

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 47

No. 561

SEPTEMBER 1993





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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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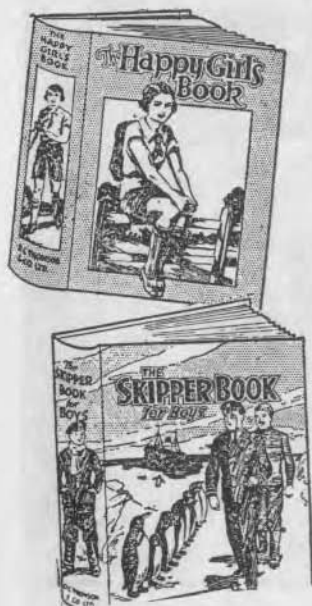
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THE EDITOR'S CHAT

OUR ANNUAL

Once again, as September begins, I am calling for contributions for the C.D. Annual. This, I know, has a special place in the affections of C.D. readers, recalling those luscious volumes which as children, many of us received at Christmas-time. It was always fascinating to have the adventures of our story-paper and comics heroes and heroines in permanent book form, and the festive season would have seemed a good deal less bright without these wonderfully varied and delightfully produced Annuals.

I have already received several extremely engaging items for this year's C.D. Annual, but I still need more articles, stories, pictures and poems. I am sure that, as always, you will rally round and make this year's Annual a worthy successor to the splendid ones we've had so far. Next month I shall start to "trail" its contents in some detail (contributions already received cover Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Sherlock Holmes, the



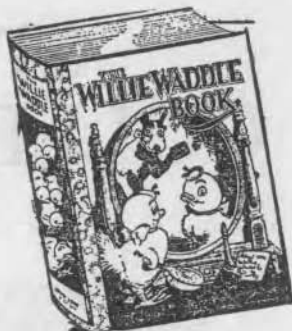
Nelson Lee, Sexton Blake, the Rainbow - and a great deal more).

Enclosed with this issue is an order form from which you will see that once again I have endeavoured to keep price rises (to cover increased printing costs) as low as possible. To whet your appetites, I've featured an Annual on our cover this month as well as reproducing covers from several popular, and lesser-known, Annuals in this editorial.

Happy reading.

MARY CADOGAN

1920 THE 1920
HOLIDAY
 ANNUAL
 FOR BOYS AND GIRLS



BRANDS FROM THE BURNING

by Peter Mahony

Part 3

The Lumley-Lumley saga was altogether less complex - and rather less convincing. Apart from one or two single stories (Valence and Courtney of the Greyfriars Sixth spring to mind), this was Hamilton's first venture on this theme (Gems 129-134; 141, 142; 158-161 of 1910 and 1911). Some later stories involved Lumley, but his main history is contained in these 12 tales.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was a rank outsider. His upbringing had been in American missing camps, New York's Bowery, gambling saloons, etc. - all the formative influences of a "Dead End Kid". He was landed at St. Jim's by his new - rich father on a 3 year, no expulsion contact. Dr. Holmes and his staff were expected to repair the damage caused by parental indulgence and neglect.

Jerrold had all the vices of a Hamilton "villain" - plus one or two more. He smoked, gambled, cheated, lied, had a violent streak, and was more sexually aware than the average boy of that time. He carried Ethel Cleveland off in a pony-trap and actually made a 'pass' at her! Having alienated all the decent elements at St. Jim's, Lumley suffered a sudden 'illness' and died. Everyone promptly felt remorse that they had not tried to tolerate and understand him more.

My own opinion is that Hamilton, keen to resurrect a forgotten character, had already decided to introduce Levison at St. Jim's. The Lumley brand of villainy, largely due to bad early training, was to be replaced by the altogether more sinister wickedness of Levison. Therefore, to clear the decks, Lumley died. But to finish him while still an almost unrepentant sinner jarred on Hamilton's basic philosophy. He just had to give the Outsider one more chance to redeem himself. So, with typical tongue-in-cheek panache, Hamilton gave Levison the resurrection job. Lumley was revived and went away to convalesce amid oodles of belated goodwill from boys and masters.

His return followed predictable lines. Led by Gussy, the decent chaps welcomed Lumley with open arms. Tom Merry put him in the House football team. Lumley blotted his copybook by foul play in the match. Immediately everyone had a revulsion of feeling - except Tom who, typically, preferred to give Lumley the benefit of the doubt. Friends fell out; then Tom, unpopular because of his stand, was let down again by the Outsider. Tom threw Lumley over and the dear boy promptly reverted to his worst behaviour. Egged on by Levison and Mellish, Lumley gave Tom a rough time with various plots, culminating in a drugs-drink "frame-up" which was a forerunner of Ponsonby's plot against Frank Courtenay four years later. Lumley's plot failed and he was once again the complete outsider. (Logical thus far; but Hamilton still had to clear Lumley-Lumley from Levison's way. Two deep-dyed villains in one school form were one too many.)

So Holmes and Railton took a hand. The Terrible Three were asked to take Lumley under their wing. Manners and Lowther were not keen. Neither was Tom, but he felt that the head's request could not be refused. Reluctantly, they took up the Outsider; predictably they brought it off. Lumley, faced for once with genuine care and concern, showed his mettle by responding positively. It all sounds a bit facile, but Hamilton made it convincing.

An interesting development ensued. Tom Merry was never quite the "innocent old duck" again. When Talbot appeared, Tom played "Good Shepherd" willingly because he was convinced that the Toff's resolve was genuine. He was far more sceptical about

Levison and Cardew - and, indeed, about Marie Rivers. The Lumley-Lumley experience had taught him to look beneath the surface.

Four reforms; one at Highcliffe; three at St. Jim's. Two of the latter depended on Tom Merry's role; the third, at least partly, on Tom's disciple, Talbot. Hamilton knew exactly where his strongest 'good' character was; at Greyfriars during this period Wharton & Co. were tinkering with the Hazeldene and Vernon-Smith problems without any lasting success. The great reforming days at Greyfriars were yet to come, and before they did Rookwood made its appearance with yet another "burning brand".

(to be continued)

THE BLACK HORSES OF VENGEANCE

A D.C. Thomson "classic"

by Donald V. Campbell

The Wizard, September 1846 and the first illustration said it all:
Fast action. Thrills, Mystery. You get them all in this stirring new story...

Fast action. Thrills. Mystery. You get them all in this stirring new story of a strange revenge!



Trouble At The Turnpike

THE LAST WARNING OF THE GHOST FROM THE GALLOWES!

Just look. Do you remember it? Do you remember it in its first incarnation - *The Wizard*, September 1846, or perhaps it rings a bell from its picture strip form in *The Wizard* some twenty years later?

What was it about this story that not only excited a fourteen year old just after the war but still gave pleasure to the same man (boy?) in his thirties? To start with there were the chapter headings and the panels of "slogans" - "No Mercy From The Whisperer!", "The Man With The Scar", "The Race On The Heath". But, beyond the immediate "hooks" there was the story itself. And - the illustrations. A picture heading for every episode that had something new and exciting to communicate.

At the time the whole seemed so real. It appeared to have a high degree of historical accuracy which, on later investigation, proved to be true. So, what was the story about? - rival coach firms in 1780 fighting for the privilege of carrying the mails. The "whisperer" of the headline was the hero - "The Man With The Scar"! - but where had he got the scar and why do his coaches carry the scarlet emblem of the gallows?

To come back to the historical accuracy. Roads in the late eighteenth century were starting to benefit from the work of two great engineers (both Scots) - Thomas Telford

(1757-1834) who was the surveyor of roads in Shropshire, and John McAdam (1756-1836) from whom we still have the noun, tarmacadam.

By the end of the century four hundred towns were on the route of mail coaches and, in just a few years on and into the new century, coaches would have improved their average speeds up to around nine miles per hour from the much slower six of the 1700s.

The effect of the radical changes to the roads as well as the development of superior coaches meant, for example, that a journey from Manchester to London lasted the weary traveller three days in 1754 but in 1836 the journey took nineteen hours. Coaches were, in any event, a costly means of travel by any standards and suffered immediately from the advent of the railways in the 1830s.

The discomfort and long journeys may be discovered from an eye-witness from 1820 (Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax): "*Wednesday, 2 February (Tadcaster)... off from Shibden at 10. Walked to the White Lion (Halifax & approximately 2 miles) Carriage ready & after taking us thro' the town..we walked a couple of miles and then took them up 3 miles from Bradford. Stopt there at the Sun (on account of the horses) half an hour. Got to Leeds (The White Horse, Boar Lane) about three and thirty....Off from Leeds in less than three quarters of an hour and got out at the Chalone'srs (Tadcaster) a few minutes before 6. Thursday 3 February (York)..Down to breakfast at ten and a half & off to York at twelve and a half. A pair of posters brought us in one and a half hours (twelve mils) & I got out at the Duffin's at 2.*" Enough of the social history of transport!

Benjamin Fagg! Now there is a name to dwell on. It seems to be full of hate, evil, hidden deeds and lies. Why, or how is it, that the writers of boys' stories could conjure up evil in a name? Were we conditioned into it? For example, how could Mr. Smugg, in The Hotspur's Red Circle stories, be other than a nasty, if ineffectual, pompous character, born to be the butt of boy's jokes?

In **The Black Horses of Vengeance**, Fagg is the owner of a fleet of coaches trying to get the mail contract for the run from London to Bristol. He is evil and unscrupulous but we soon recognise that there is something to haunt him from his past. The haunting is to do with the gallows of Tyburn Hill. He is suddenly faced with the appearance of competition in the shape of the Gallows coaches and the man with the scar - and where is the scar? It is round his neck and not unlike the rope-burn from hanging.

Fagg wonders, has Ned Burford really come back to haunt him? Did Ned fail to die on the gallows? (By the way, could someone called Ned possibly be a BAD MAN?)

THERE'S PERIL IN THAT POINTING PISTOL!

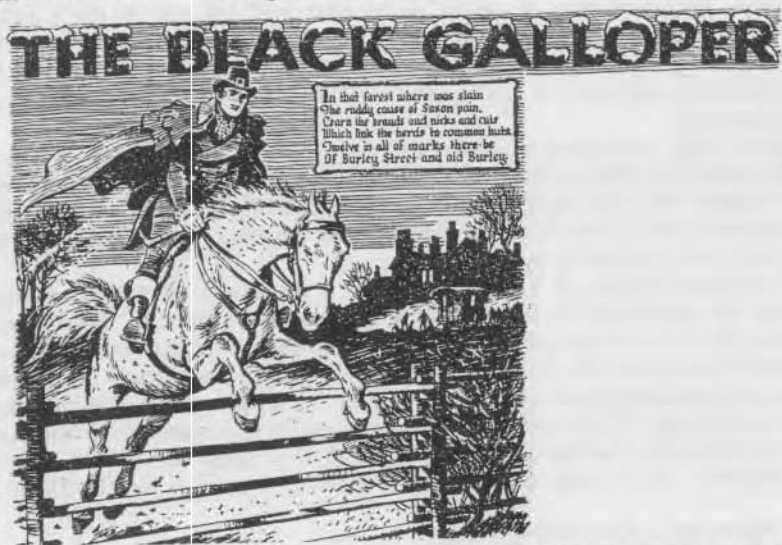
THE BLACK HORSES OF VENGEANCE



Dan Jenks' Ambush

Outside of the Wilson series, this story was one of the longest to appear in *The Wizard* at that time. To complicate time-matters the paper only appeared in the shops three out of four weeks through paper shortage: you might remember that shortages were, by far, more extreme after the war than during it. This meant an horrendous gap for the eager reader, waiting for his favourite paper, every three weeks. This was a wait that was never fully assuaged by the other Thomson periodicals. It is probably fair to say that others might be able to pinpoint the most important differences between the house papers of D C Thomson. At this distance the writer can not.

A later series, following directly after *The Black Horses*, but with a new artist, seemed to try to cash in on the popularity of *The Black Horses of Vengeance* but was immediately limited by the nature of its framework - "ten baffling rhymes, ten curious tests" - all to be solved, one supposed, in ten weeks. *The Black Galloper* (how close to another title can you get?) sets out on quests, riding his trusty steed. But it is not the horse that is the *Black Galloper* it is the young Corinthian, Rupert Tavendale, who dresses in all-black. Now here is another name to think about - couldn't be a "baddie" could he? Has a Cavandale ring about it as well.



In the end the historical story faded away from *The Wizard* to be replaced by more and more war items. Even as a picture paper *The Wizard* was to die. The continuation of war, and fighting generally, was seen in *The Victor*, from Thomson, and in *The Valiant*, from Fleetway/Amalgamated. So we shall not see the likes of **The Black Horses of Vengeance** again. If, somewhere, the 1946/7 Black Horses still ride it would be nice to hear about them.

(Illustrations copyright D.C. Thomson)

Historical notes:

Richards & Hunt, *Modern Britain 1783-1964*, Longman: information on roads and coaches, circa 1780-1830.

Helena Whitbread, *The Diaries of Anne Lister, 1791-1840*, Virago.



EDITOR'S NOTE:

In the August C.D. Mr. J.H. Mearns raised the question of the publication of a Sexton Blake Centenary book. Mr. John Bridgwater has reminded me of an interesting article by Cyril Rowe which was printed almost ten years ago in C.D. 446, February 1984. The late Josie Packman, who then conducted the Blakiana column, commented that, sadly, no 90th Anniversary publication had appeared and added "so perhaps members will be interested in the idea put forward by Cyril Rowe of one for the 100th Anniversary. It will no doubt be done by one or more of our younger enthusiasts. I suggest that as a number of our Sexton Blake fans may not be around in 1993 they write an article for publication in this proposed publication and that such articles be kept by a suitable member of the O.B.B.C."

Despite this slightly rueful note, I am glad to report that the articles I have recently received to mark the Centenary have been contributed both by veteran and by younger readers of the C.D. I do not have enough of these contributions to make a book, but our special Sexton Blake Centenary C.D. later this year will, I hope, provide a worthy tribute to this long running and much loved saga.

Mr. Rowe's 1984 article is reproduced here, and may stimulate some further contributions.

SEXTON BLAKE 1893-1993

by Cyril Rowe

"The Missing Millionaire" by Harry Blyth dated 13.12.1893 in the Marvel saw the first appearance of this noted character. We are now within 10 years of the 100th Anniversary of this. I wonder if the Old Boys' Book Clubs as a whole are considering making any effort to celebrate this event. If it was to be a publishing event, the effort should start early enough to give sufficient time for the job to be done. This of course, would depend upon what was decided on. I set out some ideas which would need corporate effort and/or corporate approval and corporate backing. To take the backing first one would need to know how much or how little of clubs funds could be used to bring the idea about. The amount would depend upon the worthwhileness of publication of such a book as was eventually written or compiled, and whether by one author (advised) or by several, and whether an edition mainly aimed at our own numbers or whether a larger readership was sought.

Now to the matter. I suggest it could be composed of such authoritative articles as our membership could supply and write. This would need an overall editorship and some degree of grammar correction, etc., etc., the more so if general publication was achieved.

The other type of compilation might be a collection of several Sexton Blake stories spanning the years to demonstrate the changes and versatility of the man and his authors.

This again I suggest would need a very comprehensive editorial introduction dealing with the development of the Blake Saga, i.e. a condensed resumé of such articles as our membership could produce for re-shuffling into one authoritative foreword.

Well I throw it forward as a project to mull over. We have in our midst members who have already made the big world of publication. I name no names but wonder if they could advise if it came to anything



NEW BOYS AT ST. FRANKS No. 1 Willy Handforth

by E.B.G. McPherson

Edward Oswald Handforth and his two staunch chums Church and McClure were broke. They were waiting in the Triangle, hoping the postman would bring one of them a letter containing a remittance, when Pitt approached them. "There's a letter for you in the rack, Handy" he said, "He was much earlier than usual this morning". Handy and Co. rushed indoors and the letter was grabbed in a trice. As Handy tore the envelope open some notes fluttered to the floor, 2 pound notes and 4 ten shilling ones. Handforth immediately gave one each of the latter to his pals. He then started to read the letter and before he had read many lines turned pale, and sat down. "My only Sainted Aunt!" he shouted, jumping up again, "I won't stand it". After a while he calmed down a bit, and explained to his chums that his younger brother was coming to the school.

"Of course, that's why the Pater sent such a big tip, to soften me up a bit. Don't worry; I'll pack him off back home as soon as he shows his face here." "Do you think that wise" said Church. "The Head might not like it, or Sir Edward?". "Perhaps you're right" agreed Handy "But he had better not come running to me with his troubles".

Several of the third formers, headed by Owen Minor, the leader of the form, go to the station, to meet Willy, who surprises them all when they first catch sight of him, as he is wearing a blue and white 'Sailor Suit' with short trousers. After their astonishment has subsided a little, he invites them all to a feed on the way back to St. Frank's.

Meanwhile Fullwood hears from one of his 'sporty' pals, who is staying in the area, that a youngster of the same name has been 'sacked' for cribbing Exam results. He approaches Handy, and attempts to blackmail him. Handforth confronts Willy who says that he was sacked, but before he can explain, his major starts to tell him off, so Willy gets his back up, and leaves the study. When Willy arrives at the third form common room, all the fags are waiting for him, and hold a trial, in which he is found guilty, and

sent to 'Coventry'. Willy then challenges Owen Minor to a fight, much to the amusement of the rest of the third, but he knocks him out and thus becomes the new leader of the fags.

Willy takes the job extremely seriously, and says he is not very satisfied with the conditions. Most of the third laugh at him but he goes to the housemaster, Mr. Nelson Lee, and asks if they can use a number of old boxrooms at the end of their passage as studies. He is given permission, as long as they cause no mess and make their own furniture. The fags have a competition as to which study does best, and generally vote Willy a first class leader.

Then Sir Edward Handforth turns up at St. Frank's, and visits his elder son, to see how Willy is getting on at the school. After Handy tackles him about Willy's trouble, Sir Edward sends for Willy to demand why he had not told his brother all of the story, Willy says that Edward Oswald did not give him a chance. It seems that he had been blamed for the offence and sent home, but a few days later the real culprit had been caught, and Willy had been reinstated without a stain on his character. However, his father had decided to send him to St. Frank's anyway.

Edward Oswald apologies most profusely to Willy, and then excuses himself, to go and find Fullwood, to administer a thoroughly deserved thrashing.



SYLVIA POWER - THE GIRL IN THE IRON MASK

by Bill Lofts

Sylvia Power was certainly an unusual detective in more ways than one. She first appeared in the comic *Merry and Bright* No. 155, dated 4th October 1913. Comics were then mainly catering still for the adult market and consequently there was a love interest involved.

Having some foolish tiff with her lover, as a result of which he completely disappeared, Sylvia was full of remorse when all attempts to trace him proved fruitless. Consequently she opened a detective agency and put on a hideous iron mask as a sort of penance. The main idea was to draw the maximum publicity to herself, by having her photograph in newspapers throughout the world. This was in the hope that her lover would see and recognise it, and return to her.

Sylvia Power was assisted by a boy/page by the name of Nipper Nick, who could disguise himself by twisting his rubbery face into dozens of different features, so that at times he looked like a deformed old man. She also had a giant bloodhound of the name



of 'Don' - who, like Pedro, in the Sexton Blake saga was originally a gift from a grateful client.

The pure detective stories ran for a number of years when Sylvia, in answer to the numerous queries about her mask, simply said that 'she had once had an accident to her face, leaving bad scars so consequently wore her mask to hide them'. Finally, in 1917, and by a stroke of luck a client talked of an adopted son who had disappeared, and she was able to put two and two together by descriptions. She was united with her lover. The mask was removed, and they lived happy ever after, one presumes.

MERRY AND BRIGHT.

The First Yarn of a Grand New Series of Stories which START TO-DAY, and deals with the Adventures of a Mysterious Girl known as



No. 1: ONLY A CONVICT'S CHILD.

Whilst I do not know the author of the series, as Fred Cordwell was editor of *Merry and Bright* I would strongly suspect he would have been involved in its creation, other writers probably penning the odd tales that were not connected with the main plot. It all makes melodramatic reading today, but 80 years ago it was thrilling to the working class readers who lapped these stories up. Sylvia was a really lovely girl, and richly deserved her happy ending - like the more famous Man in the Iron Mask.

BOOK REVIEW

By Squadron Leader Dennis L. Bird, RAF retired

"BIGGLES: THE LIFE STORY OF CAPTAIN W.E. JOHNS", by Peter Beresford Ellis and Jennifer Schofield (Veloce Publishing PLC; 1993; £12.99)

For any air-minded boy born as I was in the 1930s, the Biggles books were irresistible. For me there was an added interest, for the artist who drew the black-and-white illustrations was our next-door neighbour Alfred Sindall. But it was the stories themselves that really drew me: exciting, fast-paced, ingeniously plotted, with all the loose ends neatly tied up at the finish.

I moved on to other reading when I was about 14, and one of the revelations of this first-rate biography of W.E. Johns is how long his airman hero continued after that. The last posthumously-published book, "Biggles Sees Too Much," came out in 1970 - so it is not just my generation who grew up with him, but boys (and girls too) of the '40s, '50s, and '60s. And of course he is still read today, as the Random House firm Red Fox have discovered since they started re-publishing Biggles in paperback in 1992.

William Earl Johns was born on 5th February 1893, so it is wholly appropriate that his Life should be re-published in his centenary year. Both authors are well known in their field. Peter Beresford Ellis has produced over sixty novels as well as a biography of the Victorian writer Sir Henry Rider Haggard ("King Solomon's Mines", "She", and so on). Jennifer Schofield is the author of "Talking of Biggles" (Collectors' Digest Publications, £2.25) and has written often about him in "C.D."; as chairman of the Johns

Centenary Committee, she has been the moving spirit behind many of this year's celebrations. And she has had RAF connections: she sat on interview boards at the Officers' and Aircrew Selection Centre when it was at Biggin Hill.

Their book was first published as "By Jove Biggles" by W.H. Allen in 1981; the new edition has a particularly interesting final chapter on fresh information which has come to light since it first appeared. For instance, thanks to Sir Peter Masefield we now know who was the original of Biggles - not, as previously supposed, Air Commodore Cecil George Wigglesworth, but another officer who attained the same rank, Arthur Wellesley Bigsworth. Sir Peter knew Johns well, and discussed the stories with him. Johns said that "Biggles was a compendium of several people but the first ingredient" was Bigsworth. Two of his exploits - bombing a Zeppelin and sinking a submarine from the air - were included in early Biggles books. Sir Peter expanded on this theme in his speech at the RAF Club last February, at the Centenary lunch. He ended: "Success in life is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get. W.E. Johns achieved both."

One of the many merits of this book is its comprehensive survey of its subject. It is not just about the author of Biggles. Worrals, Gimlet, Steeley Delaroy are all given their due; so are Johns' many other writings - adult novels, science fiction, books on flying, radio plays. Nor have the authors overlooked his love of gardening. When he started the magazine "Popular Flying" in 1932, his offices were next door to the monthly "My Garden". He picked up a copy, and was inspired to become a contributor. He ran a regular column from 1937 to 1944. Then, driven by V-1s from his home and garden near Lingfield in Surrey, he fell in love with Scotland and moved for nine years to Grantown-on-Spey. There were no more gardening articles.

By this time readers feel they have come to know Johns well. We see him first in his family circle in Hertford, where he grew up. He then became a sanitary inspector, of all things, at Swaffham in Norfolk, where he unwisely fell for a vicar's daughter, Maude Penelope Hunt, and married her in 1914. She was eleven years his senior, and when he came back after four years of war they proved incompatible. Her health failed after the birth of their son Jack in 1916, but she lived on until 1961. Johns supported her financially, but he left her in 1920; she would not agree to a divorce, so when he met the real love of his life, Doris Leigh, they lived together without the benefit of marriage.

The book describes in well-researched and satisfying detail Johns' life in World War I, first as a soldier and then in the Royal Flying Corps. As a pilot, he had many crashes; the authors wittily remark that "Had the Allied aircraft he destroyed been German, he would certainly have qualified for the designation 'ace'." Shot down and taken prisoner in September 1918, he tried to escape and was lucky to survive. These experiences provided plenty of material twenty years later for Biggles.

Johns joined the new Royal Air Force in 1920, and was promoted to Flying Officer (equivalent to Lieutenant). He stayed in this rank for the next seven years, which has always puzzled me. From my own RAF days I know that there was automatic promotion to Flight Lieutenant (equal to an Army Captain) provided you passed Promotion Examination B. Did Johns sit, and re-sit, and fail time after time? For he never was promoted - except by himself, when he decided to call himself "Captain" W.E. Johns from 1932. By then he had retired from the RAF and established himself as author, artist, editor, and journalist. Books poured forth from him - 96 on Biggles alone, during which the slim young RFC pilot progressed to Major, charter pilot,



Wings of Romance (1939).



Biggles of the Camel Squadron (1934).



Menu for the Centenary Luncheon held at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, on February 6th 1993.



Worrals of the Islands (1945). (Courtesy Hodder & Stoughton)



Desert Night (1938).

Some illustrations in BIGGLES: THE LIFE STORY OF CAPTAIN W.E. JOHNS

Squadron Leader in the Battle of Britain, and finally to air policeman in the Cold War post-1945 world.

"Worrals" - Flight Officer Joan Worrals of the WAAF - was created at the request of the Air Ministry in 1941, to boost recruiting. As I wrote in some "C.D." articles in 1991, I could never really believe in her, because she was always flying operational aircraft, sometimes into battle - and the one thing real WAAFs never did was fly aeroplanes! However, she was charming and popular, and Johns wrote eleven books about her in nine years.

The main body of this book is reprinted from the 1981 edition, even retaining the original pagination. This obviously helped to reduce costs (and the price is a modest £12.99 - only £4 up on the 1981 edition), but it means that errors and misprints are perpetuated. We have "aircraftsman" for "aircraftman", for example, and "Dragon Moth" for de Havilland Dragon; "Boom" Trenchard has acquired a new nickname ("Boomer"), and the winner of the 1927 Schneider Trophy is wrongly named. The last point, and a few others, are corrected in the introduction on page 4 - but anyone leafing through the book will see only the misattribution on page 120. However, these are trivia, and not the authors' fault. Generally, the new publishers have done a fine job; there are extensive appendices giving Johns's bibliography and other information, and the meagre four pages of photographs in the first edition have been doubled. Altogether it is a book to delight all Johns enthusiasts.

And what of the accusations of racism, sexism, and war-mongering that have been made against him? These, as the authors clearly show, have been much exaggerated. We have to remember the times in which he wrote. Biggles's occasional mild remarks just happen to have been the way people talked in the 1930s - regrettable, perhaps, but true. The villains were often white. Women did not appear in the stories because Johns's schoolboy readers wrote to him saying they did not want any. And although war is an evil, it is an evil from which some good may come - qualities of courage, endurance, and loyalty which (as Mary Cadogan pointed out at the Centenary lunch) are still needed today, even if not much mentioned. It is these virtues which are encouraged by W.E. Johns and his books.

A SAD FAREWELL TO OLD FRIENDS

Bill Bradford has informed me of the passing of Horace Owen, who had been a loyal supporter of the London Old Boys Book Club and of the C.D. since 1971. Horace, who had been ill for some time, died in a hospice at the age of 83. Those of us who knew him will remember his regular attendances at club meetings, his great enthusiasm for the Sexton Blake papers, and his kindly interest in all hobby activities.

Some time ago Bert Hamblet told me that Frank Unwin, known to many C.D. readers, had died. Frank had been involved in the hobby since the 1940s, had attended meetings of the Liverpool Club and been a member of the London O.B.B.C. He was also a successful and popular broadcaster, who will be much missed.

We salute these two long-standing friends and supporters.

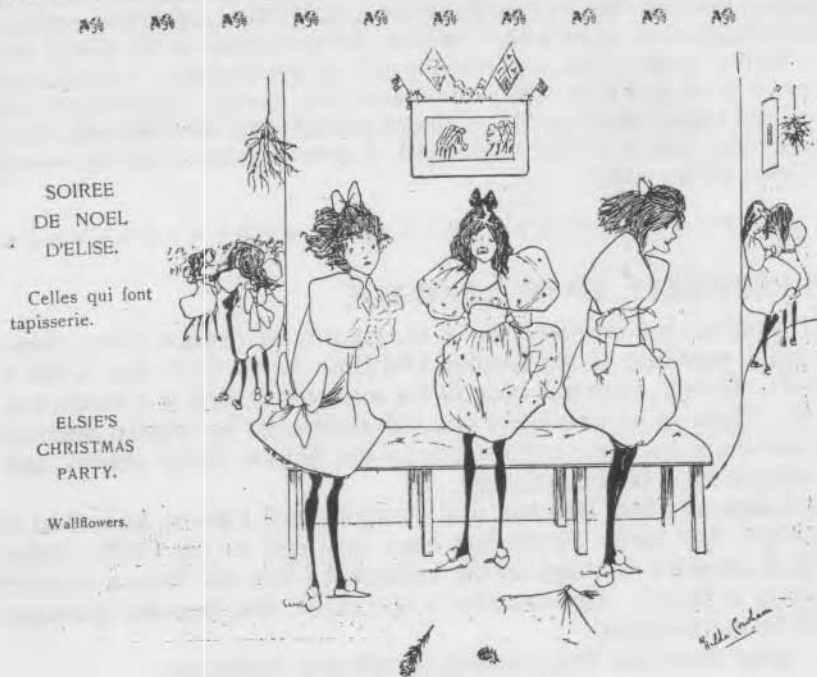
HILDA COWHAM - An artist of many talents

by Len Hawkey

This year marks the 120th anniversary of Hilda Cowham's birth - and, next year, the 30th anniversary of her death. It is, coincidentally, the 110th anniversary of the birth of her husband, the artist Edgar Lander.

Hilda was born in Wimbledon, in south west London, went to school there, and studied at the Wimbledon School of Art. Gaining a scholarship, she went on to the Lambeth Art College. She won a competition in the "Studio", a prestigious magazine of the time, and this led to a demand for her work, which was soon appearing in "The Sketch", "The Graphic", "The Sphere" and similar "glossy" publications in the late 1890s. She was probably the first woman to have a drawing accepted by "Punch" and the long-legged, skinny, "Cowham Girl" soon became well-known. Around 1901 she married Edgar Lander, himself an artist, whom she had met at college. If the reference books are to be believed, she was ten years his senior. (If a note of doubt creeps in, it is because Lander was producing accomplished illustrations for "The Boys' Friend" and other periodicals in 1898, when he would only have been 15! By the same reckoning he would have been just 18 when he married Hilda - anyway, with that difference in their ages, would they have been at Art School together?)

Be that as it may, Hilda's work was in demand constantly over the next 30 years or so. Apart from countless illustrations in books and magazines, she produced etchings and watercolours, holding exhibitions in Paris, the States, Canada, and even in Australia. She became an R.A., R.I., R.W.S., and an S.G.A. Pen & Ink, "Washes" and watercolours were used mainly for her illustrations which were cleverly "stylised" and



From *Pitman's French Weekly*, 1897



Hilda Cowham picture
from Ethel Talbot's
Betty at St. Benedicks,
1935



From
Boys' Friend,
1898

often seemed somewhat "sketchy". She also produced etchings, domestic paintings and landscapes; work which, alas, we never see.

What became of her in later life, the writer cannot say. Photographs, in her early years, show a quite pretty, dark-haired woman, with a sensitive, studious expression. According to magazine articles, she espoused the cause of "women's lib." and liked to move in the artistic circles of her day.

Throughout her long and prolific career, she had a formidable rival in Mabel Lucie Attwell, although, if they ever met, or what they thought of each other's work, is not recorded. As people usually prefer a smiling, chubby child to a awkward, gawky one, it is M.L.A.'s work which is better remembered today - not always with justification. Mabel's work is always beautifully finished and rounded, whereas Hilda's could appear careless and sometimes out of proportion - but *that* was her adopted style. Some of the colour-plates Hilda did for various Annuals, with their delicate colouring and art-deco feel, are quite the equal of anything her rival produced.

Mabel Lucie Attwell was six years younger than Hilda, but strangely, they both died in 1964 - the latter then being in her 90th year. They both had artist husbands, who served in the 1914-1918 War. Mabel's husband, Harold Earnshaw, lost an arm, but became, if anything, an even better artist by teaching himself to use his other hand. Edgar survived unscathed, but seems to have given up illustration, concentrating on more serious painting and etching. The Landers lived many years on Clifton Hill, St. John's Wood, and had a son in 1913. It is believed he also became an artist.

The mystery about their ages intrigues me. Hilda had work accepted while still a student, and, as previously mentioned, Edgar was producing excellent illustrations for "The Boy's Friend" (for example) in 1898 - at the age of 15. By 1901, supposedly at the age of 18, his even more mature work was accepted by "Penny Pictorial", "The Windsor Magazine" and even by "Punch". If the records are to be believed, Hilda would have been 40 when her son was born in August 1913 - rather late in life, although of course, by no means unlikely. Possibly some reader can throw light on these dates, which hardly seem to "add up".

Although Edgar seems to have abandoned illustration after 1914, his wife went on prolifically until at least the late 1930s. In my own collection her work features in some 50 or more magazines, annuals, etc. - from "The Sketch" in the mid-90s, through innumerable Amalgamated Press publications, Annuals from Blackie, Father Tuck, Partridge and so on. Little Folks for upwards of 20 years, and many of the popular "Adult monthlies" such as Strand, Pearsons and Pall-Mall, featured her work.

Mabel Lucie Attwell, albeit more popular, never matched her rival's output. The former had many imitators, of course, - Agnes Richardson, H.G.C. Marsh-Lambert - to name but two; but there was only one Hilda Cowham, and nobody seems to have even attempted to copy her unique and unconventional style.

WANTED: ENID BLYTON, W.E. JOHNS, CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers, and ALL ephemera related to these authors. ANY original artwork related to Bunter, Blyton, Biggles, Eagle or other British comics and boys papers. ALL Boys Friend Libraries by W.E. Johns and Rochester. Many "Thriller" issues and first editions in wrappers by Charteris required. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel. 0923 232383.

GREYFRIARS COMMENTS

GOOD CAPTAINCY, DECENT CHAPS, etc.

by Mark Taha

I must correct a statement in Colin Cole's article on Wharton's captaincy. Hazeldene was not just a specialist goalkeeper: he was also an outfield player. In 1932, in the 'Downfall' series, he replaced Vernon-Smith when Wharton let him out of the Rookwood match. Later, in the 'Rebellion of Harry Wharton' series, Hazeldene was played at left-back in a Form match. This would seem to indicate that he was a good all-round player but not quite first-class in any position. Maybe he should have concentrated on just one!

As for the four members of the Famous Five who usually played under Wharton's Captaincy, Vernon-Smith selected all of them when he was Captain, so they can be assumed to have deserved their places on merit.

Peter Mahony's article in the July C.D. reminded me of my longstanding belief that they should have had one or two "decent chaps" going wrong. For instance, in the 1925 Rebel series, Wharton became a Vernon-Smith-like scapegrace; in my view, they should have kept him that way, perhaps chumming with Vernon-Smith rather than Cherry and Bull (easily my unfavourite Removite).

In reply to Simon Garrett - Hamilton died halfway through writing "Just Like Bunter": the last half of it, and, the last four hardbacks, were all written by G.R. Samways.

Finally - a query. I've just been reading Harry Carpenter's autobiography, "Where's Harry?", in which he recalls that he and a Hamiltonian sports journalist named Basil Storey ran a short-lived story paper called "Boys' World" back in the 40s. Does anyone know anything about it?

THE GREYFRIARS JUNIOR XI

by J.H. Mearns

The Remove became the Greyfriars Junior Football team for the same reason that they became the Greyfriars Junior Cricket XI. The team selection was based on ability and consisted of members of the Remove Form only.

"Squiff", an Australian, played in goal, supplanting Bulstrode and Hazeldene in turn. Johnny Bull and Mark Linley played full-back. Tom Browne, a New Zealander, played right-half with Bob Cherry in the centre-half position and Dick Penfold at left-half.

"Inky" played an intelligent game of football, we understand, although there might be some people who would have reservations about a soccer-playing Indian. However, some of the Indian hill-peoples are accustomed to rigorous exercise; and the Nepalese Sherpas are a case in point (ask Sir John Hunt!). If we bear this in mind and we accept Hurree Singh's demonstrable adaptability to British winter conditions (all those snow-fights, not to mention a Christmas vacation spent in the Scottish Highlands without any record of complaint!) we seem to be left with his ability to size up people and situations - to "read the game", in other words - and in this he has few, if any, equals in the Remove.

One can see him, out on the wing, busy "reading the game". Not doing too much running about, mind you (unlike some of his team-mates, perhaps) but, seeing an

opening, galvanising into sudden movement of bewildering guile and verve. And, with consummate ball control, moving between the ranks of the opposition, putting on bursts of speed (only when necessary) to arrive at the moment of the cross, the centre or the shot for goal. His speciality being, of course, the long unexpected lob into the corner of the net or the snap, sharp flick through a mêlée of players in the goalmouth.

Two other members of the Remove front-line are of much the same calibre: Peter Todd (only slightly less brilliant but perceptive and resourceful) and the canny Robert Ogilvy are not the sort of chaps to use up a lot of energy needlessly, both preferring to "use the head" as much as the feet.

Smithy and Wharton himself are the front-line exceptions, perhaps. But then, maybe that's why they seemed to score most of the goals, whilst the other members of the attack were busy making the openings.

* * * * *

Peter Mahony's provocative piece in C.D. 556 made enjoyable reading. One or two comments might not come amiss. Re. Wharton's favouritism, Skinner could be a witty and amusing fellow. Perceptive, too, yet he lacked judgement. Hence his frequent accusation of favouritism on the part of Harry Wharton whom he persisted in regarding as an insufferable prig and "Great Panjandrum". Harry Wharton was not without his faults but when making cricket/soccer selections favouritism was not really in his line.

NUGENT (NOT A ROBUST PLAYER) was a steady and reliable performer. As time went on, however, he was dropped because he didn't have the necessary form. Robert Ogilvy, the Scottish junior, was preferred for both soccer and cricket selections.

BOLSOVER (A ROBUST BUT FOUL PLAYER) played full-back against a team from St. Jim's and was sent off for a blatant foul against George Figgins. (The Greyfriars Captain was Harry Wharton.)

LIGHTWEIGHTS v. HEFTIES. There is no *effective* weight difference between St. Jim's/Greyfriars Junior XIs.

St. Jim's consists of no fewer than *SEVEN Lower Fourth Formers*: Wynn; Figgins, Kerr, Redfern, Levison, Blake, D'Arcy. *Upper Fourth (SHELL) Formers*: Noble, Lowther, Talbot, Merry - those are the St. Jim's Hefties. It is not to be supposed Noble will find it an easy job looking after Wharton any more than Merry will find it an easy task outwitting Bob Cherry. The other Greyfriars Hefties are Tom Browne and Johnny Bull/Mark Linley. No wonder matches between those teams were strenuously fought out contests!

RE-APPEARANCES

by Colin Cole

Simon Garrett commented about characters resurrected by Charles Hamilton, in *Collectors' Digest* No. 558 (July 1993).

He mentioned the re-appearance of Bulstrode in the post-war Cassell book No. 37. As he stated, the story "Bunter the Sportsman" was written by a sub-writer, although the original idea may have been roughly drafted by Hamilton. The actual writing is obviously not Hamilton's - not his style at all, although there were certain likenesses. There were also geographical errors concerning the River Sark which would not have been made by Hamilton.

During the Magnet years it was quite common for substitute writers to include characters discarded by Hamilton. This occurred frequently with names such as Alonzo Todd, Rake, Delarey and Bulstrode.

Hamilton "dropped" Bulstrode in the early 1920s but the sub-writers continued to make use of him up to 1927.

Delarey was created by Pentelow in 1916, but he was mentioned in a number of genuine Frank Richard stories for a while afterwards.

Alonzo Todd is in a special category. Although withdrawn in 1915, Hamilton did not completely "retire" him, as the "Strong Man Alonzo" series (1933) and the "Portercliffe Hall" series (1935) will testify.

Although Elliott "left" Greyfriars in 1918, to accompany his uncle to Canada, he nevertheless did appear in a number of later Magnets on several occasions, particularly in the 1930s, although in a very minor way.

Smith Minor entered the Remove in Red Magnet days but he was never a leading character. It is true that he received mention in Cassell book No. 15 in "Bunter Does His Best". However, in Magnet No. 1330 (1933), "The Millionaire Detective", Smith Minimus of the Third Form, when questioned by Mr. Vernon-Smith, stated his elder brother was in the Sixth Form while the other brother, Smith Minor, was a member of the Fourth Form (meaning the Upper Fourth). It would seem that Hamilton then regarded Smith Minor as a Fourth Former.

Charles Hamilton's treatment of some characters, particularly the lesser 'lights' tended to be somewhat erratic. He could not possibly have anticipated that his work since 1908 would have come under such searching scrutiny. Such slight faults as he did display in no way diminish my admiration for his writing.

UP-DATING

Simon Garrett writes:

There is an amusing exchange in the 1982 Quiller Press book "Bunter Does His Best", an 'edited' version by Kay King of the 1954 Cassell edition.

In the original, Redwing pressed Dutton's claim to a place in the Remove Soccer team, and Smithy dismissed him as "That deaf ass!", with no protest from good old Reddy.

In the 1982 version, Smithy again sneers at Dutton's disability, but Redwing retorts "That's a filthy thing to say!" and Smithy recants. "You know what I mean," said Smithy quickly. "I know he can't help being a bit deaf, but he'll find it hard going."

In all seriousness it is unfair to laugh at deafness, but a Politically Correct Bounder takes some swallowing.

Ms. King has stuck closely to the original plot but completely rewritten the text; updating the slang, dropping the nickname Inky, making him talk standard English etc. The length is cut by about a third, not difficult if you don't mind losing most of the Hamilton flavour. At least three other "butchered Bunters" appeared in the 1980s, but as far as I know with little success.

Editor's Note:

Altogether there were six of these Quiller Press editions. They were quite interesting as school stories in their own right but, as Mr. Garrett says, they didn't retain the authentic

Hamiltonian flavour. It is good that the Hawk versions of the Bunter books are absolute facsimiles of the originals.

* * * * *

Ted Baldock comments:

The other night I listened - with anticipation and some trepidation - to the first of the 'Greyfriars Tales' on the radio. In my case the fears were not without foundation. I was rather disappointed. What emerged were not the Greyfriars fellows. The voice of Bob Cherry was certainly not that of the cheery Bob. And Bunter fell far short, audibly of the fat Owl as pictured in my mind. We have certain images in our minds, or in this instance, sounds in our ears, of just how our heroes may come over. In the far off days of the Greyfriars stories - in pre-war days - there existed a phenomenon known as a 'Public school accent'. This was entirely absent and immediately struck a wrong note in the whole proceedings. This is not a case of pre-war snobbery; it is a factual truth. The whole canvas of the Greyfriars tales proves very difficult to re-produce in such a way (I am sure) that their founder would have approved.

Having relieved myself of the above criticism I hope it is not too harsh (it is not intended to be - just a statement of how I felt about the programme).

Laurence Price adds:

I wonder what other C.D. readers have thought of the recent BBC Radio 2 series "The Billy Bunter Stories" featuring the ex-Goodies team of Tim Brooke-Taylor, Bill Oddie and Graeme Garden, with Oddie as Bunter.

I have personally been rather disappointed with the characterisations and one or two lacklustre choices of very short extracts from available stories, notably the season opener, "Bunter the Hero". The reading for "Bunter in Brazil" actually succeeded in ignoring the central plot line altogether.

Bill Oddie's characterisation of Bunter is naturally essential to the overall success of the series, and at times Oddie has overacted, with Bunter being a little too squeaky and a little heavy on the emphasis of the 'hee hee hees', although I suppose some 'ham' should be second nature to Bunter! I think he was most successful in the third story, "Billy Bunter on Trial" which was well paced with some very amusing extracts, with Bunter at his greedy, scheming, fibbing and begging best. Lord Mauleverer came over well too and in this particular story, even the Famous Five.

Here in my view, has been the low point of the series. The Famous Five lack the necessary lightness of touch to convince the listener that they are fifteen-year-old schoolboys. Wharton comes across as a supercilious snob, Cherry is nondescript and Johnny Bull sounds like a fifty-year-old grouchy Yorkshireman, and the actor Brian Glover could have read this role. These members of the Famous Five sound like middle-aged men, by whom they are, of course, portrayed. This doesn't necessarily have to be if, for example, one compares the excellent Martin Jarvis reading the William stories where the necessary lightness of touch is evident. By clever intonation of his voice he can be a believable William or Mr. Brown or a dotting elderly aunt.

Other characterisations have been better, the aforementioned Lord Mauleverer, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, Coker, Potter and Green. But why so little Quelch, his only appearance so far a tiny cameo in episode five, "Bunter's Night Out".

In the continued absence of any reshowings of the Bunter television series with Gerald Campion, I am, however, still pleased some Bunter has been broadcast. There have been some bright moments in the series but I only wish it could have been so very much better.

WILLIAM - AGAIN

Richmal Ashbee, the niece and literary executor of Richmal Crompton writes:-

Brian Doyle's comments (in the July C.D.) about "William's Foggy Morning" of course chuffed me greatly, particularly since his reviews are always very much to the point... His closing sentence is very sound.

(Editor's Note: Readers will remember that Brian referred to Richmal Ashbee's finishing of her aunt's unfinished story as a "seamless join". The closing sentence which she mentions commented that I too am now one of the Women Behind William, so naturally I am happy that Richmal Ashbee concurs with this!)



(Illustration © the Thomas Henry Fisher Estate & reproduced by permission of Pan Macmillan's Children's Books)

BABS AND CO'S HOLIDAY EXPEDITION

by Margery Woods

Chapter 3

"She's worse than she is at school!"

"She's the absolute limit!"

"She actually sent me to the village to get a shampoo for her --- as though I were a frog from the Second!" exploded Mabs. "What are we going to do about her?"

"Well," offered Diana, "I said we ought to drop her in the pigswill bin."

"She's an utter blight with a capital B," groaned Janet.

The chums were gathered by the field gate, on the evening of their third day at the Coldburne dig. The three days could have been fun, even though their initial imaginings of sieving for lost treasures, carefully washing precious pieces of porcelain and labelling items in their best handwriting had not yet happened: they could have enjoyed the mundane tasks of unpacking the equipment needed to sustain a large party of volunteers and generally making themselves useful to the adult experts, to each of whom had been assigned a couple of youthful assistants, whose enthusiasm, hopefully, compensated for their lack of both experience and knowledge. But the presence of Connie Jackson had blighted any hope of that pleasure. The chums had found themselves more or less relegated permanently to cookhouse duties, excepting Marjorie and Jemima, who had been a little more fortunate. Marjorie had been bagged by a rather vague and bookish lady who said Marjorie was just the girl she had been looking for, and whose manner suddenly lost its vagueness as she surveyed the would-be-bossy Connie. Connie subsided, and was forced to subside a second time before a somewhat redoubtable professor of mature years, and wisdom to match, whose air of eccentricity met in perfect harmony the burbling wavelength of Jemima Carstairs. Jemima too waved an unfond farewell to Connie the Blight.

Car doors slammed down the lane, where Lydia and Rosa had climbed into a roomy open-top owned by one of the older boys among the volunteers. There were five youngsters in the car and much laughter floated back as they drove off towards Coldburne and a disco.

"How do those two get away with it?" asked Clara bitterly. "They've done nothing but skylark since we came, but if we step out of line for a minute she's down like a ton of bricks."

"And hauling us away from the sing-song last night," grumbled Diana. "Telling us she has the authority to pack us off home if we don't toe the line --- her line!"

"Do you really have to put up with her all year at school?" asked a sympathetic voice. "You poor kids."

Jack Amberleigh, his arm carelessly about Jen Maybury's shoulders, had ambled to the gate. He surveyed the circle of rebellious faces and said, "Cheer up. I happen to know that Connie the Blight has gone into the town with one of our committee members. Our local sympathetic string quartet is giving a concert in the Vernon Hall."

Jen giggled. "They're not that bad, Jack."

"No?" he was unabashed. "Even Connie needs sympathy to listen to them for three hours, and on the hard chairs at the Vernon. So, girls! We can all go to the sing-song tonight. The kids have got a campfire going, there're sausages to grill and beans to bake, and one of the lads has brought a guitar."

The girls needed no further urging, and were in a much happier mood when it was time to turn in. There was no sign of Connie, but she was there at the crack of dawn, reminding them that breakfast has to be served by seven-thirty prompt.



"She's not a blight," said Diana with great feeling as they started on the mountain of washing up. "She's a sadist who enjoys every moment of it. And what's this special event today that she was muttering about but said we'd find out later?" Diana dropped a plate, swore as it shattered, and viciously kicked the pieces under a bench. "I think I'll go home. Anything would be better than this!"

But Diana brightened a short while later.

The site was invaded by the media.

Five reporters, four photographers, and a TV crew very effectively put an end to all work that morning. They moved around, asking questions, and appeared disappointed that no newsworthy discovery had yet been made. Several worthies from Coldburne dropped in, some of the locals idled by in case they were missing anything, and a burly man, of dark and unsmiling visage, arrived in a large pretentious-looking limousine and walked on to the site as though he owned it.

"That's Raymond Handyl," whispered Jen. "He's one of the consortium that wants to build a leisure complex here. They say he's totally ruthless."

"He looks it," said Babs.

The big man turned and glanced in the direction of the chums. "Hmm," his voice carried quite clearly, "they're resorting to child exploitation here."

Clara was the nearest and she was not prepared to let the disparaging remark pass unanswered. She glared defiantly, her instant dislike patent: "We're all here of our own free will," she said loudly.

He looked a bit surprised, then shrugged. "No accounting for tastes, is there?"

"No." Diana had moved to Clara's side to eye him with insolent challenge. "But for you and others like you, Mr. Handyl, this child exploitation wouldn't be necessary."

Again he looked surprised, then he looked more sharply at the platinum-haired Firebrand. "Do I know you, young lady?"

"I don't think so," Diana tossed her head and stalked back to the chums, a small, secretive smile on her lips.

"What was all that about?" hissed Mabs. "Do you know him?"

"No, but I know of him. Wait till I see Curmudge."

"Why?" exclaimed Clara.

"Curmudge has just got a parcel of shares that will give him majority holding in a company that Mr. Sarcasm over there has been angling after for ages," said Diana with great satisfaction.

Raymond Handyl was not the only one to have been struck by the sight of the self-possessed Firebrand. One of the TV crew followed the girls as, goaded by the ever vigilant Connie Jackson, they moved towards the kitchen hut to organise dinner.

"Some of these visitors are staying, so we'll have to provide extra," she announced. "You'd better --- Yes?" she looked at the young production assistant. "You want me?" A simper dawned on Connie's thin face at the prospect of being featured on TV. But her hopes were dashed.

"No, we want the blonde girl over there, and the others with her. Stand clear please."

"Well!" Connie bridled, but the TV production team were well used to would-be stars who were not required. Brushing Connie aside like an indignant fly, they rapidly organised the girls, Diana in the centre amidst the food preparations, and set up the recording equipment.

"Okay, girls, just be natural, when the red light shows we've started." The commentator began:

"Everyone is hoping the green meadows here will yield up some exciting discoveries from the past. But an expedition, like an army, if not exactly marching on its stomach, needs to be fed. The nearest restaurant is several miles away, so a fully equipped field kitchen has been set up here and manning it are these enthusiastic young volunteers from one of Britain's great public schools. Feeding sixty or so people every day is a task they have taken in their stride."

"And so fourth and so fifth," murmured Jemima, who had escaped her scholarly charge and come to investigate. "Fame at last and I had to miss it."

"You've also missed all the dirty work here," Clara reminded her as the TV session ended and the kitchen was left to its normal use.

"We're going to run out of spuds," Janet cried. "Is there another sack?"

There wasn't, and Connie said sharply, "Somebody will have to go and dig up a bucketful. Now. You go, Bessie Bunter."

Babs stepped forward. "I'll go with her."

"You say here," snapped Connie. "It doesn't take two to dig up a bucketful of potatoes. The rest of you get those carrots scraped and the rest of that sack of potatoes."

Then you can do the apples for the pie." She turned to Bessie who was hovering at the door. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

"W-w-where do I get the potatoes?"

"Out of the field! Collect a spade at the tool hut, take this bucket, and turn left at the gate. Got it?" Connie snarled. "And hurry!"

Poor Bessie dared not argue. She did as she was bade, waddled out of the gateway and, being Bessie, blinked to the left and then turned right up the lane. Sure enough, the next field appeared to roll into the distance, showing long long rows of the familiar green tops. Bessie did not venture far; she started her not very expert digging at the nearest corner and was soon rewarded by fat creamy shapes that rattled into the bucket with satisfying thumps. Bessie paused for breath, wiping perspiration from her hot red face. One more clump should fill the bucket. She thrust the heavy spade back into the hole she'd made and puffed breathlessly. The spade seemed to be stuck. She heaved at it, and it came free with what looked like a bit of old twisted metal caught on the blade.

Bessie shook it, and a voice behind her exclaimed:

"It's Bessie, isn't it? Why are you digging up my field?"

"Oh--h-h, bib-but I was told to!" The plump duffer of the fourth tottered round to face Jack Amberleigh's good-humoured surprise. "Connie sent me."

"The Blight? She would." He took pity on the hapless Bess. "Here give me that spade. The vegetables for the site are in the big allotment at the other side. Did you get lost? I---" He broke off abruptly, bending to snatch at the bit of metal Bessie had unearthed. He rubbed sharply at it, and now even short-sighted Bessie could see that it had shape to it, and that a dull gleam was showing through the earth that encrusted it.

"I dare not believe it!" He turned it in his hands, scraping it with his thumb nail. "Come on, Bess, let's get back to the site."

"W-what is it?" Bessie was trying to keep up with his long strides and cope with the heavy bucket which he'd forgotten in his excitement.

Impatiently he halted and relieved her of her burden, then laughed down at her perplexed face. "I may be wrong, I hope I'm not! But I think you've made a great discovery. I think... oh, I don't know what I think! It must have been turned up near the surface when the field was last ploughed."

Bessie, for once, was able to make an intelligent observation. "Wuw-when we get back Jemima's Professor will know."

* * * * *

Jemima's Professor did know.

He pronounced it, after a long suspenseful examination, to be part of a torque, an ornamental neck band of twisted metal, and undoubtedly pure beautiful gold. There was only one small disappointment; the diggers had turned up several ancient coins, but this discovery was dwarfed by Bessie's great find in Jack's potato field.

It was very late that night before the excited girls could settle themselves down to sleep. Connie, unwillingly, had been forced to retreat before the boos and jeers of a new party of youngsters now ensconced at the other end of the big hut; they had nothing to fear, and let the unpopular prefect know this beyond doubt. So Connie had flounced into the small partitioned room at one end which probably, in the hut's early military history, had been the quarters of the section N.C.O., and slammed the door.

Lydia and Rosa were among the missing, as usual, and Babs, conscientiously worried about them, got no sympathy from Diana, who pointed out that Connie had

appropriated authority and so must take the responsibility as well. "Let her do the worrying," the Firebrand advised unsympathetically, and snuggled her glorious tresses deep under the blankets.

Babs lay still for a long time, and seemed to have just drifted into sleep when a thud startled her into a wakeful cry.

"Shut up!" came the hissed response in Lydia's unfriendly tones, "you'll wake Connie. I only dropped a shoe."

After a few rustles and stifled giggles, silence descended once more, but too late for Babs. It seemed hours later, after tossing and turning in her bunk, that she saw the wavering glimmers of light outside the window, and then, later, sounds she could not identify yet which were definitely disturbing.

None of her sleeping companions was stirring. Even Bessie's snores had muted as the plump duffer probably dreamed of fame and fortune awaiting to reward her. Bessie was ever the optimist in this respect! Babs settled back, trying to relax, then sat bolt upright as a distinct cracking noise came from a distance, carried on the still night air.

Babs hesitated no longer. Noiselessly she pulled on her working jeans and jacket over her pyjamas, groped for her torch and slid quietly out of the hut, pausing briefly to put on her shoes, before looking to left and right in search of disturbance. Perhaps she was being over imaginative, perhaps she should wake Mabs and Clara, but she had a strong premonition that something was wrong, and also it was unfair to disturb her chums until she was more sure that such action was justified. It was two in the morning, and they all had to be up early. Cautiously Babs crept along the path that linked the huts and Portacabins.

Her eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, picking out outlines, and the torch remained unlit in her hand as she reached the last cabin in the row. No sound, no movement at all; Babs smiled ruefully to herself and hoped that her night amble would help her to sleep! Then she heard the whisper, and saw the door of the cabin was partly open.

Babs forgot caution. She switched on her torch and rushed to the door of the hut. There was a shocked exclamation, then a scuffle, and the next moment two black clad figures burst from the interior and almost knocked Babs flying.

"Hey --- stop!" she shouted, and heedless of any danger she shot off in pursuit, stumbling over rough patches and past shrub branches that caught at her clothing. Behind her a light came on in one of the huts but she did not stop, her one thought to try to identify the intruders and challenge them. For intruders they were: why run if they had legitimate business on the site at that time of night. She shouted, "This way!" hoping that help was on its way, and rushed on.

She had almost reached the boundary of the site now, marked by a hedge through which the two dark figures were scrambling. Moments later Babs followed, and pelted across the field beyond towards the crumbling remains of an ancient ruined barn, home of nettles and brambles, and apparently devoid of anything interesting when the chums had rambled past during their first exploration of the site surroundings.

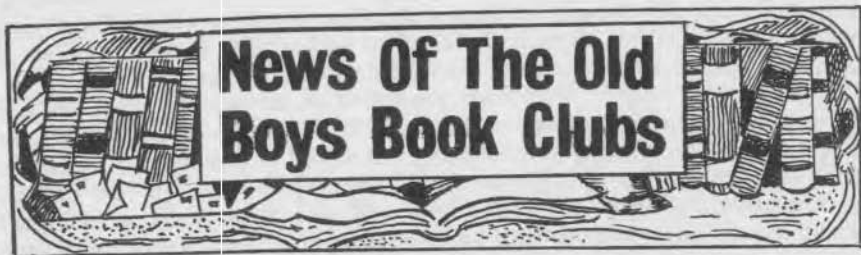
There was a road beyond, and the dim outline of a vehicle. Babs groaned; they were going to get away. She stumbled over a stone hidden in the grass, and almost fell, but not before she had glimpsed the strands of fair hair under the cap of one of the intruders and heard a breathless exclamation in a girl's voice. Babs was almost sure it was the girl at the big house, the girl in charge of little Emma on the runaway bike. And then a dark figure loomed over Babs. Powerful arms seized her and thrust her violently against the low ruined wall.

"That'll teach you to interfere, you meddling bitch!"

Her assailant swung her round then lifted her bodily and bundled her over the wall into a stone-filled recess that seemed to open suddenly beneath the great tangles of nettles and creepers. As Babs tried desperately to clutch at something, anything, to regain her feet she heard a car door slam and an engine kick into noisy life.

It was the last sound she heard as her head struck against something hard and unyielding and she plunged helplessly down into blackness.

(to be continued)



LONDON O.B.B.C.

Our August meeting was held at the home of Roy and Gwen Parsons at West Winterslow, near Salisbury, and, despite annual holidays and the journey involved, 13 members were present.

It was sad to learn of the death of Horace Owen on the 3rd, a loyal and popular member of the Club since 1971. He had been seriously ill for some 18 months and had borne this with great fortitude.

Roy conducted a musical quiz, related to Hamilton characters, which revealed the very limited knowledge of some of us! Top marks to Roger Jenkins, Ray Hopkins, Tony Potts and Eric Lawrence, in that order. Later, Roy spoke on the wartime issues of the Boy's Own Paper, with emphasis on displayed covers and Biggles contents. Although these issues were reduced in dimensions and contents, at least it kept the paper alive, actually until 1967.

During a scrumptious tea, we were invited to put a date to a full range of Holiday Annuals which were displayed with the year concealed. Not as easy as we thought. Eric and Ray were joint winners and your humble contributor a poor second. Phil Griffiths then read the first chapter of 'William the Lawless' now available in paperback (Macmillan Children's Books) which was proof that Richmal Crompton, even in her last years, could still hold and amuse us. The next reading was by Roger, and this time it was from Magnet No. 1337, an excerpt from the Hiking Series, with Bunter more concerned with food than the fate of Bob Cherry.

The next meeting will be on Sunday, 12th September at 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent, where John Wernham will provide some of the programme. It has been agreed that we gather at noon so please bring a packed lunch, unless you choose to eat prior to arrival.

BILL BRADFORD

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

As we never expect a large number of people to attend a meeting in the holiday month of August and our programme is adjusted accordingly, it was encouraging to have nine attending our meeting.

Chris Scholey from Leeds, on his first visit to us, announced he was well on the way to completing his collection of original "Magnets". Gary Panczyszyn had made the trip from Derby but the vagaries of British Rail meant he had to leave before 7.00 p.m., prior to our official meeting time. Still, he was able to meet a number of people and make a small reconnaissance of Leeds.

Mark Caldcott took the chair, for a free and easy programme with plenty of convivial chat and observations. Chris explained how he first became involved in reading and then collecting "The Magnet". Unlike many of us who had read the Bunter stories at School, Chris discovered the Howard Baker books and used them to prepare a paper for his examinations - and from then, he became hooked. Mention was made of "The Goodies" presenting Greyfriars stories on Radio 2, and the forthcoming centenary of "Sexton Blake". Our C.D. poet, Keith Atkinson, presented a "Riddle Me Ree" and Keith Normington was the winner.

A relaxed and very enjoyable meeting.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

MIDLAND O.B.B.C.

Bill Lofts, our guest speaker at the Spring meeting on April 24th, gave an interesting talk touching on several aspects of the hobby, his main theme being the reactions of girls to the Greyfriars characters - not always what a mere male might expect! We rounded off a most pleasant afternoon with discussion, friendly conversation and another of Christine's splendid teas.

The autumn meeting, at which we shall again have the great pleasure of Mary Cadogan's company, will be at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, September 25th, in the Blackheath Library.

GEOFF LARDNER

WANTED: GEMS: 154,155,160,169,170,173,186,193,195,196,199,204,205,217,231, 286,290,294,295,344,355. To complete a set. Condition unimportant - even without covers! Your price paid. Write: W. LOFTS, 56 Sheringham House, Lisson Street, London, NW1 5NY.

WANTED by enthusiastic collector to buy, swap (or borrow)? 1/2d MARVELS with Jack, Sam and Pete stories and pre-1914 1d MARVELS. Singles or whole years welcome. DAVE WESTAWAY, Sunslow, 96 Ashleigh Road, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 2JZ. Tel. 0395 275734.



MARTIN WATERS (Wellingborough): I can inform Mr. Atkinson of Bradford (who wrote in the C.D. about the Three Fishers) that several hostelrys around the country bear the similar though not identical name of the 'Three Fishes'. During the late 1950s, I was a member of an RAF Regiment squadron based at Catterick in the North Riding of Yorkshire. During the National Service era 'demob parties' were a regular feature as personnel left the service and returned to civil life. Our favourite venue was a small pub beside the river Swale not far from Catterick village; the pub's name was the 'Three Fishes'. In more recent times I have often passed another pub named the 'Three Fishes'. It was located in the village of Turvey, between Northampton and Bedford. I think the landlord must have been an aviation enthusiast because for some years the pub garden contained a full size replica of a Fokker Triplane of WW1 vintage. I think that there is a further pub of this name in the Maidenhead/Marlowe area, but my memory may be at fault. Speaking of honoured names, travellers in the Peak District, passing along the main road which overlooks Monsal Dale, will find a pleasant hotel named 'Cliff House' which overlooks the well-known railway viaduct in the centre of the dale. Now we know what happened to Bessie Bunter in adult life!

GARY PANCZYSZYN (Derby): Thanks for the latest C.D., lovely as usual. I was lucky enough to read some Schoolgirls' Own and School Friend stories when I was young, but coming back to them after 20 years I have found myself a little confused between the Morcove and Cliff House characters. Every issue (and back-issue) of the C.D. clears up something of this subject for me, and fixes up my memory for me - I remember that the Morcove girls were the prettier ones, naturally!

RON GARDNER (Leamington): I have recently acquired 'The Target Book For Boys' (Spring Books, London). A large and hefty volume, it contains a series of short stories by authors whose names are completely unfamiliar to me, a 2 page picture story about a certain 'Lone Ranger', unaccompanied by any Indian partner and not wearing a mask, and finally, scattered throughout the book, a series of school and adventure stories by some very familiar names.

These comprise 'A Bargain in Bikes' - a story of Rookwood by Owen Conquest; 'The Rio Kid Rides Again' by Ralph Redway; 'Tough on Turkey' by Frank Richards (a story of Carcroft school); 'Winning Through' by Frank Richards (a Felgate story); 'Jimmy the Shark' by Charles Hamilton (a story about 'King of the Island', it says); and lastly, 'Skip's Secret' (another Felgate story by) 'Frank Richards, Creator of Billy Bunter and Greyfriars'.


I would imagine these stories are all re-prints from the post-war annuals, 'Tom Merry's Own', 'Billy Bunter's Own', or from the Raymond Glendenning Sports

Annuals, which also contained one or two school stories. I bought this book from a second hand bookshop (in the little town of Moreton-in-Marsh, I believe) for £1 and its excellent value for the money!

BILL LOFTS (London): I greatly enjoyed Eric Fayne's article on the early Hamilton Boys Friend Libraries. I well remember in the early days of the hobby how fascinated I was by the mystery surrounding some of them, and whether they were actually penned by Charles Hamilton.

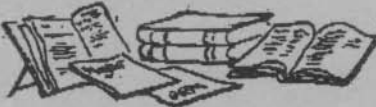
The main suspect was *The Silent Three*, April 1911 exact date. Taking the bull by the horns I actually sent a copy to the great man himself, asking if he penned it. The answer was in the negative - pointing out some sentences and phrasing he 'hoped he would never use' but also suggesting it could have been written by the younger 'Hook', son of the famous creator of *Jack, Sam, and Pete*. Much later official records proved him right. Charles Hamilton went on to say that S. Clarke Hook was a nice old gentleman, etc. I'm also positive that Eric is right and that the artist was Warwick Reynolds who drew the cover. A number of other Boys' Friend Libraries were by him in that period.

WANTED by private collector, the following Annuals: MERRY MOMENTS 1921-26; MY FAVOURITE 1934; PLAYTIME 1928; JOY 1923, 1926. Also Nister's Holiday Annuals. Good prices paid. Prompt payment. F. ARMSTRONG, 35 Allenby Road, St. Annes-on-Sea, Lancs., FY8 2DL. Tel: 0253 726244.



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SPECIAL AUTUMN NUMBER



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