

THE COLLECTOR'S DIGEST

JANUARY 1955

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Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
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A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

THEY GOT AWAY ONCE MORE: On the morning of December 17th, the "Annuals", all addressed and stamped, were stacked high on the tables of the York Duplicating Services awaiting the arrival of H.M.'s. mail van. When I looked in again in the afternoon the tables had been cleared. I gave a sigh of relief - once again our "Annual" was away to all points of the compass. It is possible that one Australian enthusiast received his copy by Christmas Day, for so keen was he that he would insist upon it being sent by air-mail. I felt flattered seeing the postage was more than the cost of the "Annual".

A day or two of anxious waiting, then came the first report. It came appropriately enough from my first hobby friend, Harry Dowler. My heart leapt, for this is what I read:

"A marvellous production, the best ever! Congratulations to you and the York Duplicating Services for such a worth-while job. Your subscribers must be absolutely thrilled when they open their envelopes and see such a glorious array of articles, so informative and almost encyclopedic, about their favourite authors and papers of their boyhood days. And so well produced, a positive delight to the eye. You have indeed increased the joy of our Christmas. Many, many thanks and I really mean it."

Well, a perfect start indeed. Harry, he won't mind me saying, can be a candid critic. If he thinks something is not up to the mark, he isn't afraid to say so. Consequently his praise is all the more appreciated.

A few minutes after I had read Harry's letter came a telegram from Dublin - "Congratulations - Wonderful Annual received

today. John Stokes."

A little later a letter from Anthony Baker I can't resist quoting:

"After days of anxious waiting it has come!! If I say that this year's C.D. Annual is the best ever, I shall be understating it, for quite honestly, I don't know how to praise it enough. It is a quite incredible masterpiece. The articles the illustrations, the production, and the information are A.1.+⁺ And so it went on right up to Christmas. I don't mind saying now that when I was working day after day on the "Who's Who" I got a little tired, but by gosh! it's all been worth while. What pleases me too is that coupled with praise for the contents, there's praise for the York Duplicating Services. They fully deserve it.

Well that's the eighth year in succession. How empty my Christmas would seem to be without it. In any more Christmasses left for me may there always be an Annual in my prayer.

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97, 98, 99, 100! That next big event draws ever nearer, so sharpen your pencils. Most likely the price will be 2/6, and nearly double the usual number of pages. I should like some of you to tell of how you first heard of the C.D., and of any happy experiences or friends you have made as a result. I shall have something to say on that score myself, but I shall have to curb myself, for if I told all the story, I should require a production as big as the Annual!

GREETING CARDS: My very best thanks to all who sent me cards at Christmas. What a grand display they made. It thrills me to think of what a lot of friends I've got.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

"ANNUAL" CORRECTIONS

- Page 28. 'The Ken King Stories' in the Boy's Friend Library - Delete No. 557 "The Outlawed Three". It was a 'Rio Kid' story.
- Page 28. D.B. Webster's Advert. The Holiday Annual required is for year 1935, not 1929.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by Josephine Packman

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22

Owing to the length of the articles I am once again left with only enough room for a few words. Next month I will be back with my usual page. Meanwhile I trust you all enjoyed your C.D. Annual - especially the "Blake Circle" feature.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

SEXTON BLAKE 1954By DEREK FORD

In the "Case of the Fatal Souvenir" (S.B.L.119) Lewis Jackson refers to a periscopic mirror which Sexton Blake sometimes uses to observe the client awaiting him in his consulting room. It is a pity that he does not also possess a mirror which could give him some idea of the cases his chroniclers are about to credit him with, too. If such an apparatus were available to him I feel sure he would have refused responsibility for quite a few of the cases attributed to him in 1954, published in the S.B.L. run 303 to 326. To be brief, the only thing that went "up" last year in the S.B. World was the price of the Library from 8d. to 9d. in June: as usual there was no intimation or explanation of this increase.

Seven of the usual twenty-four case-books came from Anthony Parsons - one more than in 1953. Two of these cases take Blake abroad, to India and Morocco. His "Secret of the Moroccan Bazaar" (319) is notable for featuring Blake right the way through from page one. Just the opposite, however, was "The Wicked Three" (322) reminiscent of the "Case of the Jap. Contract" (271) I thought - in which Blake plays only a small part. This case incidentally, introduces his Godson, barrister Guy Statham, successfully defending his first murder case. Superintendent Venner appears in three of these cases. The case-book best enjoyed was "The Secret of Sinister Farm" (305).

From Walter Tyrer, Hugh Clevely and Rex Hardinge came four case-books apiece. The only case written-up by Tyrer worthy of S.B. in my opinion was his "Riddle of the French Alibi" (303);

the rest were poor affairs, especially the "Council Swindle" (318), a most weary investigation: compare it with Paul Urquhart's "Boro' Council Ramp", published in 1937. I think Clevely's "Heir of Tower House" (313), starring Pedro the bloodhound, was his best case-book in 1954; the rest weren't too bad. Rex Hardinge went in for wholesale murder at sea in case-book 308 and 315; unfortunately I must rate the latter and 325 as intruders into the S.B.L., for they only featured Blake as an incidental character. No. 306 was all right.

John Hunter, contrary to my note in "Sexton Blake 1953" that he had given up writing for the S.B.L., produced two case-books (312 and 320) to his usual formula; both cases take Blake to France.

Stanton Hope, John Drummond and George Rees provided the remaining three case-books. Of these, I regard Hope's "Mystery of the Engraved Skull" (309) - taking Blake to Australia in a search for, among other things, the sunken gold stripped from the Kee Jong Temple dome, and re-uniting him with those navy types Joe Harman and Mike O'Flynn - as the best S.B.L. I read last year. I commend Rees' "Secret of the Suez Canal" (324) for its well-drawn background.

Briefly, Eric Parker illustrated fourteen issues; did you notice his mistake on cover of S.B.L. No. 317?

A note of future titles began in August. There were no "Magazine Corners". The only "fillers" were two "Laughter in Court".

The two-page Blake strip still appeared in the "Knockout". The illustrations leave much to be desired, but the strip story is not bad considering its limit of a new case every week.

In conclusion, I should like to tell you this story told me by a London correspondent:

Looking in a shop off Charing Cross Road, he spied in the window a much-battered bust of Sexton Blake, labelled "Straight from the Temple of Mithras, 15/-".

He comments: "As the Temple is reckoned to be some 1,800 years old, this must surely be the first Sexton Blake!"

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SEXTON BLAKE ON THE FILMS

By WALTER WEBB

PART TWO.....ON THE SOUND TRACK

The novelty that synchronized sound brought to motion

pictures had long worn off before any decision was arrived at to make a full-length, all-talking Sexton Blake picture, and it was not until the year 1935 that a British company began work on a screen adaption of Hamilton Teed's story "They Shall Repay!", which was published in UNION JACK No. 1,378 and featured Mademoiselle Roxane. When I first saw this film in Birmingham eighteen years ago - it was called "Sexton Blake and the Mademoiselle" - it required much fortitude on my part to sit and see the whole thing through, for, like many of its predecessors, it was a drab affair, not through any fault of the artistes, but due to the material at their disposal which offered no scope at all for them to exercise their talents. Made by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and directed by Alex Bryce, this picture was generally released week commencing 10th February 1936, and had George Curzon playing the role of Sexton Blake and Tony Sympton as Tinker. Both were no more than adequate in their respective parts, as was Lorraine Grey as Roxane. The character of Inspector Thomas was played by Edgar Norfolk.

A bad start to the new Sexton Blake talking pictures, which was destined to be very little improved upon in the near distant future. Two years later Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer released another Blake film, entitled "Sexton Blake and the Hooded Terror", which was adapted from the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY story, "The Mystery of No. 13 Caversham Square", by Pierre Quiroule, and quite a number of players well known in British films appeared in the cast. George Curzon and Tony Sumpson were again Sexton Blake and Tinker; Granite Grant was played by David Farrar, and Mademoiselle Julie by Creta Gynt. A notable addition to the cast was Tod Slaughter, well known for his portrayal of Sweeny Todd, the Demon - Barber, who was seen in the role of a character named Michael Larran. Mrs. Bardell, Blake's housekeeper, was portrayed by Marie Wright. Slightly better than the previous film but a long, long way from being a good production, and one can only sum up by recording it as a waste of time for the excellent artistes who appeared in it.

Early in 1945 came an hour and twenty minutes' offering of another film featuring the famous character, entitled "Meet Sexton Blake". David Farrar, who had played the character of Granite Grant in the previous picture, enacted the role of Sexton Blake in this one and gave quite a good performance. A young actor named John Varley played Tinker. The film was an adaption of Anthony Parsons' story, "The Case of the Stolen Despatches"

(S.B.L.No.19, New Series), and was directed by John Harlow. As in most of Anthony Parsons' stories Superintendent Venner was prominently featured, as was also Sergeant Belford. Venner was played by the well-known British actor, Gordon McLeod. The character of Yvonne, who was undoubtedly the Mademoiselle Yvonne de Braselieu of the S.B.L. stories, was played by Magda Kun, and that of Mrs. Bardell was in the capable hands of Kathleen Harrison. Hardly a brilliant bit of casting here, for although the latter is in the front rank of British's character actresses, she lacks the physical proportions necessary to make her identical in any way to Blake's generously-formed housekeeper. It was indeed a very emaciated-looking Mrs. Bardell who flitted across the screen in this particular film - a film notable not so much for its quality, which was only moderate, but for the appearance of a sixteen-year-old girl, playing only her second part in pictures, who is today, both here and in America, famous for her many splendid performances in films in which she has appeared, on the strength of which she has reached well-merited stardom. In private life Mrs. Stewart Granger, she is better known as Jean Simmons.

During the same year, just prior to Christmas, British National-Anglo-American Pictures distributed a further Sexton Blake film directed by John Harlow. This one was called "The Echo Murders", based on the S.B.L. story "The Terror of Tregarwith", by John Sylvester, published in May 1943, and once again David Farrar played the role of Sexton Blake. A notable absentee was Tinker, and neither was Mrs. Bardell featured; in fact, in this hectic but confused picture, Blake battled without the assistance of any of the various favourite supporting characters well-known to readers of the Blake papers.

This is the last Blake film to date, and at the time of writing there is no sign of any further productions featuring the famous character going before the cameras, for, without exception, they pulled in very little at the box-office. That they were poor money-spinners may be attributed to several factors; firstly, they were made as cheaply as possible; secondly, hardly one name likely to mean anything at the box-office was included in any of the productions; thirdly, selection of the stories adapted for the screen left a lot to be desired, and since they were all indifferently acted, directed and produced have long since been forgotten by the ordinary film-goer. If remembered at all it must be by the few

remaining loyal readers of the Blake papers.

Looking back on the hundreds of Blake stories that have been written, it must be admitted that a vast number of them would lend themselves most unkindly to cinematographic treatment. They were written for the thriller fan, and that means principally for masculine consumption, but a film which aims solely at satisfying the male with no regard at all for the entertainment of the opposite sex is destined to flop.

The series of Sexton Blake stories ideally suited to the screen would be the Nirvana tales by Hamilton Teed, for they contain everything necessary to make good entertainment in that medium - a good plot, containing a strong human interest, with romance, adventure and crime proportionately blended. Having, with good reason, cast a vote of no confidence in British producers, I would like to see a Hollywood effort in respect of the Nirvana stories with all British players - or nearly so - in the leading roles. In the hands of a good scenario-writer these stories could be compressed into a whole to make a film - preferably in technicolour - which would appeal to the vast majority of cinema audiences. And who more suitable for this task than Barré Lyndon, himself an old Sexton Blake writer, now resident in Hollywood, and famous for his highly successful play, "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse", which was not only a success on stage and screen, but was very favourably received on T.V. and Radio. Barré Lyndon also wrote the scenario for that excellent and unusual film "War of the Worlds", besides several others. Better known to readers of the old boy's papers as Alfred Edgar, he was for a time editor of the Nelson Lee Library, in which capacity he has not escaped a certain amount of criticism from surviving readers of that periodical. But if his editorial ventures did not meet with the success aimed for, there is no question as to his ability as a writer, and he would be just the man to write up Sexton Blake for the screen.

Given the job of selecting the cast I would unhesitatingly choose British actor Guy Rolfe for the role of Sexton Blake, for any Blake follower who saw this fine actor in the part of the doctor in the recent British film, distributed by Renown Pictures, "Dance, Little Lady", must have been amazed at his uncanny likeness to the character as portrayed by that talented artist, E.R.Parker in the Blake papers. Dirk Bogarde, one of the most popular young stars of the British screen, would fill the role of Tinker admirably,

whilst for the part of Mademoiselle Yvonne, the beautiful young adventuress who caused such riotous disturbances in the heart of the famous detective, Maureen O'Hara has all the necessary qualifications to make the role a successful one. Finding a British star or featured player to take the part of Nirvana the waif, who did to the youthful Tinker what Yvonne did to Blake, is a much more difficult task and I find it necessary to cast across the water for the star who would do more than justice to the role. The ideal choice there would be Virginia Mayo who although American is not obviously so, and has on more than one occasion filled the part of an English girl with success, as witness her pleasing performances as Lady Barbara Wellesley in C.S. Forrester's epic of the sea, "Captain Horatio Hornblower, R.N.", and as the Lady Edith in "King Richard and the Crusaders", the screen adaption of Sir Walter Scott's famous story, "The Talisman", which is now going the rounds. As the blonde dancer who stole Tinker's heart and almost caused a break-up in the Baker Street firm, Virginia Mayo would not only look the part but would invest it with both charm and intelligence, and having no little ability as a dancer would be in her element. With a musical score added, one or two original dance numbers introduced and under capable direction a film with such a fine cast with unstinted co-operation from the technical side to do full justice to their talents, the story of Nirvana the dancer could easily be made into a first-class motion picture of wide appeal. Of course, the chances of such a film being made are practically nil, but if in some surprising manner it was made, it would go a long way towards extinguishing the unhappy memories of those cheaply produced home-made pictures which have been mentioned in this record, for there is no denying the fact that Sexton Blake has had a bad deal on celluloid - it is time he was given a break.

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A 'SLUR' ON SEXTON BLAKE

By HERBERT LECKENBY.

According to a report in 'World's Press News', December 17th, Mr. F.C. Hooper, managing director of Schweppes Ltd., speaking at the Publicity Club of London, on December 13th made the following astonishing remark:

"I do not think there is any difference between the "horror comics" of today and the Sexton Blake stories which were my

constant reading when I was a boy."

Well I don't know at what period Mr. Hooper was a boy, but whenever it was he was talking sheer nonsense when he made that remark.

The early Sexton Blake stories which appeared in the Ed. Union Jack in the last decade of the 19th century were certainly crude judged by present-day standards, even so they were classics compared with the publications which are being so bitterly and rightly condemned at the present time.

To find anything to compare with them one has to go back much further than the first Sexton Blake story, back one hundred years to the days of 'Varney the Vampyre' or 'The Feast of Blood'.

No, a thousand times No, Mr. Hooper, on behalf of Harry Blyth, Shaw Rae, Murray Graydon, Mark Darren, Hamilton Teed, Gwyn Evans and scores of others who cannot defend themselves, I'll say, "You were talking through your hat."

HANLTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

On December 19th the following letter appeared in the "Sunday Express":-

HONOUR HIM

There is one name I would like to see in the New Year Honours List - Frank Richards, author of the wonderful school-boy stories and legendary figures of Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton, and the others.

He brought so much happiness into the lives of young boys (and many not so young) that I consider in his old age some recognition is well merited. What a great code of conduct he also brought into his schoolboy yarns.

J. T. HANDLEY.

343 Pershore Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, 5.

Frank Richards is 82.

Well, I know that several members of our circle who saw it lost no time in writing to the editor saying they cordially agreed with it, I wrote one myself. Unfortunately none of them appeared

the following Sunday.

As this most worthy and sensible suggestion has now been given publicity in a national newspaper, however, I can now say that several months ago certain members of the O.B.B.C. took active steps in an endeavour to bring this much desired result about. A certain well-known M.P. was approached and that M.P. (one who has publicly spoken highly of the Magnet and Gem) replied promptly with some useful advice as to the proper procedure. So far nothing has developed, but these things take time.

In any event, of this I am sure, thousands of men, and women, of all ages, in all walks of life, all over the world, will cordially agree that if ever a man in the writing profession deserved the honour, it is the grand old man of boys' literature, and fervently hope that it will come to him in the evening of his days.

And now to lead off 1955, here is a provocative article by Gerry Allison. C.D. readers relish controversy (see out "Letter Box") so I guess there will be some replies to this.

HARRY WHARTON CAPTAIN OR HERO?

by Gerry Allison

"See, what a grace was seated on this brow" - Shakespeare.

Who is the greatest character in school story literature? There is no doubt about the answer. It is Harry Wharton without any doubt at all. Every reader of Charles Hamilton, whether his favourite school be Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, Cedar Creek or what have you, must in all fairness concede that Wharton leads the field. Of all the many hundreds of characters created by Frank Richards - to give him his best known name - none have such subtlety of personality, such depth of being, such a living reality as Harry Wharton of the Remove. He has so many sides to his character that he would be at once the delight and despair of any psycho-analyst.

But it is as the great Hero of schoolboy fiction that Wharton is supreme. He has all the grand positive virtues. He is gloriously brave, honourable, straightforward, loyal to his friends. He scorns all subtlety or subterfuge. He is handsome, frank, and sincere. And he is proud, with dignity but without arrogance. What a wonderful lad he is. Can one ever tire of re-reading the many fine series of tales in which he plays the leading part? The two 'Rebel' series, especially the latter; the

'Stacey' series; the equally fine 'Da Costa' series, and many others.

Carlyle says - "Hero-worship exists for ever and everywhere". Well, if the Saga of Chelsea would now like to add to his 'Heroes and Hero-worship' a chapter on 'The Hero as Schoolboy' he has a character absolutely made to order in Harry Wharton. He has always been one of my idols.

It was therefore with something of a shock that I read the following in a letter from one of our Club members. "..... and now I am looking forward to my next supply of books. I wonder if, for a time, I could have some which do not have too much accent on Harry Wharton. Although I agree he was a fine character study I was never his greatest admirer. Somehow or other he just didn't ring the bell for me.

Please, please don't get the impression that I have lost my enthusiasm because of what I have said about Wharton. If I could attend your meetings I would be prepared to claim that, if he had been, as well as Captain of the Remove, a real Leader, he would not have had the constant opposition from a not inconsiderable number of his Form!"

That certainly gave me something to think about! The writer of the letter is a senior Army Officer; a soldier with many year's experience of men, and especially the qualities necessary for leadership both in peace-time and in times of war. His opinion cannot be regarded as ignorant prejudice; he does know what he is talking about. The question which kept coming into my mind over and over again was this. 'Is Wharton a good leader?' I turned up the fine article on Wharton by Roger M. Jenkins in the 'C.D. ANNUAL' for 1951, and read it carefully through. I found that Wharton's capacity for leadership, or his role of Remove Captain is not referred to in any way.

I then went back to the very beginning and read of Wharton's first coming to Greyfriars. It is well known how his uncle, finding him an unruly, headstrong and wilful boy, sent him as a scholar to his own old school in order that he should be tamed by contact with other boys, much of course against Wharton's will. One of the first signs that Harry is intended to be cast in the role of head boy comes in Magnet No. 8, "The Nabob's Diamond", where he has his fortune told by Nadesha, a gypsy palmist. This is what she says:-

"The hand tells much. Shall I tell you what your nature is, young gentleman?"

"Yes," said Harry, smiling.

"You are proud and reserved and hot-tempered, not always just, and sometimes taking offence for a trifle," said the gypsy.

Wharton turned red. The chuckle with which his chums greeted the gypsy's words showed how true they were - at least, in the opinion of the Removites.

"Hot and wilful and reckless," murmured the gypsy, half to herself; "but sound at heart, high-spirited, a born leader of boys, and then of men. Yet your life may be wrecked, and if so, the danger will come from yourself - from your own temper and impatience."

Harry laughed rather uneasily.

"You are not flattering," he said....."

And now, after long thought, I wonder if Nadesha was not wrong in one particular. Was Wharton, after all, not a good leader? I have mentioned that amongst his traits that he was proud. Pride, the first of the seven deadly sins, the sin for which Satan was cast out from Heaven...."hurled headlong flaming from the Ethereal Sky, with hideous ruin". I remembered the well known passage in the Book of Proverbs, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall".

Yes, despite Wharton's courage, his fine sense of honour, his perfect equipment for the role of hero, there was a chink in his armour. His Achilles heel was ever his fatal pride.

The thought of Achilles prompts me to compare the great hero of Homer's Iliad with the hero of the Remove. Achilles, the greatest fighter amongst the Greeks - the champion of the Grecian host, whose final battle with, and victory over Hector is the most thrilling episode in any epic - Achilles, bravest of the brave WAS NOT THE LEADER OF THE GREEKS. No, Achilles too was proud. He too got on to his high horse, and would sit sulking in his tent, whilst the war went on without him. How like Wharton!

Homer did not make Achilles the leader of the Greeks because he knew that he was not the man for the post. His 'Captain of the Remove' was Agamemnon. Homer knew that bravery was not enough. Many other qualities are needed for leadership. Prudence, wisdom, humility, and the calm, unprejudiced mind.

I feel that my correspondent was perhaps right. There were others in the Remove better fitted for the leadership of the Form

than the handsome, brave, impulsive Wharton. One who comes to mind, rather oddly perhaps, is Lord Mauleverer. Despite that laziness, which was largely assumed after all, Mauleverer showed many signs of being a good leader. He was cool, tolerant, and very wise and true in judgment. Do you remember how he took the lead in the High Oaks rebellion when Mr. Quelch was unjustly dismissed. He bought a local mansion, and controlled the rebels wonderfully well. He finally got them to allow Mr. Quelch to take charge and run the Form correctly. And how truly great he was in the Crum series. And on both occasions when Wharton rebelled, Mauly was the man who stuck to him and tried to lead him straight.

Another Removite who would have made an excellent Captain of the Form is Field. Good at sport and in class, and a very level-headed chap, with no enemies. Even the cads respect Squiff, and he had no high and mighty airs to irritate them. Yes, S.Q.I. Field would have been an excellent leader. And what about Mark Linley? Perhaps in his case the Head-boy of the Form would not have been the Captain of Sports, but Linley had a great capacity for serious and honest leadership.

Just compare Wharton with Wingate, who was the ideal Captain. How fine and calm Wingate always is when he has to give judgment, or when he is up against Loder. He never gets into a sulky humour, and joins a rival team, letting Greyfriars go hang. No, he knows how to subdue his own resentment for the good of the School. When do we find Wharton considering the good of the Remove. Very seldom, I venture to think.

I have recently been reading through the Wycliffe tales by Jack North. At that school Jack Jackson is just another such lad as Wharton. Brave, adventurous, and always the leader of his 'Co' of five. Himself, MacDonald, O'Hara, Taffy Davies, and Beiram Sinhji. But the Commander, who led them in their games and in the Form, was Harry Merry, a chap very similar to S.Q.I. Field, and, like him, an Australian. Merry was a real leader, even if he was not the 'Hero' of the series.

Well, I have said my piece, and I hope no one will think that I have lost any of my love for Harry Wharton in considering whether he was an ideal Form Captain. I assure you I have not. But just think of Kipling's lines on what makes a man a leader of men:

If you can keep your head when all about you,
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too.....

The operative words are those underlined. I suggest that they do not apply to Harry Wharton, the Captain of the Remove at Greyfriars.

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DO YOU REMEMBER?

by ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 7 - Magnet No. 1418 - "Quelch's Easter Egg"

Some Collectors incline to the opinion that Greyfriars stories featuring Highcliffe were always more interesting than the others. Certainly, Highcliffe was a very interesting school, with some well-drawn characters - a great improvement on Rylcombe Grammar School or Bagshot as a rival establishment. The unscrupulous Ponsonby, the remarkable de Courcy, the snobbish Mr. Mobbs, and the doddering Dr. Voysey were a fine quartet - too fine, indeed, to be restricted to occasional performances. Highcliffe played a prominent part in the Courtfield Cracksman series, and in a number of single stories, like the occasion when Ponsonby destroyed some of Mr. Mobb's precious stamp collection and tried to incriminate Courtenay. Another typical - and seasonable - story was No.1418 entitled "Quelch's Easter Egg."

1935, like the previous year, was one of many series and few single stories. The story of Mr. Quelch's famous Easter egg was therefore all the more notable for being one of the few single stories. It was woven round a very slender theme but, like all stories by Charles Hamilton, there were no loose ends and no wasted incidents - everything dovetailed neatly into one complete and harmonious whole.

Bob Cherry had incurred the special enmity of Ponsonby, whose schemes of revenge all went awry until he hit upon the idea of sending Mr. Quelch an Easter egg with an insulting notice. The cover has a typical Chapman illustration depicting Mr. Quelch reading the insulting words: "Don't come back after Easter. We're fed up with you! Too much jaw, too much cane! Every man in the Remove is sick of your gargoyle of a chivvy. Get out and stay out!"

Pon had filled the remainder of the cardboard egg with an assortment of rubbish, including a torn up letter from Major Cherry

to his son, which Mr. Quelch regarded as conclusive proof, but the Head, with that touch of penetrating wisdom denied to the Remove master, decided that the circumstantial evidence was a little too thin, and his investigations revealed the truth. Mr. Mobbs, it may be added, refused to believe any ill of his favourite, and so Ponsonby escaped punishment from that quarter, though Nemesis was to overtake him from another. And so ended a pleasant, if not remarkable, story, which must have brightened Easter time at many a home twenty years ago.

MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd): 1356. The Bounder's Folly; 1357. The Vanished Schoolboys; 1358. The Slacker's Awakening; 1359. Who Walloped Wingate? 1360. The Mystery of the Head's Hat; 1361. Disowned by his Father; 1362. The Bounder's Rival; 1363. The Form-Master's Secret; 1364. Form-Master and Rogue; 1365. The Bounder's Big Bluff; 1366. The Schoolboy Trippers; 1367. The Shadowed Schoolboy; 1368. The Spying Form-Master; 1369. Bunter the Ventriloquist; 1370. Saving a Scapegrace.

Nelson Lee Column

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By JACK WOOD
NOSTAW, 328 Stockton Lane
York.



Here we are at the beginning of a new year, so first may I extend to all my readers best wishes for a Prosperous and Happy, 1955.

I had intended resuming our tour of Bannington this month, but pressure of business has caused me to neglect my researches in the files, so I crave your indulgence until circumstances are more

favourable. New Year being the time for sentimental remembrances, however, here is a timely reminder by an old friend.....

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

By JIM SUTCLIFFE

After 26 years I still have a very clear recollection of Saturday, August 4th, 1928. A cold wet day in my part of the country at any rate, so cold in fact that we had a fire (people complaining of last summer, please note) in front of which after tea I devoured that week's copy of the Nelson Lee.

It was No. 118 1st New Series and contained the story "Spirited Away", the opening yarn of the famous Indian Series.

However, what appealed to me most was the fact that the story opened in my own county with that famous trio, Handforth, Church and McClure arriving at Halstead. Actually Brooks named it Heddingstead in this particular story - a combination of Halstead and two adjacent villages - Dible and Castle Hedingham, but anyone who knows the little town will recognise in their arrival a very accurate description of Halstead.

It was not until three years later that I found that Brooks himself lived there and having since those days become a cyclist and covering on an average 6,000 miles a year, many are the pilgrimages I have made to this part of Essex, which to me is much more associated with St. Frank's than is Sussex, more generally termed the St. Frank's country. So, on Saturday, July 31st, 1954, I decided to see how many places in Essex and its adjoining counties I could visit in a day that would revive happy memories of stories by Edwy Searles Brooks.

Starting at the early hour of 5.30 a.m. I soon covered the 11 miles from my home to Chelmsford and just as I entered the town what should I see also entering from the London direction but a familiar looking Austin Seven. "By George!" I said to myself, "that looks like Hardy's old bus." And sure enough it was, with Hardy driving and Church and McClure in the back seats, all clad only in their pyjamas! Of course they had fallen out of the School Train at Bellton and were now on their way to Colchester, but instead of taking the Colchester road they carried straight on and under the railway bridge and turned into the little used highway that led to Braintree. Hardy himself had an idea that he was on the wrong road but there was no one about to ask.

I took the same road and suddenly realised that it wasn't

so quiet today for the Grey Panther came smoothly past followed by first a motor cyclist and then a sports M.G. What was more surprising was that Sexton Blake himself was at the wheel of the Grey Panther and Rupert Waldo in the M.G.! Incidentally in the M.C. was also £10,000 in golden sovereigns!

Just after this procession had passed me, a large chauffeur driven limousine came smoothly by containing no less a person than Sir Edward Handforth, M.P., but he did not accompany me far, for just after Little Waltham, but not quite up to the Highland Garage, he was kidnapped in broad daylight by the ruthless Green Triangle agents. What was more amazing however was that another Triangle man who looked Sir Edward's double re-entered the limousine and continued on my road. Only a short distance further on I found Handforth in trouble in his Austin, having discovered that his petrol tank was practically empty. Not unusual for Handy, you will remark! Still there's always the spare can. What! Empty too? And the Highland Garage is shut up, so Handy nurses the Austin along in hope of finding some petrol although neither he or Church and McClure have any money in their pyjama pockets.

I carry on, also petrolless, and find Handy thwarted from taking the Colchester road in Braintree by the sight of a policeman, so we all continue on the Halstead road and reaching this fine old Essex market town the arm of the law is again abroad, and partly in desperation and partly from a sudden flush of inspiration, Handy takes the Hedingham road and very shortly arrives at Stapleton Towers, Vivian Traver's home, where they not only frustrate a burglary but also relieve the burglars of enough petrol to take them to Colchester!

Myself, I passed straight through Halstead on the Sudbury road, although I was tempted to make a call at Tring Manor in the little hamlet of Pebmarsh so thinly disguised as Pellmarsh in the "Clue of the Frozen Knife".

In front of me, however, were still the bogus Sir Edward Handforth and Sexton Blake in the Grey Panther, the mystery motor cyclist, and Waldo in his M.G. We all passed through Sudbury and Long Melford. Now, suddenly, on a very desolate stretch of road, the motor cyclist began to overtake the Panther and as he drew level he pointed a pistol at Sexton Blake and fired at point blank range! The Panther severed off the road and came to a stop practically unharmed in a clump of bushes. Just as I arrived at the spot, Waldo had lifted Blake out and was just starting off with

the unconscious detective in his M.G. towards Bury St. Edmunds where he left him at the hospital, before becoming "Sexton Blake's Understudy" at the Manor House, Little Budeley. By the time I arrived at Bury St. Edmunds, it was evident that there was considerable activity by the local police and I soon learned that the bogus Sir Edward had been audaciously "kidnapped" by the Green Triangle in front of hundreds of people!

While confusion reigned in the town and the police were throwing road blocks across every exit, the real Sir Edward had been kidnapped back at Little Waltham!

Smart work Professor Zingrave!

Before leaving Bury myself, I recalled to mind the Christmas series of 1929. Snow was falling fast as the train with Edward Oswald Handforth's guests arrived at the station. Outside, well lighted motor coaches were waiting, and into them the party piled, and after many twists and turns of the old town they took the Long Melford road for Christmas at Travis Dene, the Handforth country estate.

Coming out of my reverie I took the Stowmarket road and arriving at this town I met a party of St. Frank's juniors headed by Lord Dorrinore. They were all carrying suitcases and seemed rather tired and disgruntled, considering they were just starting the Easter vacation at Dorrinore Hall. Christine and Co. of the College House looked very fed up indeed. I left them all struggling along on their three mile walk with Dorrie setting a brisk pace up in the front. Little did they dream of the adventures that lay head of them in the ill-fated airship "Suffolk Queen" and far off Mordania.

I continued on my way through Needham Market and Ipswich and shortly before reaching Colchester I turned off into the lanes towards Marks Tey. About five miles short of that small but important railway junction, I came across a large red charabanc of 1921 vintage.

Apparently there was some slight mechanical trouble, for the occupants, nine College House juniors under the leadership of Bob Christine, were wandering about the lane while the driver, in smart livery, made adjustments with a spanner.

Having finished he prepared to give the charabanc a trial run while the juniors watched.

A short distance away he turned it round and began to act in

a strange manner. He climbed out of his seat and began throwing out suitcases, bags and portmanteaux in a heap at the side of the lane. Then, with increasing speed and with hooter blaring, he drove back towards the party of juniors and as he swept past he pulled off false whiskers and wig to reveal himself as Nipper! As he passed, he threw out an envelope which someone picked up and on reading it Christine & Co. found that they were exactly five miles from Marks Tey Station with barely time left to walk there to catch the Stowmarket train.

As they stepped it out with their luggage they found little consolation in the fact that although their own April Fool's Day jape had misfired, Nipper & Co's was very successful.

No wonder they looked rather fed up when I saw them at Stowmarket!

Incidentally they were all "Fooled at the Finish" by Lord Dorrimore!

I now made my way home and arrived comfortably fired in time for tea, exactly twelve hours after I had started out, having covered 170 miles and over a quarter of a century of memories.

The stories I have mentioned are Union Jacks Nos. 799 and 1516, Nelson Lees, Old Series 304 and 305, 1st New Series 118, 160 and 188, 2nd New Series, No. 3.

Brooks was obviously fond of Essex and East Anglia and for Nelson Lee enthusiasts who possess cars or other means of transport, stories featuring particular places provide excellent objectives for a day's outing.

The following are a few from memory:-

Union Jack No. 801. Nelsons Lees 1st New Series No. 108.

2nd New Series Nos. 4, 5, 10 and 13.

Victor Gunn's "Nice Day for a Murder", Berkeley Gray's "Vultures Ltd." and Mr. Ball of Fire".

* * * * *

More memories are recalled by the following letters in the Daily Telegraph bearing on the current "horror comics" controversy:

VIVE NELSON LEE

To the Editor of The Daily Telegraph:

Sir, Although I am in general agreement with Mr. Kenneth Young in his criticisms of some Victorian and later horror fiction, I must gently protest that he spoils his case when he includes Nelson Lee

(the schoolmaster detective) as one of "often strange morality."

Lee always encouraged and exemplified probity of character, reasonable dealings and fair play, and a manly courage among his schoolboy wards. He had a quiet personality, was often introduced "reading in his study" or "taking a quiet constitutional"; he was in "thoughtful mood" and he gave friendly smiles!

Nor was he lacking as a teacher in school or out. He would give detailed descriptions, for example, of prehistoric animals, and ancient peoples to "the juniors" and would remind them of their studies - even when on holiday.

He used violence - usually "fisticuffs" - only in self-defence or to protect others against blackguards, wild men and such.

Incidentally, there are thousands of "old boys" who still read of Nelson Lee, perforce in old weeklies and monthlies, often in preference to reading about "heroes" who are themselves perverse, sadistic, but modern.

Yours faithfully,
V. WALLACE STOKES.

Darlington.

To the Editor of The Daily Telegraph:

Sir, As a former fan of Nelson Lee, mentioned by Mr. Kenneth Young, I must write to uphold the integrity of a man whose doings were chronicled weekly in a yellow covered periodical which devoted itself to the doings of plucky people in all stations of life.

I may perhaps have misunderstood Mr. Stokes, who implies that our hero was a member of the scholastic profession. In my memory he appears to belong exclusively to the private detective fraternity. Indeed, his series of non-stop investigations have allowed him but little time to hold down even a part-time job, in any other sphere.

Yours faithfully,
ALEXANDER W. GIBSON.

Worthing, Sussex.

URGENTLY WANTED: NELSON LEE'S, 1st New Series (1926-30) Nos.
1, 6, 16, 33, 35, 50, 134, 135. GOOD PRICE PAID. R. PAYNE,
5 BUGBROCKE ROAD, GAYTON, NORTHANTS.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON O.B.B.C. - REPORT OF THE MEETING HELD ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19TH.

Christmas meeting at "Cherry Place" once again and about the best of them all. Twenty three members were in attendance and the fine agenda was thoroughly enjoyed by all. C.H. Chapman was present and some of his first remarks were about the current "Collectors' Digest Annual". He stated what a very fine job of work it was and how he thoroughly enjoyed reading it; these remarks were endorsed by Chairman Len.

A very satisfactory report of the Hamilton section of the library was given by Roger Jenkins and it was unanimously agreed to him purchasing a bound volume of four numbers of the "S.B.L." A full list of what he has for loan will appear in the January issue of the newsheet. Bob Blythe gave a likewise satisfactory report of the Nelson Lee section. C.H. Chapman then kindly did three drawings on a blackboard of William George Bunter, Alonzo Todd and Frank Richards, these being greeted with great applause.

Following this Jean Jardine, aged nine, read out her essay that appeared in her Woodingdean School magazine on her favourite author, Frank Richards. More sincere applause and congratulations by the chairman.

Len then read excerpts from "Gem" number 608 entitled "The Amateur Advertiser" which were written in the first person. This also went down very well with the company present.

Bob Whiter then presented his quiz and this resulted in a win for Cliff Wallis, Bill Lofts being second and Roger Jenkins third.

Frank Vernon-Lay then produced his effort and this was won by Bill Lofts with myself second and Len Packman third.

Impromptu talk was given by Cliff Lettey of Bristol, who was attending the meeting with Frank Rutherford. A very fine effort and very enjoyable. One of the new famous feeds in the Rag was indulged in with hot mince pies greatly in evidence.

A very fine sale of "Magnets" took place together with other books that were in great demand.

Finally, C.H. Chapman shewed round many of his famous drawings of W.G. Bunter and the other equally famous characters. This

proved so interesting that the time simply flew and it soon came time for the Bristol pair to return, they very kindly taking Mr. Chapman home to Reading in their car. Bill Jardine left for Brighton, not forgetting to take Jean along with him. Thus with happy memories and the thoughts of reading the "C.D." Annual and the two "Owns" plus the latest Bunter book over the Yuletide another happy gathering terminated.

Annual General Meeting at Wood Green on Sunday, January 16th, 1955.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

NORTHERN SECTION CHRISTMAS PARTY, DECEMBER 11TH, 1954: The fifth Christmas Party was just as successful and enjoyable as its predecessors, the only regret being a smaller attendance. For reasons already explained, the tea was partaken of at the Craven Dairies, Boar Lane. Everyone satisfied, we proceeded to the Club Room. There no time was lost in getting down to the fun and games.

First came a Twenty Questions programme. Members of the team were J. Breeze Bentley, Cliff Beardsell (all the way from Stockport), Ron Hodgson and Jack Wood. The team was in brilliant form getting eleven out of fourteen, despite some real teasers. How the dickens Jack Wood got "The Dawn" so quickly beats me - he must have had some "training" from another Jack.

Then we had a couple of good Quizes; these, and the Twenty Questions, compiled by Gerry Allison. I shudder to think what would happen if ever he was absent.

Following this came some delightful piano playing by young Christine Banks. A real artiste on the instrument is Christine.

Back came Gerry with the reading of a Christmas Cedar Creek story from the Boys Friend to close a happy evening.

Next meeting, January 8th, 1955.

H. LECKENBY,
Northern Section Correspondent.

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING: Instead of the usual monthly meeting we had our Christmas Party on December 18th at the Crown Hotel, Corporation Street. The clan mustered in excellent strength and we were very pleased to welcome some visitors. Our Chairman acted as M.C. and we spent a pleasant evening with a varied programme of

games, some dancing, appropriate toasts, a reading from the "Cavandale Abbey" series and another from Bill Gander's Canadian Magazine about "Billy Bunter's Ailments". (There were read by Mrs. Corbett). Mr. Corbett entertained us with an accordian recital; and last but by no means least, we enjoyed a really scrumptious buffet well worthy of Billy Bunter's best efforts.

Perhaps it savours of "Blagging" and was not quite Greyfriars style to meet on licensed premises, but it must be recorded that the venue was very central and convenient, the private room admirable for our purpose, and our landlord spared no pains to make us happy and comfortable. I have expressed to him our grateful thanks and, incidentally, he hopes to see us again next year. Our thanks are due also to our pianists, a keen lady member (Mrs. Weston), for balloons and the loan of a gramophone; and to our Chairman and others.

EDWARD DAVEY.

* * * * *

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING - DECEMBER, 1954: There was a remarkable large attendance on this occasion, no less than eighteen members being present. As this was the pre-Xmas meeting, there was quite a seasonable appearance about the room, thanks to the Websters, and no time was wasted in getting things going.

The secretary having submitted the financial report, the state of which is quite satisfactory, section and club matters were dealt with by the chairman, and various points were discussed by those present. These included tentative arrangements for the New Year Party to be held on January 16th; this will be run on similar lines to last year's party, and, judging from the suggestions offered, it promises to be even more successful. Final details will be discussed at our next meeting on January 9th.

The next three hours were fully occupied in entertainments of a most varied description, a good start being made with a novel picture quiz presented by Frank Unwin. Peter Webster and Jim Burke were the winners of this easy (?) competition, with 15 and 14 points respectively.

Then followed the poetry competition - and what an eye-opener this was! We little suspected the wealth of hidden talent in our midst; a most surprising and gratifying feature of this event was the fact that not one member failed to submit an effort. The

LETTER BOX
MORE FAME FOR BUNTER!

December 22nd, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. and C.D. Annual - two treats for Christmastide! I have just been reading the article on King of the Islands; interesting to me, at least, from the first word to the last. And the "First Christmas Gem" brought back many very happy memories. Can it really be nearly half-a-century since it was written? It doesn't seem like it in the very least.

I was very much amused the other day by a letter in the Sunday Express, the writer of which proposed Frank Richards for the Honours List! What an idea! A kind thought, never likely to materialise. But Bunter, at least, is going to be honoured, by inclusion in an Encyclopedia, as the editor of the same has recently informed me.

We are having wild weather here and the stormy winds do blow. I half-expect the roof to go sailing out to sea, taking the T.V. aerial with it. But what's the odds so long as you're 'appy?

Best wishes for Christmas, laddie, and every sort of good thing in the New Year.

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

-----ooOoo-----

JIM COOK GETS IT OFF HIS CHEST

4 Swanston Path, South Oxhey,
Watford, Herts.

Dear Editor,

So Basil Adam does not like Nipper, the St. Frank's school-boys or myself?

Nipper because he has no breeding - the St. Frank's school-boys because they are only caricatures and myself because I associate with the Proletariat by admiring Nipper.

Nipper's dubious entry into the world raises a squeak from Mr. Adam and once more our Welfare State is threatened.

Nipper's lack of moral tone and noble character expels him from the same class of Greyfriar's chaps, so off with his head,

quarter his body. Fling his remains to the wolves. How dare he be patronised, honoured and remembered!

Will this oblige Basil Adam?

I must not lose sight of the fact that criticism is as old as the hills and that the squawk of anger finds solace in the squeak of complaint. I am here - even if unsuccessfully - to say what I like within the laws of libel and the bounds of accuracy and fair comment.

Because Mr. Adam has questioned my ability to assess the finer points which undoubtedly spring from good breeding. He lectures me and tells me where I can educate myself. In fact he would sack me from Greyfriars for having friends at St. Frank's.

But I must tell him that we Plebeians at St. Frank's were not entirely without Nobility. And Nipper always held his own with the Sir Monties and Hon. Douglasses (vide Boys will be Boys).

Who, among the many Nelson Lee lovers will fight down with me this petty sense of inferiority which has continuously been thrust upon us. I love St. Frank's and have read every story dealing with it that appeared in the N.L.L. I state once more that to my mind Nipper was the power behind the throne - the pulse running through the circulation and I shouldn't be surprised if his absence from its pages at one period was not the reason for the subsequent decline.

Bob Blythe, our one-time columnist and owner of all the Lee's won't agree with me, I know. He thinks Nipper is a Prig with a Capital P.

Bob is very quiet these days. He doesn't visit St. Frank's any more. Can it be that Hamiltonia has finally enveloped him and that he prefers Bunter to Bellton. Never mind, they will never convert me.

And what about the rest of you Lee-ites? Isn't it about time we dominated the Collectors' Digest for a change? The editor has to cater for the majority but if you make yourself heard he will bow down to pressure.

I wonder just how much of St. Frank's Mr. Adam has read. Therefore I cannot know if he is familiar with Edwy Searles Brooks' wonderful characters. I feel sure his unilateral opinion which he has expressed in his letter in the C.D. is born out of contact with St. Frank's College. And what exactly does he mean by the St. Frank's characters being only caricatures? Did he ever read

the Communist series, the South Seas series, the Sahara series, the Hunter the Hun series. For Heaven's Sake, Mr. Adam, the characters in these series alone were full-blooded, topical, real live people. Everyday boys from all walks of life.

So back to your Bunter, Basil, you haven't lived.

JAMES W. COOK.

(Do seem to be starting the New Year with a spot of bother, don't we? Actually Jim's outburst should have been in last month, but was crowded out. I'm all for plenty of hearty, hard-hitting controversy, but don't lets take things too seriously. We musn't have any libel actions, they're expensive. Any, honestly, Jim, I try to be as neutral as a good referee. H.L.)

WANTED: Stories by Jack North, Richard Randolph, Randolph Ryle, Particularly School, Cricket and Football Yarns. BROSTER, PRIMROSE COTTAGE, KINVER, STOURBRIDGE.

WANTED: ANY copies of CHIPS between years 1914 and 1920 (inclusive) Good Condition Only. 2/6 each offered. L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

AND ANTHONY JOINS II:

Christ Church Vicarage,
Barnet, Herts.

Dear Editor,

Can you, or any other collector, please tell me what the "important announcement" was that Maurice Down said in Magnet 1682 he would make the following week? In the following week's issue, which was, of course, the last one, he said he would have to postpone the announcement. Anyone any ideas what he had in mind?

I feel I must answer Robert Farish's letter. Tom Berry was certainly smiling, Talbot was certainly handsome, Blake was certainly burly, but I'm blown if I can tell it from Macdonald's illustrations. I think Mr. Farish's memories must really be based on the excellence of Martin Clifford's descriptive powers, rather than the "Gem" illustrations. However, like most of these things, it is merely a matter of personal opinion, over which we have to agree to differ.

Yours very sincerely,

ANTHONY BAKER.