

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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SEPTEMBER 1998

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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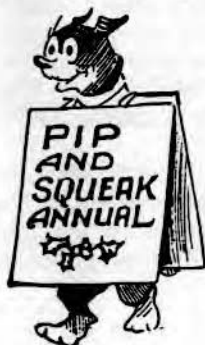
ANNUAL TIME AGAIN

Writing this Editorial on a sunny August day it seems strange to be telling you about our forthcoming Annual - but, already, I have received several articles for this which I am now preparing to send to our printers. As always it seems that our annual bumper volume is likely to be crammed with "goodies" to entertain us and stimulate our imaginations. Next month I shall begin to "trail" its contents which will deal with many aspects of our hobby.

You will see that I have included order forms with this issue of the C.D. As in previous years I have tried to keep the price as low as printing and postage costs permit. It helps me a great deal if I can receive your orders **as soon as possible** so that during the planning stages I can know

approximately how much money will be available for the production of the Annual. And, of course,

don't forget to send me articles, stories, poems and pictures for inclusion in its pages.



LONG-RUNNING SERIES

Readers will note that Bill Lofts' name appears once again in this issue of the C.D. in the *Other*

Favourite Detectives series. I still have several of Bill's articles and it is a privilege to continue to publish his works.

E.S. Brooks enthusiasts should rest assured that Mark Caldicott's series of articles on the Nelson Lee, through now having a brief "rest", will soon be continuing in the C.D.! I am glad to be able to report that I am now receiving more articles on Brooks and the Nelson Lee, and indeed on the Sexton Blake saga. The goodly flow of articles on Greyfriars and other aspects of Hamiltonia continues. However, one or two C.D. readers have expressed disappointment that we did not mark in July the 60th Anniversary of *The Beano*. I did put out feelers to one or two enthusiasts but so far no 60th birth tribute to this most famous of D.C. Thomson's comics had reached me. But C.D. Beano fans - and Lord Snooty & Co. - should live in hopes that such an item will grace our pages before long!

HAPPY READING,

MARY CADOGAN





THE CODE THAT LED TO A FORTUNE AT ST. FRANK'S

by Ray Hopkins

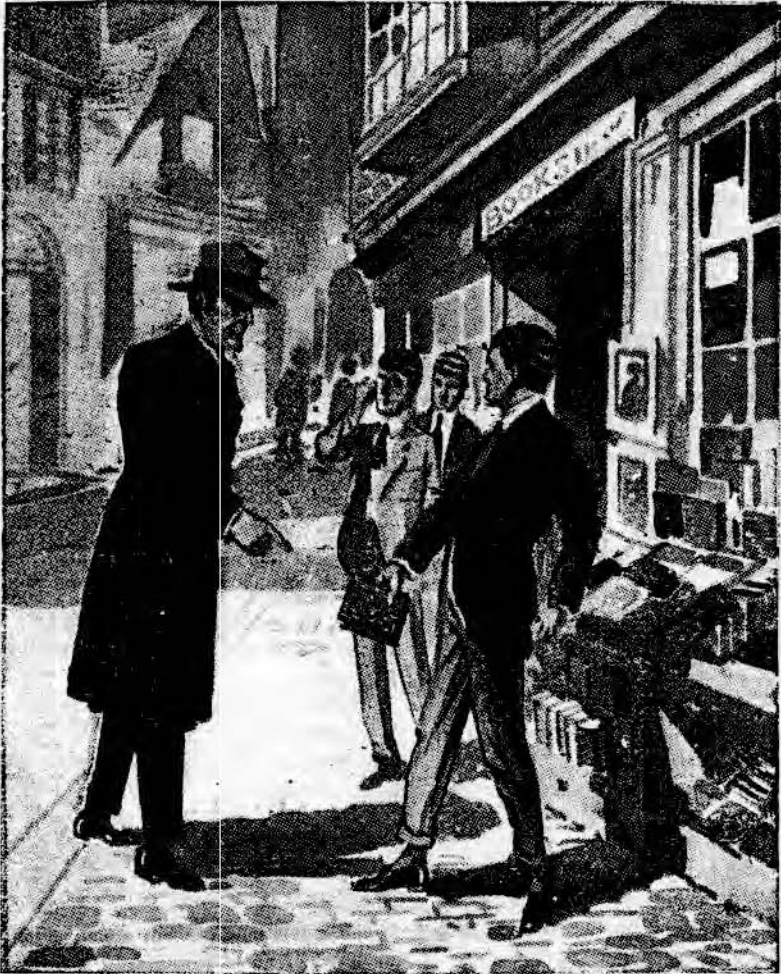
Having paid, as Nipper says, "the enormous sum of sixpence" for a tattered, ancient book from Old Spragg's back street bookshop in Bannington, he isn't too well pleased when a well-dressed man demands he let him have it as he leaves the shop. I pause to inform you that we are way back in October 1917 in NELSON LEE Old Series 125, "The Mystery of the Blue Volume," in case the massive sum of sixpence is causing 1990's guffaws!

The book is "Crimes of Fifty Years Ago," published in 1798. Tregellis-West and Watson cannot understand what interest Nipper can possibly have in such an untidy, grubby book, still not knowing that their chum is assistant to the great Nelson Lee, or that their housemaster, Mr. Alvington is that celebrated detective. Nipper has, of course, picked up the book thinking that Lee could well be interested in it.

The excitement the man displays at seeing the book in Nipper's hands cools down, also his anger at not being obeyed instantly by a mere boy. He tells Nipper the book belonged to an old friend and he wants it as a memento. He offers a shilling for it, then two shillings, rising to five and finally ten shillings. Nipper feels he would have resold it to the man instantly had his attitude not been so rude and domineering, but all the rises in offers will not make him change his mind.

No. 125—LONG, COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORY.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE BLUE VOLUME.

Another Tale of NELSON LEE & NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE. Set down by NIPPER, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Yellow Shadow," "Nipper at St. Frank's," "The Verdict of the School," "The City of Burnished Bronze," etc.

Back at St. Frank's, Lee notes that the cover of the book is ready to fall off, observes how disreputable it is in general and, after examining the contents, informs Nipper that Old Spragg has swindled him and that threepence would be far more than it is worth. The man must have been some crank for offering what he did, for the book is worthless. Despite this, it was to be the cause of some lively times in the near future at St. Frank's.

Finding the outside of the old book easily removable, Nipper utilises it to protect an old coverless dictionary that he uses constantly and makes it permanent by glueing the dictionary's spine to the inside of the blue cover. The addition of end sheets also protects the dictionary. The inside pages of "Crimes of Fifty Years Ago" he hides beneath a pile of old periodicals.

The following day, Nipper observes Teddy Long acting in a suspicious manner. He had almost bumped into the three chums, given them a startled look and darted off as if he wished to avoid them. Nipper and his Study C chums, sensing that Long's guilty look is in some way connected with them, run after him. Tregellis-West, seeing a bulge beneath the sneak's waistcoat, pulls it open and a blue covered volume falls to the ground. Long tells them that a stranger gave him half-a-crown to bring him the book, a similar sum to be paid when the junior places the volume in his hands. The man is waiting for him in the lane now! But he must have seen them coming as there is no sign of him when Nipper and Co. hasten there.

The next stage in the mystery of the blue volume occurs a couple of days later. The Ancient House has been bested in a jape by Bob Christine and Co. of the College House, and to get their own back Nipper decides to creep into their rivals' dormitory, remove all their clothes and hide them in a box room. No damage was done and it would merely take some time to find them and they might be late for breakfast, but they would know it was tit for tat on the part of the Ancient House, and doubtless be wrathful.

Nipper successfully accomplishes his midnight task. Climbing out of the College House window by which he had obtained egress, he sees a man forcing a window of the Remove common-room and climbing inside. Tregellis-West and Watson are waiting to haul Nipper back into the Ancient House dorm by the knotted rope with which he left and are suitably startled by his news. They suggest waking the rest of the form to capture the presumed burglar. But Nipper heads for the Housemaster's study and Nelson Lee joins them in the search. They discover the burglar in the Remove passage but he is too quick for them, locks himself in one of the studies and escapes through the window. By the time they open another study door and fling open the window, the man is too far away for them to pursue him dressed only in night clothes and slippers.

When they investigate Study C it is to find that the blue covered volume is missing. So the person anxious to get hold of it after two abortive tries has it in his hands at last. Through, as Nipper explains to Lee, he still does not have what he really wants, namely the 'innards' for which he had substituted his coverless dictionary.

And here we must reveal that for which the man is looking: a series of mysterious figures scribbled on the fly-leaf at the back of the book. Nipper shows them to Nelson Lee who says they must be some kind of cipher, a code in which a series of figures can be translated into letters or words containing a hidden message. Nelson Lee suggests they all go to his study and discover the message's hidden meaning. Late as it is, and when they should all be in bed, he says the cipher is a simple one and should not take long to crack. Tregellis-West and Watson are thrilled to be asked to accompany Nipper, not knowing that, as the detective's assistant, Nipper is automatically required. As Dick Bennett, he cannot be asked to accompany Mr. Alvington (the disguised Nelson Lee) without his two chums.

The list of figures, each one below its predecessor, is followed by several others. Lee deduces that the first figure in the column must be a page number while the following figures are words to be found on that page. When all the words on all the page numbers are retrieved from the book the following message is revealed:

ARCH STOW FACE NORTH TWENTY YEARS AHEAD
FIVE-AND-HALF FURTHER LEFT DITCH DIG.

The message, says Lee, reveals why the burglar was so anxious to get hold of the old book. The directions must refer to a hidden treasure of some sort.

Lee has to do a little more translating in order to explain to the boys that the first two words must refer to the arch beneath the bridge that crosses the River Stowe. The rest must be accomplished on the spot by spacing out the yards mentioned and discovering a ditch to be dug. Mr. Alvington promises to call all three of them two hours before breakfast when they will proceed with forks and shovels and dig at the spot mentioned.

At the bridge, Lee produces a compass. They make their way below the arch and do indeed find a ditch after spacing out the required lengths facing north and turning left. The three boys dig and in five minutes they uncover a battered leather trunk. Violence erupts! At the moment of discovery, Nipper is hit on the side of his head and recognises his assailant as the man he had first seen at the bookshop. Unluckily for the treasure-seekers, he is accompanied by four gypsies, one armed with a cudgel. Lee immediately knocks out the man. The three juniors rally and surprise his subordinates by enthusiastically attacking them, Lee already having sent the cudgel flying. The gypsies, not expecting such lively opposition from three smallish boys and one old man (for Mr. Alvington, Lee is made up to look considerably older than his years) and with their leader unconscious, feel that the game is up and disappear.

When he regains consciousness Lee informs their prisoner that when the police arrive he will be charged with deliberate assault and burglary. The man admits that it was he who broke into the school but hardly thinks he deserves prison for stealing an old dictionary. He gives his name as Ginter and says he has just been released from prison on ticket-of-leave.

Deane, another convict, with whom Ginter had struck up a friendship, had been sentenced to ten years for a burglary during which he had smashed the skull of a footman. But the footman did not die and Deane had had time to hide the proceeds of the burglary before being arrested. The unearthed trunk contains the priceless gold ornaments and plate stolen from Sir James Massington's home near Bannington some five years earlier. At his trial, Deane refused to tell where he had hidden the gold plate and it was presumed lost forever when he became ill and died. However, before his demise, he told Ginter where to find details of the location of the stolen treasure. He had written the cipher in the back of a book belonging to Deane's uncle in Bannington at whose house he had hidden after the burglary and where Deane was arrested. It so happened that Deane's uncle had sold a lot of his books to Old Spragg, the second-hand bookseller, among which was the battered blue book, "Crimes of Fifty Years Ago", the description of which Ginter had obtained from Deane's uncle. Ginter had arrived at the shop just as Nipper had emerged with the very book he wanted. Which is where we all came in!

Despite feeling some sympathy at Ginter's frustration, Lee hands him over to the police. He is sent back to prison for a further term not only because he was intent on securing valuable stolen property but also because of his burglarisation of the school and the dangerous attack on the three juniors and housemaster from St. Frank's.

Nipper and Co. are each given a magnificent gold watch by Sir James Massington for the recovery of the priceless possessions he had never expected to see again and Lee, as

Mr. Alvington, contrives to keep himself out of the newspaper reports of the treasure's recovery.



NO ORCHIDS FOR SEXTON BLAKE!

by J.E.M.

George Orwell's unwelcome views on boys' weeklies have not exactly made him a hero in OBB circles. But take a look at another offering from this critic. In his essay, "Raffles and Miss Blandish", written in 1944, Orwell argued that British crime fiction had fallen increasingly under the influence of American "pulp" writing, a prime example being that notorious nasty, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, published at the beginning of World War Two. A brutal gangster tale, written in pseudo-American, its author was an Englishman who had never even been to the States.

Orwell suggested that, in the past, fictional baddies of the Raffles breed had usually possessed a number of old-fashioned virtues - Raffles himself was not described as a gentleman crook for nothing. In his code, some things were "simply not done". By contrast, in novels of the *No Orchids* kind, anything and everything is done. Cruelty by crooks and cops alike is described without disapproval and even with downright relish. *No Orchids* itself seems to have attracted a large audience during the Nazi blitz on our cities but, whatever its connection with the war, its strongest links, as Orwell suggested, were clearly transatlantic in origin. Which (at last!) brings me to wartime Sexton Blake.

I have just been re-reading *The Secret of the Demolition Worker* by John Hunter (*SBL* No. 31, Third Series), published in 1942. One distinguished Blakian expert has described Hunter as "the nearest British equivalent to the high-production pulp fictioneers who flourished in the States during the 1930s". Hunter's writing is seen as "punchy, pacey, dramatic, often violent and always readable". On the evidence of *SBL* referred to, it is hard to quibble with any of this judgement but it is the "violent" ingredient I particularly want to look at in the light of Orwell's essay.

How close to the *No Orchids* school did John Hunter get? To be fair, he made only part of the distance but there are a few significant signposts. Written only a couple of years or so after *No Orchids*, Hunter's story contains at least one chapter horrific enough to bear comparison with anything in the earlier work. It describes the torture of an elderly man by (significantly?) an American gangster, though the story itself is set in wartime London. We are spared no detail of the violence which leads to the victim's death and, later, a helpless woman is threatened with the same treatment.

I have to confess to reading only two or three other wartime Blakes so I really can't judge how typical of the period Hunter's writing was. As a devoted Blakian, I can only say that this episode left an unpleasant taste - which is rather sad since much of the tale itself is entertaining and even quite memorable.

The plot concerns the discovery in the bombed-out remains of a lawyer's office of a box containing the clue to a vast fortune. Naturally this is soon the target of criminals of every stripe, from "respectable" lawyers to shady inhabitants of the East End. Almost all the characters are sharply drawn; one or two, like a cunning, unscrupulous drab from the docklands and a ruthless but cowardly young solicitor, remain strongly in the memory.

John Hunter seems so concerned, in fact, to make his characters live that Sexton Blake himself tends to get pushed into the background. Out of 26 chapters, Blake appears in only half a dozen - and then sometimes only marginally. Tinker is separately featured in at least three while Inspector Pike of Scotland Yard gets plenty of limelight. In addition, Blake is shown to be rather slow on the uptake in following leads in the case; he is even twitted about this by Tinker. (Incidentally, is this the first story in which Tinker assumes the name of Carter?)

One way and another, the old Blakian image comes out of the story pretty badly. Even the brutal torturer is brought to book by a character who seems to have come from a similar mould. In the old days, it would have been a two-fisted Blake who did the job. Altogether, it is almost as if Hunter would have preferred to dispense with Blake altogether. Certainly, in this tough Americanised mode, Blake cuts a rather awkward figure.

So, did the tendency Orwell described make very much impact on the wartime Blakian saga as a whole? And what of the post-war "New Look" Blake? For me, as an old-fashioned Blakian, the great case-book was effectively closed well before Organisation Man and a sexed-up Sexton took the stage. Perhaps more widely-read Blakians will throw some light for us on the general tone of those later years.

(Footnote: A copy of *The Secret of the Demolition Worker* is one of the very few post-1939 Blakian items to come into my possession. It is valued principally because as an Eric Parker fan I also possess, courtesy of pop lit expert Jack Adrian, the original cover design by E.P., which can be (and is) enjoyed independently of the story it illustrates.)

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DETECTIVE O'FLYNN

by Bill Lofts

**JOIN YOUR OLD FAVOURITE, PAT O'FLYNN, IN HIS ROUSING NEW ADVENTURES
WITH SCRAPPER BUCKROO, THE BIG DETECTIVE. EVERY STORY COMPLETE.**

Patrick O'Flynn was a giant of a man, and as strong as a horse. He was Irish, from Ballygoyle. A soldier of fortune and world adventurer, he saved the life of



**DETECTIVE
O'FLYNN**
IN
THE RED ROBBER OF THE AIR.

a famous Scotland yard detective nicknamed Scrapper Buckroo, and became his assistant. Later, when Inspector Buckroo had retired from Scotland Yard, O'Flynn became a private detective himself, setting up the O'Flynn Detective Agency. These tales were comical at times and unpretentious. They appeared in *The Jolly Jester* comic in 1923.

HEDLEY O'MANT, THE ALMOST FORGOTTEN AUTHOR

by Joe Ashley

In over twenty years of reading *Collector's Digest*, I have read about many of our favourite authors, e.g. Charles Hamilton, Edwy Searles Brooks and various Sexton Blake authors. But I have found little mention of one of the most prolific writers of nineteen-thirties boys' fiction, Hedley Angelo O'Mant. He was perhaps better known as Hedley Scott and Captain Robert Hawke, a name he shared with its originator G.M. Bowman. He took over the popular Baldy's Angels stories from Bowman. This First World War flying series was one of the main attractions in *The Ranger*, of which magazine O'Mant was the editor. He later edited its successor, *The Pilot*, and created another First World War flying series 'Pups of the Bulldog Breed'. O'Mant could write from personal experience for he was a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in the 1914-1918 conflict. In the Second World War he served in the Royal Air Force as a Squadron Leader Non-operational.

If his First World War stories depicted the Germans as arrogant, and of the Himmel and Donner und Blitzen types, and his R.F.C. Mess indulged in schoolboy pranks, well, we were schoolboys when we read the tales and his war-in-the-air stories were very exciting!

Charles Hamilton created the character Ferrers Locke, Detective, and used him in some of his Greyfriars stories. O'Mant took the character over, much to the resentment of Charles Hamilton. But I presume Amalgamated Press held the copyright so there was very little he could do about it. O'Mant wrote of Locke as a squadron leader and master spy in the First World War. Later he was depicted as a private detective with his young assistant Jack Drake, not unlike Sexton Blake and Tinker. Indeed O'Mant wrote two Sexton Blake stories in the *Sexton Blake Library* (648 'The Suspected Six', and 695 'The Mystery of the Missing Refugee').

Some years ago I obtained from the late Doctor Bob Wilson some *Boys' Friend Libraries*. Among these were two volumes of Hedley Scott stories. I was surprised at the variety of tales O'Mant had written. Pirate, Football, Flying, Detective, School and Speedway stories.

In these two volumes I found one of my favourite Ferrers Locke stories, 'The Man Behind The Scenes' which had appeared as a serial in the *Magnet*. I still enjoy reading it. O'Mant was not above rehashing a story. The late Bill Lofts supplied me with a list of *B.F.L.s* - which I have mislaid - but it showed 'The Football Crooks', which was reprinted as 'The Rangers Recruit' (325 *B.F.L.*).

Men Behind Boys' Fiction by Lofts and Adley states that O'Mant wrote substitute stories for the *Gem*, *Magnet* and *Popular* and edited *Wild West Weekly*. It also says that he was probably the most popular editor at the Amalgamated Press.

He wrote many serials later compressed into *Boys' Friend Libraries*. I think he wrote about 20 *B.F.L.s* but cannot verify this, for, as I have noted, I have mislaid my list. He was indeed a prolific writer but not to be compared with Charles Hamilton or Edwy Searles Brooks for output.

Sadly Hedley Angelo O'Mant died in 1955 of bronchial pneumonia at the early age of 56 years.

Editor's Note: By a strange coincidence, on the day when I received Mr Ashley's article I had been reading about Hedley O'Mant in a letter from John Wheway which was published in the October 1961 issue of *The Record* (Fleetway Press's house magazine). I reprint this letter here, as it throws some light on Hedley O'Mant, who appears to have been an extremely colourful character:

In the August issue of *The Record* I wrote that I had been informed that Hedley O'Mant (what a boy *he* was!) had been killed in an air crash. I also said that I didn't believe it, but the truth (which I entertain with a sense of sad bewilderment) has been given to me by Hedley's own daughter, Miss P.E. O'Mant. I am sure I have her permission to quote from her letter, as follows:

"You might like to know just for the record that he [her father] died from heart trouble, caused through the war, nearly five years ago."

I do remember now that Hedley was invalided out of the R.A.F. about 1944 when he surprisingly popped up among us at the "White Swan", next door to Fleetway. I have many happy and hilarious memories of him both in and out of the office, for life was always exciting and colourful when one found oneself in Hedley's company. As a young man he was a successful author who wrote under the name of Hedley Scott, though what inspired him to use *that* surname I can't fathom, seeing that he was one of the most typical Irishmen

I've ever met. He was always one of the best and (when he had any) more than free with his money.

Some light on the air crash rumour is shed by a letter I have received from W.O.G. Lofts, a stalwart of the *Old Boys' Book Club*. Mr Lofts attributes the rumour to a story told by Samways, a friend of Hedley's, who had a vivid dream during which this air crash incident most realistically happened. Samways must have told this dream to somebody who accepted it as gospel and so spread the story as fact.

Thus the mystery is exploded. But I can't get rid of that odd feeling that Hedley is still around somewhere.

Yours sincerely,
J.W.

I-SPY, BIG CHIEFS, CODES AND REDSKINS by Laurence Price

"We get on the real Downs about five miles farther on," said Mr Reed. "The children will love them and there are some fascinating almost forgotten churches that very few people visit, I'm afraid. Now then, all of you, which style will you each take?"

This had been a favourite game with the children on their last tour. They each chose a style of architecture and tried to recognise it in the little churches. They made some queer mistakes but they learnt a lot too, and found that buildings got more and more interesting the more they knew.

"I shall be Perpendicular," said Paul.

"I'll be Saxon," said Tony, who didn't know much about it.

"And I'll be Modern," said Patsy, "that's easiest, and Mother can be Decorated and Daddy Early English. Now we're fixed."

from *The Caravan Family* by M.D. Hillyard (c.1933)

The family might have been better 'fixed' and avoided some of those 'queer mistakes' had they been carrying a copy of *I-Spy Churches* but they were a decade or so too early!

I first discovered the little books in the mid-to-late nineteen fifties when their colourful covers carried such titles as *I-SPY - CARS - 6d - NEWS CHRONICLE - I-SPY No 16*, while inside the book was liberally illustrated with dozens of excellent line drawings and simple descriptions, to help you to 'spy' and spot the subject illustrated, with high points awarded for the less common or difficult ones. Also inside was an introduction from Big Chief I-SPY that read:

With I-SPY CARS you'll get some fun wherever you are. On her way to the dentist a REDSKIN spotted a vintage Bentley, and it cheered her up even on that doleful journey.

The rarer the car, the more the excitement - and the bigger the score. You'll soon get an eye for the helpful details - stoneguards, bonnet straps, grilles, louvres, and such like - and you'll become quite knowledgeable about them.

I-SPY Cars! A fascinating interest - and one that will make you safer on the roads. The more alert you are to cars and their speed, the less likely you are to put yourself in danger.



Austin Seven (13)
Perhaps the best known of all British cars.

The Austin Seven was introduced as far back as 1922, and

grew up a bit as the years rolled by. Count your points for any early example of this popular car.



Austin A40 (14) I-SPY the vertical "Winged-A", the heart-shaped top panel of the bonnet, and the front mud-guards sweeping down to join the half-spats on the rear mudguards. Count your points for an open or saloon car of this make.

I-SPYed	When	Where	Score
(13)			20
(14)			10

In those more innocent days we found no problems in accepting a wise paternal message from Big Chief I-Spy or being identified as a Redskin; this reflected an affinity and admiration for the Indians and their great ability to observe and track in the wild. And there was genuine and innocent *excitement* to be had from seeing a 1913 Vauxhall 30/98 for which one could award oneself a near maximum 34 points; although I'd award myself a lot more than the minimum 10 points if I saw an Austin A40 Devon convertible today! And as for a Crossley Regis ...

The first Big Chief, and originator of the I-SPY series was Charles Warrell, who was born in 1889 and eventually lived to be over 100 years old. He was born the son of a West Country schoolmaster and was himself a headmaster by the age of 23. His first book was *The Science of the Soil* published in 1920.

He had a belief in education as "the fun of finding out" and from 1940 was producing small self-help guides, which sold in millions through Woolworth's at 9d (3.75p) plus his shilling (5p)

Warrell Guides.

Long inspired by the Woodcraft Indians movement founded by E.T. Seton in Connecticut in 1902 and similar Indian Lore organisations, Warrell adapted this approach for the launch of the first I-SPY Warrell Way Spotterbooks which he published in 1948-9, initially at one shilling each, in a horizontal format.

But Warrell's "REDSKINS" were expected to "do their I-SPYing in the streets and roads, as well as the woods and fields" which might be taken as a pragmatic twentieth century approach to traditional Indian woodcraft and lore!

You could also join the I-Spy Tribe which gave you "the right to use the SECRET CODES and the SECRET SIGN". The I-SPY CODE BOOK explained the Tribal Rules and what was expected of every true REDSKIN. Big Chief I-SPY resided in the Wigwam-by-the-Water, at various locations in London and elsewhere, and wished all his Redskins, in code, Odhu/ntinggo. I am, of course, still honour bound not to reveal this secret code to anyone; perhaps a visit to Bletchley Park,



Jack and Jill on the I-SPY trail

Do you travel by road? Then, like Fleet-foot with Jack and Jill, you can have the thrill of the I-SPY trail.

"I-SPY On The Road" gives you 120 things to look for—and you can get a score for each one you spot!

Yes, I-SPY is a wizard idea—and it's smashing to see your score grow.

Score 1,250 points—and if you are a REDSKIN you will be entitled to an Order of Merit with the Tribal Rank of ROAD SCOUT—2nd Class. Score 1,500 points—that's the full score—and you reach First Class Honours.

With each rank you move up one place at the Council Fire. Odhu/ntinggo, REDSKIN.

Big Chief I-SPY

NEWS CHRONICLE Wigwam, LONDON

where the German Enigma Code was broken during the Second World War, might be the answer!

The first I-SPY titles included "Famous Cars", "In the Country" and "Football Stars". From 1949-51 the *Daily Mail* took on the series in the same format but at a reduced price of 6d (2.5p) each, with new titles such as "At the Circus" and "Dogs".

From 1951-60, and the period I remember them the best, they changed to the more familiar vertical format and were published by the *News Chronicle* at 6d. They soon had full-colour and very attractive covers and the range extended to 39 titles - "Churches" was the last to be published in those years.

News Chronicle—I-SPY The Unusual 41

Chemist (72)
 I-SPY the pestle and mortar—not as common as the large coloured bottles—see "I-SPY in The Street."

Where?

When?

Score (20)



Camera Shop (73)
 Where?

When?

Score (10)



There were some wonderful additions, perhaps the most curious being No. 24 in the series "The Unusual". Things to spot included a thatched telephone kiosk, a pestle and mortar sign for a chemist, a Tram-pinch road sign (a warning of a narrow space between the pavement and the tram lines) or a railway tunnel chimney or a street lamp on a pillar box!

In the one shilling I-SPY Colour Series such as "In Pond and Stream" could be found such underwater horrors as the Carnivorous Water Beetle described thus:- "This beetle is a ferocious fighter. It can dive and fly - almost a flying submarine."

In *I-SPY - AIRCRAFT - 6d - NEWS CHRONICLE - I-SPY No 15*, from about 1954, could be found a car-carrying Bristol Freighter, the Avro Vulcan bomber and surely forgotten trainers like the Miles Magister. Each little book is a time-capsule of the period, in design and outlook.

From the early nineteen-sixties various attempts have been made to update the format.

The Dickens Press produced a more glossy 2/6d (12.5p) series, often with photographs, such as I-SPY "Cars", from 1965-68. That particular book included pop-art and road map backgrounds but the simple charm of the 6d books was gone.

I-SPY books continue to this day, now published by Michelin and still pocket-size but much more glossy and full of colour photographs. All references to Big Chiefs and Redskins have been carefully excised, although for a few years, about 1983-87, the naturalist, David Bellamy, was an enthusiastic CHIEF I-SPY and helped to update the books.

Different formats, annuals and promotional editions for companies have also appeared over the years but, for me, nothing will ever compare with the little 6d books produced in the nineteen-fifties and their wonderful line illustrations and colourful covers.

The final series 'starring' Wharton was the famous 'Doubles' saga (*Magnets* 1422-33) of 1935. Having recounted Harry's rise from a spoilt, sulky new boy to a self-reliant leader, and having shown - three times - how inherent faults in his character could generate (or at least contribute to) a fall from favour, Frank Richards now created an *alter ego* to cause Wharton the most trouble he had ever experienced.

The 'doppelgänger' ploy had been worked by Hamilton several times in the first two decades of the *Magnet* and the *Gem*. Peter and Alonzo Todd; George Wingate and a wastrel cousin; Tom Merry and Reggie Clavering; George and Gilbert Grundy; Mr Quelch and Klick Ferrers; Tommy Dodd (Rookwood) and another wastrel cousin;

and Paul and Rufus Slimmey (Cedar Creek) had all been subjects of short series of mistaken identity. Only Bunter's 'double' had generated a long saga (*Magnet* and *Gem* 1919), probably because it was really two semi-independent series - Billy at St. Jim's; Wally at Greyfriars. Both Bunters had potent reasons for exploiting their physical likeness; consequently, their deception lasted longer than any of the others mentioned above. It was Billy's stupidity that caused their fall.

Wharton's 'double' was of a different calibre altogether. The rascally 'twin' theme had been tried by Hamilton in brief spurts - Merry, Quelch, Slimmey - but Clavering, Ferrers and Rufus Slimmey had no redeeming features. Their characters were too different from those whom they impersonated for success to be anything but fleeting. Good triumphed over evil each time because the 'heroes' were too upright for their apparent descents 'to the dogs' to be credible. With Wharton, his chequered record of arrogant behaviour gave a determined rival a real chance of pulling him down.

Ralph Stacey was a relation of Harry's - a poor relation. He was a clever student, a great cricketer - and a scheming rascal. He was jealous of Wharton; and very like him in looks. Apart, it was easy to mistake one for the other. Their first clash came at Wharton Lodge; Stacey, in Harry's absence, had been smoking in the 'den'. Wharton ejected him, but not before Stacey had made it clear that Harry, as a nephew, had no more 'rights' at Wharton Lodge than he, Stacey, had. Later, their animosity was exacerbated when Stacey butted into cricket practice.

Hurree Singh was Harry's guest and the obnoxious Ralph batted impregably against Inky's bowling. Then he proceeded to demolish Wharton's wicket with ease. Harry, already miffed, did not take kindly to being outshone. When Stacey repeated the process

HARRY WHARTON'S DOUBLE!

By FRANK RICHARDS



on the tennis court - supplemented by taunts and swank - the antagonism of the Doubles became permanent.

Stacey went to Greyfriars - at Colonel Wharton's expense. At Courtfield Junction, Bob Cherry mistook him for Wharton. Stacey disillusioned him; a row ensued; the new boy was stranded on the platform. Then Bunter, under the same misapprehension, conned 'Wharton' into taking a taxi to Greyfriars. Stacey was saddled with the bill. Other mistakes followed, chiefly because the Doubles shunned each other and were not seen together until bedtime.

Skinner, always malicious, had sent Stacey to the Fifth Form passage on a wild-goose chase. There, Coker had licked Stacey in mistake for Wharton. In the dormitory, Stacey exacted retribution by pulling Skinner's nose. High-minded Harry decided that Stacey was bullying and chipped in. A full-scale scrap was interrupted by Mr Quelch. 500 lines apiece was the result.

Stacey, eager to supplant Harry with Colonel Wharton, set out to be a model pupil. Quelch was soon regarding him as one of his best scholars. His cricketing prowess made him popular in the Remove. Harry had to be 'advised' very firmly by the Co. to include Stacey in the trial match against the Upper Fourth.

Billeted in Study No. 1, Stacey turned up there while Harry was finishing his lines. (Like a good boy, Ralph had already done his.) Swanking remarks about his value to Remove cricket got Wharton's 'goat'. Another scrap resulted in spoiling Wharton's lines. Quelch was displeased; Harry, thinking Stacey had done it deliberately, self-righteously decided that Ralph was not 'decent' enough to play for the Remove. Public opinion sided with Stacey.

Temple of the Fourth took a hand. Shrewdly, he recruited Stacey for his XI. Stacey, eager to embarrass Wharton, took care to butter up Temple's ego. Facing a tough task, the Remove were not pleased with their skipper.

When the Upper Fourth won by an innings (Stacey 120 plus about 14 wickets), Wharton's popularity sank to zero. His determination to omit Stacey from school matches was bound to bring trouble.

Before that could occur, the Doubles had a brief *rapprochement* - courtesy of Cecil Ponsonby. The Highcliffians ragged Stacey in mistake for Wharton. Harry came to his rescue; together they routed the ragers. Surprised by Wharton's chivalry, Stacey had a change of heart and resolved to be 'civil' in future. Harry accepted the olive branch - but with mental reservations.

The rift soon re-opened. Quelch spotted Stacey at the Three Fishers. Reacting swiftly, the young rascal established an alibi. Wharton, out alone in his skiff, could not supply one. Quelch gave him the benefit of the doubt, but Wharton's sensitivities were offended. He accused Stacey of deliberately 'framing' him. Stacey hadn't, but the suspicion set his devious mind to work. Further offences would be laid at Harry's door.

Greyfriars, minus Stacey, played Courtfield - and lost. Wharton, faced with the Remove's resentment, gave them an ultimatum: "If you want Stacey, I stand down!" Some of the team were inclined to take him at his word.

In these early episodes all Harry's inborn insecurity surfaced. Stacey's jibes about his 'dependent nephew' status made him question his uncle's true regard for him. Temporarily overshadowed by Stacey's cricketing skills, Wharton mounted the high horse, excluding his rival on 'moral' grounds. This promptly left him open to Skinner's suggestion that he didn't want Stacey 'stealing his thunder'. Despite his courage and leadership qualities, Harry was always emotionally insecure. He resented being an orphan and he hated the idea of being ' beholden ' to anyone. Stacey did not have to work very hard to exploit Wharton's weaknesses.

The next disaster was almost entirely due to Harry's lack of self-control. Skinner chalked an insult on the door of Study No. 1. Wharton lost his temper and Quelch found him 'bullying' Skinner. Matters were made worse by insolence and Wharton was detained. He promptly broke detention.

Out of gates, Harry saw Mr Prout threatened by a footpad. He went to the rescue and stunned the footpad. While Prout was recovering, Wharton bolted - but not before he was recognised.

Meanwhile, Stacey had taken Harry's place in detention - a good deed in return for Wharton's help against the Highcliffe ragers. Quelch was deceived, but when Prout arrived, full of praise for 'Wharton', Stacey was saddled with the kudos for the rescue. Harry, of course, was angrily dismissive of Stacey's well-meant impersonation. He thought it was 'cheek'. It required some terse home truths from Bob Cherry to deter Wharton from exposing the masquerade.

Stacey had to endure 'conquering hero' status - and Wharton appeared churlish by refusing to honour 'the brave deed'. Then Bunter nosed out the subterfuge - and it all became common knowledge. Stacey 'confessed' to Quelch - he couldn't "bear honours that were not rightly his" - and Wharton collected a Head's flogging. This was a bad error on Quelch's part. Wharton had 'cut' detention, but he had saved Prout. Stacey, who had deceived Quelch, was let off altogether. Both should have been punished - or neither. 'Two weights and measures' invariably lead to further trouble.

In the next story, roles were almost reversed. Wingate spotted Stacey 'blagging' with Ponsonby & Co. The delinquent made a bolt for it, got back to Greyfriars, and went straight to Quelch for 'help with Livy'. Wharton was out of gates at the time - Wingate assumed he was the culprit and gave him 'six'. Harry's riposte was to delete Stacey from the list for the Highcliffe match.

Faced by injustice, Wharton always over-reacted. He never took punishment philosophically; any hint of unfairness would make him seethe. By using his position as captain to get his own back on Stacey, Harry came perilously close to Stacey's level. Though nine other members of the side deserved consideration, all Wharton could think of was avenging the harsh treatment of himself.

Wholesale resignation followed - met with icy indifference by Harry. While the Remove were collecting an innings of defeat at Highcliffe, Stacey was rescuing a drowning Bunter from the Sark. Later, the Doubles chanced on each other out of gates. Harry, feeling guilty about the match, was ripe for a row. Stacey, fatigued by his aquatic exertions, could not resist an untimely taunt. They fought: Wharton knocked out Stacey.

Back at Greyfriars, Harry was suspected of picking a fight with a man 'under par'. Quelch gave him lines for fighting: Stacey went unpunished - more injustice!

Bitter and resentful, Wharton resigned the captaincy - and vowed to cut cricket altogether. His moves were now being dictated by pride, resentment and anger - not the happiest of motivators!

Before the captaincy election, Stacey played against the Shell (under the temporary leadership of Vernon-Smith) and covered himself with glory. Then Quelch sacked Wharton as Head Boy and appointed Stacey in his place. The outcome of the election seemed obvious.

Unfortunately for Stacey, his likeness to Wharton now worked against him. Harry was accosted by a man from the Three Fishers, who gave him a note from Joey Banks intended for Stacey. For the first time in this series, Wharton used his head. He offered the letter to Stacey before a crowd of Removites, giving a graphic account of how he had come by it. Stacey denied any connection with it. Wharton then proposed to take the letter to Quelch - to put himself in the clear. Stacey, not daring to involve Quelch, had to admit in public that

the letter was his. His reputation nose-dived: Tom Brown, persuaded to stand by Harry, was elected Captain of the Remove.

Discredited, Stacey visited the Three Fishers. Bunter followed - in Wharton's raincoat. Stacey, afraid of Bunter's tattling, abandoned his spree. Bunter stayed, playing billiards. Then Quelch arrived and Bunter barely escaped - leaving Wharton's raincoat in his hurry. Quelch impounded the coat: back at Greyfriars he took Wharton before the Head. Harry, who had visited Courtfield with the Co., was able to account for his whole afternoon. Quelch, having involved Dr Locke with a mistaken accusation, was highly embarrassed.

Stacey's clandestine peccadilloes increased. His wastrel father, Captain Stacey, 'needed' £50. Ralph, to help his parent, backed 'Pork Pie' at 5 to 1 - on tick! Playing cricket at St. Jude's, he gleefully anticipated the result of the race. Pork Pie lost: Stacey was devastated. He played poorly. St. Jude's were winning when Wharton, included in the side by Tom Brown against his own inclinations, batted splendidly and turned the match. Roles reversed - with a vengeance!

With Quelch, Harry was still in bad odour. A disrespectful rag - quite in Smithy's style - convinced Quelch that Wharton was at the Three Fishers again. Hauled before the Head, Wharton called on Wingate and Gwynne as his alibi. Then he admitted the 'spooft': "I did it to make a fool of him" (Quelch). Harry was exonerated, and Quelch was 'wigged' by his principal: "Such mistakes bring authority into contempt." When, later, Quelch had a chance at Wharton - the Doubles had been fighting again - he did not spare the rod.

Stacey's 'black sheep' status was becoming known in the Remove. Vernon-Smith had 'rumbled' him; the Famous Five and Bunter knew him for a rascal; so did Lord Mauleverer. The reckoning for 'Pork Pie' - Joe Banks wanted £10 - found Stacey pinching a letter addressed to Mauleverer. The Famous Five suspected the theft. They pursued Stacey to Popper's Island, where he was steaming open the letter. A fracas ensued; Wingate interrupted it; Stacey got clear with the letter. Afraid of discovery, he planted the letter on Bunter - who lost it. Later, it turned up, with the tenner intact. To save Wharton a family scandal, Mauly gave Stacey the tenner. Banks was paid and Stacey survived.

His cricketing form returned and he was selected for the 1st XI. Stephen Price, aware of Stacey's selection, backed Greyfriars to beat Highcliffe for £10. Gerald Loder, unaware of Stacey's inclusion, took the bet. When he found out, Loder, already hard-up, was desperate. Then luck intervened - good for Loder, bad for Stacey.

On yet another visit to the Three Fishers, Stacey was seen by Loder. (Stacey's carelessness on these occasions can only be explained by his confidence in using his likeness to Wharton. So long as he could elude capture there was a good chance of landing the trouble on Harry.) Indeed, Loder thought he had spotted Wharton. For once, Harry had a firm alibi; therefore the culprit was Stacey. Loder, a victim of Price's sharp practice, solved his problem by blackmailing Stacey: "Play badly, or I put in a report."

Stacey, in a cleft stick, bowled badly and Highcliffe took a first innings lead. Then, humiliated by the spectators' reaction, he partially redeemed himself with a hat-trick against the Highcliffe tail. Loder, furious, looked for Stacey during the tea interval to 'read the riot act'. Unluckily, he picked on Wharton instead. Harry, his suspicions aroused by Smithy ("Somebody's trying to help Highcliffe win"), let Loder run on until he had incriminated himself and Stacey. Then he revealed his identity and threatened to 'shop' the precious pair.

Leaving Loder in abject fright, Wharton saw Stacey and persuaded him to 'play up'. Highcliffe, set 50 to win, were skittled for 20. The Doubles visited Price and the £10 went into the hospital box. Evil defeated; sportsmanship upheld; and, temporarily, a truce between the rivals.

The respite was short-lived. Bunter was given 'six', plus a 'book', for cribbing. (Smithy had helped Bunter with a form exercise. Bunter, predictably, left the 'crib' with his paper. Stacey collected the papers: Quelch disapproved strongly. Smithy collected a 'book' as well.) Indignant with Stacey, Bunter went on the warpath - and blacked Wharton's eye by mistake! That physical similarity really was a drawback!

Smithy, also vengeful, hit at Stacey more successfully. Ralph went on a night-time 'razzle'; Smithy locked him out. Stacey tried getting in at Mr Capper's window - a reckless enterprise, born of desperation. Capper was awakened; Stacey had to run for it. With his wits working overtime, he blacked his own eye - with ink from a fountain-pen. After a hair-raising chase, Stacey dodged into the House - but not before he was recognised, complete with black eye. In the dormitory, he cleaned off the ink, got back to bed - and watched while Quelch carted Wharton off to the punishment room.

Despite hot denials, Harry was not believed. Vernon-Smith, dismayed that Stacey had got clear, did some hard thinking. Next morning, he appeared in public - sporting a black eye. Some calculated insolence when Quelch questioned him led to Smithy being caned. When Wharton went before Dr Locke, Smithy barged in and raised 'reasonable doubt' in the matter by washing off his own black eye in the masters' presence. The Head took the view that Stacey could have done the same - Wharton's bacon was saved. Quelch, on the other hand, was convinced of Harry's guilt.

Stacey, livid with Vernon-Smith, removed the Bounder's 'book' from Quelch's study. Bunter, concealed under the desk (he had been ragging Quelch), saw the culprit's legs. The inquiry exonerated Smithy. Bunter was caned; but Stacey had come close to exposure.

If Wharton's pride and short temper often aggravated his troubles, Stacey's gambling propensities did as much for him. Both had arrogant streaks: Wharton's made him feel 'above suspicion'; Stacey's led him to think he was 'too clever to be caught'. Resentment in each was a weakness. Harry's came out in sulky defiance; Stacey's, deeper-seated, was based on jealousy - the poor relation. Wharton's instincts were basically good; Stacey's were evil. Consequently, Harry did the occasional bad deed; Stacey, less frequently, did a good one.

The closing stages of this saga saw the plotter coming more into the open as he tried to destroy his rival. As a result, Stacey ran more risks than before. Dr Locke, at least, was not prepared to blame Wharton without clear proof when the Doubles were involved.

This became clear in the 'burnt barn' affair. Mr Piker, a local farmer, found Stacey smoking in his barn. Stacey bolted, but his cigarette set fire to the straw. £5 of damage was done (don't forget, this was in 1935!). Piker identified Wharton - until he saw Stacey. Neither had an alibi - the Head reserved judgement. Colonel Wharton, however, was sent the damages bill. Later, he wrote to Harry telling him to pay the bill "from his own resources". (Quelch's adverse reports had had their effect.) Stacey, in the clear, seemed well on the way to success.

Then the tide turned. Vernon-Smith, deliberately, Bunter, unintentionally, and Fisher T. Fish, unscrupulously, placed Stacey in danger. First, Smithy ruthlessly exposed the plotter to Wingate and Quelch. Dear Ralph came into school with cigarettes in his pocket; Smithy, in the know, accused him to Wingate; Stacey's only recourse was to refuse to turn out his pockets. He appealed to Quelch; when the cigarettes came to light, he claimed they had been 'planted' on him. Wingate did not believe him; Quelch, with difficulty, did.

Meanwhile, a row in Fishy's study scattered his 'takings' all over the floor. In the confusion, Bunter swiped a fiver and hid it in a book (revenge for Fishy's meanness). Fishy, naturally, assumed that the fiver had been stolen. Wharton, one of those present at the row, later received £5 from his Aunt Amy to pay Mr Piker. Fish promptly concluded that Harry had taken his fiver. He complained to Stacey, who, as Head Boy, dutifully reported the 'theft' to Quelch. Wharton, incensed by the accusation, was insolent to

Quelch (Stacey might make things bad; Harry could always make them worse). Of course, Bunter's prank came to light and Quelch, for once, excused Wharton. Instead, he gave Stacey a severe 'wiggling'.

Colonel Wharton had already decided to move Harry to another school next term. (Quelch had made it clear that he preferred to keep Stacey!) This was sad for Wharton, but it didn't suit Stacey, either. Harry, in new surroundings, would soon re-establish his reputation; Ralph's rule-breaking would be much more risky without a double to fix it on. Stacey wanted to disinherit Harry. He had to achieve that before the end of term.

The first effort came a cropper - on Bunter. Stacey lay in ambush for Quelch in the Head's garden. Bunter, hiding there with a tin of purloined toffees, was squirted with ink intended for Quelch. Wharton's cap, left by Stacey as 'evidence', proved a waste. Quelch's inquiry left him more suspicious of Stacey than Harry.

The next bid was drastic. At night, Stacey poured indelible ink over Quelch's books and papers, including the manuscripts of "The History of Greyfriars". The ink bottle and its dregs were to be planted on Wharton.

There, the plot foundered. Bunter, on a tuck-raid, blundered into Stacey in the dark - and the bottle was smashed. Quelch's investigation the following morning traced the ink to the Remove dormitory but there was no clear indication of the culprit. Wharton - and Stacey - were in the clear.



"I guess I mean business!" said Fisher T. Fish, mistaking Wharton for Stacey. "I ain't told a single guy about seeing you at the Three Fishers. I ain't going to, neither. You can pull Quelch's leg as much as you like. But I'll mention that it will pay you to buy the hat I'm offering for sale." Mr. Quelch, on the other side of the big elm, heard every word.

Nemesis came in the form of Fisher T. Fish. Earlier, Fishy had spotted Stacey at the Three Fishers. Being Fishy, he had feathered his nest by 'selling' his silence. Stacey had to buy a succession of 'tatty' articles to preserve his reputation. Now, the notorious 'likeness', so exploited by Stacey, worked against him. Fishy mistook Harry for Stacey and tried to 'put the screw' on him - in the open quad. A row ensued - and Quelch, sitting under the elms, heard it all.

It was the end of the road for Stacey. Quelch sent for Colonel Wharton. Together, they questioned the Doubles. Both denied entering the Three Fishers. Then Fishy was called in and, under severe cross-examination, he 'shopped' Stacey. The young rascal insolently defied the two men: "Cut out the pi-jaw! The game's up, I can see that. I'm sick

of Greyfriars and I'll be glad to go!" - and, after a grudging apology to Wharton, Stacey went.

So ended the final Wharton saga. He resumed his place as Head Boy and Captain of the Remove; re-entered his guardian's good books; and was restored to Quelch's favour. A bit hard on Tom Brown, perhaps, but a suitable happy ending.

Frank Richards probably felt that he had plumbed the Wharton well dry. In the remaining five years of the *Magnet*, Harry was a prominent supporting player but he never 'starred' in more than the occasional single story. Until - in the last *Magnet* of all - but that could make an interesting article on its own! Certainly, the high drama at Greyfriars - as opposed to the low comedy of Bunter, Coker etc. - was at its peak when Harry Wharton took centre stage.

SGOL AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by Dawn Marler

In September 1939 Britain and France were at war with Germany, following the German invasion of Poland. In the following year, 1940, the first series of the *SGOL* ended with numbers 732, "Their Mediterranean Mystery", and 733, "The Riddle of Ravenscar School". One of the reasons for its suspension was the paper shortage, but, at the time, it was hoped that the suspension would only be for a limited period, and that the *Libraries* would resume their appearance in the future. The *Libraries* did resume in 1946, "Secret Leader of the Rebel Four" being the first one. The new series had a new look, with colourful and exciting covers. However, during its run from 1946 to 1963, the *SGOL* was not going to be allowed to forget the war. Seven *SGOLs* of the second series were war stories, and there are a few that made brief references to the war, such as the mention of rationing books and clothing coupons. This was particularly so in "Assistant to the Secret Agent" (82), which was first serialised in the *Girls' Crystal* in 1948, when rationing was still very much in evidence. Its author, 'Dorothy Page', was the paper's editor, Stewart Pride.



CHUMS OF THE BLUE CHATEAU



The first one which could fully be termed a war story was "Chums of the Blue Chateau" (228) by Helen Crawford (H.E. Boyten) which had first appeared as a serial in the *School Friend* in 1953. The story is about two French girls, Suzie Fontaine and Blanche Lambert, at school in 1943 at the Blue Chateau in France, when that country was occupied by the Germans. The two girls helped a British airman, Pilot Officer Dick Stanley, who had landed by parachute into enemy territory; he was engaged on a secret mission for the Allies. Dick had been wounded and the girls hid him in an old deserted cottage, once a mill. He needed to obtain an envelope containing secret instructions; this was hidden in an old grandfather clock at Papa Danton's farm. Being wounded, Dick was unable to make the search. This was where the two girls were

able to help, because they were going to that very farm with other members of their school puppetry group to give a show. While at the farm they found the barn where the clock should have been, but only a clear space showed where it had once stood. However, they managed to track it down - just as it was about to be driven off as salvage by the Nazis. They found the package inside the clock and when they next saw Dick they excitedly handed it to him. The Nazi Commandant of the district later visited the school because he had heard that an allied airman might be in the district and receiving aid, which he suspected was from someone in the school. His suspicions brought about changes. The pupils now came under a Nazi regime. The much loved and respected Headmistress was replaced by a member of the Nazi Party. Continuing to aid the British airman, the chums were helping the Allies; they had become fighters for France under the suspicious eyes of the Nazis.

This was not the only story set in Nazi-occupied France. Others were the "Heroine of France" (330) by Janet McKibbin; "Mam'selle X" (380) and "Mam'selle Pimpernel" (396) both by Renee Frazer (Ronald Fleming).

"Heroine of France" features a brave family called 'Maxine' and a very courageous girl. They had a little curio shop, at least this was how it had appeared to the Nazis, although in fact this was an escape route for British prisoners. It was a secret haven - a refuge on the route to freedom. This gripping story depicts the

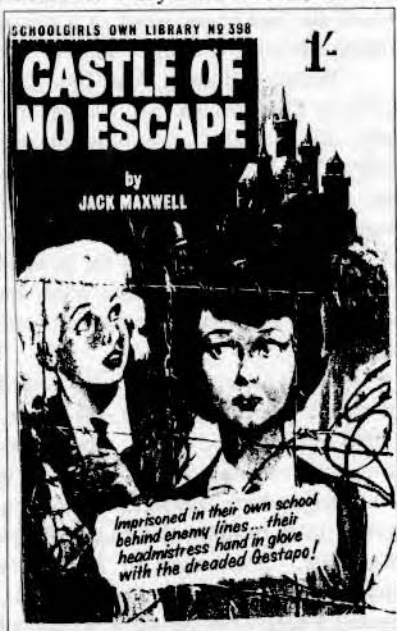


horrors of Nazi-occupied France. By the end of the story the Germans had been driven out. Vignon was once again a happy town. In peace-time some of the British airmen paid the curio shop a visit and saw again the cellar where they had been harboured until escape was possible. The war had brought them cruel enemies, but it had also brought them "friends they would cherish for ever".

"Mam'selle X" and "Mam'selle Pimpernel" were one and the same person. Her real name was La Belle Avril, an actress by profession and a girl of many disguises; this was necessary because she was a secret agent working for the French Resistance in the aim of liberating France from the terrors of the Nazi regime. "Mam'selle X" is set in Paris in 1944. A girls' boarding school had already come under fascist control, the former Headmistress being replaced by a female member of the Party. Any teacher who would not succumb to Nazi rule was dismissed. Avril arrived, disguised as a new Nazi mistress. Her purpose was to destroy a German secret weapon believed to be near the school. One of the pupils was to become her loyal helper and assistant in this daring mission. Again, a gripping story, success in that mission being its end. It enabled the long-awaited invasion by the Allies to take place; it was a great day for France!

In "Mam'selle Pimpernel" the story began in London, when Britain was under the shadow of the Blitz again, it was a daring mission for the secret agent. Danger threatened at every turn, Avril knew that the slightest slip would mean capture - even death. She was disguised as an air-raid warden. In this way she could watch a house in which lived a Professor and his two children. The Professor was engaged in secret work for the Allies. Avril feared for their safety. Her next disguise in the story was as a driver for a private hire-car firm; this was to enable her to transport the Professor and his children to the safety of some relatives in Shropshire. On the way there was a day-time air-raid; while in an air-raid shelter the children became separated from Avril and their father, and were kidnapped and taken to France. Avril, in another disguise, was parachuted there in pursuit of the children. They were found, rescued and eventually returned and England under her care. She had returned to England, after another of her many dangerous missions.

"Castle of No Escape" (398) by Jack Maxwell is set in Germany, in a castle which was a girls' boarding school, "Schloss Grabenstein". It is yet another school where the former Headmistress has been replaced by a woman of the Nazi Party. Four of the schoolmistresses do not conform to the regime, so they are dismissed. The school has become a prison, almost like a concentration camp, and as the title suggests there was no escape, although attempts were made. Those caught were severely punished and put into solitary confinement in the deep dungeons prepared for the purpose. Eventually three girls did escape via a secret



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by EILEEN McKEAG

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secret fighter
for freedom!



passage. Once outside they were helped by a British secret agent who was disguised as a German officer and was in the area for the purpose of finding these girls. Two of them, Fay and Debbie, were eventually reunited with their fathers who were on secret work for the Allies; the third, a German girl called Heidi, was hoping to go on to Switzerland as soon as possible. It was a happy ending in the midst of war. Fay and Debbie would not forget their friend Heidi, and the way they had got away from the castle of no escape.

"Terry's Double Role" (405) by Eileen McKeag is a story of a circus girl who became a fighter for freedom. At the beginning of the story the circus was on tour through countries not yet involved in the war, ending at Luxembourg, also a neutral country, or so the circus people thought. The clown Bocko had heard different, and he urged the owner to pack up the circus and head for France. But they were too late. On the way they became hemmed in by the enemy and had to camp

in a field under the watchful eyes of the Gestapo. The story had a happy ending, of course. The circus eventually was able to move on and progressed to Switzerland. There was plenty of action, drama and escapes. Terry eventually received good news of her mother, whom she had feared dead or a prisoner, and they were safely reunited. Again a happy ending while the war raged on.

"Wendy's Role in War-Time England" (270) by Elise Probyn (J.E. McKibbin) is the only *SGOL* that is set fully in war-time England; it is September 1940, the time of the Battle of Britain. The story is wonderfully told and the reader is drawn into the horrors of bombing and the privations of rationing, of meagre war-time food, and war work. In fact, it is a good social history of the time.

Wendy was a member of a theatrical troupe. When her father, an actor, was called up into the Navy, she joined the troupe and entertained servicemen. There is a mystery which surrounds a missing play script, stolen from the dressing room used by her father. It belonged to Wendy's uncle, and he accused her father of the theft. This caused a family rift between Wendy's father

WENDY'S ROLE IN WAR-TIME ENGLAND

BY
Elise Probyn



and her uncle. Doing war work in a Food Office as well as her entertainment work, Wendy set out to solve the mystery of the missing script to clear her father's name. This she achieves and the story has a happy ending, because not only does Wendy vindicate her father but - it was "August 15th, 1945 - and on that day the war ended and peace was signed". Peace from war, and peace within Wendy's family once again.

Regarding war-stories, it is fitting to mention the *SGOL* companion papers, because the post-war *School Friend*, *Girls' Crystal* and the *Schoolgirls' Picture Library* also carried these.

In the *School Friend* we find such stories as "Her Perilous Wartime Mission" by Anne Gilmore (John W. Wheway), *School Friend* July 1959. This ran as a serial to December 1959. Lucy Beaumont, from England, is at boarding school in France when the war breaks out. Stranded there, as the Nazis swept across the country, she is able to live with Madame Duprez and her son George, a member of the local resistance group. Lucy becomes involved in helping the group and she is featured again in another Wheway story in *School Friend* (May 21 to October 1960), this time as a "Schoolgirl Secret Agent".

There were also picture-strip stories of the war in the *School Friend*, such as "Mam'selle Marie - Heroine of Fountain School" (SF 1956); "Babette - Helper of the Boy Commando" (SF 1958); "Danger Line - 43" (SF 1960).

War stories in pictures also appeared in the *Girls' Crystal*, such as "Kit on Secret Service" (GC Mar. 4 1961); the "Burma Belle", bound for Rangoon, in war-time Burma.

The *Schoolgirls' Picture Library* also had its share of war stories, including "Schoolgirl Fighters for France" (114); "Fugitive of the Fjords" (270); "School Behind Enemy Lines" (275).

The occasional story about the war was carried over to the Christmas Annuals: the *Girls' Crystal Annual* for 1950, for example, had the story called "Her Perilous War-Time Task".

These war stories do not always carry the mystery or suspense so popular in the ordinary stories found in the *SGOL*, *SF* and *GC*. Rather, they are stories of reality, not fantasy. As I read these books I felt I was witnessing the horrors, not only of the war, but of the cruel and frightening Nazi regime itself.

In a way the stories are a tribute to the gallant work carried out by the French Resistance Movement. These books are well worth reading, and they make you feel thankful indeed that we and our allies won the Second World War.



YESTERDAY'S HEROES

The subject of BRIAN DOYLE's latest article in his series is Bruce Graeme's 'Blackshirt', a likeable adventurer in the tradition of A.J. Raffles and, like him, a 'gentleman-cracksman' who believed in the old axiom 'better safe than sorry' (except in his case he thought it better to rob a safe without saying sorry!) Graeme wrote over 100 books (including 13 about 'Blackshirt') and his son, Roderic, later turned out another 100 or so (including a further 20 about 'Blackshirt'). Prolific and versatile undoubtedly, but then so was Richard Verrell (also known to one or two as 'Blackshirt') in his astonishing life both before and after he became a smooth, charming (and tough) robber of the rich, and ultimately, patriot and agent for his country.

BLACKSHIRT THE AUDACIOUS



BRUCE GRAEME

'Blackshirt' might be described as the Georgian-Elizabethan equivalent of the Victorian-Edwardian 'Raffles' - a sort of streamlined, 'new look' version of the likeable rogue who operates technically on the wrong side of the law, but morally on the right side of everyone else. For Richard Verrell (that was his real name) kept the gentleman-cracksman's skills going strong and successfully between, and after, two world wars. He was a famous, or rather infamous, cracksman-hero who was really a rather nice chap, a 'good egg'; who robbed only the rich (who could afford it) and decidedly a 'goodie' rather than a 'baddie'.

If Blackshirt had met Raffles the two men would probably have not liked one another particularly. Civilised and polite good manners and jocular mutual respect would be as far as their relationship would have gone. Blackshirt was a decent chap - unflappable,

urbane and lightly-humorous, don't you know, and not as black as he was tainted; despite his sobriquet, he wasn't at all a blackguard. Raffles, under all his surface-charm was more than a touch ruthless, often cold and calculating, a bit of a snob, and not much of a ladies man. Whereas Blackshirt softened at the sight of a pretty face and trim ankle and, indeed, met (in an odd kind of way) the girl of his dreams in the first chapter of the first Blackshirt story. Her name was Bobbie but (fortunately for Richard Verrell) she wasn't one...

Blackshirt burst upon the unsuspecting literary world in 1925, created by Bruce Graeme. He and his *modus operandi* are introduced straight way on Page 2 of that first book titled simply "Blackshirt". A C.I.D. Superintendent from Scotland Yard is explaining to a V.I.P. (who is about to be robbed, wouldn't you know?) all about Blackshirt (who is currently at the top of the Yard's 'Most Wanted' Black List):

"Blackshirt is a criminal, a man, who it is believed, moves in Society circles and is the intimate of Society people. It is assumed that, in the day, he lives the easy life of a well-to-do gentleman. When night falls, however, the tale is different. He becomes a nighthawk, a crook, an audacious burglar."

The Superintendent (who, it transpires, nurses a sneaking admiration for Blackshirt) goes on to say that a series of very clever jewel thefts have been carried out in London's West End over the past few years. The thief has been seen only once and then only briefly for a second or two - but enough time for the observer to note that he was dressed entirely in black. Hence his nick-name of 'Blackshirt'. Why black? "Camouflage," explains the C.I.D. Chief patiently. "Obviously if one works in the dark, one merges more completely into the surroundings if dressed in black."

The reader is let into the secret that Blackshirt is really one Richard Verrell. But who *is* the mysterious Verrell? Graeme describes him: 'He looked not more than 27 or 28, though he was in reality 30 years old. His complexion was healthy, his features regular. As a whole his face was striking in its pleasantness. It was not that it was handsome, or within approach of effeminate beauty. The secret was that, paradoxically, it spelled that it belonged to a man - a gentleman. That, as a whole. Individually, his features all merged into insignificance compared with his eyes. It was his eyes which upheld him. They were large brown eyes... when angry they assumed a steel-like hardness; when gazing at a woman they were full of unspoken love and passion. Above all, they created the impression of honest uprightiness.' Many readers' reaction to that bit of somewhat woolly description, might well think to themselves (apropos Oscar Wilde's 'Dorian Gray'), yes, but wait until you see the portrait in the attic... Or perhaps be reminded of Irish poet W.B. Yeats' words on English poet Rupert Brooke: 'He is the handsomest man in England, and he wears the most beautiful shirts.' But we'll come to the shirts later...

Curiously, despite his rather ethereal looks and his bearing and speech of a 'gentleman', Richard Verrell's early years were more like a combination of Sexton Blake's Tinker, and Charles Dickens' Artful Dodger, and not at all like those of A.J. Raffles, who was a public school man through and through, and an England Test cricketer to boot. No public school or landed gentry background for Verrell.

As a child he had been found wandering in the streets of London's grimy East End. The couple who found him unofficially adopted him - for their own reasons. The couple - whose name might have been Fagin but wasn't - trained the boy in the ways of crime - petty crime. They taught him to thief and steal and burgle and pick-pocket. He soon became a

master rather than a pupil and amply rewarded his 'parents' with cash and goods until he was 15, when they were killed in an accident.

Left to fend for himself he soon developed a taste for literature and read every book and magazine he could find - or steal. He began to write and, before he was 22, had sold his first story. A crime story. Then came World War One and he served in the Army with courage and distinction, winning the Military Medal. After the war, he took up writing again and soon published his first book, a crime novel (about a subject he knew well!), which became a widely-hailed best-seller and made him famous overnight. In time, he won many friends, some in high places, earned good money, polished his manner and his accent, and enjoyed respect and liking from all who met him. He had become (like Pip in 'Great Expectations') a gentleman. But not one of his new friends suspected that Richard Verrell was also 'Blackshirt' the famous criminal cracksman. And, despite his success, he continued his life of crime for the love of it and because he enjoyed the danger and excitement of it.

Verrell lived in a luxurious flat in Kenilworth Road, Notting Hill, in West London, with his valet, Roberts. In his bedroom was a wardrobe built to his specifications - but even Roberts didn't know everything about it, though he kept it neat and tidy.

There was in it, cleverly-concealed behind a secret panel, a large drawer, and it was there that Verrell, or Blackshirt, kept his 'working clothes' and the tools of his trade. There were black shoes, socks of black silk, black evening dress trousers and dinner jacket, a black cloak, black silk scarf, black gloves, black mask and hood, and not forgetting, and carried in a special pocket, a black silk top hat, which unfolded at a touch, and could be set upon his immaculately shining black hair in a second. It goes without saying, of course, that there were also several perfectly-tailored, custom-made black, silk shirts. If he should give anyone (perhaps the police) a 'black look' he would still appear inscrutable, since the expression wouldn't get past the midnight hues of the rest of him. He would be 'Bible-black... and crow-black...' like dead of night in Dylan Thomas's 'Milk Wood'. 'Black was beautiful' as far as Richard Verrell was concerned.

One is reminded of that famous exchange in Chekhov's play 'The Seagull' when Medvienko asks Masha: "Why do you always wear black?" "I am in mourning for my life" replies Masha. "I am unhappy." Not that Richard Verrell was in mourning for his life, or for anyone else's. He liked dressing in black, found it practicable and useful and, in fact, was never happier than when he set off at night to conjure up his own special brand of 'black magic'.

There was, incidentally, no connection whatsoever between Blackshirt and the similarly-named 'Blackshirts' or Fascists who followed Sir Oswald Mosley in the 1930s. Bruce Graeme created his fictional hero in 1923 (two years before the first book) when Mosley was still a Labour M.P. If anything the name was probably a jocular reference to Mussolini's 'Blackshirts' (he had come to power in Italy in 1922). It wasn't until 1932 that Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists - and by that time Graeme had published four Blackshirt books...

Apropos all this, coloured shirts seemed to be much in vogue in various political organisations in the Britain of the 1930s. Mosley's wore black ones. Commander Locker-Lampson's Anti-Communist Vigilantes wore blue ones. Major T.C. Douglas's Social Credit Organisation favoured green, the Independent Labour Party's Guild of Youth chose

red ones, and the British Fascists Association were big on brown shirts. Needless to say, English cricket teams remained loyal to white shirts.

And some may recall one of P.G. Wodehouse's best novels, 'The Code of the Woosters' (1938), in which a leading character was one Roderick Spoke (later Lord Sidcup) who formed a Fascist-type organisation whose followers both wore, and were known, as 'Black Shorts'! Wodehouse satirized Mosley and his followers with hilarious perception. One exchange of dialogue went as follows:

"When you say 'shorts', you mean 'shirts', of course?"

"No. By the time Spoke formed his association, there were no shirts left. He and his adherents wear black shorts..."

Blackshirt originally appeared in a series of 10,000-word episodes in Cassell's 'New Magazine' in 1923-24. The editor was Harold Wimbury, who encouraged Graeme to continue with the episodic story and with the off-beat character. Publisher T. Fisher Unwin's Editor, A.D. Marks, liked what he read too, and chose to reprint this first Blackshirt serial in a book to launch a new series of popular novels to sell at 3/6 (18p). 'Blackshirt' was published in this form in 1925 and Graeme's Dedication read simply 'To Harold Wimbury'. The book was a huge best-selling success, reprinted within a few weeks, and continually reprinted from then until 1939, eventually selling over half-a-million copies. William Vivian Butler called Blackshirt 'the most durable desperado of them all' in his entertaining book 'The Durable Desperadoes' (1973) - no mean compliment when you remember that some of the other 'desperadoes' covered in the book were such heroes as Bulldog Drummond, 'The Saint', Norman Conquest, Raffles, The Toff, The Baron, Arsene Lupin and James Bond.

Bruce Graeme published 13 Blackshirt books in all and, for the record, they were: 'Blackshirt' (1925), 'The Return of Blackshirt' (1927), 'Blackshirt Again' (1929), 'Alias Blackshirt' (1932), 'Blackshirt the Audacious' (1935), 'Blackshirt the Adventurer' (1936), 'Blackshirt Takes a Hand' (1937), 'Blackshirt, Counterspy' (1938), 'Blackshirt Interferes' (1939), 'Blackshirt Strikes Back' (1940), 'Son of Blackshirt' (1941), 'Lord Blackshirt: the Son of Blackshirt Carries On' (1942) and 'Calling Lord Blackshirt' (1943).

(To Be Concluded)

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FORUM.

From J.E.M., Brighton:

My article, "No Orchids for Sexton Blake" (see pages 8 to 9) was in our Editor's hands before I read Derek Ford's excellent Blakiana piece (*Digest* for August) which confirms the view that John Hunter was not greatly enamoured with Sexton Blake. As Mr. Ford suggests, it did seem as if the 1941 "New Series" might be going to usher in a non-Blakian *SBL*!

I don't think I have read anything by Anthony Parsons whom Mr. Ford defends, but I can certainly endorse the view that the "new Blake" was never to recapture that traditional Baker St. flavour.

From Colin Wyatt, Canvey Island:

Of particular interest to me in the August C.D. was Ian Whitmore's article concerning the numbering on the editorial bound volumes of the *Magnet*. I found Ian's article intriguing. I worked for The Amalgamated Press for many years. (Coincidentally I began my career at Fleetway House exactly 41 years ago today, 19/8/98). In all my time there, working on a wide range of publications, I never once saw a bound volume of a weekly periodical that contained more or less than 26 copies. They were always January to June and July to December. The only exception being of course, when a publication began or finished after those dates. The first bound volume of the *Magnet* for instance, which I was lucky enough to find deep in the vaults of Fleetway House before it was demolished, contained just 20 issues, February 15th to June 28th 1908, which is different from the volume that Ian mentions.

Oddly too, I never ever saw a volume that was numbered in the way he describes. Certainly none that I possess or saw, have anything on them other than the publication name, the issue numbers, and the date. If there were indeed others as Ian describes, then it's certainly news to me! I can't help wondering however, if his bound volumes really are editorial office copies, and not ones bound by someone else.

This doesn't answer the problem of the inconsistent numbering on Ian's volumes. It rather adds to the mystery, I'm afraid.

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NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS

LONDON OBBC

The sun was out and the flowers were in bloom for the August meeting at the home of Peter and Dorothy Mahony on Sunday 19th. Indoors, members were treated to a leisurely and entertaining programme.

Roger Jenkins spoke of the once popular crime writer H.C. Bailey, and then initiated a discussion on the genre of detective fiction. Roy Parsons reflected the continued interest in Nelson Lee within the club as he read an article from the *St. Frank's Companion*.

Peter Mahony took centre stage for the second half of proceedings as he entertained us with a Greyfriars Remove quiz and a close study of that class which examined many characters in considerable detail. More discussion followed, and members expressed concern that poor old Mr Quelch was forced to teach forty pupils, possibly as a result of Dr Locke's desire for extra school fees.

Vic Pratt

NORTHERN OBBC

During the holiday month of August, it was good to see twelve people assembled for our meeting, at which a warm welcome was given to the second visit this year of Keith Normington and his wife Rungnapa on a holiday in Britain. Also, it was good to see again Doctor Nandu Thalange, making the journey from Norwich.

Mention was made of the Frank Richards Day to take place in Broadstairs on 27th October. It sounded a good programme and our President, Mary Cadogan, will be speaking at the meeting. Keith then spoke about life in Thailand. He told us about the culture, the weather, the political situation and the cost of living. He pointed out that he had plenty to read in the old boys' book line - Nelson Lee and the crime/detective books of E.S. Brooks along with various other authors' works. Keith is happy to live in Thailand, but misses the more defined seasons, blackberries and daffodils - as well as being able to attend the Old Boys' Book Club meetings!

Nandu Thalange then presented one of his celebrated papers on the medical diagnosis of characters in the books we read. We have had Bunter, Ponsonby, Coker - now it was the turn of William, the creation of Richmal Crompton. William apparently suffered from Hyperactivity Syndrome! Hopefully, the script for this talk, given originally at this year's *Just William* meeting, may be seen in some future *C.D. Annual*.

Our next meeting, on 12th September, will see a return visit from local publisher Russell Dever, who will talk about "New Technology in Publishing". Our October 10th meeting is our annual lunch with guest Mary Cadogan. You are very welcome to attend our lunch and evening meeting that day - further information from Darrell Swift, 0113 304 9271.

Johnny Bull Minor

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*Editor: Mary Cadogan, 7 Ashfield Close, off Brackley Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 1SN
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