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STORY PAPER

40

NOVEMBER
1986

COLLECTORS DIGEST

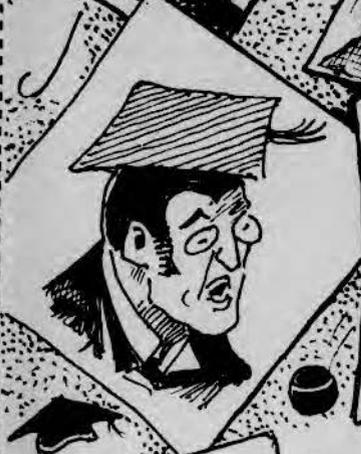
VOL. 40
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RUBY
JUBILEE

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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Founded in 1941 by
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Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

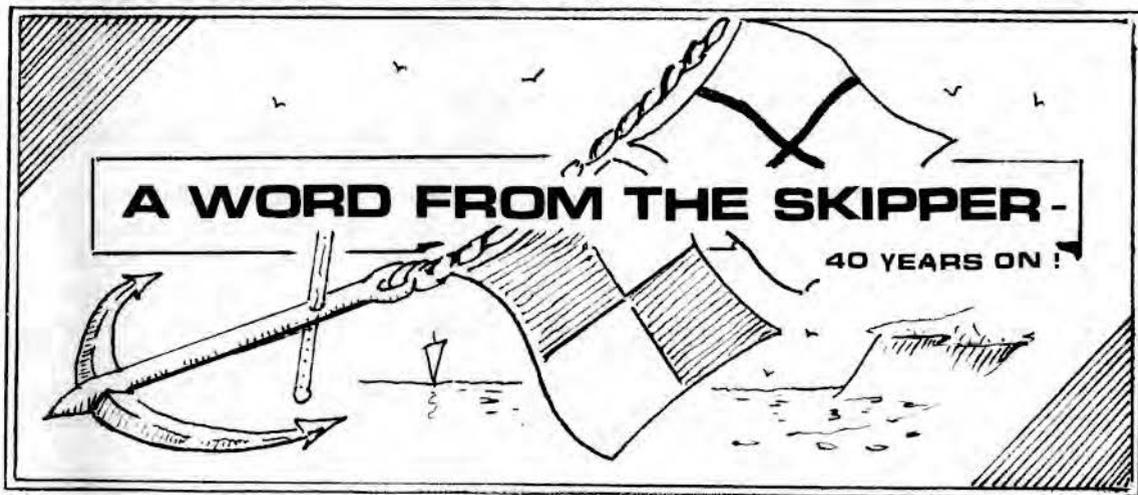
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No. 479

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OUR RUBY JUBILEE

It seems like only yesterday that I was preparing my Editorial for our Coral Jubilee - our 35th Anniversary. Yet the intermediate five years have gone by in a flash - and here we are at our Ruby Jubilee - our 40th Birthday. Where have all the years gone? It just doesn't seem possible - but it is so. 40 years.

It is exactly 40 years since a pleasant, dedicated Yorkshire - man in late middle life founded and sent out the first copy of this magazine. That first issue was dated November 1946. Just a few of us are left who were in it, right from the beginning. How

many I wonder! Not a lot, for 40 years is a long time - and a long time takes its toll in human life. If you were in it from the start, drop me a line and let me know. It would be interesting to know, near enough, just how many of the starters have stayed the course. It can only be a mere handful.

Way back, in the thirties, I though I was a bit of a weirdo - a young schoolmaster still having the Magnet and Gem delivered regularly and saving them week by week in a pile which was getting larger and larger.

My first hobby correspondent was a Canadian - Tex Rickard - who had seen my name in the editorial column of the Gem. We exchanged letters for years. He put me in touch with another keen Canadian, Bill Gander, and it was Bill Gander who some time later passed on my particulars to the little Yorkshireman, Herbert Leckenby.

So I began to realise that I wasn't exactly a lone voice crying in the wilderness. It began to look as though there might actually be a thin framework for a hobby.

Was there a hobby? I began to wonder.

Ten years earlier, in November 1936 to be precise, the Editor published the following item in his Editor's Page in the Gem:

"I have received a card from E. Pannell, a Portsmouth reader. He asks me whether he can obtain an issue of the first numbers of the Gem and the "Schoolboys' Own Library." I very much doubt if an issue of the first Gem is still in existence. The only copy I have is in a bound volume. There might be some copies of the first S.O.L. still about, but I doubt it."

How wrong that editor was! Mr. Down had no idea what was going on. I'm not sure whether I had a copy of Gem No. 1 at that time, but I certainly had the S.O.L. from No. 1.

But I am digressing. Let's go back to the Ruby Jubilee. Following on Bill Gander's introduction, a regular correspondence started between Herbert Leckenby and myself. He often rang me up, though he was never too easy to hear over the telephone.

So Herbert started the C.D. With glorious optimism, and over-ambitious, he made it a monthly. A monthly, with only one pair of hands on the editorial job, was tempting fate. It made no allowances for illnesses or accidents, or other eventualities. Yet it has been its frequency and its regularity which have been the root of the C.D.'s success. It has lasted longer than all the papers of which we write so lovingly, and, touch wood and thank God for His goodness, it has never missed an issue.

Herbert started from scratch. He had little knowledge of or interest in Hamiltonia, which was to be by far the backbone of the hobby. His interest was mainly in the very early Boys' Friend, long before Rookwood. (If he were living today, Herbert would be 100 years old. Your present Editor is not a hundred; he just feels a hundred now and then.) Herbert had no personal collection to speak of.

But Herbert wrote a small neat hand, and he loved writing. He was a great letter-writer, and he had a large number of correspondents. Those correspondents were to form the nucleus of the new magazine. (Bill Gander, on the other hand, was younger, and had a big collection of Magnets and Rookwood of the earlier days.)

It is rare for any magazine to be still going strong after 40 glorious years. It is rare for any magazine to have only two editors during such an immense span.

Bill Gander was a lonely man. Herbert Leckenby was a lonely man. And your present editor is lonely, too, since I lost my beloved Madam. Yet we have hundreds of friends who have made it all possible.

C.D. brought us together.

A thousand thanks to you all. God bless you.

A DIFFERENT WORLD

This country of ours has changed a lot from the one into which C.D. was introduced forty years ago. There have been a great many changes, and very few of those changes have been for the better.

Inflation hadn't taken off then. It cost one penny to post the magazine to a reader for delivery the next day. Today the same service cost not much under four shillings. It cost 1/- for a man to have a haircut in a good-class saloon. Today a man under 65 won't get much change from £3, no matter how little hair he may have left. There was more countryside - government after government allots more and more countryside to the developers in spite of the preservationists. There won't be much left in another 40 years.

Bookshops have become little havens for pornography in the name of progress. Crime has become an epidemic, and murders are two a penny.

In 1946 C.D. evoked happy memories of the lovely old papers we read in our childhood. Forty years on, readers turn to C.D. to have a half-hour with a world which is gone beyond recall.

A VOTE FOR THE SCHOOL CAPTAIN

Fifty years ago this month our Danny was enjoying in the Gem a four-story series in which Kildare, Captain of the School, was called home, and an election was called for someone to replace him. The series had originally appeared early in 1914.

Youngsters would have enjoyed it immensely - the thought of Tom Merry, a junior, being elected Captain of the School and therefore with more authority than any of the prefects.

For the adult reader a little thought makes the theme extremely unlikely. It is certain that any Headmaster, with vast experience of boys, would select his most suitable prefect for his school Captain. He would not have him selected by a general vote in the school, thus making it possible for any inappropriate boy to get the job.

I cannot recall that the same theme was ever used at either of the other Hamilton main schools.

An election for Junior Captain was, at least, more feasible, and that was a theme which recurred on a good many occasions. Tom Merry lost out to Cardew, Wharton was outvoted in favour of Vernon-Smith, and Jimmy Silver had to make way for Mornington. The junior elections provided high drama and much excitement in a good many outstanding series.

But the appointment of a captain of the School by an election was just not believable. All the same, I reckon I enjoyed it as a youngster. Didn't you?

THE ROARING FORTIES

Still on the forty theme. Come Christmas, all being well, we shall have the 40th edition of the C.D. Annual. Have you ordered your copy yet?

THE EDITOR

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

The other night I came home late. My man had been calling - and calling - and calling for about two hours.

So, at last, I strolled in. After all, a Princess can't hurry herself. My man was pleased to see me, of course.

I went straight and used my litter tray which is always placed in the alcove in the hall as soon as it gets dark.

My man said: "Well, if that isn't the limit!"

There's no pleasing some people.

C.D. RUBY JUBILEE

Here are some of the nice things you have been saying about us. They bring a warm glow to the old heart, even though I know I don't deserve half of them. It is not modest of me to publish them, but I couldn't resist the temptation.

ERIC

FORTY YEARS YOUNG.

by Mary Cadogan

Rubies are warm, glowing and very precious - and so too is the C.D. which now celebrates its fortieth anniversary with this Ruby number.

What a wonderful achievement it is for a privately circulated paper to be so long-lived and so well-loved! It is as much part of our lives as the Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee, Union Jack or Schoolgirl were during our childhood. And, as a link between the various Old Boys' Book Clubs, it is the ever friendly focal point of our collecting circle.

The energy, enthusiasm and dedication of our Editor, Eric Fayne, and his predecessor, Herbert Leckenby, have been boundless. When the C.D. was launched forty years ago, few people could have anticipated that it would continue to provide nostalgic reading and entertainment into and beyond the middle of the nineteen-eighties.

The C.D. is indeed a jewel - and long may it continue to add lustre to our lives. Thank you dear Eric, again and again, for helping to keep alive for us all so many of the pleasures of past times. We are for ever in your debt.

LESLIE ROWLEY writes:

At this season of anniversaries you will be receiving many letters of appreciation for the good work and indefatigable effort with which you have ensured the continuation of the much-loved magazine and its Annual.

Being a simple soul I've lost count of the number of anniversaries that have sped so illustriously on their way. All I know is that, for seemingly endless time you have enhanced the enchantment of the old stories which we all love so much, injecting us all with your own personal enthusiasm for that wonderful world of make-believe.

Two simple words are all that come to mind as I write this letter. They are 'thank you'. Thank you for laughter shared and love for friends departed whom we both know.

TO ERIC - ON REACHING FORTY

Here	Widened
Only	Everyone's
Will	Outlook;
Something	What
Of	Eagerness
Value	To
Ever	Open
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(E. HOLMAN)

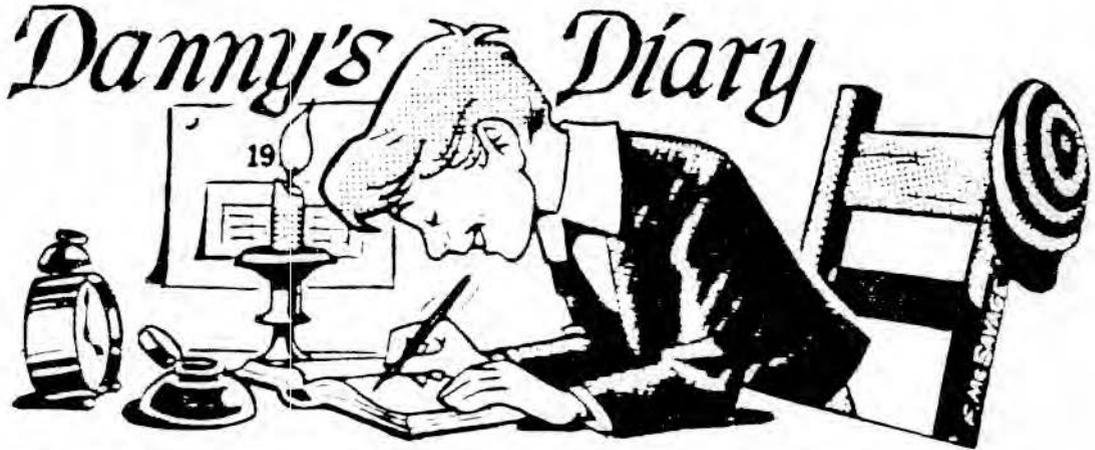
J.E.M. writes:

You invite comments for the Ruby Jubilee issue. What can one say that is adequate?

I became a reader of the Digest just under half its lifetime ago and yet still feel very much a new "old boy". And I simply can't begin to express by gratitude for the enormous pleasure and interest these pages have given me.

I have also been shown the greatest kindness and generosity by so many contributors: The late Mr. and Mrs. Packman, Mrs. Cadogan, Bill Thurbon, Len Hawkey, Bill Lofts, Christopher Lowder, and you, yourself, among a whole host of others.

It is most unlikely that I shall be around in another 40 years time, but I fervently hope the Digest will be.



NOVEMBER 1936

This month went out with a blaze of light and a shower of sparks. On the last day of the month the world-famous Crystal Palace was burnt down. I believe the great glass Palace was first built in Hyde Park for an exhibition sponsored by the Prince Consort in Victorian times, and later it was moved to Sydenham. It is sad to know that only the two great towers are now remaining. People watched the blaze for any amount of miles all round London.

The Modern Boy is well up to standard at present. Best of the bill is the Charles Hamilton serial "The Schoolboy Detective", about Len Lex. Len is suspicious of no less than four of the school's masters in his search for the criminal known as the "Sussex Man". This month Len learned the secret of the strange midnight prowlings

of Mr. Bullivant. Bullivant is not the Sussex Man, but he has broken the law. I like this school story very much - it is well out of the ordinary - and I'm sorry that it must be getting towards the end of it now.

Captain Justice has been going strong. First tale of the month was "Clash of Giants". In this one we have a gigantic dinosaur crashing into battle with young Midge clinging to its back.

Next came "Cavern of Doom" with Captain Justice and the Flying Cloud speeding to Midge's rescue. The exciting story is then carried on in "The Lost Land" which brings that series to an end. The end of November brought the start of a new Justice series with "The Flying Zoo". Captain Justice's airship has a most startling cargo - a cargo to set England in a mad panic. Whew!

There is also a series of flying stories by George E. Rochester. These are war stories. There is a serial "Menace of the Terribore" about two schoolboys on holiday who encounter the most amazing mechanical monster ever invented. Another serial is "Biggles Fights Alone".

Towards the end of the month the English Cricket Eleven set out for Australia, to fight for the Ashes. There has been some surprise in cricket circles that Gubby Allen has been made skipper of the side. Everybody knows he is a top-class cricketer, but in fact he has played but little first-class cricket. He puts his career first and the game of cricket second. Actually he was born in Sydney, Australia, though he has lived here since he was a small child. He did big cricket things at Eton and Cambridge. He plays for Middlesex, but only plays a few games for them each season. But in one season, against Lancashire, he took all ten wickets, hitting the stumps eight times - a rare feat for any fast bowler, for they usually rely more on catches. But Gubby Allen is enormously keen, and he says "I'm out to get those Ashes".

Also in the English team are Wally Hammond, Maurice Leyland, Fagg, Duckworth, Les Ames and plenty other star names. The first match starts at Brisbane early in December.

We mustn't forget that Australia have their secret weapon. His name is Don Bradman.

The new invention of Television is catching on, and more people are buying TV sets. Programmes are televised by the B.B.C. from Alexandra Palace. Good job it wasn't the Crystal Palace.

A great month in the monthlies. In the S.O.L. the Greyfriars story is "Captain and Tyrant". Gerald Loder has coveted the position



of Captain of Greyfriars from the day he was made a prefect. At last, by underhand methods, he usurps Wingate's place. But the hour of Loder's triumph is a bad one for the whole school.

The St. Jim's S.O.L. is "St. Jim's in Revolt!". It's a great story, the early part dealing with a feud between Mr. Ratcliff and Cutts of the Fifth. In the second part of the story Mr. Ratcliff is left in charge of the school, and a rebellion takes place with a barring-out.

The St. Frank's S.O.L. is "The Mystery of St. Frank's". The St. Frank's heroes are in London with Nelson Lee and Nipper up against kidnapers, crooks

and Chinese smugglers. A very exciting tale, full of action.

In the Sexton Blake Library I had "The Trail of the White Turban" by Coutts Brisbane. A cunning plot of the murderous crook Gunga Dass is countered by Sexton Blake, and a battle of wits take place.

In the Boys' Friend Library I bought "The Hidden Land" by Murray Roberts. This is a Captain Justice story. A young Indian prince is driven from his country by an unscrupulous rival, and Captain Justice and his friends take up the case to get the prince back on his throne.

In Portsmouth they have scrapped their trams and replaced them with motor buses. And the Dudley Opera House has been

destroyed by fire this month. What a month for fires!

Some tip-top films at the local cinemas. Eddie Cantor was good fun in "Strike Me Pink", a story about a timid owner of an amusement park who is threatened by crooks. Some good tunes in it. Freddie Bartholomew was in "Little Lord Fauntleroy", and James Cagney in "Frisco Kid" was out of the ordinary with the star as a sailor of long ago on the Barbary Coast who sets himself up as a mob-leader in that area.

Shirley Temple was great in "Captain January". A little girl is rescued from a shipwreck by a lighthouse keeper, played by Guy Kibbee. I found "The Petrified Forest" a little bit stodgy - I think it is the film of a play - about travellers who are held up by Gangsters. It has a wonderful cast - Leslie Howard, Bette Davis, and Humphrey Bogart.

Perhaps the best of the month is Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur in "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" about a retiring poet who inherits a vast fortune, and surprises everyone by his honesty. A quite good British musical - Gracie Fields in "Queen of Hearts" with John Loder, about a mill girl who poses as being from high society and wins an aristocrat for a husband.

"A Night at the Opera" is great stuff for Marx Brothers fans. The three brothers wreck an opera show, and then set to work to build it up again. The 4th brother, Zeppo, is not in this one. I very much enjoyed the Foreign Legion story "Under Two Flags" with Ronald Colman, Claudette Colbert (she plays the cafe girl named "Cigarette") and Rosalind Russell. Fine stuff.

A truly stunning month in the Gem. Absolutely top-notch stories. "Gore's Guilty Secret" is the best November 5th story I have ever read. Crooke is struck down in the quad on the eve of Firework night. Koumi Rao is suspected of having done the deed, but the title gives away the guilty one. There is a hilarious sequence where Gussy helps Glyn to make fireworks, and, as a consequence, the set pieces read "The New House is a Rotter", and "The Head is Requested to and Eat Coke".

Then follows a series of which the opening tale is "Tom Merry's Triumph". Kildare, the School Captain, is recalled to Ireland owing to illness at home, and so an election for a School Captain to replace him takes place. Cutts looks the likely winner, but Tom Merry stands for Captain and is elected. Then came "Captain Tom Merry", and we enjoy Tom's adventures in his new lofty position. But at the end, the Head requested Tom to stand down and let Cutts take over.

So the third tale in the series is "A Bully at the Helm" with Cutts as the new skipper. The series continues next month. I am enjoying it enormously.

The old Magnet stories fit in snugly in the last few pages of every Gem, and I hope they go on for ever. This month's early Greyfriars tales have told of the boys becoming stage struck, and the formation of the Wharton Dramatic Society. Great stuff!

The L.M.S. have broken the world's speed record for railway travel by doing the journey from London to Glasgow (402 miles) in 5 hours 53 minutes. The return journey was even faster.

Franklin Roosevelt, in the United States, has been re-elected President with an enormous majority. So they evidently like him. He must feel like Tom Merry did when he was elected School Captain.

A gorgeous month in the Magnet. There is a rather mysterious new boy in the Fifth at Greyfriars. His name is Valentine Compton and it looks to the reader as though he is part of a smuggling gang. The opening story of the series, set around Firework Day, is extremely well-told, is a bit involved, and holds the interest. It is called "The Secret of the Smuggler's Cave". When Harry Wharton & Co. and their girl friends from Cliff House set out for a picnic in the cave, they didn't know they were in for a big adventure. Bunter and his sister clear off with the boat and leave the party stranded. Bunter and Bessie get into difficulties with the boat, and the new boy, Compton, swims out against the tide, to give them help. An action-packed tale with not a bit of padding in it.

Next came "They Called Him a Funk". It was Wharton who was called a funk because he wouldn't break bounds, but he shows he has real nerve as the story unfolds. Then "The Schoolboy Smuggler". This is the actual tale where Compton comes as a new boy (bit late in the term for a new boy to arrive) and he is warmly welcomed owing to his pluck in rescuing Billy and Bessie. Compton is a first-class footballer, but Vernon-Smith suspects that the new senior wants watching for other reasons.

Last tale of the month is "Contraband" and it stars the new senior, Valentine Compton, and Vernon-Smith who is watching him. It's terrific stuff. The series continues next month.

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

S.O.L. 280 "Captain and Tyrant" comprised the middle three stories of the 9-story Loder-Captain Series of the Magnet of late 1925.

For anyone wanting a perfect S.O.L. - and, what is more, a perfect St. Jim's story, then that person need go no further than S.O.L. No. 281 "St. Jim's in Revolt". It is an oddly constructed volume, in a way, but, either by accident or design, the compiler hit on the right formula. The volume starts with the brilliant school story "The Housemaster's Mistake" from the Gem of the summer of 1924. This is the famous story where Mr. Ratcliff erroneously accuses Cutts of theft. At the end, Cutts demands - and gets - a public apology from the embarrassed Housemaster. All well and good. St. Jim's at its best. This was a fairly long single Gem story, occupying nearly half the S.O.L. To complete the volume he compiler went three years earlier to late 1921 for a 3-story rebellion series, this time with Figgins and the New House rising in rebellion against their Housemaster.

Following on the superb Cutts story, this could easily have been a faulty move. A barring-out series would almost certainly be more extravagantly written than the perfect "House master's Mistake".

But actually the little barring out series is restrained in length - only 3 Gems from a time when the stories were very short. It is restrained in length and in the way it is written. A novel twist comes when the School House boys under Tom Merry bring the rebellion to an end. What could easily have been a badly balanced tale is actually one of the best S.O.L.'s you could hope to find.

The 1936 Gem story "Gore's Guilty Secret" had been "By Whose Hand?" in the first week of November 1913. It was a Koumi Rao story - and was actually the last one on that character to be reprinted. In fact, Hamilton only wrote one more single about Koumi Rao. It is remarkable that he created a good character, and then neglected him completely.

There then followed a four-story series from the Spring of 1914 (the stories for reprinting in the Gem were being picked out very much at random at this time, and the reason is obscure). This was a series in which Kildare left St. Jim's, and first Tom Merry, in two stories, and then Cutts, in two stories, became Captain of the School. In 1914 the series was interrupted by the inclusion of a sub-tale, which makes it clear that the real Martin was behind the clock with his material. "Tom Merry's Triumph" of 1936 had been "The New Captain" in 1914. "Captain Tom Merry" had the same title on both occasions. The 1936 "A Bully at the Helm" had been "Under His Thumb" in 1914.

So it was 50 years ago that the winsome and charming little lad, Freddie Bartholomew, was delighting cinemagoers in such fine films as "Captains Courageous" and "Little Lord Fauntleroy". It gives one a pang to think that, if he is still living, he is now in his sixties. I wonder how time has treated him.

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR ANNUAL YET?



REVIEW

by J.E.M.

SEXTON BLAKE WINS. Selected and introduced by Jack Adrian
(Dent's Classic Thrillers. 460pp. £5.95)

I confess to being a Blakian not entirely enamoured of the man himself. For me (with all respect to Jack Adrian!), Sexton Blake has always suffered from the "second-hand Sherlock" image. It was, for the most part, the army of supporting characters in the Blake saga which kept me a staunch and unwavering follower. After all, none of the great popular thriller-writers, from Oppenheim to Edgar Wallace, created villains more exotic than Zenith the Albino, or adventuresses more glamorous than Mlle. Roxane, or Scotland Yard men more memorable than Inspector Coutts. Nor were their stories more ingenious than those of Blake's top scribes. Dent's Classic Thrillers series now pays homage to this truth by adding to volumes of stories by Wallace, 'Sapper' and Leslie Charteris the collection under review.

This is a selection from Sexton Blake's golden age and Jack Adrian has chosen brilliantly. Picking the authors themselves was not, perhaps, his most difficult task. Most obvious claimant for inclusion was G. H. Teed, former globe-trotter and adventurer and undisputed giant among Blakian writers. But Teed contributed not only scores of novel-length yarns to the saga but a whole galaxy of characters as well and every reader will have his or her own favourite. Which would yours be: Marsden Plummer, master-crook? Mll. Yvonne? Prince Wu Ling and his sinister Brotherhood? Or one of a dozen others? Jack Adrian has confidently settled for a story of Blake versus Dr. Huxton Rymer, physician and criminal,

and his accomplice, the savage, glamorous Voodoo Queen, Marie Galante. The Treasure of Tortoise Island (Union Jack, 1925) is a high-temperature tale of skulduggery in the West Indies which excites by its authentic background alone. This 60 year-old story does Teed proud.

Gwyn Evans was, perhaps, as Jack Adrian says, the best-loved of all Blake authors and his inclusion is also inevitable. The House of the Hanging Sword (Detective Weekly, 1933) is a story of private vengeance in the colourful and bizarre mould Evans made all his own. No other Blake writer could make the implausible so convincing - or so gripping.

Each of the old Blake weeklies provide two other well-chosen tales. From the Union Jack (1930) comes The Green Jester by the talented mystery-man, Donald Stuart, a fast-paced and macabre adventure for Blake and Tinker (I promise no reader will ever look at a scarecrow again without a shudder!); and The Four Guests Mystery (UJ, 1932) by Robert Murray, a classic country house puzzle by the man who created the ever-remembered Criminals' Confederation.

Detective Weekly for 1933 contributes a superb introduction to Monsieur Zenith - surely the most unforgettable character in the Blake pantheon - in The Box of Ho Sen; and a most unusual tale by Rex Hardinge who deserts his more familiar African haunts for a home-based crime story written from the murderer's angle. When The Man I Killed originally appeared in the DW readers raved about it and they were justified in doing so.

Two of the remaining stories in the present collection are much shorter pieces from the Sexton Blake Annual (for 1940 and 1941) by Anthony Parsons and the popular John Hunter. Though they are immensely enjoyable, I would cheerfully have swapped both for just one Kestrel story by Lewis Jackson or a Waldo tale by Brooks. But Jack Adrian was almost certainly right to cast as wide a net as possible; the majority of this book's readers will be unfamiliar with many of Blake's chroniclers.

Last and most intriguing: a short story from the Evening Standard (23rd November, 1936) by Pierre Quiroule. Sexton Blake Solves It was bought for the Standard by crime-writer Dorothy L. Sayers who was then, as Jack Adrian puts it, "something of a Blake champion." Quiroule's tale is a neat, polished little gem to round off the collection.

But the stories are not all. Jack Adrian's sparkling introduction includes a lively defence of our sleuth, a publishing history

of the Blake "libraries" and some fascinating anecdotes of publishers, editors and writers alike. Additionally, he prefaces each story with an informative note on its author. Sexton Blake Wins is a return trip to that exciting, magical and now somehow innocent world of the old thriller writers - a nostalgic journey for the aficionado and a revelation for the new reader. The book is absurdly cheap.



Always the Bridesmaid - but never the Bride?

Part 6.

By W.O.G. Lofts

Edwy Searles Brooks was instructed to model his new school on the highly successful Greyfriars - there being no question about this, as this was one of the few bits of information he chose to reveal in his sketchy account of the change in 1917. His new school of St. Francis' College (called St. Franks for short) was named after his wife Frances of whom more details will be revealed later.

The transformation was very cleverly done in my opinion. Nelson Lee and Nipper had been in long combat with the Fu Chang Tong - a murderous Chinese Secret Society. "The Fu Changs mean to dog me until I am dead" said Nelson Lee in a historic statement: and when Sir Rupert Manderley visited Lee and asked him to solve the mystery surrounding the disappearance of one of the masters at St. Francis' College in the village of Belton, Sussex. Nelson Lee and Nipper found it a heaven sent opportunity to disappear for a while. They turned up with Nelson Lee in the disguise of Mr. Peter Alvington, a housemaster, and Nipper as Dick Bennett. No. 112, which brought about this quite revolutionary change was entitled 'Nipper at St Franks' and the tales were written in the first person - e.g. being related by Nipper himself.

At St. Franks they both met with many adventures, though gradually the school story superseded the detective story. Even so, they always retained a detective flavour, and in nearly every story Brooks introduced a mystery for either Nelson Lee or Nipper to solve. However, it would be correct to say that the boys themselves came to dominate the stories and Nelson Lee became more and more a minor character as the years rolled on. The main characters were Nipper, Archie Glenthorpe, Reggie Pitt, Ralph Leslie Fullwood, Vivian Travers (in later series) and William Napoleon Browne. Perhaps the most prominent was Edward Oswald Handforth - a type of Horace Coker character - of whom more will be heard later. There was no doubt that the change in the format of The Nelson Lee Library was a success, when the readership rose to a healthy level. So much so, that in 1919 they reprinted some of the best series in The Monster Library, that are much sought after today. Really wonderful value for only a shilling in those days with the stories hardly abridged from the original.

WHO'S A SPECKLED HEN, THEN?

By William Lister

As far back as I can remember there have been speckled hens around. It will always be the same. People don't change. This has been demonstrated by Edwy Searles Brooks in Monster Library No. 4, "The Boy from Bermondsey".

Every generation has its own breed of snobs. There are still places where you are an outsider if you don't wear an old school tie.

In the past, A.J. Cronin and other well-known authors have formed their plots with a speckled hen at the centre. Perhaps a doctor working among miners or the unemployed for a small fee, and looked down on by the highly-paid medical giants. Perhaps, in other instances, a teacher or a scholar may be the victim.

Now, I know that, and you know that, and Edwy Searles Brooks knew it - and so "The Boy from Bermondsey" was born.

A brief study of golf clubs, for instance, will prove my point. "Who is that fellow? By gad, sir, we can't accept him." I find the same thing among working men if you are not in a Union you are a speckled hen. Even the clergy promotes it, as you would soon find out if you were an ordained woman minister; mostly they are looked on as speckled hens by the male fraternity.

Writing school tales week after week is no easy job. You have

to take the school and the same boys, and inject something that makes the whole thing to life in each series. In the case of "The Boy from Bermondsey" the injection was Jack Mason, a speckled hen.

Week by week one had to keep the plots flowing. E.S.B. used Ghosts, Adventure, Holidays, Chinese Secret Societies, Ezra Quirke, Rebellions, Mystery teachers. You name it. E.S.B. had it.

The coming of Jack Mason kept the whole of St. Frank's buzzing for the entire length of a Monster Library. Opening the tale with a short preamble up to Chapter 4, Brooks introduces St. Frank's to a boy from Bermondsey. That did it. He really put the cat among the pigeons. One look at Jack in his cheap, ill-fitting school uniform - and hearing he was from Bermondsey - and things really began brewing.

Fulwood & Co made the first move. They thought Jack Mason would be an absolute boulder, totally unfit for taking his place among the sons of gentlemen. After all he was poor, and had never been to anything better than a council school. At the best, he should be kept at a distance.

Having got his plot and his main character, E.S.B. played his next card. Conflict! Conflict is a main ingredient of almost all stories. Soon, around Jack Mason, were those in favour of him and those against. Moving around, on the outer circle, was a wicked uncle and a generous benefactor who, unknown to Jack, was paying his fees.

I am tempted to think there is a hint of Oliver Twist and Charles Dickens. A poor boy, after many adventures, found that his chief enemy had been his step-brother. His benefactor was a rich close relation. The whole things brought to light by the finding of a locket left by Oliver's mother in a poor-house as she lay dying.

Toward the end of a most exciting tale - indeed, it rates among his best - Brooks brings to light the real villain, and the close relationship of Jack Mason's benefactor. E.S.B. knew his Dickens; even a locket is involved in the final revelation.

Buy or borrow "The Boy from Bermondsey." You'll never forget it.

* * * * *

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH:

An usherette is a girl who is paid to put a man in his place.

TO BE FRANK...

By Ernest Holman

Anniversaries are all around us at present; most notable of all, the Ruby celebrations for both CD and CDA. It is now time to look back 40 years once again - to 1947. This was the year when the first of many Hard Backs about Greyfriars began to appear. I say 'about Greyfriars', not 'about Bunter' quite deliberately; this article has as its purpose an attempt to discover just how much of the school itself peeped through. Accepting that the books were supposed to be about the Owl - if only to justify the 'selling' titles - nevertheless many of the regular characters did manage to play some good innings. In addition to Fat Bily (always present, sometimes throughout, many times just 'there') what situations and characters did we find?

Probably the first story apart, nothing new or original. The mixtures as before, in fact. All the same, let us look at the 'other than Bunter' people and happenings. Going briefly through the stories from the start, we find the following: Quelch on the Warpath; one of those 'odd' characters, a Headmaster's Secretary - turning out, of course, to be a wrong 'un (I wonder who wrote Chapter 41?); Bob Cherry having the Removites backing him up in a Barring Out in the Rag; Brian Mauleverer being the cause of a trip to Brazil, with Inky's black noodle being in evidence; the familiar 'unknowing' paying guests routine was worked at Christmas, with Squiff laying the Ghost. (An example here of the author's over-indulgence in prolonging a revelation - already obvious to the reader - in Chapter 34); the Benefit Tin Collection racket, with Smithy in one of his 'better' guises and Coker having a ball by forcing the Masters from their Conference Room.

The next encounter was with cannibals in the South Seas - a last minute rescue was made by that 'Modern Boy' favourite Ken King, along with his crew aboard the ketch, "Dawn"; Bunter's long-awaited postal order turned up, was lost until found in the Housemaid's 'Hoover' - all Vacs. carried that description then! Stephen Price, of the Fifth, was the cause of a false accusation against Wharton, when for a time Harry went through one of his 'troubles'. This was the last of the Skilton Books.

The first Cassells Book dealt with the stolen 'Blue Mauritius' stamp from Sir Hilton Popper; an old yarn resurfaced when a Founder's Day holiday saw some of the school making a day trip to France - where Smithy lived up to his nickname of the Bounder and poor Tom Redwing had a torrid time; then followed: Loder's

Feud with Wingate; Price again, in the event of Coker's lost tenner - and the Famous Five willingly (!) doing Horace's Georgic for him; Smithy and Wharton had one of their battles for the Captaincy, with the former holding the reigns for a brief spell; and - yet again - Billy and Wally Bunter changed places!

When the 17th Book in the series came out, Chapman had taken over the illustrations from the late Bob MacDonald. (One of these pictures showed a group of schoolboys before the Head - and the reader might have been forgiven had he wondered if he was holding in his hand an adventure of either Jennings or William Brown!) The story featured Smithy on the tiles and a reluctant but well-meaning Bunter taking to swotting; others that followed - Bunter once again being mistaken for a Peer of the Realm - in borrowed plumes, of course. This was, however, an unusual story, in that a great deal of the action was played out at St. Jim's - a good part of it concerned the efforts of Tom, Blake and Co. to prevent Gussy 'Thwashing' a wascal'; an incident with Coker, Prout and a tomato was only put right in the end by (guess what?) the rescue of Old Pompous by Coker from a couple of footpads; Henry Quelch's History of Greyfriars' was the basis of a story, when the 'tosh' was stolen - with resultant false accusations, near-rebellion, Smithy in the Cart, and general mayhem; memories of the last pre-war Summer of 1939 were recalled with a trip on Old Father Thames, including encounters, as would be expected, with Coker and Co, and the Nuts of Highcliffe.

An old chair purchased for Study No. 1 from Mr. Joyce, the local woodcutter, turned out to have precious stones in it; a hiking holiday followed most of the usual paths, but there was one unusual event towards the end, when Vernon-Smith gave Cardew of St. Jim's a thrashing (judging from an illustration, a pretty severe one!) Quelch was upended in his study one night, in the affair of Fishy's incriminating Accounts Book; Christmas was joyfully spent at that most cosiest of places, Wharton Lodge; Coker wrote an unfortunate limerick that subjected him to eventual blackmail; a black-faced Foreign boy, no stranger to the Greyfriars scene, was again remarking 'Icky tang wang oodle'; Coker again, digging for the Abbot's lost treasure; a trip to Butlins, featuring that worthy himself, in which Bunter spent the Proprietor's money and Coker was thrown out of the Camp; a verbal and entertaining clash between Prout and Quelch; Smithy gave us a repeat of an old yarn, when he unmasked the Head's guest as a Bank robber. Then came the last completed story by the author - another trip to the South Seas, starting aboard a 'plane

belonging to Tom Brown's father.

The foregoing incidents - hardly even bare bones - are intended to try and show that - despite the necessary presence of the 'Title Holder' - the books gave quite a stage to the 'others' who were, and always will be, part of the Greyfriars Saga. For me, I feel that the author's attempts to remain himself within the confines forced upon him was no mean achievement!



FAIR PLAY

BY CHAS HAMILTON

THE VERY FIRST HURREE SINGH STORY
ever written, from 80 years ago.

A couple of days had elapsed since vengeance in the shape of Lantham had visited Robinson, but the chief of the Fourth was still sore, both in body and in mind. He wanted badly to get even with the chums of the Third, but his opportunity had not yet come, though he was looking out for it. Now

as he saw Hurree Singh going alone into the bicycleshed, he gripped Hake by the arm and hurried him off on the nabob's track.

"It's bub-better to take the little bounders one at a time!" gasped out Robinson. "We'll give Inky something for himself now and let Redfern and Lawrence wait."

"Right you are."

They hurried into the shed. Hurree Singh looked round as they entered. The Indian boy was on his guard at once.

"Now we've got you!" remarked Robinson, closing the door. Hurree Singh did not reply, but he watched the two Fourth Formers cautiously.

Hake made a dash at Hurree Singh. The lithe, active Indian dodged him and dashed for the door. Robinson was in the way, and Hurree butted at him and sent him rolling over. He crashed into a bicycle, and mixed himself up with it on the floor, and yelled. He was hurt. Hurree reeled from the shock, and before he could recover himself Hake had turned upon him and seized him.

"I've got him!" ejaculated Hake. "Now, keep still, Inky, or you'll get warmed!" Hurree Singh struggled violently. Hake inserted his knuckles into the back of the nabob's neck, and held him in a vice-like grip, and the Indian, half-throttled gave it up.

Robinson picked himself up. He was hurt, for his head had knocked against the crank of the bicycle and his elbow had gone through the spokes.

"Hold the little beast tight, Hake!" he said. "I'll tit-tit-tit-tan him!" Hurree Singh grinned. "Don't you be a bib-bib-brute!" he said deliberately. "I don't want to be tit-tit-tanned."

Robinson turned as red as a turkey-cock, especially as he saw that Hake was grinning.

"What's the matter with you Hake? What are you twit-twit-twisting your face about like that for? Ain't it ugly enough already?" he demanded.

"I was only smiling," said Hake.

"Crumbs! If you smile like

that you ought to wear a mask. Now Inky, you are going to get something."

The Indian began to struggle but it was useless. The two Fourth Formers twisted him over and then Robinson began to whack him. Robinson had picked up a short stick, the blows fell thick and fast.

The blood of the Nabob of Bhanipur was boiling. But as the thrashing proceeded his resolution melted away, and he began to yell in good earnest.

"There!" panted Robinson, at last, flinging the stick down. "I think that will did-did-do. You won't be so ch-ch-cheeky again."

Hurree Singh was released, and the two Fourth Formers laughed as he walked away. His usual elegant carriage was conspicuous by its absence. He twisted and turned as he walked with a really comical effect, though it was not in the least funny to the nabob himself.

Robinson and Hake took themselves off very well satisfied. Hurree was not one to complain and he composed his face as well as he could as he entered the school house. Owen Redfern met him in the hall.

"Hallo, chappie! What's the matter?" he asked noticing that something was wrong.

Hurree Singh explained.

"The brutes!" said Redfern, "Have they hurt you much?"

Hurree Singh made a grimace. "It is painful", he said; "but it will be all right so long as I do not have to sit down." A bell rang as he spoke.

"There's the dinner-bell!" exclaimed Redfern. "I'm afraid you'll have to sit down, chappie."

The only consolation is that we'll make Robinson and Hake sit up, sometime."

They entered the dining-hall. Mr. Lumsden was at the head of the Third Form table. Redfern and Hurree Singh took their places, on either side of Reggie Lawrence. Knowles grinned at the nabob across the table. He saw that the Indian had been in the wars, and was greatly pleased thereby. And from the Fourth Form table at a little distance, Robinson, too grinned at the nabob.

Hurree Singh was extremely uncomfortable in his seat. He was compelled to shift his position continually, and at last his movements caught the eye of Mr. Lumsden. The Third Form master frowned at him.

"Hurree Singh!"

"Yes, sir."

"Keep still!"

"Yes, sir."

And the nabob made an effort to keep still. But he was soon twisting again. Again Mr. Lumsden singled him out.

"Hurree Singh, how dare you wriggle about in that manner after I have expressly told you to keep still?"

"I am sorry, sir."

And for a couple of minutes the nabob was still as a mouse. But it was of no use, he had to move, and as he wriggled painfully upon the form, Mr. Lumsden arose in his wrath.

"Hurree Singh. I am sorry to find you guilty of this deliberate impertinence. Come here!"

Hurree Singh rose reluctantly and approached the Form-master.

"You have been-ah-deliberately impertinent" said Mr. Lumsden. "I must-ah-make an example of you, Hurree Singh. As you will not remain quiet

in your seat. I can only conclude that you do not require any dinner."

Hurree Singh made a grimace. He was hungry, but it was of no use to argue with the Form-master. Every eye in the hall was fixed upon Hurree as he stood there, conspicuous and the red was burning under the dusk of his cheeks.

"You will go to the doctor" resumed Mr. Lumsden "and tell him that you have been guilty of impertinence to your Form-master. Go at once!"

"Yes sir."

And poor Hurree Singh turned to go.

Owen Redfern glanced wrathfully across to the Fourth Form table. He was greatly inclined to stand up and explain the truth to Mr. Lumsden. But it was not needed. Robinson, who had, of course, heard all that passed, had whispered to Hake and was on his feet, very red in the face.

"If you please, Mr. Lumsden," he began.

The Third master looked across at him.

"Did you speak to me, Robinson?"

"Yes, sir. If you pip-pip-pip----

Mr. Lumsden stared at him in angry amazement. That only made Robinson more confused, his stuttering grew more pronounced than ever.

"If you pip-pip-please." gasped out Robinson. "If you please, Mr. Lumsden. It isn't Inky's fault-I mean Hurree Singh's---that he doesn't kik-kik-kik---"

"He doesn't kick? What does the boy mean?"

"He doesn't kik-kik-kik----"

"Why should he kick? Whom should he kick? Are you out of your senses Robinson?"

"He doesn't kik-kik-kik-kik-keep still" stuttered Robinson. "Its because he's got a pip-pip-pip-pip----" "He's got a what?"

"A pip-pip-pip--pain." Robinson got it out at last. "It isn't his fault, sir."

"Oh, he has a pain! Is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know anything about it?"

"Because I gig-gig-gig--"

"You what?"

"I gig-gig-gave it him, sir."

"You gave him the pain?"

"Yes sir,"

"Do you mean there has been an accident?"

"No, sir, I licked him for being chik-chik-chik---"

"For being what?"

"Cheeky, sir."

The Hall was yelling with laughter now. Mr. Lumsden passed his hand across his heated brow. He found Robinson's conversation exhausting.

"Oh, I see!" said the master of the Third. "Is that the cause of your absurd motions in your seat, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes sir"

"You are suffering from a pain?"

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"Yes, sir; a severe pain in the portion of the anatomical structure which contacts with the hardness of the form" said Hurree, in his beautiful English.

Even Mr. Lumsden gave the ghost of a smile.

"Then you may go back to your place, Hurree Singh."

"Thank you, sir! You do not desire me to convey that message to the doctor, sahib."

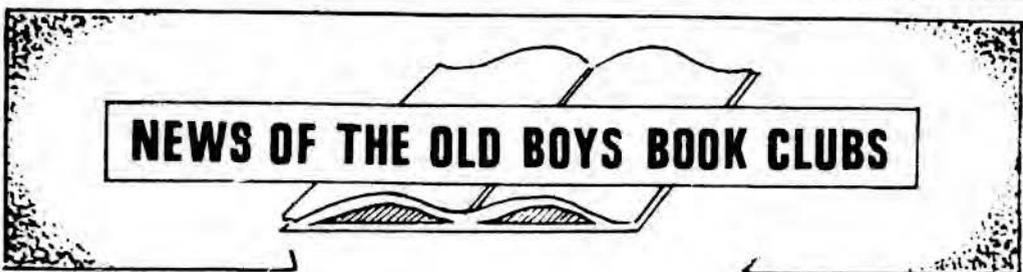
"No. Sit down."

"As for you, Robinson," said Mr. Lumsden, "you appear to have been guilty of a piece of ruffianism but as you have owned up in a manly way and Hurree Singh makes no complaint, I shall take no further notice of the matter."

Whereat Robinson, who had expected a caning at the least, heaved a great sigh of relief and sat down.

"Old Robinson's not a bad sort," remarked Redfern. "Fancy his owning up like that! All the same, we've got to put him through it, for having the cheek to touch one of our Form."

* * * * *



NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS BOOK CLUBS

SOUTH WEST

The autumn meeting was held at Tim Salisbury's home on Sunday 21st September, 1986 and we were pleased to welcome our latest member, Mrs. Radford from Bridgwater.

Bill Lofts talked about 'The old time Collectors and Dealers in the hobby, from the early Boy's and Girl's magazines right up to the days of the Amalgamated Press empire. The talk was illustrated by Bill passing round some of the weeklies.

After a delicious study tea, Terry Jones spoke to us about how he became interested in The Gem and St. Jim's stories.

Bill then concluded the meeting with an interesting talk on notable people who had written to Howard Baker on the Greyfriars facsimiles. These included Peter Cushing, the late Roy Plomley etc.

After a very happy meeting we dispersed looking forward to the next time which will be in the late Spring 1987.

MIDLAND

Only 9 members turned up for the opening of the new term. It is to be hoped that we do better next month. Tom Porter was still absent and he is sadly missed, but he is in no position to resume activities just yet.

We clarified our meeting dates for the rest of 1986. These are November 25th and 16th December. The latter is the Christmas Party to which all O.B.B.C. members and friends are invited.

Refreshments - at least the eatables - were provided by Joan Golen and Johnny and Betty Hopton. The rocketing price of a cup of tea or coffee decided us to each buy our own for this occasion, and Ivan had ideas on making our own at the next meeting.

Your correspondent provided a 15-answer quiz, with two very acceptable prizes. These were won by Geoff Lardner and Keith Normington.

Ivan Webster gave a reading from Magnet No. 1149, in which Bunter was blubbing and the Famous Five were trying to find out why. Bunter first informed them that his pater had been run over by a motor-bus. Then the motor-bus became a taxi and his pater became his uncle. Liars need good memories. The reading caused great amusement and was much enjoyed.

There were two quizzes by Geoff Lardner which kept us all on our toes.

Kind regards to all O.B.B.C. members.

JACK BELLFIELD

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Edward Witten on Sunday, 5th October.

Bill Lofts gave an entertaining talk on "Our Hobby Magazines." He began by reminding us that the 40th birthday of Story Paper Collectors' Digest was very near, and that during the entire run - first under the editorship of its founder, Herbert Leckenby and then that of his successor Eric Fayne, the Digest has not missed a single month's publication.

Bill proceeded to give a long catalogue of magazines dealing with old boys' books, illustrating it with specimens from his own collection. An early one was "Interesting Items" (1904 to 1964) ("No comics after 1914"). In 1917 Joseph Parks started a magazine called "Vanity Fair", later becoming "Collectors' Miscellany." Bill referred to Story Paper Collector, sent out free of charge for a number of years at intervals by Bill Gander of Canada, and which later was amalgamated with the Digest.

Bill was warmly applauded for his excellent talk. We then settled down to enjoy Edward's hospitable tea. This was followed by an entertaining Quiz programme by Tony Cowley. The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Edward for his hospitality.

LONDON

It was a happy gathering of 27 members at the Liberal Hall, Ealing on this fine October day which enabled for the tea break in the garden. Highlight of the meeting was Bill Lofts fine disquisition on the various magazines that have been published on the collecting of the old boys' books and papers of our youth. Bill illustrated his dissertation with specimens culled from his own collection. He mentioned the longest running magazine Collector's Digest which in November reaches its Ruby anniversary number. The late

Bill Gander's Story Paper Collector, a bound volume number one, was on view and it was generally agreed that it was a work of art. For Hamiltonians, Miriam Bruning read a short extract from the Magnet Dallas series.

Roger Jenkins conducted one of his letter grid quizzes and the first three to finish it were Eric Lawrence, Winifred Morss and Thelma Bradford.

Next meeting will be at the Walthamstow rendezvous on Sunday, 9th November and with accent being on Sexton Blake in view of the attendance of Jack Adrian with copies of his book Sexton Blake Wins.

Votes of thanks to Bill and Thelma concluded the meeting.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 11th October, 1986

Eleven were present on a fine autumn evening.

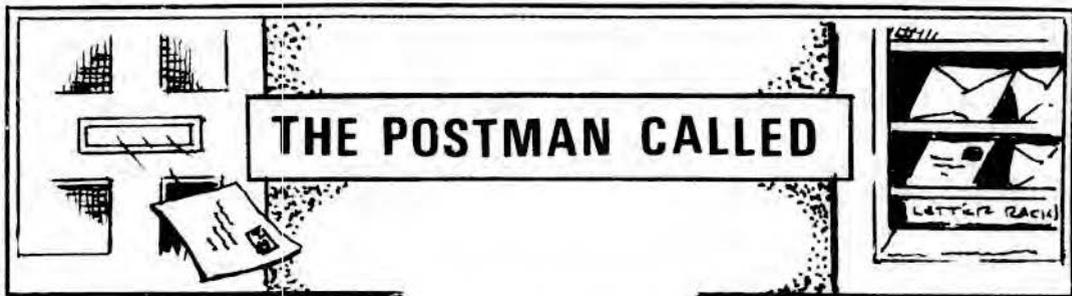
David Bradley and Paul Galvin gave a report on the forthcoming Biggles meeting to be held in Leeds: it appeared that twenty people would be present. A report was given of the recent t.v. recording of STILL - WILLIAM with Dennis Waterman as "William" grown up. Seemingly, those that went to the show gave a good report of it.

Paul Galvin gave an interesting talk on Captain W.E. Johns. Captain Johns had been a very prolific author and although most people associate him with Biggles, it was only during the last fifteen years of his writings that he concentrated mainly on his flying hero.

Paul had brought a selection of books from his own collection to illustrate his talk and he also brought along some beautiful dust jackets from early and scarce Biggles books.

Darrell Swift gave the fourth in his series about the people who have contributed to the works of Frank Richards - this time Mr. W. Howard Baker. Praise had been given over the years with regard to the lovely productions from this publisher. We all did agree that through this publisher, many people had been brought into our hobby and no doubt Mr. Baker had through his publications, got people involved in hobby clubs! We all agreed, that Mr. W. Howard Baker had played a very prominent part in the furtherance and encouragement of the writings of Frank Richards.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR



BRIAN SAYER (Margate) The book containing the celebrated essay by George Orwell on "Boys' Weeklies", which was the subject of an inquiry by a correspondent in your September issue, is "Orwell", the collected articles between 1920 and 1940 published in paperback by Penguin.

The essay in which Eric Blair (Orwell) "perpetrates so many inaccuracies" and the rapier-thrusting reply of Frank Richards is contained in volume one, "An Age Like This".

The Orwell-Richards encounter was the subject of a question in the recent "Brain of Brains" general knowledge quiz on B.B.C. radio. The question was answered and Chairman Mr. Robert Robinson expressed the opinion that Frank Richards got the better of Orwell.

A Thanet historian, writing about Kingsgate in a local newspaper some time ago, said that after the battle of words in Horizon, Orwell visited Charles Hamilton at his home in Percy Avenue.

Orwell later recorded: "On meeting Mr. Hamilton, I felt strangely at ease inside the comfortable atmosphere of his small study, so small it would seem that the walls might burst at the countenance of the amount of work produced therein."

It is interesting that forty-six years after the Orwell essay, William George Bunter still rolls on. There may be those who challenge Charles Hamilton's right to the title of "World's Greatest School Story Writer" - but they surely cannot deny he is the best loved!

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: And that, I think, is enough about Orwell for the present time.)

ALAN MORPETH (North Shields) May I comment on Ben Whiter's notes about "The Three Fishers" and "Cross Keys" and their resident bookmakers. Like Mr. Whiter, my father was a licensee of a well-known public house. It was in the centre of the town and well-known to the police as a port of call where there was no trouble

and where the customers behaved themselves. A local bookmaker regularly attended this house for the purpose of taking bets and paying out to lucky punters. Presumably a blind eye was turned because of the good reputation of the licensee and his premises. I assure the practice was not just common to the North East of England, and despite the less than good reputation of the Three Fishers and Cross Keys, a similar blind eye may have been turned in their cases.

LESLIE LASKEY (Brighton) "Danny" refers in his September Diary to a notable landmark in the history of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" namely the expansion of the monthly programme to three books instead of two. The inclusion of tales of Nelson Lee and St. Frank's October 1936, was an excellent idea for it enabled the "S.O.L." to provide a wider variety of stories.

I remember that it placed a bit of a strain on one's pocket money, however. A whole shilling per month, in addition to the fourpence per week for the "Magnet" and "Gem" together, absorbed a large proportion of available funds!

Very few issues of the "S.O.L." were missed, nevertheless.

BOB CUSHING (Welwyn) I was captivated with the interview conducted by "our Special Representative" with the late lamented Edwy Searles Brooks. I found it most revealing and my mental picture of the great man was, like the interviewer's greatly at variance with my mental picture of him, unlike my conception of Charles Hamilton whose appearance was very similar to that envisaged.

LEN HAWKEY (Leigh-on-Sea) Yesterday I purchased a bound volume comprising 3 "Phil May's Annuals" plus 2 Tom Brown's Annuals. I was surprised to find that each of the T.B. Annuals contained a story by Charles Hamilton. I knew, of course, that he had written prolifically before the birth of the Magnet and Gem, but had not realised he had also aimed at a more adult market - a fact which is probably well-known to such pundits as yourself.

He certainly spread his talents over a wide field, even at that early stage (the Annuals are 1904-5), one being a humorous tale, the other a detective story. The latter features the "famous" London detective Denham Croft. Did C.H. write any more tales of this sleuth, I wonder. What a busy and enterprising chap the young Charles must have been.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: A good many years back in C.D. we serialised, over a few months, a romance by C.H. which had appeared in Tom Brown's Annual. It wasn't much of a story, but it created interest.)

JACK BERRY (Southgate) Since my wife died last year and I was left on my own I have looked forward more and more to the C.D. How you manage to keep such a high standard is beyond me.

SKELTON ISLANDS

by George Beal

In your issue No. 373 (January 1978) you published a short piece from me which referred to stories appearing in Warne's Pleasure Book for Boys. The two stories which interested me were 'Galleon Island', which appeared in the book for 1927, and 'Bell Island', which appeared in 1928. Prompt replies came from Brian Doyle and W.O.G. Lofts. Recently, I obtained copies of both books, and was able to read the stories again. The writing was surprisingly good, and I find the stories still very interesting to read.

Both of the stories were remarkably similar in style, and with an almost identical theme: that of setting foot on a mysterious island, to find skeletons and a Spanish galleon trapped there, having been so held since the days of the sea rovers. Had the stories not been credited to two different people, I would have thought that they were by the same hand. However, 'Galleon Island' is shown to have been by 'W. Hianes Jull', and 'Bell Island' (as mentioned originally by Bill Lofts) was by C. Bernard Rutley.

Now the name 'W. Haines Jull' looked rather odd to me. I have never heard of such a surname as Jull. A little reflection, and the obvious became clear. This was simply an anagram, which I made out to be a transposition of the letters in the name 'Julian Welsh'. I have never come across such a writer myself. It might have been yet another pseudonym, perhaps of the editor himself (one W.J. Gordon), or possibly of C. Bernard Rutley. As I remark above, the writing style of both stories is remarkably similar.

Perhaps other readers have come across the name Julian Welsh, or perhaps his doppelganger 'W. Hianes Jull' has been seen in print elsewhere.

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LESSER LIGHTS

by E. Baldock

When one thinks of Skinner, Snoop and Stott. They seem naturally to conjure up a mind picture of characters diametrically opposed to those of Harry Wharton and Co. Three - more or less - weedy youths who have never attained and seem never to have aspired to any great heights of popularity among their contemporaries in the Greyfriars' Remove. Their leader, by common consent and probably also for his infinitely more highly developed faculty for mischief and intrigue, is of course Harold Skinner. Little can be said in praise of this bright youth - he possesses very few attributes worthy of being noised abroad. A natural schemer and plotter with a highly developed sense of humour at other fellows' discomforts. In many respects he is well suited with these shortcomings to be the leader of a rather despicable trio. Poor Skinner, with such a reputation to carry through life. Yet the remedy lies within the individual - are we not what we choose to make ourselves? It would be comforting to think and hope that possibly out in the great world which lies beyond the gates of Greyfriars - one day - he may aspire to something a little higher than his present habits would suggest - but ...?

Sidney James Snoop does possess one or two redeeming features, chief among which is a reluctance to follow Skinner to the ultimate in his schemes. Some facet in his make-up cries - rather whispers - halt. Some fragment of a better self sounds a warning, but unfortunately an over-riding lack of courage and conviction does not always generate this fleeting light in the darkness. Poor Snoop, in better company he might well develop into a fairly decent fellow.

Stott as a character is somewhat more shadowy. With a minimum of persuasion - a nuance well developed in Skinner's glib nature - he may be swayed

in almost any direction with promises of gain or kudos. A veritable reed vibrating in the slightest breeze from any direction. He is a malleable and easy pawn in the hands of unprincipled fellows. Yet Stott, once beyond the influence of his dark angel Skinner and rubbing shoulders with decent fellows, has been known to play a tolerable game of football with encouragement from such stalwarts as Bob Cherry and, oddly enough Herbert Vernon Smith.

I imagine that many of us have at one time or another, while reading of the exploits of this iniquitous trio in the Magnet, experienced an overwhelming desire to kick them under much the same provocation as we hissed the villains at our local cinema. Yet with all their faults they must be considered and appraised as more or less expendable characters in the Greyfriars' saga, being members of that select fraternity - the Remove. It may perhaps be said that Skinner and Co have contributed more to the ageing process and increasing acidity of Mr. Quelch as time has progressed than any other factor. It would be interesting and surely revealing to hear his - Quelch's private thoughts and opinions concerning this unholy trio.

Masters' Common Room is traditionally the clearing ground for excesses of steam generated during form time. But it is doubtful whether Mr. Quelch allows himself the pleasure - or relief - of such releases of 'hot air' concerning even the black sheep among his flock. One imagine that he contains his emotions, excessive though some may be, very much within himself. It is in this context that we may be fairly sure his ashplant comes into its own to the dismay of such fellows as our friends Skinner and Co. Picture them if you will, all three ranged in a dismal row before Mr. Quelch's desk. A sorry unprepossessing trio, quaking under the steely shafts of that gimlet eye which seems to pierce all, missing not the minutest atom. One has a mental image of a sharp blade passing through a piece of butter, thus easily does that eye, renowned of old, pierce the subtrefuges of the unhappy three. It is Skinner who will brazen, bluff and attempt to hedge, not on behalf of his companions in distress, this is not his way; if he can but struggle to the bank out of danger well and good, let the others take their chance - such is the nature of this bright member of the Greyfriars Remove.

The sparkling waters of the Sark ripple on much as they have done down the ages. A light wind stirs the willows lining its banks and rustles through the elms on Poppers island. Another day is passing in the quiet serenity of this charming old corner of Kent. The shadows of our three gay dogs lengthen as they jerk along after their three originators. 'Nobbled Nick', has come home well in the rear of the field in the three-thirty, being 'unplaced' is I believe, the term in racing terminology. Skinner and Co are poorer by the sum of one pound and are consequently in rather an unenviable and savage mood. But 'Satis verborum' - brace up Skinner, you also Snoop and Stott, life may hold something better for you yet.

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