

STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 54

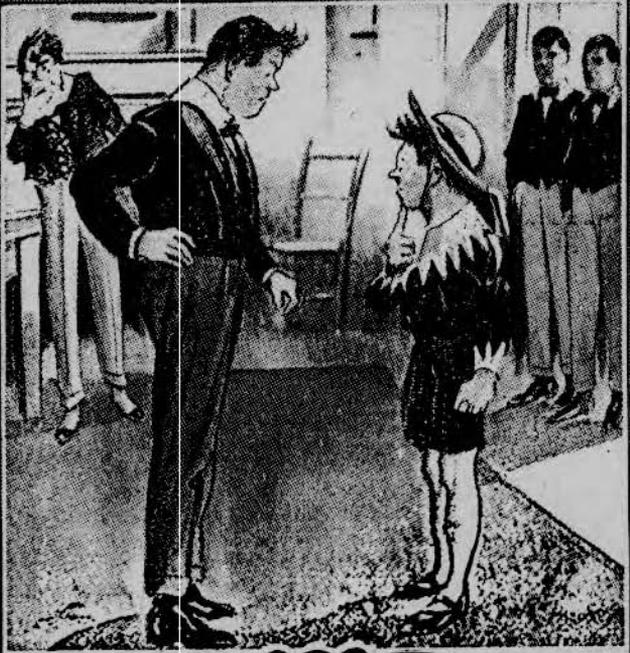
No. 639

MARCH 2000

MONEY PRIZES FOR AMATEUR DETECTIVES!

SEE PAGE 40 IN  
THIS NUMBER!

The Nelson 2<sup>d</sup>  
Lee Library.



**HANDFORTH'S MINOR**  
A Delightfully Humorous Story of St. Frank's College.—Look Inside!

# EPISODES IN BESSIE'S LIFE

Bessie Bunter, The Famous Fat Girl at Cliff House School



It was only a joke, but Bessie  
Quite failed to guess as much.  
When the Fourth elected her "Captain"  
She proceeded to act as such!  
She told her amused "supporters"  
That life would be extra fine;  
But everything got so muddled  
That Bessie was glad to resign!



It happened to Bessie at Christmas-time,  
When proudly we heard her boast  
She'd borrow some armour, and take a  
stick  
And catch the ancestral ghost!  
The "ghost" so elusive and hard to find,  
Was a monkey that wore a white dress;  
She "found" it all right, as our picture  
shows—  
And, my word! how it did alfright  
Bess!



A hundred-pound cheque for Bessie  
came,  
"Pay bearer," the wording said,  
And, needless to say, this large amount  
Did jolly well turn her head.  
She bought lorgnettes, and she put on  
airs,  
Large purchases, too, she'd make;  
How sad was Bessie to find the cheque  
Was simply a big mistake!

# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by  
W.H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by  
HERBERT LECKENBY

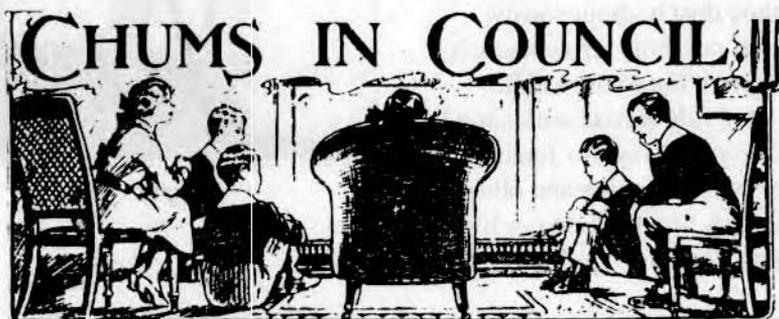
S.P.C.D. Edited and Published 1959 - January 1987 by Eric Fayne

VOL. 54

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MARCH 2000

PRICE £1.50



Friendship is one of the most impressive and resilient themes to be featured in the books and story-papers which we remember and re-read with so much pleasure and satisfaction. I have always found too that collecting these papers and sharing the joys of reading them have produced many long-lasting real-life friendships.

I would like to pay tribute to one particular hobby friend – Regina Glick, who wrote to me almost immediately after *You're a Brick, Angela!*, which I co-authored with Patricia Craig, was published. This was my first commercially published work (although I had earlier written several articles for the C.D.) and Regina's was the very first letter of appreciation that I received. It triggered a correspondence between us that lasted from 1976 until she died towards the end of 1999. We met many times and became extremely good friends. Her lively and detailed letters, which were mainly about books and authors, were always a great pleasure to receive. She was not only a warm and generous

friend to me but to many other book-collectors and enthusiasts. She loved the meetings of the Northern O.B.B.C., of which she was a keen member, and I know that she is much missed by the Club.

During the past few months we have lost several friends from our collecting circle and, although their passing inevitably brings sadness, I like to recall some words from a thirteenth-century manuscript which Regina sent me soon after the death of her greatly loved husband, Ted, about ten years ago:

‘If thou dost harbour sorrow,  
let not thine arrow know it;  
Whisper it but to thy saddle  
and ride abroad with song.’

It is good always to remember the happiness which Regina and other hobby friends brought into our lives.

Happy Reading, MARY CADOGAN



Regina

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**UNBOUND MAGNETS WANTED:** 64 91 95 110 204 207 215 217  
219 220 221 223 227 229 230 231 253

G Good, Greyfriars, 147 Thomes Road, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF2 8QN.  
Tel: 01924-378273.

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

Tel: 01923-232383.

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How dedicated a Hamiltonian were you? Did you just read the stories, enjoy them and then – that was that? Or did you, like myself, compile scrapbooks, filling them with, i.e. lists of the studies and their occupants, draw maps of the different schools and their environs; placing the various villages, towns, inns and other establishments – where you thought they should be situated? Regarding the scrapbooks, I'm afraid I ruined many a *Magnet* and *Gem* in those far-off days – not realizing at the time that I wouldn't be able to re-read the stories at a later date. Features such as "Greyfriars Interviews" and the various portraits of the character series were cut out, necessitating the replacement of these now useless for reading copies. Well we all do silly things – "Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit". Especially when young! To quote an ancient cliché – it seemed a good idea at the time! Speaking of such things, of course there were many instances of the papers themselves advocating, you might say, mutilation. I refer to the competitions and offers that the Amalgamated Press held from time to time. To enter, the reader had to cut out the application slip or coupon. If the entering token was small, not too much harm was done, but to quote one example – cutting out the stamps for the Armaments Race completely in most cases ruined the paper for any re-reading.

But to return to being a dedicated Hamiltonian, I – to use one of our much loved author's favourite quotations – "lived, moved and had my being" in Hamiltonia. As can be seen in the photograph, taken at the tender age of sixteen – I had a blue blazer decorated with the white edging (as portrayed by Messrs Chapman and Shields in the pictures) of the Greyfriars saga. My mother, sisters and girlfriend were pressed into service embroidering the Greyfriars badges – one from the Holiday Annuals and the other from the last *Magnet* cover of the Stacey series (I drew them out first). These were worn with pride on the aforesaid blazer and my white cycling jacket. They also knitted blue and white scarves and pullovers. Even today when wearing a tie is mandatory I wear a blue and white striped necktie. I've always been sorry that the straw boater went out of fashion for normal summer wear – I'd have loved to have worn one sporting the Greyfriars colours.

My mother would let my friends and me have a fire in my bedroom. We would sit around this and cook 'sosses' and pretend we were having tea in a Remove study. Always interested in weaponry, I acquired a breastplate and morion, and hung them over the mantelpiece – representing the Squire of Polpelly, one of my favourite *Magnet* series. (Dear old Les Rowley loved the transposed version of the Harrow School song that the

'bounder' wrote out for Bunter to sing in that series – we would often sing this version together when Les was on leave and staying at my house – he even made a tape of it to play when he returned to his foreign appointments.) With the lights out and just a candle for illumination, we would read out loud the ghost visitations from the various Xmas numbers – the firelight glinting on the armour and other weapons hanging on the walls and casting strange shadows in the corners – just as Frank Richards loved to describe in his stories. Those were wonderful days and I feel that my generation owes a debt of gratitude we can never repay to that great man.



A youthful Bob Whiter – looking very much like Bob Cherry!

When looking back I often say to friends I wouldn't exchange my boyhood for anything. I remember picking up a very tattered, pages missing etc., copy of the 1923 *Holiday Annual*. To my joy, the pages containing the portraits of the St. Jim's characters were intact (these were small reproductions from the rear covers of the *Blue & White Gems*). I promptly pasted them on a piece of cardboard and nicely framed, they made a fine decoration on the wall. I also had some of my own humble 'works of art', both in black & white and colour, hanging alongside. The mantelpiece was also a good place to display some of the plywood cut-outs. In later years I was lucky to have a couple of the late Peter Cushing's cardboard cut-outs.

Speaking of Peter, I well remember the first OBBC meeting he attended. It was at my house in Wood Green – when I opened the door to him, his first words were "Hello old chap – how's the rugger?"

My sisters, who were handling the

catering, were charmed! In case some of you are unaware – Peter was a jolly fine artist – apart from the pictures on the cut-outs I recall the beautiful butterflies he painted on his wife's shawl. He was also an avid collector of model soldiers and of course a keen Sherlockian.

But I digress – it was whilst on holiday at Margate that my parents and I spent the day at Ramsgate. I was deep in the *Gem*, when I heard a click and brother Ben had snapped me. If any of you are interested you can see the photo in *Gem* 1619 Feb. 25 1939 "Blake Answers Back"! (Story: "They Called Him a Duffer!") When I came to the States, my first house was soon decorated with a painted sign 'Greyfriars'. I'm afraid

Scouting and many other activities have prevented me from adding a similar sign to my present abode. However, I have managed to decorate the walls with several photographs of Frank Richards, Gerald Carnpion in his Bunter outfit and C.H. Chapman, all suitably signed. The map of Greyfriars hangs over a chest of drawers, opposite the original Peter Jackson drawing from the *Evening News* of Bill Martin, the well-known dealer/collector, sitting amongst his collection of *Magnets* and *Gems*. (For many years Bill used to have me design his Xmas cards.) And last but certainly not least, the original drawing Miss Evelyn Flinders drew for me of some of the boys of St. Jim's; this was reproduced some time ago in the C.D.

As I've recently retired from the Scouts I'm hoping I'll have more time for some of my other interests. Whilst indulging in Baden-Powell's brainchild my main duties as a Commissioner were teaching Cub and Scout masters, giving them fresh ideas to take back to their packs and troops. Each month was devoted to a different theme. On one occasion it was 'Be a Detective', the idea being for Scouts to be observant and help stamp out crime. To make it interesting I copied out the double disc cipher key from the *Magnet* Secret Seven series. I stuck the duplicated copies on stiff card and fastened them together with brass paper fasteners, which allowed them to rotate. I divided the leaders into two groups who sent messages to each other – they loved it! I used to build bicycles to specification for racing, touring and stage and circus performers. These were made under my own name – had I remained in the U.K. it was always my ambition to market the 'Moonbeam' cycle. I mentioned this to Frank Richards in one of the many letters I was privileged to send him – in the reply he was delighted, and thought it a good idea! In my mind's eye I could see the advertising posters – 'Ride the Bike that Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter ride!' I remember C.H. Chapman in 1952 sending me a copy of the *Reading & Berkshire Review*. Apart from the excellent article on him by Thomas Sheridan, 'Chappie' had designed a jolly advertisement for Kingsway Motors – he had drawn Billy Bunter riding a BSA Bantam motor cycle!

Yes, I guess you can say I've been a dedicated Hamiltonian from that far-off day when my brother gave me a 1929 *Holiday Annual*. I've been hooked and can truthfully say I have never stopped reading the stories. Even during the Second World War I always had a volume of *Magnets* or *Gems* in my kitbag. So here's to dedicated collector readers everywhere, long may they enjoy Hamiltonia, one of life's finest tonics!

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**WANTED:** *Uncommon Danger* by Eric Ambler (1938) (reprint of paperback [Penguin] as original edition now too expensive).

Any copies 1934-35 *Thriller Library*.

*By Land and Sea* by Herbert Strang.

*Broadway* (film edition) 1931.

*Poor Dear Esme* by Burrage (or would pay well for loan)

**Contact Miller, 6 Friar Walk, Brighton BN1 6NJ. Telephone: 01273-556445**

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## BAKER STREET BORROWINGS?

by J.E.M.

Critics like to remind us – though heaven knows why they bother – that Sexton Blake bears a passing resemblance to an earlier Baker Street sleuth who lived at 221B (we haven't got a precise address for Blake himself). It is also sometimes hinted that one or two other characters from the Blakian case-book might have been inspired by the Holmesian chronicles. About such claims more later, but first let's remind ourselves of just a few unforgettable and indisputable **originals** among Blake's allies and adversaries, all **very** different personalities from any of those from the hansom cab era.

It is clear, for example, that Blake's world-famous young assistant, Tinker (or, if you wish, Edward Carter) bears not the slightest family likeness to Dr. John (sometimes James!) Watson, the faithful companion of S. Holmes. One is a spunky young man originally rescued from the slums, the other a middle-aged, middle-class professional. On the domestic scene, Blake's housekeeper, Mrs Bardell, cheerful mistress of the malapropism, is without doubt a far more colourful character than Mrs Hudson ever was. Pedro, of course, carries not the smallest hint of Sherlockian ancestry; he is certainly not a descendant of that pathetic canine which Holmes noticed had failed to bark in the night. Pedro is simply unique.

As far as Blake's police allies are concerned, CID men like Inspector Coutts could hardly be regarded as plods of the Gregson and Lestrade school. They are far more convincing figures altogether. Dogged and shrewd, they even occasionally steal a march on Blake and, as personalities, are also well differentiated. The bluff, genial Coutts, for instance, is a very different chap from the waspish Superintendent Venner, the dour Inspector Thomas or the sarcastic Inspector Harker. Among Blake's non-police supporters, the two-fisted, two-gun American, Ruff Hanson, and the ebullient Fleet Street journalist, Splash Page, are other unique figures to enliven the great saga.

We now turn to the Blakian villains. It might be thought – indeed I've often thought it myself – that Blake's great adversary, the repellent Professor Jason Reece of the Criminals' Confederation, looks suspiciously like that other criminal master-mind, Professor James Moriarty, the bane of Sherlock Holmes. However that may be, the Criminals' Confederation's later boss, John Smith, is a very different character altogether: a true original in fact. With his unobtrusive dress, his self-effacing manner – and even his 'grey' name – he hints at a menace far more convincing than that projected by the scowling, snarling Reece. Mr Smith, it might be argued, foreshadows a real-life sinister figure, the Organisation Man, faceless and deadly, of our own day.

Monsieur Zenith the Albino is another obvious original. Apart from his ruthlessness, he is about as far away from Mr John Smith, or indeed any other baddie in the Blakian canon, as it is possible to get. An outrageous character who smokes opium cigarettes,



wears full evening dress at all hours of the day and employs a Japanese servant, he must be about the most exotic villain with whom Sexton Blake ever crossed swords (almost literally, since another inseparable part of Zenith's accoutrement is a swordstick!). It has been said

that some of the inspiration for Zenith is owed to Guy Boothby's character Dr Nikola, but if there is a debt here, it is a small one. Zenith's creator, Anthony Skene, is on record that the true model for Zenith was a real-life albino he had once encountered. At all events there is no hint of a Zenith in Sherlock Holmes' case-book.

Finally, the ladies: apart from a large number of frightened and suppliant clients, Holmes encountered only one member of the opposite sex to stick in our memories, Irene Adler. A dazzling adventuress, she actually outwitted the great Sherlock. There is indeed no-one else remotely like her in the annals of Number 221B. The Blakian case-history, on the other hand, contains a wide variety of ladies, though we have to admit that two of its most famous females don't provide much of a study in contrasts. Not only is Mlle Roxane clearly an adventuress of the Irene Adler breed, she is also not much more than a clone of Mlle Yvonne. Both are rich, glamorous and dangerous with a loving eye for Blake, and both are often involved in very similar encounters with him. Why their creator, G.H. Teed, ever bothered to transmute one into the other remains a great Blakian mystery in itself. Fortunately, there is plenty of feminine contrast elsewhere.

Take, for example, the savage Haitian Voodoo Queen, Marie Galante, who lives in every sense on a different latitude from Yvonne and Roxane, while the tragic Miss Death, who featured so memorably in a series by Gwyn Evans, is uniquely different from any of the foregoing. Of the females who sought succour and protection from Sexton Blake, perhaps one of the most memorable is Elsa von Kravitch, the wretched and appealing daughter of the very nasty Baron von Kravitch.

So there we are: 'tocs, villains and ladies for all tastes. Whatever debt Sexton Blake himself owes to that famous occupant of 221B, we can see from just a handful of examples that there is a whole glittering galaxy of stars in the Blakian firmament who have little to do with the life and times of that earlier Baker Street resident.

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**FOR SALE:** C.D. Annuals: 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999. All at £7 each – whatever the year.

Also: "90 Glorious Years" - £12.

Letters of Frank Richards - £7.

All items postage extra. J. Houghton, 93 Enfield Street, Pemberton, Wigan WN5 8DJ

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## NEW BOYS AT ST. FRANK'S No. 1 Willy Handforth

by E. Grant-McPherson

Edward Oswald Handforth and his two staunch chums Church and McClure were broke: they were waiting in the Triangle, hoping the postman would bring one of them a letter containing a remittance, when Pitt approached them. "There's a letter for you in the rack, Handy," he said. "He was much earlier than usual this morning." Handy and Co. rushed indoors and the letter was grabbed in a trice. As Handy tore the envelope open, some notes fluttered to the floor, two pound notes and four ten shilling ones. Handforth immediately gave one each of the latter to his pals, he then started to read the letter, and before he had read many lines he turned pale and sat down. "My only Sainted Aunt!" he shouted, jumping up again, "I won't stand it!" After a while he calmed down a bit, and explained to his chums that his younger brother was coming to the school.

"Of course, that's why the Pater sent such a big tip, to soften me up a bit. Don't worry; I'll pack him off back home as soon as he shows his face here." "Do you think that wise?" asked Church. "The Head might not like it, or Sir Edward?". "Perhaps you're right" agreed Handy, "but he had better not come running to me with his troubles".

Several of the Third Formers, headed by Owen Minor, the leader of the Third, go to the station to meet Willy, who surprises them all when they first catch sight of him as he is wearing a blue and white 'sailor suit' with short trousers. After their astonishment has subsided a little, he invites them all to a feed on the way back to St. Frank's.

Meanwhile Fullwood hears from one of his 'sporty' pals, who is staying in the area, that a youngster of the same name has been 'sacked' for 'cribbing' exam results, and he approaches Handy and attempts to blackmail him.

Handforth confronts Willy, who says that he was, but before he can explain his major starts to tell him off, so Willy gets his back up and leaves the study. When Willy arrives at the Third Form common room, all the fags are waiting for him, and hold a trial, in which he is found guilty and sent to 'Coventry'.

Willy then challenges Owen Minor to a fight much to the amusement of the rest of the Third, but Willy knocks him out and thus becomes the new leader of the fags.

He takes the job extremely seriously, and says he is not very satisfied with the conditions. Most of the Third laugh at him, but he



In a very short time Willy had three or four fags howling on the floor.

goes to the Housemaster Mr Nelson Lee, and asks him if the fags can use a number of old boxrooms at the end of their passage as studies. He is given permission as long as they cause no mess, and make their own furniture. They have a competition as to which study does best, and generally vote Willy a first-class leader.

Then Sir Edward Handforth turns up at St. Frank's, and visits his elder son to see how Willy is getting on at the school. After Handy tackles him about Willy's trouble, Sir Edward sends for Willy to demand why he had not told him all of the story. Willy says that his brother did not give him a chance. It seems that he had been blamed for the offence and sent home, but a few days later the real culprit had been caught, and Willy had been reinstated without a stain on his character. However, his father had decided to send him to St. Frank's anyway.

Edward Oswald apologises most profusely to Willy, and then excuses himself to go and find Fullwood to administer a thoroughly deserved thrashing.

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## LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT INSTALMENT

by Mark Caldicott

Which school has the following characteristics?

It is a boarding school, pupils being between the ages of 11 and 18. The Headmaster is both benevolent and wise, the teachers a mixture of the kindly, the severe but fair, the eccentric and the vindictive. The school has prefects who are a mixture of the pompous and the sporting.

The school is divided into houses, with fierce rivalry between them, the focus of which is rivalry on the sports field.

The stories have a cast of characters. The central figure is brave, honest, modest. He acts with decency and fortitude. He has stalwart and loyal friends who are willing to face danger for each other. He is hated by the boulder of the school and his cowardly pals. The latter are snobs who speak with drawling voices and believe themselves to be a cut above the rest.

The stories are full of adventure and incident, with a clear message of morality, of good and evil throughout, and there is always a mystery to solve.

The school, of course, is St. Frank's. Or is it?

There is another school which also fits this description. The first story was published not in 1917 but eighty years later, in 1997, and the latest, the third, was published in July 1999. This latest book was much publicised in advance, more so, probably, than any other children's book I can think of. It sold out the whole of its first print run of 270,000 within a week, and has had to go immediately into a second run. It went to the top of the hardback bestsellers list knocking out its adult fiction rivals.

Any more guesses?

If you have been holidaying on another planet, and haven't guessed by now, the name of the other school is Hogwarts, and I am referring to the Harry Potter books written by J K Rowling.

At this point some of you may be thinking – oh, no, not Harry Potter again. The books are everywhere, the stories are out on tape and there is an argument about how the film should be made. I risk alienating those of you who are sick of the hype and feel I'm climbing onto the already-overloaded bandwagon, adding to the overkill. And in the ESB column as well! OK, well in defence of this article (as those of you who have already read the stories will probably agree) whatever the hype, the success of these stories is not simply a product of advertising and publicity. They are nothing less than wonderful stories which are well worth reading for their own sake. They are children's stories which, at the same time, appeal to adults – indeed such is their appeal to adults that there are two editions of each book – one marketed for children and another, in a more sober binding, for adults.

There is another reason for choosing to look at these books. We are looking at a series of stories which is not yet complete. For once, as befits the early editions of the *Collectors' Digest* of the new millennium, we have a series of stories new episodes of which will appear in the 21st century. Once more we can look forward to the next episode, wondering what it will bring, just as, long ago, readers of the *Nelson Lee* could do.

The interest in the Harry Potter stories is already in evidence in the pages of the *Collectors' Digest* where enthusiasm for the stories among those more usually devoted to Charles Hamilton's work is obvious. Parallels with the Greyfriars stories are being delineated in its articles and it says a lot for the readers of the *Collectors' Digest* (not to mention the vision and perspicacity of the Editor, of course) that new authors can be so readily embraced, and new stories discovered which are true to the best traditions of those more usually celebrated in these pages. And I agree with those who draw the parallels with Greyfriars, for it struck me as I read the stories how similar the story-telling approach, the portrayal of the characters and incidents of the stories captured the feeling of Greyfriars. I want to go further, in fact, and argue that the similarities between the Hogwarts and St. Frank's stories is even more marked.

So, for those of you who don't yet know, it's about time we asked the question – who is Harry Potter? (Time for Potter enthusiasts to put on the kettle while we explain to the uninitiated.)

Harry Potter is a boy who believes his parents to have died in a car crash, and is being brought up by his aunt and uncle the Dursleys, who are his guardians. He is treated cruelly and suffers the taunts of their son, the dreadfully pampered Dudley Dursley. Harry is made to live in the broom cupboard under the stairs and is hidden from the outside world. He feels himself to be a misfit in the world because odd things happen to people when he is with them. What he doesn't know, however, is that the Dursleys are hiding him away because they know the dreadful truth – that Harry's parents were wizards. The Dursleys fear that Harry himself may also be a wizard. For the Dursleys this is a social disgrace, and any evidence of odd behaviour in Harry is a sign of impending wizardry which must be quashed and hidden from view.

Harry himself does not discover this until an invitation arrives for him to become a pupil of Hogwarts School. Hogwarts is a very special school. It is a school whose purpose is educating wizards in the art of magic. From the point at which Harry begins to prepare for his education as a wizard he discovers that there are two universes existing

side by side: the world of the Muggles – the ordinary world that the Dursleys inhabit (and incidentally the rest of us non-wizards) and another world, unnoticed by us Muggles, a world in which the natural laws no longer rule supreme. Hogwarts, of course, is situated in this unnoticed world.

In the other world Harry discovers he is a celebrity, a very special person. Strangers greet him warmly and point him out to their friends. He learns for the first time of a powerful wizard, so feared by other wizards that they refer to him as “You Know Who” instead of by his actual name of Voldemort.

Voldemort was a clever wizard who had turned to the dark arts, the evil side of wizardry, and had gathered a strong following. At the time of Harry’s birth Voldemort was at the height of his powers. But then, having used his evil spells to kill Harry’s mother and father, Voldemort had tried to kill Harry. For reasons unknown to anyone Harry, though only a baby, had proved immune to Voldemort’s spell – all that Voldemort’s attack produced was a scar on Harry’s forehead. Somehow, his failed attack on Harry had drained Voldemort of his power and he had fled, removing this threat of evil from the wizard world. Baby Harry’s survival became a cause for celebration. All this was unknown to the growing Harry, however, because the wizards had left Harry in the care of the Dursleys who, of course, told him nothing of this. On his return he is treated with some awe and respect by all except a few of the more caddish and jealous of the pupils and teachers.

(OK, Potterites, you can come back now.)

All this, of course, is very far removed from the world of St. Frank’s. But it is the background to Harry’s entrance as a new boy to Hogwarts School. The major part of the stories themselves are the day-to-day adventures of Harry and his chums at school and once arrived at Hogwarts the feeling that we are in an old-fashioned public school adventure is strong. Like the St. Frank’s stories, the everyday school events are focused on a mystery which the intrepid chums set out to solve through detective work and through dangerous encounters with the enemy. For Harry this involves some aspect of the fight against the return to power of “You Know Who”.

It is not so much a direct parallel in the plot lines, more it is the strength of the resonance with typically-recurring themes and characterisations in the St. Frank’s stories which strike us. It is this aspect which I shall look at further next time.

*(To be continued)*

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**FOR EXCHANGE:** SOL Nos. 98, 109, 111, 115, 153, 159, 163, 165, 169, 171, 175, 187, 191, 193, 199, 301, 305.

**WANTED:** Nos. 118, 128, 130, 132, 136, 138, 140, 150, 170, 188.

Philip Tierney, 6 Abbey Park Road, Grimsby, Lincs. Telephone 01472-354287

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**PRE-WAR DUPLICATE** *Hotspurs, Skippers, Wizards, Rover, Adventure* for exchange only. Various other exchanges. I am interested in most comics/story papers up to 1940c. Ken Townsend, 7 North Close, Willington, Derby DE65 6EA. Tel. Burton-on-Trent 01283-703305.

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## NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUBS

### London OBBC

*Collectors' Digest* editor Mary Cadogan took the chair for the February meeting of the London O.B.B.C. in Ealing.

Puzzles and quizzes were the order of the day, provided by Larry Morley, Len Cooper and our host, Mark Taha. The little grey cells were stretched to the utmost!

Less taxing and more restful were a series of humorous incidents from the *Gem*, read by Ray Hopkins; an article entitled "Forever Hamiltonia" written by Bob Whiter and read by Mary Cadogan, and Bill Bradford's "Memory Lane".

**Vic Pratt**

### Northern OBBC

On a cold and wet February evening there was a good attendance at our meeting. Also it was the first sighting of our newly printed programme for the year 2000 and we all agreed that it looked as if we were going to have an exciting year.

John Springer then spoke about "Dressing Up or Disguise". This well researched paper, using references from many children's books, illustrated how dressing up and disguise have been used in the plots of many of our favourite stories.

Darrell Swift then told us how he met Jennings, or at least Dermot Jennings, the man on whom Anthony Buckeridge based his stories. On a trip to New Zealand, Darrell met Dermot, now in his eighties, at his home in Nelson.

**Paul Galvin**

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## OCCASIONALLY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MYCROFT HOLMES.

by **Derek Hinrich**

### Part One

Mr Sherlock Holmes had the highest possible opinion of his elder brother Mycroft's capacity, an opinion he evidently shared with "Lord Bellingier" (apparently a collective term to describe the Rt. Hon. W E Gladstone and the third Marquis of Salisbury, Prime Ministers 1880-1894)<sup>1</sup> and whose functions, and that of "his" cabinets, Mycroft Holmes apparently at times supplanted (it was in November 1895, you will remember, that Sherlock Holmes explained to Watson that his elder brother Mycroft drew "four hundred and fifty pounds a year, remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind, will receive neither honour nor title but remains the most indispensable man in the country ... since ... The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearing-house, which makes out the balance ... his specialisation is omniscience ...



*Mycroft Holmes and some of his masters. Clockwise from bottom left: Mr W.E. Gladstone; the Marquess of Salisbury; Mr A.J. Balfour; and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Lord Rosebery was unfortunately unavailable.*

Again and again his word has decided the national policy ...” and that he was in a sense, “occasionally the British Government”). In short he fulfilled, if Sherlock Holmes is to be believed, the functions of the Cabinet Office (which did not then exist) and of innumerable cabinet and inter-departmental committees, both ministerial and official, besides those of other less-publicised organs of the state. A large role, even if the functions of government were fewer and less complex than they are today, but there were giants in the land in Victorian England and Mycroft Holmes was the Renaissance Man of Whitehall.

In 1895 Mycroft Holmes was approximately 48 years old<sup>2</sup> and had apparently held his onerous post for something over a dozen years, since he was engaged in the same task when Watson first met him in 1882 (according to Gavin Brend’s chronology) during the

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Greek interpreter affair when, however, Sherlock Holmes told Watson that his brother audited the books of some of the government departments, explaining in '95 that he did not know Watson so well in those days.

I wish to examine Mycroft Holmes's official career in relation to his times. One problem in doing so is to know when he entered government service. We do know that his younger brother went to university, even if we are not sure which, but it does not necessarily follow that the cleverer but indolent Mycroft did. I cannot help feeling that Sherlock Holmes was probably a scholarship boy for it seems pretty clear to me, as I have argued elsewhere, that as a young man he was very poor and a more than usually impecunious student – hence his acquired taste for coarse and presumably cheap pipe tobacco and his surely ingrained habit of making up the first pipe of the day from the dottles of the day before (I have tried it: it is not to be recommended). It may, however, be assumed that, as a career civil servant, Mycroft Holmes would have entered the public service between the ages of 17 and 23, depending upon when he completed his formal education, that is to say, between 1864 and 1870.

The Northcote-Trevelyan *Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service, together with a Letter from the Reverend B. Jowett* was published in February 1854. The Report advocated “the substitution of competing examinations for appointment by patronage, and the establishment of a system of promotion according to merit ... to obtain full security for the public that none but qualified persons will be appointed, and that they will afterwards have every practicable inducement to the active discharge of their duties”<sup>3</sup>.

It was a long time, however, before the proposed reform was fully effected. The Civil Service Commission was founded the same year “to examine candidates already nominated. No attempt was made, at this stage, to interfere with the system of patronage, but merely to assess the capacity of those put forward for appointment by ‘persons of political influence’ ... it was not until (June 4th) 1870 that an Order in Council was issued which marked the beginning of the end of the patronage system. A list of offices to be filled by Open Competitive Examination was published, making it possible for men to enter the Service at two levels according to their educational achievements, and without the help of a patron, unless they wished to enter the Foreign Office or the Home Office”<sup>4</sup>.

It is thus apparent that Mycroft Holmes owed his post to the patronage of “persons of political influence”. If it be objected that he may have been a late entrant to the Service then it must be pointed out that in those days this would still have involved patronage, which died hard. For example, shortly before Sherlock Holmes retired from practice, “Lord Bellinger” himself retired from his politics and his private secretary – the younger son of a peer, a man of fashion, and a member of the Marlborough House set – was appointed Permanent Secretary of a government department which, by its nature, had many close links with the Palace and the new sovereign.<sup>5</sup>

The basis of Mycroft Holmes's appointment surely raises speculation about the initial stages of his younger brother's career and the extent to which the establishment of his practice may have received benevolent assistance. “Interest” is naturally frowned upon nowadays but its effect has not always been malign as, for example, it enabled Horatio Nelson to reach post rank at 22 and the Honourable Arthur Wellesley to become a

Lieutenant-Colonel at 26. The brothers Holmes might thus complete a respectable quartet for who can deny they were as pre-eminent in their chosen fields?

There can of course be no doubt that the Civil Service Commission could not have done otherwise than agree that Mycroft Holmes, the possessor of a first class mind and a scion of the lesser gentry, was entirely suited for the post to which he had been nominated.

Whether Mycroft Holmes was a university graduate and entered the Service shortly after coming down in 1869 or was recruited three years earlier, at the end of his schooldays, is basically immaterial. Whenever he joined, he would have retired at sixty in 1907 and he would have served for some 38 years or more and would have seen the Civil Service grow enormously in that time. In 1855 it numbered 17,815 exclusive of "Inferior Revenue Officers, Postmen and Letter-Carriers, Office Keepers, Messengers and Porters". It would have been little larger in 1869 but by 1900 it had reached 100,000 and by 1914 some 150,000, largely as a result of the social legislation of the Liberal Governments of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Mr Asquith.

So when Mycroft Holmes took up his first post the total strength of the Civil Service was less than that of most departments today, but where did he fit into it?

Before I retired I found tucked away in the reserve stock of my office library a copy of the *Imperial Calendar* for 1882 and was able to obtain photocopies of a few pages. It was a curious and fascinating volume. It was firstly a private and not an official publication. At any rate, the copy I saw was a private publication: there may have been an official one as well (for much of Victoria's reign there were two Army Lists, the official one and a private enterprise rival). It also contained all sorts of irrelevant information – for example an almanack, and high tide tables for London Bridge. The Civil Service is so large today that the old HMSO *Imperial Calendar and Civil Service List* and its successor, the *Civil Service Year Book*, have for years only listed the six most senior ranks (and not necessarily all members of these) but in 1882 the complete staff of every department was listed by rank and name. As a Victorian publication it showed a very nice sense of the proprieties as to which grades were entitled to "esquire", which to "Mr", and who appeared with only surname and initials like professional cricketers of the day. There was sometimes, however, a difference of opinion from one department to another upon which grades merited "esquire" and which "Mr".

Thus, for example, in 1882 the staff of the Board of Trade numbered 275 from Permanent Secretary to Assistant Firelighter, inclusive. Today the staff of the Department of Trade and Industry numbers 11,400.

The one thing the 1882 *Imperial Calendar* did not include was details of salaries, but I found these in the *Whitaker's Almanack* for that year in the City of Westminster's Reference Library, and I was surprised at what I found, for if Mycroft Holmes was sometimes the British Government, then it was, par excellence, government on the cheap.

In 1882 the salary of the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, the highest paid civil servant of the day, was £2,500 per annum. The Permanent Secretaries of the other principal departments each had salaries of £2,000 pa while those of lesser departments received salaries varying between £1,500 and £1,800 pa (uniform service-wide salaries were not introduced until after the First World War). Income tax that year was five pence (2p) in the pound: no tax was paid on incomes of less than £150: incomes of less than

£400 were not taxed on the first £120: and incomes of more than £400 were not taxed on the first £150.

The adjustment of the value of money in the past to current levels is a difficult task for a layman but I read recently that the equivalent of £25,000 in 1937 is £815,000 today. I have also seen it said that the pound in 1938 was worth 13s 4d. (two-thirds) in terms of the pound in 1914. If there was no significant inflation between 1882 and 1914 (and the principal inflationary factors, I believe, were the gold deposits extracted from the Rand and the Yukon) then these figures would suggest that £2,500 in 1882 would represent £122,250 in 1992 and £450 would be £22,000.

Glancing through *Whitaker* for 1882 I found that the following posts bore salaries between £400 and £500 pa:

Chief Gas Examiner, Board of Trade;

Clerk of Trades Mark Registry, Board of Trade;

Assistant Examiner of Spoiled Stamps, Inland Revenue;

Second Class Clerk, Legacy & Succession Duties Section, Inland Revenue;

Superintendent of Furniture, Office of Works and Public Buildings;

all worthy and useful officials performing necessary functions (and one at least of some personal distinction: the Chief Gas Examiner was both a PhD and an FRS) but hardly men to decide the fate of the nation and the empire!

I also found that the salary of a Second Class Clerk (First Section) of the Exchequer and Audit Department was £450 pa. This, too, was hardly the post of an *eminence grise* but it is significant and suggests how Mycroft Holmes's career began, how it developed, and why and how his brother came to describe it as he did.

The first annual Finance Act as a single measure embodying the Budget was an invention of Mr Gladstone as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1861. The Public Accounts Committee was established the same year and five years later the Exchequer and Audit Department was created by statute as the instrument of Parliament and of the Committee in overseeing the work of government departments, in ensuring that monies voted were spent only on the purpose for which they were intended, and that due economy was observed. The work of E & AD (now subsumed in the National Audit Office) is not auditing in any commercial sense as the Appropriation Accounts of departments are not kept in that manner.

*(To Be Continued)*

(This article was originally published in the *Sherlock Holmes Journal*).

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Lord Bellinger" was twice Prime Minister. Only two men held this office more than once while Sherlock Holmes was in practice, Mr Gladstone and Lord Salisbury, so one of these must be "Lord Bellinger". See Chapter 7 of Gavin Brend's *My Dear Holmes* for the argument in extenso. Mr Brend, whose chronology I follow, places *The Second Stain* in the autumn of 1886 which identifies "Lord Bellinger" as Salisbury. I have, however, for convenience treated "Bellinger" as a portmanteau word.
2. Mycroft Holmes was seven years older than his brother. If Sherlock Holmes was born in or about 1854 (see *His Last Bow* where he is described as 60) then Mycroft was born in or about 1847. Gavin Brend argues cogently for 1853 as Sherlock Holmes's

natal year which would put Mycroft's birth in 1846. I am inclined to accept Mr Brend's argument but I have worked on 1847 though 1846 would in fact slightly strengthen my case.

3. See *The British Civil Service 1854-1954* by Wyn Griffith, HMSO 1954, p14.
4. *Ibid* p15.
5. Sir Schomberg McDonnell (1861-1915), Permanent Secretary, HM Office of Works 1903-13. He resigned after being cited as co-respondent in a divorce suit.

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## I REMEMBER

by Bill Bradford

I read the *Boys Magazine* during the last two years of its publication. It was launched by Hulton on the 27th February 1922 but published by Allied Newspapers from June 1924. The covers were of a "shocking" pink and it was generally known as the "pink 'un". Approximately 9" x 7" in size, it normally consisted of 36 pages in smaller than average print, not much larger than that in early issues of the *Nelson Lee Library*, and usually contained four stories, almost all serials or series. Most papers of those times usually ran to seven stories.

On the death of my good friend, Bob Blythe, I acquired almost all of his collection of E.S. Brooks stories, including those in about a dozen copies of the *Boys Magazine*. A few years later, Norman Shaw talked me into buying about 500 issues at a very modest price, and my next good fortune was the purchase of a number of mint copies, complete with free gifts. I now lack about 40 copies for a complete run, but at today's prices I think I can go on wanting.

Talking of free gifts, few other papers can have offered so many. Earlier issues specialised in 'art plates' of football teams, individual footballers, cricketers etc., and these were given intermittently into the 1930s. In 1932 there were at least 20 *Wonder Books*, a 26-page booklet of interesting events or features, and in 1933 there were at least 16 supplements, called *The Thrill Library*, each with an 8-page story.

Although I think the cover illustrations were poor, illustrations within were about average. No expert on illustrators, even I can identify work by Glossop, Fred Bennett, R.H. Brock and Cuneo. In 1926 you could join the *Boys Magazine League* and obtain a free badge, one of which I recently obtained from Norman Wright.

There were the usual inevitable competitions, including one for Cup Final tickets plus travelling fares: quite an eye-catcher! I have spent several days browsing through my collection and, before a more detailed breakdown, there are a few aspects that to my mind are significant. I think this paper could have been called the 'John Hunter Weekly' as that prolific author (writer of Capt. Dack stories in the *Sexton Blake Library* and elsewhere) had serial stories throughout the 12 years, all attributed to him, although this was not the usual practice in *Boys Magazine*.

Falcon Swift, a detective and prominent footballer, complete with monocle, together with his young assistant, Chick Conway, appeared in the first issue and at regular intervals over the years. I do not know the original author but E.S. Brooks appears to

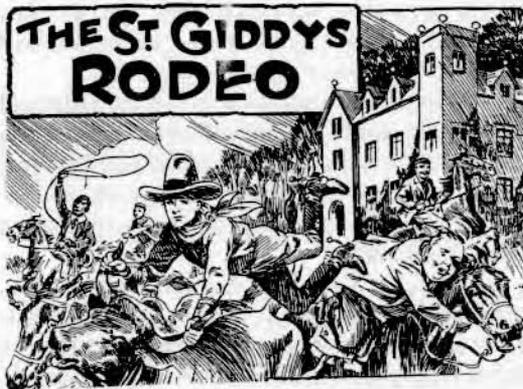
Chaps—Here's the Rousing Long Complete Yarn of the Dandy Cowboy in the Wild West that appears in our Next Thrilled-filled Issue.



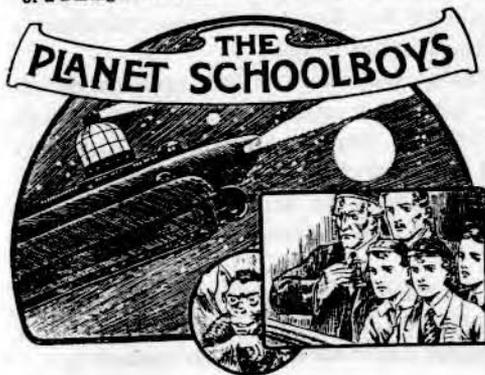
## THE DANDY COWBOY— OUTLAW!

Up against it! With no Law to Help him but the Law of Mighty Judge Colt. Rex, Go Get Your Guns, Boy. The Sheriff and his Men are After you on a False Charge.

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A Voyage of Discovery Among the Stars! Who can tell the marvels that wait the bold adventurer in the limitless ether? There are adventures, dangers, and triumphs, too, incredible to mortal man! Your chance to experience them, Chums, is in the vivid, ferreted chapters below!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

have taken over from no. 496 in Sept. 1931, having previously written "The Planet Schoolboys" in issues 278-291 (1927). Brooks wrote in at least 67 issues, including stories of "Terrorland", "The Devil Doctor" and "Bulldog Hamilton", mainly in 1933/34.

My old favourite George E. Rochester wrote several stories of the French Revolution and "S.O.S. Squadron" in Nos. 594-603, this under the pseudonym of Hamilton Smith. He had just started a new football series in Nos. 619/620, terminated by the paper's demise. At regular intervals were the stories of St. Gideon School (St. Giddy's) by F.G. Cook, which were very popular. Another long-running series were tales of Stormcove College, by Ross Harvey (r.n. H. Clark Hook) which featured a Famous Four and references to a Cliff House School! Almost as frequent were the adventures of one Rex Remington, known as The Dandy Cowboy. Need I say more?

Michael Poole wrote a number of serials, not less "The Blott of Berisford" later to appear as a hardback and also as *Schoolboys Own Library* No. 74. At least 13 stories subsequently appeared in *The Boys Friend Library*, seven by John Hunter ("The Football Spy" in No. 161 and repeated in No. 563). Early issues contained four stories, later increasing to five. I lack the time, inclination and vision to deal with many issues but thought we would look at No. 1 in some detail and investigate at annual intervals thereafter. Authors are not always credited and where the story title does not indicate the theme, I will put a short outline.

#### No. 1, published 27.2.1922

The first of a long-running series about Stormcove College by Ross Harvey and illustrated by Thomas Henry.

*Lure of Lost Island* by John Hunter, ill. R.H. Brock. A modern pirate story.

*Dare Devil Trent* by Stanton Doyle. Featuring a football wizard.

*Chronicles of the Queer Club* ill. by Glossop. Adventures of four modern boys.

*Exploits of Falcon Swift*. An athletic detective, famed for boxing etc.

Plus usual Editor's page and The Jester's Page, devoted to jokes. Also an art plate(?) of a famous football club, which I cannot identify.

#### No. 53, dated 24.2.1923

*The Raiding Planet* by Brian Cameron. Invasion by planet Thor in 1987 (29 instalments).

*Vandals of the Screen*. Jimmy Duggan, schoolboy and film star.

*The Phantom Plane*. A Falcon Swift story.

*The Fire of Doom*. Adventures of three young explorers.

*The Luck of the Leather* by John Hunter. Football.

#### No. 105, dated 23.2.1924

*Matched for a Million* by Bat masters (r.n. Bernard Buley). Athletics.

*The Maker of Diamonds*. Falcon Swift again.

*Buccaneers of the Sky* by Geoffrey Prout. Space adventures.

*Getting the Wind Up*. A schoolboy millionaire at Rutton School.

#### No. 156, dated 21.2.1925

*Man in the Iron Mask*. Falcon Swift.

*Outwitted*. A story of the River Police.

*Fire Face - Racing Driver* by Capt. John Wetherby. Also B.F.L. 166.

*Champion of the World* by H. Wedgwood Bellfield.

*The Dodger*. Another tale of Harold Lloyd.  
No. 209, dated 20.2.1926  
*Crook with the Hypnotic Eye*. Falcon Swift.  
*Diamonds in the Jungle*. Mystery and melodrama.  
*Secret of the Underworld*. Adventure with dinosaurs.  
*Clash of Cars*. Motoring story.  
*The Unseen Terror*. Mystery serial by J. Hunter.  
No. 261, dated 5.3.1927  
*Adventures of Commander Hemingway of the 'Gnat'*. Naval.  
*On the Trail*. Rex Remington – The Dandy Cowboy.  
*Mystery Man of the Crew*. Rowing on the river.  
*The Outcast of St. Mervyn's*. Public school story.  
*Invasion by John Hunter*. China tries to master the world.  
No. 313, dated 3.3.1928  
*The Bar 8 Cowpunchers Punish the Indians*. Western.  
*Signals Against the Cyclone Crook*. Featuring young railway drivers.  
*Orphans of the Storm*. Another tale of St. Gideon's.  
*The Kicking Wonder*. Football series.  
*World Under the Ice* by F. Knowles Camplin. Thrills at the North Pole.  
No. 365, dated 2.3.1929  
*The Fighting Footballer* by Bat Masters (Bernard Buley)  
*Disowned By His Father*. St. Gideon's.  
*Mysteries of Chang Fu*. A yellow threat to the world.  
*The Boy Millionaire*. Humour.  
*Never Steal a Sacred Spider*. Adventures in the Congo.  
*The Peril King of Amazon Mystery-Land*.  
No. 417, dated 1.3.1930  
*Phil England, King of the Boxing Ring*.  
*The Flying Circus*. Literally!  
*The Schoolboy Champion*. St. Gideon's.  
*Thomas the Assaulting Salt*. Comic series.  
*No Kudos for Meteor Crook*. Scientific thrills.  
*Blizzard Boys Klondike Bound*. Perils of a gold rush.  
No. 470, dated 7.3.1931  
*Return of the Skywayman*. Aerial adventures.  
*Team of Tees* by John Hunter. Footballers v Master Crook.  
*Fatty Slocum, Stowaway*. St. Gideon's.  
*Crimson Chaos in Radium Mountain*. Series about the Canadian Mounties.  
*The Talons of Sin Fang*. An Eastern menace.  
No. 521, dated 27.2.1932  
*Terrorland* by E.S. Brooks. A thriller series.  
*Dynamite Doom*. Railway in the Rockies.  
*Hoppy's Hippos*. The boy millionaire.  
*In the Name of the People*. French Revolution, ill. by Cuneo.  
*Six Balls or Bust*. Football.

*The Schoolboy in Snob's Clothing.* St. Gideon's.

No. 573, dated 25.2.1933

*The Stadium Spectres* by E.S. Brooks. Footballers v Dr Zorro.

*The Tornado Terror.* Thriller about the Black Shadow.

*The Talkie Timber Shooters.* Filming in Canadian woodlands.

*That Uncanny Carpet.* A fun tale.

*The Iron Monster.* Tale of the Taxi Tec.

*The Ice Pirates* by Bernard Buley. Scientists in Polar region.

No. 620, dated 20.1.1934 (final issue)

*Lightning Fist* by George E. Rochester. Football.

*Dick Turpin's Schooldays.* An earlier Turpin series was by J. Hunter.

*The Invisible Submarine.* End of serial of plot to conquer the world.

*The Blizzard Ranger.* Intrigue in frozen lumberland.

*Whale and Whoa.* Final doings of Laurel and Hardy.

*Menace of the Monsters* by J. Hunter. Concluding serial of prehistoric monsters free in London.

*Announcement.* Next week combined with *Champion*.

**PREPARED — FOR PERIL**

**OUR GRAND TWO-PART DETECTIVE YARN.**

Falcon Swift, the Sporting Detective, and his Boy Assistant in a romantic and thrilling venture, telling how they helped a youthful king to regain his lost crown after a series of breathless and sensational exploits.

As an overall observation I would think that the *Boys Magazine* was consistent in its contents and presentation. If not one of the 'greats' it was well received for some 12 years. By 1934 there were so many weekly boys' papers that not all could survive and D.C. Thomson publications had a wider appeal (but not to this

contributor!!). If the foregoing details have little interest for my younger readers, I hope they may stir the memories of some of my contemporaries.

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**It helps the C.D. if you advertise your "For Sales" and Wants in it.** The rates are: 4p per word, £5 for a quarter page, £10 for a half page and £20 for a whole page.

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## FORUM

### From Peter Hanger:

Thank you for another fine issue of SPCD. I have been enjoying it since the days of Herbert Leckenby ...

With reference to your note about Marjorie favouring Bob rather than Harry, I began reading the *Magnet* when I was twelve and rather liked the Cliff House girls, but not enough to write to the Editor asking for a date with Marjorie like some 'nutter' is supposed to have done. But, as I grew older, I realised just how unreal they were. For fifteen-year-old girls were not interested, in my own personal experience, in boys of their own age, but went for lads two or three years older than themselves. And, what's more, preferred the Loder types rather than the Wingate types.

There are lots of little anomalies like this but I love Greyfriars in spite of them.

### From J.E.M.:

A few words on the February Digest ... Warmest gratitude for Steve Holland's list of the 1934-35 *Thriller Library*. I have been looking for copies of – or even any reference to – this Library for years. The information is invaluable and leads me to hope I might be able to track down the odd copy, hence the enclosed ad.

Much enjoyed Brian Doyle's review of the latest *Alice* (for the Millennium), though I must dissent from his criticism of Tenniel's original illustrations. "A little adult more than a little girl", Brian says of Tenniel's Alice. Surely she is depicted as being a little adult inside a little girl. As Mary Cadogan put it in her *CD Annual* article, *Alice*, "though knowing herself still to be a child senses her future womanly role". Tenniel captures this perfectly. Anyway, more power to your pen, Mr Doyle; for me, and I'm sure for all *Digest* readers, your contributions are ever a stimulus and delight.

### From Reg Hardinge:

The February 2000 CD was an outstanding issue. What a splendid example of rhythmic and descriptive poetry ("The Highwayman") with which to bring down the curtain! Bob Whiter's most informative article "Riders of the World" with its sparkling illustrations was really first rate. Steve Holland must be complimented on furnishing a comprehensive list of the *Thriller Library*. Details about author Henry Holt are sparse, I have found. In the late thirties and early forties I read quite a number of his crime novels – "Tiger of Mayfair", "The Scarlet Messenger" and "Calling All Cars" to name three. Inspector Jim Silver and Andy Collinson featured in most of them.

### From Ted Baldock:

The January CD was a splendid 'kick-off' to the new millennium. The Colin Crewe Catalogue is a mouth-watering addition. What a wonderful collection of B.O.P. Annuals! How well I remember those great stories of Charles Gilson – "At the Call of the Czar", "The Mystery of Ah Jim", "The Stolen Grand Lhama" and perhaps the best loved of all, "The Lost City", and Harold Avery's "Fifth Form Mystery". To my way of thinking there exists nothing today nearly approaching these tales.

**From Larry Morley:**

May I write and say how much I enjoyed Brian Doyle's article "Film Fun at Greyfriars". There was however a feature film made about schoolboy heroes, now practically forgotten I'm afraid.

In 1925 the Welsh Pearson Film Co. (Cricklewood Studios) made a film of "Jack, Sam and Pete". Whether or not it was intended for the juvenile market or for general consumption I do not know; no doubt there is a copy of it buried in the vaults of the B.F.L. The film was described as a rollicking adventure, with colour sequences. No doubt hand stencilled on every frame – i.e. blue for night, red for fire scenes, black and white for day. Welsh Pearson was a much respected company in the 1920s so I would imagine that the film had a quality look about it.

I had a bound volume of *Picture Show* many years ago and there was a full page spread about the movie. The British film industry has treated our schoolboy heroes pretty shabbily in the past, all 'B' quota quickys – witness the Sexton Blake films, the English-made 'Saint' efforts and on TV the dreadful Billy Bunter playlets. This is all wishful thinking but it would be nice if some film company would make a decent picture of one of our boyhood heroes. I doubt it, though, as there is no market commercially for them.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

**by Brian Doyle**

**Little-known or un-remembered Facts and Items gleaned while serendipitously browsing through the archives.**

**Did you know that . . . .**

Billy Bunter once met Sexton Blake? It happened in a 'substitute' story "Disgraced by His Father" written by Noel Wood-Smith, in *Magnet* No. 818, dated October 13, 1923.

William Brown attended a meeting of the London Old Boys' Book Club in 1960? The auspicious occasion was amusingly described by Arthur Moye in the CD for November 1960. But the actual story, "William and the Old Boys" has yet to be written ... !

The famous bookshop, Foyle's, in London's Charing Cross Road, once devoted a whole window display to original copies of the *Magnet*? It was just before Christmas in 1959, and was arranged to publicise the latest Bunter Christmas Show at London's Victoria Palace, "Billy Bunter flies East" (starring Gerald Campion in the title role).

Frank Richards, when asked if he kept a card-index of all his many characters, replied: "Do you keep a card-index of all your friends .... ?"

Gerald Campion, famous as TV's 'Billy Bunter' and in the same role on the London stage, appropriately presented a food and cookery programme on Southern TV in 1960?

He founded – and ran – the famous London show business haunt, ‘Gerry’s Club’ in Shaftesbury Avenue for many years, and later became a well-known restaurateur.

*Film Fun* reprinted St. Frank’s stories in 1961, *Knock-Out* reprinted Rookwood stories in 1960-61, *Look and Learn* reprinted Greyfriars stories in 1963, and *Tit-Bits* reprinted a Sexton Blake serial in 1965? There were other instances. But Charles Dickens’ book “Reprinted Pieces” wasn’t, apparently, even considered!

Harry Wharton was presented to His Majesty King George V in an early *Magnet* story?

A 47-year-old surveyor advertised that he would offer a 4-bedroomed, freehold cottage in Romsey, Hampshire, in exchange for 500 *Magnets*? That was in 1962. Six years later, an advertiser in *Exchange and Mart* offered two ‘repairable’ cottages, plus an acre of land, in the Wye Valley, in exchange for a complete set of *Magnets*. I have not been able to trace if either of these fascinating transactions ever took place satisfactorily or not, or, indeed, if the offers were genuine ....

“Danny’s Diary”, by editor Eric Fayne, and covering May 1912, began its long (over 20 years, I believe) run in the *Collectors’ Digest* in May 1962? (Danny always went back exactly 50 years in his magical memories.) His delightful, nostalgic and informative ‘Diary’ was perhaps the most popular feature in the magazine and was obviously based upon Eric’s own vivid and personal memories. Incidentally, did you know that Danny’s surname was ‘Penlerick’? Eric disclosed it for the first (and last) time in the 1968 *CD Annual*. Where, I wonder, did ‘Penlerick’ come from? Does anyone know?

A ‘Billy Bunter Club’ was suggested by the editor in the *Magnet* in 1940? The timing could have been better – and the project never materialized. But, six years later, the ‘Old Boys’ Book Club’ did materialize and so, though the ‘BBC’ never got off the ground, the ‘OBBC’ did .... !

Lewis Carlton, editor of the *Union Jack* and author of several Sexton Blake stories (the first in 1915), and who went on to edit *Pluck* and *Boys’ Journal*, left the Amalgamated Press to become an actor and appear in a stage play about Sexton Blake? Whether he played Blake or Tinker is uncertain, as conflicting reports credit him with both roles! Maybe he did play both. Some authors complained that their editors were often two-faced .... !

In 1964, a Birmingham public library reported that 22 Bunter books had been stolen from its shelves? (“It wasn’t me!” protested Bunter indignantly. “I was nowhere near the place. Where is Birmingham anyway? As a matter of fact, I was having a snack in the cake-shop opposite the library – jolly good swiss-rolls they do there! I’ve never even been into that library – there’s no food in there – I know ‘cos I looked! And what would I be doing with books about myself, anyway? Who on earth would want to read about ME .... ?”)

Edwy Searles Brookes named his famous school 'St. Frank's' after his wife, Frances?

Most Greyfriars enthusiasts are familiar with J.S. Butcher's book "Greyfriars School: a Prospectus" published in 1965. But did you know that, sadly, the author died a few weeks before his book was published and he never saw the finished work .... ?

P.G. Wodehouse's very first novel, his school story "The Pothunters" (published as a book in 1902) was serialised in *Boys' Friend* under the title "By Order of the League" in 1923?

Sir Douglas Bader, the famous legless air ace (whose remarkable story was immortalized in that wonderful film, "Reach for the Sky" with Kenneth More playing him) was rumoured to have edited the *Rocket* boys' paper in the 1950s? But I can find no mention of this in the three full-length books about the great man, though he did dabble in journalism around the mid-to-late-1950s. Perhaps someone has a run of this paper and can solve the mystery? Maybe he was 'Air Correspondent' or something similar?

A propos this, I can't resist giving you a true anecdote, told to me by Kenny More himself, when I knew him at Pinewood Studios during the late 1950s. He and Bader had become close friends, and Bader was being introduced one night as guest speaker after some golf club dinner. The Chairman (not a keen movie fan) stood up and said: "I expect many of you here tonight know our guest from the silver screen, when he played, with great success I'm told, the role of Kenneth More in a picture called 'Reach for the Sky'..." Bader, apparently, enjoyed the faux pas/joke more than anyone ....

*The Speedway Gazette* ran a series of school stories in 1967? Why?!

There was a 'Bunter's Café' in London's Edgware Road in the late 1960s?

There was a Greyfriars Secondary School in Yorkshire around 1919? It was mentioned in a *Magnet* of the time.

*The Scout* was the longest-running boys' paper ever? It ran for over 58 years (1908-66) – and the last *Scout Annual* appeared in 1968.

Sir John Betjeman (the late Poet Laureate) once referred to *Rainbow* comic in a poem, "Summoned by Bells", his "Autobiography in Verse" (1960):

"Rainbow came on Wednesdays,  
With the pranks of Tiger Tim,  
And Bonnie Bluebell and her magic gloves ...."

Tom Dutton – the 'deaf' Removite at Greyfriars – was a brilliant ice-skater? He apparently proved it in *Red Magnet* No. 369.

The original 'Bunter' (of the once-famous 'Bunter's Nervine Tonic' advertisement, from which Frank Richards was said to have 'borrowed' the name for his 'Fat Owl'), was the

grandfather of BBC writer and broadcaster Roy Plomley (famous, of course, for his programme "Desert Island Discs" – still running today after more than 50 years)? Plomley once told me that he was a great *Nelson Lee* fan in his youth – I sent him half-a-dozen copies and he was delighted and grateful – but he never invited me to appear on his popular programme .... !

Frank Richards once wrote a letter in Braille, in reply to a blind fan?

Some people think that Frank Richards had an obsession with characters' names beginning with the letter 'J' in his Greyfriars stories? I've never got around to counting – have you?

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## MORE GEMS OF HAMILTONIA

from Pete Hanger

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"If Smithy's fearfully keen to see me he can say so," he remarked. "Tell him to come to the phone and whisper those sweet words himself."

"He – he – he's gone out."

"He can ring me up when he comes in, then."

"I mean, he – he's got the toothache, and can't phone. That's why he asked me to call you up. See? He's got a fearful swelling on his cheek from earache –"

"As well as toothache! Poor chap!"

"I mean toothache. Such a fearful swelling that he can't speak a word. He said to me –"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter.

"Go it, old fat fibber!" chortled Bob. "What did he say to you while he couldn't speak a word?"

"Oh! I – mean, he – he can hardly speak a word – just whisper, see? It gives him a fearful pain to speak with such a headache –"

"Headache, too! Poor old Smithy!"

"I mean earache – that is, toothache. Don't keep sniggering, you silly ass! I think you might be a bit sympathetic when poor old Smithy's laid up with a head – ear – I mean toothache!"

"So I would be, old fat man, if I believed a word of it!" said Bob cheerfully.

*Magnet 1523*

Coker smiled. He almost smirked. Coker was pleased with himself. True, Coker generally was pleased with himself. But this time he had cause. Coker had done the trick. Coker had worked the oracle! Coker had taken the matter in hand, where all others had failed, and, like Caesar of old, he had come, and seen, and conquered! It was Coker first, and the rest nowhere!

*Magnet 1521*

"Ten to one on St. Jim's!" said Bunter recklessly.

"Ten to one in what?" asked Skinner. "IOU's?"

*Magnet 1068*

Bunter flew up the staircase at a rate which really looked as if the law of gravitation had ceased to exercise its influence on heavy objects.

*Magnet 1614*

With all the Remove, except himself, at games practice with the games master, he had his choice of bikes, and he was going to take the jigger belonging to the fellow least likely to kick him for having done so. So Frank Nugent, as the best-tempered fellow in the Remove, was going to have the pleasure of lending Bunter a bike.

*Magnet 1532*

..... you and Mark Linley at back, Johnny."

Johnny Bull nodded. That selection seemed to him eminently satisfactory. In fact, he did not see how it could be improved upon.

*Magnet 569*

"Wibley!" Mr. Quelch seemed to bite off the name. "So - so - so it is you! A boy of my Form! Can I believe my eyes?"

Wibley did not answer that question. Really, Mr. Quelch himself was the best judge of that!

*Magnet 1536*

"Look here, Wharton, it's about the cricket!"

"You're going to speak about cricket?"

"Yes," frowned Temple.

"My hat! You've heard of the game?" asked Wharton.

"What!"

"But if you've heard of it, why don't you play it?" continued the Captain of the Remove. "It's quite an interesting game when you come to know it. I've often seen you chaps monkeying about with a bat and ball, and wondered why you didn't set to and play cricket!"

*Magnet 488*

When Mossoo gave lines, they were generally from the *Henriade*, which was used in the French class as a school-book. Acquaintance with the great work, Mossoo thought, was a good thing for his youthful pupils.

Few of them had any desire to become more closely acquainted with that great work. Indeed, many of the Removites would have liked to have the gloves on with the great Voltaire for having written it at all!

*Magnet 1537*

"Oh crikey! I - I - I'm Wibley, sir!" groaned the hapless Wib.

"Wibley, of my form!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Perhaps he had hoped that the young rascal belonged to another form. *Magnet 1536*

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Editor: Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 6PY

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