

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 2003



"HULLO, boys and girls, here we are again," called a jolly voice, and the Whisker Pets faced outside to greet Father Christmas—in an aeroplane! "I should never get round in time in a sleigh, there are so many boys and girls waiting for me!" he explained. "Hurrah for Father Christmas and all his jolly friends," called Teddy Tail, and the Pets hurried until they were hoarse! "Thank you!" carolled Cinderella and Dick Whittington. "See you at the pantomime!"

Christmas Chestnuts
for the
Fireside



A Very Happy Christmas!



Willie Hunter's Christmas
Card.



HARRY WHARTON.



The gentleman who is nearly as old as Methuselah.



And may it be a Merry One for all "Magnetites."

COLLECTORS' DIGEST CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 2003

Editor: MARY CADOGAN



This second *C.D. CHRISTMAS SPECIAL* comes to you with my warmest seasonal greetings. I feel sure you will agree that it well conveys the appropriate Christmas spirit and, of course, evokes happy memories of some of our favourite old papers, hobbies and pastimes.

At this time I like to take the opportunity of thanking all of you who have contributed articles, stories, pictures and poems to the *C.D.* during the course of the year. It is wonderful that the stream of contributions never dries up, and that probably we have recently achieved an even wider range and variety than in the past.

I must also thank Mandy and everyone at Quacks, our printers, for their continuing help and co-operation. And, of course, I want to say how deeply I appreciate the support of our ever-loyal readership. I often feel, when I read your letters, that we are part of a very warm and large family - we share so much in our love of the old books and papers.

So, with my thanks to you all, I send my most sincere wishes for

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND
A HAPPY AND PEACEFUL NEW YEAR

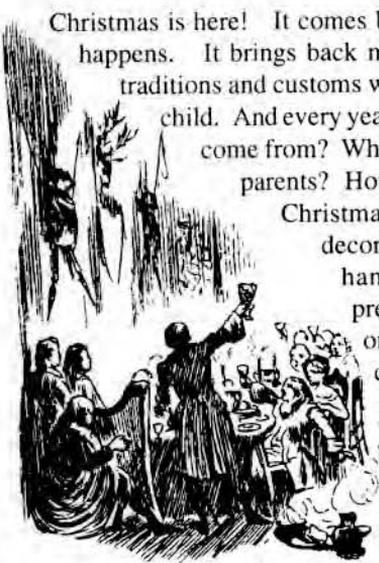
Mary Cadogan





THREE AUTHORS AND CHRISTMAS

by GLYN FREWER



Christmas is here! It comes but once a year, but every time, the same thing happens. It brings back memories of childhood Christmases and all the traditions and customs which make the season so special, especially to a child. And every year it gets me to thinking, where did these traditions come from? Who brought them to us, to our parents, and to their parents? How did we all come to take it for granted that every Christmas we stack the fire with a great yule-log, we decorate the house with holly, ivy and mistletoe and hang up paperchains; we exchange cards and presents; we roast chestnuts and feast ourselves on turkey or goose, plum pudding and cake, pull crackers and wear paper hats? And, of course, there should be snow. Who put these ideas into our heads?

My answer to these questions has to do with three great writers; writers whose fondness for the season and whose skill with words have depicted Christmas in ways that

are unforgettable: Washington Irving, Charles Dickens and Frank Richards.

It is generally accepted that the Victorians invented most of the traditions we associate with the sort of Christmas I'm talking about, the ones I grew up with. The Christmas of today is fast becoming a travesty, being increasingly an excuse for crass, cold-hearted commercial exploitation. No, I'm talking about the sincere, warm-hearted customs that did the heart good of all who took part in them. But many of these customs originated long before the Victorians, and one writer who came upon them has recorded them in his own inimitable way. The surprise is that he was an American, a visiting anglophile in the 1820s. Washington Irving wrote sketches of his travels through the English countryside observing the ways Christmas was celebrated, and from these sketches his book 'Old Christmas' was compiled, superbly illustrated by Randolph Caldicott. He described the English traditional Christmas with such affection and skill that his writings became almost as popular as those of Dickens a score of years later. It is improbable that Dickens himself would not have known, read and liked these sketches.

Charles Dickens is today acknowledged as the great 'populariser' of our traditional Christmas through the extraordinary success of his masterpiece 'A Christmas Carol'. More than any other single work, this book was seminal in spreading throughout the reading public the Christmas spirit and customs which we all enjoyed as children.

The story is as popular today as it was when it first appeared a hundred and sixty years ago, in December 1843.

These, then, are the first two of my three authors whose Christmas writings have delighted me. But it was the third one who made the greatest and most enduring impression, because he was the one whose writing I read during those so-called 'formative years'. This was Frank Richards. I must have read hundreds of *Magnets* and *Gems* and enjoyed them all but I have to say that, when Frank turned to describing Christmas, he notched himself up a gear and wrote at his brilliant best. All his Christmas stories seemed more vivid and heartfelt than usual, surpassing even the South Seas and Egyptian adventures.

I am convinced that Frank regarded Christmas as his favourite setting. Every year for over thirty years he came up with a story that drew from him his best descriptive writing. How he re-mixed the same ingredients year after year to produce a different enjoyable feast for his readers remains a miracle. First and foremost, there had to be snow; Christmas was unthinkable without it. With snow came snowballing. Frost, too, was important; with frost came ice, and with ice, skating on frozen ponds. And not only skating, but the sudden breaking of ice so that someone could fall through in peril of their lives and be rescued. There had to be panelled rooms with secret panels and hidden passages. And ghosts: spectral figures that groaned and moaned and dragged clanking chains. And last but not least, Christmas fare: feasts so lavish and appetising that they satisfied even Bunter. Each Christmas story was a winner and today, as I re-read them, I can sense the influence of not only Dickens, but Washington Irving as well.

Let us look at a few extracts, from each author, beginning with Washington Irving's book 'Old Christmas'.

"The pitchy gloom without makes the heart dilate on entering the room filled with the glow and warmth of the evening fire. The ruddy blaze diffuses an artificial summer and sunshine through the room and lights up each countenance into a kindlier welcome. Where does the honest face of hospitality expand into a broader and more cordial smile — where the glance of love more sweetly eloquent - than by the winter fireside? And as the hollow blast of wintry wind rushes through the hall, claps the distant door, whistles about the casement, and rumbles down the chimney, what can be more grateful than the feeling of sober and sheltered security with which we look round upon the comfortable chamber and the scene of domestic hilarity?"

And another from the same book:

"The dinner was served up in the great hall, where the Squire always held his Christmas banquet. A blazing crackling fire of logs had been heaped on to warm the spacious apartment, and the flame went sparking and wreathing up the wide-mouthed chimney. The great picture of the crusader and his white horse had been profusely decorated with greens for the occasion; and holly and ivy had likewise

been wreathed round the helmet add weapons on the opposite wall, which I understood, were the arms of the same warrior.”

And this from Charles Dickens’ great work:

“It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge’s time, or Marley’s, or for many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam.”

Here’s a second extract from the same work:

“For the people who were shovelling away on the house-tops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball - better-natured



missile far than many a wordy jest - laughing heartily if it went right, and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half open and the fruiterers were radiant in their glory. There were great round pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence."

Descriptive passages such as these are echoed in the Christmas stories of Frank Richards. Take this example, from 1935:

"It was a wild, windy, snowy December night - the wind howled up the coomb from the Atlantic, trees creaked and groaned and the boom of stormy breakers came echoing from the distance. Snow was falling over the old roofs and chimneys of Polpelly. But in the old oak hall of the lonely mansion in the coomb, all was bright and cosy and cheery.

"The log fire blazed and roared and crackled. Innumerable tall wax candles in ancient sconces, illumined the room, glimmering on the red berries of holly branches that decorated the walls.

"Billy Bunter sat in an immense armchair, in which ancient squires of Polpelly had sat in their time. The cushioned arms of the chair were about a foot wide and on them Bunter had piled refreshments: a plate of tarts, a bag of doughnuts, a little hill of oranges, and a small mountain of rosy apples; a plate of nuts, a plate of almonds, a plate of muscatels, and several other things."

And this, from 1927:

"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced round at the circle of faces in the old oak-panelled, hall of Eastwood House. Snow was falling without, in the deep December dusk; the winter wind wailed among the old trees in the park, and whistled round roof and chimneys. But in the dusky old hall a great log-fire diffused warmth and comfort, casting strange lights and shadows among the armoured figures and the hunting trophies on the old walls. The firelight was soft and pleasant, glowing on cheerful and bright young faces, on the green leaves and red berries of the Christmas holly."

So much for wider comparisons. Now let us see how the three writers compare more specifically on the subject of ghosts, a Christmas ingredient common to them all. Here's Washington Irving:

"When I returned to the drawing-room, I found the company seated round the fire, listening to the parson, who was deeply ensconced in a high-backed oaken chair. He gave us several anecdotes of the fancies of the neighbouring peasantry, concerning the effigy of the crusader which lay on the tomb by the church altar. It was said to get up from the tomb and walk the rounds of the churchyard in stormy nights,

particularly when it thundered; and one old woman, whose cottage bordered on the churchyard, had seen it, through the windows of the church, when the moon shone, slowly pacing up and down the aisles. It was the belief that some wrong had been left unredressed by the deceased, or some treasure hidden, which kept the spirit in a state of trouble and restlessness. Some talked of gold and jewels buried in the tomb, over which the spectre kept watch."

Dickens' ghost is perhaps more familiar:

"The bells ceased, as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise deep down below as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

"The cellar door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still! said Scrooge, "I won't believe it."

"His colour changed, though, when without a pause, it came on through the heavy door and passed into room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leapt up, as though it cried, 'I know him! Marley's Ghost!' and fell again."

And this from Frank Richards in 1939:

"The unfortunate fat Owl stood shaking from head to foot. After what seemed an age, a sound came through the silence - a strange metallic sound, like the clinking of a bunch of keys!

"Clink, clink!

"Bunter gave a gasp of utter terror. It was said that the old miser's ghost clinked ghostly keys to unlock a phantom chest when it wandered, with a spectral light seeking the vanished hoard. Now, echoing eerily in the gloom, the clinking of iron keys came to Bunter's fat ears."

To all these descriptions, there is a common thread, a common ancestry, not just of ghosts but of all the seasonal ingredients. Washington Irving's sketches were sourced by long-established folk-memories; Dickens drew on him and the same fund of handed-down lore; Frank Richards drew on both as well as the store of earlier traditions. In the field of literary activity, from poems to plays to books, cross-fertilisation is a known, recognisable and natural process, as often as not, subconscious. On a personal note, my first children's book 'Adventure in Forgotten Valley' probably drew on my childhood reading of books like 'The Lost World' and 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth' more than I realised at the time of writing. It's what a writer does with ingested material that matters; how he puts his own stamp on the new work. Shakespeare did a pretty good job of making the earlier Danish

chronicle of *Hamlet* very much his own, as did Malory with the much earlier King Arthur romances and as Frank Richards has done with all the Christmas lore that preceded him. All three writers exercised their own particular genius on the material and fashioned their own unique depictions.

Frank's particular genius was to be able to conjure up in youthful minds a concept of Christmas that was uniquely his own. I would take a bet that in the minds of *Magnet* and *Gem* readers today, their ideas of Christmas have all been coloured by the way he portrayed his favourite time of year.

Here's the final Christmas message from the Magnet:

"Greetings chums! Here's to a very merry Christmas!

"Thirty one years - and thirty one Christmas numbers - have passed by and here we are with another - the greatest number of the whole year. I do not propose to dwell on the contents of this bumper number, but I feel that I cannot let it pass without saying a few words to my vast number of chums scattered over the world. My sincere wish to you all is that you will enjoy a merry Christmas, with lots of presents, good Christmassy fare, and jolly parties. I am looking forward to being in the thick of festivities myself and hope to pull a cracker with the youngest of them. If only it were possible for my vast army of chums to sit down at one big festive table, wouldn't we have the time of our lives? . Nevertheless, although this cannot take place, I shall be with every one of my loyal readers in spirit, if not in the flesh, during this Christmas of 1939."

GRAND YULETIDE YARN OF EXCITING SCHOOLBOY AND DETECTIVE
ADVENTURE INTRODUCING HARRY WHARTON & CO. OF GREYFRIARS,
AND FERRERS LOCKE, THE CELEBRATED BAKER STREET DETECTIVE!



Bunker gasped, with palpating heart, at the slowly moving, twinkling light. Then he gave a gasp of utter terror as a strange metallic sound, like the striking of iron keys, came to his far ears!





A CLIFF HOUSE CAROL

Hilda Richards
And the other contributors to "The Schoolgirl" wish you one and all
A Very Happy Christmas

Greetings

Lots of fellows talk about Santa Claus (or Father Christmas) and know nothing at all about him, except that he manages to keep his face clean while sliding down chimneys. Now I've been looking into his history, so lend me your ears and I will a tale unfold.

Once upon a time a poor old beggar was wandering through the snowy steppes of Russia. Climbing the steppes made him footsore and weary, and the only bit of luck he'd had in twelve years was when the snow froze his feet so he couldn't feel his corns.

He couldn't afford a shave, so his face was hidden in a long white beard—which was probably all for the best. And because he had a fat and jovial appearance, nobody would believe he was starving, and when he begged for alms, the passers-by would cast one eye on his girth, then smile him on the boko with yep brick.

"I say, you fellows," he whined, holding out his hat, "can you lend a fellow a groat until to-morrow? I'm expecting a postal order from a titled relation in the morning. The postal order will be for ten roubles, so if you lend me that, I'll hand you—I say, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you—beasts!" And he got no alms—only boots!

He did everything he could think of to get money, except work—he didn't think of that—and when Christmas came round, he was without a bean,

The Story of Santa Claus

Discovered after years of tremendous research

By BOB CHERRY

Even a Russian farmer, who found Claus with a chopper in his turkey-shed, didn't believe he was there to chop up firewood. "Thou varlet," he snarled. "Thou didst come alter my turks. To pay for thy sheek thou canst go and gather me some firewood, or dadblame me, I'll pop yo in gaot for the festive season."

So poor old Claus tottered out, groping with numbed hands in the snow for bits of wood so small and rotten that a sparrow would have scorned to perch on them. He passed through a neighbouring park, belonging to a rich king, and as it was the Feast of Stephen, this king followed the custom of his house and looked out. Kings in those times always had to look out. It paid.

"Hither, page," roared this king, "come stand by me. Dost thou see what I seeest? Or have I got them again? Bring me flesh and bring me wine, we'll ask this codger in to dine."

Santa Claus was very interested in the flesh and wine—especially the wine—but what he liked most was the lavish gold and silver plate which adorned the table. So when the king turned his back, he stuffed the lot in a sack, pinched the royal reindeer sledge, and vanished like smoke. And King Wenceslas swore a mighty oath he'd never be such a sap as to ask a peasant into the palace again.

Being in a hurry, Santa Claus exceeded the speed in a built-up area until he was gonged by the Reindeer Corps. The cops cast a suspicious eye on his sack.

"Wetcher got in there?" they asked, and when they saw the contents, they whistled softly and look out their manacles.

"Present, that's all," said Santa, banking on his jovial appearance. "I'm going to leave them at the houses of poor people!"

"Oh, yeah? We'll come with you and watch!"

There was no help for it, so Santa drove round, stuffing costly gold and silver plate in the peasants' cottages. Then the cops shook his hand and wished him a Merry Christmas.

"Merry Christmas? Har, har, har!" And poor old Santa drove straight off to the workhouse and rang the visitors' bell.

And that, my beloved 'earers, is the story of Santa Claus.

More or less!



London Old Boys' Book Club

Our meetings are held throughout the South East, in London itself but also in Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, and Surrey, usually on the afternoon of the second Sunday in the month. We discuss all kinds of children's literature, comics and storypapers, and popular literature including adventure stories, detective stories, plus illustrators/cartoonists, and films, entertainment etc. As you see, we don't take life too seriously. We are fond of our name, but please note that we are co-educational. Why not come as a guest for a meeting? You will receive a warm welcome. A study tea is generally provided!

If interested, please contact Vic Pratt, Secretary, London OBBC, 1 The Rise, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9AG. Tel No 01494 729660. Email: thebeesong@yahoo.co.uk



GREYFRIARS CHIMERA

by Ted Baldock



What phantoms lurk with flowing coals
To stir the memories of those early years.

A dark dismal afternoon towards the end of the year. Only three o'clock which means that the magic hour heralding tea-time is yet some way in the future.

This seemingly dull period, this shadowy time in the dying year is an evocative time, when the fire burns brighter in curtained rooms and dancing shadows are active on the wall, and upon the spines of books in the book case. A time when the mind begins to stir, and old memories begin to surface. A time to gaze into the depths of the quietly burning fire and view once more the happy scenes of the day before yesterday. When the past emerges from the mists of time and springs into sharp focus. Old friends, familiar faces, smilingly come and fade in the flowing coals, and there is much laughter.

The old monastic buildings, the quadrangle, and the sixth form green are overshadowed by the elms. A feeling of quietness has been created by centuries of tradition, important to us of a later age as part of the background in which we have followed the adventures of the Greyfriars fellows.



There are masters of this little world of school, Quelch, Prout, Hacker, Capper and the benign white-haired Headmaster, Dr. Locke; also the domestic staff, and the tetchy old Gosling who, it is said, 'never enjoyed the glorious days of youth, keeper of the Greyfriars gate from time immemorial'. And Mr. and Mrs. Nimble are for ever associated with the little tuck-shop in the corner of the quad.

Of the boys, so many faces as well known to us as our own reflections in a mirror. Harry Wharton and Co., and the incorrigible William George Bunter: George Wingate, the popular Captain of the school, with, in the shadows, Gerald Loder, Walker and Carne, hovering close by the seedy figure of Joseph Banks against the background of the equally seedy riverside rendezvous, the 'Three Fishers'. A world created in the early days of the twentieth century, the scene and characters move and play their various parts with which we have become intimately familiar. We would be unimpressed by any attempt to change or update the familiar image.

Thus are they retained in our memories. I suspect that we would rise in justifiable indignation at the dreadful prospect of Billy Bunter refusing an invitation to a study feast or, perhaps more distressing yet, the Famous Five seated round the table in

BOB CHERRY
gives you . . .

A Nursery Rhyme for Christmas Time

Eat-a-cake, eat-a-cake, Bunter man,
Eat up the cake as fast as you can,
For Smithy has missed it, so eat the
last lump
Before he arrives on the scene with
a stump !

Little Boy Bull, come blow on your
horn,
And make us all wish we had never
been born ;
I've just had a licking from Quelchy,
you see,
So blow a few groans on your cornet
for me !

Fisher T. Fish has lost a quid
And can't think where to find it !
But there's the note, on the back of
his coat,
Where it's jolly well pinned be-
hind it !

Dick Rake can eat no cake
Because he's found none there,
For Billy Bunter got there first
And cleared the cupboard bare.

Hey-diddle-diddle, I'll ask you a
riddle—
The difference 'twixt Bunter and
me ?
He's got the "big check" on his
trousers that I
Shan't get from the Editor—see ?

Rock-a-bye, Coker, perched on a
bike,
Slaughtering chickens and pigs and
the like ;
If the bike skids, old Coker will fall—
Down will come Potter and pillion
and all !

Study No. 1. with the door locked and 'enjoying' cigarettes and playing cards in a mist of swirling tobacco smoke.

An even wilder excess would be the elevation of Horace Coker to the exalted position of Captain of the School, replacing George Wingate in a landslide victory. Surely there is a distinct element of fantasy here, something quite ludicrous. One can almost hear the great Horace saying as he assumes office that he will carry forward with the utmost vigour the development of his celebrated 'short way with fags'.

Imagine, if you can, Henry Samuel Quelch hurrying towards a clandestine meeting deep in the recesses of Friardale Wood with a frowsy hanger-on from the 'Three Fishers', or, Heaven forbid, exchanging harsh words and blows with the vicar of Friardale over the Chess-board, during one of their weekly sessions at the Vicarage, in consequence of an alleged false move. Should such a disaster occur would not all Friardale and Greyfriars become instantly cognisant? Such an outrage could surely not be concealed from that small and rural community.

It is almost possible to hear the boomings and twitterings in Masters common room that would occur if Mr. Quelch appeared, 'sporting' a multi coloured eye or a ruddy nose. The effect would be nothing less than electric.

"Quelch, my dear fellow, what on earth has happened..."

"Have you been attacked, Quelch, this is monstrous."

"Go along instantly, Quelch, and see the Matron with that eye..."

"A piece of raw meat must be applied. Really, Quelch..."

Can it be imagined in the wildest dreams that one would see the venerable Dr. Locke slipping under cover of darkness to Mrs. Mimble's little tuck-shop to purchase a bag of chocolate biscuits? Or that Gerald Loder would snap his official ash over his knee, vowing never to administer another 'six' while he remains at Greyfriars. Or that Vernon Smith and Harold Skinner would, with heads together, be deeply absorbed in Dean Farrar's 'Eric, or, Little by Little'. Or, perhaps most bizarre of all, that Horace

Coker would insist in his foghorn tones that he agrees whole-heartedly with Potter and Greene.

Imagine this series of phenomena; the mind would boggle indeed. Finally, to round off such impossibilities, imagine the spectacle of Police Constable Tozer strutting down the little high street of Friardale sporting three silver chevrons on the sleeve of his uniform. Promotion at long last! Scotland Yard would do well to take especial note.

At such a point the drowsy fireside dweller would tend to slide and drift happily into the land of 'Nod', soon to watch the tall figures of the sixth-form prefects disappearing into the rain-swept quadrangle. A brief sentence setting the scene of a long ago story, carrying all the ingredients of romance and adventure of another Greyfriars School mystery.

A junior boy has failed to turn up at 'call over'. The hour is late. It is a wild night of wind and rain. Mr. Quelch, the Remove master has become increasingly anxious and a search party has been dispatched to search for the missing Removite.

What reader, be he – she – young or not so young can fail to be 'held' by such a beginning? What are the circumstances? Who is the missing junior? What has happened to delay his return to the school?

Such were the inducements held out to the reader. Who could fail to wonder what happened next? Against the beautifully constructed background of Greyfriars school, these tales of mystery and adventure were played out week by week.

The lamp in the Remove master's study has been burning far into the night as he anxiously awaits the return of the search-party – and, hopefully, the missing junior. The mystery is afoot. How dull the world would have seemed had those wonderful stories in the weekly 'Magnet' not existed.

What cared we for ranting dictators, posturing politicians and uproar concerning the latest society scandal. Just so long as our favourite cricket or football teams were performing well, and the 'Magnet' duly appeared each week at the appointed time our world was complete.

Now looking back upon those early years we recognise that we were young, and perhaps readily impressed. What is difficult to explain with any clarity is the fact that now, in later adult times those early impressions have never been eclipsed. That there existed in those early days an element of magic is certain, and this seems still to be present, retaining all its original freshness.

It has been said that embedded deeply in the nature of every man there lurks the eternal boy ready to welcome and respond to romance and adventure.

The exploits of Harry Wharburton and Co. and Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School loomed very large upon our youthful horizons in the 'twenties and 'thirties. The crusty features of Henry Samuel Quelch, the fruity boomings of Mr. Prout, the iniquities and narrow escapes from expulsion of Herbert Vernon Smith and the uproarious activities of Horace Coker were to a large degree our staple diet during those formative years.

So does fantasy proliferate on dull winter afternoons in a darkening room while

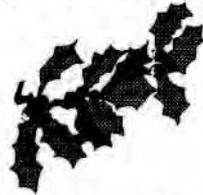
we sit gazing into the fire? Cold reason returns when the light is switched on and one is brought to earth once more.

Time has moved on and it is nearing the witching hour, Billy Bunter's favourite hour – and mine also – teatime. May we hope that it will be something in excess of 'Door-steps and Dish-water' which the Owl assures me is the traditional fare at Greyfriars for this meal, a statement over which I ponder with some doubt.



BRANSBY WILLIAMS AND THE "SONG OF THE ROAD"

by Laurence Price



It seems increasingly fashionable these days to have Top 20 Or Top 100 polls for the public's (or the critics') favourite books, films, songs and so on. Fascinating to a certain extent, in that although there may be some consensus of opinion, that poll will almost certainly not tally with your own personal selection; and what you consider a bona-fide classic won't make an appearance at all. And, being realistic, what we like at twenty years old may be quite different by the time we reach fifty, and again at seventy-five, and so on if we are granted a long life span; although naturally, certain childhood favourites may always remain so with us, and perhaps that is no truer than for the members of this club!

I'm now fifty-three and I want to write about a new 'favourite' film of mine that I chanced to see, and thankfully recorded on video, about three years ago. What makes it interesting is that I think it very unlikely it would receive any mention in any Top 100 poll of best films of all time or the like. Well, for me, it has become a well-loved personal favourite.

The film is called *Song of the Road*. It was made by UK Films in 1937 and starred Bransby Williams. Now, I personally, knew nothing whatsoever about him when I first saw the film but my interest was recently revived by mention of him in the last two issues of the 'Collector's Digest' - March and June 2003 - by Derek Hinrich and Brian Doyle. As a very recent convert to the computer I checked the internet and, lo

and behold, found a lot of information about him.

Bransby Williams Pharez was born in 1870 and made his first appearance on the music hall stage in 1896. He had a successful career performing monologues, recitations and sketches, specialising in Dickens characters, performing in Dickensian garb. He recited passages from the author's works, favourites being the *Pickwick Papers* and *A Tale of Two Cities*; he could bring an audience to tears with his portrayal of Grandfather Trent from *The Old Curiosity Shop*. He also performed many comic monologues with titles like "Uncle George", "The Plumber", "The Waxworks Watchman" and "How We Saved The Barge" and countless other ones. Here's the opening stanza of "Uncle George", written by Greatex Newman and Fred Cecil.

*It's plain as I ain't a policeman,
An' likewise I ain't a Boy Scout,
I'm a Bailiff...Yes, that's my profession,
The bloke wot goes round chuckin' out.*

When he goes 'to an 'ouse to distrain' he is mistaken for 'Dear Uncle George' who's been away in 'Noo York' and has come back 'to retire now yer fortune yer'd made'. The wily bailiff decides to take advantage of the situation and stay for the night but the family pretty well take him for all he's got; money for 'terbacca' and 'drinkin' yer jolly good 'ealth' and he's even touched for fourpence to sleep on some old sacks in the garret. The monologue ends:

*When I got up next day, all the furniture'd gorn,
Exceptin' a rusty old fork,
An'a note, left beside it, said "Dear Uncle George",
"Goodbye, we're just off ter Noo York!"*

Many of the monologues, available to read on the internet, are in this style and still seem very amusing. Bransby Williams was still performing many of his Dickensian characters for BBC TV, in the early 1950s. He would run through a gamut of Dickensian characters, from Pickwick to Bill Sykes to David Copperfield, standing alone before a lectern, leapfrogging from one character to the next - really quite amazing for a then octogenarian! He died in 1961, aged 91.

He also made appearances in several films. In 1926 he was in a film with the intriguing title of *The Jungle Woman* but probably his most noteworthy film of the late silent era was in Hitchcock's 1927 film for Gainsborough Pictures called *Easy Virtue* based on a Noel Coward play. The female star was Isabel Jeans; Williams played "The Correspondent". In 1933 he was in a musical called *Soldiers of the King* with Cicely Courtneidge and Edward Everett Horton. A long and varied career then, and he also wrote an autobiography *Bransby Williams - by himself* published by Hutchinson in 1954, a book I have added to my 'wants' list!

Back now to *Song of the Road*. I love this gentle, rambling Arcadian romance of the English countryside and, of course, 'the road'. This film was directed by John Baxter and is described by one anonymous critic as a quota-quickie. Baxter also made serious films such as *Love on the Dole* but delighted in the working class culture of

the music halls and directed films for Old Mother Riley as well as Flanagan and Allen and George Robey.

I feel sure he must have delighted in having Bransby Williams for the lead character of Bill in his equally delightful *Song of the Road*. The film was based on a story by Michael Kent and adapted by H.F. Maltby with the screenplay by Gerald Elliott. It tells the touching story of Bill and his faithful cart horse, Polly, who at the outset of the film are employed by a London council, still using a fleet of horse-drawn vehicles.

Cue the council meeting where the pompous chairman announces that horse-drawn vehicles are to be withdrawn as they are old-fashioned; but "*the drivers of horse-drawn vehicles shall be given the opportunity of learning to drive motors...*" or they'll "*be given one month's wages and their engagement will be terminated.*" It's an old, old story - a reminder that nothing really changes, except, of course, that change changes everything!

A reluctant workforce accepts the inevitable, except old Bill. He's too old to change and, anyway, what would become of his faithful Polly? He'll take her into the countryside - things haven't changed there - there'll be plenty of work for a man and his 'orse. It's a risk, of course. Bill has little money but first he'll need to buy Polly at auction. She is valued at twenty pounds... "*'ow much for these?*" he asks the pawnbroker as he reluctantly pawns his late wife's jewellery - he's got "*Fifteen pounds in the post office, a couple in the Christmas Club.*" The pawnbroker is reasonably sympathetic and tells Bill he'll not be in a hurry to sell the jewellery for which he allows him the necessary three pounds.

So Bill leaves London riding Polly bareback and side-saddle through the busy city streets, past billboards advertising Ecko radios, and down Whitehall, doffing his cap in respect as he passes the Cenotaph and then they ride on, with the Houses of Parliament as a backdrop. The scene changes to enchanting and sometimes lingering scenes of the English countryside - Bill and Polly ride through leafy, Arcadian glades, surmount rolling hills and view the chequered fields below. The camera pans and lingers on scenes of leafy, swaying trees and fields of sheep. They ride over the South Downs and past Chichester. So aptly titled *Song of the Road* this 71 minute film is a lyrical picture-poem, beautifully and sensitively filmed by Jack Parker.

Bill stops at a pub. When he enquires about a job "*cartin' or 'aulin'*" he's told "*it's out of date*" and "*reckon you're a bit too late - tractors and lorries round these parts now...*" And Bill just can't believe it when he's told there is a munitions factory in the area. "*Munitions! - but in the country?*" exclaims Bill. So even in the countryside, in 1937, things are changing.

Disillusioned, Bill and Polly proceed on their way. Then Bill meets a tinker trying to light a fire by the side of the road. They break into conversation and much of this conversation really sums up the mood of the film, and the predicament facing men like Bill. Bill, giving a match to the tinker so he can light the fire explains he's trying to get work for Polly and himself.

"... 'orses is out of date these days, like tinkers," says the tinker.

"Don't pans want mending anymore?" asked Bill.

"That's not the point - who's going to give a tinker a tanner to mend a kettle when they can buy a new one for sixpence? With a couple of new saucepans thrown in..."

"... Things don't look to bright for you and me, do they?" says Bill, dejectedly.

"Oh, I don't know - they can keep their new-fangled ideas - everything's going to fast for me. One of these days they'll blow themselves sky high and then they'll want your 'orse to pull them out of the mud. And me to mend their boots!"

"Progress is progress. It seems we can't stop it..."

"Yes, but the electric light's progress and when it breaks down we're glad of a candle!"

"D'you know," says a temporarily consoled Bill, "I'm rather glad I met you."

I think we all know the feeling, a sympathetic ear that confirms our own view, even if we know, in our heart of hearts that that view may still be forced to change. I think Bill and the tinker still speak for us all. The film is primarily about one man's stubborn resistance to change tied to an instant nostalgia for the past. Of the sudden obsolescence of once useful and treasured skills; a reminder that nothing remains static, that everything is constantly changing. It has ever been so but the film demonstrates that perhaps such changes can take place with acts of kindness and compassion: it doesn't have to be the soulless, bureaucratic method used by the London council at the beginning of the film which is still, regrettably, often the 'modern' way of which I expect many of us have unfortunately had direct experience.

Bill and Polly move on again. Then he meets a travelling showman and his wife, or rather Dr Dando and his quack remedies, a purveyor of a patented Throat Balm and nerve tonics. Their old nag can pull their caravan no further so Bill and Polly at last find work. But Bill only accepts a 'bob' to tow them when five bob would have been cheap! Dr Dando is, however, a loveable rogue and soon has Bill very cheaply in his employ and Bill seems to have no problem in helping to con the gullible public, even pretending to be Dr Dando when, later on, ironically the real Dando contracts a sore throat and loses his voice!

All this takes place at a fairground run by a Mr Bartholomew; Bartholomew wants Dando to come into partnership with him but Dando will need to modernise - the horses, and therefore, any need for Bill and Polly, would have to go - he's got a tractor. In the meantime a nasty bit of work called Daniel Lorenzo is making life difficult for Naomi, Dando's sweet little wife but Bill overhears him blackmailing her. Bill soon sorts him out but he thinks Dando can only give Naomi the life she deserves if Dando goes into partnership with Bartholomew. It's a bittersweet parting for them all but Bill moves on again.

He eventually manages to find work on a farm working for the good-hearted Mr Kepple who is evidently in love with a widow, Mrs Trelawney. Polly helps pull heavily laden carts of hay as the harvest is gathered in manually, with scythe and

sickle and horse-drawn threshing machine in the time-honoured and traditional way. But it is clear, even to Bill, that the farm is run on very old-fashioned methods and is uneconomic. Why? Because kindly Mr Kepple still uses a lot of farmhands, instead of modern machinery, and, of course, a lot of 'orses!

A grumpy farm hand confirms all this "*This farm - out-of-date - 'orses and rakes!*" They ought to do everything by machinery like Bristowe, clearly one of the new breed of gentleman farmer, on the adjoining farm. The farm hand conveniently forgets, or perhaps doesn't realise, that he is, of course, effectively talking himself out of a job.

It is left to the good-hearted Bill to not only matchmake so that Mr Kepple and Mrs Trelawney get together but also to persuade Kepple that he must update and use machinery like Bristowe to remain competitive. "*If you don't farm the new way, you can't live...*" says Bill.

As, together, they watch the new machinery and the tractors and the lorries working on Bristowe's farm, even Bill has recognised that the age of the horse is past and it is obsolete as a working animal.

On the matchmaking he pretends to Mrs Trelawney that Mr Kepple is in bed with 'heart trouble' - which in one sense he does have, of course! The deception is taken in good spirit and as the marriage later takes place so is the harvest brought in with new machinery.

But machinery's still not for Bill or his Polly. But this is a film of happy endings. Mrs Trelawney finds him a job at the Melrose Stables where he can look after "*all those horses that have had their day*" and where there is a stall for Polly, and a place for Bill, who couldn't change, as a stud groom and "*a stall for each of the others that have done their work faithfully and well.*"

We leave Bill and his beloved Polly in her stall. He's giving her a titbit.

"*Hello, Polly, here we are - together to the end, eh?*" One likes to think so.

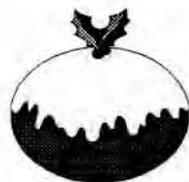
This is a tender, heart-warming and unashamedly sentimental film. A paean to a lost rural age but with the message, that even Bill eventually understands, that the times and a centuries old way of living were about to go through an irrevocable change, through necessity though possibly not necessarily for the better.

It is, perhaps, only a very minor film, a mere 'quota-filler' but it has a very real period charm that both manages to celebrate in a kindly and gentle manner the passing of one age and the advent of another. Another anonymous critic described the film thus - "*Filmed in the open air in the English countryside, Baxter creates a beautiful tale that will stay with you long after the film ends.*" All I would want to add is that *Song of the Road* is ultimately held together by the charming and touching performance of Bransby Williams.





JAM FOR CHRISTMAS



by Ray Hopkins

Well, of course, he would, wouldn't he? Bunter, I mean! Overhear the word JAM through the slightly open door of Study No.1, and think something to eat was being discussed. Inky was explaining to his legitimate listeners that the Jam was arriving that very day. Bunter was ecstatic, threw open the door and gave them all a blanket invitation to the Christmas hols at Bunter Court. With one proviso: it would only be fair if Inky brought half of the jam with him. Bunter, of course, would be pleased to pay for his half. What with, one bemusedly wonders?

The Famous Five, by this time in an hilarious state, let themselves be urged by the Fat Owl to get to the gates as the Jam is expected at three and it's just on. While Wharton and Co. are gleeful at Bunter's misunderstanding, he is positively dancing with joy. He is expecting a rather large lorry as the figure of a hundredweight (the Jam's weight had been given as eight stone in the study), but his animated features tend to sag a little as he sees only a motor car containing two dark-skinned gentlemen approaching the school. One is an Indian Prince Bunter is told. "Oh!" said Bunter... "Relation of yours, Inky?" "My esteemed uncle." "But where's the jam? Is he sitting on it?"

Uncle and nephew salaam to one another when Inky's relation, enveloped in a fur-lined overcoat to combat the icy (to him) English weather, steps down from the car. More overt bowing occurs when Mr. Quelch appears on the scene to escort the visitor and his nephew to Dr. Locke's study. Bunter is totally flummoxed. "Where's the jam?" he roars after an examination of the interior of the car. Inky's uncle turns and inclines his head. Bunter ignores the three proceeding up the front steps, "Where's the jam?" he hollers again, clutching Bob Cherry's arm. Four of the Famous Five slew Bunter around so that he is facing the retreating back of the visitor. "There he is, going up the steps. He's Inky's uncle and he's a Jam! That's the Jam Inky was expecting this afternoon – about a hundredweight of him."

It's only a week before Christmas break-up at Greyfriars and the Jam, whose full name and title is Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh, taking tea with Dr. Locke, requests permission for his nephew to accompany him back to a mansion in Trumpington Square, London which he has taken for his visit to England. The Famous Five, the Bounder, Redwing, Peter Todd, Tom Brown, and Squiff are also invited as well as Jack Drake, recently a scholar at Greyfriars but now the pupil/assistant to famed Baker Street detective Ferrers Locke, cousin to the Headmaster.

A couple of days later, Harry Wharton is surprised to receive a gift from Hurree Singh in the form of four large Christmas candles each marked for one of the Study

No. 1 chums. A note enclosed asks that they bring them to London when they come and they will be lit when placed on the Christmas tree. "Then there will be small delightful surprise for esteemed chums." Bunter is peeved because Inky had neglected to send him one. Bob Cherry points out that Bunter has not been invited. Bunter gives him a knowing look. Faithful readers of the saga will also mirror the same knowing look!

The following day Bunter, carefully hidden from the school house between the old elms and the school wall, is dipping into a bag of jam tarts he has found lying unattended in Smithy's study. He is surprised to see Inky's "dusky face and deep black eyes" climbing over the wall "in the most secret and surreptitious manner". It is, of course, not Hurree Singh at all as Bunter quickly realises when he is forced back against a tree and an iron grip that silences his squeal for help is clamped around his throat. The man asks him if he is Wharton and where can be found the parcel of candles. He says he is Hurree Singh's servant. The candles were sent in error and he has come to take them back to London. He tells Bunter to show him Wharton's room. "If you give the alarm, I shall drive my knife between your shoulders!" As they watch, the lights go out in Study No. 1. The Hindu drags Bunter back to the elms, cords up his wrists and ankles, plunges a rag into his mouth and leaves him lying helpless on the ground. The Fat Owl, shaking like a leaf, hears the rustling of the ivy as the intruder climbs up to the window of Study No. 1.

Bunter is missed at lights out by Wingate, the Captain of Greyfriars. He is nowhere to be found inside; a search for the fat junior believed to be in hiding in one of the studies reveals that the door to Wharton's study is locked on the inside. The Bouncer, peering through the keyhole, reports the astonishing sight of a burglar inside the study: a Hindu going through Wharton's desk. Wingate pushes the Bouncer aside to verify his amazing statement. Study No. 1 door is attacked with a heavy form from the passage recess. As it crashes inwards, Wingate and Co. are just in time to see the dark faced man exiting via the window. As they pout out of the building by the front door, together with an irate Mr. Quelch, the burglar, whoever he was, had disappeared. The fact that he may have found a hiding place among the elms institutes a search of the grounds.

Bob Cherry trips over something bulky and believes he has found the burglar. But Mr. Quelch's lamp reveals that it is only Bunter, bound and mute, his eyes popping with fear. The Remove master wants full details of Bunter's predicament, and finally whittles down an attack on the fat youth by thirty Hindus armed with scimitars from which Bunter bravely defended himself to one man with an iron grip and a knife, which sounds more probable. When told that the man was seeking some cheap, sixpenny candles (Bunter's jealous downgrading of the candles' real worth) from Wharton's study, he can hardly believe that either. But a search of Wharton's desk reveals that the burglar had not discovered the secret compartment where Wharton had placed the box of candles. Mr. Quelch carts off the candles to be placed in the Head's safe. "It was not likely that the thief would venture to return", says the

author. Sez you, murmurs the knowledgeable reader.

Harry Wharton took the candles home in his trunk when Greyfriars broke up and, accompanied by his three chums, travelled to Wharton Lodge. On the last lap of the journey at Wharton Magnus Station Bob spots a Hindu on the platform which makes him hurry to where their four boxes have been removed from the baggage compartment. There are only three; Wharton's is missing! Peter, the old porter, tells them, "The dark gentleman pointed out the box and asked me to take it out to a cab". Heavens, the Hindu had beaten them after all. But when they leave the station he is still there on the pavement and a cab is just pulling up. Bob Cherry's loud hail startles him and he hares off down the village street and vanishes along a misty woodland lane where the Co. lose him. No more was seen of the "dark gentleman" during their stay at Wharton Lodge.

On Christmas Eve morning at the London Terminus, the Famous Four are vastly surprised to be greeted by Bunter begging a lift to Trumpington Square. Wharton points out that he has not been invited. Bunter ignores this and promises that he will stay close to Wharton to protect him if any dark gentlemen appear on the horizon. Wharton is carrying the candles in his suitcase and looks grimly around as they leave the platform. In the melee the four are separated and Wharton is hampered by Bunter's grip on his sleeve. Bunter trips and falls. Wharton, jerked almost off his feet, feels a strong grip on his wrist. His bag is wrenched from his hand. He looks up to see the thief in full flight with his suitcase. It is the Hindu and he is quickly lost in the crowd, and all because Bunter would not get go of Wharton's sleeve. When the Co. get together again Bob Cherry suggests that Jack Drake may be their best bet to retrieve Wharton's suitcase and the Christmas candles.

Wharton jumps in a taxi to Baker Street and is just in time to see Jack Drake leaving Ferrers Locke's house with a suitcase. He is on his way to Trumpington Square. Wharton persuades Drake to accompany him back to the station where the Co, with spluttered interjections from Bunter, apprise Drake of the facts, they feeling that if anyone can solve the mystery of the Christmas candles, he can. As there are still twenty-four hours to go before the candles have to be put on the tree, they decide not to tell Inky that they are missing. Drake, who has already been working on the case in his head, feels a very strong possibility that with certain information he can get from the staff at Trumpington Square, he may just be able to confront the thief and retrieve the candles.

The Famous Four and Drake receive a rapturous welcome when the door of the large mansion is opened. Had Bollywood movies been invented and Greyfriars had had access to Channel Four (far *too* late night!) the scene inside the magnificent hall would have already been familiar to them. All the bright colours one could think of were represented in the décor, and deep pile Persian rugs had already cosseted their feet as they mounted the steps. Kalouth, the Jam's major-domo, from the height of his 6ft 3 inches (your reporter wonders if the author had been inspired by Jetsam in the 1934 film "Chu Chin Chow") salaams deeply and ushers them inside where they

are transfixed by the magnificence of the Nabob of Bhanipur. No longer their dusky chum of the Remove, an Inky their eyes have never seen before greets them. His jewel-encrusted outer garments are surmounted by a massive diamond glittering in his turban. The Nabob apologises for his over-the-top appearance explaining that it was the Jam's desire that his nephew wear Indian costume while in London. "Trot in, old beans, I mean, honour me by deigning to soil your feet upon my humble floor." Inky's smile does not fall so brightly upon the uninvited Bunter who tells him the magnificence reminds him of Bunter Court. But hospitality supervenes. He swallows his annoyance and salaams to Bunter. Kalouth is assigned to guide the juniors to their quarters above, during which time Drake has a word with him and is given the name of a staff member who is on leave, also the address in London where he can be found.

Drake leaves the mansion observed by Bunter who realises that this is a glorious opportunity, he having neglected to bring a suitcase (a regrettable error in the accompanying illustration). When Drake returns he will find his dinner jacket, waistcoat and trousers adorning the fine figure (as Bunter thinks of it) of the Fat Owl and at least two of the articles will contain long rips at the back.

Jack Drake, on information received from Kalouth, goes to a Bloomsbury lodging house and is received in a shabby sitting room by Din Das, a member of the Jam's staff who has been on leave for a week. The Hindu, though startled to be told that Drake is here as a representative of Ferrers Locke, the Baker Street detective, remains impassive, swears he knows nothing of Wharton's stolen suitcase and has never heard of Hurree Singh's Christmas candles. Drake tells Din Das that Bunter will be able to identify him as being the man with the hooked nose and close-set black eyes who attacked him. The thief failed to steal the candles when he broke into the school, and also at Wharton Magnus Station, but succeeded on his third attempt at the London Terminus. Din Das professes to know nothing of all this even though the thief's description matches his own facial appearance. Drake tells the Hindu if he will hand back Wharton's suitcase it will avoid Drake's having to call the constable on the beat to arrest him. He can leave without further trouble. Drake gives him one minute to make up his mind. Din Das looks at him for a long moment then carries the suitcase from the bedroom and hands it to Drake. Drake opens it and finds that the candles have been removed. Din Das is watching him from the bedroom door and as Drake turns to accuse him of already removing the candles, the Hindu slams and locks the door and, by the time Drake has smashed the lock with a chair, Din Das has vanished through the window and is climbing rapidly down the drainpipe beside it. As Drake reaches the pavement the taxi in which Din Das has climbed carrying the box of candles, is speeding down the street.

Drake raises his arm and another taxi quickly pulls up. His taxi keeps the other in sight and they reach Charing Cross Station just as Din Das leaves the ticket window and races to board the Dover night express. The platform gates clang shut just as Drake squeezes through. The train chugs slowly towards the daylight at the end of



A PRINCELY WELCOME FOR THE GREYFRIARS GUESTS!
Specially drawn for the "Holiday Annual" by C. H. Chapman.

the platform. A porter and guard attempt to stop him as he runs beside the moving train. Drake pulls on the handle of the last carriage door. It is locked but another passenger has opened the window. Turning sideways, Drake grasps the frame of the carriage window and, feet still pounding the platform, he hauls himself head first into the carriage. Din Das is in a carriage further down the train and has seen his pursuer successfully fling himself aboard. He grins derisively because the train is composed of separate carriages with no communicating corridor. He is safe from pursuit for the time being.

About halfway to Dover the train slows down in open country with no station in sight. Another passenger opines someone must have pulled the communication cord. Drake can guess who that was and waits at the open window for confirmation of his suspicions.

When the train stops, Din Das leaves the train and takes off, swiftly followed by Drake who has to squeeze through the window of his locked compartment door. In the darkness he follows the sound of the thief's pounding feet. The Hindu can hear the sounds of pursuit and grits his teeth with frustration as he realises the young detective's younger and longer legs are catching up on him. Finally, breathlessness forces Din Das to stop and stand, eyes blazing and a knife held in his upraised hand. He made a lunge at Drake as he came nearer but stepped back with a cry as he found himself facing a revolver. He drops the knife and stands with arms raised as Drake, prodding him with the gun, pulls the box of candles from his coat pocket. Drake indicates "hook it" with a motion of his head and receives a final blaze of hate from the thief's black eyes before he turns and runs off into the darkness.

Meanwhile, back at the Jam's mansion, the group of juniors, by this time augmented by Smithy, Reddy, Toddy, Tom Brown and several other Removites, are arraying themselves in their best evening wear, only Wharton having to make do with less formal wear. When Bunter enters their dressing room pausing to sashay a bit, chin raised, as though he were on a catwalk, they gasp, wondering, as he too arrived without a change of clothing, where he had found the evening suit he is squeezed into. Wharton realises Bunter is wearing Jack Drake's clothes and urges the juniors to bump him. But Bunter steps back and raises a lordly hand. "You are with me", the Fat Owl states, "and I expect you to behave yourselves. I am responsible for you in a way and want none of your blessed horseplay. I don't want to be disgraced by a mob of dashed hooligans. I expect you to do me credit – as far as you can, of course". The Fat Owl just escapes being slaughtered by one and all like the victim on the Orient Express as Jack Drake bursts in waving the box of Christmas candles.

All the four candles are placed in their designated holders under the smiling eyes of Hurree Singh who will be told later of the adventures of the candles and how they almost missed arriving in time for the lighting of them by the smiling Jam.

As the candles burn down half an inch, each one makes a popping noise and a tiny ebony box rolls down to the floor. "From each of the four boxes a magnificent diamond pin blazed and sparkled." Wharton and Co. place the pins in their shirt

fronts where they sparkle for the rest of the evening, a sight that unfortunately can never be seen in the less glamorous surroundings of Greyfriars. Jack Drake's retailing of the retrieval of the candles makes an enthralling story to be listened to by the avid throng as a fitting close to the day's festivities.

* * * * *

(The above incidents were assembled from "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles" by Frank Richards, printed in the 1939 Greyfriars HOLIDAY ANNUAL.)



IN PRAISE OF SECOND-HAND BOOKSHOPS

by John Hammond

Fifty years ago almost every English town had its second-hand bookshop, often tucked away in a quiet side street, where bound volumes of *Punch* and *Strand Magazine* lay cheek by jowl with sets of Dickens and well thumbed copies of *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

Nowadays, alas, such shops are few and far between. Partly due to rising overheads and partly due to the popularity of the Internet - it is much easier to search for out of print books by pressing a few buttons on a computer - the number of second-hand bookshops has markedly declined. Yet it would be a pity if these shops disappeared from our market towns. Sometimes untidy, frequently eccentric, they are an essential part of the English scene.

My favourite shop stood on a winding road which branched away from the market square in Nottingham. Outside the door was a rack containing inexpensive bargains - odd volumes of Everyman's Library, pocket classics, and thin paper editions of *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* or *Other Men's Flowers*. Mixed up with these you would come across obscure titles such as *Albanian Statistics* or *The Romance of Primitive Methodism*.

Indeed, much of the joy of browsing was the pleasure of stumbling on the unexpected. Inside the body of the shop most of the space was taken up with a huge table on which were piled that week's acquisitions: hardback novels, paperback classics, and books on history, biography and current affairs. All were priced in



pencil, usually one or two shillings. Many a bargain have I bought from that table. My much loved copy of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, published in Macmillan's Cottage Library, was purchased there for the grand sum of one and ninepence.

The walls were lined with well filled shelves of standard authors such as Wells, Shaw, Thackeray and Walter Scott. A smaller table at one side was filled with ephemera – old magazines, illustrations culled from odd volumes, and sets of forgotten journals with titles like *The Quiver* or *The Butterfly*.

Some rickety wooden stairs led to a cellar, heated by a coal fire, where bearded gentlemen browsed for hours among dusty piles of theology, philosophy and politics. Here you could find such once familiar titles as *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy, or *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler, all reasonably priced and in good condition.

That shop was a university to me and I spent many a Saturday afternoon poring over its shelves in search of elusive bargains. When it finally closed I noted its passing with a pang of regret. There are still plenty of *new* bookshops around but they are not at all the same thing. To me, nothing can equal the thrill of entering a second-hand bookshop and browsing along its shelves, happy in the knowledge that at any moment I may find a book I have been searching for for years.

Even though that particular shop has long since gone, there are of course many excellent second-hand bookstores still left. One thinks of those in cathedral cities such as York, Norwich and Lincoln; or Charing Cross Road in London, still a haven for book lovers; or a "book town" such as Hay on Wye; or Carnforth in Lancashire with its splendid emporium boasting a stock of 100,000 volumes.

I once worked in a second-hand bookshop myself, and although it was poorly paid it was a very happy experience. It was a real pleasure to meet "bookish" people - the kind of person who would ask "Have you a copy of Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*?" or "Have you a copy of Walton's *The Complete Angler*?" On the whole I found bibliophiles to be a genial group of people - friendly, patient and courteous. There is, of course, the odd exception. There was, for example, the lady who announced in a loud voice; "I was in your shop six months ago. You had a book on cookery; I can't remember what it was called, but it had a bright red cover and it was sort of flatfish. Have you still got any? Well, *why* haven't you?"

You never know what you are going to find in a second-hand bookstore. Mixed up with unbelievably obscure tomes (the dullest title I ever found was *A Bibliography of Deceased Entomologists*) you may come across a long sought after volume - perhaps a missing title by your favourite author or a book you remembered from childhood and have been searching for ever since. George Orwell, who was once a bookshop assistant himself, wrote: "Books create more and nastier dust than any other commodity known to man, and the top of a book is where every bluebottle chooses to die." That is true. But it is also true that for many of us browsing in second-hand bookshops is one of life's greatest pleasures and that life would be poorer without them.



FOREWORD : "MURRAY ROBERTS" (Robert Murray Graydon - 1890 - 1937) was the creator of *Captain Justice* and the stories appeared in *The Modern Boy*. Stacey Blake -1878 - 1964 wrote *Captain Christmas* stories for *The Penny Pictorial* and *The Union Jack*. Justice served in the Royal Navy and Christmas in the Mercantile Marine. I had never heard of Captain Christmas until December, 2000, when I sold some of my "Adventures of Captain Justice Reprints" to Brian Teviotdale. He phoned me and asked, "Why does Captain Justice look like Captain Christmas?" As I had no idea of what he was talking about he sent me photocopies of *Union Jack, No. 1247, 10/9/1927* and on the Ernest Ibbetson cover there was Captain Christmas looking, and behaving, just like Captain Justice. Eric Parker, who illustrated two Union Jack stories about Christmas, made him look like Justice as well. And as Stacey Blake's hero and Murray Roberts' hero share the same attitude to life and the ability to win through in all circumstances

I decided they must have been **twins**



Jack

THE (BRITISH) HARDY BOYS



Jim

BY R.HIBBERT

A Tale of Estrangements, Parental Rejection, Sibling Rivalry & the Usual Misunderstandings of Melodrama

There's a certain amount of wild surmise in the following, but, in the light of Brian Teviotdale's astonishing discovery, I think it's permissible.

This is the plot of a gripping yarn which needs the genius of someone like Catherine Cookson to do it justice.

We have to work out details of Justice's early life and his real identity; Captain Justice is his *nom de guerre*, but we know from the first episode of *Captain Justice - Modern Pirate* (*Modern Boy No. 146 - 22/11/1930*) that his name began with "Har...". When Justice kidnapped Thornton Hilder (one of the men he blamed for the death of his father) his victim managed to scream, "You, Har----" but was silenced when the Captain rapped out, "No names." and jabbed his revolver in his stomach. After scanning all four pages of *The Hereford and District Phone Book* which list the "Hars----" I've plumped for

HARDY

and decided that our hero's a collateral descendant of Nelson's Flag Captain, **THOMAS MASTERMAN HARDY** (1769 - 1839) who ended up a Vice Admiral and Governor of Greenwich Naval Hospital. Only a descendant of such a great naval hero could have done the things *our* hero did; and *he* could do anything.

As for his Christian name I've decided it's

JAMES

because he's up there, in the loneliness of supreme command, and no one (not even O'Mally, his second officer) addresses him by his *first* name. His parents are dead and his brother (but more about

him later) are the only ones whoever called him James. *NOW* he only hears it from his own lips; hence his favourite expletive "By James !". The fact that he's swearing by the name of Saint James the Greater, who happens to be the Patron Saint of Spain (where - Justice can be biased - the dagoes live) makes no difference. If he wants to hear his given name he's the one who has to say it.

I set Captain Justice - Modern Pirate in 1929 (the story first came out in *The Modern Boy* in 1930) and, in Justice's own words, "Ten years before" i.e. in 1919, "my father took his own life. He was involved with four seemingly reputable financial magnates, who were engaged in company promotion on a large scale. Their names were Thornton Hilder, Amos Brand, Chilton Draper and Lord Oscar Griffin and they were actually engaged in a colossal swindle that threatened to become public. So they made my innocent father their scapegoat, and, when the crash came, rather than face public trial he committed suicide. The other four piled all their misdeeds on his shoulders and got off quite free."

Justice had to resign his commission, was shunned by his former friends, and was expelled from all his clubs. He then left England and was determined upon revenge. There's more than a touch of the Edmond Dantès about Justice. For all of the first five series of Justice yarns (320 pages) the Captain is bent upon vengeance.

Most of the last two paragraphs have been taken up with a wordy - but necessary digression -, so back to the plot outline.

If Justice was made captain just before he resigned he can't have been born much later than 1883.

So his Date of Birth was 1883

Say, on **January 7th** at **15.45**, towards the end of the Afternoon Watch.

And his IDENTICAL TWIN

(see the evidence of Ernest Ibbetson's illustrations for The Case of the Oil Pirates in Union Jack , No. 1247, 10/9/1927 was born half an hour later at **16.15** during the First Dog Watch on **January 7th**, 1883.

The younger brother is called JOHN

(See The Case of the Oil Pirates, page 1) and soon after *his* birth

Mrs. Hardy (née **Lavinia Christmas** dies.

The boys' father, JOHN JAMES HARDY

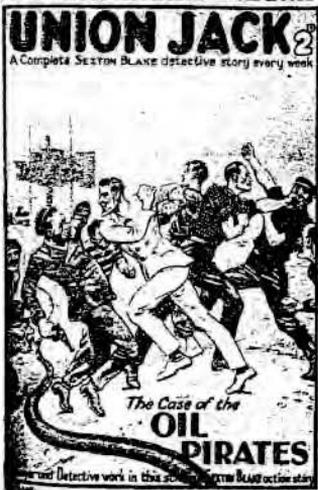
Justice tells us is , "a person of high wealth and considerable standing in public life." so we'll give him a large comfortable mid-Victorian villa with extensive grounds, not far from Greenwich Observatory and overlooking the Thames. In this idyllic spot James and John enjoy their early years in the care of their still grieving father and numerous servants, one of whom is their loving nurse

BETSINDA BIRTWHISTLE.

And she is a great comfort to Hardy Senior, who refers to her as "the sunshine of the home."

THE HARDY BOYS

as they're affectionately known to the Greenwich lower class, are inseparable companions and spend hours watching the ships going to and from the Pool of London, or playing at pirates, or re-enacting the parts of Captain Hardy and Vice Admiral Nelson on the fateful day of October 21st, 1805.



JUSTICE the PEACEMAKER



Captain Justice's 33rd Adventure
 Reprinted from 'THE MODERN BOY'
 New Series Nos. 71-82, 24.6.1939 to 9.9.1939

BUT THEN

John James Hardy's recently widowed sister, **Clementina Mortdale** moves in and proceeds to take control of the household. Betsinda is dismissed without a character and the malevolent **Mademoiselle Defarge** becomes the boys' governess.

For reasons too devious to be explained in a plot outline (something to do with her own son, Lionel) Aunt Clementina, aided by Mademoiselle, poisons Hardy Senior's mind against John. "It's John's fault that Mrs Hardy (Miss Christmas as was) died. If she'd just given birth to James she'd still be with us".

Mr. Hardy (John's only begetter) was "in no way to blame" and the deluded idiot comes to believe her.

He deluded easily and, thirty years later he was led to believe that his business partners, Thornton Hilder, Amos Brand, Chilton Draper and Lord Oscar Griffin with their, "Just sign here, John James. No, no need to read it", were honest men.

In 1918 he gave his name to the

HARDY HOME FOR HOMECOMING HEROES, THEIR WIVES AND KIDDIES

A Deposit of 15 Guineas Secures a Modern Bungalow on the South Downs, a scam which made Horatio Bottomley's swindles seem less important than those of an office boy pilfering from the stamp fund..

John James' partners took all the money and he took all the blame. Faced with ruin and disgrace he blew his brains out in February, 1919 and effectively blew away his son James' career in the Royal Navy.

But we must get back to the consequences of Aunt Clementina's arrival in 1890. The boys, inseparable until now, are parted. James is sent away to a select and expensive boarding school, John's enrolled at the local council school, Standard 1; sixty five in the class. It's rough, but reasonable education and John sticks at it. In any case the atmosphere's a lot better than at home, where he's shunned by his father, persecuted by his aunt and looked down upon by the servants.

By 1896 it's decided that James shall be a Royal Navy officer and arrangements are made for him to enrol as a cadet in January, 1897. John wants to be a cadet too, but he's told by his aunt (his father never speaks to him) that the fees are impossibly high and that they can barely afford to send James. Not true.

ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 15TH, 1897

as Hardy Senior and James leave by the front door for Dartmouth and H.M.S. BRITANNIA, John leaves by the back door for London Docks. He's fourteen and by the end of the day has signed on as Ship's Boy aboard the barque DAVINA BLAIR, Master, Captain John Quill. He gives his name as

JOHN CHRISTMAS

and on that day the Hardy Boys begin their new lives.

POSTSCRIPT : Readers of the **Captain Christmas** stories (and there aren't many of us left) will know that the Captain supports his aged mother and visits her when on leave, but, critics might argue, Lavinia Hardy died in childbirth in 1883. But the woman John Christmas calls MOTHER is the long lost **Betsinda Birtwhistle**. He found and rescued her from a life of poverty.



Biggles Books pre-war, pre-war and post-war Thomsons, Dixon Hawke Libraries, all FOR SALE. Call or write me at following with offers.

GERALD FISHMAN, 509 Raymond Street, Rockville Centre, NY 11670 2741. Tel: 516 536 4083. To Mary, as always, my fondest regards. Gerry.

Best Wishes to Mary and all Hobbyists. If you would like a copy of my next comics/story papers list (new contacts only) write to JACK WILSON, Nostalgia Unlimited, 19 Dunbeath Avenue, Rainhill Prescot, Merseyside, L35 0QH.

All Good Wishes of the Season to Hobbyists everywhere. ANDREW PITT, 45 Westholme Road, Bidford on Avon, Warwickshire, B50 4AL.

Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year to all Digest Readers. LESLIE KING, Chesham, Bucks.

AVAILABLE: All copies (unbound) History Today, since 1966, and Cricketer since 1993. LEWIS, 01227 462005.

Xmas Greetings to all Hobby fans, especially Thomson fans. DES AND AUDREY O'LEARY, Loughborough.

WANTED: Almost any pre-war OBB's. Greetings to all aficionados. KEN HUMPHREYS, 9 Nottingham Road, Hucknall, Nottingham, NH15 7QN. Tel: 0115 9632566.

Christmas and New Year Greetings to Mary and fellow readers and collectors. ERIC BAINES, Beeston, Nottingham.

MAGNETS WANTED: Various, from 43 to 239 and 673. G. GOOD, 147 Thornes Road, Wakefield, WF2 8QN. Tel. 01924 378273.

Happy Xmas and Best Wishes for 2004 to friends and readers everywhere. BILL BRADFORD, Ealing.

CHRISTMAS WITH THE BRUIN BOYS AND DAN DARE

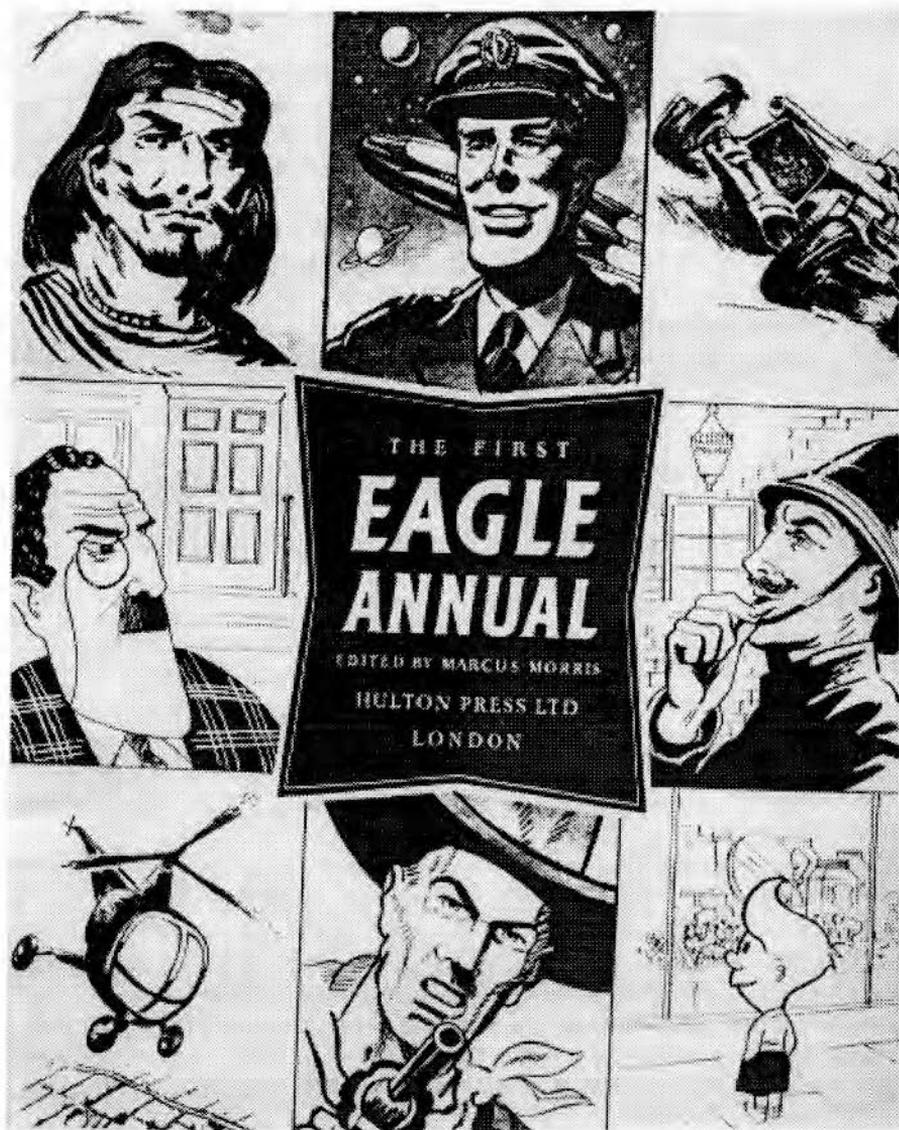
by Richard Piper



Unlike the "Magnet" and "Gem", with their wonderful Christmas series, which are familiar to me only second hand [literally] or courtesy of Howard Baker, my childhood comics did not extend themselves to provide Festive reading in the build up to the Big Day. Or if they did, I have no memory of it. This piece therefore concerns itself with the Annuals linked to those comics, which constituted sure fire hits as presents at a reasonable price. [Expectations were lower then anyway, at least in the early '50s!] Two Annuals in particular: "Rainbow" and "Eagle". Could I really have progressed straight from the one to the other? If there was something in between, again it has left no major imprint on my memory.

"Rainbow" was a remarkable comic, not least because, judging by some Tiger Tim adventures pasted into my father's old scrap book, it did not seem to have felt any need to change or adapt between the 1920s and the 1950s. I do not have any of my old Annuals, but picked up at a book fair one for 1955, by which year I was most certainly an "Eagle" reader. So how does it come across to me now? Well, it's nicely produced, with, of course, many more words and much less colour than books targeted at the under 5s have now. [Or those targeted at 15 year olds for that matter!] What's really eye-opening, even for a fairly crusted Tory like me, is how Politically Incorrect it is. Eight years after India and Pakistan became independent nations, and only two years before Ghana did the same, the Policeman Pete strip starts: "Wake up, sah," says little Sambo to Policeman Pete. "Yo' must hab forgotten what day it is, Massa Pete." "Wolligogs, yes," gasps our funny policeman....etc. etc. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and such strips seemed normal enough in the all white Wembley of fifty years ago. My memories of "Rainbow" are very happy ones, and the Bruin Boys nestle comfortably in the mind's eye alongside "Children's Hour" characters like Polly and Oliver, and Norman and Henry Bones, the Boy Detectives.

While "Rainbow" had not changed more than the date on the page in thirty years, "Eagle" represented everything that was bright and modern and new about the 1950s. I thought it was wonderful then and I think that it's wonderful now, to the extent that I have assembled the first twelve Annuals [again my original copies have gone astray], albeit without paying more than a fiver for any of them. I've selected number 5, one that I remember well, by coincidence also from 1955, partly because it contains a Festive Dan Dare story: "Operation Plum Pudding", set in the unimaginably distant 1997. Sir Hubert: "It'll mean cancelling someone's Christmas leave". Dan: "I wouldn't think of it. I'll go myself!" "I rather thought you would". [Hooray! But will he miss the chance to kiss the lovely Jocelyn under the mistletoe? My story line, not Frank Hampson's! I went off her many years later when I learnt that her middle name



was Mabel. Digby is reluctant to miss his Christmas dinner but returns a hero, having helped to capture two "interspatial criminals" with the aid of Aunt Anastasia's Christmas pudding. The rest of the contents are pretty good too. Regulars like Harris Tweed and P.C. 49, long stories including a Rex Milligan and features on cricket [Denis Compton] and football [Stanley Matthews]. I was the right age for heroes, but Dare, Compton AND Matthews.....!

When I finally graduated from "Eagle" [if I ever really did] I moved on to the "Hotspur", in its dying days, as it turned out, as a story paper. There was no Annual to go with it, unfortunately, judging by a pre-War one I bought recently and which really is full of rattling good yarns, mainly about schools, which I don't believe featured as much by the late 1950s.

In later years in the run up to the Big Day I have tended to read old Wharton Lodge stories or "A Christmas Carol", and as a Sherlock Holmes fan I wouldn't want to be without "The Blue Carbuncle". But I might just take in an "Eagle" Annual as well. Roll on Christmas!



The thoughts of Graham Greene on literature and young people

by Des O'Leary

Graham Greene? Young people's literature? Surely not?

Yet throughout his work his interest in young people is evident. He is concerned with their reactions to the adult world and the reasons for the appeal to them of certain authors. He also examines the effect of their own childhoods on the writings of those authors.

His own work in fiction and film shows clearly his fascination with youngsters in a threatening world. There's Pinky, the evil teenager of 'Brighton Rock', or the boy protagonists in short stories like 'The Basement Room' (better known in its film version, 'Fallen Idol') or 'The Destroyers', where a gang of boys, organised by their nihilistic leader, demolish a whole house. In another film 'The Stranger's Hand', scripted by him, the kidnapper, finding that his boy victim could not, after a long separation, recognise his own father, lets his hand fall onto a copy of Spengler's pessimistic 'Decline of the West' (rather unconvincingly to hand I always thought).

In the 'Collected Essays', a wide-ranging selection of articles, book reviews and other pieces written over many years, collected together and published in 1969, Greene deals, among other things, with some writers either popular with youngsters or who show in their writing conditions which have affected their own childhoods.

(Omitted in this article, regrettably, is a long essay on Beatrix Potter which demands a separate study, I feel.)

In Part I of the collection, entitled "A Personal Prologue", we find reflections on his own boyhood reading in an essay entitled *'The Lost Childhood'* (1947) in which he muses "in childhood all books are books of divination... and like the fortune-teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water, they influence the future." He feels his own future path had been affected noticeably by Rider Haggard's *Gagool* when, at nineteen, he studied Colonial Office appointments and "very nearly picked on the Nigerian Navy for a career." And especially Marjorie Bowen's *'Viper of Milan'* in which, at the age of fourteen, "the future for better or worse really struck. From that moment I began to write... Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. There was another theme I found there... the sense of doom that lies over success... the feeling that the pendulum is about to swing."

This essay has already recounted Greene's early encounters with reading, first revelation that he could read for himself in a paperback adventure of *'Dixon Brett, Detective'* before proceeding to devour the contents of his family's bookshelves, Captain Gilson's *'The Pirate Aeroplane'* ("I must have read that book six times at least"), *'Sophy of Kravonia'* by Anthony Hope... Stanley Weyman's *'The Story of Francis Cludde'* and "above all books at that time of my life, *'King Solomon's Mines'*. *Gagool* has remained a permanent part of the imagination but Quatermain and Curtis - weren't they, even when I was only ten years old, a little too good to be true?"

Then came the revelation of the *'Viper of Milan'*. But before that he gives us a vivid picture of the new reader's joy in the world of adventure stories. "What do we ever get nowadays from reading to equal the excitement and the revelation in those first fourteen years? Of course, I should be interested to hear of a new novel by Mr E.M. Forster... but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilised pleasure with the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee I felt when I found on a library shelf a novel by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Captain Brereton or Stanley Weyman which I had not read before."

'The Viper of Milan's' action is shot through with ambivalence and corruption and we can see the roots of Greene's own interest in the perverting influence of evil on innocence so typical of his own attitude in his fictional world, which one critic has named "Greeneland". The character of Harry Lime in his film *'The Third Man'* is a memorable example.

'The Burden of Childhood' (1950) is a study of the different reactions of Kipling and Saki (Hector Munro) to "the burden of their childhood", their similar colonial backgrounds and miserable experiences of childhood when sent back to England while their parents stayed in the East. Greene notes that "family life for such children is always broken" but, unlike Dickens who had learned sympathy from his own wretched childhood, both writers showed a taste for cruelty, later developing a distinct style behind which they could shelter. Kipling used "manliness, knowingness, imaginary adventures of soldiers and Empire-Builders", Saki "protected himself with epigrams... but the best stories of Munro are all of childhood, its humour and its

anarchy as well as its cruelty and unhappiness... How often these stories are stories of practical jokes. The victims... are sufficiently foolish to awaken no sympathy - they are the middle-aged, the people with power; it is right that they should suffer temporary humiliation! because the world is always on their side in the long run... behind all these stories is an exacting sense of justice. In this they are to be distinguished from Kipling's stories in the same genre - 'The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat' and others where the joke is carried too far. With Kipling revenge rather than justice seems to be the motive."

'*Rider Haggard's Secret*' (1951) was prompted by the vivid biography of her father by Lillias Rider Haggard. Greene pays tribute to the great adventure story writers "A.E.W. Mason, Stanley Weyman and Rider Haggard, perhaps the greatest of all who enchanted us when we were young. Enchantment is just what this writer exercised; he fixed pictures in our minds that thirty years have been unable to wear away: the witch Gagool screaming as the rock door closed and crushed her; Eric Brighteyes fighting his doomed battle; the death of the tyrant Chaka; Umslopogaa holding the queen's stairway in Milosis..." Greene is glad that this biography shows Rider Haggard's acceptance of deep personal grief - his only son had died in childhood - in dignified resignation. The revelation came one day while fishing with his friend Rudyard Kipling - who had also lost a beloved child. These "two elderly men, in some ways the most successful writers of their time... suddenly let out the secret. 'I happened to remark,' Haggard wrote, 'that I thought this world was one of the hells. He replied he did not think - he was certain of it.'

"Haggard's comment starts shockingly from the page in its very casualness and then we begin to remember the passages we skated so lightly over in the adventure stories when we were young and the world held promise: the dying thoughts of Quatermain; Montezuma's daughter (and her suicide beside her lover). Ayesha (with the mad Khan's hunting). Nada the Lily (and the death of the beloved). We did not notice the melancholy end of every adventure or know that the battle scenes took their tension from the fear of death which so haunted Haggard from a vivid dream in his own childhood."

'*Harkaway's Oxford*' (1938) Now for a change of mood when Greene delights in the extravagant deeds of a nineteenth century 'penny dreadful' hero, Jack Harkaway in 'Jack Harkaway at Oxford' where Jack succeeded in the then unprecedented feat of winning his blue for rowing, cricket and football before ending the academic year with a double-first. All this too, in spite of the many attempts upon his life and honour engineered by Davis of Singapore whom he had baffled as a schoolboy in the East. Among these attempts were cheating at cards (foiled by Jack's skewering the cheat's hand to the table with a fork); an attempt upon Jack's life in a railway train; the kidnapping of Emily, Jack's betrothed; the sabotaging of a steeplechase; Jack's imprisonment for debt on the eve of the Boat Race (the plot was foiled by the grateful Hilda whom he had saved from drowning in the Cher) and even by the setting alight of Emily's dress!

As well as reading of these melodramatic events, we meet characters like Sir Sydney Dawson, typical aristocratic undergraduate, an enthusiastic participant in 'screwing up' of an unpopular tutor - who had the door of his rooms screwed shut! Sir Sydney also kept a stock of "explosive cigars" in his rooms. "'I keep them for my tradesmen, the fellows come here worrying for orders and I give them a cigar, which soon starts them,' laughs the jovial baronet."

Greene concludes his light-hearted tribute to the penny dreadful "it may be argued that, because the author, Edwin J. Brett, had never been to Oxford, this whole setting is imaginary, an Oxford of the heart..." But why should there not be a wish to return to a more attractive time and place in "this confused uncertain age"?

Finally, let's look at Greene's review of young people's weekly story papers written as the Second World War started to move on from the 'phony war' period, showing the fantastic fictional picture presented in these publications. The first sentence of *'The Unknown War'* (1940) immediately catches the attention. "There are legendary figures in this war of whom most of us know nothing." He continues "Secretly, week by week, they fight against evil things... Steelfinger Stark, greatest lock expert in the world, who broke open the headquarters of the German Command in Norway; Worrals of the WAAF... Captain Zoom, the Bird Man of the RAF - these are the heroes (and heroines) of the unknown war." Schoolboys, of course, also played their part. "Nick Ward, because of a certain birthmark on his body, is considered sacred by Indian hillmen, and periodically he visits the Temple of Snakes in the Himalayas to gather information on Nazi intrigues. When spotted on one of his journeys by enemy agents, his resourceful headmaster, to protect him, orders all his fellow pupils to wear hoods so that the Nazi agents can not identify Nick. "To Ward we owe it that a plot to enable German bombers to cut off Northern India failed."

"Perhaps the spirit of these heroes is best exemplified by a heroine - Worrals, who shot down a mysterious unmarked intruder aircraft. Her real name is Pilot-Officer Joan Worrals, WAAF, and we hear of her first... complaining of the monotony of life. 'The fact is, Frecks, there is a limit to the number of times one can take up a

WORRALS FLIES AGAIN

by Captain
W.E. JOHNS

Author of The "Biggles" books



HODDER & STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

light plane and fly it to the same place without getting bored...' Boredom is never allowed to become a serious danger to these lone wolves: one cannot picture any of them ensconced in a Maginot line.

"But the man who inspires one with the greatest admiration is Captain Zoom the lone flyer who beats away on his individualistic flights borne up on long black condor wings, with a small dynamo ticking on his breast." He it was, who frustrated the plan of Vultz, the brilliant Nazi engineer "a fiend in human form", to construct an invasion tunnel from Guernsey to Cornwall using his new boring-machine. However, Vultz's insistence on using only captured RAF men as slave labour delays things. He will use no other "because my boring-machine kills those who work in it. It shakes them to pieces. I have reason to hate them. I will have RAF men or none." Yet the delay thus caused enables Zoom to rescue the RAF prisoners and the Guernsey base was pounded to pieces by the RAF. "The Bird Man had succeeded in his biggest job, the saving of Britain."

Greene muses "but Vultz, one assumes, escaped. None of the leaders in this war ever dies, on either side... Neither good nor evil is ever finally beaten. We are all of us seeing a bit of death these days, but we shall not see their deaths. They will go on living week after week in the pages of the "Rover", the "Skipper", the "Hotspur", the B.O.P., and the "Girl's Own Paper"; in the brain of the boy who brings the parcels, of the evacuee child scowling from the railway compartment on his way to ignominious safety, of the shelter nuisance of whom we say: "How can anyone live with a child like that?" The answer, of course, is that he doesn't, except at meal-times, live with us. He has other companions: he is part of a war that will never come to an end."

Graham Greene was seen by many as a possible Nobel Prize winner for his fiction. In this small sample of his essays which I hope will appeal to readers of Collectors Digest I think he shows himself a shrewd critic of wide sympathies as well.

Graham Greene Collected Essays Vintage Classics 1999 (first published 1969)



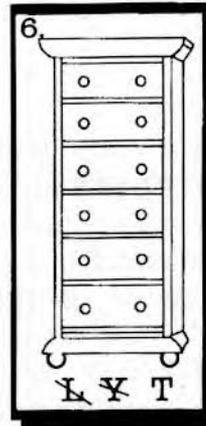
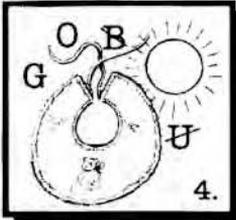
Have a great Xmas,
If your spirits sag,
Just read your Digest
It's a heartwarming Mag.

JOHNNY BURSLEM

A Happy and Peaceful Christmas to all our readers. TONY COOK,
tel. 01494 530785.



"Solve this puzzle"
says **Dr. Holmes**



By: Robert Whiter
-2003-

Answers on page 62



THE GREYFRIARS CLUB



Bob and Betty Acraman, founders of the international **GREYFRIARS CLUB**, formed over 25 years ago to support, help and personally encourage our ex President the late Mr Howard Baker, (who has attended so many of our meetings as reported in the Courtfield Newsletters) send our Heartiest Christmas Greetings to Mary Cadogan (our great long time Editor of the C.D), for her excellent and untiring efforts in producing the C.D. and Annual each year, and to all its readers, as well as our own club members and friends, throughout the world.

Howard Baker in his huge task has reproduced, in his excellent publications , reprints of thousands of all the old papers and Annuals we love so much. We have many happy memories of those years. The numerous happy meetings of the club, held in our homes (and recorded in our "Courtfield Newsletters") at which we often had forty, fifty and even sixty members attending apart from our postal members whose dozens of letters of interest were published in the C.N.

We now have many hundreds of the brand new editions, not only of the Magnet & Gem but also the Holiday Annuals. What more could we have possibly have hoped for? and I speak as one who has every one of the original Holiday Annuals, Collectors Digests & C.D Annuals right back from the start , in addition to hundreds, if not thousands of original Magnets and Gems! And what "GEMS" they are (excuse pun.).

Here is a sad recollection. Some years ago, after contacting the agents of the owners whose board was outside, I arranged with their representative to be shown over the part of Fleetway House where the Editorial offices of the Magnet & Gem were - and actually went into the Editor's office and rooms which I would never have otherwise been able to see. What an experience it was to visit each Editor's personal sanctum, and think that these rooms which were once so busy preparing the next issues of the Magnet & Gem for each week were now stark and empty!! What a whole world had disappeared. With a sad heart I finally left with my guide, and one last look! Not a thing had been left. Everything was gone! Alas ! I had hoped to see their offices as they were left with chairs and desks - some remnant left - to remind me of the Magnet & Gem but no such luck. It was nevertheless a fascinating visit. Our members will recall the article with pictures of my visit to Fleetway House that I published in our Courtfield Newsletter at the time.

I cannot close without a mention of all those other publications that helped to keep our schools alive such as Mandeville Publications, Oxonhoath Press, Sportsguide Publications and Fleetway Publications etc, We owe them our thanks also , and long may they reign.

Bob Acraman
Chairman/Secretary



THE CHAMPION

by Bill Bradford



This paper was launched by the Amalgamated Press on 28.1.1922 and ran for 1729 issues before being incorporated with the *Tiger* in March 1955, having itself swallowed up *Young Britain* in August 1924, *Boys' Magazine* in January 1934 and *Triumph* in May 1940.

The first Editor was Francis Addington Symonds, and circulation rapidly reached half a million per week. Initially issued on a Monday, priced 2d, it contained 29 pages and the fairly small print probably meant more reading than any of its competitors. Credit was given to most authors and illustrators, which is very useful. In the early years it claimed to contain a 6-page supplement but this was actually part of the 28 pages and numbered in sequence - just a gimmick! Early stories were largely built round a scientific basis, and the Editor wrote many of these under his pen-names, Earle Danesford and Howard Steele.

Over the years the number of pages declined to 26, then 24, but, during the war years and after, the paper reduced further in pages and size. By 1947, there were only 12 small pages. The price had remained at 2d until about 1942/3. In my opinion the early years were vastly superior, although as late as 1940 a survey suggested that *Champion* was the fifth most popular boys paper, D.C. Thomson claiming the top four places.

Now I must confess that *Champion* was not my own favourite paper: I preferred its sister publication, *Triumph*. I only read it intermittently during the mid-late 1930s. However, in latter years I have acquired the first 130 issues, plus half year volumes for 1934, 1937, 1938 and 1939. Thus most of my comments will be based on these. In my youth *Champion* had a high percentage of sporting stories, featuring the likes of Smudger Smith, Sgt. Dunn and his fighting sportsmen, and Square deal Samson, the strong man Sheriff whereas *Triumph* contained thrilling adventure serials. *Champion Library* (1929-1940), priced 4d, consisted of reprints from *Champion* and *Triumph* stories. Out of 274 issues about 129 were ex-*Champion*, only 64 pages, I did not buy it very often! Alternatively the *Boys' Friend Library* (96 pages for 4d) included, I think, 25 of the *Champion* stories, 2 appearing twice, *Outlaw of V Barn* (No. 588 and 664, plus *The Grey Bat*, 203 and 692).

Probably the best known characters are Colwyn Dane, Fireworks Flynn and Rockfist Rogan. Incidentally, in earlier years, the paper was approximately 12" x 9" - none of that metric nonsense for me!

Let us look at the early years in some detail. Some of you will know far more of latter years than do I.

No. 1 - Week ending Jan 28, 1922. Mystery-sport, the Tip-Top Weekly 2d. Free photo card of Georges Carpentier (first of a long series of famous champions). The cover is by Fred Bennett, a most prolific artist who illustrated for A.P. for some 4 decades.

The first story *The Bell of Santadino*, by Eric W. Townsend, illustrated by Bennett, is a 14-week serial of adventures in Peru. Next, *Sons of Steel* by Alan Blair (W.J. Bayfield), illustrator Harry Lane, a story of ship-building on the Clyde, is to run for 9 weeks, followed by *The Outcase of St. Basil's*, a school story by Henry St. John, illustrated by R. Macdonald. Then we have the 6-page supplement *Paid to Lose* by Arthur S. Hardy, illustrator Frank Grey, one of the only 2 Sexton Blake stories in the *Champion*, the other being in issue No. 7, *The Golden Wolf*, by Hartley Tremayne, (R. Couatts Armour) illustrator Louise Gunnis.

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Story No. 5 is *The Flying Detective* by Geoffrey Rayle (Eric W. McLean), illustrator Fred Bennett, to run for 21 weeks under different titles. Finally, *Fair Play* by Ernest School (W.E. Groves) illustrator L. Gunnis, is a tale of adventure in the Lancashire mill-land, which ran for 6 weeks. Most issues ran to 6 stories, all serials/series other than that in the 'supplement'.

Let's jump a year to issue No. 53, 27th January 1923, commencing with *The Wizard of the Wilds*, by Arthur Brooke (Arthur C. Marshall), illustrated by Valda, the first in a series of adventures of Trimley Dare, a much travelled courier, which lasted for 4 weeks. Then *Quest of The Golden Web*, by Eric Townsend, illustrator Valda, a serial in 4 instalments, of globe-trotters in foreign lands. The 'supplement' is *Vultures of the Line* by Carras Yorke, a story of robbery on the Great Western Railway - 8 pages, 15,000 words. Then another serial *Scoundrels Ltd* by Howard Steele, a pen-name for many writers of these tales of Panther Grayle, Detective. By now, not all illustrators are named and I can only identify a few. Followed by *The Cockney at St. Kilda's*, a school story by Martin Shaw (Le Breton Martin), illustrated by E.E. Briscoe. Only 5 stories this week, due to the length of the supplement, but still giving photo-cards of famous sportsmen.

A year later we have No. 105, w/e 26th January 1924, starting with *Rivals of Ravenscar*, written by Geoffrey Gunn, illustrator E.E. Briscoe, a school story of 'astounding mystery, sport and fun'. Next, *Leave It To Len* by Ivor Martyn (Bernard

FIREWORKS FLYNN'S FREEBOOTERS



By Donald Dane



THE RACING HIGHWAYMAN



ROCKFIST ROGAN, R.A.F.



By Hal Wilton

Smith - 2nd editor of the *Champion*) which is a kind of mystery thriller, 'pictured' by E. Shelley.

This week's supplement is *Mr London of London* by Capt. Malcolm Arnold (A.N. Murray) who wrote 173 stories of Sexton Blake and created Count Ivor Carlac, Professor Kew and Hon. John Lawless. Followed by *The Grey Bat*, by S. & F. Warwick, pictures by Valda, a serial, an eerie crime story. Then *Tigers of the Sea*, by Rex Stormalong, a tale of bloodthirsty Dyak pirates in the Southern Pacific.

Finally, *Pride of the Pictures*, by Howel Evans, a struggle for fame in the cinema world. By the way, the paper is now reduced to 24 pages, as from No. 72, 9.6.1923. Looking through the early years, it is only now I appreciate just how good they were.

I should make a brief reference to the *Champion Annual*, worthy of an entire article. I never bought it as a boy as the price of 6/- would buy 18 of the 4d. libraries - my favourite publications. I have since acquired a complete set, namely years 1924-1942, 1947 and 1950-1956. The first two are particularly good, comprising 360 pages; the 1926 annual was down to 224 pages and over the years it was reduced further in size, and, in my opinion, was less of interest.

As one of our old comedians used to say

"IT'S REET CHAMPION LADS"



A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

'Ooooooh!' murmured Billy Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Ooooooh!'

'Anything the matter?'

'Wooooooh!'

Dinner was early on Christmas Day. It could not have been too early for Billy Bunter. The fattest face at the festive board was also the brightest. The viands were ample and attractive: and Billy Bunter's onslaught on them was quite a record, even for Bunter. Wells and Young John exchanged glances, wondering where he packed it all. Aunt Amy gave him some somewhat anxious glances, perhaps fearing that disaster might accrue. But hospitality was unlimited: and when hospitality was unlimited. Billy Bunter was the man to make the most of it. It was against Billy Bunter's principles, if he could help it, to leave anything eatable uneaten. But on this occasion he simply had to. Even Bunter had to roll away, reluctantly, leaving delightful things unconsumed.

He rolled as far as an armchair by the fire in the hall. He sat, or rather collapsed, into that armchair. He gazed at the fire with a glassy eye through his big spectacles. Bunter had done well at dinner—a little too well. He could not help feeling that

perhaps he had overdone it a little.

'Oooooogh!' murmured Bunter.

The Famous Five gathered round him. They had enjoyed their Christmas dinner, with the excellent appetites of healthy youth. But the whole Co., probably, had not done quite so well as Bunter. His single performance had put them all in the shade.

'Enjoying life, old fat man?' asked Bob Cherry

'Ooooh!'

'What's up?' asked Nugent.

'Wooooooh!'

'Feeling ill?' asked Harry Wharton, sympathetically.

'Nunno! I-I-I'm all right!' gasped Bunter. 'I-I feel a—a—a little queer, that's all. I don't know why.'

'He doesn't know why!' grinned Johnny Bull.

'The whyfulness is terrific,' chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'It wasn't the turkey!' mumbled Bunter. 'I'm sure it wasn't the turkey! I had only four helpings of turkey.'

Then it couldn't be that!' said Bob, gravely.

'It wasn't the Christmas pudding! I had only seven helpings of Christmas pudding——'

'Couldn't be that either, then!'

'No! And it wasn't the mince pies—I had only a dozen, so it wasn't the mince pies——'

'Perhaps it was the lot together,' suggested Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ooooooh!' mumbled Bunter. 'Wooooh! I say you fellows-ooooh! Wooooh! I-I-I don't feel quite well! Ooooooh! Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Ooooooh!'

The Co. were sympathetic. But sympathy was not of much use to a fat Owl within whose extensive circumference four helpings of turkey were on bad terms with seven of Christmas pudding, and all of them at war with a dozen mince pies. So they went out for a run in the open air, leaving Billy Bunter to recover at his leisure.

When they came in, an hour or two later. Billy Bunter was still sitting in the armchair by the fire. But it was a much brighter Bunter that blinked at them through his big spectacles.

'I say, you fellows,' squeaked Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'I say, is it tea time?'

'Ha ha. ha!'

Evidently Bunter had recovered.

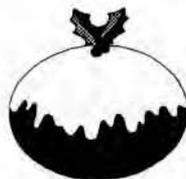
It was a merry Christmas at Wharton Lodge: and, as it had happily turned out, none the less merry because Billy Bunter had come for Christmas.

From *Bunter Comes for Christmas*, by Frank Richards (1959)



A Passage to Interior

by Ernest Holman



I suppose that the general - and intended - supposition about the Greyfriars Remove passage was that it started on a landing, approached from the Main Hall, and started its progress by passing Study No. 1.

Well, I would go along with that, with one amendment. Yes, there was a small spot that could be called a landing, after Removites mounted the stairs in the hall, until they reached the second floor. Where I make a change, however, is in placing what is always referred to as the Remove landing. That is a longer and larger section and is situated, in my mind, at the END of the Remove passage - after the last study. There are many reasons for such a point of view.

Events in the stories were very frequently centred on Study No. 1, generally when the Famous Five were gathered there. How often does it happen that footsteps are heard approached the Study from a distance - a prefect, an angry Coker or the heavier tread of Mr. Quelch? These footsteps would not be heard coming ever nearer if No. 1 study was the first to be reached from below. So, obviously, THE Remove landing was at the END of the passage.

After all, there were stairs down from the landing to other forms and their studies. Quite a bit of schoolboy 'activity' often took place on that Remove landing. Most telling of all, what price the 'Coker stairs'? How many times was the mighty Horace hustled, hurried or kicked down the stairs from the Remove landing - far too numerous occasions to count; but, this is the point: those happenings could not possibly have been perpetrated on the stairs that led down to the Main Hall. Decorum was required at that end of the Remove passage - much more leeway was possible at the OTHER end - in the interior of the building.

If one thinks of the ructions that DID occur on the Remove landing, there cannot be any doubt that they happened *away* from the 'respectable' end of the corridor. Cricket indoors on a wet day would see Wharton bring out his bat and take up batting position outside No. 1. He would drive the ball down the passage and if it were not fielded, it would roll across the landing and down the stairs. Similarly, football would never be played with shooting towards the Main Hall direction. So, THE Remove landing of story renown had to be away from the Main staircase.

Now, another point is to be raised - about the situation of the Remove studies. To all intents and purposes, they seemed to be all on one side of the corridor. It would make a very long passage indeed. Personally, I have a further amendment to make. I reckon that the studies were on TWO sides of the Remove Passage - otherwise, there would be a very narrow part of the building for studies to be only on one side. I suggest that a sensible set-out would be that No. 1 started on the left of the Main

staircase, with the next study that side being No. 3. No. 2, 4, etc. would be on the opposite side, maybe not directly opposite the door on the other side. A window would probably separate, say, studies 3 and 5 on one side, between 8 and 10 on the other side.

To support this, let's examine a typical occasion. Bunter on the look out for tuck would open the door of No. 7 slightly and peer out. If he had, for example, designs on a cake in No. 1 Study and wanted to watch the door, he couldn't do it on the same side. If, though, he had his eye on No. 4 study, then the door would be clearly visible.

It is true that nothing in the stories ever suggested a double-sided array of studies - illustrations (never that reliable) never showed door numbers and there is no mention, say, of a person going ACROSS to another study. All the same, I do feel that the two sides study lay-out really made sense. So, what was actually at the far end besides the landing. A short step round a corner to stairs leading to the box rooms. Possibly what the Estate Agents still call the 'usual offices'. No doubt the landing was used at its other end by, perhaps, the Fourth Form. That landing certainly came prominently into the stories - it was probably a quicker way to the playing-fields, the Gym and, certainly, the Rag.

What, then, of the Main stairs. Well, they would be used when the chaps were going out of school, with the Lobby for coats, etc. somewhere down in that direction. Classrooms must have been down there, too, for at break everyone went into the Quad through the Main entrance and exit. Masters' studies and those of the Sixth Form would have been downstairs in such a place that the Remove passage could be reached via the interior stairs.

Well, all this is, at most, speculation as to what COULD have been a lay-out. How will we ever know, anyway? Well, we might - don't forget the part of the stories that frequently introduced Henry Quelch's famous History of Greyfriars. Was it, in fact, completed? Did Quelch, on retirement, continue with it, probably living in the vicinity and often visiting the establishment? When he finally shuffled off this mortal coil, was the Epic finished or did Henry, like Stevenson, think that it was more blessed to travel than to arrive? Would Quelch want to have finished it, thus taking away his main object in life? In whatever shape it was finally, where is it now - well, I would guess somewhere within the walls of the school.

One thing does strike me, however. In five years time, the *Magnet* will be celebrating its one hundred years since it arrived in 1908. Despite the long time that has elapsed since then, I find it interesting that there is still something to be written about and, one hopes, to continue this process through the pages of CD.

Well, now - that, surely, cannot be a bad thing, can it?



Christmas Greetings to the Editor and all Hobby friends. REG AND MAUREEN ANDREWS, Salisbury.

Season's Greetings to all hobby friends from THE BECKS OF LEWES AND PEVENSEY.

WANTED: 1 copy Startler, 1 copy Scout, B.F.L., Sons of the Men of Mons No. 142. M. FOLLOWS, 60 Hipwell Crescent, Leicester, LE4 2OL.

Joy, Peace and Good Health to all. COLIN AND ELLEN PARTIS, Great Grimsby, Lincolnshire.

Festive Greetings to everyone. Wants and Sales lists welcome. GEORGE SEWELL, Mayfield, 27 Humberstone Road, Cambridge, CB4 1JD.

Compliments of the Season to all readers. D.D. BALL, 9 Brookfield Rise, Middle Lane, Whitley, Melksham, Wilts., SN12 8QP.

Yuletide Greetings to London Club members and hobby friends everywhere from ROGER COOMBES, 6 Alder Grove, Yateley, Hampshire, GU46 6EN.

Season's Greetings to all. Happy reading. ANDREW MILES, Sydney, Australia.

FOR SALE: H.B. 15, Tracy Series, mint condition, offers. HARRY BLOWERS. 25 Churchfield Road, Rothwell, Leeds, LS26 0EJ. Happy Christmas to all OBBC members.

Greyfriars for ever. Christmas Greetings, good wishes. BARRIE STARK, Sussex.

Season's Greetings from NAVEED HAQUE, Canada, to all hobby fans.

Season's Greetings to all hobbyists, especially devotees of Nelson Lees. ARTHUR EDWARDS.

Christmas Greetings to CD readers. I still want Champion Library War Stories. J. ASHLEY, 46 Nicholas Crescent, Fareham, Hants., PO15 5AH. Tel: 01329 234489.

Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2004 to Mary, Bill and all friends. JOHN BRIDGWATER, 5A Saulfland Place, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4QP.

WANTED: C.D. Monthlies and Annuals, P. Galvin, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks. Tel. 01226 295013. Happy Christmas.

RUPERT ANNUALS - the essential Christmas presents when we were young. I have hundreds of spare copies looking for a new home from the first one published in 1936. I also have loads of other Rupert books - all too many to list, so please send details of what you would like, or advise me of when you would have been reading Rupert, and I will offer what I can.

A stamped addressed envelope will guarantee a reply. So treat yourself for Christmas, and wallow in Nutwood Nostalgia.



Happy Christmas!



JOHN BECK, 29 Mill Road, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2RU.

BEST WISHES to LOBBC members and thanks for another great year. LEN COOPER

JACK HUGHES, Diprose Street, Pimlico, Queensland, wishes all Happy Days.

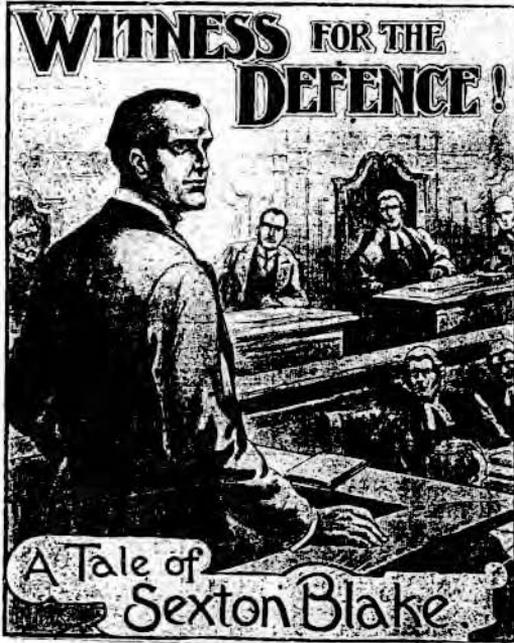
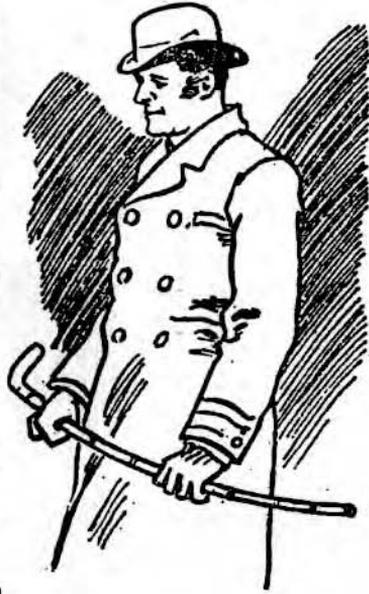
THE GREYFRIARS AND CLIFF HOUSE CHRISTMAS GREETINGS ON PAGES 2 AND 11 HAVE BEEN COMPILED BY MARGERY WOODS.

KEEPING ONE'S COUNTENANCE

by Derek Hinrich

When Sexton Blake first confronted his public in 1893, he was a solidly built young man with light sidewhiskers, clad in an ulster and billycock and carrying a stout ashplant.

In those far-off days, he lived in lodgings in Islington. But when, in 1904, he moved to Baker Street within a month or so of Mr. Holmes's retirement to the Sussex countryside and the pleasures of a contemplative life and beekeeping, a change slowly came over Blake. He was still rather more stalwart than he later became in the definitive portraits by the masterly Eric Parker but his features nevertheless steadily became more aquiline and clear-cut. Perhaps it was something in the very air of Baker Street, which affected him in this way. The pictures below, of 1911 and 1914, show this development nicely.



At about the same time, however, a strangely aberrant portrait giving him an almost Napoleonic countenance was current for a time.



The portrait above of Blake, in profile smoking a pipe, in 1914 is not unlike one of Parker's famous studies of the detective in the 'twenties, thus:



though a later study from the 'thirties by Parker is of a rather more angular Blake, a change in spirit with the times, perhaps, or the influence of George Curzon's dapper appearance as Blake in three films during that decade:



After Parker's retirement, the portraiture of Sexton Blake suffered some vicissitudes, but at last a new standard representation was developed. This was a pen and ink sketch based on the face of the actor Geoffrey Toone who played Blake in the film *Murder at Site Three* of 1960. He actually seems to bear quite a close resemblance to the Blake of 1911, so the wheel completed a three-quarter circle at the last.





The Christmas Specials



BRIAN SAYER dips at random into his collection of boys' story papers to see how those other than The Magnet and The Gem celebrated the season of goodwill.

A CHEERFUL lad, perhaps 13-years-old, hurries down the street, his breath visible in the cold air. His school cap cannot prevent his ears from being reddened by the icy nips on that frosty, late December morning.

His mother would have called out to him to 'put something warm on or you'll catch your death of cold!' But Peter or John, or whatever the boy is called, is in a hurry. A jacket and jersey and brisk walking are his defences against the chilly weather.

In one pocket of his short, grey trousers he jingles two coins not long given him by a visiting uncle. The coins are shiny and new - two gleaming pennies bearing the head of His Majesty George V.

The boy reaches his destination - a corner newsagent's shop. He pauses a moment to admire the mechanical tableau behind the misted window. It is a cut-out of a boy and girl looking at a jovial Father Christmas. Every few moments the hidden clockwork causes Santa to lift a present from a cardboard sack.

Peter or John - or maybe Paul - no longer believes in Father Christmas but he hopes that the present he wants most of all, the latest Greyfriars Holiday Annual, will be at the foot of his bed on Christmas morning.

The bell above the door rings unmusically as the schoolboy enters the little shop. Thick, multi-coloured paper chains festoon the browning ceiling. Two large paper bells, one red and one green, hang over the counter. There is a smell of fresh newsprint mingled with the sweeter scent of confectionery.

The lad's glance lingers on the jar of toffees but, still fingering his two copper coins, he then fixes his attention on the right-hand side of the counter and the little piles of brightly illustrated comics and boys' magazines - each competing for his attention and his tuppence!

The holiday of the year draws closer and publishers of juvenile papers contribute to the gathering excitement with their Christmas Specials. There was a happy choice of Christmas reading: seasonal printed fare to enjoy by a cheerful coal fire while munching a mince pie.

As contributors to Collectors' Digest have observed enthusiastically in its glorious history, Hamilton's Christmas tales, especially in the 'golden' era, warmly embraced the spirit of the festival.

A glance at only a few Magnet titles helps to prove the point: The Phantom of the Towers, The Mystery of Wharton Lodge, The Wraith of Raynham Castle, Christmas at Hilton Hall.

The Magnet, The Gem, The Popular, The Schoolboys' Own Library dripped with snow and seasonal articles.

Edwy Searles Brooks perhaps comes closest to Hamilton for producing Christmas tales. The Spectre of Handforth Towers and The Ghost of Travis Dene are but two Nelson Lee titles with strong seasonal themes. But what if my imaginary schoolboy reader spent his tuppence on another story paper?

Dealers often trumpet that an issue is a Christmas one. The fact is established by the accompanying price, usually much higher than other numbers! Yet apart from a dab of snow on mastheads and story titles, and a "Merry Christmas" message to readers, some story papers gave only a passing nod to the season of goodwill.

The D.C. Thomson papers were handicapped by their serials. For example, in the 1937 Hotspur "Big Christmas Number", a strip of holly looks incongruous over a picture of the evil headmaster leading his gang of Cornish wreckers in The Hungry School Above The Whirlpool.

Red Circle usually had a festive theme but Mr Smugg had no reason to be smug because the school tales were outclassed by Greyfriars and St Jim's. The Hotspur is my favourite of the Big Five. There are tales in the pre-war papers which, I believe, could be turned into TV serials. Unfortunately, come December, it seemed that a Christmas theme was stuck to a series like a tinsel star.

An exception is the "Big Christmas Number" of 1935. An excellent page one picture showing Mr Smugg watching two boys, dressed as fairies and squaring up for a fight, heralds a long Christmas and entertaining school story. Four of six yarns in the issue have a festive theme although one is slight.

But this is dated December 7 as if the idea was to "get it over with" as soon as possible. Two issues on to December 21, 1935 the Hotspur announces seven great stories for Christmas reading. Inside, the festive fare is meagre and the cover has a far from jolly picture of a boy escaping from the barred window of an industrial school.

The first Christmas Hotspur, number 17, December 23, 1933, has a superb picture of a Christmas party seated at a table with a large football-shaped Christmas pudding in the foreground.

A Canadian Mountie, his head bandaged, holds up a 'Wanted' poster of a man wearing an eye patch. The wanted man, holding a gun, peers in at the window. There is a snowy theme in most of the tales, including one featuring the popular Big Stiff and carolling.

However, sleigh bells could not be attached to the Black Wolf, Swooping Vengeance or the Buffalo Bill series.

One year on, the 1934 Christmas special carries a splendidly amusing picture of cowboys watching two Santas punching each another. Behind the cover about half the stories have a holiday theme.

On December 16, 1939 the Hotspur's "Bumper Xmas Number" arrived. That month The Magnet was offering Christmas at Wharton Lodge and the "Lamb series" with delightful snowy illustrations, mystery and hooded figures over two or three issues.

The Hotspur provided one story with a strong Christmas theme. This was in the

Tongue-Twisting Champion of Britain series. The Red Circle story has no Christmas cheer and other tales, including Western and outer space yarns, though admirable, are unsuitable for festive glitter.

Oddly, the title of a new series about a terrible 19th century school, *The Face at the Window*, drips snow and ill-matches the illustration of a gruesome master flogging a small boy.

Despite the war, people continued to celebrate Christmas yet, in 1940, *The Hotspur's "Bumper Xmas Number"* carried one tale with a seasonal theme and a flimsy one at that.

The printers brought out the holly leading, and one or two story titles, like the ancient Roman series "Pep-talk" Polonius, were hung with snow. That was it!

I accept that a good read is a good read but what is so special about such 'Christmas specials' - or the special prices asked for them today for that matter?

Take the 1950 *Hotspur* "Merry Christmas" number. Front and back page cartoons had arrived and orphan Tommy Gunn concludes his first adventure with a Christmas feed. Inside, the stories are either unseasonable or have only a faint whiff of roast turkey about them.

So what about a Wizard Christmas?

The 1946 "Christmas Number" has the cartoon Spadger Isle inhabitants enjoying a snowy 25th on page one. Inside, it might as well be any time of the year apart from, yes, those holly strips and snow-cruised titles.

The Wizard's "Xmas Holiday Number" of 1938 (£12-£14 being asked today) thrills with such tales as *Red Mask*, *The Black Outlaw*, *The Red MacGregor* and *The Fiery Cross of Texas* but there are no signs of Christmas crackers in any of them. In fact, it's business as usual.

Leap forward to Christmas 1950 and Cromwell might still be in charge of the country. There is a "Tom Smith" front page of party puzzles but none of the stories is "Christmassy".

The "Christmas Number" of *The Rover*, 1926, has a splendid page one picture of a Scrooge-like gentleman scowling at a snowman that resembles him, while, in the background, two schoolboys grin.

This issue would, indeed, have been a merry Christmas read for lads that year. There is a Western yarn called *The Roughneck Santa Claus* and other stories tied to the season as well as themed editorials.

I like the intro to the *Skinny Kidd* episode:

"Christmas was near at hand. Mother Gum down at the sweet-stuff shop had festooned it with paper chains of many colours, and had brought out the doll dressed as Father Christmas which she had stuck in the window for the last twenty years."

Page one of the *Christmas Rover* of 1937 has a chef, brandishing a saucepan, in pursuit of a seal balancing a huge Christmas pudding on its nose. Inside, *Peskie* the *Eski* eats the Christmas candles. There is a school story with a festive theme but tales like the *Fearsome Deeds of the Black Sapper* and the *Hovering Avenger* have nowhere to hang the holly.

THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER THAT TOPS THE LOT!

THE CHAMPION

THE TIP-TOP STORY-PAPER FOR BOYS.

2^d



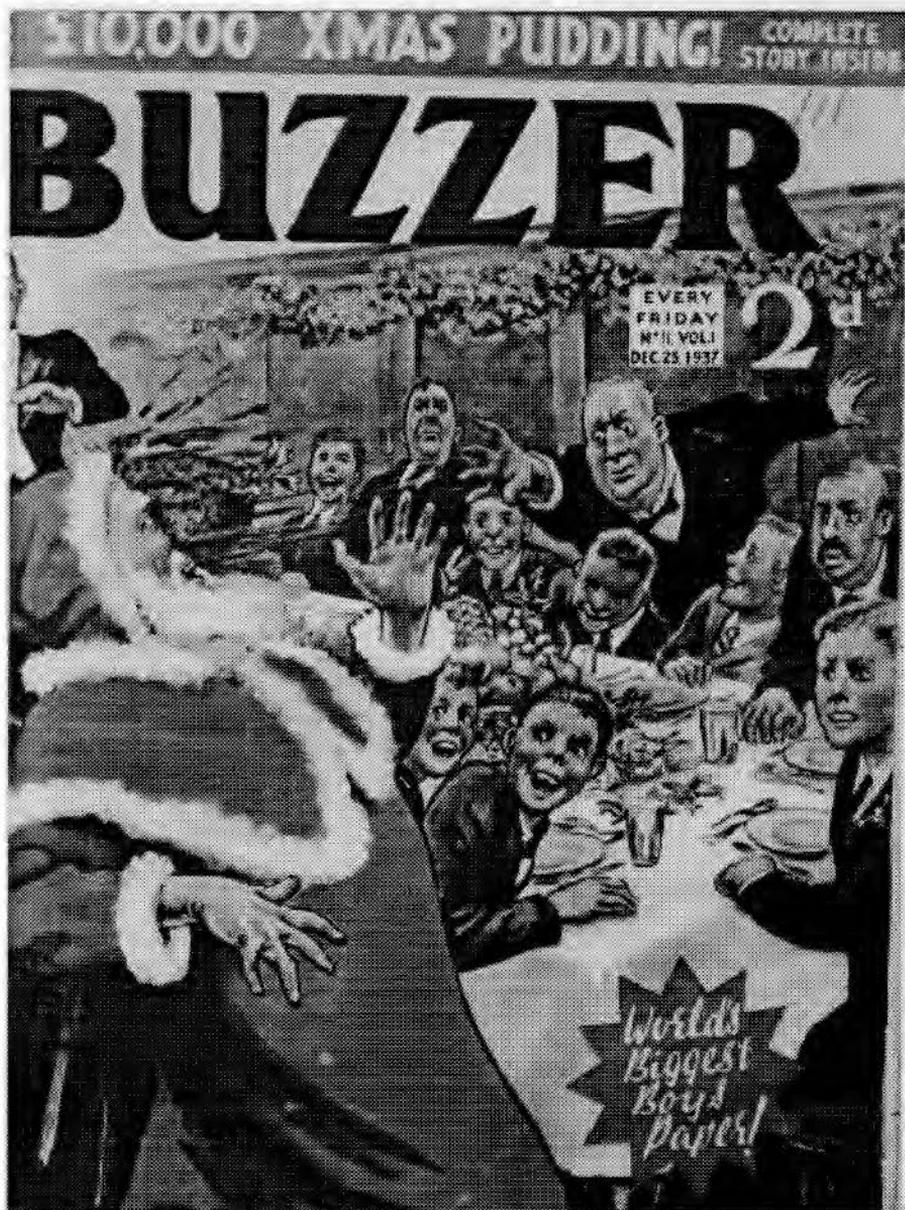
THE
GALLERIO COMBINE'S
CHRISTMAS
SURPRISE!

THIS IS THE YARN FOR YULETIDE
FUN AND FROLIC, LADS! MAKE
SURE YOU READ IT!

No. 268. Price 2/6. Great Morning

Printed in Great Britain

*A delightful cover picture to tempt schoolboys in December 1928.
Only two of the five stories have strong Christmas themes.
One is a Colwyn Dane detective mystery called
"The Case of the Fake Santa Claus"*



The big-size Buzzer was a choice for Christmas reading for boys in December 1937. A festive theme runs through the stories which include The Man Who Was Father Christmas.

There is a double centre spread of seasonable cartoons.

The "Grand Christmas Number" of the Skipper (strangely issued on November 23, 1935) presents a pleasing page one picture of a dishevelled Santa Claus sitting on a post while a bear plays with his sack of toys.

There are festive-themed yarns including A Jolt on the Jaw for Santa Claus and The Vengeance of the Xmas Pudding illustrated by an African native fleeing from a huge pud rolling behind him.

It was clearly too difficult to give the Is The Head A Crook? serial a "Merry Christmas" topic and, still less, the saga of The School of the Lash - unless they were having a whip-round for the milkman's Christmas box.

The "Bumper Xmas Number" of Adventure in 1922 carries a page one picture of some schoolboys with a man and a horse. Only a snow-capped wall and roof indicate the season. Inside there is a Christmas story featuring Posh Marston "the schoolboy ventriloquist" and another starring Dixon Hawke. Three tales have no seasonal theme but then one is set in the Sahara.

The Triumph gave two car cards away with its "Ripping Xmas Number" of 1924. The orange and navy blue cover shows a jolly party with one fellow squirting another in the face with contents of a soda siphon. The page layout is jumbled and the artwork, in my opinion, is rather basic.

However, the Triumph jumps into a festive mood with its first story called Nick's Merry Xmas Mix-up. Snow scenes, parties and puddings continue through the issue.

On to 1927 and the Christmas Triumph cover depicts a lad trying and failing to hold on to armfuls of puddings and other treats while being snowballed. The J.J.'s Xmas Panto heads the Christmas menu of tales. However, only one other story has a Christmas theme.

In 1936 The Triumph ignored Christmas completely on its covers. The issues of December 12, 19 and 26 have the customary dramatic red and blue illustrations but there are no season's greetings; not one leaf of holly. In the three editions I can find only one Christmas yam and that features Professor Pete, the Boy Inventor.

The Christmas Champion of 1937 has a jolly picture of schoolboys using large catapults to snowball rivals.

This scene is from Fireworks Flynn's Schooldays. That episode, the latest Colwyn Dane detective adventure (The Christmas Radio Raiders) and Sergeant Dunn's Fighting Sportsmen have slight festive themes and other tales none. Inside, the paper looks as much as it would in July.

After hitching a reindeer ride to 1951 we find The Champion seasonal number has an attractive red and white page one picture of Ginger Nutt dressed as Father Christmas and handing cakes and other treats to boys in a festooned dormitory.

(Not even at the most charitable time of the year can I find a snowflake of praise for those "boy who takes the biscuit" tales.)

All the stories have Christmas themes - even in the jungle with Kalgan and with Rockfist Rogan on Crossbones Island. The Colwyn Dane thriller is The Riddle of the Mystery Snowballer.

Another riddle is why the paper looks so clinical, lacking the expected seasonal editorial decorations and snippets.

The "Grand Special Xmas Number" of The Boys' Friend of 1927 would have been tuppence well spent. It is packed with seasonal yarns and editorials. The red and

navy blue cover depicts a sword fight - a scene from the Dick Turpin adventure inside. Other tales include Captain Crash Earns his Christmas Dinner and Corinthians Clash on Christmas Eve ("a tale of old time fighting, feasts and mystery").

In comparison, the 1904 Christmas edition of Boy's Own is as appetising as cold sprouts. The cover picture of a jester with boys in Tudor period clothes is attractive but I wonder how much our grandfathers and fathers enjoyed such fare as "Rags": The Story of a Schoolmaster or Christmas in India, "by an army officer".

No wonder, about four years on, The Magnet was a success.

The Captain, Christmas 1915, provided plenty for a boy to read over the holiday. However, an article headed Christmas in the Navy is about the limit of festive themes and is perhaps an early example of "Don't mention the war".

Alas, I have no Christmas numbers in my files of The Ranger.

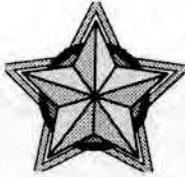
I have read only a small percentage of the stories in the Christmas issues mentioned or others in my collection.

Perhaps when the fairy lights are twinkling again I will make a start. Yet I feel certain that I will again be spending Christmas - a snowy, ghostly, funny, engrossing, holly-decked Christmas - with Harry Wharton and Co.



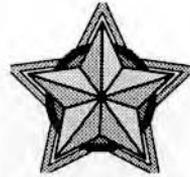
ANSWERS TO DR. HOLMES'S PUZZLE

1. LAWRENCE, Edgar, Fourth Form, Study No. 5 New House
2. TAGGLES, Ephraim & Martha (Mangle), Porter and Lodge keeper, Tuckshop Proprietress.
3. MANNERS, Harry (Spanners). One of the Terrible Three, Shell, School House, Study No. 10. A very keen photographer.
4. GIBSON, Stanley. Known as "Curly", 3rd Form (Bib & Sun).
5. WILDRAKE, Kit (Sir Francis Drake). Hails from the Boot Leg Ranch in British Columbia, 4th Form, Study No. 2.
6. TALBOT, Reginald (Tallboy). Study No. 9, Shell. Used to be known as the "Toff".
7. ROYLANCE, Dick (Boy & A Lance). Study No. 7, School House, 4th Form. From New Zealand.
8. HAMMOND, Harry, Horace (Salmon). The Cockney from Bethnal Green. His father is in the Hat Trade.
9. DARREL, George, Bruce, Richard (Barrel). Kildare's, Best Chum, a Prefect, Study No. 13, Sixth, Form, School House.



CONQUEST AT CHRISTMAS

by Mark Caldicott



Collector's of the Berkeley Gray (i.e. Edwy Searles Brooks) Norman Conquest novels will recognise "Thank You, Mr Conquest", published in 1941, as one of the more difficult titles to find. For me, a quest of around forty years to collect the entire series of stories was finally achieved with the tracking down of this title. While it is the case that in my collection some of the early titles are not first editions in dust wrappers, and a couple of the very rare ones ("Meet the Don" and "Conquest Takes All") are paperback versions, I feel that the quest is now over.

"Thank You, Mr Conquest", as well as having this personal significance, also has another special place in a wider sense, for it is the one and only Norman Conquest Christmas story.

The story first appeared as a two-part series in *The Thriller* in December 1939. "Thank You, Mr Conquest", *Thriller*, 567, 16-Dec-39 and "Happy Christmas, Crooks", *Thriller*, 569, 30-Dec-39 were seasonal stories for that year. The slogan accompanying the title page of the first of these declares: "Trouble came at Christmas...right to Conquest's doorstep. And our Norman gave it a warm welcome.. .too warm for some people".

There is an intriguing oddity in the way the Christmas aspect this story is adapted for its appearance in novel form, as I will reveal shortly.

Chief-Inspector Williams is spending a social evening with Norman and Joy Everard. Norman is spoiling for action, and wants to find a "nice juicy conspiracy" to get his teeth into. "There aren't any," Sweet William tells him. "Everything's deadly dull. It usually gets that way around Christmas time." When the doorbell of "Underneath the Arches" rings, Norman asserts flippantly that trouble might be on the doorstep this very minute, little suspecting how right he is. There at the door is a girl asking to be admitted. Norman senses a trick when he catches a glimpse of a shadowy figure in the background. Just as he is about to act on his suspicions, the girl falls into his arms with a dagger in her neck.

Norman is convinced he was the intended victim and that the girl unwittingly got in the way of the knife-thrower. She has died instead of him, and he wants to avenge her death. The clue of her return railway ticket, found in her handbag along with a golden guinea, leads Joy and Norman, accompanied by the indomitable Mandeville Livingstone, to the village of Coombe Mallett, situated in the Mendip Hills.

The journey there is not uneventful. Nearing Coombe Mallett, Norman's Hispano Suiza is within inches of plunging over a cliff, the road having been temporarily diverted to achieve this end. Realising the danger of a further attack, he avoids a sniper's bullet and, by leaping a boundary wall, gives chase to the sniper. He is thwarted by a man armed with a shotgun who turns out to be working for the owner of the land on which he is now trespassing. Reaching Coombe Mallett Norman and

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER! SPECIAL STORY

THE THRILLER

LIBRARY 2 WEEKLY



THANK YOU, M^r CONQUEST!

BRILLIANT LONG MYSTERY STORY

By BERKELEY GRAY

Joy discover that the girl's reference to "Four Bridges" refers to an inn of that name. Though the hour is late, Conquest wastes no time and, leaping from the car, he hammers on the door of the inn "just as clouds blotted out the stars and snow began to fall. 'Real Christmassy, this is!' murmured Conquest."

The landlord, palm greased with four of Norman's crisp fivers, makes the party welcome, mentioning his surmise that they are there in connection with the funny business at Glaston Manor. Intrigued, Conquest learns that the shotgun-wielding gentleman of his recent encounter is the assistant of Black Rufus Sedgewick, the owner of the manor. Black Rufus has run into hard times to such an extent that his home, the manor, has been sold over his head and purchased by his nephew, a Mr Tony Crawford. The landlord mentions that Crawford is staying at the inn with his wife who, earlier, departed for London and has not returned. Drawing an obvious conclusion, Conquest immediately goes to Crawford's room. Entering without invitation, he finds Crawford feigning sleep, a fact Conquest deduces from the muddy footprints on the bedroom floor, and confirms when he draws back the bedclothes to reveal that Crawford is fully dressed. Crawford asks if Conquest is one of Black Rufus's men and explains how his uncle is resisting his attempts to possess his property.

Conquest is surprised when Crawford's wife appears, proving Conquest's suspicion that she may have been the dead girl misplaced. However, as he tells Joy, he believes Crawford to be involved in the evening's dirty work and to have been the sniper who got away. This makes Black Rufus the innocent party in Norman's eyes. He suspects, and the narrative confirms, that the golden guinea is a clue to the reason for Crawford's determination to seize the Manor. Crawford believes a family legend that a cache of ten thousand Charles the Second guineas is hidden in the Manor. Crawford is aided in this venture by the evil Travis, a man out for revenge against Conquest who, during an earlier adventure (recounted in "Mr Mortimer Gets the Jitters"), had leapt from a staircase onto Travis's chest and crippled him for life. It is Travis, we learn, who killed the girl when trying to put a knife into Conquest's heart. We learn that she was an actress hired by Crawford.

When Conquest goes exploring the countryside near the Manor he is taken by surprise by Travis and another man and is thrown into a swallow hole. He plunges into the water and does not surface. His assailants believe they have killed him, but Norman has dived under a rock and into a cave. Bravely, he allows the current to carry him into the unknown and eventually emerges in a large underground chamber. He is triumphant when he spots two ancient kegs, this signifying another way out. He reaches an oak door, the other side of which is a chamber wherein he finds a chest filled with thousands of golden guineas, not to mention the skeleton of a murdered man.

Joy Everard, worried by Norman's prolonged absence, goes outside the inn where she overhears Willington, the lawyer acting for Black Rufus, arguing with Tony Crawford. Clearly Crawford is blackmailing Willington - Willington's son, Jim, is in fact the man who helped Travis "murder" Conquest. Willington has fraudulently

delivered the deeds of Manor into Crawford's hands. At heart he is an honest man, and declares he will reveal the truth to Rufus.

Conquest, meanwhile, has discovered that the exit to his secret chamber is via the sundial in the garden of the Manor, and has returned to the Four Bridges Inn where he rousts Joy and Mandy. The party visits Crawford's room, where he finds, not Crawford, but Valerie, the girl who is not in fact Crawford's wife, and the luckless Jim Willington.

Travis and Crawford have left. Valerie and Jim have been discussing their distaste for Crawford's activities and fall in with Conquest. Meanwhile, at Glaston Manor, Willington tells Black Rufus the truth. At this point Crawford and Travis enter the manor and briefly hold Black Rufus at gunpoint, but Conquest is soon on the scene to put paid to this attack.

That should have been that, but for events which had unfolded in London, where Tommy the Ice Man, a member of the Mayfair gang, has raided Kiffini's the jewellers. With accomplices Arthur Lyber and Horse Face Herbie Mason the gang escape near-capture by Superintendent Williams and flee for safety. They have received a note from Crawford, also a gang member, that he is to take over Glaston Manor and so they naturally head for the manor as their safe haven. They arrive just at the moment Conquest is removing his prisoners from the manor. In the ensuing melee, Black Rufus is hurt and Norman realises he must surrender. As a result he and the others are bound and imprisoned in a storeroom. Travis is all for killing them but Crawford has other plans. Tying Conquest with ropes is, as his followers know, playing into his hands since he is a second Houdini. He is free in no time and releases the others. He puts on an act for the purposes of fooling the greedy guard. Horse Face Norman, into thinking he has hidden some of the gold for himself. This allows Norman to slog him on the jaw, enabling the party to move into the main part of the house. The other members of the Mayfair gang are held up by Conquest using Herbie's gun.

Here the interesting anomaly in the translation of the *Thriller* stories into novel



"Valie don't fool me, neither," said Conquest, pulling the bed-staffs back. "She was talking sleep or some thing."

form is evident. Up to this point ESB seems to have carefully edited out any reference to Christmas. All the quotations I have used so far appear only in the Thriller versions of the tale. However, the next chapter of the story in both *The Thriller* and the novel is headed "Christmas Decorations" and, suddenly in the novel version it is Christmas. Conquest remarks: "The obvious thing to do, of course, is to march you out in a bunch and lock you in the hall cupboard. But I never do the obvious thing - and besides, it's time we thought about the Christmas decorations."

These Christmas decorations consist of each member of the gang being trussed up and hung from a ceiling hook in the manner of a row of hams, taking the opportunity also of relieving Tommy of the Kaffini diamonds. Conquest's fun springs a leak when Jim Willington returns to the manor and, finding to his surprise the Mayfair gang hanging from the ceiling, is fooled by Crawford into cutting them down. Travis seizes Joy and Conquest surrenders again. This time they all, including Jim, are taken to the wine cellar and housed in different cells, Norman sharing with the luckless Jim Willington: "Brother Jim, we're having lots of fun. Christmas in the ancestral old manor looks like being a great success...All we need is the family ghost."

It is as if Brooks had realised at this point that the original story had some intrinsic elements which involved references to Christmas decorations and Christmas presents which could not be written out. So he switched tack in the novel. This last quotation is, in fact, in the novel and not in the original *Thriller* version.

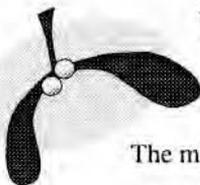
Crawford believes that if Conquest is left to starve he will reveal the whereabouts of the secret room with the gold. The Mayfair gang decide to go to the Four Bridges Inn for refreshment, where they meet with Valerie. She is now severely at odds with Crawford but agrees to accompany him back to the manor. Crawford has doubts about Conquest and decides to check on him. Norman has laid a booby trap which Crawford walks into, but in the ensuing fracas Crawford's gun goes off and Conquest is hit in the shoulder. Valerie is incensed at Crawford's lack of compassion to the injured Conquest.

Christmas Eve at Scotland Yard (or December 23rd in the novel version) sees Sweet William the recipient of a parcel bearing the message "Urgent! A Christmas Box from Your Old Pal Norman Conquest of Glaston Manor." At first he consigns it to the waste bin, thinking it a joke at his expense, and being too concerned about the missing Kaffini diamonds to enjoy such frivolity. Then he worries that the parcel be timed to go off by itself anyway. So Williams surrenders to his curiosity and, opening it, discovers the very diamonds he is seeking.

The versions of the story diverge at this point. In the Thriller version of the story, Williams goes immediately to Glaston Manor where Valerie finally turns on Crawford and gives the game away to Williams, who rescues Conquest just in the nick of time as Travis prepares to despatch our hero. In the novel version the climax of the story is developed more slowly. Williams takes more time in getting to the manor, while Valerie is thrown into Joy's cell where she reveals that she has possession of Norman's wrist watch, which Conquest had slipped into her hand when she had dressed his wounds. The wrist watch, Joy knows, contains a miniature file which is

powerful enough to cut through the bars of the cell. In this conclusion, it is the escaped Joy who reveals to Williams that Conquest is being held prisoner.

And so we are left with this mystery. Why did ESB emulate Scrooge? Why did he set out to eradicate Christmas and then have a change of heart to embrace it? Whatever the reason, this is a readable yarn and one I am very glad to have on my shelves after such a long search.



YULETIDE ACTIVITIES

by Ted Baldock



The mistletoe hung in the old castle hall,
The holly branch shone on the old oak wall;
And the baron's retainers were blithe and gay,
And keeping their Christmas holiday.

T.H. Bayly, *The Mistletoe Bough*

Wells, the portly butler at Wharton Lodge, turned the key in the pantry door, thus ensuring the safety of the festive contents within that fascinating little apartment. Wells was not by nature a suspicious man. He had implicit trust in every member of the staff at the Lodge all of whom were of long-standing service, Colonel Wharton being a kind and generous employer.

The guests, of course, did not enter into the equation, they in this case might be considered as being above the law, with the exception of one corpulent member of the party. William George Bunter had the unenviable reputation of being under suspicion from the moment of his arrival at Wharton Lodge.

The domestic area below stairs was very familiar to him. It was important - indeed essential - in his view that this should be so. Who knows when a fellow might feel a trifle peckish, especially during the long winter nights. It was essential that a fellow should be cognizant of the exact location of the commissariat and the shortest and safest way of approach.

There was in his opinion no better stimulant to insure a good night's sleep than a substantial wedge of cold Christmas pudding with perhaps a side dish of mince pies, four or five being a reasonable number, and a chocolate biscuit or two to finish up with and make doubly sure. Thus fortified, Morpheus would have no problems whatever in coaching the Owl into the magic world of dreams, where, unlike Midas, everything he touched would be turned into 'tuck'.

Unfortunately life is beset with problems and hurdles which, upon occasion, could and did prove most irritating. It was in this particular case a portly butler, a

locked pantry door and the necessity of being careful and silent enough not to disturb the household. Members of this, if awakened, tended to misinterpret a fellow's actions.

A fellow's word, that of a gentleman, had been in some doubt on several previous occasions. There had been some quite unpleasant incidents in the past when it had been difficult to explain one's presence in the kitchen regions in the dead of night. There was one fearful time when Wells had so far forgotten his social position and calling that he had actually twisted Bunter over, and administered quite a vigorous spanking in the presence of not a few guests and members of the kitchen staff.

Thus it behoved special care to be exercised. It was, as Mr. Prout, at Greyfriars would have said, quite unprecedented and certainly not the conduct of a menial towards a public school 'man'.

On Christmas morning we are fortunate enough to listen to the following dialogue as the fellows gather in a cheery group at the breakfast table: "Merry Christmas, Wells, I say, that bacon and those sossies look good". "Merry Christmas to you, Master Bunter, I trust you slept well, sir."

All hatchets on this most wonderful day are buried. Would that a way could be found to extend and perpetuate these sentiments throughout the year! John, the footman is smiling broadly as he stands at the sideboard, awaiting orders. A contrast indeed to that humble, even bleak setting of the miracle of the first Christmas which occurred so many years ago.

"A Happy Christmas, all you fellows," smiles Colonel Wharton, a greeting echoed by Aunt Amy as she busies herself among the coffee cups.

It is a scene worth recording and to look back upon in the uncertain days which lay ahead. This dear lady liked nothing so much as being surrounded by cheery, youthful faces. Perhaps in some way it helped to recall her own - now rather distant-youth. So did she beam on all the fellows - including Billy Bunter, who returned the attention with a smirk reaching from one ear also to the other. Even Colonel Wharton, although a little less demonstrative, joined in the laughter and chatter round the festive board.

In times of stress and trouble it is a recognisable instinct, morally and physically, for fellows to rally and offer support. Strangely enough this rather splendid notion seemed never to reveal itself where the Owl and food were concerned, for some reason to him a dark mystery. It seemed to stimulate wrath and a desire to lay far from gentle hands upon his fat person. It was one of the many mysteries which was never really solved by his limited intellect.

However Yuletide was a time to set aside pretty differences. A time to gather round the blazing fire and 'be all of one mind' Observe the cheery faces in the glow of the fire. Listen to the cheerful chatter wherein the Owl's familiar exclamation, "I say, you fellows", is lost midst the laughter and good cheer. May that same laughter, that same spirit never cease to reverberate far into the future.

Outside, silently the snow is falling in large drifting flakes, adding that final element towards a traditional Greyfriars Christmas.

ON THE W.I. CIRCUIT

by Dennis L. Bird



When I retired, as a senior college lecturer in Parliament and Government, I thought it might be advisable to augment my pension by giving talks on other subjects. The most obvious source of income was the Women's Institute circuit, so I wrote to the West Sussex Federation. Accordingly, I was invited to audition along with several other applicants.

I chose as my subject "Ice Skating", having been deeply involved in that graceful pastime for over 50 years. For nearly two decades I was the skating correspondent of *The Times*, and since 1978 I have been the official archivist and historian of the National Skating Association, the sport's governing body in this country.

All went well and I was told my name would be included in the annual W.I. Handbook of recommended speakers. I offer 14 different subjects and, by keeping my fee low (£20 a time) I seem to get a good many bookings. And not only from W.I.s and Townswomen's Guilds; among other organisations who have endured my talks are various Probus (Professional and Business) lunch groups, Rotary, Shoreham Horticultural Society, Sussex Yacht Club, Steyning British Legion, the University of the Third Age (U3A), and the quaintly-named Shoreham Women's Gas Federation.

One of the most frequently requested is my talk on "Schoolgirl Fiction of the 1930s and 1940s". The dates are carefully chosen. I have a sister four years older than me, and when I was a schoolboy, just before the Second World war, she let me read her weekly story papers and books. This habit continued into my teens. My interest then lapsed, until a meeting with Mary Cadogan in 1976 revived it and I began to write articles for her *Collectors' Digest* magazine and Annual. I am also an occasional contributor to *Folly* and *Serendipity*, the journal of the Dorita Fairlie Bruce Society.

In my talk, I begin with a little history. The first book purely for girls, so far as I know, is *The Governess* (1749) by Sarah Fielding, sister of the *Tom Jones* novelist Henry Fielding

Thanks to that marvellous book *You're a Brick, Angela!* by Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, I then do a quick scamper through Charlotte Yonge, Lewis Carroll, *Little Women*, and the Religious Tract society's magazine, the *Girl's Own Paper* (1880-1956). Angela Brazil must also be mentioned—I always pronounce her name like the nut, while pointing out that she liked to be called "Brazzle". On the razzle? I speculate. But as the heyday of her work was before the 1930s, she is just outside my parameters, so I say no more about her. Incidentally, one elderly lady at one of my talks told me that as a little girl she had been taken to tea with Miss Brazil.

The main part of my discourse is divided between books and weeklies. The book section tends to be dominated by the Big Three: Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elsie Jeanette Oxenham (who has Sussex connections, for she lived in Worthing), and Elinor Brent-Dyer. I always talk a little about "Dimsie" (Daphne Isobel Maitland), but my favourite

Bruce character is Nancy Caird, from her rebellious youth at St Bride's to her mature years as church organist at Easterbraes.

I never disparage Enid Blyton. I was brought up on her *Sunny Stories* weekly. Her Famous Five, Secret Seven, and Malory Towers books are still widely read. Her vocabulary may be limited, but she has that magical ability to make the reader wonder what happens next. Anything which encourages children to read is to be commended.

Noel Streatfeild, of course, features in the talk. Not only does she have a Sussex background (her father was Bishop of Lewes), but she also wrote some of the most notable books in my chosen period: *Ballet Shoes*, *Tennis Shoes*, and so on. I focus on two of her lesser known works. One is *The House in Cornwall*, which I first read as a serial in my sister's *Girl's Own Paper*. It is a curious, uncharacteristic adventure about some children and an exiled Fascist dictator.

The other Streatfeild book which has an enormous appeal for me is *White Boots* (1951). It is a remarkably accurate study of two girls thinking of a career in ice skating. It uncannily mirrors the true-life story of my first girl friend, Barbara Wyatt of Brighton, who was on two Olympic teams but never quite reached the top because she was



driven too hard by an over-ambitious mother.

I usually mention *We Couldn't Leave Dinah*, the Mary Treadgold book which won the Carnegie Medal in 1941. Dinah is a pony, owned by two children in the Channel Islands who refuse a chance to escape to England in 1940. The Germans invade and their commanding General brings to the island of Clerinel his granddaughter Nannerl. She too comes to love Dinah, and the book is a remarkable wartime account of a friendship across the battleground of war.

World War Two inspired a whole new patriotic literature for children. The Air Ministry were keen to boost recruitment the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), and they approached a well-known author of boy's books – Captain William Earle Johns. His character "Biggles", Squadron Leader James Bigglesworth, had featured in many tales of aviation daring. Johns responded by creating a girl flier, "Worrals", Flight Officer Joan Worrals, first in a serial in the *Girl's Own Paper* and then, in a series of a dozen or so books.

Worrals, however, was not a very convincing personality. During the war, the WAAF carried out many essential duties as drivers, fitters, mechanics, radar operators, fighter-plotter—but the one thing they did not do was fly aeroplanes. Yet Worrals takes off in a "Reliant" (Johns meant a Defiant fighter) and shoots down Germans!

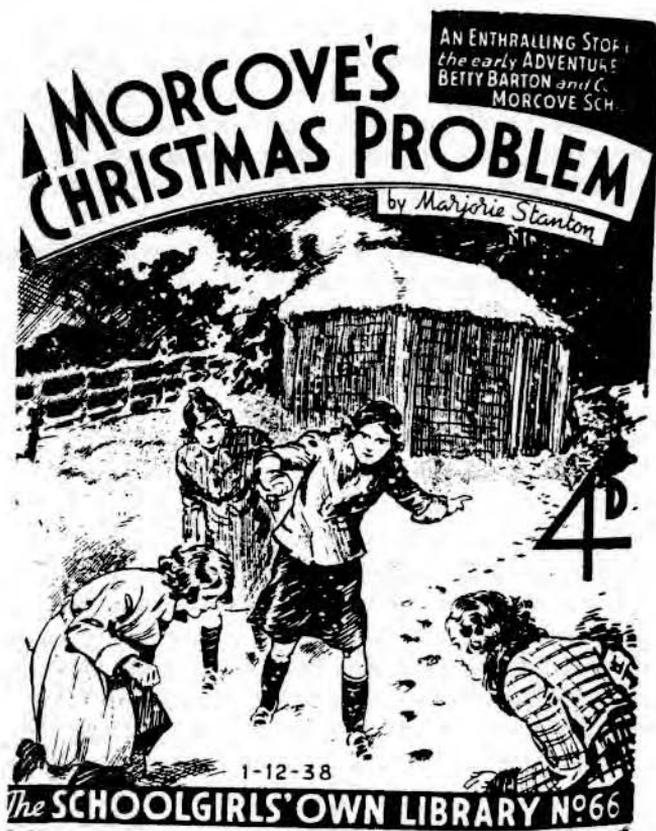
This is unrealistic. But there were women pilots who flew almost all the advanced military aircraft of World War Two. These were the hundred or so girls in ATA—Air Transport Auxilliary. They were the ferry pilots (also known as "Ancient and Tattered Aviators", because most of them were elderly or handicapped men.)

Under the inspired leadership of Pauline Gower, the ATA girls flew almost every type of aeroplane, from Tiger Moths to Spitfires, Tempests, Mosquitos, Stirlings, Halifaxes, and Lancasters. The only type they were forbidden was the Short Sunderland. This was a four-engined flying-boat and, in addition to the pilot, it had to carry a (male) flight engineer. There was a chance that a Sunderland might have to land and anchor overnight with a man and a woman aboard together! Unthinkable!

In fiction, the valiant ATA girls were represented by Marise Duncan, in a series of books by "Dorothy Carter". This was a pseudonym for Mrs D.E. Hemings, who died in 1949. She and her husband Jack Hemings wrote many stories for young people. Marise featured in six of them—first of all in a serial called *Mistress of the Air* the *Girl's Own Paper* in 1937-1938. They were firmly based on reality, for Mrs Hemings herself had taken flying lessons, and her books are remarkable for their technical accuracy and faithful descriptions of genuine aircraft. (I write as a retired RAF squadron leader with some 20 years in the service.)

In 1937, Marise Duncan wins the King's Cup Air Race—a feat based on fact, for a woman, Winifred Brown, had done just that in 1930. The Marise stories then take us to the Pacific, to Hollywood (*Star of the Air*) and Northern Canada (*Snow Queen of the Air*), before World War II sees her in the ATA, ferrying warplanes in Britain, Russia and Australia. She is a credible and likeable heroine.

One of the most important books of World War II was Pamela Brown's *The Swish of the Curtain*. Written by an adult, it would have been adjudged very good indeed;



written, as it was, by a 14-year-old schoolgirl, it is a masterpiece, full of humour and accurate characterisation. It is the story, based on the author's own experiences, of seven children who put on their own plays in a church hall in Fenchester (really Colchester). There were four later books in the series, but only *Golden Pavements* stands comparison with the original.

So far I have written about books. These were quite expensive—usually 3s 6d or 4s in those days' money. Much more accessible in financial terms were the weekly schoolgirl papers, at two old pence a time, usually containing six stories of about four pages each (6,000 words). Some of these were serials which would run for perhaps 15 weeks—hefty novel-length at some 90,000 words.

There were interesting differences between these two categories. The books—often 300 pages long—allowed for a quite leisurely development of plot and personality. The serials in the weeklies, however, demanded some sort of crisis at the end of each episode, to be resolved in the next instalment (“With one bound our heroine was free”). This often led to some rather sensational plotting, and was perhaps one reason why many parents and schoolteachers refused to allow their girls to read them. Time and again when I give my talk and display copies of *The Schoolgirl*, the

Girls' Crystal and so on, members of the audience tell me: "I was never allowed to read those papers." Silly, really, because they were full of uplifting tales of good triumphing over evil, and were often illustrated with excellent drawings.

Another difference was that the books, almost without exception, were written by women—but the authors in the weekly papers were all men. They masqueraded under female pseudonyms, such as "Marjorie Stanton", "Hazel Armitage", "Isabel Norton", "Renee Frazer".

The most famous of these was "Hilda Richards." "She" was also "Frank Richards," "Martin Clifford," and various other people. "She", in fact, was Charles Hamilton (1875-1961), who in Edwardian times invented Billy Bunter and Greyfriars school for the boys' papers *The Magnet* and *The Gem*. And as long ago as 1909, Charles Hamilton also created some girl chums for the Greyfriars lads: gentle Marjorie Hazeldene and tomboy Clara Trevlyn of Cliff House School

In May 1919, the Amalgamated Press, owned by Lord Northcliffe of *The Times* and *Daily Mail* sought to capture the schoolgirl market with a new weekly, *The School Friend*. Charles Hamilton, writing as "Hilda Richards", was invited to develop Cliff House School with Marjorie and Clara, and new characters – Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and above all Bessie Bunter, gluttonous sister of the notorious Billy. Hamilton was now writing some 20,000 or 30,000 words a week, and the publishers decided he was over-extended, to the detriment of his Greyfriars tales. So after eight weeks he was replaced at *The School Friend* by Horace Phillips, who became the new Hilda Richards. He did so well that, two years later, he was given his own series in a new Amalgamated Press weekly, *The Schoolgirls' Own*. The result was Morcove School, set in a real location (Mortehoe) in North Devon. Disguised as "Marjorie Stanton," Phillips created a large cast of varied and convincing characters—just as good as the Cliff House stories now being written by John Wheway. And Morcove had an extra dimension. Cliff House was exclusively about wealthy upper-class girls. Phillips made his heroine, Betty Barton, the daughter of an out-of-work Lancashire factory hand and his charwoman wife; a rich uncle from Canada paid for her to go to Morcove, and the early Morcove stories feature the social conflict between Betty and her haughty form-mates.

Sadly, almost all the schoolboy and schoolgirl weeklies were killed off by paper shortages at the beginning of World War II. The only girls' paper to survive was the *Girls' Crystal*. This had been established in 1935, and was slightly different from the others. Instead of concentrating on boarding-school stories, it was intended for the older girl who was leaving school and starting in a job. Consequently, its heroines were more adventurous: they flew aeroplanes, drove racing cars, worked for the Resistance in France and combated the Japanese in the Pacific.

And for me, a schoolboy in the 1930s, the *Girls' Crystal* was memorable for the character of Noel Raymond. In those days the detective story was enormously popular with adult readers. From 1933 to 1940 *The Schoolgirl* ran a series about a girl detective. Valerie Drew, and her sagacious Alsatian dog, Flash; but in most of her 226 adventures the identity of the criminal was all too obvious. A much more ingenious series was

that featuring Noel Raymond. Noel—a debonair young man of 24—was introduced to *Crystal* readers in 1935, and for once his creator, Ronald Fleming, was allowed a male pseudonym: “Peter Langley.” His 500 or so Noel Raymond cases were unique in the children’s weeklies in that the identity of the wrongdoer was almost always kept secret until the very end. This was a powerful lure to the reader; as a girl in a *Girls’ Crystal* advertisement put it, “I adore being baffled”.

Noel was tall, handsome, and aristocratic – originally a little like Dorothy L. Sayers’ Lord Peter Wimsey. But during the war years, those days of blackouts and Woolton pie, air raids and spy scares, he hardened into a tough and resolute investigator. After the war and until his end in May 1951, he mellowed into the rather cosy “Nunky” when he took his young niece, June Gaynor, into partnership.

All these characters have been very real to me in a lifetime of over 70 years. Books and weeklies have given me immense pleasure, and thanks to Mary Cadogan I have been encouraged to share this with a wider audience.

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The Bruin Boys Go Shopping.



Solution of the Puzzle-Story which appears on page 4.



One day Mrs. Bruin sent the Bruin Boys to buy some bread. On their way back from the shop Tiger Tim gave a loaf to each boy to carry. They had not gone far when Tiger Tim and Bobby Bruin gave their loaves to a poor old man and his wife. Jumbo, Jacko and Fido tried to jump a ditch and dropped their loaves in it. Later, they came to a well, and Willie Ostrich, Joey and Georgie Giraffe, in trying to pull the pail up, let their loaves fall down the well. When Mrs. Bruin heard what they had done she sent them straight to bed.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

by Johnny Burslem



Down in the Forest something stirred
It certainly wasn't the note of a bird.
"That's him" said Wharton "He's scoffed the lot"
"There's always the chance" said Bull "It's not".

In a tiny glade surrounded by trees
They came across a sight to please
T'was "Father Xmas", beard red with jam
Still clutching, it seemed, a roll of ham.

"It's not!" yelled Cherry. "That's not our Billy"
"Something's wrong", said Bull. "Plain silly"
"That's our picnic basket, all the same
"Whoever he is, he's part to Blame".

Inky bent down, "One of Bunter's gob-stoppers"
Came a click, then the five were ringed by coppers.
"O.K. men they *are* Greyfriars School,
Keep an open eye for the other fat fool".

"Mornin', young gents" a sergeant stepped out,
You've done a great job in catching that lout,
The idea of food - it could not fail
He'll spend the *next* six months in jail".

A yell went up, the crook upped to run,
His escape was foiled by an officer's gun.
He was led away, Nugent eyed the bin
"It's ours, all right, what the tuck was in."

In the silence, that followed a squawk was heard
It certainly wasn't the note of a bird
"I say you fellows I'm tied to a tree
How your tuck got there - it wasn't me!"

He was taken away on release from the Oak
Undamaged, but treated as if a big joke.
Lucky old Bunter and a chuckling Five
It's Xmas time, just great to be alive.

