

The COLLECTOR'S' Digest

OCTOBER 1954, vol. 8, no 94.

Price 1s.6d.



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Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
7, The Shambles, YORK.

From the Editor's Chair

THE NORTHERN SECTION MOURNS AGAIN: It grieves me deeply to have to announce that the Northern Section O.B.B.C. has again lost, by death, a very popular member - Harry Stables of Bradford, who died on September 9th, aged 67.

His passing so soon after that of Jack Munro came as a great shock to me, for the three of us being of the same generation, formed a little 'Clubette' of our own. But, Harry was held in high regard by all who knew him, young and old. He was a fellow of sterling worth, generous and good-natured. He would come along to the meetings with a big parcel under his arm, almost too big for him, containing papers from his collection he was about to loan to Jack Munro, who would greet him with a beaming smile. Now both my comrades have gone. I wonder if they have met again somewhere in the Unknown.

Since he died, I have often pictured him as we saw him on the occasion he gave us his first talk. He walked across to the table, prepared his notes, then started the speech in those quiet tones of him. He hadn't been talking long before we discovered that he had a quite unexpected gift of delightfully dry humour. Every now and again he would slip in some droll comment, and a quiet smile would light up his pale features.

Although we knew he did not enjoy the best of health, we were quite unaware that he was suffering from the pangs of a dread disease.

Harry was frail of body, but great of heart. No one ever heard him speak a harsh word of his fellow man; it is indeed true to say that if ever a man deserved to be called a fine old English gentleman, that man was little Harry Stables.

The sympathy of all will go out to Mrs. Stables in her great loss.

* * * * *

IT'S DRAWING NEARER: Since I wrote last, I have received Roger Jenkins' article for the Annual "Those Beguiling Blue Gems". Gemites will, I'll wager, declare they have been well oatered for this year. I won't say it's better than his smash hit last year, but it's as good.

And J. Breeze Bentley tells me that his contribution is to be called "Bob Cherry's Romance". You will be able to guess the theme of that one. Yes, Hamiltonians you can look forward to Christmas.

Thirdly, whilst in London Len Packman handed me his article - "Comic Characters", a carefully compiled record of the contents of 'comics' when they were really 'comics'.

And there's another important event looming up, the 100th number of the C.D. There's only six months to go. Whilst at Brighton it occurred to me it wouldn't be a bad idea to have reviews of other hundredth numbers, the Gem, Magnet, Nelson Lee, Union Jack, etc. The other fellows cordially agreed. What do others think?

Harking back to the Annual, all goes well, but I should like to have all the orders in with the least possible delay. And some adverts. please.

* * * * *

THE WANDERER'S RETURN: Ah me, my London holiday is over once more. I said before I set out that I wouldn't mind if it meant an eighteen hour day. My word, I underestimated it; honest!

Invariably each year I get two kinds of thrills, one, seeing ~~once again old familiar friends, the other meeting those whom previously I had only known through correspondence.~~ It was so once again.

When I arrived at King's Cross, there was Len Packman waiting at the barrier just as he has been for several years past. A few minutes later over a cup of tea, he brought out the programme he had mapped out for my benefit. Phew! Then when Josie had joined us we set out for the Modern School at Surbiton for a delightful evening with Eric Payne.

Just before I left home I received a letter from Tom Dobson

one of our Australian friends, who said he had been touring this part of the world but was leaving for home on the 15th. Len saw to it that an appointment was fixed for the 14th. It was kept, and in less than no time the three of us were chattering like old cronies. You know how it is in this fraternity of ours. Then Len took us on to the premises of Mandeville Publications, and Tom came away with the new Annuals under his arm. He'll be reading them now somewhere on the high seas. Bon voyage, Tom.

Then there was the birthday party at Len's home on September 15th. There lo! and behold, I found Harry Dowler, my first friend of the hobby. That was a real pleasant surprise. There too was an old comrade, Charlie Wright, and young Anthony Baker, whom I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time.

There was also that familiar rendezvous close to Liverpool Street Station where year by year, Jimmy Hunter and Eric Landy come along, both looking just the same, for all the world as if it was a weekly meeting instead of a yearly one. There's a real Greyfriars touch about all this I assure you.

There were happy evening meetings, Bob Blythe's at Holloway, Ron Deacon's out at Blackheath, and the old familiar room at Cherry Place, Wood Green, where I was introduced to Frank Lay.

Twelve noon on another day found us at Baker Street to meet Marcus Johnson for the first time, who escorted us into a nearby restaurant. Marcus told us afterwards he had made some notes to make sure there was something to talk about. He didn't require his notes, needless to say. We parted at two o'clock; if we had gone on till ten we should still have been talking!

One right good day was when I met George Mell on Waterloo Road at lunch time, went on to see Arthur Richardson at the Ministry of Civil Aviation in the afternoon, and from there on to the Marble Arch to meet Roger Jenkins for our usual marathon walk.

A new experience for me was a visit to the British Museum with the man who is a familiar figure there - Bill Lofts. As he piloted me round that vast cathedral like Reading Room I marvelled more than ever as to how the dickens he dug out all that information for the Annual. Talk about the patience of Job!

I've left until almost the end the Brighton meeting held this year at Bill Jardine's. What a delightful happy event it was. Uncle Benjamin will be telling you all about it; I'll just say there seemed almost sufficient food on the tables to have satisfied

the delegates of a certain conference held recently at the same resort. A generous pair, Bill and Gladys Jardine, to put it mildly.

Lastly, my sincere thanks to John Shaw for making me so comfortable throughout my stay and to Len for arranging a programme which went off without a hitch from start to finish. Crammed as it was, each midnight found me as fresh as paint, the fellow who was sent into "retirement". Ah well, the War Office hasn't heard of the Brotherhood of Happy Hours! Au revoir London.

* * * * *

MORE VISITORS TO YORK: Shortly before my journey to London, Charles Churchill and his brother George set out from their home at Exeter and travelled the roads to York to spend several days. The brothers, Jack Wood and I had some grand times together; Charles and Jack both keen Leeites had plenty to talk about.

And so my list of those I have met grows longer but it can't grow too long.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

(Leeites will sign enviously over this graphic description of a real find, I'll warrant. H.L.)

STACKS OF NELSON LEES

by C.L. Lettey.

This is a story of Nelson Lee treasure trove. It is the story of perhaps the largest single hoard of Nelson Lees ever to be discovered - fourteen and a half years complete run 1919 - 1933 and all in good condition.

Ironically enough they were discovered by a Magnet collector - myself, who never (until lately) appreciated the Nelson Lee.

The story of the discovery takes me back two years. I had about a dozen copies of the Magnet and very little hope of obtaining any more for I knew nothing about the C.D. and its little world of readers and collectors. Consequently I was a lone Magnet collector with no contacts such as I enjoy today.

Bristol does not possess many second-hand magazine shops. It was always the same "No" I received when I inquired for Magnets.

However, one day the shopkeeper said "I had a gentleman call last week with a bundle of old boys' school stories for sale. A complete year I believe for 1919, but I turned them down".

Immediately and unreasonably the thought struck me - "Magnets"! But that shopkeeper was one of those fellows who are never really sure about things. "At any rate", he assured me, "it was a book very well known when I was a boy". This uncertainty was paralysing!

"Can you tell me where this gentleman lives?" I said, hoping for the improbable. But here I was lucky. He knew him to be a caretaker at a church in the district.

That clue was important and I soon knocked up all the church caretakers in the neighbourhood. At last I came to the church of St. M -, and found my old gentleman. "Are they Magnets?" I asked. "No" he said "they're Nelson Lees and I've got stacks of them all tied up in complete years".

My spirits fell. However, I am glad I had enough sense to step inside to see the Lees. He took me to a small room littered with old hymn books and religious works and there against the wall stood fifteen bundles of Nelson Lees all neatly tied in complete years, all in numerical order! The discovery of this hoard (January 1919 to the end) did not thrill me at the time. Of course I had read the Lee as a boy and had retained a secret affection for the name at any rate.

I could see also that the old gentleman wished to sell. I bought the whole lot there and then, impulsively as I often do, and made him very happy with a fair price. (Note: Since then I admit I have sold them for twice the amount. At that time I had no idea of old book values).

My most urgent problem was to get them home. Fortunately I have a small workshop near the church and I resolved to get the whole lot there at one go!

The old caretaker got a large sack and the fifteen bundles went inside.

A passing youth helped me with the burden. Fourteen and a half years of Nelson Lees make a very heavy load! Later on I got them home to Kingswood carrying two bundles at a time.

This discovery must surely have been one of the largest hoards unearthed at one time. They had narrowly escaped destruction several times, I was told by the caretaker. During the war they

were booked for salvage but something had saved them. The church had been bombed but still they had survived.

The remainder of my story was told in the C.D. some time ago, when I advertised the lot for sale (Do you remember?). I sold them all to Nelson Lee fans and spent the proceeds on Magnets.

The aftermath? Well, I have been reading an odd Nelson Lee or so lately and have found them most interesting. Indeed I almost regret selling the hoard! But now they are gone - to the right homes at any rate, and I have no doubt they will endure many a long year.

Moral: If you are a Nelson Lee collector try hunting for Magnets!

BLAKIANA

Conducted by Josephine Packman

27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

In view of the length of Blakiana this month, I must make my opening remarks as brief as possible.

In this issue I am publishing two very interesting replies to the letters on Anthony Parsons and Pierre Quiroule, which speak for themselves. Other replies will appear in Blakiana next month, together with another article by Herbert Leckenby entitled 'Before Tinker's Time'.

I regret I have not as yet had time to read the current S.B.L's and therefore cannot say anything about them.

And now for the 'Blake Circle Quiz' result.

It was decided by a panel of the Blake Circle that points should be awarded for every question - or part of question - as the case may be. For example: Question No. 2 = 3 points; No. 4 = 1 point; No. 5 = 2 points, and so on. For question No. 17 the maximum number of points is six, six names being asked. Question No. 24 has 11 names = 11 points. The total possible points is 57. I should also mention that the points have been awarded strictly in accordance with the answers. Thus, in such as question No. 2, if the answer was given in the wrong order, any that are in their correct place score a point.

The winners are as follows:-

1st	Walter Webb	54 points
2nd	F. Vernon Lay	53 "
3rd	(R.E.J. Rouse	(52 "
	(W.H. Bradshaw	(52 "

As a result of this unforeseen tie, an early S.B. Library has been sent to both Mr. Rouse and Mr. Bradshaw, an additional prize having been supplied by the Blake Circle.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who sent in their entries, and, as Jim Merralls of Australia suggests, maybe we will have another quiz later on.

JOSEPHINE PACKMAN.

SOLUTION TO SEXTON BLAKE QUIZ

1. Mrs. Gaffney.
2. 1st. We-Wee; 2nd. Griff; 3rd. Wallace Lorrimer.
3. Griff.
4. Barry (or Topper).
5. Nigel Blake and Mary Ann Cluppins (or Berkeley Blake)
6. G.H. Teed.
7. Henri Garrock.
8. Dr. Huxton Rymer.
9. Isabel de Ferre.
10. Larry.
11. Fifette Bierce.
12. Lobangu.
13. 1916.
14. Dr. Satira.
15. Ruff Hanson's Guns.
16. Olga Nasmyth - alias Lola de Guise.
17. Leon Kestrel; Fifette Bierce; Papa Bierce; Semiramis; Madrana; Lessing; Shanghai Jim; Marinotte.
18. Bill Withers and George Wibley.
19. The Yellow Tiger; The Secret of the Coconut Groves; Raiders Past.
20. 1913.
21. The Case of the Jade-Handled Knife.
22. John Smith.

23. The Crimson Conjuror, by Gwyn Evans.
24. Rymer; Wu Ling; Zenith; Kestrel; Kew; Three Musket-
teers; Plummer; Mary Trent; Isabel de Ferre; Yvonne;
Uncle Graves.
25. M. Poole; M. Osborne; A. Paterson; L. Jackson;
H. Maxwell; W.M. Graydon.
26. Mr. Jardine (or Mr. Hunter).
27. Bubbly Water (Champagne).
28. Muriel Mari.
29. Kingsmere.
30. 1926.

-----ooOoo-----

THE GWYN EVANS STORY

By Herbert Leckenby

Over five years ago in No.29 of the C.D. I gave some extracts from C.W. Shepherd's absorbing book "Let's Walk Down Fleet Street" concerning Gwyn Evans. Mr. Shepherd said Gwyn was quite a character in the Street of Ink and described him as "tall and dreamy, wispy, ethereal, and who died quite young, leaving a world in which he always seemed something of a stranger. It was odd that such a gentle poetical man should have been an author of Sexton Blake thrillers, but he turned them out with incredible facility, not only with inspiration but with his abnormal speed on the typewriter".

One of the stories about him I referred to briefly in that earlier number, but it really is so delightfully audacious that I feel it is worth giving it in full just as Mr. Shepherd told it. Here then it is:

"The best story of Gwyn's financial acumen concerns the exploit of the Albert Memorial and the Hard-boiled Egg. It may seem trivial, but it is illustrative of the odd, boyish mind which belong to so many Fleet Street men. Gwyn, who never needed money but always wanted it; who earned plenty and spent about the same, was face to face with one of the usual financial crises. It was essential that he should have a few guineas next morning. Ordinary ways of getting the money did not appeal to him, and as you could then buy hard-boiled eggs in buffets, Gwyn bought one that evening. Then accompanied by a lady friend, he went to the Albert Memorial and sat down on the plinth steps, complete with his hard-boiled egg.

Next, he began to toss the egg from one hand to the other, keeping all the time a Gandhi-like composure. Meanwhile the lady went to the nearest policeman who happened to be just outside the gates of Kensington Gardens.

"Oh, Officer", she said, "there's a man behaving in an extraordinary manner on the steps of the Memorial".

"Nothing really wrong, I suppose?" queried the policeman, saying that he would go along in any case to see what it was all about. There he saw Gwyn still tossing his egg to and fro. The Officer could not call to mind any law forbidding a man to do what he liked with a hard-boiled egg, even on the steps of the Albert Memorial, but, as a small crowd had gathered, he had to say something. He asked Gwyn what it was all about.

"Well, I happen to belong to the Society for the Veneration of Ancient Monuments" explained Gwyn, "and each year one of us does this; at a different monument of course. It was Cleopatra's Needle last year. Sort of rite you know".

The policeman could do nothing except tell Gwyn that he had been at it long enough to serve the intentions of any Society born of man, and walked away. Whereupon Gwyn strode off with his egg, but only to the nearest telephone kiosk, from where he rang up the Daily — (No, I daren't mention it!).

"Gwyn Evans here. Good story. Chap on Albert Memorial tossing a hard-boiled egg about. Some peculiar rite or something. What? No. I can't do the story myself. Busy on something else, but you can send a man along. If the egg bloke has gone, your man can ask the nearest policeman who was questioning him when I came to 'phone you".

This is a normal procedure when a newspaperman otherwise engaged ~~stumbles across a story~~. So along went the man from the paper. He had, of course, to fall back on the constable for the story, which was confirmed. Furthermore it was printed, and next morning Gwyn went round and received three guineas from a grateful newspaper.

After all, as Gwyn told me when I discussed the ethics of the affair with him, there actually had been a chap behaving extraordinarily at the Memorial!".

Well, that's what they call making news, I suppose. And those of us who knew and delighted in the inimitable stories he

wrote could just imagine him acting like that. A real Splash Page touch.

And there's the other story of another occasion when he was hard up. He wrote the first and last chapters of a Sexton Blake story, then taking an old typescript, he made a sandwich which had all the appearance of a completed story. The editor glanced at it and gave him the chit to draw the all important cash. A day or two later he burst into the editor's room full of apologies, and explaining he had got all his copy mixed up handed over the complete new story.

Well, some of his yarns did seem a little haphazard and jerky, didn't they? Maybe that was one of them.

Alas, what a pity he died so young. If only he was writing those stories now. Just fancy if round about Christmastide you could pick up a Sexton Blake Library from a bookstall with a title something like "The Case of the Man Who Stole Nelson's Column" - by Gwyn Evans, a story which took us to Baker Street with Blake, Tinker, Pedro, Splash Page, Inspector Coutts and the Bardellisms of the devoted landlady.

42, West Bond Street,
Macclesfield, Cheshire.

Dear Mrs. Packman,

Mr. Cook's grand article on Anthony Parsons in this month's C.D. answers a long-felt wish of mine to know more about my favourite author - of today, that is. I was not greatly surprised that he knew so little of Sexton Blake, when he came to write about him: rather have I often wondered how he came to be writing fiction at all - considering his army position. The great thing about A.P. is that the majority of cases he reports are worthy of Blake, which is more than can be said about his other chroniclers.

Points that occur to me after reading this article are:-

- (1) It is a pity that the Amalgamated Press gives no more information to the would-be chronicler than "The same Central Characters are invariably used" and for him "to familiarise himself with the personalities of those". After 60 years, surely some sort of guide-book should be available. (One could cite the trouble the B.B.C. goes to with their characters, and none are of long duration. There is always a howl of protest after the slightest slip.)

- (2) Looking back on the last twenty years, one doesn't find the S.B.L. often using 'characters' - it was mainly in the weekly. And this I think answers the question of why the Library doesn't use them today it has never been part of policy. I expect it was thought that the reader would feel cheated if the criminal escaped at the end. Not so with the weekly, where there was a quicker 'follow-up'.
- (3) Writers in the 'C.D.' often comment on the 'slick, new policy' in the S.B.L. today, but is it? I think rather from choice this was forced upon it by the reduction of pages from 100 to 64. Incidentally, W. Tyrer never seems to have got used to this; notice the rusted ends to his case-books. It has meant all 'padding' must go - and I'm afraid Pedro supplied quite a bit of that. Let me be honest, much as I liked the faithful hound, he just doesn't fit into the scene today - not that provided by the present band of authors, anyway. Inferior though the present S.B.L. is, I suppose we must think ourselves lucky that this unique series still survives, that Blake has not become a 'space-'tec', or his cases be related in 'strip' form in the Library - which I believe was once discussed.

I recently read Pierre Quiroule's last case-book (691) "The Missing Envoy" but can't say I was particularly 'struck'. Perhaps it wasn't really representative. Anyway, on Mr. Payne's enthusiastic note I shall certainly look up my copies by this author and see if we are in agreement. The Sexton Blake field being such a vast one to the researcher, I suppose there will always be some part of it 'neglected'.

Quite a few foreign 'S.B.L.' covers were illustrated in the early issues of the 'Detective Weekly'.

I think Parsons' latest case-book is outstanding for featuring Sexton Blake right the way through from the first page. Usually he lets the case develop before bringing Blake in.

Sincerely,

DEREK FORD.

42, Ashbridge Street,
St. Marylebone, London, N.W.8.

Dear Josie,

I must congratulate you on the very interesting articles in

Blakiana this month, and would like to reply to some of the contributors.

Firstly regarding Anthony Parsons. I was really most astonished to read that Parsons never read boys stories nor bought boys papers as a boy himself, for this totally contradicts a letter I saw written by him some time ago. In it he stated:

'Although I never bought 'Blakes' or read them as a boy, my taste in those days ran more to Claud Duval, Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard. No school stories for me, cloak and sword stuff was my meat'.

The rest of the article I agree with wholeheartedly. Anthony Parsons (who is a tall, dark, good-looking man) has most certainly written more words about Blake than any other author writing today in the S.B. Library. Until Lewis Jackson and Gilbert Chester retired some years ago they were in the lead. Rex Hardinge must be a close second.

It speaks volumes for the editor's policy and fine management of the S.B.L. that the Library is still running today, whilst other Library publications have long since finished. How many readers know that the present editor of the S.B.L. is the same man who was in the chair when the first S.B.L. was published in 1915? He has, I believe, been with the A. Press for over 50 years. A most wonderful record of success and achievement, and one which will never be equalled (as far as the S.B.L. is concerned). Readers who (like myself) delight in the Blake yarns of yesterday must remember that authors of present Blake yarns must submit stories as laid down by the policy of the A. Press. Nobody can teach the A.P. their business. If they thought the old type of yarns would sell today as they did years ago, one could wager they would publish them as soon as possible. There is no sentiment in business - or very little. Too much sentiment would soon mean 'no business' (H.L. please note!)

One last word about Anthony Parsons. I rather like his stories, especially about the far East. I can vouch for the correctness of details in such stories, as I have been out East myself for several years. There is no doubt that if he continues to turn out Blake stories as he has done in the past, he will soon have written more words than any other author known (his work to include that in Pluck, Detective Weekly, Union Jack, Marvel, etc. etc.)

And now in reply to Eric Fayne's letter on Pierre Quiroule (W.W.Sayer). I agree entirely with his praise of this brilliant

author, but I must state that he has not been neglected in the Elakiana section of the C.D. He has been mentioned and articles written about him from time to time. C.D's No. 4 and 50 contained quite lengthy articles about him.

I remember seeing a letter written by him a long time ago, in which he said: "I used to think my Blake stories were very crude when I first started as a 'free-lance writer' and I like to forget them".

The 'rolling stone' is now an Inn Keeper somewhere in Sussex, I believe. "Riders of the Sands" was, to my mind, a masterpiece of descriptive writing by him.

Yes, Pierre Quiroule was a brilliant author of Blake stories - far above the plane of many other authors I could name.

Lastly, with regard to Herbert Leckenby's postscript on the back page. This gives some sort of confirmation that there was another Sexton Blake in existence before the one so well-known. Readers will no doubt remember my offer of £10 for a copy of "Sexton Blake, Investigator" (1874), this being 19 years earlier than the first Blake story known. (See C.D. No. 85). Despite my offer and over a year's research amongst the old periodicals at the British Museum, no further clue has come to light regarding this 'other Blake'.

Sincerely,

Bill. (W.O.G. LOFTS)

AVAILABLE Most Magnets, Gems, 1930-1940, others from 1907. Nelson Lees, 1925-1933, also 1917-1919. Union Jacks 1906-1916, 1923-1933. Sexton Blakes 1917-1946. Collectors Digest, C.D. Annuals, complete runs. Holiday Annuals 1921, 1923, 1927, 1931, 1932, 1936-1939. S.O.L. most issues 200-411. Populars 1912-1917, 1926-1930. Boys Friend Weekly, Long Runs 1902-1914, Others 1915-1926. Boys Realm, Long Runs 1911-1915, 1919-1926. Marvels 1897-1922. Boys Friend Library 1907-1940. Plucks 1896-1903. Boys Magazine 1922-1930. Diamond Library 1918-1920. "Oldtimers": Charles Peace, The Dark Woman, Female Bluebeard, Susan Hopley, Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Further Details gladly supplied (S.A.E. Please). Exchange suggestions welcomed. Offers of Books for Sale usually accepted. T. LAMBERT, 347 GERTRUDE ROAD, NORWICH

WANTED: ANY COPIES OF CHIPS BETWEEN YEARS 1914 and 1920 (inclusive)
 Good condition only. 2/6 EACH OFFERED. L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

IN THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY: During one of the meetings recently of the British Association, that annual gathering of learned and dignified scientists, a discussion took place relative to the merits and demerits of the fat and the thin members of the younger generation. And as an example of the stout ones, the name 'Billy Bunter' fell from the lips of those grave gentlemen. Fancy that now. In the halcyon days of the Magnet one would have scoffed at the idea of such a thing happening at such a gathering. Quite possibly though, quite a number of those professors loved Greyfriars in their youth.

Quite a number of the newspapers played it up; the 'Manchester Guardian' for instance spread across two columns - "Billy Bunter (and Bessie) Vindicated" - "The Future to the Fat".

* * * * *

HARRY WHARTON IN TROUBLE: Harry Wharton has been in the news too for a youth of that name was inspired to sink in flames a miniature of the 'Queen Mary' at a carnival at Knaresborough, Yorkshire. A spokesman for the Cunard Company was 'appalled' at the idea, and made it publicly known. Harry gracefully abandoned his plans.

THE VICAR'S ERROR: The Rev. Denys Aston of Brockmoor, Staffs. slipped up badly recently. Attacking the modern habit of long-winded phrases for simple things like fluonomist for chimney sweep and rodent operatives for rat catchers, he invented a phrase of his own - he called them "Billy Bunterisms".

Well, well, poor old Bunter has been guilty of many crimes, but he was wrongly accused this time, and fans of his in the district soon made the Vicar aware of it.

Jack Lucas of the 'Birmingham Gazette' wrote an entertaining column on the subject on September 8th.

On September 26th the 'Sunday Express' carried a headline across six columns; "Prince William gets a Billy Bunter collar." It referred to Prince William of Gloucester who has just gone to Eton and it was stated he would have "the high Eton collar that

Billy Bunter always wears".

Now here's the reviews of the two Annuals in Gerry Allison's best style. It will be noted that "Billy Bunter's Own" is down to 8/6d, and Len Packman and I were told when we called at Mandeville Publications that "Tom Merry's Own" will follow suit next year.

T W O N E W A N N U A L S

"TOM MERRY'S OWN". MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS	10/6
"BILLY BUNTER'S OWN. MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS	8/6

Reviewed by GERRY ALLISON

"I say, you fellows, he's done it again!" Here they are once more, those amazing one-man Annuals, Tom Merry's and Billy Bunter's Own, and as good as ever. With Frank Richards, Martin Clifford, Ralph Redway, Hilda Richards, and Uncle Charles Hamilton and all!

Beautifully illustrated by C.H. Chapman and R.J. Macdonald those old friends. The covers are delightful, whilst the inside pictures take us right back to the days of the Magnet and Gem. Many, many thanks to this great trio, and especially to Charles Hamilton, the G.O.M. of boy's stories.

Both books are wonderful, the only anomaly being that Tom Merry is fatter than Billy Bunter, which seems impossible. I cannot describe the entire contents of these Annuals in detail, but here is a brief list of the good things inside their covers. We have all our old favourites, except (alas) Rookwood. And what a feast there is. Besides long stories of St. Jim's and Greyfriars see below, we have yarns about the Rio Kid, Jack of all Trades, Jimmy McCann and High Coombe, Ken King, Felgate School, Cliff House, etc., etc.

Here are short accounts of the piece-de-resistance in each book.

In Billy Bunter's Own we have "The Right Thing". 88 pages. Here Harry Wharton is once more in Mr. Quelch's bad books, and acts accordingly. An excellent story, with the familiar rescue from drowning in one of those wicked little tributaries of the River Sark. Surely there never were such dangerous streams.

"From Foes to Friends". 81 pages, in Tom Merry's Own stars Cardew, Manners, and Manners Minor. A fine, dramatic story which

I enjoyed immensely. One of those tales which the editor of the old papers used to describe as 'powerful'.

In a foreword to Billy Bunter's Own, our author says:- "Many years ago - more than he really cares to remember - Frank Richards adopted a motto from Horace, "Carmina non prius audita virginibus puerisque canto!" If I dare risk Mr. Quelch's wrath, I would construe this into something like.

'These songs I sing for girls and boys,
New songs not heard before'.

Well, we boys and girls of all ages will surely welcome these brand-new stories of all our dear old favourites, and will wish their author many, many happy returns, and all our love.

—ooOoo—

POTTED PERSONALITIES NO. 6 (Second Series)

Horace Coker:

Coker of the Fifth, like spinach, asparagus, and salad cream, is an acquired taste. You either like him as an occasional tasty morsel, or you dislike him intensely. It might be true to say that he is very welcome in small doses, but that too much Coker can become very tedious. Nevertheless, he is a clever piece of character painting, of necessity somewhat larger than life, though not too much so. We have all met the type of person who is so thick-skinned that it is impossible to perceive his ego.

Coker has changed very little down through the years. In Red-cover days he was in the Shell, until Aunt Judy bullied the Head into promoting him to the Fifth; he ran his own amateur dramatic society; he put up the COKER CUP for football competition; his nose was seriously put out of joint when his young brother, COKER MINOR, came to Greyfriars and was put into the Sixth. It is many years since we have heard of Reggie Coker, so he has probably left Greyfriars.

In more recent times, we have seen Horace at his most entertaining when he has been at "war" with Mr. Prout, as has happened on more than one occasion. Who can forget such jolly romps as "WHO PUNCHED PROUT?" when Coker threatened to punch his form-master and was suspected of having done so, or "FOOL'S LUCK", when he blundered in and saved Mr. Prout from a spot of blackmail.

Coker played a fairly big part in the famous Lancaster series, one of the Magnet's greatest half-dozen, and again in the Caffyn

series, an outstanding set of Coker stories.

Harry Wharton & Co. are usually shown at daggers drawn with the self-satisfied Coker, but the Co. have spent at least two Christmases at Coker's home in distant days. Apart from Harry Wharton, Bunter, and Vernon-Smith, I rather doubt whether any Greyfriars fellow has starred more regularly over the years.

In one way, in fact, Coker beats the lot. Not even Bunter himself can have featured more often as the "guest artist" in the rival Hamilton stories. Seldom did Tom Merry or Jimmy Silver go caravanning, or sailing the Thames, or touring without meeting Coker, Potter, and Greene - with painful results for Horace. Tom Merry and Co. even ran into Coker in Italy.

Coker, like Bunter, suffered from being imitated. Grundy of St. Jim's and Gunner of Rookwood were clearly modelled on Horace, without marked success. Few would claim that the St. Jim's story or the Rookwood story would have lost anything at all if Grundy and Gunner had never been invented. Like the odious Baggy Trimble, they were really weak spots in superb histories. But the one and only Coker has played a worthy part in Greyfriars history, and, in fact, Greyfriars without Coker would be like Hamlet without the Prince.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 4 - Gem No. 797

A harsh and unpopular master was always a valuable asset to a fictional school, and St. Jim's was doubly fortunate (or unfortunate according to one's point of view) in possessing two such masters, Mr. Ratcliff, and Mr. Selby.

Although there were a number of fine stories written around Mr. Ratcliff, one cannot avoid the suspicion that he was really only a caricature. We are told that Mr. Ratcliff was a suspicious and mean-minded man who disliked Figgins for his frank and open honesty of character. This was alright so far as it went, but it did not really explain all of Mr. Ratcliff's tyranny. Mr. Selby, on the other hand, as Master of the Third, suffered constantly and continually both from indigestion and from the high spirits of his form, and it is no wonder at all that a man who was inclined to be over-suspicious should become so bad tempered and irritable at finding that so many of his suspicions were in fact justified. The

varying traits in his nature were never so entertainingly displayed as they were in Gem No.797 (reprinted in Schoolboys' Own No.344).

The Third Form had decided to buy their form master a birthday present, in an effort to soften his heart. As Wally D'Arcy said, wild beasts could be cured by kindness, and Reggie Manners added that even murderers had been known to have some good qualities. Trimble advised them to buy Mr. Selby a large birthday cake, which would have the dual advantage of touching Mr. Selby's stony heart and also in all probability would be given back to them to eat! Of course, the scheme went wrong. Unbeknownst to the Third, Trimble ate the cake and filled the box with newspapers and a brick. Mr. Selby was convinced it was a disrespectful trick on the part of his form, and caned them all round. The story ended thus:-

"From that dreadful hour there was no suggestion in the Third of taming Mr. Selby by kindness. Kindness, evidently, was wasted on him, and the Third returned to their old methods. That night, when the Third Form-Master sought his room, a bag of flour descended from the top of the door upon his weary head, and the terrific yell that rang out from Mr. Selby brought comfort and solace to listening ears in the Third Form dormitory."

This was Charles Hamilton at his best and Mr. Selby at his worst, the recipe for many a fine story about St. Jim's.

—ooOoo—

THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE "MAGNET". BY ANTHONY P. BAKER

As a rule, few adult novels are illustrated. Illustrations seem to be considered as worthy only of children's books. That the author's own description should be sufficiently vivid and the reader sufficiently imaginative not to need them is, I suppose, the obvious argument. Yet, to me fine illustrations add something which cannot otherwise be found however excellent the author, for they are an art in themselves. How many great works have been made greater, because the author's work has been accompanied by that of an artist of equal merit? There are, to my mind, three outstanding examples which prove this point. First, Sir John Tenniel's work in "Alice in Wonderland"; secondly, that of Sydney Paget in the Sherlock Holmes stories in the "Strand"; and, thirdly, that of C.H. Chapman and Leonard Shields in the "Magnet".

The "Magnet" was, of course, a boys paper, but the substantial

number of older readers would not look upon the illustrations as unnecessary, though few authors, if any, have excelled Frank Richards' powers of description. Rather, they would see in them finer points which would escape the notice of the majority. C.H. Chapman's work was an integral, indeed, when it had become established, a basic part of the famous paper.

Mr. Chapman and his colleague were successful because they possessed the two obviously necessary qualities of being able to portray characters and background. In the former, Mr. Chapman stands almost unrivalled in his class. Frank Richards, with all his genius, could not have given us quite such a masterful picture of Bunter, without C.H. Chapman's collaboration. It took several years for the Fat Owl's final form to be reached, as it were, but the artist's eventual creation is incomparable. The broad check trousers, the bursting waistcoat, the bow tie and the plump face, on which the artist could portray absolutely any expression, all dominated by the large pair of spectacles.... that's the wonderful picture that Mr. Chapman has given us of Frank Richards' creation. Even the spectacles are unique, being a sort of egg-shaped pinz-nez variety, yet they somehow blend perfectly! Phiz's illustrations of the fat boy in the "Pickwick Papers" are absolutely nothing compared to those of Bunter.

So does C.H. Chapman give form to Frank Richards other characters, always exactly corresponding to the author's descriptions, yet adding that touch of his own which makes his work so invaluable. What is there to compare with his picture of the stern faced, gimlet eyed Mr. Quelch, the hard decisive features of the Bounder, the hefty, overbearing Coker, or the portly and pompous Prout? Moreover, unlike R.J. Macdonald, Mr. Chapman has succeeded in giving each individual in the leading groups a face of his own. I can picture quite clearly in my mind the face of each member of the Famous Five, while the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. are much less distinct.

The background to the "Magnet" illustrations is always equally successful, thus showing the characters to their best advantage. Whether at school, in the form room, or a master's study, or the "Rag", or the quad; whether out in the Kentish countryside, in the lanes or on the river, Mr. Chapman seems to me to be just as vivid. Even when the scene is abroad, he nearly always seems to capture the atmosphere, which is no easy task. And if a picture

does capture the atmosphere, as those in the "Magnet" do, almost without exception, then surely it has fulfilled its function.

Anyone who has been for a holiday on the Thames, and who then opens one of the "Magnets" in the "Water-Lily" Series will find that vivid memories are brought back, not only by the story itself, but also by the illustrations.

Doubtless an art critic would find a number of faults with the "Magnet" illustrations. Perhaps fortunately in this respect, I am no art critic, and to me the illustrations have all that is necessary for setting off Frank Richards' stories. As a final example of this, we can take the Greyfriars stories on television. When the series was planned, there was no question -- thanks to C.H. Chapman's vivid illustrations -- of how the characters or setting should appear, but merely who should play the parts. Indeed, may I go so far as to say that, without C.H. Chapman's work in the "Magnet", I am inclined to doubt whether Frank Richards' stories would ever have appeared on T.V.

AVAILABLE: Magnets 1918-22, 1932-40; Gems 1918-22, 1935-40; Populars, 1917-23; Marvels 1918-22; Sexton Blakes 2nd and 3rd series; Nelson Lees, many numbers, 1924-33; Aldine Buffalo Bills (early stories) 1914 onwards, over 100 issues, also various 1920; Aldine Robin Hoods, 1902; 40 numbers Aldine Dick Turpins 1902. Monster Library, No.17; Greyfriars Holiday Annuals; Boys' Friends; Boys' Realms; Adventures; Rovers, etc. etc. Original 1st English edition (issued in parts 1852) of Uncle Tom's Cabin, offer. Sibleys Astrology 1796, nearly 500 pages, 8 plates, published in 60 numbers price £5. Many similar rare items. 1st vol. of bound numbers of Vanity Fair, with plates, offer. Photography, Railway, Film, American Mags. Crime, etc. Satisfaction guaranteed. S.A.E. please for all enquiries.

WANTED: Certain Penny Bloods; Sexton Blakes (pre 1935); Union Jacks, Nelson Lees 1915-21; Best prices paid. All types Cigarette Cards for sale. RONALD ROUSE, 3 ST. LEONARDS TERRACE, GAS HILL, NORWICH, NORFOLK.

5/- each offered for the following in good condition - GEMS 582.586. MAGNETS 739. 795. 1003. 1004. 1011. 1013. 1015. 1024. 1027. 1028. 1034. 1047. 1114. 1142. 1154. 1177. 1215. 1223. ROGER JENKINS, "THE FIRS", EASTERN ROAD, HAVANT, HANTS.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION: The recent articles by Jack Wood on the Sussex countryside were recalled to all those who undertook the journey to the St. Frank's country on the occasion of the September meeting at Woodingdean, hosts Bill and Gladys Jardine. Whilst the majority of the party elected to go by the open top bus along the front to Rottingdean and then by further bus to Woodingdean via Ovingdean, that stalwart of the Nelson Lee clan, Bob Blythe and myself thought that the walk would be better. However all enjoyed the journey and Bannington and Bellton were conjured up by the charming villages passed. Arriving at our destination, the bus travellers getting there first, we walkers found that we were not the last as Chairman Len had gone off with Harry Homer to discuss matters about the forthcoming Blake Circle meeting. A lordly luncheon repast was indulged in and with plenty of time for conversation until the meeting started at 4 p.m. A map of the St. Frank's and St. Jim's countryside was on one of the walls whilst other suitable pictures etc. were on the others. Host Bill had prepared a very fine quiz about the two aforementioned schools and it was good to see Charlie Wright in the first place with Bob Blythe second and Bob Whiter third. Our Len was fourth in this very fine quiz. A fine impromptu talk by Bill Jardine was thoroughly enjoyed and it concluded with Bill giving his three favourite authors, viz. Frank Richards, Edwy Searles Brooks and Gwyn Evans. Our Herbert, who was with us, also gave a short impromptu talk which also was thoroughly enjoyed. The study feed was a delight and all to quickly came the time to return to Brighton station. On the way to the station, the lights of Brighton and Hove were viewed and enjoyed. Thus ended the first Woodingdean visit and our grateful thanks must go out to the host and hostess for such a grand time.

Next meeting of the club will be at Wood Green on Sunday, October 17th, 4 p.m.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

* * * * *

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, 239 HYDE PARK ROAD, LEEDS, SEPTEMBER 11th, 1954

There was an excellent attendance, but unfortunately for the second

meeting in succession it opened on a sad note, for we had to mourn the passing of another member, lovable Harry Stables. Chairman J. Breeze Bentley, in a few well-chosen words, paid tribute and all stood in respectful silence for one minute. As I have said in my chat, he will be greatly missed. During the afternoon, Gerry Allison, Norman Smith and myself called on Mrs. Stables and she told us Harry had told her often how much he enjoyed the meetings.

After the usual business had been got through, J. Breeze Bentley started the reading of that controversial 'Magnet' story, "A Very Gallant Gentleman", the story some consider the very best of the "substitutes" and others that it is not at all in the Greyfriars tradition. Whether or no, it seemed to go down quite well and it will be completed next month.

Following refreshments, we got down to one of Gerry's card games, 'Stand up Bunter'. Due to the fact that there were quite a lot of 'white lies' about, Bunter was often on his feet.

Next meeting October 9th, when another good attendance is hoped for.

H. LECKENBY,
Northern Section Correspondent.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING, SUNDAY, 12th SEPTEMBER: Once again there was a good attendance at this meeting with all the regulars present, and "ready for action". The Secretary, having dealt with the minutes, etc., the chairman discussed various club and section matters, which included a proposal to advertise once again in the local paper with a view to attracting new members, and it is hoped we shall obtain as satisfactory a response as when we previously advertised. Next month will be our annual meeting, which will include election of officers, library stocktaking, etc. and it is earnestly hoped that as many members as possible will attend. Business will be kept as brief as possible, with the object of devoting the rest of the evening to a social, which we think will be enjoyed by all.

After refreshments we joined in yet another game which was featured on the radio - "Talk yourself out of this". Each member in turn was put in the box, and had to defend himself satisfactorily against certain charges. Despite the stringent cross-examinations by the "judges", some of the prisoners told the most plausible "fibs", and could not be shaken; others were not quite so success-

ful, however, and were "sent down" without hesitation. Some of the stories offered were most remarkable, and a tribute to the victims' fertile imagination, but in most cases justice was done, we think. This was one of the best games we have had, and we all enjoyed it immensely.

The meeting closed at 10.15 p.m.

Next meeting, Sunday, October 10th, 6.30 p.m. (not 7 p.m. as usual).

FRANK CASE.

Secretary.

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, 30th AUGUST: Members arrived rather slowly for this meeting, but they were nevertheless all fighting fit and ready for an enjoyable evening. We were very glad to welcome a new member, (Mr. Broster), from Kinver.

Mrs. Corbett read the delightful final chapters of "Harry Wharton's Amazing Relation" in a really finished style which made it all the more enjoyable.

Then we had a series of short speeches on all kinds of subjects drawn at random from a hat, which caused quite a bit of amusement. Nevertheless they were very good even though a few of us trembled in our shoes in case we drew an unknown quantity as it were. However, Mr. Porter came to the rescue once or twice and seemed very much at home whatever character he had to tackle, and he had quite a varied selection. I am sure that he could have told us much more about Sir Hilton Popper, our own Treasurer (!), and Wingate.

Half way through the evening the telephone rang to announce the voice of our Secretary on holiday in Colwyn Bay. Rather a nice gesture and one which shows that he had us in mind.

The guessing competition and the raffle were both won by the writer for the second time running - purely a coincidence I can assure you and there was no "wangle".

Refreshments were not forgotten and after our usual get-together yet another very pleasant evening came to its close.

CAROL SCOTT

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, SEPTEMBER 20th: Coming events are said to cast their shadows before, (most certainly they have to be prepared for), consequently after the minutes with which we opened our meeting, we had quite a discussion about the proposed Christmas Party.

Then followed a reading by Mrs. Corbett from a "Holiday Annual" after which it was refreshment time. Then we had a very special raffle the prize being a Holiday Annual presented by our Chairman. Our new member (Mr. Broster), invited to make the draw drew first our Chairman and then himself! We were very pleased, but also amused.

After a little competition which was won by Miss Scott, we settled down to another two minute speech session; for this meeting on one topic "Which is the best character created by Frank Richards?"

Some interesting arguments were advanced on behalf of sundry clients; Vernon Smith being rather favoured. Such debates are very useful in clarifying our ideas, but I felt myself that there is no best character really, any more than one can say which is the prettiest village in Yorkshire - that county so favoured with many beautiful ones.

And so to lights out once more.

EDWARD DAVEY.

Nelson Lee Column



By JACK WOOD
NOSTAW, 328 Stockton Lane
York.



Here to ease the monotony of the tour between Helmford and Bannington are two more of the entries in our recent competition, Both, I'm sure you will agree first class stuff and full of interest. First, James Cook, a former Organising Officer of the St. Frank's League, who explores.....

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ST. FRANK'S AND THE HAMILTON SCHOOLS

It is mostly the characters themselves that supply the answer because there I find the boys of St. Frank's have no counterpart to those of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood.

Several well-wishers have "loaned out" to St. Frank's boys from the Hamilton Schools when the occasion has arisen, but mostly to support the axiom that comparisons are odious.

I never did like the gritty bitterness that sometimes crops up between E.S. Brooks fans and supporters of Frank Richards, but it seems whatever difference is formulated, the truth whichever side propounds it is going to hurt.

To Hamiltonians I would say, where will you find anybody remotely comparable to Nipper, the Captain of the Remove at St. Frank's, in all the skippers at Frank Richards' command? True, Nipper, was extremely lucky in having Nelson Lee as his guardian, but it is that fact that enhances the outstanding qualities which Nipper expressed in his leadership, ideas and strength of character.

Try, ye Hamiltonians and find a counterpart to Handforth - the gentle bully - Reggie Pitt, the fantastic schemer at first and really hateful, but who later reformed.

Then there was Ezra Quirke who, had he been in films would never have been seen by children, but somehow passed the censor at the Fleetway House. And don't forget Brooks must have departed very widely from the narrow lanes of schoolboy fiction to wander as he did with Quirke into the esoteric field of spiritualism. It is these bouts of originality that made us bless E.S.B. Jerry Dodd, Waldo, Solomon Levi - who once bought a cinema - Singleton, Goodwin, Paddy Little..... oh, I could go on and on.

No, you haven't any like these at Greyfriars, St. Jim's, or Rookwood. Edwy Searles Brooks covered so wide a field of action and event, and his characters were so lovable that I doubt if anyone could not have been impressed. You know, I can picture the St. Frank's country, Belliton, Bannington, Caistowe, the Moor, and the lane just outside the School. To me they are real places - this is my spiritual home. But of all the hundreds of "Magnets", "Gems", and "Populars" I enjoyed I could never associate their "worlds" with that staying power that came from the pen of Mr. Brooks.

It was a weakness I suppose that we usually associated ourselves with a certain character from the boys' papers and tried to imitate them, but while there were many chaps at St. Frank's who

were admirable and safe subjects for such reflections, I do not think this was wise when it came to the Hamilton schools. Wharton and Co. being top dogs naturally had Study No. 1, but Nipper & Co. were quite content with Study C. Wharton was subject to moods and his feud with Quelch ran to an unreasonably long series. Sorry I have to discuss Tom Merry and Jimmy Silver so peremptorily but really how weak they were in comparison to the stalwarts of St. Franks! Wasn't it noticeable how Brooks moulded his "men" and gave each an outline that made itself felt when mentioned. There wasn't so much of that sameness with the Nelson Lee stories as there was with the Hamiltons. Take any number of St. Franks juniors away from the N.L.L. stories and the interest would still be maintained, but just you omit Billy Bunter and the Famous Five and the Magnet is empty.

That in short is the difference between St. Frank's and Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. No doubt, in fact most certainly, the lane which leads to that Elysian Meadow is by way of these school stories, but I think the St. Frank's route is the shortest.

My Favourite St. Frank's Character? - undoubtedly and unreservedly, Nipper. No character has yet equalled this really strong scheming, tactician, who uses polemics as fine as a Filibuster and proves black is white. Read the Buster Boots series if you don't believe me - study the Expulsion series when Kenmore got him sacked on faked evidence and Nipper came back to St. Frank's disguised.

Can anybody remember the William K. Smith series and not agree with me? Or whenever the juniors were away in strange lands and Nipper usually took the reins?

Does anyone not recollect the "explosion" that descended on St. Frank's in the shape of one Richard Bennett and still not say "Nipper, that wonderful tonic!"

George Mell, a familiar author in other spheres, tells us succinctly.....

WHY I PREFER ST. FRANK'S

I prefer the St. Franks stories for the very good reason that a chance copy of the "Nelson Lee" fell into my hands in the days when the famous detective spent all his time battling against crooks. If that accident had not happened, I might never have known the boyhood delights of wading through the annals of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood and following the fortunes of countless fictitious

(cont'd)

WANTED: SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY (First and Second Series Only). Your price paid for good copies. Serial numbers and series to: JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

GEMS for Sale. S.A.E. to H. BLOOM, 45 HAMPTON ROAD, ILFORD, ESSEX.

football clubs that won both League and Cup in such papers as the "Football Favourite".

But, as a fairly recent recruit to the ranks of Old Boy's Books' Collectors, my judgment, now more mature, tells me to apply other tests. And Lee still comes out on top!

The transition from crime to school and the periodical mixing of both were so skilfully done that for versatility alone E.S. Brooks must rank even ahead of Frank Richards, who stuck mainly to school stories except for creating the Rio Kid and King of the Islands. But Brooks, profiting no doubt from the pioneer work of other writers, never seemed to go through a time when he was learning to write.

None of his stories is as crude as an early Sexton Blake or the early Greyfriars yarns I have so rarely seen. He was mature from the start and, for example, did not overload his school with too many warring factions like the New House-School House and Shell-Fourth Form rivalries of St. Jim's or restrict it to single form plots like those of Greyfriars.

Clever, too, was his lettering of studies and his novel Ancient House. His excursions into Lost Worlds were always convincing. Lee's struggle against the League of the Green Triangle still remains in my memory though thirty-odd years have passed since I read it. Who else but E.S. Brooks could so graphically describe a fire at the school he had created? And did any other boys' writer ever be so up-to-the-minute as he in bringing his boys to London?

Let's hand it to him. He was superb.

MY FAVOURITE ST. FRANK'S CHARACTER: Even the most idolatrous Brooks fan will hardly maintain that he created such world-famous types as Bunter, Inky, D'Arcy or Harry Wharton. But as a combination of pluck and dumbness, vitality and unconscious humour Edward Oswald Handforth is probably the outstanding character at St. Frank's. He's my first choice!

LATE NEWS: We deeply regret to report the death of Joseph Parks, 2 Irvin Avenue, Saltburn-by-Sea, Yorkshire, editor and publisher of "The Collectors' Miscellany".

LAST MINUTE REMINDER - HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR ANNUAL YET?