

# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

## ANNUAL

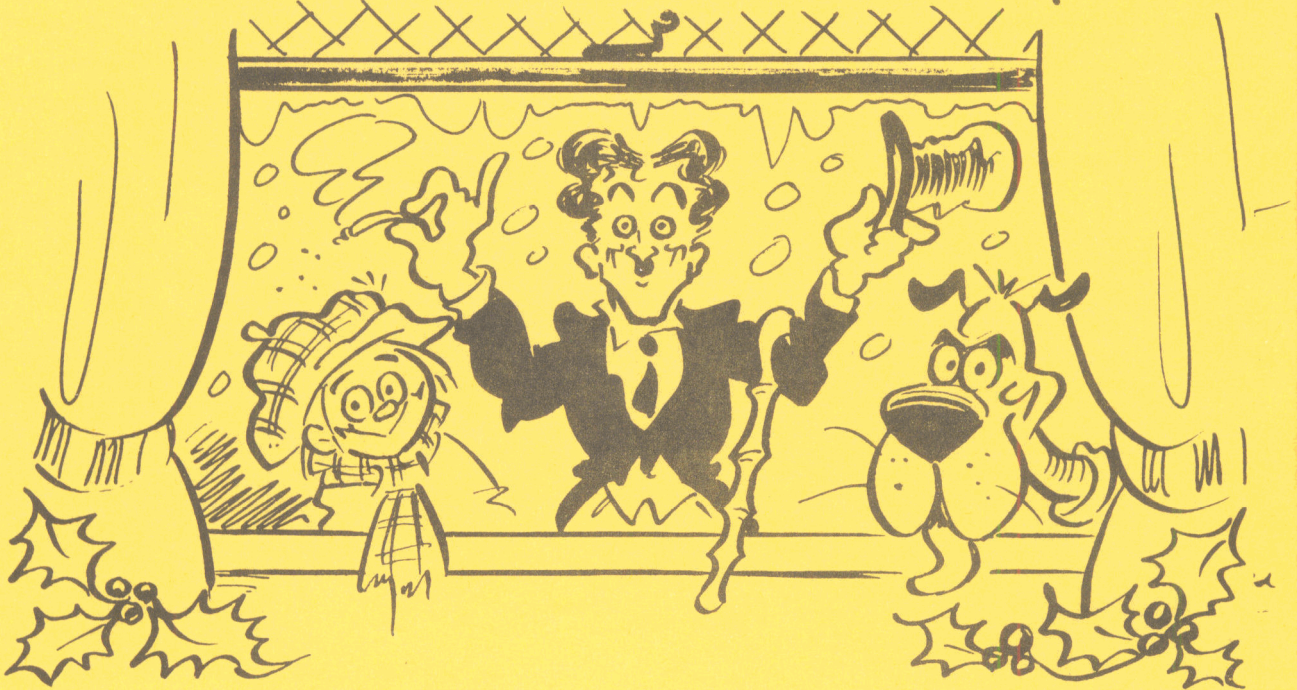
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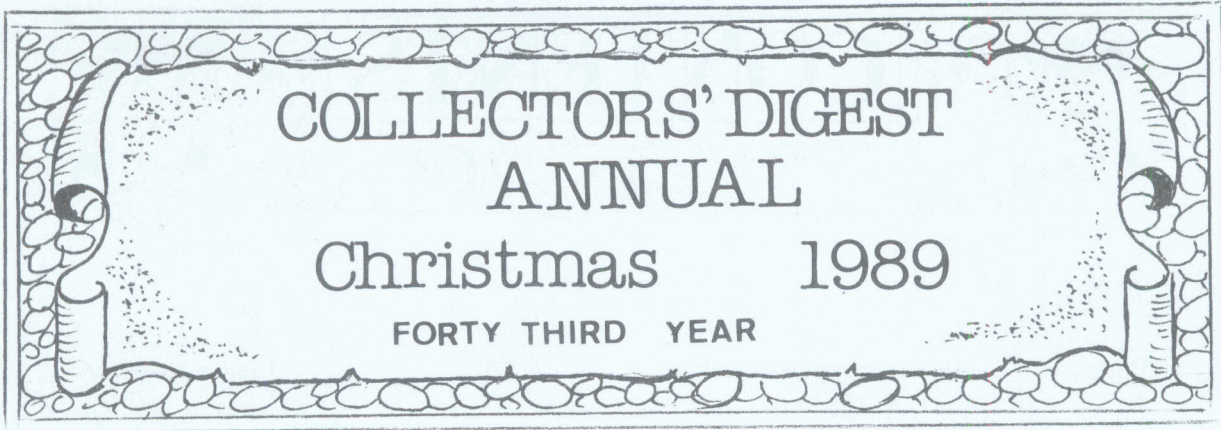
# Happy Xmas

GOT ROOM ON YOUR SHELF FOR US THIS CHRISTMAS?



(PICTURE BY TERRY WAKEFIELD)

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Kent. BR3 2PY

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### FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

Once again it is my very real pleasure to present you with a new Annual which, I hope, will add greatly to your Christmastime joys.

As always, Henry Webb has provided our striking cover drawing, and headings for most of the articles. Our artist from across the Atlantic, Bob Whiter, has added pictorial embellishments and so too has the late and much missed Terry Wakefield. My predecessor editor, Eric Fayne, has once more dipped into his rich fund of memories and written about some of the earlier days of our hobby while our other authors - too numerous to mention individually - have between them covered a wonderfully wide-ranging field of interest.

We are indeed fortunate in having so many enthusiastic contributors. This Annual seems to me to be one of our best ever - but perhaps I feel (and say) that every year! I should like to take this opportunity of thanking everyone who has helped to produce this year's offering, including the staff of our helpful printers in York. Most of all I extend my warm thanks to you, the readers, upon whose loyal support both for the monthly C.D. and the Annual I can always rely.

May you all be blessed with a right Merry Christmas and a truly Happy, Peaceful and Prosperous New Year.

*Mary Cadogan.*

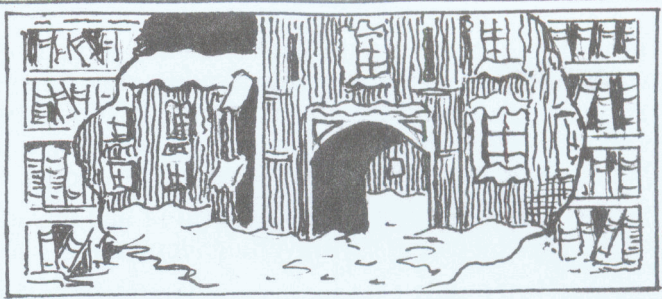
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# CONTENTS

Pages 3 - 9	Christmas Interlude .. .. .	Leslie Rowley
Pages 10 - 14	A Rift in the Lute .. .. .	Esmond Kadish
Pages 15 - 24	William and Perfect Cleanliness .. .. .	David Schutte
Pages 25 - 26	Those Editors Couldn't Half Tell 'Em .. .. .	Len Wormull
Pages 27 - 28	Gulls and Greyfriars .. .. .	H. Webb
Pages 29 - 31	The Man with Many Faces .. .. .	Len Hawkey
Pages 32 - 36	Bingo .. .. .	Ernest Holman
Pages 37 - 39	Three Cheers for Wycliffe .. .. .	C.H. Churchill
Pages 40 - 45	One Boy's War .. .. .	E.G. Hammond
Pages 46 - 47	Holiday Reading .. .. .	Norman Wright
Pages 48 - 49	Those Eccentric Leagues and Societies .. .. .	W.O.G. Lofts
Pages 50 - 52	Coker and Handforth .. .. .	Maurice Hall
Page 53	Guess this mixed bag of Greyfriars, Rookwood and St. Jim's Characters .. .. .	Bob Whiter
Pages 54 - 56	My First Pip and Squeak Annual .. .. .	Ray Hopkins
Pages 57 - 65	The Silent Three and a Christmas Mystery .. .. .	Marion Waters
Page 66	When the London Club came to Surbiton .. .. .	Eric Fayne
Pages 67 - 69	Foreigners at Hamilton's Schools .. .. .	Roger Jenkins
Pages 70 - 71	St. Frank's in London's Theatreland .. .. .	Jack Greaves
Pages 72 - 73	George Figgins and Cousin Ethel .. .. .	Bob Whiter
Pages 74 - 76	Greyfriars Reflections .. .. .	E. Baldock
Pages 77 - 81	Those Christmasses with Tiger Tim .. .. .	Margery Woods
Page 82	Happy Hours Unlimited .. .. .	
Pages 83 - 84	Let us not forget Sexton Blake .. .. .	Jim Cook
Pages 85 - 89	William's Television Show .. .. .	Brian Doyle
Page 90	Norman Shaw .. .. .	
Pages 91 - 93	Swallows-and-Amazons-For-Ever .. .. .	Dennis L. Bird
Pages 94 - 97	More Nelson Lees for Christmas .. .. .	E.B. Grant Mc-Pherson
Page 98	The Greyfriars Club .. .. .	
Page 99	Answers to Guess this Mixed Bag of Greyfriars, Rookwood and St. Jim's Characters .. .. .	
Pages 100 - 104	The Beginnings of the Champion .. .. .	D.J. O'Leary
Pages 105 - 109	Valerie Drew - Girl Detective .. .. .	Mary Cadogan
Page 110	Howard Baker Press Ltd. .. .. .	

# Christmas Interlude

By Leslie Rowley.



I had given an energetic tug at the ancient bell-pull that was set in the even more ancient pillars of the school gate. It seemed ages since the little local train had set me down at the village station and, having uttered its sibilant gasp of tortured steam, had clanked its reluctant way into the Stygian gloom. A solitary porter, standing under a solitary "pop-popping" gas lamp, had relieved me of my ticket and slammed the barrier behind me before I could enquire my way.

The hour was late, and the village I had passed through was deserted and silent. Looking above the shuttered shop fronts I had just been able to make out a familiar name or two as I made my way up the narrow street and out into the confines of a country lane. Instinct rather than a sense of direction, prompted my footsteps and, for once, instinct had served me well. As I waited at the gateway for an answer to my summons, I had reflected on the circumstances that had brought me to this particular corner of Kent. A master at the school had advertised for a research assistant to help him over the Christmas vacation, and I had applied because the idea of spending the holiday at such a famous place had appealed to me. Like most men who have not attended a famous school as a boy, I was curious and anxious to enjoy an experience that had eluded me. My application had been accepted, and I had intended arriving at a much earlier hour, but a snow drift on the line long after the train had left Charing Cross had caused a lengthy delay and I had missed an earlier connection for the branch line.

A sudden shaft of light from the porter's lodge, augmented by a glowing storm lantern held aloft, had brought me back from my reflections. The lantern had approached, and its guardian, having reached the gates, had regarded me with a far from friendly eye. He was crusty of visage and gnarled of feature and, when he had opened the gates, his hoary voice had complained with the creaking of the hinges, as his breath had carried with it more than a suspicion of the product for which the name "Gordon" is renowned.

"Fine time of night to fetch a man from his bed. Bad enough during term time when those young rips break bounds and a man is turned out to nab 'em. 'Ow's a man to get some sleep, as I sez to the 'ead, when a man's dragged out after midnight, I sez. Why, its 'ard on a man that's ---- Oh! thank 'ee kindly sir!" His change of attitude had, no doubt, been influenced by the florin I had pressed into his hand, and which he had promptly transferred to his trouser pocket, before leading me, bobbing lantern held aloft before him, toward the darker shadows ahead. Feeling something akin to the page in Good King Wenceslas, I had followed on, through a magnificent avenue of elms, till we were confronted by the School buildings themselves.



A few moments later I had come face to face with my new employer, a tall, lean man, whose eyes had a steely, piercing gaze that had made me feel that I may not have washed the back of my neck that morning! However, his greeting was friendly enough after I had apologised and explained the reason for my late arrival. The porter had been dismissed and had gone willingly to seek his repose and I had felt sure that my employer would just as willingly seek his own bed but, no, I must be hungry and, whilst the housekeeper had left only a cold collation for me, he would heat some coffee for me which would dispel the icy chill of my travelling.

I ate my supper in the room that had been allotted to me - a study belonging to a Sixth Form prefect. It was small, but cosy enough and some thoughtful person had lit a fire, the remaining embers of which threw a ruddy glow against the dark oak panelling. In a curtained alcove was a bed, with the covers invitingly turned back and, having unpacked and washed, I was soon between the sheets and sound asleep with having given only a cursory glance at a folded issue of "Sporting Snips" I had found wedged in the back of the chest of drawers.

The grey light of a winter's morning had intruded through a gap in the window curtain when the strident call of my travelling alarm clock had brought me back to consciousness.



I had pulled back the curtain further in order to gaze upon the world outside. It was an attractive picture! Immediately below the window, what I was later to learn was the Sixth Form green, lay with its covering of snow. Beyond was the Quadrangle, on either side of which the School buildings stood, every roof, every ledge and every buttress carrying its burden of winter. Nature had played the artist, not only with the architect's fulfilment of long ago, but also with the silvered tracery on every branch and bough! Long as I could have gazed upon that scene I dare not. Schoolmasters are often whales on punctuality and, from what I had seen so far, I judged my employer was no exception!

Over the meal that the Housekeeper had set for us I was given an outline of the work that lay ahead. My companion was engaged in the writing of a history of the School, a task that he had begun long years ago but which had recently suffered a set back. A boy so lost to propriety; so obsessed with wretchedness, had poured a mixture of gum and ink over that precious manuscript! The author had salvaged what he could, but a massive wad of that manuscript has been ruined and the care and toil of many months been set at nought. Had the villain been discovered, I enquired. No, I was told, but there would be the most rigorous of enquiries at the beginning of the next term. Expulsion faced the culprit, if discovered, but the look on the manuscript owner's face indicated that something more violent - like boiling in oil - should feature on the agenda! It certainly was an incident of vandalism and wanton destruction, and I had much sympathy with the man who had worked so hard and diligently at his task, only to find it so treated by a wretch so lost to reason and decency.

Now that loss had to be made good. Free of many of the tasks and responsibilities of a form master during term time, a certain leeway could be made up. With the aid of an assistant, the time he would have spent on research could be halved. For my task was to check and confirm the many references and cross-references contained in the body of the text and in the footnotes thereto, and to build therefrom the necessary index, without which a work of that nature would be incomplete.

It is for others to assess the industry and devotion which I applied to my task. My hours were spent in the School Library, at a vast table littered (if such a term may be applied to such priceless items) with leather-bound tomes and scrolls of parchment and vellum. There were plans of the buildings that existed before the school itself. There were black letter manuscripts, cracked and faded by age. At times my eyes grew weary either from close work or from trying to decypher some illegible writing. Whenever it seemed that I might flag or falter, a word from the schoolmaster historian was enough to infect me with refreshed enthusiasm and I would apply myself to my duties with renewed vigour.

My interest in the School developed into something warm and close as the days went by. As I read and re-read the precious words that formed the chronicles of this ancient foundation, the more I became of one mind with my patron who had opened the door of such enchantment for me. He, in his turn, displayed a kindly interest in my well-being. His austere countenance belied a friendly heart and, if ever I was in error as I often was, he displayed a patience that would have been the envy of Job himself.

One night, when the hour was late and the winter winds lashed round the walls and sang down the chimneys; when the snow had flung itself incessantly against the window panes, and the distant elms strove to make their complaining heard above the elements, I sat back to rest my body and my eyes. On the table before me lay several scrolls from which the appallingly close script looked blackly back at me. Time enough tomorrow, I thought, as I gathered them up to return them to their resting place. As I did so, however, one folio - as though reluctant to accompany its fellows - fell to the floor.

Having put the rest of the documents to bed, I returned and picked up the one that had fallen. It appeared to be a continuation page from a longer manuscript, for the writing on it began and ended in mid-sentence. In my eyes, the hand was a crabbed but scholarly one, and the phrasing and spelling were those used in the eighteenth century. Shorn of these peculiarities, the text read as follows:-

*"administering of the physic proving of no avail, it was decided that Master Septimus Clarke should be returned to his parents so that they may consider placing him at some other school or, failing which, to seek his committal to an asylum. I am not at ease with what has been done for reasons which I now set down.*

*"firstly, that Master Clarke has hitherto been of sound intelligence and has shown a sober approach to his studies, acquitting himself well in History and Greek.*

*Secondly, that among the records appear other accounts witnessing like appearances of the Prior Anselm at or near the place given in this instance.*

*Lastly, that no evidence has been shown as to how this affliction could have come upon the said Master Clarke through a more orthodox or earthly agency.*

*It is common amongst our beliefs that Prior Anselm took his great secret to his grave and that many men count as true that his spirit still guards the..."*

There the writing ended and I was left wondering what "great secret" Prior Anselm had taken with him. As to poor Septimus Clarke, I found myself hoping that he had managed to escape being committed to an asylum. Had he really come across the restless shade of the Prior, and where had this encounter happened? I turned the document over. On its reverse was a roughly etched plan and, although it conveyed nothing to me, it might well make sense to my employer. But the hour was late, and I would place it before him on the morrow. I put the paper away with its fellows.

I quitted the Library and, putting on a scarf and overcoat, left by Masters' Lobby. The thick oaken door closed behind me with a gentle thud as I turned to bow my head against the driving snow. Midnight had long since bioomed from the clock tower, but I was not ready for sleep. As my feet crunched the white crystals beneath them, my lungs took in a bounty of fresh air. It was a relief to be clear of four walls; to get rid of a few mental cobwebs and to bring some warmth and colour to my cheeks. But I took care to keep close to the school buildings, and to avoid the crumbling masonry of the cloisters and tower. One introduction to Prior Anselm was enough for the present. After all, he belonged to the past. Or did he?



"Undoubtedly the hand of Dr. Hugo Catterhall, who bridged the closing years of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries!"

It was the following morning and I had shown my "find" and asked my questions after we had finished our breakfasts.

"Catterhall was a man before his time, and must be reckoned with the great Arnold when one thinks of the reforms that the latter introduced. The good work begun by Catterhall was

negated by his successor, Selsden Savage, a tyrant who was known to award fifty lashes for the merest infraction of school rules; but I digress. To return to Catterhall is to return to a humane man with a concern for his scholars, as is shown in the case of Septimus Clarke. As a conscientious Headmaster, Catterhall would have been steeped in the School's traditions amongst which he must have encountered mention of the legendary treasure that the good Anselm is supposed to have hidden. Legend has it that the brave man still keeps watch over the gold and silver plate and other precious items that were in his charge: but a historian must deal in facts, my dear sir, and I would advise you to do likewise. Treasure - if treasure there still be - has eluded all search from that initiated by Thomas Cromwell's commissioners at the time of the Dissolution to the inquisitive schoolboys of the twentieth century. Now, I feel that we should be applying ourselves to the task in hand!"

I was disappointed. How could this man, with his love for the School, with his love and dedication to chronicling its very history, dismiss in such a casual manner the possibility of precious treasure lying beneath our feet? For once I found difficulty in "applying myself to the task in hand". As I sat at my desk making notes, the letters of the various words seemed to regroup themselves into such words as "Anselm", "treasure", and "gold". Once or twice I received a sharp glance and was aware of disapproval in those steely eyes. Having no reason at all for displeasing their owner, I mustered my thoughts to give my work the concentration it deserved.

There was a sense of unreality already surrounding me. The vast building, empty and silent from the sounds of term-time, the meals prepared by a housekeeper whom I had yet to meet, and the claims of history that reached out from every parchment that I handled and every word that I read. It was heady wine for one such as myself, and it was with relief that I lay down my pen on that particular day. To my surprise, my taskmaster greeted me with the faintest trace of a smile on his angular features.

"My Remington has developed a slight fault and, until it is seen by the mechanic tomorrow, I can make no suitable progress. You may be interested in having a look round the School. Research can be boring with no respite at all, and I would be pleased to show you round after tea."

I had an especial interest in visiting the junior studies, and my guide took me to those of his own boys in the Remove Form. Character takes shape early at a public school, and there was evidence of this in each of the rooms we visited. Study No. 1 was one of the tidiest, although the bulging ottoman that doubled as a window seat, indicated that the tidiness had been achieved at short notice. The books on the bookshelves shared their space with dog-eared folders labelled "Footer Fixtures" and "Duties of a Head Boy". Study No. 4 was extravagantly and opulently furnished with a stub of a cigarette in the grate at odds with a book on seamanship that rested on the table. A frown creased the brow of my conductor on these travels and this intensified as we continued on our way. In study No. 7 our attention was drawn to an armchair that had seen better days, its springs obviously having been tested to their utmost, and a small ocean of crumbs lay on the carpet upon which the chair stood. Study No. 11, and the Remove master demonstrated a strong sense of smell, and opened the window so that the wind from the North Sea could blow away the traces of stale tobacco smoke. There was some untidiness in Study 13 as well. The top of the bookcase was graced by the presence of a single football boot, to which the mud of the football pitch still remained. In the coal scuttle a pair of boxing gloves inelegantly reposed, and I searched the Remove master's face for further sign of disapproval. To the contrary, I thought I detected the faint suspicion of a smile, but, doubtless, much of what we had seen would be remembered on the first day of the new term!

From the high windows of the Lower Fourth dormitory one could see a distant gleam of silver where the English Channel beat its waves against the cliffs. The room was almost Spartan in its furnishing of thirty two iron bedsteads, arranged in rows on each side of the dormitory's length, and furnished with a chair and wooden locker apiece. My imagination brought to mind the early morning chaos as rising bell stridently sounded, and the forbidden pillow fights and dormitory 'spreads' by the flickering light of candle ends, or perhaps some shadowy figure, silent in the sound of slumbering schoolfellows, as some misguided youth left to keep a forbidden rendezvous.

I was shown the Remove box room, behind the wall of which, I was told, lay a secret passage that connected by a long and tortuous route to the hollow of an ancient oak. At my



request we paid a visit to the vaults, the cold, dank depths of which sprawled their arched caverns beneath the floors of the school buildings. A maze of narrow passages led away into darkness beyond the limits of our electric lamp and the wishes of my guide, who told me that many of them remained unexplored and were considered to be dangerous from the risk of falling masonry. I mentioned the possibility that the good Anselm may have hidden his 'treasure' somewhere in the unknown limits of that cold and inhospitable labyrinth, but the Remove master made no reply until we were in the reassuring comfort of his study.

"Apart from the cloisters and the tower - both ruined by the advance of time and the cruel hand of man - little remains of the original buildings above ground. But the area has an atmosphere that acts upon the fanciful imagination. A boy of my form imagined he witnessed some spectral visitation, but it transpired that he had grossly over-eaten a variety of foodstuffs that he had pilfered from another boy's study. Of course, I did my best to dispel his illusions and to curb his dishonesty. There is a hidden staircase behind the panelling of this very room, secured from the investigation of curious schoolboys, I might add. There is a hidden cell beneath the flagstones of the ruined tower and another was discovered under the floor of a nearby cottage that was comparatively recently used to gain entry to the school by an Old Boy who had chosen dishonest ways!"

It had been an interesting tour of the school, both above and below ground. After I had left him, I made my way back to the Library and, a few moments later, I was studying the sketch on the reverse of the document dealing with the future of poor Septimus Clarke. I must confess that there was temptation in my breast - a temptation that tended to push the tenets of etiquette aside - to go in search of Anselm's treasure myself. It would be easy enough to obtain the key to the vaults from where it hung in the Remove master's study, but a careful study of the roughly drawn plan gave no hint that it indicated an area of the vaults. The thought of re-visiting those chill and damp lower regions on my own was discouraging, to say the least, and with it was the feeling that I was betraying a trust. The treasure was safe as far as I was concerned, but it was intriguing to have found a clue and not to test it.

I did not sleep well that night! In fact it was doubtful if I slept at all! Every time my eyes closed, my imagination brought from the depths of a restless mind a dark picture of the old prior, whose glittering eyes carried a sombre message of doom to any who thought fit to seek out his well-hidden hoard. I recognised, in that terrible stare, a personal warning not to intrude. If it was a nightmare, it is one which I have no wish to experience again. It was not only the intensity of Anselm's (for I am convinced it was he) gaze, but the icy atmosphere that emanated from his presence. Long before the first grey rays of dawn had penetrated the room, I had risen from my bed, the disturbed linen of which lay on the floor, where the twisting and turning of my uneasy frame had thrown it. But was it a nightmare? Or had that good man come from out of the shadows of the unknown to repeat a warning to me that he had given to others down through centuries that had passed since he met his mortal end at the orders of those he had so courageously defied?

My task-master was in the Library before me, and happily reported that his Remington was now back in service, due to the expertise of a mechanic who had been more punctual than either of us. Before work for the day began he had something further to say on the Septimus Clarke document.

"I have been talking to a Governor of the School on the matter, and he is most interested in your 'find' and would like to see it for himself, and has invited the two of us to be his guests for Christmas Day and Boxing Day. I have told him that I would discuss his kind offer with you, but I hope that you will accept. He is an Old Boy himself, and currently has a nephew at the School - my Head Boy, in fact! I am sure he will make us both very welcome, as will his sister, his nephew, and the boy's friends who are staying with him. It should prove a most pleasant break for the two of us, and mixing with young company should prove refreshing and stimulate us for our return to our tasks afterwards."

I gratefully signified my agreement. The meals supplied by the invisible housekeeper were good - extremely good - but they lacked the seasonal touch. Roast turkey, with all the trimmings; Christmas pudding and mince pies, had a "wild call, a clear call, that could not be denied". It would also give the dinner jacket, that I had fortuitously brought with me, a much needed airing! My 'discovery' of the Clarke document had not only merited more official recognition but the entrée to Christmas festivities at a country house.

In the days that followed, I applied myself to the task with renewed endeavour but, meticulous as I strived to be, I came across no further reference to the good Anselm or his treasure. Nevertheless, the progress we made earned more than a nod of approbation from my schoolmaster historian.

"We have almost made good that part of the manuscript which that wretched boy destroyed, and you, my dear sir, will be free to return to your home at the New Year!"

This plain statement of fact rather dulled my good spirits. I had not known this man or the school long, yet it seemed an age since my arrival. Of his opinion of me, I had little evidence. My own opinion of him had grown in a respect and a regard that touched the edge of friendship. My feeling for the school in which I had, for so short a while, lived, moved and had my being, had grown into one of affection. When the time came to leave, I would be very sorry to go.

On Christmas Eve, our kind host's car arrived to bear us away to his home in Surrey. The wintry landscape with its filigree of frost and rime, and its carpet of white, sped by as the car quickly covered its journey. Then we were through gates and up the drive to the doorway of the house that was to be our home for the next two days!

The hospitable warmth of our host, his sister, and the rest of the house party was as apparent at the time of our arrival as it was at the time of our departure. But what a lot happened in between!

A genial man with a military bearing, the master of the house took us to the library so that we could speak in private of the Septimus Clarke 'document'. Over a glass of sherry, the master of the house handed over the document for inspection.

"I will keep this document, gentlemen." Our host moved across to a wall safe, "and place it before the board when we meet early in the New Year. But, first, may I exact from you a pledge of discretion in the matter? If the name of the School is noised abroad, it will draw to it the very kind of attention we wish to avoid. Imagine the School being under siege by the Press. Imagine every boy being stopped and questioned at the beginning of the new term. The pressure could be tremendous on both scholars and staff!"

It seemed an easy enough matter to agree to at the time but, later when I had quit the school, I wrote to the governor of the school and asked if he could agree to the writing of an article from which all names of persons and places were absent. That agreement was forthcoming, and this account is the result. I do so hope that I have been successful in cloaking the school and its staff and pupils in anonymity, insuring that the school would be denied any intrusion by the media.

To revert to the house party, at which I was so fortunate to be a guest, to say that I enjoyed myself would be an understatement. In such a company it was impossible not to feel young. A pleasant Indian boy who favoured a peculiar style in English invited me to pit my wits at a game of chess, when we had returned from skating on the frozen lake. Another youngster, with flaxen hair and smiling blue eyes, suggested we punt a football about in a nearby meadow. A slim schoolfellow ran slender fingers over the piano keys as we gathered, after dinner, in the music room. As the witching hour of midnight approached we gathered around the great fireplace to hear our kind host thrill us with a ghost story.

A performance that was rather marred by an extensive yawn from a boy of rotund appearance, whom I had observed earlier at the table. In fact, it would have been difficult not to have observed him. He consumed more than his waistcoat could withstand, and button followed



button as the thread could no longer take the strain! The lady of the house was not the only one to display concern at the result of such gluttony. Even the butler, imperturbable as was his custom, raised a querulous eyebrow at this gastronomic intake.

Such are the nature of the memories that I took back to the School with me. The checking and cross-referencing continued, and my digestion was again able to adjust itself to a more normal diet. My schoolmaster and I saw in the New Year after a quieter fashion. On the morrow I would be returning home, and I was viewing my departure with a stronger feeling of regret than I had deemed possible on the night of my arrival. There would be an acknowledgement of my assistance when the "History" was eventually published, my old taskmaster informed me. He walked over to a tall bookcase and, from behind the protection of its diamond-paned doors, selected a volume that was bound in finest tooled leather.

"A small memento of your stay", he said softly as he handed the book to me. It was an anthology of the works of Keats, my favourite amongst poets. I accepted it with sincere words of thanks.

At his suggestion, we took a turn in the open air. As we closed the door at the end of Masters' Corridor, the sound of midnight boomed from the clock tower...

When it stopped, a New Year had begun and we were walking through the same avenue of stately elms that had witnessed my arrival. Our footprints, which would be quickly obliterated by the falling snow, marked where we turned to look back at the shadowy buildings of a school to which I felt I now belonged.



\*\*\*\*\*

**WANTED and FOR SALE:** "William", Wodehouse, Blyton, Brazil, D.F. Bruce, Brent-Dyer, Buckeridge, "Bunter", W.E. Johns, Oxenham, Saville, etc.  
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**WANTED:** Modern Boy, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 23, 140, 141, 184, 188, 324 335, 337, 338, 339, 342, 400, 414, 496, 501, 503, 512. Second Series 1 to 8, 15 to 18, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 36, 78, 82, 83, 84, 86.

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**STILL WANTED:** Sexton Blake Library, 2nd Series, No. 453, On the Midnight Beat by John G. Brandon. YOUR PRICE PAID.

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Best Wishes to Norman Shaw, Eric Fayne, The Editor and all fellow Collectors.

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Very Best Wishes for Christmas and The New Year to Madam, Editor, Eric, Chris, Norman, Laurie, Les, Bill, Mac and all Hobbyophiles. Still wanted C.D. Annuals 1947, 1948, 1953. Please help.

JOHN BRIDGWATER, 5A SAULFLAND PLACE, HIGHCLIFFE, CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET, BH23 4QP.

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## A Rift in the Lute

Esmond **By** Kadish

One of the first Greyfriars tales I encountered, after my brother, Norman, had introduced me to the MAGNET in 1932, was the second "Wharton the Rebel" series. No doubt, at that early age, some of the complexities of the plot, and of Wharton's character, must have escaped me, but I recall that I felt great sympathy for him, and earnestly hoped that the estrangement between him and the rest of the Famous Five wouldn't be permanent; that Wharton might swallow his pride, and make up with his pals. All the same, I thought that I could understand his bitterness.

I don't know what profound psychological inferences may be drawn from it, but the fact is that most of us seem to enjoy reading about other people's quarrels, disagreements, or tiffs. Perhaps it's just relief that it's not actually happening to us! Charles Hamilton, in particular, excelled at this "rift in the lute" theme (one of his favourite expressions), and seemed equally adept at depicting it in both its serious and comic aspects. In the first Wharton the Rebel series of 1924-5, matters are serious enough for Wharton and Nugent to come to blows:

*"The slim and graceful Nugent was no match for the captain of the Remove. His handsome face, almost girlish in its delicacy of feature, was sadly marked now. His strength was almost gone, but his courage was indomitable."*

The "crowning humiliation" for poor Frank Nugent is reached when Wharton merely wards off his blows "easily, coolly, till he stopped, panting with rage and shame". Harry makes a belated attempt to patch things up with his erstwhile chum:

*"Nugent-" Wharton made a step towards him.  
 "Don't touch me!" exclaimed Nugent shrilly.  
 "Get away, I tell you! You make me sick!"  
 Wharton had indeed worn out the patience of the most patient of his chums. Henceforth it was Nugent who was unforgiving."*

A less intense, but still serious, misunderstanding occurs at Rookwood in "On Fighting Terms", (S.O.L. no. 341) when Hamilton uses the familiar device of having one member of the Fistical Four - in this case, Raby - display some uncharacteristic cowardice. He has apparently left Jimmy Silver, Lovell, and Newcome to the tender mercies of their Bagshot rivals, but has actually taken off to rescue Pankley's young brother from drowning in the river. Raby gets blamed for leaving his pals in the lurch - especially by Lovell - but when Pankley major explains the reason for Raby's desertion to Silver and Co., and they want to resume the old, friendly relations, Raby, understandably, feels disinclined. Normal relations are only resumed when Raby rescues his chums when they are in danger of being marooned on an island in the river by their deadly rivals from the Modern House, Tommy Dodd and Co.

When it comes to St. Jim's, Hamilton has ample opportunity to show the humorous side of his "rift in the lute" theme in the person of the "one and only" Gussy. In the final tale of the 1923 "River Adventurers" series in the GEM, Arthur Augustus is very much "on his dig", having been made to appear "widelicious". He threatens to "wetiah" from the party, and his friends seek to dissuade him, applying the "soft sawder" liberally:

*"Do you think we can keep on without you?" asked Blake, raising his eyebrows.  
 'Who's to advise us about camping?'  
 'Who's to give us tips about handling the boat?' asked Dig.*

*'Who's to give us help all round when tact and judgment are required?' asked Monty Lowther solemnly."*

And so on. Gussy is mollified, and it's only later that the penny drops, and he realises that "the little scene had been got up for the especial purpose of pulling his noble leg.":

*"You fellows were wottin'! he said suddenly."*

Good old Gus! I believe it was the critic, C.A. Lejeune, who, when comparing the virtues of pre-war film stars with the modern variety, remarked that the latter might be just as good actors - perhaps better - but what they lacked was the charm of their predecessors.

I feel rather like that about the characters in the Old Papers - especially ones like Gussy - although I wouldn't dream of telling him to his face that I thought he had "charm". He would only jam his monocle firmly into place and freeze me with a stare!

At Cliff House in the thirties - as depicted by John Wheway in the *SCHOOLGIRL* - there was the occasional falling-out, too. Babs and Mabs didn't actually come to blows, of course, but their friendship certainly seemed imperilled once or twice. In the 1934 series, "Mabs Must Never Know", (nos. 245-48), Barbara Redfern learns, from a headline in a Canadian paper, that Mabel Lynn's "playwright" father, Major Lynn, and Mabs' mother, have been arrested on "serious charges". Babs seeks to protect her chum - currently writing a new play for the "inter-schools Dramatic Competition" - and tries to prevent her from learning the shattering news. The charges against Major and Mrs. Lynn are, of course, totally false, and Babs' aid is enlisted by Mabs' detective cousin, Austin Lyn - "a real Sexton Blake" - in proving the innocence of Mabs' parents, who are accused of stealing "a valuable nugget of gold." The real villains



*"CHEER up, Babs! I believe in you; you wouldn't do anything really rotten!" Bessie could get no further. She dabbed miserably at her eyes, and then unashamedly wept also.*

are the Knox family, who have rented a large mansion, Ivy House, in the neighbourhood of Cliff House. Babs is persuaded by Austin Lynn to "do a bit of detective work" on her own. She has to strike up a friendship with the junior Knoxes, Sammy and Katie, find the gold nugget, which has been hidden in the house, and expose the "frame-up" which has caused Mabs' parents to be arrested.

As Jemima Carstairs might have expressed it: "A tall order, forsooth!". Sammy and Katie Knox are a totally obnoxious pair - if you'll pardon the pun! You can tell that Sammy is a bad lot, because Laidler has pictured him wearing plus-fours - a sure sign of depravity! Sammy also drives a fast car - "twenty-horse, you know!" - and refers to Bessie Bunter as "old lard tub". Since she can't explain her real motive for currying favour with the Knoxes, Babs' conduct naturally causes hostility amongst her form-mates, who send her to Coventry. Even worse for Babs, there is a misunderstanding with Mabs who, clearly, "must never know". They quarrel:

*"I thought you were my friend, Barbara. You were until you got this bee in your bonnet, and since then you've not been the same. The Barbara Redfern I was friends with has ceased to exist. The Barbara Redfern I once knew", she said, her eyes flashing, 'would never have let me down so heartlessly as you have, Babs, whatever the reason.'"*

After which outburst, poor Mabs bursts into tears, and flees from the study. It is then Bab's turn to break down:

*"She drooped suddenly, and in round-shouldered helplessness dropped into the chair Mabs had vacated.*

*And then:*

*Two soft, fat arms stole gently round her shoulders. A hot, soft breath fanned her neck. She looked round, smiling a twisted smile. Bessie Bunter, having staggered from her chair, stood there, her fat face pitifully twisted, her eyes blinking rapidly behind her spectacles. 'Oh, Bib-Babs!' she croaked. 'Bib-Babs, cheer up! Mum-Mabs dud-didn't mean it, you know, and-and I believe in you, Babs. You wuw-wouldn't do anything rur-really rotten, you know.'"*

An affecting scene, and another stage, perhaps, in Wheway's skilful development of Bessie Bunter from female Fat Owl to an appealing character with real feelings - a lovable duffer, if you like.

Mabs herself, although deeply hurt by her friend's conduct, is nothing if not loyal. After their quarrel, at call-over, Babs and Mabs still stand side by side, but "stiff and upright", without glancing at each other. Then Babs feels "a soft cold hand stealing like a caress" over hers:

*"Four cold fingers closed round her own fingers. Some electric quality seemed to spring from those fingers into hers, making her whole face glow with sudden pleasure.*

*The grip tightened. Her own fingers folded up to meet those so trustingly entwined in hers. And there, holding hands, but still not looking at each other, Babs and Mabs stood until call-over was finished."*

One can't quite see Wharton and Nugent acting in similar fashion but, in writing about the Cliff House girls, "Hilda Richards" has, perhaps, more scope for describing such emotional incidents than "Frank" might have at Greyfriars! At any rate, there's little doubt that Wheway knew how to touch the heartstrings of his readers when he wished.

Needless to say, all comes right in the end, although both Mabs and Bessie are sent to Coventry for speaking to Babs. With the co-operation of the unflappable Jemima Carstairs, the Knoxes are K.O'd, the gold nugget retrieved, Major and Mrs. Lynn cleared of all charges - and guess who wins the competition for the best-written play? Incidentally, as well as the customary appearance in the S.G.O.L., this series was one of four reprinted as a half-crown Merlin paperback in 1967, under the title of "Bessie Bunter and the Gold Robbers" - abridged, of course. As far as I know, this was the only post-war reprinting of the Cliff House tales, so perhaps a vote of thanks is due to the publishers, Paul Hamlyn, even if the books didn't sell too well.

The friendship of Babs and Mabs is threatened again in another SCHOOL-GIRL series, "The Girl Who Came Between", (nos. 345-7), in 1936. This time, the rift between the two "inseparables" is caused by a scheming new girl, Clarice Dyson. As Clarice is the daughter of an old friend of Mr. Redfern's, Barbara feels that she should stay behind at Cliff House to welcome her, instead of accompanying Mabs to Courtfield that afternoon, as arranged. Mabs has had her eye on a "simply marvellous cherry-coloured taffeta evening gown" in the window of Holland's Stores, for quite a time. (Babs and Mabs apparently never patronised Chunkleys Department Store - or maybe they'd never heard of it!) In choosing clothes for herself, Mabs, who is "singularly talented in other directions", has, it seems, "an almost pathetic reliance upon Babs' instinct." Piqued by Babs' not going with her to Holland's, Mabs buys the cherry dress anyway. When she shows it to her friend, back at Cliff House, Babs - rather tactlessly! - pronounces it "lovely", but "not with your fair hair and complexion". There is the inevitable row. Babs is hurt and bewildered; Mabs, furious, then contrite. She feels "a sudden surging wave of wretchedness", as she flings herself on the dormitory bed, and lies there, "the cherry taffeta carelessly crumpled beneath her weight, her shoulders heaving with great sobs".

Laidler has gone rather overboard in his illustration of Mabs in the cherry-coloured gown; she looks rather like a stand-in for Carole Lombard in one of those "crazy comedy"

films they used to make in the thirties, and seems at least twenty-five years old. Perhaps Babs had a point after all! (I wonder if Mrs. Lynn knew what kind of clothes her golden-haired daughter was buying with her pocket-money?)

## The GIRL who Came Between



The interloping Clarice is quick to take advantage of the wedge created between Barbara and Mabel. A two-faced mischief-maker, brimming with good nature on the surface, yet quite capable of kicking Bessie's little Pekingese dog, Ting-a-ling,

in a vicious fit of temper, when she thinks no-one is looking, she has not come to Cliff House to play "the good little girlie", as she puts it. Mabs and Bessie can see her duplicity; Babs can't. The deceitful Clarice gets Bessie turned out of her study, and takes her place, whilst Mabs, unable to stomach Clarice's scheming, also quits. Matters reach a head when Clarice's needling of Mabs during the rehearsals for a play, in which both have leading parts, causes the latter temporarily to lose her self-control:

*"Mabs suddenly flung down her book, turned, and rushed off the stage. 'Oh, oh!' she almost screamed. 'Let me get out! Let me get out - please!' And so fierce was her attitude, so frightening, somehow, the passion which flamed in her face, that the stupefied audience gave way to her."*

Eventually, Clarice overreaches herself, and Babs realises her true nature. Harmony between Babs and Mabs is restored.

In the first of the two Faith Ashton series (nos. 443-7), early in 1938, it is Babs who tumbles before Mabs to the fact that Faith can't be trusted, and Bessie does so before either. Like Clarice Dyson, Faith, who is a Canadian cousin of Babs, is a dangerous schemer, only rather more ambitious. She is after Babs' captaincy, which she succeeds in acquiring for a time. She turns up at Cliff House in "The New Girl Was So Charming", and is described as the "prettiest, sweetest new girl who had ever come". Everyone seems to like her. Even Tomboy Clara, "usually unimpressed by looks", finds Faith's "long-lashed blue eyes and "doe-like expression, with just a hint of pardonable nervousness" difficult to resist. Only Bessie had reservations, and senses that all is not right with Faith. She does not know why:

*"Faith had done nothing to her. Faith, indeed, had been as sweet to Bessie as to the rest of them. It was Faith who, at Waterloo, had insisted on helping Bessie with her luggage; Faith who, when Bessie had confessed to a liking for a snack, had slipped out and bought her sandwiches at a station on the line."*

Faith, in fact, is so impossibly appealing, sympathetic, and generous, that I've often wondered why the practical, hard-headed girls of the Cliff House Fourth didn't begin to

suspect her much sooner. Perhaps it's part of human nature to want to be deceived by such a winsome character.

Left to her own devices, Faith soon reveals her true nature. Alone in Study No. 4, she studies the Junior School Captains' Shield, with the name, "Barabara Hilda Redfern", engraved upon it, with an acquisitive eye. Noticing a photograph of Babs placed above the shield, she takes out one of herself and wedges it into the frame, effacing that of Babs:

*"Swanky cat! Faith sniffed disdainfully."*

Like Clarice Dyson, Faith, while appearing to be charm itself on the surface, is a dab-hand at spiteful, underhand tricks. Her technique is to ingratiate herself with her prospective victim, and then swiftly pull the rug from under her. When Mabs is worried about her sick cat, Mustapha, she suggests bringing him into the study for warmth. This is against school rules, and Mabs is in hot water when Mustapha is later discovered snoozing on the bed of the unpopular prefect, Sarah Harrigan. At the same time, she courts popularity with the determination of a baby-kissing politician on an election campaign. In a subsequent tale of the series, "Not the Girl She Seemed", Faith, apparently unsuspecting that she has an audience in Babs and Co., is perceived comforting and "cuddling the woeful little figure" of a distressed Second Former. Amongst her other tricks are contriving to supplant Bessie Bunter in Study 4, (the glowering Bessie is forced to move into Study No. 1, with the supercilious Lydia Crossendale and Co.), and appropriating Babs' scheme for raising money for local hospitals, and taking the credit.

When Babs, finally suspicious, accuses her of ruining Mabs' chances of participating in an ice carnival, Faith is goaded into dropping the mask briefly:

*"You-you spying, interfering cat! Startlingly the words were hissed. Startling, too, was the livid fury in Faith's face as she swung upon her cousin. 'You-you', she choked, and then stopped abruptly, aware in that moment that she had allowed the mask completely to fall, and shaken, it seemed by a sudden fit of trembling."*

Babs feels disgust; she is no longer deceived by Faith.

Her triumph in ousting Barbara Redfern from the captaincy is short-lived, when Aunt Felicity arrives at Cliff House. Aunt Felicity, who has been pondering to which of her two nieces - Babs or Faith - she should will her considerable fortune, has been making a few "inquiries" about Faith. She is not pleased about what she has learned, and the baby-faced schemer is duly exposed as a dyed-in-the-wool villainess.

Wheway wrote a second series featuring the odious Faith Ashton early in 1939 (nos. 494-7). Perhaps this series is not quite so satisfactory as the first because the only person who now remains deceived by Faith is the new, temporary headmistress, "Evelyn Northchurch Venn", who is taking Miss Primrose's place what that lady is taking "a rest". (Odd how often Miss Primrose is absent from Cliff House, recuperating from some illness or other!) Miss Venn is, like other temporary headteachers at Cliff House, "a tartar", but Faith finds her a useful and powerful ally, as she once again steals the form captaincy from Babs, and the games captaincy from Clara Trevlyn - although not without considerable opposition from the "no-surrender Tomboy". After some rebellious stirrings by the Fourth against Faith, Miss Venn, in her turn, learns the truth about her extraordinary protégée.

Interestingly, Wheway was still using this kind of two-faced character in 1951, when, as "Anne Gilmore", he wrote a school serial, "The Trouble-Maker of Study Four", for the GIRLS' CRYSTAL.

Charles Hamilton and John Wheway - clever writers, both, and shrewd observers of youthful behaviour, and never better, perhaps, than when they were describing the pangs of a fractured friendship.

(A rift in the lute, according to Eric Partridge's "A Dictionary of Clichés", means "a hint of quarrels or troubles to come". The line comes from Tennyson:- "It is the little rift within the lute that by and by will slowly silence all.")

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# William and Perfect Cleanliness.

BY DAVID SCHUTTE.



(This pastiche is based on the famous characters created by Richmal Crompton. Illustrations are by Thomas Henry.)

When Robert bought a pair of binoculars from the second-hand junk shop in Hadley, William lost interest in all his usual activities. Suddenly, everything else seemed dull and commonplace by comparison. Robert had binoculars, and William did not have binoculars. It was a situation in which William could not rest content until he had tried Robert's binoculars. And no doubt when he had tried them, he would not be satisfied until he had some binoculars of his own - preferably Robert's.

He began his campaign of attrition the next morning at breakfast.

"Robert, as you're goin' out to play cricket today, would you jus' please lend me your b'noc'lars for jus' a few minutes?"

"Certainly not", said Robert, tersely. "I'm locking them up, and under no circumstances are you to touch them. Not even for a few seconds. So you can just shut up about it."

"That's very harsh, dear", said Mrs. Brown. She viewed William's interest as purely educational. "I'm sure he couldn't damage something as robust as binoculars."

"Give him half a chance", sneered Robert, "and he could damage something as robust as Hadrian's Wall."

William looked hurt and indignant.

"I only want to look through 'em", he said defensively. "I don' see how I can hurt 'em jus' lookin' through 'em. I mean, eyes can't damage things, can they, jus' lookin' through 'em?"

"No", said Robert with heavy irony, "eyes can't damage things. It's the grubby little hands holding them that damage things."

William, undeterred, tackled Robert again at lunch, at tea, and again at breakfast the following morning. But Robert, with wisdom acquired from long experience of his younger brother, remained unmoved by William's persistent eloquence. It was not until some time later that something finally happened that was to weaken Robert's resolve.

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Olivia Nugent had recently moved to the village with her two maiden aunts. Although she was occasionally to be observed on shopping expeditions, neither she nor her aunts ever attended any social functions. She was an exceptionally pretty girl, but timid, and it had proved impossible for Robert, or any of the other eligible males in the neighbourhood, to make her acquaintance in the acceptable manner.

William, for whom there was no such barrier as social etiquette, had already met Miss Nugent and indeed had already spoken to her. He had upset her shopping basket one afternoon by using her as a turning post to change direction while being hotly pursued by Ginger. Miss Nugent then witnessed William receiving a resounding punch on the head from Ginger, and was so shocked by it that she found herself apologising to William for being in his way.

"I'm so sorry!" she said. "If I hadn't been here you might have got away."

William was in turn so surprised by her kind concern that he apologised profusely and stayed to pick up her scattered purchases. Miss Nugent told him he was an angel (a description that had never

previously been assigned to William), and he and Ginger stood staring after her as she departed slowly through the village.

It was not often that William was moved to compliment a member of the opposite sex, but on this occasion he made an exception.

"Crumbs!" he said. "She's nice!"

"That's Miss Nugent", said Ginger. he said it with the conviction of one who is deeply impressed. "My brother Hector's been wantin' to meet her for ages. He keeps complainin' that she never goes anywhere he goes an' he can't meet her prop'ly."

"Robert's jus' the same", said William simply. (They often found during their discussions that Hector and Robert were just the same.)

"I bet Hector'd be mad if he found out she'd spoke to us an' not him", said Ginger.

"So'd Robert be", said William. Then, after a pause: "Did you see her eyes? She looked right at me, an' her eyes were - well, a sort of mauvy colour."

"Yes", said Ginger. "They're wot Hector kept on about. He kept on an' on about her eyes bein' mauve."

"An' Robert kept on about 'em once. An' he kep' sayin' it was unfair that she di'n't go to anythin' soshul an' how could anyone be met if they di'n't go to anythin' soshul?"

As they gazed after Miss Nugent's slim departing form, they both felt a rare brotherly sympathy towards Hector and Robert, and each made a secret vow that his brother should have the opportunity to meet Miss Nugent.

Usually, when William and the Outlaws made such vows they never rested until their sense of honour was satisfied, but on this occasion a tortoise intervened. It emerged into the road from a hedge, whence it was immediately "rescued", and subsequently lived to rue the day that it had succumbed to the spirit of adventure. William and Ginger did not see Miss Nugent for some time after that, so the incident and their good intentions were temporarily forgotten.

The next time that Miss Nugent was involved in the Outlaws' affairs was some weeks later. Miss Nugent lived with her two guardian aunts in a medium sized

cottage on the outskirts of the village. The cottage had the distinction of having a substantial stream at the bottom of its garden. The stream wound through many accessible parts of the surrounding countryside, but the stretch that bordered Meadow Cottage was one of the most attractive. Not only was it deep, but it was of a challenging width that was, in fact, just too wide for the Outlaws to jump over. It therefore presented a perennial challenge to their prowess as long-jumpers.

Douglas was usually made to go first because he jumped the least well and could usually be relied upon to hit the water in the middle where it came up to his waist. Henry would follow, then Ginger, and finally William, each getting slightly further than his predecessor, but all getting equally soaked.

Now although the stream was in the meadow just outside the Nugents' property, it was possible (in theory) to leap from the meadow to the other side by the added expedient of grabbing the garden fence on arrival. However, in order to gain sufficient speed for the return journey, it was necessary to open the back gate of Meadow Cottage and use part of the garden as a running track. The garden was fairly secluded, and it was possible to carry out this operation without being observed from the cottage windows.

William opened the gate for Douglas.

"C'm'on, Douglas. See'f you c'n get more'n half way this time. Take a good run."

With shouts of encouragement from the others, Douglas made a courageous attempt, but failed to improve on his usual distance. He waded out with his shoes full of mud and strands of weed hanging about his person. Henry followed, missed his footing on take off, and to the delight of the others landed flat on his front in the middle of the stream and became the subject of a brief but interesting rescue operation.

When Ginger's turn came, his run down to the gate was energetic, his foot perfectly placed, and his leap enormous. It was the best jump that any of them, including William, had ever made, and he landed within a few inches of the meadow bank.

William, the previous holder of the record, realised that his reputation as leader was at stake, and calculated that the only

way to leap the stream was to get a much better run. Reckless with ambition, he decided to use the whole length of the garden. Cautiously, he explored the path beyond the shrubbery, and it was as he neared the cottage that he heard the unnerving sound of a female crying. The sound came from the french windows that opened on to the garden from a little sitting room.

William approached and was surprised to find not a child, but Miss Nugent. She was dressed in a maid's uniform and was sobbing into a very damp lace handkerchief.

William suddenly remembered the incident of the shopping basket, and was immediately troubled by the recollection that he had left an avowed intention undone.

"What's the matter?" he said. He stepped into the room.

Miss Nugent blew her nose and turned liquid mauve eyes towards him. She did not seem surprised at his presence or his unorthodox method of entry.

"Oh, I'm glad it's you", said said. "You're the only person who's ever been nice to me."

William was nonplussed but accepted the situation without further thought. He was a great accepter of situations.

"I - I di'n't mean to mess up your shoppin' that day, an' - "

"Oh, don't worry about that. You picked it up for me and that was nice. Boys who were really rough wouldn't have done that. They would have said something horrid and run away."

William felt a strange flush rising to his cheeks.

"Oh - Oh, that was all right. It was nothin'. I'm always doin' that sort of thing" - hastily - "not knockin' over people's shoppin', I mean. Jus' helpin' 'em an' suchlike."

There was a moment's pause in the conversation while Miss Nugent sniffed and blew her nose again.

"I - I'm sorry. I shouldn't get so upset, but I do."

"What about?" said William.

"Oh - THEM." She tossed her curls in the direction of the closed door that led to the rest of the cottage. "They've gone out for their walk for an hour and they expect

their rooms to be cleaned by the time they get back and I'm just fed up with them. They make me wear this old maid's uniform to keep my own clothes clean - and they just treat me like a slave. I don't know what to do."

"I had a slave once - " began William, but suddenly thought better of it. Miss Nugent had now turned her glistening mauve eyes towards him. "Why don' you jus' run away?" he said encouragingly. "That's wot my slave did. He got fed up an' jus' ran away."

"I can't."

"Course you can", said William, sensing the chance of adventure. "Why don' you come with us? We'll get you across the stream at the back. Me an' Ginger c'n almost jump it, an' prob'ly you could get right across without gettin' very wet, an' - "

"I'd love to", said Miss Nugent, "but it's not as simple as that. They're my aunts, you see, and they're very strict. It was good of them to take me in when my parents died. But they make me do all the work to pay for my keep, and they never let me go out - never - except for shopping - and then they expect me back in no time at all, and they're awful if I'm a minute late."

"So are mine. Mine are awful too 'f I'm a minute late."

"I just can't leave."

"Course you can", said William enthusiastically. "It's jus' down the path an' across the stream. They wouldn't think of lookin' that way. Not jus' at first." William conjured up a mental scene of the two aunts leaping across the river wielding spears and axes. "An' we could be in Marleigh before they got back."

Miss Nugent gave way to a little smile.

"You're very sweet, - oh, I don't even know your name - "

"William", said William. "You're Miss Nugent, aren't you?"

"Yes. That's very clever of you, William." Miss Nugent dried her eyes as best she could with her wet handkerchief. "It would be lovely to run away with you, William, but I just can't. I've no one else in the world, and no money - "

"No, I've no money, neither, 'cos they keep takin' it off me..."

" - and if I don't stay with them I'll never have enough money to get to college

and learn something really worthwhile and become a teacher or something. I'm sure they **mean** to be kind, but" - she nodded towards the closed door - "but they're so horrible to live with. They don't even read newspapers, you know. They think they're morally corrupting - but you wouldn't understand that. They subscribe to the magazine of the Society of Perfect Cleanliness, and that's all they ever want to talk about."

"What's Perfect Clean- what you said?"

"They believe that the body and the mind should be perfectly clean", said Miss Nugent.

"My folks want that, too", said William.

"Oh, but they're horrified if they see a speck of dirt in the cottage, and they won't go out for their walk if it's windy, and they cover themselves up when they go out so they don't bring any dust back into the house."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Ginger, Henry and Douglas, whose patience in waiting for William to make his record-breaking attempt had finally expired. They were even wetter and muddier than when William had last seen them. They stood, an interested group a few feet away, on a rug that grew increasingly damp.

"Miss Nugent", said William. He made a sweeping gesture of introduction that embraced the whole room and part of the garden.

"Hello, boys", said Miss Nugent. A little worried frown appeared as she looked at the carpet. "I'm so sorry to have kept William from your game, but he was very kind and stopped to talk to me. Now why don't you all go and play, and I'll clean up the room, because they'll be back soon, and I can't face them if they're displeased. They go for a walk for an hour most days at three o'clock. Why don't you come back tomorrow at five past three and we can talk some more?"

"All right", said William.

"That's settled, then", said Miss Nugent. "I shall look forward to it."

The Outlaws reassembled in the meadow and William summed up the details of his conversation.

"They b'lieve in Perfect Clean-Cleanliness", he said, "an' they make her

dress up as a maid to keep the cottage clean, an' they mistreat her, an' they never let her out 'case she brings dust back, so she's a pris'ner, an' we've gotter do somethin'."

\* \* \* \* \*

William slipped unobtrusively into his house and managed to change his clothes before the full horror of his condition could be observed by his family. William had learned from long experience that wet and muddy clothes discovered in one's bedroom provoked less comment than wet and muddy clothes discovered on one's person.

When William came downstairs, Robert was at the library window looking through his binoculars. William entered and coughed politely, looking, by his standards, unusually clean and respectable.

Robert knew the cough, and ignored it.

William coughed politely again.

"No, you can't borrow the binoculars", snapped Robert. "And you can jolly well shut up."

William assumed an expression of hurt innocence.

"I don't want to borrow you b'noculars, Robert. I'm not really interested in b'noculars jus' now."

"Well clear off, then", said Robert unkindly.

William, however, did not clear off.

"Robert", he said, "have you ever thought of startin' a Society for Perfect Clean- Cleanliness?"

Perf- ?" Robert swung round to meet William's expression of earnest enquiry. "Are you trying to be funny?"

"Me?" William's expression changed to one of hurt disbelief. "Me be funny? No, Robert. I jus' thought you might like to start a Society of Perfect Cleanliness, that's all."

"Well, I don't", said Robert. "And if I did, you'd never get into it. I never heard of such a ridiculous idea. Now clear off."

William cleared off.

\* \* \* \* \*

When William had gone, Robert continued to sweep the garden and

surrounding countryside with his binoculars, but his interest was waning rapidly. Something in the way William had asked the question was intriguing him. Where would that kid get an idea like that?

That evening at Jameson Jameson's, Robert asked him casually if he had ever heard of a Society for Perfect Cleanliness, and Jameson said he hadn't. Hector, Ginger's brother, hadn't heard of it either.

"What is it exactly," asked Hector.

"Well", said Robert, "one can only imagine it's a sort of society that thinks everything should be perfectly clean. Pretty silly, really..."

\* \* \* \* \*

The following evening it was Robert's turn to corner William. William was in his bedroom, leaning out of his window as far as the laws of physics would allow, throwing acorns at the next door cat.

"What did you mean when you asked me about starting a Society for Perfect Cleanliness?" Robert demanded.

William pulled himself back into the room, all bewilderment and innocence.

"I was jus' askin' if you'd be int'rested in startin' one, that's all, Robert. Nothin' else. Jus' if you'd be int'rested."

Robert glared at him suspiciously.

"Why should I be?"

"Only", began William slowly, "only 'cos Miss Nugent might be int'rested, that's all, Robert."

William leaned out of the window again and had time to throw six more acorns at the cat before Robert's voice stammered in his rear.

"M-Miss N-Nugent?" Robert's demeanour changed abruptly. He abandoned direct attack and became flushed and excited. "You m-mean Miss Nugent who lives at Meadow Cottage?"

"Yes, Robert", said William. "Miss Nugent who lives at Meadow Cottage."

"Have you been talking to her?" said Robert suspiciously.

"Only jus' a bit."

"What did she say?"

"Miss Nugent was sort of int'rested in the Perfect Cleanliness thing, an' I jus' wondered, as I di'n't think there was one in

the village, I jus' thought it might be nice for Miss Nugent if you sort of started one."

Robert's suspicions rose even further.

"If you've said anything to her about what I said at breakfast the other morning, I'll wring your filthy little neck..." Robert uttered a hollow laugh. "It must have been the state of your neck that inspired her to mention perfect cleanliness in the first place."

William ignored this insult.

"I di'n't say anythin', Robert, honest. I jus' thought -"

But Robert, in spite of his excitement at the prospect of Miss Nugent attending any function that he, Robert, might organise, found himself in his long experience of William still searching for some ulterior motive.

"Why are you taking so much trouble over this?" he demanded.

"I've never known you to take trouble over anything unless you were after something."

William was deeply wounded.

"Me?" he protested. "Me? I'm only doin' it for you, Robert, 'cos I know how much you want to meet her, an' -"

"Oh, shut up."

"- An' you once said you'd give your b'noculars for a chance to meet with Miss Nugent", said William.

"What. When? I never said anything of the sort, you little wretch."

"You did, Robert. When I was askin' you the other day, you said the only thing that'd make you give up your b'noculars was the end of the world or a chance to meet Miss Nugent."

Robert vaguely recalled the jest.

"That was just a joke", he said. "I was trying to get it into your thick skull that it's impossible for you to get anywhere near my binoculars. So beat it."

"But you said, Robert."

"Well, I'm afraid a social gathering of a society doesn't count as an evening out, so don't think it does."

"But you did say you'd give me your b'noculars if you did, an' -"

Robert, who felt that his sensibilities were being probed too deeply, began to advance upon William, who had moved towards the door.



*"Look!" she screamed in horror. "There's a piece of fluff by your foot."*

"If you so much as mention..." he began.

William ducked and fled.

\* \* \* \* \*

Robert set about founding the local branch of the Society for Perfect Cleanliness with enthusiasm and energy. He contacted the Society's head office in London, filed the necessary applications and circularised the surrounding populace inviting their attendance at an inaugural meeting in the village hall, to be addressed by a man from London.

\* \* \* \* \*

In suggesting that William should call again at five past three the next afternoon, Miss Nugent had been asking rather a lot. To William, time was a source of continual surprise. He was always shocked when he was too early for a meal, and always hurt and indignant when he was too late. On

this occasion, William arrived at the cottage at half past four, believing it to be about half past two.

As he crept alone up the path, he heard voices emerging from the open french doors. Positioning himself behind a bush, he looked cautiously through the foliage into the room. The two maiden aunts were seated, one on a chair, and one on a stool. they wore long smocks and sandals and both wore pince nez. Miss Nugent, still wearing her maid's uniform, was standing nearby, while the sisters argued with her.

"But the house is filthy", said the one on the stool. "You simply don't deserve any time off."

"But it's ever such a good film, and it's on at Marleigh, and..."

"A film!" said the one on the chair. "Whatever next? Last month you wanted to join a tennis club, the month before that you wanted to waste time with dramatics, and now you want to watch a film. I don't know what your morals are coming to."

"It's a Charlie Chaplin, and there were posters advertising it in the shops - "

"Certainly not!" said the one on the chair.

"They shouldn't be allowed to advertise such things where innocent people can see them", said the one on the stool. "It's a disgrace, and I shall write to the council about it."

"But it couldn't do any harm - it's a comedy - "

"It is the levelling of serious matters to mere facetiousness", said the one on the chair, quoting the latest issue of Perfect Cleanliness, "that undermines the moral hygiene of society - "

Suddenly there was a shout from the one on the stool.

"Look!" she screamed in horror. "There's a piece of fluff by your foot!"

"It's a disgrace!" said the one on the chair. "You shall clean the whole house again until it's perfect. Then you can retire to your room and read my copy of Perfect Cleanliness."

At this point William had heard enough. He felt that it must be at least half past three by now, and he returned home in thoughtful silence.

To William's surprise and enjoyment, it was tea time when he arrived home. Robert, who had been ordered by the man from London to fumigate the Village Hall, was already having misgivings about his involvement with the Society. He glared at William across the table, but said nothing. William maintained an expression of pensive innocence. Eventually, it was William who spoke.

"There's a jolly good film on in Marleigh, Robert", he said.

"Well, I'm not taking you to it", said Robert, with unnecessary venom.

"William was only mentioning it, dear", said Mrs. Brown placidly. "There's no need to bite his head off."

"He's up to something, Mother, you'll see."

Mrs. Brown glanced at her younger son, whose expression had not changed throughout tea.

"Oh, I'm sure he just wants to see the film, don't you, William?"

"I wouldn't mind", said William through a mouthful of cherry cake. "I jus'

noticed as I was passin' the shops that it was on an' jus' thought Robert might like to go, that's all."

"What film is it, William?" said Mrs. Brown.

"It's Charlie Chaplin."

"It sounds nice, Robert."

Robert, though he liked Charlie Chaplin, was not prepared to admit it, because admitting it meant he might be landed with taking William.

"I don't like him much", he said.

And there, so it seemed, the matter ended.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the day of the society meeting, William managed to arrive at the rear of Meadow Cottage between three and four o'clock, and found Miss Nugent on her hands and knees polishing the floor. She paused and looked up.

"Hallo", she said. She seemed pleased to see him. "They're going out tonight, William. There's a meeting of the Perfect Cleanliness Society in the village, and they're going. They don't want me to go to the first one - they want to see what the people are like, first. So I shall have the whole evening to myself. It'll be heaven!"

"There's Charlie Chaplin on in Marleigh", said William. "Why don't you go an' see that? 'Stead of stayin' in, I mean."

"I couldn't go without their permission, William. Not unless" - Miss Nugent hesitated - "unless I knew I could be back before they got back. But I couldn't trust the buses, could I? And I don't know what time the film will finish, or anything."

"Ten o'clock", said William promptly.

"But how could I get back?"

"What if you was took in a car?" said William. "That'd be all right, wouldn't it - if you was took - in a car?"

"Well - yes, William, but... I don't know anyone with a car who would take me, and - "

"You jus' be ready", said William. "You jus' be ready at half past seven, an' I promise - promise - you'll be took - taken", William added. "But you've got to promise to be ready."

Miss Nugent, for whom events had suddenly moved at a reckless pace, promised to be ready. An adventurous spirit that had been stifled for years was beginning to stir within her, and she was as completely under William's control at that moment as the tortoise that had wandered on to the road the week before. She was going out. And not only was she going out, but she was disobeying her maiden aunts to do it.

\* \* \* \* \*

The meeting of the Society of Perfect Cleanliness was scheduled to begin at seven o'clock. By six o'clock Robert had taken up his position in a thoroughly disinfected Village Hall that was more redolent of a hospital. At six fifteen the man from London arrived and started to set up his projection equipment. At twenty-five minutes past, Jameson and Hector arrived together, both looking very smart and clean. It had been Robert's intention not to invite any eligible males of his own generation, partly because of his embarrassment at being associated with a society of such dubious character, but chiefly because he hoped to monopolise the company of Miss Nugent himself. Owing to his careful and exclusive canvassing of retired widowers and septuagenarian spinsters, Robert had been unaware of William's active campaign to tell every young adult male in the village that Miss Nugent was attending the meeting.

A steady stream of smart young men began to arrive and hover around the entrance, nervously excited, while Robert grew more and more uncomfortable. Eleven years experience told him that William was probably responsible, but his eye searched for him in vain.

At five minutes to seven, Miss Nugent's aunts arrived. The male population, recognising their arrival as heralding the imminent presence of Miss Nugent herself, greeted them with overwhelming friendship and smiles and all but carried them to the most advantageous seats. Eagerly they clustered back to the doorway to await the entrance of the niece.

When Miss Nugent did not appear, the bolder males asked the aunts if Miss Nugent was coming?

"Not to this meeting", said the first aunt.

"She may come to the next if we give it a good report", said the second.

Robert heard the fatal words with a sinking heart. The eligible males heard the fatal words with sinking hearts. At almost the same moment, the man on the platform tapped his little hammer, and the meeting was called to order.

To illustrate his lecture, the man from London started by showing some popular silent films as evidence of the undermining, by the Establishment, of physical and moral cleanliness in modern youth.

"Notice", said the man, "how the little tramp thinks nothing of stealing an apple from the greengrocer's barrow. See how his first instinct is to strike the greengrocer on the minimum of provocation. Notice how they roll in the dust of the street."

The male audience roared with laughter. William, who had appeared at the door to watch for Robert, roared with laughter. Even Miss Nugent's aunts found the laughter infectious, and for the first time since they were young themselves, began to smile decorously. Only Robert and the man from London remained resolutely unamused. Suddenly, Robert's eye fell on William. With murder in his heart, he slipped towards the doorway at the back of the hall, grasped William by the ear, and dragged his protesting form outside.

"You're nearly pullin' it right off!" William shouted.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Robert. "I'm surprised you've the cheek to turn up after telling me that Miss Nugent was interested in this ridiculous Society. I'll be the laughing stock of the village."

"But Miss Nugent is in there, Robert."

Robert hesitated, but only for a moment.

"Where?"

"At the front, both of them" said William.

"Both - " Robert stopped. "But they're Miss Nugent's aunts."

"Yes", said William. "They're both called Miss Nugent as well, Robert."

Robert's fury was redoubled.

"Do you mean to tell me - !"

"Will you kin'ly let go my ear now, Robert?"





*"Miss Nugent", began William, "this is Robert. Robert, - 's'Nugent. An' by the way, her leg's got better all of a sudden."*

" - That when you said Miss Nugent was interested, you meant - " Robert was unable to finish the sentence.

"I jus' said", protested William, "that Miss Nugent was int'rested. and excuse me, Robert, but I think my ear's almost off now, an' there's a message for you - from the other Miss Nugent, Robert."

Robert was suddenly galvanised. He released William's ear.

"Miss Nugent? The real Miss Nugent? You mean she's coming after all?"

"You've got to go an' fetch her, Robert, in your car. She's hurt her leg a bit an' can't walk properly, an' I said you'd be d'lighted to fetch her in your car."

"But I can't bring her here. The meeting's in uproar. Listen to them."

"I heard her saying the other day", said William meaningfully, rubbing his ear, "that she spechully likes Charlie Chaplin."

Slowly, very slowly, a light began to glow in Robert's brain. Miss Nugent liked Charlie Chaplin. Miss Nugent had hurt her leg and needed to be collected. Every other eligible male in the neighbourhood was occupied in the hall. The maiden aunts were no longer guarding Miss Nugent. Miss Nugent was waiting at the cottage. Charlie Chaplin was on in Marleigh. William -

But William, unbeknown to Robert, was already racing across the fields towards Meadow Cottage.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Robert reached Meadow Cottage, he was surprised to find Miss Nugent waling with William in the adjoining field that bordered the stream. They were approaching the fence as Robert drew up. Grinning from cheek to cheek, Robert

stood respectfully waiting while William introduced them.

"Miss Nugent", began William, "this is Robert. Robert, - 's' Nugent. An' by the way, her leg's got better all of a sudden."

Miss Nugent winked at William.

"I'm delighted to hear it", said Robert.

"William and I were just taking some air", said Miss Nugent. "It's such a relief to escape from the cottage for once."

William said goodbye and melted into the countryside. Robert, feeling as if he were floating several inches off the grass, escorted Miss Nugent to his car. As they drove towards Marleigh, Robert thought - but only for a moment - of all his friends in the village hall. Tomorrow there would have to be explanations, but in the meantime there was this evening...

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning William awoke to find Robert's binoculars on the chair by his bed. He was consequently late for breakfast, and when he did arrive at the table he found a perfumed letter beside his plate addressed: "William - Private and Personal." William opened it and read:

"Dear William, I wanted to write to you straight away, and I have asked Robert to wait so that he can deliver this note to you personally.

"I think your brother is very sweet, and we have had a lovely evening. But it's you I want to thank.

"My two aunts somehow discovered this evening that they like silent films, which means that they will let Robert take me out again next week. I'm sure he will be able to tell me how to get into college and make something of myself.

"And it's all thanks to you, dear William. I hope to see you sometimes when you and your friends cross the stream, and if you come on Sunday at three I'll give you all a special tea.

"I shall always be grateful for the wonderful help you have given me.

"Love from your friend,

"Olivia Nugent."

"Who is it from, dear?" asked Mrs. Brown.

The whole family were looking at William with interest. William, for once in his life, blushed at the breakfast table.

"Jus' a friend", he said.

\*\*\*\*\*

Season's Greetings from JACK WILSON (Nostalgia Unlimited). New List in New Year will go automatically to previous correspondents. New customers write 19 DUNBEATH AVENUE, RAINHILL, PRESCOT, MERSEYSIDE, L35 0QH.

Happy Christmas to all Readers from Booksleuth, and a New Year in which all your Story Paper, Comic and Book 'Wants' are satisfied. In case of difficulties call in Booksleuth. Our Booksearch Service is Worldwide and completely free. VICTOR BROWN, 64 LEGBOURNE ROAD, LOUTH, LN11 8ER.

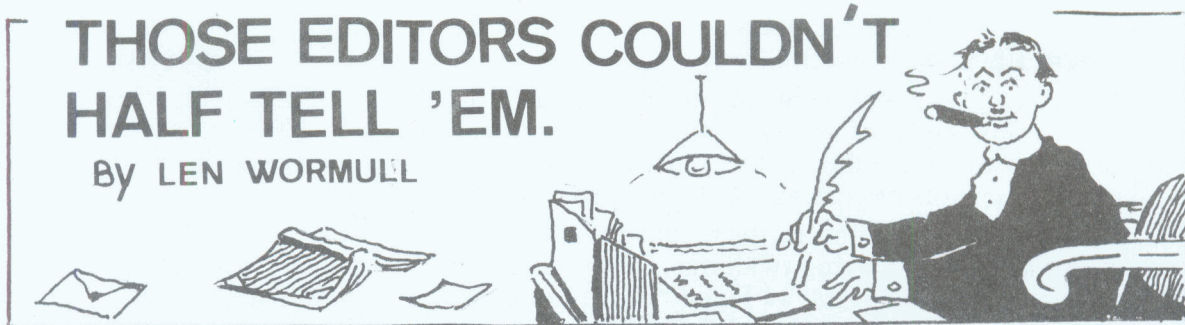
Happy Holiday, and New Year, to Mary, Eric, and all C.D. readers. Peace to my big brother, Norman, wherever he may be, and to all our departed friends and loved ones. ESMOND KADISH, 18 GROVE GARDENS, HENDON, LONDON, NW4 4SB.

A Very Merry Christmas and A Happy Healthy and Prosperous New Year to Mary, Eric, Bill, Norman, Robbie and all the staff, contributors and readers of the Digest and Annual. Long may it all continue. JOSEPH P. FITZGERALD OF MANCHESTER.

Greetings to all C.D. Readers, especially Mary Cadogan, Roger Jenkins and Norman Shaw. WANTED: Many Schoolboys' Own Libraries. Please let me know what you have available. MARK STAFF, 6 ROCHFORD CLOSE, BOURNEMOUTH, BH6 4AZ.

# THOSE EDITORS COULDN'T HALF TELL 'EM.

By LEN WORMULL



I feel a bit guilty penning this because my early relations with editors were always happy ones. They were my friends, and they told me so. That I should cast doubt on what they said never crossed my mind for a moment. Once their product was in my hands I was in another world, anyway. Happy days! Time and the hobby, however, play the funniest tricks. Lately I have been trying to catch them out playing SPOT THE "CRAMMER"! The word is a minor falsehood, though officially it means 'permissible lie'. The back-room boys had quite a penchant for the stuff, it would seem. It became a convenient device for the "invented" reader and question; for pretending all was well when things were not. And as a lead-in it served a useful purpose. For example: 'Entering the office this morning, I accidentally tripped over a fire bucket containing sand'. Editor explains why it was sand and not water. Know what I mean?

My renewed interest in the editorials was triggered by a Danny's Diary reference to November, 1937. In this he remarked on the Magnet editor's decision, at the 'request' of readers, to bring back the original orange-coloured cover. Danny queried the colour, saying it was red, and thought that only a few Magnet readers could have seen a red one. He rather doubted the editor's word, and so did I. Now read this little gem, taken from the same editorial making the announcement. The editor was annoyed that morning with having to strap-hang on the bus all the way to work, unable to read his newspaper. He envied a young lad of about thirteen, seated comfortably and, with a radiant smile on his face, reading the current copy of the Magnet. As Derek Jameson would say, 'I arsk you!'. Or as I would say, pull the other one!

Here's more: Reader asked if there are such things as ghosts? Ed: "This reminds me of a ghost story told me the other week", etc. Another reader asks: "Can you tell me anything about the steamer Bremen?" Ed: "Well, it happens that I can, for I took the opportunity, one day recently, to run down to Southampton, and have a walk over that splendid vessel". A detailed description followed. Ed: "When I have a fit of the 'blues', I settle in my armchair, and read the next Frank Richards yarn".

NUGGET WEEKLY (1920) was only a few weeks old when it took the plunge. 'Hundreds of readers', it claimed, had asked for the **return** of Professor Zingrave, a character who had yet to appear! It should be noted that N.W. was an amalgam of three failed Libraries: Prairie, Robin Hood, Detective. Zingrave had, I believe, appeared in the last-named. An implacable enemy of Nelson Lee in his own paper, he here continues his duel with the detective. I felt rather sorry for this editor, whose enterprise had brought a splash of colour to the illustrations, inside and out. By week 27 the paper was in such dire straits that readers were invited to take over the editorial chair, with a prize of one guinea for the best suggestions on how to improve the paper. Nothing came of this revolutionary plan. With No. 34 the paper folded through lack of support.

In my short selection, SURPRISE walks away with the "Crammer Award". It was not until its closing stages that it recognised Bullseye as a companion paper, and only then because a merger was in the pipeline. The countdown, editorially, went like this:-

- No. 86: Postbag gets larger and larger each week. Hints from readers invited.
- No. 87: Scores of letters singing the praises. Readers wished Surprise came out twice a week. Advised to read Bullseye. Lists stories in current issue.
- No. 88: Exceptionally large number of letters, many saying how they wished there was another paper as good as Surprise. Well, as a matter of fact, there is: Bullseye. Lists stories.

No. 89: Last Issue. Important announcement. Renaming Surprise. In future it will be called Bullseye.

Which reminds me of the words of Edwy Searles Brooks, in the aftermath of the Nelson Lee: 'Yes, I think the Old Paper was more or less on its last legs in 1933. It was, of course, editorial policy to delude the readers into believing that the Old Paper was at the peak of its popularity. All editors do that sort of thing when a paper is in bad shape.'

But let's not be unkind to those star presenters of ours. After all, what was a little kidding in the overall scheme of things. They catered for us, pandered to us, leaned over backwards to please us. And as Danny rightly observed, it was the stories that mattered. Crammers aside, editorials on the whole were a mine of information. Quite encyclopaedic, in fact.

\*\*\*\*\*

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The Season's Greetings to all hobby friends everywhere. DR. JOHNNY AND BETTY HOPTON, 79 SCALPCLIFFE ROAD, BURTON ON TRENT, STAFFS.



# GULLS AND GREYFRIARS

BY  
H. WEBB.

It was one of those cold grey, late winter afternoons when dusk comes early and the fireside calls, that I very reluctantly dragged myself away from the glowing hearth and left the house for a last stroll before tea. An odd flake or two of soft snow brushed my cheek as I turned up my collar against the icy air.

The droning hum of a straining tractor came from over the hedge as I turned into the lane out of the cold wind.

I made my way to the field gate and gazed across the brown ploughland. Standing there beside the bare hedge in the now thickening snowflakes I watched the tractor lurching upon its way to the far limits of the field and back again with its attendant gull flock that followed behind in a flickering white cloud swooping again and again to pick up their winter harvest of worms and grubs.

The sight of their dipping, wheeling white forms and the sound of their screaming mewing calls, unlocked a store of nostalgic memories of my childhood, a childhood spent for many days and weeks alone in an orphanage Infirmary ward.

It was there that I came to know the things I loved best, quietness, isolation, time to lie and think childish thoughts, the still winter evenings alone, the yellow glow of the street lamps beyond the blinds, muffled voices in the street below the window, but most of all my books, those heavy old volumes with their enchanting stories, stories that would take me far beyond the confines of that quiet Infirmary ward and those orphanage walls. Those books became a magic carpet for me, a new world had appeared. Those books conjured up a whole new realm of enchantment and my young mind opened up to their tales of adventure and imagination. I found an escape route to places of daring and thrills and fun. My every day became richer and full of glorious escapades that whisked me away to a world where swarthy pirates flashed their swords, and explorers fought with ebony cannibals on Pacific beaches, stories of endless adventure and excitement that would take a boy deep into the Amazon jungle discovering the lost treasures of the Incas. Hundreds of exciting tales awaiting the receptive mind of any imaginative youngster.

The Public School stories were my favourites, stories in which boys broke bounds after dark, the Study feasts, the cads, the friendships, the raggings, all those many repetitive yarns that figured in their pages. The scope was limitless.

But the dear old Magnet and Gem papers topped them all, I avidly devoured their stories each week as they came along. Those exciting and funny escapades of Billy Bunter and the Famous Five of Greyfriars and Tom Merry, Blake and D'Arcy of St. Jims.

Sometimes, after growing a bit tired of Bunter's incessant squeaking and quest for food I would sit back in my bed, propped up on my pillows lazily gazing across to the orphanage farmland over the road, watching old Fred Farthing ploughing, with a long noisy trail of shrieking, squabbling gulls rising and falling behind him and his old horse as he plodded steadily across the field, all swooping and diving on the worms and grubs exposed by the plough-share as it turned the fresh dark earth over into the light. After a while I would return once again with eager anticipation to the studies, corridors and quadrangle of Greyfriars with its characters of Coker, Quelch, Vernon-Smith, and the inevitable Bunter.

The strengthening wind awoke me from my chilly day-dreaming, and with a sigh I left the busy tractor and its mewling, fluttering crowd of white companions and turned into the now driving snow to make my way back to the beckoning fireside.

Some will be thinking 'that's a sign of age' harking back to one's boyhood days. Not at all. Those are the moments of childhood which most people leave behind when they become adult but which I must confess still linger strong with me. I will always look back with nostalgia on those wonderful magical days of 'Gulls and Greyfriars'.

\*\*\*\*\*

Roger Jenkins sends Chairman's Christmas greetings to all members of the London O.B.B.C., now celebrating its 41st year and still going strong. Particular thanks to the honorary officers - Secretary Mark Jarvis, Treasurer Norman Wright, and Librarians Bill Bradford and Duncan Harper - whose unstinting good service is so much appreciated by everyone.

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Christmas Dinner,  
After you've eaten,  
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Give "C.D." your orbs,  
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=====

# THE MAN WITH MANY FACES



BY  
Len  
Hawkey



Over the years, the C.D. has saluted the "Detectives", the great Sherlock, Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, Ferrers Locke, and Dixon Hawke.

To these famous names many others could of course be added. Such was the effect - especially of the first two named - on the reading public over the first four decades of this century that almost every periodical, including even the so-called "comics", featured its own "sleuth". Quite a few of these were, in effect, "syndicated", appearing in several different papers, their adventures penned by a variety of authors.

One cannot name them all, but a few of these vivid creations were, for example, Hawkshaw (in the early "Jester"); Nick Carter, popular on both sides of the Atlantic; Falcon Swift, the Monocled Detective; Martin Track; Panther Grayle; Curtis Carr (the Flying Detective); "Q", otherwise Martin Quest; Moreton Stowe (also a "Special Correspondent"), and even a dog detective, Dirk, again from the pre-1914 "Jester".

It was my old friend J.E.M., writing about Eric Parker some time ago, who prompted my memory of a forgotten character, Frank Darrell. Who, you may well ask, is Frank Darrell? A good question, as I do not recall his name cropping up in our pages over the past 15 years, nor is he mentioned in E.S. Turner's excellent book "Boys will be Boys".

Yet for more than a decade - 1921 to 1931, and possibly later - he was a permanent feature in "The Scout", their "resident detective", in fact, billed mostly as "The Man with Many Faces", albeit he started off as only "The Man with Two Faces", doubtless adding to them as his popularity increased. Like Sexton Blake, he was a man of many talents - actor, mimic, contortionist, as well as investigator.

His assistant was Roy Martin, a little hunchback cripple. Darrell himself always seemed rather lacking in personality, and was rarely described, physically, after the initial story. In this he was said to be around 25, recently demobbed, tall, well-built, sharp-featured, with keen probing eyes - except for his youthfulness, a ringer, in fact, for almost all his rivals!

In January 1921, when they started, the stories were written by Darrell's "friend", Stanhope W. Sprigg, but after a few months, and without any explanation, they were taken over by another "friend", Sidney Strand (the editor must have been fond of alliteration)! Messrs Lofts and Adley give us some interesting information about Mr. Sprigg, but little or nothing seems to be known of Sidney Strand, who nevertheless continued the saga into the 1930s.

Although the stories usually had quite intriguing titles - "The Case of the Kostick Pearls" - "The Deserted Taxi Mystery" - "The Mongolian Dwarf" - "The Mystery of the Missing Barges" - "The Twelve-Foot Man!" etc., they seem long on coincidence, and short on cohesion and deduction. On the other hand, they moved swiftly, creating enough excitement to hold the interest of most youngsters - **and** one assumes, the magazine's publishers, Pearsons. Each tale of usually about 2000 to 3000 words was complete in itself, but for the first year or two there were no illustrations, other than a small sketch which formed part of the heading. This remained constant on the whole, but occasionally the small drawing was changed. The excellent Thomas Somerfield started off, but was followed by a very mediocre performer, L.H. Bishop, whose work I have not, thankfully, met elsewhere.

In January 1923 - and this, at last, is where J.E.M. jogged my memory - the heading, **and** an additional illustration were supplied by Eric R. Parker. One cannot help wondering if his work in "The Union Jack" had come to the Art Editor's notice - although it should be added that Parker had drawn for Pearsons (publishers of "The Scout") before he started with the



The man gave a cry of fear as the American detective wrenched at his coat and tore it bodily from his back. It was a dramatic moment.

*Illustration by J.H. Valda - The Scout, 1926*



Frank Darrell hurried towards the elderly gentleman who leant dazedly against the carriage door.

*E.R. Parker's illustration from The Scout, April 1924*



Amalgamated Press. He did some very good covers for the former in the Summer of 1922, which, I believe, was a few months before his work first featured in the old "U.J."

Actually I never cared much for the "Scout", in my young days. It kept all its stories and articles rather short, and was, not unnaturally, peppered throughout with scouting news and articles. On the other hand they did use a wide variety of artists, some of the best in their profession, including a good many from the A.P. stable. Others, whose work was seldom seen in the magazines from Fleetway House, included Tom Heath-Robinson, R.H. Brock, and Bertram Prance. All, at some time, portrayed Frank Darrell, Prance in particular, and though his work is more associated with "Punch", "The Passing Show" and similar humorous journals, he was excellent, throughout the '20s especially with school yarns. Even so, the best illustrator of Sidney Strand's tales was J.H. Valda, who took over in 1925, and continued fairly regularly until 1931.

By then the "Man with Many Faces" was appearing only once a month or so, and the fact that Stanhope W. Spriggs died in 1932, when the Frank Darrell saga was petering out, tends to support the suspicion that Spriggs and Strand may have been one person. I only have the "Scout" Annuals up to 1931, so cannot say whether Darrell made any subsequent appearances. Nor is it possible to assess to what extent the stories were completely original, or akin to tales of other detectives, in other periodicals. Maybe some more knowledgeable reader might let us have observations on these aspects. Suffice to say that a character who evidently held the affection of a great number of young readers for over ten unbroken years must deserve a place in any list of fictional detectives from bygone days.

To conclude - a little mystery! A curious thing took place in February 1923. Without warning the versatile Darrell was suddenly replaced by a so-called "world famous detective, FARRINGDON". His exploits, similar in style to Darrell's, lasted only a couple of months, but the stories were credited to none other than Frank Darrell, thus adding journalism to his many other achievements! Why this hiatus occurred was never explained, either before or after the event.



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Richard (Bingo) Little was the nephew of the well-heeled Mortimer Little, of Little's Liniment fame (It Limbers Up The Legs) and biffed about the Metrop. on a pretty comfortable allowance. This latter had a habit of finding its way into the holdalls of various Turf Accountants. This, in its turn, tended to hamper Bingo in carrying out his principal occupation - that of falling in love with a motley assortment of feminine acquaintances. As, however, the course of true love never lasted long enough to achieve any suggestion of smoothness, Bingo's associates at the Drones Club were well versed in becoming aware of the blowing of his romantic fuses. Jeeves once described Bingo as 'a very warm-hearted gentleman' but Bertie Wooster would have none of it. "Warm-hearted my foot," he announced. "He ought to wear asbestos vests!"

Bertie and Jeeves, as it happened, were shortly to become other than mere bystanders. When Bingo fell for a waitress who worked in 'one of those blighted tea-and-bun shops that are dotted all over London' matters began to look serious. Uncle Mortimer would never approve of his nephew's betrothal to a member of the 'lesser Society', being only too well set in his class prejudice views. "I've got to have an increase in my allowance if I am to get married," Bingo pointed out to Bertie - so Jeeves was asked to come along with one of his fruity schemes.

Jeeves pointed out that it would be a good idea to take advantage of Uncle's temporary incapacity - a medical banning from the pleasures of the table ("Eats like a starving python" said Bingo) as well as a bad attack of gout. When Bertie expressed surprise at Jeeves' knowledge, he was further astonished to be told that Jeeves was on terms of 'some intimacy' with Mr. Little's cook! Bingo considered it was up to Jeeves to do something, as he had provided the tickets for the charity dance at which Bingo had met this Mabel. When Bertie was told that Jeeves had been at the dance (shaking quite a nifty foot, it seemed) Bertie began to realise that Jeeves didn't always 'pop off' to the local of an evening.

Nevertheless, Bingo and Bertie were eager to learn of Jeeves' plan. The idea was for Bingo to pay a series of visits to Uncle whilst the latter was 'inactive' and read to him. Bingo was doubtful - the Sporting Times being about the limit of his perusals - and even more aghast when it was suggested that the chosen reading should be from the many works of the romantic novelist, Rosie M. Banks. Rosie, it seemed, specialised in stories of 'rags to riches', 'poor girl marries Squire's son' etc. Such matter would, reckoned Jeeves, do much to break down Mr. Little's attitude to 'the lower strata'. Bingo took quite a bit of persuading but, not without trepidation decided to 'have a go'.

Jeeves, of course, had hit the nail on the head. At first, Uncle had seemed to quiver at the choice of literature but Bingo managed to slip an opening chapter through his guard and, from then on, all appeared to be 'gas and gaiters'. When Uncle heard a particularly emotional passage about the 'high' marrying the 'low' he gulped like a stricken bull-pup. So it generally went on, with a noticeable mellowing of Uncle after each session. Bertie was glad it wasn't him - anything in the nature of Rosie's 'mashed potatoes' style brought him out in cold sweats! All it seemed, was turning out for the best and it did seem as though Jeeves could chalk up another triumph.

Unfortunately, Bingo could never leave well alone, and Bertie soon found that he wasn't so far removed from matters after all. Bingo's improvement to the scheme was for Bertie to be introduced to Uncle as Rosie M. Banks; to push it along, see that the allowance was increased when Rosie presented Bingo's case, and, in general, to come away with Uncle's complete

blessing. It was, of course, useless Bertie offering any protest ("We were at school together, Bertie" pointed out Bingo.) So - off went Bertie to Uncle with Bingo.

Up to a point, everything proved the success of this latest wheeze. Bertie found Uncle Mortimer was already convinced about 'no class barriers' - so much so, in fact, that he had proposed marriage to (and been accepted by) his cook. Marriage, pointed out Uncle, would necessarily become an additional expense and economies would have to be made. These economies included Bingo's allowance, which could no longer be maintained. "A fine mess you and Jeeves have made of everything", was Bingo's summing up. Jeeves, it seemed, was not averse to a severing of his relations with the future Mrs. Little. He had met a young waitress at a charity dance with whom there was an understanding. A coincidence, Jeeves informed an eyebrow-raising Bertie!

Bingo was now reduced to taking 'one of those tutoring jobs' to make ends meet. This involved 'educating' the younger son of the Glossop family, at the same time falling in love with elder sister, Honoria. Bertie, arriving for a visit at the Glossop home, was promptly roped in to assist in Bingo's 'latest'. This was a complicated scheme that was to see Bertie pushing young Oswald off the lake bridge whilst engaged in fishing, in full sight of Honoria - as soon as the lad hit the water, Bingo was to spring from nearby bushes, swim to the rescue, and earn the undying love of Honoria. Not without difficulty, Bertie managed his part in the affair - but when Oswald struck the waters of the lake, there was a noted absence of a rescuer. Bertie, throwing off coat, had no course open to him but to put himself on as an understudy. By the time he came up from his dive, he was 'interested' to note Oswald, using the Australian crawl, making safely for the bank. Honoria laughed loud and long (like the Scots Express going through a tunnel) and accused Bertie of an attempt to impress himself upon her affections. Bingo's explanation was simple - he'd met someone much more attractive than Honoria and had been 'otherwise engaged!'.

One Sunday afternoon, Bertie found himself strolling through Hyde Park and stopped to listen to a group in one spot at Speaker's Corner. A bearded bozo, in slouch coat and tweed trousers, was holding forth on behalf of the 'Heralds of the Red Dawn', fairly laying into the idle rich. Bertie was startled by a voice nearby saying "Seeking material for one of your delightful romances, eh?" and then noticed that his neighbour was Bingo's Uncle. The bearded Revolutionary on the stand had also seen Uncle and, pointing him out to the interested watchers, told everyone that there stood Lord Bittlesham, a useless member of society, who had downtrodden the poor for centuries. "Does nothing but eat four meals a day and generally worship his belly" the Speaker went on.

Not surprisingly, Uncle withdrew and Bertie went with him, interested to know that old Little was now a Peer of the Realm. What was more, he owned Ocean Breeze, on whom Bertie had wagered a lavish amount to bring home the Cup on Goodwood Race Course shortly. Marriage, it appeared, plus the recent honour bestowed by a gracious sovereign, had enlarged Uncle's horizon - Lady Bittlesham having a great interest in 'the Sport of Kings'.

A greater surprise shortly awaited Bertie; when meeting Bingo at the Drones, he was told that the 'bearded bozo' was Bingo himself. The reason, of course, was obvious - and this time the name turned out to be Charlotte Corday Rowbotham. (It would seem that, towards the end of the 18th Century, a Charlotte Corday - Daughter of the Revolution - was noted for her activity in stabbing people in their baths; when she finally assassinated the 'Friend of the French People' she earned herself a visit to the Guillotine - and today old Rowbotham had so named his own daughter!)

Bingo had met Charlotte on top of a bus, become immediately smitten and, on learning of the 'Heralds', had enrolled (in disguise) as a member. The main gang of three included a morose individual known as Comrade Butt, with more than a passing interest in Charlotte. Bingo was sceptical - "But - I've cut him right out." He went on to describe Butt to Bertie as 'nature's mistake! Bertie, of course, was to become involved. As Bingo had placed what money he now had an Ocean Breeze, he wanted Bertie to invite the Heralds to tea.

"See what a bit of good this will do you," urged Bingo. "When the Revolution does come, you'll be sitting pretty." Bertie was to keep Rowbotham and Butt occupied in conversation, whilst Bingo paid due attention to the girl. Whether Bingo's beard helped him in his wooing was never apparent - but it certainly had an affect on Jeeves. When Bingo arrived in Bertie's apartment, clad about the face, Jeeves was seen to have shied like a startled horse!

The tea party went into session; Butt had little to say, sitting sullenly and gazing with disgust at the two love birds. Rowbotham was full of talk and tucked into the repast with equal gusto. At parting, the Founder of the Heralds informed Bertie that the food they had just eaten had been wrung from the bleeding lips of the poor; such items would be touched upon at their Goodwood meeting. As far as could be ascertained, when the three visitors had departed, they had left nothing at all for the starving poor. Jeeves was exhorted earnestly by his employer to 'try and break it up'.

Bertie tracked down the Red Dawn Revolutionaries at Goodwood, in full voice before a crowd of onlookers. Ocean Breeze having finished out of the first three, the bearded Speaker was drawing a bitter picture of a trusting public, led to expect great things from Lord Bittlesham's horse, raising everything they could, including raiding the baby's money box, to put on the nag's nose. "What does he care?" asked Bingo in loud voice. Old Bittlesham by now had arrived with the Constabulary but was having no success in interesting them in doing something about the slanderous remarks. It was left to Comrade Butt to bring down the house.

Many well-connected folk were coming round to the views of the Red Heralds, Butt informed his listeners, including the very nephew of Lord Bittlesham. So saying, he reached out, jerked Bingo's beard off in full view of Uncle - and got a really big hand from the audience. The sequel was painful and need not be described. Suffice to say one more romance ended for Bingo, and with it any further connection with the Heralds. Later that day, Jeeves did wonder if he had been a little injudicious in revealing Bingo's identity to Comrade Butt!

Left high and dry again, Bingo went back to tutoring. ("After all", said Bertie, "he and I did get some sort of a Degree, you know!") This time, the engagement was at Twing Hall and, naturally, Bingo had fallen under the spell of Cynthia, daughter of the house. A group of young people, including Bertie, were present and, to relieve the monotony of country house visits, one of their number started a Book on the Great Sermon Handicap. It seemed that within a radius of about six miles there were churches galore, all giving forth sermons once a week. After a close study some week-ends of 'form', it soon became obvious who was noted for rapid, short sermons and who, in turn, took rather longer over their offerings. Prices were fixed accordingly and the holder of the ticket bearing the name of the most lengthy speaker scooped the lot. Every Speaker was to be clocked by 'a reliable steward of the Course' so roll up, study the Odds and pick your fancy.

Bertie soon saw that he had a trick up his sleeve. Remembrance of an earlier visit, when he had been lugged to church one Sunday, recalled a very long Sermon called 'Brotherly Love'. To seek out the Vicar concerned, ask him to repeat the treatise and generally to take his time over it, was soon arranged by Bertie and bets were placed accordingly. It went wrong, of course. The Brotherly Love Sermoniser went down with a chest cold ("Coughing in his stable all night", said the Report): in order not to disappoint Bertie, however, the delivering of the sermon was given to a neighbouring Speaker as a means of obtaining a Headmastership. The Governors would be there, judging very largely on the applicant's sermon. All bets, of course, were lost, as the winner was the longest priced runner, noted previously for very short sermons. The Book, in which Jeeves had a half-share, cleaned up. The Vicar's message to tell Bertie about the change of venue did not reach him in time. Cynthia was now able to announce her engagement to the forthcoming new Headmaster, even if Bingo viewed the whole proceedings with disfavour. "Preaching another man's sermon", he cried. "That sort of thing should be reported to the Stewards of the Jockey Club!"

A little luck attended the next venture of Bertie and Bingo, at the Twing Village Sports - where, despite the Vicar's insistence, betting was not absent from some of the races. Jeeves provided a solution, as usual, here. Later, there was another shattered romance when Bingo, producing the end of year Village Concert, made a complete ass of himself and only narrowly missed being chucked into the adjacent Duck Pond. In fact, Bingo carried on much as previously, although Bertie did his best to keep out of the way.

It was some little time before the two crossed paths again. One afternoon, Bingo blew into Bertie's apartment with a flower in his buttonhole and a look on his face as if someone had socked him behind the ear with a stuffed eel skin. After some remarks from Bingo about the weather, lower bank rate, news from Silesia, etc. he added "Oh, I say - I know what it was I came to tell you - I'm married!"

Bertie wavered in his thoughts. Flower in buttonhole, the dazed look in the eyes, all the symptoms indeed, but Bertie was so used to seeing Bingo stagger through over fifty romances, it just didn't seem feasible. But it was. Once more, the lady in question was a waitress; she had accepted him, and now ---! Bertie knew only too well what was coming. 'Rosie M. Banks' was to present Uncle with the latest epistle ('The Girl who Braved All' - curse her, thought Bertie!) and then to work the oracle for the acceptance of Bingo's marriage, restoring of his allowance and Uncle's general 'Bless You, my Children' message.

So Bertie set out, armed with new Book but insisted on Bingo and wife coming too. Leaving them seated in the Hall at Uncle's, Bertie went upstairs to do his stuff. It worked - and Bertie was relieved finally to get away, proceed down to the Hall and send up the happy couple to receive Uncle's congratulations, etc. Which were not given - a snag developed, as in all Bingo's affairs. For, who did Bingo's wife turn out to be? None other than Rose M. Banks herself. She had been so thrilled that Bingo wanted her for **herself** that she had accepted him. (Bingo had met her working in Service - actually, to obtain material for her 'next'.) To say that Bingo was shattered when Rosie had revealed herself to Uncle was to put it mildly. Where did Bertie come in, then? Rosie wanted to know - Uncle wanted to know. What Bingo wanted was help. "A nice kettle of fish - I knew you'd muck it up!" was Bingo's grateful comment to Bertie, when he met him.

Bingo got the help he needed, needless to say, from Jeeves. This worthy counselled Bingo to tell Uncle and Rosie that he had introduced Bertie in good faith, having always accepted Bertie's statement of the Authorship as the truth. Bingo was to explain that the Woosters had a history of being 'not quite right up there'. Rosie's romantic nature soon saw her accepting Bingo's assurance and Uncle followed that line. All was well that ended well - but Bertie, when he was acquainted with the solution, found himself with an extremely unpalatable taste and a straining of relations with Jeeves. He was particularly churned up to know that wherever he went, the story would have revealed him as an acute eccentric, one whose presence was to be avoided. Bingo was quite consoling about it, however. "They'll all think as usual - that you're just plain potty!"

One thing that later was to make things easier for Bertie was the fact that marriage kept Bingo out of circulation most of the time. Rosie, with her forgiving nature, soon forgave her husband's errant friend and even invited him to a stay at a country place in Norfolk. It was here that Bertie was first introduced to the cooking of Anatole. When Aunt Dahlia heard about it, she stored the information away for future reference.

Bingo still had a few 'upsets' in his life. When Rosie went abroad on one of her lecture tours, she left money behind for the use of Bingo whilst 'minding' her family of pekinese dogs. Bingo would sometimes drop the money at Hurst Park and seek assistance elsewhere - tutoring again came to the temporary rescue. Sent to Monte Carlo to obtain colour for Rosie (not to bet, of course, dear!) he had a run of luck and managed to 'collect' for once. Rosie came out to him, confessed to having had a flutter at the tables and was reassured by Bingo that "I understand these sudden temptations. I never have them, but there - ". So all was well, especially when Rosie secured him the job of Editor of 'Wee Tots', a weekly for the more than usually retarded youngster. Intereference by the owner in Bingo's 'Uncle Joe to his Chickabiddies' chat had to be overcome. Even without assistance from Jeeves and Bertie, Bingo seemed to take with him the 'Luck of the Littles'.

Came the day when Algernon Aubrey arrived on the scene. The author of his being even took him once to the Drones Club; not to the delight of the members, who saw Algy's comparison with Edward G. Robinson. Bingo slipped up when backing Algernon against his Bookmaker's baby for the 'ugliest' child. The Judge awarded the palm to the Bookie, adding "But you ought to see the one I've got at home!". There was a further flutter in the 'Fat Uncles' contest but on the whole Bingo weathered through.

The final parting of the ways between the Littles and the Woosters was now to take place. Rosie wanted Jeeves to find her a new Housemaid - Aunt Dahlia wanted Jeeves to entice Anatole away from Rosie. Bingo wanted Bertie to snitch the dictaphone recording of an article by Rosie for Aunt Dahlia's Ladies Monthly. The article, shuddered Bingo, is called 'How I keep the Love of My Husband-Baby'. The thought of how he would feel when the article was seen by his friends and acquaintances made Bingo go hot and cold in turn. "Pinch it" he said to Bertie. "Then she won't be bothered to do it again - I know her!"

It meant Bingo and Rosie being absent when Bertie made the attempt. It involved pekinese dogs, maid-servants and policemen, before Bertie was able to make a quick sneak through a window and into a passing taxi. All was well, however. Jeeves unearthed a Housemaid for Rosie - when she arrived and met Anatole, the cook, the air heated up. In a previous engagement, Anatole had behaved towards her with a feeling warmer than mere friendship - and Anatole was out of Rosie's employment and into Aunt Dahlia's in a twinkling. Bertie decided that this was the very last occasion when he would try and help Bingo. He needn't have worried, however - when Rosie learned that Anatole was in Aunt Dahlia's service, she refused to submit the article. Bingo breathed again!

Bertie and Bingo did not meet again. Bingo, from time to time, had a few more set-backs - including a spell of Banning the Bomb - but in the end the providence that watches over a certain type of man came up trumps. One day at the seaside, Wally Judd caught sight of Algernon Aubrey. Wally was a well-known cartoonist and soon saw the advantages of a character like Algy. Negotiations were entered into, payment changed hands, and all was nicely fixed for Bingo. No doubt Bingo was able to draw his 10% Agent's commission from Wally - plenty of money in this kind of well-syndicated works; probably under the title of 'The Little Horror', Algy's parent was now 'sitting pretty'.

There, then, one leaves Richard Little, secure in the knowledge that whatever had gone before, in the end he lived up to his nickname by hitting the Jackpot!

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JACK HUGHES wishes all collectors A Blessed Christmas and Bright New Year.  
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# Three Cheers for Wycliffe

BY C. H. Churchill.



The first story paper I remember seeing was a "Gem". It must have been 1916 or 1917 and we were living in Paignton, S. Devon. One day in summer my brother (6 years older than I was) decided to take me up to the park. On the way we called in to see one of our grandmothers. She came up with a tip of twopence (quite a good sum in those days) so on our way to the park we purchased a "Gem" and a bag of sweets with the twopence. I was more interested in the sweets than the book as up to then I had been happy with the "Rainbow" and "Comic Cuts". My brother was a reader and my parents used to chip him with reading what they called 'Halfpenny Horribles' and told me that I would probably be reading them in due course. I hotly denied this but they were proved right as I became much more of a reader than my brother.

Referring to the above mentioned "Gem" I can remember looking at it but the title of the story has gone from me. I do know that the opening chapter featured an episode of Grundy, Wilkins and Gunn, the well known St. Jim's trio. I remember no more as I became interested in the bag of sweets again.

In 1918 we moved to Exeter and I was still on "Rainbow". However, one day in late 1919 my brother visited the local market bookstall and came home with a few Nelson Lees of the "Mr. Martin Barring Out" series. I commenced reading them, became "hooked", and ever since my real preference has been for St. Frank's stories by Edwy Searles Brooks. I became avid for reading material and sampled the Gem, Magnet, U.J., Popular and many others.

My brother was fond of the adventure stories in the B.F. 4d. monthly issues. I remember "The Red City" and Ferrers Lord stories very well. Then one day in 1921 he brought home B.F. Lib. No. 532 "Jack Jackson's Enemy", by Jack North. He and I became very fond of these Wycliffe stories and continued to have them each month. They continued at one story per month for ages. Naturally, at that time we did not know that the real author was called Pentelow, and that Jack North was a penname. He wrote other stories besides those about Wycliffe such as the Haygarth ones, but my preference was for those about Wycliffe. I have since learned that all these stories were originally published in those famous periodicals of the pre-1914 war or during it. I mean The Boys Friend Weekly, The Boys Realm and The Boys Herald.

Pentelow became Editor of the Gem and Magnet in the period of the first war, 1915 to 1919 roughly. He wrote many stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, and they were published in the Gem and Magnet during that period but under the names of Frank Richards and Martin Clifford.

Today, collectors of these two papers are not very fond of these "substitute" stories, as Pentelow made no effort to copy the style of Charles Hamilton but wrote them in his own way. As the late Herbert Leckenby (whom I had the pleasure of meeting in York about 1950) used to say, "Pentelow, writing stories of his own creation of schools, was in a different class from when he wrote stories for the Magnet and Gem under the names of Richards and Clifford". With this view I heartily concur. His stories of Wycliffe were really good with some very good characters in them.

The saga of Wycliffe is very simple. It merely records the adventures of four boys who entered the school on the same day. They were Jack Jackson (English), Donald McDonald (Scottish), Patrick O'Hara (Irish) and David Davies (Welsh). They met on the journey down and became very friendly right away. They decided as a jape to get dressed in national costumes and turn up at school in a cart. They managed to get the clothes in a passing shop. The picture here-with shows this episode very well.



Wycliffe was composed of seven houses. The School House was presided over by the Headmaster, Dr. Anderson. The other houses were known by the names of the Housemasters, namely Gazman, Whiteman, Morant, Dunford, Leigh and Bowker. The school captain and head prefect was a fine young fellow called Walter Raleigh.

Our four heroes were assigned to Mr. Bowker's house which was the most backward of all in most ways. This was because it was under the sway of a caddish clique headed by Carver and Harris of the Fifth. The prefects were a poor lot on the whole and were really indifferent as to what went on, and Mr. Bowker could not be less interested. The Headmaster had even transferred a prefect, Barham, from another house to try and improve things but Barham found his task almost impossible.

Jack Jackson & Co. became friendly with Harry Merry, an Australian, and Beiram Sinhji, an Indian, who were already there and gradually influenced the weaning away of Charles Horace Harris from the influence of Carver & Co., the caddish clique.



Harris and his two chums, Porson and Wicks, became interested in football and other games, and, largely due to the activities of Jackson & Co., Harris was elected Football Captain of the house. As a result Harris & Co. teamed up with Jackson & Co. and, thus united, managed to improve Bowker's sporting prowess so that they became champion House by the end of the term.

There was an underlying plot to these stories. Jackson's father was an explorer and had been "lost in the wilds" abroad for quite some time. Jack was under the care of a guardian. This gentleman, however, was to inherit Captain Jackson's fortune if he failed to survive his journey and if young Jack could be disposed of. Being unscrupulous, this precious fellow made several attempts to dispose of Jack but they all failed for various reasons. This person then came to the vicinity of Wycliffe and managed to get a hold over the rascally Mr. Bowker (because the housemaster was so fond of gambling and drinking) and he was forced to join in these activities. All this plotting came to nought, and the plotters were vanquished. I am unable to describe the incidents that brought this about as this story is the one missing from my collection).

A rather attractive feature of these Wycliffe stories is that as one reads them the characters get older and the boys move up into higher forms and even have "Minors" arriving on the scene. I have yet to find anything like this occurring in any other school stories.

I shall be glad if I have succeeded in convincing any reader of these notes that there are other schools than Greyfriars, etc. which can be interesting to read about, and that Mr. Pentelow could write good stories if he liked to make the effort.

For some of the above information I am indebted to our well respected ex-editor, Eric Fayne, and for the bright sunshine lately which has helped me to re-read the Wycliffe stories with the very, very small print which was the fashion in printing boys books in the twenties. A very merry Christmas and prosperous new year to anyone reading this.

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*THE LITTLE THINGS*

*By An Old Girl*



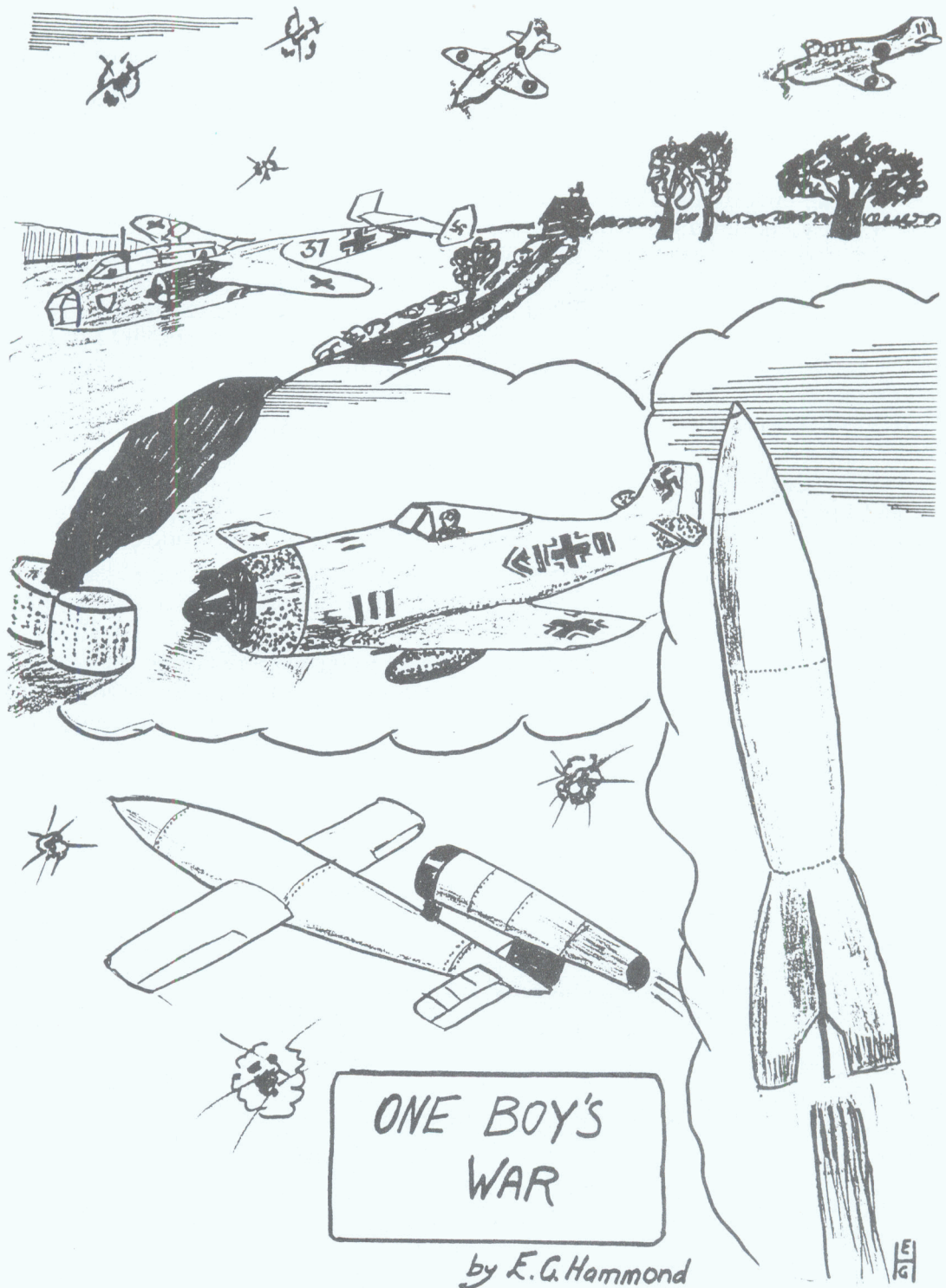
**T**HE sunlight on the study wall,  
The table laid for tea ;  
Three voices raised in eager talk—  
Just Elsie, Dot and me.  
It isn't much—a simple scene  
Of girlish life and fun.  
It's little things like that that count—  
When schoolgirl days are done !

The rising bell ! With strident clang  
It bids us face the day.  
A grumble falters on my lips—  
I hear Dot Harvey say :  
" It's Wednesday, girls ! This afternoon  
We meet St. Claire's—hooray ! "

A little thing—a memory  
That's here with me to-day.

The match is played—the last goal scored ;  
They say our side has won.  
Our captain's voice rings in my ear :  
" Phyl, old girl, well done ! "

A little thing—but oh, the joy !  
One girlish heart beats high.  
It's just those little things that count—  
When years have passed you by.



The day war broke out, as dear old Robb Wilton used to say, I was exactly eleven and a half years old. I am, of course, referring to the "Vera Lynn War" or as it is sometimes known, World War II, not to some of the minor skirmishes we have been experiencing ever since. I remember sitting in our tiny dining room, with mother, father and younger brother, listening to the wireless as Mr. Chamberlain's chilling words came over

the air at 11.15 on that Autumn Sunday morning 50 years ago.

"I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that, unless we heard from them by eleven o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no

such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany..."

As his announcement continued, we looked at each other. I had learnt of the horrors of the First World War from conversations overheard, when surviving members of our family discussed it. I think we all felt that the mayhem would start where the last one had finished. We were not alone in our thoughts.

The Prime Minister's speech finished and very shortly afterwards our Peace was literally shattered. The air raid sirens sounded. Ours was located atop a tall steel mast behind our local police station. As a matter of fact, it still is. Being only a hundred yards or so from where we lived, we experienced the banshee wail in full volume. A stomach turning sound it was.

Mother gathered my brother up in her arms, he was only four, and ran to the Anderson shelter, recently erected at the end of the garden. Father was about to shepherd me in the same direction, when I experienced the very urgent need to use the lavatory. His pleas, to get a move on, were superfluous. Everything seemed to be moving where I was sitting. After what seemed an age, but was probably not more than a few minutes, I was pleased to join the rest of the family in the shelter. As we sat and nothing seemed to be happening, we began to get impatient. After about twenty five minutes, and at that stage of hostilities complete amateurs about the rigours of war, we decided to go back indoors. After all it was getting close to Sunday lunch time, and I was empty, or so I thought.

We had only been indoors for a few minutes, when the siren sounded again. We then had instant replay. Mother and brother to the shelter, me to the lavatory and father imploring me to get a move on.

It only took a short time for father to realise that it was in fact the "All Clear" sounding. Everyone looking a little sheepish made for the house, except me. I had not left and although I now knew the danger had passed, parts of me seemed not so sure.

Strangely enough I never felt ashamed of my fear on that first day, any more than I took a pride in not being afraid later in the war, when there was good reason.

Things changed in those first few months of war. Not in any radical way that would make a lasting impression on a boy of eleven. For a few weeks schools closed, which was a plus for me and my friends. The blackout was difficult for a few weeks, but everyone soon got used to the ritual, although the warden's 'Put that light out' rang out for the next six years. It was some time before the necessities of life became scarce and for the hardships of rationing to bite. Even at its worse, rationing provided a balanced if uninteresting diet. In fact the only things I can honestly say I missed during the six years were bananas.

Living on the fringe of Greater London near Hornchurch aerodrome I was well placed to witness part of the Battle of Britain. My interest in things aeronautical had probably started in pre-war days when I avidly read all the 'Ace' series from our local library. The Battle of Britain consolidated that interest and has continued throughout my life.

Many times I saw the contrails of the fighting aircraft high overhead, scratching the blue sky in their deadly aerial ballet. I heard the whistle of bombs and the clatter of shrapnel and empty shell cases. So high were they usually that the chatter of machine guns was very faint. I witnessed a Dornier Do. 217 being shot down by a pair of Hurricanes. As the German plane flew in a gentle downward glide the two Hurricanes criss crossed behind him, firing when lined up with his tail. It was nothing like the way in which films and television normally depict aerial combat. It seemed a slow gentle spectacle, no smoke, no flames just the intermittent sound of machine-gun fire. The German took no evasive action, nor, it appeared, did it return any fire.

I was told later that it had crashed, only a few miles away in Grays. All the crew were dead. It is conceivable that they were all dead as they passed. This would account for the lack of evasive action.

On another occasion I saw three German aircrew being escorted into our police station. Three young, blond men in smart, grey green uniforms. They certainly didn't look supermen, nor so very different from our own local pilots.

I well remember the afternoon when Thames Board Mills were bombed and set alight. For days the whole area was under

a cloud of fragments of burnt paper. It made today's stubble burning paltry in comparison. Another afternoon, a Saturday, Hornchurch Aerodrome was the main target. The Luftwaffe were successful and much damage was done. It was during this attack that a bomb landed among three Spitfires of 54 Squadron just as they were taking off to intercept. All three planes were destroyed and miraculously all three pilots survived. The details were published after the war, as at the time information about such incidents was never published. But I well remember the noise of bombs and gunfire from the aerodrome on that last day of August 1940.

A few miles down the road from where I lived a damaged Junkers Ju 88 crash landed in a meadow. As the locals made their way towards it, they were met by the crew, who urgently motioned them back. A few moments later the aircraft blew to smithereens. The pilot had set off a time bomb, or so we were told. The story was certainly believed at the time and the crew were given a grudging admiration. Whether it were true or not I never bothered to confirm, but I do know the 'plane exploded.

The farmer whose meadow it fell in, was resourceful as most farmers are. He opened the field to souvenir collectors at 6d (21/2p) a head, the proceeds to go to the all important Spitfire Fund. Being like most of my contemporaries an avid souvenir collector, I had my six pennorth. I was pleased with my selection, it was a rivetted piece of metal about 18 inches by 12 inches with four bullet holes in it. These made it a particularly good find. It took its place with many other wartime objects. Perhaps it was the war that gave me a start in a lifetime of collecting. If so I am eternally grateful, as I have never stopped since. Now it is books, art and comics that fulfil my collecting proclivities, much more peaceful.

The Battle of Britain merged into the Blitz without us even knowing. Now there are academic arguments as to when one finished and the other started. But at the time it was not even considered. All it meant to us was that the buggers had stopped coming by day and were now coming by night. The Blitz was by far the worse of the two actions. In daylight you could see your enemy and were not losing any sleep. Also the Blitz took place in

winter, during seemingly endless nights. We would descend into our shelters soon after tea-time and emerge at day-break. This went on for many months with very few breaks. My brother and I had bunk beds and therefore did get some sleep in relative comfort. Mother, father and two neighbours rested as well as they could sitting up every night. I never remember my father complaining or losing a day's work. It is surprising what one can stand when there is no choice.

We were lucky during the Blitz. The worst that befell us was a chimney pot being blown off, when a bomb destroyed a row of cottages fifty yards down the road. The following morning, mother, our neighbour and I viewed the wreckage. The rescue services were still sorting through the rubble, making pathetic piles of goods and chattels that were once the essentials of now shattered homes. An old couple had been killed and four other families made homeless. While we were watching the activity, a time bomb, of which no one was aware, went off in a ploughed field fifty yards behind us. A mighty roar, a blast of wind and a cloud of smoke. I looked around and mother and I were the only one standing. Everyone else had had the good sense to drop to the ground. The local children including me, used the massive crater as a gang stronghold for many weeks. The farmer seemed in no hurry to fill it in, probably lacking labour. Over the site now stands the forecourt of the Cooper Coburn School.

I think it was during the Blitz I first missed the demise of the *Gem* and the *Magnet*, especially the latter. The summer months following their stoppage had been so momentous and traumatic that their loss had not really registered. In the numerous hours spent in the dugout, when reading often supplied our only entertainment, their loss was brought home. I remember reading the *Champion*, *Rover*, *Wizard* and *Skipper*, the latter lasting nearly to the end of the Blitz.

All good things come to an end, and fortunately so do bad. The Blitz petered out and life went on. There were far more shortages now. Rationing was strictly imposed. It hit our family perhaps less than some others. For we may well have been the progenitors of the TV programme, "The Good Life". We grew vegetables, kept chickens and ducks and over forty

rabbits. At one time we even kept a goat. When I think of the size of that garden, I don't know how we did it! Not an inch of space was wasted.

My father was a bricklayer, so was not called up for the services. Instead he was drafted away to wherever the Government, in their wisdom, deemed he was needed most. He went to Suffolk for some time to help in the construction of airfields awaiting the arrival of the American 8th Air Force. Later he went to Tilbury Docks helping to build the caissons that made up an essential part of the Mulberry Harbour that was used in our return to Europe. Yet later in the war he was sent to London, to repair damage caused by V2s. It was while doing this that he was hit by flying glass from another V2 that landed close by. A visit to hospital for stitches, then back to work. But I am getting ahead of myself.

With father often away, I was now elevated to "man of the house" at the early age of thirteen. Although I had a paper round in the morning and went to school, it fell upon me to look after our livestock. This meant that after school I collected food for the rabbits and in season gleaned corn for the chickens. This took up a great deal of time. When father was away it also became my duty, no matter how distasteful, to kill and dress the livestock when necessary. This resourcefulness made us as a family less prone to the rigours of rationing.

My paper round afforded me some experiences worth mentioning. I vividly recall the beautiful spring morning, when suddenly, just above the housetops, appeared four of the formidable new Focke Wulf Fw 190 fighter bombers. I saw the blunt yellow noses, and beneath each a large bomb. As they passed I could see the pilot clearly in the nearest aircraft. I swear he was looking at me. Even then I had time to admire the powerful beauty and grace of an aircraft that proved to be one of the greatest in the war. That most people admired the pilots for their courage and audacity goes without saying. A few moments after their passing I heard the rattle of their guns and then minutes later the muffled explosions from the bombs. The bombs were dropped at Ilford and the gunfire heard was their firing at the Romford Gasworks as they passed. At least one gasometer was set alight. I had a

friend then in hospital beside the gasworks. He witnessed the attack from his hospital bed. He was much envied for being luckily ill at the right moment.

The other paper round episode was of a more farcial nature and reflects little credit upon me. It was much later in the war when our Home Guard had swelled its ranks into a formidable force, numerically! It was on the occasion of a gathering of all the local companies for the monthly early morning Sunday Church parade. I was returning home from my paper round, when the head of the column, which I could see stretched for a considerable distance, had reached the cross roads where I usually went over. With the call of breakfast and an always healthy appetite I was impatient to be on my way. It was obvious that the column would take many minutes to pass, and with a lack of respect which was their due I decided to cross. Between each company was a space of a few yards. Each company was led by its commanding officer, and recognising our local commander, a local butcher very full of his own importance, I decided this was perhaps the best place to cross. No sooner the thought than the deed. I was almost through when our commander/butcher tried to grab me, using language hardly suitable on the way to church. He grabbed my rear mudguard which although it made me wobble and slow down, failed to stop me, which in the circumstances was just as well. As I looked back he was shouting and shaking his fist, the gap between his and the preceding company widening. My only consolation was the sight of many smiles on the faces of his own men. I was never forgiven and many years later he still scowled at me, but said not a word.

Our enthusiasm for collecting souvenirs never diminished throughout the war. We were ardent if not always sensible collectors. We had a profusion of shrapnel, nose caps from anti-aircraft shells, fins from incendiary bombs, pieces of parachute and parts from aircraft that crashed locally. Often tragically, they were from our own planes. I had a section of yellow painted canvas-covered plywood, from the Fuselage of a Miles Magister trainer, an American water bottle from a wrecked Flying Fortress, plus many bits and pieces from the same plane. All these objects were swapped and bartered for, in the same way as cigarette cards, stamps, comics, etc., had been before the war.

Once I was on my way to the site of a crashed Mustang Fighter with the hope of yet another souvenir, when I met a friend returning from it. He told me not to continue as the pilot had been blown into a tree and his body had not yet been taken down. Needless to say I turned back.

Probably my best find of the war was an unexploded incendiary bomb. I discovered it while playing on a local railway embankment. Only one boy was with me at the time and he not a very close friend. It was our unwritten code that finders were keepers. With the slightest hesitation, I picked it up (now I shudder at the thought) and took it home. Realising that mother may not view it as an amazing stroke of luck as I did, I hid it in the garden shed. Half an hour later, a knock at the front door came from a Special Constable.

"Upon information received we have reason to believe that your son has found a bomb, and now has it in his possession", in his stentorial official voice said the policeman. I heard this from the back parlour.

"Not my boy I'm sure. Just a minute, I'll call him", says mother. Sheepishly I sidle to the door.

"Tell the officer he is wrong", again, mother.

He knew immediately that he was not: "Go and get it son". Mother was more than surprised to see me walk through the house holding a very lethal looking bomb.

It had never occurred to me that any danger was involved. My disappointment was overshadowed by my desire to meet my treacherous "friend".

When the VIs, or Doodlebugs, as most people called them, started to come I was coming of an age when I realised that they could be dangerous. I admit to a slight flutter in the lower reaches when they were approaching, and a sigh of relief when they had passed. I always had silent prayer for the people they were approaching. Most people old enough to remember have their own doodlebug stories. I am no exception. I remember well the very dull raining Saturday morning, waiting in the glass department of the local builders merchant, while a pane of glass was being cut for me. An ominous roar, so well known to us, told of a fast approaching doodlebug. Suddenly silence, for two or three seconds, then an ear splitting explosion. The

windows of the shops opposite fell out with a crash. I was standing, hardly believing my eyes. The assistant serving me was spreadeagled on the floor. Coming from the East End of London he had the presence of mind and practice to do the sensible thing. Not one window on our side of the road, which was nearer the explosion, had broken. More important my piece of glass was intact.

One evening we were playing tennis with some American soldiers in the local Recreation Ground, when an approaching doodlebug stopped and plunged to earth about a mile away. We never moved without our bikes and four of the lads including myself were at the incident within minutes, long before any of the rescue services had arrived. It had fallen close to some bungalows and had caused great devastation. Roofs and windows were no more. Wreckage and glass was everywhere. An old lady appeared from the ruins of her bungalow, obviously in a state of shock and bewilderment. Although dazed her only concern was for her cat, that had been in her back garden when the bomb arrived. We helped her away from the ruin that five minutes before had been her home. We then looked for her cat. We never found it, but heard later that happily it returned. When the rescue services arrived we were ordered away: "Young fools, can't you smell the gas?". A gas main had been ruptured. We did smell it, but being young and stupid, had not considered it might be dangerous.

The other incident involving doodlebugs had an amusing conclusion. I was sitting at our dining-room table one Saturday evening in August 1944, making a model of a Republic Thunderbolt fighter out of timber and putty. No plastic kits then. The family were out visiting, so I was alone. I heard the sound of an approaching doodlebug, so hastily ran into the front garden. As I did, the engine stopped and I heard the explosion, and a few seconds later saw a pall of smoke rising into the sky about a half a mile down the road. As always my trusty bike was standing at the ready. I was on my way within seconds, and was climbing down into the still smoking crater within two minutes. It had landed in a meadow, doing no damage other than making a very large hole. That meadow is within fifty yards of where I now live.

Wreckage of the VI was strewn everywhere, but in the bottom of the crater, looking like hidden treasure to a collector, were two objects. One was the mastergyro and the other was the magnetic compass. Both beautiful works of precision engineering. The magnetic compass was a joy to hold. It was the pride of my collection for a long time. Alas over the years the entire collection disappeared, and I know not where. But I digress. Wasting no time I was into the crater; the objects, not being large, were tucked under my jumper, and I was on my way home before anyone else arrived. Halfway back I was passed by a squad of Home Guard in a lorry, presumably on their way to the scene.

Many, many years later, I was married with two daughters and at a family gathering the war was being discussed. My father-in-law, an ex-Sergeant of the Home Guard, was relating how one Saturday evening he and his squad spent many hours hunting for the mastergyro and magnetic compass from a doodlebug that landed in a meadow. They were joined later by elements of the R.A.F. to help in the search. Imagine his reaction, and the family's amusement, when I told him how he had passed them on the way! As it happened I knew more about the objects

than he did. He claimed that the setting of the magnetic compass told the authorities where they were coming from. As we had been bombing the sites for months, I think the powers-that-be were trying to make the Home Guard feel useful.

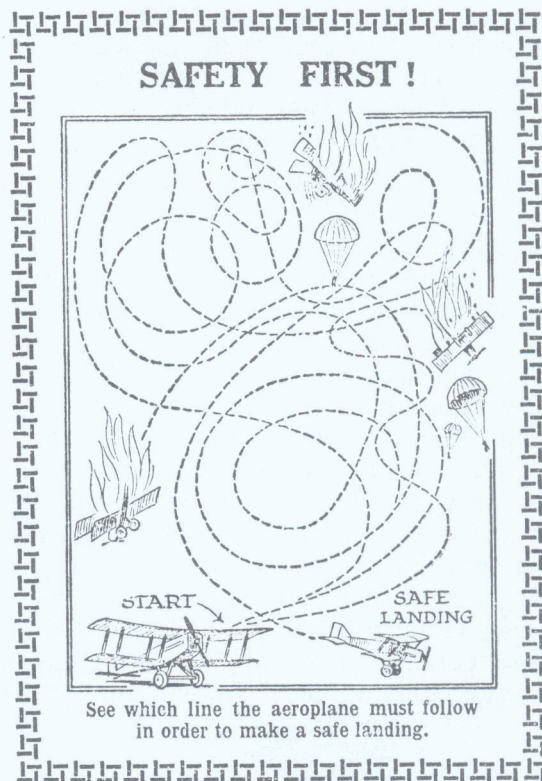
Many other memories come back to me. The massive build-up of arms and troops before D.Day. The hundreds and hundreds of vehicles, lorries and tanks, parked from London to Southend, in fact, the whole length of the A127 and then some.

The V2s later in the war. A terrible weapon, but not really frightening. Because the explosion was the first thing you heard; when that happened, and you were still alive, the danger was over. It was then that one heard the roar of its approach, like an almighty thunderstorm. Being much faster than sound, the danger was over before the warning noise.

It seemed at the end that suddenly the war was over. I suppose it also coincided with the end of my boyhood. Then the frenetic celebrations of V.E. and V.J. days. What a feeling of relief. And what hope for the future. Many years were to pass before we realised the pre-war days of plenty.

But that is another story!

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# Holiday Reading

By Norman Wright



One of the last items I slip into the suitcase before going away for a week's holiday is something to read. It is usually a last minute thought and often totally unnecessary as our holiday outings tend to take in every town, village and hamlet that has so much as a sniff of a second hand bookshop. But famines have been known and it is reassuring to have a modest volume or two handy to read leisurely on the beach. Once the decision to take something has been made the next difficulty is deciding on the title. Should it be some old favourite; a tenth re-reading of "The Hound of the Baskervilles" or a favourite Charteris? Holiday books tend to take a fair bit of wear and tear so treasured volumes will be left on the shelf. Perhaps the pile of recent acquisitions, that have not been sniffed at since their purchase months, weeks or days before, may offer something suitable? These thoughts usually flash through my mind in the time it takes to walk from the kitchen, to check that the kettle has been unplugged, to one of the many bookcases where some of my treasures and trifles repose. The rest of the family are in the car waiting to get started and my wife's voice summons me. Making a quick decision I snatch up a couple of volumes and bound to the car like a naughty boy late for registration.

This year's pick was "Ironsides Sees Red" by Victor Gunn and "The Cleverness of Mr. Budd" by Gerald Verner. The former an old favourite last read fifteen or sixteen years ago, the latter my first introduction to Superintendent Robert Budd, courtesy of a book borrowed from my good friend Bill Bradford.

The nice thing about both books is that the majority of their contents are novelette length tales, a convenient and satisfying length, just short enough to be finished in one long evening's read and just meaty enough to occupy the time taken by the rest of the family to build a monster sandcastle with turrets, tunnels and torture chambers (poetic licence).

The 'Ironsides' tales had seen the light of day in "Detective Weekly" in the 1930s during its non-Blake days, and two of the Mr. Budd stories had been the main bill of fare in "The Thriller" at about the same time. The two detectives were remarkably similar, both rather shabby individuals who became more irritable the closer they came to solving the crimes they were engaged upon. All five tales had good opening chapters that succeeded in pulling their readers straight into the story with a minimum of superfluous wordage. "Death in June", had a gem of a first chapter in which Johnny Lister and Cromwell bantered with each other over the merits and shortcomings of various types of holiday.

Having devoured all three 'Ironsides' tales and the first two Superintendent Budd stories, I discovered that the final third of "The Cleverness of Mr. Budd" consisted of five short stories all featuring Mr. Budd and his stooge, the melancholy Sergeant Leek. In all probability they were originally written for some pre-war paper, but a scouring of my "Thriller Index" and "Detective Weekly Index" failed to reveal them, or any other title under which they may have been masquerading. I began to read the third offering, entitled "The Clue", and had progressed as far as the second page when, like Bunter when he discovered the 'pop' bottle contained castor oil, I suddenly sat up and took notice. I regarded the tale with a more critical eye. The plot was familiar. Though not as a Mr. Budd story. I read on eagerly to confirm my suspicions. Yes, there could be no doubt about it. "The Club", with the names of the two main characters changed, was a printed version of the Sexton Blake 78rpm record "Murder on the Portsmouth Road". Most of the dialogue was identical, even such immortal lines as - "I told 'im if 'e didn't treat 'er better than what 'e'd been doing I'd croak 'im" - were left intact. I was not surprised at finding the tale in a book of Donald Stuart stories. In part 2 of my series "Multi Media Blake", in the "Collectors' Digest" for July 1987, I mentioned that the label of that elusive record bore the credit D. Stuart, and guessed that it would have been too much of a coincidence if it were not 'our' Donald Stuart. But, all the same, it was satisfying to have my surmise corroborated.

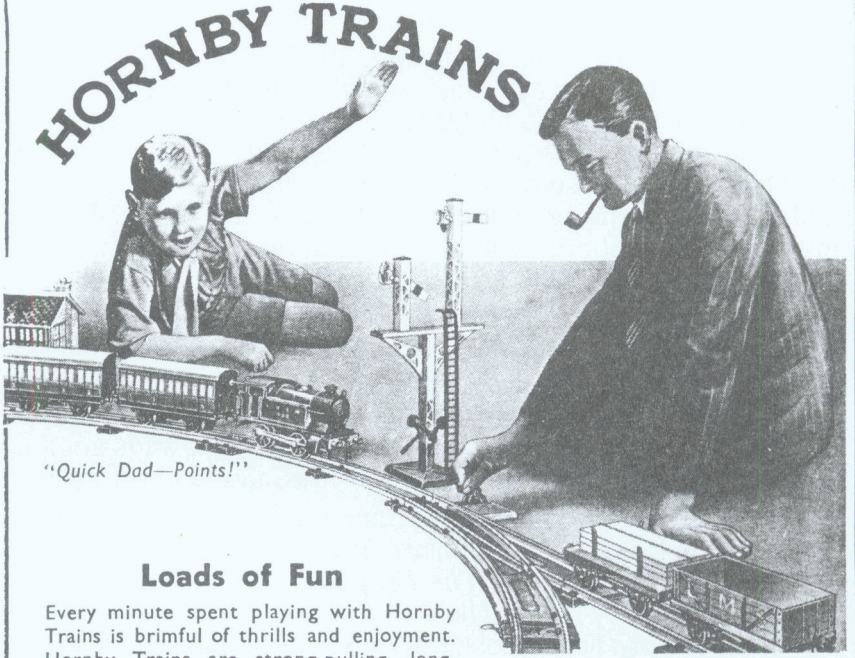


I felt the satisfaction Sherlock Holmes must have felt when he had successfully solved another mystery. I smiled to myself, adjusted my well worn dressing gown and stretched out my long thin fingers... "for me Watson there is always the stick of Norfolk rock".

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THE MECCANO MAGAZINE

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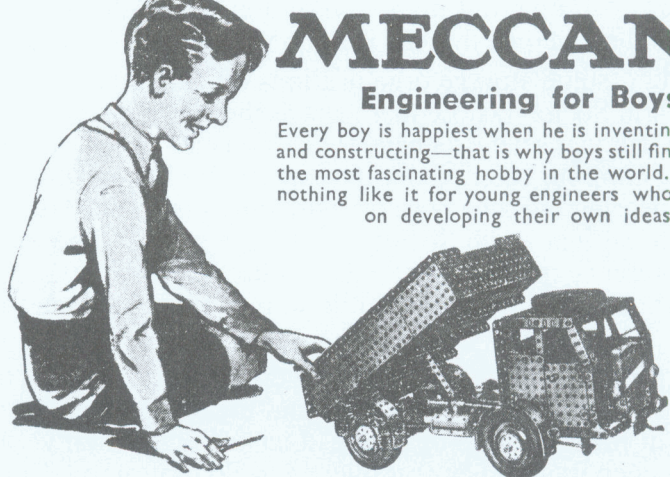
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# THOSE ECCENTRIC LEAGUES AND SOCIETIES.

BY W.O.G. LOFTS.



Through the years, it has always been my great pleasure to attend many literary functions. Here, one usually meets a number of interesting people for the very first time. It is especially most refreshing to hear the different views and opinions about our favourite characters in the world of fiction. Sometimes these views give one much food for thought.

At a literary convention, not all that long ago, a lady remarked that whilst she greatly enjoyed the stories of William, she always considered that when Richmal Crompton described eccentric leagues and Societies, "it was a bit far fetched, as such organisations would not exist in real life". Well I must admit that I was somewhat shaken by her remarks, as certainly such dotty organisations **do** exist. Also some remarkably eccentric people are around in various collecting fields today. Many years ago I wrote a series of articles entitled 'The Eccentrics' on some I had met in my early days, once all were then dead (with names changed to avoid legal complications or hurt feelings).

Indeed, the introduction of these various Leagues and Societies, represented, at least to me, Richmal Crompton at her best. The antics of some of these weird people endeared me to the William saga. I was always fascinated by William's reaction to them, which was one of mild curiosity and politeness towards the organiser. Probably thinking how strange grown-ups, who were supposed to be the intelligent ones, could be, he always good naturedly went along with them, pretending to be interested in the Societies' aims and activities.

There were of course a number of these strange organisations in the long run of the William books, far too many to comment on here. It is worth, however, commenting on the book *William the Detective* and the story *The League of Perfect Love*. Its members were briefly sworn not to take life in any form. The smallest creature or insect had as much right to live as a human, so mouse-traps and rat-poison were strictly forbidden, also the swatting of a fly. One had to be careful in walking on the grass in case one stepped on a worm. Rose trees had to be sprayed with an ingredient that gave nourishment to the insects instead of a poison that would kill them. Unfortunately at one of the League's meetings, William had let loose a number of rats, which caused its panic-stricken members to plead with William to get Jumble his dog to get rid of them. Jumble did his job very quickly, with the members then hastily leaving the meeting, with the outcome that the League was soon disbanded.

As mentioned earlier, some strange organisations do exist in real life, probably the best known being The Flat Earth Society whose members as the title suggests firmly believe that the world is flat, despite the fact that scientists have for many generations proved that it is round. I can well remember at school our science master explaining this fact by diagrams showing a steamer gradually disappearing over the horizon, with only the smoke still showing to indicate the curve. According to the Flat Earth Society, to go in a straight line by boat results in one going over the edge; that may explain why so many ships disappear completely without trace! But to be fair this organisation is extremely mild compared with some others I have come across in my time.

Around 1950, a group of pious and staid women thought it disgraceful and disgusting that our canine friends should walk, as it were, round the streets naked. Consequently they dressed their own pets in little trousers or panties (according to their sex). The aims of the Society were to try and encourage other dog-owners to do the same. The press and T.V. on hearing about this went along with it at full pelt. A supposed member of the Society was shown going up to a member of the general public exercising his dog and asking why he "allowed his dog to walk the streets naked". Before the astonished man could make any reply, the Society member went on about "how disgusting it was, and the dog ought to be ashamed of

himself". Thinking he was dealing with a lunatic, the man then ran off, with the dog bounding at his heels, wondering what all the fuss was about.

The Smile League Day which happened some years ago, when everyone wore a smiler sticker was really nothing new. I can well remember many years earlier a Smile Society formed by a local group who believed that the majority of the general public always walked about looking miserable and needed cheering up. So members went out in the streets smiling at everybody. Unfortunately it brought the wrong reaction from some members of the public. One member who smiled at men who were frequently entering and leaving a public building was arrested by a policeman! In court he had a lot of explaining to do before the Judge gave him the benefit of the doubt.

Another member was given a black eye by the boyfriend of a young lady, whilst a third was whacked over the head by an elderly lady who thought he was trying to get fresh with her. As a result the Society lost some of its members, and in a short time the Smile League was heard of no more, like Miss Crompton's so many delightful Leagues and Societies.

So in my view, none of the dotty organisations in the William Books is far-fetched, when some even more crazier ones exist in real life. Long may they amuse future generations of readers who are introduced to the William saga.

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"THERE'S OMSHAFU HIMSELF," SAID MISS FAIRLOW IN HER CLEAR VOICE. "I CAN SEE HIS DEAR LITTLE PINK NOSE PEEPING OUT."

MISS EUPHEMIA JUMPED UP WITH A PIERCING SCREAM. "SOMETHING STUNG ME!" SHE CRIED. "IT'S BEES COMING FROM UNDER THE SOFA!"

WILLIAM AND SOME MEMBERS OF A HIGHER THOUGHT SOCIETY  
(FROM WILLIAM THE FOURTH)



# Coker AND Handforth

BY Maurice Hall.



It has been said that Edward Oswald Handforth was a carbon and inferior copy of Horace James Coker. To look at the pair briefly, I can see how this idea may have grown up. In detail, things prove to be a lot more complex. For example, let me examine our duffer of the Fifth at Greyfriars.

Coker is big, beefy, slow to understand and rugged of features. He is in the Fifth Form, sharing study No. 4 with George Potter and William Greene. The study is well furnished by Coker. Potter and Greene appear to own very few possessions. Most of the provisions are supplied by the generous Coker, who receives more than adequate finance from his Aunt Judy, who also sends her beloved Horace regular hampers. His Aunt looks after him, assuming the role of parent in such matters of obtaining his Remove from the Shell into the Fifth Form, and when on another occasion Coker was sacked (Magnet 1656) and had to go into hiding while the Famous Five tracked down the real miscreant. This leads the researcher to wonder where his parents are, alive or dead? Coker's home is Coker Lodge, while his Aunt lives at Holly House. Yet curiously, Coker spends more time at his Aunt's house than he does at his own.

Potter and Greene are really rather a poor pair of friends to Horace. Whenever a hamper arrives or Coker is setting up a treat, then Potter and Greene are in evidence. However, if their leader decides to 'sort those cheeky fags in the Remove out', then his pals somehow just seem to disappear like 'ghosts at cock-crow'. There was just one time in the Brander series when Potter and Greene threw caution to the winds and rescued Coker from a severe beating by Mr. Brander and his nephew Otto Van Tromp. This was a rare event indeed!

As a fighting man, Coker has few equals. His right is like the kick of a mule and his leg-of-mutton fists are fearsome objects. It is, however, Coker's complete lack of fear that puts him in a class of his own. No danger could stop him going to a friend's rescue, or even to that of an enemy who needed a hand. Friend and Foe alike, could rely on Horace at all times, and not be let down.

Coker's opinion of himself is simple. He knows that he is right and thus does not consider other people's opinions. If his friends agree to support his ideas, all is well. Horace has had many a disagreement with Mr. Prout his Form-master over his original style of spelling. An example;

"How many K's in exasperating?" asked Horace Coker.

Potter and Greene of the Fifth smiled.

"None, old chap," said Potter gently.

"Don't be an ass, Potter!" said Coker crossly "Do you know, Greene? Are there one or two - single or double?"

"I wouldn't put any," said Greene, shaking his head.

"Don't be a fathead, Greene!" Coker gave an angry grunt.

"You fellows can't spell," he said. "You're worse than Prout. Prout can't spell, though he's a Form-master! I'm a fool to ask you, of course. I can spell your heads off any day!"

Looking at the dictionary would not solve Coker's problem, as the dictionary was usually wrong anyway, according to Horace! He continued his letter to Aunt Judy using just one 'k' in exasperating!

Coker has a younger brother Reginald, who, quite unlike Horace, is extremely brainy. Reggie is small and of slight build and definitely not a sportsman. Dr. Locke, recognising his mental prowess, placed him in the Sixth Form as its youngest member. Reginald's joining the

Sixth Form caused. Horace nearly to have a heart attack, (he being still in the Fifth). Little is heard of the younger Coker for long intervals.

Poor old Coker has the disadvantage of a lack of knowledge, of being a clumsy performer at all sports and having an unfortunate habit of dealing with 'fags' in a derisory fashion. Those suffering from his heavy-handed attentions have been known to accuse him of 'bullying'; this is, of course furthest from Coker's intentions. If the 'fags' won't recognise their place in life, Coker will not fail to enforce it, but 'bully'? Never!

Taken from Magnet No. 1151 is Frank Richards own assessment of his creation, the 'Fool of the Fifth':

'Coker really was a nice fellow in his way. There was nothing mean about Coker. Everything he had was at the service of his friends. So long as Coker had his own way, and was always given his head, and never contradicted, a fellow could get on with Coker. And as Coker always knew best, on all imaginable subjects, there was no reason why he shouldn't always have his way uncontradicted.'

Rather a ladies' man, Coker has been smitten by the fairer sex on more than one occasion, and, in typical fashion, finds himself tongue-tied when he looks into a girl's eyes. The many girls he has fallen in love with obviously quite like him, but so far nobody has taken him seriously and he, for his part, forgets them rapidly in favour of other diversions.

Coker to me, is Honest, Fearless, Self Confident in all aspects of Life, his rugged features reflecting his innermost thoughts, which are without rancour or meanness. If you have Coker on your side you have a true friend.

Edward Oswald Handforth of the St. Frank's Remove was introduced to the reader in Nelson Lee Number 112 (O.S.). Younger than Coker, Handforth is tall, heavily built with the air of a prize fighter about him. A quiff of curly hair falls over his brow. Strong rugged features give him a grim look, but underneath the serious face he can put on a happy and friendly smile when the occasion requires.

Handforth's home is a mansion in the Kensington area, where he lives with his father, Sir Edward, and his mother. Edward (or Ted) also has an older sister Edith and a younger brother Walter. Walter Handforth is a bright and energetic thorn in his brother Ted's side. He is in the Third Form at St. Frank's and is leader of the Form. While Edward Oswald is endeavouring to lead his own life in the Remove, Walter is just around the corner to throw a spanner in the works and often does!

Study D in the Remove houses Ted Handforth, Walter Church and Arnold McClure. The three boys are great pals and very loyal to each other in spite of Handforth's threats to 'biff' his chums for the slightest reason. The reason in most cases being that Church and McClure do not agree with Handforth on some minor subject under discussion. For all his hot and at times hasty temper, Handforth is generous to a fault. He often makes rapid decisions before hearing all the evidence and it is hard to convince him that he is in the wrong - but this is not an impossible task.

Handforth is seldom short of finance, though Church and McClure share in the day-to-day expenses. The only time he is unwilling to part with cash is when his brother Wally comes round for a loan. Ted believes in endeavouring to act the elder brother, which means asking the reason for the loan of five or ten shillings which has been requested. Wally, being brighter than Ted, usually manages to talk his major round!

The gentle sex is adored by Ted, who is never happier than when talking to some golden-haired maiden. He is, however, quite happy to converse with any girl regardless of her hair colour. Handforth personifies the gallant knight of old, forever ready to rush to the rescue when the opportunity occurs, and often when it does not. Many a young girl has responded to Handforth's approaches, but always he returns to his main girl friend, Irene Manners, from the nearby Moor view School for young ladies.

A measure of just how close the chums of Study D are was well shown in the Death of Walter Church (Nelson Lee Nos. 76 - 79). This 4-part series dealt with a mysterious fortune-teller named Zuma, who set up his tent on the outskirts of Belmont village. Amongst those who visit the mystic is Church, and he is told by Zuma that he is in danger, and that shortly there will be nothing in his future but emptiness. Church is a little disturbed, but soon forgets about it, until he starts to feel increasingly tired, and gradually sinks into a trance. Handforth

has tried to get Church back to his normal self with no success, and is there by his side when death strikes his chum. The story that follows, with Handforth unable to accept that Church is dead, is both powerful and compelling. He and McClure try to unravel the reason behind the mystery, but it is mainly Handforth's determination to seek an answer that provides the truth in the end.

Edward Handforth took the lead in the St. Frank's stories, even though Nipper (Dick Hamilton) was the main original character (like Wharton in the Magnet). While Bunter overtook Wharton as the most popular 'Magnet' character, Handforth displaced Nipper from the centre stage in the 'Nelson Lee Library'.

Handforth was a scrapper of awesome repute. It was not, however, a case of blind slugging; he had some considerable style and did not rely on pure strength, though he had plenty of that, anyway. No odds would deter him; the more the merrier was Handforth's motto. He was not a bully either by accident or design. In spite of his enjoyment of a scrap he was, basically, a soft-hearted romantic.

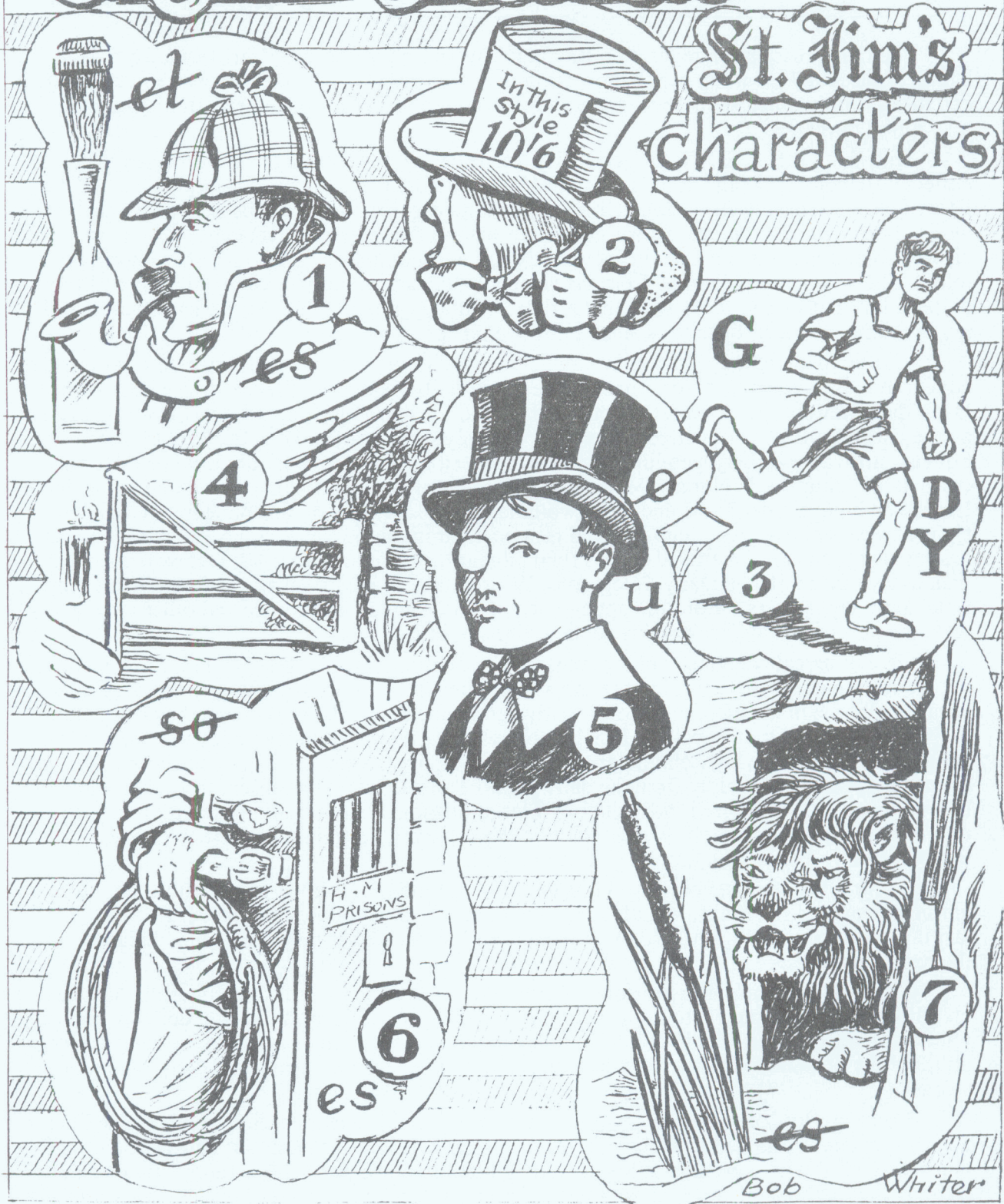
In the classroom Handforth was not in the top group. He managed to get by after a fashion but he had to work harder than most. As a sportsman, Handforth was a natural choice in the Cricket and Football teams. He played as a batsman in cricket, and was the goalkeeper in the Remove football team. Any activity was certain to include Edward Oswald Handforth.

Having looked at both our burly schoolboys, it is important to remember there is an age gap between them. Handforth is around 14 years old, Coker about 16. I think that although Handforth was created after Coker, there is little to prove that he was another Coker. Far from it, he was a well-crafted character, greatly loved by the Nelson Lee readers and others who discovered him at a later date.

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# Guess this mixed bag of Greyfriars, Hookwood & St. Jim's characters



Bob Whiter

ANSWERS ON PAGE 99



# MY FIRST PIP AND SQUEAK ANNUAL

By Ray Hopkins



The faded inscription reads, "To Raymond, Wishing you a Merry Christmas, from Auntie Dolly, Xmas 1927", but the neat handwriting is that of my Dad. I don't ever remember being called anything other than Ray, so perhaps "Raymond" was considered more select for inscription purposes.

This is the PIP & SQUEAK ANNUAL for 1928 and the title page says it is its 6th Year, edited by Uncle Dick and issued by The Daily Mirror, Fetter Lane, London, E.C.4. The Frontispiece is a beautifully coloured painting of a little girl riding on the back of an exotic bird whose body is a lemon and whose wings are made of berries and bananas. The artist has clearly signed her name as Helen Jacobs. Not, I suspect, the lady who naturally springs to mind! She who springs to mine from the same athletic endeavour is lovely, dark-haired Betty Nuttall, but that's nowt to do with this article. (Editor's note: Helen Jacobs has been one of my favourite, magical illustrators since I discovered her when I was seven!)

The thrill of being given this Annual was to be able to peruse the many complete adventures, in picture form, of what had been my daily treat from the children's page of my Dad's daily newspaper. I wasn't encouraged to read the rest of the paper! The famous "Pets", as they were collectively called, were Pip, a manly dog, rather like a friendly big brother; Squeak, a lovable dithery penguin and Wilfred, a small mischievous rabbit whose dialogue consists of "Gug" and "Nunc". Wilfred is President of the The League of Gugnuncs which Uncle Sandy, in a letter at the end of the volume, urges everyone to join and learn all the secret signs and passwords. Although Wilfred is concerned in all the Pip & Squeak stories, he also has his own Annual, advertised on the final page of my Annual, price 6s, just twopence less than today's issue of The Daily Telegraph! Wilfred, Uncle Sandy says, was found in a turnip field some eight years before the appearance of this Annual, and joined the other two, who were the pets of Uncle Dick and his nephew Christopher.

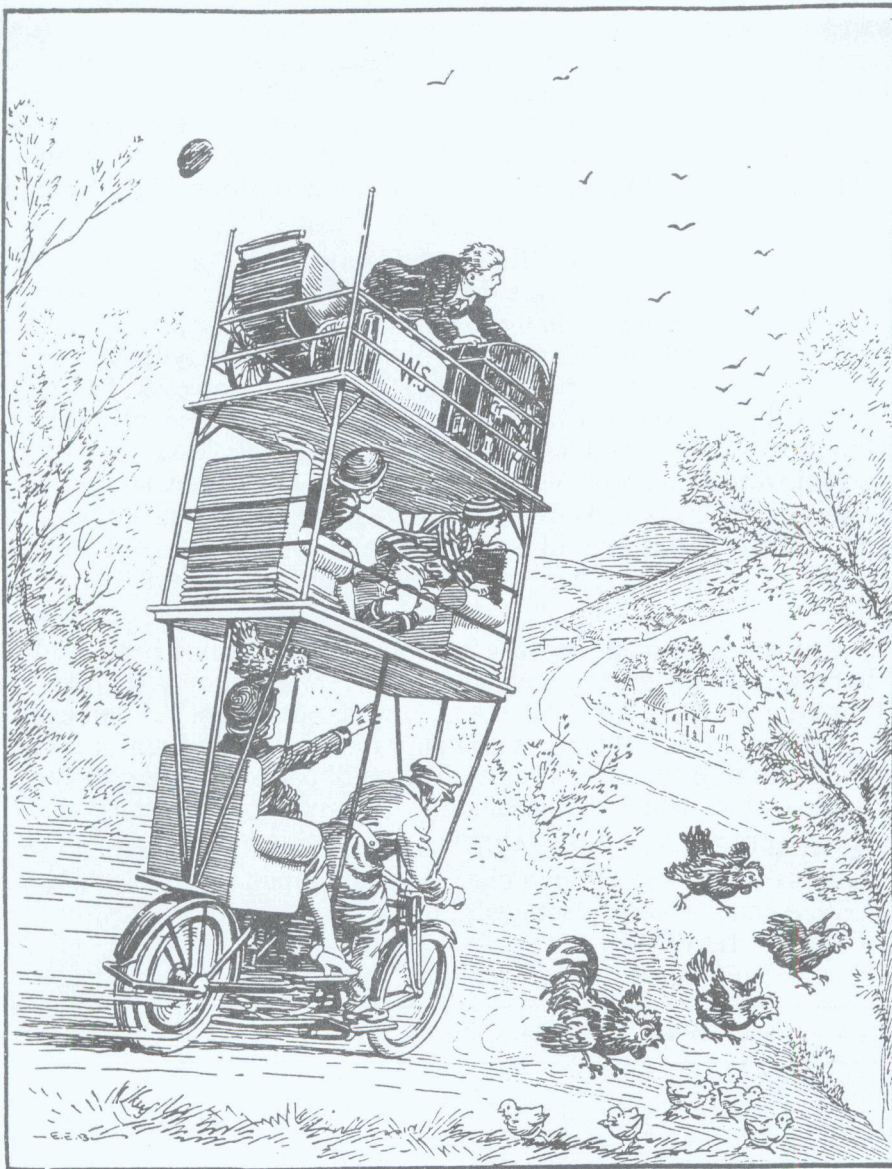
Squeak reveals in a piece of autobiographical writing that she was born on an island off the South Coast of Africa and that the rather dreadful, tattered-looking old penguin we occasionally see in the picture stories is really her Auntie Ada. She says Auntie has never been the same since she met Popski, a Bolshy dog who makes many appearances in this Annual. Auntie and Popski are two characters who are sometimes brought in for comic relief. A character I remember vividly from the daily picture stories, but who is absent from this Annual, is a villainous, bewhiskered individual in a large-brimmed hat and often pictured carrying a round, black smoking bomb, whose name is Wtzkoffski, presumably meant to be a Russian Revolutionary. Perhaps he turned up in later Annuals.

Uncle Dick's household also consists of Angeline, a youthful maid with a cap, long apron and striped stockings, Aunt Emma, Aunt Fanny and an office-boy named Roland. The last three are mentioned in Uncle Dick's letter but I'm not sure if they are actual characters in the daily stories.

Mr. A.B. Payne's illustrations of the Pet's adventures are so evocative of one's childhood that it is a puzzle to know why the Annual's cover illustration is not done by him at all. It's nice to see the Pets in colour but the unknown artist hasn't got their faces quite right, although he does include Peter, a white dog, one of Pip's friends who turns up in the picture stories.

There are lots of poems, a few fairy stories for younger readers, for which Uncle Dick apologises but felt he had to include, after receiving a deputation from the Fairies, Elves and Gnomes Union who were unemployed. There are also some very short, funny stories about fighting gramophone records, quarrelling Jellies and a Zoo for Human Beings, all very original ideas as you can tell, also exciting adventure stories for the young age group for whom the Annual is intended.





"Stop! Stop!" howled poor Mrs. Shaw, while a chicken rested happily on her hat.

*Illustration by E.E. Briscoe for 'Off for the Holidays' by E. Langford Bowes*

There are some very familiar artists on hand as well. Nina K. Brisley of "Milly, Molly, Mandy" fame is well represented in several stories and in a very attractive colour plate which contains a poem about an unusual tree which, like the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens, has an illustrated trunk supporting it. Our old friend E.E. Briscoe, the producer of detailed and familiar drawings of architecture to be seen around St. Frank's, has illustrated several stories. One story has beautifully drawn aeroplanes and dirigibles and is a thriller entitled, "The Mystery of the Missing Airship" by Charles Belton. Another features a wonderful motor-cycle which has three "storeys" with armchairs fitted on the first two and a storage place for luggage on the top floor. Dad, Mother, the baby and three older children are all quite comfortably spread throughout this glorious contraption when they go "Off for the Holidays", the title of the story by E. Langford Bowes. The illustrations are very eye-catching, but I have a "leetle doubt" that the motor-cycle would really stay upright with such a group of people, furniture and luggage aboard. Finally, Mr. Briscoe has done splendidly funny illustrations, a quite unusual side to his artistic talents, of loaves of bread and cakes with arms and legs for "The Boy who liked Cake". The author's name is given as HILDA REDWAY and, just for a moment, I wondered! The style of writing, however, did not ring a bell, though I am not one

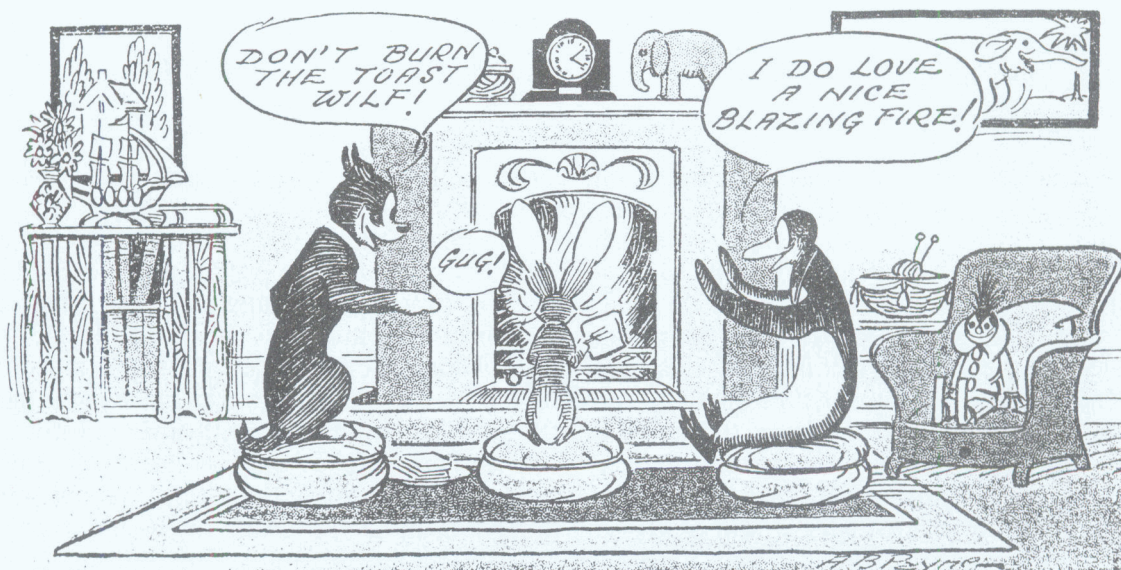
who finds writing styles easy to put names to without a byline to help me. F.M. Leicester and Cyril Holloway are other artists' names we have come across in other publications, as well as one of our very favourite school story artists from AP publications, Savile Lumley, fondly remembered for his SOL covers and title illustrations to Rookwood and St. Frank's reprints. He turns up in this Annual as the illustrator of two school stories featuring Tower School by Richard Barnes, who, Uncle Dick implies, has been writing stories of this school since the first PIP & SQUEAK ANNUAL. "Scorcher" Royston, Captain of the Third Form, is the leading character.

I did just wonder if these were my first introduction to school stories in general, and light hearted ones in particular because, by the time the 1929 Annuals were available, I must have been reading the light hearted stories in the GEM which I now know were NOT written by the Master. In the Charles Hamilton Companion Volume One Eric Fayne says, "The year 1928... was a dreadful year, with only four stories from Hamilton". However, having no experience of stories written by the real Martin Clifford, the lack of depth in the writing and perhaps rather potty plots, which may have tended to be slapstick, probably tickled my nine year old fancy, and I remember enjoying them, probably precisely because they were so juvenile. Up until the time I began reading the GEM my weekly read was a comic with a full colour cover called The SUNBEAM, of whose contents I recall nothing, though there may have been school stories to read in it, as well as the picture strip stories and comic adventures available in children's comics of the twenties.

My 1929 Christmas Annual, because no doubt of what I had been reading in the prior weeks, was the first fat one with the thick pages, whose description you will readily recognize as being the Greyfriars' HOLIDAY ANNUAL. It was some years before I ever knew that the HA's prior to 1929 were much thinner with many more pages but, unfortunately, printed on paper which tended to turn brown with age. The cardboard-like pages of the 1929 and later HA's have remained white, which may mean they have more rag content.

And so my first PIP & SQUEAK ANNUAL was my last. It's nice, however, to be able to look back and have a browse through one's own childhood gift books. Although the front cover of this 1928 Annual is water damaged, I think I'm very lucky it has survived intact from Christmas 1927 to thus far in 1989.

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Four o'clock on a cold winter day, when Wilfred makes the toast.

# The Silent Three And a Christmas Mystery

By Marion Waters

Illustrations by Ruth Owers



It was a bitter, cold day in December, 1951. While the small, branch line train made its way through the Dorset countryside, Peggy West stretched her tired limbs and looked about her. In the corner of the compartment, Betty Roland, Peggy's friend and study mate, was fast asleep, her fair curls resting on the faded upholstery. Once more, Peggy read the telegram which had summoned her from her home in Lancashire the previous evening. The message was from their friend, Joan Derwent, who was staying with a relative in Dorset. It read: "Please come at once, bring old clothes, and something green". Peggy knew what was meant by 'something green'. The previous year, when Betty had been wrongfully expelled for theft, the three girls had formed a secret society known as the 'Silent Three', to clear Betty's name and to expose a bullying prefect. When acting as a secret group, the girls wore long green robes and hoods to conceal their identities; hence the reference in Joan's telegram.

Soon the dramatic outline of Corfe Castle appeared in the distance, and the train began to slow down as it approached the station. Peggy gently shook Betty: "Come on, sleeping beauty, we've arrived". As the train drew to a halt, the girls took up their cases and climbed down onto the platform. Joan was waiting for them. She was dressed in old clothes, which contrasted with her usual 'chic' image, and her attractive face wore a strained look.

"It's very good of you to come", she said as she greeted her chums. "I hate to drag you away from your families at Christmas, but we have a mystery here, and my cousin Angela needs help."

"It's a pleasure to come", said Peggy with a grim smile. "Imagine being the only teenager in a house full of middle-aged people, I'd much rather help your cousin with her farm work." "You know we will

always help", added Betty, "that's what the Silent Three are for".

As the three girls travelled to the farm, Joan explained that her cousin Angela Barsett, who was a widow with two young children, was desperately trying to keep her late husband's farm going. The holding was small and the soil was poor, and she was heavily in debt to the bank. The local bank manager had been applying pressure on her to give up the place. "I would have thought that the bank would have been more sympathetic in view of Angela's situation", said Betty thoughtfully. Joan went on to explain that she had twice discovered men trespassing on the farm by night. "Once is possible", she said, "but twice is suspicious". "It sounds like a task for the Silent Three", replied Betty. "I understand now why you asked us to bring our robes", added Peggy.

The girls soon settled in at Ivy House Farm. Angela was a pleasant woman, tall with dark hair, though she was tense and soemtimes irritable because of the pressure she was subjected to. Betty and Peggy worked on the farm with her, while Joan, who was not as strong as her chums, acted as cook, housekeeper and 'nanny' to Angela's two small children. The children were shy at first, but they soon grew to trust 'Aunt Joan'.

At the earliest opportunity, Joan made her way into the small town of Corfe Castle, and paid a visit to the bank where Angela had her account. Over the years, Joan's parents had been generous with pocket money, and in consequence Joan's account held a considerable sum. The bank manager had a sly, shifty look, and Joan knew immediately that she could not trust him. She explained that she was a relative of Angela's and that she wished to pay off the arrears on her loan. The manager took notice of Joan's excellent clothes, good manners, and self-assured manner. (Inwardly she didn't feel very confident.)



*Betty observes the plotters*

He was also impressed by the firm of stockbrokers whom Joan gave as a reference. She didn't mention that her father was the managing director! With a very bad grace the manager accepted her cheque; he didn't hide his disappointment when he learned that there was no chance of it 'bouncing'.

Outside in the street, Joan almost jumped for joy. The account was now up to date, Angela could not be evicted until she was three months in arrears, and a lot could happen in three months. Angela was angry with Joan when she learned what had taken place, and accused her of interference.

"You can always pay me back one day", said Joan quietly. That night as the chums prepped for bed, she related what had happened.

"One would expect the bank manager to be pleased to have had the account brought up to date", said Betty. "There is something strange about this." "A crooked

bank manager", remarked Peggy, "we haven't met many of those before". "First time for everything", replied Joan, as the girls settled to sleep.

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The following day, Betty had been working in the fields at the furthest extremity of the farm. When her task was complete she made her way homeward. Cold and hungry, she was looking forward to her evening meal, and to a comfy armchair by the fire. At the edge of the field, she spotted a large car parked in the lane beyond the hedge. Drawing closer, she spotted a man and a woman standing beside the car, looking out over Angela's farm, and talking in an animated fashion. The lady was in late middle age, dressed in expensive clothes. The man was respectful towards her and Betty guessed that he was her estate manager or bailiff. Listening, she realized that they were discussing Angela and her farm.

"The young woman has serious financial problems", said the man. "I doubt if she will be able to keep the farm going much longer." "We shall soon have it in our possession", replied the woman smugly. Hidden behind the hedge, Betty's face was grim. Who were these people, and why were they so keen to possess Angela's farm? As she drew closer, Betty noticed that the lady had left her handbag and gloves resting on the wing of the car. Swiftly, she snatched the gloves, and returned to her hiding place behind the hedge. Betty had no intention of stealing them, but she hoped that when she returned the gloves that she had 'found', she then would be able to learn more about the pompous looking woman and her male companion. Soon afterwards the couple drove off, not having noticed that the gloves were missing. Betty then emerged from hiding and made her way back to the farm. She described to Angela the couple she had observed. "The lady you saw was Mrs. Ponsonby, who owns the estate which borders my farm", replied Angela. "She is very wealthy, and she has always been pleasant to me. The man would be R. Jamieson, her estate manager. He is a respected figure in the area, I've never heard of him being mixed up in anything shady."

Joan had been listening to the conversation; suddenly she spoke out. "He is the man I caught trespassing on Angela's land. He fits Betty's description exactly." "But why?" asked Peggy. "Angela says that the farm is small and the land is poor, so why all the interest?" "That is what I intend to find out", said Betty, as she produced the 'borrowed' gloves.

The following day Betty made her way to Moorland Villa, the home of Mrs. Ponsonby. She wore her best clothes, and carried her robe concealed in her handbag. Angela had warned her that Mrs. Ponsonby lived in a large house with lots of servants, so there would be little opportunity for clandestine activity. Betty rang the door bell and was admitted by a maid. "I believe that Mrs. Ponsonby lost some gloves yesterday", said Betty. "I would like to return them." After a short wait, she was shown into the study where Mrs. Ponsonby who was sitting at the desk was pleasant in a rather condescending manner. Betty explained her errand and produced the gloves. They were a distinctive pair,

hand sewn in soft grey leather, obviously very expensive.

"Yes, these are my gloves", said Mrs. Ponsonby, "where did you find them?" Betty replied that she had found them in the lane, just after the car had driven off, which was more or less the truth. Mrs. Ponsonby thanked her without any great feeling or warmth, and the maid escorted Betty from the room. "I've just made a pot of tea", she said, "would you like a cup?" Betty was soon seated in the kitchen, having tea with the maid, whose name was Mrs. Jarvis.

"Miserable old goat", she said. "You take the trouble to return her precious gloves, and she hasn't even the courtesy to give you a lift home." Betty smiled and replied that she enjoyed a good walk. It was obvious that Mrs. Jarvis didn't think much of her employer. Betty remained non-committal; she realized that Mrs. Jarvis might have been briefed to set a trap for her, and to 'pump' her for information. "Lady Bountiful, we call her", said Mrs. Jarvis, "she thinks she owns the place". Then Betty learned that Mrs. Ponsonby was friendly with a bank manager. Mrs. Jarvis was very scornful: "She is old enough to be his mother", she said. Betty thanked her for her hospitality, and made her way back to the farm with much to think about. "She is friendly with a bank manager", thought Betty, "it's all beginning to fit into place".

That evening, Mrs. Ponsonby received her man friend. He drove up to the front door of Moorland Villa, and was admitted. He did not see the three slim figures, clad in green robes and hoods, who were watching from the shrubbery. The Silent Three had paid a secret visit to observe Mrs. Ponsonby and her friend. "That's him", said Joan quietly, her face grim beneath her mask. "That's the little creep who tried to stop me paying off the arrears on Angela's loan." "But why are they so eager to gain possession of the farm?" asked Peggy. "The mystery deepens", replied Betty.

The hooded girls were not able to hear the conversation between Mrs. Ponsonby and her guest, but Peggy examined the doors and windows on the ground floor, with a view to entering. She carried a pen-knife with a very thin blade, which she used to 'spring' the catch on a French window, thus gaining entry. With a soft rustle of silk, the Silent Three made

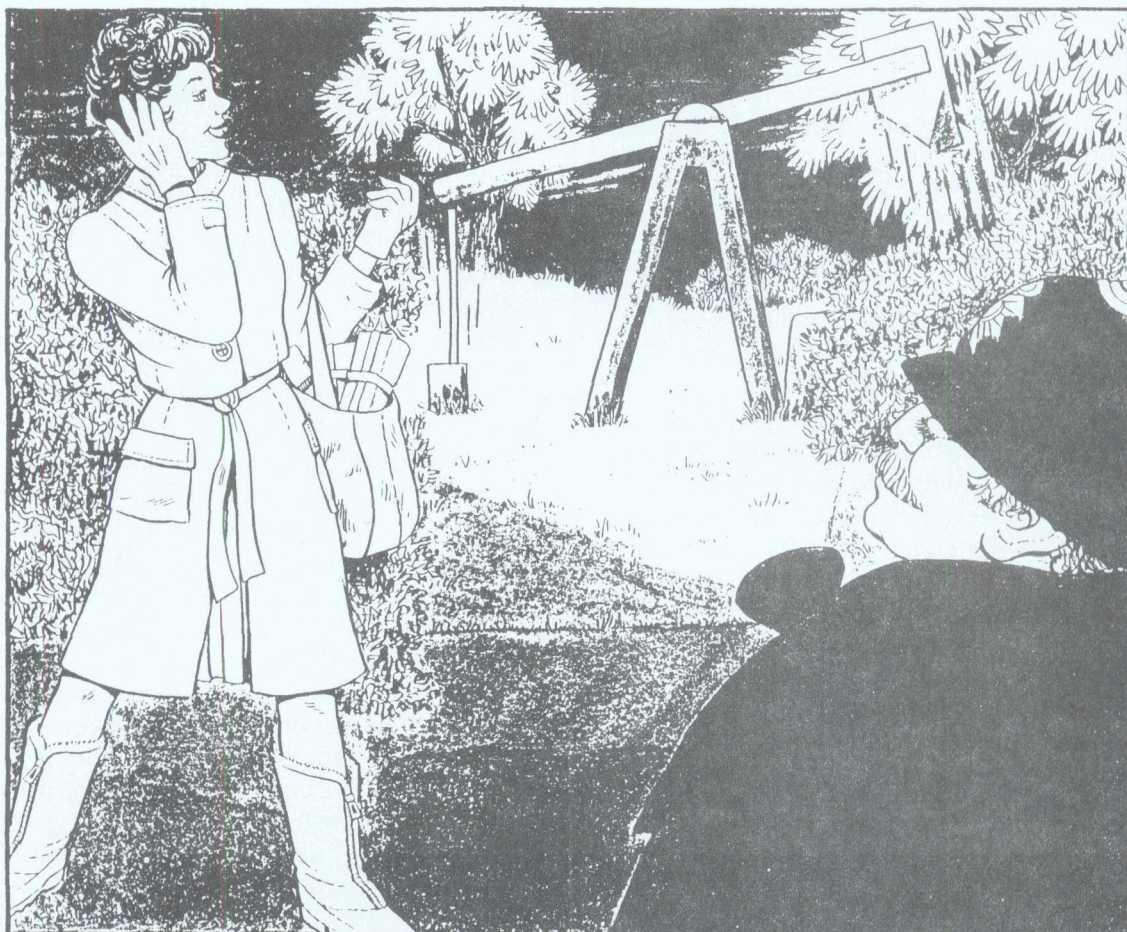
their way inside. Carefully they wiped their footwear so as not to make any wet footprints. They all wore gloves to avoid the hazard of leaving fingerprints. While Mrs. Ponsonby was entertaining her guest in the drawing room, the girls searched the study and library but were unable to discover any useful information. Rather sadly, they left the house, and carefully secured the French window. Joan and Peggy felt rather downcast at the lack of success, but Betty was more cheerful.

"We have proved that we can gain secret entry to the house, explained the leader of the Silent Three. "We know that the bank manager visits Mrs. Ponsonby on the same evening each week. The next time he comes, we shall be waiting, concealed in the house, and perhaps we'll learn something useful." "If only we could", said Peggy. "Just so long as we can help Angela and the children", added Joan.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following Saturday afternoon, Peggy carried out some last minute

Christmas shopping in Swanage, but then discovered that there was no bus or train back to Corfe Castle for several hours. Having 'phoned Joan to warn her that she would be late, Peggy set off to walk home. A strong, active girl, she enjoyed a long walk, and possessed a good sense of direction. If she had followed the main road back to Corfe Castle and then the minor road to the farm all would have been well. However Peggy attempted to save time by cutting across country. In due course she was hopelessly lost, footsore and weary; she sat on a milestone to take stock of her position. Feeling just a little sorry for herself, she became aware of a strange noise coming from the neighbouring field. Her curiosity aroused, Peggy made her way through a gap in the hedge, and came across an amazing sight. In a fenced enclosure, a strange machine was at work. The machine looked like a giant see-saw. There was a central support, shaped like an inverted 'V', at the apex, a heavy steel beam rocked to and fro. At one end of the beam was a large weight, while at the opposite end, a steel rod vanished into the ground, moving up and



*Peggy and the 'Nodding Donkey'*

down with the motion of the beam. There was no one to attend the machine, and no sign of any control room, or other means of direction. It just rocked up and down in the darkness, looking rather eerie, like something out of a science fiction film.

Suddenly a light was flashed on Peggy, and a stern voice said, "Now then, young lady, what's all this". Peggy spun round. In the torchlight was was able to make out the cape and helmet of a uniformed police constable. "I didn't mean to trespass", she explained, "I'd lost my way. I heard the noise, so I made my way through the hedge to explore". "I thought you were at least a Russian spy come to probe our secrets", replied the policeman. "I've never seen anything like this before", said Peggy, "what is it?" "We call them 'nodding donkeys'", explained the constable, "it's just a big pump to lift the oil out of the ground". "Oil!" exclaimed Peggy. "Yes", smiled her mentor, "it's an oil well". "Goodness", gasped Peggy, "I thought they were all in America or in the Arab countries".

"We have quite a few round here", explained the policeman. "Oil was first discovered in Dorset during the 1930s. Naturally the oil field was developed a lot during the war, and with all this trouble out east, there is renewed interest. I often meet parties of surveyors in the course of my patrol." As Peggy was escorted back to the main road, he said: "Would I be right in thinking that you are one of the posh young ladies who are staying with Mrs. Barset at Ivy House Farm, on holiday from your swell boarding school up north?" In reply, Peggy removed her gloves to reveal her scarred and bruised hands. The policeman whistled softly. At the back of her mind, Peggy was beginning to construct a theory. "Do you think that there could be oil on our farm?" she asked. "It's possible", replied her companion. "Oil has been found in small quantities all round here. I know that Mrs. Ponsonby has had her own land surveyed, and she would be keen to buy Ivy House Farm, should Mrs. Barset decide to sell up". "It's all beginning to fit into place", said Peggy to herself.

Back at the farm that evening, she related her discovery to the others. "Now we know why Mr. Jamieson was trespassing on the farm at night", said John. "He was directing the survey for oil." Mrs. Ponsonby is obviously after

your land for the oil that may be there", said Betty. "The cunning old hypocrite", said Angela with anger in her voice. "She pretends to be friendly, and all the time she is planning to steal my land." "We won't let her", grinned Peggy, "leave that to us".

The following day was Christmas Eve, and the children were naturally very excited. Joan was busy in the kitchen making her final preparations. Betty, Peggy and Angela had spent a hard day in the fields, and were almost too tired to eat their evening meal. Later, after the children had been put to bed and Angela was resting, the Silent Three made a round of the farm premises and the adjacent land. Everything seemed quiet, but Christmas Eve would be an ideal time for any underhand activities, and the girls felt the need for vigilance. In one of the fields the sheep were restless. As the chums made their way towards them they could hear men's voices and the sound of an axe being used. "Here we go -- trouble", hissed Betty. There was a hurried rustle of silk as the chums slipped on their robes. Like ghosts, the masked and hooded figures crept forward, silent in the still night air. A group of men were breaking down the fence which separated Angela's land from the public highway. It was obvious that they intended to drive the sheep through the gap, scattering Angela's valuable stock. Betty's face was grim beneath her mask as she gave instructions to her chums. Peggy and Joan had difficulty in suppressing giggles as they listened.

Suddenly a lump of mud flew through the air, striking the leader of the men on the side of the head. Angrily he turned round and spotted a figure in a green hooded robe lurking in the darkness a few yards away. "You young hooligan", roared the man, and gave chase, which was just what Betty wanted him to do. His companions joined in, and they pursued her across the fields towards an open gateway. The robed figure seemed to vanish, but the men hurried on. In their anger they failed to notice the trip wire placed across the open gate, and went sprawling into the largest and deepest patch of mud on the entire farm. A torch was shone into their faces; robed figures loomed out of the darkness, and stood over them. "It's Mr. Jamieson, the estate manager engaged in trespass and wilful damage", said the leader of the hooded figures. "Be sure you repair the damage, or you will suffer". With a

taunting laugh the phantom-like figures vanished into the night, leaving the men to free themselves as best they could. The Silent Three returned to the farm in high spirits. It was necessary to clean their robes which had been splashed with mud. While Joan and Angela filled the children's stockings, Betty and Peggy made a final round of the farm property to ensure that all was safe. It was after midnight when the chums finally took to their beds. "Happy Christmas" chuckled Betty, as they settled to sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christmas Day passed in a very pleasant fashion. The girls were delighted to see the children enjoying themselves, and for a while they forgot all the problems they had to face at Ivy House Farm. Early on Boxing Day, Joan's parents arrived to take Angela and the children out to dinner, followed by a pantomime. Left to themselves, the Silent Three tackled the farm work, and dined on the cold leftovers of their Christmas dinner.

As dusk was falling, the girls made their way to Moorland Villa. It was time for Mrs. Ponsonby's weekly meeting with her man friend. Once in the grounds, they slipped into their robes; hoods were drawn up and masks adjusted. Three gloved hands met in a fond squeeze. "For Angela and the children", whispered Betty. The robed figures made their way up to the house. Swiftly Peggy opened the window with her knife, and the girls tip-toed inside. The window was secured, and, taking care not to leave tell-tale footprints on the floor, they concealed themselves behind the curtains and waited. Soon Mrs. Ponsonby entered in company with her friend. "That's the bank manager", whispered Joan to her chums. The two plotters settled in their chairs, and the conversation began. "Bad business", said the man. "Your bailiff being chased off the farm last night." "Bungling fool", said Mrs. Ponsonby angrily.

The man then produced a number of documents from his pocket. "These are the results of the survey we have carried out on



*The seizure of the documents*





*"You are the most picturesque burglars I've ever seen."*

Ivy House Farm", he said, "there are good signs of oil being found there". Behind the curtain the Silent Three listened with grim faces. "This is a bill of sale I have drawn up for when that woman finally decides to quit. The farm will be in your name, but I intend to claim half the profits", he said. "But of course", said Mrs. Ponsonby, sounding as sincere as a rattle-snake. Betty was considering the possibility of seizing the documents when disaster struck. Peggy moved her foot off the thick carpet onto the highly polished wooden floor; the rubber sole of her footwear made a loud 'squeak' on the shiny surface. Peggy attempted to regain the safety of the carpet, her foot slipped, and there was an even louder 'squeak'. The plotters sprang to their feet. Betty hissed, "Peggy, grab the documents and go out by the French window. Leave the crooks to Joan and me".

The Silent Three went into action, Betty lifted the hem of the curtain and flung it in the man's face. Unnerved by the sight

of the hooded figures, Mrs. Ponsonby screamed wildly. Quick as lightning, Peggy grabbed the documents and made for the French window. Joan was wrestling with Mrs. Ponsonby, who was still screaming. Then her man friend broke free from the curtain and raced after Peggy. Betty pushed a chair into his path and he went sprawling. Meanwhile Peggy had vanished into the darkness. Joan gave Mrs. Ponsonby a push, and she fell over her struggling man friend. "Come on No. 2", yelled Betty seizing Joan's arm, "let's go". The chums hurried out into the corridor. Quickly Betty guided Joan into the study. On her previous visit she had noticed a small alcove behind the bookcase. Swiftly the two girls squeezed into the small gap and remained hidden, hardly daring to breathe.

A few minutes later the bank manager, seething with fury, burst into the room, accompanied by some of the servants. They searched the room while

Betty and Joan hugged each other in the alcove, not daring to move a muscle. Remaining hidden for some time until all was quiet, they emerged from their hiding place, adjusted their hoods and masks, and stretched their cramped limbs. Betty led Joan along the corridor towards the main hall. The girls moved silently in their rubber-soled footwear, and were about to make a dash for the front door, when a pleasant voice said, "Not that way, come with me".

The girls spun round and found themselves face to face with Mrs. Jarvis the maid, who chuckled quietly and said, "I must say you are the most picturesque looking burglars I've ever seen. That's a fantastic 'get up' you are both wearing." "It keeps the draughts out", replied Betty as the chums were guided into the kitchen. "Are you going to give us away?" asked Joan anxiously. "No fear", grinned the motherly looking lady. "This is the best night's fun I've had for years. The mistress is having hysterics, and that swollen-headed bank manager is going around in a purple fury. Serve him right." Mrs. Jarvis surveyed the two robed figures and said, "Would I be correct in thinking that you are the young ladies staying with Angela Barsett, and one of you is the girl who came here the other day with the mistress's gloves?" Betty and Joan slipped back their hoods and introduced themselves. Mrs. Jarvis entertained the girls for about an hour, until it was safe for them to leave the house. They drew up their hoods and warmly thanked her for her help. "Think nothing of it", she smiled, and, surveying the masked and hooded figures, she said, "It seems a shame to hide such attractive faces, but your robes are a good disguise." "They protect our faces from frostbite in winter", replied Betty. "Not to mention sunburn in hot weather", added Joan.

The two girls made their way through the grounds, until a third robed figure appeared out of the darkness. "Peggy", exclaimed Betty, spotting the 'no. 2' on the girl's hood. "Thank goodness you are safe." "I got clean away", laughed Peggy. "But I was beginning to get the wind up over you two. I was sure that you had been nabbed."

The Silent Three reached the farm without mishap, Angela surveyed their flushed and happy faces. "Just what have

you been up to?" she asked. Peggy produced the documents she had seized, and Angela examined them. "The cunning schemer", she said angrily. "The proof we need", said Joan. "Now we can clear up the mystery, and you can live in peace", added Betty. The chums slept soundly that night with the precious documents concealed beneath Peggy's pillow.

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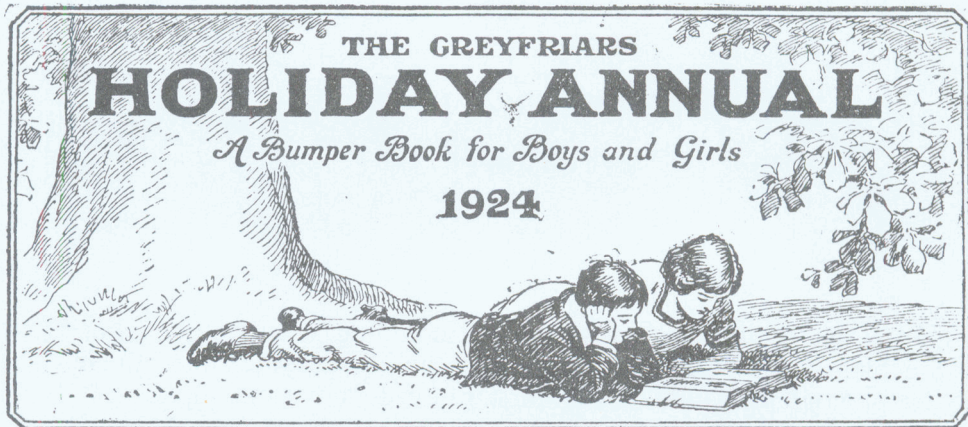
Two days later, Mrs. Ponsonby was working in her study, her brow was furrowed and she drank nervously from the glass on her desk. It had been a most unsatisfactory day. Her fellow conspirator was in police custody, pending investigation of his mis-handling of Angela Barsett's affairs, and Mrs. Ponsonby had no doubt that she too would soon be called to account. She had arranged to leave early the following morning for a holiday on the continent. Her final task was to destroy all the documents relating to the neighbouring farm, so that no material evidence would remain to incriminate her. The smug looking woman finished burning the last of the documents. Suddenly something happened that made her blood run cold. The lights were switched off without warning, a curtain was thrown aside, and a tall figure in a green hooded robe stepped into the centre of the room. Mrs. Ponsonby was terrified; she rose from her chair, but the way to the door was barred by a second hooded figure. She opened her mouth to scream, but the robed figure in the centre of the room spoke in a commanding voice. "Sit down and keep quiet, or you will be gagged." Trembling with fear, Mrs. Ponsonby did as she was ordered. A third robed figure stood beside her, with a large handkerchief at the ready. The central figure, who bore the figure '1' on the front of her hood, pointed an accusing finger. "Take heed, Mrs. Ponsonby", said the hooded figure. "You are a cheat and a thief. Your evil treatment of Mrs. Barsett is known to us, and dire punishment will follow." Mrs. Ponsonby gazed in terror from the girl's masked face to the elegantly gloved hand that was pointing at her. Beneath their masks, the girl's faces were severe; little did she know that Peggy and Joan were having great difficulty in keeping their faces straight during Betty's tirade.

With a final mocking laugh, the hooded figures vanished into the darkness, leaving the guilty woman cringing with fear. In the garden, Angela was waiting for them, clad in the Silent Three's spare robe. "Betty you were priceless", she said happily, "you should be on the stage". "I did my best", laughed the leader of the Silent Three. Happily, the robed figures made their way back to Ivy House Farm.

The following morning, Betty, Joan and Peggy had to return to their homes, prior to the start of the new school term. Angela drove them to the station.

"I'll never forget what you've done for me and the kids", she said warmly. "All part of the service", replied Betty. The train started to move, the chums settled in their seats; for Betty and Peggy it was the start of a long journey...

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*This Book Belongs to* \_\_\_\_\_

# WHEN THE LONDON CLUB CAME TO SURBITON

By Eric Fayne



I cannot remember the exact year when this photograph was taken, but I fancy it was in the early Nineteen-Sixties. On that occasion the newspaper, the Borough News, sent along a reporter and a photographer who took a number of excellent group pictures.

C.H. Chapman, the famous Magnet artist, was present on that occasion. At an earlier meeting at Surbiton, Charles Hamilton's sister was present with a friend, and, on another occasion, a relation of Charlie Chaplin attended, though he arrived late, having lost his way.

Our first meeting had been in 1948 (it was in fact the Club's third, following on Wood Green and East Dulwich respectively) and was actually held at our Kingston-on-Thames address, as were the next four Surbiton meetings in successive years. After that, the Surbiton meetings were always in Surbiton, at our Grove Road address.

The meetings were popular, if the attendances were anything to go by. My beloved "Madam" was a superb hostess, and she was loved by all the members who knew her. How fortunate our Club has been down the years with its wonderful hostesses.

It is difficult to recall all the things we got up to at the Surbiton meetings. I recall a strawberry tea, in bright sunshine, at tables set out on the lawn. And a treasure hunt in the roomy garden, with specially prepared clues. I forget who found the "treasure".

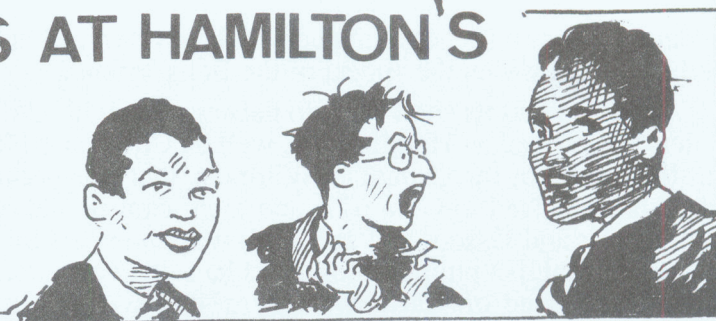
On earlier occasions, before TV became the rage and cinemas were still fashionable, there used to be a novelty at the close of the meeting. When the gathering ended, in the usual way, anybody who felt like it was invited to adjourn to the "Small Cinema" for a programme lasting about 45 minutes. The programme would comprise short subjects (and always the very latest Tom & Jerry release from M.G.M.). Warner Bros., at that period, were releasing some 2-reelers consisting of sequences from various old Mack Sennett Comedies. We usually included one of these 2-reelers in the little show - and it always brought down the house.

(In the photograph, Mr. Chapman is seated in the centre of the front row. Miss Edith Hood (Charles Hamilton's housekeeper) is fifth from the right in the same row, and Eric Fayne is standing on the extreme left.)

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# FOREIGNERS AT HAMILTON'S SCHOOLS

BY ROGER JENKINS



George Orwell in his famous 'Horizon' article declared that Charles Hamilton had two basic political assumptions in his stories: that nothing ever changes and that foreigners are funny. In those war-time days, Charles Hamilton had a spirited riposte to the second point:

*As for foreigners being funny, I must shock Mr. Orwell by telling him that foreigners **are** funny. They lack the sense of humour which is the special gift of our own chosen nation: and people without a sense of humour are always unconsciously funny. Take Hitler, for example - with his swastika, his good German sword, his fortifications named after characters from Wagner, his military coat that he will not take off till he marches home victorious: and all the rest of his fripperies out of the property-box. In Germany they lap this up like milk, with the most awful seriousness; in England this play-acting ass would be laughed out of existence. Take Mussolini - can anyone imagine a fat man in London talking the balderdash that Benito talks to wildly cheering audiences, without evoking, not wild cheers, but inextinguishable laughter? But is Il Duce regarded as a mountebank in Italy? Very far from it. I submit to Mr. Orwell that people who take their theatricals seriously **are** funny. The fact that Adolf Hitler is deadly dangerous does not make him less comic.*

During the war, such an answer was very telling, but there is something more than a little odd about the whole discussion, which seems to be based on very early red Magnets. In those days foreigners were depicted as comic, but can the obvious parody of Mussolini - Signor Muccolini in the 1936 Magnet series - be regarded as comic? On the contrary, there was something rather sinister about him, especially as he was acting as a spy in addition to being a circus proprietor.

In fact, it is necessary to go back to Magnet 33 and the other stories dealing with the Aliens' School in order to analyse the earlier attitude to foreigners. Adolphe Meunier, the French boy, was very pally with Fritz Hoffman, the German, but they were often at daggers drawn because of the ancient hostility between their two countries, and this, together with their halting English, was a major part of the amusement. "Ciel! Zat you let me go" and "I tinks I misses you too, aint it?" are samples of their poor English. Hurree Singh, however, was in another category altogether, as Nugent makes clear to Hoffman who hopes that the Indian junior would leave with them to new premises:

*"Bosh!" said Nugent. "You're a giddy alien and Inky is a true-born British subject. He is black but comely, and we're not going to part with him."*

It is important to note that it is Nugent who makes this distinction, since Nugent was based on Charles Hamilton himself. The rules of the game are thus laid down: boys from the British Empire are not foreigners and are therefore not funny.

It was at Rookwood that the colonial aspect was most apparent, with Van Ryn, Pons, and Conroy. Van Ryn, a South African, was accepted after settling accounts with Higgs, the bully. Pons from Canada was japed by the Bagshot Bounders on his arrival and it took him a long time to live this down; eventually he blackmailed his way into the team, pretending not to know anything about football, only to display unexpected talent on the big occasion - a typical Hamiltonian theme, this. Conroy from Australia fell foul of Carthew and it took the Colonial Co. a long time to even this score. This emphasis on juniors from the colonies was not just a glorification of the British Empire: the Amalgamated Press sent large consignments of these publications around the Empire, and the presence of colonial juniors in the Hamiltonian schools was a good selling point, as well. The choice at Rookwood, however, was perhaps a little odd

in that Pons was a French Canadian, and Van Ryn a Dutch South African, but perhaps this was all designed to widen the appeal of the Boys' Friend.

St. Jim's had its share of colonials as well, with Clifton Dane (the creation of a substitute writer, taken over by Hamilton) as well as Clive, and Noble (usually called Kangaroo) but it was the arrival of the Canadian, Wildrake, that was perhaps the most memorable. He arrived riding bare-backed in Gem 677, and then leapt on the back of a charging bull, played tricks with a lariat and lasso, and above all was an expert tracker. He had to learn to adapt to the ways of an English public school, and he settled accounts with Knox in exactly the same way that Conroy used on Carthew. There, however, the resemblance ends, because Wildrake played a starring role in a number of different series after his arrival, and was kept in the limelight in a manner that none of the other colonials ever quite equalled, and there was even a long series some years later, set at his father's ranch in British Columbia. No doubt it was Wildrake's wide variety of talents that made him useful in later plots, long after the novelty of his arrival had worn off.

Oddly enough, Greyfriars did not feature boys from the Empire much, apart from Inky. Tom Brown, who arrived from New Zealand in Magnet 86, is a well-known name. Snoop blacked his face and masqueraded as a Maori (Bunter knew that New Zealanders were All Blacks), but the real Tom Brown arrived and celebrated his arrival by kicking a football that unfortunately caught Mr. Quelch as he was coming out of the House. After this exciting beginning, Tom Brown tended to fade into the background.

Sampson Quincy Iffley Field, from Australia, was originally much more promising material for plots. The initials on his leather bag made Bob Cherry call him Master Squiff when they met in a railway carriage in No. 343, en route for Greyfriars. Squiff was reading a book called 'Cricket for Beginners' and everyone assumed he couldn't play, until he joined Trumper's side against Greyfriars. This lively element of spoof made a very readable story, and when Johnny Bull went to Australia for a while Squiff seemed to be taking his place as a member of the Famous Five, but when Bull eventually returned Squiff tended to fall into the background as well, rather like Tom Brown.

Piet Delarey who came from South Africa was a creation of Pentelow's, and he was always included in the published lists of Removites even though Hamilton never acknowledged him. Nevertheless, in his substitute stories Pentelow attempted to form a Colonial Co. at Greyfriars with Brown, Squiff, and Delarey, but it did not last, especially as Pentelow concentrated on the Gem rather than the Magnet.

So far as foreigners are concerned, an early permanent character was Wun Lung who arrived at Greyfriars in Magnet 36 wearing decorated silk clothing. His typical answer was "No savvy" though he quickly gave up the pretence of not understanding when Bulstrode took a knife and declared he would cut off his pigtail. A delicious stew made from Mrs. Kebble's dead dog was a typical incident, and equally typically Hurree Singh refused the dish from the very beginning as Indians knew something about Chinese cooking. Perhaps a deeper dimension was added when his Mandarin uncle followed him to England to try to take him back to China away from the foreign devils, but this was only a brief moment, and most of the time Wun Lung was characterised by his "No savvy", his stews of "lats and mice", and his appeals to Bob Cherry for protection.

One of the most prominent foreigners in the Remove was Fisher T. Fish, the boy from New York. Although not as prominent as Bunter, his character changed in a very similar manner over the years. When he arrived in Magnet 150, he was boastful but ineffectual, though not objectionable: so he was a member of the group spending Christmas at Wharton Lodge. As time went on, he became mercenary with all sorts of extravagant schemes; as the war dragged on he seemed to grow almost evil, and eventually settled down in the nineteen-twenties to a quiet life of usury. Transatlantic readers were not enamoured of Fisher T. Fish and even Canadians like Bill Gander took objection to him. Perhaps that is why Putnam van Duck was introduced in two Magnet series, to show a more acceptable side of the American character, but of course it is unlikely that the Magnet had much sale in the U.S.A.

The only other foreigner in the Remove was Napoleon Dupont who arrived in Magnet 546. In the end Nap became a most unlikely study-mate and pal of the bully Bolsover, but he soon fell into the background and was heard of infrequently thereafter.

It was in the da Costa series in Magnets 1059-67 that Charles Hamilton presented his most penetrating study of what might be called a non-British foreigner. Da Costa was a half-caste (Eurasian) of Indian and Portuguese extraction, presumably from the Portuguese colony of Goa originally, though he had been to school in Lucknao. Bunter had overheard the plot for da Costa to get Wharton disgraced so that an inheritance would go to Captain Marker, but no one believed Bunter except possibly Hurree Singh:

*"You think you understand Hurree Singh!" Da Costa laughed. "I understand him better in a few days than you ever could in a hundred years, because I also am from the East."*

When da Costa went on to say that Hurree Singh suspected when no one else would, and would watch with an outwardly smiling face, Wharton became uneasy as the Oriental outlook was being revealed to him, though having accompanied the Prince of Bhanipur to India not so long before he might have been better prepared than he seemed to be at the time. Yet it was Wharton's open nature that dissuaded da Costa from his mission, until the combination of Bunter's trickery and da Costa's inquisitiveness led to a breach, and a series of cunning attempts were made to bring about Wharton's disgrace, but then a reconciliation occurred, and Captain Marker himself took up the task. The series is full of references to Indian habits and customs, and comments on the British Raj, and it represents an insight into character and motivation that marks it out as one of the high peaks of Hamiltoniana.

Of course, there were many adult foreigners who were villains, even if they were not amusing, either. Ijorra, the man from South America, in Magnets 114-5, was one such, and da Silva, the Portuguese, in Gems 82-3 was another. Both these series were wholly set in England but were motivated by earlier events in foreign countries; nevertheless, the English adults were wholly in the right, naturally. Stories like these were the precursors of the famous foreign holiday series where all sorts of exotic villains were on display.



"If you know who abstracted the watch from my study," said Mr. Queich, "you will point out the culprit to me." Da Costa raised his hand. "There's the thief!" he said. And with a steady forefinger he pointed at Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove.

What purpose was served by all these overseas characters? Charles Hamilton later claimed that he made Hurree Singh a member of the Famous Five to promote racial harmony, a concept that was considerably in advance of its time before the second World War, but no doubt readers in the sub-continent were happy to see an Indian boy on equal terms with English schoolboys. So far as the other foreign boys were concerned, apart from Hurree Singh, it is more likely that they were initially offered as quaint curiosities, though Hamilton was too shrewd a judge of humanity to depict cardboard characters. The nearest approach to a stereotype was probably Wilhelmina Limburger who was at Cliff House in red Magnet days. This German girl with her broken English was the prototype of Bessie Bunter and her sheer greed, and all in all was a completely unsympathetic schoolgirl. No doubt if boys like Wun Lung and Napoleon Dupont had first appeared in later issues of the Magnet they would have been jettisoned as ruthlessly as da Costa who was a far more complex and fascinating character. Equally, in the Gem Wildrake would have left instead of remaining so long to overshadow some of the more established characters. Of course it was quite credible that famous English public schools should attract pupils from overseas, and if we are honest with ourselves I suppose it is true to say that we would never wish it to have been otherwise.

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After being stationed in London in the army for quite a time during the war, and also a one-time collector of London postmarks, I am always interested when E.S. Brooks features this great city in many of the Old Series stories. I particularly like those set at holiday time when the boys, whose homes were in the London area, were allowed to invite friends to stay, usually towards the end of the holiday, for a few days before proceeding back to St. Frank's to commence another term.

Apart from their visits to such places as The Wembley Exhibition, Hampstead Heath, and the London Zoo, the London theatres were often mentioned, particularly at Christmas time when Nelson Lee would probably treat Nipper and some of his school friends to an evening at the theatre to see a pantomime or some other type of show.

Handforth was usually among the party, and this always led to trouble, for Handy, with his clumsy antics, always seemed to upset other members of the audience who were seated in the near vicinity. On numerous occasions he was lucky not to be thrown out. This caused much embarrassment to his two friends, Church and McClure, and other members of the party.

Here are some of the London Theatres and picture-houses mentioned in the Old Series. Quite a few will obviously be fictitious, while some of the real-life ones have disappeared for ever. In the period covered by the Old Series the music halls, theatres and picture-houses were in their hey-day, and no one thought at that time that television would come along and drastically affect the attendances, causing many places to close, some to be pulled down, while others would become bingo halls or perhaps super-markets! Very sad!

The Cosy Cinema, Fulham Road (164)  
 Daly's Theatre (561)  
 Dominion Theatre (561)  
 Drury Lane Theatre (367)  
 Emperor Theatre (Haymarket) (564)  
 Globe Theatre (565)  
 Haymarket Theatre (565)  
 Hippodrome (395)  
 His Majesty's Theatre (561)  
 London Coliseum (187)  
 London Pavilion (471)  
 Lyceum Theatre (464)

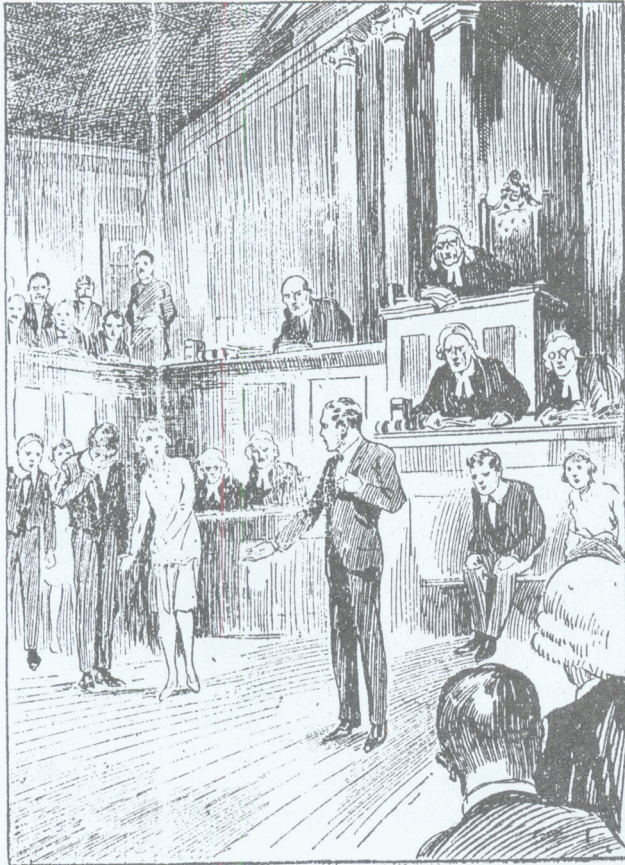
Majestic Theatre (395)  
 Maskelyn's Theatre of Magic (449)  
 Nell Gwynne Theatre (244)  
 Orpheum Theatre (500)  
 Oxford Theatre (226)  
 Pall Mall Theatre (565)  
 Pavilion (Brixton) (395)  
 Queen's Theatre (565)  
 Stoll Picture House (228) (known earlier as The London Opera House)  
 London Opera House (228)  
 (see above)

One of the most interesting series from a theatrical point of view was the final one in the Old Series Nos. 561 to 568, which centred on the play stolen from Horace Stevens of the Fifth Form and written by his late father, Vincent Stevens. Originally it had been named "The Third Chance", but, after that rascal Roger Burton had stolen it, it was renamed "The Whirlpool" and produced at the Emperor Theatre, Haymarket. Eventually Barton was brought to justice, and there were some interesting court scenes at the Law Courts where William Napoleon Browne's father, Sir Rufus Browne K.C., was the prosecuting council.

Also in the Old Series, E.S. Brooks mentioned the names of several plays and shows produced in London, such as: *A Cuckoo in the Nest* (565), *The Admiral Crichton* (562), *His Father's Son* (566), *Is Zat So* (565), *Cinderella* (244), *Babes in the Wood* (500).



Also mentioned are several well known film stars and variety artists who were appearing at some of the theatres already mentioned: Harry Herbert (394), Jack Hulbert (395), Stanley Lupino (395), The Duncan Sisters (395), Tubby Edlin (395), Miss Maisie Gay (395).



Judge and jury listened in amazement as the schoolboy actors and a Moor View girl began to speak the lines of the play that Horace Stevens' father had written. Except for the mere names, the watchers saw that they were acting Roger Barton's play—word for word.

THE SCHOOLBOY ACTORS' AMAZING EVIDENCE!



No. 567.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 17, 1926.

Finally two London theatre owners are featured quite prominently in the last series in the Old Series (561 to 568). One is a Mr. Samuel Arrowsmith, whom Brooks described as a world famous West End manager, the supreme controller of several big London theatres whose success was a byword in the world of the theatre. The other is his great rival, Mr. Augustus Crowson, who was the sole proprietor of three of London's most important theatres. Although their names are obviously fictitious, their careers must have been based on characters who were similar in real life.

With the above series completed, the Nelson Lee's small format disappeared for ever, having been issued in this manner since 1915. I wonder what the readers in 1926 thought of this change?

\*\*\*\*\*

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# George Figgins & Cousin Ethel

By Bob Whiter.

Re-reading the numerous Christmas stories (something I always do at this particular time of the year), I suddenly realised that the Gem's *Lord Eastwood's Christmas Party* contained not one word about snow! This is surely unusual, almost unique; a Christmas tale by our old friend without snow. Well, there you are! But that is not what prompted this article. The story gives an insight into the relationship between Cousin Ethel and George Figgins. In the sixth chapter we have Arthur Augustus disturbed:

*'He looked round for Cousin Ethel. And what he saw was Cousin Ethel and George Figgins walking away down one of the garden paths, so deep in conversation that they seemed quite lost to their surroundings.*

*"Bai Jove!" repeated Gussy, frowning. It was borne once more upon Gussy's noble mind that Figgy's air of proprietorship when he was with Cousin Ethel was a little disconcerting. And Cousin Ethel seemed very interested in her talk with Figgins, which was surprising enough to Gussy. Gussy had never noticed that George Figgins was particularly brilliant or entertaining in the conversational line.'*

If you've read the story you know that Cousin Ethel is very worried about Lord Eastwood's health, and doesn't like Bloore, his lordship's 'man': "I think my aunt might not like me to speak of it, but I - I must consult somebody", said Ethel. "I know I can trust you." Figgins' honest face glowed with loyalty and devotion. "I hope so, Ethel", he said softly.' Of course, in the story Figgins and Ethel ask Kerr's advice, and he, together with Wildrake, frustrates Bloore's knavish tricks:

*'Figgins rushed away in search of Cousin Ethel. The girl was on the terrace, and she met him with a bright face. "Didn't I tell you it would be all right if it was left to Kerr?" said Figgins, beaming.*

*"You did!" said Ethel softly. "Oh, I am so glad - so glad! I have seen my uncle this morning. He has had a very severe shock but he looks better - much better. His life was being sapped away - ". She shivered. "Oh, I am so glad that Kerr and Wildrake -"*

*"Kerr chiefly", said the loyal Figgy.*

*Arthur Augustus had no more serious trouble than his observation of the fact that Figgins seemed to think that Ethel was his cousin, not D'Arcy's at all!*

I do not possess the actual Gem in which Cousin Ethel first made her appearance, but to quote from Roger Jenkins in his excellent article 'Those Beguiling Blue Gems', 'Cousin Ethel made frequent appearances in these early days. Although she was D'Arcy's cousin she seemed far more interested in Figgins. Even Tom Merry took second place here, and in No. 34, when he referred to Figgins in her presence as "that rotter" she paid him out in her own coin. It is interesting to note at this juncture how "Martin Clifford" liked the name of Ethel. We had the Head's niece, Miss Courtney, as well as the music professor's daughter, named Ethel'.

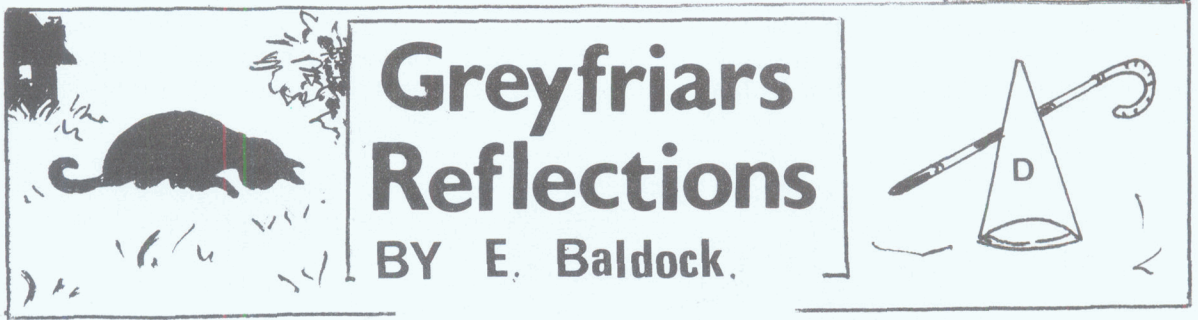
Whilst on the subject of names, I seem to recall that when Cousin Ethel first appeared, around 1907, her surname was Maynard. This was rectified in the reprint 'The Saint Jim's Speed Cops' in 1931, and subsequently she was Miss Cleveland. Her relationship with George Figgins gleams like a silver thread through the St. Jim's saga. It was something that we readers wanted to emulate. We all wanted to meet our own Cousin Ethel. Then of course we wanted to be a character in the mould of George Figgins, such was the craftsmanship of the author. "Martin Clifford" gave us a standard to live up to, and even if we did not quite make it,

I'm sure we tried, and were the better for it. To paraphrase Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: 'One likes to think that there is some fantastic limbo for the children of the imagination ... Perhaps in some humble corner of such a Valhalla, George Figgins and his Cousin Ethel may find a place'.



\*\*\*\*\*





## MRS. KEBBLE'S 'TREASURE'

Quite by accident the other day while sunning myself on Gosling's window ledge, I overheard Mr. Mimble enquiring of that ancient how long had I been on the school staff. I shall not deign to repeat the answer he received to this quite normal and civil question, but merely put on record that I am not half, no, not by a long, long way, as old as he. Officially I am known as Mrs. Kebble's cat and Mimble ought to have known what a 'young fellow' I am, but these old gardeners you know, they are so forgetful. Sufficient it is to say, I am an equally well-known and well-liked 'personality' among the domestics and the boys alike - which is certainly NOT the case with old 'Gossy'.

There is a corpulent fellow in Mr. Quelch's Form - in fact he is extremely fat. I believe his name is Bunter, although I have heard the other boys refer to him by many other strange and, by my own fluffy standards, uncomplimentary titles. This boy seems from prolonged observation always to be blinking (through a pair of large owl-like spectacles) round corners and along passages, as though in search of something. This boy, I say, has the frequent temerity to accuse me - of all respectable and well-brought up cats - of purloining certain savoury comestibles which happen to be missing from the pantry. The outrage of these accusations leaves me speechless - or rather purrless - as though I, a very strictly brought-up cat, would crouch to such dastardly actions! It is a sad fact of life as well the good Mr. Calverley knew; says he - "Should ever anything be missing -- milk, coals, umbrellas, brandy - The cat's pitched into with a boot or anything that's handy." (Incidentally I have never in my life - all nine of them - ever stolen an umbrella, and as for brandy...)

This monstrous Bunter, whose very trousers (vulgarily and loudly checked) offend my refined and delicate susceptibilities, has a brother, a minor edition of himself, with habits and customs very similar to his own. Both appear to have no respect whatsoever for other fellows' cupboards or foodstuffs. Now I have no ambitions or desires whatever in the cake or tart line, while biscuits, pineapples and jam pass me by like the idle wind. I must admit, however, that a certain effort of will-power is necessary where pies of a savoury nature, chops, legs of pork and sausages are concerned; but then - I was going to say - I am only 'feline', and have to grit my teeth and vigorously lick my tail to take my mind off such delicacies.

Mrs. Kebble, my mistress and mentor, reposes great faith in me, although I do find it rather mysterious and unnecessary that she never fails to close the door of the pantry and other food-cupboards in the kitchen. This prevents me from carrying out one of my most important duties, as I see it, which is exploring and policing to assure myself that no stray mice have effected an entry. I sometimes feel that we cats are very much misunderstood.

On the whole the boys are quite a decent set of fellows - for humans! There is one whom I take the trouble to avoid whenever possible. I think his name is 'Tinner' or perhaps it is 'Skinner'. He is an unpleasant youth who certainly does not accord due respect to a chap's dignity. No, I do not much care for Skinner. I have many places of repose in this rambling old school, for I take lengthly 'naps' throughout the day, especially if the weather is inclement outside and I am unable to patrol; I hate getting my feet wet. One of my favourite spots is a deep and shabby old arm-chair in Mr. Quelch's study. Years of constant use have produced a perfect concave hollow in the cushions where a fellow can really get down to it and relax. Oh, the happy hours I have spent here. Mr. Quelch has frequently come in and sat down to work at his desk by the window without, apparently, seeing me. He is rather a decent old gentleman who respects a fellow's dignity.

Like all self-respecting cats I have my 'special' people, those with whom I enjoy a very close affinity. Perhaps I may mention two. Mary, the maid, who gives me the odd illicit saucer of milk, unbeknown to Mrs. Kebble. This is naturally much appreciated and as a result she and I are excellent friends. Then there is a boy called Coker in the Fifth Form, a big clumsy chap who seems always to be undergoing a process the other fellows call 'ragging'. He is most kind to me, often spending some time agitating the fur at the back of my head, an inaccessible area I am unable to reach. It is most soothing, and never fails to put me into a good humour; a decent fellow Coker.

On the whole life is tolerable at Greyfriars. The boys are a little noisy and boisterous at times, but one cannot have everything perfect. We cats know, so much better than they, how to conduct ourselves. We have a dignified and civilised outlook on life. 'We' never throw - or as the boys have it 'hurl' - objects at each other, being far too adult for that. As I was saying to Mrs. Kebble the other day, when I was sitting on her lap having a quiet chat: "Some of us must maintain a standard of good behaviour - mustn't we?"

## A COMMON ROOM FRACAS

### 'So foul a sky clears not without a storm' (King John)

It was an unnecessary storm in a very small tea-cup. Dignity and the possession of a newspaper - and an armchair - were at stake, with the unhappy result of almost bringing two elderly gentlemen, two old colleagues and friends, to the point of exchanging blows. Thus are furious (though happily brief) storms massed suddenly from small, insignificant unworthy causes. Such too are the natures of elderly gentlemen, of two particular gentlemen not entirely unknown to fame - or to us. Pope has told us, not without some relevance that - 'The ruling passion, be it what it will, the ruling passion conquers reason still'.

Form masters are not temperamental as a general rule, at least not more so than anyone else pursuing an equally taxing profession. But Mr. Quelch had experienced a particularly trying morning. Bunter had been more than usually obtuse. Vernon Smith had been impertinent to the point of rudeness, and Skinner had been caned for sniggering in class. Break had come as something of a blessing that morning. He had not exactly flung himself into the first armchair available in the common room, but he had undoubtedly sat down with quite undue force and determination. Reaching out he had picked up the first paper coming to hand; unfortunately it happened to be Mr. Prout's own private copy of *The Times*. In opening it, again with quite undue energy, Quelch had actually torn a part of an inner page. Heinous!

Mr. Prout appeared in the doorway and paused as he surveyed the room. Prout usually made his 'entry' in this manner (which sadly was practically always ignored). There was Quelch sitting in his chair, and to aggravate the situation ensconced behind his copy of *The Times*. "Unprecedented", he murmured to himself, changing colour slightly. Then clearing his throat audibly he advanced upon Quelch rather like an outraged cockatoo. That gentleman continued to peruse the paper, quite oblivious of the fast approaching storm. "You are sitting in my chair Quelch, you are reading my paper." It was not exactly a snort but something very closely akin to one. Perhaps Mr. Quelch did not hear; perhaps in his present mood he did not choose to hear; again perhaps he was too deeply immersed in the information of the day contained in the august columns of Prout's paper. In any case he gave no sign. "Mr. Quelch!". Prout roared this time, the flimsy pages of *The Times* vibrated quite visibly. "What is it, Prout?" snapped Mr. Quelch testily. "Do you not see that I am reading the paper?". Mr. Prout's face assumed a delicate shade of purple; "I see you reading **my** paper, and sitting in **my** chair", he hooted. "This is unparalleled." "Really Prout!" "Really Quelch!"

The spectacle of two elderly gentlemen squabbling (there can be no other term applicable) was at once distressing, amusing and certainly ridiculous. The atmosphere in Masters common room was quite electric. If distinctions were to be made perhaps Mr. Prout was, by a shade or so, the purpler of the two. He felt that by all the laws of tradition and precedence had had justice on his side. Here was Quelch - who should have known better - comfortably ensconced in his armchair perusing his copy of *The Times* as though he had every right in the world so to do. Really it was quite unprecedented, quite unparalleled. For one dreadful moment - which

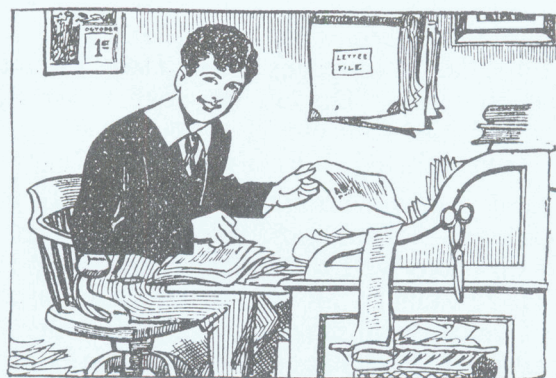
seemed like an hour - assault and battery appeared to be in the offing. Poor Mr. Twigg, the Master of the second form, a peaceful little soul, was quite devastated by the scene as he hovered fretfully on the outskirts, as it were, of the battle area, twittering: "Gentlemen, gentlemen please remember where you are..." Mr. Hacker, the Master of the fourth form, smiled sourly. "Really, I must say ..." He got no further. "You need say nothing", snapped Mr. Quelch, who realising that his position was a little tenuous was becoming increasingly acid. "Just so Hacker, please remain silent" boomed Prout. On this point at least the two antagonists were in agreement. Mr. Hacker changed colour, swallowed hard, but remained silent. He observed distinct danger signals were he to proceed. "That is my chair Quelch!" boomed Mr. Prout, returning to the attack. "It is the common property of the school", snapped back Mr. Quelch. "Upon my soul!" Gentlemen, gentlemen, really..." It was the quiet and seldom heard voice of Mr. Capper, a usually silent and certainly unobtrusive member of the common room. Scarcely ever were his tones heard in that august apartment. Thus it was perhaps that now, at this highly charged emotional point, it cut across and revealed in all its starkness the reality of what was happening, the whole ridiculous aspect of the affair. "Gentlemen, cease this disgraceful exhibition immediately. Recall your position, remember who you are - please. Oh dear, what would Dr. Locke say should he hear, supposing the boys ... " Poor Capper broke off, he was quite distraught. But there was something in the intensity of this appeal which reached down through the layers of anger overwhelming both masters and had an immediate effect.

Quite suddenly Mr. Quelch felt cool, perhaps a little ashamed of his conduct and the attitude he had assumed, and of his extreme acidity. Similarly Mr. Prout's outraged boom became more a species of rumble as he also saw the enormity of his conduct. Mr. Quelch spoke first. "My dear Prout I must apologise..." Mr. Prout waved a plump deprecating hand: "Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all, it is I who should apologise - I insist". "But really Prout!" "I insist Quelch." Magnanimity was in the ascendent. Peace and tranquility were the order of the day.

That same evening Mr. Prout was observed pressing Mr. Quelch to accept a biscuit from the communal barrel kept on the common room side table, and, not to be out-done, a little later there was Mr. Quelch actually filling Prout's wine glass for the second time with an air of joviality itself before passing in to dine. "Excellent sherry this, Prout." "A splendid vintage Quelch, your health old fellow. Perhaps you might care to discuss a glass of port in my study after dinner Quelch?" "Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Prout. I have some papers to correct first - but depend upon me."

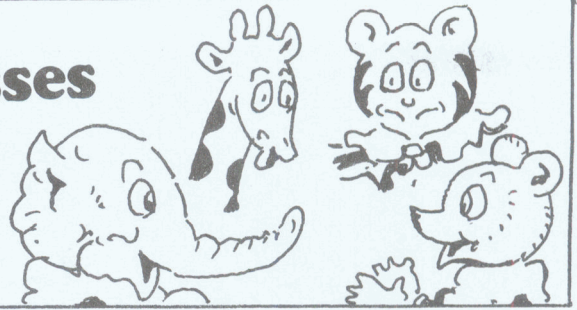
The storm had passed away as though it had never been. The clouds had rolled by. They were now *aequo animo* - all was calm and bright - until the next time. Thus was another crisis circumvented, and the two senior masters at Greyfriars 'lived' to fight another day.

\*\*\*\*\*



# Those Christmasses With Tiger Tim

BY Margery Woods



Christmas in the twenties and thirties could be a bleak event for many children, especially those in the impoverished areas of Britain and the slum districts of the big cities. For them the sparkle, the warmth and the goodies were firmly out of reach behind the tantalising glass barriers of the department store windows.

Often the highlight of Christmas would be the school Christmas party, organised by the devoted teachers who strove to bring a semblance of seasonal joy into the grim and cavernous classrooms of the gloomy city board schools which were a hangover from the bleak if well-meaning efforts of the Victorians to provide free education for the poor. Amid the brown paint and the dun distemper, the children's feet tramped the Jolly Miller and The Grand Old Duke of York over grey un-linoed boards while a teacher pounded out an accompaniment on a piano which all too often had seen better days. Usually, for the three months prior to Christmas, each child brought a halfpenny per week to go into the party fund, and so by Christmas, for sixpence a head, those dedicated teachers managed to lay on a party tea with a cracker and minute gift for each child. And somehow it always managed to include the unfortunate child who was unable to contribute those precious halfpennies. So, in such conditions, was it strange that the comics of those years provided quite a large part of the pleasure in those children's lives?

The corner newsagent's counter each weekend was a regular scene of small children clutching their pocket money and breathing heavily over the merits of Rainbow, Playbox or Puck, yearning for the vivid colour of their covers, yet sometimes torn between splurging a whole twopence on one comic or settling for the plainer penny Larks and Funny Wonder; two for the price of one! But the decision was even harder to make during December when all the things that spell Christmas to a child were arrayed in the gaily illustrated Christmas issues. And what journeys those comics would make once they left the newsagent's. They would be bartered and swapped, lent out, rescued from awful fates in dustbins or mopping up after baby or cat until on the point of disintegration.

Amalgamated Press were the recognised masters of the golden age of comics, and what a superb collection they mastered.

Puck was a great favourite, a rather superior comic. In its early days, when it became purely a publication for children, it cost a penny and had twelve pages, except for the Christmas issue. In 1916 this was announced as the Grand Christmas Double Number at 2d. But not quite! It contained only twenty pages. No doubt the readers forgave this slightly inaccurate interpretation of the word double. It was beautifully presented, its cover a full page illustration of Santa on his sledge, surrounded by the paper's favourite characters who partied merrily within the pages. Val Fox, Angel and her Playmates, Dr. Jolliboy, the Merry Mischiefs and Dan the Menagerie man, along with the regular features like Puck's model to cut out and make. Nearly twenty years later these evergreen characters were still going strong, except that Angel had lost her front page spot, being replaced by Jingles Jolly Circus, and the famous Rob the Rover and Rin Tin Tin had joined Puck's starry cast.

By 1919 the price had doubled to 2d---all the year round, and the Christmas number was a rather more spartan affair. Come 1933 and Puck was slanting its fiction towards a slightly older age group while retaining its colourful picture strips for the younger kiddies.

While Puck featured mostly human characters Jungle Jinks lived up to its name and followed the well tried tradition of lovable animals vested with human characteristics which had been established in the Victorian era. With Paddy and Pam at the Jungle's Edge, The Jungle School Ship and a cover lead entitled Joyful Jinks on Jungle Island it must have been difficult

# THE RAINBOW ANNUAL.

1937





for authors and artists to capture the accepted Christmas atmosphere. But on December 13th, 1924 they tried valiantly, with Breezy Ben, Sambo and the Boys getting playful on Christmas Eve. Ben dresses up as Santa but falls asleep, whereupon the naughty Cherubs daub his face with burnt cork. When he wakes up and sees himself in the mirror he demands to know why Sambo is dressing up like Santa. Frightfully racist, alas. By December 27th Jungle Island is smothered in snow and someone has even managed to import a robin to sit cheekily on a branch, the palm trees having been temporarily banished from the scene.

A lesser known comic (and very difficult to find now) was My Favourite, with a short run of some six years. In style nearest to Puck, My Favourite was a classy example of the genre, aimed at readers almost ready to move on to the storypapers. The fiction was well written, occupying full pages and dense blocks of small print---the sight of which would probably send many of today's children reeling towards the TV switch in search of much more instant gratification. The accent was on adventure, usually of the far-flung-outposts variety, there was a page of little stories written by readers, with tuckbox prizes for the four best. Strongheart, another wonder Alsatian, occupied the back page picture story, and the centre red-coloured pages, usually reserved for comic strips for younger readers, consisted of three picture serials. With Round the World in the Jolly Rover as cover lead feature My Favourite must have had the same problem of Christmas scope as Jungle Jinks. So far I have been unable to locate a Christmas issue of this comic but judging by the few I have it must have had a following round the world, for mine bears the stamp of the The Shanghai News Co., of Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai. One can't help speculating on what a Chinese child would have made of one of our comics; possibly a similar reaction to that of the American confronted by an English pantomime.

On December 25th, 1927, The Sunbeam presented a Feast of Christmas Fun in their Merry Christmas Number. This was a most attractive comic, apparently aimed at the age group between Chick's Own and Puck. The cover story featured the Merry Mischiefs, led by Jack Horner, and within was the picture tale of Carrots, a London waif who got involved with a circus, and yet another waif, Motherless Mary, also in pictures. The back cover story, an historical entitled The Secret of Tiger Island, the centre pages were for the little ones, and the fiction consisted of a western adventure, Sunset Ranch, The Children of the Lighthouse, set in South America, and The House That Jack Built, which featured Jack and Jenny, two young inventors. Lastly came a Robin Hood series called Daisy Bell, the Little Maid of Sherwood. Uncle Jack's page held lots of puzzles and riddles and tricks to complete an entertaining and well balanced mix for a tricky age span.

Playbox, also appealing to the same age category, favoured a beautiful full page special illustration on its holiday issues. These were superlatively drawn by the A.P. artists who at that time must have been virtually unequalled in that particular genre. New Year 1929 found the Chummy Boys at the pantomime, depicted beneath the lovely Playbox masthead set in its string of Chinese lanterns. It is sad to run to Playbox exactly ten years on, reduced to magazine format, and even sadder to see it in 1948, once again tabloid but reduced to eight pathetically thin pages. Only the Woolley Boys and Tommy Twinkle, now allowed only a very small column, survived the war, Editress Mrs. Hippo was succeeded first by Flip then by Uncle Ben, and the Hippo Girls diminished to a minute two-picture strip. Even the cover title's paper lanterns had shrunk.

But for many readers looking back down the years in wistful nostalgia the king of the comics must be Tiger Tim. He had already made several appearances before Rainbow made its debut in 1914 and in 1920 he was given his own paper, Tiger Tim's Weekly. The first series was in small format, single colour; it was not until the new series commencing November 1921 that he burst forth in full glorious technicolor, so to speak, complete with free balloon, in the tabloid form which remained until that doomsday of so many beloved comics and storypapers in May 1940.

It says much for the appeal and holding power of Tiger Tim that this single character was able to sustain two similar publications from the same stable for so many years. Lots of Christmas fare came with Tim. Somehow he managed to start Christmas early and make it last longer. On December 10th, 1921, in his editorial letter he bemoaned the fact that Christmas was taking an awfully long time to arrive. But they were all making ready. On the 17th, Mrs. Bruin is making the Christma spuddings, with the not very helpful help of the Boys, and on the 24th, beneath a delightful snow-topped heading, Tim and the Boys positively fall into that



BLINDMAN'S-BUFF  
IN THE FOREST



gorgeous pudding. There was a model of Father Christmas on the back cover to cut out and make, and the story of Cinderella along with Porky-Boy's Christmas Stocking tale within.

Each of the Bruin Boys was a distinctive character, written and drawn with consistent care. Despite their naughtiness the Bruin Boys always sugared the pill in their Christmas message. They knew that if they didn't go to sleep on Christmas Even there would be no visit from Santa. And they carefully saved their pennies to buy a gift for Mrs. Bruin. So the affection of a family was perpetuated.

In comparison to the pow wham crash of today's comic characters theirs was a very gentle anarchy.

If spin-offs are any gauge of popularity Tiger Tim must have far surpassed Rupert in those days, considering that Rainbow continued to thrive alongside Tiger Tim's Weekly, while Playbox also featured Tim. Then there were the annuals which crowned the year of the weeklies. Beside the annuals linked to Tiger Tim's Weekly, Rainbow and Playbox there were two more Tiger Tim related, the Bruin Boys Annual and Mrs. Hippo's Annual, this last featuring the feminine counterparts of Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys. Five annuals and three weeklies linked to one character was quite an achievement during the heyday of the twopence coloured, when so many rivals fought for a share of the available market.

All A.P.'s comics maintained a very high standard of artwork and fiction but perhaps of all of them Puck took the prize for classic presentation. Playbox was pretty, Bubbles and Bo Peep charming, Tiger Tim's Weekly and Rainbow exceptionally bright and jolly. Sunbeam lived up to its name and its pictorial layout and colour did all but smile at the reader and say: "Buy me!". Remembering the basic similarity of printing style and content great credit is due to the artists and writers who succeeded so brilliantly in giving each paper its own distinctive character.

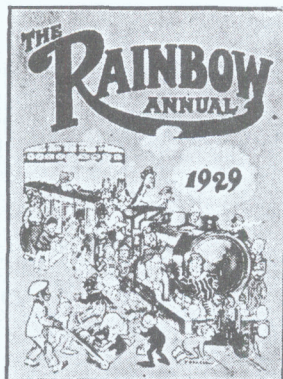
They brought colour, charm and amusement all the year round into many young lives as well as developing reading skills in a delightfully painless fashion. They well deserved the affection of those of us fortunate enough to have enjoyed their happy pages.

Yes, they were very special.

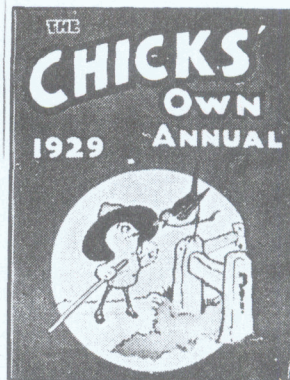
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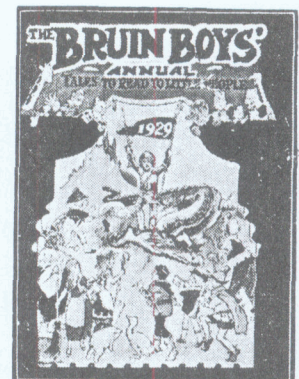
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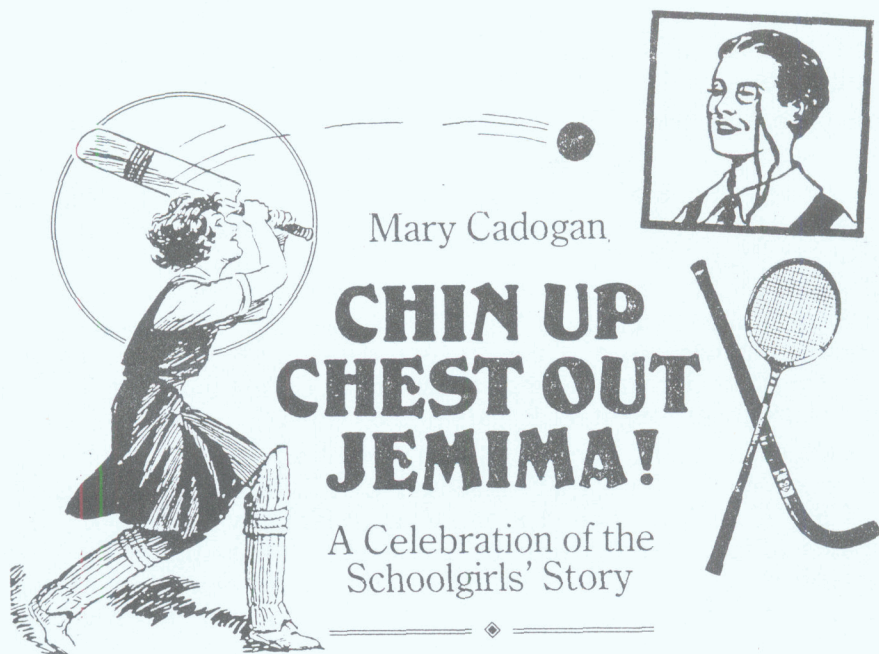
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# Let us Not Forget Sexton Blake.

By Jim Cook.



The name of Scotland Yard is universally known in the English-speaking world, and, when we say that, we tie it in with Sexton Blake, for 'The Yard' was mentioned in the Sexton Blake Library more than in any other hobby publication.

I have just been reading a *READER'S DIGEST* dated March 1976 with an article 'Inside Scotland Yard', giving a few facts that must be welcome to enthusiasts of Sexton Blake. Our hobby, of course, is concerned with the old turreted neo-Gothic headquarters on the Thames Embankment, the old 'Yard', with which Blake was familiar, and where our memories will remain.

Still the article mentioned is very interesting. There are 20 storeys in the new building at 10 Broadway, London, S.W.1. A complex network of radio, teleprinter and television systems controls London's Metropolitan Police district, comprising 2035 kilometres of city streets, country lanes, docks, factories, palaces, slums, night-spots, government offices, and also Heathrow Airport.

Each time I see the name New Scotland Yard a little shiver of apprehension attacks me as I remember a little adventure I had in that famous place. I had called in at the British Airways' office near Victoria Station to check my departure time and to buy an airline bag. After that I walked down Victoria Street with the bag wrapped in my plastic rain coat and came to Scotland Yard in Dacre Street. I suddenly remembered that I had sent to a correspondent in Australia a photograph I'd received some years ago from the old Scotland Yard. I walked into The Yard to ask if they would kindly give me another large photo. I was told to sit down and wait while the young lady at the counter 'phoned somewhere in the building.

As I sat there with the parcel under my arm, people came and went without any fuss, but I could see from the corner of my eye a shadowy figure hovering about me. A few minutes later I was called to the counter and told I could take a photograph from outside.

It wasn't until afterwards that I realised I had been suspected of planting a bomb, and the figure bobbing around me was ready to pounce and arrest me if I left the building without the parcel. Yet I had been allowed to enter with the parcel under my arm easily enough!

I once tried to join the Police but was turned down because of weak eyesight. Even in those days I thought of Sexton Blake and Scotland Yard as one; this most famous police headquarters lives on in our hobby literature together with the name of Sexton Blake.

Sadly the adventures of the Baker Street investigator and his youthful assistant, Tinker, are now remembered mainly just by those of us who recall the old days when their eagerly awaited exploits were published weekly, and monthly. Sherlock Holmes still enjoys long-lasting adulation, but I think that when Sexton Blake is revived (as he must be, one day) he will outlive every other detective of fiction. We must not forget Sexton Blake! After all, story paper heroes are better to adore than some from real life who can let us down. They provide us with memories which never tarnish.

There are those who consider Blake and Tinker only as memories in the backwater of yesterday, because they think Blake would be hard put to it to temper justice with mercy in crime-solving today. That may be correct, for the mechanics of crime now are very different from those times when Blake jumped into his Grey Panther Rolls Royce in pursuit of his quarry (whom he usually overtook).

Blake came across many ladies who figured in his search for truth, and I am surprised not to find their names adopted more often in real life today, as they are very becoming.

Perhaps one day will meet a June Severance or an Yvonne Cartier or, indeed, a Lady Emily Westholme!

That fictional detective contemporary of Blake, Nelson Lee, did not become as familiar with the people at The Yard as did Blake. The man from Baker Street more often than not worked in conjunction with Scotland Yard.

Let us remember Sexton Blake by reading and recounting his adventures. He is part of Britain's heritage and it is up to us to honour him. If we cannot build an outward shrine to the memory of Sexton Blake and Tinker, let us erect one in our hearts!

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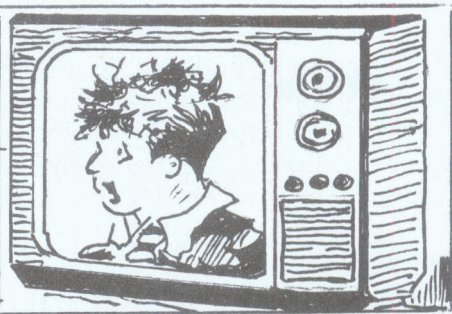
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# William's Television

**Show. By Brian Doyle.**



*"Now listen", said William. "You're goin' to see a new television show diff'rent from any other television show you've ever seen in your lives before... a television show with real live people in it..."*

from WILLIAM'S TELEVISION SHOW, by Richmal Crompton, 1958

WILLIAM'S TELEVISION SHOW was the title of Richmal Crompton's 1958 William book, and as a title, it was both retrospective and prophetic.

We all knew William, of course, and still do. The wonderful, anarchic, cosy, hilarious and fascinating world of the grimy-knee'd, tousled haired, sock-sagging, short-trousered, skew-whiffed capped, ever-active 11-year-old William, the schoolboy with pockets bulging with giant humbugs, acid-drops, pear-drops, almond delights, lollipops, bits of string, indiarubbers, broken toy soldiers, bottles of liquorice-water, stubs of pencil, matchboxes containing female-scream-inducing stag-beetles and, now and again, off-white mice. A boy fond of dropping both final G's and bombshells, idoliser of pirate-chiefs, cowboys, detectives, master-criminals, savages and, occasionally, Joan, the pretty, dark-haired little girl from next door; hater of pomposity, policemen, washing, boys who dressed in velvet-suits, homework, baths, Violet Elizabeth, and girls in general.

Always doing things he liked with dedication 'worthy of a better cause'. Bristling with 'righteous indignation' when wrongly accused. Forever using his favourite adjective 'jolly', and favourite exclamation 'crumbs!'. Plotting blood-curdling revenges on the nasty 'Hubert Laneites'. Possessor of an infinite capacity for producing chaos. Tramping purposefully along a road, invariably paved with good intentions, towards retribution, and finally realising that his unique interpretation of events would inevitably differ from anyone else's. Enjoying more than anything, being with his beloved group of 'Outlaws', Ginger, Douglas and Henry, and not forgetting Jumble, the dog.

Considering all this, it was clear that William Brown, his friends and enemies, and his colourful everyday life and adventures, were long overdue to conquer the world of television. They had conquered radio way back in the 1940s with the highly-successful BBC radio series JUST WILLIAM, which ran over almost 100 half-hour episodes from 1945 to 1948, with a final series in 1952. The original Williwam was young John Clark, who was eventually succeeded (after around 60 episodes) by Julian Denham, David Spenser and Andrew Ray. The radio series was so popular with all ages that, at its peak, it achieved a listening figure of 18 million! The original cast also appeared in a stage version, JUST WILLIAM, which opened at Christmas, 1946, in London, and then went on tour. I saw this production twice, first at the Granville Theatre, Walham Green, Fulham, London, and later at the Lewisham Hippodrome, in South London, when I met John Clark and Jacqueline Boyer (who was then playing Violent Elizabeth). I remember that they both agreed that appearing in the stage show 'was fun, but hard work'. John is today married to actress Lynn Redgrave and works as her manager.

William made his television bow on 24th January, 1951, when Joy Harington (subsequently to produce the Billy Bunter TV series the following year) produced a single play, JUST WILLIAM, for BBC TV, starring Robert Sandford as the eponymous hero. I didn't see it, serving in the RAF at the time, though I frequently passed close to Richmal Crompton's house, on Bromley Common, on my way to and from my Fighter Command station at nearby Biggin Hill. I've never encountered anyone who **did** see it either, so I've no idea what it was like...

Then came a wait of more than 11 years when, in May 1962, a JUST WILLIAM BBC TV series began, with Dennis Waterman as William, plus Christopher Witty (Ginger), Robert

Bonnerman (Henry), Carlo Cura (Douglas), Lockwood West (Mr. Brown), Patricia Marmont (Mrs. Brown) and Gillian Gostling (Violet Elizabeth). It ran for six weekly episodes, with a further six episodes running from March to May, 1963. This time, Denis Gilmore took over as William, with Kaplan Kay as Henry, the rest of the cast remaining as before. I don't have any critical reactions to hand, though I do seem to recall that Waterman came in for some criticism because his accent was too 'lower class'.

Nearly 14 more years elapsed until William Brown surfaced upon the waters of television again, and this time it was to be with a major splash of nationwide publicity - and for the first time the new series of JUST WILLIAM was to be for a rival 'commercial' ITV network to BBC TV - for London Weekend Television. The Press went to town. The news that TV was searching for a boy to star as William broke on 25th June, 1976. "Wanted: Scruffy Young Star!" screamed the Daily Mail. "Crumbs! 'Just William' Gets a TV Series" announced the Daily Telegraph more sedately. "Just the Job!. ITV Needs a William", said The Sun on Page 3 (William a Page 3 toy-boy? Perish the thought!). "Just Harold. Hunt for TV William with a Wilson Nose!" yelled the Daily Express mysteriously.

Apparently, Stella Richman, executive producer of the new series, had announced that William had always reminded her strongly of Harold Wilson, especially the snub nose and the laugh. She was now looking for a 13-year-old boy of 5 feet 2 inches in height, who didn't have to be a professional actor, but who should be hard-working, adaptable, have no especially identifiable accent, and a sense of humour. He would be paid at least £75.00 per episode, plus rehearsal money. Each episode would cost around £10,000.00. She was also looking for children to cast in the other roles, plus a small mongrel dog to play Jumble. The series was to be written by Keith Dewhurst, adapting from Crompton's own stories, and produced and directed by John Davies.

All these newspaper stories were riddled with the usual errors (why don't journalists do their homework?) and many ran extremely ugly and badly-reproduced drawings of William said to be by Thomas Henry, the original illustrator, but nothing like his fine work. (I myself had a letter of protest printed in the Daily Mail at the time, regarding these drawings, but nobody apologised or put the matter right.) All the papers were under the impression that the first William stories had appeared in 1928, for some reason (they were so unanimous that I should think this was due to an error in the Press release issued by LWTW). The Daily Telegraph, who should have known better, stated in their Leader Column, no less, that William was "horrific... bullying and half-daft"! The writer had obviously never read a William story in his life. Ominously, The Guardian reported producer-director Davies as saying that the stories were "rich in satire of middle-class pretensions" and that writer Dewhurst compared them to the plays of 17th century writer William Congreve ('Just William' Congreve, no doubt!). "They are all about money", he said, "which is always running out and they hold these great conferences to work out how to get more and what they will do when they've beaten the system and are millionaires." The hearts of William admirers must have sunk when they read these pretentious and half-baked interpretations of their beloved William.

In late-September, the popular Press went beserk - even their breath seemed to come in short pants - and anyone might have thought that World War Three had broken out. Screaming headlines announced that 14-year-old Adrian Dannatt, from Canonbury, in North London, and a pupil at Westminster School (a leading public school) had landed the role of television's brand-new William. The newspaper pages were black with photographs of him wearing a school cap (the wrong one, with vertical rings instead of the correct horizontal ones seen in the books) at various rakish angles and a necktie twisted into even more untidy positions. His hair was too neatly combed and he was wearing long trousers, but apart from that he seemed a nice boy (and after all they hadn't even started rehearsing yet so let's be fair). Adrian had read about the search for William in the Daily Mirror and written an application letter, all off his own bat, apparently, just 'for a lark'. The Press made much of the fact that Adrian's only previous acting role had been as Adolf Hitler in a school play which had been 'a bit of a flop' and also that he had been chosen from over 2000 applicants. He said that he had read most of the William books, that he had a 19-year-old sister (though her name wasn't Ethel!) and that his parents had often called him 'a right little William'. His father was a Professor of Architecture at Manchester University. Adrian also told the Press that he was rather looking forward to being famous.



On 1st October (still in 1976) the newspapers were plastered with photographs of Adrian Dannatt meeting up with 12-year-old veteran actress, singer and dancer Bonnie Langford, from Twickenham, who had been signed to play the dreadful, lisping Violet Elizabeth. She was, of course, perfect for the part (she still is) - and looked it. On 6th October, in the Daily Express, top columnist Jean Rook ran a major interview with Adrian Dannatt. Obviously a William fan, she enthused "William Brown is a priceless antique. An inky, bloodstained, black-eyed, crumple-capped classic... William lives on... you can whiff the bullseyes on his breath... the magic essence." She heartily approved of Adrian playing William and liked him a lot. Amused by his 'quotes' and humour, she ended "They shouldn't need to write this boy a script".

Over the next weeks, more pictures of Adrian and his associates, busily filming the new TV series, appeared in the Press. Casting was now complete and was, for the record: Ginger (Michael McVey), Henry (Craig McFarlane), Douglas (Tim Rose), Mr. Brown (Hugh Cross - who had, curiously enough, played brother Robert in the William Graham feature films in the late 1940s!), Mrs. Brown (Diana Fairfax), Ethel (Stacy Dorning), Robert (Simon Chandler), Mrs. Bott (Diana Dors - a brilliant piece of casting!) and Mr. Bott (John Stratton).

Episode One of the new TV series - William and the Begging Letter - went out on Sunday, 6th February, 1977, at 4.35 p.m. and ran for 30 minutes, including commercials. There were 13 episodes in this First Series, which ran until 1st May, 1977. There were 14 episodes (including a one-hour Christmas Day Special) in the second (and final) series, which ran from 23rd October, 1977 until 22nd January, 1978. Again, Sunday tea-time was the transmission time. The cast and technical credits were the same. The stories were set in the 1920s and the costumes and sets were a delight, as was the theme music by Denis King.

There was much merchandising and promotion. New paperback TV tie-in editions, with photographs on the covers, of ten William books were issued by Armada, backed up with posters and other special display material. There was a new William game, special William sweets, and a new JUST WILLIAM Annual, published by World Distributors, and which ran to two issues. A record of the theme music was also on sale.

The whole country seemed to go William mad with the advent of the new TV series. Newspapers and magazines ran numerous news items and lengthy features and William (often in company with Violet Elizabeth) found himself on more than one full-colour cover. William was definitely 'the flavour of the month' during 1977.

The newspaper TV critics' reactions to the first episode were generally very good. They welcomed young Adrian Dannatt's portrayal of William, despite one or two minor reservations.

"He's plump where the famous illustrations tell us that he should be toughly chunky, but fits the bill in other directions - natural, lively, blessedly un-actory and bound to get better", remarked Shaun Usher in the Daily Mail. "Of the star quality of young Dannatt there can be no doubt", said Richard Last in the Daily Telegraph. "He exudes self-confidence, without ever falling into brashness. He exemplifies scowling rebellion, but his plausibility is obvious. In short, he is the William of the books from tousled head to ungartered socks." "...a forceful lad who is also quite attractive", gushed Nancy Banks-Smith in The Guardian. "He looks right, but is not dirty enough and he cannot as yet ring the necessary changes on outrage, assumed innocence and gloom - his exemplar's most important expressions. He also needs to look more scheming", wrote Michael Church in The Times, appearing to expect nothing less than Olivier's Richard III from a 14-year-old schoolboy who had virtually never acted before. "Plump-cheeked, dishevelled and exactly like the original illustrations", said Martin Wainright in the London Evening Standard.

Clearly attempting to smash a walnut with a sledgehammer was Hazel Holt in The Stage and TV Today. "At present he does not have the experience, the technique and (most important in this case) the authority to carry the major part of William", she wrote. "He lacked too, that essential hardness and brusqueness - that relentless quality which the entire adult world learned to dread, that agonising persistence against which, ultimately, there was no defence. And, to those of us brought up on the illustrations of Thomas Henry, his hair was both too long and too tidy." Methinks the lady doth protest too much! Ms. Holt seemed to be bringing the standards of a new Hamlet at London's National Theatre to a likeable, cosy TV series going out at Sunday tea-time.

Bevis Hillier, in the Sunday Times, just seemed bad-tempered about the whole thing (he was, poor dear, more used to writing about antiques, of course). "The pudgy, phlegmatic boy who plays William is either mis-cast or he can't act for toffee... the splendid cartoon credits have got William right: he should be an ingenious Dennis-the-Menace type - not leadenly obstructive like this actor, but fiendishly constructive in mishchief-making." It could have been said that Mr. Hillier couldn't write 'for toffee'; not only does he commit the cardinal error of not even naming the actor who played William, but he appears not to know that Dennis the Menace is decidedly **not** hyphenated, or not to realise that one of William's best-known and most effective ploys **was** to be, on suitable occasions, 'leadenly obstructive' usually to great effect...!

Clive James, in the Observer, was uncharacteristically mild: "Adrian Dannatt is far too kempt. He is a natural actor, but for William he is unnaturally clean. The whole point about William is that no matter how carefully Mrs. Brown spruces him up he is a wreck before he gets out of the room." Jilly Cooper, in the Sunday Times, found that Dannatt "depicted William just as I'd imagined him, solemn, introspective, gazing reflectively through a black thatch of hair, but nevertheless displaying a havoc-making potential which bodes well for the future." Philip Purser somewhat testily commented in the Sunday Telegraph: "I seem to be the only viewer in Britain who found JUST WILLIAM somewhat short of masterly. The podgy William is nicely natural in his own mould, if not much resembling the bullet-headed scruff of the Thomas Henry illustrations."

All the critics appeared to enjoy the series generally and (apart from Dannatt) picked out Bonnie Langford's Violent Elizabeth and Diana Dors' aitch-dropping, nouveau-riche Mrs. Bott (of Bott 'All) for special praise. But practically everyone in the cast came in for words of approval and the charming and authentic 'look' of the series, set around 1928, was raved over.

"They have got nearly everything right..."; "They have carried out Richmal Crompton's original intention by making them stories about children for adults..."; "Good subversive stuff..."; "enormous fun... romps along with great flair... curl up and tune in."; "...as close to the stories we all read and loved as could be expected... they've even overcome those basic, obstinate hurdles of class and accent...". And so it went on.

Our own Eric Fayne, in the March 1977 issue of Collectors' Digest, was guarded in his comments. He began by saying that his old friend, Richmal Crompton, would have been thunderstruck by the furore caused in the Press by the arrival on the TV screen of the Just William series. He confessed that he was not caught up in the excited glow which seemed to have enveloped everybody else, though he had seen only the first two episodes in the series at the time of writing. "The producer is handicapped by the shortness of each episode", wrote Eric, "another ten minutes of running time would make a big difference... the lad who plays William seems a bit colourless so far, though I would rather see him under-act than be too precocious..." He also commented that it was impossible to please everybody which, of course, is very true...

My own personal view was that every episode was a pure delight. From the catchy, 1920s opening theme music and graphics, right through to the closing credits, I thought London Weekend TV had captured the atmosphere perfectly; the sets, decorations and clothes were especially excellent. Adrian Dannatt's William was extremely good and he was certainly no plumper than Dicky Lupino's William in the 1939 feature film. Anyway, nobody could possibly bring exactly to life Thomas Henry's brilliant drawings and Richmal Crompton's word portraits. William's 'Outlaws' were acceptable but colourless - the trouble was that Dewhurst's otherwise excellent adaptations had made no attempt to characterise them and, as we know, Ginger was as different from Douglas as the latter was from Henry in the stories. Here they might as well have been called Boys 1, 2 and 3. Everyone else was excellent, especially Bonnie Langford and Diana Dors.

The last episode of JUST WILLIAM was William and the Tramp, transmitted on 22nd January, 1978. It was also the end of the entire series; after those entertaining 27 episodes William disappeared from the TV schedules and was missed by millions. And, despite receiving many letters asking them to repeat it, LWT have always refused, for reasons best-known to themselves. It's all very sad and very regrettable.

And whatever happened to Just William himself, 14-year-old Adrian Dannatt? I recently corresponded with Adrian and he today works as a busy freelance journalist

and writer. He has contributed to many newspapers and magazines, including the Sunday Telegraph, Sunday Times, Daily Express and Mail on Sunday (where he was 'stand-in' film critic for a brief period). After completing his education at Westminster School, he went on to read English at Durham University, where he also appeared in several stage productions. He then went to London and worked for a year on the British edition of Elle Magazine, and also became a producer on the BBC radio arts programme Kaleidoscope. He is also writing poetry and fiction and has been working on film and TV scripts.

What are his memories of playing William on TV?

"Oh dear, yes indeed, I was the young, bright-eyed and hopeful actor who once, so long ago (it seems a different, more innocent age) set out to play Just William, plucked from obscurity, only to be sent back into that black land. I am still occasionally asked about it by those with memories as good as your own, sometimes even stopped in the street as I hobble out of Tesco's, and then my heart beats stronger with the memory of those halcyon days. Memories are all I have left...!

"Naturally, I greatly enjoyed playing the part", says Adrian, "and found television and minor - very minor, I'm pleased to report - celebrity, quite congenial. But instead of pursuing and conquering the acting profession, I foolishly decided to complete my education. I don't really regret not going into acting, and probably most who witnessed me on stage at University will have equally few regrets that I didn't!"

Adrian now lives in London's West End and continues to write for various publications. Keep an eye out for his by-line - and recall that television's last Just William is today Just Adrian...

You can't keep the immortal schoolboy down, however...

In July, 1986, the national Press was full of an appalling idea that a couple of scriptwriters were busily working on for Thames Television. A new TV series, titled STILL WILLIAM, would feature William and the rest all grown-up and into middle-age! William, at 40, would be a civil servant employed in the Oxford offices of the Employment Department, with Henry as his boss. William would be married to Dorinda Lane, sister of the hated Hubert Lane, and they would have a 13-year-old daughter, Alice. Mr. and Mrs. Brown would be living in retirement in Eastbourne, while Robert would be regional manager of his father's bank, with Ethel now a well-known actress. Ginger, now a balding fabric designer who rents the Outlaws' Old Barn (?) is (whisper it) a homosexual... The adult William would be, it was hoped, played by Dennis Waterman (who played the young TV William back in 1962). He would drive a Morgan car, his only extravagance. Even William's dog, Jumble, was not forgotten - he still would have a dog, called Jumble 4.

This decidedly peculiar and bad taste scheme seems to have bitten the dust, thank Goodness. After an initial splurge of Press publicity, no more was heard of it. Let's hope it remains so.

The latest rumour is that noted British playwright Adrian Mitchell has written a new play titled provisionally WILLIAM AGAINST THE WORLD, to be directed by Sir Peter Hall. It was originally intended for production at the National Theatre, in London, but now that Sir Peter Hall has left that ignoble edifice, it will probably appear at another London theatre. It is said that a leading young comedy actor may play William and that the piece is intended for adult audiences, that is to say, not for children. As I say, all this is speculation at present, but it sounds like another interesting development in the never-ending saga of William Brown...

If William himself - 11-year-old William - were around to digest all these recent news items, not to mention the TV series, what would he do, I wonder?

I can suggest his possible reaction.

Registering righteous indignation, he'd pop another bullseye into his mouth, and kick an imaginary stone along the lane. "Crumbs!" he'd snort. "Crumbs...!"

And then a wide, almost beatific, smile would spread across his grubby features.

"I've jolly well shown 'em, "he would murmur distantly, as he threw another stick for Jumble...

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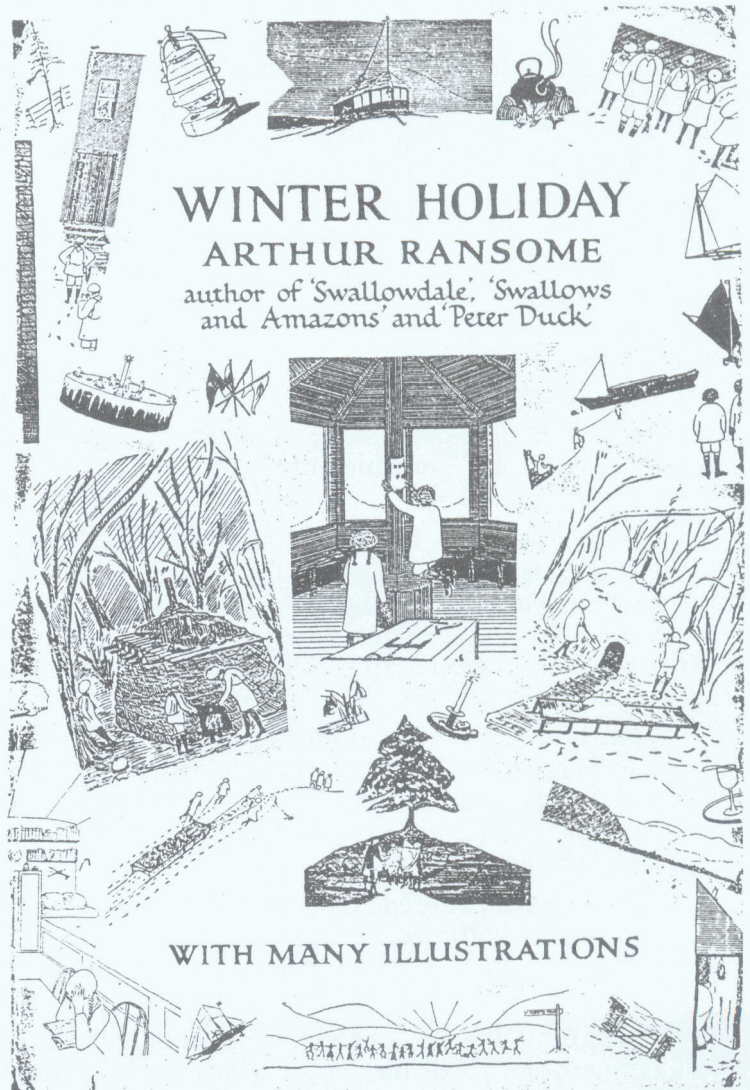
by  
**Dennis L. Bird**

Recently a letter arrived on my doormat from the writer Christina Hardyment. In 1984 she published a delightful guide, "Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's Trunk", in which she described how she and her children had explored all the places mentioned in those famous tales of the 1930s. Now she wrote to say that the sailing dinghy "Mavis" - the original of "Amazon" - was in need of restoration, and she was launching an appeal so that this renowned little vessel can be exhibited at the Windermere Steamboat Museum. I wrote back: "When I think of all the pleasure I have received over nearly 50 years from Arthur Ransome's books, the enclosed cheque is a small price to pay!"

That appeal set me thinking about the man who was such a strong influence on my childhood. The very first time I ever came across his name must have been about 1939, when browsing through my parents' bookshelves: I discovered "The Book of Love", a 1911 anthology edited by Ransome. But the real beginning, of course, was through reading his novels for young people. I can remember very clearly my first, borrowed in 1942 from the public library: "Winter Holiday".

It was probably the best one to start with. Many youngsters - my wife for one - were put off Ransome for ever by all the sailing technicalities; he seemed to assume that you knew it all already. But there is no sailing in "Winter Holiday". It takes place on Windermere when the great lake is frozen fast (Ransome was recalling the 1895 winter of his youth). And the book starts not with the Swallows and Amazons, but with the Callums - bespectacled, bookish Dick and romantic Dorothea. I could identify with Dick - I was then 11 - and with their puzzlement at the activities of the Walkers signalling to each other. ("They might as well be in some other world." "Why not?... Morse - Morsian - Martian.")

Once I had read that book, with its climactic sledge-ride to the "North Pole", a summer-house near Ambleside, I was captivated for life. I worked my way through all the stories in the



next year or so, and saved up to buy my own copies. They were then 8 shillings and sixpence - 42½ pence in present-day money. I did not read them in chronological order, although that would have been the most sensible way, but I soon felt thoroughly at home with the various families - so much so that they seemed part of my own. Most prominent among them are the Walkers, offspring of a naval Commander and a practical, easy-going Australian mother. There is the resourceful young student of sailing, Captain John, master of "Swallow"; Mate Susan, always concerned to see that everyone was properly fed and that Able Seaman Roger went to bed in good time when they were camping. And there was the dreamy Titty. In her book "You're a Brick, Angela?" our Editor Mary Cadogan refers to the "unexplainable oddity" of her name - "we are not told if this refers to the size of her chest". But surely there is no mystery? "Titty" must be short for Letitia, a name familiar to one of A.R.'s Victorian generation (he was born in 1884). There is a "Titty" in one of Jerome K. Jerome's books, and I expect it was a common enough abbreviation, in those more innocent days.

The Swallows' friendly rivals, sailing "Amazon", were the Blackett sisters Peggy and the unforgettable Nancy - real name Ruth, but "Uncle Jim" (retired pirate Captain Flint) "says Amazons are ruthless", so she changed her name. She is cheerful, courageous, full of ideas, venturesome and amusing. She is the originator of those memorable phrases like "Belay there!" and "Galoots!" and "Jib-booms and bobstays!".

It is fashionable nowadays to criticise the Ransome characters for being too middle-class. That would apply to almost any children's stories of the 1930s - M.E. Atkinson, Garry Hogg, all those tales about private schools. But in fact A.R. showed that he also had a sure touch with workmen's families. When the Callums go to the Norfolk Broads, in "Coot Club" and "The Big Six", they make friends with the boat-builders' sons Joe, Bill, and Pete. These boys speak in the authentic vernacular of Norfolk folk, and despite persistent poverty they enjoy life hugely.

When I first made the acquaintance of the Swallows and Amazons, there were only ten books, but late in 1943 there was much excitement among my schoolfellows. There was to be a new story! - "The Picts and the Martyrs". In the event, it turned out rather a disappointment - the shortest and weakest of the series. It is perhaps hard for young people today to realise how eagerly Ransome was discussed. We used to argue about where the house "Beckfoot" was, and would test each other out by asking "What are the first (or last) words of 'Swallowdale', 'Pigeon Post'?" and so on.

We had to wait until 1947 for the last complete book, "Great Northern?" And then in 1988 Hugh Brogan, Ransome's biographer, published a tantalising unfinished fragment: "Coots in the North", in which the Norfolk lads meet the Lake District children. Sad that A.R. never completed it!

He did not stop writing entirely; he contributed notable introductions to the Mariners' Library of classic sailing stories by Voss, Slocum, E.F. Knight, Erling Tambs, and others. But he was so discouraged by the destructive criticisms of his fierce Russian wife Evgenia that he finally gave up his marvellous children's books. That extraordinary woman would denigrate them mercilessly - until they were published; then she would not hear a word said against them!

The attraction of the stories lies, I think, in three main qualities. First, A.R. never talks down to his readers but treats them as equals. At times, this becomes almost a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude, but it is honest. His writing style is plain to the point of flatness - in dialogue his continual "said...said...said" becomes monotonous. Oh, for a little elegant variation! - "he replied", "she added".

Second, the children all behave with consistent realism; they are just like some of those I saw around me half a century ago. The realism is often conveyed in a vein of gentle, rather ironic humour which I did not perceive as a boy, but which came through strongly when I re-read the whole series in 1974 after seeing the Virginia McKenna film.

And third, the stories are always set in real places, apart from a certain amalgamation of Windermere and Coniston. This was particularly gratifying to me in 1950 when I received my first post in the RAF, to Felixstowe. I was able to visit Harwich, Shotley, Pin Mill - and to find that there was even an Alma Cottage, and a real Miss Powell once lived there.

Felixstowe was the starting point for A.R.'s masterpiece, "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea". This relates how the Walkers inadvertently drifted out to sea in a fog in the 8-ton cutter

"Goblin" - in reality Ransome's own yacht "Nancy Blackett", now happily back in commission since May 1989. It is one of the finest sailing stories ever written - and I am not alone in that opinion. Captain Jack Coote, RN (an appropriately Ransomian name!) includes an extract from it in his 1988 anthology "Down the Wind", alongside passages from famous nautical writers like Erskine Childers, Hammond Innes, Hilaire Belloc, and Maurice Griffiths. And in 1987 the Cabinet Minister John Wakeham spent his summer holiday in his own yacht, re-tracing "Goblin's" unplanned voyage to Holland.

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Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!



# The TERRIBLE THREE'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

A Double Length Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

# More Nelson Lees For Christmas.

By E. B. Grant Mc - Pherson.



Readers of my efforts in last years Collectors' Digest Annual, will, no doubt, remember that we left Mr. Bruce at Dorriemore Castle in 1925, thinking of his lost love. May we start this year's edition by bringing them together?

Several of the Moor View girls had seen the photograph on the mantelpiece in the dining room, and commented on the likeness to a Miss Haliday, one of their mistresses, and, by judicious enquiries, had discovered that in actual fact they were one and the same person, whom Mr. Bruce thought was dead. So, unbeknown to Mr. Bruce they contrive to get her to the castle, at the same time as Dorrie arrives, and falls in with the party's plans.

They arrange to get them together in a game of blind man's bluff, and Henry Bruce is, of course, overjoyed, so an even happier end to the Xmas holidays is enjoyed by all.

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## CHRISTMAS 1926

Ted Handforth looked out of the carriage window. "North Walsingham" he cried, "and about time too". From the adjoining compartments, cascaded a number of boys and girls; Handy's Uncle Gregory had invited quite a number of the St. Franks juniors, and also many of the Moor View girls, to spend Christmas with him, at Handforth Towers in Norfolk.

They all went out through the turnstiles, expecting to find several cars waiting for them, but the road was empty. "Come on" said Willy, "it's only three miles, I expect they got tired of waiting". The girls agreed, despite the objections of Edward Oswald, and so they set off, it was a lovely night, with the snow being crisp underfoot, so nobody really minded the walk.

It is about 11 o'clock when the party turns into the drive to the castle, but instead of the brightly lit building that they expected to see, the drive leads them to a stark edifice that looked more like a prison. The door is opened by an old man, who says his name is Rodd, and that he is the butler, that the General had been called away suddenly, but had left word that the visitors were to have supper, but to be sure to be in bed by midnight.

Rodd's wife takes the girls to their bedrooms, to freshen up, while the butler shows the juniors to the dining room. The food is good, but the only illumination is a number of candles. Rodd explains that there has been a power failure; after a while the lads get tired of waiting for the girls, and start to have their supper. Then the butler comes in and insists that they retire to the bedrooms immediately, as it is almost midnight, and the young ladies have already retired, Handy, of course, starts to argue, but Rodd practically orders the boys to bed, muttering something about a White Lady.

Later that night a noise wakes some of the Removites, and they look out of the door, into a faintly moonlit corridor, and see Willy Handforth, cowering in front of a hazy figure, which looks just like an old Tudor style lady. As Handy runs toward his younger brother, the figure vanishes; when Handy reaches Willy, he sees that he is deathly pale, and unconscious. The juniors carry the youngster to his bedroom, and go to wake Nipper and the others. Just as they are all going to Willy's room, there is a disturbance in the hall, and there is General Gregory Handforth, and several others, all laughing their heads off.

When the party of juniors reach the hall, the General tells them that the girls are all fast asleep in the real Handforth Towers, just a couple of miles away, and this is a partly ruined



castle which has not been lived in for years. There are a number of large cars waiting, so the juniors all get dressed, and, with much chipping, are driven to the proper castle, to get a good night's sleep.

When the boys awake the next morning, young Willy comes in for a lot of questioning; he of course had known all about the prank to be played on his elder brother and his friends, and had to explain how he worked the trick with the White Lady. This was done with a sort of umbrella, made to look like a ghost, being covered with a filmy cloth (that collapsed when he operated a lever) and a lot of white make up.

As the holiday progresses, there are plenty of the usual games, snowballing, skating and all the fun that young hearts could desire, ending on Christmas Evening with a hugely successful masked ball.

After Christmas, Lord Dorriemore turns up, accompanied by his great friend Umlosi, the Kutana Cheiftan, and takes the whole party for a flight in a large airship, which is stationed not far from Handforth Towers. (This leads into the Northestrian series, one of my personal favourites, on which I hope to enlarge at a later date.)

## CHRISTMAS 1927

As we open this story, there is a barring out in progress, caused in part by Handforth who had come across Merrell and Marriot up to their usual dirty tricks, having tied a tin can to a kitten's tail. Of course he gives them both a good hiding, and being caught in the act by Mr. Pyecraft is taken before the Headmaster and receives a caning. Merrell and Marriot, however, being vindictive set a trap for Mr. Pyecraft and arrange it so that Handy gets the blame, for which he is to receive a public flogging, Handforth however, refuses to accept this, and escapes to his study, where he bars himself in.

Meanwhile the rest of the Removites, knowing the true facts, collar the two cads, and, threatening them with dire results if they don't confess, take them to the Head's study. Unfortunately, they do not confess, but pitch the Head a yarn, with the result that, as they are both due to be allowed home early because Marriot's sister was about to be married, they get off even earlier, and thus escape the wrath of the Remove.

The upshot of all this is that the whole of the lower school rebels, taking possession of the Modern House, and barricading themselves in. The Headmaster sends for Sir Edward Handforth, hoping that he will be able to take his son away and settle the matter, but Willy, Handy's younger brother, manages to waylay Sir Edward and explain the whole matter to him, who, instead of taking Handy away, sides with the rebels, and, as food is getting short, promises to send them more, including some Xmas goodies.

Then one of the school governors, a General Carfax, arrives and determines to quell the rebellion. Sending everyone else home, seniors, masters, and staff, he installs himself in the Head's house. For a while nothing happens, and then, on Xmas Even, as the juniors are just about to retire, ghostly music is heard, seemingly from nowhere. The more fainthearted of the rebels try to make a break for it, but Nipper, Handy, Pitt and the more staunch members of the Remove guard the doors and windows, and prevent them leaving. Given the bright light of day, the boys regain their courage, and an excellent Christmas dinner is provided by Fatty Little and his willing band of helpers.

After dinner the music starts again, and a Phantom Monk is seen on the roof by Gulliver, who almosts faints, but Nipper and one or two others chase the ghost. He turns out to be a radio engineer, whom the General has employed to drop loudspeakers down the chimneys, thus causing the ghostly music.

With the haunting cleared up, the Christmas revels and the barring out continue happily. How the rebellion comes to an end makes a very good yarn, which I hope to be able to tell for you at a later day.

## CHRISTMAS 1928

This series opens with the news that Reginald Pitt, captain of the West House, has inherited an old Castle from a distant relative. The Castle is in a little village only about 18 miles from St. Frank's so he decides to visit it on the next half holiday with a party of his schoolmates.

The Castle proves to be rather dilapidated in parts, but quite habitable, so he invites all his friends to spend the Xmas with him there at a house warming party, and says he will get his sister to bring all her chums from the Moor View School as well.

As they are talking there is a knocking at the door: on opening it they find to their surprise it is Ezra Quirke, who used to attend St. Frank's, and now lives in this village, Pitt asks him what he wants, and Quirke says that he has come to warn them to stay away from the Castle, as it is haunted by an elemental, and to leave now before they are hurt.

Reggie says "don't talk rubbish", and returns to the big old hall with the rest of the juniors. Quirke follows. Just as they get there, they hear a noise, and see a large oak table suddenly fall over on to its side with a crash, Pitt runs towards the table followed by Handy hoping to find a wire or something of that sort, but there is nothing. The others who had run from the hall are now coming back. Pitt says the time is getting on and they might as well start back, when suddenly one of the other Removites gives a scream and points to the old stairway. They all turn to look, and there, walking slowly down the stairs, is an old man! He walks down the stairs, and across the hall and straight through the upturned table. This is too much for the boys, and they all run from the hall out into the open air, banging the front door after them.

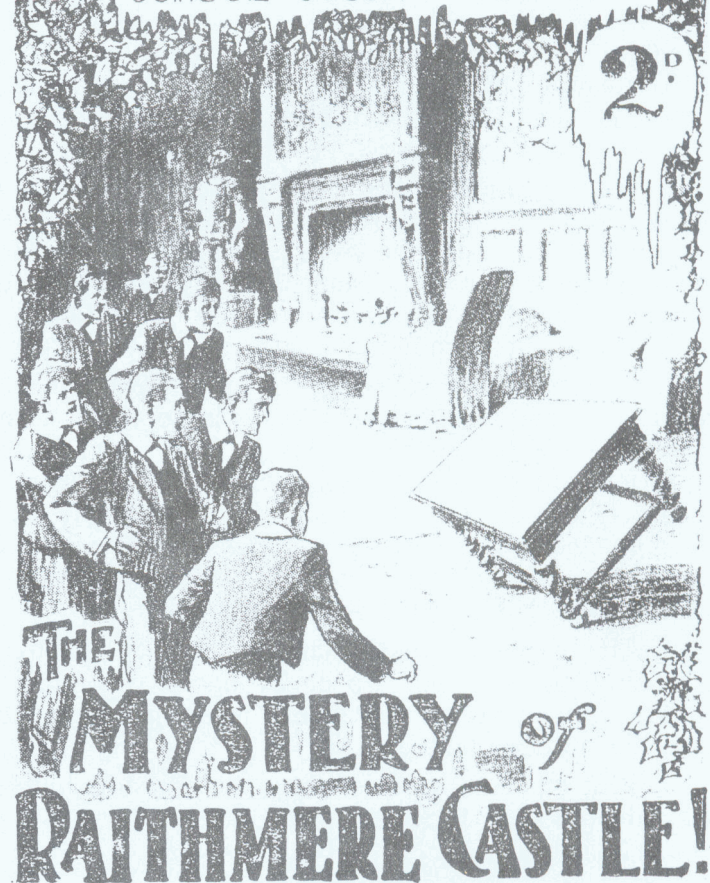
By the time they have reached the spot where they had left their bikes they have slowed down. "What a frightened lot we are" said Pitt. "But that old man" said Church, "He walked right through that table". "We've been fooled before" said Nipper. "Let's go to the village shop, and have some tea, and talk it over."

"By jingo! that's better" said Reggie Pitt, and they all felt that the excellent tea had put new heart into them, "It will be alright in the bright lights, when the place has been all done up" said Pitt, "You don't mean that you are still going through with the house warming" said Church. "Of course", replied Reggie, "you all agreed". "Don't worry, study D won't let you down", Handy said, glaring at Church.

Pitt had contacted his parents, who were going abroad for Christmas, and his father had given instructions for the castle to be brightly lit and decorated, and made ready for the visitors, and also had sent most of the staff from his London house. So, when the party arrived, they hardly recognised the place, it had so changed. After a good lunch, they were suddenly aroused by a maid screaming, and,

**ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER!**

THE **NELSON LEE**  
SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY



**THE MYSTERY OF RAITHMERE CASTLE!**

A vivid extra-long complete Christmas yarn featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 138.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 22nd, 1928.

when asked the trouble, she said she had seen an old man on the stairs. The butler tells her not to imagine things, but it sets the juniors thinking.

During the night, a noise wakes Handy, and he sees an elf sitting on his bedpost. He tells his chums, who say that he probably had too many mince pies for supper, but when Fatty Little goes downstairs early in the morning for some food, and sees a large table groaning with loads of goodies, which suddenly vanishes, and later in the morning two of the girls see some tiny fairies dancing on the lawn, it proves to much for the servants, who all leave the castle.

The boys and girls, however, are made of sterner stuff, and decide to stay on. That night, Nipper and Co. start to explore the older part of the castle, when they see an old man running along one of the corridors. Handy chases him, and, while tearing round a corner, trips and crashes right through a secret panel. There is a flash, and what appears to be some machinery catches fire.

After it is put out by the rest of the juniors, who are hot on Handy's heels, they find out that the old man had been Mr. Merton's companion for years, and had lived secretly in his old apartments ever since the death of Reggie Pitt's uncle.

It turns out that the old gentleman is an inventor, who had designed a special film camera lens which was capable of projecting three dimensional pictures. He has been playing these tricks to scare the boys away, thinking that if he were found he would be turned out. However, Pitt of course, says he is quite welcome to stay.

So, the mystery is solved, the servants return and Ezra Quirke is squashed, and a really fine time is had by all.

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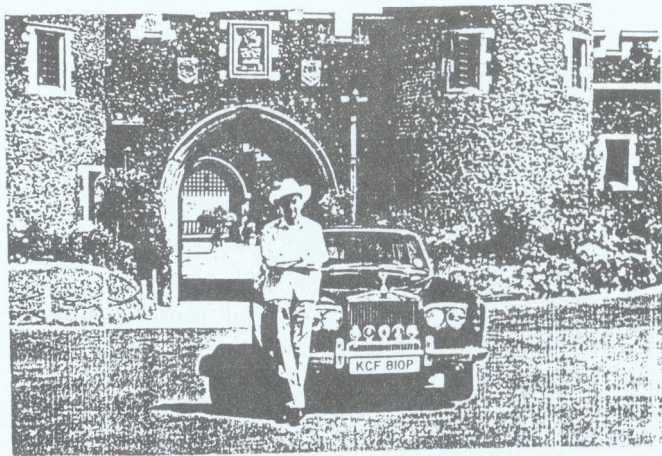
## THE SNOW-FIGHT

THE snow lies deep at Gosling's door,  
And he is almost weeping ;  
The more he sweeps it up, the more  
The snow itself comes sweeping !  
Then Gosling blames the Weather Clerk  
For causing all the trouble :  
"Although I've swept from dawn till dark  
The fall is nearly double !"

But happy schoolboys love the snow ;  
We fairly revel in it !  
And while the wintry winds do blow  
We're busy every minute,  
Kneading our snowballs into shape,  
And rushing into action ;  
A stirring snow-fight is a jape  
Which yields full satisfaction.

The Upper Fourth and the Remove  
Are waging war with fervour ;  
And very sturdy foes we prove,  
Delighting each observer.  
Volleys of snowballs fill the air,  
Crashing upon our foemen ;  
Till they retreat in wild despair,  
Looking as white as snowmen !

Uttering war-cries loud and shrill,  
And joining forces neatly,  
We hurl our snowballs with a will,  
Routing the foe completely !  
And Gosling, lingering at his lodge,  
With visage melancholy,  
Is just one tick too late to dodge  
Our last triumphant volley !



THE GREYFRIARS CLUB first established in January 1977 to give more personal direct encouragement and feedback to the publishers of the beautiful reproductions of the MAGNET & GEM (and allied magazines) by means of club meetings at which members could personally meet the publisher and discuss further new reproductions and which club is now in its 13th YEAR OF QUARTERLY MEETINGS many of which have been attended by our Hon. President Howard (Bill) Baker and Miss Edith Hood (Hon. President of the FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM & LIBRARY trustees); - have great pleasure in extending THE HEARTIEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to our President and to all hobby connoisseurs of goodwill and integrity everywhere, not forgetting our Editors of the C.D./A.'s. As always membership of the club IS COMPLETELY FREE - see for further advices C.D.A. 1985, 86, 87, 88, pages 112, 128, 119 and 102 & C.D. March 1980 page 24. SPRING meeting at the castle 2 p.m., 8th April.

It is therefore with sadness that your Chairman since his last announcement in the C.D.A. 1988 has to record the passing of one of our dear and most popular members, Miss Edith Hood, who had donated so many of 'OUR FRANK'S' relics to your chairman for the museum now held at the castle. Your Chairman attended the chapel service at Barham in Kent for Edith, as he did for our most gifted member the late Norman Kadish whose service was held at Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, in October last year. In September this year at a request from Renee, Norman's wife, your Chairman sold the major part of Norman's collection to Norman Shaw. Our thanks to Norman Shaw also for his extremely substantial offer, which was accepted, your Chairman delivering Norman's collection to Norman Shaw in Dulwich. We lost two very keen members and personal friends. Read in peace Edith and Norman.

Following our recent return from the U.S.A. (N.Y., Orlando, Miami, and the Bahamas) in October this year, your Chairman was delighted to welcome Mrs. Una Hamilton Wright into the club when she and her husband Brian visited us at the castle and presented us with two board games used by Frank Richards and members of his family. At Barham the following day he nominated her as an Honorary Trustee of the Museum. **Private viewing by Club members only making the usual telephoned appointment** to your Chairman, R.F. (Bob) Acraman, Curator of the FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM & LIBRARY & Director of Kingsgate Castle, Tel. 0843 64460, at the castle or Stevenage 0438 352930.

## ANSWERS TO:

### "GUESS THIS MIXED BAG OF GREYFRIARS, ROOKWOOD AND ST. JIM'S CHARACTERS"

1. Henry Chisholm, D.D., M.A., Headmaster of Rookwood.
2. Stephen Price, Fifth Form, Study No. 5, Greyfriars.
3. George Alfred Grundy, Shell School House, Study No. 3, St. Jim's.
4. George Bernard Wingate, Captain, Head Prefect and Head of the Games, 6th Form, Greyfriars.
5. Peter Tupper, Page-boy, Rookwood.
6. Lawrence "Larry" Lascelles, Maths and Sports Master, Greyfriars.
7. Philip Rushden, Sixth Form, School House, Study No. 12, St. Jim's.



**W**HEN the fairy lamps are lighted, and the dancers are excited  
As across the ball-room floor they wheel and whirl;  
When the mistletoe and holly both combine to make things jolly,  
And your partner is a gay and charming girl.  
When the whole wide world rejoices, and the sound of merry voices  
Gives the "knock-out" to depression and to care;  
Life is good, and life is joyous, and there's nothing to annoy us,  
For the Christmas spirit's reigning everywhere!

# THE BEGINNINGS OF "THE CHAMPION"

BY D. J. O'LEARY



The arrival of D.C. Thomson's ADVENTURE in 1921 announced a dangerous challenge to the long-established supremacy of the Amalgamated Press in the field of boys' publications.

The A.P.'s response was swift. In January 1922 appeared the first issue of "The CHAMPION". It proclaimed itself proudly on its cover as "The Tip-Top Story Weekly" offering "MYSTERY-ADVENTURE-SPORT". A "real photo" of a sporting champion was given away each week, the first being that of Georges Carpentier the boxer.

The Editor, F.A. Symonds, beat the drum loudly and, it seems to me, with some justice, in his praises of his new story paper. In his editorial column, or CHAMPION CHAT, he showed himself eager to stress the wide appeal and value for money being offered. "You hold in your hands", he told his readers, "No. 1 of the biggest of all weekly story-papers of its kind on sale anywhere at the modest price of 2d..... The CHAMPION consists of twenty-eight large pages, made up of long opening instalments of no less than four brand-new serials, the first of a splendid series of complete detective stories on novel lines, and a stirring complete 15,000-word long novel. Then there is our 'Sports Page', our 'How to Make' corner, and the first of a new series of 'Success' articles by a business expert; also the initial article in the "Sporting Champions" series, which runs in conjunction with the superb real photographs of your favourite champions, one of which is being presented with each issue of our paper".

In addition, a series of articles encouraging boys to think seriously of emigration to the Dominions was featured. Titles like 'British Boys for White Australia', 'Canada, the Land of Opportunity' and 'Your Prospects in New Zealand' painted a glowing picture of what could be achieved by determined young lads in these "new" countries.

When one considers the lively 'Champion Chat' where the Editor announced glowingly the list of coming attractions; the great emphasis put on an amazing variety of sports, not only football and cricket, but tennis, swimming, horse-racing and, especially, boxing; the exciting articles featured in the 'How to Make' series of what soon developed into the 'Champion Hobby Club' (some examples: a table gramophone, a scooter, a wireless set); the 'Grand Football Competition' run in conjunction with other Amalgamated Press publications; the excellent artists such as Fred Bennett, Louis Gunnis, Sid Pride, Harry Lane and J.H. Valda, who illustrated the stories and vivid cover pictures: when one considers all these enticements, even before contemplating the many and varied stories offered to the readers, it comes as no surprise that the Champion soon reached a circulation around the half-million mark (according to E.S. Turner in BOYS WILL BE BOYS).

Here is a complete list of the stories contained in the first fifteen issues from January 28th to April 15th, 1922:

## SERIALS

Title	Author	Illustrator
THE BELL OF SANTADINO (issue 1 to 13. Treasure hunting in South America)	Eric Townsend	Fred Bennett
SONS OF STEEL (issue 1 to 9. Adventures of a young shipbuilder on the Clyde)	Allan Blair	Harry Lane
THE OUTCAST OF ST. BASILS (issue 1 to 15. Gipsy Jack has a hard time in his new school)	Henry St. John	R. MacDonald
FAIR PLAY! (issue 1 to 6. A Lancashire mill-lad's adventures)	Ernest Scott	L. Gunnis

Title	Author	Illustrator
THE WAR OF REVENGE (issue 7 to 18. Germany's war of revenge in 1962: see Chapter XI of BOYS WILL BE BOYS - E.S. Turner)	Leslie Beresford	Arthur Jones
"GET THERE JACK!" (issue 10 to 17. A tale of London business life)	Gilbert Gray	P.J. Hayward
THE SECRET OF LOST RIVER (issue 13 to 21. Search for a lost explorer in South America)	Sidney & Francis Warwick	J.H. Valda

### COMPLETE STORIES

PAID TO LOSE (issue 1. A football story featuring Sexton Blake)	Arthur S. Hardy	Frank R. Grey
SHIPS OF THE DESERT (issue 2. Mammouths and a sand-yacht in South America)	Reid Whitley	A. Jones
"FIGHT ON!" (issue 3. A boxing story)	Edgar Sayers	Sid Pride
THE BOSS OF V-BAR-V RANCH (issue 4. A cowboy yarn)	Gordon Shaw	J.H. Valda
VIC, THE VENTRILOQUIST (issue 5. A yarn of fun and mystery)	Charles L. Pearce	P.J. Hayward
THE PRIDE OF THE GREY HUSSARS (issue 6. A story of regimental sporting life)	Capt. Malcolm Arnold	J.H. Valda
THE GOLDEN WOLF (issue 7. A Sexton Blake story)	Hartley Tremayne	Louis Gunnis
THE MAMMOTH HUNTERS (issue 8. A sequel to SHIPS OF THE DESERT, issue 2)	Reid Whitley	A. Jones
RED O'MALLEY'S LAST RACE (issue 9. A racing story)	Capt. Malcolm Arnold	E.E. Briscoe
CHAMPIONS OF THE RIVER (issue 10. A student with a secret at Ruskin College strokes Oxford to victory over Cambridge in the boatrace)	John Heritage	W. Reading
THE POISON BAT (issue 11. Mystery and adventure in South America introducing Martin Quest, popularly known as "Q", 'the Solver of Mysteries' and his street boy assistant, Hairpin)	Earle Danesford	Arthur Jones
THE RANCHERS' FEUD (issue 12. A tale of the V-Bar-V Ranch)	Gordon Shaw	J.H. Valda
THE PRODIGAL OF THE FOURTH! (issue 13. A tale of St. Dunstan's School)	Arthur Brooke	J. Roberts
THE MYSTERY FINAL (issue 14. A thrilling story of the Cup Final)	John W. Wheway	C.H. Blake
MAROONED IN THE PACIFIC (issue 15. A young valet proves himself the better man when he and his master are marooned in the Pacific)	S.S. Gordon	?

### SERIES

<u>CURTIS CARR, THE FLYING DETECTIVE</u> (issue 1. <u>The Pilot Plunderers</u> . Curtis Carr and his assistant, Hunky Dorey, foil a murderous impostor and decide there will be plenty of scope for a flying detective.) (issue 2. <u>The Caste of the Armour-Plating</u> . Carr prevents an attempt to sabotage deliveries of armour plating for British battleships.) (issue 3. <u>The Ransom of El Toro</u> . Our hero rescues a kidnapped maiden in Mexico and clears the name of her matador fiancé. As the kidnapper bandit goes to prison, Carr is even the best man at her wedding "for it was an English wedding solemnised in an English church".)	Geoffrey Rayle	Fred Holmes
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Real Photo of JACK DEMPSEY Free To-day!

**THE CHAMPION**  
2<sup>D</sup>  
MYSTERY-ADVENTURE-SPORT  
The Tip-Top Story Weekly.

Vol. I. No. 9.

EVERY MONDAY.

Week Ending  
March 25th, 1922.

JACK DEMPSEY

MORETON STOWE  
Special Correspondent

SPLENDID PHOTO  
GRATIS

New MORETON STOWE Series and GRAND NATIONAL Complete To-day!



(issue 4. The Flash of Flame. Curtis Carr is flying over Northern Mexico as he muses "the land where the oil-pockets abound, where the treacherous greasers, with ever-ready knives, lurk and prowl and take the unsuspecting newcomer's life". Carr deciphers a mysterious type-written message to solve the mystery of a fire deliberately started in an oil company.)

(issue 5. The Mystery at Rugged Gap. A forced landing in the American desert lead Curtis and Hunkey to finding the murderer of a sheriff.)

(issue 6. Poisoned Waters! Loss of his radiator water forces Carr to land in the South African desert. He foils the dastardly plot of a villainous Boer and avenges the treacherous murder of a young Britisher.)

(issue 7. Prey of the Monkey-Men! A Britisher vanished in the Orinoco jungle of South America, kidnapped by the half-human Monkey-Men. Carr flies to his rescue. Geoffrey Rayle also supplies an article in this issue claiming that the existence of this tribe is confirmed by explorers.)

(issue 8. The Caste Mark! In Burma the mysterious half-caste Serachim Nube is recognised by Carr as a vicious criminal he has encountered before. Despite his gang of Afghan henchmen (Afghan? In Burma? Yes!) he is brought to justice.)

(issues 9 and 10 introduce Moreton Stowe who will alternate with Curtis Carr until Issue 22.)

(issue 11. The Outlaw of the Clouds. "The further adventures of Curtis Carr, the Flying Detective, versus the Air Pirates!"

PART 1 - The Scarlet Claw. Curtis Carr in China recognises a picture of the mysterious Kang who is secretly developing his country's airpower. It is a portrait of Ton Sin, once the head of the most powerful secret society in Peking. Following a giant airliner, marked with the sign of the scarlet claw, Carr discovers a secret cavern. It is the Headquarters of the Secret Society of the Scarlet Claw! Thanks to the prompt action of Hunky Dory, Curtis manages to escape from the cavern and fly to safety. The battle against Kang had begun!

(issue 13. The Outlaw of the Clouds - continued.

PART 2 - The Clutch of the Claw! Carr and Hunky Dory are captured by Kang.)

(issue 15. PART 3 - Fires of Doom. Carr succeeds in escaping in his plane and in destroying his enemy's giant aircraft.)

(issue 17. PART 4 - The Red Balloon. The struggle to save China from Kang's revolution goes on.)

(issue 19. PART 5 - The Plague of Death! Carr follows Kang to Peking where he and Hunky learn the details of the latter's devilish plans and manage to steal the deadly plague bombs.)

(issue 21. PART 6 - The Gong of Doom! Kang is defeated and killed. China is saved!)

MORETON STOWE was the other featured series of the early issues of the CHAMPION. Roving the world for the "Morning Telegraph" often accompanied by Sammy, the copy-boy, he uses his immense experience to keep his paper always first with the news.

#### **MORETON STOWE, SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

##### **Author**

Stacy Blake

##### **Illustrators**

A. Allen/Bernard Hugh

(issue 9. The Famine Breakers. Scoundrels stealing food destined to relieve a famine in Russia are defeated by Stowe.)

(issue 10. The Treasure Seekers. A millionaire treasure-hunter plays a joke on his friends. When real pirates take the 'treasure' away from them, Stowe tricks the villains and comes off best.)

(issue 12. The Head-Hunters' Secret. Stowe searches for scientists lost in Papua. Captured by cannibals, he is saved thanks to brave Sammy.)

(issue 14. The Island King. Stowe helps the British King of a South Sea Island to defend the natives against exploitation.)

(There are further Moreton Stowe adventures, all self-contained unlike Curtis Carr's campaign against Kang, in Issues 16, 18, 20, and 22.)

We have seen enough, I think, to appreciate the variety of fare offered to young readers. I have had time only to consider the first fifteen issues. The CHAMPION continued with yet more inviting offerings in the weeks which followed. Here are a few of them.

Issue 16 brought a new St. Basil's serial by Henry St. John, THE THREE MOSQUITOS. Proudly announced also is Panther Grayle, "a detective with different methods" in his first appearance in a story entitled SATAN'S EYE! (It was hardly surprising that F. Addington Symonds was so proud. Under one of his pen-names, Howard Steele, he was its author!)

Issue 17 gave us a profile and photo of Leslie Beresford, author of the popular serial THE WAR OF REVENGE. Mr. Beresford expresses his interest in what we would now call "science fiction". (There is also on the same page a rebuttal by the Editor of one reader's attack on THE WAR OF REVENGE, which deals with a German attack on Britain in 1962, as a story which would recall to many people days of sorrow and horror. The Editor is firm in seeing the story as a valuable warning against being unprepared.)

In issue 19 we meet Strongbow of the Circus which the Editor describes as "the greatest circus yarn ever written", to be followed shortly by "Zara of the Earth-Men" featuring "Q", the Solver of Mysteries". A thrilling connected series this, featuring also Madame Celeste, "Q"'s old adversary.

But why continue? The CHAMPION was to carry on its policy of thrills and adventure for many more years. It has been a pleasure to look back at its beginnings and to see the birth of a real champion story paper!

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# Valerie Drew - Girl Detective

By  
Mary Cadogan



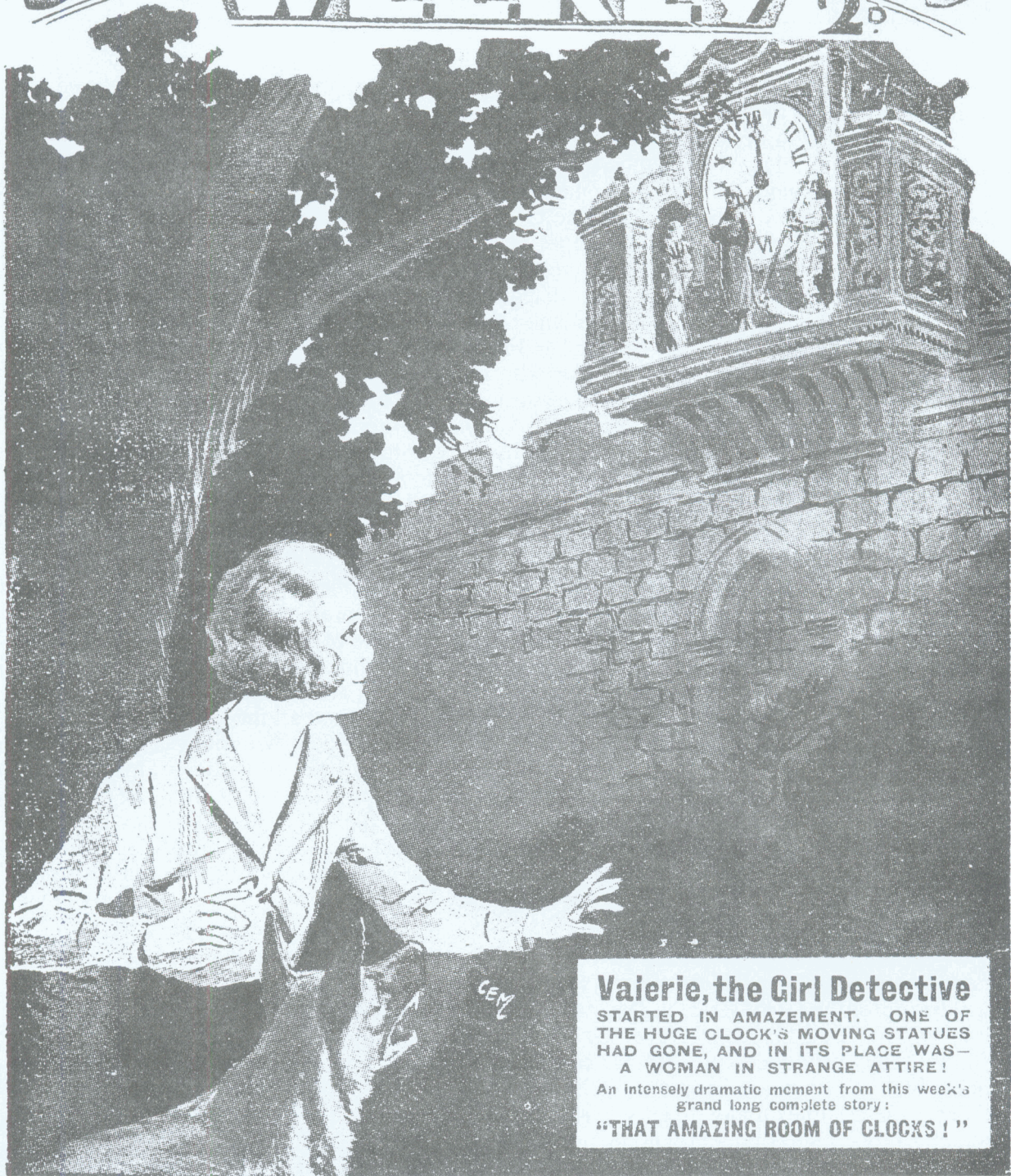
After the Cliff House and Morcove girls, Valerie Drew - the red-haired, violet-eyed and always charismatic girl detective - must surely be the most popular of story paper heroines. She was the creation of John W. Bobin who is, of course, known to many C.D. readers for his Sexton Blake tales. Using the pen-name of Adelle Ascott he launched Valerie in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* no. 553 on 7th January 1933; she was not his first attempt at a young girl sleuth, however, for writing as Katherine Greenhalgh he had produced Sylvia Silence ('The Girl Sherlock Holmes') for the same paper as early as October 1922, and, as Adelle Ascott, had concocted another teenage female investigator, *Lila Lisle* for the *Schoolgirls' Own* in 1930. It is interesting that all three of these girl detectives have animal assistants. Sylvia's are Jacko, a large grey monkey and Wolf, 'an Alsatian ... with an intelligence little short of human'. Lila has a monkey companion, and Valerie has Flash, the Alsatian, who is not only immensely appealing, both in text and pictures, but who manages to solve several cases on his own. (Such was the flair of Bobin and his successor authors of the Valerie Drew stories that Flash's amazing exploits came across to readers as completely credible.) As well as having animal helpers in common, Bobin's three girl sleuths were somewhat similar in appearance; each possessed auburn hair, which ranged from 'bronze-brown' in the case of Sylvia to 'red-gold' for Lila and flame for Valerie. (Fiery tresses seemed to be a statutory requirement of the teenage female crime-cracker during the 1920s and '30s. Across the Atlantic Nancy Drew, who first appeared in 1929, started by being fair but soon abandoned blondeness for Titian tones, while Judy Bolton was firmly redheaded from the beginning of her saga in 1932.)

Valerie's history is interesting, for because of Bobin's premature death at the age of 45 her series had to be taken over by other authors only a couple of years after she was launched. I am indebted to Bill Lofts for information about her authors, and, particularly, about the identity of 'Isobel Norton', who was credited as the writer of the stories from 24th July, 1937 (*Schoolgirls' Weekly* 770) with 'Valerie's World-Wide Quest' and all the tales which followed in this paper, and in *The Schoolgirl* (from 524 - 12th August 1939). Valerie was transferred to the latter because the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* ended on 20th May 1939 (with the last instalment of the Isobel Norton serial 'House of Hidden Peril'). Bill confirms that of the long run of Valerie stories which appeared anonymously (from *Schoolgirls' Weekly* 654 to 769) Lewis Carlton produced a few, and Reg Kirkham many. Kirkham almost certainly continued with the tales, to become 'Isobel Norton'. He had, of course, for many years, been writing humorous stories for the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* and other papers (Hilary Marlow is probably his best-known pen-name).

I wonder, however, whether Ronald Fleming, who wrote girls' stories as Rhoda Fleming and Renée Frazer, and who as Peter Langley created the attractive male detective, Noel Raymond, for the *Girls' Crystal*, also had a small hand in Valerie's adventures at some time or another. Writing his *Patsy Never Grow Up* series for the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* (as Rhoda Fleming) he produced on 27th October, 1934, in no. 627, a story called 'Patsy Turns Detective', in which his irrepressible heroine becomes a kind of spoof Valerie Drew. Like Valerie she assumes many disguises, and she calls her Scottie dog flash (though his name is actually Flop). She frequently compares herself with Valerie. This could, of course, simply be a tribute from one A.P. author to another - but I suspect that Fleming, who as mentioned earlier was to develop his flair for detective writing once the *Girls' Crystal* began, was already experimenting with sleuthing stories even in Bobin's time. Possibly he helped out with Valerie and Flash adventures when the original author was ill or on holiday?

FREE INSIDE! SIX SUPERB PHOTO-STAMPS OF FAMOUS FILM STARS

# SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2<sup>D</sup>



## Valerie, the Girl Detective

STARTED IN AMAZEMENT. ONE OF THE HUGE CLOCK'S MOVING STATUES HAD GONE, AND IN ITS PLACE WAS— A WOMAN IN STRANGE ATTIRE!

An intensely dramatic moment from this week's grand long complete story:

**"THAT AMAZING ROOM OF CLOCKS!"**

No. 533. Vol. XXI.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

January 7th, 1933.

Cover of *Schoolgirls' Weekly* containing the first Valerie Drew Story.  
The artist is C.E. Montford

Valerie enthusiasts will appreciate the biographical details about her creator which Bill Lofts has given me. John William Bobin was born at Lewisham in South East London in 1889. Of working-class parents, he was from childhood an avid reader of all the Amalgamated Press boys' papers, especially the *Union Jack*, with its Sexton Blake stories. He married in 1910, and had at least ten children. He wrote his first stories in exercise books and on odd scraps of paper whilst driving a horse-drawn laundry-van around the streets. The stories which he sent to Fleetway House showed great promise and originality. His first Sexton Blake exploit, 'The Case of the Anonymous Letters', appeared in the *Union Jack* in 1912. Later on he took over the character of George Marston Plummer from another writer who was killed in the first World War. Eventually he produced Aubrey Dexter, an original character, who became popular in the Blake saga.

During the 1920s he produced a wide variety of stories, many with sporting themes, for different A.P. papers. He wrote in his own name, and as Steve Nelson, Matthew Ironside, Mark Osborne, John Ascott and Victor Nelson. In the girls' papers he wrote as Gertrude Nelson (in which name he created one of the earliest girls' secret societies, the Silent Six, for the *Schoolgirls' Weekly*) and, of course as Katherine Greenhalgh and Adelie Ascott.

He moved to the Rochford/Southend-on-Sea areas in the early 1920s, partly because his health was never strong, and it was felt that country or sea-air would be beneficial to him. Sadly, he died in the prime of his life and writing career on 9th April 1935, when he was only 45, and Valerie Drew, his most colourful and popular creation, had been running for just a little over two years.

As a footnote to Bobin's personal story, Bill Lofts writes that the eldest of his children, Donald Edward Charles Bobin, was later to work at the A.P. on the *Girls' Crystal* and the *Schoolgirls' Own Library*. He also wrote girls' stories as Shirley Halliday, and was the last editor of *Detective Weekly*.

But back to Valerie and Flash! Valerie was stylish from the beginning, epitomising both her role and her decade by striding around in crisp tailor-mades, divided skirts or slacks, and sometimes carrying a business-like walking stick. At first she is supposed to be eighteen, but during the course of her saga she matures from a sort of superior sixth-former to an extremely sophisticated young woman, who owns a 'delightful Park Lane flat' and can pilot her own aeroplane. (This is only one of her redoubtable skills: she understands deaf and dumb language, accurately reads the messages of signal flags hoisted on ships, 'speeds along country roads' in her 'trim sports car', and can nonchalantly navigate yachts, motor-boats and sail-planes. She is also a wizard at disguising herself.)

She tangles with every kind of criminal, and eventually enlists her arch-opponent - Marcelle Dauphine, the French jewel-thief - as a (reformed) ally. Marcelle injects charm and chic into the Isobel Norton serial 'The School on Haunted Island' (1938) when she acts as Valerie's assistant. This *Schoolgirls' Weekly* story is a re-working of Bobin's 'Valerie Drew - Schoolgirl Detective' which first appeared in the paper in 1933, when Valerie, aged 18, was able to solve a mystery by going back to school as a sixth-former. In the 1938 version Valerie has sufficiently matured to have to infiltrate herself into the school as a mistress rather than a pupil.

Valerie's surname suggests that she might well have owed something to the earlier established Nancy Drew, from America; indeed her first mystery, like Nancy's, was concerned with clocks - 'That Amazing Room of Clocks'. However Valerie's personality is more distinctive than Nancy's, and certainly the English girl's canine assistant is far more dashing than the boyfriend (Ned Nickerson) who sometimes helps Nancy with her cases.

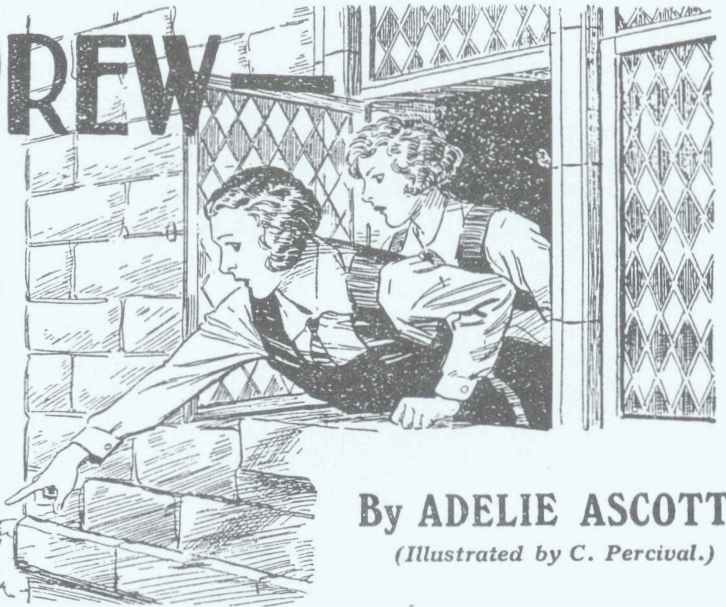
Flash is intriguing from the start of the saga. Unlike Valerie, he doesn't have to mature; his competence is breathtaking from the outset. When, for example, Valerie is holed up by enemies in a crumbling disused coalmine she can order him through a crack in the seam to 'Find X - you know his scent!', and he will immediately and gratifyingly do so. (This was very fascinating to me as a schoolgirl reader, because my own doggy pet, although tremendously endearing, was not only much less skilled but much less obedient!)

Valerie's long-running saga abounds in vignettes which haunt one long after the stories have been read. Appropriately the first sentence of the first adventure is 'Down, Flash - down!', as the Alsatian's eagerness is established. In *Schoolgirls' Weekly* 542, in 'The Problem of the Red-Haired Girl', after solving the mystery Valerie helps to get a friend's

THRILLING OPENING CHAPTERS OF A RECORD-BREAKING SERIAL IN WHICH YOU WILL MEET AN OLD FAVOURITE. HERE, WAITING TO GREET YOU, IS—

# VALERIE DREW

## SCHOOLGIRL DETECTIVE



By ADELIE ASCOTT,

(Illustrated by C. Percival.)

WHEN VALERIE DREW, THE 18-YEAR-OLD GIRL DETECTIVE, BECAME A SIXTH-FORMER AT PRIORY SCHOOL, SHE DID SO TO SOLVE THE MOST PERPLEXING CASE OF HER CAREER.

"You alone can save the school from ruin, Valerie," said Priory School's kindly headmistress.

"I'll try to save it," was Valerie's modest reply.

VALERIE DID TRY—WITH THE AMAZING CONSEQUENCES RELATED IN THIS STIRRING SERIAL.

C. Percival's first picture of Valerie  
(from *Schoolgirls' Weekly* 577, 11th November, 1933)

mother to Switzerland for much needed medical treatment. As the friend and her mother go off on the boat train from Charing Cross station:

Valerie stood watching and waving her handkerchief in farewell...

'Well, that's that, Flash!' she said. She stooped and patted him. 'Funny how happy it makes me to make others happy, eh, old boy!'

In the cover of no. 550, an incident from 'Her Quest on the Ship of Secrets' is illustrated, with Valerie rowing desperately on a stormy sea, and Flash swimming and helping to pull the boat along by a rope attached to its prow. The ever loyal, intrepid and intelligent Alsatian's thought processes are often described, and readers have no difficulty in empathizing with these. His weighing up of various characters, and accurate assessments of their villainy or innocence, are delightfully conveyed, and so too is his confident, even sometimes self-congratulatory nature; when, for example, in *Schoolgirls' Weekly* no. 600, the dog has been particularly resourceful (solving a mystery virtually on his own as indicated by the title, 'Detective Flash'), and Valerie's client compliments him:-

Flash lolled his tongue and looked as if he quite agreed with her. False modesty was not one of his failings ...

Dear Flash - and dear Valerie! Their charm came across as much in the illustrations as in the narratives. The first artist to portray them was C.E. Montford. He illustrated the first five stories (S.W. 533, 542, 550, 557 and 573), but excellent though he was it was C. Percival, taking over the illustrations from 577 and staying with Valerie and Flash throughout the saga, who created the definitive images of the sleuthing girl-and-dog duo. His Valerie was stronger-faced but just as pretty as Montford's; she had redder hair, and, somehow, a greater air of determination (and style) about her. Percival, almost as much as Bobin, made Valerie resiliently vivid.

FLASH SHOWING HIS CUSTOMARY INITIATIVE IN COVER PICTURES  
 BY C.E. MONTFORD (573) AND C. PERCIVAL (594 and 616)

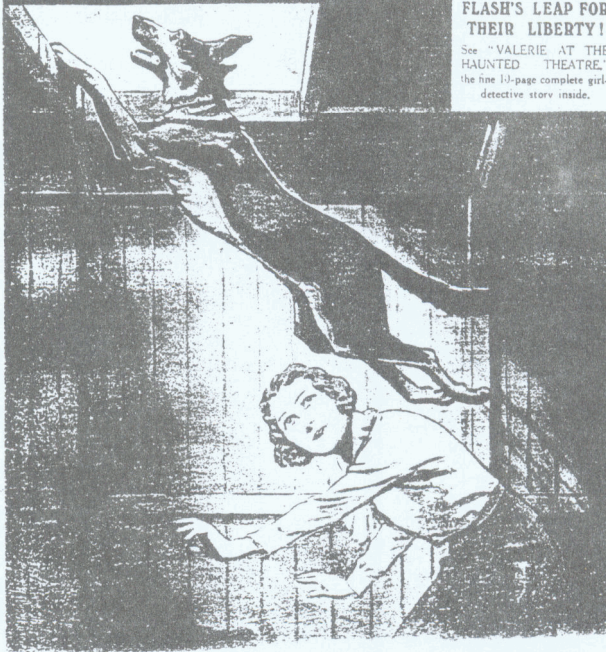
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# SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2¢

No. 594. Vol. XXIII.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

March 10th, 1934.



**FLASH'S LEAP FOR THEIR LIBERTY!**  
 See "VALERIE AT THE HAUNTED THEATRE," the fine 10-page complete girl-detective story inside.

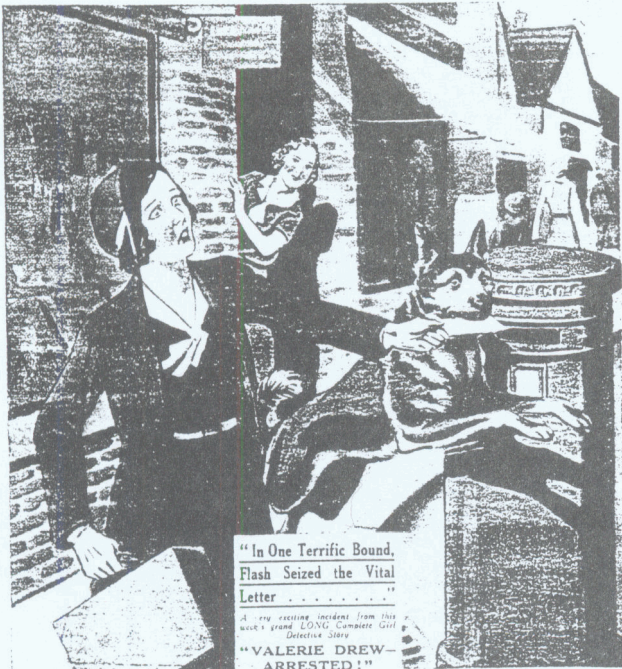
VALERIE DREW—THE SILENT SIX—AUTOGRAPH ANNE—QUICK-CHANGE PEARL—PATSY  
 IN THIS ISSUE!

# SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2¢

No. 616. Vol. XXIV.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

August 11th, 1934.



**"In One Terrific Bound, Flash Seized the Vital Letter . . ."**  
 It's the exciting incident from this week's grand LONG Complete Girl Detective Story  
**"VALERIE DREW—ARRESTED!"**

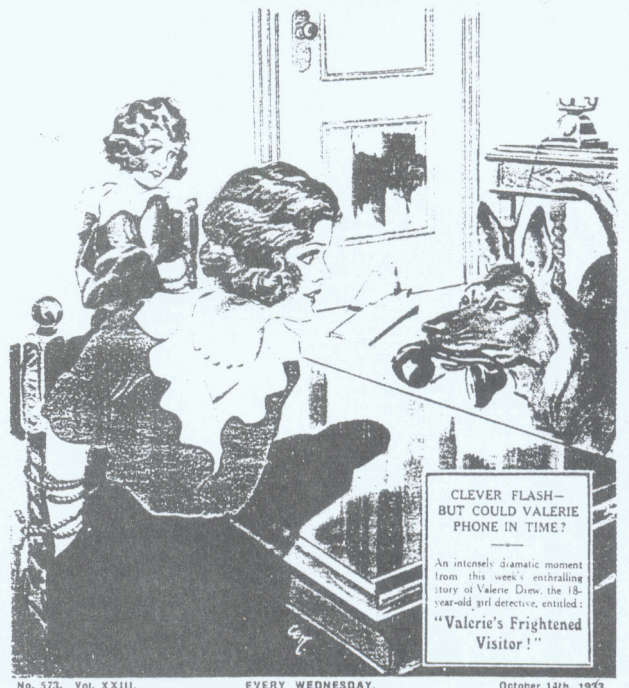
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# SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2¢

No. 573. Vol. XXIII.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

October 14th, 1933.



**CLEVER FLASH—BUT COULD VALERIE PHONE IN TIME?**  
 An intensely dramatic moment from this week's enthralling story of Valerie Drew, the 18-year-old girl detective, entitled:  
**"Valerie's Frightened Visitor!"**

\*\*\*\*\*

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