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ISSUE

ADVERTISING COPY DATE

APRIL (on sale 16 March) 20 February

MAY (on sale 20 April) 22 March

BILLY BUNTER & Mr. CHIPS

The 'Greyfriars' stories of Frank Richards have long been established as one of the most popular areas of modern book collecting. It's a tribute to their enormous success with readers of all ages that we are now witnessing growing interest in books about 'Greyfriars', its creator, and the schoolboys whose exploits made the school famous. Only a handful of fictional creations have been celebrated in this way, and Billy Bunter and his chums are right there alongside James Bond and Biggles as the most popular literary characters of this century. As Alex Kernaghan explains in this month's issue, the success of the Bunter stories has produced many guides and companion volumes, which tell the story of how Frank Richards wrote his classic tales of school life.

Like Frank Richards, James Hilton is best remembered today for creating one timeless character — the kindly schoolmaster, Mr Chips. But Hilton was also responsible for writing the books which were the inspiration for famous Hollywood films like "Lost Horizon" and "Random Harvest". The moguls in Hollywood were so impressed with his work that he eventually became a full-time scriptwriter, contributing to movies like "Mrs Miniver" during the Second World War.

Film adaptations of their work have helped to increase the popularity of two of our other authors this month. Angela Carter is probably still best-known for writing the short story "The Company Of Wolves", which was later made into a very successful feature film directed by another novelist, Neil Jordan. But as one of the most collectable modern authors in Britain today, all of her work is now rising steadily in value, and her early titles are now much sought-after in their original dust-wrappers.

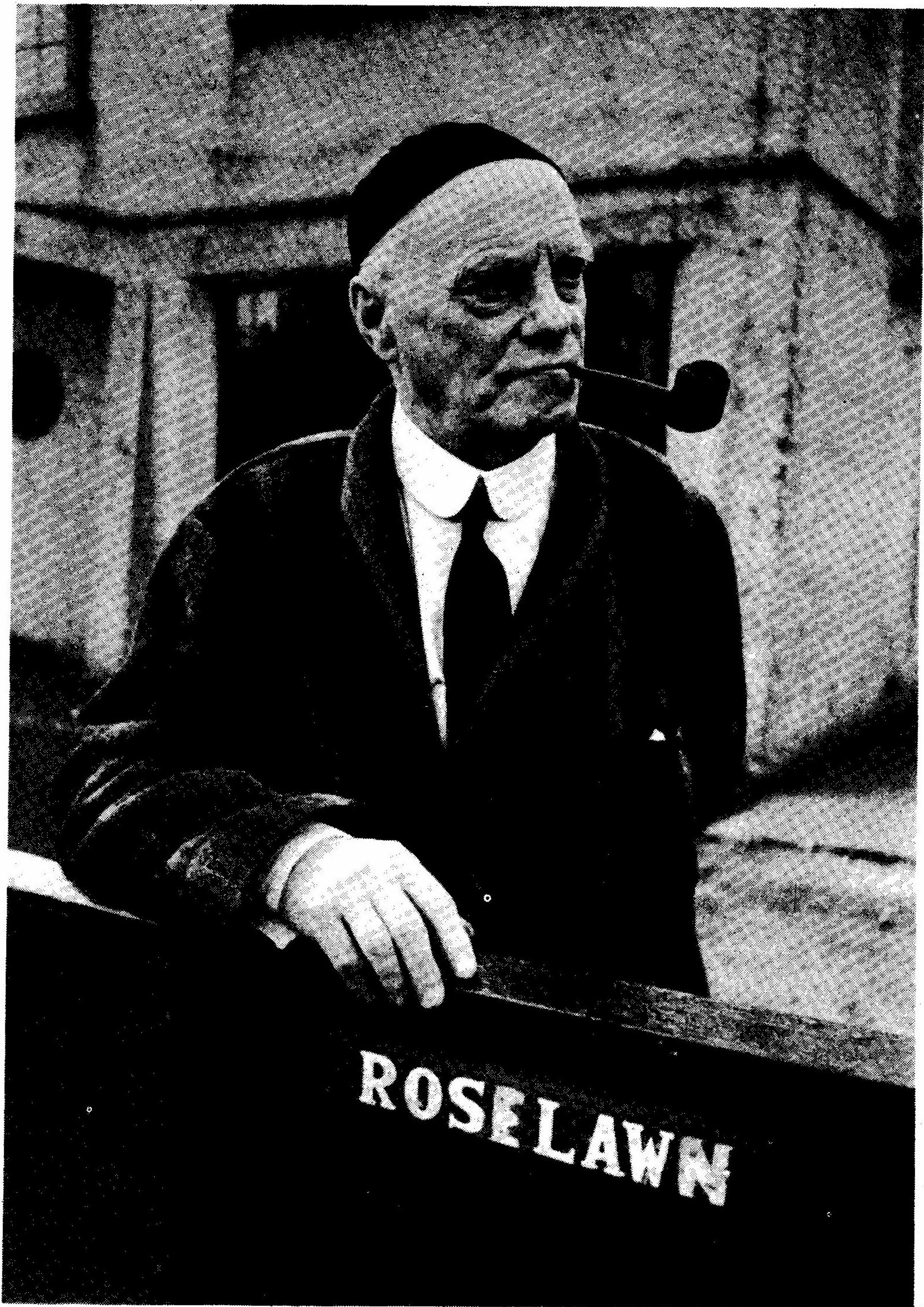
As our survey of his Current Selling Prices reveals, Kingsley Amis is still one of the most popular novelists of this century when it comes to collecting his first editions. In his case, it was the literary and movie success of "Lucky Jim" which established his reputation, and this title is still his most valuable first edition. But prices of many of his later works are also rising fast, and his books still seem an excellent investment for the future.

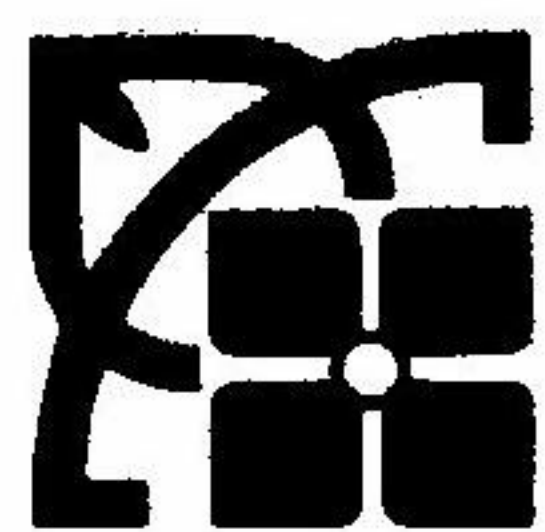
Edward Thomas, one of the literary generation so tragically killed during the Great War, never lived to see his critical reputation established. As Kevin Nudd tells us in his feature, Thomas was forced to make his living from 'hack work', writing books on a variety of subjects in order to keep his family alive. In his lifetime, his poetry was not highly regarded, but after his death he gradually came to be considered one of the most inspired writers of the early part of this century.

Also in this issue we have articles about the French novelist and critic, Emile Zola; collectable espionage books from the two World Wars; and the artists and travellers, Jan and Cora Gordon.

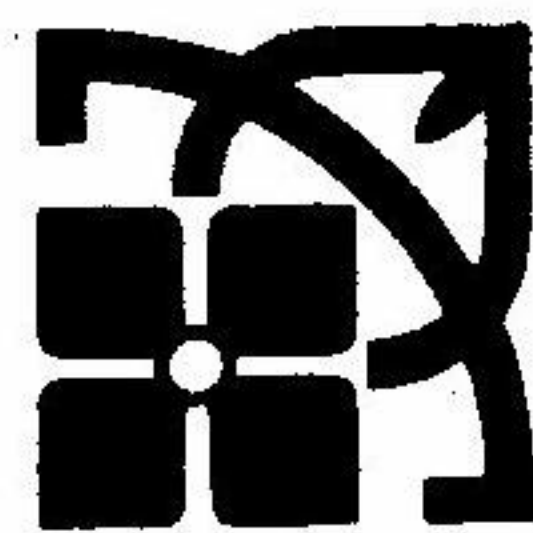
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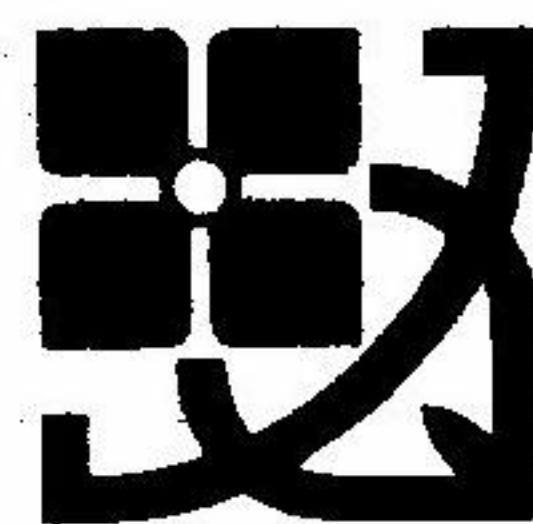
GREYFRIARS'



COMPANION VOLUMES



ALEX KERNAGHAN SURVEYS SOME OF THE
THE BOOKS AVAILABLE ABOUT THE FAT
OWL OF THE REMOVE AND HIS FRIENDS



When Frank Richards died on Christmas Eve 1961 at the age of eighty-five, the only book available that shed any light on the great man's life was "The Autobiography of Frank Richards", published by Charles Skilton in 1952. (Skilton had been the publisher of Richards' famous yellow-jacketed Billy Bunter books from 1947 to 1952 — see Book & Magazine Collector No. 30.)

Richards' autobiography was a joy to the many thousands of readers for whom the ivy-clad walls of Greyfriars School were more real than their own more humble academy — yet who knew virtually nothing about the Grand Master himself. The book opened in typical Richards style: "Frank Richards, at seventeen, was at a loose end. He was in the perplexing state of not knowing what he was going to do." From there, referring to himself simply as 'Frank', he gave us the broad brushstrokes of his life — how he had started writing; the background to the 'Gem' and 'Magnet'; his love of travel and near-perilous adventures in Paris, Venice, Rome and Monte Carlo. We learned how he managed to escape Austria in 1914 — a mere three days before Britain declared war on that country; and how he had made it through Switzerland to France and safely back home. It was all stirring stuff and amusingly told — for 'Frank' was an amusing fellow.

It's true that he whisked us through the Great War, the intervening years and World War II in a mere forty pages, but what of it? The austerity of post-war Britain was still too close for comfort. Much better to be reading of the genesis of Jimmy Silver & Co.

of Rookwood, or Jack of All-Trades, or Cedar Creek or Ken King of the Islands! And threaded through it all, there was Richards' own deep and abiding pleasure at a life well spent entertaining young readers. "You see", he explained, "there isn't anything better."

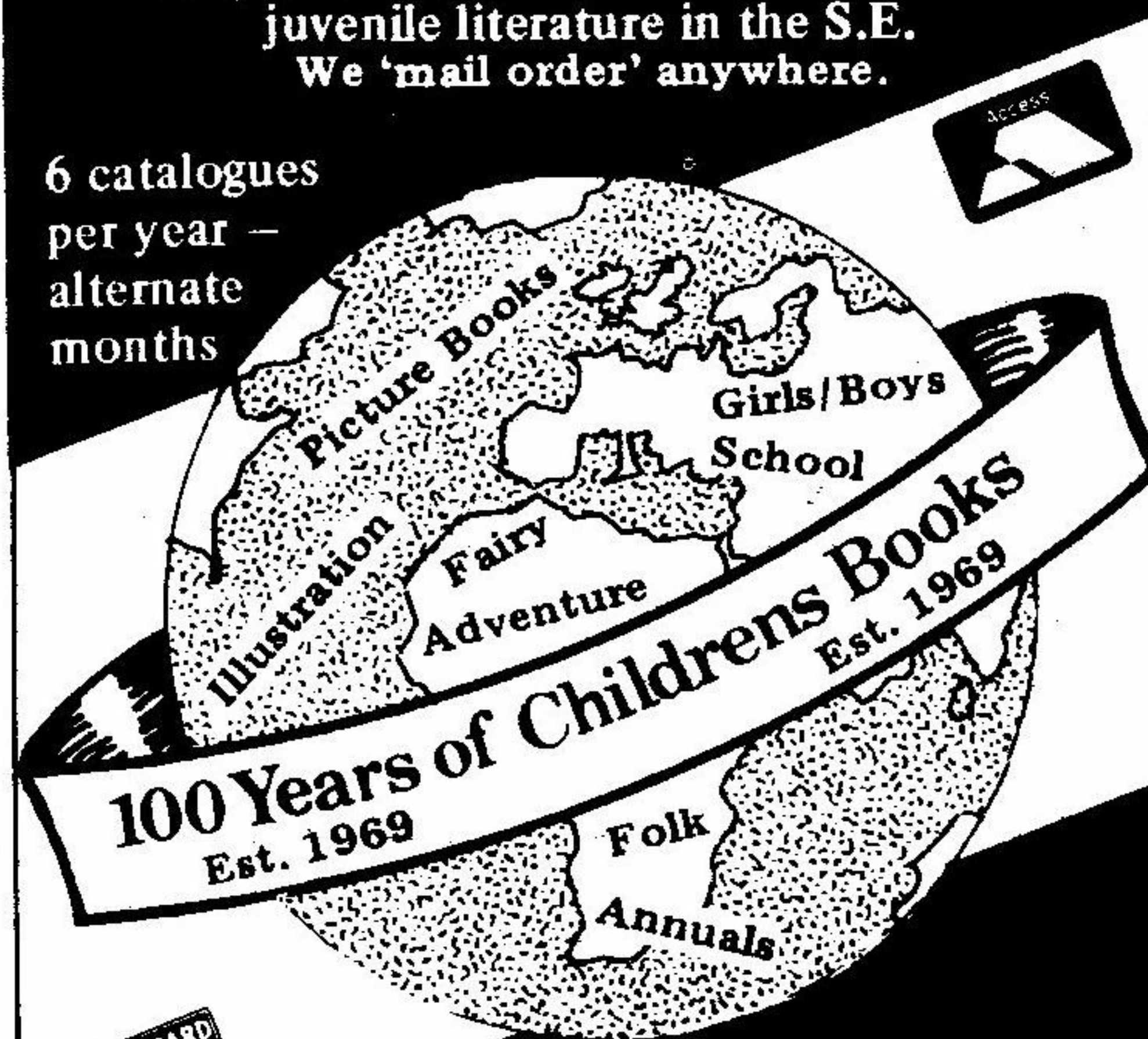
When Frank Richards completed his autobiography he was, incredibly, seventy-five years old — and still going strong. By the time the autobiography was in print in 1952, Billy Bunter had reached the television

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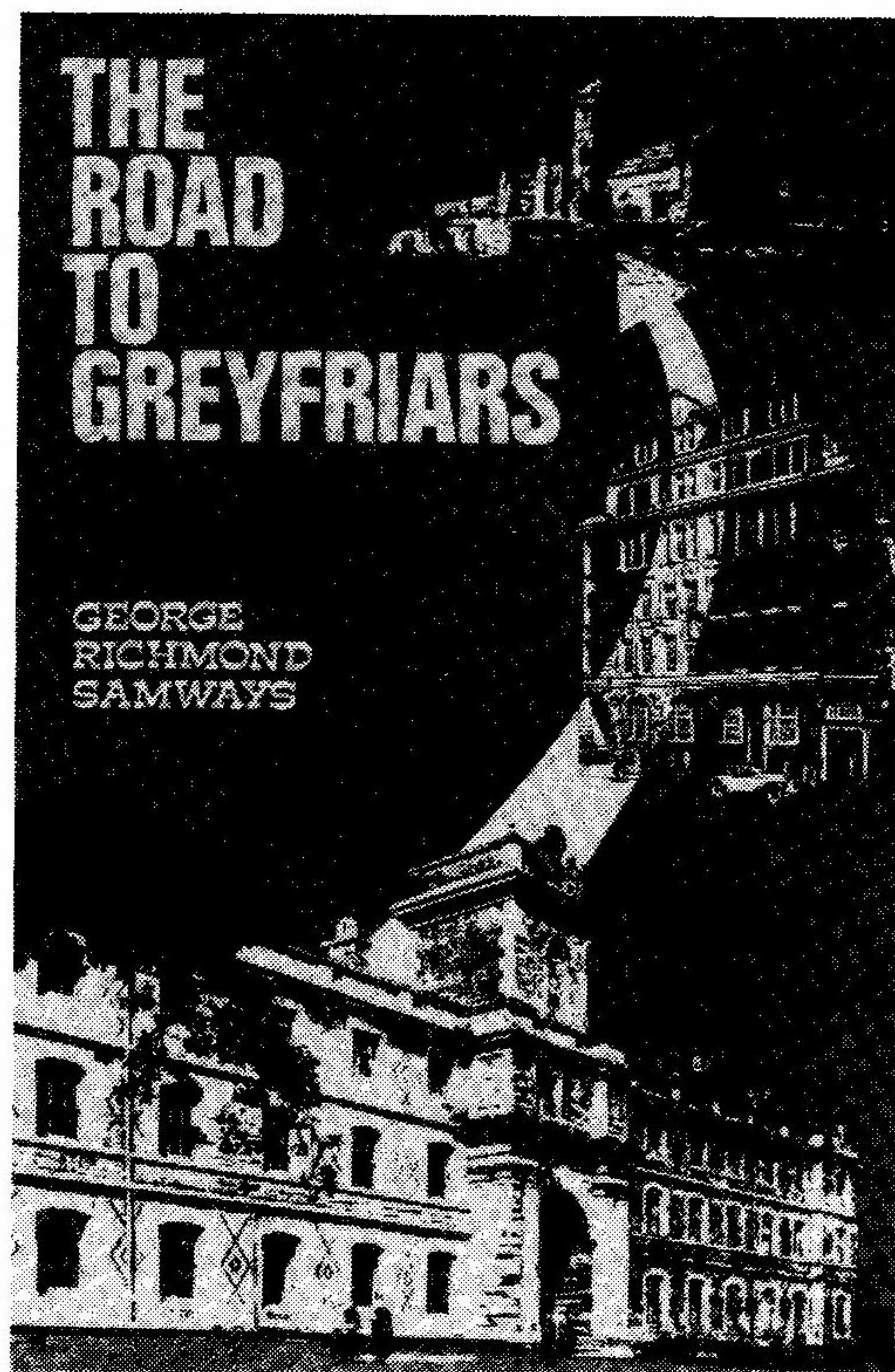
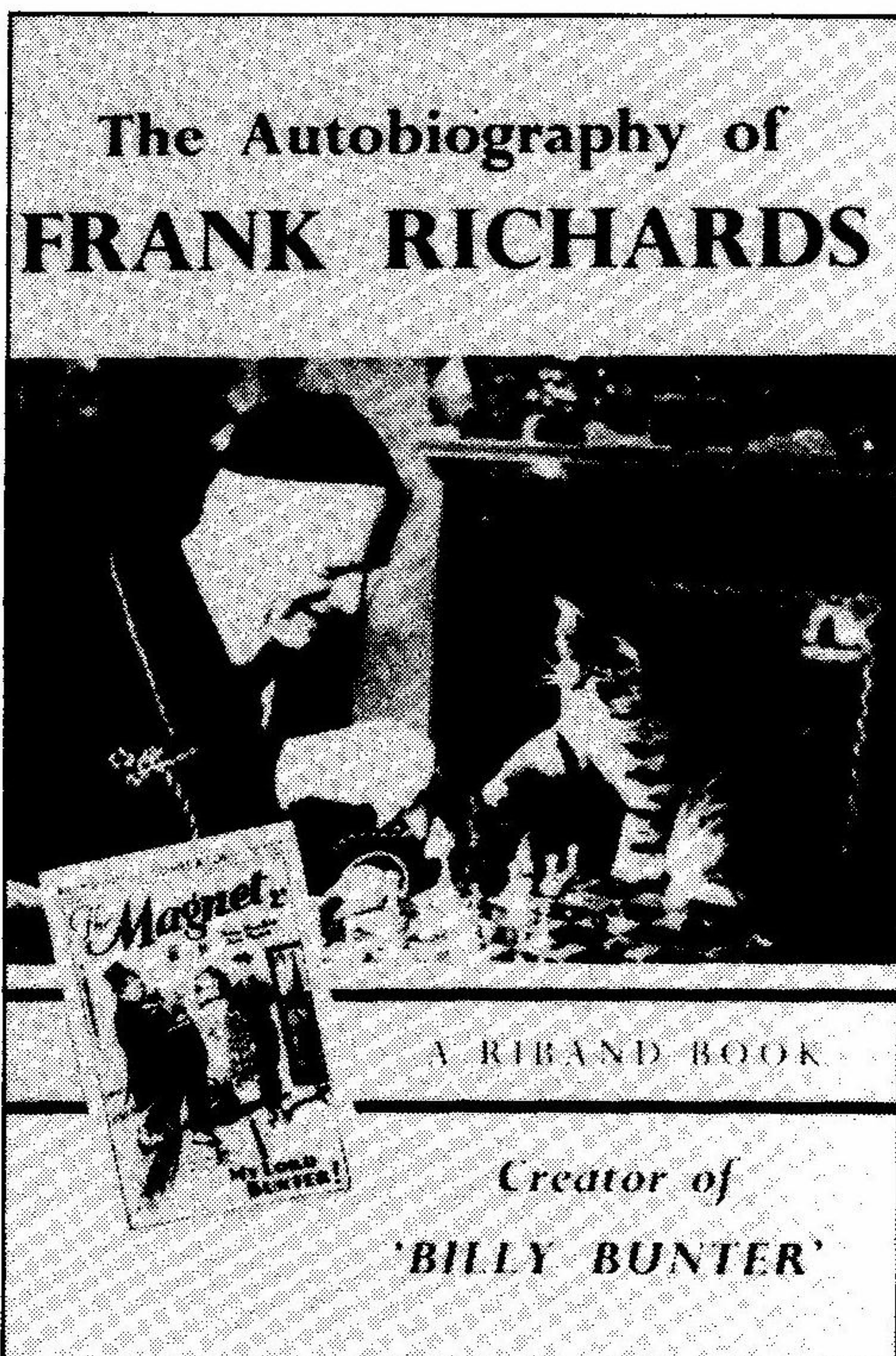


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screen in the shape of Gerald Campion, and a new generation took Bunter to their hearts. In many respects, the last decade of Richards' life was his most successful, reaching as he did a greater audience than he could ever have hoped for via the printed word alone. While Richards could never have guessed of the fame that yet lay ahead, his biography was typically optimistic. "An autobiography is not a biography", he wrote. "It cannot go on to the finish. That is the affair of the biographer, who, one hopes, will not have occasion to get busy yet awhile. Frank is still here. He is alive and kicking! He still finds the world a jolly old place to live in, and is happy and contented." Some readers, though, and indeed some critics, were less so.

Why had Richards, who had spent his entire life writing for schoolboys, kept his own childhood under wraps? Where was the

Many considered Frank Richards' autobiography too bland and wanted to know more about his own childhood, and the reputed rows at the 'Magnet' offices. The book is now worth £12-£15.



George Richmond Samways, a Billy Bunter enthusiast, considered his employment at Fleetway House the happiest days of his life. His memoir was published by the Howard Baker Press in 1984.

nitty-gritty of the reputed rows between Richards and some of his editors at Fleetway House? And what of his personal life, of which he gave us but the barest glimmer?

In his autobiography, Richards himself confessed to having excised whole chapters "with an unsparing hand", preferring to drop any vitriolic excess he had expressed in his first draft. For some, the biography was too bland, and searching questions had to wait for an answer.

PAPERBACK

In 1962, a year after Richards' death, Charles Skilton issued a sturdy paperback 'Memorial Edition' of the autobiography, with a preface by the publisher and an excellent appreciation by Eric Fayne, a leading light of the Old Boys' Book Club. We were also treated to sixteen pages of superb photographs. The book sold for 12/6d but

would fetch around £5 today in Very Good condition, while the original hardback would be worth around £12-£15.

Meanwhile, the London publishers Cassell & Co. were still producing the yellow-backed Billy Bunter books, and continued to do so until 1965 when the 38-book series ended with "Bunter's Last Fling". By way of celebrating the magnificent success of the series, Cassell issued "Greyfriars School – A Prospectus" by J.S. Butcher that same year. The "Prospectus" justly claimed to be the only complete published guide to Greyfriars, covering every aspect of the school: its history, location, staff, organisation, curriculum, sporting records and facilities. It reproduced the school's armorial in a full-colour frontispiece and gave comprehensive plans of the school's buildings and grounds, with a detailed colour map of the surrounding district printed on its endpapers. It included hundreds of pen-portraits of the masters, staff and boys, with details of their characters, homes, families, and academic and sporting achievements. "For anybody who wants to know anything about Greyfriars School", the dust-wrapper flap read,

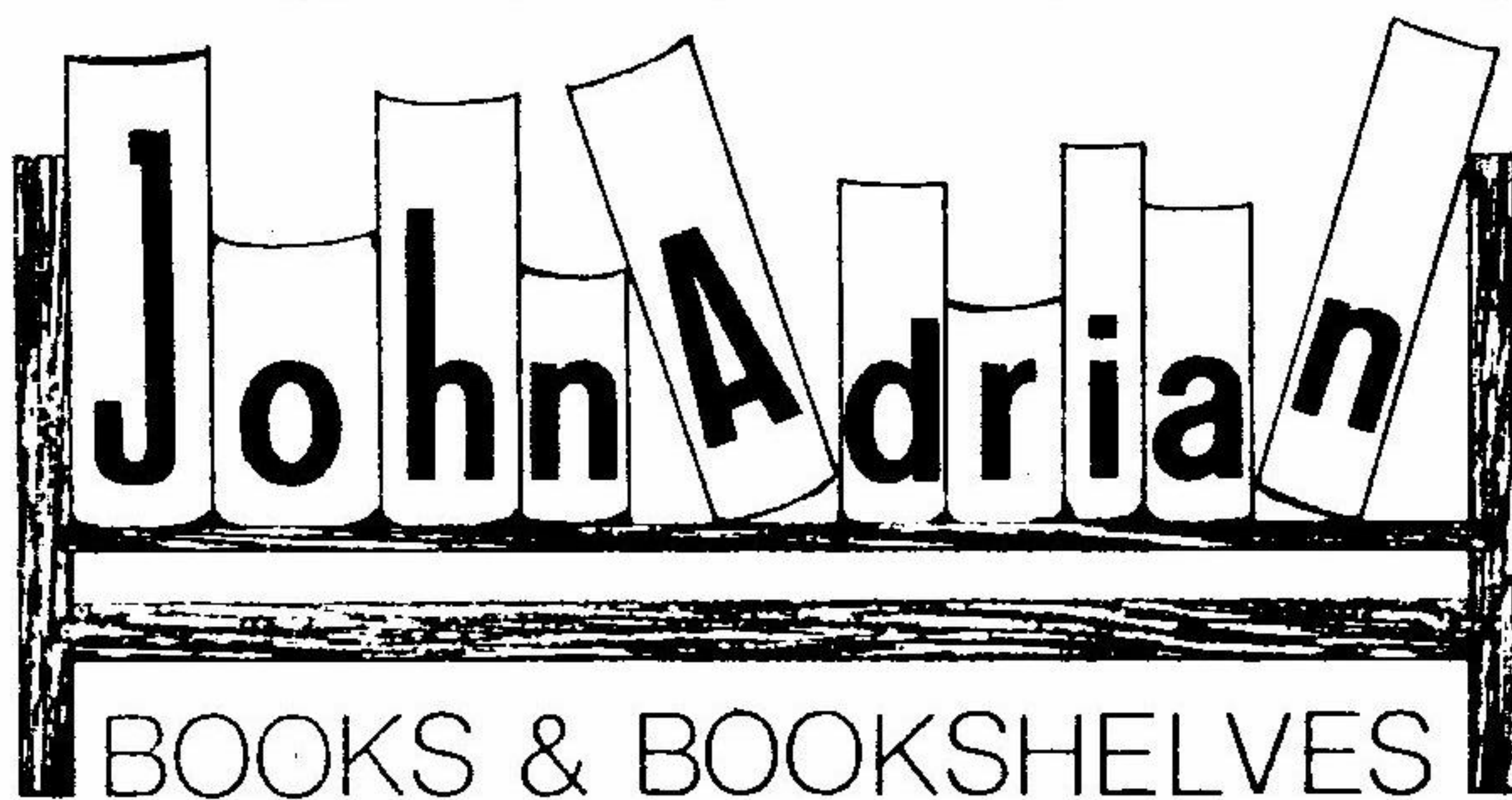
"from how to get there by train or car, to the whereabouts of Mr Quelch's study; from the opening hours of the school tuckshop to the recorded height and weight of the Fat Owl himself."

The "Prospectus" is indeed a veritable treasure trove that reads like a thoroughly researched history of a real locale and its inhabitants. It includes a glossary of slang expressions used by the Greyfriars men, and a comprehensive index to the book in general. Mr Butcher delved deep and wide in his labour of love, even to the extent of unearthing the Greyfriars motto: *Conamur Tenues Grandia* (Horace, "Odes", I vi 9 – 'Though slight we strive for greatness').

ARMS

The book was issued at 30/- in an all-white dust-wrapper with the Greyfriars coat of arms embossed at its centre. It is therefore rather difficult to find unsoiled, most volumes tending to turn up dusty or somewhat stained. Even so, there are still a number of Very Good copies around, and these usually sell for about £6.

Six years were to pass before the next



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Greyfriars 'manual' was to appear – "The Magnet Companion", edited by George Beal and published by Howard Baker in 1971. Howard Baker had already staked a claim to fame two years earlier, when he had begun publishing exact facsimiles of the 'Magnet' and 'Gem', binding and selling them in volume format. In many ways, "The Magnet Companion" was a product of the extensive research Baker and his editors had undertaken in that publishing endeavour.

DIRECTORY

The "Companion" was a comprehensive directory of all 1,683 Greyfriars stories published in the 'Magnet', with cross-references to those that had appeared in Baker's own bound volumes, and additional cross-references to runs and series in the original papers. It also included an index-to-story-title for collectors of individual 'Magnets', and as such proved an invaluable source guide.

The book was revised and reprinted six years later as "The Magnet Companion 77", with a short biography of Richards and background data on the 'Magnet' editors,

illustrators and substitute writers. It also incorporated detailed listings of the popular 'Schoolboys' Own Library', a pocket-size monthly that ran from 1925 to 1940 with stories culled from earlier 'Magnets'.

Either "Companion" can be picked up for just a few pounds today, while the latest version, "The Concise Magnet Companion 86", issued in limp cloth covers, is still available at £4.95.

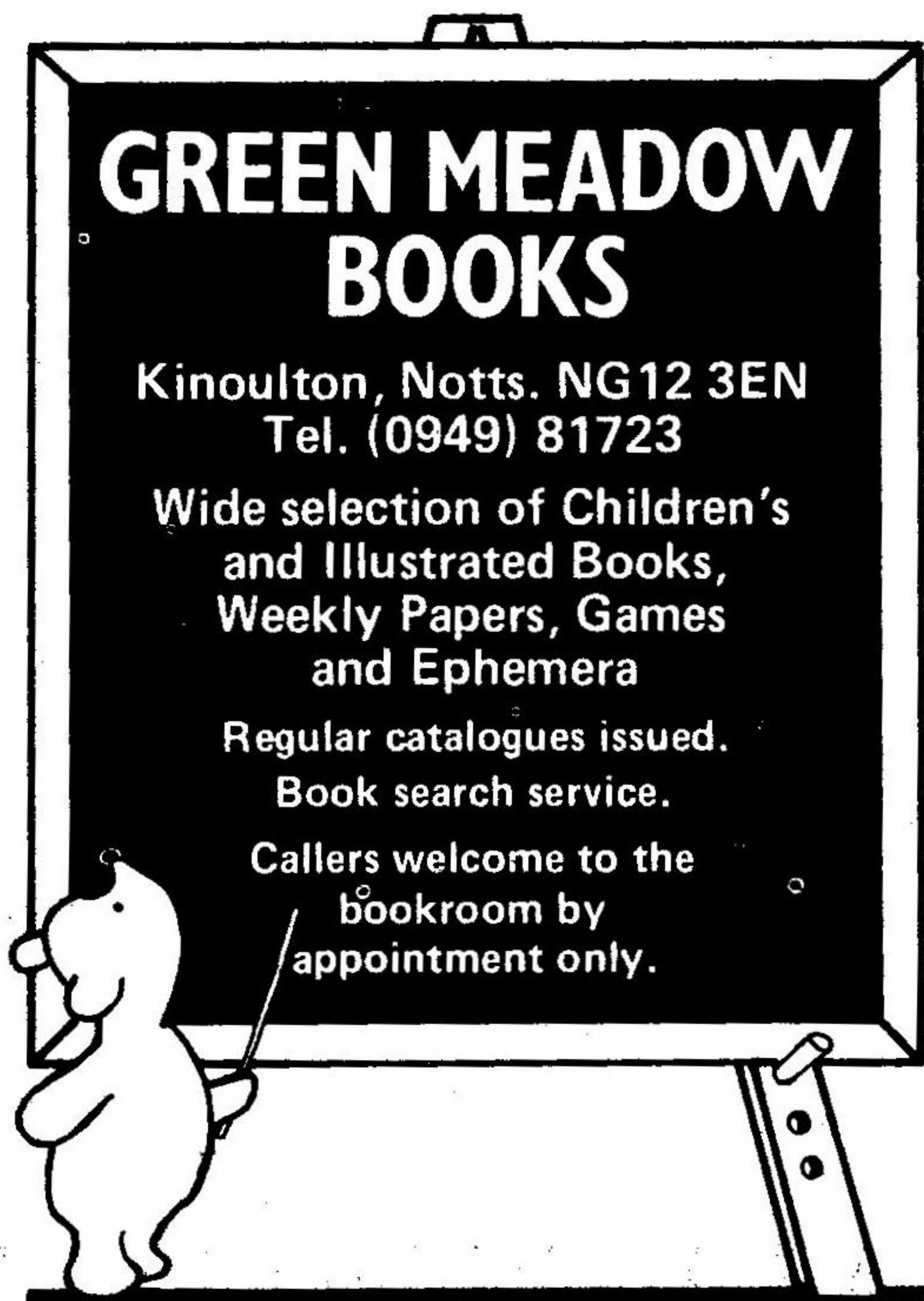
I'd like to take a brief look at this juncture at a series of worthy books produced by the Museum Press, an imprint from the Charles Hamilton (Richards' real name) Museum in Maidstone, Kent. Seven volumes were produced between 1972 and 1985 under the general title "The Charles Hamilton Companion", with appropriate volume numbers. The first was sub-titled "A History of the 'Gem' & 'Magnet' " by Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins, and the second was "The Greyfriars Characters" (1976) by John Wernham, the museum's founder and curator, and Mary Cadogan. Both books survey their respective subjects with considerable skill and depth, giving us a wealth of background detail hitherto unavailable. In addition to covering a multitude of Greyfriars characters, Volume II provides us with a comprehensive analysis of Richards' work, the structure of his stories, and his influence on several generations of readers. There is also an illuminating article by Richards' long-standing housekeeper, Miss Edith Hood.

PUBLISHER

Both these works are copiously illustrated throughout, attractively bound in card covers and produced to a highly professional standard. While they aren't available through usual retail outlets, they can be obtained direct from the publisher: Museum Press, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent; or through specialist dealers. No true aficionado of the Greyfriars saga should be without them.

None of the remaining five volumes is specifically related to Greyfriars, and therefore fall outside the scope of this feature. They are all, however, true 'Hamiltonia' and as such are likely to be of considerable interest. They will be found listed in the bibliography at the end of this feature.

In 1975, W.O. Lofts and D.J. Adley



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George Beal's "The Magnet Companion", an extensive directory of all 1,638 Greyfriars stories, is essential reading for any fan of Frank Richards. Fine copies are now worth around £3-£5.

tackled many of the questions Frank Richards himself had left unanswered, in their excellent biography, "The World of Frank Richards", published by Howard Baker. Lofts and Adley were scrupulous in their attention to detail and exhaustive in their research. Having firmly established Richards' ancestry, they revealed that Richards was the sixth child of eight, born in a rather unpretentious row of lower-middle class terraced houses known as Oak Street, in Ealing. His father, John Hamilton, a 'cabby' by profession, was of Scottish descent, and died of cancer when Frank was only seven.

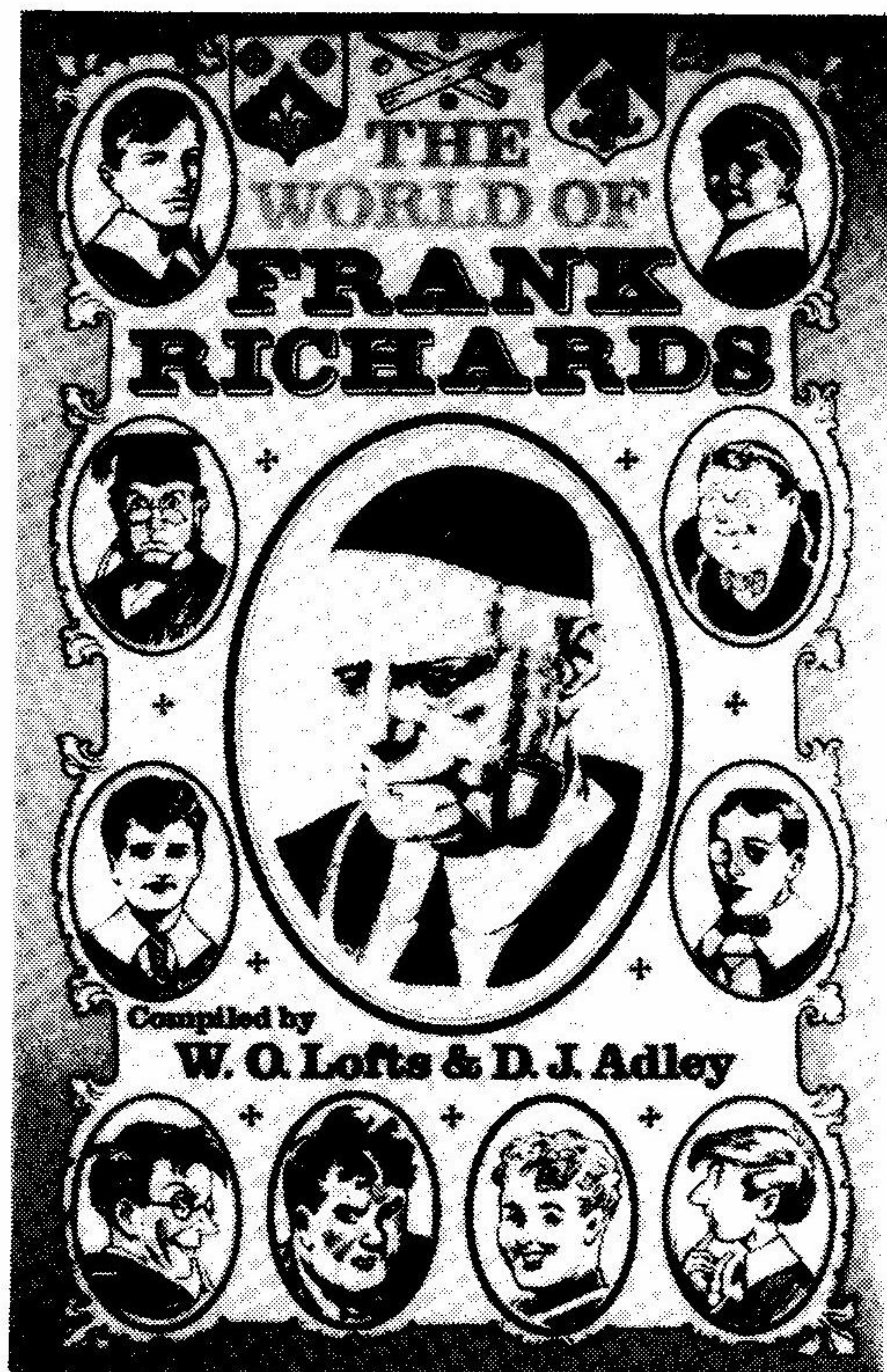
There had been much speculation earlier by readers and others as to whether Richards had attended Eton or Harrow, perhaps using these halls of academe as the basis for Grey-

friars. The truth, though, was rather more mundane. Young Frank first attended his local Ealing British School, Thorn House — then "a school for young gentlemen" — at three guineas per term. His education was completed by a private tutor.

Even so, Frank had proved a voracious reader with an extraordinarily lively imagination, and a facility for Latin and Greek that left even his teachers behind. By all accounts he was a quiet lad, eminently reliable and always truthful — traits that were to remain for the rest of his life.

Richards' burgeoning career and apprenticeship with the 'Magnet' and 'Gem' are well documented by Lofts and Adley, and we discover that the Fat Owl of the Remove was based largely on Lewis Ross Higgins, the genial editor of 'Chuckles'. Less genial was John Nix Pentelow, the third editor to take

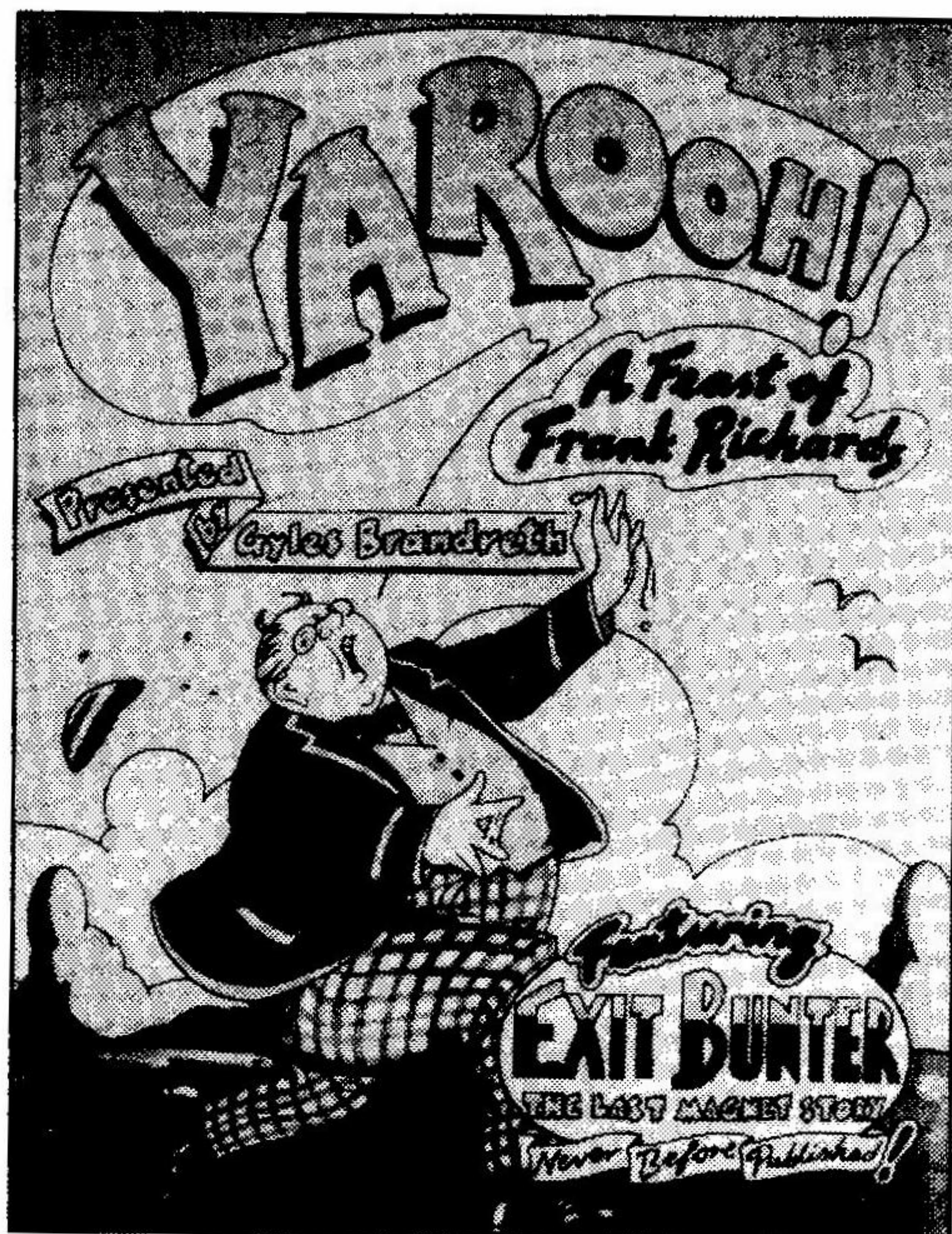
Lofts & Adley's "The World of Frank Richards" is a superb piece of research, and it filled many of the gaps left by the great man's own account of his life. It was published by Howard Baker in 1975.



the reins at 'Magnet' headquarters. Richards had endured occasional quibbles with the former editors, Percy Griffith and Herbert A. Hinton — but they were as water unto wine. Furious clashes with Pentelow over editorial decisions were to burn in Richards' breast for many years; though to be fair many of the apparently arbitrary decisions taken by the editor were later to be proven wholly justified.

There was also the unpleasant stance taken by Richards concerning the writer John W. Wheway. Wheway had produced over 500 of the Bessie Bunter stories for 'The School Friend' when Richards had been forbidden to continue supplying that publication by the 'Magnet's' Director-in-Chief. When, much later, a publisher referred in print to Wheway as the author of the Bessie Bunter stories, Richards was incensed. He responded, uncharacteristically, with a wrathful letter accusing Wheway of being an impostor and 'cashing in' on Richards' popularity. The truth was that John Wheway wrote only to editorial direction, and the fact that the stories continued to appear under the 'Hilda Richards' by-line had nothing whatsoever to do with him. But then nothing incensed Richards more than substitute writers tinkering with his beloved creations, whether for 'School Friend', 'Magnet' or 'Gem'. It was something that forever rankled and that he considered unforgivable.

Much of the Lofts and Adley book is given over to the 'low-down' on the not too savoury exploits of several of the 'Magnetite' editorial staff, thereby filling in many of the gaps Richards had felt obliged to leave. It throws new light too on some of the more popular Greyfriars illustrators, and some of



"Yaroooh! A Feast of Frank Richards" is a pot-pourri of Richards' work, and includes songs, stories, poems, a radio play and even a piece written in Latin. It was issued in 1976.

the lesser-known fictional creations of Richards himself, such as Jim Dainty, Bunny Hare and Dick Carr.

All in all the biography is a superb piece of research, meticulously written and hugely readable. It succeeds admirably in fleshing out the real Frank Richards in a way that the author's autobiography, whether for reasons of modesty or restraint, failed to.

BIOGRAPHY

"The World of Frank Richards" has been out of print for quite a few years. A Very Good copy complete with its dust-wrapper will cost around £10. Failing that, you may like to consider the latest Richards biography, "Frank Richards: The Chap Behind the Chums", by that famous writer on other collectable juvenilia, Mary Cadogan. This was published by Viking/Penguin in 1985 at £14.95, although it seems to have been remaindered since then and copies can be picked up for half that price.

In celebration of the centenary of Richards' birth, Eyre Methuen issued "Yaroooh! A Feast of Frank Richards" in



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1976, priced at £4.50. This handsome book was a pot-pourri of Richards' work edited and introduced by Giles Brandreth. Delightfully illustrated and beautifully produced, it contained a decidedly varied range of Richards' work including poetry, songs, a radio play, a television play, a piece written in Latin and a dozen short stories – including "Exit Bunter", purported to be "the last Bunter story written for the 'Magnet' and never before published".

EXUBERANT

Brandreth's introduction and appreciation of Richards' work is as sunny and lively as one would expect from this exuberant personality, and while the actual selection of material may be something of a hotch-potch, it is nevertheless a most agreeable volume. That it is uncharacteristic of the more sought-after 'Hamiltonia' is reflected by its current value – it can still be found for around its original published price.

Our final three Greyfriars' companion books were all produced by the Howard Baker Press. The first of these was "Greyfriars for Grown-Ups", published in 1980. This was a compilation (made by Lawrence Sutton) of writings from 'Magnet' and 'Gem' with reminiscences and commentaries by a motley assembly of celebrities including Bob Monkhouse, Peter Cushing, Jack Trevor Story, Roy Plomley, Charlie Chester, Arthur Askey, Nicholas Parsons and others. Perhaps Bob Monkhouse summed it up most succinctly: "Frank Richards is not simply the best in his field. He is the field. He created it. He found the soil barren, sowed it with fantastic invention, fertilised it with schoolboy dreams and gave the world a unique harvest of glorious obsessional fiction." This somehow says it all.

Not so much intended as a volume to be read from cover to cover like a novel, the book is a delight to dip into at leisure – a rich souffle, light but entertaining. Complete with a striking black dust-wrapper, it is still in print and available from the publisher or dealers at £5.95.

In 1982, Baker published "McCall's Greyfriars Guide" by Dr. Peter McCall, which was something of an updated "Prospectus" – a sort of who's who and what's where of people and places in the Greyfriars environ.



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Packed with all kinds of readable minutiae, it includes many useful appendices and a comprehensive bibliography of Richards' output. This very useful volume is still in print at £7.95.

The third book published by Howard Baker was "The Road to Greyfriars" by George Richmond Samways (1984). Samways, an avid admirer of Bunter and his Greyfriars chums since a lad, suffered a severely underprivileged childhood after being orphaned at an early age. By sheer hard work and gutsy determination he taught himself shorthand, typing and book-keeping, and by his early twenties had found employment with Fleetway House — thus beginning "the happiest days of my life". He quickly rose to become chief sub-editor of 'Magnet' where he penned many substitute Greyfriars yarns when the real thing was not at hand — in addition to being the regular 'Greyfriars poet'.

While much of "The Road to Greyfriars" is Samways' own autobiography, he gives us,

as sole editorial survivor of that golden era, a vivid and fascinating insight into what it was actually like to work in the 'Magnet' offices over a span of some twenty-five years. He reflects with perspicacity on the personalities of the time, the comings and goings of the various editors and illustrators, Richards' relationship (or, sometimes, lack of it) with them, the difficulties encountered in ensuring the paper went out week after week, and his own first meeting with his idol, the Great Man.

WARMTH

It is a book of considerable warmth and depth, revelatory and illuminating, with at its core the history of the most popular boys' paper of all time. The last word, then, should go to Samways himself: "When once asked if I considered Frank Richards the greatest of all school-story writers, I replied that I should call him the best loved. That seemed to me then — and still seems to me now — the very highest of tributes."

COLLECTABLE GREYFRIARS' COMPANIONS

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THE MAGNET COMPANION edited by George Beal (Howard Baker Press, 1971).	3-5
THE MAGNET COMPANION '77 edited by George Beal (Howard Baker Press, 1977)	3-5
THE CONCISE MAGNET COMPANION '86 edited by George Beal (Howard Baker Press, 1986)	in print 4.95
✓ A HISTORY OF THE GEM AND MAGNET by Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins (Museum Press, 1972).	4-6
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✓ FROM WHARTON LODGE TO LINTON HALL (Museum Press, 1985)	6-8
✓ THE WORLD OF FRANK RICHARDS by W.O. Lofts and D. Adley (Howard Baker Press, 1975)	8-12
✓ YAROOH! A FEAST OF FRANK RICHARDS edited by Gyles Brandreth (Eyre Methuen, 1976)	4-6
GREYFRIARS FOR GROWN-UPS edited by Lawrence Sutton (Howard Baker Press, 1980).	5-8
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