

STORY PAPER

86p

VOL.
44

No.

528

CHRISTMAS
NUMBER

DECEMBER 1990

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MEMORIES

TIP TOP

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THE SEASON OF GOOD WILL AND GOOD CHEER

Once again it is a great joy to be putting together the December issue of the C.D. which, as always, I have tried to make extremely seasonable. As you will see, the main pillars of our hobby are represented in festive mood. The spirit of Christmas which these pictures and articles so vividly convey comes to all C.D. readers with warm greetings from our contributors and myself.

This issue is also an expression of gratitude to the authors, artists and editors who through the old papers and comics did so much to make our childhood Christmases bright. It is a special pleasure to publish an article by Una Hamilton Wright about her distinguished uncle, Charles Hamilton, who had a particular flair for creating in his stories that mixture of warmth, humour, mystery and good-will that so perfectly suits the Christmas holiday mood.

CHRISTMAS READING

During the run-up to the seasonable festivities, I look forward almost as much to what I will be reading over Christmas as to its family gatherings, parties and outings. Every year I set aside a small pile of books and papers for resavouring; generally I do not find time to read them all, but certainly Christmas would not be Christmas if I couldn't dip into some of the winter holiday exploits of Harry Wharton and Barbara Redfern and their famous Co's, or try to unravel at least one Blakian mystery, and drop in on St. Frank's, Morcove and St. Jim's. Even if I have time only to flip through certain papers and to look at their wonderfully atmospheric pictures, the Christmas mood is well and truly recreated for me. My plan this year is to try to read at least one story or series of Yuletide adventures for each of these famous schools - even if some of these are fairly short versions in the Annuals. And of course those luscious, holly- and snow-bedecked comics will not be neglected; in this issue of C.D. Henry Webb's cover aptly expresses their essential vitality and warmth.

At this time of year we take stock of many things, and reflect upon our blessings. I would like to take this opportunity of saying a big 'thank you' to my loyal readers and contributors, and to the ever helpful staff in our printer's office, who do so much to ensure that the C.D. appears every month throughout the year and that the Annual reaches you in good time for Christmas.

There is still time for you to order your copy of the Annual if you have not already done so (£7.90 for the U.K. and £9.50 for Overseas). I wish I had space to give details of all the items in it which I have not previously 'trailed'; at any rate, I am able to whet your appetites with a few. Rex Diamond has produced an article about his work on the JUST WILLIAM radio series; Ray Hopkins introduces us to his very first story paper; Margery Woods has written a VALERIE DREW Christmas mystery; Jennifer Schofield reflects on BIGGLES AND THE FESTIVE SEASON; Bob Whiter writes on two Greyfriars characters, Ted Baldock on the Fat Owl and Jack Greaves on further aspects of the countryside around St. Frank's. In addition there are various articles on the old papers and collecting in general, and some autobiographical accounts. I think I can truly say that there is something for everyone in this year's Annual which will, I know, add considerably to the delights of your seasonable reading.

As always I most heartily wish each one of you

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

MARY CADOGAN





COMICS AT CHRISTMAS

by W.O.G. Lofts

Christmas was always a special event in our favourite comics in pre-war days. The splendid traditional C.D. cover this month, drawn by Henry Webb, depicts some of them, plus the characters, and probably brings back very happy memories to many.

The Christmas numbers were a real delight to behold. The front cover, usually drawn some time in advance, was lavish with holly, snow, and mistletoe decorations, especially round the title and edges of the comic. There would probably be a traditional scene, such as ice skating on the frozen lake or snowballing, with a snowman complete with hat and old pipe. Then surely the best scene of all inside a large house, where all the festivities are taking place, with the yule log burning in the grate: a large illuminated Christmas tree, fully decorated with small candles and tinsel with the many presents wrapped in coloured paper. Famous characters such as Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys would be sitting down for their Christmas dinner at a long table that was groaning with food. The large turkey waiting to be carved, crackers waiting to be pulled and plates of mince pies helped to fill the board. Then the special moment of the beaming Mrs. Bruin bringing in the large, steaming Xmas pudding, followed by none other than Father Christmas with his sack full of presents which were possibly sent by the readers of the comic, boys and girls who loved dear old Tiger Tim (or his sister Tilly) and the Bruin Boys and the Hippo girls.

Readers may welcome some details of the comics shown on this month's C.D. cover.

The Jester. 23rd February 1924 to 18th May 1940. 847 issues.

This popular comic had many changes of title during its run, which can actually be traced in its family tree from 1892 to 1953. Probably its most popular character was Constable Cuddlecook - a comic policeman, who wore a tiny helmet. His name could not have been more apt because of his love for a cook, who used to put hot steaming rabbit pies for him on the window sill. Created by Don Newhouse, he was later drawn by Bert

Brown, the jovial cockney top comic artist, whom I met many times at his home at Addiscombe, Surrey. Bert also drew another great favourite; Moonlight Moggie, a comical cat whose exploits usually started at midnight! There was also another famous strip, always on the back page, of The World Wide Adventures of Basil and Bert, (two tramps) created by Don Newhouse and Roy Wilson, but much later drawn by George Parlett. The latter artist probably also drew the monocle worn by Basil in the wrong eye!

**Funny Wonder. 26th December 1912 to 16th May 1942.
1404 issues.**

Like the *Jester*, this comic had many changes of title during its run. Charlie Chaplin was easily its most popular early leading character who started on the front page drawn by Bert Brown in 1915. Later on this had Pitch and Toss - two sailors, drawn by Roy Wilson, probably the most beautiful comic artist. Fondly remembered also was Marmaduke and his Ma - drawn by Freddy Crompton. After all these years I'm still puzzled at the type of hat Marmaduke is wearing. Looks like a starched American naval hat! Whilst nearly all comics had their own famous office boys, surely the *Jester* had the most famous one of all in Horatio Pimple, with his weird and wonderful spelling that would make Bunter or Coker look like good spellers. They did exist in real life on the old time comics. I once saw one in the corridors of Fleetway House, with hair plastered down, inky fingers, and talking with a true ripe cockney accent!

The Joker. 5th November 1927 to 18th May 1940. 655 issues.

Curiously first published by a Fleetway Press that had no connection with Amalgamated Press Ltd., but was run by Harold Mansfield, an ex-editor at A.P. who had left after some dispute. Later he sold out to his old firm, where it was edited by Richard (Dick) Newton Chance, father of the skilled Sexton Blake writer 'John Drummond', who also wrote about a dog detective in *Chips*.

Easily its most famous character was Alfie the Air-Tramp and his dog Wagger. Drawn by A. Pease it was later taken over by John L. Jukes, a friend of mine for many years, who took a deep interest in the hobby as a whole. Alfie was a sort of pilot accompanied by his dog. He had a very tiny plane indeed, with patched up wings. Another favourite of mine was Dicky Duffer the Dunce, who always wore a traditional dunce's cap in or out of the schoolroom. Come to that, I just cannot remember at all my schools ever seeing a boy wear one. Boys had to stand in the corner, perhaps, for some misbehaviour, but never to wear the large cone-shaped paper hat.

Tip Top. 21st April 1934 to 29th May 1954. 727 issues.

This was a new style comic that came out with its companion *Jingles*. A big difference from the traditional black and white comics was that an orange colour was added to the front and back pages.

The comic also had more adventure strips than comic situations. Stanley Gooch, the editor, had the advantage of the services of the star artist, Roy Wilson, who drew amongst others *The Adventures of Jerry, Jennie, and Joe* on the front cover. The best remembered series of stories was tales by 'Tilly' of the Tuck Shop. No doubt *Tip Top* was a success as it ran for over twenty years, and yet another comic *Golden*, was added to the group and is remembered by many.

Comics to my mind can bring back nostalgic memories just as great as boys' or girls' story-papers. Surely for most of us, childhood days are the happiest in our lives?

ROSE LAWN REMEMBERED (I)

by Una Hamilton Wright

THE HOUSE THAT WASN'T CHRISTMAS

As Christmas approaches my thoughts inevitably turn to my favourite uncle, Charles Hamilton/Frank Richards, who died on Christmas Eve 1961. A death is devastating whenever it occurs but a death during the joyful Christmas season is especially poignant. I felt that I could never again fully enjoy Christmas, recalling, as it did, the person above all others who had made my own Christmases so intensely happy. And now, as Christmas 1990 approaches, after the death of Edie Hood, my uncle's housekeeper, last year, I find that I am the sole survivor of the original residents of Rose Lawn.



It was a four-bedroomed detached house with a large garage and a pleasant garden which backed on to corn fields. The view from my uncle's study window stretched over these to the sea beyond. Set in a long, straight road of other seaside holiday homes, Rose Lawn was about half a mile from the beach. My uncle bought the house as a holiday home for the summer on my account: I suffered very frequently from nose and throat troubles and he believed fervently in the benefits of really fresh, clean air away from the smoke and smog of London where we all lived. The Thanet air at North Foreland was supposed to be very bracing and full of oxygen - nothing else would have influenced him to look for a property in that bleak stretch of countryside in north Kent.

In my mind's ear I can still hear the voices of those original residents of Rose Lawn as they prepared the house for occupation during the mid-twenties. First, Nellie Beveridge, uncle's house-keeper, a professionally-trained cook, calling us to perfect meals amid the chaos, "Lunch is ready and I've told Mr. Hamilton" - a

triumphant note in her voice, for she was proud of the fact that she had found Rose Lawn in that part of Kent reputed to have the best air for her employer's niece's health.

I can hear Mother's and Uncle's quick-fire repartee and punning, the gleeful scoring-off by two very witty people. Then my godmother's, Grace's, voice as she and mother chose colour schemes at Uncle's behest - white paint, dove grey walls, and lavender jaspé curtains all through except for the dark, chilly dining-room which Uncle christened 'the Tank' - a name which stuck ever after. "Oh, Grace, do you think the red and green Indian carpet will go with mauve curtains?" Mother had her doubts, "Of course it will" - Grace's decisive, practical voice, she was an artist and she knew. Mother was short-sighted and anxious while Uncle never noticed interior decorations, regarding them as exclusively a female preserve.

Then there was the voice of my father - an intermittent presence during the start-up period. He opted for staying out of the decision-making by entertaining me: a slightly breathless "I think you're getting a bit big for piggybacks" (I was four) revealed his fifty-two years.

Finally, there was Nanny's (Edie Hood's) cosily persuasive "Now Mummy said you were to eat **one** piece of bread and butter before you could have any cake...(Pause)... Oh, well, shall Nanny make you a chocolate sandwich then?" And Nanny did, a diplomat right from the beginning.

Most important of all, there was Uncle himself, always approachable, even when he was working - on hearing my tap on his study door "Come in my little dear, what can your old Uncle do for you?" Whereupon he would sympathise, enthuse, instruct or explain according to the need of the moment.

To begin with, Uncle 'camped' in Rose Lawn while the gas lighting and heating was dismantled and the house wired for electricity. Mother and I and Nanny stayed in a hotel in Cliftonville and came over to Kingsgate every day. The decorators followed the electricians accompanied by the carpenters who constructed a large, pine larder with glass doors and ample shelving on three sides, in the kitchen, which also had a new deep sink installed under the side window. All was bustle and activity, Mother was worried lest Uncle's work should be interrupted, and speed was the order of the day. She used to enthuse, "Edie's wonderful, she's so **quick**". Devoted to Mother, Edie was extremely quick and nimble, darting here and there helping people with their various tasks. I had to help her count curtain hooks as part of my education. She, counting in twos, was finished almost before I'd begun. Light on her feet and petite in build she was like an airy spirit flitting from room to room. "I'll do it!" and she was there, doing it, ever cheerful and enthusiastic. To someone short-sighted like my Mother she was a boon. "As though by magic" was a phrase I often heard applied to her efficiency. Mother became very dependent upon her and Edie gave the impression she wished to be her retainer for life. They appeared to be such friends.

Rose Lawn was a house of life and laughter and happy activity, redolent of holidays and relaxation. That was how I saw it during the long summers before schooldays began, long summers that stretched from Easter to Autumn. I was intensely happy there, it was a house that revolved round me, a house in which I had a stake right from the beginning. My health problems receded and I was full of energy - as opposed to the childish lethargy that sometimes engulfed me at home in London. I had two sets of toys - a London set and a Rose Lawn set, the latter being a size smaller and slightly less elaborate than the home versions.

So why do I see Rose Lawn as the House that wasn't Christmas? Why did not the family gather there for the chief festival of the year?

Rose Lawn was not Home, not to any of us early residents, and Home is the place for Christmas celebrations. Home to Uncle was London, with my parents and me. Not even Clyde Cottage, at Hawkinge in the Downs behind Folkestone, ('Appletrees' had not then been built) meant 'Home' to him. Certainly not Rose Lawn, the summer place.

As a child I could not conceive of Rose Lawn being anything but jolly. Naturally I could not see the emptiness - and I was too young to imagine it - after we had returned to London for the winter. Uncle remained behind with his elderly housekeeper, free to concentrate on Billy Bunter, free from temptations luring him out to play. Living alone with Miss Beveridge and no other company depressed his spirits. The autumn gales, and later those of spring, figured frequently in Uncle's three letters a week to my mother (although not in his weekly letter to me). Many were the allusions to the "wind being in the west" and "east winds that have blown for days", causing his headaches (as he thought), to be followed by sunny letters when the wind had changed. He hated the bleakness of North Foreland so much that he took to retreating to Hawkinge soon after we had returned to London, there to stay until Christmas, when he joined us in London, and thither to return until shortly before Easter.

It was a few years after the purchase of Rose Lawn that Uncle conceived the idea of having a bungalow built near the Old Windmill and Hawkinge Old Church in an orchard he already owned there. 'Apple-trees' was completed in 1930-31. The climate and scenery of south Kent appealed to him, also its proximity to France. He still cherished pipe-dreams of returning to the continent, but Miss Beveridge disliked living abroad and so he sold his two French properties and settled for England. The 'leafy lanes' of Kent in his stories are all to be found in the south of the county, not amid the flat, windswept landscape of Thanet. Uncle could not have endured Christmas there and would never have chosen to spend it in Kingsgate had not the Second World War changed his fortunes and narrowed his choice. His post-war Christmases spent on the Thanet coast were not happy - depression descended upon him like a blanket and there were haunting echoes of the past. It was a cruel irony of fate that sentenced him to die in his summer place on Christmas Eve.



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CHRISTMAS AT TRAVIS DENE

by Jim Sutcliffe

The 1929 Nelson Lee Christmas holiday series covers a really big party at the Handforth country mansion, Travis Dene, near Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk.

To start with we must join a party of Removites leaving the Palladium Cinema in Bannington to find a snowstorm raging. Most had come on their bicycles, although Handforth had come with Church and McClure in his faithful Austin-Seven. They make a start back to St. Frank's, battling against the elements. A sudden violent gust of wind sends Handy's car into a ditch, but some of the cyclists carry on, walking with their bikes. From the railway bridge they discover that there has been a landslide of snow into the cutting below, blocking the railway line; the local evening train is due. They scramble down and endeavour to stop the train with their bicycle lamps, but are too late to prevent it ploughing into the great wall of snow. Handforth and Co. are helping a young lady and a girl from one of the carriages just as Nipper comes up and recognises the lady as Eileen Dare, the girl detective featured in the early Nelson Lee stories. It turns out that the young girl is her niece, Molly, and they

are both on their way to St. Frank's to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Stokes in the West-House. However, the visit had been kept secret as Molly was in danger from enemies who were trying to kidnap her. Now it was no longer secret, as Handforth told the guard that Eileen was the famous detective. Handy's car is pulled out of the

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HANDFORTH'S GIRL GUM !

An enthralling long complete yarn of school, mystery and adventure.
Introducing the cheery chums of St. Frank's.
New Series No. 187. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. November 26th, 1929.

drift and makes a very steady journey to the school with its passengers. Eileen is worried about the publicity, and her fears are well founded for the very next day Handy's young brother Willy, on his way to the village, is questioned by a couple of tough looking customers in a car. He manages to mislead them by appearing to be stupid. Unfortunately, after Willy has gone on his way. Teddy Long appears and is only too eager to supply them with all the information they require, for which he is reimbursed financially.

Meanwhile Willy, who has always declared that girls are useless creatures, becomes "smitten" by Molly's charms, much to the disgust of his bosom chums, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. "Thank goodness she's only here as a visitor", said Chubby. "Perhaps Willy will become normal again." An attempt is made that same night to kidnap Molly, but it is foiled by Willy's watchfulness, and he slashes the tyres of the car waiting to take her away. After this Eileen considers that St. Frank's is no longer a safe place, and Sir Edward Handforth comes to the rescue with an invitation to Eileen and Molly to join the forthcoming Christmas party at Travis Dene. He has come to the school to give his sons Edward and Willy carte blanche to invite all their friends. However, when Ted Handforth hears that Willy is inviting half the Third Form, he decides to discourage them and proceeds to the fags' Common Room and tells them of the "family ghost" of Travis Dene. This is a Roundhead general, captured by the Cavaliers and imprisoned for many years in a deep dungeon until he died, who now haunts the place at Christmas. He has long whiskers and matted hair, and clanking chains. After this description, some decide to withdraw their acceptance but a pep-talk from Willy soon reverses that!

The main party arrives at Bury St. Edmunds station to find ideal Christmas weather and plenty of snow. (Eileen and Molly have travelled by car a few days earlier.) They find comfortable motor coaches waiting outside the station for the journey to the ancestral Handforth home, brilliant with lights and blazing yule log fires.

"What time does the ghost walk, Handy?", asks Harry Gresham. "Everybody's talking about the ghost, it'll be a swindle if we don't see it!" Well, they do not have long to wait, for soon after they go up to bed Handy hears some thudding. He goes to the door and there is the ghost just as described by him, but it vanishes. They keep watch, and an hour or so later it appears again: this time they capture the ghost and it turns out to be a maid-servant named Ellen, who claims she thought she would play a joke on the boys to frighten them. She begs them not to tell Lady Handforth who would then dismiss her, so they agree. It all fitted in with the legend Ted Handforth had told before they left St. Frank's. When questioned about it after the ghost's appearance he said "I was going to tell you earlier - there isn't any legend, I invented it all to try to stop those fags all coming!" Willy said, "There's something fishy about the whole affair", and Nipper agreed. "She told us she was impersonating the ghost but she made no noise, she didn't rattle her chains, so that shows she only wore the ghostly clothes as a safeguard." "She was going towards Molly's bedroom", said Willy. Nothing else happened that night and they retired to bed to catch up on their lost sleep, with the exception of Willy who kept a lonely vigil until dawn.

The next day, which was Christmas Day, was a time of great festivities. The morning was devoted to tobogganing, and in the afternoon the girls challenged the boys to a snowball fight, Ena Handforth having brought her friends from Moor View School. However, during this a stone in a snowball hits Jimmy Potts on the head, giving him a nasty cut. The rest of the day passed off uneventfully and Ellen,

the maid, had been kept under observation. That night however, Jimmy Potts' head was worrying him. He got up, saw someone carrying Molly wrapped in a blanket down the stairs, and raised the alarm. Molly was dropped in the snow and the kidnapper vanished. The next morning Ellen had also disappeared.

This is Boxing Day and in the evening there is dancing in the ballroom. Handy has a disagreement with Church and McClure in the library, where a secret panel is discovered and Handy, as usual, insists on exploring. They find an ancient skeleton. "Perhaps, there's some treasure", Handy says, and they keep on exploring until they are suddenly captured by Molly's enemies, who have been using

one of the cellars as their hide-out. Soon the captives are joined by Travers who had been searching with Nipper for the others; Nipper is found, unconscious. Willy Handforth on his own discovers where the crooks are, and thinks he can force them out by setting fire to some straw. This, however, nearly has disastrous results but fortunately all ends well. The crooks are captured although not before they make a last attempt to abduct Molly; this would have succeeded but for a skilful car chase on snowbound roads by Nelson Lee.

After all this, Eileen Dare reveals the reason for the attempts to kidnap Molly. The girl is not her niece; her real name is Molly Stapleton and her parents died in India when she was young. She was sent to Mr. Stapleton's brother, who was a worthless scamp but her legal guardian. He was then murdered because of a great swindle, and some friends brought Molly back to England. Her adoptive parents were not very cautious, and Molly's sad story was the talk of the homeward trip when two international confidence men on the ship saw a chance of making money if they could capture Molly and hold her to ransom. However, all ended well, and the last few days of the festive holiday were peacefully spent, with Molly in due course becoming a member of the Moor View School.



Your Editor says—



It helps the C.D. if readers advertise their WANTS and FOR SALE book and story-paper items, etc. in it. The rates are 4p per word; a boxed, displayed ad. costs £20.00 for a whole page, £10 for a half page or £5 for a quarter page.

Our Editor has kindly suggested that I send you my greetings at this time of the year. Season of memories. And, with memories, perhaps, one is living history.

I am deeply grateful that such large numbers of C.D. readers have kept closely in touch with me since I vacated the editorial chair. Your letters are full of memories. Nearly all of you, in your letters, remember the Princess Snowee, and that is a delight to me and just purrfect for her.

Snowee has changed a good deal since those days when, occasionally, she contributed the Princess Snowee's Corner to our lovely magazine. She has had two strokes in the past 12 months, and they have left their mark. To-day she walks very, very slowly. She can't get upstairs any more. Only with a ready hand to help her is she able to get up on to the knees of "Her Man". She lies about and sleeps a very great deal. But she eats well, and still dribbles as she purrs. And she is as lovable as ever. She sends her love to you all.

Memories. For some, as in my case, the memories of the old papers form a backcloth to our entire life. And for very few of us - those of us who have been about a very long time - can that backcloth be as extensive as mine.

I first knew the Gem before I could read for myself. My older sister read them to me. I have happy memories of my first, "D'Arcy's Libel Action". A very amusing school story, and a tip-top one, beautifully written by the Old Master when he was fairly young. The theme remained fairly original, and that, in itself, is a little unusual. Arthur Augustus criticised the slovenly appearance of Mr. Japp, the Mayor of Wayland. And Mr. Japp, apparently, sued Gussy for libel. It was a story of Kerr's impersonation, a part which was not quite so original, but always delightful.

The Magnet caught up with me a little later. My Mum visited a lady living nearby, a Mrs. Allen. My Mum took her small son with her. It was early in the First World War. Mrs. Allen's son, Horace, was away in France. To keep me interested, while she and my Mum gossiped away the evening, Mrs. Allen gave me a box of lovely Red Magnets, which had belonged to her son, Horace. When we left, Mrs. Allen said: "Take them with you, darling, if you like. Horace won't want them any more." I have often wondered what Horace thought when he came back from the war.

That night, in bed, I read "The Hidden Horror". Later, I was bellowing: "Mum, Mum, there's a snake under the bed." I must have been an unusually timid lad.

"The Hidden Horror" has always been one of my Red Magnet favourites. A superb tale, packed with wonderful atmospheric thrills.

A bit later - buying Gems and Magnets and Penny Populars for 2 a penny at a stall in Gravesend market. They bought them back, if you were mad enough to want to part with them, for twopence a dozen.

Then schooldays in the twenties. Stopping at the newsagent's on the way home from school. On Mondays, the Magnet and Boys' Friend - maybe "When the head Resigned", a tip-top start of a little series in which the Sixth Form rebelled. And, in the Green 'Un, perhaps "Mr. Bandy's new Boy" in which an expelled Mornington became delivery boy to the grocer, mainly to annoy the Rookwood Headmaster.

(Continued on Page 32)



A CONTRAST IN CHRISTMASES

by J.E.M.

What Charles Dickens is to Christmas, Gwyn Evans is to the Christmas case-book of Sexton Blake. In its later years, the Union Jack without one of Gwyn's yuletide yarns would have been as unthinkable as Dickens without his famous *A Christmas Carol*. Let's take a look at a couple of stories which contain the Evans magic.



The Man Who Hated Christmas (UJ 1417) appeared just 60 years ago and was probably, at least in part, inspired by Dickens' story of that celebrated Christmas-hater, Ebenezer Scrooge. Like all Evans' work, *The*

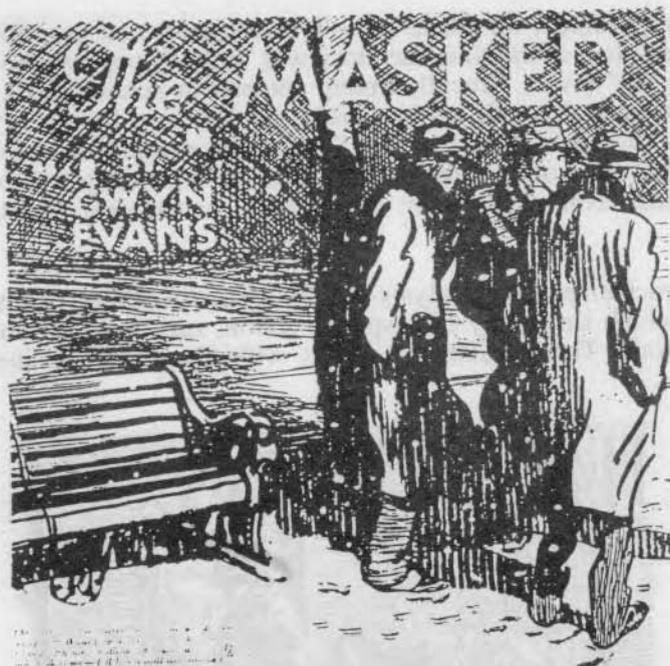
Man Who... carries a delightful flavour of the bizarre. Its cover illustration shows a malevolent-looking gent about to cosh an innocent sandwich-board man dressed as Santa Claus, while an interior drawing, reproduced here, also conveys a marked lack of seasonal good will. What, in short, is going on?

This is a problem for Blake as both investigator and psychologist. It is interesting that, at the time the story was written, pop psychology was very much "in" (even, I recall, among adolescent schoolboys!) and this fashion left its mark on all writing, including detective fiction. Freud was the chap to quote and it is clear that Sexton Blake (and Gwyn Evans) had fully digested the works of the master. Blake is even inspired to invent a psychological term of his own: Noelphobia, or the fear and hatred of Christmas!

But armchair psycho-analysis is only a small, if significant, part of this story which has plenty of suspense, action, surprises and convincing detective work. There is also, as always with Evans, some memorable



characterisation - especially of the baddies. An unusual and entertaining Christmas story.



After the fable of a modern Scrooge, we turn to an even older fable brought up to date - that of the Good Christmas Fairy. She appears in *The Masked Carollers* (UJ 1521), Evans' seasonal offering for 1932, as a beautiful girl in a silver mask, arriving not in a pumpkin or magic coach but a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce. What her connection is with a group of down-and-outs on the Thames Embankment is finally revealed in a most absorbing tale of detection which involves not only Blake, Tinker and Mrs. Bardell but that ebullient newspaper reporter, 'Splash' Page.

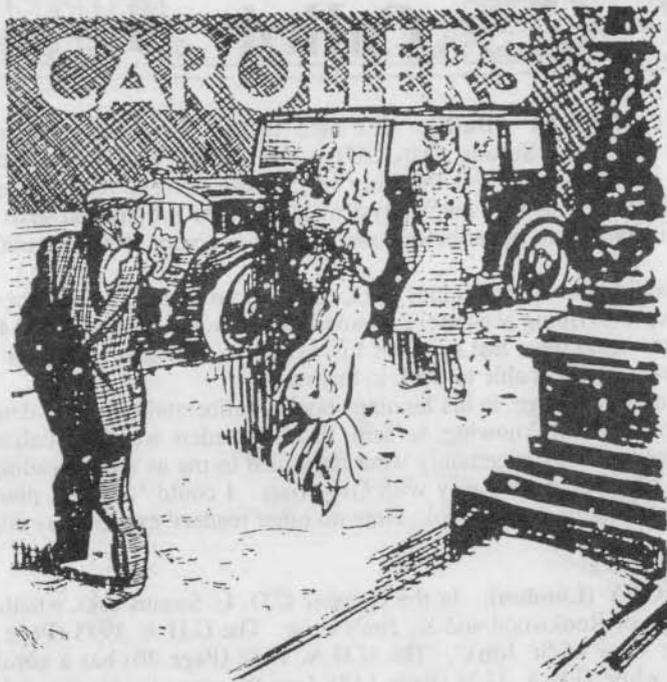
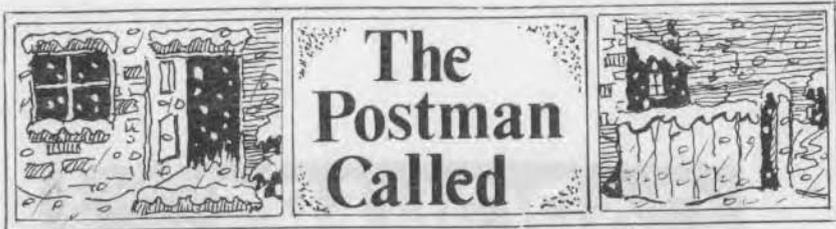


Illustration by E. L. Parker.

I featured *The Masked Carolers* in a CD article some 13 years ago but make no apology for returning to it here. I regard it not only as Evans' best Christmas yarn but perhaps one of the most entertaining stories he ever penned. It also makes a most interesting contrast to *The Man Who Hated Christmas*. Neither of these stories needs to be read only at this time of the year. I have especially clear and happy memories of first reading them well out of season many years ago. Eric Parker's illustrations to both also revive some early joys.





SIMON GARRETT (Bath): It's nice to see Greyfriars geography under discussion again (L. Susans, Oct. CD). The subject is always absorbing and seemingly inexhaustible. Yet the truly remarkable thing is that although Charles Hamilton didn't give us very much physical detail of the school, and what he did give was often inconsistent, nevertheless one does have a very strong mental picture of the place.

If he had drawn up meticulous files, charts, floor plans etc and kept referring to them to keep everything accurate, I wonder how it would have affected his writing? I suspect he would have lost much of his freshness and spontaneity, or perhaps he was temperamentally unable to work in this way.

Anthony Buckeridge, in his Jennings books, deliberately avoided descriptions of Linbury Court school, knowing, he said, that his readers would visualise their own schools anyway. This is certainly what happened to me as a boy reading Jennings. But it didn't happen in this way with Greyfriars. I could "see" the place all right, but it was nothing like my school. How do other readers' experiences compare with mine?

P.B. MAHONY (London): In the October C.D. L. Susans asks whether plans of the buildings of Rookwood and St. Jim's exist. The G.H.A. 1923 (Page 262) has a "Bird's Eye View of St. Jim's". The G.H.A. 1922 (Page 20) has a similar view of Greyfriars, while G.H.A. 1924 (Page 118) does the same for Rookwood. The only detailed plan of an 'interior' was the Greyfriars one on Page 50 of the 1923 G.H.A. Perhaps this is a field for attempting specific plans from the aerial exteriors mentioned above. Pinpointing the "End Study" at Rookwood and Study No. 6 at St. Jim's would be an interesting exercise.

BILL LOFTS (London): I enjoyed the article by L. Susans. The topography of Greyfriars has been discussed at Clubs and in C.D. many times, nearly all agreeing that it is a sheer impossibility to draw the old school or map, because of so many inconsistencies in the stories. J.S. Butcher was a complete stranger to our circle, and most of his material was gleaned from Holiday Annuals and Pentelow write-ups. He died before his work was published, according to Cassells Ltd. To correct a common error, it was the creator of Greyfriars who put the First Form in Greyfriars School. I wrote a full length article about it in the October 1960 C.D. At least two Magnets mentioned it (No. 241, 1912, The introduction of Reggy Coker, and No. 291, 1913). There might have been more, though to be fair the genuine Frank Richards only mentioned the 'Babes' of the First in a short sentence, and dropped any mention in later Magnets.



Two coincidences accompanied our Editor's fascinating account of Worrals of the W.A.A.F. (October CD). On a personal note, the daughter of old friends of mine was accepted for RAF pilot training (a Worrals for the 90s?). And, of more general interest, I saw an article about Kitty Hawke, lead feature of *Girl*, which was launched as sister paper to "Eagle" in November 1951.

Clearly she was designed to emulate the phenomenal success of space hero Dan Dare, who had blasted off in Eagle eighteen months before. There was the same dashing bravery, the same humour, the same piloting skill, the same small close-knit crew, even the same green uniforms, whilst the automatic pilot was "Georgina", corresponding to the usual "George" favoured by Dan.

But Kitty Hawke also seems to be in clear line of descent from W.E. Johns' Worrals, who had been grounded only a year before. Although Kitty was a civil rather than a military pilot, she was very much the same breed of cheerful positive feminist, making her point by deeds rather than words. In fact, she was not destined to do so for very long. After a promising start, her mission degenerated into a rather dated business concerning a Ruritanian palace revolution. The entire Kitty Hawke saga lasted a mere twenty one weeks before she was replaced by a conventional school story in response to popular demand.

Does this mean that the school-girls of my generation were a feeble lot? Not necessarily. It's my firm belief that the better types stayed with Eagle! Eagle did, after all have the crucial advantage of Frank

THE NEW SUPER-COLOUR WEEKLY FOR EVERY GIRL

Girl

SISTER PAPER TO EAGLE



EVERY FRIDAY

VOL. 1 No. 1 NOVEMBER 2, 1951



Hampson, recognised as the greatest strip-cartoon artist of his time (some would say of all time). And several famous *Girl* contributors, notably Chad Varah, also worked for Eagle.

As for Worrals, well it's hard to understand those librarians and teachers who brand W.E. Johns as sexist. They can't have read the books. Worrals and her friend Frecks were strong female role models. Modern Feminists are always deploring the absence of such characters in children's books.

It's interesting that although the CD article talks of Frecks' "blonde beauty" and Worrals' "raven-hued charm", and illustrations support this, Johns' initial descriptions are very different. In the first book, "Worrals of the W.A.A.F.," he says "Not even her friends could call Worrals pretty..." and Frecks "...had no pretensions to good looks." This is in line with the modern demand, that women should not be judged primarily by their looks.

Once again, the remarkable Captain Johns was several decades ahead of his time!

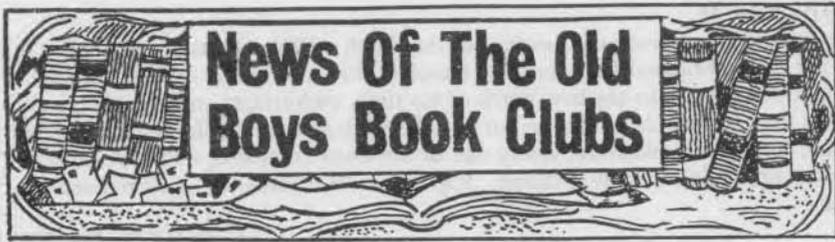
(Editor's Note: Mr. Garrett's comments on Kitty Hawke and Worrals are very interesting. I absolutely agree that Worrals and Frecks were pioneering feminist role-models, giving the lie to criticisms of Johns as being "sexist". Readers may be interested to read the following remarks from Dennis Bird; he and Mr. Garrett were among several readers who wrote expressing appreciation of my 50 years on tribute to Worrals.)

I much enjoyed your article on Worrals. The 1940 "GOP" covers were a delight - I remember seeing my sister's copies. I'm sorry to disillusion you about the November 1940 WAAF! She can't have been Worrals, because she is clearly an "other rank"! The cap badge gives her away: officers' cap badges were quite different. The badge with the letters "RAF" was for aircraft women and not officers, but I agree that she looks just as one imagines Worrals.)



Worrals took a compass bearing of the direction indicated. (p. 55)

WORRALS AND FRECKS in
Worrals of the Islands.



News Of The Old Boys Book Clubs

MIDLAND O.B.B.C.

There were 16, members and visitors, at the Autumn Meeting held at the Blackheath Library on September 28th. Three friends from Yorkshire unfortunately found themselves stranded in Derbyshire, otherwise we would have been 19.

The Chairman thanked Jack Bellfield, your correspondent for so many years, who has now given up the job, and hoped he would be able to enjoy the meetings even more without the need to take copious notes.

He then had the sad task of paying tribute to our late vice chairman, Vince Loveday, who passed away on Sept. 1st, after a short illness. Vin's love for the old papers and enthusiasm for the club will be sadly missed. Jack had already told us that Tom Porter was very poorly.

The meeting then moved on to happier things as the Chairman introduced Mary Cadogan, whose visit to the Club had been looked forward to by us all. We were not disappointed. She talked about the books and papers, the authors, artists and characters and the people who had meant so much to her over the years, and as she talked she produced for us copies of such papers as "Rainbow" and "Playbox" and "Tiger Tim's Weekly"; there were copies of the Boys' and Girls' "Daily Mail" with Teddy Tail, and mention of Radio Luxembourg and the "Ovaltiney's" led to a spirited rendition of that famous theme. We heard about Arthur Askey's love of the Magnet and Gem, and Mary's own introduction the papers, to the "Schoolgirl" and "School Friend" and the school stories of Angela Brazil and Co. We learned about her love for the cinema, with copies of old Film Magazines and postcards. She talked about the "Silent Three" and "Worrals of the WAAF", with copies of the Girl's Own Paper with their wonderful covers of service women, and finally she talked about fairies, which she has loved all her life. All in all a veritable feast, and she hadn't mentioned William at all! It was hugely enjoyed by everyone, and the Chairman expressed himself as being "speechless" in his words of thanks.

Terry Jones was then introduced. He spoke of his memories of the Magnet and how much it had influenced his life from his schooldays onwards. His great hero was Bob Cherry. He said that the papers still had a wonderfully therapeutic effect. He had taken one into hospital and on coming round from the anaesthetic the first sight he had was of Quelch caning Bunter, so he knew he was still in this world at least. Terry also entertained us with one of his broadcasting scripts based on his own schooldays.

The meeting concluded with a short business meeting. It was felt necessary to make an increase in subs for the year commencing 1st Jan. 1991 and a charge of £1 per head for those attending meetings. The date of the Spring Meeting will be announced later, though the venue again is likely to be the Blackheath Library.

ADDENDUM

We have learned since the meeting of the death of Tom Porter, so long the main-spring of the Midland Club, on 15th October after a long and difficult illness. It is hard to find words to say how much of his time, enthusiasm and knowledge as well as his love for the old books, he put into the Club and the Hobby in general over the years. His great collection, surely one of the most complete, will now probably be broken up, which is a great shame. Impossible to replace, we shall not see his like again.

CHRISTINE BRETTELL

SOUTH-WESTERN CLUB

Ten people gathered at Tim Salisbury's home, 20 Uphill Road, Weston-Super-Mare, on Sunday, 23rd September, with Bill Lofts in the chair.

Bill's first talk dealt with the William Exhibition currently on display at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood in celebration of the centenary of Richmal Crompton's birth. Bill remarked that these days it seems to be all centenaries and wondered if he started it all over thirty years ago, when Frank Richards was still alive. Having been asked to give a talk to the London Club, a task to which he was then new, he was casting around for a subject and, thinking of Frank Richards, reflected that if the great man were to live to 1976 he would be a hundred. This led him to the title of his talk which was: "Centenaries to Come".

W. Grant-McPherson then spoke on the Modern Boy. He took it from No. 1 onwards, its great appeal to him being the regular articles on cars and how they worked. No. 1 had a story about cars and also a King of the Islands story purporting to have been written by Sir Alan Cobham, although of course actually by Charles Hamilton. Mac recalled Sir Alan Cobham's flying circus which toured the country in the twenties, following Sir Alan's historic flight to Australia, and how he himself went up on one of the short flights which were to be had for a few shillings.

In about the twentieth issue there was a story of war between Earth and Mars. Biggles was also a product of the Modern Boy. Famous authors who wrote for the paper included Geo. E. Rochester, Charles Hamilton (who also ghosted for Wally Hammond), E.S. Brooks, Alfred Edgar, who was the author of the car racing stories and later edited the Nelson Lee, P.G. Wodehouse and Gunby Hadath. There were also excellent articles about real people, such as Sir Malcolm Campbell, Sir Henry Seagrave, Kaye Don, Laurel and Hardy and so on. Charles Hamilton introduced some new schools in the M.B. including Claverhouse (of which the first story was supposedly by Wally Hammond) and High Combe, the School for Slackers.

The background theme to the celebrated Captain Justice stories was that four financiers had defrauded him and the stories concern his attempts to get them together to make them pay. After each of his adventures he would escape to his secret hideout in the flooded crater of an extinct volcano.

Following these two most interesting talks we adjourned for the customary delicious tea so kindly provided by Tim's mother, then returned to hear Bill's second talk. This was entitled "What a Swizz!" and took a look at some of the more dubious advertisements which appeared in boys' and other papers of the period.

We had had three knowledgeable and quite fascinating talks from experts in their subjects and we had been well cared for and fed. It was an excellent day in every way, thanks to the efforts of the speakers and the hospitality of Tim and his family.

GEOFF LARDNER

LONDON O.B.B.C.

20 members attended the November meeting at the Harpers residence at Loughton. Bill Lofts gave us a talk on Public Libraries, noting that the British Library has some 200 million books and periodicals within its walls. As usual, a discussion followed Bill's talk, which produced the amusing anecdote of a kipper being used as a bookmark!

After a delicious tea supplied by Suzanne Harper, Bill Bradford read the Memory Lane newsletter from November 1970 at Ruislip. Norman Wright then treated us to a slide show and talk on the celebrated artist Eric Parker, whose work was indeed prolific. A discussion followed, and then all too soon it was time to leave and look forward to our Christmas gathering.

This meeting will take place on the 9th December at 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing from 4 o'clock. A full tea will be provided, and please let Bill Bradford know a few days before if attending on 081 579 4670.

GRAHAM BRUTON

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

For our November Meeting we gathered at the Longstanton Old School House home of our Secretary, Tony Cowley.

Our special guest was Mary Cadogan who presented her totally absorbing 'Letters to and from Authors'. All the authors were from the first half of the twentieth century and were once working in the field then called Children's Literature, and consequently very familiar to us.

Later, Mary introduced a highly relevant treat. Two guests from Amalgamated Press and Fleetway House: Pat and Alan Davidson well-known nowadays for their children's book heroines. Fascinating reminiscences of the late Fifties inside A.P. and of when A.P. was being taken over by the Mirror with the resultant staff upheaval. We are anticipating further episodes. Afterwards Bill Lofts briefly spoke about the background to A.P. during this period.

ADRIAN PERKINS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Chairman Joan welcomed the thirteen present to our A.G.M. on 10th November. We were sorry to find that Geoffrey our Secretary was still unwell and was awaiting an operation.

The election of officers took place and everyone agreed to continue for one further year. It was unanimously agreed that we should invite Mary Cadogan to be our President - our Vice President to be Anthony Buckeridge.

Paul Galvin reported that the W.E. Johns' meeting held in Nottingham had been a great success but was the last to be organised under the auspices of the Northern Club. However, the meeting would take place next year under the wing of

another volunteer. Keith Atkinson reported on his recent visit to the Richard Jefferies Society in Swindon. William Hirst spoke on BERTIE - one of the lesser known characters in the Biggles books. Bertie did not come to light until after the war and therefore missed out on some of the best Biggles stories. Johns portrayed Bertie as the typical aristocrat - monocled, flippant, laid back yet intelligent, and astounding people on occasions with his simple deductions and suggestions. Biggles did not appear to regard him too highly and, certainly, he could not be described as a sleuth in the same way as Biggles and Ginger could. Perhaps Bertie could be compared with such noble lords as Mauleverer at Greyfriars, and the aristocrats portrayed in so many of the old story-papers and books.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR



WANTED: W.E. Johns Worrals books - Worrals in the Wastelands, Worrals of the Islands, Worrals investigates. Any condition. SIMON GARRETT, Bathwick House, Bathwick Street, Bath, Avon. BA2 6NX. Tel. Bath (0255) 466512.

UP TO £20 PAID for good bound volume of B.O.P. 1921-22 containing 'Treasure of Kings' by Major Charles Gilson. Offers to H. Webb, 74 Whitland Close, Stoke Park, Ipswich, Suffolk. IP2 9YT.

WANTED: £20 each offered for "*Boys Friend Libraries*" featuring BIGGLES. £15 each offered for Biggles jigsaw puzzles. £3 each offered for "Happy Mags". £15 offered for B.F.L. no. 204, "Crooked Gold". Original artwork of Bunter, etc., always wanted. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Telephone (0923) 32383.

WANTED: by Collector. JOHN HAMILTON: Pre-War hardbacks, any title with or without D/W, including the 'Ace Series', 'Airmans Bookcase', 'Flying Thrillers', 'Sundial Mystery' and Adventure Library, and Airmans Bookclub editions in Dustwrappers. W.E. JOHNS: Any Pre-War hardbacks, with or without D/W, and Paper back editions of 'MOSSYFACE' (by William Earle) and any 'BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY' Editions, any condition considered. JOHN TRENDLER, 7 Park Close, Bushey, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD2 2DE. Tel. (0923) 31608.

WANTED: Any condition - Leave It To Conquest, Conquest Takes All, Convict 1066, (Berkeley Gray). Footsteps of Death, Ironsides Smashes Through, Alias The Hangman, Borgia Head Mystery, Whistling Key, Painted Dog, Dead In A Ditch, (Victor Gunn). PHIL GRIFFITHS, 21 Harcourt Field, WALLINGTON, Surrey, SM6 8BA. Tel. 081 647 0508.

WANTED: by Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent:
SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY, POST SECOND WORLD WAR SERIES -
 numbers as follows:
 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,12,14,15,17,18,19,20,26,28,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40,42,
 44,45,46,48,50,51,52,53,54,55,56,58,59,61,62,63,65,66,68,78,79,80,86,105,113,295
 314.

PRISONERS OF SPACE: The 4th Deluxe Collectors' Edition of Dan Dare Pilot of the future. Published by Hawk Books at £15.95.

Reviewed by Norman Wright

Christmas just would not be the same without a new volume in the Hawk Books Dan Dare series, and the fourth volume is every bit as good as those that have gone before.

Prisoners of Space is a good story, its slightly shorter length is more than made up for by its taut, tight plot. Once more the totally evil Mekon is back in the centre of things, his one aim is to have his revenge on Dan Dare, the spaceman who destroyed his corrupt rule of Venus. All of the regular characters share Dan's adventure, the action of which is set mainly on a space station. In addition to the characters met in the previous stories a trio of new faces make their debut in this volume. Groupie, the handle-bar moustached veteran, makes the first of his irregular appearances in the saga, together with 'Flamer' Spry and Steve Valiant, two Astral College cadets. Editors, it seems, always tried to introduce youngsters with whom the readers could identify. In my view the average reader was much more likely to identify with Dan Dare than with any young scholar - however daring he may have been!

Each volume in this series seems to be better printed than the last and with this book the colour match and line quality are faultless. As an added bonus an eight page strip reprinted from the Eagle Annual for Christmas 1954 is added. Dash out and buy it straight away!!!



FAVOURITE CLIFF HOUSE CHRISTMASSES: BABS & CO tell **MARGERY WOODS** about some of their happiest and most thrilling winter holidays.

BABS

A very exciting Christmas was the one we spent in London, at Robin's Roost, an ancient coaching inn by the river. It had everything. Old beams and inglenooks, secret passages and a grotto, and marvellous atmosphere. Our Bess wasn't sure about the ghost, though! Still, we soon settled him---at least Clara did, with a pear in his chest! And this was the Christmas when we met Audrey and Jim, whose villainous guardian would have outdone any pantomime wicked uncle. We got lost in London, and Gunda Lal had us mystified.

This one has Janet's vote, too. She says she's going to ask Aunt Janice (whose home Robin's Roost is) if we can spend another Christmas there some day. We can't wait!

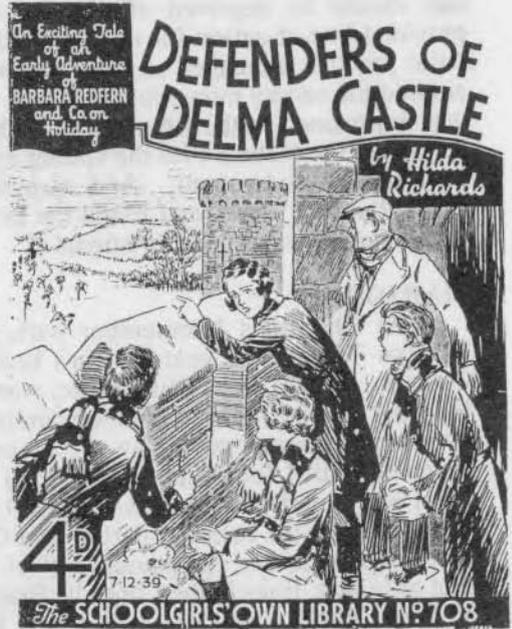


MABS

I have especially fond memories of our visit to Christmas Castle. Clara's father arranged a wonderful transformation that took us all back a century for a true Dickensian Christmas. A stage coach to ride in, lanterns, a baronial hall, a haunted turret, and we all wore period costume, crinolines and pelisses, bonnets, cloaks, dainty muslin dresses-- if only we had gorgeous costumes like these in our Drama Society wardrobe at Cliff House. Of course we had lots of adventure, a Red Crusader, a lost will, villains and the real heirs to Christmas Castle. Truly a memorable Christmas!

CLARA

My favourite festive season was really a New Year hol we spent with Jemima at Delma Castle. It turned out a bit of a spartan affair because of the great siege, when we'd rescued young May Steffins from the gypsies. Their leader, Mother Faa, besieged us, but we won with a spot of real old medieval warfare. Fatima was worried---we were snowed up as well and had to conserve the grub in case we couldn't renew supplies. But it was still great fun because we were a wonderful crowd that year. Ralph Lawrence, Jimmy Richardson and Douglas Coutts were with us, and best of all, our favourite imp, M'lizi. Oh boy! did she enjoy herself wreaking vengeance on old Mother Faa. Great fun! Great holiday!



JEMIMA

For me our Mistletoe Manor Christmas was the most intriguing of all. There was masses of snow and enough feasting to satisfy even our plump and hungry Bess. Besides all the festive ingredients there was enough mystery to keep the jolly old brain cells well and truly exercised. There

COME TO MISTLETOE MANOR WITH BABS & CO.,

THE SCHOOLGIRLS



was a White Queen who walked and walked, obviously determined that no one should be deprived of viewing her! She chased poor Bess and provided lots of action for us, especially when Clara, putting in a spot of lariat practice, managed to lasso yours truly instead. Must have greatly amused the snowy monarch! This was the year of the mystery girl who was imprisoned in the labyrinth of secret tunnels in Mistletoe Manor, not forgetting the picture with the sliding eyes---just for a change from sliding panels, you understand. And a mysterious old well, which our fair Babs plumbed, ahem, and found the treasure. Yes, as friend Leila would say: that sure was some Christmas!

MARJORIE

The Christmas I remember with most joy is the one we spent at Trevlyn Towers the year Dulcia's brother, Dick Fairbrother, and Berry Osborne, old girl from Cliff House, were guests. They were very much in love but had so many misunderstandings that Dick lost his temper and threw the engagement ring away. I was determined it shouldn't be lost so searched until I found it. We were all anxious to make things work out for Dick and Berry, and we must have succeeded for they did get engaged. But the happiest part of that Christmas was when we helped old Mr. Bracewater and his grandson Noel to be reunited at Bracewater Hall. Not only that, Babs helped find the Bracewater fortune and clear the name of Noel's father. That year was a truly lovely Christmas.



Christmas Romance at Trevlyn Towers!

BESSIE

Really, you girls, I think it's rather silly writing about your favourite Christmas. I've simply racked my brains and I can't decide where we had the plumpest, juciest turkey, the tastiest chicken and hams, the biggest most gorgeous Christmas pudding, the most scrumptious mince pies, the creamiest trifle, the most super-de-luscious chocolates and the fattest sausage rolls. I tested them all, so I should know!

(So sayeth the expert--the fattest food tester in the West. ANON).



HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL.



WANTED by Collector: Pre-1970 Williams, Bunters, Blytons, Biggles, Brent-Dyers, in dustwrappers. Also Rupert and other Annuals, Comic giveaways, Original artwork, associated Ephemera. High prices paid, or exchanged. JOHN BECK, 29 Mill Road, Lewes, Sussex.

WANTED: Modern Boys, bound or singles. Bound vols. of The Gem, Nelson Lee, Biggles and Captain Justice, Boys' Friends Library. Other bound volumes of Story Papers for my collection. Many Howard Baker volumes required. P. GALVIN, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks., SY5 2DT. Tel. 0226 295613.

HAMILTONIA ALL TYPES: WANTED especially Holiday Annuals all years, Howard Baker Press and Club volumes, Dustwrapped Biggles, Bunters, Williams, Enid Blyton, Malcolm Saville, Jennings. Generous prices paid. Contact: COLIN CREWE, 12b Westwood Road, Canvey Island, Essex. Tel. 0268 693735, Evenings 7.15 - 9.30 p.m.



CHRISTMAS MAGIC IN 'MAGNET' AND 'GEM' by NORMAN WRIGHT



Story papers and comics were havens of seasonal festivities. In their turn sweltering summers were followed by leaf-strewn autumns, firework nights and crisp cold winters. But the crowning glory of the year was always Christmas.

When December arrives I often pull out my collection of Christmas numbers; several hundred issues spanning almost a century and encompassing examples from almost ninety different publications. Whether large or small, fat or thin they nearly all exude a warm feeling of seasonal well-being and Christmas cheer. It is rare indeed to find a comic or story-paper issued in mid-December that does not bear its full ration of snow, holly and all the other traditional December decorations. We may now be suffering the un-seasonal gloom of the greenhouse effect, but through the magical pages of our favourite old publications we can, once more, tramp through thick snow, skate on frozen lakes and indulge in snow-ball fights until our fingers freeze and our cheeks shine red.

'Magnet' and 'Gem' bore some superb snow-drenched covers and between those covers appeared powerful prose that conjured up a concentrated essence of the festive season in all of its' moods.

"The Ghost of St. Jim's", in 'Gem' no 197, dated 18th of November, 1911, bore a blue cover depicting Tom Merry And Co. following 'The White Monk of St. Jim's'. The ghostly mood of the story was immediately conveyed in the opening paragraph -

".....Snow-thicker and thicker! The white flakes were falling incessantly. Walls and roofs at St. Jim's were gleaming white, and the old quad was wrapped as in a winding sheet. Through the dusk of the winter evening, the leafless elms stood up gaunt and spectre-like, the white branches stretching ghost-like against the dim sky...."

The following year's 'Grand Christmas Double Number' was another ghost story, entitled "Nobody's Study", but without a doubt the most famous Xmas 'Gem' was "The Grand Winter Number" for 1913, the unforgettable "The Mystery of the Painted Room", a fifty thousand word story that must have kept the goose flesh creeping on many a young reader. Unlike previous 'Gem' Christmas double numbers "The Mystery of the Painted Room" had a coloured cover; a wonderfully atmospheric illustration of D'Arcy staring in horror at the plaster ceiling moulding of the Painted Room -

".....It was past one o'clock, and still Arthur Augustus sat in the deep, old chair, watching the dying embers. The room was brilliantly illuminated by the electric light, the old panelled walls glimmered and gleamed in it. Arthur Augustus's gaze wandered to the painted ceiling, and he idly watched the graceful forms of the nymphs delineated there, and the jolly face of Bacchus, crowned with vine leaves.

The face of the god of wine seemed to grin at him, and the eyes to watch him with a derisive smile. Suddenly Arthur Augustus gave a violent start. It seemed to him that the painted eyes of the Bacchus had actually moved that they were actually living, and were watching him.

"Bai Jove, I suppose I'm getting dweamy!" he murmured. He watched the painted figure in a fascinated way. Was it imagination?

Could an eye painted by human hand gleam at him in that manner -
 watching him- watching him!
 A shudder ran through D'Arcy's limbs....."



"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM!" *A Mysterious, New, Long, Complete Tale of School Life and Adversity continued in this issue.*

One of my favourite 'Gem' covers adorns issue number 724, published in December 1921. It illustrated an incident from "Lord Eastwood's Christmas Party", depicting the boys in festive mood having 'Fun at the Party'. What wouldn't I give to have the original of that Briscoe cover hanging on my living room wall!

While Tom Merry and Co. were enjoying Lord Eastwood's Christmas Party in 'The Gem', Harry Wharton and Co. were spending their Christmas as guests of Hurree Singh, and the cover of 'Magnet' no. 723 depicted the nabob in all of his glory welcoming his guests.

Christmas 1924 saw the beginning of the first Wharton the Rebel series. "Harry Wharton's Christmas" (880) was spent with Vernon Smith, while the following week's issue, entitled "Friend or Foes?" consolidated the rift between Harry and his chums. Both covers depicted Bunter far from enjoying the abundance of snow that adorned the covers; but then, he had been responsible for the lack of reconciliation between the Famous Five, and undoubtedly deserved all of the snowballing that he received!

The following year's 'Special Christmas Number' had Loder on the cover, receiving a snowballing that was not to his taste. The caption read 'A Christmas box for the tyrant of the sixth...' In 1926 Bunter was receiving another unpleasant 'Christmas Box' on the cover of the 'Grand Christmas Week' number of 'Magnet'. The Christmas issues of the 'Magnet' for 1927 found Bunter spending Christmas with the philanthropic millionaire Mr. Sempronius Skelton, a circumstance that was

brought about by the Owls' temporary change of character after reading Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". The cover of the 'Bumper Christmas Week Number' depicted Bunter distributing money to the poor, an action that fully justified the caption 'An amazing incident from the grand long story inside!'

One of my favourite 'Magnet' series is the Courtfield Cracksman series; a near perfect blend of all the Hamilton magic - including a splendid Christmas at Wharton Lodge that introduces readers to one of the most successful of all the Hamilton Villains. It was a fitting Christmas with which to end the decade.

Next year I will pull out the pile of Christmas 'Magnets' from the 1930s and look at some of the treasures overflowing from them.



Season of Memories (Continued from Page 13)

Tuesday, the Popular, as it had then become. (Long years later David Nixon, starring in a Bunter Show at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, told me that his favourite paper as a boy had been the Popular - and I took him along a bundle of them with my compliments. He was delighted. "That's magic!" he said.)

Wednesday, the Gem. Maybe this time "Trimble Tells the Truth", a glorious read in which the fat boy proved himself next week to be "Too Good for St. Jim".

And on Thursday, the Union Jack. Possibly "The Amazing Case of the Blind Fiddler" starring Leon Kestrel, a great favourite of mine in those days.

And then - adulthood. Unlike Mr. Buddle, who met the Gem late in life through a trying pupil named Meredith, I became a schoolmaster who knew the Gem from the beginning and encouraged my boys and girls to support the grand old paper. We had our Gem evenings. Evenings of feasts and fun and games. Any of my boys and girls could attend our Gem evenings, providing each lad or lassie carried the current issue of the Gem. The Editor of the Gem, in his Chat, printed pictures of my boys and girls with their Gems, and that brought Bill Gander on my track. And Bill Gander set Herbert Leckenby on to me. And another wonderful phase of my Gem and Magnet life had started Wonderful days. Memories, memories. And then our glorious C.D. which goes from strength to strength, all these years later.

But I'm overstaying my welcome with my memories. Our lovely Editor might get fed up to the teeth - and so might you!

May you have a wonderful Festive Season, and may 1991 bring you all that you have ever wished for. Especially plenty of good reading.

As I said once before, on a memorable occasion: Thank YOU for being YOU.

SPECIAL - CHRISTMAS - NUMBER



A CHRISTMAS BOX FOR THE TYRANT OF THE SIXTH!