VOL. 44 No. 526 OCTOBER 1990

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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HERBERT LECKENBY

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The Editor's Chat

THE ANNUAL

I promised last month to give you some 'tasters' of the new C.D. Annual which now is in preparation. As always, it is truly a box of delights covering many aspects of the hobby. Roger Jenkins has contributed an intriguing study of **Cecil Ponsonby, The Cad of Highcliffe**, Ernest Holman investigates a Sherlock Holmes literary mystery, E. Grant-MacPherson writes on the last Christmases of the Nelson Lee while 'J.E.M.' has produced a fine Sexton Blake pictorial feature and puzzle. Dennis Bird writes about plot variations in the schoolgirl papers on the theme of **Two Men and a Girl**, and Les Rowley treats us to **The Never Welcome Guest**, a seasonable and atmospheric pastiche which features Bunter, the Bounder and the Famous Five. And there is, of course, much, much more - some of which I will be 'trailing' in next month's C.D.

If you haven't already reserved your copy of the Annual, may I remind you to let me have your order soon; the price is £7.90 in the United Kingdom and £9.50 overseas (both prices include post and packet).

****

WORRALS OF THE W.A.A.F.S. - FIFTY YEARS ON

I feel that perhaps I should have called this editorial 'Between You and Me and the Joystick' - a title used by the wartime Girl's Own Paper for its aeronautical articles. Many of these were written by Captain W. E. Johns whose Biggles was by then already famous. His charismatic female creation, Worrals, who first appeared in the G.O.P. exactly fifty years ago, was to become one of the very few cult hero-characters of juvenile fiction during the Second World War.

It is indeed appropriate that we should be marking her half-century at the same time as we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain, for Worrals, created by Johns at the request of the Air Ministry to boost W.A.A.F. recruitment, arrived on the fictional scene when in real life our imaginations were still surging and soaring with the great achievements of Churchill's famous 'Few' - those Battle of Britain pilots to whom we and so many others continue to owe so much.

To celebrate Worral's fiftieth year I have reproduced on the front of this month's C .D. the cover of the G.O.P. which launched her. It was the first of a most attractive series of patriotic cover-girls, drawn in full colour by McKinlay. The Red Cross Nurse was followed in the November issue by a radiantly smiling and extremely engaging dark-haired Waaf who seemed at the time to me (and I'm sure to most G.O.P. readers) to be a representation of Worrals.

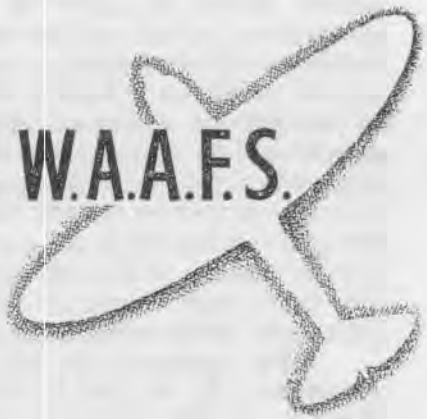
I had begun to take the G.O.P. a few months earlier, after the sad demise of The Schoolgirl in the paper shortages of May, 1940. Johns' heroine seemed to spark the G.O.P. into new life and vitality; her adventurous exploits marked the paper's change from a rather smug and dismissive editorial attitude towards the war to one of highly dedicated patriotic endeavour. Readers who had hitherto been urged to concentrate on their knitting, sewing and other domestic tasks were now urged to throw themselves into campaigns to Dig for Victory, to collect salvage, to fight fires and, if they were old enough, to join the women's services. They were encouraged to emulate their new heroine: 'Behold, Worrals - she's emerged to do her bit in this war. She's a real live character with a genuine love for planes; in fact her job means something to her. It is her whole life. She's ready to take all personal risks in the service of her country. She's made up her mind that there'll always be an England.'

Johns sustained this stirring mood throughout Worrals' wartime adventures. By the time he began to produce these he might well have begun to find the Biggles saga something of a sinecure. He certainly appears to have welcomed the opportunity to 'star' a girl character. Some of his most stylish writing went into the Worrals stories, as well as a great deal of empathy with young girls and their aspirations. As well as wonderful Worrals there was her chum and side-kick, Frecks, whose blonde beauty niftily complemented Worrals' raven-hued charm. Masculine appeal was conveyed in the person of Bill Ashton, the young Spitfire pilot who was romantically attached to Worrals despite her bracing brush-offs: 'Be yourself. You'll laugh at this nonsense in the morning.'

Worrals was to be featured in several books which were first serialized in the G.O.P. Soon after the war ended she, like Biggles, substituted air-detection work for air battles and counter-espionage activities. She was the heroine of eleven full length novels and three short stories. Despite their nubility, neither Worrals nor Frecks married (or, as far as it is recorded, ever even came near to this). The two girls remained

firm friends and colleagues throughout the war when they had to foil pompous senior officers, Gestapo agents and Japanese combatants, and subsequently when they were mopping up escaping Nazi war criminals, mad white Queens on remote Pacific Islands and middle-eastern gun-runners. The Worrals books constantly conveyed Johns' flair for writing about war in the skies, as well as his strong feeling for place and atmosphere. However, most important of all, the Worrals tales put across to readers more vividly than any pre-1939 girls' flying stories the virtues of courage, teamwork, loyalty to cause and country and the value of enduring friendship.

As well as paying tribute to W. E. Johns in my editorial this month, I am publishing a splendid article about some of the feminine characters in the Biggles saga. This has been especially written for the C.D. by Jennifer Schofield, who is possibly better known to many of you as Piers Williams, the co-author of the definitive biography of W. E. Johns, **By Jove, Biggles!**



WORRALS of the W.A.A.F.S.

BY

Capt. W. E. Johns

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SOME OF THE MANY PERSONALITIES MENTIONED byE.S. BROOKS

By Jack Greaves

Throughout the long history of the Nelson Lee (Old Series) featuring the school stories, Edwy Searles Brooks introduced hundreds of characters into the saga, many of whom played major parts in the various series, while others only appear quite briefly, often referred to simply as Jim, Bill or Tom - 3 favourite names for these minor characters.

All the above were, of course, fictional but quite often Brooks would introduce the names of well-known real-life sportsment, film-stars, scientists, explorers and historical figures, etc. Perhaps the odd reference doesn't amount to much, but when all the details are filed the list grows considerably and although I haven't , as yet, read all the Old Series school tales, I am surprised how many subjects E. S. Brooks covers in these references, and there must be many more.

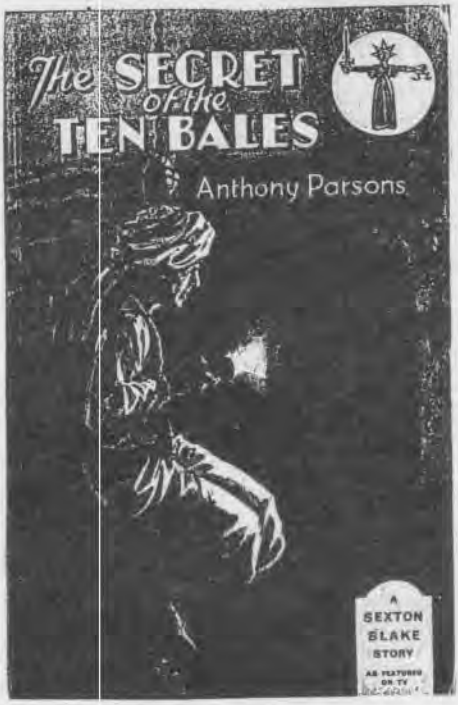
I now list some of the well-known names I have so far recorded:-

Roald Amunson (395)
Barnum (420)
Battling Siki (395)
W. H. Berry (Music Hall) (401)
Steve Bloomer (543)
Edid Bennett (films) (427)
Canute (456)
George Carpentier (342)
Charlie Chaplin (342)
Chopin (415)
Crippen (408)
Oliver Cromwell (445)
Conan Doyle (448)
Daniel (lion's den) (462)
Darwin (371)
Duncan Sisters (Music Hall) (401)
Jack Dempsey (326)
Grace Darling (528)
Edison (469)
Tubby Edlin (Music Hall) (395)
Douglas Fairbanks (265)
Guy Fawkes (387)
Goliath (455)
W. G. Grace (317)
Gladstone (545)
William S. Hart (427)
Henry VIII (408)
J. B. Hobbs (317)
Houdini (388)
Jack Hulbert (395)
Hawker (Atlantic flyer) (310)
J. W. Hearn (cricketer) (518)
G. L. Jessop (cricketer) (361)
Joan of Arc (399)
Judge Jefferies (514)
Kid Lewis (298)
Sir Oliver Lodge (448)
Stanley Lupino (395)
Abraham Lincoln (545)
Longfellow (443)
Marconi (394)
Fanny Walden (footballer) (543)
Duke of Monmouth (James Scott) (468)
Moses (484)
Thomas Meighan (films) (427)
Napoleon (482)
Nelson (484)
Nero (369)
Charles Peace (408)
Mary Pickford (427)
Baden- Powell (524)
Charles Ray (films) (427)
Rameses IV (392)
Ranji (Ranjitsinhyi) (cricketer) (318)
Rockefeller (244)
Heath Robinson (368)
Sandow (465)
Robert Falcon Scott (explorer) (375)
Shakespeare (443)
Charles Stewart (Charles I) (445)
Trotsky (245)
Tutankhamen (422)
Duke of Wellington (468)
Jimmy Wild (295)
Fanny Walden (footballer) (543)

****

Editor's Note

Several of you have expressed warm appreciation of J.E.M.'s recently ended pictorial Blake features, and many of us hope that a further series will soon be forthcoming. The fine pictures selected by J.E.M. were, of course, from pre-Second World War times. I've recently acquired a few copies of the 1968 Dean hardbacks, and have enjoyed contrasting their colour picture covers with Eric Parker's strong line drawings in the weeklies. The two examples reproduced here also suggest how wide-ranging were the settings of the Blake stories.



FALCON SWIFT

by Derek Adley

When Edward Hulton launched the Boys' Magazine on 27 February 1922 he was entering a market that offered fierce opposition from A.P's Champion and D.C.Thomson's Adventure, Rover and Wizard. It was also a market that he had little experience of. The launch must have been a success for the paper ran to 620 issues ending 20 January 1934, though on the way it was taken over by Allied Newspapers Ltd and finally by the A.P. itself, who as was its policy for closing papers it took over, them absorbed it into the Champion.

It' s fair to say that the Boys' Magazine was never really appreciated until some 30 to 40 years after its demise, and then the interest in it seemed to grow, particularly with science-fiction buffs. In the forties and fifties one had a hard job getting rid of Boys' Magazine for just a few 'old pence'. One thing it had had - like its many contemporaries - was its own resident dectective, Falcon Swift, a truly amazing and versatile sleuth, who had gifts beyond anything of his rivals.

The first story was simply entitled 'The Exploits of Falcon Swift the Sporting Detective", which, in fact, was to become the collective title for the whole series. From then on each story had its own title; 2 - The Demon Racer; 3 - Iron Island; 4 - The Case of Zavarre the Fencer; etc.

Falcon Swift mostly wore a lounge suit of the best cut, impeccably polished shoes, a bowler hat set at a jaunty angle, an ever flashing monocle and a silver knobbed cane - later his bowler hat was replaced by a 'topper' and his appearance reminded one of early pictures of John Creasey's 'Toff', though perhaps this should be the other way round as the first 'Toff' novel did not appear until 1938! Swift was a Cambridge triple blue who seemed to be proficient in every known sport, for example, boxing, sculling, soccer, fencing and cricket, and it was often mentioned that Swift's prowess was of Olympic standard. Whatever his game he was always graced by a monocle. This was in evidence whilst playing International Soccer, playing for England in a Test Match and, another time, fighting in the boxing ring for the heavyweight championship. Outside of the sporting field in an early issue, No. 38, he could be seen supporting his dangling assistant whilst hanging upside down over a ravine - and yes, his monocle was firmly in place.

All of which raises a very pertinent question: Did Falcon Swift have a weak eye or was the monocle purely for vanity? I wonder if this ever occurred to his youthful readers.

His assistant was Chick Conway, the once street urchin (weren't they all?) whom he had literally taken out of the gutter. At one time Swift held a temporary commission with the Black Dragoons, and faithfull Conway acted as his batman.

For the first few years Falcon Swift yarns appeared on a weekly schedule but then they became irregular and spasmodic. Most of them were illustrated by Harry Laine and one could usually find a sporty theme in the title as the following selection will show:

5. The Mystery Footballer
6. The Secret of the Boat Race
379. The Fate of the Favourite
380. The Amazing Motor Race Case
382. The Test Match Drama
394. The Mystery of The Schneider Cup Champion

Whilst many of the stories did have this sporty theme, in his time Swift crossed swords with Bulgarian Assassins, Chinese Dope Smugglers, Indian Thugs and Corsican Bandits, and, whilst he had this amazing gift as a sportsman, he was just as at home 'out West' fighting Indians and breaking in bucking bronchos. Like these foreign organisations his adversaries were many and varied and

included jewel-thieves, kidnappers, murderers and fire-raisers. Swift was even spectacular with his car, it being a supercharged Hispano-Suiza. He also owned a private plane and, of course, was an expert pilot.

Whilst the Falcon Swift stories that appeared exclusively in Boys' Magazine were written by a number of authors anonymously, one very prolific author of them was Harry Belfield. Another writer who also wrote several of the tales was Edwy Searles Brooks, and considering his popularity it is probably a good idea to list all his contributions: 496 to 508 The Shooting Sleuth, 1931 serial. The rest were all complete stories published in 1933. 573, The Stadium of Spectres. 574,The Creature of the Crater. 575, Kidnapped at the Cup Tie. 576, The Football Raiders. 577, The X-Ray Footballers.578, The Invisible Menace. 583, Lose Wembley - or Die! 609, Rocket Robbers.

It is quite surprising to read the Editor's boost for the Falcon Swift story 'The Trail of Frozen Death!' which appeared in number 527 in 1932:

"This is one of the finest detective yarns I have ever secured for you, chaps. I hung breathless on every word as I read it. The famous secret service man who created the Monocled Manhunter has given us a yarn that you will remember for many moons after you read it. Perhaps the inspiration for it came to him when he himself was tracking a terrible criminal band in the Arctic Regions not many weeks ago ....."

And so he went on in the same vein; I wonder if the story lived up to the build-up, and I wonder if this brought a grin to the face of the author of 'The Trail of Frozen Death'?

****

THE LAST STAND.—"Falcon Swift was forced to retreat to the curtains, behind which the Vanishing Cracksman had disappeared, and there he made his stand."
(See "The Clash of Giants," p. 13 inside.)

Vol. IV.—No. 92.—November 24, 1923

BIGGLES AND THE FAIR SEX
by Jennifer Schofield (Piers Williams)

Although Biggles, Algy and Ginger were first and foremost intrepid airmen, they also found time to fall ardently in love.

The most memorable 'Affaire de Coeur" in the Biggles series is the hero's encounter with the beautiful Marie Janis, 'a vision of blonde loveliness, wrapped up in blue silk'. She was the love of his life despite some obvious drawbacks - she was a German Spy, and out to kill him (**The Camels are Coming**).

Algy's turn comes in **Biggles Flies Again** when his infatuation for the President of Bolivia's daughter alarms his comrade: ' Algy, old son, you can't go on flirting with Consuelo unless you intend to marry her!' The worried Biggles urges a hasty retreat whilst the band is still playing jazz - not the Dead March.....

In that brilliant story **Biggles 'Fails to Return'** Ginger falls blazingly in love with Jeanette, a young French girl helping Biggles to escape; his friends tease him but Jeanette's mother smiles knowingly as the young couple artlessly reveal their emotions.

Only Bertie, it seems, was out of it; he was 'afraid of women' and resolutely pushed a dancing girl away when she wanted to sit on his lap in **Orchids for Biggles**. Still, as Biggles commented, 'some men are like that.'

Yet the philandering Algy has no more amorous adventures, Jeanette never reappears to the lovelorn Ginger, and Biggles was doomed to hide his broken heart for over half a century. The reason for all this celibacy was strictly commercial - as Biggles grew older his fans grew younger, and small boys want action, not soppy stuff. Captain W. E. Johns told a reporter that one of his rules was ' no girls, no love interest.'

This restriction must have irked the author, whose own romantic temperament was evident in his impetuous marriage to Maud and his subsequent life-long devotion to Doris. Typically, his sense of humour came to his aid in **Biggles & Co.**, where he introduces Stella Carstairs, 'a remarkably pretty girl', and an airwoman with her own aeroplane. She obviously admires Biggles, and in an adult novel would undoubtedly supply the 'love interest'. Instead, she is fobbed off at every turn - Biggles starts by ungallantly failing to recognise her, when she drops in to see him he sends her home by bus, and the climax comes when Ginger commandeers her aeroplane!

Johns' pragmatic attitude to life extended to women. In his thriller **The Unknown Quantity** his heroes decide that if one of the villains they are seeking out and killing turns out to be a woman, even ' a young rapturous maiden', it won't make any difference! In the Biggles series lack of chivalry reaches its height in **Biggles - Secret Agent** when Biggles and Ginger search for their carrier pigeon in its basket in a forest, only to see von Stalhein's storm troopers find it first. Luckily for the airmen, the soldiers start chasing a young girl, and with a crisp 'cone on' to Ginger, Biggles sprints in the opposite direction. As he later explains, the business was too serious for gallantry - the girl would have to take her luck, but 'it's a tragedy about the pigeon.'

However, Biggles could be gallant upon occasion, to the lovely princess in **Biggles Goes to War,** to the even lovelier Princess Marietta in **Biggles 'Fails to Return'** who could nurse, cook and shoot to kill, and most of all to Marie Janis, when she was grey-haired and bespectacled. In 1965, Bill Johns relented, broke his rules, and allowed his alter-ego to meet his elderly love again, and rescue her from behind the Iron Curtain. Although as Biggles said, 'at my age' he did not contemplate marriage, once Marie was safely in England, he and the reformed Erich von Stalhein,

1.

With a wild screech, the figure leapt to its feet and bounded across the floor

2.

"Don't move," said the Princess, "Drop that pistol."

3.

"I didn't know you smoked, Fraulein."

Illustrations

There are very few illustrations of women in the Biggles series!

1) The picture of the old hag comes form **Biggles Flies South** (Jack Nicholls)
2) The picture of Princess Marietta in action comes from **Biggles Fails to Return** (Stead)
3) The quite glamorous picture of Marie in later life comes from **Biggles Looks Back** (Studio Stead)

who loved her too, went to visit her often. The tale has great feeling and charm, but what Johns' young readers made of it is hard to imagine.

Women play a very minor and subordinate role in the series as a whole, but not because Johns did not love and also respect them. He was a friend of Amy Johnson, and knew just how brave and resourceful airwomen could be. But there are few really forceful women in the stories - there are Marie and Princess Marietta, and perhaps one can count the tough old hag in **Biggles Flies South**. The German airwoman who tried to murder Biggles in a story collected in **Biggles of the Special Air Police** did not amount to much. No woman is Biggles' equal - but that is as it should be; the Captain knew that however good the team, there must only be one leader. Biggles must be unrivalled - which is why, when Captain W. E. Johns created his wonderful WAAF, Worrals, he gave her a series of her own.

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COURTFIELD INCIDENT

by E. Baldock

Chunkley's on a warm summer afternoon: an oasis of shade and anticipatory delights - a gourmet's Arcadia: A table by one of the open windows over-looking the busy Courtfield High Street: Cooling drinks, iced lemon and strawberry tarts. And, in the circumstances not at all unnatural, William George Bunter, an uninvited self-attached member of the party comprising the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove, Tom Redwing and Herbert Vernon-Smith. The waitresses are being kept in constant motion back and forth, no doubt perspiring beneath their cool and charming exteriors, and possibly formulating opinions of varying intensity as they perform their task of keeping a continuous supply of good things en route to the tables.

Good things flowed to Bunter's table in a delicious stream, and the bill went up by leaps and bounds.

It is the proud and not inconsiderable boast of Messrs. Chunkley, and universally recognised in that fair corner of Kent, that they are able - and always willing - to supply at a moment's notice anything from a packet of coloured map pins to a gold painted bedroom suite - a four poster if desired. Therefore all the elements of sacrilege are present when one has to report that, on this particular afternoon, quite suddenly strawberry tarts ceased to be. In short, they had 'run out'.

It is true that demand had been particularly heavy through a combination of the summer day's heat and Billy Bunter's excessive appetite! The rapidity with which he had been demolishing these delicacies had left a number of people at nearby tables almost bereft of speech as they watched, open-mouthed, this exercise in demolition. Never had strawberry tarts vanished so swiftly or completely as they did that afternoon at the Greyfriars' table. Bunter's capacious mouth seemed to absorb them effortlessly. Amazement and incredulity were rife in a considerable area around that particular table. Waitresses were conferring together with many nods and shrugs in odd corners, disbelief writ large upon their faces. Some, it is to be feared, were giggling as they whispered.

"Bless my heart", said one stout lady to her companion, gazing with awe at Bunter.

"He'll do himself a mischief to be sure", the while herself consuming a largish wedge of cherry cake (another Chunkley speciality), so although it was quite probable that Bunter might harm himself, it was perhaps not so likely as that she would inflict damage upon herself!

"I say, you fellows, they say the strawberry tarts have run out, quite disgraceful I think. I've half a mind to have a word with the manager about it. When a fellow chooses to patronise a particular restaurant, especially a public school fellow, he expects to be given service, not to be told that supplies have run out." Billy Bunter was quite pink with indignation. It was a little short of tragic - it was certainly scandalous - that this should have occurred when someone else was paying. Bunter had to be shut up. Bob Cherry remained silent but aimed a vigorous hack beneath the table with a booted foot popularly thought to be the largest in the Greyfriars Remove.

It has long been a generally accepted theory - or is it an old military maxim? - that every bullet has its billet, which billet it will always find in due course. This principle may, with equal confidence, be applied to 'hacks' - especially 'hacks' administered in the dark, as it were. There is a glorious uncertainty in such shots which lends a certain credence to this theory. There were no less than sixteen individual ankles compressed beneath the Greyfriars table that afternoon at Chunkleys. Bob took what he conceived to be a reasonably accurate aim, but like so many aspects of this life, this is where the 'glorious uncertainty' took over. The 'hack' found a billet. There was no doubt about that, thus conforming to the accepted theory to a degree. But it was not Bunter who was the recipient. The anguished howl from Johnny Bull would seem to suggest otherwise - and so it was.

At this point, on the far side of the room two figures appeared in the open doorway and paused, glancing round for a vacant table. One was a tall and angular gentleman possessed of a gimlet eye which swept over the crowded room and appeared to take in everything in one all-seeing gaze. The other was short in stature with a marked tendency to rotundity.

"It is extremely busy this afternoon Quelch," he said. "Yes, Prout", returned Mr Quelch, motioning to a waitress. They were soon accommodated at a secluded table pleasantly screened from the vulgar gaze by a potted palm.

"A cooling beverage Quelch, something cold."

"Tea would be more beneficial, I think, Prout - the cooling effect of tea is very marked on a warm day."

It was during these solumn deliberations that the two Greyfriars masters became aware of a disturbance on the far side of the room. Johnny Bull's agonised roar had caused a momentary silence to fall upon the assembled company, and his immediate reaction had caused the table at which they were sitting to rock wildly, and several plates and glasses, fortunately empty, together with a shower of crumbs crashed to the floor.

"My sakes!" spluttered the stout lady at an adjoining table, coughing and doing her best to dislodge a fragment of cherry cake which had gone down the wrong way, while her companion assisted with the best of intentions by thumping her back with admirable vigour.

Prout's eye, from its distant vantage point, gleamed. He was tired and very warm. Quelch, always an energetic companion had walked him off his feet - almost. These extremities were both hot and not a little sore, as was Prout's humour. But now, suddenly, he felt much better. Retaliation, at least in part, appeared as though by magic a distinct possibility, and Prout was not going to let the opportunity slip by. "Is that Bunter, is that Vernon Smith, I see yonder Quelch, boys of your form I believe, causing a disturbance?" Mr Quelch's gimlet eye gleamed, "Nonsense Prout," he snapped. "Really Quelch, I can see them quite clearly ..." Mr. Quelch paused; he too was looking keenly across the room and he saw equally clearly that it was indeed boys of his form who appeared to be involved in some disturbance. Prout's inuendos concerning his boys were nothing less than anathema to him. It is to be suspected that Prout was aware of this and played with unerring accuracy upon this vulnerable chink in the Remove master's armour, sadly with some degree of success for he never failed to rouse Mr. Quelch's deepest ire.

He frowned and his stern features coloured. He hated to be placed in such a situation, but having been so placed there was no doubt that he would do his duty. His tea-cup poised half-way on its journey to his mouth froze, life seemed for a moment to suspend itself. On the other side of the room events were moving swiftly. Several waitresses looking suitably shocked (but doubtless enjoying the situation as being something outside the usual, somewhat boring routine) were converging upon the table occupied by the Greyfriars fellows to repair the ravages caused by the uproar. A waiter loomed in the offing, moving galleon-like through the complexity of tables - a stout and impressive waiter whose very waistcoat buttons exuded dignity and allegiance to the 'house', his whole attitude proclaiming (almost audibly) that he was prepared to uphold the sacred reputation of Chunkley's to the last drop of his blood.

There followed a hectic ten minutes of explanations and apologies during which both parties managed with admirable calm to 'keep their heads when all about them,' etc. During this time Mr. Quelch, acting upon second and mature reflections decided to hold aloof and trust that the situation would resolve itself more or less amicably, which in fact it did. His turn, he decided grimly would come later. There was one exception. Billy Bunter - although he had escaped a vigorous hack - felt ill -used and thwarted. That a store claiming such a reputation as did Chunkley's should actually run out of strawberry tarts was little short of scandalous (it would have been excusable had they run out of four-poster beds). Fortunately, as everyone agreed, the Owl's opinions and feelings commanded very little attention, except that, once safely outside and a reasonable distance on the way home in a secluded spot, they fell upon him and proceeded forcibly to demonstrate the error of his ways, which correction did not impress Bunter one iota.

It may be of some small interest to record that the stout lady, whose partiality for cherry cake was extremely evident, felt moved at the termination of the fracas to indulge in another cup of tea - 'just to settle my nerves, you know' - and a further slice of Chunkley's excellent cake. Surely she and Billy Bunter would have found common ground on a number of gastronomic levels!

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WILLIAM WHIMSY NO 3 — by Norman Wright

If you were a child in the late 1940s, the chances are that you were one of the nine million young listeners who regularly tuned into "Just William" on the wireless. It is also likely that your parents were part of the equally large adult audience. The thirty minute programmes were originally broadcast at 8 pm. on Tuesday evenings, but the show became so popular with young listeners that it had to be repeated every Sunday afternoon.

The original William was played by John Clark who was later replaced by Julian Denham and then David Spenser. The first few episodes were based on stories taken from the William books, but later episodes were especially written for the series. Writing in "The World Radio and Television Annual" published circa 1946, Rex Diamond said, ".. The reaction to "Just William" by listeners was a pleasant revelation and proved that here,maybe, was a turning point in light entertainment..."

It is perhaps typical of the B.B.C. that whilst vast quantities of highly boring material have been retained in their archives, a less auspicious fate awaited the bulk of popular drama series produced during the 1940s and 1950s. Thousands of the discs on which the programmes were recorded were destroyed and only one episode of "Just William" managed to escape the carnage.

The show's theme tune, composed by Leighton Lucas, was available on sheet music published by B. Feldman and Co. The cover, printed in black and red, bore a photograph of William (John Clark) grimacing as he swallowed some medicine, administered by Mrs. Brown (Betty Bowden). Copies of the sheet music are rare items of William Whimsy.

Editor's Note: We are happy to announce that this year's C.D.Annual will include an article by the radio script-writer Rex Diamond, who was Editor of the **Just William** programmes.

AN EARLY ST. JIM'S STORY

by W.O.G. Lofts

Many years ago now, to be exact in the May 1962 Collectors Digest, I wrote up the results of my research into Charles Hamilton's early writings (that is those prior to his penning the regular St. Jim's and Greyfriars stories in The Magnet and The Gem).

His output for the firm of Trapps Holmes was really astonishing - staggering would be a better word, as he was simply pouring out all types of fiction:

School/Adventure/Detective/Mystery/Romance/Travel/Historical/Sea/and Circus yarns, as well as serials.

Apart from those in his own name there were tales using a dozen pen-names as well, not counting the many anonymous stories which one is certain came from his pen. During the Boer War period he was even writing patriotic war stories of South Africa at the same time as Edgar Wallace was sending back his famous War Despatches to the Daily Mail. Both were regarded as phenominal in their life-time. In Hamilton's case, output was almost unbelievable with him churning out so much material weekly that one concludes he must have been chained to his typewriter!

A full list of all his school stories then found and known was published in 'The Men Behind Boys Fiction' in 1970. This then covered about 97, but since that date others of different names have been discovered, making it over 100 today. His first (about two years earlier than those previously known) was 'Kenyon Academy' in 'World's Comic' on 23 March 1900.

Stories featuring schools with the same name as Greyfriars, Rookwood, Cliff House, and Highcliffe were published some time before the ones we know so well, but, of course, with different settings and scholars. When an author had created so many schools I suppose it was inevitable that names would be repeated, so that Quelch, Wharton, Wingate, Trimble, Railton etc. would be duplicated and appear in some of these early stories.

THE HALFPENNY COMIC. February 18, 1905.

OUR LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.

HOW HOSKINS WON!

A STRANGE TALE OF THE FOOTBALL FIELD.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

St. Jim's (it was really St. James's, but nobody ever called it anything but St. Jim's) St. Jim's College prided itself upon a good many things, but if it ever bragged about one thing more than another, it was its football.

At St. Jim's football was not merely a game, a grand game, as it is everywhere else, but it was a worship, and the high-priest thereof was Bulkeley, the captain of the school.

In the season they talked football at St. Jim's morning, noon and night, they talked it at their meals, they scrambled about it in their [illegible]

and Bulkeley, who sat beside him, said kindly, "Hallo! are you ill, Hosky, old chap?"

Hoskins shook his head, and watched the Professor with eager, almost hungry eyes. He saw the great man subject men and animals to his marvellous influence, and put them through all sorts of antics. And when the professor appealed to the audience for some members thereof to test the genuineness of his performances, Hoskins bobed forward like an arrow from a bow, or rather like a projectile from a 4.7 gun. Perhaps his evident enthusiasm pleased the professor, who say [illegible]

Further recent research brings to light more discoveries, amongst them another 'new' school in 'The Halfpenny Comic'. This was called 'St. Jim's' - which completes the duplication of all his famous schools in the fiction field. The original or famous St. Jim's as we know first appeared in Pluck in November 1906. This one predates it by some 22 months, being dated February 18,1905.

Of course the boys and scene are different (though to be exact no locality is given) but what is highly interesting is the explanation at the beginning of the first story 'that St. Jim's is not the real name of the school. It is actually St. James' College, but every one called it St. Jim's!' A phrase that I have heard before, and since, relating to the famous Tom Merry school in Sussex.

Captain of the school was named Bulkeley, who was also Captain of Games. So too was George Bulkeley of Rookwood in the Boys' Friend starting in 1915.

The main character in this story was Ned Hoskins of the same surname as the well known musician who shared a study with Hobson of the Shell at Greyfriars. Could he have been an elder brother?

The story was certainly competent enough for boys to read. St. Jim's is mad on football, with Hoskins no exception, the only snag being that he cannot play for toffee. A hypnotist comes to the town giving performances that amaze everyone. Hoskins offers the Professor his savings of £11 if he can make him into a star footballer. The Professor accepts, mainly because he needs the money to pay widow Jones his lodging money as he is behind with rent. He plays a blinder in the match, where they beat their rivals 9-0, he scoring most of the goals. Knowing that he could never play like that again, and not having the money to use the hypnotist's services, Hoskins calls it a day, satisfied with his one-off performance.

There were two other stories of St. Jim's in 1905, the last with the title (believe it or not) of 'King Cricket'. But that is another story.

* *

WANTED: £20 each offered for *"Boys Friend Libraries"* featuring BIGGLES. £15 each offered for Biggles jigsaw puzzles. £3 each offered for "Happy Mags". £15 offered for B.F.L. no. 204, "Crooked Gold". Original artwork of Bunter, etc., always wanted. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Telephone: (0923) 32383.

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WANTED: To complete a long run: GEM 1589.
MARY CADOGAN, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 2PY.

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CLIFF HOUSE HOLIDAY DIARY OCTOBER 1990
by Margery Woods

Report to Colonel Carstairs from Jemima Carstairs

"I've been thinking," announced Jemima suddenly. "Putting my old brain to work, you know. I think I've got the jolly old mystery nailed down."

Yes, Guv, I can quite understand that you require a full account of exactly what did happen on Santos. And yes, while nobody likes to be wrong, I frankly and fearlessly admit that I was wrong, at least half wrong. I just hope it wasn't too embarrassing for you, old spartan, all those enquiries in the corridors of jolly old power, what! I hereby grovel abjectly. Again, I grovel! (Enough grovelling? Or should I complete the obeisances to all four corners of the planet?) No? Righto, I'll get on with the old finger exercises.

You see, being held incommunicado on the esteemed Gloriana that day, I didn't know about the nocturnal party Babs and Co suddenly decided to throw that night. Nor did I know that our Fatima would wake up to find her playmates flown and promptly decided to find out where the feast was happening that she had been so cruelly barred from. You'll recall that Bessie is not the quietest and most discreet of girls when she's on the track of grub. Mr Margesson awakened to investigate, and discovered that Fatima and himself were apparently the only occupants, apart from staff, still tucked up at the villa. All the kidlets gone, and both Rex and Felicity among the missing, and Aunt Mary sound asleep over her book on the patio, having not heard a murmur.

But I must go back to the yacht, where Captain Skegs and Peter had been helping me to co-ordinate certain bits and notions to come up with a theory. It was Babs' frieze for the form project that gave me the idea, and Peter, who is super-de-wiz at drawing and gets all the jolly old perspectives right, made a map showing the layout of the caves and their proximity under the monastery ruins. He marked where Babs and Clara were shut in that night and the results were rather interesting.

You will remember that Babs and Clara found some horrid dank passages which came to an end among rubble and a deep pothole. Well, it wasn't a pothole, though it was too dark for them to see much that first night. So I suppose it was natural that the second expedition included more gear and means of illumination. None of it linked up with the caves below — at least maybe it did once upon a time, but it did link up with something very very eerie (pause while I shudder, Guv!) and absolutely stunning. But I digress. Must marshall facts in proper order!

I'd managed to garner quite a bit of gen from the locals during my imbibing sessions at the taverna. One fisherman's young son spoke quite good English, after a couple of seasons he'd spent in the big wide world of the tourists' fleshpots, after which he'd decided that the old island and the girl next door were more in his line. He helped me sort out the old tales about the treasure, which I think we should consider with an open mind. It is easy to dismiss old tales as garbled hearsay, but on a small island like Santos which has scarcely been touched by the improvements, ahem, of modern civilisation, and the families can trace their heritage back for many generations, it is quite possible that the myths grew out of facts. We knew there was a wreck, we knew there was a treasure, and we knew the wreck has been well and truly searched, not only by authorised marine archeologists but by centuries of curious and adventurous small boys. Most of the village homes have the odd coin or simple relic found in the area, but what of the true treasure? We know for certain that Turkish pirates

regularly raided this group of islands, and we know they sacked the monastery, taking many of the precious relics from it, which would be beyond price by today's values. Which brings us to Mr Margesson's part in the mystery.

Celeste's grandfather became interested in Santos purely from the monastery angle. Last year he spent a few days with a crony who was staying on Majorca to research the Chopin/George Sand sojourn there. Apparently this friend is a writer, and busy with a new book about the composer. Of course the monastery at Valdemosa is famous now and decked out with tourist gimmicks, Chopin's piano and picture postcards sort of thing. Mr Margesson suddenly got the bug to do a spot of research himself — not on jolly old music but on the monasteries dotted all over the Med area, especially the eastern end. And that seemed to start it all, Guv.

Celeste says he started haunting the antiquarian book dealers for ancient tomes on the subject, and a contact got him assistance from the Greek authorities, there was even an article about him in some journal or other. That was the signal for Rex and Felicity to ingratiate themselves into the scene. After he found a particularly interesting reference to Santos in the book that went missing he decided to make the island the focal point of his first research. It seems that St. Spiridion's here is supposed to have a hidden cell sculpted out of the rock foundation, and this was once a hiding place for the monastery's plate and precious books, where they could be concealed during times of trouble. But the secret of its entrance was lost when the last monk died and took the secret with him. That was four hundred or more years ago. I gather this was quite usual --- the hiding places, I mean --- in those days, and other churches and monasteries more vulnerable would entrust their relics to a hidden cell, as a sort of safe deposit. Which brings us to the logical conclusion, Guv; what better place to conceal the treasure from that very special ship when it was wrecked? Fearing the pirates who then swarmed in the area, the noble old captain would desperately salvage as much as he was able of his cargo and take it to the monks for safe keeping, before he tried to return to his lord to tell him the treasure was safe. But what happened to him? No one will ever know now, alas.

I wish I'd been there with Babs and the girls that night when they broke through and found the cell. It must have been the moment of a lifetime, Guv,to enter where no foot had trod for four hundred years and see the glory there within.

It was Simpkins who spotted the cutter homing in just before midnight, one of those really fast jobs like the drug smugglers use. No lights, and a distinctly sinister look in the moonlight. We didn't stop to chew over the matter, I think our instinct was tacit and unanimous. We piled into the launch and made for the inlet by the wreck. It's a devil of a climb up to the ruins, but I guess we broke the records, and we were just haring for the eastern end when we heard a scream. I knew it was Mabs, and then Clara was yelling. We plunged down the old stairs, sliding and stumbling along those rough passages. It's a positive warren down there. Clara was still yelling — someone had annoyed her — and we followed the sound. Then suddenly a body crashed into us, then another. The language was somewhat naughty, what, but some of it was in Greek, which was just as well! Then Peter and Simpkins were grappling with the utterers of the aforesaid language, ahem, and through the scrimmage somebody else fluttered and Clara hove into view, yelling, "Stop her! She got a handful of the stuff!"

I was the nearest and managed to stick out a foot. Better than trying to fight by Queensberry rules at a time like that. Dear Felicity went flying, right into Peter's arms, which was more than she deserved, and rainbow of light showered through the torch rays. There was still a mix-up, while we sorted out who was supposed to be fighting whom, and that was when yours truly began to feel very small indeed. So should our tomboy, but you know Clara: never give in.

The objectionable Rex was working under cover for the Greek police, to try to nail the latest international art thieves. The two big bods Clara objected to so much were greek detectives, and one insignificant little man we'd scarcely noticed as he mooned about the island not saying boo to a goose, turned out to be the gang's head lookout man. How blind can a Carstairs get? Even Mr Margesson didn't know Rex's real purpose on the Island, and of course, it was now obvious why he wanted us out of the way; we were definitely de trop. Clara says we cramped his style too much!

But Felicity quite took the biscuit, that ingenuous infant who didn't look as if she had the brains of a backward second-former was one of the stalwarts of the gang. Good cover, what! Once it was public knowledge after that magazine feature and the gang discovered that Santos was Mr Margesson's destination and the monastery his main focus of interest, Felicity's instructions were to attach herself to Celeste, which she did with considerable success. Hm, maybe a third-former's craftiness!

Oh, I mustn't forget the shuddery part. The opening that looked like a pothole was actually a shaft which had once had a ladder access, and below was another passage leading to the cell. Marjorie almost keeled over, and the rest of us turned a trifle pallid. For the cell had a guardian. No-one will ever know exactly what happened, and his poor bones will never tell.

But if you'd seen the treasure he guarded. Treasure from the ancient east. Precious gems set in beaten gold, wrought into collars and armlets and ankle bands. A fabulous mask inlaid with pearls and lapis lazuli, a dagger of bronze chased with silver and an ivory hilt. Necklaces, bracelets, marvellous head-dresses, three glorious caskets filled with jewels and gold coins. So many exquisite things of unguessed at antiquity. We couldn't take it all in at one sighting. And there was the monks'own treasure. Three great carved chests holding their church plate and books, and manuscripts of illuminated script on vellum. Rex wouldn't allow anyone to touch these, he sealed the chests until the restoration experts get here.

Well, Felicity and the gang she'd summoned in the boat are now in jail. Mr Margesson is getting in touch with you, Guv, and I gather the Greek Minister of Arts is delighted with the outcome of the Santos Affair! So don't judge your spartan chip too harshly! Even if the villains turned out to be goodies it all came right in the end --- well didn't it ...?

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Fifty years on from The Battle of Britain and the launch of W.E. Johns's **Worrals of the W.A.A.F.,** it seems appropriate to draw C.D. readers' attention to this super history of the women's air services. As well as its extremely informative and lively text, it carries a wonderful selection of atmospheric photographs .
(Patrick Stephens Ltd., £14.95)

From W.O.G. Lofts, London

Frank Richards in his Autobiography, gave the information that the name of Tom Merry his famous school-boy at St. Jim's, was taken from a famous black and white illustrator who was around at that period of 1907.

Recently whilst perusing some Victorian magazines, I came across an article about him, and found it most interesting. Seemingly, the real-life Merry was a Cockney, being born at Bow, London, in 1855. At an early age he showed great talent for art, later travelling all over Europe to gain experience. Later still he went to South America, gaining experience all the time. He was specially noted for the amazing speed at which he drew, as well as being extremely versatile in all other areas in the Art world. He even promoted plays, painting all the scenery.

A Bohemian, Tom Merry dressed in a colourful style. One picture I saw of him showed him in a big lace collar, apparently wearing a sort of Lord Fauntleroy suit! Readers may well recall poor Tom Merry arriving at St. Jim's in a similar outfit, dressed in this fashion at the insistance of Miss Fawcett, his Guardian. Whether Frank Richards had seen this photograph, and was inspired to use the idea for an amusing entrance for Tom, one will probably never now know.

From Mark Taha, London

Reading a Rookwood story in the **Schoolboys' Own Library** I was struck by Mornington's hiring a motor car to take the team to a cricket match. I find it hard to imagine a car big enough to hold eleven passengers plus the driver. May I ask those who remember the period if there were any cars like that in 1920? (I think the story was written about then.)

From Ian H. Godden, Victoria, Australia:

The March of the Centenarians by Brian Doyle (August C.D.) is a splendid article but I would like to correct him on one small point; Gerard Fairlie's autobiography was called **With Prejudice.** The wrong title **Without Prejudice,** is given in **The Men Behind Boys' Fiction** (by Lofts and Adley) which is, no doubt, what led Brian Doyle astray.

I particularly enjoyed Jim Sutcliffe's piece on Archie Glenthorne, a great favourite of mine in the Nelson Lee series and one of the best of the

E. S. Brooks characters. I also liked Mark Taha's excellent article on Frank Richards' moral code and agree that it was a worthwhile one.

From Revd. P. Hobson, Woodhall Spa

I am sorry that nobody answered my query about the Bunter short stories in Comet. I should have thought a volume of Greyfriars short stories would be popular, that is, if they were written by Frank Richards. I have always loved short stories, and I think it is a great pity that all the story magazines have disappeared. The last to go was **London Mystery Mag.**, but the one I liked the best was **Suspense**, which went in with **Argosy** shortly before that finished.,, Perhaps an article on adult story magazines would not come amiss in C.D.?

Editor's Note: I share the Revd Hobson's love of good short stories, which I find particularly satisfying as bedtime reading. (Once I get launched into a long story or novel I tend to go on reading into the small hours until my eyes nearly fall out!) Some authors, of course, were masters - or mistresses - of the short story rather than the full length book: Richmal Crompton is a case in point, for generally every chapter of a William book was a complete and perfectly structured episode, originally written for magazine publication. It would be good to know more about the Greyfriars stories in Comet, and whether C.D. readers feel that these might make an attractive collection, if reprinted.

It is always intriguing to clear up a literary mystery,no matter how small. In **Denise's Diary** (November 1989 C.D.) Dennis Bird referred to **The Tyrant of Ranalpur, a Schoolgirl's Own Library** story by Clive Bancroft, about whom nothing seemed to be known. Through the good offices of Robert Whiter during his recent trip from California to England, I met Colin Austin, whose father was Stanley Austin. As many readers will know, Austin was not only a prolific writer of Boys' stories (in his own name and as 'Frank Richards' and 'Martin Clifford' substitutes in the Magnet and Gem) but of exciting and dramatic tales for girls (as Sheila Austin). Colin Austin had come across Ray Hopkins' response (C.D. February) to Dennis Bird's article, which speculated on the possible real name of **The Tyrant of Ranalpur**'s author and commented 'We shall never know for sure, now'. Colin Austin is delighted to be able to confirm that in fact it was his father who wrote as Clive Bancroft. He has given me some interesting and amusing information about how that particular story came to be written, as well as much other fascinating detail about his father's work, which I shall be reporting fully in a forthcoming article in C.D.

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A CHILDREN'S CLASSIC, COLOURFUL CRIMES AND COMIC BOOKS

by Mary Cadogan

In my view one of the best children's stories ever written is Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden. This perfect poor-little-rich-girl-finds-herself tale has now been republished by Heinemann in facsimile (£12.95) so that the delightful 1911 colour illustrations by Charles Robinson are glowingly conveyed; best of all, his line-drawn end-papers, long since dropped, have been resurrected.

This story of the spoiled and sour small girl (Mary) with her dispirted invalid cousin (Colin) finding health, vitality and happiness through tending their secret garden is timeless; it is well worth re-reading every few years for the sheer sense of well-being that it produces in readers of all ages.

A Classic English Crime (Pavilion Books - £12.99) is a splendid collection of specially written detective stories to mark the Centenary of that Mistress of Crime - Agatha Christie. It is compled by Tim Heald, and contributors include Julian Symons, H.R.F. Keating, Simon Brett, Catherine Aird and several other giants of the sleuthing genre. Mysteries meander from serene country houses and village fetes to great wicked cities; from dinner-table poisoning to a body found in a trunk at a station on the Brighton line. Sometimes bizarre and always baffling, these 1990 stories are redolent of the Golden Age of detective fiction.

The American Comic Book Catalogue (Mansell - £40.00) has been prepared by Denis Gifford, who has written so many nostalgic works for book and comic collectors. He has now produced a catalogue of 'the Evolutionary Era' of American comic books. This is very much a reference book which - disappointingly in view of its subject - has no pictures apart from the one on its cover. However, it is almost certainly the first comprehensive charting of American comic books of this very important period (1884 - 1939). These are wide-ranging and frequently elusive for collectors and students of the genre. Denis gives detailed information about dates, publishers, orginal prices and contents of 472 categories of books featuring characters as assorted as cowboys, detectives, the Komical Katzenjammers, Little Orphan Annie, Buster Brown, Mickey Mouse, Blondie and Dashwood, Popeye, Charlie Chaplin and dozens of others.

The high price of this book may put it beyond the range of many collectors although, of course, it should hopefully find its way into public and reference libraries.

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WANTED by Collector: Pre-1970 Williams, Bunters, Blytons, Biggles, Brent-Dyers, in dustwrappers. Also Rupert and other Annuals, Comic giveaways, Original artwork, associated Ephemera. High prices paid, or exchanged. JOHN BECK, 29 Mill Road, Lewes, Sussex.

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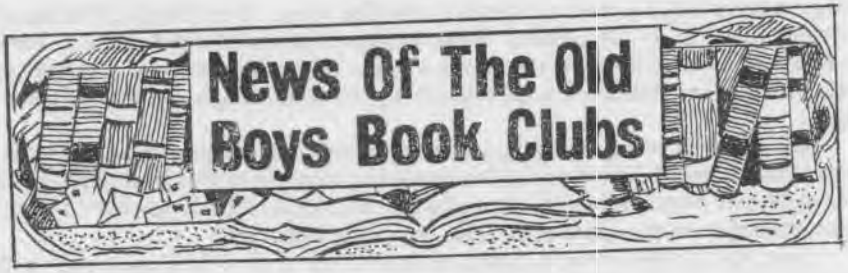
A
CLASSIC
ENGLISH
CRIME
Edited by TIM HEALD
13 Stories for the Christie Centenary
from the Crime Writers' Association
CWA



Cambridge Club

For our September gathering we met in the Old School House, Longstanton, home of our Secretary, Tony Cowley. For the initial meeting in the 1990/1991 season we held the usual Club A.G.M. as well as having a preliminary discussion of plans for celebrating our 20th Anniversary next May.

Bill Lofts presented a very stimulating talk on the other Old Boys'Book Clubs. Fascinating reminiscences. It is always good to hear what the other clubs in the common network provide (both now and in the past). The C.D.Reports flesh out the former, of course.

Later, we heard an audio tape of a broadcast on Radio Cambridgeshire concerning both the Club and the Southport Eagle Exhibition.

Adrian Perkins

London Club

A fine turn-out for the September meeting at the Ealing Liberal Hall. Our guest speaker was Rex Diamond, script writer for Tommy Handley, Will Hay, and probably best known as editor of the William Radio Shows of the 1950s. The audience was totally enthralled as Rex related many anecdotes a of life at the B.B.C. in the 40s and 50s.

Norman Wright gave us a quiz on school and detective fiction, which was followed by Roger Jenkins a with a Greyfriars puzzle. Memory Lane reading as usual from Bill Bradford, and finally an amusing short cricket story from our Chairman, Brian Doyle.

Next Meeting - Richmond Adult and Community College on Sunday 14 October. Please bring your own comestibles.

Graham Bruton

Northern Club

For the first time ever, as far as the writer knows, the Northern Section of the Old Boys' Book Club met outside the couny of Yorkshire: on a fine sunny afternoon on 8 September ten of us were at the home of Bruce and Geraldine Lamb at Macclesfield, Cheshire.

The whole house was open for our investigations: virtually every room had books neatly stacked on shelves (Bruce apparently constantly organising the fixture a of more of these!) placed in drawers and cubby-holes. What a treasure trove was to be found: we all discovered gems of a true nature - items long forgotten or even our

having no knowledge of their existence in the first place. Geraldine's collection of schoolgird books is very impressive: Bruce had his Dickens and other classics: Their son John had a complete set of the Howard Baker Facsimiles and their younger son James had Biggles, William, a large collection of modern annuals and his war games hobby.

The study tea was outstanding, and even Bunter could not have done full justice to that. Home cooked cold meats and home baking were enjoyed by all and the choice of desserts was mouth watering. Mrs Mimble had really done us proud! Toddy's packet of sardines in the centre of the table was politely declined!

After tea, a mini formal meeting to discuss our visit to Midland Club on 29 September, the visit of our Co-President Mary Cadogan on 13 October and lunch on that day. Bruce presented us with the outline of the programme he was organising for next year and already most dates are filled. It will be an exciting and stimulating programme as ever.

After being in the kind hospitality of the Lamb family for over five hours it was reluctantly time for us to depart at 8.00 pm. after giving a hearty vote of thanks to our hosts.

Johnny Bull Minor

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ST JUDE'S AND TOPHAM by H. Heath

The Fourth Form at Highcliffe was a splendid creation by Charles Hamilton, and was a source of rich material for some high quality stories in the Magnet. Highcliffe was a major star on the Greyfriars stage, and it followed that two other Schools, St. Jude's and Redclyffe, could only hope to have an occasional walk on part.

However, whenever I read a Magnet which has St. Judes as the opposition at a football or cricket match, I am reminded of the Eric Wilmot series of 1936.

This series although it had an identical plot to the earlier and memorable Victor Cleeve series of 1928 in the Gem, is a firm favourite of mine. The St. Jude's v. Topham (Wilmot's School) football match at St. Jude's was featured in the first issue, and what happened immediately afterwards was crucial to the plot and was the starting point of the story.

Bunter, who had gone to St. Jude's the same afternoon in a vain search of the Famous Five, was a solitary Greyfriars' onlooker amongst a crowd of St. Jude's fellows and about a dozen from Topham. He had arrived towards the end of the game in which Topham defeated their opponents 4-1, with Wilmot scoring all four goals.

The Wilmot series covered six issues, with St. Jude's and Topham being referred to constantly. Bunter also repeatedly alluded to Wilmot's tremendous display in a football match, but for reasons of his own he refused to say either where it had taken place or for whom Wilmot had played. As far as I know, never in the Magnet was the name of St. Jude's mentioned so many times. Furthermore, another rare experience: in one chapter there was even reported speech by Lunn, the junior captain of St. Jude's in conversation with the Famous Five. It was as a result of this chance meeting with Lunn that Harry Wharton & Co. learnt of Wilmot's great display in the match, and of his four goals.

After this brief appearance in the limelight, St. Jude's was returned to the customary position back stage to join Redclyffe, and Abbotsford from the Gem.

What of Topham? Did it disappear for all time after the ending of the Series? I had hoped that this School, said to have been located in Surrey, was the same Topham that appeared in the Mascot School Boy Series by Hamilton, in 1947.

On this matter, I found it interesting to see the reference made to Topham in the Magnet Companion '77 Directory. In the review of the Greyfriars Press Volume 14 which included the first four issues of the Wilmot Series, the writer under the name of "Quidnunc" stated on page 134, that Wilmot was sacked from Topham which was introduced by Frank Richards in post-war publications. There is little doubt that this was a reference to the Mascot Series. It was unfortunate that the review went on to say that Eric Wilmot was the nephew of Mr. Capper, the Master of the Upper Fourth, instead of Mr. Hacker of the Shell.

I have read only one of the Mascot slim booklets "Top Study at Topham", and unfortunately for the cause of continuity, there is no mention of Wilmot or of Raleigh the junior captain. In addition, the Topham in the Mascot was set in Buckinghamshire.

It was with sad reluctance that I also came to the conclusion that it was another case of Hamilton's fondness for repeating some names. (This view had been referred to previously by Eric Fayne, in C. D. 458, following my suggestion that the Eric Wilmot series had been neglected in the columns of the C.D.)

Hamilton was certainly in the habit of repeating names, and Topham easily fell into this category. Thus, there was Topham of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood and in the Magnet (No. 925) there appeared for a fleeting moment, Mr. Topham, a Master at Redclyffe School. Then a surprise! In the early days of the Magnet, No. 138 of 1910 vintage, Ponsonby the then junior captain of Highcliffe stated that a challenge to play a football match had been received from Topham.

In discussing the part played by St. Jude's in this story, I feel that it is impossible to ignore that of Topham. To me, the Schools are synonymous with the excellent Eric Wilmot Series which was related in Magnet Nos. 1457, 1458, 1460 ,1469 and 1470.

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GUESS WHO?

It would be a trick question to ask you the name of the William story connected with this picture. Actually it does NOT represent William, his friends, or Hubert Lane, but is an illustration made by Thomas Henry for a school Story for LITTLE FOLKS magazine.

CONQUEST ON THE ROAD by MARK CALDICOTT

E.S. Brooks thrives on an obvious love of motoring and the highway in telling his tales. They are a recurring theme in the Norman Conquest saga. In telling those stories over a thirty-year period there is reflected the changing fashions in the motor car, particularly in those owned by the Conquests themselves.

When we first meet Conquest he is on foot, walking down a country lane, his feet crunching in the snow. He has just arrived from India and is on his way to confront the despicable Geoffrey Mortimer *(Mr. Mortimer Gets The Jitters, 1938)*. It is at Mortimer's house that he meets Joy Everard, and together they ride away in Joy's M.G. sports car. It is not until we meet him again *(Vultures Ltd., 1938)* that he owns a car, a Hispano Suiza roadster. In escaping from Count Rurik Voegler's men Conquest sacrifices this car, sending it crashing over a cliff, and it is the replacement Hispano which features in subsequent adventures.

Britain goes to war, the air raids on London commence, and a crippled Dornier crashes onto Conquest's Bayswater home, destroying both it and the Hispano which is found "thirty yards from where he had left it, upside down, shattered, a mere heap of junk" *(Six Feet of Dynamite, 1942)*. Joy is injured, and Conquest is angry. He undertakes a suicidal mission behind enemy lines, but, of course, returns triumphant.

Conquest's move to a new home in the West End coincides with a change of car. He acquires a custom-built, semi-racing road car, the Pace Special, from the racing driver J.J. Pace. It is his initial over-enthusiasm in driving home the Pace Special which leads to a minor road accident. As a consequence he volunteers as temporary driver of the Midnight Express, a state-of-the-art delivery wagon, running into trouble en route *(Blond For Danger, 1943)*.

The Pace Special is not always too reliable. It is because of a breakdown that Norman returns home on a train, and rescues a would-be suicide from the track. This leads Conquest to a very sticky set of circumstances arising from which he is tried for murder *(Killer Conquest, 1947)*.

The first saloon car owned by the Conquests for everyday use belongs to Joy. After her M.G. she progresses to an Alvis, and then to a Jaguar saloon. It is the Jaquar which is used whenever the Pace Special is considered too conspicuous. In addition to these main vehicles, we discover from time to time that Conquest has other odd motor cars tucked away in various locations. One particular model is a battered but deceptive old saloon which hides beneath its bonnet a super-charged engine. This is kept on standby in a lock-up garage.

Eventually Conquest acquires an additional car, a Mercedes 300 saloon, which gradually gains favour over the Pace Special *(Conquest*

After Midnight, 1957). The Pace Special comes to be regarded as an expensive toy which stands "in the garage, unused, and more or less unwanted". When it is wrecked by an escaping villain, Norman confesses that it was "a brute to drive" and that he was "glad to be rid of her" *(Death On The Hit Parade, 1958)*.

The search for a replacement for the Pace Special takes Norman to Paris where he is reported to have clinched a deal on a "wonderful new French sports car". Conquest's return home is delayed, however, by a spell of knight errant activity against Parisian gangsters *(The Big Brain, 1959)*. Strangely, the Paris deal must have fallen through, since the French car does not appear in future episodes. Conquest retains the Mercedes 300 until he exchanges it for a Lagonda Rapide *(Conquest In The Underworld 1962)*. The Lagonda is the final car in the saga, a name reminiscent of the roadsters of the thirties when the saga commenced.

But we should go beyond the cars in looking at E.S. Brooks' stories. It is the road itself which is a favourite starting point for Conquest adventures. If we look merely at stories which start on the road we find at least eleven of the forty-nine fall into that category. And what a variety of incidents is conjured up in the imagination of ESB! Consider the following: a girl cyclist saved from a falling tree *(Cavalier Conquest, 1944)*; a young girl running into the road in front of the Pace Special, fleeing from a wicked uncle *(The Conquets Touch, 1948)*; a foot striking the window of a passing Buick *(The Spot Marked X, 1948)*; a small dog thrown under the wheels of Joy's Alvis *(Duel Murder, 1949)*; an escaped lion leaping over the top of the Conquests' car *(Conquest After Midnight, 1957)*; being mobbed by demonstraters in Whitehall *(Get Ready to Die, 1961)* seeing a parachutist bail out of an exploding jet plane *(Conquest in the Underworld, 1962)*; stopping the car to get rid of a wasp *(Conquest Overboard, 1964)*; and rescuing a would-be suicide from the Thames *(Conquest Likes It Hot, 1965)*.

One final mystery. In 'The Spot Marked X' the topic of adventures starting on the road is being discussed. Conquest reminisces:

> "a year or two ago young Mavis Grant dashed
> out into the road after she refused to do a
> fan dance for our old pal Rurik Voegler".

Consider this. Conquest met Voegler for the first time in *'Vultures Ltd.'*, at the end of which Voegler appeared to commit suicide by jumping from a window into the sea. He reappears in *'Mr. Ball of Fire' (1946)* with a clear indication that there has been no meeting between himself and Conquest in the meantime. By the end of this story Voegler is definitely dead. Thus not only is the Mavis Grant affair unchronicled, but it is impossible. Is this just a lapse by ESB, just a throwaway remark to pad out his story, or has anyone an explanation?

And a footnote: What cars did E.S. Brooks himself drive? It would be interesting to know whether he ever owned any of the cars he ascribed

to his heroes, or whether, like his readers, he only aspired to them in the fantasies embodied in his stories.

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GREYFRIARS FLOOR SPACE

by L. Susans

I don't know how frequently floor plans of Greyfriars School have appeared in the Magnet or, more likely, the Holiday Annuals. I don't have any old Holiday Annuals and the only floor plans of the old school that I have seen in recent years are those included in J.S. Butcher's Prospectus published in 1965. Mr. Butcher has undoubtedly taken these from one of the Holiday Annuals but when they first appeared I've no idea. I don't know who drew them; I suspect it was the sub writer who introduced a First Form in one series of stories in the Magnet as a First Form classroom is shown on the plan. It is unbelievable that so many errors could be included that are in disagreement with the stories penned by Frank Richards.

Mr. Richards did not, as far as I recall, give any detailed description of Greyfriars but he was consistant on several matters. For example, the Sixth Form studies were always said to be on the ground floor and each also served as a bedroom for the occupant. The Form Rooms were also on ground level. In the Prospectus plans the studies of the Sixth are shown on the first floor with separate bedrooms on the second. Also all the form rooms are shown on the first floor. Again, according to Frank Richards, the Second and Third Forms used their classrooms for their social activities but these plans include, apart from the Recreation and Games Room (The Rag), a Junior Common Room, a Fags' Room, and every form seems to have a Club Room while the place is littered with Lounges and Writing Rooms. If all these amenities existed I hardly think the Second and Third would go anywhere near the classroom except for lessons and perhaps Prep. Greyfriars was, after all, a comparatively small school with about 200 pupils so I would have thought that most of them, the Lower School at least, would have used the Rag.

I don't doubt that these points have been raised before in Collectors' Digest, probably when the Prospectus was first published but I wasn't a member then. When I was a schoolboy in 1928, a school chum in my form showed me a Holiday Annual dated about 1923 which contained a different set of Greyfriars floor plans from those shown in the Prospectus. I can't remember any details as I could only take a quick glance at the book under cover of the desk during a lesson. Perhaps one of our members could confirm the date of the annual that I referred to.

Even the most accomplished architect would find it difficult to produce any plans which related to all the stories. There is so much we do not know. I remember reading in some of the older Magnets that the Tuck Shop was in the corner of the Close while in the later stories it was in the corner of the Quad. We are uncertain what facilities were at the school. I

assume they had a Laboratory; I believe it did receive a mention in one of Frank Richards' plays in a Holiday Annual of long ago; but we never hear of a Science master. In a post war Bunter book M. Charpentier was taking detention or giving a lesson in Classroom No. 10. There were seven forms at Greyfriars, ignoring the sub writer's First, so what were Classrooms Nos. 8 and 9? Perhaps Mr. Lascelles and Herr Otto Gans had their own classrooms, although I would have thought they would have held lessons in the various formrooms. So we aren't really sure how many classrooms existed.

I assume that there was a Fives Court at the School. Fives bats are frequently mentioned, but they never seem to come into contact with a ball, only the tight trousers of W.G. Bunter! Was there a swimming pool at the school? No mention seems to be made about tennis or hockey either. I did see a reference in one story to the Greyfriars Rifle Range.

A clear picture cannot be obtained from some of the stories. I remember one amusing episode when Coker, as ever at loggerheads with the Remove, clambered onto the roof and dropped stink bombs which he intended for the Rag down the chimney of Masters Common Room. This would imply that the two rooms were adjacent, but if Mr. Richards wrote another story with a similar plot the chimney could turn out to be Mr. Prout's or perhaps the Headmaster's.

When one considers the numerous occasions when petty crooks 'on the run' have taken refuge in Study No. 1 in the Remove the impression is given that the study must have been near the main door.

None of these things is really important. Frank Richards and his young readers were more interested in the story than the exact location of a certain room and that is how it should be.

There is just one other point I would like to mention. In Dr. Peter McCalls excellent book 'The Greyfriars Guide' the following information is given. I have condensed it somewhat: 'The Quadrangle is a three sided structure the front of which is open. In one corner is the old Abbot's House now converted into the School Tuck Shop. One side of the Quad on the ground floor contains the Sixth Form Studies, in front of which is Sixth Form Green. On the other side of the Quad are Masters' Studies and Common Room. On the first floor are many of boys' studies while the second floor is devoted to dormitories. The central part of the building contains the imposing Archway leading to the Close which lies behind. To the side of the arch is the main entrance leading to the Hall and Dining Hall'. An entry referring to the Close describes it as 'an enclosed quadrangle behind the main facade. It is surrounded by the Gymnasium, Chapel, and Kitchen quarters."

I don't know where Dr. McCall got this information. I doubt if it was from the writings of Frank Richards. I'd be interested to know. Perhaps there is another set of plans, if so it's a pity that they were not used in the Prospectus.

Just one other thing. I have never seen anything of a smilar set of plans for St. Jim's or Rookwood. Were there ever any? I should be very interested to hear the views of other readers of the Digest. Who knows, perhaps we have a member with architectural leanings who could produce a new version, but I don't envy him the task.

* *

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