

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 28 N^o 328

APRIL 1974



16p

THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS

10,000 Hardbacks (Old Boys' Books) mostly with Pictorial Covers by Authors such as Henty, Manville Fenn, Avery, etc. Many Annuals, including G. H. A'S, Chums, B. O. A's, Captains, Champions, in fact nearly all the popular ones including some of the lesser known!

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 28

No. 328

APRIL 1974

Price 16p

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THE KURSAAL AND ALL THAT

Plenty of us who spent our childhood in the south-east of England, and bought the Gem, Magnet, Nelson Lee, School Friend, or Union Jack, on our way home from school, are well acquainted with the resort which calls itself Southend-on-Sea. Plenty of us, without doubt, look back on "a day at Southend" with our parents, or with a friend or two, or with a Sunday School treat. Southend, as I remember it, was a superb venue for a day's outing. With a sharp pang of regret we will have read that Southend's famous Kursaal is falling to the developers, while a big shadow of doubt hangs over the future of "the longest pier in the world".

My own "day in Southend", and I must have had hundreds of them, was usually carefully planned. First a ride on the circular route covered by a system of toastrack trams via "the boulevards" - a delightful trip.

Then a walk down the pier - about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles of it - and a ride back on the pier tramway. Maybe, if one was lucky with the tides - and one needed luck, for Southend is a bit notorious for its lack of sea-water over long periods of the day - a dip in the briny at Thorpe Bay. And finally a visit to the Kursaal, the fun-fair de-luxe.

There was everything at the Kursaal to delight the young visitor while his money lasted - all sorts of weird and wonderful rides and strange sensations to ensure that the reveller went home feeling either deliriously happy or fearfully bilious. Not forgetting the mighty Water Chute, for which the Kursaal was long famous. When I was a child they had two giant "dippers" - one named the Figure 8, and the other simply the Scenic Railway. Both were large-scale dippers, equalled only at Blackpool and Great Yarmouth. Many years later, at the Kursaal, they built an even larger dipper, named the Cyclone.

Last year, concerning the fatal dipper accident at Battersea Fun Fair, it was said that the dipper in question was over sixty years old and had been bought from Southend Kursaal. It must, therefore, have been either the Figure 8 (given other names in its later times) or the Scenic Railway, for the Cyclone was far younger.

It is easy to see (even allowing for the propensity of developers to destroy as much as possible) the reason for the decline in the popularity of the Kursaal and Southend Pier. Up till the Hitler war and after, Southend was always packed with day trippers in the summer. It was the nearest resort to the East End of London, and it was the happy hunting ground of the cockney.

Southend is served by two railway lines from London. One used to be the Great Eastern from Liverpool St., via Shenfield (later the LNER) and the other the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway (later the LMS) from Fenchurch St. The L. T. S. R. was the cheapest railway in the land - one halfpenny a mile compared with one penny a mile on all the others. So trains from Fenchurch St., via the eastern suburbs, were cheap. This railway, in addition, had a branch which ran from Southend to Tilbury via places with names like Stanford-le-Hope and Lowfield Street and at Tilbury it was connected with Gravesend by ferry. So there were very cheap trains from London's East End, and also, by ferry, from a large section of North Kent. No wonder that Southend became the

trippers' paradise.

When the L. T. S. R. was sold to the Midland Railway, a clause in the contract stipulated that the line should always operate at half the price of other railways. I reckon they managed to dodge that bit when they nationalised the railways.

Post war affluence hit Southend. The tripper, with his car or two, no longer goes there. He goes farther afield. But many of us will always have happy memories of the Kursaal and its garish attractions.

GLORY HOLE

My job as editor necessitates that I ramble constantly over the hillsides of the past. Inevitably, therefore, I have a ragbag of a mind. My latest scrap from the ragbag is to wonder just why they reprinted, in the S. B. L. of 1939, "The Stationmaster's Secret" of just after the first-world-war. I myself had been responsible for the bringing back of the Pierre Quiroule tales, though I did not know then who was the creator of Grant and Julie. I only knew that it wasn't the writer of the two substitute Grant and Julie tales which preceded the return of Pierre Quiroule. Maybe that was the start of the reprinting of some other SBL tales.

It still seemed odd to bring back "Stationmaster's Secret" which, so far as I recall - and I still have the original - was a rather melodramatic effort, though I may be wrong in this.

ANTHONY GILBERT

My good friend Mr. Ben Whiter has sent me a press cutting concerning the death of the mystery story writer, Anthony Gilbert, an authoress whose real name was Lucy Malleson. It is sad to know that we have lost a writer who has entertained millions of fans over so many years. Anthony Gilbert was noted for her original plots and for her remarkable solicitor-cum-detective who was a rough diamond who called all old ladies "sugar". Perhaps her best remembered tale is "The Woman in Red" which was made into a film entitled "My Name is Julia Ross."

Danny's Diary

APRIL 1924

On the 23rd of the month, the King opened the great Wembley Exhibition. Millions of people listened to the King's speech on the wireless. I expect we shall go to it. They say there is a wonderful fun fair with a giant Dipper, and that people yell out on the dips and lose their false teeth.

Rookwood in the Boys' Friend has provided some fine reading. In the opening story, the series ended about the barring-out on the island in the river. Mr. Dalton lent the Head a hand, ended the rebellion, and then accepted the Head's gracious invitation to resume duties in his old post at Rookwood. This story was "Back to Rookwood." Next week, "That Ass Gunner" was the one who decided that rebellion was better than class work, and tried to start another barring-out, with disastrous results for Gunner.

"In Luck's Way" was a delight. Not very original in plot, but so well told that it provided a lovely little tale. The Fistical Four trespass on Mr. Devereux's land, and cheek him. On the way back to school Jimmy saves an Airedale dog which is trapped, by its trailing chain, on the railway line. When Mr. Devereux arrives at Rookwood to pick out the trespassers, Jimmy & Co. pull faces so that they will not be recognised. But Mr. Devereux has really come to thank the young hero who saved the Airedale dog.

Finally "Tupper Goes the Pace" was a good laugh. The uncle of Tupper, the page, has died and left his pub, the Peal of Bells, to Tupper's father. So both Tupper's look forward to a life of leisure in a pub. Tupper gives in his notice, and cheeks everybody, including the Head. But, alas, the pub is mortgaged, and Uncle Bill really left nothing but a load of debts.

Summer Time started on 13th April, so the long evenings are back. It always seems to get colder as soon as Summer Time comes in.

At the pictures we have seen Lillian Gish in "The Greatest Question"; Rin Tin Tin, the new and splendid dog star, in "Where the

North Begins"; Gloria Swanson in "The Prodigal Daughter"; Buster Keaton in "Our Hospitality"; Lionel Barrymore in "Unseeing Eyes"; and Alice Brady in "Hush Money".

The editor describes the barring-out series in the Nelson Lee Library as startling and thrilling, and he's right. Though it doesn't do to stop and wonder whether it isn't very far-fetched, it's all very entertaining. The Remove is barring-out in the power station against Mr. W. K. Smith, who has bought up St. Frank's and the surrounding countryside, and is building factories all over the place for his foreign workmen. The Remove is driven out of the power station, but, by means of a secret passage, manage to transfer the barring-out to Willard's Island. Eventually the whole of St. Frank's joins in the rebellion, the villainous Mr. Smith is defeated and arrested, and the old Head comes back to take charge once again. A really frantic series which held the interest all the time. Titles of this month's tales: "The Island Fortress", "The Rebel Remove", and "Fighting For St. Frank's." Now the start of a new series for Easter, the opening tale being "The Schoolboy Circus Owners."

There is a new and original story of St. Frank's in the Boys' Friend Library. It is entitled "Phantom Island".

In the Sexton Blake Library there is a really tip-top tale, introducing Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie. Set partly in London and partly in Latvia, it is truly enthralling reading all the way through. It is entitled "The Vanished Million".

In the Cup Final at Wembley, Newcastle United beat Aston Villa by 2 - 0. Unfortunately the big occasion was rather marred by a train accident. An excursion train carrying people to the Final crashed in a tunnel near Euston, and four people were killed and fifty injured.

For a change, the opening story in the Magnet this month, "Pen's Pal", was tip-top. Though the sensitiveness of Newland in being a "sheeney" is embarrassing and the poverty of Penfold is overcooked, the story is well told. Pen's father invests £50, his savings, in buying swindling shares. Pen cannot accept help from Newland, so Newland picks a quarrel with Pen. Then, after Newland's father has taken a hand, the swindlers let Mr. Penfold have his £50 back which he paid for the shares. And, though Pen and Newland become friends again, Pen

never suspects that his father was saved from loss by Newland.

But I can't say much for "The Plundered School". A party of Old Boys comes to stay at Greyfriars, including one Old Boy, Dick Chester, whom everyone had thought killed in the war. A football match is played, the Remove puts on a silly concert party to entertain the Old Boys - and then the school is plundered - all sorts of precious items being pinched as well as the Remove sports fund. Luckily the thief is caught - someone pretending to be the dead hero, Chester.

In "Inky's Peril", Hurree Singh hears from his old tutor and adviser, Kashmir, that a half-caste is trying to seize the kingdom of Bhanipur. Efforts are made to kill Inky with a snake and to kidnap him, but it all ends abruptly with the trouble over. Rather silly stuff.

"Too Clever of Skinner" had some good moments to end the month. A man, wishing to cross the river in Skinner's boat, is charged £5 by the unscrupulous Skinner, who is paid in sovereigns. But, in these days of paper-money, sovereigns are worth 25/-, and Skinner tries to sell them. They turn out to be counterfeit.

A ferry service has opened between Harwich and Zeebrugge. Prince George performed the opening ceremony.

It has been an excellent month in the Gem with some splendid complete stories. The first was "Racke, the Renegade", not by the real Martin Clifford, but by no means a bad tale. It introduced Koumi Rao who hasn't been heard of for years, and his character is different from an early tale about him I read. Someone is plotting against the British in Koumi Rao's kingdom in India. (Rummy to have a similar tale to the one in the Magnet, though the Gem one is much the better.) Racke is paid to lure Koumi Rao to some kidnappers. A very, very concentrated tale. Potted, in fact.

"Trouble for Trimble" was grand fun. Trimble found Mr. Lathom's tiepin, and decided that finding is keeping. Later the tiepin disappears again, and this time Trimble is suspected of theft. But it turns up in the Bissell Sweeper of Mary, the house-maid.

A truly splendid complete tale was "Glyn, the Gold-Maker", in which Glyn thought he had discovered the secret of the transmutation of metals. And finally "Up Against Ratty", in which Mr. Ratcliff looked for trouble and found it, and Glyn provided Ratty with a bell-ringing hat.

Real tip-top fun.

The licensee of the Blue Anchor Hotel at Byfleet died from strychnine poisoning, and a Frenchman named Vaquier has been arrested for his murder.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "Trouble for Trimble" was a compact, perfect little school story. In post-war years, Charles Hamilton extended its plot into a Bunter book, with Bunter in the Trimble role, in a story three times the length of this one in the Gem, but, possibly, with no more success. Mere length is no criterion of success in story-telling.)

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

COLONEL CLINTON

by Norman Wright

Colonel Clinton turned up at St. Frank's early in 1919, but remained for only a short time, leaving for a mental institution in number 194. He did, however, during his brief period as housemaster of Modern House (a position left vacant due to the illness of Mr. Stockdale) manage to cause chaos and more than just a little excitement at St. Frank's.

Brooks always seemed to be at home when dealing with an unusual character, particularly with one who instigated radical changes in the system of things. One can almost hear Brooks thinking to himself, working out the plot, "What would a group of characters do if presented with a series of intolerable situations?"

Clinton was a big, bombastic man with a large moustache and a loud voice. He was a fanatical disciplinarian who thought only in military terms. His character was such that he would not tolerate argument, or consider the rights or opinions of other people. Brooks set this character in charge of the Modern House and stirs the brew.

Christine and Co. did not take kindly to the colonels new ideas, which included, to begin with route marches, drills and parades. In his introductory speech to the house the tyrant makes his aims clear.

"You must do what you are told without question. The spirit of independence must be crushed out of you. You are soldiers - my soldiers. And I shall drill you and discipline you until you have lost all individuality."

The situation developed when there was a minor revolt. The colonel treated the rebels very harshly and the juniors had to grin and bear it. Matters got worse when the colonel engaged an ex-soldier to drill the boys. The man was a scoundrel in the true Brooks fashion and eventually received the order of the boot from Dr. Stafford. Events came to a head when the colonel ordered the boys to wear ridiculous uniforms, decorated with tassels.

Throughout all of these goings on the rest of the school watched in anticipation. Nipper and Co., who did not have a very large part to play during the opening episodes helped the Moderns whenever they could. Mr. Crowell, a mere master, (as we are told in the story) strongly disapproved, but was unable to voice his opinions. Nelson Lee was keeping an eye on things and doing a little investigating at the same time. But what we may ask was Dr. Stafford doing?

Throughout the development of the plot the situation becomes more and more intolerable. We are shown, however, that the headmaster faces many problems if he intervenes. The colonel was appointed by the school governors and as such could only be dismissed by them. As a housemaster Clinton had a considerable amount of authority, and though a tyrant he was very highly qualified. The head was in a difficult position. Brooks gets this fact over to his readers beautifully. He does not over do it. The Doctor did intervene early on in the series and Clinton was very off hand to him in front of the boys. What could the headmaster do? Eventually when things become intolerable the head journeyed to London to consult the governors personally. He returned with the authority to 'sack' Clinton. However, with the departure of the Colonel, Dr. Stafford's real troubles began. But I will not spoil the story by revealing further details of the plot.

The beauty of this series lies in the sheer audacity of the colonel. There are also some very fine conversations between the head and Clinton. The reader feels that he wants to punch the tyrant on his poggy nose when he is being rude to the head!

Unlike other stories of this type in the Nelson Lee Library the reader was able to see the story through the eyes of leading characters who were not directly involved in the antics of Clinton. Nipper and Co. sympathise, but are not actually suffering. They regard the situation

as rather amusing. Towards the end of the series Nelson Lee and Lennard of Scotland Yard are the main figures in the stories. The reader has plenty of varied characters to swell the scene, and as with many of Brooks series a new boy appeared to play out a role in the plot. In this case you got two for the price of one with the introduction of the Trotwood twins, Nicodemus and Cornelius, both amusing characters who fit snugly into the St. Frank's montage. But the star of the series is Colonel Clinton, a tyrant you can love to hate.

UNIQUE HORIZONS

by R. J. Godsave

In order for characters of the present day to go back into the past or forward into the future an author usually introduces a time machine into his stories.

E. S. Brooks transports the twentieth century scholars of St. Frank's into the atmosphere of past centuries and lost civilisations by giving such a plausible explanation as to how this state of affairs can come about that the whole story appears as a perfectly natural course of events.

The first St. Frank's Nelson Lee of this nature was o. s. 119, "The City of Burnished Bronze", a story contained in one issue.

The "El Dorado" series, which was in a sense a sequel to the "Clement Heath" series, would be quite up to date if written in the present time, as the forests of the Amazon River region are as impenetrable to-day as they were in 1920, when Brooks wrote this series.

Two years later a fascinating series of the St. Frank's party being marooned on a south sea island appeared, this being followed immediately by the New Anglian series with its seventeenth century atmosphere.

In 1924 the Nelson Lee readers were to find the St. Frank's juniors in the Sahara Desert, and follow their adventures with the descendants of a lost legion of Ancient Rome. Sanctuary being found in the desert by a freak of nature which had shut out the outside world, leaving a pleasant tract of land hemmed in by mountainous cliffs.

Again, Brooks with his Northestrian series took both reader and St. Frank's boys back into the twelfth century, a world of armour and sword. An active volcano and icy conditions caused violent storms

which sent a helpless airship off course, only to find a warm and arable spot locked within the ice of the South Pole.

From the educational point of view the reader of the Nelson Lee Library must have gained a large amount of knowledge both historically and geographically, as Brooks endeavoured to be accurate in his descriptions and locations.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Mr. Bailey has written a marvellous article about the detectives which not only appeared in many boys papers, but in hard cover books during the last half-century. I make no apology for including it in Blakiana because all these detectives contributed in their way to the Blake Saga. Some of the authors based their characters on Sexton Blake and others on Nelson Lee, etc., and I will go so far as to say that I myself have read stories by most of the authors who will be mentioned in each episode of this article. I hope everyone will enjoy it. Part Two will appear next month.

O, IMMORTAL BAND OF SLEUTHS

by Ken Bailey

Part One

The Hunter in the Bowler Hat

The world of the private detective was introduced to me by way of that celebrated criminologist Falcon Swift. Through the pages of "Boys' Magazine" I was able to follow the exploits of this superior being who, aided by his young assistant Chick Conway, regularly crossed swords with Chinese dope smugglers, Bulgarian Assassins, Corsican Brigands, Indian thugs, et al. In these adventures action spoke louder than deduction, for the brevity of the stories, sandwiched as they were between those of the boys of St. Gideons and cowpoke Rex Remington, precluded any longwinded dissertations on logical theories. The artist's conception of Swift gives a hint of the man about town, stylishly clad in a well cut lounge suit, highly polished shoes, bowler hat and flashing

monocle. I had not, up to that time, ever seen a person with the latter adjunct. In fact it is only within the last few years that I have been blessed with this experience. The event in question happened when business took me to an old stone farmhouse at the foothills of the Black mountains which are not very far from my home. There I met a man, a Southerner I fancy, with the air of an artist or an author, and there, screwed before his right eye was this rather supercilious looking eye-piece. The bowler hat was more mundane for Father wore one regularly on Sundays until fashion decreed its banishment to a remote shelf where, as the years by, it assumed that greenish hue that comes to all retired headgear. Depicted as he is, Swift bears a marked resemblance to Sir Kreemy Nut, though I suspect the artist had Lord Peter Wimsey in mind as he sat at the drawing board. Swift was adept at many sports; his performances at boxing, fencing and rowing, were of Olympic standards. The car he drove was a Hispano-Suiza, a vehicle conveying an air of powerful dignity in an age when automobiles were of classic form.

After Swift came Dixon Hawke (although I thought the publications of D. C. Thomson rather *infra dig*) Colwyn Dane, Ferrers Locke, Martin Steele and Nelson Lee. In my pre-Sexton Blake days Lee was the one character who adventures could arouse in me any real appreciation of the mystery story. At that time the weekly school story papers had no strong appeal to me, and I recollect that I rarely purchased "Magnet" or "Gem" unless a smashing free gift was offered. But E. S. Brooks was something different. Here were classroom antics, football field action, holiday adventures, plus chilling mystery. By writing the foregoing I do not belittle the output of Frank Richards. Like many others I was not ready for the doyen of school story writers. I wager that many did not enjoy Richards classic sense of humour until they were nigh on two score years and ten.

Sexton Blake did not really come my way until the end of school-days was fast approaching, although countless Union Jacks had passed through my hands, but only as currency in the endless trading of one thing for another. There is little I can say about Sexton Blake that has not been said already. More knowledgeable pens than mine have written appreciations which do justice to the Baker Street sleuth. Enough to say that I first experienced the dank wreathing mists at Wapping Old Stairs

and first glimpsed the furtive Oriental figure merging with the dark shadows as I stood watch with Sexton Blake.

It is now almost half a century since I followed the trail with Falcon Swift, and down the years a whole regiment of sleuths has crossed the printed page. Some have not even left a faint shadow on the memory, have not even survived beyond their first case, but have left this mortal coil unsung and unmourned. But I see dimly still the jaunty bowler hat, the glinting monocle and the silver knobbed cane as Swift whirls away to a Thames-side boat house and a final rendezvous with the international diamond thief.

to be continued

NOT EVERY COFFIN IS OCCUPIED

by Raymond Cure

I am intrigued; I am intrigued by the title "The White Hearse Myster." I am also intrigued by the theme. I don't claim that everybody would be, but I am.

I don't like funerals (who does) but still there is something about them that draws me. Many years ago I lay in a coffin while the lid was put in place. Of course, the lid was removed a few seconds later, and I couldn't get out quick enough.

My friend and I had been in the Undertakers cellar, I wondered what it would be like to be in a coffin, and said so. "Try it" said the Undertaker; so I did.

As a young child my Auntie took me to the cemetery every Sunday afternoon (it was the custom in those days) no doubt my Psychiatrist would say that accounts for my interest in "The White Hearse Mystery", in fact my first attempts at reading were from grave-stones. So, now we understand each other, I will proceed.

It appears that way back in 1929 (according to the "Union Jack" No. 1353) several thousand Londoners saw the White Funeral including Sexton Blake and Tinker, I'd have been there myself had I got wind of it. However, as the saying goes "It's never too late" so join me now.

Sexton Blake and Tinker were on their way to Baker Street from South of the river, by way of Park Lane, and as they turned into Oxford Street, it came into view. A hearse first, followed by four or five mourning coaches. This funeral was unlike anything the onlookers had

ever seen on the streets of London. The hearse was painted white. The drivers of the hearse and coaches, in tall white hats, coats of white serge, boots with white tops, even the bows of their whips were of white, as at a wedding.

Each pair of horses was white. The most incongruous thing of all was the white coffin. It was not a normal casket, but square, like a packing case, quite unusual for containing human bodies.

Do not blame Sexton Blake and Tinker for being curious, because by now I bet you are curious too, I know I am. To add to the mystery none of the mourners were over thirty-five, besides which nobody looked mournful.

Now at this point you can leave the funeral cortage, if you so wish, you can turn the page and read the next article in this excellent little magazine, but I would advise you to come along to the cemetery.

The whole curious outfit now turns in at the graveyard. Now comes the punch - I know you will be shocked - it is a pets cemetery . . .

The papers of the following day reported the whole thing as a hoax, but don't you believe it, folks. Now, I have never been in favour of anything mocking the dead. I have laughed occasionally at films where comedians have antics with coffins and hearses. The humourous song "Aint it grand to be blooming well dead" is in bad taste, particularly if people have just lost a loved one. I assume the organizing of our White Hearse Funeral was in bad taste too. Though it was all in good fun and even the contents of the coffin was said by the organizer, not even to contain the body of a dog, but only a number of unpaid bills, hence the inscription "Old Bills Remains" on the coffin lid.

The creditors it appears, objected to them being buried and asked permission to exhume. And from now on - keep your seats please!

Somebody reports a missing person, Sexton Blake discovers a blood stained towel, and if that doesn't make you suspicious, nothing will. The missing man, Mark Allbut, an eccentric, a dark horse, a villain; you name it and Mr. Allbut has all-but done it. However, all good things come to an end - in fact all bad things do too or hadn't you noticed?

Now, Sexton Blake is no Knucklehead. He was onto it almost as soon as I. I got it figured that this missing body would be in that white coffin when it was exhumed.

So I was taken aback when the coffin was opened and found to be empty. No Mr. Allbut, no dog, no unpaid bills, but as empty as Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

Sexton Blake was also taken aback, why nothing in the coffin? Why not the unpaid bills? Sexton Blake figured that there had been some-one or something in it, and it had been "got at".

If my reader knows Sexton Blake as I know Sexton Blake, he will realise that Blake will not leave things there, and he will ferrit out the answer to all these questions.

Well! he did "ferrit" out the answer, and a very interesting and unusual one too.

I won't pursue the matter further. If my reader has a drop of Sexton Blake's blood in his body, he will obtain a copy (by purchase or loan) from the C. D. Libraries, of the "Union Jack" mentioned, and come up with the answer to those questions himself.

By the way, next time you pass a cemetery - remember every gravestone tells a story!

(The author of "The White Hearse Mystery" was Rex Hardinge. J. P.)

* * * * *
"WANTED TO PURCHASE" - Boys' Friend 4d. Library; U.J.'s with Confederation Stories; Aldine Buffalo Bill Novels; Bullseye Library; Amal: Press Rocket 2d.; Chips; Comic Cuts; Pink Boys Realm; Green Boys Friend; B.O.P. Annual with Serial "Living It Down" or "Under A Shadow".

List of available numbers, condition and prices to:

ROBERT STORY

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+ + + + +
New collector trying to find early Magnets - can you help? Top prices paid, or possible exchange for Holiday Annuals, etc. Practically anything before 1931, but especially 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 401, 402, 403, 404, 406, 411; 626, 629, 630, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 640, 642, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 657, 658, 660, 661, 662, 668, 670, 671, 672. I'd also be very interested in early bound volumes. Remember when you started, and please go through those spare copies!

DUNCAN LANGFORD-ALLEN, TYE HOUSE, ELMSTEAD, COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

+ + + + +
Collector requires Sexton Blake's 1st series from 1915; 2nd series from 1925; Union Jacks especially years 1920-1922. Also pink covers and J. Parkes - Collectors Miscellany. Few duplicates for exchange.

H. A. OWEN, 28 NARCISSUS RD., WEST HAMPSTEAD, LONDON N.W.6.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 117 - Magnet No. 1517 - "The Man with the Glaring Eyes"

Charles Hamilton often based a Magnet or Gem story on a contemporary news item, and a news item that I particularly remember is the case of the man with staring eyes, as the newspapers called him in 1937. He was thought to be demented and wild in his appearance, and I particularly recall an occasion when a cousin of mine claimed to have seen him and been duly frightened: she felt, no doubt, that this encounter enhanced her own importance, but her parents inclined to the view that it was an imaginary episode. At all events, when the Magnet story appeared about two months later, I had no difficulty in associating it with the news item, and no doubt many other readers saw a similar connection.

The Magnet story began quite promisingly with Mr. Quelch being late for class, and then handing out heavy punishments that were either excessive or unjust. Vernon-Smith discovered that the Remove master had been upset by a paragraph in the Daily Telegram, and by a process of elimination he decided that the news item was the one about Philip Darke, a hypnotist in Magicland, who had hypnotised his employer and walked off with the takings. Later on, Darke, who was a distant relative of Mr. Quelch, arrived at the school and hypnotised him into arranging for him to stay at Greyfriars under the name of James Watson so that he could lie low until the hunt was over.

I have always felt a little uneasy about this particular Magnet story. In the first place, hypnotism was a subject that Charles Hamilton had hitherto used as a basis for comic episodes, usually on the assumption that it was merely a pretended power that had no real substance. In the second place, it has always been stated that people cannot be hypnotised against their will, and they cannot be made to do things of which they would not approve. Mr. Quelch was about the last person at Greyfriars to be overcome in this way, and therefore the whole basis of the story is suspect.

Nevertheless, despite this handicap, there were some convincing episodes in the story. Perhaps the finest was when Vernon-Smith got Wharton to agree that the lines imposed by Mr. Quelch were unjust and

would not be written, and then Wharton was later annoyed to receive commendation from Skinner, but could not back down without losing face. Even if the style of writing was deteriorating in the later nineteen-thirties, Charles Hamilton's grasp of characterisation and motivation was masterly until the end, and it is still possible to read with keen enjoyment certain sections of "The Man with the Glaring Eyes". It is a pity that the main theme is so incredible.

* * * * *

REVIEW

THE 1925 HOLIDAY ANNUAL

(Howard Baker Press:
£2.75)

This delightful reprint of the 1925 Holiday Annual (published in September 1924) cannot be faulted. It is to the publishers' credit that it is published without cuts of any kind, which makes it the best of the Annuals so far re-issued. The only difference is that the original colour plates are reprinted in sepia, which was probably inevitable and not likely to worry anyone.

As in 1924, there is a mountain of varied reading matter, some of which will be read with relish while some is entirely neglected. Along with the Hamilton schools there is a vintage gem from P. G. Wodehouse, an offering by Michael Poole about St. Katie's, and a bit of adventure from Duncan Storm, plus plenty more.

Top of the bill, possibly, was intended to be the long Greyfriars tale "The Bunter Cup", specially written by Frank Richards for the Annual. It is a slightly hackneyed affair - the sort of thing which was worked to tedious death by at least one of the sub writers - in which the various school juniors compete for a Cup presented by the Bunter family. Hamilton, at least, shows how that sort of thing could be handled to provide entertainment. Whether it gets off the ground for you depends on whether you like sports contests as bases for school story plots.

Figgins is in for "The Bishop's Medal", a pleasant yarn which is a reprint of "Rallying Round Figgins" of the early 1914 blue Gem. "The Rival Editors" is a reprint of a red Magnet story "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" of 1913, also reprinted in S. O. L. No. 89.

Rookwood fans will be disappointed. That old school is given

a very poor innings.

The 1925 edition may not be the best of the Holiday Annuals - that's all a matter of taste - but even if the standard had slipped a mere trifle, there is still plenty to please everybody. And, as we mentioned before, it is certainly the best of the H. A. reprints, and a book not to be missed by the enthusiast.

WANTED: Amalgamated Press "Robin Hood Library". Also "Thriller Comics Library", featuring Robin Hood. Urgently wanted to complete set - "Monster Library", number 5, very good price offered for this or could swap.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 79 ELFRIDA RD., WATFORD, HERTS.

++++++
WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 817, 826, 828, 832. BOYS' FRIENDS issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256 (inclusive). Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE,

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 190. LAST VOYAGE

The original Greyfriars Herald, which brightened eighteen weeks of that grim year 1916, was novel. It had a quaint charm which is not matched elsewhere. It was, of course, a freak paper, and, as such, its circulation can never have been large.

Its surprising format, along with its slight but fascinating contents, gave the reader the distinct and pleasing impression that he was indeed enjoying a real school magazine. But that fact alone limited the circulation to the ranks of the most rabid Magnets fans. In spite of that, it was helped by the additional fact that most of the contents were written by Charles Hamilton himself, though that was not enough to save it. The first Herald died from lack of support and not from the paper shortage.

It was surprising, everything considered, that the publishers decided to revive the Greyfriars Herald in 1919. It is perhaps indicative of the way Greyfriars had grown in popularity, in spite of the scourge of the sub writers, between 1916 and 1919. All the same, the original enthusiasts who hastened to the newsagent's to buy the revived paper must have been disappointed.

The new Greyfriars Herald was too professional, too commercial, for it to give even the most ingenuous Greyfriars fan, eager to be deluded, the impression that he was actually reading a paper edited and composed by schoolboys. There was but little of the original charm left. Most illusion-destroying of all was that the chief attraction was a series of school stories about the Benbow, written by Owen Conquest. Herlock Sholmes, who, as an old favourite, should surely have been on the scene from the start, was not brought back till thirty or so weeks had gone by, and then it was too late.

The Benbow stories have always been pleasant reading, and they have the novelty of their setting as a school on a ship. They have all of the Hamilton competence but little of his genius. The characters were out of the school story writer's stock drawer, and the plots, despite the ship setting, were hackneyed.

It was clear, early on, that the new Greyfriars Herald was really

a failure. It was nothing in particular. The illusion of its school magazine origin was faint, it was not a school story paper, and it was not an adventure paper. It foundered on the rocks of uncertainty.

Those who loved the Benbow tales, and there were plenty such readers, were, I have no doubt, lost when they took the decision to send the Benbow on a trip to the West Indies, with a section of the schoolboys including all the leading characters. The Benbow tales became purely adventure yarns.

The tales of the Benbow at sea continued for about seven months, and during that time the paper's name changed, via the Greyfriars Boys' Herald, to the Boys' Herald. So they adopted the abandoned name of Hamilton Edwards' far better paper of distant days.

When the Benbow returned to England, Jack Drake and Rodney went to Greyfriars, and the change was abrupt, clumsy; and unconvincing. The Benbow was laid up, and St. Winifred's, the parent school, destroyed in an air raid during the war, was not yet sufficiently re-built to house all the boys. So only a percentage of the Benbow boys could go to the newly-built school. The two heroes went to Greyfriars. Tuckey Toodles said he was going too. Luckily he didn't.

After the Benbow docked, Drake, Rodney, and Tuckey Toodles, were the only boys left aboard. Incredibly, Harry Wharton went on the ship to invite Drake and Rodney to Wharton Lodge for Christmas. Tuckey Toodles also accepted a non-existent invitation to Wharton Lodge. He had meant to invite them all to his own magnificent home, Toodles Towers, but ---

But yes, they would all accept with grateful thanks, as the result of a wink from Drake. So Toodles, dismayed at the thought of arriving at his own modest home with three unexpected guests, made himself scarce very hastily - for the last time.

Harry Wharton was astonished at Toodles's activities, but surely he should not have been. He had experienced exactly the same thing from Bunter on many an occasion.

Hamilton, by transferring Bunter's characteristics to so many of his fatties like Trimble, Muffin, Todgers, Toodles, etc., devalued Billy Bunter. He came perilously near to making hackneyed the greatest money-spinner in schoolboy fiction. To-day it doesn't matter. Bunter

has lived on, still making money, while his photostats are forgotten except by the few who never forget.

The Drake and Rodney at Greyfriars tales continued for quite a while, appearing anonymously now with the Owen Conquest name dropped, though Hamilton wrote practically all of them. Then they, like the Benbow, ended just as abruptly, and Drake went off to be the assistant of Ferrers Locke, the detective, in a new series, written for a time by Hamilton himself.

Towards the end, the Herald became a receptacle for nondescript short stories, until, with a life of about five years behind it, it was amalgamated with the Marvel.

* * * * *

THE MAN THAT I MARRY

Harry Wharton pens a reply
to Marjorie Hazeldene

The totally uncharacteristic confiding by Miss Hazeldene to Mrs. Cadogan under the above heading has caused no little embarrassment to Bob Cherry and myself.

Perhaps neither of these ladies realise that 'Collectors' Digest' is widely and avidly read at Greyfriars and that both Bob and I have, as a result of the publication of these confidences, suffered much at the hands of our school-fellows. Skinner, who has been particularly offensive, is now nursing a black eye and a damaged nose. Doubtless we shall deal just as emphatically with anyone else who finds this situation funny, but fisticuffs alone are insufficient not only as a deterrent but as an indication of what Bob and I feel about what Marjorie has to say. I feel that the record should be set straight.

No fellow likes to be reminded of the weaknesses in his character and I am no exception. I do not question the truth in Marjorie's criticism of my failings, but I am very, very surprised that she should have seen fit to have voiced it to such a wide audience. It is unlike her to cause hurt to others and I feel, that on reflection, Marjorie will regret having caused hurt to me. I find, too, that she has been perhaps less than circumspect in her assessment of her brother. Can this really be the Marjorie that was always so loyal to her brother? Loyal regardless of his many weaknesses and ever ready to excuse him his faults, or so it was until she chose to compare him unfavourably with his school-

fellows. I hold no brief for Hazel and we differ in many ways and it may be all very well for myself and others to call him a fathead, but blood, Miss Hazeldene, has previously been thicker than water. What has made you change?

Bob, poor old Bob, is skulking in the box room above the Remove corridor. When last I saw him his face was as red as beetroot. He has stopped coming into Study No. 1 or into any other study including his own. We have appointed Mauly as a kind of ambassador to try and bring Bob round. He is badly needed when we meet St. Jim's next Wednesday, but how am I going to persuade him to put in an appearance for practice let alone the match itself.

Old Inky who often utters more sense than the rest of us put together opines that "Silence is the cracked pitcher that goes often to the well." I feel he means that so serious a subject as marriage should be discussed when, and only when, the time is ripe. That time, Marjorie, I feel is not yet. The world in which you, Bob, and all the others, including myself, have our beings, is a world in which little alters. We are good friends and I hope that it will always be so whether you or I are proved wrong.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

(Interesting items from the
Editor's letter-bag)

HARRY BROSTER (Kinver): I was very interested in your remarks about public libraries and especially in your description of how the library you used did their checking in and out. The one I was a member of in my youth at Netherton Dudley was exactly as you described yours at Gravesend. The same cabinets of alternate red and green numbers. All little trays with red one end and green the other. "In - green"; "Red - out". The little membership cards with your name and number to fit in the little tray. I found the card I had - I knew I had it put away somewhere. When I read your article I made a point of finding it and I have it now in front of me.

IAN BENNETT (Sapcote): Thanks, not only for C. D. , but also for the truly magnificent C. D. Annual last Christmas. In my opinion quite the best yet, despite there being no mention of my particular favourites.

Capt. Justice & Co. Apart from our common interest (indeed, devotion would be more appropriate for yourself) in old boys' books, we also share a great fondness for the domestic cat, so I feel that the delightful Mister Softee article compensated well.

RAY HOPKINS (New Cross): We at our house were all flung back some forty years when in the new C.D. Annual, we were confronted with something that had been familiar to us during the 1920's and 1930's: the reproduction of the Pierrot-bedecked NEW CROSS EMPIRE Programme.

The title illustration to the new Slade yarn pushed me, or rather my idea of Slade, back to before the 1939 war. I have always presumed Mr. Buddle's adventures were happening now. Most intriguing! I like the way that events recounted in a previous story are commented on and enlarged in the present story. It adds a feeling of continuity to the stories which is very satisfying.

I found John Geal's parallel charting of the fortunes of the AP and DC Thomson boys' periodicals a fascinating exercise. Interesting to compare the two sets of rival papers in this manner and, although it appears that D. C. Thomson is the winner, yet we in the OBBC never seem to welcome any new members who are old readers and new collectors of any of the D. C. Thomson papers. This is odd when one stops to think about it.

Another look at that delightful piece of fluff on page 110. What a lovely idea to have an article on Mr. Softee and what a brainwave to christen his friend Diana Dors - certain to cause reminiscent chuckles by all readers who know this delightful actress - but what a sad end. (My family lost our two cats - called "Greener" and "Mickie" in similar violent fashion before the war and have been cat-less since - our street is like an M road or a race track so impossible to keep animals in safety these days!). Mr. Softee's article was a fine "smiles and sighs" piece of writing, greatly enjoyed.

GERALD FISHMAN (New York): As a former Glaswegian, and British to the core, I must admit that I am saddened by all the trouble you are having. Still, much to the puzzlement of my wife who is American, I keep reassuring her that the British people will take this in their stride. We were watching a television programme the other day dealing with the

war years, and there was Vera Lynn singing, George Formby strumming, and Flanagan & Allen holding court as only they could. It was sheer nostalgia alright, but the reason for the survival of Britain was clearly seen, and it remains today. It's called "The British Way of Life", and while everyone may not have two cars, TV, and all sorts of material things, at least they can say in all seriousness, "no matter what ever happens, we here on this tight little island will manage somehow, we always have."

The C. D. Annual was tremendous.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: My very grateful thanks to scores of readers who have written in concerning the red and blue system in public libraries, old films, Mr. Softee, and other matters recently referred to in our editorial columns. It is only possible to quote from a few letters in our columns, but thank you, all you wonderful people, who have brought such warmth to my heart.)

* * * * *

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 1. THE START OF IT ALL

The cinema in our school at Surbiton was unique. Our equipment was always 35mm - that is, full commercial size as used in public cinemas. We booked films from all the big commercial renters in Wardour St., often showing those films before they reached the local picture houses. This is the first of a new series of items in which I endeavour to tell you of the school cinema we ran for twenty-five years, the equipment we used, ranging from the hand-operated little projector, advertised in the Gem, down to the giant Kalee Elevens with Western Electric Sound. And of the films we played, from the silent pictures of Richard Barthelmess, Colleen Moore, Harry Langdon, and Micky McGuire down to the great sound films of Sinatra, Bogart, Cagney, Jeannette Macdonald, Gable, Garland, Rooney, and the like.

It commenced in the late twenties. It was the tail-end of the silent picture era. Talkies were just round the corner, and were being talked about as a possibility, not very seriously.

In the Gem and Magnet at that time there were advertisements inserted by a firm named Ford from an address in Red

Lion Square. I bought their largest machine, described as a semi-professional model. I think that Ford's must really have been agents, for the machine came to me through a man at Leytonstone, who also had old films for hire. He was an extremely pleasant man, and I got to know him well. For a while I booked a few films from him, though my ambitions went much higher than very old subjects which had probably been sold off by the main renters. Purposely I do not mention the name of the man at Leytonstone, as, a year or two later, there was a strange occurrence to which I shall refer in due course, and, even though it was a very long time ago, I would not wish, if he is still living, to cause him what might be embarrassment.

The machine cost about £40, so far as I remember, - quite a bit of money for those days. Its spool boxes held 1,000-feet of film.

Professional models held 2,000-feet of film, and, in fact, in all the twenty-five years I was in the cinema world, that was the limit allowed for spool-boxes in any British operating-boxes. That was up till the later fifties.

Regulations were a lot slacker on the continent. I recall going to a cinema in Bellinzona in Northern Italy, where they had only one machine, with giant spoolboxes, in the op box. They screened the whole of "Modern Times", the Chaplin feature, on the one projector without an interval.

The Ford machine was a neat little affair for a home show, but it was soon to prove inadequate for my ambitions. However, it served its purpose for a term or two.

Early on, I thought that I should have to be satisfied with booking very odd stuff from people like the Leytonstone gentleman, but I took the plunge and approached one of the least important of the commercial renters. I contacted Pathe.

I expected a snub, but had an agreeable surprise when they sent me their current release list. I had no thought just then of booking features, but, in any case, Pathe seldom released anything very striking in the feature line. But, though Pathe was never noted for its features, there was one field in which it led - the serial. Had they not made, many years earlier, "The Exploits of Elaine" and other Pearl White thrillers, calculated to be bigger queue-formers than anything else on the bill?

By the time of which I write, serials had long lost their early popularity, even though the double-feature programme was not yet general. But the serial was still an attraction. The current serial release on the Pathe list was "The Green Archer." I booked it. The Pathe serials were attractive from a school-term point of view, for they always ran to ten episodes. The most popular length for a serial was fifteen episodes, obviously too long for a school term. But some of our serials ran to twelve episodes, and, though less convenient than the ten-episode variety of Pathe, I seem to have booked a few of them as terms went by.

"The Green Archer" was, of course, the famous Edgar Wallace story. I

remember that it was an excellent serial, though, beyond that, I can recall nothing about it or what players featured in it. Also on the Pathe list was a six-episode series of travelogues under the title "The Lure of the East", instructive single-reelers about India. "Green Archer" was in ten two-reel episodes. Our opening programme consisted of "Lure of the East", Pathe Pictorial, an old two-reel film entitled "In The Dredger's Claw" (which came from Leytonstone), and "Green Archer."

Readers will remember "Pathe Pictorial" of which I booked quite a few as fill-ups down the years. It was a pleasant magazine type of single-reeler, with a new issue every week though I never played them regularly under contract as some cinemas did. There was usually a few hundred feet of Pathecolour film, plus often a short cartoon sequence, and sometimes a variety act of the period, and other interesting oddments. Charles Hamilton appeared in Pathe Pictorial many years later, long after sound had taken over, and, of course, we played that one in its day.

To end up I will just look at other serials we ran in the early years. In our second term we ran "Fighting Hearts", though I can recall nothing about it. I have a feeling that it was a series of boxing stories from Pathe, but my records of the serials are scanty.

In our third term I booked "Scotty of the Scouts", a twelve-episode serial released by Wardour Films. I fancy this was the worst serial we ever played. Next term brought "Whispering Smith Rides", a ten-episode serial and a good one, maybe from Universal. Then a very popular one from Universal - Rex Lease in "The Mystery Pilot", a ten-episode serial of a sailor on leave. Then "Bill Grimm's Progress", a twelve-episode serial or series, probably from Universal.

Next came what, at that time, was heralded as the very finest serial ever made. The critics praised it highly, which was unusual for they usually turned up their noses at serials. This was a ten-episode serial from (I think)

Fathe entitled "Belphegor, the Phantom of the Louvre". It was actually a French production, which did not matter in silent days. Later it was pruned and issued as a single feature, running about 1½ hours, though I never saw that version. But "Belphegor" was undoubtedly our finest serial.

Then "The Mysterious Airman", a ten-episode serial. Next a series of campus stories: "The Collegians". Then a similar series entitled "Sporting Youth". Next was "The Indians are Coming", a twelve-episode serial. And

then the last of our silent serials before we "went talkie" - "The Yellow Cameo". After we installed sound I never booked any more serials.

In following the serial bookings, I have jumped the gun. Next time I shall go back to our first term with a cinema, and how I suddenly had the urge to book big feature films. That was in the closing weeks of that first cinema term. Our first feature - the first of nearly two thousand - was Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Mackaill in "Shore Leave."

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

School stories was the theme for our meeting on 10th March.

Mr. Armitage, for twenty-seven years Headmaster of Soham Grammar School, compared the Hamilton schools with real public schools. Reading the Gem and Magnet long ago had inspired him with his ambition to be a schoolmaster. He believed that the modern monolithic comprehensive school, milked of its seniors to form Sixth Form colleges, meant the end of the Greyfriars type of school and the really valuable Greyfriars spirit.

Neville Wood gave an interesting talk on the adult school story, referring to such titles as "The Hill", "Stalky & Co." and "Goodbye Mr. Chips", and others. Jack Overhill talked of his impressions, as an outsider, of the Leys School when, as a boy, he lived near it and compared it unfavourably with Greyfriars. Fifty years later he wrote up his memories in the "Cambridge News", and was invited by the Headmaster to visit the school while his article was reprinted in the school magazine.

Bill Lofts talked on the Red Circle school stories in the Hotspur. A discussion ensued concerning the respective merits of Hamilton's "Peter Pan" characters compared with those of Red Circle, J. N. Pentelow's Wycliff and Haygarth, and others in which the characters

grew older and were succeeded by others.

Next meeting, 7th April. Theme: crime and detective stories.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 9 March, 1974

After business and chatter came a game organised by Jack Allison in which we formed two teams - Greyfriars and St. Jim's (inevitably!). Questions were asked of each team simultaneously and the answers were related. For example, 'Gosling's nose' and 'a nip of whisky' do seem to have some pertinent connexion!

The first round was won by St. Jim's and the second by Greyfriars.

After refreshments came another round to decide the winner, but unfortunately it didn't and the umpire ruled it a draw!

Then another tournament for the same teams, in which each had to guess the title of a book. But although each team guessed the donor of the book and its recipient yet neither could guess the correct titles! Greyfriars had 'The Goodness of Georgie' (sent to Johnny Bull by his auntie Bull) and St. Jim's had 'The Life Story of the Potato - from Seed to Saucepan' (sent to Alonzo Todd by his uncle Benjamin).

Ron Hodgson then gave his five-minute talk on why he preferred schools with a house-system. He liked them because, when younger, his own school had a house system. Also it was possible to have more characters within the school and consequently more scope for stories!

Ron conceded that the smaller cast at Greyfriars allowed for more masterly character drawing, and went on to say that Greyfriars included the best of Charles Hamilton's characters, i.e. Harry Wharton and Vernon-Smith.

The final item was a quiz presented by Harry Blowers, based on Turner's 'Boys will be Boys'. Ron Hodgson came top and Elizabeth Taylor and Bill Williamson tied in second place.

LONDON

Members gathering at Greyfriars, Wokingham, the home of Eric and Betty Lawrence, were happily surprised to find welcome visitors

present at the meeting in the persons of Eric Fayne and Madam. They were both given a warm and hearty welcome.

The emphasis of the meeting was on the old Comic papers. Bill Lofts delivered an excellent talk on the subject, illustrating same with some splendid specimens of the old favourites. Continuing the theme, Mary Cadogan added to the flavour of nostalgia with a talk on Tiger Tilly and her history. Ben Whiter read the late Len Packman's charming "Farewell to the Rainbow", published years ago in S. P. C. He also displayed the final issues of Comic Cuts and Chips.

Millicent Lyle gave much pleasure with her pleasant reading of a most amusing "William" story.

Eric Fayne marked his visit by conducting an original and amusing game of "Consequences" covering the whole range of the hobby. It was much enjoyed by all those taking part. The winners were Mary Cadogan, Laurie Peters and Roger Jenkins, and each received a souvenir of the occasion.

A magnificent tea was served, and the meeting ended with hearty thanks to our genial hosts - the four Lawrences - Eric, Betty, Graham and Jean.

The next meeting is on Sunday, 21st April, at a venue to be announced.

* * * * *

- MENTAL ATTIC -

Ernest Holman looks in

One of the pleasures of C. D. is the releasing of memories stored somewhere in one's 'mental attic' - and two items in the February issue have done just that.

Did anyone else, you ask, come across the 'red and blue' book indicator in yesterday's libraries? Indeed, yes - when I was at school, we were enrolled as members of the Leyton, E. London, Public Library and during the time allotted to an English Language lesson, were all taken on our initial visit to choose our first books. I well remember reading through the book lists provided, selecting my book, looking at the indicators, etc. Each time, the book I wanted was in red for 'out'. In the end, as we were now intruding into the lunch-time period, I selected a blue number at random and put in my request. Through a sort of grill,

a gentleman looked down closely at me, shook his head and remarked, somewhat sadly, that "You don't want that sort of book, sonny." He was very helpful, however, and asked me to wait a moment; then he produced what turned out to be a most interesting 'Western'. My fellow students were somewhat taken aback at this apparent 'preferential' treatment. I have often wondered, in later years, just what 'sort' of book it was that I had selected. That system of 'colour' indication lasted for some little time, possibly even into the early thirties.

The other item that tapped my memory was the mention by J. E. M. in *Blakiana* of the *Sexton Blake Play* by Donald (Gerald Verner) Stuart. You had already displayed the programme page of this play in a CD of 1972, and I promptly looked it up. As stated, Arthur Wontner played *Sexton Blake*, Eve Grey was the 'heroine' and the part of 'hero' Paul Cairns was played by Wilfred Babbage (wasn't he one of the Dr. Dales of Radio?). The *Union Jack* had been making frequent mention of the forthcoming play and, not content to wait for future information, I more than once rang the A. P. office to find out the latest news. This was provided very willingly and I started putting aside for a really good seat at the (then) new Prince Edward Theatre. Eventually, when the play was due to open, I went most importantly to the nearest City Keith Prowse and booked what seemed to me a 'super' seat at something like 12/6d. or fifteen bob.

The play was thoroughly enjoyed by yours truly - much more enthusiastically, I'm sure, than by my surrounding fellows. As your contributor mentions, the play did not run for very long in the West End, but later it appeared 'on the road'. I saw it again at the old Borough Theatre, in East London, adjacent to Stratford Market station. There, at considerably lower prices, I obtained a seat about five rows back in the front stalls. The intimate atmosphere of a smaller theatre, and nearness to the stage, made the subsequent presentation much more enjoyable even than the first viewing. This, probably, was the 'road' show that J. E. M. refers to, appearing at Bedford and Walham Green. I believe it also played later at the Ilford Hippodrome.

When the play first appeared in the West End, no less a critic than Hannan Swaffer reviewed it - glowingly; in addition, he wrote a most lengthy and interesting article about the stories, publications and readers

of the great Sexton Blake (and never once referred to him as the 'office boy's Sherlock Holmes:').

I recall some memorable scenes from the play. In particular, a setting in the famous Consulting Room, when Blake suspects (correctly) that the Newspaper Reporter is the sinister 'Mr. Midnight'. Blake leaves the Consulting Room, during which time Waring, the Reporter, drops a drug into his own glass. Blake, returning, diverts Waring's attention and switches glasses, only to shortly discover that he has been TOO clever. The ending was most dramatic, with a real car being driven on to the stage for the level-crossing finale. When 'all is well' and the criminal has 'bitten the dust', Blake turns to the 'hero' and 'heroine' and says, most effectively, "Take her away Cairns, Midnight has passed!"

Donald Stuart wrote the story of his play for a later U. J. (probably about mid-1931 - I'm sure I remember a most vivid green cover).

Round about this time, also, a twelve-inch Sexton Blake Record was issued at 4/6d. entitled 'Murder on the Portsmouth (Dover?) Road.' A very interesting, compact little cameo lasting, with both sides, less than fifteen minutes. I wonder if anyone has a copy today?

Finally, I seem to remember talk of turning the play into a film. Mention was made of using it as a vehicle for Herbert Marshall and Edna Best; on another occasion, Leslie Banks was suggested as Blake. Whether it did ever become a film, I cannot now say. It may have turned up as one of the 'Second Feature' type of films of those days.

With the recent staging of the original Sherlock Holmes play, I can't help thinking what an excellent revival Donald Stuart's play would now make. I wonder if any theatrical producer would be interested!

* * * * *

WANTED: 1935 Funny Wonder Annual.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GENS 817, 826, 828, 832. BOYS' FRIENDS issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256 (inclusive). Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE,

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