

The

Collectors' Digest

1/6th

APRIL 1958
VOL. 12 No. 136



Robert
Wright
57

Frank Richards liked the Manchester Guardian articles:-

Rose Lawn,
Kingsgate-on-Sea,
Broadstairs,
Kent.

24th March, 1958.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for sending me the article from the Manchester Guardian, which I return herewith after perusal and re-perusal. It is an excellent article, and I really think that W. G. Bunter will require a larger size in hats, after having been accorded so much space in a paper of such standing.

I was glad to see Mr. Pound's verses therein, and Dr. Wilson's remarks came very pleasantly. I am not sure that the last paragraph is well-founded, about what may happen fifty years on. Most of the readers of the Bunter Books are of post-war vintage, and certainly there will be some tens of thousands of them still going strong in A.D.2000. Frank Richards, though now shaking hands with Father Time on the best of terms with him, will probably be gone by then; but will not "old readers" remember — as they do now, bless them! I shall hope so at any rate.

With kindest regards,
Always yours sincerely,
FRANK RICHARDS

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WITHDRAWAL - In my Editorial Chat I asked for your help on behalf of Ronald Hummell. I did this in all good faith as he had urged me to do so. However, just as we were about to go to press I had a letter from him asking me not to bother as circumstances had arisen which made it unnecessary. It was too late to delete the paragraph. Hence one here to save you papers and postage.

BILL MARTIN'S ADVERT - Maybe some of you will have been wondering why Bill's advert hasn't been appearing on this page lately. Well, I'm sorry to say Bill hasn't been well and felt he couldn't cope with orders. However he hopes to be back with one next month.

-THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST-

Vol. 12 No. 136

Price 1s. 6d.

APRIL, 1958

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York.

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

VERY MUCH IN THE NEWS. Some months ago when writing about the preparations for the Greyfriars Golden Jubilee I expressed a hope that it would get some good publicity in the press. Well, my word! we got some, far exceeding my expectation. I mentioned some of it last month, now I can report that in The Bookseller of 1st March, there was a photograph showing Bob Mortimer's splendid window display at Bentall's, Kingston-on-Thames. Then two London papers had interviews with Horace Roberts at whose home the London Club's February meeting was held.

Up North the exhibitions at Leeds and York created lots of interest. A long letter of praise concerning the latter appeared in the local evening paper and a number of letters to me direct. One was from a lady who had several volumes of the Magnet but which she said she did not feel inclined to part with at present.

Then one morning a representative of the "Manchester Guardian" called on me. He had seen the exhibition and had been greatly interested. He stayed about an hour and took a lot of notes. Among the things which caught his eye was Bob Whiter's Bunter Calendar hanging on the wall and the telegrams concerning the Annual.

Time passed and I got a bit anxious. But I need not have

worried for on Friday, 14th March, his story appeared and it was indeed bigger than I ever dared expect. It carried headlines across two columns "Greyfriars and the Fat Owl Fifty Years On - Golden Jubilee of Nostalgia" and the story covered a good two half columns.

The correspondent had taken a copy of the February C.D. away with him, and he made good use of it. Among others he mentioned Roger Jenkins, Eric Fayne, Rev. A. G. Pound and Dr. Wilson. We'll forgive whoever was responsible for one error. It was stated I got 30,000 enquiries!! a year, whereas I had said 3,000 letters.

Anyway it was a real achievement to get so much space in the "Guardian" universally acknowledged to be one of the greatest of all newspapers.

That was not the end of it; by no means. Immediately following letters started to flow in. They came from all over the country. The first was from Leslie Ayre, of the London Evening News, himself a Hamilton fan. He asked for a copy of the February C.D. They are still coming in as I write and I'm trying to cope.

Yes indeed, we do keep getting into the news, don't we?

* * *

AN OLD FAVOURITE RETURNING. Bill Lofts has heard on good authority that Eric R. Parker's work will be seen again soon in the Sexton Blake Library.

A CHANCE FOR A GOOD DEED. Ronald E. Hummell of 79 Duncombe Road, Upper Holloway, London, N. 19 is a permanent invalid. He is a great lover of the Hamilton papers. He has a few copies but these he has read over and over again. He longs for more, but cannot afford to buy them. So may I appeal to those of you who are blessed with good health to have a look round to see if you have any copies you can spare. Then send them along to him. By so doing, you would bring some cheer into the life of one who finds the days hang so heavily on his hands.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

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LATE NEWS FLASH. Trevor C. Wignall died at Hove, Sussex, on March 22nd, aged 75.

He was best known as a sports writer, his Daily Spotlight

appearing in the Daily Express for many years. But he also wrote one or two Sexton Blake's. The Express, in an obituary, mention this saying he got £50 each. In his own autobiography, however, he said he asked for £60 and got it. He also wrote some stories of Northern Rugby League football for the Boys' Realm, one being a serial called "The Thick of the Scrum". He wrote boys' stories under several pen names.

H.L.

WANTED Bound Volumes "MAGNET" (any except 1939) loose "Magnets" and "Greyfriars" S.O.Ls.
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TO GREYFRIARS FANS: For Sale, cut-out figures representing 57 of the principal characters of the Greyfriars Stories. All very lifelike, painted in colours and varnished. All fixed on wooden stands, made to last. Each figure has small cards giving details of each character. Three paintings in water colours:- "Christmas at Wharton Lodge" "Billy Bunter at Home with Parents" "Bunter Standing Treat in Tuckshop" (All Newly Framed. Size 20" x 12") Painting of Greyfriars School. Picture of Harry Wharton. The unique collection should be of great value in years to come. Price £25 or near offer. Can be seen any time. ROBERT MORTIMER, 115 WALTON ROAD, EAST MOLESEY, SURREY.

Blakiana . . .

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

Since typing the "copy" for this issue of Blakiana I have obtained a copy of the S.B.L. reprint of "Five Years After", and on reading the Editor's Foreword I find he does give the year the story was originally published as 1906. It is, however, badly printed, and the final figure can very easily be mistaken for an 8 instead of a 6. This "ties up" with the information furnished by Mr. W. H. Bradshaw. (See further on in this issue.)

In regard to Bill Lofts' article on "The Chef", I wish to make it quite clear to Bill and the reader that I do not intend to make it a practice of mentioning the "peculiarities" and "weaknesses" of those authors whose work we admire and love so much. In this particular case, however, there is much to be said for Mr. Twyman's remarks, and and it is in fairness to him (and any other Editor for that matter) that I am making this exception.

JOSIE PACKMAN

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PLEASE DON'T FORGET THE CHEF!

By W. O. G. Lofts

In the course of my meetings and interviews with authors in the Blake field, both past and present, one of the most informative persons I have met is Mr. H. W. Twyman, for many years Editor of the UNION JACK and many other papers. (See C.D. November, 1956).

Mr. Twyman takes a keen interest in that which has been written of Soxton Blake in the C.D. and C.D. Annual, and has in fact read my copies of these magazines dating back to the commencement.

In the course of his letters to me Mr. Twyman has, from time to time, not only corrected and amplified various writings in Blakiana, but also pointed out things which have given me food for thought - things which only a person in the capacity of Editor would be in a position to know and appreciate. Many of these things are both interesting and informative, and for the benefit of readers of Blakiana I am permitted to quote from certain of Mr. Twyman's letters.

The subject of Blake lore has, of course, many facets. I propose, therefore, to deal with them month by month, commencing in this issue with the matter of the praising of a given Blake author, as viewed through the eyes of the Editor. Mr. Twyman's remarks on the subject are very interesting. They are as follows:-

"In reading these Digests, I am repeatedly being reminded I'm like a chef in the kitchen off-stage who designs or invents the meal while the waiter who comes into contact with the diners gets the credit, or at least the favourable reactions, for it. A chance dip into one of these volumes reminds me yet again. Blake fans go into ecstasies over the authors of their favourite yarns almost to the point of Blakolatry, but don't realise in the least degree what part the poor chef in the kitchen had in them. Maurice Bond is the current instance, in an article about Gwyn Evans and his Christmas stories.

"I no more than anyone would seek to discount the story-telling skill of these writers they praise - in fact, just the contrary, for it was because I estimated them so highly that I bought their stories so often - and the popular appeal of, say Gilbert Chester, and the stimulating gusto of Gwyn Evans were not lost on me. But it is a fact - an unrecognised fact - that Gwyn's manuscripts to me mean a lot of corrective work that was unfairly left for me to do. He was incredibly slapdash and irresponsible in these matters. Also, I was sometimes disappointed that the story hadn't turned out as brilliantly as it had seemed in the first place. I say 'first place' because nobody will ever know, and myself have forgotten, all the hours I have ~~paid~~ with him in pubs and places hammering out the details of an idea that I had given him for a story or series. The "Union Men" and "Mr. Mist" were two that come to mind; there must have been many more from first to last, including some of the highly-esteemed Christmas stories. And, apart from initiating and polishing the story itself, there was the presentation of it in the paper, with all sorts of little ideas and garnishings that seem to have added up to what the circle call the Golden Age of the "Union Jack."

"What has prompted these remarks is that I find Maurice Bond, in his piece about the Gwyn Evans Christmas stories (p. 335 Vol. 1) mistakes my own garnish-contribution for the main Evans product, or seems to. He quotes a passage (attributing it to Gwyn Evans - page 338) which is my own typical if inferior style!

"Maurice Bond does take the edge off my peeve a bit by remarking that the passage he referred to "did more to make the detective a real character than hundreds of stories could have done. It was witty,

topical, and in every way just as we should have imagined the great man to speak."

"Still, it does go to show you how a hard-working chef can get overlooked, doesn't it!

"There was one item I read somewhere - referring casually and in effect to somebody named Twyman who had something to do with the paper somehow. But perhaps that was due to lack of adequate information. It must be admitted, though, that I have found such things cumulatively irksome; after all, even an editor has his amour propre."

That there is food for thought in what Mr. Twyman says, I'm sure you will agree; and please note that he does pay a genuine tribute to those authors whose work he bought so often."

Next month I will write of "The Round Table" and other matters.

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FIVE YEARS AFTER

In a recent letter from Mr. W. H. Bradshaw of Los Angeles, California (with whom Len and myself have been in correspondence for many years), Mr. Bradshaw adds a most interesting and enlightening post-script. Here it is:

"By the way, I notice in December, 1957 C.D. "How's Your Memory?" (No. 9) that mention is made of S.B.L. No. 105 (First Series) and the Editor's statement that this story appeared in 1908.

"The original story "FIVE YEARS AFTER" was first published as a 55 page 70,000 word Christmas Double Number, in UNION JACK No. 165 dated December 8th, 1906.

"It was dramatized as a four-act stage show, three scenes in the first act and two in the rest, and first shown, as far as I can ascertain, in Liverpool on February 24th, 1908. It played all over England continuously for over a year and a half, until September 20th, 1909. Quite a record.

"The author, presumably W. Murray Graydon, wrote and had published another Christmas story, not a Double Number, in UNION JACK No. 272, dated December 26th, 1908, entitled "THE FAMILY SKELETON" in which appeared some of the same characters and places as in "FIVE YEARS AFTER", namely, Roger Blackburn, Marjorie Lovell, the Vicar, Covington Hall, etc., though only in minor roles.

"It is this latter story that perhaps the editor wrongly had in mind when he mentioned the date of the original publication of "FIVE

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* * * * *HOW'S YOUR MEMORY? - TEASER No. 10By E. V. Copeman

Sexton Blake and Tinker have been in plenty of scrapes in their time but what about Pedro? Many of us who think nostalgically of the faithful old bloodhound are inclined to visualise him either sitting cosily at Blake's feet by the consulting-room fire, or else sniffing eagerly at the trail as he leads a posse of Scotland Yard men to the master-crook's hideout!

The following extract is taken from a story in the S.B.L. in which Pedro played a very prominent part. Can you identify story and writer?

With a thunderous bay, Pedro whipped out from the trees and bounded at the tall fair man, who at once saw him coming and stared as if he could not believe his eyes.

He raised an ivory-topped stick he had in his hand and, lowering it quickly, he turned to the car, snatched a thick rug from the back seat and swung round to meet the attack.

"By heavens, it's Sexton Blake's bloodhound!" he cried with an oath. "How the devil did he get there?"

It was his old enemy with whom Pedro was face to face with all the dormant primeval instincts of his breed were boiling within him, roused to life as they had never been before.

Maddened by the lust of slaughter, frenzied by the memory of the cruel treatment he had suffered, he leapt like an avenging fury at the man, who shielded his body with the rug with one hand, and with the other defended himself with the stick.

He rained blows on Pedro, and Pedro scarcely felt them. Again and again, snarling ferociously, he sprang at his enemy, trying to reach his throat, forcing him backward, driving him this way and that.

The man was terrified, though he had the advantage. He was losing his nerve. This monstrous infuriated hound remembered him, he knew, and was bent on having his very life.....

Savagely, harder and harder, the blows rained on every part of his body. He was sick with pain and a mist swam before his eyes, but he fought doggedly, desperately on, with tenacious resolve, worrying his

enemy, and repeatedly hurling himself upon him.

He fastened his jaws on the motor rug and tore it from the man's grasp; and, rearing upon him once more, he gripped his arm, shook it as a terrier shakes a rat, and bit deep into the flesh.

The man yelled and cursed as the red blood spurted. He made a futile attempt to recover the rug, and thus gave an advantage to Pedro, who bit him on the hip and on the wrist: and then, snapping at his breast, he sank his teeth in the man's blue serge jacket and wrenched from it a ragged piece of cloth and a letter that was in an inner pocket.

The man beat him back with a glow of the stick. Pedro was nearly spent. He could scarcely keep his feet. Another hard blow staggered and weakened him. He had got the worst of the struggle and he knew it. He had been terribly punished, beaten until he was more dead than alive. One of the blows had fractured a rib, and another had rent from his collar the brass plate with Sexton Blake's name and address on it.

But the splendid old hound was not utterly helpless. He had a chance of escape and he must take it, loth though he was to give in.

By sheer willpower, by strenuous efforts that were a torture to him, he rallied his spent strength and with the torn letter and the piece of blue serge still between his teeth, he turned tail and beat a retreat, scuttling as fast as he could into the grove of fir-trees, in the direction from which he had come.

A "strategic withdrawal" they would call it these days! Pedro realised the truth of the old adage: "He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day!" Alas, that we don't read of his fights in the S.B.L. in our present time.

Well, who wrote the story and what was its name? I once said in an article (vide C.D. No. 116) that "I don't want to have to force myself to wade through a lot of outdated cliches in order to provide myself with a dose of nostalgia". This yarn is full of "outdated cliches" - but, frankly, I loved every one of 'em!

Clues? The only one I'll give is that this particular yarn was a "Pedro Story" - a rare gem in which the old hound was the star. Old timers should readily identify the style of writing from the large extract quoted and identify the author. Can you as readily recall the title?

HAMILTONIANA

compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Did you know that the conductor of the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra is named - H. Vernon Smith? Well, he is for according to a cutting sent me by Wilfred Darwin he conducted at a concert at Rotherham on March 10th.

* * *

Some time ago I mentioned an article on the Greyfriars Golden Jubilee which had appeared in the Sydney "Sun-Herald". It was quite a lively article but the writer of it made a mistake for he stated D'Arcy was one of the Greyfriars boys. He was soon made aware of his error, made evident by a number of cuttings sent me by Len Stone. But one would insist that D'Arcy did go to Greyfriars and that he was one of the Famous Five! Another Australian paper had an interview recently with Ernie Carter which gave details of his splendid collection.

There's an alert little army of Hamilton fans "down under".

* * *

As Walter Webb told you last month, Sexton Blake Library, No. 402, "Murder Most Intimate" reintroduced Hazel, the gentle giant who is an ardent collector of Magnets, I can't resist lifting these pars. from page 40. Blake and Hazel are looking for an important scrap of paper

"They went downstairs and, in his office, Hazel began to turn out the drawers in his desk, Blake helping him. "Magnets" the detective grunted. "Magnets! Magnets everywhere!" Then: "Hullo - what's this -?" "No, sir, that's not it. That's a letter from a chap I know, Herbert Leckenby in York. He runs a magazine for us collectors -" Hazel delved deeper into the drawer, but what's that. That might be it."

It was. On one side there were numbers of Magnets Hazel still wanted and on the other a valuable clue. Blake takes the paper, promises an anxious Hazel he'll take care of it and with a grin says he'll try and get him some of the Magnets he still requires."

Well, well, in my time I have seen quite a lot of names in the

S.B.L. but never dreamt I should once see my own. I hope Sexton Blake keeps his word and Hazel gets a complete set.

* * *

Now here's a letter from the one we have to thank for the Greyfriars Cup.

The British Political Agency,
P.O. Box No. 2,
Kuwait,
Persian Gulf.

Dear Herbert,

I shall be very grateful if you would mention a word of appreciation in the Collectors' Digest for those of the four clubs who helped to make the recent Greyfriars Cup Competition a success. May they find their reward in the pleasure of reading Greyfriars Herald extracts in forthcoming issues of the C.D.

Midland's winning entry must certainly be something to have attained a lead over the talent from the other clubs - talent which is certainly not wanting as all of us know. I for one, will be impatiently awaiting my Hamiltoniana from now on and I hope you, Mr. Editor, will have gained plenty of copy through the medium of the contest.

Finally a word of sincere thanks to Bill Gander for acting as judge and to Frank Lay and Roger Jenkins for certain tasks connected with the contest which it would have been impossible for me to carry out from Kuwait.

All best regards,
Very sincerely,
LES ROWLEY

* * *

Now for the first extract from the Midland Club's Greyfriars Herald.

POLICE-COURT NEWS FROM GREYFRIARS

With Profuse Apologies to the Daily Papers

By OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT - W. H. BROSTER.

An unusual case came up before Mr. Justice Wharton in which the

plaintiffs, Study No. 7, claimed from the Remove Form the return of the original (and only) postal order made out in favour of William George Bunter, now fastened to the wall of the "Rag". Evidence of ownership was given by Mr. Peter Todd, Q.C. who said his client, Mr. Bunter, had no ulterior motives but just wanted the historic relic to be in its proper place over the mantlepiece in Study No. 7. Cries of "Gammon", "Rats", were heard in the public gallery. Mr. Richard Rake, Q.C., put the case for the defendants. The priceless treasure (worth exactly sixpence when issued) was the common property of the Remove inasmuch that every one of the thirty-odd members of that illustrious body has some time or other (perhaps more than once) cashed it.

Magistrate:- "I agree entirely with you. I have more than once." Mr. Todd then proposed to call his colleague, Mr. Thomas Dutton, to give evidence.

Groan from the Magistrate. "No - no, under no circs. Keep Dutton out of it."

Mr. Justice Wharton then gave his decision in favour of the defendants, the postal order to be kept in the "Rag". Arguments were forthcoming but ended with the strange trio from Study No. 7 being ejected from the Court on their necks.

* * *

Horace James Coker, a very violent character and a constant offender, was then brought into the court. As police constables Bull and Bolsover had suffered much injury from the defendant and were unable to do their duties, special constable Skinner had rendered the prisoner helpless by the simple expedient of cutting off his trouser buttons and removing his braces (that is, while several other fellows held him.) Besides being in this precarious position, the prisoner had momentarily lost his breath and could neither plead "guilty" or "not guilty" of the charge of unlawful impersonation.

Detective Inspector Penfold gave evidence that on the night of November 5th, prisoner did wilfully and with malice aforethought seek to interfere with the games of the Second Form. The charge had been brought by Mr. Richard Nugent who said that the prisoner had deliberately changed places with the guy they were about to burn.

"Why didn't you finish the job?" came a voice in the well of the court.

"The little scoundrels nearly burnt me alive" roared the prisoner now recovering his breath.

"Silence in the dock". "Rap the prisoner hard, constable Skinner."

P.C. Skinner did so, hard on his knuckles, hence the sudden scuffle in the dock and the howl of merriment from the crowd.

George Tubb of the Third gave evidence that cleared the matter somewhat. He showed how on the night aforesaid he and his tribe had appropriated the guy belonging to Mr. Nugent. Further evidence showed that the Second Form had mistaken the prisoner for the guy (a natural mistake, as the Magistrate agreed).

Mr. Justice Wharton:- "I think that the jury on the whole will agree with me that this is not a charge of false impersonation but just Coker's fatheaded way of interfering. I sentence him to running the gauntlet from here to the Fifth Form passage."

This was done, and for once the prisoner could not retaliate, his hands being otherwise engaged!

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton Papers. He gives his own views superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue.)

No. 13. Why did the Gem's circulation drop in white cover days?

At the beginning, for at least half a dozen years, the Gem's circulation was greater than the Magnet's; it had, in fact, the largest sale of any boys' paper at that time. When a new paper, the Penny Popular, was issued in the autumn of 1912, it presented reprints of the early Tom Merry stories, which seems proof that in those years before the first world war St. Jim's was more popular than Greyfriars.

But in 1915 a slow decline commenced in the Gem's circulation, until in 1918 that paper's figures were far below those of the Magnet. In 1919, Martin Clifford contributed a droll little story, "The Amateur Advertiser", in which Gussy decided to take in hand the matter of the Gem's circulation.

Why did the decline take place? I am certain in my own mind that it was due to something in connection with the Gem itself, and not to any superiority of the Magnet. True, with some notable

exceptions, the general high quality of the stories deteriorated between the white covers, but this deterioration was evident in the Magnet too. The Gem's standard of story was higher than the Magnet's during those war years. Only two series are really outstanding in the Magnet between 1915 and 1918 - the Redwing series and the Judge Jeffries series. There were more excellent tales in the Gem, even at this time than in the Magnet.

Did the substitute writers have anything to do with it? To some extent, perhaps, but they had nothing to do with the difference of the two papers' circulations, for the Magnet published at least as many substitute stories.

Was it because the Magnet had Billy Bunter? It would be easy at this stage, to ascribe Bunter as the reason, but I do not believe it for a moment. I cannot see how Bunter in the Magnet could have harmed the Gem, and, in any case, it was not till many years later that Bunter was built into the subtly attractive character that he was to become later on.

Why then did the Gem fall behind the Magnet? The only reason I can accept is that the changes in the Gem Stories did not meet with general approval. Tom Merry was eclipsed; some other leading lights of blue cover days fell into the background; for a considerable time the Gem became largely the story of Talbot and different aspects of his past; Levison reformed, a change which altered the balance of the stories to some extent; many new characters were brought on to an already well-filled stage. The editor, possibly on the evidence of his postbag, always described his changes as popular. This may have been true - but it is also a truism that minorities make the most noise.

Probably the Gem was not helped by the absence for some years of its regular artist, Macdonald. The change of artist may have seemed symbolical of the change of story policy.

During the early twenties, I asked the Editor whether the Gem's circulation was still behind the Magnet's. His reply was "Yes! But the difference is not now nearly so great as it was!"

It has always been my opinion that the Gem, in changing its story policy, lost its "old faithfuls" and during the war years the general run of tales was not strong enough to bring in new readers in sufficient numbers. In the early twenties, the Gem reached its second golden age, the stories improved greatly on those of 1915-1920, and the circulation went up leaps and bounds, though it never again quite reached that enjoyed by the Magnet.

It's just my point of view! What's yours?

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOESNo. 11. Did we suffer from too much Bunter in the Magnet?

GERRY ALLISON writes: "As a boy, I used to stop buying the Magnet for weeks or even months at a time, because I simply could not stand any more Bunter! And then I would start reading about Greyfriars again, until once more I got a surfeit of the egregious Owl. Am I alone in my dislike for W.G.B? I never got tired of St. Jim's or Rookwood in this way."

DON WEBSTER writes: "I'm afraid we must agree to differ regarding our fatuous friend, Billy Bunter. To me, he had no redeeming features, nor was he consistent. He just developed as the years rolled on (like Iser, too rapidly for me).

Bunter was pernicious, untruthful, greedy, unscrupulous, artful, snobbish, and I always found him a most unpleasant character. I cannot subscribe to your views that if one disliked Bunter, they could not claim to be a genuine Magnet fan. I loved the old paper, but could easily do without Fishy and Bunter."

ROGER JENKINS writes: "I think you have hit the nail squarely on the head when you say that one cannot profess to love Greyfriars and at the same time dislike Bunter. Bunter cannot be detached from any of the Magnet series of the best period (except Ravenspur Grange. I enjoyed this series, but I do not think it was a Greyfriars series at all, and ought not to have appeared in the Magnet). In fact, Greyfriars is Bunter, and Bunter is Greyfriars.

I am not certain which is my favourite Bunter series, I think the Bunter Court series was the most comical of all, but Bunter was detestable throughout, and had not then acquired what you call his subtle attractiveness. The Whiffles series and the Wharton Lodge series were both excellent in their way, but I retain a soft spot for that much older quartet in Nos. 874 - 877, in which Bunter was sentenced to be flogged and asked to be expelled instead so that he would have a chance of going to a better school. It is this unexpected and outrageous turn to his fatuity which never ceased to amuse me."

JOHN WERNHAM (on an earlier topic) writes: "The stories of Outram of St. Jim's (1916) was one of my first experiences of Martin Clifford's work, and I was delighted with them. I was all keyed up for the next week's issue which, if I remember rightly, was a Grundy story, almost

totally lacking the magic of the other stories. This, I have since learned, was written by a substitute author. My point is that I could know nothing about such things in those days, yet the delight in the first stories and the disappointment with the succeeding story were unmistakable - and these things could have nothing to do with idolatry.

Although it would be wrong to suggest that all the substitute work was without any kind of merit, it is undoubtedly true that the art of making characters live is given to very few people, and that Frank Richards possessed and still possesses that rare gift."

ERIC FAYNE sums up: "My thanks are due to Gerry Allison, whose suggestion it was that "too much Bunter?" should be discussed in this series.

Certainly Bunter has all the unpleasant traits as listed by Don - but those traits are Bunter, and I love him just the same.

I agree with Roger that Ravenspur Grange was not a Greyfriars series at all, but neither was the China series, which had its own quota of violence and deaths, and, by the same yardstick, should never have appeared in the Magnet. I feel that the omission of either series would have left the Magnet much the poorer, even though they were admittedly far out of the usual run of Magnet series.

* * * * *

CHORDS IN THE MEMORY

Contrary to the expectations of the "Manchester Guardian", nobody succeeded in making an attempt at this contest in the Jubilee Number of the C.D. The prize will therefore be held over to a future contest. Just for the record, here is the solution of the puzzle:

- (A) 1. Loder. 2. Lancaster. 3. The Lancaster series.
 (B) 1. Bunter. 2. The Famous Five. 3. The Kenya series.
 (C) 1. Orris. 2. Bunter. 3. Bunter at Mauleverer Towers series.
 (D) 1. Colonel Wharton. 2. Harry Wharton. 3. Wharton, the Swot, series.
 (E) 1. Mauleverer. 2. Famous Five. 3. Egypt series.
 (F) 1. Dick Nugent. 2. Frank Nugent. 3. The Rebel series, 1932.
 (G) 1. Mr. Quelch. 2. The Famous Five. 3. Valentine series.

- (H) 1. Prof. Sparkinson. 2. Alonzo. 3. Strong Alono series.
 (I) 1. Huree Singh. 2. Wharton. 3. Bunter in the Attic series.
 (J) 1. Mr. Quelch. 2. Mr. Smedley. 3. Smedley series.
 (K) 1. Mr. Quelch. 2. Wharton. 3. Stacey series.
 (L) 1. Mr. Carter. 2. Bob Cherry. 3. Carter series.

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Which Do You Prefer?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 4 - The Talbot series or the Lancaster series.

There was not a lot to choose between Reginald Talbot and Dick Lancaster as characters. Both were strikingly handsome, well-mannered, outstanding cricketers, and extremely popular at their schools. And of course both were expert cracksmen, Talbot being known as the Toff and Lancaster as the Wizard. There was a difference in age, Talbot being sixteen and so qualifying for the Shell at St. Jim's, while Lancaster was eighteen (a more realistic age for a cricketer) and so entering directly into the Greyfriars Sixth, a most unusual occurrence. There can be no doubt, too, that both characters were extremely popular with the readers of the stories. So much for basic details.

Talbot first appeared in 1914, at a time when the Blue Gem had passed its zenith, whereas the Lancaster series was published in 1931 when the Magnet was at the very height of its fame and fortune. These facts cannot fail to have some bearing upon the relative merits of the series in question. Nevertheless, the first two Talbot series constituted the finest series of all to appear within the old Blue covers, and there is ample evidence that Talbot captured the imagination of the Gem readers in a way that Lancaster failed to do for the Magnet.

The crux of the matter is probably the fact that Talbot was a junior whereas Lancaster was a senior. Why the middle school should be so much more popular with the readers than the senior school is a difficult question to answer, but it is undeniable that Lancaster possessed a certain remoteness which was not felt in the case of Talbot.

Even when this is freely admitted, it is an inescapable fact that the Lancaster series was much better written than the first two Talbot series. The drama in the Magnet stories was spiced with many amusing incidents and some delightfully wry touches as well, like the description of the scene at Popper Court when the moneylender called to turn the screw on Sir Hilton. The Lancaster series was covered with a fine

gossamer of mellow humour and diverting incident which did not detract from the dramatic episodes but rather added to them by way of emphasising the contract. The two Talbot series, on the other hand, were stark and unadorned; they were written with a vivid simplicity that succeeded at times in touching the reader's heart. Their impact was therefore much stronger, but they do not bear re-reading so often because they lack the brilliance in style which formed such a priceless adornment to the Lancaster series.

Lancaster left Greyfriars at the conclusion of the series and was heard of no more, whereas Talbot is of course still at St. Jim's today. Undoubtedly the Gem editor knew what pleased the public, and he cannot be blamed for deciding that Talbot should stay. Yet the decision was, in an artistic sense, wrong, in the first place, Talbot had a limited part to play, and after a while the constant repetition of the same theme became tiresome; the first two series made a most dramatic impact upon the reader, whilst all the other reminders of Talbot's past (with the exception of "The Housemaster's Homecoming") made no such impact. The readers were getting what they had asked for; the trouble was they were asking for the wrong thing. In the second place, Talbot was too much of a potential rival to Tom Merry to be allowed to stay. You cannot have in the same form two popular characters who are both excellent sportsmen, outstanding in every way, and in short more than qualified to be captain of that form. Yet that is the situation which obtained after Talbot came to St. Jim's to stay, and Tom Merry never played quite the same part in the stories again. It was true that Talbot professed that he would never accept the captaincy or take Tom Merry's place, but the fact was that he was still at St. Jim's and that his pre-eminence cast a dark shadow over Tom Merry. In the same way, Wingate would have been completely out-shone by Lancaster if he had remained at Greyfriars. That is why those who have a soft spot for Tom Merry can find it in their hearts to wish that Talbot had, like Lancaster, Valentine, and many other attractive characters, made his bow and then left the stage for ever.

As between Lancaster and Talbot, I find the Toff much more appealing as a character. But as between the Talbot series and the Lancaster series, I would choose the Magnet version every time because it is so much better written.

Which do you prefer?

* * * * *

S.B.L. REVIEWSAPRIL - 1958Crime of Violence (No. 403)James Stagg

It would be difficult to imagine a setting less typical for crime than in the tranquil beauty of the Cotswolds. Yet in one of its prettiest villages Sexton Blake and Tinker are plunged into a vortex of murder and hatred such as they expect to find only in the more densely populated areas. It's another one of those spot-the-murderer stories, so popular nowadays, the victim in this particular instance being a garage owner. Although the author floods his narrative with suspects, mostly feminine, you will probably steal a march on Blake by discovering the identity of the murderer before he denounces it.

Two things which particularly appealed to me were (a) the nice touches of humour disproving the theory that Jack Storey has the monopoly amongst the present Blake chroniclers; (b) the author's portrayal of our old friend, Coutts of the Yard. Not quite in the affectionately remembered Murray-Evans tradition, but the nearest approach to it since the beginning of the new order.

Rating.....Good

* * *

Lady in Distress (No. 404)Martin Thomas

In Martin Thomas the S.B.L. has in its depleted ranks a contributor of unusual merit. Such was the conclusion I drew on arriving at the end of this, his second contribution. It's a well told whodunit, but unlike its predecessor the identity of the assassin is a little harder to determine. The victim is a poet, but hardly an endearing sort of character, so your sympathies are not likely to be excited by his untimely demise. The many varied suspects include an elderly care-taker, a pianist, a farmer, an Italian barber, a gigolo, and a dramatic critic. Blake dominates the stage throughout, as in all true good Blake stories he should do, and the author sees to it that his unique reputation is satisfactorily upheld whilst at the same time assuring us of several hours of good, interesting reading.

And for the record, the striking cover in crimson and black makes history. It's the first time a lady artist's work has been used

for a Blake story. But, welcome Margeret Higgins - a talented recruit to the ranks.

Rating.....Very good

WALTER WEBB.

WANTED URGENTLY - I offer 10/- each for any copy of Chips from January 1916 to October 28th, 1916. In good condition.
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GENS REQUIRED - good condition essential. 313-322; 326-333; 336; 333-342; 348; 356; 358-9; 375; 379-380; 382-388; 390; 392-395; 400; 499. Write ERIC FAYNE, 23 GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

100 S.O.Ls. (S.A.E. Lists) Offers for 200 Pre-war Boys Papers, "Rover" "Adventure" etc. Bound 1928 "Nelson Lees" (113-36). 1939 "Magnet" Boys Pocket Libraries. Scarce 1912 "Diamond Libraries". "Punania" (1867) "Munsey's Magazine" 1918-19 bound, hundreds pages. 1912 Christmas "Childs Companion Annual". 1923 "Holiday Annual" 1936 "Modern Boys' Annual". 30 1934 "Magnets" bound three separate volumes £9 3 0. "By the Fireside" (1926) 8/6
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GORDON THOMPSON, 53 WALLASEY PARK, OLDPARK ROAD, BELFAST,

FOR SALE - 200 Nelson Lees. 1st Series 1/2 each. 2nd and 3rd new series 10d each. All plus postage.
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OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION

The gathering at Kensington on Sunday, 16th March, was unique, inasmuch that the chief feature of a very good agenda was a performance of the very fine school film, "Goodbye Mr. Chips". Those present thoroughly enjoyed this fine film and their thanks were afforded to projectionist David Harrison and his able assistant, Roger Jenkins. Both the afore mentioned were able hosts of this very fine evening, Roger giving good progress reports of the Hamilton section of the Club Library besides conducting several rounds of the Criss Cross Quiz. The third advert quiz was won by Bob Whiter. Len Packman gave a very humorous reading, "My Krismas Kollum" by Philpott Bottles from the Christmas number of "Chips" of 1914. Next meeting will be on Sunday, 20th April at a venue to be decided. It was very pleasing to see Eric Lawrence present after his recent indisposition. Copies of the "Manchester Guardian" with the very fine Greyfriars article in it were passed round. Thus a very good meeting indeed. Votes of thanks to the hosts concluded the gathering and home we all went for call-over.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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NORTHERN SECTION MEETING - MARCH 8th, 1957

Snow was falling heavily as we made our way to the Hyde Park Road, and Woodhouse Moor made an appropriate picture for an old fashioned Christmas card. But we soon forgot the elements the moment we got inside the Club Room, for all was cherry and cosy there.

Stanley Smith was regretfully unable to make the long journey from East Anglia. Fortunately, J. Breeze Bentley was with us again and he took his old place in the chair. He gave a hearty welcome to two new members, Tony Potts and Geoffrey Wilde who joined us as a result of the Leeds Exhibition. Business over Roger Jenkins up for his annual visit, always looked forward to by all members, gave us a talk on one of the most famous of the Greyfriars characters - Henry Samuel Quelch. He got a hearty round of applause before he started, and a still heartier one when he finished for it was in his best style

and that's saying something. A ding-dong discussion followed which lasted until refreshment time.

To wind-up we had a go at that ever engrossing game, Stan Smith's Criss Cross Quiz. Stanley always comes in handy even when he isn't with us.

Next meeting, 12th April. It's the Annual General Meeting, and worse luck, there's an interval of five weeks.

HERBERT LECKENBY

Northem Section Correspondent.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING - 24th FEBRUARY

Chamber of Commerce, Birmingham 6.

It was a much depleted "Form" who assembled to hear a mixture of good and bad news. Chairman Jack Ingram was ill in hospital and Vice-Chairman, Jack Corbett in bed with influenza. All wished them a speedy recovery.

To balance this, I was able to give members the joyful news that we, the Midland Club, had won the Greyfriars Challenge Cup. The Chairman expressed the gratitude of the Club in general to those responsible for this triumph, the Secretary who produced the magazine, the contributors of the various items and the work of the artist, not forgetting the lady who was responsible for the typing and setting out. This was seconded by Norman. Letters of congratulation from the other three clubs were handed round.

As is obvious, the advertised programme had to be adjusted and we started off with a nice easy quiz at which all members did fairly well. Sixteen Hamilton names had to be sorted out into eight pairs (cousins actually). Then "fireworks" by Norman. The "Form Master" (and his deputy) being away, the Treasurer let himself go on one of his specials. His subject for debate was "Shall we specialise or shall we generalize?" He introduced his subject by referring back to last meeting when a remark was made that if it had not been for Charles Hamilton there would have probably been no Old Boys Book Clubs. He deplored the fact that the Hamilton Papers were given preference and further than that, that the "Magnet" was put ahead of the "Gem" and "The Boys Friend". All were entitled to have their own preference as to what they read or collected but definitely the Magnet was given

too much limelight in the O.B.B.C. There were other papers and other authors and though he admitted the Hamilton stories had a lot to do with the creation of the Old Boys Book Clubs, he did not agree that they were the sole inspiration. The Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake tales were mentioned. The debate which followed was joined by all and many interesting and amusing opinions were put forward. We all enjoyed it and wished we had more time for further discussion.

The night ended with Ted Davey reading from a Collectors' Digest Annual. This gave some of the highlights of Magnets, starting from 501 "The Jeffreys Rebellion" and including the Wally and Billy Bunter series and many others up to 1922 (time did not allow for more).

Yes, a jolly good time for all the small attendance and we feel sure an enjoyable night for our new member.

Next meeting, Monday, 31st March at 7.30 p.m. Room 8, Chamber of Commerce, New Street, Birmingham.

* * *

Merseyside Section Meeting - Sunday 9th March.

Despite the bitterly cold and snowy weather there was a good attendance for the March meeting.

A report was given by the Chairman on the Library and the financial position. Both are quite satisfactory. For the next hour internal matters concerning the branch came under discussion, and it was quite late in the evening before tea was taken. An excellent discussion then took place on the stories other than those of our favourite schools, that we enjoyed as boys. Some interesting views were given and tastes ranged from Coral Island to Aesops Fables. One member who shall be nameless, had to confess he never enjoyed any books at all in his youth.

Next meeting, Easter Sunday, 6th April at 7 p.m.

NORMAN FRAGNELL,
Secretary,
Merseyside Branch O.B.B.C.

120 MAGNETS FOR EXCHANGE, mostly pre 1934. Details on request. WANTED IN RETURN Magnets prior to No. 517 or will buy at good prices. Offers please to:- F. COCKROFT, HAWBER HOUSE, SILSDEN, NEAR KEIGHLEY, YORKS.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD
 Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.
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 * * * * *

Things are very quiet just at present, but as you will see from our resident correspondent's latest report below, quite a lot has been happening at St. Frank's.

Despite a delayed Spring, the countryside is looking delightful in that part of the world, and Jim Cook tells us of a wide range of activity at the old School. Here it is:-

A few days ago when it was raining and all the boys and masters were at class I decided to take the opportunity and visit the school museum. I had heard so much about it especially from Dick Goodwin who had, he said, built two special glass cupboards for the Head and that I would be very interested in their contents. So I made my way to the end of the corridor and entered the library. Here I paused to browse round the shelves for a few moments after which I went through to the school museum.

Owing to the angle the entrance to this big, and curiously shaped room is built all the space is not evident at first. On both sides are various specimen cases which looked so gloomy and sombre in their dark surroundings. But at the end which is set at another angle I saw the two glass cases and they were magnificent.

These truly wonderful cabinets were full of exhibits each having a printed card beneath with a few words of information. Here I saw a mortar-board and gown that had once belonged to Mr. Hunter, Housemaster at St. Frank's, circa 1918. And the inscription told me that Hunter the Hun was arrested for treason after a lively period of a schoolboy rebellion. Yes, I remember that well.

The juniors staged a revolt led by Nipper against the tyrannical edicts of Hunter and they finally won the day when Nelson Lee and the Yard wanted the Hun for something more serious than cruelty to school-boys.

Next, a small bottle caught my eye with the word "Zaxzol" written on it. The card with it explained that a Mr. Trenton once used the contents as a drug to force the Headmaster of St. Frank's

into periods of insanity. I was beginning to think I was at Scotland Yard in their Black Museum! However, not all the objects were relevant to bad schoolmasters for there are numerous gifts from Lord Dorrimore in the shape of native weapons and utensils from all over the world.

* * *

I was particularly interested in a long spear donated by Umlosi. I learnt from the description written on the card that this spear was the one used by Umlosi when he challenged his half-brother to combat at a time when the chieftanship of the tribe was at stake. The result was that Umlosi was made Chief of the Kutanas. It also states it was at this same place, Zenobu, that Dorrie introduces Umlosi to Nelson Lee and Nipper for the first time. This place, Zenobu, is some distance from East Africa. So, here we have definite information how Umlosi first met up with Lee.

Each of these small cards which accompany the exhibits bears a number and letter, so I should imagine a more detailed write up is available in some work of reference. Probably the Head is in charge of this. These cabinets must contain practically the history of St. Frank's. These superb cases are unique in that each and every object is a dateline in events and happenings at the College. As we know they have all been recorded and these pieces are proof positive that the chroniclers have been faithful.

As I stood there in that museum I got a strange feeling that I was living in a some hitherto overlooked peculiarity of time. There was no suggestion of morbidity, no moribund atmosphere that usually is associated with museums, but a feeling of Youth and Age together.

Letting my eyes wander I saw a gold piece - oval in shape, that had been brought back from El. Dorado, "a mysterious hidden city, tucked away behind the Brazillian forests." I well remember that glorious adventure years ago, I have read it so many times that incidents connected with the affair keep cropping up in my mind.

* * *

I also gazed at a beautiful locket which had been given to the museum by Jack Grey. This, it stated, had contained the vital clue to the treasure which was discovered at El. Safra, North Africa.

A bottle of sand reposing on a small shelf made me very inquisitive. It was brought back from a lost Roman city in the middle of the Sahara Desert. This was, of course, the Sahara series we read

about. The sand looked very much the same as other sand to me, but perhaps a geologist had made some reference to this find and after all it did come from an unknown part of Africa. And not long ago I read of somebody who had little bottles of sand and soil of nearly all the places on Earth, so, I suppose I shouldn't wonder at anything.

Well, it would take me too long to describe all the curios in those cases although I would like to mention the pair of handcuffs. I did think at first that they were connected with one of Mr. Lee's cases and had some horrible criminal association, but these were, in fact, the pair of manacles that were used to bring the great John Bunterfield Boots down a few pegs. When he woke up one morning at the height of his power he found himself handcuffed to the bed rails! And these were the handcuffs actually used.

Some wag had written in very tiny, "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi".

It was getting rather dark so I left those two splendid works of Dick Goodwin. There were cricket bats and footballs which had very special reasons for being there, and there were pieces of rock and lumps of stone and sea shells of marvellous colours. Caps not belonging to St. Frank's and other trophies were in abundance, and photographs and ash plants and a pistol all connected at some time or other with the boys of St. Frank's. I walked over the the window and looked out into the coming evening, and just below me there was the quiet piece of ground near the Head's shrubbery. It was still and calm.

* * *

I am sorry my monthly letter has dwelt rather long on this museum with its many memories so I'll report at once my other activities at the school. A lesser known Junior Augustus Hart of Study T implored me to visit his study for a few minutes. Justin B, Farman, and Owen Major who also occupied this study were there, and I spent a very pleasant hour during which a special spread was laid on for my benefit. The American boy spoke of the many adventures he had had since he came to St. Frank's. If my memory serves me right, he caused some excitement the moment he entered the School. And I think a trip to the United States by the boys were one of the results.

When I asked him if my memory served me right Farman agreed it had.

I have been invited to all the studies and I have promised to attend. It usually means a lot to eat, stuff I had given up long ago as indigestible; but I am none the worse for it. Take note, one of

these invitations include a visit to Study B!!

Study B is occupied by these three juniors, Claude Gore-Pearce, Arthur Hubbard and Teddy Long! By the time my next report comes round I hope to include this trip to Study B.

By the way, I gleaned this little piece of knowledge from Mr. Crowell. It is about St. Frank's. I learnt that in the XIIth Century a Franciscan monastery was founded on the site of the old school, founded, of course, by St. Francis of Assisi, or Members of that Order.

 THE SWOP MART. Offered for swop only, the following Greyfriars, St. Jim's, St. Frank's, S.O.Ls., Magnets last salmon cover series. Hol. Annuals 1925. 1930. Monster Libs. Aldine Dixon Bretts, Adventure, Footer Libs., Boys' Friend 4d Libs., Champion Annuals. I require:- Greyfriars, St. Jim's, S.O.Ls., N.L.Ls., old series. Nuggets of St. Frank's tales. S.A.E. please.
 JACK COOK, 178 MARIA STREET, BENWELL, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE 4.

UP-TO-THE-MINUTES REVIEW

"BILLY BUNTER'S BARGAIN"

By Jack Wood

A little late for the Golden Jubilee celebrations, this 22nd book in the Bunter series is none the less welcome, and is itself a bargain at the price.

Frank Richards has provided another lively story of the Fat Owl in which apparently unrelated incidents are woven into the pattern of the story with all the mastery of the author and the skill of Chapman's artistry.

Because of trouble over Wharton's lines, which he handed into Quelch as his own, Bunter is bounced into his armchair, which breaks under the strain. His bargain consists of a replacement which he obtains "on tick" at a sale.

When we learn that the chair comes from the lodgings of the local Teddy Boy whom Wharton suspects of being a smash and grab raider, and that the proceeds of the robbery are still missing, we know the answer.

But Frank Richards' methods of reaching that answer are always diverting and as readable as ever. A pleasant addition to the series.