

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

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LAST MONTH'S COVER.

Our cover picture last month - the reproduction of a cover picture on "Fun & Fiction" - was quaintly old-fashioned and altogether charming. "Fun & Fiction" was outstandingly lucky with its two main artists - J. Louis Smythe and G. Wakefield. In some ways their respective work was oddly alike - Smythe with his vampish, shapely females and Wakefield with his cherubic boys.

The great puzzle is which group of the public the paper was aimed at. Each copy contains a number of full pages of comic pictures, featuring the same characters week after week. There were stories of violence and detection and mystery to appeal to the males. Many of the serials were melodramatic love stories to appeal to the girls. Some of the series were quaintly outrageous, and outrageously appealing, intended, one would think, for younger

boys. Many of the series and serials were plainly for the fair sex. There were series of articles on real life classic crimes, and series of articles on stage and music-hall personalities of the period, aimed, one would think, at adults.

"Fun & Fiction" ran for just over 2 years, from the end of 1912 till early in 1914. The editor, at one time, claimed that "Fun & Fiction" had the largest circulation in the world of any weekly paper. The appearance of a sister paper, "The Dreadnought" would seem to support that claim.

But the end is mystifying. Another companion paper was announced, "The Firefly". It turned out, however, that it was "Fun & Fiction" changing its own name to "Firefly" and halving its price. So, actually, "Fun & Fiction" closed down. An odd end for a paper with the largest circulation in the world. Obviously the editor had led his readers up the garden path.

I have all the two years of the paper bound in three volumes, and I delight to browse over them, though I doubt if I've ever read any of it. But I value those 3 lovely volumes, which must be pretty rare.

"Dreadnought" was first issued in Boys' Friend size, later changing to Magnet size and finally coming under editor Hinton who reprinted the early Magnet tales therein. "The Firefly" started in Magnet size (the same size as "Fun & Fiction"), but later changed to an orthodox comic paper style - and a very, very charming one, before it was amalgamated with the Butterfly somewhere about 1917.

Rather reminiscent of "Fun & Fiction" was the "Bullseye" of much later days (and, to some extent, "The Surprise" of later still), but I have a feeling that though there was a similarity in far-fetched stories, they were aimed exclusively at boys, and did not have the feminine tilt which was so charming in the original paper.

RAINBOW? NEVER HEARD OF IT!

Articles of all types are always welcomed for consideration for C.D.'s pages. It isn't essential that they should be typed. But, when they are not typed, more often than not I have to type them. It all depends on the handwriting of the contributor. Particularly with the names of fictional characters, or fictional places, or titles of stories, it is necessary that they should be clear so that anyone not acquainted with the hobby should know what

they are meant to be.

Recently a very lovely lady was typing out for me two articles from contributors. She went off with them one evening, and the next evening she was back. She pointed out several words decipherable to me alone. I told her what they were. "And what's that?" she enquired, pointing to a scrawled name. I examined it carefully, and came to a decision.

Then our conversation went something like this:

"Oh, that's the Rainbow." "The Rainbow? What's that?"

"You've heard of the Rainbow, the most loved quality comic paper for younger children and read avidly by older children and adults."

"I've never heard of it." "Wot? Never heard of the Rainbow?"

"Never."

It seemed incredible. We went on:

"You've heard of Mrs. Bruin and the Bruin Boys." "No, never!"

"Tiger Tim? You must know Tiger Tim." "Who's Tiger Tim?"

My strength was failing. My voice was weaker:

"And Bonnie Bluebell and her Magic Gloves."

The lovely lady shook her head, and smiled. It made me feel very, very mature; nay, over-ripe, as Alonzo would say. It just seemed impossible that an adult, even a young adult, had never heard of that wonderful paper.

I said I would try to find a copy of the Rainbow for her two grand little daughters to own and enjoy.

What a lot little modern children are missing! I'm glad I wasn't born yesterday.

THE ANNUAL

All your favourite contributors have turned up trumps on behalf of this year's Annual. There is an immense variety of attractions, and I am confident that some of you will write and tell me that the edition is one of the best ever. All being well, the postman will be bringing it along to you in good time for Christmas.

We cannot print many extra copies, these days, to allow for latecomers. Have you ordered your Annual yet?

THANKS AGAIN!

Once again, my grateful thanks to the huge number of readers who have written in concern over Madam's illness which landed her in hospital some months ago. In so many cases I have not been able to reply by letter. The vast majority of you understand, and

sympathise, in the knowledge that if I took time off to write personal letters, the C.D. would have to miss a month. But I am deeply grateful to all who have written.

At the moment I am thankful to let you know that Madam has progressed very nicely in the past few weeks. She has to take care, and I have to take care of her - for she is precious to me - but the trend is in the right direction.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

Danny's Diary

NOVEMBER 1933

King of the Islands is back in the Modern Boy. He seems to have been a long time coming, but this latest series is fine and worth waiting for. The first tale in the new series appears in the third issue of the month, and is actually entitled "King of the Islands." In this one, Ken, the skipper of the "Dawn", takes on board a passenger whom they find on the wreck of a coasting vessel. The man they take aboard is a little fat Eurasian named Mr. Jam. And, though Ken is glad to have rescued him, somehow Ken doesn't like Mr. Jam.

The second tale of the series, the final one for this month, is "The Pearls of Jam". The strange passenger, picked up from the sea, has a huge bag of most wonderful pearls. And this week yet another passenger comes out of the sea - Billy, the Beachcomber.

The Rio Kid picture serial has ended and been replaced with a page of Mickey Mouse pictures. I like Mickey in the cinemas, but not in Modern Boy.

The motor-bike series about Red-Hot Horton with his Norton continues, by Kaye Campson. The Grey Shadow is back in a new series by G. E. Rochester. And there is a new series about Captain Justice.

Walt Disney has introduced a new type of technicolour cartoon called Silly Symphonies in which the pictures are made to fit the music instead of the music being made to fit the pictures. The first one is entitled "Three Little Pigs" and Disney has won an Oscar for it. It contains a lovely song entitled "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" Katherine Hepburn has won an Oscar as the best female

actress for her part in "Little Women", and another award for being the cinema's Greatest Discovery of 1933.

The Gem has been fine this month. "Rolling in Money" is a real winner, and very original. Lord Eastwood puts £50 in the bank in Gussy's name and provides his son with a cheque book. Gussy spreads cheques far and wide and is soon overdrawn. Finally he sends a cheque to the bank to make up the shortage. Terrific fun. Unfortunately this one is not illustrated by Macdonald. Mac has been absent quite a lot lately.

Next, "Gussy's Latest Love Affair". Her name is Clara O'Neil, and, to cure Gussy, she accepts his proposal that they should become engaged. This also is not illustrated by Macdonald;—the artist is the one who used to draw in the Nelson Lee Library, I think. He copies Mac, but he isn't much good.

But Mac is back to illustrate "The Millionaire Boot-Boy". Binks, the pageboy, inherits a great fortune from his uncle. He wants to become a St. Jim's boy, and the Head lets him. Binks father is "too proud to work" and his mother is called "Washerlady" by Gussy. Final story of the month is "Up Against it", the start of a serious series starring Tom Merry. Miss Fawcett has speculated with her own money and with Tom Merry's as well, and has lost the lot to Crook's father, a shady financier. Binks offers to help, but Tom refuses, and so Tom leaves St. Jim's and goes home to comfort Miss Fawcett and to find a job. It promises to be a very good series.

The old St. Frank's series about China, which was transferred to the Gem, has ended, and a brand new serial, "The White Giants of El Dorado" specially written by E. S. Brooks has started. It's a big adventure tale of the St. Frank's boys far away.

In the Schoolboys' Own Library there is a big contrast between the two new editions. "Who Punched Prout?", all about Coker and Mr. Prout, is a dream of delight. But the other tale, "The Siege of St. Jim's", about a Russian ex-prize turning up at St. Jim's, as new boy, is too daft for words.

Horatio Bottomley, who died recently, seems to have been an important man in his time, for there has been a lot in the papers about him. He owned and edited a number of papers including The Sun Evening Paper of long ago, John Bull, Mary Bull, Lotinga's Weekly, a sporting publication, and Sunday Illustrated. He was in dozens of court cases, in most of which he conducted his own defence. He was M.P. for South Hackney for some years before the war, till he had to resign, and then for the same constituency just after the war.

He went to prison for five years, and then started a paper. John Blunt, which failed. He had a three weeks' contract to appear at the Windmill Theatre, arranged to help him by his actress friend, Peggy Primrose, but he collapsed on the third day. He died in hospital later at the age of 73.

Some people thought him an old scamp; some, like my Gran, thought him a wonderful man. For years my Gran did his Bullets competition in John Bull without winning a sausage.

There is a new book published by Agatha Christie and it is a volume of short stories under the title "The Hound of Death." Some of the stories are ghostly and really eerie, and the others are crime tales. All the 12 stories are lovely reading, but the best of the lot is "The Witness for the Prosecution."

While on the subject of crime, Doug took me to the Duchess Theatre in London where we saw Edmund Gwenn in "Laburnum Grove". It is written by J. B. Priestley, and it's about a counterfeiter who gets away with it. I loved every minute.

My Gran gave me "Hound of Death" (I shall pass it on to Doug as a Christmas present), and Doug paid for my seat at the Duchess Theatre. It cost him five bob, and was in the Dress Circle.

At the local cinemas we have seen Jack Holt and Ralph Graves in "Dirigible", all about disaster striking a giant airship; Robert Armstrong and Fay Wray in "King Kong", the marvellous film which opened the London Coliseum as a cinema a few months ago; Lionel Atwill and Paul Lukas in "The Secret of the Blue Room", a lovely little theatre of the same quality as "The Old Dark House" of some time back; another great thriller "The Mystery of the Wax Museum" starring Lionel Atwill and Fay Wray, in which all the waxworks looked so real - whewww! Joan Bennett in "Arizona to Broadway"; Laurel and Hardy in "Fra Diavolo", a musical opera kind of thing with L. & H. providing a bit of fun - fairish, but not tip-top of the marvellous pair.

And now for the marvellous Magnet. Opening tale of the month was "The Greyfriars Guy" - is it the Head? Coker thinks the Head's dead. Whizzbang fun. Then "Down With the Tyrant" in which Walker, the prefect, sets out to tame the Remove. But the Remove tames Walker.

And then the start of a simply great new series, opening with "The Greyfriars Strong Man". This one re-introduces Alonzo Todd. He does a plucky deed to aid Professor Sparkinson. And the Professor rewards him with a phial of fluid of which, when he takes a nip of it, he will find himself with superhuman strength. Second tale in the

series is "Alonzo the Great" which shows what happens when a reformer like Alonzo gets the power to throw his weight about. Simply terrific. I can't wait till next month to read some more of this one, but wait I must.

NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY".

S. O. L. No. 207 "Who Punched Prout?" starts off with "The Fellow Who Wouldn't Be Caned" from the Magnet of early 1928, and then follows on with the "Who Punched Prout?" couple from the end of the same year. An all-Coker, all-Prout affair, and one of the very best of all the S. O. L. 's. A superb story, the contents of which slot in beautifully. S. O. L. No. 208 comprised two linked stories by a sub writer, entitled "The Boy From Russia" and "The Siege of St. Jim's", from the early summer of 1927 in the Gem, published here under the title "Siege of St. St. Jim's".

In the 1933 Gem, "Rolling In Money" had been "D'Arcy's Bank Book" in the blue Gem of the Spring of 1910. A delightful school story, with an original plot, and Hamilton at his most inventive and most amusing. "Gussy's Latest Love Affair" had been "D'Arcy's Disappointment" in the late Autumn of 1910. "The Millionaire Boot-Boy" had been "Binks, the Millionaire" from near the end of the year 1910. The phasing out of Binks, for the sake of a single story, was one of Hamilton's big mistakes. Binks, the little pageboy, deeply influenced by lurid American cheap fiction, had been an excellent minor character in the stories. Toby, who replaced Binks, was nothing at all and not a patch on Binks.

"Up Against It", entitled "the Fatal Telegram" at Christmas time 1910, was the opening story of the 7-story (8 if you include the Joe Frayne tale which ended it all) which ran in the blue Gem over the last weeks of 1910 and into 1911. Unhappily, these stories were all very drastically and very clumsily pruned which spoiled them. It was a quite unbelievable series in a way. Miss Fawcett lost her own money and her ward's as well. Once again the little question - whence came Miss Fawcett's money? And previously we had not been told that Tom Merry had money of his own. Uncle General Merry was being held prisoner by the Afghans, and Uncle Frank was globe-trotting, so there was nobody to turn to.

For many years this was a series but little known. Fragments of it had appeared in the early Penny Popular about 1916, but, apart from that, it had been lost until it turned up in the Gem in 1933, marred by drastic pruning. The pruning was mainly caused by the new St. Frank's serial. And, of course, the Gem in 1910 had 32 pages, with smaller print, while in 1933 the Gem had 28 pages and larger print.

Censors of plays and films in earlier and less permissive times tended to look with some disfavour on stories in which the criminal, in the end, "got away with" his crime. One such play was "Laburnum Grove", but it was splendid, with Edmund Gwenn ideally cast. Christie's "Witness for the Prosecution" had the criminal getting away with it in the short story. But when she dramatised it for the stage, Christie added a short piece so that the criminal got his just deserts. It spoiled the thing, to some extent, for the shock ending was lost. It was by no means the only time when Christie spoiled a story when she turned it into a play.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

As there has been quite an amount of material about Tinker and how he has been more or less neglected and spurned by some folks, I thought I would reprint the article beginning in this month's Blakiana written many years ago by the late Walter Webb on the subject of Tinker's history. I trust you who are newcomers to the hobby or do not have a copy of the C.D. Annual in which this article was published, will enjoy it.

I am looking forward to the Sexton Blake book which Chris Lowder is in charge of and hope to hear more about it very shortly.

THE STORY OF TINKER

by the late Walter Webb.

Part One.

reprinted for Blakiana from the C.D. Annual 1955.

In compiling an article on the adventures- and mis-adventures - of Sexton Blake's astute young assistant, the writer is confronted with something of a problem, for he is faced with not so much with what to include as what to leave out. Before him stretches a field of information, but so vast that, of necessity, many acreages must be left unprobed. Also, to write of Tinker's history with any degree of authenticity is difficult, because, although there were several stories published - mostly in serial form - dealing with his early exploits, they were contradictory in treatment, so giving the puzzled researcher the task of sifting the wheat from the chaff.

To quote what must now be ancient history, Tinker slipped quietly and unobstrusively into an unsuspecting world during the late Autumn of 1904 in an unpretentious 'Union Jack' story entitled "Cunning Against Skill" written by a schoolmaster named Lomax writing under the pseudonym of Herbert Maxwell. After finding him wandering in the streets of London an orphaned waif and stray, Sexton Blake had adopted him, the circumstances being similar to those in which Nelson Lee discovered Nipper.

Tinker - first described as a 'small, bright, cheeky-faced boy' rose to popularity with amazing rapidity, for, at the outset, "Union Jack" readers took him to their hearts, and certainly the stories of Sexton Blake were much brighter and more entertaining for his

inclusion in them. The demand for more Tinker and Blake too did not pass unheeded by Hamilton Edwards who, at that time, controlled nearly all the Harmsworth boys papers and he arranged for serials featuring the famous pair to run in the pages of the 'Boys Herald'.

Tinker presented Blake with quite a problem at first, for whilst the boy was worth his weight in gold to him by reason of his tenacity, pluck, keen observation and grit, that natural impetuosity with which every lad of his age is endowed, had to be curbed somewhat, and his struggle with the King's English mastered, for, be it noted, King Edward VII was the reigning monarch at the time of Tinker's entry into the fiction world. Although Blake cared not a fig what his clients thought of him for employing such an urchin to assist him, he did resent the silent contempt the more aristocratic of them showed towards the cheery little waif, and whilst cursing them inwardly, realised that in such a youngster, with so many natural abilities, the imperfection of his speech was bound to be a great handicap in the work he - Blake - would need him for. However a year at a public school would soon alter that, and thus it came about that at Blake's expense, Tinker, like his old pal Nipper, who went first to St. Ninian's and thence to the famous St. Frank's, found himself a pupil at Telford College. But, it seems we are a little ahead of ourselves here, for history has it that many adventures befell Tinker ere he was fortunate enough to fall under Blake's wing.

In the prologue of "Tinker's Secret" (U.J. No. II49) on the occasion of a wet and dreary night in November, it was revealed that when a young lad of nine or ten years of age, Tinker was selling newspapers at his usual pitch near the Three Nuns Hotel in Aldgate, when two closely wrapped up figures came into his line of vision through the driving rain - a girl of about sixteen or seventeen years of age, beautiful and classic of features, and a golden-haired little girl of about his own age. Egged on by the older girl, Tinker saw the little girl with the fair hair make her way to a cigar stand where an elderly man was standing, and skilfully remove from his waistcoat a gold watch and chain, afterwards making off with them, in order to pass them on to the older girl. Tinker gave chase and catching the little girl just before she could hand over the articles, snatched them from her grip. As he was attacked by the elder girl a constable came on the scene and she made off dragging the frightened child with her. After making arrangements for the stolen valuables to be returned to their rightful owner, Tinker

made his way to the only home he had, till then, ever known - a little garret room in Wapping.

Following a period of serious illness, due to the exposure of his ill-clad form to the elements, Tinker began a slow fight against the miserable conditions of his uncared for existence and eventually, feeling well enough, made for his old pitch at Aldgate, searching the vicinity where the 'beautiful pale devel' as he mentally termed the older girl, and her golden-haired little companion, used to stand in search of intended victims. But the two girls never came back, and after three weeks of patient waiting the ragged little newsboy suddenly disappeared and was never seen at his old pitch again. Nine years later, as the friend and protege of Sexton Blake, Tinker was once more to meet them and in circumstances which were seriously to jeopardise his friendship with Blake and come perilously near to causing a permanent breakage of his relationships with the man he admired, loved and respected more than any other living being. For the child with golden hair was Nirvana, whose beauty was to completely turn Tinker's head and have him floundering confusedly in a world suddenly become unreal by her ethereal presence.

To be continued

* * * * *

A CASE OF CO-INCIDENCE

by W. T. Thurbon

In 1968 a documentary novel was published by McDonald, called "The Sniper", written by Barry Wynne. It was interesting to me because it was based on letters written home during the last months of the war by a man who had been born, and lived in the Cambridge-shire village of Steeple Morden. Arthur Hare, the "sniper" of the title had served in the army before the outbreak of the war in 1939, when he was called up as a reservist. In the final months of the war he served as a sniper with an Infantry battalion during the final defeat of the German Army.

The novel included biographical material about Hare, and his boyhood in the village, and the encounters of Arthur and his gang with a local farmer. These included on one occasion a raid on the rooks nesting in the farmer's trees, just before his annual rook shoot! This interested me particularly, since I knew the farmer concerned, and also the farm, which had been owned by the Cambridge College, for which I have worked for over sixty years. The land had

been owned by the College since the reign of Henry VIII.

Recently "The Sniper" was reissued in a new paperback edition. A note at the end told of the death of the sniper which occurred just as the proofs of the new edition were being checked.

Remembering the rather tenuous connection with the College I asked the College sub-librarian, who is also a member of the Cambridge O.B.B.C. if the Library would like the original edition of the "Sniper". He answered yes and I gave the copy to him on Wednesday 24th August. On Saturday 27th August I passed one of our Cambridge second-hand bookshops, and saw a paperback with the title "The Sniper". I picked it up, thinking it might be the first paperback edition of Wynne's book. Imagine my surprise when on looking more closely I saw below the title, the words "Sexton Blake Library." This was a Mayflower-Dell paperback, published in 1965. S.B.L. Library, 5th series, No 19; author Robert Williams. To find myself handling two books with the same title in the same week was rather a remarkable co-incidence.

Barry Wynne's "Sniper" is a real soldier, a sergeant, who performs his job in the closing months of the war. He is an example of the good British Soldier and of the English Countryman.

William's Sexton Blake story is one of the better ones. Briefly the leading character, had been trained by Sexton Blake as a sniper. (In passing it is interesting to find Blake, in a 'flash back' in the story, as a Commando Colonel). This man is wrongly charged and imprisoned as an attempted murderer. He is "sprung" by the real villain, who then begins a campaign of killing the members of the jury concerned in the case as cover for the murder of his partner, whose wealth he needs to save him from extreme financial trouble; expecting that the escaped prisoner will be regarded as "the Sniper" revenging himself on the jury that has convicted him. In the end the mystery is solved and the real "sniper" trapped by Sexton Blake. A complicated, but by no means unreadable "thriller". When I first read through the story I wondered if Williams had taken his title from Barry Wynne's book, but I found Williams's story was published before Wynne's book.

There is, however, a significant point of resemblance between the two stories in one way.

In the closing paragraph of Barry Wynne's book he says of Arthur Hare: "in the Autumn when the pheasant shoots are on, Arthur neither fires nor loads a gun. As he said to his colonel, he has hung up his guns for good. He will not even accompany the beaters."

In the closing chapter of William's "Sniper" Inspector Coutts says to Sexton Blake "How was it you were so certain Neilson wasn't the sniper?" - - - - "There was a brief silence, during which Blake's eyes looked into space, and his mind went back across the years. Then he said, very quietly, 'Not Neilsen. You see, I saw his face the day he had to shoot the Germans. I knew then, that no matter what he had been taught - or learned - during the time Britain was at war, he was not the kind of man who would kill in cold blood' ".

Bur what a coincidence. Two stories, with the same title, found within three days. Both in paperback. One based on the life of a real man, the other a story. Yet both carry the same message. That a soldier may, in war, have to be a killer, but when peace comes the average man reverts to civilised ways again and lays aside all thoughts of killing.

WALTER TYRER. 1900 - 1978

by W. O. G. Lofts

Information has just come to hand of the passing of Walter Tyrer - the extremely popular Sexton Blake writer. Born at St. Helens. 5th January 1900, he first worked at the local glass works - and curiously occupied the same stool as that of Clarke-Hook the famous writer once sat in his same beginnings. After serving in the R.N.A.S. in the latter part of World War I. he sold his first story to the a.p.s. Detective Magazine in 1921. In 1924 he started a long association with D.C. Thomson's papers, writing mainly for their almost adult girls papers, although he also contributed to their boys papers. In 1935, however, he switched back to the Amalgamated Press, where he started the famous 'Miracle' as well as writing extensively for it. He had no equal in the type of sensational stories in its pages - that were lapped up by the masses. "She sent her Mother to the Scaffold" - and "The Sin of the Curate" themes. His first story for The Sexton Blake Library was No. 53. "The Mystery of Squadron X" dated August 1943, and his 37th and last in Jan. 1956. "The Clue of the Pin-Up Girl".

It was my pleasure to correspond with Mr. Tyrer in the sixties - when he confessed that as a boy he revelled in the Charles Hamilton Dickensian mould school stories, that taught him to write in a sort of easy going and always readable style. In an article in Lilliput magazine in 1947, he admitted to writing at least 20,000,000 words of juvenile fiction, as well as having

published several mystery novels with such titles as "The Hangman's Daughter" - and "Jane the Ripper".

Personally, whilst I greatly enjoyed his stories - especially those published in the 1943-50 period, because of their easy flowing reading. I have always thought essentially he was not a crime writer, when he confessed to me once that dramatic romantic fiction was his true vocation.

So yet another of the old timers has left us, though his stories will remain with us for many years to come.

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST: FRANKS

by An Old Boy

Somebody, in a moment of reflection, once remarked that railway platforms and hotel bedrooms are the most lonely places. And I would like to include Public Schools. They can be a veritable desert to the unfortunate pupil, who like a one time junior named Burnett who struggled so valiantly to win a Scholarship to enable him to stay at St. Frank's which has been recorded by Nipper under "Jack Grey's Temptation.

Burnett was one of those juniors who remained in the background but who came to light as it were when his pater was unable to pay the fees for his continued stay at St. Frank's and both Jack Grey and Burnett were the sole contenders for the Scholarship since Jack Grey was placed in a similar position.

Burnett has now left St. Frank's, but a notebook was recently found that bore his name in a mattress and from it's contents Burnett must have gone through a tortuous period before he won the Scholarship. He had written about times when he wanted to die rather than carry on. He had no special chums and I cannot tell which study he was allocated even since so little was known about him.

I have seen this notebook with its jottings of misery. It is a pity juniors who live in such a heartrending state when their only outlook is a daily round of abject introspection it is a great pity they do not take their woes to their Housemaster. Nelson Lee could have saved Burnett many hours of unnecessary pain.

It was a terrible time for Jack Grey too. His pater was also in financial difficulties and only by winning the Scholarship was Jack's next term assured.

Burnett was an obscure junior who went about in shabby bags. He was a College House junior and never did anything according to Reggie Pitt.

Evidently when Burnett left St. Frank's he had forgotten where he had hidden the notebook, but a maid found it when changing the bed. She handed it to Mr. Lee and through Nipper I came to see it.

A fierce period of swotting went into the running for that Scholarship . . . Grey at one point fainted from fatigue. Both boys felt they had to win to remain at St. Frank's. But Burnett's trial was a ghastly period of uncertainty and forlorn hope. His notes tell of running away from the school and calling on an aunt in London. He did not intend to face his father if he lost. Another item in the notebook speaks about running away to sea . . . he had noticed how easy it appeared to board an ocean-going vessel at Caistowe.

In the end it was Jack Grey who won the Scholarship and coming as it did with an upturn in his father's fortunes Jack told the Head as Burnett had come second he would ask for the award to be given to Burnett.

And so it came about that Burnett was granted the Scholarship and stayed at St. Frank's.

AMBITIOUS SCHEMES

by R. J. Godsave

There is little doubt that the Nelson Lee Library was well to the fore in schemes which, apart from the usual cricket and football photographs and metal badges, helped greatly in bringing up the circulation of the Library whilst keeping the regular readers happy.

Whether these schemes were over ambitious is open to question, but they all made wonderful starts which after a time came to an end or was gradually faded out. That Brooks, whose writings of St. Frank's were at the best in the old series which were first class and helped very much in bringing the Nelson Lee to the fore.

The greatest of these schemes which were extremely successful was undoubtedly the Monster Library. This library was a collection of reprints of previous series of the Nelson Lee which was out of print. Introduced in November 1924 the Monster lasted for 19 months at 1/-d. per month. An extremely well drawn three colour by 'Val' cover made the monthly issue a class in its own. For the readers of the Nelson Lee it was a boon as in the early 20's back numbers were extremely difficult to obtain. Apart from an occasional advert

in the 'Exchange & Mart' there was little hope of obtaining back numbers. From the financial point of view it is possible that cost of such an adventure was more than the publication of the Monster could bear.

Another scheme which made a great start was 'Nipper's ; Magazine' introduced when the Nelson Lee was increased to 2d. in 1921. A wonderful effort with a delightful drawn cover, it was as a supplement in the Nelson Lee, and for the first dozen or so could be detached from the Lee as a whole magazine without damage to either the Nelson Lee or the magazine. From then on its future was uncertain, and was far from what it started.

A third scheme which never materialised was that of a map of the St. Frank's surrounding countryside. In spite of E. S. Brooks' promises, which were clearly stated in his correspondence columns, to the effect that it would appear within a few months etc. it never became a possibility. This ambitious scheme could be far too costly to proceed with which was no doubt the reason for its non-appearance.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 191 - Magnet No. 761 - "Skinner's Chum

The immediate post-war years constituted a bleak time in Magnet history, with substitute stories being the rule and genuine stories very much the exception. It was not until the early summer of 1922 that Charles Hamilton returned to more regular writing for the paper, and "Skinner's Chum" appeared during the time that improvement was under way. There were only ten chapters in the 20 pages Magnet, even though there was no serial, but space was allotted the editorial (one page) the Greyfriars Herald (four pages) and articles (two pages). All the same, the St. Jim's stories at this time were often a little shorter than the Greyfriars ones, which is a little difficult to account for, since the Gem was then in a flourishing state.

The title of Magnet 761 was rather an odd one, since Bunter was also the chum of Snoop, Stott, and Fish at this time, all of whom were expanding sprats to catch a whale. Bunter had sent a short play to a firm of theatrical and literary agents called "Sharkey & Co.", who had written back to say that it was very suitable as a curtain raiser and they hoped to place it shortly in

a prominent West End theatre. When Mr. Quelch tore up the letter, Bunter was moved to gasp "It's a shame!" - a spirited remark that was not untypical of Bunter at this stage. Later a registered letter came, enclosing a ten shilling note from his cousin Wally, leading Skinner & Co. to believe that Bunter had actually sold his play. Consequently his new-found friends rallied round their plump pal Billy for the time being.

Earlier in the year, a substitute writer had penned a series featuring Wally Bunter as form-master at Greyfriars, and the editorial office tried to rationalise the situation in No. 761 by inserting references to Wally's status as form-master and mentioning that he was away resting for a while, without trying to explain how a form-master could possibly have a rest in term time. (Even more ridiculous was making Wally Bunter a form-master in the first place, as he was the same age as Billy.) There were also strange points about Hamilton's narrative: he referred to prior events which he had to explain as he went along, instead of relating them first of all. So Peter Todd later referred to Bunter's earlier letter asking Wally for a loan, and when Coker sought vengeance on Bunter we were told that all the Remove knew the misdeed Bunter had committed. No doubt all this was caused by limitations of space, but it was not Hamilton's usual technique and the reader could be brought up with jolt by these unusual practices.

It goes without saying that Bunter's playwriting did not bring him in any income, and his new-found friends deserted him quite rapidly. We may be left wondering about the lampoon on Sharkey & Co. (who were also literary agents). with the possibility that it could have been motivated by some personal experiences in Hamilton's own professional career. Right from the beginning, Mr. Quelch was absolutely certain: "You are forbidden to have any further communication with these rogues."

REVIEWS

CAPTAIN BOB CHERRY

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Club Special)

This superb volume contains 7 consecutive Magnets from the late summer and early autumn of the year 1910. The Greyfriars stories were at their longest of all time at this period, many running to 23 chapters. Mere length is, of course, no criterion of the quality of a story, but

if one pauses to think, the realisation comes of the work that the writer put in every week of his life at this time - two very long stories, one to the Magnet, one to the Gem, plus all manner of odds and ends. The sheer weight of work makes the mind boggle. However did he manage it - and go on living to a ripe old age?

Alonzo Todd plays a prominent part in most of these yarns. From the advertisements, plus his obliquity, it would seem that he was being groomed for stardom, yet for some reason the author or the editor later changed their minds. They were wise. Freak characters are fun and interesting in small doses, but become tedious if overplayed.

It would be idle to suggest that any of these 7 stories is a masterpiece, but each is delightfully written and full of charm. The opening tale "Alonzo the Great" Mr. Quelch handing out lines to his form at an enormous pace and showing himself far short of the excellent and experienced schoolmaster we knew years later. Wharton and the good lads do the lines; the bad boys decide to "appeal to the Head".

"Billy Bunter Limited" shows the Owl floating a company and trying to sell shares in same up and down the form. "Harry Wharton's Century" is an odd tale with Pegg the venue of some young loutish holiday trippers on a noisy week-end. Equivalent of Edwardian Mods and Rockers, maybe. They come across the schoolboys. The schoolboys play the Lambs at cricket and the Lambs are all out for 0. A false touch. Then comes Wharton's century.

"Alonzo's Plot" is rather a famous tale in its way. It has several little plots, and, in one unbelievable one, Miss Primrose is made to believe that Mr. Quelch has fallen in love with her. A shade embarrassing, but packed with interest in its way. "The Postal Order Conspiracy" is the well-known one in which Bunter is sent a quantity of small value postal-orders. Clarke's cover to this story was to be reprinted many times as the years went by.

"Todd the Terrible" has Wharton resigning the form captaincy. Then, in the sequel, "Captain Bob Cherry", Bob who has been elected in Wharton's place, is at his wits end to find a centre-half to play in the game against the Ramblers. Wharton advises him to play the newish boy, Vernon-Smith "says" he can play football. (Odd way to choose a player, one would think.)

So Bob plays Smithy - and the Ramblers are beaten. Bob thinks that anyone so farsighted as Wharton should be captain. So Bob resigns, and Wharton is back in his old job. Quaint is hardly the word for this little romp, but Quaintness is the great, great charm of these early Magnet tales.

Treat yourself to a great volume of quaintness, And Arthur Clarke's illustrations are a delight. In fact, the whole volume is a delight, and the production, as always with these specials is in impeccable good taste. Lovely!

THE GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL

Howard Baker: £7.95

These latter-day Holiday Annuals have made a place for themselves in the season's festivities, and are as much a part of Christmas as the old Holiday Annual was when we were in the bloom of youth. This latest volume will give much pleasure to everyone.

Top of the bill, probably, we would place two stories from the "Nerki, the Sorcerer" 3-story series on the Nelson Lee Library of 1932. It is usually accepted that E. S. Brooks was

back in top form with this yarn, and it is redolent of an old-fashioned Christmas. Archie Glenthorne has a party in a strange old house set in the New Forest, and weird and wonderful are the happenings as the writer unfolds his tale. In passing, it seems a slight pity that the third story was not included in the volume, instead of one of the Magnets. The final tale of the series is promised for next Spring. Reminds you of the thriller serials in the cinemas: "See the next sensational episode in this theatre - next year."

The volume contains 3 Magnets - consecutive but not linked tales from substitute writers from the end of 1919. Probably nobody will mind. Some like anything about the old chums, some can't tell the difference, and some find fun in analysing. But, in any case, these 1919 Magnets are fascinating to browse over. The 3 tales are "Alonzo's Agency", "Bunter on the Boards", and "Bunter's Christmas Portrait."

The ladies are well catered for with a Christmassy issue of "The Schoolgirl" from Yuletide 1938. There is a seasonable Cliff House tale on this menu.

There are two consecutive Gems from December 1932. "The Rival Scouts" is a rollicking yarn of rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's. It had been entitled "The Plot Against the Head" in 1908, though that was a poor title. The "Plot" is really only a detail.

Finally, and most people will love this famous story, there is "The Ghost of St. Jim's". In this one you recognise the worth of Binks, the pageboy, living in a dream world of lurid American fiction. And this is the one where the ghost cannot be seen - but can be heard, going Tap, Tap, Tap.

This tale, called by the same title, was the Christmas Double Number of 1908 - and a lovely one. It was marred in 1932 by very drastic pruning, but the eeriness is retained, and it is still a joy to read and wallow in its nostalgic pages.

I never cease to admire the way the old Nelson Lees are presented in these Howard Baker volumes - blown up to Magnet size, and with printing which is soothing and easy on ageing eyes. Another volume to cherish.

* * * * *

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

MIDLAND

Fifteen members gathered for our September meeting. We welcomed two of our postal members making their first visit to our club - Betty Hopton and her husband Dr. John Hopton.

In a recent issue of C.D. Eric Fayne made the point that reading Hamiltonia aloud is not all it is cracked up to be. I was so impressed I raised the point. A reading is always part of our programme and I do the reading. I asked for it to be withdrawn. After a discussion we decided on a reading every other meeting and

left the subject.

Tom Porter's Anniversary Number on show was Nelson Lee Library No. 225 "Sir Monty's Ordeal" dated 27th September, 1919 - 64 years old to the day. The Collectors' Item was a Monster Library "St. Frank's in London" dated 1926.

Refreshments were provided by Joan Golen and the Lovedays, with a fine gesture from Johnny Hopton in paying for the tea and coffee. The nicest people join our club.

Bob Acraman read a chapter of a love story by Chas. Hamilton. Just after the war these beautiful little books were sold at Woolworth's; now they are collectors' pieces. The sparkle is there, even in a love story. Bob's reading was very good.

A New game from Tom Porter was Greyfriars Name Builder. It was popular, and Christine Brettell, as usual, was the winner. How does she do it?

There was a discussion on the prospect of all the O.B.B.C. clubs meeting together at one fixed venue. Not new. In the sixties several highly successful meetings were held at Chesterfield.

Best wishes to O.B.B.C. members everywhere.

JACK BELLFIELD (Correspondent)

LONDON

A distinguished assemblage of members and friends enjoyed a very good luncheon party at the Liberal Hall, Ealing on Sunday, 9th October. Supporting the President of the club on the top table were Roy Parsons, Roger Jenkins, Madam and Eric Fayne, Louie Blythe, Josie Packman and Gwen Parsons. There were excellent seating arrangements for the rest of those present. The special occasion this time was to celebrate the half a century since the last issue of the Nelson Lee Library was published. An excellent repast was enjoyed, wine was provided by Roy Parsons and, as customary, John Wernham provided the souvenir menu cards.

Bill Bradford proposed the toast to the Nelson Lee and Roy Parsons proposed the toast to the Club to which John Wernham suitably replied.

After luncheon numerous quizzes and readings were held and then followed tea. But I think the highlights of the gathering were the informal and intimate conversations and get-togethers, surely one of the very best luncheon parties that the club has enjoyed since the first one 20 years ago. Bill Bradford and Thelma were heartily thanked for their catering efforts and also thanked were Norman and

Sandra Wright for their assistance in helping get the hall ready and the other ladies, Gwen, Suzanne, Winifred, Josie, Gladys and Ann for their assistance that helped things going very smoothly. Also thanks to those who helped wash up the dishes.

Next meeting at the Townwomen's Guild, Hoe Street, Walthamstow on Sunday, 13th November. Tea provided but bring own viands.

BEN WHITER

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Vic Hearn on Sunday, 2nd October 1983. We were pleased to welcome visitors, Darrell Swift and Graham McDermott, and also Eric Parker's daughter, Shiela Harris and her husband, David.

Bill Lofts gave a talk on Eric Parker. Bill said he would always remember Eric with particular affection. It should always be remembered that the artist sold the paper as well as the author. There was no single author for the Sexton Blake stories, nor, of course, artist; but for a very long period Eric Parker was the outstanding Blake artist. Bill had met Eric Parker many times with various editors, and also at the big Fleetway House meeting for the launching of "Valiant". Eric looked younger than his real age, and was always neat and well groomed; he had a genial manner, and got on well with people. He was born on 7th September, 1898. In the course of his career Parker drew covers, and illustrations, for the Union Jack, for the Sexton Blake Library and for the Detective Weekly. He also did work for "Chums" and "The Scout", and during the World War for "Knock Out" etc. as well as for the government. After the war he worked for "Look and Learn". He later did Sexton Blake covers for Howard Baker. Bill showed a sketch Eric had made for the Sexton Blake farewell party, and said all the portraits were clearly recognisable. Bill's talk was loudly applauded.

After enjoying Mrs. Hearn's lavish hospitality, to which everyone did justice, though Bill Lofts was doing a little weight-watching, Vic ran an entertaining record quiz, mainly of bands, singers and comedians of the 1930's.

The meeting closed with warm votes of thanks to Bill for his talk, to Mr and Mrs. Harris for coming to the meeting, and to Vic and Mrs. Hearn for their splendid tea.

NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 8th October, 1983.

We had a very low attendance - only eight - but it was a very cosy atmosphere in our new accommodation in THE CITY OF LEEDS ROOM, at Leeds Parish Church. With warm decor, comfortable chairs and an informal atmosphere, the room was not unlike the Common Room at Greyfriars. With large stained glass windows, pictures hanging on the walls and memorial plaques, the room was voted a "hit" by all those present.

We began proceedings by reading out a letter from the widow of Breeze Bentley. Breeze was well-known in hobby circles and he will be missed by many people.

A lively discussion then took place on the new Bunter books, published by Quiller Press. Miss Kay King, the writer, had recently been in Leeds and had appeared on local television. It would appear that Miss King had known very little about the writings of Frank Richards, when she had been given the task of re-writing the Bunter books, previously published by Skilton/Cassell. However, she had stated that after reading the books, prior to re-writing them, she had begun to know more about Frank Richards and realised that he had a marvellous gift of characterisation. Miss King had been very sympathetic towards the cause of our group and fully understood why most - if not all - members were not keen on the books themselves. It was hoped, that younger people reading the books, may progress to the "real thing" as it were. Strangely, copies of the new William books recently re-published by Macmillan in paperback and hardback, were on show. A number of years ago, the William books had been re-printed in abridged form, with new illustrations. Some of the hardbacks had also been re-written. Now, twelve years later, the books were in the shops again, but this time reverting to their original style of format. The new books had all the original illustrations by Thomas Henry and all stories were complete as originally published. It seemed strange that the new Bunter books had gone the way of the William books twelve years previously, and now the William Books were available alongside the Bunter books, except unaltered.

After refreshments Keith Atkinson presented a Quiz in Rhyme. Each person was given a sheet containing 23 questions about characters' names in the old school stories. By using the clues for each question given in rhyme, it was possible to insert the

appropriate name. The initial letters of each name composed the name of a "famous institution" NORTHERN OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB!

For those visiting us in the near future, we now meet the second Saturday in each month at 6.30 - 9.00 p.m. in the CITY OF LEEDS ROOM, Leeds Parish Church, Leeds 2.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

SOUTH WEST

On Sunday, 9th October, eleven members gathered at Tim Salisbury's home for their autumn meeting.

We were pleased to welcome Bob and Betty Acraman. Bob gave an interesting talk on the foundation of the Courtfield Greyfriars Club and also read from Herbert Leckenby's secret diary. We were all delighted to see the wonderful painting of Frank Richards which was presented to Bob last year.

It was good to have two new members with us - Mrs. Lamb and her son, John, from Gloucestershire.

Our thoughts were with Howard Pipe who died in July. He was a founder member and always a keen and interested supporter.

Tim mentioned that he had written to Charles Skilton, publisher of the Bunter books. He lives in a village nearby and in his letter of reply says he hopes to come along to the Spring, 1984 meeting. That date will be announced later.

After tea and much talk, a recording of "The Myth of Greyfriars" was played while members browsed through photographs which Bob had brought along and also numerous collectors items brought in by members.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

Chas. VAN RENEN (South Africa): I need not mention with what unfailing delight I have enjoyed the two latest Digests. The monthly advent of this intimate little publication remains one of the highlights of my advancing years. After nearly 37 years of receiving it regularly I find it difficult to visualise what life would be without our little friend.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): The regular deliveries of C.D. have been

a source of comfort and much appreciated, needless to say. It is still the best buy in the land, and how nice to look back to better days. I often think of you toiling away in the cause. The secret must be dedication, discipline, and good health. But then editors belong to a special breed, immune to ailments afflicting the common herd. Only joking!

RAY HOPKINS (Oadby): I was delighted to see reference to my Dad's favourite weekly in the August issue, namely John Bridgewater's article "Hobbies" Weekly. This doesn't come up very often. In fact I believe the last time was the issue received just after my Dad died. I remember feeling sad that he was unable to read it. I still have all his old copies. He collected it from the 20's right until it finished in 1967. Most are loose copies but he had been able to pick up some nice bound copies, including Volume 1 of 1895.

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon): To be honest, I've always found "Fishy" a rather irritating character, with his obsessive quest for "spendulics and phoney American speech. As editorial comments, and those of Les Rowney, indicate, he was nothing like a real-life American. It has been observed before in the "Digest" that one reason for Hamilton's characters being so absorbing, is that they don't always run true-to-type. Thus, there is Wharton's well-known obstinate temper; Nugent's occasional tantrums on behalf of his brother; Vernon-Smith's flashes of nobility (although this is part of his character), even the equable Hurree Singh occasionally shows a flash of temper, and Bunter can demonstrate unexpected bravery:- "Beneath Bunter's layers of fat, there was a spark of British pluck". Only poor Fishy is always greedy; his sole function at Greyfriars being the pursuit of wealth by means of various sordid and petty schemes. A complete caricature, in fact, and, therefore, not as convincing as Hamilton's other characters as far as I'm concerned. Of course there was the delightfully named Putnam Van Duck to set against him, but he was really only an incidental character in one series, and the Rio Kid was in quite a different category anyway.

J.P. FITZGERALD (Manchester): Oh, the pleasure of anticipation. Looking forward to all those editorials, articles, letters, and reminiscences, filled with so much happiness, recalling those days of pure and simple joys and keeping them alive and well. Which

reminds me that, on and off, for the past 50 years or so, I have been recalling the first four lines of a poem by W.G. Bunter, entitled "Ode to a Jam Tart" which goes:

"Alone and silent on the plate,
Last remnant of Bob Cherry's tuck -
How can I leave thee to thy fate,
When I could gobble thee, with luck."

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): There are so many things that one used to be able to go into a shop and buy which were taken for granted but these days are unobtainable for love or money. There is at least one glorious exception - our beloved S.P.C.D.

I find it better than ever, if that is possible; so many interesting articles, and it is nice to see a number of fresh contributors in recent months. And the Skipper, organising and directing the bits into the whole, each month.

LEN HAWKEY (Leigh-on-Sea): It may sound silly for someone who has reached his "three score and ten", but I look forward to C.D. with the same anticipation as I did for the Magnet, Gem, and Nelson Lee etc 60 years ago.

What a lovely cover in October. Don't know who chose the adjective "gorgeous" but I quite agree. Wakefield is one of my great favourites. He modelled himself on J. Louis Smythe who was probably about 10 years his senior. A J.L.S. cover would be very nice one of these days. I believe he did some good ones for the early Dreadnought, though, alas, I haven't any. Some of his best work was for the covers of the large "Girls' Friend", too.

(A Smythe cover is lined up for the very near future - if we are spared. - ED.)

WANTED: "The Boy without a Name and Rivals and Chums". Also "A Strange Secret".

Mrs. E.E. HOPTON, "KARUNDA", 79, SCALPCLIFFE ROAD, BURTON-on-TRENT, STAFFS. DE15 9AB.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: Disposing of collection of Hundreds of Books, both Hardbacks and paper; Boys' and Girls' Annuals; Wallace, Yates, Famol, E. R. Burroughs, Sapper, E. S. B., Edson, Charteris, etc. Also many Bunter books. S.a.e. for full list.

E. McPHERSON, "TYNINGS", UPPER MILTON, WELLS, SOMERSET.

FRANK RICHARDS AND THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

by Peter Hanger

It has recently been revealed that, 25 Squadron Royal Air Force; after almost twenty years in NATO'S front line in Western Germany, has returned to the mainland of Great Britain (together with it's Bloodhound Missiles) to R.A.F. Whyton, Huntingdonshire, to take it's place in the Air Defence of the United Kingdom.

What has this got to do with Frank Richards you will surely be asking; and the answer is; probably nothing but.....

In his description of long lazy sunny summer afternoons Frank Richards often made reference to the buzz of aeroplanes from the nearby Wapshot Air camp.

And in the early Nineteen Twenties Frank Richards purchased a home at Hawkinge, near Folkstone, a "front-line" fighter station whose aeroplanes were, in fact, 25 (fighter) Squadron Royal Air Force.

After service in France during the Great War 25 Squadron returned to the United Kingdom and was disbanded on the 20th January, 1920. Three months later the Squadron was reformed at Hawkinge it's equipment being Sopwith Snipes.

About the time that Frank Richards would be writing the Sahara series, these Snipes would be replaced with Gloster Grebes. In their turn, these Grebes would give way to Armstrong Whitworth Siskins. The Loder v the Famous Five series would be flowing from Frank Richard's famous Remington at about this time.

Two and a half years later in February 1932, the famous Hawker Fury (the forerunner of the legendary Hawker Hurricane) would take it's place in the order of battle. Vernon-Smith - captain would have been in Frank Richard's mind as this occurred.

In the Thirties, before the formation of Fighter Command (1st June, 1936) 25 Squadron together with 43 and 1 Squadrons (also equipped with the Hawker Fury) formed No. 3 Fighter Wing. 43 and 1 Squadrons were based at Tangmere (an even more famous fighter station than Hawkinge) 90 miles to the west. Their task was to defend the Portsmouth dockyards.

But changes occurred even more rapidly as "The Storm Gathered". As the Skip series was being written the one-seater Furies would be handed over to 41 Squadron and 25 received the two-seat version, the Hawker Demon. Ten months later (The Texas series) the Demons would be replaced with Gloster Gladiator, the R.A.F.'s last biplane. A mere six months later (The Tracy series) 25 Squadron was to acquire

the Blenheim fighters with which it would fight the Battle of Britain.

It would be satisfying to record that 25 Squadron went on to play a decisive role in that decisive battle but owing to the unsatisfactory nature of it's aeroplanes, it did not. Had the battle been fought only four months later it's Bristol Beaufighters would surely have done better.

But by this time 25 Squadron moved from Hawkinge and converted mainly to the night-fighter role, operating in succession De Haviland Mosquitoes, De Haviland Vampires, Gloster Meteors and Gloster Javelins before being renumbered 11 Squadron. It is still flying with English Electric Lightning. Soon after, 25 Squadron became a land based Bloodhound missile Squadron.

There cannot be much doubt that Frank Richards was familiar with the Royal Air Force. The Muccolini's circus series shows this quite clearly for it is really a tour of fighter stations in Kent and Sussex. Those very stations, in fact, which were to bear the brunt of the fighting during the Battle of Britain.

It was during 1936 that the Royal Air Force went over to functional Commands rather than Area Commands that had existed hitherto. Fighter Command was formed on the 1st June, 1936, and it may well have been this event that gave Frank Richards the idea for this series. Had it been written twelve months later then Signor Muccolini would surely have become Herr Adolf Tipler.

Of course, we must not forget, that Frank Richards also purchased a home near to Manston Aerodrome. So it may not have been just 25 Squadron's fighters that became the "buzz of aeroplanes from nearby Wapshot Air Camp".

It could just as easily been the Bristol Fighters of 2 Squadron, who flew Hawker Lysanders in France in 1939 and now fly Jaguars in Nato's front line in Western Germany.

Another possibility would be the Vickers Virginia's of 9 Squadron, whose "giant" bombers thundered (at 80 m.p.h.!) through the defences of the 1934 exercises and perpetuated the myth that the bombers would always get through. And those Wellingtons and Lancasters spearheaded Bomber Command's assault on Nazi Germany. It was the Avro Lancasters of 9 Squadron, together with those of 617 (the Dam Busters) Squadron that sunk the Tirpitz, without Winston Churchill incurring one word of criticism! Both of these Squadrons have been prominent in the Royal Air Force Bomber (now Strike) Command during these precious days of peace. They have

recently become first and second with the new 'Tornado which will take the Royal Air Force into the next century.

So the next time you spend a long, lazy, sunny, summer afternoon in the Remove Form room, or a ramble on Courtfield Common and hear the "buzz of aeroplanes from the nearby Wapshot Air Camp" spare a thought for 2, 3, 9 and 25 Squadrons who are still active in preserving our freedoms.

* * * * *

READ ANY GOOD REBELLIONS LATELY?

by Ray Hopkins

In "The Great Barring-Out at St. Jim's" (GEM 212, 2nd March, 1912), Mr. Ratcliff, forbidden by the Head to cane the seniors in his own form, the Fifth, proceeds to take it out on all juniors who belong to the Shell, the Fourth, and the Third. His special targets are Figgins and Co. of the Fourth, and his mistreatment of them culminates in a politely-worded round robin from the Fourth, requesting him to curtail his excessive punishments. Mr. Ratcliff answers the round robin by stating that all those who signed it will be given twelve strokes of the cane, a thousand lines, and will be gated for a fortnight. Dr. Holmes is away, so Mr. Ratcliff is in charge and orders his victims to appear in Big Hall. But Figgins and Co. do not materialize for the promised dozen strokes and the siege of the New House begins. Four against Fifty is impossible odds and so Monteith and three other Prefects fail to break in. Mr. Ratcliff orders the rebels to emerge at once: Figgins, Redfern and their Co's will be expelled and the rest will be publicly flogged. There are no takers for this attractive offer'. Taggles, attempting to smash the lock with an axe, has sooty water squirted over him. Mr. Ratcliff, impatiently taking the Porter's place, is not only soaked, but knocked down the steps by the stream of water. Mr. Ratcliff attempts to enter the stronghold at two o'clock in the morning, but Kerr is on watch, and gently touches the tip of his nose with a red hot poker. Collapse of vinegary party! Mr. Railton has despatched a telegram to Dr. Holmes, who is faced by a huge blister on said nose when he returns. Mr. Ratcliff is sent on holiday for the rest of the term and all is calm and bright as the barring-out ends - with no punishments and no recriminations.

There is a greater element of slapstick in the barring-out at Cliff House (SCHOOL FRIEND 16-18, Aug-Sept. 1919). The barring-out

takes place in the Clock Tower, a separate building in the school grounds, and easier to hold against invaders - as long as you remember to bring enough grub. Barbara Redfern not only has the peril of the tyrannical substitute head-mistress, Miss Potter, from without, but has to contend with the continuous secret onslaught on the food supplies by Bessie Bunter, and fifth-column activities on the part of the two malcontents, Marcia Loftus and Vivienne Leigh, from within. Miss Potter was evidently educated at the same College of Cruelty as Mr. Ratcliff, though her scope is much wider: she terrorizes the whole school! Her punishments are: cancelled half-holidays; cancelled tennis, hockey and other sports; all letters home censored; extra lessons and drill; rising bell tolled one hour earlier; no suppers! But only the Fourth courageously rebel! Miss Potter offers them all a severe thrashing and immediate expulsion if they will emerge at once. Bessie, prowling in the lower regions of the clock tower at midnight, shrieks for help as a ghostly creature on silent wings approaches and recedes. Realizing that she is still clutching a jar of jam she has stolen from the rebels' small food store, she backs towards an open window and drops the jam into the night. A fearful yell awakes the echoes as the jar strikes the ladder-climbing Miss Potter on the nose. More food is lost when Bessie falls into the water tank at the top of the tower, and one of her drying stockings falls into Clara Trevlyn's stew! Miss Bullivant, Piper the Porter, and Boker the Page, make an assault on the clock tower door, but are repulsed with the aid of a bag of soot from the stove pipe, shaken over the invaders by Dolly Jobling; the dough Clara had intended for a pudding; and a tin of pepper wielded by Barbara. Informed by the treacherous Marcia that Mabel, Lynn, Clara and Dolly are to make a late night foray to Friardale to post letters to all the rebels' parents, Miss Potter captures them, consigning them to the detention room for expulsion the following morning. Barbara rescues them, and the rebels are united for the final confrontation with Miss Potter and Co. which starts with the battering down of the door by Piper and Boker and the storming of the narrow clock tower stairway by Mesdames Potter and Bullivant. The rebels hurl a large piece of old tennis netting over the four invaders and their struggles for freedom cause the ancient stairway to collapse beneath them. Their screams and yells are silenced by the sudden entrance of Miss Primrose, summoned back to Cliff House by a

telegram from Miss Bellew, the Fourth Form Mistress. Thus, the rebellion of the girls ends in a similar happy fashion to that of the St. Jim's juniors seven years earlier. Miss Primrose decides Barbara and Co. had good reason to revolt and forgives them all, and Miss Potter, the vanquished tyrant, is sent packing.

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THE OLD SCHOOL DESK

by W.O.G. Lofts.

Recently a correspondent in Israel wrote to me at length about the old school desk - curiously a subject not touched on in our hobby before. He related how in his schooldays he started off 'bound, mind, and soul, in a one piece bench and desk, so heavy, it could not be budged, and needed no riveting to the floor. As he progressed to higher schools and at later periods, the desks like the school traditions, became newer and lighter; the final furniture being steel framed, and graced only with a thin, teak-stained plank for a table-top.

Many years later - and after leaving South Africa for Israel, and serving in the Army, he found alongside a deserted British air-field and barracks (abandoned in 1949) along the old Jordan/Israel border, a little Bedouen village, and lo! inside the tiny, junior school that served the Arab youths, was the same ancient furniture that graced his original school. He saw his own initials carved on the heavy ink-stained bench/desk that brought him back to the wonderful nostalgic days of his own boyhood. There were hundreds of carved initials deeply ingrained that would remain for ever. These were the same sort of desks that Harry Wharton & Co. might have scribbled their arithmetical calculations, to be imprinted for posterity.

I suppose when one thinks about it, the old school desk played an enormous part in our own schooldays, as well as in the Hamilton school saga. Numerous plots were hatched with papers and other things hidden in them - though the main thing I remember was that Bob Cherry had a habit of banging his lid down rather hard, and so did most during the French lessons under poor Mossoo! In my own case I have no real nostalgic memories of my old school desk, as I regarded it as a sort of hard wooden object and uncomfortable. Recently at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood I noticed on display a large number of old rocking horses. Likewise I have no nostalgic memories of them at all - though an old soft cuddly teddy

bear may be different. I remember the old ink-well holes at the top of my old school-desk, but was never wilful enough as a boy to carve my initials. I was told many years ago that the old school desk that Sir Winston Churchill sat on at Harrow is still in existence with his initials "W.C." engraved deeply. But then other readers may indeed have very happy memories of their old school desks, and my piece may arouse further nostalgic happy memories of those so happy days in the past.

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