

STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

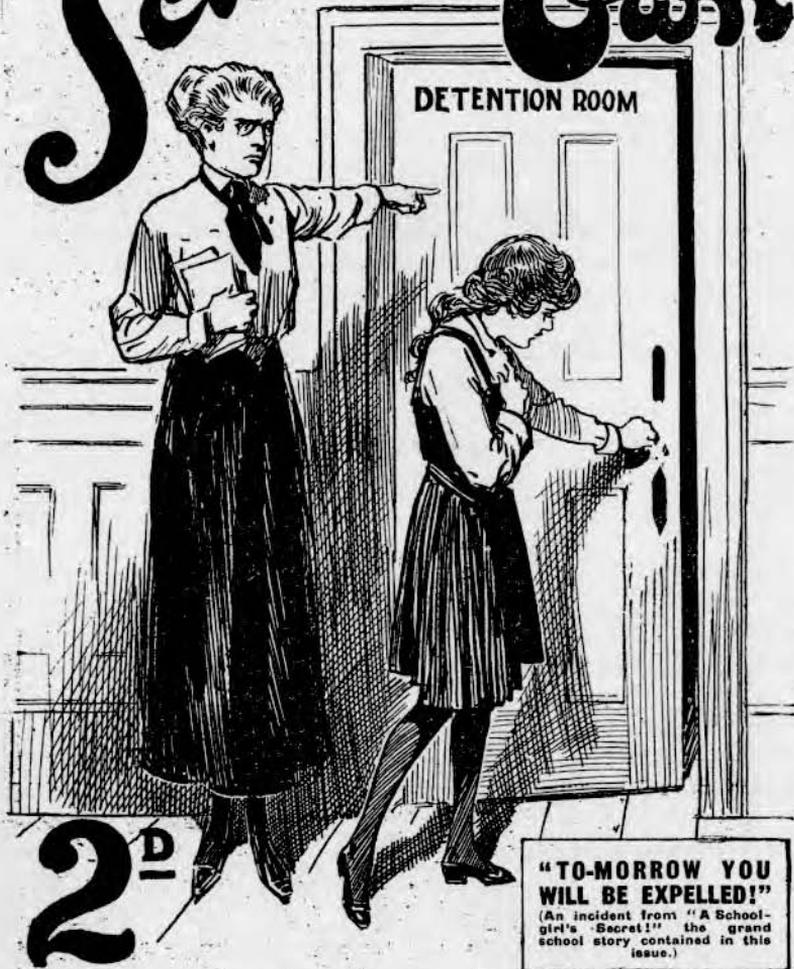
VOL. 54

No. 637

JANUARY 2000

ENLARGED MILLENNIUM EDITION

# The Schoolgirls' Gun



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**"TO-MORROW YOU  
WILL BE EXPELLED!"**  
(An incident from "A School-  
girl's Secret!" the grand  
school story contained in this  
issue.)

## GEMS OF HAMILTONIA

from Pete Hanger

Quelchy was such a sceptical, practical beast. He never went to the pictures. Probably had never read a sub-title in his life, or even seen a crook play. His thoughts ran on severe scholastic lines. Would Quelchy realise the import of that awful letter? Would he? Bunter could not help feeling that he wouldn't. That Carboy was in league with burglars, that he had let thieves into Oldcroft, and was now going to let thieves into Greyfriars, was clear as daylight to Bunter. He had had, as it were, the advantages of a film education. But a practical beast like Quelchy might pooh-pooh the whole idea - snort at it, in fact.

*Magnet 1080*

"Bessie!"

"Oh!"

"Keep that basket shut!"

"I'm only counting the tarts!" said Bessie Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Well," said Miss Clara Trevlyn, "don't; the more often you count them, the less there will be to count."

"If you think I was eating a tart behind this sunshade, Clara . . ."

"I believe you'd eat the sunshade, if there was nothing else to eat!"

*Magnet 1528*

It was not uncommon for Bunter to ask fellows to a feed. If the invitation was accepted, it was generally followed by a request for a temporary loan. To accept an invitation from Bunter was to stand a feed for oneself - and Bunter!

*Magnet 981*

The fat junior had intended to venture upon a little cheery conversation with his headmaster during the run to Highcliffe. The expression on Dr Locke's grave face, however, discouraged him. In Bunter's charming character obtuseness was delightfully combined with impudence. But one glance from the Head was enough to take the impudence out of Bunter, and he sagely decided not to waste his conversational gifts upon so very discouraging a hearer.

*Magnet 959*

Mr Quelch - always a thoughtful gentleman - was providing him with a special task in Latin irregular verbs, so that he should not waste his time. Bob could easily have dispensed with that. He would have preferred to take the *Holiday Annual* into the Form-room with him. He liked it better than Latin verbs regular or irregular.

*Magnet 982*

. . . Really it was an excellent poem; and there were a few fellows even in the Lower Fourth, who could appreciate its beauties. But William George Bunter was not one of those fellows. Bunter would have given the Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Gray for a cake, and thrown in those of William Shakespeare as a makeweight and considered that he had got the best of the bargain.

*Magnet 1300*

"The train rushed by with a noise like - like -"

"Like a railway train?" suggested Peter.

"Like Bob Cherry taking his boots off?" asked Skinner.

*Magnet 1016*

# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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W.H. GANDER

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## THE EDITOR'S CHAT



We and the C.D. are now launched into the new millennium but I make no apology for looking back – at least as far as the Christmas season – with two intriguing articles included in this month's issue. Norman Wright and Ted Baldock have both contributed to this Enlarged Edition items about childhood Christmas delights which continued into the New Year and

beyond: because the books and papers which they discuss still provide satisfactions today, their reflections are not only seasonable but of lasting interest.

I am sure that many readers will endorse Brian Doyle's assessments this month of literary and library bans. It is noteworthy that the four writers he specifically discusses (Charles Hamilton, Richmal Crompton, W.E. Johns, and Enid Blyton) have, despite occasional dismissal by heavy-handed critics, been dominant forces in popular children's fiction of the twentieth century. Their wonderful stories have spanned many decades and seem likely to continue to appeal to the children (and adults) of the twenty-first century.

The New Year brings us into a new series about boys' papers: Bill Bradford is delving into his extensive library to write about a variety of lesser-known weekly and monthly publications.

Perhaps, as the New Year is traditionally a time for fresh and good resolutions, I could remind readers that I not only look forward to receiving articles on the works of Charles Hamilton, E.S. Brooks and the Sexton Blake writers but on all other aspects of our hobby. As we know, its byways – like its highways – offer us many riches! Don't forget – short items are particularly welcome. And remember that whether you are typing articles or writing them by hand it helps your Editor and those who work at our printers if you leave good spaces between the lines and wide margins on each typed or written page.

It remains only for me to thank you for all your warm Christmas cards and greetings; and to wish you a truly Peaceful, Prosperous and Happy New Year.

MARY CADOGAN

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New Year Greetings to readers. **WANTED:** (a) *The Outlaw of the Shell* by John Finnemore, (b) *Always A Knight* by W. Campey, 1913 (?)

MAURICE KING, 27 Celtic Crescent, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2TG. Tel: 01305-269026.

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## OBITUARY FOR BETTE COLBY

Bette, aged 75, wife of Victor Colby, passed away on November 23rd 1999.

Bette Colby, née Pate, was associated with the C.D. back in Herbert Leckenby days, and corresponded him, and later with Eric Fayne.

Bette was a popular contributor to the C.D. and its annuals.

She was Secretary of the now no longer existing Australian Golden Hours Club, and as such corresponded with the Secretaries of the various OBBC Clubs. She was widely known and respected and will be much missed.

She was interested in most of our favourite papers, particularly those dealing with Sexton Blake. Our condolences go to Vic on his great loss.

(Mary Cadogan - from details supplied by Vic Colby)

JACK HUGHES provides this obituary for a great stalwart of our hobby.

## JAMES (JIM) COOK

Just two months short of his ninety-first birthday, Jim Cook of Auckland, New Zealand, has died.

Born in Poplar, England, he became a reader of the *Nelson Lee* in that paper's early years. A keen member of the St. Frank's League he became an area officer and helped organise local League clubs, enlisting new members from his school.

A Methodist, he belonged to the Sunday School of the Poplar Mission where the renowned 'Lax of Poplar' held sway as the minister. In later life Jim liked to reminisce about that man's life and times.

During the Second World War Jim served as a hospital orderly and had some narrow escapes in times of bombings. Following the war he worked for many years at the Fox Film Studios, meeting many of the stars of film and TV. Of many of these he did not have a very high opinion, their private lives being of unpleasant character and personality.

As his two sons had migrated to New Zealand, and at his wife's insistence, the couple migrated also. At Sydney, *Nelson Lee* hobbyists there enjoyed meeting them, spending a day till the ship left.

One disappointment on leaving England was that the bulk of his complete collection of *The Lee* had to be disposed of, although in later years he was able to replace many and he built up a library of nicely bound volumes of his favourite paper.

He maintained many pen friends within a circle of Lee and Blake. He only suffered Hamilton readers, and when visiting England and attending Club meetings he was always at the fore in arguing for Lee and St. Frank's against Hamilton's schools. His 'Letter from St. Frank's' appeared in the *Digest* for many years, novel sidelines to the stories as seen from the view of a visitor to the school. For many years he was a personal friend of Edwy Searles and Frances Brooks. Letter writing ceased in 1994 when he was taken victim of Alzheimer's. On November 9th 1999, as he was walking to a nearby shop, he was struck down by a massive stroke and died several hours later in hospital.

## Annuals for Christmas

By Norman Wright

What would Christmas have been without a good old Christmas annual or two tucked inside our Christmas pillowslip? There must be few of us who cannot close our eyes and transport ourselves back to some favourite Christmas of our childhood. The feel of those packages done up in bright paper, tantalisingly tactile to our touch, interestingly shaped and, perhaps, with a mysterious rattle when we shook them. Rip off the paper and look inside. If, like me you were a child of the 50s – and there are a fair few *Collectors' Digest* readers who grew up in the shadow of the Milky Bar Kid and Muffin the Mule – you can probably remember some of the likely gifts. Was it a Dan Dare radio station. These are still so plentiful on the second hand market that I think every child in the kingdom must have had one at some time or other during the mid to late 1950s. Or was it a Hornby or Tri-Ang electric train set. Gosh, one with a headlight glowing from the front, or with a capsule that made it steam. And in those smaller packets, did you get a Corgi car – you know 'the ones with windows', that gave Corgi the edge over Dinky – until the latter started putting windows in theirs.

There must have been many of us who received boxes of plastic figures – I came along just too late for lead soldiers. I was addicted to plastic figures; mainly knights and cowboys and spacemen. At one time I was forbidden to spend any more pocket money on them. But at Christmas it was different; Aunts and Uncles could add to my armies. The best of the bunch were the Swapits, made by Britons. How many of us can remember getting a boxed set of Wars of the Roses Knights stuffed into our Christmas stocking? Each figure with moveable visor, removable sword or axe, or pike or pole-axe. Great stuff. And as well as all the Dan Dare merchandise – and there was enough of that flowing from the toyshops during the fifties to fill every pillowcase in the land – there was quite a surfeit of Robin Hood toys. Richard Greene may have been Sir Henry Baskerville to some older readers but to us boys in the fifties he was the Robin Hood and we all wanted to find some Britons Robin Hood figures, or a Robin Hood plastic Bow and arrow, or a Robin Hood playsuit or some similar goody in Lincoln Green tucked into that pillow slip.

But once the toys were looked at and given a preliminary going over; when the tinplate robot had been wound up and allowed to run off the carpet onto the lino, when the pogo stick had been bounced a few times round the garden, what then was it that we always ended up with our noses glued to

for the best part of the day. Not the 'big' present that Mum and Dad had saved up to buy us, but one of those perennial annuals, without which Christmas would not have been Christmas.

I can't remember the first annual I ever received, it was probably *Robin* or perhaps *TV Comic Annual*, but I do remember the first annual that I really loved and that was a *Rupert Annual*. The cover depicted Bestall's little bear belting along on a sledge. It was early to mid 1950s and I particularly loved one of the stories in which Rupert and his chums, together with some girl guides, went on an adventure up a river in a rowing boat in search of adventure. This really appealed. It was the first work of fiction I read that made me want to go off in a rowing boat. There would, as I grew into Enid Blyton, be many others, but it was that little bear that germinated the seed of adventuring into my young consciousness. I remember discussing the possibilities of building a boat with a school-mate. We could find a river and look for an adventure. Our ideas, alas, never materialised which was probably just as well. At that time our carpentry skills left a lot to be desired. Lets face it, if we had difficulties making a bow and arrow what chance did we have of making a boat! I was reminded of our boat building ideas a few months ago when listening to an LP track by the Kinks entitled *Walter*. Those familiar with that particular Ray Davis song will understand what I mean.

But, of course, most of us soon grew out of Rupert and moved on to more academic works – like *The Beano*. Some older readers probably spent much of their childhood, in their imagination, at Greyfriars but Bash St. was the educational establishment that I grew up with; at least every Wednesday after school in the pages of *The Beano* and each Christmas in *The Beano Book*. Many a Christmas day found me, and many of you I imagine, chortling over the escapades of Biffo and Roger the Dodger and Grandpa, and that arch Menace – Dennis. My two favourite funnies characters in *The Beano* were Dennis the Menace and Jonah. Jonah came late to *The Beano* but Dennis was there from the early '50s and soon had his own annual, which could quickly be added to the Christmas list for a generous aunt or uncle to buy. I remember getting the second *Dennis the Menace Book*, for Christmas 1957. It was, for many years, one of my favourite books. Dennis did all the things we all wanted to do but didn't. I had a great desire to be like Dennis but, alas, I fear I was far more like Walter! I did save up and buy many of the jokes that Dennis used: black face soap, wobbly pencil, even a packet of stink bombs – remember the motto printed on the side of the box "the biggest stink since Hitler", but I hoarded them in my hidey hole rather than use them.

The *Dennis the Menace Book* for 1958 may have been one of my favourite books but my favourite annual of all time was the *Robin Hood Annual* issued by the Amalgamated Press. There were four issues dated between 1957

and 1960. The first one that came my way was the 1958 issue – I got it in the same Christmas stocking as my first Dennis book. Wow what a Christmas that was! The Amalgamated Press annuals were not based on the Richard Greene TV series, (those were published by Adprint and were always considered inferior by us boys) but was effectively, the annual for kids who read the Robin Hood issues of *Thriller Comic Library*, one of the 64 paged monthly pocket sized comics issued by the Amalgamated Press (and as a matter of interest my all time favourite comic). Within the AP Robin Hood annuals were stories, strips, coloured plates and factual information on Robin Hood and his times. A veritable feast that would have satisfied even Friar Tuck. Read the AP Robin Hood Annuals, have the Robin Hood issues of *Thriller Comics*, watch the TV series and you would be an expert on the feudal system – at least that’s what we all thought at the time. And in fact I still maintain that it was that combination that brought about my great interest in Saxon and Medieval times. In the ensuing years I got the Robin Hood Annuals for 1959 and 1960 in my Christmas stocking and during later years – in my second childhood - I sought out a copy of the missing 1957 issue, as I did also the 1956 *Dennis the Menace Book* which had originally appeared before my *Beano* reading days had begun.

As boyhood gave way to teens I stopped getting annuals - for a few years – until my second childhood, which fortunately began fairly soon after my first childhood ended, when I again became interested in annuals. With the dawning of this second childhood I once again found that when my wife or a close friend asked me what I wanted for Christmas I could still answer, “Well if you can find me a copy of such and such an annual for nineteen thirty something, that would be great.” Sadly it is no longer a question of going down to the corner newsagents to buy a copy. Those bumper year-books of our youth, read on Christmas day and enjoyed for years afterwards, are now harder to find. But when we do find them and turn the pages we can still sometimes feel that same thrill that we first encountered year ago, when, as children, we crawled down the bed in the half-light of early Christmas morning, pulled an annual from our pillow case and eagerly chortled over the humour of Desperate Dan or thrilled at the exploits of Jimmy and His Magic Patch. Ah, Christmas Annuals.

(See illustration on back cover.)

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## READING THE BANS (OR, BANNING THE READS . . .)

by Brian Doyle

Billy Bunter, William Brown, Biggles, Noddy . . . some of the most popular and best-loved characters in children's literature. But what else do they have in common?

They have all been banned from British public libraries at one time or another! And, in addition, have all been criticised as being poorly written or as 'bad influences' on children. Laughable? Of course. But those in 'authority' often are just that. Laughable, or just plain pathetic.

The famous 'Billy Bunter Ban' of 1970 is still remembered by many. It hit the national newspaper headlines in no uncertain fashion and became something of a 'cause célèbre' for at least a week (and that's a long time in journalism!).

It all began when Miss Dorothy White, the 62-year-old Chief Librarian of Ipswich Public Libraries in Suffolk, decided in her wisdom to banish her stock of Bunter Books to a special 'reserve stock' area, apparently curtained-off from the gaze of the general public, which contained books available only by 'special request'; these were said to include sex education manuals, graphically-illustrated medical works, 'risqué' novels (such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Fanny Hill* and, believe it or not, James Joyce's *Ulysses*). There was also a somewhat controversial children's 'instructional' book of the time titled, rather querulously, *Where Do Babies Come From?*

Here Billy Bunter was to 'serve his time' in doubtless embarrassment (and with no time off for good behaviour) without even a cookery book or two to lighten his hours. It would surely be even worse than the dreaded 'punishment room' (reserved for those just expelled) at Greyfriars School. The Fat Owl's detention was to be indefinite and only relieved if and when a piping juvenile voice would bravely ask if he could please 'take a Bunter out?'. Talk about 'Blind Date' . . .

Miss White was quoted as saying somewhat loftily: "I strongly feel that the Bunter stories are unfair to fat children. Other children might make fun of them. Billy, and his sister, Bessie, were, as I recall, gluttons, and we do not want to perpetuate this mistaken image. Excessive fatness can be a physical disability, it should be remembered." Warming to her subject, Miss White concluded: "Billy Bunter really is an odious character - a horrid boy. In fact, I think he was a bit warped."

The Ipswich Children's Librarian (who apparently hadn't had much of a say in the matter - and obviously had an eye on her job) said: "I agree with Miss White's decision. The Bunter-type humour is out-of-date for today's children anyway."

Mr. Brian Tooke, no less a figure than the Chairman of the Ipswich Libraries Committee (and patently something of a Greyfriars fan), was reported as saying: "I will look into this matter right away and see what can be done about getting the boy reinstated."

It was all rather like Dr. Locke intervening when a boy had been expelled by Mr. Hacker.

After all this broke in the national press, there were many letters to newspapers, especially the London *Times*, some quoting Charles Dickens (The Fat Boy in *Pickwick Papers*) and Shakespeare (Falstaff, and Julius Caesar's comment: "Let me have men about me that are fat . . ."). One writer even compared Bunter to Mr. Micawber,

pointing out that Bunter was always waiting for something to turn up too, especially his famous Postal Order.

There weren't any questions asked in Parliament (at least, if there were, there is no mention of them in my cuttings on the matter), but there were newspaper editorials, leaders, and several cartoons, including a memorable and classic one by the famous Giles in the *Sunday Express*; this showed a long queue of wicked-looking children at a public library counter, where one lady assistant was saying to another: "Yaroooh! Back come all the Fanny Hills and Lady Chatterleys - out go all the Billy Bunters . . . !"

Peter Grosvenor, the then-Literary Editor of the *Daily Express* (whom I happened to know) rang me for my thoughts on the affair and came out next day with a full-page article, including a few of my 'quotes': 'Mr. Brian Doyle, a leading Bunter expert, thinks it's sacrilege! "Do you know they actually chose what was virtually Bunter's 62nd birthday to ban him? He made his debut in *The Magnet* in February, 1908. And I was at school with a fat chap who was quite proud to be nicknamed 'old Bunter'.'" (Forget that 'leading Bunter expert' bit - you know what journalists are . . . !)

The whole affair eventually died down and, a week or so later, Ipswich - and Miss White - bowed to public pressure. Billy Bunter was reinstated on the 'open' junior library shelves and came out from behind the curtains, no doubt a sadder but wiser schoolboy. The local Libraries Committee official was quoted as saying: "After all, these are classics of children's literature, aren't they?" So there. And thus ended the great 'Billy Bunter Ban' (I nearly wrote 'Bun') of 1970. I can't help wondering what books now lurk today behind those curtains in Ipswich Public Library. Perhaps someone could go and take a peep and let us know . . . ?

Of course, the banning of popular children's characters (whose adventures can be read by all ages!) has been cropping up regularly for many years.

'What A Shame About William!' was a *Daily Express* headline in 1965, when Lancashire Public Libraries ruled that the *Just William* books on their shelves would not be replaced when they were withdrawn due to their worn condition. A spokesman said: "We want better quality books, not the sort of stuff children can read in comics."

William - together with Biggles and Noddy - also suffered at the hands of the not-so-saintly St. Pancras Public Libraries, in London, in 1963, when, after a ban, the Chief Librarian bleated: "We think the stories are badly written and do not stimulate a child's imagination." It was in the 1950s that this same St. P. decreed that no books by Richmal Crompton, W.E. Johns or Enid Blyton were to be replaced by new copies when the time came.

Biggles has, of course, been condemned several times over the years for his so-called 'fascist' and racist attitudes. William Brown has been accused of contributing to juvenile delinquency, his constant slang and the dropping of his 'g's'.

But the children's author who has suffered most from self-righteous and often ignorant preachers is the prolific Enid Blyton, who has probably brought more pleasure and delight to young readers in Britain (and elsewhere) than any other writer with her 700 books and countless magazines published over around 70 years. She has played a major part in teaching children to read and to acquire the habit of reading too. She should have been made a Dame in the 1960s.

But no, people loved to snipe at her and her works. Hertfordshire Public Libraries suppressed her books from the late 1940s - but 'reinstated' her some thirty years later! Many of her books were withdrawn and barred from public library shelves up and down the country from the 1950s onwards; the instances have been far too many to cite here.

Poor little Noddy - so popular with little children - has borne the brunt of the librarians' and critics' rage, for various odd reasons. They include his 'suspect' relationship with his friend Big Ears, his limited vocabulary, his being portrayed as a simpleton and mere caricature, and Blyton's use of black (gasp!) golliwogs as violent villains, not to mention her dated attitudes to racism, sexism and class. Most of the children who feature in her stories are despised because they are 'middle-class', have good manners and speak well. And why not? A pleasant change from many of the 'heroines' of today's co-called children's stories, which are apt to be about foul-mouthed pregnant schoolgirls living in sordid conditions and who drink, take drugs, speak with 'orrible accents, are rude and objectionable to all they come into contact with, know nothing about anything, and often have violent, mean and evil-tempered parents or boyfriends. Yet the books about these sort of young people are usually praised to the skies and frequently win awards. These are the books that should be banned.

But dear old Enid has successfully sailed through these recurring storms of prejudice and still remains the most triumphantly best-selling children's author of all time. I was brought up (and largely learned to read) on her *Sunny Stories* weekly magazine in the late 1930s/early 1940s and on her story-books and novels (though I missed out on 'Noddy' - I had grown up by then!) and I don't think it's done me much harm . . .

And while we're on the subject of suppressed books: do you remember that Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* was officially banned for many years in South Africa, during the dreadful reign of apartheid there (think about it . . .).

It's always been pretty certain that children are much better judges of what children want to - and don't want to - read, than adults. Reading should ideally be diverse and varied, surely. Serendipity - that's the word I was trying to remember (and what a delightful word it is!); it means that faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident.

Beatrix Potter used it now and again - and she knew how to please the young, both in words and pictures. Nobody ever tried to ban her . . .



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## OLD CHRISTMAS

by Ted Baldock

Again at Christmas did we weave  
The holly round the Christmas hearth.  
*Tennyson. In Memoriam.*

What set of circumstances is it that combined to produce such evergreen memories of those wonderful old Christmas numbers of the *Magnet* and *Gem*? Why do we regard them with such affection?

They had a very special meaning for us and, of course, we had an equally special loyalty to them. How we looked forward to the publishing day! These papers brought immediate joy and fulfilment to the festive occasion so eagerly anticipated by us. These special numbers opened the gateway to Christmas, and now surely some of our most abiding memories of the twentieth century will be of that magic moment when we opened the first page and were immediately transferred to the jolly and adventurous worlds of Greyfriars and St. Jim's.

Browsing through them today one finds many echoes of our own schooldays. Years seem to fall away and we are able to view once more those fresh young days when we had the world at our feet, and Harry Wharton and Co. (and Billy Bunter) were a power in the land. Bunter's fat features - a sight to behold - with an expansive grin stretching almost from ear to ear as he surveyed the heavily laden festive board.

Much water, dark and fair, has flowed beneath old Courtfield bridge since those days. Yet the vision remains stamped indelibly as ever upon our minds. What is the secret held by these old numbers that exert such an influence? What is it that makes them so dearly loved? What elements conspired to produce such lasting memories? Here is food for thought.

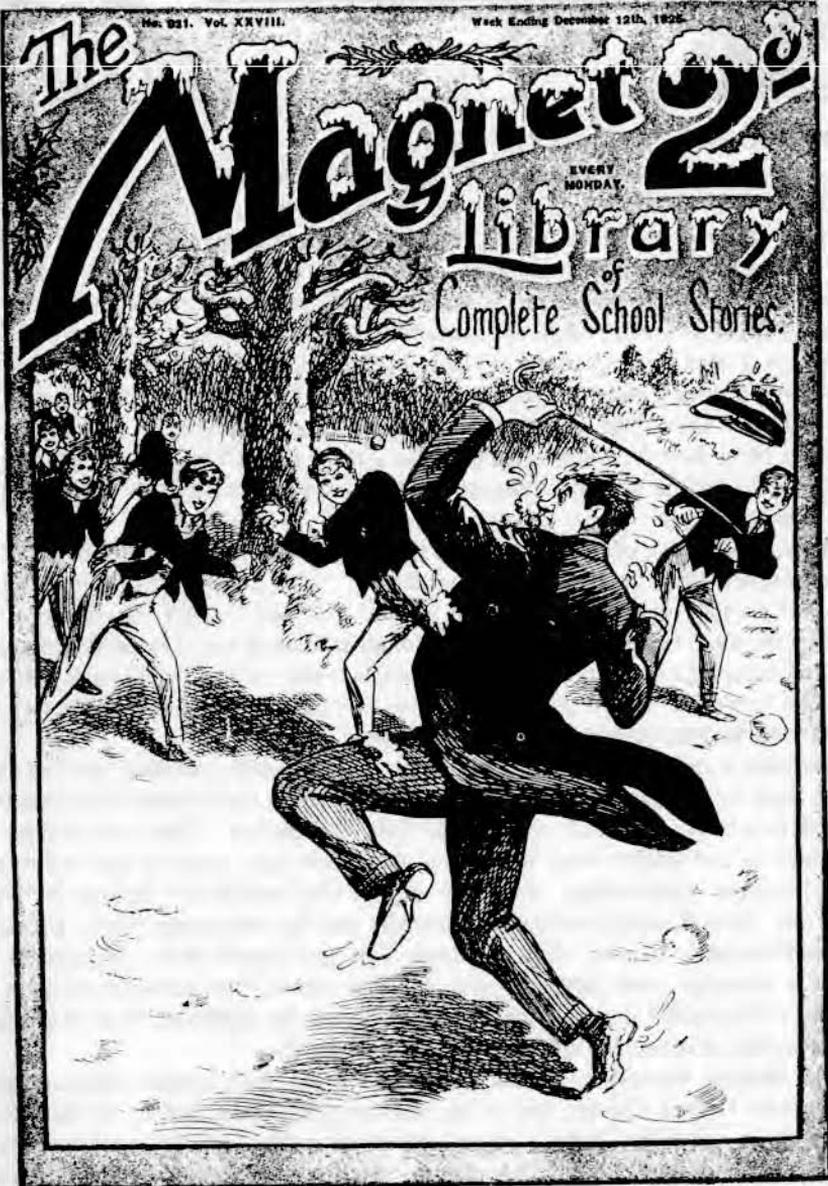
There was sure to be snow and bitter winds howling round the chimneys of Wharton Lodge. Christmas would have been incomplete were such weather lacking. John, the footman, would be keeping the fires well supplied with logs. Although such duties did not by custom fall within the realms of his official duties, John would be 'helping out' with all the traditional spirit of the season, much to the relief of Mary, the maid within whose sphere lay these chores. Wells, the portly Wharton Lodge butler, unbent his strict ritual at this time and became, in a sense, quite Pickwickian, allowing himself certain little jovialities with the staff 'below stairs'. The mellowing influence of the season was very much in evidence.

Hurree Singh, 'Inky', if tradition means anything, would be crouching over the fire in Harry Wharton's 'den', very susceptible to open doors and draughts, and dreaming of the scorched and dusty plains of Bhanipur. And, as well as the Famous Five, Bunter would be waiting in the wings!

All would be well in that world so familiar to us. All is preserved for posterity in those Christmas numbers.

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SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER



A CHRISTMAS BOX FOR THE TYRANT OF THE SIXTH!



## A 'RESPECTABLE' PAIR OF CROOKS

by J.E.M.

As Alexandre Dumas famously said, "Look for the woman; there must be a woman at the bottom of it." Well, you don't have to search for long in the saga of Sexton Blake. From the beginning, there was never a shortage of female involvement, and numerous ladies - invariably of matchless glamour - lent their presence and talents to both sides of the law. Blake's endless encounters with the opposite sex introduced females from every class and clime and a more exotic lot it would be hard to imagine: from Princess Lara to the Duchess Ysabel de Ferre and from Lady Marjorie Dorn to Lady Molly Maxwell - to say nothing of more familiar names like Mlle Yvonne, Mlle Roxane, Vali Mata-Vali and Marie Galante. Then there were females of humbler origin like Biuri, a poor girl from India, and Nhin Kee (of dubious employment) from Indo-China. In fact, I once put together a list totalling 54 names (*Digest* No. 485) - not including characters from the so-called 'new Blake' era.

Many, if not most, of the above ladies were amorously involved with Sexton Blake, even sometimes when they were breaking the law. It is little short of miraculous that Blake ever escaped marriage but we can be sure that, had he ever joined one of these females at the altar, he would have made an honest woman of her. One story introduced a lady crook named Conversation Kate who told Blake that "if there were more men in the world like you there would be fewer women like me." Clearly a brand ready to be plucked from the burning by the hand of matrimony.

The male criminals against whom Blake struggled were certainly not left behind when it came to an interest in the opposite sex. In truth, the baddies often had female accomplices who were at least as deadly as their *companeros*. Their relationships were only hinted at and readers were left to speculate about any intimacy that went beyond merely 'business' partnerships. Examples of this kind include Dr. Huxton Rymer and Mary Trent, Leon Kestrel (the Master Mummer) and the bewitching Fifette Bierce, and Marsden Plummer's liaisons with Vali Mata-Vali and Muriel Marl. In none of these cases was marriage even hinted at and, for this reason, any personal feelings were generally soft-pedalled since 'living in sin' could not be approved of in those distant times (it would, of course, be all very different nowadays!).

One striking exception to this treatment of the male-female relationship was introduced by Gilbert Chester, one of the most popular Blake authors of the inter-war years. Gilbert and Eileen Hale, a pair of extremely ruthless crooks, were actually *man and wife!* Not only were they 'respectable' (well, sort of) but enjoyed very prosaic names. One could almost imagine living next door to 'the Hales' - or perhaps even 'Gil and Eileen'. However, there was nothing commonplace about their activities and still less about their appearance. Here is Gilbert Hale: "As he approached, a street lamp brought

his clean-cut aristocratic features into relief . . . young and extraordinarily good-looking . . . His figure was well-built and athletic. Through the upturned points of his overcoat collar peeped the wings of a dress-tie . . .". Not, in reflection, the sort of chap you would immediately address as 'Gil'! And this is his wife, Eileen: "Slight, short and petite, she was one of the loveliest girls he had ever seen . . . Her voice was low and mellow . . .". Both these quotes are from "The Proud Tram Mystery" (UJ 1485), the first story in the famous Tram series. From the same source we discover just how tough and ruthless Eileen can be. She not only bullies her husband but shows no hesitation in using a silver(!) automatic pistol which she carries in the top of her stocking.

It goes without saying that the nefarious plans of the Hales are, as ever, frustrated by Sexton Blake. Not for the first time, we are left wondering how Blake's opponents ever made a living. Even by pre-war standards their aim in this story is modest enough: a blackmail plan to enrich themselves by ten pounds a week. None of your grandiose million-pound plots here. Perhaps, after all, they really aspired in their hearts to a modest middle-class existence appropriate to their respectable married status?

The Hales appeared in only a handful of *Union Jack* stories and only twice in the SBL (First Series). However they came into their own in the Second Series, the Sexton Blake Catalogue listing 17 titles. It is interesting that a couple of these suggest motoring or racing-car themes - reminders of Gilbert Chester's own personal interests. Chester also shows a wide technical knowledge in other fields. For instance, in the "Proud Tram" story from which I have quoted, he provides some fascinating information about musical instruments. But perhaps, in the end, his most memorable gift to Blakians was his creation of that marvellous pair of 'respectable' crooks, Mr and Mrs Hale.

#### **Afterword:**

If, in the post-1920 era, the Hales were a rare breed, married crooks were not unknown to an earlier period of the saga. According to the late S. Gordon Swan (see *Digest* 385) one such case was Ezra Q. Maitland, an American baddie, and his equally lawless wife, Kate. When her husband was executed Kate was so enthusiastic for the married state that she vigorously pursued another crook who, for his part, was so keen to *avoid* matrimony that he faked his own death! In the same period, even Marsden Plummer sought wedlock (if with mixed motives). Nowhere, it appears, were there hints of 'partnerships' or 'living-in'. In short, at least up to the First World War, it was, for the crooked as for the law-abiding, marriage - or nothing!

\*\*\*\*\*

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## BEHIND EVERY GREAT MAN . . . .

by Tony Glynn

A news item appearing in October caused considerable interest among those who enjoy a good yarn and, when I read it, my thoughts went to the *Nelson Lee Library*, Edwy Searles Brooks and his wife, Frances.

The newspaper story concerned the popular jockey-turned-novelist, Dick Francis, and it conjectured whether or not his wife, Mary, had a previously unacknowledged role in producing his many best-selling thrillers. It seems the question was raised in a recent biography of Dick Francis which pointed out that his educational and literary background was inferior to that of his wife, a university graduate and former publisher's reader, and Mrs Francis might be his unsung collaborator.

This is not the place to go into the provenance of the Dick Francis novels, but the matter of husband and wife collaborations is of some interest to Leeites and the name of Francis provides an added aptness. St. Frank's, you may recall, was properly called St. Francis's College and it acquired that name for reasons special to Edwy Searles Brooks.

Among my St. Frank's treasures, I have some full typescripts of *NLL* stories from 1928 and 1929, each neatly secured by a spine of that old-fashioned sticky brown paper - the kind which criss-crossed our windows in blitz days - and each bearing the title of the story, the number of the *NLL* and the date on which it was to be published. Every so often the back of one of the pages bears a rubber date stamp which, I think, indicates the conclusion of a batch of typing done that day. These dates, when compared with the publication date of each story, show that ESB was working two months ahead of schedule.

These typescripts are, in fact, the carbon copies kept by ESB, made available to me some years ago by that *NLL* expert of happy memory, Bob Blythe. They reveal a meticulous system of working and the keeping of a carbon was a wise precaution against the loss of the top copy. The typing is faultless and the sub-editor handling the original typescript could hardly have found fault with it. Indeed, the printed versions do not show alterations to the text. The carbons in text and presentation are prime examples of professionalism.

The transferring of Edwy Searles Brooks' plotting and characterisation to the page was not, however, the work of his own hand, for the typing was done by Mrs Frances Brooks, whom he had married in 1920.

In the *St. Frank's Jubilee Companion*, published in 1977, the couple's son, Mr. Lionel Brooks, described his father's working methods. He wrote that ESB frequently outlined a synopsis and characters with a fountain-pen but dictated the bulk of the story for typing by Mrs Brooks. At one time, he used a dictaphone but he later took to dictating directly to Mrs Brooks as she typed. It was obviously a perfect partnership for Lionel

Brooks pointed out that, while his mother had little literary ability of her own, the constant co-operation enabled her to help out in many ways and to assist ESB when he was stumped.

Edwy Searles Brooks did, of course, pay special tribute to his wife by giving his fictional college the masculine form of her name - Francis. Since St. Frank's was created in 1917, three years before their marriage, I presume this act of christening took place during their courtship. It is a nice touch and I like it all the more because my sister happens to be named Frances. I have a family feeling for St. Frank's.

My much-treasured *NLL* carbons have considerable nostalgic value. Some of them, such as "The Mystery of Edgemoor Manor" from 1928 and "Archie's Lancashire Lass" from 1929 were among the first stories of St. Frank's I ever read when, in the middle of the Second World War, I came upon a little cache of *NLLs* in a second-hand bookshop. The weekly had then been defunct for a decade but for me, a 12-year-old hungry for reading matter in those paper-starved years, they opened a wonderful world and I wanted more. The fascination lingers on and I remain a Leeite.

To consider both the typescripts and the printed versions of the stories is to glimpse the tremendous industry to which ESB - and Frances Brooks - were committed. Nor was the *NLL* the whole story for, in those early years, ESB was also working for the Sexton Blake market and other fiction outlets.

Whether the Dick Francis novels are joint efforts or not, we certainly know that the St. Frank's saga owes much to the wife of the college's creator.

Many another decade has rolled by since the *NLL* folded but Leeites still find the St. Frank's stories fresh and enjoyable. In enjoying them, we should surely spare a grateful thought for Mrs Frances Brooks who played an essential role in creating the saga centred on the college to which she gave her name.

\*\*\*\*\*

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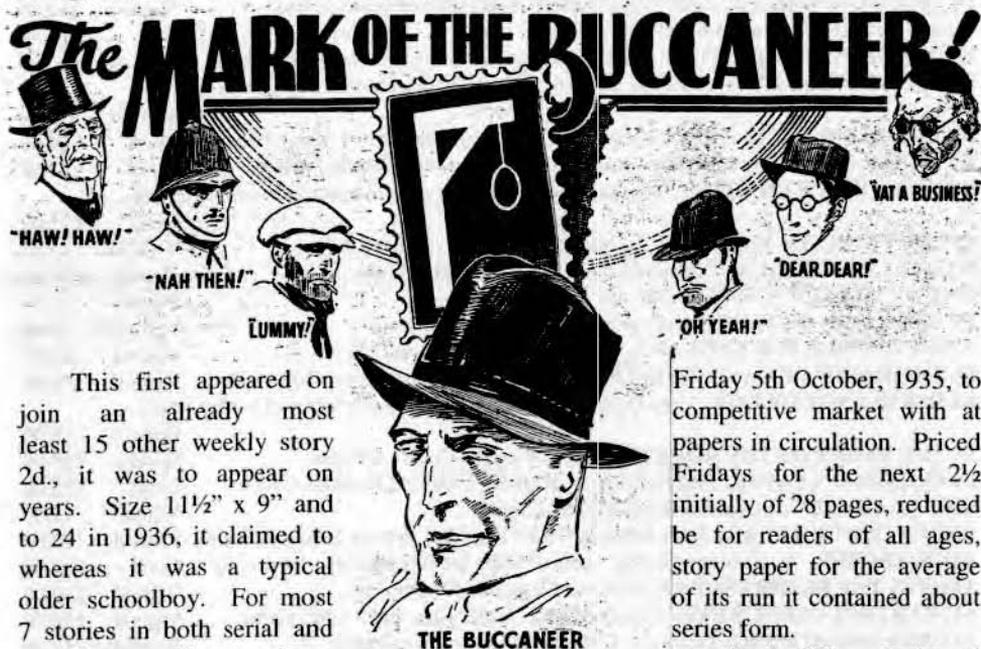
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## I REMEMBER

by Bill Bradford

One of the few advantages of getting old is to have lived through much of the golden age of boys' papers, and remembering the joy of publication day and the anticipation of the next instalment of a favourite serial. My interest goes back to 1930 when my father presented me with the current monthly issue of the *Boy's Own Paper*, which I still possess!

I thought that, over a period of time, I would recall some of these memories particularly of the lesser known papers, as I am sure I could not add to your knowledge of the most popular publications. Our Editor will no doubt tell me when you have had enough; meantime I will start, for no particular reason, with the *Pilot*.



This first appeared on join an already most least 15 other weekly story 2d., it was to appear on years. Size 11½" x 9" and to 24 in 1936, it claimed to whereas it was a typical older schoolboy. For most 7 stories in both serial and

The first issue contained "The Outlawed Three" by Charles Hamilton, which ran for 14 weeks and later emerged as *Boys' Friend Library* No. 557 (hereafter I shall refer to the latter publications as *BFL*.) Also in No. 1 we have "The House of 100 Eyes", a 12-week serial by Paul Urquhart, real name Ladbroke Black, who wrote many stories in the Sexton Blake Library (2nd Series). He also wrote "The Black Monk" in Nos. 13-30 (*BFL* 553). I personally consider these two series the highlights of the *Pilot*.

That prolific and accomplished author, Alfred Edgar, contributed at least two excellent series, "The Law of the Forgotten Men" (No. 20-29, *BFL* 269) and "The White Knight Rides Again" (No. 29-41, *BFL* 584). George E. Rochester wrote "Their Bronco was a Bike" between issues 46-54, which was repeated as "The Tandem Cowboys" in *BFL* 604.

Another author, R. Gordon (real name Adrian Murray) had a series "Mark of the Buccaneer" in No. 41-52 (*BFL* 634) and "The Laughing Buccaneer" intermittently between No. 53-125 (*BFL* 654). This 20th century Robin Hood was a counterpart of the Saint and according to Lofts and Adley ("The Saint and Leslie Charteris") extracts of original Saint stories were used without Charteris's knowledge. Severe repercussions resulted, and presumably the author learned his lesson. However, the stories were very popular with readers of the *Pilot*, most of whom would be too young to be conversant with the Saint books. Both *BFLs* are very scarce. I also note that a Charteris book in 1933 was called "The Brighter Buccaneer". Surprising what comes to light when you start delving!!

In 1937, Charles Hamilton created another new school, Bendover, casting Will Hay as Headmaster. Hay was then at the peak of his career and star of many film comedies. These stories appeared in No. 72-83 (*BFL* 647) and in No. 88-102 (*BFL* 649). Howard Baker republished these in 1981. This series returned in No. 106-109, this time written by E.S. Brooks. The latter had written "Houdini Magic Maker No. 1" in issues 96-102. These stories were published as "The Schoolboy Magician" in *BFL* 670. Brooks also wrote "Buffalo Bill's Boyhood" in No. 121-131 (*BFL* 674).

Around this time it was popular to introduce stories of well-known people. Hence we read of the early adventures of Leonard Henry, of Ken Maynard and two footballers, Alex James (Arsenal) and Fred Steele (Stoke City). During the last year of the *Pilot* there was an increased tendency towards stories told in picture strip, such as "Comic Capers of Stainless Stephen" (comedian), "Return of Tarzan" and "Beasts of Tarzan". From issue No. 76 the front cover ceased to depict incidents from the stories and changed to comic strips. This did nothing for the paper and seemed unsuited to a story paper. I have never cared for picture stories, especially alleged funny ones, and read to be thrilled!



Leonard Shields, Fred Bennett and S.H. Chapman.

At least 24 stories reappeared in the *Boy's Friend Library*. I have only 90 issues, lacking mainly those from the last year, so I have probably omitted sundry interesting aspects. To sum up, this was a paper I bought most weeks, but it was not 'a must'. I never thought it as good as the *Ranger* which it was supposed to supersede. It was helped by several very good authors with excellent stories, but I think it declined latterly, probably the reason for a sudden demise. Copies are very scarce, perhaps because it was never a big seller and production runs must have been limited. The last issue was on Friday 2nd April 1938, No. 131.

\*\*\*\*\*

**BIG BEN AND LITTLE LEN** were a pair of brothers who had a long-lasting and tempestuous career in *Comic Cuts* through the 1930s.



When not at war with their dear old dad, they were displaying a distinct lack of brotherly love and scrapping with each other. Whichever way their warlike energies were deployed, however, it was usually Little Len, a shrimp in loudly chequered trousers, who came off best in the last panel.

If I'm taken to task for showing Big Ben with a cigarette, well, he was of his time and was frequently shown smoking. In fact, in one 1931 episode, his doctor restricted him to one cigarette a day and he was depicted sporting an all-day gasper of enormous proportions, made

from baccy filched from Pa. And you can't get much more politically incorrect than that!

Ben and Len issued from the ceaselessly busy pen of that mainstay of the penny comics published by the Amalgamated Press, "Charlie" Pease.

**Tony Glynn.**

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## FILM FUN AT GREYFRIARS? Sadly, Brian Doyle has to say 'Cut!'

Greyfriars on the big screen as a major cinema film? It's never happened, regretfully. Not yet, anyway. But it nearly did, more than once. If you believe the odd rumours and occasional Press stories over the years.

A letter to the *Collectors' Digest* at the time drew readers' attention to a brief news item in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1963: "45 years ago, there were vague plans to put Billy Bunter into films. The turrets and tuckshop of Greyfriars never materialised at Elstree." The letter-writer remarked: "That takes us back to 1918, when Elstree was barely established as a film-making centre. Was this story true and, if so, which company was interested?"

Editor Eric Fayne replied: "One can find references to a possible Greyfriars film in editor Hinton's 'Chats' early in the World War One period in *The Magnet*. And, in the 1930s, *Magnet* editor Down referred to similar film projects."

When well-known British film director John Paddy Carstairs (he made the first few Norman Wisdom comedies in the mid-1950s) died in 1970, *The Times* Obituary Notice included this interesting item: "John Paddy Carstairs formed Repton's first Film Society in 1927, when he was a pupil there, and also directed its first film - a melodrama of public school life entitled 'The Hero of St. Jim's'." It was presumably only publicly exhibited at the school.

I knew Paddy Carstairs during my time at Pinewood Studios as a publicist in the late 1950s and often chatted to him. If only I had known about his early 'St. Jim's' film I could have asked him about it. But, unfortunately, I **didn't** know about it! Only an amateur schoolboy film, no doubt, but fascinating, nevertheless . . .

The late Bill Lofts (and how we all miss him) once told me (and also mentioned it in one of his *CD* pieces) about a projected British feature film about Greyfriars in (I think) the 1950s. The planned casting was so ludicrous that it takes the breath away! Apparently, the once-popular 'gormless' comedian Claude Dampier (he of the prominent front teeth and non-stop talk about his landlady, Mrs. Gibson) was to portray Mr. Quelch, and the broadly-humorous (rather in the 'Old Mother Riley' mould) music-hall comedienne Nellie Wallace was to be the 'House Dame'!

With this sort of set-up, Dr. Locke would no doubt have been Frank Randle, Norman Evans, Mr. Prout, and Max Miller, Gosling, the school porter. 'Wee' Georgie Wood would, of course, have been Bunter and Charles Hawtrey, Harry Wharton. The school would naturally be changed to Blackfriars . . .

Another, more recent, flight of fancy concerned rumours that 'camp' comedian Julian Clary might well be in a possible TV series featuring Billy Bunter and his schoolfriends. No doubt at Gayfriars . . . !

In 1959, show business journalist Peter Noble, in his weekly spot on the BBC radio programme *Movie-Go-Round*, announced that the current Billy Bunter stage show in London (*Billy Bunter's Mystery Christmas*) was such a big success that it was to be produced as a feature film, starring Gerald Campion "in the part he has made his very own", chortled Noble, being unable to resist the witty comment that "he would be playing a big, fat starring role!" Oh dear . . . . Nothing further was heard of this.

And when, in 1960, the Disney film *Greyfriars Bobby* came out, it was, of course, nothing to do with that venerable seat of learning in Kent (as some people apparently imagined it was!) but the screen version of Eleanor Atkinson's popular novel, first published in 1940, and based upon the true story of a Skye Terrier dog who so loved his master that, when the latter died, he kept vigil (and strict guard) and would not leave his grave in the Greyfriars 'kirkyard' (or churchyard) in Greyfriars Place, in the heart of Edinburgh. There is a statue of the little canine hero on the spot to this day. A lovely and moving story - but still nothing to do with Greyfriars School . . . !

But that always seems to be the case when hopes and rumours of a movie Bunter or a motion picture Greyfriars crop up. And there appears to be little likelihood of such a film these days, sadly. Perhaps it will eventually happen. After all, Greyfriars has made it onto stage, television and radio - the cinema screen should be the next logical step.

But would we like it if it **did** happen? Maybe not. But it would be nice to be given the opportunity to find out.

A case of 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips!' - 'Hello, Mr. Quelch!' . . .

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## **A TROUBLED REUNION AT MORCOVE**

**by Ray Hopkins**

Hilda Fawley is thrilled to think she is to see Betty Barton, her old Council School friend from Lancashire, when she arrives as a new girl at the school in Devon. Unable to find Betty, who is spending the weekend at Exeter, Hilda takes the opportunity to cycle into Barncombe to meet up with two other old friends from Ribbleton Council School, from whence they all hail. Edna and Dick Loring and their mother had moved south only three months previously.

Hilda is disturbed to find Edna in poor health with a very pronounced limp. Dick is employed by a local surveyor's office. Edna and Hilda compare their old surroundings in Ribbleton with the small villa surrounded by a large garden where the Lorings now live, and the attractive country situation of Morcove School.

Edna appears to be strangely disturbed when she hears that Hilda's Form Captain is none other than Betty Barton. Betty, Edna feels, is bound to have changed for the worse with her parents having gone up in the world. Edna urges Hilda to hide the fact that they are living in Barncombe from Betty. Hilda is further puzzled when she returns to the school and greets Betty effusively. Betty is cold and hostile but she will explain no further than saying that Hilda cannot be unaware of the reason for her change of attitude. Hilda shakes her head in disbelief. More mystery! Hilda is not only puzzled but filled with unease.

Betty's great chum, Polly Linton, and her first champion at Morcove when she arrived from Ribbleton, is also puzzled by Betty's avoidance of the new girl. Polly hopes to heal the breach and thinks she is succeeding when Betty invites Hilda to accompany Study 12 on a picnic. But Hilda has already promised to visit Edna Loring. Later, Betty, leaving the Creamery in Barncombe where she had had tea with Study 12 and Hilda, sees Dick doing some surveying work with his employer and, surprised that he is now living locally, goes home with him. The rest return to Morcove and Polly asks Hilda why she

hadn't told Betty that the Loring's were now living in the neighbourhood. Betty reports to Study 12 how happy she has been to meet Edna again and plans to make regular visits. Hilda, her head in a whirl, again wonders at Edna's original fear of meeting Betty as the Form Captain is evidently brimming over with goodwill toward the lame girl.

Polly, playing detective, wonders why Betty has turned against Hilda whereas Edna hasn't. Polly, feeling she must clear up this mystery, hikes Hilda along to Study 12 to confront Betty and insist on knowing what the problem is. Betty agrees to tell but the only one who would be able to confirm her statement is a teacher who has since emigrated to Canada.

This teacher had called at the Bartons' impoverished home saying her desk had been rifled and money stolen. All the evidence points to Betty's having taken the money, but she forgives her because the Barton family are on the verge of starvation. Betty protests in vain that she is innocent. Long after, fresh evidence came to light exonerating her. The empty box stolen from the teacher's desk was dug up in the back garden of the house where Hilda Fawley had lived. And that is why, says Betty, "I cannot forgive the girl who caused such undeserved misery in my home".

Hilda strenuously denies that she had any part in the theft, but she realises that there is no way she can prove what she is saying in much the same way that Betty was unable to do, at the time of the original theft. Hilda is viewed with compassion by the majority of the form who feel that poverty caused her to do what she did. So she is, in a way, 'forgiven' for the transgression. But forgiveness for something only she knows she has not done is a form of insult and Hilda retreats from the companionship of the form. She stops playing tennis and dropping in to see Edna because the Study 12 coterie have taken to visiting the lame girl.

Dick Loring, who is enjoying a very pleasant acquaintanceship with both Polly Linton and her big-hearted brother Jack, decides to take a hand and see if he can't clear up the puzzle of the different attitudes of the three former friends from Ribbleton Council School. Through the good offices of Jack Linton, who pretends his motor-cycle and sidecar is so old and decrepit (it isn't) that he must have a new one, Dick is persuaded to purchase Jack's old one for £7.50 (Dick feels that it is worth more in the region of £27.50 and plans to have it properly valued by a mechanic and will insist on paying Jack as much as it is really worth). So Dick is not only able to take his sister for runs in his new acquisition but also gives Hilda lifts when he comes across her on her own.

And here enters the villainess in the shape of Diana Forbes, a worthy successor in cruelty to Cora Grandways. Cora has been forced to see the error of her ways by becoming afflicted by blindness. Diana observes Betty talking to Dick at the school gates. Dick is asking Betty why she has a down on Hilda.

Diana thinks Betty is jealous of Hilda's friendship with Dick and throws out little hints around the form hoping they might decide it is time to have a better-natured Form Captain. The elegant Diana Forbes might just be the one! Diana also steals a sheet of Betty's distinctive heliotrope notepaper from Study 12 then, copying Betty's handwriting, she writes to Dick telling him why Hilda is so much alone these days: Hilda stole money while at Council School and another girl was accused of the theft. Diana does not sign the letter but words it as though written by the girl who was blamed.

Dick shows the letter to his sister and Edna, petrified, hears her brother say that he is convinced neither girl is the real thief. He shows Hilda the letter, says he doesn't believe a word of it and utters his suspicions of an unknown girl who must have been the real thief. Hilda, working herself up to a state of anger she has never felt before over the sneaking letter, tells Polly she cannot speak to Betty ever again and fully believes that Betty wrote to Dick accusing her.

Polly, also in high dudgeon, pulls Betty out of a tennis match so that Hilda can accuse her to her face. Betty denies writing the letter and Diana is quick to remark that the Form should not be forced to stand a captain that the cannot respect.

As this debate is progressing at Morcove, Dick is tearing up the letter in a field near his home. The pieces scatter in the wind! Diana keeps up her whispering campaign against Betty who decides she must see the letter purported to be written by her. Polly joins Betty in seeing Dick at Barncombe and he gives them the bad news that the letter is no longer in existence. He also tells them that nothing can shake his faith in Hilda and so he must be true to her. Betty, white-lipped, informs Dick that, as he obviously believes she is a girl who tells lies, she will no longer be able to speak to him.

Betty finds a coldness in the attitude of several of the girls who have always backed her up so that, apart from her Study 12 chums, she feels that perhaps the Form should have a new Captain, one they can trust and believe in. Hilda regrets this turn of events and, knowing that it has entirely been brought on by the forged letter, urges Dick to try to find any surviving pieces. He is able to find enough to show the handwriting clearly.

Back in Study 12, the remains of the letter are studied by Betty's chums and their comments as to its authenticity cause her to cry, "You're not trying to prove that I didn't write the letter; you're trying to prove that I did!" She orders them to get out of her sight. Only Polly remains to comfort her.

The letter has also caused tension inside the Loring household, Edna inclining to the belief that Betty did not write the letter, while Dick, in his championing of Hilda, feeling that she must have. Hilda is saddened to see the worsening relationship between the previously loving brother and his lame sister. Dick tells Hilda he feels Edna is deteriorating in health and her limping step, which had begun to improve on their removal to Barncombe, seems to have become more pronounced. Hilda tells Dick that the Study 12 coterie is now broken up and Betty only has Polly to support her.

Edna, alone with her anguished thoughts, ruminates on the possibility of what would be the attitude of her new friends at Morcove, what indeed would her brother and mother think of her and, above all, what would Hilda think of her if they all knew the reason for the apparent deterioration in her health. For it was Edna herself who had committed the crime of stealing the teacher's money box, of climbing over into the garden where the Fawleys used to live to bury the empty box, during which she had fallen and damaged her ankle which had never healed properly!

Edna confesses to Dick when he returns home and insists on going herself to Morcove to face up to the two girls she has wronged. "I was the thief!" Edna reveals to Betty and Hilda. Edna tells them she knows she has been the cause of all the friction at Morcove between her old Council School friends. She wants no forgiveness, she does not deserve any and will not intrude on any of them again. But Betty and Hilda won't have that and insist that they will now be able to be the same friends they were at Ribbleton.

So one puzzle has been cleared up and, almost at once, the other (who wrote the letter) is also revealed by Tessa Trelawney. The astute Tess has been studying the pieced-together torn-up letter with a magnifying glass and comparing the writing with a specimen of every other fourth-former's handwriting. She is thus able to reveal that, without a doubt, the underhand letter-writer was Diana Forbes. If she refuses to confess, the confronted Diana is told, Miss Somerfield will be informed and she will be expelled.

Diana refuses to admit her guilt but Betty must be put right in the eyes of the rest of the Fourth by Tess revealing her findings to them. If the Form insist on knowing the name of the culprit then Diana would have to face the consequences of the Form's rage. So Diana is revealed as the miserable schemer she is, but she does not have to leave Morcove.

Naomer, who is willing to drop everything at any time in order to eat, have a refresher and make merry, cries "What ze diggings; bekas we must have a spread to cellerbrate!"

(From *Schoolgirls' Own* 430-434, May 1929, reprinted in *SGOL* 665, "Not Fit for Morcove", Jan 1939.)

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## SOME REFLECTIONS ON CLIFF HOUSE AND MORCOVE

by Dennis Bird

I find it interesting to "compare and contrast" (as the old school exam phrase has it) the girls of Morcove with those of Cliff House. Our Editor and Patricia Craig have of course done this in some detail in their brilliant book *You're a Brick, Angela!* – and shown how the two series were linked together in their origins. Charles Hamilton started the Cliff House stories as a sideline to Greyfriars, but soon handed over the "Hilda Richards" pen-name to Horace Phillips. Phillips did so well that in 1921 the Amalgamated Press allowed him to start his own series; thus was Morcove born.

Both sagas revolve around the captains of their respective Fourth Forms: Barbara Redfern (Cliff House) and Betty Barton (Morcove). These two girls have much in common; they are unfailingly good, kind, generous, compassionate – too good to be true, one feels at times. The difference between them is in their backgrounds: Barbara the daughter of well-off middle-class parents, Betty from a working-class home in the North (father an unemployed factory-hand, mother a charwoman). Betty naturally found difficulty in being accepted at a famous public school to which she had won a scholarship, but by the time I came to know her, she had long since proved her worth and was regularly re-elected Form Captain.

Each girl has her own closest friend. Barbara's was the colourless Mabel Lynn, golden-haired and pallid – or so I found her. She never seemed to me a necessary character – although, to be fair, I never read the story which gave her prominence, judging by its title ("Mabel Lynn's Mystery Idol", *SOL* 684).



**Polly Linton (Fourth Form)**

Age: Fourteen and five months.  
Height: Medium.  
Colour of hair: Brown.  
Colour of eyes: Blue.  
Home: Linton Lodge, Devonshire.  
Hobby: Teasing Paula (so she says) !  
Favourite games: Tennis, cricket, hockey and swimming!  
Favourite flower: Rose.  
Lucky day: Monday.  
Favourite colour: Blue.  
Favourite name: Barbara.  
Ideal holiday: A voyage round the world.  
Favourite pet: A marmoset.

*Polly Linton*

Betty, on the other hand, had a chum of great personality – the impetuous, true-as-steel Polly Linton. She was from a much wealthier background (her parents lived at Linton Hall), but was always a loyal supporter of her leader.

Cliff House had a girl rather like Polly; Clara Trevlyn, all-round games player, hot-tempered and candid friend, a courageous individualist. By an attraction of opposites, her closest crony was the gentle Marjorie Hazeldone, a rather Mabel-Lynn-like figure (in her book, Mary Cadogan says “Marjorie’s gradual development in the girls’ papers into a milksop is disappointing”).

Comedy is very differently handled in the two series. Cliff House’s Bessie Bunter is of course simply a female version of her brother Billy, and is an unreal caricature. Morcove’s lighter moments come from not just one pupil but two – the rich Paul Creel who cannot say her “r’s”, and Queen Naomer of Nakara. I always

found Paula’s diction rather irritating (I should say “wather iwwithating”), but the interplay between her and Naomer is often quite amusing. As for the youthful African Queen, I am not sure how she would be regarded these days when racial matters are highly sensitive, but she is always presented as a kind and often brave character; the reader should laugh with her and not at her.

Villainous personalities are scarce at Cliff House, apart from one or two prefects and the acid Miss Bullivant (although she too has moments of humanity). Diana Royston-Clarke and Rosa Rodworth are fiery rebels, often selfish but not really bad. Offhand, I can only think of Faith Ashton as truly unlikeable; curiously, she is Barbara Redfern’s cousin. But she rarely appears.

Morcove, on the other hand, abounds in unpleasant people. Some are brought in just for one story but there are also several regulars. One of them is the school sneak Ursula Wade; then there are Cora and Judith Grandways (Judith vacillates between being good and bad), Diana Forbes, and others.

Entirely unique at Morcove, and without counterpart at Cliff House, is Pam Willoughby; I have already written about this serene, lovely, and rather remote figure and shall do so again.



*Clara Trevlyn*

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## NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS

### London OBBC

As usual it was a tight squeeze in Bill Bradford's front room as the London OBBC held the traditional December Christmas meeting in Ealing; a tradition that has so far lasted 22 years. The exchange of greetings and Christmas cards was, once again, an epic undertaking!

The festive programme was packed with good things too, including Mary Cadogan's celebration of Billy Bunter's centenary, Norman Wright's evocative memories of Christmas annuals in the 1950s and quizzes prepared by Bill Bradford and Larry Morley. All this as well as suitably seasonal readings from *The Magnet* and *The Union Jack*, by Roger Jenkins and Duncan Harper respectively, and a splendid yuletide tea. **Vic Pratt**

**(Editor's Note:** In case some CD readers are puzzled by the mention of "Billy Bunter's centenary" I should explain that, although the Fat Owl was not formally launched until 1908 in *The Magnet*, Frank Richards "thought him up" in 1899. However, when he presented the idea to an editor it was then rejected - as Frank rather caustically commented years later, publishers frequently fail to recognize potential "best-sellers".)

### Northern O.B.B.C.

Even though some members could not be with us because of their own parties and commitments, we had twelve at our December Christmas party.

We were delighted to have with us Richard Burgon, on vacation from Cambridge University. However, it was also a sad occasion for Regina Glick, a much loved member, had died only a short time before.

The table resembled a study feed of great magnitude with more than people could eat and, rather strangely, coinciding with Richard's visit there were various beverages available - especially such items as Paul Prout's Bear Hunting Concoction and other similar names - although the bottles had a look of Sainsbury's about them.

There was also plenty of time for chat and discussion. Joan presented a "what is it?" game with our trying to identify various pictures. Mark had brought along a game of publishers' symbols or logos - which turned out to be quite a brain-teaser. We see these symbols day after day usually, but recalling the owner is not so easy! Geoffrey presented a first lines quiz - by reading the first few lines of various works, we had to guess the titles. Not easy - but Paula Johnson was the winner.

Time for more chat, and then a toast to the Club and our past members who had the foresight to begin our meetings in 1950. It is through them and subsequent enthusiasts that we are still here and will celebrate our 50 years of existence in the year 2000. It was a happy throng that left at 9.15 p.m. **Johnny Bull Minor**

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## CORNWALL'S LAVENDER LADY

by Bel Bailey

Angela Brazil's schoolgirl stories nowadays change hands for ever increasing sums. At the turn of the last century schoolgirls greeted these books with enthusiasm and today they are almost a cult with some book-collectors, reflecting a totally different age.

Angela turned out her novels on average of two a year for nearly half a century, so they still appear (often in battered condition) at second-hand bookshops. It is good to remember that many of these best-sellers were written in Cornwall where she often lived with her brother Walter and sister Amy. Here the family would pick sloes and make their own sloe gin!

All her life Angela had been fascinated by legends of fairies and her attraction to Cornwall was increased by its plentiful superstitions concerning sprites and other elfin creatures. In her book *The Little Green School* she recounted tales of pixies with a kind of semi-seriousness, but remember that about this time even the great Conan Doyle believed in fairies!

The three Brazils lived at a white, semi-detached cottage perched up on the cliffs at Polperro. This they named 'The Haven'. Many visitors came there and to these Angela would talk of the ancient tales of Cornwall, its fairies, ghosts and Little People, saying wistfully "I would dearly love to see a fairy".

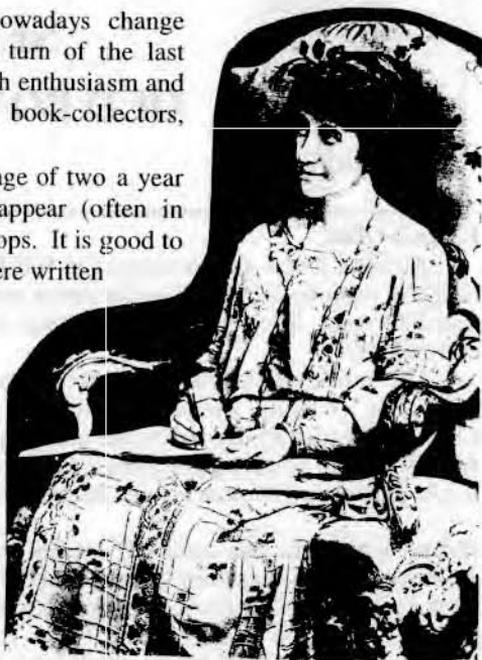
She would go out for two-hour boat trips on Hedley Libby's *Petunia*, along the west coast to Fowey. Some of these visitors would be young readers of Angela's books and for these she would often organise children's parties with lots of clotted Cornish cream and fruit. Angel cake was always a must on these occasions and this was eaten with both strawberry jam and cream!

On one occasion a child protested there was a moth in his tea, which upset Angela greatly. "Impossible!" she repeated, for one suspects that the novelist never relaxed but took everything very seriously indeed.

Curiously Angela had a stuffed seagull suspended from her bedroom ceiling which gave guests rather a start if they stayed overnight!

Angela had written of one of her characters as 'The Lavender Lady', and this may have been a self-portrait for the novelist wore pale mauve most of the time too. Many of her pictures show her dressed in lilac, mauve or violet shades and with a large bunch of violets pinned at her throat. This is how her Cornish neighbours remembered her best.

Her sister, Amy Brazil, in her youth trained as a nurse at Queen Charlotte's Hospital in London, while brother Walter trained to be a doctor at St. Bartholomew's in London.



Angela Brazil (from her autobiographical book *My Own Schooldays*).

Angela studied art at the famous Heatherley's Art School in London from about 1887 to 1889 (when she was 17 to 19 years old) so these three all had excellent training in their own chosen fields. Angela and Amy also illustrated some of the schoolgirl stories and the family was a close one – almost a mutual admiration society, even as they grew old together, all unmarried.

Walter and Angela virtually adopted a talented young musician, Gilbert Morris, who was a child prodigy. Walter was family doctor to the boy's parents and so he and Angela became this promising lad's patrons. Theirs became Gilbert's second home. This all reveals the basic kindness of heart which seems a Brazil trait.

It appears that Polperro always regarded the Brazils as 'foreigners' but the residents owe a considerable debt to Angela's generosity. As an early conservationist, when she learned in 1922 that land belonging to the ancient manor of Killigarth was being sold, Angela bought a portion for £550. This was part of Warren Field.

She wrote about the purchase to her friend Marie Stopes, "I have just bought the cliffs and hillside between Polperro and Talland. I heard they were for sale, and I was so afraid a speculative builder might get them that I thought I had better save them before they could be spoilt. It makes a reserve for seagulls and primroses."

In 1927 Angela purchased yet more land adjoining this for £83.15s, so she saved a total of 38 acres. After her death in 1947 she left this land to the National Trust (rather like Beatrix Potter in the Lake District). Cornwall can be proud of its Lavender Lady and her 'schoolgirl' ethos and creations.

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## **DEREK FORD WRITES:**

### **A Festival Mystery.**

Rummaging amongst my 1951 *Collectors' Digests* I came across the following letter in the March issue:

Dear Sir,

#### Festival of Britain 1951 Exhibition of Books.

I am collecting on behalf of the organiser some material for a special decorative feature in this exhibition, and I am writing to ask for your help in connection with it.

The feature consists of a number of large false "Books" with automatically turning pages, each one of which will show a series of illustrations of famous scenes and characters in English fiction. The illustrations will be mounted on the leaves of the "books" which will be placed in compartments at the main end of the hall.

One of these "books" will contain illustrations of famous literary detectives, and we are naturally very anxious to include Sexton Blake. The Amalgamated Press have suggested that you might be willing to lend us some material.

We cannot, of course, use books for this exhibit as only single sheets can be mounted. What we are looking for, therefore, are single illustrations, book jackets, or imperfect copies of illustrated books which we can purchase and break up for the illustrations. If you can help us in any way, we would be most grateful.

Yours truly, Patricia Robinson.

After that, silence. No further mention in "Blakiana" or by Herbert Leckenby. No reader reported. No item appeared in the minutes of the Clubs, and I am sure members of the London club must have attended the Festival exhibition. So who saw Sexton Blake at the Festival? Or was it all postponed for the current Millennium Dome? I am sure I saw in a recent newspaper a photograph of 'a number of large false "Books"' at the Dome. But did Sexton Blake get a look-in at the "famous literary detectives" this time, and was there such a section?

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## BOOK REVIEW

by Mary Cadogan

**Jennings Sounds the Alarm** by Anthony Buckeridge. Published by David Schutte, 119 Sussex Road, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 4LB.

This book is a welcome addition to the Jennings canon. It comprises the texts of the first seven Jennings plays, originally broadcast in BBC *Children's Hour* in 1948 and 1949. It was, in fact, on radio that Jennings made his debut, and his narrative adventures in book form were soon to follow. The plays were so popular that Buckeridge went on to write over sixty of them; many were transmitted several times and for years Jennings headed the list of favourite programmes in *Children's Hour Request Week*.



Sadly most of the recordings of the plays have been lost but now, through this publication, we have the opportunity of re-savouring their wit, warmth and sparkle.

Anthony Buckeridge has contributed a useful introduction which sets the scene and reassures us that "the scripts have not been updated or altered" in any way. Each play is preceded by details of its original broadcast date and cast-list. As an additional bonus, Val Biro has provided a full-colour cover, and a black and white illustration for each of the plays. As Anthony says, these pictures have "recaptured the essence of the Jennings stories in a way which is both humorous and appealing".

*MR. WILKINS: Don't touch it, Jennings, don't touch it.*  
*JENNINGS: But I know how to handle them, sir. I can hypnotise it ...*

establishing relations with his good-natured master, Mr. Carter. The first episode – like the subsequent ones – is rich in the jokes, word-play and enterprise that characterise all Jennings' exploits. Whether he is running away from school, tackling an apparently poisonous spider or calling out the Fire Brigade, every adventure is deftly plotted, structured and full of convincing schoolboy dialogue.

*Jennings Sounds the Alarm* is a treat for Buckeridge fans, and for all of us who nostalgically recall the original presentation of these plays on *Children's Hour*. The book can be obtained direct from the publisher at £12.00 (plus £1.00 for postage and packing to any U.K. address or plus £2.00 if posted to anyone abroad).

## FORUM

### From John Hammond

The year 2000 marks the centenary of the birth of novelist and scriptwriter James Hilton, the author of *Goodbye Mr Chips*, *Lost Horizon* and *Random Harvest*. It is regrettable that much of his finest work is completely out of print in Britain. To help to remedy this situation it is proposed to form a James Hilton Society to stimulate interest in his life and work. Further details can be obtained from me at 49 Beckingthorpe Drive, Bottesford, Nottingham, NG13 0DN. A stamped addressed envelope would be appreciated.

### From Ian Anstruther

I am working on *Eric or Little By Little* which has always interested me. I am not sure what I am going to focus on yet but one of the things I would like to examine is the influence, if any, this book had on subsequent school stories. So, in subsequent school stories I am collecting mentions of *Eric*. Thus, in *Stalky & Co.* for example, there are five different references to it, all disparaging. This was forty years after *Eric* was written. (*Eric*, 1859; *Stalky*, 1899.) I am collecting references to *Eric* – in any book in any context; and would be grateful to any reader who can send me any. My address is Barlavington Estate, Petworth, Sussex, GU28 0LG.

### From Ted Baldock

I thought Bob Whiter's illustration of 'old Pompous' in the November C.D. was first class. He certainly seems to carry all before him. By his very bearing he could well be booming – "No, Quelch, none of my boys would ever . . . perhaps one of yours my dear fellow . . .". Both he and Quelch do seem to possess definite 'Mr Chips' propensities.

### From Grace Batham

Morcove is my favourite fictional school. I first read *The Schoolgirls' Own* in the 1920s, although I was reading my cousin's *Magnets* first. Then I started with *The Schoolgirl* in 1932. The two girls I dislike most are Pam Willoughby and Barbara Redfern, the two Miss Perfects, who can do everything! My favourites are Polly Linton and Clara Trevlyn.

*(Editor's Note: I too always preferred the 'tomboys' and 'madcaps' to the more impeccable and conformist characters in the girls' schools. Empathy and identification, I suppose . . .)*



"GOOD-BYE, MR. CHIPS!"

## From Terry Jones

As usual, I enjoyed the September C.D. Outstanding, in my opinion, was that article by Ted Baldock, "Things That Were".

Reading the article on the lawn in late afternoon in the sunshine, I was under those "dusky elms late on a summer evening" with those "white-clad figures in the level rays of the afternoon sun". As our writer so well put it, "they have become part of a way of life for many who have known them for so long".

I picked up my copy of "St. Jim's in the Soup" this morning to check the date again because that is the oldest of the Hamilton works I have. It tells me how long I have been with the two leading schools because my mother bought it for me. My mother certainly knew what to get a young ten-year-old lad. The date is July 6<sup>th</sup> 1933 so I have been with them 66 years.

You may be interested to know I am one of the many contributors to the BBC *The Century Speaks* that started last week. I appear in five episodes.

The BBC interviewer spent a whole afternoon with me last summer and two hours of tape will go into the National Sound Archive at the British Library as well as Gloucester Archives. So, at least, one *Collectors' Digest* reader goes onto the shelves of people history. One wag wanted to know if I was going to be buried in a time capsule!!

Whenever I think to myself "How stupid can you get? These schools (Greyfriars and St. Jim's) do not exist", through my letter-box comes the C.D. with the latest articles which surely prove me wrong. Coker is still kicking fags, Bunter is still pinching grub, Smithy is still over the wall in the darkness and Mr Quelch still glares at Prout when he booms "One of your boys, of course, Quelch".

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## MORE GEMS OF HAMILTONIA

from Pete Hanger

Harry Wharton stopped impatiently.

"Well, what is it?" he exclaimed.

"You lend me half-a-crown, and I'll" - Bunter sank his voice to a confidential whisper -  
"I'll put in a word for you with Bessie."

*Magnet 615*

"All very well for you to cackle!" roared Bunter. "I never said anything about old Popper! And, besides, I said it all in confidence - strict confidence! If somebody's repeated what I said, he's made it all up!"

*Magnet 1028*

Bunter had said that he did not want a whack in a two-bob cake. Bunter was not always veracious: but that statement was true. He did not want a whack in that cake. He wanted it all.

*Billy Bunter's Banknote*

. . . He was not quite capable of opening another fellow's letter deliberately. But it was extremely probable that Smithy's letter would have come open by accident, had not Harry Wharton happened along just then.

*Magnet 1015*

**BOOK**

**by Mark Taha**

**Flashman and the Tiger** – George MacDonald Fraser (Harper Collins, 1999)

The literary highlight of the year – Flashy’s back! This book is different from the rest, consisting as it does of a novel, novella, and short story – each of them “a grand roistering read” and filmable without a megabudget (hint, hint!).

The book’s set in the latter part of our hero’s life; his age varies from 56 to 72. The novel might have been entitled *Flashman on the Orient Express*. After in 1878 helping a journalist friend to scoop the world and infuriate Bismarck, he accepts an invitation from him to Paris in 1883 in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to keep out of another campaign. Things, as usual, don’t go to plan – he finds himself forced into guarding the Emperor of Austria from assassins. At least, that’s what Bismarck’s agent tells him. The gentleman in question is the son of his old adversary, ‘German Flashman’ Rudi von Starnberg – and a chip off the old block! To avoid spoiling the story, I’ll just say that the duel in the salt mine would do Hollywood credit and that he might have helped postpone the First World War for a few decades. The intrigue is fascinating and his ladyfriends – undercover agents in more ways than one – are like something out of James Bond, especially the French one!

The novella, “A Scandal at Baccarat”, deals with the famous Tranby Croft scandal of 1890 and reveals that maybe Elspeth wasn’t quite as dumb as she looked – a disconcerting shock for her husband! – and the short and title story was first published in a shortened version in 1975. It starts with Flashman’s brief and unwilling participation in the Zulu War and first meeting with another fictional character, ‘Tiger’ Jack Moran. Fifteen years later, at 72, he’s trying to protect his granddaughter’s virtue (ahem!) from him and being looked over by two men who “looked like a poet and a bailiff”. The “poet” makes the somewhat elementary deduction that our hero is an elderly German ship’s steward who’s come down in the world and drinks too much bourbon!

There’s more humour in this book than in most of the series. I highly recommend it – and Mr Fraser has given himself some hostages to fortune for future books. It seems that Flashman was in the Egyptian and Sudanese campaigns of the 1880s (Gordon’s intelligence chief at Khartoum) and, in earlier years, both a prospector in Australia and a missionary in the South Seas (the mind boggleth!). One think I did find unconvincing – surely he’d have been a general by the 1880s?

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Title page of the 1957 *Robin Hood Annual*.

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