

# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 46

No. 542

FEBRUARY 1992

No. 1599 Vol. 62 Every Friday

Week-Ending September 20, 1952

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# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR  
Founded in 1941 by  
W.H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST  
Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

S.P.C.D. Edited and Published 1959 - January 1987 by Eric Fayne

VOL. 46

No. 542

FEBRUARY 1992

Price 96p

## THE EDITOR'S CHAT



As I write this editorial at my home in Beckenham, the January day is shrouded in freezing fog but I am sorting out my summer clothes because in a few days time I shall be taking off for India once more. By the time you read this editorial I shall be back home again; the great difference between

## WINTER TRAVELS...

Just over ten years ago I visited India for the first time in my life. I felt that, despite the changes which have taken place there over recent decades, I was indeed following in the footsteps of Harry Wharton & Co. when they went to India in 1926 as Hurree Singh's guests, and were struck by the sharp contrasts of its cultures, society and physical terrain.



"Do not stir," whispered Inky. "Not a movement! Buster, keep still, on your life!" Billy Buster caught his breath. "What do you mean?" he gasped. "Keep up your stammered courage," said Hurree James Ram Singh, softly. "It is a snake—and if you move he will strike!"

my travels and those of the Famous Five is that, in common with most people today, I like my journeys to be quick. I shall reach Indian in a matter of hours by air whereas the Greyfriars juniors had an epic and exciting trip by land and sea which of course spread over several weeks' issues of the Magnet.

### ARTICLE IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

In the OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES section of the December 1991 C.D. I published an article about Superintendent Flagg & 'Know-All' Newall. Unfortunately the author of this, and several other interesting features which were sent to me with it, did not put a name on his or her work. I had hoped that by now I should have heard from this contributor so that I could rectify the omission; I do hope that this author will come forward so that the correct attribution can be made.

### AN ILLUSTRATOR OF DISTINCTION

Rather belatedly I would like to pay tribute to Reg Parlett, the great comics artist who died in November last, at the age of 87. During his long and successful career he drew for an extremely wide range of comics, including Funny Wonder, Crackers, Eagle, Whizzer and Chips, and Buster. Possibly his best known strips were his long running depictions of 'Big-Hearted Arthur and Stinker Murdoch' in Radio Fun, to which he also contributed sets of Ethel Revnell and Gracie West, Duggie Wakefield and Jack Warner. His father, Harry, drew for several Victorian publications, and his brother George was also a comics illustrator. Reg Parlett was still drawing only a few months before his death, and his loss severs yet another link with the exuberant, stylish and good-humoured comic strips that were so much a feature of juvenile publications in the 1930s and '40s.

### OUR ANNUAL

I have received literally dozens of letters of appreciation of the 1991 C.D. Annual. It is heart-warming to know that the efforts of our contributors have once again struck the right note with so many of our readers. Although I am not able to answer these letters individually, I would like you all to know that I have read every comment and suggestion with great interest, and with the contents of future Annuals in mind. It would be invidious to single out specific authors or artists who have received such warm praise, but it really does seem as if this Annual has been voted one of our best ever, containing, as several correspondents have remarked, something for everyone.

Happy reading,

MARY CADOGAN

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## INTO HIS STRIDE

by Mark Caldicott

Skrinkle Haven is a small, sandy bay guarded by a horseshoe of sheer-sided cliffs. Relaxing on its sand on a sunny day, one is sheltered from the wind by the height of those cliffs. The hundred or so steep and winding steps which provide its only access, preserve it from the import of the equipment required for the noisier water sports, thus retaining a tranquility dappled only by the laughter of children and the splash of waves breaking on the shore.

Something to read from a favourite author is all that is required to complete the picture. I mentioned in a previous article my acquisition of the ESB Nelson Lee stories between OS 38-106. This treasure trove accompanied me on my holidays, and so it was, in this idyllic location - the best of circumstances - I made my first acquaintance with Jim the Penman. Here, and in other equally conducive surroundings in the beautiful county of Pembrokeshire, I followed the fortunes of this master forger, saw through the conclusion of the first great battle with Professor Cyrus Zingrave, and was introduced to the charming Miss Eileen Dare.

My reading commenced with 'The President's Peril' (NLL, OS No. 38), a full scale adventure taking Nelson Lee and Nipper to Rio de Janeiro in a plot which combines the Green Triangle with not only a South American counter-revolutionary plot (foiled by the intrepid pair, of course) but also a hidden treasure.

I then met Jim The Penman (NLL, OS No. 39). ESB must have been pretty pleased with himself when he conceived the idea of a man with an amazing gift to reproduce undetectable forgeries. The possibilities for intricate plots arising from such a premise are seemingly endless. But the whodunnit element of the first story is also remarkable, with Nelson Lee (and me) almost making a ghastly error of detective judgement, before he is assisted by the heavens themselves in providing the 'lightning clue' of the title.

More escapades followed in Nelson Lee's battle to expose to justice one by one the governing members of the League of the Green Triangle (Nos. 41 and 44). Then, in 'The Ship Of Doom' (No. 47), Zingrave is discovered to be the head of the League by his own stepdaughter, Vera. Through her love for Douglas Clifford she already has the knowledge of the evil doings of the League, but has been sheltered from the truth by Lee and Clifford. Zingrave conceives a dastardly plot to poison his step-daughter on a sea voyage. The plot, needless to say, is foiled, and in 'The Great Club Raid' (No. 50) Lee seals the League's fate by a daring burglary on the Orpheum Club, its secret headquarters, in order to seize the club records for Inspector Lennard. Zingrave is the only man to escape the ensuing police raid, and a final encounter, followed by a chase to Java, apparently seals the fate of Zingrave when he is engulfed by the sudden eruption of a volcano.

Meanwhile Jim the Penman has been causing Nelson Lee some problems by forging a will to establish a false inheritance ('The Great Will Forgery' OS No. 42), and a marriage certificate in order to come into the inheritance of a girl he believes to have died in a train crash ('The Forged Marriage Lines', OS No. 45), and comes near to betraying his countrymen in 'The Forged War Orders' (OS No. 49). I particularly enjoyed 'The Mystery of the Moor' (OS No. 51), set in the wilds of the Yorkshire Moors, and with Jim The Penman impersonating an old miser in order to discover the hiding place of his treasure. The miser's servant sees through this deception, and seeks Lee's help, the story concluding with a twist which fools not only the Penman but Nelson Lee as well. In 'The Mystery of the Mail Van' (OS No. 54) Lee unwittingly colludes with Jim the Penman in a bullion robbery. The day is saved by Nipper, but only because that invaluable assistant had chosen to have a day off.

With the close of the Green Triangle stories, the stage was set for a new series, and into the spotlight steps Eileen Dare. Eileen establishes herself immediately as no mean detective, and, as well as having all the charm and beauty one could desire, also appears to be a good all-round chap. In this first story, 'Nelson Lee's Lady Assistant' (OS No. 57), Eileen's father suffers a dreadful betrayal at the hands of his late partner's son, one Roger Haverfield, who must be one of the worst scoundrels in the ESB catalogue. Lee is unable to intervene to save Mr. Dare from his fate, and an innocent man dies. Eileen moves to London, swearing vengeance on those who had sent her father to his death in disgrace.

My holiday reading ceased there, and I had reached only No. 57. Such joys still to come. These stories are packed with inventive plots, outlandish twists and turns; and with coincidences which, if we were not so completely enraptured, if we were not so entrapped in the web of wonderful story-telling, would floor our suspended disbelief.

E.S. Brooks in these stories is getting into his stride as a writer. After all, he only started writing regularly for Nelson Lee Library four months earlier, and his other contributions up to this point were either substitute Magnet and Gem stories, where he was constrained by the requirement to imitate Charles Hamilton's style, or infrequent contributions to other papers. That is why I believe that in these pages, read in such delightful circumstances, I was seeing the first full-blossoming of a master craftsman.

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## Your Editor says—

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It helps the C.D. if readers advertise their WANTS and FOR SALE book and story-paper items, etc. in it. The rates are 4p per word; a boxed, displayed ad. costs £20.00 for a whole page, £10 for a half page or £5 for a quarter page.

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## DETECTIVES AND THEIR DOGS, etc.

by John Bridgwater

In his most interesting book "On the Scent with Sherlock Holmes" (published by Arthur Barker Ltd. in 1978) Walter Shepherd makes some what I can only regard as tongue-in-cheek comments on Sexton Blake. In the chapter dealing with Holmes's monographs, the use of dogs for tracking arises and his preference for mongrels is noted. He does not seem to have favoured the breeds used by modern policemen, Alsations and Labradors, nor the bloodhound or 'sleuth-hounds' recommended by Watson in "The Creeping Man". Shepherd goes on to say this "neglect of the bloodhound was later used to throw doubt on his detective skill by publisher Alfred Harmsworth".

I will now continue to quote directly from the book:-

*"Ever since 1894, Harmsworth had been mocking him by printing alleged reports of the preposterous activities of a fictitious Baker Street detective called Sexton Blake..."*

What Holmes had found out to provoke Harmsworth's antagonism is unknown, but there seems little doubt that the publisher was aiming either to ruin Holmes's reputation or, in some way, to cash in on it. Holmes's fictitious reports certainly achieved enormous sales. By the end of the nineteenth century he had already become a legend, and nothing is easier to gate-crash than a legend. It does not matter who King Arthur was, or if he ever lived at all, it will always be possible to make money out of him. Similarly, it no longer seemed to matter who the great 'Baker Street detective' was, so long as everybody believed there was an address in Baker Street to go to. And Harmsworth took pains to make Sexton Blake appear a more normal, reliable human being than Holmes looked in the published pictures. Instead of sporting a theatrical deer-stalker and Inverness cape and smoking a calabash pipe, Sexton Blake wore a common bowler hat and was described as a well-built Victorian gentleman, and he carried nothing more exotic than a heavy stock. Obviously he was the real detective and Holmes the phoney.

When Holmes retired to Sussex to keep bees in 1903, and was no longer available to people who still sought his help, Harmsworth continued to misdirect would-be clients to the non-existent Blake. When it was at last realized that there was no Blake, certain lewd fellows of the baser sort began to spread the rumour that perhaps there was no Holmes, either! Holmes's clients and their friends knew better, of course, but Scotland Yard thought it good for Lestrade's and Gregson's reputations to let the thing ride.

Further, the 'information' Harmsworth put out about Sexton Blake was sometimes, and in some respects, similar to that related of Sherlock Holmes but reduced to absurdity. For example, after Holmes had retired to Sussex, Blake was alleged to have retired to the country as 'Henry Park'. But when Henry Park was accused of a local robbery, Sexton Blake promptly turned up again in Baker Street and was engaged to

track himself down! Holmes may then have recollected how, in Baker Street also, he had been asked by Lestrade to track down himself and Watson for the murder of Charles Augustus Milverton in 1899. What a mockery! And it was immediately after this, in 1904, that the 'superiority' of the fictitious Blake was clumsily suggested by his spectacular use of a bloodhound named Pedro. This somewhat belated dig at Holmes suggested that his neglect of this celebrated breed implied either ignorance or incompetence. Once can imagine Holmes's comments to Watson on the long-distance telephone:

"Wonders will never cease, Watson! There seem to be no limits to the credulity of the great British public. That man Harmsworth has added a phantom bloodhound to his phantom detective, but his periodicals report it as hard fact! Yet the phantom hound of the Baskervilles was more real than the phantom hound of Baker Street. If Moriarty were still alive, I might have suspected his twisted sense of humour of starting this hare - if a bloodhound can be so described."

I cannot imagine any Blakian accepting the above quotations with enthusiasm but a few chuckles may be raised. I have not come across the story in which Blake retires as Henry Park and would be most interested to read it. Can any reader tell me which story it is, or better still, loan me a copy?

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## JUNE GAYNOR

by Dennis L. Bird

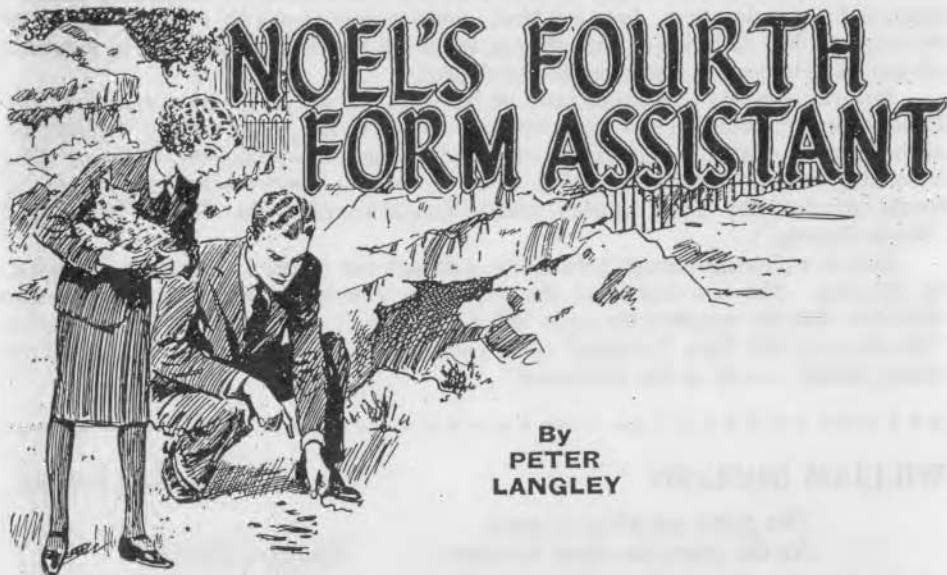
This series began in the August 1990 issue of "C.D." with Noel Raymond, the urbane young man whose detective exploits delighted "Girls' Crystal" readers between 1935 and 1951. Perhaps it is now time to look at his niece and later partner, June Gaynor.

She made her first appearance in a story entitled "Noel's Fourth-Form Assistant" (issue dated 2nd October 1937): "June Gaynor was the daughter of Noel's married sister, and had been left in her uncle's care while her parents were visiting friends." That is the first and last mention of her mother and father; some disaster must have overtaken them soon afterwards, because for the rest of her schooldays she lives with one or another of a multiplicity of aunts. Presumably these were on the Gaynor side; Noel himself seems to have no living relative apart from "his 14-year-old niece" with "a pair of vivacious grey eyes set in a very attractive face".

She already has ambitions. "I'm sure I could be a lady detective, if I had the chance, Uncle Noel!... It's really simple - when you know how." Here she exhibits the naivety which occurs throughout her career as we see her grow up; she is 28 by the time of the last story. She never aspires to the sophistication of that other detective of the schoolgirl papers, Valerie Drew. Valerie drives fast sports cars, owns and flies her own aeroplane. June is much less independent, although she has a certain recklessness and a



wild imagination which sometimes jeopardise her uncle's more professional investigations.



By  
**PETER  
LANGLEY**

In "June's First Case" (21st May 1938) she is allowed to play quite an active part in Noel's work - although he has to cover up an error at the end. "Not for worlds would Noel have had his young niece's well-earned triumph spoilt by a little slip."

By 1939 June was appearing every couple of months or so, and then (from 5th August to 30th September, just as World War II was beginning) came a series of nine stories in which Noel becomes greatly concerned by June's activities. His old adversary, the girl jewel thief Rosina Fontaine, meets June by chance, and persuades her that she is a much-misjudged innocent; June throws in her lot with Rosina, and then - seemingly completely captivated - begins to help the crook in her criminal schemes.

At last Noel hits on the truth. His niece has a double (a problem that recurs in later years). The real June is being held prisoner; she has to be rescued and the wrongdoers punished - all of which Noel achieves.

Little was heard of June during the war; she appeared only two or three times a year apart from 1943, when the nine stories about her and Rosina were re-published. In her sole appearance in 1944, June had become a WVS assistant in a Forces canteen.

The turning-point in her life came in 1945. Amazingly she is still at school (she must have been all of 22). Noel is engaged in a desperate battle of wits with the mysterious and elusive "Grey Falcon", whose felonious skills would have impressed Professor Moriarty. Noel has been asked to investigate a minor mystery at a girls' school, but being too busy he sends June there instead. His case and hers turn out to be connected; the Grey Falcon and his organisation are arrested, and at a celebration dinner Noel announces "I have decided to invite June to join the firm of which I have the honour to be head... Rise and toast Miss June Gaynor, my detective partner!".

There is no more talk of school after that, and a new brass plate on the door of Noel's London flat proclaims "RAYMOND & GAYNOR, Private Investigators."

They spend the golden summer of 1947 at Baycroft Holiday Camp, where Noel somehow finds enough peace and quiet to write a book on detective investigation. Needless to say, there are many distractions as a whole series of crimes disturb the happy holiday atmosphere. June and Noel, working now as equals, solve mystery after mystery - as they do in 1948, when they go to the USA so that Noel can act as technical adviser on a Hollywood film about Scotland Yard.

June occasionally undertakes cases on her own, and one of the most exotic is "The Princess June Protected" (30th July 1949), which takes place when she and "Nunky" are on holiday in Arabia. And so we leave them after the implausible affair of "The Vanishing Statues" (26th May 1951), to carry on with careers which, alas! were no longer chronicled by "Peter Langley" (really Ronald Fleming, alias "Renee Frazer" and "Rhoda Fleming").

June is a pleasant enough personality, although her occasional irresponsibility can be irritating. She is a less vivid character than Valerie Drew, and a less effective detective. But she remained the apple of her fond uncle's eye. As he put it at the end of "The Mystery Girl They Televised" (24th February 1951) "There's no one to equal my young partner - so far as I'm concerned!".

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## WILLIAM GOSLING

by Ted Baldock

The gates are mine to open  
As the gates are mine to close...      *Rudyard Kipling*

The visitor's first encounter on entering the Greyfriars precincts can be a trifle discouraging. He is confronted by that crusty custodian of the gate, William Gosling. Should the weather by chance be inclement, he will rather disconcertingly survey you from the window of his little lodge before venturing out to ascertain whether or not he recognises you. He will then issue forth in the full dignity of his official capacity, and desire to know your business. Having identified yourself and enquired as to directions, and satisfied Gosling that you are not (a) a terrorist, (b) a spy or (c) an enterprising cracksman come to establish the whereabouts of the Head's safe, you will be allowed to proceed across the Quadrangle.

Gosling's palm is of a distinctly horny nature. It would be an interesting computation to know just how many sixpences, shillings and other coins of the realm have been collected by it over the years. Of equal interest would be the knowledge of the number of times that Gosling's elbow has been raised in salute to his presiding genius, Bacchus, since that far distant day of his inauguration as keeper of the gates at Greyfriars. These little facets of information (quite useless in themselves) would hold much fascination for the dedicated seeker of such trifles.

Gosling's addiction to the wine when it is red - or should it be the ale when it is frothy - is legendary. His nasal organ, rubicund to a degree, gives clear evidence of a close and amicable relationship with the vinous God.

His insistence that he is a sorely tried man, being constantly harassed by "them dratted boys" suggests that extension of thought was never one of

Gossy's strong points. One may wonder if it ever occurred to him that, had the aforementioned boys all "been drowned at birth", there would exist little scope for a porter at the gates of Greyfriars or indeed any other school. However, cantankerous old curmudgeon as he undoubtedly is, he would be sadly missed were he to disappear from the Greyfriars scene.

Imagine entering the precincts of the school without the glowering visage of Gosling having you under surveillance! Dr. Locke may well rule the school with benign and gentle tolerance: Mr. Quelch may keep the Remove under strict discipline but Gosling presides over the comings and goings at the gate. It is not unlike approaching a frontier post. One feels that

the production of passports and visas would not be entirely out of place, especially should you be unfortunate enough to be unknown to the ancient porter of Greyfriars.

Gosling is a law unto himself; he is, without doubt a 'one off' character. Perhaps an over-abundance of years as keeper of the school gate has made him into a phenomenon!

History does not record the existence at any time of a Mrs. Gosling. Herein possibly lie some of the seeds of Gosling's excessive crustiness. Lack of exposure to the softening influence of the gentler sex does tend to manifest itself in morose and bleakish humours. However, this is merely theorizing. It has also been suggested that generations of Greyfriars fellows have brought about his general sourness of outlook, but for all his faults, which are legion, Gosling is a much loved figure on the Greyfriars scene. Remove him and the picture would be several degrees duller.



(Picture by Bob Whiter)

Oh, Gossy guardian of the gate  
 Have mercy on me do  
 I know I am a trifle late  
 But please do let me through.  
 Pray do not clank your keys so grim,  
 Please do not look so sour  
 I know I have committed sin  
 It's barely past the hour.  
 So wipe away that fearful frown  
 And be a sporting fellow  
 Here, I will tip you half-a-crown  
 If you will only mellow.

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## MATCH OF (YESTER)DAY!

by Alan Pratt

The first soccer story that I can remember reading was *Limp Along Leslie* in *The Wizard*.

Leslie, a sheep farmer by profession, was also a gifted footballer (despite the physical disability that gave him his nickname) playing regularly for a First Division club as an amateur. To be honest, the story wasn't that good. Thomsons had a habit, in the fifties, of trying to educate as well as entertain their readers and, consequently the footballing sequences were sandwiched, somewhat uncomfortably, between chunks of text on the rights and wrongs of sheep farming.

It was good enough, however, to make me want to read more soccer stories and I soon discovered that there were better things available on the market.

## THE FASTEST WINGER IN FOOTBALL



The *Champion*, for example, featured some great serials by Frank Pepper (writing as John Marshall). In "The Come Back Centre Forward" a goalkeeper, disfigured in a road accident, undergoes extensive plastic surgery before returning to his former club as centre-forward under an assumed name - his object being to expose a crooked director. Danny of the Dazzlers (the prototype of Roy of the Rovers) was featured in a serial entitled "Danny Helps the Rovers Fight Back", which recounted the return to greatness (under Danny's expert guidance) of a once proud club fallen on hard times. The club in question was situated in a seaside town and the under-rated Mr. Pepper made full use of the atmosphere of an out-of-season holiday resort. In yet another Pepper serial, "The Fastest Winger in Football", Streak Swift of Ironcaster is believed to be behaving irrationally after a too-close encounter with a goal post! Only Streak (and of course) the reader know that the odd acts are actually being carried out by a 'doppelganger' working for a gang of crooks. This was another atmospheric tale, the setting this time being a railway town where most of the club's supporters were workers in the rail yards.

Edward R. Homegall wrote imaginatively about most sports, soccer being no exception. In the short-lived *Boys Favourite Library* (retailing at 7d presumably in an attempt to undercut the 8d market) was a gripping yarn entitled "The Hooded Terror Tong" which told of a fiendish Chinese Secret Society's attempts to kidnap and torture a

first division footballer. I no longer have this book in my possession and, for the life of me, I can't imagine what they wanted him for but it all seemed pretty plausible at the time!

"Bouncing" Bernard Briggs was the goalkeeper that couldn't be beaten in a serial that showed Thomsons at their best. Briggs was a scrap dealer as well as a footballer, carrying his wares in an old bath attached to his motor-bike as a sidecar. Our Bernard was always falling foul of short tempered club directors and snobbish officials but somehow managed to fall on his feet - a theme used equally effectively in other Thomson stories such as "I Flew With Braddock" and "The Tough of the Track". In one serial Bernard and Limp Along Leslie were featured together playing for the same team but, to me, this served only to emphasise the somewhat faceless nature of Leslie as a character.

I have written before about Sydney Horler but without making specific reference to his football stories. The very first Horler novel that I read was, in fact, "The Great Game" and I still consider this to be one of his finest works, marginally better even than "Goal!". Both stories dealt with the changing fortunes of professional clubs in a way that showed, to advantage, the author's journalistic skills. One might almost have imagined that the clubs existed so convincing was the writing. His public school story "The Football Funk" was serialised in Chums in 1925 subsequently appearing in hardback as "On the Ball - A Football Story". Again, the accounts of the football matches were terrific. Unfortunately the "school" aspects of the story, such as they were, left much to be desired and it was hardly surprising that Horler moved into other literary directions soon afterwards.

### CHUMS

The Old Boys' Match—in which Vassall Figures—is Vividly Described in This Instalment. An Introduction is Given on the Next Page

## THE FOOTBALL FUNK

A Story of Football at Repington

By SYDNEY HORLER



SEIZING HIS CHANCE—THE DEPUTY'S GREAT GOAL  
Goal! The ball had travelled like a brown bullet, wide of the goalkeeper's right hand and came to rest snugly in the corner of the net

There were many more of course: Baldy Hogan, Nick Smith, Cannonball Kidd - the list is endless. The very fact that Roy of the Rovers continues as a weekly in its own right shows the lasting appeal of soccer fiction. Looking at the illustrations in my son's copies, I see that the shorts are shorter and the hair is longer but apart from that, everything is much as it always was: astounding comebacks, last second winners, victory for the just, defeat for the unscrupulous. I can't help feeling that when Roy finally hangs up his boots there will be another young "natural" just waiting to take his place in the hearts of young readers.

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## MEETING UNCLE OOJAH AGAIN

by Ray Hopkins

It was most enjoyable to read Len Hawkey's article on the character named in the title above and amazing to hear that his adventures continued to be available for the little ones until 1951. I first came across Uncle Oojah over sixty years ago when the family moved to an area in New Cross where there was a Public Library available for this eager reader just a couple of streets away. This article was so interesting. I never knew Uncle Oojah began in a newspaper or appeared in so many annuals. I never came across any of them! And I was surprised to read that there were only two hardcover books published. My memory is probably at fault but I thought there were six or seven which I first observed on my local library shelves, all bound in Navy blue with Uncle Oojah outlined in gold on the cover and (perhaps) spine.

Just to check that my memory wasn't expanding what I thought I saw all those years ago, I consulted one of my favourite reference sources: the British Museum Reading Room Catalogue. They list only five, as follows, the last three of which I couldn't possibly have seen in the 1920's:

Oojah House (1922), E. Hulton and Co.

Oojah's Treasure Trunk (1926), Daily Sketch & Sunday Herald.

Uncle Oojah (illus. Talintyre) (1944). Collins.

Uncle Oojah's Travels (1938), Warne.

The "Uncle Oojah" Books (illus. Talintyre) (1946), Haverstock Pub. (the last sounds like more than one, but no separate titles were contained in the Catalogue). There was also another book listed, which may or may not be an Uncle Oojah book: Meadowsweet Farm (1927), Enworth Press. All the above publications were shown as being by Florence Lancaster, pseud. Ellen Wallis, afterwards Lancaster.

It was a great pleasure to hear about this early reading favourite of mine and see what he looked like again.

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## FREEBIES!

by Margery Woods

Fashions change, morals mutate and entertainment constantly evolves, but one facet of human nature remains unchanged; the desire for something for nothing.

Publishers promoting their wares, new ones or old ones needing a readership shot in the arm, have always been alert to and exploited this human frailty. In the present age of computers they doubtless gauge with infinitesimal accuracy the number of readers induced by a free gift to sample the ware on offer, the number who remain readers, and the hardened lot who take and run, watching the newsagents' counters for fresh freebies.

Amalgamated Press/Fleetway obviously found this promotional device a rewarding one, judging by the amount of largesse distributed regularly with their juvenile publications. The choice of gifts tended to be somewhat of a sameness, aimed to please mass taste, football ephemera for the boys, and film star pictures for the girls, varied occasionally by a novelty or something the youthful reader could use.

On August 3rd 1929 THE SCHOOLGIRL was launched with "a magnificent array of stories" (Cliff House, alas, relegated to a brief serial instalment in the back pages) and a free gift. "6 Real photos of Famous Film Stars" (but only two of them within that actual issue --- hopefully the reader would be induced to hasten in search of the next one) and a stand-up mount on which to display the set of photos of those now long gone stars: Dolores Costello, Laura La Plante, Dolores Del Rio, Clive Brook, Norma Shearer and Ronald Colman. Few of these names recall memories today but they must have been top attractions to provide a selling draw for the launch of a new magazine. Clive Brook appeared in a TV showing a year or so ago of SHANGHAI EXPRESS, which starred the fabled Dietrich. He personified the stiff-upper-lip Englishman to the point of woodenness, and Ronald Colman is remembered for his portrayal of Sidney Carton in TALE OF TWO CITIES. But the others ... Perhaps the film experts among our readers can provide info.

The photos themselves were delightful. Glossy sepia, the size of a cigarette card, and I was delighted to discover two of them still within the pages of their respective issues when I acquired these very early issues of THE SCHOOLGIRL.

Possibly the new magazine was soon making inroads into the readership of rival magazines (tactfully referred to as sister papers) for a few weeks later THE SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY was proudly advising readers of a free album and no less than twelve real photos to collect. Film stars of course. Not to be outdone, SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, perhaps essaying a slightly more up market image, offered a set of Good Luck Letter Seals, to be followed by a magic "Dismal Desmond" novelty (for Schoolgirl readers' small but loyal brothers whom SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN numbered among its audience?) and a set of oil-paint transfers depicting the Romance of History, with which all manner of personal or household possessions could be adorned.

Life settled down for a while on the free gift front until the new magazine reached its first birthday and celebrated with --- yes! --- more film stars. This time on coloured sheets with gummed backs and an attractive little album, complete with index of contents, in which to mount the pictures as they appeared during the next weeks. I suppose I should be grateful for the adhesive, as this ensured the presence to this day of the coloured sheets, probably due to storage in some slightly damp attic, firmly affixed within the pages of the magazines. Now, nothing short of a bath would make some of those bathing beauties part company with the print.

**FREE!**



Beautiful Stand-up Photo of

**AMY JOHNSON**

**GIVEN AWAY WITH THIS WEEK'S SCHOOL DAYS**

The Chummy Paper for Schoolgirls. Price 2<sup>d</sup>

NEW ON SALE

NEW ON SALE

Meanwhile, **SCHOOLDAYS**, another companion paper, also had a gift for its readers, a stand-up photograph of that famous airwoman of the thirties, Amy Johnson, and **THE SCHOOLGIRL** followed up its sticky pictures with a joint promotion of gifts with **SCHOOLGIRLS WEEKLY**. This was a kind of draw, in which the reader registered her --- or his --- name and watched the weekly lists to see if something from that tempting cornucopia illustrated on the magazine cover might come their way. But there was small print to read! Registering one's name was only the beginning, hoping for an appearance in the weekly list only the second, there still remained the little matter of inducing a playmate to become a regular reader of the paper. Only then could the claim be made and the excited anticipation of the postman's knock begin. What would come? Would it be a wrist watch? A camera? Or perhaps a writing case? Or even a fountain pen (with a gold nib)? Perhaps it would be a necklace, a needlework kit, or an etc....? Hope ever springs eternal!

There were many more gift promotions in the storypapers as the thirties progressed and competition for the available readership increased among publishers. The film star photos continued to flow in abundance, increasing from cigarette card size to postcard. Close to the denizens of the silver screen in popularity came royal ephemera as the little Princesses won the hearts of the public. There were albums, for autographs, for confessions, for the photographs, for birthdays, and bookmarks to assist the reader in finding the way through them. There were more sets of gold and black transfers, butterflies, wheels of destiny, and once, in **SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN**, a Hawaiian Baby Lucky Charm!

The Cliff House girls came into their own again in **THE SCHOOLGIRL** with a series of photo cards --- and of course an album in which to collect them. But perhaps the most attractive of them all, and possibly sought after by today's collectors, were G.M. Dodshon's colour portraits of the girls given in **SCHOOL FRIEND** during the twenties. Admittedly some of his black and white illustration in those early days, particularly of Bessie Bunter, verged on the freakish, but in these cards he excelled himself.

Later in the thirties shampoos became a favourite freebie, and the occasional piece of jewellery, but a shampoo was not really a satisfactory collectable, nor promised the fun of adorning hairbrushes and hand-mirrors with black and gold transfers. Nor for the possible laying of foundations for future joy at Antique Road Shows --- or even the humbler car boot sale!

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## **CHARLES HAMILTON'S CRICKET**

by Simon Garrett

Don Webster's letter (C.D. 539) reminded me of another of Charles Hamilton's cricket anomalies. His batsmen often "snick" the ball, as if deliberately. But I quite agree that such details are of little importance. Hamilton used cricket as an arena to display Remove rivalries, aspirations and intrigue.

Would the Number Eleven place go to Wharton's friend Nugent or Smithy's friend Redwing? Would Hazeldene (nobody's friend) be tempted away from the sleazy green billiard table to the wholesome green cricket field? Would Wharton's captaincy survive the unscrupulous manoeuvres of a Stacey or a da Costa?



What mattered was the satisfying resolution of these issues, the cricket background was merely a pretext. More details of the play might have been a distraction from the main theme and as such unwelcome even to cricket fans like myself and Mr. Webster.

Yet for all his lack of cricket knowledge, Charles Hamilton could still use the game effectively to evoke character. Thus we saw the dour, dogged, defensive batting of Johnny Bull; the exuberant big hitting of Bob Cherry; the brilliant but flashy play of Vernon-Smith; the nervous, erratic talent of Hazeldene; and many a courageous captain's innings from Wharton. Nor should we forget that when Bunter and Coker weren't scoring own goals, they were usually hitting their own wickets.

There are many acknowledged experts on the game who couldn't write about it half as enjoyably as the unique Mr. Hamilton.

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## WHAT SHALL I DO NOW MUM?

by John Geal

Musing over Old Times and harking back 60 years to 1931/2, I list as my **regular reading** as a 10 year old boy:

### **Purchased:**

*Magnet* - (brought by my father for himself, but I had first go).

*Wizard* - (from 2d weekly from my Grandfather) *Modern Boy*, *Hotspur* and *Bullseye* (from my 6d weekly pocket money - sweets and anything else came from running errands at 1/2d a time).

### **From swapping:**

Adventure, Rover, Champion, Boys Magazine and Ranger. Comics, Film Fun, Chips Funny Wonder, and Puck, also 2 B.F.L. Monthly.

### **Plus Occasional reading from Swaps:**

Skipper, Gem, Startler, S.O.L. and any others going.

In addition I read a Library Book each week, and delved into any Christmas Annuals that might be going the rounds.

And these are only the ones that I can remember!

On top of this I found time to:

Go to School, run errands, take part in all street games, go to Cubs, play football, collect cigarette cards, go fishing with my uncle, attend Sunday School (to get my card stamped for the sea-side outing), Saturday Morning Cinema (my hero - Ken Maynard, what a Cowboy!), Saturday afternoon - follow Kingstonian F.C.

Occasionally, I remember, I was bored with nothing to do! But knowing how much I can get through in a week, nowadays, **JUST WHERE DID I FIND THE TIME?**



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**WANTED: by Collector.** JOHN HAMILTON: Pre-War hardbacks, any title with or without D/W, including the 'Ace Series', 'Airmans Bookcase', 'Flying Thrillers' Sundial Mystery' and Adventure Library, and Airmans Bookclub editions in dustwrappers. W.E. JOHNS: Any Pre-War hardbacks, with or without D/S and Paperback editions of 'MOSSYFACE' (by William Earle) and any 'BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY' Editions, any condition considered.

JOHN TRENDLER, 7 Park Close, Bushey, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD2 2DE. Tel. (0923) 31608.

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## LEVISON'S LAST MATCH

by Peter Mahony

### Part II

Twenty minutes later, Lorimer opened the bowling from the pavilion end. Levison, in the slips, scowled resentfully. In his early career he had always been given the less favourable end. "Old Bill likes to bowl with the slope" - or "Steve prefers the pavilion behind him". Then, when he had reached his prime, the tune had changed. "This youngster looks promising, but he's not filled out yet. Be easier on him if he bowls with the wind. You don't mind, do you old man?" Now, here he was, rising thirty nine, and still expected to do the donkey-work - even in his last Test. His eyes burned at Tom Merry, fielding at cover-point. He knew there'd be no use in protesting. Merry was a good captain - too good perhaps. His thoughts were always for the team. No sentimentality; no old-pals' act. The fastest bowler had first choice; Levison had to make do with what was left. The veteran decided that this was a day for the quiet life. After all, he'd get his fee. Why fag for it?

Four overs passed. Lorimer, unhappy with his footholds, was erratic - his two overs cost 14 runs. Levison contributed two innocuous overs for a mere 4. Then it happened. Lorimer, pussy-footing about, lost his stride and nearly did the splits. When they picked him up, his face was twisting with pain.

"It's my groin. I felt it go."

He was helped off. The twelfth man took his place. Tom Merry spoke to Levison:

"Would you like to change ends? I'd prefer to use my quickest man down the slope."

"Thanks - but no thanks!" The reply was a sneer. "I'm not exactly yearning to injure myself. I've found my line here. I'll stay at this end, if you don't mind."

"As you wish." Merry swung away, his annoyance scarcely concealed. Blount, the third seamer, took over at Lorimer's end. Matters did not go well for England. At lunch, Australia was 85 for no wicket. Levison's seven overs had cost 19.

Lunch was not a happy meal. Tom Merry's usual bonhomie, which did wonders for team spirit, seemed to have deserted him. He sat, hardly eating, looking pale and drawn. Once or twice, Levison glanced curiously at him. Their long-standing relationship, though never very friendly, was sufficiently deep for Levison to be surprised by the skipper's present attitude. Always good-tempered, tolerant to a fault, Tom had never been a defeatist. Yet, now, the cheery spark was completely absent. With some inward satisfaction, Levison concluded that he had managed to get under his captain's skin.

Levison left the dining-room and nipped along to the toilet. It had become his habit in recent years to fortify himself with shots of brandy at each interval. It was easier to indulge the habit in the privacy of the loo. A quick swig at his hip-flash and he was ready for the afternoon's play.

When he returned to the dressing-room, he was surprised to find it in turmoil. A gaggle of players, selectors and stewards was gathered in the centre of the room. Their attention seemed to be focussed on the floor.

"What's wrong?" Levison grabbed Foster, one of the new 'caps', by the arm. "Something up?"

"It's the skipper. Doubled up and keeled right over. He seems to be in a lot of pain."

Levison stood stock-still. So that was it! Merry was ill. From the group came the tones of a doctor. "It looks like a burst appendix. We must get him to hospital right away."

Suddenly, Levison's brain was racing. A quick glance round confirmed that Lorimer was missing.

"Where's Stan?"

Again, Foster answered"

"At the hospital. The physio sent him for an x-ray."

Levison thrust his way into the group. Tom Merry, his pleasant features twisted by a spasm of pain, lay gasping on the floor. The doctor was sponging his brow. Stangate, the chief selector, clutched at Levison's arm, like a drowning man at a straw.

"You'll have to take charge. You're the senior man. None of the others has as much experience. Until Lorimer gets back, at least. Go and see Conroy and ask if we can use a second substitute."

The resumption of play was delayed by ten minutes, while the unfortunate captain was taken off by ambulance. Levison led a somewhat motley crew onto the field, reflecting sardonically that this too was typical of his luck. He'd spent a lifetime running second, making do, improvising, living by his wits, waiting for the big opportunity. Now, it had come, and he was expected to tackle the Australians with half a side. But only as a stop-gap, until Lorimer returned. Well, what was that quotation? "One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name?" Levison proceeded to crowd the hour.

The Australian openers, Gay and Conroy were looking forward to an afternoon of easy run-gathering. What transpired shook them rigid. Levison, operating down-hill, dug into the past, finding reserves of pace he hadn't used in years. Conroy, having had his fingers rapped by a 'lifter', was considerably perturbed when the next one bounced past his left ear. Old Lev. bowling bumpers! In ten years of relentless opposition, he had never known it to happen. He was still getting over his shock when the third ball yorked him.

After that, it was a procession. Between lunch and tea, six more Australians came and went - five of them to Levison. 85 for 0 became 160 for 7 - and England was in full command. Levison led the side in, with thunderous applause ringing in his ears.

Stan Lorimer greeted them in the dressing-room.

"Well done, lads! Great bowling, Lev. We'll wrap them up after tea."

Levison's face set. Nastily, he inquired:

"You've recovered then? Going to polish off the tail?"

Lorimer flushed slightly.

"Not exactly. I've got the leg strapped. Doc. says I shouldn't, but I reckon I can field in the slips all right. And I'm sure the Aussies'll let me have a runner for batting. After all, with poor old Tom gone, we've got to put everything into it."

Levison moved away, scowling blackly. So this was what he'd bowled his guts out for! To let this thrusting upstart pick up the kudos. Savagely, he decided that was the end of it. Let Lorimer get on with it.

The final session was a fiasco. Australia's tail, led by Harry Noble, wagged, while the English bowling flagged. Levison contributed three pedestrian overs - then retired with sore feet. Half an hour before the end he limped off the field - just in case Lorimer asked him for a final burst. He had showered and had his legs massaged by the time stumps were drawn. Australia, 240 for 9, had been let off the hook.

It was a bad night for Levison. He had to make seven telephone calls before he found one of the 'ladies' listed in his diary available - a vacuous blonde named Daphne Burton. Three hours of her company at the Holborn Casino soon palled - especially as

he hit a losing streak. Most of his funds were gone when they staggered back to her Bloomsbury flat in the small hours.

His thoughts ran to his own marriage - failed long ago. His wife, a former Morcove student, had been gentle, kind - but sexually modest and shy. Her diffidence about marital relations had sent the impatient Levison looking elsewhere. Guiltily, he remembered the anguish on her pleasant face when one of his peccadilloes came home to roost. She had forgiven him - and then he had transgressed again. After the third repetition, the forgiveness had run dry. She had waited for him to depart on his next tour and then had left him. He had made one or two half-hearted attempts at reconciliation, only to be firmly rebuffed.

At first his wife, whose religious principles were well-developed, had refused to consider divorce. That hadn't bothered Levison too much, but, later, friends had persuaded her to offer him 'his freedom' in return for adequate maintenance. Levison, whose finances were not equal to the demand, had preferred to leave things as they were. Ten years later, they were still legally married. Idly, he began to wonder where she was now. She had gone up north somewhere, to teach. To his surprise, he found himself thinking fondly of her. Their first year of marriage had been happy and comfortable. She had been a good, loyal wife - much too good for him, he reflected sardonically. His restless nature had spoiled it all

*(To be continued)*

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## **ETHEL TALBOT - 1888 to 1976**

by Bill Lofts

Ethel Talbot was a well known girls' writer in the twenties and thirties. After this date, her numerous stories gradually petered out, when it was probably assumed that she had died, or that during the World War Two years something had happened to her to prevent her carrying on.

In all, she could be said to be something of a mystery, as not one iota of detail was ever penned by biographers about her in all the reference books I have examined. Not even the dates of her birth and death.

Ethel Talbot was prolific, as well as being very versatile in the juvenile field. Schoolgirl stories, tales of Girl Guides, Cubs and even Brownies poured from her pen. She obviously had an interest in these youth movements. She also wrote stories for the much younger children about fairies, one delightful tale being 'The Girl was was fond of Fairies'.

To show further what a mystery she was, when the late Derek Adley and I published 'The Men Behind Boys Fiction' in 1969, we included a reference to an E. Talbot writing for Chums and B.O.P. At that period we could not establish if it was the same Ethel Talbot of girls story writing fame, of whom we knew nothing.

Thanks, however, to John Beck of Lewes, East Sussex, who recently obtained a large pile of letters and papers dealing with her career, some information has surfaced. Further research has brought more details to light about this writer and background. In all probability, John will write later, when he has had a chance to sort through all the papers, gathering them in some sort of order.

Ethel Talbot was her real name. She was born at Camberwell, London in February 1888, the daughter of W.W. Talbot, an influential businessman, who had offices in The

Strand. At an early age, having an excellent education, she showed great promise with her poems, especially one written on her 13th birthday.

In her early twenties she married a German translator and writer, Herman George Scheffaeur, settling down in the Shooters Hill area of South East London, where she lived for the rest of her life. They had a daughter later on. Her work was in great demand with such big firms as Ward Lock, Cassells, Warne Nelson, and Epworth Press publishing her stories and poems through the years. She also contributed to British Girls' Annual and Little Folks.

In time, under her married name Ethel also translated her work into German, as well as German works into English. Her husband was working for the German Government, and photos seen showed that she too spent quite a lot of time on German soil. Her work petered out fairly quickly in the early part of the Second World War. Could this have been due to internment? Though readers would have been completely unaware that she had any German connection or ties.

As it was she lived on for almost another 35 years after her last book (there were a few reprints in the fifties), leaving a fairly large sum of money. She was believed to have died at Greenwich Hospital on the 27th November 1976, being 88 years old. Though never reaching the popularity of Angela Brazil, or Brent-Dyer of Chalet School fame, there is no question that Ethel Talbot was a much appreciated writer in her time.

**Editor's Note:** It is so good to have, at last, some biographical information about Ethel Talbot who, in my opinion, was as stylish and competent a writer as the 'big 4' authoresses for girls - Angela Brazil, Elsie J. Oxenham, Elinor Brent-Dyer and Dorita Fairlie Bruce. Unlike Elsie, Elinor and Dorita, she did not create series books or characters. If she had done so, I'm sure that her works would now, like theirs, be avidly collected.

We shall look forward to John Beck's article which will provide further information about Ethel Talbot. Meanwhile C.D. readers may be interested to know that she had approximately 95 full length books of fiction for juveniles published between 1918 and 1949, as well as at least 3 volumes of short stories, and two collections of poems in 1912 and 1921.

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**WANTED:** Modern Boy 324, 335, 337, 338, 339. Any reasonable price paid. ROY PARSONS, 'Foinaven', Church Hollow, West Wintorslow, Salisbury, SP5 1SX.

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**WANTED:** ENID BLYTON/W.E. JOHNS/CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers, all pre 1960 ephemera. £20 each offered for Biggles "Boys Friend Libraries". £5 each offered for "Thriller" nos. 88,116,157,176,280,286,392, 393,469,583,586.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 EASTBURY ROAD, WATFORD, WD1 4JL. Tel: 0923 32383.

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## 'YOUR FEET'S TOO BIG'

by Frank Unwin

'Can't stand you 'cos your feet's too big'. So ran some of the words of the song made famous by the legendary Fats Waller some fifty or sixty years ago.

On the joyous occasion of Terry Waite's release from cruel captivity in November, this remarkable man immediately demonstrated his humour as well as his courage by referring jokingly to his size fourteen shoes. It reminded me of the early days of the war when I served with a colossus of a recruit who needed size sixteen army boots. At the time they were unobtainable, and it was only natural that the rest of us envied his good fortune when he was excused from all parades and route marches. Eventually, suitable boots were found, and the Royal Navy was not called upon to provide a couple of barges.

Just prior to Terry Waite's release I had been reading a Greyfriars yarn in which Billy Bunter, for various dastardly deeds, was feeling the full force of the Bounder's boot on his tight trousers, and it was the Waite humour that made me wonder who at Greyfriars possessed the biggest feet. If anybody could have provided the answer it was the Fat Owl himself, having been on the receiving end of innumerable boots or shoes.

Taking Greyfriars as a whole, and all things being equal, it is perhaps safe to assume that the proud owner of the biggest feet belonged to the Sixth Form - possibly Wingate or Loder. But I would hazard a guess that Horace Coker was a prime contender - probably not size sixteen, or even fourteen, but possibly twelve. As Coker had a short way with fags, Bunter and other juniors had painful experience of those hefty boots.

Outside Greyfriars, but still a Magnet character, what about P.C. Tozer? I cannot recall a description of this bobby's actual physique, but, being a policeman, it's a safe bet that his feet were on the beefy side.

But let's confine ourselves to the school itself. The Fifth and Sixth Forms apart, possibly Bolsover major possessed the biggest feet, with Bob Cherry, whose feet had often been the subject of some cheerful leg-pulling, not too far behind. But hold on a tick. What about the masters? We have read so much about Paul Pontifex Prout's elephantine tread that it would not surprise me in the least if Prout's 'plates of meat' carried off the prize. Certainly another size twelve, at least, so let's settle for an unlucky thirteen.

What do readers think? Who did own the biggest feet at Greyfriars? Prout, Coker, Bolsover major or Bob Cherry? Perhaps none of these characters. For this world-shattering question could Johnny Bull, Tom Brown and 'Squiff' come into contention?

Let's stick with the Removites and forget Prout, Wingate, Loder and Coker. I plump for Bolsover major, Bob Cherry and Squiff in that order. One thing's for certain, and it's back to Billy Bunter and the oh so frequent 'thud on tight trousers'. If only the rear of those ample trousers miraculously possessed the power of speech, there would have been no doubt as to the owner of the biggest feet at Greyfriars - no possible shadow of doubt whatever.

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**WANTED:** Greyfriars Book Club. Volume No. 1 'The Worst Boy at Greyfriars', No. 2 'Loder for Captain', No. 3 'The Making of Harry Wharton', No. 4 'Harry Wharton & Co. in India', and No. 6 'Paul Dallas at Greyfriars'. Must be in fine to very good condition. State your price please. W.L. BAWDEN, 14 Highland Park, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 2EX.

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**JOHN LEWIS (Uttoxeter):** I enjoyed in the December C.D. Norman Wright's excellent review of the Magnet Yuletides during the 1930s. It was particularly pleasing to note his appreciation of the years 1938 and 1939 - two first class series that are so often under-rated by some aficionados. However, I was rather puzzled to find that there was not any mention of the 1937 'Reynham Castle' Christmas series, which surely merited some comment.

**BILL LOFTS (London):** I greatly enjoyed the C.D. Annual this year. Articles for everyone whatever the interest. Regarding Ray Hopkins' article on Chums, it must be remembered that *Men Behind Boys Fiction* came out 23 years ago. Consequently an enormous amount of fresh information has since come to light. I can confirm that Draycott M. Dell was 'Paul Corydon' as well as 'Rodney Holland' and 'Dick Drake'.

Regarding Fred Gordon Cook, whilst he wrote some stories for The Nelson Lee Library of St. Franks, they were never used, but recorded in an old stock book. I can well remember the Magnet editor telling me how he deplored his substitute stories for The Magnet and Gem. "Just because he uses the classical quotations that Charles Hamilton was fond of using, he thinks he has written a good imitation story, plus pages of Ha Ha Ha's".

John Hunter used to ghost for famous footballers in stories, and E.R. Home-Gall for Ice Hockey and Speedway Stars.

**RAY HOPKINS (Oadby):** I was surprised to read in the December SPCD that our Editor had found one of the missing Cliff House stories in the 1942 SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL after all. It must have been a cause of acute disappointment to come across it issued not as a Cliff House story and with a lot of strange girls' names in it. It sounds as though the staff of the SCHOOLGIRL and SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL had been thrown out with the closure and that the new lot decided that no mention should be made of the resident school that had served the old SCHOOL FRIEND and the new SCHOOLGIRL so faithfully from 1919 to 1929 and 1932 to 1940. I wonder whose potty idea it was that all mention of Cliff House School must be expunged from all AP publications for girls after 1941? Cliff House, the resident school that must have surely boosted sales of the SCHOOLGIRL when it was reinstated in 1932 (perhaps by readers' insistence?). Why could it not have done the same for GIRLS' CRYSTAL, the only survivor? Evidently it was decided that a resident school would not fit comfortably into the format of the only survivor, although the genre appears to have not completely died out.

I was so interested to read in Bill Bradford's CHUMS article in the Annual that that august mag (which may then have still been published by Cassells) put the impressive



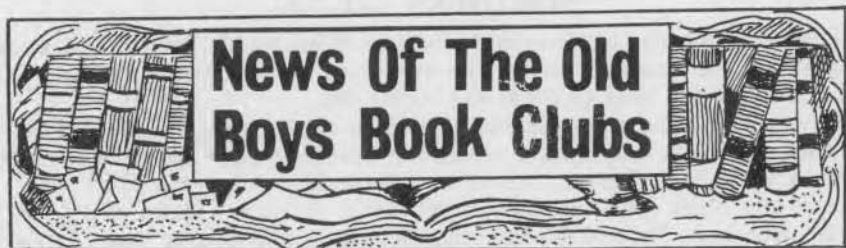
name of RADM Evans to works written by staff writers: however, he does have quite a long list of titles in the British Museum Catalogue. I counted thirty-three including six different editions of "South with Scott" which I'm sure he really did write himself because he was there! Also, a dozen of what sounded like boys' adventure stories and an autobiography called "Happy Adventurer" and published in 1951 by Lutterworth Press.

This business of putting celebrity names as bylines to works in boys' weekly papers causes one to ponder why the girls' papers didn't follow suit and print (for instance) "A Magnificent Flying Story" by Amy Johnson (ghosted by L.E. Ransome) and "A Grand Laughter Story of Backstage Life" by Gracie Fields. Well, why not? Reg Kirkham could have handled the needful humour in this standing on his head.

**MARK TAHA (London):** In reply to Dennis Bird's article in the Annual on 'doubles', there was a silent film version of 'Rupert of Hentzau' in the mid-1920s. Jeffrey Richards mentioned it in his brilliant 'Swordsmen of the Screen'. Unfortunately all I can remember of his account is that the film ended with Rudolf and Flavia leaving Ruritania after proclaiming it a Republic.

**PETE HANGER (Northampton):** I really did enjoy E.G. Hammond's article in the Annual... I wouldn't go so far as to say that Slim Jim is my favourite series but I have always regarded it on the same level as The Courtfield Crackman, which most people regard as infinitely superior... I have always considered 'The Eleventh Hour' (Magnet 1672) as the finest story of a dramatic nature that you will find anywhere... Was it not a touch of genius to allow Vernon Smith to 'sack himself' rather than allow Mr. Lamb to achieve his object? Like all true drama 'The Eleventh Hour' had its full share of humour.

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### CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our December meeting, which took place at the home of our Chairman, Vic Hearn, consisted almost entirely of members' short contributions.

Vic himself delivered several items: a programmed video presentation, a video compilation starring the likes of Peter Sellers and Norman Wisdom, and a reading from an Annual from half a century ago. Tony Cowley provided audio tape excerpts from humorous radio shows, notably a Christmas Hancock broadcast. Roy Whiskin also gave a reading - his choice was from Volume 46 issue of The Captain. Howard Corn discussed some recently discovered foreign Eagles - these contained materials from

many of the Hulton juveniles, not from only the title paper. Significantly, for most members, Paul Wilkins discussed several books which were around at past Christmasses in the Fifties and which one might well have received as presents.

A.B. PERKINS

### LONDON O.B.B.C.

Our Annual General Meeting was held at the home of Chris and Suzanne Harper on 12th January.

Suzanne was elected Secretary, Alan Pratt Chairman, and all other current officials were re-elected.

Roy Parsons then read an amusing Trackett Grim adventure entitled "The Clue of the Torn Pyjamas". Bill Bradford read from Newsletter No. 331 which recalled the January 1972 meeting. Tea followed and members were able to inspect Chris Harper's extensive book collection.

Norman Wright read "Biggles Carves the Turkey", one of the three Biggles Christmas stories, and Don Webster rounded off the proceedings with a Hamilton quiz entitled Hidden Names. Roger Jenkins was the winner, with Alan Stewart and Roy Parsons close runners-up.

Warm thanks were expressed to Chris and Suzanne for their kind hospitality.

Next meeting: Sunday, 9th February at St. Luke's House, Kew.

ALAN PRATT

### NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Despite the reported incidents in the increase of 'flu, we had ten members attending on a cold but clear January evening. However, our Chairman Joan had fallen victim to the dreaded virus and Mark Caldicott was in the Chair.

David spoke about a proposed new venue for our Annual Dinner in March, to be confirmed at the next meeting, and was also investigating a new venue for our October meeting at which Mary Cadogan and Anthony Buckeridge would be present.

Paul and Mark spoke at some length about the new Library catalogue, now officially launched. Work on this had been going for this about three years - initiated by Paul and William Hirst. Mark had used his computer equipment to produce a fine, comprehensive publication and everyone was surprised at the huge extent of our library. Geoffrey was thanked for his time and efforts in organising the printing.

After refreshments, a superb reading from Geoffrey from Magnet 1657 - a hilarious conversation on the telephone between Miss Coker and Mr. Quelch!

Next meeting: 8th February, with Willis Hall talking about his writing career.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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What did Biggles see when he shaved himself each morning? Not the face of a conventional hero. Captain W.E. Johns gives a haunting description of his airman's features in the very first Biggles story, 'The White Fokker' (Popular Flying, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1932, 'The Camels are Coming', August 1932). The pilot was serving in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War, an acting Flight Commander, although still in his teens. He was fair-haired and good-looking, but the tension was beginning to tell:

'His deepset hazel eyes were never still and held a glint of yellow fire that somehow seemed out of place in a pale face upon which the strain of war, and sight of sudden death had graven little lines...'

The image in the mirror showed the visage of a brave but over-stretched lad, no superman, and Biggles did not have the physique of a hero, either. He was 'slight' and his frayed nerves were further betrayed by his hands:

'small and delicate as a girls, which fidgeted continually with the tunic fastening at his throat...'

Slight, pale, jittery - and with feminine hands! How could a youth who looked like this become the dauntless ace of the early figures, a cult figure to adolescents avid for tales of aerial warfare, and the daring adventurer and detective of the later series of ripping yarns? But worse was to come. In 'Biggles Learns to Fly' (1935) Johns emphasized Biggles; unheroic looks still more. The airman was 'slim, rather below average height and delicate-looking' with hands which were 'small and white, and might have been those of a girl', although now he was credited with finely cut features, a square chin and a firm mouth.

But of course, the author knew exactly what he was doing in creating his nervy teenager. He stated his purpose unequivocally in the preface to 'The Camels are Coming' - Captain James Bigglesworth was intended to represent the spirit of the RFC, and although he was a fictional character, he could have been found in any RFC mess in the great days of 1917 and 1918. Although Biggles was courageous, intelligent, practical, charismatic and a born air fighter, he was also a lifelike, vulnerable young officer, and this was his most valuable asset. He was more 'real' and believable than any conventional hero, and Johns made sure that he remained so throughout the series. He enjoyed presenting Biggles as a hater of physical violence and certainly with his distinctive hands he was no Rockfist Rogan.

Once established, the airman's looks changed little. In 'Spitfire Parade' (1941) Johns fell back on his original description to give a glimpse of Biggles as a Squadron Leader in World War II. He strode across the landing-ground of Number 666 Fighter Squadron with a light step, and his figure was still slim, although now 'his bearing was that of a man of experience'. His deepset hazel eyes held 'a sort of speculative fire'; his clean-shaven face was pale and lined and his hands, 'as small and delicate as those of a girl, were nearly lost in the fur of the gloves they carried'!

Biggles' own description of himself in 'Biggles Defies the Swastika' (1941) is consistent with his creator's, but far more laconic. Whilst posing as a Norwegian called Sven Hendrik he had to describe a pilot he had once worked with:

'Tigglesworth - or was it Nigglesworth?'

'Was it Bigglesworth?'

Biggles started. 'That's right - funny name.'

'Could you describe him?'

'He was a slim fellow with fair hair - rather sharp features. As a matter of fact, he was about my build.'

# BIGGLES IN AFRICA

By CAPTAIN  
W. E. JOHNS



So far, so good - a clear picture of Biggles is given in the passages I have cited, but unfortunately there are few more references to the airman's appearance in the series. If the reader does not happen to chance on one of Johns' descriptions then the illustrations to the stories became more important. A number of artists have tried their hand at Biggles' portrait, but no definitive image has been produced. Johns was never lucky enough to find a Thomas Henry, the brilliant illustrator of Richmal Crompton's 'William' series. Anyone who has read even one of these stories, which are always accompanied by line drawings, knows just what William looks like! Perhaps the most generally accepted representation of Biggles is the painting of him in flying-kit, reproduced on the dust-jacket or OUP reprints, but it is uninspiring. Biggles looks serious, fat-faced and stupid, and his gloved hands look enormous!

I prefer Alfred Sindall - who illustrated a number of the Thirties

adventure stories and the first books of the Second World War period - to any other artist in this field. His version of Biggles is a mature, sophisticated man, with a moustache in the later pictures. There is no reference in any of the texts to this appendage until 1955, when the mystery deepens. In a short story entitled 'The Case of the Secret Inquisitors' that appeared during that year in 'Biggles' Chinese Puzzle', the Air Detective assumed a false identity to assist him in foiling the 'Inquisitors'. This entailed 'some slight alteration to his personal appearance (such as shaving his moustache)...'

Did Biggles really sport 'a tache, or did Johns come to think he must have had one, because he was shown with it in Sindall's illustrations?

The last few Second World War books and all the illustrated volumes in the Air Police stories have pictures by Leslie Stead of Studio Stead and these have their admirers. However, I personally don't think the representations of Biggles are convincing or attractive. But Stead could create memorable action scenes, and I treasure the drawing of Ginger as an onion-seller in 'Biggles "Fails to Return"'.

It is impossible to discuss Biggles for long without mentioning Algy, Ginger and Bertie, but the descriptions of them in the series are simple in the extreme. When Algy first appeared as a raw young pilot during the First World War, he was unprepossessing, with long hair, freckles and a permanent expression of amused surprise. However, he soon matured and once his position as Biggles' lifelong friend was established Johns

never refers to his physical features again. The reader can imagine him at will, or see him as the handsome, stropo young man of the Sindall illustrations.

Ginger, first encountered as a teenage lad, had a freckled, alert face and redhair. His bright locks are occasionally referred to throughout the series, but no other details about his looks are given. Now please try an experiment - visualize your idea of William's friend, Ginger. Now think of Biggles' young protégé, Ginger Hebblethwaite. Are they the same? Perhaps most people have only one imaginary Ginger. Bertie is even easier to summon before the mind's eye. We are told in 'Spitfire Parade' that he had small aristocratic features, a wisp of hay-coloured moustache, a monocle and bright blue eyes. A foolish face and an eye-glass form our habitual image of him, with a dash of Bertie Wooster.

Another factor may influence the way we 'see' Biggles and his friends. Some of us will remember the series of Biggles adventures on television and the appearances of the various actors. Others will have viewed the more recent Biggles film, and may agree with me that Neil Dickson looked very impressive in the title role. In my opinion though, the actor who would appear the most authentic would be Edward Fox.

What does appearance matter? And why should you be dictated to? I feel sure that many readers prefer to imagine characters in their own way, and

*Biggles with moustache in Sindall's illustration to Biggles Defies the Swastika*



*Fool! he snarled, striking Biggles across the face with his open palm*

*Stead's portrait of Biggles*



indeed, if you identify strongly with Biggles, you don't visualize him at all. You become one with him, sharing the dangers that threaten him, seeing through his eyes the hand on the joystick is your own. Even if Johns' guidelines are followed, some mental adjustment has to be made according to the ages of the characters in the story to hand.

But in spite of all this, I do think Biggles' physical characteristics are important, and I do imagine him for the most part as he is described in that first, intense, unforgettable passage. His appearance reflects his experiences and personality, and for all his glamour he is essentially a war-scarred, real and vulnerable human being, created by Bill Johns as his own personal tribute to his brother officers in the RFC, the men he flew and fought beside in the great days of his youth.

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## INFORMATION AND ARTICLES REQUIRED...

Mr. Barry McCann of London writes:

'I'd be grateful if C.D. readers would help me on a difficult question. A friend of mine remembers a book, NOT a boy's paper or comic, that featured a character who was always referred to by his nickname 'The Hawk' but whose real name was Falconer. He had a dog called UGGLES! Does anyone know where this character appeared, and who was his author?'

Mr. E.H. John Gibbs of Taunton writes:

'I have only been receiving the C.D. now for just over a year, and during that time I've noticed no mention, article wise, of the FILM FUN and RADIO FUN Annuals and comics. I am wondering if perhaps it is possible at some date in the future to include some information on these. I would very much like to know what other collector friends feel about these two comics.'

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# TERRY'S ONLY TERM

Ethel Talbot



BLACKIE

# TERRY'S ONLY TERM



ETHEL  
TALBOT

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Editor: Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 2PY.

Printed by Quacks Printers, 7 Grape Lane, Petergate, York, YO1 2HU. Tel. 635967