

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 47

No. 563

NOVEMBER 1993

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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THE EDITOR'S CHAT

100 YEARS OF SEXTON BLAKE

The Editor's Chat



This month a large part of the C.D. is devoted to articles and illustrations in celebration of the Centenary of Sexton Blake who is, of course, the most famous and popular of all boys' paper detectives. It is even arguable that Blake is the most written-about of *all* fictional detectives and indeed of all fictional characters. I don't suppose anyone has ever essayed a word count of his adventures from number one in that December 1893 *MARVEL* to today, when articles about him still appear regularly in our own magazine as well as cropping up from time to time elsewhere. His exploits have certainly inspired many millions of words, plus plenty of stage, screen, radio and TV adaptations.

As well as remembering the authors and illustrators who have produced and perpetuated the Blakian legend, it seems appropriate in this Centenary issue of the C.D. to recall members of our hobby circle who have helped to keep the great sleuth's image ever-bright. From the first issue of the C.D. (in November 1946) H. Maurice Bond conducted a Blakian section which was subsequently taken over by Josie Packman. Josie, whose husband Len was a founder-member of the London Old Boys' Book Club, was

until her death a few years ago indefatigable in her championing of the Blake saga. She not only ran *Blakiana* in the C.D. but organized the London Club's Sexton Blake lending library (now ably carried on by Duncan Harper) and we remember with much pleasure her Blake contributions at many meetings. Amongst stalwart past and present-day Blake contributors, special mention should be made of Walter Webb, Jack Adrian (whose recent compilation of stories SEXTON BLAKE WINS is a 'must' for collectors) and J.E.M., whose frequent features in *Blakiana* we so greatly enjoy.

A CENTENARY PUBLICATION

I am very happy to report that the hoped-for Sexton Blake Centenary book *will* be published. Norman Wright and David Ashford have produced a fascinating and wonderfully illustrated manuscript, which John Wernham has agreed to produce under the imprint of the Museum Press. (Further details are given elsewhere in this issue of the C.D.)

THE C.D. ANNUAL

As always I hope to have the Annual ready for distribution early in December; it is already well into production. I have already 'trailed' several items, and now give a further foretaste of some of its 'goodies'.

Last month I reported that our Annual would include a story by Richmal Crompton, the author of the William books. I am now extremely happy to announce that a hitherto unpublished story by the creator of that other illustrious William (the Owl of the Remove) will, like Richmal's tale, be another of the Annual's 'star turns': Frank Richards' *Little Children Don't Tell*, though very different in mood from his Greyfriars stories, shows the insight into the minds of the young that we always expect of him. Tony Glynn has contributed a touching Christmas memory from fifty years ago, with a strong Hamiltonian flavour, Dennis Bird recalls a wide range of extremely popular juvenile reading while Ernest Holman reflects on cinematic delights of sixty years ago, from *King Kong* to *Flying Down to Rio*, and Des O'Leary bids an atmospheric *Goodbye to the Hotspur*. The ever popular Bruin Boys, and many of the other attractive characters with whom they rub shoulders in the RAINBOW, are lovingly remembered by Reg Hardinge, and George Beal has delved into the stories and pictures of the lesser-known but also very appealing paper called FAIRYLAND TALES.

Cliff House and Morcove are also represented: I'll be trailing them more fully - as well as other articles - next month. If you have not already reserved your copy of the ANNUAL please don't forget to send your order to me soon. It costs £9 for U.K. readers and £10 for those living abroad (both prices include post and packing).

I wish you all lots of time for happy reading.

MARY CADOGAN

CENTENARY CALL

by Ernest Holman

The end of the year in ninety three
Holds a most pleasant memory
Exactly one hundred years ago

Marvel came along to show
A name that soon would be well-known
Right from the start this man had shown
Villians that their way was grim
Each time they came into his swim
Later in another paper
Long to tell his every caper
On the way to rising sales
Union Jack took up the tales
So soon his way was very clear

Solving matters far and near
Even the files of Scotland Yard
Xmarked cases that were hard
To them he gave the acid test
On every one he came out best
Now is the moment one and all

Before the days of winter call
Look out your pens in time allowed
And try to do this hero proud
Keep on the tracks that he would take
End up by toasting Sexton Blake



Blake took the paper with a trail of villains, and turned to Oliver. "There's your man," he said sternly. "The man who murdered Mrs. Armitage."

From Penny Pictorial C. 1909



The above illustration was first used in "1/2d Marvel" No. 5 to advertise "The Missing Millionaire" in No. 6. The illustration appeared in No. 6, then again in the 3rd Blake story "A Golden Ghost" in "1/2d. Marvel" No. 11. It was re-used in "U.J." No. 2 in 1894 "Sexton Blake Detective". 46 years later it was used in a reprint of the "U.J." story in the second "Sexton Blake Annual" (September 1940). In the 1960s it was used yet again in "Valiant Book of T.V.'s Sexton Blake" - so it had a good run for its money!

Congratulations to Bob Whiter on his excellent article "Blakiana Bric-a-brac" and his cover of the October 1992 S.P. Collectors' Digest. In this 1993 Blake Centenary year I would like to add some comments dealing with the very first mention of Sexton Blake.

I have before me, the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" nos. 1 to 7, and have examined them carefully to find the first reference to Sexton Blake. There is no such reference in nos. 1 to 4. On the back page of no. 5 is a feature called "The Editor Speaks". Having dealt with various matters concerning his paper, he goes on to say:-

'On this page we are able to introduce you to three of the characters who will figure very prominently in our next number.

In the early part of the next story, a millionaire mysteriously disappears, and SEXTON BLAKE, a very clever and daring detective, takes the case in hand, determined that his investigations shall bring forth fruit.

"It means a race now" he says, 'between my brains and another London Mystery, and I'll back myself to win". Rose Brinton is in reality the daughter of a duke, and

heirss, to great estates, but one night she also mysteriously disappears and SEXTON BLAKE has a double mystery to unravel.

Ernest Truelove is asked by one whom he thought a friend to cash a cheque for £20,000. He wonders at the largeness of the amount, but as a favour, agrees to do so.

Scarcely does he emerge from the bank with the amount in notes in his pocket, than he is arrested.

At this moment SEXTON BLAKE arrives on the scene, and, to his great surprise, he also is arrested. This adds another mystery to the list.

Fresh difficulties arise in every chapter, and how the clever detective surmounts them all, and eventually solves the mysteries, we leave you to find out for yourselves.

The title of the story will be "THE MISSING MILLIONAIRE", and, without fear of contradiction, we say that it will be read by all with unflagging interest from the first time to the last.

THE EDITOR'

A small portrait entitled SEXTON BLAKE DETECTIVE is shown in the bottom right hand corner of the Editor's page.

"HALFPENNY MARVEL" No. 6 contains the Blake Story "the Missing Millionaire" (by HAL MEREDETH) and "HALFPENNY MARVEL" No. 7 contains the sequel to this story, and features the same characters including Blake. It is entitled "A Christmas Crime", and is by the same author, Hal Meredith.

SEXTON BLAKE also appeared in "HALFPENNY MARVEL" No. 11 "A Golden Ghost" by HARRY BLYTH, who I understand also wrote as Hal Meredith.

"HALFPENNY MARVEL" No. 25 (dated 25/4/1894), showed on its back cover a reproduction of the front cover of the "1/2d Union Jack" No. 1, a new companion paper, to be published two days later, on 27th April, 1894. This establishes the chronological tie-up of these two papers. Blake does not appear in "HALFPENNY MARVEL" 25.

1/2d UNION JACK" No. 1 does not have a Blake Story, but does have a full page announcement on the back cover, of the Sexton Blake story to appear in the next number.

"1/2d Union Jack No. 2 contains a story, for a time thought to be the first ever of Blake, called "SEXTON BLAKE - DETECTIVE" Blake also appears in "HALFPENNY MARVEL" No. 33 and "1/2d Union Jack" No. 15.

I have all the above papers, so can vouch for their Blake content. They cover the very first of the long continued Sexton Blake saga.

The first of these papers specifically dated is "Halfpenny Marvel" No. 25 (25/4/1894). Working backwards and forwards for The "Halfpenny Marvel" and using the dates given on the "1/2d U.J.s", the chronological order of the above papers is as follows:-

"HALFPENNY MARVEL"	No. 5 - 6/12/1893	(Announcement of Blake and first portrait)
"	"	No. 6 - 13/12/1893) First Blake Stories
"	"	No. 7 - 20/12/1893) "
"	"	No. 11 - 17/1/1894) Blake Story
"	"	No. 25 - 25/4/1894) No Blake, but back cover depicts front cover of forthcoming 1/2d U.J. No. 1

1/2d UNION JACK No. 1	27/4/1894	No Blake story, but back cover announces Blake in 1/2d U.J. No. 2
1/2d UNION JACK No. 2	4/5/1894	First Blake story in U.J.
HALFPENNY MARVEL No. 33	20/6/1894	Blake story
1/2d UNION JACK No. 15	3/8/1894	Blake story

At the end of 1993, SEXTON BLAKE will have been continuously remembered for 100 years. May he never be forgotten!

SEXTON BLAKE - A CENTENARY CELEBRATION

by Norman Wright and David Ashford

I am delighted to announce that John Wernham, President of the London Old Boys Book Club, has agreed to publish a book celebrating the centenary of that great fictional sleuth. Sexton Blake. The book will be a mix of New text, written by David Ashford and myself, and a number of 'landmark' reprints. The whole to be lavishly illustrated with material drawn from every aspect of Blake's century of detecting.

The main body of text will be a substantial introduction tracing Blake's career from 1893 to date. This will look at his origins and the building up of the Baker Street persona that we have come to know so well. Another section will consider the allies and adversaries and yet another the femmes fatales, with which the saga is liberally sprinkled. The contributors - writers and editors - will not be forgotten and there will be a long section on Eric Parker, the artist who made the image of Sexton Blake as memorable as Sydney Paget made that of Sherlock Holmes. This section will include a number of tributes from colleagues who actually worked with the artist. Blake's appearances off the printed page will not be over-looked nor will the long series of adventure picture strips that ran for almost twenty years in "Knockout".

The reprints will include a very early Blake adventure from the *Halfpenny Marvel*, "The Man From Scotland Yard", featuring George Marsden Plummer, perhaps the most enduring of Blake's foes, and a Sexton Blake adventure strip from an early *Knockout Annual*. The book will be A4 size to give plenty of scope for many of Eric Parker and Arthur Jones' atmospheric contributions to the canon.

It is hoped that everything will be ready for publication in the spring of 1994: not quite in the centenary year, but we feel sure that when it is out you will feel that it was really worth waiting for!

NORMAN WRIGHT

A BLAKIAN PICTURE QUIZ

(Set by J.E.M.)

How many of the characters indicated by an arrow can you identify? You don't have to go back to the original Union Jack and Detective Weekly stories. These illustrations, all by Eric Parker, have appeared much more recently in the Digest.

Clues: There are five villains, three created by the same leading author. The sixth figure? Well.



(Answers on Page 18)

Part 2

Long before he turned the corner into Masters' Corridor Prout became aware of a disturbance uniquely alien to the surroundings from whence it came. Masters' corridor was a place where Greyfriars men trod cautiously. Even Prout's elephantine tread was softened by the carpeted floor. It is true to allow that the frenzied yells of some erring junior undergoing punishment would sometimes jar upon the ear, but even that was mild in comparison to the din that now confronted Prout. It was with shock and anger that he realised that the row emanated from his very own study. The thunder already on his brow from earlier causes intensified as he looked in at the study doorway.

"Coker! Let go of that Remove boy, that Bunter, at once and explain yourself. Bunter, for what purpose have you ventured into my study?"

Coker let go of Bunter as if he had suddenly become red hot. Having taken one look at Prout's thunderous visage Bunter tried to make a bee-line for the door, the passage and freedom. It was just Prout's misfortune that Bunter's foot with all its attendant weight, landed on Prout's pet corn. The next moment the master of the Fifth was executing an excited dance with all the passionate execution of a whirling Dervish. Whether Prout was as wounded as his agonised yell proclaimed Bunter did not linger to find out. It seemed that his feet scarcely touched the floor as he negotiated Masters' corridor at umpteen miles per hour.

Left behind, Coker had the desire to follow, but a restraining and convulsive clutch from Prout bade him stay. Prout had some thoughts to communicate to that ornament of his form, and whilst it was true that the communication entered one of Coker's extensive ears and exited from the other, Prout wound up by giving Coker a Georgic. Which would have been all right if Potter and Greene could have been persuaded to write it. But Potter and Greene had been amongst those who had gathered to enjoy the elusive feast and they, having been disappointed, saw no reason why Coker should not be disappointed as well. From expressive words they proceeded to expressive acts. Kicking Coker could not, of course, make good the missing tuck but, when they left the study to go along to the games room, they felt infinitely better. Coker, on the other hand, felt infinitely worse!

Bunter, having reached the Remove staircase, significantly reduced his rate of knots. Unfortunately for Gerald Loder he was walking down that staircase when Bunter came charging, at a still respectable speed, up. The sound of the ensuing collision brought the startled Removites to their study doors. Bunter, considerably stepping on Loder as he did so, resumed the perpendicular and with renewed impetus escaped to the upper regions.

Having dealt purposefully and eloquently with with Coker, Mr. Prout commenced investigations into the recent trespass of W.G. Bunter. Evidence was plentiful. Clues abounded in their number and variety. Crumbs of cake and flakes of pastry did little to dignify the pattern on the carpet. Fragments of cold veal and ham pie and a discarded chicken bone bore ample testimony to the wideness of Miss Coker's choice of good things for her beloved nephew's delectation. Examination of Bob Cherry's cricket bag

confirmed that it had been used to convey the spread to Prout's study. Armed with that bag, Prout left his own study for that of Mr. Quelch.

Henry Samuel Quelch was not feeling his bonniest that afternoon. He had just completed marking form papers, the last one of which was that submitted by Bunter. Among schoolmasters is an inbred belief that they earn every penny of their salaries. Mr. Quelch had often thought that he earned a lot more, and now was one of those occasions. Bunter's work had never pleased him, but the present effort had out-Buntered Bunter, so to speak. Quelch had, from time to time, counselled Bunter to do better. That counselling had failed and it was now the time to emphasise the spoken rebuke with something a little more efficacious. The Remove master put down his pen and picked up his cane. There came a tap on the study door and Mr. Quelch lay down the cane. Bunter's further education had to be delayed. He gazed with thinly veiled irritation at Prout as the fifth form master made his entrance.

Mr. Prout took a deep breath. Other members of the school staff recognised the sign as a warning that Prout was about to hold forth at great length. Quelch prepared to cut Prout short if need arose. Otherwise, Prout, like the brook in the poem, would go on for ever. For that reason Quelch did not offer his visitor a chair. Standing, Prout would tire quicker than Prout sitting.

"I have come to complain, seriously complain, Quelch about a member of your form, a Remove boy by the name of Bunter. A boy known throughout the school for his outrageous gluttony. On my return from Courtfield this afternoon," Prout's face twitched reminiscently, "I found this Remove boy, this Bunter, being remonstrated with in my study by Coker of my form. It seems that Bunter had purloined a quantity of comestibles from Coker's study and, having conveyed them to my study in this bag - a bag belonging to Cherry, another boy of your form, proceeded to devour them."

"Has Coker made any complaint about this misappropriation of his alleged property?"

"No sir, he has not. But he has expressed to me his desire to deal with the matter himself and from what Coker admitted whilst expressing his wish, there is no doubt in this matter. Mr. Quelch, it was my intention to lay the matter before the Headmaster. Out of consideration for you, sir, a colleague who has seen fit to spurn my advice and counsel--"

Mr. Quelch recognised the signs. He reached for the bell on his desk.

"Please sir, it wasn't me. A-a-at the time Mr. Prout thinks he saw me in his study I was talking to Wharton about games." Bunter had been difficult to locate and Wingate who had conveyed him Quelch's study had given him a couple of swipes for his trouble. On their way, Bunter had observed the figure of Loder lurking in the shadows and had seen the almost wolfish expression of Loder's face - an expression that foretold a high old time for Bunter when next they met.

In Bunter's presence, Prout had made his complaint about Bunter's manifest misdeeds. If Prout over-did it a little it had, of course, nothing to do with the affair at Prout's lecture earlier. Bunter had been heard in defence of himself. He had pleaded that he hadn't known about Coker's hamper which, in any case, was nothing like the ones from Bunter Court, or alternatively, the real suspicion should fall on Mrs. Kebble's cat. Both pleas were disallowed.

"Mr. Prout, you have witnessed the crass stupidity of this boy; his arrant disregard for the property of his school-fellows. Normally I would not plead for leniency in a case or theft, but this is not a normal case of dishonesty. In his obtuseness Bunter has been lost to all the seriousness of pilfering. If you still wish the matter to be placed before the Headmaster, I will not dissuade you. On the other hand, if you are prepared to leave the matter in my hands----"

Prout was a kindly man and a sympathetic one. He could sympathise with Quelch's dilemma for had he not experienced crass stupidity in his own form? Coker, of course was constitutionally incapable of pilfering tuck. Yet Coker was as obtuse as they come. It was rumoured in the Remove Room that Prout's bald patch was the outcome of his tearing out his hair at having Coker in his form. It was part of accepted history that when Coker had got his remove from the Shell Hacker had danced with joy whilst Prout had danced with rage.

"I leave the matter in your hands, Quelch." The master of the Fifth spoke slowly, as though he had some qualification to add. He had.

"I would only stipulate one thing, Quelch: that is that you make Bunter's punishment exemplary. A caning - a severe caning----"

"Yow-wow-wow!"

"I certainly agree with you Prout. A severe caning, a very severe caning - cease that ridiculous noise Bunter - should meet the case. If you are satisfied, Mr. Prout."

"Quite satisfied, my dear Quelch"

Mr. Quelch nodded. In all probability he was grateful for Prout's understanding and shared fully in his colleague's satisfaction. Mr. Quelch picked up the cane and pointed to a chair. Prout and Quelch might both be satisfied, but Bunter did not share in that satisfaction. However, in an imperfect world it is not possible for everyone to be satisfied. Bunter had enjoyed the feast, now came the reckoning which he did not enjoy at all.

It was an exhausted Mr. Quelch who finally laid down the cane. Perhaps he felt Bunter had had enough. Bunter felt he had had more than enough. When he left his form-master's study his progress was slow and painful and accompanied by numerous harrowing yelps..... He was such a pathetic picture of woe that Coker, who called on Bunter later prepared to demonstrate his short way with fags, decided to let the sun go down on his wrath.

Soon after Coker left Bunter's study, Gerald Loder entered it. If Bunter expected any such compassion from the Sixth form bully he was sadly mistaken. Instead Loder took the ash from under his arm. Bunter watched him apprehensively. The next moment those apprehensions were fully realised!

It had been an exciting afternoon for Mr. Prout, but not half as exciting as it had been for William George Bunter. Doubtless there would be other hampers to purloin; other study cupboards to be raided; for tuck would never be safe from podgy paw and capacious mouth. That way lay the future. For the present, Bunter emulated the king, who never smiled again. For the present Bunter realised and ably demonstrated that the way of the transgressor was hard!

MULTI-MEDIA BLAKE

Mr. John Bridgwater has sent us these two pictures from UNION JACK no. 71 of 7th December, 1907.



Mr. C. Douglas Carle as Sexton Blake in "The Case of Colours," the powerful sketch now appearing at the principal theatres of variety in the country. An article illustrated by photographs, entitled "Sexton Blake on the Stage," appears in to-day's "Penny Pictorial."



Mr. Leo Gilbert, the clever young actor who takes the part of Tinkler in the highly successful SEXTON BLAKE sketch, now appearing at the best-known variety theatres throughout the country. An interesting article entitled "Sexton Blake on the Stage" is published in to-day's issue of "The Penny Pictorial." Sold by all newspapers.

Reg Hardinge has provided the picture and sales blurb below, from UNION JACK no. 1286 of 9th June, 1928. He writes:

"Langhorne Burton starred as Blake in six two-reel silent films which went out on general release in 1929. They were: 1) MYSTERY OF THE SILENT DEATH. 2) SILKEN THREADS. 3) THE GREAT OFFICE MYSTERY. 4) SEXTON BLAKE GAMBLER. 5) THE CLUE OF THE SECOND GOBLET. 6) BLAKE THE LAW BREAKER.

Copies of the bust of Sexton Blake that Langhorne Burton is holding were available at most of the cinemas where these films were shown.



SEXTON BLAKE ON THE FILMS!

*Your opportunity to obtain
a large-size, real photo of
Sexton Blake for Sixpence.*

In response to very many paid and unpaid requests of readers, arrangements have been made to supply photographs of the hero of our weekly stories.

The picture herewith is of Mr. Langhorne Burton, the living double of Sexton Blake, now starring in a series of films shortly due for release.

The actual photographs can now be supplied to readers at the low price of 6d. This includes packing and return postage, and is, incidentally, rather below the actual cost of production of these really handsome pictures.

It should be emphasized that they are not reproductions or prints, but real photographic manuscript ten inches high by eight wide—rather larger than the size of this page. They are, as you will realize, eminently suitable for framing.

If you wish to obtain one of these attractive manuscript photos in bulk for your menu and make the presence of Sexton Blake even more real to you, don't neglect this chance. The supply is limited, and applications will be dealt with in rotation.

Send a postal order for 6d. to—

"Sexton Blake,"

an British Film-reel Productions Ltd.,

25, Imperial House, Regent Street, London, W.1—

and don't forget to give your own name and address when ordering.



THE BEST ONE OF ALL

by Edward Allatt

If subscribers to this magazine were asked to submit their ten most favourite series that they had read in the *Nelson Lee Library* over the years I imagine that there would not be many that would coincide exactly, but most probably there would be quite a few who would plump for the same series that they liked the best of all. It is not my intention to submit such a list but to make a few observations on the series that have appeared in that paper. There are quite a few series that I never had the opportunity to read, for instance I never got to read the first 'Northestria' stories, or the 'Communist School' tales so I cannot compare them with series that I have read.

To my mind the short lived *Monster Library* got it right; there were some really fine series reproduced in that magazine. Many of those would be included in several readers lists. For me, if it was a St. Frank's story that was good enough, so in a sense my list would have to be endless because, with a few exceptions, every story was a favourite. Stories of 'lost civilizations' have a long tradition in literature and such tales involving the St. Frank's crowd would probably feature in a good many lists.

The various series that appeared around Christmas time were invariably well written, containing all the necessary ingredients, lonely isolated mansions and castles, snow and ice, ghosts, and other 'things that go bump in the night'. Those tales that took all the characters overseas, usually as guests of Lord Dorrimore, were always a pleasure to read, and educational. The visit to the South Seas I especially recall. Who was it who was blown from one island to another during a typhoon?

The stories which I most enjoyed were those that were written about the school itself and its surroundings, the house rivalries, the japes and pranks. As I reflect down the years it seems to me that the stories that I found the least enjoyable were those featuring 'arch-villains', 'master criminals', and 'mad professors' like Zingrave. Such individuals getting involved with schoolboys lacked credibility. Now I have to make the decision and name my own series that I liked best of all, and it is the one which took the school to Australia and New Zealand during the Australia versus England Test Match series 1928-29. I wonder how many readers will agree with my choice?

Conclusion:

Babs had long since forgotten her headache and bruises. All that mattered was escape, and there had to be another mode of egress from this mysterious old hidey-hole. Memories of the mysteries she and her chums had shared and solved in the past returned, bringing their knowledge and inspiration. Her sense of smell had already detected a smokiness and warmth nearby, so the chamber was somewhere near a fireplace, one still in use. Hence, an occupied house! Slightly hyped now with excitement, Babs giggled aloud as she pictured the reaction of the owner when she eventually cracked the enigma of a secret panel and emerged like a dishevelled being from some realm of fantasy. In the end, she cracked more than the enigma!

The most cunning of all secret panels suddenly yielded up her freedom as it swung with a ghoulish creak out into some room, taking with it a small occasional table, a Dresden shepherdess, a photograph in a silver frame, two books, and a large standard lamp. Aghast at the sounds of damage, Babs stumbled out into the bliss of light, fresh air sweet with the scent of beeswax polish, and the astonished presence of Jack Amberleigh.

The heavy walking stick in his hand wavered to the floor as he took an incredulous step towards the apparition that had materialised into the great hall of Amberleigh Abbey.

"What---? Is it ---?" He blinked hard. "Is it Babs?"

"I'm sorry." For the moment she could only stare at the shattered remains of delicate porcelain lying on the carpet and then try to restore the lamp and table to their places.

He was staring in wonderment at the hidden room and exclaiming at the ingenuity of the panel's construction, which when closed would be completely indistinguishable from the surround into which it fitted. Babs was trying to explain, to give an account of the events that had brought her there, while he could only wonder at the manner of her arrival.

"Didn't you know it was there?" she asked.

"No." He had gone into the hidden chamber and exclaimed again as he saw the black entrance that gaped beyond. "There are several secret passages and cavities, and my grandfather used to talk of a passage underground that was supposed to have led back to the original abbey that stood near here before the Dissolution. This must be it! Oh, I must get torches and---"

Suddenly he turned back and clapped a hand to his head. "Babs---I'm a thoughtless brute! You've hurt your head. Come on, let's get you restored, then you can tell me all about it."

He showed her upstairs to a big, comfortably appointed bathroom, showed her where to find towels, toiletries and the first-aid cabinet, and suggested she have a good soak. "By then I'll have rustled up some brekker---it's Meg's day off---I don't think she'll be up yet---it's not six yet." He grinned. "So you'll have to make do with my cooking. Serve you right, young lady, I've been listening to your progress for the last half-hour and wondering what kind of invader was trying to get in!"

Babs felt much restored after a luxurious bath and shampoo, and made her way downstairs to a very welcome cup of tea, followed by bacon and eggs quite expertly

cooked, toast with lashings of butter and marmalade, then coffee to chase it all. As she recounted more lucidly what had happened.

"You say you think one of the intruders was the blond girl from Raymond Handyl's place?" Jack asked keenly.

"Yes---my eyes had got used to the dark by then and I saw the streak of blonde hair coming out of her dark cap. But it was her voice! She has one of those high, sort of silvery voices, affected, and she cried, 'Stop her, Mig!' as---"

"Mig?" Jack frowned. "Sure it wasn't Rick she called him?" Babs shook her head, straining to recall more details of those frantic moments. "I'm sure it was Mig. Oh, I hope they didn't---"

"So do I." Jack stood up. "Wait here, Babs, I want to make a couple of calls, then we'll get over to the site."

The early morning sun was spreading a glorious haze of apricot across the awakening countryside as Babs paced restlessly to the window, but for once her artist's eye remained blind to its beauty. It was quite a while before Jack returned and said grimly: "Well, I think I've roused a few heads from their peaceful sleep. Right, let's go."

There was little trace of sleep at the site when Jack drove in and braked to a halt. Youngsters hung about in groups, officials clustered together worriedly, and a police car was parked near the main Admin cabin, where more members of the Society were talking to an inspector and his sergeant. Babs was out of the Range Rover almost before it stopped and heads turned. Mabs and Clara were the first to spot their chum, then a spiteful cry rang out and Connie Jackson rushed forward.

"There she is!" she cried dramatically. "This is the girl you want to talk to, Inspector. This is the girl who ran off in the night when the robbery took place."

Babs' face whitened. The jagged cut and bruise stood out vividly on her brow. "You mean---?"

"I mean the torque and the coins have been taken." Connie's eyes were vindictive. "I think you'd better tell us the truth, Barbara Redfern."

A storm of protest broke out from the girls, and the inspector held up his hand. "One moment." He looked at Connie. "Do I understand that you are making an accusation against this girl?"

"I think she knows something about it," flashed Connie.

"You have evidence?" The inspector's voice was rather quiet.

Abruptly Jack stepped forward and placed his arm round Babs' shoulders while a slow hiss came from the chums. Jack directed an icy stare at the Blight before he said: "Inspector, I suggest we adjourn somewhere quiet. I can vouch for Babs, and she may have some very important evidence. But she has been injured, as you can see, while she endeavoured to prevent the robbery."

Babs had to go over her story twice before the inspector was satisfied that she had remembered every detail. It transpired that the chums had already made an exhaustive search of the site and had discovered the cave-in, which the professor had insisted must be roped off until experts decided it was safe to explore. The traces of the attack on Babs had also been pinpointed, there had been a third person in the car, and investigations were already taking place. But the possible identification by Babs was of great value. The inspector smiled. "Thank you, Miss Redfern. I think you'd like to join your friends now."

"And here's Raymond Handyl," said Jack, as they emerged from the Admin cabin. "Let's see if he can throw any light."

The big limousine slid to a stop and Raymond Handyl got out. He looked unusually perturbed and apologised for being late. "I had to see to young Em myself, everybody seems to vanished." He looked accusingly at Jack. "I hope you don't think I had anything to do with this business. I'll admit it's in my interest to clobber the site project, and I can see my own project going up in smoke, but I draw the line at theft."

"We want to interview a young female employee of yours."

"Pattie? The blonde fluff my idiot son brought home and talked me into employing?" Handyl said with arrogant disgust. "I suspect she's a spy in the camp. Don't worry, she'll be found, later if not soon---Em! I told you to stay in the car!"

His abrupt exclamation was ignored by the small ears for which it was intended. A small excited girl in a pale blue track suit was racing across the site, pursued by a very large man of decidedly off-putting mien. She dived past the inspector and flung herself at Babs with cries of delight. A torrent of confidences followed, mainly concerning her sore leg that was nearly better---a track suit leg being dragged up in order to display the said leg---and would Babs come and play with her!

Raymond Handyl frowned. "You know my daughter?"

"Daddy! This girl rescued me in the lake, when I fell off Tammy's bike and---" The child stopped, her small fist going to her mouth as she realised she had said too much.

"In the lake?" Handyl's face stiffened with alarm. "When?"

"Pattie said I hadn't to tell, cos she wasn't watching me."

Suddenly he snatched her up in his arms, glaring at the burly minder who stood by guiltily. "Is this true?" he demanded.

"Perfectly true." Jack spoke up. "I saw it happen. You nearly lost your little daughter last week. You've Babs here to thank that she's safe and sound."

"My God!" Handyl's arms tightened round the child. "It seems I employ lunatics! Babs, you'd better come and work for me. How can I thank you? Is there anything you want? Name it!"

Every moment was making it obvious that Handyl, ruthless as he could be, had a weakness. His adored little daughter was his personal Achilles heel. Babs shook her head. "I'm only glad I was there. But I hope you'll let us finish our work on this site before you take over," she added darily.

He laughed. "I wouldn't dream of taking it over now, dear girl." He set Emma down, then shrugged. "You win some, you lose some. There are other sites. And if I can be of any help, Jack....Metal detectors? You can't let a harvester loose in that field. And you'll need an expert squad on those underground ruins."

"Daddy," Emma piped up, "can we have a party?"

"Of course you can have a party, cherub."

And a great party they had, which was only a prelude to the excitement of that expedition. The metal detectors turned up a fantastic treasure trove, for which Bessie claimed full credit, and the excavation, which was to take two years to complete, eventually revealed not only the foundations of the tenth century abbey but a whole Saxon settlement. The shadow of the motorway faded completely and the treasure trove ensured that Jack's beloved home would remain in his family for a long time to come.

The memories of that eventful holiday remained sweet long after the chums returned to Cliff House. True, there was the reckoning with Connie, but as Clara said, they were innured to that! Laboriously printed notes and lavish gifts from young Em continued to arrive for her beloved Babs --- until the following Easter when there was a

joyous reunion at Amberleigh---when Jack made the attractive Jen his bride---and Emma was the littlest bridesmaid.

ANSWERS TO A BLAKIAN PICTURE QUIZ:

- Top Left: Baron von Kravitch, the last significant creation of G.H. Teed to appear in a series. This appeared in 1933 the first year of Detective Weekly.
- Top Right: One of Teed's most famous villains, Dr. Huxton Rymer, who made his bow in the Union Jack just before World War One. (This portrait was drawn much later for D.W.)
- Bottom Left: Wu Ling, a Fu Manchu type villain introduced by Teed shortly after Sax Rohmer's famous character first appeared 80 years ago.
- Bottom Centre: (Through the keyhole): Dr. Maldoom was the brainchild of George Rochester and appeared in a single D.W. story. Maldoom liked turning corpses into life-like waxworks.
- Bottom Right: The Man Himself, of course! Sexton Blake in pursuit of a wrongdoer about 60 years ago.



SEXTON BLAKE
—a study by
Eric Parker

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A GOLDEN AND A CENTENARY CELEBRATION

by BILL LOFTS

It hardly seems possible, when I only realised it recently, but it is now almost 50 years since I first read my initial Sexton Blake story. That was in December 1943. It was whilst serving with the armed Forces in Burma, and I had no boyhood memories of the character.

Probably my meeting with him is unique amongst his enthusiasts. I was on patrol in the Burmese Jungle on a sort of reconnaissance S.A.S. unit, making way for the main advance to have an easy passage through enemy territory. We had just routed the Japs from a native village when with bren-gun at the ready I entered a native hut, cautious of booby traps. Strewn over the mud floor were a number of paperbacks mostly in Urdu and Japanese. But one was in English entitled The Sexton Blake Library, which I stuffed into the large pocket in my green jungle outfit to read later when I had a chance! To whom it had belonged I could only wonder. Probably a fellow soldier then on his way to help build the fated Burma railroad, never to return.

We made the village our Headquarters, and during my quieter moments I read the well written story, which was quite a contrast from the vast amount of American-type tales then in abundance in the Far East. The story, curiously enough, was set in Burma. It was penned by Anthony Parsons and entitled 'The Secret of the Burma Road' (3rd Series No. 28). Sexton Blake, I noted, like the great Sherlock Holmes lived at Baker Street, London. Not far from where I lived. I had at the age of 10 tried to visit 221b to see Holmes in a pea-soup fog one early evening, and nearly got lost, until a friendly policeman told me to run off home!

On returning to Calcutta and civilisation, I wrote home asking my Mother to send me out any copies of The Sexton Blake Library she found at the Gerald Swan bookstall in our local market. Then I read all these avidly. On returning to England in 1945 via a Hospital ship because of wounds from another arduous patrol, I became very interested in the whole history of Sexton Blake. I met dozens of authors and editors (including the main artist Eric Parker) who were responsible for the production of the Blake saga. Many indeed became my personal friends.

Indeed, it was not all one way traffic in them supplying information, as I also helped those who were still writing with research into Fleetway Publications and I.P.C. Magazines Ltd. - and even helped in their securing important contracts in a T.V. series featuring Sexton Blake.

Mainly in the Collectors Digest I have written hundreds of articles for Blakania since 1951 till the present date, detailing my meetings with various Blake authors, and other personalities in this field.

It is to Sexton Blake that we owe so much, when on his 100th birthday, we congratulate him on a remarkable achievement. I shall remember with affection many of his contributors, now unfortunately all passed on, but never to be forgotten.

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.

Part 5.

In chronological terms. Hamilton's last burning brand was Ralph Reckness Cardew of St. Jim's. Grandson of the rakish Lord Reckness and nephew of the dissolute Lord Lilburne, Cardew derived little positive example from his aristocratic connections. There were elements of both Mornington and Vernon-Smith in his character, but he lacked the stubborn pride of the former and the physical toughness of the latter. His line of airy wit was reminiscent of De. Courcy, but, though capable of good deeds, he did not possess the Caterpillar's innate goodness. The darker side of Cardew's nature gave rise to petty nastiness - but only once did he plumb the depths of real villainy. His spells of dingy blackguardism resembled the 'old' Levison - he needed to break out Occasionally. However, his ingrained laziness prevented him from sustaining good or bad spells for any length of time. Cardew's most consistent quality was his ability to get bored with any situation.



Nevertheless, he is one of Hamilton's most fascinating studies. At first, he appeared to be a nasty piece of work. He was chillingly distant to Gussy (a much better connected distant relative) and downright rude to Digby. Then he behaved insolently to Mr. Railton and snobbishly towards 'Arry 'Ammond. Gussy dropped him; Levison and Clive were not too keen on his addition to their study. Next he fell foul of Cutts, collecting a vicious hammering for interfering when Cutts was bullying Levison minor. Cardew did not sneak on Cutts; but he enjoyed tormenting the Fifth Former by pretending that he would - understandable, but not particularly savoury. Still, there was some good mingled with his unpleasant traits.

The next episode found him insulting Dick Redfern - "a poverty stricken cad". This led to his ostracism by the St. Jim's juniors - an outcome which severely shook his arrogance. Mornington would have carried on regardless; Cardew could not cope with being scorned. He was in danger of drifting into Racke's set; but luck gave him a chance to redeem himself. He blundered into a rag by Redfern on Mr. Ratcliff. Mistakenly accused by 'Ratty', Cardew shielded Redfern and collected a Head's flogging. This aversion to 'sneaking' was a highly developed trait in Cardew.

Fluctuation between 'good' and 'bad' was a regular element of Cardew's behaviour. He developed a contemptuous antipathy for Tom Merry - probably motivated by jealousy. Cardew's upbringing had given him a taste for calling the shots, but he lacked the industry and determination for real leadership. Tom's vigour and instinct for the 'right thing' made him a valued and respected skipper: Cardew had to reflect deeply before he could do 'right', and sustained vigour was always beyond him. Consequently, he clashed more frequently with Tom than with anyone else. Early in Cardew's career at St. Jim's, Tom stopped him from shying a stone at Farmer Grubb. Cardew broke bounds that night, shattered the farmer's window and planted evidence incriminating Tom. Levison exposed him to the Junior School; rather than face the scorn of his peers,

Cardew owned up. From that time, Tom always regarded Cardew with suspicion - a factor which contributed to their frequent differences.

An arrogant disregard of Dr. Holmes' quarantine restrictions (there was scarlet fever in the Wayland district) landed Cardew and the Levisons in trouble. Kildare suggested to Tom Merry that "The Junior Captain should deal with it." Cardew was walloped with a cricket stump until he promised not to break bounds again. (This episode showed that Cardew lacked real toughness; Mornington, in a similar situation, did not give in to Jimmy Silver & Co.)

Shortly afterwards, Cardew was 'do-gooding' for a blind ex-soldier. Then, amazingly in view of future events, he accused Monsieur Morny of theft. It turned out to be a mistake, but Cardew had involved the Head and came close to the 'sack'. The next development placed Cardew squarely in M. Morny's situation.

Lacy, a new boy at Rylcombe Grammar School, had been a contemporary of Cardew's at his old school, Wodehouse. It transpired that Cardew had been expelled for stealing. Cardew contended that he had been "asked to leave" and was innocent: "circumstances" had been against him. Grundy was particularly belligerent about harbouring a thief at St. Jim's and Cardew was sent to Coventry. He took a peculiar revenge by planting a fiver on Grundy and accusing him of theft in his turn. The matter was almost proved; then Cardew revealed the truth. He said it showed that 'evidence' was not always to be trusted - which, he maintained, was the case with his own downfall at Wodehouse. The scheme back-fired; Cardew was understandably, regarded as a devious villain. Eventually, it emerged that a Wodehouse Sixth Former was the real Culprit; Cardew had been covering up for him. Nevertheless, his reputation had accumulated a few more stains.

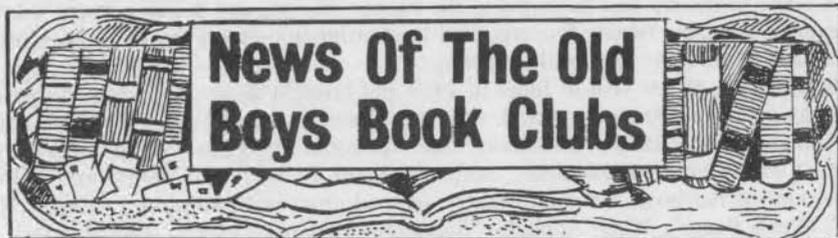
The 'in and out' behaviour continued. Cardew behaved badly towards Paul Laurenz when Commander Durrance, Cardew's uncle, showed an interest in the lad. He picked a fight and was licked; then, investigating Laurenz's background, he became convinced that the boy was Durrance's long-lost son and therefore his own cousin. To his credit, Cardew proved his theory re-uniting father and son and disinheriting himself of £10,000 in the process.

Shortly afterwards, he was indulging his 'rotten' streak at roulette in Tickey Tapp's bungalow. Then the better side turned up again when he joined the Levisons (including Doris) in exploring the St. Jim's vaults. Racke trapped them there. Separated from the brothers, Cardew and Doris had a harrowing time wandering underground. Cardew reassured and supported the wilting girl until they were rescued. As a result, Cardew's reputation rose greatly.

His next escapade involved new boy Kit Wildrake. A challenge 'pact' (for each to take the lead in an excursion) was made. Cardew's 'trip' was a night visit to a gaming club. Wildrake was not keen, but Cardew held him to his word. On their return in the small hours, they were victims of a rag by Monty Lowther and Cardew had decidedly the worst of the experience. (Hamilton often used Lowther for Cardew's 'come-uppances'. After Cardew's snobbish treatment of Redfern, Lowther, in disguise, turned up as Cardew's 'poor relation' and made the over-sensitive aristocrat squirm with embarrassment. As Tom Merry's best pal, Lowther resented Cardew's contemptuous criticisms of his chum. Through his penchant for practical joking, Lowther soon discovered that Cardew had an aversion to personal ridicule. He readily embarrassed Cardew when occasion demanded - and Cardew, usually placid, "often lost his temper) Wildrake annoyed with Cardew, got his own back by taking him on a 15 mile tramp.

Cardew's stubborn streak kept him going, but he lacked the physical strength to endure it. Wildrake, had to carry him home (or at least to the nearest stations).

(To Be Continued.)



MIDLAND CLUB

The Autumn meeting at the Blackheath Library on September 25th, brought together a cheery group of eleven from far and wide.

We were delighted to have Mary Cadogan as our guest speaker. She spoke on what Frank Richards had meant to her and examined the different levels of his appeal - as an entertainment, as an influence for good and as a writer of great skill in characterisation and human observation. Her talk was heard with great appreciation, some discussion followed and, after another of Christine's excellent teas, we set off homeward feeling that, however long the journey, it had been well worth it.

The Spring 1994, meeting has been arranged for Saturday, 16th April.

GEOFF LARDNER

SOUTH-WESTERN CLUB

Eight people assembled at 20, Uphill Road, Weston-Super-Mare, on Sunday, October 3rd, to enjoy the chairmanship of Bill Lofts and the generous hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Salisbury and Tim.

Between Bill's two talks, on the Greyfriars maps and on the history of Sexton Blake, Laurence Price read two of Frank Richards' Herlock Sholmes stories and E. Grant Mcpherson gave an amusing account of his recent experiences in hospital. It was an afternoon of rich variety and much enjoyment.

We next meet on Sunday, 8th May, 1994.

GEOFF LARDNER

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Saturday, 9th October saw the Annual Lunch at our club and it was a very cheery party that assembled at "Under The Clock Tower" in Wakefield in the presence of our President Mary Cadogan and Vice-President Anthony Buckeridge. All twenty five present enjoyed a delicious lunch in our private and impressive dining room.

The afternoon was spent at the new and beautiful home of our secretary. The pride of place - certainly in Geoffrey's eyes - was the new library and it was a credit to the builders. Vera's hospitality and delicious home-baking and afternoon tea were as splendid as ever.

A warm welcome was extended to the twenty five present at our evening meeting (not exactly the same twenty five who had been at lunch as some could not stay for the evening and some came just for the meeting).

Mary spoke of her visit to India in 1980 and brought along reminders of that trip. As it was over the Christmas period, she had wanted to take things that would remind her of the traditional British Christmas. She had taken along seasonable items to read, copies of which were passed round. Although Frank Richards had never been to India, his account of the boys' adventures there seemed amazingly accurate. "Happy Extra Mag", "Peg's Paper", "C.D. Annual", "Schoolgirls' Own Library", "The Magnet" - all helped her to make her not so homesick. An unusual but fascinating talk from Mary.

Eileen Buckeridge spoke about "Living With A Humorist" and declared that a humorist really must be a pessimist, seeing all the things that could possibly go wrong in the normal events of life. She mentioned real-life incidents and how Anthony had used similar situations in one of his stories.

He had for example been in the fire service for a short period which was humorously reflected in a story.

Eileen's talk was informative and amusing. To conclude and to respond to popular request, Anthony Buckeridge read a hilarious incident from "According to Jennings": an alarm clock bought by the boys as a presentation to Mr. Wilkins suddenly went off in the middle of one of Wilkie's lessons, causing confusion and mayhem - proof that even the simple, innocent and well-intentioned things of life can go wrong!

Saturday, 9th October was a day that will be remembered by many for a long time, and we look forward to something similar next year.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR



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Four Sexton Blake Annuals were published, most of us know that, what most enthusiasts cannot agree on is the year of the Annual. I have used my own collection for research, and the following findings. I think enough information has been collected to place the Annuals in the year they were determined for.

I am using Editor's blurb published at the time of issue. Using this as guidance I would think this solves "The Great Sexton Blake Annual Mystery - What Was The Year."

SEXTON BLAKE ANNUALS (4) (undated-card covers)

Checklist of some of the publishers blurb & adverts. This will confirm when the Annual was issued, and the year of the Annual determined.

1. **SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1939.** (issued autumn/winter 1938 for 1939) cost 3/6d. Cover: Blake & Tinker with Pedro following a scent along the pavement by Eric Parker. First story: The Sundowners Secret by George H. Teed.

Checklist/Adverts

Thriller No. 506	October 15th 1938	picture of Annual & blurb	page 381
Thriller No. 507	October 22nd 1938	picture of Annual & blurb	page 407
S.B.L. No. 645	November 3rd 1938	picture of Annual & blurb	page ii
Thriller No. 510	November 12th 1938	blurb	page 479
S.B.L. No. 650	December 1st 1938	blurb	page 89
Thriller No. 514	December 10th 1938	picture of Annual & blurb	page 572
Thriller No. 515	December 17th 1938	blurbs	page 603/4
Thriller No. 516	December 24th 1938	picture of Annual & blurb	page 624
Thriller No. 517	December 31st 1938	picture of Annual & blurb	page 649

(no Sexton Blake Annual issued 1939 for 1940)

2. **SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1941.** (issued autumn/winter 1940 for 1941) 160 pages. cost 3/6d. Cover: Blake on the telephone, Tinker & Pedro looking on by Eric Parker. First story: The One Who Knew by Anthony Parsons.

Checklist/Adverts

S.B.L. No. 736	January 1941	picture of Annual & blurb	page ii
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3. **SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1942.** (issued autumn/winter 1941 for 1942) 160 pages. Cost 4/- Cover: Blake & Tinker behind archway, waiting for chasing arabs by Eric Parker. First story: The Riddle of The Cross by Gilbert Chester.

Checklist/Adverts

S.B.L. No. 5	August 1941	picture of Annual & blurb	page iiiii
S.B.L. No. 9	October 1941	picture of Annual & blurb	page iiiii
S.B.L. No. 10	October 1941	picture of Annual & blurb	page 90
S.B.L. No. 11	November 1941	picture of Annual & blurb	Page iiiii
S.B.L. No. 12	November 1941	picture of Annual & blurb	page 90

*Also on back cover of the Sexton Blake Annual; publishers advert for Knock-Out Fun Book for the year 1942.

4. **SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1943.** (issued autumn/winter 1942 for 1943)

First Story: Under Sexton Blake Orders by John Hunter.

Checklist/Adverts

S.B.L. No. 31	September 1942	blurb by The Editor	page 96
S.B.L. No. 32.	September 1942	blurb by The Editor	page 94

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Editor's blurb of January 1941 for the 2nd SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1941 (illustrator Eric Parker)

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SEXTON BLAKE Annual

4/-

Editor's blurb of November 1938 for the 1st SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1939 (illustrator Eric Parker)

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★

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SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL

Obtainable from all Newsagents and Booksellers.

Editor's blurb of November 1941 for the 3rd SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL 1942 (illustrator Eric Parker) (taken from back cover of S.B.L. No. 11)

Only recently has the sad news come through: Stan Knight, esteemed Senior Vice-President of the Midlands O.B.B.C. passed peacefully away last October in retirement in Gloucestershire. Despite almost total blindness depriving him of his beloved reading, Stan remained faithful to the end to his life-long enthusiasm for the old papers and his friendship with all who enjoyed such interests with him.

More than twenty-five years ago, there was scarcely a monthly meeting of the Midlands Club without correspondence from Stan, who, being unable to travel up to Birmingham personally made doubly sure there was an enthusiastic letter - more often than not, plus a 'little something' for Club funds - to put before appreciative assembled members. His generosity and ever-willing help to fellow enthusiasts was legendary. Stan was always prepared to lend from his own collection (largely housed at the Cheltenham premises of a certain renowned gentlemen's outfitters, the manager of which he was for many years!). Indeed it was entirely due to his personal kindness that I was able to borrow and read all the B.F.L. Captain Justice books published before I became a regular MODERN BOY reader back in 1935. It was typical of Stan to have presented me with a much sought after B.F.L. from his collection to complete a series for me.

It was great privilege to have been his friend. As the Bard of Stratford put it: "Oh good old man, thou art not for the fashion of these times!"

R.I.P. old friend.

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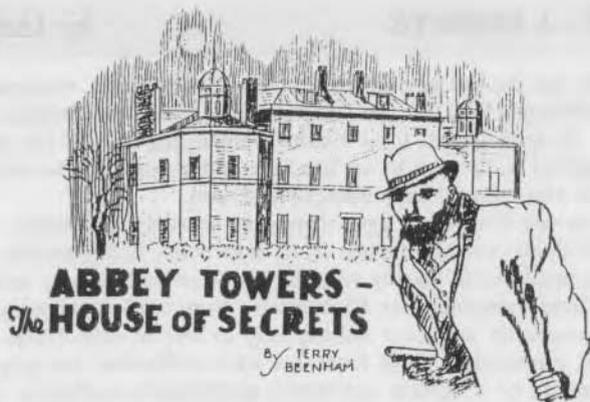
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Over his long career Sexton Blake found himself in many desperate situations in all parts of the world.

I have read and enjoyed many of his adventures but, without hesitation, can say that the narratives which give most pleasure are those adventures recorded by the author G.H. Teed, involving Huxton Rymer and Mary Trent in settings around the East End of London and Rymer's residence at Abbey Towers near Horsham in Sussex.

Rymer, the criminal adventurer, has a special authority and attraction about him. He exudes a brooding power, strength of character and determination in all his intelligently conceived criminal activities. He is a master of the grand scheme but also minute detail. He is not a cardboard cut-out character reacting to strings pulled by the author, but well-rounded and three dimensional.

Huxton Rymer has a beautiful confederate, Mary Trent, who is faithful but is well able to look after herself. Mary Trent is entirely feminine and uses her charms to gain advantages in difficult situations.

The bond between Huxton Rymer and Mary Trent is recorded as an enigmatic loving relationship, like that of an engaged couple. However, words of affection spoken are restrained. There is no term of endearment more intimate than "old boy" or "dear". Both Sexton Blake and Tinker are fully aware of Mary Trent's attractive face and figure and have, on occasion, been duped by her when she has used her charm to further yet another of Rymer's schemes.

Rymer has been known to show interest in other women but always seems more than pleased to return and continue the long standing loving relationship with Mary Trent.

Eric Parker's illustrations help to provide additional roundness to G.H. Teed's characters. While watching television recently I became aware of similarities in appearance between Pamela Armstrong and the illustrated Mary Trent. Ms. Armstrong also displays cool intelligence in the way I imagine Mary Trent would have done.

Huxton Rymer is a retired surgeon, eminent in his field. He has great intelligence and often uses his brainpower to create criminal organisations to carry out his masterful schemes. Small groups of crooks assembled and strictly disciplined by Rymer have been formidable opponents to Sexton Blake over the years.

Huxton Rymer has even had the temerity to set himself up as a Consultant in criminal matters and for a fee or a "cut" will offer an advice only service or personal involvement.

The pen of author G.H. Teed has created a very clear and long standing permanent home for Rymer at Abbey Towers - just a reasonable car drive from London to Horsham in Sussex.

Whenever I am in the vicinity of Horsham on my own journeys I cannot help but think of Rymer's nearby residence and wonder what sort of reception I would get if I attempted to call in!

After entering through the big double outer gates and passing by the small stone lodge alongside I would have to be careful to keep to the gravel drive while on my way to make enquiries. The extensive grounds of Abbey Towers are notorious for concealed wires, traps and devices in the shrubbery which, on being disturbed, give a signal to the house as Blake has discovered over the years when trying to penetrate under cover of night.

Shortly after passing the entrance lodge I would probably get a brief but first full glimpse of the mellowed stone house. Eventually the path goes over a little stone bridge spanning a stream. As I approach the house I would see the distinctive towers beyond which would be the old stables which Rymer had converted into garages.

Peel, the dignified butler in charge at Abbey Towers, would open the door of course and no doubt inform me that his master "Professor Butterfield" (Rymer's alias identity) was "not available" or "away on business".

Peel is always shown as either unable or unwilling to give any clues to the whereabouts of his crook master. Whether he really knew the true identity of the professor will always remain in doubt. Blake suspected that he did not.

Rymer has a well equipped laboratory there with a false wall operated on well oiled machinery which opens with a slight whirring sound to reveal a secret retreat. This comprises a very comfortably furnished underground flat, well stocked with food and drink and suitable as a "bolt hole" for several weeks if necessary whenever Rymer has to lie low. Being underground there is, of course, a need for ventilation and this has been achieved by a scientific system which Rymer had perfected.

Abbey Towers has been associated with Huxton Rymer as his permanent country residence for a very long while. As such, if it ever came on the market, it would be the very sort of property to be eventually purchased by the National Trust and preserved for all time.

As a current National Trust member and avid reader of Huxton Rymer's adventures and career I would be very keen to spend a day at Abbey Towers, go on a guided tour of the house and learn even more about its hidden secrets and then, before departure, buy souvenirs of my visit at the gift shop! Imagine a treasure house of originals and facsimiles of Union Jacks and SBL's, replicas of the SEXTON BLAKE bust, and the SEXTON BLAKE card game, videos of SEXTON BLAKE films, wall mounted figurines of BLAKE'S most formidable foes like PROFESSOR KEW, WU LING and HUXTON RYMER himself, and beautifully framed enlargements of ERIC PARKER illustrations.

Oh well, one can only dream!



Menace lurking in the shrubbery



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