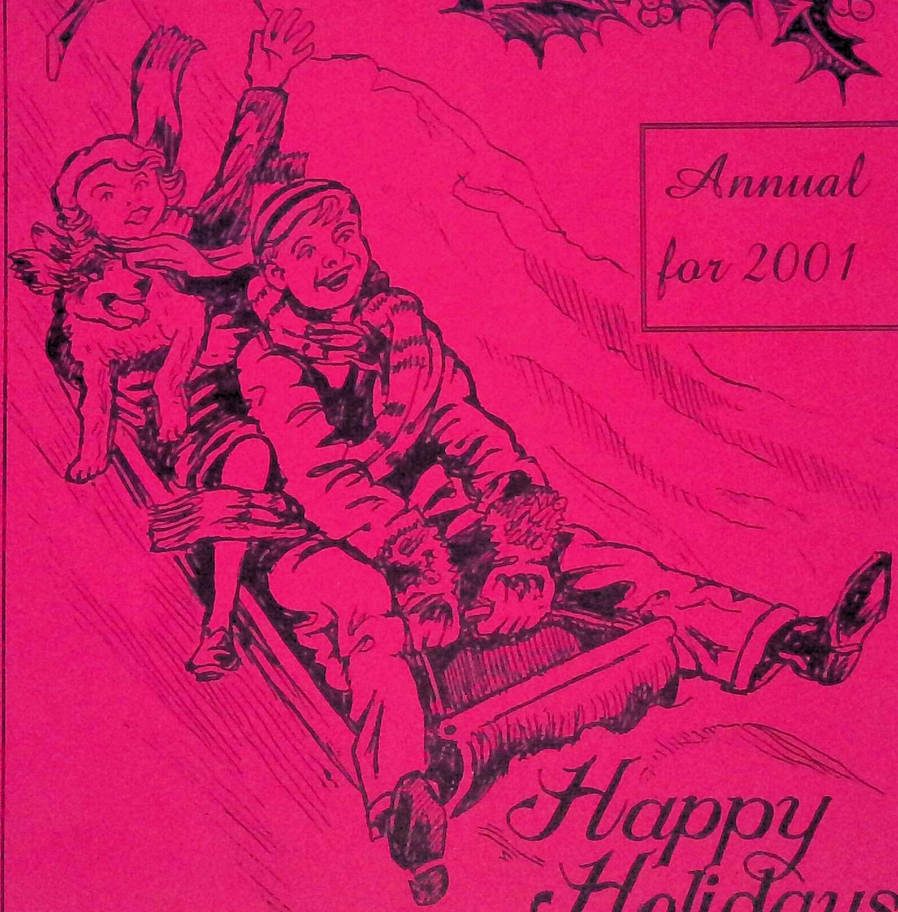
The Story Paper

Collectors' Digest

Annual for 2001



Happy Holidays

BOB WHITER

"That Exciting Christmas Day" Festive Christmas Story, by Eliza Richards. Inside

THE SCHOOLGIRL

EVERY SATURDAY 2d

No. 283. Vol. 11. WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED "SCHOOLDAYS" Week Ending December 29th, 1934.

BABS & CO.'S CHRISTMAS DAY THRILLS—

An amusing complete long story of Barbara Redfern & Co., by Eliza Richards. Inside

COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL CHRISTMAS 2001

Fifty-fifth year

EDITOR: MARY CADOGAN, 46 OVERBURY AVENUE, BECKENHAM, KENT BR3 6PY.

FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

As Christmas comes near it is once again my very great pleasure to bring you another C.D. Annual which (as I always say and believe!) is as fine as its many predecessor volumes.

You will see that it includes features on our traditional favourites – Hamiltonia, Blakiana and Brooks – and there are also, of course, wide-ranging articles covering everything from the derring-do of wartime or cowboy heroes to the iconoclasm of Dennis the Menace and real-life Lancashire comedians.

Our dear friend Henry Webb, who has provided the Annual's cover-drawings and headings for so many years, is unfortunately at present too incapacitated to do so. I should like to express my best wishes to Henry for his full recovery and also my warm thanks to him for past help. I am deeply grateful to Bob Whiter who has most ably, readily and speedily produced our front and back-cover drawings this year.

Of course, I am also extremely grateful to *all* our enthusiastic contributors of articles, stories and poems. I know that much effort and research has gone into these informative and entertaining features.

Thanks should also be conveyed to Mandy, Freda, Margaret, Michael, David and all at Quacks, our printers, for their help not only with the Annual but throughout the year with our quarterly magazine.

Lastly I most warmly and deeply thank all you wonderfully loyal subscribers to the Annual and the C.D. I sincerely hope that this volume will enrich the festive season for you, and once again I send the time-honoured wish –

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY, HEALTHY AND PEACEFUL NEW YEAR

MARY CADOGAN.

CONTENTS

GREYFRIARS VIGNETTES

by

Ted Baldock

TERM'S END

The anticipation of the Christmas holidays - especially to the young – has no equivalent in the calendar of days.

There is nothing on earth quite comparable with the joy and magic of Christmas.

Observations

Ghosts, wraiths, spectres, ghouls, spooks and goblins, not forgetting hollow groans, doors slowly opening by their own volition, unnatural creakings beyond the door – a strange recital... But Bunter, Coker, Quelch, Prout and Gosling, with Bob Cherry lighten the load – as it were.

The time was mid-December approaching that longed-for magic day heralding the end of another term. Five fellows. None other than Harry Wharton and Co. were seated comfortably round a glowing fire in Study No. One at Greyfriars. Wind and sleet were beating on the window. The old quadrangle without appeared a strange and deserted territory in the gloom. The wind all day had blown 'great guns' and seemed to be putting in an extra effort now that dusk had fallen.

Within it was a cosy scene. The study table retaining what appeared to have been a substantial feast – a tea in the grand manner.

A few days more and the old school would be vacated and left to solitude, grey light, much darkness and whistling draughts. Even Gosling, gnarled old 'Gossy', gave the vast empty building a somewhat wide birth during winter vacations.

In Study No. One shadows were dancing on the walls in tune with the rising flickers from the fire.

"Another term ended," sad Harry Wharton.

"Another year coming to a close," said Frank Nugent.

At this point the study door opened and a pair of spectacles glimmered in. "I say, you fellows!" It was the Owl.

"I say, have you fellows teaed yet?"

Bunter gazed upon the 'ghost', as it were, of the substantial spread, which had a short time before graced the table. "I say, I may as well finish off that cake and those biscuits – and the jam, raspberry I see, my favourite you know". "Go ahead old fat man", said Wharton. "As I was saying you fellows..." Billy Bunter was left to his 'cleaning up' operations at the table.

"When we have all left for the holidays, this study, the passage outside, all the form-rooms and stairways must be a silent and lonely world". Harry paused, "If any old time monks should decide to 'seek the glimpses of the moon' surely it would be the vacation they would select for their wanderings. Hence the shufflings in the passage-ways old Gosling is said to have heard when he makes a duty survey every day or so to the supposedly deserted building. Mimble goes with him. Two ancient heroes against the imagined powers of darkness is not without its amusing aspect!"

To attempt a logical explanation of such phenomena would destroy the romance, if such it may be called, of the unknown. Is there not a thrill attached to 'Things that go bump in the night'? However, Gosling has his own ideas on the subject. "Wot I says is this 'ere! I don't like coming in when all them young rascals are away". Evidently Gos. has a soft spot for the fellows after all.

Let us taker a leap in time, a privilege afforded to the would-be story teller.

Wharton Lodge on Christmas morning. It is breakfast time. Billy Bunter's fat features are radiating broad beams of satisfaction which would seem to indicate that something rather special has occurred.

"I say, you fellows", Bunter fairly chirruped, his entire fat figure radiating bonhomie. "I say, my Uncle Carter you know".

"Good old Uncle Carter, has he sent you a Christmas card?" enquired Johnny Bull.

"Better than that!" cried Bunter. "I say, you fellows, look at this." He waved a slip of paper over the breakfast table for all to see. "Uncle Carter has sent me a postal order. Here it is. "

"Congrats' old man!" said Bob Cherry. Now you will be able to settle up all those little outstanding debts – lucky fellow."

Breakfast was a cheery meal, surely it is always so during the holidays, the Owl losing count of the number of rashers he consumed while gazing at his long expected postal order which he had propped up against the sugar bowl. "Merry Christmas, you fellows", he cried wading into the toast and marmalade. "Merry Christmas, John, Merry Christmas, Wells old bean."

Whether or not the portly and dignified butler appreciated the 'old bean' is problematical. However, it was Christmas and he returned the greeting in the traditional manner. There passed through his mind that highly charged moment, now several years ago, when, pushed a little beyond his usual urbanity his hand had made vigorous contact with Bunter's trousers. But that was a long time ago. It was history, and this was the season of good will to all men – even Bunter.

A strange silence had hung over that little affair of which Colonel Wharton must have been cognizant. Perhaps he secretly approved the action of Wells. Such, at any rate, was the opinion below stairs.

Breakfast proceeded in a buzz of cheery chatter and laughter. "I say, Wells...". "Yes, Master Bunter." "We would do with more rashers and eggs and toast, and the marmalade bowl is empty, and, I say, Wells, look alive there."

Billy Bunter was in his glory. "And John, more coffee here, we train our menials at Bunter Court to anticipate our needs. Keep awake."

John, with a very expressive face, duly 'kept awake'. It may be wondered whether the thoughts passing through his mind at that moment were entirely in accord with peace and goodwill to all men, even to fat and badgering Owls!

Let us leave them now, a merry group seated round the glowing fire in the hall at Wharton Lodge. Laughing and chattering. Young fellows with all the world at their feet, all standing eagerly on the brink of the great adventure of life.

May the ghosts of all our past Christmases rise up and haunt us – and them – pleasantly with happy memories and kindly thoughts.

May William George Bunter in a rare, too rare, moment of unselfishness give a thought to those countless other young fellows, and adults, who will fare decidedly less opulently than the Wharton Lodge party or ourselves this Christmas.

And now as 'Tiny Tim' Cratchit has observed for posterity – 'God bless us all, everyone'.

With the wild wind blowing hard without,
With the snowdrifts building high,
Within we hear the merry shout,
As the fading year slips by,
To all the fellows we have known
Throughout the passing years,
To the friendships we have sown,
All – we salute with cheers.

DREAM QUEST

Over the fields of yesteryear
Through misty realms of sleep,
A vision stands out deep and clear
A promise I must keep.
To visit Greyfriars once again
To tread that hallowed ground
I wonder, will it be the same,
Will echoes still resound.
Are these but shadows that I seek,
Deep hidden in the past
So be it – they are all complete,
I'll see them all at last.
Do the rooks still strut and caw,
Up in the ancient elms,
As they did in days of yore
In those familiar realms.
Will Gosling still retain the gate,
Will he still rattle keys,
Reporting those who turn up late,
Ignoring all their pleas.
Is Mister Quelch still holding sway,
With ever ready cane
In that old form room, dim and grey,
Is all this just the same?
Does the passage known so well
In countless tales now past,
Still hold the same old magic spell
Or is it quiet at last.
I'll see that dear old room the 'Rag',
And view the ink-stained walls,
I'll hear, who knows, the shout of 'fag',
When Loder irate calls.
Perhaps I'll see the shadows fall
Athwart the sixth form green,
Perhaps I'll hear the eternal call
Of things that might have been.
Of one thing I am doubly sure,
As from the past I seek,
I'll meet the fellows there once more,
My dream will be complete.

DOUBTFUL GENIUS

The general so likes your music,
that he desires you, for love's
sake, to make no more noise with it
(Othello)

The afternoon peace is shattered by a cacophony of crashing and discordant chords as of a hundred souls – or cats - in torment. A fearful din. The rooks in the old elms in the quad have taken flight and are scattered far and wide complaining harshly at the destruction of their wonted peace.

Claude Hoskins, the musical genius of the fourth form, is getting busy on the opening movement of his twenty third concerto. The marble bust of Beethoven in the music room is said to adopt a pained expression whenever old Claude gets going on the piano.

This may be pure hearsay, not of course that it would have been in the least surprising. Old Claude's music (?) seems to have had that effect on many of his friends.

Harold Skinner, the humorist of the remove, has often averred that it was necessary, if one were to retain one's ear-drums intact, to have cotton-wool plugs securely in positions when passing within fifty yards of the music room when Claude was in residence.

Whether this was prompted by envy of Hoskins capability – or, as he unhesitatingly asserts, his 'genius' – to produce such sound is not clear. He has been heard explaining to his bosom chum Hobson that 'it is just unadulterated jealousy of my professional ability old man. These chaps are nothing but Goths and Philistines where music is concerned.'

Most music lovers are aware of the seemingly endless melody in Wagnerian music it is inspiring and deeply satisfying,. Its general effect is soothing, it elevates the listener to a higher sphere of thought, far above the mundane. Claude Hoskins of the fourth form at Greyfriars has made similar claims for the thunderous outpourings and hysterical counterpoint in his own dismaying and frequently disturbing compositions.

Mrs. Mimble's cat, a feline of some character, has been accredited with being the inspiration of certain passages in his Piano concerto Opus 29. This, of course is a gross libel emanating, it is suspected, from Harold Skinner.

Congreve tells us, and he speaks from experience that, 'Music hath charms to sooth a savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak'. Taking a fairly wide consensus of opinion among the Greyfriars fellows, there would be few who would agree with these sentiments. Certainly no remove 'man' would subscribe to them, and Horace Coker of the fifth form, who

"Look here, you cheeky fags!" shouted Hoskins. "Oh, my hat! Mind my music! Oh, crumbs!" Five pairs of hands jerked the musical genius of the Shell off the music-stool. He sprawled on the floor in a gasping heap.

may be said to possess a mildly 'savage' breast, would certainly wax very emphatic upon the subject, no doubt bringing into active practice his celebrated 'short way with fags'.

It surely must at last boil down to a definition of the term. Music – the art of combining sounds with a view to beauty of form and expression of emotion. Poor old Claude. It is either he or his critics – one or the other – both cannot be right. Perhaps we are not yet sufficiently educated into the mysteries of Musicology to appreciate the mystic art as propounded by this genius of the fourth form. Has it not been often stated that a prophet is without renown in his own land?

Genius manifests itself in many and diverse ways and is open to many interpretations. Claude Hoskins may be described as a 'Thumper par excellence', although he would probably not appreciate the epithet. HE is convinced that within him lie the seeds of musical genius, his friends have varying degrees of reservation on this point, many are quite emphatic. Some fortunate beings are said to be born with silver spoons in their mouths. Rumour, that erratic jade, has it that Hoskins made his debut into the world clutching a tuning fork.

Not a particularly bright star in the Greyfriars firmament, Claude is a relatively harmless, rather likeable fellow who lives and has his being in a world of staves, crochets, semi-quavers and thunderous chords, not to mention agonising scales. A wayward genius or a disturber of the peace and tranquillity of Greyfriars? Most fellows incline to the latter opinion. Claude is the unorthodox musician – a carefully cultivated image this – with rolling eye and extravagant gestures.

There are moments, far too many of them according to his chum James Hobson (a carefully kept secret from the composer) in this Opus 47 which easily subdue many of the more thunderous and stormy passages in Beethoven and Wagner. These passages have been likened to one of the larger batteries of cannon at Waterloo. In terms of volume Claude makes a very credible show, but, many fellows are continually asking – "is it music?" which, of course does not endear them to the composer.

On being asked which is the most universally shunned room at Greyfriars, the answer would, in nine cases out of ten, be the music room when Hoskins is in occupation. As a room it is very spacious and charming with large windows letting in the maximum of light, also perhaps rather less charming, letting out, when open, a less than acceptable scale of decibels. In the centre of the floor stands a large concert piano, a well-used instrument – and very much a 'going concern'. The bust of Beethoven glaring down stonily from his lofty perch at the top of the music cupboard could, one feels, have much to say upon the liberties taken with the mystic art as practised by Hoskins. It is here that he (Hoskins) spends much of his leisure time. A creative genius? a noisy bounder? a harmless ass? Who may say. He is an integral part of the Greyfriars scene – and sound. He is a fact of life, as such we must accept him together with all his blemishes.

A GOLDEN APPLE

William George Bunter was sprawling with all the inelegance of a Harlequin at home in Mr. Quelch's armchair in that gentleman's study. His little legs were outstretched, and his bullet head was reclining on a cushion. Behind his large spectacles his eyes were closed, while the sound of distant thunder reverberated through the study. Not by any stretch of the imagination could the Owl be said to present an edifying sight.

So thought Mr. Quelch as he stood in the doorway for a moment, bereft of speech, with an expression on his acid features which could only be described as demonical. It was temerity of the first order for a boy to be in a master's study at all without express permission, but to occupy a master's armchair constituted an impertinence unparalleled. To slumber in it was – to state the case mildly – sacrilege. Quelch's loss of speech was however momentary. He fairly roared.

"BUNTER."

His strident summons would surely have awakened the seven sleepers of Ephesus had they been taking a nap in the Remove master's study. Yet the effect on Bunter was minimal. The Owl stirred and grunted while his snore changed an octave or so; that was all. Morpheus still held him in close embrace.

Mr. Quelch stepped into the study. He stepped to his desk where reposed his cane which habitually lay there ready for use at a moment's notice. Then he paused. Mr. Quelch, beneath the accumulated layers of acidity which years of school mastering had endowed him with was at heart a kindly gentleman, an essentially humane and understanding one. The cane could wait. Approaching Bunter he grasped a fat shoulder and gave the Owl several vigorous shakes. This had an effect. Bunter stirred and wriggled and spluttered in the process of waking up.

"Grooogh, I say... I'm not here... it wasn't me... it was a rotten cake anyway... I say..."

"Silence, you stupid boy, wake up, rise immediately." Bunter, by this time having been thoroughly roused and observing the identity of the shaker, lost no time in rising.

"Oh... I say sir, I wasn't sitting in your chair, I just bent down to..." "Silence," hooted Mr. Quelch. "How dare you sir. What are you doing here, what do you want?"

Bunter's fat little brain usually operated in a very sluggish manner. However, circumstances tend to alter cases. It was now whirling at full pressure.

"Oh, sir, I wanted your opinion sir – I wanted your guidance with this passage in The Aeneid you set for prep..."

Mr. Quelch was designated by certain members of his form as a 'Wily old bird' and this not without justification. But there did exist in his armour certain chinks. William George Bunter was fully aware of them. Here lay the only route – albeit perilous – of escape from a potentially dangerous situation.

Henry Samuel Quelch knew his Bunter from long and intimate experience. It was a generally accepted fact in the Remove that the master could see through oaken doors and stone walls, so powerful were his penetratory powers. Now he bent upon Bunter a very penetrating glance indeed, never had his gimlet eye had such piercing qualities.

"Where is your Virgil, Bunter", he enquired in a deep voice.

"Oh, I ...er ...I say sir", stammered Bunter who was in possession of nothing remotely resembling a book – much less a Virgil – unless by some miracle of necromancy it had been suddenly transformed into a bag of rather sticky bullseyes.

"Bunter, are you prevaricating, if so ..." Mr. Quelch did not complete the sentence but its inference was quite unmistakable.

"Oh, no sir, you know I wouldn't, all the fellows will tell you what an honourable champ I am..."

"Indeed I know nothing of the kind", rapped Mr. Quelch. "You will bend over that chair Bunter and I shall endeavour to instil some elements of truthfulness of which you are so obviously in need".

"Oh, really sir... I say..."

"Silence! Bend over that chair."

Mr. Quelch had armed himself with his cane and now stood flexing it in a most disturbing manner. Its flexibility was fearful – to the Owl – to behold. There seemed no escape. Slowly, very slowly Bunter bent over and presented a wide expanse of trouser – and squirmed in anticipation.

Mr. Quelch did not keep him in suspense. The cane rose and fell with rhythmic precision in

his sinewy hand. Equally rhythmic were the roars of Billy Bunter. It was rather a distressing scene – especially for the beleaguered Owl. Seldom had his tight trousers experienced such a dusting. Seldom had the Remove master laid on 'six' with such consummate vigour. On this occasion he had little doubt that it was fully justified. It is possible – indeed very probable – that Bunter had somewhat different views. However, justice was being done – and heard to be done. Once again Billy Bunter was finding that the way of a transgressor is not strewn with roses.

An official 'six' could and frequently did mean no more than three or possibly four mild whacks. On this occasion Mr. Quelch administered the full complement. Indeed there seemed every indication that he would transgress the sacred rule of 'six' and continue to pile up the score. Fortunately for Bunter, calm reason prevailed and he paused much to the Owl's relief, although his lamentations continued to echo along masters' passage for some considerable time afterwards.

That evening Bunter was still suffering severe but gradually subsiding twinges. Finding sitting somewhat painful, he was wandering restlessly about the study, grunting and emitting the occasional 'Ow' and 'Grooogh', a proceeding not conducive to the peace and quiet rather essential to Peter Todd and Tom Dutton who were patiently trying to settle down to Prep.

"I say, you fellows…"

"Shut up."

"Beast – I say…"

"Look here you fat ass, if you won't shut up, get out of the study, scoot, disappear, emigrate – go anywhere, just be quiet about it".

"Oh, really Peter, this is my study you know…"

"And this is my fives bat", roared the exasperated Peter reaching for that little instrument of correction. Bunter eyed this proceeding with no small concern. His fat person had been, so he considered, assaulted sufficiently for one day. He duly 'shut up'.

One more incident – only too familiar to us – in the fat career of William George Bunter. A career in which are hinted among other less salubrious characteristics, unscrupulousness, a blatant deviation from – or non-recognition of - the truth, and a degree of artfulness far from admirable. As his form fellows have so often reiterated among other less than complimentary sobriquets he is a 'fat villain'.

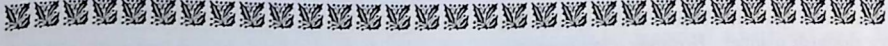
Yet imagine Greyfriars without Billy Bunter. It would be better to leave such imaginings to the realms of the impossible. It has been said that one imperfect apple will contaminate a whole barrel. Should the barrel be fortunate enough to contain a golden apple, however, the case will be completely reversed.

Very few readers will dispute the fact that William George Bunter is indeed an apple of the purest gold – a very corpulent and valuable fruit indeed, who has ensured the enduring, and endearing, success of the Greyfriars story.

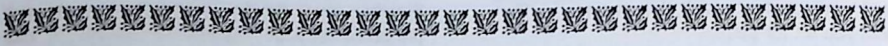
Happy 81st Christmas Dad. Thanks for introducing me to Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. RICHARD

Joyous Greetings for Christmas and New Year to all our friends, COLIN and ELLEN PARTIS, Great Grimsby, North East, Lincolnshire

All good wishes of The Season to Hobbyists everywhere. ANDREW PITT.



Season's Greetings to all chums and fellow friars and to Mary, esteemed editor of our beloved Collectors' Digest. MAURICE O'CONNELL, 12 Beechwood Park, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Ireland.



If I Were A Rich Man

by

Una Hamilton Wright

What were Charles Hamilton's aims and objects? Did he have a plan for his life? What did he set out to do? And did he achieve it?. It is easy to see that he was successful in his life if you judge from a money standard. He earned a very comfortable living and never wanted for anything material. He set his sights at a slightly different angle from the average new-rich. By living in Kent near or beside the sea he looked after his health. But had he any other aims? And how did he set about achieving them?

When he sat at his typewritter gazing across the farmer's fields towards the top of the cliffs and the sea, what were his thoughts? Did his mind run back to his youth, still overshadowed by his late overbearing father? Did this red-haired ogre leave him yearning for freedom and independence? Sadly, it did.

Thanks to the father's deplorable drinking habits, funds were extremely short. There was never any chance of having anything he wanted. As a boy he lived in his daydreams and told them as stories to his siblings, particular the younger two, Douglas and Dolly. They both loved Charlie's stories about Canada and the United States in which he played Cowboys and Indians for real. And so he had found one way of wish fulfilment to live his life in his mind. Fortunately most of the young reading public was of the same mind as the author: his stories sold very well once he had taken the daring step of submitting one to an editor, as the result of the urgings of his elder brother Alex. So, he quickly developed from being a penniless teenager (except for his Uncle Steve's handouts) to being a well-to-do late teenager after only three years of being published. His stories were constantly in demand and he never received a rejection slip.

Charles's instinct with his newfound wealth was to buy presents for members of his family who were duly weighed down with bicycles, a sewing machine, clocks, watches and jewellery. He bought himself a bicycle but was to wait until 1900 until he bought his first typewriter - a trusty Remington. Without his realising it, he was slipping into the position of being family provider. He took financial responsibility for his mother and for his sister Dolly whom he offered to adopt. His mother tactfully steered him away from that, she understood Dolly's dread of being 'owned', they both knew that generous people could also be masterful people. However, Charles had now settled on one of his aims in life; to make money not only to be independent, but to be able to look after people.

Because of his desire to look after his Mother and needy siblings he also sought to do good. He regarded it as one of the duties of those who could afford it. And so his giving became less aimed at 'indulging' and more focussed towards helping his brothers and sisters carry out their own responsibilities. He gradually came to see himself as the wise and kind guide, rather in the way his Uncle Steve treated his sisters and nieces and nephews. This kind and gentle and successful man - he owned countless businesses in Ealing - saw it as his duty to look after his sisters. Uncle Steve was the only surviving uncle in the family, and when asked why he had not married he replied, 'I haven't the time with seven sisters to look after.' Charles slipped into this mould very easily.

Charles along with the rest of the family had had a religious upbringing and he really cared about doing good and was grateful to God that he was able to do so, for the fact was that by following his inclinations he was now in the position to serve God.

To equip himself for serving God he needed some preparation and decided, with some encouragement from his sister Dolly, to offer himself for Confirmation. This they did together on 21 March 1905 at St. Peter's Church, Paddington. The Bishop of Kensington officiated. This deeply moving event was to take root in his thoughts and bear some special fruit many decades later. In January 1950 an article of his was printed in the Church Magazine in Thanet which revealed the line his thoughts had taken. During his life his prayers had been answered and he wanted to share this experience with others. In this article he wrote, "That prayer is answered by the good God is to my mind not a matter of argument or discussion, but plain fact, plain to all but those who, having eyes, see not. But in this matter as in all others, it is necessary to have regard to common sense. We must

consider how we pray and for what. We must consider whether our prayers may deserve an answer And the first step must be to eliminate selfishness, which can scarcely be expected to find favour in the eyes of our father in Heaven.

"The man who should pray to be permitted to break the bank at Monte Carlo could hardly look for an answer. The man who should pray for worldly success must expect to find the heaven dumb. For what is worldly success but a desire to live in a bigger house, and wear better clothes than our neighbour? God may pity the folly of such a petition, but He will hardly accede to it. If you pray for advantages for yourself you are wasting your breath. But if you pray to be made a better man, a kinder husband, a more dutiful son or father, God will help you. Your prayer will be answered; and you will find the happiness for which you ought not to ask given to you unasked. God will lend His ear to such prayers; but He cannot be expected to listen to selfish whinings.

"To my mind then, it boils down to this. If we pray that we may do our duty, that we may have kinder hearts and more patient minds, in a word that we may be better Christians, God will hear and answer. But if we pray for our own benefit, as a hog might for a larger allowance of swill, there will be nothing but silence: precisely the answer we shall deserve."

This aim of wanting the right thing echoes through all his stories. Right always triumphs in the end just as the readers hope it will. The characters divide into two basic types, the goodies and the baddies and the readers instinctively side with the former as the author intended they should.

Of the things he wanted for himself, freedom came top of the list, but he never attained it. His gambling was very largely dictated by his wish to be free. He loved writing and would by no means have given it up, but with freedom from obligation he could have taken a rest sometimes and he could have written only when he felt like it. But that sort of life was denied him. His aim and object was to do good and thus his path through life was marked out. He learned to live a pleasant and enjoyable life without ever deviating from his object.

Freedom always eluded him, money came to him and then slithered away because he had not the time to make a plan for looking after it. But he needed money to carry out his good works. He liked accepting responsibility for helping people, that made money an essential. But in a way his aims in life were at cross purposes – what did he pray for? Did he pray for an ample earned income that would supply all his generous urges. That indeed was the prayer that was answered until IPC upset the process. Charles found this very difficult to accept because of all his commitments, he had not the ability to save money and he reacted as though he had been robbed. Perhaps it was a nudge from the Almighty that earthly things are not to be relied upon.

Season's Greetings to Mary and all fellow Collectors' Digest readers from MERYL WITTY, Sunnybank Queensland, Australia.

Happy Christmas and New Year all Hobby friends. REG AND MAUREEN ANDREWS, Laverstock, Salisbury.

Christmas and New Year Greetings to all readers. Still looking for 'Under Wolfe's Flag'.
ERIC BAINES, 22 Hetley Road, Beeston, Nottingham, NG92 2QL.

Season's Greetings to all friends, and happy reading. D.D. BALL, 9 Brookfield Rise, Whitley, Melksham, Wilts, SN12 8QP.

Paragraphs About Personalities, Places, and Peculiarities Pertaining to Morcove

There is a roller-skating rink at Morcove, installed a few years ago when this healthy sport was all the rage. The rink is still popular with all the girls, many of whom have become expert in the pastime.

* * *

Betty Barton & Co. are widely travelled. They have been to Africa on several occasions during the "hols", visiting the northern desert country and also the dense, tropical region in the heart of the Continent. They have also been to Canada, to South America, and to Southern Europe.

* * *

Stormwood School is Morcove's deadly – but very friendly – rival at hockey. In a recent game, played on the Stormwood ground, Morcove only just managed to win. Up to a minute before the final whistle went the score was one-all. But, with a supreme effort, Ethel Courtway, Morcove's "star" forward, broke through the Stormwood defence and brought off a beautiful shot. Stormwood are determined to have their revenge in the very near future!

* * *

There is no tuckshop at Morcove. Until a few years ago there was one, but it was closed by Miss Somerfield, who considered that there was no necessity for it. The girls are generally free, after school, to run into Barncombe for provisions.

Betty Barton & Co., of the fourth Form, run their own Form magazine. Betty is the editress, and she is ably supported by Polly Linton, who acts as sub-editress, "reporter", fiction writer, printer, and "newsagent".

* * *

Mr. Jack Somerfield, the Headmistress' brother, has a passion for aviation and exploring. He had many thrilling adventures in his wide travels, but is now married and is supposed to have settled down. He is a great favourite with all the girls, and especially with Betty & Co. With his gay and helpful wife, Lena, he last year took the girls on a thrilling air hop to the Equator.

He is very attached to Jack Linton, Polly's schoolboy brother, who has a tremendous admiration for the famous airman-explorer.

* * *

Standing as it does high up on a headland overlooking the Atlantic, Morcove catches the full force of the gales that often sweep across the northern coast of Devon. There are many treacherous rocks not far from Morcove, and the scholars have more than once seen a vessel go ashore in a gale.

* * *

Which lessons are most popular with the Fourth formers? Here are a few opinions:

Betty Barton: "I don't know which lesson I like best, though history is very fascinating. Maths are not bad, either."

Polly Linton: "Lessons? Don't ask me – I could do without the jolly lot! Still, I like geography best, I think."

Paula Creel: "Howwows! Pway don't mention the wetched things. But since you're so pwessing, I agwee with Betty. Histowy is not bad, bai jove, but a gweat stwain on the memory – yes, wather!"

Madge Minden: "I like music best. After that, I think I like literature."

Naomer Nakara: "Ah, bah, I have no use for ze lessons! They are – how you call eet? – a bore! School would be all right wizout zem. What do I care eef William ze Conqueror burned ze cakes at Waterloo? Now eef---"

(Naomer would cheerfully have filled the

page with her reasons for disliking lessons, but we must take the rest for granted.)

Pam Willoughby: "I like them all. Maths are the best, though. Music? Of course!"

Cora Grandways: "Don't bother me! I hate the lot, and I'll be jolly glad when school and lessons are done with for ever! And now you can buzz off!" (We did!)

* * *

Boating and bathing are very popular at Morcove during the summer. A portion of the foreshore belongs to Morcove, and here the girls bathe twice a week, only the youngest girls being forbidden to enter the sea. Many of the girls are very fine swimmers.

* * *

Morcove has its own fire brigade, and once or twice in each term the whole school assembles for fire "drill". It is imperative that all the girls should be skilled in the management of escapes and hoses and should be taught exactly what to do in case of fire, as the nearest official brigade is at Barncombe, four miles distant.

* * *

There is a cinema at Barncombe, which scholars are allowed to visit by permission. Some of the more lawless spirits in the school have been known to break bounds to visit Barncombe's cinema.

* * *

There is evidence that at one time smugglers made use of Morcove's cave-ridden coast, and they certainly could not have chosen a safer spot for their activities. In many of the caves traces of the work of smugglers have been discovered by juniors in search of "hidden treasure".

* * *

Morcove School has its own private chapel, where morning service for the girls is held on Sunday. The nearest church is at Barncombe.

* * *

Barncombe Castle, the country residence of the Earl and countess of Lundy, is one of the most stately and ancient homes in the county. Betty Barton & Co., who are friendly with Lady Evelyn Knight, the charming daughter of the house, have often visited the Castle and have been thrilled by its beauty and romance.

In the summer a fête is held in the grounds of the Castle, to which nearly all the inhabitants of Barncombe come. The Earl of Lundy owns much of the land in the neighbourhood of the town, and Lady Lundy is on the Governing Board of Morcove School.

From Schoolgirls' Own Annual

A LANDMARK IN THE SAGA OF SEXTON BLAKE

by
Derek Hinrich

Number 2/165 of *The Union Jack*, the double number for Christmas 1906, featured a story by William Murray Graydon entitled *Five Years After*. This was subsequently reissued as *SBL* 1/105 in time for Christmas 1919, when it was described in an editorial preamble as,"...probably the most popular Christmas novel that has ever been written..." The editor went on to say that it had later been dramatised and had played in theatres all over England (indeed, according to the British Film Institute's, *The BFI Companion to Crime*, it was in turn the basis for the first ever Sexton Blake film), and that he was republishing it in response to many requests.

It clearly, then, represents an important stage in the great detective's development in which, of course, William Murray Graydon, as the most prolific author of his adventures, had already played a major part with the creation of those staples of the Baker Street household, Mrs Bardell and Pedro.

I have just read *Five Years After* with rather mixed feelings. The elder Graydon reminds me in a way of that great pioneer of the Cinema, D. W. Griffith who, despite all his innovative work that contributed so much to the development of the film as an art form, found, after the Great War, that his Victorian sentimentality side-lined him.

The very cover of *Five Years After* illustrates the problem nicely. It represents the confrontation in the prologue between Marmaduke Lovell, the haughty squire of Cossington near Minehead in Somersetshire (who affects the style of dress of the 1820s) and the sturdy old yeoman farmer, John Blackburn, whom he has just had evicted on a snowy Christmas Eve because the farmer's son, Roger, has dared to pay his addresses to the Squire's daughter. The old farmer brandishes his VC in the Squire's face, reminding him that he won it saving the Squire's life in the Course of a battle with the Boers (given that this originally was 1906 and their apparent ages, the battle must have been before even the First Boer War of 1880-81!).

Later, the farmer leaves the tumble-down cottage on a neighbour's farm, which is now his home, to shoot something for the pot. As the old man intends to cross the Squire's coverts on his way to the spot where he hopes to find a hare, his son, fearful that his father might encounter the Squire's keepers, dashes after him. Just as he catches his father up, he hears a shot and a cry. His father is holding a smoking shotgun and swears that he had fired at, but missed, a pheasant in a tree. Nevertheless in a nearby thicket they discover Squire Lovell dead, shot at point blank range with a shotgun!

John Blackburn protests his innocence, that by some mischance the two shots must have been fired simultaneously. They hear the noise of the Squire's keepers bursting through the undergrowth. Quickly Roger Blackburn throws his cap and handkerchief into the bushes with his father's gun. He tells his father to go home while he sets off into the night as the obvious suspect.

This is all related with great vigour and one can easily visualise it being dramatised and played full-bloodedly in the great tradition of transpontine melodrama. Moments in *The Silver King* or *The Ticket of Leave Man* come to mind.

Five years have passed. The scene changes to a snowy London a few weeks before Christmas.

In the interim, Marmaduke Lovell's ne'er-do-well nephew, Randolph, having inherited the entailed estate of Cossington Hall with a rent-roll of £4,000 a year has returned from New York (whence he had been sent by his uncle as a remittance man) to take possession of the family seat; and the late squire's daughter, Marjorie, having inherited the rest of her father's property (a house in Berkeley Square and £15,000 a year) lives in London with a small household and devotes herself to charitable work amongst the city's poor, in the course of which she has made the acquaintance of another philanthropist, Mr Sexton Blake; and Roger Blackburn has completely disappeared.

We now encounter Sexton Blake as with Tinker and Pedro he makes his way about the

West End one evening, dispensing charity. It is a richly Dickensian scene. Blake's charity is here given personally, more in the manner of Haroun al Raschid passing in disguise amongst the citizens of Baghdad than in the highly organised fashion he adopted in later days at the instance of Gwyn Evans, when that great department store, Harridges, would be instructed to send anonymous hampers to sundry old lags' families while the men of the house were away, "working for the Post Office."

Presently Blake and his companions make their way to a parish hall near Baker Street where he has arranged with the vicar, and with the assistance of Marjorie Lovell, to serve a Christmas dinner to the local down-and-outs. There, as the meal proceeds, he is shortly joined by Miss Lovell, accompanied by her cousin Randolph who is visiting London. Suddenly, amongst the derelicts, she encounters Roger Blackburn. Recognition is instant and mutual.

Blake, the vicar, Roger Blackburn, and the Lovells withdraw to a side-room. Roger Blackburn swears that he is innocent of the murder of Marmaduke Lovell. Marjorie Lovell comes to believe him but Randolph Lovell demands first that the police be summoned and then Marjorie's hand in marriage as the price of his silence and for letting Blackburn go. Distraught, she agrees. Sexton Blake in a flash of intuition – or psychological insight - realises that Randolph Lovell has, while lying safe himself in New York, hired an assassin to make away with his uncle. Blake lets Roger Blackburn escape through a window, at the same time telling Marjorie that he will not act as a witness to her promise which he considers was obtained under duress and so void. The vicar agrees. Marjorie nevertheless regards herself as bound to keep her word. Sexton Blake vows to establish Randolph's guilt.

But first Blake has to find Roger Blackburn. After avoiding the police who have arrived belatedly to arrest Blackburn, Blake fetches Pedro and tracks Roger to his squalid lodgings, from which he takes him to rooms in Notting Hill and provides him with money and clothes and instructions to lie low while he, Blake, pursues his investigations. Roger Blackburn tells Blake that after fleeing Cossington to divert suspicion from his father he had made his way to South Africa where he and a partner had "struck it rich" in the diamond fields. Having sold up, the partners had set out for the coast. On the way, Blackburn had fallen sick and while he was *hors de combat* his partner, Theodore Mings, had absconded with all the proceeds of their mining venture (Roger Blackburn was not alone amongst Blake's clients in suffering in this way: similar catastrophes befell those in his first two recorded cases. Oh, the frailty of human nature!).

Randolph Lovell meanwhile has realised what Blake is about and has shadowed him as he follows Blackburn's trail with Pedro. Throughout this adventure Pedro's power to follow a scent is truly remarkable. At one stage he follows a trail infallibly through the thick of the Strand and other bustling thoroughfares. How different from poor Sir Charles Warren's experiments with bloodhounds at the time of Jack the Ripper when the dogs lost themselves on Clapham Common.

Soon after, Blackburn informs Blake that he is being dogged by Simon Faggus, a sturdy villain, a former poacher of Cossington who gave dubious evidence at the inquest on the murdered squire and has since left the district after reputedly coming into money on the a death of a relative in the colonies no-one in Cossington had ever heard mentioned.

It is evident that Faggus is Randolph Lovell's hired assassin. At the same time Blake discovers that Lovell is in the toils of a man called Haydon Creed, his evil genius, who first introduced him to the vicious life that led to his banishment to America, and then incited him to arrange the murder of his uncle. Creed is now blackmailing Lovell and, at the same time, urging him to marry his cousin for her fortune.

Blake learns that Faggus lost a letter from Randolph Lovell offering him money for the murder, in the squire's plantation on the night he killed the old man. Blake takes to searching the wood in the hope that the letter might still survive.

A series of desperate adventures then ensue, in the course of which the villains make several attempts upon the life of Roger Blackburn and Blake providentially rescues him from these again and again. Blake is also hampered in his work on Blackburn's behalf by the determined efforts of Detective Inspector Widgeon of Scotland Yard to arrest Blackburn for murder, leading him to flee from Blake's protection, where he has for a time been installed at Baker Street as a "valet", and take to the life of a street beggar.

Faggus and Creed track Blackburn down and abduct him with the intention of drowning him in the Thames but Blake is on their track and succeeds with the help of the river police in rescuing him. In the fracas, after their boat is sunk, Faggus kills Creed, presumably to facilitate his own escape. Blackburn slips away before the river police can identify him and inform Inspector Widgon.

Blake now persuades Marjorie Lovell to take service in disguise as a housemaid at Cossington Hall. There she succeeds in obtaining the London address of Faggus and passes it to Blake who, however is promptly knocked unconscious (for the third time!) by Faggus with a bludgeon, he having come to see if Blackburn has visited his aged parents in the village. Lovell prepares to dispose of Blake in a priesthole hidden behind the panelling of the Hall's Library

but is thwarted at revolver point by Marjorie. She and Sexton Blake escape in a horse and trap prepared by her father's old coachman.

Returning to London, Marjorie encounters Roger Blackburn working as a pedlar or hawker in St Paul's Churchyard and carries him off to Berkeley Square. She tells him that he is now rich. Theodore Mings has been injured in a motor accident and is confined to a bed in Charing Cross Hospital. Blake has visited him there and has forced him to disgorge half the proceeds of the mine - £25,000.

In the meantime Tinker, taking his turn at scouring the Cossington estate, has hidden from Lovell and Faggus, bent on the same task, by climbing a tree. After they move off, he tries to descend, but falls into the hollow trunk. And there he finds the letter! It is still legible but as he makes off he is chased and shot at by Faggus. Nevertheless he gets away safely.

Events now move swiftly to a *denouement*. Blake goes down to Minehead and swears out a warrant before a magistrate. Thus equipped, he descends on Cossington Hall with three

constables only to find that Randolph Lovell is not there. He has left shortly before Blake's arrival. Blake deduces that Lovell has gone to seek Faggus whom he believes to be hiding nearby. On the advice of one of the constables, he sets out for a local cavern known as "the Gull's Nest" as the most likely spot. As they approach it they hear two pistol shots. They find Simon Faggus and Roger Blackburn struggling, locked in each other's arms, on the edge of a chasm within the cave. With the aid of Pedro, Blake and the constables overpower and secure Simon Faggus. It transpires that Blackburn had come down to see his parents and give them the glad tidings that his innocence has been established but had fallen in with his enemies instead. They had made one last attempt to make away with him but, in the struggle, Faggus had accidentally killed Randolph Lovell (the shots they had heard) while attempting to shoot Blackburn.

Simon Faggus was plainly a very bad choice as a "hitman". After the "sitting duck" of the old squire, he had only succeeded in killing his confederates.

After that, matters are brought surprisingly rapidly to a happy conclusion.

Inspector Widgeon is sent smartly to the right about.

On Christmas Eve, John Blackburn and his wife are reinstalled in the Manor Farm at the gates of Cossington Hall.

That same day Roger Blackburn and Marjorie Lovell are married (by special licence, I suppose) and take up residence in Cossington Hall, which, we are told, now belongs to the old squire's daughter since the death of her cousin "cuts the entail".

Now I thought that the breaking of an entail required a private Act of Parliament and I would rather have expected, with a substantial entailed estate at stake, a protracted search for cousins in the male line to the third or fourth or further degrees to have followed, with possibly enough subsequent suits in chancery to warm the hearts of the Chancery Bar for many years to come (some of my ancestors were chancery lawyers and I suspect that their clients were inclined to take a rather "jarndyced" view of them). But still, let us have a happy-ever-after ending for it is a Christmas story and the two young people deserve it.

And finally, we are told, a year later the couple live at Cossington in connubial bliss with their own two-month old son, Roger Lovell Blackburn.

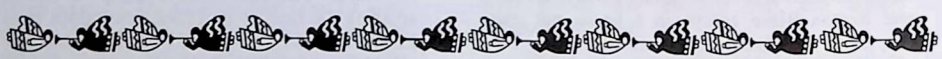
According to *The Sexton Blake Index, Five Years After* was adapted for the stage in 1908 under the title *Sexton Blake, Detective* and was presented with five other plays, also adapted from *Union Jack* stories of Sexton Blake, by John M. East. Blake was played by Horace Hunter. None of these plays reached the West End but they enjoyed quite a long life - into the 'twenties - with touring companies in the suburbs and provinces. It was only in 1930 that *Sexton Blake* trod the West End stage - in *Sexton Blake* by Donald Stuart/Gerald Verner.

Blake's first stage appearance, however, had taken place a year previously, in 1907, in what *The Index* describes as a sketch shown at various variety theatres entitled *The Case of the Coiners*. Blake was impersonated in this by C. Douglas Carlisle.

And when *Sexton Blake Detective* became the film *Sexton Blake* in October 1909 it starred C. Douglas Carlisle as Blake: he also was credited with the script and direction. The production company is said to have been "Gaumont/ Melodrama Production Syndicate".

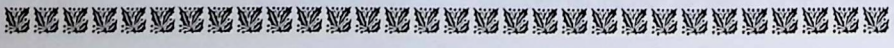
I know very little of Mr Carlisle beyond his name, but I gather that he was a well-known actor in melodrama touring companies. A friend has given me copies of some stills which appeared in *The Graphic* of October 1st 1927 of Mr Carlisle starring as William Corder in *Maria Marten; or. The Murder in the Red Barn* at the Theatre Royal, Elephant and Castle. From these he would seem to have the appropriate physique to make a presentable Blake. He was a tall lean man with a prominent nose.

But what would the acting be like? Silent acting before the Great War was, to put it mildly, a very mixed bag in the USA and generally worse over here (though Forbes Robertson's farewell *Hamlet* was a revelation). Still, it would be interesting to see *Sexton Blake* if it still exists in a viewable condition: an almost holy and certainly an historic relic.



Seasons' Greetings to all Hobby friends from the Becks of Lewes (KIT and RON) and Pevensy (NEIL and SUSAN).

Season's Greetings to all Hobby Friends. ARTHUR EDWARDS.



Walt Slade – Texas Ranger

by Alan Pratt

Walt Slade, Texas Ranger, was the hero of countless western adventures in pulp magazines and paperbacks.

Initially through the pages of monthlies such as Thrilling Western and subsequently in novel format, his exploits were so widely read that UK publishers New English Library were able to boast of a "series sale exceeding 7,000,000".

All stories were attributed to Bradford Scott, almost certainly a house name used to cover a variety of hands, despite claims on one internet site that the author was, in fact, A. Scott Leslie. But, however uncertain the authorship, there is no doubt that Walt Slade is a pretty colourful character.

As befits any half-decent western hero, he is over 6 feet tall with wide shoulders, broad chest and slim sinewy waist. His eyes, of the palest grey, are like "ice over fire" when his temper is roused and his nose is both prominent and hooked causing him to be known throughout the Texas border country as "El Halcon".

As the star ranger in Captain Jim McNelty's Border Battalion, Slade is, as one might expect, a great man in a rough and tumble as well as being unbelievably quick on the draw. He has other qualities, however, that help in the constant battle against "wideloopers" and endear him to just about everybody else.

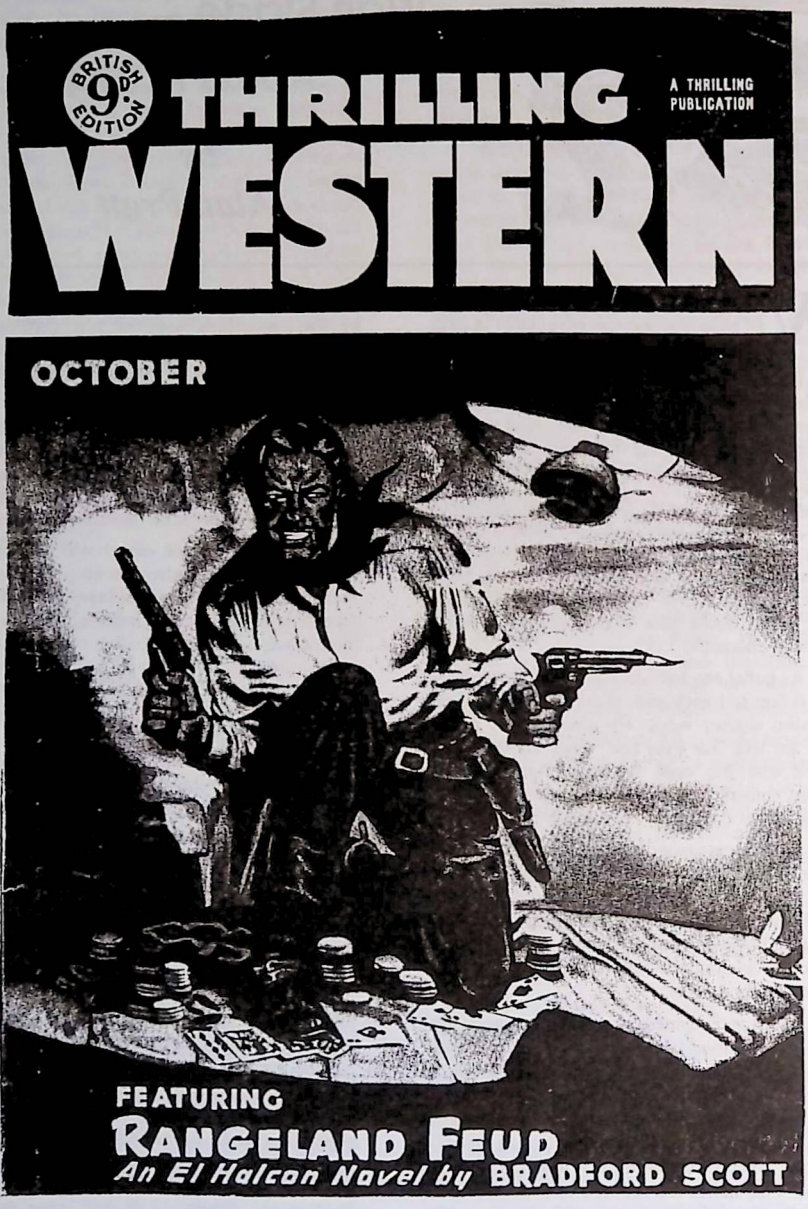
He is an educated man in a largely savage land, a qualified engineer with an in-depth knowledge of mining and railroad construction, a distinct advantage in dealing with lawless individuals bent on destroying mines and diverting railroads. He is also the possessor of a baritone voice so beautiful, that when he sings in the saloons, ladies are reduced to tears and their menfolk strangely overcome with emotion. On one occasion, as Slade warbles a tuneful ditty whilst riding across the prairie, we are told that the coyotes stop their howling and a lone rattlesnake lifts his head from the ground to listen – this latter claim being, perhaps, a trifle suspect as I am reliably informed that rattlesnakes have no ears!

Our Walt is also a deeply religious man. He is, seemingly, able to convert known tyrants into warm and kindly souls by the use of suitably apt Biblical quotations thus earning their undying gratitude. He is also heralded as a God-like figure by the poor Mexican peons who populate the border towns and who regard El Halcon as the champion of all who are poor and oppressed.

On his magnificent stallion Shadow ("don't touch him until I say so if you don't want your arm bitten off!") Walt Slade is an impressive and complex character and, as he sets off on whatever mission awaits him, the reader knows that danger and intrigue will never be far behind.

Typically, the ace ranger will be sent to a rough, tough border town to resolve insurmountable problems. These may take the form of widespread cattle rustling, a war between the cattlemen and homesteaders or an attempt by parties unknown to sabotage the progress of the railroad. Whatever the problem, Walt Slade is the man for the job and if, with his myriad of talents, everything seems kind of routine, he has yet to combat the Unknown. Indeed almost all Slade adventures fall into the category of western mysteries in that things are not always what they seem to be at first glance. Are the cattlemen really behind the attacks on the railroad or is there some other unseen sinister force at work? Is the chief mining engineer merely incompetent or is he deliberately setting out to sabotage the mine? As Walt Slade mingles with the townsfolk, usually working under cover but often accompanied by the town sheriff, he gets to know the local personalities and begins to draw conclusions accordingly. In the course of seeking out the mastermind behind the outrages, he will face death on many occasions. Bad guys will lay in wait for him in thickets and dark alleys but generally end up as corpses on the floor of the sheriff's office awaiting identification. Of course, Slade doesn't emerge entirely unscathed. Bullets fired in his direction will tear strips from the sleeves of his shirt, rip off his boot heels or make holes in his Stetson. In an amusing instance in Thunder Trail (NEL), the author sends up the repetitive and formulaic nature of such sequences by having the sheriff suggest to Slade that, in view of the large number of holes in his hat, he should buy a new one at the expense of the county.

As Slade's investigation proceeds he will usually be drawn out of the town, often in to rugged, hilly country where the chances of being



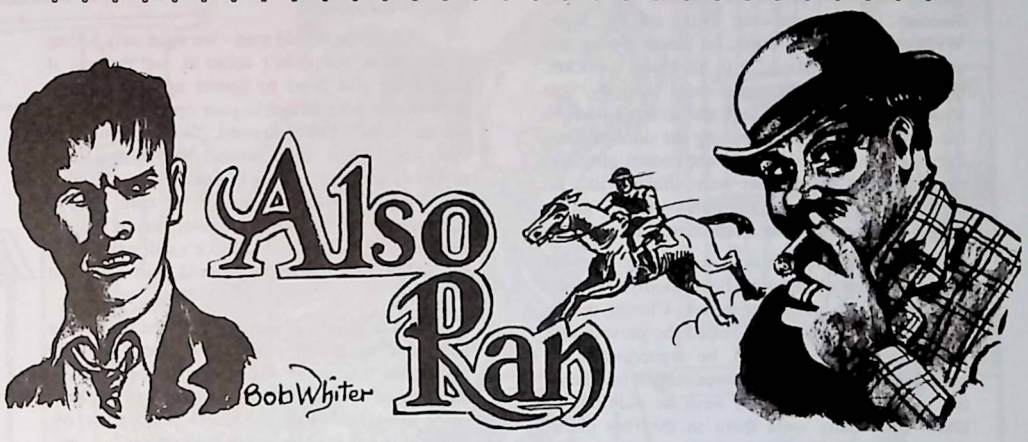
eliminated are greater. Bad guys will, it seems, go to almost any lengths to remove El Halcon and always, lurking in the background like the masked villains so beloved of the old Republic serials, is the master criminal whose identity will not be revealed until the final chapter.

Paradoxically, in view of the number of outlaws who bite the dust at Slade's hand, none of the stories are particularly violent. Descriptions of blood and gore are kept to an absolute minimum and "good" characters tend to suffer no more than the odd scratch. Also, whilst glamorous saloon girls are often featured in prominent rolls the stories have no sexual content or love interest. Slade will dance with Gypsy or Rosa or whoever and may even give her a chaste kiss but this is as near as the ladies get to the man that they wistfully acknowledge will never settle down.

Most of the Slade adventures are simply written and follow conventional patterns. There is a large amount of repetition and events are often predictable. But this, in itself, is not a criticism because the same charges could be levelled at many of our favourite boys' paper writers. The fact that one knows what to expect does not prevent a reader going back for more of what he or she enjoys.

I like the Walt Slade adventures because they are pacy and exciting. I revel in the homespun philosophies, the simple approach to religion and the evocative descriptive passages and, whilst I am not blind to the "corn factor", I am usually ready to go back for more of the same.

Sadly the pulp magazines which contained the earliest and some of the best yams are becoming very hard to find but there is a consolation in the fact that the paperback editions turn up regularly in charity shops and at boot sales never commanding high prices. One would hope and expect that with "series sales in excess of 7,000,000" this situation will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.



Also ran: Blue Peter, Sweet Music, Gadfly 2 and Pork Pie. The words danced before his eyes - the newspaper, opened to the racing results page, dropped from his trembling hands. The hapless sportsman groaned and slumped forward in his chair, his left hand supporting his head. That idiot Loder saying he'd had it straight from the horse's mouth! Pork Pie was a sure thing for the Welshham stakes and would romp home first in the three o'clock race at Wapshot! He already owed Bill Lodgey a large amount of money, and Bill had been very unpleasant about taking a further bet on tick! Only by lying that a favourite aunt was sending him a decent remittance, did Stephen Price finally convince the bookie that he would be in funds the next day. Now - what was he going to do? He had planned that this big win would not only get himself out of the hole, but his friend Cedric Hilton as well. Both seniors had had an unusual run of bad luck for the last few weeks. All the usual 'supply depots' had run dry - even Walsingham, Hilton's father's butler at Hilton Hall, who in the past had dipped into his savings to help out the senior, had sadly but firmly declined to help.

The weedy senior, looking even more pasty than usual, groaned again - visions of a wrathful Bill Lodgey coming to the school and denouncing them swam before his eyes - he could almost see the stern visage of the headmaster, Dr. Locke, and hear his stern accents expelling them both, in front of the assembled hall. A sudden thought of perhaps 'touching' Loder or one of his two cronies, was dismissed almost immediately - it was from Loder he had received the so called 'cert'. The bully of the sixth, together with Walker and Carnes, had no doubt also backed Pork Pie heavily and would be in the same boat. He looked at the clock on the mantelpiece - there was just time for a stroll in the cloisters - in those peaceful precincts perhaps something, some way out, might come to him. He thought of waiting for his friend Hilton, who had gone down to the tuck shop to obtain supplies for tea, his credit still being good. He decided against this and left the study. As he walked along the passage he could hear the loud tones of Coker engaged in one of his many altercations with his two study-mates. The thought of that fathead, probably with a wallet stacked with notes, caused Price to grit his teeth. The angry tones increased in volume, culminating in a terrific crash!

Two figures came flying out of Study number 4, followed by a wrathful Coker. Obviously the goaded Potter and Greene had

taken all they were going to take and had turned on the mighty Horace! Without awaiting the consequences of their action, they had, like the guests in *Macbeth*, stood not on the order of their going but had left at once. Before the weedy sportsman had time to dodge, something that felt like a battering ram struck him! It was, in fact, Potter and Greene, followed by Coker, who knocked Price flat on the floor; not being able to stop themselves they landed on top of him. How many elbows, knees and fists were pushed into the hapless senior, he would never know! Suddenly they were scrambling to their feet and resuming the chase.

Not knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, aching all over, Price gradually sat up, gazing around. His eyes alighted on a thick Russian leather note-case lying on the floor. Without stopping to think, he reached over and picked it up and placed it in his blazer's pocket. Glancing around to make sure nobody was looking, he rose to his feet and tottered back to his study. Closing and locking the door he sank into the armchair. With an unpleasant glitter in his eyes, and hands that were shaking like an aspen leaf, he took out the bulky wallet. As he expected, it was crammed full of rustling notes.

Selecting the required amount to see his friend and himself through, he hurriedly crammed this money into an inside pocket. Closing up the note-case he stood up and wiped the perspiration from his brow. After all, he argued with his conscience, Coker would never miss a few notes out of so many - chances were he didn't even know how many were there in the first place. After his next 'win', Price told himself, he would repay Coker - it wasn't stealing - it was merely a loan! He slipped the wallet into another pocket.

A frustrated attempt to open the door interrupted his thoughts! An annoyed voice was asking him why the door was locked. With a shaking hand Price quickly lighted a cigarette and puffed a few clouds of smoke before unlocking the portal. Hilton strode into the study carrying a fairly large parcel. "What the deuce" he started to say, and then sniffed the smoky atmosphere. "Couldn't you wait for me?" he continued and then looked at his friend's face. "My hat Pricey, what's wrong? You look as white as a sheet. Oh!" He thought he comprehended. "You thought I was Wingate or Prout!" Price nodded, not daring to speak. Hilton undid the parcel on the study table. "I say old man - it's all right, why don't you put the kettle on?" "I've just remembered, I have to see a man", stammered Price, "I'll be right back." Before Hilton could reply, Price hurriedly left the study and almost ran along to Coker's study; luckily nobody was in sight. The door was still open, just as the study's occupants half left it. Trying to look casual, Price entered the trio's apartment and, taking the note case from his pocket, he dropped it half under the table where it wouldn't be hard to find.

He was just in time! He had barely quitted the study when from the direction of the stairs he heard the powerful tones of the great Horace. "That's all very well George Potter, but one of you has caused me to lose my wallet - I've a jolly good mind to have study tea on my own!"

"We keep telling you we are sorry old man" put in Coker's other studymate, William Greene, "and I'm sure we'll find that you dropped it in the study - after all we've covered exactly the same ground on our way back.

"Hitting a fellow and then trying to bump him" continued Coker disregarding his friends admonishments - "I've a jolly good mind -" As when he had previously made the same remark, Potter and Greene carefully refrained from asking him, "What mind?"

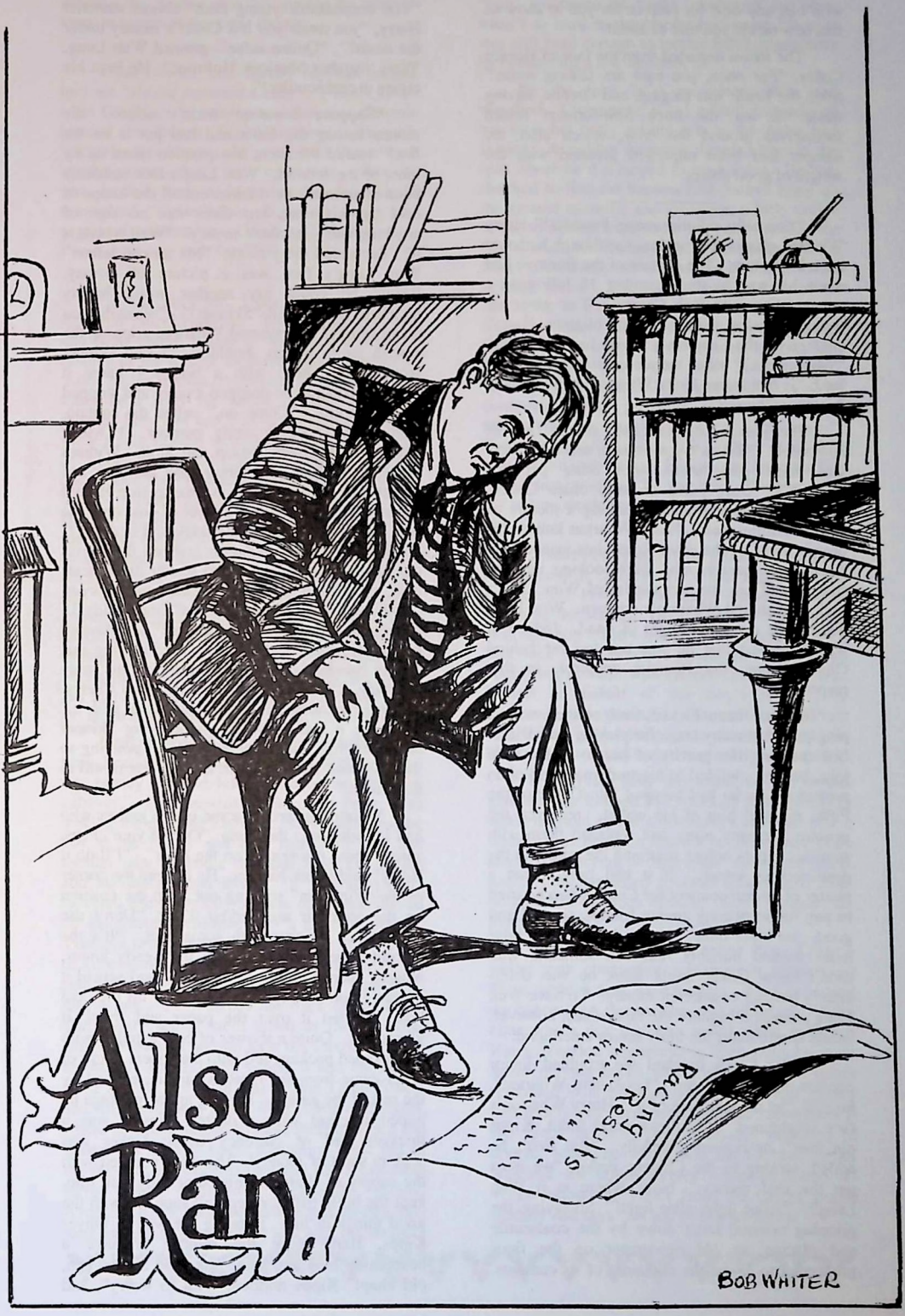
"Oh come on old man - we were only joking - you know we didn't mean it, we thought it would do you good to limber up a bit before showing us how to tackle your opponent without fouling him." Coker thawed, "Well if you put it that way." The three seniors had by this time reached, and were about to pass, Price. "Here's old Pricey," said Greene. "I'm sure you've forgiven us for knocking you over, haven't you?" Looking a little puzzled at Price's still white face, he added "I didn't know we'd hurt you that much."

"I say Price", broke in Coker (he didn't like Price and never made any bones about showing it, but he felt under the circumstances, a little showing of the milk of human kindness wouldn't come amiss), "We're just about to have tea, my Aunt Judy has sent me a ripping hamper."

"Thanks." Price forced himself to speak naturally, "Hilton's just getting ours ready: perhaps another time." "Price's getting very polite, isn't he?" said Greene, staring after the receding figure of the weedy senior.

The sight of Coker's wallet lying half under the study table banished any future discussion on Stephen Price. With a sight of relief Coker clutched it, although there was a puzzled look on his rugged visage. "What's up old chap?" asked Potter, and Greene, who was sorting out the kettle, turned and looked curiously at the great Horace.

"How did it get under the table?" asked Coker, looking at his studymates. I distinctly remember putting my patting my pocket after you cheeky bounders tried to bump me!" "You must have been mistaken - perhaps you felt the outline of your pocket knife." Coker glared at his two friends - really they were stretching things even for Coker to suggest mistaking the hard outline of a knife for a wallet! "No I wasn't mistaken", he almost bawled. "Now come on old chap, don't lets fight - let's have tea" pleaded Potter in a honeyed tone. "Yes, let's hurry up with tea" added Greene, jamming the kettle, which still had enough water in it, on the fire, "otherwise there


Also Ran!
Racing Results
BOB WHITER

won't be any time for prep or for you to show us that new tackle you told us about."

The frown departed from the face of Horace Coker. "For once, you men are talking sense." Soon the kettle was singing, and Greene, having made the tea, the three fifth-formers seated themselves around the table, which after the hamper had been unpacked groaned with the weight of good things.

"You silly, idiotic young bounder!" Harry Wharton glared at Wun Lung as though he could have bitten him. The captain of the Remove had made his way to study number 13 following a conversation with Bob Cherry. "I've given up trying to reason with the young blighter, Harry" confessed the captain's curly-haired friend. "What uppee?" asked the junior from the flowery land; "Is handsome Hally Wharton annoyed with this poor Chinee?"

The junior Captain gazed at the face of innocence. "Haven't you enough sense to know you don't play tricks with other people's money?" "Only jokee on silly oldee Coker" replied the Chinese junior, looking a picture of injured guiltlessness. Harry Wharton knitted his brow. Some of the other Removites grinned but most of the juniors who were looking into the study could see the seriousness of Wun Lung's trick, and shared Wharton's concern. Wun Lung was a past master at slight of hand. Indeed, it was rumoured that he was not too far behind Oliver Kipps, the Remove conjuror, in that respect.

He had been kicked, and swatted with a ping-pong bat many times for playing such tricks. Not realising the gravity of his so called little joke, he had confided to his studymate and often protector how he had bumped into Coker of the Fifth, relieved him of his wallet, removed the genuine currency notes and replaced them with spurious copies before returning the wallet to the unsuspecting senior. If it had only meant a matter of embarrassment for Coker when he tried to pay for something among friends, so well and good - no harm done. But in this case the false notes looked horribly real and someone who didn't know Coker might think he was deliberately passing counterfeit money! To have Wun Lung attempt to replace the false notes, however, would surely make the burly senior smell a rat.

Oliver Kipps touched the troubled junior captain on the shoulder. "Look here Wharton", he said, "let me take care of it". Harry Wharton's face brightened. "You're a good scout, Kipps old man", he replied gratefully. "But first", he added, turning to the Chinese junior, "we must get the real money. Now, where is it Wun Lung?" "Allee light, allee light!" So saying, the grinning oriental knelt down by the coalscuttle and placing an old newspaper on the floor proceeded to divest the container of its contents. "You unspeakable young idiot" almost stuttered Harry, "you mean you hid Coker's money under the coals?" "Quitee safee", grinned Wun Lung. "You 'member Sherlock Holmsee? He kept his cigars in coal scuttlee!"

"Suppose someone hadn't noticed the money among the coals and had put it on the fire?" roared Wharton, his question taken up by most of the fellows. Wun Ling's face suddenly became serious - he'd taken out all the lumps of coal by this time, but there was no sign of anything else - let alone money! "Well where is it?" demanded the juniors. "Me no can tellee!" Wun Lung's face was a picture of dismay. Before he could say another word, Monty Newland gave a yell "Skinner!" "What do you mean Monty?" questioned Wharton, gripping the Jewish junior by his shoulder. "I saw Skinner leaving this study with a box - I know it contained coal as he dropped a piece and stopped to pick it up." "Come on," yelled the captain, leading the rush to study number 11 which Skinner shared with Snoop and Stott. Without bothering to knock he threw open the door and rushed into the study just in time to stop Harold Skinner from emptying a shovel of coal onto the fire. "What the devil do you think you're doing?" howled Skinner, as Wharton grabbed the shovel out of his hand, causing it to scatter its contents over the hearth and part of the study carpet. "How much of the coal you took from Study 13 have you already put on the fire?" "I haven't taken any coal," lied Skinner, not knowing that Monty Newland had watched him from his study doorway. "Don't lie Skinner" said Bob Cherry. "I don't care about the coal it's what was with it." Realising it was futile to go on lying Skinner licked his lips and muttered, "This", pointing to the spilt coal" was the first, and the rest is still in the scuttle."

Wharton turned to some of the juniors who had crowded into the study. "One of your chaps, spread some newspaper on the floor". "I'll do it Harry" said Frank Nugent. He noticed the corner of the "Pink 'un" sticking out from the cushion on the armchair and jerked it out. "Don't use that!" cried Skinner with some heat. "It's the current issue!" Disregarding the weedy junior, Nugent opened up the racing paper and spread it on the floor. Harry Wharton lifted up the coal box, inverted it over the paper and shook it vigorously. Quite a shower of coal together with a blackened package fell onto the paper. A cry of relief came from the remove captain, echoed by the rest of the juniors. Picking up the package he wiped it clean with a duster - inside was a thickish wad of currency notes; Coker was seldom short of money! This fact, coupled with the supply of hampers his Aunt Judy sent him, kept the burly fifth former well supplied with the good things of life. Handing the wad to Oliver Kipps, Harry gave the remove conjuror a beseeching look and said, "As soon as you can, old chap!" Kipps nodded, "Not to worry", and

slipping the money into his pocket he hurried away in search of the great Horace.

"That's twice that cheeky fag has barged into me "almost stuttered Coker - "I don't know what Greyfriars is coming to - first that Chinese kid and now Phipps - I think his name is Phipps". "Actually it's Kipps, old man" said Potter in a soothing tone - don't let it upset you - after all, you landed him a kick in the bags he'll remember! "Coker's face cleared and broke into a grin of satisfaction. "Well as I always say - I've a short way with fags!"

"If this ain't pie, I don't know what is" muttered 'Stirr' Huggins. The tattered foot-pad had been taking a nap in the thickets when a rustling of the foliage awakened him. Known as 'Stirr' by his friends on account of the number of times he'd seen the inside of Her Majesty's prisons, Stirr had had bad luck. Only that day, while trying to steal a chicken from Piker's farm, he'd been surprised by the farmer's dog and had had to flee for his life, leaving a portion of his tattered nether garment in the dog's jaws! Having hopefully shaken off his pursuers he found that the farmer's men, alerted by the dogs barking, had given chase; he'd taken refuge in a thicket a stone's throw from The Three Fisher's Inn. On hearing the rustling he kept very quiet, fearing it might be one of the farmer's men. Very cautiously he peered through an interstice in the foliage, and was relieved to see a well-dressed senior schoolboy with a pale face standing only a few feet away. He was looking in the direction of the inn and obviously was waiting for someone.

'Stirr' heard the senior mutter to himself - "I hope Lodgey isn't late. I just want to pay him this money and get back to school in time for callover." (An imposition had kept Price from making the meeting earlier.) 'Stirr' then saw the boy in the blazer and blue and white cap and muffler take a bundle of notes from his pocket and hurriedly count them. "If this ain't pie!" repeated Stirr. Quietly he bent down and picked up his constant companion - a knobbly cudgel. Taking a firm grip on it, he leapt out of his place of concealment and snatched the notes from the startled boy's hand, and at the same time dealt him a nasty blow across the back of his head. The weedy senior went down as though pole-axed. Without a second look the footpad took to his heels! Bill Lodgey yelled, it was enough to make anyone yell. Bill had left the Three Fishers and was on his way to the little clump of thickets, where he had arranged to meet Stephen Price and collect his money, when something burst out of the thickets and crashed into him like a run-away lorry! Bill went over backwards, yelling! Avoiding Bill's clutching hands and staying only long enough to give them a lick with the cudgel - 'Stirr' continued his flight. Although the blow wasn't as hard as the one he had given Price, it was still hard enough to render Bill Lodgey *hors de combat* for a few minutes.

By the time he'd recovered, Stirr had vanished. Cursing, he stood a little unsteady on his feet, his body aching where the blow had landed. A sudden moaning directed him to the spot where he'd arranged to meet Price. He was shocked to find the hapless fifth-former lying on the ground moaning and groaning, a little trickle of blood oozing from under his hair. Raising the boy's head, Bill Lodgey felt in his pocket for his flask. Removing the stopper he placed it to the stricken senior's lips, Price allowed a little of the raw spirit to enter his mouth, causing him to splutter a little. But it was enough to make him feel a trifle stronger and enabled him to ask Lodgey, "Did you - did you" he stuttered - "manage to stop him? He's got your money" he continued. "Don't you worry about it, Mr. Price" uttered the book-maker, "he got clean away". Even the usually callous Bill Lodgey could feel pity for the injured boy: in any case he knew this transaction wouldn't be the last - Price and his pal Hilton would soon be in funds again.

"Found him lying on the ground", truthfully explained Bill Lodgey. He'd half supported and half carried Price to the Three Fisher's, before 'phoning the school. Dr. Locke had sent his car with the boy's form master, Mr. Prout, to fetch him back to the school's sanatorium. The Head could find no fault with the bookmaker's actions, indeed on behalf of the boy's parents, he expressed their gratitude. On recollection, Price told Hilton he'd merely gone to reason with the bookmaker and had been attached by a footpad.

When Price fully recovered, he felt almost glad that the footpad had attacked him, especially when he read in the Courtfield Chronicle that a certain Bert Huggins, known as 'Stirr', had been arrested for trying to 'distribute' counterfeit bank notes - the wretched footpad didn't dare state how he had obtained them so 'Stirr' resumed his place in 'Stirr"!

That the money he'd taken from Coker's wallet was counterfeit remained a mystery to Price, until a few weeks later. He was sitting unobserved on the circular seat under one of the elms which line the 'elm walk' when he heard Harry Wharton reprimanding Wun Lung for once again playing tricks with money. The captain reminded Wun Lung of how Coker's real money had nearly got burnt when he had substituted it for spoof notes. The remaining mystery, of course, was: just where had the Chinese junior acquired the bogus money - had he found it? When asked, the junior from the Orient smiles blandly and says "So solly - me no savvy!"

A Pseudonym Made for Two

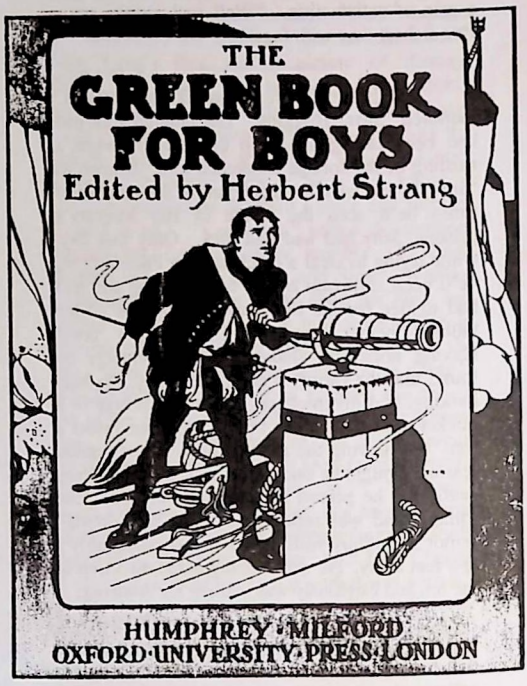
Brian Doyle looks at the amazing career of 'Herbert Strang'

George Herbert Ely and James L'Estrange were two men with but a single thought (to write a good, successful and best-selling boys' book) and a single name ('Herbert Strang'). And they must surely have felt a trifle schizophrenic at times - either or both - as they cheerfully and busily masqueraded under their assumed name to write or edit literally hundreds of boys', girls' and children's stories and books; they might even have been in two minds about their tales, characters, settings or whatever. After all, what's in a name? Quite a lot, when you consider the incredible success, prolificity and achievements of Ely and L'Estrange and their close associate 'Herbert Strang' (not to mention their later manifestation as 'Mrs. Herbert Strang' who never, poor lady, ever seemed to have the distinction of a Christian name).

For it has been estimated that the two men produced over 100 boys' novels and edited in excess of 350 annuals, series and other collections and anthologies during their more than 40 years collaboration as authors, editors, colleagues and friends. And the name 'Herbert Strang' was one of the most famous, respected, indeed loved, in the field of children's books during the first 40 years of the 20th century.

Ely (1866-1958) and L'Estrange (1867-1947) (a glance at their full names will show how they arrived at their joint pseudonym!) first met in Glasgow in 1903 when in their mid-30s and became friends and would-be writers. No information seems to be available about their earliest lives and careers (and no photograph of the two ever appears to have been published) but a popular boys' writer who evidently influenced their writing was the great George Alfred Henty.

In 'The Captain' magazine in 1908, Herbert Strang (I will henceforth refer mainly to the dynamic writing duo in the singular for convenience) reminisced about Henty (who had died six years earlier) thus: 'I was introduced to him by reading his stories in the 'Union Jack' boys' magazine, which he edited (during its short run between 1880-1883). He became my hero - I begged his autograph and photograph. I wrote to Henty and asked him if he could persuade one of his authors to write a serial especially for my school magazine, which I edited. He wrote a story himself a sea-yarn called 'The Fate of the *Seaflower*', some 15,000 words written in his small, crabbed hand in violet ink...!'



Strang obviously based at least some of his writing style on that of Henty (apart from his lighter, semi-humorous, 'transport' or flying tales), so perhaps it was no coincidence that many critical articles which appeared about Henty mentioned Strang as a likely, indeed obvious, successor in the field of boys' adventure and historical stories.

'Mr. Henty was the ancient master in this kind; the present master, Mr. Herbert Strang, has ten times his historical knowledge and fully twenty times more narrative skill.' (*Manchester Guardian)*

'The majority of boys' writers are content to provide their young friends with mere reading. Herbert Strang offers them literature'. (*Glasgow Herald*)

'Mr. Henty's mantle may most worthily by worn by Mr. Herbert Strang.' (*Truth*)

When Ely and L'Estrange produced their books, neither ever wrote a complete one on his own. It was, perhaps, a case of two heads being

better than one. The plots were worked out together. Then L'Estrange, who had travelled widely, supplied the local colour and did much of the research, including the historical and geographical details, as well as that for the 'transport' technicalities concerning aeroplanes, ships, railways, new inventions and guns, while Ely did the actual writing, often involving action, adventure, description and characters. It seemed to work well and one can picture the two men, seated at their neighbouring or opposite desks, comparing notes occasionally and reading aloud their various 'bits' from the day's work.

Some 30 years ago, I corresponded with Mr. F.A. Cowing, who wrote to thank me for remembering Herbert Strang in my *book The Who's Who of Children's Literature.* He had been the Accountant with Hodder and Stoughton's children's publishing department around 1907 and came to know the team of Ely and L'Estrange quite well.

'They came to London in 1907 and founded the Children's Book Department of Henry Frowde and Hodder and Stoughton, their object being to publish better books for children. Their own books were as far as possible historically and geographically accurate', he wrote. 'Mr. Ely was the kindly, schoolmaster type while Mr. L'Estrange was the businessman type, but they were both kindness itself, easily approachable and always ready to listen and encourage. They were the joint-managers of the new department - Mr. Ely of the elementary educational side and Mr. L'Estrange looked after the picture and gift-book side.'

Mr. Cowing went on: 'I always understood that Mr. L'Estrange plotted the books and that Mr. Ely wrote them, but it must have been a spare-time occupation for them, being 'Herbert Strang', for they were fully-occupied running what was a busy and substantial publishing business. But they liked to give young authors and artists every encouragement. A young accountant on the staff wrote a story and asked Mr. L'Estrange for his opinion. He was advised to persevere and was soon earning himself a few guineas by writing stories for Strang's *Little Big Books* series'.

Another anecdote supplied by Mr. Cowing: 'Mr. L'Estrange wrote a kind of personal shorthand - the first letter was clear and the rest a wriggly line which somehow suggested to the eye what the following letters should be. He told me he developed it when he was a young reporter. Mr. Ely, on the other hand, used a very broad relief nib and wrote every letter clearly.' This suggests that the team wrote all their stories by hand; they must have worn out quite a few pen-nibs in their time...!

Mr. Cowing concluded his reminiscences to me by saying: 'They were two of nature's gentlemen and I revere their memory'.

Herbert Strang's first book for boys was written in Glasgow and published by Blackie and Son in 1904. It was 'Tom Burnaby' and was dedicated to Strang's nephew Jack, then a schoolboy at Harrow. It was a fair example of many of Strang's future adventure yarns. Tom is the 18-year-old hero who, uninvited, joins his uncle, Major Burnaby of the Guides, on a punitive expedition in the Ugandan Protectorate, to avenge the murder of a British Force under Captain Boynes. The natives revolted against British military authority, By Gad! Tom has no suitable qualifications (except having been 'the best bat in the school eleven and a safe man in goal', though he does conveniently speak both German and French and seems to be a good man in a scrap). Then come 350 pages of fights, uprisings, battles, encounters with wild animals, and much talk of 'backs' and 'niggers' (presumably acceptable back in 1904). Tom even meets Alison, 'a pretty and dainty' 17-year-old girl and they at once take a shine to one another. Deuce, it's enough to make a Strang man blush...!

But this first novel was quite well-written and the story never let up for a moment. More books followed, published by Blackie, and Strang began to earn a reputation for good, exciting, manly and wholesome boys' adventure and historical novels.

After about three years, an apparent rift appeared between Blackie and Strang concerning, it was said, the American Rights to the books. And Strang wrote no more for Blackie and (as described above by Mr. Cowing) joined Henry Frowde, Hodder and Stoughton, to take over and supervise their Educational, Juvenile and Prize Books Department, from October 1906. Ely and L'Estrange were to be paid the sum of £600.00 per year (whether individually or jointly is not clear from my researches) and, in addition to their publishing duties, they were to provide at least two 'Strang' books a year. In fact, Strang wrote many more books, and edited even more, than the minimum required! Later, around 1818-19, the 'Strang' team joined the Oxford University Press, both in the publishing and writing fields and remained for the next 30 years or so – certainly until L'Estrange's death in 1947.

But, remaining in the early-1900's period for the moment, Strang's books around this time included: 'One of Clive's Heroes' (1906), 'Samba: a Story of the Rubber Slaves of the Congo' (also 1906), 'Rob the Ranger: a Story of the Fight scouting stories'), 'Humphrey Bold: His Chances and Mischances by Land and Sea' (1909) and 'A Gentleman-at-Arms: Being Passages in the Life of Sir Christopher Rudd, Knight' (1914); all were published by Frowde, Hodder and Stoughton, London, with Bobbs-Merrill doing the honours in the United States.

As well as being prolific, Strang was also versatile, turning his hand to every conceivable type of boys' story (with the exception, for some reason, of the school story). His favoured genres were historical adventures, modern adventures, often in what was then 'the British Empire' ('upon which the sun never sets'), and tales of marvellous new inventions and forms of transport. He was fond of 'fantastic' new inventions, sometimes with a touch of science-fiction thrown in, and was obviously influenced by H.G. Wells and Jules Verne; like those two writers, some of whose 'futuristic ideas' came true in later years, so did some of Strang's.

'King of the Air, or To Morocco on an Aeroplane' came as early as 1907; and others in this vein included: 'Lord of the Seas, a Story of a submarine (1909); 'The Cruise of the Gyro-Car' (1911); 'Swift and Sure: the story of a Hydroplane' (1910); 'Round the World in Seven Days' (1911); 'The Flying Boat' (1912); 'The Air scout' (1912); 'The Motor Scout' (1913); and 'The Air Patrol' (1913), which contained the first-ever *coloured* illustration, by Cyrus Cuneo, of a bombing attack by a conventional (as opposed to a 'SF') aeroplane.

Before long, Strang's success led to a broadening of his literary enterprises. 'Herbert Strang's Annual for Boys' was first published in November 1908 (dated 1909), and continued year-after-year until 1927 (published by Hodder and Stoughton). It then continued as 'The Oxford Annual for Boys' (edited by Strang) until 1941. This long run of annuals comprised luxurious books which were beautifully-designed and illustrated (by such artists as the Brocks, Savile Lumley, T.H. Robinson, H.L. Shindler, Terence Cuneo and John de Walton) and presenting a high standard of school and adventure stories and various articles (authors of the former included such fine writers as Gunby Hadath, Richard Bird, Desmond Coke, Jeffrey Havilton, Harold Avery and Charles Turley; among the adventure story writers was, of course, Strang himself!).

But Herbert Strang almost cornered the market in 'Annuals' for boys, girls and children during the first 40 or so years of the 20th century. Apart from several other series of boys' annuals the dynamic duo of Ely and L'Estrange changed sex to become 'Mrs. Herbert Strang' to edit 'Mrs. Strang's Annual for Girls' (OUP, 1919-27), 'Mrs. Strang's Annual for Children' (Frowde, Hodder and Stoughton, 1913-15) 'Mrs. Strang's Annual for Baby' (1915-26) and so on. Some of the stories that originally appeared in Strang's boys' annuals, subsequently turned up in another series with 'coloured' titles, e.g. 'The Purple' Annual for Boys', with other annuals working their way through the rainbow via Green, Brown, Orange, etc. I have no room to mention all the other series of books and annuals produced by Strang and his Missus (it's a wonder there was never a 'Herbert Strang Jnr.' or the advertising catch-phrase 'You're Never Alone With a Strang!'). There was also a whole series of 'Great War' boys' novels, e.g. 'With Haig on the Somme' (1918). And, although he never contributed any serials to 'Chums' or 'Boys Own Paper', he did supply 'The Captain' with half-a-dozen serials between 1914-20, all of which later became books.

My own personal favourites in the Strang saga include 'Bright Ideas' (light-hearted adventures of a boy-inventor), 'Palm Tree Island', 'Humphrey Bold' and 'No Man's Island'.

Ely and L'Estrange – the Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Jekyll of boys' adventure writing in the first half of the 20th century, otherwise known as 'Herbert Strang'. Today, he is almost forgotten by many and remembered by few. But he is surely well worth the remembering. As well as entertaining and, yes, educating them, a million boys' minds and maybe opinions and personalities were possibly part-moulded and influenced by his writings, his heroes, his creations – and all those books and annuals…

A small toast then to the Big Three: George Ely, James L'Estrange and Herbert Strang…

WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

The Girls' Papers

by

Bill Lofts

Girls' papers certainly do not have as long a history as their boy counterparts. In fact I've always classed them in two almost different categories. Those that contain girls school stories of *The School Friend* type, that were intended for the eight to fourteen year-old groups, then those which were almost adult, with titles as *Red Letter, Oracle, Miracle* and *Secrets* stories. Tales of wicked girls captioned under such headings as "She sent her Mother to the scaffold" – and at times with pictures of a young girl holding a baby in her arms under the title of "The Young Curate's Sin".

Even the counterpart of *The Boys' Friend – The Girls' Friend* - had tales of an almost adult group. Apart from 'Polly Green's Schooldays', which had a long run, its contents were practically like those of a real woman's magazine.

One can pass over the very early girls' papers in mid-Victorian times such as *The Young Ladies Magazine* and *Young Ladies Journal* and the long winded *Girls of the Period Miscellany* (1869) that had only nine issues. *Girls' Own Paper* could be said to be easily the most famous girls' paper of them all. Commencing in 1880, although it had one or two changes of name, it ran right on to 1950, then called *Girls' Own Paper Heiress*, then just becoming the last named which was certainly adult in content. The 'Own' certain made the reader feel that it *was* her own paper, with its friendly ring.

Sweethearts was the title of a girls' paper in 1898, though after only seventeen issues it was altered to *Girls' Favourite.* I may be wrong, but the word 'sweethearts' seems very old-fashioned today, only used by oldies remembering the days of their courting. *Bow Bells* was another good title which maybe had the suggestion of 'happiness' in the bells ringing out for *Joy* (another title for a girls' paper in the mid-twenties). There was also an adult paper called *Wedding Bells*, which comes more to the point, full of love-tales and marriage stories.

Whoever thought up the title of *Forget-me-not Novels* deserved a medal as well as a big bonus from the publishers, as this Library ran from 1891 to 1926 (maybe then only the great strike stopped it), with a grand total of 2,577 issues. When one thinks about it, it's very surprising that other names of flowers were not used in girls' paper titles. There was a *Poppy's Paper* (1924) and *Violet Novels* but I believe these were girl's names, and relating to the colour of the cover, rather than flowers. When one thinks about it, it's remarkable that no paper was titled *Rose*, the traditional English flower.

Girls seemed a popular title at the turn of the century to the end of the First World War. *Girls – Mirror, Gossip, Home, Reader, Realm, Sphere,* and just *Weekly*. 1919 saw the birth of *The School Friend*, surely one of the most loved school story papers of them all. The title alone speaks for itself, as girls do make friendships at school that last a lifetime, even to the great-great-grandmother stage! Followed by *Schoolgirl* and *Schoolgirls' Weekly*, these never had such a friendly ring. There had been a *Schoolgirls* in 1894 but perhaps it was ahead of its time as it only ran for 6 issues. *Schooldays* and *Schoolgirls' Own* were other titles in the nineteen-twenties. *British Girl*, companion to *British Boy,* that came out in 1921 was simply a boys' paper with girls' names – so was D.C. Thomson's *Bluebird* in 1922, which had a run of just under four years. Amalgamated Press were so concerned at their great rivals entering the girls' market that they promptly brought out *Ruby*, though whether this paper was named after a girl or a precious stone is not known. After only twenty numbers it was absorbed into *Schoolgirls' Own.*

The 'twenties also saw the dominance of girls' names as titles with *paper* or *weekly* after it. *Pegs, Pam's, Polly's, Poppy's* as well as a *Peg's Companion.* Maybe the 'p' was popular because the two 'p's slipped off the tongue, though there was a *Betty's Paper* and *Weekly* and an *Eve's*

This is the only picture we have of our much-missed Bill Lofts

Own Stories. As mentioned earlier, the 'twenties and 'thirties were also dominated by older girl papers such as *Lucky Star* and *The Red Letter* types. The latter is an excellent title; as to buy the paper was a *red-letter* day in more respects than one.

The middle 'thirties saw *The Crystal* which seemed a bad choice for a name (maybe *The Crystal Ball* would have been better for it was something to look into!). But, after only nine issues it was changed to *Girls' Crystal*, which had a very long run of almost thirty years, ending up as Girls' Crystal Picture Stories *in 1963*.

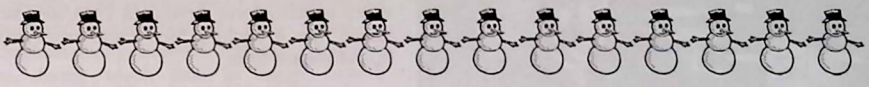
Pam's Paper, which started in 1923, published by Allied Newspapers, changed its title after 177 issues to *Up-To-Date* but after only eight issues of that name it folded – so obviously here is a case where the new title did nothing to improve circulation. A comic appeared with that title in 1928; it fared no better, only lasting 28 weeks.

The eventual lifting after the Second World War of rations of paper brought some highly successful girls' papers. R.T. Eves, who had brought out the earlier *School Friend* in 1919; and who is believed to have originated the title, thought so much of this still that in 1950 he revived the *School Friend* which sold a staggering million copies a week in its early period. Hulton's, who had brought out the successful boys' paper, *The Eagle* replied with *Girl*. In its early days it was rather like a boys' paper with girls' names, but gradually it changed to a more feminine style.

Princess (edited by Jackie Hunt, an old friend of mine), *Poppet*, *Serenade*, and *Valentine* were just a few of the novel titles to be issued in recent times, then we come to the astonishing

long list of girls' names. True the policy had been used in the past, but this time had slicker effect by dropping 'paper' or 'weekly' after the main title... so we have *Penny, Tammy, Sally, June, Roxy, Jackie, Judy, Cherie, Mandy, Marty, Mirabelle, Diana, Suzie, Nikki, Bunty* and *Misty*.

Whether the last two *are* girls' names I do not know, as one finds some extraordinary ones these days! *Misty* was an unusual paper in that it dealt with ghostly, or spooky stories, *Misty* suggesting an eerie atmosphere. I nearly forgot *Fab*, which is short for fabulous, and an adopted young niece has produced a few excellent numbers of *Brill* (short for 'brilliant'). To give an even more up-to-date effect, there are *Oh Boy, Boyfriend, Trend and Seventeen.*



All About Mee

(and his Children's Newspaper)

by
Brian Doyle

"Now what I want is Facts – stick to the Facts, sir! Facts alone are wanted in life." So said Mr. Gradgrind in Charles Dickens' Hard Times.

A man who would have gladdened the heart of Arthur Mee, for Dickens also described Gradgrind as 'a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts'.

And Facts were what Arthur Mee dealt in: matters of fact and factual matters. He was both a factotum and a human factum, a veritable factory of facts. Mee supplied those Facts to his young readers with a vengeance. In their hundreds, in their thousands and in their millions. Not just 'The Facts of Life' (though they were doubtless included in there somewhere). But the Facts about Life – and People – and Things – and Places – and Animals – and Birds – and Trees – and Flowers – and about How Things Worked – and if they didn't work, why they didn't work.

Arthur Mee did 'stick to the facts;', which would doubtless have pleased Mr. Gradgrind and, in addition, millions of children and other young readers (and often their elders too) throughout Britain for generations beginning with 1908.

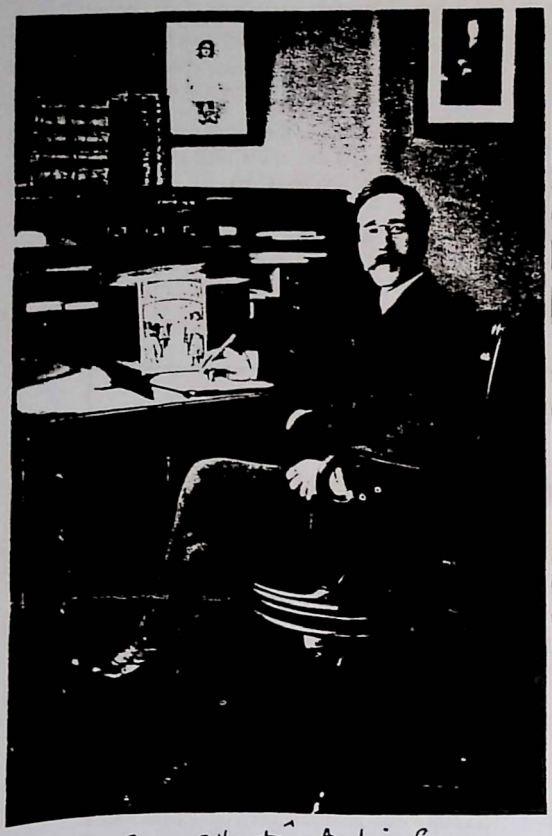
Mee, just to remind you, created such publications, indeed such National Institutions, as The Children's Encyclopaedia, The Children's Newspaper and many other multi-volumed educational books, magazines and 'part-works', from the early-1900s up to his death in 1943, with some of them continuing for long afterwards. He was probably the greatest popular educator Britain has ever known. 'You – and Mee – can take on the world!' as an advertising tag had it at one time.

Oscar Wilde once said: 'The Young know everything'. They may well have done after reading Mee's works. He was one of the country's most prolific writers, turning out over a million words every year for many years and well over 50 million words in his too-short lifetime. Not quite Charles Hamilton perhaps, but well on the way...!

Mee was probably the first (or certainly one of the first) to coat the educational pill with sugar, making information and facts acceptable and palatable, indeed enjoyable and fascinating, to young people. Like Mary Poppins, who found that 'a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down...'!

I want to spotlight Mee's The Children's Newspaper particularly in this article. It ran, or perhaps strolled sedately but knowledgeably and enthusiastically, from 1919 until 1965 and was Mee's proudest achievement. He always considered it his most important work and was wont to call it The Book of My Heart. He edited every copy (over 2000 of them), as well as writing the weekly Editorial or Leading Article (as well as many other 'Special Articles') and supervising every word published like a kindly but strict hawk. He began the first issue with the words 'Good Morning, World!' and the paper's sub-title on the front page was 'The Story of the World Today for the Man and Woman of Tomorrow'.

The Children's Newspaper originally started



Arthur Mee, at his desk in Temple Chambers, London, while editing the first edition of the Children's Encylopaedia. The current number stands in front of him, the first seven bound volumes on top of desk. The portraits on the wall are those of Marjorie and Lord Northcliffe.

as a small part of Mee's monumental Children's Encyclopaedia, which he created and edited (and co-wrote) from 1908-10, when it was first issued as a serial publication in 50 fortnightly parts, eventually comprising, and being re-issued in, 8 bound volumes. The subsequent New and Enlarged edition came in 59 parts comprising 10 volumes between 1922-25. (And so on, because it was forever in print for many years in various editions).

When Harmsworth's began publication of the Children's Encyclopaedia in 1908, the 'serial publication' format was not new to Mee. He had already edited the Harmsworth Self-Educator (in 48 parts, later 8 volumes in 1905-07) and was half-way through Harmsworth's History of the World (in 51 parts, later 8 volumes, in 1907-09). And after the original Children's Encyclopaedia he plunged straight away into further huge part-works (later volumes) covering The World's Great Books (1909-10), Natural History (1910-11) and Popular Science (1911-13). As one wag in his office once remarked: 'A glare from Arthur speaks volumes…!'

When that original 'C.E.' ended as a serial publication, Mee started, as a 'follow-on' a unique monthly called The Children's Magazine (1911-14). It later became My Magazine in which monthly form it ran until 1933, also being issued (like everything Mee wrote or edited) in bound volume form.

A small 'supplement' to My Magazine was The Little Paper, a sort of miniature Junior Newspaper for Children. From this sprang the idea that Mee had nurtured for years – a special and separate illustrated newspaper, written especially for children and young people.

This 'idea' became a splendid fact when Arthur Mee's The Children's Newspaper was founded as a black-and-white weekly on March 22, 1919 (curiously enough, two great writers for children happened to have died on March 22nd: Thomas Hughes, who wrote Tom Brown's Schooldays, in 1896, and Frederick William Farrar, author of Eric, or Little by Little in 1903). It was an immediate success and soon attained a weekly circulation of half-a-million young readers, being issued at 1½d, later becoming 2d, at which price it remained for many years.

It was a 12-page (later expanded to 16-page) journal with illustrations and photographs. The news items resembled the contents of the C.E. in that they emphasised the achievements of heroic and ingenious individuals of both sexes from all walks of life. There were many photographs, drawings, maps and diagrams, articles, anecdotes, stories, jokes and verses, plus The Editor's Table and a Leading Article by Mee. Mee's teetotalism and strong religious beliefs sometimes showed through and the paper's politics wavered occasionally – not that children were particularly interested in politics, of course. Its circulation became considerable, but it's possible, indeed probable, that its popularity was mainly due to its being bought for children by their parents, aunts and uncles, and sometimes even their schools, rather than because of young readers' thirst for knowledge and current affairs…!

It may be of interest to record that in 1919, The Children's Newspaper ran a photograph of 11-year-old Dudley Watkins, who had been described by his local newspaper in Manchester as 'an artistic genius for his age'. Since Watkins subsequently became the best-known comic artist in Britain and remained so for over 30 years, the newspaper was demonstrably right. Watkins (1907-69) created and drew such memorable characters as 'Desperate Dan' (in Dandy), 'Lord Snooty and His Pals' (in Beano), 'Jimmy and His Magic Patch' (in Beano), 'Oor Wullie', 'The Broons' and many, many others, especially for the D.C. Thomson papers, as well as illustrating

many books.

Who was Arthur Mee? Let's take a glance at his life and career – and read all about Mee!

He was born in Stapleford, near Nottingham, on July 21, 1875, the son of a railway fireman. He was educated at the local Stapleford Board School (later renamed in his honour 'The Arthur Mee School') and left at the age of 14, becoming a 'copy-boy' and proof-reader's assistant on the Nottingham Evening Post. At 16 he joined the Nottingham Daily Express, remaining for four years, during which time he taught himself shorthand, 'self-educated' himself by reading books, magazines and newspapers, and spending many hours in the local public library, and working hard as a general reporter and learning his craft of writing. He became Editor of the Nottingham Evening Post at 20, and began to write articles for several London-based magazines, including Tit-Bits. He went to Fleet Street and became Editor of Black-and-White in 1901, and then Literary Editor of the Daily Mail. He wrote three books, then began his career as editor and writer of popular part-works, which later became volumes.

As well as the titles already mentioned, Mee's other popular children's works included The Children's Bible (1924) (in which The Bible was condensed to 250,000 words and illustrated with well-known paintings), One Thousand Beautiful Things (1925), The Children's Shakespeare (1936), The Children's Bunyan (1929) and One Thousand Famous Things (1937). And one mustn't forget the stern-but-useful Why We Had to Go to War (1939) and the bang-up-to-date (at the time) Arthur Mee's Black-Out Book (1939). From 1917 until 1943, Mee wrote around 40 children's works and an equal number for adults. One of his great achievements was his King's England (1936-45), a series of 40 red-bound volumes describing England county-by-county.

Although he wasn't keen on children's fiction (no Facts there!) he did run serials and stories in The Children's Newspaper by such popular authors as Anthony Buckeridge, Malcolm Saville, Arthur Ransome, Noel Streatfield and T.C. Bridges.

And no less a children's writer than Enid Blyton acknowledged Arthur Mee's works as a leading influence on her writing. As a girl, she read his Children's Encyclopaedia from cover-to-cover, fascinated by and memorising some of the more curious facts she found there. She especially liked Mee's book Letters to Girls. She actually entered a child's poetry competition run by Mee in one of his publications and was thrilled to receive a letter from the great man telling her that he intended to print her verses and would like to see more of her work. Appropriately, in 1922, The Children's Newspaper gave a nice and encouraging review to her very first book Child Whispers, and, in 1925, Mee's My Magazine published another item by her in its pages.

It should perhaps be mentioned that The Children's Newspaper wasn't unique in its field. The Boys' Newspaper, published by Cassell's, ran for 98 issues from September 15, 1880. And the same publishers also brought out The Boys' and Girls' Picture Newspaper in 1923 and that lasted for 63 issues.

The final number of Mee's The Children's Newspaper was that of May 1st, 1965. It was to be 'amalgamated' with Look and Learn magazine. The Editor in its last two years was John Davis, and the Editor from 1953-63 was Sydney Warner. On what would have been The Children's Newspaper's 50th Anniversary, on March 22, 1969, I interviewed Warner in a series of items I was doing for the BBC's popular radio programme 'Home This Afternoon', to mark that 'occasion'. Warner, a dapper, friendly man, who had known Mee well, reminisced about the great journalist.

He told me that Mee received many thousands of letters from all over the world. A grateful girl-reader in Australia once sent him a small bag of gold-dust, which had taken her six years to gather! And I remember Warner telling me that a man had once walked into Mee's London office and told him he had just been released from a long term in prison. He said that each week every prisoner had been given a free copy of The C.N. by the enlightened Governor, and this man, who had read it from cover-to-cover every week for many years, told Mee it had changed his life, educated him, and made a new and reformed man of him; he was, he assured Mee, going to start a new and worthwhile life the very next day. Mee, obviously touched and impressed, had shaken the man's hand, presented him with a signed copy of the current issue (but not, apparently, with a free Fiver) and asked him to keep in touch and let him know how his new life was going. It would be nice to report that this golden character had carved out a brilliant new career for himself, made a fortune, and bought his three lovely children a copy of The Children's Newspaper every week. But, sadly, Mee never heard from his again...

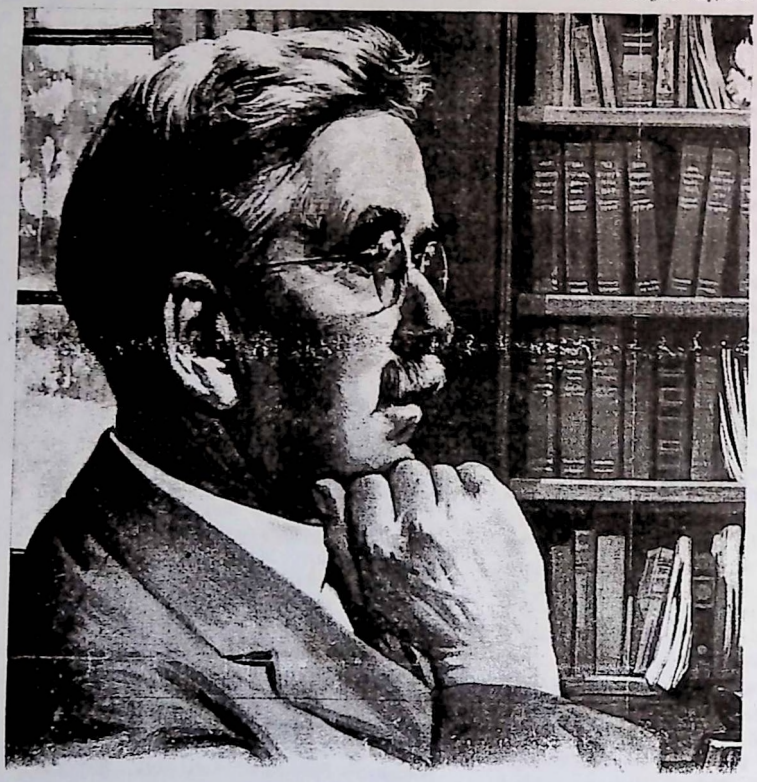
Warner also said in my radio interview with him that The C.N. had had an influence on certain famous Polar explorers. Apparently, it was the last paper mentioned by Sir Ernest Shackleton as he left London for the last time. And it was an item in The C.N. that moved a wealthy American to give financial aid to Amundsen, before he set off for his icy explorations.

That very last issue of The Children's Newspaper (which I have before me as I write) stated that the three greatest inventions during the 46 years of its run were: Television (John Logie Baird), Penicillin (Sir Alexander Fleming) and the Jet Engine (Sir Frank Whittle). There was an

CHILDREN'S NEWSPAPER

Wednesday—Ninepence FOUNDED BY ARTHUR MEE Week Ending 1st May, 1965

In This Issue . . .



OVER 2,000 ISSUES

THIS is the last C N—the last of more than 2,000 issues—and it seems right that the front page should pay a tribute to its Founder, the man who first gave children a newspaper of their own and was its devoted editor for nearly a quarter of a century.

Arthur Mee was a brilliant journalist, and sufficiently clever at his craft by the time he was 20 to become editor of the *Nottingham Evening News*. That was an achievement not many men can have equalled.

But there were greater things to come. Before long Arthur Mee was in London, making a name for himself in Fleet Street as one of the team of the great newspaper proprietor, Lord Northcliffe.

The portrait of Arthur Mee (left) is the work of Ralph Bruce, who has contributed so many front-page pictures to C N

Gifted with a flair for choosing the right men, Lord Northcliffe once said of Arthur Mee that his capacity for ideas amounted to genius. Some of those ideas brought great results in the form of a series of educational publications, including the *Harmsworth Self-Educator* and *History Of The World*.

Then came the *Children's Encyclopedia*, and for the rest of his life (he died in 1943) all Arthur Mee's talents and energies were dedicated to children.

Arthur Mee believed that nothing but the best was good enough for the younger generation

advertisement in which leading ballerina Beryl Grey stated firmly to a young admirer: 'Ambitious girls DON'T smoke...' And, in a last-ditch attempt (too late!) to appeal to the modern teenager of 1965, there was a feature on the pop group 'The Yardbirds' (whose lead-guitarist was one Eric Clapton).

The final front-page of the final C.N. featured an impressive painting of Arthur Mee, with a headline reading 'Over 2000 Issues'. The accompanying article concluded: 'The Children's Newspaper came out on a spring day in 1919, full of promise. On a spring day in 1965, with promise fulfilled, it makes its final bow'.

In the May 1965 issue of the C.D., editor Eric Fayne made an (for him) uncharacteristic and some people thought rather unkind attack on The C.N. and its passing.

"It was stodgy and uninspiring", he said. "The children of the 1920s liked it no more and no less than the children of 1965. I should be surprised if more than a handful of youngsters ever bought if for themselves. The great puzzle is how and why it managed to keep going for 46 years. It was a memorial to the great Arthur Mee, but nothing else."

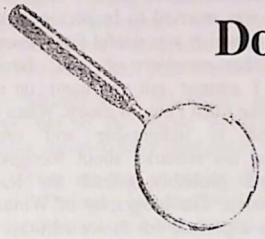
In the July 1965 issue of the C.D. came a letter from the veteran and prolific boys' writer,

Frank S. Pepper, saying that Eric's opinions of The C.N. "took my breath away". Pepper (who as 'Hal Wilton' created 'Rockfist Rogan', the RAF air ace, for Champion in 1938 and wrote all the stories about him every week for 22 years, as well as creating such heroes as 'Captain Condor' (in Lion), 'Roy of the Rovers' (in Tiger, etc.) and many others) had joined the staff of The C.N. aged 16, as, at first, an office boy, in 1926, working under Mee for 4 years. He said nice things bout his old boss, ending: 'I was very grateful for the writing habits Arthur Mee drilled into me. I was lucky to have come under his influence when I was serving my apprenticeship in the writing trade.' Pepper died in 1988 aged 78.

Arthur Mee must surely have contributed as much, if not more, than a whole army of great teachers, to the education of the young of Britain (and elsewhere) over a great many years. He once said wryly, in the 1920s: 'I know nothing about children really…' (though he did have one daughter, Marjorie, born in 1901).

'Of making many books there is no end…' says the Biblical quotations.

So must the great Arthur Mee have thought, somewhat resignedly, to himself now and again. And with good reason…



Dorothy Leigh Sayers 1893-1957

by Roger Jenkins

I always suspected that Dorothy L. Sayers had been a reader of *the Magnet* and *Gem* for a brief time, since Lord Peter Wimsey had a touch of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the name of his manservant, Bunter, was such an unusual name that it could only have come from the pages of the *Magnet*. She was also able to mention Sexton Blake at length in her famous Introduction to "Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror".

Her father was a clergyman and a classical scholar. She attended Godolphin School at Salisbury and became Gilchrist scholar at Somerville College, Oxford, where she obtained Honours in Modern Languages, but degrees were not awarded to women when she graduated in 1915, and she had to wait until 1920 when Oxford relented, and allowed women to receive their degrees, hers being an M.A.

What to do with her degree became a problem. Teaching at Hull Grammar School she disliked, and she next entered a publisher's office, but they found her too merry, talkative and argumentative. Her next post was at a copyright agency, and one of her most successful advertisements was one for Guinness, which could be seen on the underground for decades. It showed a toucan bird next to a drink, and the slogan was "If one Guinness is good for you, just

Dorothy Sayers
(from Barbara Reynolds' book *Dorothy Sayers, Her Life and Soul)*

think what toucan do." Finally, she took to writing detective stories, which eventually gave her the financial independence she craved, but she did not dare resign her copyrighting post until 1932.

Looking at photographs of Dorothy Sayers at meetings of the Detection Club, I should think she was the most unfeminine person present. She was a large woman with an Eton crop and pince-nez, and she quite intimidated Margery Allingham. John Dickson Carr always supported Dorothy Sayers, and got some stick from the other members because of it. Certainly Dorothy Sayers gave some very favourable reviews of his books. It is almost impossible to believe that this mannish-looking woman had had an illegitimate baby - a social disaster in those days - and had successfully hushed it up. In 1926 she married a shattered war hero. Captain Atherton Fleming, and it is said that she looked after him devotedly until he died in 1950. As she was at the height of her writing powers in the 1920's and 1930's, it must be assumed that he was looked after by servants. It may be that Lord Peter Wimsey's occasional demoralising war memories were based on her own husband's behaviour. Despite all this, Dorothy Sayers had a lively sense of the ridiculous, and when she had well imbibed at a meeting of the Detection Club she would recite in a Sunday School teacher's voice some indecent limerick like "There was a young man of Madras".

These amusing traits in her character were not reflected in her work. Her published output was smaller than most of the other women members of the Club, such as Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham, though all these women writers have remained in print, unlike the work of the men members. Only Christianna Brand's large output has all but disappeared from print. Dorothy Sayers' first novel was said to be written in collaboration with Robert Eustace, whoever he might have been. This book was called "The Documents in the Case" and it was written in epistolary form (or in letters). This type of writing is most difficult, because it means that the true nature of the various letter writers takes a long time to emerge, and it is such a difficult task that Jane Austen actually altered an epistolary novel "First Impressions" into the normal third-person narration of "Pride and Prejudice". "The Documents in the Case" is not an easy read, but it is moderately successful.

Lord Peter Wimsey first appeared in her next novel, "Whose Body?" when an unknown corpse was found in somebody's bathroom. Wimsey did not appear as a fully-rounded character in this novel, but he was a bit more recognisable in "The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club" which revolved around the problem of which of two people died first, a rather obscure legal point being in issue, as a result of the 1925 Law of Property Act. "Unnatural Death" was caused by injecting air into a vein, but medically this is most unlikely. What is true about these early novels is that they were well-plotted, and the loving care bestowed upon them is obvious. After this, the standard became very variable. "Five Red Herrings" is clearly a product of its time, and had dated more than any other of her books. It deals with an artists' colony in S.W. Scotland, and the solution depends railway timetables and tricks with railway tickets. It is clever without being interesting. On the other hand, one of her finest novels is "Strong Poison" introducing Harriet Vane, whom Wimsey saved from the gallows. The solution is most ingenious and utterly convincing at the same time. Harriet Vane appeared in later novels, such as "Have His Carcase" which has a promising beginning, with Harriet finding a dead body on a beach, but the novel lost its way when complicated journeys by a motor car became the main problem to solve.

It should be mentioned at this stage that Wimsey's sister was married to Inspector Parker of Scotland Yard, which was useful for Wimsey, even if some other members of the family disapproved. I cannot put my hand on my heart and say I like Lord Peter Wimsey. When he is facetious he is unbearable and often exaggerated, and his remarks about foreigners and Jews would probably offend the Race Relations Act today. The biography of Wimsey that was used as a preface for future editions of her novels would tend to suggest that she was in love with her detective. On the other hand, she once said "I can see no end of Peter this side of the grave". On another occasion, at a formal dinner, she said she was sick of Peter, and shouted out across the table "Aren't you sick of Poirot, Agatha?" This ambivalent attitude may account for some of her unsuccessful novels.

Dorothy Sayers declared that she didn't want to produce crossword puzzle novels but books that supplied a criticism of life. These are the very books that I rate as failures. "Gaudy Night" deals with mischief at a women's college at Oxford, and Wimsey installs Harriet Vane to investigate. The mystery is eventually solved, but there is not enough substance to sustain such a long novel, dealing mainly with chit-chat between women dons. Even more disappointing is "The Nine Tailors" set in an East Anglian village, and dealing extensively with campanology. No one could fault Dorothy Sayers' knowledge of bell-ringing, and indeed her father had been vicar of a parish in the Fens, but there is no murder but merely an accidental death, and it is hard to accept that this is a detective novel at all. The last completed novel, "Busman's Honeymoon" which takes place after Wimsey has at last married Harriet, is sub-titled "A Love Story with Detective Interruptions", and shows her powers on the wane.

It is pleasant to turn to the one definite success among her later novels, "Murder Must Advertise". Her eleven years at a copywriting agency constituted an experience that was put to excellent use. A member of staff had fallen down a spiral iron staircase, and Wimsey arrived as Mr. Bredon, a new member of staff, entrusted with the task of tracking down a murderer. The liveliness of the staff who think up slogans for advertisers, and the amusing coining of phrases has a ring of truth that utterly convinces. Wimsey discovered that the root of the mystery lay in messages hidden in the printed advertisement. His disguise was blown when he played cricket for the copywriting firm, and his cricketing style was recognised.

A small quotation from this novel will give you its flavour:-

"Tell England. Tell the world. Eat more oats. Take care of your complexion. Shine your shoes with Shino. Ask your grocer – children love Laxamalt. Bung's Beer is Better. Try Dogsbody's sausages. Give men Crunchlets. Stop that sneeze with Snuffo. Flush your kidneys with Fizzlets. Flush your drains with Sanfect."

"Murder-Must Advertise" may be a 1933 novel, but in the hectic world of advertising nothing seems to have changed in 60 odd years.

What are we to make of the unfinished novel "Thrones, Dominations" which has just been published with the second part written in accordance with Sayers' own notes? It has been skilfully done, and it is difficult to spot the join, but the second part reads like an historical novel explaining social customs among the upper class in the 1930s. Had the author finished it herself, the result would have been a vast improvement on what we now have. The general effect is uncertain.

When we examine the short stories, a completely different picture emerges. They are lively and varied, and the first selection, "Lord Peter Views the Body" has very ornate titles such as "The Bibulous Matter of Taste", in which three Wimseys present themselves at a French chateau to receive an important document, and they are subjected to a series of blind tastings of wines, in order to identify the real Wimsey. His knowledge of old books is interestingly explored in "The Learned Adventure of the Dragon's Head". The book of stories entitled "Hangman's Holiday" contains the amazingly ingenious "The Image in the Mirror", the most successful of all the short stories about Wimsey. The last selection of stories is "In the Teeth of the Evidence", and, like "Hangman's Holiday" it contains some Wimsey and some non-Wimsey stories. The group concerning Mr. Montague Egg, a commercial traveller in wines and spirits, provides a very down-market detective. Odd stories like "The Inspiration of Mr. Budd" and "The Man Who Knew How" are semi-humorous with sinister overtones, and, like Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers could produce a story with a supernatural basis.

We now come to the very last Lord Peter stories, in a volume entitled "Striding Folly", published after the author's death. The first two stories had been published in 1939 in a collection entitled "Detective Medley" ed. John Rhode, but the last one, written in 1942, had never before seen the light of day. The first one, "Striding Folly", which gave its name to the volume, revolved around chess games and a curiously prophetic dream. This ended in a real death, and the Chief Constable's friend with the eyeglass was of course Wimsey. "The Haunted Policeman" dealt with a policeman who was induced to look through the letter box and saw a murdered man who disappeared. As this was the day Wimsey's son was born, he gave the constable champagne while he told his story. The policeman said it tasted like cider. The last story, "Talboys" had a purely domestic setting. Wimsey now had three sons – Bredon, Roger, and Paul – while Harriet continued to write detective stories among the hubbub. The most curious remark was to the effect that Bredon would inherit all the real property as it was entailed. As Wimsey had himself purchased his flat, his town house, and his country house, it was difficult to understand how it could be entailed. Perhaps it was a reference to Bredon possibly inheriting the Denver estates.

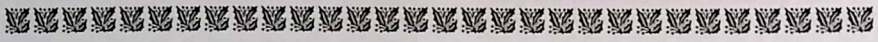
Perhaps we should now consider whether detection is a suitable pastime for an aristocrat. Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh both gave their detectives very upper-class backgrounds, though they themselves were not titled. Dorothy Sayers certainly attempted to depict Wimsey as being very uneasy when a murderer he had helped to catch was to be hanged. To enable his family to appreciate Wimsey's talents, the novel "Clouds of witness" relates how his brother, the Duke of Denver, is accused of murder and refuses to supply an alibi. Dorothy Sayers had great fun with a trial in the House of Lords, and talk of a silken noose, but even so the mystery is something of a damp squib.

After the "Striding Folly" volume, Dorothy Sayers wrote no more detective stories. During the war, she wrote a play about the life of Jesus, entitled "The Man Born to be King" and when it was broadcast on the BBC it caused considerable criticism because it was all in colloquial English. Nowadays, it would hardly cause a ripple of annoyance, which shows she must have been ahead of her time. The rest of her life she devoted to turning Dante's "Divine Comedy" into English verse, but it was unfinished at her death and completed by someone else. This translation also incurred adverse criticism, and that has not subsided, even now.

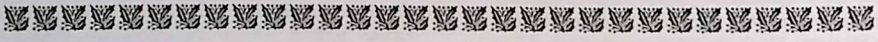
An American publisher wrote to her after the war, requesting her to provide an introduction to a new omnibus volume of her work. She

refused, stating that she wrote detective stories merely to make money, and she had no further interest in them. This is not an uncommon reaction when a writer changes direction, but in her case it was rather different, in that her detective stories provided the cash to pursue what was really a hobby, though no doubt her academic mind found Dante more to her taste than detection. Perhaps I should end by stating that modern practitioners have praised her detective novels. Ruther Rendell holds her in high esteem, and P.D. James stated that Dorothy Sayers, more than any other writer, had made detective stories intellectually respectable. I think she would have greatly appreciated that tribute.

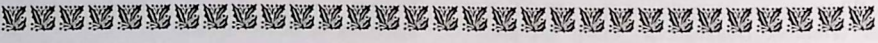
Best Wishes to all hobby friends. Happy reading over the Festive Season and in the future. JOHN BECK, Lewes, BN7 2RU.



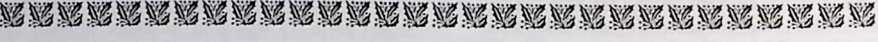
Merry Christmas, Happy New Year to all friends worldwide. BETTY and JOHNNY HOPTON, Greyfriars, 6 Wellfield Road, Carmarthen, SA31 1DS.



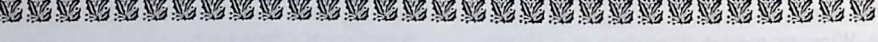
History Today magazines complete set unbound 1968 onwards, £350 o.n.o., buyer to collect. Enquiries (letter only). LEWIS, 17 Glen Iris Avenue, Canterbury, CT2 8HP.



Very best wishes for Christmas and 2002 to Mary, Bill, Chris, Les, Mac and all CD readers. JOHN BRIDGWATER, Flat 5A, Saulfland Place, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4QP.

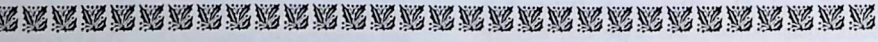


As I write this my adopted land is undergoing a shock exceeding that of the Pearl Harbor Disaster. I am comforted by the fact that the land of my birth, and one of precious memories, has seen fit to unite once again with us. God bless you all in 2002, and God Bless all firemen and policemen. They stand alone, always, and give so much. GERRY FISHMAN, 509 Raymond Street, Rockville Centre, N.Y., USA, 11570.

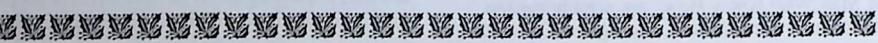


Each Xmas now, I look at my face
Check on the bits that have got out of place.
But take heart dear readers
Do not fear the cracks
Just think of the Money
One saves on the Tax.
Have a Cracking Xmas.

JOHNNY BURSLEM

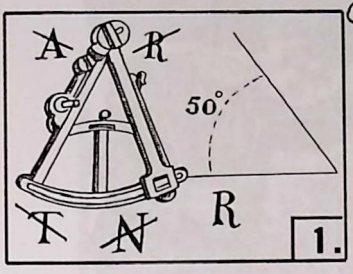


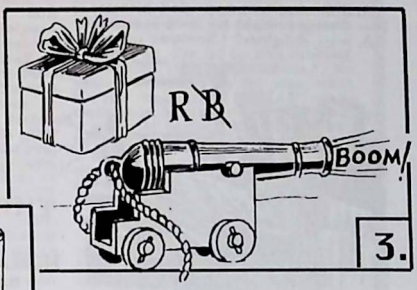
Greetings to all fellow enthusiasts. I am still wanting Champion Library war stories. J. ASHLEY, 46 Nicholas Crescent, Fareham, Hants., PO15 5AH. Tel: 01329 234489.

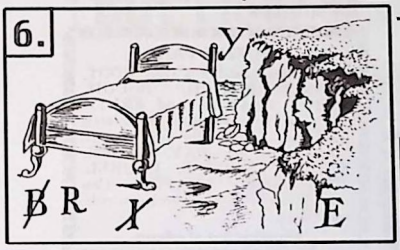


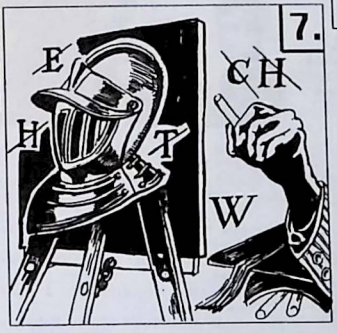
Guess these places in & around Greyfriars

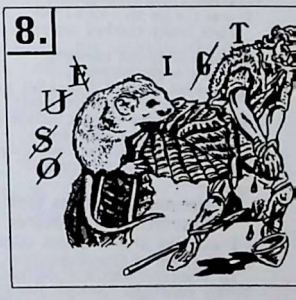
By Bob Whiter











(Answers on page 64)

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS WEEK ISSUE OF—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL.

By a HOLIDAY ANNUAL.

(1)

'Twas only just a month ago
That I was newly bought and splendid,
But now I'm torn and smudged and worn,
And my career's completely ended.
With spotless pages, colour plates,
And stories, humorous and pleasant,
Bob Cherry thought the book he bought
A most delightful Christmas present.

(2)

Frank Nugent borrowed me next day,
And lent me to his minor, Dicky;
From him I met, to my regret,
Young Sammy Bunter, fat and sticky;
His major Billy took me back
And sold me to a Fishy rotter,
Who sold me for a shilling more
To Coker as a gift for Potter.

(3)

George Wingate borrowed me from him,
And Tubb, his fag, annexed me gladly;
Then from the fags, reduced to rags,
To Trotter I went very sadly.
He left me on a window-seat
Where Nugent found me and returned me!
Bob took one look at me, his book,
Then silently and sadly burned me!
Thus ended, full of fire and flame,
My tour of Greyfriars College—Shame!

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

Old Inky doesn't worry
When he goes out carolling,
For he can always "Hurree"
If the folk won't let him "Singh."

It's a lovely Christmas dinner—
Lick your tongue!
Bird's-nest soup and tender snails,
Choice rat-pies with puppies' tails,
Curried cats and frog and whales—
It's a lovely Christmas dinner
For Wun Lung!

When Skinner sent an almanac
At Christmas to his Uncle Ned,
Although the dates were printed black,
His birthday date was marked in red!
My legs looked just like nutcrackers
When I was skating—but
It was the ice on which I fell
That really cracked my nut!

When I went out carolling
A dog began to howl,
He howled so loud I couldn't sing,
The noise he made was foul!
And then, from out his cottage door,
Appeared old Gaffer Jones;
Said he: "We've heard you sing before
And recognised your tones!"

Christmas Greetings from the Greyfriars Rhymester

I wish the best of health and luck,
The best of Christmas cheer,
To everyone who has the pluck
To read ME through the year!
(They deserve it.—ED.)

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

HORACE HACKER, M.A.,

master of the Shell Form.

H is for HACKER, a master we hate,
He lives in an almost perpetual bate.
His features are acid and so is his tongue,
We do not imagine he ever was young.
To think of old Hacker an inky-faced boy
Makes Shell fellows chuckle with daring and joy.

It cannot be true that he ever was pressed
To bend himself over for six of the best!
He'd certainly answer the master: "How dare
You tell me to bend myself over that chair?
This insolence, sir, you shall dearly repent,
To meet your requirements I cannot consent!
The whole situation's unparalleled, sir,
A thing that should not be allowed to occur!"
An hour or so longer he'd stand there and speak,
And probably finish by caning the Beak!

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By THE GREYFRIARS RHYMESTER

CHRISTMAS GRINS

Bolsover major had nightmare on Christmas Eve. He dreamed he was kissing Quelchy under the mistletoe!

Fisher T. Fish is going to have his Christmas pudding X-rayed before taking a slice. There's a threepenny-bit in it somewhere.

Cecil Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, is spending Christmas at Dartmoor.—At last!

Quelchy has been asked to carve the turkey in his hotel. He is bound to "cut up rough."

PUZZLE PAR

Here are parts of a tree, ROOT, STEM, BRANCH, BOUGH, SPRIG, LEAVES, and FRUIT. Each of these words is associated with one of the following, though not in this order—BAY, GINGER, HOLLY, LICORICE, LAUREL, MISTLETOE, GRAPE. Can you pair the correct words together?

Answer at foot of column.

There was much handshaking and congratulation among the fellows who, after a long and stern fight, succeeded in not having Bunter for Christmas.

Among the big-game hunting trophies in Mr. Prout's study will shortly appear the stuffed head of a savage wait, which he shot as it howled beneath his window.

Mr. Hacker's cook forgot to put the stuffing in his turkey. The unfortunate woman is now too busy writing 500 lines to worry about Christmas.

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

Licorice-root, Stem-ginger, Laurel-branch, Mistletoe-bough, Sprig of holly, Bay-leaves, Grape-fruit.

The Greyfriars Guide Hopes to Meet You All Again in the New Year!

Our Special Reporter has the fearful job of finding out what ghosts think of the Festive Season.

THE MOANING MONK. (Ghost to Greyfriars School, by appointment) : "Christmas is a snare and a delusion. I'm a hard-working ghost, anxious to earn my living—or non-living—by haunting as many people as the Ghosts' Trade Union permits. Yet what happens? Just as I'm ready to put in a good night's haunt, the boys break up for Christmas, and I'm reduced to haunting Master Fish, who spends his holidays at the school.

"Mind you, I haunt Master Fish very thoroughly. Indeed, I keep his hair permanently on end during the Christmas vac. But it is a waste of talent.

It is small satisfaction to me to drive Master Fish nightly up the nearest chimney when I might be spreading dismay and terror through an entire school. I feel that my moans are of really first-class quality. Let me give you a sample moan—there's no charge——" (But I left hurriedly at this point.)

THE RED EARL. (Ghost of Mauleverer Towers) : "Speak not to me of Christmas, thou scurvy malapert. I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, were I not infringing the copyright of Hamlet's ghost—the varlet! Ha, ha! So that scurvy Monk would groan at driving one pestilent numbskull up the chimney! What would he say to a job like mine?

"Grammercy, sir, I tell thee this. He should try haunting a lord who could sleep peacefully through the veriest earthquake. Time after time, beshrew me, have I roared myself hoarse by the rogue's bed. I have haunted him so terribly that, odd's my life, I've frighted myself and fled in terror. And not an eyelid, sir, has the fool batted. He might have been sleeping in a hammock beneath the whispering trees for all the notice he took of me. Beshrew me, it's wearing me to a shade!"

OUTSIZED OSWALD. (The awe-inspiring spectre of Bunter Court) : "I say, you fellows, Christmas is awful. It's the worst time of the year. It's all very well for these Moaning Monks and Red Earls to grouse, but they don't know what hardship means.

"I first became a ghost one Christmas when I thought I had room for just one more mince pie. I crammed it in and burst on the spot. Well, as soon as I was a ghost, I started haunting the kitchen. Most Bunters do that without waiting to become ghosts.

"The agony is fearful. You see, old fellow, ghosts can't eat, and to see all those turkeys, puddings and pies simply asking to be wolfed is more than flesh and blood can bear—or ghosts, either. I have to watch Billy and the others shovelling the stuff away, and I can't get so much as a mouthful. I'm sure it will be the death of me.

"By the way, old fellow, did you say you have five bob you don't want? I'm expecting a ghostly postal order in the morning. Don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you—! BEAST!"

AWFUL ALGERNON. (The blood-curdling phantom of Popper Court) : "Don't talk to me of Christmas, sir. Dashed impudence. I know you, boy—I saw you pulling down one of Sir Hilton Popper's 'Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted' boards. Don't blame you, either. Last Christmas, after I'd haunted him, he put a 'Ghosts Will Be Prosecuted' board on his bed-room door.

"Gad, sir, I'm fed up with haunting Sir Hilton at Christmas-time. He believes in looking on the wine when it's red—looks pretty hard, too. Consequence is, he takes things like me as a matter of course. The room being full of spotted eagles, he doesn't notice a mere ghost. Good mind to resign, sir, and haunt a temperance hotel—only I'd have to sign the pledge, and that's a thing no Popper would ever do!"

* * * * *

And if Sir Hilton Popper sees this, the next ghost to be interviewed will be Terrible Tom Brown, the Phantom Reporter, slain by a Bad Baronet!

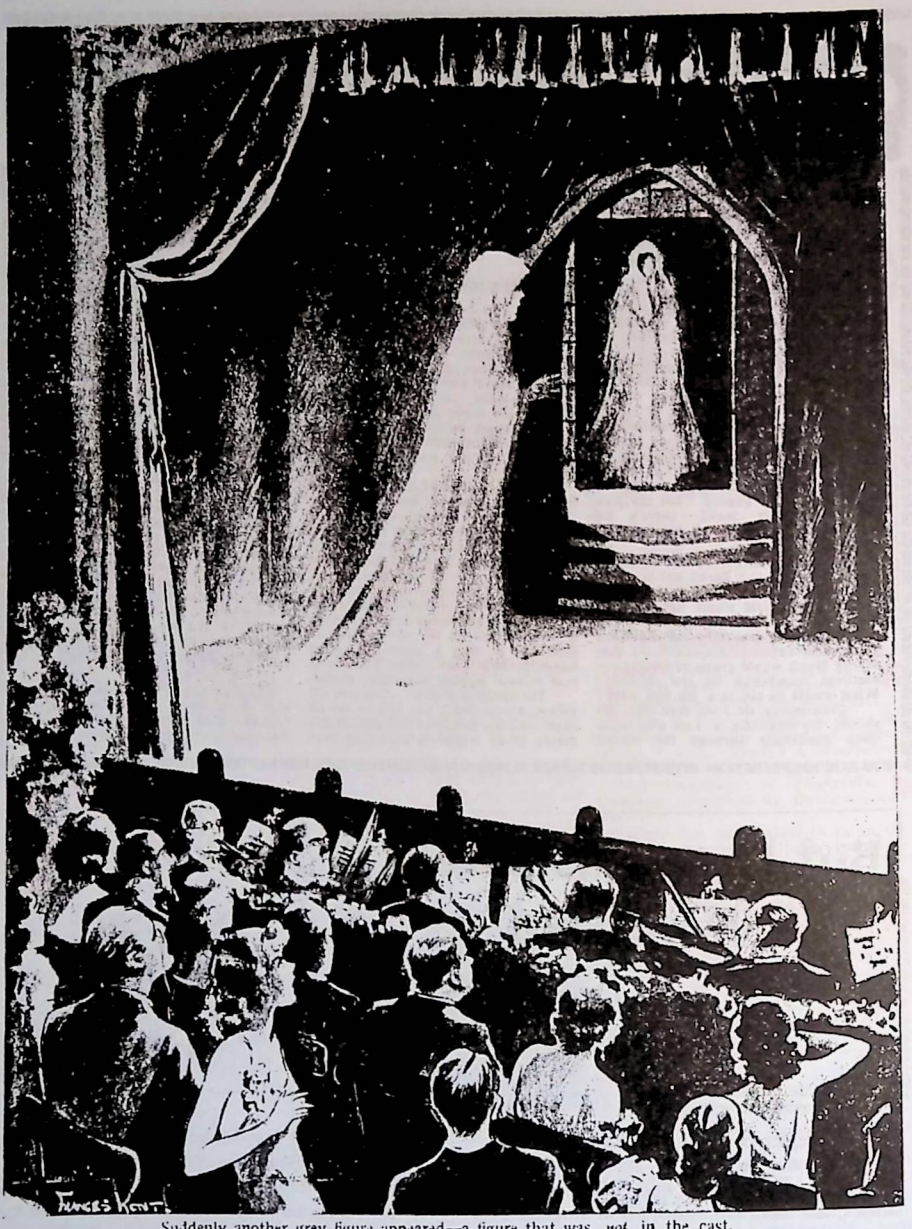
But Fleur Has Often Wondered

by Mary Cadogan

In the September 2001 C.D. Ray Moore wrote: 'Given that so many of the old A.P. papers had a fascination with printing "ghost" stories, are there any examples in *Magnet, Gem* or any of the girls' papers where one of these Yuletide spectres turned out to be exactly that, and not a spy, thief, smuggler or whatever?' There is no doubt that ghost stories in both boys' and girls' papers generally turn out to have nothing to do with the supernatural but to be tricks or hoaxes, usually, as Ray suggests, carried out by ordinary human characters who are up to no good.

However, prompted by a memory of a story in one of the 1930s girls' annuals, I decided to look further into this. Ever since I read that particular tale as a schoolgirl it has niggled my memory, and I've carried in my mind its closing line: 'But Fleur has often wondered -----'. I couldn't recall much more about it, and sometimes wondered if I'd simply imagined that this was a particularly compelling spectral story but a year or so ago, I rediscovered this closing line – and of course the whole story – in the *Golden Annual for Girls* of 1938. So – for the purpose of this article – I read it again, and decided also to read all the ghostly stories that appeared in the *Golden Annual* and the other prominent girls' annuals of the same year, 1938 (actually, as we know, 1937 but dated 1938).

I will describe here the spectral exploits of the *Schoolgirls' Own* and *School Friend Annuals*, the *Popular Book of Girls' Stories* and the *Golden Annual for Girls* of that year, saving



Suddenly another grey figure appeared—a figure that was *not* in the cast.

the 'But Fleur has often wondered -----' story to the end!

The *Popular Book of Girls' Stories* for 1938 had no truck whatsoever with supernatural happenings, real or imagined, so we can quickly dismiss that.

The *School Friend Annual* carried one story which promised a ghostly element: this was 'The Unexpected Witness' by Denise Hope which was subtitled 'A Gripping Mystery Story'. It features two cousins, Mavis and Janet, who are invited to stay at a house acquired by a young aunt whom they've never met, as she's only recently returned from abroad. However, the house, Moor Manor, far from being the luxurious residence which they anticipated, turns out to be old, draughty, creepy, creaking and neglected, with decaying furniture, and lit only by candles.

An elderly, apparently deaf, servant is in attendance but there is no sign of their aunt. Mavis, always cheerful, makes the best of things and is considerate towards the aged retainer, while Janet – a bit of a bitch – moans constantly and is rude and unpleasant to the servant. She is obviously only staying on at Moor Manor in hopes that the unknown aunt will turn out to be rich, and generous towards her nieces.

The two girls notice that in the portrait of a beautiful young female ancestor the eyes appear to move (shades of the *Gem's Painted Room* series!). Later, Janet becomes hysterical with fear when she sees this same ancestor's face at an upper window. Convinced that Moor Manor is haunted, she leaves without ever meeting the aunt who has invited her there. Mavis – less certain that there *is* a ghost – stays on, and her young and pretty aunt soon puts in an appearance. She bears a strong resemblance to the ancestor in the portrait, and it is she, of course, whom Janet has mistaken for a ghost. (Actually the aunt has been disguised for most of the time as the old, 'deaf' servant in order to find out what her nieces are really like.) Mavis's good nature and kindness to the supposed servant are rewarded as her aunt whisks her off the her *real* home – a well-appointed and luxurious house nearby – for a great and memorable holiday. So, as in most ghostly tales, there is nothing truly eerie about 'The Unexpected Witness'.

The *Schoolgirls' Own Annual* features the traditional Christmassy house-party in a warm and welcoming mansion with lashings of snow outside in 'The Ghost Play' by Louise Carlton (Lewis Carlton). This author was very good at creating stories of mystery and suspense (in the Sexton Blake saga and elsewhere) and this girls' tale makes rewarding reading.

Kay Warren is in the throes of producing a play 'in the huge baronial hall' of her father's house (Normanhurst) but on the night before the performance she sees the 'dreaded grey spectre' outside in the cloisters. The tradition is that whenever the owner of Normanhurst or one of his family sees this ghost it heralds death or monetary loss. Kay is also worried, naturally, that her play might be doomed and, with ambitions for a theatrical career, this would 'spell disaster' for her.

She keeps quiet about sighting the spectre in order not to upset her friends who are staying at Normanhurst and are in the cast. However, one of these guests, Renée, also spots the ghost and makes its appearance widely known. She is suspected of 'playing ghost' although there are various spooky signs for which she does not seem to be responsible – strange tappings, and distant greenish glowing light through which a grey figure is moving.

Kay and her friends go ahead with the performance, despite any fears which they may have about ghostly happenings. Kay has written into the play an episode in which the Normanhurst ghost walks – all done by tricks of lighting. But she gets more supernatural atmosphere than she bargains for. When her planned spectre appears on stage, to suitably weird music played by the orchestra, a second totally unexpected apparition also treads the boards. When these two ghosts are seen simultaneously there is horror and uproar from the audience, but Kay has sufficient presence of mind to pursue the interloping ghost and unmask it. She finds (rather anti-climactically) that it is their housekeeper, Mrs. Hannington. This otherwise impeccable lady is playing ghost to prevent guests and the audience for the play from going into the East Wing because she is hiding the previous owner of Normanhurst and his wife, who are now penniless there.

Of course Kay's wealthy father agrees to help the impoverished pair so there is no need for Mrs. H. to carry on her spookish tricks. The performance of the play is resumed – and Kay's future on the professional stage is assured by the warm approval of a theatrical dignitary who is in the audience.

It is a pity that this story ends with a touch of banality because the ghostly suspense is, for most of the narrative, well sustained. The second of the 1938 *Schoolgirls' Own Annual's* flirtations with the supernatural is called 'Rona Films a Phantom' by Muriel Holden (Roland Jameson). Rona, an enthusiastic amateur film-maker, goes with her cousins Joan and Belle to Bilbury Manor where she's been given permission to make a historical film, in which a ghost is to be featured. Of course, during the proceedings an unexpected 'spectre' (a lady from the Stewart period) turns up and Rona, by chance, films her. The three girls revisit the Manor by night to try to lay this ghost. It transpires that this 'phantom' is one of a gang who have by their spooky stunts scared off the housekeeper who is supposed to be looking after the house while the owners are away. Rona's film helps the police to identify the gang who, we are told, were using the manor 'for a gigantic swindle connected with the sale of bogus shares'!

Nothing supernatural about that, of course.

So now we come to the *Golden Annual for Girls*. It included three ghost stories. The first, *The Weird of Weirdslea Grange* was by Joan Inglesant (Draycott M. Dell) a writer who was particularly good at creating strongly atmospheric mysteries. Audrey Morton lives with her parents in Weirdslea Grange and sees what appears to be a great band of white and ghostly figures in the grounds at night. Their presence has become known in the village and further afield, and is scaring away visitors from Weirdslea Grange, which Audrey's parents are now running as a hotel. (All their money has been invested in it.)

The ghosts are reputed to be those of knights killed in a battle that had taken place

A Story of a Strange Mystery

By JOAN INGLESANT

nearby during the Wars of the Roses. The villagers (and Audrey's parents) seem too craven to investigate the mystery. However, plucky teenage Audrey takes things in hand. She looks up the Morton family history and finds that the legend of The Weird (a headless spirit) has existed from the time of Charles the First, although no-one has ever claimed to see it. She ventures outside at night and sees the mass of ghostly figures – but, revisiting the garden by day, finds a well-polished, military brass button on the ground. Locating a nearby army camp, Audrey finds that after dark the soldiers are using a machine (a 'kind of cinematograph') which 'can suggest an attack at night by troops when... there are no soldiers there...'.

Audrey explains the difficulty these manoeuvres have made for her family and, to make up for the loss of business at their hotel, a kindly officer arranges for 'a number of regiments' to seek accommodation there – and, as the 'ghosts' are no longer seen, all is well again for Weirdslea Grange. A good story, but, again, nothing truly supernatural takes place.

The *Golden Annual's* 'A Test for Tessa' is by Bertha Leonard, and from its first, full-page illustration we know we are in for encounters with something spectral. Tessa and her brothers and sisters answer a newspaper advertisement offering a free holiday to a family which will help a man who wants a mystery unravelled. The advertiser is Captain Wynflete of The Monastery at Clinton-by-Storrbury. He is wheel-chair-bound as the result of disablement caused by an air crash. He also has failing sight (because of cataracts, and readers are reassured that eventually an operation will save his sight) and his double handicap renders him incapable of solving the puzzle connected with his home. He has restored the old monastery and uncovered cryptic clues carved in the old walls:

'By fire and air go find the lair

Nor step nor stair shall take ye there...' etc.

Tessa and her family explore the monastery in the light of the clues and one night Tessa decides to search around the great fireplace in the kitchen. From the cavernous depths of this 'a

Was it the wreaded spectre ?

cowled figure that shone with an unearthly glow came gliding into view'. A monkish spirit? No – it turns out to be a burglar who is after Captain Wynflete's silver! Tessa hides from him by climbing up the chimney on its jutting brick ledges: she then terrifies the intruder by emitting a series of blood-curdling yells and wails. Rooted to the spot he is soon apprehended and handed over to the police.

Meanwhile, up in the chimney, Tessa has uncovered a brick aperture which contains an iron canister of 'old folios and missals' that make the Captain, 'an archaeologist at heart', so happy that he gives Tessa a cheque for a hundred pounds. So the main mystery of the whereabouts of the monastery's particular treasure is solved – although the 'unearthly glow' around the cowled figure is not referred to again or explained.

The third ghost story in the *Golden Annual* – the one which stayed in a niche in my memory for so long – is 'In the Dark' by Dorothy Vernon (C.L. St. John Pearce). Its heroine is Fleur who is staying at Cranleigh Towers, the home of her school friend, Bell. They find a secret drawer in an old bureau: it contains a faded note from a previous occupant of the house recording the fact that he had seen, in that very room, the figure of a man in 'the costume of the second Charles, with frills and ruffles, a large wig on which was a plumed hat. ...It stood there... gazing up at the painting of Lady Honoria...'

This portrait still hangs in the room, and Bell explains that Honoria is an ancestor who died in 1690. She adds that 'the picture's worth a ton of money'.

Before the two girls read the rest of the note they go out into the garden and Bell loses the piece of paper. She seems very disturbed and, after Fleur goes fruitlessly in search of it, she finds Bell talking agitatedly to a young man, who quickly takes off. Bell offers no explanation of

this, or of her strange mood, but later that day Fleur hears her crying in her bedroom.

Bell still refuses to tell Fleur why she is so upset but she enlists her help for a task that *must* be performed that night, when everyone else is in bed. Fleur finds that she is to help Bell take Lady Honoria's heavy picture down from the wall and upstairs into Bell's bedroom, where Bell locks them in with the portrait. They are supposed to take it in turns to sleep or keep awake and, while Bell is asleep, Fleur looks out of the window: she sees the stealthy figure of the man who had been earlier in conversation with Bell mounting the steps to the room in which Lady Honoria's picture is usually hung.

As he does so, something extraordinary happens. Wildly waving his arms as if warding off an attack, the young man wheels in his tracks and, terrified, flees to the end of the garden. It seems that some fearful enemy – invisible to Fleur but seen by him – is pursuing him. When the young man eventually disappears into the trees beyond the garden, Fleur, whose hair has literally stood on end, breathes 'The spectre of the cavalier was after him!'

The next morning there are some explanations. The local doctor calls to say that Bell's brother has been brought to him in a delirious state and he is 'in for a bad bout of brain fever'. He's been hospitalised and keeps on mumbling about being pursued by some ghostly cavaliers, and he also mentions a picture. Apparently he was carrying his passport and a ticket to France.

Bell breaks down and tells Fleur that her brother, Philip, had told her he was going to steal

Carefully they lifted down the "ghost" picture.

the picture and sell it abroad (we gather that he has always been 'a bad lot'). That, of course, is why she took the picture into safe keeping for the night into her bedroom.

Bell also explains to Fleur that she never actually lost the note they had found in the secret drawer, and that this in fact described not one but two ghostly cavaliers who, both in love with Lady Honoria, had fought a desperate duel. Apparently Bell had told her brother about this when she met him in the garden. She and, at first, Fleur think that, suffering from a guilty conscience about his proposed theft of the picture, Philip simply imagined those two fighting spectres and thought that they would stop at nothing to prevent him from taking away Lady Honoria's portrait.

This explanation satisfies Bell, but on reflection Fleur cannot accept it. She is anxious that her friend should not be upset, so does not voice her doubts, but she feels that there could have been some supernatural intervention to keep the picture where it belonged, in Bell's family home.

'In the Dark' ends dramatically with the unfinished sentence

'But Fleur has often wondered…'

And sometimes I wonder too. I think that just once in my life I *have* seen a ghost: at any rate it was something that could not be explained by logic or rationality. So, like Fleur, I have often wondered…!

CROMWELL AT CHRISTMAS

by Mark Caldicott

Although Edwy Searles Brooks provided many memorable and charming Christmas tales of St Frank's in the Nelson Lee Library, seasonable yarns featuring his other major characters are rare and, in the adult novels, almost unknown. One such exception is the Ironsides Cromwell adventure "Death in December", one of the three stories which comprise "Ironsides Sees Red", first published in 1943 under the Victor Gunn pseudonym.

I have a soft spot for this book, it being among the very first of ESB's works I read. It reminds me of my grandparents' house. They lived only a few miles away from my childhood home in a huge old place housing not only my grandfather and grandmother, but four aunts and an uncle and a cousin. Its location on the busy main road between Oldbury and Smethwick, in the West Midlands, was not the most attractive, but its size made it a wonderful place to play all kinds of games.

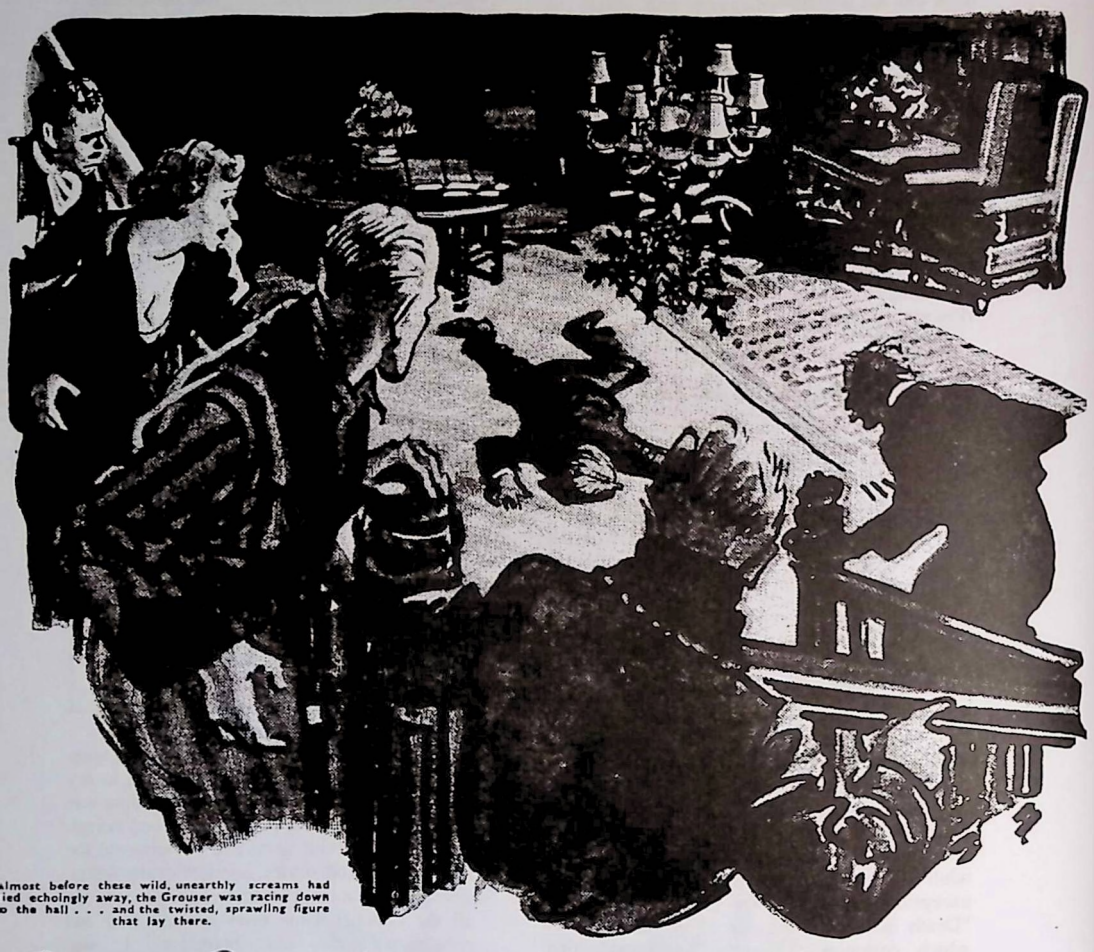
It was also a great place for the family to gather to celebrate Christmas, and I have fond childhood memories of many of these. This was a time when the adults, with a few days holiday from work, could for once be persuaded to join in our favourite games.

At the turn of the staircase, was a large open bookcase. I had taken no interest in this in my earlier childhood days when this half landing was a rustler's hideout or a part of Sherwood Forest. But I remember that when I first discovered the Norman Conquest stories, courtesy of my father, who was a great fan, I began to search around for all the Berkeley Gray titles I could find and remembered the old bookcase. I was disappointed - there were none - but my uncle searched out two White Circle paperbacks by Victor Gunn. "Read these," he said, "I reckon they're by the same fellow."

Thus on successive family visits to the old house I found a comfortable corner and read "Three Dates With Death" and "Ironsides Sees Red" - immediately adding Victor Gunn to my list of favourite authors. Each of these two novels is made up of three short stories. I loved the atmosphere of dark mystery in these yarns, of which the story in question, "Death in December", is a typical example.

It was several years before I discovered the name of Edwy Searles Brooks as the real name behind both Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray - thus proving my uncle right – and several more before I discovered that in fact all the stories in "Ironsides Sees Red" are reprints of Grouser

A flesh-and-blood figure that left not a single footprint in the snow . . . a body and bloodstains that vanished in seconds and without trace . . . With mysteries like these to solve, even "Crouser" Beeke of the Yard felt he could enjoy his Christmas. Long complete story by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.



almost before these wild, unearthly screams had ied echoingly away, the Grouser was racing down o the hall . . . and the twisted, sprawling figure that lay there.

The Fantastic Affair at... CLOON CASTLE

Beeke stories first appearing in *Detective Weekly*. "Death in December" first appeared as "The Fantastic Affair at Cloon Castle" (*Detective Weekly*, 252, 18-Dec-1932). The Cromwell stories which are adapted from Grouser originals, unlike Brooks' other adaptations of previous stories, have all of the original wording, chapter heading and names of characters and places (apart, of course from the transition from Beeke and Cavendish to Cromwell and Lister). While adding nothing to the text, however, the original *Detective Weekly* versions are graced by some splendid Eric Parker illustrations.

"Death in December" (I describe the Ironsides Cromwell version out of pure nostalgia) begins when Johnny Lister persuades Cromwell to join his family for Christmas. For the festive occasion. General Lister has opened up Cloon Castle, a neglected building in the wilds of the Derbyshire Peak District. The Christmas

"In Heaven's name, man—stop!" cried Lord Halstead. But already Grouser Beeke had raised the lid of the Cavendish tomb, and at sight of what lay within, the two watchers started back in horror-stricken amazement.

celebration is to be a house warming party for the old place.

Johnny tries to get his dour partner into the spirit. "Christmas Eve, now, and sundry log fires inviting us.. .Ironsides, old sourpuss, we're going to have the time of our lives" says Johnny, but then adds, unwisely, "no routine - no murders - no crooks. Nothing but jollity and laughter."

Snow covers the ground as they approach the brightly-lit Cloon Castle in Johnny's Alvis. As they take the final turn of the drive their headlights catch a figure making its way across the drive with an unnatural, stumbling gait. They are startled to see that the figure is dressed in a queer old-fashioned cape and a high-crowned, wide-brimmed hat. Moreover, when they go back to investigate they notice that the figure has left no footprints in the snow. "A fine place to bring me to for Christmas," observes Ironsides. "Ghosts all over the place before we even get indoors!"

Ironsides is introduced to General Lister. Johnny asks his father whether the castle has a resident ghost and is surprised by the surliness of his father's reply. Later in the evening, after a sumptuous and cheerful meal (at which Ironsides divests himself for once of his blue serge suit and suffers a white tie and tails) , the gentlemen gather round the library fire and, as often happens in such circumstances, the hot toddy flows and the talk turns to the subject of ghosts. Someone mentions that the place has a Death Room and, to the alarm of the General, the party demand to see it. It is the room where two hundred years earlier Sir Travers Cloon, the lord of the manor, was foully murdered and was found lying on the floor in a great pool of blood with a broken iron stake through his heart.

The room, having been neglected and locked up for years, is suitably eerie and its atmosphere chills the party guests. But Ronnie Charton, an unpopular young man whose general manner suggested he was doing everyone a favour by his presence, declares he will sleep in the Death Room.

Ronnie's aim is to show that all this talk of ghosts is pure bunkum. He changes his mind, however, when he is woken by a scream and sees a body, dressed in clothes of a bygone era, lying in a pool of blood on the floor and sporting a broken and jagged-ended iron stake in its heart. Ronnie runs terrified from the room and collapses in the hall. A search of the room reveals that there is no sign of any body or of any blood on the floor. Had Ronnie seen the ghost of Sir Travers Cloon?

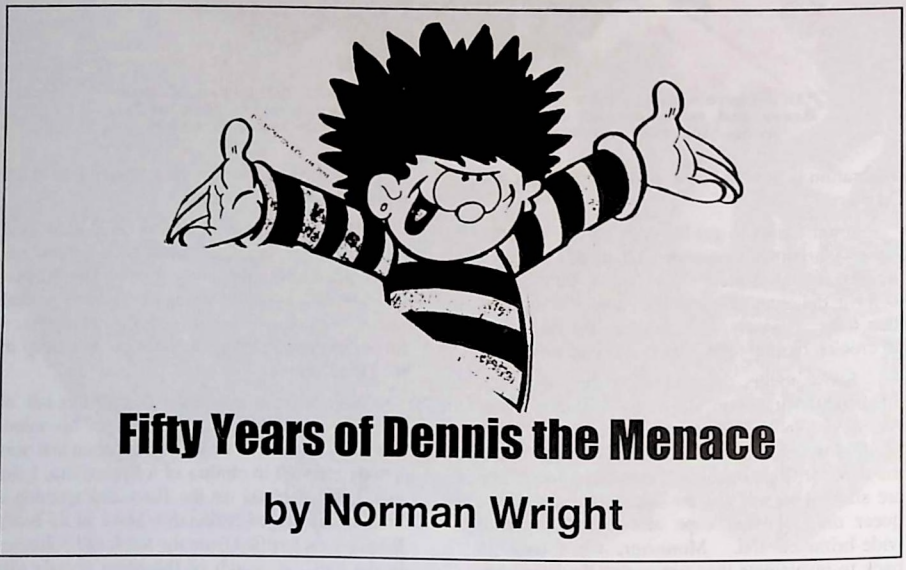
Most members of the house party are of the opinion that Ronnie has been the victim of his own imagination and have little sympathy. The celebrations continue unabated, the snow now being so deep that the castle is completely cut off. While the rest of the party are enjoying themselves with winter sports (in the manner of a typical St Frank's Christmas episode), Cromwell, who suspects trickery, investigates the Death Room. He finds that at the back of the room there is an entrance to the family crypt and, on entering and examining the crypt, discovers in the coffin of the last occupant of the castle an additional corpse - the body of a man, dressed in strange clothing, who had been dead for no more than a few hours. Further, the body is wrapped in

a bloodstained rubber sheet painted to look like the parquet floor of the Death Room.

The murderer is one of the house-party, of course, but which of them. Cromwell escapes an evil attempt upon his life before solving the mystery of the murder, not to mention the riddle of the figure that left no footprints. I will not spoil the story for those of you who have not yet discovered it.

On re-reading this tale after a quite a few years, I recognise that this is in its own way an updated version of ESB's typical St Frank's Christmas episode. We have the invitation to join a house party in a festively decorated castle, the mysterious figure appearing from nowhere and the suspicion that there may be ghosts about the place. There is the mystery to be solved against a background of heavy snow that has cut off the building from the outside world. And there are the tobogganing, ice-skating and other winter sports. As a murder mystery, however, the tale telling has taken on a darker and more chilling tone.

One thing I love about re-reading well-loved stories is that they can evoke memories of where or when you first enjoyed them. To me this story will always bring back memories of visits to that big old house in Oldbury Road, Smethwick, long since demolished but the scene of many a happy Christmas.



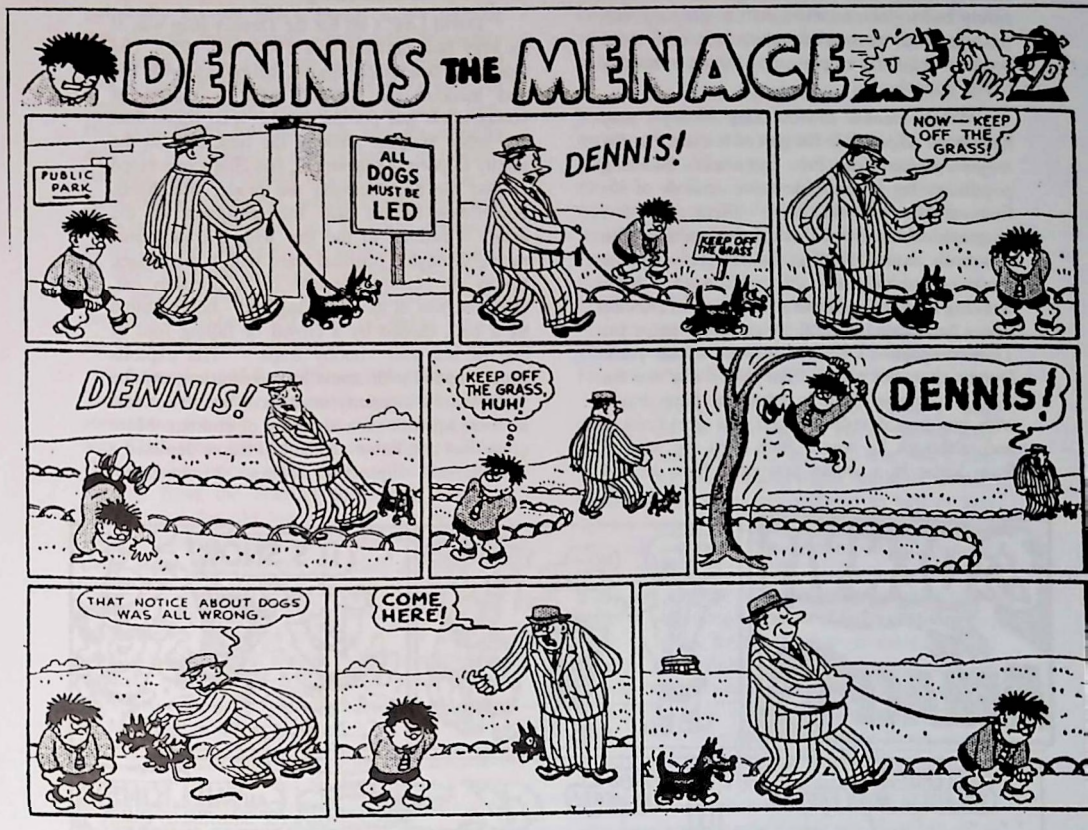
Fifty Years of Dennis the Menace

by Norman Wright

Dennis the Menace, one of the best known characters in the history of British comics, celebrated his fiftieth anniversary during 2001 Back in 1951, when he took his first tentative steps in the pages of *The Beano*, his potential probably went unnoticed, yet his mischievous, anarchistic antics bucked the comic trend that had prevailed since the Victorian age. Here was a fresh, vigorous, new character; an anti-hero totally different from anything that had been seen before in a British comic. His popularity grew rapidly and his success led to the creation of a host of other characters drawn along similar lines such as "Little Plum", "The Bash Street Kids", "Minnie The Minx" and "The Banana Bunch". But with Dennis the old adage, 'imitated but never equalled', was certainly true. Over the decades many attempts have been made to emulate his success with similar characters but none has ever quite succeeded in capturing the unique blend of anarchy and impish vulnerability that, at his peak, was the essence of Dennis the Menace.

By 1951 the *Beano* was in need of inspiration. The vigour of its early years had vanished and while its cover had undergone a change for the better with the creation of "Biffo the Bear", many of its internal 'funnies' strips were beginning to look tired and dated. Weekly publication resumed in 1949 and new blood was needed to bring the comic firmly into the post-war era.

According to George Moonie, the first editor of the *Beano*, the name 'Dennis the Menace' came from an old music hall song that included the line: "I'm Dennis the Menace from Venice, a gay gondolier...", but like most of the



First Dennis strip. *Beano 452. 17-3-51.*

comic's characters Dennis' creation was probably a team effort. The new feature was cautiously announced with a single line at the top of page five in *Beano* No. 451: "A great new fun pal appears in your *Beano* next week - look for 'Dennis the Menace'." The first nine-frame strip appeared on March 17, 1951, and replaced Allan Morley's "Sammy's Super Rubber". Like its predecessor, it was printed in black and white.

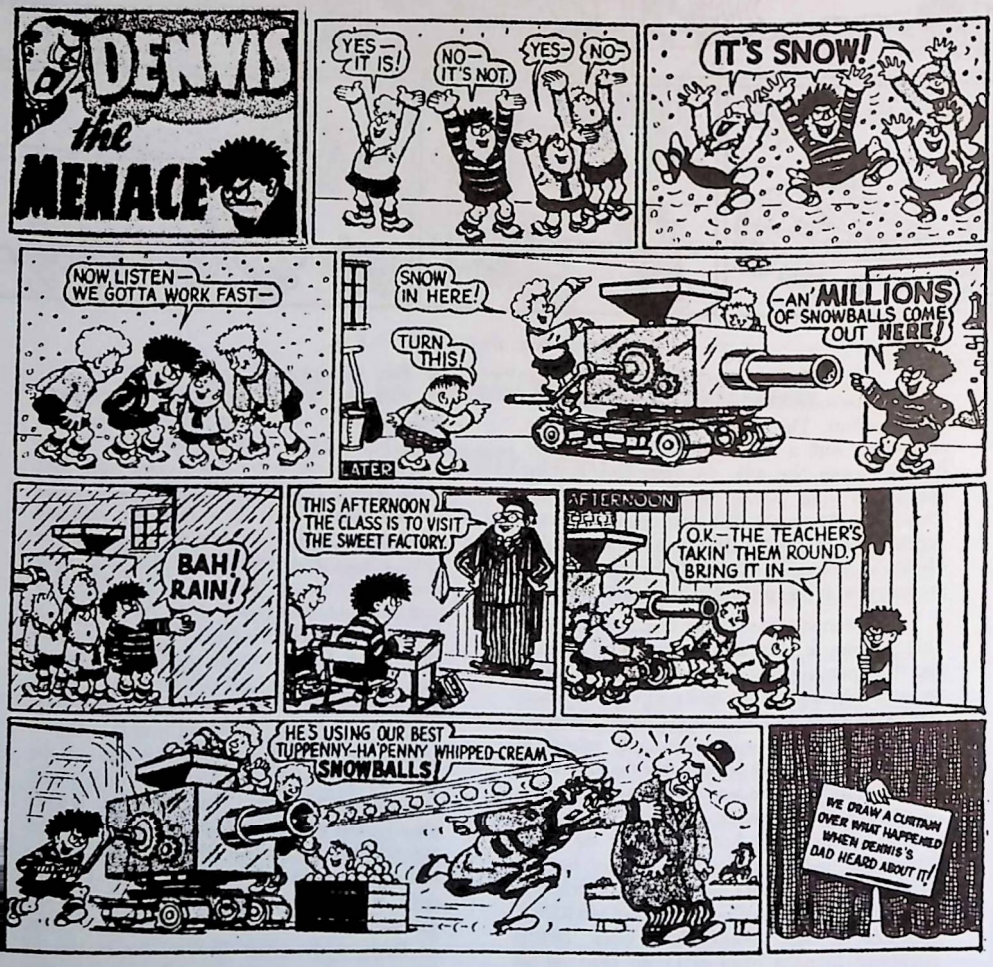
The first strip was rather mundane, showing little promise of what was to come. 'Dad', Dennis and their pet dog (not Gnasher) go for a walk in the park where there are two notices. One reads: 'All Dogs Must be Led' and the other: 'Keep off the Grass'. After Dennis persistently refuses to stay off the grass Dad decides that the first notice is wrong and takes the lead off the dog and puts it on Dennis. The humour is gentle, lacking the zany touch that later became one of the strips' trademarks. Also lacking was Dennis' familiar striped Jersey. A more inventive and outrageous plot, and one typical of many that were to follow, appeared a few weeks later when Dennis attempted to be a 'Wall of Death' rider on his bedroom wall.

"Dennis the Menace" was a complete departure from D.C. Thomson's usual fantasy-based, or slapstick comic strips. Here was a forceful character, very much his own man, with whom readers could easily identify in a way that had not been possible up to that time with any other comic character I can think of. It is true that some comics had inserted juveniles into their adventure strips in the misguided belief that readers would identify with them. An example of this type of character is 'Flamer' Spry in the Dan Dare strips. But it has always been my belief, based on memories of my own boyhood reading, that readers found these juveniles rather boring. When I read *Eagle* I identified with Dan Dare - never mind 'Flamer' Spry! But this was not the case with Dennis the Menace. Here was a young character with whom readers could readily identify. His attitude to authority, rules, manners and relatives rang a bell with every reader who had ever secretly wanted to saw up their school desk, build their own tank or tell an awful aunt just what she could do with her birthday gift book of Bible stories. And BeePee, the makers of itching powder, stink-bombs (The biggest stink

since Hitler'), black-faced soap and the like, surely had to take on extra staff to keep up with the schoolboy demand for these and other joke products regularly employed by Dennis in his day to day antics!

While Dennis' law-breaking life-style may have been responsible for part of his success, the major reason for the characters' enduring popularity lay in the superlative artwork of his first artist, David Law. There are few biographical details of David Law available. He was born around 1907 in Edinburgh, where he remained throughout his childhood. After working briefly for Odhams he moved to Dundee where he created several 'single bank' strips for Thomson papers. One of these was an embryonic Dennis character named "The Wee Fella" for the *People's Journal*. Law is reputed to have drawn with tiny pencil stubs wedged into steel holders and, although he was a staff artist, he worked from home in a studio converted from an old dairy attached to his cottage.

David Law' s art for the Dennis strip was at its very best between late 1951 and 1955. The sets were beau'ifully drawn, brimming with life and humour and showed what a master of composition and perspective he was. More than any other 'funnies' artist of the time he had the ability to portray movement. His characters raced around the page leaving the reader breathless. Sometimes Dennis was the instigator of the action - rushing to the fire with a trampoline, racing through a hospital ward with a dispensing trolley or crashing around on a dodgem car. Often he was at the receiving end - being butted by a bull, chased by a crowd or falling foul of one of his own booby traps - His exploits usually ended with some just retribution, and the scriptwriter's ingenuity must have been stretched to come up with such a variety of endings. More often than not, however, the last frame depicted a well-earned slippering being administered,



Fun with snow! Beano 499. 9-2-52

though this practice was discontinued in the politically correct 1980s David Law's humour was derived from scripts which were frequently developed around common themes. A much-used plot during the mid-1950s concerned the mischief created when Dennis read a book or saw a film. His enthusiasm for the story and the ensuing attempts to re-enact it always ended in trouble. Another well-developed story-line was that of Aunt Bessie's presents, which usually appeared innocuous enough until put to some ingenious misuse by her nephew. The most well-used plot of them all featured school reports. No matter how hard Dennis tried to rid himself of them, they refused to be parted from him and as a result always earned him a slippering.

Law also had fun with some regularly-used 'Dennis' characters. Grandad appeared often: sometimes the two would be allies and then it was Dad who received the spanking – from Grandad, but, more often than not, humour was derived from the conflict that raged between Dennis and the old man. Walter, the boy who lived across the road, featured infrequently in the early strips and was not so much a 'softy' but more a boy who kept clean and stayed out of trouble. Curly, Dennis' best friend, was an early invention in the strips and one of the band of small boys who, with Dennis as their commander, created mayhem throughout the town in all seasons of the year with their attempts to make snow, create volcanoes, etc. etc.

In the very early days of the strip the ritual slippering in the last frame had not been established and Dennis often came out on top. In addition, the familiar striped jersey was not always worn; it only became a permanent fixture when the half-page feature was given the important 'inside front page' position in the issue dated September 1, 1951. By March 7, 1953, such was Dennis' popularity that his adventures were extended to the whole of that page.

By 1953, Dennis had become so popular that in November of that year Law began drawing further sets of his adventures for *The Weekly News*, a paper on similar lines to Tit-Bits, published by D.C. Thomson. A persuasive advertisement in the *Beano* read:

> "Boy am I proud!" says Dennis the Menace. No wonder! Super new adventures of our bad boy now appear in *The Weekly News* too. Ask your Dad to buy this family newspaper!

On February 13, 1954, Dennis took over the full colour back cover of the Beano from "Pansy Potter" and remained there for the next four years.

During the mid-1950's the character's appearance began to change. Dennis' sturdy angular figure began to elongate and by 1956 he was noticeably thinner and taller than he had been in 1953. Law's style, once so fluid, began to stiffen. Facial features became less natural. Plots too were changing, beginning to rely more on violence for their humour than on the zany antics of the earlier years.

In the Autumn of 1955, the first "Dennis the Menace" book went on sale. Its content consisted mainly of early sets reprinted from the *Beano*. This annual and its two successors are arguably the best of the series; all three reprinted the cream of David Law's early 'Dennis' sets. Later volumes, appearing in the 'sixties and 'seventies contained, in addition to reprinted *Beano* material, many of the strips which had previously appeared in *The Weekly News*. For many years a "Dennis the Menace Book" was published on alternate years to a volume featuring another David Law creation, "Beryl the Peril".

In March, 1958, "Dennis the Menace" was replaced on the back page of the *Beano* by Ken Reid's "Jonah", and for the next four years The Menace occupied various pages inside the comic. Often the character was reduced to half or two thirds of a page and it was during this period that the strip was at its lowest ebb. The plots were often lifeless and laboured. From about 1959 there was another noticeable change: the quality of Law' s drawing began to deteriorate. His line, once so clean, became almost scribbled. Facial features lost definition and the composition of the frames became uninteresting. Dennis still moved at a frantic pace but, unlike the drawings of the mid -1950's, he now raced through bleak, empty frames, often in close-up to avoid the necessity for drawing much background detail. In his book "A Very Funny Business", Leo Baxendale tells us that Law was a perfectionist who worried about his work. After the success of Dennis the Menace in the *Beano* Law was asked to draw the strips for *The Weekly News* and also created Beryl the Peril for *Topper* (1953) and "Cap'n Hand" for *Beezer* (1958). The pressure of producing all these weekly strips must have been a great strain on him. Baxendale also revealed that Law did not enjoy the best of health. These two factors probably explain the fall in the quality of his work.

In mid-April, 1962, Dennis returned to the back cover of the *Beano* where the addition of colour to the strip tended to mute the imperfections of the drawing and the character took on a new lease of life. Animals had frequently featured in the strip and in 1968 a permanent animal character was introduced; a shaggy menace of a canine named 'Gnasher'. He became Dennis' pet on August 31, 1968. Gnasher was immediately popular and later, in 1971, the title of the strip was changed to "Dennis the Menace and Gnasher". Eventually Gnasher was given his own feature inside the comic.

Stand-in artists had occasionally drawn the strip during the late 'fifties and early 'sixties but, towards the end of the 'sixties, David Law' s health began to fail and the duplications of

Dennis by other artists became more frequent. The last "Dennis the Menace" strip drawn by David Law appeared in *Beano* No. 1462 on July 25, 1970. David Law died in April, 1971. aged just sixty-three.

After Law's death Dennis the Menace was drawn by Dave Sutherland who remained the character's permanent artist until his retirement in 1998. Since then the strip has been drawn by David Parkins. In 1974 the character took over the prestigious front cover from "Biffo the Bear", and in 1998 a new character, Dennis' new baby sister, Bea', was introduced. As with several other *Beano* characters, Dennis became the subject of a merchandising campaign that has resulted in everything from bicycle bells to bubble-bath bearing his image. The character even has his own fan club, with membership now standing at over one million.

Dennis the Menace of 2001 is a very different character from that created by David Law in 1951. The strips may be longer and in full colour but the subtlety and fine drawing of the mid-fifties has gone; replaced by a brashness and reliance on slapstick almost reminiscent of the type of strips that Dennis helped to put out of business back in the early 1950s. David Law did not lived to see the staggering success of his creation but it was his twenty years of drawing that established the character and ensured its survival. He left a rich legacy of superb artwork in *The Beano* and the "Dennis the Menace" books that those of us brought up on the character during the 1950s can still re-read and relish.

INVISIBLE DICK REVEALED

by

Ernest Holman

During the first half of the Nineteen-twenties, one of my weekly reading papers was the D.C. Thomson's *The Rover*. Prominent amongst the many stories that appeared were the adventures of a character known as Invisible Dick. He had discovered a curious jar that after sniffing, made him invisible for a period of time. These adventures continued for quite a time.

Some time in 1926, there was an announcement in *The Rover* that a book of the stories of Invisible Dick would shortly be published – I believe, at the price of 2s/6d. This conjured up in my mind how I could manage to get it. Usually, at Christmas time, my present consisted of the latest Just William book. As I had a birthday about five weeks after Christmas, I usually managed to ask for – and receive – some other publication. So I dropped the hint about the new *Rover* publication – which received only, as I thought, slight interest.

Some time during this year of 1926, I went down with one of the childish ailments – I think it was that not-very-nice affair known as mumps!

After a while, I was recovering slowly though still confined to bed. What a surprise I received one morning to see a packet on the chair beside my bed. On opening it, what did I find? Of course, it was the book entitled *Invisible Dick*. The striking coloured cover – printed on the front – illustrated boards, I believe the trade calls it – had the large title saying that *Invisible Dick* was by Frank Topham. There was a scene of a policeman chasing after a dog running alongside a riderless bike proceeding along the road.

Well, that book stayed with me for years and I must have read and re-read it many many times. Where it ended up eventually I do not recall – but for some time it was one of my favourites. From time to time as the years rolled by I often thought of the stories and once or twice tried to find out if certain second-hand dealers ever had a copy. No one had – one of them informing me that, not only had he never heard of him, but he had never even seen him!

Book searches failed to produce any result either, and the idea of ever seeing a copy of the book again receded. Until a year ago – and I

decided to take the plunge and write directly to D.C. Thomson at Dundee. As they were then republishing some of their earlier items – the Broons, Oor Wullie, etc. – I asked if they were likely to be considering reissuing *Invisible Dick*.

Only a few days later I received a very large envelope from them. It contained a letter from the Juvenile Publications Editor, James Richards, informing me that no such publication was being issued again. However, he sent me a mass of photocopies including the entire first chapter of *Invisible Sick*, plus a complete copy of a *Rover* of 1925, with an Invisible Dick story inside. He gave me an address in London where I MIGHT obtain a copy. Also enclosed was a page from a later, 1960 comic in which Invisible Dick appeared for a while in a strip cartoon.

Well, nothing came of my continued search and I was about to finally give up, but the Editor had urged me to 'keep trying'. I decided to put an advertisement in the small 'Wanted' section of the monthly *Book and Magazine Collector*, but with only faint hope. Nothing happened for quite a time – until suddenly a firm in Coventry informed me that they had a good copy of the book available. Pricey, of course – but after all, it was a rare publication.

The book finally arrived, and what a load of childhood memories of the stories came flooding back! So much so that, one evening deep into the

book, my wife's voice enquired as to whether I knew what the time was? Immediately, I recollected a similar incident. When I was deep in Invisible Dick during my mumps recovery period and my mother brought up my lunch. I was very deep in the book when she exhorted me to 'not let your dinner get cold'.

The stories themselves were short, without any waste of time or padding and, in the style of many stories then, took a lot for granted. They were, however, very readable. *Invisible Dick* now rests amongst so many other books on the shelves, and before long I know it will be taken down and read yet again. There was an inscription on the inside page of the book, in very boyish writing, stating that it belonged to the writer and was dated May 1926.

The last story of all interested me greatly, for on a visit with his friend to what the author called 'careless Southend', Dick dropped his sniffing jar off the end of Southend Pier and it was lost. That finished the book. However, the copy of *the Rover* of 1925 that I had received showed that both Dick and his closest pal were now making use of the invaluable jar. So at some time or other it must have been recovered from below the Pier extension – a very notable case of using 'author's licence'. When I first read the book as a child, I was living in a London suburb and did not know much about Southend-on-Sea. Now that I have lived for over fifty years within three miles of the famous Pier, I have two thoughts in mind about what an author's licence' could bring forth. To recover (intact, at that) something dropped from the end of the Pier was very highly imaginative. Also, railways in those days had their oddities even then. Dick and his friend used the London, Tilbury and Southend line of the old L.M.S. Imagine how my eyebrows rose when I read in the final story of the book that, not only did the train go to Southend after calling at *Tilbury*, but it went *through* that station of Tilbury.

Just how long Dick continued in *The Rover* I am not sure – for some time, I believe. However, towards the end of 1926 I was beginning to discover the *Magnet* and *Gem* and, eventually, went over to the A.P. papers. *The Rover* would have been the last one to be given up – actually, it was the very last of the many story papers to stop as such, in the early days of Decimal Coinage at, I think, the new price of 3½p.

Well, that's it – after three-quarters of a century I have finally caught up with that great *Rover* character. If, by any remote chance, a certain humorous dealer should be reading this, then I can assure him that I HAVE seen Invisible Dick!

Greetings from a new subscriber. WANTED: Early Magnets, NOT REPRINTED by Howard Baker. 206, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 217, 219, 224, 225, 229, 615, 668, 673, 674, 675. Originals or copies. FRANCES BLAKE, 33 Grenville Court, Chorleywood, Herts, WD3 5PZ. Tel: 01923 283795.

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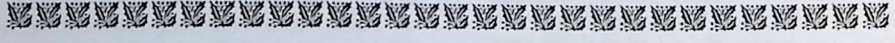


Greetings to all hobby friends. Still seeking certain Percy F. Westerman stories plus Champion Annual 1929. Best wishes for Xmas and New Year. DES AND AUDREY O'LEARY, Loughborough. Tel. 01509 215628)

To Dr. Locke, Mr. Quelch, Mr. Prout, "Mossoo" and all the Greyfriars staff, not forgetting Gosling. Warmest Seasonal Greetings from the parents of Greyfriars boys (PATRICK MORLEY, North Somerset, Greyfriars Parents Association).

Lancashire Stars of Stage, Screen and Radio

by

Jeffrey Richards

(Jeffrey Richards is Professor of Cultural History at Lancaster University)

There has been a continuous tradition of representations of Lancashire and Lancashire folk, particularly in comic form, throughout the era of the mass entertainment media. It was developed in the music halls and has been transferred, largely intact, to films, wireless, records and television. Like so much in our history, this Lancashire identity grew out of the shared experience and the effects of the Industrial Revolution. So in order to understand the nature and appeal of the Lancashire stars, it is important to understand their historical and geographical context.

Regional Identity: Images of the North

Before the nineteenth century, Lancashire as a whole was a sparsely populated, remote, forested and backward region, the poorest in Britain. The Industrial Revolution changed all that. The North, and especially Lancashire, decisively came into its own in the nineteenth century. It became 'the workshop of the world', the source of Britain's global pre-eminence. Industrial England was to a great extent a Northern England. A strong Northern culture developed, both in Lancashire and Yorkshire, with a flourishing local press, vigorous party political organizations, a rich dialect literature, a distinct musical tradition centred on brass bands and choirs, and a growing interest in regional history and archaeology.

Given the inevitable existence of sub-groups and sub-cultures - in Lancashire immigration produced a substantial Irish Catholic minority which was never entirely integrated - and given the fact that there was always strong loyalty to individual towns, the county was nevertheless remarkably cohesive. Its heart was Cotton Lancashire, a society characterized by my colleague John Walton as a stable, tightly knit, conservative society, which, despite a significant minority of badly-off people and the problems of pollution, disease and overcrowding, generated a uniquely prosperous high income working-class culture. It was bound together by shared employment experience, traditions of good neighbourliness and mutual assistance. Its communality was enhanced by participation in the commercialised leisure industries that emerged in Victorian Britain and centred on the music hall, seaside holidays, football and the pub. All of these contributed to the creation of a cultural identity and enduring images of Lancashire and Lancashireness.

Culturally and geographically this was an urban, industrial, working-class world, which came into existence in the early nineteenth century and remained in place until the 1960s. Its life as Richard Hoggart (brought up in Hunslet) says, was "dense and concrete", a life whose main stress was on the intimate, the sensory, the detailed, the personal where conversations centre on people, relationships, sex, work and sport, and not on theories or ideas. It was a world of hierarchies, traditions, rituals and routines, bound together by shared beliefs in patriotism, luck, fate and clear definitions of manliness and womanliness. All of this was to provide the raw material for Lancashire comedians.

But within this working-class world, there was a crucial distinction between what the Victorians called 'the rough' and 'the respectable' working classes. 'Respectability' involved a belief in education, self-advancement, domesticity, thrift, restraint and good manners, and "roughness" living for the moment, rejecting authority, education and thrift, drinking to excess, fighting, swearing and fornicating without restraint. Some people embraced "respectability" wholly, others "roughness". For some these concepts represented twin facets of their experience or different phases in their lives.

Historians have long seen class-consciousness as crucial in understanding the history of modern industrial society. But recently greater attention has been paid to other ideas transcending class differences. One is the idea of gender roles, the nature and significance of being a man or a woman. Another is the concept of a shared regional identity.

People define themselves in different ways at different times. They define themselves as male or female, as being from a particular family or faith, from an individual town or specific region, from a defined race or class or country. Being proud of being Lancastrian, therefore, did not preclude being proud of being British. What is interesting to observe is how the Lancashire stars embody, comment on and interpret these multiple identities.

Whether the North was defined in terms of class or people or gender, there was something that was recognized as a Northern personality. Sir Henry Miers in a 1929 essay on "some characteristics of Manchester Men" singled out strenuousness and determination, directness and independence of judgement, intense civic pride and a belief in "that fundamental and cheering principle: namely that every man is as good as his neighbour". "The characteristics of which I am speaking," he concluded, "are those that strike one as belonging to the whole population, whether well educated or not."

The industrial landscape of Lancashire and the plain-speaking, independent-spirited, good-hearted Northerner were continuously promoted by popular culture from the earliest days of the commercialized leisure industries. It was in comedy in particular that these images or myths of the Lancastrian were preserved, burnished and transmitted to audiences who affectionately recognized and identified with their essential truths. For as George Orwell noted: "Myths which are believed in tend to become true because they set up a type or persona which the average person will do his best to resemble."

Music Hall and Cinema

The music hall was the dominant popular cultural form of the second half of the nineteenth century. The musical hall programme mainly consisted of songs. Songs and choruses provided a shared experience, a chance for the audience to express solidarity, to recognize and affirm their values, attitudes and aspirations. So songwriters sought to dramatize general attitudes and songs strongly reflected the aspects and characteristics of working-class life noted by Richard Hoggart: love (treated as romantic), marriage (treated as a trap and a disaster), work (and how to avoid it), city life, food and drink, clothes and holidays. The values portrayed were patriotism, fatalism, comradeship. A mild anti-authoritarianism, defined gender roles and the idea of an immutable social order.

Despite the trends towards a national culture in the music halls, some stars remained local stars and never ventured beyond the boundaries of their region, mainly because dialect humour and songs, whether in Scouse, Geordie or broad Lancashire, could only be understood locally and did not travel. This underlined and reinforced local patriotism.

There were regional differences in humour. Cotton Lancashire's humour tended to be slow-building, anecdotal, character-based humour; London humour was much faster, patter, joke and dialogue-based. This is encapsulated in the difference, for instance, between Lancashire-based Frank Randle and London-based Max Miller. In this regard Liverpool is much closer to London and not to be identified with industrial Lancashire proper. For Liverpool is not a "Lancashire" city at all. It is a Celtic city that happens to be situated on the Lancashire coast; the Irish and Welsh influences much stronger than the English. It is also a seaport and like all seaports, London and Newcastle for instance, it generated a different kind of humour from the hinterland. Liverpool-born comedians like Tommy Handley, Arthur Askey and Ken Dodd have been much more verbal, surreal and faster than the slower more realistic character comedians of Cotton Lancashire.

It was the musical hall which fed the new media of the twentieth century - films, wireless and records. It provided the stars, the sketches, the songs and prolonged the life of the music hall tradition on celluloid. Lancashire boasted the greatest number of cinema seats per head of the population in England: one cinema seat for every nine people.

George Formby and Gracie Fields

In their local cinemas, Lancashire filmgoers would often see the stars they had previously watched on the music halls. The greatest Lancashire stars were undoubtedly George Formby and Gracie Fields, who succeeded in appealing both to Lancashire in particular and the working classes in general. The social survey organization Mass Observation, investigating the preferences of working-class holidaymakers in Blackpool in 1937-8, concluded unambiguously "the biggest heroes of the working class are their 'own' Gracie Fields and George Formby."

The sampling of opinion at Blackpool is significant, for Blackpool was the Mecca of the North. All of Lancashire went there regularly for its annual holiday, creating a massive audience for entertainment. The Lancashire stars recognized this. Gracie Fields (*Sing As We Go*) and Frank Randle (*Holidays With Pay*) made films there. George Formby sang about *My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock*. Formby, Randle, Harry Korris, Jimmy Clitheroe, Al Read and the rest regularly appeared there, often for summer seasons.

But Fields and Formby were more than simply Lancashire stars. They became national stars: Fields was the top British female star at the cinema box office from 1936 to 1940 and Formby was the top male star from 1937 to 1943. Both were rooted in the music hall tradition. Both remained inextinguishably Lancashire. Both became symbols of the people.

There was never any doubt but that George and Gracie were Lancashire and proud of it. Their accents remained as thick and strong as hot pot, George proclaimed his origin in a string of songs (*The Emperor of Lancashire, A Lancashire Romeo, The Lancashire Toreador, A Lad fra Lancasheer.*) Gracie herself wrote and performed *Lancashire Blues*, an exile's lament for a region represented in the song by clogs and hot pot. She also celebrated life and work in the cotton mills in *The Clatter of the Clogs* and *Clogs and Shawl*, sang songs built around dialect expressions like "Eee By Gum" and "Nowt about Owt" and recalled the county's passion for football, complete with terrace banter, in *Pass, Shoot, Goal.* Of Gracie, J.B. Priestley wrote: "Listen to her for a quarter of an hour and you will learn more about Lancashire women and Lancashire than you would from a dozen books on these subjects. All the qualities are there: shrewdness, homely simplicity, irony, fierce independence, an impish delight in mocking whatever is thought to be affected or pretentious."

But there is something more revealing about them too. When Formby died in 1961, *The Manchester Guardian* compared his popularity to Fields, writing: "The two Lancashire comedians in fact had much in common: the characters they created might have been man and wife, the one springing from Wigan, the other from Rochdale, with such pride in their roots that they never let us forget them." This creates an intriguing conjunction: the dominant, no-nonsense Gracie and George, whom one critic described perfectly as "a platoon simpleton, a mother's boy, the beloved henpeck, the father who cannot hang a picture. Underlying his everyday follies there is the sublime wisdom of the ordinary fool who loves and trusts the world." This conjunction accurately reflected the North-West as matriarchy. The sociologist Geoffrey Gorer found in his researches for *Exploring English Character* (1955) that this was a particular characteristic of the region. "Put briefly, in the North-Western region, women have greater authority in their family and greater independence than in any other part of England. In the North-East and the North, paternal authority is highest" and "there are the greatest number of all-male associations." One reason for matriarchy is almost certainly the high level of female employment in the North-West by contrast with the North-East.

Culturally the strong-minded, independent-spirited Lancashire lass is also celebrated in the forthright, honest mill-girl heroine of Stanley Houghton's 1912 play *Hindle Wakes* (filmed in 1927, 1931 and 1952) and the shrewd, characterful bootmaker's daughter in Harold Brighouse's 1916 play *Hobson's Choice* (filmed in 1920, 1931 and 1954). Their lineal successors are the matriarchs of *Coronation Street:* Ena Sharples, Elsie Tanner, Annie Walker, Hilda Ogden and Bet Lynch: and character comedians like Morecambe-born Thora Hird and Hylda Baker from Farnworth.

If Lancashire recognized in George and Gracie qualities specific to the region, the nation also identified characteristics to admire. For Gracie and George shared certain qualities that were at a premium during the Depression and subsequently the war - optimism, cheerfulness and indomitability. These were encapsulated in George's catchphrase "Turned out nice again, hasn't it" and in Gracie's repertoire of spirit-lifting songs (*Sing As We Go, Looking on the Bright side, Look Up and Laugh*).

Formby was second-generation music hall, and his original stage act was copied completely from his father, George Formby Sr., whom he strongly resembled vocally. Formby Sr., billed as "The Wigan Nightingale", had been born illegitimate in great poverty in Ashton-Under-Lyne in 1875. He learned his trade as a singing beggar and suffered all his life from a permanent cough and a weak chest which he wove into his act with the catchphrase "Coughing better tonight". But he developed TB which killed him at the age of 44 in 1921. Formby had created the character of John Willie, the gormless Lancashire lad in baggy trousers, tight jacket and bowler hat, slow-talking, henpecked, accident-prone, fond of his beer but able to muddle through in the end. When he died George Jr. took over and made it the basis of his screen character.

It was partly by becoming a universal symbol that Formby achieved his success. He was Northern and working-class, but more important, he was the little man who won through against all the odds, as Chaplin had been on the silent screen and as Norman Wisdom was to be in the 1950s. He was, as Colin McInnes observed, "'Everyman', the urban 'little man' defeated - but refusing to admit it". Mass-Observation recorded that the fantasy sequence in his 1940 film *Let George Do It* in which Formby landed at Nuremberg and knocked out Hitler was one of the biggest cultural morale boosters of the early war years. It was the visual encapsulation of the People's War with the English Everyman flooring the Nazi 'Superman'.

There was also an innocence about George that was essentially childlike, which explains why he was as popular with children as with adults. The cry "Ooh, Mother" which he emitted whenever in danger and the gleeful "Aha, never touched me" when he escaped his pursuers were the reactions of a child. He even put his tongue out at pursuers on occasions.

It was this innocence and the sunny outloook that neutralized the potential offensiveness of some of his songs. His songs - he recorded 189 in all - were a vital part of his appeal. Many of them dealt with sex but in a way which stressed shyness, voyeurism, caricature

and saucy innuendo: *Me Auntie Maggie's remedy, My grand-dad's flannelette nightshirt, My little stick of Blackpool rock, When I'm cleaning windows, In my little snapshot album.* In their approach and their themes - honeymooners, nudists, fat ladies, underwear - they recall the comic seaside postcards of Donald McGill and they served the same function - the harmless defusion of a major area of tension in a deeply repressed and conventional society. As Orwell wrote of McGill's postcards, so he might have said of Formby's films: "These things are a sort of diary upon which the English have unconsciously recorded themselves. Their old-fashioned outlook, their graded snobberies, their mixture of bawdiness and hypocrisy, their extreme gentleness, their deeply moral attitude to life, are all mirrored here."

Gracie Fields was an even more significant national figure than George Formby. She was more than just a film and stage star. She was a phenomenon. She was a music hall star who by being herself became a national symbol. To the British as a whole in the 1930s she was simply "Our Gracie". As Graham Greene, then a film critic, wrote: "All Miss Fields' films seem designed to show sympathy for the working class and an ability to appeal to the best circles: unemployment can always be wiped out with a sentimental song, industrial unrest is calmed by a Victorian ballad and dividends are made safe for democracy."

This is true so far as it goes. But it must also be recognized that it was the talent and personality of Gracie that made this message palatable. Her personality remained true to her Lancashire roots and the public repaid her with a devotion that hardly faltered until the war. Significantly it was intellectuals who criticized her films for not being realistic enough and not advocating radical solutions. But it is evident that audiences did not want to see people sinking into depression, apathy and torpor. The value of Gracie was that she was one of them but could rise above it. The titles of her films constitute a set of injunctions to avoid despair or apathy, anger or revolution: *Looking on the Bright Side, Sing As We Go, Look Up and Laugh, Keep Smiling, The Show Goes On.* It was a message of courage and cheerfulness, delivered to the people not by a politician but by one of their own, one who knew what they were enduring and whose advice could be trusted. If they had felt that she was betraying them they would have shunned her. That they took her to their hearts suggests that she really did represent something that the nation wanted and that, as demonstrated by the election in 1931 and re-election in 1935 of a National Coalition government and the genuinely joyous Silver Jubilee celebrations for King George V, was national consensus. So during the 1930s Gracie was able to embody simultaneously Rochdale, Lancashire, Britain, the Empire, the working class, women and the people at large.

Mancunian Films

Fields and Formby represent the 'acceptable face' of popular culture, the upbeat, optimistic, essentially decent face. But there is another face. As George Orwell writes in his account of the British people *The Lion and the Unicorn:*

> In all societies, the common people must live to some extent against the existing order. The genuinely popular culture of England is something that goes on beneath the surface, unofficially and more or less frowned on by the authorities. One thing one notices if one looks directly at the common people, especially in the big towns, is that they are not puritanical. They are inveterate gamblers, drink as much beer as their wages will permit, are devoted to bawdy jokes, and use probably the foulest language in the world.

This is at once too sweeping and too one-dimensional. It takes no account of the complex interplay within the working-classes between 'rough' and 'respectable'. But there are elements of truth here and this aspect of popular culture was catered to by a submerged and subversive culture, rooted in the music hall and preserved on celluloid by Mancunian Films.

The only film company and studio operating outsider the south-east of England, Mancunian Films was based in Manchester. It was the brainchild of John E. Blakeley (1889-1958), who was from a family of cinema-owners and film renters in the North-West. Blakeley saw a market for Northern humour in film and put together a consortium of film and theatre owners from the region to form Mancunian Films. Blakeley was to produce twenty-five films for the company over the next twenty years. Initially, he rented soundstages at minor London studios, like Riverside at Hammersmith, and took his company down to film his comedies. But in 1947 he fulfilled his long-held dream of creating his own Manchester film studio in a converted Methodist chapel in Dickenson Road, Rusholme.

Historically, the great value of Mancunian Films is that they are almost totally uncinematic. Although John E. was billed as director, the films were not so much directed as staged. The acts did their 'turns' in front of the camera. The films were in reality photographed variety shows, a series of sketches by music hall stars who knew their trade, with musical interludes which employed as guest stars popular singers of romantic ballads - Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth, Cavan O'Connor and Josef Locke - reflecting that deep strain of sentimentality running through working class culture alongside the delight in subversive knockabout.

A Mancunian script, such as it was, often contained blank pages with the word 'bus' at the top, which was a sign that the comics should insert their own comic 'business'. Since the

performers worked regularly together, they developed a creative rapport, and adlibbing and improvisation came naturally. The films were cheaply made but audiences loved them because they reflected their own attitudes, lifestyles and mores. The films would usually centre on an activity common to working-class culture, (football match, the factory, the pools, the chip shop, holidays) and culminate in a factory concert, celebrating simultaneously communality and the spirit of the music hall.

Frank Randle and Norman Evans

Mancunian's leading star was Frank Randle, who was also an investor in the company. Randle never became a national success as a film star. But he was a great regional success in the North. He was not taken up and transformed into a national star as both Gracie Fields and George Formby had been, almost certainly because he was too disreputable and subversive. Gracie, the big sister figure, and George, the overgrown urchin, were essentially safe; indeed Gracie was the embodiment of "the respectable' working class. Randle, toothless, lecherous, combative and insubordinate, embodied the 'rough' working class ethic. One of his regular characters was a scrofulous old man, frothing with ale and senile lust.

Randle's films consist of a series of sketches highlighting the various aspects of his anarchic persona. He is totally disrespectful, showing contempt for authority, giving two-fingered salutes to officers and being generally bloody-minded, scrimshanking and obstructive. In his earliest films, *Somewhere in England* (1940), *Somewhere in Camp* (1942) and *Somewhere on Leave* (1942), which put him in a service context, he can be found disrupting pay parades, medical parades and drills, and permanently baiting and defying the sergeant major. He returned to this service setting for his final film *It's a Grand Life* (1953).

He is also violent, lecherous and drunken, as indicated by his catchphrases which included "I'll fight anyone", "I'll spiflicate the lot of you", "Bah, I've supped some ale toneet" and "I bet tha's a hot un." So there are regular sketches showing him wrecking rooms such as the sergeants' mess, trying to get upstairs while drunk and taking a bath fully clothed in the same state, and amorously pursuing pretty girls.

The comedy is physical, destructive, sometimes surreal, often funny and expertly choreographed. Much of the character and the activity reflected the real Randle, who was given to punishing drinking bouts, outbursts of violence, wrecking dressing rooms and once setting fire to a hotel whose service had displeased him. He died bankrupt in 1957 at the age of 55 from tuberculosis and cirrhosis of the liver.

In contrast to the individualism of Fields and Formby, which reflects the self-help ethic of the 'respectable' working class, Randle was always part of a gang, a frequent characteristic of the 'rough' working class.

Exactly the same format as the Randle films is adapted in films starring Norman Evans (1901-62), the Rochdale-born comedian, who was an altogether gentler and more genial figure than Randle. He was best known for his impersonation of an ample-bosomed Lancashire housewife in the sketch 'Over the Garden Wall'. Toothless, aproned, confidential, she leans on the wall retelling local gossip and gleefully discussing family scandals and people's ailments. This sketch was expanded to a full-length film *Over the Garden Wall* (1950), a prototype sitcom. It is the comic evocation of the Lancashire matriarch and it was a characterization taken over and faithfully reproduced by Les Dawson and Roy Barraclough in their double act as Cissie and Ada.

Al Read and the Radio Stars

Norman Evans' comic monologues and proto-sitcom routines perfectly epitomise a mainstream tradition in Northern humour, the slowly developed character piece, building up detail and drawing on familiar situations, dialogue and reactions. It is the comedic manifestation of Richard Hoggart's definition of working-class culture, noted earlier, as rooted in the intimate, the sensory, the detailed and the personal. The important features are the slow build-up, the ladling-on of detail and the shared sense of recognition of familiar situations between performer and audience.

Radio was the perfect medium for this kind of monologue and a master of the form was Al Read (1909-1987), who made his name on radio in the 1950s and 1960s. Read had complete mastery of the vocal patterns, preoccupations and situations of the northern audience. Listening to recordings of his programmes, you continuously hear the laughter of recognition from the audience. The nagging wife "from the kitchen", the embarrassingly forthright and questioning child ("Dad, dad, what's that man doing, dad"), the know-all from next door ("You'll be lucky, I say, you'll be lucky"), a gormless phone-user ("Just a minute - just, just, just a minute"), were regular features, as were send-ups of institutions: the police force, the post office, hospitals, garages.

Al Read was born in Salford, the second of six children, and spent the first six years of his life in "a two up, two down, in Kipling St., Salford." In his autobiography he recalled a classical working-class background:

> Poverty - though we never called it that - was a way of life, something to be coped with. Everybody was in the same boat. It

> was a close-knit place full of sights and sounds which have disappeared today: travelling knife-grinders; the knockers-up...; the coalmen...; the corner shop, sawdust on the floor... Outside our house lay an exciting world, the life of the street... Even as a lad my built-in scanner was busily working away, absorbing the warm, cluttered life around me - housewives gossiping over the garden fence, their husbands yarning away on the street corner as they waited for the pub to open - and storing it away for future use.

Al Read's family had been in the meat-processing business but went bankrupt during World War One, hence the "two up, two down" in Salford, Later the family fortunes recovered, the business was re-launched and Al became a salesman for it, incorporating anecdotes, jokes and accents into his sales patter. Eventually he took over the family business but continued to tell stories and what he called "pictures from life" in after-dinner speeches. A BBC producer spotted him doing one of these speeches and signed him up for radio. Working with the experienced scriptwriter Ronnie Taylor, he produced the scripts for his radio-shows, a succession of comic monologues in which he did all the voices, even the dog. His signature tune *Such is Life* ("Such is life - life is what you make it, Show 'em you can take it on the chin") was in the tradition of Fields and Formby optimism. The stories were drawn from life:

> The comedy had grown up with me and reflected my own personal experience...! never tried to make people laugh, and there were never any 'gags' as such in my routines... All the story lines were culled from the small embarrassments and frustrations of everyday life.

Radio made him an instant star, his catchphrases "Right, monkey" and "You'll be lucky" sweeping the nation. From radio, he moved onto the variety stage, topping the bill in Blackpool and at the London Palladium. His career faded, however, when television eclipsed radio. He tried television but never liked it and his whole style and format were quintessential radio.

Conclusion

The North's nineteenth century pre-eminence was undermined by massive structural changes in industry and the economy that Britain underwent in the years after World War One. The depression of the 1920s and 1930s initiated a long process of decline in the staple heavy industries of the North that has continued until the present. Industrial, commercial and financial hegemony in Britain passed irrevocably to the South-East. The great Victorian towns and cities of the North had their hearts ripped out in the redevelopment schemes of the 1960s and the tightly-knit communities were broken up and scattered. Cultural and technological change, centred on the growth of television, motor cars and private housing, promoted a more privatised society in place of the bustling communality of the nineteenth century. All of this had a profound impact on projections of Lancashire and Lancashireness.

The mass media in general, television and the commercialised youth culture in particular, have had a universalising and up to a point Americanising effect in all areas, including humour. Although there remains a tradition of raucous, scatalogical Northern humour in the Randle vein, it has retreated to the clubs because it is too 'blue' and politically incorrect (in its sexism and racism) for television. It is unrepentantly practised by the likes of Bernard Manning and Roy 'Chubby' Brown.

There remains a rich tradition of character-based comedy on television, particularly in the work of David Croft and his collaborators (*Dad's Army, Hi-de-Hi, Are You being Served? 'Allo, 'Allo, You Rang, M'Lord, Oh Dr Beeching*) , but few of these are set in the North. The long-running *Last of the Summer Wine* by Roy Clarke, set and filmed in Holmfirth, is a notable exception. But much of the richest and most popular comedy is rooted in the idioms and life patterns of the South, either cockney (*Only Fools and Horses, Birds of a Feather*) or suburban (*Keeping Up Appearances*). A Southerner, David Jason, is currently Britain's best-loved comic character actor.

In terms of performers, many post-war comedians have chosen not to emphasize their Northerness, but to draw instead on transatlantic models. Ted Ray (1906-1977) was born in Wigan but adopted a mid-Atlantic style of perfectly timed gag-cracking in the manner of George Burns, Fred Allen, Bob Hope and Jack Benny, whom he emulated by using a violin as prop and adjunct to his act. Eric Morecambe (1926-1984), born in Morecambe, and Ernie Wise (born in Leeds in 1926), started out in variety but went on to become Britain's best loved double-act on television in the 1960s and 1970s. Their act was rooted in the world of show-business in all its aspects and showed little sign of Northerness. Rather the inspiration for a double act with an overgrown, hyperactive, surreal, child (Eric) and a long- suffering, rather pompous parent-substitute (Ernie) is again America, where Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello and Martin and Lewis had perfected the model.

There have been two notable exceptions to the decline in Northern comedy. One is Liverpool, which, as has already been argued, has always had a distinctive culture and a humour different from that of Cotton Lancashire. It has survived and flourished in the long-running sitcoms of Carla Lane, *The Liver Birds, Bread*

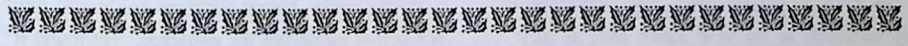
and *Luv* and in a succession of stand-up comics who exploit the same vein of verbal surrealism as Ken Dodd. The other notable standard-bearer of Northern humour was the late, great Les Dawson, probably the last major representative of the cultural milieu that gave us Norman Evans, George Formby and Frank Randle. Les Dawson, son of a bricklayer, was born in 1935 in Collyhurst, Manchester, and his humour remained rooted in that working-class world that inspired Al Read and in the tradition of using deadpan humour to overcome misery and deprivation. But along with the elaborate anecdotes of Northern misery goes an exuberant linguistic grandiloquence, inspired by his idol W.C. Fields, which often prompts him to claim that his latest story is one he learned "from the gin-sodden lips of a pock-marked Lascar in the arms of a frump in a Huddersfield bordello." He also wrote several comic novels, allowing his rich imagination and linguistic inventiveness to take flight on the printed page.

But for the most part today Cotton Lancashire serves as the butt for parodic humour, as in the ITV series *Brass*, starring Timothy West as ruthless northern mill-owner Bradley Hardacre, a series which hilariously and systematically sent up all the conventions of the North Country "trouble at t'mill" drama. But the cultural identity forged in the nineteenth century has two lasting legacies, in the enduring popularity of the paintings of L.S. Lowry and the Granada soap opera *Coronation Street*, which has run continuously since 1960 and which might itself have stepped from the canvases of Lowry. Lowry was a melancholy man who declared: "I'm attracted to sadness. Everywhere you see suffering and it gets worse. I've a one-track mind. I only deal with poverty, always with gloom. You'll never see a joyous picture of mine. I never do a jolly picture. The thing about painting is that there should be no sentiment." But it was not the recurrent images of cripples, accidents, and funerals that people responded to in Lowry's work. It was the fairgrounds and football matches, the railway stations and factory gates, the VE Day celebrations and Whit Walks processions, the texture of a vanishing world, a nineteenth century industrial landscape teeming with life. Faced with the destruction of these surroundings, their inhabitants retrospectively imbued Lowry's canvases with their own sentiment and warmth, a longing not for the dirt and noise and poverty of the past, but for the communality, comradeship and ordinary decencies that they associated with a world they were rapidly losing. It is for this reason that Lowry inspired a sentimental pop song *Matchstick Men and Matchstick Cats and Dogs* and was offered a knighthood by that shrewd populist, prime minister Harold Wilson. It also explains the continued affection for *Coronation Street*, which combines the richly comic music hall tradition with the genre of Northern working-class realism embodied in the work of Harold Brighouse, Stanley Houghton and Walter Greenwood in a celebration of a way of life that for many Northerners, imprisoned in tower blocks or marooned on bleak estates, has ceased to exist. We are all becoming suburban now, and Lancashire comedy is an endangered species.

The legacy of the Al Read tradition of closely observed monologues which artistically recreate speech patterns, preoccupations and world-views of the North have a present day television legacy in the work of Northern writers: Leeds-born Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* (particularly those with Thora Hird and Patricia Routledge), in Morecambe-born Victoria Wood's *Dinner Ladies* (set in Manchester) and in Manchester-born Caroline Aherne's *The Royle Family*. But these are not just comedies; more comedic visions of life with a dark side often involving disease, divorce, despair and death.

Season's Greetings to all. My next catalogue will contain Hamiltonia, Thomson's Big Five, early Dandy and Beano, Nelson Lee, Sexton Blake, Boys and Girls Cinema, Eagle, 1930s, 2d coloured comics. If not on my mailing list, please write for your free copy to: JACK WILSON, Nostalgia Unlimited, 19 Dunbeath Avenue, Rainhill, Prescot, Merseyside, L35 02H.

A Happy Greyfriars style festive season to Mary and all hobby friends of CD. MARGERY WOODS, Harlequin Cottage, Scalby, Scarborough. Still Wanted: Schoolgirls' Weekly with Valerie Drew and many 1st series Schoolgirl's Own Libraries. Tel. 01723 365876.



ROOKWOOD:
THE BOY WHO LOST HIS MEMORY

by
Ray Hopkins

Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome are puzzled by the cultured speech of the frightened boy in torn, ragged clothes whom they rescue from a short, thick-set man with a broken nose who is pursuing him into the hollow of the heath where the Rookwood trio are enjoying a bread-and-cheese break from a hike in the country air. The man attempts to fight off Silver and Co, with a thick cudgel but Jimmy plants a telling punch on the side of his head. The brute gives up and races off.

When the juniors get a proper look at the frightened boy they realise that his features are familiar to them. He has quite a remarkable resemblance to Adolphus Smythe, the Giddy Goat of the Rookwood Shell but, as one of them remarks, he hasn't the vacant look of the Smythe they know. The boy tells them he doesn't know who he is or where he comes from. He has been beaten and held prisoner. A savage blow on his head had knocked him out and his memory had fled.

The Juniors take the boy back to Rookwood with them. because of the likeness of features, Mr. Bootles, master of the Fourth prior to the advent of Mr. Dalton, brings him face to face with Smythe who denies any knowledge of the ragamuffin. Dr. Chisholm congratulates Jimmy Silver on being perspicacious enough to have brought the boy to Rookwood and decides he can stay until his family are found; his mode of speech is evidence enough that he is a person of some education. When tested scholastically, it is obvious the boy is quite up to the standard of the Rookwood Fourth Form. Dr. Chisholm decides to place him in the study of the Fistical Four (Silver, Raby, Newcome and Lovell). They make him welcome, knowing that it is only a temporary measure until the boy regains his identity when he can be returned to his own school. Dressed in Etons and cleaned up, he looks like the rest of the Fourth-formers.

He tells Jimmy Silver and Co. that his memory for the subjects he had previously studied returned to him quite readily when put to him by the Head. He feels that if he ever hears his own name spoken he would recall that it was his. This gives Lovell an idea and he begins firing surnames at the new junior and, as they later remark, becomes a bit of a bore in the process. Smythe, when approached to furnish names of any of his relatives differing from his own, refuses, saying there are no poverty stricken persons in his family. He has his nose rubbed in the quad for his snobbish cheek.

Tubby Muffin, on a grub quest in Smythe's study, finds himself caught by the return of the owner with his father: the reason the cupboard is so full of delicious items which made Tubby's eyes sparkle as he saw them arrive. Luckily, the table that will soon be groaning with delectable viands, is covered by an extra large cloth, Tubby makes a dive and is ensconced there by the time the Smythes enter the study.

Smythe's cousin, Mr. Smythe tells his son, has mysteriously disappeared. No trace of him has been found and he is feared dead, possibly drowned, as his cap was found on a beach near his school. "When the boy was left an orphan, his father's will left him to the care of the headmaster of Lynthorpe, instead of in my charge. I should, of course, have felt it my duty to take charge of him, as he was your mother's nephew. However, it was not required of me. The headmaster of Lynthorpe, an old friend of Mr. Clare, the boy's father, accepted the charge cheerfully; and no communication passed between the boy and me. Since that time I have not given Charles Clare a thought, His existence was recalled to me when your Uncle Richard, your mother's brother, died in South Africa, and his will was made known. By the terms of his will his money was to be equally divided between Charles Clare and yourself, Adolphua. The sum amounts to ten thousand pounds if both were living. Otherwise, the whole sum was to go to the survivor. Certain legal steps will be necessary for his death to be presumed. But that will be only a matter of form if he is not discovered, which seems now to be hopeless."

By this time, Smythe's chaotic thoughts are being duplicated by those of the listener beneath the table. In addition. Tubby began to think of blackmail. Smythe tells his father nothing about the new boy but is sure in his mind that he must be the missing cousin. But he determines to say nothing to anyone. "He was startled to discover a vein of rascality in his nature, of which he had not before suspected the existence. He found it brought a sense of guilt that was extremely disconcerting."

THE BOY FROM NOWHERE!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

A Powerful and Dramatic Tale of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the Chums of Rookwood.

Angry with himself, knowing what he should immediately do to reveal the new boy's identity, Adolphus is knocked stone cold when Tubby Muffin, all sly grins and pretended concern for young Nobody, as he refers to the new boy, tells Smythe that he heard everything when he was concealed beneath the table and must tell Jimmy Silver at once. However, if Smythe asks him as a pal to keep his mouth shut, he will. He will be pleased to accept the loan of a pound from his pal, of course.

Meanwhile. Lovell is still doggedly going through the alphabet and has been jumping about a bit in the order becoming impatient because their new study mate shakes his head and says "No" so consistently. He decides to try inserting some Christian names and go back to the first few letters. The whole study is thrown into sudden excitement when Lovell says "Charley" and the boy says, "Yes, my name's Charles!" The first name, however, does not immediately bring forth his surname.

Following the "loan" of several more pounds to his "pal", Smythe disconcerts Tubby by telling him that he will go to the head and complain that he is being blackmailed by "a fellow extorting money to keep a secret." Expulsion will undoubtedly follow. Muffin, all outraged dignity, informs Smythe he refuses to accent another loan from him. "If you offered me a pound note at this moment, I should refuse to touch it!" However Tubby goes on, "If you like to hand over ten bob, and call it square ..." He departs in a hurry as Smythe picks up a cricket stump.

Tubby's next money-making effort is to offer Smythe a document which certifies that young Nobody is Smythe's cousin, a fact which Smythe is keeping secret for monetary gain. He says if Smythe will not give him ten shillings for it, he's sure young Nobody will. Smythe grits his teeth and a crisp ten-shilling note finds its way into Tubby's hand.

It has been noticed by the Classical Fourth that Tubby, following trips to the Shell study corridor, invariably makes his next port of call Sergeant Kettle's school shop. This has become a daily occurrence and Jimmy Silver fears that Tubby has turned into a thief. On Jimmy's cornering him and demanding an explanation of his sudden wealth, Tubby invents a series of highly coloured explanations: an uncle dying in South Africa and leaving him ten thousand pounds; a first prize win in a French Lottery Bond; a successful bet on a horse race; and finally, a win at Banker from Smythe of the Shell. To Jimmy's amazement, when questioned, Smythe corroborates Tubby's assertion as the source of his sudden wealth, Tubby breathes a sigh of relief, almost immediately followed by howls of pain as a five's bat is applied with vigour by the Captain of the Classical Fourth. Jimmy tells him he'll get two dozen if he ever plays Banker again.

But the new, wealthy fat boy still continues to spend alarmingly large sums at the school shop on comestibles and Jimmy Silver finally realises that Smythe is only supplying Tubby with the wherewithal in order to keep him quiet. Jimmy badgers Tubby who blurts out that he had overheard a "secret" when he was hidden beneath the table when Smythe's father visited the school. In true Bunter fashion he immediately denies having been beneath the table and says there is no secret!

Word arrives at the school that a man with a broken nose together with a confederate, has been arrested at Rookham. They are counterfeiters and were caught passing false currency notes. At the word "counterfeiters" coming to his ears Charley remembers that it was they who had kidnapped him. He had seen them

in an old cottage in the wood near Lynthorpe tying up bundles of currency notes. There was also a machine on which they had manufactured them. When they saw Charley watching them through the window, one of the men knocked him out, causing his mind to become a blank. He had been kept a prisoner in a cave in a quarry until he was able to escape and was saved from the broken-nosed man by Jimmy Silver and Co.

Tubby fears that he will be plunged back into the pit of impecuniosity, once again. But perhaps there's a chance ... He races to Smythe's study. "Two quids, and I'll let you off for good," he is blurting hurriedly to the Shell junior, just as Smythe's study door bursts open to admit as many of the Classical Fourth as can push their way in, pulling Charley with them, and demanding that Smythe accompany them to the Head to let him know the truth But Charley demurs. He doesn't want the Head to know that his cousin knew all along that he was the lost schoolboy.

So the Head is told but without mention of the scandalous part played by both Smythe and Muffin. Then he leaves Rookwood to give evidence against the two counterfeiters and returns to Lyncroft, sorry to leave all his new Rookwood friends, but glad to be Charley Clare again instead of the boy who lost his memory.

THE END

This series first appeared in weekly *Boys' Friend*, 2nd Series, Nos. 971 to 974, January-February 1920, and was reprinted in *Schoolboy's Own Library* 42, entitled "The Boy from Nowhere", December 1926.

Answers to Bob Whiter's Puzzle

1. Quadrangle (Quadrant + Rangle
2. WAPSHOT W¢AP$ SHOT
3. BOXROOM BOX R⌀OOM
4. The RAG (JUNIOR COMMON ROOM)
5. CLOISTERS (CL)OYSTERS
6. REDCLYFFE (R)ED CLIFF
7. ELM WALK HELMET (W)ALK
8. DORMITORY DORMOUSE IT GORY
9. TUCK SHOP FRIAR TUCK (S)HOP

Christmas Greetings
and All the Best for 2002

To all readers of *The Collectors' Digest*

and

The Collectors' Digest Annual

And to our editor, Mary Cadogan

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"HOLY ORDERS"

by Johnny Burslem

My surname is Price and I'm not very liked
A Bus strike was on, so with my JIGGER I biked
I just had to see at the church CHRISTMAS FETE
The entertainment… that the Vicar did relate.
T'was at the church hall… Potter told Greene
Coker… was performing… the interest was keen
In aid of Church funds… he was to create a 'Pose'
Drain money from visitors, filling twelve rows.
"He's posing as ATLAS" I said "Having a rest"
"Hoping his 'MACHO' will excite interest"
"That's nothing to do with Christmas" said Potter
"The crowd here will only regard him a rotter"
T'was centre stage at the back of the hall
Coker did kneel with a whacking great ball
"What is it he's doing?" hissed Potter to Greene
"Whatever it is? Looks jolly obscene"
"He thinks he's ATLAS" Price caught Potter's blink
"Hoping his beefcake will drive 'em to drink"
"But that's nothing to do with Christmas" urged Potter
Eyeing the crowd, his brow getting hotter
"'fact is, crouching there… he looks jolly rude"
"…and remember…" Greene giggled. "Out ATLAS was nude"
"Hang about" I added "The curtains are closing,
our Coker is stripping ready for posing"
Potter choked. Wiped his lip "He just wouldn't dare"
"Betcha life" said Greene. "…and the Vicar's there"
As the 'Tabs' swished to… the 'REV' opened throttle
"Brethren" he coo'd, "Relax on the bottle.
Our Festive attraction for unsettled times
that we struggle under beset with foul crimes
is depicted here realistically tablau'd
of a man weighed down with a burden backload.
Backstage now I will check on this scene
He turned. Opened Curtains and slid in between.
The proscenium arch now boasted a board
Switches galore for mechanics thus scored
A hand shot out and with movement quite slick
the "TABS" opened slowly after sounding a click
The buzzing crowd were COMBAT DE HORS
THE ROAR THAT FOLLOWED rattled the doors
Coker… in birthday suit (saved by the ball)
was pushing the Vicar again'st the rear wall
Out came a hand to click curtains in place
Anxiety made fumbles… and wrong switch to face
The floor opened up and down went the scene
last glimpse of Coker and Rev' (ball between)
Pandemonium ensued. Geene roared. Potter fell
To the sound of stamping… threats opened to yell
The "Father" was rescued, although sorely bruised
Coker redressed and violently abused
The Crowd called to order and Potter revived
The Spirit of Christmas restored… but contrived.
A HAPPY NEW YEAR AND LOTS OF GOOD CHEER
Should the "CLOTH" first feet… DO NOT VOLUNTEER
All Coker would say, pending suing for libel
was, the vicar had coshed him, whil'st bent… with a bible!

The Sea Falcon

by Squadron Leader Dennis L. Bird, RAF (retired)

Sixty years ago, Erroll Collins was a popular writer of flying stories for the good old "Boy's Own Paper" monthly. I know very little about him, except that his name sounds Irish, and one of his tales featured Foynes, the flying-boat base on the River Shannon.

What I do remember most clearly is the story he wrote for the "B.O.P." in 1940-41. This was "The Sea Falcon", in six instalments. It was really pure hokum, but – like a suspense film directed by Sir Alfred Hitchcock – it was very high-class hokum. It was stirring stuff for an aviation-minded 10-year-old like me.

The story begins at the "sandy, gale-swept air base at Borkum" – a real-life Luftwaffe station on an island in the East Frisians, at the mouth of the River Ems. A very senior German officer has just told the base commander that the Führer has offered 20,000 Reichsmarks for the British air ace Barry Falconer, dead or alive – and at that moment a Hawker Hurricane shoots up the base, destroying several of the mine-laying seaplanes. The daring pilot is of course Flight Lieutenant Barry Falconer, DFC and bar, "a happy warrior of England".

Barry returns to "Air Base B", on the North Sea coast of England. Readers have already been told in Chapter 1 that "Deutschland's most brilliant Secret Agent 17" is operating there. Who can he be?

Air Base B is commanded by Air Commodore Hardwick, and a new deputy has just arrived to help him: Group Captain James Roger Debenham Jarvis, DSO, DFC. Jarvis and Falconer take an instant dislike to each other.

It soon emerges that there have been leakages of information from Air Base B. Someone is informing the Luftwaffe of RAF operations. The Group Captain's batman, Sayers, says he has found a gold swastika badge in Barry's aeroplane. Jarvis says Barry's bank account shows payments from the Nazis.

Infuriated, Barry punches the Group Captain, is arrested, and tried by court-martial. He is found guilty of treason and sentenced to be shot at dawn. Barry's friend, Teddy Griffin, has been detailed to fly a seaplane to Headquarters to deliver some urgent despatches. His aircraft is ticking over ready to take off, when Barry Falconer escapes from custody, knocks out the batman Sayers, and flies off into the North Sea.

There, he is attacked by a German seaplane. He shoots it down, and lands alongside. The dead pilot, Hauptmann Konrad von Reinhardt, carries apers showing he is to take command of the refuelling base at Ingersholm, off the Norwegian coast.

Barry, who speaks faultless German, assumes von Reinhardt's identity, and takes over at Ingersholm – which is manned solely by an old rogue named Emil Kronk and a young lad, Otto Jungermann.

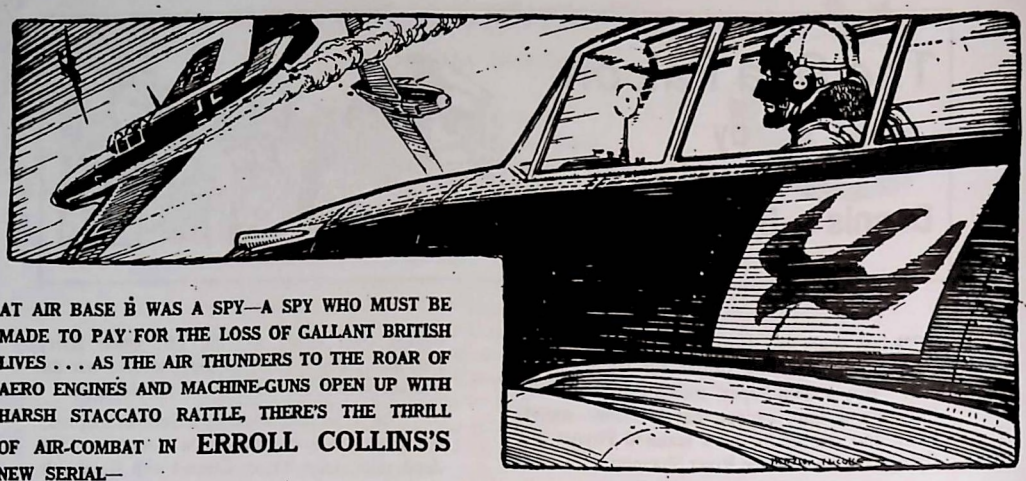
Barry now becomes "The Sea Falcon", flying von Reinhardt's seaplane, and intervening on a number of occasions when RAF aircraft are under attack. In one such incident, masked and in his seaplane with a moveable panel showing a stooping falcon, he chases off German fighters attacking a Supermarine Walrus amphibian.

Back At Air Base B, Barry's friend Flying Officer Teddy Griffin begins to suspect Group Captain Jarvis, but normal service duties prevent him from following up his ideas. Flying a Fairey Swordfish torpedo-bomber floatplane, he is shot down and captured by U-boat 101. The submarine's commander, Kapitän Müller, knows all about Teddy and his Air Base B colleagues – so there has clearly been a leak of information. The U-boat heads for Ingersholm to refuel.

Meanwhile, Barry has alerted Air Base B to Ingersholm's importance, and has suggested an air attack. What he does not know is that his friend Teddy is heading for his island as a prisoner on U-101.

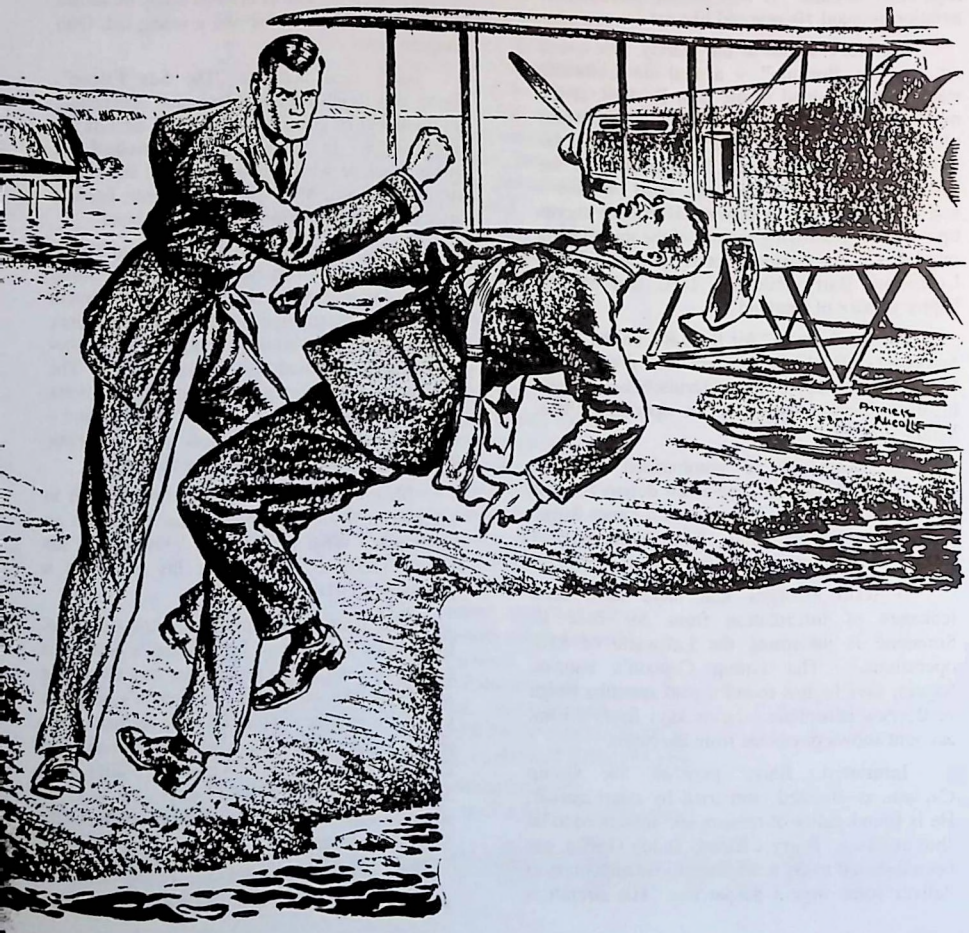
The pace of the narrative now quickens. Ingersholm is bombed; Emil Kronk's cottage is set on fire, but Barry rescues the boy Otto. He and Griff take off in the Sea Falcon's seaplane with Otto and the captured Kronk aboard. They return to Air Base B, where Barry confronts Group Captain Jarvis ("Agent 17", alias Kurt Steinmark). Jarvis tries to escape, but is killed when he runs into the still-turning propeller of the Sea Falcon's seaplane.

In the final Chapter 33, Teddy Griffin is awarded the DFC, and Falconer is promoted



AT AIR BASE B WAS A SPY—A SPY WHO MUST BE MADE TO PAY FOR THE LOSS OF GALLANT BRITISH LIVES . . . AS THE AIR THUNDERS TO THE ROAR OF AERO ENGINES AND MACHINE-GUNS OPEN UP WITH HARSH STACCATO RATTLE, THERE'S THE THRILL OF AIR-COMBAT IN ERROLL COLLINS'S NEW SERIAL—

THE SEA FALCON



The right of Sayers was like fire to powder. Barry drove his clenched fist, with every ounce of strength behind it, into the man's squabby face.

Squadron Leader and decorated with the Victoria Cross by King George VI.

So ends a morale-boosting tale of high adventure in the best "B.O.P." tradition of writers like G.A. Henty, Gunby Hadath, and the Westerman brothers, Percy and John.

One of the most attractive features of "The Sea Falcon" was the excellent illustrations by an uncredited artist. (Signed drawing shows that he was Patrick Nicolle.) Not only were the drawings full of realistic action, they also accurately depicted real aeroplanes. For instance, in the scene showing Barry's fight with the batman Sayers, there is a plainly-identifiable seaplane in the background. It is a Fairey Seafox – a rather rare type, but it had made news in real life in December 1939, in the naval battle with the German pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee.

Other illustrations showed a Hawker Hurricane, Messerschmitt 109s, Heinkel 111s, a Handley Page Hampden, a Fairey Swordfish, and a first-rate depiction of a Supermarine Walrus.

Erroll Collins's artist was aeronautically more realistic than the author himself. Collins did not have a very firm grasp on the capabilities of the aircraft he described. The Seafox in which Barry escaped was slow (maximum speed 124 mph) and poorly armed – yet in it he shot down a German!

"The Sea Falcon" in fact contained many technical howlers. Young as I was, I knew a bit about the RAF because all through the Second World War my family had airmen billeted on us from No. 277 Squadron at Shoreham Airport.,

Here are some of Collins's gaffes. He had little knowledge of RAF ranks. He wrote of "Commodore Hardwick" and "Captain Jarvis", and referred to the latter's "four gold tapes... on his shoulders." RAF officers only wear gold braid on mess kit, and then it is on the lower sleeve, not the shoulders.

And Collins was completely at sea over the ranks of Pilot Officer and Flying Officer. He described Fg Off Andy Wetherall as having "two tapes against Bobby Cotton's solitary one". But a Flying Officer has only one sleeve-ring (not "tape" – that term is used for an NCO's chevrons). A Pilot Officer also has one ring – but a much thinner one.

Air Base B in the story is impossibly complex. It apparently houses fighters, bombers, and Fleet Air Arm seaplanes. Barry Falconer and Teddy Griffin sometimes fly fighters, sometimes bombers, or "a Swordfish with seaboots" (floats). What a headache for the Equipment Officer, keeping spares for so many different types!

Barry's court-martial is implausible because Air Commodore Hardwick is the President. As base commander he would have been responsible for putting forward the charges, and he certainly would not have been allowed to sit on the court.

In an attempt at semantic authenticity, Erroll Collins introduced some RAF slang into his dialogue, and he elucidated it in a couple of glossaries. We young readers were told that "Recco" meant "Reconnaissance" (actually the RAF adopted the Army term "Recce"). "Binds me rigid" meant "bores me stiff". "Shooting the line", he said, meant "being officious". The phrase was actually "shooting a line" and had nothing to do with officiousness; it simply referred to "boasting".

Reverting to aircraft types, Collins has Barry habitually flying a Luftwaffe seaplane, in fighter-style role. Unfortunately, the Germans had no such aircraft. Their principal floatplane, the Heinkel 115, was very effective for reconnaissance mine-laying, and air-sea rescue. But its top speed was only 196mph and it was armed with just two machine-guns. Hardly suitable for the Sea Falcon's daring exploits! So Erroll Collins and his artist had to invent a non-existent type – something like the twin-engined Messerschmitt 110 with floats.

As a narrator, Erroll Collins was forceful, carrying readers along with the sheer exuberance of his style. This is his vivid description of the scoundrelly mechanic Emil Kronk:

"With his shaggy black hair and unkempt beard, and the black patch over one eye, he might have been an old-time pirate or the chief of a smuggling gang. But his filthy drab-

Alliance against Mars

SIR – I was prompted by current events to pull down one of my favourite childhood stories, *Mariners of Space* by Erroll Collins, describing a war between Earth and Mars. The book opens thus:

"Gentlemen, it may mean war!"
Sir Robert Hargreaves' voice was grave. Challengingly, he looked round the glass-and-steel lined room off Whitehall, where, in the year 2000, the Earth Senate sat in conference.
Sir Robert's fellow senators looked up sharply at their President's blunt words. Each man represented one of the four World Federations: John P. Rockerbilt, shrewd, just ruler of the British-American Empire; M. Borisov of Moscow, soldier, reformer and scientist; Dr Ming, wise, law-giving chief of the Asiatic Federation; and lastly, that great statesman, Jacques Ferrand, who had welded a troubled Continent into the United States of Europe.

Apart from getting the date wrong by a year, along with President Blair's name, it is quite prescient. Incidentally, the Martians lost.
Christopher Booker
Litton, Somerset

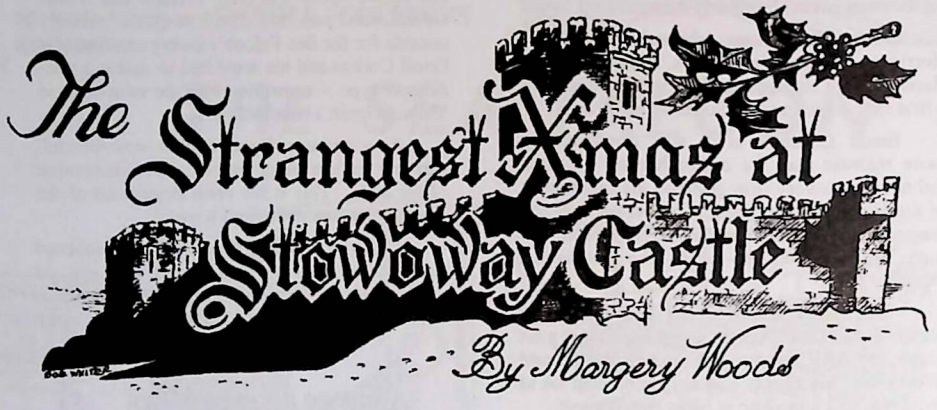
"Daily Telegraph," Monday, October 8, 2001

The Sea Falcon's author is still remembered...

coloured shirt, his loose blue trousers, and huge feet thrust into broken muddy boots, gave him the air of a Russian peasant. His one eye held an expression of both avarice and cunning."

Sometimes Collins's enthusiasm ran away with him (or perhaps he was paid so much a page?). At any rate, Chapter 19 was sheer padding. It took up three full pages of a total of 56, and concerned the rivalry between two East Coast fishing boats. The relevance to the story was that they were attacked by three German aircraft, who were chased off by the sea Falcon. Three paragraphs rather than three pages would have sufficed.

Enough of carping criticisms! I thoroughly enjoyed the story, and will always fondly remember Squadron Leader Barry Falconer, VC, DFC and bar, and the gift his fellow-airmen gave him: "The Falconer Trophy... that splendidly-moulded silver model of a virile and swooping falcon."



When the chums of Greyfriars and Cliff House responded to a very strange Christmas challenge they had little warning of the mystery and the enemy they would face.

Chapter 1

The annual Bunter problem

"I say you chaps..."

"Buzz!"

"Fade!"

"Beasts!" The doorway of Study No 1 remained blocked by the fattest member of the Remove. Indignation glowered across the face of Billy Bunter. "Can't you be polite to a fellow for a change and answer a simple question," he demanded.

"If it's as simple as you the answer's no," said Bob Cherry. "Now give the door some breathing space."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter chose to ignore this jibe. "You know it's a halfer and the match is cancelled?"

"We know." Vernon-Smith stepped forward. "Missing some exercise? Why not take a nice walk to Pegg cliffs and don't give up when you get to the edge."

Bunter glared but remained static. "You're all done up like dogs' dinners. Where are you going?"

The Bounder did not make his normal response to this blatant demand. He smiled, a not really pleasant Bounderish smile. "Shall we tell him? We're going to meet the girls for tea at Chunkleys. And---"

"Smithy! You idiot; You swore us to secrecy and---"

Smithy ignored the cries of protest. He was grinning now. "Bunter can't make it---he's his usual, disgusting untidy mess. Come on, race you to the bike shed."

Surprised, bewildered, the Famous Five hurried after the flying figure of the Bounder. In double-quick time they wheeled out their jiggers and turned into the Courtfield road. Harry Wharton, abreast of the Bounder, was still frowning. "Why, Smithy?" he asked, "after we arranged with the girls to keep the Bunters out of

it until we'd had this meeting with your pater and Diana's father."

"Two reasons," Smithy said calmly. "First, I've taken care of Bunter's bike. It'll take him an hour to get it going---after he's tried everybody still around to mend it for him. Secondly, we're not going to Chunkleys. We're going to that new place on the Dover road. Parking is impossible now near Chunkleys so Dad said the Europa would be better. It won't be full of shoppers, either."

"If you say so," Harry sighed, One had to admit that Smithy thought of everything these days---perhaps sometimes a bit too worldly-wise for the world of a schoolboy.

They caught up with the Cliff House girls at the approach to the hotel and exchanged greetings. There were six of them today; Barbara Redfern, junior school captain, with her study chum, Mabel Lynn; Tomboy Clara Trevlyn and sweet-faced Marjorie Hazeldene, to whose side Bob Cherry instantly gravitated; the enigmatic Jemima Carstairs surveyed her surroundings through the inevitable monocle, and at the forefront of the group Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of Cliff House, whose father apparently had formed an alliance with Smithy's father, the reason for this still remaining a secret hinted at for the past couple of weeks but not yet disclosed. However, it seemed that this afternoon the chums would be enlightened.

In a happy, chattering group they entered the hotel foyer. "I see you managed to shake off Bunter," said Clara. "How did you manage it?"

They told her.

Marjorie shook her head. "That was a bit unkind."

"So how did you kindly lose Bessie?" teased Bob.

Babs chuckled. "We persuaded Janet and Leila to make noises like a large plate of jam tarts and edge towards the tuck shop."

"Look---there they are," exclaimed Smithy, and with Diana hurried towards reception where the tall burly figures of the two millionaire parents had appeared. Smithy greeted his father and began introductions while Mr Royston-Clarke kissed his daughter and said he hoped she'd been behaving herself. Sparkles glinted in Diana's wide blue eyes and her smile at him flashed mockery. "What do you think?" she challenged her indulgent parent. She looked stunning in a beautifully tailored charcoal grey trouser suit teamed with a rose-pink cashmere sweater while gossamer silk tails of a bandeau round her blonde hair floated across one shoulder. Babs' eyes held a thoughtful expression as she watched; a memory of a summer cruise had returned, of Diana turning up unexpectedly, pretending to be eighteen years old as she took a job as companion to the daughter of a film producer, hoping to realise her whim of the moment, a part in a film. But playing the part of an adult had proved more difficult and exhausting than she had imagined. She didn't seem to be having any problems at the moment, Babs thought. Then her attention snapped back to the present.

"We've booked one of the small conference rooms." Mr Vernon-Smith glanced over his shoulder, and one of the reception staff who was hovering hurried forward. "If you'll come this way, sir..."

He led them along a wide corridor and showed them into a comfortably furnished room which held just the suggestion of an informal venue rather than a conference of executives. There was a central table with phone and stationery, and a long table against one wall set with refreshments.

"Oh, Bunter alas, what art thou missing," murmured Frank Nugent, eyeing the lavish array of goodies festooning the table. Pots of tea and coffee were arriving and there were trays of mixed drinks and fruit juices already in place. "If you require anything else, sir..." said the leading waiter, and notes slipped discreetly from hand to hand.

"Well, kids, muck in." The two parents gestured. "Get your strength up. Christmas is coming and you may need some."

The chums exchanged glances, resigned to secretive hints, and Smithy said: "Come on, Dad, let's get on with it while we eat. We've got a roll call to get back to if you haven't, and we want to see the girls back to Cliff House."

"We'll see the girls safely back, don't worry," said his father, and Clara exclaimed: "With six bikes as passengers as well?"

There was laughter mingled with the chinking of plates as refreshments were selected and at last all were seated and relaxed. Mr Royston-Clarke bit into a sausage roll. "Well we've bought an island," he said casually.

"And there's an old castle on it that we're converting into an hotel." Mr Vernon-Smith manoeuvred a smoked salmon savoury neatly into his mouth. "Jolly good, these."

Twelve jaws ceased chewing.

"An island!"

"A castle!"

"Where?"

"Just west of the Scillies." A second salmon savoury vanished.

"But why? Haven't you got enough projects on the boil?" demanded Smithy.

"Oh, one of the back burners was vacant," said Diana's father, "and this seemed an interesting opportunity."

The chums fell silent; obviously the two men were enjoying their moments of tantalization. The indication seemed to suggest patience. Mr Vernon-Smith was sorting out a sheaf of papers and glossy brochures from his briefcase. He spread them on one of the occasional tables. "Help yourselves to a browse. These will tell and show more quickly than we can describe."

The chums swooped eagerly and gathered round the table.

"Gosh," breathed Bob Cherry.

"Wow," said Clara.

"The wowfulness is awesome!" exclaimed Inky. "This is your castle?"

The two fathers smiled and nodded. The brochure cover picture showed a great castle, of Norman origin, with all the turrets, towers, ancient keep, buttresses and massive arched doorway, well studded with bosses, so familiar from much-loved storybook illustrations. There were slits set deep in the walls of the battlement, and the grooves in the stone entry where once had lurked a portcullis. Mullioned windows, possibly of later addition, glinted from embrasures, and smooth greensward sloped down to enclosing walls and the outer gate- house, and the whole impressive pile crowned a rocky promontory that rose sheer from the sea.

"Ever spent Christmas in an island castle?" said Mr Royston-Clarke."

"In a castle, yes," said Wharton, " but not on an island that looks as remote as this one."

"Well now's your chance," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "What do you think?"

"All of us?" asked Bob."

"All of you are invited."

Jemima fixed her monocle more securely and looked approvingly at the photograph of Stowaway Castle. "I'd call this a truly Spartan old abode."

Then Babs looked up from her brochure, a faintly puzzled look in her eyes. "Yes," she said, "but we're not 'exhausted, stressed business executives desperately seeking total escape from pressure and the rat race'".

Laughter and giggles broke from the chums. Smithy said: "Agreed. but don't we need escape from Quelch and a few others?"

"Actually, we're hoping you'll help us," said his father. "But first let us tell you a bit more about the place. You can read for yourselves what we know of its history, that it's one of those rarities these days, a privately owned island, and that it has been in the ownership of a very wealthy American whose ancestors all hailed from Cornwall. He did most of the restoration and modernised it inside to true American standards of comfort---and you know what that means!" He paused, and Diana's father took over. "What we don't tell you in the brochure is that this American dreamed of retiring here. Unfortunately his wife, and his family, didn't think much of that idea. In short, there has been a very Draconian divorce that has cost the poor man dearly. So his dream castle had to go. But we hear on the grapevine he's found certain consolation of a youthful feminine variety and is sailing into a different sunset. Good luck to him."

"Is---is the castle haunted?" asked Marjorie.

"Of course! All the best castles are haunted," laughed Smithy's father. "There's tales of a treasure, and tales of smugglers, and it's far more comfortable than Polpelly. But we're hoping that this Christmas will be in the nature of an experiment."

"We're hoping you'll volunteer to be guinea pigs," said Mr Royston-Clarke.

"Guinea pigs!" they echoed. "How?"

"There are no amusements on the island. Apart from some sheep and goats and fish there are only about six inhabitants, who are now our tenants. More of them later. We reckon that a lot of people long to take a break somewhere where no-one can get at them. Where there's nothing to remind them of the pressures they live and work in. We are gambling on being able to provide that atmosphere. So there's no TV, no newspapers, no post, except for a weekly boat from St Mary's, and no phone link. There's a radio link for emergencies and a chopper pad, otherwise it's the local boatman. And he's not exactly accommodating. But there's a wonderful library of books, jigsaws, games, a pool and a beach---for summertime, of course. And we'll install other facilities as we think of them. So we'd like to see if you can make your own amusements, enjoy Christmas, and be more or less self-sufficient without getting bored, and of course in the worst time of the year weatherwise. Depending on how you get on, we'll try our idea on stressed city professionals next summer. If that fails, we simply revert to a conventional summer hotel and adjust accordingly."

"Do we have to do our own cooking" asked Marjorie the practical.

"Heavens---no! We've engaged a small staff to see to essentials. But don't expect hand and foot waiting on. Okay? Electricity is from generators. Food and fuel stores are ample." Smithy's father paused and gave a jocular smile. "We're not expecting you to join the castaways brigades, you know.

"How did it get its name---Stowaway Island?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, in the very early days of the emigration rush towards America some ships' captains used to search their ships for stowaways once they'd left port and dump them on the island. Its position was both strategic and handy. The poor

wretches then had to make their way back as best they could."

There were sympathetic murmurs from the chums, then Mr Vernon-Smith glanced at his watch. "Time's getting on. Think it over and decide. If the idea doesn't appeal we can revert to original plans and see you all at the Abbey for Christmas. So you can let Diana and my son know fairly soon. Oh," he added, "I leave it to you what to do about your own very expert stowaway. Who knows? Bunter may even be fun!"

Chapter 2
Bunter solves his own problem!

"You've got an infernal cheek!"

"You mean you wrote to my father; A load of guff about being so interested in his new venture," the Bounder snarled.

"Telling him you wanted to look after your sister," gasped Wharton.

"And that you had several constructive ideas about the project," snorted Johnny Bull.

"And we're actually landed with you, you benighted bandersnatch," groaned Bob Cherry. "I didn't know you could write, anyway."

A fat smirk of satisfaction graced Bunter's sticky features. He dropped another toffee paper on the floor of Study No 1 and surveyed the furious faces of the Five and Smithy. "My mother wrote the letter and I copied it." He waved Mr Vernon-Smith's letter triumphantly. "I've got all the times and directions---the flight to St Mary's and then the chopper out to the island."

"I trust your Dad's chartered a Jumbo jet, Smithy old chap," chortled Bob. "We'll need it to transport this elephantine mass."

"Oh, get out, you fat idiot." The Bounder raised a threatening foot and Bunter suddenly decided that discretion was safer than valour and departed with a surprising turn of elephantine speed, leaving the chums to reflect ruefully on what Bob termed the inevitable spanner in the Christmas works.

But their high spirits were soon recaptured during the last few days of term and the rush of Christmas shopping and updates of plans with the Cliff House girls, along with important phone calls and postings to families and friends. And as Smithy said, they could deal with any nonsense from Bunter once they were there and adult supervision would seem to be minimal. Now they were almost there, aboard the chopper for the last short hop to Stowaway Island, and chatter lost in the noise of flight. A considerable load of luggage and the two millionaires had gone on ahead and now excited cries came from Diana and Smithy who were sitting right up front by the pilot.

"We're there!"

"It looks gorgeous!"

The rest of the party strained against the frustrating seat belts to see but in moments the chopper was already hovering and starting to descend. The big landing pad loomed up white against the broad flat expanse of green of the outer bailey of the castle, and, laughing and ducking under the whirl of the rotor, they saw Mr Vernon-Smith and Mr Royston-Clarke waving to greet them from the stone bridge over the moat. Diana's father went to have a few words with the pilot before the helicopter rose again and swooped over the island. There was so much to see and take in but exploration would come later. A man and a woman waited under the archway that led to the inner bailey and the castle itself. The man was slim and dark, with the small pointed beard and thin moustache currently fashionable, and his features did not look as though they smiled easily. The woman was slightly built, with grey hair and dark eyes in a pale face. She was shivering a little. Although the December day was bright and sunny the wind from the Atlantic was sharp and blustery.

"This is Max Alvan who is managing the castle, and this is Mrs Quinn, the housekeeper." Diana's father motioned the chums forward. "They'll endeavour to help if you require anything."

The manager and the housekeeper inclined their heads and murmured a brief welcome. Then the housekeeper smiled and her face warmed quite attractively. "There's tea waiting," she said. "You'll be ready for it after your journey."

This was very welcome. Most of them, apart from the Bunter siblings, had been too excited to eat that day. Now they all gazed eagerly about them, appreciating the loving care with which the ancient castle had been restored over the years, with modern comfort subtly added while retaining and restoring its wonderful stonework and heavily timbered interior. Mr Vernon-Smith warned that many of the castle's outer buildings and walls were still ruins and were best avoided for safety's sake. And no cliff climbing. There were coves with beaches to the south of the island, and in the Great Hall they would find a large plan of the Keep and the other sections which constituted Stowaway Castle. Finally he added, "I trust you all to be sensible, and don't go exploring alone. Remember the Buddy System then no-one will get lost and maybe hurt."

Mrs Quinn came then to show them to their rooms---bedchambers would seem a more suitable term for the big dark-panelled rooms with timbered ceilings and cunningly concealed lighting and four-poster beds. But the en suite bathrooms were strictly twenty-first century.

Bob Whiter

Frank Nugent wondered how on earth the builders had coped with the demands of the plumbing. Bob Cherry wondered how the "Sparks" had coped with the massive wiring operation; Bessie was worried about the kitchen equipment! She was also worried because her luggage had been taken to a room to be shared with Jemima. But there were other swappings going on and Babs was resigned to taking the nervous fat duffer under her wing while her special chum Mabs moved in with Jemima. Eventually all was sorted out and the chums descended to Great Hall where their two hosts waited to escort them to the dining room, where all Bessie's fears regarding the cooking facilities were proved groundless. Even Bunter was satisfied after three steaks, a dozen sausages, a dish of mushrooms, eight large roast potatoes, two stuffed onions, a trim of garlic carrots and greens, followed by lemon meringue pie, only half a large apple tart---his sister snatched the other half---and about half a pound of cheese and biscuits to fill up the odd holes. Mrs Quinn had visibly blanched when she checked that the young guests had all had sufficient and Bunter asked if there'd be mince pies for supper.

Unusually for the more nervously inclined with memories of nights disturbed by villainy in previous holiday abodes, they slept like the proverbial tops to awaken refreshed and ready for brekker next morning. Mr Vernon-Smith and Mr Royston-Clarke departed after breakfast and a few final warnings and instructions. The chums waved them off with goodbyes and promises, then returned indoors to eye each with excitement.

"What shall we do first?"

Chapter 3
First impressions

"Explore!"

"Yes! Let's explore.

"The castle!"

"No---the island."

"No," said Diana in a firm voice. "None of those."

They looked at her in some surprise. "Why not?"

"We must have a meeting first." She stopped beneath the arch, head high, in the same determined stance the girls knew so well. "We'll have it in the Great Hall."

"Well I'm not frowsting around inside on a gorgeous morning like this," cried Clara Trevlyn. "She can have her meeting to herself."

A half smile appeared on the Bounder's lips. "Is Di always as bossy as this?" he said to Babs, who was nearest.

"I'm afraid so." Babs sighed. "Wait, Clara. I think maybe we'd better have this meeting. There are plans to talk about."

In silent assent they followed the Firebrand indoors and into the huge galleried hall with its vast fireplace. An invitation to do exactly what Clara scorned leapt in the flames and crackle of the log-fire that cast its rosy warmth out to the circle of chairs. With the exception of the mutinous Clara the chums sat down and looked at Diana, who perched on the edge of a black carved table.

"I heard that bit about being bossy and I deny it," she said. "I just think we should decide how we are going to enjoy ourselves, celebrate Christmas, and try out my father's---and yours--" she glanced at the Bounder, "ideas about the possible business side of the venture. Remember, we're supposed to be seeing if we can amuse ourselves during the silence and isolation and lack of social amenities. We---"

"Yes," interrupted Clara, "but it can't really apply to us. We're not escaping high pressure jobs and traumas over spiteful colleagues trying to pinch promotion ahead of us and---"

A loud snore and grunt interrupted Clara's objection.

"Tip him out!" The Bounder leapt up and seized the back of Bunter's chair. Next moment a wildly protesting Bunter hit the floor with a thud that shook even the solid walls of the Great Hall. "At ten a.m." exclaimed the Bounder, disgustedly. "Now sit up and pipe down."

"What I was trying to say," resumed Diana, "is that this should be the only meeting and that each of us can do our own thing, subject to being sensible about it. I've made out a list of things we should do as it's Christmas. There's a tree lying about somewhere to be decorated and boxes of stuff for that. There's a piano somewhere if wanted for carols or whatever. But if someone feels more like a session in the library with Einstein or Kant, so be it. What are you sniggering at, Clara Trevlyn?"

"Just wondering who's going to be first at the library to meet Einstein or Kant---who's Kant, anyway?"

"Now, children, please," said Jemima. "This is non-productive. Diana is quite right. I've only one suggestion to make---and I'm sure Diana already has it in mind. We should have a log book, on this table, say, and we should leave a note of where we're going and estimated time of return. And that this afternoon we sort the tree out. All in favour?"

All hands went up with the exception of Bunter's; the fire and the after affects of his gargantuan breakfast had taken over again.

"Good," said Jemima. "Now, any volunteers to be my Buddy for a gentle meander round the castle walls?"

"Yes, ma'am." Smithy stood to attention, and Clara and Babs and Harry and Frank laughingly volunteered their buddyship. Mabs wanted to see if the library had a drama section. Inky said he'd like to explore the library for books on India. Diana said she'd join Marjorie and Bob Cherry on a ramble in search of the beach. The Bunters decided the fire needed their company.

A thin bright sun streamed down the greensward as the chums strolled to the main gate, where they paused, then split into two groups as Jemima and her buddies turned to the path along by the wall and Diana, Marjorie and Bob chose the well marked path that led downhill from the castle. As they passed the Gatehouse, which was now obviously a domestic residence, Diana noticed a curtain twitch at one of the windows. It hastily dropped and Diana whispered, "Did you see that? I think it was Mrs Quinn. She looks worried, that woman."

"Well," Bob laughed, "if she's the cook she can look as worried as she likes as long as the grub keeps coming. Perhaps she's worried about the drain on her store cupboard now she's seen Bunter."

"Oh look," exclaimed Marjorie. "There's the beach. Let's go down." She hurried ahead to descend the rough hewn steps that led down into a small charming bay ringed by low rocky cliffs. At the far end a couple of cottages nestled under the lee of a hill and a cluster of small boats bobbed at the side of a short rough landing stage.

"This will be gorgeous in summer." Diana stirred the pale sand with one toe. "Isn't it clean?"

"It will be unless one of those blighters out there springs a leak," Bob said dryly.

Far out a massive tanker made its wary way up the Channel. Beyond it a second one followed, reminding them that the English Channel was virtually the most heavily used channel in the world.

"Is that a cave?" Diana had moved on. "Let's have a look."

The deep cleft in the cliff proved to be just that, cold, dank, and smelling of seaweed. It

seemed to run back quite a distance, then Marjorie jumped with shock as a figure appeared out of nowhere right in front of her and a voice made sharp and hollow in the enclosure demanded, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Nothing." Marjorie backed away, towards the open and the figure followed. It was a girl of about fifteen, carrying a clutch of lobster pots. Now they could see her in the sunlight they saw she was thin and wiry, her long black hair tangled about a face brown with an all year tan from being outdoors in all weathers. Close to, there was something like fear behind the aggressive attitude. Diana, however, was unmoved. She said coldly: "I don't think it's any business of yours who we are or what we want. We could ask you the same questions."

"I live here," the girl said. "We're the last fishing family trying to make a living here. We supply an hotel over at St Mary's."

"What's your name?"

"Jennie. What's yours?"

"Diana." The owner of that name tilted her blonde head to one side. "Diana Royston-Clarke."

The girl's eyes widened, then narrowed. "You mean you're---"

"Jennie; What are you---who's that?" A burley man stood at the cottage end of the bay. He gesticulated angrily and started to stride along the beach. Suddenly the girl backed away.

"You shouldn't have come here," she hissed. "Not till it's over. Stay away, do you hear? Or---"

"Jennie!"

Abruptly she whirled around and fled, the lobster pots bobbing and swinging as she ran, while the three chums stared after her with stupefaction on their faces.

Chapter 4
Bessie Misses A Christmas present

"She was a strange little thing," said Bob as they updated each other over lunch. "Sort of scared and angry at the same time. And her father---I take it he was her father---looked a really surly brute."

"But what did she mean?" Diana's eyes narrowed "We shouldn't be here---not till it's over. What's over?"

No-one could produce an answer to that one.

"We met an artist," Smithy said as he turned to Max Alvan, who had brought a bottle of green ginger wine at Bunter's request. "He was the typical artist type. Scraggy beard, pipe in mouth, slouch hat, posed in front of his easel on the headland, and every syllable had to be dragged out of him."

"I thought his work looked good," said Babs, who was an artist of no mean repute herself. "And most artists hate an audience peering over their shoulder."

"We found a fascinating book about the castle," said Mabs.

"Yes, and the treasurefuls all hiding," said Inky. "Two treasures."

"Any maps?" Bunter said hopefully between swigs of green ginger.

"Not of the two treasures," laughed Mabs.

"No clues?"

She shook her head sadly.

Smithy pushed his chair back. "Shall we sort out the tree?"

Sorting the tree passed the afternoon very pleasantly. There were ample supplies of decorations in the boxes mentioned by Smithy's father and the chums had all brought gifts for each other to be placed under the tree until Christmas Day. Yet despite the tree it didn't seem like Christmas. None of them could put a finger on the reason for this. Bunter said it was because of no post; his postal order was probably waiting for him at Greyfriars and there were no means of getting it. Bob reminded him that had a miracle brought that long awaited postal order there was nowhere on Stowaway Island to spend it.

This did not seem to bring much comfort to Bunter. However, a superb evening meal did help him break his first evening's record, and he rolled ponderously to the most comfortable chair he now claimed as his own. Soon his snores reverberated to the raftered heights above, and the chums sought sanctuary in the room next to the library which contained the piano. With Mabs at the keyboard a singsong soon got going in renderings from Christmas carols through to the popular hits of the day. Max Alvan looked in once to see that all was well and bade them goodnight.

"Do you think he has instructions to keep an eye on us?" asked Harry Wharton.

Smithy shook his head. "Not that I know of. He's a bit of a dark horse, though."

"Mm," said Diana, "with that satyr beard. Creepy!"

"At least my father assured me there was no way he could be Soames in disguise," Smithy said lightly. "So as long as he does a good job, why worry? Hey, where's Bessie?"

"Oh, she went up to our room," Babs said. "Something very important she'd forgotten to put under the tree."

But a trace of uneasiness had crossed Babs' face when Bessie had not rejoined them about ten minutes later. At last she stood up. "I'll just go and check on her. She's probably scoffing chocolates by the fire."

But Bessie was not scoffing chocolate by the fire in Great Hall, nor was she in the bedroom she shared with Babs. "Come on, kidlets," sighed Clara. "Let's find her. You know what she is."

"No, wait." Harry Wharton checked them. "This is a big place. Let's look methodically."

They returned to Great Hall and studied the big plan of the castle. Diana said, "But she can't be lost. Our rooms are along the right hand corridor at the head of the stairs. Surely even Bessie can distinguish between the left and the right."

"No, said Smithy. "Wharton's right. We have to search methodically. Because there are staircases at each end of this hall. If she went up the wrong staircase and took the right turning at the top, heaven knows where she's landed."

The girls' faces paled. Quickly the chums split up into pairs and set off to search the castle. Babs and Harry went first to Bessie's room to make sure Bessie hadn't managed to lock herself in wardrobe or bathroom. The window was tightly closed against the dark night and the eternal sullen wash of the equally black sea far below. Babs did not like prying into other people's possessions but she opened the chest of drawers and inspected the untidy jumbles within. There was no sign of the gifts Bessie had wrapped earlier, and Babs shook her head. "I think she must have been here. There's no----"

"What's that?" Harry pointed and reached down at the side of the chest of drawers. He picked up the small package, wrapped and sellotaped in Bessie's inimitable style, thoroughly creased and sticky. The little Christmas label said it was with love to Babs. "It looks as if she did go up the other staircase.

Worried now, they hurried along the gallery, down the stairs and across the hall to ascend the other staircase. Here the right hand corridor was chill, dark and gloomy. The rooms opening off it were still showing signs of work and decorating taking place. Then the corridor branched off into gaunt grey stone walling with a spiral staircase winding up to one of the towers. Then they heard voices and Jemima calling: "Is that you, Spartans?"

"Yes---any sign of her?"---as they raced upwards.

Jemima stood at the top, in a large circular room. She held out her hand. On her palm lay a small, butterfly shaped gilt brooch. "We found this along the left-hand side---there' s a warren of passages and nooks and corners. Is it Bessie's?"

Babs nodded. She could imagine the plump duffer getting scared in such strange surroundings, searching for the room she knew and wandering deeper into the dark mazelike passages and becoming more bewildered.

Diana and Smithy came pounding up the stone spirals. "Any sign?"

"No. "

"Let's get back to Great Hall, collect torches, and make a proper search. She must be somewhere."

"She might have gone back to the hall," Marjorie whispered hopefully.

But she hadn't. Smithy jerked Bunter awake and demanded roughly if he'd seen his sister. "Leggo, you beast. I don't know where she's got toy" grunted the Fat Owl.

"Is something wrong?"

The smooth voice of Max Alvan broke in on the group. "I thought I heard shouting." His expression was enquiring and keen as well.

They told him, and he said, "Of course we must search. It is easy to get lost in a place like this until you've found your way around."

Suddenly he proved cool and authoritative. He decreed no splitting up; one party to keep together and Marjorie and Inky to remain behind in Great Hall in case Bessie returned---his glance deemed Bunter to be useless---and armed with torches they began a slow and thorough search of the castle.

"Tell me when we reach the place where you found the brooch," said Max Alvan.

"It was somewhere near here." Jemima stopped, playing her torchlight along the wall above head height. "I noticed some carving chipped into the stonework." They moved on, beginning to shiver now. The stone vaulted passage was dank and chill, and distinctly eerie, then it widened and ended in the same broad opening with a spiral stairway as they'd found in the other passageway.

"Is this the bit of carving you saw?" asked Diana, pointing up.

Jemima inspected it. "No," she said, "this is a mason's mark. They used to carve these geometrical patterns on their handiwork, to sort of mark where they'd got up, methinks." She turned back, still seeking, and gave a cry. "Yes, here it is." They clustered round, to study the quite large marking indenting the stone wall.

"It looks like an archer's bow in shape," said Clara, "with the cord pulled back by an arrow." She started pressing bits of it, adding that there were bound to be secret passages and rooms in an old castle like this one. Bob Cherry pushed the arrow point but nothing happened. No movement, and no convenient wood panels to slide open.

But Max Alvan urged them on. "This is the tower over the guard -house, I think, so we can't get any further. We'll return to the gallery and look in the chapel."

At a time less anxious the chums would have lingered in this small but important part of medieval life with its fine oriel window and intricate carving, but anxiety urged them on, to

follow Max Alvan as he led them up a narrow newel stairway cut in the thickness of a wall which came out on the battlements. It was a brief look there, against a wind with a knife edge lashing their faces. Bessie would never have lingered up there!

Max Alvan seemed to know the castle well. In turn he showed them the Armoury, the Muniments Room, the Solar, the Guard Room, and many other apartments. Finally the kitchen and laundry and pantry, the most likely place that Bessie would aim for. But nowhere, apart from the finding of the brooch, was there a sign that Bessie Bunter had ever existed within the walls of Stowaway Castle.

Chapter 5
...And Loses A Brooch

Few of them slept that night.

Babs fell into an uneasy doze in the small hours then wakened instantly when a tap came at her door. She shot upright. "Who is it?"

The door opened and the familiar nonchalant tones of Jemima Carstairs sounded. "May I put the light on?"

Babs was already groping for the overhead bedside light. Jemima said, "Sorry to startle you, Babs, old henchman, at six ack emma, but the old noddle has just realised that we may have missed something at last."

"Go on," said Babs.

Jemima perched on the side of the bed. "I don't think the carvings chiselled into the stonework meant anything. Just one of those odd little coincidences. Remember when we went up the tower newelstair to the battlements? We were on the first floor and it was quite a distance up the top. But surely there must be a stairway between ground floor and first floor. I did notice an alcove with a grill barring it off but it was too dark to see properly and Max Alvan seemed anxious to shepherd us all back to the more civilised sections of the castle."

"Do you think he's okay?" Babs ventured.

Jemima adjusted her monocle. "I don't know. He does seem to hover somewhat, in the most courteous of ways, when we're talking, and our Greyfriars' rajah said he noticed him talking on a mobile phone out in the Bailey just before dark yesterday, moving about as if he were having difficulty in contact."

"Mm, we always seem to find one of them wherever we go." Babs managed a smile. "I couldn't help laughing when Smithy said his Dad had assured him positively that the dreaded Soames would not turn up."

Jemima nodded. "When I came up last night Harry was leaning over the gallery rail, looking very worried. We had a discussion and he was thinking along the same lines as me. And he pointed out that if our Bess had got lost even she is not dumb enough to forget that she was already upstairs on the bedrooms floor; she wouldn't go up to a higher floor, but she might try to find her way downstairs."

"Let's get dressed." Babs flung back her duvet. "It's ten past six. We've got two hours before breakfast. Let's go and hunt."

"Good," said Jemima. "I'll call Harry---he wants to join us."

Harry and Frank Nugent were already dressed and waiting by the gallery rail, gazing down into the dimly lit Great Hall. Jemima put a finger to her lips and whispered: "Let's not talk now---we don't want to raise the household."

Carrying their torches and fastening warm jackets, they stole to the left-hand staircase and the gloomy passageway where Jemima had found Bessie's brooch. Harry whispered: "None of us slept much and we all wanted to search. Smithy thought it best if we kept to our original idea of splitting up and covering a wider territory. He and Diana have a plan and said they'd be back for brekker. Bob and Clara and Inky have already departed. Said they couldn't sleep so might as well have a hunt round outside and they thought they'd see if they could find that Jennie girl with the lobster pots."

"Wish we had some chalk to mark our way," said Frank.

"Don't remind me of sessions with Quelch." Harry pulled a face. "I've got a thick marker pen which is better than nothing."

"Good," said Babs, a little shakily. "We don't want to get lost as well:"

The eeriness of the ancient castle had them in its grip now, though none of them would have admitted it. Jemima stopped. "This is the place, but I think this bow and arrow marking is just another mason's mark. I know Clara was longing to find a secret door, but look at this wall. It's solid."

Harry nodded, running his hand across the rough stonework. "These walls could be anything up to ten feet thick."

"Exactly, old Spartan," said Jemima, who was known to have a great interest in archaeology. "Stairways and even rooms have been found hidden inside that thickness." She dropped her torchlight and moved on over the uneven ground. In the semicircular room of the turret they stopped expectantly. It was Jemima who went straight to the unobtrusive recess under the turn of the stairway to the battlement. She stepped inside and borrowed Diana's favourite cry of triumph. "Yoicks! I thought so." She emerged and they saw the iron barred gate, easily unseen from the room, in the left-hand side of the recess. And the gate hung loose on its ancient hinges revealing the descending stairway.

They looked at each other, the same question and fear in four pairs of eyes. Would Bessie have ventured down that dark descent? Remembering it was evening, and she would have no torch? And that the source of artificial light stopped short in the turret room, although the former wealthy American owner had begun installing floodlighting round the base of the castle and the battlements. She had come this way; the brooch proved that. So why?

"Come on," said Babs. "If only to rule out this possibility."

In silence they began the dark descent. The coiling stairway seemed to go on for ever and they did not dare try to hurry. And at each step they dreaded they might find the injured form of their chum. They could smell the sea now, or was it just the damp chill of the air? They reached a small landing and another gateway, its heavy old iron-barred gate leaning back against the wall. And now the steps were roughly hewn from rock.

"We must be deep in the heart of the cliff," murmured Jemima.

There was a rueful cry from Babs. "Look out---I've landed in a pool."

The steps ended on an uneven rocky surface and a small cavern opened out in the rays of their torches. Water dripped from the roof and a distant rumble came to their ears. There was no sign of natural light but Harry surmised that the sea could not be far off. None of them had any idea of the times of high tide, and Jemima urged Harry to start getting his artwork onto the wall. The sound of the sea was discernable now and suddenly Babs grabbed Jemima's arm. "I thought I heard voices! Can you hear anything?"

They listened, and Harry shouted, "Hello! Anyone there!" and the echoes reverberated through the cave. And then---

"Ahoy there!"

Slipping sliding, the chums tried to hurry, to where the first daylight showed faintly through a narrow cavity at the far end of the cave. They were on sand now and another larger cave opened out beyond it. At the V-shaped entrance three figures were outlined. Bob Cherry, Inky, and Clara Trevlyn.

"Any sign of Bessie?" they all cried simultaneously, and all sighed disappointment at negative responses. Bob and Clara and Inky had started off along the outer walls and completed the circuit, then found a rough track down the cliff side, from where they'd walked along to the caves but had seen no sign of Jennie and her lobsters.

"We've come down from the castle," said Harry. "We'd better all return that way. The others will be getting alarmed if we don't show up soon."

They turned to leave the lightening morning with the rising sun sending its sparkle across the eastern reaches of the Channel. The return journey was made without incident and after a hurried wash and tidy-up the chums made their way to the dining room.

The fire was burning cheerfully and the "stay-at-homes", as Bob addressed them, Mabs , Johnny and Marjorie, lingered restlessly by the fireside. Bunter, however was not lingering with them.

The small niceties of courtesy had never troubled Bunter. He sat in sole splendour at the head of the big Tudor oak draw-table, indulging his favourite exercise in life; keeping his fat jaws in good working order. Platters of bacon, mushrooms, kidneys and sausages were arrayed before him, rapidly revealing their attractive floral designs as Bunter reached for the servers yet again.

At the opposite end of the table stood Max Alvan, slightly leaning, his hands resting on the back of the big oak carver chair. He said dryly: "I suggest you all start breakfast. Going hungry won't restore your missing friend."

"Is Smithy back," asked Harry.

"No, neither is Diana."

The chums discovered that their early morning expedition had induced their appetites. Johnny Bull made a pointed task of removing all edibles from Bunter's end of the table, not a simple undertaking but successful. Mrs Quinn came in with ample fresh reinforcements, all of which were placed well away from Bunter's end of the table. She asked if their missing friend had been found then shook her head. "The lass can't be far. She can't run away. The only way off the island is by boat and I don't fancy her chances on getting one of that fisher lot to take her. So she's still on the island."

This was obviously intended to be consoling but somehow its labour of the obvious failed the intent. And now fresh unease gripped the chums. Diana and Smithy had not returned from their personal search for Bessie.

Bob Cherry got up from the breakfast table and sighed. "Shall give them another half hour then send out the search parties again?"

Max Alvan was still in the room. He said, "I must ask you all to let me know if you set out again. More importantly, where you plan to search."

They stared at him. Johnny Bull said, with a hint of belligerence: "We can't do that. We don't know ourselves."

Harry stood up and glanced at his watch. "It's nearly ten. Why wait another half hour?"

Chapter 6
Bessie---and a small surprise!

The two latest objects of concern for the chums were standing on a slight rise of waste ground behind a small cottage at the far end of the island. As a cottage in a romantic setting it left a great deal to he desired. Both front and back gardens were sadly overgrown with weeds on which winter had little effect, the paintwork was blistered and faded, and gates had long since parted company with their hinges. Twin curls of smoke from the two chimneys were the only signs of life about the place.

"This was definitely the one that brute of a man came from," Diana said. "I can't say I fancy our reception if we knock at his door."

"Scared?" Smithy raised sardonic brows.

"Not in the least," she said airily. "Just stating a fact."

"Come on---live up to your nickname."

They walked down the incline, hesitated then entered the gateway and rapped on the door. It instantly swung open under the touch.

"Anybody at home?"

"Who wants to know?"

The rough voice startled them. The burly fisherman had rounded the corner of the cottage so silently for such a big man.

Smithy said politely: "We expected to meet up with one of our friends here."

"Well I ain't seen her. Now be off with you."

"How did you know it was a her?"

"Why you nosy young---"

"Her name is Bessie!" Diana deliberately raised her voice, and heard a young child's cry from within the cottage. "Oh, you've got a baby. Is her name Bessie?"

Again, Diana raised her voice as loudly as she could and the man suddenly lunged forward at her, his forearm catching her shoulder. Diana responded with a scream that surprised herself and Smithy even more. She cried, "You struck me! That's assault! I could have you in court for that." She turned. "You saw that. Smithy. You're my witness."

Smithy was grinning, partly at Diana's act and partly at the fury on the fisherman's face. Then abruptly they were silenced.

From the cottage came the cry of a child again, and with it a thin, quavering voice, unmistakable: "B-b-Babs---Babs---"

"I knew it! She had to he here!" In a flash Diana moved, and before the man gathered his dismayed wits together she shot past him, round the side of the cottage to where a back door stood open. A thin woman with lank straggling hair and a weary expression turned from a stone sink and a pile of steaming laundry. "Who---what---?"

"Where is she?" Diana snapped. "I know she's here. I heard her!"

"Damn you woman---don't you dare say a word !" The bulk of the fisherman filled the doorway. Behind him Smithy was trying to pass him. "She hasn't said a word yet, you brute," Diana cried, as the man thrust out a violent arm at Smithy's face.

The Bounder was sent staggering. His temper flared. He recovered his balance and leapt at the burly man.

The man turned. "Spoiling for a fight, you whippersnapper?" He shook the schoolboy off as a man might shrug off a jacket. "Let's have you outside and---"

"Stop it;" Diana yelled. "You're just a bully and a coward. Threatening a schoolboy! When my father hears---"

"She's right." A strange voice broke in. The artist appeared at the door. "Lay off it, Jem, you idiot. You've ruined everything."

"I don't know what you've ruined, and I don't care," Diana cried. "We came for our friend and we're not leaving without her."

"You see," said the artist, "they're just a couple of youngsters. You can't blame them for wondering why you're so damn surly."

Diana and Smithy both caught a certain inflexion in the artist's tone, a hidden warning that Jem was too thick to hear. Diana turned to the woman. "Where is she?"

The woman reached for a heavy key by the sink. She faltered: "I didn't have anything to do with it. I didn't want to keep the fat lassie here but it was the baby. He made too much noise..." She put the key into Diana's hand and pointed to a door across the small inner hall. Diana twisted it frantically in the lock and flung open the door. On the threshhold she stopped and gasped. "I don't believe it!"

Bessie was there, sitting on a sagging old sofa beside a small, smokey fire. She looked bedraggled and tired, and she was not alone. Huddled in her arms was a small child, perhaps two or three years old. A child with flushed, feverish cheeks and frightened eyes. With thin little arms it was clinging desperately to Bessie. Suddenly it let out a terrified cry.

Smithy burst into the room, with Jem lunging in behind him. Smithy yelled over his shoulder: "If you've hurt her you'll pay for it. I'll see to that, make no mistake." He touched Bessie's hand: "Are you all right?" Bessie nodded, and Smithy glared at Jem. "I don't know what all this is about, why you've kidnapped our friend and this child, but there are fourteen of us up at the castle and we'll see you in the hands of the police if it's the last thing we do."

"You see, Jem," the artist said sadly, "you've ruined everything. I'm getting out now, while I can."

"But, Phil! The money!" Jem appeared to forget all about Bessie, the child, Diana and the Bounder, and rushed out after the artist.

"Come on, Bessie," said the Bounder. "Let's get you back to the castle." He turned to the woman. "You'd better take the child."

"Oh no!" The woman shrank back. "I don't want him. He—he's not ours."

The Bounder shook his head. For once he appeared baffled by this situation. Bessie stood up, the child still in her arms. She said: "I can't leave him here. He's sick."

"He doesn't look as if he's going to leave you," said Diana.

"But what's going to happen?" The Bounder spread his hands helplessly. "He must belong to somebody. We can't take him back to the castle."

"Oh yes," Bessie said stubbornly. "I'm not leaving him!" She looked on the verge of tears, and so did the child.

Smithy gave it up. He strode out of the cottage. Bessie and Diana followed, the child with his head on Bessie's shoulder, obviously settling down for a sleep.

The artist was -striding along the small landing stage towards a neat white motor cruiser moored there. Jem was shouting imprecations, the artist ignored. Diana, the Bounder and Bessie paused only briefly before making for the beach and the shortest way back to the castle. Halfway there the search party appeared, with joyous cries and many questions.

"Not now," said the Bounder. "Can somebody persuade this infant to put Bessie down and we might get back a bit quicker. I need some breakfast!"

Bessie shook her head and plodded on determinedly up the hill path. Babs stayed close to her side. "What happened, Bess?"

"I g-got lost when I went up for your present." Bessie paused for breath. "I went on along a passage to see if it came out the other way. B-but it didn't." Another pause for breath and to hoist the child more securely in her arms. "Then I saw the funny little staircase and thought it would lead me down to the hall and---and I'd start again. And then I heard him crying, and he didn't stop, and I had to go on down. He was at the bottom of the steps, in the cave, all by himself." Another pause for gulps of air from the now breathless Bessie. Yet she refused to give in. "Then I pip-picked him up and he tried to talk to me but I couldn't understand what he was trying to say. Then two men came into the cave with lanterns, and one said, 'There he is, we'd better take him back to your place. Your missus can see to him. Who's the girl?' Then the other one, that beastly Jem, said, 'How should I know, but we'd better take her back as well until the business is finished.'"

"Oh, Bessie," sighed Babs. "You've had a right old time of it, haven't you?"

"Oh, and I'm famished," groaned the fat duffer. "All that woman give me was a small tin of soup. And he was sick after she gave him some tinned custard and bread." Bessie shuddered at the memory.

Babs was silent. She was wondering how on earth all this was to be sorted out. They appeared to have acquired a baby. Name unknown. Destination unknown. Parents unknown. A baby, moreover, who appeared to have attached himself with great determination to Bessie.

But another surprise was waiting for them in the castle.

A group of people were huddled round the fire in Great Hall, their hands cradling cups of soup. But fear froze their faces when the chums entered. Smithy breathed a heavy sigh. "Now what?" he exclaimed.

Marjorie Hazeldene hurried to Babs. "Two men brought these people here a few minutes ago. They're with Max somewhere."

"Max! I knew it!" Smithy groaned. "I knew he was up to something. Why do we never have a Christmas in peace?"

"But where've you been, Bessie?" Clara demanded. "Who's the kid?"

"Bessie's starting a nursery school," said Jemima blandly.

"Anybody know the way to the kitchen?" snarled the Bounder. "That is if Bunter has left anything edible in this place." He stormed off, and the chums turned to Bessie. "Let's get you and your new little friend upstairs for a clean up."

But they were stopped as they moved across the Great Hall.

A woman detached herself from the group by the fire. She came uncertainly towards Bessie. "You look after him?" Her English was heavily accented. "You very kind. He has no-one. Thank you." She turned and almost rushed back to her group, as though afraid.

Then Mrs Quinn entered. "There's food in the dining room if you'll all come through."

"Oh, yes." Bessie forgot about a wash and brush up and was first through, still with her sleeping burden. The chums followed, and the strangers, two young men, an older man and three women, came uncertainly as though uncertain that they were doing the right thing. They sat down and forgetting any fear, fell to the food as fiercely as any Bunter. Except that real hunger fuelled their fervour. Smithy arrived then, carrying a plate of cold ham, bread and butter and a shive of apple pie. "That Max has something to

do with all this. I'm going to phone my father soon as I've eaten this and find out just what is going on."

"Yes, Max is concerned about all this," said an amused voice behind Smithy. Max, and two men in the uniform of Customs and Excise dropped into chairs beside the Bounder and Diana.

"Don't you know who those people are?"

Diana shook her head.

"They're illegal immigrants. We've come to the heart of a racket here. A well organised one. Where better to ship in a small boatload, than an uninhabited island in the Channel and a place to hide them while false papers are prepared for them."

"By that artist chap?" said Smithy "He's gone. An hour ago."

"In a white motor cruiser called the Herald," said Diana.

"He's known to us," said one of the Customs officers. "We'll catch up with him."

"What about that brute Jem?"

"A small cog. Used to ferry them over to the mainland a few at a time, to a small cove and cars waiting for them."

"Does my father know about this?" said Smithy in sour tones.

"Yes, We'd been trying to track the source of this pipeline for several weeks and traced it to a small lonely cove on the Cornish coast, people were reporting glimpses of strangers where strangers rarely appear. Also thefts. When we discovered that the island was now uninhabited and the American owner had put it on the market we got interested. The agent gave us the new owners' names and we contacted them. Your father, young sir, was not too pleased, and neither were we when we heard about the Christmas party for a dozen schoolgirls and boys. So we arranged for Max to get the manager's job to keep an eye on you all, but of course your fathers were sworn to secrecy."

"Just wait till I see my parent," said Diana grimly. "How could he?"

"So of course the smugglers lost the castle as a hiding place for those refugees and this latest batch had to be hidden in the caves for a couple of nights, poor blighters."

So what's going to happen to them?" asked Jemima.

"Don't worry. We'll be moving them out this afternoon. They'll go through the usual procedures. You'll have your Christmas party in peace."

"Peace," sighed Diana. Her animosity had disappeared and all the warmth and generosity of her strange, wilful nature came to the fore. "Yes, it's Christmas. She looked at Smithy and a glance of pure understanding passed these two rebellious youngsters.

"Cancel your arrangements until the twenty-seventh," said the Bounder.

"What?" exclaimed Max, and the two Customs men stared. "What do you mean?"

"What I say," returned the Bounder. "We want to give them Christmas, warmth and food and safety, before they go through the weeks or months of uncertainty about their futures. It's only three more days."

"And there's Bessie's baby," said Diana softly. "He's adopted her. He's a baby for Christmas."

Max and the law looked long at each other and then at the chums.

"It's highly irregular," Max said.

"So has our last day been," said Smithy. He leaned towards Diana. "Our fathers are not going to be pleased, are they?"

"No," said Diana, with a wicked grin. "Mine will be furious."

"So will mine---it's going to cost him, not letting us in on the secret." His returned grin was as equally wicked as Diana's.

He stood up and faced the three men. "So that's settled, okay?"

Max sighed. "Okay. But remember, if you lose a single refugee I'll have you in the young offenders court before you can say not guilty."

It seemed like magic when the party came to life. Frantic preparations began. Max yielded gracefully and helped to get bedrooms ready for these most unexpected Christmas guests. The girls piled happily into kitchen chores to help with the extra cooking. The boys put up more decorations, brought in ample fuel and logs for the fires. There was a hasty rummage among personal possessions to find new or almost new articles that could be put on the tree for the refugees. Mabs parted with a new, soft woollen blue dress and with Marjorie's sewing skills a smart little suit was made for the little boy. Frank and Harry and Babs created a cardboard whirligig on a stick that actually worked and Babs painted it.

The child's name was Stefan. The woman who had first spoken to the chums told them both his parents had died in a bombing raid. She and the others had managed to smuggle him on the van which brought them the first leg of their journey and then aboard the freighter which had brought them to the island. Then Stefan had lost himself in the dark caves and Jem had refused to wait any longer while they searched for the hapless child.

After Jennie's encounter with the chums Jem had to get the refugees away before the chums discovered them, and the final stage of the

smuggling pipeline of human misery was not due to take place until two days later. So the refugees were herded into a ramshackle shed at the back of Jem's cottage, a shed stinking from the years of the fish gutting for which Jem and a brother had used it. When they went back later that night to look for the child they also found Bessie. Unable to cope with a screaming child, Bessie was forced to return to the cottage where they locked her up.

The refugees themselves gradually came out of their shell of fear and entered into the warmth and joy now reigning at Stowaway Castle---a castle still living up to its name!

Diana and Smithy decided to go to the cottage and invite Jennie and her downtrodden mother to spend Christmas at the castle. As Diana said, they'd obviously suffered years of misery at the hands who of the brutal Jem, who now, hopefully, was locked up in the best place for him.

The last members of the Christmas gathering arrived on that late afternoon before Christmas Eve.

The expressions on the faces of the two millionaires were distinctly ominous as the scene unfolded. Diana smiled sweetly at her father and said: "Why didn't you tell me you were planning all this excitement for me. We've really enjoyed it all." She reached up to plant a kiss on his cheek. "I hope you've brought your Father Christmas outfit and a sack of presents."

Mr Royston-Clarke hadn't, unfortunately, but his mouth twitched as he said he would see what he could do within the short time remaining.

Nearby, Smithy was repeating virtually the same line---without the accompanying kiss---to his father, and Mr Vernon-Smith was trying to remain stern as he made the same promise. And then the two men gave in and laughed.

Suddenly it felt like Christmas at last!

Those Magnificent Marvellous Machines

by
Des O'Leary

Colin Morgan, that great authority on the DC Thomson story papers, often discussed with me his project for an article on their vast and entertaining array of fantastic machines. His starting point was the striking cover of ADVENTURE no. 1114 (26th August 1944). This cover looked back over the many futuristic inventions which it had featured since its beginning as the first of the Big Five story papers in 1921. Although World War II was raging at this time, warfare is not particularly the theme, rather devices which could be used by heroes or villains in adventures around the world and even in space. When Colin learned that he would not be able to write this article himself he sent me some material which he had assembled with the wish that I might undertake it for him.

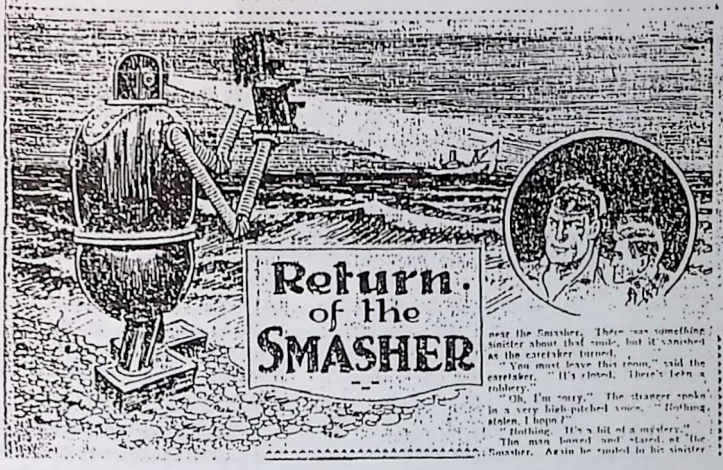
BEGINS INSIDE—"THE SON OF ALI THE WICKED."

As well as the inventions featured on this ADVENTURE cover, an article inside the paper gave more examples of its fertile stock of gadget-based stories. The reader is reminded (or his Dad is!) of "The Electric Shadow" of 1932 with his inflatable flying suit; the "Human Eagles" of 1934 whose mechanical wings were attached to a power-unit on the men's bodies; in that same year, "The Man Who Doomed The World!" was one Zorak with his 'human shell ... a projectile which functioned by means of an electric motor, with a man lying inside it at the controls. It had a diamond-hard nose, just as armour-piercing bombs and shells have but did not explode... It cut through concrete walls or the steel hulls of ships... an everlasting shell!'. 1934 also produced a gigantic aeroplane 'a floating city, no less, with factories, dormitories, dining-halls, recreation rooms etc.' which even dwarfed 'those tremendous and monstrous in size' U.S. B29s just then bombing Japan. I find even more interesting the mention of robot soldiers from 1927. This is quite an early use of the term 'robot', which must have been soon after Capek's play "R.U.R." popularised the word.

1931

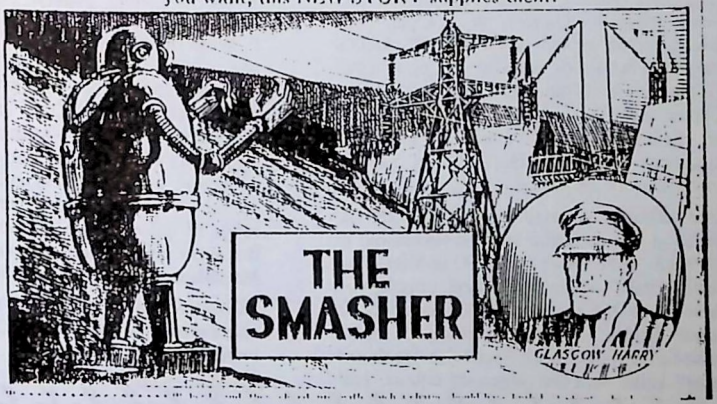
THE GREAT FIGHT BEGINS — The Men Who Build the Railroad, Against the Strange Figure Who Wrecks Their Work.

1933



1954

Where has it come from, this metal monster with the grip of death? If it's thrills you want, this NEW STORY supplies them!



Of course ADVENTURE was only one of the Thomson story papers and this delight in fantastic mechanical marvels was also a feature of ROVER, WIZARD, SKIPPER and HOTSPUR. Let us take a look at some other examples, avoiding those directly connected with war or space fiction. The Second World War did indeed enlist many of the famous Big Five heroes, Morgyn the Mighty, Strang the Terrible, the Wolf of Kabul and Chung among others. In the same way one fondly-remembered robot, the Iron Teacher, made his first appearance (HOTSPUR,1941) as an extraordinary schoolmaster in the Wild West, where gunmen and rustlers found him an invincible opponent before he, too, went on to triumph over German and Japanese foes, the role for which he is perhaps best remembered.

Leaving aside the display of ADVENTURE'S innovations featured on this cover (the Crimson Phantom, the remote-controlled racing car of 1923; 1925's Undersea Boys with their marvellous tractor capable of surface or sea-bed work; the ultra-sensitive listening device of the Whispering Phantom in 1936; and The Ocean Scooter, a speedboat with a rear-mounted aero-engine) let's consider how its companion papers were competing.

First and foremost should come The Smasher. Not the present DANDY strip but perhaps Thomson's favourite robot menace. It made its debut in 1931 in WIZARD, soon returning there in 1933 to face again its nemesis, Glasgow Harry, the engineer who defeated it again and again in Canada, the USA, Africa and South America, not only in the WIZARD but also in the DANDY picture strip in 1938, ROVER in a text story in 1954 and again in ROVER in picture strip form in 1971. Comics like VICTOR in the 1960s and BULLET in the 1970s featured it again.

ROVER had another long-lasting favourite in The Black Sapper, first appearance 1929. His wonderful 'land submarine' bored its way into bank vaults, prisons and even London Underground stations while engaged in his criminal activities. Luckily, the Sapper later became a servant of law and order. WIZARD'S Captain Q of the 1930s was also seeking revenge on his enemies in his futuristic though unenclosed helicopter, aided by his giant black companion. Mute Selim. Happily, after a somewhat unscrupulous beginning, Q, like The Sapper, reformed to work for justice.

The turbulent years of the late 30s and the approach of the world war were foreshadowed in SKIPPER'S 1938 story "The One-Man War Against Britain" where malevolent cripple von Starken sends his radio-controlled bombers to devastate British targets. Fortunately, a brave Scottish boy and the British Secret Service thwart his plans. In the next few years, of course, real German bombers would wreak havoc on Britain and would not prove so easy to defeat.

Looking at the many technological wonders featured so prominently in the Big Five must lead us to speculate about this interest on the part of their authors, and even more so of their dominating creative editors. The main reason seems obvious. Boys have always been intrigued by intricate mechanisms. With the Industrial Revolution, Britain pioneered an abundance of inventions, from the steam engine and railways to the internal combustion engine, aircraft and great building and engineering achievements. (Indeed, with regard to great engineering feats, it would be an unusual year when the staunchly Scottish Thomsons did not picture the mighty Forth Bridge under attack by a variety of foreign invaders!) In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, too, boys' fiction was heavily influenced by the stories of Jules Verne, whose 'Voyages Extraordinaires' were usually made in extraordinary machines like his submarine Nautilus or the airship Clipper of the Clouds. These stories were often serialised in boys' magazines like B.O.P. as were similar stories by many other authors.

In the inter-war years, when the Big Five started, the modern world with its aircraft, submarines, racing cars etc., together with their depiction in the increasingly popular new medium of film, stimulated an overwhelming interest in speed and air travel. Boys delighted in their Hornby Dublo train layouts or Meccano sets, which gave them an early interest in and understanding of how things worked. By the way, a recent Nobel Prize winner in Science stated on the radio that he was convinced that the diminished influence of Meccano was a contributory cause of Britain's present engineering decline.

So, the vigorous new papers from Dundee had a great opportunity to appeal to boy readers with adventure stories set in the modern world of invention, speed and imaginative machinery. These new story papers, of course, were not alone. Older authors like 'Herbert Strang', Percy F. Westerman, F.S. Brereton, Harry Collingwood and many others were extremely popular, while later periodicals like CHAMPION (from 1922) nand MODERN BOY (from 1928) also emphasised their up-to-date approach. But Thomson's Big Five provided a loosely integrated collection of story-tellers guided by controlling editors of genius, which were able to offer a range of unforgettable characters with machines that were ultra-modern or, even better, futuristic. Magnificent machines - marvellous stories!

(Dedicated to the memory of Colin Morgan, that much-missed lover of D.C. Thomson story papers.)

A Few Notes on

Those Grand Christmas Double Numbers

by

John Bridgwater

If someone suggested you might like to read a romance about a young woman, kidnapped in the street, going on a long sea voyage with illegal immigrants and drug dealers followed by an ever faithful friend who would willingly risk his life for her, you could be excused for thinking, "This is a topical Mills and Boone novel. Not for me!"

However, you could be wrong. This description fits one of the *Union Jack* Grand Christmas Double Numbers, No. 529 to be precise. It was published on 29th November 1913. Maybe that word "romance" did not mean quite the same as it does in the everyday speech of 2001. An example of the use of "romance" in those days is given in the first few pages of the 1903 book entitled "Romance" by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer which was serialised by BBC radio some years ago.

The period before 1920 was a golden age of Christmas Double Numbers. Most of them had 48 pages, a few earlier ones had 56 pages, and all for 2d. They contained approximately 80,000 word "romances". G.H. Teed wrote most of them. Andrew Murray, C. Haytor and M. Storm wrote one each. Edwy Searles Brooks, who was beginning to make an impact on *Union Jack* near the end of that golden age, wrote two, 1917 and 18, but they had dwindled to 28 pages and then 16 pages by this time. The golden age was over.

A list of Christmas Double Numbers is given below:

Date	*UJ* No.	Title & Characters	Author	Pages
5/12/1908	269	The Ghost of Rupert Forbes	M. Storm	56
7/12/1912	478	The Mad Millionaire (Count Ivor Carlac)	Andrew Murray	56
29/11/1913	529	The Sacred Sphere (Yvonne, Huxton Rymer, Wu Ling)	G.H. Teed	48
19/12/1914	584	A Soldier and a Man (Yvonne)	G.H. Teed	48
27/11/1915	633	Fugitives of Justice (Yvonne)	G.H.Teed	48

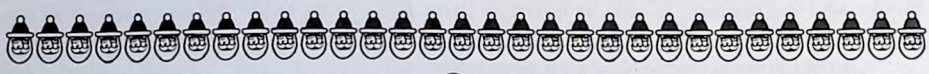
Date	*UJ* No.	Title & Characters	Author	Pages
25/11/1916	685	The Blue God (Yvonne, Huxton Rymer and Hammerton Palmer)	G.H. Teed	40
24/11/1917	737	The Peril of the Trahernes	G.S. Brooks	28
28/12/1918	794	Waldo the Wonder Man (Rupert Waldo)	E.S. Brooks	16

An unexpected aspect of Double Numbers was that they were not just confined to Christmas. There were Easter, Spring, Summer and Holiday Double Numbers. All on the grand scale and many with coloured cover pictures which lifted them out of the ordinary in the Union Jack's pink cover days. A list of them is given below:-

Date	*UJ* No.	Title & Characters	Author	Pages
Easter 30/3/1907	181	Sexton Blake's Zulu (Lobangu)	C. Haytor	56
Easter 22/3/13	493	The Diamond Dragon (Huxton Rymer)	G.H. Teed	56
Summer 2/8/1913	512	The Yellow Sphinx (Yvonne, Huxton Rymer, Wu Ling)	G.H. Teed	48
Spring 11/4/1914	548	The Case of the Radium Patient (Yvonne & Huxton Rymer)	G.H. Teed	48
Summer 20/6/1914	558	The Death Club (Yvonne)	G.H. Teed	48
Holiday 1/8/1914	564	The Crimson Pearl (Yvonne & Huxton Rymer)	G.H. Teed	48
Easter 3/4/1915	599	The Vengeance of Elevea (The Council of Eleven)	G.H. Teed	48
Summer 31/7/1915	616	Bribery and Corruption (Hammerton Palmer)	G.H. Teed	48

Returning to *UJ* 529 as an example of these spacious romances in which Teed really did spread his unquestioned story-telling abilities. In this one he not only wrote an intriguing crime story: it is also a travel story with vivid descriptions of a Canadian winter and adventurous sea voyages. It is really quite educational as well as enjoyable. The title "The Sacred Sphere" refers to a very special Christmas present, which is finally given to a very unexpected recipient.

The lists are probably very incomplete as they only give those I have had available to read. There are likely to be some I have not seen, but from my reading I recommend anyone who enjoys a really long story full of incident and interest to try the Grand Double Numbers.



Crabbe's Practice
A Twice-Told Tale

by
Derek Hinrich

I recently had the chance to acquire a bound volume of the Boy's Own Paper for 1885. My interest was quickened by the knowledge that some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's early stories had appeared in this publication, and sure enough in the Christmas Number for that year, I found "Crabbe's Practice" by A Conan Doyl MB CM, "the Author of 'An Exciting Christmas Eve, etc.'".

"Crabbe's Practice" is a humorous story and tells how the fairly recently-qualified Dr Crabbe at last establishes the foundations, by rather unorthodox means, of a successful practice in a provincial English city with the assistance of a friend, who is the narrator of the tale. Conan Doyle's early partner, the extraordinary Dr George Turnavine Budd, is plainly the inspiration for Dr Crabbe (as it has been suggested he was, in whole or in part, for various other characters of Doyle's, Professors Moriarty and Challenger amongst them). The stratagem by which Crabbe effects his exit from an over-crowded political meeting which leads to his first meeting with the narrator is a triumph of eccentric lateral thinking which sounds to be pure Budd.

On the other hand, the precarious early days of his own practice in Southsea may have suggested the main thrust of the story to young Doctor Conan Doyle as a piece of wishful thinking. How does a new doctor establish himself in a practice if he cannot advertise? Did not Conan Doyle himself pass anonymous paragraphs to a local Southsea paper about a runaway horse and carriage fortuitously stopped outside his door and the providential assistance he was able to render to the driver and passengers?

An arranged "accident" to a third party in front of a crowd and an inspired (in both senses of the word) display of medical assistance by a passing doctor was the sort of stroke one might well imagine Crabbe-Budd devising.

"Crabbe's Practice" was apparently not included by Conan Doyle in any of his collections of short stories until he regrouped them in the 'twenties. According to the introduction to John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green's *Unknown Conan Doyle Uncollected Stories*, it was in fact the only one of his early stories that appeared in the BOP which he did eventually republish.

"Crabbe's Practice" took up approximately three pages of the BOP's Christmas issue, printed in double columns in quite small type. In my copy of *The Conan Doyle Stories*, where it appears as the last of "The Tales of Medical Life", it occupies fourteen and a half pages. I wondered idly how many pages of the omnibus matched a page of the BOP, so I took the Murray edition down to see.

As I did so, I had a considerable surprise. There were marked differences between the two texts. It appears that when Sir Arthur collected "Crabbe's Practice" he substantially re-wrote it, so that there are now in effect two "Crabbes", the BOP or Ur-Crabbe, and the mature version. The latter is naturally more polished, as one would expect after Conan Doyle's forty years' experience of his craft. But while they are essentially the same story there are, as I said, notable differences between the two.

For example, the Ur-Crabbe begins, "John Waterhouse Crabbe was a man of ready resource and great originality of mind. When I first met him he was a medical student at Edinburgh University, and had distinguished himself in the classes..." While the later version has the more urbane opening, "I wonder how many men remember Tom Waterhouse Crabbe, student of medicine of this city. He was a man whom it was not easy to forget if you had once come across him..."

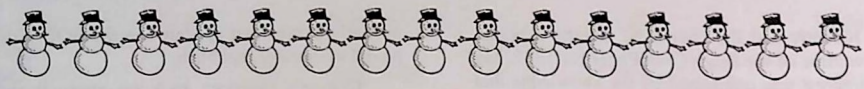
The Defoe-like style of the earlier version would, however, no doubt have been more suited to the BOP which was then but six years old. It must be remembered that the BOP was the child of The Religious Tract Society and at that time the editor was invigilated upon by a panel of evangelical clergymen who believed the Paper should be devoted to works of an improving nature and who only grudgingly and reluctantly accepted the need of fiction of a humorous or adventurous sort to sugar the pill.

In the Ur-Crabbe the narrator is called Hudson, in Crabbe he is Barton (Dr Jack Barton, not Dr Hill Barton: that was the alias of another Doylian narrator). When Crabbe needs help in the earlier version he

invites Hudson to come and stay with him and his wife at "Bridport": in the later it is Mrs Crabbe who writes inviting Barton to "Brisport" (I wonder if Conan Doyle meant "Brisport" all along and the BOP printers misread it: it seems likely from the text). There are other embellishments as the story proceeds.

There is one point in both versions which intrigues me. I know medicine had advanced well beyond the four humours stage by this time, but was the stimulation of the moribund by electric shocks recognised treatment in 1885 or was Conan Doyle here, as with his warnings of unrestricted submarine warfare and proposals for the "tin hat", in advance of his time?

The existence of two separate versions must surely make "Crabbe's Practice" unique amongst Sir Arthur's published works (though the earlier version is probably fairly hard to find now) but possession of both does furnish a fascinating insight into the development of Conan Doyle as a writer and a contrast between the apprentice and the master.



The Bunters at Home

by

Roger M. Jenkins

(Reprinted from the 1962 *C.D. Annual)*

Part 1 – The Bunter Children

The whole of the Bunter family is removed at least one stage beyond reality. This is in itself rather a strange circumstance, since Charles Hamilton's characterisation was, generally speaking, superb. He created a range of finely differentiated characters possibly, as George Orwell claimed, so that each reader could find at least one with which to identify himself. Yet Billy Bunter, Charles Hamilton's most famous character, is about the last person any one would wish to claim kindred with, and is also the grossest character of them all (in traits as well as size): the subtle touches that distinguish the others are entirely lacking here. Bunter surprises and amuses us with his audacity, his misfortunes and his successes. Yet we never stop to think how out of place he really is.

In his early days Bunter was nothing but a silly, half-blind schoolboy, a character as credible as any of his form-fellows, but it was not long before he began to become more exaggerated. The explanation of this is to be found in a letter which Charles Hamilton wrote to me ten years ago:-

"Here it is, straight from the horse's mouth! Billy Bunter was first evolved about 1898 or 1899, as I think I have mentioned in my autobiography. No, not as a minor character, but as one to be developed according to circumstances: or rather, left to develop himself. Poor old Bunter might have been rolling down the Remove passage while the Boer War was going on, had the editor of the time seen differently. But he had to wait for years, when at length I sort of smuggled him into the *Magnet*, where he had a chance to grow – and did 'Planning' never comes into this kind of thing; if you 'plan' a character I think you will end up by producing something like nothing on earth. He just grows, like Topsy. All that the author has to do is to give him his head!"

Dickens had had experience of characters getting out of hand, especially his grotesques like Mrs. Gamp and Mr. Micawber who seem to be so differently constituted from his more restrained ones. But Dickens' later novels have none of these really eccentric characters whereas, of course, Bunter was a fixture at Greyfriars to the end. This blending of reality and unreality was skilfully done, but one has only to compare the behaviour of Mr. Quelch in, say, the Stacey series (*Magnets* 1422-33) with his behaviour in the Bunter the Runaway series (Nos. 737-9) to spot the difference: in the first one, Mr. Quelch is a character of high drama, whereas in the other he is approaching a caricature out of a comic strip. There are merits in each series, but this kind of antithesis is to be observed throughout the *Magnet*, and it is Bunter who is responsible.

Sammy Bunter is, if anything, more in touch with reality than is his elder brother. On the very

A new picture of Billy Bunter, specially drawn
for Collectors' Digest Annual by C.H. Chapman

day that he arrived at Greyfriars (*Magnet* 144) he showed the clearer understanding, the greater perspicacity:

"I shall return it to you out of some of my postal-orders if I do not get the loans back from Wharton and the others."

"Oh, chuck it! That kind of yarn's no good in the family, you ass!" growled Bunter minor.

"Billy Bunter rubbed his nose thoughtfully. It occurred to him that Sammy was right on this point. But humbug was so ingrained in Billy Bunter's nature that to part with it would be like parting with a bit of himself."

Sammy is too spry to allow himself to indulge in flights of fancy like his brother. In the renowned Bunter Court series Sammy was quite willing to share the benefits of the swindle but he left quite suddenly when events took an awkward turn. As a consequence, Sammy is not so unbelievable a character as Billy, but he is also clearly presented to us without a grain of sympathy: towards the end of the 'twenties Charles Hamilton showed quite a deal of affection for Billy Bunter, but Sammy was always detestable.

Bessie Bunter made her first appearance in the school Friend, the first six numbers of which were written by Charles Hamilton. She is nearer to Billy in age, but closer to Sammy in outlook. The first *Magnet* reference to her is in No. 651, in which Billy dressed up as Bessie in order to secure admission to a feed. Bessie's appearances in the pages of the *Magnet* were usually fleeting: she seldom playing any part in the plot, and was just an unwelcome companion to Marjorie and Clara. Billy and Bessie are usually more entertaining when referring to each other in absentia: Billy when offering to put in a good word with Bessie on behalf of one of the juniors (in the mistaken belief that this commendation would earn him the favour demanded), and Bessie when threatening a boy that she would get her brother Billy to thrash him for his misdeeds.

Bessie is like her two brothers – she is literally and metaphorically short-sighted at times.

Part 2 – The Adult Bunters

Mrs. Bunter is a somewhat shadowy figure who never puts in an appearance at Greyfriars: even letter writing is something she leaves to her husband. But Mr. Bunter more than makes up for his wife's reticence. He is mentioned fairly regularly in the *Magnet*, the first occasion of any importance being in No. 366 when he pulled off a handsome deal on the Stock Exchange and sent his eldest son four fivers. This horn of plenty soon ran dry, but the episode was long remembered and often lent credence to some of Bunter's later boasts, Skinner, for example, referred to this event in "chequemate" (1929 Holiday Annual) when Bunter received a cheque for fifty pounds from his father. It turned out that the cheque was only to be shown around, and then returned, so that Mr. Bunter's eldest son could keep up appearances.

Mr. Bunter's vanity led him astray more than once. A famous occasion was No. 474 entitled "Viscount bunter". He was convinced that he could lay claim to an extinct earldom – all that was needed was to pay the expenses of an investigation. He even put in an appearance at Greyfriars on this occasion, whereas in No. 897, when history repeated itself, the closest we come to him is in correspondence:-

"There was a Sir William de Bonterre who fought for King Charles," said the Owl of the Remove. "There's a lot about him in this book, sir. Of course, we always knew we were descended from a distinguished family. We're connected with many titled people – "

"What?"

"And, according to what the man told my pater, sir, the connection of the Bunters with the de Bonterres could be worked out quite easily. It's only a question of paying the necessary fees for the investigation."

Mr. Quelch opened his lips, and closed them again. He did not desire to state to Mr. Bunter's son what he thought of Mr. Bunter's absurdity. If the fat stockbroker chose to believe that he was of knightly descent, and to pay away cash to some unscrupulous adventurer for inventing a pedigree for him, that was Mr. William Bunter's own business."

Bunter was blessed with many aunts and uncles. There was, for instance, Aunt Peggy whose remittance he failed to share with Sammy on the day his younger brother first came to Greyfriars. There was also Aunt Amelia, who entertained some of the Bunter tribe for Christmas in 1939. But the astute one was Aunt Martha who was asked to have the young Bunters for Christmas in 1933: she firmly stipulated that, if Bessie came, it was only on the strict understanding that neither of Bessie's brothers accompanied her.

The most famous of the Bunter uncles was Mr. George Bunter who was reputed to be very rich. Bunter had been named after him, and had great hopes of a valuable Christmas present from him in No. 1036: it turned out to be a copy of *The Christmas Carol*":-

"There was some delay in obtaining the book," said Mr. George Bunter. "I did not care to pay two shillings for so small a volume; but after some delay I discovered a shilling edition."

Bunter gasped.

Uncle George went on to elaborate his reasons for choosing this book:-

"You are doubtless aware, William, that you are absolutely selfish –"

"Wha-a-at?"

"That you never give a thought to others –"

"I-I say –"

"That you disgust your relatives by a base and undivided attention to your own selfish interest –"

Uncle George was also a disappointment in No. 1139, when he was ill and staying at a seedy boarding-house in Folkestone. MR. Bunter suggested that his eldest son should pay a surprise visit to the invalid, but it was Bunter who had the surprise:-

"Mr. Bunter thanks you for calling to enquire after him, sir –"

"Show us up," said Bunter.

"But he does not feel well enough to see a visitor –"

"Eh?"

"And he advises you – "

"What?"

"To return to your school without delay –"

"Oh!"

"As it is so late. That is all, sir," said the hall-porter politely.

Uncle George was convalescing in Mentone on the Riviera in No. 1159, from whence he sent Bunter an ironic letter congratulating him on the progress in his studies and promising a handsome tip if he won a prize for Latin verses. Bunter was artful, but not artful enough, and Uncle George was never called upon to honour his promise.

If Mr. George Bunter had heard nothing about his eldest nephew to please him so far, he came to hear something which quite definitely displeased him in No. 1349, something which must have quite blighted Bunter's chances of being made his uncle's heir. This sad rift in the lute came in 1933, at Christmas time, when Billy and Sammy were farmed out to Uncle George when Bunter villa was closed down for the

holidays. He was not the type of uncle that liked to see his nephews enjoying their food, and objected most strongly when the cook told him that cakes and puddings and cold fowls were missing from the pantry. In an effort to find better quarters, Bunter telephoned Wharton Lodge to inform Harry that he was prepared to put up with his fat-headed old fossil of an uncle over the holidays. Unfortunately it was Colonel Wharton who answered the telephone, and the desired invitation was not forthcoming. As he put down the receiver, Billy remarked peevishly to Sammy that he supposed he would have to put up with the stingy old codger after all. Unluckily, Uncle George he happened to enter the room just at that moment, and Bunter was given notice to quit. His great expectations were finally shattered.

Part 3 – Home Sweet Home

Even when taken one or two at a time, the Bunters are overwhelming: when they are all gathered together en masse at Bunter Villa in Reigate, the result is pure farce. Charles Hamilton's puckish sense of humour takes wings and flies away on its own, as it does so magnificently in *Magnet* No. 1019:-

The poet has told us that 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view. Certainly that was the case with Bunter Court.

Generally a building seems small in the distance, and grows larger the nearer one approaches to it.

In the case of Bunter Court this well-known natural law was reversed.

Bunter Court loomed as a large and imposing mansion from the distance of Greyfriars. Close at hand, it diminished remarkably into the moderate dimensions of a villa in Surrey.

Five or six Rolls Royce cars woke the echoes of the wide domain of the Bunters when Billy was at Greyfriars. When he was at home, a single Ford spread its scent of petrol over the whole place, and did not have to spread it very far. "

Bunter's dealings with his family in this number of the *Magnet* shed a revealing light on holiday life at Bunter Villa:-

There was trouble at home for William George, too. He owed Bessie five shillings. Five shillings was not a large sum; but if it had been five hundred thousand pounds, Bessie Bunter could scarcely have dwelt on the subject with more eloquence. In season and out of season, Elizabeth Bunter dwelt on that topic tirelessly. Bessie was, in Billy's opinion, a cat. Bessie's opinion of Billy could not be expressed so laconically. Her vocabulary on the subject was very extensive indeed. Only on one subject could Billy and Bessie agree. That was the subject of Sammy. They heartily agreed that Sammy was a little beast."

Bunter had approached Sammy for a loan and, annoyed at being refused, he banged his head on the fence. His final approach was to his father:-

"I'm afraid you'll miss me a lot, dad, if I'm away practically the whole of the vacation."

"Why should you suppose so?" asked Mr. Bunter in surprise.

"Oh!"

"You need be afraid of nothing of the sort!"

"I-I think perhaps I'd better do some shopping in Southampton, dad," he stammered. "Things for a voyage, you know."

"Quite a good idea."

"Twenty pounds would see me through", said Bunter hopefully.

"Very good. If you possess such a sum, there is no objection to your expending it on an outfit."

"Oh!"

"Now, please do not interrupt me further."

Of course, there was a sting in the tail. As Billy was leaving, his sister came running after him:-

Bunter smiled. At the moment of parting Elizabeth Bunter seemed to realise what a nice brother he was, and wanted to say good-bye – perhaps to hand him a cake or a packet of toffee for the train. Bunter's fat face was quite genial as Bessie rolled up.

"You're going away?" gasped Bessie.

"Yes."

"Not coming back?"

"N-n-no!"

"Well, then, that five shillings –"

"Wh-a-at?"

"That five shillings –" gasped Bessie Bunter.

William George Bunter stared at her. His geniality vanished. It was not to say an affectionate farewell that Bessie had hastened after him – it was not to give him a packet of toffee toe at in the train. It was to raise, once more, that old, distasteful question of the five shillings."

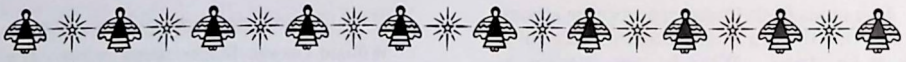
As a study in heartlessness, a complete and callous disregard for each other's feelings, these episodes from *Magnet* No. 1019 could hardly be excelled. The whole Bunter family seems to exemplify the psychiatric notion that those people who are unloved find consolation in eating. It is episodes like these that have led one recent critic to declare that Charles Hamilton must have hated Bunter; but this is a false conclusion. Of course, if Wharton or Nugent or Cherry had been treated with callous indifference by his close relatives, it would have been a dramatic story indeed, but

then these are all credible characters. When you have characters that are almost incredible, then normal standards must go by the board. We are intended to enjoy Bunter, even to hope that he will be successful in his outrageous escapades, but we are never intended to feel sorry for him: even when he is wronged, as in the Carter series (where hilarity is the keynote), the only re-action the reader is expected to have is a feeling that he richly deserves practically anything that comes his way. So it is that the Bunter episodes in the *Magnet* are on a completely different plane from all the others. As soon as one of the Bunters is mentioned, we depart from normality and enter the realms of irony and satire.

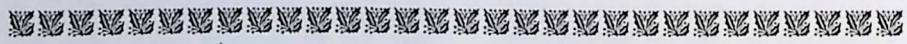
If any one doubts this, it is only necessary to consider some parallel series to prove the point. Compare, for instance, the dramatic Wharton the rebel series (879-888) with the hilarious expulsion of Bunter series (874-7); compare the serious snobbery of de Vere (749-752) with the fatuous snobbery of the Bunter Court series (910-917); see how serious were the effects of da Costa's plots against Harry Wharton (1059-1067_ and how amusing were the effects of Carter's plots against Bunter (1561-1572); think how sorry we are supposed to feel for Colonel Wharton when he was temporarily financially embarrassed (1255-1261), and how we laugh at Mr. Bunter when the same unfortunate thing happened to him (1349). The Bunter version of each theme seems like a farcical parody of the other version. Walpole said that life was a comedy to those who think but a tragedy to those who feel: certainly we feel for Wharton and we think about Bunter. It is also true that tragedies appear to be comedies only when they feature characters who are slightly unreal.

There was, of course, one person at Bunter Villa who seemed to have some spark of natural feeling, and that was Mrs. Bunter. As natural feelings are so out of place at Bunter Villa, we do not see much of her. It is, however, on record that she used to give William an affectionate hug when he left and also provided him with food for his journey. It is also on record, in *Magnet* 1532, that Bunter utilised an unexpected windfall to provide his mother with a holiday in Bournemouth when she was ill. But these moments of tender affection are, really, false coinage in the Bunter clan: Bunter out of character is not Bunter at all. So when he reforms under the influence of Cora Quelch in Nos. 364 and 460, when he saves the gipsy child in 1016, and when he becomes benevolent in No. 1036, he is acting out of character: in fact, any time when he ceases to be selfish he also ceases to be the Bunter who rightly earned his creator such world-wide renown, and he becomes just a good-natured fat boy like Fatty Wynn. The collector who likes Bunter when he seems to have reformed is the collector who does not really like the true Bunter at all, and he had far better transfer his allegiance from Greyfriars to St. Jim's. Of course, Bunter does not star in every *Magnet* story, even though he features in most. But he is an inescapable part of the Greyfriars scene, and no one can honestly claim to like the Greyfriars stories if he fails to find amusement in Bunter.

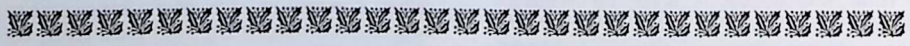
Dickens was not the only author to combine eccentric characters with credible ones: Shakespeare, for example, featured Falstaff and Prince Henry in the same play. The relationship between Bunter and the Famous Five must be regarded in the same light, as a bridge between farce and true drama, be it comedy or tragedy. Only a gifted author can synthesise almost incompatible elements into an acceptable whole. That is the measure of Charles Hamilton's true greatness: not so much that he created Bunter but that he contrived to place such a character in a believable setting.



Greetings to Mary, Darrell, Andrew. Hobby friends. JACK HUGHES, Townsville, Australia.



Season's Greetings from Maurice King, 27 Celtic Crescent, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 2TG to all readers.



READY, YOU FELLOWS? Then off we go again with—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL. Masters' Corridor.

(1)

The Masters' Studies here are situated,
They're studies full of gravity and gloom,
And here your breath is permanently baited,
So let us take a peep in every room.
The first is Prout's, with many curious features,
His Winchester repeater's seen at once,
With stuffed and mounted carcasses of creatures,
The relics of his bygone thrilling hunts.

(2)

In Quelchy's room a typewriter is noted,
And reams and reams of manuscripts he's done,
That glorious work, to which his life's devoted,
"The History of Greyfriars, Volume One"!
And Wiggins has a heavy window curtain
To make a dark-room for his photographs,
Whatever the result, it's fairly certain
He'll be annoyed if anybody laughs.

(3)

Mossoo has lots of books in foreign lingo,
While Capper's study's very neat and prim,
And Hacker's foreign curios—by jingo!
Those swords and spears are typical of him!
And Larry Lascelles boasts of many a trophy,
With cups and caps and silver shields galore,
While Twigg's content with poetry and coffee;
It's very quaint—the Masters' Corridor!

"I SAW THREE SHIPS COME SAILING IN!"

A Verie Olde Carol, as warbled by W. G. Bunter.

I hope my ship comes sailing in,
Comes sailing in, and brings some tin,
And if I get it, I shall grin—
That Christmas postal order!

I've been expecting it for years,
For years and years (excuse my tears!),
I'll shout with joy when it appears,
That Christmas postal order!

Perhaps some titled relative,
Some relative will surely give
The thing for which alone I live,
That Christmas postal order!

Alas, the postman's gone away,
He's gone away, and sad to say
He didn't hand to me to-day
That Christmas postal order!

Perhaps, at length, it will arrive,
It will arrive, if I'm alive,
By Christmas, 1985,
That missing postal order!

* * *

Why are the stars like star-gazers?

Because they have studded the sky for ages.

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

PATRICK GWYNNE,

The Irish Sixth Form Prefect.

G is for GWYNNE—an Irish coon,
And, faith, he's not a bad gossoon!
No, on the whole, he's not so bad,
And that is kind of me, bedad!
For here's a thing I'd have you know:
He gave me six a week ago!
Six whistling wallops on a spot
Where every pain feels extra hot!

And on the Christmas vac I take
A most uncomfortable ache!
Yet, notwithstanding this, I say
He's not so bad—the pesky jay!
He's second prefect, Wingate's chum,
And always smiling, never glum.
At sport he's grand and plays to win,
So here's a MERRY CHRISTMAS, Gwynne!

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By THE GREYFRIARS RHYMESTER

XMAS GRINS

It seems a strange way of accepting a Christmas present to want to whop somebody. Luckily Loder doesn't know who sent him the cigars! (I bet he smokes one though, all the same.)

A famous London store is advertising "Fifty New Lines in Christmas Gifts." That's nothing—Quelchy's just given me five hundred!

One of this year's Christmas bargains is a model railway so true to life that the trains are always late.

Our local railway is offering "Reduced Fare for Christmas." As long as our kitchen staff don't copy 'em that's O.K. by me.

Quelchy's so fond of dishing out lines this Christmas that some of us are wondering whether he will go a bit further and leave us a few lines in his will!

PARTY PUZZLE

A Christmas traveller was heard whistling "Good King Wenceslas" to the tune of "Home, Sweet Home." What was his profession?

Solution at foot of column.

Fisher T. Fish doesn't trust anyone, not even Father Christmas. He is putting a padlock and chain on the stocking he will hang up on Christmas Eve.

Peter Todd says the weather is too cold to put your nose outside the door. Of course, in Toddy's case, when his nose is out most of him is out, so this may be true.

ANSWER TO PARTY PUZZLE

A magician! Nobody else could whistle words!

Bees in Amber

by Reg Cox

At 88 years of age I find that memories of events seventy years ago are fresh in my mind, but I struggle to remember what happened a week ago! I am sharing with you some memories of films I saw about seventy years ago and which I have never forgotten.

The first is a scene from the silent epic film *Ben-Hur* which was made in 1926.

The Jewish people are cruelly oppressed by the Roman invaders, and are longing for deliverance and freedom.

A young Judean prince, Ben-Hur, lives with his sister and widowed mother; they have a beautiful home, and are comfortable and well-to-do.

Everything changes on the day when the tyrant Gratus enters the city in a triumphal procession. As the procession nears Ben-Hur's home, the family are watching from the roof-top when Ben-Hur accidentally dislodges a tile which crashed onto the pavement just as the tyrant's chariot is passing by. In the ensuing commotion Ben-Hur is arrested as a would-be assassin, and is later sentenced to the slave-galleys for life.

We next see a group of wretched prisoners escorted by soldiers to the coast to serve their sentences. In the blazing heat they come to a small village called Nazareth, and come to a halt at the village well which is opposite a carpenter's shop.

The prisoners are in irons, caked with sand and sweat and parched with thirst. As the soldiers quench their thirst, Ben-Hur bends down to drink but is hurled to the ground where he lies helpless in despair.

Just at this point a hand appears at the side of the picture holding out a "dipper" of water. Ben-Hur gulps down the water in a frenzy, and then the hand lays down the dipper and rests for a few moments on Ben-Hur's head. As he looks up at his helper his whole expression changes to a look of awe and wonder, and he rises refreshed and strengthened to face the fearful ordeal ahead.

The author of the book (General Lew Wallace) made it a condition that the film could only be made if the figure of Jesus Christ did not appear.

I have always felt that the restraint imposed upon the film-makers made this scene infinitely more moving than it would otherwise have been. After 70 years it is still fresh in my mind.

My second scene is from one of the early 'talkies', a musical called *Sunnyside Up* made in 1929. At this time the sound for the talkies was recorded on a gramophone record, carefully synchronised with the action. If a film was damaged, the piece to be removed must be replaced with blank film of exactly the same length. Otherwise a man's voice could be talking on the sound, and a woman speaking entirely different words would be on the screen. On my copy there is at one point a rhythmic scratch-scratch for a few moments, when the needle is passing a bad spot on the record.

The film begins with two vivid and highly-contrasted sequences, each with a caption. The first caption says "New York July 4th with the 4 million", the second "Long Island, July 4th with the 400".

The New York sequence is a vivid picture of more or less poor people celebrating July 4th. Remember that the film was made in the year of the Wall Street Crash, which caused the 'Great Depression' which followed.

One feels that the scene is an affectionate picture of simple poor folk enjoying their day with a genuine desire to banish the harsh realities of their lives.

Some boys are capering in a cascade from a street hydrant; a mother sits with a swarm of children on the tenement steps, and another mother is seen cutting her son's hair, with a pudding-basin to guide her scissors (just as my mother cut my hair in those far-off days!). A policeman is running a baseball game, and also in the street some young girls are dancing round in a circle. Then the local band arrives; a motley crew of men and boys with an extraordinary collection of instruments. They make a huge and happy noise, and the scene is set for a street concert, which seems to me to be convincingly true to life.

The 'chairman' is the local undertaker (complete with top hat) and he introduces a couple who sing and dance a comic song "You'll find me picking petals off a daisy". Their act ends as they disappear head over heels from the

platform and retire rather the worse for wear.

The next item is a recitation by a small boy (a young Jackie Cooper). He begins "Under the spreading chestnut tree" but after a few words breaks off in some distress and runs off clutching his middle.

The chairman then introduces Janet Gaynor who sings a song really appropriate for those days "Keep you sunnyside up". (If you have nine sons in a row, baseball teams make money you know!) This meets with tumultuous applause. She then asks the happy crowd to sing it with her, but after a few bars she stops, and calls out to a large menacing man with an utterly grim expression "What's the matter with you then?" She cajoles him "Smile a little smile", "Just a little bit more", and gradually his grim expression melts away, and he turns his head back with great gusts of laughter.

It was a lovely moment, and the whole scene showed a crowd of very ordinary poor people triumphing over their environment. I've never forgotten that street concert, nor the grim-faced man who changed so convincingly.

My third scene is taken from the Western *Stage Coach* made in 1939.

The coach is to travel to Lordsburg, New Mexico on a route menaced by hostile Indians.

The film begins with a series of cameos introducing the passengers who are to sit out on this journey: quite an assortment.

There is Dallas (Claire Trevor) a show-girl who has been forced to leave town as an "undesirable". Next comes a Southern lady (Louise Platt) who is on her way to join her soldier husband. She is heavily pregnant, and her baby is born at a stage-post on the route. Then there is a Southern gentleman who has fallen on hard times and is a gambler (John Carradine). He offers his protection to Louise Platt. Then there is Mr. Peacock (Donald Meek), a timid 'whisky drummer' (from Kansas City, Kansas). Then comes Doc Boone (Thomas Mitchell) an alcoholic doctor who delivers the baby, after many cups of hot coffee! Finally the local bank-manager (Barton Churchill) who is absconding with the Bank's money. The driver and "Shotgun" are Andy Divine and George Bankcroft. The coach sets off on its dangerous journey.

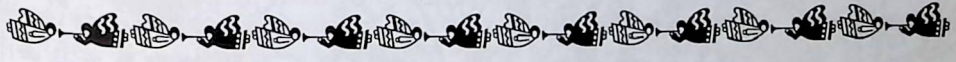
Suddenly and unexpectedly the coach slows down and comes to a halt. At the road-side is a tall slim and handsome cowboy, holding a saddle, and obviously wanting a lift. He throws his addle on to the roof and joins the other passengers.

This was for me an electric moment, as it must have been for many more cinema-goers. Why?

Of course! We were witnessing the birth of one of the greatest stars of Hollywood, and certainly of Westerns. John Wayne had made many "quicky" B Westerns, typical of their genre. There was always a hero, tall and handsome; a villain usually dressed in black and with a black pen-line moustache, a heroine, a young girl who usually had only a small part. This was a semi-comic but good character (Gabby Hayes). The action would always include thrilling and exciting chases on horse-back and one or two ferocious fights in which the hero, after several tumbles, would defeat the villain. And at the end, the hero and heroine would ride off into the sunset (John Wayne and Claire Trevor do so in this film) or we might see a domestic scene with the hero and heroine settled down in wedded bliss with a little son to love and cherish.

John Wayne made a huge number of 'quicky' B Westerns in which the acting was wooden and unconvincing. He made one feature film *The Big Trail* in 1930 but made little impression and returned to B films.

In *Stage Coach* he was directed by John Ford, and this time his career took off. For the next 40 years he was **the** Western star, and a huge box-office attraction in many countries. At a late date he won an Oscar for his portrayal of Rooster Cogburn in *True Grit*. (But I saw the beginning!)



WILL MAKE THE HOLLY-DAYS REAL JOLLY DAYS!

No 872 DECEMBER 24 1938

MERRY AND BRIGHT XMAS FUN NUMBER

1D

AUGUSTUS MAKES A TOPPING FATHER CHRISTMAS

1. It was Christmas Eve in the school-house,
When Miss Mee to our old Toppy said,
"I want you to be Father Christmas
Before you take yourself off to bed!"

2. "Why, that certainly makes you look like him!"
She cried, when she saw his disguise.
"Now, get up and then down the chimney.
You will be such a splendid surprise!"

3. Then she trotted along to the school-room
And said, "Children, all listen to me!
Just sit still and keep watch on the chimney
And old Father Christmas you'll see!"

4. Now, up on the roof top our Toppy had come
With that sackful of Christmas toys.
"Hallo, there!" he called out down the chimney.
"Merry Christmas to all girls and boys!"

5. O'er the edge of the chimney he scrambled, you see,
And then swiftly began his descent.
But before he'd got far down the ladder, oh dear!—
That chimney began to look bent.

6. As Miss Mee and the youngsters watched it,
They soon saw that all was not right.
For poor Toppy as old Father Christmas
Got so far, and no farther that night.

7. Yes, Augustus Topping no longer could stop in that chimney—'twas such a tight fit,
And he burst through the wall of it, had a great fall from it—and then on the hearthrug he hit.
But the sackful of toys tumbled on to the boys and the girls who were waiting to greet 'em.
And the following day all were happy and gay—Toppy certainly knew how to treat 'em!
There were cakes—very big ones, and creams ones and fig ones—on the table, old Toppy had set it all.
But that fine Christmas fare didn't stay long on there, for the company very soon ate it all!

A MERRY XMAS TO ALL

THE GREYFRIARS CLUB

Once again your Hon Chairman and founder of the **GREYFRIARS CLUB** (now in its 25th year of operation) and the **FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM AND LIBRARY** established 22 years ago, (which is on temporary loan to Broadstairs C.C.) takes this opportunity to wish all our club members and enthusiasts of Christian goodwill and integrity, our **HEARTIEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS** .. Once again our particular congratulations go to Mary our C.D. and Annual Editor, together with its printers whose combined efforts and work so unfailingly enchants us in these trips of nostalgia each year, and whose work leaves nothing to be desired. Long may it be so!

Now back to Broadstairs C.C. Unfortunately they inform me they have no plans for another grand exhibition this year, in which the Frank Richards Museum has been a main exhibit, and I am thinking of recalling it back to Stevenage to join the other half of our Frank's exhibits that I hold here. I would like to hear your views on this for Stevenage is certainly much nearer than Broadstairs for central England members to travel to, and they can see the full exhibition. As stated I would like to hear your views on this.

What another grand year it has been and I would like once again to thank all those members who have written to me in the past year with their opinions on our Frank`s stories still going strong, despite competition from the unnatural " Harry Potter" stories, whose huge success I am sorry to see. Possibly the stories are harmless but I feel they are not of the real world and we live in the real world, of which we consider our "Frank's" stories are natural and plausible happenings. Witches, wizards and broomsticks are not. Give us our "Frank's" stories every time, for a good fascinating story and a good and inspiring read. There is nothing nicer, I feel, than for us to return from our lovely holidays to some of the worlds most exotic places, and in a quiet moment settle down to have another read of our "Frank's" stories .to bring us back into the plausible every day world, in the nicest possible way.

Club members may remember our son Robert, who helped out at many of our meetings both of the "Old Boys Book Club" and of the "Greyfriars Club" held at our Ruislip home "COURTFIELD" . After getting his degree in Computer Science (BSc Hons.), he was offered a position in Australia, which he accepted and where he then met his charming wife Margaret, a "Quantas" air hostess. They now have two children and a lovely home in Brisbane, where we have visited them several times on extended stays. while also visiting Adelaide, Brisbane, and Hong Kong. (see last year notes para 7 in C.D.A.) etc. Well Robert decided he would like to visit us with his family for a year or two, so that all our grandchildren can get aquainted ; our other two sons also have a boy and a girl each, of about the same as Robert's two children . Robert has bought a car to get about in and we are having some wonderful times all together once again, and needless to say the heated indoor pool is in constant use. As can be imagined it is quite hectic at times when they are all here together, but they are great fun. Club meetings here will obviously have to be suspended while they are here, since it could place too great a strain on your Courtfield Hostess in catering for so many, but keep your correspondence coming and I can still publish the Courtfield Newsletters in full colour every now and then, to keep us all in touch.

As you all know the C.N. was published to encourage Howard Baker to republish all the old papers - the MAGNET GEM and SCHOOLBOYS OWN and the HOLIDAY ANNUALS - in brand new mint form, the ANNUALS complete with dust jackets. But now that our old President, William Howard Baker has followed our very own Frank Richards and our dear Miss Hood and previous Editors of all those papers, it may well be that we not only have enough of their works in our collections but we also have all these beautiful reproductions that will stand another lifetime of reading, for generations to come, and clearly our late President Howard Baker is now in a place where he no longer requires support for his publications, and the fundamental purpose of our club is now no longer required by him, thus allowing ourselves more time to enjoy our reading of his reprints, holidays, and family.

However undoubtedly three sons and 6 grandchildren demand more and more of our time, apart from our holidays. This year we have visited Malta and the adjoining island of Gozo for a long stay. It really is a fascinating place to visit and I would say a must. We chose Malta as the Merchant Navy Association were laying a wreath in St Paul's Cathedral in Valletta, underneath a plaque in memory of Merchant seamen who lost their lives around Malta and we had to pay our respects with our Association. There is another Church well worth a visit, St Paul's Shipwreck Church said to be built where St Paul was shipwrecked in Malta. Both are lovely churches and a third beautiful cathedral we visited was Mosta Cathedral The huge dome of this cathedral was hit by a bomb in the last war, which went right through the dome, hit the marble floor and skidded right across the floor to the open front doors to the outside where it did not explode. The Maltese called it a miracle and we are inclined to agree, as no one was killed. The Bomb now stands inside the cathedral (with its explosive removed) for all to see. We also had another lovely holiday, again in France, right on the Spanish border at Perpignan with our sons and their families in a first class modern hotel called Mar-I- Sol , built right on the beach on the Med

This year we shall again be attending the memorial service in St Paul's Cathedral for Merchant Seamen (Entry by ticket only) before we go along to the Mansion House in response to the Lord Mayor's invitation to the London Branch of Merchant Navy Association to have lunch there, all of which brings back vivid memories of friends and comrades of the old days - when our Frank was still in his prime mature years and still writing. Happy Days!

Incidentally how many of you spotted the article in the current edition of the magazine "Bygone Kent" written by one of our enthusiasts. Rowland Powell, who had written to me asking for some information about the magazines that our "Frank " had written in ,and naturally I was very pleased to be able to help him. In his article he had kindly made several references to your Hon Chairman for the help I had given him in his very interesting article, and needless to say there were several interesting pictures of our Frank's home in Kingsgate as well as reprints of front covers I had supplied him with. He had also printed a picture of the old Greyfriars Monastery in Kent that I had previously printed in our Courtfield Newsletter with the appropriate reference to the holders of the copyright of the postcard on which I first saw this picture.. We had a grand chat about the hobby and he kindly sent me a copy of the magazine for the help I had given him. The article is on page 619 of Volume 2, number 10, of the magazine.

What a terrible disaster it was in New York It seems only a short while ago that your Courtfield hostess and myself were standing on top of the tower that was open to the public on one of our visits to N.Y. Little did we know that would be the only time. We similarly climbed to the top of their famous Statue of Liberty and also the Empire State Building
We sent a letter of sympathy to the American Ambassador and received a very nice letter of appreciation from him Perhaps we shall picture us on the tower in our next newsletter.

Look forward to seeing you all again

R. F. Acraman

Chairman/Secretary

"That Exciting Christmas Day"

Festive Christmas Story, by Hilda Richards, inside.

THE SCHOOLGIRL

EVERY SATURDAY

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No. 283. Vol. 11.

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED "SCHOOLDAYS"

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