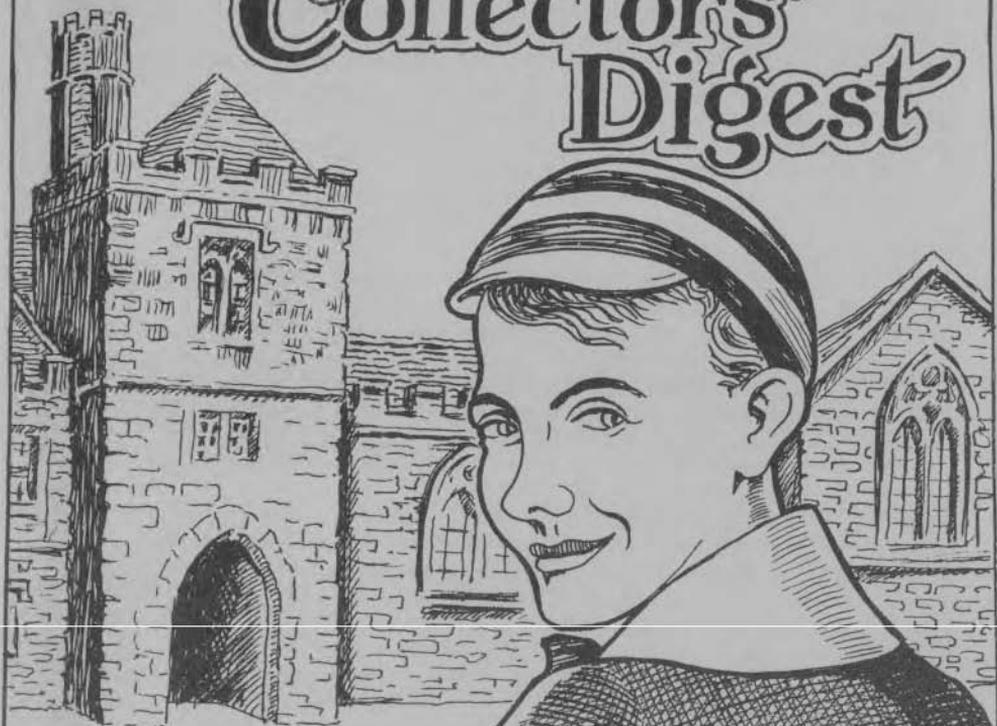


The Story Paper

# Collectors' Digest



VOL. 47

No. 558

JULY  
1993

£1

# Monty Lowther

Bob Whiter '93

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# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by  
W.H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

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## BETWEEN FRIENDS

### A Visit to York

On holiday recently, travelling north, my husband and I stopped in York to visit the firm of Quacks who so speedily and competently print the CD every month. It was great to meet for the first time the hard-working and friendly team whom I've known for several years now by correspondence and the telephone. Alex and I were shown round their picturesquely rambling premises which are situated in one of the narrow old lanes just a stone's throw away from the magnificent York Minster. It was fascinating to see the equipment and technology used in the production of our little magazine. Quacks (once known as York Duplicating Services) have, of course, been typing and printing the CD from its early days, during which time its production has progressed from hammer to laser (from manual typewriter, duplicating and hand-folding to today's electronically controlled processes). The technology is frequently changed and updated - but the courtesy and consideration of the staff at Quacks remains constant. I was delighted to meet Michael, Mandy, Debbie, Christine, Freda and other members of the staff, and to

## THE WOMAN BEHIND WILLIAM

A LIFE OF  
RICHMAL CROMPTON



*"I've written some jolly good tales," said William, "An' I wouldn't mind helpin' you a bit."*

be able to thank them in person for their unfailing helpfulness and efficiency.

### It's That Boy Again!

This month marks a high-spot in the happily long running *William* saga. Macmillan, who started to reprint the books in paperback some ten years ago, have now, with the issue of *William the Superman* and *William the Lawless*, made every one of the 38 books in the series once again available. This is a remarkable publishing achievement, underlining William's perennial, cross-generational appeal as well as the sparkingly fresh quality of Richmal Crompton's writing.

The world of William is further celebrated in an excellent book by David Schutte entitled *William the Immortal*, and in a new reprint by Macmillan of my Richmal Crompton biography which originally appeared in 1986.

I am naturally extremely happy that *The Woman Behind William* is available once more. Elsewhere in this CD it is reviewed by Brian Doyle, together with the other William books mentioned here. I must say that I am both flattered and pleased by Brian's closing sentence!

### Extended Coverage of E.S. Brooks

I recently asked for your views on whether our Nelson Lee Column should be widened to include Brooks' other fictional works. Your replies indicate a positive response *so long as St. Frank's continues to be regularly featured*. So - it is up to you, dear readers and contributors, to keep supplying plenty of Lee and other material. I would also appreciate your suggestions on a new name for this column, so that we can have a fresh heading made for future use.



The games they expect you to play at parties are sickening.

### Sexton Blake Centenary

In Blakiana this month Mr Bridgwater refers to the centenary of Sexton Blake which will occur in December of this year. The CD will be celebrating it a month early - in the November issue - so that our December number will allow plenty of space for Christmas items. I have already received several interesting Blake Centenary features, but there is still room for one or two more in this forthcoming Centenary Special.

Happy Reading!

MARY CADOGAN

(Illustrations of *William* features in this issue of the CD are copyright of The Thomas Henry Fisher Estate and are reproduced by permission of Pan Macmillan Children's Books.)

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**Part One:**

One of Charles Hamilton's recurrent themes was the reform of the 'sinner'. At least twenty major series in Magnet, Gem and Boys' Friend were based on the reformation (complete or partial) of "bad" lads by the influence of good ones. The most important "sinners" in the Hamilton catalogue were:

1. Reginald Talbot (The Toff)
2. Herbert Vernon-Smith (The Bounder)
3. Valentine Mornington
4. Rupert De Courcy (The Caterpillar)
5. Ernest Levison
6. Peter Hazeldene
7. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley (The Outsider)
8. Ralph Reckness Cardew

The reclamations of Talbot, De Courcy, Levison and Lumley were successful (though I have some doubts as to whether Levison's would have lasted into manhood); Smithy and Mornington were better people after their 'repentance' but were always prone to back-slide; Cardew did occasional good deeds, but lacked the commitment to reform properly; Hazeldene, time and again, proved a complete wash-out.

The Talbot reform was the most drastic and, paradoxically, the most lasting. At his first appearance, he is a hardened criminal - handsome, good company, pleasant mannered, but also a skilled cracksman, deceitful, almost callous. Nevertheless, the Toff had three qualities which provided a solid base for his reclamation - he was brave, intelligent and determined. Once he was exposed to the kindness of Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton and to the straightforward Christian honesty of Tom Merry, his intelligence made him realise that there was a better way of living than his hand-to-mouth conniving, cheating and thieving. Having made the decision to change, Talbot's courage and determination saw him through the many difficulties which beset him. He risked injury to protect St. Jim's from his rascally confederates: he faced death by starvation rather than back-slide: he obtained a King's Pardon by a display of physical courage and coolness in danger beyond his years. All the time, he had the support of Tom Merry, who without realising it, provided a model for Talbot to emulate. Having set his foot on the right path, the Toff worked hard to obtain a scholarship and pay his own way through college. The lucky discovery of his uncle, Colonel Lyndon, made Talbot's final circumstances easier and pleasanter, but the vital change to his character had already been achieved before this happened.

Fairly soon after his personal reform, Talbot was emulating Tom Merry, perhaps outstripping him as a helper of 'lame dogs'. Tom, a much harder 'nut' than most people realise, had little time for humbugs. He saw, almost instinctively, into others' characters, knowing that Talbot and Lumley-Lumley had a basic integrity which would help them to reform if only they were pointed in the right direction. Conversely, Tom also knew that Levison and Cardew were basically flawed; that any reforming was likely to be temporary and convenient, not permanent and sound. (He was wrong about Levison, but oh, so right! about Cardew). Talbot, more patient than Tom, had a greater tolerance of Levison (and Gore and Cooke) because he knew what an uphill battle a true penitent faced. His good influence struck a chord in Levison's peculiar nature, because Levison knew that Talbot had been lower down the path to destruction than he, Levison, had ever been.

The one jarring element of Talbot's saga is the wholesale reformation of his various confederates. John Rivers, the 'Professor', is persuaded by a combination of Talbot and his daughter, Marie, to go 'straight' - provided he can be helped to get clear of the authorities! Tom Merry & Co. were dubious about the ethics of this, but Rivers' subsequent enlistment in the army solved the problem. The 'Professors' gallantry in action brought him a King's Pardon too - rather too much of a good thing, I think. Talbot obviously had a bit of a guilt complex for he also got involved with saving Hookey Walker from justice. Hookey emigrated to Canada, but I wonder whether he really 'went straight'. Like the 'Professor', he had a long criminal history to live down.

The peculiar element in all of his was Marie Rivers. A "Little sister of the Poor", she must have been a devious minx to use such a calling as "cover" for her criminal activities. Her regard for the Toff seemed genuine, though her concern for her rogue of a father motivated her more deeply at first. Like Marjorie Hazeldene, she was adept at "persuading" her boyfriends to aid unworthy causes. I suspect that Talbot, in adult life, could well have suffered emotionally at Marie's hands. He had the nobler spirit of the two: often that ends in being exploited by the less sincere one. (Incidentally, Tom Merry, though always polite and gentlemanly towards Marie, was instinctively dubious about her - particularly when Talbot came a cropper so soon after her appearance in the stories. As I said before, a 'hard nut' our Tom!)

The Toff's reform took place in 1914-1915 (Gems 334-337; 351-354; 362; 363; 393).

*To be continued...*



"Marie!" exclaimed Talbot in astonishment. "What are you doing here?" The junior seemed to lose all his nerve at the sight of that fresh pretty face, with the clear blue eyes that had a mocking light in their depths. "The Toff!" she murmured.

\*\*\*\*\*



## TRUE CRIME JOINS SEXTON BLAKE

by John Bridgwater

The 13th of December 1893 is one of the most memorable dates in the history of detective fiction. A date we OBB enthusiasts will be celebrating in December this year - the Sexton Blake centenary.

A third of the way into that century, in 1922 to be precise, a major editorial decision was made to include real-life crime articles along-side the Sexton Blake stories. It was probably a very high level decision as the articles commenced practically simultaneously in both the Union Jack and the Sexton Blake Library. "The Detective Magazine Supplement" started in No. 969 Union Jack of the 6th May. This supplement grew into four encyclopaedic volumes. The first number contained articles on Scotland Yard, Pinkertons, finger prints, memoirs of a criminologist and Dartmoor Prison. The last covered the Rhodesian Police, misdemeanours, and the Invisible Eye, an automatic camera which, it was hoped, would photograph the criminal actually in the act of committing a crime. The last issue appeared in UJ No. 1215 of 29th January 1927 completing a magnificent run. This monumental work was followed by a change of tone. The new series was called "Tinker's Notebook", a column of cheery chit-chat on criminal concerns. It injected a welcome element of humour into the UJ and ran until No. 1377 of 8th March 1930. After this the centre pages of UJ reverted to general crime articles such as "Crimes that Thrilled the World". Later a crime gossip column began entitled "From Information Received". It lasted until the end of the UJ.

The Detective Weekly carried on the true crime tradition. "Tinker's Notebook" was revived and afterwards "From Information Received" which carried on right to the bitter end in May 1940. Whilst these were running a long series of articles on individual crimes and individual criminals appeared. Next came a series intriguingly entitled "Crimes Solved by unofficial Detectives". After this "Amazing Continental Crimes" had a run. A star turn which appeared for a long period beginning in No. 145 of 30th November 1935 was "The Crime Information Bureau" run by The Man from Scotland Yard, ex-Detective Inspector Brust. Interspersed between all these items were a number of miscellaneous general crime articles. No doubt at all, the DW was little less than lavish in its provision of true crime.

It is worth noting at this point that prior to the "Detective Magazine Supplement" there was a tendency for the UJ readership to look on Sexton Blake as a real person.

This was actually encouraged in UJ No. 69 of 3rd February 1905 in which a foreword to "Sexton Blake's First Case" referred to him as a living person. (See my article "Sexton Blake Lives" in SPCD No. 547 of July 1992.)

Both the UJ and DW provided their readers with ample quantities of articles and comment on real-life crime but what of the Sexton Blake Library? The approach here differed considerably from that of both UJ and DW. The Library generally allocated one page, usually the last one but not invariably, to true crime. The whole series was called "Our Magazine Corner" and lasted throughout three series though the title was dropped on occasion towards the end. A large number of the articles were on crime, many related to the Sexton Blake story they accompanied; others were of a general nature. Of those related to the story they appeared with, a number of examples are given below:

<b>First Series</b>	<b>Story Title</b>	<b>Our Magazine Corner</b>
No. 244	The House of Ghosts	Spiritualism
250	Fingerprints of Fate	When Fingerprints Have Convicted
253	The Case of the Courtland Jewels	Remarkable Jewel Robberies
278	The Case of the Cabaret Girl (Partly set in Vienna)	Description of Vienna in 1927
371	The Case of the Pink Macaw (Bird used for crime)	Animals used to Kill - Monkeys used by Chinese as shock troops - Horse tried and found guilty of kicking master to death and burned alive by Monks.
377	The Secret of Thirty Years (Telegraph messages from London received in Brazil)	Laying the transatlantic submarine cable
<b>Second Series</b>		
1	The Secret of the Coconut Groves (Pearls from coconuts)	Production of copra
9	The Case of the Man Who Never Slept	Deeds of violence through want of sleep, and hypnotic sleep used to commit crime
71	The Bloodhounds Revenge	Bloodhounds ability to track made difficult by introduction of cars and tarred roads
121	The Case of the Poisoned Pen	Crime by post and post office detectives' methods of opening suspect letters
139	The Mystery of the Golden Chalice	Antiques crimes and story of the Holy Grail found and sold to USA before fake discovered

140	The Riddle of the Runaway Car	Car theft, even in 1928, one of the biggest police problems - organised gangs with nation wide sales outlets. Fake hitch hikers and feigning illness used to stop motorists for car theft
190	The Ballot Box Mystery	Election Crimes
380	The Fatal Friendship	Fatal friendships
385	Guilty but Insane	Guilty but insane
470	The Secret of the Sealed Room	Sealed rooms
545	The Bells of Doom	Five Hours Wrong
604	The Crook of Fleet Street	Bribed to Confess

**Third Series**

8	The Man from Occupied	Secret Messages
98	The Blackmailed Refugee	Crook Officials
247	The Case of the Frightened Girl	Evading the Police

This list gives some idea of the wide range of subject and unexpected snippets of information to be found in this series. A fascinating quarry of straight and off-beat knowledge. The articles ended, more or less, in 1951 though some did appear at odd times afterwards. There were some breaks and a few missed opportunities (probably due to lack of space) during the run. "Our Magazine Corner" added a real-life dimension to the stories they accompanied enhancing the readers enjoyment thereby.

A last thought on these real-life articles in UJ, DW, and SBL; I wonder how many of us read them at the time? I must confess I did not. It is only as a collector in later years that these excellent articles have come into their own for me and given me hours of enlightenment and enjoyment.

\*\*\*\*\*

**FOR SALE:** Reading copies only 5 original Holiday Annuals, 1923, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1934. Mandeville - Billy Bunter's Own No. 3. Cassell - Bunter Does His Best. The Best of Magnet & Gem. 30 copies of Nelson Lee. Offers or exchange for SOL's. **E. Sheppard**, 1 Forge Close, Spring Lane, Bempton, Bridlington, YO15 1LX. Tel. Bridlington 851373.

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## FOOTSTEPS OF DEATH

by Mark Caldicott

Two English gentlemen were washed up on a desert island. For two months they said only 'Good Morning' and 'Good Evening' to each other, and carried on their separate lives. One day one said to the other 'I say weren't we introduced to each other once by Buffy Windlebury'. The other replied 'I say, I think you're right. Good job we were or we'd have carried on like this forever.'

If all E.S. Brooks' characters were washed up on a desert island, very few of them would have this problem.

Imagine the introductions taking place on the desert island. Signor Cappelli and the members of Cappelli's Circus (originating in 'Canvas and Caravan', BFL 200, 1912) would know Waldo the Wonder Man, since he was introduced to us as the strong man of that circus ('Waldo the Wonder Man', UJ 794, 1918). Alongside Sexton Blake and Tinker, the latter story also brought guest appearances by Nelson Lee, Nipper, and the boys of St. Franks school. Tinker repaid the compliment by visiting St. Franks in the Nelson Lee Library (e.g. the Barring Out series, NLL OS 229-236).

Handforth of St. Franks could therefore introduce the boys of St. Jim's to all of the foregoing, since he visited them in the Gem series (Gem, 1059-1062, 1928). The St. Franks members would be acquainted with members of the Blue Crusaders football team from their encounters in Boys Realm (NS 64-80) and Nelson Lee Library (1st NS 146-159). Professor Cyrus Zingrave, leader of the infamous Green Triangle, as well as having many encounters with Nelson Lee, has also made his presence known with the Blue Crusaders in this Boys Realm series.

Sexton Blake could introduce the party to Scotland Yard's Inspector Bill Williams, whom he met in 'The Three Frightened Men' (SBL 2nd S 641, 1938). In turn Sweet William could introduce Norman Conquest, Joy Conquest and Mandeville Livingstone to the gathering.

It is an endearing characteristic of ESB's writing that he took delight in 'guest appearances' of his characters in other series. It may well be that this practice was a conscious attempt to get readers of one Amalgamated Press publication to buy others, and I think ESB was always keen on expanding the market for his stories. Nevertheless, whatever the motive, the effect is to draw us more closely into the world of his writing.

On our desert island, however, the pair who would be left to live their separate lives would be the characters from one of ESB's major and best-loved series, the Ironsides Cromwell stories. Cromwell and his assistant Johnny Lister have never 'guested' in any other series, nor have they entertained such guests. Apart from a reference to 'Fellows like Norman Conquest and the Saint and Bulldog Drummond' (Ironsides Smells Blood, 1946, p.40), there is no cross reference to any of ESB's other characters in this series.

The Cromwell saga remains one of ESB's major achievements, and the first hardback story 'Footsteps of Death' (1939) one of his most entertaining. It relates the adventures of Floyd Trenton, in reality Duncan Wayne, a fugitive from misjustice who returns to the Midlands city of Netherton (didn't ESB know there really is a Netherton in the Midlands, though nothing like his fictitious version?) to prevent the true culprit, Nigel Stacey, from marrying his daughter. Cromwell was the policeman in charge of the original enquiry in his pre-Scotland Yard days, and he has sworn to bring Wayne to justice. Unfortunately a holidaying Cromwell is the first person Wayne meets on his return to Netherton, but the years have changed Wayne's appearance and he is recognised only as Floyd Trenton. Wayne sets out on a campaign to terrorize Stacey into leaving his family alone. This results in a murder which Cromwell sets out to investigate, to the peril of Duncan Wayne. In the end, however, true justice prevails.

My very battered copy of this novel was obtained from a short-lived, and very dubious, second-hand bookshop in Birmingham many years ago, but it remains a treasured possession. When I re-read it recently it had lost none of its zest.

Of course, there is some confusion in this series created by the fact that ESB started it twice! It has two contenders for the 'first in the series' title. Chronologically, Ironsides made his appearance first in The Thriller on 30th September, 1939, in an episode entitled 'Ironsides of the Yard' (Thriller, 556). This, and two subsequent episodes (Thriller 558 & 560) make up the story republished as the second hardback Cromwell novel, 'Ironsides of the Yard' (1940). The Thriller at that time was war-oriented, and 'Ironsides of the Yard' tends to suffer as a result. As an opener to the series my personal preference is 'Footsteps of Death'.

In the novel series, there is a difficulty to overcome. This is the awkward fact that in 'Footsteps of Death' Cromwell's assistant is Johnny Lister, star of Hendon Police College, whereas in the Thriller 'Ironsides of the Yard' series Lister is a member of the diplomatic service. ESB accommodates this in the novel version of 'Ironsides of the Yard' with an explanation that Lister had left the police force for the diplomatic service through pressure from his parents, and much to the regret of Ironsides. Lister, of course, returns to the force in later novels.

Ironsides Cromwell has many loyal followers, some preferring this series to any of ESB's other contributions. Due to the kindness of a fellow enthusiast, Mr. Tony Mustard, I have had the opportunity to read several Victor Gunn novels I have not seen for about twenty-five years, and am rediscovering the Ironsides magic.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**WANTED:** ENID BLYTON, W.E. JOHNS, CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers, and ALL ephemera related to these authors. ANY original artwork related to Bunter, Blyton, Biggles, Eagle or other British comics and boys papers. ALL Boys Friend Libraries by W.E. Johns and Rochester. Many "Thriller" issues and first editions in wrappers by Charteris required. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel. 0923 232383.  
\*\*\*\*\*



Bill Lofts writes about two more sleuths from the Comics

### Rex Ranger - The Prairie 'Tec'

It was a former editor of the black and white Penny Comics who told me that easily the most popular stories - judged by readers letters were those of the detective and western type.



So, in the pink *Chips* dated 25th July 1925, readers had the best of both worlds with the commencement of a long series of stories featuring Rex Ranger, known as the Prairie 'Tec'.

He was a well built young man of medium height, booted and spurred wearing light coloured riding breeches, tweed jacket and a wide brimmed sombrero hat. His face was rather handsome, with a firm square jaw and steely grey eyes.

He rode a big chestnut mustang named Prince, with a silver mounted quirk hung from his wrist. His assistance was a Red Indian boy named Red Deer, aged about fifteen. In the initial story Rex Ranger had saved him from being beaten up by a 'baddie' - Red Deer being so grateful that later he helped Rex by his expert tracking to solve a case, the outcome being that he joined him, they both becoming good friends.

The weekly complete stories ran till July 17th 1926, having a year's run, where, after catching the thieves who had stolen the Red Diamond Ranch pay-roll, they both rode off into the sunset.

The author is not known but this series does suggest the style of Charlie (talking to horses) Lewins.

## Digby Grant

Detective Inspector Digby Grant of Hurley Street, C.I.D. later moved on to Scotland Yard, where he was known to his friends as 'Digger'. A young man with a lean athletic figure, and keen brown eyes, he had captured more crooks than any other member of the C.I.D. His assistant was Sam Smart a sturdy freckled youth, the son of Sergeant Tom Smart, who had been murdered by a gunman. In the early stories prominence is given to Sam Smart's bloodhound who, like Grant, was known as 'Digger'.

These stories appeared in the white *Comic Cuts* in the very early thirties, though later on Sam Smart and his dog 'Digger' were dropped, which suggests that another writer was involved.

### A DOUBLE TRAP.

In this fine complete mystery story, Digby Grant, the Scotland Yard Detective, pits his wits against a ruthless blackmailer.



The men were so exactly alike that the Professor did not know which of the two was the man he had vowed to kill.

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**Simon Garrett writes:** Concerning Colin Cole's enjoyable soccer-selection piece (CD 558), Bulstrode did make a brief comeback long after the Magnet - in the 1965 Cassell hardback "Bunter the Sportsman". The writer gets closer to Hamilton's style than most Magnet subs' however the staccato dialogue sticks out like a sore thumb. Do we know anything about the hardback subwriters?

Incidentally, the genuine Charles Hamilton resurrected two more forgotten men, Smith Minor and Elliott, in "Bunter does his best" (Cassell 1954). This was when Wharton was scratching around desperately to field a soccer team. Unable to locate these low-profile Removites, he delved still deeper into the bottom of the barrel, and completed the eleven with Stott and Bunter! It is pleasant to record that a reluctant but loyal Mauleverer performed gallantly at outside right when this motley crew took on the mighty Courtfielders.

## SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE AUTHORS

### This month: A Tribute to WILL GIBBONS by Margery Woods

Like Lewis Carlton, about whom I wrote last month, with Will Gibbons there is also a mystery. He too produced great stories for girls and boys. He was a Yorkshireman, and he too had theatrical connections, his father being a singer and comedian. (See THE MEN BEHIND BOYS' FICTION for biography.) Gibbons wrote quite a bit of humour for the boys' papers. One particular series of comedy tales appeared in THE TRIUMPH during 1927. The Terrible Tecs enacted Gibbons' own special brand of the Sherlock Holmes lark, while the Jolly Japers, Vic Vickers, and Mick Martin of the village pet shop, the leading spirits of the Village Boys engaged in some hilarious feuds with the boys from the big school, whose leading lights rejoiced in the appellations of Beefy Blogs and Spoofer Pickles.

Other lively characters in these jolly tales were the Merrymakers of Slowville. In one adventure the pals decide to assist Mr. Theodore Lancelot Thrillem, a local novelist, in the promotion of his latest book, The Man Who Won Through. Sandy, Swappy and Gatepost are a delightful mixture of Lovejoy and Arthur Daley, ever ready to buy bargains which hopefully they will then flog for a super profit. At the time of the great promotion, their business capital stands at five pounds, and they invest the lot on a large consignment of Mr. Theodore Lancelot Thrillem's latest epic, convinced that the selling will be easy. Sandy decides to study the tome for half an hour so that he can plan the best method of 'booming' the sales. On discovering that it runs to over five hundred pages of small print he closes the book hurriedly, wondering if it might be better to 'boom' the author instead.

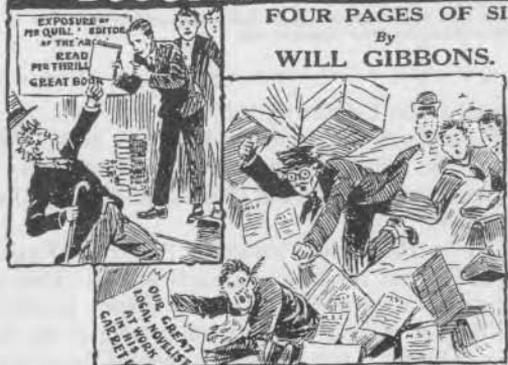
The promotion begins in the market place, where they construct with egg boxes their idea of a genius struggling to create in a garret, much to the amusement of the local populace. During a slight altercation with the butcher boy and a basket of over-ripe tomatoes, the author himself arrives, unfortunately in direct line of fire. Sadly he

**MIND YOUR WAISTCOAT-BUTTONS, LADS! THE MERRY MAKERS ARE HERE AGAIN IN—**

**THE BOOST THAT NEARLY BUSTED 'EM!** 

**FOUR PAGES OF SIDE-SPLITTING LAUGHS**

By  
**WILL GIBBONS.**



**THE TRIUMPH**  
AND  
NO PLEASANT  
SONS  
PEOPLE!

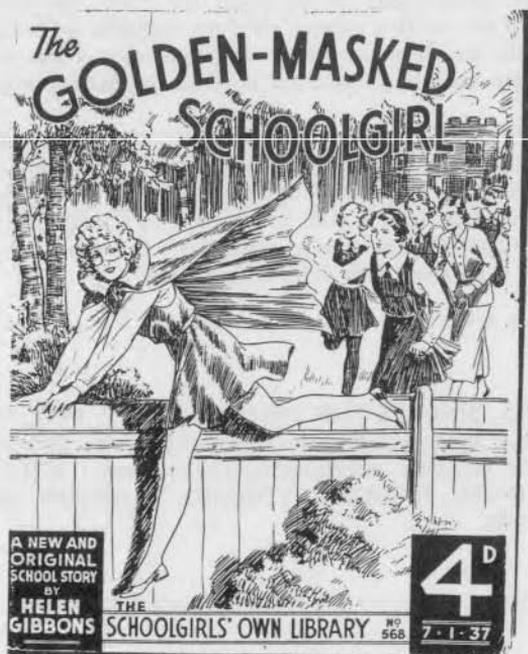
is not impressed by the boys' efforts, and the arrival of the Law breaks up the fun. Not downhearted, the Merry-makers decide to dramatise a scene from the great man's book, in which the Fair Rosamund wrings her hands while waiting for Upright Eustace to rescue her from vile Sir Jasper's doomed castle. The scene becomes more disastrous than dramatic, and once more the Law steps in to spoil the fun. But the lads are really in hot water when they decide the great novel is actually an exposé of the local newspaper editor and the bank manager, Mr. Debbit.

The author is horrified, tempers flare, and dark threats of libel fill the air. But as in all good story-paper fiction the lads are actually right! Mr. Debbit is in truth a swindler, and the resultant publicity assures tip-top sales of the book. Mr. Thrillem is so pleased he tells the lads he is sending them a reward.

When the reward arrives by registered post the lads fall on it gleefully---only to reveal an autographed copy of *The Book*! All five hundred pages of death-dealing prose! Lovely!

Later, Gibbons turned his attention to the girls' fiction market and adopted the pen-name of Helen Gibbons.

Devotees of the SCHOOLGIRLS OWN LIBRARY will remember that the first of the four monthly issues was usually a new and original story, and Helen Gibbons was the author of many of these (a spot shared with Ruth Maxwell). For the library he created, among others, a lively and attractive character called the Golden-Masked Schoolgirl, who wrote plays and adored disguise. At her new school she soon made friends---and bad enemies---and discovered the secret passages and nooks and crannies through which she stole, disguised in her shining gold costume and mask, in search of the missing family treasure so that she could clear her father's name, reunite her mother and stern old grandfather, and unmask her plotting, unscrupulous cousins. Stirring stuff!



In *THE SCHOOL ON TOUR*, (SGOL 452) Gibbons gives a first rate demonstration on how to hook the reader and get a book going. In fact, it gets off to a blazing start---literally!---with the school on fire and Glory Gale, the heroine, fighting her way back into the conflagration to rescue the Junior Camera Club's equipment. Glory is trapped in the fire and has to escape by the fire brigade ladder. During her desperate mission a burning panel splits and reveals a small compartment with a leather bag inside, and automatically Glory snatches it before she clammers out onto the ladder. She has also noticed that the fire began in Olga's study--Olga being the crony of unpopular Olivia, a senior and president of the Senior Camera Club, who bitterly resents the photographic efforts of the juniors.

And so the threads of the story are laid in the first two or three pages. The school is badly damaged and the head decides the girls shall continue their education on a camping tour while repairs are done. All of which ties in very neatly with the results of discovering the little leather bag in the secret compartment. For the bag holds a broken portion of an amber idol and a map marked with red crosses, and the map is of virtually the same area the school will be traversing on the walking and camping tour. There is much excitement and adventure as they follow the map, taking super photos all the way and waging a battle of wits with the two vindictive senior girls. Presumably a little school work is done along the way, but knowing his young readers the author does not waste much time describing that unpopular subject. And at each marked spot the chums discover another piece of the idol, on which quest the villainous Jake of the gypsies is also bound. At last the pieces begin to fit, with the discovery of an eastern princess who is imprisoned by another villain, Raschid. Glory soon rescues her, though, and hears that the idol is a sacred one, stolen from a temple. The princess has hidden the last piece of the amber idol of eternal bliss, and by this time virtually every character in the story is after that idol for the great reward its discovery will bring. But Glory and her chums are the true heroines of the exciting climax, their photographs are published in the press and a banquet is held in their honour. Olivia and Olga are in disgrace, Raschid arrested and everyone else happy, including a man and his little daughter who were met along the way and reunited.

Another grand story by yet another superbly talented writer. Who knows if the mystery concerning these two authors will ever be solved? It seems strange and very sad that writers who created so much delightful mystery for a myriad girls and boys should leave real-life mystery behind concerning their own fate. But perhaps someone, somewhere may solve their final mysteries, some day. One thing we do know: there is absolutely no mystery at all about their story telling talents.

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**WANTED: ROVERS, SINGLES FOR 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960.** I can supply comprehensive list of numbers. If anyone has any at all please contact me. All complete and sound condition please. JOHN GIBBS, WELLS COTTAGE, EASTCOMBE, BISHOPS LYDEARD, TAUNTON, SOMERSET, TA4 3HU. Tel: 0823 432 998.

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## TIME REMEMBERED

by Ted Baldock

And time remembered is grief forgotten,  
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten.  
Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon*.

Saturday was a 'Magic' day. This may have been attributed to the fact that it was a non-school day. I am sure this must have helped; a spirit of freedom pervaded the air. The whole week-end lay before us, a limitless period. Who knew what adventures might befall? Then, to add to the 'Magic' there was a pristine copy of the 'Magnet' delivered that morning with the daily paper to be conned over and read at leisure.

How would Billy Bunter extricate his fat person from his latest escapade? Would Vernon-Smith be detected entering the school via the box-room window at midnight by a grim and gimlet-eyed Mr. Quelch? ("So you have returned Vernon-Smith!") Magic days indeed.

Then came the Saturday afternoon treat, an occasional visit to the cinema. How we looked forward to these outings! How we cheered when, at long last, the lights dimmed and we settled down to enjoy the antics of Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. Whether we fully appreciated or understood the subtlety of some of Charlie's humour is debatable, but there is no doubt that we enjoyed it. As our heroes leapt and became involved in fearful situations on the screen, in the pit below the piano would tinkle and the violins - two of them - would saw away in grand style with appropriate 'mood music', and the world was ours for an hour or so.

School for the glorious moment was quite forgotten. We lived, moved and had our being in a world of adventure and fun. Surely these are memories worth preserving. That age has now departed; it has disappeared into limbo forever. Re-creations have been attempted in these latter years with only varying degrees of success. Inexorably time moves on, and we, together with our dreams and longings, are carried along with it. This is the wonderful phenomenon we call 'Life'. Equally wonderful, perhaps, is the ability to retain in our minds the memories of former days. Thus may we keep ourselves young at heart.

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**COLIN CREWE** 12B Westwood Road, Canvey Island, Essex, Tel: 0268 693735. **For Sale:** Charles Hamilton Centenary Plate, 1976. A "must" for the book room. £12.50.

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# Monty Lowther

By Bob Whiter



Do you like Monty Lowther? As with all characters, some readers did and others didn't. Some of course didn't care either way! His nearest equivalent at Greyfriars was probably Bob Cherry, whilst at Rookwood I would plump for 'Putty' Grace. Speaking of Bob Cherry, I don't think Monty ever approached Bob's popularity. This was strange in a way as Lowther had many more facets to his character than had Bob.

Bob was a happy-go-lucky junior, full of fun and the joys of life, loyal, brave and true, the type of person that most people would like to have as a friend - in fact it was often stated that even the "rotters" found it hard not to like him.

Monty, on the other hand, was also loyal, brave and true, full of fun--- although the latter might be taken a step further. Perhaps a little too much fun? He was a never-ending purveyor of puns and jokes. How often has one of the juniors asked the question, "Is that one of your rotten jokes" to which almost invariably Monty would reply, "No, it's one of my good ones!"

Lots of the time, Monty would carry it too far, indeed it was hard for him to be serious at any time. The Gem carried a column for many years, "Just My Fun - Monty Lowther calling" followed by "Laugh These Off - with Monty Lowther". Looking back, one can see a little bit of Charles Hamilton in Monty Lowther and the other humourists who have appeared in the stories. I remember, when I visited our great author, I cautioned him about sitting on the cat's tail - Sammy had jumped up into the chair he had vacated to get a book to show me. Laughingly Charles said, "With My Poor Sight I have to be very careful - why, only the other day. I sat down on The Tale (tail) of Two Cities!"

But leaving his humour for a moment, let's look at Monty's other attributes. We have remarked on his sterling qualities - loyalty, bravery and truthfulness. How about his histrionic feats? From what we are told, he was the equal of the New House junior George Francis Kerr, or of Wibley at Greyfriars, with his impersonations. To coin a phrase and use the title of Gem 237 he was "Stage Struck"! In the story he runs away from school and joins a seedy theatrical group, whilst in Gem 332 he again tries the stage with his old friend, Horatio Curl.

In almost similar vein we have him imitating our old friend Eric Fayne by tickling the invoices in accompaniment to silent movies. This was in Gem 403 "The Call of the Cinema." So Monty was really quite a talented youngster. His ideas and "wheezes" were as numerous as the grains of sand on the beach. Sometimes they were successful, but on quite a few occasions they recoiled onto his own head. A case in point was when meeting Dick Julian, the Jewish junior (a little bit of alliteration there) on his arrival at the School, Gem 394. He was too clever by half and Julian very skilfully turned the

tables. Unfortunately this showed Lowther in a poor light, and it took a certain incident at the water mill for him to realise his folly, and become friends with Julian.

Another example was told in Gem 341, when Monty had a wonderful idea for prolonging the Summer hols. When the juniors returned to the school they found that someone else had bagged study No. 6. It took all of Monty's ingenuity to regain possession of it for Jack Blake and his friends.

One topic we should touch on is Monty's friendship with both Tom Merry and Harry Manners. These three friends, known as "The Terrible Three" surely complemented each other as no other trio did. Manners, the studious, quieter type; Lowther, full of the joys of spring, and lastly Tom Merry, also full of fun but endowed with a greater sense of duty and leadership. I started this brief article with the question "Do you like Monty Lowther?" Speaking for myself the answer is yes! His irrepressible jollity and impersonations appeal to both my sense of humour and love of play-acting.

I sincerely hope you feel the same way.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

By Brian Doyle

**"William - The Immortal": An Illustrated Bibliography, by David Schutte. (Published by David Schutte, May 1993, at £12.50, plus £1.00 p/p and obtainable from him at Myrtle Cottage, Stedham, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 0NQ).**

David Schutte's book is called "*William - The Immortal*" - an apt title. My dictionaries define 'immortal' as 'famous for ever', 'a person of lasting fame', 'enduring fame', 'undying' and 'imperishable'. And William Brown is certainly all of these. As William Cowper said "Blessed be the art that can immortalize". And Richmal Crompton assuredly had that art.

Mr Schutte's book is sub-titled 'An Illustrated Bibliography' and it vividly lives up to that description. David Schutte is a leading and well-known collector and dealer in Richmal Crompton's 'William' books (as well as other popular authors), so he obviously has expert knowledge of his subject, which he manifestly enjoys and loves. His book was surely an engrossing labour of love, and he communicates his enthusiasm to his readers.

He lists details of every William book ever published (all 38 of them) from the first, "*Just William*" in 1922, to the last, "*William - the Lawless*" in 1970, with full descriptions of the books' appearance, contents, binding and dust-wrapper, including when and where the stories originally appeared, and much else; even reprint dust-wrappers are identified. Every fine detail of each First Edition is given (except, for some reason, the number of illustrations the book should contain - a rather essential point, I should have thought). Information is also given as to the publications in which the William stories first appeared; not only in "Happy Magazine" and "Home Magazine", which most William enthusiasts will know about, but also of their

publication in "Modern Woman", "Home Notes", "Homes and Gardens" and of the William picture-strips by Thomas Henry in "Woman's Own".

Mention of Thomas Henry brings us to one of the prevailing joys of this book. Henry of course illustrated the William Stories and books for over forty years, and here we have more than 200 of Henry's original William illustrations, cartoons, drawings and dust-wrappers, from various sources, including many pictures that have never been reprinted before. Every picture is a delight.

Mr Schutte, as well as supplying useful details concerning all the paperbacked reprints of William books, etc., also includes a rough guide to the scarcity of each book, grading each from No. 1 (very common) to No. 20 (extremely scarce). The rarest title is the very last one, "*William - the Lawless*" (published posthumously and never reprinted, though it is now appearing as the final Macmillan paper-back in the William series, enabling many of us to complete our sets at long last!)

There are additionally six articles 'by' William (Richmal Crompton, of course) that have lain forgotten since the 1920s and 1930s. The 'missing' William story, "William on the Trail" (which was included in the 1980 Lofts-Adley "William Bibliography") is also here; this was never included in any of the books, for some reason.

But the best way to discover just what this delectable publication contains is to obtain a copy and browse through it. No William collection will be complete without "*William - The Immortal*", and for serious collectors of the First Editions (dust-wrappers essential!) it will become a vital reference tool.

Criticisms? Mr Schutte rather disarmingly precludes these to some extent by beginning his book with the words: "This book is not intended to be an exhaustive bibliography of all William publications, but more a celebration of the golden age of William from 1919 to 1970 in the publications of George Newnes Ltd." Fair enough.

But though he mentions in passing the two standard biographies of Richmal Crompton - Mary Cadogan's "*Richmal Crompton - The Woman Behind William*" and Kay Williams' "*Just Richmal*" - as well as Mary Cadogan's indispensable and already classic "*The William Companion*" (Mrs Cadogan provides a heart-warming Introduction to this present book, by the



"If I'm to be left in the same house as that there limb, I hands in me notice here and now."

William Helps the Cause

way), Mr Schutte makes no mention of Margaret Disher's "*Growing Up With Just William*", a useful adjunct to these, or even of more light-hearted books such as "*The Just William Cookin' Book*" by David Reid, or of the two "*Just William Annuals*" or even of "*Just William's World: a Pictorial Map*" by Gillian Clements and Kenneth Waller. All these are surely worthy of mention in a "*William Bibliography*", whether or not it is intended to be 'exhaustive'?

Mr Schutte also states that details of all William TV, radio, stage and film productions can be found in "*William - a Bibliography*" by W.O.G. Lofts and Derek Adley. This is not so. Details of *some* of these may be found there, but certainly not all, by any means. Do William fans realise, for instance, that a William play was presented in 1947-48 at no less a theatre than the huge London Palladium (second only to the London Coliseum in seating capacity among London theatres - over 2,300 in fact!)? Not many do and they won't I'm afraid, find it listed in the Lofts-Adley publication (admirable and useful as it is in many ways).

It might also have been helpful for the book to have included brief biographies of Richmal Crompton, Thomas Henry and Henry Ford (who took over the William illustrations after Henry's death in 1962); and even to have a list of major articles on William, Richmal Crompton, Thomas Henry, etc. that have appeared over the years in newspapers and magazines (including several in the "Collectors' Digest" and the "Collectors' Digest Annual"). All grist to the mill, surly, in a literary biography?

But perhaps all his is a trifle carping and pedantic. "*William - The Immortal*" is a delight from beginning to end and it will give enormous pleasure to every admirer of young William Brown. And there are many more of those around than have been dreamt of even in Violet-Elizabeth's little philosophy.

"I've read all the books I want to read," said William tersely (in Richmal Crompton's "*William*", Chapter 10).

Crumbs, but he'll be sorry he missed this one...!

**WILLIAM - THE SUPERMAN & WILLIAM - THE LAWLESS**  
(Macmillan Children's Books, Paperbacks, July 1993. £3.50 each)  
**THE WOMAN BEHIND WILLIAM: A Life of Richmal Crompton,**  
by Mary Cadogan. Re-issued as a PaperMac, Macmillan, London,  
July 1993. £9.99

There are three more treats for admirers of William this month.

Over the past ten years, Macmillan's have been reprinting the William books in paperback, complete with their original Thomas Henry (and latterly Henry Ford) illustrations. Now these enterprising publishers have completed their mammoth but delightful undertaking with the reprinting of Richmal Crompton's last two William books: "*William - The Superman*" and "*William - The Lawless*". This means that the entire William series of 38 titles is now in print and available in paperback.

It is especially welcome to see "*William - The Lawless*" in print again after a wait of 23 years. It was Richmal Crompton's last book and appeared

in 1970, the year after her death. It was never reprinted for reasons unknown and this Macmillan paperback publication marks its first appearance since then. That original book is today extremely rare and valuable; I recall seeing a copy (with dustwrapper) in a bookshop off London's Charing Cross Road about four years ago and priced at a modest £300.00! 'A snip!', I hear you cry; but I resisted temptation, walked on and (like Felix) went on walking...So, this new paperback edition will be snapped up by many William admirers to complete their set (including me).

There are six stories in the landmark "*William - The Lawless*" and the best (and funniest), I think, is "*The Outlaws and the Wedding Present*". Another story, "*William's Foggy Morning*", was left uncompleted (Richmal Crompton sadly died while writing it) and it was completed by the author's niece, Richmal Ashbee, from her aunt's notes and jottings. It would be a fascinating exercise to deduce just where Crompton's writing ended, and where Ashbee's began, but I, for one, found it impossible to tell - the joint is seamless.

If I didn't know the above, I would have plumped for another story in the collection, "*William and the Good Old Days*" as the unfinished tale, since it makes William say, untypically "Shut up!", "We might give it a try,", "Let's have a bash at it.", "Rubbish!", "bloke", and "Don't be a clot!". Would Richmal have really put such words and phrases into William's mouth?

Most of the stories in both these books suffer from something common to all the later William books, in my opinion: far too much colloquial conversation among William and the Outlaws, and not nearly enough prose description, thereby cutting down on Crompton's delicious humour. Whereas the 'reported speech' and 'slangy talk' was acceptable and amusing, in the books up to, say, the mid-1950s (although my own personal favourite period was 1925-35), the written 'dialect' (for that's almost what it was) became a mite tiresome in the later stories. For example: "let's go 'n look", "ought to 've let us", "an' jus' think", "p'raps he dropped it d'liberately", "crim'nals", "las' one", "trifically" and "p'lice" (and from "*William - The Lawless*"). And in the next paragraph, immediately following on from such as these, Crompton has William saying "Come on, there's no time to be lost" in perfectly good English... She also describes William as having (far too many times) "a throaty chuckle" (3 times in 4 pages in one story).

But there, I'm probably being too pedantic again. All the stories in both these books are never less than delightfully entertaining and often very funny.

A word on Henry Ford's illustrations: as most people know, he took over the illustration of the William books (upon the death of Thomas Henry) in 1964 and "*William and the Witch*" contained drawings by both Henrys and, while Ford's were acceptable, they were never in the Thomas Henry class (what could be?). But his illustrations for "*William - The Lawless*" are, I feel, pretty good and his best to that time; he was really 'getting there' with this book (has Ford since done any more children's book illustrations, I wonder? I don't ever recall seeing anything else by Henry Ford. Does anyone know anything about this somewhat shadowy figure?)

Just one criticism of Ford in "*Lawless*": he does tend to make his adults look far younger than they should be. He makes Miss Milton, for example, look in her 20s or 30s, when she should surely be in her 50s; and a store manager said to be on the verge of retirement appears to be in his 20s or 30s too.

But all William fans will surely give a rousing cheer of welcome to these final two additions to the paperback set. Many congratulations to Macmillan's for completing the entire William saga in 38 good-looking paperback volumes; it's a good deed in a dark world. A whole Library of Laughter!

Published simultaneously with the final two William books is the Macmillan paperback reprint of our worthy editor Mary Cadogan's "*The Woman Behind William: A Life of Richmal Crompton*". This delightful and fascinating biography (the first in its field at the time of its original publication in 1986) now has a revised Introduction by the author, bringing the remarkable William (and Crompton) saga up-to-date (the Centenary Celebrations of 1990, the William Exhibition in London, the appearance of a wax-work of William in the Madame Tussaud's Exhibition in London - reminiscent of a William story in its own right! - in the same year), but in other respects the book is the same as the original edition, telling the absorbing and often moving story of a modest and likeable woman who, after her teaching career was cut short by polio in her early-30s, concentrated upon writing, with astonishing success, creating one of the most popular and enduring fictional characters of the 20th century. Teaching's loss was indeed literature's gain...The book also has 16 plates and numerous Thomas Henry illustrations, and details of all Richmal Crompton's works; as well as her 38 William books, she also published over 40 adult novels and 9 books of short stories.

The only mild criticism I have is that Mrs Cadogan makes no mention of the several "Just William" BBC radio series of the mid-to-late 1940s, the stage productions, the three feature films, or the four television series (especially the hugely-successful ones of 1977) which did much to revive and maintain the William (and Crompton) traditions and popularity over the years. Many youngsters were first introduced to William via the radio and TV productions, which led them on to the books.

*The Outlaws and the Wedding Present*



WILLIAM TRIED THE HANDLE OF THE BACK DOOR. IT OPENED.

*A Henry Ford illustration from William the Lawless*

This biography was widely and enthusiastically reviewed in 1986, so I won't take up valuable space by 'gilding the gorgeous lily', except to say that this is surely the model of what a biography should be - readable, entertaining, knowledgeable and enjoyable. Mrs Cadogan is the acknowledged authority on Richmal Crompton and her marvellous 'off-spring', William Brown, and she has the happy knack of wearing her expertise lightly and elegantly.

"The Woman Behind William"? There are surely now two: Richmal Crompton and Mary Cadogan...

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## BABS & CO'S HOLIDAY EXPEDITION

by Margery Woods

### Part One: Chapter 1

"We're here!"

"The Cliff House Archæological Expedition has arrived!" cried the golden-haired Mabel Lynn with a dramatic flourish.

"The Cliff House Gofers, you mean," retorted tomboy Clara Trevlyn.

"Go for this and go for that!" chanted Janet Jordan and Leila Carroll, the American member of the happy chums.

"Come on, girls," laughed Babs, the junior school captain, her blue eyes dancing as she reached up to the rack. "Let's get our gear together."

The train from London had just pulled into Coldburne Station, and already a party of youths were blocking the door as they all attempted to heave their large backpacks out at the same time. A good deal of happy badinage rang through the compartment, bringing amused smiles from some of the adults who had shared the journey, but a small boy was not so happy as he whinged round his young mother demanding ice cream as she endeavoured to collect unnumerable carrier bags together.

"I want to go to Sam's for Tutti-Frutti Glory," he whined, tugging at her sleeve. The harassed mother dropped a carrier and good-natured Marjorie Hazeldine picked it up and helped the woman along the compartment to the other door, seeing her safely out onto the platform with her spoilt offspring and being almost barged over by the plump and solid form of Bessie Bunter who was descending at that moment.

"Here's your bag, my fair and fatuous damsel," chuckled Jemima Carstairs of the elegant Eton crop and gleaming monocle. "Catch!"

Bessie, of course, missed and Marjorie for once ignored the fat duffer's protests and dived back into the train to rescue her own belongings. Mabs was squealing that she hadn't got her camera and Clara was having a tussle with the strap of her sports bag, an article she seldom stirred very far without, and at last they were all out on the platform.

"Right...are we all set, girls?" asked Babs happily.

"We are now," said Clara, pointing. "Here are your missing links. Now don't all cheer at once, girls."

Descending in lordly fashion from the next compartment were three familiar figures not exactly guaranteed to evoke great joy in the hearts of the chums. Two looked ready for Ascot rather than the dig the girls were bound for, all were wearing make-up and nail lacquer, and all wore expressions that could not be interpreted as anything but challenging to Babs' leadership. Lydia Crossendale wore a sleek shirtwaister of apricot silk that enhanced her dark raven-haired attractive looks; Rosa Rodworth, the Stormy Petrel of the Fourth, looked stunning in a rose linen suit, and Diana Royston-Clarke - Firebrand Diana - had chosen to wear the oldest, most worn and faded jeans in her wardrobe teamed with a blue checked shirt and a white bandana confining her shining blonde tresses. Being Diana, she managed to look as if she'd stepped off a magazine cover; she also managed to make her companions appear completely overdressed.

"Well, don't all look so welcoming," she said sardonically. "We're here, all reporting like good little girls, just as Primmy told us to."

"Great," said Clara disgustedly, "you've made our day!"

"And then some," muttered Leila.

"Well, Spartans," Jemima said tactfully, "shall we turn the jolly old tootsies in the direction of the jolly old transport that..." she stopped as Babs gave a startled exclamation.

"Where's Bessie?"

"What? Isn't she here?"

Suddenly anxious, the girls looked up and down the platform. The little station was deserted now apart from themselves, but of the fat duffer there was no sign. "She must have gone out to the coach." Babs started forward and behind her Lydia sneered: "Well you can't have lost her...she's too fat to mislay!"

"Shut up!" snapped Clara. "Somebody see if she's in the buffet while I check the cloakroom."

But they drew a blank, as did Babs when she hurried outside. Nor was she on the bus, aboard which the party of youths were already ensconced in the back seats. A thin, irritable looking man wearing a transport badge clipped to his open-neck blue shirt asked brusquely: "Are you the last lot for the Abbey?" Without waiting for any response he swung himself up into the driving seat of the somewhat ramshackle bus. "Well, come on," he said. "I've got to be back here by one."

Babs hung back. "There's one to come...we're just looking..."

"Lost one already?" The bus engine grunted into life, while a raucous chant of "Why are we waiting?" began from the boys in the rear seats.

"Look, you go on," said Babs, "while I have a quick scout round." She looked pleadingly at the driver. "Just a couple of minutes, please."

He nodded resignedly, and suddenly Jemima pointed at a placard nearby. Against a background of the American flag it announced: Special today.

Hawaiian Glory. 99p. Sam's Ice Cream Parlour. "Methinks you will find our fair Fatima having a quick sample of Uncle Sam's special."

"She followed that infant!" exclaimed Mabs.

"I'll come with you," cried Clara, "it can't be far."

"She might have found a tuckshop," called Janet.

It wasn't far to Sam's inviting establishment, about two doors up the High Stret that led off the other side of the market square. But there was no sign of the truant Bessie. In dismay the two chums looked at each other. Across the square the coach driver gave an impatient hoot and revved his engine more fiercely. Babs came to a decision. "Go back, Clara, no sense in two of us being left behind. I'll look for her...we can't leave her stranded. And explain what happened when you get to the site. Make our apologies and we'll be there as soon as possible." Clara looked ready to protest, and Babs shook her head. "Go on, Clara."

Unwillingly the tomboy moved away, to cross the square and board the bus, which moved off immediately leaving Babs alone in the little market town of Coldburne.

Resisting the impulse to sample the delicious ice confections at Sam's, Babs moved on, uncertain where to start in this town completely new to her but grimly determined to find the missing junior. She still couldn't imagine how Bessie had managed to vanish so quickly, for even now it couldn't have been more than six or seven minutes since they got off the train. And it seemed highly unlikely that she had found another party of youngsters bound like themselves for Amberleigh Abbey and the archæological dig on which the chums were to work as volunteers during the first ten days of the summer vacation.

The chums had nearly failed to make it, all being under the minimum age of sixteen which was stipulated. But because Miss Primrose was involved in the project, after meeting an old colleague at a recent convention of head teachers, and because of most of the seniors had holiday plans fixed, the chums were now hotfoot to aid Primmy's dear friend and the Coldburne Archæological Society's current battle against Progress. Progress being the advancing swathe of yet another motorway across England's green and pleasant land. During the past few years several interesting finds had been made in the area; an ancient bracelet and some coins believed to be of Saxon origin. The little society had done its best to investigate the possibility of an important Saxon settlement slumbering away beneath the lush meadows and verdant countryside of Amberleigh, but their funds were limited and farming interests had not always been amenable to invasion of their land by enthusiastic excavators. Now, surveys and research had confirmed that there was almost certainly some foundation for the society's belief, and this, plus two public enquiries and a strong protest lobby of locals who bitterly objected to having a motorway thundering past their three picturesque black and white timbered villages, shattering the peace of the countryside and changing all their lives, had succeeded in achieving a halt, albeit temporary, to the march of Progress. The society and Primmy and her friend, with the young owner of

Amberleigh Abbey...who also had his problems...had organised a dig at very short notice. Locals had dug into their pockets, facilities had been offered, experts were coming from all over the country, and the Heads at the convention had promised to raise some volunteer labour from their more able and responsible pupils. The dig would go on for most of the summer and if a settlement was revealed the march of Progress would have to be diverted in another direction.

It had taken quite a lot of pleading before Miss Primrose relented, against her better judgement, and allowed Bessie to be part of the team, but only on Babs' promise to be responsible for her. Sadly, Primmy knew her girls!

And now Bessie had made a great start by getting lost!

Coldburne was not very big. Within ten minutes Babs had traversed its three narrow little main streets, found its Olde-Worlde Tearooms, also minus Bessie, and returned to the Market Square, telling herself that she would find Bessie there, probably indignantly looking for them. But she wasn't nor was she within the station. There was nothing for it but to search the town once more and enquire at all sources of comestibles. She glanced into the café, and saw only summer-frocked matrons partaking of coffee and meringues and gossip; but no-one answering to Bessie's description had been in recently. Worried now, Babs made her way back to the ice-cream parlour. Teen-aged boys and girls perched on high stools and cradled tall glasses of multi-coloured cream concoctions. Two young children giggled and slurped a sickly pink mixture through straws, and a small dog of no known breed watched these noisy proceedings hopefully. But yes, instant recognition came into the young assistant's face at the mention of Bessie. Yes, she'd come in for a Hawaiian Glory about half an hour ago. Then she'd got a triple-decker chocolate and vanilla sandwich to take out with her. Babs' expression blanched, despite a certain air of respect on the youth's face as he recounted Bessie's gastronomic capabilities. Babs thanked him and set off across the square, and there was the culprit, woe-begone and frightened, huddled on a bench just by the bus stop.

Bessie! Why ever did you go off like that? Didn't you..."

"Oh, Bib-Babs...I couldn't find you...and the the bus had gone...and..."

Recriminations were useless. Bessie, naturally, had got it all wrong by assuming that the whining child and its mother would go straight to the ice-cream parlour. But they had gone home first, presumably to deposit the shopping. Bessie, whose sense of direction was not nearly as well developed as her appetite, had hung around until they emerged and then followed them back into the High Street, luckily for Bessie no great distance, and found Mecca. She had probably missed Babs by minutes. Typically once she'd found Babs, Bessie's fear vanished and indignation took its place. She was hungry, why hadn't they waited for her, the mean things, and how long would the next bus be?

"As long as buses usually are!" retorted Babs with a bitterness she rarely showed. Enquiries elicited the alarming news that only one bus per day ran

out past the Abbey; the next one was tomorrow morning. A telephone call to the Abbey supplied the information that the site telephone was not yet installed, and only the housekeeper was at home in the Abbey at the moment. No, she didn't know what to suggest but she'd send a message over to the site as soon as she could. Perhaps a taxi would be best...

Coldburne had two cabs, both of which were out, there was a hire car if they had driving licences...It was five miles to Amberleigh Abbey.

Bessie suggested brightly that they go and have a snack at the tea rooms, by which time the taxi might be back. Babs sighed. "No! We walk!"

"Walk?" cried Bessie. "Fif-five miles?"

"Five miles," said Babs firmly. "It's your own fault."

"But I'm hungry," wailed Bessie.

"Tough," said Babs, for once bereft of sympathy. "You've taken enough ice-cream on board to fuel you for ten miles."

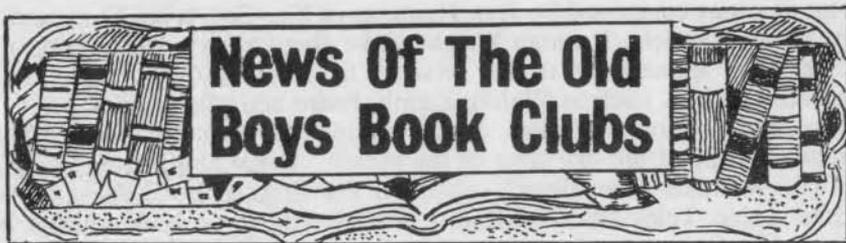
It was a warm clear day, true strawberries-and-cream-in-the-garden sort of weather, and it should have been an idyllic walk along the peaceful winding green lanes to Amberleigh. Babs would have revelled in it at any other time, but Bessie was no walker. She complained every few steps of the way, demanding to have a rest, protesting that she couldn't walk one step farther. Babs kept checking her watch; she reckoned they'd only covered a third of the distance and already it was well over an hour since they left Coldburne behind. The lane emerged from woodland shade into open countryside, farmland to one side and rolling parkland at the other. Within minutes the perspiring Bessie rolled to a halt.

"Oh dud-dear! I kik-can't go another step. Are we nearly there, Babs?" the fat one gasped.

Babs perforce, stopped. "In another three miles we might be," she sighed. "Come on, Bessie."

But Bessie had sunk down on the hilly verge and leaned back against the fence. With another despairing glance at her watch, wondering when, at this rate, they would ever reach Amberleigh, Babs rested her arms on the top bar of the fence and gazed across the countryside. There was a large house in the distance, from which the smooth greensward rolled down to a broad limpid stretch of water, fringed at its far side with woodland. Babs could just make out two figures, a girl and a young man quite near the house, and a terrier dog gambolling about. Faintly across the distance came the sound of the girl's laughter. Reluctantly Babs prepared to get Bessie moving again, then a sudden movement caught her eye. The dog was tearing down towards the lake and with it was a small child on a bicycle. The other two figures appeared to take no notice and the child on the cycle was going ever faster and heading straight for the lake. Suddenly Babs realised that the child had lost control of the bike that was far too large for it. The child screamed at the same moment that Babs vaulted over the fence and tore across the green. Could she reach the child in time?

*To be continued...*



### **SOUTH WEST CLUB**

Bill Lofts started our May meeting with a talk on girls' choices of boys at Greyfriars School and after threw open the meeting for our comments. Mac (E G McPherson) then gave us an amusing story from Nelson Lee featuring the girls from Moor View School. After a delicious tea, Bill concluded the meeting by telling us all about 'Scoops', the first Boys' Weekly to be entirely devoted to Science Fiction stories back in 1934. The Next Meeting will be in Weston-super-Mare on Sunday 3rd October 1993.

### **CAMBRIDGE CLUB**

We had our May Meeting at the St Neots home of member Robert Smerdon. After the short business section was completed, Bill Lofts paid a moving tribute to his friend Leslie Charteris, who died a month ago. Bill then gave a talk about 'Scoops' the short lived science-fiction-for-boys paper. This sole-subject text paper mixed fiction with the occasional scientific fact, whereas the more successful story papers intermingled the science fiction stories with the usual school, sport and adventure story categories. Robert gave an anthology of prose and poetry in his Desert Island Books. A very varied selection indeed, ranging from "The Lord of the Rings" to an Iranian poet.

**ADRIAN PERKINS**

### **LONDON OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB**

The May meeting was held at the Beckenham home of Alex and Mary Cadogan. Bill Bradford and Eric Lawrence recited "You are old, Father William" from Alice in Wonderland and members recalled quotes from

"Alice" in Charles Hamilton's books. Roger Jenkins presented a Greyfriars word search which was won by Mark Taha. Members listened to a new cassette of songs composed by Ken Humphreys The Greyfriars Song and Mr Henry Samuel Quelch. Norman Wright spoke about Sexton Blake, beginning with his first appearance in the Marvel in 1893, and other characters connected with him, such as Waldo, Zenith, Pedro and Mrs Bardell.

The June meeting took place at the Wokingham home of Eric and Betty Lawrence on one of the dry days of the month. Brian Doyle entertained us with "The Wonders of an Hour", sub-titled The English Boys Public School in Films, Stage, Television and Radio. Part 2 will be presented at the July meeting. Eric Lawrence played the piano for us, leaving us to guess the titles and work out the hidden composer, only one member being successful. Eric Fayne got us to work on a blockbusters quiz, and Eric Lawrence on a 'hangman' type quiz. The next meeting is on Sunday 10th July at the Chingford Horticultural Society Hall, London E4.

SUZANNE HARPER

### NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Our Chairman welcomed the fourteen present, with a special welcome to Bill Lofts paying another popular visit to our club. Bill gave a tribute to Leslie Charteris whom he had first met in 1960. Bill had written articles for THE RECORD, the house magazine of Fleetway. "The Saint" was a Fleetway character and from writing about him Bill and Leslie Charteris became firm friends. The author of "The Saint" had a keen interest in the popular papers in his boyhood, including "The Magnet". Bill then went on to tell us something of the workings of Howard Baker Press; how he and Howard Baker had spent many hours in discussion and planning programmes. He then talked about C. Arthur Pearson's "Scoops", the science fiction paper which was first published on 10th February 1934. It had many critics, but quite a number of its productions came true in later years. It had a print run of 100,000 copies but ceased publication after only 20 issues.

Geoffrey rounded off the proceedings by reading a hilarious piece from "Bunter the Hunter" from the Howard Baker facsimile. Our next meeting is on 10th July, a summer break and barbecue at the new home of our Secretary, 147 Thornes Road, Wakefield. We meet from 6.00pm: all welcome to come along, but please bring an item of tuck to barbecue!

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** As well as *Biggles & Co* and the *International Biggles Association*, an informal group of W.E. Johns enthusiasts meets once a year (usually in October at Nottingham). Details can be obtained from: Mrs. Alison Thompson, 2 Homewood Crescent, Hertford, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 1NH. (Please enclose S.A.E.)

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The I.B.A. is the only official organization in the world of people interested in, or collecting, the works of Captain W.E. Johns. It exists some seven years now. In Holland we have over 200 members, and more in other countries. Our "Biggles News Magazine", mostly in Dutch, is published every two months and members can place a free advertisement in it concerning their collections. If you are interested in membership of the I.B.A. please send your full name, address, date of birth and signature, together with £10,00 in cash to:

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