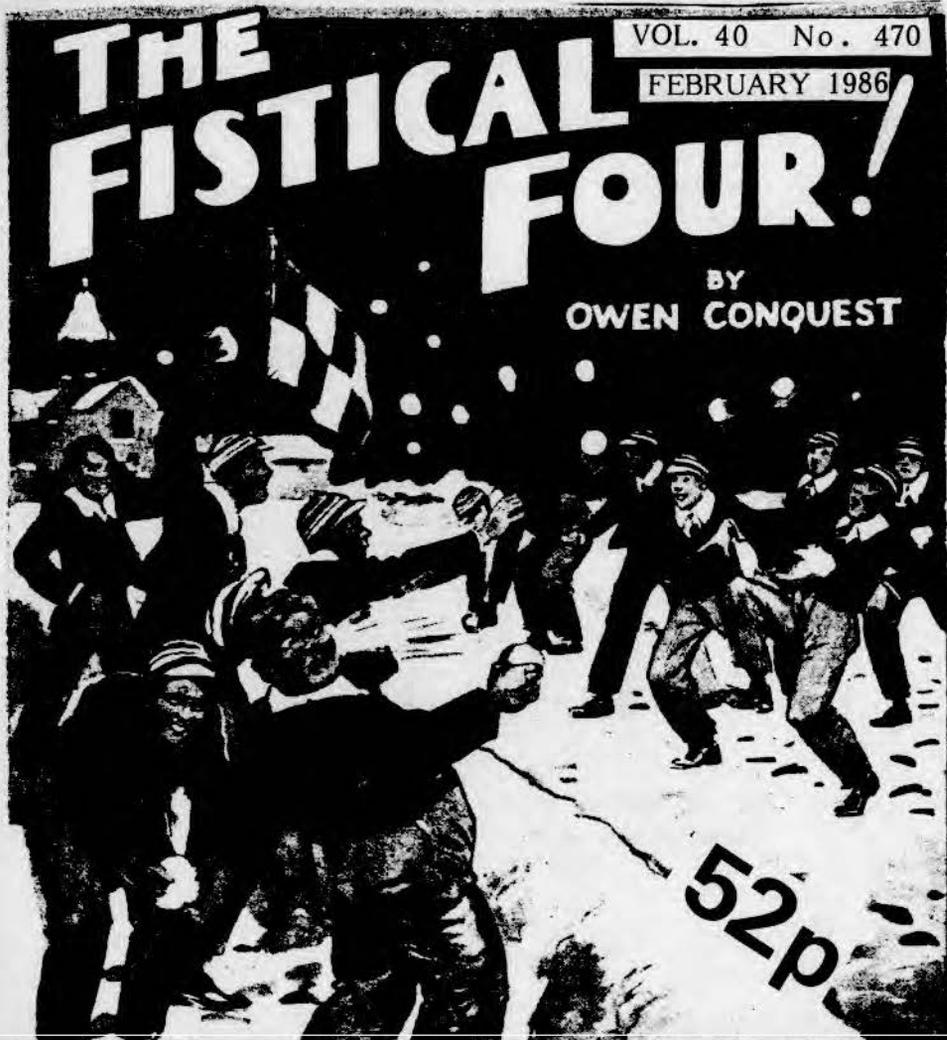


STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST



# THE FISTICAL FOUR!

VOL. 40 No. 470

FEBRUARY 1986

BY  
OWEN CONQUEST

52p

## SCHOOLBOYS' OWN

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# STORY PAPER

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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by  
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

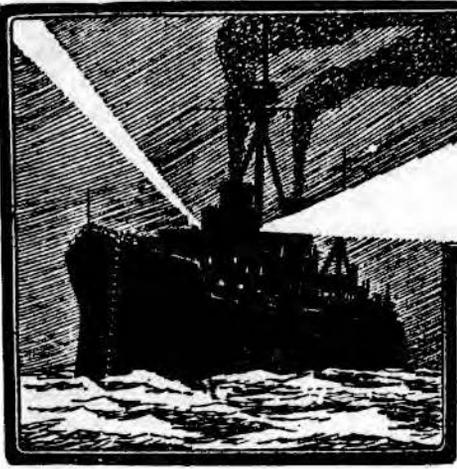
VOL. 40

No. 470

FEBRUARY 1986

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## A Word from the Skipper.

"One of the most labour-saving  
inventions of today is tomorrow."

### DETECTIVES PARODIED

Over Christmas I re-read Agatha Christie's "Partners in Crime". As Christie fans will be well aware, this is a collection of short stories introducing Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, characters who had previously appeared in the writer's second novel "The Secret Adversary".

The plots are light, and not too believable, but, as with all Christie books, it is all immensely readable and holds the interest throughout. A novelty of these short stories is that, in each case, Tommy and Tuppence model themselves on a particular detective or group of detectives. The book was written in 1929, and Christie

obviously was well acquainted with them. My own education on detectives must have been very limited, for I am positive that in 1929 I would have known none of them except Sherlock Holmes, and even in his case my knowledge was skimpy at that time. I did not even know Hercule Poirot, for I did not read my first Christie, "Ten Little Niggers", until just after the war. That was when I became hooked. I blush to state that my 'tec' acquaintance was limited to Sexton Blake in 1929.

Here is a list of the detectives parodied in "Partners in Crime", and more than half of them I know nothing about even today. "Dr. Thorndyke" was the creation of Austin Freeman; the brothers Desmond and Major Okewood, created by Valentine Williams, and they are outside my ken; Timothy McCarty and Riordan, created by Isabel Astrander, quite unknown to me; Sherlock Holmes; Thornley Colton, a blind detective, who may have been created by a Clinton Stagg, though I had never heard of any blind detective; Father Brown by G.K. Chesterton; The Busies by Edgar Wallace; The Old Man in the Corner, from Baroness Orczy; Inspector Hanaud, created by A.E.W. Mason, but unknown to me; Inspector French, the creation of Freeman Wills Crofts, all of whose adventures I read later - but not in 1929; Roger Sheringham by Anthony Berkeley seems to have been well known, but not to me; Reggie Fortune by H.C. Bailey, on whom my mind even now is a blank; and, finally, Poirot, the greatest of them all, in my popularity stakes now - but not in 1929.

I think it can be truthfully said that most of those characters are not known at all today. How many of them have you older readers ever come across?

#### A BOOK ON MUSIC HALLS.

Plenty of my readers, like their editor, have hundreds of happy memories of the heyday of the Music Halls between the wars, and, indeed, up till the early fifties.

One of my nephews gave me for Christmas a book entitled "Empires, Hippodromes, and Palaces". It is written by Jack Read, published by the Alderman Press of London, and is lavishly illustrated. It gives the history, in fascinating style, of some three dozen fine and famous music halls over the country, with accounts of the various stars who performed at those halls.

It was a great disappointment at first to me to find that the lovely Kingston Empire and its lesser but still grand sister, the Aldershot Hippodrome, are not included. I find, however, that the

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book concentrates on halls designed by the famous theatrical architect, Frank Matcham, "the most prolific and inspired creator of theatres this country ever produced". Apparently, the "Kingshot" Theatres were not the work of Matcham, splendid though they were.

Like all books nowadays, it is expensive, but any public library would be able to get it for those interested, and I heartily recommend it to my readers.

There may be an inaccuracy or two in the text, though they do not detract from the great value of the work. In one place, the author mentions that Gracie Fields was touring in "Mr. Tower of London" between 1925 and 1929. This was not so. I have evidence that Gracie Fields in "Mr. Tower of London" played the Grand at Gravesend in 1919. By the mid-twenties Gracie was playing in the magnificent Archie Pitt revue "By Request", supported by several of the Fields family. And in 1927, Archie Pitt took Gracie to the West End in a memorable revue "The Show's the Thing", in which Archie himself played a character part or two.

The error may have come about because, no doubt motivated by the great success of Gracie Fields, and by newspaper columnists who traced her career, Archie Pitt revived "Mr. Tower" for a time in the twenties, sending it out on tour with Gracie's sister, Betty, playing the old Gracie part. I recall seeing this revival at Kingston Empire some time, and finding it tame and disappointing. It was a light musical comedy, and not in the same street as the Gracie Fields revues toured by the Pitt firm.

THE EDITOR

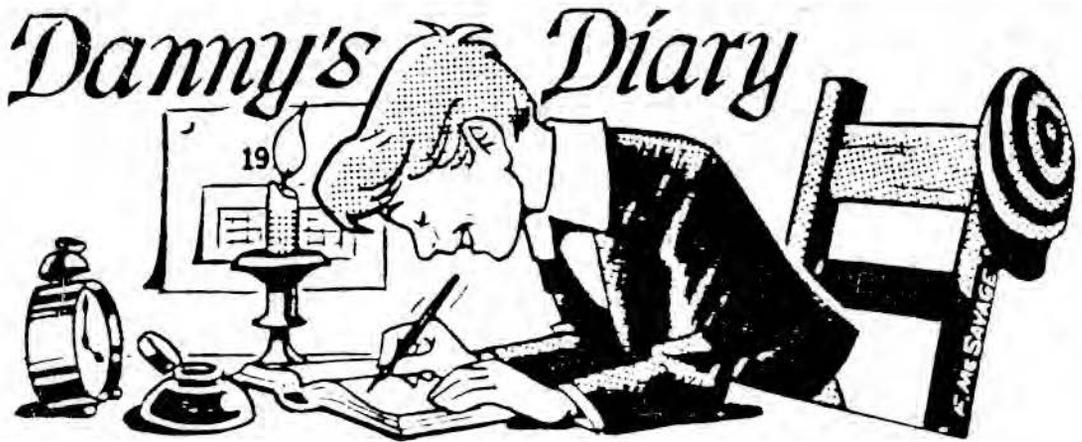
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### THE ADS ON OUR BACK PAGE

This month we present a full-page of advertisements on our own back page - but these are no ordinary advertisements. They are over 90 years old, and they come to us, through the courtesy of Mrs. Margery Woods of Scalby. At least a couple of them seem to have lasted through to the present day; and one wonder's whether Frank Richards himself ever used Bunter's cures for pain.

Mrs. Woods comments: "I should imagine the sales of these wonder cures could have been quite considerable in the vicinity of Greyfriars, especially when their namesake was around. Headaches and all nerve pains removed..."

The advertisements actually come from a Victorian paper named "FRIENDLY LEAVES", issue dated October, 1885. It's a new title to me.



February 1936

In Modern Boy the new series about King of the Islands has carried on. The opening tale of the month is "Rogue of the South Seas". Ray Paget, the scallywag who was sent to the South Seas for Ken King to make a man of him, has vanished from the "Dawn", and he has fallen into the clutches of Barney Hall, the biggest rogue of the South Seas.

Next came "Deserter's Trail". Ken gets a clue to the whereabouts of the scallywag. Then came "Koko, the Kanaka" in which Koko, the giant black bosun of the Dawn helps Ken to get the truth out of Barney Hall as to what has happened to the scallywag, and Paget is taken back to the "Dawn".

Then "Mutiny on the Dawn" in which Ken thinks it is a good joke when the cooky-boy, Danny, (cheek using my name for a cooky-boy) emptied a pail of garbage on the scallywag's head. But it led to mutiny, with the scallywag in charge, and Ken a prisoner on his own ship. Finally "Wrecker of the Pacific", with Ray Paget, now in charge of the ship, determined to pile the "Dawn" on a coral reef. This is an excellent series, and it goes on next month.

There is a new series of full-page pictures of stories of Felix, the Cat, the film cartoon character, in Modern Boy every week, replacing Mickey Mouse. On the films I like the Mickey Mouse ones better as they are in colour, while Felix is in black and white.

I'M FELIX-  
SEE ME  
EVERY WEEK  
IN  
MODERN BOY!



Another new series in Modern Boy is one of motor-racing stories, introducing a boy driver. This series is by Alfred Edgar, whom the editor says is the best writer in the world of motor-racing stories.

We listen to a fair amount of wireless programmes in my home, and I like the dance bands. Henry Hall plays with the B.B.C. Dance Orchestra some evenings, coming on early in the evenings. He has a signature tune "Here's to the Next Time" and I like it a lot. I also like the Savoy Orpheans who often play dance music later in the evenings.

A good month in the local cinemas "Star of Midnight" stars William Powell and Ginger Rogers. The leading lady in a Broadway show disappears and a big lawyer solves the mystery. It is tip-top and is obviously inspired by the successful Thin Man films."

"Stranded" stars Kay Francis and George Brent, and was a bit mixed up, but good in parts. Tom Walls was amusing in "Stormy Weather", and Richard Dix was pretty good in "The Arizonian". I found "On Wings of Song" starring Grace Moore, a bit heavy-going, but the ladies and highbrow people love it. Carl Brisson is good in "All the King's Horses".

I liked "The Crouching Beast" starring Fritz Kortner, based on one of Valentine Williams' "Clubfoot" detective novels.

For the ladies the film of the month has been "Anna Karenina" starring Greta Garbo with Frederic March, Basil Rathbone, Freddie Bartholomew, and plenty more. It is about a Russian aristocrat's wife who falls for an army officer. Doug says it is "sooperb". He went to see it twice.

Finally, a rather stodgy film named "Escapade" starring William Powell and Luise Rainer. Story of the love affairs of an artist in Vienna.

An excellent month all through in the Gem. The month kicked off with the two stories, both first class, about the arrival at St. Jim's of 'Ary 'Ammond, the Cockney. These two tales are entitled

"A Cockney at St. Jim's and "The Cockney Turns up Trumps". One of the Cockney's staunchest friends is Arthur Augustus, and an enemy plots to wreck the friendship.

The third week brought "They Faced Dishonour" which is a great tale, even if it makes uncomfortable reading here and there. Tom Merry and Gussy each tell lies to save young Wally from expulsion.

Then came "The Convict Hunters", in which an escaped convict, Jonas Racke, goes into hiding near St. Jim's, so the school is "gated". But that doesn't stop Tom Merry & Co joining in the convict hunt.

Finally "The Boy from the East" which brings Koumi Rao to St. Jim's. He is a Prince of India who comes with a legacy of hate against all the relatives of General Merry. So Tom Merry finds a deadly enemy in the boy from the East. Absolutely tip-top tale.

The new Rookwood series has continued all the month in the Gem. First tale is "The Mystery Man Unmasked". For some time someone unknown has carried out daring outrages at Rookwood. The culprit is finally exposed as the new boy Dudley Vane - as if we hadn't guessed! He is mentally ill, and goes off to a sanatorium. I'm not sorry to see him go.

Next tale is "The Rookwood Man-Hunt". Slog Poggers, a ruffianly tramp, tries to rob the Head, but Jimmy Silver & Co. step in. Mr. Poggers is still around in the next tale "Lovell's Wonderful Stunt". And he is still around the following week to meet up with Lovell in "The Boy Who Broke Bounds". And Slog Poggers is still on the trail of the Head's notecase next week in "The Midnight Marauder".

The series continues next month.

The 4d Libraries always have plenty of interest, and this month's are no exception. In the Schoolboys' Own Library is "The Downfall of Harry Wharton" which is the concluding novel of the series about Wharton as a rebel and the "worst boy in the school". It must be the most magnificent school tale ever written by anyone. The other S.O.L. is a Rookwood one, "The Fistical Four", which is a pleasant change as it seems a long time since there was a Rookwood S.O.L.

In the Boys' Friend Library there is another Nelson Lee and Nipper detective story "The Stunt Club". Last month I was astonished to see a Nelson Lee tale by someone called Cartwright. This one is by Walter Edwards, so a lot of men seem to be writing about Nelson Lee now.

There is no Pierre Quiroule novel in the Sexton Blake Library

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No. 262. - THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY.

# The FISTICAL FOUR!

by Owen Conquest



A rousing long complete school story featuring JIMMY SILVER and Co.,  
the fighting chums of Rookwood.

this month which is disappointing, but "The Case of the Murdered Wedding Guest" by Warwick Jardine is good, and, in another one, "The Terror of Thunder Creek" by Stanton Hope, Blake and Tinker solve a case in Canada.

In real life, too, the papers have been full of a murder case. Nurse Waddingham and her lover, a man named Sullivan, opened a nursing home in Nottingham. Local authorities sent them a couple of patients - an 89 year old woman named Baguley, suffering from senility, and her 17-stone middle-aged daughter who was paralysed. The nursing home was paid £3 a week for looking after and boarding these two hard cases. After a while, Mrs. Baguley made a will leaving everything she had to Nurse Waddingham in exchange for the two ladies being looked after at the nursing home for the rest of their lives.

Shortly after the will was signed, the two ladies died of excessive doses of morphine. Nurse Waddingham and Sullivan's trial has taken place this month. Sullivan was discharged for lack of evidence, but Nurse Waddingham was found guilty and sentenced to death.

And now to the marvellous Magnet. The series has continued about Eric Wilmot. The Greyfriars chums are always pleased to welcome new boys, but Eric Wilmot - dubbed the Form-master's favourite - refuses to be friendly with anyone in his new school. Next came "The Remove's Recruit". The new boy changes his attitude a bit, and proves himself a first-rate footballer.

And now something quite inexplicable happened. Bang in the middle of the Wilmot series it is abandoned, and the chums start out on an overseas holiday. It's really astonishing with a capital H.

The first tale in the travel series is "The Trail of Adventure". The chums get an invitation to go to Brazil as the guests of an earlier character, Jim Valentine. And, along with the new series, the Magnet is giving away free gifts in the form of "Magic Spectacles" and pictures which come to life when you look at them through the spectacles of red and green. It's called Third Dimension, and I remember seeing some films like this some time ago in the cinemas, when they gave you the specs when you went in. Some people thought it would become a regular thing in the cinemas, but it never caught the public fancy.

Second story in the Brazil series is "Rolling Down to Rio". The chums find danger in the sinister form of O Lobo, the Wolf of Brazil. And then the last tale of the month is called "The Wolf of Brazil". The chums are getting near to Brazil where they are to meet their old friend, Jim Valentine, but they are menaced all through the journey by O Lobo.

And the Magnet is still giving away the 3-dimension pictures.

I might conclude the month by mentioning that Barratt's the sweets firm, are producing six-foot lengths of licorice skipping ropes, which sell in the shops at 2 a penny.

#### NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

S.O.L. No. 261 "The Downfall of Harry Wharton" comprised the final four stories of the First Rebel Series from the Magnet of very early in 1925. S.O.L.No. 262 "The Fistical Four" comprised seven of the early Rookwood stories, not consecutive, from the Boys' Friend of the opening months of 1916. There was one tale involving house rivalry and introducing Miss Dolly, the Head's daughter, followed by the series which introduced Rawson, the scholarship boy, followed by the series which brought "Lord Mornington" to Rookwood. It is a great S.O.L. for the student of the early Rookwood. And what a marvellous paper the Boys' Friend was early in 1916 when those stories were first appearing. Macdonald illustrated all the early Rookwood - and what spacious illustrations they were!

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When Mac went to the war Rookwood passed into the hands of Philip Hayward, which made the school more distinctive, less linked with St. Jim's than when Mac was drawing the pictures. And in the closing years, Hayward was followed by Wakefield.

The 1936 Gem titles "A Cockney at St. Jim's" and "The Cockney Turns Up Trumps" had been "The Cockney Schoolboy" and "Parted Chums" late in 1913

"They Faced Dishonour" in 1936 had been "Shoulder to Shoulder" in the early summer of 1913. A very good school tale, giving the impression of being just slightly smug. The heroes were just a little too good to be true, though the moral was sound indeed. "The Convict Hunters" had been "£100 Reward" in November 1913, just before that year's Christmas Double Number.

"The Boy from the East" had been "A Disgrace to his House" in the autumn of 1913. The new boy, Koumi Rao, was an excellent character study, and one wonders why Hamilton never built upon him. He only starred in just one more Gem story, sad to relate.

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## THE LAST DAYS OF THE UNION JACK

by WILFRED DARWIN

The Union Jack, even towards the end of publication was still the best detective story paper on the market. The old authors, whose names had become by this time, almost synonymous with that of Sexton Blake, were still very active. What is more, the same old formula, Plummer, Zenith, Waldo, Rymer, Wu Ling etc., which had been followed so successfully in the past, was still adhered to.

One or two new authors had also joined up. These were generally of a mediocre quality though one, in fact, showed any real brilliance. The exception was Donald Stuart, whose great Sexton Blake stage play brought the Baker Street detective before the public eye as nothing else could have done. Perhaps his greatest contribution the U.J. was "The Green Jester". A strange name for a criminal indeed, for there is nothing amusing about a murder.

Many new ideas were tried out in the latter days of the U.J. obviously with the intention of increasing circulation. Old characters were revived and the new ones were created.

One successful experiment was the resurrection of the Reece character and the Criminals Confederation. Certain alterations were made, however, to the original text, which, to me at least, was not exactly agreeable. Even the titles were changed. I shall always maintain that "The Hidden Headquarters" was a better title than "The Squealer". I missed the old illustrations too. Up to about 1930 the quality of the stories varied little. There may have been odd occasions perhaps, when an author was not quite himself, but these were few and far between.

After 1930, though a certain amount of rot seemed to creep in. It seemed as if either the authors or the publishers were losing their grip. In the old days there had been a style and dignity about the V.J. which the reader did not fail to appreciate, a state of things which was in marked contrast to the years which led up to it's final closure. For one thing, the U.J. like a few other periodicals of the time, had given way to the influence of gangsterism. Gilbert Chester and Anthony Skene were the chief offenders.

In my opinion "Sexton Blake saves Blackpool" and "Sexton Blake Cleans up Chicago" were very poor stuff indeed. There was a cheapness about these stories which hardly did credit to the paper or to Blake. Small wonder, I think, that the Blake tradition became almost non-existent. I was always very critical of the Blake in Africa yarns too. Though I used to read them, I could not quite dispel the feeling that Blake was out of his element. Characters like Lobangu and Sixpence seemed queer company for the great English detective.

It was a pity though, for Rex Hardinge, who penned these stories of Blake in Africa is a good writer. Though I have not read any of his more recent yarns I shall always remember with interest that grand story of his which appeared during the latter days of the U.J. "The Man Who Sold Death". Here was Rex Hardinge at his best. Even G.H. Teed the recognised genius of the foreign travel story could not have written a better one than this. Incidentally the subject of the story was one which had shortly before given no little amount of space in the U.J. Detective Magazine supplement - the dangerous drug traffic.

It is interesting to note that several of the more famous Blake authors wrote articles for this worthy addition to Sexton Blake's Own paper. Rex Hardinge wrote the last story ever to be printed in the old U.J. Unfortunately it was just another stereotyped Blake in Africa yarn. Personally I could; have suggested a more fitting "finale" for what was without doubt, a grand paper.

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THE MINOR CHARACTERS

by A.G. Standen

Some of the best drawn characters in the Sexton Blake stories, particularly in the Union Jack, apart from the resident villains, were the friends made by the detective over the years.

Earliest of all were Lobangu and Sir Richard Losely, and Waldo, the Wonderman, that rara avis an original character, was more friend than foe. The young Ah Wo, sent to England by his astute banker father to learn English banking methods, was the creation of R. Coutts Armour, and was first encountered by Blake in the U.J. story "The Gas Ring Mystery".

Another believable character, created by G.H. Teed, was Sir Gordon Saddler, the Mystery Man of 'Frisco, certainly in line with the great English eccentrics, from Sir Sidney Smith, Burton, "Chinese Gordon", to Lawrence of Arabia.

We must not forget Beaudelaire, the drawf, from whom Blake often received vital information concerning Leon Kestrel, by judicious use of flattery.

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PEGG

by J. F. BURRELL

The maps recently published by D.R. Spiers at last put Pegg into what would seem to be its right place. In previous maps J.S. Butcher and Magnet No. 1672 put it near Courtfield in completely the opposite direction.

Until the end of the Magnet in 1940 its position is described fairly consistently as is also the case in the Skilton and Cassell hardbacks. In The Magnet it was a sea side village with only a landing place for small boats. In Magnet 1312 (Holiday Cruise series) and 1277 (Egypt series) larger boats, like steam yachts have to be

(Continued on Page 18 )



"Edwy Searles Brooks was always right."

by E. Grant McPherson

E.S.B. had the happy knack of writing stories that however unlikely they seemed, had a habit of coming true.

Two of his tales in particular struck me as being most unlikely, I was only twelve when the 'Marooned School' series was written.

For the benefit of readers who may not have read this series, it deals with a huge reservoir, situated at Edgemoor, a village not far from St. Frank's that is damaged to such an extent that in a spate of very prolonged rain (that sounds very familiar) that a wall cracks and all the water pours down the valley and floods the entire area around St. Frank's to a depth of some 10 to 12 feet.

Completely cutting off the school. To add to the trouble, all the masters and prefects are away, having been called by the local council in a vain endeavour to save the reservoir.

Thus the plot is nicely laid for a very good series.

At the time I remember thinking how impossible such a thing could be, you could'n't possibly flood an area to such an extent.

And Yet; A few years ago it did actually happen here at Cheddar only a few miles from where I live. After an extra heavy period of rain the river overflowed and a deluge flooded the whole area to a depth of up to 20 feet causing a terrific amount of damage (Shades of the Marooned School series).

Then there was the "Snowed Up School Series". There is a heavy fall of snow some 6 to 8 feet deep cutting off the entire district.

Of course all sorts of things happen to make a not very impressive series. It must be remembered that this is the worst period of the Nelson Lee (all sorts of troubles beset the Old Paper at this time and I hope to write more of this period at a later date).

Again the school is left without masters, save only Mr. Pyecraft. All the others had attended a special dinner at the 'Grapes Hotel' in Bannington, unfortunately there had been an outbreak of food poisoning that had affected all the masters, and they all end up in hospital with the result just mentioned. Mr. Pyecraft finding himself in sole charge somehow gets in touch with a group of confidence tricksters who convince him that they are a number of teachers who are on their way to another school, but cannot get there because of the snow, so he hires them to look after the school with as you can imagine, disastrous results.

Not one of the best stories by a long, long way, probably not even from Edwy's pen. The only outstanding thing about the series as far as I was concerned was the snowfall part, it struck me as being quite impossible for so much to fall so quickly. But; The Xmas of 1963 changed my mind I live in a bungalow on the side of the Mendips,

On Boxing Day the roads were clear as usual, the lawn was lovely and green, when we awoke the next morning, it was to find the entire area covered in snow to a depth of some 10 feet and a 30 foot snowdrift completely surrounding our bungalow.

Apparently a combination of snow and wind in the right (or wrong) direction had worked the trick, and the whole of the area and infact half of Somerset was under a considerable depth of snow.

We were snowed in until the middle of March when the snow ploughs finally dug us out, and even then the roads were just 8 foot tracks in a white expanse, we still had snow in our garden in June. Edwy had been right again.

Finally, how is this for coincidence, foresight, luck or call it what you will. In 1912 E.S.B. wrote a story in the 'Dreadnought' about two brothers who go to different schools and later change places. This later appeared in the 'Boys Friend' these being under his pen name R.W. Comrade.

In 1927 he expands the theme, and we have the Castleton Twins series which ran concurrently in both the 'Nelson Lee' and 'Gem'. I must confess that I thought it a very good series and although I normally only bought Lee I splashed out on the Gem for the duration of the series, should readers be unfamiliar with the yarns it dealt with twin brothers, one a sportsman in the true sense of the word, the other being a 'Goer of the first water. Due to a mix up in reports in various local papers, Alan who is the 'bad hat' arrives at St. Frank's with a reputation for being a champion footballer, whilst Arthur who is really the athletic one

turns up at St. Jims with the reputation of being a real 'bad hat'. As the tale unfolds Alan makes St. Frank's too hot to hold him by fouling at football, gambling and generally getting up to all sorts of shady tricks, so he writes to Arthur and making out it is a jape gets his brother to change places with him.

Arthur does so and of course is met with a terrific ragging, realising after a while what has happened however, he sets about clearing his name, meanwhile Alan at St. Jim's finding how Arthur has made good feels ashamed of himself and runs away from St. Jim's returning to St. Frank's in an effort to put things right. It all ends well in the end with a surprising finish that I will not reveal in case any readers wish to read the series.

Once again in 1941 he uses the same theme, this time in the 'Schoolboys Pocket Library' under another of his pen names Edward Thornton. Edwy must have liked the general format of this story as he wrote 4 versions of it, but here comes the crunch, his story has come true once again, two young ladies have brought it to life. Quote. Identical twins Caroline and Susan had teachers and classmates seeing double when they swapped schools for a day. The twins changed uniforms and sat through each others lessons for a Xmas jape, and the two 16 year old sisters got ten out of ten for their cheeky impersonation.

Caroline had everyone fooled when she posed as her other half at her sisters school, and no-one spotted the difference as Susan answered the roll call at Caroline's school. The twins who each have 8 O' Levels outwitted quite a number of teachers before they were finally rumbled when an eagled eyed sports mistress spotted Caroline as she was changing for a keep fit lesson. She coached both girls for the county hockey team. Luckily their headmistresses saw the funny side of the escapade.

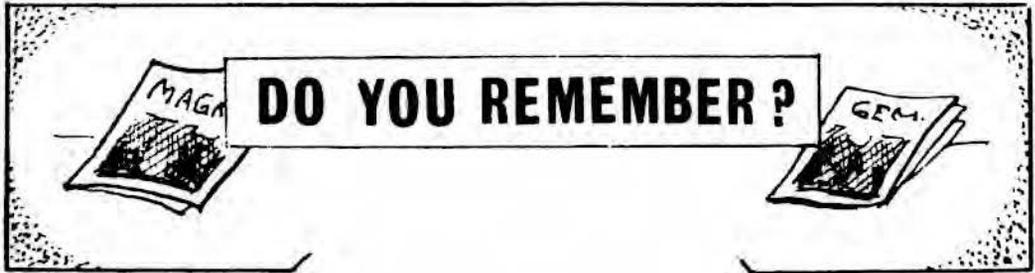
So Edwy got it right yet again. Truth can be as strange as fiction.

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### TRAGIC MONTH

As we go to press we get the shattering news that three of our most loyal and long-standing readers have been taken from us. We regret to announce the deaths of Syd Smyth of Australia; Clifford Letley of Bristol; and Peter Regan of Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

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No. 211 - Blackrock Island Series - Magnets 1626-9

by Roger M. Jenkins

The shadow of the coming war was already darkening the horizon in Easter 1939. Mr. Vernon-Smith had contributed £250 to the Governors' Fund for A.R.P. shelters, but the millionaire was also using the fear of war to line his own pockets. He was buying properties in Devon with a view to re-selling at a handsome profit to those who wished to scuttle away from the big cities. The Bounder, though interested in his father's financial affairs, was anxious to break up early so that he could go on a jaunt with Ponsonby & Co. for a few days before joining his father in Devon, and from this convoluted situation the Blackrock Island series began. Punter imitated the millionaire's voice on the telephone, asking Dr. Locke to give special leave, and in order to keep Bunter quiet Vernon-Smith gave him an invitation to Blackrock Castle for Easter, and the Famous Five were later included in the invitation as well. When they arrived, they discovered that the castle was a ruin and that Dave Oke's hut was the only habitation.

The later Magnets showed a mark decline in the author's style. The gentle irony, the surprising simile or metaphor, the detached humorous style - all had disappeared. What was left was the same strong characterisation and the same compelling story line. Charles Hamilton never lost his powers in plotting and narration, and the scene in Mr. Rance's office between the millionaire and his son was as fascinating as scores of other disputatious conversations over the previous years. Whilst one might have wished for a glimpse of that stolen holiday with the nuts of Highcliffe, it is understandable that it would not have been strictly relevant to the plot. Nevertheless, it was never made convincingly clear why Mr. Vernon-Smith should have used a run-down estate agent like Mr. Rance and why he should have boarded in the man's house instead of staying at

a local hotel. It was also left unexplained how the kidnapped millionaire was forced up a rope ladder, and how Rance alone was able to block the cave with boulders. Perhaps Charles Hamilton was feeling the strain now that he was writing new Gem stories each week as well as the Magnet tales.

Yet there were some pleasing touches as well. The series began with a quarrel between Vernon-Smith and Redwing and ended most appropriately with the Redwings' lugger arriving off the North Devon coast in the nick of time. Suspense was maintained by a feud between the Famous Five and Rance, with a continued investigation into the mystery of the cave, and the overall romantic attraction of being marooned on an island was likely to be very appealing to the youthful imagination. Certainly no one could complain about a lack of incidents, and all in all the series would have been very acceptable to that large group of fans of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

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PEGG (continued from Page 13)

reached by small boats. Perhaps, as also with Hawkscliffe, FR tends to make them more like Cornish fishing villages and in some instances describes a coast more like that county.

The hardbacks, however, make Pegg a much larger place, particularly in "Billy Bunter's Double". "Pegg, originally a fishing village had not always had a front, it was still a fishing village in parts. In other parts it was a seaside resort with an array of boarding houses, ice cream stands and other attractive amenities." There was also a cinema and there are illustrations of a large pleasure pier and of some Victorian buildings on the front. FR obviously wanted a seaside resort fairly near to Greyfriars where Billy Bunter's double, Wally, could stay, and doubtless altered Pegg to suit.

Other hardbacks like "Bunter the Stowaway", published in 1964 after FR's death, make it not so large but gives it an old wooden pier from which steam yachts can sail and in "Bunter's Beanfast" a pleasure steamer sails from there to Boulogne.

In probably the poorest of the hardbacks "Billy Bunter at Butlin's" published in 1961, the year of Charles Hamilton's death, Sir Billy Butlin is in the neighbourhood of Pegg with a view to establishing a Holiday Camp. Although such a poor story it is more likely that

(continued on Page 25)

# The Bound of the Haskervilles !

Another Grand Story dealing with the Amazing Adventures of HERLOCK SHOLMES, Detective.

## CHAPTER ONE

THE story of the disappearance of Sir Huckaback Haskerville, and the strange events that followed, has never been fully told. It is my privilege as the faithful companion and chronicler of Herlock Sholmes, to give the story to the public for the first time.

It was Sholmes, it is needless to say, who solved the mystery that had baffled the police for three weeks. It is only just that my amazing friend should be given, even at this late date, the credit that is his due.

The disappearance of Sir Huckaback, the head of one of the oldest families in Slopshire, had created a sensation. There were whispers of family dissensions that had preceded it. Society held that Lady Haskerville was to blame. What seemed certain was that the unhappy baronet, after hot words at the breakfast-table, had rushed forth from his ancestral halls, and plunged to his death in the deep chasm in the heart of Haskerville Park. From those gloomy depths he had never emerged.

Strange stories were told of that yawning chasm in Haskerville Park. Tradition had it that a certain ancestor of the Haskervilles who had sided with King Charles



A strong scent of frying fish came from the open window!

in the Civil Wars, had escaped the soldiers of the Parliament by a desperate leap across the yawning gulf. From this tradition the place was known locally as "The Bound of the Haskervilles". A certain resemblance was given to the story by the fact that this ancient Haskerville had had a considerable reputation as a bounder in the Royal Court before the wars.

Be this as it may, there could be little doubt that his descendant had perished in those gloomy depths. His footsteps had been traced to the edge of the chasm, and there were no returning footprints. Where his ancestor, pursued by Cromwell's Ironsides, had bounded to safety, if local tradition was to be relied upon, Sir Huckaback had plunged into his doom.

The grief of Lady Haskerville was terrible. For several days she was not seen at the theatre or the cinema. I was not surprised when one morning, as I sat at breakfast with Herlock Sholmes in our rooms at Shaker Street, Lady Haskerville was announced.

Sholmes made a slight gesture of impatience. He was very busy at this time upon a case of the missing Depaste diamonds, and had no mind for other work. But his face relaxed at the sight of Lady Haskerville. Even the clever work of her Bond Street complexion specialist could not hide the pallor of her beautiful face.

"Mr. Sholmes," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "you will help me! I have come to you as a last resource. The police are helpless."

Sholmes smiled ironically.

"It is not uncommon for my aid to be called in when the police have proved to be helpless," he remarked. "But really, my dear Lady Haskerville--pray sit down--really, I cannot leave the case I am engaged upon."

I glanced at Sholmes, wondering whether his firmness would be proof against this beautiful, tearful woman.

My friend wavered.

"Well, well," he said. "Let us see what can be done. Pray give me the details, Lady Haskerville. You may speak quite freely before my friend Jotson."

"I am convinced that Sir Huckaback still lives," said Lady Haskerville, weeping. "But he will not return. Mr. Sholmes, it was my fault; I admit it. Oh, to see him once more and confess my fault upon my knees! The bloaters were burnt!"

"The bloaters?" queried Herlock Sholmes.

"It was a trifling quarrel," said Lady Haskerville tearfully. Sir Huckaback's favourite breakfast dish was the succulent bloater. I have never cared for bloaters; my own taste ran rather in the direction of shrimps. Mr. Sholmes, we love each other dearly; yet upon this subject there was frequently argument. On the morning of Sir Huckaback's disappearance, there were words--high words. Sir Huckaback maintained that the bloaters were burnt. I maintained that they were done perfectly. Mr. Sholmes, to my shame I confess it, I knew that the bloaters were burnt!" She sobbed.

Sholmes' clear-cut face was very grave.

"And then?" he asked quietly.

"Then, Mr. Sholmes, Sir Huckaback rose in wrath, and declared that if he must eat burnt bloaters he would not remain at Haskerville Park. I was angry, too; I was not myself at that moment. In my haste I said that if he persisted in his obnoxious predilection for bloaters, I never desired to look upon him again. He gave me one terrible look, and vanished. Too late I called to him; he did not hear, or he would not heed. I hoped he would return. In spite of the difference in our tastes, I loved him dearly. But he did not come back. Search was made. The police were called in. The track of his boots was found, leading down to the yawning abyss in the park known as the Bound of the Haskervilles. There he had disappeared."

Lady Haskerville trembled with emotion. My own eyes were not dry.

The grief of this beautiful woman moved me deeply. Sholmes was unusually gentle.

"But I cannot believe that he is dead," continued Lady Haskerville controlling her emotion. "Mr. Sholmes, he is keeping away from me. He has taken my hasty words too too seriously; and that he will never give up bloaters I know only too well. I feel that he is living yet, in some quiet and serene spot where he may be able to enjoy his favourite breakfast-dish undisturbed. He must be found, Mr. Sholmes, or my heart will be broken. This dreadful doubt must be set at rest."

"It is quite certain that the footprints leading to the chasm were really Sir Huckaback's?" asked Sholmes.

"Yet, that is certain; his foot-prints were well known. He took number eleven in boots."

Herlock Sholmes caressed his chin thoughtfully for a moment. Then he rose to his feet.

"Your car is outside, Lady Haskerville?"

"Yes, Mr. Sholmes. You will come with me?" she exclaimed eagerly

"We will come," corrected Herlock Sholmes.

"My friend Jotson will, I am sure, give up his patients for one day."

"Willingly!" I exclaimed.

Ten seconds later we were in the car, whirling away at top speed for the ancient home of the Haskervilles, in the heart of Slopshire.

(to be continued)

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FOR SALE: More Gems down the years, this month from the Danny period of about 50 years ago; 1339; 1345 - 1351; 1354 - 1355; 1359; 1364 - 1365; 1368; 1372; 1377; 1384 - 1386; 1389; 1392; 1396 - 1397; 1407 - 8; 1411; 1420; 1434; 1448; 1454; 1459 - 1460 (the Cockney at St. Jim's pair); 1461 - 1466: 80p each; Condition varies but mainly good; rougher Gems at 25p each: 1362; 1370- 71; 1374 - 76; 1399; 1403; 1443; 1439. Schoolboys' Own Libraries: No. 50 "Tom Merry's Enemy" £2; 258 "Captain and Slacker"; 260 "The Stick at Nothing Schoolboy" (these two comprise a Cardew series at £2 each; 270 "Japers of St. Jim's 287 "Tom Merry & Co. Declare War"; 320 "A Lion at St. Jim's": £1.50 each. Old Boys Books, a complete catalogue by Lofts & Adley (brand new condition £1; Howard Baker Volume "Tom Merry's Weekly" (brand new condition) £3.50; Guinness Film Facts and Feats" (1985) brand new at half-price: £3.45 Postage extra on all items.

Write ERIC FAYNE (no reply if items already sold)

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"ORIGINAL GHA's 1924/5 £8 each plus postage. Dawkins, 33, Ivy House Park, Henlade, TAUNTON, Somerset, TA3 5HR."



A MORCOVE ANNIVERSARY

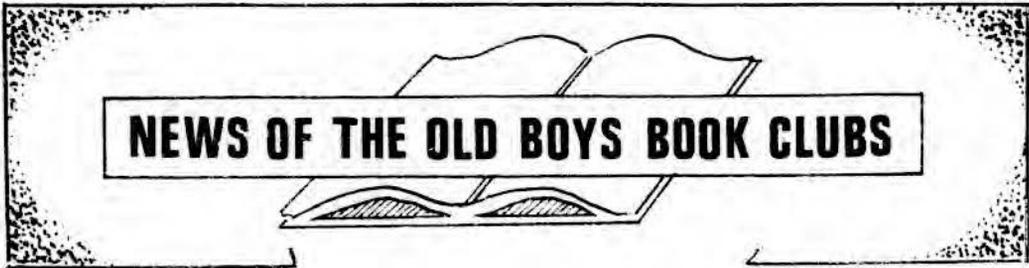
(Remembered by Mary Cadogan)

65 years ago this month the Schoolgirls' Own and Morcove School were launched. This paper was, of course 'sister' to the already immensely popular School Friend. Appropriately, Morcove was the brain-child of Horace Phillips ('Marjorie Stanton'), who had done so much to enhance the appeal of Cliff House when, as 'Hilda Richards', he had been one of the main authors to take over from Charles Hamilton and 'feminise' the saga of Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Marjorie and Clara.

Phillips created strongly appealing characters and stories of unusual intensity and charm which, as adults, we can still find fascinating. 65 years on, let us pay tribute to Horace Phillips for his wonderful schoolgirl creations, like Betty Barton, the steadfast Captain of the Morcove Fourth, and her chums - Madcap Polly Linton; the boisterous teenage Eastern Queen, Naomer Nakara; Paula Creel, the lisping and languid duffer whom she loved to tease; Madge Minden, the Fourth's musical genius; Tess Trelawney, a gifted artist, and the elegant, impressive Pam Willoughby. Equally unforgettable are Morcove baddies, with imperious Cora Grandways and sneaky Ursula Wade topping the list! And Leonard Shields's charismatic illustrations of them all made a perfect complement to Phillips's stories.

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WANTED. Lot O Fun, publisher Henderson, Litvak, 58 Stanwell Road, Ashford, Middx. Phone Ashford, Middx. 53609.



## NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS BOOK CLUBS

### CAMBRIDGE

We met at the home of Adrian Perkins on Sunday, 5th January, 1986. In the absence of Vic Hearn, Edward Witten was in the chair.

The Club learned with very great regret of the death of Jack Overhill's wife, and of the illness of his daughter. The Secretary was writing to Jack on behalf of the club to express our deep sympathy.

Adrian Perkins gave a fascinating talk on Frank Hampson, the creator of Dan Dare, and co-founder of "The Eagle". He was supported by Tony Cowley, who backed up the talk by showing film of the "Eagle", and of the recent mini-convention of "Eagle" fans at Northampton, "Minicon 85". Adrian's talk was warmly applauded. Club members browsed among Adrian's superb collection of "Eagles" and "Eagle" memorabilia with great admiration for the wide range of "Eagle" material he had assembled.

After enjoying Mrs. Perkin's delicious tea, during which your scribe found that Adrian's daughter was a member of the Guide Patrol who had won a Scout and Guide "Quiz" which he had helped to organize; Keith Hodgkinson entertained the meeting with a selection of Science Fiction films: following on an earlier selection he had shown at a previous meeting. In the semi-darkness your scribe found his notes even more illegible than usual, but the programme included "Flying Saucers", "Crack in the World", "Alien", "Star Wars", "The Empire Strikes Back" and (?) "Tron" (I think!)

Having assured ourselves that the chairman's moped was safely leaving us on terra firma and not rising skyward, we then departed on our separate ways, after warmly thanking Adrian and Mrs. Perkins for their entertainment and hospitality, with happy memories of our first meeting of 1986.

W.T.T.

### LONDON

A nice attendance assembled at the Walthamstow rendezvous for the first meeting of 1986 and the news that Joanna Clare arrived on January, 2nd to add to the family of Suzanne and Chris Harper. Congratulations were accorded to them by all present.

More plaudits for Brian Doyle at the conclusion of his reading the short Dylan Thomas story entitled "The Outing."

The "All at Sea, Shipping forecast" quiz conducted by Miriam Bruning was won by Alan Stewart and Timothy Bruning.

Winifred Morss read Memory Lane which came from the August 1970 Newsletter, number 213 and dealt with the meeting at Ruislip.

Don Webster conducted his "Name that Song" quiz. This proved popular and Winifred Morss was the winner.

A splendid reading given by Arthur Bruning taken from the Greyfriars Holiday Annual of 1927 told of Bunter going with the Remove Form footballers to St. Jim's, to escape the wrath of Mr. Quelch.

More Bunter as Roy Parsons read a letter written by the "Owl" to his pater requesting a loan and members had to spell like Bunter had written it, Laurie Sutton was the winner.

Duncan Harper read chapters from Union Jack 1470, "The Phantom of the Pantomime" and Bill Bradford read a Edwy Searles Brooks manuscript of a bizarre Sexton Blake story. Vote of thanks to Thelma and the lady helpers for making the tea.

Next meeting will be The Annual General one and will be at the Liberal Hall, Ealing on Sunday, 9th February. Bring tuck but tea will be available.

BEN WHITER

### NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 11th January, 1986

We were pleased to hear that Jack Allison was now out of hospital. He is taking a period of convalescence.

Our newest member is Margaret Atkinson and she was officially welcomed to our Club. Margaret commenced her first "official" duties by helping Mollie prepare the refreshments in the kitchen!

We had received the kind offer of her late husband's collection from a Mrs. Rhodes and we shall be adding the items to our library.

The book "The Wonderful World of Film Fun" was on view which brought some comment.

Mention was made of the "Windmill" series on television and

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the recent clips from "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School", 1956 and 1960 vintage. Also recently shown on television, was a clip from a 1960's "Biggles" programme. We had been able to see how production techniques had improved over the years.

Michael Bentley presented a hundred percent Greyfriars quiz dealing with facts that as readers, we should all know. Bill Williamson was the winner.

Geoffrey Good presented a "last Lines" item quoting from various well-known pieces of literature - such as "Wuthering Heights", "I, Claudius", "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's". This was a very stimulating exercise. Credit to Keith Atkinson for obtaining the most correct answers.

Visitors are welcome on the second Saturday of each month from 6.30 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church Cafe/S.P.C.K. Bookshop, City Centre, Leeds - very near to the railway station.

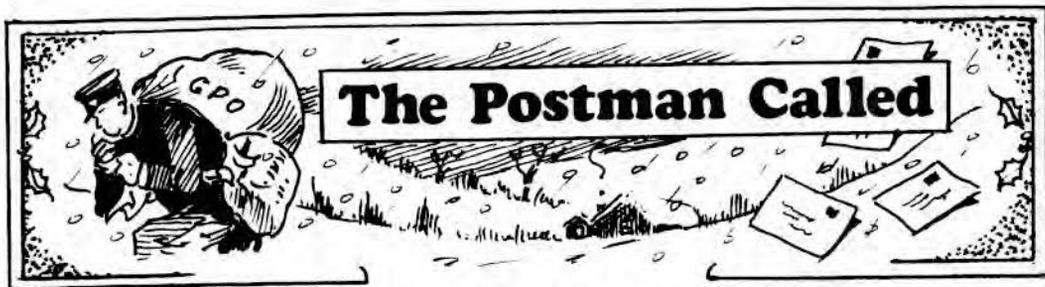
#### JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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PEGG (continued from Page 18)

a camp be established near a seaside village rather than the thriving resort of "Billy Bunter's Double".

Also in the hardbacks Pegg acquires a railway station. In "The Runaway Rebel" (M1296) the search for Wharton extends towards Pegg and the prefects express surprise that Wharton has gone there as it has no railway. In the hardback "Bunter the Bold" however, the absent-minded Professor Pawson forgets to alight at Courtfield and is carried on to the terminus at Pegg and in Billy Bunter's Bodyguard (1962) the level crossing at Pegg is mentioned. In the Butcher map, however, the railway is shown as passing about half a mile inland from Pegg but no station is shown.



JOHNNY BURSLEM (Wickford) I Waited until Christmas Night to Open the Annual and read your opening letter. Bless the spirit that prompted you into action, for this year's Annual is a Beauty.

COLIN PARTIS (Grimsby) Yet another fantastic Annual! In reply to the letter by J.E.M. of Brighton in December, readers may like to know that "Tales of St. Austin's" has also been published by Penquin Books in their Wodehouse series. Besides "Out of Bounds", another story from "Tales of St. Austin's" reprinted in the Holiday Annual was "How Pillingshot Scored", but I don't remember the year. The souvenir Press has also published in hardback six Wodehouse school stories. "The Gold Bat" and "The White Feather" were both about Wrykin School, at which school the famous Wodehouse character "Psmith" was a pupil.

DICK WENSTRUP (New Richmond, U.S.A.) Has the "Small Cinema" series ever been published as a whole? It was a great series, and well worth printing. I missed quite a few and would welcome the chance of reading them all in chronological order.

E.G. HAMMOND (Upminster) In your chat this month you mentioned the Romford - Upminster - Gray's branch line and wondered if it still existed.

Indeed it does. At the moment the Upminster - Romford section is being electrified. The Upminster - Grays section was done some years back.

On several occasions closure has been threatened, but fortunately the voice of the silent majority was raised loud enough to be heard by the powers that be. We locals hope that these threats have been silenced for good, but one can never be sure.

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J.F BURRELL (Bristol) I have just read my first Collector's Digest Annual and think it excellent.

One or two points.

Roger M. Jenkins, in his very good article on Highcliffe expresses surprise that two schools like Greyfriars and Highcliffe should be so close together geographically.

This is far from being unknown. In close proximity are Taunton, Kings Taunton and Queens, Taunton, at Horsham there is Christ's Hospital and Collyers and Petersfield has Bedales and Churchers.

Charles Hamilton may have overdone it when he also inserted in the same neighbourhood, Redclyffe and St. Judes, but this may have been a matter of convenience regarding sporting fixtures. Add to this the schools that the Cliff House writers had to include as they were not allowed to mention Greyfriars.

Harold Truscott raises an interesting point about Hamilton having no use for corridor trains. Maybe it helps with the plot if the victim of an attack cannot escape but it has considerable scope in connection with disputes with different parties of boys returning to school or on breaking up day. Mr. Vernon-Smith travels down to Sussex in a first class non-corridor compartment. Living in Kent may have been more familiar with non-corridor trains as the Southern Railway and its constituents had more non-corridor coaches than the other companies due to their shorter journeys. In 1932 I recall travelling in a through train from Brighton to Cardiff which had some non-corridor coaches.

Eric Lawrence also raises an interesting point about the two wicket keepers called Oldfield. His selection for such an important match as this was something of a mystery. Leeds born Peter Carlton Oldfield never played for a first class county but for Oxford University and in first class matches for MCC. This match has always been looked upon as something of a Test Trial and he was unlikely to be selected for England with such good wicket keepers as Ames, Duckworth, Levett, Wood and Farrimond around.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: I recall as a small child having complete years of "The Children's Magazine". Each issue had two full pages in colour of Mrs. Hippo's Boys, or something similar - a forerunner of the Bruin Boys. Later, "The Children's Magazine" had its name changed to "My Magazine".)

DENNIS HILLIARD (Stapleford) Thank you for the Annual which arrived early for Christmas. As usual it was savoured after morning serice on Christmas Day. Thank you for the rich offering again so tastefully served.

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I read with interest your notes on "The Children's Newspaper. I have never read a single copy although I can recall the publication. That very great man Arthur Mee was born in Stapleforth and attended school here. Today he is commemorated in the town in the name of a Further Education College and a post-war street. At the nearby Comprehensive School he is remembered in the 'Arthur Mee Award' presented annually to the pupil most favoured by staff and pupils. They receive books on tools to enable them in career training.

Two of 'my boys' (Stuart Bradwell 1951 and Philip Robinson 1972) won that prize. Both were leading members of a Boys' Club I ran there for 30 years. Both are still in touch and have proved a credit to the award.

I treasure, particularly Arthur Mee's 'Kings England' series and have the set of the original printing.

Miss EVELYN FLINDERS (Hitchin) I loved the Chat about Bessie Bunter. She was a much nicer character than her brother, Billy. She even had a heart, a really soft one.

F. STURDY (Middlesborough) An article on Claremont School is, I think, overdue. Or, perhaps, an episode from "Cnuckles" and reprinted in the manner of the early St. Jim's, pre-Tom Merry, period that you gave us in C.D. some time ago. Together with the Magnet reprints I found them most enjoyable, as I did the Herlock Sholmes stories. All in the cause of variety, and Claremont is in the family of the Companion Papers".

Re-reading the Goldhawk series of St. Jim's, I regard them as Hamilton's best writing since the second world war. Also, "The School Bell" should receive some attention. By the way, where was the scene laid? A district in S. London?

Mrs. IRENE RADFORD (Bridgwater) Thank you for the Christmas issue of C.D. I have read it from cover to cover and I enjoyed every word.

I liked the cover very much, it was really Christmassy - a fore-taste of all the good things inside, and what good things there were too. Especially, I enjoyed that lovely article by Tommy Keen "Peace on Earth at Wharton Lodge". It was beautifully written, very touching but lovely; sentimental - yes - but I think that all C.D. readers are a bit sentimental, we must be to enjoy the nostalgia of reading all the magazines and books of our youth.

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BRIAN DOYLE (Putney) Regarding your query about T.B. Reed's FOLLOW MY LEADER: this story was originally published in book form by Cassell's in 1885 and later ran as a serial in Cassell's BOYS' WORLD Magazine in 1906 under the title THE BOYS OF TEMPLETON (which was the book's sub-title in hardcover). It would appear to be Reed's second published full-length novel for boys (not counting his books of collected short stories), appearing after THE ADVENTURES OF THREE-GUINEA WATCH in 1883 and before THE FIFTH FORM AT ST. DOMINIC'S in 1887 (these two being originally serialised in BOP, as you say).

FOLLOW MY LEADER was illustrated by W.S. Stacey and, as I point out in my two books (THE WHO'S OF BOYS' WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS and THE WHO'S WHO OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE), together with the above information, never seemed to catch on in the same way as Reed's other novels, for some reason.

BILL LOFTS (London) I must confess that I always liked Charles Hamilton's Bessie Bunter, and her introduction in the Greyfriars stories. Although almost a carbon of Billy, such was the skill of the characterisation that I could detect differences in her and her two brothers. Sammy was much sharper, Bessie more strong willed. Unfortunately I was told that there was a lot of acrimony between the editors of Magnet and School Friend due to Charles Hamilton writing Cliff House tales for the latter. As a result, the dispute went to Director level, and the outcome was that Mr. Hamilton ceased to pen further stories, Greyfriars was also forbidden to be mentioned in the stories, so they created other boys' schools. Secretly I was also told that the editor of School Friend did not mind this at all. He did not wish to give any publicity mentioning Greyfriars to a rival paper The Magnet, that had a large number of girl readers - and secondly he had found out that Charles Hamilton's Bessie Bunter was not liked by many of his girl readers.

Regarding the Charles Skilton 'Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School' volume. At a Western Club meeting last year in which Mr. Skilton attended, he gave the information that it sold very badly indeed. It seemed to him that old readers of Cliff House were simply not interested. This was not due to Mr. Hamilton writing it - but simply that in our hobby the interest in old girls papers is very tiny indeed - compared to say Magnet, Gem, and Nelson Lee.

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HIGHCLIFFE'S UNIQUE FOURTH FORM

by H. HEATH

The C.D. Annual was a welcome arrival and I enjoyed particularly the article by Roger Jenkins entitled, "HIGHCLIFFE, A STUDY OF A SOCIETY IN DECAY".

It is well established that a story in the Magnet featuring Cecil Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe was usually one of high quality. There was of course never any chance of Ponsonby reforming, and if he had there is little doubt that the Magnet would have been the poorer without this devious character. As it was the well drawn and so different character of Frank Courteney, Rupert De Courcy and Cecil Ponsonby continued to provide the key ingredients to many splendid stories.

Roger Jenkins refers to Courtney and Ponsonby as being cousins. Ponsonby had at least one other cousin who was not so well known. In the opening story of the "Benbow Series" (St. Winifreds), in the Gem, No. 1588, it is stated that Vernon Daubeny and originally very much in the Ponsonby mould, was a cousin of Ponsonby. Daubeny subsequently reformed in the course of the 61 stories featuring the "Benbow".

I have long been interested in a fourth member of the Highcliffe Fourth - Reginald Gadsby. In one of the earlier stories concerning Highcliffe, "Rivals and Chums", it is said that;

"next to the great PONSONBY HIMSELF, Gadsby was the most unscrupulous young rascal among the select circle of "blades" in the Fourth Form at Highcliffe".

The original inner circle of "nuts" consisted of Ponsonby, Gadsby and Vavasour. This is shown in Magnet No. 880 (The First Wharton Rebel Series), when these three notables holidayed together in the South of France. Over succeeding years, Monson edged out Vavasour from the inner circle, whilst Gadsby although still remaining very much a member, mellowed in the course of time. This change is clearly shown in Magnet No. 1339 (The Hiking/Holiday Annual Series).

Vernon-Smith joins Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, Vavasour and Drury at Gadsby's home, Gadsby Croft, and the six settle down to play poker. Vernon-Smith's thoughts on the Highcliffians is illuminating:

"He noted that when Vavasour or Gadsby dealt the cards he had his usual luck - at least as good as the others. When Ponsonby or Monson or Drury dealt he had a good hand - good enough to inspire reckless betting, but not quite

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good enough to beat the dealer. Having noted that much the Bounder was aware that the three of them were acting in consort to rook him. Gadsby and Vavasour were left out of that peculiar game - Gaddy because he was too decent Vavasour because he was too stupid to join in such proceedings".

Highcliffe when introduced into the Magnet was for me always an added attraction. Unfortunately, like the New House at St. Jim's and the modern side at Rookwood, the complete list of that infamous Fourth Form remains shadowy and incomplete. Nevertheless sixteen members can be named: Courtenay, De Courcy, Benson, Blades Drury, Gadsby, Jackson, Jones, Merton, Monson, Pelham, Ponsonby, Smithson, Tunstall, Vavasour and Yates. I estimate that the strength of the Form was lower than that of the Greyfriars Remove, and attempt the following calculation:

Let us assume that Study No. 8 containing four of Courtenay's most ardent supporters, Smithson, Yates, Benson and Jones was the end study. We know that Courtenay and De Courcy were in Study No. 3 with Ponsonby, Gadsby and Monson in Study No. 5. It was very likely that the remaining five studies each contained three occupants. This makes a total of twenty four, of which nine were "nuts" - Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, Vavasour, Drury, Blades, Pelham, Tunstall, and Merton.

The book, "Greyfriars School - A Prospectus" by J.S. Butcher has the Highcliffe School colours as "black and white". Although I am unable to verify it, these colours may have been taken from an editorial column entitled, "Blake Answers Back" which appeared in a 1939 Gem. I am satisfied that the correct colours were "Yellow and Black" as stated in the Gem No. 1599 when a Highcliffe v. St. Winifred's football match was featured. This fact is amply confirmed in the post-war book, "Billy Bunter's Postal Order" published by Charles Skilton Ltd. in 1951.

It was a pity that Hamilton wrote only two stories with Highcliffe firmly in mind. However, taking into consideration all that was written about Ponsonby & Co. in the Magnet, and this was considerable, it could be said with some reason that Highcliffe had earned the title of "Hamilton's Fourth School".

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