

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 45

NUMBER 533

MAY 1991



BLAKE
CONSOLE'S
SPEARING

HARRY LANE
05

• A STORY OF SEXTON BLAKE •

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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The Editor's Chat



You will remember that in the March C.D. I mentioned that Mr. R. Hunter had been a C.D. reader from its beginnings, and I asked if any other readers who had been taking the magazine since November 1946 were still amongst our subscribers.

I was delighted to have a response from three readers (although I suspect we have a few more 'founder subscribers' who have not yet replied). That well known authority on Hamiltonia, Mr. Roger Jenkins, writes that he subscribed to the C.D. from No. 1, and not only has a complete collection of it but of the **Story Paper Collector**, and Bill Gander's smaller occasional magazine, the **Red River**

Rambler. Mr. Ray Benett from Wolverhampton writes that he too is 'one of the "old faithfuls" who have subscribed to the C.D. from No. 1, and possess every copy'. Mr. John Geal has written at greater length about his involvement with our magazine from the commencement, and I have reprinted his interesting letter in full elsewhere in this issue.

However, sadly I have once again to mention the passing of two loyal and longstanding readers and contributors, Mr. G. Crang of St. Columb, Cornwall, and Mr. Jim Sutcliffe of Wickford Essex. Both were particular enthusiasts of the **Nelson Lee**; they will be very much missed, and we send sincere condolences to their families.

On a more cheerful note I am glad to be able to inform you that new, and sometimes surprisingly young, readers keep coming into our list of subscribers. Their contributions often appear in the C.D., together with those by many of our long term enthusiasts. Whilst on this subject, may I take the opportunity once again to ask that articles submitted for publication should be typed, with double spacing between the lines, and wide margins. If articles cannot be typed, they should be written extremely clearly, with particular care given to names of characters, stories, locations, etc. As I have previously mentioned, the ever-helpful staff at our printer's office, who set up the final lay-out of the C.D., do not have our detailed knowledge of the characters and contents of the old papers. It is up to us to provide them with clear copy.

With thanks, as always, for your contributions and your kind, appreciative letters, and with good wishes to you all.

MARY CADOGAN



SEXTON BLAKE AND DETECTIVE WEEKLY

by J.E.M.

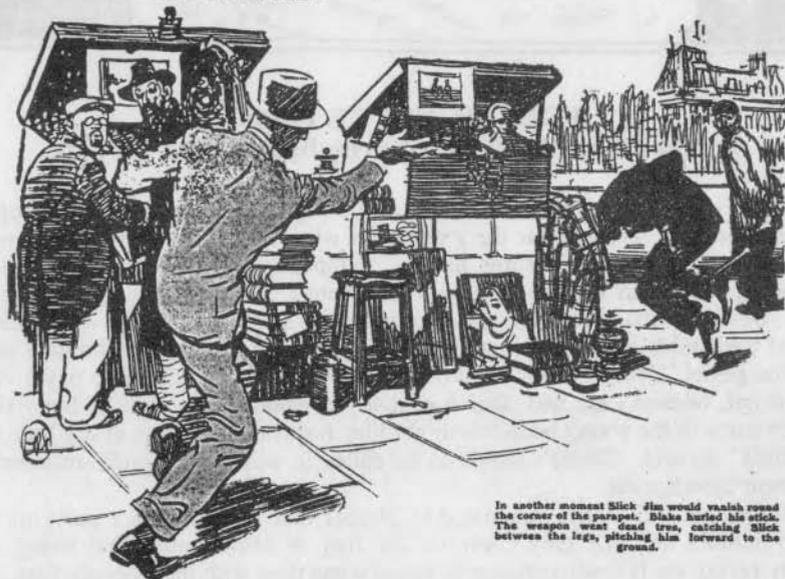
Number 4

The Chocolate King Mystery (DW No. 6) was the second story in the Baron and Elsa von Kravitch series by G.H. Teed and was, perhaps, one of the best. The baron is a very bad man indeed; his daughter, Elsa, by contrast is a near-angel, her sole weakness being an unswerving loyalty to her father. She cries out, so to speak, for our protection - not to say, affection. In short, our hearts bleed for her, while we can only wish her nasty dad a speedy end.

In this tale, von Kravitch plots the kidnapping of a French millionaire called Gaston Perrier (a chocolate, not a mineral-water, tycoon!) and Sexton Blake gets involved while chasing a crook named Slick Jim Prentice from London to France. Needless to say, as well as assisting Inspector Thibaud of the Sureté to thwart the baron's scheme, Blake also captures his original quarry.

Teed was a genuine cosmopolitan and his French settings are convincingly done. There is also plenty of action. Not for the first time in a Teed story, the final shoot-out between cops and crooks involves a heavy machine-gun!

Eric Parker's illustrations show, respectively, Blake trying to reassure a frightened Elsa, and giving chase to Slick Jim; and what an evocative drawing this second one is. Anyone who has ever been on Paris's Left Bank will feel an instant twitch of recognition and nostalgia.



In another moment Slick Jim would vanish round the corner of the parapet. Blake hurled his stick. The weapon went dead true, catching Slick between the legs, pitching him forward to the ground.

WANTED: 'Magnet' Greyfriars Press Volume No. 16 'Harry Wharton's Enemy', No. 17 'The Black Sheep of Greyfriars', No. 29 'The Mystery of the Moat House', No. 39 'The Ghost of Polgelly'. Greyfriars Book Club volume No. 9 'The Boy from the Underground'. Must be fine or very good condition. Also other volumes. W.L. Bawden, 14 Highland Park, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 2EX.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Annuals 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941. A very good price paid for the set of all four in good condition. TERRY BEENHAM, 20 Longshots Close, Broomfield, Chelmsford, CM1 5DX. Tel. 0245 443059.



FOOLED AT THE FINISH

A trio of April Fool Japes recalled by Jim Sutcliffe

It was a few days before the Easter Holiday in 1921 and the main topic of conversation at St. Frank's was the great event when the school would break up and fellows disperse to their various homes. Nipper and Co. were in the Triangle discussing their plan when a low, powerful sports car made its way through the gates. Seated at the wheel was the sporting peer, Lord Dorrimore, well known to most of the juniors, many of whom had been members of his various holiday parties.

The genial "Dorrie" as he was known to his friends, had come to pay a visit to his old pal, Nelson Lee, and after a chat he revealed the motive of his visit. "I thought some of the young bounders might like to spend a few days at my little shack in Suffolk" he said. Dorrie's shack, as he called it, was the magnificent Dorrimore Hall, near Stowmarket.

Before he left, Dorrie suggested to Nipper that he make up a party of about twenty juniors and that they come on the first of next month, that being April, thereby giving the fellows a chance to spend some time with their people first. "You may as well all come down on the same train" his Lordship said. "Better than straggling along in twos and threes. There's a good train from Liverpool Street at two-thirty and I'll meet you at the other end."

Nipper made out his list of guests, there being fifteen Ancient House juniors and ten College House. They were all delighted as they knew they were in for a first class time. Before they departed from the school, however, Bob Christine called the College House contingent together. "Has it struck you that the date we go to Dorrie's is a significant one?" he asked. "It's April the first -- All Fools Day and we're going to fool those Ancient House fellows properly." Christine explained his scheme to them - early in the morning of the first of April all the Ancient House chaps would receive a telegram saying "change of plan - all catch the twelve-thirty train from Victoria to Brighton". The telegrams would be sent off by Len Clapson whose home was in Suffolk. This was the April Fool Jape number one.

Bob Christine's arrangements went according to plan except for one unforeseen event, for Dorrie himself arrived at Nelson Lee's chambers in Grays Inn Road as he and Nipper were breakfasting, Dorrie's intention being to run Nelson Lee down to Stowmarket in his sports car. Nipper realises that Christine is tricking them when Montie Tregellis-West arrives to see if he is ready to go to Victoria. He quickly sets to work on his own April Fool joke, but first sends off a telegram to Dorrie saying the party would now catch the four-thirty train from Liverpool Street. Meanwhile Christine and Co. gathered at Liverpool Street for the two-thirty train as arranged,

all laughing over the fact that the rest of the party would now be in Brighton. Just then a smart little man appeared in uniform: "Master Nipper?" he asked. "No, he's not here" said Christine. "Well, is Master Christine here?" he asked "That's me - what do you want?" asked Bob. "My name is Reppin, sir, I got a coach outside - my instructions are to take you all to Dorrimore Hall in Suffolk, maybe there's some delay on the railway sir."

Christine and Co. are quite happy with no fares to pay, so they set off in the charabanc, through Chelmsford, Witham, but just after Kelvedon they leave the main road and turn into a lane; then Reppin seems to be having some trouble with the engine and suggests the juniors get out to stretch their legs while he looks at it. After a few minutes he says he is going to run it up the road and back. He drove a short distance, then turned it round and began to behave oddly, throwing out all the luggage onto the grass. Then, starting up again, he roared down the road with his electric horn sounding. As he passed, Christine shouted to the others, "The driver - it's Nipper!" Nipper, who it was indeed, had pulled off his disguise of wig, false whiskers, etc., and as he passed the group he threw down a note which told them to try spelling "Reppin" backwards, and that their joke had mis-fired and they were just over five miles from the nearest station, Marks Tey. If they stepped it out they would join the four-thirty from Liverpool Street on which the Ancient House juniors would be. Nine very weary juniors joined the train when it stopped there. Here ended April Fool jape number two.

However, even this was not the end for when the train eventually pulled in at Stowmarket it was raining but they were all confident that Dorrie would have cars waiting for them, and that they would soon be in the luxury of Dorrimore Hall. Much to their surprise there was Dorrie in thick boots and macintosh and with a walking stick "Got your luggage?" he asked. "It's only a three mile walk!" At last they arrived to more surprises - nothing like their expectation, no fires, rather bare surroundings, a wash in cold water, then a great table with plates of thick bread and butter followed by luke-warm weak tea, after which Dorrie suggested they must be tired and go up to bed. They found this to be a chilly barren room with twenty five uncomfortable beds with coarse blankets. They were all awake very early and vowed they would dress and slip off to Stowmarket for a good meal and catch the first train back to London.

They descended the stairs and immediately saw a huge white painted board with two words on it: - "APRIL FOOLS!". On going outside they discovered it was not Dorrimore Hall, but a big orphan school, closed for the holiday. Just then Dorrie arrived, and they were soon off to the warmth and comfort of the real Dorrimore Hall where they finished off a ripping holiday. So there ended April Fool jape number three.

SUSAN is still **DESPERATELY SEEKING** some weekly copies of "Girl" and "Schoolfriend" for 1956. Chambers, Holly House, Bleasby Road, Fiskerton, Newark, Notts, NG25 OKL.



DANNY LOOKS BACK

Fifth Spasm

The first St. Jim's story ever had appeared in *PLUCK* in the issue dated 10th November 1906. And now I have arrived at the twelfth - and the last - of the St. Jim's stories in that paper. And this issue is dated 11th May 1907. So the St. Jim's tales featured in *PLUCK* over a period covering exactly 6 months.

This final story is entitled "The Shadow of a Secret". Oddly enough, it is described, in the heading, as "A Tale of Figgins & Co.". I say "oddly" because the stories had originally been introduced as very much the schooldays of Jack Blake who, presumably, was intended to play the lead in the tales. This one, like most of the others, mainly concerns the adventures of the seniors, with the juniors forming a kind of "beauty chorus" in support, supplying the light relief, as it were. Once again it is a tale of Kildare and Monteith. And once again there is plenty of "plot" in the yarn.

Coincidence plays a big part in this story. Of course, coincidences DO occur now and then in real life. But when one comes on a coincidence in a school story one wonders whether contrivance would not be a better word. I asked my brother Doug what he thought and he said "Don't try to be a show-off, Danny".



Still, I think that coincidence in "The Shadow of a Secret" does stretch the belief of the reader a little. The tale starts with Kildare wondering whether he should include Monteith in the First Eleven cricket that season. "The Head prefect of the New House was certainly one of the school's finest cricketers. But after his conduct in the football season, Kildare had resolved that he should never again play in the college First Eleven. Monteith had been on his best behaviour lately, but Kildare knew him too well to be much impressed by that."

NEXT WEEK! "SPECS, THE TWINS & CO." By H. CLARKE HOOK.



[VOL. 5, No. 132, NEW SERIES.]

The First Long (School) Story.

Complete in this issue.

THE SHADOW OF A SECRET

A Tale of
Figgins & Co.

By CHAS.
HAMILTON



While Kildare is cogitating, Blake arrives with a letter for Kildare. A country fellow had handed it in at the school gates. Kildare reads it and exclaims aloud: "Micky! Good heavens! Poor old Micky. Oh, the fools - the brutes --". Then he realises Blake is still there, and sends the junior off.

Monteith arrives, to ask whether he is to be playing cricket for his school. Kildare gives him no hopeful answer. Then Kildare grabs up that letter - he didn't want Monteith to see it - and dashes off, leaving an astonished Monteith alone in the captain's study.

Kildare has picked up the wrong paper - and left the mysterious letter lying there on the table. Monteith picks it up and reads it.

Kildare's brother, Micky, is in trouble with the police. "Eric, I'm running away from the police. I don't need to tell you that I am innocent. But the Glyndon diamond is missing, and they say I have taken it. Ralph Monteith is the hardest on me, and it is to him I owe all this misery. He believed the worst at once.

"I have no money. I am hiding in the castle ruins near St. Jim's. Please come to me there. It's a lonely place and there's not much fear of discovery. Please, do come."

Monteith, being able to read this letter in this rather remarkable way, goes back to his own study and writes a letter to his cousin, Ralph Monteith, at Messrs. Stein & Stein, Hatton Garden, London. Monteith of St. Jim's asks Monteith of Hatton Garden for the full story of Mickey Kildare's transgression.

It's interesting enough reading, of course. But in the first chapter we get terrific coincidence - and contrivance piled on contrivance. It takes a bit of swallowing that Micky Kildare should be working in a firm, the manager of which is the cousin of Kildare's great enemy, Monteith of the New House. And the letter falls into Monteith's hands through an unbelievable bit of journalistic jiggery-pokery.

Kildare goes to the ruins, and gets the story from his hiding brother. Leaving the ruins, Kildare meets up with Blake and Co., who, by a coincidence, are out to have a picnic in those very ruins. Kildare sends Blake & Co. away from the scene. However, a little later, four more juniors arrive at the ruins - Figgins & Co. - Figgins, Kerr, Fatty Wynn, and their new recruit, Marmaduke Smythe. And, by a coincidence, they, too, have decided to have a picnic at the castle ruins. And these four actually meet up with the fugitive, Micky Kildare.

Now Monteith has a letter from his cousin Ralph, manager of Stein & Stein. Yes, says Ralph, Micky Kildare is wanted by the police for stealing a priceless diamond. Ralph goes on to say that he, Ralph, is trying to take over the firm without the owners realising what he is up to. He is sending a little packet of documents, which could be embarrassing for Ralph if they fell into the hands of the heads of the firm, by special messenger to Rylcombe Railway Station. He wants Monteith of St. Jim's to collect this package and look after it till Cousin Ralph sends for it. And a crisp £5 note is enclosed in the letter for our Monteith.

So our Monteith asks Figgins to collect the package from Rylcombe Station. Then our Monteith blackmails Kildare. Put me in the cricket team or I betray your brother's whereabouts to the police. Figgins gets a hamper of tuck in Rylcombe, and then collects the mysterious packet - supposed to be containing films - from the special messenger at the Station. Blake & Co. raid the hamper. But Mellish escapes with it to his own study and locks himself in. There, while Blake & Co. hammer on the study door, Mellish tucks in and comes to the package. He opens it and finds the diamond.

Justice is done. Kildare's brother is cleared. The relative of Monteith goes to prison.

At the finish, Monteith tells Kildare that he is glad that he, Monteith, failed. Kildare says: "I'm glad you've spoken like this. Don't you think that in the future we might manage to get on a little better together? To show that I'm in earnest, your name goes down first in the list for the Headland match on Saturday."

And so --- Monteith played the game of his life, and his brilliant scoring very materially helped St. Jim's to the great victory won that day.

To sum it all up ... Rather too much coincidence for credibility; a wealth of plot packed into 10 long chapters; and a rattling good story holding the interest throughout.

And that covers the twelfth and last of the St. Jim's stories in PLUCK.

The Editor's Chat that week wound up with the following:

"My readers will find a pleasant surprise in the issue of the GEM Library containing the school tale of Tom Merry.

"What this surprise is I'm not going to tell you, except that you will meet some very old friends.

"I am told that readers of the GEM unanimously vote it a gem, so I think you will not regret exchanging that odd halfpenny for the complete book. Ask for No. 11 of the GEM Library, price ½d."

ERIC FAYNE Comments on DANNY LOOKS BACK

The "pleasant surprise" was that Charles Hamilton had become Martin Clifford, and Martin Clifford had sent Tom Merry and all his friends and acquaintances at Clavering to Charles Hamilton's St. Jim's.

And that was why every intelligent older reader knew, as the years swept by, that Martin Clifford's real name was Charles Hamilton as the Gem went from strength to strength.

I sometimes ponder as to why Tom Merry became an instant success with readers while Jack Blake was never more than one in a supporting cast. My memory may be bad but, off-hand, I cannot recall one series or single story in the Gem in which Blake played a starring role. Tom Merry clicked. Jack Blake, for some reason, did not.

Over the past 30 years I suppose that hundreds of our clan have told me of their favourite character in boys' fiction. Plenty have quoted Tom Merry as their Number One - as he was mine. I doubt if anyone put Jack Blake in that position.

I wonder why!

Editor's Note: Eric's comments on Jack Blake are interesting and, I'm sure, accurate. However, I must mention that my father, who introduced my brother and myself to the *Gem* and *Magnet*, always spoke more warmly about Blake than any of the other juniors. From my father's age, I would suppose that his first reading of Hamilton's stories was in PLUCK.

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 Paperback 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.

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OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES



THE STRANGE SAGA OF WILL SPEARING

by Len Hawkey



It may at first seem a little odd that a character who appeared in well over a hundred stories, in the *Union Jack*, *Pluck*, and other popular papers (often in a leading role), should scarcely have received a mention in this magazine over the past twenty years. Yet such has been the fate of the once popular William Spearing, late of Scotland Yard.

Of course, his fame, and the time of his success, go back to the early years of this century, and may explain to some extent why he has been long forgotten. His creator, Norman Goddard, has likewise long since vanished, but in his day the topsy-turvey career of Will Spearing was unique, starting as a Scotland Yard Detective-Inspector of middle-age, and

ending as a humble, if enterprising "bobby-on-the-beat"!

Norman Molyneux Goddard, a really gifted storyteller, was born in 1881, and, as Bill Lofts tells us in "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction", he was the younger brother of Ernest Hope Goddard (1879-1939). The older brother was, in fact, editor of the *Union Jack* at 17 - in 1896 - and later edited both the *Sketch* and the prestigious *Illustrated London News*. Norman was just as precocious, writing his first Sexton Blake story when he was 18, and thereafter prolific in tales of every description. He used 6 or 7 pen-names, mainly "Mark Darran", and, in the period when authors' names were seldom given, shared a good deal with William Murray Graydon, who was his senior by almost 20 years.

In 1905, still only 24, he introduced the character of Det-Inspector Will Spearing into his *Union Jack* stories. Spearing was a stolid, burly man, who spoke, like Dickens' Mr. Jingle, in a terse staccato, manner. He had his moments of success, but as with Coutts and Lennard, in later

years, was mostly a foil for the quick-witted Blake. For almost a decade, in Goddard's stories, he was the chief contact between Baker St. and the Yard, but when Goddard took over the character of George Marsden Plummer from the absent Michael Storm, Spearing played a much smaller role. He appeared in quite a few Plummer yarns, not mentioned in the otherwise invaluable S.B. Catalogue, and in fact, retired from the Force, and set up as a "private eye". He did not aspire to Blake's imposing clientele, but busied himself in a humbler sphere, although Blake still made use of his services from time to time.

The inventive Goddard was often given to novel touches and, adding verisimilitude to the Spearing saga, he adopted a flash-back technique, and started a long series in Pluck, recounting Will's early days as a raw young Constable. The smart and resourceful P.C. Spearing seemed to pull off some remarkable coups every week, stretching credulity a bit but, unlike his later self, he was both agile and quick-witted.



Police-Constable Spearing.



From their cover the three detectives saw the dark figure of a man emerge from the drive and strike off across the common. "It's Plummer!" whispered Sexton Blake.

(A rare illustration - by J.M. Lewis - with Blake, Tinker, Pedro, Spearing and Plummer: Dreadnought 1912)

Therefore it was no surprise, when, after a year or two, he was taken out of uniform, and became Detective Spearing, of the C.I.D. Later he was transferred to Scotland Yard, promoted to Detective-Sergeant, and rose to become Det. Inspector.

The Pluck stories ran well into 1914, and some introduced a William Murray Graydon character - the bearded, sinister, Laban Creed, who was also occasionally an adversary of Sexton Blake.

I cannot trace that any other author used Spearing, apart from Norman Goddard, alias Mark Darran. He did appear however in a number of U.J. stories, reprinted in abridged form, during the early years of the Penny Popular, and he featured in at least one Dreadnought serial in 1913 - "The Great Conspiracy", - along with Blake and Plummer.

In 1914, alas, came the Great War, and Goddard, although well into his '30s, was soon caught up in the conflict. He became a 2nd Lieutenant, and in July 1917 was killed in action. Although the saga of Sexton Blake - and of George Marsden Plummer - continued long thereafter, sadly the sturdy Will Spearing perished with his creator on the battlefields of Flanders.

A REAL MYSTERY STORY

by H. Heath

What a pleasant surprise it was to see the reproduction of the front cover of the S.O.L. No. 353 entitled, *The Schoolboy Tec* in the April edition of the C.D.

This story by Charles Hamilton, which introduced Len Lex at Oakshott School, has always been a firm favourite of mine. It was first published in the *Modern Boy* (nos. 452-461) in 1936, and in my opinion this Hamilton story is almost unique. On this occasion the reader is given a real school mystery story to contend with. It was certainly not one of those all too frequent cases where the writer shared with the reader the identity of the criminal or somebody's secret. It was quite the reverse; Hamilton gave three possible suspects, all Masters at Oakshott, as being the mysterious cracksman known as "The Sussex Man", and also a fourth suspect whose identity remained unknown for some time.

I can recall only the *Rogue Rackstraw* series from the 1922 *Gem* as another Hamilton school story to mystify the reader. My favourite Hamilton series is the *Courtfield Cracksman* in the *Magnet*; what a magnificent story this is! How much better it would have been if the identity of the cracksman had not been signalled well in advance to the reader, is a matter for conjecture.

The *Schoolboy Tec* was the first of four series in the *Modern Boy* featuring the adventures of Len Lex at Oakshott. The second one, the *Moat House* series appeared in the *M.B.* (nos. 462-465), and this was

followed by the *Tunstall* series (nos. 479-484), and then finally, *The Hold Up Man* in nos. 485-488. The third and fourth series were published in the S.O.L. no. 371 entitled, *Asking for the Sack*, while *The Moat House* story appeared in the 1941 *Greyfriars Holiday Annual*.

The Len Lex stories were all well written, but I consider that *The Sussex Man* series was outstanding, and provided the reader with a splendid mystery story in the Autumn and Winter of 1936.

DOROTHY CARTER: NOVELIST OF THE AIR - PART TWO

by Squadron Leader Dennis L. Bird, RAF (retired)

(with illustrations from *Mistress of the Air* by D.L. Mays)

MARISE DUNCAN

I now want to go back a couple of years, to October 1937. That was when the "Girl's Own Paper" began 12 instalments of Dorothy Carter's "Mistress of the Air"; it was later published by Collins in book form in 1939. It got off, literally, to a flying start:

"Last lap, Marise", said Captain Duncan. There was a note of strain in his voice... "Second prize isn't good enough", said the girl quietly. "I'm going to catch that Hawk, Daddy. We might get it on one of the turns." The Vega Gull roared on - to victory in the King's Cup Air Race, over a real course from Hatfield to Sacombe and Hoo End.

The idea of a woman winning this prestigious trophy was not fiction. In 1930 the aviatrix, yachtswomen and ice hockey player Winifred Brown had beaten all comers in her Avro Avian biplane. Dorothy Carter's heroine is a less tomboyish personality, but she is quietly determined to show that she can hold her own in a man's world. "She was going to have things done her way. That was Marise all over" - to quote from the third novel.

"Marise Duncan" is a Scottish name, but we are told nothing of her ancestry. In fact, she seems to come from a fairly typical English middle-class family of the 1930s. The author is much more sure of herself in this book than she was a year before in "Flying Dawn", and the Duncans are well-rounded and nicely-contrasted characters. Captain Duncan had been an intelligence officer in the Army in the First World War; now, like Peter Mallory, he is an airline pilot "bringing his big Imperial Aircraft liners in from a Continental trip." ("Imperial Aircraft" is a thin disguise for the national carrier Imperial Airways.)

Mrs. Duncan, who later confesses to having found World War I "great fun" when she was a driver for Army officers, is an altogether shallower and more mundane person. She is disappointingly lukewarm about Marise's great victory. "Her mother took no interest in flying at all and quite evidently thought it a waste of time." She feels secretarial training would be better for her daughter - such as Amy Johnson had. "It's more - more respectable", said Mrs. Duncan petulantly.

Fortunately for Marise, her father takes a different view. It was he who had guided her to her "A" licence (private pilot), and later to the "B" commercial pilot's licence.

Her King's Cup honours make Marise readily acceptable as a flying instructress, and she takes up an appointment at Bonnington Flying Club near Lympne. Several of the novels feature this part of Kent, and it is typical of Dorothy Carter's meticulous accuracy that nearly every place-name is real: Littlestone, Aldington, even Smeeth. That last one sounds like an invention when it appears in the fifth book, yet it exists.

"Mistress of the Air" turns into an adventure story in the

Pacific Ocean, but its author is so enamoured of that enchanting world of the 1930s flying clubs that she is reluctant to move on from Bonnington. Marise's fellow instructors Tony Arcoll and Jim Custance re-appear in later stories. And one of her pupils eventually leads her to an expedition round half the world.

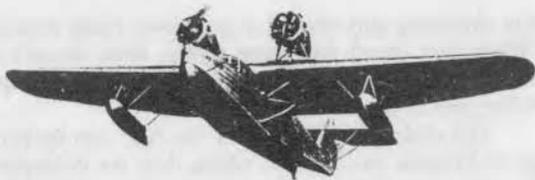
This is Pauline Williams, who wants to be "ready to fly for a long distance pretty soon." A treasure hunt in the Pacific is being planned, and Pauline's grandmother, the formidable Lady Wilhelmina Williams, is the driving force. Lady Wilhelmina herself comes for tuition, as does the recently-retired General Barclay.

When they have all acquired pilots' licences, Marise is told of the planned expedition to the Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu) in search of an Elizabethan pirate's treasure. She recommends the Saro Cloud as the most suitable equipment. This is an excellent choice - a twin-engined eight-seat flying-boat with retractable wheels, an amphibian in fact. The technical details quoted are admirably accurate, and this is one of the consistently satisfying features of the Carter books. The author really knows her stuff. Passing remarks about aircraft handling are authentic, and so are the types mentioned: Avro Tutor, General Aircraft Monospar, "a little Topsy monoplane" (Belgian), the Sikorsky "China Clippers" at the Azores. Names to send a thrill down the spine of the aviation enthusiast!

The flight to the Pacific via the USA is full of incident; there is a particularly realistic account of a storm over the Atlantic. Once we reach Honolulu, Santa Cruz and the islands, however, the author seems to lose interest in her plot and in the feeble attempts of her villain (Pauline's cousin Cyril Williams) to thwart the treasure-hunters. All ends happily, of course, and chief pilot Marise receives her due acclaim.



"Mistress of the Air" exemplifies a recurrent Dorothy Carter theme: two girls working together. The next book, "Star of the Air" (Collins, 1940), again features two girls - Marise and a friend, but this time the latter was not a flier but an American newspaper reporter, Lila Repton.



Saro Cloud

They meet when Marise goes to Los Angeles under contract to a film company. Her mother is predictably disparaging about the invitation. "Hollywood! Ridiculous!" said Mrs. Duncan. Marise thought it might be fun. "Life isn't fun!" snapped her mother... "I don't like Hollywood! It isn't respectable." "Mum, you can't say Shirley Temple isn't respectable." "That's different. She has her mother with her." "Well, why shouldn't I?"

Of course, Mrs. Duncan gives in and accompanies her daughter on the "Queen Mary" and across America, and Lila helps them find a Los Angeles apartment. Some varied characters appear, with some witty comments from the author. The excitable producer tells the publicity man "What's true isn't no business of a Press agent. Any mutt can put what's true in the papers. What we want is artistic addition to the truth." And there is the film's big star, that "delightful kid" Gloria May: "She's been a kid for a good long time."

Marise has an early argument with the producer when she insists that she must do her own flying, rather than a stunt man. But later she learns a hard lesson. She is required to crash an old Stinson - and when she sees the film "rushes" afterwards, she realises it looks tame. Says Mr. Hiram Plitzen: "Was that crash convincing, or did it look like a fake? You got to see sense now. I'm getting Jim Grant to do the crashes."



She was pulled off the wing remorselessly

Jim Grant is one of Miss Carter's most interesting creations: "a gaunt, elderly man" with only one eye, and a limp. He is English, an old World War I pilot now making a living stunt-flying for the film industry. Marise comes to like him greatly. We meet him again in the later books, and I always had a secret hope that, despite the difference in their ages, he and Marise might one day marry. But, like Worrals,

this charming and attractive girl never finds romance. As she says in Los Angeles, "When you spend your time flying, there doesn't seem time for sweethearting." In the final book, she goes so far as to say "I'm quite used to boys" - but only as colleagues in the air." Sad!

The main plot of "Star of the Air" can be briefly told. Marise and a film unit go to Arizona on location, where they are kidnapped by Mexican bandits led by one Conquistador Felipe. Thanks to a plan of Lila Repton's they are rescued with the help of the Mexican Air Force flying Gloster Gauntlets and Westland Wallaces from their base at Hermosillo (a real place).

*

So far, Marise has always had a feminine comrade - Pauline Williams, then Lila Repton. In the next two books she is very much on her own, relying on her considerable resources of skill and personality.

"Snow Queen of the Air", published by Collins in 1940, is set in an unusual locale: the snowy wastes of the Arctic. Captain Duncan is on temporary leave from Imperial Airways to act as consultant for a new airline route in northern Canada. He takes Marise with him across the Atlantic "in the Empire flying-boat Coryphee"; they go to Repulse Bay (it exists) and start discussions on possible aerodromes to be used by the new airline - Fairbanks (Alaska), Aklavik, Coppermine, Fort Radium, Yellowknife. As one has come to expect from Dorothy Carter, these are all genuine.

Captain Duncan secures for his own use a de Havilland Dragon Rapide, the most beautiful biplane ever designed. Marise is allotted a D.H. Moth Minor. Here I thought I had caught out Miss Carter in an error, because she later mentions its "cabin". Now the Moth Minor was well known as a light trainer with two open cockpits and no cabin. But on referring to the relevant volume in the admirable Putnam series on aircraft companies, I found that as usual she was right: a few Moth Minors were built with cabins - and one was exported to Canada!

"Snow Queen" contains some rich characters: Revd. Erasmus Witherspring, an elderly missionary, and his sister Lucy; Sergeant Jim Bathurst of the "Mounties"; Candid Pete, a rugged lumberjack who delights in taking everyone down a peg or two. The plot partly concerns the machinations of a rival airline, and incidents include Marise's flight through a blizzard and her forced landing among an Indian tribe who have a legend about their future Queen materialising out of the air. They naturally identify Marise as this new leader - their "Snow Queen of the Air".

The book ends with the Canadian Governor-General (at that time Lord Tweedsmuir, the novelist John Buchan) opening the new airline. It flies "the latest



"It's a girl" - he bellows

models - Frobisher or Ensign." Again, these details sound exactly right. "Frobisher" was the elegant de Havilland Albatross which went into service in January 1939; the Armstrong Whitworth Ensign operated from October 1938.

(To be Concluded)

A FIVE TYPE PROBLEM by **ERNEST HOLMAN**

Where were they?

I refer to the five Schools forming the basis of this piece.

Not an easy problem - unlike the placing of 221b Baker Street, for instance. (Apartment 1b, No. 22 Baker Street - on the East side).

Our first type - St. Frank's, that free-and-easy-going concern. Not a great deal of a problem here, as E.S. Brooks presented us with a pretty good idea of locality. On the South Coast, in Sussex, only a short distance inland. Near enough, if not precisely, this would be somewhere between Peacehaven and Seaford - Newhaven, even, for Caistowe.

Farther to the west of St. Frank's would be Rookwood, in Hampshire. A not-too informal academy, this - but held firmly in the grasp of Dr. Chisholm. Where, though, in Hants? Well, Roger Jenkins long ago reckoned on a spot within the North-East corner of the County. He also pointed out that there is actually a small town named Bagshot thereabouts. In other words, in Eric Fayne country - near enough to Aldershot.

Back again to Sussex and, of course, St. Jim's. Where do we place our X to mark this spot? Not near the coast, it would seem - Figgins, for example, once set off 'early enough' to get his connection for Brighton. I would class this establishment as the most stately of our Schools - many years ago, a C.D. writer listed some probable Old Boys, including Captain Hugh (Bulldog) Drummond. Narrowing down to a possible 'place' for Tom Merry and Co., how about somewhere on the eastern side of Sussex - East Sussex, today, I suppose? To bring it down to an area, I have decided to plump for a spot between Balcombe and Haywards Heath.

Carcroft, of later origin, was not far from St. Jim's. A more modern sort of School, probably - film producers' sons, etc. Gussy once set out to visit his friend, Vane Carter, one afternoon on a half-holiday. It was something of a bleak locality - a long stretch of Carcroft Moor, in the middle of which A.A.D. suffered a severe drenching from the elements. So, in all probability, Carcroft can also be sited in the above St. Jim's area.

The most noted of all our five schools, however, is naturally that of Greyfriars. More varied characters to the page than anywhere else. No doubt because of its long-living adventures, this establishment can be visualised as a 'great' School. Yes, but where does one place it? The most difficult of them all to pinpoint. Somewhere in Kent!

In my youthful Magnetic days, being an annual visitor to Margate, I always believed Greyfriars to be near this seaside resort. However, the fact that Margate was only ever visited by the Greyfriars juniors during a summer holiday suggests that it was far from reach on a half-holiday. One general idea (including a few maps that have appeared over the years) would seem to put Greyfriars 'somewhere

around' Deal. There are, though, several discrepancies in the stories in consideration of this area. When Ashford and Canterbury are mentioned, for instance, the distance stated would take these places to the extreme edges of Kent - or even right out of it.

Eventually, I arrived at the fact that Greyfriars was at the other end of the County. How about St. Mary's Bay, on that tip of Kent that edges out to Dungeness (Hawkscliff?) It would give some probability to those early-morning journeys to other Schools in the South.

Does anyone delve into this sort of 'placing' nowadays? Certainly, it wouldn't be wished to make a 'Sherlock Holmes' affair out of it. Still, if anyone feels like a little mental recreation, perhaps a view or two might be offered. In whatever 'neck of the woods' you may reside, dear reader, what do you think? Even a suggestion from Baker Street might prove of interest!

BELLE OF THE BALLET

by SUSAN CHAMBERS

Ballet, with its emphasis on the visual was an ideal subject for the picture strip, a fact exploited by 1950s girls story papers. Doyenne of this genre has to have been *Girl's* 'Belle of the Ballet'. Belle Auburn was a boarding pupil at a School of Dancing run by Lydia Arenska, French, eccentric, strict. Her constant companions were steadfast David, his dizzy sister Blossom, and fellow boarders, Hotzi and wisecracking Mamie. Belle's early stories were a touch melodramatic with a plethora of poor orphans, wicked uncles and jealous rivals. However they set down Belle's strength of character, high principles and dancing genius.

Once established, Belle proved to have an effervescent, exuberant and attractive personality, with dancing blue eyes, and a blonde ponytail which seemed to polka as she capered through life. For over a decade Belle led her chums into many a fray, and her enemies a merry dance. She was not averse to locking foreign secret police officials into bathrooms, "A royal romance"; or to throwing hired thugs into the sea, "The pier theatre" - a delicious seaside romp which stretched Belle's talents as they revived said theatre with their own ballet, despite skulduggery from the opposition.

Belle was implacable in her devotion to and defence of Mme. Arenska, who always seemed to be a whisker away from penury. On holiday in "The Jolly

GIRL 30 April 1958



Wagoners" Belle and Co give public performances of Morris dancing so that they can provide Mme. Arenska with a holiday. Further, Belle was always a champion of the underdog and a fighter for justice, often with startling results. "Runaway" saw Belle changing places with her double, Princess Sophia of Morania, and thus livening up the court in London aided and abetted by the indomitable Mamie. In "Genie of the Lamp" Belle and her pals unmask a jewel thief onstage during a performance of Aladdin.

With all this extracurricular activity it is a wonder that time was ever found for classes and exams. Yet Belle and friends were very serious about dancing; despite temptations from film producers, etc. Belle always led the way back to the practice bar to perfect their art - "Mystery at the film studio" and "The great little ballet".

The strip first appeared in November 1952. George Beardmore (initially with Terry Stanfield) wrote all the stories. The first three were illustrated by John Worsley, and then taken over by Chris Garvey who gradually gave the strip a lighter look. Stanley Houghton, probably the best remembered illustrator, took over in 1956; until 1961 has hand showed Belle and her pals extracting fun and adventure from life. Henry Lindfield, Belle's last illustrator, updated Belle into the 1960s, initially without losing her essential character: Mme. Arenska looks twenty years younger, exuding Parisian chic rather than French eccentricity.

But Belle's friends gradually disappeared until there were only herself and Mamie. The strip was retitled 'Belle & Mamie', they became models instead of ballet dancers, zanier but flimsy, and certainly lost my attention.

It is much vaunted that 'Girl' was first published to answer a demand from girls reading their brother's *Eagle*. Yet the strip "Kitty Hawke - pilot" crashed within months of takeoff. Belle in her ballet world remained in the spotlight for more than ten years. What then was her appeal? Her milieu might have been traditional but there was nothing soppy about Belle. She proves that it is not necessary to have an aptitude with an altimeter, or skill with a spanner to be positive and liberated.



The Editor, Story Paper Collectors Digest

Dear Mary,

Replying to your enquiry in the March S.P.C.D. as to how many readers are still going strong from No. 1:

Include me in!

How did it all come about? Here goes -

I grew up in a Magnet household, my Father read the Magnet from No. 1 until the end, never missing a copy. So that when I was born I was booked for Greyfriars as it were, like the boy registered for Eton at birth.

My mother taught me to read at a very early age - fluently at age six, and an avid reader of anything. My first clear memory of a Magnet is the "Da Costa" series that I read through the weeks each side of my seventh birthday. I read the Magnet every week from then on until that day of shock, in May 1940, when I attended the Newsagent to collect my copy, only to be told that no boys' books had arrived, and that he (the newsagent) had no idea why. He had no official news until the following week.

Be that as it may. The War intervened - came the end, and I saw an advert in Exchange and Mart selling some Magnets, and this started me collecting. I was a subscriber to a Newsheet called "The Bulletin", edited by a Mr. Cox in Wales, which listed all members and their wants and addresses.

Out of the blue came No. 1 of The Collectors Digest, sent on appro from Herbert Leckenby (he too, was a Bulletin Member). I immediately became a reader and got to know dear old Herbert very well through long letters (in his miniscule hand) and via long telephone calls.

Came 1948, and a certain Eric Fayne wrote to inform me the Old Boys Book Club was holding its 3rd Meeting at his School at Surbiton (I lived at Kingston, 3 miles away). Would I care to come along? I attended virtually every meeting from then on for about 7 years, and through the club made many fine friends in the Hobby. Those early meetings, with hosts of magazines for sale and swop, were a delight. The Hobby had not yet 'gone commercial'; we all quickly built up collections and eventually I had about a thousand Magnets, and had the years 1928 to 1940 bound in half years.

In the late 1950s in a fit of madness that happens to many of us from time to time, I got rid of them all (when I think of those lovely bound Vols. I weep although I maintained my link by still taking the Collectors Digest).

I then saw an advert for the No. 1 Vol. of the Howard Baker Facsimiles, and became a regular purchaser over the years, buying many vols from Norman Shaw until I had over 100 various Magnets, Gems, Greyfriars Book Club editions, etc.

Since retiring, I started to read through the collection and gradually sell them off, as I would probably never get time to read them all again. I'm now down to about 50 vols. So I have plenty yet to read. But I still get tremendous pleasure from reading the S.P.C.D. each month.

My heartfelt thanks goes out to the editors who gave and still give so much of their time that our Hobby might thrive:-

To Herbert Leckenby, my grateful thanks for starting it all.

To Eric Fayne, who gave so much of his time to the Mag. over the years.

To Yourself, for carrying on a great tradition and a Magazine that has never missed a copy or month in 531 numbers. (Now 533 - Ed).

Best Wishes from a faithful reader,

Yours sincerely,
JOHN GEAL.



JIM COOK, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND: With reference to Jim Sutcliffe's article 'An Old Spanish Custom' (February C.D.). I well remember that period when we were urged to BUY BRITISH. In fact I took part in publicising this effort and took round posters etc. to many London busy spots and main railway stations. Eventually a photo was sent to me showing where I displayed a BUY BRITISH poster, and I was told that this photo was shown through the South African media

I am still entranced by Eric Parker's drawings. I think I was the last hobby person to see him alive; he died soon after I visited him.

JOHN BECK, LEWES, EAST SUSSEX: I was interested in Edward Rake's letter re. the 1947's Mascot publications (February C.D.). My understanding was that they ceased when Frank Richards was able to write about his beloved Bunter again for the Skilton hardbacks. Interestingly there was also another similar format publication by WCM publications which featured Sparshott School. Some characters had familiar names, i.e. Lamb, Carboy, Rake and a Vernon. The first one, I believe, (it is not numbered) was entitled THE SECRET OF THE SCHOOL by Frank Richards ('Author of Billy Bunter') at one shilling (36 pages including covers); no. 2, THE BLACK SHEEP OF SPARSHOTT; no. 3, FIRST MAN IN! and no. 4, LOOKING AFTER LAMB. I am not sure if there were others or not. The inside pages were very poor quality but the covers were attractive being in colour by Macdonald.

ROY WHISKIN, CAMBRIDGE: I spotted a cutting in the local paper on my last visit to Thanet describing Greyfriars Court, 'A Development of Luxury Flats at Kingsgate, Broadstairs, Kent'. The description of these flats includes the following:

Greyfriars Court has been named after Greyfriars School, the educational establishment of the famous story book character Billy Bunter, created by Frank Richards for the old boys' paper "The Magnet" back in 1908.

Frank Richards lived for many years in a cottage in Percy Avenue which is adjacent to this development site.

I'm surprised that the local council have never named a road after Frank, but then he's always had to live in the shadow of Charles Dickens and has never had the recognition in Broadstairs that he should have done.

DENNIS M. HILLIARD, STAPLEFORD, NOTTINGHAM: I am sorry that *Danny's Diary* concluded in 1940: Why? So much of the enjoyment of the series was the reference to films shown at the local cinemas, to the occasional Blake series and the lead stories in the national press. I would see Danny continuing to purchase the occasional old battered copy of boys' books from the local market stall, having a William book for his birthday, going to the cinema (who didn't in the war years?), recalling *Garrison Theatre, Itma*, etc. from steam radio, as well as newspaper headlines which still evoke pride, joy, sorrow and humour in a way which many will never forget. I wish I could write this myself, but, alas, I am not so gifted or massively learned in the hobby as dear old (young!) Danny is!!

(**Editor's Note:** Several readers have commented on our *Danny Looks Back* series with much pleasure. They seem to hope that he will have other windfalls of the old pre-*Danny's Diary* papers about which he can write for us. It has certainly been good to dip into PLUCK with him. There are several years of MAGNET and GEM about which I still hope he will write; these, of course, are the early days of these papers.)

On another subject, the correspondence and Martin Waters's article about Braddock have attracted much interest and comment. Alan James of Sudbury wrote to give us information about his memories of this character from the early 1950s and in 1958, and below are some further notes about this flying hero.)

MARTIN WATERS: Could I please add a comment to Dennis Bird's letter in the March 'C.D.'? Matt Braddock is indeed flying a captured German aeroplane, though in fact the aircraft is a Messerschmitt 210, not 410, (the two types are almost identical in appearance.) The attacking aircraft are American Mustangs as Mr. Bird states in his letter. The exact details of the story escape my memory, but Braddock and Bourne were certainly attacked by three inexperienced American pilots who failed to notice the British markings on the captured aircraft. Braddock later gave evidence at a court of enquiry, and was able to exonerate the three American pilots.

DENNIS BIRD, SHOREHAM, WEST SUSSEX: The March "C.D." has arrived with more news of Sgt. Braddock! I do like the drawings; I see your writer Martin Waters mentions the technical accuracy of the stories, and this applies to the illustrations too. The shark-toothed aeroplanes shown on the left of this month's illustration is a Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk (Warhawk in the USAAF); they were flown in the Far East by General Chennault's "Flying Tigers" and had just those markings. Even more interesting is the other drawing on the right: this is a rare de Havilland Mosquito - rare because it is in fact a Sea Mosquito with folding wings. Most Fleet Air Arm aircraft had wings that folded backwards (Swordfish, Albacore, Skua, Avenger, Martlet) but the Mosquito's folded upwards, as shown. Now I have to spoil a good story! The first Mosquito landing on an aircraft carrier was made in March 1944, not 1942, and the type did not go into production for the FAA until late 1945 - after the war! However, we mustn't let niggling facts get in the way!

SOME EXTREMES OF HAMILTONIA by Mary Cadogan

I am often struck by the way in which Charles Hamilton can rapidly switch moods from one extreme to another. This is most evident in his long running dramatic series when, for example, Harry Wharton might be undergoing a period of estrangement from his chums - and indeed from every decent fellow at Greyfriars; the starkness of his plight is almost unbearable to readers and so, from time to time, the tension has to be alleviated by the buffooning of Bunter, the comic truculence of Coker or some sophisticated verbal duelling between Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout. Such shifts of mood work well too in the single-issue complete tales. I have just re-read Magnet 1206, *BILLY BUNTER'S BUNK* (in the Howard Baker volume *BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS*). As always, the story gets off to a swinging start, with Quelch, shielded from view beneath one of the ancient elms, inadvertently overhearing Bunter cooking up a plot to get home early for the Easter holidays. The Fat Owl's plan is characteristically inept. He urges Wharton to pretend to be the Bunter Court butler, and to telephone Quelch with the fiction that Mr. Bunter is 'frightfully ill' and therefore wants to have the consoling company of his elder son without delay. In Billy's view'even a beast like old Quelch is bound to be a bit sympathetic, when he hears that a fellow's father is laid up with plumgago and galloping influenza and things like that. Pile it on thick, you know...'



There is some hilarious discussions between Bunter and the Famous Five who of course refuse to become party to his scheme. The furious but fair-minded Mr. Quelch feels that he cannot cane Bunter because he has 'always made it an invariable rule to take no official note of words overhead by chance'. Nevertheless he sternly remonstrates: '...I warn you to take care, Bunter. I warn you to be careful.' The most obtuse member of his form provokes his wrath still further by replying 'Oh, yes, sir!...I'll be jolly careful that you don't hear me another time' and 'I've often told the fellows, sir, that you're not half such a beast as you look, sir. I have, really sir.'

Billy then works out the wording of a telegram supposedly from his father to his form-master:

"Quelch, Greyfriars School, Kent.

"Danjerusly ill with knewmonia.

Send William home at wunce. BUNTER."

Quelch discovers this draft. Bunter is caned, cuts prep while he tries to dream up yet another plan for breaking-up early, and is detained for his direly comic and erroneous construe in class on the following day.

Then - astoundingly - whilst in Quelch's study with his form-master called away, Bunter receives a telephone call from his father conveying the worrying news that Mrs. Bunter is 'very weak from an attack of influenza' and wants to see Billy.

Mr. Bunter, in his usual brusque, high-handed manner, tells his son to pass this message to Quelch, and to come home immediately. Bunter is in a state of shock and deep concern. His tenderness towards his mother is touchingly conveyed, but of course he cannot convince Quelch that his father really has telephoned.

The Remove master is too indignant about Bunter's fibs and conniving to deign to put through a call to Mr. Bunter which might have cleared up the misunderstanding. Billy has 'cried wolf' too often; no-one at Greyfriars believes him, and Hamilton builds up a very strong picture of his distress at not being able to get home to 'Mums'. The Fat Owl has no money for his fare, and is locked up in the Head's study to await a flogging. However, spurred on by desperation at his mother's situation, he jumps from the window and begs a lift to the station - and the loan of his railway fare - from some St. Jim's juniors who are leaving Greyfriars after a football match. Tom Merry & Co. are at first inclined to think Bunter is 'rotting' as usual, but to their 'astonishment and alarm' they see 'two fat tears rolling down two fat cheeks'.

With a lot of 'Oh crumbs - oh cwickey - bai Jove, he's blubbing!', they take pity on him and see him through. His thoughts during the journey home are entirely for his mother. We are told that this was a Bunter that 'would have astonished the Remove men'. On reaching Bunter Villa, although tired and hungry, he dismisses Mr. Bunter's offer of food and rushes upstairs:

He was conscious of only one thing - of a familiar plump face, now unfamiliar in its paleness, that brightened as he stood by the bedside. 'Willy!' said the faint foice. The old name of childhood that Bunter had not heard for a very long time.

'Oh, mums!'

Mr. Bunter looked in at the door; then he trod away, quite softly.

The reader has swung with the Owl of the Remove from hilarity to pathos. Soon we are back again with humour. At the story's end 'all is calm and bright', with Mrs. Bunter restored to health and strength: Billy is reinstated at Greyfriars and, in his characteristic mode, heaps insults on his form-mates whilst scoffing their tuck at study-teas. Mr. Quelch contents himself with expressing the hope that Bunter might now 'cease to prevaricate' - a forlorn hope, perhaps, but one which is conveyed in Hamilton's engaging style: 'Truth and Bunter had long been strangers, but surely now it was to be hoped that they had struck up at least a nodding acquaintance.'

A MYSTERY SOLVED



(Copyright Thomas Henry Estate, 1927.
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Pan Macmillan Children's Books)

The surnames of Henry and Douglas, two of William's notorious band of Outlaws, have long been a matter of conjecture amongst enthusiasts. They have, indeed, been mentioned in learned papers and lectures, but until now no conclusive evidence has been found about them. You can imagine my surprise and pleasure at receiving a letter from Nick Peel, who had read my *William Companion*, enclosing a note from Richmal Crompton herself which solved this long-standing mystery. Nick had apparently written to Richmal when he was a small boy, asking about the surnames of Ginger, Henry and Douglas. You will see that she gives Ginger's as Merridew; of course he was also at times called Flowerdew and, in a BBC broadcast during the 1960s, his author suggested Merryweather as another version of his name. I have permission from Richmal Crompton's niece and literary executor (Mrs. Richmal Ashbee) to reproduce the letter in facsimile, as I feel sure that readers will appreciate this

revelation straight from the author's pen. Just in case her writing is too difficult to be decipherable to everyone, I should confirm that Henry's family name is Bates, whilst Douglas's is Frinton. I am deeply grateful to Nick Peel for sending me this letter from a quarter of a century ago. It was read out by me at the William Day organized by Darrell Swift in Bury (Richmal's birthplace) on April 27th, and considered by everyone there to be an important addition to our knowledge of the

MARY CADOGAN

BOYS' SCHOOL STORIES - Summer catalogue of boys' and adult school fiction available now. Stamp or SAE to Robert Kirkpatrick, 244 Latimer Road, London W10 6QY.

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Dear Nicholas

Thank you for
your letter. I'm so glad
that you like the William
books. Gings's surname is
Merrideau, Henry's is Bates
& Douglas's is Finton. I
don't think that I've
actually used them in

the static - except Girigis.
I'm afraid that the next
William book won't be
published in time for
your birthday, but it
should be out some time
in the autumn. It will
probably be called "William
& the Masked Ranger." I
hope you'll like it!

With all good
wishes to you for a
happy 1966

Yours sincerely
Richard Compton.



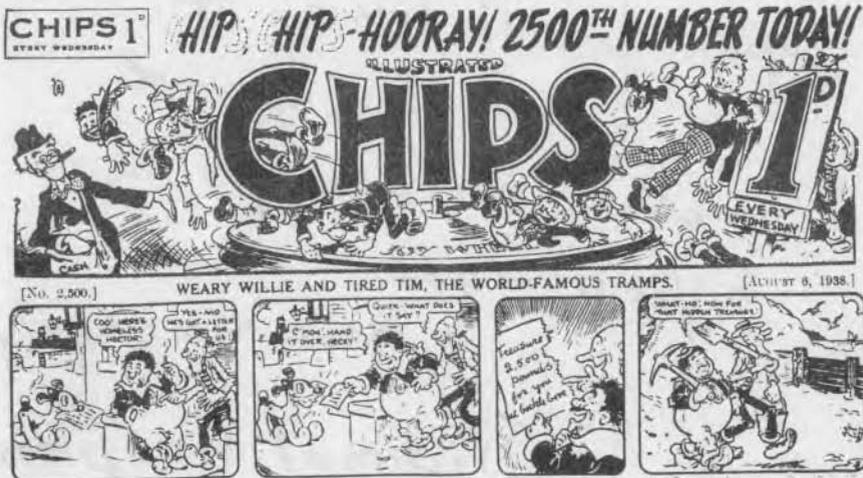
OUR BOOKSHELVES

REVIEWS BY
MARY CADOGAN

(Picture by Terry Wakefield)

THE INTERNATIONAL BOOK OF COMICS by Denis Gifford (Hamlyn £9.99)

Originally published in 1984, but missed by me and, I'm sure, many others because of its somewhat exclusive distribution then, this book is a most welcome addition to the collections of anyone who is interested in comics. Vintage Gifford, packed with information and lavishly illustrated in colour and black and white, the text is presented in a lively and highly entertaining manner. Certainly all my favourite comics are mentioned, with a host of others - some known to me and others not. Although it is international, the author gives British comics, from the early nineteenth century to the beginning of the 1990s, the extensive space and coverage which they deserve.



It is stunning value for money, offering 256 large pages (including the helpful four page index). Denis dedicates his opus to Ally Sloper (Friend of Man) who first appeared on the comic scene in 1884, and also to his own Aunt Florrie, an endearing lady who seems to have started Denis's interest in the genre by coming to visit his family over half a century ago 'with a copy of *Puck* rolled up in her mackintosh

pocket'. And, apparently every Friday after that she brought a different comic to the young enthusiast until he was old enough to go out and buy such gems as *Chips*, *Jester*, etc.

As well as providing a history and a global survey of the comic in all its aspects, this tremendous book brings back memories of the excitement we felt when, for example, we rushed out to buy no. 1 of *Mickey Mouse Weekly* in 1936, or no. 1 of *The Dandy* in 1937 - even if, unlike Denis Gifford, we were too inhibited to blow its give-away Grand Express Whistle all the way home!

THE GOLDEN AGE OF CHILDREN'S BOOK ILLUSTRATION

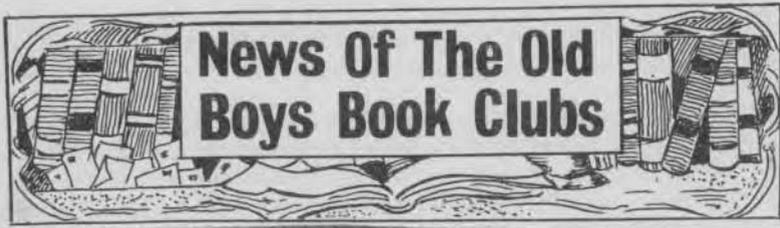
by Richard Dalby (Michael O'Mara Books £17.50)

Large, and with more than 150 illustrations, Richard Dalby's dip into childhood books from the 1860s to the 1930s provides examples of the work of a range of artists whom many of us remember with delight. There are biographical and bibliographic notes (which I would like to have seen expanded) about each illustration but the main joy of this collection is, of course, its pictures, 48 pages of which are in full colour. Divided into three sections (The Victorians, Howard Pyle and his disciples and The Golden Years), the selection has generally been drawn from 'classics', fairy-stories and other books on long-standing popular themes in the juvenile literature field. With the exception of Folkard's *Teddy Tail*, ephemeral characters from comics, story-papers or Annuals are not included. An opportunity for a follow-up volume, perhaps?

There are other surprising omissions - for example, no Alfred Bestall, Harry Rountree, Hilda Cowham, Joyce Mercer, Harry Furniss or S.G. Hulme Beaman. However, there are wonderfully well reproduced drawings and paintings by (amongst many others) Richard Doyle, Arthur Hughes, Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, Louis Wain, Jessie Wilcox Smith, Maxfield Parrish, H.R. Millar, the Brocks, the Robinsons, Rackham, Shepard, Dulac, Goble, Pogany and Nielson. Most of all, perhaps, I enjoyed seeing again fairy and nursery type illustrations by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, Beatrix Potter, Millicent Sowerby, Mable Lucie Attwell, Cicely Mary Barker and Margaret Tarrant.

MURDER BY GASLIGHT by Leonard Piper (Michael O'Mara Books £13.99)

In very different mood, *Murder by Gaslight* is a collection of 'True Tales of Murder in Victorian and Edwardian England'. Events are faithfully reconstructed, from the actual murder to the details of police investigations and the resulting trials. Covering shocking but not always well known crimes, the book will probably appeal to readers with a taste for detective/thriller fiction. It ends on a salutary note: Leonard Piper suggests that in Victorian and Edwardian England 'it was still possible to believe that sane men did not behave like monsters...'. At the end of the twentieth century however, 'it is very different. We have seen far too many monsters and are, alas, no longer so easily shocked or surprised by cruelty and inhumanity'.



CAMBRIDGE CLUB

For our April meeting we gathered at the Willingham village home of Keith Hodkinson.

To start the meeting proper we watched a videotape of Part 4 of ITV's 'Comics the Ninth Art'; the half-hour programme dealt with syndicated newspaper strips during the 1920s.

Later, Keith presented a selection of film extracts having the general theme of 'Monsters we have loved?'. These concerned such famous monsters from the films of Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, Jekyll and Hyde, Phantom of the Opera and Jaws 2, etc.

ADRIAN PERKINS

LONDON O.B.B.C

Chairman Graham Bruton welcomed members to a new location, St. Luke's House, Kew for the meeting held on 14th April.

The formalities over, Norman Wright provided a lively "audio" quiz in which members were urged to identify mystery voices from a series of tape-recordings. These included Charles Hamilton, Richmal Crompton and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The winner was Brian Doyle who followed his success by reading an interesting and amusing article about Clayton Moore, better known as The Lone Ranger. Bill Bradford took us Down Memory Lane and Don Webster then gave a talk entitled "This Fascinating Hobby". Don's anecdotes about the early days of the O.B.B.C. proved highly entertaining and his presentation was very well received. Alan Pratt supplied a quiz on comics and papers which produced joint winners, Brian Doyle and Mark Taha. Roy Parsons rounded off the proceedings with a lively reading from Gem No. 756, Gussy Among the Girls, a particularly entertaining sequence in which Tom Merry and friends "discuss" Gussy's continued absence with their headmaster.

Thanks were expressed to Don Webster for kindly arranging the venue.

I unfortunately omitted to mention in my last report that Laurie Peters, a member for many years, sadly passed away shortly after the death of his wife. I am saddened also to hear of the death of our good friend Jim Sutcliffe, a regular attendee at meetings who will be greatly missed. Our sincere condolences go out at this time to the families of Laurie and Jim.

ALAN PRATT

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Chairman Joan welcomed the assembled crowd, and a round of spontaneous applause indicated that we were delighted to have our Secretary Geoffrey back with us after a long absence.

We were sorry to have to hear of the death of Derek Adley: there seemed to be so many hobby enthusiasts lost of late.

The Club Dinner held on 23rd March was a huge success with 17 present including one of our newest members, Willis Hall, the author, scriptwriter and newspaper columnist (of Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall fame). Our President, Mary Cadogan, and Vice President, Anthony Buckeridge, had both sent messages of greeting. We were sorry that neither could be with us. Keith Atkinson reported that our Club had a prominent mention in the newsletter of The Richard Jefferies Society. Keith's excellent paper, presented to our Club last year, is now available to members of the Society. A long discussion took place with regard to our Club's concern at the possible cessation of the Howard Baker programme and we agreed that we would be only too willing to promise its continuance if at all possible. Paul Galvin reported on the recent W.E. Johns' Meeting held in Watford, and Darrell mentioned that plans for the Just William Meeting to be held in Bury on 27th April, were taking shape well.

Harry Blowers presented the recording of "Floreast Greyfriars" - fifty minutes of sheer delight. After refreshments, Geoffrey really showed us that he had come back to the Club with a bang! In his inimitable style, he read a hilarious chapter from Magnet 875, "The Vanished Ventriloquist". Dr. Locke is completely taken aback when Bunter indicates that he would much prefer to be "sacked" than receive a flogging for using his ventriloquial powers.

A truly delightful meeting.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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