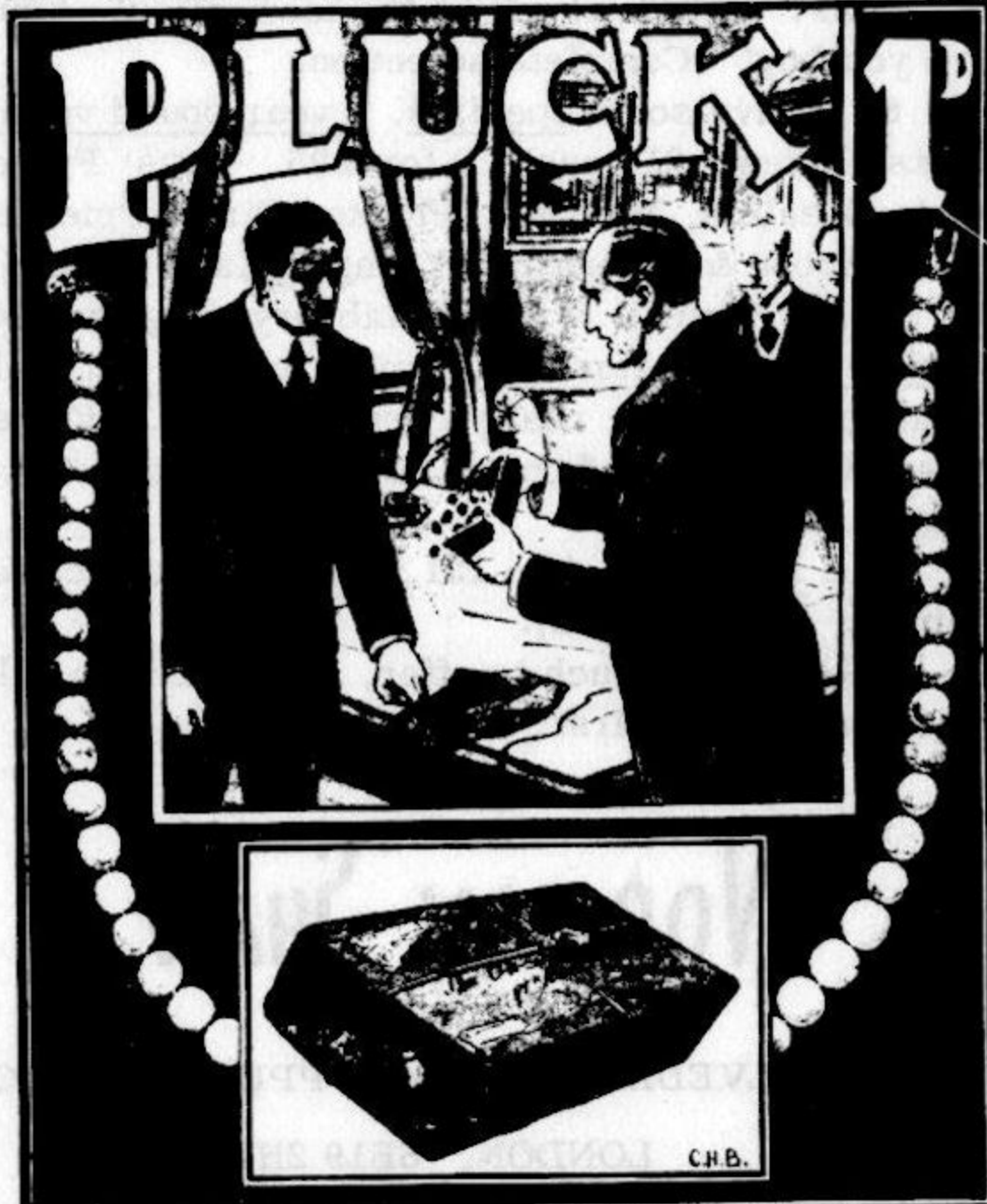


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**COLLECTORS DIGEST**

VOLUME 32 NUMBER 375

MARCH 1978

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**THE OVERCROWDED STAGE**

Some books seem to have too many characters in the story. Dickens, perhaps, was one writer who spoiled his ship, for me, by having sometimes too large a crew.

One comes across the same thing in plenty of detective and mystery stories. I am very fond of most Agatha Christie books, but at times she seemed to introduce too many characters, even though her work on her minor characters was outstanding. There is method in the madness of the writers of whodunnits. The place to get lost is in a crowd. The superfluity of characters makes it difficult to decide who committed whatever fell deed was being investigated by the detective.

But the limelight, diffused over a crowd, is less bright than the spotlight which picks out one or two. So the writer who has too large a cast runs the risk that his readers' interest may become less intense.

A contributor to our columns this month suggests that there were too many characters at St. Frank's. My knowledge of St. Frank's is not sufficient for me to give an opinion as to whether our contributor is justified, and whether that school's cast was too heavy.

Whether Brooks was guilty of this failing, I cannot say. But certainly Charles Hamilton was, particularly with St. Jim's. In the Gem's middle period the limelight was diffused over far too many characters from 1914 onwards. Thus the intimate charm of the earlier blue Gem era was lost.

It is a risk which is always present with a very long-running series. Characters are introduced for a particular purpose, and then are left to clutter up the stage and turn up now and then to give certain readers nostalgic twinges. It happened in this haphazard way at Greyfriars, and the Remove became of absurd proportions. But Hamilton saw the danger in time, and by the late twenties he was chopping away the dead wood (one rather surprising victim of his axe was Bulstrode) and giving further newcomers clear exit lines at the end of series. Also, at Greyfriars, Hamilton never really allowed his spotlight to stray too far away from Harry Wharton, Billy Bunter and the Bounder.

At St. Jim's it was rather different. He deliberately reconstructed his cast, introducing a mass of new boys who had large parts to play, and even new Co's. The change was marked and it did not please old readers, so that, after 1914, the Gem's popularity waned.

By 1927 or so, Hamilton had learned his lesson, but it was too late for him to act upon it with St. Jim's. But that he had learned the lesson was clear when in 1939, contributing only three monster series (in length) between Easter and Christmas of that year, he centred his plots on very old favourites and ignored the rest. I wish that he had done it twenty years earlier.

## SERVICE

At the moment the drivers of the buses in North Hampshire are on strike. Their reason (if any reason is needed for modern strikes) is that the heating in certain buses is inadequate for them. So, without warning, out they come on strike, indifferent to the fact that, all along the bus routes, scores of elderly people are waiting in the cold for buses

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which will not come.

They should have seen the tram drivers years ago, with little but big overcoats and oilskins to protect them from the elements. And the ferry skippers on their open bridges in bitter weather. The bus drivers of today would drop dead at the prospect.

They must have been a tough breed, those old tram drivers.

And, while we are there, nearly 50 years ago, let us pause for a moment to give a thought to Turner Layton, the singer who died recently, in his eighties. Some of us well remember Layton and Johnstone, the incomparable singing pair, who sang songs which were really songs, in voices which were really voices. When, sadly enough, they split up due to domestic differences of opinion, it was a big loss for the music halls. But they are not forgotten while those who enjoyed their talents are left.

### MISTER SOFTEE

"He's one of the most famous pussy-cats in the world," we told Mr. Softee's vet.

And so he was, too.

In the many thousands of letters I have received in the past few years, most of them contained some mention of Mr. Softee. And at Christmas time, any amount of the great number of Christmas cards which came into Excelsior House had his name added to that of Madam and mine.

He was our Philpot Bottels, here in the editorial office, for seven delightful years. And now he is gone. The animal lovers among my readers, and there are many scores of them, realise how much we miss him.

Our very, very grateful thanks to the great number of loving folk who have sent us along kindly and helpful thoughts in letters and in telephone calls since Mr. Softee died. God bless you all for being so understanding.

THE EDITOR

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FOR SALE: 40 rare 'old series' Nelson Lee Libraries before number 103. £1.50 each.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 EASTBURY RD., WATFORD, HERTS.

# DANNY'S DIARY

MARCH 1928

The Modern Boy, described by its editor as "the most up-to-date boys' paper in the world", seems to be finally settled at 28 pages after its opening weeks of shrinking sickness. I am still having it, for Mum ordered it regularly from the newsagent for me, but I'm not really all that keen on it. Still, I greatly enjoy "King of the Islands", the serial which is supposed to be written by Sir Alan Cobham. I'm always a bit suspicious about these important people who turn out to be wonderful authors as well as famous in some other sphere.

But the Ken King tale is picturesque and exciting. Ken King is having a shot at getting a secret hoard of gold on the island of Falloo. Kit Hudson arrives in time to stop the witch doctor from making cottage pie of Ken King. Finally, in the last instalment of the month, a seaplane is heading for the islands. It terrifies the natives but has no terrors for Ken King.

The Gunby Hadath tales, about a boy named Sparrow seeking his fortune, are not really in my line, but Alfred Edgar's motor-racing tales are good of their type, if not exactly my kettle of fish.

An entire new series of silver coins has been issued - florins, half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences - and they look lovely as they turn up in people's change. The new issue came into circulation on the 12th of the month.

There are two new shows on in the West End of London. At the Queen's Theatre there is a play called "The Trial of Mary Dugan", in which 12 people are chosen from the audience each evening to be the jury. The play is about the murder of a man named Rice. "What kind of a man was Rice?" asks the counsel. "He was a pudding," replies the witness.

At the London Pavilion there is a new Cochran revue entitled "This Year of Grace" with Sonnie Hale and a new young star named Jessie Matthews. The music is by someone named Noel Coward.

The Rio Kid is still going great guns in the Popular. The first Kid tale of the month is "The Trail of Death" in which the Kid is hired to

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shoot up and murder the "nesters". But the Kid changes sides, and fights for the "nesters". In "The Kid's Venture" he gets the chance to make some money by taking charge of a dangerous cattle-drive. Next week "A Deal in Cows" in which the Kid sells the cows he won for taking on the drive. Mc' Cann tried to cheat the Kid. In "The Good Samaritan", the Kid helps and nurses a wounded man, but the villain, Two-Gun Casey, tries to betray him to the sheriff.

Last, "Saved by an Outlaw" in which the Kid stays to help a poor and desperate man who tried to rob him. All magnificent tales. I hope the Rio Kid goes on for ever.

A second new automatic telephone exchange has been opened in London. This one is the Bishopsgate Exchange.

Two excellent tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library. "The Outlaws of the School" - grand old Greyfriars tales in which fagging for the Remove is finally abolished, and "The Swell of the Circus" in which Gussy runs away from St. Jim's and joins Tomsonio's Circus.

In the Magnet the tip-top High Oaks series has continued and ended. Mr. Quelch has been sacked from Greyfriars owing to a misunderstanding with the Headmaster, due to the evil Skinner. The Remove has rebelled in support of their form-master, and the whole form, under the rare leadership of Lord Mauleverer, has transferred to High Oaks, which has been purchased by his Lordship. Unfortunately, there is no law and order at High Oaks, and Mauly, while advertising for a Headmaster, engages the services of a pugilist named Juggins to maintain discipline. In one amusing story, a disguised Ponsonby, arrives as Mr. Buncombe, M.A. Oxon, O.B.E. For a while, till he is found out, Mr. Buncombe gives the High Oaks boys a hot time. As a result, Mr. Quelch comes along to take charge temporarily.

Finally, Colonel Wharton looks into the matter, the misunderstanding between the Head and Mr. Quelch is cleared up, and Greyfriars returns to normal. The titles of the stories are: "High Jinks at High Oaks", "Mutiny", "The Boy Headmaster", and "The Return of the Rebels". A dream of a series.

With the last tale of the month another new series started. In the first story "Black Magic", Mr. Crum, a travelling hypnotist, wishes to place his son at Greyfriars. Most unexpectedly, Dr. Locke, after an

interview with Mr. Crum, accepts the son, Henry, into the school. But young Crum also seems to have a strange influence. Both Wingate and Loder act strangely. Mauleverer is something of a chum of Crum's, and he steps in when Wharton and Crum are to fight. So Crum gets knocked out by Wharton, and admits that he deserved it. Intriguing, fascinating, and delightfully written this new series gives great promise, and leaves me yearning for more.

At the pictures we have seen Fred Thompson in "The Two-Gun Man"; Charlie Murray and Chester Conklin in "McFadden's Flats"; Lon Chaney in "Tell it to the Marines"; Richard Dix in "Knockout Reilly"; and John Gilbert with Renee Adoree in "The Big Parade". Quite a good month in the cinemas.

The month's opening story in the Nelson Lee is "The Mystery of Edgemore Manor", in which the Earl of Edgemore is having trouble over mortgages, due to an overbearing millionaire, Gore-Pearce, whose son arrives at St. Frank's as a day-boy. There is also an unscrupulous lawyer, named Snell. And it is Handforth who takes the lead to help the Earl. The next tale is "The Schoolboy Householders". Then in "Fifty Pounds Reward", that is the sum offered by Snell for the recovery of a pocket-book he has lost. Last tale of the series is "Out of the Past", and Nelson Lee himself plays a welcome substantial part in this one. So Snell is arrested, the Earl gets his house back, and he finds his grandson of whose existence he didn't know. The Earl welcomes the boy, and says "Fear not!" to him. You would think he would have said "Don't be scared of me", but I suppose "Fear not" came to the same thing in the end.

To wind up the month came "The Boat-Race Truants" in which Handy takes a party to see the University boat-race, and it is William Napoleon Browne who really makes it possible.

The Gem is running extra-long tales every week now, but they don't amount to much. The Gem has celebrated its 21st birthday this month. The stories have been "The Jape of the Term" in which a new German master, Herr Schwartz, arrives; "Prefect and Rascal" which was about Knox; two Trimble stories, "Trimble the Truant" and "On the Trail of the Truant"; and "Cardew the Knight Errant" in which Cardew wins £25 in a competition, and gives it to Miss Elsie Watts who has stolen a similar amount to save her brother.

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The Rookwood serial "His Own Enemy" has ended, and another one, equally counterfeit, entitled "For the Honour of Rookwood" has started. It is about Babbington, who is a cousin of Cuffy's.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 71, "The Outlaws of the School" comprised a red Magnet of the autumn of 1911, of the same title, with its sequel which was entitled "By Order of the Form" which was the last Magnet tale for the same year. S.O.L. No. 72, "The Swell of the Circus" comprised two Gems of early 1910. Tomsonio's Circus was created by Hamilton, under the pen-name of Harry Dorrian in Pluck in 1909. The series was discussed in a Let's Be Controversial essay in 1975. This circus appeared in one Magnet story, and also in two Gem stories a couple of months before "Swell of the Circus" appeared in the Gem. The Gem stories were a good bit superior to the Magnet one.)

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# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

By a curious coincidence I received two articles from writers at the opposite ends of the Earth, namely Mr. J. E. M. of Brighton, Sussex, and Don Harkness of Australia. Both articles have the title "WHAT'S IN A NAME" but the contents are very different, so I thought it would be a good idea to publish them together in this month's Blakiana. I am sure both articles will be of interest to all Blake fans, at least I trust so.

I have a few more articles in hand but would be pleased to receive some for future use.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME

by D. Harkness

What's in a name? Quite a lot when you come to think of it. Take detectives for instance. Have you ever noticed how the most popular sleuths nearly all had two-syllable Christian names and one-syllable surnames? For example take our own Sexton Blake; then there was Sherlock Holmes, Nelson Lee, Dixon Hawke and Ferrers Locke to name but a few. Across the Atlantic they had Philo Vance and Charlie Chan. (Do you recall how well suave William Powell played Vance in the Movies and what a perfect Charlie Chan the Swedish actor Warner Oland made?)

Thanks to the men who wrote for the U.J. we have many names

of characters whom we take for granted, that sound just right. Pride of place must go to the name Sexton Blake, surely the most unique in the annals of writing, and we must not forget Tinker with his solitary name.

The criminals against whom Blake waged war were aptly named also. How more sinister George Marsden Plummer sounds than just plain George Plummer, and even plain John Smith seemed a perfect name for the President of the Criminals Confederation, which also boasted names like Mr. Reece and Sir Philip Champion.

Then we had Dr. Huxton Rymer, a fitting name, you'll agree for a criminal doctor, and Dirk Dolland, the Bat, a name which suited him. It suited him when he was living a life of crime and it still rang true when he reformed under Blake's guidance.

"Splash" Page may have sounded rather obvious to some people for a newspaper reporter's name but not to me. I found it wholly believable. And when you think of Splash Page you naturally recall its irascible editor, Julius Jones.

It was never quite clear to me if Zenith the Albino had another name. I do know he was very particular that he was always called Monsieur Zenith by other crooks.

There are far too many names to mention in detail so I will conclude the criminal element with that ambitious Oriental Prince Wu Ling, who sought not only to conquer China but wipe out the entire white race as well.

Among the "goodies" we have the perfect name of Scotland Yard's Chief Commissioner in Sir Henry Fairfax and his faithful subordinate Detective Inspector Coutts, a name which never could be improved on.

We must not forget the ladies. Mlle Yvonne Cartier was unforgettable, and many a reader found a soft spot in his heart too for Mlle Roxane Harfield and June Severance. Mention must also be made of the bad girls like Vali Mata-vali, Mary Trent, Marie Galante and Sophie Beautemp, any of whom could be just as sinister and vicious as their male counterparts. If I have overlooked a character of your own personal liking please forgive me. I have but tried to give a cross-section of the most popular names which seem to describe and apply to the characters created by the various authors.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME - MAGIC, THAT'S WHAT

by J.E.M.

It is no doubt a shocking thing for any Blakian to confess but the great detective comes only third on my list of the Saga's attractions. After the brilliant work of Blake's foremost illustrator, Eric Parker, the main fascination for me of the Sexton Blake stories lies in the vast army of Blake's criminal adversaries - and, above all, in their names. For, in spite of what Shakespeare says, there's a deuce of a lot in names. We are all, at some time or other, obsessed by them. They have the magic of music and, like music, can play on our very nerve ends. Who has not felt a frisson, a physical thrill, at the sound of some exciting name?

Certainly most successful fiction owes a lot to the names of its characters and nowhere is this more true than in the case of detective stories. Here is a world of deliberately heightened thrills and emotions. Names therefore, must also be given a special resonance - and especially perhaps, those of the villains and outlaws. One only needs to read such names as Count Fosco, Professor Moriarty, Dr. Fu Manchu and Karl Peterson, to feel a shiver of excitement and anticipation. But perhaps no fictional saga of crime has produced more colourful names than the stories of Sexton Blake. For me, at least, some of them remain unforgettable. Count Ivor Carlac, Jason Reece, Zenith the Albino, Rupert Waldo the Wonder Man, Wu Ling, Vali Mata-Vali, Mlle Roxane, Nirvana. All are of glittering extravagance and they excited and still excite me in a way that is difficult to describe.

It is interesting, perhaps, that no character, however impressive, ever fully rouses my enthusiasm if the name does not move me. A case in point is Huxton Rymer. He always sounds like a mixture of cheap salesman (huckster) and failed poet. George Marsden Plummer is another well-drawn character badly let down for me by unsuccessful naming. The surname, when uttered, conjures nothing more glamorous than the friendly chap who comes to repair the water pipes! Of course we all know the device of labelling the most exciting personality with the most commonplace name, but this ploy can be used only sparingly.

A notable success in this regard is Mr. John Smith, President of the Criminals Confederation, who remains one of my favourite Blake

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characters. In general, however, crime and detective fiction has thrived best with a cast of exotic names.

This fact has been satirically exploited by a number of modern authors. Colin Watson, whose "Flaxborough Chronicles" were so delightfully televised, has surely produced one of the most memorable names for a genteel lady crook - Miss Teatime. But perhaps the first prize in this field should go to the BBC Radio playwright whose own name I unfortunately forget but whose principal creations are totally unforgettable. I recommend to all crime-story addicts Inspector Millions and his assistant Dynasty Surecard, both of the "Detective" - the Scotland Yard of the nineteenth century. So far, I believe, they have appeared in only two plays but in these have been well supported by other memorable characters like Lord Quandary and (a lovely one this) Edgar Joint-Schism. Incidentally these preposterous names go not only with some gorgeously orotund Victorian dialogue but also some first-class excitement and mystery. No Blakian should miss these plays, certainly that is, no Blakian who loves his thrills well spiced with gaudy and unforgettable names.

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## NELSON LEE COLUMN

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

Gore-Pearce, in one of his more spiteful moments, questioned Nipper's parentage during a quarellsome period with the captain of the Remove. Gore-Pearce was to wish he hadn't cast doubts on Nipper's upbringing for he experienced a very painful aftermath.

Stemming from that row was an idea to ask Nipper if he would tell me for the benefit of readers how he got his name and if his parents had ever been found. And the following is how he told it to me.

Nelson Lee was responsible for the continuance of the nickname after Lee was investigating a case that took him to Paddington Station in London and a pert, bright eyed youngster, who was called Nipper by his pals was able to inform the detective a clue that assisted Nelson Lee in successfully closing his case.

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Lee was in need of an assistant and Nipper from that time filled the role. His nickname stuck as nicknames will. For obvious reasons Nelson Lee had to trace Nipper's parents and the result was very revealing.

Nipper's father, Richard Hamilton, was a member of the Diplomatic Service in St. Petersburg - a junior attache at the British Embassy. In midsummer of that year his wife went to Oxford, in England, and on 31st July, her husband received a cablegram announcing the birth of a son.

The son was named after the father, Richard Hamilton. From that time Nipper is unable to supply details to fill the gap of fourteen years. Perhaps in some future period the full story of Nipper's early life may be disclosed.

Nipper was sent to St. Ninian's for a while, but as Nelson Lee's assistant he was to be involved in some remarkable cases. These have been faithfully recorded by the chroniclers of the day.

When Lee and Nipper were threatened by a Chinese secret society they departed from 131a Grays Inn Road, their London home, and turned up at St. Frank's College where Lee became a Housemaster and Nipper a pupil.

Before this transition came about Lee and Nipper were to meet a character who was to remain with us till the end of saga - and beyond. Lord Dorrimore was already well-known to the Grays Inn Road pair, but later Dorrie's great friend, Umlosi, became inseparable and was always with them wherever they went until the time came for Lee and Nipper to be installed at St. Frank's.

But they all used to meet up again during holidays abroad and many wonderful adventures have been recorded of this indomitable four.

I would like to interpose here and correct an error in the chronicles that stated Lord Dorrimore was minus two fingers at the time Lee met him in Africa. Nipper assures me Dorrie has no missing fingers and the mistake was probably due to Dorrie having two fingers bandaged due to an accident.

Old Umlosi's biography would fill many pages, but Nelson Lee's pre St. Frank's adventures in the world of crime would fill even greater tomes.

But what a foursome! Lee and Nipper, Dorrie and Umlosi! Their daring exploits put all other heroics to shame. The full story has yet to be told of this brave and courageous association of their many undisclosed deeds in the interests of world peace.

We have to thank Lee's visit one day to Paddington Station for bringing Nipper-Richard Hamilton - into our lives, and Lord Dorrimore's valiant friend, Umlosi, for being on the spot when they met in Africa.

Finally we have to thank Edwy Searles Brooks for his very enthralling accounts of the activities that these four took part in which were recorded with unforgettable reality.

### "FATTY" LITTLE

by R. J. Godsave

To James Little, otherwise known as "Fatty" Little, belongs the distinction of becoming a junior scholar of St. Frank's without ever having been in contact with the famous college situated near Bellton in the county of Sussex. In o. s. 228 "The Fat Boy of St. Frank's", James Little arrived with his father at the Turret College which was at that time the temporary home of the St. Frank's scholars. This move to London was the result of the revengeful act by the Greek junior Titus Alexis in setting fire to the College House for supposed cruelty to himself by the college authorities.

New boys, as a rule, were nervous and rather scared, but Jimmy Little, after his father had left, acted as though he had been at St. Frank's for a whole term. It was impossible to dislike him with his abundant good-nature. While his mind was on his lessons his thoughts were far removed from food. At other times food was almost his god. At the same time, he was not a glutton in the sense that he was not continually raiding studies for food. Actually, he was extremely honest in paying back small loans when his weekly supply of pocket money ran out.

Like many other fat boys Little was an excellent cook, showing great interest in the preparation of a meal. When the St. Frank's Cadet Corps was formed in the Island Camp series he automatically occupied the position of camp cook. He featured in many Nelson Lee series, and apart from his cooking interest he was extremely useful when the Removites found themselves fighting a gang of roughs brought in by a temporary Headmaster in an effort to subdue the barring-out rebels by

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force. He just threw himself forward and any obstacle in the shape of a human being had to go.

With a sunny and pleasant disposition Little soon made himself popular with his fellow juniors, and was to prove himself to be a great asset to his creator - E. S. Brooks.

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### MORE PSYCHOLOGY

by Joe Conroy

The editorial comment 'The Psychological Moment' gave me something to think about (Jan. Edtn. C.D.).

Just recently there has been a lot of discussion and comparisons made on the different styles of writing of Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks. That Editorial, I think, lends a vital new factor to this interesting comparison.

Numerous youngsters, regardless of parents and teachers, loved to read purely school stories. Lots of others favoured the more adventurous and futuristic stories. The first were catered for by the Magnet, the Gem and at first, by the Nelson Lee. The latter by the Rover, the Wizard and the Adventure. The Magnet and Gem were straightforward school stories in which we ourselves became involved. We knew the masters and boys individually. We were part of the school. We joined in the action. We were in form with them. We went on holiday with them. But always quite normal and feasible. We accepted and enjoyed the unlikely ventriloquial tricks of Bunter on holiday and saving us from the natives as a wee bit far-fetched but part of the fun. And we looked forward after the holiday to another term at school. Roger Jenkins comments on the doubtful credibility of Wibley being only a schoolboy and being such a genius at make-up. This we now know to be very far-fetched but we were schoolboys and enjoyed it. I suppose as well that it is not impossible. We have youngsters who are star performers today. Now we come to the article by R. J. Godsave titled 'Isirium'. Our schoolboy author Chas Hamilton's slight exaggerations with Bunter and Wibley fade into insignificance in comparison. A fascinating story it may be. Yes. But all too many times did E.S.B. write this particular type of story. Strange forgotten tribles. Huge mechanical monsters with caterpillar wheels. Not very feasible at all to a youngster looking

for a good school story. Thus I think St. Frank's foundered in a wealth of very unlikely adventure stories. The adventure came first and St. Frank's second. School story readers turned away from the Nelson Lee and took to the Magnet and Gem. Thus an early demise for the Nelson Lee.

I think the Lee could have been saved by handing St. Frank's over to Chas Hamilton to prune and tidy things up (there were far too many characters anyway) and to put new life into St. Frank's and make it a College again. They could perhaps have joined in the sports with Greyfriars and St. Jim's!

Edwy Searles Brooks could have continued with his undeniably great adventure stories minus St. Frank's in say the 'Boys' Magazine' no doubt with great success.

\* \* \* \* \*

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 148 - Magnet 1068 - "Billy Bunter's Bookmaker"

Magnet 1068 was a single story that came between two series, and perhaps lends force to the argument that single stories were seldom able to reach the heights in the way that was open to a long series.

Billy Bunter's occasional excursions into the world of gambling were always something of a puzzle to the reader. Charles Hamilton used to explain them away on the grounds that Bunter envisaged untold wealth which would make Mrs. Mimble welcome him with open arms, but it was a little difficult to credit that such a lazy person would devote so much time and energy to a project like getting in touch with bookmakers.

In No. 1068 he wrote to a bookmaking firm in Shaftesbury Avenue and attempted to gamble on credit. When that failed, Wibley masqueraded as Mr. Bagshot and accepted bets on credit from Bunter, and needless to say all Bunter's sure snips proved losers. It was a simple story embellished with small incidents, and it was saved by the humorous touches. For example, when Bunter realised that the letter in reply from the Shaftesbury Avenue bookmakers would be noticed by Quelch, Snoop promised Bunter a good send-off when he was expelled and Fisher T. Fish reminded him to repay the shilling he owed him before he left.

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When Bunter invited D'Arcy to bet on the result of the cricket match with St. Jim's, he got this reply:

"I wegard you as a toad, Buntah! That is to say," added Arthur Augustus hastily, "if I were not a visitah heah I should wegard you as a toad!"

It was touches like these that raised the story above the level of mediocrity.

When "Billy Bunter's Bookmaker" appeared in the summer of 1928 between the da Costa and the Whiffles Circus series, it was a time when the Magnet was on the upward trend and drawing close to its zenith. Although Charles Hamilton had by that time completely mastered the art of writing series, he had not developed his new style so successfully with the single Magnet stories which were still of uneven quality, with plots that were not always so tightly knit as they might have been. It seems clear that, in developing his fully mature powers as a writer, he still regarded the single stories as mere interludes in more important work.

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NOT JUST NOSTALGIA . . . . .

by Darrell Swift

I am sure that I am not by myself, when I claim that I was introduced to our hobby through somewhat "remarkable" circumstances.

As a schoolboy, I was introduced to the Bunter hardback books by a certain class-mate. At the time, I was reading the Jennings and William stories but this colleague always "pounced" on any new Bunter addition to our school library. Eventually, I followed his lead by reading my first story by Frank Richards in hardback form, "BILLY BUNTER THE BOLD" - and from that time I was "hooked" and made a special point of reading all the Bunter books in the school library, although by that time, some of the earlier books were unavailable.

Being a bit of a book worm, I always tried to buy as many books as I could - always fiction, and wherever possible, school stories. I considered all the stories by Frank Richards, far superior in this line. Quite by accident, I discovered the Tom Merry stories in hardback and although the yarns were accredited to Martin Clifford, I distinctly recall thinking that the style was identical to Frank Richards' and I wondered if

the two gentlemen were one and the same person. I didn't at the time realise I was right, of course.

When I left school in 1959, I ceased buying the Bunter books, thinking that perhaps I was a little old for such items: but when it came to giving quite a number of my prized possessions away to an orphanage nearby, I clung on to the stories by Frank Richards and Martin Clifford. There was something about them, that I could not put my finger on: I accepted that the style was excellent - even if the plots were not too exciting themselves. At all events, I kept these books (about 15 in all) and they were placed in a suitcase, never to see the light of day for about another 14 years.

Up to that time, I had heard of "The Magnet", but I knew virtually nothing about it, except that it was a boys' (and girls'?) weekly paper relating the stories of the boys of Greyfriars and that it ceased publication years before I was born. It was not, in fact, until 1973 that I was to see my first "Magnet" - and that being a Howard Baker facsimile publication. I recall at that time, receiving a parcel from our book department at the company at which I work: the parcel being addressed to a foreman in the factory. Having to visit that foreman on business, I took the parcel with me, which he opened. Only from the corner of my eye, as it were, I glanced at a copy of the Magnet reprint "BILLY BUNTER AND THE GREYFRIARS MUTINY". I almost pounced on that book and refused to let that foreman replace it in its package! I found out from that learned gentleman, that he was a keen follower of Greyfriars.

I then realized that perhaps I was not quite so childish after all, when I decided to keep the Bunter and Tom Merry books: it seemed that there were others who held a particular fascination for the works of Charles Hamilton. Certainly, I can only say I am grateful to that foreman for obtaining that particular volume and that by chance the parcel should come to me by mistake in the first place, for it was through those circumstances that I was introduced to "The Magnet" and "The Gem". How I got involved with the O.B.B.C. and Collectors' Digest is just another course of events, being themselves almost as "spectacular" as the sequence related above.

So many critics of our hobby claim that adherents of "The Magnet"

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and "The Gem" are just plain nostalgic. I can say, I am sure, without contradiction that this is just not so. "The Magnet" ceased publication four years before I was born and it was not until 1973 that I read my first full-length story in a facsimile of "The Magnet". Admittedly, I had read the Bunter books (or, some of them) and I was completely taken over by the style of writing but since reading "The Magnet" as it was originally published, I certainly would agree that their stories and style were far superior than could ever be put in a small hardback. So, when I read copies of "The Magnet" or "The Gem", I read them for pure pleasure: nostalgia doesn't come into it - and even if it does, what does it matter anyway?

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### REVIEWS

#### "BUNTER'S RICH RELATION"

Frank Richards  
(Howard Baker: £4.50)

As Arthur Carter had been kicked out of his previous school it would seem that he was lucky to be received as a pupil at Greyfriars. His uncle, not pleased at his nephew's disgrace, had altered his will, and it seemed possible that £50,000 might, in consequence, be diverted from Arthur Carter to Billy Bunter.

So the scene is set for the obnoxious Carter to endeavour to make sure that Billy Bunter, in his turn, is disgraced and expelled from school. And this time, for a change, it is Bob Cherry, hiding near a waiting room at a railway station, who necessarily hears the plot being discussed by the plotters, Carter and an unscrupulous solicitor.

This volume contains the first six stories of the 10-story Magnet series of early 1938. The series is one of the best of the latter-day Magnet, and it is typical of the period in that the main plot remains static after being explained in the opening tale. Each succeeding week there is a sub-plot in which Carter tries to disgrace Bunter - and fails. This is a series of enormous contrivance, but the contrivance is unerringly clever and vastly entertaining.

Many of the sequences are novel, so that a sense of repetition is largely avoided, and there is plenty of bubbling humour. For those who enjoy the latter-day Bunter, the whole thing is a giant tonic. It rang the bell loudly in 1938, and I imagine it will do the same exactly 40 years later.

#### THE GREYFRIARS IMPERSONATOR

Frank Richards  
(Howard Baker: £4.50)

Here we have the concluding four stories of the Carter series, in which Right - in the unlikely personage of Billy Bunter - triumphs. At the end, to everybody's satisfaction, the

scheming Carter is booted out of Greyfriars.

In the early post-war years, Frank Richards reintroduced the rich Uncle Carter in a hardback Christmas story, though by that time Mr. Carter had apparently lost his wealth and was running a seaside boarding house, where his clientele seemed to be schoolboys on holiday. At least, we can only assume that it was the same Mr. Carter.

The four Carter stories in the volume under review should please all Bunter and Greyfriars fans. The book is completed with four single stories from other periods, three of them being consecutive yarns from the Magnet of the Spring of 1933. Two of these have Wibley in the star, and typical, part, and there are lots of unbelievable but truly rib-tickling situations. The third tale, "Popper's Unpopular Prize", tells of Sir Hilton offering a prize in a compulsory contest, the first prize being £5 and the second a whacking. Run of the mill, but good fun in its way.

The final tale "Bunter, the Ink-Splasher" comes from the early summer of 1930. Bunter runs away from school to avoid a just punishment from Mr. Quelch. Though here and there the story becomes a little farcical, it is noteworthy for some screamingly funny dialogue in various places. Vaguely, the tale is reminiscent of a sub story "Billy Bunter's Bolt" in the Magnet of 1916. In that old tale, Bunter ran away to join a circus. In 1916 Bunter was offered £2 a week to appear. In 1930, his salary was to be 15/-. An example of deflation? Naturally, the 1930 tale is vastly superior and great fun. Excellent volume, well up to the standard of the reprint series as a whole.

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## BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

### No. 48. THE RETURN OF THE LION

We opened the new term with a double show from Warner's; Sebastian Shaw in "Too Dangerous to Live" plus Ronald Reagan in "Nine Lives Are Not Enough".

And then, with the following week, M.G.M. was back - the first M.G.M. feature we had played for some years. The long hiatus had been due, I am sure, to the fact that, before the war, the dispatch department of M.G.M. had been moved to Rickmansworth, which had bumped up transport costs. At any rate, M.G.M. features at last proved irresistible, and the lion was back roaring on the screen of the small cinema, never to leave again while the Small Cinema remained.

This was a double-feature programme, pride of place going to Wallace Beery in "The Bugle Sounds", a delightful M.G.M. film in which mechanism replaced the horses in the army, with Beery in a typical part of the old sergeant who loved animals and resented Progress; in support was Arthur Margotson (like that of Sebastian Shaw, the name eludes me all these years later) in "The Nursemaid Who Disappeared" from Warner's. Also in the bill was a Barney Bear coloured cartoon "The Rookie Bear".

Next, from Warner's, came Bette Davis in "The Letter", a fine psychological thriller from a short play by Somerset



# The Postman Called

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

D. WEBSTER (Bideford): I read with interest the article on Cliveden. Surely half a dozen or so stories appeared in the Boys' Friend? What a lovely cover to C.D. this month! Ethel was always a great favourite of mine, as was Marie Rivers. She seemed so level-headed and charming.

M. S. FELLOWS (London): When I receive my C.D. I always turn quickly to the Biography of a Small Cinema to test my memory. I look for the words "Whoever he or she was", next to a name. I think that with the February issue I am beaten. I cannot for the life of me remember Rosetta Towne, though I remember Barry K. Barnes and "The Midas Touch". I will find out about Rosetta Towne if it is the last thing I do.

W. THURBON (Cambridge): When I was a boy I found Henty quite readable. I depended on prizes or junior and school libraries for nearly all of the ones I read though. I think one reason why most copies found are prizes, etc., and that many boys did not read them, was the fact that they were far too expensive for boys in the last two decades of the 19th century or the opening years of this century. But many boys (and girls) who did read Henty in their youth had a keenness for history instilled in them which has lasted. I owe my interest in history to the Aldine Robin Hoods and to Henty; the fine writer "Bryher" says in the foreword to her "Coin of Carthage" that her interest in Hannibal was first aroused by reading "The Young Carthaginian" as a child. A recent reviewer in "History Today" recalled that "With Lee in Virginia" was the source of special interest in the American Civil War. Don Featherstone, the doyen of War-gaming, is a collector and reader of Henty, and so was that much loved and greatly missed member of the Northern Club, Gerry Allison. Great though Henty's faults were he was, in his day, probably far more popular with the boys and girls who had access to his books than present day critics always admit.

G. W. MASON (Torquay): I thought 'Cousin Ethel' and 'Gussy' graced the cover of the February C.D. very becomingly. I remember following

the original story as a serial.

H. HOLMES (Barrow-in-Furness): I must congratulate Tom Porter for his fine article on the "Intensity of Brooks". There is no doubt that Brooks had a remarkable imagination. This was shown in a story that Tom didn't mention in his plaudit of Brooks. It was written under one of Brooks' pen-names, Reginald Browne - "The School in Space", a Gerald Swan hardback publication. His description of gales, vegetation, etc., in this story is really intensive to say the least.

I. HEWSON (Tolworth): I thoroughly enjoyed the annual, (as ever), which contained many interesting and amusing articles. "The Everslade Empire" made splendid Christmas Day reading and was quite the best 'Mr. Buddle' adventure I have yet encountered.

Many thanks for a truly magnificent year in C.D.

J. BERRY (Southport): May I take this opportunity to congratulate all concerned in producing the Annual. It is really good, I'm sure it improves each year. As a Northerner I enjoyed R. Hibbert's "North & South". He's got it 'just right'.

Whilst in a complimentary mood may I say how much I enjoyed Tom Porter's "The Intensity of Brooks" in February C.D. It was absolutely great. I wish I had written it.

P. HARRIS (Montreal): "Chums in Council" I found most interesting, as your taste for the old papers ran exactly parallel to mine. My school-days spanned the period of World War One to the mid-twenties, and, like you, I found my old Headmaster and the teachers were very much pro-B.O.P. and Chums, and for a good year's effort one could be assured of a B.O.P. or Chums Annual. Following in Dad's footsteps, any Annuals I collected were for soccer, and, if I had a choice, it was Chums. I still have those Annuals among my collection. But my choice, like yours, ran to Magnet, Gem, Popular, Jester, Chips, Comic Cuts, etc., and later included Adventure, Wizard, Rover and Boys' Mag. So, please, add my name to your "lazy, happy-go-lucky" readers club. I feel in good company.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): It is a pity that we did not ask Charles Hamilton during his life-time for more details of his minor series.

Possibly the Cliveden tales ended simply because in 1907 he was writing full-length stories of St. Jim's and the new Magnet series. Rookwood was popular with readers in the Penny Popular in 1919, and so maybe the editor thought that old Cliveden stories rehashed as 'new' would be more acceptable to readers of their greatly loved Rookwood. A new school of Cliveden (unknown to them) may not have had the same impact. The paper Dreadnought I agree with our editor all the way, it was a strange curious paper with its many changes of format to try and win readers. It was soon sunk without trace with the paper shortage in 1915.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: I doubt whether a paper shortage had anything at all to do with the demise of the Dreadnought, in June 1915. The Sexton Blake Library, the Nelson Lee Library, and the Greyfriars Herald all came on the scene after that in the same year.

I did not mean to convey that Cliveden should have appeared in the Penny Pop of 1918. But it could have been used a dozen years later when there was a famine of re-print Hamilton material. In 1918 there was no real reason why genuine Rookwood early adventures should not have appeared. Concerning Mr. Webster's comment, I have not seen Cliveden in Boys' Friend, though I have a long complete run of that paper. But they may have featured in the closing year of Hamilton Edwards' reign, say in late 1908. Personally, I have not come across them.)

D. WESTCOTT (London): Can anyone tell me if there was a series, in the middle thirties, in Thomson or the A.P. papers, featuring "The Death of Glory Boys", a boys' battalion in the First World War?

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MAGNETS for sale: 1934-1940 complete, bound in half year volumes; best offers. COMPLETE C.D. (less vol. one), 1948-1977, 27 bound volumes (1976/77 loose); best offer. C.D. Annuals, 1950, 1951, 1965, 1967, 1971/2/3/4/5. Offers. Greyfriars Prospectus, u.g.c. with cover, £4.50. Yaroo! A feast of Frank Richards, as new, £2.50 (£4.50). Boys will be boys, new edition, as new, £2 (£3.50). Autobiography of Frank Richards, as new, £1.25. B.B's Mystery Christmas, Play, £1.00. Boy without Name/Rivals & Chums (reprint) £1.50. Magnet No. 1 (reprint), mint, offers. Trouble for Tom Merry (Spring Books) nice, with cover, 75p. 18 Bunter paperbacks, £2.50. Magnets, miscellaneous bundle of reading copies, 1914-1929, £6.00. All plus postage.

WANTED: Magnets before 1914, and Nero Wolfe books by Rex Stout.

DUNCAN LANGFORD, TYE HOUSE, ELMSTEAD, COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

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WANTED: Bessie Bunter Merlin Books; School Friends; Schoolgirls; C.D. Annuals.

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM ST., BELFAST 12.



# News of the Clubs

## MIDLAND

The weather struck hard at our January meeting. Snow, treacherous roads and fog made travelling hazardous. Only five members put in an appearance.

Nevertheless, the small group spent a jolly evening. Refreshments were grateful and comforting with hot coffee and cakes provided by Ivan Webster.

The Anniversary number was Gem No. 312, published 31st January, 1914.

There was a lively discussion on the respective merits of Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks. All five members were now Hamilton devotees, but Tom Porter and Jack Bellfield as schoolboys preferred Brooks. The great thing about Charles Hamilton was his impeccable English. Schoolboys reading a master of English style week by week were bound to absorb it. There is no illiterate person amongst Hamiltonians. Edwy Searles Brooks great quality was the intensity of his writing. He "lived" each story and never more than in the Ezra Quirke series. He was, however, often guilty of errors in grammar and style, which an educated person finds irritating, but schoolboys would probably scarcely notice it in the thrill of the story.

There were readings by Ivan Webster and Jack Bellfield.

The meeting closed at 9.30 and we wended our way home through the foggy uninviting streets. Ivan Webster wished to see his favourite team beat Manchester United on T.V. This they truly did.

J. F. BELLFIELD  
Correspondent.

## CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at 5 All Saints Passage, on 5 February. The Secretary drew attention to an editorial note to the Club's report of the January meeting in the "Digest" in which the editor had said that Charles

Hamilton did not bet on horses.

The meeting heard with great regret of the death of "Mr. Softee" and agreed to write a letter of sympathy to Eric and Madam.

Mike Rouse gave a further talk on Cigarette Cards, illustrated by a superb sample from his collection, covering the inter-War years, including some very fine special items, such as a set of large Dickens' characters, a set that fitted together to make the "Laughing Cavalier" picture; a set of the arms of the Cambridge and Oxford colleges; a fine Ardath album of photographs of great historical interest and many others. This item aroused great interest and revived memories of the past.

The Secretary read a paper, prepared by Jack Doupe and himself, on the "Chums" League of Sharpshooters, which had been formed by "Chums" in 1911 to promote shooting among boys, and also as a promotional "gimmick" in the battle for circulation between Cassells and the rival Harmsworth papers, all of which were publishing warning war stories. The outbreak of the 1914-18 war had revived the league when it was flagging, and "Chums" had run a national shooting competition, and published a series of stories about "Sharpshooter Smith" which rather suggested what the result of a collaboration between Charles Hamilton and G. A. Henty would have produced. Mike Holliday showed a fine sample of large paper-back novels of the late 1920's and early '30's.

Jack Overhill produced a copy of No. 9 of the second series of the Aldine Robin Hood Library, "Robin Hood and the Wrestler". Bill Thurbon confirmed that the cover picture was the same as that on the cover of the same story in the first edition, when the title was "Robin Hood and Bede the Wrestler".

After enjoying Mrs. Thurbon's tea the meeting discussed arrangements for a possible open meeting in April at which it was hoped two well-known speakers would be present.

Next meeting on 5 March, host Edward Witten.

### LONDON

The Pearl Anniversary Meeting of the club took place at Hume House, East Dulwich, on Sunday, 12th February, Josie Packman being the Hostess. Bob Blythe, in the chair, spoke of the 30 years progress of the club and expressed grateful thanks to all the hosts who have

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proffered their homes for meeting venues. There was an appropriate greetings card from Eric Fayne and Madam, one from Stanley Knight and a sketch from John Addison.

After the usual formalities, Eric Lawrence was elected chairman for the ensuing year. The rest of the retiring officers were re-elected en bloc. Brian Doyle then spoke of the forthcoming return of Sexton Blake on T.V. quoting the information from the Sunday Times. Then Brian played over a recording of B.B.C. radio programme, "A GOOD READ", the one that appertained to Frank Richards and which Benny Green, Peter Black and Hubert Gregg commented on.

An album of club meeting photographs of yesteryear was exhibited by Millicent Lyle.

Bob Blythe cut the magnificent anniversary cake and all partook of this plus a bumper glass of sherry. To round off with, there were the usual tea and sandwiches. Then it was beside the firelit glow and a film show, projected by Ray Hopkins. The first films were of Mary Cadogan and her brother when young and then came those taken at the various outings of the club. These included Excelsior House at Surbiton, the Nayland Rock Hotel at Margate, Roselawn at Kingsgate, Hawkinge and Folkestone, Friardale at Ruislip and the Lewisham Clock Tower where Ray and his father, Charlie and Olive Wright and John Bush used to wait for the coach. The happy conviviality of this fireside show, plus seeing both ourselves and those who have passed on, was a fitting tribute to the thirty years of the club's existence. Votes of thanks followed to all those concerned with the success of the gathering.

Next meeting at 58 Stanwell Road, Ashford, Middlesex. The phone number is MX. 53609 and the host is Isaac Litvak. The date is Sunday, 12th March.

BENJAMIN WHITER

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WANTED: Howard Baker books (Greyfriars & St. Jim's); also "Men Behind Boys' Fiction" by W. G. Lofts.

LEESE, BUNNY HILL, COSTOCK, NR. LOUGHBOROUGH, LEICS.

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Magnets 1926 to 1932 WANTED, Magnets, Populars, SOL's, Boys/Girls Annuals, Classic Illustrated for Sale or Exchange, SAE lists.

JOHN BECK, 29 MILL ROAD, LEWES, SUSSEX.

WANTED GREATLY: Magnets 755, 762, 768, 769, 831, 833, 850, 865, 871, 888, 902, 941, 948, 949, 951, 985, 995. Many before 498. Good prices or generous exchanges.

J. DE FREITAS, 648 STUD RD., SCORESBY  
VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3179.

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ESPECIALLY WANTED: complete and in good condition: Union Jacks 493, 512, 529, 548, 555, 594, 599, 633; SBL's 1st & 2nd series; Magnets 707, 795, 999, 1111, 1112; Gems 604, 774, 792, 801, 954, 970, 990, 1206. Will pay over the odds for these; please state price.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE RD., LONDON, SE19 2HZ.  
(01-771-9857)

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E.S.B. Saint Frank's Diamond Jubilee plaques. By post, £1.15 inclusive.

BEN WHITER, 36 NES COURT HOUSE, POTT STREET  
BETHNAL GREEN, LONDON, E2 0EG.

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Will pay £4.50 each for Monster Library Nos. 5 and 11 in good condition. Also wanted: C.D. Nos. 360, 361, 362, 363, 364.

J. BERRY, 8 ABRAMS FOLD, BANKS, SOUTHPORT.  
Tel. SOUTHPORT 24621

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FOR SALE: C.D's 1967-1978, mint, 122 copies, £20 + postage (or offer). S.a.e.

SANSOM, 58 LONGWOOD GARDENS, ILFORD, ESSEX.

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ESPECIALLY WANTED: SOL's Nos. 237, 253, 255, 286. £4 each offered. More than four times the price, but urgent.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE RD., LONDON, SE19 2HZ.  
(01-771-9857)

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SEXTON BLAKE ON TELEVISION

Sexton Blake and Tinker are to feature in a new series, scripted by Simon Raven, next October. We are promised that they will consist of wholesome stories without the sex and violence which makes us reach for the "off" switch when so many TV plays are presented.

FLEETWAY HOUSE IS NO MORE

by W. O. G. Lofts

Its appearance in pre-war days was that of a large imposing white building, with the distinctive feature of a large clock outside. Over the last decade, with the erection of skyscraper office blocks around it, it now looks small in comparison. Its whiteness has turned to a dirty grey, and the hundreds of staff and stream of visitors that once graced its portals are now gone. Once a hive of industry it is now deserted, and even the war memorial plaque by the entrance steps has been ripped from the wall to be erected elsewhere. I refer of course to The Fleetway House, shortly to be demolished to make way for the developers - the home for over fifty years of the mighty Amalgamated Press, and one of the world's biggest publishers. For several generations of children they produced weekly and monthly the cream of boys/girls papers, comics, and the yearly Annuals.

It is curious, that I must have walked up those marble steps into Fleetway many hundreds of times, yet on each occasion one had a feeling that one was entering a holy domain. Perhaps it was simply the thought that in this very building were created and produced some of the finest papers and characters of all time in the history of juvenile publications. Probably the first person I met was Harold J. Garrish then Director of juvenile papers, and once a writer himself. He was certainly a mine of information on the old authors and artists going right back to the Harmsworth Brothers days. Then there was Bill Fisher, the jovial, red faced editor of the Rainbow comic group. Jackie Hunt, then on Princess and formerly editor of Detective Weekly. Reg Eves and E. L. McKeag of the School Friend girls group of papers - not forgetting John L. Wheway. Cecil Graveny of The Nelson Lee Library. Phil Davis and Jack Le Grand of Film Fun. Bill Pike who edited the Rookwood tales in The Boys' Friend, and was now on the picture Libraries. Basil Reynolds of the nursery comic Tiny Tots. Len Pratt editor of the Sexton Blake Library had just retired, but it was here I first met W. Howard Baker whose task was to modernise the famous Baker Street Detective. At a later date, I used to see regularly Chris Lowder who some years previous had been a schoolboy correspondent. Chris had won rapid promotion from a junior sub-editor to editing the comics Buster and

Lion. Many of these former editors have long passed on, but they were all friendly and co-operative in answering my endless questions, and are fondly remembered.

I would however have loved to have visited Fleetway in pre-war days, and seen especially the Magnet and Gem offices. By today's standards the offices and corridors were very small and narrow and of course very old-fashioned. H. W. Twyman editor of the Union Jack called them 'cubby holes' and 'watertight compartments', but there was a sort of cosyness and friendliness, an intimacy unmatched by today's large glass window office blocks. There used to be brown uniformed girl messengers with pill-box hats, and smart tall ex-guardsman commissionaires complete with medal ribbons in attendance. In the main waiting room on the ground floor hung a large framed original front cover of a Christmas Double number of the Rainbow drawn by H. S. Foxwell the main illustrator. It disappeared from the wall one night (so I was told) and even the detective powers of Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee failed to recover it!

Amalgamated Press commenced as Harmsworth Bros. in 1888 in Tudor Street. Later they moved to Bouverie Street, and in 1912 settled in Fleetway House. In the late fifties the name of the firm was changed to Fleetway Publications, and most of the papers moved next door to a brand new building aptly named New Fleetway House. I can remember this period avidly, as in moving out of the old building they cleared out the old files of periodicals that had been left in offices from defunct comics and boys papers. They simply dumped into the dustbins hundreds of Vols. of Boys' Friend Libraries and comics such as Puck and Sunbeam, as well as numerous woman's magazines.

By 1972 I.P.C. had taken over Fleetway Publications and New Fleetway House was sold, so back went the staff once again to the old building. Around 1975 I.P.C. decided that all the various groups of papers and magazines scattered around Long Acre (formerly Odhams) and Southampton Street (formerly Newnes & Pearson) as well as Fleetway House, should be housed in one building. So in 1976 they all moved over to the new skyscraper building at King's Reach on the South side of the River Thames. Old Fleetway House was still used by a few commercial

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papers and storing purposes, but it was eventually sold to the developers and by 1978 will be no more.

If there are ghosts at Fleetway House, what stories they could tell? Especially of the many unusual visitors. The staff of The Magnet well remember a gentleman by the name of Vernon-Smith arriving in a towering rage, demanding to see the editor, and protesting at the bad light his name was presented in the Greyfriars stories. Groups of small boys wanting to know the exact location of Greyfriars/St. Jim's/and Rookwood so that they could play them at football. Anxious people with problems trying to see Sexton Blake, convinced that he must have worked there writing out his adventures. Then mistaking H. W. Twyman the Union Jack editor and his office boy as Sexton Blake and Tinker. The characters were so real to so many, many readers.

There is a rumour going round, that some valuables were buried beneath the main pillar at Fleetway House, when it was being built. Whatever the demolishers find, nothing could be more valuable to me than to have had the privilege of meeting so many editors of the old papers at Fleetway House.

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#### ITEM OF NEWS

from Don Reed

I recently visited Mr. C. Adamson now retired here in Christchurch, who was office boy for the BOYS' REALM in 1922-23. John Nix Pentelow was the Editor then and George Wright was his sub-editor. Mr. Adamson's memories of J. N. Pentelow were those of a very good "boss", very old for his age, and never without a cigarette in his mouth. He kept a basketful of these in the office, and one job of his office-boy was to make sure that basket was never empty. As Wright smoked a pipe all day the office was always a fug-hole! Pentelow and Wright spent most of the time writing for their various papers, and the day's work usually finished about 4 p.m. - except on Thursday, the day the REALM went to press. Then it was panic stations all round, until the new issue was sent over the street to the printing department about 7 p.m. Occasionally if there was a corner of the paper to fill in the office boy would be sent to the library to get a story on some sport or football team, and for this he got paid the usual author's rates, in addition to

his ordinary pay. Evidently the idea was to encourage younger staff members to become writers for the Amalgamated Press papers. All the staff could take three free papers each week, and as most of the married men usually only took the Woman's Weekly for their wives it was the office boy's "perk" to keep the unwanted copies. Which, Mr. Adamson said, kept him popular with his girlfriend and her young sister!

Mr. Adamson left AP in 1923, went to India with the RAF, and did not see a BOYS' REALM again until I took round a 1923 issue for him to see - an issue he had helped to prepare 54 years earlier.

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS - STOP PRESS

NORTHERN

Saturday, 11 February, 1978

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde welcomed a goodly gathering by remarking that it was pleasant to see so many here on such an unpleasant evening. Being in nostalgic mood he told us that it was twenty years since he had attended the first meeting of this Club. Today we were as lively and well-supported as ever.

Geoffrey later played for us a recording of the radio broadcast 'A Jolly Good Read', parts of which (inevitably) raised our hackles and stimulated us to discuss at length the problem of ignorance and inanity passing in the name of knowledge.

We were certainly in disagreement with the speakers when they saw no great literary merit in the writing of Hamilton. We felt that his genius lay first and foremost in his own inimitable literary style. As one of our members had said last month, he could create an atmosphere in just one sentence.

Discussion proving conducive to edification and enlightenment, we discussed up to refreshments, through refreshments and up to the close, when, lest we should be stranded for the night, we sallied forth into the snow and the eddying fog.