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The Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1947 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 14. No. 158

Price 1s.6d

FEBRUARY, 1960

Editor:

ERIC FAYNE

Excelsior House,
Grove Road,
Surbiton, Surrey.

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From the Editor's Chair

SPECIAL NEWS. There was some disappointment that the WHO'S WHO was not a feature of this year's Annual. Nobody complained, for it was fully recognized that the preparation and inclusion of this section was, under the circumstances, a sheer impossibility. Therefore it is a pleasure to announce that the COLLECTORS' DIGEST WHO'S WHO is to appear as an entirely separate publication.

OLD FORMAT. As an adjunct to the Annual, the Who's Who has been invaluable for many years. Starting as a lusty youngster, it has now become a strapping adult, and it has really outgrown its old home. It began to occupy a great deal of very valuable space in the Annual. At times, to minimise the amount of space it occupied, much of it had to be inserted into odd corners here and there - an inconvenient but unavoidable arrangement. Furthermore, we feel that a separate Reference Book will be handier for the reader. Again, there are some readers who do not subscribe to the Annual, yet who would like to possess a copy of WHO'S WHO.

NEW FORMAT. We believe that our readers will welcome the COLLECTORS' DIGEST WHO'S WHO as a separate entity. It will be of the measurements of this magazine.

Included loose with this issue of the C.D. is a form which you are asked to complete and return to this office as soon as possible. The work of compiling the publication will be heavy on top of other commitments, and, to ease our clerical headaches, entries must be made on the official form. The form must be returned if your name is to

appear in the Who's Who. In order to give all our overseas friends time to return their forms, the latest date for receiving them is fixed for March 24th.

WILL IT PAY ITS WAY? That will depend upon the loyal support of our readers. We can only guess, at the moment, at the number of pages the work will occupy, and at how large the sale will be. The WHO'S WHO will be published in mid-April, price 2/6d.

If it is a loss, we shall grin and bear it. If it manages to make a profit, that profit will be ploughed back into the C.D.

All general particulars will be included free of charge. A reader is at liberty to make any further announcement he wishes concerning himself, his collection, his "wants", but these will be charged for at advertisements rates of 1d. per word. The more readers who take advantage of this service, the more comprehensive the finished work will be.

In our late Editor's time, he allowed this extra information as a free advertisement, a generosity he could not afford. The separate WHO'S WHO certainly cannot afford to be so generous. Every reader, we believe, will see the fairness of this.

Quotations can be given for full page or half-page displayed advertisements, should they be desired in addition to the general information.

THE CLUBS. One page of the new booklet will be devoted to each of the Clubs - the names and addresses of all their officers for the current year, and a brief history of each Club.

A MEMORIAL TO HERBERT LECKENBY. Best of all, perhaps, is that the NEW 1960 WHO'S WHO will be a Memorial to our late Editor. On the first page, the entire work will be dedicated to him. Whether the Who's Who will be published each year, or, possibly, every alternate year, will depend upon the demand. But the Who's Who, whenever it appears, will be dedicated to Herbert Leckenby.

Further details of this mighty new venture will appear in our next issue. In the meantime, please fill in your forms and return them as soon as possible, aiding our work by making them as clear as possible. Advertisements and additional announcements must be pre-paid. You need not, however, unless you wish, order and pay for your own copy of the publication just yet. The latest date for the acceptance of orders for the work will be given next month.

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST WHO'S WHO - an entirely separate publication - will be a MUST for every reader.

THE EDITOR.

PENNY COMIC PARADE

by
ANTHONY GLYNN

Weary Willie and Tired Tim, hurtling downhill in their homemade two seater which had an old bathtub as its main body component, raised their decrepit hats to a pretty girl with the greeting: "Pip, pip, Priscilla!" While its occupant's attention was so distracted, the vehicle crashed into the standard of a fire alarm, wrecking itself and the alarm and having the immediate effect of bringing a squad of firemen to drench Willie and Tim with hoses as they sprawled in a heap of debris.....

Thus, in black ink on pink paper, Weary Willie and Tired Tim capered for a 1925 audience. "Chips," the front page of which was Willie and Tim's stage for more than half a century, and its companion penny comics are now collectors' items. All those who eagerly spent their pennies on even the last of these publications, all who chuckled at the drawings and hung on breathlessly for "next week's thrilling episode" of the serial stories are now adults. The penny comic is another world away.

It should be recorded that the penny comic's origin was probably rooted in "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday", a halfpenny comic of the eighties which flourished a decade before American newspaper comic sections came into being. Ally Sloper was a Micawberish swigger of gin, the creation of a gifted cartoonist named W. G. Baxter. Earlier in his career, Baxter worked on a humorous weekly in Manchester, drawing events in the city, its leading men and portraits of visitors from noted divines to Lily Langtry. He died of tuberculosis in miserable London lodgings while still in his thirties. Weary Willie, Tired Tim and many another seedy comic paper adventurer owed much to Sloper.

We certainly received value for money in the penny comics of our youth. Of eight pages of tinted newsprint, four were devoted to comic strips and four to stories, generally two serials and two complete in themselves. The eccentric characters of the comic strips clowned in a world where good always triumphed over evil in a spectacular fashion to the accompaniment of: "Ow!", "Yow!", "Thud!", and "Wallop!" It was a world of types. Burglars always wore striped jumpers and masks and they humped bulging sacks marked "swag."

Schoolmasters were usually crochety martinets and officers of the law were so given to flirting with domestics and accepting large pies

from below stairs that the cognomen of P.C. Cuddlecock typifies the whole penny comic police force.

The backgrounds of the comic drawings had a peculiar rickety-rackety appearance and were not far removed from the world of Phil May and George Belcher. Any social anthropologist who delves into penny comics is likely to find that the dominant influence was that of the music hall. The knockabout action and the fashions of costume - as witness Tired Tim's ludicrously small hat - came directly from the music hall stage. The whole penny comic genre of art was, in fact, music hall translated into line-drawings for the benefit of a class which delighted in music hall. That an early publication in the field was called "Dan Leno's Weekly" is not without significance. Overtones of "Fred Karno's Army" were to be found in Plum and Duff, the boy soldiers of "Comic Cuts" who battled the authority of Sergeant Suet for many a year. "Chips" featured a column of cross talk, headed by a drawing of the pair who were supposed to perpetrate it, one of whom was an obvious caricature of George Robey. In 1936, "Comic Cuts" carried the adventures of Captain Quick, who was Harry Tate, skewed moustache and all. The music hall's preoccupation with eating was there, too. The reward which frequently came to comic characters in the last panel was a large meal - in penny comic terminology, it was a "slap-up feed" or a "blow out" - and heavily laden tables were approached with the gusto of Harry Champion advancing on boiled beef and carrots.

Penny Comic argot was peculiarly its own. One wonders whether anyone in real life ever exclaimed: "Corks!" The suggestion of foreign dialogue was accomplished quite easily. "Chips" featured the Bolshevik threat in the thirties in the persons of Crown Prince Oddsockz and his henchman Serge Pantz, two bomb-planting upstarts. The Russian effect in speech was achieved by tacking the suffixes "ski" or "ovitch" on to at least one word in their speech balloons.

The second world war made it necessary for Oddsockz and Serge Pantz to become Nazis and the "Russian" in the balloons was therefore changed to "German."

Those who wrote the three and four-line captions under the strip pictures created a literary tradition all their own, employing onomatopoeia, alliteration and not a few words of their own devising. Fair examples are:-

"Bravo, boys!" boomed the boss, buzzing along with a bag of bounce and a brace of free tickets for the circus....", and:

"He doesn't seem to agree to it!" yummed Dusky, "Oh, he'll fall for it!" smiled Dando. And - kerlunk!"

According to caption writers, when the comic characters made their remarks, they not only "yummed" and "smole", they "yaffled", "yapped" and "tuffed". The winsome female characters, however, invariably "lisped."

One wonders about the men who drew the strips. Considered technically, their work was of a higher standard than many of the more sophisticated gag cartoons of today's popular dailies and their industry must have been tremendous. There must be many a story behind the strips. Is it true, for instance, that Weary Willie and Tired Tim were created by the book illustrator Tom Browne and that he had to cease drawing them because he ran out of situations and his nerves suffered when the tramps began to haunt his dreams? One wonders, too, about the anonymous men - and, perhaps women - who wrote the stories. They created escaped convicts, always youthful and handsome and usually heirs to vast estates wrongly convicted through acts of rascally counter-claimants; cowboys who owed everything to Buffalo Bill's circus and nothing to the west of American history and steely-eyed detectives who moved purposefully through a Limehouse populated by sinister Chinese. A long established feature of the penny comic was the column supposedly written by the office boy. Every penny comic had its office boy, Philpot Bottles of "Chips", Sebastian Ginger of "Comic Cuts" and Pimple of "Funny Wonder". All were chronic illiterates.

The war dealt the death-blow to the penny comics. They wouldn't suit the youngster of today who can buy scarcely anything for a mere penny. Modern influences have made them far more sophisticated than the 1925 audience for which Willie and Tim wrecked their bathtub two seater; they receive their overtones of Fred Karno, Plum, Duff and Sergeant Suet when they tune in to "The Army Game." So, Willie and Tim, Homeless Hector, Big Ben and Little Len, Dicky Duffer the Dunce and dozens more penny comic entertainers have gone to join Ally Sloper in printing ink folklore. They belong to that sunny past when the world and ourselves were different.

But their memories linger on. Some weeks ago, I passed a grocer's shop outside which a baker's vanman was throwing wrapped loaves to his assistant, standing at the shop door. The assistant was a boy far too young ever to have read a penny comic. But the vanman wasn't and, as he tossed the loaves, he counted them in a loud voice:

"One-ovitch! Two-ovtich! three-ovitch.....!"

* * * * *

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

In this issue you will read all about the 'scoop' for Blakiana that I announced last month. It is unquestionably the biggest 'scoop' we have ever had, and this will become more and more apparent with each surprising revelation. I feel that Bill Lofts and Mr. W. Howard Baker cannot be thanked enough for allowing this valuable and enlightening information to be released.

J. N. Pentelow lovers will find this month's instalment of "Century-Makers" of special interest. Next month he will be telling you all about the "Era of the Reprints." This will be followed by "Death of an Artist", in which Walter pays tribute to the late Arthur Jones.

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * * * *

CENTURY-MAKERS

(And a few other interesting statistics)

By WALTER WEBB

INSTALLMENT ELEVEN

LAMENT ON CRICKET

In looking over the stories which have been written around the adventures of Sexton Blake, one feels somewhat amazed to discover to what little extent sport featured in them. Why were soccer and cricket, two of our greatest games, both of which enjoyed a following second to none in popularity, boycotted in such manner? The authors who specialized in the sporting yarn were there - a little reflection brings to mind immediately such names as Arthur S. Hardy, Walter Edwards, John Nix Pentelow, Robert Murray, C. Malcolm Hincks, Tom Stenner - to name half-a-dozen; all could have been utilised in the provision of stories coming under that category, and although several did feature Blake on the Turf, it seemed that his authors almost to a man found little of interest in cricket and football when they had Blake on their minds. Hardy and Hincks did contribute isolated tales of the winter game, but what sort of a showing did cricket get in the Blake papers? Just one paltry story, and to look for that, one has to wade back into the dim and distant past to the year 1912 when a story entitled "The Case of

the Colonial Cricketer" was published. Why only one such story at a time when the great summer game despite suffering the irreparable loss by retirement of the great Dr. W. G. Grace in 1908 was enjoying a popularity it has seldom captured since?

One of the foremost authorities on cricket in the country, John Nix Pentelow wrote two S.B.Ls in 1927, which did not deal with that subject at all, and so passed by a glorious opportunity of producing something really original in the output of Sexton Blake stories. Imagine a novel based on the lines of that author's grand serials which appeared in the BOYS' REALM under such titles as "Smith of Rocklandshire," "Boy Bayley, Professional", "Young Yardley" etc., with Blake, Tinker and Pedro travelling all over the country with the New Zealand touring team, ably led by T. C. Lowry, the old Cambridge University and Somerset cricketer, whose first visit to play Test Matches on these shores it was, and swayed by circumstances in the course of their investigations to visit all the well-known cricket grounds, in which Lords, the Oval, Headingley, Trent Bridge, Old Trafford and Edgbaston come immediately to mind. Blake meeting the cricketers of that period, famous and idolised by the crowds which thronged those grounds - Jack Hobbs of Surrey, Wally Hammond of Gloucester, Herbert Sutcliffe of Yorkshire, Frank Woolley of Kent, Patsy Hendren and J. W. Hearne of Middlesex.....and of particular interest to me by reason of being a Warwickshire fan..Harry Howell, little Billy Quaife and the Hon. F.S.G. Calthorpe (all since passed into the valley from which there is no return); grand cricketers all.

But for some reason or other, cricket did not find any favour in the editorial sanctum of the various Blake papers, from which it must be gathered that the summer game with its grand fellowship and sportsmanship found no echo in the hearts of those men who held the fortunes of Sexton Blake in their hands. A very busy man, J. N. Pentelow found very little time to write about Blake; then, when he did so it must transpire that he turns out two very ordinary novels of little interest to the Blake connoisseur when, as already stated, he could have produced one of a nature which today would have been of absorbing interest, and, in its historical value, a muchcherished or sought after item. And of the man who wasted his talents in such manner the following biographical details may be of interest, since in looking through the several collectors' magazines which have appeared, they do not seem to have been printed before - at least, not in their entirety.

John Nix Pentelow died at Cashalton Beeches, Surrey, on 5th July, 1931 - not, as believed at the A.P. in 1927 - and was a frequent contributor to "Cricket" of which he was editor and proprietor from

January, 1912, "Lilleywhite's Annual" and "The Cricketer" which was edited by P. F. Warner. He also wrote for "Wisden" in the pages of which famous almanack his name received honourable mention in the list of past and present great cricketers of England and the Dominions. He was born 26th March, 1872 at St. Ives, in Huntingdonshire, and his reason for deciding on the pen-name of "Harry Huntingdon" when writing for CHUMS is therefore made quite unnecessary of explanation. He died aged 59.

Before leaving the world of sport in which Blake was so much a stranger, one must pay tribute to the two well-written racing stories by Tom Stenner, who was introduced a little earlier on. It was obvious that the author was treading on very familiar ground when relating "The Puzzle of the Blue Ensign," and in describing "The Case of the Disqualified Derby," two of the best stories of the Turf in which Blake ever appeared, and it comes somewhat in the nature of a surprise that the author was never again asked to contribute further novels on the subject. Born in Minehead, Somerset, in 1886, Thomas Robert Stenner wrote for both A. Press and D. C. Thomson Publications, and besides being responsible for the National Trophy Competition was also the originator of the first Speedway test match in 1930. In addition to speedway and horse racing he specialised in ice hockey, and at the time of writing is still alive at the ripe old age of 75 years, still capable, one feels, even in these much-changed times, of turning out a readable novel of Blake and the sport of kings in the new look S.B.L.

Getting back to the statistical side again it is to find that only two new authors made an appearance during 1931. Being unable to secure a Christmas story from Gwyn Evans, such as had been customary in previous years, the editor of the U.J. was compelled to turn to a writer who was reputedly very friendly with Evans, viz., (83) WILLIAM J. ELLIOTT, a specialist in the type of novel which would never have seen the light of day in the A.P. publications under any circumstances. In the S.B.L. the name of (84) JOHN ASCOTT appeared, but it was generally known that this was a non-de-plume and covered the identity of John W. Bobin, who was introduced much earlier under his other pen-name of MARK OSBORNE. (85) STEPHEN HOOD is believed to be none other than Lewis Jackson, but there is no proof of this at the time of writing, so he must be introduced here as another author of the "hit and run" variety, having written only the one story. The name of (86) PAUL URQUHART on the cover of the S.B.L. necessitates his name also being entered here, but, ~~as has~~ been previously stated, he was actually LADBROKE BLACK; and for the same reason the name of (87) REID WHITLY must also go down, he and COUTTS BRISBANE both being pen-names of R. COUTTS ARMOUR. A

similar case is that of (88) V. FREMLIN, pseudonym of ANTHONY SKENE.

The year 1932 was to prove the last completed year in which the U.J. was published, for early in 1933 Blake fans were to receive the distinctly unpleasant shock of its absorption into the new DETECTIVE WEEKLY. 1932 was also to mark the policy of the reprinting and re-modernisation of past stories, and these, as far as records are concerned, will receive their just reward - the cold shoulder, for to give an author added credit for something he has already been endowed would be to give him an undeserved advantage over his colleagues. The republication of the Confederation stories in the U.J. was to set the example for a similar policy in the S.B.L. Early in this particular year came (89) WILLIAM P. VICKERY, and then the name of (90) WARWICK JARDINE appeared on the cover of the S.B.L. for the first time. Into the pages of the U.J. in July came (91) STAFFORD WEBBER. The distinction of being the last author to make his debut in the U.J. fell to (92) ARTHUR J. PALK, who was described as being an Australian; and then six issues later the splendid old paper went the way of so many of its predecessors, plunged into oblivion by a rapidly changing world whose support, gradually withdrawn over the years despite an editor's great efforts to avert it, had nevertheless precipitated a slide from which, having gained such momentum as to become unstoppable, resignation to the inevitable had resulted.

Robert Murray, Gilbert Chester and Anthony Skene in that order entered the ranks of the century makers in 1932 and the positions of the leading contestants at the end of that year stood as follows:-

G. H. Teed (273); Gilbert Chester (103); Robert Murray and Anthony Skene (101); Mark Osborne (90); Gwyn Evans (88); Allan Blair (85); E. S. Brooks (81); Coutts Brisbane (71); Lewis Jackson (58).

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS

Foreword

A few months ago I heard that Bill Lofts had acquired a complete list of titles and authors of stories in the S.B.L. This included the real name of the writer to whom payment for the particular story was made. In his usual thoughtful and generous way, Bill not only very kindly offered to let me make a copy of this for my own records, but also said that I could publish them in Blakiana.

At this point I should explain that this list - the official A. Press record - came into Bill's possession through the courtesy of Mr.

W. Howard Baker. Mr. Baker has most kindly given both Bill and myself permission to release these authentic details.

Many of the revelations are so astounding as to be almost unbelievable; nevertheless, the fact remains they are indisputably true.

These valuable details will be released in monthly batches. Here then, is the first batch.

JOSIE PACKMAN

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NELSON LEE COLUMN

The Lee Column has not been received this month, and the Editor apologizes to Lee fans for its omission. He hopes that readers will find compensation in Bob Blythe's fascinating "Musings on the Early Lee" which has replaced it. Once again, Lee enthusiasts are asked to send along articles for this popular section of the C.D.

* * * * *

WANTED: Sexton Blake Library - 1st series: 11, 17, 37, 105, 109, 111, 198, 201, 219. 2nd series: 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 495, 520, 667. Boy's Friend Library - 1st series: 10, 68, 102, 105, 107, 165, 229, 246, 669. 2nd series: 396. Union Jack: 689, 690, 691, 693, 695, 702, 703, 704, 721, 722, 725, 727, 732, 733, 736, 740, 743, 746, 749, 751, 752, 1041, 1064, 1098, 1388, 1390.
MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.W.22.

WANTED: GEMS: 313, 314, 315, 319, 320, 321, 322, 356, 358, 359, 376, 385, 386, 387, 392, 457, 459, 493, 773, 935, 946, 950, 951, 953, 954, 956, 964, 968, 970, 976, 977, 980, 984, 986, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1116, 1126, 1129, 1133. MAGNETS: 45, 52, 134, 136, 138, 141, 195, 205, 238, 277, 318, 319, 325, 344, 345, 346, 347, 353, 357, 358, 386, 388, 389, 400, 411, 714, 649, 717, 719, 752, 773, 809, 834, 849, 850, 856, 858, 863, 862, 864, 865, 866, 868, 900, 921, 924, 925, 935, 936, 940, 942, 943, 944, 946, 948, 949, 950, 951, 954, 955, 958, 965, 967, 988, 996. POPULARS: 370, 385, 390, 393, 395, 398, 452, 455, 461, 466, 474, 475.
ERIC FAYNE, "EXCELSIOR HOUSE" GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: Nelson Lees: 328 - 332, 334, 335; 384, 386 - 391, 393, 396, 397, 445, 457, 470, 471, 473, 478, 545, 551. Second New: 125, 141, 142, 144 - 146. Monsters 1 - 7. Schoolboy's Own: 169, 171. Would take without covers if story complete.
THOMPSON, 53 WALLASEY PARK, BELFAST, 14.

WANTED: THE SCHOOLGIRL 2d. weekly. 7/6 each for copies dated 1932, in good clean condition. Details to:
MR. N. LINFORD, c/o. Stephen Glover & Co., INTOWN, WAISALL.

* * * * *

CHALLENGE TO THE COMMONWEALTHQUIZZLE No. 15

A	1			2					
B		3							4
C			5	6					
D	7	8							
E		9	10						
F	11	12							
G	13		14						
H			15		16				
I			17		18				
J			19	20					
K		21				22			
L		23	24						
M							25	26	
N						27			28

The letters in the numbered squares, if placed in sequence in the lower grid, will spell out something that according to Gussy, Towser has.

CLUE DOWN: A. How Dicky Nugent might refer to his major.

CLUES ACROSS:

- A. Wingate and Loder are - kind of.
 B. Relish for Jack Blake.
 C. A spar with Redwing.
 D. Cardew is almost rash.
 E. A cap and a topper are included in Gussy's, presumably.
 F. A blow in the South Seas series.
 G. It was once exchanged for the Gem.
 H. Rhyme with Mellish to adoen.
 I. Lo! Train for the master.
 J. Bob Cherry calls Bunter a fat one.
 K. Used to describe the Bounder.
 L. This Billy Bunter is quite a long way.
 M. Tom Merry wouldn't be found dead in it. (3, 5)
 N. A Noble way of saying they're in their element in Leap Year.

* * * * *

(We have a brilliant group in the Old Country who manage to solve our Quizzes, which are far from easy. We feel sure that the brains overseas are just as good. Therefore this Quizze is presented especially for our pals of the Commonwealth. Write down the words in the lower grid and the solution to the Clue down, and post to the Editor. A newly-published British book will be posted to the sender of the first correct solution received from Australia, South Africa, or Canada.)

RESULT OF QUIZZLE No. 14. Solution to Clue Down: "Footer practice"
 Hidden words: "Mr. Lascelles, the boxing beak." First correct solution was received from R. Godsave, 35 Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, to whom 5/- has been sent.

Sexton ~ Blake ~ Library ~ Reviews

JANUARY, 1960.

EPITAPH TO TREASON (No. 443)Wm. A. BALLINGER

This novel commences with a scene by no means uncommon outside many music-halls in England today. It involves a fan-worshipping group of teenagers and the particular object of their hysterical adoration, one Larry Bacardi, a top-of-the-bill guitarist, whose personality, dress and general demeanour gives one an instinctive feeling of familiarity. Larry's attractive young step-mother is murdered and his own life threatened, yet he offers Sexton Blake the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars to keep out of things. Blake wants to know why.

It's back to the days of Munich, 1938, the suicide of a young Parliamentary Assistant Under-Secretary charged with and found guilty of selling military secrets to the Germans, an act of treason of which he was innocent, the sworn vengeance of one aware of that fact - and Larry Bacardi.

Here's a first-class novel with thrills all the way through to its devastating climax and Grimwald's un-grudging acknowledgement of Blake's detective prowess in the last sentence. One thing is imperative - the story-telling of newcomer Wm. A. Ballinger is such that he must be lined up for further commissions in the Blake saga.

Rating.....Excellent

DESERT INTRIGUE (No. 444)JAMES STAGG

The standard set by previous stories of Blake's wartime assignments is very high, and it is commendably upheld in this latest addition. Amongst the Long Range Desert Group of the valiant Eighth Army, carrying out sabotage operations hundreds of miles behind Rommel's armies in the Western Desert, is a traitor. Through him, the Germans are getting information as to the L.R.D.G.'s movements. Patrols and columns are being ambushed and completely wiped out, and Blake's job is to find this traitor. A familiar theme, maybe, but an intriguing one. Intelligence have done an excellent job by discovering that it is through one of the patrols themselves that the vital information has leaked. It is his job, Craille tells Blake, to round off their good work by discovering the man responsible.

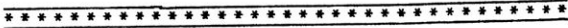
The gallant Eighth Army stand at bay at Al Alamein and Rommel's armies stand poised at the gate of Alexandra when Blake arrives to

to join the L.R.D.G., his task made more difficult by the open hostility of the very man he has come to aid. Yet it is through one of them that he finally unmasks the traitor.

A fine novel, with a climax typically exciting of most S.B.L.'s these days.

Rating.....Very good

WALTER WEBB



ODDS AND ENDS

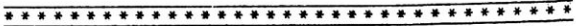
by Gerry Allison

HERBERT'S COLLECTION. Many readers of this magazine are aware that its late editor had a considerable collection of books, and are no doubt wondering what is happening to them. So I will try and put everybody 'in the picture' as they say.

After Herbert's death, his house and its contents were taken over by the estate. In December however, a number of cartons containing many old papers, were by agreement with Mr. Raymond Leckenby, Herbert's son, delivered at the house of Mr. Jack Wood. The secretary of the Northern Section O.B.B.C. and myself have now been over to York, and have inspected the said cartons. To describe their contents as chaotic is an understatement.

It at once seemed obvious that much of Herbert's collection was missing, and we are of the opinion that during the past year or two, Herbert has been disposing of his books, probably to subsidize the 'C.D.' and to finance his voluminous correspondence. The greater portion of the papers remaining are in POOR CONDITION, and seem to be of the less popular type of book, such as Marvel, Pluck, etc.

The complete sorting of the books will be a big task. At the meeting of the Northern Section O.B.B.C. on January, it was arranged that the Secretary should write to Mr. Raymond Leckenby, and to inform him of what was being done, and to point out the condition of the papers. Further information on this subject will be given in due course.



WANTED (in condition good enough for binding) S.O.Ls: 42, 65, 66, 162, 257, 258, 259. Nelson Lee Old Series: 236, 291. The following for exchange only are available: S.O.L's: 210, 350, 353, 373 plus 10 St. Frank's S.O.Ls. Nelson Lee Old Series: 388, 478, 483, 485, 510. Second New series: 150. Gems: 375, 393, 1035, 1254, 1421, 1504. Continued..

Magnets: 1162, 1164, 1165, 1166, 1645, 1650, 1656.
 BRIAN HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

WANTED URGENTLY: the following Boys' Friend Libraries, 1st series, Nos. 670, 721 (Haygarth School stories by Jack North), also Nos. 745, 753, 757 and 761.

W.H. BROSTER, PRIMROSE COTTAGE, STONE LANE, KINVER, STOURBRIDGE, WORCS.

WANTED: The Popular - 127-135, 137, 138, 141-145, 147-159, 161-163, 166, 169-171, 174-184, 186-188, 190, 191, 193-201, 203-205, 207-211, 220-229, 231, 311, 313, 314, 316-318, 320-322, 325-334, 336-343, 345-347, 349, 350, 352-357, 359-361, 380, 381, 388-398, 404, 406, 411-415, 418, 428, 449, 451, 452, 454-456, 459-463, 465, 466, 469-488, 499, 518, 544, 545, 547-551, 556-558, 560-566, 568-571, 572, 577, 578, 581, 591, 596-599. S.O.Ls - 60, 68.

DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

Autobiography of Frank Richards, Album 80 Sports Photos 1922 from O.B. Books. Several hundred "Picturegoers" 1949 onwards. Sell or exchange for Lees, Jacks, Magnets, Nuggets, Realms, etc. OFFERS. CHAPMAN, 35 BARROW ROAD, BARTON-ON-HUMBER.

PRESS DAY. The latest date for the acceptance of literary contributions and advertisements for this paper is the 18th of the month. Club Secretaries are asked to submit their material as early in the month as possible, in order to aid production and prevent publication delays.

OUR COVER PICTURE. Our picture on the cover shows some of the London Club members who attended the show. From right to left you can pick out: Alan Stewart, Len Packman, Eric Fayne, Josie Packman, Haydn Salmon, Horace Roberts, Reuben Godsave, Valerie Sutton, Laurie Sutton, Ben Whiter, Millicent Lisle, Don Webster, David Samuel and family. The children are Robin Whiter, Christine and Graham Lawrence and the twins are Jacqueline and Stephanie Evett.

WANTED: Magnets, S.O.L's, Populars and Holiday Annuals. Send details with prices to:-

K. F. KIRBY, WESLEY STREET, UMTATA, CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

AUSTRALIA

The activities for the year 1959 were brought to a happy conclusion on the evening of December 28th. Host and hostess were Mr. and Mrs. McGrath at their lovely home at Strathfield, a suburb of Sydney. Members were accorded a warm welcome when they arrived at 7 p.m. and a toast to the continued success of the club was proposed and drunk with enthusiasm.

Three coloured films were then shown by Mr. McGrath and members enjoyed a delightful sojourn in England during the screening of "The Trooping of the Colour" and a glorious travel talk called "The Three Seasons". Main feature of the evening was a Martin and Lewis film, and their antics at the circus were greatly enjoyed, judging by the hilarity of the audience.

At the conclusion of this well-chosen programme, a delicious supper "a la Billy Bunter" was served by Mrs. McGrath, and members gathered round the spread to chat about the hobby.

A copy of the C.D. Annual had been received by Syd Smyth, and this was in great demand as it was passed round, the competition being so fierce that the Secretary didn't even get a glimpse inside at the treasures. Judging by the sounds from the lucky ones, it was even better this year than expected.

Two most interesting letters from our Editor were then read - the news about the Billy Bunter show and the arrangements made to celebrate this event was pleasing to the Hamiltonians, who wished they could have joined their friends in London to cut that cake - a plum one, of course! Other good news for these enthusiasts was the advice about the Magnet titles to be available soon in their entirety. They were pleased to hear that Bill Loft's investigations to track down the substitute writers of the Hamilton saga are now nearing a successful conclusion.

The evening ended with thanks to our generous host and hostess, and an expression of good wishes for the New Year to our friends in the hobby overseas.

B. PATE - Secretary.

MIDLANDS

Meeting held 21st December, 1959

As this was our Christmas meeting and the last of the year, we

had expected a bumper attendance, especially as our two friends from Bristol, Mr. and Miss Rutherford, were attending, as also was Miss Freda Guest, who does our News Letter and our Cup entries. It was disappointing that only eight of the regulars turned up to welcome the visitors.

We learned the sad news that Tom was very ill with pneumonia. Apologies were sent in by Ray Bennett and Win Brown; also by the two members from Burton. Anyway, the eleven of us made the best of things and we enjoyed ourselves. There was an abundance of "Mrs. Mibble's pop" (three or more varieties), and enough eatables to satisfy Billy Bunter.

Beryl being away, we got down to the programme which was curtailed under the circumstances. Jack Corbett formed a questionnaire of twelve Greyfriars items. Norman managed to get top score - seven out of twelve. The treasurer then gave us his eight selections of "Desert Island Books".

The news that we were runners-up in the Greyfriars Cup Competition was received with satisfaction. Though we had hoped to be winners, it was nice to learn that Gerry and Co., had managed it this time, though that pleasure was tinged with regret that Herbert Leckey was not alive to share their joy. Congratulations, Northern.

Mr. Rutherford gave us a short talk on his association with the old papers, and, in the course of it, why he preferred Charles Hamilton's stories to those of Edwy Searles Brooks.

George Chatham saw to it that everyone was well served with the eats and drinks. A very nice little party - one of the best we have had - but it would have been better, had we had with us Tom, Beryl, Ray, Win Brown, Ron and Mrs. Mercer, and Jack Ingram. Maybe we shall be seeing them in the New Year.

To wind up, I am glad to say that Tom Porter is getting over his illness, and will soon be back in harness.

HARRY BROSTER - Secretary.

NORTHERN

Meeting held 9th January, 1960

A first-class turn up for the first meeting of the New Year, with 20 members present. We were pleased to welcome Cyril and Mrs. Banks and Christine, after a long absence.

In appreciation of all the hard work Jack Wood has put in for the Club and the C.D. it was proposed by Gerry Allison that Jack be elected to the Committee in place of Herbert. This was seconded by Harry Barlow and carried unanimously.

Business was soon dealt with and we settled down to the evening's programme, which was given by Stanley Smith. In his talk, Stanley set out to prove that all school stories sprang from one prototype. In 1871, the Education Act was passed which made education compulsory for all. In 1877 the Religious Tract Society investigated the possibility of producing a high class weekly magazine, and in the next year published the Boys' Own Paper.

One of the writers in this paper was a young man, Talbot Baines Reed, who produced many interesting articles before one of his masterpieces was serialised - "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's". This story contains all aspects of school-life - fagging, breaking bounds, sport, school newspaper, upper and lower school, etc., and Stanley believed that the development of all school stories by any author followed from this story, as he proved in his most interesting talk.

One other item was a short discussion on the form of a memorial to Herbert, and various points were put forward, such as a collection of Number Ones, coloured slides of first issues, facsimiles of various books, or a bound volume of books suitably inscribed. This is to be carried on later with suggestions from other Clubs.

The next meeting is 13th February, when I hope (unless I have followed their example) to give a short talk on the "School for Slackers."

R. HODGSON - Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held Sunday, 10th January, 1960.

Despite the inclement weather, most of the regular members turned up for this, our first meeting of the New Year. After the financial position had been given there was an open discussion as to the probability of recruiting new members, and also on the advisability of altering the date of our meetings. For many years, Sunday has been our regular day, but for some members, particularly in the summer, Sunday meetings have their drawbacks.

It was therefore agreed to hold the next meeting, as an experiment, on Friday, 12th February, at 6.30 p.m.

After a brief discussion on these problems, a new type of quiz was presented by Frank Unwin, called "Rhyming Couples." Various phrases were given, and from these we had to deduce the rhyming names from the four schools. This was a well thought out game, and was won by Don Webster with 14 correct out of 16.

Tea and library business followed, and then came Don Webster's "Spell like Bunter" quiz, which we understand was previously tried out

with the London Club. Trying to spell like the fat owl was not so easy as it sounded, and many of us were troubled with the problem of two K's and two G's. However, George Riley's spelling proved "superior" to that of everybody else, and he won the competition well in front.

Next meeting, as previously mentioned, Friday, 12th February.

NORMAN PRAGNELL - Secretary.

LONDON

The 12th Annual General Meeting took place on Sunday, January 17th at the residence of Horace Roberts at Streatham. It was a happy and successful meeting and was well attended.

Len Packman was elected chairman for the coming year, and the rest of the old guard were re-elected. Vote of thanks to the retiring Chairman, Frank Lay, to treasurer Bob Whiter, and to auditor Charlie Wright were given. The two librarians, Roger Jenkins and Frank Lay, were suitably thanked for their good work during 1959.

An excellent selection of competitions, puzzles and quizzes was thoroughly enjoyed, especially the "Snakes and Ladders" item conducted by Eric Fayne and the topical prizes he presented in connection with it.

A lengthy discussion about the trend to depart from the realm of Old Boys' Books took place, and it was agreed to limit up to the year 1940 as the field of books and papers for all future talks, competitions etc.

Thanks were expressed to the hosts, Horace and Betty Roberts, for their hospitality and the fine feed. It was decided to hold the next meeting at Hume House, Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22, on Sunday, February 21st. Hosts will be Len and Josie Packman. Kindly notify them, if intending to be present. Phone: NEW Cross 7449 after 6 p.m.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

SOMEBODY SAID

Recently we came across the following bit of wisdom: "What this country needs is dirtier finger nails and cleaner minds!" Which means, perhaps, harder work and less X-certificates. Nothing to do with Old Boys' Books, of course - though we wondered when we saw a schoolboy buying, not school stories, but nude pin-ups from a newsagent.

* * * *

HAMILTONIANA

FRANK RICHARDS ON TELEVISION

In mid-January, Hamiltonians had the surprise - and the treat - of their lives. Frank Richards appeared on television in the programme "To-night". Starting with a shower of old Magnets and Gems, which made us sigh for the old days, the picture faded into the author being interviewed in his study at Broadstairs.

Witty and buoyant, energetic and amazingly boyish, he made a splendid television impact. Asked which of his characters was his favourite, he replied: "Billy Bunter, of course. After all, I've known him for fifty years."

Congratulations, Frank Richards - and commiserations to those who were unlucky enough to miss "To-night" that night.

MAGNET DISPLAY AT FOYLE'S

Arranged by Mr. Michael Anthony, who was one of the stars in the Victoria Palace show, a display of Magnets down the years was given in one of Messrs. Foyle's windows in Charing Cross Road. It was attractively laid out, and, particularly at night when the window was illuminated, caused large groups of walkers to stop and gaze for long, nostalgic periods. An outsize picture of Frank Richards dominated the display.

Those who entered joyfully to purchase a Magnet came sorrowfully away, but plenty departed happily with new Bunter books under their arms.

FAMOUS GREYFRIARS

Our Australian pal, Tom Dobson, sends us an article which appeared in the Melbourne Newspaper "The Age" on Boxing Day. Entitled "Back to Bunterland and Days at Famous Greyfriars" the article, which is a splendid piece of writing, is illustrated by two Chapman pictures from the Magnet. Captions, under the main heading, read as follows:

"Nostalgia is expensive - but what isn't? And when the present is so gloomy, when cricket has become too slow and football too fast to be scientific and poetry no longer even rhymes, who wouldn't look to the past for pleasure?"

We hope to publish a few extracts from this fine article in our next issue.

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. 35. DID THE MAGNET DECLINE AND FALL?

I can find no visible evidence that it did. Years ago, some unfortunate young people were said to go into a decline - a euphemistic term for tuberculosis - with gradual deterioration resulting in death.

One who is blasted out of existence in wartime cannot truthfully be said to have declined and fallen - and that is what really happened to the Magnet in 1940. Its death was as sudden, as unexpected as the death of Lord Kitchener in World War One.

Plenty of papers within our ken have declined and fallen. The "Boy's Friend" of happy memory, lost everything that made its survival worthwhile. It turned to a hotch-potch of ragged material in an effort to live - and it fell. The "Popular" became diseased in the same way - and fell. "Modern Boy" in its death struggles, turned frantically from one format to another in a futile fight for survival, but the decline went on - and it fell.

Could the most discerning reader have detected any sign of disease in the roots of the Magnet in the last year of its life? I say he could not. Apart from some of the normal economies of wartime, which showed in every paper in the land, there was nothing else. No adoption of corsets to hide the protruding tummy, no wig to hide the incipient baldness, no revival of old glories to mask a dearth of good new material, no strong supporting programme made necessary by a weak main feature. In plain words, no slow decline to suggest an inevitable fall.

Was there a single regular reader who was not shocked and astounded that Saturday morning in the early summer of 1940 when his newsagent told him that the Magnet was no more? I doubt it. The end of the Magnet would not have been the bombshell it was if we had previously detected any signs that its end was imminent.

Please do not regard this as any adverse criticism of Roger Jenkins' article in the Annual. I think the article magnificent. I have read it a number of times, with keen enjoyment, and there is not a word of it with which I disagree. The only thing I didn't like was the title, which seemed to mean something which I am sure our gifted writer did not mean.

What of the stories of the Magnet's closing year? As Roger truly observes with his superb use of metaphor, the "divine spark" had gone. Both Bunter and the Bounder had somehow lost their subtle charm of a few years earlier. A harsher quality had replaced the well-loved mellowness. Plots, though fascinating and clever in individual stories, had become static, making series seem too long. The increased length of the salmon-covered stories had led to too much dialogue, too many near-irrelevant situations.

But never forget, as Roger has often stressed, that such criticism can only hold water when the later tales are compared with Frank Richards' own work. Between 1925 and 1934, the Magnet had presented some of the most glorious school stories ever written. The quality of the writing had really been far higher than necessary for the medium in which it was presented. Those stories reached a summit which no writer of school stories had ever touched before or would ever attain again.

Those who were boys in the salmon-covered period delighted in the Water Lily series, for they had never read the vastly superior Old Bus series. They loved the Lamb series, for they knew nothing of the writer's infinitely greater Courtfield Cracksman series. They found the reincarnated Soames an intriguing character, for they could not compare him with the Soames of earlier times. Comparisons could not sour the boys of 1940 as, to some extent, they soured us.

I maintain that in 1940, the Magnet was still the finest school story paper in the world. The stories were still so good that they were surpassed by those of only one paper - the Magnet itself of a few years earlier.

For the Magnet there was none of the ignominy of being amalgamated with some other paper. It did not decline and fall. It was blasted out of existence by the machinations of a madman named Hitler. It died the death of a hero.

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

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 33. CHUMLEY FOR SHORT

BETTE PATE writes: "I greatly enjoyed the interesting and amusing 'Chumley for Short.' I read the Magnet and Gem when my elder brother was interested in them. All the characters were old friends, and as I read your words I could hear myself wrestling with those strange names as I did while I was still struggling with my reading. Despite

our Aussie accent and the fact that we are regarded as a weird mob by some folk, I found that my pronunciation agreed with yours, most every place. It would be interesting to pay a visit to all the Clubs and hear their various interpretations of these names. Thanks for a very pleasant interlude."

GEORGE SELLARS writes: "I remember, during a reading lesson at school a boy pronouncing "fatigue" as "fatty-gue". What a howler! I used to call Reilly "Reelly", so it seemed very funny to me when Gussy said "Weally, Weilly".

Of course it is easy to get wrong with pronunciation, especially with such names as Kerruish and Lefevre. Talbot is, of course, 'Tol-but' and not 'Tal-bot.'"

FRANK UNWIN writes: "I found 'Chumley for Short' very amusing. English surnames are most bewildering. Personally, I pronounce names my way, not B.B.C. way - sometimes to the horror of certain people who like to be a little superior. But surely Fishy's real name is GHOTTI? The 'gh' as in tough, the 'o' as in women, and the 'ti' as in station.

It all reminds me of the story of the foreigner who, studying the English language, one day glanced up at a cinema hoarding and promptly fainted. He had read 'CAVALCADE' - pronounced Success!"

CLIFF LEMPEY writes: "I must praise 'Chumley for Short'. It was very instructive besides being original (which is rare these days.)"

BERNARD PRIME writes: "'Chumley for Short' on pronunciation (especially the indiscreet 'howler' at the end) was very enjoyable."

DON WEBSTER writes: "I was not happy with the facetious article re pronunciations, but, as you say, we all have our own interpretations. I think Lefevre would be the most difficult to agree upon. Yes, I expect many of us referred to Frank 'Nugget' and I even read 'Yaas, wathah' as 'Yaas, wat - hah' as a youngster.

CHARLES VAN RENEN writes: "When Bill Hubbard spent an evening with me some years ago I noticed that he pronounced the name 'Delarey' as 'Deh-lay-ree' with the emphasis on the 'lay', and I have often wondered whether that was the accepted pronunciation in England. Here in South Africa (and Piet, pronounced Pielt short and sharp, does hail from our shores) we call the name 'Deh-la-ry' with the emphasis on the last syllable. I think it was Bill who corrected me when I spoke of Kerr as 'Cur'".

ERIC FAYNE adds: "Alan Stewart tells me that the Scots actually call Kerr "Curr-r-r-r-r". And Alan should know.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB TAKES THE VICTORIA PALACE

By
DON WEBSTER

BY STORM

By
DON WEBSTER

If any proof were needed regarding the popularity of that immortal Frank Richards' character, Billy Bunter, the attendances at the Victoria Palace matinees during the month's run of "Billy Bunter Flies East", have been evidence itself.

On Saturday, January 2nd, thanks to the untiring efforts of Eric Fayne, some fifty or so members of the London Branch of the O.B.B.C. visited the performance.

A report on the play has already appeared in the C.D., so further comments on the cast and acting would be superfluous, but I must reiterate that Gerald Campion is the ideal Bunter - he lives the part.

Furthermore, the characters portraying the Famous Five are infinitely superior to those playing the Removites on television.

An added interest to the show, as far as we were concerned, was that one of our own members had written the incidental music for the production. Eric Fayne, whose name appeared among the "credits" on the printed programme, composed two Bunter songs, "Roll Along, Billy Bunter" and



"Old Billy Bunter, the chocolate hunter" and these were happily used as theme music. Though we received copies of the lyrics, and made efforts to sing, we were not too successful in this direction, but we made up for our vocal shortcomings by tapping our feet and humming.

At the end of the performance, Eric Fayne announced that the O.B.B. Clubs all over the world, had sent Billy Bunter a cake. The presentation was made by two little girls, the daughters of Vernon Evett of Gravesend, who is himself a keen Greyfriars fan. Gerald Campion was brilliant when "Bunter took the Cake." The house rocked with unrestrained laughter.

Then Eric produced a postal-order (manufactured by our artist supreme, Bob Whiter), and announced that the O.B.B.C. felt that it was time Bunter's long-expected postal-order arrived. Once again Bunter had us in stitches with his antics.

Finally, Eric called for three cheers for Billy Bunter, asking the boys and girls from eight to eighty to cheer so loudly that Frank Richards would hear them down in Broadstairs. The result was shattering and ear-splitting. The audience in the Victoria



Gerald Campion

Palace showed no signs of lung trouble that afternoon.

After the performance most of our party went on to the stage, and were photographed with Gerald Campion. It was an afternoon of

tremendous success, and one which none of us who were fortunate enough to be there will ever forget.

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SECOND PARTY

Another large party, for which the O.B.B.C. was indirectly responsible, attended the show the following Saturday, January 9th. This time it comprised old boys and girls of the Modern School, Surbiton, who were joined by several club members, including the Rev. John Dockery and George Sewell. This time Billy Bunter was presented with a Tuck Hamper (Les Rowley will be delighted to know that it was his famous hamper - refilled), and the presentation was made by two old boys of the Modern School in their red and white striped blazers. This time Eric Fayne informed the audience that the O.B.B.Clubs, all over the world, had sent Bunter a Tuck Hamper, and two boys of St. Jim's had come along to present it to him. The joke was enjoyed by the vast audience.

Then came the cheering again. Whether it was louder than on the previous Saturday it is difficult to say, but it was truly terrific. Finally, the two boys of St. Jim's stood among the Greyfriars boys while several "curtains" were taken before a wildly enthusiastic audience.

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TRUE STORY

One afternoon at the Billy Bunter show, a little girl of no more than three years of age sat with her eyes glued on the stage. When Billy Bunter went off, during the performance, she announced in a shrill voice "Billy Bunter's gone to the bathroom."

After the last curtain had fallen, and the National Anthem had been played, she sent up a wail "Billy Bunter has gone. I want Billy Bunter."

Truly our fat Owl catches the fancy young!

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AU REVOIR, BUT NOT GOOD-BYE

The final curtain fell on "Billy Bunter Flies Ecst" on Saturday, January, 16th. Gerald Campion received a tremendous ovation. He could so easily have spoiled things by stepping out of character, and

making a typical curtain speech. He didn't. It was Billy Bunter who came forward, with a typical Bunterism, to squeak "All I have to say to you is that you're a lot of cheeky beasts." And all the cheeky beasts wended their way homewards, happy and contended, and humming "Roll Along, Billy Bunter."

Enthusiasts will be delighted to know that this year's presentation has been even more successful than last year's. Our Northern friends will be delighted to know that arrangements are in hand to present "Billy Bunter Flies East" at a northern theatre next Christmas. And we are all delighted to know that Billy Bunter has become as much a national institution of the London stage at Yuletide as Peter Pan, and a brand new Billy Bunter play will be presented in London next season.

OPINIONS, PLEASE. No. 3.

VERA NICHOLLS writes:

"Why is Mr. Arlington Wilkes, a master at St. Frank's, never mentioned? He was an insignificant, shabby little man, yet I liked him. Didn't anyone else care for him?"

Have you any views on the above opinion. If you have, jot them down, keeping them short and snappy, and post to the Editor.

W. LISTER writes:

"It is many years since I saw a Nelson Lee, but I well remember that Handforth was a favourite character of mine. Anything good will always create a demand. The demand at that time was for Handforth. I don't think he featured too much."

BERT HOLMES writes:

"Why the dickens does one of your readers regard Wodehouse's school stories as "Almost unreadable"? What's wrong with 'Mike' and 'The Golden Bat'?"

DON'T FORGET TO FILL UP AND RETURN TO THE EDITOR

YOUR WHO'S WHO QUESTIONNAIRE!

MUSINGS ON THE EARLY LEE

by ROBERT BLYTHE

One friendly criticism that has been directed at the St. Frank's stories is that there were too many new boys, most of them with unusual characteristics. I agree with this to some extent, but the stories were of a public school, and it would have been strange had the new boys been few and far between. If they had had no unusual gifts there would have been no point in introducing them.

Before St. Frank's came into the picture, two characters, whose names spelt adventure, made their appearance. Lord Dorriemore and Umlosi were introduced to us as old friends of Nelson Lee in No. 105, "The Ivory Seekers." Every year after this, when the summer holidays came round, we were sure to find Lord Dorriemore inviting a number of Removites to share some exciting adventures with him.

The story of how Nelson Lee and Nipper decided to go to St. Frank's is well known, but for the benefit of any who are not familiar with the story, this, briefly, is what happened:

During a visit to America on the track of a criminal Lee was forced to join a Chinese secret society, the Fu Chow Tong. One of the rules of the Tong was that, should he attempt to escape, he would be branded as a traitor. However, after several narrow escapes from death, Lee managed to return to England, where neither he nor Nipper was safe. The pair buried themselves at St. Frank's College under the guise of Mr. Alvington, housemaster of the Ancient House, and Dick Bennett of the Remove.

In that story, No. 112, we met a number of characters, nearly all of whom became famous and remained in the narrative until the end. These were Handforth and his chums, Church and McClure; Tregellis-West, Watson, Fullwood, Bell, Gulliver, Christine, York, Talmadge and Teddy Long, all of the Remove. Morrow was the only senior featured, though a brief mention was made of Fenton, the school captain.

When Nipper arrived, the College House was top dog, the Ancient House being in a poor state. Fullwood, then a complete rascal, was captain of the Ancient House Remove, while Bob Christian was form captain. After numerous stirring adventures, Nipper became captain of the Ancient House juniors and of the Remove.

The first new boy after Nipper was an American, Justin B. Farman (No. 114) who played his part in some entertaining stories, and then in No. 132, we were introduced to Cecil De Valerie, at first a complete

scamp, possessed of an ungovernable temper.

Sessue Yakama, the Japanese boy, arrived in the next issue. He was a likeable character, but never played a prominent part in the stories after his initial appearance.

A few weeks later we met that original creation Tom Burton, otherwise known as "The Bo'sun", whose nautical mode of speech made him the butt of such fellows as Fullwood and Co.

No. 143 marked the introduction of the boys of the River House School, who appeared in the stories frequently until the end. On one occasion they had a story all to themselves, in an "early Schoolboys' Own."

His Grace, the Duke of Somerton, came along in No. 166, and he surely, must have been the most untidy and the most original duke in fiction.

Reggie Pitt, one of the most popular characters of all, made his debut in No. 170. The "Serpent" was the unsavoury nickname which he earned for himself very soon, and the stories of his reformation were told in unforgettable style. Jack Grey, who came to St. Frank's as Jack Mason in No. 178, did much to bring about the change of heart in the "Serpent", and at the end of a very satisfying series we learned that Mason was really the son of Sir Crawford Grey.

Those terrible twins, Nicodemus and Cornelius Trotwood came along in No. 187. Nicodemus, with his remarkable memory and his ventriloquism, played a larger part than the deaf Cornelius, but neither was ever very prominent.

Fatty Little arrived nearly a year later, just in time to join the juniors in their barring-out against Mr. Martin. Unlike his famous contemporary, Billy Bunter, he was at once a great favourite with his schoolfellows, although his appetite was something they could never understand. A good cook, and a decent fellow in every way, he soon took a prominent part in the form's activities. Later, he gained renown as the goalkeeper for the West House Eleven.

And so they came, standing the test of time, and winning their places in the warmest spots of our memories. How pleasant it is to live again, with them, their exciting adventures, their hopes and disappointments, their ups and downs, in the halcyon corridors of yester year.

