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AUGUST
1994

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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The Editor's Chat

SOME QUESTIONS ANSWERED

I have been extremely gratified by readers' responses to my editorial in the June C.D. Under the heading of THOSE ELUSIVE MEMORIES I asked if readers would rack their brains to answer Jim Lake's query about stories of a fictional kitten named Nicholas Thomas, and to provide for me some details about a poem called 'The Elephant'.

Bill Lofts has written: 'Mention of the Nicholas Thomas stories by Kitty Styles is in my file of 'Cats'. These were in a series of about half a dozen books published by Samson Low Ltd. between 1948 and 1954. The kitten, I suppose, was like the white 'Gloops' who appeared in the Sheffield Star (having tens of thousands of members of a club). As far as I know the author only penned one other book, which was about Jesus, "Kitty Styles" may be a nom-de-plume.....'

I now know just about everything that there is to know about 'The Elephant', thanks to remarkably detailed and helpful replies from Brian Doyle, Neil Beck, John C. Hunt and Maire Newton, to all of whom I am

most grateful. The poem was written by the Hon. Herbert Asquith (son of the Liberal statesman of the same name who was Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916 and who became First Earl of Oxford and Asquith in 1925). It seems to have been included in at least seven anthologies, some of which were published here and some in America. The author lived from 1881 to 1947 and wrote several novels, a book of verse for children (*Pillicock Hill*, in which 'The Elephant' probably first appeared) and two other volumes of poetry.

It is delightful for me now to have the complete text of this poem, of which I had recalled fragments for so many decades, and it is printed in full at the end of this editorial for you all to enjoy.

FURTHER QUERIES...

Jim Lake's question about Nicholas Thomas and mine about 'The Elephant' have prompted several more from C.D. readers who have memories of poems and stories that they would like to identify and re-read.

John Hunt who, as mentioned above, responded to my own query, asks if anyone can provide him with the complete text of 'the piece of doggerel' which starts

The swallow is a roving bird,

and ends

And on his journey home again he met a blooming hawk,

Who pulled all his feathers off and said 'Now, you blighter, WALK!

He has, apparently, been trying to trace this since about 1950.

Striking a more serious note about elusive half-memories, Paula Newton writes as follows:

'As children my sister and I had immense pleasure in reading Enid Blyton's books and now that we have two small girls of our own we would very much like to get them a collection. I know that this is a tall order as apparently there are over 700 titles, and in order to do this we need a list of all she wrote. Is it possible to get such a list? Also, my sister and I often talk about a story featuring a girl named Fennela and a dog that grew wings from two humps on his back. We think he was some kind of wolf-hound. it was a grand story, but this is all we can remember. Can any C.D. reader help us to identify it?'

Tony Glynn and Leslie Laskey have each written, elsewhere in this issue, about memories of books and story papers, and their search for 'lost' childhood literary treasurers.

What a joy it is when such gems are located, and such mysteries are solved.

Happy Summer reading to you all!

MARY CADOGAN

THE ELEPHANT
by Herbert Asquith

Here comes the elephant
Swaying along
With his cargo of children
All singing a song:
To the tinkle of laughter
He goes on his way,
And his cargo of children
Have crowned him with May.
His legs are in leather
And padded his toes;
He can root up an oak
With a whisk of his nose:
With a wave of his trunk
And a turn of his chin
He can pull down a house,
Or pick up a pin.
Beneath his grey forehead
A little eye peers,
Of what is he thinking
Between those wide ears?
Of what does he think?
If he wished to tease,
He could twirl his keeper
Over the trees:
If he were not kind,
He could play cup and ball
With Robert and Helen
And Uncle Paul:
But that grey forehead,
Those crinkled ears,
Have learned to be kind
In a hundred years;
And so with the children
He goes on his way
To the tinkle of laughter
and crowned with the May.

* *

BRANDS FROM THE BURNING by Peter Mahony

Part 12: Herbert Vernon-smith (5).

In the last eight years of the 'Magnet'. Herbert Vernon-Smith's 'supporting roles' were frequent, but he starred in only four major series. Three of the these were 'wowsers'; the fourth was the unconvincing, melodramatic Texas holiday series.

After relinquishing the Remove captaincy, the Bounder went into his shell for almost a year. He showed sympathetic concern for the scapegrace Wharton in the second "Rebel" series (Magnets 1285-1296) - "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind". Then, he took a dislike to Jim Valentine ('Dick the Penman') and in a mood of self-righteousness set about unmasking the boy criminal to Inspector Grimes. At the last minute, Smithy had a change of heart. He contrived to lead the police off Valentine's trail, while the boy escaped to join his uncle in South America.

Not long afterwards, there was trouble over the cricket. A dispute arose about the opposing merits of Nugent and Redwing for the eleventh place. Smithy made caustic remarks about Nugent's poor form; they nearly came to blows. Then Dicky Nugent landed in trouble with Mr. Twigg; the Bounder became involved; Nugent lost his temper. An unhappy match at St. Jude's got Wharton's goat; he made a mess of the captaincy and deliberately wasted Smithy's talents. The Bounder then missed the second innings through playing Guardian Angel to Nugent minor who was on the razzle. His motives were misunderstood and he was 'sent to Coventry'.

Barred by the Remove, Smithy joined up with Temple & Co. He was beating the Remove, almost single-handed when a 'gammy' ankle let him down. Temple managed to complete the victory, but it was very close-run. Dicky Nugent's peccadilloes then came to light and good relations were restored. (This duo - Magnets 1319 and 20 - covered a number of well-worn themes: the troublesome younger brother; the picking of the captain's friend for the team; Smithy's maliciousness; Wharton's high-handedness; Temple's smug self-satisfaction. If the Remove had been less parochial Scott and Fry of the Fourth and Hobson of the Shell would have been regular member of the Junior XI - then all the arguments about Hazeldene, Nugent, Redwing, Ogilvy etc would have been voided. The narrowness of Wharton's approach to leadership provided Hamilton with endless opportunities for variations on this theme - and provided excellent reading.)

Vernon-Smith was heavily involved in the next pair of stories (Magnets 1321-22). Larry Lascelles, the Boxing Beak, overheard the Bounder arranging a nocturnal outing. He made Smithy promise to drop the excursion; Smithy, never honourable where masters were concerned, broke his promise. Lascelles, suspicious, investigated after lights out. A bruiser with a loaded stick was preparing to attack the master, when Smith shouted a timely warning - giving himself away in the process. Lascelles, though grateful, did his duty and the Bounder bagged a Head's flogging.

Vengefully, Smith set out to expose Larry's renewed connections with the Prize Ring. Due to Bunter's meddling, the Bounder got hold of a story that Lascelles was booked to fight the 'Game Chicken'. He spread the news, even to the length of reporting it to the Head. Larry refuted it and Smith had to 'sing small'.

Later, Lascelles' old connections kidnapped him and kept him prisoner until he agreed to fight the 'Chicken'. The Bounder, following up his unworthy suspicions, discovered the missing master and effected a rescue. The vengeful feud ceased and Smithy got back into favour. Once again, courage and resource had expiated the faults of the unpleasanter traits in his character.

The better side of Smithy turned up in Magnets 1329-30. Jack Wingate of the Third had 'plunged' on a 'dead cert' and was in debt at the Three Fishers. The Bounder, concerned for Wingate Major's reputation, chipped in to protect the wayward fag when he had broken bounds at night. Young Wingate escaped the clutches of authority, but Smithy was caught - by old Wingate! Reported to the Head, he was sacked - for the umpteenth time.

Returning home, Vernon-Smith had to tell the whole story to his father. Though he gave no names, the millionaire learned enough to set off post-haste to Greyfriars. After an unrewarding encounter with the Head and Mr. Quelch, "Old Smith" interviewed Wingate. He had already learned that the Bounder was protecting a boy with 'a decent older brother'. Working on that assumption. He asked Wingate to produce all the 'minors' from the fag forms for interrogation. That proved inconclusive, but the millionaire then went to the Three Fishers to pursue his inquiries.

Wharton, who had guessed the true state of affairs, prevailed on Jack Wingate to make a clean breast of it before Mr. Vernon-Smith returned. He did so and Smith was exonerated. (In these stories Mr. Vernon-Smith's opinion of a Public School education emerged: "All you learn there is so much rubbish..... You get shreds and patches of various subjects; nothing essential or useful in any of them..... The whole thing's piffle, from a practical point of view. But it's one of the graces of life - like music and painting .....Education - real education - will begin after you've left Greyfriars." I wonder if this was a reflection of Charles Hamilton's own Views?)

Having survived yet again, the Bounder retired from the limelight. He turned up during the summer holidays when, as a guest at Gadsby Croft, he foiled a burglary plot by a rascally butler and saved the Greyfriars Hikers from being framed for it. Later on (Magnet 1347) he fell foul of the reforming Strong Alonzo (Todd), but, being Smith, he thought of a way of nullifying Alonzo's great strength and got his own back on the luckless Duffer.

Just for a change, Vernon-Smith's next important role was as a victim - of Kranz the kidnapper. Through breaking bounds, Smithy was present when Major Cherry was attacked by a masked man who was 'after the plans of an invention that may revolutionise flying.' The Bounder chipped in to foil that attack; but afterwards Bob Cherry was kidnapped - by air from the school playing fields!

Then Smithy, late for lock-up, took a short cut through the Three Fishers. Wingate caught him; Dr. Locke caned and gated him. Resentful, the Bounder broke bounds at night. Wingate found the lobby window unfastened and secured it; Smithy was shut out. In desperation, he tied the underground passage from the old priory to Quelch's study - only to find that the exit panel was screwed shut! He spent the night in the vaults; knocked for admission in the morning; and was duly expelled.

During his excursion in the vaults, the Bounder had seen Major Cherry's attacker. Putting in some hard thinking, he declared that Bob Cherry was held prisoner there. Recklessly, he set out to rescue Bob single-handed; hoping thereby, to have his expulsion rescinded. Unfortunately, Kranz snaffled Smith too. Later, Tom Redwing was also captured.

The Bounder was not a passive prisoner. He led the others into a couple of futile attempts to escape: he also came to blows with Bob Cherry. Eventually, Lord Mauleverer made the same deductions as Smithy - with the added one that Kranz was the culprit. With Wharton & Co's. assistance, Mauly rescued the captives. Kranz was arrested; Vernon-Smith, in view of his original deductions and unsuccessful rescue attempt, was rather fortuitously reprieved. (One wonders whether Dr. Locke was a bit

of a facing both ways man. He often came down heavily on the Bounder; then, usually through external pressures, he would reconsider his verdict. To say the least, there was little evidence of firm principles about his decisions. Smithy would 'get his goat' - or perhaps Quelch would make him screw his courage to the sticking point and expulsion was decreed: then Mr. Vernon-Smith would get to work and Dr. Locke would back-track. If the Smiths had gone away quietly, he would have been pleased; as they didn't, he was prepared to change his mind to get them off his back. As a teacher who has endured vacillating headmasters, I am well aware that the Lockes of this world far outnumber the Quelchs. It seems that Hamilton was also aware of it: another indication of his perspicacity.)

The next major series (Magnets 1360-73) involved Vernon-Smith's inheritance. The long series of escapades which had culminated in the Kranz expulsion had exhausted everyone's patience. Quelch, in poor health, was fed up with the scapegrace; Mr. Vernon-Smith, aware that his influence on Dr. Locke was seriously weakened, gave Smith a final warning - "another expulsion will incur disinheritance." A cousin, Lucius Teggers, was the rival heir.

Quelch had to take sick leave. Teggers, part-owner of a scholastic agency, provided a temporary replacement - Eustace Smedley. The real Smedley had gone to Canada; Teggers appropriated his name and qualifications and went to Greyfriars as Smithy's form-master. Trouble followed in waves.

Smedley/Teggers had high hopes of disgracing his rival. The Bounder's flawed character, always ready to kick over the traces, glorying in the defiance of authority, apparently presented an easy victim. Smedley had only to exploit Smithy's blackguardly traits to achieve his scoundrelly aims. The hardness of Mr. Vernon-Smith's character was also an advantage to Smedley. If he could catch Smithy red-handed in flagrant rule-breaking, the outcome was assured - at least so it seemed. Whether 'Old Smith' would have disinherited Herbert when it came down to it is debatable; in the past he had always excused his son and stretched every point in his favour. Nevertheless, it was sufficient for the imposter to believe that disgrace for the Bounder meant filthy lucre for himself. Consequently, he kept an eagle eye on Smithy's activities and confidently awaited an opportunity.

Unfortunately, Smedley did not appreciate how wily the Bounder could be. Cunning himself, he was rather nonplussed to find his young rival just as crafty. The expected crash did not come. Smedley had to start plotting to contrive the Bounder's downfall.

Smithy's proverbial luck came to his rescue. Wharton forewarned him about Smedley's animosity; Bob Cherry did the same on another occasion; several times, Bunter, pursuing schemes of his own, either foiled Smedley or put Smithy on his guard. After a number of narrow squeaks they got through the term and everyone dispersed for the Easter holidays. Smedley, having tried several dodges - catching the Bounder out of bounds, planting a 'stolen' tenner etc., had to relinquish his post as Quelch was now recovered. His schemes seemed doomed to failure.

There were still some shots in the locker. Vernon-Smith had been consigned to a tutor for the vacation - 'Old Smith' still did not trust him to behave properly. Bunter, at a loose end as usual, was 'conned' by Smithy into taking his place while he went on the razzle with Pon & Co. For a while they got away with it; then Mr. Vernon-Smith turned up and exposed the deception. Some lucky coincidences on a day trip to Boulogne healed the rift between father and son: Smithy spent the rest of the hols at Wharton Lodge. Smedley made some more attempts to blacken his character. An

alleged visit to the races turned out to be a frost; then he accused Smithy of laying bets with Joey Banks. Quelch, a guest at Wharton Lodge, took up the matter; Smedley was exposed as a vindictive rogue.

Later Quelch was attacked and injured. The assailant, Smedley in disguise, got away. When they returned to Greyfriars, Teggers/Smedley resumed his post as Quelch's substitute. Smithy, fully aware of the man's animosity, started retaliating in his usual reckless style - and the fur flew!

Bunter, bribed to use his ventriloquism, gave Smedley a terrible time with disembodied voices. The Bounder, his taste for excitement aroused, started blagging again. Redwing put a stop to a nocturnal excursion and incurred Smithy's displeasure. Coker, pursuing some confiscated tuck, accidentally flattened Smedley in the dark and inadvertently saved Smithy's bacon. Then an 'over-the-edge' rag on Monsieur Charpentier put the Bounder in danger of the 'sack'. Mossoo let him off; but Smedley tried to bribe the French master to pursue the matter. Skinner overheard the masters' conversation and gave Smithy a warning. Ashamed of himself for ragging Charpentier, the Bounder made amends by selling a diamond-pin and donating the proceeds, anonymously, to the impecunious Frenchman.

Smedley discovered that the pin had gone and accused the Bounder of using the money for gambling. A sticky situation ensued. Once again, expulsion loomed; but Mossoo, thinking the head had been his benefactor, revealed the story to Dr. Locke. Smithy was exonerated - and commended for his generosity.

There were other incidents. Smedley banned the Bounder from cricket and fell out with Lascelles as a result. (The staff were getting wise to him - Prout, Charpentier, the absent Quelch and now Larry were strongly disapproving.)

Eventually, Mr. Vernon-Smith turned up and Teggers/Smedley had a narrow escape from exposure. Then Prout, who knew the real Smedley's uncle, received a letter which placed Smedley in Canada. Quelch, recovered from his assault, was due to return. The plotter, abandoning hope of Smithy's rascality being brought home to him, planted a tenner in a letter from Mr. Vernon-Smith. He expected the Bounder to accept it as a parental tip and spend it. Smedley would then move in with a theft charge. Luckily for Smith, Bunter meddled and the tenner finished at the bottom of the Sark. Smedley, thoroughly baffled, showed himself up to Dr. Locke. Then he ran into Mr. Vernon-Smith and the imposture, was exposed. The rogue's parting shot put much of the characters of the Vernon-Smiths into a nutshell:

"The game's up now! Well, you asked for it - it was your own doing! Your own doing from beginning to end! Did you think that you could dangle a fortune of millions under a man's eyes and nothing come of it? You are an old fool, Mr. Vernon-Smith - and your son is a young rascal! He has deserved a dozen times to be expelled - and I'm sorry that I never brought it off!"

Unappealing as Teggers/Smedley was, one cannot help feeling that he had a point - in fact, several potent points. The Bounder chastened by the experience, made a vow to be 'good' in future.

(continued next month)

* *

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MATCH OF THE DAY 1907

by Alan Pratt

W.J. Lomax's "A Football Mystery - How Sexton Blake Solved It" (Union Jack No 169, January 5th 1907) must surely be one of the most astonishing cases ever undertaken by the Great Man.

Following up the disappearance of Sir James Collier, Blake discovers a link with the Crimson Ramblers, a soccer team consisting entirely of "foreigners" currently touring England. Not only have the Ramblers had the audacity to challenge English football supremacy but they have actually beaten the top sides such as Woolwich Arsenal and the Corinthians by large scores and without conceding a single goal!

To add insult to injury, the Ramblers enjoy a fairly riotous lifestyle, attending banquets, theatres and smoking concerts, dancing "nearly all night" yet playing "their usual smashing, overpowering game next day," In the various matches played against top English sides it was apparently "a common occurrence for a goalkeeper to be driven backwards into his own goal by the tremendous force with which the ball was kicked." Additionally "on more than one occasion the ball actually burst through the netting and it was a regular feature to see the goalkeeper carried off the field insensible."

Now Blake, being a pretty astute sort of chap, quickly realises that such things could not happen without some form of devious foreign trickery being employed. Indeed he feels sure that Sir James must have stumbled upon the Ramblers' secret thus rendering it necessary for Raymond, their manager, to effect his temporary disappearance. Spot on! James is currently languishing in a disused coal mine in Derbyshire, to be released only when the Ramblers have played their final tour match against a full England eleven. With Blake hot on the trail,Tinker falls into the clutches of the evil Raymond who, aided by his star wingers, Eclair (a Frenchman) and Blitzen (a German), takes Blake's young assistant to join Sir James. Of course the pair eventually escape and are reunited with Blake who has, by now, discovered the Ramblers' secret.

Blake retires to his workshop engaged on some mysterious business of his own in preparation for the grand climax of the story, the England match! And what a match! Blake, Tinker and Sir James are playing for England disguised under false beards (one red, one black and one grey) and the Ramblers are trounced by thirty goals to nil!

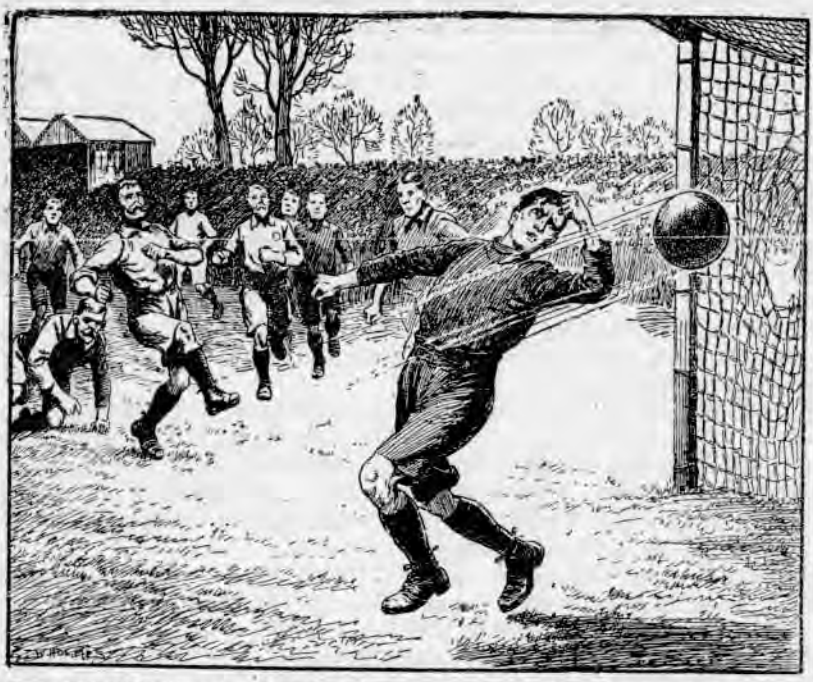
All that is left for Blake to do now is expose the fraudulent Raymond and this he does in front of the F.A. Committee and an army of policemen. The Ramblers' success, he explains, was attributable to the type of football boots used. Whipping back the sole of the boot, Blake points out a "beautiful combination of perfectly adjusted wheels, springs, cogs and levers" and a tiny stud on the toe of the boot which resembles a gun sight. Such boots, it seems, would "add a hundred percent to a player's kicking power, two hundred percent to his speed and make it possible for him to shoot with the accuracy

of a firearm." By way of demonstration he persuades one of the police constables to try a pair on and that worthy jumps "seven and twenty feet" down the room.

In case any reader still wonders how the Ramblers could get whopped thirty - nil, the answer is simply that Blake produced some mechanical boots in his workshop that were even more deadly than those described above.

With the villain routed and all gate monies returned what else can be said? Final word to the author. He tells us that there was much celebration not only in England but also in India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, in mining camps at Bendigo, under the shadows of the Himalayas and in prospectors' tents in far off Rhodesia. "And (writes Mr. Lomax) all this shows how deeply stirred was the heart of the Empire at the prospect of its football laurels being snatched away from England by a scratch team of foreigners. The general feeling was that a national calamity had been adverted."

Wow! they don't write 'em like that anymore!



SEXTON BLAKE SCORES FOR ENGLAND.—It was Sexton Blake who had tripped up Eclair, and it was Blake who had flashed down the side and completely mystified the Ramblers' keeper with a beautiful cross-shot that found the net amid thunderous applause. Second goal to England.

* *

Would the lady who phoned me on Monday, 13th June regarding Sexton Blake items for sale and rang off without leaving me her own phone number please contact me again, Margery Woods, Tel. 0723 365876.

SWEET SMELLING DEATH

by Ian Godden

Chief Inspector Bill 'Ironsides' Cromwell, ESB's chief character in the Victor Gunn novels, did not have a very impressive physical appearance. The Chief Constable of the area in Wales where this novel is set remarks on first seeing Cromwell, "Looks more like a down-at-heel door-to-door salesman than an important Scotland Yard officer". At the start of the chapter in which this remark is found ESB describes Cromwell as "middle-aged, dour, forbidding in expression, and adorned with shaggy eyebrows over a pair of keen, penetrating eyes." A page or so later we are told that, "It was difficult to believe that this lean, sour-faced man in the shabby blue serge suit and misshapen hat could be anybody important."

Not only was Cromwell most un-detective like in appearance but his methods of investigating a crime were also highly unconventional. In NEXT ONE TO DIE we are told that, "Cromwell's methods were not always orthodox but they had a habit of bringing home the bacon" and more or less the same words appear in most of the stories. In SWEET SMELLING DEATH, Cromwell's highly individual methods almost result in disaster for himself and for his young assistant, the perenially cheerful but not over-intelligent Sgt. Johnny Lister.

Towards the end of a murder investigation in a Welsh village, Cromwell & Lister sneak out of their hotel at night, without telling anybody their plans, and go off to investigate a building which houses a small local perfume distillery. One thing leads to another and the two detectives find themselves in a highly dangerous situation which would have resulted in their demise had it not been for the fortunate intervention of the young man who has followed to see what they were up to.

Cromwell & Lister have come to a remote Welsh valley to investigate the murder of an Englishman, married to a local woman, who has been found murdered. He was highly unpopular locally being a drunkard and a womaniser. The locals have no doubt at all that the man was murdered by his wife with the help of a farm-hand with whom she is thought to be having an affair. The murder weapon is found in a shed on the dead man's property and, later, the dead body of a woman with whom he was having an affair is found there also. The locals are just about ready to lynch the ones thought to be guilty and Cromwell & Lister find themselves highly unpopular for not making an arrest.

Cromwell disregards all the local commotion and goes about solving the case in his usual phlegmatic manner.

* *

CLIVE MARKHAM AND DANE THE DOG DETECTIVE

by Bill Lofts

Probably one of the best detective series to appear in any comic. Clive Markham and his four footed friend appeared in the pink comic 'Chips' for over twenty years, commencing in 1933.

The author was John Newton Chance - whose father Richard, was actually editor of the famous comic. Whilst Markham was the detective as such, a great deal of emphasis was placed on Dane when for a considerable time the title of the series was 'Dane the Dog detective'. This was reminiscent of the earlier Dirk the Dog Detective and his master, Paul Sleuth. Dane was a magnificent animal, with a noble head, and big brown eyes. When in his master's car, he would sit up in the front seat beside him. At one time the stories were told by Clive Markham, and whilst in the main they were short, complete yarns at times they ran into serial form.

Living at Greye, a fictitious place-name, Markman was cared for by his housekeeper, Mrs. Barton. The stories were of an excellent quality, and it was no wonder that in 1944 the creator turned a Dane serial together with another story into an adult novel entitled 'Screaming Fog'.

John Newton Chance was an extremely prolific, and successful writer, pouring out stories in books and newspapers. In several letters he told me that other writers eventually penned the Dane stories. Sexton Blake enthusiasts may remember his first-class stories under the John Drummond pen-name in the Third series. There were approximately 25 of them.

John Newton Chance died in 1984, aged about 72.

* *

CRIME AT CLIFF HOUSE
by Margery Woods

Part 3 The Wickedest Girl At Cliff House!

By the autumn of 1939 Cliff House School was nearing the demise of its long saga of adventure, humour, heartbreak and cameraderie, all the endearing qualities which had brought it so close to the hearts of so many readers. The country was now at war, and though this was recognised in these stories it was kept to a well-judged amount of reference without affecting the story content too much. Perhaps it is with hindsight to imagine that a sense of impermanence hung over the publishing pattern; certainly long series were not nearly so frequent and week after week would bring another single story. Until November, when one of the most exciting series enlivened the darkening weeks of that first wartime winter.

Glenda Maine arrived at Cliff House as a sixth former, ostensibly to complete her studies for matriculation. She was attractive, with great surface charm that was skilfully drawn by John Wheway, and became very popular. Only one girl in the school suspected that Glenda Maine was not as she claimed to be, but needless to say that one girl was not believed, and equally needless to say the suspicious one was Barbara Redfern.

Her actual arrival was glossed over, masked by the advent of Ray Ellis, an American chum of Leila Carroll's, who was visiting England with her father. Ray had a distant aunt in England who had recently died and Ray's father had allowed her to stay at Cliff House for a few weeks while he sorted out the estate of their late relative, who had left Ray a considerable legacy. The chums meet Ray at the station and the first thought is "grubbins", much to Bessie's delight, so they adjourn to the café, where Leila and Ray

excitedly catch up on events since their last meeting. There doesn't appear to be a single cloud looking on the horizon, least of all from the presence at the next table of a prim, quiet old lady who asked politely if the chums minded her sitting there.

But Babs does notice one or two puzzling things about the old lady, things she is to remember later, after the old lady, apparently by mistake, has picked up one of Ray's cases instead of her own. And of course, when the chums get back to Cliff House and Ray shows them the contents of the case, her legacy of jewels, Babs recalls the old lady and experiences the same chill she'd felt in the café during the encounter with the woman. While the girls gasp at the sight of a glorious emerald pendant the Bull arrives and dispatches Babs on an errand with a book for a new sixth form girl. And so Babs meets Glenda Maine and, through one small betraying mannerism, recognises her as the disguised old lady in the café.

Glenda seems instantly likeable to all but the Junior Captain and her popularity increases with the jolly sing-song in the music room where she proves herself a skilled pianist. Here there is emphasis on her hands, and it must be noted that the author lays about all the clues for the reader as well as Babs. Later, the Bull arrives at the study with a trumped-up accusation about a book and orders Babs to unlock a bureau belonging to Jemima, who is away from school at the time, in which Ray's case of jewels has been locked up for safety. Babs, suddenly realising the true identity of "The Bull", challenges her, much to the surprise of the chums. There follows a series of sinister little confrontations between Babs and the treacherous, sophisticated Glenda, who knows perfectly well that she has been rumbled yet is confident and cool enough to treat the situation with mocking amusement which holds an underlying tone of threat to Babs.

In a favoured ploy, Babs can't win. Her attempts to safeguard Ray's jewels only end in antagonising Ray and the disappearance of the gems, albeit temporarily until they mysteriously reappear with the exception of the emerald pendant. The first story ends with Glenda a heroine, having saved the pendant from an unknown intruder, and the promise of further treachery to come in the following week's story.

The promise is more than fulfilled with Babs made unpopular among her own chums and even with her boy chum from Friardale School, Jimmy Richmond, as she engages in a battle of wills and subterfuge to prevent Glenda Maine succeeding in a daring robbery at the nearby home of the wealthy Field-Croft family.

In the third story Mabs has come round to Babs' view of Glenda Maine, and she too now has to suffer the vindictive attention of the older girl. There is to be yet another school collection, for the hospital charity fund this time and the chums are aghast when they learn that Glenda has been appointed school treasurer. Their request to Miss Primrose to give the task to Dulcia Fairbrother, the school captain, meets a sharp and unsympathetic refusal from the Head. The two chums decide to take on Glenda at her own game; Mabs is no slouch at the art of disguise. This plan is thwarted when Mabs, disguised as the Head and in the process of removing Glenda from the treasurer's job, is confronted by an appalled Miss Primrose, which naturally, Glenda makes the most of!

Exist Mabs in dimmed spot!

The climax of the great collecting week is a masquerade held in Courtfield Market Place. This proves a tremendous financial success, except for Bessie, who had taken her collecting box to Courtfield High School tuck shop, where she had been thoroughly taken in herself by one of that rival school's chief japers. Poor Bessie dissolves into

tears when her magnificently heavy box disgorges lead curtain weights, old buttons, bits of iron filings and magnetic sand filched from the Courtfield School's laboratory.

The girls try to console Bessie by means of a somewhat contrived scheme of an impromptu competition which Bessie wins, as she is meant to, but which ends in a perfect opportunity for Glenda to discredit Mabs. After which, the obtuse fat duffer manages unwittingly to alert Glenda to the chums' latest plan. Disaster befalls Mabs as she tries to prevent the theft of the bumper Cliff House collection on its way to the treasurer of the hospital fund committee. Mabs is accused of theft and is expelled. Now Glenda has succeeded in removing one of the barriers in her path. The next one must be Babs!

The final story reveals Glenda's true identity and the reason for her presence at Cliff House. Her real name is Natalie Swift, and she is a daring crook who is a mistress of disguise. Her role of schoolgirl is a perfect cover for her sorties out to local houses in search of precious loot. And at Cliff House she finds what must seem like a crook's pot of gold at the rainbow's end.

Not long after poor Mabs has been expelled Clara Trevlyn receives a letter from home, a letter with a very intriguing document enclosed.

Ardent researchers of Cliff House history will recall that Clara Trevlyn's aunt had once lived at Cliff House at a time when it became a private residence for a while. Great Aunt Sarah was reputed to have been very wealthy, and had willed her possessions to Clara's great, great grandfather, but after her death no trace could be found of this supposed fortune and gradually the family came to the conclusion that the eccentric old lady had simply imagined her wealth. Now Jack, Clara's brother, rummaging among an accumulation of ancient papers in the attics of Trevlyn Towers, had found this mysterious old chart.

Of course the chums are wild with excitement---so is Miss Charmant!---as they pore over this map which appears to be of the Cliff House crypt. The readers would have guessed by now that Miss Charmant was actually Glenda up to her old tricks again, and their guess would be right as she loses no time in filching the precious chart and going in search of the treasurer. All the ingredients dear to the hearts of storypaper readers are present in this final story of the Glenda Maine series: the mysterious depths of the crypt, the secret door and the tunnel, the tracing out of it, the battle of wits with the audacious girl crook, and at last the discovery of the treasure Great Aunt Sarah had concealed there all those many, many years ago. But Glenda Maine does not give up easily. She manages to lock the girls underground. She also helps a roof cave-in to make more sure of their being unable to pursue her while she carries out her last planned coup, that of disguising herself as Miss Windham, the Hospital Fund Secretary, probably to enable her to make a successful departure from the school without fear of challenge. But there is always the small, unforseen and apparently unrelated happening that can ruin the best laid of plans. And so it was in the case of Glenda Maine.

When the chums finally dig their way out of the tunnel ruins and set off in hot pursuit of Glenda and the stolen treasure the first person they espy is Piper, the school porter. They breathlessly ask if he has seen Miss Maine, to be told that nobody has come in or out of these gates this morning, he's just opening them. That is when Babs has one of her famous, brilliant flashes of intuition.

If this is right, then the Miss Windham addressing the school after morning callover can't have arrived; the Miss Windham in Big Hall at that very moment has to be Glenda Maine. Eureka!

A few moments later Glenda Maine is unmasked, in that last dramatic confrontation before the entire school. Out of her bag tumble the treasure, gold and jewels---and the make-up box with all the secrets of her disguises.

This is a great series---provided disbelief is completely suspended. During its course Glenda Maine impersonates: Miss Bullivant; the old lady in the café; Miss Charmant; Mrs. Tallow, the housekeeper at the Field Croft house; Dulcia Fairbrother; and Mabs. It is one thing to carry off a successful disguise on stage with the proscenium between artist and audience, or in front of cameras with a fully trained staff of make-up experts at hand, but another to carry it off successfully in broad daylight and at close quarters with people who know the subject very, very well. Time after time in popular fiction the disguise ploy crops up, and it is always a ploy to question. With Glenda Maine some of these disguises were donned and shed in rapid time, perhaps too rapid for complete conviction, particularly with her older subjects. The contrast between youth and age is so marked that hours can be needed, even with today's advanced skills, to alter facial contours, and add age to youth or, even more difficult, subtract it. And the three giveaway points, neck, hands and upper arms, always present a special problem before the make-up experts turn to the obvious like wigs and padding. But again, these stories were created to amuse and thrill youngsters, and most of them not only fulfilled this aim extremely well but were worked out with great skill and craft.

There was a postscript to this series. Glenda Maine turned up again a few months later...

(More next month....)

* *

FROM JOHN GEAL

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA No. 6 Fisher T. Fish MAGNET No. 1110

"Six, I guess!" said Fisher T. Fish. That remark did not mean that Fishy was uncertain of the number and was guessing at it. He knew that he wanted six tarts. He was merely speaking the language of his native land.

Mrs. Mimble proceeded to sort out six large and lucious jam-tarts. Fisher T. fish watched her with a thoughtful brow and a searching eye.

It was uncommon for Fisher T. Fish to stand himself anything like a spread in his study. Food at Greyfriars School was paid for, and a fellow who did not turn up at a meal was losing something for which cash had been paid - an impossible thing to Fisher Tarleton Fish. Tea in the study was all very well if the school footed the bill; but the school didn't. Tea in the study, therefore, was of no use to Fisher T. Fish. His private opinion was that the Head allowed tea in the study in order to save expense in the catering, and not a little extra profit. Fishy could understand that; it was what he would have done himself had he been a schoolmaster. What he couldn't understand was fellows falling into so obvious a snare. But Fishy had long ago discovered that the poor little island in which he now sojourned was populated by the world's prize boobs.

The school tea in Hall was plain and wholesome - quite wholesome and very, very plain. Every fellow above the Third was allowed to tea in his own quarters if he liked, at his own expense. It was a highly - prized privileges, and no fellow ever tea'd in Hall except in stony periods! Except Fishy! Fishy turned up to tea in Hall, not because he liked it more than anybody else, but because it had been paid for; and he always ate as much as he possible could on the same principle. Fisher T. Fish never missed tea in Hall unless some fellow asked him to tea, which fellows seldom did, unless they owed him money and desired an extension of time on a loan.

* *

GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE

by D.J. O'Leary

Reading some favourite story-papers recently of the period 1942-1944 in the Thomson publications, particularly the ROVER and WIZARD, (both kindly donated by Colin Morgan, author of the indispensable ROVER INDEX), I was struck by some stories which had stayed in my memory for around fifty years and which now seemed to chime in with up-to-date news-stories. In the past six months, for example, I saw a T.V. programme on California's preparations for the "Big One", the huge earthquake when the San Andreas fault finally slips and produces devastation in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Shortly afterwards I read of continuing research into lasers and holograms at my local University, Loughborough. Finally, I heard on the radio a report on the scandal of drugs in athletics which has tainted even world records and the Olympics.

My mind slipped back to my junior school days when my avid reading of the Thomson "Big Four" (ADVENTURE, WIZARD, HOTSPUR and ROVER - for by then the SKIPPER had gone) gave, even in the midst of the war, re-assurance that brave and resolute men opposed the worst that nature and evil men could send against them and would always triumph in the end.

War stories naturally predominated at that time and heroes like the Iron Teacher and the Wolf of Kabul made fools of Axis forces every week. But the traditional mainstays of boys' fiction were still there, school, cowboy, space, historical and magic stories played their part too. One element was always present: the heroes were always honourable, prepared at all times to sacrifice themselves for their duty and their comrades.

Of the war stories I remember especially one with a really striking basis. In the "Convoy of Ghost Ships", from the ROVER of 1942, German attacks on Arctic convoys are continually frustrated, leaving the Nazi U-boats, planes and surface raiders baffled. Mysteriously, attempt after attempt to destroy the British convoys comes to naught when merchant ships and escorts seem invulnerable to torpedoes, bombs and shells. The reason was as follows: in the destroyer Grangle was mounted ".....a glass shelf attached to an electrical apparatus which stood on a suspended table...." and on this shelf were set out "...tiny model ships less than one inch long, perfect in every detail. They represented warships, freighters, tramps and general cargo ships." The civilian inventor in chart had discovered a method by which images of model ships could be projected on to the sea with all the appearance of reality. The illusion was perfect in three dimensions so that even from the air these phantom ships seemed to be real. A touch of authenticity is added by the necessary condition that the device could only be operated "when the temperature was below 40 degrees and there was a certain amount of mist. The North Sea at this season was ideal...."

The genuine destroyer was too insignificant a target for the enemy airmen and seamen in the midst of what seems a tempting array of bigger prizes and, with the judicious removal of one or two models from the apparatus in the middle of a ferocious attack, the Germans were hoodwinked into thinking their efforts rewarded. Meanwhile, other convoys were able to get through to their destinations unharried.

When I mentioned my delight in re-reading this story which had always struck me as ingenious and not implausible, my friend, who is a lecturer at Loughborough University, at once exclaimed: "Why, it sounds like holograms!"

(I don't know whether the idea of holograms was around during the last war but in the earliest editions of H. Montgomery Hyde's study of Sir William Stephenson, A MAN CALLED INTREPID, we read that Sir William, Head of British Intelligence in North America, was once amazed to see a Canadian lake apparently full of warships. The producer of this illusion? Jasper maskelyne the famous stage magician who was then working for the Intelligence Service. May be the ROVER was on to something!)

Another story which seemed to me when I first read it as having hit upon an original basis for a tale of fantastic adventure was THE FIRES BENEATH THE DESERT (the WIZARD 1944): "In that part of California south of Los Angeles earthquake shocks were frequent. During the past ten years whole cities had been wiped out and thousands of lives had been lost..... For years scientists had studied the causes of these disturbances and had calculated that if a big explosion could be caused far enough underground, the direction of the earthquake shocks would be altered. The desert would get the earthquakes instead of the fertile coastal belt."

Certainly, in 1944 few of us in Britain were aware of California's constant peril from natural "time bombs" like the San Andreas Fault. But the attraction for me was the series of hair-raising adventures experienced by the four explorers. Clad in suits of asbestos and steel when flames threaten, they successfully carry their loads of "nitrogenulene" through an amazing variety of deadly dangers to its place for explosion. "They had reached regions of fire, had discovered fabulous monsters and strange races of men, underground oceans, jungles and many other marvels" before they could return to the cave system in the desert from which they had set out.

The pillared cavern where the one-horned fury lives.

Even if the WIZARD's anonymous writer had obviously been influenced by Jules Verne's JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH and Edgar Rice Burroughs' PELLUCIDAR novels, we schoolboys didn't know that, and wouldn't have cared if we had!

(By the way, when this story was reprinted in picture strip version in the NEW HOTSPUR, 1960-1961, the asbestos suits had been changed, for the worse in my opinion, to reflect a more astronaut-like costume and the title was now "The Hot Walk to the Everlasting Fires"!)

The last of these 1940s' glimpses of the future came as I was in the very middle of reading a "Wilson" story from a 1944 WIZARD. Although this particular story did not hold the same resonance for me as the previous ones discussed, I must have read it before (I'd read all the Wilson yarns from their beginnings in 1943) but, as I glanced at the heading "Germany uses drugs; Britain uses Wilson", a voice from the radio began a discussion of present-day drug scandals in athletics.

Wilson, of course, was arguably the greatest hero created by the D.C. Thomson story papers. A mysterious and eccentric athlete, his first adventures were set in prewar days and supposedly narrated by sports reporter W.S.K. Webb who had been present at Wilson's astounding début, a mile run in three minutes forty-eight seconds (remember, this was set in the 1930s).

The unprecedented popularity of Wilson, whose character combined fantastic elements (his super-human abilities, his mysterious origin and age, his secret base on the Yorkshire Moors) and the authenticity of the superbly described world of athletics, all this ensured a number of series in various Thomson papers, in both written and picture form over many years. And, more unusually, Wilson was a real-life inspiration for many youngsters. To quote Bill Lofts in THE MEN BEHIND BOYS' FICTION: "I do know, for a fact, that these stories inspired more than one young athlete to later become International runners."

I suppose that drugs to enhance performance have always played a part in competitive sports. Now, with the enormous financial rewards for success, the temptation is vastly increased with the results we see today. But Wilson's first encounter with the problem came when, just before the outbreak of war, he was part of the British team competing in Nazi Germany.

Dr. Pfeiffer, the sinister President of the Reich Bureau of Sport and Physical Education assures Goebbels that he will ensure that the German runners defeat the British, despite the presence of the phenomenal Wilson. Nevertheless, Wilson and his team win narrowly, in spite of the performance of the Nazi athletes whose running surpasses what their previous records reveal of their abilities.

Germany uses drugs; Britain uses Wilson. Who wins? Why, Wilson, of course.

Before the next and final race, a medly relay, at Nuremberg, the Britons relax in Switzerland, near the German border. They are interrupted by the furtive arrival of one of their defeated opponents. Now a disgraced fugitive after his failure, he tells them of the drugs the Germans will take again to guarantee success in Nuremberg. Their only chance, he tells them, is to take the drug themselves. The British, of course, scornfully reject the drug he's brought for them and, indeed, Wilson throws it on the burning log-fire.

Then he maps out their strategy: "It's a matter of mathematics.... our times will have to add up to less than the Germans' total, that's all. I'll run the half-mile stage of the race and I calculate I'll have to run it in one minute". With the world record standing at around one minute fifty seconds at the time this would obviously be a tall order!

Thanks to Wilson's inspiration and unorthodox training methods - he runs a practice half-mile straight down a hill-side to prove it can be done in a minute - the Britons triumph, and drugs in sport, this time, do not succeed.

From these stories we as boys could have absorbed some useful lessons: the value of science and ingenuity in the battle against an enemy enjoying overwhelming superiority in the "Convoy of Ghost Ships"; the skilful and fearless use of technology to overcome the blind forces of nature in "The Fires beneath the Desert:" the defeat of a perverted science by the determined refusal to lower one's standards when faced with failure in "The Truth about Wilson."

An idealistic interpretation, perhaps, which we were unaware of in our enjoyment of thrills and action. But the constant emphasis on the need for tenacity and determination in pursuit of worth while goals could never have been a bad message to send to young people.

When the Thomson authors - alas, anonymously - gave us some glimpses of the future, they also provided us with thrilling adventure stories and a solid code of values.

I think we can agree that this was no mean achievement.

(Illustrations: Copyright D.C. Thomson)

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MORCOVE MUSINGS

by Dennis L. Bird

Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Cliff House and many other famous schools feature regularly in the pages of "Collectors' Digest", but in recent years there has not been so much about another notable academy - Morcove. The Editor and I felt that it was time to redress the balance a little, so this is the first of an occasional series about Betty Barton's alma mater.

Many readers will have fond memories of the activities of the study 12 girls, but such reminiscences belong in later articles. I want to begin with the story of the school itself. It was situated in magnificent scenery facing the sea, on the north coast of Devon - that is, somewhere along the spectacular 50 miles of coastline that runs from near Hartland Point to Lynmouth The nearest town was Barncombe, which seems to have been somewhat itinerant; it is variously described as being five, six, and even ten miles from the school. Much closer was the village of Morcove itself, which sounds from its name as though it must be right on the coast - but we hear little of it in the saga.

The school itself dates only from the nineteenth century, but it stood "on the site of a much older scholastic establishment" (I quote from the "Schoolgirls Own Annual" of 1928). Many centuries earlier there had been a monastery there, but during the reign of King Henry VIII most of the buildings were pulled down. What little was left

standing was turned into a so-called "dame school" in the time of queen Elizabeth I. In the 1820s, a tremendous storm assailed the North Devon coast and most of the aging buildings collapsed. The site was then abandoned for several years.

Eventually someone had the idea of opening a new school there. The land belonged to the Earl of Lundy, of Barncombe Castle, who became a director of the school, and a handsome structure soon arose in white stone, the facade being in the Grecian style. There was "a large main building with north and south wings." The classrooms, Great hall, music-room and dining room were all in the main building. The North Wing housed the headmistress's private quarters, the staff common-room and bedrooms and the kitchens.

Most of the girls' dormitories and studies were in the South Wing, the Sixth Formers having the ground floor. The Fourth Form studies were on the third floor, but their dormitory was in the main building.

In front of the main building was the quadrangle, with playing-fields stretching away to the south. Near the kitchen-garden (which provided all the fresh vegetables needed) were the coal-house, some disused stables, and the garage for the headmistress's car and the school bus.

"The lodge and school gates are directly in front of the main building," says the Annual. "The Lodge is a pretty little house occupied by Septimus Steggles, the school porter. His wife, called by the girls 'Dame Steggles,' runs the school tuckshop."

At the extreme east end of the grounds stood the last relic of Morcove's old days. It was a ruined tower which at some time had been a gatehouse. It might have been part of the original monastery of Morcove, or perhaps it was the home of the Tudor lady who ran the dame school.

And ever present were the moors which ran right down to the top of the stern cliffs which plunged sheer to the often troubled waters of the Bristol Channel. The beach was a favourite resort, and so were the many mysterious caves.

Such was the background to the Morcove stories, which ran from 1921 to 1938. The school's ethos may sound a little strange and old-fashioned in these cynical 1990s - although I think we could do worse than pay heed to some of those values, summed up by an anonymous pupil in that 1928 Annual:

"Our girls....'play the game.' There is practically no sneaking in our school, our mistresses are all perfectly good sorts, and we pay just as much attention to the athletic side as we do to the scholastic. The result is that a girl, when she leaves Morcove, is not only thoroughly educated in the scholastic meaning of the word, but she knows how to keep up what we proudly term 'the Morcove spirit.' None of our old scholars have let us down yet, and we hope they never will."

* *

AN ENDEARING DUO

by J.E.M.

Edgar Wallace's famous character, Mr. J.G. Reeder, has been given a well-deserved airing in these pages. I expressed my own enthusiasm for him nearly four years ago in the "Other-Favourite-Detectives" series (Digest No. 525). Much more recently, Len Hawkey and Ernest Holman have come up with some fascinating information and, in Len's case, some thought-provoking and entertaining views on possible Reeder derivatives.

Wallace created only a few characters who appeared in his stories more than once and, of these, John G. Reeder, detective-extraordinary at the Public Prosecutor's Office, was surely outstanding. It is therefore, noteworthy and intriguing that another character turned up more than once in the Reeder series. This was the delightful and unforgettable Margaret Belman to whom Mr. Holman refers in his article, "JGR" (Digest No. 570).

Never having read *Terror Keep* from which he quotes, I was horrified to learn that the shrewd, staid Reeder here seemed to have taken leave of his senses, behaving quite skittishly and even enjoying a kiss from Miss Belman! This is certainly not the Reeder *or* the Margaret Belman we meet in the collection of short stories published under the title of *The Mind of Mr.J.G. Reeder*.

Here, Miss Belman behaves with suitable respect (touched with some awe) for the great detective. She rejects the young man referred to in Mr. Holman's article but this does not indicate any switch of affection to the paternal Mr. Reeder. He, for his part, always behaves with great correctness to the young lady who, incidentally, happens only to be a neighbour and gets involved in dangerous adventures entirely by chance.

Margaret Belman turns up in four of the eight stories in the collection referred to and, in all of these, is saved from lethal peril by the ever-vigilant Reeder. But the sharing of some pretty hair-raising adventures generates very little emotion between them. It is true that on one occasion Reeder looks down into his young companion's face and feels "a curious sensation which was not entirely pleasure and not wholly pain." In another episode he does go as far as kissing her hand but this is only when they face imminent destruction and even Reeder can see no way out; (in fact, of course, they are duly saved). In short, feelings beyond friendly affection and warm respect simply do not arise. Indeed, Reeder is genuinely disappointed when Miss Belman breaks with her younger swain.

This strangely assorted duo is perhaps unique in the Wallace oeuvre. It is surely an unusual and fascinating combination for any fiction. For me, and I am sure for countless other readers, the brief adventures of J.G. Reeder and Margaret Belman have an odd and unforgettable warmth - and not a little humour.

(All the stories in *The Mind of Mr. J.G. Reeder* appeared in The Thriller in 1934, the actual Reeder-Belman tales being "The Stealer of Marble", "Sheer Melodrama", "The Green Mamba" and "The Investors".

Incidentally, in all of these Miss Belman's surname is spelt with only one "l" unlike that apparently used in *Terror Keep* as quoted by Mr. Holman.)

BRIAN DOYLE comments:

Re. Ernest Holman's piece about Mr. J.G. Reeder, created by the prolific Edgar Wallace; he mentions that Will Fyffe played Reeder in a British film in the thirties. He may be interested to know that there were, in fact, four Reeder films: "Red Aces" (1929), with George Bellamy as Mr. Reeder; Edgar Wallace himself both directed and wrote the screenplay; "Mr. Reeder in Room 13" (1938), with Gibb McLaughlin as Mr. Reeder, and co-starring the delectable Sally Gray. Directed by Norman Lee: "The Mind of Mr. Reeder" (1939), with Will Fyffe as Mr. Reeder (one of the most bizarre pieces of mis-casting of that or any other year!) and co-starring Kay Walsh and Ronald Shiner. Directed by Jack Raymond; and "The Missing People" (also 1939), again with Fyffe, Walsh and Shiner, and again directed by Raymond (they were both probably made 'back-to-back' - at the same time.)

As for radio, Eliot Makeham played the title-role in a BBC Radio series, "The Mind of Mr. J.G. Reeder", as part of the series 'Time for Crime', in August-September, 1940.

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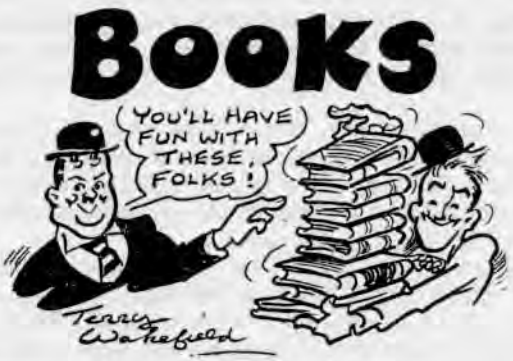

ROUND-UP OF SUMMER READING

by Mary Cadogan

MOSSYFACE by William Earle (W.E. Johns.) The republication of this book, which has been unavailable for over sixty years, is a most welcome event. John Trendler and Norman Wright, who have now privately produced it, are to be congratulated for their enterprise in relaunching it in such an attractive hardback edition, which includes four specially commissioned, atmospheric illustrations by Ron Tiner.

The C.D. has a particular interest in this early story by W.E. Johns; six years ago, in our June 1988 issue (no. 498), Jack Adrian contriubted an article 'In Pursuit of "Mossyface"' which revealed the results of his researches into the dating of this book. Until then it had been thought to have first appeared in 1932, when it was published by Mellifont. It was known to be W.E. John's first extended work of fiction, and its printing by Mellifont preceeded the first Biggles book, *The Camels Are Coming*, by some months. However, thanks to Jack Adrian's diligent researches (and what he

described as a stroke of luck) he was able to establish that *Mossyface* was first published as long ago as 1922 as no. 121 of the Weekly Telegraph Novels series produced by John Leng.

It features James Margerson - known as 'Mossyface' - a former First World War pilot who becomes involved in an exciting middle eastern exploit in co-operation with a distinguished Egyptologist, Augustus Graham, his attractive daughter Mary, and Tommy Vincent, who had been Margerson's observer during the war. Mossyface stumbles on Graham and his daughter in the grounds surrounding the large house, deep in the English countryside, where they are living in a state of seige, with enemies waiting to pounce and to steal an invaluable papyrus which Graham has discovered in an ancient Egyptian tomb. This gives clues to the whereabouts of a temple which is said to house not only remarkable treasures but another papyrus 'giving information that would in all probability throw light upon matters which have been the subject of much controversy among Egyptologists for many years.'

Augustus Graham and Mary have, before the advent of Mossyface, been afraid to venture beyond their house and garden, for fear of attack from their besigers. Needless to say, Mossyface, who is cast in the mould of the casually intrepid and fearfully adept flyers which Johns was so good at creating, makes short shift of Graham's enemies, and hits on the idea of taking off to Egypt and pursuing the quest for the temple and its hidden treasures by air.

As well as the chills and thrills of the chase (and of rescuing Mary when she is abducted by tribesmen) there is a touch of romance and lots of early aviational atmosphere, including a description of an air battle in which Mossyface and Vincent who are unarmed have to get the better of opponents who are well equipped to dispense instant death and destruction:

'With lightning speed he [Mossyface] kicked out his right foot resting on the rudder bar, and swung the joystick right over, performing the stunt known as 'half-rolling', and even as he did so the vicious crackle of a Lewis gun split the air above the roar of the engines, and a stream of bullets passed where he should have been, but was not,...'

Good, inspiring stuff in a joyous read! I whiled away a delicious afternoon in the sunny garden with *Mossyface* and am delighted to have it to add to my collection of books by W.E. Johns. As it has been privately published, it can only be obtained on postal application to Norman Wright, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, Herts, WD1 4JL, with a cheque or postal order, made payable to J. TRENDLER, for £26.50 (for the U.K.), £27.50 (for the rest of Europe), £29.40 (for the U.S.A. and Canada) and £30.50 (for Australasia). These prices, of course, include postage charges.

A BUCHAN COMPANION by Paul Webb (published by Alan Sutton, £16.99). As its cover blurb claims, this book is a Guide to the Novels and Short Stories of John Buchan, an author whose tales of high adventure seem (despite changes in fashions and social mores) to have an enduring appeal. It is both a welcome appreciation of this wonderful story-teller and a useful index of his works, providing an alphabetical guide to the characters, settings and plots. Paul Webb has spiced his literary assessments with perceptive social comments and, unlike certain contemporary critics, he sets out to enhance rather than to undermine our appreciation of his distinguished subject. He also gives information about how Buchan's books were originally received and reviewed, and identifies real-life people who have inspired the creation of some of the characters.

In short, *A Buchan Companion* is a book which will provide many hours of happy browsing and, as well as having plenty of nostalgic charm, it is rich in wit and insights. Ideal bedside reading, it is a volume to drool and dream over. As well as Paul Webb's intriguing comments on the books and stories, I very much enjoyed his biographical introduction, and his inspired selection of colourful quotations from the Buchan canon. Richard Hannay, for example, reflecting on the surprising softness of the quarters occupied by his Teuton adversary, Ulric von Stumm, remarks 'It was the room of a man who had a passion for frippery, who had a perverted taste for soft, delicate things...', while Archie Roylance deals firmly with the boredom of his friends: 'Here you are, every one of you a swell of sorts, with everything to make you cheerful, and you're growsing like a battalion!.... What you want is some hard exercise. Go and sweat ten hours a day on a steep hill, and you'll get rid of these notions.' The final paragraph of Paul Webb's introduction expresses the hope that, as well as being useful to students of social history, this Guide will convey the fun of reading Buchan. His enthusiasm is certainly infectious, and his readers - to quote his own words - 'whether they tramp the Scottish countryside of *John Macnab*, run through the Istanbul back streets of *Greenmantle* or survive the dangers that lurk by every Mayfair corner in *The Power-House*' - will certainly enjoy the pleasures that this book presents.

A GOLDEN LOVE STORY by Phyllis Seymour (Lutterworth Press, £14.99). In a very different mood but also extremely enjoyable is this personal, real-life account of one woman's life and relationship with several generations of a family of golden retrievers. Phyllis Seymour's story will touch the hearts of every dog-owner; it is humorous as well as moving to read of her gradual metamorphosis from 'novice owner at the mercy of her puppy's wiles' to expert dog handler, trainer and breeder.

The author found her involvement with her retrievers particularly satisfying because for much of her childhood she and her family had lived in a flat where it was not possible to keep dogs. Just before their marriage, she and her future husband were greeted, at a Godstone hotel, by two beautiful golden retrievers - and it seemed a case of love at first sight: as she says 'from then on, there was never a second thought: the breed had spoken to us there and then.'

Dog breeding and training is, of course, hard work, and *A Golden Love Story* describes the practical problems associated with this as vividly as its joys and satisfactions. The book carries a short foreword by Sir Colin Cowdrey who, commending Phyllis Seymour's story writes that 'Any dog owner will recognise the fun, fulfilment and ultimate heartbreak associated with the love of these special friends.'

.....

THE ISLAND OF ADVENTURE by Enid Blyton. Facsimile published by Pan Macmillan. Hardback £14.99, paperback £3.99. **Reviewed by Norman Wright.**
Enid Blyton's *Adventure* series has always been a favourite amongst older children and it is not surprising, therefore, in this, the fiftieth anniversary year of the publication of the first book in the series, that Pan Macmillan should have decided to reprint *The Island of Adventure*, as a facsimile first edition.

Set on the rugged coast of Cornwall the four heroes of the story, Jack, Lucy-Ann, Philip and Dinah, are soon up to their ears in high adventure on the bleak Isle of Gloom. *The Island of Adventure* is Blyton at her very best, written at a time (1944) when her creative powers were just reaching their peak. It is a magical blending of many of her most potent plot ingredients that resulted in a tale that was both literate and exciting. It

has that vitality and freshness, found in all of her best work, that gives it a timeless quality.

Unlike some of Blyton's other adventures stories, that frequently seem to come to an end all too soon, the *Adventure* series were all chunky volumes, with *The Island of Adventure* running to 327 pages. Such length gave Blyton plenty of space to develop her plots and characters. One of the great joys of the *Adventure* titles are the illustrations by Stuart Tresilian whose work was used for all eight books in the series. While not having that brooding mystery of Eileen Soper's Famous Five illustrations, his work was always beautifully composed and conveyed a great feeling of rural England. His colourful dustwrapper designs for *The Island of Adventure* and subsequent titles must have helped to sell many copies. Some years ago the original artwork for half a dozen of his *Adventure* series dustwrappers came up for auction where they realised far more than their estimated value.

Pan Macmillan have done a fairly good job in producing a facsimile of the original first edition. The book itself was reproduced from an actual first edition that I provided the publishers with. The paper used for the facsimile is slightly thicker than that used in the original 1944 edition resulting in the volume being about three eights of an inch thicker than the original. Another difference is that although the book has pictorial boards, similar to the original first, the picture is not embossed. The original wrapper design has been used but on close comparison between my own first edition and the facsimile I see that on the true first edition dustwrapper Enid Blyton's name appears in block letters on the front and spine while on the facsimile her famous signature appears - indicating that the facsimile wrapper was produced from a reprint wrapper. These small points aside it is a pleasing volume that will sit well on any bookshelf. As original copies of the first edition are now scarce and costly this book will be welcomed by many collectors as a very acceptable substitute - until they can track down an elusive original dustwrappered copy.

* * * \

AN ELUSIVE BOOK

by Tony Glynn

You really touched a chord when you mentioned the reading memories which have become half lost over the years. I thought at once of a book whose title I have been trying to recall for years and years - and, naturally, I thought a great deal about the person who gave me the book - Millie.

Millie was a lovely young lady who lived with her parents next door to my grandparents in the seaside resort of Southport. She was very fond of my young sister and myself.

At the outbreak of the war, she was probably a typical girl of the thirties and she always seemed to be lighthearted. During the first Christmas holidays of the war, Millie and her fiancé took me to the pantomime. They seemed to me to be very grown up and sophisticated but I suppose they were both only about 20. They indulged me 'something dreadful', buying me sweets - still plentiful and not yet on "points" - and giving me a wonderful time. It was the last Christmas in which there was anything of the old atmosphere of peace, before the world changed so greatly. Possibly Millie and her young man had some idea of the dramatic times which were developing for their generation, indeed, for all of us, because just a year later, I was involved in the Manchester "Christmas Blitz" of 1940.

I have a very fresh memory of sitting in Millie's house while she prepared for that visit to the theatre and she was merrily singing "Waltzing in the Clouds", a Deanna Durbin song which was all the rage at the time.

Soon after this, when I was visiting my grandparents again and just before Millie married, she gave me a book which she said had been among her own books since schooldays, though it was a boy's book. The curious thing is that, for years, I have been trying to recall its title. It probably dated from the middle thirties and it was of the familiar format of so many children's books of the time: stout cloth covers and thick pages of the kind used in annuals. It was a tale of shipwreck and I remember the name of the author well enough. It was H. Taprell Dorling who preceded his name with a naval rank, Commander, I think. I encountered his name in later years and I believe he used the pen-name "Taffrail" on other works. Indeed, I think this pseudonym appeared in brackets after his name on my elusive book.

Curiously, though I enjoyed this yarn and recall devouring it during the train journey back home, I cannot remember much about it except that it concerned two boys wrecked on a remote island. I do remember that the name of the ship they were wrecked in was the "Endeavour" and I think this might have occurred in the name of the novel. I also recall that, at one point, the boys quarrelled and tried to go their separate ways. I wonder if any CD readers have encountered this book?

Nor surprisingly, whenever this tale comes to mind and whenever I hear any song by Deanna Durbin, I think at once of good-hearted Millie. But perhaps that's one of the secrets of our hobby - it's not just those old books that delight us; it's the many precious memories surrounding them.

Keep up the good work. The CD is a tonic every month.

* *

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 Rd., Watford, WD1 4JL. Tel.(0923) 232383.

MORE MEMORIES

by Leslie Laskey

I am sure that there are many readers who have had those tantalizing, incomplete memories of particular books that they read a long time ago. A search for a book or magazine may be rewarded many years later.

I recall the day when, as a first-former at my school, I chanced to walk past the doors of the school library during the lunch-hour. A second-former named Parker was standing beside a great stack of "MAGNETS" that must have been more than a foot high. He was accosting passers-by with the announcement "MAGNETS - ten for a penny."

I stopped and looked. I recognised that paper with the blue and orange printed cover. Several months earlier, when I had still been at my prep school, a boy with whom I had gone home to have tea had given me a copy of this paper - also a copy of another one called the "GEM". I remembered that I had found both papers interesting. So I bought ten of Parker's "MAGNETS". I could not afford to buy more.

The ten papers included two or three stories from the "Ralph Stacey" series which had been published a year earlier. I remember that there were also included parts of the "Polpelly" Christmas series.

I found that these "MAGNETS" provided compelling reading, and it was not long before I began to buy the paper every week. I did not save my copies until the spring of 1938. From then on I saved both "MAGNETS" and "GEMS" and I still possess all my original copies up to the closure of the papers.

However, I had still not been able to read more than parts of that gripping story of Ralph Stacey at Greyfriars.

Long after the War, in 1956, I was glancing through a copy of "EXCHANGE & MART" when I came across an advert inserted by book-dealer Thomas Lambert of Norwich. I wrote to him and subsequently bought from him a large number of "MAGNETS" and "GEMS". A few more stories in the "Stacey" series turned up.

It was not until 1975 that the late, and greatly missed, Norman Shaw was able to fill in the final gaps in my "Stacey" series. At last I was able to read that splendid series from start to finish.

It had been a long time.

Incidentally, it was Norman Shaw who introduced me to the "C.D.". I had never heard of it before.

* *

FORUM

For the exchange of Readers' views

From BEN BLIGH: Re. Brian Crookes' article Branch *Line Bookstall* in last month's C.D., the Index Album of *Speed Cars* was given with the Skipper no. 441, February 11th 1939, and *Motor Cars* was given with Skipper no. 440, February 4th, 1939.

Editor's Note: Mr. COLIN MORGAN also provided us with this information as well as making the following comment:-

As a student of the 'Dick Barton' radio series, I was very interested to see it mentioned by Brian Doyle in his 'Other Favourite Detectives' piece on p.11/12. However, there is one small error - the series ran until 1951 not 1950 as stated.

From MARK TAHA: In reply to John Lewis (FORUM C.D. 571) I remember during the Stacey series Bunter being described as weighing fourteen stones in the story and as 14 stone 12½ lbs by the Editor. Also I'd say that Dr. Locke was over sixty if Colonel Wharton had been one of his pupils.

On another point, Peter Mahony's series is one of the best things I've ever read in C.D. I must, however, point out that Squiff was captain of the Remove when Wharton was 'chucked' in the 1932 Rebel series. Wharton indeed described him as 'the best man for the job' and his influence got him in by a landslide. However, Squiff stepped down early the following term saying 'We want Wharton! I only thought of myself as a stopgap.' I remember Wharton playing against the Remove twice - losing for the Fourth and winning for Courtfield. One final point, Peter made a mistake in his last paragraph. On both subsequent occasions when the captaincy fell vacant, Vernon-Smith *did* stand as a candidate. He got only four votes in the Autumn of 1932, but only lost by one vote to Tom Brown during the Stacey series.

Frankly, I preferred him to Wharton. Vernon-Smith was easily my favourite Removite. And with him as captain - well, life would never have been dull!

From JOHN BECK: I was interested to read of Bob Whiter's recollections of his first Rupert book (Forum, July C.D.). From his description it would appear to be the 1931 MONSTER RUPERT which contains stories 'Rupert and the Robber Wolf' and Rupert and the Enchanted Princess' as well as 'Rupert and the Black Dwarf' which Bob remembers. The book cost 2/6d (12½p), the same price as the next three issued each year up to 1934. Although the four books featuring Mary Tourtel's Rupert stories appeared one per year, they are not considered to be 'Rupert Annuals'. These were first published in 1936 and featured stories written and illustrated by Alfred Bestall. Rupert Annuals still appear in time for inclusion in Christmas stockings every year, and now feature stories by Rupert's current artist, John Harrold. It must be the longest running current children's Annual and has been in full colour since 1940.

The yellow book from Bob's past featuring 'Rupert and the Enchanted Princess' is undoubtedly no. 1 of the 'Rupert Little Bear Library' issued in 1928 at 1/- (5p). The series ran to 46 issues up to 1936 and the books were reprinted a number of times up to the 1940s, some issues being repriced at 6d, 9d and 1/3d.

Editor's Note: I understand that all the Rupert stories and books are identified (often with cover illustrations) in THE NEW RUPERT INDEX which is available at £8.00 post free (for U.K.) or £10.00 post free (overseas airmail). This is available from John Beck at 29 Mill Road, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2RU.

From CLARICE HARDING: I am enjoying the exciting *Crime at Cliff House* series by Margery Woods..... How I wish we could have some *School Friend* and *Schoolgirls' Own* facsmilies. I would buy every one!

From JOHN LEWIS: I thoroughly enjoyed the *Do You Remember* articles by Roger Jenkins on the Brander Series (C.D. 570). He is, however, mistaken when he avers that Otto Van Tromp and Meyer Brander are unique in the annals of Hamiltoniana because of their Dutch nationality. There was one other Dutchman in the Greyfriars saga - the murderous red captain Van Dirk, who figured prominently in the second South Seas series of 1938.

From EDWARD CHAMBERS: I was very interested in Roger Jenkin's "Do You Remember?" article on the Brander Rebellion Series. Mr. Jenkins describes the Dutch nationality of the villains as "a nationality unique in the annals of Hamiltonia." Whilst I'm sure this is true of major villains, it's worth remembering that *Jack of the Circus* ends with the hero being kidnapped and sent out to sea on a Dutch vessel! Furthermore, Jack was less fortunate than Bunter because his Dutch assailants don't speak any English!

Jack of the Circus was the last Jack book to be published, and after reading it, I was afraid I might have to leave the hero "all at sea" for ever. However, I've learned from Darrell Swift that more Jack books were written by Frank Richards and that the manuscripts still exist.

Editor's Note: Mr. Chambers expresses the hope, shared I am sure by many of us, that these manuscripts might be published. He further comments:

Mr. Jenkins' description of Magnet 1169, whose title picture depicts an incident not actually printed in the text within, set me wondering how often this took place. By coincidence I was reading Magnet 147. *The Schoolboy Traitor.* The cover depicts a stern Dr. Locke about to throw open the door of Vernon-Smith's study, through which a trail of cigarette smoke is issuing. The caption reads 'Caught Smoking!' Not only does this incident not appear in the story, but I'm unable to work out whereabouts it was pruned from.

From DARRELL SWIFT: I was very interested to read Mark Caldicott's contribution in the Nelson Lee - E.S.B. column in the July edition of the C.D.

It is through Mark and Keith Normington of our Northern Club that I have recently read three books by E.S.B. The first, "The Lost World of Everest" was intended for boys and E.S.B. was at his most imaginative with lost worlds and lost tribes. His adult novels involving Norman Conquest and Inspector Ironsides were easy to read - indeed, I considered the author's style no different for children than adults! One can criticise an author's work (but it is true that fact is often stranger than fiction) but if the reader enjoys it, then that's all that matters when it comes to fiction.

From J.E.M.: Ted Baldock's piece on Herbert Strang in C.D. 570 was much enjoyed and prompts a personal query. Can Mr. Baldock or Bill Lofts or any other Strangian expert positively identify a volume which I much treasured over sixty years ago, though, alas, it has long left my possession.

It had as its title *or*, if it was one of the famous annuals, its *sub*-title, *By Land and Sea*. It contained a story about the Franc-Tireurs in The Franco-Prussian War, another tale called, I think, *The Cheat* (about a man named Harold Linkman) and a play-script. *The Doctor's Mummy*, a farce about the attempted resurrection of an Egyptian pharoah. There were, I recall, a number of illustrations by H.M. Brock. Was this a one-off or an annual and what was its date?

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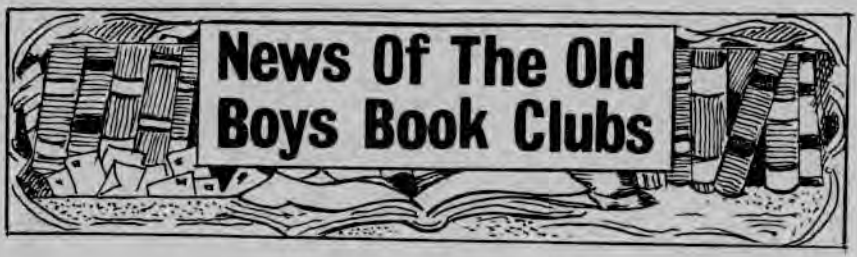

SOUTH WESTERN CLUB

The Spring meeting was held on May 8th when those present were entertained to most interesting talks by Bill Lofts and Laurence Price, covering films, Rupert and the Magnet holiday series.

The Autumn meeting will be on Sunday, 25th September, at 20, Uphill Road, Weston-Super-Mare.

GEOFF LARDNER

NORTHERN O.B.B.C. REPORT

A party of seven met for an informal lunch at the Waterton Hall Hotel, Wakefield on Saturday, 11th June. Our honoured guest was Mr. Bill Lofts from London and the afternoon was spent at the delightful home and library of our secretary,

Bill was warmly welcomed to our evening meeting and his main topic was C.H. Chapman, the Magnet artist whom Bill first met in 1960. Chapman actually thought Leonard Shields a better artist than he, and he also liked the work of Warwick Reynolds. Born in Thetford, Norfolk he and his family moved to Reading when he was 16. Among his first work were commissions for "Ally Sloper". He claimed to have used the local vicar as his model for his depiction of Dr. Locke. Chapman was extremely busy with his work on the "Magnet", the Greyfriars Holiday Annual and other papers.

Keith and Margaret Atkinson kindly presented the Club with an iced cake in celebration of their Ruby Wedding. We offer them warm congratulations, and the cake was much enjoyed.

Geoffrey then read - in his inimitable way - a hilarious episode from Magnet 897 in the series "Bunter the Cavalier".

In July ten club members plus guests enjoyed the fine weather and the hospitality of our secretary, Geoffrey, and Vera at their Wakefield home for our summer barbecue.

We were extremely sorry to hear that our member, the distinguished author Willis Hall, was in hospital very ill, and, of course we all wish him well.

New books from Hawk were on display along with a facsimile of the very first "Adventure" book by 'Enid Blyton marking the 50th anniversary of its first printing. George Beal's Howard Baker 'Magnet" listing was mentioned. It was felt that this would be helpful to many collectors.

Our next meeting will be on August 13th at our usual venue, SPCK Café , Holy Trinity Church, Board Lane - Leeds City Centre.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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