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NO.
206.

COLLECTORS DIGEST

FEBRUARY
1964

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 18

No. 206

FEBRUARY, 1964

Price 2s. Od.



THE RUT:

A reader, whose main interest is the Modern Blake, recently wrote me that my "trailer" concerning the attractions in the 1963 Annual made it clear to him that there would be nothing to interest him in the Annual. He asked why the Rio Kid had received such scant attention, and why the Thriller and the Thriller Library had been neglected. He added that one might have expected the famous "Saint" to be a subject for discussion, and passed the opinion that the Digest and the Annual plough and replough old ground with the inevitable result that they get deeper and deeper into a rut.

We are the first to admit that, for a reader whose main interest is the Modern Blake, the Digest and the Annual are poor "buys." We cannot publish articles which we do not receive, and the lack of articles coming to us on the subject indicates that, however much we regret it, there is no very great interest in the Modern Blake.

We are, in fact, just a little too near in time to the Modern

Blake, and the same thing applies to the post-war Bunter books. When Modern Blake and post-war Bunters were being published, we always gave space and time to reviewing them. It is not our fault that we can no longer do that. Let a few more years slip by, and I have little doubt that our historians will turn their searching spotlight on the Modern Blake and the post-war Bunters.

Is there any truth in the suggestion that we are getting deeper and deeper into a rut? Well, the editor's mailbag is heavier than ever before - some weeks it reaches staggering proportions - and our expanding readership is very healthy indeed. Those little details do not indicate that we are in a rut - unless our readers are in a rut, too, and enjoy floundering in the rut with us.

In fact, the scope of the Digest is wider to-day than it has ever been, and that is why the mailbag is heavier than it has ever been. Readers have more things to write about, bless their hearts!

Was the 1963 Annual produced from a rut? Of course it wasn't! The 1963 Annual contained more variety than ever before. For its volume it comprised an enormous variety of subjects, even though the Modern Blake was not one of them.

We do not pretend that variety is popular with everyone. Some, and they are in a minority, would like to see us narrow our scope. Almost without exception, readers write in a very friendly fashion, and different readers will say things like: "Slade is out of place in the Digest and the Annual," "Nobody is interested in articles on film magazines," "You don't give us enough Eamiltonia," "You don't give us enough Leo," "It is wrong to give us modern tales of St. Jim's and Greyfriars," "It is waste of space to give us articles on the Captain (or) King Pippin (or) William (or) Talbot Baines Read (or) Laurel and Hardy' and so on. Some say "Don't publish pictures - nobody wants them!" and others say "Please give us more pictures." And so on, and so forth.

One thing is certain. A magazine which some readers slam for too much variety is certainly not in a rut. At least, that's how we look at it.

THE EDITOR.

WANTED TO COMPLETE SET:

Collectors Digest Annual 1947 and Collectors Digest, numbers 5, 6 and 9. Your price paid for these; alternatively I have 70 duplicate C.Ds. (mostly below 100) for exchange at very generous rates or I will sell them. P. HANGER, 10, PARK SQUARE, KINGS HEATH, NORTHAMPTON.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE

A MINNOW AMONG THE WHALES

IN THE BUNTER SHOW.By ERIC FAYNE

Trembling, nervous, hot round the neck, and cold round the feet, I approached the Shaftesbury Theatre for my first rehearsal. I was undecided whether to go in at the front like the rich people, or whether to use the Stage Door. With the memory in mind of using other stage doors and then searching frantically for 2 hours to find a way out, I went in by the front.

After wandering along thickly-carpeted corridors, tripping over a cleaner, peering into deserted bars and spotless toilets, I eventually found the vast, lush, dimly-lit auditorium.

In one of the stalls at the rear sat a gentleman in a master's cap and gown. He was Clement McCallin who played Mr. Quelch. He was learning his part from a mighty script, and he glared at me as I accidentally knocked his mortar-board askew.

"Who are you?" he rapped.

"I'm the pianist." I said humbly.

The gimlet eyes bored into me.

"Pianists are the lowest form of insect life in the British theatre," he barked.

Feeling that in a moment he would say "Cheese, Mr. Christian," I staggered on. In the aisle stood Richard Dale, the director of the play. I approached him nervously. I said:

"I'm Eric Fayne. You remember - I played last year --"

"How could I ever forget it?" said Mr. Dale with feeling.

A very attractive young lady swept towards me. Attractive but stern. She was Miss Milnes, the Production Manager. She spoke crisply.

"Good morning! How do you do? Quite well, I hope! Lovely day! Will you kindly remember that a rehearsal called at 10.30 means 10.15, not 10.45!"

"I couldn't find --" I began.

"Quite!" Miss Milnes waved a dainty hand. She called to one of her assistants.

"Nigel, kindly show Eric to the pit."

Nigel took charge of me. I followed him through a sound-proof door, along a stone corridor, down some stone steps.

"You're new to the theatre," said Nigel, as I tripped over a scene anchor.

"I've been behind before --" I stuttered.

"Brilliant repartee!" said Nigel.

I emerged into the orchestra pit. Frantically I looked for the piano. I looked under the drum and into the musical director's lunch basket. There was no piano.

Desperately I peered out into the auditorium.

"I can't seem to find the piano," I said. "There's a large harp -- but I've never played the harp --"

"The stage hands are bringing in the piano," said Miss Milnes.

The stage hands brought in the piano.

"Is the piano where you want it?" asked Miss Milnes. "It is to be placed exactly where you want it."

"I think --" I began.

"Quite!" said Miss Milnes. "We're ready at last."

I examined the piano, and collected a few cushions belonging to the orchestra which played for the evening show which was entitled "How To Be Trying Yet Not Really Successful."

"Eric," came Miss Milnes' voice, "the entire cast, the entire stage staff, and the entire Shaftesbury Theatre are waiting for you."

I sat down, loosened my collar, and struck a few discords. To my horror I discovered that I had four thumbs on each hand.

An acid voice reached me:

"Eric, you are engaged to play the piano, not tune it."

I started to strum. I raised my eyes. I found that the curtain had gone up. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, seated at desks on the stage, were staring at me.

"Have you finished cleaning that piano?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I was playing it," I said, with what dignity I could muster.

"I told you so," said Johnny Bull.

The rehearsal ran its course, as all rehearsals will.

As I headed for the stage door, I saw David Nixon, the star of the show, coming towards me down some stone steps. I nearly swooned. Here, in the flesh, was the television idol whom I had worshipped for so long from my armchair. I wondered whether he would speak to me.

He did. He said: "Don't block up the gangway!"

Rehearsal followed rehearsal, and my thumbs grew larger and clumsier.

After I had crashed my last chord at the end of the opening performance, a young man leaned over the orchestra rail and spoke to me.

"I was wondering why you played 'Land of Hope and Glory' all through the show," he said politely.

"Sir," I answered frigidly, "that was not 'Land of Hope and Glory,' it was 'Roll Along, Billy Bunter!'"

"I could have sworn it was 'Bluebells of Scotland!'" said his fair companion.

On New Year's Eve I decided it would be appropriate to play "Auld Lang Syne" at the end of the show. So, as David Nixon ended his warm little speech to the audience, I struck up "Should Old Acquaintance Be Forgotten." (At least, that's what I meant it to be.)

The entire cast stood thunderstruck. They forgot to bow to the enthusiastic audience. They just glared at me. Frank Nugent said "I knew that chap was potty," and as the curtain swept down I heard Johnny Bull say "I told you so."

Every evening there was a crowd of autograph hunters at the stage door. I beamed on them all encouragingly, but it didn't have any effect, except on Boxing Day. On that occasion I was buttonholed by a lady in furs, a gentleman in a pepper-and-salt overcoat, and a boy of about twelve.

"Would you please give our son your autograph?" gushed the furry lady.

"Well --" I smirked, and added modestly: "Of course, you know I'm not --"

The pepper-and-salt gentleman thrust a Biro into my hand, and the lad held out an expensive autograph book.

"Large and clear, please," said the happy gentleman.

With a flourish I wrote ERIC FAYNE right across a page.

The lady scanned it, and her warm smile faded. She let out a squeal.

"Look, Bertram, it's a nobody. He's ruined Wilfred's book."

"How dare you ruin Wilfred's autograph book? How dare you pass under false pretences? We thought it was Michael Anthony. Wilfred has already got the Beatles and Billy Cotton - and now - you - how dare you?"

I escaped.

I've still got the Biro.

Before you start taking that lot too seriously, I must hasten to add that working with the Bunter Co is a most wonderful experience. It is very satisfying to feel that one is a member of a team - if only a minnow among the whales - like being a member of the Greyfriars footer eleven, off to play St. Jim's. Each doing his best for his side - for the show.

The kindness of everyone, the friendliness of everyone, is something which I shall

never forget. The co-operation is tremendous. For hour after hour, day after day, rehearsals go on, and tempers are seldom if ever allowed to fray.

The company quickly made me feel one of themselves. The stage hands always had a cheery word for the minnow. The stage door keeper could not have been more kindly and courteous if I had been Russ Conway. The ladies on the staff of the auditorium were altogether charming. They used to come down to the orchestra rail for a chat before the theatre doors were opened, and, after the first week, they always brought me a cup of tea and biscuits and passed them over the rail after the interval.

On the last day of the show the theatre manager came down and leaned over the rail. He said: "This is your last day. I hope you have had an enjoyable season, and that you will take away happy memories of the Shaftesbury Theatre."

I assured him that I shall always love the Shaftesbury Theatre.

Usually, after the performance, I would meet Nigel, the Assistant Production Manager, on my way out. Invariably he would say, simply: "Thank you, Eric." And I would reply: "Thank you, Nigel." He was the man who gave me my light signals so expertly.

It was always a joy to hear his "pep" talk to the company, over the intercom, early in the afternoon. He would say: "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. You have exactly half an hour before the curtain rises. I wish you all a successful performance."

David Nixon told me that he had been a keen reader of the Magnet for many years, and was always a Greyfriars fan. He looked at me quizzically. "Another paper I loved ... Was there a paper called the Popular?"

I told him there was.

One afternoon David Griffin (Johnny Bull) sought me out to ask if he could have a copy of Collectors' Digest. I took him one the next day, and I also gave him a copy of the Famous Magnet tale "Johnny Bull On The Run."

Often while the show was on, I used to sit and wonder - and I mean wonder. I would think of the days when I used to buy the Magnet, week after week. The last thing I could ever have dreamed was that one day I should be taking part myself in the presentation of a Greyfriars play in the West End of London.

In those pre-war days they used to say that it would be impossible to stage Greyfriars for the simple reason that it was a sheer impossibility to cast Billy Bunter. Yet Billy Bunter has been perfectly cast, both in Gerald Campion and in his successor, Peter Bridgmont.

The one boy who, in my view, has never been too successfully cast is Harry Wharton. He has proved the most difficult of all. Few members of the audience can realise how difficult it is to cast the boys. This year we had the perfect Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, both held over from last year. In appearance, manner, and speech they could not have been bettered. But outside the pages of the Magnet, boys grow older and bigger. Our perfect Bob and Johnny may be too big by next year. Who can tell?

It could be that this year's Harry Wharton was the best so far. Dark, good looking, with fine eyes, he gave much promise. After a doubtful start, he improved enormously after a performance or two. If he read one or two of the Wharton classics, he might yet make the perfect leader of the Famous Five.

I was almost startled one afternoon to meet Frank Nugent, smoking a cigarette in a corridor. And he was certainly the smallest and probably the youngest of the Five.

People have said to me: "Surely you get bored, seeing the same show day after day." I never did get bored, for the simple reason that something different was always happening. There was the afternoon when the egg broke as Bunter was putting it under his cap. There was another time when I got smothered with egg when Bunter flung out his egg hands at the hilarious end of the fourth scene. An afternoon when Bunter lost his collar and bow in a scuffle.

"Where's your collar and bow?" asked David Nixon, impromptu.

"I'll tell you when you're older," retorted Bunter.

An afternoon when a scene stuck as it was being lowered, and I received the flashing green light to urge me to let the piano take over from the wind which was sounding over the Tannoy.

The audiences were every bit as fascinating as the players. I was always gratified to see the large number of adults in every audience. On Boxing Day I am sure there were more adults than youngsters in the theatre. The appeal of these shows to young and old alike is very obvious. For this reason I think that the inclusion of the more subtle piece of dialogue here and there is to be welcomed. Such items pass speedily over the heads of children, but make the adults feel that they are also catered for.

At every performance I made friends quickly with a number of the youngsters in the front stalls. They love to have notice taken of them, and it creates a spirit of real bonhomie among their parents.

One afternoon a lad surveyed my piano with his head on one side.

He said slowly: "It's rather an old-fashioned piano, isn't it?"

"We had it sent over specially from Bunter Court," I assured him. He was more than satisfied.

A little girl said to me one day: "The only thing wrong is Bunter's trousers. They are not the same as the other boys'."

"Well," I pointed out, "Bunter is so fat. They have to use three pairs of ordinary trousers to make one pair for Bunter."

Another satisfied customer.

A small boy said to me: "When Mr. Quelch gives Bunter the cane on his bottom, I reckon that David Nixon will make it disappear."

I agreed - though I was uncertain which was to disappear - Quelch's cane or Bunter's bottom.

Sometimes I would impress on the youngsters that the whole show was magic. They were thrilled when, by merely waving my hand in the air, I could make all the lights in the orchestra pit come on, and then cause them all to go out by snapping my fingers.

Parents would come to me after the show and say, in awed voices: "Thank you for talking to my son (or daughter). It's helped to make their afternoon." Now that was nice when folk said things like that. It kind of made me feel a bit important, and it's kind of pleasant to feel a bit important.

I was tickled to death when, during the interval, youngsters would often come and pop ice creams into the pit for me. On the last afternoon of the show I had six. I managed to eat two of them. If Bunter, on the stage, ever caught sight of me wolfing ice creams and then going on to tea and biscuits, he must have felt jealous.

Most delightful of all was to shake hands with Digest readers across the orchestra rail. They came along in their scores, and there was hardly one afternoon during the whole month when I did not have the pleasure of meeting readers, many of whom I had never met before. I was really moved by the loyalty and affection of so many, plenty of whom had come long distances especially to attend the show. Of the long distance folk, there was Jack Wood who had travelled from York; Mr. and Mrs. Whitehead from Fakenham in Norfolk; Les Palmer and his three fine sons from Oxford; Mr. and Mrs. Jim Sutcliffe with their two splendid daughters from Southend; Mr. and Mrs. Ken Bell with a party from near Lincoln, and Mr. and Mrs. Jack Overhill from Cambridge. Can anyone wonder that my month or more at the Shaftesbury Theatre was a period which I shall never forget? My deeply sincere thanks to Digest readers, club members, Old Mods, and all my other friends who came along to make me happy during the run of the show.

I regret to end on a sombre note. I have been compelled to instruct my solicitors, Messrs. Nipper and Handforth, to sue Collectors Digest for libel. In the January issue the Digest reporter wrote, about me: "From the circle he might, at a pinch, have passed for one of the Famous Five, but from the stalls you could see it was Billy Bunter's grandfather in disguise." If that isn't libel, I don't know what is. I wouldn't have minded if they had likened me to Colonel Wharton, Mr. Prout, or (continued on page 12)..

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27, Archdale Road,
East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

Sexton Blake - "UNION JACK" - official information
No. 4. By W. O. G. Lofts

THE MYSTERY OF 'MICHAEL STORM' SOLVED !

"Sexton Blake has solved many tricky puzzles in his long and distinguished career, but few have presented such a knotty problem, as this one within the realm of his own saga."

When Walter Webb wrote this tailpiece in an Annual article a few years ago - he could have little dreamed - like myself, that the burning year-in-year-out question on the mystery surrounding the Sexton Blake author, would be finally solved. Old readers of Blakiana, I feel sure will not mind me repeating once more the story of the creator of George Marston Plummer - for the benefit of new ones, who may have missed the earlier accounts on the mystery surrounding 'Michael Storm'

'Michael Storm' was the name of an author who wrote some excellent school stories in 'Marvel' 'Pluck' 'Boys Friend' - and probably several other papers in the 1906-10 period. In this period he also wrote a few Sexton Blake stories for the 'Union Jack' commencing with that fine story introducing George Marston Plummer in 'The Man from Scotland Yard' (U.J. 222 11/1/1908). An astonishing fact is that no editor - or author for that matter had ever seen the writer, and it was generally agreed by them, that 'Michael Storm' was a complete mystery man, who lived abroad. About 1910 Mrs. Storm presented herself to Amalgamated Press and said simply 'That her husband had died abroad' and that she had quite a few stories written by her late husband' - and they were accepted and paid to her. Later it transpired that many of these stories were in fact written by G. H. Teed, who had met Mrs. Storm whilst coming over from Indo-China on the same boat, and Mrs. Storm had introduced his stories to Fleetway editors, as a sort of goodwill, to a new author trying to get a start in writing boys fiction.

Nothing illegal of course about this - and soon Teed was to become one of their greatest writers - whilst Mrs. Storm just faded out of the picture.

In an early C.D. Annual the late Herbert Leckenby stated that 'Michael Storm' was the pen-name of a Charles Ignatius Sempill - who had written quite a few novels under that name - and who had written many Radio scripts for the B.B.C. Investigation by myself at the time - showed that as this gentleman was only born in 1898 (as by an Author's Who) it was a sheer impossibility for him to have written stories (which were indeed above the average writer) when 8 years of age!

Confusion on this mystery was also introduced when it was suggested that 'Duncan Storm' another writer in the same period was the same person. But I was able to prove beyond doubt many years ago, that the writer of the very popular Bombay Castle stories - was none other than the popular Gilbert Floyd, who had no connection with 'Michael Storm' at all.

Boulogne-Sur-Mer in France is a very pleasant sea-side resort, and several times a year I visit this French town, now greatly rebuilt since the shelling which reduced much of it to rubble during the second world war. Prior, however, to the first world war, it was here that an Englishman of the name of ERNEST SEMPILL - probably related to the famous Baron Sempill family wrote his stories for the Amalgamated Press under the nom-de-plume of 'Michael Storm' which he was even known under by official records.

It is not my intention to dwell on the subject, of why and how this writer chose to do this, as it was purely his own private affair, and no concern of ours - but proof of these findings were recently given to me by a well known editor - who had I know, met 'Michael Storm' several times, but in the past was greatly reluctant to talk about the affair - except to say that it was a great mystery affair, best forgotten

... What you say about Michael Storm is accurate to my recollection; and it is quite possible he was related to Baron Sempill. I met him quite a few times, on his fleeting visits to my office, and I should say he was a man of good education. A fluent and witty conversationalist, aged about 45, he was similar in appearance to Peter Ustinov the famous actor - complete with whiskers all round his face. He lived in either France or Switzerland

Readers of the old UNION JACK who have read the excellent Xmas Double Number for the year 1908 entitled "The Ghost of Rupert Forbes" will also be interested to learn that Forbes is the family name of the Sempill's, and to read this story, and also the theme of the first

Plummer story, they may glean some idea perhaps of the mystery surrounding 'Michael Storm'. It is obvious that there must have been some connection between Ernest Sempill and Charles Ignatius Sempill - maybe father and son.

Ernest Brindle:

As written in another article for the C.D. - this writer had, it was believed, some connection with a very early substitute St. Jim's story in the GEM. A famous war correspondent for the DAILY MAIL in the 1900 period, Ernest Brindle did however, write quite a large number of boys stories in various papers controlled by Hamilton Edwards. Mr. G. R. Samways can remember him well, as he was an old pupil of King Edward's School - which he, H. W. Twyman (editor of the U.J.) and Hedley O'Mant (Chief sub-editor on the MAGNET) attended - and probably was instrumental in getting them a start on their respective careers. Mr. Samways can also remember with pride a letter that Ernest Brindle wrote to him, whilst he (Samways) was still at school, praising some verse he had wrote in the school magazine.

Ernest Brindle did however write at least one Sexton Blake yarn for the UNION JACK, No. 427 16/12/1911, entitled THE RAJAH'S VOW. And so another name is added to the growing band of authors who have written about the great detective SEXTON BLAKE.

BLAKE IN SYDNEY

By Eric Copeman

Last night here in Sydney we had Sexton Blake visit us in our lounge room per medium of TCN Channel 9, one of Sydney's commercial television channels. It was a real case of nostalgia because Blake brought with him Tinker ("his name's just Tinker" said Blake), Mrs. Bardell, Superintendent Venner and Sergeant Belford. Yes, it was an old film, the one released in 1944 called "Meet Sexton Blake" starring David Farrar as Blake, and maybe its story wasn't all that brilliant, but at least there was a reasonable attempt to portray Blake the way we used to think of him. Our first view of him was from the back, in topcoat and hat and he looked for all the world like an E. R. Parker illustration come to life! Tinker (John Varney) may have lacked some of the character we like to imagine him to possess but at least he referred to Blake as "guv'nor" and Blake called him "old son." Mrs. Bardell may have lost a little weight but she dropped some good "Bardellisms" whenever she appeared and there was every attempt made to keep her in character - Blake even affectionately referring to her in the old Gwyn Evans style as "Mrs. B." There were intelligent

observations and deductions, some good free-for-alls, shadowing, gloomy docks, murky river scenes, shootings, in fact most that we were willing to accept in an SBL of the vintage years. Blake remained completely in character throughout, aloof but lovable, complete with dressing gown and briar pipe in a couple of more homely sequences, and admired and respected by odd characters in the story. Verner wasn't so convincing; he would have been better if he'd been called Coutts. Belford was simply a bumbling assistant with a pronounced accent. But even Pedro was referred to a couple of times and it was good to hear all the familiar names in our own home. Unfortunately the film was screened late - it didn't start till 11 p.m. and finished at about 12.30. Equally unfortunately, when the sequences were interrupted by "commercials," the film was reintroduced with a printed sub-title of "Meet Sexton Black" and that jarred! And in one of our local TV weeklies I read the words "Sexton Blake of Scotland Yard solves a difficult crime." But the other TV book was more accurate in saying "Sexton Blake and Scotland Yard join forces to solve a difficult case." It was a touch of the old days and I loved it. I wasn't the least critical. I couldn't afford to be. It's the only Blake film I have ever seen. And it was Blake the way I like to remember him. (Just one odd note. A young girl who helped Blake and Tinker was called "Nobby Clark" and it was the first time I'd ever heard of a female of that name!)

A MINNOW AMONG THE WHALES (continued from page 8)...

even Gosling, the Porter! But Billy Bunter's grandfather! No, sir! I am suing the writer of the report, the editor of C.D., and York Duplicating Services. I hope to be able to retire in comfort on the proceeds.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS: (Memorial Edition) 25/-.

Available from all booksellers, or direct, to any address in the world, from Collectors' Digest Office.

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

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: 1927 Holiday Annual. Sexton Blake Libraries, 1957 - 1963. All in excellent condition.

WANTED: Nelson Lee Libraries 1923 - 1933. S.O.Ls. (St. Frank's only). Fullest details to:-

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Hamiltoniana



DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 47 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 170 - "Prefects on Strike"

Charles Hamilton always regarded the Magnet and the Gem as having a circle of readership that was superior to that of the Boys' Friend. The true lover of the school story, he reasoned, would read about Greyfriars and St. Jim's, whereas the not so avid reader who wanted a selection of short items would take the Boys' Friend in which the Rookwood story, with some five or six chapters, occupied only about a quarter of the paper.

Of course, Charles Hamilton was too fine an artist to write down to his readers or to offer second-best deliberately. The Rookwood stories consequently represent an achievement that was of a very high quality, and in a way they were more consistently good than the Greyfriars or St. Jim's stories, since they were written over a shorter period of time and were only a brief episode every week. In a sense they represent a brilliant cameo - the art of school story writing in miniature.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Charles Hamilton used Rookwood as a testing ground for themes that occurred to him. If they succeeded, well and good - they would be used later in the Magnet and the Gem: such themes as a floating boarding-house and a rebellion on an island in the river first appeared at Rookwood (which makes me disbelieve the theory that the Amalgamated Press supplied Charles Hamilton with detailed plots in the Golden Age, since so many themes at this time were repetitions of earlier ones). If the theme didn't succeed, or didn't seem likely to transfer well to another school, then no more was heard of it. Such themes as a strike of masters or prefects could not be used at other schools because they depended upon the stubborn irascibility of the Rookwood headmaster.

It was Dr. Chisholm who sparked off the crisis in the tale that

was reprinted in No. 170 of the Schoolboys' Own Library - "Prefects on Strike." As Owen Conquest said, "His decisions were promulgated, as it were, from the heights of Olympus, and it was not for common mortals to criticise them, much less oppose them." Bulkeley walked into a booby-trap intended for Carthew, lost his temper with Raby, and was instantly removed from his high position by Dr. Chisholm who had arrived at such an inopportune moment. The prefects themselves were incensed, and after protesting to no avail they resigned in a body.

Like all Rookwood stories, this tale came quickly to a crisis and developed speedily in short episodes. There was no time for the leisurely approach common in later Magnet series. Nonetheless, there was plenty of drama, and some humour (when Tubby Muffin was elected captain, to thwart Carthew), and events moved swiftly to a satisfying conclusion: "the obstinate pride of the old gentleman was vanquished at last."

* * * * *

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA No. 4. (New Series)

The juniors listened to Mr. So's bubbling talk with interest; but they wondered whether there was not something more solid in "old China" than in "new China".

"Later," said Mr. So Fat, waving an enthusiastic hand, which narrowly missed the nose of a Tartar gentleman passing by, and caused the Tartar gentleman to jump - "later, we sweep away all this; we have new, grand roads, and motor-cars by the honourable myriad! In this city, so far, there has not been one motor accident! Later, we have our accidents, same as in honourable London - great, new hospitals shall be erected, to accommodate the victims of immense traffic! Yes, China is slow - but China advances! Oh, yes, I am ashamed to say that we still cut off obnoxious head of criminal in China! Later, we hang one another with excellent ropes, as you do in England! Oh, yes!"

"Fine!" grinned Bob.

"Here there is little wheeled traffic." said Mr. So Fat. "In the South of China wheels are few; once they were almost unknown. In the North, plenty! Later we have immense quantity of wheeled traffic! Oh! Yes! Where there is a wheel there is a way, as you say in English."

The party walked on into the fishmongers' street. The sights in that quarter did not raise their spirits. They shivered at the sight of slices cut from living fish for sale.

Johnny Bull gave an angry grunt.

"Brutes!" he growled. "Let's get out of this!"

"I agree with whole heart!" said So Fat. "In England you boil your lobster alive! But perhaps he like it! Yes?"

- - - - -

(There will be a special competition in connection with this new series of Gems of Hamiltonia in a few months' time. Watch for future announcements.)

* * * * *

M A G N E T M U S I N G S

By O. W. Wadham

Who would secure most votes if a popularity poll on Greyfriars characters was conducted among today's collectors? I am sure the Bounder, Vernon Smith, would be the winner.

Many Greyfriars boys seem just "too good to be true," and may have had something to do with the decline in Magnet sales in the 'thirties.

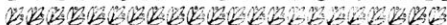
By that period boyish behaviour had vastly changed from the 1912-14 pattern, even if it remained the same in Famous Five fiction till the unfortunate finish.

Mention in September Collectors' Digest of a reprint of "Billy Bunter Butts In," which has "the ever-popular theme of Harry Wharton feuding with Mr. Quelch," reminds me that in No. 259 of Schoolboys' Own Library, Harry Wharton becomes the rebel of the Remove, falls out with friends, openly defies his form-master, and makes himself "the worst boy in the school." The story, "Rebel of The Remove," was much sought after in those 1936 days, I presume.

In the Gem that month there was more feuding - a Jimmy Silver and Co. dispute entitled "From Foe to Friend." Come to think of it, Herr Hitler was getting into his stride in 1936, so little wonder feuding was popular even in boys' papers.

I have never seen a college boy in N.Z. wearing a top hat. They just would not dare, so I am wondering what kind of reception Magnet No. 1,456 received in this country when the cover showed Greyfriars' boys about to board the Friardale train wearing shining top hats. More especially as, in the first chapter, Bob Cherry declares: "There's Temple in a topper. What about footer to fill up time? Thoughtful of Temple to bring that topper." I reckon N.Z. readers would have heartily agreed - especially as the artist had shown Bob and pals in top hats, too!

Nelson Lee Column



CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS VISITS LONDON OBBC

By Ray Hopkins

When he visited the London OBBC in December 1963, Edwy Searles Brooks revealed that, while he was still at school, his favourite paper was THE BOYS' HERALD. Mr. Brooks is now 74 and he first started writing adventure stories for fun when he was 15. At the age of 17, he wrote a 2,000 word story and sent it to a paper called YES OR NO. He received three guineas for this story. This encouraged him to send a 10,000 word story to THE BOYS' FRIEND.

"The Editor sent for me and said I looked so young that he thought I was one of his readers. He accepted my third story and then asked me if I could write a St. Jim's story. I sent in a 6,000 word story and the Editor was very pleased with it. Then he asked me to write a serial consisting of 18,000 words per week. The Editor gave me the basic idea for this story."

While Mr. Brooks was writing an occasional Sexton Blake story, the Editor, Mr. Back, asked him to do a Nelson Lee story. Mr. Brooks asked the editor if he could write a series and was asked for an outline of the proposed series. The editor felt that authors tended to run out of ideas and that a series would not be completed. However, THE GREEN TRIANGLE was the first series, then followed THE CIRCLE OF TERROR. The Editor then suggested what became the JIM THE PENMAN series. This writing of Nelson Lee series continued for a while until the Editor suggested making the Detective a part of a continuing school series. Mr. Brooks was doubtful about this step and felt that Nelson Lee would be out of his element. However, the first Nelson Lee school story he wrote doubled the circulation of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. It was called NIPPER AT ST. FRANKS. The name of the school was invented by Mr. Brooks. He didn't have to look far for a

name for the school. His wife's name is Frances.

"I think the decline of THE NELSON LEE was caused by two things: the national slump and unemployment after 1929 caused the circulation to go down and there was too much mucking about with Editors. Editor May went to another paper and was replaced by two or three other editors. When Alfred Edgar became editor he wanted every story to feature Handforth. Also, I had to conform to editorial wishes to change the setup at St. Franks in regard to the increasing of the number of houses. However, it was my idea that Ralph Leslie Fullwood should undergo a reformation. I did not intend to reform him at all when I first invented him, and after his reform I had to supply another black sheep in the shape of Bernard Forrest. After THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY finished, I felt pretty awful about being relegated to the back of THE GEM.

"I never collaborated with anyone in the writing of the St. Frank's stories. I did not plot the school stories out before writing them. In regard to THE NELSON LEE, there was no collaboration at first between the author and artist and Arthur Jones was the only artist I ever talked to in regard to the illustrations drawn for the St. Frank's stories. He was a very nice chap and very quick to grasp what I intended.

"Most St. Frank's stories took me three days to write in longhand. When I started to use a dictaphone I found I could write a story in three hours. I was usually five stories ahead in the Nelson Lee/St. Frank's series. When I went to America for a holiday, I wrote six complete Nelson Lee stories in one week. I dictated those direct to a typewriter, to my wife and brother. The Editor said afterwards that they were as good as any others I had written."

Mr. Brooks enjoyed writing for THE UNION JACK. Regarding THE PROUD TRAM, Editor Tryman was let down by the author who was to have written the fifth story in the series. He telephoned an SOS and sent Mr. Brooks the list of clues by post. The story was finished in time for publication but it was a race against time. Mr. Brooks does not now work at this hectic pace. He writes three or four novels a year under his pen-names Victor Gunn and Berkeley Grey. Norman Conquest was first called Peter Gay by him but the editor thought that the name by which this character is now known was the better of the two. The author did not at first plan to write a series of Conquest stories. He intended him solely to be in a couple of stories he was writing for THE THRILLER. Mr. Brooks preferred writing Detective Stories to School Stories and his main preference was for Sexton Blake with Nelson

Lee as second choice.

"I usually plan 15 chapters for my new novels. My Victor Gunn stories sell very well in Germany. In America, they have so many of their own detective writers that it is a difficult market to break into. I have travelled all over America and the Continent; however, I had not been to Canada when I took the boys of St. Frank's to the Canadian Northwest. Hulbert Footner's writings helped me with the local color for these stories."

"Though I had read THE MAGNET and THE GEM as a boy at school, when I was asked to write substitute stories for THE GEM about 1910, I found it hard to write about another author's inventions because it is so easy to make them appear out of character. I can understand Mr. Hamilton's feelings about substitute stories appearing under his name. I didn't like stories in THE BOYS' REALM appearing under my name when I had not written them, however, it was the policy of the AP to employ substitute writers."

As members of the London OBBC and having access to Librarian Bob Blythe's copies of THE NELSON LEE, we are in a more fortunate position than the author of the original stories, for he commented:

"If I read any of the St. Frank's stories now they would all be new to me. They were all written a long time ago and I have forgotten most of them."

So it would seem that we who have newly discovered St. Frank's or those of us who are re-reading Edwy Searles Brooks for the first time since boyhood probably have a greater appreciation and enjoyment of his school stories than the author himself.

* * * * *

LEE EXPERT SAILS FOR NEW ZEALAND

Jim Cook, the well-known authority on Nelson Lee lore and popular writer of our Letters From St. Frank series, left England early in January to make his home in New Zealand.

Our Australian Club is arranging a special meeting to welcome Mr. Cook when he breaks his journey at Sydney, and our New Zealand readers will be happy to know that so knowledgeable an expert as Jim will soon be among them.

We wish Jim and his family every happiness in their new home, and we are delighted to assure readers that another of the famous St. Frank's letters will soon be on its way to Collectors' Digest.

NEIL BECK IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES

Neil Beck writes;

I have just read Jack Wood's article in January C.D.

I would like to apologise for my mistake in my Annual article when I said that Xmas 1918 was a year with no Christmassy story.

My explanation is that I have never read the series and, as I looked down the list of titles in the Jack Mason series and saw no Christmassy title, I wrongly took this to mean that there was no Xmas story.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS - 52, 131 to 149 inclusive, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 435, 469, 706, 719, 751, 752, 753, 762, 763, 809. Most issues between 821 and 890, 900, 921, 924, 925, 936, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996.

GEMS - Many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also Nos. 925, 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1129, 1150. POPULARS: 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. EARLY PENNY POPULARS: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 48.

ERIC FAYNE, "EXCELSIOR HOUSE," GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

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ANNUALS WANTED: "Holiday" 1920; "Champions" pre-war (not 1925).

RAYNER, BANK, CLARE, SUFFOLK.

DANNY'S DIARY

FEBRUARY 1914.

This month we all went to the last performance at the Tivoli Music Hall in the Strand. It was originally opened in 1891.

Mr. Albert Chevalier, who was in the very first show there, was also in the last

one, and he made a nice speech mentioning old favourites like Dan Leno, Jenny Hill, and Charles Godfrey who had appeared at the theatre, and he then led the audience in singing "Auld Lang Syne." The Tivoli is now to be pulled down, and they talk of building a picture palace in its place.

A GRAND ISSUE OF A GREAT PAPER!

The
NOW
ON
SALE
1^D POPULAR



A DRAMATIC SCENE IN THE GREAT SEXTON BLAKE STORY.

I have had the Penny Popular every week this month, because there has been a splendid series of stories about the St. Jim's boys afloat on a steamer called the "Condor." One of the covers of the Penny Pop was quite strange for a boys' paper. It showed a wedding, and it was drawn by R. J. Macdonald to illustrate the Sexton Blake tale which was called "The Fenfield Conspiracy." Mr. Lindsay was most amazed when I showed it to him. He said it was an old story, once called "The Third Man," which appeared in the 1d Union Jack in Queen Victoria's reign.

In the second round of the F.A. Cup there was only one draw out of 16 games. Aston Villa, the cup holders, won away against Exeter, and Manchester City beat Tottenham at Manchester.

The Magnet has been quite good this month without being exceptional. "Bunter's Black Chum" was a fine footballer named Diniwayo. Bunter pretended to know him well, so Wingate asked Bunter if he could persuade Diniwayo to play for the Greyfriars First Eleven. This was a facer for Bunter, who didn't really know Diniwayo at all. However, it all turned out well, and Diniwayo did play for Greyfriars at the finish.

"The Factory Rebels" was rather an odd story about a strike, led by a brutal agitator named Nat Boggs, at a local jam factory.

In "Peter Todd's Plot" Wingate was accused of mixing with bad people at the Anchor Inn, but it turned out that it was really someone else who looked like Wingate. Snoop was the snob in "The Snob's Lesson." He was ashamed of his Canadian uncle, Mr. Huggins.

In "The White Feather" there was a nervous new boy named Percy Esmond. He got his pluck back eventually.

The school teachers in Herefordshire are all out on strike for more pay. It seems a dreadful example for schoolmasters to give to their classes, but I wish my own Headmaster would go on strike. Ever since he found out that I keep a diary, he calls me "Peeps." So far, I haven't told him off for it.

Doug took his lady friend, Freda, to see "After the Girl," a new revue at the Gaiety Theatre. It lasted 3½ hours which Doug said was much too long, though I myself like plenty for money. The scenery was marvellous, and the costumes, according to Freda, were very beautiful, very fashionable, and very uncomfortable.

I don't seem as though I can ever get on with Freda. She told my Mum she was shocked to see me walking on a lady's inside.

Mum gave a little squeak and said: "Walking on a lady's inside? What do you mean, Freda?"

Freda explained that she had seen me walking with a lady, and I was on the inside of the pavement. Freda is a bit of a cat. I had to keep my sword arm free, and in any case, it wasn't a lady - it was my Mum.

The Gem has been good this month. In "Making Things Hum," Mulvaney Major had his young brother, Mick, come to St. Jim's as a new boy. Mick is a riot.

In "Rallying Round Figgins," Figgins entered for an examination called the Bishop's Medal. He wanted to show Cousin Ethel that he had brains as well as brawn.

I didn't care much for "D'Arcy's Mysterious Present" in which Lord Eastwood sent Gussy a walking stick which different people tried to steal. The stick contained some valuable state secrets. A bit silly, I thought. Next week it was Lowther who was "Led Astray" by Levison, Knox, and Cutts. Lowther bet on a horse, and tried to go to Muggleton Races. In the end, Cutts and Knox were flogged.

"A Birthday Celebration," was funny. Tom Merry & Co. got up a concert to celebrate Mr. Linton's birthday, and Figgins took the place of the real conjuror who was named Mr. Bulger.

I have just bought an iron hoop which I bowl along the road with a skid. It is good exercise, though Mrs. Tonbridge, our next door neighbour, says the noise of it goes through her poor head. It is great fun trying to bowl my hoop along the tram lines.

I had one copy of Chuckles this month. Frank Richards' story about Dick Trumper and Co. was "The Courtfield Challenge," and there was also a Ferrers Locke story called "The Tattooed Eye."

WANTED: Nelson Lee Lib. 1st new series Nos. 188, 189, also all numbers in very good condition of Aldine "Buffalo Bill Library" and Aldine "Robin Hood Library," also Thrillers Nos. 278, 279, 343, 359, 360, 361, 365, 369, 371, 372, 379, 381, 382, 383, 386, 442, 443, 485; also B.F.L. 1st. 749 "Corinth for the Cup." Will pay high prices or will give liberally, Nelson Lee Lib. 2nd series many numbers, Schoolboys Own Lib. (St. Frank's) many numbers.

V. E. COLBY, 8 BERESFORD AVE., BEVERLY HILLS, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

News from the Clubs

MIDLAND

Meeting held 17th December, 1963:

The meeting before Xmas is always an unlucky one for us as far as attendance goes. Works parties and other engagements generally keep quite a few of the members away. Tonight was no exception. The nine present were besides myself, Norman Gregory, Madge and Jack Corbett, Win Brown, Tom Porter, Jack Bellfield, Ted Davey and John Bond. There was no fixed programme and a quiz concocted by the writer was first disposed of. Fourteen items, Hamiltonian and Sexton Blake with one Nelson Lee, seemed to be more difficult than I thought and only Tom Porter and Norman had much success with these. Four each correct. The Collectors Item was a wonderful mint volume of Christmas Magnets brought along by Tom Porter. The anniversary number was No. 1609, Harry Wharton's Christmas Guest. Another one was one from the famous Rebel series, No. 1296, The Runaway Rebel. A Game of Greyfriars Bingo was then enjoyed - Norman appearing again to have all the luck that was going though Madge Corbett was the lucky one to win the Library raffle. The reading was from a Magnet of the Loder's convict cousin series and much to the taste of the assembled members. For all the small attendance this was a happy little meeting and finished up the year 1963 in a highly satisfactory way. Next meeting January 28th.

HARRY BROSTER Secretary.

NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 11th January, 1964:

There was an excellent attendance at 239 Hyde Park Road for this our first meeting of 1964, and fortunately the weather conditions were a great improvement on those prevailing in January of last year. Our Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, was compelled to make an early departure and so Vice-Chairman Jack Wood occupied the centre of the rostrum. He had a special word of welcome for two new members, Mr. and Mrs. T.

West.

We had an unusually large and interesting batch of correspondence this month, including a letter from Lawrence Morley, who attended the meeting of the London club at which Edwy Searles Brookes was present. We were also pleased to hear from Norman Smith, who has now left the district, but hopes to be able to attend meetings from time to time. Jack Wood had just returned from London, where he went to see 'Billy Bunter Meets Magic,' at the Shaftesbury Theatre, and also met Eric Fayne, who cordially returned our good wishes for the New Year on behalf of the London Club.

Then Gerry Allison took over for the first item of a new series of talks and readings in which various members will give their impressions of one of Charles Hamilton's characters. Gerry chose Vernon-Smith of the Greyfriars Remove, and read an extract from a Magnet story which described how the Bounder, out of his dormitory at night, surprised a burglar in the Head's study - an episode which illustrated Smithy's nerve and presence of mind.

A quiz by Frank Hancock of 30 questions followed, the winner being Elsie Taylor, with 22 correct. Bill Williamson next with 21, and Neville Vear, Jack Wood and Gerry Allison equal third with 20.

A short discussion on general topics followed, and we terminated another enjoyable meeting at 9.20 p.m.

Next meeting, Saturday, 8th February.

F. HANCOCK

Hon. Sec.

AUSTRALIA

December Meeting:

Happy anticipation turned into enjoyable reality when members sat down for their Christmas party at the Cameo Coffee Inn on Thursday, December 19th. Mine host, Mr. Chapman, excelled himself, and like the weather the bill of fare was most enjoyable. The candles on the cake were lit and members toasted the future of the club, now celebrating its sixth birthday.

For an hour there was discussion and reminiscence as greetings cards and letters from overseas and interstate were passed round. Congratulations to the London Club on persuading Edwy Searles Brooks to be their guest. Our Lee enthusiasts are eagerly awaiting further news of this memorable occasion.

As always, it was good to hear from such old friends as Harry Broster, Ron Hodgson, Bill Gander, Jack Murtagh, Bill Hubbard, Josie

Packman, Norman Pragnell, and many others nearer home. One thing only was needed to make the evening perfect - the presence of our friend and editor, Eric Fayne - and also the presence of our other good friend, C.D. Annual.

Our party was everything we hoped it would be, and as a pleasing finale, members autographed the menu cards which will be preserved in the club archives.

January Meeting:

It was decided to hold a meeting in January despite the heat wave and the summer holidays. It was pleasant to welcome Don Harkness back, though we missed our other new enthusiast, John Gardener. There was an interesting discussion on the current Bunter Show and the programme was passed round. Everyone was delighted to know the show is doing so well.

Bob Whiter's artistry was admired when his greeting card was passed round, and it was also very pleasant to hear from him.

The secretary reported on the arrangements to meet Mr. and Mrs. Jim Cook at each Australian port they call at on their way to New Zealand. Perhaps we can persuade them to abandon ship in Sydney and become regular members of the Golden Hours Club.

Treasurer Ernie Carter announced financial details, and the meeting closed. Next meeting, Thursday, 13th February.

B. PATE (Secretary)

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held, Sunday 12th January, 1964:

Sickness curtailed the attendance at this meeting and to make matters worse we were greeted with the news that George Riley was leaving us. George has been a member for many years, joining during the days at Waterloo House. He was in fact still at school at the time being a contemporary of Peter Webster, Don Webster's son, who was also a schoolboy when he was with us. George is now a married man and while we are sorry to lose him we wish him the very best of luck in his new job in Barnsley.

After the business part of the meeting was over the new acquisitions to the library were inspected and met with general approval. We then discussed the possibility of making some tape recordings and it was decided to record excerpts of a later meeting when the attendance was better.

As this was George Riley's last meeting he introduced the quiz

(it also gave someone else a chance of winning) the honours this time being shared between Bill Gally and me.

The meeting finished earlier than usual.

Next meeting, Sunday February 9th.

BILL WINDSOR

LONDON

A bright start to the New Year was the occasion of the first meeting, venue Cricklewood, delightful hosts, Marjorie and Bill Norris. Don Webster's quiz caused roars of laughter; winner Bill Lofts, and then Roger Jenkins put the Don through his solo quiz. It was about knowledge of the "Gem" and Don got two thirds of the questions right. Charlie Wright and Laurie Sutton had private attempts and both did well.

Thanks to Gerry Allison, a tape recording of Tom Hopperton's talk "Alas the Chimes" was played over and enjoyed by the company present.

A cinema show by the hosts consisted of an episode of "The Perils of Pauline," two reels of Charlie Chaplin and a film taken at the May meeting by the hosts. The latter was quite good; nice to see oneself on the screen.

With excellent reports by both the librarians, Bob Blythe and Roger Jenkins, a delightful feed and many good discussions, it was unanimously agreed that a good time had been had by all.

The Annual General Meeting of the club is scheduled for Sunday, February 16th, and will be held at Hume House, Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. If any alteration members will be advised in the monthly newsletter.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

16 B.F.L. year 1935 to 1939.....	36/-	Holiday Annual 1923.....	£1
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MAGNETS 1619-31-36-50-58 }.....	22/-	GEMS 1350-1370-1547.....	7/6
1660-1668-77-78-81-63 }			

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Yours Sincerely

Interesting Items from
the Editor's Letter-Bag

JOHN TROVELL (Colchester): Of the many outstanding items appearing during the year surely "Penalty for Improper Use" shone like a beacon. What a joy to find the old well-loved Greyfriars characters in a modern setting. Please let us have more of these, and could we have an occasional St. Jim's and Rookwood story on the same lines? What can one say of the Annual that has not been said many times before? A feast of pure pleasure indeed. The work of Alfred Hanson had me really walking the well-known Greyfriars landmarks. Danny was delightful. These, and many more such contributions keep one at least young in heart.

ROSS STORY (Worthing): The Annual lived up to our usual expectations. I was so glad you included a story of Vanderlyn - I am certain that if Martin Clifford had been able to incorporate him in his St. Jim's stories he would have become as immortal as Tom Merry & Co.

(We regret to learn that Mrs. Story has had to enter hospital for an emergency operation. We wish her a very speedy return to perfect health and strength. - ED.)

Mrs. M. TAYLOR (Streetly): Ever since I was seven years of age, and I am in my late fifties now, I have read the Gem and the Magnet. In fact, Frank Richards has been part of my life, bless his dear heart. He is still alive to me.

W. J. RAYNER (Clare): Congratulations on this year's Annual - a splendid piece of craftsmanship and a credit to all concerned with it.

MAURICE KUTNER (Clapton): In a volume filled with good things I was particularly interested in Tom Hopperton's "Drew's Big Draw." I thanked you this time last year for a reproduction of a Warwick Reynolds drawing on the cover of C.D. Yet another of his drawings graces the current issue, so please accept my thanks once again. He

is my favourite of all the A.P. artists, and I consider there is no better way to begin the year.

JOHN STOKES (Dublin): Was Bunter much slimmer years ago than in the later tales? In one of the Look & Learn stories, he climbed in through a ship's porthole. Not even as a small child could I ever squeeze through any porthole. How did Billy manage it?

(The story in question was a sub story, and in sub stories anybody could do anything. - ED.)

JOHN McMAHON (Glasgow): What a wonderful book the Annual is! I only wish I could find the words to convey my gratitude for both the Annual and the Digest.

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): My wife and I will certainly be coming up to see the show. It will be fifty years next November since I bought my first Gem, "Tom Merry's War Fund," which I talked about in my broadcast on "Magnets and Gems." But don't look for an old codger with a bent back. I'm just home from my dip in the river - water temperature 34 degrees - which I've been in all the year round for 42 years.

(Jack and Mrs. Jack DID come to the show, all the way from Cambridge. He looked more like George Wingate than someone who bought his first Gem fifty years ago. Jack, we salute you. - ED.)

JIM HEPBURN (Blyth): I enjoyed Bill Lofts' article on "Chips." I was introduced to that grand comic in 1912 when I was seven. I used to visit a smallholding where they got "Chips" every week. The youngest child was about forty and the oldest 75. All used to read it every week.

JULIUS LENNARD (Winsford): The star of this year's Annual was easily the wonderful picture of the dear old Penny Popular. Please let a full-page picture of one of the grand old papers be a feature of every Annual in the future. I nearly forgot Danny. Danny could make any book a star attraction. Why don't you publish a bound edition of Danny's Diary? It would be a certain winner.

ALEX PARSONS (Tranmere): I am intrigued by the January cover. Surely it is by Warwick Reynolds? This is the style which has haunted my memory for years. For some vague reason I have always associated the name Ransom with it. Did a boy of this name appear temporarily in the Gem of the early twenties?

(Warwick Reynolds indeed. If a Ransom appeared he was almost certainly a "substitute" character. - ED.)

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): "Advantage Vanderlyn" was the best yet Slade story for me. Somehow the roles of the Hamilton schools seem reversed. The young, attractive sportsmaster is not like Dalton or Railton but is a snake in the grass, whereas instead of the older master being the villain of the piece, like Selby-Manders-Ratcliff, Mr. Buddle is the darling of the plot. Is this intentional or just a coincidence?

(We'll ask the author when we see him. - ED.)

JOHN UPTON (Southend): In his article in the Annual, Frank Hancock refers to the "Who's Who's" in the early Holiday Annuals, and says: "Bertie de Vere, a 'thorough paced little blade' in the Third, who tried in vain to lead Algy Silver astray, also sounds interesting." He adds: "It seems a pity that some of these characters were never allowed to play a leading part." The story of Bertie de Vere, at least, is related in the Holiday Annual for 1939 - called, I think, "Algy Silver's Pal," and presumably a reprint?

FROM 'PLAYFAIR CRICKET MONTHLY,' JANUARY 1964

An article called "Fours Galore from Springbok 'Frank Woolley'" by Dick Whittington, an Australian sports writer, dealing with the South Africans at present touring 'down-under'.

He has just made a general statement regarding the high rate of boundary-scoring by two Springboks, Graeme Pollock and Eddie Barlow. Then:-

"Graeme Pollock, the second son of a Scottie newspaper editor in windy Port Elizabeth, is not the kind of young man people seek nicknames for. But Barlow, because of his tremendous facial resemblance to Frank Richards' 'Fat Boy of Greyfriars,' is universally known as 'Billy Bunter' Barlow.

"Eddie doesn't quite know whether to be upset or pleased about this but it's getting him a stack of publicity and the nickname is going to stick whether he likes it or not.

"Barlow is an electric mover whether batting, bowling or fielding. The only time Billy Bunter of the Magnet magazine moved as fast as Eddie was when en route to the tuckshop or in full flight from Bob Cherry's boot or a coterie of creditors."

.....

REMEMBER THE MAGIC OF PIP, SQUEAK AND WILFRED?
(to say nothing of Auntie and little Stanley!)

Asks BRIAN DOYLE

It was heart-warming to see Harry Webb's delightful drawing of Pip, Squeak, Wilfred and Co. on the cover of the Christmas C.D. Like so many others, I grew up with these much-loved characters and enjoyed many a laugh at their adventures.

The characters first appeared as a daily strip in the "Daily Mirror" on 12th May, 1919, and continued without a break for more than 21 years - until 14th June, 1940, in fact. They also appeared for a time in the "Sunday Pictorial." The strip was revived in the "Daily Mirror" in January, 1947, but only for a once-a-week appearance on the Saturday children's page. It continued in this abbreviated form until 1st September, 1954, when it transferred to the newly-started "Junior Mirror," finally appearing on 2nd March, 1955.

Pip and Squeak were originally created by B. J. Lamb, who wrote the story-line, and illustrated by A. B. Payne. Lamb was known to thousands of children as 'Uncle Dick' of the "Daily Mirror" and once explained (perhaps with tongue in cheek) how his famous characters were born.

When Lamb left the Army shortly after the First World War, he thought he would like to keep a dog for company, so bought one for 5/- from a local dogs' home. A few days later he heard that a very intelligent penguin was up for sale, so he bought that too. Having obtained the two pets, he began to rack his brains for suitable names. Then he had an idea.

While serving in France he had had a batman whose nickname was 'Pipsqueak.' Lamb recalled the name affectionately, split it in two - and so his dog became Pip and his penguin Squeak.

He began to work for the "Daily Mirror," suggested that his pets might make the basis of a new comic-strip - and thus began his long collaboration with artist A. B. Payne. The latter's work had already appeared in various comic-papers, etc., as had that of his brother, G. M. Payne, who at one time did much work for "Chums," "Boys of Our Empire," etc. A. B. Payne, incidentally, drew the "Pip and Squeak" strip throughout its long life, right up to 1955. He died in 1961.

The result of the Lamb - Payne collaboration was an instant hit with "Daily Mirror" readers and, more particularly, with their children. The latter bombarded the "Mirror" offices with invitations to parties

and to tea for Pip and Squeak...

In their early days, the animals lived with 'Uncle Dick' himself in a house on the 'edge' of London (which was very convenient because they had only to turn to the right to reach the country and to the left to see the busy crowds and gaily decorated shops of the town). There was a pretty maid called Angeline around too, who took an immediate fancy to Pip and Squeak and treated them just as real children.

Wilfred, the rabbit, arrived about a year later, when Squeak found him catching butterflies in a clover field. He 'looked so sweet' that she immediately adopted him as a member of the family. He never really grew up and became a sort of Peter Pan of rabbits. He also became probably the most-loved little rabbit in the Britain of the '20's and '30's (always with the possible exceptions of Beatrix Potter's 'Peter Rabbit' and Lewis Carroll's 'White Rabbit,' of course...) Wilfred was always getting into scrapes and conversed in a strange tongue of his own, which consisted chiefly of such phrases as 'Nunc nunc,' 'Ick ick,' 'Wow' and 'Gug gug.'

Soon after Wilfred's appearance, a strange and eccentric-looking bird arrived on the scene. Her feathers were rough and untidy, her white 'shirt-front' (she was a penguin too) far from clean, and her eyes afflicted with a short-sighted squint. She announced herself as Squeak's Auntie - and Auntie she quickly became, not only to Pip and Squeak, but to a vast circle of boy and girl friends. Auntie lived in Rag Street, in a poor quarter of London, and was probably the most memorable of the characters - a fact which owed much to Payne's hilarious and graphic pictures of her.

Later, Pip and Squeak adopted a tiny baby penguin named Stanley, and he too became a permanent member of this notable family. Stanley was the 'baby' of the group and always being rescued from terrifying escapades. Other, lesser-known characters appeared from time to time, but Pip, Squeak, Wilfred, Stanley and Auntie were the 'stars' and deservedly so.

Soon after the endearing family made its bow in the pages of the "Daily Mirror," the "Pip and Squeak Annual" appeared on the bookstalls, quickly followed by "Wilfred's Annual." Both appeared regularly until the outbreak of World War II.

B. J. Lamb wrote the 'scripts' for the strip until 1940. In their later years another "Daily Mirror" staff writer took them over, Don Freeman. But, as I've said, A. B. Payne drew all the pictures from first to last.

Pip, Squeak, Wilfred and Co. are still remembered affectionately today. And those old Annuals are as rare and costly these days as Greyfriars Holiday Annuals. Which only goes to prove the quality of the magic the unlikely combination of a dog, a rabbit, and two or three penguins could once conjure up...

BEYOND THEIR YEARS

By R. J. Godsave

It is interesting to note that whilst girls were introduced in school stories written for boys, it was seldom that boys appeared in school stories for girls.

The fact that the average schoolboy labours under the delusion that schoolgirls think on the same lines as he does, has given many an author the basis for a story. Both Charles Hamilton and E. S. Brooks have made use of this in stories written by them.

Why then, was the same theme not used in books written for schoolgirls? With, perhaps the mention of a brother in passing, it would appear that it was not considered necessary for boys to be introduced into a schoolgirls' story.

It would seem, therefore, that boys did not necessarily appear to be of any great importance to the schoolgirls of that age. From the boys' point of view, a certain amount of interest is added to a story with the inclusion of girl characters.

Girls being naturally more mature than boys, would have resorted to the novel for the added interest, which would account for the lack of boy characters in their books. The interest in the opposite sex would probably be centred on a more adult character.

Doubtless, the novels of Ethel M. Dell and Ruby M. Ayres were well and truly read by them. How many schoolboys would have read these novels? Precious few, I would say, and I doubt whether the few would even admit it.

Such romantic novels are principally written for the fair sex; the adventure type of book specialising in their appeal to the so-called stronger sex.

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RANDOM QUERY

From W. T. Thurbon

A random query, raised by an article on Pantomimes in the Xmas issue of the Illustrated London News.

Who christened Nelson Lee? We know that a last minute change of heart on the part of Conon Doyle caused Sherryful Jones to become Sherlock Holmes and thus set the pattern for all those private detectives with the double syllable christian name and single syllable surname of whom Sexton Blake is only the greatest among many.

(Incidentally on the Radio and Tele' they seem to have changed the pattern. Paul Temple, Dick Barton, Inspector Barlow and Maigret.)

But did Maxwell Scott invent the name Nelson Lee, or did he take the name from Nelson Lee, a very well known figure in the Theatre and Pantomime world in the mid-nineteenth century?

Does anyone know?

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