

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOL. 30 N^o 349

JANUARY 1976

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WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE YEARS?

Last month I drew attention to the fact that Collectors' Digest is now in its 30th year; that, come next November, this magazine will reach its 30th birthday. Our Pearl Jubilee.

C.D. has lasted, and is more popular today than it has ever been. Memories have lasted - well, more or less - and we have to be careful lest we make up what we can't remember. And we have lasted - well, more or less. Perhaps, where the golden hair once blew there is now a fly's skating-rink; maybe our slim waists and our broad shoulders have

changed places; probably the eyes and the ears are not so keen and acute as they used to be. Still, the same loyal hearts go beating on, and the ladies, at any rate, God bless them, get more beautiful than ever with every passing year.

But where have all the years gone? Nearly thirty have slipped away since Collectors' Digest first slid modestly through your letter-box one misty November morning long ago. To me the thought is staggering. It just can't be true. And yet it is.

Ye shall be as gods, knowing everything. In the old days there was an aura of mystery about the old papers, the people who wrote for them, drew for them, worked for them. Was there not a charm in that mystery? Or are we all the happier for being told so much? I can't answer that one.

I think the hobby is just as wonderful as it was 30 years ago, and, best of all, the friendliness of it all is just as worthwhile and heart-warming.

THE FOUNDERS OF THE MOVEMENT

In our letter-bag this month Mrs. Josie Packman gently reproves me for what I wrote in my editorial last month, and points out that the founders of our club movement were not Hamiltonians at all. I regret not expressing myself more carefully.

I have had the impression - I may well be wrong - that Hamilton has been the hard core of our club movement down the years, but I would be the last one to belittle the achievement of the two co-founders, Mr. Blythe and my old friend, Len Packman, when they actually founded everything all those years back.

In fact, Herbert Leckenby, the founder of this magazine, was not a Hamiltonian either. His interests lay mainly with the Hamilton Edwards empire and other grand old periodicals which were in the shops just before and just after the turn of the century. He had little or no real interest in the Charles Hamilton writings.

So, while we celebrate the centenary of the creator of Billy Bunter and Tom Merry, we also give thanks to Bob Blythe and recall with gratitude the memories of Len Packman and Herbert Leckenby - the three who planted the roots of the movements, without, perhaps,

realising what a sturdy tree it would have become thirty years on,

EVER UPWARDS

No, I'm not talking about that sturdy tree now, but about rising costs. In spite of all the pronouncements from the powers-that-be that inflation has been curbed at last, our production costs continue to rock since the price of C.D. was raised by a penny last July. From next month, the price of this magazine will have to be increased by twopence to 20p per month.

I can only say that our price rises are kept back till the last possible moment, and then are introduced after much heart-searching. For many of our readers are those being hardest hit in this crazy age.

Personally, I do not believe that inflation will ever be stopped. I'm not all that convinced now that the authorities want it to be stopped. While wages continue to rise every year (even the O.A.P's get a bit, though they always have to wait many months, during which time inflation has overtaken that bit), I cannot see that price increases can ever be halted. Politicians, etc., tell us that wage rises do not cause inflation. Then where do the wage rises come from if not from the higher price of everything?

I find it hard to believe that Authority, seeking to curb inflation, would ever have introduced a system of currency which was bound to cause (and go on causing) price explosions; or would have introduced VAT which put a heavy tax on masses of things never taxed before; or caused the most gigantic rises of all in the state industries which all of us are obliged to use.

Of course, all this inflation is bound to cause unemployment. Soon nobody but the State will be able to afford to employ anybody. And I suppose the State will borrow the money from the Arabs.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

SEASONAL GREETINGS to all our friends, particularly Sarah Baddiel, Norman Shaw, Ed. Jones, Denis Gifford, Bill Lofts. Always wanted: comics and books printed by Thomson and John Leng.

STAN & CHERIE JENKS, NORTHBROOK, FARNHAM, SURREY.

Danny's Diary

JANUARY 1926

A right merry month at Rookwood in the Boys' Friend. For the first two weeks, the Fistical Four were still on their Christmas holiday at Lovell's home. In "Ambushing Uncle Peter", they try to get on better terms with their fellow guest, Lovell's fierce Uncle Peter. The idea is for Lovell to rescue his uncle from three tramps, but, unfortunately, Uncle is a nippy old gent, and he grabs one of the tramps - who turns out to be Jimmy Silver. But in the last of the series, "Lovell Does the Trick", Lovell saves his uncle when the old boy goes through the ice - and then all is calm and bright.

Next, two stories involving Peele. In the new term, Mr. Dalton finds Peele studying the advertisement of a moneylender, Mr. Spindles. This tale showed Peele as "Too Clever By Half". Then, in "Peele Pays the Price", Peele makes it seem that Mr. Dalton is having dealings with the moneylender, but Putty Grace takes a hand and turns up disguised as Mr. Spindles.

Last of the month, "Muffin the Merciless", shows Tubby getting hold of a letter from Joey Hook to Bailey of the Fifth - and Muffin is blackmailing Bailey.

A nasty experience for the Prince of Wales. As he was riding, his horse fell dead under him.

The Nelson Lee Library started off with the final tale of the holiday series - "The New Year Revellers". The guests at Dorrimore Castle plot to bring about the reunion of Miss Halliday and Mr. Bruce, each of whom thinks the other dead. Then "The Schoolboy Dictator" started a new barring-out series. Guy Sinclair is appointed prefect of the West House in place of Morrow, but he has brought that about by blackmailing Mr. Stokes. Next week, in "The Tyrant of the West House", Sinclair by his mad rule, starts off a revolt, though it is mild at first. Next "The Schoolboy Despot" showed things going from bad to worse in the West House. Last of the month, "The Revolt of the West House", tells of how rebellion broke out with a vengeance - and the

barring-out is on.

Trams are normally the safest of all public transport, so it is curious to have a tram accident in my diary for two months running. This month a tram left the lines at Greenwich, crashing into a shop window, and 12 people were injured.

The best picture in the cinemas this month was a lovely tale of a military school: Richard Barthelmess in "Winning Through". Other excellent films we have seen are J. Warren Kerrigan in "The Covered Wagon"; Colleen Moore in "Sally"; Larry Semon in "The Wizard of Oz" and Lon Chaney in "The Unholy Three".

Much better stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month after a few weak ones. The latest are "The Taming of Harry Wharton" telling how Wharton and Bob Cherry came to Greyfriars, and "The Vanished Schoolboys", a tip-top kidnapping tale about the Rookwood chums.

The Gem started the year with "Grundy, the Ventriloquist" a slapstick affair in which Grundy kidnapped a stage vent so that he, Grundy, could appear on the stage. And then he appeared in a school concert in which Marie Rivers played the piano.

Then came a couple of stories which were clearly part of the Christmas holiday series, though the entire Christmas party - the who bag of tricks - went back to Eastwood House for Lord Eastwood's birthday celebrations, according to the tale. Proper mysterious. Gussy was attacked by a tramp, he was helped by the Terrible Three, and then a young man named Cecil Lagden also chipped in - and the tramp got away. Lord Eastwood invited Lagden to stay on for a few days, but Manners was suspicious of the stranger.

At the end Lagden got away with Lord Eastwood's gold plate. This tale was "Gussy's Guests". The sequel was "Pongo Plays Up". For once, Pongo, Wally's mongrel, was really useful, and found the gold plate hidden in a hollow tree. But not before a strange photograph came on the scene, and James, the footman, tried to find the plate himself - and got knocked out for his pains. A pretty good couple, though from the real Martin Clifford, but mysterious as to why they were separated from the Christmas series.

"The St. Jim's Treasure Quest" was a rather silly affair, in

which Harvey Shaw, a detective, who was a boy at St. Jim's in 1910, hid ten sovereigns and organised a treasure hunt, providing clues, for the St. Jim's boy to compete in it. Julian won it in the end. He had to go to Dr. Holmes and say "Stand and Deliver". The Head said: "Splendid, my boy."

Last of the month, "Football Rivals", was extraordinarily awful. Kildare's cousin, Captain Kildare, asked Kildare to take ten juniors and make up a team, including himself, to stay at Dalethorpe Manor and meet a team in a soccer game. But Glyn hears a wireless broadcast asking Eric Kildare to go home at once as his mother is ill in the wilds of Ireland. So Tom Merry takes the ten, plus Trimble. Cousin Ethel is there. And so is Mr. Morden. And Capt. Kildare's daughter is there, and Mr. Morden pinches her necklace.

It's amazing that we keep paying tuppence for this sort of thing.

The 3rd Monster Library is out (it costs 1/-) and it is called "The Tyrant of St. Frank's".

For quite a while the papers have been full of items about a man named Hayley-Morris. He has been sent to gaol for three years, by a judge at Lewes Assizes.

First Magnet was "Bowling Out Bunter". Bunter entered for a competition with someone else's ticket and won £100. But there was a catch in it. It was really Linley's. This was followed by "Coker's New Year Resolutions", which was meant to be very funny. In "Quelchy's Queer Adventure", Mr. Quelch meets a stranger, one dark, wet, windy night, and the stranger laughed a harsh, unnatural laugh which sent a shiver down Mr. Q's spine. The man is Rupert Villemond, alias Flash Jim. And the man is the splitting image of "Horace Henry Quelch".

Next "The Prefect's Plot" starred Loder as a scoundrel and Bolsover Minor as a victim. Last of the month was "The Hand of an Enemy" in which Mark Linley is expelled for pinching Ponsonby's bank-note. Very sad. This last one carries on next month. A rather grim month in the Magnet.

Conan Doyle's story "Rodney Stone" is running as a serial in "All Sports". It was serialised in the Boys' Friend a few years ago.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: No. 19 of the S. O. L. "The Taming of Harry Wharton", was a reprint of Magnets Nos. 1 & 2 from 1908. S. O. L. No. 20 "The Vanished Schoolboys" was, in some ways, Hamilton's most eerie and most famous kidnapping story. It comprised 5 stories from the Boys' Friend of 1918. In the original tales, the villain of the piece was Captain Lagden (a favourite Hamilton name). In the S. O. L. the name was changed to Captain Langton. The change is really remarkable, for it must have entailed a complete re-write of the story for the printing department. Why was it done? Well, as Danny observes, a Cecil Lagden was the villain of a couple of Gem tales in January 1926. It was quite obvious to anyone that these two Gem tales were part of the Christmas period in the Gem, and nobody knows why there was an hiatus in their publication. There could have been no editorial reasons for the delay, so it must have been due to something in connection with the author - an indisposition or even a manuscript straying in the post. As the name of Lagden was changed in the S. O. L. tale, it cannot have been due to the names clash.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

At the time of writing these words none of us know quite what the New Year is likely to bring forth but I hope and trust that we shall all be able to look forward to a good year, especially in the realms of articles for Blakiana. 1975 was a really excellent year in this respect, I tried to give everyone the sort of interesting articles they wanted, even to the very controversial item and the replies from various members. Thank you all very much for your contributions and may the New Year issues be as interesting. At the moment I have a good supply of material for Blakiana, enough for the next three or four months, but that will give you time to think about what to write for publication after that. My best wishes for a Happy New Year to you all.

OH! JOLLY GOOD SHOW, SIR

by Vic Colb

It was revealed that Blake, Tinker and a small group of men were the advance guard, the main party of fifty when it arrived, could deal with the Doriri while the advance guard could deal with the yellow priest through the underground passage to the Temple. The odds were discussed. There were 17 of Blake's group left unwounded. Spots

estimated the enemy to exceed a thousand. "Phew!" said Blake, "Long odds. Still we cannot afford to wait. We've got them on the run for the moment and we've got to keep them going and not give them time to think."

An alarm bell rang in the temple summoning all to a gathering on a nearby mountainside where the Priestess was to be slain as she had not averted the calamity of the arrival of the white men, and a new priestess was to be appointed. Hence when our heroes arrived at the Temple it was deserted. Realising the cause Spots brought down his fist with a bang. "It's up to us to save her, she may be the worst kind of she-cat, but she's a woman". The others agreed with him, but as Errol pointed out their first priority must be the looting of the Temple treasure and this looting was then carried out, quickly and effectively, the spoils being very rich indeed.

The Temple floor began to heave and tremble, cracks appeared. The party got out into the open and saw the entire yellow community toiling up the mountain side. Suddenly the ground rocked and heaved. A great vivid crimson crack had opened up in the virgin snow near the summit of the mountain. Then came a dull rumbling roar, like the roar of thunder and the whole mountain top split to pieces and a great crimson stream of lava began rushing down with incredible rapidity engulfing everyone on the mountain. Blake and Co. had to save themselves. They rushed back into the tottering Temple and on into the underground passage pursued by the molten lava. It was touch and go whether they made it to the high ground in time. Safely back to their camp they found that the main party together with fear of the eruption had caused the Doriri to flee. Celebrations were the order of the day and as Blake had brought Champagne and cigarettes as well as other essential stores, they were able to sit and smoke and drink champagne out of mugs. Twelve days later they were back at Errol's cave home. On the morrow they would start down to the coast. The champagne came out again. Spots said "Here's a toast to the Land of the Unknown". "And here's another" cried Errol springing up and pointing out across the moonlit space to where a silvery glimmer of sea could be seen far, far away. "Here's to the Land we know best - England, after all these weary years", and there was a gulp in his throat. They looked at him and

standing around, drank his toast in silence.

ORGANISATION MAN

by J. E. M

Monsieur Zenith the Albino, Prince Wu Ling of the Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle, Leon Kestrel the Master Mummer, Rupert Waldo the Wonder Man - more glamorous names than these were never found in the annals of fictional crime. And behind each name lay a personality to match it. Yet I have to say that none of these glittering figures, nor the many other exotic criminals Sexton Blake encountered (including some very ravishing ladies) ever made quite the same impact on me as a villain who carried the commonest surname in the English language.

I first met Mr. Smith (he appeared to have neither forename nor initials) 43 years ago in Union Jack number 1484, in a story of the Criminals' Confederation called Enter the President. The title was something of a cheat, for in fact the President had made precisely the same entrance some 13 years before that in a story called The Case of the Stolen Yacht (UJ 816), of which the 1932 tale is a re-hash. It is probable that some narrative damage was done to the earlier story by the second version but, if so, I doubt if it affected the portrait of Mr. Smith, President of the Criminals' Confederation. To quote from the 1932 account:

"Everything about him seemed to be grey. His hat, gloves, clothes and even his spats and grey suede shoes. His eyes looked through spectacles whose rims were of grey steel. His thinning crop of hair accentuated the colourlessness of his complexion. ... His colour scheme was as devoid of relief as a battleship."

His general demeanour matched his dress, soft-voiced and diffident. But, as events revealed, Mr. Smith was as ruthless and deadly as befitted the head of the "greatest criminal conspiracy the world has ever seen."

Though later overthrown by the repellent Mr. Reece, he always struck me as a far more convincing leader of the C.C. Reece, with his grotesque appearance and rasping voice, not only made his evil character all too manifest, but usually appeared far too arrogant and uncontrolled to be the convincing head of any global organisation.

Incidentally, Reece also seemed to me a somewhat derivative figure, bearing a suspicious resemblance to an earlier Napoleon of crime, Professor Moriarty.

Mr. Smith, too, may well have some fictional ancestor, but for me he is an original. He points forward, not backward, to a familiar figure of our time. This stealthy master-mind, with an appearance as neutral as his name, is surely a prototype of the modern Organisation Man who sits at the centre of every large concentration of power, whether this be a crime syndicate or some faceless bureaucracy.

Such a man is far from the ordinary gang-boss; ruthlessness does not preclude a certain fastidiousness. Like his up-to-date counterparts in crime, politics and big business, Mr. Smith is no mere hooligan. In Enter the President, he pays a personal call on Sexton Blake to warn him against meddling in the affairs of the Confederation. With two henchmen close behind him, he makes a surprise and silent entry into Blake's house; the detective is literally a sitting target, but Mr. Smith does not resort to murder. The swiftest answer to Blake's "meddling" would also have been the crudest, and the C. C. President clearly regards himself as superior to the gutter assassin. Somehow, his apparent scruple makes his air of menace seem the greater. All in all, a memorable character and, as I've said, a prophetic one.

So, if you weary of opera cloaks and swordsticks, fantastic disguises or prodigious feats of strength; if, in short, you are seeking a change from some of the larger-than-life individuals we often meet in the Sexton Blake saga, you could do worse than take a trip with that supreme grey eminence of crime - the sinister Mr. Smith.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

MYSTERIES OF ST. FRANK'S

by Ernest Holman

Having just re-read all the CD's for 1975, some interesting points relating to St. Frank's bring themselves to my notice. Taking the word in perhaps a somewhat 'broad' sense, I draw attention to certain 'mysteries'.

In the February CD, R. J. Godsave refers to the 'doubling up' of St. Frank's yarns in Nelson Lee and Boys' Realm during 1919. This took my mind forward by about nine or ten years, to the time when Edwy Searles Brooks had taken over the authorship of the Blue Crusader football stories in Realm. In 1928/29 Brooks began a long series dealing with the characters of St. Frank's and the Crusaders. The series ran in both Nelson Lee and Boys' Realm, with the events exactly related (presumably a 'sales' policy). One often needed to take a second look at each weekly publication, in order to obtain exact continuity of story. With the India and Australia series, this particular two-publications set of stories remains one of my favourite memories of St. Frank's - nevertheless, I recall my own efforts of the time in linking the various incidents from both books. I remember writing on the pages just where each incident occurred in the companion paper. I would then re-read them, switching from book to book, in actual chronological order. Much as I enjoyed this series - and hope one day to be able to meet up with it again - I must admit that, looking back over the years, I find this procedure of the publishers somewhat mysterious. Why, in order to get readers to take the 'other' paper, did the A. P. not adopt a better sales policy? Why, indeed, did not someone in the editorial office suggest publishing the first half of each weekly pair - sequence for sequence - in N. L. and the second halves in B. R? Surely the necessity to continue reading the full series by buying the 'other' paper would have been a greater assurance of larger sales?

In the May issue of CD, Jim Cook mentions the fact that Greyfriars and St. Frank's did not establish contact with one another; except, he tells us, when Greyfriars came to St. Frank's for the final of the Dorrimore Cup. If you look at this story, you will find that the author's name is 'mysteriously' omitted. Not actually a 'mystery', really - for the simple fact is that E. S. B. did not write this particular episode.

CD for last August - and we find William Lister asking the question: "Does an artist read the stories until something 'clicks' or does he just pick a subject at random?" Recent reading of many Magnets does reveal quite a few discrepancies in the Chapman and Shields sketches, in relation to the actual stories. On the other hand - although I am mostly relying on memory - I do not recall variations by

the N. L. artists (but see a later 'mystery' in this article). Even the few N. L.'s that I do possess show story and illustrations as correctly relating one to the other. The 'mystery' here is: did E. S. B. have a say in these drawings or was the N. L. Editor of the time more alive to the necessity of keeping sketches and story in line?

My final mystery really comes to light from a perusal of the last few years of the Nelson Lee column. From time to time mention is made of the Ezra Quirke series of 1925. Although this mystery series was pretty well finished off with solutions, I did feel that a few of the incidents were a little 'glossed over' (e. g. what REALLY happened to Kenmore); but it is the explanation of the divided cellars and the moving door that still remains a 'mystery' to me. I first read the series when it was published by Howard Baker in 1974 and a few months ago had a second reading of it. Result - still a 'mystery'!

The sketches showing the division of the original cellar into two separate chambers surely could not have been in accordance with the stated solution. The very fact of the curtain hangings and door entrance must surely reveal that there was some kind of alteration. Chart B shows the two divisions; in entering the left-hand cellar, the door is on the RIGHT; BUT - upon entering the right-hand cellar, the door is then on the LEFT! Even if the door came to the centre each time, the arrangement of the curtains does not 'fit'. The curtains in the left-hand cellar widened to the left - the curtains in the other widened to the right.

Assuming the artist had slipped up in drawing Chart B and that really both sets of curtains were equally spaced apart, there would have to be a considerable number of yards for the door to move, to come into the centre of each set of curtains - and we are specifically informed that even Nipper had not noticed the alteration in the position of the door. Without doubt, this would have been obvious had the door moved more than a yard or so.

The greater the 'mystery', the more simple (usually) is the answer. I am left with two points of view. Either I have hit a 'blind' spot and 'missed a trick'; or -

Could it be that Ezra Quirke really WAS the greatest magician of them all?

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

"Lord Shuv-Haypenny recoiled in horror as the laser beam seared its way down the thick metal plate about his head.

The millionaire diamond merchant was about to be cremated by the fierce burning ray.

The crook scientist giggled as he directed the laser down, down till the victim's hair began to sizzle.

Then, suddenly, the death ray was extinguished.

Trackett Grim was pointing a luger pistol into the neck of the mad scientist. Splinter, Grim's able assistant, was releasing Lord Shuv-Haypenny from his bonds."

No, I haven't had a brush with Tracekett Grim. Handforth has asked me to include in my Letter to the Collectors' Digest Trackett Grim's latest case. He wants to prove that Trackett Grim has not given up.

Well, I didn't promise to send the full hair-raising account of Handy's story. Nipper had already refused to put it in the St. Frank's magazine because it was far too bloodthirsty and violent. But I have the full episode as Handy gave it to me and I will try and get the editor's permission to publish if it is wanted.

A James Bond film was recently shown at the Bannington Palladium and Handy never misses one of these. He once told me it gave him ideas to relate more truthfully the cases of Trackett Grim.

Bannington Palladium is owned by Solomon Levi's father and several of the juniors have shares in the cinema. The account has been recorded. And speaking of Solomon Levi reminds me about the different Faiths that is ever hardly mentioned in the day to day lives of the juniors. Levi naturally retains his Jewish upbringing and he doesn't mind admitting he has the Muzuzza to touch each time he enters his study. The fellows have often wondered about it and Levi is always very eager to explain. His study mates, Dick Goodwin and Morgan Evans, look forward to the Jewish food Levi's mother sends from London. Timothy Tucker of Study Q West House is still very much a revolutionary and an Agnostic.

Yung Ching, Study R West House, it is safe to say, practises one of the indigenous religions of China which is Confucianism.

Hussie Ranjit Lal Khan, Study N West House, Mohammedan,
Sessue Yakama, Study 4 Modern House, Buddhist.

There has never been any necessity to include in the records the different Faiths and religions of the boys although they have been accepted. Each religion with its different Sabbath did become a curiosity with the arrival of Solomon Levi in the beginning, but as other juniors of varying Faiths entered St. Frank's the novelty wore off.

The St. Frank's chapel is unfortunately not large enough to hold the rest of the school's inmates and services are held at different times on Sundays. The Rev. David Smythe officiates with frequent help from the Rev. Goodchild, the vicar of Bellton Church.

It is strange to see such cads and villains as Bernard Forrest, Gore-Pearce, Guy Sinclair, etc., listening perforce to sermons and singing hymns in the chapel when they are probably hating every minute of it.

As far as I can ascertain this beautiful chapel has never been damaged or fired during the fierce battles and exciting times at the old school. It still stands today, with its ivy-covered walls, supreme and indifferent to the outside world. St. Frank's has known disasters, floods, explosions and change, but the chapel remains as a monument to better days.

Both Nelson Lee and Nipper long for those old days when they solved cases together from their chambers in Grays Inn Road. And even when it was necessary to move to St. Frank's Lee found his powers of deduction very useful for the criminal activity that occurred in and around the school.

But today, there is a new breed of criminal. He is more vicious, more cunning and more scientific. But so is the police. They have to be. They have to meet force with force.

It would be very interesting to hear from Nelson Lee how he fights Professor Zingrave and the League of the Green Triangle these days. Zingrave is still very much alive Mr. Lee tells me. I think old Zingrave has a soft spot for St. Frank's and Nelson Lee. The times he has threatened to destroy them both are legion, but the famous school-master-detective and St. Frank's remain.

* * * * *

STOP PRESS: HARRY DOWLER HAS DIED IN CHESHIRE

REVIEWHAPPY DAYS

Denis Gifford
(Jupiter Books: £3.95)

Described as a Century of Comics, this volume is happy browsing ground for those interested in the history of the traditional British comic paper and its development from 1870 down the tumbling, changing years to 1970. It is mainly a history in fascinating covers and is a genial delight for the elderly, and, I fancy, for the youngsters too.

Reproduction varies to a certain extent. Those in full colour, and there are large numbers of them, are superb. Of the others, those reproduced in black and white seem to be rather superior to those in sepia. The author clearly had his work cut out in selecting which would make the best reproductions.

Page sizes of the originals, of course, varied. Lot-O-Fun and Comic Life were large-sheeted, many of the rest were Boys' Friend size, and plenty more were Magnet size. Funny Wonder and Butterfly were printed on green paper, Chips was - well, what was it? At any rate, different comics had different dyes. These differences cannot be shown.

But that is not important. The author has done a great job, and his short, pithy comments add to the fun and interest. My own favourite? Well, I think I must plump for the thousandth number of Comic Cuts - yes, 1000 - and dated in the lovely Edwardian summer of 1909. And who do you think were on the front page, all those years ago? The Mulberry Flattites. No less. I'm sure I met those jolly Flattites going on for twenty years later. How their charms lasted! A gorgeous volume for the man who loves comics.

* * * * *

RUGGER OR SOCCER?

by W. O. G. Lofts

Whilst it is true the majority of Public Schools play rugby as their main sport, they often or not play soccer as well. Indeed, I have been told that some Public Schools do only play soccer, so there is no hard rule laid down except perhaps by tradition. Greyfriars was of course a Public School with always soccer tales to the fore during the

seasonal months. Frank Richards did however on rare occasions introduce rugby into his tales (e.g. The Greyfriars Fifteen & The Remove Rugger Team) but whether he was familiar with the technicalities of the game is debatable, or indeed why he should write about the game at all is not known. Unless, of course he thought that it made a change from the eleven man game. Certainly H. A. Hinton the editor (1911-21) was a dye-in-the-wool rugby enthusiast, when he had played the game for the famous club of Blackheath. By all accounts he also scorned the game of soccer, and made his feelings well known on the subject in discussion in the Magnet office. But even he was sensible enough to realise that the majority of readers were ordinary schoolboys who attended elementary schools where they only played football.

In the circumstances it was obvious that a succession of rugby stories would not appeal to readers, who would not like an alien game in their favourite Greyfriars setting.

Curiously, and only recently I discovered a non-Magnet Charles Hamilton school story of rugby in an issue of Boys' Journal (No. 65, 12th Dec. 1914) entitled "The Interloper". Research proved that it was actually a reprint of a much earlier tale in The Boys' Realm (No. 297, 8th Feb. 1908). The story features the school of St. Friars, the main character being 'Taffy Llewellyn of the Fifth Form', and the story is the usual run-of-the-mill type and plot, where 'Taffy' after being kidnapped by another boy and locked up, escapes just on time to score the winning try. Readers may well recall the old controversy in the Trapps Holmes paper The Vanguard, where a year before the Magnet appeared in 1908. H. Phillpot Wright (certainly not Charles Hamilton) was writing a series of stories of Blackminster School featuring a Billy Bunter. Chief character at that school was ... Taffy Llewellyn!

As our editor stated some time ago, one feels that Mr. Hamilton must have been aware of the other stories, but I feel certain that in this case he had used the name of Llewellyn (all welsh boys used to be called Taffy) in other stories long before the mysterious Phillpot Wright, but this is not the subject in question.

Rugby or Football, whatever one's choice, Frank Richards could still spin always an excellent yarn, though curiously as far as I remember he never wrote about his own favourite game of tennis, but I may be so

wrong. He played the latter game until he was 70 I understand.

* * * * *

THE ROOKWOOD SAGA

by J. H. Mearns

"In Hampshire's lovely woods there stands
A building grey and hoary,
And many a sage
In every age
Has witnessed to its glory.
The fame of Rookwood School demands
High place in song and story."

(Holiday Annual, 1934)

I first encountered Rookwood in "The Magnet". The story was "The Schoolboy Cracksman!" in the legendary Lancaster of the Sixth Series by Frank Richards and, soon after, I met Jimmy Silver and the cheery chums of the Rookwood Fourth in "A Dog with a Bad Name!" by the same author. This was a cricket school story with a difference. For me, at any rate, an important feature of the story was the cricket match between the Rookwood and Greyfriars junior elevens. Greyfriars won, in the end, but only after a stern struggle in which, in addition to 'Uncle James' (the champion junior bowler at Rookwood) such doughty performers as Mornington, Lovell and Rawson appeared.

It was about this time I became intrigued by the quality of the announcements in "The Magnet" concerning the further adventures of the Rookwooders in "The Gem", "The Schoolboys Own Library" and "The Holiday Annual". The announcements were of a uniformly excellent format: concise, pithily worded and accompanied by an illustration in miniature.

The Gem

The very first stories I read in "The Gem" by Owen Conquest - and I quote from memory - were -

"Who put Carthew in the Stocks?"

"Lovell's Luckless Love Affair"

"The Rival Thespians"

"Silver's Splendid Spook"

"Muffin Finds a Way"

In these and in many, many other "Gem" stories the baggy-

trousered heroes of the Fourth were depicted in the drawings of Saville Lumley. The drawings, no less than the stories, exerted a simple, direct appeal that was truer to the image of boyhood, somehow, than either Macdonald or Shields, much though I admired those two fine artists - especially the latter.

The "Manders on the Spot" and "Dudley Vane" Series which followed much later I remember as being well-wrought stories, written in a contrasting vein; although, for me, Rookwood has always been a clean, light-hearted place, full of high spirits.

S. O. L.

In "The Schoolboys Own Library" I read, "Trailing the Phantom!" and "Son of a Cracksman!" in which the themes of Cricket and Christmas were both worked out by the Master at his very best. If only - I used to think - I could play cricket like Kit Erroll, and be so modest with it (so unlike the disdain of Mornington or the 'swank' of Vernon-Smith!).

Stories in "The Holiday Annual" reached the same high standard: "Putty's Priceless Prank!" (Rookwooders taking a holiday from Etons NOT in drawings by Saville Lumley)

"Presence of Mind!"

"Hansom's Twin Brother!"

"Getting their Own Back!"

"What Happened at the Boat House"

In all of these stories Owen Conquest displayed his mastery of the short-story form. Only Frank Richards' Grimslade yarns and Martin Clifford's "Making Game of Gussy!" compare in crisp economy of dialogue and style.

At the beginning of these reminiscences, I quoted from a poem in "The Holiday Annual" and should like to close with another quotation. But before I do, I should like also to suggest that, as part of the Rookwood Jubilee, the Editor might reprint "Classics V Moderns", three poems on sporting themes appearing in "The Holiday Annual", 1933.

"The sunset with a touch of fire
On Rookwood's walls is gleaming;
Then sinks from sight

cont'd . . .

And it is night;
 The lady moon is beaming
 In silver on this lovely shire -
 And Rookwood lies a-dreaming. "

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Most of the Rookwood stories in the Gem were substitute yarns.)

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

ROGER JENKINS: The statement that Charles Hamilton regarded "The Housemaster's Homecoming" and "The Boy Without a Name" as his two best stories was made by me in the 1954 C.D. Annual and reprinted on page 28 of the "History of the Gem and Magnet". The source of this statement was in the correspondence between John Shaw and Charles Hamilton in the early days of the war, when he was writing nothing and looking back over his past achievements. (It is a pity that much of this voluminous correspondence was lost, as it was the basis of John Shaw's list of substitute stories.) It is as well to note that the two items count as single stories, not series.

I think that Hamilton had a very keen judgment of his own work. When I examined the collection he had saved from the salvage demands I noted that it contained Magnet series of the Golden Age only, Rio Kid reprints in the Boys' Friend Library, some miscellaneous Schoolboys' Owns, Holiday Annuals, and the two Highcliffe stories. There was hardly a Gem to be found. Of course, some of the very early items might have got lost, but nevertheless there is no denying that this selection would still be regarded as containing his very best work, and I am sure that in his heart of hearts Hamilton knew this when he put it by to keep.

W. O. G. LOFTS: Perhaps it would have been more correct to state that 'Boy without a name', and 'Rivals and Chums' were far superior to other stories Mr. Hamilton was writing at that period. The Wingate Love series in The Magnet was feeble as a comparison in my own humble opinion. I quite agree with our editor, that Charles Hamilton being a very kindly man often agreed with readers own comments as to what period was his best work! I can well remember a correspondent pointing out to me that the Bunter Books were his finest work, because he had a letter from the great man himself to prove it!

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: If, by his mention of the Wingate Love series, Mr. Lofts is referring to the film-school series, this did not appear till late 1920. And, in any case, it was not written by Charles Hamilton.)

* * * * *

To mark Charles Hamilton's Centenary Year we bring you, through 1976, one of those rare early St. Jim's stories which set the famous author on the road to fame, 70 years ago.

- MISSING -

"Ready, D'Arcy?"

"Just a moment, deah boy, while I get my eyeglass."

Jack Blake made a gesture of menace.

"If you stick that blessed eyeglass on, Aubrey, I'll ram it down your throat, as sure as you're a silly ass," he exclaimed.

"But weally," protested Arthur Augustus.

"You're coming for a sprint now.

You can take the eyeglass for a walk another time. Are you coming, slowcoach? Kick him, Herries."

Herries raised his foot, and the swell of St. Jim's hastened out of his reach. He joined Blake, who seized him by the neck and ran him down the stairs at a headlong pace, across the hall, and out into the quadrangle.

D'Arcy arrived there gasping, not quite knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Weally --" he gasped.

"Shut up!" said Blake. "You've asked me to help you in sports, and make an athlete of you, haven't you?"

"Yes, that it twue, but --"

"Well, I'm going to do it. You want to get into the Junior House Eleven, don't you?"

"Ye-es," said D'Arcy rather doubt-

fully. "It would be very nice, but --"

"Well, I'm going to make you fit. I've taken you for some nice long runs, haven't I? Don't you feel all the better for them?"

"Ye-es."

Arthur Augustus did not sound very enthusiastic. He had an ambition to figure in the house sports, and in an unlucky moment he had asked Jack Blake, captain of the School House Junior Eleven, to help him on.

Blake was his chum, and D'Arcy's deficiencies in the athletic line had sometimes chafed him. He had taken the swell of St. Jim's at his word promptly enough, and more than once since then D'Arcy felt sorry he had spoken.

"You see," explained Blake, "you're such a silly ass, and such a dawdling donkey, and such a fussy nincompoop, that if I go easy with you, you'll never get fit. I'm going to make you a sportsman, or perish in the attempt."

"I think it more likely I shall pewish!" murmured D'Arcy.

"You're getting much better already," said Blake. "What you want is something to buck you up. When you're sprinting you always want to stop and take a rest. That won't do. I can't keep on stopping to kick

you; it takes too much time."

D'Arcy grimaced. He would not have objected if Blake had left those little attentions out of the course altogether.

"I've thought of a way to buck you up," continued Blake, as they walked across the quadrangle. They were in their running-clothes. "See old Figgy over there."

"Yes. What about Figgy?"

Figgins, the chief of the New House juniors at St. Jim's, was standing by the big gates talking to Wynn and Kerr, his special chums.

"We shall pass them going out," said Blake. "Now, I'll tell you what you've got to do. You've got to snatch Figgy's cap off his head and run for it."

"But, I say," exclaimed D'Arcy in dismay. "Figgins will be cwiss, Blake."

"Yes, I fancy he will," grinned Blake. "That's my idea. He'll chase you to get his cap back, and to give you a pasting. That'll make you buck up. Isn't it a ripping idea?"

"I don't think it wipping at all --"

"Are you going to obey orders, Adolphus Aubrey, or are you not?"

"I'll do it if you like, Blake," said D'Arcy meekly.

"That's right. I'll make a man of you in time. Figgy will give you a run for your money --"

"But suppose he collahs me before I can get away?"

"If he does, I'll biff him."

They strolled on past the New House juniors. Blake nodded to Figgins & Co.

"Hallo, Figgy," he said. "I hear there's to be new rules in the New House."

"Oh!" said Figgins suspiciously.

"I've heard nothing of it."

"They're going to break it to you gently. It'll be a shock to your system. They're going to make you all wash at least once a week. Bravo, Aubrey!"

Figgins had turned fiercely towards Blake, and, at the same moment, D'Arcy snatched his cap off and bolted through the gates.

Kerr tried to intercept him, but Blake put out his foot, and Kerr sat down. The Blake darted after Arthur Augustus.

"Good-bye!" he said, waving his hand. "If you want that cap back again, Figgy, you can chase us; not that you'd have much chance. New House cad!"

But Figgins was already chasing the School House comrades. He was bursting with wrath as he sped in pursuit, intent upon administering the drubbing of his life to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy knew what he had to expect if he was caught, and he sprinted along beside Blake as he had never sprinted before. The cap was still clutched in his hand. Blake was grinning.

"Jolly well done, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "We'll keep that cap for a trophy, unless Figgy recaptures it. If he sticks it out, we'll give him a run as far as the ruined castle."

They left the lane, and turned into the footpath through the wood. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were pelting on their track. Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House, was dropping behind, but Figgins and Kerr were running strongly.

Figgins was the champion forward of the New House junior team, and had he been in running garb he would probably have overhauled the School House chum for Blake had to slack down to keep D'Arcy

company. Blake looked back over his shoulder.

"I fancy he's gaining," he remarked. "Lucky for you Figgy isn't in flannels, Adolphus Algernon; but he'll stick it out, I'm sure of that."

The footpath wound through the wood, and sight and sound of the pursuers were lost. D'Arcy was getting "bellows to mend".

"Buck up, chappy!" said Blake encouragingly. "I don't want to hurry you, but Figgy will paralyse you if he gets his paws on you."

"I-I-I'm all wight!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Hallo! Get out of the way there!" called out Jack Blake suddenly, as a burly figure came out of the wood into the path ahead.

The path was narrow at this spot, and the stranger, standing in the middle of it, completely blocked the way. He was a burly, thick-set fellow, with a dark skin and black eyes, and a ragged beard. He looked like a gipsy. There was a short, thick cudgel in his right hand, and a black pipe between his teeth.

The two runners came to a halt. D'Arcy was not sorry, but Blake was wild.

"Stand aside, confound you!" exclaimed Blake.

The gipsy grinned evilly, and twirled his cudgel. His swarthy face was reddened by drink. For the first time it struck Blake that the man had an object in stopping them. The wood was a lonely one.

Blake made a movement to brush past, and the gipsy swung up the cudgel threateningly. Jack jumped back.

"Burn me! If you attempt to pass I will strike you down. Give me what money you have about you. Quick!"

The man looked dangerous. Blake wondered how far off Figgins & Co. were. He would have been very glad just then to hear their footsteps in the silence of the wood.

"Quick!" snarled the footpad.

"Haven't a stiver about me," said Blake coolly. "You see, I don't generally carry all my vast wealth when I'm in flannels. You've come to the wrong chap, my giddy highwayman. So now you can clear."

The cudgel jerked up for a blow. Blake's fists were clenched, but D'Arcy dragged him back.

"Here, I have a sovereign," he exclaimed.

The ruffian turned to him savagely.

"Quick, then, or --"

"You'll give the brute nothing, Algernon," exclaimed Blake. "If you do, I'll punch your head."

The gipsy sprang at him, lashing out with the cudgel. But he had to deal with a lad trained to rapid dodging on the football field. Blake moved like lightning, and the weapon swept down and missed him by inches, and the next second both his fists were planted in the swarthy face.

The gipsy reeled back. D'Arcy, springing forward, snatched the cudgel from his hand, and sent it flying among the trees. But Blake was no match for the burly footpad. A heavy fist crashed between the boy's eyes, and he fell half-stunned in the grass.

Down upon him went the ruffian, raining savage blows. D'Arcy clutched at the man and strove to drag him off. Leaving Blake for a moment, the footpad dealt D'Arcy a stunning blow, which sent

him headlong into the bushes. Then he recommenced on Blake.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

Two running figures came in sight far down the path.

"Help!" yelled Blake.

Figgins and Kerr came on at full speed, and almost before the gipsy knew that they were coming, they were upon him. They gripped him and dragged him off Blake, and he went down under them, and they jumped on him.

He struggled fiercely, but they had him at a disadvantage, and pinned him down. Blake, though dazed and hurt, was quickly running to aid them. Arthur Augustus extricated himself from the bushes and came to lend a hand. The gipsy gasped and choked into silence.

"You beauty!" said Jack Blake, rubbing his forehead where the ruffian's fist had struck him. "I shouldn't wonder if I get a pair of beautiful black eyes. What shall we do with the beast?"

"Take him into Rylcombe police-station," said Figgins. "I've seen this beast before, and he's a bad lot. He's a rotten thief, and the gipsies have kicked him out. His name's Barenegro. There's enough of us to take him to Rylcombe."

The gipsy scowled like a demon. They dragged him to his feet. He began to struggle fiercely, but they hung on him like limpets,

"Now, forward!" said Blake. "March!"

They moved forward. Just at this time Fatty Wynn came puffing up to take a hand in the proceedings.

With five guardians, the gipsy hadn't much chance of getting loose. But his black eyes were rolling like those of a wild

animal, watchful for a chance.

"You can give Figgy his cap back, Adolphus," said Blake. "He deserves it for chipping in like that. Of course, he couldn't have caught us up in a month of Sundays."

"I'd have had you in another minute exclaimed Figgins. "You can't run for toffee."

"Who can't run?" demanded Blake.

"You can't, except when a New House chap is chasing you to give you a licking."

Blake and Figgins were both getting wrathful, and they almost forgot their prisoner. The gipsy was not slow to take advantage of the dispute. With a sudden desperate effort, Barenegro broke loose, and bounded away into the wood.

"After him!" yelled Blake.

The juniors dashed among the trees, but the gipsy disappeared. Pursuit was hopeless. They came back into the path looking foolish.

"The bounder's gone," said Blake crossly. "All your fault, Figgy."

"All your fault, you mean, ass!"

"Anyway he's gone now. Look here, Blake, if you think you can get away from me, I'll give you a run back to the school."

"Right you are," said Blake promptly. "Mind, Aubrey is counted out. It's me you've got to catch."

"That's agreed. One minute start. Off with you."

Blake started off with D'Arcy by his side. Arthur Augustus was determined to show that he could run. But Blake, as he heard Figgins & Co. whooping on his track, put his best foot foremost, and shot ahead.

Figgins & Co. soon overtook D'Arcy, and Figgins gave him a gentle shove in passing, which laid him in a restful attitude in the

midst of a thicket. And the New House trio tore after Blake.

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT OF THIS OLD STORY NEXT MONTH)

The Postman Called (Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

E. W. COX (Bitterne): Nice to receive the Christmas C.D. which evokes the spirit of the old days. Although the Cigarette Case Christmas series has usually been dismissed, it has, for me, always been a favourite. The reason is that it was my first Xmas Magnet series which I bought, as a ten-year old. I had read the previous Xmas series (via a cousin) and the Steele series, on loan from a friend who had batches of the early 1930 numbers, and the Steele and the Soames series were always the two which remained in my heart as the best. Similarly, my favourite Holiday Annuals were always those of 1938, 1939, and 1940. Later when I managed to obtain several of the 1920 H.A's, I found them generally unattractive. Illustrations were old-fashioned, and the stories had nothing to do with Christmas. The paper, too, had faded, whereas the much later editions, on the thicker paper, remained clean and white (and still does). Childhood memories determine the "golden years", I am sure.

Next, the dismissal of "I Am A Fugitive from A Chain Gang" in the "Small Cinema" article. I first saw this film in 1970 at the National Film Theatre, and it still retained the impact and force which I am sure it originally made. Certainly not overrated, it remains a classic, and contains one of the most haunting endings on film.

S. GORDON SWAN (Western Australia): I was pleased to see the tribute to Marion Davies in the "Biography of a Small Cinema". (C.D. for November, 1975.) She was a favourite of mine, too, and revelations of her personal life have not dimmed my appreciation of her abilities and charm.

Having just read the book, "Operator 13" by Robert W. Chambers, I recall that she played opposite Gary Cooper in a film version of this and displayed her versatility by disguising as a mulatto girl in order to act

as a spy against the South in the Civil War.

I did not know she was libelled in the film "Citizen Kane", as, when I saw this picture, I was unaware it was based on the character of William Randolph Hearst.

Mrs. J. PACKMAN (East Dulwich): There is one little point about the Club mentioned in C.D. I trust you wouldn't mind me saying that the credit for founding the Old Boys' Book Club should be given to two men who were not Hamilton fans. Bob Blythe was, and still is, the Nelson Lee expert, and Len was not a Magnet fan, more a Sexton Blake and Lee one, so one can hardly say that the Hamiltonians founded the Club.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): I agree absolutely with all but one of Mr. Fishman's comments on R. F. Delderfield's magnificent novel TO SERVE THEM ALL MY DAYS; I think it unlikely that Delderfield borrowed from Mr. Chips, for the two novels are quite different - except that they both deal with a schoolmaster's career.

But I was particularly interested in Mr. Fishman's letter because when I was planning my article on ADULT SCHOOL STORIES for the new Annual I intended to include in it a discussion of Delderfield's book. But I discovered that the more I tried to do this, with justice to the novel the more space it took, and at last I had regretfully to omit it. I may deal with it later on its own.

Delderfield was born in 1912, and there is no doubt that he was a MAGNET and GEM reader. In TO SERVE THEM ALL MY DAYS there is Algy Herries, the original headmaster of Bamfylde, Towser as the name of a dog, and Hoskins, nick-named "Sax", a musical pupil who eventually marries David Powlett-Jones' daughter, Grace. In A HORSEMAN RIDING BY we have Lovell, Tozer, Potter, Bull, Morgan and Voysey, in THE AVENUE "Inky" (for a coloured doll) and Figgins and in the Swann saga Ratcliffe, Lovell and Rookwood. Fair evidence?

* * * * *

A HAPPY NEW YEAR to One and All. From: Capt. John Gunn & Mrs. Winifred Gunn, 65 Walton Gardens, Grantham, Lincs.

You'll see from the above that we have retired, and for the first time for 30 years, we can look out of our back windows and see NOT Cobbles, Crate, Casks, Cellar-flaps - BUT - A Garden. Now I've got to get myself a rake, fork, hoe, etc., and a Back-ache. P.S. I still want Nelson Lee (old series) Nos. 114 and 144, for binding. Can anyone help?

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 22. GABRIEL OVER THE SMALL CINEMA

We opened the new term with Ben Lyon, Mary Brian, and Glenda Farrell in "Girl Missing" from Warner Bros. Next, M. G. M. sent us Gary Cooper and Joan Crawford in "To-day We Live", which was one of those house-packing romances which cinemagoers used to enjoy.

Then, from Universal, Lew Ayres in "All Quiet on the Western Front". This was acclaimed a masterpiece, though I was not all that keen on it myself. It was, of course, anti-war propaganda, and I have rather a built-in antipathy to propaganda of any kind.

This was followed by Ramon Novarro with Myrna Loy in "A Night in Cairo", from M. G. M. What a lot of Novarro films we played! In this programme I am surprised to see that one item was Felix the Cat in "April Maze", a sound cartoon. Somehow I have always associated Felix with the silent screen.

Next, from Gaumont-British, a Musical Romance: Lilian Harvey in "The Only Girl". M. G. M. followed this one with Robert Montgomery and Walter Huston in "Hell Below". Then, from Universal, Charles Murray and George Sidney in "The Cohens and Kellys in Trouble".

Next, from M. G. M., Laurel and Hardy, with Dennis King, in "Fra Diavolo". This was described as "a comic opera", not so popular as many of the great comedians' features, though it had its moments.

After that, a double-feature programme, both pictures from M. G. M.: Diana Wynyard in "Men Must Fight", supported by

Norma Shearer and Marie Dressler in "Let Us Be Gay".

From Warner's came Isobel Elsom and Gibb McLachlin in "The Thirteenth Candle". Next, from Universal, Clyde Beatty in "The Big Cage". Followed, from Warner's, by Douglas Fairbank Jr. and Loretta Young in "The Kid's Last Fight".

Then, a double-feature programme, both this time from Gaumont-British: Lilian Harvey in a famous musical of the day, "Congress Dances" plus Lil Dagover in "The Second Kiss", also a musical. It sounds a bit too sophisticated for our audiences.

Next, M. G. M. again with John Gilbert in "Fast Workers".

After that came a remarkable film of which I have very happy memories. This was Walter Huston and Franchot Tone in "Gabriel Over the White House". I reckon that one is long forgotten today by older cinemagoers, but I have never forgotten it. I had not booked this film when I was preparing the term's programmes. The advance publicity had made it clear that it dealt with American political life, and, as such, would probably have little interest for an English audience. By some chance, however, when the film was released, I happened to see it at the Super Cinema in Kingston-on-Thames. To my surprise I greatly enjoyed it, and it made a deep impression on me. So I rang up M. G. M. and booked it for one of the dates which I always left open for any such

booking. So the film came to the Small Cinema, and it was a great success.

Next, from Warner's, came James Cagney in "Picture Snatcher". Then, from M. G. M., Kay Francis and Walter Huston in "Storm at Daybreak". Then Ernest Truex and Una Merkel in "Whistling in the Dark". I notice that, in the same programme with the last-named feature, we played a single-reeler: Don Bradman in "How I Play Cricket". I fancy the cricket item was released by M. G. M., but I am not certain of this.

Then came the longest programme we ever played in all our history (it must have been as long as plenty of those which they put on at the Trocadero, Elephant & Castle) - and it came about by accident. Only a week or so before the programme was due, I discovered, to my consternation, that I had booked two full shows for the same date. First there were two very big features, and, in addition there were a number of 2-reelers, plus the Universal News which came along regularly under contract. As our first feature we played the technicolor musical: Jack Oakie in

"Hit the Deck". (I have already written concerning this film in an article "Tinkle, Tinkle, Little Star" in the C. D. Annual of some years back.) It was the musical version of the old silent film "Shore Leave", and, though Jack Oakie was a little miscast compared with Richard Barthelmess of the silent masterpiece, it was still a delightful picture. I have no record of who played the female lead. Years later, in the fifties, M. G. M. made "Hit the Deck" again, but this one was a dreadful affair, bearing only the slightest relationship to either "Shore Leave" or the "Hit the Deck" film which we were now showing. According to my booking lists, the Jack Oakie "Hit the Deck" was released by Gaumont-British. Our second feature (though it was a famous and giant first feature in its own right) was Luis Trenker and Vilma Banky in "The Rebel", from Universal.

Our final programme of that term came from Universal, and was Lionel Atwill, Gloria Stuart, and Paul Lucas in an eerie thriller: "The Secret of the Blue Room".

* * * * *
RED MAGNETS wanted. Offer 3 for 1. Nos. 10, 134, 136, 158, 162, 167, 171, 181, 200, 215, 217.

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BILLS AMUSEMENT ALLEY: A bright and cheerful collectors' paper for folks who can still afford to see the postman! First issue (January 1st) includes "Old Time Cinemas We Loved", "Wills Cigarette Cards", "Judy Garland" by Ken Sephton, "Tit Bits Centenary News", "The Screen Parliament" and other bright things. 30p by postal order (payable to "Flower Patch") from

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News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

Highlight of the November meeting was the introduction of new member Edward Sabin, who disclosed that he remembered purchasing a copy of Magnet 520, 'A Very Gallant Gentleman', in 1918.

The company, eleven in total, turned to talk of favourite Hamilton characters, followed by a reading by Ivan Webster from Magnet 1447 'Guyed on the Fifth'. The remainder of the evening passed pleasantly with the perusal of Tom Porter's anniversary and collectors' items. Tom's goodies: Nelson Lee Library (old series) 390, 25/11/1922, 'When a Boy's Down' - 53 years old to the date of the meeting and Sexton Blake Library 526, 'The Last Tiger' of 1963. This was the last SBL of the third series and carried a personal message of farewell from Sexton Blake to readers of the chronicles of the great man. The evening was rounded off with a dash of Greyfriars Bingo - but as always time is the enemy - 'call over' again.

CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Club met at Brooklands Avenue, kindly arranged by Edward Witten, on 14 December.

Jack Doupe gave a talk on the Boys' Own Paper, outlining its history, its editors, and its contents. He mentioned many of the serials and their authors. Jack was warmly thanked for his most interesting talk and urged by members to send it to the Editor for the Digest for next year's Annual.

Danny Posner gave a hilarious account of the events which led to his appearance in a number of newspapers in the character of Billy Bunter - Vic Hearn having recognised him from the picture in the "Sun".

Jack Overhill opened a discussion on incredible incidents in boys' papers, Bill Thurbon, Edward Witton and Danny Posner all contributing to the discussion.

Danny reported on the Old Boys' Book scene; there is to be another auction at Sotheby's in the near future; the principal items will

be "Bullseyes", a much sought after item.

The meeting closed with a hearty vote of thanks to Edward for his hospitality, and the exchange of Christmas greetings.

LONDON

Once again, Yuletide at Courtfield. In festive mood, we enjoyed two readings by candlelight - one from Roger Jenkins on Hamiltonia, the other from Norman Wright on Nelson Lee.

Reuben Godsave provided a seasonal party game which proved popular, and Bob Blythe entertained with a musical quiz. Bob Blythe's anagram on "Christmas at Handforth Towers" stumped everyone, but Bob presented prizes for the four best efforts.

Representing the National Book League, David Benthien was present in connection with the Hamilton Centenary Year.

Sumptuous Christmas fare was provided by our hosts, the Acramans, and Bob and Mrs. Acraman were suitably thanked for their hospitality.

Next meeting at 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S. E. 22. Tel: 693 - 2844. Please notify Josie Packman if attending.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN

Saturday, 13 December, 1975

A cosy party assembled at Wharton Lodge for Christmas and we were pleased to have with us a number of members' families and friends.

Tea was, of course, a product of the culinary artistry of the Cliff House girls, and again they excelled themselves, to the palatal delight of us all!

The genius of Jack Allison was behind our first game, though whether or not it should be referred to in the singular is doubtful. Different games were taking place at each table, though at the first winner's call we all moved systematically to other tables. Norman Smith had the highest marks with 196, then Marion Wilde with 192 and Harold Durden with 191.

Then into the dangerous realms of athletics, to be more precise, a bat the balloon game. Five teams took part, Greyfriars, Rookwood,

St. Jim's, Cliff House and St. Frank's. St. Frank's fans please note - their team won the cup!

Before supper we divided into two groups for Happy Families games, Hobby aficionados in the one group (who played out the game to the bitter end and a total take-over!) and our non-Hobby friends in the other group. The Hobbyists played with families of the Hobby characters and the others played the more orthodox Happy Families game. Winner among the non-Hobbyists was Violet Hunter and winner among the aficionados was Geoffrey Wilde.

And with supper came to an end another delightful pre-Christmas gathering of the Northern Club.

We wish a happy new year to all readers of CD!

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REVIEW

THE GREYFRIARS CHARACTERS

John Wernham & Mary Cadogan
(Museum Press: £2.50;
by post £3)

This latest welcome offering from the Museum Press is devoted almost entirely to Greyfriars and Cliff House. It's the Magnet, the whole Magnet, and little but the Magnet in a giant feast of reading and pictures. Almost every character on the earlier Hamiltonian Magnet stage is given attention and appraisal in varying degree of intensity, and even a few non-Hamiltonian creations get a share of the limelight. The work entailed must have been enormous, but what I like is the sheer sincerity of it all. The writers have toiled for the love of the thing, and not (as often occurs with professional writers as opposed to amateurs) with tongue in cheek.

Who wrote what of the two authors concerned is not indicated, and one can only guess. But that is part of the fun. The book would appear to be based to some extent on the famous Greyfriars Gallery written by Pentelow nearly 60 years ago, covering the hugely famous and the minutely infamous, and that Gallery surely inspired the new book. There are crowds of pictures from the early, the middle, and the later Magnet and a few from elsewhere, plus some remarkably fine photographs of the great author himself. The book ends with an article by Roger Jenkins in which he reports on an interview he had with Charles Hamilton's house-keeper, Miss Hood. With this book, Magnet-lovers will be in their element. It could be the last word on the Greyfriars story. For the sake of the future of C. D. and the Annual, we hope that it isn't!

("The Greyfriars Characters" can be obtained direct from the Museum Press, 30 Tonbridge Rd., Maidstone, or from the Collectors' Digest Office.)

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SALE OR EXCHANGE: Film Annuals & Broon Annuals, SBL's, post-war. WANTED: CD's 332 to February 1976; H. Baker reprints 1975.

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.