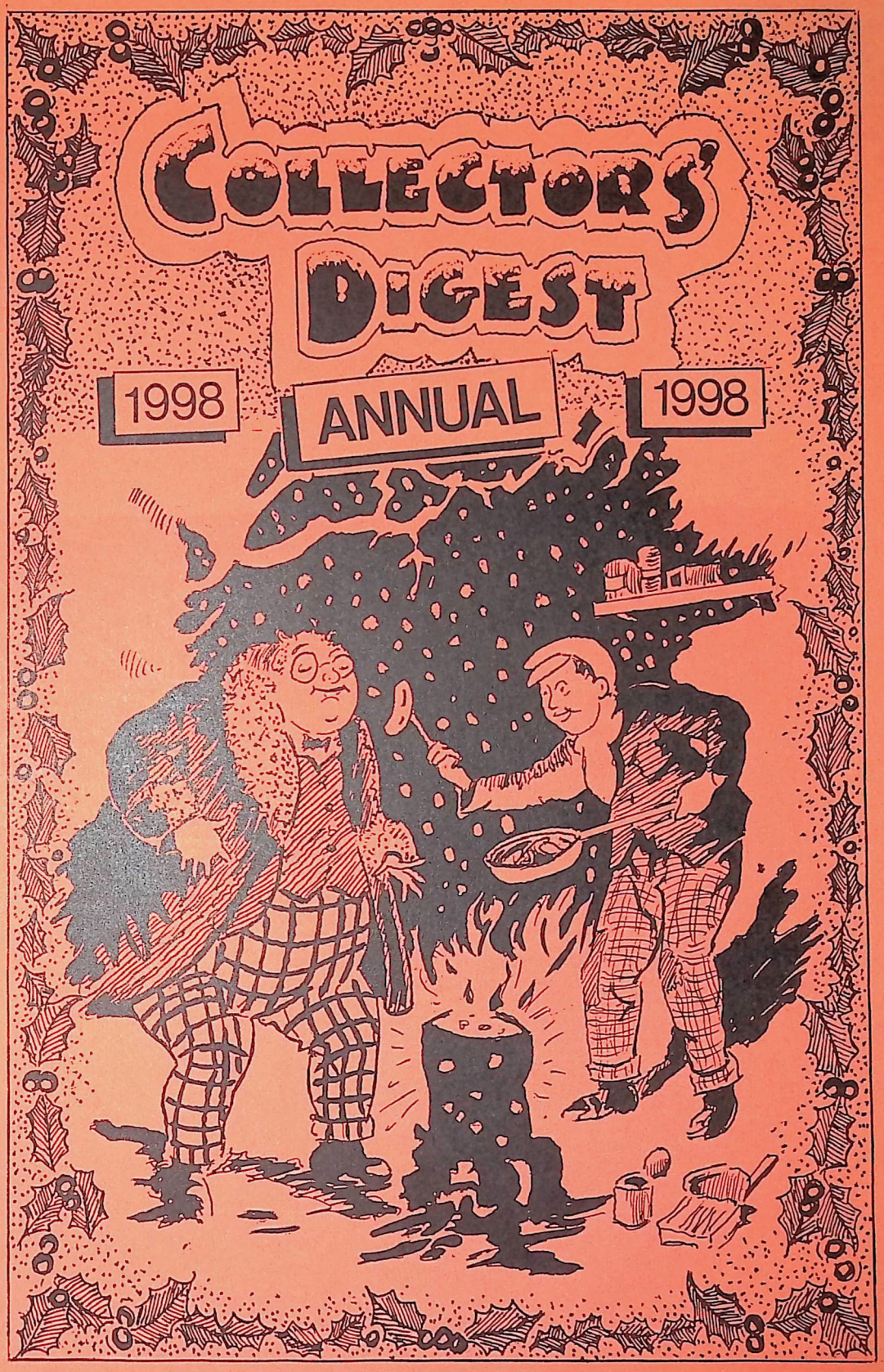
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

1998 ANNUAL 1998



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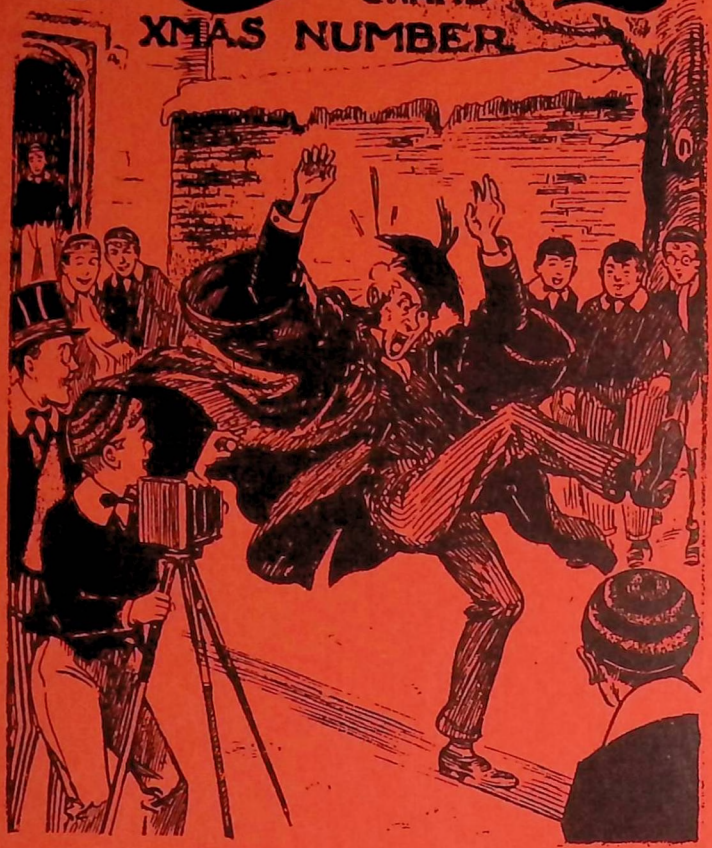


All the Season's Fun and Frolic with Barbara Redfern & Co.!

The GHOSTS of Christmas Castle!

COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL CHRISTMAS 1998

FIFTY SECOND YEAR

EDITOR: MARY CADOGAN, 7 ASHFIELD CLOSE, BECKENHAM, KENT BR3 1SN

FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

Once more it is my pleasure to offer you another C.D. Annual - which, as you will see from the heading on this page, has now run to 52 volumes. I can honestly say that this issue ranks as another of our 'best evers': its zestful, informative, entertaining and varied contents maintain the high standards of our previous annuals.

As always, we cater for most tastes in the hobby. It is a particular satisfaction to be able to include another unpublished Frank Richards story which Una Hamilton Wright has provided, and of course to have her further memories of 'Uncle Charley'. Our contributors have 'come up trumps' for us again in the realms of Hamiltonia, St. Frank's and Sexton Blake. It is good too that this year the D.C. Thomson papers have inspired several articles and that some popular girl characters also adorn the Annual's pages. Other items range from 'Just William' to pirates, invasion tales and interplanetary adventures . . .

The annual provides opportunities for intriguing illustrative material, and this year we are fortunate in having Brian Doyle's special C.H. Chapman pictures. Once again our thanks are due to Henry Webb and Bob Whiter whose drawings add so much to this volume.

I must give very warm thanks to Alison Scott and all the staff of Quacks, our printers, for the wonderful and never-failing help with the C.D. throughout the year and with the annual. Keeping up with the C.D.'s demanding schedule is indeed a *tour de force* on their part.

I want also to convey my deep gratitude to all our contributors. As Editor I am blessed in receiving such excellent and continuing help from them, and of course from the C.D.'s band of loyal and enthusiastic readers, without whose support our magazine and annual would not be marching on so firmly towards the new millennium.

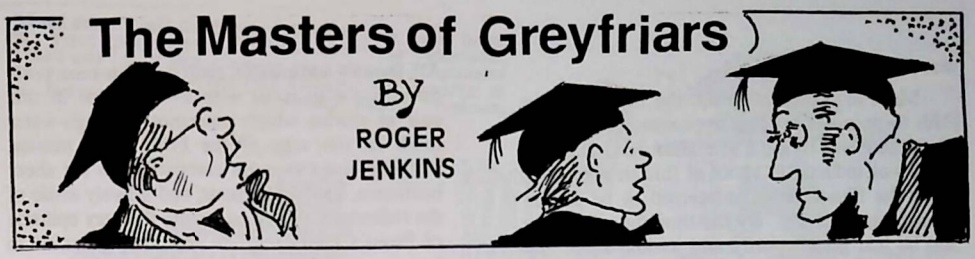
As always, I hope that the annual will add to your Christmas joys and celebrations. I send you all the age-old but ever fresh greeting - A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY, PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.

MARY CADOGAN.

CONTENTS

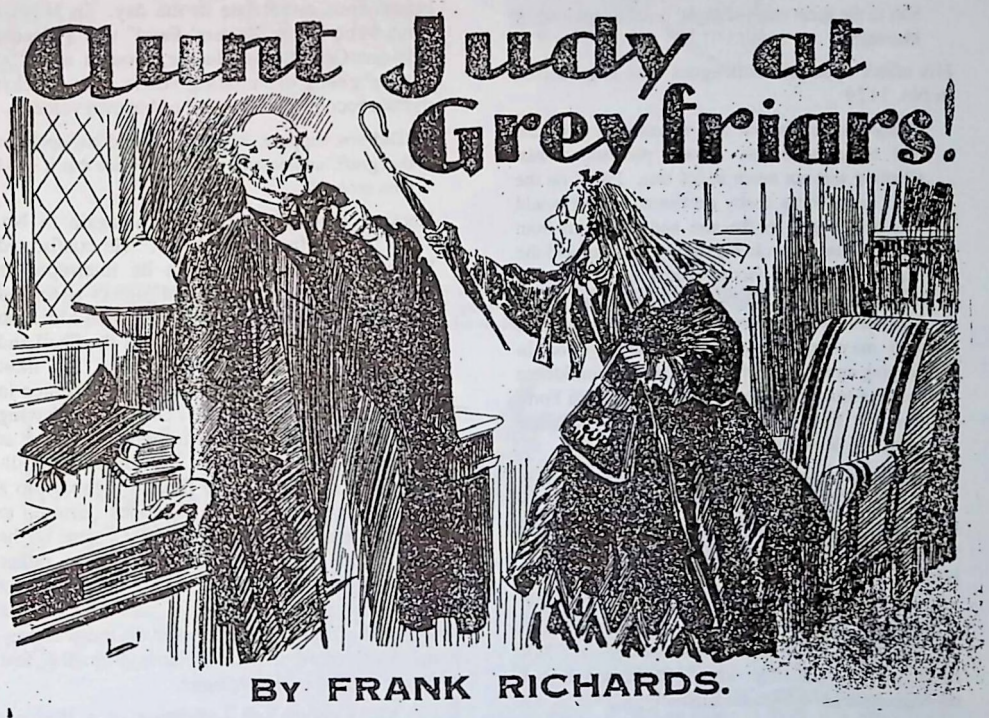
Page		
3	The Masters of Greyfriars	Roger Jenkins
8	Incorporated With?	Bill Bradford
13	Who? What? Why? Where?	J.E.M.
15	St. Frank's: The Secret of the End Study	Ray Hopkins
19	'You Ought To Be In Pictures!'	Brian Doyle
26	Guess These Places	Bob Whiter
27	Christmas Holiday Houses	Bob Whiter
29	Ancestral Voices Prophesying War	Derek Hinrich
34	The Boy Who Walked By Night	Leslie S. Laskey
38	Christmas Stories And S.G.O.L.	Dawn Marler
42	Believe It Or Not!	Ernest Holman
46	Something New Under The Sun	Tony Glynn
49	Answers to Who? What? Why? Where?	
50	Christmax Boxes Of Delight	Donald V. Campbell
53	Greyfriars Revisited	Ted Baldock
57	Answers to Christmas Holiday Houses Quiz	
58	Meet the Lone Ranger	Norman Wright
62	Colin Crewe	
63	Memories of Uncle Charley (One Foot in the Cradle)	Una Hamilton Wright
67	Silverwings at Christmas	Frank Richards
69	Smith of the Lower Third - The First Few Weeks	Brian Bunker
71	Happy Hours	
73	Denise the Dancer	Dennis L. Bird
76	When Bunter Came Home for Christmas	Les Rowley
80	An Old Fashioned Christmas at St. Frank's	Mark Caldicott
83	Fifteen Men on the Dead Man's Chest	Reg Hardinge
84	Letter from Frank Richards	Introduced by Glyn Frewer
86	A Visit From St. Nicholas	Peter McCall
87	The War of the Worlds	Laurence Price
90	Chapman, Bunter and Doyle	
92	Colin Crewe	
93	William the Hyperactive	Dr Nandu Thalange and Donald V. Campbell
96	The Big Stiff	Des O'Leary
100	Oh, Ye Olde Victorian Christmas!	Margery Woods
112	The Evening of Leuthen	Martin Waters
116	Bunter The Con Man	Peter Mahony
123	The Old Boys' Book Club - Northern Section	
124	The London Old Boys' Book Club	
125		
126	The Greyfriars Club	

The Masters of Greyfriars



By ROGER JENKINS

The assistant masters at Greyfriars were all unmarried, like the dons at Oxford colleges in times long past, but Dr. Locke, like the Master of such a college, had the privilege of taking a wife. The first mention of his family seems to have been in *Magnet* 48, when Bunter banked up a study fire so high, to aid his cooking, that he caused a fire in the Remove, and it was Harry Wharton who rescued Molly Locke, the Head's younger daughter. His elder daughter, Rosie, had been kidnapped as a baby for an act of revenge, and she grew up thinking that the circus owner was her father. When she was reunited with her parents in N. 162, a convenient birth-mark proved her identity. She was kidnapped again in No. 167, but found and reunited with her parents permanently. The only other close relative was the Head's niece, who appeared as a suffragette in No. 50.



The kidnapping of Rosie had an unexpected sequel in No. 181. It turned out that Dr. Locke had incurred a debt of £1,000 to pay detectives who had looked for Rosie over the years. He had not gone to his bank, oddly enough, but had gone to loan sharks called the Confidential Debt Agency. He had already repaid the £1,000 plus £2,000 interest, but he still owed another £5,000 in interest. When he expelled Vernon-Smith, his father who was called the Cotton King came to Greyfriars and told Dr. Locke that he owned the Debt Agency and would ruin Dr. Locke if he refused to take his son back. The Head refused, and it was Bob Cherry who eventually cut the Gordian knot. Incidentally, in later years Vernon-Smith was incensed when ill-natured juniors suggested his father was a moneylender, but these jibes were in fact true.

As time passed, Dr. Locke's family seemed to fall into the background more and more until they were totally forgotten, and when the Head spent Christmas at Wharton Lodge in 1929 he was on his own, though Ferrers Locke was on the track of the Courtfield Cracksman. The exact relationship of Dr. Locke to the detective was always left very vague.

Mr. Paul Pontifex Prout, the master of the Fifth form, made his first appearance in No. 38.

was always left very vague.

Mr. Paul Pontifex Prout, the master of the Fifth form, made his first appearance in No. 38. Wun Lung was flying a kite after dark, and Mr. Prout was induced to shoot at this strange bird. From the illustrations he seemed to be a slim young man of thirty. By the time the war broke out, he had grown portly and middle-aged, and bitterly regretted he was too old to join up. No. 458 found him in his study consoling himself by cleaning his guns and thinking about battle, murder, and sudden death. Coker persuaded him to hunt German spies, but it was all a fiasco. It was in the late twenties when Prout's character was eventually rounded out with a series of artistic little touches that brought him completely to life, like this in No. 1042:

> Prout had found, with every passing year, more and more difficulty in buttoning a waistcoat. Perpendicularly, Prout was not impressive, but his diameter and circumference were impressive. His form - not in his hearing, of course - likened him to the great earth-shaking beast mentioned by Macauley.

His effect upon his colleagues was emphasised in No. 1129:

> Henry Samuel Quelch was a man of few words, and those were not always pleasant words. Chatting was not much in his line. Prout, on the other hand, was a chatty gentleman. Prout would take a colleague by the arm and walk him from the Common Room to his study for a chat; and the expression on the victim's face at such a time might have moved a heart of stone. Prout would occasionally drop into the games study to chat with members of his form. He believed in keeping up a spirit of free and friendly confidence between master and pupil. What the Fifth Form men felt like on these occasions, Prout never knew and never suspected.

It was in No. 1042, said by Charles Hamilton to be his funniest story, that Prout eventually requested the Head to chastise the most irresponsible member of his form. After he was caned, Coker donned a beard and went into Prout's study and told him to bend over. ("Amazing," said Mr. Quelch. "My dear Prout, are you sure he uttered those words?"). Mr. Prout grasped his rifle, and Coker's scheme of revenge somehow became unstuck.

Perhaps the most hilarious episode concerning Prout occurred in 1187-8. He incurred a number of physical injuries by accident, and when he finally staggered in at the school gates with two black eyes, everyone from Dr. Locke down to Gosling thought he was engaging in orgies of drinking and fighting:

> "Take my arm - the arm of a friend", urged Capper. "Walk as steadily as you can. Lean on me . . . Think of the sensation it would cause if you were to fall, or even to stumble! Think of the boys, sir - think of the Head!"

All Prout's unbearable patronage in past years came home to roost with a vengeance in this pair of stories which represent the high-water mark in the saga of the Fifth Form master. Nothing else can quite compare with the sheer brilliance, mellow humour, and a lively sense of the ridiculous. They constitute the very epitome of Prout's character. It would be pleasant to leave matters there, but the Prout headmaster series in 1390 - 1400 deserves mention. With power, Mr. Prout's amiabilities vanished. He appointed Loder as school captain, and supported him in a dispute with Mr. Quelch. It was a logical extension of his character, but an unpleasant one, and only Dr. Locke's unexpected return when Prout was about to administer some unjust floggings prevented his reign from being worse than it was. After all this, it was difficult to view Prout in quite the same light again.

Mr. Horace Hacker, the Master of the Shell (often called 'the acid drop'), came into real prominence rather late in the day. In *Magnet* 1086 "The Form Masters' Feud" was a dispute between Quelch and Hacker, brought about by Bunter's skill in imitating voices. Mr. Quelch did not recognise the sound of his own voice:

> "Did you suppose, when this absurd boy spoke in that gruff, unpleasant, ridiculous voice that it was I who spoke?"

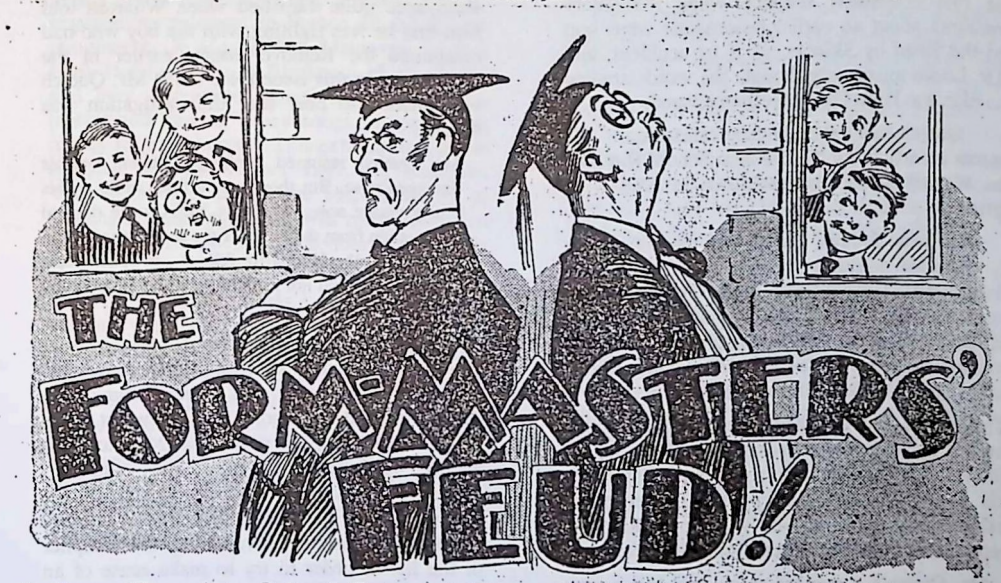
Hacker came into the limelight again in No. 1156 "Who Hacked Hacker?". He confiscated Hobson's lovely cake when he interrupted a dorm. feast, and a number of juniors attempted to retrieve it. *Magnet* 1307 "The Mad Musician of Greyfriars" featured Hoskins of the Shell and that meant Hacker was involved. His most important role was in the Tuckshop Rebellion in *Magnets* 1510-15. The Governors, having written off Prout, decided to appoint Hacker as temporary headmaster. The impatient, ill-natured Shell master, the nearest approach to a tyrant master, was an obvious choice to precipitate a rebellion, but by 1937 some of the magic had gone, and the effect was rather disappointing. Instead of drama there was just horseplay and high spirits, and the episode where the rebels made Hacker do the washing-up reads more like an episode from the Red Circle school in the *Hotspur*.

Mr. Capper was something of a shadowy figure, often referred to but never given a real part to play. In early days he was an ornithologist, and later he was said to be a golf bore. The various traits he showed were a bit contradictory, and he remains an unsatisfactory pen-picture.

Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch, the master of the Remove, was involved in so many stories that a single article could be written about him alone. In early days, he was depicted as a lantern-jawed man in his early forties, wide

"Bend over!" said the disguised Coker, in deep, husky tones. Mr. Prout jumped back. "Wha-a-at?" he ejaculated. "Bend over!" "Mum-mum-my gog-good man!" stuttered the Form master, his ample flesh quivering and creeping, as he realised that he must be dealing with a madman.

ALL THROUGH HUNTER! Quarrels among the junior members of Greyfriars are frequent and painfully free, but quarrels among the masters—those highly dignified gentlemen in caps and gowns—are very rare indeed. Yet this week, Greyfriars has a fresh sensation to talk about, for two of their Form masters actually quarrel!



A Long Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co., the world-renowned chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

awake and with a certain sense of humour. By the time of the coloured covers, he was in his mid-fifties, with angular features and pince-nez. The earlier Quelch was probably the better teacher, but the later Quelch was by far the more interesting character. I always like to think of Quelch in No. 1297 when, wandering alone in the snow and mist near Wharton Lodge, he missed his way, and cried out "Help! If you are a Christian come to my aid!" Jim Valentine did just that, and in the end he sponsored Valentine for Greyfriars, paid his fees and expenses, and bestowed his frosty kindness upon him.

Perhaps the most outstanding story about Quelch in his early days was *Magnet* 407 when Skinner managed to insert an advertisement in a local paper inviting ladies of the neighbourhood to call at Greyfriars to meet a man of pleasing disposition with a view to matrimony. This seems to have been the last time that a joke at Quelch's expense was perpetrated by a boy whose identity was never definitely known to him. If Mr. Quelch had no wife, he possessed other relatives. His plump niece Cora Quelch came to the school twice and was fond of Bunter. His nephew Roger was so addicted to practical jokes that uncle was quite pleased to see him leave Greyfriars, but Quelch did not forget Roger Quelch, and sent him presents from time to time.

Mr. Quelch was something of an author. For years he had pored over black-letter manuscripts in the school library, from which he gleaned the material for his forthcoming History of Greyfriars. On countless occasions the manuscript was hidden or even destroyed, and in one celebrated instance when derogatory remarks about an earlier headmaster were sent to the Head by Skinner, as if by accident, and Dr. Locke mistakenly thought the words applied to him, the High Oaks rebellion ensued.

Quelch had other literary relaxations. He wrote an article for "The Public School Review" in *Magnet* 1296, and sat down to read it in print:

> Like most authors, Quelch was fond of reading his own works. They seemed so superior, somehow, to the works of anybody else. Perusing that masterly article on an important subject, Quelch could not help feeling pleased. The June sunshine at his window was reflected in the frosty but genial smile on his countenance.

The article was destined to cause the Remove master some acute embarrassment later in the story, but now let us turn from his relaxations to his vocation, which was perhaps never better exemplified than in No. 1150 in which he returned to Greyfriars after a long absence:

> Mr. Quelch's somewhat crusty face had a very bright expression. He had enjoyed an unusually long holiday; but the Remove master had reached a period of life when prolonged holidays did not appeal to him very much. His life was wrapped up in his work at school; and like many schoolmasters, he had a rather lost feeling outside the school walls.

When he caught sight of Bunter:

> Mr. Quelch, seeing a Greyfriars fellow, felt like the war-horse snuffing the battle from afar. It was like the smell of the barracks to an old soldier.

Quelch was quite glad to see Bunter, but when it turned out that Bunter had been sent home and was returning without permission in the hope that his form-master would intercede on his behalf, the ears of the fat Owl were boxed and he was sent back home.

What are we to make of the three famous series - the two Rebel series and the Stacey stories - when Quelch and Wharton were at loggerheads? Of course the stories would be nothing without the feud between master and boy, but it is possible to wish that Quelch had not been so embittered that his judgement should have been clouded by resentment and that Dr. Locke should not have been obliged to rebuke the Remove master so often. Some readers of the *Magnet* today consider that these three stories spoil the image of Quelch that was so assiduously built up elsewhere. At any rate, it is pleasing to record that in the very last *Magnet*, Mr. Quelch told Wharton that he was determined never to be misled in his judgement again.

There was a very human side to Quelch's character. When Loder reported Wharton for fighting with Ponsonby, Mr. Quelch's annoyance quite vanished when Wharton told him that he was fighting with the boy who had catapulted the Remove master earlier in the afternoon. In this issue (No. 1215) Mr. Quelch was pleased to hear that the castigation was severe:

> Mr. Quelch resumed rubbing ointment on his damaged nose. But there was a faint smile on his crusty visage now. Probably Mr. Quelch derived consolation from the news of the severe castigation inflicted on the Highcliffe fellow - in spite of the fact that he could not possibly approve of anything of the kind.

The identity of the other form-masters at Greyfriars is surrounded in mystery. At various times Mr. Twigg was said to be master of the Third form and the Second form. The list in the 1921 Holiday Annual states that Mr. Eusabius Twigg was master of the Third, and Mr. Bernard Morrison Twigg was master of the Second form. It seems that these unusual Christian names were invented by the compiler of the list in order to try to make sense of an error by Charles Hamilton. In later times, Mr. Wiggins was credited with being the master of the Third. There was a mention in one *Magnet* of the "Babes" of the First form, but nothing

was ever heard of them again.

Greyfriars was conceived in the old tradition of form-masters who could teach all subjects, instead of possessing a staff of specialist teachers, which has been customary at public schools and secondary schools for some decades now. Of course, from the point of view of the narrative, the form-master's thorough knowledge of the boys in his form enabled Charles Hamilton to give a more intimate picture of the events he was describing. Nevertheless, he did make an exception in certain cases, particularly modern languages, which no self-respecting form master could ever lower himself to teach.

It was traditional before the First World War for a German teacher to be a Prussian disciplinarian like Herr Schneider at St. Jim's. Herr Gans at Greyfriars played little part in the stories, and when war came the position of a German teacher was clearly a difficult one. *Magnet* 456, published towards the end of 1916, analysed the feelings of the various Removites towards the German master. Skinner led a campaign to make Herr Gans think he was losing his mind. It was made clear in the story that Herr Gans was a Saxon who resented Prussian domination of Germany, and he was also depicted as a generous and kind-hearted person. In view of the German war atrocities it was rather a brave attempt on the part of Charles Hamilton to get the reader to sympathise with an enemy alien.

No such consideration applied to the French master, Monsieur Charpentier, who was beset by impecunious relatives in France all asking for remittances. In *Magnet* 234, Mauleverer took a Bank Holiday party to Blackpool of all places, and they discovered Monsieur dressed as a pierrot and singing saucy songs to earn more money for his relatives. This extreme was never repeated, but in *Magnet* 1242, for example, Vernon-Smith suspected the French master of stealing a banknote and it was made clear just how shabby Monsieur Charpentier was, simply because of the money he was sending to France.

The French master's most noticeable attribute was his inability to keep order, and this was specially in evidence when, after insisting that Wibley be expelled for dressing-up like Monsieur and poking fun at him, the Remove turned his lessons into a bear garden:

> Mr. Quelch's grim glance turned on Mossoo. There was a gleam of scorn in his eyes. A master who could not handle boys had scant respect from Henry Samuel Quelch.
>
> The classroom looked as if a hurricane had struck it. Mossoo sat in the middle of the wreck like Marius in the ruins of Carthage. He sat and rubbed his nose and the back of his neck, and spluttered. Mr. Quelch very nearly snorted at the sight.
>
> "Can I assist you, Monsieur Charpentier?" he asked, unable to keep the inflexion of sarcasm from his voice.

Mr. Lascelles, the maths master, arrived at Greyfriars in *Magnet* 324. He was seen by the Famous Five in the boxing ring at Chilford, where he fought under the name of Larry Lynx. It was kept dark as far as possible, but events took a more serious turn in No. 331 when his old associates kidnapped him in the hopes of making him return to the ring. It was never really made clear why a mathematics graduate needed to become a prizefighter, and what Dr. Locke precisely knew was never disclosed to the reader. Certainly at Rookwood Dr. Chisholm was extremely annoyed to discover that Dicky Dalton was a prizefighter.

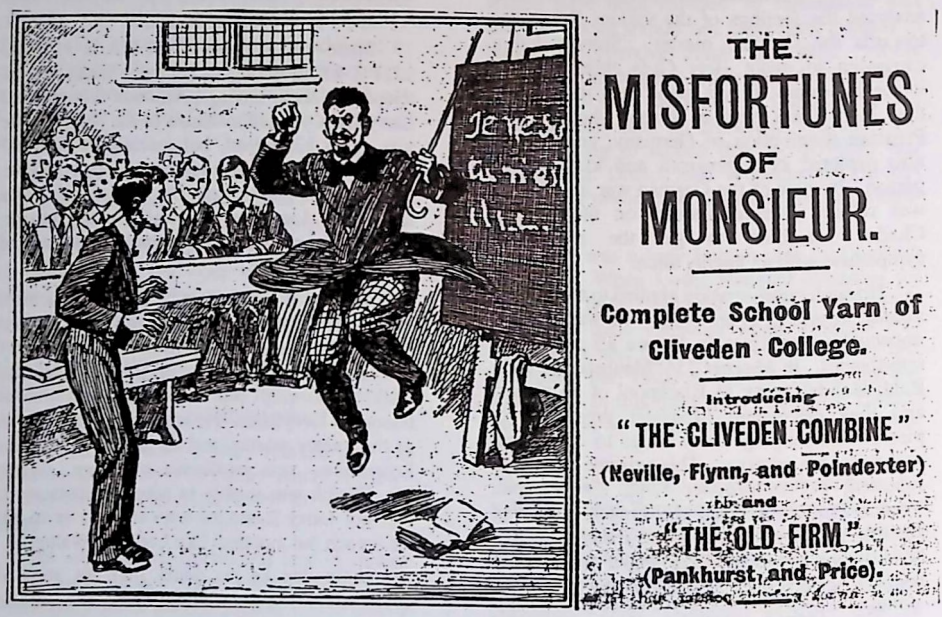
There was a replay of all this in *Magnets* 1321-2 when, owing to Bunter's tricks on the telephone, some boxing promoters thought that Larry Lynx wanted to return to the ring, and he was again kidnapped, but rescued by Vernon-Smith who had been tracking him out of spite. It became apparent that Dr. Locke did know about Mr. Lascelles' previous boxing career, and merely needed to be assured that he had given it up for ever.

Among a staff of middle-aged teachers, Larry Lascelles stood out as the one exception but, as he was not a form-master like Dicky Dalton, he seldom had a prominent role, and there were very few descriptions of maths lessons at Greyfriars. He was usually referred to as the games master, and he played cricket for Loamshire - as a gentleman, of course. When Mr. Quelch was unable to take the Remove, it was not Larry Lascelles who stepped in to fill the breach but a prefect like Loder or Walker.

There can be no doubt that the staff at Greyfriars were well-defined and their characteristics etched into the mind of every reader. The exaggerated tyrants like Ratcliff, Selby, and Manders had no place at Greyfriars: Hacker, the nearest to a tyrant at Greyfriars was only a minor character, and even he was worried about his nephew Eric Wilmot. Undoubtedly, it is Prout and Quelch who are unforgettable, and they illuminate nearly every story in which they appear. They are the special glory of Greyfriars. We shall never forget them.

Incorporated With?

Within the Hobby we often refer to the longevity of some of the boys' papers, but how about the ill-fated and short-lived publications? My research reveals a number that only ran for two to three years and sometimes only for a few months, none of which were 'axed' by the outbreak of either World War. With the aid of *Old Boys Books* (Lofts and Adley), a really invaluable guide, and with reference to my own collection, I offer a few statistics and data which may, I hope, interest you. In the case of my own papers, my knowledge is limited by the few issues I possess.



In each case I have indicated the publisher, duration of run, number of issues, approximate size (length by width) and average number of pages. There were many short-lived papers in the second half of the last century and the first decade of this one, quite a few of these published by E.J. Brett or Guy Rayner. For this exercise we will commence in 1911 and conclude in 1939, my knowledge and interest in later papers being almost non-existent.

Boys' Best Story Paper (Newnes) 7.10.1911 - 22.6.1912 = 36 issues. 14" x 10½" 16 pages.

Despite bright red and white covers and a few established authors, such as E.L. Breton, and illustrations by Paul Hardy, it seems a bit heavy going. My only copy contains three serials and three short stories. However, it is difficult to pass judgement on something designed for readers of so long ago and different from papers most of us know.

The Dreadnought (A/P) 9.3.1912 - 12.6.1915 = 159 issues. 11" x 7". 36 pages.

I think this superior to many of its rivals. The green and black covers catch the eye, and contents varied from Cliveden stories by Charles Hamilton to exploits of Sexton Blake. "Scorned by the School" and "Cad of the School" by E.S. Brooks first appeared herein (Nos. 25 - 48).

Cheer Boys Cheer (A/P) 25.5.1912 - 13.9.1913 = 69 issues. 11½" x 7½". 36 pages.

A very bland orangey pink cover with equally dull stories. Mainly serials (about 7). With authors such as J.N. Pentelow, R.S. Warren Bell and Horace Phillips, the Editor, one might have hoped for something more attractive. Replaced by:-

The Boys' Journal (A/P) 20.9.1913 - 9.1.1915 = 72 issues. 11½" x 7½". 32 pages.

Initially the same colour and format as its predecessor, it later changed to blue and white with 28 pages. Usually 6 stories including 2

NELSON LEE and NIPPER'S ADVENTURE in the Ding-Dong STRUGGLE against PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE and the Powers of the GREEN TRIANGLE.

serials. Authors included Charles Gilson, D.H. Parry. Illustrations by Fred Bennett and Harry Lane. Incorporated with the *Dreadnought*, which itself only survived a few more months.

Detective Library (A/P) 2.8.1919 - 10.7.1920 = 50 issues. 7½" x 5½". 32 pages.

I always think of "libraries" in terms of monthly publications but this and the next two items were definitely weekly papers. Only about 2 stories per issue with numerous tales of Nelson Lee, although only those from No. 29 (Feb 1920) were penned by Brooks.

Robin Hood Library (A/P) 15.4.1919 - 10.7.1920 = 57 issues. 7½" x 5½". 32 pages.

Initially full length stories of the King of Sherwood, amongst the poorest I have ever read, some set in Spain and Africa, including an unbelievable character, Master Thom Cure. The only redeemable features were the serials, commencing in No. 33, byauthors David Goodwin and Morton Pike.

The Prairie Library (A/P) 15.4.1919 - 10.7.1920 = 57 issues. 7½" x 5½". 32 pages.

Mainly long stories of Buffalo Bill. I cannot lay my hands on my one and only copy but memories and impressions were not favourable.

Nugget Weekly (A/P) 17.7.1920 - 5.3.1921 = 34 issues. 12" x 7½". 16 pages.

This was an amalgam of the last three papers, containing stories of Robin Hood, Buffalo Bill and Nelson Lee. The covers, largely by Fred Bennett, were multi-coloured and looked as if the actual colouring had been done by a reader. I think the short life of these last four papers had much to do with the uninteresting contents.

Sports and Fun (A/P) 11.2.1922 - 25.11.1922 = 42 issues. 13½" x 9". 20 pages.

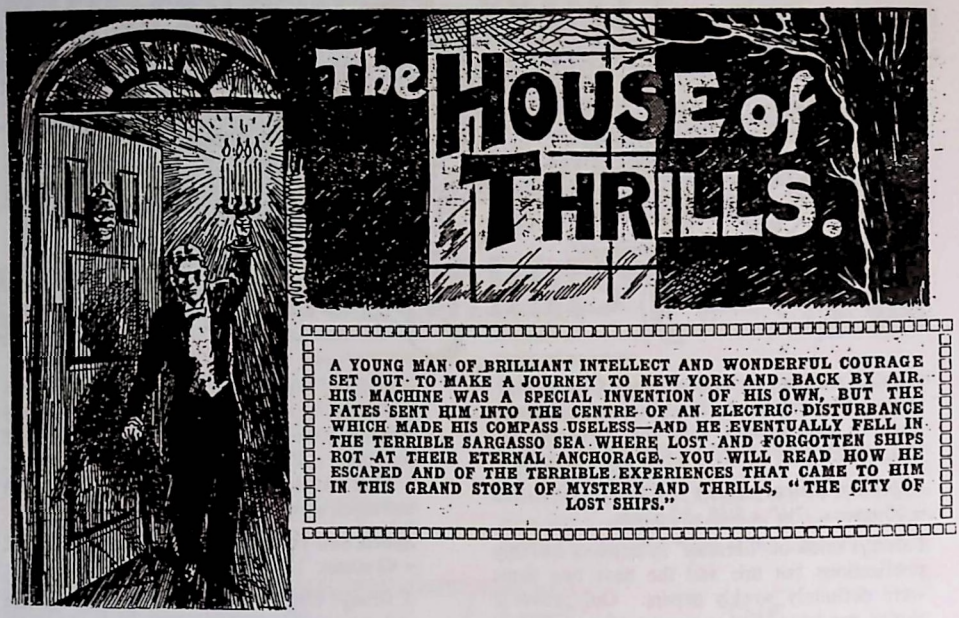
A strange effort with an average of five stories and numerous cartoons. The back page was usually a large photo of a popular football team. I wonder it lasted for 42 weeks!

Sports and Adventure (A/P) 29.4.1922 - 25.11.1922 - 26 issues. 9½" x 7". 44 pages.

The only two copies I possess indicate just one serial (Eric Townsend) and four series. The title is a fair description of the contents, which do nothing for me.

The Rocket (A/P) 17.2.1923 - 11.10.1924 = 87 issues. 13" x 8½". 24 pages.

An attractive paper with plenty of good reading, usually five stories of which two would be serials. Authors and illustrators were normally credited, something I find highly desirable. Thus we know Gwyn Evans wrote herein, in 1923, prior to his first Sexton Blake story in the *Union Jack*. Alfred Edgar wrote a long series of Western yarns under the pen-name of Jake Denvers. The Editor, Francis A. Symonds, made many contributions as Earle Danesford!



The cover was multi-coloured with Valda well represented throughout.

Rovering (Religious Tract Society) 22.3.1924 - 28.3.1925 = 54 issues. 11½" x 8½". 36 pages.

Allegedly for "young men", it was obviously aimed at older youths of the Boy Scout movement. Stodgy articles and a mass of advertising made it a rather messy and uninteresting publication. Strange that it was not a product of C.A. Pearson who produced *The Scout.*

Vanguard (D.C.T.) 15.10.1923 - 22.5.1926 = 136 issues. 12" x 7½". 28 pages.

Generally comprised one long and three short stories. An unattractive and uninteresting paper and I am surprised it survived as long as it did. *Adventure, Wizard* and *Rover* had been very successful, so maybe Thomson were unduly ambitious.

Startler (A/P) 1.3.1930 - 27.2.1932 = 105 issues. 10½" x 7". 28 pages.

Having just looked through 26 issues I can find nothing to commend! About seven stories, with an occasional serial. It was replaced by:-

The Surprise (A/P) 5.3.1932 - 11.11.1933 = 89 issues. 11" x 7". 32 pages.

An interesting and more mature paper. Very rarely found, but I happened to visit Norman Shaw on the right day! Two school serials, "Chums of Cranworth" and "Only a Council Schoolboy", the latter reminiscent of Hamilton in plot and characters. Usually a longish story of Martin Holt, Detective, plus about four short stories. Illustrations, largely by George Wakefield, were very eye-catching. Subsequently incorporated in:-

The Bullseye (A/P) 24.1.1931 - 24.1.1934 = 183 issues. 11" x 7½". 28 pages.

Quite the most legendary paper of its decade. Now very scarce, and probably commanding the highest price of any A/P publication. Thrilling stories with weird twists owed much to the illustrations of George Wakefield. Noted for "The Phantom of Cursitor Fields" and "The House of Thrills" series, both written by Alfred Edgar, plus 4 - 5 short stories. I first read it at the age of ten, too young to really appreciate it. A version of the "Phantom" story appeared in *Supernatural Stories for Boys,* published by Hamlyn in 1968, although it was there credited to one Henry Pope.

The Red Arrow (D.C.T.) 19.3.1932 - 18.3.1933 = 52 issues. 8" x 6". 56 pages.

A singularly unattractive paper with dull covers and few illustrations. Contained a long adventure story and a short serial. I only tried a couple of issues.

Scoops (Pearson) 10.2.1934 - 26.6.1934 = 20 weeks. 12½" x 9", average 23 pages.

Probably the first science-fiction paper for boys, and totally different from anything seen before. Contents included serialisation of "The Poison Belt" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, two complete stories by E.S. Brooks and a George E. Rochester serial "The Black Vultures". Probably a little ahead of its time, and it never caught on. A few years ago a complete run sold for about £200, but not today!

The Pioneer (A/P) 10.2.1934 - 28.7.1934 = 25 issues. 11" x 7½". 28 pages.

Rather striking covers and well illustrated by

Valda, Parker and Glossop. Only one serial, "Ghosts of the Spanish Main" by Draycot M. Dell, really stands out. No better or worse than many other publications of its day, but probably just one too many.

Boys' Broadcast (A/P) 27.10.1934 - 29.6.1935 = 36 issues. 14½" x 10½". 20 pages.

Launched with a blue and white cover, but changed to more colourful covers in its latter weeks, and very slightly reduced in size. Usually six stories including one serial by Captain Essex, a pen-name of Richard Essex, author of the "Lessinger" books. Glossop was busy throughout.

The Pilot (A/P) 5.10.1935 - 2.4.1938 = 131 issues. 11" x 9". 28 pages.

An interesting paper with good stories and illustrations. Many of the serials eventually appeared in the *Boys Friend Library*. Charles Hamilton contributed "The Outlaw Three" and the early "Will Hay at Bendover" stories, although later episodes were by E.S. Brooks - I wonder why? One of the best of the 'failures'. I was sorry when the paper was incorporated in *Wild West Weekly*.

The Buzzer. (Newnes). 16.10.1937 - 18.6.1938 = 36 issues. 12½" x 10". 32 pages.

Another large format with fascinating covers by Valda, who also did many of the inside illustrations. E.S. Brooks wrote stories of "The Invisible Speedman" in every issue but I found it held little appeal for me. Newnes' successes were mainly confined to the 3d and 4d libraries.

Wild West Weekly (A/P) 12.3.1938 - 18.2.1939 = 50 issues. 12½" x 10½". 32 pages.

Normally two serials and five short stories, mainly set in the old Wild West, but a few modern crime stories and some of World War I (generally by Rochester). Some excellent covers by D.C. Eyles, with Eric Parker and Fred Bennett much to the fore. A most attractive publication but, to me, it never seemed to fulfil its early promise.

* * * * * * *

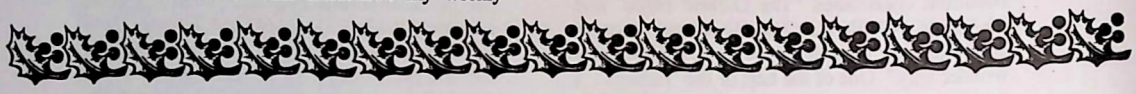
Are there any conclusions to be reached from my investigations? Amalgamated Press had the most failures over this period, yet these were only a relatively small percentage of their tremendous output. D.C. Thomson scored five hits and two misses! Small format issues had a short life, yet how about the success of the *Nelson Lee?* It looks as if, in the 1920s and 1930s, the large format was equally unpopular, only the *Boys' Friend* was still in demand till 1927, but no doubt the Rookwood stories

extended its life.

It would seem that those papers giving a wide variety of stories each week were more popular, yet the *Magnet* and *Gem* indicate otherwise. While I was at school, every week there were at least a dozen papers on sale. The average pocket money was sixpence per week, and each desirable publication cost twopence, plus the monthly Libraries at fourpence. Thus it was a most competitive market and only those most popular could survive.

Is it that some magical blend of presentation and storytelling prolonged the life of other papers? How much was due to the authors, or the control and vast knowledge of the editors, is hard to say. Whatever some papers lacked, no amount of gimmicks or free gifts could save them. As one who read most of the publications in the 1930s, I have tried to think back as to what influenced my weekly choices. Though I was often initially attracted by eye-catching covers, eventually it was the appeal of certain stories, rarely knowing the authors, that ensured my regular purchases. Certain story characters did much for a paper's popularity and, looking back, certain names still come to the fore. Ken King and Captain Justice (*Modern Boy*); Dixon Hawke (*Adventure*); Baldy's Angels (*Ranger*); Colwyn Dane (*Champion*); Victor Gaunt (*Triumph*); Flying Beetle (*BOP*): Wolf of Kabul (*Wizard*) - to name just a few which come instantly to mind. Occasionally the combination of many good authors was a winning factor, of which *Chums* must be the best example.

It's all a long time ago now, but I hope that even those who are too young to remember the pre-Second World War publications may find something in all this to interest them.



STILL WANTED - S.B.L. 5TH SERIES. FONTANA 1, 20, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30, 31, 38, 40. BEST WISHES TO ALL C.D. READERS FOR CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR.
J. ASHLEY, 46 NICHOLAS CRESCENT, FAREHAM, HANTS. PO15 5AH. 01329-234489

****

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS AND VERY BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR TO MARY, BILL, CHRIS, LAURIE, LES, AND MAC AND ALL HOBBYISTS. CAN ANYONE HELP WITH WORDS FROM ANY RONALD FRANKAU SONG?
JOHN BRIDGEWATER, FLAT 5A SAULFLAND PLACE, HIGHCLIFFE, CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET BH23 4QP.

****

SEASON'S GREETINGS. MANY THANKS TO OUR EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTORS.
REG ANDREWS, LAVERSTOCK, SALISBURY.

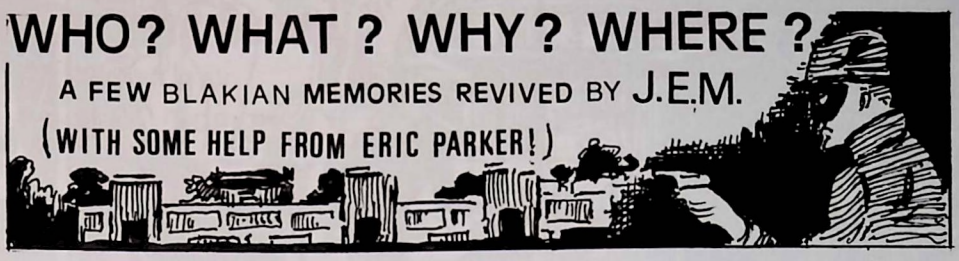
****

UP THE A ONE TWO SEVEN
ALONG THE M TWO FIVE
DOWN THE M ELEVEN
I'M SURE HE'S STILL ALIVE?
HE SAID HE'S FATHER XMAS.
ON TOP HE ADDED "SORRY"
THERE WON'T BE ANY PRESENTS
HIS SLEIGH HAS HIT A LORRY.

WANTED: HOMES FOR 6 REINDEER.
FELICITATIONS, JOHNNY BURSLEM.

****

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO FRIENDS AND READERS EVERYWHERE.
BILL BRADFORD



Follow the clues anti-clockwise. (see next page)

1) **WHO** is the evil-looking character attempting to hypnotise Sexton Blake?

2) **WHAT** is that curious mark on the ground which is so clearly frightening the three Orientals?

3) **WHY** is the nasty, dwarfish Mr. Reece, head of the Criminals' Confederation, looking round so suspiciously at the bearded seaman on the left?

4) **WHERE** is this incredible scene being enacted?

5) **WHO** is the Jill-in-a-box and can she escape her villainous-looking captors?

6) **WHAT** are Blake, Tinker and Inspector Coutts doing in a theatre at rehearsal time (they are certainly showing no interest in the ladies of the chorus)?

7) **WHY** is the ship's steward hiding from the girl who is herself acting rather furtively?

8) **WHERE** is this somewhat odd incident taking place and what is the significance of the large key the boy is holding?

Answers on page 49.

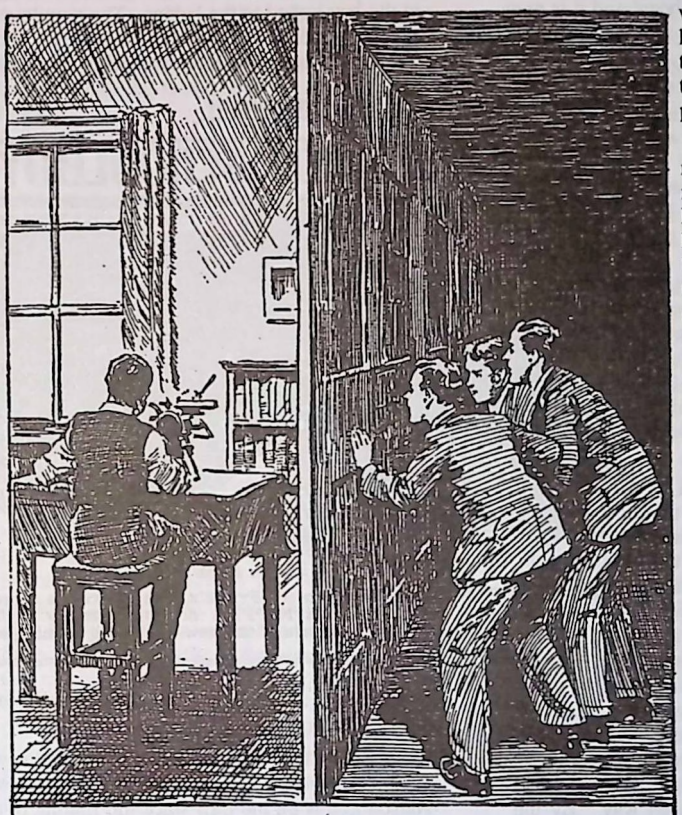

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

St. FRANK'S: The Secret of The End Study.

BY RAY HOPKINS

What is the new boy from Lancashire doing locked in the end study in the Ancient House Remove? Apart from time spent in class, eating and sleeping, Dick Goodwin is there all the time working on something that is mystifying the Remove no end, sanctioned by Dr. Stafford, who has said he must not be disturbed! A screen has been placed just inside the door so that nothing is visible if one gets a glimpse through the open door. Frosted glass has replaced the clear glass in the study window. All these things conspire to exercise the Remove's curiosity to fever pitch.

But by means of a secret passage which finishes on the other side of one of the walls of the study of mystery and which fortuitously contains a spyhole covered by a sliding panel, Nipper and Co. are able to see right inside the study. Dick Goodwin is working diligently on an "extremely complicated machine, beautifully constructed, and a masterpiece of intricate mechanism". It appears to be "three feet square and eighteen inches high". When Goodwin finishes his work Nipper observes that he lowers the machine beneath the top of the table which he then covers by a sliding panel.



I applied my eye to the spyhole in the woodwork, and found that I was looking right into Dick Goodwin's study of mystery! The new boy himself was there, in his shirt-sleeves, and he was seated at a table on which rested a complicated piece of machinery. "Well I'm jiggered!" I murmured.

A stranger in the neighbourhood, Naggs by name, gets acquainted with Fullwood and discovers that he hates the new boy for no better reason than that Goodwin's father has been reported as being hauled up in court over a £700 debt. He tells Fullwood that Goodwin's father is a scoundrel who has robbed him of a valuable formula for a dye which is something uniquely new to the cotton trade. Goodwin Sr. told Naggs he will be rich in three months but when he approaches him later he says he knows nothing of the new dye. Dick was given the formula when he left for St. Frank's and Naggs believes it to be secreted somewhere in Goodwin's study. Will Fullwood right a great wrong and help him retrieve his stolen formula? What Naggs hopes to find is something much more solid than a piece of paper. Fullwood has no inkling of this.

Fullwood doesn't believe Naggs. Being cast from the same mould, he believes that others are just as crooked as he is. But, to get back at Goodwin, he agrees to help him get into the study at the end of the Remove passage. Also, he won't refuse the sixty pounds Naggs promises to him and his pals, Gulliver and Bell.

Fullwood and Co. also discover the secret

passage, Tommy Watson having forgotten to close the entrance to the tunnel and passages in the North Tower leading to the secret passage in the Ancient House. Nipper and Co. hide in a deep recess and overhear that Fullwood and Co. have also discovered the sliding panel and spy hole into Goodwin's study.

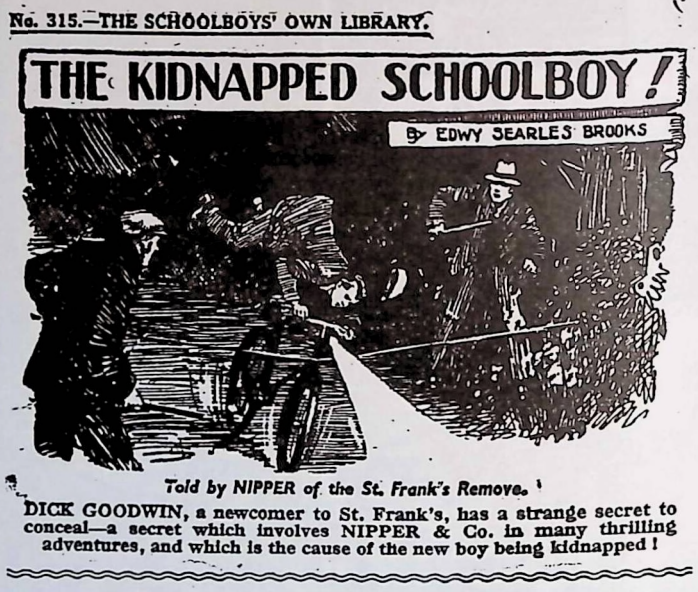
Nipper tells Goodwin what he has seen and also warns him that Fullwood has access to the spy hole. Goodwin is taken into the passage and shown the spy hole in the panel. Returning to Goodwin's study, Nipper and Co. help him to shift a heavy bookcase in front of the panel thus blocking the spy hole and stopping anyone entering the room via the panel. Goodwin, out of gratitude, offers to explain to them exactly what he is doing in the locked study, but Nipper refuses to listen saying they know whatever it is, it must be honest and above-board and it is none of their business.

Fullwood gives Naggs a map and instructions how to get into the secret panel into Goodwin's study and Naggs says he will give him ninety pounds if all goes well as this method sounds considerably safer than his having to break in through the window. Of course, he has no intention of giving the junior anything, but Fullwood doesn't know this. Nipper follows Fullwood from the dormitory and watches him unlock the cellar grating through which Naggs will enter the Ancient House.

Nipper informs Nelson Lee that there are burglars in the secret passage having made sure, by keeping his ear to the panelled wall of the passage containing the Remove studies, that Naggs has arrived at the panel leading into Goodwin's study and heard him cursing because the heavy bookcase has made it impossible for him to enter. Nelson Lee confronts him with a revolver and, in a panic, Naggs throws himself at the panel leading into the studies passage, which gives way. By the time Lee has run along the secret passage he has escaped into the night.

Naggs and a confederate kidnap Goodwin and take him to Bramley Gap, some sixteen miles from St. Frank's. There they intend to force Goodwin to reveal the secret of his new invention, not the dye formula with which Naggs had bluffed Fullwood, but a marvellous new piece of machinery keenly desired by the real villain of the piece who is behind all these endeavours to capture Goodwin and who is no less than a rival cotton manufacturer to Goodwin Sr.

Half a mile from the shore at Bramley Gap lies what remains of the ruined Bramley lighthouse and it is to this grim place that the two men take Goodwin and lock him inside the former storeroom. There he is left without food, the kidnappers hoping the solitary confinement without sustenance will force the boy to speak. Six hours later they return to the prisoner, find him still obstinately silent and, to frighten him into talking, tie him to the iron ladder which leads from the sea up to the lighthouse door. When the tide comes in it will gradually submerge him and he will cry for help. Naggs intends to row back and release the boy in the nick of time. He is prevented from doing this by that old enemy the weather. A violent storm makes it impossible for them to get close enough to the boy lashed to the ladder. The tumultuous waves would smash the boat to pieces. Dick Goodwin, the waves now saturating him from



had to toe, watches in despair as the small boat vanishes from his sight.

Although the doomed junior does not know it, help is nearer at hand than he supposes. Nelson Lee is on the trail since the finding of a note written on a piece of scrap newspaper and wrapped around a pencil which Goodwin had been able to throw out of the car near the spot where he had been kidnapped. Concealed in the darkness of a cave where the kidnappers discuss their plans, Lee hears of their foul plot and decides to wait and arrest the two men when they return.

When they come back alone Lee points his revolver at the men knowing that they have left Goodwin to die. The torch which Naggs hurls at him knocks Lee out and he falls to the sandy

floor of the cave while the two villains race off.

But the detective is only momentarily unconscious and he knows that he is the only one who can save Dick Goodwin, and the only way he can do this is to swim the half mile to the boy lashed to the iron ladder. He is able to cut him free but the boy's suggestion that they climb the ladder and shelter inside the lighthouse is thwarted by a huge wave which sweeps them both off the ladder too far away to get back to the rocks. Their exhaustion makes it impossible for them to return to the lighthouse and in fact the tide is carrying them back towards the shore but Lee fears they will both become unconscious and drown before they can reach Bramley Gap.

Handforth and Co., sailing in a small boat from Caistowe, have had their craft partially damaged by the storm and have lost the sail and oars but are drifting in the direction of Bramley Gap and manage to pull the exhausted Lee and Goodwin into the boat before it capsizes on the beach.

Dick Goodwin's father goes to St. Frank's to visit his son. The ordeal of no food and of being lashed to the ladder in the rough sea has given him a fever and he has been admitted to the sanatorium. Mr Goodwin introduces himself to Lee as the owner of a cotton mill near Oldham which has been facing hard times for the past four years. His son had worked on plans for a new spinning machine which would double the output of the mill. Naggs was the manager of one of the departments in Mr Goodwin's mill and had tried to get the details of the new machine from Dick. this for the purpose of informing a rival mill-owner, William Fordley, an unscrupulous scoundrel, for whom Naggs has been acting as a spy. In order to safeguard the plans for the new machine, Dick was sent to St. Frank's and installed in the impregnable end study in the Ancient House Remove passage. Mr Goodwin tells Lee that, even though Dick has completed his model and finds it works perfectly, if the plans were stolen, the machine could be put on the market by anyone and the Goodwins would not be able to prove it was Dick's invention. Lee advises Mr Goodwin to go immediately to London, apply for a patent and register it and thus safeguard the invention for ever. Thus the factory will be saved from failure.

On the train to London, the Goodwins meet an amiable old gentleman who says he is Sir Walter Collinson who has been visiting his grandson at River House School. Arrived at Victoria Station Sir Walter offers them a lift in his taxi to the City but on the way has a heart attack and asks to be taken to his home in Bloomsbury. As they help Sir Walter indoors, the door is banged behind them and they are faced with a revolver pointed at them by Naggs.

Nelson Lee, still suspicious that something untoward might happen to the Goodwins on their way to the Patent Office, has alerted Inspector Lennard of Scotland Yard to make sure they arrive safely at their destination. Lennard has sent one of his best men, Det. Sgt. Vincent, to keep an eye on the Goodwins. This alert young policeman has observed all that has taken place since their arrival at Victoria Station and the detour to the house in Bloomsbury.

Naggs, by this time, has removed the plans for the new machine from Mr Goodwin's attache case and intends to leave for Oldham by the 4:50 train from King's Cross. It is Naggs' accomplice who is at the house when it is raided by Inspector Lennard and Nelson Lee and the Goodwins are freed. But their precious plans are already on the way to Lancashire.

Nelson Lee and the Goodwins leave on a twin-engined Handley-Page from Hendon Aerodrome in order to get to Oldham before Naggs. A ten-seater is the only one available at short notice, so Nipper, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, who have gone to see the guvnor off, luckily for them, cannot be refused a ride as well.

To Naggs' utter surprise he finds himself facing the Goodwins and Nelson Lee when he gets out of the train at Hollinwood. Lee removes the plans from Naggs' pocket only to find that the envelope contains blank sheets of paper. This discovery causes such consternation that Naggs jumps back into the train (next stop Oldham) where he observes Mr Josh Cuttle who he knows has been sent to St. Frank's as someone to keep protective watch on Dick Goodwin, under the guise of an odd-job man. He realises that Cuttle must have substituted the blank sheets for the real plans while he was asleep. Naggs attacks Cuttle and retrieves the plans and, as the train slows down going into Oldham, he jumps from the train and vanishes into the night.

Lee and the Goodwins drive to Oldham Station where they are met by Cuttle who tells them he has lost the plans. Cuttle has become involved as he, too, had followed the Goodwins to London and watched Naggs leave the house in Bloomsbury and followed him onto the train to Lancashire.

Handforth's Uncle George arrives from China and invites Edward Oswald, Church and McClure to spend two days with him in London. While there, Handforth talks his uncle into letting them go to Oldham to retrieve the lost plans. Nelson Lee has failed - Handforth will succeed! This plot ploy puts Handforth and Co. in the train to Oldham where they spot Naggs in a train going in the opposite direction. He is going to Brentlowe, fifty miles from London, to deliver the plans to William Fordley. As the two trains are both halted at a station, Handforth

and Co. change from one train to the other and, watching Naggs, follow him when he exits at Brentlowe and track him to the empty house where he is to meet Fordley.

Church and McClure hide while Handforth finds a side door which opens abruptly and he is hauled by his collar inside. Church and McClure watch Fordley arrive and realise they will not now be able to rescue Handforth unaided. Returning by train to Oldham, they find Nipper and Co. at the Maiden Arms Hotel. He tells them that Nelson Lee has gone missing. Accompanied by the Goodwins and Josh Cuttle they pile into a fast car and head back to Brentlowe.

Handforth is amazed when Naggs, who has dragged him inside the house, speaks to him in the voice of Nelson Lee. What a master of disguise his Housemaster is, Handforth thinks in admiration. Fordley advises that Handforth be released. His companion in criminality concurs and to Handforth's astonishment the man he believes to be Nelson Lee does something he never does - shakes hands with the departing junior. By the unusual action Handforth observes a deep scar on the main's forefinger - a scar he knows his Housemaster does not possess. Handforth realises that Nelson Lee is not alone in being able to reproduce the speaking voices of others, and that his hand is being shaken by the real Naggs.

Fordley, examining the plans, says Dick Goodwin is a genius and gives Naggs £10,000 who assures him this is the final and only payment. He is not a blackmailer - not just at the moment, that is - though he fully intends to extract more money later from Fordley.

Fordley's chauffeur, after dropping his master at the empty house, calls on Inspector Hammond of the Brentlowe Police and informs him that he is really Nelson Lee disguised, having persuaded the real chauffeur to pose as being ill and sending Lee to Fordley as a friend who is willing to be his replacement. Lee requests the aid of four Police Constables to go to the empty house to arrest both Naggs and Fordley. Lee, Hammond and their uniformed helpers overtake another car containing the Goodwins and the rest of the St. Frank's contingent, also on their way to the empty house. Nipper is relieved to see his missing Guvnor safe and well.

Naggs and Fordley are appalled when Handforth emerges from beneath the table on which they are negotiating their transaction. He had sneaked back into the house through a window while the two criminals had been busy at the front door getting rid of an old tramp - a real one - paid by Handforth to create a diversion while he made his way inside. Handforth punches Naggs and Fordley until they are dazed and helpless and finally knocks them both out. Handforth the supreme has conquered the villains with his celebrated fists and when the two cars arrive, the occupants find the victor waiting for them. "Oh, you've come then," he says. "You have done well, my lad," says Nelson Lee. "It's nothing, Sir. Merely a trifle," Handforth replies.

The plans now recovered, Dick Goodwin's father can look forward to a successful resumption of his cotton mill business, proud of his son, who can return to St. Frank's as a carefree schoolboy.

Have you been able to follow this tortuous plot? Gratters, all of you. As the author remarks, tongue in cheek one suspects, and puts into the mouth of Tregellis-West (*NLL* 282): "This reminds me of one of those old film serials. It does, really!" And Tommy Watson continues, "We've often laughed at them - how the hero and villain are always getting hold of something. First the hero gets it, then it's pinched from him by the villain, then the hero gets on the track of the villain ... and so it goes on ... this seems to be something of the same kind, only it happens to be real life."

The sound you hear from afar may be the echo of a mighty guffaw emanating from E.S. Brooks. Um, ah, yes! I'll leave that happy thought with you as your chuckles rumble away into the distance and your own real life suddenly rears its rather bland (or otherwise) head. Ta-ra, then.

* * * * *

Joyfully re-written from Nelson Lee Library *Old Series 275 to 283, 11 Sep - 6 Nov 1920, and reprinted in* Schoolboys' Own Library *315 and 318, Oct - Nov 1937. (They don't write them like that any more!)*

'You Ought To Be In Pictures!'

BY BRIAN DOYLE

Over the years, BRIAN DOYLE has found that fellow-collectors of the old books and papers seem to be almost as interested in films and film-stars, especially those of yesteryear. And when they know he has worked in 'the business' for 40 years, questions often follow - questions such as: 'How did you get into the movie business?', 'Did you ever meet Marilyn Monroe or John Wayne?', 'What's your favourite picture?', 'What's Michael Winner really like?' and so on. Everyone likes the movies, it seems. So Brian hopes the following early reminiscences may intrigue at least some of those 'everyone'. And he also hopes that readers will forgive the apparent 'name-dropping' - it's just part of his job ....

It was only my lack of ability that prevented me from becoming a professional actor. So I did the next-best-thing and worked closely with actors - and actresses and movie stars - for the next forty years.

The dream was always there. And I was lucky enough to live it - and enjoy it - for most of my working life.

Over all those years I've always been amazed to have earned quite a good living from what I enjoy doing most, without a single dull or boring moment, working on 94 feature films (from start to finish and often beyond) with locations in 22 countries (and all over Britain) and meeting hundreds (probably thousands) of wonderful and fascinating people.

I've danced with Rudolph Nureyev, Anna Neagle, Donald O'Connor and Tamara Toumanova, the great Russian ballerina, sung with Johnny Mathis, Sammy Davis Jnr., Frankie Vaughan and Deborah Kerr, been hugged by Richard Burton, kissed by Jean Simmons and Claire Bloom, sworn at by Ava Gardner, punched by Peter Finch, pushed into the Indian Ocean by David Niven, awoken on the telephone at 5am by Gregory Peck, arm-locked by Robert Mitchum, driven at high speeds in their cars by Norman Wisdom, Brian (now Lord) Rix and Terry-Thomas, had my horoscope read by Shelley Winters, been held at sword-point by Christopher Lee, nailed down in a coffin by great Hollywood director Billy Wilder, eaten a hamburger at 3am by the side of Loch Ness with Queen Victoria (the screen version!), been held at gun-point by armed guards in Jerusalem, chased by cowboys on horseback in Spain, chatted with Jack Nicholson as he balanced upside-down in his favourite yoga position, been offered half-a-million pounds by Keith Moon (the somewhat wild drummer with 'The Who' pop group) - an offer which was withdrawn when he sobered up the next morning and before I could get it in writing: had tea from a silver tea-service with George Raft, had coffee with John Lennon and Paul McCartney in the mid-1960s, rowed with Yul Brynner, ridden a horse with Leonard Nimoy ('Mr Spock' in 'Star Trek') and been questioned politely by Her Majesty the Queen.

Forty years in the movie business and I've never ever heard anyone shout 'Lights - Camera - Action!' on the set (that phrase went out in the 1930s). The words usually used are 'Turn over - Sound running - Action!' It's one of those curious myths - rather like 'Elementary, my dear Watson', which Sherlock Holmes never said.

But where was I? Oh yes, my early acting ambitions ....

It was the spring of 1951 and I was nearing the completion of my two-year stint of National Service in the RAF; my last 17 months of service were spent at the famous fighter station at Biggin Hill, Kent. Growing up during the Battle of Britain and watching 'dog-fights' between Spitfires and Hurricanes and the German Messerschmitts in the blue summer skies of 1940 (and nurturing an ambition to be a Spitfire pilot), I was rather thrilled and honoured to be based at Biggin Hill, then part of No. 11 Group, Fighter Command, but also the home of Nos. 600 and 615 Squadrons, which did most of their flying at weekends. An unofficial 'perk' of serving at B.H. was that we were allowed to leave the top-buttons of our uniforms undone - and I got a little vicarious kick out of that, like being a member of an exclusive club.

I was also honoured to work as the personal clerk to the C.O., Group-Captain Arthur H. Donaldson, DSO and Bar, DFC and Bar, and AFC (no Bar to that, he must have been slacking at the time), who was a marvellous chap and a distinguished fighter pilot during World War Two (also a cousin by marriage to the great Douglas Bader, with whom he had flown in the same squadron).

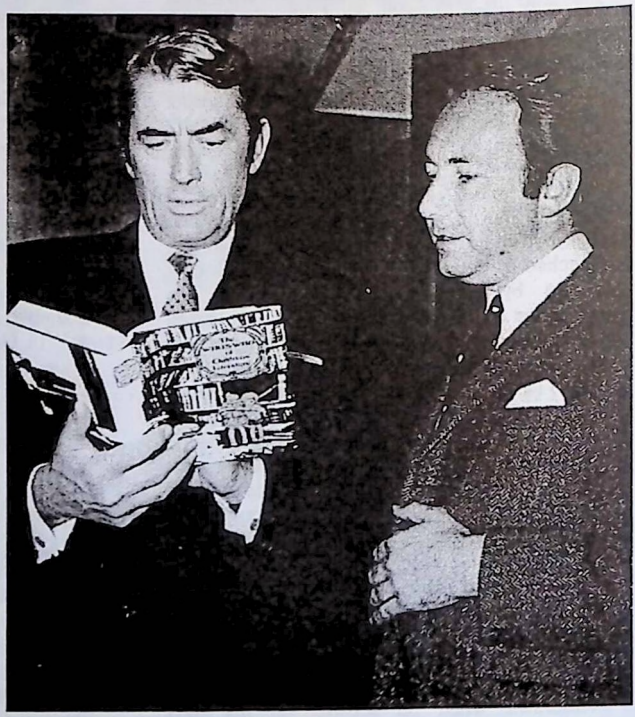
Biggin Hill was quite close to London, as well as being famous, and we saw our share of VIPs. One morning I entered the C.O.'s office to receive instructions for the day and noticed a familiar figure sitting in an armchair in a corner of the empty room reading *The Times*. I sprang smartly to attention, and bellowed "Good morning, sir!" Winston Churchill lowered his newspaper with a touch of irritation and gave me an Edward G. Robinson snort. "Hmmmmm!" he answered and, with a curt nod, he returned to his newspaper. I refrained from giving him an efficient 'V-salute' and backed out of the office. Churchill lived just down the road at Westerham and made occasional flying trips from B.H.

On another occasion, Group-Captain Donaldson sent for me and gestured towards a moustachioed, smiling figure by his desk. "Doyle, will you take Mr Whittle next door and show him the files on (whatever-it-was) and find him a cup of coffee". "Sir" I answered and, when we were in the outer office and I had catered to his needs, said to Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet-engine and later Sir Frank, what an honour it was to meet him. He shook hands quite affably and chatted for a few moments. I was honoured and a bit nervous too - after all, he had been an RAF Air Commodore until recently and was one of the most famous men of the century. And you had only to look across to the airfield to see examples of his invention - B.H. was home to mainly Meteors and the odd Vampire in those days.

I was due to be 'demobbed' and return to 'civvy street' in a few weeks and, rather than return to my job as an assistant librarian at Woolwich Public Library, had thoughts of becoming an actor. I had enjoyed a few minor successes in productions at school and with a small dramatic society at Eltham, in South London, was a regular (at least once a week) West End theatregoer and had always been mad about theatre and films, not to mention radio and television, so I decided to try for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, which had produced hundreds of leading stars over the years - and why shouldn't I be one of them? I applied for an audition form and filled it in. They supplied several sheets of speeches from well-known plays, both classical and modern. I had to select one, add any speech of my own choice, turn up one morning in a few weeks time, and do my stuff. I was applying for a special Leverhulme Scholarship, since my parents wouldn't be able to afford the fees. Like Mark Linley of Greyfriars, I wanted to be a successful scholarship boy!

I chose a speech of Hotspur's from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, the one that begins "My Liege, I did deny no prisoners" from the RADA list and my own choice was from one of my favourite modern plays, Anouilh's *Ring Round the Moon*, which I had seen six times at London's Globe Theatre, one reason being that I had fallen in love with Claire Bloom, who co-starred in it with Paul Scofield and Margaret Rutherford! It was also a marvellous, romantic and witty play. My speech was that of Hugo, one of twin brothers (both played by Scofield) to the pretty Isabella (Claire Bloom), which began "Now, Isabella, I'm ready for better things ...." and involved standing on a chair halfway through (auditioneers were allowed a chair, a stick and a hat as 'props', if required, as I recall).

I was frankly terrified when the great day dawned, especially when I saw that the Academy's Principal, the famous and forthright Sir Kenneth Barnes, was sitting in the middle of the row of half-a-dozen judges. I climbed onto the small stage, lit by a couple of lamps, and began my bit of Shakespeare. I began quite well, then dried-up halfway through and was prompted by Sir Kenneth himself (who probably knew the complete works of Shakespeare by



Gregory Peck, with Brian Doyle, looking at Brian's just published book (1968)

heart, I thought) before stumbling on to the end.

Then I came to my *Ring Round the Moon* speech - the highlight of the occasion, so far as I was concerned anyway. Trying not to sound like a bad impersonation of Paul Scofield, I was off. All went well until I climbed onto my chair (as Scofield did in the play) which uncooperatively toppled over as I stood upon it (it was rickety to begin with anyway). I heard muffled laughter as I picked myself, and as an afterthought, the chair, up, and continued, somewhat breathlessly, with my gem of Anouilh. "And tomorrow I set off by the first train to hunt big game in Africa ....", I concluded on a high note. "Thank you, Mr Doyle," came Sir Kenneth's fruity tones. "I'm sorry about the chair, sir," I ventured nervously. "Don't worry about it, Mr Doyle - it all added to the scene," he said encouragingly.

I heard from RADA a week or so later. I was not, it appeared, destined to join the ranks of Oliver, Richardson or Gielgud. We're very sorry, they said, but I hadn't scored enough marks to warrant the award of a scholarship, though I might be considered again if I wanted to attend as a fee-paying student. It was only around six guineas a term but, as I said, my parents just couldn't run to that amount of tin in those days. So, somewhat discouraged, I abandoned any further thoughts of stardom, or even acting, and went back to my pre-RAF job at the local public library (see last year's *Annual*).

But I was, as it turned out, destined to enter the glamorous worlds of show business and movie-making and it was all due largely to two newspapers: my local Woolwich paper *The Kentish Independent* (a very good one, as it happened) and the national *Daily Mail*. I'll abbreviate the sequence of events for space reasons (incidentally, why, I wonder, is 'abbreviate' such a long word?).

In the autumn of 1952, and trying to cheer myself up after a broken romance, and as a result of reading an interesting item in the *Daily Mail,* I applied to become a member of the viewers' Panel of Judges which would choose the paper's National Television Award-winners in several categories. To my amazement, I was selected. After two or three meetings with my fellow-judges (all 'ordinary and representative' TV viewers, though one of them turned out to be the well-known Cockney writer and book-dealer of the time, Fred Bason) at a London hotel, I duly cast my votes and attended a final get-together meeting in London.

Much to my surprise (again) I was asked if I would like to present three of the Awards personally at a live Gala TV Awards Show (also to include variety turns) to take place at the Scala Theatre, London, in January 1953. I'm still not sure why I was invited to do this, though someone did suggest that it was because I was the youngest of the Judges!

I said yes, please, and duly hired a dinner suit, took a taxi to the Scala (then-famous for its annual productions of *Peter Pan*) and was all set to experience the most exciting evening of my young life (I was just 22). In the midst of a big variety show, with full orchestra conducted by Eric Robinson and such popular acts as Horace Kenny, Robb Wilton and the Television Toppers, I found myself presenting the 'Best Actress' Award to Yvonne Mitchell, and the 'Best Actor' Award to John Slater. I had written my own little speeches mentioning the various plays the two had appeared in over the year and memorised them and it all seemed to go very well. I didn't need a 'prompt' this time - and I didn't have a chair to fall off! I was even introduced personally by that well-known TV announcer of the time, Mary Malcolm. After presenting the Award to T Leslie Jackson, producer of 'the Most Entertaining Programme of the Year', *What's My Line?* (when I was introduced by the lovely Sylvia Peters), I figuratively mopped my brow and thought that was it. But the best was yet to come ....

There was a big party after the show at which I met and chatted to every TV star and personality that ever was. They included (and if you are of the age to cast your TV memories back to the early 1950s the names might revive a few memories) Gilbert Harding, Richard Dimbleby, Eamonn Andrews, Bernard Braden, Barbara Kelly, Annette Mills (of 'Muffin' fame), George Cansdale, Ronald Waldman (*Hello, Puzzlers!*), Elizabeth Allan, Humphrey Lestoque, Max Robertson, Robb Wilton, the aforementioned Yvonne Mitchell and John Slater, and many others. It was truly a great night.

Back behind the counter at Woolwich Public Library the following Monday morning, several people came up and said they had seen me doing my staff in the big BBC TV show on Saturday night (remember there was only the BBC channel to watch in those days!), what had it been like, and so on. I also naturally received a few hostile looks from certain colleagues who thought I was getting a bit 'above myself' (whatever that means).

Since there appeared to be wide interest in the event, I felt that the occasion should be brought before a wider local public, and therefore wrote a short piece (in the 'third person') for the local paper, *The Kentish Independent,* whose Editor, Miss Rita Neves, I knew slightly from her occasional visits to the Library; her offices were just around the corner anyway. She rang me and said she would be running the item that week. She did and I still have the cutting to prove it!

That was the start of my 'journalistic'

career and the first of many contributions I made to the 'K.I.' on a freelance basis. I wrote articles about the many famous people who had been born in, or had lived in, Woolwich, about the Royal Arsenal, about the Royal Artillery based there in the barracks, about the Royal Military Academy (which was the London equivalent of Sandhurst for many years), about the Royal Artillery Theatre and the stars who had appeared there over the years, and I interviewed some of the actors and actresses currently appearing there in the 1950s. I also reviewed the occasional production. Daringly, I began to cast my net wider; if I saw an actor or actress I especially liked in a television play, I would contact them and ask them for an interview for the 'K.I.' newspaper. It rarely failed and I enjoyed meeting and chatting to them.

Then I suggested to Miss Neves that I write my own regular column for the paper, comprising interviews with stage and screen stars. "Can you get them?" she asked doubtfully. "I'll get them," I promised. And, thankfully, I did.

I got to the stars through a combination of tenacity, luck, perseverance and sheer cheek, combined with an ounce or two of 'line-shooting'. I plugged the good old 'K.I.' as the 'newspaper of the year', said it was read particularly by show business people throughout London, and even that it was 'taken' by Buckingham Palace (because of the Royal Arsenal, Royal Artillery and Royal Military Academy connections!) I even arranged for regular copies to, in fact, be sent to 'Buck House' to make it so ....

I came to know - and get along with - the publicists at several London theatres, especially the London Palladium (where top American stars often did special 'seasons' in those days) and at the leading film studios such as Pinewood, Elstree, Shepperton and Ealing. And the whole thing gradually built and built .... I always sent cuttings of my columns and articles both to the stars and the publicity people and, fortunately, they seemed to be pleased with the results.

I had special 'visiting cards' printed, slightly larger than usual so that they would stand out, headed 'Meeting People With Brian Doyle: News and Views of Personalities in the World of Show Business - South London's Brightest Column about Show People appears regularly in The Kentish Independent' etc. These I sent out and handed out like confetti ....

Before my new column actually started, I had contributed interviews with such people as Norman Wisdom, Frankie Howerd (an 'Old Boy' of my own school, Shooters Hill Grammar, in Woolwich), Claire Bloom, Dorothy Tutin, Yvonne Mitchell and Douglas Duff, the author of many fine boys' stories. For the subject of my very first column (which appeared in June 1955) I chose leading American singing star Alfred Drake, who had created the leading role of Curly in the original run of *Oklahoma!* on Broadway in 1943, as well as starring in the original New York production of *Kiss Me, Kate.* He was then in *Kismet,* running successfully in London, and made a fine interview. My column ran for more than two years and my 'subjects' in that time included Danny Kaye, Bob Hope, Howard Keel, Johnnie Ray, Harry Secombe, Dirk Bogarde, Ginger Rogers, Ray Milland, Emlyn Williams, Jimmy Edwards, Tony Hancock, Richard Todd, Frankie Vaughan, Terry-Thomas, Rod Steiger, Tommy Steele and Ian Carmichael. Plus many others. There is no room to write about them all here. Just a thought or two. Danny Kaye was very serious, talking about his charity work for the United Nations Children's Fund. Bob Hope was very funny. Steiger talked about his poetry - and recited much of it! Ray was charming and told me he was three-quarters Blackfoot Indian - at times he sang flat, as I pointed out in my piece 'Johnnie Ray becomes Johnnie Doh ....!' Ginger Rogers was bad-tempered and had a bad cold. Ray Milland was grumpy. Secombe was hilarious and unpredictable, as he is now as 'Sir Harry'. The rest were nice, friendly and chatty (as I've usually found all actors and actresses to be).

My favourite film studio to visit was Pinewood, in beautiful country settings in Bucks. It remains, together with Lord's Cricket Ground, one of my very favourite places in England. During my trips there in the mid-1950s, I came to know the small permanent staff of publicists quite well (one publicist to each Rank picture being made) and I thought their job was an ideal one and 'made in heaven' as they say. I dropped a hint one day to Derek Coyte, the Publicity Controller, that I'd love to work there. He asked me to send him a large batch of my recent interview-pieces for the 'K.I.', which I did.

One morning a few months later, I received a telegram: "Please ring me re Pinewood employment. Regards, Coyte." I rang. Could I start as a trainee publicist in two weeks time? I thought about the matter. For all of five seconds. "Yes", I said, "I could". The money was good, though that wasn't important. It was the prospect of working in movies at my adored Pinewood Studios that was. I handed in my resignation at the Library, telling my boss that I was going into the cinema business. "Which cinema?" he enquired, "the Odeon or the Granada?"

I started at Pinewood Studios in July 1957, as assistant to a great man named Gerry Lewis, who had done many Rank films as unit publicist and was currently on the last three weeks of *The*

One That Got Away, based on the true story of Franz von Werra, the only German prisoner-of-war in Britain to have successfully escaped to sanctuary abroad. The film starred German actor Hardy Kruger and many fine British supporting actors. Gerry taught me much about film publicity work, how to write a good, effective news story, and an arresting feature or biography. How to tell a good still photograph or colour transparency from a poor one. And so on. I spent my time usefully on the latter stages of shooting on this picture, talking to members of the crew, interviewing actors and leading technicians and writing about them. Also looking after visiting press people, both writers and photographers.

Then Gerry and I started on another film called *Carve Her Name With Pride,* starring Virginia McKenna as Violette Szabo G.C., another true wartime story about an ordinary South London young housewife who became a top British secret agent and who eventually died in a German concentration camp. It was directed by Lewis Gilbert, who had just had a big success with the Douglas Bader story *Reach For The Sky* starring Kenneth More. This was fascinating, inspiring and moving stuff and turned out to be a marvellous, award-winning British film.

Our technical advisor on the picture was the famous agent Odette Churchill, G.C., whom I came to know quite well. You may recall that her own story was filmed as *Odette* starring Anna Neagle and Trevor Howard. Grimly she would advise the director and actors on how a Gestapo interrogation scene would go, or how people were treated in a concentration camp. Every detail must be correct. And it was. McKenna gave a brilliant performance, as did Paul Scofield as her fellow-agent and Jack Warner as her concerned father.

At one point in the film, the Free French Army officer whom Violette married recites to her a poem he has written for her - and to remember him by if he dies in the war. It was, in fact, written by Leo Marks, a Codemaster during the war, and it aroused considerable interest when the film was released, with thousands of people writing in and asking for the words and for further details. So much so that Virginia McKenna made a commercial record of it. All those who saw the film may remember some of it:

The life that I have is all that I have,
And the life that I have is yours.
The love that I have of the life that I have
Is yours and yours and yours ....

A sleep I shall have, a rest I shall have,
Yet death shall be but a pause,
For the peace of my years,
In the long green grass,
Will be yours and yours and yours ....

It moved several people to tears when we were shooting the scene in a sunlit field in Bucks. in the summer of 1957. It moved many more people when the film came out. And it still moves me to this day.

But what exactly does a film publicist do, I hear you ask - assuming that you've stuck with me thus far, of course! The job, basically, is to get the film talked about and written about by the Press, TV and radio, as much as possible, and to ensure that the talk and the writing is good and complimentary and that it will make the public want to see the picture when it comes out.

The publicist (also sometimes called the unit publicist and occasionally the publicity director) works on the film throughout its shooting period, arranges and usually 'sits in' on interviews for the press with the stars, director, producer and other key unit-members, does huge amounts of writing - features, biographies, at least a dozen 'news stories' a day, announcements and so on - which are released to the British and English-speaking press throughout the world, and in translation in other countries. He or she acts as a 'go-between' for the film and the media; when you read about 'a spokesman' saying something or other, or confirming or denying some rumour, that's usually the publicist. The publicist has to interview all the leading actors and actresses and key personnel on the film (usually these days with a tape-recorder, though in the old days it was with a notebook at the ready).

The publicist's other main job is to sort and arrange and caption the hundreds (sometimes thousands) of still photographs taken during the film, both scenes from the picture and 'off-sets' showing the cast relaxing or chatting, and portraits. He or she also has to 'kill' unflattering shots of the stars and sometimes have them 're-touched'. An average picture may have around 2,000 each of black-and-white and colour photographs (on a 007 Bond picture I did we had around 15,000 of each!).

There's a lot more to it than all this, of course. Coping with the odd temperamental star who now doesn't want to do an interview or photo-session they'd promised to do days before, keeping the visiting journalists or photographers happy, looking after competition-winners, taking stars out to lunch or dinner with visitors or VIPs and so on. And when you're all on a foreign location for several months it all gets terribly complicated!

Publicity and advertising, by the way, are two entirely different things. You pay (quite heavily very often) for advertising, but publicity is free. And publicity is very important if you're an actor or actress - the better-known you become, the more people will want to employ you, and the public to see you. Even the biggest

stars like to maintain their 'image' and keep their names before the media and the public. The history of film publicity is littered with famous names who might never have been heard of without it. But I don't agree with whoever said "all publicity is good publicity" - adverse publicity can easily affect, or even ruin, a career or a reputation. It was, I think, Irish playwright Brendan Behan who once said: "There is no such thing as bad publicity - except maybe your own obituary". Publicity could perhaps be described as washing your clean, or dirty, linen - both professional and private - in public. And that's quite enough about the technical definitions of movie publicity, I think!

Brian Doyle and Bette Davis on set at Pinewood Studios (1979)

Halfway through shooting on *Carve Her Name With Pride* I was taken off the picture and 'promoted'; in other words, I was given my own film as full publicist. It was quite a minor Rank production that few people have heard of these days. Titled *Heart of a Child* and based on a novel by Phyllis Bottome, it was set in the Austrian mountains and was all about a small boy who runs away from home with his huge St. Bernard dog at the time of the First World War. There were no big stars - people such as Donald Pleasence, Jean Anderson and two gifted child-actors, Richard Williams and Carla Challoner, both aged nine. The producer was Sydney Box and the director, the young Clive Donner, who later went on to bigger things. Most of the picture was shot in the glorious scenery of the Austrian Tyrol in summer and we were based in a delightful village called Seefeld, not far from Innsbruck. It was my very first trip abroad and my first flight in an aircraft!

And there I will leave my actual movie experiences for the time being. Maybe I'll return to stories and anecdotes about the many films I worked on another time. But I will reminisce a short while longer about the movies, if I may ....

I think I became a movie enthusiast when I saw my very first picture at the Granada, Woolwich, when I was about seven. It was Korda's *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, based on the H.G. Wells story about an ordinary little man (played by Roland Young) who is given the gift of having his every wish granted. It made a big impression on me and after that my parents often took me 'to the pictures'. I can't recall exactly what pictures I saw, although there was, of course, *Snow White* and lots of short Disney cartoons. Another film stays in the memory: *Florian* based on Felix Salten's novel (he also wrote *Bambi*). It was about a white Lipizzaner stallion of the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna, and his master (played by Robert Young); at one point they go through the Great War together in the army and the great horse rescues his master and takes him to safety. Oh, it was very moving! It was my mother's favourite picture, I remember. But I've never seen it since it came out in 1940 - and it's never, so far as I know, been shown on television.

As a teenager in the later 1940s I haunted the local cinemas in Woolwich and Plumstead in South London, where I grew up (I actually lived in Abbey Wood) and went to them at least twice a week. I often learned my 'social etiquette' from the films I saw. The way you stood up when a lady joined or left your company; what you said when you met someone; how you addressed an older man as 'Sir'; how you lit someone's cigarette, or tipped a waiter or doorman, how you raised your hat when you met a lady (I wore only a school cap at the time, but I stored away the information for later reference) - even how you kissed and held a young lady! All this stuff came in extremely useful when I grew older.

And clothes too. I liked the overcoat John Mills wore in *The October Man* and eventually tracked it down in Burton's. I liked the striped tie Farley Granger wore in *Strangers on a Train* and found an identical one. That white, belted (but invariably tied) and high-collared raincoat favoured by a dozen or more 'private eyes' (especially Alan Ladd and Dick Powell) was a

tougher proposition, but I at length hunted it down in a menswear store in Charing Cross Road. I never wore a hat so was unable to raise it to a lady in Mayfair or Hollywood style, but I perfected (or imagined I did) that little salute with two fingers to the temple that Robert Mitchum liked to do. (When I had the privilege of working on a picture with Mitchum many years later, I told him all this over a drink. He stared at me seriously (he rarely smiled) and said: "I never saluted the broads - I just kissed 'em and smashed 'em in the kisser!" Then he did give me the ghost of a grin, but it quickly disappeared.) Danny Kaye often wore light brown trousers and a dark brown jacket. I saved up, tracked the items down, and wore them proudly to the public library where I worked at the time. The Chief Librarian glared at me and snorted "Don't wear your sports clothes to work, Doyle". I mentally bludgeoned him to a sticky end with a blunt instrument (*The Thin Man* movie) and wore my new outfit to the next sporting event I went to (though it seemed strangely out of place at Lord's Cricket Ground, I fancied).

My favourite films? There are about 30, but chiefly, I think, they would be: *Great Expectations* (David Lean, 1946); *The Red Shoes; A Place in the Sun; A Matter of Life and Death; Odd Man Out; Carrie* (William Wyler, 1952); *All About Eve; An American in Paris; Henry V* (Olivier version); *Hamlet* (ditto); *Goodbye Mr Chips* (both the 1939 and 1969 versions); *Portrait of Jennie; Elmer Gantry* and *A Star is Born* (1954 version). It's so difficult to trim the list, as I expect readers would find if they tried to compile such a list. What about the Jolson movies, and *Lawrence of Arabia,* and *Vertigo,* and *Carousel,* and *Camelot* and *Spartacus* .... The only pictures I would rate as 'favourites' in more recent years have been *Mr Holland's Opus* (for which Richard Dreyfuss was nominated for an Oscar - a sort of American 'Mr Chips' it came out about four years ago), *Obsession* (with Cliff Robertson), *Forrest Gump* and *Evita.*

The favourites among the films I have worked on over the years? *Star Wars* (and you'll spot my name down there in about 35th place in the end-credits!), *The Man Who Would Be King* (four months locations in Morocco! With Connery and Caine - and John Huston), *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes,* (directed by the great Billy Wilder, with Robert Stephens (later Sir Robert) as Sherlock. And the picture in which I made my own screen debut! Maybe I'll tell you that story next time ....), *The Innocents* (lovely Deborah Kerr - one of the nicest ladies in the business - in the screen version of Henry James' classic ghost-story *The Turn of the Screw*), *A Touch of Class* and *Educating Rita* (three months in marvellous Dublin).

My favourite film music score: John Williams for *E.T.* and Bernard Herrmann for *Vertigo.* My favourite movie song: 'Too Late Now' as sung by Jane Powell in *Royal Wedding.* My most exciting day on a movie-set: the day when Ken Russell (with whom I did five pictures) shot the complex scene where all those girls stand on the wings of an aeroplane to a music play-back, while half-a-dozen 'silent' films are simultaneously being shot on neighbouring sets! My favourite stars to work with: Michael Caine, Roger Moore, David Niven, Anthony Hopkins, Deborah Kerr, Lee Remick, Ann-Margret - and the incomparable Bette Davis, probably the greatest star I ever worked with ....

That's about all for now, folks!

Sometimes I lie awake at night and I ask "When will it all end?" Then a voice comes to me that says, "Right after the credits!"

As Hardy used to say to Laurel: "Oh, yeah ...?!"

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO OUR EDITOR AND ALL C.D. READERS.
ANTHONY COOK, 134 CHAIRBOROUGH ROAD, HIGH WYCOMBE, HP12 3HW

****

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL DIGEST READERS. ERIC BAINES, 22 HETLEY ROAD, BEESTON, NOTTINGHAM NG9 2QL.

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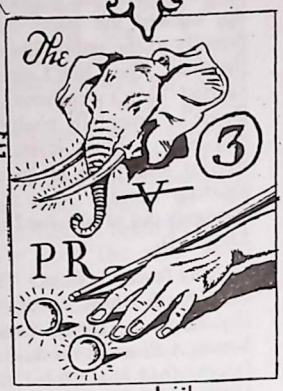
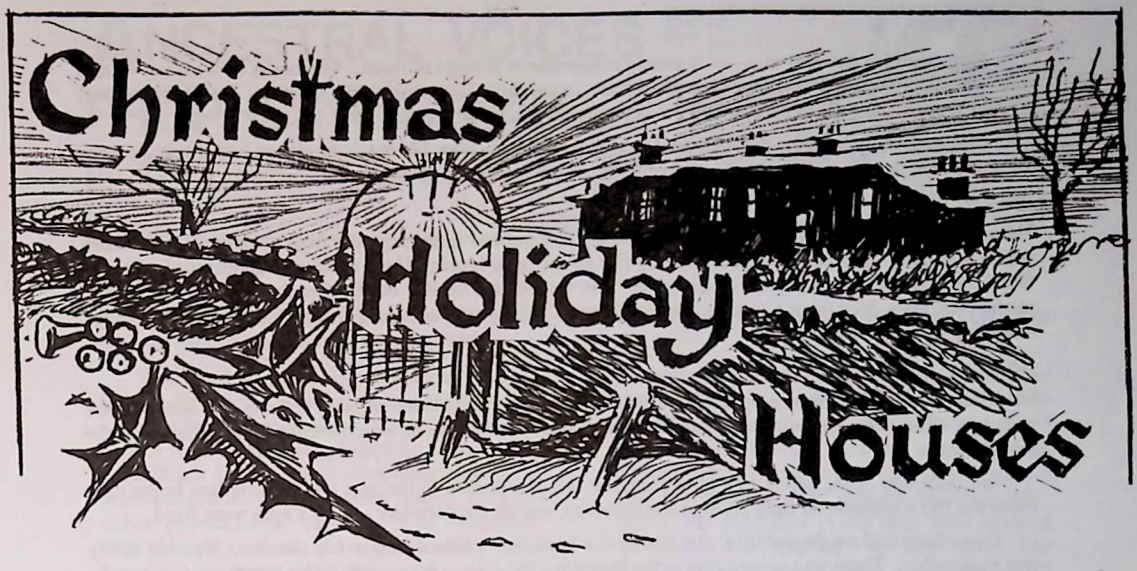
SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL FRIENDS OF THE HOBBY ESPECIALLY FRIARS CLUB MEMBERS. ARTHUR EDWARDS, LONDON E12

****

Guess these places where the boys have spent Christmas



BOB WHITER



BY BOB WHITER

See if you can guess (or remember) from which Xmas series the following extracts have been taken. Seven are from Greyfriars series, one from St. Jim's and one from Rookwood. Each one can be linked with the puzzles on the page "Guess these places where the boys have spent Christmas".

No. 1

Harry Wharton held up a lamp, and the light glimmered on walls of panelled oak black with age.

-------- -------- was an ancient building, some parts of it dating back to Saxon times, some to early Norman. But the residential part had been modernised, and the ghost of the Red Earl - had that phantom really walked at Christmastide - would no doubt have been surprised and disconcerted at finding itself among electric lights, bathrooms, garages, wireless installations, and other things that certainly would have made any returning spirit from Tudor times sit up and take notice. But the-------- -------- had not been changed - there was no electric light there, and all was dark and shadowy when the chums of -------- visited it.

No. 2

After that he left his room and proceeded to-------- . Undoubtedly it was just as well that -------- was out.

Turning on the light in -------- room, Billy Bunter proceeded to look for what he wanted. --------, fortunately, was well provided with clothes. It was unfortunate that he did not possess Bunter's handsome, well-developed frame; all his things were much too limited in circumference for Bunter. But that, after all, was a difficulty that could be overcome. Where there was a will, there was a way. A waistcoat, for instance, could be slit up the back with a penknife. This procedure did not improve the waistcoat considered as a garment. But it made it meet round Bunter, which was the chief thing.

No. 3

-------- and -------- looked about them with interest as the -------- came in sight.

The ancient building had been converted into a modern country house, but it still bore its old name. The grey old walls, that had withstood the storms of six or seven centuries, rose amid the trees, leafless now and white with snow. The trap followed a drive between rows of ancient oaks and beeches, under the branches of which the old monks had walked in days that were long past. On the east side of the rambling building a grey old tower rose against the sky.

"What a jolly old place!" said -------- .

"Looks as if there might be a cheery Christmas ghost there, by Jove!"

No. 4

The juniors alighted from the car and went into the house. His lordship was not visible; but -------- was there, evidently expecting them.

Faint surprise dawned in--------'s stately countenance at sight of them. The butler of -------- ------had not, perhaps, expected William George Bunter to produce such creditable friends. No doubt he had expected some more Bunters, and had not been greatly bucked by the prospect.

His manner was extremely respectful to the newcomers, after his majestic glance had dwelt on them for a moment or two - with a subtle difference from his manner to Bunter.

No. 5

He mounted the steps, and stopped on the balcony and blinked in through the french windows. The room inside was dark, save for the glow of the log fire on the open hearth. If the room was unoccupied, this was Bunter's chance; and it looked unoccupied. He turned the handle of the french windows cautiously, pushed the glass door open a few inches and listened. There was no sound from the dusky room save the crackling of the glowing logs.

No. 6

He occupied one of the rooms opening off the Great Hall, a vast apartment, with walls of oak almost black with age. The deep, old windows had wooden shutters, every one of which creaked and groaned in the winter wind.

His door was open, letting in a glow from the fire that burned in the vast ancient fireplace in the hall. From the fire a glimmer of light showed the doorway, and on the doorway --------'s eyes were fixed.

Something had awakened him - he felt as if a hand had touched him in his slumber. But that surely was impossible. There was no one else in the house but old -------- fast asleep in his room.

No. 7

-------- opened the door cautiously, noiselessly, and stepped into the corridor.

He waited a few moments to listen.

But there was not a sound in the great house. Only faintly from outside came the wail of the winter wind in the leafless trees of the park.

So silently had -------- gone that the other juniors hardly knew that he had started. Only -------- ------- - had seen a faint shadow pass the bed.

-------- crept cautiously towards the stairs, and, stopping every moment to listen and to peer into the darkness, he descended silently in his noiseless shoes.

He reached the great hall on the ground floor, where figures in ancient armour loomed up in the gloom around him.

No. 8

Lights were gleaming from the many windows of -------- -------- casting ruddy light into the wintry darkness.

It was Boxing Night, and all was merry and bright. A wailing wind shrieked over the old roofs and among the chimneypots and rattled the creaking branches of leafless trees. Outside all was wintry; but within was light and merriment. Motor cars came continually up the dusky drive and landed guests at the great door. Mingled with the buzz of cheery voices came the strains of the band, already playing a merry tune.

No. 9

It was strangely, eerily, like the ghost story they had heard - and what, in the name of all that was horribly mysterious, could it mean? No one was in the King's Room - no one could be there, unless he could pass through solid walls or solid doors, locked and bolted. Yet that door was opening to an unseen hand.

Spellbound they watched with throbbing hearts.

The door stood wide open at last and the doorway was no longer vacant. The juniors could not believe what they saw. Yet they saw it.

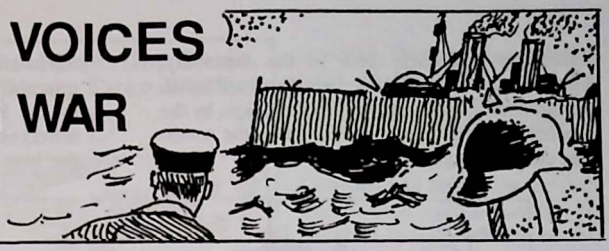
A figure in the ruff and doublet and trunk hose of Tudor days, but all a spectral whiteness, stood there.

The face was in shadow as it looked towards them; but they could make out that it was a ghastly, lifeless whiteness, with two eyes that gleamed and glittered as if from a dead mask of white.

Answers on page 57.

ANCESTRAL VOICES PROPHESYING WAR

By Derek Hinrich



The full text of a talk given during the East Coast expedition of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London at Nacton, Ipswich, on Sunday, 6th July 1997.

Two hundred years ago, in February 1797, the last foreign invasion of the mainland of the United Kingdom took place. The invaders, a French force 1400 strong, called *Le Legion Noir* - the Black Legion - and consisting mainly of press-ganged convicts had been landed, without either provisions or supplies, near Fishguard after five days at sea in rough weather. The French Government - the Directoire - believed Wales to be a hotbed of revolution. As soon as the Legion was ashore, the French ships fled. The invaders were led by a septuagenarian American colonel named Tate, who was both a veteran of the War of Independence and a failed confidence trickster, who had left the infant USA in a hurry. His hungry and seasick soldiers found they preferred getting drunk and looting to fighting and soon were a danger only to their officers. The invasion lasted three days. Legend has it that they were encouraged to capitulate by the sight of a column of Welsh women in their scarlet shawls and tall black hats who, with shouldered broomsticks, were marched by an enterprising member of the local gentry, in imitation of infantry and not quite in full sight, down Bigney Hill and then, under cover of side-roads, back to the top to multiply their numbers. A female cobbler, Jemima Nicholas, is also reputed to have taken twelve of the *Legion* prisoner with a pitchfork. No wonder then that the Directoire, which is principally commemorated in the UK by a pattern of lady's knickers, was soon afterwards swept away by the rather more formidable General Buonaparte.

Thereafter, however, the Royal Navy perfected the close blockade of enemy ports so that when seven years later, an anxious lady asked Lord St Vincent what he thought the chances of Bonaparte - as he had become - invading were, he was able to reply, "I don't say the French can't come ma'am, but I do say they can't come by sea".

And after Trafalgar there the fear of invasion more or less rested for nearly seventy years.

A momentary scare in 1858-9 prompted the birth of the volunteer movement but after a further dozen years of peace patriotic fervour had subsided and the volunteers, especially the yeomanry regiments, became little more than another form of social club - until Colonel Chesney, concerned at the low level of preparedness at home and the success of the proto-blitzkrieg thunderbolts of Prussia wrote a long short story - it ran to some 24,000 words - which was published in the May 1871 issue of Blackwood's Magazine. It was called *The Battle of Dorking*, caused a sensation and created a whole new genre of fiction.

The Battle of Dorking was supposedly the reminiscence of a grandfather, written in 1921, casting his mind back fifty years and lamenting the disaster which had overwhelmed his country and in which he had played a part as a soldier in a Volunteer Regiment. It told how the Channel Fleet had been lured into a minefield by an enemy, who had then succeeded in landing an army between Brighton and Worthing and the overwhelming defeat at Dorking that had followed. Though the point was not emphasised, the invaders spoke to each other in *German.*

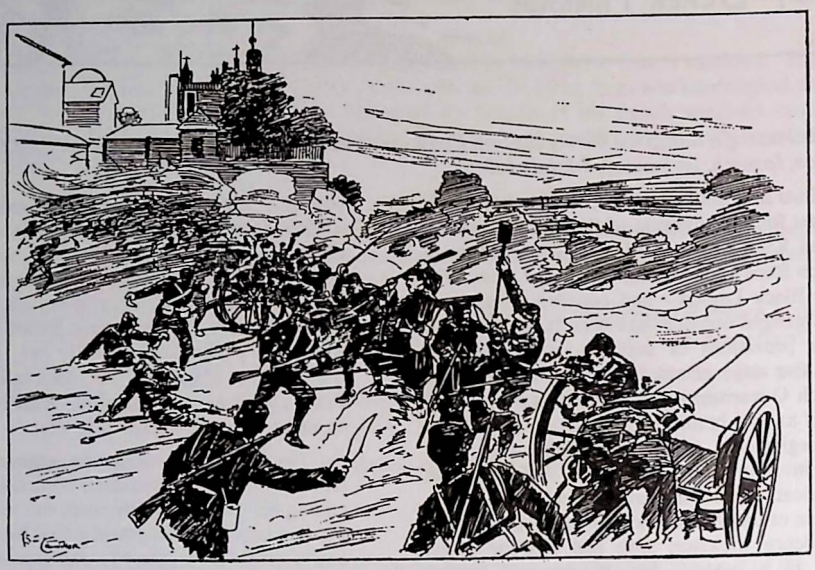
The tale was the talk of the Town, men queued to read copies of it in the clubs, and a plethora of pamphlets followed, supporting or rebutting Chesney's argument on the country's lack of preparedness for war with another great Power.

The excitement gradually died down, however, and the country at large relapsed into complacency under the shield of the greatest navy the world had seen, but as the last decade of the Nineteenth Century commenced, fictions of future wars became ever more popular and alarmist.

In 1892 William Le Queux published *The Great War in England in 1897.* The book is a lurid farrago of nonsense and is full of hectoring jeremiads on the danger of the country's unpreparedness but it was very popular. The book turns upon the initial premise that the United Kingdom is about to abandon "Splendid Isolation" and to ally itself with the Central Powers, the very opposite of what happened ten years later. It relates how, after a Russian spy - posing as a German baron and man about town - has obtained a copy of an Anglo-German treaty of alliance, the Channel Fleet is sent on manoeuvres in the Atlantic to the west of

Ireland by a French clerk in the Admiralty. This is followed by a Franco-Russian declaration of war and, within three days, by the landing of armies by both Powers on the south-east coast of England.

the mixture as before, only even more so. This time the invader was Germany and the landing by the Humber. The book was another best seller, endorsed by Field Marshal Lord Roberts, the hero of the Second Afghan and the Boer



GOORKAS SLAUGHTERING THE FRENCH ARTILLERY AT GREENWICH OBSERVATORY.

All hell breaks loose. Our coastal towns are bombarded, the countryside is ravaged and laid waste, towns and villages are burnt, an anarchist mob runs amok and red revolution stalks through London, Cossacks rape and pillage, babies are tossed on bayonets. Our gallant forces, regular and volunteer, struggle valiantly but are forced inexorably back to the gates of London. Birmingham falls and is sacked but the tide turns at Manchester when Canadians and Australians reinforce our army. The invaders are flung back and finally annihilated near Horsham. A prominent part is played in this final victory by Bengal Lancers and Ghurkas landed at Sheerness, having come up Channel despite the enemy fleets.

The Royal Navy, having returned, conquers finally in some Homeric naval actions with the combined fleets of France and Russia fought at apparently the same point-blank ranges as that at which Nelson engaged that other combined fleet at Trafalgar - despite advances in steam propulsion, armour, and weaponry. Ramming is a popular tactic.

Oh yes, and our gallant troops fight throughout in redcoats, despite khaki having been adopted for active service for twelve years. In the meantime, too, the army of the German Emperor, our dear queen's favourite grandson, has poured over the Rhine and his Italian allies are sweeping through Savoy.

Le Queux returned to the theme a few years later, in 1906, in *The Invasion of 1910.* It was

Wars and, in retirement, the great advocate of compulsory peacetime military training (for which he coined the phrase "National Service" to sugar the pill, "conscription" smacking of foreign military despotism). Le Queux's book was initially serialised in *The Daily Mail* and the itinerary of the invasion with its detailed descriptions of fighting in various towns and cities did wonders for the *Mail's* circulation in the places named. *People like having their flesh made to creep.*

The Daily Mail's proprietor, Lord Northcliffe, was convinced of the coming danger from Germany to the point of phobia. In 1910 an American newspaper commented, "It will be a marvel if relations with Germany are not strained until war becomes inevitable as a direct result of the war-scare campaign inaugurated and carried on with the most reckless and maddening ingenuity by the Northcliffe syndicate of newspapers."

The group included, beside newspapers, several boys' story papers, among them *The Union Jack* (Sexton Blake's own paper), *The Magnet* (the home of Billy Bunter and Greyfriars School), *The Gem, Pluck, The Boy's Friend*, and *The Marvel.*

In the years preceding 1914 Sexton Blake frequently crossed swords with German spies, undertook secret missions abroad, or uncovered plans for a teutonic descent on Britain. On two or three occasions, he encountered the Kaiser himself.

In *The Gem*, some Territorials taking cover near St. Jim's were mistaken for Germans. One of the schoolboys said: 'It can't be the Germans. We all know they are coming some day, but they have not finished their fleet yet.'

In other papers of the group, invasion stories abounded. These had been a staple since the late 'nineties and at first, as with Le Queux, the enemy had been France or Russia, or both in combination, but by the middle 1900s, Germany had assumed the role of bogeyman in chief. A Boys' Friend picture for an episode of one such story shows the German army landing in England. The artist was castigated for not putting in enough uhlans. Please note the boy scout standing by to act as runner for the thin khaki line.

The authors of these tales were not without some prescience. In one, in which a retributive invasion of France was undertaken the British troops on crossing the Channel find that a prefabricated harbour, constructed by the Royal Engineers to the orders of Lord Roberts, has preceded them to their chosen point of debarcation. Did the designers of Mulberry read *The Boys' Friend Library* in 1909?

In another tale, after the Germans had landed on the East Coast their second wave is engulfed in flames at sea by two cadets of Greyfriars (another school of the same name) who pour petrol on the sea, sail fire ships in amongst the Germans and then ignite the lot - shades of that rumour which spread simultaneously and apparently independently on both sides of the Channel in the summer of 1940 after Dunkirk to the encouragement, no doubt, of those units of the Wehrmacht earmarked for Sea Lion - *"The English can set the sea on fire!"*

Other boys' papers followed suit, even at the upper end of the market where *Chums* regularly featured similar stories. One of these - one of many such by Captain Frank H Shaw - found a new foe to invade us - a Sino-Japanese alliance - and featured a great naval battle in the Channel in which our fleet was personally commanded by King George V.

More respectable authors than Le Queux also looked into the future. H.G. Wells wrote a story in 1903 "The Land Ironclads" which might be said to foreshadow the tank, only his ironclads were ponderous armoured land leviathans at least as big as modern motor juggernauts. He also wrote a novel in 1907, while the aeroplane was in its infancy and two years before Bleriot crossed the Channel, entitled *The War in the Air*. This is an intercontinental war fought with airships, begun by Germany and ending in the death of civilisation as they knew it - worth a mention but altogether too apocalyptic. There is, however, an interesting scene where the German airfleet destroys the US Navy by bombing.

More practical imaginative work was offered by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his article, "Great Britain and the Next War" in the *Fortnightly Review* for February 1913 and in his long short story of a year later, "Danger" in which he forecast the dangers of unrestricted submarine warfare on merchant shipping and our supply lines.

The humourists had their say, too. P.G. Wodehouse offered *The Swoop, or How*

(left) From *Chums*, 1911, a boys' adventure magazine. King George V commands the fleet in 'The Terror from the East'.

"Report the result of that shot to me," said the King, and the commander put his glasses to his eyes. "A hit, sir—the enemy is sinking," he said. And he spoke no more than truth. A fifteen-inch shell had exploded under the cruiser's stern, shattering her stern-post.

Clarence Saved England, A Tale of the Great Invasion. The measure of the book may be taken by the way in which news of the invasion is conveyed in the stop-press of the evening paper, "Fry not out 104. Surrey 147 for 8. A German Army landed in Essex this afternoon. Loamshire Handicap: Spring Chicken, 1; Salome, 2; Yip-i-addy, 3; Seven ran."

H H Munro ("Saki") contributed *When William Came; A Story of London Under the Hohenzollerns.* This deals with a Britain already under German occupation. The view is darker and satirical in line with the spirit of the author's elegantly sardonic little stories of polite Edwardian Society.

But notwithstanding the effusions of Le Queux, the greatest impact was made by two different works, one a novel in 1903 and the other, a play, six years later.

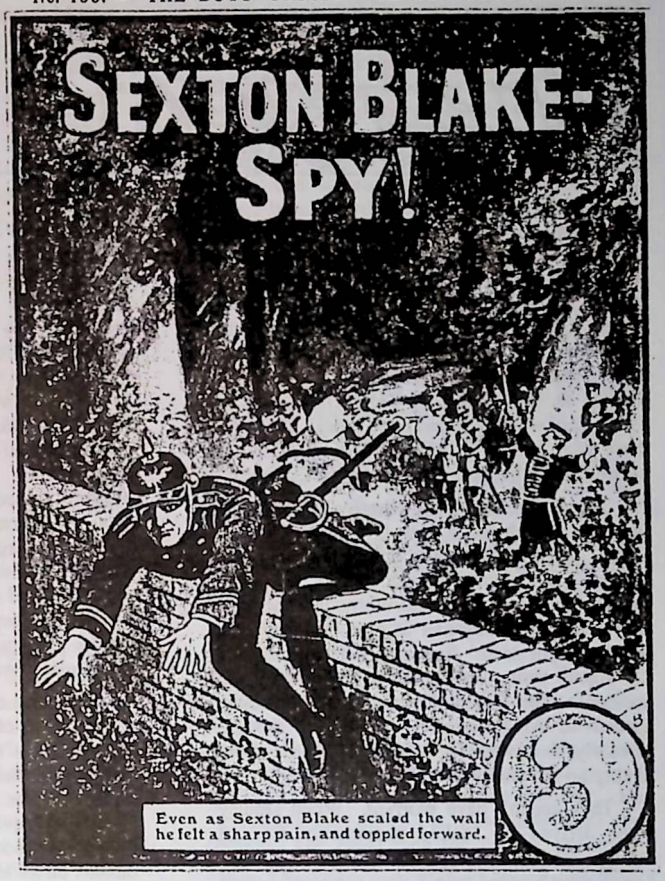
The Riddle of the Sands by Erskine Childers is sometimes called the first spy story: it was not - Le Queux and Phillips Oppenheim had been at it for years - but it was the first and perhaps only novel of its genre related with such power, immediacy, and convincing detail that one can still read it for the first time today, nearly a hundred years afterwards, and wonder just how much Childers might have stumbled on among the Friesian islands in 1902 that he attributes to his protagonists, Davies and Carruthers. Did he find evidence of German manoeuvres or wargames for an invasion of our east coast? Is his book a lightly fictionalised account of real events, or just a thriller, or simply the best *roman a these* in English?

In January 1909 a play, *An Englishman's Home* opened at Wyndham's Theatre. It was by Major Guy du Maurier, the brother of Gerald and the uncle of Daphne (sounds like Dornford Yates doesn't it?). The play begins one foggy Boxing Day morning at Myrtle Villa, in Whickham, Essex and tells of the landing in England of invading troops in the service of "Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress of the North".

The play was the sensation of the Season. Royalty attended a performance. Anybody who was anybody attended a performance. There was a recruiting office for the Territorial Army in the foyer for anyone inspired with patriotic fervour by the drama. And some no doubt were.

Alas, lightning does not strike twice. Major du Maurier's play was adapted for the cinema in 1939. Nine authors - some of them distinguished - collaborated on the screen play. Bit it was a turkey. Graham Greene, then a film critic for *The Spectator*, wrote, "There is nothing to be said for this film - though it might prove useful propaganda in enemy countries, purporting to illustrate the decadence of English architecture and taste."

But the story had served its purpose the first time.



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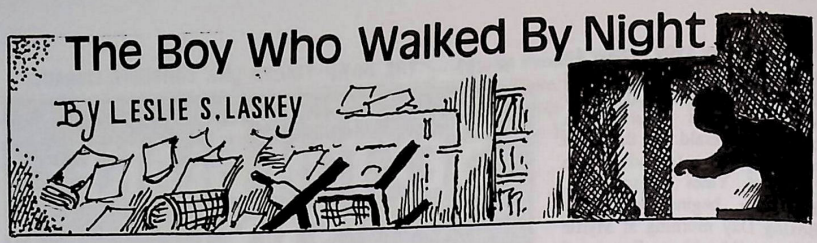
SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL READERS FROM LESLIE KING, CHESHAM, BUCKS.

The Boy Who Walked By Night

By LESLIE S. LASKEY



Quite soon after the BOYS' FRIEND (Weekly) ended, stories of Rookwood appeared in the back pages of THE GEM. However, these stories were obviously not written by the real Owen Conquest. Another run of similar Rookwood stories followed three years later. Then, when the St. Frank's stories by Edwy Searles Brooks ended in THE GEM, late in 1935, Rookwood returned once more. This time there were stories written by Charles Hamilton himself under his pen-name of Owen Conquest.

There were two quite lengthy serials. The first one introduced a new boy named Dudley Vane. Before this boy's arrival Mr. Richard Dalton, the Classical Fourth master, requested Jimmy Silver and Co. to accommodate this new boy in the end study and to give him any help that he might need. Apparently Vane had been ill since being involved in an aeroplane accident. The fistical Four, of course, readily agreed to Mr. Dalton's suggestion though, privately, they were far from enthusiastic about having an "invalid" landed on them.

They needn't have worried. When Dudley Vane arrived he looked remarkably fit and strong. He had an early tiff with the bumptious Lovell which ended with a very surprised Lovell being floored.

Dudley Vane quickly settled in with Jimmy Silver and Co. who were pleased to discover that the new boy was a good footballer. One afternoon a junior games practice was interrupted by Mark Carthew of the Sixth. He was looking for Lovell who had failed to hand in some lines. The impatient Carthew strode on to the field amongst the players to seek out Lovell. He was struck on the ear by the football, neatly kicked by Vane. Mornington then tripped him up and several other juniors gleefully seized the opportunity to fall on top of him. Unfortunately for the footballers Mr. Dalton arrived on the ground, just at that moment, to discover a school prefect clambering up, smothered from head to foot with mud. The result was a detention on Saturday afternoon for all the players. This was a heavy blow, for a house-match was fixed for Saturday.

The hot-headed Lovell crept down from his dormitory to chalk a message on the mirror in Mr. Dalton's study suggesting that he should "wash out" the detention. As he entered the room he was bowled over by some person coming out quickly. He got up and promptly tripped over some article of furniture. The light flashed on as Mr. Dalton came in, awakened by the noise from his study. The room was a

shambles. Furniture was overturned and ink splashed everywhere, and it appeared to the master that the culprit was caught.

Lovell admitted his intention to leave a message on the mirror but he hotly denied shipping the study. Dr. Chisholm was sufficiently impressed by Lovell's vehement denials to delay the intended sentence of expulsion in order that further enquiries could be made. Lovell was taken to the punishment room.

While he was confined there Mr. Dalton was attacked in the dark in the quad. The attacker stole up behind him, drew a large sack over his head, and then quickly knotted it round his victim's legs. Dalton was discovered staggering blindly about. The Head had to assume that the culprit was the same person who had shipped the study and Lovell was released.

By now there was an air of tension throughout the school.

Who was this mystery attacker?

When next would he strike?

Dudley Vane found himself in a tight corner when he was the only Classical on a school bus amongst a crowd of Moderns. Needless to say he was ragged, but it was all in good humour until Vane apparently lost his temper and delivered a savage punch on Tommy Dodd's nose, drawing blood. The result was that Vane spent the rest of the journey on his back on the floor of the bus. At Tommy Dodd's instigation several Moderns planted their feet on him to keep him there. The humiliated Vane was soon in a very dusty and dishevelled state. Arriving at Rookwood, Vane was reprimanded by Mr. Dalton over his untidy appearance. He answered the master back, asking him whether he thought he'd got like this on purpose. That remark earned him lines and the threat of a caning if he said any more.

Later, as the winter dusk fell, Mr. Dalton and Jimmy Silver were in conversation in the former's study. Suddenly a large stone crashed through the window, scattering broken glass all over the floor. Jimmy dashed out with Mr. Dalton to investigate but the stone-throwr had made his escape. An angry Mr. Dalton went indoors but Jimmy, using a torch, hunted in the snow for tracks or other clues. He ran into Tommy Dodd and Co. and was promptly attacked. He lost his torch somewhere but succeeded in jamming Tommy Dodd's face in the snow, causing further damage to the latter's nose.

Tommy Dodd resolved to break house bounds that evening in order to see Jimmy Silver and even accounts with him. He dropped from an alcove window in a passage in Manders' House and made his way cautiously in the dark towards Head's House. Suddenly he became aware that someone was near him. He saw, dimly, a face near his - the eyes glittering. He asked who was there. Then he was brutally attacked by a person who was stronger than him. Forced down on to the ground he was punched repeatedly and savagely in the face, his head striking the ground. His attacker left him lying unconscious, where Mr. Manders later chanced to find him. Partly recovered, he was helped indoors and roll-calls were promptly held, for Dodd's attacker had obviously been out of house bounds.

The only boy who was absent was Valentine Mornington of the Classical Fourth. With his usual disregard of school rules Mornington had gone out to skate on the frozen River Roke. He'd had a fancy to skate by moonlight. When he returned he soon found himself in the Head's study - accused of the brutal attack on Tommy Dodd. His story was not believed and the horrified Mornington was expelled.

In the morning a taxi carried Mornington away to Latcham Railway Station. He was accompanied by Mr. Dalton.

Dr. Chisholm arrived in his study and sat down at his desk. Soon he began to cough as smoke began to billow from the fireplace, although there was no wind. He crossed to the window to open it. He discovered that the window frame had been screwed up. He turned round angrily. Clearly somebody had gained access to the roof and blocked the chimney. He crossed to the door. It was locked on the outside. The Head rang for Tupper, the house page. He called to Tupper to unlock the door. The page replied that he couldn't do that because the key wasn't there. With the smoke thickening Dr. Chisholm, in desperation, picked up a heavy book and hurled it through the window, knocking out almost the whole pane. Boys outside were treated to the extraordinary spectacle of their headmaster leaning out of the broken window, gulping in fresh air, with smoke drifting past him.

Mornington was gone, but it appeared that the mystery man of Rookwood was still there.

As Mr. Dalton was still away Carthew was instructed to take charge of the Classical Fourth for the first lesson. He soon dropped on Lovell, rapping his knuckles for talking. At one stage Carthew stood, looking out of the window. An apple struck the back of his head. Carthew demanded to know whether Lovell had thrown it. Lovell denied it. Carthew then asked Vane whether he had seen who threw the apple. Vane refused to tell him anything. Then he refused to be caned for not telling him. Carthew attempted to grab him by the collar but Dudley Vane resisted. Vane was as strong as the Sixth-Former and Carthew was sent reeling on to the floor. He jumped up furiously and went for

Vane who delivered a punch that sent Carthew down again. The other Classicals gaped with amazement and horror as Vane then dragged Carthew bodily across the classroom floor to the door. He pulled the door open and then literally kicked the hapless prefect out into the passage and slammed the door shut.

Dudley Vane's violent fit of temper seemed to end as suddenly as it had begun. Now calm, he returned quietly to his desk, sat down, and picked up his pen.

Carthew did not return.

Later a taxi drew up outside. Mr. Dalton had returned and Mornington was with him. Dr. Chisholm had telephoned to the stationmaster at Latcham and left a message for Mr. Dalton. Mornington's sentence of expulsion was rescinded.

Vane was summoned to Mr. Dalton's study where Carthew was waiting with the master. The prefect was admonished by Mr. Dalton for threatening to punish a boy for not informing on another boy. Mr. Dalton warned Vane to control his temper in future and he ordered him to accept a caning there and then from Carthew.

After Vane had left the study Mr. Dalton sat in deep thought for some time. Dr. Chisholm was deeply worried about the series of outrages that had taken place. Mr. Dalton had a particular worry on his mind.

He had a growing suspicion that the mystery man of Rookwood was a member of the Classical Fourth.

By this stage of the serial most GEM readers would have guessed that Dudley Vane was the culprit. This new boy seemed to feature very prominently, and the outrages began only after his arrival at Rookwood. The only real mystery now was - why? Why should an apparently decent sort of fellow react to quite minor grudges in such a savage manner. Perhaps those readers who were familiar with R.L. Stevenson's story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde already knew the answer to that question.

Mornington held a party in his study after prep to celebrate his return to the school. Vane did not attend. He invited Tubby Muffin to share a cake with him in the end study. Vane sat with his back to the study clock. At one point he asked Muffin what the time was. Tubby glanced across at the clock and said that it was just nine o'clock. Tubby and most of the cake departed. Jimmy Silver and Co. returned from Mornington's study. Shortly afterwards Mr. Dalton arrived at the end study, looking extremely serious. He told the juniors that an attack had been made on Carthew a short time before. Apparently the prefect had been entering hi study and, before he could switch on the light, some person inside the room had struck him on the head with a heavy ruler and left him stunned. In view of Dudley Vane's attack on Carthew earlier in the day Mr. Dalton required to know where Vane had been at nine o'clock, which was the time that Carthew had been assaulted. Vane replied that he had been in his study and that Muffin had been with him. Tubby Muffin was summoned and he confirmed Vane's statement.

Mr. Dalton arranged with Bulkeley of the Sixth to patrol the school passages late at night in the hope of apprehending the prowler. They heard a sound of movement in an adjoining passage. The next moment came the sound of a match being struck and several fireworks, jumping crackers, were hurled round a corner, just in front of them. The noise of the explosions roused the whole school. Mr. Dalton immediately visited the Classical Fourth dormitory. Nobody was missing. Mr. Dalton enquired whether any boy had any knowledge of fireworks being brought into the school.

Tubby Muffin gave an involuntary gasp of "Oh, crikey!"

Tubby certainly knew something about fireworks. Earlier he had hidden behind an armchair in Jimmy Silver's study when he was being hunted by Higgs about some apples that were missing from Higgs's study. While there he had heard someone come in and rummage about in Jimmy Silver's box-seat. When this person had gone the inquisitive Tubby had taken a look inside the box seat. Hidden under some lumber had been a package. Tubby had partly unwrapped it and discovered that it contained a bundle of jumping crackers. Even Tubby Muffin couldn't eat jumping crackers and he had carefully replaced the package. Now, under questioning by a grim-faced Mr. Dalton, Tubby let it out that he had seen some fireworks in the end study. All five occupants of the study denied any knowledge of the fireworks, but they were now under suspicion.

The realisation that it must have been Vane who had placed the fireworks in the box-seat came as a shock to the Fistical Four. If Vane had been responsible for letting off the crackers it followed that he was also responsible for the other incidents including that horrifying attack on Tommy Dodd. The observant Vane soon noticed a change in Jimmy's manner towards him. When Jimmy passed him without speaking to him an ugly look flashed across Vane's face. It became obvious to him that Jimmy knew.

That evening the mystery prowler struck again - for the last time.

Jimmy Silver was alone in the end study after prep when all the study lights suddenly went out. Somebody had tampered with a fuse in the passage. Jimmy heard a sound of movement and he was seized in a powerful grip. Hands closed tightly round his throat and he felt himself choking. At that moment Tubby Muffin

groped his way into the study. The sudden blackout had seemed to Tubby an ideal opportunity to investigate the box of chocolates that he knew was in the study cupboard. He bumped into two struggling figures. The attacker promptly released his grip on Jimmy Silver's throat and made to leave the room. Jimmy grabbed hold of the other's jacket and pulled him down. The two struggled on the floor while Tubby emitted terrified yells. Mornington, with a torch, arrived and was followed by several other juniors. The flashlight illuminated the face of Dudley Vane, a face that was so distorted with fury that it was barely recognisable. He was seized on all sides. Although he struggled and fought like a madman he was eventually held down.

Mr. Dalton soon arrived on the scene.

Dudley Vane was taken away from Rookwood on the following morning, never to return. He was mentally ill and he required supervision and treatment.

This story had an unusual theme. It was very melodramatic and the plot was rather thin. Charles Hamilton's stories from the 1930s period were notable for the skilful plotting.

The late Eric Fayne did not believe that Hamilton wrote the Dudley Vane story (Editorial, C.D. No. 452). He said that Hamilton had told him in a letter that he had not written any Rookwood stories for THE GEM. Eric suggested that the author had had a memory lapse over the second serial (beginning in GEM No. 1460) which he was satisfied was a genuine Owen Conquest story. I am in full agreement with Eric on that point.

The Dudley Vane serial, with its succession of highly dramatic incidents and its all-pervading atmosphere of mystery and menace, was more like an Edwy Searles Brooks school story than a Hamilton one.

Is it possible that Brooks wrote this story? His St. Frank's stories had just been terminated in THE GEM. Could he have submitted a Rookwood story, perhaps in response to an editorial suggestion?

That seems to me to be unlikely. I have recently read the Dudley Vane serial right through again. I did not notice a single sentence, nor even a phrase, that was not in tune with Hamilton's familiar and impeccable prose style. Those writers who tried to imitate him invariably gave themselves away. If this is an imitation then it is an extraordinarily good one.

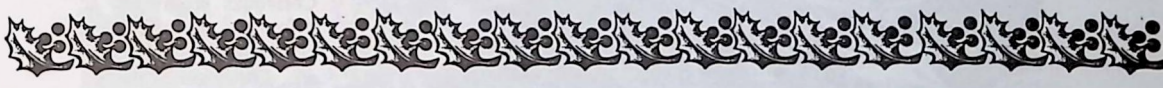
Dudley Vane's name provides a further indication that this was Hamilton's work. The author had a habit of repeating surnames at different times. There had been a Vane at Greyfriars in the early years of THE MAGNET. Some years after THE GEM ended, Hamilton introduced a boy named Dudley Vane-Carter into a story of Carcroft School. We all know Hamilton's attitude towards the use of his pen-names over other writers' work. It seems scarcely credible that he would have made use of a name that had been invented by one of the substitute writers.

It is unlikely now that we shall ever know, with absolute certainty, who wrote the Dudley Vane story.

As a boy I found this to be an exciting story and I remember that I enjoyed reading it. Doubtless many hundreds of other boys did; and that, surely, is just what the author would have hoped for - whoever he was.

This serial was published in GEMS No. 1449/51 and 1453/59 (it was held over for one week when No. 1452 contained a cover-to-cover St. Jim's story).

When the story was reprinted later in THE SCHOOLBOY'S OWN LIBRARY (No. 356) it was given the rather chilling title of "THE BOY WHO WALKED BY NIGHT".



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XMAS GREETINGS TO ALL C.D. READERS, PARTICULARLY MEMBERS OF THE S. WEST CLUB. MAC.

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GREETING AND BEST WISHES TO MARY AND ALEX AND ALL READERS AND WRITERS OF THE DIGEST FROM SEXTON BLAKE FAN, STAN MASON.

Christmas Stories And S.G.O.L.

BY DAWN MARLER

Christmas is a family time of festive fun, but it is also a time to find that solitary place in which to enjoy a Christmas Annual (including, of course, the *Collectors' Digest Annual*) and a Christmas story in the *Schoolgirls' Own Library* and, perhaps, an odd one in the *Schoolgirls' Picture Library*. It is also a time when friends and family gather round a cheerful log fire, curtains drawn, lights dimmed, and ghost stories told, and if, by any chance the house or manor is reputed to be haunted, there could be added fun; the ghost itself might appear! Such a scene may be seen in the story by Joan Maitland in the *Girls' Crystal Annual for 1947*: "Their Exciting Christmas at Haunted Manor".

The young people are gathered together, sitting in the light and warmth of the log fire, perhaps telling each other a ghost story when, suddenly, a shadow of a ghost like figure

appeared at the window. In this case it all began as a Yuletide joke by Jean Royston and her brother but, what started out as fun, resulted in plenty of thrills as well. Such a story makes a Christmas for the reader.

The spirit of Christmas began during the late summer when the adverts for the next Christmas Annual appeared in the *Girls' Crystal* and the *School Friend*. Each paper advertised its own respective Annual; the same adverts appeared on the back cover of the *SGOL*, sometimes with details of the contents. All added to the fun and excitement of receiving an Annual for Christmas.

While the *Girls' Crystal* and *School Friend* papers had a number of Christmas stories for the festive season, both in picture script and prose, the *SGOL* and *SGPL* contained their own Christmas Stories.

However, with reference to the First Series of the *SGOL*, I could find only four seasonal stories: "Babs & Co's Magic Christmas" (516), which had appeared in the *Schoolgirl* in 1932: "Babs & Co's Old-Fashioned Christmas" (613), from the *School Friend* 1933; "Morcove's Christmas Problems" (661), from the *Schoolgirl* in 1934; "Noel's Xmas Ghost Hunt and Other Stories" (711), which appeared in the *Girls' Crystal* 1936/7. [Editor's Note: There are a few which can be added to this list.] Christmas stories were more popular in the second series of the *SGOL*, which, in a way, is surprising as there were great Christmas festivities before the war, large family parties and so on. The cover of the *School Friend Annual* for 1936 gives some idea of the approaching festivities: Bessie Bunter with her friends are busy making either a Christmas Cake or Puddings; two of her friends are reading out the recipe; one is beating the eggs, while the others are all wanting a stir and to make a wish. Even Bessie's Pekinese dog, Ting-a-ling, catches the spirit of the occasion.

In the 2nd series *SGOL* there are at least eight Christmas stories, a real enjoyment over

the Christmas period. Here are some Christmas titles to whet the festive appetite.

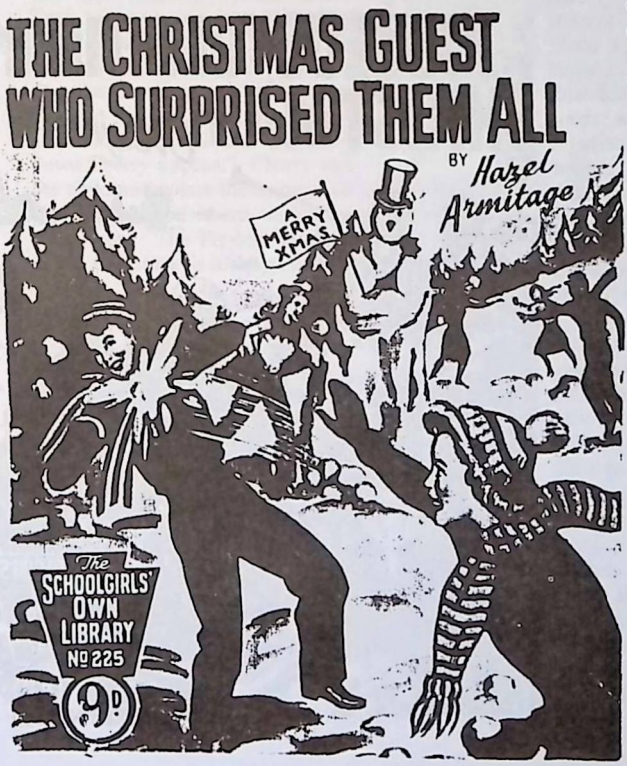
"Their Christmas of Surprises" (101) by Evelyn Day (Eric Lyth Rosman). This is an exciting Christmas story with fun and mystery. Lisa Carleton takes her young brother and sister to the North of England to visit their Grandfather who was supposed to live in a large, old house; there had been no hint that he was poor and no longer lived in such a place but in an old cottage nearby.

The plot is centred on the old house; a ghost called the "White Monk"; a Mrs. Batley with her fat son, whom Lisa and the children had met on the train. By the end of the story the mystery has been solved. The "White Monk" has turned out to be a boy called David, who helps to solve the mystery. The real villains were Mrs. Batley and her son. Unusual, in a way, but, nevertheless, a good story of mystery and suspense to start off your Christmas reading.

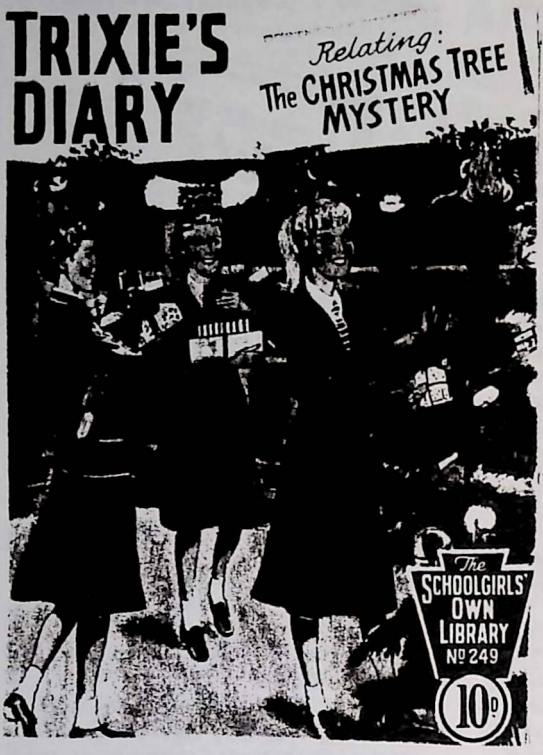
"Their Exciting Christmas at School" (149), by Jane Preston (Reginald G. Thomas) is a unique school story, featuring a group of six schoolgirls who had to spend their Christmas at the school with a few members of staff. The main reason was because the girls' parents were abroad, very likely working as Civil Servants: "Like Joy's, all their families lived abroad, so it was impossible for them to spend Christmas at home". Although travelling had become easier by the 1950s, it might have proved difficult for a young schoolgirl to travel alone to join her parents in a foreign land. However, it does seem

strange that there are no other relatives whom the girls could have visited to have some kind of family Christmas, perhaps taking a friend with them. Where are the Uncles, Aunts and Grandparents?

Staying at the school provided thrills as well as fun. The story features a ghost, oak panels that opened into a secret passage, and a villain. It proved to be "Their most wonderful Christmas", and one they would not forget.



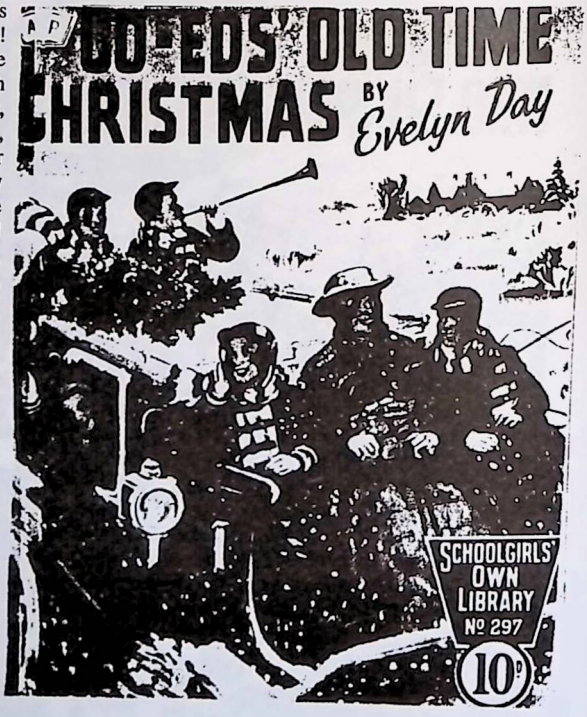
"The Mystery That Threatened Their Christmas" (173), by Judy Thomas (Reginald G. Thomas) features Stella Ransom, who tries very hard to make the Christmas Party at her aunt's Boarding House ("Turret House" at Cleemouth) a success. She is to act as hostess for the Christmas season. In the very first page the reader is magically caught up in the excitement of travelling, mixing with other Christmas passengers on the train; the bustle of people carrying bright and mysterious parcels. The plot is centred on a package containing a gold locket which was thrown to Stella at the station by a veiled lady; this package was to prove important to Stella and those dear to her, but there were others after the package. Stella, of course, wins in the end. The story, mixed up as it is in mystery, conveys the essence of the Christmas spirit, with fun, games and competitions among the guests. It is a story that should put every reader into a festive mood.



house: at least, that is what Raye Everest and her cheery chums expected. But one of them was soon to provide everyone with more excitement than they ever expected! That someone was Valentine Venn. The story starts off with a delightful cry from Raye; "O, Look! It's starting to snow... It's going to be a white Christmas, after all!" Most of us recall with pleasure Christmases when there was snow, snowball fights and sledging, and, perhaps, skating on a frozen pond or lake. Arthur Ransome conveys this atmosphere in his story "Winter Holiday". Just reading it can make one feel cold. Very pleasant on a hot summer's day! Snow made everything perfect for Christmas, hence the delightful cry from Raye. However, snowy pleasures in this story become slightly overshadowed by the mystery and suspense which hang over the festivities at the old manor. The plot features a necklace known as "The Lanvale Luck". Valentine Venn, who was missing in the earlier part of the story for purposes of his own, considered himself as a bit of a detective, but his friends found him irritating. They did not take him seriously, because he never seemed to be particularly intelligent, yet he achieved amazing results when tackling a mystery, as he did in this story. Venn solved the puzzle surrounding the necklace in his own quiet, Sherlock Holmesian way; an annoying way to those who did not understand him and how he worked. He goes absent at the beginning of the story; he is evasive; he gives nothing away, no matter how many times he is asked. In fact he is almost like a ghost among the guests; but, once he has solved the mystery and the "Lanvale Luck" is safe, he comes forward as the "Christmas Guest who had surprised them all". A really delightful Christmas story, and one you won't be able to put down.

"Trixie's Diary: The Christmas Tree Mystery" (249), edited by Ida Melbourne (Eric Lyth Rosman) stars Trixie Sharp, that popular, lively schoolgirl, and her delightful brother 'Pongo', Trixie shares with the reader further extracts from her diary which, in this story, involves the mystery surrounding a Christmas Tree which had been presented to her school. I find Trixie very enjoyable to be with when sharing her exploits; she draws the reader in with her, and I simply adore her brother Pongo; he is great fun.

"Their Exciting Christmas in Bear Park" (274), by Sheila Austin (Stanley Austin) is a Christmas story with a difference. It is set in the Canadian Rockies; Wendy Merrick acts as a guide and hostess to a party of girls and boys who arrive to spend their Christmas vacation in Bear Park; here they will be able to enjoy all the fun and thrills of the winter sports. The story is not without its mystery and suspense, set in these wonderful surroundings.

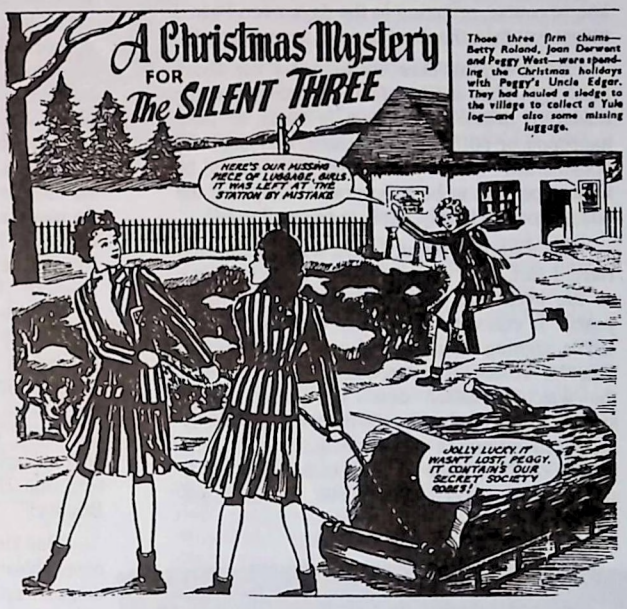


In "Co-Eds' Old Time Christmas" (297), by Evelyn Day (Eric Lyth Rosman), the Co-Eds, Kitty Jordan, Steven Wilshaw and other cheery girls and boys from "Queenscourt" college, feature in an enjoyable Christmas adventure. They are to spend the festive season together in a country house, to enjoy an old-fashioned Christmas, with all the trimmings. They begin their holiday in style that fits the occasion. They travel in an old stage coach and, as it sets off, an old hunting-horn is sounded; it heralds the joys and thrills that abound in this story. There are a ghost hunt and secret oak-panels and passages, crooks, and a detective. All ends happily with the mystery solved, and everyone enjoys a very happy Christmas.

"Wonderful Christmas: (367), by Shirley Lane is about Cherry, her brother Tim, and Baby Sue and Boxer their dog. They were going to spend Christmas with their Grandad and their Gran, Lady Fulton who lived at Frincombe-On-Sea. Their mother would join them for Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Their Grandad, who had just married Lady Fulton, had taken a "Lavender Cottage", which was reputed to be haunted by the ghost of an old Prior. It was also reputed that it was unwise for anyone to spend Christmas in the cottage every seventh year. Of course it was the seventh year when Cherry and the children visited there. True to reputation, on Christmas Eve, horrible groans could be heard; things were thrown about; then the ghost appeared. The story contains an "inexplicable mystery - so baffling that a chill of fright ran down Cherry's spine." Cherry and the children explore the ruins of an old priory, and there make some amazing discoveries. The mystery is solved and a very happy Christmas is had by all.

Finally, I would like to make a brief mention of the *Schoolgirls' Picture Library*. These picture stories may not be so popular because they lack the deep story line of the prose Libraries - but I beg to differ here. First, the stories are not superficial: there is a lot to take in besides reading the words in the 'bubbles'. I have found them exciting and a change from the prose. The *SGPLs* with Christmas stories have been a joy to have and to read. Here are just a few, hopefully to whet the appetite.

In "Vera's Christmas Adventure", Vera Kingsley and her two brothers, Tom and Sonny, were to spend Christmas at 'Greystones' with their Great-Aunt Lavinia and Great-Uncle Herbert, while their parents were abroad. The story, although in pictures, contains much mystery and suspense. Vera had already featured in one picture story as the heroine of "Mystery Manor" (4). "Aunt Melinda's Ghost!" (194) is a Christmas story set in a big old house with Vicky's eccentric aunt; there is a ghost-hunt and an exciting mystery to solve. "Christmas at St. Bridges" (195) is the story of livewire Nurse Nora and her very first Christmas on the ward. "Christmas in the Highlands" (40) describes how, at the stroke of midnight, the ghost would walk the battlements of ancient Kilburnie Castle. A thrilling Christmas puzzle. "The Merrymakers' Swiss Christmas" (106) is just one of the many adventures of Sally & Co., this time in Switzerland.



We should not forget that the Silent Three had their own Christmas adventures in "A Christmas Mystery for the Silent Three" *(School Friend Annual,* 1955), a picture-story. The three chums, Betty Roland, Joan Derwent and Peggy West, spend their Christmas holidays with Peggy's uncle at 'Holly Lodge'. The famous three successfully set out to prove the innocence of a girl, wrongfully accused of theft, by tracking down the real culprit. The story finishes with a happy Christmas Tea.

Now it is time to find that place of solitude where you can read some of these exciting stories. If you do not have any of the *SGOLs* mentioned in this article, you can have the added fun of looking for them in some second-hand book shop!

A Happy Christmas and Happy Reading.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT!

BY ERNEST HOLMAN

Not an original title, by any means. I recall it as the one used by an enterprising gentleman named Ripley. He recounted unusual events that happened to occur around the world - I suppose, a very early forerunner of the Guinness Book of Records. One Sunday newspaper, in the 1930s and 1940s, took some of these items and turned them into an illustrated feature appearing regularly, for many years, on their page three. (I am, of course, referring to the days when Page 3 meant just that, the third page of a newspaper!)

What follows here comes under the above heading. They are, in fact, something for the reader to decide whether it is likely to have happened or not! In some cases, they are well documented - in many others they are 'stated' by various persons to have occurred. There are the odd one or two hardly likely to be swallowed!

For a starting point, I have selected Royalty. Here, I feel, I am on safe ground to be believed, as the event has been well known for many years. It concerns the Prince of Wales in the 1920s, signing his name before a huge crowd in Canada. It has been stated that a wag amongst the watchers called out: "Look out, you're signing the Pledge!" Whether that really happened or not, a cameraman caught a fine picture of the Prince smiling broadly and it is stated to have been a favourite within Royal circles.

King George V at the microphone

Royalty takes us next - still in the 1920s - to the time of the King's rest visit to Bognor after a bad illness. It appears that he and the Queen would sit out of doors and listen to the Guards Band playing for them every day.

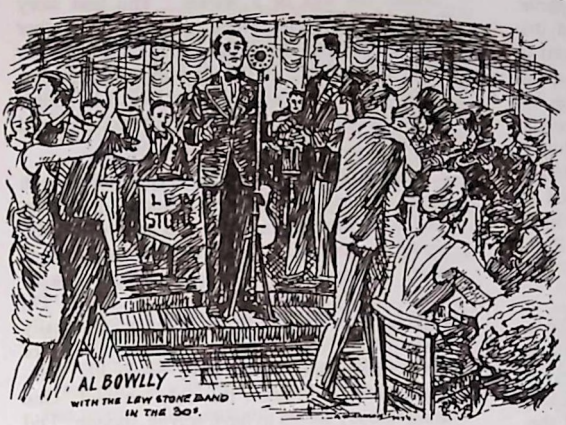
One of the soldier musicians was named Jack Simpson and he was the percussionist. When he played on the xylophone, the King expressed great pleasure and asked for more of the same. Jack set about rehearsing many numbers for the instrument. He went into intricate movements by using two tappers in each hand - all the numbers were much appreciated by the royal patient. When Jack recounted the events of the time at a later date, he told of the time when he became ambitious and started playing with three in each hand. It was too much and he quickly discarded one from each hand. When he did so, the King is said to have leaned forward and laughed loudly. So much so, that Queen Mary had to push him back into his chair and make him 'cool down'. In true regal fashion, she was obviously not amused! When the visitors departed, Jack says he felt weak all over with the strain of rehearsing constantly - not long afterwards, he handed in his papers and took to the world of dance bands - a less exacting life, he reckoned. It has been reported that, years afterwards, when the King was not feeling 'too good', Queen Mary suggested another visit to Bognor. We are told that His Majesty's reply was: "B - - - - r Bognor!"

One final yarn of the Royal Family is added now, although it was one of those 'images' that cropped up from time to time - I recall that it was a great favourite with many members of the British Forces during the later stages of the War.

The story tells of the visit to Buckingham Palace of a General Commanding Officer of renown. During a conversation with King George and Queen Elizabeth, the King asked: "How do you get on with .....?" (naming a very noted soldier). The General pointed out all the very good qualities of the person concerned; then he is said to have added: "Mind you, I sometimes think he is after my job!" The King smiled as he replied: "I am very glad to hear you say so. Some little while ago, we had him here for tea. Then, I was left with the strongest impression that he was after my job!"

Having mentioned Jack Simpson, it may be a good time to look at the world of dance bands, so prolific in the 1930s. Many tales are told of different musicians and leaders but the main theme seemed to be that it was an all-absorbing

and time-consuming experience but for all that most enjoyable. Not always when merely playing in a hall for ordinary ballroom dancing, but when broadcasting and performing on stage, when much more than mere 'music for dancing' was included. Many of the band leaders were generous enough when engaging the best players. Some, of course, a little imperious, others quite friendly with all.



Dancers sometimes would sidle up to a Leader, slip something into his hand and ask for a certain number to be rendered. It is said that one such leader cheerfully accepted a fiver, but if the offering was a mere pound, would put it into the top pocket of the dancer with a sad shake of the head. The leader most remembered happily and favourably by musicians was Billy Cotton, where a very cheerful atmosphere prevailed. This may have been due to the fact that very few changes were made to the personnel. Most likely, the maddest and merriest group was that of Harry Roy, whose members were a boisterous set of lads. So much so it has been said that many numbers had to be constantly repeated due to much laughter in the middle of a recording. One such has lived through and was recently issued as part of a set. During the number, much jollity breaks out and we hear the agonised cry of the engineer saying: "Come on, this is already the fifth time we've tried it!" The number, it seems, went on and makes interesting listening now. Most Leaders were popular with their players, if at times a little distant. It is a strange thing to say, but there was one such Leader - quite a 'name' - who was heartily disliked by all and sundry.

BILLY COTTON

The question in the title at the start now becomes interesting. How much could one really believe of the many stories that emerged from that prolific factory of 'facts' known as Hollywood? Not many, seems to be at all likely, but some may, for all that, be worth repeating. My favourite was always the statement made by Sam Goldwyn. When asked if he was in agreement with anything, he usually remarked: "Include me out!"

There is a story of a noted producer who often had trouble with temperamental stars, but found a sure way of solving the problem by suddenly clutching his heart and collapsing onto a settee. It is said to have disarmed many a firebrand, even if he was always back in harness the next day as right as rain.

There was a story current in the 1930s of a company who had many famous writers working together on a book they intended to film. It is said that some time passed before the company became aware of the fact that they had not, in fact, obtained the film rights!

One person certainly made capital of many of the 'events' in the film industry. P.G. Wodehouse had a not too comfortable time when working in Hollywood. He subsequently turned out a handful of short stories of the so-called happenings in Hollywood that, in their way, were classics indeed. Mind you, Plum Wodehouse was never short of stories to tell others about his life. He once sat next to a lady at a dinner party who told him that her son had read every one of his stories. "What will he say", she said, "when I tell him that I have been dining with Edgar Wallace!"

Plum tells a story of an event during his internment in Germany during the early 1940s. A fellow prisoner was understood to have once followed Plum and a Reverend gentleman around the exercise yard, hoping to hear something of an intelligent nature. What he got, P.G. said later, was an earnest discussion between myself and the Reverend gentleman concerning those "rubber-heeled sausages" we had for lunch!

In a letter to a life-long friend, Plum once told of his visit to a medical specialist, at a time when he was going through a spell of what he called 'spasms' - occasional spots before the eyes and a buzzing head. After an exhaustive examination, it was pronounced that there was nothing the matter with the patient and that

everything was working well. "I see," said P.G. "Still, what about my spasms?" The medico looked at him for a while before saying: "Well, if I were you, I'd just have them!" An assurance was given that he would do so!

Broadcasting memories of early days can make interesting reading and many events of radio matters have been circulated from time to time. One thing that was prominent in those days was the job of the man in charge of the 'push-off' button, whenever it was considered it was best to curtail the broadcast. One clerical gentleman, giving a morning talk, ended up by urging his listeners to never forget that someone was always watching over them, I don't think! That was what the listeners heard - apparently, at the end of his broadcast, the speaker turned to the producer and said "I don't think that took too long, did it?" The button man was a little late on 'casting off' and stopped at an unfortunate time.

Another well-known broadcaster of those days was the story-teller, A.J. Alan. His yarns were tall but feasible. They were a great success. He did once, when asked if anything unusual had ever happened to him, tell of the time when, after finishing a broadcast, he was informed by a studio hand that a crowd of people were waiting outside to take his photograph. A.J. decided to join them, by leaving the studio by a back door. After a while, the evening's announcer came out and posed for a photograph. "I know it was a good photograph" said A.J. Alan, "because when, later, I autographed the copies, everyone said what a good likeness it was!"

Thomas Woodroffe, famous for his 'Fleet's lit up' broadcast, once gave a commentary on the Cup Final. The game was well advanced, with no goals, and he expressed the view that he would eat his hat if a goal was scored. A story followed that, in the studio, he did in fact eat a hat. One had been prepared, made of sugar. It was stated that, a little later, he 'did not feel too well'!

I suppose sport is one area where stories abound. Plenty are nowadays recorded and played back. Others - a little more lurid, and published under 'certain' titles, are now well known. Not all, though - for instance, was it really true that a football commentator, getting mixed up with names, kept trying to overcome the problem by promptly saying "He has now passed to ....." and getting round things that way? It went awry eventually, because as he was struggling with names, he suddenly broke off and shouted "Oh, my goodness, someone has scored a goal!" Television also had its problems - it was once said that a football commentator, wishing to be helpful to viewers, told that that "if you are watching in black and white, Mexico are the team playing in green"!

Perhaps cricket comes in for a large proportion of 'stories'. Denis Compton had many such told about him. That, despite his hair advertisement, he was never at all tidy when batting, bowling or playing football for Arsenal. Denis, of course, was the 'run out' specialist. He confessed himself once that he dared not count up the number of times he had caused the loss of a wicket. The best story concerns the time when, batting in brother Leslie's Benefit Match, he ran his elder brother out. In a corner of the dressing room, so we have been told, Leslie told him that if he didn't score a century during the second innings, he'd break his ..... neck! Denis duly obliged.

Most of us by now are very familiar with Brian Johnstone's 'Botham' incident in a Test Match. Whilst his laughter was apparent, it did sound as though the rest of the commentary box were 'egging him on'. At one time, when he could hardly contain himself, he cried "Oh Aggers, do stop it!" Brian, mind you, actually had a very broad sense of humour - readers of his books or those who have heard his 'one-night stands' will know this only too well. One thing nobody seems to have solved, though. Did Brian's natural humour cause him to make certain gaffes, or were they spoken with tongue in cheek - e.g. "It looks as though Captain Ray Illingworth is about to relieve himself at the nursery end!" There was a story once that a radio announcer, giving the lunchtime cricket scoreboard, included the item that "Edrich was ill". Later, he made a correction, pointing out that Edrich had scored 111.

Let us not overlook that cricketing fan named J.N. Pentelow, one time editor of the *Magnet* and *Gem*. John Nix Pentelow was a law unto himself during his reign, by all accounts. When a not too pleased author came to see him, everybody for a long distance away knew what went on. J.N.P. was deaf, shouted very loudly and, so far from discussing the writer's grievance entered into a long history of cricket lore. I often ponder if any of those authors, wondering what they might have got from the interview, ever realised the significance of the editor's unusual second name!

Perhaps a few 'reported yarns' of a general nature might now be included. A teacher once took his pupils to sit in the House of Commons and listen to the proceedings. After a long time there, he emerged and was asked if his pupils had been interested. "Oh yes", came the reply. "I, too, found it so". He paused for a moment, then said "Mind you, I never had any idea at all what everyone was talking about!"

One tall story once told to me concerned the visit of an H.M. Inspector of Schools, on a journey to the farmland areas of Yorkshire. He found that the teacher was using pictures of various farm animals, with the type of animal printed large below - e.g. horse, cow, pig, etc.

The HMI suggested that the identification of the type of animal should be 'blacked out' and the children asked to identify it. He selected a large picture of a sheep, covered the word at the foot, and tried it out on the class. "What is this?" they were asked. No answer. After some prompting, one boy eventually rose and said "Well sir, I'm not absolutely sure, but I think it's a two-year-old Border Shorthorn!"

Another event depicted to me by a colleague told of his visit to a London football ground where the visitors were a French team. One robust cockney took exception to some strong tackling by the French players, and repeatedly shouted "Dirty b - - - - - d!" A little Frenchman standing near eyed him doubtfully during the match. Then, after a tackle produced a tumble, the French player promptly helped his opponent to his feet. The little French onlooker was delighted. "Ah", he shouted to the Home supporter. "Clean b - - - - - d, what?"

Now it seems only right that I should include a direct story of my own, for the discerning reader to make his decision about it. I was once seated in a London Tube train when two young girls entered and sat opposite me. One had a paperback copy of H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. "Oh, yeah," said her friend. "I see that on the telly". A look of disgust came over the face of the girl with the book. She held it away in front of her. "This," she said, "ain't what was on telly. This is a b-------g story!"

I had hoped to be able to finish this effort as I had started, with what was most likely a true story. Well, I have no evidence to offer on the one I will finish with. I have heard it mentioned and/or read about it and am prepared to accept it as the truth. It concerns someone already mentioned - that cricket cavalier, Denis Compton. In complete contrast to Sherlock Holmes, Denis never had any time at all for what might be called 'detail'. I really do believe the following to be correct!

The M.C.C. gave Denis Compton a dinner at Lords to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. During the height of the festivities, the guest of the evening was called away to take a telephone call. When he returned, it was seen that he was looking very thoughtful. He sat down without a word and stayed silent for some little time. Gradually, the jollity died down and then away. Someone eventually was emboldened to ask "Is anything wrong, Denis?" Denis looked at him for a while, then said, with a very straight mouth, "Well, that was my mother on the telephone. She says -" he paused, gulped a little, then said, "She says that I'm only 49!"

SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM DOWN UNDER. ANDREW MILES, AUSTRALIA.

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HAPPY XMAS AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR TO ALL HOBBYISTS EVERYWHERE, ESPECIALLY TO YE EDITOR! STUART WHITEHEAD, YEW TREE COTTAGE, BUTTS ASH, FAWLEY ROAD, HYTHE, SOUTHAMPTON SO45 3NH.

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SEASON'S GREETINGS TO MARY AND HOBBYISTS FROM JACK WILSON, NOSTALGIA UNLIMITED, 19 DUNBEATH AVE., RAINHILL PRESCOT, L35 0QH

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Something New Under The Sun

Now that I have retired to Southport, I have more than once taken a sentimental stroll along the road in which my grandparents used to live and heaved a nostalgic sigh on passing the spot where my pal Dick and I sat on the pavement, our backs against the garden wall and with our noses deep in what seemed to be the newest wonder of the age. On that glorious summer day, we were two short-trousered eight-year-olds, each with his newly minted copy of *The Beano Comic* - to give it its full title - dated July 30 1938 and numbered "1".

I suppose I was lucky among the youngsters of our not notably prosperous part of Manchester in those hard-pressed thirties because I had grandparents residing in this seaside resort and I spent a good chunk of the summer holidays with them. Dick and his family lived next door and he and I quickly became friends. We were the same age and had similar interests, chiefly cowboys and Indians and comics.

In 1938, my favourite comic was undoubtedly *Chips*. I couldn't wait for Wednesdays to roll around so that, on my way home from school, I could pick up my wonderful pink pennyworth at the newsagents. On the front page that year, Weary Willie and Tired Tim were whisked off to Africa, where they had hilarious hairbreadth escapes; inside, Laurie and Trailer were involved in fantastic doings with a collection of wonderful inventions, Ivor Klue, the great detective, battled crime in an unlikely manner, "Homeless Hector", the lost dog, wandered into a whimsical exploit each week while the nibs of "Casey Court" entered with gusto into some rib-tickling venture. On the back page, there was a serial strip, "Chums of the E-Men Patrol", about which I was enthusiastic, and among the printed stories were my special friends, Captain Kerrigan, the tough little skipper, and Clive Markham, with Dane the Dog Detective.

It took a lot to shake my devotion to *Chips*, which represented, of course, the long-established comic tradition of the Amalgamated Press which then led the field. Times, however, were slowly changing.

I knew nothing about circulation wars in those days and did not know that the arrival of a new style of comic in December 1937 was the first shot in such a war. It was the *Dandy* and it came from the Dundee firm of D.C. Thomson. It was smaller in format than most AP comics and its contents and presentation broke the mould created by the London firm.

This new comic, priced at twopence, had a fresh and novel look. It made the A.P. titles look old-fashioned and it quickly gained readers. I was among them, but I was still faithful to *Chips*.

Then, during the summer holiday from school, came the second shot from Dundee, the strangely named *Beano*, though I vaguely understood that a beano was a grand feast - what the good old A.P. stable would call "a slap-up feed". I certainly liked this new arrival which, like its stablemate, the *Dandy*, had a freshness even though it shared certain peculiarities with the earlier arrival, chiefly a brand of slang which was unfamiliar to those of us south of the Tweed.

True, the front page had a not very inspiring resident, "Big Eggo", an ungainly ostrich drawn by Reg Carter, but, on turning the page, one immediately encountered a bunch of characters who would become some of the most famous ever crated by the as yet unsung Dudley D. Watkins - "Lord Snooty and His Pals". Snooty was shown in his Eton suit, fretting amid the stuffy confines of the ancestral manor, but when he changes into ragged clothes and joins the tough kids of Ash-Can Alley, he becomes one of us.

"Son of a Duke But Always Pally - With the Beezer Kids of Ash-Can Alley" carolled the legend above the title. And there was that peculiar slang again. "Beezer" was an alien word to me. It appeared to be one which was entirely the property of the firm of D.C. Thomson of Dundee. In the 1950s they even produced a comic of that title.

Among the cast of characters in that first *Beano* was "Ping the Elastic Man", drawn by Hugh McNeill and one of his earliest efforts, not that we knew the names of the artists in 1938, for all their work was anonymous. Many a long year on, I met Hugh McNeill's widow and learned that he and I were born very close to each other and he and his wife were married at a church just round the corner from my old Manchester home. After his early days on the *Beano*, McNeill went on to greater things and is perhaps best remembered for "Harold Hare" but he also created "Our Ernie" and "Deed-a-Day

TIN-CAN TOMMY
THE CLOCKWORK BOY

He Hasn't Been Weighed Since the Age of Three
—The Weighing-Machine Always Broke, You See.

BIG FAT JOE

The Crowd Tied Poor Ping in a Knot—To Prove He Wasn't Talking Rot.

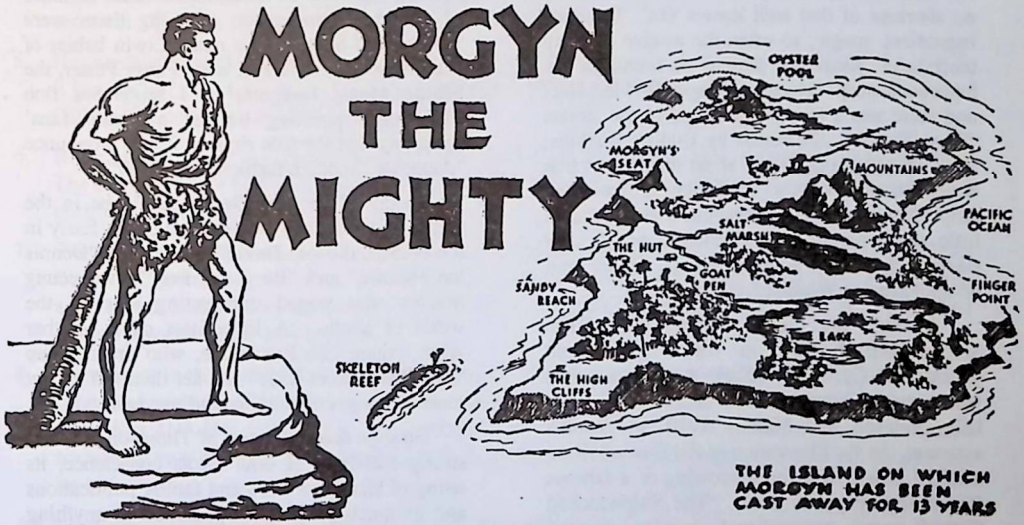
HERE COMES PING THE ELASTIC MAN

Son of a Duke But Always Pally—
With the Beezer Kids of Ash-Can Alley.

LORD SNOOTY AND HIS PALS

The Strongest Man in the World!

MORGYN THE MIGHTY



Danny" in the *Knock-Out* and much more.

Fresh though many of the features in that first *Beano* appeared at the time, there is now a tame look to some of them. The double-page spread of small strips: "Wee Peem", "Little Dead-Eye Dick", "Hairy Dan", "Contrary Mary" (a donkey), "Smiler the Sweeper" and "Helpful Henry" now seem to have no special attraction but, when I was an uncritical eight-year-old, I suppose I enjoyed them as much as I did the rest of the line-up in this new look publication.

And enjoy them I certainly did. Among the strip characters was one who would become well established in the *Beano*, the mechanical boy "Tin-Can Tommy" who, on his initial appearance, was drawn in a most unfamiliar style. An artist whose distinctive style was certainly familiar through his many contributions to the D.C. Thomson story papers and the recently launched *Dandy*, Allan Morley, produced a full-page strip, "Big Fat Joe". In earlier years, Morley worked for the A.P. comics and, in the 'twenties, drew "Casey Court" in my favourite *Chips*.

Roland Davies, a cartoonist remembered for his newspaper strip, "Come on, Steve", created "Whoopee Hank, the Slap Dash Sheriff", anonymously, of course, while the hands of artists whose work was familiar from the D.C. Thomson story papers could be detected in the new comic's adventure strips. One was "Morgyn the Mighty", a character long established in the *Rover* and one half of the Dundee firm's twofold answer to Tarzan, the other being "Strang the Terrible". Then there was "Wild Boy of the Woods", who was actually described in the blurb above the title as "a young Tarzan", while "Cracker Jack" was a rodeo cowboy who fought crooks with a bullwhip.

In both strips and printed stories, there was no shortage of that well known D.C. Thomson ingredient, magic, so often the motive force in their boys' yarns. It was to be found in the humorous strip "Hooky's Magic Bowler Hat" and there was a fairy-tale element in the stories "Tom Thumb", illustrated by Dudley Watkins, and "The Wishing Tree", about an ancient tree which granted wishes. In similar vein was the strip "Rip Van Wink", wherein a bewhiskered little character faces the modern world after sleeping for seven hundred years. There were no apologies to Washington Irving.

Among the text stories was "The Shipwrecked Kidds", in which two spoilt youngsters, Cyril and Ethel, are shipwrecked with two of the crew of their father's yacht, Big Bill Thomson and Mickey Swift, the cook's assistant. In the illustration of the four adrift on a raft, I now find a foreshadowing of a famous *Beano* feature yet to come, "The Shipwrecked Circus", well remembered by its devoted followers.

"The Wangles of Granny Green" was a lighthearted story about a young boy who perpetrated various japes while disguised as his grandmother, if you could swallow such a situation - and, at eight, I could, just as, later, I could swallow the idea of Wibley, of the Greyfriars Remove, impersonating middle-aged masters.

Animals came into their own in three stories: "The Ape's Secret", with a circus setting; "Black Flash the Beaver" and "My Dog Sandy".

To help charm the twopences out of the pockets of the younger generation, there was the usual free gift with the first issue of the new comic. It was what was termed a "whoopee mask", merely a strip of cardboard with two eyeholes. As I recall, Dick and I were not greatly impressed by it. It would hardly conceal your identity if you set out to rob a bank. The second week's free gift, as trailered in the first issue, was more promising. It was a set of "sugar button sweets". With its penchant for rhymes, the House of Thomson told us they were: "Sugar buttons, black as jet, best you've ever tasted yet!" If I remember rightly, they turned out to be liquorice sweets.

Novel though it appeared to my young eyes, the initial *Beano* now looks rather a hotch-potch of humour, thrills, magic and a page of printed jokes. There is nothing to suggest that the new comic would, in time, become a winner.

It would battle through the war years, going fortnightly in the years of paper shortage. Its cast of characters would deal out buckets of classic come-uppance to the representatives of the Axis powers and Winston Churchill himself would make a guest appearance with Lord Snooty and His Pals. Some characters would become 'familiar as household words' to those of a certain generation. Among them were Snitchy and Snatchy, the upstart twin babies of Lord Snooty's entourage, and "Pansy Potter, the Strong Man's Daughter" - I remember Bob Monkhouse pointing out at a comic fans' gathering that the title rhymes if you pronounce "daughter" Scottish fashion, as "dotter".

In the 'fifties, the *Beano* would be in the van of new trends in British comic art. Early in the decade, the late David Law created "Dennis the Menace" and "Beryl the Peril", two young horrors who waged unrelenting war on the world of adults. A little later came another artist, young Leo Baxendale, who dreamed up "The Bash Street Kids" and set them off on yet more rampages of anarchy and mayhem.

Strange that the house of Thomson, with its strong stiffening of dour Scots conscience, its string of bland women's and family publications and its much publicised opposition to anything so revolutionary as the trades union movement, should give rise to a culture of thumping,

bashing and anti-authoritarianism. Come to think of it, though, long before the arrival of *Beano*, the Thomson boys' papers featured dozens of schools in which discipline had broken down and power had passed to the pupils with exaggerated results.

In the very week in which I write this - in September 1998 - the *Guardian* made reference to the 60th anniversary of the *Beano* and did a profile of Dennis the Menace, describing him as 'a quintessential British character; a timeless cultural icon'. Dennis, it seems, now has an official fan club 1.5 million strong. He is a TV star in Europe, especially in Germany, and Dennis the Menace merchandising brings in about £5 million annually.

Times have changed indeed for, if you ask anyone to name a British comic, they'll almost certainly reply: 'The Beano'. Like me, you have to be fairly long in the tooth to recall even the names of *Chips*, "Weary Willie and Tired Tim", "Homeless Hector", "Casey Court" and everything else which emanated from the once dominant A.P. comic empire.

Permit me, then, to heave another nostalgic sigh for that sunny day in the school holidays of 1938 when two youngsters sampled the brand new *Beano* and never imagined that they were in at the start of something big.

****

ANSWERS TO WHO? WHAT? WHY? WHERE?

1. Wolfgang Nacht, who is a member of the sinister Double Four (yes, you've guessed it, a gang with eight members), led by a Balkan monarch, believe it or not. This incident is from *The Doomsman of the Double Four* by Gwyn Evans (*DW* No. 41), an entertaining tale from a series about the most exotic bunch of crooks to be found anywhere in the Blakian casebook.

2. Nothing less than the sign of the Yellow Beetle, the sinister trademark of the power-crazed Prince Wu Ling (would-be Emperor of Manchuria - and that only for starters) whose agents have just murdered these poor chaps' British boss. See *Sexton Blake in Manchuria* by G.H. Teed (*UJ* No. 1494), a far better yarn about sinister Chinamen than any of Sax Rohmer's Fu-Manchu tales.

3. The beard conceals the face of Sexton Blake who is now a prisoner on Reece's yacht. Masquerading as an officer on a ship the Crim. Con. has just hi-jacked, Blake will, of course, be in some trouble if his identity is discovered. A tense moment from *Volcano Island* by Robert Murray (*UJ* No. 1500), a memorable series about Blake versus a world-wide crooks' union.

4. A criminal attack by military tanks (!) on the centre of London is just one colourful incident in *Night Birds*, another high-temperature tale by Anthony Skene (*UJ* No. 1420) featuring the ever-popular Zenith the Albino. A further episode finds Blake and Tinker trapped on a naval target-ship on the high seas. Skene could never resist the most outrageous plots for his stories but he rarely failed to entertain. This is a particularly cherishable piece of hokum.

5. Her name is Astra Savine, a most mysterious and exotic lady who is in love with Sexton Blake - or is it his double? To learn more about her and the fate of the two Blakes, go back to an unusual tale by Gilbert Chester entitled *Decoy* (*DW* No. 24).

6. Blake and Co. have just been told that a foul murder has been committed: a dramatic moment from *The Crimson Smile* by Donald Stuart (*UJ* No. 1523) which centres on a Christmas panto and a picture portrait with some most intriguing properties.

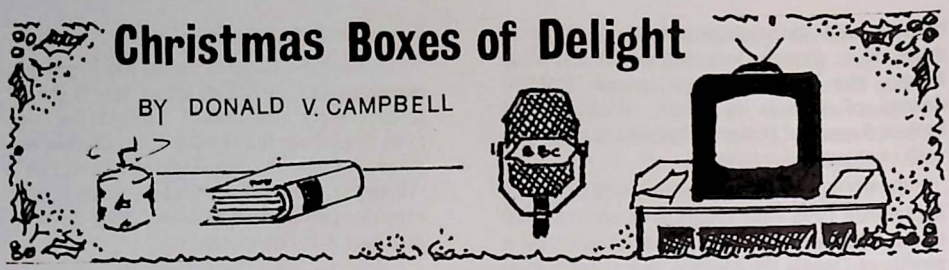
7. The steward is, in fact, no peeping Tom but Sexton Blake, again in disguise, and on the trail of Fifette Bierce the glamorous partner of Leon Kestrel, another man of a thousand faces and a long-time adversary of Blake. They all feature in *The Panic Liner Plot* by Lewis Jackson (*DW* No. 73), the last Kestrel story to appear in this paper.

8. The statues in the background are Rodin's famous "Burghers of Calais" and the key is a vital symbol connected with a Royalist plot to overthrow the French Republic. This amusing episode is from *The Fifth Key* (*UJ* No. 1498), the last instalment of Gwyn Evans' famous Onion Men series and something very different from the Double Four stories - a dazzling reminder of Evans' versatility and inventiveness.

All the stories referred to are, in the language of their day, "rattling good yarns" and, as vintage Blake, they represent nostalgia-plus.

Christmas Boxes of Delight

BY DONALD V. CAMPBELL



Both of my 'Christmas Boxes' come from the 1940s. Both still have a power and a magic of their own. Both were introduced to me by the B.B.C. Children's Hour and both are books worth remembering and, even, re-publishing. To the first.

The most magical of all experiences for me was when the B.B.C. (in the 1940s) led me to John Masefield and his *Box of Delights*. The play ran at Christmas time - as it surely must because it is a Christmas story. The music had a musical box magic about it (another box of delights). In those days credit was almost always given for musical excerpts. This most supportive of musical moments was taken from Victor Hely Hutchison's "Carol Symphony". It was to be almost forty years before I was able to own a recording myself - only in the 1970s was it recorded and offered for sale to the general public!

Even without *The Box of Delights* it (the Carol Symphony) has been de-rigueur in the Campbell household as a background to Christmas morning and the opening of presents. Yes! We still get together. The sixty-pluses gather with the thirty-somethings and the grandchildren and ritualise the present opening and time stands still again for (some of) us. To say it is nice would be an understatement. John Masefield's fantasy though is the true background to what is happening.

My desire to listen again to the timeless music that Hely-Hutchison wrote carried me through those decades until it was available. Then it somehow got mixed in to my own children's Christmas experience. What they have missed out on is both the Masefield book and the experience of the radio play that really did tingle the spine in the glow from the old Philips radio set.

Children's Hour was always capable of giving delight and surprise. The combination of fantastic adventures and surprising music locked into the conscious and subconscious of this child and has remained with me into ripe adulthood. As ever with the old BBC and its integrity it made the child of the time want more. The more, in this instance, was the book.

The book. Going back to it now I realise that it was a hard book. Difficult in many ways but especially in its use of language. But atmospheric and mysterious is what it was and remains. Even the names. The boy - Kay Harker. The Punch and Judy man - Cole Hawlings. Herne the Hunter, inextricably linked with Christmas and the Bishop of Tatchester - the pagan and the Christian. **"The wolves are running"** - that curious and repeating mantra. These all combine to lure us into one of the finest of children's fantasies.

The B.B.C. are not quite as daft as we sometimes think. Their radio cassette series released a recent adaptation of *The Box of Delights* for general sale and a worthy follower of the original it is, with Donald Sinden as the sinister Abner Brown, Celia Imrie as Sylvia Daisy Pouncer, and Lionel Jefferies as Cole Hawlings. Regrettably, the original Hely-Hutchison music was replaced by some commissioned but rather undistinguished music by Neal Brand - my apologies to the composer!

About ten years ago there was a B.B.C. TV adaptation of the work. This had a small fortune spent on it in the way of computer generated trickery. The magical trickery worked very well. I think that it was just once (or twice) repeated but it deserves rather more frequent airings for our children's children, I think. The late and great Patrick Troughton played Cole Hawlings to perfection. Perhaps TV dispenses with some of the mystery and magic, much as C.S. Lewis and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are less successful when seen than when read or aired on radio.

Nevertheless, as book, radio drama and TV dramatization *The Box of Delights* is a classic. It is a splendid story. It has excitement and magic and mystery. Of course the book has that abiding problem of early twentieth century children's books - it is middle class. It is rooted in a society that many either can't see, have no wish to see or want to dismiss. If we can pass that aspect by then the magic remains.

There is an enduring problem with the story and that rests not with the author but with the reader. If we don't like fantasy or magic stories then *Box of Delights* is a non-starter. If we are put off by the use of poetic language or by the insertion of poetry into the narrative line then we are also going to find the book 'sticking' somewhat. What shines out from Masefield is a

sense of awe, of discovery, of enchantment that can be enjoyed or marvelled at by both adult and child alike. Can we 'lobby' for a repeat of the TV production - if, that is, it is still in the B.B.C. archives? Why not? The ensuing interest could cause the re-publication of the book and give another generation a chance to marvel at the power of storytelling of a high order and to gaze and wonder at the craftsmanship of a master of words. Poetry in prose.

Although *Box of Delights* was seminal for me, it had been preceded by another book involving the adventures of Kay Harker. This was *The Midnight Folk* - a candidate for good animation if ever there was one. *Midnight Folk* is much more immediate and less mysterious than its sequel. It pulls the reader straight into the world of the cats and rats that Kay somehow-shrinks-to-fit without noticing the strangeness. Both books are dizzying tours-de-force.

My second box of delights for Christmas is another book that the Children's Hour opened up for the young listener through a dramatisation - *Brendon Chase.*

I returned to Brendon Chase recently. It was the same. It was as though I had never been away from it. The Blindpool was still populated by an amazing variety of wildlife. Old Smokoe Joe still had his 'nose' - red and bulbous and embarrassing to look at. The boys still showed off their skills with a .22 rifle (with a silencer, else they would have been discovered much sooner). Yes, Brendon Chase is a splendid place, a timeless place, an adventurous place.

Have you never read it? What treasure-trove awaits you.

Brendon Chase was written by 'B.B.', which was the pseudonym of Denis Watkins-Pitchford who illustrated this, his own story, and other of his own books. He was not only a fine artist - particularly of wildlife, his *Dark Estuary* is a most beautiful and sought-after book, filled with glorious water colours of birds - but he was also a most sensitive writer. I was not to know this when, as a schoolboy, I listened to the serialization on Children's Hour. *Brendon Chase* was originally heard in 1946 not two years after its first publication. How well Bertha Lonsdale (dramatist) and Nan Macdonald (producer), of the Northern Region, identified good material. And so quickly.

I read the book after hearing the serial. What returns so evocatively are the scraper board and silhouette drawings that Watkins-Pitchford produced for the book. Some of them are beautiful cameos of wildlife: an owl, a night-heron, the Blindpool. Others were comic silhouettes: the local policeman up a tree (treed by a rutting deer), the same character trundling his bike in search of the runaways, the frantic

escape of Little John in the baker's cart.

And then the music. Nan Macdonald (one supposes) selecting unerringly the strangest and most beautiful music for the serial. **(This was the orchestral version of Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*).** I went straight out and bought the Black Label' Columbia recording of it. That has long gone the journey along with my wind-up gramophone. Years later the old 78 was to be replaced by a cassette of the old String Quartet performance and then - later again - by a CD with the long-remembered orchestral account.

That a story (both radio-play and book) and its illustrations and a piece of music should have made such an impact makes one lament the loss of such stimulation for our modern youngsters.

'B.B.' wrote the book in 1944. It was picked up by radio almost immediately. The sensitive yet exciting story is a combination of wildlife and countryside sketches coupled to stirring and comic adventures. There is only

one girl and she is peripheral, yet a source of constant reddening of the cheeks in Big John (John). He even sends her a beautiful badger pelt as a 'sign'. To paraphrase someone or other - "He married her, dear reader ...." But that is only lightly touched on in the Epilogue.

We might ask ourselves if the story is believable? Could the three boys - Robin, John and Harold - however well educated in woodcraft and country lore, run away and live without problems in the middle of an 11,000-acre wood? Run away, that is, and live without detection - despite the whole countryside and the nation being roused to action? The *Morning Post* for example gets in on the act rather swiftly. The book is so good that the answer can only be 'Yes' - and an unqualified 'yes' at that.

Of course they are middle-class. Their parents are in India. Their guardian is an old aunt. Schooling is of the public variety! But their middle-classness does not get in the way even now. Whether the local doctor would have really kept their secret for so long is a moot point. Apart from that, there is little with which to quibble - if quibble we must.

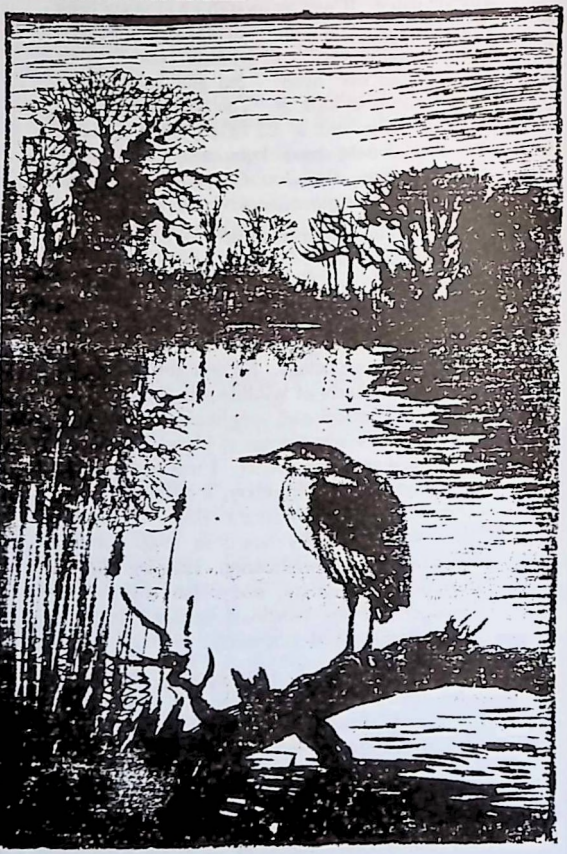
I have only recently read the obnoxious, and, I must suggest, sick, modern children's book *Junk* by Melvyn Burgess. This was before going back for another journey into *Brendon Chase*. The comparison, as they say, "is, and was, odious!" As it happens, both books reject the notion of 'naughtiness' being a 'good' thing - the boys have penances and so forth to make up for their quite desperate act of running away. But somehow the older book shades the ideas so neatly that there is little at which to take offence.

The modern book is just plainly detestable. Naughtiness in *Junk* is drug-taking, squatting, under-age sex and teenage pregnancy! I shall not be returning to it, not in forty days, nor in forty weeks, never mind forty years. How (probably and otherwise) sane people - *The Guardian* and librarians - could award *Junk* medals for excellence defeats me. Something to do with the nineteen nineties?

But, back to 'B.B.' and *Brendon Chase*. The comic and rustic sergeant of police was a staple of many an author before the war. Bunting is an intelligent but unfortunate rural 'bobby' character. He rightly 'knows' the boys are in Brendon Chase. He keeps looking for them but eventually gives up after the episode with an excitable deer. We shall pass over the affair of the lost trousers - but it is funny! So the book, to some extent, is stereotypical and rooted in its time - just as *Swallows and Amazons* is. Nevertheless it is a good adventure story with few longeurs. Watkins-Pitchford enjoys his essays on flora and fauna but these are always germane to a past or a coming incident.

One feels saddest for the poor old aunt. Misunderstanding boys is part of her stock-in-trade. Nevertheless the stresses she is placed under by their 'vanishing-act' are unfair. But 'no aunt' would mean no reason for running away. She is also required to collapse with 'the vapours' rather as Jane Austen's old aunts and others did. So we see more of the stereotypical in her as well as in Bunting.

The most interesting and most powerful character is the charcoal burner who lives in the forest - Smokoe Joe. A 'loner', he takes kindly to the boys. After all, they had saved his dog from a lingering death in a rabbit burrow. He teaches them the lore of the forest. His explanation and description of the life and way of trees is both mystical and forceful. His bulbous nose is a great source of mortification to him - and it is getting bigger - and initially it accounts for his awkwardness with the boys. Big John saves Smokoe's life after an accident and it is this episode that reveals their hiding place to the doctor. In the end it is the doctor who discloses their secret to their father - newly arrived from India - but they were about to 'give themselves up' anyway - living outdoors is not so attractive when snow-bound winter replaces summer and autumn.

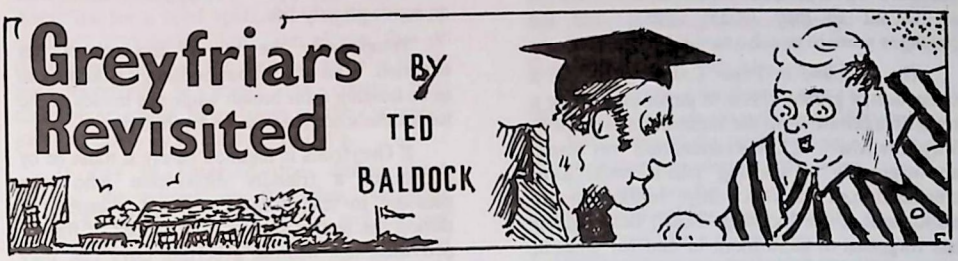


The Night Heron at the Blind Pool

Each boy gets his own 'adventure' within the story and perhaps the most exciting, and certainly the funniest of these, is the foray by the youngest - "Little John" (Harold) - into Brendon Town to get the supplies. This is before they decide that living off the land is the only way. The climax of the incident has Little John careering on a horse and cart through the town and into the countryside with the populace in pursuit - reminiscent of Toad's escape from prison and the train chase. How he escapes and gets back to the others is a fine chapter - possibly a good one for reading aloud to children starved of literature.

Even though you knew from the start that they would have to go back to civilization it is the suddenness of the slightly 'pat' ending that surprises and disappoints. But, having said that, this is still a fine book. I only wish that I had seen the Southern Television production of the story which was made twenty years ago. Instead it must be the Children's Hour presentation (and why not?) that I shall continue to remember with thanks. With thanks for three things: for introducing me to the book, for discovering the author as artist, and for familiarising me with the music.

It is a few years since I read the book and it may be a few more before I pick it up again. It will be worth the wait and the read.



YESTERYEAR

The Greyfriars lights are twinkling yet,
The stately elms still blow,
'Tis not as though we would forget
For time has much to show.
Wingate may have passed this way
Where summer shadows fall,
Here, Henry Samuel Quelch held sway
Great days we may recall,
The roars of Bunter may be heard;
The ash's steady swish
Awakes the echoes and disturbs
The peace which we would wish.
Here masters stroll and take their ease
Beside the Sixth form green
Enjoying oft the balmy breeze,
And discourse so serene.
Hacker arm in arm with Prout
Whose fruity boom is heard,
While from the fields a distant shout,
Deep then our hearts are stirred.

THE WAKE OF THE STORM

The lessons are done, and the prizes won,
And the counted weeks are past;
Oh the holiday joys of the girls and boys
Who are 'home tonight' at last.
So much to tell and to hear as well
As they gather round the glow,
Who would not part for the joy of heart
That only the parted know -
At home tonight.
(F.R. Havergal)

Greyfriars during the Christmas vacation. An empty shell in so far as youthful humanity is concerned. Empty, yet resounding quietly and continuously with a host of small sounds and echoes.

When old buildings, especially ancient ecclesiastical foundations (was not Greyfriars a Friary in an earlier more distant age?) are left empty of the normal noisy, thriving life of a great school they tend to take upon themselves another distinctive existence.

Empty and deserted they may be but they are by no means silent. They take on a life of their own - suppressed during term - and blossoming in rather an alarming manner when the last key has been turned.

They creak, they groan, they snap and sigh. Old joists and beams protest, producing strange and disturbing half-noises; one is never completely sure that they actually occur. Doors tend to swing slowly ajar of their own volition - or by some stray draught. Little whorls of dust seem to form into startling and disturbing

shapes as they drift along empty corridors.

There comes the sudden patter of running feet, receding and drifting back to the uneasy listener. Snatches of conversation, little bursts of smothered laughter. The school is empty of boys and masters yet it is far from being uninhabited.

Gosling and Mr Mimble, whose duty it is to make occasional pilgrimages through the form-rooms and corridors, could - and do - recount many strange and unexplainable incidents which are not entirely the products of over-indulgence in certain fiery liquids.

The boys have departed to the four corners of the land, their minds filled with the anticipated jollities to come over the festive season. They have left the school arena, the battle-ground of term-time, for a brief period to take care of itself. however, evidence of their presence is everywhere. The form rooms are not so vacant as they would appear, and the passages seem to re-echo to subtle vibrations.

On the table in Peter Todd's study lies a collection of grubby sheets of paper all bearing a repetitive phrase from the immortal *Aeneid* of P. Virgilius Maro. Close examination will reveal an originality of spelling which could have emanated from one source only. In the rush and excitement of the looming 'Hols', Billy Bunter has forgotten to hand them in and Mr Quelch, concerned with a hundred matters at the conclusion of the term, has forgotten also that they were due. The noble band of domestic staff will probably find quite a harvest of such interesting documents scattered around as they embark upon the monumental task of 'cleaning up' after the 'young gentlemen'.

It is a gracious time of comparative silence and peace when even Gosling has been known to allow himself an ancient smile over his potations, and Mr Mimble may be seen to relax his toil in the kitchen garden. When Dr Locke, from the heights of Olympus, will indulge himself with sundry uninterrupted periods which may be classified as 'dozing off' for a brief spell (as is the custom with elderly gentlemen, even Headmasters).

Surely from that awesome apartment, masters' common room, one may catch the rustle of yesterday's *Times*, and a mellow boom enquiring for the *Educational Supplement*, together with the quiet chink of coffee cups. The room may appear empty, yet it teems with an active ghostly life.

Temporarily the life of the school has departed. The old school buildings would seem to be holding their breath while the noises of the term-time's activities seem loath to die.

If Greyfriars is haunted surely it must be by ghosts of a friendly disposition who take pleasure in revisiting once more - especially during the festive season - the scenes of former activities, not without a certain envy one may imagine at the jolly era through which their old haunts are now passing.

FIELDS OF ENDEAVOUR

> A constant stream of boys, all in football gear, crossed the court, bound for the playing fields. It was a splendid afternoon, and the distant thud of the practice balls being kicked about round the goals was in itself sufficient to make a boy quicken his pace from a walk to a run.
>
> *Harold Avery. Out of the Running.*

> And all this part where we are is the little side ground, right up to the trees, and on the other side of the trees is the big side ground, where the great matches are played.
>
> *Tom Brown's School Days.*

Much has been written about the venerable old buildings of Greyfriars School. The quadrangle, the activities of Greyfriars "Men" in the form-rooms, the common rooms and further afield beyond the gates. The Tuckshop, the old Gatehouse - the abode of William Gosling the ancient porter, has received a fair share of attention. Now let us turn our attention to the playing fields. Those stretches of greensward, the scene of so many Homeric battles in the past. Where in the summer season white-clad figures may be seen chasing the flying ball, while in winter along the crowded touchlines muffled figures cheer and shout unlimited advice to their respective house teams on the football field.

The curtain rises on many Greyfriars stories with Harry Wharton seated at the table in Study No. 1 with puckered brow, a sheet of paper before him and a pencil poised hesitatingly in his hand, debating in his mind whether or not Vernon-Smith's recent form can justify his inclusion in the Remove Eleven in the match against St. Jim's or Rookwood. These are matters of first importance. The ground on little side in is near perfect condition, the weather bids fair to be ideal in the afternoon. St. Jim's are said to be at the top of their form - a very formidable item of information. Hence the puckers on Wharton's brow. Hence his hesitation. Smithy has been playing the goat lately. The ass was detected smoking a surreptitious cigarette in the cloisters by Wingate, and summary justice had been applied

in the shape of "six" which certainly did not improve the Bounder's humour at all. On his good days, however, he was a very useful man indeed, quite indispensable. This has been proved many times in the past - so down goes his name, and the pucker on Wharton's brow becomes a shade less strong.

Few places can present a pleasanter aspect than the first eleven cricket pitch on the day of a big match in perfect summer surroundings. The crowd of fellows gathered round the pavilion on the veranda of which stand ranks of deckchairs designated for the privileged few. Masters frequently excusing themselves from the sterner duties of the form-room enjoy cooling drinks while watching the doughty deeds of the sixth-form giants.

Around the out field, groups of fellows are lying on the grass enjoying to the full the match, the sunshine, and the relaxation of school discipline for a brief spell, exchanging learned badinage concerning their own eleven, that of their opponents, and the summer game at large, not forgetting to assert the course they themselves would have taken to the "spinner" just sent down by Kildare of St. Jim's.

It may be observed that, during these learned discussions on the play, wrestling matches and skirmishing on the turf are not uncommon. Emphasising of points seems to necessitate drastic measures among the "fags" of the second and third forms. Henry Newbolt unerringly sounds the right chord in his poem, *The School at War*:

> We played again the immortal games,
> And grappled with the fierce old friends,
> And cheered the dead undying names,
> And sang the song that never ends.

These are the dog days to be stored up and treasured in the memory and, when less perfect times come as sooner or later they do, brought forth and re-lived once more. The playing-fields of our early days and the influence of the games we played thereon may well prove a profitable testing ground in the years ahead. This influence can hardly fail when, deep within us, run the happy traditions of the old *Magnet* and *Gem* days.

When willow is king and the sward is green
And the sky a heavenly blue,
Doughty deeds of valour are seen
In the game that is ever new.
The wicket is casting a shadow long
Upon the crease so smooth,
The pavilion clock, can it be wrong?
Bids us now is the time to move.
The battle's been on since the cool of dawn
When crisp to the work we bent,
The opposing side seems a trifle worn,
Hard play has the victory sent.
But now the field lies empty and still,
The elms take a darker hue,
But listen and yet you will catch the thrill
Of the game that is ever new.

ONE SUMMER AFTERNOON

I dream of pies and apple flans,
Of endless strawberry tarts,
In splendid trim I have my plans
With doughnuts will I start.
Bring on the jelly, where is the cream?
Just give a chap a chance,
Those mincepies look a perfect dream
To battle I'll advance.

Never had the interior of Chunkley's tearooms looked so cool and inviting as on that hot summer afternoon. Bunter stood perspiring on the pavement - rather like a fat Peri at the gates of paradise - gazing through the window at the cool fronds of Chunkley's palms which stood discreetly in corners hiding certain tables from the public gaze.

The fresh white table-cloths, each graced with its ornate little menu card, and the general air of cool opulence, all seemed to be inviting Bunter to enter this realm of plenty and to partake of the goodly things he knew to be waiting there. Just imagine a large slice of one of Chunkley's best melons on such an afternoon!

It was quiet, rather early for afternoon tea. Two neatly dressed waitresses were standing chatting in a quiet corner awaiting the call of duty. Billy Bunter took in the familiar delights as he stood clinking a penny and a sixpenny piece on his pocket. He knew from past experience that Chunkley's, being a rather superior establishment, would not extend any great service for sevenpence.

It was sad. It was annoying. It was quite unjust. It was the Owl's bad luck.

Bunter had been expecting a postal order for some considerable time - for months in fact. But, owing to the extremely dilatory methods of the Post Office, this had failed to materialise. Such slackness was the source of much annoyance to the Owl of the Remove. Several letters on the subject had been written to his father, none of which had elicited a reply.

Bunter was getting desperate. He was 'stony broke'. Not at all a happy situation for a Public School 'man'. Here he was some miles from Greyfriars, very hungry, with just sevenpence in his pocket, barred from entering the gates of plenty. It was an extremely unsatisfactory plight.

Funds for the journey back to Greyfriars did

not worry him unduly. Something would turn up: Bunter was usually an optimist. The real problem - a most important one - was an all consuming hunger. He was always hungry. It was his natural state. But now, something - or someone - had to be done to rectify matters. The situation was serious.

It is more or less generally accepted that when one's fortunes are at a particularly low ebb something turns up. So it was on this occasion. Bunter was standing rather desolately on the pavement outside Chunkley's Emporium, with hands in his pockets and with a deep pucker on his podgy brow wondering what on earth to do next.

His resources might just stretch to a bath bun and a glass of ginger beer. This would leave him minus a rail or bus fare back to Greyfriars. Torn between conflicting emotions he chose - expectedly - to sustain the inner man and leave the tiresome matter of getting home to luck and to the gods of chance.

Then it happened. Fortune smiled, rather like the sun breaking clear of dark storm clouds. The sound of distant explosions destroyed the afternoon peace of the high street. In the distance, approaching rapidly in a cloud of dust, Bunter observed a goggled figure crouching over the handle-bars of an antiquated motor cycle. As it roared closer he was able to identify the rider. It was none other than Horace Coker, of the Fifth form at Greyfriars.

Here was luck. Here was possible deliverance from his worrying situation. Here was - perhaps - a free ride back to the school. Billy Bunter was extremely quick on the uptake in any matter concerning his own well being.

"I say, Coker!"

Coker glanced round and seeing Bunter for the first time frowned portentously.

"What are you doing, you young tick?"

"Oh, really, Coker."

"What are you up to, you young rascal?"

"I say, you know, is it any business of yours what I am doing here?"

"Don't be a cheeky fag," snapped Coker.

"Oh, really, Coker."

Bunter should have been aware by this time that Horace's celebrated 'short way with fags' might soon be demonstrated. But Coker dismounted from his steed, raised his goggles, and moved towards the inviting portals of Chunkley's, therein to refresh himself before exploding back to Greyfriars.

Even Bunter could see that the situation was becoming desperate, that an effort from him was required unless he was to be dismissed into the tuckless wilderness - plus having a long walk home.

"I say Coker, I'm jolly hungry. Those beasts said they would be heard by three o'clock. I overheard Wharton and his pals arranging to come to Chunkley's this afternoon - I - I mean Wharton was saying to me that should I happen to be in Courtfield this afternoon they were going to Chunkley's and might join up . . ."

"You young rascal, you were eavesdropping," growled Coker. "Wharton was pulling your leg, you fat ass."

"Oh, really Coker, I - I hope I'm not capable of such conduct."

Coker, for all his fatheaded and dictatorial ways, was certainly not a bad fellow at heart. His own pals had deserted him, and here was a hungry Owl, also on his own. He relented.

"Shut up and come along. I will stand you a feed and run you home."

Bunter could scarcely believe his ears.

"Oh, I say old chap, that's awfully good of you."

"Don't 'old chap' me!" snapped Coker. "Just shut up and come along."

Bunter needed no second bidding.

Coker strode into Chunkley's followed by an Owl consumed with great expectations. A waitress was soon in attendance.

"A small doughnut and an Abernethy biscuit for the fag. I will have a vanilla ice - a large one - and three of your special gooseberry tarts please."

"I say Coker, I say, I could 'go' an ice and some tarts, you know."

"Shut up and don't waste time."

Back in their secluded corner Mildred whispered to Doris: "The big boy called the little fat one a 'fag'. Doris, what did he mean?" Doris shook a shingled head. "Who knows, these young gentlemen have a language all their own - I don't know I'm sure." At which they both shook their heads and gave attention to matters more important to them. "Have you seen Ronald Colman at the Majestic this week . . ?"

* * * * * * *

"I say Greeney, this is something like."

"Rather. I wonder what that ass Coker is up to."

"I don't much care at the moment, let us savour the peace while we may." replied the philosophic Potter.

Coker's two bosom friends were lounging in a punt drifting slowly with the current down the Sark. Greene was trailing his hand in the limpid water and gazing up at the sunlight slanting through the willows overhead.

"How peaceful it is without that idiot - I

mean without old Coker - thrashing about with a punt pole."

"He's not such a bad old ass really you know."

The basis for this sudden softening of feeling towards their leader was a little unclear. It could perhaps have been not unconnected with a large hamper - one of Aunt Judy's 'specials' - which they knew to be standing as yet unpacked in Coker's study. Potter winked up into the slowly passing willow fronds.

"I think Aunt Judy is a perfect gem. I could do with an aunt like her myself."

"I agree old man, I sometimes wonder what she sees in Coker, he's such a bull-headed ass."

So they drifted along down-stream in the sunny afternoon, minus Horace, with pleasant anticipations of a splendid tea (Coker's teas were always munificent) in the offing.

* * * * * * * *

Billy Bunter and Horace Coker, their repast finished, rose to leave the tea-room, Coker slipping a coin beneath his plate. Bunter stared, his spectacles gleamed. They fastened on that coin. It was a large silver piece, he was quite certain it must be a half crown. A half crown, undreamed of wealth in his present stony state. Yet here was this fifth form fathead throwing such wealth about. It was beyond the Owl's comprehension, yet it revealed much concerning Horace Coker.

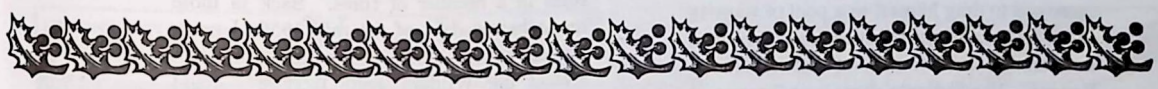
There followed a nightmare journey back to Greyfriars, the Owl, on the motorbike's pillion, clinging to Coker as to a long-lost brother. There were screaming brakes, continuous exhaust explosions, wild howls from sundry dogs who managed by the skin of their teeth to avoid Coker's flying wheels and numerous chickens who left clouds of feathers flying in the air in their frantic rush for safety.

It was a weary and nerve-wracked Bunter who collapsed into his bed in the Remove dormitory that night. Scarcely had his fat head touched the pillow when his nasal organ began to tune up, and it was not long before he launched into his nightly symphony so familiar to his fellows. Ever and anon he grunted uneasily. Was he recalling in the land of dreams the spectacle of Horace Coker devouring a king-sized vanilla ice across the table at Chunkley's while he was negotiating a dry Abernethy biscuit?

There had however been a modicum of balm in Gilead. Peter Todd had a seed cake (a very modest confection compared with one of Chunkley's 'specials') and a tin of sardines in whose demolition Bunter had lent a willing and sturdy hand. All was grist after an afternoon of famine.

Outside the summer night was serene and quiet. An almost full moon sailed majestically over Greyfriars, moving shadows silently across the quad. It had been an eventful afternoon for Bunter and for Horace Coker. It had been a blissful, idyllic one for Potter and Greene, gliding peacefully down river in a punt - minus Coker.

Perhaps one may spare a final thought for Mildred and Doris, those worthy and charming waitresses at Chunkley's, who, their day's work over, had spent a happy evening enjoying the flickering shadow of Ronald Colman on the screen at the local cinema. All's well in this best of all possible worlds.



ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY HOUSES QUIZ

No. 1 *Magnet* No. 1244 December 19th 1931. "The Ghost of **Mauleverer Towers**".

No. 2 *Magnet* No. 1140 December 21st 1929. "Billy Bunter's Christmas" from the Courtfield Cracksman series. **Wharton Lodge.**

No. 3 **Reprinted** in the *Holiday Annual* for 1923 and later in the *Schoolboys Own Library* No. 284. I do not possess the original publication. H.A. Title "The Mystery of **The Priory**"

No. 4 *Magnet* No. 1192 December 20th 1930 "The Mystery of **Cavandale Abbey**".

No. 5 **Holly House.** *Magnet* No. 984 December 25th 1926 "Coker's Christmas Party".

No. 6 *Magnet* No. 1453 December 21st 1935. "The Spectre of **Polpelly**".

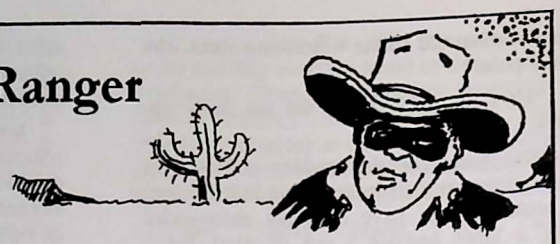
No. 7 Reprinted in *The Gem* No. 1505 December 19th 1936. "The Hidden Hand" (originally printed in *Gem* 302 1913 entitled "The Mystery of the Painted Room", the complete story in one issue. When reprinted in 1936 it covered two issues.)

No. 8 *Magnet* No. 1402 December 29th 1934 "Hunted Down"! from the Christmas at **Hilton Hall.**

No. 9 *Magnet* No. 1558 December 25th 1937 "The Wraith of **Reynham Castle"**

Meet the Lone Ranger

by Norman Wright



We bought our first television set in 1955 and I have to admit that as a child of the 1950s I was rather a TV addict, watching children's television every evening as well as a fair chunk of other programming. My two favourite genres were swashbucklers: *Adventures of Robin Hood, William Tell, Ivanhoe, The Scarlet Pimpernel* and the like; and westerns. 1950s television was awash with westerns: *Hopalong Cassidy, The Range Rider, Rin Tin Tin* and *The Cisco Kid,* to name but a few, but my favourite western character at the time was *The Lone Ranger.* I vividly remember watching the first Lone Ranger adventure and the excitement that episode caused in the playground next day at school. It seemed that everyone in my class - everyone with a TV set that is - had watched it.

For those unfamiliar with the character I will set the scene. The first Lone Ranger episodes described how a company of six Texas Rangers, led by Captain Dan Reid, was ambushed in a blind canyon by the Cavendish Gang. The gang believed that all six Rangers had been murdered but one lived and managed to drag himself to a pool of water in the shade. Later an Indian entered the canyon and tended the wounds of the remaining Ranger. The Indian's name was Tonto and he recognised a medallion worn by the injured Ranger as being one he had given to a boy who had saved his life many years before. He had named the boy Kemo Sabe - faithful friend. Tonto buried the five dead Rangers while the remaining Ranger gradually recovered his strength and vowed to bring the Cavendish Gang to justice. To help him with this task he asked Tonto to dig a sixth grave so that the gang would remain unaware that he was on their trail. To further hide his identity he made himself a black mask from a piece of his dead brother's vest.

Tonto and the Ranger then visited Jim Blane who agreed to work the silver mine owned by the Ranger and his dead brother. He used some of the metal to mould silver bullets for the Ranger; these would be his trade mark. He would shoot to wound, never to kill; his work would always be to bring criminals to justice, never to take justice into his own hands.

During the hunt for the Cavendish Gang the Ranger's horse was killed and he went to Wild Horse Valley where he saved a great white stallion that was being attacked by a buffalo. Man and beast became companions - each having a mutual respect for the other. The Ranger called the horse Silver and together, The Ranger, Tonto and Silver, they went after the Cavendish Gang and thereafter other wrong-doers in the American West of the 1880s.

The first Lone Ranger television story, made in 1949 and shown on British TV a number of years later, was made up of three episodes, and a great part of its success was the casting of the lead characters. The Lone Ranger was played by Clayton Moore, a well known 'B' movie action star, and Tonto was portrayed by Jay Silverheels, an athletic and charismatic native-American actor who, prior to *The Lone Ranger,* had appeared in small roles in a number of films. Back in those monochrome days of the mid 1950s I never missed an episode, and the theme music - always the William Tell Overture - could never be heard without an overwhelming desire to utter some of the introductory words: "A fiery horse with the speed of light . . ."

I grew up and put The Lone Ranger behind me until one morning in the early 1980s I was looking through the spoken word section of the local record library when I spotted a set of LP records with a splendid colour cover depicting Moore and Silverheels in their Ranger and Tonto costumes. I borrowed the set and played the discs. The voice of the Ranger was not that of Clayton Moore and from the sleeve notes I gleaned that these were transcriptions of episodes of a long running American radio show and that the deep-voiced actor playing the Ranger was named Brace Beemer. I determined to find out something of the history of the character

and set about locating references in cinema and television books.

At first I found little in the way of information but then I discovered a book entitled *Who Was That Masked Man* by David Rothel, first published in 1976 but expanded and reprinted in 1981. The book contained many interviews with those responsible for the origin of the character. I found other books that filled in missing bits of the jigsaw until I had a fairly clear picture of the development of a very long running and popular character.

The Lone Ranger made his debut in 1933 on the USA radio station WXYZ in Detroit. The station's owner, George Trendle, broke away from the Columbia Broadcasting System and needed a show to attract sponsors, and thus the Lone Ranger was born. There has always been a dispute as to who actually created the character. Trendle says that he did, radio director Charles Livingstone says he had a hand in it; but the man whom I feel played a very important part in the creation of The Lone Ranger was writer Fran Striker who developed the character in his hundreds of radio scripts.

The story-lines were set in the 1880s and in the earliest episodes, which were not scripted by Striker, the Lone Ranger was a very different character to that so well loved from the mid 1930s onwards. But soon under Striker's guidance he began to develop into the familiar masked figure mounted on a fiery white stallion.

The first regular Lone Ranger adventure went out early in 1933 and the station broadcast three programmes a week for 52 weeks a year until 3rd September 1954; a total of 2596 radio half hours. The theme to the show from the very beginning was The William Tell Overture.

During the course of its long run on the radio only four actors took the role of the Ranger. The first was George Seaton, who was followed by Jack Deeds who played the character for only two days! For seven years the Ranger was played by Earle Graser and his recording of the famous lines: "Hi yo Silver, away," heard at the end of each

USA reprint in *Mickey Mouse Weekly* 15 December 1945

episode, continued to be used after his death right up until the end of the radio series, and was then used again at the end of each television episode. The longest running radio Ranger was the deep-voiced Brace Beamer, who remained in the role from the death of Earle Graser in 1941 until the final radio episode in late 1954. Beamer had hoped to take on the television role but he was not even considered for the part. Throughout the entire radio run the role of Tonto, who made his first appearance in the eleventh programme, was played by John Todd.

In the early days of radio it was almost impossible for a station to estimate just how many listeners a show had. The broadcasters of *The Lone Ranger* found out early on that their character was very popular when, in the May of 1933, they offered a free pop-gun to the first 300 *Lone Ranger* listeners who wrote in. They were swamped with 25,000 requests! Some time later when it was announced that The Lone Ranger would make a personal appearance at a local recreation ground 20,000 fans turned up to see him. The show was a hit.

The success of the *Lone Ranger* radio show spawned many spin-offs. In 1936 the first in a series of full-length Lone Ranger novels by Fran Striker was published. These continued to appear regularly until 1956 when the final volume in the series, *The Lone Ranger on Red Butte Trail*, appeared. Many of these novels were published in the UK during the 1950s by Sampson Low. In addition to the novels there were comic strips and a whole range of toys and games. Anyone wanting to see something of the vast array of Lone Ranger merchandise that has appeared over the years can do no better than consult *The Lone Ranger Pictorial Scrapbook* by Lee J. Felbinger (Countryside Advertising 1988) wherein most of its 260 pages are packed with photographs of Lone Ranger collectables.

In 1938 the Lone Ranger adventures were transcribed onto disc for transmission by other radio stations and by the following year 140 radio stations were broadcasting regular adventures of the masked man and his Indian companion. The runaway success of the character soon attracted Hollywood and in 1938 Republic made a fifteen-chapter serial entitled *The Lone Ranger* starring Lee Powell as the Ranger and Chief Thunder Cloud as Tonto. This was long thought to be a 'lost film' but a few years ago a poor quality print with Spanish sub-titles was discovered in South America making it possible for enthusiasts to judge for themselves the quality of the production. Anyone viewing the serial today is immediately struck by the fact that the leading character is very different from the radio personification of the Ranger. In the Republic serial The Lone Ranger is one of five Texas Rangers and he only wears a mask when in action. Viewers who tried to identify which of the five characters was the real Lone Ranger by comparing voices were cheated by the film company, who dubbed in the voice of Billy Bletcher whenever the masked Lone Ranger spoke! Despite the plot bearing no resemblance to the radio depiction of the character the serial is great fun with plenty of action and a very catchy theme tune. Republic followed it up in 1939 with *The Lone Ranger Rides Again*, this time with Robert Livingstone in the lead role. Despite the popularity of these two productions no further serials were made as a dispute arose between George Trendle and Republic Pictures over the treatment of the character. Trendle had failed to notice that their contract did not stipulate how the character was to be depicted and he was angry that Republic had changed the whole feel of the character. He refused to allow further serials to be made by Republic and legend has it that after this dispute Republic Pictures destroyed the negatives and all known prints of the serials.

The Lone Ranger continued to flourish on the radio and on the printed page but the advent of his adventures on television in 1949 gave the character a huge boost and a world-wide following. The first three-part television adventure had reasonably high production values but the following series of black and white episodes were very low budget affairs, quickly filmed and with much of the action taking place on small studio sets. Even as kids we got rather fed up of the Ranger and Tonto continually stopping next to a very obviously cardboard boulder! After 78 episodes Clayton Moore quit the series and was replaced by John Hart. But Hart lacked the conviction and authority of Moore and after 52 episodes Moore returned to the role. In 1954 George Trendle sold all rights in the character to the Jack Wrather Corporation who increased the budget for the television episodes and began to film them in colour. In all there were 182 episodes in black and white and 39 full colour episodes. *The Lone Ranger* became the first television series to be filmed in colour. In addition to the television episodes Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels also portrayed the characters in two feature

films, *The Lone Ranger* (1956) and *The Lone Ranger and the Lost City of Gold* (1958). These films are readily available on video in the USA but as far as I am aware they have not been shown on British television in at least the last 25 years.

The Lone Ranger made his comic strip debut in the USA in 1938 and reached British readers a year later in the pages of *Mickey Mouse Weekly*. With the advent of the television series other British comics and annuals began to show an interest. For a number of years there was a regular *Lone Ranger Annual* reprinting American strips and in 1957 *Comet*, the gravure weekly published by Amalgamated Press, began reprinting American Lone Ranger strips. But in my opinion the very best depiction of the character is to be found in the full colour Lone Ranger adventure strips drawn by Mike Noble that appeared in *Express Weekly* in 1958. His strong, clean line had the edge over all the black and white reprints.

Probably the low point for all Lone Ranger enthusiasts was the 1981 film *The Legend of the Lone Ranger* starring Klinton Spilsbury and Michael Horse. When plans for its production were announced the Wrather Corporation put a restraining order on Clayton Moore preventing him from making personal appearances at rodeos as The Lone Ranger. This was taken up by the media and the public who were invariably on the side of Moore. When the film was eventually released it was a disaster and fortunately for all concerned seems to have ridden off into the sunset! The restraining order on Moore was lifted in 1985 and he continued to make personal appearances as The Lone Ranger.

In 1996 Clayton Moore wrote his autobiography, *I Was That Masked Man*, in which he revealed many details of the filming of the ever popular television series. My autographed copy sits on the bookshelf alongside other books on the character. For generations of boys and old boys Clayton Moore is the Lone Ranger.

Front cover advert for the *Lone Ranger* 23 August 1958 drawn by Mike Noble

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DREADNOUGHT - BOYS' JOURNAL MIXED PLUCK BOUND VOLUME half year July-Dec of 1913 issues 453-478 inc. red cloth gold lettering. (This is Amal. Press file copy and states the volume should be returned to Mr Kent Bear Alley.) What a pedigree! Price £98.

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Memories of Uncle Charley

By UNA HAMILTON WRIGHT

(One Foot in the Cradle)

Let me begin by saying that I am very happy to write about my favourite topic - my memories of Uncle Charley. I am going to take several themes and enlarge on them so that I can give you an in-depth picture of what it was like to have Charles Hamilton as a member of one's household. He lived with my parents in London when I was very small and only moved to Kingsgate, where we spent our holidays, when I was four years old. He was a man of many facets and so my childhood memories of him embrace many different subjects and situations. Therefore this will not be a straightforward chronological reminiscence as the themes were all evolving contemporaneously and there was much overlapping.

1. In the very beginning there were the **Bed-time Stories,** "Red Riding Hood" making the deepest impression. I loved it so much it eventually made me want to be able to read. I heard it for the first time before I was two, enthralled as Uncle emphasised the drama of the wily wolf devouring the poor old Grandmother and then impersonating her. He changed his voice for the different characters in the story and acted the parts so well that I was actually frightened for Red Riding-Hood's safety every time! There were many other tales, including the "Three Bears", "Cinderella" and the "Sleeping Beauty", "Hansel & Gretel" and many others from *Grimm's Fairy Tales,* Rhymes from *Mother Goose* and later on, *Aesop's Fables.*

Then, when I was a little older, about five or six, Uncle began to make up stories for me and there was a series about Silverwings, the Fairy in the Great Green Forest. In these stories she encountered various animals who were presented in a humorous and unfrightening way. I think they were introduced to show that they were not really fearsome beasts, and even wolves were all right **really.** There were other moral tales to demonstrate that little girls were really happier if they did what their mothers told them.

Uncle read or told stories in a very mellifluous but clear voice - a soothing sound that would have been conducive to sleep had not the subject-matter been so interesting. His deep blue eyes sparkled as he impersonated all the characters and his diction was distinct and clear-cut. He sat on a chair beside my dropside cot and later beside my miniature bed, relaxed and unconcerned about the passage of time. He enthralled me just as he did all his young readers of the *Magnet* and *Gem.*

As I grew older I became less willing to go to bed and thought that I could have the bedside story without having to go to bed for it. Alas this was not to be. But as none of my grown-ups believed in being tough with children, I had to be wooed to bathtime and bed. Uncle gave his attention to the problem - how to make his little niece willing to retire at the end of the day? He tried all sorts of games with the large stuffed animals, making them talk to me with suggestions about going to bed to get my beauty sleep and waking up fresh in the morning. To no avail. Little niece still wanted to stay up and play with uncle and listen to the wonderful stories while still up, just like the grown-ups. Finally, Uncle hit on the idea of installing a huge stuffed elephant on wheels, big enough for a small person to ride on. This did the trick - I was happy to ride in state all along the landing to the bathroom where an inviting steaming bath awaited me. The little niece was happy but there were murmurings from the grown-ups, "Charley, you do indulge her so." "You're sure to spoil her." The big elephant finally retired to Kingsgate, to my mother's bungalow called Mandeville, where he appeared at one of the garden parties recorded on 16 mm. film which some of the O.B.B.C. members may have seen.

2. Next to stand out in my early memories of my uncle is **Caution** - "Mind you don't bump your head, my little dear" - the words are recorded in my memory and long years later I can still hear them in my mind's ear still warning me to be careful. When I was very small "Mind you don't fall over" was another regular warning. I grew up very cautious and with a considerable amount of forethought for a small child. Uncle was very safety conscious. When we first moved into Mandeville, when I was seven, he had borders dug and planted under all the opening windows, because, as he wrote in a letter to

me of August 1957, "I recall how worried I used to be about windows opening just on the level of children's heads, - especially your own dear little nut!" - I had written to tell him that I remembered about the window levels and had copied his idea of planting borders under them for the same purpose.

Other manifestations of his caution were his attaching a rope to inflatable beach toys and standing on the beach holding it so that the rubber swan or fish could not float away on the tide and carry his niece with it - as had sometimes happened to unfortunate children. He insisted that the 7' sailing dinghy he had built for me should have a lead keel to avoid risk of capsizing. He wouldn't allow toys made of celluloid because of their flammability and railed against manufacturers who made children's playthings from such dangerous material.

He was particular about food, that it should be fresh and he deplored the use of tinned food, calling it horrible muck which he would not eat. Green boiled sweets were anathema to him - he believed they contained some kind of poisonous substance to produce the green colour!

He was good at mopping up tears and tending wounded knees. He soothed toothache with heartfelt sympathy because he had suffered with it very badly when he was a boy. His remedy was a tincture called 'Bunter's Nervine' - which was rubbed on my gum, thus setting up a heat, and it really worked. "My poor child, I wish I could bear the pain for you". He never lost his ability to sympathise with the heightened sensitivity of a child's feelings.

3. Although Uncle was very safety-conscious, especially where children were concerned - there were certain aspects of his behaviour which were well-nigh reckless: he appeared to be foolhardy over fire risks. I have very clear recollections of interrupting him at work - only to be greeted and encouraged with "What can your old uncle do for you, my little dear?" I had managed to wriggle in under the housekeeper's defences and mother's instructions that "Uncle must on no account be disturbed in the morning when he is working". I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about as I received such a warm welcome. The study was always bright and warm. The large window looked down the length of the back garden, over the lavender bushes and the high hedge to the rolling cornfields beyond, where a thin line of houses was just beginning to advance from Cliftonville. I remember the sky as always being an intense blue with a skylark singing somewhere nearby. Opposite the door were the bookshelves - crammed - on the wall over the big light-oak desk. To the right, in the corner, was a built-in cupboard where all the *Magnets* and *Gems* were stacked, so many of them that they started to topple out when the cupboard door was opened. On the left of the door as you went in was a little fireplace. The paint on the jambs of the mantelpiece was blistered with heat, for uncle always had a coal fire if the weather was the least bit chilly - windows open for fresh air and a coal fire piled dangerously high and blazing. This is where the fire risk came in - he would keep a can of paraffin handy and literally throw some of the contents on the fire if it began to burn sluggishly. No wonder that all the fireplaces in rooms inhabited by him showed scorch-marks. Electric fires were occasionally used as boosters, but he did not like them as he thought they made a stuffy atmosphere. If they appeared unwilling to work he treated them to a hearty kick and cursed the chap that made them!

His study was only a medium-sized room and his big desk took up a lot of space. He typed at a little typing desk in front of the fireplace. In summer he preferred to sit with his back to the mantelpiece and the light from the window on the left - he was very particular about having a working or reading light on the left. In the cold weather he would sit the other way round with his feet stretching under the typing desk towards the fire. If they were still cold he would bury them in a foot-warmer, a kind of double bedroom slipper made of thick leather and fleecy-lined. He used to cut off the bottoms of his typing desks and shorten a stool to match so that he sat with his legs nearly horizontal. I think he was more in the direct beam of the fire at this low level. It also meant that he was that much more accessible to a small child - I was literally eyeball to eyeball with him when I caught him working - perhaps this is why I was always so very conscious of his eyes and their faraway expression and humorous twinkle.

4. Uncle Charley loved gardens and gardening - I can remember him pottering about, taking a breather before starting work in the morning or before lunch. More than anything he loved trees. A house screened from the public gaze was his ideal - Rose Lawn failed miserably in this respect, but he made up for it when he bought the extra garden in Percy Avenue, nearly opposite his house, by planting a screen of fast-growing trees - poplars and sycamores - all along the front and side boundaries. The 'Field', as he nicknamed the new garden, soon became a very private place. My parents' home in Hampstead appealed to him because he liked the trees surrounding it so much. He also loved Golders Hill Park which had a private entry at the top of the road because the grounds had been beautifully landscaped with

trees and because it opened on to Hampstead Heath which was his favourite 'lung' in the London area.

He used to take me for walks and outings there, first in an upright pram and later on foot. He was always extolling the beauty of trees and pointing out to me views from different angles. As a diversion from appreciating nature he also used to play 'shops' with me there, appropriating one of the summerhouses and allowing me to divest him of his gloves, his cycle clips, his handkerchief and his umbrella so that I could 'sell' them back to him noting the prices and adding them up in my head. Arithmetic had always been a dreadful headache for him, right from schooldays, but it never was any worry to me. I am sure he wanted me to be able to cope with it without pain and woe, and worked out a method of introducing it in a pleasant context.

Tree-lined suburbs appealed to uncle, such as Hampstead, Golders Hill and Hampstead Garden Suburb, where he was based during the two world wars. He found Kingsgate on the bleak Thanet coast very deficient. Thus he came to have a bungalow built near Hawkinge in the Downs behind Folkestone. This little property was set in the middle of an orchard on the side of a South-facing hill, surrounded by high hawthorn hedges. It was a complete contrast to the Kingsgate house. It had only two or possibly three properties near it, all owned by families living off the land. A huge old windmill looked down on it protectively from a high neighbouring bank and the cock next door crowed to welcome each new day. It was as precious to uncle as his fictional Great Green Forest was to me. The quiet sounds of the countryside, the murmurings of insects and of distant haymakers, the lush greenery bathed in the warmth of a southerly sun, all furnished the man who could not afford to take a holiday with the means to unwind and find a little peace and relaxation. The smells of the countryside did not intrude, the smell that I remember most was the smell of the ubiquitous paraffin, and also that of some kind of lubricating oil - everything that he could not urge into action with a kick was lubricated liberally from a large and greasy oilcan that always seemed to be within reach.

About two years after the bungalow was completed Uncle had an electric generator installed and so a gentle whirring sound was added to the sounds of the countryside. He looked after this himself and felt very proud of his ability to do so as he was not in the least technically-minded. Again the oil-can was his main aid. It was some time before he dared the kick technique. He used to go and switch the machine on for the evening, before that water had to be pumped up by hand with a great lever handle in the kitchen. Electricity was only used for lighting and the water pump; heating was by means of log fires and oil stoves, thus ensuring that the smell of paraffin was a permanent background. Logs were stacked in neat piles against the outside walls as well as in the log shed - very like the neat way the logs are stacked in Switzerland in readiness for winter.

I think Appletrees was an attempt to recreate a corner of the Alps in England after his travelling days were over. I have travelled in many of the places he loved on the Continent and they keep reminding me of facets of his home life in England. The Appletrees site originally had a series of rustic sheds, connected by an open verandah stretching across its highest point, near to the winding lane that led up from Hawkinge Old Church. Built entirely of wood and white-washed inside, they served him as a summer workplace before the bungalow was built. He would spend the day there in all but the coldest weather and return to Clyde Cottage, his little home in Hawkinge Village, to sleep, apparently to get away from his housekeeper, who could be somewhat domineering. When the bungalow was completed, he made good his escape by giving Clyde Cottage to the housekeeper!

The wooden sheds most definitely recalled the more primitive of the Swiss chalets to be found high up in the summer pastures. And the treescapes in Golders Hill Park, London, I have recently discovered, very much resemble those of Continental parks, particularly those in the district of Como, a place he very much loved.

5. As I grew older Uncle still enjoyed writing fiction for home consumption. We eventually persuaded him to type up the Silverwings stories and some of the others, which I now have. Play-writing took over from story-writing for his eleven-year-old niece. He had always enjoyed amateur theatricals and it was a favourite hobby of his when spending Christmases on the Continent before the First World War. I had always been stagestruck in a childish way. So now we had a feast of home-produced plays, performed at Rose Lawn, whose lounge Uncle enthusiastically converted into a miniature theatre. He had curtains and stage-lighting installed and a doorway cut through the wall to the hall to allow the cast to exit without having to thread their way through the audience.

For a considerable part of the summer holidays spent at Kingsgate I had one or more friends staying with me and these together with schoolfriends from London already

holidaying down there and also local children, made a big enough team to perform the plays. Sometimes we would get Uncle himself to act a character part such as a Wizard, and sometimes the grown-ups would act a play for the children. Always Uncle was the author.

Uncle wrote to order - we would tell him the sort of play we wanted, Red Indians, Cavaliers and Roundheads, Detectives, and how many people we had available. He would settle down to writing it immediately on rising from his after-lunch nap and we would have our play by tea-time. We learned words quickly and in two days the production was ready. Sometimes only the characters would be listed and the plot sketched out. Then the Method Acting technique would be used - we would all make up our own words as we went along. It was amazing how effective this approach could be. Uncle helped with producing on these occasions.

One of the small bedrooms was turned into a Green Room cum Dressing Room and boxes of theatrical make-up arrived from Gamages. There were three wigs as well as beards, moustaches and lengths of false hair. Uncle loved dressing up - but always as a character who needed to wear a hat. This was because his hair had retreated very early and he felt a bald head prematurely aged him and made his head look too large. He normally wore a hairpiece. So hatted characters were the perfect answer. I remember him as a pirate, a Chinese emperor, a wizard and an Arab - in all of which costumes he was thoroughly at home. He enjoyed coming down to the children's level and being one of us.

Costumes were run up by a local sewing-lady from lengths of material gleaned from the summer sales, props were hand-made in Uncle's dining-room, known as the 'Tank'. Sometimes we would be short of some vital prop, such as a large stuffed toy which we needed so that it could apparently come to life and talk to the characters on stage. Uncle would ring up Bobby's Department Store in Cliftonville and describe to the Head of the Toy Department exactly what was wanted and along it would come, delivered the next day, or sometimes even on the same afternoon!

I noticed that although Uncle was too shy to meet new people he loved talking to them on the phone. He was completely confident by phone, just as he was by letter. The telephone in those days was a wind-up affair sitting on a wooden box of tricks. After winding the little black handle vigorously he would hold the earpiece to his left ear waiting for the operator to answer. Then he would dictate the number and wait. Frequently he rang the Kingsgate Post Office at the top of the road, Percy Avenue. So many times I heard him give the number, "Broadstairs One, please". He would order beach toys and boxes of sweets and chocolate bars en masse, he still remembered the sweet tooth of childhood and knew how much sweetstuff a child could consume! This certainly made him very popular with my friends, many of whom asked "Is your uncle going to be there?" when I invited them to a party.

Every summer we gave a garden party in Mandeville and Uncle had the first two of them recorded on 16 mm. film by a professional photographer from Margate. In them Uncle performed all sorts of comic antics, his star-turn was turning a somersault. Father donned his panama and posed elegantly looking rather like Maurice Chevalier, while Mother and her friends stood as straight and tall as they could, all trying to look slimmer than they really were, while I capered about trying to get friends in front of the camera and Nanny trotted round with a worried look on her face and a damp cloth in her hand mopping up spillages. In one shot I spanked Uncle's hand while he was sitting on the big elephant on wheels because I just couldn't think of anything else to do on the spur of the moment. I knew one had to move in front of a ciné camera and that was movement of a sort. I still have these films and we sometimes show them for the amusement of our daughters. Uncle had copies made which he kept at Rose Lawn and I believe both of them found their way into John Wernham's safe keeping.

6. I have subtitled this account "One Foot in the Cradle" because Uncle always seemed to me to be one of the children. There was a part of him that never grew up and so he could be trusted to see things from the child's point of view. He was an advocate at court representing the younger generation.

I think there was a good deal of two-way traffic between his writing life and his family life, plenty of cross-fertilisation. Some ideas were tried out at home before they appeared in the *Magnet*, and I think the atmosphere of the *Magnet* overflowed into home situations making them more brilliant and sparkling than was usual in normal, ordinary life.

The topics I have covered in this article are only the tip of the iceberg; there are many more, were there but space. For example, there were the musical evenings where Uncle sang and did impersonations, and he and Father performed Cockney songs with convincing 'Seven Dials' accents. There were the long sessions of song-writing, with Uncle writing the words and Father providing the music. They fancied themselves as modern Gilbert & Sullivan, and made fun of politics in a similar sort of way. Some of their songs found their way into the *Holiday Annuals*.

Then there was Uncle's concern for moral standards - on a par with those of Mary Whitehouse. One Christmas the Western Brothers had offended when singing their famous song "The Old School Tie" on the wireless. The risqué line was where Gandhi's loincloth fell off, although he was wearing his old school tie and thus the situation was saved. Uncle sprang from his chair as though it had been red hot and turned off the wireless, muttering "Filthy muck, how dare they do it?" He then immediately rang the BBC and complained and followed up his complaint with a letter. I don't think Broadcasting House budged but they wrote a polite reply.

In his earnest concern for manners and morals Uncle showed the sincerity and simplicity of the child. Like a child he really believed that when he pointed out that something was wrong, something would be done. He was disillusioned, as a child would have been, but he also became cynical in a way too mature for a child to comprehend. This cynicism shows from time to time in the humour of the Greyfriars stories and in the considerable amount of comic verse that he wrote. He saw and heard with the eyes and ears of a child and never quite obeyed St. Paul's injunction to "put away childish things".

Silverwings the Fairy woke up early on Christmas morning, and jumped out of bed in a great hurry.

"Why are you getting up so early, Silverwings?" called out Fairy Appleblossom.

"Because I must go and see the woodman who lives by the Great Green Forest, and take a Christmas present to his little boy and his little girl," answered Silverwings.

And she dressed very quickly, and put her fairy wand under her arm, and took a Big Teddy for the woodman's little boy, and a Baby Doll for the woodman's little girl, and flew away from Fairyland.

When she came to the Great Green Forest, it was still very early, and the woodman and his family were not yet awake. The door was locked, but Silverwings touched it with her fairy wand, and it opened at once. She went into the little house very quickly, because she did not want to wake up the children. She placed the Big Teddy against the door of the little boy's room, and the Baby Doll against the door of the little girl's room, so that when the children woke up and came out of their rooms, they would find them. Then she walked out of the house: and was just going to shut the door, when she saw Redneck the Fox.

"Good morning, Silverwings," said Redneck the Fox.

"Good morning, Redneck," answered Silverwings politely. She did not like Redneck because he was a very naughty fox, but Silverwings always had very nice manners, so she answered him politely.

"Do you know that the White Rabbit has fallen into the lake?" asked Redneck the Fox.

"Oh dear! I must go and get him out at once," said Silverwings, and she flew away, and she was so anxious about Mr White Rabbit that she quite forgot to shut the door of the woodman's cottage.

Redneck the Fox watched her go with a very sly grin. When she was out of sight, he crept very quietly towards the woodman's house.

"These good people aren't awake yet," said Redneck to himself; "It would be rather a lark to carry off those Christmas presents, and hide them in the wood," and Redneck laughed, being a very naughty and mischievous fox, and fond of playing wicked tricks on everybody.

So he went very softly into the woodman's house, and picked up the big Teddy in his teeth, and crept out with it, and hid it very carefully under a heap of leaves in the wood. Then he went back to the house to fetch the Baby Doll.

Now as Silverwings was flying towards the lake, all of a sudden she heard a little squeaky voice say:

"Why, bless my ears and spectacles, it's Silverwings! Good morning, my little dear."

And she looked round and saw Mr White Rabbit.

"Why, how did you get out of the lake, Mr White Rabbit?" asked Silverwings in surprise.

"Bless my ears and whiskers! I've never been in the lake," said Mr White Rabbit.

"Didn't you fall into the lake in the Great Green Forest?" exclaimed Silverwings.

"Bless my toes and tail, I haven't been near the lake," answered Mr White Rabbit.

Then Silverwings knew that Redneck the Fox had told her a story, and she guessed that he was going to play some trick at the woodman's house, and she flew back as quick as anything. She was just in time to see him hide the Big Teddy under a heap of leaves, and go back to the house. Then Silverwings picked up the Teddy, and touched him with her fairy wand, and said:

"Go back to your place!"

And as the Teddy was filled with magic by the touch of the fairy wand, he made just one jump, so fast that he could not be seen, and immediately dropped into his place at the door of the little boy's room in the woodman's house.

By that time Redneck the Fox had reached the house again, and he went in to pick up the Baby Doll: and gave a jump when he saw that the Big Teddy was in its place, where he had first seen it.

"Why I must be dreaming!" said Redneck, staring at the Big Teddy, and rubbing his long sharp nose. "I'm sure that I took that Teddy out and hid him under the leaves. I'm sure there weren't two Teddies. At least, almost sure. Anyhow, I'll take this one out too."

So he picked up the Big Teddy in his teeth again, and carried him out into the wood, and dropped him under a tree, and covered him up with leaves. Silverwings made herself invisible, so Redneck the Fox did not see her, or know that she was there. He covered up the Teddy and went back to the house again. Then Silverwings touched Teddy again with her wand, and made him jump back into his place at the little boy's bedroom door. He went as quick as a flash of lightning, and Redneck did not see him passing over his head. Redneck went on into the house, and when he found the Teddy in his place again, he was so astonished that his mouth came wide open, and he stared at Teddy with his eyes bulging out of his head.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Redneck. "Here he is again! I've taken out two Teddies, and there's still one here. I'm absolutely certain that there weren't three, yet I've taken out two, and there's still one left. I can't make this out."

However, he picked up Teddy in his teeth once more, and carried him out, and buried him in leaves, and went back for the Baby Doll. But Silverwings touched the Teddy as before, and he jumped back, so Redneck found him there when he got to the house again.

This time Redneck was so astonished that his eyes came wide open like saucers, and he gasped for breath.

"This beats me," he said. "I've carried away three Teddies, one after another, and now here's a fourth. It seems to be raining Teddy Bears this morning! I wonder where they are all coming from."

He looked at the Teddy for a long time, very much puzzled, and scratching his nose. But at last he picked up Teddy and carried him out to the wood, and buried him under more leaves.

"No, that does it," said Redneck as he went back to the house. "This makes four Teddies that I've buried under the leaves, and there can't be any more."

But when he went in for the Baby Doll, Silverwings had made the Teddy jump back again, and there he was, leaning against the door of the little boy's room, as large as life.

Redneck the Fox was so astonished that he jumped right off the floor, and came down on his tail so hard that he squeaked:

"Wow!"

That noise awoke the woodman, and he came out of his room very quickly, and caught hold of Redneck by the back of the neck.

"Now, what are you doing here?" he asked, picking up a stick.

Redneck wriggled but he could not get away.

"You've been playing tricks!" said the woodman, lifting the stick.

"Oh! No! Not at all!" said Redneck, in a great hurry, "the - fact is, I came here to give you some Christmas presents, old chap."

"Nonsense!" said the woodman.

"Honest Injun!" said Redneck, "I've got four beautiful big Teddies outside, just like that one standing against your little boy's door . . . one for you, and one for Mrs Woodman, and one for your little boy, and one for your little girl."

"Nonsense!" said the woodman again.

"Keep that stick away!" said Redneck, "Seeing is believing, Mr Woodman. Come and see."

So the woodman went out of the house with Redneck, to the place where he had hidden the Teddies, under the heaps of leaves. Redneck was sure that they were still there, because he remembered burying them under the leaves one after another.

"Here's the place," he said, pointing with his nose to the four heaps of leaves.

"Nonsense!" said the woodman.

"Well, look under those heaps of leaves," said Redneck, "and if you don't find a big Teddy under each heap, you can whack me as hard as you like with that stick."

So the woodman turned over the first heap with his stick, and there was no Teddy underneath the leaves, and he brought down the stick across Redneck's back with a loud WHACK!

"Ow!" howled Redneck, "I know I put it there! I remember putting it there."

Then the woodman turned over the second heap of leaves, and there was no Teddy, and he brought down the stick again. WHACK!

"Wow!" roared Redneck. "I can't understand this! I distinctly remember putting a Teddy there!"

Then the woodman turned over the third heap of leaves, and there was no Teddy, and he gave Redneck another WHACK!

"Whoop!" roared Redneck, "I tell you I put a Teddy there! Wow!"

Then the woodman turned over the fourth heap of leaves, and still there was no Teddy, and he brought down the stick on Redneck's back so hard that it broke into two pieces.

WHACK! CRACK!

"Whooooooooh!" bellowed Redneck, and he wriggled so hard that he got loose, and ran away into the Great Green Forest.

Then the woodman went back to his house, and called his little boy and girl, and they got up, and found the Christmas presents that Silverwings had brought for them. And Redneck crawled home to his den in the wood, and wondered what had become of those Teddies he had buried under the leaves. And he never found out, so he is still wondering.

Smith of the Lower Third– The First Few Weeks

BY BRIAN BUNKER

I am a Thomson man. I was a Thomson boy. I don't know when I first read the Thomson comics but certainly by late 1946 I had brought home by my father from his work, *The Wizard, Adventure, Hotspur* and *Rover* each week and also the *Champion* for a short while; I won't tell you what I thought about the *Champion* for fear of increasing the blood pressure of *Champion* fans.

I am not a person who has early childhood memories, in fact I can remember very little before the age of ten, but I vaguely remember reading *Film Fun* and I am told I had Rupert read to me at the age of four and that I was reading him myself shortly afterwards, certainly I could read before I went to school.

The Thomson publications did not really hit me until number 1133 when Smith of the Lower Third started. This story to me was bliss. I liked Red Circle in the *Hotspur*, but I always had the feeling that like in the cinema I had come in halfway through. I liked Baldy Hogan in the *Adventure* and Rob Higson in the *Rover* but Tom Smith, well!!! Why did I like Tom Smith so much? Possibly because I had gone to Grammar School in September 1946 and though I was to be happy there ultimately the first year was tough. The school was a Grammar School but it had prefects who could smite your behind with an umpteen size slipper and I suppose I saw Tom Smith in myself and vice-versa.

Many school stories, both in books and comic paper form, detail the problems of a scholarship boy who didn't fit in initially with the more upper class boys and Tom had problems like this a well as finding the unwritten school customs baffling, and this was a major theme particularly in the early stories.

Smith of the Lower Third ran in the *Wizard* from 1133 to 1294, a total of 162 editions covering three and a half years, and then immediately started Smith of the Fourth Form from 1295 for another 45 stories. The Lower Third stories were reprinted in later *Wizards* and also later again in the *Rover*. I disposed of my comics in my University days and then in my fifties I was struck, like so many others, by nostalgia for the past and less complicated world and probably for the straightforwardness of school life as against my then present school

teacher days.

So started my present Thomson comic collection, and my idea of literary heaven would be every edition of all four titles in my possession, but I fear only the *Hotspur* is a practical possibility. Some years ago, I gather, the view was expressed that Thomsons would never be collectable. I wish they weren't as I would now be paying much less than I am for copies!

Now, I will try to detail the problems that Tom faced in his early days, the days when he was the fag of "Tacks" Simmerson.

"Look at him. He hasn't had the decency to turn it down." Tom had no idea what the problem was and excused himself, saying he didn't know that you couldn't turn up your collar until the Second XI. Simmerson wants to give him six but Clive Mitchell (the House Captain) sends him out on the promise not to do it again.

Among the Lower Third boys is a loud mouth called "Sprat" Perkins. If he hadn't shouted "Gosh, look at the Newt" - nickname for new boy - perhaps Simmerson wouldn't have been involved; "Sprat" is to become Tom's school-long enemy.

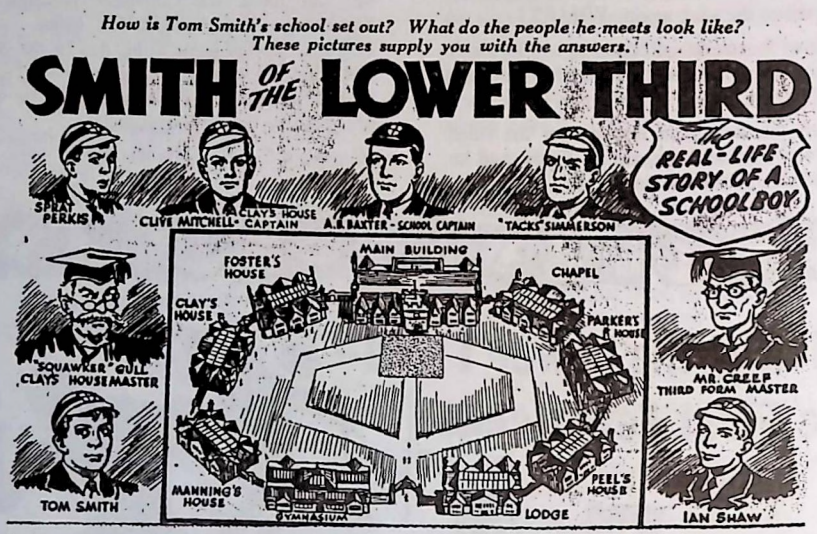

Illustration in *Wizard* 1134 (copyright D.C. Thomson). It shows the main characters in the stories and the general layout of the school.

When I thought about the Simmerson period before I re-acquired the comic concerned, I had in mind a longer period than actually occurred. The period only lasted for three editions 1133-1135, May 10th, 24th and 31st 1947 - at the time the Thomson comics came out three weeks out of four: previously through most of the war they had been fortnightly and were a very thin edition when compared with pre-war issues, now consisting of only twelve pages.

Issue 1133 starts with a standard scene of Tom arriving at Lipstone College and being lost and not sure what to do. After tea and a visit to Mr Gull (Clay's Housemaster) he goes to the tuck shop. Coming back from there, he runs into the dual problems of Simmerson (who is Clay's House vice-captain and the most unpopular prefect) and Lipstone College's customs that have the force of rule, in that as it is raining he turns up his collar. Of course "Tacks" (Simmerson's nickname, at no time in the series is his Christian name revealed) orders him to the Prefects' Room.

"This cheap little skate had his blazer collar turned up" he (Simmerson) stated angrily.

Tom lost his way to the dormitory when he was delayed by the school porter and doesn't know which dormitory is his, apparently useful labels are unknown. A prefect, Batt-Baker, opens the door for Tom and gets a jug of water on his head, no doubt aimed for Tom. Perkins identifies himself as the perpetrator and gets walloped with the back of a hair brush and vows to get Tom in revenge. Quite a first day!

Next day, on meeting Mr Creef (Lower Third's teacher), Tom is able to supply the information that Ivanhoe is the hero of the book of the same name to Ian Show, who was the boy who had told Sprat the previous night to 'lay off' Tom. These two small beginnings are to mark a long-term close friendship between the two boys, a relationship of opportunities as Tom is the son of a grocer in an industrial town while Ian is the son of an MP.

That friendship is only broken temporarily by a series of misunderstandings which lead to a fight and Mr Gull's comment "When friends fall out, they must be cruel foemen". If any doubt remains about Perkins' attitude, that is dismissed by his whisper of "a council school"

Continued on page 72

A Very Merry Christmas

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when Tom tells Mr Creef about his previous school.

Tom's final painful, very painful encounter with "Tacks" in 1133 comes again as a result of 'Sprat's' big mouth, "Look at the low down squirt from the council school now!" Tom has been sent Lipstone First XI socks by a mistake, Simmerson, of course, is in the wings and takes Tom off for a dozzer, twelve strokes of the cane. "Yes," said Shaw, "and he didn't squeal". In the practice game for which he was changing Tom doesn't play well to begin with but as he settles down, though still sore, does well enough for Mitchell to comment that he'll keep his eye on him. Factually it's not clear whether Tom received his dozzer in shorts or trousers and what socks Tom wore for football, bare legs I'm sure aren't Lipstone fashion, perhaps Ian lent him a pair, we can hope so. Life was sweet but not for long as at the end of 1133 Tom is picked by pin as Simmerson's fag!

Issue 1134 opens with Tom getting another beating from you know who because the toast got burnt as Tom, on instructions, was borrowing a book for "Tacks" from Clive Mitchell. "Tacks" did not move from his chair and left the toast to burn and Tom's comment that he thought that "Tacks" would look after the toast was disregarded, and a fives bat used! After school Tom goes to the gym for boxing practice and he comes back to defeat Sprat to the delight of Ian. However, Tom's lowest point was to come when Simmerson, yes him again, arrives to say that a Clay's boy had run across the "Sixth Form only" grass and, worse than that, had been seen by Baxter, the School Captain. Tom admits it was he and is told to report for a Prefects' beating - the fact that nobody had told him about the grass was not considered. "I bet they won't half lay it on" said Sprat and, no doubt, they did though in defence of the readers' feelings it is not described.

Tom expected his disgrace to last but it doesn't, and appears to be forgotten by next day. A letter from home gives Sprat a chance to snigger as Tom's parents, obviously unaware of Tom's problems with snobs, write to him in an envelope advertising pork sausages, a fact which goes round the House and reaches "Tacks". Meanwhile Tom and Ian watch the senior Clay's team play Peels - Simmerson is reckoned to be a good prospect for his colours given with the words "Go and see Parker's", the sports shop in the town and his performance in the game seems to seal it as he scores the winning goal.

Tom goes off to make "Tacks'" tea and is flabbergasted to be told to have a slice of toast. The reason becomes obvious when "Tacks" asks him to obtain a ham (quite a request in days of rationing) for his celebration "do" when he gets his colours. Tom writes off to his father but includes the words "make things easier for me". Simmerson doesn't get his colours and a day or two later Tom receives a letter from home dropping the thunderbolt that his parents have written to Dr. Royd, the Headmaster, accusing "Tacks" of bullying. Later Mitchell tells Tom that "Tacks" didn't get his colours because of "side" in deciding that he was a certainty to get them. "Can't blame the lad," he murmurs, "but gosh how it's come back on Simmerson."

Issue 1135 opens with "Tacks" announcing to his fellow Prefects, "the trap's closed, I've got that cheap little newt Tom Smith just where I want him." Apparently he has left a marked ten shilling note on the mantelpiece in his study and only Tom's been in there. Mitchell is upset that if theft has occurred Tom will have to go. "Tacks" makes clear his class prejudice against him. Sprat's great ears were against the door and he wasted no time in spreading the news, to other boys' surprise. "I'm not a bit surprised," Sprat sneered, "after all, he came from a beastly low-down school."

Meanwhile, unknowing, Tom and Ian are discussing the Steeplechase that afternoon and Tom learns that a House team is not chosen, but chooses itself by a boy being in the first five. After a hard race, Tom wins in the few yards but is not awarded his "V" but told to report to the Prefects' Room. When Tom arrives there, he is asked if he took the ten shilling note and he says that he did. "Tacks" is delighted but, when asked why he did so, Tom swings it against "Tacks" by listing the money "Tacks" owes him. "It's twelve shillings altogether", Tom finishes. Mitchell is disgusted. "You've been taking loans from a fag?" Mitchell insists that the remainder is paid and then announces that Tom won't be fagging for Simmerson anymore and that he can just up his "V".

"This was like awakening after a nightmare." The nightmare was over but Simmerson continued to try to get even with Tom and also with Ape (A.P.E. Carew, Tom's new fagmaster) throughout many future episodes until finally he loses his prefectship as a result of his treatment of Tom.

What about Tom? Did he overcome his problems of origin and get used to the various customs? Yes is the answer to the second part, and yes largely to the first. Time solved the second and, for the first, Tom now had backing of Ape (again no Christian name ever given) and was good at sport, always important in a public school and fairly good at work where he found Latin, which he had never done prior to coming to Lipstone, very difficult. Truthfully in the real world I doubt whether a boy could have a scholarship if he didn't know any Latin; surely Latin would have been in the entry exam!

Perhaps Tom was too good at sport as he excels at football and cricket, is excellent at boxing, gets colours in cross country and even does well at shooting and finds himself cox of

the school eight. How he ever finds time to sing in the school choir, I can't understand. Ape himself has rather a change after Tom joins him - perhaps it's Tom's character - in that when he's first introduced, and he isn't mentioned until Tom becomes his fag, it's as a rather lazy sixth former, never considered as a Prefect, not caring much for work, not really interested in sport and liable to break bounds and place bets; yet he becomes a Prefect, wins an academic exhibition and becomes goalkeeper and wicketkeeper for the college's First XIs. That's what a good fag can do!!! Tom, despite his Latin, always takes trouble and effort with his work and pleases Mr Creef greatly. His origins do emerge to blight him from time to time. A good many episodes further on he is invited to apply for membership of the gamecock club but is rejected due to his origins - still perhaps that wasn't much of a loss.

As for the stories themselves, personally now I would prefer less of secret passages, kidnapped boys, etc. but as a boy, I can't remember how I reacted. So come on you fans of the *Gem* and the *Magnet*, why not read Thomsons? You **might** enjoy them. I'm sure Charles Hamilton was a great writer but those unnamed writers in the *Wizard*, *Hotspur*, *Adventure* and *Rover* were pretty good, despite no by-line, and the one (or was it one only?) who wrote Smith of the Third was one of the best.

Denise the Dancer

by Dennis L. Bird

Denise Laxton of the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* was unique among the heroines of the Amalgamated Press's story papers. Like all the others, she underwent many adventures, misunderstandings, clashes with criminals, even kidnappings. But she also did something different: she fell in love and got married. The stories about her were clearly intended for the older schoolgirl reader just about to move on to the *Women's World* type of adult weekly.

She was the creation of "Sylvia Marston", alias Roland Jameson; he also wrote under the names "Pearl Fairland" and "Muriel Holden". Denise appeared first in a single story dated August 22nd, 1936. She was a topical character, for Ginger Rogers and Eleanor Powell were then tap-dancing their way into the mass audiences' hearts in the cinema. Presumably readers' reactions were favourable, for three more stories were published that year. There was then a gap of five months until her return at the time of the Coronation (May 1937). Thereafter she featured in every issue until January 1938, and again from April to July, and finally from October 1938 to March 1939. Altogether there were 42 short stories and three serials in the *S.W.*, all gracefully illustrated by Valerie Gaskell (who later drew "The Cruising Merrymakers" for over a decade in the *Girls' Crystal*).

"Mystery among the Motley" was readers' first introduction to Denise Laxton: "It was only twelve short months since she had left the dancing academy and she was eager to make a name for herself . . . From the grace with which she moved it was evident that she had been born to be a dancer. Denise was pretty, too, with fair wavy hair which held golden tints, and a face that betokened character as well as charm." Not much information was given about her family, except for a mention of her mother (a widow, it later transpired) and of a younger sister, "Lorna" - in all the later tales her name is Maureen.

Denise had just secured a week's engagement to dance at a "most exclusive" seaside hotel, but soon a mystery developed. Three of her costumes were stolen, and Denise herself was locked in a cupboard. A fairly typical story! It turned out that another dancer planned to take her place to carry out a robbery during a gala ball; but Denise outsmarted the crooks.

The second story, "Denise and the Dancing Portrait" (September 26th, 1936) described her as "the clever sixteen-year-old dancer" - so she must have trained very young. And would she be old enough in law to accept engagements and contracts? There is no mention of her mother or anyone else acting as an agent.

Story No 3 ("Her Secret Masquerade", November 21st, 1936) says that Denise "a year

ago had been a star pupil at a famous dancing academy, and . . . was now struggling hard to make a living as an entertainer". By Christmas ("Plotter of the Pantomime", December 19th, 1936) she had become "principal dancer of the company" at the Royal Theatre, Melchester.. That appointment did not seem to last long, for a few months later ("Only Denise Could Decide", May 15th, 1937) she was private dance tutor to Lady Cynthia Northboro - and earned the aristocratic family's gratitude when she solved the mystery of their disappearing tickets for the Coronation of King George VI.

After that came a series of ten stories about a seaside concert party - a crucial development in Denise's life. She had been engaged to join the Masked Merrymakers at Lynsand Bay, and at rehearsal she caught the eye of one of her colleagues. "She's good!" murmured Raymond Faulkner, the good-looking light comedian of the party. Denise lost no time in making his further acquaintance: "Come into the theatre a moment, Mr Faulkner," she invited. "I want to talk to you . . . May we drop the 'Miss' and 'Mister'? It sounds stodgy, doesn't it?"

She soon felt very much at home in the troupe, and her fellow-artistes became her first friends - Ray, and the baritone Clive Langham, the talented violinist Paula Westley, comedienne Vivienne Dell and the genial manager Hugh Massingham.

So far we had heard little of the Laxton family, but the first serial ("The Shadow of a Stranger", July 31st to October 16th, 1937) introduced Denise's mother and sister. Mrs Laxton "was feeling rundown", so at Denise's suggestion she and Maureen ("nearly 12") rented a bungalow at Lynsand Bay for the summer season. Very soon Denise sensed something was wrong. She found a scrap of a letter which her mother had torn up; it contained sinister phrases: "My demands . . . ruin her career". Whose career? Denise's?

The obvious response would have been to tackle her mother direct - but then there would have been no mystery and only half a story! Denise decided that her mother's delicate health made such a blunt approach unsuitable. Instead, she turned detective and soon found herself in some tight spots - including an inadvertent encounter with smugglers, from whose ship she escaped by swarming down a rope.

The main plot concerned a man named Andrew Lenfield, a former business associate of her late father Robert Laxton. Lenfield, originally called Andrew Stanbury, had served a long term of imprisonment for forgery and embezzlement. On release from prison he had faked a letter purporting to be a confession of guilt by Mr Laxton, and with it he was blackmailing Denise's mother. Needless to say, it all came right in the end and Lenfield went back to gaol.

The story is typical of many of its kind; what makes it unusual is the development of Denise's feelings for Ray. It is with his help and support that Lenfield is brought to book; but Denise hesitates to let him declare his true feelings for her because she does not at the time know whether her father really did have a dark secret. The stranger's shadow haunted Mrs Laxton into a nervous breakdown, and Denise herself felt she could not let her relationship with Ray go too far when there was doubt about her father.

When all is cleared up, the situation is happily changed, leading to probably the only proposal of marriage ever made in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly*. Ray says: "I reckon you know what I've got" (to offer). "It's precious little. But that doesn't alter the fact that I love you . . . if I could only hope that, one day, you - you'd marry me, I'd be the happiest man in the world." What else could she say but "Yes"?

There is more to "The Shadow of a Stranger" than just a detective story and a romance. It also gives a believable account of life in a seaside concert party, with its rousing nightly chorus:

Here's hoping you will come again
And bring you friends to see
How gaily goes our merry show
Each night beside the sea.

Goodnight, goodnight, and pleasant dreams.
May fortune come your way.
We hope we've helped to make you glad
You came to Lynsand Bay!

Incidentally, that - give or take a note or two - fits very well to the tune of "There'll Always Be An England", with which we were to fortify ourselves a few years later in the Battle of

Britain summer.

During her season at Lynsand Bay, Denise had been offered a major part in a film. "Sylvia Marston" took this as the starting point for the next serial (October 23rd, 1937, to January 8th, 1938). This was originally called "Dreams Are Not Enough" - rather a Mills and Boon title; when it was reprinted in the *Schoolgirls' Own Library* (No 719, in February 1940) it became "Her Mystery Foe in Screenland". That too was less than satisfactory; there was no mystery about the foe - Denise knew well enough who she was.

The Laxtons had rented a house in Chesterley, where the film was to be made, and Maureen became a pupil at "a fine girls' school", St. Adrian's. Maureen plays a big part in this story - an astute move by the author, giving twelve-year-old readers someone to identify with while their older sisters were dreaming they were Denise.

Ray Faulkner was also to be in the film. And then came disaster. The film company went bankrupt and "Danseuse Decides" was an epic that never reached the screen. Suddenly out of work, Denise was fortunate in being offered the post of dancing mistress at Maureen's school. The sympathetic Head, Miss Beatrice Newstead, said "It would be better than nothing while you are waiting for a professional engagement".

It would indeed - although it was not an easy transition. Denise's first class, "girls of 16 or 17, scrutinised her with a frankness that Denise found slightly embarrassing . . . Despite the small difference in their ages, Denise felt somehow much older than they. No doubt it was due to the fact that for some years now she had had to fend for herself out in the world."

A more lucrative opportunity soon came her way. The Headmistress's brother Ralph Newstead was a film producer who had a scenario based on a girls' school. Would she and Ray be interested? Of course they were, and "The School of Suspicions" was the result.

The film's title was apt, for St. Adrian's too became a centre of intrigue. The school secretary Norah Lawrance was in love with Ralph Newstead, and she became increasingly jealous of his involvement with his young dancer. She did all she could to destroy Denise's happiness and wreck her engagement (Norah was indeed the "mystery foe"), but thanks in part to Maureen Laxton and her school chum Joan Lumley (no, not Joanna Lumley!) the schemer was thwarted and discredited.

The film was a great success, and the story ends with Denise's marriage to Ray Faulkner. "Dancing means a lot to me," she whispered, "but there are other things even more important, and one of them's Ray Faulkner." "Only one?" he teased. "The one!" she whispered.

Picturesque Chesterley Abbey was the setting for the wedding. Old friends from Lynsand Bay were there. Clive Langham was best man, Paula Westley chief bridesmaid. Uncle Maurice Laxton from Canada (who had given vital help in trapping Andrew Lenfield) gave the bride away, and Hugh Massingham's present was something "Denise and Ray would always treasure - a large photograph, beautifully coloured", of the Masked Merrymakers Concert Party, in which they first met.

The honeymoon was spent on the Riviera. "Happy, darling?" Ray murmured, as the Golden Arrow sped them through France. "So happy that it seems almost like - a dream!" Which proves that dreams **are** enough - when they come true!

Three weeks after the serial ended, the first short story about Mr and Mrs Faulkner appeared ("While Revelry Reigned", January 29th, 1938). Then followed a gap of some two months before another run of short stories, from April to July. The first one, "Denise, Their Good Fairy" (April 9th, 1938), showed her in a curiously amoral light. A wealthy woman, Mrs Lowson, was threatening the future of a children's home at which Denise and Co. gave performances. She had a precious Pekinese lap-dog, which Denise coolly and quite illegally kidnapped, and then bargained with Mrs Lowson for his return if she would drop her plans to eliminate the home.

By now the quartet - Paula, Clive, and the Faulkners - had formed themselves into a travelling troupe called "The Four Mummers". Fifteen single-episode stories followed, some in exotic locations such as Montmartre and the Adriatic, and then there was a three-month gap before the third serial. This was "Their Foe in the Film City" (October 22nd, 1938, to January

14th, 1939). Maureen, on special leave from school, is now said to be 13 - a mere year older than she was in "The Shadow of a Stranger". On that basis, Denise would be only about 18 - yet she is described as "the famous dancer". The author has surely telescoped the timescale somewhat.

The new serial took the Four Mummers and Maureen to the U.S.A., on a transcontinental train from New York to Pasadena in Los Angeles. They had been invited by the Supreme Color Film Corporation (by this time Technicolor was all the rage), and "once the necessary screen tests had been successfully made, there could be contracts for all of them, the chance of reaching world-wide audiences, and gaining universal fame. A dazzling prospect for young and ambitious people."

Arrived in Hollywood, they were shown around the film company's studios. They were noticed by "a clean-shaven man" with a snarl in his voice - Mark Holstein. Denise and Ray did not see him. If they had, they would have recognised him as Andrew Stanbury, or Lenfield, who had served "a long term of imprisonment" for his attempts to blackmail Mrs Laxton. "A long term"? - but the Lynsand Bay episode was only a year ago. Again there is something amiss with the chronology.

If denounced, Stanbury/Lenfield would have been in further trouble, for he had obtained his job with forged passport and testimonials. To remove the threat to his livelihood, he resolved to have the Four Mummers sent packing, in disgrace. Working in secret with a rascally Mexican, Miguel Huescas, he managed to have Ray imprisoned on false charges. But Ray escaped from gaol - only to be captured by Stanbury and Huescas at their hideout across the border in Mexico. Fortunately, Denise was able to ride to the rescue on horseback, and the Mexican police took Stanbury and his confederates into custody.

A week after the last instalment of the Hollywood story, the Mummers were back in England for a new phase of their careers, in the last series of ten short stories. Tired of travelling on tour, they had bought a fine old house in Chesterley which they ran as a country club. But in the final story "The Frock of Fortune" (March 25th, 1939) Denise is about to return to the film world. "So for a little while at least we say farewell to dancer Denise" - that was what the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* wrote at the end. Sadly, she was never to return, and the paper itself suddenly shut down two months later.

That was not quite the end of the Laxton family. *The Popular Book of Girls' Stories* had published a Denise adventure, "Denise and the Rival Dancer", in 1938, and in the 1941 edition there came "The Threat to her Dancing Hopes". But that was about Maureen. Charming, gifted, resourceful Mrs Faulkner was never seen again.

In writing this article, I have been greatly helped by Ray Hopkins, who provided me with a detailed list of every Laxton story; and by Mary Cadogan, who painstakingly photocopied many of them for me. - D.L.B.

When Bunter came home for Christmas

by Les Rowley

Harry Wharton took the last sprig of holly from the dusky hand of Hurree Singh and fastened it securely to the top of the tall gilt frame before him. The painted likeness of his ancestor, clad in a cavalier's dress of old, stared mutely back and Harry round himself wondering whether there was any truth in the story of the haunting of the Lodge by the ghost from the Civil War.

The two friends stood back and surveyed the results of their endeavours. Every other picture in the hall had been similarly embellished by the red berries and green leaves of the season. In contrast to the age-darkened panelled walls, festoons of coloured balls of many colours dipped and swayed on their limits of gold and silver tinsel.

In pride of place stood a massive Christmas tree, dragged into position by a panting Wells and a perspiring Thomas, both of whom had since repaired to the butler's pantry the better to assuage their respective thirsts. It was too good

an example to be ignored and the two chums refreshed themselves with a bottle of pop as they sorted out a collection of electric fairy lamps with which to bedeck the tree. Outside, the late afternoon shadows were deepening into evening as Colonel Wharton and his sister came into the room. Both had words of approval for the decorations as Aunt Amy closed the curtains and the Colonel prodded the fire into a blaze.

As the warmth reached out to comfort them, Aunt Amy chatted happily to Hurree Singh about the latest news from India as her brother drew his nephew further across the room.

"I am sorry to tell you, Harry, that I have received some disturbing news regarding one of your guests. The local station-master has informed me that the boy Bunter has been discovered travelling on a train without a valid ticket, or the funds with which to buy one. Under the company's rules, Bunter is being returned to Reigate, the station from which his journey originated, and under the supervision of a guard. On arrival at Reigate, his parents will be contacted and the boy will be released to their custody upon the payment of expenses which are likely to be considerable. As you know, Harry, I hold shares in the railway company and this incident could well result in some embarrassment".

Wharton's feelings could find no expression in any known language. Not that he would be constrained by mere words when next he encountered Bunter. Actions would be more prominent and more painful than words. As he stood there before a frowning uncle, Wharton made a mental resolve that his fat form fellow would have a high old time of it at their next meeting.

Colonel Wharton's next words took a more gentle tone, "As you know Harry, your Aunt Amy have always left the choice of guests to yourself. Nugent, Cherry, Bull, and others have proved an excellent company to have under one's roof, but Bunter is a different matter altogether. I am sure that I can leave it to your good sense to deal with the matter. It will not be long before your other friends join you for what we all hope will be a very happy Christmas."

"You can depend on me, uncle," Wharton promised, at the same time promising Bunter the booting of his fat life if he showed himself within kickable distance of the Lodge. To which laudable enterprise Inky pledged his full support.

"Perhaps the pater of the ridiculous Bunter will dissuade Bunter from bilking the preposterous railway in future," hopefully opined Inky. "The wrathfulness of the esteemed Mr Bunter will probably be terrific. But join in a game of chess, my chum, and let us dismiss the infuriating fathead from our minds".

The two friends settled down to a game of chess before the cosy fire in the den, and all thoughts of Bunter disappeared as their game evolved. Bunter had never been held to memory dear. Bunter's presence did not radiate the dignity of the honoured guest within the gates. Fellow guests at the dinner table paused as if in awe, it is true. They would have directed that same awe at a hefty predator from the jungle and wondered where Bunter stacked it all. Perhaps Wharton and Hurree Singh felt, if anything, that Bunter's absence made the heart grow fonder. It was even possible for the chums to feel grateful to Bunter. In any event, they forgot him . . . but not for long.

"Master Bunter is asking for you on the telephone, Master Harry." Wells' tones were the deferential ones of his profession. Not by one bat of an eyelid did Wells betray his innermost thoughts on the subject of William George Bunter. Nevertheless, Wells had those innermost thoughts of the young rascal who would ring the servants' bells incessantly and give equally incessant orders for cakes and delicacies to be brought to his room from the kitchen.

Bunter's policy with menials was to keep them firmly in their place and to insist that they do his bidding without question or delay. It was not surprising that this policy had its drawbacks. On more than one occasion Bunter thought he had detected a trace of sarcasm in what the butler said. He had actually refused to pay for a taxi which had conveyed him from Bunter Court to Wharton Lodge on the frivolous excuse that it would be interpreted as presumption on his part to pay the debts of a guest. There had been another occasion when Bunter had condescendingly offered to allow Wells to loan him a fiver. For some inexplicable reason the butler had not availed himself of this golden opportunity. Bunter had been turned empty away, never realising how near he had come to making a painful acquaintance with the leather of the butler's shoe. The sins of error and/or commission that could be laid at Bunter's door were as numerous as the pebbles on the sea shore. Wells would have given almost anything to turn the fat fool on his equally fat axis and speed him on his way. But Wells held a good position with excellent pay and the freedom of a choice and plentiful cellar. It would be foolish indeed to jeopardise such a position.

So Bunter escaped the dire penalties that Wells - and a host of others - would have been delighted to have exacted from the young rascal. Now Christmas was upon the Lodge and all that would be dwelling therein. Wells was hoping that the festive number would not include Bunter, and Wells wanted very much to have that fact confirmed. He did not exactly hover at the telephone cabinet in the hall, but he carefully dusted the ledge of a nearby doorway and snatches of Wharton's conversation came clearly to the ear.

"I don't care what your pater does to you, you fat slug. Show your face anywhere near the Lodge and Inky and I will kick you all the way to Wimford station. Then we will hand you over to the station master to return you to Reigate in charge of the guard for handing over to your pater. Just imagine how glad he, the station master, and the guard will all be to see you again! Frightfully bucked, I don't think. Don't bother to ring again - the message and the warning will be the same. Ta ta, old fat man." There came the sound of the telephone being replaced, and Wells moved discreetly further along the hall. The news sounded almost too good to be true but Wells, who had been there before, so to speak, wished further confirmation of the good fortune. He approached Wharton to seek it.

"Will Mr Bunter be honouring us with his presence?" he smoothly enquired. "Shall I prepare a room and inform cook that additional meals will be required?"

Wharton looked sharply at the butler. Wells' enquiry seemed natural enough in the circumstances, but the words seemed to contain an undertone of anxiety which he could not place.

"We will not be expecting Bunter, Wells," he replied, "but a word of caution might be as well. There have been previous occasions, as you know, when Bunter has arrived unexpectedly but, even if he does, I do not anticipate that he will be staying."

With that qualification, Wells had to be satisfied. Wharton's caution was common sense, based on the many previous arrivals of Bunter at holiday times. Wells hoped that Master Harry would keep his dire threats if Bunter put in an appearance.

Harry found the Nabob had been roasting chestnuts in the interval, and he explained his conversation with Bunter.

"It seems that Bunter's pater is understudying the part of the Roman parent. The kitchen is off limits and Bunter is being denied all the things that Bunter likes best. I gather that the fat gormandiser was even made to return a mincepie that he had managed to acquire from Sammy's plate at tea time. Mr Bunter has threatened similar restrictions until the fine for bilking the railway is recovered. The fat Owl put on quite a moving performance, but I owe it to my uncle to see that his wishes are respected. Wells was seeking assurance that Bunter would not be coming, but I don't think he was convinced. Neither am I, Inky."

"The esteemed Bob, Frank, and Johnny will be here tomorrow, so there will be a plentiful number of boots to speed Bunter on his way. Let us waitfully see what the morrow may bring," suggested Hurree Singh. Both the chestnuts and chess were resumed. Tomorrow would assuredly bring the rest of the Famous Five and celebrations could begin in earnest.

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The spirit of Christmas was abroad in Reigate. Trade vans were rapidly loading for the remaining deliveries before the holiday. Over all was an atmosphere of rejoicing and hope that the bitter wind and drifting flurries of show did nothing to dispel. The spirit of Christmas was abroad in Reigate as indeed it was in every village and town; every hamlet and city.

Bunter pulled his cap down over his fat ears, and the collar of his coat up to his chin as he walked the busy streets. For once, Bunter was on an errand not connected with himself. He was making his way to the florist's, there to arrange the delivery of a spray of blooms to his dear mother. The qualities of the Bunter clan reposed almost solely in Mrs Bunter. She was a good mother and the regard of her elder son was one of the few redeeming features of William George.

Outside the florist's stood a van, the side of which bore the legend "ELMWOOD MARKET GARDENERS AND FLORISTS". Elmwood was but a short distance away from Wimford and the home of the Whartons. The opportunity was one that was too good to be missed, or at least good enough to risk a threatened booting for. Entering the shop Bunter ordered the spray for his mother and hastily wrote a note to be delivered with it. The driver was already leaving but Bunter managed to catch him at the doorway.

"Any chance of a lift as far as Wimford?"

"Cost you a couple of quid," came the offer as the driver scrutinised Bunter carefully. The fat young feller didn't look well supplied with cash but he had paid the florist for the flowers so it was worth the risk. Unfortunately that driver had none of the experience of ticket collectors, inspectors and other employees of the railway companies. When they arrived at Wimford, Bunter felt for the door catch but, to his horror, the door didn't open.

"Two quid, if you please," the van driver smiled. It was not a nice smile, displaying as it did a collection of horribly stained and vicious teeth. "Two quid," he repeated without the qualifying smile.

Reluctantly, Bunter handed over the money. As he did so, he noticed a bunch of flowers on the floor of the van. The blooms looked tired and jaded and the driver picked them up.

"Rejects," he announced tersely. "Here, take 'em 'ome to your ma. I've only got another two miles to go. But you said Wimford and here you are."

"Can you drop me nearer Wharton Lodge?"

The van driver subjected Bunter to further

scrutiny. Wharton Lodge was a very respected address indeed, Colonel Wharton was a local magistrate, and his sister well known for charitable causes. His present passenger did not conform to either of their callings or anything else. Perhaps it was a case of a prodigal son returning home for the celebration in which the fatted calf would feature. More likely to be a fatted turkey at this particular season. Lost in such speculation, the driver conveyed his passenger and decanted him at the front door.

If Bunter had expected to be greeted by a warm welcome from Wells, that welcome did not materialise. The butler had had his doubts about this being a Bunter-free occasion, and for once his usually imperturbable demeanour did not function.

"Hello, Wells. Please inform Miss Wharton I would like to speak to her. Be quick about it - I'm unaccustomed to being kept waiting."

A few moment later Miss Wharton was greeting Bunter in the drawing room and her visitor was handing a bunch of wilting flowers to her.

"A small compliment to a charming lady," said Bunter gallantly. "Wells, see that they are put in water immediately, and handle those flowers carefully whilst you do so. I see you are knitting this afternoon, ma'am. Kindly permit me to hold your wool for you."

Once outside the door, Wells tried to arrange his features so that they looked less similar to the face of a demon in a pantomime and, whilst he did so contrive, he speculated that Master Harry and his friends would be equally disconcerted at discovering Bunter safely installed and already buttering up the mistress of the house with his gift of fading flowers. Wells was too professionally trained to express himself in questionable language, but the slamming of a door or two soon acquainted others that something had intervened between Wells and his dignity.

With youthful cheeks reddened by the wintry walk from the station, Harry Wharton & Co. lost no time in presenting themselves to Aunt Amy from whom they received a gracious smile. From Bunter they received a triumphant smirk as Aunt Amy gestured to a vase of flowers, the petals of which were now forlornly dropping to the floor.

"Look what this dear boy brought me and see how kind he is. He has helped by holding my wool."

If looks could have killed, Bunter would have expired on the spot. Instead, his grinning smirk of triumph became even more pronounced until it threatened to outdo that of the famous Cheshire cat.

"I expect Bunter would like something to eat," suggested Harry Wharton. "Come to my den and I'll get some refreshment laid on."

It was a good try which Bunter rewarded with a fat and knowing wink. Bunter was 'wide' in more than one sense of the word. Once cornered in Wharton's den he would no longer be under the protection of Aunt Amy.

For possibly the first time in history, Bunter turned down the offer of a spread. The risk was too great. He had come to stay, or so he hoped, for the whole of the vac. Spending the holidays at Wharton Lodge had always meant living a life of ease. On previous Christmas visits Bunter had taxed the patience of the staff to the limit. They had been kept busy carrying snacks and meals to his room. Breakfast had been late and luncheon early. He believed in doing himself well at other people's trouble and expense; his only acknowledgement to economy being his use of soap and water with which to remove traces of his gluttony from his features. And Bunter, who always remembered mealtimes during his stay, never remembered gratuities for the staff when that stay came to an end.

Wharton and the rest of the fellows had left aunt Amy and the attentive Bunter and retired to the den. As they left Harry managed to convey a meaningful glance to the fat intruder. It indicated that Harry's wrath was not likely to go down with the setting of the sun. Bunter, in following his normal procedure, was travelling light - intending to make use of his host's wardrobe as his requirements demanded. The bedroom was connected through the den and would not be accessible until the boys had gone. Bunter was impatient to get to that wardrobe in order to avail himself of the best it contained. His restlessness communicated itself to Aunt Amy who suggested that her companion might care to take a stroll in the garden.

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Mrs Bunter gazed fondly at the flowers that her eldest son had sent her. Billy was the thoughtful member of the family. Similar thoughtfulness was not likely to be demonstrated by Sammy or Bessie. Neither would they give any assistance with the preparation of the meals or the cleaning up afterwards. On the other hand Billy, who had some culinary accomplishment at Greyfriars to his credit, would often don an apron and give a helping hand to his mother. Mr Bunter, resting from his labours of being a 'bull', a 'bear' or other peculiar animals that frequented the stock-market, would fill the drawing room with noxious fumes from those atrocious cigars that tended to play havoc with the stomach just filled with good cooking.

Mrs Bunter had the feeling that all her effort to provide an enjoyable Christmas was not appreciated by the family. Long hours of hard work in the kitchen producing appetising and seasonable dishes were acknowledged by grunts

more common to a farmyard than a suburban villa. In brief, Mrs Bunter was dissatisfied with her lot. She was also missing her son Billy, and had lost count of the number of Christmases he had been absent at Wharton Lodge.

It was only natural that her favourite son would be popular among his schoolfellows, although there seemed a peculiar absence of proper invitations for definite periods of stay. After all, Bunter himself was never quite certain how long each stay would be as his kind hosts seemed inclined to the belief that the shorter the visit, the better.

Bunter's mother also felt that the shorter his stay at the Lodge the better, but as she asked the exchange for the Wimford number she little guessed the happy meeting of minds that the call to the Lodge would engender. It was Colonel Wharton who took the call and listened carefully as Mrs Bunter explained the reason for it.

"I understand that my son is a guest of your son, Harry, and am wondering when Billy will be returning to us."

"My dear Mrs Bunter, your son could return to you almost immediately. As you know, he has made it his custom to stay with us for several Christmas holidays, but this year we find that our guest accommodation is limited and, as you wish him to return, that will ease the situation. My driver is due to collect Mr Quelch, your son's form master, from an address in the Reigate area and taking your son home afterwards should present no problem at all."

"Thank you so much for your kind help. It will be such a blessing to have Billy with us for the holiday. I am sure that you will have observed my son's many redeeming qualities which his absence from your own home will make sadly felt. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness . . ."

"Not at all Mrs Bunter," replied the Colonel courteously, no doubt wondering whether they had both been talking about the same person. "I will see your son now and explain things to him. May I take this opportunity of wishing you and your family the compliments of the season."

Mrs Bunter expressed her gratitude once more and replaced the receiver. It was just possible that Colonel Wharton felt even more grateful than she did. Certainly all the Greyfriars fellows did.

Later that evening Mr Quelch had the doubtful pleasure of Bunter's company for the short remainder of the journey to the Bunter household. The farewells were not protracted but there was relief in the mind of the Remove master that there was to be an interval before he would meet his least promising pupil at the commencement of the new term.

Mrs Bunter excelled herself as never before. There was a huge Christmas pudding, with its aroma of brandy and spice, flanked by a veritable forest of mince pies on which sparkling caster sugar rested like the delicate touch of frost. A giant turkey that would take pride of place at the festive table. At tea time there would be the Christmas cake, a masterpiece if there ever was one, its dark fruit mixture hidden by two layers - one of marzipan, the other of white icing with its greeting in deep red. There was more - much more, as the advertisements tend to claim.

And there was lots. Plenty for everyone, especially for the time when Bunter Came Home For Christmas.

An Old Fashioned Christmas at St. Frank's

by Mark Caldicott

It was an unusual Christmas by any standard. The fellows of the Remove at St. Frank's had arranged to spend the Christmas of 1923 together. By tradition the festive season was spent at one or another stately residence. This year it was to be Handforth's place and a party of ten were preparing to accompany him. But trouble, it is said, comes in threes. First, Handforth fell down the side of a cliff and was lost in a large snow drift. His friends were fearful of the worst and were digging away with growing alarm when Handforth himself appeared at the top of the cliff and asked what the fuss was about. He had managed to extricate himself and climb back up the cliff by another route. His injuries were short lived, the worst effect being that the fellows missed the train. All the same, the ill luck was ominous, and problem two soon evidenced itself - the weather. Snow was falling so thickly that the following train was first delayed and then, as the snow continued to fall, the service suspended. The final blow came when Handforth received a telegram to say there had been a fire at the Handforth home, and the party was off.

And so the boys were stranded, and Christmas was to be spent within the ancient portals of St. Frank's itself. The Headmaster, Dr. Stafford, rose to the occasion and offered to accommodate Handforth and his friends in his own house, situated in the grounds of

the school. The offer was gratefully accepted, and things began to look up.

As it happens, to Handforth's mind things were looking up already. In his mind the enforced change of plan was most advantageous, for Christmas 1923 was a special year in another way. It was during October 1923 that Moor View School for Girls had opened, and this was therefore their first Christmas in the neighbourhood. Handforth had become aware of the existence of Miss Irene Manners ever since she had arrived at Moor View. Although he would strenuously deny it to his chums, he had a great admiration for Irene, although, he thought, she probably hadn't even noticed he existed. He had begun to force the long-suffering Church and McClure into long walks, ostensibly for their health, but really just in the hope of meeting Irene.

Handforth's fall down the cliff, it may be suspected, had been during just such an outing. Ironically, it was when Handforth had just struggled to the top of the cliff, and was looking and feeling his worst, that he eventually achieved the purpose of all these walks and met Irene. "Why, Ted, whatever has happened?" she had asked quickly. Although he could have wished for better circumstances for his long-planned "chance" meeting, he was in seventh heaven, for she had addressed him as "Ted"!

She had also mentioned that she and her chums were staying at Moor View for Christmas. At that time Handforth did not take much notice of this fact, for he was expecting to catch a train to his home. Now that the fellows were stuck at St. Frank's, however, it became of supreme significance. Yes, for Handforth, the present situation was most satisfactory.

And for the others, the generosity of Dr. Stafford had meant that they were being looked after in some luxury, and the prospect of spending Christmas at St. Frank's suddenly seemed promising.

If readers of this festive episode of the Nelson Lee Library ("The Schoolboy Santa Claus!" *Nelson Lee Library, OS 446, 22-Dec-23*) were looking for a traditional yuletide story, they cannot have been disappointed. For, after this eventful opening, what follows is, I think, not only one of those wonderful and closely-woven ESB stories, but one which he has also imbued with all the spirit of an old-fashioned Dickensian Christmas story.

Phipps, Archie Glenthorne's valet, bears the news that the row of small cottages at Pelton's Bend, near Holt's Farm, are in danger of being completely enveloped in snow, making prisoners of the inhabitants. The St. Frank's party act at once, setting off to the rescue with shovels. With the help of Joe Catchpole and the other men of the cottages, they set to work. Having cleared each of the cottages the inhabitants were filled with gratitude towards the boys of St. Frank's, who were made welcome. The boys would never normally find themselves in the cottages, and were shocked at the poverty.

> Of comforts there were none. The children - three or four in each family - looked weakly and ill-nourished. Somehow there was an atmosphere of stark misery about these wretched hovels.
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> "My hat!" breathed Handforth. "Old Holt ought to be sent to penal servitude for keeping his tenants in this state."
>
> "They work for him, and that's why they've got to put up with it," said Pitt softly. "You know what a beast he is. If they dared to complain about these cottages they'd get the sack. And work's scarce enough as it is."

Farmer Holt, then, is the Scrooge of the story, who gives nothing away and does not believe in Christmas. For these poor farm workers and their families there is no Christmas bonus from Farmer Holt. Archie Glenthorne, used to the better things in life, is appalled when he is told by Joe Catchpole

> "Christmas don't mean nothin' to us. Some folks can afford a bit extry for the kiddies. but when the missus only gets a few shillings a week, she can't make no Christmas puddens. The nippers will be lucky if they gets margarine on their bread."

Archie offers money, which is politely refused. The proud villagers will not countenance charity.


And then the door opened, and Mrs. Hewitt stood there—a small, sad little figure, attired in a shabby dressing-gown.
"Jack—Jack!" she cried. "Oh, I knew you would come!"

The boys turn their attention to the tiny cottage where Mrs Hewit, the dressmaker, lives alone. This too needed clearing, but when the front window is cleared the boys are surprised to see a night light burning on the window sill. They knock on the door and are startled by the response.

"My son - my son!" came a voice to us - a voice that was thrilling with pent-up joy. "Oh, Jack - Jack! My boy's come at last".

She is, of course, deeply disappointed to discover the truth. The boys discover that her son is a ne'er do well, has been left ten years, and each year she has kept a light burning for his return.

The pathos of this episode takes the atmosphere back to that earlier age in which Dickens wrote. It is reminiscent to me of the temperance stories of the mid to late nineteenth century (the ones which feature the hopeless wife crying: "Oh, Jack, Jack, put the bottle down. Think of your family.")

"Beggin' your pardon, miss, but this 'ere tanner ain't much good"! he said roughly. "Let's 'ave one o' them quid notes! An' look sharp about it, too! 'And over yer purse, or we'll lay you out!"

Next morning dawns more cheerfully, and Irene Manners is out for a walk. She is seized by two ruffians and robbed of her handbag. Onto the scene, in time to rescue both Irene and her handbag, comes a fellow who himself has the appearance of a tramp. The St. Frank's juniors appear, and Irene describes her rescue. The ill-kempt hero introduces himself - as John Hewitt, the long lost son of Mrs Hewitt. Again the fellows offer money, this time so that Hewitt can buy himself new clothes in which to arrive at his mother's. Again the money is politely refused. The prodigal son wants his mother to accept him as he is.

John Hewitt arrives in Bellton village to a mixed reception. The worthier villagers receive him warmly, while others, seeing the state of his clothes and his general appearance, believe he has persisted in his good-for-nothing ways, and reject him. As is to be expected, his mother is overjoyed to see him, but of course has no fatted calf. Nevertheless Jack announces that he has returned to stay, and will seek employment in the village.

When he sets out to seek work, however, he meets with no success. After exhausting the possibilities in Bellton, he goes to Holt's Farm to seek work as a farm labourer. Arriving at the farm he passes a friendly word with Tom Belcher, one of the farm hands from Pelton's Bend. The two are interrupted by Farmer Holt himself, who threatens to sack Tom for wasting time. He turns to John Hewitt and tells him "I heard you'd come back. And it seems ye ain't got onything better to do than stop my men from workin'. Clear away from here, you scamp!"

Jack stands his ground, and Holt attacks him with his stick. Hewitt retaliates by knocking Holt down. P.C. Sparrow, no friend of Jack's, arrives only in time to see Jack's punch and Holt's descent into the snow. The bullying farmer claims this to have been an unprovoked attack, and Hewitt is arrested. The St. Frank's fellows, emerging from the tuck shop in Bellton High Street, are attracted by the procession of jeerers. They witness P.C. Sparrow escorting Hewitt. They hear Jack's story and, knowing of Farmer Holt's mean nature, believe Jack's account. They pay Hewitt's bail so that he can spend Christmas with his mother.

As they accompany Hewitt along the High Street, a limousine pulls up and Mr. Doyle, whom the boys recognise as the man who has recently bought the Chase, the largest house in the neighbourhood, greets John Hewitt as an old friend. Doyle offers Hewitt the post of valet. This, the boys recognise, is wonderful news, for this will solve Hewitt's employment problem, and also raise his status considerably in the neighbourhood.

Having witnessed this apparent change in John Hewitt's fortunes, the St. Frank's fellows then set off to bring happiness in another quarter. Hints have been dropped to the children of the poverty stricken cottages of Pelton's Bend that they should look out for Santa Claus, and that he will come on Christmas Eve to leave presents in their stockings. Joe Catchpole and his wife are heavy hearted by this air of expectation, for they know that the children will receive very little. The children wait and listen. Then, as the desperate parents are trying to urge the children to bed, Elsie, one of the youngsters, runs to the door and flings it open.

She stood there, listening intently.

"He's coming - Santa Claus is coming!" she cried gleefully.

"Elsie! Come back at once!" insisted her mother. "Don't be so foolish, child!"

"Oh, but mum, he's coming - listen!" said the child breathlessly.

In spite of themselves, Mr. and Mrs. Catchpole found themselves listening. The other children gathered at the door, almost too excited to breathe. And Joe looked at his wife, and their eyes were filled with wonder.

For on the clear, frosty air came the merry jingle of sleigh bells . . . and then a perfect scream of delight went up from childish throats. For round the bend of the lane came an amazing spectacle. A great sleigh, laden with parcels and toys and turkeys and geese, and other things too numerous to mention.

The Remove fellows are pulling the sleigh, dressed as animals of all kinds. The gratitude of the villagers can be imagined, and there is abundant happiness at Pelton's Bend. Moreover, the boys, and particularly Handforth, are gratified by the fact that as they are nearing the gates of St. Frank's they meet Irene Manners and Co., who heartily approve of the boys' actions and agree to meet up on the morrow. It was to be an outstanding Christmas after all.

Comes the dawn of Christmas Day, and with it a visit from John Hewitt inviting the boys to a Dinner that evening at the Chase. Irene and her chums are also to be invited.

The morning is spent on the River Stowe, skating. The Moor View girls are there, together with Phipps and some of the villagers. There is no better way to spend Christmas morning, and the scene resembles an old fashioned Christmas card.

And there is one final twist. For, as everyone sits down to what is to be a sumptuous meal and a truly joyous evening, Mr. Doyle rises to make an announcement. He tells his astonished audience that . . . but wait, if this were revealed it would spoil the surprise ending. Let us just say that ESB's Dickensian spirit continues to the end with a discreet borrowing from *Our Mutual Friend* with which to round out the story and bring a very happy Christmas to all present.

And may your Christmas be as happy as an ESB ending!

The Jolly Roger, the symbolic flag of skull and crossbones on a red or black background which denoted a pirate's vessel, was first used about 1700.

Blackbeard, the nickname of real-life Captain Edward Teach, was perhaps the most notorious and terrifying pirate of all time. He plaited his beard into pigtails and tied them with coloured ribbon. He wore pistols, daggers and a cutlass in his belt, and in a sling across his chest were three more pistols, all primed, cocked and ready to fire. His ship was the *Queen Anne's Revenge* of 36 cannon and 300 men armed to the teeth. In his final battle in 1718, Blackbeard's head was hacked off by a Scotsman. Legend has it that his corpse was thrown overboard and that it swam three times round the ship before sinking.

The famous British seaman, Captain Kidd, was commissioned to fight pirates but turned buccaneer himself. He was eventually brought to justice and hanged at execution dock below the Pool of London.

Sir Henry Morgan was a real person who was knighted by Charles II for his raids on Spanish shipping.

Lady pirate Anne Bonney became known as the Terror of the Caribbean. She was depicted by Jean Peters in the film *Anne of the Indies,* and by Hope Emerson in *Double Crossbones.*

Sessue Hayakawa, a Japanese, and matinée idol in the Hollywood silent film era of the twenties, played a Chinese pirate in the Walt Disney version of *Swiss Family Robinson.* He is perhaps best remembered for his performance as Colonel Saito, commander of the P.O.W. camp in *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* and the clash of wills between himself and the British Colonel Nicholson (Alec Guinness).

Other outstanding fictional pirates include Captain James Hook from J.M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan.* His severed lower right arm had been replaced by a steel hook, and he was finally despatched by a crocodile.

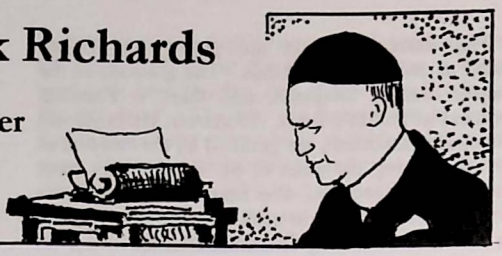
Dr Syn, Vicar of Dymchurch, Kent, was actually ex-pirate and smuggler Captain Clegg, and also known as the Scarecrow. He was created by Russell Thorndike, and featured in seven novels dealing with his activities.

Captain Flint's fabulous buried treasure was sought after by Long John Silver, a sea cook, and the crew of the *Hispaniola* as related by Robert Louis Stevenson in *Treasure Island.*

The Captain Pugwash stories published in Puffin Books are superbly illustrated by their author John Ryan who lives in Sussex. Tom is the cabin boy on Pugwash's ship the *Black Pig,* and cut-throat Jake of the *Flying Dustman,* the most terrible pirate afloat, is Pugwash's arch-enemy. The successful Pugwash cartoon series of the sixties and seventies have recently been re-launched on ITV.

Letter from Frank Richards

Introduced by Glyn Frewer



Glyn Frewer writes:

I think this letter might interest you and all fellow readers of the C.D. (which I have been enjoying for years).

The letter by Frank Richards was in reply to one sent by Frank Osborn whose daughter Marie still has the original and who was delighted when I suggested I might send a copy to you. We are distantly related and both great book-lovers. I am, in fact, the proprietor of a secondhand-book shop, with a large section devoted to children's books.

Frank Richards' reply seems a classic example of the trouble he took over replying to 'fan' letters and of the sheer pleasure it gave him. His enthusiasm shines through every line and the spontaneity of all the tiny hurried mistakes adds to the charm. It is such a cheerful letter, I thought it might make a happy inclusion in the forthcoming CD Annual.

I've been a *Magnet* addict all my life and my father (now 92) still borrows my Howard Baker reprint volumes of which I have numbers 1 to 60. He and my brother (also a CD subscriber) still remember the Saturday morning dash we three made to the doormat in order to be the first to get the latest issue of the *Magnet*.

I hope the enclosed proves useful. I found some of FR's personal views quite illuminating.

ROSE LAWN,
KINGSGATE-ON-SEA,
KENT.

September 24th 1947.

Dear Frank Osborn,

I was very pleased to receive your letter. No need for "trepidation", my dear boy. It is always a pleasure to read a letter like yours. It is true of course that a receive a good many, and my replies are sometimes, I fear, a little belated: but yours came luckily this morning, and, having just finished the second Bunter book, I am taking a day or two off to catch up with correspondence: and putting you first on the list. It is extremely interesting to me to hear that you are the proprietor of that venerable "Pluck" containing the first story ever written of St. Jim's. Herbert Leckenby sent me the photograph of it to look at, and it was quite a thrill to see it again after so many years. I had a copy myself up to 1915, when it was used up in preparing it for re-issue in the "Gem" at a time when circumstances made copy very short. There can be very few now in existence.

You must be quite an old reader if you read the Gem and Magnet from the beginning--a real veteran. And you have a copy of "Football Fortune" in the B.F. Library? This is a very old stager. It was published as a serial in the Boys Realm by Hamilton Edwards, who asked me to write it for him, ever so long ago--it must have been about 1903 or 1904. Long-ago as it is, I remember reeling off the instalments on the No. 7 Remington I used in those days, and sometimes walking into the old Carmelite House with an instalment in my pocket---being a much more active fellow in 1903 than in 1947 ! In these latter days Frank Richards is rather like a deponent verb----passive in form but active in meaning!

I wish I had a copy of "Tom Merry's Conquest"; I should be very glad to supply the missing link, if I had. But alas! nearly all my Gems and Magnets went West in 1940. They made such a mountain of paper that I thought I ought to hand them over to the salvage--and did. Have I not missed them since!

So the first number of the Magnet was brought to you when you were ill in bed! I shall hope that it did not cause a relapse!

Yes, it is rather contrary to the usual opinion to like Martin Clifford better than Frank Richards, but a good many old readers have told me so, all the same. Among the number is the editor of both papers, Maurice Down. Some time ago it was a moot point whether my second volume in the new series should be a "Tom Merry" story or a second "Bunter" book, and I consulted Mr. Down on the subject. He told me that he personally always liked Tom Merry the better of the two---nevertheless agreeing that there was a large majority in favour of Greyfriars. I think I myself belong to the latter party: I always think of myself as Frank Richards, and have almost forgotten that it is not my real name. At the same time, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was always one of my favourite characters, and I just loved writing about him. I hope that when the paper worry permits, I may write a "Tom Merry" book similar to the Bunter books: and when that comes to pass, A.A.A. will undoubtedly have a good show in it.

However, I am glad that you tell me that you are looking forward to the Bunter book---Billy the Next Best Thing, as it were! There have been a lot of delays, but the book will positively be out in October, and I believe that early copies are already being despatched. So far it has been possible to print only 20,000 copies, but the third 10,000 is on its way, and I am told that this is to be followed by a fourth and a fifth---so everyone who wants Bunter will be satisfied in the long run. At Greyfriars School nobody wanted Bunter: I am rather glad that the big public don't take the same view of him!

I shall be very interested to see your article in the C.D. which I receive regularly from York. And I thank you, my dear boy, for your good and kind wishes. My health is astonishingly good for an old boy whose eightieth birthday looms on the horizon: It is true that I have a leg which is liable to let me down unexpectedly, in a manner comic to the beholder, if not to the proprietor: but what's the odds so long as you're happy? When I am writing I feel just as I did in 1890, and verily believe that I am not a day older---though I don't think I shall ever try climbing the Alps again!

Thank you once more for a very pleasant letter.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Frank Richards

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A Visit From St. Nicholas

By PETER McCALL

(after Clement Clarke Moore)

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house,
Only Bunter was stirring, (a very small mouse!)
His stockings were placed o'er his feet with great care,
As he went on a hunt for Seasonal fare.
His chums were all nestled - five - in their beds;
While visions of sugar plums danced in his head.
Aunt Amy in boudoir, and I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter nap -
When out in the hall there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my chair to see what was the matter.
Away to the door I flew like a flash,
Tore over the carpet, and with a great crash
Fell over my footstool, right onto the floor;
Arose, and then staggered out through the door.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of midday to objects below;
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear?
But a pineapple, oranges, tarts and éclairs
With a little fat porpoise - not lively or quick -
I knew it was Bunter - and never Saint Nick!

"The War of the Worlds"

by Laurence Price

One hundred years ago, in 1898, the book edition of the science fiction classic, *The War of the Worlds*, by H.G. Wells, was published, following prior serialisation in *Pearsons Magazine* in 1897. It was an immediate public and critical success, and was another bestseller for Wells, who had already established himself as a highly talented and original author, with the publication of *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and several notable short stories.

H.G. WELLS
as he appeared in *The Graphic*
of January 7, 1899

Born in Bromley, Kent, in 1866, where his father ran an unsuccessful shop, Wells, through sheer hard work and determination, had escaped his lower middle class background, freeing himself from a life of drudgery as a drapery assistant and other dead-end jobs. Winning a hard won scholarship he had studied under the great biologist and Darwinian, T.H. Huxley, from 1884-7; in his writing and thought, Wells would be greatly influenced by evolutionary theory and humanism.

By the time he was 29, in 1895, Wells was twice married. As *The Time Machine* became a runaway success, Wells, with his new wife, Jane, moved to Woking in Surrey. Once settled in Woking, Wells developed an interest in cycling, delightfully recounted in fictional form in *The Wheels of Chance* (1896). While out cycling in the district, Wells took pleasure "in marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians".

Inspiration for *The War of the Worlds* had come in the spring of 1895 when Wells was out strolling with his brother Frank in the peaceful Surrey countryside. "Suppose," Frank remarked, "some beings from another planet were to drop out of the sky suddenly, and begin laying about them here!" It was left to the imaginative genius of Wells to develop this theme into the merciless invading Martians of *The War of the Worlds*.

For though many previous writers had written about "aliens" from other planets, and books, such as *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) by G.T. Chesney, had used the theme of a successful invasion of England, no previous author had hit on the idea of an invasion from outer space.

At the height of British Imperialism, with England a great world power and with a navy, that in the words of *Rule Britannia* "ruled the waves", Wells wanted to get through to its comfortably secure and apparently apathetic island people, how it might feel to be the victims and the actual losers of an unwinnable war, against seemingly invincible forces and weaponry. The book is indeed remarkable in the way it so accurately foreshadows the terrible wars and destruction and the plight of fleeing refugees that we have come to know so well throughout the twentieth century. Yet the book is so well written and constructed that it still remains a thrilling read, despite being a portent of doom.

The first paragraph of the first chapter, "The Eve of the War", opens Wells' masterpiece, and sets the scene for the pending invasion with these powerful opening sentences spoken by The Narrator:

"No-one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water . . . Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those beasts who perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us . . ."

As the full implications of these words begin to sink in and we wonder what right the Martians have to invade and enslave us, the Narrator reminds the reader that "before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon anima-

such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races . . . Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?"

The first Martian cylinder lands on Horsell Common, north of Woking, and a crowd are soon gathering to watch it, including the Narrator. The cylinder unscrews and a Martian is glimpsed for the first time.

"A big greyish rounded bulk, the size, perhaps, of a bear, was rising slowly and painfully out of the cylinder . . . it glistened like wet leather . . . Two large dark-coloured eyes were regarding me steadfastly . . . There was a mouth under the eyes . . . The whole creature heaved and pulsated convulsively. A lank tentacular appendage gripped the edge of the cylinder, another swayed in the air . . . Even at this first encounter, this first glimpse, I was overcome with disgust and dread."

Worse is to come. A deputation approaches the cylinder waving a white flag. The Martians unleash the power of their deadly Heat-Ray.

"Slowly a humped shape arose out of the pit, and the ghost of a beam of light seemed to flicker out from it.

Forthwith flashes of actual flame, a bright glare leaping from one to another, sprang from the scattered group of men. It was as if some invisible jet impinged upon them and flashed into white flame. It was as if each man were suddenly and momentarily turned to fire.

Then, by the light of their own destruction, I saw them staggering and falling, and their supporters turning to run."

The malign intentions of the Martians now revealed, the crowdes begin to flee, the common and nearby buildings are set alight; the fighting has begun. More cylinders arrive. Strange workings start in the pit.

As the invasion proceeds Wells uses a dramatic metaphorical description of a thunderstorm to set the scene for the first sighting of the fighting machines:

"The thunder-claps, treading one on the heels of another and with a strange crackling accompaniment, sounded more like the working of a gigantic electric machine than the usual detonating reverberations . . . And this Thing I saw! How can I describe it? A monstrous tripod, higher than many houses, striding over the young pine trees, and smashing them aside in its career; a walking engine of glittering metal, striding now across the heather; articulate ropes of steel dangling from it, and the clattering tumult of its passage mingling with the riot of the thunder . . . and I was galloping hard to meet it! . . . As it passed it set up an exultant deafening howl that drowned the thunder - 'Aloo! aloo!' . . ."

With their fighting machines and the Heat-Ray nothing can stop the Martians; using the heat rays and a deadly black smoke they annihilate the army and all other resistance and advance on London; during his flight the Narrator meets the Artilleryman and the Curate.

An exodus from London takes place; some superbly realised passages describe the dispossessed Londoners as refugees "en masse" and on the move to the north and east; dislocated in ways and numbers that only we can understand in hindsight through the dark days of this century, but surely could **never** have done in 1898! The last chapter of Book I of *The War of the Worlds* entitled "The Thunder Child" begins with a description of the exodus:

"Never before in the history of the world had such a mass of human beings moved and suffered together . . . And this was no disciplined march; it was a stampede - a stampede gigantic and terrible - without order and without a goal, six million people, unarmed and unprovisioned, driving headlong. It was the beginning of the rout of civilisation, of the massacre of mankind."

The chapter ends with the destruction and sinking of the ironclad warship, *Thunder Child,* which, although it does destroy two of the Martians, is annihilated by a third. As this symbol of England's Royal Navy is utterly destroyed, that navy that in 1898 ruled the waves, it is evident to all that Britannia can be beaten!

Wells's depiction of a Martian, inscribed in Ralph Straus's copy of *The War of the Worlds*. From Geoffrey West, *H. G. Wells: A Sketch for a Portrait* (1930)

In Book II the Martians gain control and a red weed grows over the land and chokes the rivers. The Narrator, in the company of the cowardly and selfish Curate, discovers the food supply for the Martians - man. The Curate is destined to become part of the Martian food chain. The Narrator meets up once more with the Artilleryman, who has plans to adopt what we could now call survivalist tactics to continue living free from the control of the Martians; that is, if he can actually make the effort to live as he preaches!

Disillusioned and alone, the Narrator returns to an apparently dead London. The only sound he hears is of the Martians wailing to each other "Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla." It is desolating, almost like a distress call, but the Narrator is slow to discern anything is wrong, even when he comes upon two seemingly dead,

motionless Martians. Suddenly, the Martian howling ceases.

He carries on walking, in "unendurable silence" into the night and hides, now afraid of the silence and unnatural calm.

". . . I hid from the night and the silence, until long after midnight, in a cabmen's shelter in Harrow Road. But before the dawn my courage returned, and while the stars were still in the sky I turned once more towards Regent's Park. I missed my way among the streets, and presently saw down a long avenue, in the half-light of the early dawn, the curve of Primrose Hill. On the summit, towering up to the fading stars, was a third Martian, erect and motionless like the others.

An insane resolve possessed me. I would die and end it. And I would save myself even the trouble of killing myself. I marched on recklessly towards this Titan, and then, as I drew nearer and the light grew, I saw that a multitude of black birds was circling and clustering about the hood. At that my heart gave a bound, and I began running along the road . . . I felt no fear, only a wild, trembling exultation, as I ran up the hill towards the motionless monster. Out of the hood hung lank shreds of brown, at which the hungry birds pecked and tore.

In another moment I had scrambled up the earthen rampart and stood upon its crest, and the interior of the redoubt was below me. A mighty space it was, with gigantic machines here and there within it, huge mounds of material and strange shelter-places. And scattered about it, some in their overturned war-machines, some in the now rigid handling-machines, and a dozen of them stark and silent and laid in a row, were the Martians - *dead!* - slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared, slain as the red weed was being slain; slain, after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth."

Critically, his other early science fiction masterpieces, *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau,* seem to be more highly regarded, yet *The War of the Worlds* is a seminal and classic addition to the science fiction genre. Its message remains as prescient and relevant to the late twentieth century, and beyond, as it was in 1898: a landmark of the best type of fiction which, one century on, has stood the test of time.

Textual Variations

The War of the Worlds had first appeared in serial form in *Pearsons Magazine* in 1897 but compared with the 1898 book edition there are many variations. The important chapter "The Man on Putney Hill" which features the survivalist plans of the Artilleryman is not in the 1897 serialisation and other changes almost make the serialisation a work in progress.

Amusingly, Wells, who had heartily disliked the illustations by Warwick Goble in *Pearsons,* dismissed them in the 1898 book with these words, the magazine being referred to as a pamphlet:

"They were no more like the Martians I saw in action than a Dutch doll is like a human being. To my mind, the pamphlet would have been much better without them."

Wells liked to adapt and revise his work to ensure its longevity and posterity. The best editions of *The War of the Worlds* are considered to be those based on the 1924 Atlantic ediiton, as corrected by Wells.

Other Variations on the Theme

Perhaps the most famous adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* was the notorious 1938 radio play broadcast by Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre Company; it was so realistic that it caused widespread panic and millions of Americans believed they were being invaded, and defeated, by Martians! Appropriately aired on Halloween night, 'live news bulletins' ensured authenticity as they interrupted orchestral and piano interludes with news of the invading Martians landing at Grovers Mill in New Jersey and invading the north-eastern states. There is a truly terrifying moment when the Heat-Ray strikes for the first time and transmission is lost; martial law is declared over the airwaves and the state militia is called in; instructions are given that houses should be evacuated.

Despite apologies the next day from Welles, H.G. Wells was infuriated by the extensive changes and liberties taken with his novel, primarily by taking it out of period and setting it in America; he was naturally concerned about the "deep distress and alarm" the broadcast had created throughout the United States.

Wells received an apology and damages from CBS but later on his anger did subside, and the two men subsequently met on good terms in Texas in 1940.

Wells died in 1946 so we will never know what he would have thought of the George Pal film adaptation of 1953. We can safely hazard a guess, however, that if he was angry with the 1938 radio play he would have been apoplectic with rage at the film version. Set in then modern day California, the film is entirely different in tone and spirit to the original book, although set pieces like the extermination of a 'deputation' party do take place. The main problem relates to the equivalent Curate character bravely going off alone to face down the Martians; totally at odds with the Curate of Wells' imagination. The climax of the church scenes and God being responsible for the eventual defeat of the Martians would also have angered Wells, as it did many lovers of the book. It is possible Wells might have approved of the reinterpretation of his tripod fighting machines with the quite beautiful manta ray-like machines of the film, since considered modern science fiction icons in their own right.

In 1978, Jeff Wayne's musical version of *The War of the Worlds* was released; dependent on your view of popular rock music, although the work does include impressive orchestral sections, it is the most true in spirit to Wells' great book, being set in the right

period **and** country! Many people admire the fine illustrations which accompany the recordings and the tripod fighting machines are particularly well realised!

As the centenary celebrating *The War of the Worlds* continues a live stage production of the musical version is being planned, as are other related products.

The ideas Wells propagated in *The War of the Worlds* still have influence to this day, with such recent films as *Independence Day* and the anarchic, black comedy *Mars Attacks!* reflecting that. H.G. Wells' great book *The War of the Worlds* remains, nevertheless, head and shoulders above all its adaptations and imitators, and will hopefully continue to bring as much pleasure to future generations of readers into the next century as it has to this one.

CHAPMAN, BUNTER AND DOYLE

Editor's Note: *We are delighted to publish these intriguing C.H. Chapman visualisations of Bunter. (In what other publication than our Annual would we see pictures of Brian Doyle's* The Who's Who of Children's Literature *being read by personalities as diverse as Billy Bunter and - see page 19 - movie-star Gregory Peck?) Brian provides opposite the background to these Chapman studies of Bunter.*

I enclose, as promised, the two C.H. Chapman original illustrations. The first shows Billy Bunter sitting in his favourite armchair (presumably in his Greyfriars study) enjoying (I hope) his copy of *The Who's Who of Children's Literature* by you-know-who. I had sent a copy of my book as soon as it was published (in September, 1968) to Chapman, since I had used as its frontispiece (with his permission) a composite picture showing Bunter ('from Babyhood to Boyhood' as CHC had inscribed it on the back) and which he had kindly given me when I had visited him at his home near Reading, Berkshire, to interview him for an article in the *Collectors' Digest* (I later interviewed him on his 90th birthday on tape for a broadcast that was transmitted in the BBC programme 'Home This Afternoon' in 1969). He was evidently so delighted with the illustration and its prominent position in my book that he sent me, almost by return post, this lovely picture which shows, I think, BB at his best and sunniest. This will be the first time Chapman's picture has ever appeared anywhere - anywhere, that is, apart from a prime position in a frame, in my sitting-room at home! (I like to imagine, by the way, that Bunter is reading my entry on C.H. Chapman himself in the book; or even, of course, relishing the frontispiece picture of himself . . .!)

The other Chapman drawing is, as I explain above, a special composite depicting the Fat Owl 'from Babyhood to Boyhood' (as Chapman put it) in more than 30 different pictures (even including a rare portrait of Mrs. Bunter). I was so taken with it, when Chapman generously gave it to me when I visited him at his home, for tea and an interview in 1968, that I wrote and asked if he would allow me to use it in my book *The Who's Who of Children's Literature* (which included detailed entries on himself as well as Charles Hamilton ('Frank Richards', the 'onlie begetter' of Billy Bunter). He wrote back at once giving me permission. It has never appeared anywhere else, apart from in my book, so I hope it may give some pleasure and amusement to 'SPCD' readers . . .

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Girls Crystal Annual	1960	AP	£6
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Mrs Hippo's Annual	1934	AP	£17
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Dandy Book	1985	DCT	£6
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Greyfriars Holiday Annual	1940	AP	£25
School Girls Own Annual	1924	AP	£14
School Girls Own Annual	1925	AP	£10
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William the Hyperactive

by Dr Nandu Thalange and Donald V Campbell

(being a re-working of Nandu's talk given at the 1998 WILLIAM DAY and later to the Northern Old Boys' Book Club)

Others have fallen victim to the scalpel of medical diagnosis - the Fat Boy in *Pickwick Papers* (Prader-Willi Syndrome); and Squirrel Nutkin (Giles de la Tourette's Syndrome). More famously, in *Collectors' Digest Annual*, we have subjected Bunter, Ponsonby and Coker to medical examination. Now it is William's turn to be dissected but, as always, with love and concern.

The hyperactive child is with us and - as seen by Richmal Crompton - has been with us for a very long time. but why should we think that William is hyperactive, or more specifically that he suffers from Attention-deficit Hyperactivity Disorder? A mere passing glance at William from a paediatrician would arouse the doctor's acute medical concern. For example:

William has both a **unique and a distinctive personality,** but he differs markedly from his family norm. Undoubtedly we can all deduce what Hubert Lane's parents might be like from the characteristics that Hubert exhibits. But extrapolating a Mr Brown from William Brown is an impossibility. There is some basis of medical truth in the old saw "like father, like son". Genes! But the discrepancies (more of a void) between William and his parents, and between his siblings Ethel and Robert, are marked. It is these differences that make William the original that he is.

William Brown is, alas and also, **an abysmal scholar,** yet his intelligence and imagination are well above average. He uses this native wit to good effect in disposing of the troublesome visitor that is embodied in Mr Cranthorpe-Cranborough the boarding school owner/headmaster (*William the Outlaw*). In the same book he also despatches Mr Faulkner the reluctant leopard hunter with aplomb. (That is to say, William has the aplomb - not Mr Faulkner!)

However on other occasions (should that be **most** occasions?) his plots have a bizarrely surreal aspect to them - elsewhere in the same book he decides to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

Facets of William's intelligence may be flawed but his intelligence is real enough. Educated at both primary and grammar school he clearly had enough intelligence to get to grammar school. (**The 11+ exam sought to test intelligence rather than learning.**) Yet his school reports were an invariable and constant source of disappointment to his parents.

Thus we have an intelligent boy who fails at school. Yet in *William & the Brains Trust* he demonstrates that he is capable of learning. A retired lecturer, Mr Polliter, comes to teach in William's school as the regular staff are in the services. Mr Polliter enthuses William on the subject of Napoleon. Clearly, if William's attention can be held, he is more than capable of learning.

Of the basic attributes of the hyperactive child - a **unique and distinctive personality,** an **abysmal scholar,** and both **impulsive and inattentive,** all are importantly displayed by William.

To aid the operation of medical diagnosis you will need to know more about hyperactivity. Hyperactivity is one of the so-called hyper-kinetic disorders. This group of afflictions is characterized by overactive and poorly controlled behaviour with a marked degree of inattention that is pervasive. That is, the inattention affects all aspects of the sufferer's life, being of early onset (before school age), and persisting through life.

The chief characteristic is a lack of concentration. This leads to a tendency to flit from activity to activity leaving each uncompleted. (Rather like one of your authors who shall remain nameless.) This "butterfly" mentality is coupled to disorganised, ill-regulated and excessive activity (unlike either of your authors). Recklessness and impulse mark out the hyperactive child and this is linked to a penchant for accidents and an inability to steer clear of disciplinary trouble. The hyperactive child gives rise to discipline problems not because of malevolence or defiance but from thoughtlessness.

William's trespass into the activities of those not connected to him is frequent and mainly inappropriate. Reserve is not a word that is conjured up when William Brown's name is mentioned - his lack of caution and his intrusion into the life of strangers is, perhaps, the basis of Master Brown's existence.

The diagnostic criteria normally applied to establish the "if or not" of hyperactivity fall under t main headings:

1. Inattention
2. Hyperactivity and Impulsivity
3. Symptoms (some) present from early age
4. Symptoms present in different situations
5. Significant impairment in social or academic functioning
6. Symptoms NOT due to an underlying disorder (such as autism, anxiety or conduct disorder)

Note: See the separate "boxed" items for an expansion of this checklist.

In extending and expanding the criteria we shall find that William more than matches the diagnostic criteria.

In truth it is almost farcical to say that William meets the required criteria. He has an astonishingly high match to the 22 sub-divisions listed (17 of 22 or 73% link). Just some will serve to highlight William's undeniable connections (we dare suggest) to hyperactivity.

Criterion 1 mentions an inability to listen and also proposes that the hyperactive child: **Often avoids or dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort; such as schoolwork or homework.**

From *William the Fourth - William's Extra Day.* Mrs Brown has explained Leap Year to William as the 29th February being an extra day.

"Bertram Roke was the good boy of the school.

'You're not going to school today, are you?' said William.

'Course,' said Bertram virtuously. 'Aren't you?'

'Me?' said William, 'Don't you know what day it is? Don't you know it's an extra day wot doesn't count in the ornery year. Catch me going to school on an extra day that doesn't count in the ornery year.'

'What are you going to do then?' said Bertram, taken aback.

'I'm goin' to have adventures.'

'You'll miss Geography,' said Bertram.

'Geography!' said the hero of adventures scornfully."

Criterion 2 indicates that the hyperactive: **Often interrupts or intrudes on others.**

In *William the Fourth - The Fête - and Fortune,* William has helped Miss Tabitha Croft to move house. He concludes that "she would be very inoffensive indeed . . ." and persuades her to give him tea despite that he had damaged or broken -

" . . two candlesticks, a fender, a lamp, a statuette, and most of the breakfast service . . ."

Over tea he engages in a very one-sided conversation:

". . . William waxed very conversational. He told her of his friends and enemies (chiefly enemies) in the neighbourhood - of Farmer Jones who made such a fuss over his old apples, of the Rev. P. Craig who entered into a base conspiracy to deprive quite well-meaning schoolboys of their Sunday afternoon freedom. 'If Sunday school's so nice an' good for folks as they say it is,' said William bitterly, 'Why don't they go? I wun't mind goin' then.'

He told her of Ginger's air gun and his own catapult, of the dead rat they found in a ditch and the house they had made of branches in the wood, of the dare-devil career of robber and outlaw he meant to pursue when he left school. In short he admitted her unreservedly into his friendship. . ."

This is the archetypical and eloquent William, eating and talking; talking and eating. But:

from *William and A.R.P.*

"Everyone talked at once except William. William waited patiently for the hubbub to subside. He'd have to give an account of himself soon enough. No need to precipitate matters. Meantime he was fixing his thoughts on the one bright spot in the whole situation. And the one bright spot in the whole situation was the piebald mouse. Bert or no Bert that, at any rate, was safely his . . ."

Here we have the exception proving the rule of his garrulousness.

Criterion 5 suggests: **Significant impairment in social or academic functioning.**

William is intent on becoming involved in politics *(William the Fourth).* His uncle is to hold a meeting of Liberal canvassers. William determines to be there. He remembers that in *The Sign of Death* Rupert the Sinister, the international spy, had watched a meeting of masked and secret agents by the means of concealing himself in a hidden chamber and cutting out the eye of a portrait and applying his own eye to the hole.

"There was no hidden chamber, but there was a hatch; there was no portrait, but there was the useless frame for which William had bartered his precious sixpence. He still felt bitter at the thought.

William felt, not unreasonably, that the sudden appearance in the dining room of a new and mysterious painting of a boy might cause his uncle to make closer investigations, so he waited till his uncle had taken his seat before he hung himself.

Ever optimistic he thought that the other Liberal canvassers would be too busy arranging their places to notice his gradual and unobtrusive appearance in his frame. With vivid memories of the illustrations in *The Sign of Death* he was firmly convinced that to the casual observer he looked like a portrait of a boy hanging on the wall.

In this he was entirely deceived. He looked merely what he was - a snub nosed, freckled, rough haired boy hanging up an old empty frame in the hatch and then crouching on the hatch and glaring morosely through the frame.

William's uncle opened the meeting.

'. . . and we must emphasise the consequent drop in the price of bread. Don't you think that point is very important, Mr Moffat?'

Mr Moffat, a thin pale youth with a large nose and a naturally startled expression, answered as in a

MR. MOFFATT MET WILLIAM'S STONY STARE. THE OTHER HELPERS WERE STARING BLANKLY AT THE WALL.

"DON'T YOU THINK THAT POINT IS VERY IMPORTANT?" ASKED WILLIAM'S UNCLE.

trance, his mouth open, his strained eyes on William.

'Er - very important."

'Very - we can't over emphasise it,' said William's uncle.

Mr Moffat put up a trembling hand as if to loosen his collar. He wondered if the others saw it too.

'Over - emphasise it,' he repeated in a trembling voice.

Then he met William's stony stare and looked away hastily, drawing his handkerchief across his brow.

'I think we can safely say," said William's uncle, 'that if the Government we desire is returned the average loaf will be three-halfpence cheaper.'

He looked round at his helpers. No one was taking notes. No one was making a suggestion. All were staring blankly at the wall behind him.

Extraordinary what stupid fellows seemed to take up this work - that chap with the large nose looked nothing more or less than tipsy!

'Here are some pamphlets that we should take round with us . . .'

DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

1. Inattention (6 or more required)

- Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, chores or other activities ✓
- Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities ✓
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to ✓
- Often does not follow instructions and fails to finish schoolwork or chores (not due to oppositional behaviour (defiance) or failure to understand) ✓
- Often has difficulty organising tasks and activities ✓
- Often avoids, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort such as school or homework ✓
- Often loses things necessary for tasks and activities (eg books, pencils, tools etc.)
- Is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli ✓
- Is often forgetful in daily activities

2. Hyperactivity and Impulsivity (6 required)

Hyperactivity

- Often fidgets with hands or feet and squirms in seat ✓
- May inappropriately leave classroom seat or dining table
- Runs or climbs excessively in inappropriate situations
- Often has difficulty playing or engaging in activities quietly ✓
- Is always "on the go" ✓
- Often talks excessively ✓

Impulsivity

- Tendency to blurt out answers before question completed
- Has difficulty waiting in turn ✓
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others, for example butting into conversations or games ✓

3. At least some symptoms present from an early age ✓

4. Symptoms present in different situations ✓

5. Significant impairment in social or academic functioning ✓

6. Symptoms are not due to an underlying disorder (such as autism, anxiety, conduct disorder) ✓

He spread them out on the table. William was interested. He could not see them properly from where he was. He leant forward through his frame. He could just see the words 'Peace and Prosperity . . .' He leant forward further. He leant forward too far. Accidentally attaching his frame round his neck on his way he descended heavily from the hatch. There was only one thing to do to soften his fall. He did it. He clutched at his uncle's neck as he descended. A confusing medley consisting of William, his uncle, the frame, and his uncle's chair rolled to the floor where they continued to struggle wildly."

William though was fortunate (and this is fortunate for us). Drug treatment now available for his sad affliction was never bestowed on William Brown and hence we have been able to enjoy his (mis) adventures for over half a century. Clearly Dr Bell of Hadley has not kept up with medical advances!

For the completist the full diagnostic chart is given here. Diagnosis of hyperactivity requires 6 or more matches from group 1; or 6 or more matches from group 2; and all of 3, 4, 5 & 6. Even these examples surely indicate that our William is hyperactive. The genuine William aficionado will doubtless identify particularly interesting and pertinent examples from the books that will satisfy the criteria expanded on here. GO TO IT - AND HAVE FUN!

The Hotspur's 'teacher in a class of his own – The Big Stiff'

by Des O'Leary

D C Thomson featured many school stories in their "Big 5" story papers - *Adventure, Wizard, Rover, Skipper, Hotspur* - but it was *The Hotspur* (1933-1959) which was dedicated to stories with a school background. But these yarns were very different from tales of Greyfriars or St Jim's. These were about schools for cowboys, outlaws, river-boat pilots, spies, pupils of future classes of 1975 - this last published in 1936 - for truants, for giants from a newly discovered valley, etcetera, etcetera. The schoolmasters too were unusual; G-men, pilots, hooded mystery-men, robots like the famous Iron Teacher, mounties, gangsters and so on.

It is true that its most well known establishment - Red Circle - featured a conventional setting of an English Boarding School with prefects, examinations, sports and inter-house rivalry but there was a bewildering array of pupils: Zulus, hill-billies, witch doctors, Red Indians, Chinese fleeing murderous Tongs, etc.

The teachers there were generally more familiar types: its dignified Head, the athletic Dixie Dale, the rotund Mr Barrel and, especially, Mr Smugg. "Smuggy" remains Red Circle's, and Thomson's, best remembered teacher. Stupid, pompous, vindictive and sly, loathed by all, he was the butt of innumerable misadventures and japes which provided much of the humour of Red Circle's long-running saga.

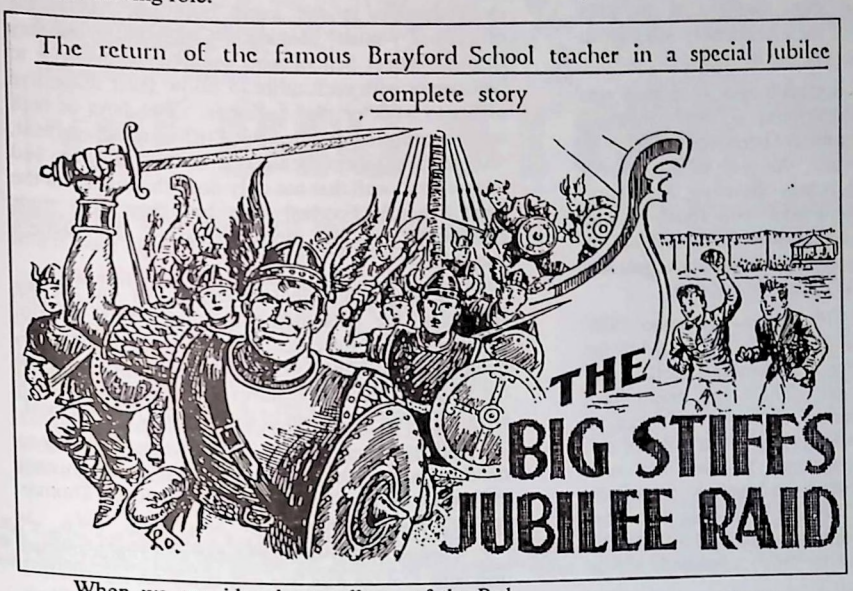
But Mr Smugg, that compendium of a teacher's worst faults, was not the only memorable teacher who made his bow in the first issue of the *Hotspur*. In his "Men Behind Boys' Fiction", Bill Lofts, a great fan of Red Circle, also singles out for high praise the outstanding and admirable teacher who is the subject of this article and, incidentally, also shared the author, R G Thomas, with Red Circle and therefore Smuggy.

Septimus Green, better known as the Big Stiff, was one of the most popular characters to appear in *The Hotspur* through the 1930s. He featured in 137 stories (and nine more appeared in 1944-5, the final series). He also had a story in the first *Hotspur Book for Boys* in 1935 as well as giving sensible and

helpful advice to school pupils in "The Big Stiff's TIPS FOR SCHOOLBOYS", a free booklet given with *The Hotspur* number 125 in January 1936.

We should note here that Adley & Lofts in their invaluable *Hotspur* catalogue (1983) have one or two minor errors and omissions. The 1935 Annual does **not** have the Big Stiff on the cover and his story inside it "Hands Up" is the **last** of the ten stories it contains, not the seventh.

The catalogue does not identify, either, the stories, "His Lordship from Paradise Alley" number 241-245 (1938), as featuring the Big Stiff in a typical problem-solving role.



When we consider the excellence of the Red Circle and the Big Stiff stories, it is easy to appreciate an author who really knows and understands school life. Even bearing in mind the catalogue's warning: ". . . it must be stressed that characters and series were in the main the creation of the editors who coached their authors in the Thomson method and style of writing . . ." it is obvious from many details that the writer is fully familiar with school routine. To give just one example. When a young lad runs away from his school where boxing has been banned and tries to insinuate himself into another one, the Big Stiff knows immediately that such a ruse cannot succeed since all pupils must attend school in their own district.

The character was a great favourite in Thomson's school story paper, even being accorded the rare privilege of a single complete story in issue number 88 in May, 1935. the Jubilee of King George V is celebrated in a lively story, "The Big Stiff's Jubilee Raid" where his class is busily involved in a re-enactment of the Viking attacks on their town. Typically the machinations of a jealous colleague are thwarted and that unpopular teacher ends up in the stocks being vigorously pelted with rotten fruit by the boys.

We can see the future course of Septimus Green's career in his very first story in issue 1 of *The Hotspur*.

When he arrives at Pendlebury School there is the disdain he has for his bullying, caning-mad predecessor. When he sits in on a Geography lesson he murmurs to himself "Poor lads, they look as if they've been slave driven for years. How they must hate school. Well, if I get a chance I'll alter that." When the other teacher is called away, the Big Stiff takes over and the geography of the western U.S.A. comes alive when he speaks to the boys from personal knowledge of the region, even rolling up his trouser leg to show an old bullet scar!

After he officially takes over next day, his unconventional approach continues and he distributes cigars to some lads he had noticed smoking in the street. Just as the green-faced smokers dash for the exit, the School Committee of Governors arrive. The School Manager, Farmer Buck, is indignant but keeps quiet when one of the others appreciates the new master's comment "They won't smoke again if I am any judge!"

As they end their visit, to the sound of their newly appointed teacher breaking all the school's canes over his knee, one of them says: "I think he's a big stiff!" And so Septimus Green acquires the nickname he would always bear.

The next lesson attended by the School Manager is another salutary surprise for him. His expectations that a history lesson will be a dry catalogue of dates to be learned becomes instead a lively series of little rhymes that the class enjoy learning. (These days we might look at this as an early manifestation of "rap"!) Farmer Buck is astonished to hear King Edward the First summed up thus:

> "Edward the First of battles had lots,
> He went to war with the Welsh and the Scots,
> And the Scotties, who with the Wallace bled,
> Made it exceedingly hot for Ted."

His reaction is one which the Big Stiff would often encounter: "Lessons aren't meant to be interesting!" Buck pronounces. Before he can dismiss Green, however, an aggressive adult who barges into the classroom bent on mischief is promptly despatched by a hefty punch on the jaw from the Big Stiff. The School Manager rapidly changes his mind.

I have detailed the Big Stiff's first day because it sets the tone for the rest of his adventures in *The Hotspur*.

He is young, active and tough. He hates caning and has trouble with his less enlightened colleagues, Headmasters and Governors. Parents, however, can see the keen response he gets from their youngsters and are usually supportive. He loves sport, especially boxing and football. He teaches History, Geography and Mathematics with flair and ingenuity. Science doesn't much appear. We can see here the type of curriculum that readers of *The Hotspur* would recognise. Not Latin or Greek, French or German, but the typical subjects encountered by boys in their elementary schools up to the age of 14 (the school leaving age).

His unorthodox approach and its success was appreciated by his employers, at any rate rapid promotion came to Septimus Green, from teacher to Headmaster to Inspector. As well as the schools where he worked, Pendlebury, Brayford, Applebury, Stoodbury Foundation School, and finally in the Second World War, Blockhouse Castle School, he was even selected by the Government to organise a search for youngsters of exceptional ability.

This series, 261-276, August - December 1938, entitled "Britain's Brilliant Boys" - discovered by the Big Stiff, has him aiding a Government "boffin" in a search for wasted talent; "whose fine brains have never been given a chance". Money is no object, he is told, and that "we want lads who are brilliant and just like ordinary youngsters. You will find such boys among the highest of the high and among the poorest of the poor." The plan is "to train these boys in a five year course so that at the end of that time they would be fitted to take command of the country's affairs".

When one remembers the ever more menacing political situation at that time, this is a timely British reaction.

As well as his teaching skills, the Big Stiff's astute mind was often called on in his stories to solve the little mysteries so typical of the Thomson papers. Whether it is picking out the right heir to a title from an equally disreputable pair of ragamuffins, or finding out the reason why an unwilling boy-jockey insists on staying in the employ of a shifty bookie who ill-treats him, or else solving the puzzle of a brilliant maths prodigy who seems to have lost all talent when once his contract has been bought out from the shady manager who is exploiting him on the music halls; these puzzles are all in a day's work to the Big Stiff. He is prepared to use unscrupulous methods, including blackmail, on crooks when the situation requires it. We may remember, on considering the puzzle solving ability of Septimus Green, that teachers are often called on to clear up little mysteries, e.g. "Who broke the classroom window?", "whose excuse for being late is the truth?" or "how do I find out what family problem is affecting someone's work for exams?" So problems are part of a teacher's ordinary work.

There's also the fact that author R G Thomas had written many Dixon Hawke detective stories for the *Adventure* in his time!

Astuteness allied with physical toughness and straight dealing are qualities easily appreciated by boys, and while not over-mindful of class warfare they do have an innate sense of justice which snobbery and arrogance offend. D C Thomson, mindful of their mainly working-class readers, held up to ridicule examples of haughtiness or pomposity but did not on the other hand set out to foment class envy. In the final series set in Blockhouse School, wartime evacuation has set down two very different establishments in the same building. It is the officials of "posh" Monkston College and ordinary Crumble Street School who squabble and refuse to collaborate with each other or allow their respective pupils to work or play together. The boys of both schools, with Headmaster Big Stiff's encouragement, soon learn to accept each other for what they are and cooperate so well that not only does the team win the local School's Football Cup but they help their Headmaster to foil crooks stealing the castle's valuables.

Although this final series is not one of my favourites, the outstanding characteristics remain: commonsense, tolerance, sport, lively lessons, humour, the foiling of villains with a good punch in the jaw! All the best features of a Thomson school story! And for me, those of the Big Stiff are the best.

What of their author? Even when we bring to mind Lofts & Adley's warning about the dominant influences of the Thomson editors, R G Thomas certainly deserves recognition.

Thanks to that indispensable and much missed magazine *Golden Fun*, we can enjoy an informative profile of Reg Thomas. In 19 (for 1989) Alan Clark writes with warm praise of this author "of many of the best stories which appeared in D C Thomson's boys' papers".

We learn that Reginald George Thomas was born on 24th June, 1899. Educated at Merthyr Tydfil, he served in the RNVR towards the end of the Great War. After taking his degree at Aberystwyth University College, he worked in Florence for a pharmaceutical company for a year before returning to England where he became a teacher at Forest Gate Elementary School. Married in 1923, he lived in Manor Park with his wife and, by 1931, had a daughter and a son. Short of money, by 1923 he had tried his hand at writing stories for various publishing houses like Amalgamated Press and Pearson's (*The Scout*). (He was himself a scoutmaster of the 21st Epping Forest Troop.) Finally success came and, giving up teaching, he became a full-time writer. About 1928 he started working for D C Thomson and ten years later he could claim to have written prolifically for their publications including the women's story paper *Red Star Weekly*. He supplied many stories for *Wizard*, *Skipper* and *Adventure* (a number of them featuring Thomson's star detective Dixon Hawke for the latter). After 1933 he mainly concentrated on *The*

Hotspur and their Red Circle and Big Stiff stories which were big factors in that paper's success.

He was certainly a favourite author of William Blain, Managing Editor of Thomson's Boys' Papers, who persuaded him to move to Dundee in 1941. There, as paper shortages decreased his work for Thomson, he worked for the Ministry of Information and became later a regular contributor to Amalgamated Press publications under a host of pen names as well as his own. Typically he was an active Sea Cadet Officer throughout the war.

He died in January 1956, having had the satisfaction of seeing his son, Graham, employed in A.P. comics like *Sun* and *Comet*.

I think we can say after looking at R G Thomas's work in the *Hotspur* that here was a man ahead of his time in teaching. His methods of encouraging boys to enjoy learning, to approach Britain's history through experiencing it, to participate wholeheartedly in "learning by doing" and to enjoy their schooldays without fear of the cane, all this shows the Big Stiff as the sort of schoolmaster that boys would have loved.

It seems to me that R G Thomas must have been a fine teacher as well as an excellent writer.

(This article could not have been written without generous help from Colin Morgan, that connoisseur of Thomson's story papers. Pictures copyright D.C. Thomson.)

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Oh, Ye Olde Victorian Christmas!

by Margery Woods

The chums were looking forward to their Victorian style Christmas with Marjorie Hazeldene. But they did not bargain for the disappearance of their two most headstrong companions; Smithy, the Bounder of Greyfriars, and Diana, the Firebrand of Cliff House . . .

Chapter 1 Recriminations . . . .

"I say you chaps. About Christmas?"

"What about Christmas, old fat man?" asked Nugent good-humouredly.

Harry Wharton laughed. "Don't encourage him!"

"We're deaf!" roared several voices in unison.

"The noisefulness of our deafness is ear-splitting." Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked up from a letter with an Indian stamp he had just collected from the rack in Hall.

It was the day before breaking up and the anticipation of the Christmas hols filled the Rag with the special kind of atmosphere that came only once a year. From the biggest, most comfortable armchair a fat face behind gleaming giglamps peered round the wing, and certain rustling sounds, suggesting that Bunter was refuelling again, came as he settled himself comfortably amid the cushions. He yelled: "I'm talking to you idiots along there. What about Christmas?"

"Oh, Christmas, the joys of Christmas!" carolled Bob Cherry. "What, oh what, is Christmas without Bunter?"

"Bliss," chuckled Nugent.

"I know what it is with him," grunted Johnny Bull. "Purgatory."

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter. "You know I was going to Mauly's place. I even turned down Smith's most pressing invitation to join him and Reddy. Of course they ain't out of the top drawer, you know. Not like Mauly's aristocratic connections."

"So that's why Smithy looked so upset ten minutes ago," sniggered Harold Skinner.

"Does Mauly know that he's not quite as top drawer as the Royals at Bunter Court but you make allowances?" chortled Peter Todd.

"Will you shut up!" Bunter hollered. "Fact is, Mauly, the silly ass, must have got his dates mixed up. He's gone!"

"How inconsiderate of him," tut-tutted Snoop.

The chums grinned. Several of them had seen Lord Mauleverer depart that morning, having by some miracle got himself out of bed at an alarmingly early hour. And like the beasts they were the Famous Five had failed to inform Bunter of that important fact.

Mauly had not been the only early departee - with permission - that morning. Tom Redwing had received a phone call the previous evening from his father telling him that all plans for Christmas were cancelled because of the sudden death of an old naval colleague. It seemed there was no-one else to call on to help the widow see to everything. so with the Head's ready co-operation Tom had hastily packed and gone to meet his father. The planned holiday with Smithy in Brittany was not to be, which explained the Bounder's gloomy mien that morning.

"You're not listening," yapped Bunter. "Where are we going?"

"Anywhere you're not!"

"You'll be able to accept Smithy's pressing invitation after all," taunted Skinner. "He'll be needing someone to . . ."

"Who's taking my name in vain?"

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, stood at the door, his face dark with anger, and silence fell on the Rag. Bunter piped down, deeper into his chair and out of the Bounder's line of vision. All thoughts of Christmas invites seemed to have left his fat head.

"Come on, Smithy, old man. Take a pew and have a cookie."

The Famous Five shuffled along the window seat to make room for the Bounder.

"Tough, what," said Wharton as Smithy stared angrily through the window before sitting down. "But it's tough on Tom as well."

"Think I don't know that?" snapped Smithy. "I wanted to go with him but he wouldn't hear of it, said it would be a sombre Christmas and he wouldn't dream of expecting me to share it." Smithy's mouth compressed bitterly. "Doesn't Reddy know me better than that after all this time? Does he really think I'm incapable of sharing the rough times as well as the smooth? I'm no fair-weather friend."

The chums were silent. They knew this was true. Despite his faults, and they were many, the Bounder was intensely loyal to Tom Redwing and would not have hesitated one moment before accompanying Tom to what would doubtless be a chill and cheerless Christmas amid strangers.

Smithy hunched moodily by the window while the chums made sympathetic noises. "And now!" Smithy flung round. "My father has just informed me that he is staying over in L.A. to wrap up some new business deal in Silicon Valley. Oh, he'll have a great time, knowing American hospitality. But I am to stay here. Here!" The Bounder seemed on the point of exploding with rage. "He says he doesn't trust me left to my own devices in town. And the Vernons don't want to know. As if I do! He says it won't hurt me for once. Boys often have to stay here for hols and the Head makes arrangements for a good nosh-up and a trip to the panto in Courtfield." Smithy's expression showed plainly his opinion of this Christmas programme. "Of course he wouldn't have worried if you lot hadn't finalised your plans."

"You know you'd have been welcome if we'd been playing host at one of our own pads," said Harry awkwardly, "but it's out of our hands this time."

"I know, but thanks for the thought. Where're you off to, anyway?"

There was a silence, then Bob Cherry glanced warily down the Rag before he said: "It's a bit of a mystery trip. No vacancies, I'm afraid."

Smithy's frown darkened again. There was something almost like smug satisfaction in Cherry's voice. Then the Bounder's sharp wits made one instant connection. "Is that fat thieving frog in here?"

There was a chuckle, then a squeak of alarm from the far end of the Rag. In a few strides Smithy reached the fireside where the fattest form in the Remove was endeavouring unsuccessfully to shrink itself to the size of an invisible atom. One look at the chocolate and crumb encrusted face told its own story.

"Here - somebody keep him off!" Bunter quavered. "I never saw your old hamper arrive, Smithy, old bean. I . . ."

"And you never followed Trotter up to my study!" the Bounder snarled. "And you never dipped your thieving paws into it, you fat, pilfering porpoise."

Rage gave Smithy added strength. He grabbed the back of the chair and with one furious heave toppled it over. Bunter crashed to the floor, yelling, while over him showered the contents of a large box of chocolates he'd endeavoured to conceal in the cushions behind him. A tin of biscuits followed, encountering Bunter's head on the way, and revealed beside the chair were a large tin containing a fruit cake from Harrods and a pot of strawberry jam. Nemesis descended on Bunter.

"Ow! Yow! Gerroff you beast! I never . . . Ow! These came for me . . ."

"And you're going to have them!" The Bounder began to force cake and chocolate into a normally very capacious mouth. But Bunter, for once, did not seem in the least bit peckish. He spluttered and struggled as the furious Bounder stuffed more cake and chocolate down his fat neck and as the final epicurean highlight of this unconventional feast Smithy wrenched open the pot of jam and upended it. Rich, luscious strawberry preserve cascaded over Bunter's head, trailing affectionately into his ears and eyes and pomading his hair with glistening pink, as though ensuring he should have the full benefit of its succulent vintage.

"Now you'll have to have your annual bath!"

Bunter spluttered and choked and gasped while waves of mirth echoed round the Rag. No-one had a great deal of sympathy for Bunter. Most of them had suffered his predatory attentions at one time or another, Bunter's philosophy having always been generous - along the lines of "what's yours is mine and what's mine is my own". Then Wharton stepped forward. "That'll do, Smithy. Don't choke him."

"I know what I'd like to do," grated Smithy, aiming his boot at the tightest check trousers at Greyfriars. He tipped the remaining chocolates over Bunter's head and snapped: "Now clean that mess up

before the pre's arrive." A final kick and the Bounder stormed out of the Rag, not feeling a whit spent of his rage at the prospect of his ruined Christmas - and the ruination of his tuck hamper.

Chapter 2. . . . and More Recriminations.

Explosions of paddy and much heart-burning were also taking place over at Cliff House.

"What's the matter with everybody?" Clara Trevlyn, Tomboy of the Fourth, barged into Study 4. "Diana's stomping around like a volcano looking for a place to erupt and Bessie's whingeing like a wet weekend, and - oh, she's here."

The plump duffer was sat by the fire, her woebegone face somewhat swollen by a large toffee Babs had supplied by way of comfort. Mabs was patting the fat one's shoulder and Marjorie Hazeldene watched, her sweet face worried.

Clara stared at the group. "For heaven's sake! It's Christmas! What's the matter, Fatima?"

"I - I kik-kik can't come with you tut-to Mim-Majorie's."

"For the hols? Why ever not?"

"Bib-bib because I - I have t-to -"

"Will somebody tell me in English?" Clara demanded impatiently. "Or this will take all day."

"It's because of her brother," Marjorie said sadly. "We have to include him with the boys for Christmas or Bessie has to stay at home."

Bessie gulped. "You know mum-my mother dotes on Billy. He's always bib-been her favourite. She can't understand why nobody at school likes him."

"We could tell her." Clara met the troubled glances of her chums. They had no time for Bessie's objectionable brother and understood all too well why his schoolmates objected to his insufferable company. After all, they had to put up with him all during the school year.

"Sus-so if Billy has to stay at home I have to as well." Bessie sniffed miserably and deposited another of Barbara Redfern's toffees in a safe place.

They looked with sympathy at Marjorie, for the problem was hers. This year Marjorie had realised her dearest wish: to play hostess at holiday time and return all the generous hospitality of her friends. For Marjorie's father, the Rector of a country parish in Suffolk, was not a wealthy man and gave every penny he could spare to the needy. Now Uncle Ben had come home from Africa to great acclaim for his years of exploration in the mysterious City of Shest. His books, lecture tours and TV documentaries in the States and Europe had brought him wealth, and he decided that a Christmas celebration was in order. Marjorie could invite her chums, as many as could be accommodated in the rambling old Rectory and no expense spared. He had never forgotten his niece's devoted nursing during his illness at Shest, even when their lives were at peril through the treachery of his trusted assistant, Zoe Barlingford. His only regret now was that Jemima and Colonel Carstairs and M'lizi could not join the party until New Year's Eve. Then they would all be reunited.

Marjorie had been glowing with happiness, planning and burning the phone line to Mrs Benson, one of her father's devoted church ladies who would see to the preparations until Marjorie got home. and then her brother Peter had dropped his bombshell. He wouldn't be home for Christmas! He'd had a super invite from Ponsonby of Highcliffe. Marjorie's heart had chilled, with fear as well as disappointment. Ponsonby and his cronies were the last companions she wished for her wayward brother. And now Bessie . . . Marjorie bit her lip; they couldn't leave dear duffer Bessie behind, and yet . . .

Clara's heart ached for her chum, faced with this decision. But the other guests must be considered, and how would the boys react?

"What's the matter with Diana?" Mabs broke the silence.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with Diana. Diana is not pleased!"

The Firebrand of the Fourth, Diana Royston-Clarke herself, stood at the door, her undeniably lovely face under its cloud of shining blonde hair marred now by a not so lovely scowl. "And what's up here?" she demanded. "Is it Christmas, or a wake?"

Babs sighed. "What can we do for you, Diana?"

"Provide a lonely orphan with a refuge for Christmas."

"What? You? Pull the other one!"

"It's true." Diana perched on the corner of the study table and seethed fury. "The cruise is off. My father has got some urgent business that can't wait until after Christmas. He's going to be holed up with three cronies in the wilds of Scotland. Very hush hush. No wives, no secretaries, no girl friends. And I'm to stay here. Here!" Diana almost spat the word. "Where I'm safe, he says! With Connie Jackson, who's volunteered to stay and look after those two second formers whose homes are in quarantine for blackleg fever or something. Poor little perishers. Can you imagine it?"

They couldn't.

"A fate worse than death," shuddered Mabs.

With Connie Jackson! The most unpopular prefect at Cliff House. They all shuddered. Even Bessie forgot her woes and shuddered.

"And my luggage is already on its way to a tropical cruise!"

Impulsively Marjorie said: "Would you like to join us, Di?"

"Could I?" Diana slid off the table. "Do you mean it?"

"Of course," Marjorie said warmly. "Only - it's going to be a homely affair. We live in a quiet village. Life tends to revolve round the church, and we'll be making our own amusement. There won't be the kind of excitement and sophistication you're used to. But you are more than welcome."

"I accept!" Diana flung her arms round Marjorie and waltzed her round the table. "I shall adore a

homely Christmas! I'm going to phone Father before you change your mind."

"One problem solved," sighed Babs. "Now, what about Bessie?"

Marjorie's worried expression returned. "Shall we have a vote? Can we leave Bessie? Raise your hands for yes."

Not one hand was raised and Marjorie turned to the door. She said quietly: "I'd better phone Bob."

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Bob was out of the House. It was Wharton who took the call. His voice warmed when he heard Marjorie's voice, but a frown narrowed his brows when she broke the news to him. "I understand," he said, "but I can't pretend to be capering with joy at the prospect of goodwill to all men when Bunter's one of them. But do what you think best, and we'll do out best to keep him in order. We're all looking forward to it tremendously."

"Thanks, Harry," said Marjorie. "Oh, and we've got Diana with us now. Otherwise she says she'll be an orphan for Christmas."

"The more the merrier," laughed Harry. "Actually, we've got an orphan here as well. Don't know what he's going to do."

"Who?"

"Poor old Smithy. His holiday plans have fallen through at the last minute and he's been told to stay here. He is not pleased!"

"Oh, no!" Marjorie's exclamation was full of concern. She had not forgotten her dreadful experience at the Abbey and how Smithy had rescued her. It had changed her opinion of the reckless Bounder of Greyfriars, a boy she had always wanted to like even as she realised how dangerously unpredictable he could be. At the Abbey she had discovered a warm and kind side to his nature that he rarely permitted others to know.

"Are you still there?"

Harry's voice brought her back to the present. "Yes . . . I was wondering . . . Harry, do you think he'd like to join us? I mean, it wouldn't be the lap of luxury - as I told Diana. We live simply and . . ."

"Marjorie!" the Captain of the Remove broke in sharply. "Smithy might be a lot of things but he's no snob. And never ever undervalue yourself," he added sternly. "I'm sure Smithy will jump at the chance, he - look, he's coming along now. Shall I call him?"

"Yes, please."

Harry did so and held out the phone. The Bounder came sullenly, muttering as he accepted the instrument. Then suddenly his expression changed like magic. He turned his back on Harry as he talked, and Harry backed away as the one-sided exchange continued in a way that seemed highly satisfying to the Bounder. "Yes, thank you! Thanks." he said at last and put down the phone. He grinned, leapt in the air and his arm swung up to give a triumphant snap of his fingers.

"I take it you're with us?" Harry smiled wryly. He was glad that Smithy's problem was solved. Smithy could be a great holiday man when he chose, and in this particular case he'd choose! But somehow Harry was not sure how Bob Cherry would welcome this particular solution to Smithy the Orphan's Christmas! And there would be Bunter . . .

Wharton left a very happy Bounder and went to break the news to his chums.

Chapter 3 Arrivals . . .

"We're nearly there!" Marjorie exclaimed excitedly.

The chums craned to see out of the taxi which was carrying them on the last lap of their journey. And quite a journey it had been, needing several changes of trains and taxis before they reached the heart of the Suffolk countryside where Marjorie lived.

"Look," she pointed. "That's Colonel Ryan's house, the oldest in the village. But it's not as fascinating as the one just ahead. Everyone calls it old Faversham's Place, though that isn't its real name," she laughed. "But there was an old lady who lived there like a recluse and when she died they couldn't find the heir. He'd just vanished off the face of the earth, years ago, and it has just been left exactly as it was when she died. Here it is."

"Straight out of Dickens," exclaimed Mabs as they saw the ancient black and white timbered mansion brooding amid its dark trees and the shadowy, overgrown wilderness that once had been beautiful grounds.

"I'd love to explore it," said Smithy.

"So would I," said Diana eagerly. "Any chance of that?"

"Afraid not, it's locked up and the trustees come out two or three times a year to inspect it. They'd be here last month. Right, we're home now," cried Marjorie.

The two taxis had reached the foot of the long winding village street and crossed the shallow, picturesque ford that gave Inglesford its name. On a sharp rise to the right was the parish church, square towered Norman with flint and stone flushwork, and just beyond it the rambling Victorian Rectory that was Marjorie's home. The barred gate looked as though it stood open permanently, as did the wide front door from which a tall, slightly stooped man came hurrying.

Marjorie rushed across the gravel drive to embrace her father, while the second taxi drew up and the chums all tumbled out eagerly. Bunter and his sister were last, having got entangled in their seat belts, and Bunter suddenly found himself held back from the excited flurry of introductions. His arms were firmly gripped by Smithy and Wharton at each side of him. "Now listen, Bunter," they hissed. "Remember what we told you. If you don't behave yourself we'll kick you down to that ford and roll you in it. Understand?"

"Leggo, you beasts." Bunter tried to free himself but the grip on his arms was inexorable.

"We mean it," Harry warned, keeping his voice low. "You are only here through moral blackmail, because the girls think more of your sister than we do of you."

"Now go and meet your host," added Smithy, with a final painful grip, "and mind your manners because we'd love to mend them for you."

Something of this seemed to get through to Bunter's fat intellect. Or perhaps it was the sumptuous tea awaiting them. None of them knew that Diana and Smithy had each been fired by the same idea and hastily ordered huge hampers of goodies to be sent to the Rectory as their contribution to the festivities. Nor did they know until all the introductions had been sorted out that the Rector's band of loyal parish ladies were all superb cooks who had baked a truly wonderful spread of cakes and pies and savouries and great platters of mince pies. They bustled round making sure that everyone was being looked after. Their officer in charge seemed to be Mrs Benson, of the immaculately coiffured silver hair and frilly blue apron. At one point she drew Marjorie aside to explain something that brought a flicker of worry to cloud the gentle girl's face. Marjorie rejoined her friends.

"I don't know how to tell you this, but . . ."

"Now, my dear," Mrs Benson broke in, "don't alarm them! It's simply that we had several last minute guests and we've run out of sleeping space. So we've arranged for two of your party to sleep at Mrs Connor's next door at Glebe House. She'll make you very comfortable - she takes in guests during the tourist season and runs a gift shop in the High Street. But of course you'll be here from first thing until last thing at night. Now I'll leave you to decide which of you is going there, then I can take you and Mr Draco to meet Mrs Connor."

"I'm sorry," said Marjorie, "but the roof's been leaking badly after that last storm and two of the attics are too damp to use. And there's Mr Draco, a friend of Uncle Ben's who coming with him." Marjorie looked on the point of tears and repeated, "I'm so sorry."

"Shall we sue her under the misrepresentation act?" said Clara.

"Getting us here under false pretences?" laughed Babs. "Oh, you idiot girl!"

They fell on their young hostess, laughing and teasing and hugging her while arguing over who was to be boarded out.

"No problem," said Harry and Frank Nugent. "We will."

"No you don't." Diana said firmly. "I was last in, so I insist."

"And I was last in," said Smith, "so I insist. That's settled."

Mrs Benson loomed again. "I'm sure Mr Draco will keep you in order."

Diana and Smithy exchanged glances, and the chums suppressed grins; anyone who thought they could keep the Firebrand and the Bounder in order was likely to discover that they had met not one but two Waterloos. At that moment Uncle Ben arrived, to a joyous reunion with his niece and to introduce the thin, rather sallow-faced Wallace Draco.

"It's enter-the-villain time," whispered Smithy.

"I don't like the look of him, either," responded Diana softly.

"Appearances can be deceptive," cautioned Harry. "He's probably just bewildered at the sight of us and the Bunters!"

The evening passed in a friendly whirl, finding their way around, getting to know Mr Hazeldene and making Christmas plans. Marjorie had planned a Victorian or Dickensian Christmas, to start on Christmas Eve, dressing up and playing old-fashioned charades, acting out their favourite classics.

"Bunter will make an ideal Tiny Tim - he looks so frail," said Smithy cruelly, eyeing the recumbent Fat Owl, who was now full to bursting point and asleep beside the fire.

It was nearing ten when the redoubtable Mrs Benson announced it was time she was going and she might as well marshal the sleepers-out to their night-time quarters. It was then that Diana and Smithy appeared to be among the missing. Their collection of distinctive designer luggage still stood in the hall, except for two small overnight bags.

"Typical," said Clara.

"Typical," agreed Harry.

"And Mr Draco seems to have vanished," said Mrs Benson. She gave her jolly laugh. "I suppose he's old enough to look after himself. I'll just cut through the back garden and see if your chums are there safely."

Mrs Benson, knowing of the narrow cutting between the gardens of the Rectory and Glebe House, got there just as Diana and Smithy, unaware of this convenient short cut, had walked quite a distance round by the road and were studying the name plate on the door as Mrs Benson came round the side of the house.

"Oh, there you are." she said rather sharply. "We've been looking for you."

Diana decided to smile sweetly. "We didn't want to bother you so we just ambled round to find the place."

"We are let off our leashes for an hour on Sunday afternoons, just to practise directional sense," said Smithy, deadpan.

Mrs Benson looked taken aback. Perhaps it was just as well that the door opened at that moment to reveal a tall, bespectacled woman with pale, authoritarian features. Hastily Mrs Benson made introductions, adding that Mr Draco would be along later, and said she would let them know at the Rectory before she went home.

Mrs Connor admitted them into a dazzling white hall and a powerful emanation of furniture polish. She opened a door. "The visitors' sitting room, although I don't suppose you'll require it." They

peered dutifully into another aura of furniture polish, to note neatly regimented chairs and small tables, and frilly net curtains so stiff in their folds that no draught would ever have the temerity to ruffle them. Obedient arrangements of artificial sunflowers and holly graced tables or cabinets at ordered intervals as Mrs Connor by-passed the dining room - "You won't require meals" - marched them briskly up the stairs, indicated the bathroom and showed them into two big bedrooms on the first floor. A smile tried to relax her features but failed. "I hope you'll be comfortable. Would you like morning tea?"

"Yes, please," said Diana and Smithy together.

"Seven-thirty, then. Goodnight."

"Oh," Smithy checked her. "Could we have keys, please?"

"It will save us disturbing you," Diana added in her polite voice, trying not to think of Miss Bullivant, and not giggle.

"Yes, I think so."

"And could we borrow a torch - we may pop back across the garden to say goodnight?" Smithy paused, "and a phone directory, please." Smithy returned downstairs with Mrs Connor. Soon he was back and tapped on Diana's open door. "May I come in?"

"Be my guest." Diana was unpacking her overnight bag by the simple means of upending it onto the bed. "Success?"

"Yes. I say, do you want to go back to the Rectory? I thought we could phone Marjorie and then maybe have an amble through the village. I could do with some air."

"Me too."

"I'll just go and fish out my mobile."

When Smithy returned Diana had freshened her face and decided her bedroom would do. It was warm and spacious, the water was hot, the towels thick, soft and snowy, there was a rack of novels and a small TV, and an assortment of toiletry samples to try.

The phone call made on Smithy's mobile, the pair stole downstairs in the manner of those long practised in the gentle art of bounds-breaking and let themselves out into the night. Although it was frosty it was clear and still, with a half moon riding high in the heavens. There were quite a few folk abroad and the village had taken on a touch of Christmas magic with the fairylit trees in cottage windows and the ornate displays of outdoor coloured lights festooned in trees and over windows. The village inn spilled warmth and light and cheery voices, and several of the locals bade "Goodnights" to the two youngsters in the friendly way of the countryside.

Diana and Smithy strolled on, discussing their schooldays, the respective merits and drawbacks of their fathers, whose ears might have burned had telepathy been a more widely held skill. Their chums would have been surprised at the easy camaraderie that was forming between the petulant Firebrand and the equally paddy-prone Bounder. Indeed, Clara and Harry and Bob had half expected an instant clash of personalities and speculated on the possible outcome. Perhaps it was because neither Diana nor Smithy had anything to prove to each other, and neither had the least fear of meeting any reproaches or lectures regarding behaviour from the other. Instinctively they understood each other very well. Instead of fire meeting fire, like had met like.

"Look," said Diana. "Isn't that the house they called Old Faversham's Place?"

"Yes." Smithy stopped. "It looks quite sinister by night. Strange it should stand deserted like that for so long."

Suddenly Diana grabbed Smithy's arm. "Is that a light in that end window?"

"I think it's just a reflection." He moved forward, through the open, sagging gates, and Diana followed. "Look," she whispered, "there's a car there, right in the shadows."

"I thought the place was empty." Smithy moved on, keeping to the cover of the trees, then his arm shot out to bar Diana's way. She ducked back, then saw the running figure emerge from the side of the old house. Then two more figures appeared, apparently in pursuit. To the horror of the watchers one of the pursuers caught up with the first figure and struck him a violent blow on the head. The figure toppled and Smithy leaped forward. "Hey! Stop that! Stop!"

Diana had never lacked courage. She shot forward, adding her yells of protest, and suddenly the two assailants curled away towards the car. Smithy knelt beside the man sprawled on the ground. "Are you all right?"

The man stirred and groaned. "Ouch! Keep off. I . . ."

"They've gone." Diana said. "It's all right." Even as she spoke the car accelerated past them, tyres squealing on the gravel.

They helped the man get unsteadily to his feet, looking curiously into his face. He looked to be in his late twenties, casually dressed and not much taller than Smithy.

"Do you know those men?" Smithy asked.

The man shook his head. "Never seen them before, but then I've just got here." Something in his tone suggested he wasn't being entirely forthcoming, but then, Diana reasoned, he'd just had a hefty whack on the head. "Can we help you home?" she asked.

"Thanks, but I'm just staying at the inn. It's not far."

"We'll walk you back," said Smithy, "and maybe somebody there can see if you need first-aid."

The man did not demur, until they reached the inn, where he stopped. "Thanks again, but I don't want any fuss."

A bit doubtfully they nodded. There was little else they could do and at least he would be safe at the inn. They turned and retraced their steps. At last Diana said: "There wouldn't be trustees on inspection at this time of night."

"Wonder what they were up to," Smithy mused. "No good, I suspect." He paused while they navigated

the ford in single file. "I wouldn't mind a look round that old house tomorrow night. Are you game, Di?"

"Definitely. Are we going to tell the others?"

The Bounder hesitated. "No, not yet. There'd be at least nine of them trying to sneak out of the Rectory. Imagine the racket if the Bunters woke up!"

Diana giggled. "Okay. Dark clothes then, and we'd better buy a couple of pocket torches tomorrow." Abruptly she sobered. "I'm glad we're keeping this dark."

"Why?"

"Didn't you notice anything about those men?"

"No, I was too busy trying to distract them from their victim."

"I saw one of them," said Diana, "when the car went past. It was Mr Draco."

Smithy stared hard at her under the lanternlight outside Glebe House. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, but do you think they'd believe me if we blurted it all out tomorrow? Uncle Ben's friend?"

"No." Smithy opened the gate and took her arm to guide her along the path. Noiselessly the two conspirators eased open the door and crept up to their rooms. Neither gave even a thought to what might be awaiting them at the old Faversham place . . .

Chapter 4 . . . and Departures.

There was a certain air of consternation amid the sleepy-eyed guests at the Rectory when Diana and Smithy ambled over for breakfast at eight. It seemed Bunter had had a bad night; which meant they'd all had a bad night.

Bunter had overeaten as usual and had a nightmare. This had caused him such a wrestle with the bedclothes he had fallen out of bed. Bunter and the floor had had a rather violent confrontation, and Bunter was never the man to keep trouble to himself. He had been given one of the attic bedrooms to himself, more out of consideration for anyone deputed to share with him than for his personal comfort. The uproar had woken the Famous Five in the other two big attics, and unfortunately the thump of Bunter's avoirdupois landing on the floor had awakened Bessie, whose bedroom was immediately below. Bessie was convinced the ceiling had fallen in on her and reacted accordingly. The outcome was the arousing of the entire household. Mugs of tea were dispensed, Bunter was dosed with stomach powder, Bessie was calmed and reassured that Hurricane Hetty had not missed the Caribbean and chosen her instead, and finally at three o'clock in the morning peace had descended again on the Rectory. Hence Diana and Smithy did not attract much interest as to how they had fared at the guest house.

Bunter made a rapid recovery and rapid inroads into a large breakfast, but it was not enough to give him sufficient strength to help with the clearing away. Bunter vanished. The chums, realising that staff at the Rectory was limited to one cleaning lady who came three mornings a week and the culinary offerings from the faithful ladies of the church, automatically set to work to wash dishes, reset the two big tables in readiness for lunch and tidy their rooms.

Then there was the tree to bring in, set up, and decorate, holly to gather and fairy lights to wrestle with. "Why do they never work even though they are perfectly okay when taken down the previous year?" groaned Bob Cherry, checking the plug. Bessie, the star cook of Cliff House, volunteered to help Marjorie prepare a ham and salad lunch and clean the vegetables in readiness for the evening meal when Captain Bossyboots - as they had nicknamed Mrs Benson - was bringing a couple of large home-made pies.

"Dad is terrified of her," Marjorie confided. "She's so efficient and bossy, but she's a tower of strength in the parish."

After lunch they explored the village, did some last minute Christmas shopping at Mrs Connor's attractive gift shop, and returned to the Rectory, well pleased with their day and the transformation they had effected in the Rectory.

Marjorie's father was quietly delighted and said the place hadn't looked so Christmassy for years. Uncle Ben returned with Mr Draco from a day's shopping expedition to Norwich loaded with mysterious and intriguing parcels.

Smithy said quietly to Diana, "Still positive?"

"Oh, yes," she whispered back. "Look at him. He looks so meek and shy, until you look at his eyes. They're like cold pebbles."

Eye pebbles or not, Mr Draco certainly didn't look capable of felling a man and leaving him unconscious, maybe even dead, and bolting at the first hint of interruption. Then Mr Draco caught Diana's unwary glance. A mask seemed to drop over his face as he comprehended the striking beauty of her oval face and challenging blue eyes under that glorious blonde hair. Something like suspicion, recognition? and sheer steely hate suddenly flashed into those cold eyes, even as he continued to puff placidly at his pipe. Diana experienced a sudden chill, then recovered. She smiled at him deliberately and asked: "Do you know this part of the world, Mr Draco?"

"Not at all," he returned smoothly. "This is my first visit, for which I'm indebted to my friend here." He clapped a hand on Uncle Ben's shoulder.

"My first visit too," said Diana brightly. "I'm so looking forward to exploring . . ."

"Shut up, Di!" Smithy hissed in her ear. "Don't needle him." He nodded at Draco and drew Diana towards the piano, where Bob Cherry was trying to play Good King Wenceslas and keep Marjorie beside him on the piano stool to play the treble hand. He banged a wrong note and Harry winced.

"Sounds more like jangle bells," scoffed Johnny Bull. "Let Wharton play, he's a better pianist than you."

"Who says?" Bob started on Chopsticks and was bodily hauled from the piano by his chums. They wrangled happily until Wharton took over and a Christmas sing-song got going. But the jollity did not prevent Smithy noticing Mr Draco's departure just

before ten. Smithy waited ten minutes before nudging Diana and the pair bade the company goodnight.

Mrs Connor appeared in the hall as they let themselves in. "Is Mr Draco in?" asked Smithy, somewhat to Diana's surprise.

"No, did you want him?" asked Mrs Connor.

Smithy shook his head. "Just that somebody dropped a pen tonight and we wondered if it was his. But we'll see him tomorrow."

"By the way," asked Diana, "is it safe to go walking at night?"

"Safe?" Mrs Connor stared. "What do you mean? Of course it's safe."

Smithy grinned. "We just wondered what the crime rate was like round here. You know - burglary, muggings, abductions. Murder!"

Mrs Connor looked horrified. "There's nothing like that. Nothing at all! This isn't London, you know!" She bristled away kitchenwards and Smithy whispered, "We've really upset her now!"

"Well at least there haven't been any robberies," Diana said.

Half an hour later they stole forth, garbed in dark slacks and jackets. The night was cloudier than the previous evening and they were glad of the pocket torches they'd bought that afternoon. There was no indication of anyone about when they reached the old house and began a cautious, exploratory circuit, testing doors and windows, all of which, disappointingly, were securely fastened.

"What a washout," grumbled Diana, whose soul was beginning to crave excitement. The eerie shadows and sounds of the night made an ideal creepy setting. "Wish we could get into the house," she sighed.

"Well we can't break in, unless you want to bring disgrace to the Rectory. And it's probably crawling with spiders and mice, even rats," Smithy added mischievously.

"I'm not frightened of them," she said scornfully, "only of . . ."

"Ssh. Listen," he interrupted. "There's a car coming."

They drew back into the cover of an overgrown rustic arch nearby and saw the car drive up with only the dimmest of sidelights. Two men got out and moved to the doorway, where, after a certain amount of fumbling at the lock, they opened it and entered.

"No crime, huh?" said Smithy. "So what are they up to? Hey . . ."

Diana had darted swiftly across to the door and nudged at it very gently. Not altogether happy at this, Smithy followed in time to see Diana edging into the aperture.

"Hang on, Miss Sherlock," he breathed, "wait for me."

"Got your trusty revolver, Watson?" she giggled softly.

"I just hope the juice is cut off. We'll look a right pair of idiots if the place suddenly floods with light. Now not so fast," he cautioned.

There was no sign of the men as they groped their way into the great house. They followed the ridges of what felt like linenfold panelling, until Diana banged her knee against something hard and scarcely restrained a gasp. Smithy risked a brief flick on of his torch, revealing a large carved chest. As their eyes became attuned to the dimness they could make out the shape of a broad hall and staircase. The cloud had parted and glimmers of moonlight cast a ghostly blue luminosity through high windows. There was a great fireplace and dark old oil paintings in ancient gilt encrusted frames at each side above high-backed settles. Then they heard voices. Smithy grabbed Diana and there was a sudden clatter.

"I've dropped my compact - trying to get my torch out of my pocket."

"Leave it!" Smithy hauled her back into the gloom by the staircase. Hearts pounding, they froze. The silence was almost palpable. Then . . .

"I tell you I heard something!" A brilliant torch ray stabbed round the hall and a second voice snapped: "Put that off, you fool! We'll have the whole village here if - Look, is this what you heard? I've just stood on it."

"Oh, my precious compact," Diana moaned under her breath.

"It's a woman's compact!" The light stabbed again. "It looks like gold."

"It is gold," Diana moaned again.

"It must have dropped out of one of the boxes last night," said the voice that was suspiciously like Mr Draco's. "Come on. Kev should be here soon."

"I don't like it," the coarser voice grumbled. "That other barn of a room. All those curtains in shreds and cushions eaten by mice, real spooky. And I didn't drop nothing last night." The voice and the shadow seemed to be right at the foot of the staircase.

Instinctively Smithy moved back further into the shadows. Then Diana heard a peculiar whirring sound. She ducked down under the stairs, smelling dust, ancient timber and mice, and willed the unwelcome two-legged companions to go away. Suddenly she was tired of playing Miss Sherlock. She'd lost her compact, her knee hurt, and she must be filthy. Then her heart almost stopped. She realised she was alone. The men had gone, probably to another part of the house. And Smithy was no longer there.

Where was he? What had happened? Had he made a dive for the door and got away? Diana straightened and banged her head under one of the treads above. "I'll kill him," she muttered to herself and tried to see if the way was clear for her own rush doorwards. But the moon had vanished and inky gloom closed like a curtain over the house.

Diana inched sideways, and gasped. Her arm was grabbed. She was yanked sideways, falling into dark space. And the whirring sound came again.

"It's all right, but don't move," came Smithy's voice near her ear. The grip on her arm tightened and she regained her balance.

"Oh my God!" she gasped. "I couldn't think what . . ."

"Sorry, Di - I got a shock myself when this panel gave way. Hang on, I'll shut it."

"No!" Diana was frantic. "We might not be able to get out again."

"We will. I think the spring's broken." Suddenly Smithy's torch banished the stygian gloom and Diana saw they were in a narrow passage with a crumbling brick floor and many dynasties of spiders' webs festooning the damp darkened walls. As Smithy surmised, the panel they'd fallen through was broken. The twisted metal mechanism that once controlled it now hung loose at one side.

"Did you hear those men?" she said. "There's another one coming. Called Kev." Diana peered through the aperture in the panel. "Smithy, we've got to get out of here and call the police."

"Too late." The Bounder was listening at the panel. "We've got to see this through ourselves."

The men had come back into the hall and there was quite a bit of noise. Feet tramped to the door, returned, and repeated the process. "They're carrying stuff out," Smithy whispered.

Diana edged under his arm. "Let me see." Two of the men were carrying the boxes while Mr Draco stood holding a large lamp. The two men came back. "Okay?" Draco asked.

They nodded. "Right," he said, "you know what to do. You two take the car. I'll walk back. You got the address, Kev? Van okay?"

Kev nodded. "But I need cash." He had a northern accent Diana couldn't quite place. Then Draco motioned him through to the recesses of the house and all went quiet.

"Right, Di. Time to go." Smithy slid the panel open and they stepped out. Silently they sped across the hall and peered outside. The car was pulling away but the van, presumably Kev's, stood there. Abruptly Smithy turned. "Go back to the Rectory, fast as you can. Tell them to call the police." As he spoke he tried the rear door of the van. It opened easily and Diana realised his intent.

"No!" she cried fiercely. "I'm coming as well!"

"Don't be stupid! We don't know what . . ."

"Stupid yourself." Diana pushed past him and scrambled into the back of the van. "Hurry up!" She seized the Bounder's hand to haul him up.

It was just as well she could not see his face clearly. Smithy did not take kindly to being ordered about by anyone. No wonder they called her the Firebrand! She was worse than Clara Trevlyn! All the same, she had guts, and she was quick on the uptake.

They were just in time. The man called Kev emerged, locked the rear door, called "So long, Guv," and climbed into the driver's seat. A moment later the van swung away, with its two unofficial passengers locked in the back, bound for who knew what destination.

Chapter 5 Journeys . . .

Diana stirred and stretched her cramped legs. "What time is it - my watch has stopped."

"Nearly quarter to one."

"Any idea where we are?"

"Not a clue."

"Let's have some light." Diana pulled out her torch, only to have Smithy grab it.

"We don't know how much light gets through the driver's partition." He focused the torch to its dimmest spot and handed it back to her. Cautiously she shone it round. The van had no windows and appeared to belong to a tradesman. There were assorted packing cases, a pair of stepladders, well bedaubed with motley paint, various building materials and a large tool kit. Smithy inspected this and selected a large wrench and a small spanner, which he handed to Diana.

"Weapons?"

"We may need them. But try to leave your victim alive," the Bounder said dryly. But Diana was more interested in the central stack of cartons against the partition. Unsteadily she crawled to them and pulled the smallest one towards her.

"Are you trying to advertise our presence?" groaned Smithy. "For goodness sake, sit down girl, before you crash down."

It was a well-timed prophecy. The van swerved sharply, braked, and accelerated, sending Diana sprawling.

"Told you so," said Smithy with a marked lack of sympathy.

Diana merely scowled at him and returned her attention to the carton. After several frustrating minutes coping with the knotted cords round it, broken by her distinctly unladylike curse when a fingernail suffered, she got the lid off the carton and gave a whistle.

"Wow! Just look at this lot!"

"Proof." Smithy stared down at the treasure within. Boxes within boxes. Silverware, leather cases of jewellery, black velvet bags holding miniatures and enamelled snuff boxes, all smothered in bubble wrap and felt material. "Pack it back as you found it and tie it up again," Smithy urged, "and come and sit down. We've got to think what's best to do."

"When we get out of this." For the first time Diana began to realise what Smithy had known for a long time; that they could be in very real danger. For how many confederates might be waiting at the van's destination? When the van was opened could she and Smithy manage to escape? And for the first time she thought of the chums and Mr Hazeldene waiting back at the Rectory when their absence was discovered, waiting, wondering, worrying . . . She gave a quivering sigh. Suddenly she felt a warm hand close

over her own. "Steady, Di," he whispered awkwardly. "We'll get through. Don't worry."

But when the van opened . . .

* * * * * * *

Diana's fear about the party back at the Rectory was well founded. At that precise moment there was pandemonium reigning at the Rectory, for the second night running.

Mrs Connor at Glebe House had settled in front of her TV with her supper drink and got hooked on the late night movie. At half past one she experienced unease, sure that something was wrong. Those two youngsters had gone out again and she hadn't heard them return. She'd heard Mr Draco come in just after midnight, but not the youngsters. Mrs Connor went to check and found her unease was not unfounded. She looked out over the garden and saw that all the Rectory lights were out except for the Rector's study, and he often fell asleep leaving it on. Well, she'd have to disturb him . . .

So began the pandemonium.

"We might have known. Smithy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Diana," said Clara. "I knew it. I can't think of a more reckless partnership if those two have got together."

"I bet Smithy had a car on standby," said Bob. "They're both night rakes. I bet they're living it up at some night spot or disco."

"Could be Ipswich, if they've got a car," said Marjorie.

"Even Norwich," guessed Wharton, "if they thought they wouldn't be missed. We should have slept at Glebe House. It was inviting trouble to let that pair loose without us to keep an eye on them."

"I wouldn't be sure." Babs shook her head. "I don't think Di took any of her party kit over to Glebe. Her stuff is all hanging in my wardrobe in our room so that she could change here during the day. She only took her pyjamas and toothbrush with her."

"She took her black slacks and pullover," put in Mabs. "For the morning, she said, when I came into the bedroom about ten o'clock."

Clara frowned. "I know Di fancies herself in black with that platinum mop of hers, but . . . Do you think they decided to go exploring? I mean, the weather's fine and she was jolly interested in that old house."

"Faversham Place?"

There was a silence while they looked doubtfully at one another. Then Babs said: "I think we should go and check. Just in case. They might have got trapped somewhere. I mean - we can't sleep without . . ."

There was a hasty dressing and search for torches, and the chums set forth into the night on what was to prove an eerie, chill and unrewarding search.

* * * * * * *

"What time is it, Smithy?"

"Nearly four."

"Where on earth is this van going?" Diana groaned. "London?"

The Bounder shook his head. "We'd have been there long since. I think we're going north. We're still on a motorway and moving."

Diana tried to wriggle into a more comfortable position on the dirty floor of the van and failed. "I don't know about you," she grumbled, "but I'm cold, hungry, thirsty, and I need a bathroom."

"I'll go along with all that." Smithy toyed with the wrench and crossed it over a crowbar, as though weighing up which was the most suitable for attack. Then he was alert. "We're in a town. Lower speed. Going over a bridge. High, big."

"How do you know?"

"A certain hollowness and a bit of pressure I sometimes get in my ears on bridges if I'm in a vehicle."

Diana was more interested in the possible end of the journey than in pressure in Smithy's ears. And she was feeling distinctly claustrophobic herself. The van was making turns now, suggesting a built up area, and the a sudden sharp, slewing turn to the left sent its unlucky passengers skidding. Then, unbelievably, it had stopped. The driver's door slammed. Feet tramped by the side. Smithy and Diana held their breath, hearing a rattle, a thump, and then silence.

Diana's heart resumed beating, and Smithy scrambled up. "We're in luck. I think he's parked us in some garage and gone off - hopefully to his booze and bed." Smithy listened for a minute or so then made short work of forcing the lock on the van's rear door. The garage door was a tougher proposition but the Bounder was driven now by the sheer determination and strength that had carried him through so many dangers during his eventful life. The door gave at last and cold raw air swept in. They stepped outside and Smithy silently eased the door closed. The broken lock might not show at first glance, he thought hopefully.

They were standing in a yard, surrounded by an untidy huddle of buildings, one of them possibly a house, others old stables, and a litter of oil drums and bits of dismantled machinery. But there was yet another high gate to challenge the Bounder's breaking out talent.

Urgency redoubled his efforts. The tall street lights cast their sickly yellow radiance over walls laced with evil broken glass along their tops, and there was the continual risk of Kev seeing them from a window. At last the gate scraped free. Smithy seized Diana's hand. "Come on - we've got to find a phone and call the police."

"Hang on - you've forgotten something." Diana produced a lipstick and marked a coral 'D' on the gate. "Identification," she said smugly.

Diana had always longed to dial 999 but now the opportunity came it had none of the speedy action she had imagined. They had no idea where they were, and had to wait until the police traced the call box. When the police car eventually arrived and Diana saw the suspicion of doubt in the faces of the young

constable and the WPC with him she had to admit their story sounded outlandish, to say the least. And apparently a warrant would be needed before they could search the premises where the van was parked.

"I tell you," Diana said frantically, "there is masses of stuff. We know the old house where they stored it and we think the head man is a guest where we're staying over Christmas."

"And where might that be, miss?" asked the constable.

"Inglesford. Suffolk."

The constable and the WPC exchanged glances. Then the policewoman said: "We don't like our time wasted by crank calls, you know. It's an offence."

Smithy shot them a cold glance. "I suggest you tell us exactly where we are. We were four hours in a van with no windows."

"You're quite a bit north of Suffolk, sir."

"How far north?"

"Newcastle-upon-Tyne, sir."

There was a stupefied silence. "No wonder it took so long," said Diana weakly.

"I think you'd better come along to the station and we'll try and sort this out. Yes," said the constable as Smithy was disposed to argue. "We'll get another car along to keep an eye on that place. With a lipstick 'D' on the gate," he added.

Diana giggled.

At last there was the blessing of a mug of strong tea and a sandwich, and a much needed wash and brush up. The story was told twice, then a burly, authoritative superintendent arrived and wanted to hear it all again, after which he made three phone calls, the last of them to an astonished but greatly relieved Mr Hazeldene. It seemed quite a long call and by the end of it certain boxes were being carried into the station and a somewhat inebriated, surly Kev was being escorted in the direction of the cells.

"We can offer you a comfy cell if you want a kip before getting back," said the superintendent, with a twinkle in his eye. "Then we'll have to think about getting you back to Suffolk."

"No problem," said Smithy. "There'll be somewhere near here where we can hire a car and driver."

The superintendent blinked, and the young WPC said: "Shouldn't we call the social worker, sir? They both look under age."

Smithy's glance at her was withering; Diana's one of sheer disdain. The Bounder said: "If we're capable of running your much wanted Christmas Gang to earth then I think we're capable of getting ourselves back to Suffolk."

The WPC caught the superintendent's eye and decided on discretion.

Nevertheless, the big police chief said firmly: "Intercity to Peterborough, where you can either change for Cambridge and go on from there, or get a taxi. Have you money?" Smithy nodded, and the big officer went on: "Let us know as soon as you get back safely. Then someone from the Suffolk Constabulary will come to see you at the Rectory. And I must impress on you both not to tell anyone, not even your closest friends, about what has happened this night. Not before we've talked to you again." A smile twitched his mouth. "I'm sure you can concoct a convincing story to account for your absence. You certainly appear to be a resourceful couple of youngsters. Now, we'll sort out some breakfast for you."

They followed police advice and were taken to Newcastle Central and seen onto the train. At Peterborough they partook of a leisurely lunch and Diana announced she wanted to buy a frock. "Now!" said Smithy in astonishment.

"Yes - if we're to follow police instructions," she reminded him cryptically. "Can you lend me some money? I only dropped a few coins into my pocket last night. I didn't foresee a trip to Tyneside and back."

Last night! It seemed an aeon ago.

So Diana bought a shimmering rainbow silk tunic, a pair of silvery slippers and a large shoulder bag into which she stuffed her purchases. Lastly, she mockingly presented Smithy with the receipts and an I.O.U.

Chapter 6 ... and Frosty Receptions ...

It was dark and nearly six when the audacious but by now rather tired pair reached the Rectory, fully expecting a rapturous welcome. Instead, there was a circle of faces wearing expressions of scorn, disgust, and disapproval. Marjorie looked about to cry and avoided Smithy's puzzled glance. Then he began to divine the reason for the chilly reception and his mouth tightened defiantly. He put a careless arm round Diana's shoulders and glared at the chums. "Well, we're back. What's the matter? Cat got your tongues?"

Only the Rector was concerned and welcoming. He embraced them both and said in a soft voice: "Don't worry. It'll be all right soon."

"Personally, I couldn't care a jot," said Diana, and the storm broke.

Wharton said scornfully: "Bob was right! He said you'd be out on the razzle, the pair of you at some disco. I'm ashamed of you, Smithy." He turned and walked away, followed by Nugent and Bull.

The girls looked coldly at Diana, who, unabashed, said airily: "So what if we did? Like to see my dress? Isn't it gorgeous?" She drew the shimmering folds out of her bag. "We had a great time, didn't we, Smithy? Even if we did get stranded and had to stay overnight."

"You're despicable!" Clara blazed. "To think that we spent last night searching the countryside in case something had happened to you." She too stalked furiously away.

Then Bob Cherry stepped forward, his face dark with anger. "You're a rotter, Smithy! You'll never change. Isn't Marjorie's hospitality good enough for you? How dare you insult her like this?"

"Why, you . . . !" The Bounder's fists clenched and he lunged at Bob. His fist shot out at the only man in the Remove who could oust him in the ring. "You're too ready with your accusations. You . . ." he ducked, avoiding Bob's blow, and waded into battle.

Only Marjorie's intervention stopped a full scale display of fisticuffs. The pair were hauled apart, still spitting fury. None except Diana noticed Mr Draco watching the altercation with malicious satisfaction. But his satisfaction was to be shortlived.

Mrs Benson hurried in, her face anxious, followed by three strangers who made towards the Rector. The chums stared at them, suddenly aware of a change in the atmosphere, almost to menace. The girls backed away. The boys closed protectively round them. Smithy straightened his tie and his cuffs, unperturbed by the interruption, and moved forward in response to the Rector's beckoning sign. Diana joined him.

"This is Detective Inspector Pierce and his sergeant, and this is Mr Faversham, the owner of the old Faversham Place. I gather he believes you are the two young people who helped him the other night when he was attacked. He wants to thank you."

"Not needed." Smithy shrugged modestly, and Diana said, "I'm glad you've recovered."

The detective turned to Diana. "I understand you saw the face of Mr Faversham's assailant two nights ago."

"I did," Diana affirmed.

"And you both recognised the same man last night in connection with the handling of stolen property?"

"Yes," said Smithy and Diana together.

"Could you identify him again?"

"We most certainly could."

"Is he here now?"

Smithy and Diana moved as one to point accusing fingers at Wallace Draco.

There were gasps from the chums and a cry of protest from Uncle Ben. Then suddenly Draco seized Marjorie and pinned her in front of him. Like sleight of hand, a gun appeared in his other hand and he began to back towards the door, dragging the frightened girl with him. For endless moments they were all frozen in shock, then the detective stepped forward very slowly, making a warning gesture. With forced calm he said: "Let her go. You can't get away with this, man."

Draco gave a snap of fury and turned the gun towards the detective.

At the same moment Smithy moved, so fast it took them all by surprise. Smithy's arm shot out and struck the gun out of Draco's hand. It skittered harmlessly across the floor and Draco was felled by Smithy's fist.

The detective caught Marjorie as she would have fallen and the sergeant grabbed Draco, whipping out handcuffs and pinioning Draco where he lay on the floor.

"You took a chance there," the detective told Smithy, "but it worked."

Smithy turned to Marjorie, putting his hands on her shoulders. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." She took a deep breath. "But how did this happen? I don't understand. Who is this friend of Uncle Ben's?"

"He's a crook," Smithy said gently, "and he must have wormed his way into your uncle's confidence. We followed one of his gang up to Newcastle last night and saved a load of stolen goods. Your father knew but we were sworn to secrecy, told to spin any yarn we liked to account for our being missing in case Draco got suspicious and took off. He'd already recognised Diana. But we'll tell you the whole story later."

Marjorie's distress was open now. She shook her head. "I'm so sorry - for the dreadful reception we gave you and Diana. It was unforgivable."

Smithy hugged her. "Forgiven already. How could you think otherwise?"

"Hey! This is getting to be a habit with you two!" cried Nugent.

"You'll have to stop meeting like this," enjoined Clara.

Marjorie laughed shakily. "Look, they're taking him away."

The law was departing with a malevolent Wallace Draco in tow. "The police chief at Newcastle believes he's the brains behind the Christmas Gang," Smithy said. "They have a complex M.O., working only at Christmas, a different area each year for the thieving but a different place miles away for a temporary H.Q. and yet another series of places to stash the goods."

"And Mrs Connor assured us that there was no crime here and no robberies," put in Diana, "yet Draco must have been organising it all from here."

Uncle Ben looked sad. "I did wonder why Draco made himself so affable in London when he kept turning up at my lectures. And he so easily played on my sympathy when he let it be known he was alone over Christmas. I suppose it had been easy for him to find out where I was staying. Then your dear father issued an invitation to bring him here for a few days."

"And being overnight at the guest house was perfect for his plans," exclaimed Harry, who was catching up with the story.

Mr Hazeldene smiled wryly. "What better alibi than being a guest at a rectory?"

They all caught up with the details throughout that evening, and some rather sheepish apologies were made to Diana and Smithy, who brushed them aside affectionately; they were too happy and pleased with themselves to do otherwise. And another guest joined the merrymaking, the long-lost heir to old Faversham's Place. His story had yet to be unfolded.

"Well!" Marjorie clapped her hands. "Can we get on with Christmas now?"

"Yes, yes!" everyone cheered. "Is it time to go all prim and proper Victorian?" cried Diana.

"And Uncle Ben has some gorgeous prizes for those who guess the most Victorian characters," said Marjorie.

"But what about costumes?" asked Mabs. "Have we to improvise or just use props?"

"All arranged," Marjorie told them. "The local dramatic society has a super wardrobe and they said we could borrow anything we liked. It's all stored in the church hall, so we can go and rummage tomorrow morning. They did a dramatisation of *Jane Eyre* back in spring so there should be some great costumes there," Marjorie finished breathlessly.

A happy discussion of suitable subjects for Victorian charades got going. Johnny Bull was going to be his namesake, if a top hat could be found. Bessie wanted to be Queen Victoria, and Bob fancied himself as the Mikado.

"But it's all supposed to be secret," protested Marjorie.

"Huh, the only one who can keep secrets here is Smithy," said Bob with just an edge of pique betrayed in his voice.

"Yes, what are you going to play, Smithy? Sherlock Holmes?" chaffed Nugent.

"Oh, no! I'm Watson," said the Bounder solemnly.

"Then who's . . . As if we didn't know," chuckled Babs.

"Yes." Diana giggled and struck an exaggerated pose with an imaginary magnifying glass. "I'm Sherlock!"

Marjorie's Victorian Christmas was beginning at last!

The Evening of Leuthen

- a historical adventure with "Collectors' Digest"

by Martin Waters

*(**Editor's Note:** I enjoyed this story which, I feel, works well with - or without - the C.D. fantasy element! I like too its tribute to Bill Lofts - or one of his ancestors!)*

Introduction.

This story is very closely based on fact. Col. Hey and his colleagues are fictitious, everyone else lived, fought and died just as in the story. There are numerous versions of Frederick's speech on the evening of the 4th December. The version included in the story is typical of most and has been selected for its brevity.

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It was the afternoon of the 4th December, 1757; a bitterly cold wind was blowing across the open plain outside the city of Breslau in Silesia, and eddied around the tower of the church in the village of Leuthen, some miles to the west of the city. A tall, lavishly dressed man gathered his overcoat tightly around him as he surveyed the adjacent countryside with a large telescope. Prince Charles of Lorraine was the Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian army and he was accompanied by his deputy, Field Marshal Leopold von Daun. The Prince completed his examination of the landscape and then turned to his colleague.

"Our Prussian friends are making themselves comfortable for the night, but I think that tomorrow we shall have a battle".

"With respect Your Highness, I think we must await the Prussians in a strong defensive position, and not venture out into the open field."

Charles sniffed in a mildly derisive manner. The Royal Prince was a decent man and he had achieved a high reputation as the Governor of the Austrian Netherlands (present-day Belgium); however, his career as a military commander was rather less distinguished. Field Marshal Daun was a much respected figure, a gifted military administrator who had done much to improve the Austrian army in the last years of peace. As a battlefield commander he was regarded as too cautious, even timid, but he was the possessor of one unique distinction. He was the only man in Europe to have defeated the King of Prussia - the Great Frederick - in open battle.

Prince Charles was the brother-in-law of the Austrian Empress, Maria Theresa, and he owed his high position to that relationship. His colleague's victory over the Prussian King was a matter of some embarrassment to him. Until the early months of the year 1757 Frederick and his bluecoats were regarded as invincible, the year had begun with a crushing victory outside the city of Prague. Charles and the battered remnants of his army had been driven into the city, and Frederick had prepared to lay siege to it. While the Prussians had bombarded Prague, Daun had hurried to the scene with a relief army.

Frederick never fought on the defensive, he had hurried to meet Daun before he could reach the besieged city. The battle had taken place at Kolin to the east of Prague. Despite heavy casualties the Prussians had stormed forward and had begun to drive the Austrians out of their positions.

Daun had acknowledged that he was beaten and he had begun to withdraw his army; however the commanders of two Saxon cavalry regiments, men with long scores to settle against the hated Prussians, had other ideas. The Saxons, followed by the rest of the Austrian cavalry, had charged, the exhausted Prussians had collapsed like a pack of cards and had fled the field. But for the heroic efforts of the Prussian foot guards, who covered the retreat, and a series of devastating cavalry charges led by the youthful Col. von Seydlitz, the Prussian army might have been totally destroyed. The distraught Frederick had to be physically dragged off the battlefield by his staff.

The city of Prague had been relieved, the Empress's brother-in-law had been saved, and the collapse of the Hapsburg monarchy had been avoided. The defeat had caused a serious dent in the reputation of Frederick and his army, and the rest of the hostile coalition - France, Russia, Sweden and the German Empire - had closed in for the kill. Frederick had been compelled hastily to leave Silesia to deal with his enemies elsewhere in Europe. Prince Charles and Daun had not wasted their time. The Prussian army led by the Duke of Bevern which had been left in the province had been defeated, the city of Breslau occupied, and the fortress of Schweidnitz - 'the Gibraltar of Silesia' - had been taken. So far the outlook had been rosy; however, during November Frederick had won a great victory at Rossbach, near Leipzig, and now the King and his army were on their way back to Silesia, hell bent on vengeance.

Once again Prince Charles surveyed the scene with his telescope. "There are not many of them", he said cheerfully. "It looks more like the changing of the guard at Potsdam, than a real army".

"The King's army is composed chiefly of regiments from Brandenburg and Pomerania - the very best in his service", replied Daun.

"The King has no generals", scoffed the Prince. "Old Schwerin and Winterfeldt are dead, Keith is a sick man, and Seydlitz was wounded last month at Rossbach, no doubt he is enjoying his convalescence among the ladies of Leipzig."

The Field Marshal looked grim. "The King has Ziethen with him. The old hussar is as wily as a fox; Driessen, Hulsen and the Duke of Holstein are all competent commanders - then there is the King himself." Prince Charles attempted to suppress a shudder.

"We will leave our positions tomorrow and meet the King in the open field", commanded the Prince. Daun gasped in horror.

"May I remind Your Highness that last month the King crushed the French at Rossbach, despite being outnumbered by three to one. I must advise caution." Charles sniffed once again.

In the meantime on the far side of the plain beyond Leuthen, a small, shabbily dressed man had assembled his generals and was preparing to address them. "Gentlemen, you know our disasters. Schweidnitz and Breslau and a good part of Silesia are gone. There is nothing left but my boundless trust in you and your courage. Each of you has distinguished himself by some memorable act. These services I know and I remember.

"The hour of decision is at hand. I shall have done nothing if I do not keep Silesia. I intend to seek out Prince Charles who has thrice our strength and to attack him wherever I find him. It is not numbers I rely on, but your gallantry and whatever little skill I may possess. We must beat the enemy, or perish every one of us before his guns." There was a pause and then the King continued: "Now, goodnight, gentlemen, by this time tomorrow we shall have beaten the enemy, or we shall never meet again."

The morning of 5th December, 1757. Frederick and his generals survey the ground. (C. Rochling)

Standing at a distance from the King and his uniforms was a tall, gaunt-looking man wearing the undress uniform of a British infantry colonel. The green facings on his scarlet coat identified him as a member of the Yorkshire militia. Col. Matthew Hey was the British representative at the King of Prussia's headquarters. In some ways it was an odd choice. Matthew Hey was not a regular army officer, though he had seen service against the Scots rebels in the '45 rebellion, and had also served at Dettingen and Fontenoy in the last war. Strictly speaking he was hardly a gentleman, he was little more than a small landowner near the town of Halifax. Most of his relatives were involved in the rapidly developing cloth trade.

An odd series of events had led to Matthew being attached to the King's headquarters. His late father had served with Marlborough. In the course of his service he had become acquainted with the Prussian Crown Prince (Frederick's father), the Prince of Anhalt-Dessau and other notables. After the war Matthew's father had supplied cloth to the Prussian army and had thus maintained contact with the government of this obscure but powerful German state. The present King of Prussia preferred either Scotsmen or Yorkshiremen as the British emissaries at his headquarters, so Matthew had been sent post haste to Potsdam at the instructions of the Duke of Cumberland himself.

Reflecting on the King's address to his generals, Matthew made his way back to his tent. He recollected that the King had spoken in German; this was unusual as he generally spoke in French.

Matthew reached his tent and was greeted by his aide, Captain Lord Charles Beckenham, who despite his rather foppish manner was a shrewd and intelligent young man. Two tough old regulars - Hurst and Jenkins - acted as servants, bodyguards, etc. Charles grinned when he saw Matthew's downcast face.

"I take it that we fight tomorrow?" he asked, Matthew nodded.

"Do we await the Prince of Lorraine and 'Mr. Bigwig' (the nickname for Marshal Daun), or do we go looking for them?" he asked.

"The King intends to seek them out and to attack the Austrians at the first opportunity", replied the older man. Lord Charles groaned.

Colonel Matthew Hey of the Yorkshire Militia

Their servants served a good supper. Lord Charles was a very rich man and he could afford the best food and wines that were available. Matthew had simpler tastes: Jenkins served him with cold beef and potatoes baked in their jackets in the embers of the fire, it was his favourite meal before action. Matthew did not care for wine and he found the heady Bohemian beer rather too strong for him. To his delight he was offered cider with his meal. "You cunning old devil", he said to his servant, "where on earth did you get it?" The old soldier winked in reply. "No names, no pack drill, sir", he replied quietly. If Matthew was to meet his end on the following day, at least he would have had a good meal first.

The two men settled down to read by the firelight. Sleep was impossible at this stage. Lord Charles had some of the latest comedies by Sheridan and other fashionable writers, as well as works by Voltaire, who, it appeared, wrote 'dirty books for posh people'. Matthew had a number of books in his valise. He usually enjoyed books by Laurence Sterne, and was particularly fond of *Tristram Shandy*. However, Mistress Eastwood, the lady who ran the circulating library in the town of Halifax, had sent him something new in her latest parcel. The publications were called *Ye Collectors' Digest* and appeared to consist of stories for children adapted for grown-ups. Matthew thoroughly enjoyed the small paper-backed books. There were stories about a boys' school in an old monastery named 'Greyfriars' and a nearby school for young ladies named 'Cliffe House'. There were stories about a fellow named 'Blake' who was a sort of 'travelling bow Street runner' who went around dealing with highwaymen, pirates, footpads and the like. Matthew chuckled at this; his elder brother was a magistrate and he liked nothing better than to lead the posse in person. At times he had to be restrained from hanging criminals without trial. Law and order was a serious business in the West Riding. There were also reminiscences by a man named William Lofts, who was obviously a tough veteran of Marlborough's wars and who had since led a very active life, travelling widely and meeting all sorts of people in business and commerce.

Matthew was deeply engrossed in the booklets and was thoroughly enjoying himself when suddenly a shadow fell across the door of the tent, and a well modulated voice said in coarse low German, "Good evening, Colonel, what is it that amuses you so much?" Matthew knew at once that it was the King himself. He sprang to his feet, but Frederick was in a genial mood and he waved Matthew to a chair.

Matthew had very mixed feelings about Frederick. He was aware that the King was a gifted soldier, administrator, law-giver and art connoisseur, and he was sure that in his strange way the King meant to do his best for his people. Frederick was capable of inspiring respect, affection and very real fear among his men. Matthew was a simple man and, to be truthful, he did not really understand the King, although he held him in very great respect and would cheerfully have risked his life in his service.

"I think you were listening when I spoke to my officers this evening?" asked Frederick. Matthew agreed. "We shall have a very hard day tomorrow", said the King. "But I know that we shall be successful. My men are burning to avenge the defeat at Kolin and our rout of the French at Rossbach has restored their confidence." There was a pause, then Frederick asked Matthew what he was reading. Matthew felt rather embarrassed. What would the King, the supreme intellectual, think of a paper using characters intended for children? Matthew did his best to explain, laying stress on the fact that the amusing stories were relaxing before battle.

"May I borrow some of them?" asked the King. "Certainly, Your Majesty," replied Matthew, flabbergasted. With a polite "good night, gentlemen", and a nod to the enlisted men, Frederick left the tent and vanished into the darkness.

"Would you believe it?" gasped Matthew.

"The King does not speak English, he won't be able to make head or tail of your books", chuckled Lord Charles.

"The King's reader, that Swiss fellow de Catt, speaks good English", replied Matthew. "He will translate them for the King."

"His Majesty is on record as saying that the works of Shakespeare are only fit to be read by an Iroquois", chuckled Charles.

"I could never understand Shakespeare", replied Matthew grimly.

Matthew eventually settled into a troubled sleep. He did not consider himself a really brave man, and he was worried about the battle on the following day. Matthew rarely said his prayers, but that night he requested the help of the Almighty to provide him with the courage to do his duty on the morrow.

It was well before dawn when the Prussian drums beat a call to arms. Matthew and Charles rose, washed and shaved, while all about them the Brandenburgers and Pomeranians prepared for battle. The two men ate a hearty breakfast and then prepared for the day's work. Matthew wore his usual travel-stained, everyday uniform, he considered that his British officer's scarlet coat was more than conspicuous in itself without added decoration. Lord Beckenham wore a lavish full dress uniform, which had come direct from some superior London tailor's. Matthew gave final instructions to his men. "If I 'come a cropper' in the course of the day, take my gold and any of my property that you fancy and get out of here, report to the British Minister in Berlin or, better still, to the Marquis of Granby in western Germany. Don't stay here, or you might find yourself exchanging the uniform of King George for that of the King of Prussia." Hurst and Jenkins grinned at these remarks.

At dawn the Prussian army was drawn up as if on parade at Potsdam. Every musket, bayonet and sword was polished, every button was fastened, every hair on each man's head was tightly drawn back into the regulation pigtail. The air was deadly still as Frederick and his generals rode down the length of the perfectly dressed line. The King nodded to Matthew, Charles and the various Hanoverian, Brunswick and Hessian officers who were attached to his army. In turn the allied officers took up their position in the rear of the King's staff. Matthew knew full well that Frederick always ran short of aides de camp, and that the foreign officers would be used to take their place. It was going to be a busy day.

After a final glance along the length of his army, Frederick gave the signal to advance. The infantry battalions shouldered their arms; as the morning sun caught the fixed bayonets their reflection ran across the plain like a flash of lightning. All along the line the fifes and drums stuck up the 'Hohenfriedburg March'; the noise was deafening. The army moved across the snow-covered fields towards the village of Leuthen; as the sun grew stronger they could see the white-clad Austrians waiting for them. Their enemies stretched for four miles across the plain, as far as the eye could see.

The battle went better than even Frederick had anticipated. The King made a feint on the left wing which confused the enemy, then he struck with full force on the right wing. The blow landed on the Austrian left wing, which was composed of Bavarians and Wurtemburgers, whose enthusiasm for the Austrian cause could only be described as lukewarm. The Austrian left collapsed and then Frederick proceeded to roll up the entire Austrian army. the Prussian army worked faultlessly, their powerful artillery blasted the Austrian concentrations and their strongholds in the various villages. The Prussian cavalry fought off numerous counter-attacks by the Austrian horsemen, and cleared the way for the infantry. The Austrian whitecoats fought with great courage and their leaders provided generalship that was at least competent, but they were outfought by Frederick at every turn.

The battle reached its climax in the late afternoon around the large village of Leuthen in the centre of the plain. The Prussians rapidly cleared most of the village, but a Franconian regiment raised by the Bishop of Wurzburg held out in the stone-walled churchyard. By this time Frederick had used up his staff of ADCs, and Matthew, Charles and the other allied officers were being used as messengers.

Artillery was used to blast holes in the wall of the churchyard, then the Prussian Garde stormed the position at the point of the bayonet. Matthew was involved in the thick of the fighting. By the time the churchyard had been cleared, his horse had been shot from beneath him, he had lost his hat, his coat was full of bullet holes, and there was an ominous dint in his gorget. He had also lost his sword, however Matthew much preferred to fight with a musket and bayonet. At the far side of the churchyard he collapsed, exhausted, against a tombstone and uttered a brief prayer of thanks for having survived so far. He also requested forgiveness for all the harsh things he had said about Maria Theresa - the Austrian Empress - who, he had been led to believe, was a most gracious lady.

Matthew was interrupted in his thoughts by the abrupt voice of Colonel Freiderich von Saldern, one of the up and coming young men of the Prussian army. Despite being in the thick of the fight, von Saldern had managed to maintain his immaculate appearance. "We are not quite dressed for guard-changing at the Palace of St. James", said Saldern in a sardonic tone. Matthew grinned and uttered expletives used by his brother's mill hands which he doubted that the stiff-necked Prussian would understand.

On the far side of the village Frederick was reassembling his army with a view to finishing off the Austrians before the light faded. Matthew was delighted to find that Charles too had survived the day. Lord Beckenham had lost his horse and had fallen into a swamp, so his immaculate uniform was covered in sticky black mud. Matthew could not help laughing.

By this time the King had assembled several battalions of grenadiers and was preparing to pursue the beaten enemy. "Doesn't the old b ------ d ever know when to stop?" muttered Charles.

"That is why he is called 'The Great'," replied Matthew quietly.

It was dark when the pursuit began with the aid of lanterns. The King led the way with the grenadiers, followed by the rest of the army. As they marched an unknown soldier took up the Lutheran hymn, 'Now thank we all our God'. His example was followed by the rest of the army and some 30,000 men sang the hymn to the finish. The incident entered German folk-lore, and ever after the hymn was to be known as the 'Anthem of Leuthen'. (Almost 200 years later it would be played throughout Germany when a certain Adolf Hitler came to power!)

Frederick pursued the broken enemy until he reached the village of Lissa, where he gave instructions to make camp. Matthew and Charles were gratified by the prompt arrival of Hurst and Jenkins with their pack-horses; soon food was being prepared and Lord Beckenham was able to put on clean clothing.

Meanwhile the King had assembled his generals. He gave them the password and preparations for the morrow, and concluded his remarks with the observation: "This day's work will confirm the glory of yourselves and our nation for all eternity". Frederick then sent for Matthew. the King was in a genial mood as might be expected after one of the most spectacular victories in history. His first act was to present the British Colonel with the order *Pour le Merite*, a very rare distinction for a foreign officer. The King had noticed that Matthew had lost his sword. On the table lay a Prussian officer's sword of very high quality, which the King gestured towards.

"That belonged to my cousin, the Markgraf of Brandenburg-Schwelt-Bayreuth, a brainless idiot who at least died doing his duty to the best of his limited ability. He had several swords, so his family will not miss this one. Take it, it is yours. When you are back on your farm in Yorkshire with your textile workers, it will remind you of the days when you served the King of Prussia."

Matthew was speechless. Frederick chuckled as he looked upon the tongue-tied Yorkshireman. "I greatly enjoyed the books that you loaned me last night", said the King. "Despite being in a foreign tongue, the humour came across very well, both I and my reader were greatly entertained by them. Are you acquainted with the Countess of Cadogan who compiles these story papers?" Matthew tried to explain that he did not normally mix in such exalted company, and that class distinctions were in many ways much more rigid in the England of King George than in Frederick's Prussia. Once again the King laughed. "I am sure that when you return to England, you will be received at the court; 'Uncle George' will wish to receive a first hand account of his nephew's activities. I am sure that you will have the opportunity to meet Lady Cadogan, so will you please give her this gift, as a token of esteem from Frederick of Prussia".

The King produced a diamond-studded snuff box which bore his portrait. It contrasted oddly with Frederick's shabby clothing and work-stained hands. The snuff box was a work of art, though oddly enough the King frequently presented such boxes as gifts, usually to civilians who could not receive the *Pour le Merite* or the senior order of the Black Eagle. By this time Matthew was in full control of himself.

"I shall convey the gift to Lady Cadogan as Your Majesty commands", he replied. The King dismissed Matthew with his final words, "I would like to borrow the next batch of *Collectors' Digest* when it arrives."

* * * * * * *

It was some years before Matthew returned to England. He served with Frederick throughout the rest of his campaigns. He was also present at Minden when the British infantry wore roses in their hats, and at Warburg when the Marquis of Granby lost both hat and wig. Matthew was presented at Court to King George, and later he had a meeting with the Countess of Cadogan - the lady was a distant relative of Lord Charles Beckenham, who seemed to be related to just about everybody of importance. She greatly appreciated Frederick's gift!

William George Bunter was fat, lazy, greedy, envious, covetous, snobbish and untruthful. He lacked most of the capital virtues, like humility, temperance, diligence, etc. His shortcomings were mainly due to his 'me' complex. The only things that mattered in the world were those which affected the well-being (or otherwise) of W.G.B. Many allowances were made for his misdemeanours - mainly on the grounds that his brain-power was so limited that he could hardly be held responsible for his actions. Consequently, retribution was rarely visited on Bunter by his peers - a kick or a thump was the usual 'punishment' for his sins, even when something more drastic was required.

The Greyfriars Remove found Bunter irritating - but he was an amusing irritant. Victims of tuck-pilfering were not amused, but the bystanders - who

The Greyfriars Remove found Bunter irritating - but he was an amusing irritant. Victims of tuck-pilfering were not amused, but the bystanders - who see most of the game - were. His harassed form-master, Henry Samuel Quelch, was frequently exasperated when Bunter, due to laziness and ignorance, perpetrated 'howlers' in class. The rest of the Remove, however, found such incidents funny. The slapstick comedy existence of the Fat Owl made him popular - and popularity leads to over-tolerance. Bunter, by and large, 'had it made'.

Bunter's reputation for obtuseness was, however, largely misplaced. The easiest way of avoiding responsibility is to plead ignorance. Bunter wanted to be lazy: but laziness brought punishment. Being incapable of understanding was a much safer way of avoiding retribution. One can be blamed for being lazy: one cannot be blamed for being 'thick'. Bunter worked his 'thickheadedness' for all it was worth - even Quelch made allowances for it.

Actually, Bunter was a good deal brighter than his contemporaries realised. At least, he was not lacking in 'ideas'. Almost completely unscrupulous, Bunter never allowed 'conscience' to come between him and his goal. While his activities were confined to snooping tuck, raising the wind on 'expected' postal orders, or dodging 'prep', this cavalier attitude did not matter too much. Unfortunately, there were some more important occasions when it did.

Occasionally, Bunter would conceive a big 'con'. Most of the time he was too easy-going to stir himself out of his habitual torpor: but now and again he would 'get going'. At various times, Bunter was blind; deaf; dumb; lame; 'good'; heroic; amnesiac; truly communist; a member of the aristocracy; and an impostor (at least thrice). All of these roles came to grief; but a good deal of thought and effort went into each role. Whatever his other shortcomings, William George was a 'sticker', playing out most of his 'cons' long after exposure and calamity had become inevitable.

His first attempt at planned trickery came early. In *Magnet* No. 30, Billy tried his hand at hypnotism. The aim was to hypnotise Mrs. Mimble into giving him the run of the tuckshop. It didn't work!

After that, Bunter spent quite a long time developing his one natural gift - ventriloquism. He became accomplished at it, developing a facility for imitating well-known voices. (Most 'vents' produce a clutch of peculiar voices suitable to the personalities of the 'dummies' which they use - they rarely imitate 'real' voices.) Bunter, in addition to being able to 'throw' his voice, became an expert 'impressionist' (like Peter Goodwright of Variety fame) and 'farmyard imitator' (like Percy Edwards). Unfortunately, being Bunter, he over-worked this 'gift' and became notorious for it. Even Quelch and the Head learned of his ventriloquism. Consequently, it was soon a 'chicken that would not fight'.

Early 'killings' through ventriloquism dwindled away as the stories went on - too many people knew what - and whom - to suspect. Nevertheless, with newcomers the ploy could still be effective. As late as the 'Lamb' series (1940), Bunter was twice able to 'make a bit' out of his ventriloquism. Each time, he was well-paid by Vernon-Smith to mystify Mr. Lamb (the new master) - once by using Quelch's voice; then by making a 'stuffed' bulldog growl. Nevertheless, exploiting ventriloquism became less rewarding after the early years of the *Magnet*.

Bunter's biggest motivator was impecuniosity. He was always broke - and grub cost money! Most of his school-mates were considerably better off than William George. A great deal of his time was spent in redressing that anomaly. Borrowing on the expectations of a non-existent postal order was a regular resource - but, like ventriloquism, it brought diminishing returns. Most fellows - particularly new boys - could be 'caught' once - and a 'feed' would result. After that, it was a case of 'never again' - and Billy went hungry.

The 'Horatio Bottomley Scam'

Charles Hamilton was always abreast of current affairs. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a series of company swindles, involving the notorious Horatio Bottomley, took place. Bottomley would float Company A on the strength of glowing forecasts of its prospects; spend the shareholders' investments in financing his high style of living; and, when the shareholders became restless, would float Company B. The capital of Company B would then be used to pay dividends in Company A! Bottomley's machinations led to a wholesale revision of Company Law (the 1909 Companies Act) and landed him in court on several occasions. He always defended himself with complete success - he even became an M.P.! It wasn't until 1920 that he came to grief over a 'Victory Bonds' swindle. Bottomley's activities gave Hamilton some bright ideas for Bunter 'cons'.

A significant factor in the development of Bunter's chicanery was his father's profession - stockbroker. Bunter picked up a working knowledge of the seedier side of stocks and shares and general finance.

In *Magnet* 130 (August 1910) William George tried to float 'Bunter, Limited' with one hundred shares of a shilling each. The Removites were to pay their 'bobs' and Bunter, as Managing Director, would obtain tuck at cost price from "an uncle in the business". The flotation did not prove popular - too many Removites thought that the Managing Director might eat the stock!

Eventually, shillings began to drift in. There was a temporary dispute because the Managing Director wanted to borrow from the subscribed capital - "the company's rules allow it, you know!" Then, the grub failed to materialise because "only seventy shares have been taken" and "we cannot start trading until we are fully subscribed". Shareholders then demanded their shillings back, only to be told: "capital once subscribed can't be withdrawn. The Managing Director's decision is final."

Pressure was brought to bear on Bunter. Grudgingly, he ordered the tuck - only £3-10s worth - and the Remove anticipated the share-out with glee. However, the Managing Director contrived to take delivery of the goods - and then absconded! (Quite

'snack'. The company was liquidated by ducking the Managing Director in a slimy ditch.

Frank Richards returned to the 'company swindle' theme on several occasions. In *Magnet* 643 (1920), Bunter proposed to buy 10/- shares in the 'Hankee-Pankee Tin Mines, Nigeria, Limited' at a shilling each. The attraction was that tin prices were rising and the shares could then be resold at par - a profit of 9 shillings per share. Bunter, of course, lacked the necessary capital for his investment. The Remove were not interested in 'forming a syndicate', so Billy raised the 'wind' by selling Peter Todd's bike! Fortunately, 'Hankee-Panke Ltd.' went into liquidation before Bunter's investment arrived at the brokers'. It was returned by the Dead Letter Office and Toddy eventually got his bike back. Bunter's intention had been to redeem the bike out of his 'capital gains', but, like many another speculator, he failed to 'get rich quick'.

Frank Richards had a low opinion of the Stock Exchange. In "Bunter the Punter" (*Magnet* 568), Bunter launched a 'credit system' and explained its workings to brother Sammy:

"It's the way they do business in the City. Half the people who buy and sell shares haven't any money. You buy shares and sell them again at a higher price before you settle up for them - if you know how to do it, it doesn't cost you anything. It's called speculation, not swindling. All I've got to do is to make fellows believe I've got money and could settle if I liked - then they'll give me credit."

With the help of Sammy, Billy created an aura of wealth. Skinner & Co. - looking for a fast buck - started gambling with Bunter. A series of disastrous plunges followed and Billy had to welsh on his bets - "if speculators lose, they go bankrupt. I can't lose anything, when I haven't got anything!" His schoolfellows took physical revenge, but Mr. Jerry Hawke, who had let Bunter extend his activities to backing horses, was not so easily satisfied. Faced with big trouble, the 'con man' hit on an even bigger 'con' to escape his just deserts.

The 'Doppelganger'

Enter Walter Bunter - Billy's double. In a well-sustained series - *Magnets* **and** *Gems* 571-585 (1919), Billy bamboozled Wally into changing places. Wally took over at Greyfriars; Billy went to St. Jim's, where Wally was due as a new boy. The deceptions survived for a whole term. Wally, a decent lad, improved Billy's reputation and showed considerable sporting prowess. He had been to Greyfriars on earlier visits, liked the school, liked Harry Wharton & Co., and would have happily settled for permanent residence there.

Billy, with a fresh start at St. Jim's, should have done just as well - but "the Ethiopian cannot change his skin". In a very short space, Billy became unpopular in both houses at St. Jim's. Wally's sporting ability was known at St. Jim's - so Billy, as Wally, had to play football. The inevitable fiasco resulted. Then, Bunter had to hawk around the junior school, looking for a study - for some reason, nobody wanted him!

Later, Billy caused trouble with his ventriloquism and eventually made St. Jim's too hot to hold him. Being Bunter, he then calmly reclaimed his place at Greyfriars from the hapless Wally. Thanks to Wally's efforts, the Greyfriars Bunter had been rehabilitated; old sins were forgotten and forgiven; Billy was able to resume his place in the Remove unscathed. Poor

old sins were forgotten and forgiven; Billy was able to resume his place in the Remove unscathed. Poor Wally could not have slipped so easily into St. Jim's - so he went off to France instead. The Bunter' double 'con' had worked - successfully enough to get Billy out of the pit into which his 'credit system' had plunged him.

The Keeping Finder

Another fascinating trait of William George was his 'findings keepings' attitude. Though it was generally confined to tuck, there were occasions when more valuable items were involved. In *Magnets* 589 and 590, he came across 'treasure trove' - with alarming and amusing results. Pursued by Ponsonby of Highcliffe, he took refuge in the cellar of a ruined cottage. There, he found a sack of valuables - mostly silver - which he decided must belong to the finder. After exploring the legal position with Peter Todd - and finding that findings weren't keepings - Bunter set his wits to work.

Bunter was a poor scholar, dense and ignorant in matters academic. But his brain could work quite sharply - and deviously - in matters of material gain. He placed the valuables into a wooden crate, which he transferred to the Courtfield carrier's depot, addressed to himself at Greyfriars! When the crate arrived at the school, it apparently contained the Bunter family 'plate', which Billy was to sell off to recoup his father's 'bad luck' on the stock exchange.

That enterprising businessman, Fisher T. Fish, got in on the act and tried to auction the 'plate' - at 20% commission! While the auction was proceeding, Harry Wharton & Co. learned that Popper Court had been burgled. The loot was Bunter's 'family plate'! Bunter and Fishy came to blows; then Bunter had to explain to Dr. Locke how he had found the loot and brought it to Greyfriars 'for safekeeping'. William George just about wriggled out of trouble before Inspector Grimes arrived!

On a previous occasion, Bunter 'found' a fiver belonging to George Wingate - and spent it. (*Magnet* 63). It transpired that Bunter had been expecting £3 a week for colouring postcards for the 'Patriotic Home Work Association'. He convinced himself that the £5, found in an old envelope in the quad, was really his remuneration! Self-deception unlimited! When Wingate reclaimed the fiver, he gave Bunter the benefit of the doubt - and Wharton & Co. were left to settle Bunter's bill at the tuckshop!

This kind of tolerance was quite frequent among Bunter's school-fellows. He 'didn't understand what he was doing'; or 'he's a fool, not a villain'; therefore normal retribution must be suspended. Perhaps if William George had been brought to court for some of his nefarious misdemeanours, he might have grown up to be less obnoxious. (He was arrested once - on the Riviera; but that was for masquerading as an adult to get into the casino.) The indulgence of others in small matters no doubt convinced Billy that 'anything goes'. Certainly, his swindling activities progressed from the spur-of-the-moment exploitation of opportunities to the planned 'con'.

The 'Disability' Dodge

Several such deceptions involved physical disabilities. The first of these was genuine - though temporary. In *Magnet* 160, "Poor Old Bunter", the short-sighted Owl dived into an empty swimming pool - and knocked himself unconscious. When he came round, he had lost his memory.

Curiously, Bunter's obnoxiousness disappeared along with his memory. For some days, he was treated kindly by his schoolmates, by the masters and even by the girls of Cliff House. One or two suspicious-minded characters - like Sammy Bunter and Skinner - doubted the genuineness of his amnesia; but events proved them wrong. Bunter became pleasant, polite, considerate of others and grateful for kindness. He ceased to swank, steal tuck or even expect a postal order. Then, just as everyone was getting used to the new Bunter, he was struck forcibly by a football during a kickabout in the 'Rag'. The blow restored his memory - and the old Bunter along with it. Life's never perfect!

Being Bunter - the original article - Billy soon tried the 'amnesia' game again - with tragic results. To lose one's memory deliberately requires a good memory in the first place - so that one can remember what has to be forgotten in order to be a convincing amnesiac. Bunter's memory, unfortunately, was a bad one. The Remove soon exposed him, but he was not deterred from trying it on elsewhere. Alonzo Todd swallowed the 'con', but Mrs. Mimble did not. Tuck on tick was not forthcoming! Another attempt to deceive Wingate nearly brought condign punishment, but Rosie Locke, Wingate's girlfriend, intervened in time.

Bunter, whatever he wasn't, was certainly a sticker. His next effort was to try his luck with Henry Samuel Quelch! Needless to say, Henry cured the affliction with a rigorous application of the cane.

Having found Greyfriars unsympathetic, Billy looked outside for his next dupes. Marjorie and Clara were convinced when they found him 'lost' in Friardale Lane. Bob Cherry got the cold shoulder from the girls when he accused Bunter of 'spoofing'. They looked after Bunter - in the tuckshop - and were even more convinced when Sammy Bunter turned up and supported the 'con'. Marjorie and Clara carted both Bunters off to tea at Cliff House - Sammy having undertaken to see his stricken brother home again. They were well fed, but Bunter had forgotten that in his earlier loss of memory he had behaved politely. This time, his natural ill manners asserted themselves and Marjorie slapped his face! End of another deception!

But not quite. Bunter tried again with Mr. Capper, but Quelch bowled him out. The *coup-de-grâce*, however, was applied by dear old Alonzo Todd. Convinced of Bunter's amnesia - Todd's gullibility was almost a disease - Alonzo set out to cure him. Last time, a sudden blow had restored Billy's memory. Alonzo proposed to do the same - with Gosling's coke-hammer! Bunter had to exit, running. He made one more attempt to flog the dead horse, but a cold water cure, regularly applied, put an end to th

deception. Nevertheless, Billy had not done too badly from his 'loss of memory'.

Bunter's physical disabilities came thick and fast in the middle years of the *Magnet*. No. 689 found him deaf; No. 715, blind; No. 787, dumb; and No. 806, lame. All the afflictions were opportune: in "Deaf Bunter", James Walker smacked Dicky Nugent's ear - and was wigged by Mr. Quelch: "Deafness has been caused by a box on the ear". Bunter's crafty brain started revolving.

He raided Walker's study cupboard, made sure he was caught in the act, and had his ear boxed. In the ensuing exchanges, Bunter took a leaf out of poor Tom Dutton's book. A series of "Ehs?" almost convinced Walker that the worst had happened. To keep Bunter from complaining to the Head, Walker gave him 10/- to have his 'deafness' checked by Dr. Gooch. Bunter, naturally, spent the money at Uncle Clegg's and reported back to Walker that "Dr. Gooch says I'll be deaf in one ear".

The Remove rumbled the deception - Bunter never could sustain a role when fellows were determined to expose him. He did, however, manage to plunder another guinea from Walker to "buy a syringe". When Walker inquired about how it worked, Bunter said he had dropped it and smashed it. (Actually, the guinea had gone at Uncle Clegg's.) Walker, scared of the consequences, agreed to buy another syringe - and give Bunter tea in his study.

Of course, Bunter spread himself too much. He took Sammy, Skinner, Stott and Fish with him, and Walker had to cater for the whole mob. It emerged that the 'guests' had paid Bunter a shilling each for their invitations. They all played along with Billy's deafness - and Walker, with visions of permanent extortion ahead of him, became desperate. A visit to Dr. Gooch exposed the 'con' and Walker returned to Greyfriars, seething. Bunter's next visit to his 'friend in the Sixth' ended with a very unfriendly thrashing. Oh dear! Still, Billy was 35 shillings plus a couple of feeds to the good.

In "Billy Bunter's Fearful Affliction" (G.H.A. 1939 - reprinted from *Magnet* 715), Bunter was detained. Tiring of Latin verbs, he began reading "Good Gilbert, the Blind Schoolboy" - an uplifting volume, kindly lent to him by that pillar of virtue, Harold Skinner! By the time he reached the point where "naughty Georgie, whose cruel blow had caused poor Gilbert's affliction, wept tears of remorse", Bunter had decided that Latin verbs were a better way of passing the time!

But all is grist to a con-man's mill. Blind Gilbert had received kindness: he had even got out of lessons! Bunter contrived to learn 'jiu-jitsu' from Horace Coker. He took a tumble, banged his head - and went blind! Coker did not believe him; but Blundell did - at least he was concerned enough to lead the 'blind boy' to Quelch's study. There, by blundering about and upsetting the furniture, Bunter gained temporary credibility. Quelch, always 'downy', sent for Dr. Pilbury, who was sufficiently dubious to arrange for a specialist to examine the afflicted one. For twenty-four hours, Bunter was treated as 'blind'.

The Remove didn't 'buy it'; especially when Skinner remembered "Good Gilbert". All the 'con' produced was a free supper; Quelch was too 'fly' to allow lesson-dodging. William George had to 'sit and listen'. Frustrated, he decided to put the screw on Coker, who had caused the 'injury'. Unfortunately, Bunter forgot that he 'couldn't see' and walked up to Coker in the open quad, demanding his 'rights'! Coker marched him off to Quelch and exposed the fraud. Blindness, like deafness, was cured by the cane.

The 'dumb' episode (*Magnet* 787) was - at first - more successful. Harry Wharton & Co. donated money to a dumb beggar: Bunter was scandalised by the waste! This time he enlisted the aid of brother Sammy. For threepence - in advance! - Sammy was prepared to testify to 'dumbness in the family'.

Billy tried it on Lord Mauleverer. Some gruesome gurgling and choking was followed by an incapacity to speak. Mauly thought Bunter was having a fit - and fled. Skinner maliciously exposed the 'con' - it's difficult to remain dumb when someone is banging your head!

Next day, Bunter tried his luck with Quelch. A very suspicious form-master interrogated the Owl for several minutes - and the replies were chalked on the blackboard. Sammy Bunter was sent for and he confirmed that the Bunters were prone to loss of speech. Quelch, taken aback, sent Bunter to Dr. Pilbury for examination. Morning lessons were missed: Billy was one up!

The weak link was Sammy. Having helped his major to dodge lessons, Bunter minor went dumb too - and Mr. Twigg let him get away with it. During break the masters compared notes - and the Bunters were bowled out. Vocal powers were restored by a hefty application of the 'cure-all'. Poor old Bunter!

Lame Bunter (*Magnet* 806) was original - the injury was genuine! A cricket ball cracked him on the knee - quite a painful business. Of course, William George had to 'milk' it. The first reward was to miss the rest of compulsory practice while the injury was tended. By the time the Remove came in to tea, Bunter was an invalid!

Nursing a heavily bandaged knee, the sufferer expected sympathy. Peter Todd was the reverse of sympathetic - Bunter had to get his own tea! Nevertheless, an evening spent slacking and dodging 'prep' was another definite gain. Sadly, an incredulous Patrick Gwynne spoiled the day by driving Bunter to the dormitory at break-neck speed.

Next day, Bunter reported to Quelch that the injury was 'black and blue'. Henry said he would examine the injury 'before morning lessons'. Bunter, with exposure looming, resorted to desperate tactics. First, Sammy Bunter was asked to "give me a kick on the knee" to make "a jolly good bruise". Sammy was more than willing, but Billy funked at the last minute.

The next dodge was to smear the knee with marking ink. It deceived Quelch, though he was wary enough to send a message to Dr. Pilbury to pay the injured one a visit. Nevertheless, Bunter enjoyed a lazy morning in his study armchair.

Limping down to dinner, Bunter had an extra reprieve because Dr. Pilbury had not arrived. (He hadn't because Bunter, during the morning, had telephoned cancelling the earlier call!) Quelch, playing safe, gave Bunter leave from afternoon lessons. The afternoon was partly spent plundering Remove studies for grub.

With his form-fellows seething, Bunter encountered nemesis - in the shape of Dr. Pilbury. Called in by Quelch, he discovered the Owl frantically trying to remove the evidence with soap and water. Being marking ink, it wouldn't come off. Quelch, appalled by the deception, cured Bunter's limp - by leaving him limp in the other sense. Still, lameness had proved a better dodge than the other afflictions.

The Opportunist

Billy Bunter's self-centredness often gave him an advantage over his peers. A crisis might loom, requiring instant action elsewhere. While public-spirited Removites left their tea to join in a fracas with Coker or Temple or Highcliffe or whoever, Bunter would remain and polish off the untended foodstuffs. This occurred so often that the plundered victims more or less accepted it as normal. There were times, however, when Billy's opportunism ranged wider.

At least twice, Bunter acquired a 'friend' in a senior form. In *Magnets* 1090 and 1221, first Gerald Loder and then Stephen Price were blackmailed by William George. Their shady activities had resulted in incriminating evidence falling into Bunter's hands. Regular feeds and frequent small loans came Billy's way - and his 'friends' in the Sixth and the Fifth suffered for their sins.

Of course, Bunter had to overdo it. He ran each well almost dry until the Famous Five intervened and restored the evidence to their rightful owners. The vengeance wreaked by Loder and price on their erstwhile blackmailer was awesome.

A 'main chance' of a different type involved the Latin Prize (*Magnet* 1159). Promised a fiver by his uncle if he could show academic attainment, Bunter entered the contest. The idea of working at Latin verses did not appeal, so Billy's fat wits were devoted to finding a 'dodge'. The opportunity came when Mark Linley went home for a while before the closing date of the contest. Bunter abstracted Linley's 'paper'; copied it out; and submitted it to Quelch as his own.

Sadly, his ignorance of Latin led him to mistake an Ode of Horace (copied out by Linley for practice purposes) for Linley's intended entry. Quelch was scandalised - as much by Bunter's apparent assumption that he, Quelch, would fail to recognise the ode, as by the Owl's intention to cheat. Punishment, as so often the case, was condign! Opportunity knocks - with Bunter, it frequently knocked back!

The Impostor

In two different, but similar, situations, Bunter undertook long impostures. Each deception took place outside Greyfriars; each involved a travelling circus; each depended on Bunter's abilities to (a) imitate another man's voice - easy for our mimic/ventriloquist; and (b) to disguise himself competently as an adult - not really very credible. Bunter's lack of intelligence and his poor memory made the sustaining of long-term deceptions very problematic.

The first of these - the Whiffles series - arose because Bunter broke detention. With Quelch on his track, Bunter came across Mr. Whiffles, the circus boss, bathing in the Sark. Whiffles, short and portly, sported a wig and a false beard which he had removed during his swim. Bunter, dodging Quelch, snaffled the whole ensemble and was mistaken for Whiffles by the circus entourage. The ensuing summer holidays were passed by Bunter masquerading as Whiffles; while the hapless circus-boss, ashamed to be known without his wig and beard, floundered behind as the circus moved on. The imposture ended in disaster, but Bunter lived on the fat of the land while it lasted.

The Muccolini series (*Magnets* 1481-90) was almost a repeat Whiffles - with a darker side. Whiffles had been an engaging character - pompous, vain but basically good-hearted. The Bunter who impersonated him was stupid, selfish, greedy - but amusing and good-natured. Muccolini was a villain - unpleasant, sinister. Impersonating him brought out the worst in Bunter, who became quite detestable. The sympathetic reader could find mitigations for William George as Whiffles; for Bunter's Muccolini there could be little sympathy.

Both of these impostures might have challenged for the position of Bunter's 'master-con' - except that it had already occurred. Of all the tricks perpetrated by William George in his chequered career, pride of place must be given to:

The Bunter Court Scandal.

In *Magnets* 910-917, Frank Richards developed the most contrived plot of the whole Greyfriars saga. The Bunter's Double, and the two Circus series were complicated, but, compared with Bunter Court, they were "as moonlight unto sunlight; as water unto wine". During its tortuous course, Bunter resorted to impersonation, fraud, extortion, deliberate deception and kidnapping in order to sustain the 'con'. While doing so, he indulged his usual penchants for greediness, laziness, boasting, selfishness and prevarication. Well-known though the story is, a resumé of the events makes impressive reading:-

Bunter was sent by Lord Mauleverer to view and report on 'Combermere Lodge'. (Mauly was 'too tired' to go himself.) William George, naturally, exploited the situation. Decked out in borrowed plumes he set off in a car ordered by Mauleverer. The chauffeur addressed Bunter as "my Lord" - a natural mistake which Billy did not correct.

Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, made the same error. Bunter, with his credentials as Lord Mauleverer established, indulged his delusions of grandeur - and conceived the bright idea of somehow hiring Combermere Lodge and passing it off as 'Bunter Court'. His fat wits worked rapidly and he persuaded Pilkins to introduce him to Walsingham, the butler, as "a gentleman who wishes to see the house" - no names specified. With Pilkins off the scene, Billy introduced

himself to Walsingham as "Mr. Bunter". All that remained was to keep Pilkins and Walsingham apart.

Luck now took a hand. A motor accident on the way back from Combermere Lodge landed Mr. Pilkins in hospital. Bunter reported to Lord Mauleverer that the lodge was 'unsuitable'. The way was now clear to book the lodge as 'Mr. Bunter'. Ventriloquism and the telephone combined to apprise Walsingham - in Mr. Pilkins' voice - that "Mr. Bunter, son of a millionaire", had taken the Lodge for three months. A condition of the agreement was to change the name of the place to 'Bunter Court'.

The scene was set. Guests were recruited in the shape of the Famous Five; Skinner & Co.; Sammy Bunter and his fag friends; and, later, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Bunter's chronic shortage of ready cash was remedied by wholesale sponging on his guests. Other people's money was lavished on the servants as tips - an effective method of diverting demands for unpaid wages! Local tradesmen, relying on Walsingham's word, supplied the necessaries of life on credit. William George became the proverbial 'pig in clover'.

Nemesis came, but gradually. First, Pilkins, recovered from his accident, learned of 'Bunter Court'. Irate, he telephoned Walsingham. The call was luckily intercepted by Bunter. Using Walsingham's voice he reassured Pilkins of the Bunter *bona fides* - at least temporarily.

Next morning, Billy encouraged his guests to have a day out in 'one of the cars'. Then he sent Walsingham to Canterbury to 'see Mr. Bunter'. After that, he gave the rest of the servants the day off for a trip to Ramsgate. When Pilkins arrived to formalise the 'let', Bunter Court was deserted - except for Billy.

With masterly strategy, Bunter lured Pilkins down to the wine cellars - and locked him in! Crisis averted - back to living it up! Bunter's nerve - and his cunning - were never more vividly illustrated. But there was more to come!

Walsingham, having returned from Canterbury empty-handed, was concerned to find the key to the wine-cellars missing. Bunter fobbed him off; but next day he was disconcerted by the arrival of Parker, Mr. Pilkins' clerk, seeking news of his employer. The high hand sufficed for Parker - Bunter had him thrown out!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy arrived - as a reluctant guest - and came across the wine-cellar key. (Bunter had dropped it in the picture gallery.) Gussy gave the key to Walsingham and the butler went to check the cellars. Bunter discovered the calamity too late; by the time he reached the cellars, Pilkins and Walsingham were in full communication. The gaff was blown - but the key was in the cellar door. With great presence of mind, Bunter locked both of them in - two prisoners instead of one.

Two soon became three. D'Arcy, spotting Bunter on a midnight trip to the cellars, realised that someone was imprisoned there. He demanded that the door should be unlocked. Bunter, under protest, did so - and banged Gussy into the cellar. Masterly!

With his crime sheet lengthening daily, Bunter carried on as 'Lord of the Manor'. For cool, unadulterated impudence this phase of his chequered career takes some beating! Wharton & Co., increasingly uneasy throughout the holiday, refused to believe that D'Arcy had 'gone home'. They demanded the key of the cellars and, while they were releasing the prisoners, Bunter bolted. The pig was no longer in clover.

The furious Pilkins and Walsingham wanted Bunter arrested. The local policeman was dubious - "he's only a schoolboy" - and, anyway, William George had disappeared. With 'false pretences', 'fraud' and 'kidnapping' to face, discretion had become the better part of valour.

The long-suffering Lord Mauleverer, to whom Bunter had turned for refuge, visited Pilkins and arranged the matter - "Can't have people bilked by a Greyfriars man". The tenancy was paid and terminated; Walsingham was compensated; tradesmen's bills were settled; servants received their wages. It must have run Mauleverer to the tune of several hundred pounds (in 1925!) Bunter had a harrowing time 'on the run', but his sufferings were temporary. What he really needed was a stiff dose of Borstal!

Nevertheless, this *tour de force* gave the lie once and for all to Billy's 'obtuseness'. The crafty and resourceful way in which he met - and overcame - alarming difficulties showed that his intellect was a good deal sharper than his contemporaries believed. Bunter was keenly aware of his school-fellows' inhibitions. Scandal did not bother him; but he knew that they would go to great lengths to avoid it. Throughout his career, William George relied on 'fall guys' to bail him out. And they always did! Who, one may ask, was the cleverer?

As a seeker of flesh-pots Bunter was unsurpassed: the 'downs' might be severe, but the 'ups' were worth all the effort put into conniving and trickery. "The children of this world are more prudent than the children of light." William George Bunter was a 'child of the world' par (or should it be *pas*?) excellence.

The Old Boys' Book Club - Northern Section

is always pleased to have visitors and new members

We meet on the second Saturday of each month
The venue is always the same in the centre of Leeds, viz:

SPCK/Holy Trinity Church Cafe,
Boar Lane,
LEEDS
LS1 6HW

We assemble from 6:30 p.m. for informal chat and a cup of coffee for our meeting to commence at 7:00 p.m. Our varied programme of talks, guest speakers and presentations from members, is usually over by 9:00 p.m. to enable people to get home. Public transport is very efficient and the railway station is only five minutes' walk away.

We have social events too, such as an informal dinner (in addition to our meeting date) usually in March or April and our event of the year is the October Annual Luncheon, afternoon informal chat and tea, followed by our evening meeting with our President, Mary Cadogan.

Our programme for the year is published in January and a copy can be obtained from our Secretary:

The Revd Geoffrey Good,
"Greyfriars"
147, Thornes Road,
WAKEFIELD
West Yorkshire
WF2 9QN

Why not send for a full programme and pay us a visit. We are really quite friendly! If you receive the monthly "C.D." as well as this Annual, you will see our monthly reports usually from Paul Galvin or Johnny Bull Minor. For general enquiries, you may telephone 0113 267 1394.

President - Mary Cadogan
Vice President - Anthony Buckeridge

The London Old Boys' Book Club

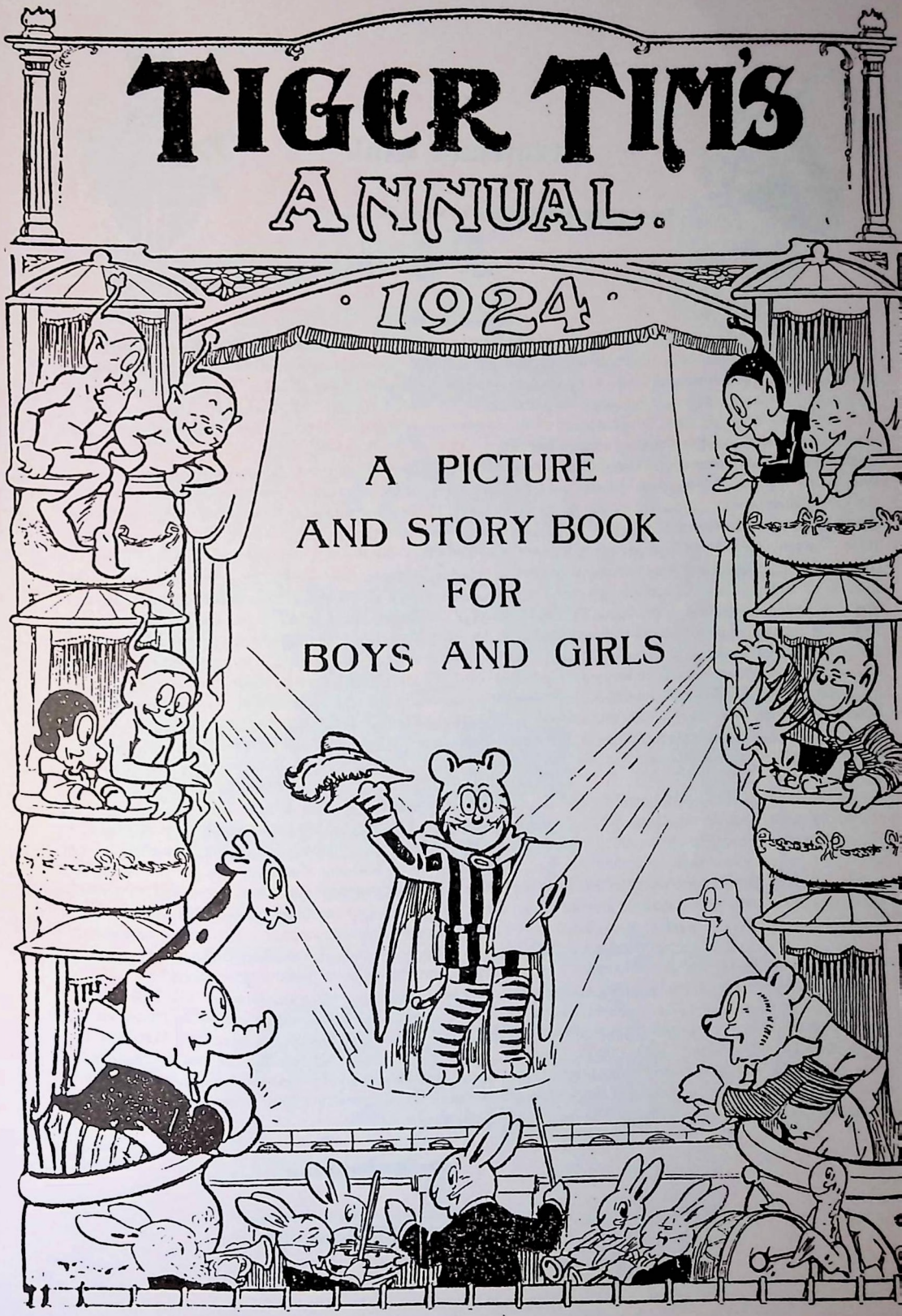
Since its formation in 1948 the London Old Boys' Book Club has held regular monthly meetings where members can chat about their favourite authors, listen to talks on everything from Bunter to Biggles, test their knowledge in light-hearted quizzes and generally have an enjoyable afternoon with fellow enthusiast and collectors.

Despite being named the 'London Club' members come from all over the south of England and our meeting places, usually in members homes, include venues in Ealing, Eltham, Chingford, Wokingham, Salisbury and Loughton. The Club usually has a luncheon in September and a guest speaker and buffet lunch in November. At other venues a tea is usually provided by the host.

At the monthly meetings, which take place on the second Sunday of each month between 3.30pm and 6.30pm, business is kept to a minimum so that there is plenty of time for the talks, readings and quizzes that make up the bulk of the formal programme. The long tea break gives plenty of time for members to chat. Our members range in age from twenty to eighty and the range of interests within the group is equally wide! While older members may be enthusing on Sexton Blake and the Hamilton school stories, those whose childhood spanned the war and post-war years are often interested in the Thomson papers, *Beano, Eagle*, Biggles etc. etc. The London Old Boys' Book Club has continued to thrive over the years because of the diverse interests of its members.

Membership at present costs just £6.00 a year, which includes the cost of a monthly Newsletter posted direct to you. A small attendance fee to cover the cost of refreshments is also charged. If you think you might like to become a member of the London Old Boys' Book Club write, enclosing an SAE, to Vic Pratt, the Club Secretary, for more details.

For membership details of the London Old Boys' Book Club send an SAE to:
Vic Pratt, c/o 27 Church Road, Heston, Hounslow TW5 0LU


TIGER TIM'S
ANNUAL.
·1924·
A PICTURE
AND STORY BOOK
FOR
BOYS AND GIRLS

The

Greyfriars Club

Home of the Frank Richards Museum and Library

Now in our 22nd year of operation and 19th year of the formation of the of the **Frank Richards Museum and Library** , once again your Hon. Chairman & Secretary has very great pleasure in extending **Heartiest Christmas Greetings** to all our club members who have written to us over the past year, and all other hobby connoisseurs of Christian goodwill and integrity everywhere - in particular to our present Editor, Mary Cadogan , who has put so much effort and work into the C.D. and Annual every year to ensure that each copy reaches us without delay at the expected time, not forgetting also our excellent printers.

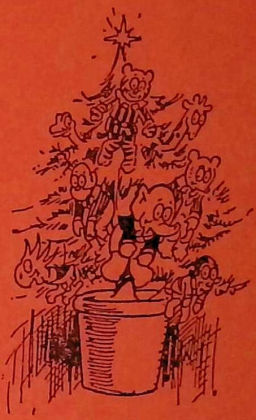
Undoubtedly all club members will have noted Mary's remarks in the issues of the C.D concerning the Broadstairs "Celebrity Connections" week and seen Mary's comments. It was as a result of a suggestion by Mary that your Chairman was approached by the Acting Town Clerk to see if I would be willing to allow viewing of the **Frank Richards Museum** at Kingsgate Castle. I had to regretfully inform the A.T.C. (for the reasons contained in the 4th para of the Club's Christmas announcement in **C.D.A '95**) that the museum had been removed to our home at Stevenage and that further viewing would not be possible. However, upon reflection, a few days later your Chairman contacted the ATC , and advised that if they would be willing to collect the main part of the museum on loan, and arrange to insure it at my figure, for their Celebrity Connections celebrations until I requested it's return, I would be willing to co-operate with their arrangements. This they were delighted to confirm by letter to me and in due course the above arrangements took place and were completed. It was available for viewing on that one day only and until it's return to me, it will be kept under lock and key – but arrangments can be made for viewing by appointment only. Readers will remember I had to make the same arrangement, as quoted in past **Christmas C.D. Annuals. 87' 88' 95'** etc. On view are all the main items in our Frank's study including his two typewriters, desks packed with endless other memorabilia, his braille stories for the blind (which I had translated for members, by blind friends) his favourite framed picture, etc. etc

Further to my remarks in the latter part of the 3rd para in last years **CDA**, members will be pleased to know that we arrived home safely earlier this year after a wonderful stay in each of the places named in our three months tour, despite the smoke haze in Bangkok (owing to the fires in Indonesia) causing both the police and pedestrians to wear face masks . There were huge traffic delays in the main roads due to the building of an overhead railway along the middle of several of the long main roads and the town centre. Bali was absolute bliss where we stayed for a week and so was Sydney where we stayed for another week ,where we again met up with Paul Duval in his 'Norman Shaw's' bookshop. We had another grand chat, browse, and purchases before carrying on to Brisbane for another long stay to spend the **Christmas Holidays** with **Friar** Robert ,our son, and his lovely family. Finally it was time to move on to the Holiday Inn in Tokyo Japan Alas no Friars, but cleanliness ,friendly helpfulness and politeness and, like Singapore, no graffiti anywhere. We were most impressed. We took the silent, fast bullet train down to Hiroshima 400 miles away where we stayed and visited every place of interest including the memorial park and museum but time was running out to catch our flight back so we left Nagasaki for next time. We spent a couple of days in Kyoto staying in the vast Holiday Inn containing 100 bowling lanes in full use and tennis courts, pools etc. We also visited the huge wooden temples (largest in the world) in Kyoto, and their huge tower. All too soon it was time to return to our room at the Holiday Inn in Tokyo for another day before going to the airport 60 km outside Tokyo to return to Heathrow. Full report in C.N. newsletter.

God Bless

R.F. Acraman

Chairman/Secretary



-A Funny Xmas Tree

The Best
Of All Good Things
This Christmas
To Every One of
My Reader Friends

—YOUR EDITOR

PRESENTED FREE WITH No. 1 OF "THE RAINBOW." February 14th, 1914.

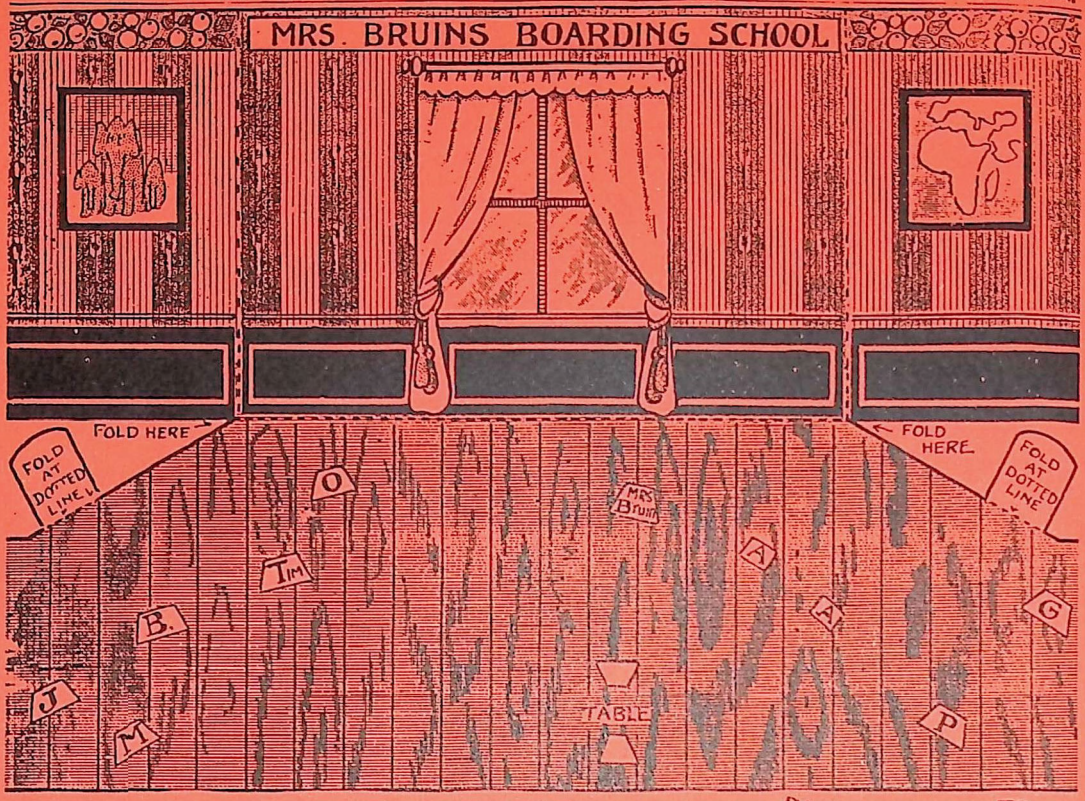


FIG I

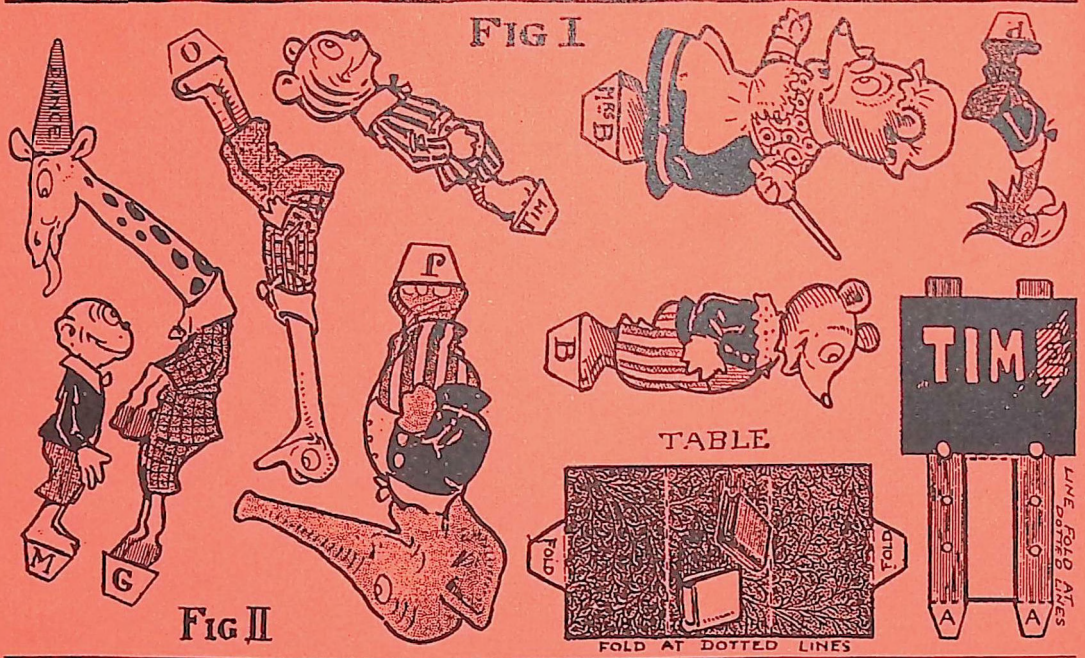


FIG II