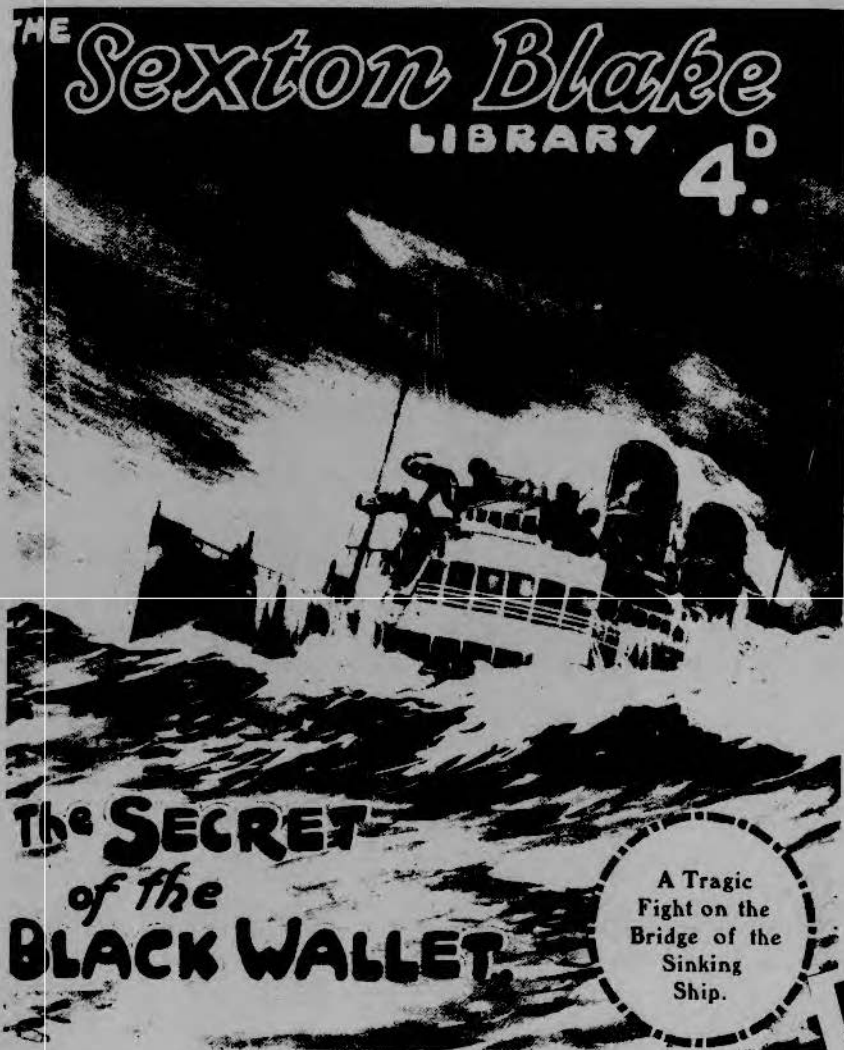


STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 39

No. 465

SEPTEMBER 1985



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MORE ON THE HARDBACKS

Last month I mused on an old story by Talbot Baines Reed. Still on the same wavelength, I have turned this month to "The Head of Kay's", one of the early school stories written by P. G. Wodehouse who was destined to become famous for his adult humorous fiction. The Wodehouse school stories are classics of their type. Six of these stories were re-published a decade ago by Souvenir Press. Early in the century they had been serialised and then published in book form by Black. The Souvenir editions are nicely produced with

attractive dust jackets, and, probably, might still be obtainable.

"The Head of Kay's" is reminiscent of Desmond Coke's "Worst House at Sherborough", a story originally serialised, in the Captain, I believe, under the lesser title of "Wilson's". I imagine that the Wodehouse tale came first, and Coke may have based his better story upon it.

"Head of Kay's" is the Wodehouse tale which has a character, Jimmy Silver, and it is a question whether Hamilton, when he created Rookwood, may have lifted his leading character from the Wodehouse tale.

In Kay's, Jimmy Silver is a prominent senior, though not the leading character. I haven't studied the matter closely, but I incline to the view that "Head of Kay's" may have been the first, or near the beginning, of the Wodehouse school yarns.

It is not a great story. It is not particularly well-balanced. It opens at Eckleton School at the end of the summer term. There is a cricket match. Kay's House will probably win, for the Head Boy, Fenn - the only good player in the House - is one of those chaps who can win a game on his own. But Mr. Kay, the housemaster, detains Fenn so that he only arrives on the scene when it is too late to save the game. Mr. Kay is rather an unbelievable housemaster.

Then comes the summer vacation, and, for no practical reason, we get a chapter or two with many Eckleton seniors in an army camp at Aldershot.

Then, back at school, Mr. Kay arranges for Kennedy, close friend of Jimmy Silver, to be transferred from his present House to become Head Boy at Kay's. And it is Kennedy who is, presumably, the "Head of Kay's" of the title. And he clashes with the previous Head Boy, Fenn.

As I said, not a strikingly good tale, and lacking the Wodehouse type of humour. All the same, it is readable, and holds the interest.

In one place we find someone waiting, like Peri, at the gates of Paradise, a familiar reference in Hamiltonia, a few years later.

The boys in "Head of Kay's" lack the facetiousness of many of the Wodehouse later school characters - and it is none the worse for that.

THE FLOODED SCHOOL

This month, 50 years ago, Danny was reading a Gem tale entitled "Washed Out". Many years earlier, way back in 1912, the

same story had been entitled "The Flooded School". It was always one of my favourites as a youngster, and I still love it.

Constant heavy rainfall had caused the river near St. Jim's to burst its banks, and the old school was flooded, a happening enjoyed by the boys and the readers, but not so attractive to the adults in the narrative - Mr. Selby, for instance. In this very wet summer of 1985, those of us who are yearning for sunshine have seen weather of a similar kind and we can sympathise with Mr. Selby.

As with very many of the plots of the blue cover Gem era, Hamilton never repeated the theme, to the best of my recollection. I used to think, when Hamilton was writing the Bunter books of the post war years and repeating his more recent plots, that it was strange that he did not go back to the blue Gem or the red Magnet and give a new airing to some of those truly excellent plots of his Edwardian and early George the Fifth days.

THE METAL TICKETS

I wonder whether many readers remember the metal "tickets" which were issued long ago at the payboxes in some of the newer silent cinemas. The cashier had a number of small handles before her, each for the purpose of issuing tickets of different prices - say, 3d, 6d, 9d, and 1/-. If you asked for three ninepennies she would turn the appropriate handle three times, and three metal tickets - possibly round or a couple of inches square - would pop up before you, stamped with the appropriate price. The tickets were collected when you entered the auditorium, and found their way back to the machine in due course.

It shows how stable prices were in those far-off days. Tickets in metal, with the prices embossed on them, would not last long nowadays with prices rising every so often.

BLAKIANA

Our Sexton Blake fans, for quite a few years now, seem to be few on the ground. In consequence, our Blakiana Column is languishing. Is Blake no longer a character who can maintain a regular Column on his own - or would it be better to make it an All Detective feature, covering any popular detective of fiction? Mr. Lofts's fascinating History of the great 'tec is drawing to a close. When that is ended, is the great Sexton to fade as a regular mainstay of a Column? Got any ideas?

THE EDITOR

Danny's Diary



SEPTEMBER 1935

The stories in the Gem this month have been absolutely tip-top. Quite the best St. Jim's tales Martin Clifford has ever written.

The first of the month is "The Mystery Man at St. Jim's" and he is a criminal who calls himself "X". He has conducted any amount of daring robberies, but he has eluded the police for years. Nobody has ever seen him; nobody has any idea even what he looks like. Yet he always warns his victims in advance when he is going to carry out a robbery. And he always succeeds.

Into this story comes a relative of Percy Mellish, the cad of the Fourth. He is Captain Mellish and everybody likes and admires him, and Percy gets some reflected glory. In this story, the mysterious "X" tells Dr. Holmes that he, "X", is going to steal the Head's Rembrandt painting. So the Head, Mr. Railton, Kildare, Captain Mellish - all strong and healthy people, sit up late at night to keep watch on the Rembrandt in the Head's study. But "X" gets away with it, all the same.

The following month came the sequel entitled "Mr. "X" Unmasked". The Head calls in the famous detective, Ferrers Locke, and, with Gussy's assistance, the detective bags the criminal and unmasks the master thief. And when they learn who "X" really is everybody at St. Jim's is astounded - but not the reader. The reader had guessed all the time. Lovely pair of tales.

Next "Washed Out", a great tale in which St. Jim's is flooded, and Tom Merry dives into the quad from his study window to save Mr. Selby from drowning. Really great.

Final of the month is "Grimes Gets Going". Grimes, the grocer's boy, becomes a pupil at St. Jim's, his fees being paid by Mr. Lumley-Lumley. The plot takes a bit of swallowing, but it's an enjoyable yarn. It continues next month with Grimes a St. Jim's junior.

The St. Frank's serial by E. S. Brooks "The Black Hand at St. Frank's" has continued in the Gem throughout the month.

Luckily the Packsaddle tales have ended in the Gem, so the St. Jim's tales are now very much longer than they were.

In real life, as the month comes to its end, war clouds are black, owing to the threats from Mussolini, the Dictator of Italy. All the nations except one in the weak-kneed League of Nations seem scared of Mussolini. Britain is the only country in the League ready to stand up to the bullying tactics of Italy. And British warships are gathering in the Mediterranean.

The Modern Boy is not all that hot at present. At the end of the month a new Biggles serial, "Biggles Flies East", has started. But Captain Justice has been going strong all the month. In the first tale "The Stowaway Captain", Justice quells a mutiny on the high seas and captures a destroyer. Next came "Wrecked in the Arctic", with Justice driving his runaway destroyer through dense fog into a sea filled with icebergs.

Then "Prisoners of the Ice", with Captain Justice stranded on an iceberg, which was the last of that series. In the last issue of the month a new Justice series starts with "Into the Unknown" with the Captain getting a message from outer space. There is also a new railway series by John Brearley entitled "Chums of the Jungle Railway".

Mum and I spent a weekend with a friend of hers who lives at Kingston-on-Thames. There is a huge shop there named Bentall's. A lovely place. In the evening we went to Kingston Empire and saw a lovely variety bill which included Nat Gonella and his Georgians Quintette; Jimmy James & Co. in a sketch; Donald Peers who calls himself the Cavalier of Song, and Revnell & West who are two marvellous lady comedians. A fine show, with a lovely resident orchestra.

In the new Schoolboys' Own Libraries, the Greyfriars story

is "Foes of the Sahara". This is the end of the holiday story about the chums and the Cliff House girls seeking the kidnapped Ali Ben Yusef in the Sahara Desert. A lovely tale. The other S.O.L. is "The Cheerio Castaways" which is a Grimslade affair, collected from the Ranger. Six schoolboys and their Headmaster are stranded on an unknown island in the heart of the Atlantic. All about Jim Dainty & Co., plus their Head, Dr. Sammy Sparshott, plus a ruthless scoundrel named Ezra Sarson.

I also had a Boys' Friend Library entitled "Slade of the Yard" by Richard Essex. This is a crime story, and a good exciting thriller.

Speaking of thrillers, the paper named "The Thriller" is giving away a 48-page guide to the Football Pools, and each week the paper publishes a list of the probable results of all the matches to help people who enter for the Pools.

Some good films in the local cinemas. There have been two big air pictures. One is "Devil Dogs of the Air" with James Cagney and Pat O'Brien and Margaret Lindsay in a jolly and exciting film about the Marine Flying Corps. The other air picture is "West Point of the Air" starring Wallace Beery who is an army sergeant who has a son who is an air cadet, played by Robert Young.

Irene Dunne is in a nice little musical "Sweet Adeline", and Maurice Chevalier is in a more classic musical, "Man from the Folies Bergere".

Ginger Rogers is in "Romance of Manhattan", and Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll are in a scrumptious British thriller "The 39 Steps".

A truly great Dickens production is "David Copperfield" with Freddie Bartholomew as young David and Frank Lawton as David grown-up. W. C. Fields is Micawber and Edna May Oliver is Aunt Betsy. A truly lovely one, this.

A nice little murder mystery is in "After Office Hours" with Clark Gable and Constance Bennett.

A slightly dull musical is "Roberta" starring Irene Dunne, with small parts being played by Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire who liven things up each time they appear.

An eerie story set in an old hosue came with "Mark of the Vampire" starring Lionel Barrymore, and the second feature in this programme was a delightful film called "Grand Old Girl" starring May Robson.

The first two Magnet tales of the month brought the conclusion

of the summer holiday series set at Portercliffe Hall. Somewhere, in or under Lord Portercliffe's ancestral mansion, lies a stack of hidden gold worth a million dollars. And Hiram K. Fish and his son, Fisher T. Fish, are after that hoard, as well as a sinister character who wears a mask. And also in the picture are the Greyfriars chums, with Bunter and Alonzo Todd, not to mention the oily, sinister butler whose name is Chandos. These two stories are "The Man in the Mask" and the final one of the series "On the Trail of Treasure".

Then comes the opening two stories of a new series set at the school. There is plenty of noise as the new term opens at the school. And among the Fifth Formers is a new senior who calls himself Jim Warren. To Greyfriars Jim Warren is a decent new boy - heir to a knighthood. But Harry Wharton has met the real Jim Warren, and he knows that this new chap at the school is an impostor.

These two tales are "Under False Colours" and "The Spy of the Fifth". The Magnet is always top-notch, and I like this new series which continues next month.

- - -

NOTES ON "DANNY'S DIARY" FOR SEPTEMBER 1935

The stories in the Gem at this time were reprints of some of the finest stories of the Golden Age of the Blue Gem, a time when Hamilton's finest work was poured into the paper in a continuous stream.

The opening two stories of the month were probably the most famous twosome in the Gem's history - the story of Captain Mellish and the Mysterious "X". They had appeared originally in the late autumn of 1912. "The Mystery Man of St. Jim's" (the drab 1935 title) had been "Baffled" in 1912. A lovely old-fashioned melodramatic title which lives down the years. The sequel, "Mr. "X" Unmasked" in 1935 had been "Caught Redhanded" in 1912.

Oddly enough, this memorable pair was never reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library, though it turned up once or twice in the Popular. It was reprinted in the post-war years by the Hamilton Museum Press of Maidstone, under the title "The Mysterious "X"" - and presumably went like a bomb.

The 1935 story "Washed Out" had been "The Flooded School" a few weeks before the Captain Mellish's stories. Surely a tale which no schoolboy could resist, and much loved down the years.

"Grimes Gets Going" of 1935 had been "Grimes of the Fourth" in early December 1912, the opening story of another twosome. From the common sense viewpoint,

it was inconceivable that an almost illiterate lad like Grimes could ever have become a St. Jim's junior, but the pair provide novelty, a good deal of excitement, and a measure of pathos. These tales show Lumley-Lumley at his most attractive.

S.O.L. No. 251 "Foes of the Sahara" comprised the last three stories of the 8-story Sahara series of the Magnet of late summer 1924.

I believe that the film "Roberta" was the first one in which Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire appeared together. Though originally they did not star in the film, their appearances in it allowed them to steal the picture, and their famous partnership followed.

* * * * *



FORTY YEARS OF SEXTON BLAKE (Part 12)

BY W.O.G. Lofts

The year of 1968 could be said to be Sexton Blake's revival year - which incidentally was his 75th year of publication. Apart from the T.V. series mentioned recently, he also had appeared on radio, the scripts being written by Gerald Verner the old Blake writer. In the written word he was still appearing in the monthly Mayfair paperbacks - plus a new venture by Howard Baker, original stories in hardback.

This was not all as Dean and Son were to publish in hardback a short series of stories from pre-war Sexton Blake Library tales for the children's market. On top of all this the weekly boys picture paper Valiant was to have picture strip stories based on the T.V. series that featured Laurence Payne. There would also be a Sexton Blake Annual published by Fleetway with pictures and text. Commercialisation was getting in the act with bubble-gum, and a Lone Star Sexton Blake detection Kit. So Blake was catering for both children and adult markets - the T.V. series incidentally appearing at 4.30 in the afternoon in the children's programme time - so it

must be classed as catering for that age group.

To celebrate all this, Fleetway held a special Sexton Blake cocktail party held in the oak paneled Directors' suite at the top floor of the New Fleetway House. All sorts of distinguished guests were invited including many from the press and T.V. mediums. Both Brian Doyle and myself were invited - on the guest list - our qualification being 'Historians of Boys' Fiction'. Apart from W. Howard Baker, Eric Parker, Gerald Verner was present. A very tall man slightly stooped with age, he wore a big old brown overcoat that I was told he wore winter and summer, brown trilby, glasses, and rather pointed nose. I only had a chance to say a few words with him, before being introduced to other guests - but he did tell me that his real name was Gerald Verner, and he was born in London.

Editor of Valiant boys paper was Jack Le Grand - an extremely nice and pleasant chap who had been on Film Fun department most of his career at Amalgamated Press - and whom I saw a great deal of in years to come. Jack had written a number of Jack Keen detective tales in Film Fun - and I can well remember saying that his current Valiant Sexton Blake serial entitled "The House of a Thousand Perils" reminded me of the old Bullseye type of serials that was in the Film Fun department.

As a memento - we were all presented with a large Sexton Blake folder that contained amongst many other things, a short history of Blake written by myself (subbed by the P.R.O. 'Shirley Long'), the very first picture of Blake, Guest Lists and so on. One of the prize items of my small Sexton Blake collection, and a reminder of a very happy event, and on the 75th birthday of our favourite detective.

* * * * *

ANOTHER OLD READER PASSES

We must regret to record the death in June of Miss Ivy Lees. Miss Lees, who lived in a small village just outside Canterbury, was an enthusiastic supporter of S.P.C.D. for a great many years. She had a deep affection for all the Hamilton main schools, but the warmest spot in her loyal heart was reserved for the Gem.

It was mainly due to Miss Lees' insistence that we serialised "Tom Merry Cavalcade" last year. She wrote at fairly frequent intervals, and constantly ended her letters with "When are you going to run the T. M. Cavalcade again?" And at long last we did - in plenty of time for this warm-hearted lady to enjoy it. We shall miss her.



A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by an Old Boy

With the summer holidays fast approaching thoughts on where to spend them are rife. Many of the juniors will accompany their parents on trips abroad, but one suggestion seems to be very popular and that is another caravan tour of England that was so successful some time ago. Wandering the back roads of Britain by horse-drawn caravan is about as idyllic an existence as many young people would imagine indulging in.

Lessons and the restrictions of school life are happily remote from sizzling bacon simmering in a frying-pan beside a stream.

Nipper refreshed my memory. There were four caravans drawn by four splendid Clydesdales, and although jogging along the highway would appear to be a peaceful tour yet on that occasion the juniors had many adventures as they travelled around.

It sounds an easy going programme but it could be very different now. Grassy spots to call home for the night are scarcer than they seem, unless one is prepared to ignore their recent occupation by cows - and unless one starts looking for them at first light nothing is more sure that one will be still hunting for a campsite at midnight.

However, where would Britain stand today had it not been for adventurous boys who later developed into brave men.

Nipper recollected that the Clydesdales can average about 30 miles a day. That is a fair step. But what happens when there is a gap between shops of about 40 miles. When one has run out of bread, tea, etc.

But apart from little inconveniences it is a healthy life having the freedom of the roads. With the stars for your ceiling and the moon for your reading lamp you can let the rest of the world go by.

One cannot guarantee similar experiences that befell the jogging juniors on those occasions, but to drift slowly through the villages and hamlets of England's pleasant land compensates for little troubles that may occur. Or big troubles for what happens when a horse breaks down or even pegs out on you. Although a dead engine is bad enough, at least one can call the A.A. A dead horse, all 2,000 lbs. of it, could be a bit of an embarrassment, especially if all one had to dig with were the hearth shovel used for collecting crumbs from the breakfast table.

But I feel sure the boys will not be deterred by facts and figures of what might happen. One may traverse the counties and shires of England in a caravan without any incident or untoward event happening. But you can depend on the juniors of St. rank's finding adventures without searching for them. Of course, caravans have a very restricted space and is not conducive to add to the holiday spirit when it rains. You can't retreat to a favourite den. But you can't have everything.

Most people spend their holidays rushing here and speeding there which cannot be a holiday at all. But to steadily jog along the country lanes with a horse in front instead of a noisy engine may not be the panacea for all ills but it can be very restful and much more healthier.

After all, we all go too fast today that we have no time to stop and stare.

"NIPPER'S NOTE BOOK"

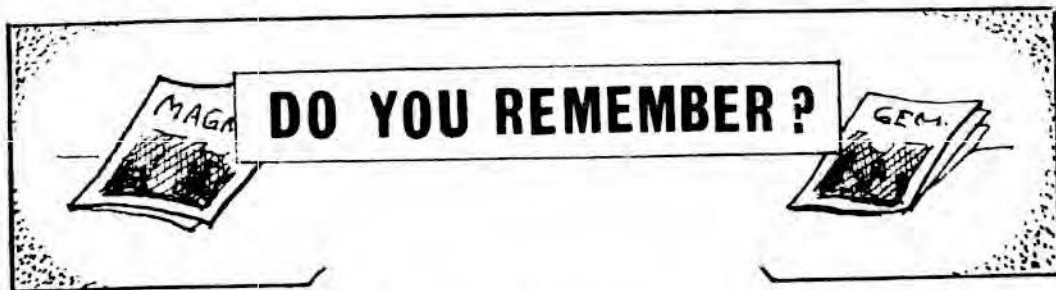
by C. H. Churchill

In early 1917 a new series of stories was announced in the Nelson Lee - "Stories from Nipper's Notebook" by the author of the "Jim the Penman" series. The first one appeared in No. 96 dated 7/4/17 entitled "Nipper's Note Book or the vengeance of Parteb Singh". This, by the way, was as mentioned by me recently, the only Lee story re-issued as an Inspector Cromwell story almost word for word except for altered names. It was published as part of a three story book by Collins in 1949 and entitled "Road to Murder". The other two episodes were also concerned with incidents "on the road". In this particular story, Lee and Nipper came across an unconscious man lying in the road while motoring on their way home one evening from the coast. They were travelling by motor bike and sidecar which was very modern in 1917. When the story was re-issued in 1949 Lee and Nipper became Inspector Cromwell and

Sergeant Lister driving in Johnny Lister's racing car. Some difference here but the story was the same.

These "note book" tales appeared in and out until the St. Frank's stories commenced in No. 112. There were ten in all and included the famous No. 105 "The Ivory Seekers" which introduced Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi. The Lee numbers of these were Nos. 96, 97, 100, 103, 105, 109, 110, 111, 119 and 124. All were really very good detective yarns, especially Nos. 97, 105 and 109. I can confidently recommend anyone who does not possess them to borrow them from the Nelson Lee library now managed by Bill Bradford.

In actuality, the St. Frank's stories were first mentioned as being from "Nipper's Note Book" but this was dropped after a few numbers. One supposes that these new school/detective stories were an experiment and could easily be dropped if they proved unpopular. Little could anyone have thought at that time how famous St. Frank's was to become and how many years it was to last. The sad thing is that one feels it was allowed to lapse through what I can only describe as inefficiency of management. It should certainly have survived until the war as so many others did.



No. 206 - Magnets 1012-13 - The Bounder's Good Turn Series

by Roger M. Jenkins

From the end of the Dallas series until the beginning of the South Seas series, Herbert Vernon-Smith was very much of a lone wolf, since Redwing had been so offended by recent events that he left Greyfriars and surrendered the scholarship that the Bounder's father had specially founded with Redwing in mind. Skinner deserted Snoop and Scott and took Redwing's place in Study No. 4, but this was not all milk and honey because palling with the Bounder could

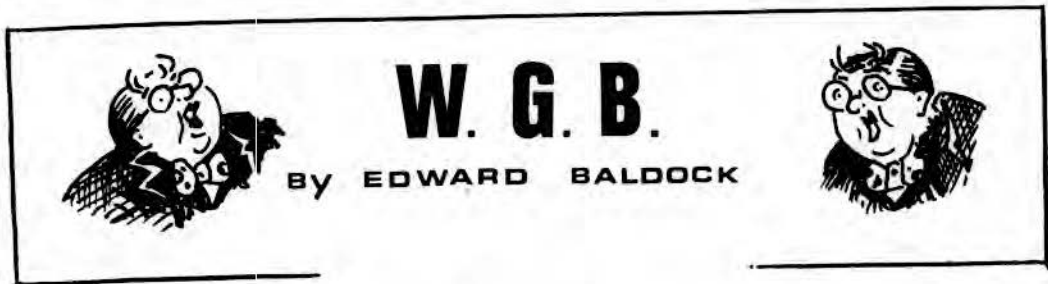
be a tempestuous affair. During those thirteen weeks of Redwing's absence, the Bounder was involved in a number of remarkable affairs, but none quite so memorable as the series in Magnets 1012-13.

Vernon-Smith could be quite quixotic at times and the series started with his trying for Marjorie's sake to prevent Hazeldene from making a fool of himself. There can be no doubt that Hazeldene, weak, touchy, and petulant, was an excellently drawn character based on real life, and those acquainted with Charles Hamilton's domestic affairs might be able to guess at the origin of the character. Hazeldene had been sent a five-pound note by a kind uncle, and the Bounder attempted to prevent him from gambling it away. His actions were misconstrued and as he was too proud to explain he was given a form ragging. His new pal, Skinner, was highly amused at this and shared his amusement with everyone. When Wharton knew and went to apologise he found the Bounder was too incensed to listen.

The second number of the series contained some fine writing and ingenious situations. In pursuance of his feud with Wharton, the Bounder boasted that he would not attend compulsory games practice the next day, and contrived to make an issue of it. He then managed to convince Mr. Quelch that he genuinely wished to try for the Head's Latin medal. As Charles Hamilton said, "Pulling Mr. Quelch's leg was an amusement somewhat akin to twisting a tiger's tail". The Remove master kindly gave him extra tuition and a note to excuse him from games practice, and all might have been well had not Bunter sought to emulate him by asking to enter for the Medal if he too could have a similar note. The manner in which Mr. Quelch investigated the matter and pinned down Vernon-Smith was an impressive example of cross-examination. The feud between Wharton and the Bounder was played out to a most unusual climax.

It is difficult not to wonder, as one peruses Magnets of 1927 and thereabouts, how writing of this quality could ever have appeared in such an ephemeral format. Not only did the plot possess features of an absolutely novel nature but there was also the fact that the characters of the two protagonists, Wharton and Vernon-Smith, were displayed impartially, neither without fault or redeeming feature. It is as though Charles Hamilton at this time was assuming an Olympian detachment, an omniscience which allowed him to present to the reader an unvarnished picture of human nature in all its varying moods. There used to be an advertising slogan "It is impossible not to be thrilled by Edgar Wallace". I should be inclined to say,

"It is impossible not to be enthralled by Charles Hamilton".



When one considers the dismaying thought that William George Bunter might never have been but for a small quirk of fate. It is an interesting exercise to ponder how the Greyfriars' saga would have developed without him. Edward Young has told us in his 'Night Thoughts' that 'Fame is the shade of immortality'. Bunter was brought into being and then almost at once put aside. Was he not, together with all his fatuity and endless potential, stowed away in the recesses of a drawer and more or less forgotten until later being resurrected and dusted off, he was launched upon his Greyfriars' career as the Owl of the Remove and set firmly upon the road to fame and world recognition? What happy chance induced Charles Hamilton to pause and reserve him for his subsequent fate? We are told that his original appearance was not particularly conspicuous; destiny takes odd and inexplicable turns at times. Imagine life without Billy Bunter, try to visualise the Greyfriars' story without the fat owl.

'I say you fellows!' That querulous and by now classic exclamation rings down, not only the Remove passage at Greyfriars' school, it echoes down the corridors of time itself, so familiar has it become. An appeal for attention to usually unresponsive school-fellows. Once more a rumour is to be enlarged upon, a proposition advantageous to the fat owl himself, yet so couched as to be assumed as a heaven-sent opportunity for other fellows to grasp and benefit thereby - or - most likely of all a bitter criticism of the Post Office for failing, once more, to produce the long expected postal order.

William George Bunter, fat, rotund to a degree, an unsavoury member of the Remove, largely unwashed, usually sticky and always

presenting a seedy and grubby appearance. A waistcoat straining at every button and trousers stretched to splitting point, glimmering spectacles and a certain craftiness of expression, such is this ornament of the Remove. Yet this unlikely material was destined to be referred to as the 'million pound schoolboy'. What was the hidden - for concealed it must have been - fascination of William George Bunter which enabled him to become a household word throughout the world? With so few redeeming qualities, this is something of a mystery. Certainly it could not have been his physical appearance, which was obese and frowsy in the extreme, while his frequent boastings of titled connections and perpetual dwelling upon his own non-existent athletic and scholastic prowess, achieved little in endearing him to the least particular fellows. His propensity for insinuating himself into company which was obviously reluctant to accept him was well known, and although largely accepted, was universally condemned.

Filial feeling in the Bunter family we are told was anything but highly developed. William George's attitude towards his minor Sammy and his sister Bessie is illuminating proof of this. Selfishness and greed would appear to loom large in the Owl's make-up. To those unacquainted with these little foibles, he would seem to be a complete outsider. We, who know him of old, can look upon his short-comings and strongly disapprove of them, yet still retain a warm feeling for him, for do we not know our Bunter from a vast experience of his activities that basically he is his own worst enemy? Mr. Quelch, his long-suffering form-master, may frequently condemn and chastise him, yet even he is not incapable of casting a kindly if frosty eye on him when the occasion warrants.

What were the attractions of the Owl of the Remove? Was it his uncanny ability to be the central figure in the elucidating of so many problems and mysteries time and time again? To manage to be in the vicinity of the all-important key-hole at the psychological moment, to be put into possession of the vital information and clues necessary for clearing the name of some member of the school from ignominy? Could it have been that he was a unique figure at Greyfriars in that he was the odd man out? Certainly he had no peers other than his minor Sammy who played a relatively small part in the Greyfriars' stories. In this sense Bunter had no rivals. Most fellows could see in their contemporaries certain similarities of character as they themselves possessed and who could be viewed in the same light.

The Owl, however, stands alone in his grubby and unsalubrious splendour as it were. Herein may lie the key to his popularity. His falls from grace were so frequent as to become a natural part of his normal behaviour. Just one such fall by almost any other member of the Remove would have placed him outside the pale for an indefinite period and would have needed several terms to live down. Not so Bunter, he was expected to outrage the normal canons of good taste and civilised behaviour, it became expected of him and sadly he seldom let his form-master or his school-fellows down.

No amount of whacking, kicking, bumping or ragging seems to have any perceptible effect on his conduct, no appeal to an improbable better self has produced any lightening of the gloom. Those tight trousers have been thudded by practically every boot in the Remove and not a few beyond over the years, bringing about no visible or lasting change of pattern in his conduct. Bunter, it would appear, is incorrigible, and of course we would have him no other way. It would not be the traditional fat Owl if regular ablutions became the vogue, if the pilfering of tuck from studies were to cease and, if, heaven forbid, he suddenly became addicted to telling the plain unvarnished truth upon all occasions. No, we prefer our Bunter unscrupulous, unwashed and steeped in his manifold iniquities and imperfections. Life without him would be akin to existence without our morning cup of tea or indeed our monthly Collectors' Digest. Doubtless we should survive, but how infinitely duller life would be under such circumstances. William George Bunter is firmly established as an institution, albeit a less than heroic one. His niche in the realms of boys' literature is assured and we must see to it that he is never usurped or denegated in any way

Whack! Whack! Whack!

May Mr. Quelch's hand never lose its sinewy vigour and unerring expertise.

'Yaroooooh!'

May the echoes continue to reverberate and never cease.

* * * * *

FOR SALE: duplicate Nelson Lee Library O/S and N/S. Approx. 550 Thomson Publications, eg.g. Wizard, Hotspur, Rover, Etc., 1960-1970c. Few Annuals. Various other bits and pieces. Stamp please for details. Would exchange for pre 1945 Sexton Blake Publications and S.B. Annuals.
KEN TOWNSEND, 7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY DE6 6EA.

REVIEW"HARRY WHARTON'S WIN"

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Book Club
"Special": £18)

This is another truly splendid book in the Howard Baker "Book Club Special" series. And it is, indeed, very special.

It comprises six Red Magnets in the period between the autumn of 1912 and the summer of 1913. 1912 and 1913 were times of "unusual" stories in the Red Magnet, and several of these stories come into that very "unusual" class.

"For his Mother's Sake" (beautifully illustrated by Arthur Clarke) is really a domestic drama. There has been a break-up in the Nugent home, Mrs. Nugent having left her husband and left the family home. She comes to the Greyfriars district with the specific intention of collecting her favourite son, the spoiled younger boy, Dicky. The "rotters" of the Remove - Vernon-Smith, Snoop, etc., stage a play which is a skit on a broken marriage. In these days, actions of that sort seem unlikely, but the dramatic play, swiftly checked by the decent chaps, provides a lively secondary bit of the plot.

Contrivance ends the drama, with Frank Nugent in a train smash, and the Nugent parents, reconciled, rushing to his bedside. A rare and unusual tale.

Then comes another quaint and entertaining yarn, "The Terror of Greyfriars". There is some farce comedy when Theophilus Flippis, the representative of a newspaper, enters the Remove to collect material for a series of articles on life in a school like Greyfriars. Chaos results. This is the last Magnet illustrated by Arthur Clarke who died about this time. His work had given great charm to the opening years of the Red Magnet. His place, the following week, was taken by C. H. Chapman, who is reputed to have been instructed to model himself on Clarke, and it is pretty obvious that he did so.

"Harry Wharton's Win", a story of rivalry with Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe, was in the shops at Christmas time 1912. Pon & Co. give a dance to which the Cliff House girls are invited, and a Pink Hungarian band (whatever that was!) is engaged to provide the dance music. Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry gatecrash as girls - Miss Franke and Miss Bobbe - which sounds unlikely but it's all great nostalgic fun.

"In Another's Name" is a familiar plot down the years. Caught out of bounds poaching by an unsavoury character named Jem Gadd, Skinner gives his name as "Harry Wharton", thus making trouble for our hero.

"The Sandow Girl at Greyfriars" is an unusual tale of quaint charm. Johnny Bull's cousin, Miss Fluffy, visits Greyfriars, and, with her unusual strength, soon makes the fur fly, especially when Bunter asks for a kiss. Jem Gadd gets another airing in this one.

Finally, in "Uncle Fish", Fisher T. Fish puts three brass balls outside his study door, and opens up as a pawn-broker. Which is all right till Bunter starts pawning other people's belongings.

A superb volume of rare and unusual style stories. A joy for every Greyfriars fan, with binding that adds glory to any bookcase.

* * * * *



LONDON

Ealing, with associations with both Frank Richards and Gilbert Chester, is one of the most popular of the various venues that the club enjoys during a year. A delightful place to meet is the home of Bill and Thelma Bradford, and, on the occasion of the August meeting, a very happy time was had by a good attendance.

Millicent Lyle read an address of welcome to Bob Whiter, who, after he had suitably thanked her, conducted a quiz which Roy Parsons won. Bill Bradford read an article by Harold Griffiths entitled "Golden Memories" which dealt with "Chums". Roy Parson's acrostic puzzle was won jointly by Leslie Rowley and Eric Lawrence.

Mary Cadogan exhibited dust covers of "But For Bunter" and "Bunter Sahib", and also copies of the re-edited edition of "Jennings Goes to School". Mary mentioned that "You're a Brick, Angela" is to be published in paperback.

Laurie Sutton was the winner of Alan Stewart's quiz. Finally, Les Rowley read a chapter from his Greyfriars book that was entitled "Horror for Hacker", a happy conclusion for an outstanding meeting.

Next meeting will be at the home of Phyllis Godsave on Sunday, 8th September. Kindly bring your own comestibles.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 10th August, 1985

Chairman Keith Smith welcomed the twelve people present, with a special welcome to Peter Plowman who was making his first

visit. Best wishes were extended to Michael Bentley who had suffered a spell in hospital and was now at home.

Molly Allison, our librarian, reported that Cliff Smith from St. Annes-on-Sea, had donated to the Club Library a large collection of C.D.s which are a very welcome addition - thanks were given to Cliff Smith for his kind gesture.

The question of increased rent for our premises was once again raised. Two members made a most generous offer which we were pleased to take up for the time being: so we shall continue to meet at the City of Leeds Room at Leeds Parish Church until we find any other suitable accommodation.

During the previous week, an article had appeared in our local evening paper concerning Darrell and his collection of William books. It was quite a good article and was much better than the ones we had seen in the past.

Darrell was also able to report that two days previous, he had been to Broadstairs and visited Miss Hood who seemed to be in good health and sent along her best wishes to all devotees of Charles Hamilton's works.

"But For Bunter" to be published in September, was passed round the meeting.

"Billy Bunter's Treasure Hunt" was a novel quiz from Keith Atkinson. By answering 13 questions of a general nature, and using the first letter of each answer, we were able to sort out the anagram of where the treasure was hidden.

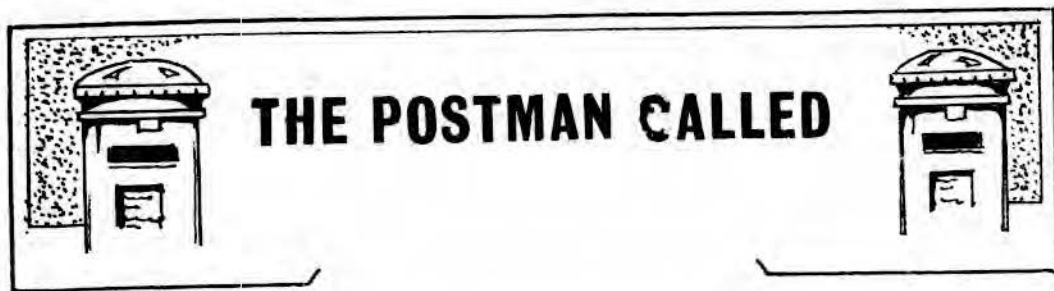
Keith Smith presented a superb item on "Dick Turpin". Keith had been interested in the exploits of this certain gentleman for a number of years and it was not until he started to do some research amongst the many items he had at home, that he discovered there was a lot of information available. Keith was warmly applauded for an excellent item.

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 "Identification guide to D.C. Thomson Annuals" by Lofts/Adley: £2.75. "The Hotspur Catalogue 1933 to 1959" by Lofts/Adley: £3.25. "The Thriller Index" (1929 to 1940) by Lofts/Adley: £1.95. All three titles available exclusively from Alan Cadwallender, 48 Cornwall Crescent, Brinnington, Stockport, Cheshire, SK5 8HB. All prices include 2nd class U.K. Postage. (Will all my old friends and customers please note that I am not, regrettably, back in business as a comic dealer.)



D. V. WITHERS (Parkstone): Way back in 1930 I joined the Nelson Lee Pen Pals Club, and commenced corresponding with an Australian lad. He like me was just about to set foot for the first time in the world of commerce, and whilst he commenced life as a Bank clerk, I joined the local Gas Company. We kept up our correspondence for several years during which time he sent me a number of stamps commemorating the first Australian Air Mail service. Incidentally I still have those stamps. Unfortunately the 'Bodyline' Test series came along and his letters ceased abruptly. I was in Australia in 1945 and found his phone number but before I could pluck up courage to ring him I was drafted home. I went back in 1981 but could not find him listed in the Sydney directory. So George W. Nicholl, late of West Murrumbidgee, Sydney, Australia, and of the New South Wales Bank, if this should ever reach you, I would very much like to hear from you!

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): Just before or after the second world war - I forget which - one of the newspapers ran a series of "Fancy That" Facts, complete with pictures to do with them. Long before that, one of the Companion Papers did the same thing, at the end of the first world war or just after it. I have a little notebook with 13 of its pages filled with very neat vocalized Pitman's shorthand of some of these "facts", which I copied out. One of them says "Cambridge railway station is the longest station in England". (It isn't now!) Another, which I haven't on record but remember well was that "Cherryhinton, near Cambridge, is the second driest place in Europe". The name of the first was stated.

Cherryhinton is a village, about three miles across the fields from here (very much built up and modernised). There's now very much talk about the weather. Trumpington is a dry spot, rain often

falling in Cambridge but not in nearby Trumpington.

Many readers have collections of the old papers, and someone might obligingly look it up and be able to confirm this bit about Cherryhinton. There were no pictures with the "Fancy That" Facts in the Companion Paper weekly. Ripley seems a name to ring a bell in the newspaper "Fancy That".

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Didn't Ripley do a column "Believe it or not" in the Daily Express? Or is my memory playing tricks!)

T. P. TIERNEY (Grimsby): I was surprised that Danny did not like Grimslade and that he did not read the Packsaddle stories in the Gem. However, he may have changed his mind during the last 50 years. Grimslade is my favourite Hamilton school (Apart from the main three, of course) and I am at present re-reading the stories for the umpteenth time. And I prefer Packsaddle to Cedar Creek.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): I was very interested in Mr. Rowe's article on Allan Quatermain, and am grateful to him for his kind reference to my last year's article in the Annual. I am impressed by Mr. Rowe's dating of Allan's life. I had not considered this in such detail, but I feel that Mr. Rowe has worked out the details with a skill worthy of Sherlock Holmes. Fitting in the various journeys that Allan refers to in passing, he must have led a crowded life. He must also have been pretty busy during his life in England between the successful conclusion of the search for King Solomon's Mines and his last expedition, since it was in this period that he had the two experiences with Taduki recorded in "The Ancient Allan" and "Allan and the Ice Gods", and the shooting party described in the opening chapters of "Maiwa's Revenge".

Apart from "Allan Quatermain" others of Haggard's novels and romances are very striking. "Red Eve", with its setting in the period of the Black Death and Murgh, the personification of Death - a figure suggested to Haggard by Kipling - is remarkable; as also are the Egyptian stories. I have recently re-read "Morning Star".

BILL LOFTS (London): I feel certain that the 1956 Rainbow Annual mentioned by Len Hawkey contained reprints in the main of work by many old artists. I seem to recall on a visit to Fleetway House, seeing an editor with piles of back numbers of papers and Annuals selecting material for inclusion in the volume. P. J. Hayward and

S. J. Cash were I believe long dead - the former doing a lot of work for the Companion Papers at one time. Harry Lane if still alive must have been a very old man, whilst R. J. MacDonald had long ceased to contribute to the now Fleetway Publications - though this needs confirmation.

Certainly there were other Tiger Tim artists after B. O. Wymer (who drew the characters smaller than Foxwell) one was I believe the grandson of the creator J. Baker, whilst the last was a Peter Woolcock.

In all the publicity about various characters and artists in the press - no-one has so far mentioned that Tiger Tim and the Bruin boys after over eighty years of continuous publishing finally ended when Jack and Jill dated 29th June 1985, went into Playhour. Though they may still appear in the odd Annual.

MRS. MARGERY WOODS (Scarborough): I was interested in the piece by M. R. Thompson, who doesn't like Bunter. But isn't Bunter our eternal whipping boy, our Aunt Sally, the epitome of all the unlikable traits we would hate to recognise within ourselves? For a few moments I tried to imagine life without Bunter. A sobering thought; for without the irritation and despairing fury engendered by his appalling behaviour, Greyfriars would discover an enormous blank in their days. Poor old Coker would have to fill the breach!

D. LANGFORD-ALLEN (Canterbury): You'll remember that during the first War the Magnet changed from red to blue/white, the reason being given that the analine dye was no longer available. What is analine dye? I'm sure that the later 'salmon' Magnets were not the same shade, even though - according to the Editor - the colour was being restored to the original. Was the dye no longer made in the 1930s? It's a minor point, but I've been puzzled by it for years!

Keep up the superb standards of C.D. - it keeps getting better!

TOMMY KEEN (Thames Ditton) Len Hawkey's article regarding the artists made interesting reading, especially as I am a great admirer of both Foxwell, and Shields.

The only illustrations I have seen with Leonard Shields' name are in the 1920 HOLIDAY ANNUAL - 'Press Day in the Office of "The Greyfriars Herald"', and again in the 1922 Annual, 'Billy Bunter'

takes command in the Kitchen', an amusing picture, with Wun Lung looking vastly different to C. H. Chapman's 'Little Chinese'. These were both sepia illustrations.

J. F. BURRELL (Bristol): I was interested in the mention of Ninian Elliott in the article "The Thirty-Nine Chaps". He is a very shadowy figure, little being known about him except that he shared a study No. 5 with Smith Minor. Oddly, however, he reappears in the Skilton hardback "Billy Bunter's Barring-Out", 1948. He plays in goal in a seven-a-side football match.

* * * * *

DESCRIBING THE ADVENTURES OF THE MOST WONDERFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD.



The Woman with the Black Heart is now probably one of the best known characters in the world. Her thrilling exploits have delighted readers in all countries where the English language is spoken, and though she is stern enough in her dealing with wrong-doers, yet so unerring is her instinct on the side of right and justice that all who have heard of her love her.

"The Woman With the Black Heart" was the overall title for a long series of stories which appeared in "Fun & Fiction" not long before the First World War.

She sounds as though she might be a villainess of the type portrayed by Theda Bara on the silent screen or by Charles Garvice in his popular novels of early in the century. But actually she was a kind of female Robin Hood, out to right wrongs; much dreaded by wicked landlords and much loved by noble-hearted convicts. The Black Heart was on her forehead - possibly a birthmark, or

maybe she was tattooed.

Who wrote the tales I have no idea, but they were gorgeously imaginative, thrilling and sensational to a degree, and they are great fun to read in bed before putting out the light, all these years later. The illustrator was either Louis Smythe or George Wakefield.

* * * * *

STILL ON THAT "TOP-HEAVY REMOVE"

from Leslie Susans

I was interested in your editorial in the July issue "The Top-heavy Remove'. As a youth I used to read the Magnet regularly between the years 1928-1931 and the S.O.L. featuring the Greyfriars stories. I'm afraid I was never really a St. Jim's fan; the Greyfriars characters always seemed more clearly defined to me although no doubt many would disagree.

I noticed in those earlier days that the members of the Greyfriars Remove must have totalled around forty which is of course unrealistic. I assume that Frank Richards left many of them waiting in the wings as it were in case he needed one of them to feature in a future story.

After the second World War I was agreeably surprised to discover that the hardback Bunter Books were being produced and I think I have purchased the lot.

In those publications I notice Frank Richard states that the Remove comprised nearly 30 members and in one volume which features a form election I think he accounts for 29. Actually in the Bunter books I think 31 are named. This excludes a brief mention of Bulstrode in one of the later books which was obviously completed by another writer after Richards' death. He certainly mentions Bolsover who I understand dropped out of the picture some years before and at least once Elliot is named who I believe had left years earlier. Having created 14 studies in the Remove and as some of them were occupied by three or more members it would appear that a large number of characters would be needed to fill them all as it hardly seems possible that some of them would be left untenanted. On the other hand he was very economical in the use of characters in some of the other forms especially the Upper Fourth and Shell.

THE CRUISE OF THE BUNTER STREET PIRATES by W.O.G. Lofts

Someone once wrote that "the air was thick with Bunter's around the start of our present century, and how right he was!

Apart from the now world famous Fat Owl who made his initial appearance in February 1908, 'Frank Richards' as 'Martin Clifford' had a light-fingered tramp by the name of Bill Bunter in the first Skimpole tale in *The Gem* in 1907. Under his real name of Charles Hamilton, our author featured Dame Bunter in charge of the tuck shop at Cliveden School in *The Boys' Herald* in 1906.

Then there was of course the highly intriguing other Billy Bunter who appeared some eight months before *The Magnet* of Blackminster School in the $\frac{1}{2}$ d *Vanguard* written by H. Phillpott Wright - certainly not our writer that has been discussed quite a lot in the past, whilst Sidney Drew another well known writer had a boy called Bunter in his school of Ranthorpe in the *Boys' Realm* of 1905.

Recently however, I have come across another Bunter story that appeared many years earlier - in the *Boys' Realm* in No. 26, 1902, entitled 'The Cruise of the Bunter Street Pirates' written by 'Captain Handyman' - this hiding the identity of Gilbert Floyd - but better known as the 'Duncan Storm' of *Boys' Friend* Bombay Castle series. His theme of boys being on a school floating ship a similar theme - taken up later by 'Owen Conquest' in his Benbow stories in the *Greyfriars/Boys' Herald* in 1919.

In this short run-of-the-mill tale it features Dick Bunter of *Bunter Street* who with his gang become pirates. Bunter is mentioned so much that the author seemed obsessed with the name, there even being a Bunter Dock! Certainly as a genealogist I know that the surname of Bunter is one of the most rarest one can find. It does have several meanings in various Dictionaries, ranging from Geological terms such as 'Bunter Beds' - or 'brightly coloured or variegated', to even a Bunter being 'a low class, women of some ill repute' - though I am certain it had originally German meanings.

Bunter however was a household word from around 1885 when there was a medical product called 'Bunter's Nervine' that claimed to cure everything from coughs to toothache, and quite possibly authors had this so popular name in mind for their characters. A few years ago I had some interesting correspondence with Roy Plomley - an avid *Magnet* reader - of B.B.C. Desert Island Discs fame - who told me that Dr. Bunter who invented the formula was his grandfather.

It would be most interesting to learn if any C.D. readers with their world wide connections have ever met or known a person with the surname of Bunter. Only last year whilst visiting an air-line office just off Picadilly in London, I was highly intrigued to see on some executive's door the name of 'David Bunter'.

After several weeks of deliberating whether and how to approach him to maybe hear the history of the name, and his reaction to the famous fat boy of Greyfriars (that is if he knew about him) my problem was solved though disappointingly by the air-line offices being closed down by the next time I passed the premises. So I have yet to meet a real life Bunter!

* * * * *

DOWN TO A DOZEN?

by Simon Garrett

Most Hamiltonians will have enjoyed the recent discussions on the true number count of the Remove. Ernest Baldock's interesting article suggests that by 1939 there were about a dozen and a half regulars, and I think that's about right but the real hard core amounts to little more than a footer team.

These would be: The Famous Five, Mauleverer, Bunter and Todd, Vernon-Smith and Redwing, Hazledene and Skinner. Right through the Golden Age, most of the real drama consisted of power politics within this select circle.

In the second rank, to complete Mr. Baldock's basic cast of regulars, I would tentatively include: Bolsover, Dutton, Fish, Linley, Newland, Snoop, Stott, Wibley and Wun Lung. Of these, Dutton, Snoop and Stott are little more than appendages to hard-core characters.

All others, at least in the 1930s, were not much more than names, although many of them did appear frequently. Mostly, their role was just to wave the flag for their countries of origin. Oddly enough, Hamilton did bring back both Field and Brown in the postwar hard-back era - both in holiday stories.

Even more surprisingly, Eliot and Smith Minor were mentioned in "Bunter does his best" (1954), but that was when Wharton was struggling to raise a footer team and both skipper and author were scraping the bottom of the barrel.

On a related theme, can some proud possessor of a full set of Magnets give us an authoritative history of the Remove studies and their varying occupants? A Herculean task, no doubt, especially in the early years, but also, surely, a labour of love?

HAPPY HOURS UNLIMITED

BUT FOR BUNTER

by

David Hughes

Hardback - with dust jacket £8.95

To be published on 22nd September, 1985

(as reviewed in the August C.D. by Brian Doyle)

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HAVE YOU SEEN THE ORIGINAL GREYFRIARS? By Betty Hopton

As a native of Carmarthen town in West Wales, and a True and Blue Friar. I thought I would bring to your attention a fairly recent archeological find that should be of interest to all Greyfriars fans, that is a genuine, lost Franciscan Friary known as Carmarthen Greyfriars. Could this be the true origin of that infamous seat of Bunter learning?

Carmarthen town is a very ancient Celtic town, built on a high hill overlooking the river Towy and it's valley, running roughly East to West. In fact the Romans built a fort on the hill, and called it MORIDVNM.

The modern name Carmarthen also has other ancient and mystical connections. The English name of Carmarthen is a contraction of the Welsh name CAERFYRDDIN, which means the castle or fort of Merlin the famous Magician, and the town has many other connections with this famous legend, such as the Old Oak, which has been protected for many centuries, because Merlin predicted that "When the Old Oak shall fall, so may also ye olde towne of CAERFYRDDIN".

However, the main point of interest to us, is that the town of CAERFYRDDIN also boasts an original, genuine Franciscan Friary,

known as the Carmarthen Greyfriars, whose initial foundations go back to 1270 or a little earlier, under the hand of either Edward the 1st or his brother Edmund. The building contained a Spectacular near completed stained glass window, which has been dated to around 1250 to 1280. The Greyfriars Friary almost became a Cathedral in 1536, but Bishop Barlow failed with his aim and the Friary continued to collapse.

In 1538 this famed seat of Welsh literature was closed by the King during his dissolution of monasteries, and in 1543 the Mayor and Alderman wrote to Henry VIII, in an attempt to save Carmarthen's Greyfriars, ranciscan Friary. This resulted in it's conversion into a grammar school, which unfortunately closed in 1547, due to the death of it's founder Thomas Lloyd. In 1644 during the Civil War, a massive ring of fortifications was thrown around Caerfyrddin, some of which can still be seen today.

Unfortunately the Friary then became a lost piece of history for several centuries and almost 350 years have passed since the Friary disappeared. It was not until 1983 that the Dyfed Archeological Trust began it's exciting excavation which has unearthed so much of this marvellous Greyfriars ranciscan Friary, details can be seen by the reconstructed diagram.

Have YOU seen the Original Greyfriars? I MAY HAVE.

* * * * *

TREVOR WIGNALL (From a C.D. Editorial of 15 years ago)

Like you, I occasionally enjoy myself by browsing over old books. The other day I was turning over the pages of one, in a second-hand book shop, and I came on the words: "My payment for Sexton Blakes was £50 on the nail".

I bought the book which was, apparently, the autobiography of a writer named Trevor Wignall. Before the first world war, he seemed to be doing some work for the Amalgamated Press. In fact, he evidently did plenty of work, and he comments that such a large quantity of his work was accepted because he was never in any great hurry to be paid for it. "There was money to spare in Fleetway House", he writes reminiscently - but still they liked to keep their writers waiting for payments due.

"Back wanted to know if I was any good at boys' stories. I said I was. I had never written one, but that was a detail. He then asked if I could rip off a serial of 80,000 words in a couple of weeks or so. Back did not give me an open-and-shut commission,

but he did state that he would receive me at Fleetway House the following Tuesday, when I was to produce the opening instalment. I faced him on the Tuesday with the instalment in my left hand and the remainder of the tale in my coat. I had written the lot between Friday night and Tuesday morning".

That was the beginning of Wignall's association with the Amalgamated Press. It did not take me anywhere, he says, but it did much more than pay my rent. "Back pushed me off on J. N. Pentelow, who knew more about top-class cricket than he did about running the Boys' Realm."

One gets the impression that Wignall wrote plenty of Sexton Blake tales, but I can only come across two credited to him in the Sexton Blake Catalogue - "The Japanese Detective" and "The House With the Red Blinds" - both published in 1920. But the impression given by the autobiography is that this work for the A.P. was done about 1913. It could be, of course, that Wignall wrote stories for the Union Jack or other papers, and he might have extended these stories for 1920 publication. No doubt our Blake experts know all the answers to this little query, and what puzzles me may be quite clear to them.

WHAT'S IN A MIDDLE NAME?

by Len Wormull

The single name was way out in front in the Greyfriars Stakes, with middle names well down the field. (Come to think of it, are middle names really necessary? Mine's been an also ran all its life.) The real winner was Frank Richards, whose skill in picking the right combination of names paid off handsomely - and for backers like us. Who knows, he could have been on a loser with Bob Wharton, Harry Cherry, Tom Vernon-Smith, Herbert Redwing, and other long-shots. Then there were those middle names. What if he had got his priorities wrong - would it have mattered? Just for an experiment, let's shuffle a few names into wrong place and find out. But a word or warning. Beware of bogus parents - nothing was sacred, not even here!

ASSHETON (pronounced Ashton) Gerald Loder: Almost certainly bogus. 'Assheton Loder picked up his ashplant, and strode to the door.' Irritating, unworkable, and un-caddish sounding. Sorry about that, all you Gerald's out there.

WOODHEAD Arthur Carne: Another curiosity. 'Woodhead Carne, of the Sixth Form, glanced round quickly before entering the Cross Keys.' Open to nickname ridicule. Joey Banks to landlord: 'Here comes young Woodenhead again.' Either spelling, this one for the "chop".

JAMES Horace Coker: A 'Jimmy Coker' smacks of a sunny disposition, a trait fundamentally wrong for the character. It was being so serious that kept him going - as a favourite funny man. And laughter is a serious business. Ask any comic. Let's give Horace his "remove" - back. And for dear aunt Judy's sake.

GEORGE William Bunter: No chance of a take-over. A good make-weight name to round him off, as it were. Georgie goring a snaffled cake? Perish the thought. As Frank said, Billy suggested itself. As befitting a celebrity, Bunter was accorded his name in full, in the manner of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Ralph Reckness Cardew, of St. Jim's.

TUCKLESS Samuel Bunter: Obviously an editorial joke on the Bunter gormandising, which needed no self-advertisement. In fact, the tuck-fullness was terrific, as Inky would say. If we had to have him, then Sammy it was.

TARLETON Fisher Fish: Slabsided and lacks euphony. Tarleton best suited initially and with emphasis, as in the jingle 'Fisher T. Fish'. The Yanks liked this method, Franklin D. Roosevelt being a shining example. 'Fishy' best for time saving, and time was money to the 'Shylock of Greyfriars'. Yes sirree.

HASTINGS Peter Todd: Origin unknown. Fine for the practising lawyer, but unsuited to the schoolboy apprentice. Unusual plea from study-mate Bunter: 'Hastings, old Chap'. Let's "Bar" this one in favour of Peter or Toddy.

THEOPHILUS Alonzo Todd: Used editorially, doubtful F.R. Long-winded like its owner. 'Theophilus The Great' too much like a Greek warrior. Too "strong" for our meek and mild duffer. Besides, Uncle Benjamin approves Lonzy.

THEOPHILUS Frederick Trotter: Surprisingly genuine F.R. Below stairs, the other servants chipped him about it, and he would have preferred Tom, Jack, or Dick. It all came to light in "Taking Up Trotter", where an imposing name was required. The one and only time a middle name was cleverly moved into first place. Or was it invented just for the occasion? Other times we knew him as Fred.

Of course, if you were titled like Mauleverer, you could dispense with forenames altogether. We knew him as 'Lord', 'His lordship', and just plain 'Mauly'. Lest you have forgotten, his other names were Herbert Plantaganet. Which reminds me. Sorry to disturb you, Mauly, but have you ever been known to say YES to anything?...
'Yaas, of course, dear boy.'

Acknowledgments: Peter McCall's Greyfriars Guide; Magnet and Holiday Annual "Who's Who. Taking Up Trotter (Magnet 1010).