

— STORY PAPER —

# COLLECTORS'

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# DIGEST

VOL 52

No 624



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# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by  
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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

S.P.C.D. Edited and Published 1959 - January 1987 by Eric Fayne

VOL. 52

No. 624

DECEMBER 1998

PRICE £1.30



fortunate we are in still having access to the fine tales and characters which were created long ago by the authors of our favourite story-papers.

This is a time for remembering these greatly talented writers, as well as other absent friends from our hobby circle. It is also a time to welcome our new subscribers, and for me to convey my warm and deep thanks to long-standing readers of the C.D. whose continued support and letters of encouragement reward my editorial endeavours. Grateful thanks are, of course, also due to those who have contributed to our magazine during the year. Happily the stream of articles, stories and pictures never dries up: the old papers continue to stimulate fresh insights and discoveries. Once again

Once again it has been my happy task to put together a Christmas number of our magazine which, I trust, will bring to each of you a touch of the true spirit of the festive season. How



I would like to thank our printers - I am very indebted to all the staff of Quacks in York for their constant and friendly help.

It now remains for me simply to wish all readers the compliments of the season. May Christmas bring you shining joys and may the New Year bring fulfilment and happiness.

MARY CADOGAN

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## IN THE RUN-UP TO CHRISTMAS

by Ted Baldock

From time immemorial - so it seems - Harry Wharton had been joined by the other members of the famous Co. for a few days at Wharton Lodge during the vacations. On these traditional sojourns they had been accompanied by an appendage, a plump addition usually uninvited, not that this rather important fact cut any ice whatsoever with Billy Bunter, he being quite impervious to anything which might prove disagreeable to himself. Of the effect upon his friends, or indeed upon any of the inhabitants of Wharton Lodge he gave not a thought.



For Wells, the Colonel's butler, life at the Lodge had proceeded in a very even tenor for many years. Wells knew the Colonel and the Colonel knew Wells. They suited each other. Mutual respect existed between the old soldier and his subordinate. Wells had a wide range of responsibilities far beyond those usual in normal butling practice. The Colonel left many things entirely to his discretion, such was his confidence.

On more than one occasion Wells had seen fit to assert this privilege when Harry Wharton and his chums, and the appendage aforementioned, had been spending the 'Vac' at the Lodge. Outrageous though it might appear to Bunter, Wells had, following a series of exasperating exchanges with him, so far forgot the canons of reasonable butlership as to waylay the fat Owl in a quiet and convenient corner. There he twisted Bunter over a plump knee and administered what may be described as a most undignified but richly deserved spanking. Bunter's dignity and ego suffered considerably as, in an equal degree, did his fat person. Wells experienced a feeling of well-being, of a necessary duty well performed.

There had been other painful incidents - painful for Bunter, that is. One occasion involved John the footman. John, a very commendable young man, had been in the Colonel's service for a considerable time and was highly thought of both above and below stairs. The unhappy details leading up to the unfortunate incident need not be dwelt upon at length. We know that Bunter's general demeanour towards menials left much to be desired. The culmination of a series of rudely Bunteresque incidents was reached when

John, feeling himself thoroughly justified, had actually kicked the fat junior in a most vigorous way. Bunter's roars of protest brought a strangely muted reaction from above stairs. Wells had, for the sake of formality, 'carpeted' John and given him to understand that whatever one's feelings one should never, etc. etc. . . . As 'wiggings' go it was an exceedingly minor affair. In fact John was barely aware that he had received a 'wiggings' at all, so mild were these structures of Wells! "Be a little more circumspect next time, John" he had said. Then, to John's amazement, Wells had placed a hand upon his shoulder and said: "You know, that young boulder is really not worthy of our notice. Be as civil as you can and - well - try to ignore him!"

What Bunter would have made of this advice from two servants would, no doubt, have been quite enlightening.

Wells felt further moved to say, "John, today you have achieved something I have long wished to do myself. Between ourselves, may I congratulate you."

Colonel Wharton may or may not have had cognizance of the affair. In any case he said nothing, which most probably signified his approval.

A brief final 'snapshot' perhaps conveys something of the peaceful and timeless quality of life at Wharton Lodge - or is this the quiet before the storm?

Wells was, as usual, portly and imperturbable: he stood surveying the general scene over which he had been the major-domo for more years than he cared to recall. The hour was early and John the footman was under the butler's supervisory eye as he performed one of his many early morning tasks, before the arrival at breakfast of the Colonel and his sister Amy.

In his hand Wells held a small bundle of letters. It was his habit to place these by the respective places at table for perusal by the family during breakfast. One may happily designate Wells as the Beau Ideal of butlers: he saw to it that everything, even down to the distribution of the morning mail, was performed with the smooth precision of a well-oiled machine. This suited Miss Amy and the Colonel, whose whole career and retirement had been organised with military exactness.

Now, not for the first time, Bunter had happened - or was going to happen sometime during the day . . . So said a dog-eared and grubby missive lying by Harry Wharton's plate. The Colonel grunted, Aunt Amy sighed, and an expression which boded anything but a cheery welcome permeated the face of Harry Wharton.

In the background Wells caught John's eye with a meaningful glance. A poet has said: "If winter comes, can spring be far behind." That glance of Wells seemed to opine "If Bunter comes, can kickings be long delayed."

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## PLEASURES RECALLED

*Still I seem to tread on classic ground.*

(Addison)

In retrospect it is difficult to think of Christmas without recalling those wonderfully ornate 'Christmas numbers' of the *Magnet* and *Gem*.

These two publications seem to have been essential to the enjoyment of the festive season. Always they were heralded in the editors' chat in issues several weeks before the



A Complete Story-Book, Attractive to All Readers.

great day. That they would be double-sized we knew from past happy experience. Also that they would be filled with thrills, adventure, fun and laughter, and that our long time heroes Harry Wharton and Co. (and Billy Bunter) would be engaged in a double-length school and holiday mystery.

The covers of these Christmas numbers were a joy, depicting snowy vistas with the Remove fellows battling through snow-storms with heads bent against the blast and collars upturned; or jolly interiors exuding warmth and comfort, usually in the *Magnet* at Wharton Lodge or, if in the *Gem*, at Eastwood House, home of the redoubtable 'Gussy'.

One recalls jolly evenings when we devoured our Christmas numbers in front of a real old fashioned log fire which crackled merrily. Bedtime came all too soon on these occasions. There was, however, solace in knowing that in the near offing loomed the new 'Holiday Annual' which was sure to appear on Christmas morning.

I frequently ask myself how it is that those issues which so enthralled long ago still manage to retain such a strong appeal decades later. Here lies a touch of magic, quite unexplainable yet very real.

Tennyson has said: "Again at Christmas did we weave the Holly round the Christmas hearth". It may be said with similar conviction that Frank Richards and the wonderful Christmas *Magnets* and *Gems* weaved an equally powerful spell over our imaginations.

The festive season without our double issues was something we could not imagine. Were they not the very essence of our enjoyment of the holiday? And even now we catch some fleeting glimpses of that long ago era and feel the excitement their appearance always generated.

(Ted Baldock)

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**WANTED:** All pre-war Sexton Blake Libraries. All Boys Friend Libraries. All comics/papers etc with stories by W.E. Johns, Leslie Charteris & Enid Blyton. Original artwork from *Magnet*, *Gem*, *Sexton Blake Library* etc. also wanted. I will pay £150.00 for original *Magnet* cover artwork, £75.00 for original *Sexton Blake Library* cover artwork. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 EASTBURY ROAD, WATFORD, WD1 4JL.  
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# Christmas Greetings From Your Many Chums





## EARLY CHRISTMAS TALES

by Derek Ford

Sexton Blake failed to appear in the first "Xmas Double Number" of the *Union Jack* dated December 12, 1896, and numbered 86, but was in a full-length case in number 88, entitled *The Living Picture*. In the second Christmas number, 138, the main story was *The Legend of Ravenswood* by S. Clarke Hook. Blake took second billing in *Bravo! Blake* by W. Shaw Rae, in twelve pages. It was a sort of reverse "Kind Hearts and Coronets".

On a summer morning, Blake leaves his chambers at Norfolk House and, shortly afterwards, coming towards him, are two men who suddenly fall in a heap on the pavement, victims of an electric leak from wires supplying a mansion. His stout cherry stick drags them from the plate on which they lie, not without some shock to himself.

Blake then recognises one as Everton Major: "Why, it's Sexton Blake!" cried the lad, with a gasp. "Old 'Bravo! Blake' as we used to call you." Sexton Blake, we were told, had been educated at the public school of Ashleigh, where Harry and Frank Everton were in lower classes. Blake, now seven-and-twenty, had not seen Frank since leaving the school at eighteen.

Blake and Harry arrive at Everton Towers in a thunderstorm. There they find Harry's father struck down by lightning in his study. Later Blake takes his camera and "directs one of the expiring sun-rays full into the eyes of the dead man". The enlarged photograph of the retina shows cousin Rawal standing with his hand on a powerful electric battery. Then said uncle Sir George, "For the sake of the family name and honour, we must never breathe such a suspicion", to which Harry agrees. Blake then warns: "Three weeks ago there were four lives between Rawal Everton and the Everton succession. Now there are but three."

Soon there appears to be only Rawal left, but Blake has rescued Charlie, the youngest, from drowning and Frank from a cliff fall. Both 'accidents' were engineered by their cousin. Blake has hidden Charlie and Frank away. Then there is poison for Harry, but Blake has arranged with Professor Mortem to put Harry into a cataleptic stupor and he is rescued from the coffin to confront Rawal, with his two brothers, after the "funeral". Blake denounces Rawal as an impostor and thrusts the photograph of the eye of his 'uncle' at him; Rawal then breaks down, presses a spring on a large signet ring which he wears and drinks the poison from it.

Incidentally, as a sales-increasing technique, the editor offered a prize of half-a-guinea to the reader who collected the largest number of the line "Special Christmas Double Number" cut from the cover by December 19th.

In the second Christmas number (191) with its main story "Beset by Foes" by Captain Spencer, Blake appears in a more seasonal tale: *A Christmas Clue*, written anonymously. Operating from rooms in Arundel Street, Strand, with assistant Watson, Blake is investigating the murder of John Dalton, groom to Lord Dalsmere, in the village of Marville. Blake finds marks on a post in the fence, letters reading "DOOBRA" at the scene of the crime, scrawled by the fast dying victim. Missing is the valet to Lord Dalsmere, Alfred Dubray, otherwise the notorious swindler Paul Delavine. On the train to Dalsmere, Blake finds that Delavine is in the next compartment. Clambering along the footboard of

the train to Delavine's compartment, he finds that Delavine has done the reverse. On the platform Delavine, with Blake's bag, waves his card and warrant and has Blake arrested and taken to the police station by a bogus policeman. Blake finds himself in a cell in handcuffs on Christmas Eve.

Chapter Five quickly clears the case up when Watson and the real constable escape from the next cell. Blake finds his bag intact and an envelope giving "P.D.'s" Strand address. After a miserable Christmas keeping watch, the new year dawns with the arrest: "Secured by the aid of two police constables, to whom he showed his warrant, and explained the curious difficulty he was in".

This Christmas I shall be re-reading two Gilbert Chester casebooks. "The Paper Salvage Crime" (3/30) with its roots back in Napoleonic times, the murder by a highwayman, and an 1805 receipt written in a copy of *Compleat Angler*. Snow falls on the cover of *The Kidnapped Pensioner* (3/64): old Isaac Yeo with his hazel stick is seeking the well in ruined Kidner's Keep, with a menacing pair in the background. Pedro makes a welcome appearance. And there is a winter mystery in *The Confiscated Ship* (3/110), about the ship *Tutakhamen*, worth a million pounds, lying in a ship-breaker's yard.

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**A REMINDER to order your C.D. ANNUAL** if you have not already done so. The cost, including postage and packing, is £11.00 for U.K. readers and £12.50 for those who live abroad. It is a truly bumper edition this year, bigger than ever. Amongst items not yet 'trailed' are a seasonable story by Margery Woods featuring Greyfriars and Cliff House characters; Des O'Leary's lively study of the *Hotspur's* The Big Stiff; Dennis Bird's article on the appealing *Schoolgirls' Weekly* character, Denise the Dancer; a historical adventure by Martin Waters and a new look by Laurence Price at H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. For good measure Donald V. Campbell presents us with Dr. Nandu Thalange's diagnosis of William Brown's physical and mental make-up . . .

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**Does any collector** have duplicate pre-war comics/story papers they wish to sell or exchange? I have various duplicates, e.g. "Champions", "Nelson Lee Library", O/S N/S series, Sexton Blake Library 2nd, 3rd series, various others. Specially wanted Christmas issues. Ken Townsend, 7 North Close, Willington, Derby DE65 6EA. Tel: 01283-703305.

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**MAGNETS, LEES, BFLs,** etc. for sale; also single issue Magnets and Gems disbound from Baker volumes. SAE for list to Neil Beck, Ivymead, Castle Road, Pevensey, East Sussex BN24 5LG.

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## BLACK, WHITE AND GRAY

by Mark Caldicott

### Part Ten - The Desperado of St. Frank's

In Vivian Travers, Brooks has created a complex character. He is no longer using a simple set of rules to distinguish the decent fellows from the bounders. With Augustus Hart and Ralph Leslie Fullwood the story was of the rejection of all evil for an embracing of all good. Travers has been expelled for gambling, but apparently has always been a decent fellow, albeit with a devilish streak. The picture is no longer black and white.

And there is a paradox. The Travers of the Boot-Boy series is, I would assert, one of Brooks' better characterisations and one which foreshadows the future direction of his literary career. At the same time and contrary to this, the creation of the Travers character is almost accidental - it is a product entirely of the needs of the plot.

Here we have a valuable insight into the essence of Brooks' writing. No other author's writing is so totally subsumed to the development of the plot as that of Brooks. All his characterisations, his scene setting and his descriptive passages arise from the needs of his carefully structured plots.

To demonstrate this claim one has only to look at Travers' next starring role. He is the hero of one of the last St. Frank's stories, published after the *Nelson Lee Library* had ceased to exist and appearing in the *Boys' Friend Library*. "The Schemer of St. Frank's" (*BFL* 435, 07-Jun-34) is centred on Travers the speed merchant. His reckless but expert handling of his motor bike was developed in the Boot-Boy series and here it is the mainspring of another minutely-plotted story. In "The Schemer of St. Frank's" is revealed one of the consequences of Travers' obsession with speed and love of danger. While Travers himself revels in the inevitable risk to his life, it is a source of worry to his parents. The story begins with a horrific accident which nearly robs Travers of his life. This is the last straw - and his father bans him from riding any vehicle at speed. Disobedience will result in Travers' withdrawal from St. Frank's and his installation in his father's city office.

In the impending absence of Nipper, Travers has become captain of the cricket team. Travers, we know, no longer occupies Study A and since the previous adventure Bernard Forrest has managed to wangle his way back into St. Frank's and is once again leader of Study A. Forrest is keen to get into the cricket team (for the purposes of this story the cads of St. Frank's have developed an interest in cricket) and Travers rejects him because - wait for it - Forrest smokes and is therefore not sound. So much for not prejudging fellows who smoke. This is now 1934, when anyone who is anyone on the cinema screen is puffing away, the cigarette is the ultimate fashion accessory and governments are encouraging

smoking as a means of tax revenue rather than issuing health warnings. Nevertheless for the purposes of this story we are back to the time when smoking affects one's ability to play sport. Travers himself declares that he has ceased to smoke since he became cricket captain and that Forrest will not be picked for the team.

Forrest himself has other ideas. Travers, in a chivalrous and selfless act, rescues Irene Manners from serious trouble by giving her a lift on a motor bike. He is seen by Forrest who then uses his knowledge to blackmail Travers into selecting him for the cricket team, not because Forrest is threatening to expose Travers, but rather that he is threatening Irene's future. Travers capitulates for the honour of a lady and faces a storm of protest, particularly from Handforth whom he has dropped to make way for Forrest. But Forrest, as it happens, plays well and the dust settles.

Forrest, encouraged by the success of his first blackmailing ploy, offers to get his worthless chum Gore-Pearce into the team for money. This is too much for Travers, who manages to escape from this predicament by relinquishing the captaincy back to Nipper. Then, after Forrest blackmails Irene into having tea in his study by an equivalent threat to expose Travers, a plan which is unwittingly upset by Handforth's fists, Travers and Irene discuss their mutual problem and decide to stand their ground. Travers points out to Forrest that his blackmailing is a two-edged sword - he may be able to get Travers and Irene expelled, but when the other fellows realise what has happened they are certain to make Forrest pay for his evil deed. Thus the threat is neutralised for the time being.

Handforth - it would be Handforth - starts a fight during a cricket match at River House school. The outcome is that the St. Frank's cricket XI is banned from representing the school. Forrest takes over the cricket team while Nipper organises a 'secret' team. In order to preserve the name of the school Nipper kidnaps Forrest's team and the 'unofficial' XI take their place (using their names) in the match against the prestigious Brent School, winning a great victory. Forrest and his fellow players keep quiet in order to take the credit for the victory on their return, but then Nipper and Jerry Dodd arrange for them to play an Australian XI knowing that Forrest cannot back out of the match and is certain to be made to look a fool.

Forrest, knowing he has been cornered into a potential disaster and believing Travers is at the root of it, fakes an emergency call from a hospital saying Travers' father won't be coming to the cricket match because he has been injured in a car accident. He then offers Travers the loan of his motor bike to rush to the hospital. Travers, of course, believing this to be an emergency, takes up the offer. When Travers Snr. arrives to watch the match Forrest informs him that Vivian is out joyriding on a motor bike. Forrest has baited the trap successfully, he thinks, but the day is saved because following a disastrous performance by Forrest's team, the old XI are immediately reinstated and a new match commences. Travers is only able to get back in time to play by burning up the road from the hospital, but then having made it he turns in such a good performance that his father, in pleasure at his son's play, relents and Travers' motor cycling is reinstated.

In this story there are elements of the old Travers. He is as urbane as ever and is still reckless as far as his motor bike is concerned. But this is all the story demands and so the Travers we get is a watered down and less interesting character. The ambivalence of the character is missing - particularly the notion of a basically decent and honourable fellow

who nevertheless embodies the characteristics of a bounder. It is not needed for the plot and so it is not there.

When the story is re-told as a Reginald Browne yarn ("The Rotter of Whitelands", 1947), Travers becomes Kenneth Pyne, "one of the most reckless fellows in Mortimer's House - not because he was wilful or mischievous, but because he got a kick out of it". The Pyne character is even more pale by comparison to the early Travers.

The earlier Travers, then, is a product of the needs of the plot. The plot of the Boot-Boy series had its roots in the classic formula for delineating and reforming the bounder. It is obvious from the way incidents from the Hart story are lifted and given a new twist in the Boot-Boy series that the earlier story was in Brooks' mind. However - and this is the opposite side of the paradox - whilst showing its origins thus so mechanically, nevertheless the plot which generated the character of Vivian Travers generated a personality which resembles in embryo form someone very similar to a later and more lasting character.

In his treatise *The Durable Desperadoes* (Macmillan, 1973), William Vivian Butler traces the birth of the genre of stories emerging in the late 'twenties and blossoming in the 'thirties. He calls this "the genre of the Gentleman Outlaw". I have suggested previously that the morality of the stories of the Hart era can be seen in the social contest of the nation's reaction to the shock and instability of the Great War, that is, in the urge to re-introduce Victorian values as a means of regaining the stability of the Victorian age. Now we are a generation on, and the popularity of the Gentleman Outlaw and the accompanying ambivalence of morality can itself be seen as a reaction to the strictness of that earlier moralising. Butler certainly sees the rise in popularity of the desperado as a product of the time, although he sees this more directly emerging out of the reaction to the Depression. Whatever the socio-historical causes, somehow, in the thirties, the moral standards of the day had begun to blur the definite line between black and white, good and evil. Along came a series of heroes in the tradition of Robin Hood, where breaking the rules and even the law is quite acceptable providing the end is one of honour or justice or social retribution. Heading the field, neck and neck, Butler tells us, are The Saint and Norman Conquest.

Vivian Travers, then, is a desperado in the best traditions of Norman Conquest. He is cool-headed, charming, urbane and a trouble-hunter. He lives for thrills, but is a gentleman of honour. He helps his fellow man, particularly when that fellow man has his back to the wall, and is not too scrupulous regarding the methods by which justice, or other worthy ends, are achieved. Above all, Travers is an essentially **likeable** character. Perhaps by the thirties the somewhat staid, upright attitude of Nelson Lee and Nipper, with just a hint of smugness and superiority, is becoming outmoded. And, dare I say it, compared with the sheer stupidity of Handforth, or the single dimensional characteristics of many of the other St. Frank's stalwarts, the original Travers is a breath of fresh air.

And, I believe, in Travers is one of the seeds of the later creation of the character Norman Conquest. Travers is, as it were, a bridge between the old and the new, a bridge between Brooks' first great creation - St. Frank's - and the next - Norman Conquest.

The creation of Norman Conquest, coming midway through Brooks' writing career, drew on a number of earlier influences. Over the last few months I have traced what I believe to be one such evolution of thought in Brooks' writing which allowed him to flesh out his own particular Gentleman Outlaw. Of course, there are other strands in the

evolution of Norman Conquest, some much more apparent (and to which I may at some time in the future return). But this particular theme - the transition from a very clear Victorian black-and-white morality to that grey morality of the thirties and beyond which made the Desperado so fashionable - is perhaps most clearly visible in the way Brooks has taken his durable theme of reformation and re-told it over the years in ways which reflect the values of the society at that particular time.

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## Greyfriars Greetings.

All through the Alphabet we go  
To gather Greyfriars greetings,  
And may their wishes cast a glow  
On all your merry meetings.

ANGEL hopes you'll back a  
scinner,  
BUNTER hopes you won't get  
thinner,  
COKER hopes you'll wake the  
neighbourvs,  
DESMOND says : " Here's luck  
bejavers ! "  
EARL MAULEVERER hopes  
you'll sleep,  
FISHY hopes you'll get things  
cheap,  
GOSLING hopes the cops may  
" drownd you,"  
HOBSON hopes that friends  
surround you,  
INKY hopes no ills come near-  
fully,  
JOHNNY BULL sends wishes  
cheerfully,  
KIPPS has conjured up a  
greeting,  
LINLEY hopes your luck wants  
beating,  
MORGAN sends you luck,  
whatever,  
NUGENT says : " The best time  
ever ! "  
OGILVY sends, " Auld Lang  
Syne,"  
PENFOLD hopes your fun is  
fine,  
QUELCHY sends his kind  
regards,  
RAKE would like to send you  
cards,  
SKINNER hopes your smokes  
are pleasant,  
TODDY hopes you'll like each  
present,  
UNCLE BENJAMIN says :  
" Quite ! "  
VERNON-SMITH hopes all is  
right,  
WILARTON sends you all the  
best,  
XMAS wishes from the rest,  
YULETIDE greetings, kind and  
true,  
ZESTFULLY they send to you !



Something moved in the bushes! They paused in the gloom, suddenly frightened, and Betty Barton held out protective arms to keep Polly Linton, Madge Minden, Paula Creel and Tess Trelawney back.

Fearing to miss their train at Morcove Road Station, the Study 12 chums had taken a short cut through a small wood near Barncombe. As Betty's torch pierced the dark, they saw a man's startled, white face as he rose to his feet and raced away through the bushes. Madge drew in her breath sharply. "Did you see?" she gasped. "He had a prison haircut!" They stared white-faced at one another. They realised they had just seen the man the Barncombe news placards are trumpeting: "CONVICT AT LARGE! DARING ESCAPE!"

They are still thinking of their brush with danger when they board the train and huddle closer together for comfort. As the train slowly leaves the platform, a noise at the offside door makes them jump. Paula trembled and pushed herself against Polly. For the second time since darkness fell they find themselves staring at the wild, white face as it momentarily presses itself against the window. A noise reaches their ears as of a door banging further down the train. They stare at one another, a nervous tenseness creeping over them as they realise that further down the train in an empty compartment a fugitive from the law is heading in the same direction as themselves. What their imagination cannot realise is that their own appalling fright is paralleled and probably doubled in the case of the runaway.

Their objective is the Old Manor House at Hillchurch, where lives Madge Minden's aunt, Mrs. Moore, an intellectual lady who spends her days closeted in her study composing articles for the *Geological Review*. Madge tells them they probably won't see much of her aunt and will have to make their own fun over the holidays.

At Hillchurch Station they are met by a tall, striking-looking, slightly older girl, whom Madge introduces as her cousin, Kyra Moore. Kyra immediately spoils the good effect her handsome looks have made on the Morcove juniors by making it plain that she is not going to put herself out to be friendly with them. "I shall have no time to entertain you", she informs them sharply. "You will have to make your own fun."

When they arrive at the Old Manor House Kyra discovers that she has forgotten the key and bangs furiously and at some length on the front door. She also shouts, "Sands, Sands, open the door. Don't keep me waiting like this, you old fool!" Betty looks at Kyra and wonders what is wrong with the girl. She expects some aged retainer of the male sex to be revealed but the door is opened by an elderly, frail lady who steps back and utters a cry of dismay.

Polly, in order to show Kyra that she isn't the only one who can make a noise, has jokingly shouted at her personal 'Aunt Sally', the languid, fastidious Paula Creel, and lobbed a couple of snowballs at her. One has inadvertently struck the grey-haired lady, which caused her startled cry. The girls start forward, uttering their concern and apologies, but Kyra tells them not to make such a fuss. "She is only my governess Sands, and a person of no consequence." Kyra pushes past them into the hall. They stare after her, wondering at her unfeeling rudeness to the gentle lady. Later, Kyra vents her dislike by complaining that her governess is keeping them waiting at the dining table. Betty, to prevent the ill-natured girl from leaving the room and shouting at Miss Sands, says she will go and tell her. Arriving outside the door of the governess's room, Betty stays her hand as she is about to knock. She becomes aware of voices from the room, one being a deeper

man's voice. There is the sound of a window being opened and closed. When the ensuing silence assures Betty that the governess is alone she knocks gently and waits until Miss Sands tells her to enter. Her eyes are red and her voice is choked as she thanks Betty and accompanies her to the dining room.

Later, Betty recounts overhearing the two voices to Polly and the rest. They are eager to search outside for footprints to see if indeed someone had left the governess' room by the window. It is only too plain by the line of footprints leading away in the snow from beneath the window that someone had done just that. As they are looking at the deep footprints Kyra approaches silently. She looks at them, observes the footprints, looks up at Miss Sands' window and snarls: "Likely as not she lets in burglars to steal the plate! I wouldn't mind betting that's her game."

Later, Betty, her eye caught by a movement in the bushes, again finds herself staring at the white face of the convict from Barncombe Prison. So his destination was the same as theirs and, as the thought strikes her, the remembrance of Miss Sands' eyes filled with tears following the overheard voices in her room makes Betty realise there must be a strong family connection between the runaway and the gentle lady.

Kyra, in bullying mood, shouts for her governess and, when she does not immediately attend her, busts into her room. Miss Sands, startled, backs away from her, hiding something behind her back. Kyra demands to see what it is but Miss Sands throws it out of the window where Betty unexpectedly catches it and realises that it is a framed photograph of the convict. Betty overhears Kyra saying she will go outside and find the object flung from the window. While Betty stares up, Miss Sands appears at the window and shakes her head despairingly at her. Before Kyra bursts out of the front door, Betty removes the photo and when Kyra runs up to her shouting "Give me that", hands her the empty frame. Kyra flings it away in fury, the piled up snow preventing the glass from shattering. Betty returns the frame and photo to Miss Sands assuring her that the secret is safe with her and she will do anything she can to help the two of them.

There is another visitor staying at the Old Manor House, a round-shouldered elderly man with a beard. The chums presume Mr. Hampden has been invited over the holidays to help Madge's aunt with some geological research in connection with the current writing project. But the girls notice that he seems to spend an awful lot of time just wandering around.

After Christmas dinner Betty and Co. organise a game of hide and seek and invite Kyra to join them. The torrent of abuse they expect does not materialise, Kyra evidently thinking that a contemptuous look will suffice in this instance. Miss Sands is grateful to be included in the youngsters' plans. Paula is the seeker and sees a figure dressed as Father Christmas. He disappears before she can unmask him. Paula is sure it is Polly but Polly says no when she is found. Paula considers that the figure, because of the height, must be an older person. Betty suspects it must have been Miss Sands' brother and is sure she is right when she finds a parcel containing a convict's coat covered in broad arrows inside the closet near where Paula had seen the red-coated figure.

Betty hands the parcel to Miss Sands. The governess tells her she has misgivings about Mr. Hampden; he appears to look at her with suspicion. She wonders if his constant roamings around the Old Manor House may mean that he is a detective in disguise. A police inspector calls and asks to see Miss Sands. Breathless with anxiety, she asks Betty to hide the convict coat in a secret panel she will find behind the bookcase in her room. Betty hides the coat behind the panel but, as she turns to leave, the door opens slowly. Betty darts behind an adjacent draught screen.

It is Mr. Hampden who, thinking he is alone, changes his appearance in a startling fashion. He straightens up and appears younger and more alert. Betty is sure now that she is watching a detective. The door opens again and Mr. Hampden just has time to become his former stooped self before Kyra enters. She shows no surprise at Mr. Hampden's being there but stops his activities by saying she will wait in the room until her governess returns. Mr. Hampden glowers but leaves. Kyra immediately tries to force open the locked desk. Kyra leaves the room swiftly as she hears the governess coming up the stairs.

Betty has not told her chums that the convict is Miss Sands' brother so she is worried when Polly and Co. tell her they intend to search for secret panels in the Manor House believing that the convict may be secreted behind one of them. Miss Sands confirms that they have guessed correctly. Her brother is indeed upstairs at that very moment. Miss Sands clasps her hands in fear. "If they give four rapid taps he will think it is I and open the panel."

Betty rejoins her chums and is horrified to find that Kyra is with them. A hollow panel is found but the searchers are deflected by the sound of another panel opening around the corner of the passage. They race round there expecting to confront the convict. But out steps Mr. Hampden! Betty sighs with relief, returns to the other panel and gives four rapid taps. Arthur Sands opens the panel and Betty hurriedly tells him what the girls are doing and that his sister suggests for safety's sake he go to her room and lock himself in.

During the night, Betty hears the front door close and wonders if it is Arthur leaving. She looks out of the window of the empty room next to Miss Sands' and sees Mr. Hampden standing motionless in the snow. He is staring up at the window of Miss Sands' room from a vantage point right below the window where Betty is standing, so that if they glance out of the window they will not see him. Betty hears the window of the governess' room being raised and suspects her brother is about to leave. As Arthur Sands begins to climb down the rain pipe that

# The Schoolgirls' Own



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Betty's Restraining Influence!

An incident from this week's episode of complete story of Betty Barton & Co. by Hurdine.

runs beside the window, Betty pushes the snow that is piled up on the window sill. The watcher beneath is swamped and temporarily blinded and, while he is thrashing about in the snow, Arthur gets away.

The next day, while the Morcovians are enjoying a snowball fight at the front gates, a police inspector, accompanied by a sergeant, arrives. The latter are surprised to be told that there is already a detective on the case (the girls tell them they believe Mr. Hampden must be a detective) and seem to think this is a bit irregular as there is no need for a detective in the case of an escaped convict. With this information in mind, Betty wonders, if Mr. Hampden is posing as a detective, then what is his real reason for being at the Manor House? Can he be connected with the reason Arthur Sands was imprisoned? Is the

purpose of his disguise to prevent the convict seeing his face? Would Arthur Sands immediately recognise him, and what effect would this have on Mr. Hampden's quest for whatever he is searching for?

The police inspector informs Betty and Co. that it is known that Miss Sands is the missing man's sister. They are sure they can get some vital information as to her brother's whereabouts from her. Betty, returning to the house to warn Miss Sands that the police inspector is on his way to interrogate her, finds Arthur in her room. She borrows the long overcoat and cap that Arthur has been using when leaving the house and donning them allows the inspector to catch a glimpse of her. This causes a hue and cry! Darting down a corridor out of the inspector's sight she drops the cap outside the door and hurriedly stuffs the coat beneath the mattress as Madge follows her inside the room. Madge tells Betty that her cousin Kyra is so spiteful she would turn in the convict if she could, just to revenge herself on Miss Sands. Her governess has done her no harm, her only crime being that she is in a position of authority over her. Kyra resents authority of any kind.

After all the other rooms have been searched for the figure in the long overcoat, the two policemen go to Miss Sands' room and find it locked. They demand that the door be opened in the name of the law. When the door is unlocked a stooped, bearded figure emerges. He says nothing but hands the inspector a calling card which reveals him to be a detective. He relocks the door, retaining the key, and goes to the room used by Mr. Hampden.

While the inspector is quizzing the governess, Madge obtains a duplicate key. She and Betty enter the room to see if they can discern what Mr. Hampden might have been searching for. A sound behind the screen alerts them to the fact that there is someone else in the room. They find a man bound and gagged but it isn't the convict. It is the man who has been disguised in a beard and calling himself Mr. Hampden. "Madge guessed that the convict had been hiding behind the screen when the detective entered, and had seized him, forced him to change clothes, and then bound and gagged him."

Arthur Sands returns, accompanied by his sister together with the two policemen and the rest of the Morcove girls. He hands the inspector half a sheet of foolscap which he says proves his innocence. This he found in the room occupied by Mr. Hampden. "I have had the other half, my sister kept it for me. I knew that it was in the possession of the man who was really guilty. He, in his turn, was searching for the piece that my sister kept. I mean the man posing as a detective. He is the guilty party."

Arthur Sands pushes aside the screen to reveal the man he has left bound. But the man they had known as Mr. Hampden, who has managed to release himself, pushes the screen onto his accuser. He eludes the clutches of the police and escapes by way of the window but falls as he encounters a slide made by the girls and sprains his ankle. The policemen secure him and "he confessed to all his crimes and he had to serve the sentence that had so nearly wrecked the life of the governess' brother".

Arthur Sands had to return to prison and there wait for his reprieve. It arrived before Betty and Co. had to return to Morcove and they join in the celebrations with Miss Sands and her brother. Kyra does not rejoice with them but remains, glowering and still resentful, in her room.

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(From *Schoolgirls' Own* 151-154, December 1923/January 1924. Reprinted in *SGOL* 231, "Morcove's Christmas Problem", Dec 1929.)

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## MYSTERY AT CARRINGTON GRANGE

### Part Three: Conclusion

by Anthony Cook

The following afternoon, school having finished for the day, Harry Wharton was walking through the gardens towards the temporary hut which had been erected on the sports field. He was accompanied by Cherry and Nugent. As they rounded the end of the garden which gave them a good view of the road below they saw a small convoy of cars appear. As they watched a small army lorry wound its way downwards, followed by a similarly camouflaged staff car, while bringing up the rear was a car whose bell on the front labelled it as a police car.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, trouble for somebody!" Bob Cherry sang out. "Looks like they are heading for the cottage. Come on, let's go down." Frank Nugent started down. "Hold hard, chaps" Harry Wharton snapped. "This is something special. They won't want us around. Look at the lorry."

Even as he spoke half a dozen figures descended from the lorry with what appeared to be weapons in their hands. As they stood watching, two figures - one in uniform and a civilian - came back out of the house. The uniform pointed upwards towards the school; the police car swung round at speed as the two clambered aboard heading round the bend towards the main entrance of the school.

"Let's go back and see what's happening" Johnny Bull suggested, and the chums started back at a run. As they reached the main door of the Grange the police car drew up and, when the first figure emerged, Harry Wharton voiced his surprise. "Look chaps, it's Ferrers Locke in uniform!" At the same moment Ferrers Locke spotted him. "Wharton, can you locate Mr Quelch for us. Every moment counts."

Without a word and typical of the Captain of the Remove, Harry moved quickly. Within a matter of minutes he was back with his Form Master. As Mr Quelch arrived the chums hesitated in the hallway. He turned to them but as he was about to address them the police sergeant driver who had joined them pointed upwards to the top of the main staircase: "Good heavens sir, look!" And well they might, for a strange sight met their eyes. A small procession, headed by the rotund figure of Bunter, came from the upper corridor and was about to descend the stairs. On seeing the Removites, Bunter let out a cry. "I say you fellows, he's g-g-got a gun, d-do something - oh crumbs!"

Behind Bunter a figure in air force blue, whom they recognised as Flt. Lt. Verity, was indeed wielding a gun and it was pointing to Bunter's back. Following close behind were a young woman and a bullet-headed character also waving a gun.

"Back, all of you!" Verity shouted. "If anyone makes a wrong move this school will be one pupil less."

"I say . . ." came another squeak from Bunter, who was being prodded down the staircase. As they reached the bottom Verity addressed Ferrers Locke. "Right, the keys to the car, quickly." It was the Inspector who turning to his sergeant driver barked: "Rogers?" "In the car sir." The Inspector gave his driver a withering look before saying to Verity, "You heard."

The procession came forward, a quaking Bunter still in the lead, but as they reached the doorway it all seemed to happen. Wharton, who was nearest, stuck out a foot and Bunter went flying. "Yarooogh! H - e - lp!"

It was enough. Ferrers Locke was on Verity before he comprehended what had happened and had sent him crashing to the ground. His gun dropped as he landed. At that precise moment it was Frank Nugent who shouted: "There's another one up there!" Those who were not concerned with the rough and tumble looked upwards, as did the bull-necked man, to see another figure on the landing. As the thug at the back raised his gun there was

a crack as the figure on the landing fired. The man's gun flew from his hand and the new arrival descended the stairs, not before Harry Wharton had yelled: "It's Soames!"

The tables however were turned and the law was in charge. It was only another cry from the doorway that attracted the attention of the Removites to the fact that Bunter was still on his back and making enough noise to attract the entire school. "I say you fellows, can't you help a chap - I can't move and that chap's going to shoot."

Bunter did get some attention at last and to the consternation of his form-mates really could not stand. The three Germans, for that is what they were, struggling to the end, were led away by Ferrers Locke and some of his men who had by that time arrived from the cottage. Bunter, complaining that it was all Wharton's silly fault, was escorted, with difficulty, to Matron in order to assess the damage.

A little later Johnny Bull asked, "What on earth was Soames doing mixed up in this business?" Harry Wharton shook his head. "We may find out later. Did you see him raise his hat to us on the way out; typical of the man. Mind you, it was Soames who was responsible for catching that spy at Eastcliff Lodge the other Easter. He was certainly all for his country then. I doubt if he has changed that." At that moment Wingate poked his head round the common room door. "Wharton, Mr Quelch wants you in his study immediately. I should look presentable. He seems to have some high-powered company with him." Wingate, as Captain of Greyfriars, always sought to make a good impression for the sake of the school, and he practised what he preached.

"Now what?" asked Harry. "Never find out if you don't beat it down there" Bob Cherry grinned.

"Right. Oh!" Harry reached in his pocket and produced a bar of chocolate. "Go down to the san and give this to Bunter. After all, I did trip the fat owl up."

Five minutes later he presented himself to Mr Quelch. His master was seated at his desk while Captain Locke and Inspector Rogers sat on either side of the fire. "Ah, Wharton. You know Captain Locke of course; this is Inspector Rogers. It was at Captain Locke's suggestion that I agreed you should join us. I - that is we - think it important that you understand the situation fully and in this way perhaps, ah, shall we say embellishments and speculation will not occur." At that moment a knock on the study door announced the arrival of tea and inviting-looking biscuits. "Will you please hand round the refreshments Wharton, while Captain Locke enlightens us regarding the facts of this case."

Ferrers Locke tried to hide a smile as he realised that Mr Quelch was thoroughly enjoying himself and had helped, for the second time, to solve another mystery. As soon as Harry Wharton had served the refreshments and availed himself of the same at his form-master's bidding, Ferrers Locke began unfolding the story. "Thank you Mr Quelch. I will be as brief as possible. It all really began with Inspector Rogers' visit regarding a light which had been seen in this area. It did, as we now know, come from the turret room by means of a paraffin lamp and gave the bearings to a German plane which came over on sundry occasions. The purpose was not to create any destruction but to drop certain supplies including a quantity of counterfeit money for the use of its agents. Entrance to the turret room was made from the cottage, for there are a series of tunnels and chambers built some two hundred years ago connecting the cottage with the turret room." At this point Mr Quelch interrupted. "This puzzles me slightly. Sir Geoffrey and James Verity must have been well aware of the link between the cottage and the school. I would have thought it would have been mentioned prior to our occupation."

"Ah, but you see," continued the Captain, "the door immediately below the turret stairs unlocks only from the cottage side, as does the entrance from the cottage. There are no more doors, only passages and chambers in between. Verity had the key in his key cupboard but there was no reason it should ever be used: therefore why bother to mention it?" "Why is the link there at all?" the Inspector grunted. At this Ferrers Locke grinned.

"That is a long story which goes back almost two hundred years and has a certain romantic connotation regarding one Sir Henry Carrington." Mr Quelch's eyebrows raised while the Inspector only grunted again. "What happened was that Flt. Lt. Verity, whose real name we do not know at this present time, though he is certainly a member of German Military Intelligence as are his friends, had been in the area for some time. He realised that this was an ideal location to receive their supplies, and that the turret room was also the ideal place from which to signal the aircraft. They realised that Verity was the key man, and came to the cottage on some pretext and forced all the necessary information out of him. Their first failure was in not getting all the parachute down from the oak, not a credit to them as they are usually a careful lot, our enemy, and cannot be underestimated."

Mr Quelch interrupted again. "What about James Verity? Is he in any way implicated?" "No." Ferrers Locke shook his head. "In fact he has had a rough time. The lower door of the link was open when we arrived and we found him tied up in one of the chambers. It must have been difficult for him not to have told those thugs anything they wanted to know, their methods are ruthless. At the moment James Verity has been taken to hospital for a thorough checkup and with any luck should be back with you very soon."

"Can we presume that all the small clues that came to light made up the complete picture, Captain?" Ferrers Locke shook his head. "Not quite. What brought matters to a head was a certain observation by Mr Quelch. The man calling himself Flt. Lt. Verity gave him a scrap of paper containing a telephone number. The number contains a digit seven. It is not our custom to cross our figure sevens in this country but that is the continental method. Mr Quelch took note of it and informed me. Though certainly not conclusive, we added up all the facts and, having made contact with Inspector Rogers, thought the best thing was to put matters to the test. If nothing had been wrong we might have looked rather silly but our task is to follow up everything which points to situations which are out of the ordinary. In this case we were more than justified. In general the enemy had done their job quite well but they slipped up on silly things. Furthermore when Mr Quelch showed Verity around the school his main interest seemed to be in the dormitory. Just another little slip, but worth notice, as Mr Quelch and I planned prior to his visit."

"The only thing that you haven't mentioned is the original letter. One must presume that they forced Verity to write it thereby allowing them the necessary time to complete their plan."

"Undoubtedly. It was also a very astute move as Verity has a brother in Birmingham, and providing that it was left to either the Head or Mr Quelch to look further into the matter, which would have taken some time, they knew that they would have been long gone Inspector." There was silence for a minute as the company relaxed, until Ferrers Locke said with finality: "I think that wraps up another case Mr Quelch." The Remove master's face betrayed a satisfied smile. "Indeed so. You will no doubt be kind enough to let me know of any interesting details which emerge at a later date."

"I will, and I would like to thank young Wharton for his prompt action, giving us the chance to turn the tables." Wharton reddened. "Thank you Captain Locke" he managed, and catching Mr Quelch's eye he added: "Thank you, sir, for allowing me to sit in on this. Oh, I'm sorry about Bunter, sir, but I could not think of anything better at the time."

"Bunter is detained for the night with a twisted ankle, I am informed. It was indeed unfortunate, Wharton, but I feel sure that you will make some act of reparation to the boy." There was a glimmer of a smile on the master's lips and Wharton could see his next week's sweet ration disappearing quickly. As Harry rose to make his exit he hesitated. "May I ask Captain Locke a question, sir?" he asked Mr Quelch. "You may."

"I was wondering about Soames, sir."

A broad smile lit up Ferrers Locke's face. "I wondered if you might comment on that gentleman. I am well aware that you and some of your chums know quite a deal about

James Soames. You need have no fear, however; he is indeed one of us. During wartime we employ many strange, not to say dubious, characters. We need certain skills and I think you realise that Soames is a man of many skills and of considerable use to a department such as mine."

Wharton thanked Ferrers Locke for the information and, acknowledging his form-master, took his leave. "I must be on my way too" the Inspector said. "Thank you for your hospitality, sir. Captain Locke, I will no doubt see you later." With this he took his leave. When he and Mr Quelch were alone, Ferrers Locke chuckled. "Quite a day. Poor old Rogers, he felt a little left out of things but I feel sure that my explanation did enough to placate him. You did right to contact me."

"A satisfactory conclusion, I feel. Certainly an amazing introduction to our first term here at Carrington Grange" said Mr Quelch.

As the Captain rose he smiled. "I almost forgot something in the rush. When you contacted me through Colonel Wharton I discovered that Sir Oliver and Lady Carstairs were visiting for a few days. As they are people of the utmost discretion I mentioned the fact that there was a mystery afoot in which you were involved. Lady Carstairs asked me to give you this." He produced an envelope from his inner pocket. "Oh!" said the form-master, rather at a loss for words, for he was not in the habit of receiving letters from titled ladies or, for that matter, females of any kind.

"You may realise that Lady Carstairs is much younger than her husband, considerably so. As a young woman she took a degree in higher mathematics at Somerville. She is now putting her skills to good use and is working with a special team in north Buckinghamshire. She has been given a commission in the WAAF." "Very commendable" was all Mr Quelch could find to say. With that Ferrers Locke left.

Alone at last, Mr Quelch opened his missive, which read: "Dear Mr Quelch, I hear with interest that you are again involved in some mysterious affair. If things keep up like this I think that we shall see the world's first academic sleuth. I too am now working for our country as no doubt Captain Locke has told you. Let us hope that we meet again in the future. Kind regards, Elizabeth Carstairs." It was the end of a hectic day but Mr Quelch sat back with a satisfied smile on his face as he re-read the letter and almost guiltily put it carefully in his desk drawer. Sitting quietly by his fire the master took up his book again, though despite his general satisfaction found it quite hard to concentrate!

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EVEN IF YOU FORGOT THE  
LINES I GAVE YOU —  
DO NOT FORGET TO ORDER  
YOUR COLLECTORS DIGEST  
ANNUAL

# THE CHRISTMAS HAUNTINGS AT MISTLETOE MANOR

by Margery Woods

Surely the most evocative of all festive settings was created by John Wheway when he chose for the Christmas destination of the Cliff House chums a haunted Elizabethan house called Mistletoe Manor.

All the ingredients are there for the traditional storypaper Christmas adventure. Snow - lots of it - and transport suffering accordingly, but a wayside station there, with a buffet adorned by holly and garlands, a blazing fire and a beaming assistant ready to serve the party with tea, coffee, cocoa or lemonade (Oh wherefore art thou British Rail and all the rest?), providing the setting for the meeting with the mysterious girl who rescues one of Barbara Redfern's precious parcels. And then the manor itself. Great Hall, huge crackling log fire, minstrels' gallery, vast Christmas tree and, naturally, the mistletoe from the hoary old oaks of the famous house. The chums are no sooner there than comes the dramatic entrance of the ancient retainer, all in black, armed with an even more ancient blunderbuss, to quaver the news that the ghost has been knocking again.

This is enough to make Clara Trevlyn's eyes shine even more brightly, and the chums instantly propose a ghost hunt. Of course General Redfern - Babs' grandfather - avers that ghosts don't exist at Mistletoe Manor, they don't exist at all. Then, unwillingly, he admits there are stories . . . The ghost of the White Queen, and a certain Walter Pembury supposed to have been walled up alive in this very room two hundred years ago but still tapping his way out!

Cue for dramatic tapping from the fireplace!

Delicious shudders all round and panic stations under the table for Bessie; the crash of a tray of glasses as the ancient retainer dives for his trusty blunderbuss, while the wind moans eerily round the high gallery above the great hall. Drinks and peace are restored, then Babs, ever the artist, studies a portrait of a beautiful woman, so lifelike the eyes seem to move. The portrait is of the former owner of Mistletoe Manor on whose family misfortune has descended.



The pace of the story never slackens. No sooner has Babs decided that the skill of the artist and her own imagination has caused the illusion of living moving eyes than the White Queen appears. Luminous, uncanny, with a winking shimmer of light crowning her head.

The perfect cue for an enthusiastic charge by the would-be ghost hunters, a crashing of armour bumping down the staircase, and the ancient retainer knocked out by the shock of his ancient blunderbuss discharging its contribution to the uproar.

The White Queen disdains any further part in the commotion and promptly vanishes.

The General is furious, says he won't have his house turned into a battlefield and promptly packs them all off to bed as a punishment. Of course he does not know the chums, even though one of them is his own granddaughter. They gather in Babs' room to study the enigmatic scrap of paper she has found on the stairs. Its mysterious message reads:

Newel staircase in Well Tower.

19 up. Kick step where worn.

An irresistible challenge to ghost hunters longing for midnight! And in the Well Tower Babs discovers she has seven instead of six companions; another head count shows only six! But the nineteenth step does not disappoint. A secret panel reveals itself and black mystery beyond. Then Jemima does her own head count and announces that they are eight! Disparity in numbers present soon ceases to puzzle them when they discover the secret panel has closed and refuses to open. They are trapped!

Meanwhile, Bessie, who is sleeping in Babs' room, Babs being the only one prepared to suffer Bessie's snores, has woken up and discovered that she is alone. It is two o'clock in the morning and no Babs. Premonitions of disaster beset the fat one until she remembers the pudding and ginger wine left on the table downstairs (Mistletoe Manor staff being either slack about the clearing up or considerate of a Bunter appetite unappeased during the small hours). Bessie ventures out puddingwards and instead of pudding meets the White Queen.

Thus ensues the second spasm of pandemonium that night. Brewster and the blunderbuss are quickly on the scene, along with everyone else - except Babs and Co. Bessie, being Bessie, lets the cat out of the bag about the ghost hunt and the secret mission to the Well Tower. So all go forth to the rescue, where the panel still refuses to open and Brewster must relinquish his blunderbuss in favour of an axe. (That poor long-suffering house!)

The General is less pleased than ever and forbids all ghost hunting, or else! He might as well have forbidden the sun to rise. The White Queen considers herself exempt from all human orders and continues to tantalise them but is caught by the expert lasso wielded by Clara. At last the ghostly White Queen is unmasked, to reveal the mysterious girl of the first night. She refuses to give any explanation of her presence and is locked up in a room by the General, who threatens to call the police if she doesn't talk. But to their amazement she appears to escape. They do not know that she has simply exchanged one prison for a much worse one; a freezing stone cell high in the Silent Tower, a tower without any visible sign of door or entry, where two masked figures have taken her. Shivering and alone, she hears the Christmas chimes ring out their message of goodwill across the snowy countryside.

It is Bessie who spots her despairing waves at the tiny window high in the Silent Tower and summons the chums. The rescue involves a tortuous journey through a trapdoor and a maze of underground tunnels and a surprising false lead.

There is another complication in the story; that of an elderly couple who arrive at the manor seeking shelter. They have run out of petrol and the woman is feeling ill. They are given generous hospitality by General Redfern and it is into their room that the chums emerge when they finally extricate themselves from the tunnel maze.

## Grand Christmas Number



The inter-encounters of heroines and villains become a hectic game of General Post throughout the labyrinth which exists beneath Mistletoe Manor and its grounds with their collection of strange towers. Eventually the girl is found. Her name is Joan and she has a chart which will lead to the discovery of a hidden treasure belonging by right to the Pembury family - if only she can solve the cryptic verse penned by a long dead Pembury who has concealed his fortune in an old oaken chest. The solving of this, naturally, presents little difficulty to the chums of Cliff House. They have had long experience of solving cryptic clues as well as the laying of ghosts and the unmasking of plotters.

But there is a kidnapping of Joan's father and the resultant moral blackmail of the girl to get possession of the vital chart before the story is wound up with the exposure of the Lesters, who have been the culprits behind the troubles besetting the Pembury family.

And so the Pembury family comes into its own at last. The Lesters are carted off to take their

punishment, and General Redfern waives his lease on Mistletoe Manor, but not before a joyous, untroubled festive season gets under way.

For a great Christmas read, this story can be found in *The Schoolgirl* issues 386, 387, 388 of 1936-7. Told in John Wheway's inimitable style, it combines pace, colour, fun, drama and emotional appeal. One small weakness, perhaps; how did the Lesters know they would be given a bedroom with a secret panel that would assist all their dire plotting? Or perhaps most of the rooms had their own personal panels! After all, much secret coming and going went on in those great Elizabethan houses, romantic, murderous, and otherwise! Most of the storypaper adventures, especially those featuring school chums, had to contend with this weakness, that the strangers had to be the villains, there just wasn't the writing space to allow a series of red herring characters, as in the detective who-dun-it where one character is pitted against as many suspects as the plot throws up. The school story reversed the pattern when of necessity there would be close on a dozen regular chum characters, all of whom needed to be characterised for the benefit of any new readers not familiar with the week by week cast. One of the oldest authors' rules, "Show, not tell", is pertinent to this story pattern, to be able to characterise in "showing" words without resorting too much to the adverbial short cuts and not hold up the pace for the reader

already friends with all the leading characters. This is one of the writing skills that separates the masters from the hacks. The best of the A.P. team of writers handled their large casts of characters with masterful skill. So, enjoy your Christmas with them all.

History does not record how the blunderbuss celebrated the rest of its Christmas!

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## LEGS FOR CHRISTMAS

by John Burslem

It's that time of year again when we think of Presents, Pud and Panto. I myself grab the *Magnets* that deal with adventures that have GHOSTS in abundance. This also goes for the *Gem* and Handforth's follies in the *Nelson Lees*.

The eerie figure in doublet and tights fascinates me and it is always the "rotter" that performs the task. Now . . . These gentlemen of doubtful integrity must have smashing figures. Legs alone should be those of a ballet dancer. Vast shoulders to climb, swing and push creaking doors. The blood must boil. (It's always a freezing cold night.) Getting into tights is a triumph in itself. If your fingers are numb, forget it! (Cor! I got a ladder!) Especially if they are silk. You just cannot have woolly ones as a spirit. You have to put up with draughts. Mind the knees do not knock and you must not mention a jock-strap. Most criminal gents avoid it.

My wife and I have run a dancing school for more than thirty years. It's a tough old world. But when I read the delightful stories one refrains from the wicked chuckle. Imagine the Scottish castle at midnight (numb fingers - bagpipes too). Stone walls, the piercing wind ("I'm sure me knee caps 'ave dropped orf!") Bandy legs are no use.

Count Zero - having fallen through the trapdoor and scuttled down to the cave - "Beppo! I've laddered my tights. Get another pair out of the vase up there."  
"But signor, they are red." "Caramba! So are my veins."

Best of all - when Johnny B. whacked a stately exit through a door - Did the shock of the knees hitting the floor cause a hernia? - his support to slip? wig tilt? graze his knuckles? Well - he did have a fine pair of legs . . . guess he broke the mile record. Lovely stuff.

You have no need for pantomime. Have a glorious Christmas holiday . . . A quick giggle when Mauleverer relates the "Glow" of the Phantom.

Oh! A last thought. "YES", it is "SHEETS" - The Full Cover Up! The thought of a couple of midget acrobats under one is just frightening.

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## CHRISTMAS BOOK CHOICES

from Mary Cadogan

Hopefully, in between our family festivities, there will be times when we can dip into favourite old papers and annuals. Hopefully too we will be able to sample some of the new books which have been published in time for Christmas, from which I have particularly enjoyed the following.

1998 marks the centenary of the birth of the distinguished and multi-faceted author, C.S. Lewis. To celebrate this and his creation of the truly magical world of Narnia, Collins have issued a crop of attractive books. First and foremost is *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*, a huge and finely produced volume which comprises all seven novels of this immensely popular series (bound together for the first time). As a bonus it includes an informative introduction by Brian Sibley, written in his usual zestful and perceptive style. The publishers have had the happy inspiration of asking the original illustrator, Pauline Baynes, to produce full colour versions of her black-and-white pictures. The glowing

results enhance the pages of this bumper book, and of current individual paperback reprints of each of the novels. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a treasure-chest that will appeal to children of various ages - and to adults - and so can be classed as a book for oneself, one's children and grandchildren, indeed for the whole family. As such it is more than worth its cover price of £29.99. The individual reprints of the seven Narnia novels retail at £6.99 each. Collins have further marked the centenary by producing a puzzle book *The Magical*

*Land of Narnia* (£3.99) and, at £12.99, a young children's abridged version of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* which carries extremely appealing pictures by Christian Birmingham.

The lasting attraction of these books is summed up in Lewis's own words to his god-daughter, to whom he dedicated the original version of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*: "I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realised that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales . . . But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again . . .".



Still in the world of modern children's classics, we have *The Silent Hills of Shropshire*, by Malcolm Saville and Mark O'Hanlon, which we are told is the very last new Malcolm Saville title that will ever appear in print. Malcolm began to write this in 1978 and I remember him telling me then how thrilled he was to be producing this account of, and tribute to, Shropshire, the part of England that he loved above anywhere else. As we know, his children's books, particularly the series featuring the Lone Pine Club, have sent several generations of young people in search of the geographical settings which he described so well and so satisfyingly. Mark O'Hanlon, who has already presented us with an excellent *Lone Pine Companion*, has now from Malcolm's synopsis completed the unfinished manuscript of *The Silent Hills of Shropshire*.

The Introduction and first chapter are entirely by Malcolm and some parts of all the other sections were also written by him. Mark has filled out Malcolm's original text with sensitivity and intimate knowledge both of Shropshire's lovely countryside and of Malcolm's books. These are sometimes quoted in the narrative: there are also snippets from other Shropshire-lovers such as A.E. Housman and Mary Webb. Interspersed with detailed descriptions of locations and walks are interesting nuggets of historical information and stories from the folk-lore of the region. To all enthusiasts of Malcolm Saville's books and to all lovers of the English countryside I thoroughly commend *The Silent Hills of Shropshire*. It is available, U.K. post free, at £8.99 a copy from Mark O'Hanlon, 10 Bilford Road, Worcester, WR3 8QA.

In very different and more dramatic mood is *Death at the Arsenal* by Peter Mahony, a popular contributor to the C.D. This, as its title suggests, takes us into the world of mystery, murder and intrigue. It also provides the thrills and chills of Second World War treason and sabotage, with romance of the traditional variety thrown in for good measure.

Peter Mahony dexterously harnesses elements of the authentic Home Front atmosphere to give colour and depth to this pacy espionage 'whodunnit' in which both military and

civilian police try to track down munition-stealing enemy agents and fifth-columnists. Both 'goodies' and 'baddies' are well-drawn: especially engaging are the main protagonists - the C.I.D. sleuth and the two female leads (a dancer and an A.T.S. corporal). The cast ranges from show-biz personalities to military personnel, politicians and publicans. *Death at the Arsenal* is just right for an exciting and nostalgic read over Christmas. It is available from the author (see enclosed order form).

Also in the world of mystery and mayhem I have been wallowing in *Crime Writers and Other Animals* by Simon Brett (Gollancz £16.99). For many years now I have been a fan of Brett's brilliantly written TV and radio series, and of his novels featuring the actor-cum-detective, Charles Paris. *Crime Writers and Other Animals* is the first collection of short sleuthing stories by this author that I have come across. Because I tend to find brief crime tales disappointing compared with full-length mystery novels, I wondered if this volume would lack the depth and sparkle of Brett's longer works. Happily it does **not**! Every story features vivid characters and a tautly constructed plot with a tantalizingly unpredictable twist in its tail. The skill and sheer gusto of these stories will enliven the Christmas period for many enthusiasts of detective fiction.

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## MURDER AT THE CIRCUS

by Reg Hardinge

It was while Blake and Tinker were down at Helmsford in Sussex putting the finishing touches to a case they were working on that they first encountered Waldo. Christmas was imminent when Tinker attended a performance of Capelli's Grand International Circus in which the star attraction was Waldo, the Wonder Man.

Slimly built and of average height, Waldo possessed phenomenal strength. He invited members of the audience to match his weight-lifting act. Tinker and others had a go, but were unable to emulate his spectacular feats. He had picked up a cross-bar with two fingers and tossed it up into the air with ease, catching it on the back of his neck as it came down. He had lifted a heavy weight with one hand, raising it above his shoulder.

When James William Durand, a performer of tricks on a cycle, was found dead with a poisoned arrow through his back, suspicion fell on Gerald Fletcher, a conjuror, billed as 'Osiris the card wizard'. Two circus workmen had seen him in Durand's dressing-tent bending over the body. When Fletcher was arrested, his fiancée pleaded with Sexton Blake to take up the case to prove Fletcher's innocence. Blake accepted and also waived his fee, for which the girl, Ethel Hanwell, was deeply grateful.

In the course of his investigations Blake discovered a poisoned arrow similar to the one which killed Durand in a bureau in Fletcher's caravan. But Blake was certain that it had been planted there by the killer. Later on in the empty circus arena Blake and Tinker saw a figure on a ladder at the top of a tent adjacent to Durand's, dismantling something which was carried across the meadow to the river into which it was flung. When Blake and Tinker intervened Blake was picked up like a feather and tossed into the river. Tinker, armed with the branch of a tree, smashed it across the skull of his adversary. The branch snapped in two, the recipient of the blow never flinching, and Tinker, likewise, was seized and hurled into the river, and the man was gone.

Blake and Tinker dived several times to the bottom of the river and eventually retrieved the discarded object. It was constructed of wood, with a piece of elastic fixed between two prongs from which the poisoned arrow was launched. The murderer was, of course, Waldo. Blake worked out that, at the precise moment in his act that Waldo threw his cross-bar into the air, Durand was seated in his tent putting on his make-up. The cross-

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## GRAND XMAS NUMBER.



**WALDO, THE WONDER-MAN!** A Clever Story of Strange Yuletide Happenings, introducing **SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, NELSON LEE, NIPPER,** and a Fascinating New Character. Specially written for the Christmas Number of the "Union Jack" by the Author of "The Case of the Hollow Dagger," "The Studded Footprints," "The Terror of Trevis Weld," "The Crooks of Rapid Hollow," etc., etc.

bar severed a piece of string and released the arrow pointed at Durand's back, which flew through the air and embedded itself in his back.

Further investigation revealed the motive for the murder. Waldo was being blackmailed by Durand who knew about the strong man's unsavoury past. While Blake proceeded to Scotland Yard to unearth further details about Waldo, Tinker travelled to nearby Bannington and on to St. Frank's College to see his pal Nipper. Nelson Lee, the well-known Grays Inn Road criminologist, was a housemaster there. Nipper and his two chums, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, invited Tinker to tea along with Handforth, Jack Mason, Somerton and De Valerie.

Through Waldo's fingerprints Blake established that he was actually William Waldron, who had escaped from Dartmoor while serving a ten-year sentence for burglary with violence. When Blake and a Scotland Yard Inspector arrived at the circus, Waldo resisted his arrest and set his caravan alight by upsetting an oil stove. Though badly burned he felt no pain, and making a run for it boarded a goods train bound for Bannington. Nelson Lee was there, as Waldo jumped off, to pursue him and hold him in a vice-like ju-jitsu grip until he was overpowered, but Waldo managed to burst open his cell at Bannington police station and vanish.

Back at Baker Street Blake received a letter from Waldo saying that he was starting a campaign of crime, and that his first move would be to get even with the great detective. One of the happiest days that Blake and Tinker spent that Christmas was at the home of the newly-married couple Gerald and Ethel Fletcher.

Waldo the Wonder Man (*U.J.* No. 794) was the very first Waldo story by Edwy Searles Brooks. Taken from Tinker's case-diary, the events are narrated by Tinker himself. The *Union Jack* carried 89 episodes in all of the Waldo saga. E.S. Brooks wrote his first Sexton Blake story "The Motor Bus Mystery" (*U.J.* No. 431) when he was only 18. The first of the 16 cases in which Nelson Lee was associated with Sexton Blake was published in 1918. Sometimes Nipper figured in them, and Waldo appeared in two of them.

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## **NEWS FROM THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS NORTHERN O.B.B.C.**

Our A.G.M. was held on Saturday, 14th November. All the present officers agreed to stand for a further year and were unanimously re-elected.

Congratulations were offered to Richard Burgon on passing his driving test! Richard will be leaving us next year to go to university. We were delighted to hear that Regina Glick had had a successful operation and was now convalescing; we missed her at the meeting.

Darrell spoke about the success of the Frank Richards Day held in Broadstairs on Tuesday, 27th October. Only a few known hobby members were present although all the Clubs had a representation. Mary Cadogan and Una Hamilton Wright were guests for the day. The morning exhibition of some of the artefacts of Frank Richards was held in Kingsgate and the afternoon talk on the life and work of Frank Richards was given by Mary, with personal memories from Una, in the Council chamber. The evening saw "The Fat Owl's Meal", attended by 38 people including officials of the Council. Among the local people who attended the afternoon talk were two who had personally known Frank Richards, as they had lived in Percy Avenue, Kingsgate: they provided some interesting facts about life at "Rose Lawn". All in all, it was a most pleasant event and, for those of us leaving the following morning, it was a case of sad cheerios.

Geoffrey Good then read "Oliver Asks for More" so superbly that we really were all asking for more!

Our Christmas Party will be on December 12th at 5.30 pm at our usual venue.

**Johnny Bull Minor.**

## LONDON O.B.B.C.

The November meeting in Chingford was a memorable one for those present. Not only were members treated to one of Audrey Potts' splendid buffet lunches, but we also had a very special guest: Jenny Hammerton of British Pathé, who had come to talk about her work cataloguing Pathé newsreels and ciné-magazines.

Ms. Hammerton entertained those present with an entertaining audio-visual extravaganza which featured many rare clips from the archives, including Frank Richards' legendary appearance.

Still more good things followed: Brian Doyle's fascinating paper on the life and work of Peter Cheyney, the hard-boiled crime-writer, and Roger Jenkins reading a Rookwood story from the *S.O.L.*

The next meeting, our Christmas gathering, will take place at the home of Bill Bradford in Ealing, as is traditional. Vic Pratt.

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## GEMS OF HAMILTONIA

from Pete Hanger

Troubles of that kind were not infrequent in Bunter's fat career. Even Lord Mauleverer, the easiest going member of the party, had groused about Bunter bagging his best silk pyjamas. But Bunter was used to selfishness and ingratitude. He declined to allow such things to affect him. When Bunter wanted anything, obviously, Bunter ought to have it. That, to Bunter, was as clear as anything in Euclid. If other fellows groused, all that Bunter could do was to let them grouse. If they derived any consolation therefrom he was not the fellow to grudge them such consolation. *Magnet 1106*

The Famous Five sat up and took notice, as it were, as they heard that. Hacker was well known to be a tartar in the Shell; but, whatever he did in his own Form, he had no right to pull Remove ears. Billy Bunter's ear, no doubt, was the least important ear in the Remove. Still it was a Remove ear, and no Form-master but his own was entitled to introduce pain into it. *Magnet 1621*

"Quick-Eye", of "Sporting Tips", gave Crackerjack as an absolutely certain winner - and "Quick-Eye" knew. At least, Bunter supposed that he did. Knowing all this, "Quick-Eye" put his knowledge at the service of the public, through the medium of "Sporting Tips", instead of backing Crackerjack himself and making lots of money - which was very generous and self-denying of "Quick-Eye". *Magnet 1568*

Jam from the broken jar streamed over a fat face, as Billy Bunter squirmed. Some of it went into his mouth, where Billy Bunter intended all of it to go. But some of it went into his nose, and his ears, and his hair, and plastered on his spectacles. That was not what Bunter had intended at all! Taken like that, even strawberry jam, of the very best quality, was not nice. *Magnet 1478*

... said Bunter, "Thrills you to the marrow of your bones! Pawker Chew, the great American film actor, plays the bandit, so you can guess what it's like. You should see his eyes roll!"

"Is it a talkie?" asked Nugent.

"Yes."

"Chance to study the American language, anyhow," said Frank. "May pick up enough to talk to Fisher T. Fish in his native tongue." *Magnet 1137*



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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This odd page has turned up amongst my books. It is typical of Lock's attractive illustrations for Annuals in the *Tiger Tim* group. I wonder if any C.D. reader knows which one? At any rate, you will all enjoy doing the puzzle.



☒ You all know how Prince Brave-heart rescued the beautiful Princess from the Dragon. How he helped the old lady in the forest who told him how to overcome the wicked Giant and slay the Dragon. Here you see the Prince cutting the ropes that held the Princess, and, if you look carefully, you will also see the old lady, the wicked giant, and the dragon hidden in the trees and clouds. Turn the picture all ways and see whether you can find them ☒

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Editor: Mary Cadogan, 7 Ashfield Close, off Brackley Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 1SN  
Printed by Quacks Printers, 7 Grape Lane, Petergate, York, YO1 2HU. Tel. 01904-635967