), but this was only a pious fiction of the editor's. I had divided the story into two 'books'; and the editor insisted upon christening Book II 'The Missing Heir' and treating it as a new serial. The first instalment of 'The Missing Heir' appeared in the next number after the one containing the concluding instalment of 'The Silver Dwarf' and the story ran until August 6th - 20 weeks; making 36 weeks for the complete story. For the complete story I received £175.10s.

"Before 'The Missing Heir' came to an end the editor commissioned me to write another serial ('A Son of the Sea' which began to be published in the Boys' Friend on July 23 and ran until Dec. 17 (22 weeks). For this I received £110.15s.

"Whilst this last-named serial was running I wrote two long complete stories ('The Rival Squatters' and 'A Dangerous Experiment') for the Big Budget, and one ('A Slip of the Pen') for the Boys' Realm, a companion paper to the Boys' Friend and controlled by the same editor.

"When 'A Son of the Sea' was approaching its conclusion, the editor commissioned me to write a detective serial for the Boys' Realm. This story ('Nelson Lee's Rival') began on Nov. 29th and was still running when the year closed. Finally, in the closing days of the year, I wrote another long complete story ('To Save the King') which was published in the Boys' Friend on December 24th. Altogether from writing received £391.10s.2d."

Henceforward Maxwell Scott's diaries are mainly concerned with domestic affairs, and references to his literary labours are confined to brief summaries.

For instance, of 1903, he writes: "With regard to my writing during this year, there is little to record beyond the fact that Pearsons (the publishers of Big Budget) brought out a new boys' paper called the Boys' Leader. For this I wrote a complete story in October, and started a detective serial in November. These, with three complete stories for Harmsworths, and two serials, brought me in, in 1903, £409.19s.9d., the largest income I had ever earned in one year by story-writing."

In next month's instalment, which will bring these excerpts to a close, we shall bring the entries up to the selling of the Nelson Lee copyright in 1915 when the Nelson Le Library began, and will hear in passing something of Maxwell Scott's contributions to Blakians.

Continued

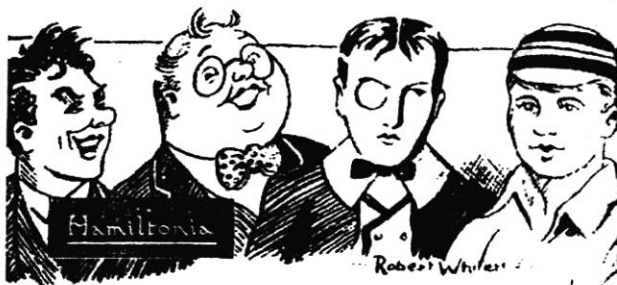
FOR SALE: Schoolboys' Own Libraries; Boys' Friend Libraries; Nelson Lees (all series); Gems and Champions (including No.1). W. Colcombe, 256 South Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex.

WANTED: Fantasy Fiction, any Condition or Binding: Henry J. H. Bartlett, Peas Hill, Shipton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Library, No.1 (First Series): "The Yellow Tiger, by G. Hamilton Teed. Drummond, Megginch Castle, Errol, Perthshire.

A Treat in Store

Leonard Packman has had the good fortune to glance through a proof copy of Billy Bunter's Christmas Party and votes it absolutely the best Bunter book yet.



by Herbert Leckenby, pro.tem.

So far no one has volunteered to run this particular column, so to give it a start I am saying a few words myself. As, however, there's quite enough of my scribblings in the mag. already, I hope someone else will take it off my shoulders forthwith.

A week or two ago one of my correspondents told me he had been reading one of the earlier Magnets and was puzzled by it - it seemed to him that Frank Richards was off form when he wrote it. I was able to explain to him that the story he mentioned was not written by the Frank Richards we know, but by one of the "substitutes". Now this correspondent happened to be one who has only recently had the urge to once again read the papers of his youth, and he was quite unaware of the story of the Magnet-Gem substitute writers.

Well, this is by no means the first time this slice of Magnet-Gem history has cropped up lately, and it seemed to me that something should be done about it. Older members will be aware that about two years ago, John R. Shaw, who has made a greater study of the St. Jims-Greyfriars stories than any of us, compiled lists of the imitation stories, and these were published in our contemporary "The Collector's Miscellany". Since then scores of new

members have joined the clan, and there may be also many older members who are unaware of them. So I immediately got in touch with Mr. Shaw. He promptly agreed to revise the lists, he having since writing it found some additional stories. Consequently I propose to publish them in the next Annual, for some were such wretched, puerile efforts, that those not in the know should be warned. They are interesting in a way; though, and worth reading, if only to show how wrong was George Orwell, that provocative critic, when he said anyone given the lay-out could write a Gem or Magnet story.

Douglas Warth, writer of the "Odd Man Out" column in the "Sunday Pictorial", was at the Campion cocktail party to celebrate the re-birth of Tom Merry, and this is what he had to say. "As a schoolboy I was occasionally caned for reading the weekly adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at the fictional school of St. Jims. As a young man I was ashamed of the time I had wasted on them. Personally I think the old idea of banning Tom Merry was a good one - as heroes, he and his gang are such emasculated little prigs."

Well, anyone who reads Warth's column regularly knows that he is one of those aggravating, contrary sorts of blighters who listens to what people are saying and then says the exact opposite. If, when the sun was shining from a blue sky and a refreshing breeze was blowing, you said to him, "Grand day," he would probably snarl, "I hate fine weather." Or is it just a pose to make his column different? Anyway, I know one Gemite who gave him a mouthful.

Another prospective feature for the Annual is a list of the series stories in the Gem and Magnet - the various travels, Tom Merry Out West, Talbot, Bunter Court, Ralph Stacey, Paul Dallas etc. with comments thereon. Which were the most popular? Where the Gem was concerned, I can hear someone calling, "Talbot!" Anyway, here's a subject for discussion, so come on you fellows, send your views along and don't let the light nights stop you; ours is an all the year round hobby.

Have you often wondered what the circulation of the Gem and Magnet were? I know I have. Well, I can now tell you, on most excellent authority, that, where the Magnet was concerned, it was over 200,000 in 1939. Now it will be seen from one of the newspaper stories that Frank Richards estimated that "Bunter has taken £1,000,000 from the reading public."

Well, with something to work on, let's go into this for it's very interesting.

If the circulation in 1939 was 200,000, I think most will agree that some years earlier it would probably be more, and for more than half its life the price was 2d. Suppose we stick to 200,000 as the average, and to 1½d. as the price, a year would give you about £65,000. Multiply that by 32, and you would get something like £2,080,000! Arithmetic is not my strong point, but even if I am anywhere near right, Frank Richards would appear to have been over modest. And that leads to another thought. How much has been spent on Magnets since the paper disappeared from the bookstalls, since they became collectors' items and prices ranged from 2d. up to - well, you know, don't you? Anyway, I'm not going to try and work that one out. Anyone else like to try?

Old Boys Book Club

The Stanmore Meeting

May 22. An enjoyable meeting was held at 93 Aldridge Avenue, Stanmore, Middlesex, host genial Frank Keeling. Owing to the change over from the first Sunday until the third one in the month, this was an extra meeting to bridge the gulf of six weeks until the June gathering. Frank was fortunate to be host, owing to the energetic Robert Blythe's endeavours, of two famous old boys' papers artists, to wit, Eric Parker, Sexton Blake illustrator, and Kenneth Brookes, who drew for Nelson Lee. A representative gathering of fifteen spent a very enjoyable time as no sooner than the two guests had arrived we adjourned to the garden where the chairman gave a hearty welcome to them. Mr. Parker was then subjected to a barrage of questions to which he good-naturedly replied. Valuable information and data was secured all about the Union Jack and Sexton Blake illustrations. It was typical artists meeting and enjoyable to the full, especially to the members interested in drawing. Autographs were secured by nearly all present, and after suitable refreshments, and a hearty vote of thanks, the two guests left greatly impressed by the

welcome they had received. Exchange and mart followed, Bill Martin having kindly supplied another parcel of books on approval.

Attendance: Len, Jose and Eleanor Packman, Robert and Laura Blythe, Charlie and Olive Wright, Ben and Bob Whiter, Ian Whitmore, J. Waite, A. Richardson (a new member), Miss P. Pluck, Frank and Mrs. Keeling, Eric R. Parker and Kenneth Brookes.

BENJAMIN G. WHITER, Hon. Sec.

Once again a grand muster of members assembled at the home of Charlie Wright, 12 Ashburnham Place, Greenwich, London, S.E.10 on Sunday, June 19th.

The reading of the last meeting's minutes, correspondence and treasurer's report was quickly proceeded with. Then the available supplies of club notepaper were distributed, and it is to be hoped that all who have not yet received a supply will get theirs next month.

The article by Robert Whiter in the "Collector's Miscellany" was then shewn to all who had not seen it and it was stated that numerous enquiries, and a few new members had been the result of this write-up. The thanks of the club were expressed to the editor of the C.M. for publishing same.

Two good write-ups in the "Wood Green Observer" and the "South London Observer" were read, and the thanks of the club were extended to our worthy chairmen for dispatching copies of these newspapers to all and sundry.

The possibility of Greyfriars being put on the stage at some future date seems very bright, and Mr. Herford-Janes attended the meeting with Peter Cushing to get local colour and see for himself the enthusiasm of the various members.

A very good miscellaneous quiz, compiled by Charlie Wright, followed and was won easily by our worthy Chairman, Len Packman. In a tremendous photo finish for second place the brothers Whiter Bob and Ben could not be separated. The quiz embraced all old boys' books and included questions about the characters of comic papers of yesteryear.

A proposal for a Christmas social, put forward by Bob Blythe, was unanimously agreed to and details will be worked out later on

and members will be informed as to these.

Then followed a passage from Gem No. 371, "Master Marie", read by Len Packman, a chapter from Nelson Lee Old Series No.485, "Scandal of St. Franks" read by Bob Blythe, and finally a passage from Magnet No. 1543, "Spectre of Polfelly" read by Bob Whiter. These three readings gripped a very enthusiastic audience and were thoroughly enjoyed by all.

The dates and venues of the next three meetings are:-

July 17th, 706 Lordship Lane, Wood Green, London, N.22.

August 21st, 41 Friar Road, Brighton 6.

September 18th, Hume House, 136 Lordship Lane, East Dulwich,
London, S.E.22.

A hearty welcome was afforded to two new members, Mr. Harry Horner and Mr. C. Bartlett.

Attendance:- Charlie and Olive Wright, Frank and Mrs. Keeling, Bob and Laura Blythe, John and Mrs. Geal, Miss Pat Pluck, Ian Whitmore, John Robyns, Peter Cushing, Mr. Herford-Janes, Harry Horner, C.J. Bartlett, Bob and Ben Whiter, Len, Jose and Eleanor Packman.

BENJAMIN G. WHITER.

GREYFRIARS ON THE STAGE

"Magnetites", particularly those in the southern area, will be interested to hear that negotiations are proceeding with a view to a stage adaptation of a Greyfriars Christmas story to appear on the London stage at the end of the year.

At a recent interview several "possible" Xmas stories were submitted for consideration, but "Billy Bunter's Christmas Party" (Skilton & Co) is also a possibility.

The final selection remains to be seen, but I can, however, assure our readers that suitable talent will be available to play the principal roles.

LEONARD PACKMAN.

INTERESTING ITEM: Some splendid photographs were taken when Messrs. Eric R. Parker and Kenneth Brookes visited the Old Boys' Book Club meeting at Stanmore. One shows the artists alone, the other with the members. Copies 1/- $\frac{1}{2}$ plate size, 2/- full plate, can be obtained from Frank Keeling, 95 Aldridge Avenue, Stanmore, Middlesex.

The Nelson Lee Column

All queries and suggestions to Robert Blythe,
46 Carleton Road, Holloway, London, N.7.

Mr. Webb of Birmingham has discovered some interesting facts concerning the early stories which I think will be of interest. Here is what he says:- "You will recall that this story (i.e. No.2. 05) was stated to have been written by the author of the Plummer and Spearing stories. It is believed that stories written round these two old popular characters were penned under separate authorship, but as I have recently discovered, this was not the case in every instance.—— When Darren discontinued the Spearing stories they were taken over by other writers, among whom were Mark Osborne, Lewis Carlton, and Allan Blair. Osborne introduced Spearing into his Plummer yarns, and so it is almost a certainty that he was responsible for the story in question."

Mr. Webb also asks if, in view of the Maxwell Scott article, whether I would publish the Numbers and titles of those stories by Scott that appeared in the Nelson Lee. I have already given them in a previous article, but I don't think that it would be out of place if I gave them again here.

- O.S. No. 7 A Miscarriage of Justice
- 8 The Convicts' Vendetta
- 13 In Borrowed Plumes
- 48 When Rogues Fall Out

It will also be of interest to many to learn that, apart from these titles, there appeared in O.S. No's 420-431 and 432-441 two serials by Maxwell Scott entitled "The Silver Dwarf" and "The Missing Heir" respectively. Even more surprising, perhaps, is the fact that they were reprinted again, although slightly rewritten, in four Nelson Lee's as late as 1932 in the 2nd N.S. The titles of these were

- 2nd N.S. No.112 The Quest of the Silver Dwarf
- 113 The Trail of Fortune
- 114 The Missing Heir
- 115 The Final Round

These stories were of course reprints of the stories that originally appeared in the "Boys' Friend" in 1901-1902. "The Silver Dwarf" appearing in the first 2d Christmas No. in 1901 and "The Missing Heir" in No.42 in 1902.

Another informative letter comes from Mr. Burrow of Leeds. He groups the early stories as follows:- "Regarding the early issues of the N.L., I judge from the style of writing that Nos.1,4,9,20 were written by the same author, that a second author wrote Nos.2,10,18, and a third author wrote Nos. 3,6,11, 12. Nos. 5,14,56 appear to be three separate authors. All the other early detective tales were by either E.S.B. or Teed or Maxwell Scott."

This alters slightly my own grouping, so let's see what we can arrive at in view of the information received. I have it on the authority of our worthy Editor that No.1 was by William Murray Graydon, in which case, according to Mr. Burrow, Nos.4,9 and 20 were also by him.

Mr. Webb tells us that No.2 was written by Mark Darran, so that accounts for Nos. 10 and 18. No.56 according to Mr. Webb is by A.S.Hardy.

As Mr. Burrow says, all the rest were by E.S.B., Teed or Scott. Which leaves us Nos. 3,6,11,12 by one author unknown, and Nos. 5 and 14 by two other authors.

It is a great pity that the editor's policy of using the words "By the author of——" was not given in the case of these six particular copies. However, next month I propose to give the names of Police officials contained in these stories in the hope that our U.J. friends will be able to trace them. Usually an author had his favourite Scotland Yard man and, if they can be traced, we can add the final chapter to the Nelson Lee's greatest mystery - "The Mystery of the Three Unknown Authors".

A name that will appear in this column frequently in the future is Mr.A.J.Southway. The indefatigable Mr. Southway has given me enough questions and suggestions to fill this column for months, in fact I'm slightly staggered by their variety. However, I'll do my best to get through them. All you'll need, Jim, is patience. I hope you've got plenty.

Now for the series which this month brings us into the 1st new series.

- O.S. No. 515-522 Cricket series (Note: Nos. 521 & 522 complete stories)
- No. 523-528 The Remove under canvas as Boy Scouts.
- " 529-536 Holiday Adventures in the Pacific (Intro. Clive Russell)
- " 537-541 Fullwood's Reformation
- " 542-549 Intro. Sara Quirke The Schoolboy Magician
- " 550-560 The Barring-out against Guy Sinclair.
(Note Nos. 550 & 551: Christmas at Dorriemore Castle)
- " 561-568 Horace Stevens' efforts to get his Father's play produced.
End of Old Series.

1st New Series.

Nos. 1-11 Sports Series

- " 12-19 Holiday Adventures in China
- " 20-25 Handforth as Remove Captain

Finally this month's titles:

- O.S. No. 191 Dr. Stafford's Ordeal
- 192 Who Killed the Colonel
- 193 The Schoolboy Sleuth
- 194 The Colonel's Secret
- 195 The Mysterious X
- 196 The College House Martyrs
- 197 The Schemers of the Sixth
- 198 The Bullies League
- 199 The Breaking Point
- 200 The Council of Eight
- 201 The Spy of the Remove
- 202 The Treachery of Study A
- 203 The Rascal of the Sixth
- 204 Free from Bondage
- 205 Faked Evidence
- 206 Expelled from St. Franks (Nipper)
- 207 Under False Colours
- 208 The Mystery of the Blue Grey Car
- 209 The Duffer of St. Franks
- 210 Bowled Out.

(The reason why other writers took over the "Spearing" stories was due to "Mark Darran" serving in the First World War and in which he was unfortunately killed. He was probably serving by the time the N.L.L. was started. - H.L.)



Those Magnet Artists!

1)

Grove Road, Surlitan.
4th June, 1949.

Dear Mr. Editor,

I should like to add my voice to your tribute to that great artist Leonard Shields, whose superb pictures of boyhood must have added in no small measure to the success of the Magnet.

While I agree wholeheartedly that Mr. Shields was the finest of the many illustrators of our papers, I feel that it is rather a pity that your contributors used the occasion of their tributes as one to voice an adverse criticism of the work of Mr. Chapman. Whether one agrees with the criticisms or not, it seems to me that the occasion was poorly chosen to speak adversely of the work of one who was a colleague, and perhaps a friend, of Mr. Shields.

I see that Mr. Whiter states that Mr. Shields did the first drawings of Bessie Bunter. I am surprised to learn this, and I am not yet quite convinced of the accuracy of the statement. Mr. Dodgson drew the first Bessie in the "School Friend", and to the best of my knowledge the first Bessie in the Magnet was drawn by Mr. Chapman. I make these comments without reference to my collection and my assumption may be wrong.

Yours sincerely,
ERIC PAYNE.

2)

64 Woodlands Road, Ilford.
5/6/49

Dear Mr. Editor,

I read the report of Leonard Shields' death in the "Sunday Express" of May 1st, but missed Charles Hamilton's (Frank Richards) rather petulant reply a week later and have only just perused it in the June C.D.

We all know that Shields was not the first "Magnet" artist, but Charles Hamilton is incorrect in stating

that Arthur Clerke was the originator of Billy Bunter in illustration.

The credit for originating the over-rated Fat Boy of Greyfriars in picture form belongs to Hutton Mitchell who illustrated the "Magnet" up to No. 39.

Sincerely yours,
J. MEDCRAFT.

Nice Work!

Amersham, Bucks.
June 12th, 1949.

Dear Mr. Leckonby,

On seeing the letter from Messrs. Campion I immediately got in touch with them, and suggested two articles - one on Secret Codes, and one on Radio. I was asked to submit and I am pleased to say they have both been accepted and are to appear in "Tom Merry's Annual".

Wishing the C.D. continued success,
Yours sincerely,
REX DOLPHIN.

More Nice Work!

4 Waterloo Road, Blyth,
Northumberland, 10/6/49.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I have just had an article on "Stamp Collecting" accepted by "Mandeville Press" for publication in "Tom Merry's Annual", thanks to C.D. I got in touch with them and I have just had confirmation that it was satisfactory. It runs to 1,500 words and I am supplying the illustrations myself.

So I will be looking forward to "Tom Merry's Annual" with double anticipations, first for the thrill of meeting old favourites and secondly to see my first paid article in print.

Yours sincerely,
J. HEPBURN.

AND MORE!

21 Clegg Street, Eccles,
Manchester.

June 8th.

Dear Mr. Leckenby, Many thanks for the June issue of the C.D. Several of my stories are appearing in a new boys' paper called "The Mascot". Perhaps you have already seen a copy. Hoping to hear from you soon, Yours sincerely, JOHN E. REYNOLDS.



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

THE ROUND TABLE

June 1949

One of the highlights of the past month, as far as Blakiana are concerned, was the visit of the two old UNION JACK artists to the Old Boys Book Club Meeting at Stanmore on the 12th June. I refer, of course, to Eric R. Parker and Kenneth Brooks. By the reports received Mr. Parker gave a lot of very useful information about various Blake writers and illustrators, including some interesting anecdotes on his own career. At an early age he went to an Art School before joining up and fighting in World War I. After the war he was engaged to draw for the Amalgamated Press, his first work for them being in 1921. It is interesting to hear that his work was thought a lot of by Mr. H. W. Twyman, at that time one of the leading lights (behind the scenes) at Fleetway House. Readers of the U.J. in 1924 will probably recall his excellent serial "The Mystery Of the Marshes" which was about the only occasion his name appeared in print, at least as far as The U.J. was concerned. Mr. Parker's zest for work will be appreciated when it is known that as well as doing a lot of drawings for the A.P. he was, at one and the same time, doing Pepy's Diary and "Paule" for "The Daily Express". He related that he does the S.B.L. covers four at a time, two for the current month and two for the next month. From my own point of view it is a pity that he does not do the Sexton Blake

drawings for the "Knockout" comic, although this strip feature featuring Blake is far below par as far as we Blake fans are concerned. His work might at least give a bit of authenticity to the feature! As we already know from the wonderful Sexton Blake bust (mentioned in the last part of Rex Dolphin's article in this issue) Mr. Parker is very good at sculpture. He related how he came to design the bust at the behest of H. W. Twyman who thought that it would be good sales propaganda. I can imagine the members of the O.B.B. Club laughing when he told them how Blake's neck wilted and he had to put a lead pencil down the neck through the back of his head.

Of course it is obvious also that E.R.P. is fond of drawing. Only one doing such consistently good work could treat it as a hobby as well as a means of income. But it is interesting to note that he is also fond of figure work, historical material and items of general interest. He uses oils and water colours for these off-shoots. In addition to the U.J. he has drawn for "The Corner Magazine", "Strand" and others. At this point he mentioned the fact that his earliest drawing commission in 1915 was for a series of comic postcards. Those following his work since 1921 will often have noticed that his humorous characters were just as well done as his crooks. This is most noticeable in the stuff he did for the well known Gwyn Evans Xmas stories.

As is to be expected his father and his brother are useful with their hands, but it is doubtful if they have his natural gift for drawing, a fact which he admitted. He says he is quite thrilled to illustrate the various papers he is interested in and said that at one time in 1940 he did drawings in air-raid shelters between one and two in the morning.

As I have often thought, especially when considering E.R.P.'s work, he considers that authors can write as quick as artists can illustrate the stories they turn out.

Well, it must have been a most interesting meeting that Sunday afternoon and I, for one, would have loved to have been there. Perhaps a chance will come some time in the future. Who can tell?

I would like to say here that the above information was taken from a report compiled by that energetic member of the O.B.B. Club, Leonard Packman, to whom I tender many thanks.

Where is Drummond? A few weeks ago I was looking through the Authors' "Who's Who" and saw the name John Drummond therein.

Ah! I thought, this must be the author of the Blake stories although it is not mentioned here. So I sat down and typed out a few lines to the gentleman concerned and waited very patiently, for I have for ages tried to contact Blake authors and this seems as good a chance as any. Not long to wait! Back came a most interesting letter from Mr. John Drummond to the effect that he had not even read, leave alone written, a Blake story. But I was delighted to learn that he was interested in the old papers if not particularly so in Sexton Blake, and I am pleased to say that we can now welcome him to our circle of devotees. I sent him a copy of a recent John Drummond S.B.L. which he enjoyed very much and now, as will be seen from his advertisement in this issue, is all out to get hold of what we consider the classic Blake story. Herbert Leckenby informed him that his own favourite was the very first S.B.L. in 1915 entitled "The Yellow Tiger" and I do hope that somebody will be able to let Mr. Drummond have a copy, although it is, I know, a very rare item. But while on the subject I would appreciate it if you fellow Blakians would write and let me know what YOUR opinion is. What do you consider the finest Blake story you have read? Never mind whether it be old or new. We wish to let Mr. Drummond know the general opinions of Blake readers. There is a reason for his wishing to know as may be seen ere long.

But where is the Blake "John Drummond"? Is this name a nom de plume?

Titles. I have had several letters from readers re my plans for publishing a complete range of U.J. and S.B.L. titles. They all seem to welcome the idea and so, before long, you will all be able to complete your records as far as it is possible at the moment.

Cheerio for now,

H. M. BOND.

SEXTON BLAKE'S GOLDEN AGE

A new article by Rex Dolphin

Part V

What of Blake's own character during the period under review? It remained pretty constant except that some of the early authors were apt to disregard real detective work and make him impetuous and given to jumping to conclusions. Blake

certainly became more of a detective towards the end of the period, and more convincing, as modern authors took over.

Some authors, notably Gwyn Evans, were apt to dress Blake up in the Sherlock Holmes props - dressing-gown, monographs, long-winded "deduction". Others, Chester, Brisbane, Skene, made him chiefly a man of action though a keen observer and reasoner from trifles. I, for one, do not mourn the passing of the "dressing-gown" era. It was picturesque, but unnecessary, and too reminiscent of Holmes. Blake obviously is derived from Doyle's hero, but has a distinct character of his own, as we all know.

Tinker grew up during the decade. Many stories previous to 1920 depicted him as a callow, ill-spoken youth of about 14. In 1926 the UNION JACK editor described him as 18. Modern stories place him at about 24. Tinker had his romantic period too, at the hands of G. H. Teed, and with a junior edition of Yvonne and Roxane named Nirvana. Perhaps the least said about that the better!

No record of the Golden Age would be complete without mention of Eric R. Parker, whose contribution towards Blake's greatness was probably more important than any other individual's. Parker's drawings of circa 1923 were cruder than most of the artists' then featured, with no hint of the slick mastery which was to come. But in a couple of years he had improved out of all recognition, and was definitely the star artist. From 1926 onwards every drawing was a joy. Every character came to life. Blake, whom we had pictured imperfectly before, now became a living, recognisable man. In the Sexton Blake bust he actually took shape, and that marvellous head is surely one of the finest representations of a fictional character ever created.

What of the future? One thing is certain. We can never resurrect the past. We know in our hearts that the Golden Age has gone for ever. Let's look back at it, re-live it and revere it. Other stories are being written now - the Blake saga continues. Is it too much to hope that sometime in the future, another, different, Golden Age may dawn?

THE END

We welcome a new contributor to our pages, Walter Webb of Sparkhill, Birmingham. He will interest you with his article dealing with the older Blake stories.

BLAKE - HIS EARLIER DAYS AND CHRONICLERS

Part 1

In the issue of THE UNION JACK No. 1508 w/e 10th September 1932 there appeared in the columns of "The Round Table" feature one of the most momentous announcements that ever drew the attention of readers of that paper.

It may be remembered that, faced by an insistent demand by his readers to be informed of the identity of Sexton Blake's creator, the Editor at that time got into touch with a former Editor, which resulted in the publication of some of the most interesting information about Blake's earlier chroniclers, which up until then, had been told.

The former Editor, who was occupying the editorial chair round about the year 1905, when the policy of featuring the famous detective every week was being planned, was unable to name Blake's creator, but gave the 1932 Editor the identities of three of the men who wrote between them the early revival of Blake stories. The names of these authors were given as (a) Henry St. John Cooper, Cecil Hayter and Dr. J.W. Staniforth, the last named being better known, of course, as Maxwell Scott.

The stories which were attributed to Cecil Hayter have long since been "discovered" by enthusiastic researchers, as have also those penned by Maxwell Scott. The Henry St. John Cooper relics are not nearly so easily picked out, and it seems safe to say that, of the three, he had the smallest output. Certainly he faded out before 1915, what time his two colleagues were still turning out Blake yarns periodically.

But it was curious that the former Editor could not recall the names of the two other writers who, at that time, were contributing Blake stories regularly, and who, in output, far exceeded in quantity the yarns of those of the three last named put together! I refer to Wm. Murray Graydon and Mark Darren, both of whom commenced the Blake revival stories when they appeared mixed between tales of school life and adventure featuring other characters and heroes.

The policy of publishing the stories anonymously was not strictly adhered to in those very early days; several tales had

the author's name attached to them. For instance, in U.J. No. 95 there appeared the story "Detective and Fakir", a story of Blake at the Pearl fisheries. Readers were allowed to know that Arnold Davis was the chronicler.

.. To be continued.

In August we shall give you:- The Round Table; U.J. Titles List No.1; Conclusion of S.B.L. 3rd series titles; Part 2 of "Blake - His Earlier Days and Chroniclers"; Part 2 of "Sexton Blake and The 1st World War".

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY - 1942

Third Series: 15-38

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 15. The Case of The French Raiders. | John Hunter. |
| 16. The House With Steel Shutters. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 17. The Case Of The Mad Inventor. | John Cresseay. |
| 18. The Riddle Of The Uncensored Letter. | John Hunter. |
| 19. The Mystery Of The Stolen Despatches. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 20. The Man Who Baled Out. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 21. +The Sign Of The Blue Triangle. | Stanton Hope. |
| 22. The Mystery of The Bombed Hotel. | Anthony Skene. |
| 23. The Silk Stocking Murder. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 24. The Stowaway Of The "S.S.Wanderer". | Anthony Parsons. |
| 25. The Case Of The Missing Stoker. | Lewis Jackson. |
| 26. The Fatal V Sign. | Martin Fraser. |
| 27. The Riddle Of The Black Racketeers. | John Hunter. |
| 28. The Secret Of The Burma Road. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 29. The Cornish Coast Conspiracy. | D. L. Ames. |
| 30. The Paper Salvage Crime. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 31. The Secret Of The Demolition Worker. | John Hunter. |
| 32. The Plot Of The Yellow Emperor. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 33. The Case Of John Muir Of The Merchant Navy. | Lewis Jackson. |
| 34. The Mystery Of The Underground Factory | Gilbert Chester. |
| 35. ++The Mystery Of The American Envoy. | John Hunter. |
| 36. The Riddle Of The Captured Quisling. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 37. The Victim Of The Combine. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 38. The Case Of The Bronze Statue. | John Hunter. |

+Featuring Joe Harmon and Mike O'Flynn.

++Featuring Captain Dack and Sam Tench.

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY - 1943Third Series: 39-62

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------|
| 39. | Private Carter's Crime. | John Cressay. |
| 40. | The Riddle Of The Disguised Greek. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 41. | The Army Defaulter's Secret. | L.C. Douthwaite. |
| 42. | The Mystery Of The Kidnapped Munition
Worker. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 43. | The Mansion On The Moor. | John Purley. |
| 44. | The Case Of The Missing D.F.C. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 45. | The Case Of The Suspect Watchmaker. | Lewis Jackson. |
| 46. | The Devil Of Danehurst. | John Hunter. |
| 47. | +The Terror Of Tregarwith. | John Sylvester. |
| 48. | The Soldier Who Came Back. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 49. | ++The Affair Of The Bronze Basilisk. | Anthony Skene. |
| 50. | Doctor Sinister. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 51. | The Shipyard Menace. | Joseph Stamper. |
| 52. | Calling Whitehall 1212. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 53. | The Mystery Of Squadron X. | Walter Tyrer. |
| 54. | +++The Affair Of The Smuggled Millions. | Maurice B. Dix. |
| 55. | The Crime Of The Cashiered Major. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 56. | The Secret Of Stillwater Mere. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 57. | The Man From Madrid. | John Hunter. |
| 58. | The Riddle Of Cubicle 7. | Anthony Parsons. |
| 59. | The Monopoly Menace. | John Hunter. |
| 60. | The Case Of The Repatriated Prisoner. | Gilbert Chester. |
| 61. | The Curse Of The Carringtons. | Walter Tyrer. |
| 62. | The Case Of The Secret Road. | Anthony Parsons. |

+Filmed as "The Echo Murders" with David Farrar
as Sexton Blake

++Featuring Monsieur Zenith.
+++Featuring "Punch" Bennett.

Next month: "Union Jack" titles 1000 to 1050 and
The S.B.L. Third Series - 1941.

Commencing September:- Titles of S.B.L. 1st Series.

Can any reader supply titles or any information of S.B.L. 1st
Series volumes No's:- 7, 9, 35 to 40, 58?

The reproduction on the inside Front Cover
is from the "London Evening News", of the 25th May,
1949. And on the back page from the "Wood Green
Observer, 3rd June, 1949. (H.K. has gone a little
astray in places, nevertheless its fine publicity.

H.L.)

THE OLD BOYS

(of Greyfriars, Bookwood, St. Jim's)

ARE HERE!

ABOUT four times a year men of almost all ages, from all over London, travel by tube to Wood Green, walk a short distance down Lordship-lane and knock on the door of No. 706.

Ordinary chaps, they have one distinguishing mark: their pockets are bulging with magazines—boys' magazines. For these are the members of the London Old Boys' Book Club. Their old schools are not Eton or Harrow, but Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Bookwood, St. Francis. They are the men whose hobby is collecting the tales of Billy Bunter and Harry Wharton—yes, and possibly even Benny Bunter, too.

Secretary of the club, which was founded 18 months ago, is Mr. Ben Whiter, owner of the Lordship-lane flat. And his brother, Robert, is the treasurer.

"We have a number of members in Wood Green and around that part," Mr. Leonard Jackson, the chairman and co-founder, told me. "Our meetings are held once a month and we generally meet in Wood Green quarterly."

They take things seriously, these "Old Boys." In addition to their London meetings, they sometimes meet as far afield as Brighton, and they have already some 350 members scattered not only over the British Isles, but also other parts of the world.

Privately printed in the *Nursery* and *Old Boys* magazines. The *Collector's Digest*, which also acts as an exchange and mart among members, for trade in old Magazines and Gems and copies of the Nelson Lee library is held and runs very

"specimens" fetch high prices. President of the club? That's an easy one, for who should it be other than Mr. Charles Hamilton himself. If you do not recognise the name, you may perhaps know him better as Frank Richards, creator of the Famous Five, or Martin Clifford, author of numberless stories of the Terrible Three. Responsible for every one of these stories about the now famous schools—including Bessie Bunter and her girls' school—Mr. Hamilton has been writing them for more than 40 years.

Recently Mr. Packman sent him a copy of the *Gems* for 1915 to have it autographed. Mr. Hamilton wrote back that "Martin Clifford" had taken the opportunity of re-reading the story and considered it the best that he ever wrote.

But the Old Boys' club does not confine itself to one author. Books collected range from Victorian rarities to almost the present day. Mr. Edwy Swarles Brooks comes second to Mr. Hamilton in their esteem. He wrote the St. Frank's stories in the Nelson Lee library. Recently he visited club members at one of their meetings and talked over happy days at the old school.

The club has already been responsible for some exhibitions of halfpenny, penny and twopenny "treasures"—one most successful exhibition was at Inlington public library and it is hoping to arrange some more in the near future. Interest, the members find, runs high.

I would go to their next meeting myself, only I fear being discovered to be an interloper. This surely, could lead to only one thing: my being thrown down the stairs, shrieking, "Largo . . . you bouncers . . . rotters . . . each . . . largo . . . YARDOOOP!" E.K.