STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 46 No. 546 JUNE 1992

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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The Editor's Chat

THE SMALL SCREEN...

A little while ago I was asked to set questions for B.B.C. TV's MASTERMIND on Richmal Crompton and her William books. It was an intriguing assignment, and I gather frorn your letters that many C.D. readers watched the programme when it was transmitted towards the end of April and shared my pleasure that the contestant did well with my questions. If Richmal Crompton could have known about this particular MASTERMIND programme I am sure that she would have chuckled at William's elevation to such erudite levels. Bunter, of course, had preceded him when, two or three years ago, Frank Richards' Greyfriars stories were the chosen subject of another MASTERMIND contender.

Our hobby was again featured on the small screen in May, when your Editor appeared on NOEL'S ADDICTS. My discussion with Noel Edmonds about girls' story papers was prefaced by a vintage schoolroom scene and a play-let inspired by Angela Brazil and DAISY PULLS IT OFF. It was good to be able to display to such a vast audience pictures of our favourite Cliff House and Morcove characters, and to discuss their influence on girls growing up in the 1920s and '30s. I also enjoyed making the point that the SCHOOLFRIEND, SCHOOLGIRL, SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN and many other

weeklies of those decades were **not** comics but story paper, which offered the proverbial 'jolly good read'.

...AND WIDE OPEN SPACES

My husband, Alex, and I have recently returned from a truly wonderful visit to America. Arriving on the day of the Los Angeles riots (which we then knew nothing about) we drove a hired car along boulevards and freeways which were soon to become the locale of fires, looting and violent incidents. However, apart from commenting on the unusual slowness of traffic here and there, we noticed nothing untoward (although several days later we saw many charred and burnt out buildings).

We spent a week at Ojai, a small, orange-growing town near Santa Barbara where we have several friends and work associates. We paid a brief visit to that stalwart contributor to the C.D., Bob Whiter, and his wife Marie in their hospitable home, which despite being located somewhere in the heart of Los Angeles is redolent with the atmosphere of Greyfriars, Sherlock Holmes and so much else that is 'Forever England'. Another highlight of our stay in southern California was a day at the fabulous Paul Getty Museum in Malibu.

We next went on a most exciting trip into Arizona, Utah and Nevada (where shades of Charles Hamilton's Rio Kid and many old Western movies seemed to abound). We saw magnificent sights whose scale was truly mind-boggling. Most memorable were the gigantic sweep and awesome intricacies of the Grand Canyon (which I've wanted to see since reading about it as a child in one of Arthur Mee's papers), the dramatic, towering rocks of Bryce Canyon, the serenity of the vale of Zion, and the astounding, unbelievably over-the-top glitz of the hotels and gambling casinos of Las Vegas.

A great trip - although it is still good to be home again for the bluebells and the lush beauty of the countryside in May, and to have some time again for reading.

MARY CADOGAN

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* *

By

ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 243 - SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY No. 380 - "THE ROOKWOOD RAGGERS"

As the Rookwood reprints continued over the years in the Schoolboys' Own Library, most of the major series in the old Boys' Friend weeklies were used up, and some later numbers of the monthly library were just collections of single stories given some generalised title like "The Rookwood Raggers". This did not occur in the case of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's reprints, though one single number was occasionally used to fill up a volume containing a short series. The difference originated in the fact that the Magnet and Gem both ran for over thirty years, whereas the weekly Boys' Friend featured Rookwood for only eleven years, and each story contained a maximum of ten chapters and often rather less. Despite this, the collections of short stories were far from disappointing, and No. 380 was perhaps the most impressive of them all.

Charles Hamilton had a propensity to introduce the occasional tramp into his stories, and only Gunner could have believed that one called William Henry Dalton was the disreputable brother of his own form-master, and only Gunner could have broadcast it round the school, firmly convinced at the same time that he was shielding Mr. Dicky Dalton. The second story dealt with Tubby Muffin's famous gold pocket-watch that his uncle had given to him; its brilliance often outshone the sun itself. Putty Grace abstracted it and pinned it to Tubby Muffin's coat tail when he went to complain about its loss, but when it disappeared a second time it was a more serious matter, though Putty got the blame.

In 1951, Charles Hamilton wrote to me about Wharton's character, and then added the fact that Lovell was another working of the same theme. "Are there not many fellows who, being assured that they know best, are liable to become a little overbearing?" Nothing better illustrated the truth of this than the third story, which revolved around a Head's inspection. Peele got to know about it in advance, and left the end study in such a mess that all its occupants were caned by Dr. Chisholm. Lovell led the Fistical Four on one mistaken mission of vengeance, and then tried to lead them on another. Lovell also featured in the last story, when Mr. Greely lectured him on slacking and loafing, and emphasised the importance of deportment. Lovell's revenge on this occasion was a most sophisticated scheme, quite unlike his

usual bull-at-a-gate tactics: he telephoned two specialists and asked them to visit Rookwood and give lessons on deportment to Mr. Greely.

My own Schoolboys' Owns are bound, and it was a special delight to me to note that No. 380 is in fact the very copy I purchased over the counter in August 1939, that halcyon summer just before the outbreak of war. Re-reading that issue today has enabled me to recapture the happiness I then experienced on reading such beautifully crafted stories. Tales of Rookwood always provide a perennial pleasure to the reader.

* *

BLAKE - 'OLD' AND 'NEW'

by J.E.M.

Alan Pratt's delightful piece, *Sexton Blake - Mark 3* (CD for May), revives memories of the "Old-Blake-versus-New-Blake" debate which has surfaced many times since the 1950's. In the 1970's, for instance, at least one actual writer for the latter-day Sexton Blake Library entered the fray, crossing swords with the late Josie Packman to whom Mr. Pratt refers and who, at that time, conducted Blakiana. She had complained, among other things, that there was too much sex in the new Sexton, what with all those young women, both inside and outside the recently established Blake 'Organisation' - not to mention the SBL cover illustrations which, in Mrs. Packman's words, were dominated by "half-naked girls".

The cover reproduced with Mr. Pratt's article was, in fact, exactly the sort of thing to which she objected. Those "glamorous and busty young ladies" were certainly **not** "very easy on the eye", at least not on Mrs. Packman's eye, and, it must be said, other Blakians shared her response. Perhaps these critics had a point, though it was a rather shaky one, as Blakian author Martin Thomas pointed out. After all, the old SBL, not to mention the UNION JACK, had celebrated some pretty sultry moments (remember that "clouded bit of nudity" Mlle Roxane, as well as the ravishing Yvonne Cartier, June Severance and a score of others who had raised Blake's temperature?). Nevertheless, in the opinion of what we might call the Old Guard Blakians, it was the sex element, along with US style gangsterism, which finally polished off the SBL.

The real reasons for the disappearance of a regular Blake publication are, I believe, rather more complex. These might have had something to do with "sexploitation" but not a lot. Nor is it any use blaming the rise of television and its effects on reading habits. More crime and detective fiction is now read than ever before. Critics from a different school have simply argued that Blake had become an out-of-date figure and nothing could have saved him. This is also a viewpoint hard to justify. In the first place, stories of Blake's great progenitor Sherlock Holmes remain immensely popular and continue to be adapted for both large and small screens. The appeal of Holmes

undoubtedly lies in nostalgia for an era fixed and unchangeable (not to say romanticised). It is just possible that Blake too could have survived had he been kept firmly in what was, I think, his own true "golden age" - the 1920's and 1930's.

Making Blake "modern" may, in truth, have been the very thing that finished him off, since nothing dates so quickly as the up-to-date. Such a process means a continually changing character who, in the end, becomes unrecognisable. As for the introduction of the Sexton Blake 'Organisation', this was surely a cardinal error. If you are looking for an impressive detective **organisation**, you are not going to improve on Scotland Yard! The whole point of the **private** detective (with or without an assistant) is precisely that he is both separate from and superior to **any** organisation. This myth has provided the appeal of all private detectives from Holmes onwards.

As another Digest article reminded us, the famous fictional sleuth Dixon Hawke and his assistant Tommy Burke have been featured every week for around 80 years in D.C. Thomson's *Sporting Post*. I have had the privilege myself of contributing to this saga and though the stories often deal with modern themes, the emphasis is heavily on the prowess of the independent criminologist free from too many "up-to-date" trimmings. Hawke is certainly not encumbered by members of the fair sex and remains truly his own man. The basic feeling of these stories is of a relatively unchanging world; there is a lack of slickness - an old-fashioned atmosphere which clearly appeals to the readership. D.C. Thomson are shrewd and incredibly successful publishers who know exactly what works. A pity indeed they were not entrusted with the perpetuation of Sexton Blake, but of course they naturally prefer their own detective.

Meanwhile, Blake is regularly and affectionately remembered in these pages, and from time to time, does make a spectacular comeback elsewhere. In this connection, I can strongly recommend *Sexton Blake Wins* (Dent's Classic Thrillers), a collection of vintage Blake stories edited and introduced by Jack Adrian and first published five years ago.

* *

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* *

A ST. FRANK'S NEW BOY WHO SPEAKS IN RHYME

by Ray Hopkins

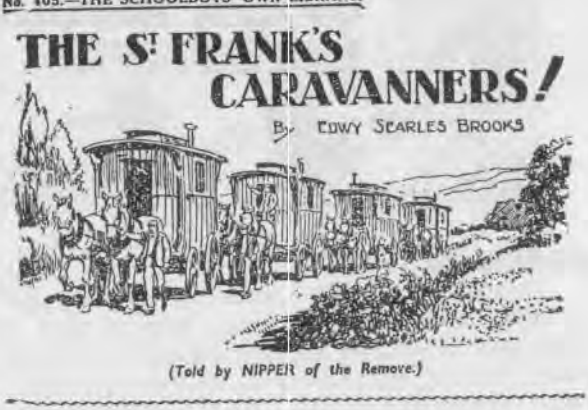
Edwy Searles Brooks has an engaging habit of introducing gloriously dotty characters among his dramatic incidents which, in the old days of film reviews, was referred to as "comic relief". Why dramatic exposition needs this break for laughter I'm not sure, but the newly introduced characters, some quite endearing and worth another read, tend to remain in the reader's memory.

In the Fresh Air Fiends Series (NLL, 1st New Series, Nos. 55-60) May-June 1927, he interjects a formidable lady, sister to Dr. Stafford, the St. Frank's Headmaster. Lady Honoria Dexter dresses in breeches, brogues and a man's Fair Isle sweater. Dr. Stafford is frightened of his armour-plated sister and is therefore unable to stop her sending the boys out of the classrooms and into the open air, ordering them to remove their collars and ties. She next institutes a camp near the school which she refers to as her "Open Air Society" and moves all the boys into tents. When the camp is destroyed by a thunderstorm, Lady Honoria sends the campers to a neighbouring farm and thus continues their health-giving open-air life.

During the course of the celebrated Ezra Quirke Series (NLL, Old Series 542-549) Oct-Dec 1925, considered by many to be a masterpiece of supernatural horror, "Old Pippy" arrives. This is Lord Pippington, an excessively wealthy, incredibly stupid, almost inarticulate schoolboy, of whom the Hon. Douglas Singleton, who knows him well, says "He spends most of his time in a sort of trance". However, he has the capability of being able to withdraw £10,000 in one go from his own bank account. This attribute is manipulated by Nelson Lee in order to entrap the crooks who are using the schoolboy magician as a front to their confidence tricks.

Nipper and Co. become the St. Frank's Caravanners in the Touring School Series of 1923 (NLL, Old Series 415-423), utilising four caravans supplied by Archie Glenthorne. While on the beach at Brightside, a winning, eccentric character emerges in a sequence involving the saving of a child from drowning. This fifteen year old boys is six feet tall (hardly the norm for the early twenties) and his long legs enable him to outdistance all the St. Frank's juniors who are racing to the rescue. They christen him Longfellow, he being head and shoulders above them in height. He tells them his name is Clarence Fellowe and that he is joining the St. Frank's Ancient House Remove next term. They suddenly realise that all his speech is in rhyme: "It so happens, my dear old chums/ that when the new term comes/ I shall pack my grip/ and off for school I'll slip/ In fact, to be exact/ in case the news you've lacked/ I shall go straight away/ and at St. Frank's I'll stay. ..... To speak in rhyme is just my habit/ and now I'd better bolt like a rabbit/ To don my clothes, I must away/ Kindly do not say me nay/ I thank you much for all you've done/ My high esteem you've surely won."

As they have all taken to Longfellow by reason of his odd and amusing style of speech, which can hardly be called poetry, and are attracted to him as he is obviously one of the best, Nipper obtains permission from the new fellow's guardian for him to stay with them for the rest of the caravan tour. Handforth, in belligerently disparaging mood, is of the opinion that they might as well install a paybox and charge admission because St. Frank's is turning into a freak show, and cites Timothy Tucker, Fatty Little, the Trotwood twins and Archie Glenthorne as examples. Church says Clarence can't help being "as tall as a lamp post and thin as a rake" and anyway, one doesn't choose his own school - he's sent there. Clarence turns out to be a very enthusiastic caravanner and eager to do his bit helping with the horses and the cooking and all those jobs that have to be done by amateurs when they come into contact with camp life. And the rhymed dialogue continuously keeps the rest of them amused.



This amusing and exciting series has the distinction, a sad one, of being the final reprinting of the St. Frank's stories. It appeared in SOLs 405, 408 and 411 in the dark days of 1940. One pleasure, possibly previously unremarked, of reading about the school in this small format is that one can gaze with pleasure at the covers portrayed by the popular artist, Savile Lumley.

* *

FOR SALE - Valiant Book of TV Sexton Blake (Fleetway 1968_ VG-F £7.50 plus p & p. Boys' Own Paper - singles VG-F (lightly taped down spines) 2.1.1886 - 9.1.1886 - 16.1.1886 - 23.1.1886 - 10.4.1886. £2.00 each plus p & p. A.E.L. COOK - Telephone (0494-530785).

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MARKHAM SWIFT

by Paul Galvin

MARKHAM SWIFT was the resident detective in the story paper 'FUN AND FICTION' which ran for 124 issues between 1911 and 1914. Looking through the stories there seems little in Swift's character to differentiate him from the many other detectives gracing the pages of story papers around this period. He is described as a tall and powerfully-built, strong-faced man of 30. He solved his weekly assignments with a blend of deduction, coincidence and good fortune, to the amazement of Scotland Yard's Inspector Monk.

Nibbles reappeared with the letter in his mouth.

Markham Swift was aided by the customary assistant. Timothy Smailes, 'Ticket of Leave Man', was a lower class ex-criminal. He is described as being short, slim and wiry looking and his face wore a good humoured expression that was almost comical. He was, in fact, a quaint little man and his age, though difficult to judge, was somewhere between 30 and 50.

What distinguished this pair from other similar partnerships in the private detective business was their animal assistant Nibbles the mouse. A constant companion of Timothy Smailes and also late of Her Majesty's Prisons, Nibbles lived in Smailes's pocket, ate Gorgonzola cheese and, in a number of investigations, played a very significant role.

"All right, Nibbles," cried Tim, "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm only going to make you get me out of another difficulty."

In 'The Seabright Affair' a suspect posts a letter which Swift thinks contains useful information regarding a criminal gang's whereabouts. With no obvious way of retrieving the letter Smailes tells Nibbles, "I want you to pop inside the letter box and fetch the letter wot's inside ... it's the only one there'. Smailes wonders if the mouse will understand, but remembers that while they were in jail he taught it to run after and fetch bits of oakum. In no time Nibbles comes up trumps and reappears with the letter in his mouth. Swift's assumption is correct and the letter leads them to the gang's hideout.

In 'The Hunchback's Secret', Swift, Smailes and Nibbles are hot on the trail of another criminal. While they chase him up to a church belfry he locks the door behind the detectives and heads for the steeple. Swift finds a key, but the lock will not turn. The detective quickly sends Smailes back to the car for some lubrication. When he returns Swift remarks, "We've got the oil-can but no feather to get the oil into the lock with". "'Ow about ole Nibbles' tail?" suggests Smails, "It's all right Nibbles ole sport I ain't going to 'urt you. I'm only a going to lubricate yer narrative and get you to 'elp us out of another difficulty". In a few seconds the oil was applied and the lock released. Unfortunately the criminal falls to his death while trying to escape, but at least the crime figures are improved.

Week after week Nibbles plays his part in the detection process and, apart from eating a few of Swift's important letters in his offices overlooking the gardens known as Lincoln Inn Fields, he causes little trouble.

Although I suspect these stories are not widely read today they are worth another look if you have copies. I'm afraid I do not know the author, but perhaps our own ace detective, Bill Lofts, knows the answer.

* *

FOOTLIGHT FEVER! by Margery Woods

Children's fiction of the interwar years, while unashamedly escapist, nevertheless mirrored accurately the sociological conditions of the day. These years were the heyday of theatrical variety and revue (the natural successors to the Victorian music hall) which provided a compelling attraction to youngsters. Noel Coward urged Mrs. Worthington not to put her daughter on the stage, but many many daughters of tender years heeded neither their mothers nor Mr. Coward's strictures. The smell of greasepaint and the glitter of tinsel were like a virus as irresistible as the common cold. A myriad youthful hopefuls sang, tapped and kicked their way round dreary provincial halls, onto seaside piers, aboard pleasure cruises and even across continents. And the schoolgirl heroines of our favourite storypapers were no exception.

One of them, Kay Forrester, the spunky heroine of I WILL BE A LONDON STAGE STAR (SOL 590), by June Turner, wearied of being a drudge to the Slade family, who were, of course, trying to defraud her of her inheritance, to come to her in her grandfather's will on condition that she made it to London stardom by a certain date. There isn't much time left when Kay discovers this fact, but undeterred she sets off to attain her heart's ambition as well as her rightful legacy. There is a lot of spite, dirty tricks and conspiracy including kidnapping, impersonation, a spell in a French jail and a

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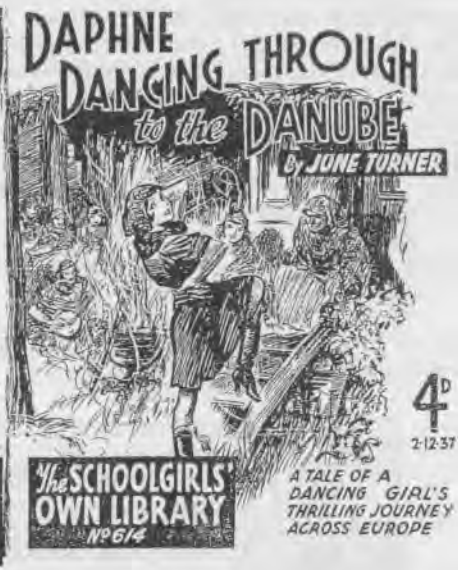
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stowaway journey in the stokehold of a cargo boat before Kay finally wins through in the classic showbiz happy ending --- going on at the last minute for the injured leading lady and winning stardom.

June Turner also created another appealing dancer called Daphne, who dances to the Danube and on the way also falls victim to French crooks, nearly following Kay into jail, before she manages to escape from Monte Carlo and cross the frontier, where she meets up with gypsy entertainers, is captured by bandits, (whose leader she manages to win over by initiating a jolly dance party for the entire group) and is allowed to go on her way to San Remo. The serial pattern of episodic adventures, each with a cliff-hanger, and set against a colourful Mediterranean background showed the story's original presentation in a weekly format. At last Daphne reaches her goal, the chalet by the Danube where her mother is convalescing, and the chance to appear in the final of the All-France Cabaret Competition with the French boy partner she has collected along the way: a competition they win, of course, which brings impressarios clamouring to sign them for stardom. Such dreams were the stuff of our childhood reading. (DAPHNE DANCING THROUGH TO THE DANUBE. SOL 614.)

Then was DULCIE THE DREAMBOAT DANCER by Joan Inglesant, who always wove in a solid plotline as well as plenty of skulduggery. The Dreamboat was a London pleasure cruiser in which Dulcie is star dancer, but this is somewhat secondary to her quest to find her grandfather, who has disappeared from his antique shop. There is much oriental colour and background in this exciting story which keeps the action going with unflagging speed. In no time the Dreamboat is wrecked, the villains have taken possession of her grandfather's shop, and the menace of the Chinese Yellow Mask (shades of Fu Manchu!) is ever present to endanger the intrepid Dulcie.

Somewhat different was THE SHADOW OF A STRANGER by Sylvia Marston, a slightly misleading title for the SOL 687 compilation of the appealing series about the Masked Merrymakers Concert Party which ran weekly in SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY. Heroine Denise first featured on her own as Denise the Dainty Dancer before she returned in the Merrymakers. The rest of the cast were a friendly crowd, each well characterised, and the shadow of the title was blackmail, of Denise's mother, through a forged letter. Amid the day to day incidents of the shows the mystery is solved as the Merrymakers rally round Denise and help in the final denouement when the villainous stranger is trapped and handed over to the police. This was possibly the first series in an A.P. storypaper to allow romance within its pages. A gentle tender friendship forms between Denise and Ray Faulkner, the attractive young comedian of the Merrymakers. And in true romantic style the story ends with a proposal, and a kiss. Another first for A.P.?

There were many more young stars: the famous Toots, of SCHOOLGIRL'S WEEKLY, who was probably inspired by Gracie Fields, and another Sally, SALLY OF THE HALLS. WHEN THE FOOTLIGHTS CALLED must have echoed the longings of small readers; there was A SCHOOL FOR STAGE STARS, and a group of SCHOOLGIRLS WHO STAGED A PANTOMIME, even Morcove had their own pierettes in one exciting story by Marjorie Stanton, and there was also SILVER PIERETTE'S SEASIDE SECRET. No doubt there were many more, if space would allow recall of all those vicarious childhood dreams of long ago.

* *

THE REMARKABLE YEAR 1903

by Eric Fayne

In recent months we have browsed together over "The Greyfriars Herald" when it appeared as a separate paper and really gave the impression of being a genuine school magazine. How it became a war casualty, and then re-appeared after the war for a new lease of life. How it slowly changed and eventually became a paper of adventure stories, changing its name to "The Boys' Herald" - until it was finally amalgamated with the "Marvel".

But there had been a much earlier "Boys' Herald", and it occurred to me to look it up and see just what sort of a paper it was.

So I went to one of my bookcases, and, summoning up all my feeble strength, I drew out my volume of that paper, and staggered with it across to my dining-table. For it is an immense volume, of very considerable weight. It contains a whole year's issues, and it was a large-sheeted paper of about the same measurements as the "tabloid" newspapers of the present day.

To my surprise I found that No. 1 of "The Boys' Herald" appeared at the end of July in the far-off year of 1903. Before any of us was born. And this giant volume contains every issue up till the end of July 1904. And what a remarkable twelve months those were, seeing the start of more boys' paper that were to become famous with the passing of time. Oddly enough, it does not give one the impression of being outdated. It just strikes one as being rather splendid. And one has a sense of regret and sadness that there is nothing like it in the shops to-day.

To-day, well, boys watch TV for hour after hour. In 1903-04 they read.

The wealth of pictures is impressive, particularly those which occupied the front pages. Prominent among the artists is G. M. Dodshon who, years later, was to become associated with the illustrations to the girls' paper, the "School Friend".

Under the paper's title "The Boys' Herald" on every front page was the information, in largish type, "A Healthy Paper for Manly Boys." At this time it seems that there were only two other weeklies in the shops for boys - "The Boys' Friend" and "The Boys' Realm". And now they are joined by the "Herald".

The Editor was Hamilton Edwards. He was a bit of a preacher and inclined to be rather smug. That trait in this character can be seen in the heading to all his very lengthy "editor's chats". That heading was "Your Editor's Advice". And he did lots of "advising" in every issue. Yet he was an excellent Editor. It is so easy for us to be snootily superior in these more enlightened days of sex, smut, muggings, and the grim racket which they call pop music. And "joy-riding" - so-called.

Let's look at No. 1. There is a school serial "The Seventh House at St. Basil's" by Henry St. John. The St. Basil's stories seem to have been popular in the first dozen years of the century. I recall that, when I was a youngster, I had a B.F.L. containing one, "The Fourth Form at St. Basil's" which I enjoyed very much. I believe I still have it. It is possible that this St. Basil's yarn in the Herald may have been the first of them, but I am not sure of this.

Another serial to start in No. 1 was "Trapper Dan" by Manville Fenn, about Indians in the American Wild West. Then there was "Wings of Gold" by Sidney Drew, an airship story. Years later this one was reprinted as a serial in a paper named the Magnet, of which you may have heard. Rather unusually, each week a full page was given to "The Battle of Life", devoted to the life stories of "famous men living at the present time". A kind of "This is My Life"!

With No. 2 we come to the start of another new serial - "Nelson Lee's Pupil" by Maxwell Scott. A story which introduced Nipper to his admirers, telling how he became

Nelson Lee's assistant. I wonder whether Nipper pre-dated Tinker as a tec's assistant. Anybody know?

NELSON LEE'S PUPIL

A STORY OF THE FAMOUS DETECTIVE

BY

MAXWELL SCOTT.

I confess that I have just read the opening chapters of "Nelson Lee's Assistant", and have enjoyed them. I cannot resist quoting a few lines:

"The detective stared at him aghast. Here was a ragged urchin from the London slums quoting - and quite correctly quoting - one of the finest gems of classic poetry.

"Nipper,' he gasped, 'who in thunder are you and where did you learn those lines?"

...Deep down in his heart he registered a vow that sooner or later he would take this odd little fellow in hand, and solve the riddle of his strange admixture of culture and cockney slang."

Fascinating, looking back into the history of those we loved long ago - and still love. Maxwell Scott wrote a number of Lee-Nipper detective serials. Maybe a Nelson Lee fan will tell us just how Edwy came to take over the characters, and what chain of events transported Lee and Nipper to St. Frank's.

With No. 3 we find the start of a series of prominent half-page advertisements to announce that a new paper for boys would be in the shops from September 8th. These ads ran each week for a good many weeks. The new paper would be "The Boys' Leader", at a penny. There were attractive lists of contents of the new paper, plus the announcement of large and various competitions the new paper would contain. It would comprise 24 pages and be "PEARSON'S WEEKLY" SIZE.

Personally, I do not recall ever seeing a "Boys' Leader", but it is odd to find a paper from the rival firm, Pearson's, being advertised in this paper from Carmelite House (later the Amalgamated Press). I wonder whether the editor found it impossible to refuse, for the Herald, an advertisement for a rival paper. After all, ads helped to oil the wheels as it were. After about 4 weeks, the ads ended. And then began a series of large ads in which Edwards warned his readers that the really great boys' papers, (Friend, Realm, and Herald) were the only ones under the control of "Your Editor".

A case of "We have to accept ads - but use your common sense." Maybe!

Early on the Editor started his attack on cigarette smoking by boys. The Editor began with a long list of all the appalling results for boys who puffed away at cigarettes. Baden Powell contributed a lengthy article on the subject. Others took up the cause, and, week after week, some more or less famous person had his say on the subject. The Headmaster of a Public School gave the opinion that boys who smoked were always poor scholars and would never make progress in this competitive world. I would, personally, tend to doubt this contention.

Authors, too, carried on with the good work. As we readers all knew, it was the "cads of the school" who were inevitably cigarette smokers.

Later on there was to be an amusing postscript on this "do gooding" on the part of the Boys' Herald. More anon.

There seems to have been a war going on at that time between Russia and Japan, and some of the authors took up the theme in the Herald. Over here we seem to have been very much on the side of Japan. The Russians were always "brutes" and "bullies". The Japanese were the "sweet and gentle Japs". (It occurs to us how feelings were to be reversed about 40 years later.)

Throughout September there were striking advertisements for another new paper for boys which would start on Friday, 11th October. This new paper would be called "The Union Jack". It would cost One Penny. Each issue would contain 50,000-word stories in the style of Rider Haggard, G.A. Henty - and the like.

"The following are a few of the Authors who will contribute long complete novels to "The Union Jack": Sidney Drew, Murray Graydon, Maxwell Scott, Henry St. John, Chas. Hamilton, Reginald Wray" - and more. Actually that is the only mention I can find of Hamilton in this 1903-04 volume. Fame was still a few years distant for the man who would be world-famous for his school stories.

So the Union Jack, in the pink paper cover of its first dozen years, started life as a paper of adventure stories. I am not sure how long was to pass before it became Sexton Blake's own paper. Can some of our experts who write for BLAKIANA tell us?

About this time another new paper started - "The Jester". It came into the shops in November 1903, described as "Your Editor's Great Serio-Comic Paper. No boy should miss it. Price One Penny".

December 5th brought the Christmas Double Number of the Boys' Herald, with a striking coloured cover by G.M. Dodshon. With 32 large pages for 2d it really was an issue to treasure. The following week saw the start of another St. Basil's serial - "The New Master", by Henry St. John. And January 1904 saw the start of a series of detective stories featuring Gordon Fox, Detective. Have you ever come across him?

February 1904 brought another new paper for boys into the shops. The MARVEL. Each issue of the Marvel would contain 2 long complete stories. And, soon, the famous characters - Jack, Sam, and Pete - would make it their own paper. It was obviously popular, for it was to run for many years. How the new papers are mounting up. 1903 - 1904 is indeed a red-letter period for all us members of the Old Boys' Book Club.

The end of March brought the Spring Double Number, this time with a fine coloured cover drawn by W. Dewar, a name with which we never became familiar. Then, yet another new paper for boys. PLUCK. "Get it for your younger brother" suggested the ads. Evidently it soon became a paper for older lads, for, as we all know, in a couple of years time it was memorable for introducing St. Jim's to an admiring public - and putting Charles Hamilton on the road to fame and fortune.

And so the Boys' Herald carried on to the close of its first year. And in its 52nd weekly issue the Editor proudly announced: "Our first year of existence has been a most successful one; so successful that I look forward to our second year of work with confidence and hope. The Boys' Herald had not long been in existence before unscrupulous rivals sprang up, endeavouring to trade on our popularity and success. All their efforts proved futile. And now we start the second year of our prosperous existence with the finest stories and articles ever published in any boys' journal."

So that was that. Looking back on that volume now, one must decide that it is superb in every way. In stories of their type, in illustrations, and in general presentation, it was never surpassed.

As the years slipped by, public taste turned towards papers of smaller measurements - Gem and Magnet size - and this was probably because the larger sheeted weeklies were much more the victims of folding and wear and tear, and difficult to retain in pristine condition. But they were truly wonderful in those early years of the century. In fact one of them, "The Boys' Friend" carried on well into the twenties, undoubtedly due to the fact that it carried the Rookwood stories.

A final thought. You remember how the Editor and lots of supporters used the Boys' Herald for a long campaign against juvenile cigarette smokers. Therefore it is startling to find that in the last month or two of that opening year, the Boys' Herald carried large advertisements for cigarettes. Week after week, in a different attractive advertisement each time, boys were invited to have a puff. The name of the cigarettes? Well - "JAPS"! Did you ever?

The Editor's motto must have been - Do as I advise, not as they advertise! Well, the ads bring in plenty of cash, the Editor may have excused himself. I wonder whether anyone was critical of the anomaly at the time.

POSTSCRIPT! I much appreciate Roy Parsons' kind comments in the April C.D. Roy's memory is more reliable than mine. The Benbow stories were indeed reprinted in the later GEM. They commenced in July 1938, the opening tale being re-named "The Bucks of the Benbow". They carried on till the Gem closed in 1939. The whole series carried through, winding up with the Benbow going off to the West Indies and the run of adventure tales. Then came quite a number of the stories with Drake and Rodney going to Greyfriars. So, as Roy reminded us, the Benbow tales were revived some twenty years after their original publication. Thank you, Roy, for sending me back to the good old Gem.

* *

WANTED: ENID BLYTON, W.E. JOHNS, CROMPTON. First editions in wrappers and ALL ephemera related to these authors. ANY original artwork related to Bunter, Blyton, Biggles, Eagle or other British comics and boys papers. ALL Boys Friend Libraries by W.E. Johns and Rochester. Many "Thriller" issues and first editions in wrappers by Charteris required. NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel. 0923 232383.

* *

"WOMEN WITH WINGS"

Female Flyers in Fact and Fiction, by Mary Cadogan (Macmillan, £17.50). Reviewed by Dennis L. Bird, Squadron Leader, RAF (retired).

There have been many books about the achievements of women in aviation, but never one like this. Mary Cadogan has had the highly original idea of studying the impact which women aviators had on the fiction of their times, which in turn acted as an inspiration to girls of younger generations. With her unrivalled knowledge of romantic novels and schoolgirl story papers, she is uniquely qualified to write such a book, and the result is this fascinating exercise in fact and fiction. Here I have to declare an interest. A keen student of aeroplanes since about 1938, I spent nearly twenty years in the Royal Air Force after the war, and so it was to me that Mary sent her manuscript last autumn for technical vetting. As a result, the occasional references to a Tupolev SB-2 or a Fokker F.VIIB/3m are mine, as are the comments about that weird man C.G. Grey, editor of "The Aeroplane" for 28 years, anti-feminist and admirer of Nazi Germany.

I hope that does not disqualify me from reviewing this book, for 99.9% of it is Mary's. It is amazing how much research she has done, and yet the outcome is not an academic treatise but a lively narrative that carries the reader along irresistibly. When the MS arrived, I thought I would just glance at it first; four hours later I was still reading avidly as the clock moved on well past midnight.

As the author says in her Introduction, "This book is a celebration of the lives and achievements of women who have taken to the skies... Their participation in aviation is part of the larger story of society's struggle to adapt to changing technologies and attitudes, which involves us all. Flying implies liberation and control of the elements. Female aviators, by their exploits and in their own

personalities, have become particularly symbolic of the widening spheres of activity sought by women and girls." It is highly appropriate that this book should appear at the beginning of the 1990s - a decade in which we men must recognise that women are fully entitled to equality of opportunity in every sphere. We have had our first woman Prime Minister; we now have a woman Speaker and more female MPs than ever before. An Englishwoman has gone into space; WRAF officers have earned their wings as pilots and navigators. Soon - surely - we shall have women priests in the Church of England. (Brought up in the Congregational Church, which has had women ministers since the 1930s, I have never understood the opposition to female ordination.)

Mary Cadogan reminds us how early it was that women became involved in flying. The first woman to ascend in a balloon did so in 1784. Dolly Shepherd was making parachute descents at Alexandra Palace in Edwardian times. Harriet Quimby of the USA flew the Channel only three years after Blériot, in 1912. Sadly, her feat coincided with the sinking of the "Titanic", which meant that the newspapers had little space to record her triumph. The Stinson sisters, also American, were training pilots for combat in 1917.

One of the useful features of this book is the attention given to the little-known names. I previously knew nothing of Thérèse Peltier, who in 1908 became the first woman in the world to fly in an aeroplane, albeit as a passenger. And who has heard of Gertrude Bacon, the first Englishwoman to entrust herself to a biplane? Or Raymonde de Laroche of France, the first woman licensed as a pilot, in 1910?

William Le Queux, a famous writer of spy stories, was probably the first leading novelist to feature a woman aviator. His "Beryl of the Biplane" (1917) accompanies her RFC boyfriend on night sorties against Zeppelins and Fokkers. Far-fetched - but an indication that a new age had dawned in aviation fiction!

Between the wars, women increasingly made their mark. First there was the age of the Marys - Mary Bailey, Mary Bruce, Mary Duchess of Bedford, wealthy ladies who could afford their own aeroplanes. Not to mention Mary Tourtel of the "Daily Express", who sent her strip-cartoon character Rupert Bear into the skies on his very first adventure in 1920.

Soon there came the famous record-breakers. Amelia Earhart (USA) became the first woman to fly the Atlantic in 1928 - but men were at the controls. She soon decided that she was just as capable as they, and embarked on her remarkable career as a pilot. She disappeared over the pacific in 1937, and "conspiracy theorists" have since developed all sorts of crazy ideas about her being an American spy, surviving and changing her identity. Mary Cadogan discusses these speculations with admirable detachment.

Amy Johnson ("Amy, Wonderful Amy"), the beautiful but rather unpleasant Jean Batten, and Beryl Markham are all given the credit they deserve. Then comes World War II, in which Captain W. E. Johns was asked to invent a character who would encourage girls to join the WAAF. The result was "Worrals" - Flight Officer Joan Worralson, whose quite incredible adventures at the controls of a "Reliant" (he meant a Boulton Paul Defiant fighter) always irritated me. Waafs just did not fly! However, Worrals did her bit for the war effort, serialised in the "Girl's Own Paper". The magazine's cover picture in November 1940 showed a glamorous Waaf whom Mary Cadogan always thought was Worrals. Sadly, I disillusioned her recently when I pointed out that the lady had an airwoman's cap badge, whereas Worrals was an officer. Nevertheless, Mary has justifiably put this picture on the dust jacket of her book (it was on the back page of the April 1992 "Collectors' Digest").

SOME PICTURES FROM 'WOMEN WITH WINGS'

Hilda Hewlett, the first British woman to acquire a pilot's certificate, in 1911.

Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson, who acquired her RAF wings in 1991.

(Illustration from 'The flying Schoolgirls', *Schoolgirl*, 1933).

Flyin' Jenny, the picture-strip heroine in the Amelia Earhart mould.

Left: Professor Peabody and Dan Dare in 1950s *Eagle*

The Supercats – girl astronauts from *Spellbound*, 1976.

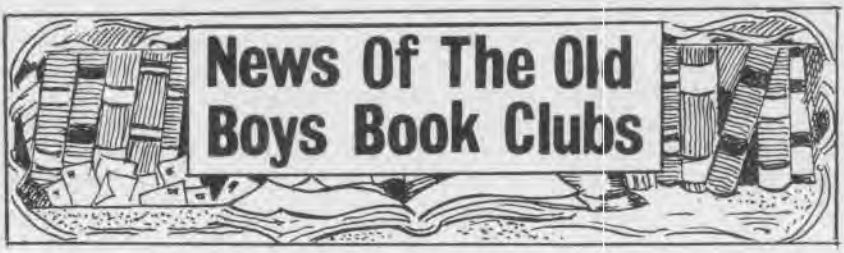
As readers will remember from my 1991 articles, I always found Dorothy Carter's character Marise Duncan much more convincing than Worrals, and "Women With Wings" gives considerable space to her. Marise was a ferry pilot in the war, under the command of Pauline Gower, commandant of the women's section of Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). Pauline too receives close attention, and a touching dedication: "For ... Pauline Gower, who, as well as inspiration, has provided the title, "Women With Wings", which was first used for her 1938 autobiographical book."

I could go on much longer about this delightful book, but I must just list some of the famous airwomen who feature in later pages: Hitler's test pilot Hanna Reitsch, the Jacquelines (Cochrane and Auriol), the sad figure of Sheila Scott, Britain's first astronaut Helen Sharman, the WRAF officers Anne-Marie Dawe and Julie Gibson who earned their wings, and the most extraordinary achiever of all, Jeana Yeager, who (with Dick Rutan) flew an aeroplane all round the world in 1986 without once refuelling.

Interwoven with all these accounts of real-life adventures are summaries of the stories which have been written about women in the air. In the background there is always the theme of woman's place in a man-dominated world. Mary Cadogan discusses the effects of the 1964 American Civil Rights Act and the later British legislation against sex discrimination. She reflects on the need for trade unions for air hostesses, but never loses her sense of humour.

As one who was impressed by the competence of WRAF fighter controllers at RAF Trimley Heath on my first posting in 1950, I am proud to be associated with Mary Cadogan's splendid vindication of women in aviation.

* *



CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our May Meeting took place at the St. Neots Home of member Robert Smerdon. We had a lengthy discussion concerning the June 21st Anniversary Meeting fixed for the afternoon of the seventh. This event should be of interest to the many people who have notified our Secretary that they wish to attend.

Later, Robert gave us a presentation on the Viz magazine. This, the most successful strip-cartoon publication of the '80s and '90s, **definitely not** for sale to children - has since 1979 provided a rude, smutty and crudely illustrated humorous mixture in bi-monthly instalments.

It is now selling around 1.2 million copies of each issue!

ADRIAN PERKINS

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Chairman Alan Pratt welcomed 12 members to the April meeting at the Chingford Horticultural Society Hall.

Tony Potts read extracts from "Novels and Novelists - a guide to the world of fiction by Martin Seymour Smith, which was followed by a lively and enjoyable discussion in relation to Hamilton and Johns.

Brian Doyle read an amusing excerpt from The Tuckshop Rebellion, Magnet 1510, and Roy Parsons presented his quiz based on a Hamiltonian character from St. Jim's.

* * * * * * *

22 members met at the Loughton home of Chris and Suzanne Harper on Sunday 10th May. The meeting started with a talk on "Film Fun" by Bill Lofts during its 43 years of production, its first editor Fred Cordwell, and its circulation of 875,000.

Brian Doyle presented his mammoth quiz of 78 answers, Bill Bradford read newsletter number 235 about a luncheon meeting in Kent, and Alan Pratt gave us a quiz on general book club interests.

Next meeting on Sunday 14th June at Eric Lawrence's home at 2, Blagrove Lane, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG11 4BE. Please phone Eric if you intend to come to the meeting. Telephone: 0734 784925.

SUZANNE HARPER

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A welcome was given to the seventeen present in April, and we were especially pleased to see the Lamb family from Macclesfield. Sample copies of Mary Cadogan's new book WOMEN WITH WINGS were on show, and a number of orders were received. LITERARY CIGARETTE CARDS was the item presented by Alan Harris, which provided insights into the hobby of picture card collecting. Alan gave us many fascinating facts and figures, and everyone was almost spellbound.

After refreshments, Eric and Catherine Humphrey read a hilarious episode - the chapter entitled 'An Inspector Calls' - from THANKS TO JENNINGS. This was extremely well presented by the readers, and everyone appreciated their spot-on timing!

* * * * * * *

Eighteen people attended our May meeting, and we were particularly pleased to have with us two visitors from Wilmslow and Liverpool.

Joan gave a report of the 10th William Meeting held recently at St. Elphin's - the school at which Richmal Crompton had first been a pupil and later a classics mistress. St. Elphin's had presented an excellent programme from the girls which, with items from the general group, a school tour and plentiful refreshments throughout the day, made this possibly the best meeting ever. It was the last to be organised by Darrell, but the meetings would continue.

Geraldine Lambe spoke about Dixon Hawke. It is remarkable that stories of him are still in print in Sporting Post 80 years since the first one appeared. Geraldine displayed examples of publications, and her talk was much enjoyed.

Our member Willis Hall spoke about his writing career. He was born in Leeds in the same street as Keith Waterhouse, and Peter O'Toole lived close by. The two writers

first met as 13-year-olds at a church youth club only yards away from where the OBBC now meets each month. Their first writing assignments were to report weddings for local papers. They lost touch when they both went into the forces. Willis wrote THE LONG, THE SHORT AND THE TALL while Keith wrote the book BILLY LIAR. Willis thought that this would make a good play, so the two of them got together again to write it. Willis described his own disciplined writing routines. He has produced numerous children's books and is currently working on a musical with Andrew Lloyd Webber. His informative and fascinating talk concluded this excellent meeting.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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SUMMER DELIGHTS

by Mary Cadogan

Last month I mentioned the new batch of Bunter titles published by Hawk Book and, browsing through these in a sun-lounger in the garden, I can't help thinking how appropriate they are for summer holiday reading.

I have just finished BILLY BUNTER AFLOAT, in which the Fat Owl and the Famous Five engage in a boating trip on the Thames. So realistic and atmospheric is the text that one can almost hear the ripples of the water and the splash of oars - and the contented snores of Bunter who, of course, expects to do nothing more than eat and sleep whilst his more energetic companions do all the work.

The stentorian voice of Horace Coker - who is hunting the Removites up and down the river - also rings in the reader's ears.

Sights, sounds and smells of summer are evident too in BILLY BUNTER'S BANKNOTE, with thrilling incidents taking place on the tow-path which skirts the garden of that notorious hostelry, The Three Fishers. There is similar sunny expansiveness in BILLY BUNTER AND THE BLUE MAURITIUS when some of the Greyfriars juniors (as well as various felonious characters) nip in and out of Sir Hilton Popper's private but much trespassed upon estates. Readers who want even stronger sunshine and baking heat can find them in the fourth of this batch of books, BILLY BUNTER IN BRAZIL.

An illustration from BILLY BUNTER AFLOAT

BOB CHERRY PUT HIS HANDS TOGETHER AND SHOT INTO THE RIVER

* *

BIGGLES AND THE LAST LAUGH

by Jennifer Schofield

The Biggles series is rich in laughter of many kinds, for Captain W.E. Johns viewed life with an amused and candid vision. All of us will have our favourite passages.

Many readers may share my affection for the more obvious humour and the schoolboy quips that add zest to various tense moments. In "Biggles & Co" (1936), for instance, the airman had to escape from a castle by climbing down a makeshift rope supplied by Ginger. He ended up by falling with a terrific splash into the moat:

"... he kicked out in blind panic, and reached the surface with a mighty gasp. With a stroke that was something between a dog's paddle and a crawl, he managed to reach the bank just as Ginger, shedding water at every step, came running along. "My goodness, what a shocking noise you made!" he muttered apprehensively, as he held out his hand and hauled Biggles up the wall. "The people inside will think that a walrus has drifted in."

"They can think I'm a school of whales if they like," snarled Biggles, unwinding coils of slimy weed from his neck and body...."

Yet in this same story, Biggles could display the debonair wit expected of a 1930s hero in a tight corner. When he encountered his arch-enemy, von Stalhein, it was evident that both adversaries knew the rules of the game. The airman was disguised as a footman in velvet jacket, knee breeches and wig, when he suddenly found himself held at gunpoint by von Stalhein. Although his unusual gear was an embarrassment to both antagonists they managed to maintain the right note of badinage:

"A ghost of a smile flitted across the face of the German .. "Your new costume fits badly, if I may say so," he observed critically.

Biggles smiled faintly. "I haven't had time to see my tailor about it yet," he confessed apologetically.

Bulldog Drummond and Carl Peterson could not have fenced better, but Sapper would never have jeopardised a dramatic situation by introducing such a note of absurdity. Johns' mischievous approach was never far away.

Sometimes the humour is more subtle. A well-known favourite passage comes to mind. In "Biggles Goes to War" (1938) our hero, as chief of the air force of "Maltovia", told one of the leaders of the country that he proposed to bomb the bridge across the river that formed a frontier with the hostile state of Lovitzna. War had not been declared, however, and the Maltovian was horrified:

"They'll complain."

"So will you. You will be most upset and send them a note asking what the dickens they mean by destroying the bridge, pointing out that by severing commercial relations they are deliberately trying to cause trouble!"

"But they won't believe that."

"Of course they won't; neither will anyone else, but that doesn't matter. My dear boy, that is what is called diplomacy ..."

Such guile was, of course, unusual for Biggles, although it was typical of him to plan a decisive action. His customary directness of speech was one of his strengths, and could also be used amusingly by his creator to expose the reality of situations. In a short story, "The Adventure of the Luminous Clay", in the collection "Biggles' Chinese Puzzle" (1955), the airman was asked at top level to bring back some radioactive clay from a remote archipelago in the Pacific. He was told that the mission was especially dangerous because several great powers were claiming the territory in question.

"I would have said that the people who have most right to the islands are those who live there," asserted Biggles.

But on this occasion there was no "collapse of stout party".

"And many people would agree with you," averred Sir James.

"But such claims are brushed aside when international politics are involved ..."

At first sight Johns made a much more straightforward use of humour in the stories set in the First World War, for he frequently described practical jokes, madcap adventures or harmless rivalries with entertaining consequences. The episodes are often very funny, and I particularly like the one in which Biggles' chum, Wilks, was tricked into shooting up a parcel containing his own pyjamas.

But there is an underlying sadness in the jesting, for it is set against a squalid background of horror and death. Biggles and the other young Flying Corps officers, like their counterparts in real life, were desperately fooling for one purpose only - to escape from the almost intolerable pressures of wartime flying and fighting.

In the short story "Reprisals", collected in "Biggles in France" (1935) the airman and his friend Mahoney, disguised as a Colonel and a Major respectively, carried out a splendid hoax on an overbearing senior officer in another squadron, and flew back to 266.

'The two pilots leapt to the ground, and, to the great surprise of Flight Sergeant Smyth, ran quickly to the back of the hangars and then on to the officers' quarters. It struck Smyth, from their actions as they ran, that they were both in pain.

They were; but not until they were in Biggles' room and had discarded their borrowed raiment did the so-called staff officers give way to their feelings. Biggles lay on his bed and sobbed helplessly. Mahoney, with the major's jacket on the floor at his feet, buried his face in his hands and moaned weakly.

"Poor chap!" said Biggles at last, wiping his face with his towel ...'

An engaging scene, that could have been written by Kipling, but perhaps the reader feels more sympathetic than amused.

There are so many aspects to Johns' humour that I can only touch on a few of them here. Much of the comedy springs from the words and actions of the main characters, and Bertie shines brightly in the Air Police era. The twists and turns of the plots can be delightfully ironic, and the style with which Johns makes his thrusts can be irresistible.

But is the laughter sometimes unintentional? I came upon the illustration reproduced here with great joy, and although in this instance Studio Stead has highlighted the understatement of the entire series, the artist has faithfully given graphic form to Johns' text. All the same, it is as well to be beware of this author. In "Biggles Flies Again' (1934) Biggles and Algy come upon a Chinese man at his last gasp on a raft in the Indian Ocean, and revive him with brandy.

"Thanks," gasped the rescued man.

Biggles raised his eyebrows. "Speekee Engleesh, eh?" he inquired.

"Not that sort," replied the exhausted man in a cultured voice, with a ghost of a smile.

Algy glanced at his partner in amused surprise, but the Chinaman intercepted the look. "I was at Oxford," he explained ...'

The airmen's expectations are mocked here, but even more so, the reader's!

It is not always possible to tell if Johns has his tongue in his cheek. A classic example of this can be found in "Biggles Forms a Syndicate" (1961), in one of the very few passages in the entire series that appears to exhibit racial prejudice:

"... I didn't care much for the chap. He was a shifty-eyed oily-looking type," a friend tells Biggles, who answers blandly, "I see. He wasn't British?"

An open and shut case against the racist Johns? Or brought by Johns against Biggles?

We will never know, and even the fact that Johns included a mirror image of this passage in "Biggles and the Plot that Failed" four years later, does not prove one thing or the other.

"He was a bit too suave, too oily," the Brigadier told Biggles, who nodded. "Are you sure this wasn't colour prejudice?"

For nothing escapes Bill Johns' impish darts: he may target Biggles, the reader, himself, and even - is nothing sacrosanct? - the medium he made so triumphantly his own. Let Algy, the valiant and cynical, have the last word. In "Biggles in Africa" (1936) the three airmen heroes, Biggles, Algy and Ginger were captured by a savage African Tribe and it seemed that nothing could save them from a vile and degrading death. It was Algy who spoke for them all:

"'Why pretend? Let us face our end with the cold calm philosophy of our race, as they say in books," he added sarcastically. "Frankly, if they take us to that crocodile pool I shall scream my head off ..."

We've come a bit late to help this poor blighter.

* *

ANSWERS TO KEITH ATKINSON'S MAGNET CROSSWORD

ACROSS

8. Frightful, fearful, frantic frown
9. Lament
10. Treluce
11. Teams
13. Star
15. Cage
16. Scott
18. Coral
20. Groan
21. Looter
22. Obi
23. Angel of the Fourth

DOWN

1. William George
2. Thomas
3. Bunter
4. A fat swot
5. Baker
6. Of Bunter Court
7. Clue
12. Facelift
14. Raleigh
17. Toothy
18. Carboy
19. Snell
20. Goat

* *

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH M.A.

by Ted Baldock

A worthy gentleman, exceedingly well read.
Henry IV Part I

Very little is known of Mr Quelch's antecedents. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that while at university he drew the attention of the sporting fraternity to himself by certain feats of pedestrianism which, although not recorded in any official archive, were much admired at the time and are probably still remembered by his student contemporaries.

He has remained a great walker throughout a long and active life. His bony legs whisk along, covering at a rare rate the highways and by-ways in the vicinity of Greyfriars. He is often accompanied by his short, stout and perspiring friend and colleague, Mr. Prout, and the pair seem to suggest to the lively imagination those splendid characters Don Quixote and his faithful servant, Sancho Panza - minus their steed, of course.

That he is regarded as Dr Locke's second in command suggests that Mr Quelch is the senior master at Greyfriars. This is a matter of contention, chiefly from Mr Prout. One of the many little differences which exist between the two masters who nevertheless manage on the whole to remain good friends and equable companions. In the enclosed, almost monastic life of the school open warfare would be extremely undesirable, and Dr Locke, who is well aware of any tensions, is nothing if not a diplomat. Indeed at times he is a veritable Solomon. Thus life at Greyfriars remains tolerable and calm.

The 'History of Greyfriars' holds pre-eminence in the Remove Master's brief leisure hours. His study is well stocked with old and dusty parchments and great vellum bound volumes from which he extracts information for his magnum opus.

The 'History' has been his greatest pleasure and, at times, his solace over many years. Although it is progressing, it is doubtful if Quelch will see the completion of his history. Nothing, however, can obliterate the happiness of his hours of diligent research.

One of the original Greyfriars monks incarcerated in his cell and working quietly at an illuminated manuscript could not present a more contented and peaceful aspect than Mr Quelch poring over some dusty old parchment in his periods of leisure, 'Horas non numero nis serenas.'

Writing the Greyfriars History was his escape from an exuberant Form, from William George Bunter and all his lamentable works. Escape for an all too short period from this thunderous and menacing twentieth century was very sweet. The dark ages - were they so very dark? Were not ruch lamps then flickering in monastic cells up and down the country while scholars were preserving and expanding those very records, which, centuries later, were to afford a school master with invaluable moments of escape.

It seems, however,that there are always flies in the ointment. Usually Mr Quelch's peace was of all too short a duration. A cumbersome step in the passage outside: a ponderous knock at the door; a fruity boom; and monastic peace would take unto itself wings. Well might Quelch 'sport his oak'. Mr Prout (who else but he?) the hero of many a tight corner - mainly , of course, in his own imagination - was never easily put off. The reiteration of knocking and booming was not to be ignored. Quelch's train of thought would be shattered: parchments were put aside; books were

closed; deep sighs were emitted. Poor Quelch - poor 'History' ... It is an undisputed fact that although the two master are good friends, there are many areas in which they disagree - in the politest possible way.

Although a strict disciplinarian, Mr Quelch is impartial to a degree in his dealing with the more unruly elements in his Form. The official ash looms fairly large, it is true, but always within strict limits of justice. The well known opinion among the Remove fellows that he is 'a beast - but a just beast' is founded upon very sound experience. In short, Mr Quelch knows his Form, which cannot be said with such confidence of Mr Prout and the Fifth Form. In Prout's estimation the Fifth can do no wrong. Every member is a good fellow - and a gentleman upon whom he could rely with utter confidence. Sadly, on many occasions this view has faltered!

Despite years of teaching experience, Prout's insight leaves something to be desired and is far less reliable than that of the Remove Master.

Popular tradition has it that there exists, concealed among the sparse hairs at the back of Mr Quelch's head, an additional eye, with which he is popularly supposed to be able to observe the activities going on behind his angular back. Apocryphal though this story may be, the Remove Master possesses a singular - and to members of his form - dismaying ability to be cognizant of matters subversive and otherwise from all points of the compass.

We all have our crosses, some minute and hardly noticable, some not so small, and Mr Quelch was no exception. In fact several tenacious ones dogged his career at Greyfriars. Prominent among these, rather unexpectedly, was a young member of the domestic staff, Elsie by name. One of her duties was to keep masters' studies in some semblance of tidiness and order - a daunting task. Elsie was a neat, particular and pains-taking girl who took pride and pleasure in her work. She waged daily and relentless warfare with hoover and duster against grime and untidiness.

Mr Quelch's chief annoyance (discounting Billy Bunter) was her re-arrangement of his notes and papers. This provoked extreme sharpness of temper that was far from good in an elderly gentleman. When he left his desk in a state of apparent disarray, there was, in fact, always method in the chaos. He knew what was which - and where. Elsie could not appreciate this, and, in a moment, bustling and clicking her tongue, she would destroy hours of meticulous documentation. Poor Mr Quelch suffered these pin-pricks of life with such patience as he could muster - which was at times very little indeed.

It has been said that there exists a panacea for every ill. We all have our well tried escape routes into which we retreat, when things become too difficult, and Mr. Quelch quite naturally turned to the writings of P. Vergilius Maro, who represented an impregnable tower against most of the trials which beset the hard-working Greyfriars Master. Little must old Vergil have realised, while penning his immortal 'Aeneid', what balm and peace he would be bestowing upon a certain angular gentleman of the twentieth century. Not to mention the tribulations he was destined to inflict upon several members of the Greyfriars Remove - and, indeed, on many real-life schoolboys!

* *

RAY HOPKINS (Oadby): Regarding Edward Allatt's postscript to his article on p.9 of the April SPCD, I wonder if he would be kind enough to pass on the pseudonym(s) used by Upton Sinclair when we wrote his dime novel boys' stories laid in West Point and Annapolis, also titles of the collections if reprinted in hardback. I consulted Kunitz and Haycraft "Twentieth Century Authors" where is said Sinclair "worked his way through College by writing hack stories for pulp magazines (mostly naval adventures, since his grandfather was an admiral and his whole family had a tradition of naval service), and jokes for the comic periodicals." Later on it said that after he married in 1900 at the age of 21 he felt that he "no longer could bring himself to write dime novels and pulp stories." However, there was no mention in the article in Kunitz & Haycraft (1961) or the First Supplement (1963) of any nom de plume that he may have used. If Mr. Allatt knows of any, there are those of us who would be grateful for the info.

NAVEED HAQUE (Ontario): In the May C.D., I particularly enjoyed the article on 'slackers and cads' by Reg Moss.

The probable amalgamation of 'the slacker' Carlton's character into that of Lord Mauleverer reminds me of Loder's rise to prominence. This was following the expulsion (in Magnet no. 107 entitled 'The Cad of the Sixth') of Carberry of the Sixth. In the early Magnet, George Joseph Carberry was the bad hat, who in his capacity of prefect bullied the juniors, and broke school rules with impunity. After this chap's ignoble departure from Greyfriars for pub-haunting Loder (hitherto a relatively minor character) filled in the breach. Clearly a lot of Carberry's unfavourable characteristics were passed on to his 'successor'.

Incidentally, according to Magnet no. 117 Loder: 'was made a prefect when Carberry was expelled.' (See Breeze Bentley's article in C.D. Annual 1953, or Magnet 117).

BILL LOFTS (London): I'm afraid I would have to disagree with R.J. Lewis (Uttoxeter) on the prowess lacking in Inky as a footballer because the game is alien in India. It certainly is played there, as I played for regimental teams against Indian teams during the last War. The game had been introduced in India by British Servicemen long before The Magnet had started. It was an experience to see two Indian teams playing in bare feet, with fireworks, crowd invasions etc. I would accept that it was not a National game or at International level.

BERYLL CHOLMONDELY (Yetminster): The Ruritanian question appears to be raising its head again in C.D. In the February issue Mark Taha refers to the 1924 film of RUPERT OF HENTZAU, mentioned by Jeffrey Richards in his SWORDSMEN OF THE SCREEN, and to its ending - the proclamation of a republic in Ruritania and the retirement of Rudolph and Flavia to England. Richards goes on to castigate the film for

'making a mockery of the profound central thread of the story - the call of duty'. In Hope's novel RUPERT OF HENTZAU, of course, Rassendyll dies to save the Queen's reputation.

However, I remember, many years ago, picking up a copy of Hope's THE DOLLY DIALOGUES - a light, amusing novel set in London society - and being astonished to notice that among those present at a fashionable reception were Flavia, Dowager Queen of Ruritania and Mr. Rudolph Rassendyll. Did Hope decide that happiness was preferable to honour after all?

Ruritanian Studies have of course long been a respectable academic discipline: vide the scholarly article on the subject published in THE TIMES about ten years ago and written by E.C. Hodgkin, their former foreign editor. A delightful correspondence ensued in that newspaper concerning the geographical location of Ruritania...

J.E.M. (Brighton): Another winning issue of C.D. JENNIE THE LITTLE FLOWER GIRL struck a very special chord. More than 60 years ago I too was a rabid fan of LARKS. I especially remember a serial story from circa 1930 called - if I remember - THE MYSTERY OF ABBOT'S CORFE, which had lots of mysterious monks and sinister goings on. I remember a LARKS strip called PRAIRIE PRANKS with 'Tom Trix' and 'Trixie' - the latter a seductively leggy miss very much in the mould of PEGGY THE PRIDE OF THE FORCE from the same comic...
(**Editor's Note**: I received many notes of appreciation for the JENNIE story, and requests for more of her adventures to be reprinted and/or discussed in C.D.).

E.H. JOHN GIBBS (Taunton): In answer to Mark Taha's question regarding the 'Deathless Men' entitled 'V for Vengeance', I remember these stories very well. They were in the WIZARD. I can give little information on the dates other than that I see from my own collection of WIZARDS that there was a series in 1951 and also in 1952. I have checked through several hundred copies from 1940 onwards but so far have not traced these stories earlier than 1951. However, I have many copies missing from these years.

Can anyone tell me where the stories of Grimslade School originated, as I've only got the S.O.L. version?

* *

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