

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 127

PRICE 1s.6d.

JULY, 1957

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Photograph by Charles Baker



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—THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST—

Vol. 11 No. 127

Price 1s. 6d.

JULY, 1957

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York.

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL! Well here once again are the now familiar forms. Gosh! we are now in the second decade and I am already hoping that when round about Christmas time you will scrutinise it, place it alongside the others and say "it completes a grand team."

However, at the start I'd like to have one of my little heart to heart talks, for I always like to look upon it as a family affair. Some time ago one subscriber, when paying for the last Annual, commented favourably on some articles, was critical of others and ended up by saying "But it costs too much". Well, I had to smile rather wryly at that and if I had bothered to reply to him I should have had to tell him that if he wanted the next Annual he would have to be prepared to pay a shilling more. However, I decided I had no need to worry over that one grouse, for only once before had I had a complaint about the price, and that was over the first one. Moreover, I have been told many times that the Annual would be well worth it if it cost twice the price.

Well the price isn't going to be doubled, but there simply has to be an increase of a shilling and I feel sure all of you will, with the possible exception of the disgruntled one referred to, ~~will~~ agree it is justified. But just in case there are a few others, I'll just point out that it's three years since the last increase of the same amount. In the interval practically every newspaper and periodical has increased its price, some more than once. Even then, some like

that veteran, "Answers", and the once mighty "Picture Post" have fallen by the way.

You wouldn't like that to happen to "Our Annual" would you? Our publishers have been very considerate but inevitably some increased costs have had to be passed on. In addition, postages and the price of envelopes have doubled in the last year or two. So I am sure you will agree I have made out my case for "another bob". In fact, I have an idea some of you will say there was no need to make any apology.

Just another word whilst I'm at it though. It does help a lot if you send your orders in early. Last year as usual, when the time came for "running off" I had a bit of anxiety as to how many copies I should allow for. If inconvenient, there's no need to send cash yet, so why not fill in the forms whilst you have them handy? Yes, as I said last month we shall have to have the "Who's Who" in again and believe me it's a terrific job compiling it. So you will make things as easy as possible, won't you?

As for contents, well, more of that anon.

* * *

THE RIGHT SPIRIT "DOWN UNDER" About a year ago, Bette Pate of Drummoyne, New South Wales joined our circle. I was able to put her in touch with several of the loyal fans in the Sydney district and since then I have many cheery, enthusiastic letters which have been a joy to read. Time and time again she has paid tribute to the friendships she has made and the pleasure that has brought into her life. Here are some extracts from a recent letter -

"Both Ernie Carter and Vic Colby were on holiday so were absent from our little party for tea. However, we made a cosy little foursome with Syd Smythe and his wife (she's such a sweet little thing with the most fascinating voice) and our new recruit, Arnold Keena and myself. We dived into Chinatown and at a genuine Chinese restaurant spent a very pleasant hour. We then went on to Eric Copeman's home. By this time we were on very friendly terms with Arnold and of course we were soon at ease with Rosemarie and Eric. Vic Colby joined us soon after and we settled down to a very interesting evening."

Later on she says, "Vic Colby has let me borrow a huge parcel of U.J's including the whole of Teed's serial "The Black Abbot".

Oh how it makes me feel that the world is still a grand place to live in when I receive letters like that.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

Blakiana

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

Thanks to Mr. H. W. Twyman, I have now the solution to one of the 'posers' I set recently in Blakiana (May 1957). I have Mr. Twyman's kind permission to quote from his letter which, as you will see, is most enlightening!

Walter Webb's 12 favourite U.J. stories appear in this issue, and a further choice - my husband's - will be printed next month. Incidentally, in comparing these selections, I find several readers plump for one or two of the same stories, including at least one of my own.

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * *

THE GREATEST OF THEM ALL

By F. Vernon Lay

To decide who was the greatest of all the many criminals against whom Sexton Blake pitted his wits from time to time is no easy task. So many names come to mind - suave Huxton Rymmer, impudent George Marsder Plummer, elusive Leon Kestrel the Master Mummer, debonair Zenith, sinister Dr. Satira, revengeful Paul Cynos - they all deserve a place high in the list, but to my mind pride of place must go to The Mysterious Mr. Reece, that enigmatic character created by that master-craftsman Robert Murray who gave us, in addition to Paul Cynos and Dr. Satira mentioned above, so many other unforgettable pen-portraits.

We first met Reece in S.B.L. 1st Series No. 41 "The Mysterious Mr. Reece". Reece became an immediate hit and appeared in a number

of Union Jack stories, generally also involving the Raffles-like character Dirk Dolland, known as "The Bat". These stories are well worth reading, dealing with the friendship that developed between the Bat and Sexton Blake, and the former's reformation and the part he played in the battle of master-minds. Over all the stories the shadow of the, as yet, unborn Criminal Confederation can be seen, and it is a very peculiar fact that when the first few numbers of the Criminal Confederation series began to appear (U.J. Nos. 806, 807 and 808) whole passages of the preceding stories were incorporated in the new stories absolutely word for word, with only such alterations as were necessitated by the new set-up of the Criminal Confederation. There is not space enough in this short article to give chapter and verse but to anyone sufficiently interested the writer will be pleased to give full details.

Tinker's first sight of Reece is described as follows (U.J. No. 778): "It was a face that Tinker dreamt about for many weeks afterwards - pallid to the greyish hue of a corpse, wrinkled like the back of spotted toad, and with a head that was as bald as an egg, the cranial development sagging over the ears, and bulging out over the bony eyesockets, wherein were set two eyes that seemed to glow with the lustre of transparent green jade. Green as emeralds they were and as unwinking as an owl, and in their depths seemed to lurk the concentration of all that was evil, callous, malevolent, and cunning. The man's hands were like the claws of a bird, yellow as old ivory, and thin as a bunch of dried bones. His nose was shaped like the beak of a vulture, and seemed just as fleshless and as osseous, and the cruel, thin-lipped mouth beneath it was twisted in a continual sneer. Tinker paled as he gazed as though spell-bound - to guess the man's age was impossible - he might have been anything from eighty to a hundred and twenty, or even older. His skin looked like the dried skin of an Egyptian mummy, and his whole body may have been dead save for the wonderful light of mental virility and intelligence that glowed in the heart of the big unwinking eyes."

There were many later descriptions of Reece but none that rank with this portrait of concentrated evil.

In the story he has lived up fully to his title of master-criminal. In the space of a few days fourteen different banks have been broken into and rifled, sixteen policemen had disappeared from their beats and one murdered, and the Chief Commissioner of Police himself kidnapped within a stone's throw of the Yard, and with all this not a single clue. At the same time six of the most expert safe-

breakers have also disappeared within a short time of being released from prison. Here is the birth of the method by which the later Criminal Confederation recruited its ranks on a world-wide scale, in which well-known criminals were contacted on their release from prison and spirited away to a hidden headquarters, much to the mystification of the world's police-forces.

Yet with all the malevolence of Reece's character, Murray - as with all his characterisations - gives him, occasionally, some signs of humanity. As for instance when, after kidnapping Tinker from Baker Street, he places a cushion under the senseless head of the bound and gagged Mrs. Bardell.

This series of yarns is well worth reading. The scope and audacity of Reece's schemes and the masterly way his plans are foiled by the genius of the one man capable of rising to similar levels of intelligence, that is, the one and only Sexton Blake, aided by the courage and nerve of the reformed Bat, the loyalty and devotion of Tinker and the dogged perseverance and determination of Inspector Coutts, in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, make them stories that demand in their own right a high place in the Sexton Blake Saga.

* * *

THANK YOU - MR. TWYMAN!

In response to the two posers I set in May Blakiana, the following letter was sent to me by the former editor of the Union Jack and Detective Weekly:

"I'm afraid I can't be very helpful about your poser concerning George Marsden Plummer, except to say that the story in which he set off at a steady lope through the gathering mist must have been before my time as editor of the U.J.; I don't think I should have passed the word 'lope'. Doesn't seem quite right somehow, in the case of a biped.

As to the other, no wonder that you and the other knowledgeable Blake devotee have failed to identify the source-story about the severed-head-carrying professor and the young man with the defective eyesight. It is not a Blake story at all, but will be found in No. 107 of Newnes' Bulldog Library (Tubby Haig) under the title of "The Man in Wax".

Your enquirer is to be excused for this error, however, for the story appeared some time in the early '20's - about 1923-4 I think.

The young man with the defective eyesight (he had just had 'drops' put into his eyes) half-saw the professor and his head in

Piccadilly and was persuaded to enter the professor's chauffeur-driven limousine crawling alongside. The whole incident was witnessed by Haig and his assistant Rags from the top of a bus. The professor was called Osman Crooch and the young man Frederick Burch. The explanation of the goings-on was that Crooch planned to impersonate himself as a corpse and thereby collect from the insurance company on a life policy.

It wasn't much of a story, but it is interesting to know that somebody has remembered that opening after all these years.

As to the author, I wrote the story myself."

* * *

MY TWELVE FAVOURITE U.J. (BLAKE) STORIES

(As selected by Walter Webb)

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. "The Case of the Cataleptic" | (No. 620) |
| 2. "Sexton Blake's Ordeal" | " 142 |
| 3. "The Master Anarchist" | " 238 |
| 4. "The Yellow Sphinx" | " 512 |
| 5. "The Black Cloud" | " 1265 |
| 6. "The Crimson Pearl" | " 564 |
| 7. "In the Midst of Famine" | " 944 |
| 8. "Five Years After" | " 165 |
| 9. "The Green Jester" | " 1379 |
| 10. "The Mystery of the Moving Mountain" | " 1020 |
| 11. "The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Pudding" | " 1157 |
| 12. "The Lord of the Ape Men" | " 1206 |

* * *

HOW'S YOUR MEMORY (No. 6)

By E. V. Copeman

Followers of Sexton Blake will recall that among other accomplishments Blake was a qualified doctor. Yet how many of us can bring to mind any story in which Blake, in the course of the plot, actually practiced (though briefly - and for one evening only) as a medical man, genuinely diagnosing and prescribing for legitimate patients?

The following extract might bring a certain story to your memory. If you can remember this incident, can you also remember the author and its title? Here it is:

Several patients sat in the waiting-room. "Good evening, doctor" one or two said, and Sexton Blake gravely returned their greeting in rather brusque tones ...

He was doing nothing wrong. Blake could have put up a brass plate outside his house at Baker Street with "M.D." following his name, and have practised as a doctor and been quite within his rights. In his younger days he had studied medicine, and he held degrees that many general practitioners might have envied. To all intents and purposes, for this evening he was a locum tenens... and not a soul could be the worse off for the detective treating their bodily ills... though he hoped he would encounter no very serious cases.

As it happened, he didn't. And patients chanced to be somewhat scarce this evening. There was a child suffering very obviously with mumps; another badly wanted her adenoids and tonsils attended to; and a navvy with gout, to whom Blake gave medicine and advice to give up beer - much to his disgust! The rest of the cases were mostly made up of coughs, colds and the after-effects of influenza.

At half-past seven Blake found the waiting-room empty. So capably did he deal with the patients that he disposed of three in the time that the real doctor would have taken to treat two.

Remember the story now? He had another patient a little later whom he attended quite unperturbably:

Back in the consulting-room (says the author), with dexterous skill Sexton Blake was cleansing and preparing to stitch up a gash in the hand of a grocer who had run a bacon-hook through his palm. But by five minutes past eight the last patient had gone.

That was when Blake's real mission began. He was searching for something and I've no intention of spoiling things by telling you about that here, except to give one more brief extract to show the extraordinary use to which he put the doctor's stethoscope. Here it is, quoted from the yarn:

As Blake went over to the combination safe one corner of his mobile lips went up in a derisive smile. All crooks were fools in some way or other. This safe was years old and of a pattern right out of date. If it held dark and important secrets, they might just as well have been kept locked in a cheap cash-box.

From the table Blake took up the medico's stethoscope. He inserted the earpieces in his ears and returned to the safe. Placing the rubber sounder against the faded green paint of the steel door in the region of the lock, he turned the pointer slowly to and fro round the metal dial of the combination.

He stood there alertly listening for the faint sounds of the fall of the tumblers.

"Got it!" he suddenly muttered.

He tossed the stethoscope back onto the table, then gave the pointer a few quick twists. There was a click and Sexton Blake opened the released door of the doctor's safe.

Guessed it yet? Here are a few clues.

1. The story appeared in the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY and was reprinted (also in the S.B.L.) within a matter of 8 years.
2. Pedro, though not actually necessary to the plot, was mentioned several times during the story.
3. The Scotland Yard man with whom Blake worked wore a beard.
4. The author wrote several stories featuring a well-known criminal antagonist of Blake's, though he was not mentioned in this particular adventure.
5. Clue to the title is partly given in my second quotation from the author, in this article.

(Answer next month)

WANTED: Union Jacks for 1917. Also any of the following numbers:- 589, 726, 862, 1026, 1028, 1031, 1122, 1157, 1149, 1150, 1161, 1199, 1202, 1203, 1226, 1237, 1238, 1240, 1241, 1242, 1243, 1251, 1262, 1283, 1396, 1398, 1399.

S.B.Ls. 1st Series any numbers. 2nd Series:- 8, 21, 25, 77, 89, 94, 102, 129, 132, 213, 236, 272, 297, 335, 489, 663, 667, 687, 693, 723 740.

Boys' Friend 4d Library, 1st Series - No. 669. 2nd Series - No. 79
Any reasonable price paid.

MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, E. DULWICH, S.E. 22.

WANTED: Old Picture Show and Picturegoer weeklies and Annuals. Other Film Guides etc.

A. J. SOUTHWAY, P.O. Box 4., BEACONSFIELD, C.P. SOUTH AFRICA.

SALE: Holiday Annuals 1924, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1940 and 1925 (few early pages missing). Schoolgirls' Own Annuals 1930, 1931. C.D's 13-126.

WANTED S.P.C. 28-32.

Offers to MELL, 49 GRACEFIELD GARDENS, STREATHAM, S.W.16.

By W. O G. Lofts.Sexton Blake Bust

One of the most treasured and sought after of collectors items is the Sexton Blake Bust. It is interesting to note that there were about 850 Busts which were originally sent to "Union Jack" readers under the Token Scheme in the 1920s. Sculptured by Eric Parker, his first attempt at this kind of thing; the mould and casts made by Regali & Son of Clerkenwell Road, London, E.C.1.

After the scheme had finished, there were still about 100 Busts remaining to be disposed of; and they were temporarily laid in a row like a wall in the U.J. Office. They gradually disappeared mostly with the departure of authors who had visited the office - and were tempted perhaps by visions of a free drink in exchange for them in the taverns of Fleet Street.

Of all the Busts that were made, only about a round dozen are known to exist today - that is, of course, in our circle. How many more are still existing in homes throughout the world, one will never know exactly.

Authors of the Thomson Papers

When my good friends, Derek Adley and Jim Swan mentioned to me recently that they were offered 10/- for copies of the "Wizard" it brought my attention to the fact how little is known about the authors who wrote for the "Wizard" "Rover" "Adventure" "Skipper" "Hotspur" and the two short lived papers "Red Arrow" and "Vanguard".

Unlike the A.P. papers who did publish the authors names - the Scottish firm did so only on very rare occasions, for reasons which are only known to themselves. Whether the policy of all stories remaining anonymous through the years was good or bad - it seems to have paid off; for the Thomson papers are still flourishing today whilst the A.P. issues have long since been dead.

Now to the important part - who did write most of the stories? I know for certain that many of the regular Blake writers did so, and the following list will surprise many:

G. H. Teed, Gwyn Evans, Gilbert Chester, George E. Rochester, Fred Gordon Cook, Francis Warwick (also of course, Warwick Jardine), Walter Tyrer, Eric W. Townsend and many more well know A.P. Authors.

A point which should be stressed is that the firm of Thomson demand a

far higher standard of writing than that which is required by the A.P. and it is not as easy as one thinks to have work accepted by this firm.

F. Knowles Campling

One of the most colourful personalities ever to become Editor of "Chums" was F. Knowles Campling. He served on the staff of Cassell's from the middle of the first world war until the early 20s. Besides writing stories in "Chums" as Editor under his own name he also wrote many yarns under the name of ERIC WOOD. Campling at a later date left "Chums" to go freelancing and was for a time Editor of the boys paper "Toby" until it was taken over by an even more colourful personality, Gwyn Evans! To conclude this little piece I would like to record one of the most remarkable coincidences I have ever come across.

In 1917 Campling was also Editor of "Little Folks Annual" and wrote a long article in its pages for the young readers on Road Safety, complete with illustrations and diagrams. Very sad to say in 1940 Capling whilst crossing the road at Lancing, Sussex, was knocked down by a bus and killed!

Tom Browne

Creator of the world famous tramps Weary Willie and Tired Tim, Tom Browne's actual letters after his name - as qualifications as an artist has been in doubt for some years. My good friend Len Packman in his excellent article on comics in the 1955 C.D. Annual mistakenly had the letters R.A. after his name; and this was the result of many interesting debates which were discussed amongst members at the London Club last year. Len in my opinion was quite justified in thinking that Browne was an R.A. as he had his first picture hung in the Royal Academy as far back as 1897, and was a regular contributor for many years afterwards.

In actual fact, Browne was made a member of the Royal Society of British Artists in 1898, and a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colour in 1901, which made him a R.B.A. and an R.I.

There was a time when Tom Browne was turning out seven sets of six drawings a piece weekly for comics in the late 1890s, and his work was such in demand that he had the market at his mercy. Browne, however, was determined to do better things, and although it has been stated that he dreamed so much of his characters and creations that they got on his nerves and handed them to other artists, I should think that the real reason was that he was determined to better himself and make a real name in the world of art. Tom Browne died in 1910.

Return of Old Favourites

Following the return of the lovable Mrs. Bardell in a July issue of the S.B.L. No. 386 ROADHOUSE GIRL by Desmond Reid; I understand that those two very popular detectives Claudius Venner and Sgt. Belford of Scotland Yard will be reappearing in the August issue 387, "Murder with Variety" by yet another new author to the Blake field, William Arthur.

Harry Broster writes

Regarding the Greyfriars Map issued with Magnet No. 1672 dated March 2nd, 1940. When Mr. C. H. Chapman who is president of our Midland Club paid us a visit in April of 1956, I myself showed him this particular map and in the presence of all us members of the Midland, he denied being responsible for this. Quoting from Magnet No. 1672 the editor said this map was the work of a 'clever artist, who was also a keen reader of the Magnet'. But to use Mr. Chapman's own words this was not the best known illustration of the Magnet. It is beyond argument that this particular map is the most accurate of any published, apart from a vagueness regarding Greyfriars' nearness to the sea, but the fact remains, Mr. Chapman denies responsibility.

(Note: In fairness Bill Lofts will say that though he had it on good authority that the map was drawn by Mr. Chapman it did need confirmation. However, Mr. Chapman's statement makes it clear that the informant was wrong. H.L.)

WANTED: Magnets and Gems. Will exchange or buy. Hundreds of duplicates.

D. O'HERLIHY, 17220 GRESHAM STREET, NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

WANTED urgently - Pink covered Union Jacks as follows:- No. 206 "Sexton Blake-Whaler"; No. 404 "The Flying Column"; No. 504 "The Long Trail"; No. 752 "The Golden Reef"; No. 878 "The Island of Death".

Your price paid.

A. G. STANDEN, 33 GRASMERE AVENUE, HEATON CHAPEL, STOCKPORT.

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SALE: Over 430 MAGNETS!! Complete run January 1932 - May 1940 (except 1267). Many mint; (all except 3) good condition. 1940 - 30/- 1932 to 36 - £6 10s. per year. 1937 to 1939 - £4 per year.

ANTHONY BAKER, CHRIST CHURCH VICARAGE, BARNET, HERTS.

LETTER BOXNo "Reduced Hours" for Frank Richards

Rose Lawn,
Kingsgate,
Kent.

June 20th, 1957.

Dear Herbert Leckenby

Many thanks for the C.D. I would have acknowledged its welcome arrival earlier, but the machine has been rather crowded of late. Just now I am up to the ears in a new series of T.V. plays which are to follow the "repeats" that are now running. It was very interesting to read Roger Jenkins on the subject of Bunter the Ventriloquist: for as it happens, one of the new plays deals with our fat old friend's ventriloquism.

With kindest regards,
Always yours sincerely,
FRANK RICHARDS

* * *

That old, old problem - Prices

47 Cromwell Road,
Cambridge.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

I venture to write to the Digest on a matter that has given me concern for some time, that of the inflated prices being asked by some people for old boys' books. Even if the scarcity value of some Hamilton books (the most prized items) justifies occasional high prices for a particularly needed item, nevertheless it seems to me that some prices quoted recently are beyond reason, and if they are encouraged, will ruin our hobby by making collecting beyond the reach of ordinary folks. For myself, I could never justify paying 12/- for any Magnet; or £10 for any year's run (presumably unbound) of the late 1930s. I am also staggered (unless I have misread the figure) at a price of £7-7-0 for a bound volume of the Girls Own Paper (1888-9). I have within the last few years myself bought two such volumes locally for well under 10/- a piece.

When I was first introduced to the hobby clan, nearly ten years ago, I found many people willing to help a new collector with the odd gift, or the reasonably priced volume. That is still, I am sure, the spirit of the bulk of collectors.

Yours sincerely,
W. T. THURBON

(Note: When I received the advert Bill Thurbon refers to I don't mind saying I was perturbed so much so that I consulted Len Packman about it. His advice was that it should be published as received and on reflection I decided to do so. From letters and verbal comments I have had since, it seems it was the best thing to do. In fairness to the advertiser I might say he is new to our circle and I think he must have acted in ignorance. The price asked for the Girls Own Paper volume would seem to make that obvious, for as Bill says, such volumes can be bought for a shilling or two. However, this publicity may put matters right. As for Bill's other remarks I do honestly think there is now a tendency for prices to come down rather than rise. As for his hope that the spirit of comradeship still exists I am happy to assure him it does as will be seen from a typical example referred to in my chat. I too, fervently hope it will always be so. H.L.)

* * *

THAT "OPEN LETTER"

319 Long Lane,
East Finchley,
London. N.2.

9th June, 1957.

Dear Editor,

In reply to "An Open Letter to readers of C.D." in the current issue of the C.D. from our old friend Jack Murtagh, of New Zealand who suggests an idea to readers to assist Bill Gander to complete his collection of "Magnets".

I am quite in sympathy with the idea, but I am not one of those fortunate readers who has a collection of HUNDREDS of "Magnets". I have now been a member of the O.B.B.C. for six years and so far I have only 60 odd "Magnets" and they are not mint condition either, so that in order to complete my collection of "Magnets" I only require 1600 numbers! So what about a little publicity to those less fortunate readers who do not possess many "Magnets". Incidentally I am not in

receipt of the "Story Paper Collector".

Of course, I admire Bill Gander for what he has done for the hobby, but as I have not yet had a copy it hardly seems worth while to start getting it now with issue No. 60.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN ADDISON

P.S. I wonder if my letter will receive the same publicity as that accorded to Jack Murtagh? *

(Comment: Well, your letter is in John. Honestly your postscript isn't really necessary. I'm always willing to give all points of view, but we must just get the matter quite clear. Whilst we can quite understand fellows who can only afford to have a small collection of Magnets having a twinge of envy for those who possess nearly a complete set, we have to remember that Bill Gander's is a special case. Even though he gets his grand little magazine out on his own "plant" it must cost him a tidy sum in postages etc. Many members would like to help him defray costs but currency regulations prevent them sending cash. Jack Murtagh therefore simply suggested a way in which some might be able to show their appreciation.

Further, Bill, I know, is always willing to send the S.P.C. to anyone who asks for it. (H.L.)

WANTED: S.P.C. 1-35 incl., Knockout Annuals, Thrillers for the year 1930, Nelson Lee Lib., 537-543 incl., 547, 548, 550-560, 566-568, also N.L.L. 2nd New Series, 121, 122, 129, 130, 133, 135-140, 155, 156. Good condition only. High prices paid. Many U.J.'s, S.R.L.'s. Dreadnought, Boys' Friend and other papers with Sexton Blake stories, serials or articles wanted. Can you oblige? Many thanks
VICTOR COLBY, 8 BERESFORD AVENUE, BEVERLEY HILLS, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

Bound Volumes of Victorian Juvenile Literature for sale:-

1. The Captain, Vol. 1, April-September 1899 (one bound volume)
2. The Boys' Journal, one bound volume, 1872.
3. The Boys' Own Magazine, two bound volumes, 1872.
4. The Girls' Own Annual, two bound volumes:- a) Vol. IV Nos. 145-196 1882/3. b) Vol. V 197-248, 1883/4.

Bindings good condition, insides mint. Enquiries and for offers for any items to:- ROGER STACEY, 60 ESMOND ROAD, LONDON. W.4.

OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

LONDON MEETING AT BOB BLYTHE'S DEN, NEASDEN

JUNE 16th, 1957

A sparkling get together was held at Nelson Lee's retreat and although Uncle Benjamin was busy dodging Tiger Bronx in Rome, we were very fortunate in having the pleasure of having Gerry Allison's company.

After the usual formalities, Josie Packman gave her Nationalities Quiz, resulting in a win for Bill Hubbard, with Frank Vernon Lay and Gerry Allison in 2nd and 3rd places. With the heat wave making us shed our coats, it was cooling to hear Len Packman's reading of "How Father Christmas came to White Pine". Bill Hubbard's Quiz saw Len Packman again in the lead with Bob Blythe, Roger Jenkins and yours truly tying for second place. Gerry Allison then won Laurie Sutton's "Fill in the Missing Letters" competition. Personally I thought the high light of the meeting was Gerry's superb reading of an extract from "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays". You had Gussy's noble accent Gerry. Gerry certainly worked overtime for we were next treated to a preview of his latest poem followed by the final quiz "A Race Course Adventure". This saw Bob Blythe and Roger Jenkins sharing first place.

Next meeting - 21st July at East Dulwich.

ROBERT H. WHITER

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NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, June 8th, 1957

Despite the absence of two or three regulars, due to the Whitsun holiday, there was quite a good attendance. Cliff and Mrs. Beardsall paid us one of their welcome surprise visits, and the Barlows of Elland were well represented.

With Stan Smith making his first miss for a long time, I took over the chair. An important matter discussed was the meeting with Midland members at Chesterfield on Sunday, July 14th. Northern members meet by the News Theatre, City Square, Leeds at 9.30 a.m. prompt.

Jack Wood, taking the floor, read some extracts from a Nelson Lee Library telling how Handforth fell in love whilst visiting the Wembley Exhibition way back in the 'twenties. It proved that Edwy

Searles Brooks was capable of some real touches of humour and the reading was much enjoyed.

After refreshments, Gerry Allison keeping St. Frank's still in the picture set a sentence building problem: yes, problem is the right word.

In our summer term two years ago, we had read to us accounts of stirring cricket matches taken from stories of school life. These were greatly enjoyed so Gerry filled up the rest of the evening with a graphic rendering of a great game between School House and Jayne's House at Slapton School taken from a John Finnemore story which appeared in the Boys Realm. Though written 50 years ago there was quite a Ramadhin touch about it. It enthralled his listeners, the ladies included, the only regret that it was a race with the clock for those who had trains to catch.

The next meeting, ah me, not until July 20th, the third Saturday. Never mind there's that Chesterfield trip in between. It will, too, give me more time to prepare my talk "I Preferred Wycliffe".

HERBERT LECKENBY

Northern Section Correspondent.

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Report of the Meeting held May 27th, 1957 in Chambers of
Commerce, Birmingham from Harry Broster, MIDLAND OBBC.

As this was the Annual General Meeting very little book lore was discussed. The Library which is progressing by leaps and bounds under the efficient stewardship of Beryl Russell, did its usual good business. We were overjoyed to welcome back into the fold Frank Bourne. This after a period of twelve months or more. A pleasing and a point towards the great keenness now manifest in the Club was the appearance of Syd Wise who came all the way from Willenhall to spend a few minutes with us and collect a few Magnets and Gems from the Library.

The Treasurer's report showed an improvement on last years profit, and my own report was received well. The new constitution was approved and arising from that we saw Jack Corbett back on the Committee as Vice-Chairman with Jack Ingram Chairman for 1957-8. Norman was re-elected Treasurer as expected and myself likewise as Secretary. Tom Porter and Beryl Russell unanimously and deservedly voted to serve on the Committee. The Chesterfield meeting with Northern suggested for July 14th was discussed very thoroughly and

quite a few members were anxious to be of the party. Matters were left in the hands of the Secretary to contact his Northern vis-a-vis to settle certain details.

* * * *

MERSEY BRANCH O.B.B.C. SUNDAY, 9th JUNE.

There were fewer members present than normally, partly due to the date being Whit-Sunday. Nevertheless the meeting opened promptly at 7 p.m. with the Chairman's business report and reading of the financial statement. For various reasons the discussion on the future date for branch meetings will be held over for the time being. Before we settled down to two quizzes it was decided to dispose of some surplus Nelson Lees and Magnets, that the Club no longer require. Consistent with the Club's policy they were sold at very low prices. It is still the opinion of the Merseyside Branch that the O.B.B.C. is a hobby to most of us and not a business. Regret was expressed at the prices asked for books by a certain advertiser in the June issue of the Collectors' Digest.

Two very fine quizzes were then presented by the Chairman, Don Webster, the first being of the "Odd Man Out" type. This was won by Mr. Laffey with Frank Unwin and Jack Morgan second and third.

The second one was a "Cryptic" in which we had to make up words of four or more letters. This was won by George Riley with Frank Unwin second. Many thanks Don for these two very fine efforts, and also for the prizes of Union Jacks and Scouts that you gave to the winners.

Next meeting, Sunday, 14th July, 6.30 p.m. sharp.

SALE and EXCHANGE: Nelson Lees, Boys Realms, Thrillers, Champions, Modern Boys, Young Britains, Meccano Magazines, Rovers, Pilots, Rangers, Chums, Practical Mechanics, Boys Magazines, Bound volumes War in the Air and Wonders World Aviation. Boys Cinema. All between 1920-1935. G. HIGHTON, 14 GREYHOUND ROAD, WILLESDEN, LONDON. N.W.10.

FOR SALE: 17 Magnets between 1259 and 1550 - 28/-
22 Claude Duvals 1-24 - 26/-; 32 Dick Turpins 8-51, 105-108 - 37/6;
24 Robin Hoods 9-56 - 28/-. All Aldines. Price includes postage.
I. LITVAK, 70 CRANFORD AVENUE, ASHFORD, MIDDLESEX.

HAMILTONIANA

compiled by Herbert Lackenby

Here is the poem Gerry Allison read at the June London Meeting. Someone present said it was worthy of space on the front page of a newspaper. I am sure all Hamiltonians will heartily agree. On another page Frank Richards tells you that he is busy preparing a new Bunter series for T.V. A moment's thought will make it clear that Gerry has not exaggerated in the slightest. Once the dear old man of Broadstairs wrote the stories of Greyfriars for a humble halfpenny paper, now fifty years later the mighty B.B.C. consider them worthy of regular appearances through the medium which brings them to the eyes of millions. Yes indeed, a "front page" story.

HOMAGE TO FRANK RICHARDS

By Gerry Allison

There's a dear old man at Broadstairs - at Broadstairs by the sea,
Who has filled the world with wonder, for millions more like me.
For more than half a century, for fifty years of fame,
He has written tales of schoolboys. Frank Richards is his name.

Or should it be Charles Hamilton? - or Martin Clifford, say;
Owen Conquest; Hilda Richards; Harry Dorrian; Ralph Redway?
It little matters what we call him - this man of many parts.
For worship of the Master is deep within our hearts.

What happiness he's given us, this King of writers all;
There never was another, that I can now recall
To whom we can compare him. No! He's without a peer.
May heaven bless Frank Richards, who is to us so dear.

His books are clean and healthy, and bubbling o'er with fun,
His genius is transcendent, and glorious as the sun.
Praise him for dear old Greyfriars, for Rookwood, and St. Jim's,
At the thought of those grand places, a tear my eyesight dims.

How can we meekly render the praise which is his due?
He's worthy of a Dukedom - I'm sure you'll say that's true!
So - let us raise our voices, and make the rafters ring:
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW — come on, chaps, let us SING!

Here's the first of a new series by versatile Roger Jenkins; he's never short of something new. They'll probably appear alternately with his "Do You Remember" Series.

Which do You Prefer?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No 1 - The Feud with the New Boy (Gems 882-883 and Magnets 1239-1240.)

Both the Gem and the Magnet enjoyed long runs, and it would hardly be surprising if examples of repeated themes were to be found here and there in both papers. It is only fair to bear in mind however, that if a theme was repeated it was usually in a different paper, and even then many years would normally be allowed to elapse before it was used again. When it is realized that the average reader never took either paper for more than four or five years, it may be seen that such repetition was apparent only to the inveterate collector.

The theme of the unreasoning feud with an inoffensive new boy really had its roots in the Rookwood story in the 1920 Holiday Annual, but it was the Greyfriars and St. Jim's versions which bore such striking similarity. Lovell, who featured in the Rookwood tale, was often unreasonable and so the story lost some of its emphasis as a result, but Manners and Nugent who starred in the Gem and Magnet versions were so far from unreasonable as a rule that the idea of either having a feud with a new boy came as a shock to the reader. The consequence was that both series were written with some force, and left a memorable impression.

Manners became involved through his camera, which Trimble borrowed without permission. The first time he had the opportunity Manners attempted to wreak his vengeance, which resulted in the intervention of a new boy, Torrence, whom Trimble had met at Rylcombe Station and was guiding to the school. Torrence then became the victim of one of Monty Lowther's little jokes and went to study No. 10 thinking it was Mr. Ratcliffe's study. Another fight with Manners ensued, and his chums arrived in time to see Manners thrown out of his own study. Thus it came about that one of the most peaceable juniors at the school began to nurse a bitter hatred of the new boy. When Manners picked up a letter of Torrence's addressed to "Eric Parkinson" he began to feel that the new boy was an imposter and that his hatred was fully justified.

Nugent became involved through his minor, who had lost his temper and was being deservedly shaken by Carlow, the new boy. Frank intervened, and came off worst, and his mortification was deepened when later he heard Dicky cheerfully admit that the new boy was not to blame. Nugent's pride had suffered a setback, just as Manners' pride

had done, and he kept up a feud which seemed justified when he overheard Carlow in conversation with a shady character. Incidentally, Carlow left Greyfriars at the end of the term, and Torrence is apparently still sharing a study in the New House with Pratt and Digges.

It is not an easy matter to decide which of the two versions is the better. On the face of things the Magnet version ought to win hands down, since it was written in 1931 when the Greyfriars stories were at the very peak of their form, whereas the Gem version appeared in 1925 when the peak of performance was already past, and the paper was on the downward grade. Nevertheless, one is left with an irrational feeling that Martin Clifford had the edge on Frank Richards on this occasion, if only because Manners' hatred of the new boy was so much better explained. Manners was studious, thoughtful, peaceably, yes, but the combination of hurt to his camera and his pride was so much more convincing a reason for the feud. Nugent was so much more diffident and self-effacing than Manners, and seemed much more likeable altogether. His sudden dislike for the new boy was therefore all the more unexpected and out of character. Accordingly on balance I consider the St. Jim's version to be the better of the two. Which do you prefer?

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 2. The Cliff House Girls

Maurice Kutner writes:- "Without the Cliff House girls the theme of the weak Peter Hazeldene, forever passing his troubles on to his patient sister, could not have been, and I consider the Greyfriars saga would have been the poorer for that loss.

The girls, in the main, acted as a yard-stick of common-sense. Whenever the Famous Five were at loggerheads amongst themselves, the calm, if not slightly pained glance of Marjorie would heal the breach, and do more than words to make them realise how ridiculous was the whole situation.

In Magnet No. 432, when Wharton and Cherry came to blows through Rattenstein's scheming, Phyllis Howell comes on the scene. "Stop it at once" she says decidedly. "you are a pair of duffers". Just previously, the Bounder thought they were a pair of silly asses, but had consented to "keep time". Schoolgirls can be very silly, we know, but the Cliff House Girls often proved that boys can be sillier.

Boys between 10 and 14 are not usually keen to read of romance, but the touch of that little more than friendship between Marjorie and Bob (as with Ethel Cleveland and Figgins) was of some interest to the Magnet readers, and in that sense can be said to have strengthened the stories.

Your question, "Did Frank Richards make his girl characters convincing?" Because Greyfriars (and Billy Bunter) dominated the scene, the girl characters were not as fully developed as they might have been. By the way, is Billy Bunter a convincing character?"

Roger Jenkins writes:- "I have come to the conclusion that Marjorie Hazeldene was featured too much in stories of one type. She was always worried about her brother, and the plots were too similar. Nugent was also worried about his brother, but he played many roles apart from this one. Marjorie, not being at Greyfriars, was featured only on special occasions, and the special occasions were nearly always the same, though I do remember a redeeming series in 1935 when her uncle was on the run, and Hazel refused to help him; this was more interesting than most in which she played a part.

Cousin Ethel always had a detached viewpoint; she was never constantly worried about one particular junior, and this made her every appearance both novel and entertaining. In addition, the peculiar Gussy-Figgins relationship which existed every time Ethel appeared was a delightful joke which never wore stale. So I say that Ethel was a much better complement to the stories than was Marjorie."

Don Webster writes:- "The marked contrast between Marjorie and Clara was a stroke of genius, for such girls do exist and are often good friends. I had no time for Bessie Bunter or any other Cliff House girls - they seemed superfluous. They play on 'Hazel's sister' brought out the good points in Harry Wharton and amusing ones concerning Bob Cherry."

(Eric Fayne thanks those readers who have written, or are writing to him in connection with the "Let's Be Controversial" series.)

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL. No. 4

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own view superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your own opinion on the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in future issues of the C.D.)

No. 4 DO WE OWE ANYTHING TO THE SUBSTITUTE WRITERS? My first

impulse is to answer NO. Very definitely we owe less than nothing to the substitute writers. The best of them never captured the spirit of the Gem and Magnet; the worst of them turned out ill-written rubbish which was a disgrace to those fine papers.

On second thoughts, proverbially the best, I wonder. Without altering my opinion of the work the substitute writers did, I incline to the view that we DO owe them something. For one thing, they provided a topic of which will be discussed so long as there is a Gem or Magnet reader left on this old earth - and that's something. For another, I ask myself whether the two papers could possibly have appeared regularly for 33 years without the substitute writers. I don't believe they could.

I tell myself that it would have been ideal if the maestro himself had written every story in the Gem and Magnet, but, even knowing his remarkable output, I very much doubt whether he could have done it. And, even if he could, he could never at the same time have given us Rookwood, Cedar Creek, the Benbow, King of the Islands, and that delightful character whom I love nearly as much as Harry Wharton and Tom Merry - the fascinating Rio Kid.

While he was writing of his other character, the subs kept St. Jim's and Greyfriars alive. Should the work of the substitute writers have been published under the names of Frank Richards and Martin Clifford? Perhaps not, but I'm not sure. It kept the illusion alive, at least.

Should Tom Merry and Bunter have been "rested" while their creator was writing of other things for other papers? Should the substitutes have written of other schools, other characters, for the Gem and the Magnet? Would the Gem have continued without even the shadow of Tom Merry? Would the Magnet have died if even the substitutes' version of Bunter had been withdrawn?

We should have waited many months for an occasional Greyfriars story in the Magnet at one time. In the case of the Gem, we should have waited for years in the late twenties.

Give the devil his due. Reluctantly, I must admit that I preferred even a substitute writer's Tom Merry to no Tom Merry at all; an imitation Bouncer to no Bouncer. In the depths of my heart I am glad that the names of Martin and Frank carried through the whole run of the respective papers.

Are you as mixed-up as I am? I loathed the work of the "subs" yet I feel that we owe them something. - I really wish that our favourite author had not had "so many irons in the fire" - yet I loved

Rookwood and the Ric Kid. Maybe I would not have had things different from what they were.

It's just my view. What's yours?

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE A.P. Comics 1930-40, Chips, Comic Cuts, Film Fun
Funny Wonder, Joker.

WANTED: Film Fun, Kinema Komic, Puck, Bubbles, Jester, Butterfly
period 1920-30.

ARNOLD KEENA, 11 PEARL AVENUE, EPPING, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

FOR PART SALE AND PART EXCHANGE: Vol. of Magnets 48 numbers between
449 and 652 for Magnets, S.O.L's. (Greyfriars and Rookwoods) Holiday
Annuals. Wanted novels by Moray Dalton.

E. MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.

CHAMPIONS wanted complete years. I have complete years "Wizards"
"Hotspurs" "Rovers" and "Adventures" 1951-2-3- and will swap.
Also wanted Nelson Lees (3rd new series) No. 20. "Chums Annuals" Vol.
1 (1892/3); No. 20 (1912) No. 21 (1913) and No. 30 (1921/2)
JOHN GUNN, GUNN'S HOTEL, STRATFORD SQUARE, NOTTINGHAM.

S.B.L. REVIEWS

JULY 1957

Corpse to Copenhagen (No. 385)

Jonathan Burke

The two golden horns of Gallehus are among the greatest archaeological treasures in Denmark. They are objects of great national pride. When Kirsten Holtensen, attractive young wife of the aged and wealthy Henning Holtensen, persuades a young and impressionable Englishman named Anthony Carew, one of a group of London musicians giving a series of recitals in Copenhagen, to smuggle the horns out of the country amongst the brass instruments in one of his instrument cases, she is unaware that she is sending him to his death. When news of Carew's murder comes to the ears of Mark Nicoll, a music critic, the later goes to Sexton Blake. For, before Kirsten Holtensen had succeeded in getting Carew to carry out that particular assignment she had tried to coax him - Nicholl - to do her bidding.

There's always a particular interest in summing up the work of a new author, or a name new to the long list of Blake's chronicles. Frankly, Jonathan Burke's debut disappointed me. His story lacked

verve and was too juvenile for my taste.

Rating

Moderate

Roadhouse Girl (No. 386)

Desmond Reid.

In this somewhat complicated novel of murder, blackmail and vengeance, Desmond Reid does not quite attain that standard of excellence he set up with his previous effort (S.B.L. No. 384).

Several people find themselves involved in the murder of John Bigott, a once brilliant Q.C. whose degeneration followed excessive indulgence in strong drink. A particularly frightened man is a crook named James Dawlish, proprietor of a couple of clubs, who ran them for the purpose of getting his clients into trouble and then blackmailing them. Since Bigott was a frequenter of the clubs and knew Dawlish to be the man behind the many mailbag robberies recently committed, the latter had good reasons for wishing Bigott's tongue stilled for ever. Then there was the mysterious murder of Raymond MacPhee, a juror Bigott had bribed in order to bring about an acquittal in a famous trial he was participating in. The hand that took Bigott's life was also responsible for the stilling of Mac Phee's. Who's?

Welcome news - Mrs. Bardell is 'doing' for Blake again!

Rating

Good

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

* * * * *

Since my last article, I have received two welcome articles from staunch Leeites, Norman Pragnell and James Cook.

The first I am using this month. Jim Cook's fine study of Larry Scott, the boy who could not tell a lie, will appear next month; it is a most interesting portrait of an unusual character. Herewith Norman's latest article.

THOSE UNPOPULAR THREE YEARS, PART III. "NIPKI - THE SORCERER"

It was in 1925 that Edwy Seafes Brooks wrote the famous Ezra

Quirke series, the series that nearly all Nelson Lee followers insist was the first story that was ever to come from his pen. Whether this is true or not, it appeared when the Nelson Lee Library was enjoying it's most successful period, and Brooks was allowed full scope for the way he wrote the first class stories that were appearing week after week. A plot based on magic, mediums, witchcraft and such similar trappings is not new in modern fiction, as witness the popularity of the novels of Denis Wheatley, but it was certainly something new in schoolboy fiction. The very great success of the Ezra Quirke series must have led the powers that be into thinking that a further Quirke series would result in an equally great success, and so in 1928 Quirke appeared on the scene again, but, alas, this series was a real flop reminding the writer of a certain television series in which a famous and glamorous star suffered the same indignity. The series failed for obvious reasons. Quirke had already been thoroughly exposed and as a character was finished, once and for all time, and could not be brought back to life again. And so Quirke had to play second fiddle to a haunted castle, whereby the mystery which served as the basis of the plot turned out to be rather a wishy-washy mess. The failure of this series must be laid at the editor's chair, for Brooks could hardly be expected to put life into a character who was dead, but would not lie down. The evidence of this mistake was still not enough for the editor, for in 1932 he had to try again, and once more a pathetic Quirke strolled across the scene. Shame on the editor and sympathy for Brooks for trying to do the impossible. Nevertheless, magic and its trimmings are always a good plot for a story, and so in December of 1932 a further attempt was made, but this time - no Quirke. The result, one of the best series that appeared in the Second New Series.

The plot was to resolve round the nefarious activities of one named Professor Nirki, a twentieth century sorcerer who lived and practised his alleged arts in a small cottage situated in the heart of the New Forest. As a character Nirki was not such a brilliant figure as Quirke or even the other two enemies of Lee who were discussed in our two previous articles, Dacca and Captain Angel, but the work that Nirki did and the effects he produced were frightening to the extreme and the story of Lee's tussle with Nirki resulted in a very fine series. It is not the writer's proposal to give a full description of the story as in the previous articles. Those readers who have read the series will know the story already and those who are not interested in this article will not bother to read it any how.

What are we more concerned with is trying to prove our contribution made in the original introduction, regarding the quality of some of the stories published during these later years.

However, very briefly the story concerns the adventures that was to be the lot of the St. Frank's juniors, with Nelson Lee and Umlosi on their Christmas vacation at the home of Lady Eustace Bower, Archie Glenthorne's Aunt. The family residence "Forest House" was situated in the heart of the New Forest and it was the main object of the boys to rid Lady Bower of the evil influence of one Professor Nerki, a sorcerer who lived in a cottage very near to "Forest House". Their efforts at the beginning of their holiday had been doomed to failure for Nerki had the juniors beaten all along the line by his various ghostly and mysterious manifestations. Two or three of the episodes had even shaken badly that stalwart Umlosi, and he was a man who feared no one. Matters were to come to a head however, when three of the juniors vanished, and it required every ounce of Nelson Lee's skill and courage to expose Nerki and bring the whole affair to a satisfactory solution. To produce such an excellent series after the two previous failures was all the more to Brook's credit. It was no mean task to think up new ideas for such a story. Re-reading the original Quirke series one would have thought that Brooks had pulled every trick out of the bag in the way of unexplainable manifestations. It was all the more remarkable that so many new ones cropped up in the "Nerki" series.

Let us look at just a few, and for a start recall Archie's encounter with the witch.

"He knew that he was not wrong, for a head had followed the hat, a queer mishapen face showed indistinctly in the moonlight, a wrinkled face with hollow eyes, a great hooked nose and nutcracker jaws - a typical witch.

Then, before his eyes, that hideous creature arose into the air and Archie saw that it was a witch mounted upon a broom. Long trailing garments floated in the wind, and then, at that second, a great black cloud obscured the moon, and the darkness shut down".

And what about this example of a man without a shadow. "Look" almost screamed Church. He was pointing - not at Nerki, but at the snow beside him. "The shadow" stuttered Church, there - there's no shadow. Hardofrth jumped. He and his chums of course, were casting intense black shadows on the white snow. But - the figure of Nerki cast no shadow at all.

To be continued.