

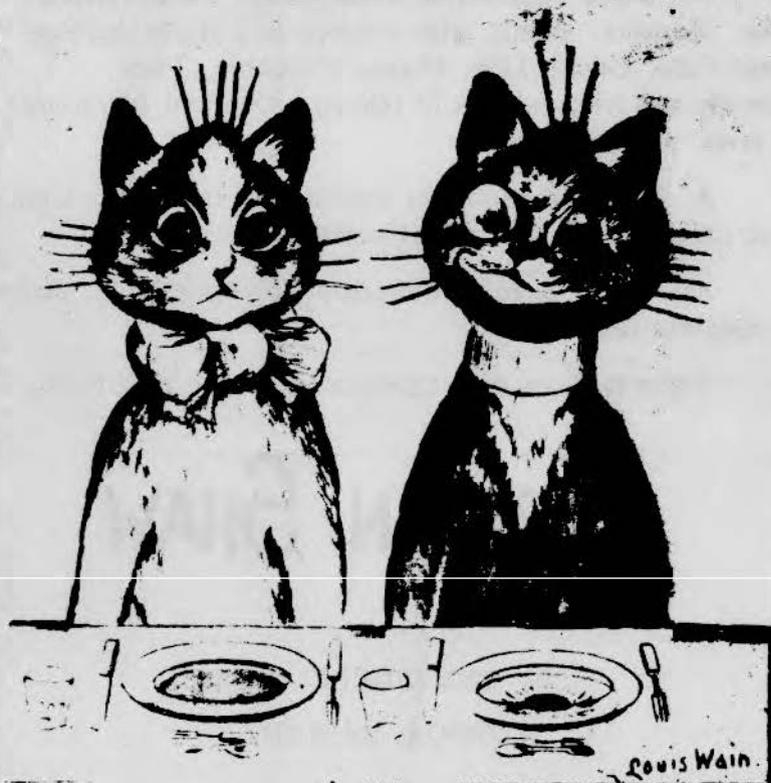
STORY PAPER  
**COLLECTORS DIGEST**

Volume 34

Number 407

NOVEMBER 1980

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**STORY PAPER**

# COLLECTORS DIGEST

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Founded in 1941 by  
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

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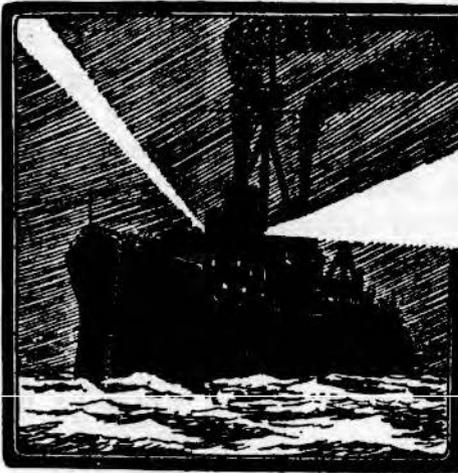
No. 407

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## A Word from the Skipper.

Kindness is a language which the  
deaf can hear and the blind read.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Last month we commented on the Gem story in which a character - a music hall artist - referred to the Boss Circuit of Music Halls. Immediately we read the name, if we knew anything about music halls, we knew that it was a reference to the real life Moss Circuit, or Moss Empires as they were often called.

We observed that it was the kind of thing that Hamilton did on numerous occasions. Changing a letter, or maybe selecting a word of exactly opposite meaning, so that the inference was obvious. I have just

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read a Magnet where Bob Cherry had a bag of Blunt's Kreemy Toffee. And I came on another Magnet story - one of the first world war - in which the chums go to a cinema and see the world-famous comedian, Cholly Chumpling.

In the past, I have often commented on the similarity in the literary styles of Hamilton and Agatha Christie. In one Christie tale a character always goes to Coot's, the Cash Chemists, for her medicines. There is also a plot which introduces a wig supplied by Larkson's, the famous theatrical costumiers.

It is the sort of thing which one comes across any amount of times. One wonders just why the authors did it. Was it intended to be near enough to the real thing for verisimilitude, but avoiding any possibility of giving offence to a firm? But surely there could be no possible risk of offence in writing, boldly, that a man had an engagement on the Moss Circuit, or that a wig came from Clarkson's, etc. So far as verisimilitude went, it was damaged by this sort of thing, for illusion is lost when you read that somebody was eating Blunt's Toffee.

Was it to avoid any hint of using a story for advertising purposes? Hardly, for immediately you read of Coot's, the Chemist, you must have thought of Boot's.

Or was it, perhaps, that the author was just trying to be very clever and very funny. Seems the most likely to me.

### YOUNG ENGLAND

I wonder whether any C.D. reader, as well as myself, recalls a play entitled "Young England" which was performed successfully, before the war, in the West End of London. Recently, readers of a Sunday newspaper have been writing in with memories of the play, which was geyed by audiences while the author sat in a box weeping at the treatment being given to his brain-child. The editor of the paper published a number of those letters. The writers of the letters seemed, one and all, to be very sorry for the elderly playwright, but were tickled pink by the wittiness and the actions of members of the audience. One confessed to going to see it four times, doubled up by the fun of "audience participation". It was said to be London's first experience of "audience participation".

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It seems to me that the letter-writers were extraordinarily naive. I remember seeing the play in the West End. I cannot place the date, but I fancy it was in the mid-thirties. I found it quite unfunny. In fact, it was the sort of thing which I detest.

As a play, it was dreadful. All about Rover scouts and girl guides and playing the game and so on. In fact, the writing was so awful that it is impossible to imagine any of the stage moguls putting it on. And it was so outrageously overacted, that it is hard to see any director being odd enough to produce anything of the sort.

The author was elderly, but it is hard to see him writing such rubbish, or sitting, weeping, in a box, night after night, begging audiences not to be cruel to his "beautiful play".

When the telephone bell rang, and the scout master went to answer it, the audience shouted "Don't keep the duchess waiting". And when the duchess put up her lorgnette, the audience yelled "Take that bicycle off your nose". And so on, all the evening.

The entire thing was obviously contrived. It was clear to me that members of the company were seated in specific parts of the auditorium, to start shouting the slogans at pre-selected moments. They did the same thing at each performance.

One of the letter-writers in the Sunday paper stated that it had packed houses for many months, but was eventually taken off as it might lead to "public disorder". I doubt that very much. While, in the eighties, riots can result from no reason at all, it was not like that in London in the thirties when the people, generally, were law-abiding. And it seems unlikely that the authorities would wait for many months of packed houses before they moved.

At any rate, after a considerable run in London, the show was sent on tour. I remember taking my sister to see it at the Royal Artillery Theatre, Woolwich, mainly to see whether it was the same performance. It was! There was the weeping author in his box. "Take that bicycle off your nose", called out people from various parts of the house, when the duchess put up her lorgnette. And the rest of the audience joined in. I found it pretty awful, but plenty of people liked it, just as some people like to see the contrived guying of "East Lynne".

Anybody else remember "Young England"?

## CONCERNING THE DIGEST

Commencing with our next issue, the price of C.D. will be increased to 30p. How long it can be held at that price, it is impossible to say.

I get much pleasure as editor of our magazine, especially at times like our 400th issue when real affection came across to me in waves from all over the world. But there is a good deal of worry as well, and one of the greatest of the worries, and one that I dread and detest, is when I have to tell you that the price must rise yet again.

My readers know that our price is kept down till it is no longer possible to avoid an increase, but that does not make life any easier for elderly folk on small incomes - and there are plenty of those among the people who like to receive C.D. each month.

## THE ANNUAL

Like the old Tuck Hampers they used to offer as prizes, this year's C.D. Annual is packed with good things. First of all, Mr. Henry Webb's cover is truly splendid. He has excelled himself. A superb article, which I have already read several times and enjoyed more at each sitting, comes from W. T. Thurbon. A skilful study of Adventure Stories, it is entrancing. Roger Jenkins is at the top of his form in dealing with the Hamilton ghosts, and Mary Cadogan's article on the lady detectives is a joy. Brimming with humour, and the occasional touch of pathos, is Jack Overhill's contribution, which brings us more memories from his boyhood when a penny was worth a penny. Ernest Holman, with our magic figure 400 in mind, looks at the Magnet, and Leslie Laskey takes a novel look at the Hamilton weather. Les Rowley, always so popular with Annual readers, joins an Assembly in Big Hall at Greyfriars. And Mr. Buddle is back in a new adventure entitled "Mr. Buddle's Adopted". And there's tons more in the Annual. I may find space to give you another Annual "trailer" next month.

Have you ordered your Annual? Time is running out.

## THE BAM BAM BAMMY SHORE

Like some of you, I remember with great pleasure the songs of

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yester year, when songs had tunes and lyrics, and, to sing, it was necessary to have a voice. A groaning whine was not enough.

In a paper the other day I came on a mention of one - "The Bam Bam Bammy Shore". I hadn't thought of it for years, but that mention set me humming and tapping. Surely the words went: "Oh, a thousand miles I've travelled, and a thousand sights I saw,

But there ain't no sight, like a moonlight night, on the  
Bam Bam Bammy shore."

Anybody recall it? I used to have it on H.M.V., played by Jack Hylton and his band.

### THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

Her Mum was out at a church meeting. The Princess had gone upstairs to bed, but as I cooked her fish, the aroma wafted upwards, and, ere long, there she was by my side. She loves her fish newly-cooked, and the scent always entices her.

So I gave her some warm fish. I locked her cat-door. She had her fill and then ambled upstairs again, while I sat down to watch the Horse of the Year Show.

I was watching the gorgeous horses, when Snowee's Mum arrived home in somebody's car. I didn't hear the car, but the Princess did. As her Mum opened the door with her key, Snowee was out and away like the wind. From time to time we went forth, calling "Snow - eeee" "Snow - eeee", but she takes her time. Shamefacedly she came back through her cat-door (unfastened again for her entry) some two hours later. She has more sense than we have.

The Princess must be the only cat in the world to have had a theme song specially written for her. I expect you know it:

"Snowee! Snowee! How I love yeh, how I love yeh ..."

THE EDITOR

\* \* \* \* \*

SEXTON BLAKE ENTHUSIAST seeks: S. B. L's (3rd series), Nos. 2, 16, 37, 39, 52, 57, 58, 60, Detective Weekly, Nos. 1, 13. Some exchanges and S. B. Annuals available. Please state price and condition. BARRY MACILROY, 80 SOUTHWOOD AVE,  
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# DANNY'S DIARY

NOVEMBER 1930

In the early hours of the night following Guy Fawkes day, two men were returning from a Bonfire Dance near Northampton, when, in a country lane, they saw what they thought was a big bonfire blazing away. As they walked, a strange man suddenly got out of a ditch, and, in the light from the fire, they saw him so clearly that, later, they were able to identify him. They walked on and found the fire was actually a blazing Morris Minor car. They called the police, who found the charred body of a man in the car.

The car was traced to a man named Rouse, and it was thought, at first, that his was the charred body. However, Rouse was arrested two days later as he alighted from a coach at the Hammersmith Coach Terminal and he has been charged with the murder of an unnamed man.

The first story this month in the Nelson Lee is "All For Archie". Archie sacks his valet Phipps, and takes on Trott in his place.

Next week "Handy's Firework Fiasco". Handy's father forbids his son to buy fireworks, but the son does, with a bang and a roar.

Next week, a long detective tale, "The Last Round", and a short St. Frank's tale "Saints V. Friars". It introduces Greyfriars, and it is a football story.

Next week "K.K.'s Birthday Party" in which K.K. prepares a jape which goes wrong. Final of the month "Travers' Trouble Treasure" in which Travers finds a lucky Egyptian Scarab, and it brings him nothing but trouble.

At the pictures we have seen Ralph Lynn and Tom Walls in "Rookery Nook"; Bebe Daniels and John Boles in "Rio Rita"; Marilyn Miller in a nice musical film "Sally"; Gary Cooper in "The Virginian"; Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell in "High Society Blues"; another lovely musical "The Love Parade" starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette Macdonald. This was a long picture. Ronald Colman and Ann Harding in "Condemned" which I enjoyed a lot. Warner Baxter in "The Arizona Kid"; a musical entitled "Movietone Follies of 1930", and Helen

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Twelvetrees in "The Grand Parade". A nice lot of films.

In London, the lovely theatre, the Alhambra, has become a cinema, and it has opened with Richard Barthelmess in "The Dawn Patrol". They say this is a wonderful picture, and I look forward to seeing it when it comes to our local cinemas later on.

The Gem opened the month with "The One-Man Rebellion" started by Grundy. Then "The Glorious Fifth" about rivalry with the Grammar School.

Next a new series, so far-fetched it's beyond my reach. First tale is "The School in the Clouds". Sir Napier Wynter, with chapters in bits and pieces, takes a St. Jim's party touring the world in the airship S.1000. A duel in an ancient castle; a kidnap by mountain bandits; trapped in a dynamited dungeon. Next "The Snake Men of Zundaki". They are chased by mad elephants. Tiger-hunting in the jungle. Fighting with deadly snakes. Last of the month "The Valley of Slaves". Chained to a gang of black slaves. Urged on by whips. That's the fate of Figgins and Fatty Wynn. My fate, too! The series goes on next month. I can't wait.

The Modern Boy continues with a reasonably good programme of complete adventure stories and serials. Towards the end of the month a series started about a character named Captain Justice, who is a modern air-and-sea pirate. The first tale is "Captain Justice - Modern Pirate", and the second story, to wind up the month, is "Desolation Island". Other characters in these stories are Len Connor, a wireless operator, and his small chum who is named Midge.

In the last Modern Boy of the month there is an excellent article on the inexplicable loss of the great airship R.101.

The two stories in this month's Schoolboys' Own Library are "The Bounder's Feud", in which Vernon-Smith seeks revenge on someone who sneaked about him, and "Who Shall Be Captain?" a tale of Wilmot of St. Kit's. I'm not all that keen on St. Kit's.

For the first time, wireless is fitted on long-distance trains. It is on the expresses from Kings Cross to Leeds.

In October a Mrs. Thomas died after a picnic when she and her husband, and a Mrs. Hearn went for the day to Bude. It was found that she was poisoned, probably with a sandwich which may have been pro-

vided by Mrs. Hearn. Later, Mrs. Hearn disappeared, and her clothes were found on a cliff-top. She may have been drowned, but a warrant was issued for her arrest.

The Popular goes wearily on its way. Only Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood are left of the old characters. The rest of the paper comprises series of adventure and farce, and it leaves me cold. I wouldn't think that it is going to last long if it continues like this.

The Magnet is simply marvellous compared with everything else in the shops. The magnificent and very long China series has gone on and has ended at last. First tale of the month is "The City of Death" with Harry Wharton & Co. in the hands of the merciless Tang Wang. In a truly tense drama, they are saved by Ferrers Locke. After the escape of the chums, Mr. Ah No murders his master to save himself from the Mandarin's vengeance over the escape. And that was the end of a wonderful series. With Tang Wang dead, the peril to the Wun boys is removed.

In the next story "Saved from the Sea" we have a grand adventure on the journey home on the yacht.

Back at Greyfriars, the first tale is "Prout's Lovely Black Eye" a real dream of a story, followed by its sequel "Who Punched Prout?"

Next "Skinner's Narrow Squeak" is a bit of an anti-climax, with Mr. Quelch walking the parapet of the school in his sleep. It is not by the real Frank Richards, but it is a long, long time since he has taken a week off so we must not complain.

A new luxury cinema, the largest in Europe, has opened at the Elephant and Castle, London. It is called the Trocadero. Apart from the latest cinema equipment, it has a great stage, fully equipped, an orchestra pit to accommodate a large resident orchestra, and the latest in Wurlizer organs. It seats 3,600 people, and will run big cine-variety programmes. Doug has promised to take me some time.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 135, "The Bounder's Feud" comprised a 3-story series which first appeared in the Magnet in late 1919. A familiar theme, less powerful than some of the later Bounder series, and none the worse for that, maybe. It made pleasant reading. The 3 stories, originally entitled "The Bounder's Fault", "Facing the Music", and "The Right Thing", fitted snugly into the S.O.L. No. 136, "Who Shall be Captain?" was originally a serial in the Boys' Friend of the mid-twenties. This was the St. Kit's conceived for Hinton's

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ill-starred weekly, and has been discussed in a Let's Be Controversial article. Hamilton wrote of another St. Kit's in an Edwardian serial, and it was also St. Kit's which Frank Richards left to go to Cedar Creek. The author seemed to have a soft spot for the name.

I believe that "Saints versus Friars" is reputed to be the only sub St. Frank's tale in the Lee. It was written by Mr. Holman, one of our loyal readers today.

The Trocadero was indeed a splendid cinema, built specially for cine-variety. With its great seating capacity it was able to stage unprecedented programmes of stage and screen attractions. It was packed nightly, and drew crowds from all over south London. Two theatres, the Kennington Theatre and the Canterbury Music Hall had offered cine-variety for many years, but I imagine their careers may have been ended when the giant Troc opened. The Troc was actually responsible for a new clause in all film contracts - that programme lengths should be restricted to 3¼ hours - but I doubt whether it was ever very strictly adhered to.

"By this time next year we shall be back in the Thirties", said a long-faced political gentleman on TV. So let's arrange a big party and go to the Troc. Front Dress Circle 2/4 in the early thirties, or 2/5 in the later thirties, after amusement tax went up a proper penny. Take a penny tram from Waterloo Station (near the Old Vic) and alight at the Elephant. Or you could walk quite safely, if you feel like it.)

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# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Just a few words to say how sorry I was to hear of the death of another of our old Blake authors. All his Blake tales were written under the name of Donald Stuart and he was very popular for his "Locked room" mysteries. Christopher Lowder has written a very fine article on Gerald Verner, alias Donald Stuart.

I trust you will also find Mr. Lister's item The Moon-Riders interesting. As he remarks, the Union Jacks are available from the Sexton Blake Lending Library and I hope members will ask for them if they have not already read these tales.

GERALD VERNER

by Christopher Lowder

Gerald Verner, one of the last surviving writers of pre-War Sexton Blake stories, died at his home in Broadstairs, Kent, on the 16th of September. He was 84.

After a somewhat colourful early career, Gerald Verner wrote his first Blake novel, The Clue of the Second Tooth, in 1927, and during the 1930's, under the pseudonym Donald Stuart, was one of the most

popular of all the Blake writers. He wrote mainly for the SBL, although he also contributed prolifically to Union Jack, Detective Weekly, and The Thriller. Most of his Blake novels subsequently appeared, in a de-Blakeanised form and under his own name, as hardback thrillers published by Wright & Brown, with whom he was associated, off and on, from 1933 until 1967, when he retired from writing.

After the War he turned to the radio, creating an impressive number of thriller serials, of which *Noose For A Lady* was undoubtedly the most ingenious. He also wrote for the BBC a series of Sexton Blake plays, with William Franklin in the title-role, in the early-1960's. As a playwright for the theatre his biggest success was *Meet Mr. Callaghan*, an adaptation of one of Peter Cheyney's thrillers. This ran for over a year at the Garrick Theatre, with the de Marney brothers taking turns to play the hero. Verner wrote a number of other plays, including *Meet Sexton Blake* (1929), and, in collaboration with Agatha Christie, *Towards Zero* (1956).

In his mystery novels Verner was heavily influenced by Edgar Wallace (at times it was difficult to tell one from the other), and his invariable method was to pile thrill upon thrill (with a hint of the supernatural for added measure), and have a cliffhanger at the end of every chapter. He also had a weakness for the villain-as-least-likely-suspect plot. As a formula, it began to wear rather thin towards the end of his career, but during the 1930's and 1940's it earned him a large and devoted following (the Duke of Windsor, for instance, was an ardent fan, owning a complete set of Verner's books).

Unfortunately, like Wallace, Verner usually started his books off well, presenting a genuinely mystifying and complex situation, but then - due no doubt to the exigencies of his current financial circumstances, and the need to collect his fee in the shortest time possible - ended in a rush, often leaving an irritatingly unsatisfactory tangle of loose ends hanging from the mystery's solution.

Against this, one of the very real pleasures of a vintage Verner is the dialogue, which is pacey, fluid, and often extremely funny; never more so than during the exchanges between the fat and sarcastic Superintendent Budd (Verner's main character) and his lazy and

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lugubrious subordinate Sergeant Leek. And for all their faults of construction and hasty writing, there is a great deal of sheer entertainment to be found in his many books.

Of the 39 SBL's he wrote (there may be more; at least two of his novels are incorrectly attributed to other writers in the Sexton Blake Catalogue) his early work is heavily derivative of Wallace and Sax Rohmer and his finest Blakes are surely most of those written during the period from 1931 to 1938. Many enjoyable non-Blake thrillers were published by Wright & Brown during the 1930's, but perhaps the years 1947 to 1955 produced his best all-round work. He wrote a number of books under the pseudonyms Nigel Vane and Derwent Steele.

As a person he was an excellent and lucid talker with a vast fund of lively and stimulating stories concerning the more unusual aspects of the world of the Grub Street thriller-writer. He also had an extraordinary knowledge of the work of his contemporaries, and a critical faculty that was by no means flawed. His death is a sad loss; he will certainly be missed.

### THE MOON-RIDERS

by William Lister

Some things leave a lasting impression. For me it is of a small-time wooden-seated picture house by name The Birley, Leeds. For one old penny you saw the most amazing things flitting across the silent screen and being very young one was suitably impressed. A feature, unforgotten, but recalled to mind by a story in the Union Jack No. 1360, by Gwyn Evans, "The Men Who Were Dead" was a weekly two-reeler "The Moon Riders" being about ten hooded villains who rode out on journeys of pillage and vandalism only when the moon was full. I can see them now, riding across the screen, a full moon behind giving the white-hooded figures a ghastly appearance.

Now, I'll not deny I have a "thing" about the moon. It's not exactly moon-madness, though I have always admired it in all its four quarters, especially when it's full. On a winter night I peer through the curtains to see a full moon riding high among dark scurrying clouds, great, while others star-gaze I moon-gaze.

How does Gwyn Evans and his "Men Who Were Dead" fit in with all this? Pick up a copy of the aforesaid Union Jack and the illustrated

cover depicts three hooded figures advancing towards you, gun in hands, if that's not enough there are six of them as there are three more lurking about somewhere. Hooded they may be but they have no horses. If there is any writer of the old papers I enjoy after Edwy Searles Brooks it is Gwyn Evans, he has a somewhat similar style.

For this tale Gwyn creates six men with no faces. Faces blown beyond recognition in World War 1. Let his pen take over:

"Six men, diverse as poles, flung together, flotsam and jetsam on the red tide of war; six men who could never again show their faces to their fellow men without evoking emotions of horror and disgust".

A solemn pledge in which they pool all their resources to see that by any means there will be no more war, eventually brings them into contact with that ace arm of the law - Sexton Blake. Not that Blake objected to the idea of no more war, it was the means used that interested him, it's not what your aim is it's the way you go about it. If it involves murder and blackmail you become a target for Sexton Blake.

By wearing special masks made of porous rubber and cellulose our six avengers were able to hide their deformity from the world.

"Seem like nice boys" (as Larry Grayson would say) but if you were a fat little German munitions millionaire and had been kidnapped and manacled to a wall in a dark cellar, and six men came towards you, six khaki clad men in steel helmets with six identical faces exuding a strange light, suppose as you cowered in your corner and those mask-like faces were removed; but at this stage again I call on Gwyn Evans:

"You have seen us as we were - now see us as we are". Six hands swept up as if in salute and then - the German saw and his flesh crawled with the horror of it. Beneath the steel helmets were six ghastly travesties of humanity, devilish gargoyle faces. Marcus Blumenleid shrieked scream after scream of babbling hysterical laughter that welled from his dew-lapped throat.

Poor old Marcus - I know the feeling, as a youngster sat side by side on the wooden forms in the darkness of the "Birley" already worked up by the goings on of the Moon-riders, a couple of girls pushed past us to reach the seats beyond us, one girl turned her face towards us. In the half light her face appeared to be badly scarred or deformed by fire or boiling water, but at our age my cousin and I along with the two lads

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on the end seats took to our heels and ran. We were out of that picture house in no time, still clutching our half-eaten apples. Poor old Marcus, shackled to a wall he could not make it, I quote "They found Sir Marcus later crooning stupidly to himself in the dank cellar of Llandur Manor. He gazed at his rescuers (Sexton Blake and Splash Page) and drooled foolishly. The light of reason had faded from his eyes, and in them lurked the terrible hopelessness of the insane."

"There shall be no more war: he screamed abruptly. Ha Ha Ha. No faces!"

The Six Dead Men is but a prelude to Blake's dual of wits for Law and Order against those strange and terrible men.

In Union Jack No. 1361, they are back again in the "House of Eyes" and in No. 1369, "The Mystery of the Wailing Wall", followed by No. 1370, "The Six Green Arabs" and you can guess who these were.

(These Union Jacks may be borrowed from the Josie Packman Blake Library if you do not possess them.)

\* \* \* \* \*

# Nelson Lee Column

FIFTY YEARS ON

by Ernest Holman

So it is fifty years since "Saints versus Friars" appeared in the Nelson Lee Library, is it?

Time plays many tricks with memory but I will try to give as clear a picture of the circumstances of that time as I can.

As a schoolboy I always had to get good marks in English in order to balance the 'not-so-good' marks in other subjects (the days when all subject marks were totalled and the pupil finished up with an over-all Position!). This was achieved mainly by 'composition, essay and general story-telling'. I had to endure the experience of often reading my 'compositions' out loud from the front of the class - offset frequently by the Master quoting my version of 'Euclid's Theorems' as the week's Big Laugh!

It was about the mid-1920's that I became a great reader of the

Companion Papers. In 1929, the new "Thriller" ran a story competition, in which one was invited to submit a 30,000 story, for a first prize of £100. My submission was a story called 'The Jackal' - but apart from the fact that it centred around Scotland Yard and this particular criminal, the details are completely lost on me. I don't even recall who turned out to be 'The Jackal'!

Well, it didn't win the Competition - a Scot living in Canada (one Murdoch Duncan) landed the £100. The story did, however, bring forth a suggestion from the A.P. Controlling Editor (Mr. P. Montague Haydon) asking me to try my hand at some Thriller-type yarns. I submitted a couple of 15,000 Detective efforts and also had a go at a Sexton Blake story. They were unsuccessful but Mr. Haydon, who had learned of my interest in the school stories, asked me to attempt a St. Frank's story. This was "Saints versus Friars" and centred around the final of the Dorriemore Cup, in which the Saints won in true tradition by obtaining the winning goal in the final minute against Harry Wharton and Co. It was published in No. 43 (Second Series) dated 15.11.30. (The main feature in the N.L. that week was the final instalment of Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk against the Master of the World - by John Brearley.)

Shortly afterwards, I received an offer from Mr. Haydon, asking me to consider joining the Companion Papers in a Junior capacity. I did not 'close' with this offer - I was never a great one for change, though what was the precise reason for my refusal I cannot really recall. Whether it would have 'worked out' I shall never know, either. I did make a few attempts at stories, without any success and eventually the whole practice of trying to 'break into the market' gradually faded away. So I never 'made it'!

During 1929 and 1930 I corresponded frequently with E.S.B. and from time to time received a cheerful reply (I can dimly recall that he used a double-colour ribbon on his typewriter - would it have been green and brown?). When my story was published (I had already informed him of my effort) I received an interesting letter, stating that he was sure I must 'have been very thrilled' about it. All the E.S.B. letters were most friendly efforts. What I do remember, however, was a late Friday night post (those were the days!) bringing me a cheque from the A.P. for ten guineas. Such a sum in those days, to one who was not yet

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seventeen, was (as Inky would say) 'worthy of being marked by a white stone'. What I did with the money I can't say - I've no doubt I 'did myself well'!

Although I always cherished very fond memories of the Companion Papers, it was not until the Merlin/Armada paper backs and then the Howard Baker publications of the post-war Richards and Clifford hard backs, but the arrival of bound Magnets really was 'the thing'!

I became a subscriber to C.D. As I had not retained my copy of the 1930 N.L. and my wife had never read the story, I advertised for a copy in C.D. (Mr. Norman Shaw promptly provided me with a copy.) The Editor of C.D. published a portion of my letter to him, in which I mentioned having written "Saints versus Friars". Forthwith, I received a most fascinating letter from Bill Lofts. It was only then that I discovered that I had solved a mystery for him.

Apparently, amongst the effects of the late E.S. Brooks, was a note about "Saints versus Friars", stating that it was not one of his own efforts. Bill Lofts had unearthed my name from the files of the A.P. and had traced me as far as my original home town of Leyton, London E.10 - then the trail had 'gone cold'. Subsequent readings of earlier C.D.'s revealed the fact that the author was not traceable. In one issue, Ross Story (who had herself written a St. Frank's story which received the appreciation of E.S.B., although never published) had expressed the view held long ago that she did not think the story could have been by E.S.B. Bill Lofts provided me with a copy of "Men Behind Boys' Fiction" in which I found I had received an entry, on the strength of this one St. Frank's story. Bill asked me for many details in the course of correspondence and he eventually wrote an article about how the story came to be written. This appeared in the C.D. Annual for 1972.

So for forty years, when the story had practically faded from memory, I was in ignorance of the fact that I had 'spoiled' the run of E.S.B. in the Nelson Lee. Quite apart from my feelings of amazement, I was left with the view of Bertie Wooster in his dealings with Aunts - that my name was probably 'a hissing and a by-word' in N.L. circles. There I was, revealed as that 'awful' person, a 'substitute' writer!

I have now re-read the story and tried to 'place it' among 'substitute' story values - but it just isn't possible. Ross Story was

right, though - it obviously WASN'T by the Master. In fact, it proved the truth of the saying 'One swallow doesn't make a summer'!

However this yarn may be regarded by Nelson Lee enthusiasts and whatever are the thoughts of the reader at this moment, let all of us be ever thankful for the C.D. and to know that in 1980 there still appears a regular "Nelson Lee Column".

I hope this effort won't spoil it!

\* \* \* \* \*

COKER

by F. R. Lowe

Although Bunter was the main funny character throughout the Magnet Greyfriars history, I think personally that Horace James Coker was just as funny, and when the two were drawn together they were a scream, (such as Bunter raiding Coker's hamper). Coker, a fellow who just seemed to slip quietly into the Greyfriars scene, with no dramatic story of his arrival, was a valuable 'comic relief' in the Magnet stories. He was a character who was gradually developed by Charles Hamilton into a big, blundering, though good-hearted duffer - always running into trouble.

It would be interesting to know how many times in the Greyfriars saga Coker was rolled down the Remove staircase by the Removites, or how many times Bunter was thrown from Study No. 1 into the Remove passage, by the Famous Five.

As time progressed, from Horace Coker's introduction into the Greyfriars yarns, it seemed that Greyfriars, without him cropping up occasionally, would not be Greyfriars.

Coker, Bunter, and Alonzo Todd many times saved the Magnet stories from being too serious.

But Coker, though dubbed as 'The Fool of the School', had his good points and soft spots, especially for his celebrated Aunt Judy. He was a great scrapper, fearless of all comers, Coker never counted the odds, and, above all, he was honest and generous - which could not be said for W. G. Bunter, and some other fellows at the school.

Coker, like Bunter and Alonzo, was sometimes overdone in the Magnet, but I think it was better for the author to overdo something comical than something too serious, considering he was writing mainly

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for lads.

Coker's lordliness, his 'short way with fags', his mad schemes, and his idea that he should be captain of the school, were always hilarious to me. His spelling, like Bunter's, was rather too unbelievable for a school like Greyfriars.

Coker's exploits were usually supplemented by his long-suffering chums, George Potter and William Greene, who would promptly rally round him if his hamper was in danger. Otherwise they always discreetly exchanged a wink, and vanished from Coker's brawls, at the risk of a chilly silence with their study-mate afterwards.

Horace Coker was fairly hopeless in any sport - contrary to his own views - but he quite often came in useful in the stories, usually by barging into situations, oblivious to danger.

His jump from the Shell to the Fifth Form astounded Greyfriars, but, as the comment was made: 'He might as well be a fool in the Fifth Form as in the Shell'. And from then on began the following remarks - or something similar:

'Talk sense - George Potter'

and

'Don't jaw, Greene'.

So, as Stanley Holloway might have said, at per tuppence per person, per Magnet, per week, we generally enjoyed, every now and then, a story of the antics and tribulations of Coker, a really great comedian. I have no doubt that the Magnet would have been a lot poorer over the years without its champion chump - the great Horace James.

\* \* \* \* \*

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REVIEWS
"THE MYSTERY OF PENGARTH"

Frank Richards  
 (Howard Baker Book Club  
 Special: £15)

This is another of the Howard Baker Collectors' Editions, and of the usual impeccable production standard for these fine volumes.

This one dates from the summer of 1923, with eight Magnets which are consecutive, apart from the omission of one substitute tale.

1923 was a time when Hamilton was writing fairly prolifically for both the Magnet and the Gem, and, in consequence, he was able to link the stories in each paper in a manner which was highly pleasant for the regular reader.

The star attraction of the volume is the 4-story series about a holiday the chums had in Cornwall, as the guest of Sir Jimmy Vivian, the owner of a sinister house near the rocky seas off Cornwall. A number of dubious characters, including, one Scaife, the Man in Black, are anxious to prevent Vivian from taking possession of his property. A well-written, well-plotted set of tales, with unusual angles. A ghost story in the summer is a rarity, as is the rather welcome absence of Bunter after the first tale of the series, plus the inclusion of Levison, Cardew, and Clive of St. Jim's, who are on a walking tour while Tom Merry & Co. are enjoying themselves on the Thames with the Old Bus.

In some ways, there is a quaint, old-fashioned charm about all the stories in this book, and for most of us it adds to the pleasure.

Apart from the Cornwall series, there are four single tales. "Lame Bunter" is one of those in which the Owl finds the means of commanding sympathy - and avoiding work - by counterfeiting some dire health handicap. In our time, we saw Bunter without a memory, Blind Bunter, and Dumb Bunter. Now he finds that marking ink will provide a satisfactory way to his becoming Lame Bunter. Very good fun.

Another single, "Mauleverer Means Business", gives us the gentle earl promising £500 for a charitable cause, but, as his guardian is abroad, Mauly has to find means of raising the money.

Possibly the most interesting of all the single stories in the volume is "A Split in the Co.", in which a mischief-maker makes trouble in the Famous Five. A good story, but too short to do the theme justice. However, it seems likely that it was this story which gave the author the idea of expanding the theme, with the result that, some eighteen months later, we enjoyed the first Wharton, the Rebel, series, of ten stories - arguably the best - certainly the most adult - though not the happiest series that Hamilton ever wrote.

The final story in the volume, "Montagu, the Mysterious", is perhaps the least attractive. A new boy, Montagu Snooks, is an upstart, pretending to be something he isn't.

An additional attraction of the volume is that, for the most part, the stories are not too well known today, for the 1923 period is notoriously difficult to collect. The Greyfriars tales, at this time, were probably at their shortest in the whole of Magnet history. The

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Greyfriars tale was the main turn on the bill of fare, and there was a full supporting programme. And the supporting programme was full of interest. The Greyfriars Herald supplements, though none but the naive could see a school magazine in them, were always worth reading, and especially much of the verse. There is a series of detective tales featuring Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake. Though, at this time, the tales were still being credited to Owen Conquest, it is unlikely that these were by Hamilton, though he had written a number of Ferrers Locke-Jack Drake stories for the Greyfriars Boys' Herald, after Drake left Greyfriars. All the same, the stories are entertaining, and very readable, with lovely titles like "The House of the Seven Candles" to carry one back to the days when detective tales of this type provided weekly joy.

A series of highway stories, under the collective title of "Galloping Dick", by David Goodwin, also provides some pleasant reading.

An excellent volume for the connoisseur. And for all the rest of us, too.

## MORE REVIEWS

by Mary Cadogan

GRACIE FIELDS by Muriel Burgess, with Tommy Keen (W. A. Allen, £4.95), is an attractive biography of the star who was for a long period taken more fully to the heart of the British public than any other performer. The story of 'Our Gracie' is, however, in many ways a sad one, and the exuberance which came across in her shows was not always echoed in her private life. It is pleasant to read a show-biz biography that does not attempt to debunk its subject. Muriel Burgess and Tommy Keen (who is of course a member of our collecting circle) tell Gracie's story with affection and sympathy. The book is beautifully illustrated with masses of photographs, letters, playbills, sheet music covers and so on. It is a must for all Gracie's fans.

Gracie, alas, is no longer with us, but another much-loved veteran, Stanley Holloway, is. He has just celebrated his 90th birthday in sprightly style, and the occasion has been marked by the publication by Methuen of two of the monologues which he immortalised. These are THE LION AND ALBERT (£2.25) and ALBERT COMES BACK (£4.25). The monologues were written by Marriott Edgar, and their wit and style are still fresh today. The gorgeous and funny pictures by Caroline Holden (arranged like 'snaps' in a photograph album) appropriately reflect the period, and Stanley Holloway's wryly humorous manner of reciting Albert's strange saga.

Equally nostalgic, but in very different mood, is a big, coloured Penguin picture book called WALT DISNEY'S SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (£2.95). The story of the film is told almost entirely in pictures which bring back vivid memories of the lovely princess, with 'lips red as a rose, hair black as ebony and skin white as snow'. And of course it is a delight to linger over the pictures of Doc. & Co., of their Hans Anderson type cottage in the wood, the characteristic Disney hill-top castle, and so many other attractive images from the 1937 cartoon film.

Back to Edwardian days - back something like 75 years - to our latest Classic Serial.

### THE REFORMATION OF MARMADUKE

"Marmaduke!"

It was Figgins who uttered the exclamation in tones of dismay. He was looking out of the window of his study in the New House of St. Jim's, when he caught sight of two figures alighting from a hack that had just driven into the quad.

One was that of a portly, middle-aged gentleman in a silk hat and a striking waistcoat, who was unknown to Figgins; but the other Figgins recognised instantly. Well he knew the weedy figure and pasty-complexioned, discontented face of Marmaduke Smythe.

"Marmaduke!" repeated Figgins.

"He's come back."

Fatty Wynn looked up from his *Catallus*, and Kerr ceased oiling his cricket-bat. They stared at Figgins.

"Marmaduke!" They uttered the name simultaneously.

"The bounder's come back," said Figgins, turning from the window. "There's a stout old merchant with him - his father, I suppose. And I really thought we were rid of the horrid bounder."

"Perhaps the doctor won't have him," suggested Fatty Wynn, hopefully.

"Oh, the Head's too easy-going for anything," said Figgins, in disgust. "If the bounder's taken back into the school, you can bet your boots that Monteith will shove him in here."

The three stared at each other uncomfortably. It was a serious matter. Marmaduke Smythe was the most hopeless

"bounder" that had ever entered the ancient walls of St. Jim's. When he departed with his mother, the rivals of the school congratulated one another. And now he had come back.

"They've gone in," said Figgins, looking from the window again.

The New House juniors were planning a concert which was to knock the School House into a cocked hat, so to speak. In the keen interest of the rehearsal Figgins & Co. forgot even Marmaduke.

But it was not only Figgins & Co. who were disconcerted by the reappearance of the scion of the house of Smythe.

When the millionaire and his hopeful son stepped out of the hack, Jack Blake and Herries were standing on the steps of the School House.

"Hullo, there's that waster again," said Blake, with a whistle. "His governor's brought him back. That's rough on Figgy."

Herries grinned.

"Figgins & Co. will be tearing their hair," he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass, and surveying Marmaduke through it. "Bai Jove, deah boys, there is that stwange animal again. This is weally too wotten."

"Figgins & Co. had better educate him when they have him all to themselves," said Blake, "just as we did to you, Adolphus. You remember what a howling duffer you were when you first came to St. Jim's, don't you?"

Meanwhile, the millionaire and Marmaduke were shown into the presence of Dr. Holmes. The doctor cast an expressive glance at Marmaduke, who looked sulky.

"How do you do, Mr. Smythe? This is an unexpected pleasure," said the doctor. "Pray take a seat."

The millionaire sat down. There was an expression of determination upon the round, red face of Samuel Smythe, millionaire.

"I've brought him back, you see," he remarked.

"Yes - I - er --"

"Marmy has been a great deal spoiled," explained Mr. Smythe. "He was his mother's pet, and I have always been too deeply engaged in business to notice how things were going on. I asked you to take him in hand."

"Yes, but --"

"You did so, and I was grateful to you. But Marmy does not seem to have got on very well at St. James's."

"No," said the doctor drily. "He did not."

"Had too big an opinion of himself, eh?"

"Yes, something like that."

"I'm not surprised," said Mr. Smythe. "You see, the son of Samuel Smythe of Mincing and Park Lane naturally thinks no small beer of himself; and Marmy has been toadied to right and left."

"I suppose so."

"Bless you, there's no nonsense about me," said Mr. Smythe. "I know what's what. Ask anybody in the City, sir, if Samuel Smythe knows what's what, and they'll tell you that he does."

"But I really --"

"Marmy's mother is a tender soul," said Mr. Smythe. "She came down to fetch him away when he wired --"

"That was very wrong of him, and --"

"When they got home, I said it wouldn't do. I said that I had given him into your charge and there he should stay until the proper time for leaving St. James's Collegiate School. That's me."

"Under the circumstances --"

"So here we are," said Mr. Smythe cheerfully. "Here we are again, my dear sir. Here's Marmaduke, returned undamaged, to have his education proceeded with. I hand him over to you with every confidence."

"That is kind of you, and I appreciate the compliment, but --"

Mr. Smythe rose to his feet.

"And now, as I am a busy man, and I dare say you are too, I'll be off."

"Pardon me!" exclaimed the doctor, "but, since Mrs. Smythe took Master Smythe away, I consider --"

"You are quite right, sir; but my train leaves in fifteen minutes, and --"

"You will kindly take your son away with you, Mr. Smythe."

"Eh?" Mr. Smythe stared. "Eh?"

"Since the boy's mother decided to remove him from my care, I cannot --"

"Oh, that's all right," said the millionaire. "I've talked her over, and made her see reason."

"However --"

"If it is a question of extra fees --"

"Nothing of the kind, but it is impossible for my authority to be interfered with in any way whatever, and --"

"That's all over," declared the millionaire. "I have Mrs. Smythe's assurance on that point. She is really quite as anxious as I am for him to be taken back into this school. I am thinking of his future. This is the place to fit him for the battle of life, and to take the nonsense out of him. My dear sir, you cannot refuse me."

"Well, well," said Dr. Holmes, mollified, "if you put it like that --"

"I do put it like that, sir."

"I must tell you that if your son does not turn over a new leaf, he will have a most uncomfortable time with the other boys."

"That's all right. He'll turn over a new leaf. Won't you, Marmy, old son?"

Marmaduke gave a grunt.

"So good-bye, my dear sir," exclaimed the millionaire. "I have twelve minutes to catch my train. Good-bye!"

Without giving the Head of St. Jim's time for another word, the millionaire was gone. Marmaduke remained standing, with sullen, downcast face. The doctor spoke.

"Smythe!"

Marmaduke looked up scowlingly.

"I am afraid you have returned to this school against your will. Is that the case?"

"I didn't want to come back."

"But you see now that it is your father's will, and that there is no help for it. Have you made up your mind to make the best of necessity?"

"I suppose I shall have to."

"You may go," said the doctor.

"You will take up the same quarters as before."

Marmaduke walked sullenly out of the room. He made his way to the New House, and presented himself at his old quarters, the study occupied by Figgins & Co.

He opened the door, and looked into the study. The voice of Figgins came to his ears. Figgins was standing in an imposing attitude, with a portentous frown on his face.

"Heat me these irons hot,

And look thou standest --"

A rehearsal was in progress. It came to a sudden stop as Marmaduke entered.

"What do you want?" said Figgins.

"The Head sent me here," said Marmaduke.

Figgins growled.

"So you're to come back into this study again?"

"I suppose I am. Dr. Holmes sent me here, I tell you."

"Well, don't make yourself a nuisance, or you'll get slain. Stick yourself somewhere, and don't interrupt the rehearsal."

"The what?"

"The rehearsal, fathead! We're rehearsing a scene from 'King John', to bring off at the concert the New House is going to give. You'll have to be in the secret as you're here; but mind, not a word of it over the way in the School House. We're going to take them by surprise when it comes off."

Marmaduke sat down, and the rehearsal proceeded.

Kerr, whose father was an actor, and whose keenest ambition was to follow

in the paternal footsteps, was stage-manager of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and he worked hard at his job. It was an uphill task,

When the rehearsal was over, tea was prepared, and Marmaduke joined the feasters.

"We'll give you a chance," said Figgins. "If you behave yourself, we'll make the best of you. Don't put on side, and you'll get on all right."

(MORE NEXT MONTH)

\* \* \* \* \*

## BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

### No. 81. AFTERMATH

When 1954 came in I was still undecided whether to follow my usual practice just before a term started, and book the programmes to fill the dates in our cinema throughout the coming term. I expect I considered. And I went on considering for a while.

Television had taken over in most homes. Public cinemas, over several years, had been closing down. And, every month, more and more were following suit.

The Star System, as we had known it for so long, was ending. Cinemagoers had gone to the picture houses mainly to see their favourite stars. In silent days, the names of Mary Pickford or Charles Chaplin outside a cinema, had been enough to fill the house, irrespective of the film. Perhaps it says a lot for films, that cinemagoers were seldom disappointed. With talking pictures, the names of Ronald Colman, Clark Gable, Jeanette Macdonald, Greta Garbo, Spencer Tracy, Judy Garland, and the like had had the same magic effect. Now, they were all gone, and, somehow, the magic names were getting less and less.

Major changes had come in, in the

past half dozen years. All films were now on non-flam stock. Non-flam, in itself, was not new. I have mentioned the problems I met unexpectedly with the lovely silent film "Q-Ships" more than twenty years earlier, because it was on non-flam stock.

As I have said in earlier articles, the bugbear of non-flam was that, for so long, nothing could be found to make a join if a break happened to occur for any reason. Nothing would stick.

But, sometime in the forties, a chemical was discovered which would join non-flam stock. I had mine from Warner's.

So nothing remained to stop safety film coming into general use - and in it came. Operators, in general, are reputed to have disliked using non-flam, and no doubt they had their reasons.

As I have mentioned before, in the mid-forties, the 2,000 ft. spool of film was at last legal, and it cut down enormously on the wear and tear of prints. Why it took so long to be accepted in Britain, I have never understood, for, in practice, all operators joined the

shorter reels together to make up the giant spool.

The film world was trying to combat the great god TV. In the early fifties, they made a number of films in 3D. It never caught on, maybe because customers had to wear the special glasses handed out by the ushers when you entered the cinema.

3D was nothing new. M.G.M. had made a series of shorts in 3D very early in the thirties. I saw some of them at the Coronation Cinema in Surbiton. They gave you spectacles with one red glass and one green glass. The effect was excellent, but it was never popular - maybe because it was over-done. Carefully used, it might have been a success.

I recall using those specs for another purpose when we played the Paramount film "Sign of the Cross" in the early thirties. I let the light pass through the red glass to throw a red picture on the screen while Nero was burning Rome. It was quite effective.

In the early fifties, M.G.M. re-issued all those twenty year old 3D shorts to cash in on the brief 3D tryout in that later time. I reckon that most customers thought they were new.

In 1953 came CinemaScope, which was followed by all sorts of other Scopes. For many months, in late 1953, I had toyed with the idea of installing Scope. The trade papers had forecast that all new films would be made in Scope.

But I never put it in. For one thing, I never liked Scope. I detested the letter-box screen - and still do. Come to think of it, I have never yet heard anybody say that they liked Scope or the letter-box screen.

As years went on, the cinemas tried hard to stop the dwindling of the size of their audiences. Giant cinemas were out. Many of them were converted into groups of small cinemas - complexes I think they call them. Some, I am told, seat as few as one hundred people. I fear they do not appeal to me, but I have never been to one, so I am no judge.

They relaxed censorship - it became almost non-existent. In my own view, it was a mistake, the money-makers being what they are.

So the months went by in 1954. Our equipment stood in situ, unused. The Small Cinema remained in darkness, the curtains across the screen.

By the summer, I decided that the Small Cinema had had its day. I called in the engineers to dismantle the equipment at long last. The curtains came down. The projection and inspection openings between the op-box and the auditorium were bricked up. The decorators set to work. The auditorium became my library. Bookcases were built into the alcoves where the loud-speakers had been mounted. Soon these bookcases were filled with volumes of Magnets and Gems.

Nobody wanted second-hand cinema equipment. The market was cluttered with it, from the cinemas which had been closing down for years. All our equipment went for scrap, for a few pounds. Our Kalee Elevens, our speakers, our electric motors in tip-top fettle, our re-winder, a couple of dozen 2000-ft. spools in a large metal trunk - and more. I couldn't be bothered to haggle or to hold on to anything. The heart had gone out of everything, and I only wanted

to get it cleared, once the decision was made.

I toyed with the idea of keeping the non-sync equipment, for it was exceptionally good, and leaving it in situ with one loud speaker so that I could play records on it when I felt inclined. But I abandoned the idea. It all went, non-sync and all. All for scrap. I daresay some wily scrap merchant made a packet out of it all. I wouldn't know.

By the late summer of 1954, *everything* had gone, and the Small Cinema, unique for so many years, was *nothing* but a memory.

I am happy, though, that I kept my booking ledgers, from the *first* to the last, which has enabled me to *write this* series covering some 25 years. I have a sneaking feeling that we saw the *best years* of the films, and they were *never so good* again.

(Next Month: The final article in this series - Looking Back)

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# News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

## MIDLAND

Meeting held 30th September, 1980

This was our first meeting since June. Our club is **growing** and we have doubled the membership in the last two years.

It was an excellent meeting with good humoured **discussion and** high spirits very much in evidence.

Tom Porter's feature Anniversary Number and Collector's item was on show. The A.N. was Gem No. 764, published on the 30th September, 1922, "Levison's Chance" and it was in mint **condition** despite being 58 years old. The Collector's item was The Golden Annual for Girls for 1925. This is always an interesting feature.

Randolph Setford, the father of the late Warwick Setford, was present. We understand Warwick left a manuscript of a Greyfriar's story he wrote and we shall be giving excerpts in our newsletter. Joe Marston, another old member, came with Randolph.

An interesting discussion took place as to whether Charles Hamilton, the greatest school story writer of all time (the opinion of the Midland Club) would ever be bettered by someone in the future. The conclusion seemed to be that it scarcely seemed possible and some said that it was not even desirable that anyone should better Charles Hamilton.

The excellent refreshments were provided by Randolph Setford, Joe Marston, Vince Loveday, Joan Golen and Ivan Webster.

A reading by your correspondent highlighted Mr. Quelch and showed him as the ideal school-master - fair minded and just and with a real regard for the boys in his charge.

The next meeting will be on 28th October.

J. F. BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

### CAMBRIDGE

The Club met on Sunday, 5th October, at the home of Adrian Perkins. The guests were Alan and Laurel Clark, and a very enjoyable time was spent by everyone in conversation about "Golden Fun". Alan Clark explained that the reasons for launching it arose from an original interest in "Rupert", from which they branched out, since there seemed to be no magazine at the time for collectors to exchange information about comics and illustrated papers, as apart from the story papers covered by "Collectors' Digest". "Golden Fun" opened a new scene; there was great enthusiasm for the first issue; the first run of 100 copies was quickly exhausted. So much enthusiasm was shown, indeed, that it became necessary to arrange for professional printing, and to make a charge to cover the cost. Alan told how the "runs" had increased to meet the increasing demand, fanned by Conventions, etc. He and Laurel discussed the work involved in the choice of covers and art work, and the interviews with artists during the course of "Golden Fun" up to date. They spoke about the special "Roy Wilson" number, with its enclosure, written by Mrs. G. M. Wilson, who was herself a writer, with a long career as author, and illustrated by Roy Wilson's daughter, herself an artist. A discussion followed, members recalling papers of their own special period. Alan produced a large number of items, including "The World Encyclopedia of Comics", Dandys, Beans, Film Funs, etc., as well as examples of the work of various artists, including both G. W. and Terry Wakefield, and many others.

The discussions continued animatedly while enjoying Mrs. Perkins's excellent tea. Several photographs of the gathering were taken by Mike Rouse and Adrian Perkins, and a splendid meeting ended with votes of thanks to Alan and Laurel for their talk and to Mrs. Perkins for her

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hospitality.

### LONDON

One of the best discussions of recent meetings was the one that took place at the Kingsbury home of Bob and Louise Blythe on Sunday, 13th October. The subjects were very varied, from the facsimile reprints to what of the future of the club in many years' time. This discussion took up the time until the tea interval.

After tea, there were two quizzes, one conducted by Larry Peters and which was won by Larry Morley. The second one was one of Millicent Lyle's efforts and here, once more, Larry Morley was the winner. Mary Cadogan exhibited an advance copy of her and Pat Craig's book about the lady detectives and which is entitled "The Lady Investigates". It is to be published in February 1981. Mary also brought along two books that contained illustrations of two Stanley Holloway monologues that featured Albert and family. To complete this item Bob Blythe played over a recording of "The Lion and Albert" which was a very successful recording by Stanley Holloway.

A model of a car in the snow with Handforth underneath and Church and McClure as onlookers which Ron Hibbert had made proved to be very interesting.

Next meeting will be on Sunday, 9th November, at 342 Hoe Street, Walthamstow, E.17.

Votes of thanks to Bob and Louise concluded the gathering.

BEN WHITER

### NORTHERN

The 366th Meeting held on Saturday, 11th October, 1980

The day had been typically Autumnal - clouds and rain at morning and sun in the afternoon. It was a cheery gathering at the Swarthmore Centre during the evening: we arrived to find that Harry Barlow, as our unofficial heating engineer, had managed to get the gas heater working and it was indeed a cosy atmosphere.

Darrel Swift gave a report on his recent visit to France, to meet hobby friends, Claude and Carole Monteilhet who had recently paid a visit to England. Darrell also reported on his visit to London to meet hobby friends and a visit to Danny Posner's new shop just off Shaftesbury Avenue.

He had attended a meeting of the South-West O.B.B.C. at Weston-Super-Mare, on Sunday, 5th October, held at the home of Tim Salisbury. We were sorry that Geoffrey Wilde, our Chairman, had to leave early that evening and the Chair was taken by Harry.

After refreshments, Mollie gave a reading from a Herlock Sholmes story. Harry Blowers presented a quiz, based on 24 questions concerning names of Hamilton characters - except one name was E. S. Brooks'. Pieces of paper were passed round the room, containing the initials of various characters. Full names had to be quoted: this made a very entertaining session and certainly, it kept people engrossed, and quiet (or almost quiet!) reigned supreme for 25 minutes. Bill Williamson was the winner.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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SHERLOCK HOLMES: anything wanted, including any take-offs (e.g. Herlock Sholmes) or comic-strip appearances.

48 SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, WIRRAL, L63 2JZ.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Postman Called

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

JACK ADRIAN (Hampstead): Roger Sansom (Blakiana: "They Couldn't Kill Raffles") might like to know that Barry Perowne wrote a third SB v Raffles story, The A.R.P. Mystery (SBL, 2nd: No. 669). Perowne's real name was Philip Atkey, and he was the nephew of Bertram Atkey, the Edwardian popular novelist and creator of Smiler Bunn, another gentleman crook. I think I'm right in saying that Perowne wrote his first Raffles stories at the instigation of Len Pratt, editor of The Thriller (and also, of course, the SBL). He had permission from the Hornung estate to update the character into the 1930's, and subsequently wrote a number of stories for The Thriller, most of which were revised and extended for publication as books - the first Perowne Raffles was Raffles After Dark (Cassell, 1933). All told, there were about seven of them, plus the Blake tie-ups (which also included a short story for the 1938 SB Annual). In the early 1950's (after a gap of ten years), Perowne began writing Raffles short stories for the US market, and these started to appear in book-form in the 1970's. I think there have been about four collections so far, but not

all of them have been published over here. For some reason, Perowne took the character right back to the Edwardian era for this new series. Graham Greene wrote a play about Raffles which had a brief West End success, and then appeared in book-form a year or so ago, and a friend of mine, Peter Tremayne, has just finished a new Raffles novel, which should be published by Magnum Books in paperback early next year.

HAROLD LACK (Northampton): Regarding your article on the tragedy at the Wood Green Empire, you are absolutely right in saying that the highlight of the illusionist's performance was to catch a bullet in his teeth. My old friend, "Popie", the late W. Macqueen Pope told me about this on one of my visits to his office over Keith Prowse's shop in Coventry Street many years ago, and in his book, "The Melodies Linger on", he refers to the event thus - "Chung Ling Soo was a master magician who was supposedly Chinese and he performed his act in complete silence. In fact he was a Lancashire man named Robinson and met his death on 23 March, 1918, at the Wood Green Empire in the course of a trick with a gun which he had performed thousands of times without mishap. He also appeared at the London Hippodrome."

I have just checked with a 200 year calendar which I have, and the date mentioned was a Saturday, so you are right again!

GEORGE BEAL (Winchmore Hill): Rumours flew as to what had happened, but the truth was that his death was really due to his own negligence. The two muskets were rigged so that when fired, the gunpowder charge exploded, but the bullets never left the guns. However, they were old guns, and apparently rarely serviced. Rust and neglect allowed the gunpowder charge to leak into the main barrel of one gun, with the result that the ammunition ball was actually fired, with fatal results.

Robinson had taken his act from that of an actual Chinese magician named Ching Ling Foo (or more accurately, Chee Ling Qua). By a strange and tragic coincidence, another illusionist, who also impersonated Ching Ling Foo, a German performing under the name of the Great Lafayette (real name Sigmund Neuberger), was also killed on stage during a performance. This was at the Edinburgh Empire Theatre on 9th May, 1911, when the stage caught fire, and Lafayette was burned to death.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: We have received many dozens of letters concerning the tragedy at Wood Green Empire, and, oddly enough, plenty of them came from overseas. The letters printed summarise the information given, and I thank everybody who wrote on the subject.)

DEAR PRINCESS SNOWEE

Dear Princess Snowee,

I read with much interest the interview with you that Les Rowley wrote up so vividly in this month's C.D. Your comments on the rather remarkable Kebble cat were of particular interest. Reading 'The Magnet' in the old days, I often wondered if this much maligned member of your species ever sought revenge on the Fat Owl for being used as his scapegoat.

I wonder if you ever have come across the very attractive cats who cropped up from time to time in 'The Rainbow', 'Tiger Tim's Weekly' and 'Playbox', and their associated annuals? I am enclosing a picture of some of these, and wonder if you might like to use part of it as the heading for your monthly column in C.D.? Also, for your interest, I enclose pictures of two catty-covers for 'Golden Stories' in 1900, drawn by the celebrated portrayer of cats, Louis Wain.

With best wishes to you and your family.

MARY CADOGAN



(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The lovely Louis Wain picture appears on our cover this month. Many thanks to Mrs. Cadogan from the Princess Snowee, and from us, her subjects. Now that she has a letter-bag of her own, the Princess is insufferable. It is quite a cat-astrophe. She begins to treat her Mum and me - especially me - like dirt.)