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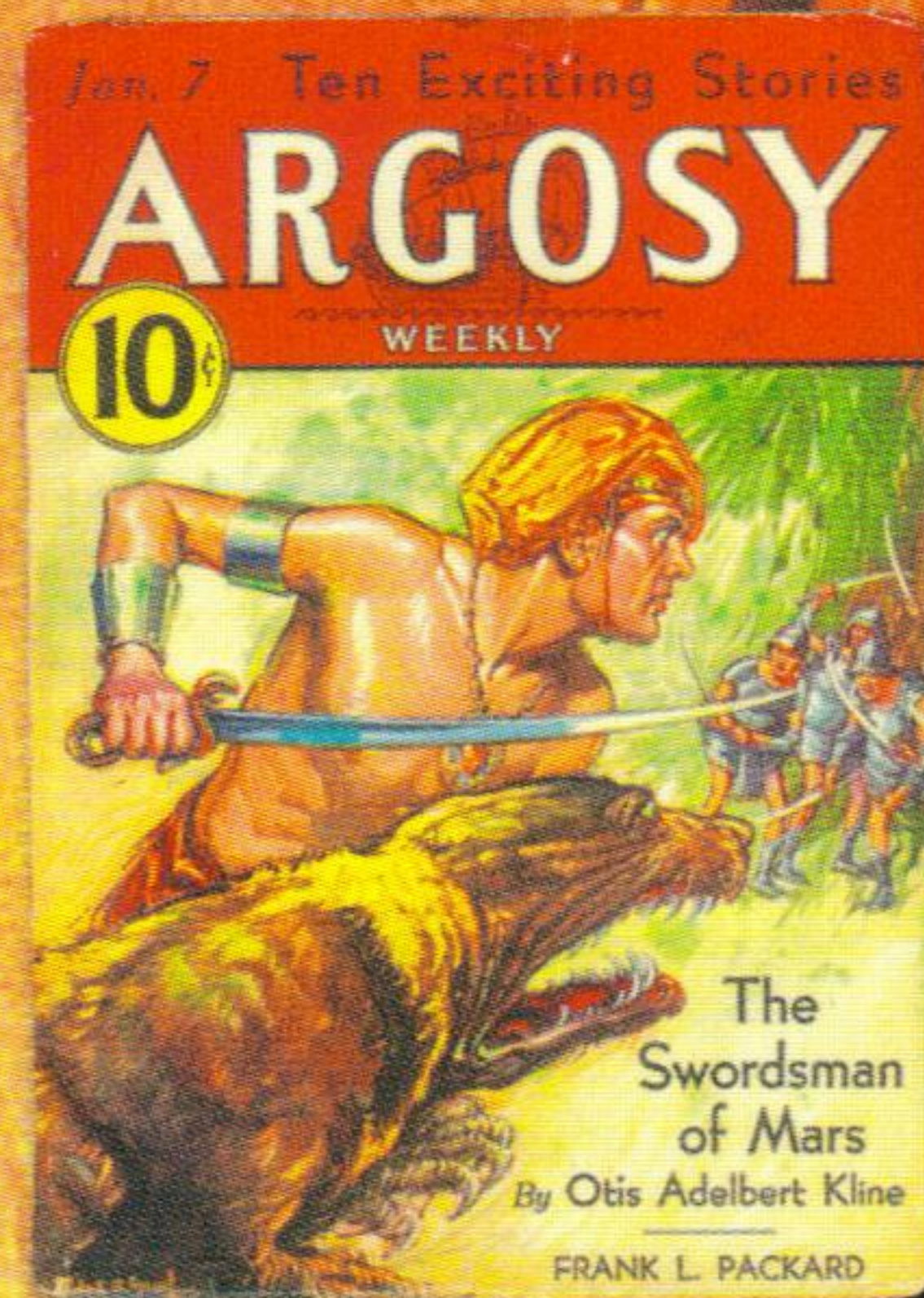
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Above: Bunter as depicted by Arthur Clark, his second artist.

The men who drew Billy Bunter

There can be few readers unfamiliar with Billy Bunter, the fat and fatuous 'Owl of the Remove' at Greyfriars School, writes Norman Wright and David Ashford. He first appeared, blinking through his large spectacles, in the inaugural issue of *The Magnet Library* in February 1908. "My word, it's the new kid! What does he mean by sprawling on the floor? I say you new fellow..." were his first

immortal words and that catch phrase, 'I say you fellows' became as familiar to generations of schoolboys as any quote from Shakespeare or Dickens.

William George Bunter is one of the best-known characters in juvenile fiction, ranking alongside Alice, Winnie the Pooh, Biggles and the Famous Five in the literary hall of fame. He has become so much a part of the language that even adults who have never read

a word of his adventures are instantly familiar with the character and, at the mention of his name, their mind's eye conjures up a vision of a well-filled figure constantly on the look out for tuck and always expecting a postal order. This recognition is due as much to Bunter's illustrators as to his creator, Frank Richards. In the same way as the popular conception of Sherlock Holmes was formed as much by the illustrations of Sydney Paget as by Conan Doyle's writing, so Billy Bunter owes a huge debt to the artists who have depicted him over the decades and made his image instantly recognisable.

In March 1907, Charles Hamilton began a series of school stories featuring 'Tom Merry and Co.' for *The Gem*, a halfpenny weekly published by the Amalgamated Press. These were written under the pen name of Martin Clifford. The following year, in February 1908, Percy Griffiths, the paper's editor, told Hamilton that he was starting a new weekly to be called *The Magnet*, and that he wanted Hamilton to create a fresh series of characters for the new paper. Using the new pseudonym of Frank Richards, Hamilton created the 'Boys of Greyfriars School', the first story, entitled "The Making of Harry Wharton", appearing on Saturday 15th February 1908.

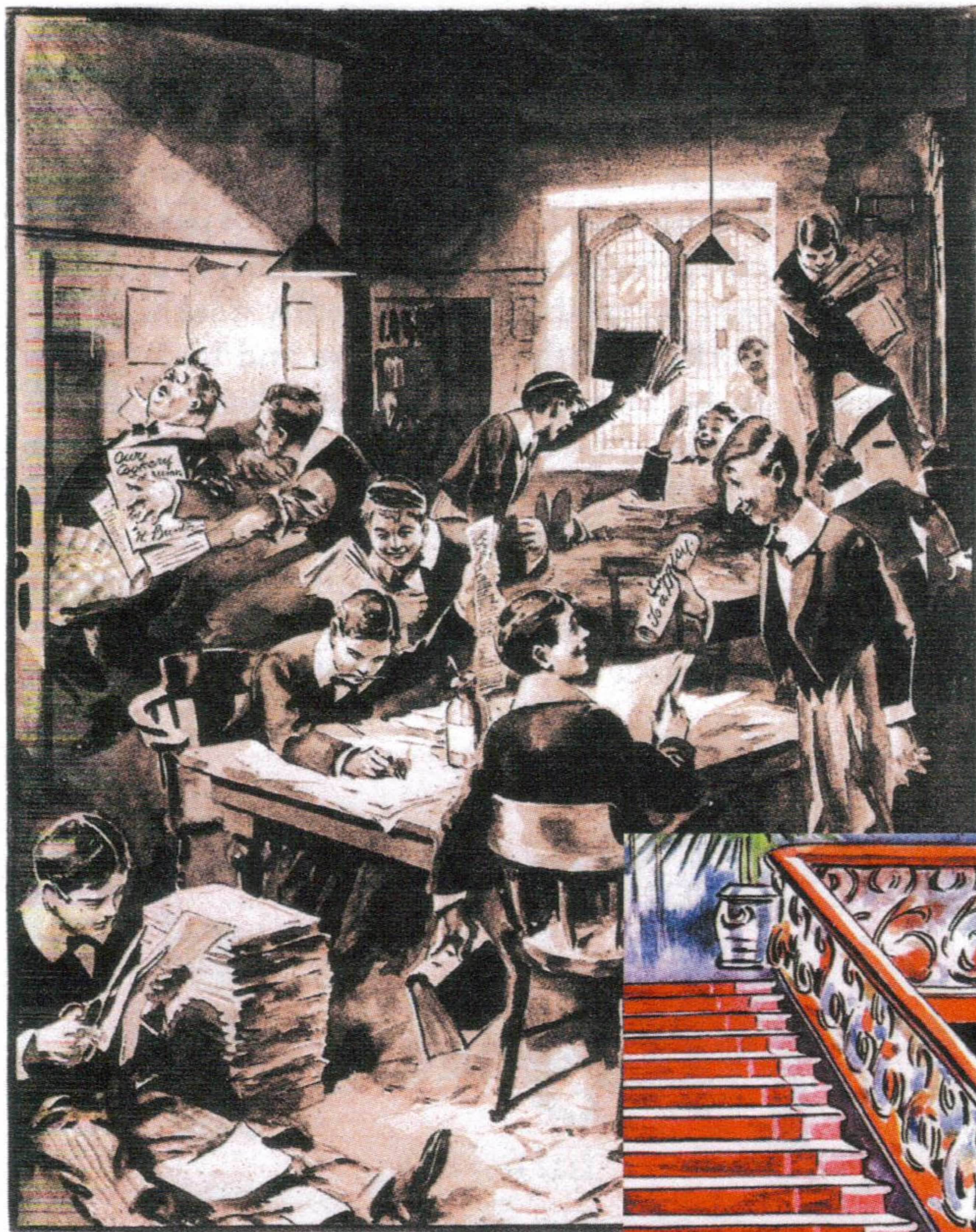
Although Billy Bunter appeared in the first *Magnet* he was very much a minor character. The action in the early issues focused on setting the scene at Greyfriars School and the settling in of the new boys, Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry. Hamilton had, however, been nurturing the character of Bunter for some time and, as the weeks passed, he gradually brought him more and more into the limelight.

The first illustrator of *The Magnet* was Hutton Mitchell, a prolific contributor to boys' week-

lies in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Percy Clarke had used Mitchell to illustrate *The Gem* since the summer of 1907 and it naturally fell to the artist to provide illustrations for the new weekly. His style was competent enough and probably considered very acceptable for a halfpenny weekly, yet his work was rather lack-lustre and he appeared to be averse to background detail. Little is known of Hutton Mitchell but, in "The Originals" by William Amos (Jonathan Cape 1985), he is described as an "artist and novelist." Amos offers a fascinating insight into the artistic creation of Mitchell's Bunter: "Bunter was modelled on three brothers: Alan, Bruce



An early depiction of Bunter by Hutton Mitchell for the cover of *Magnet* No. 25.



Leonard Shields's first Greyfriars illustration for the 1920 *Holiday Annual*.



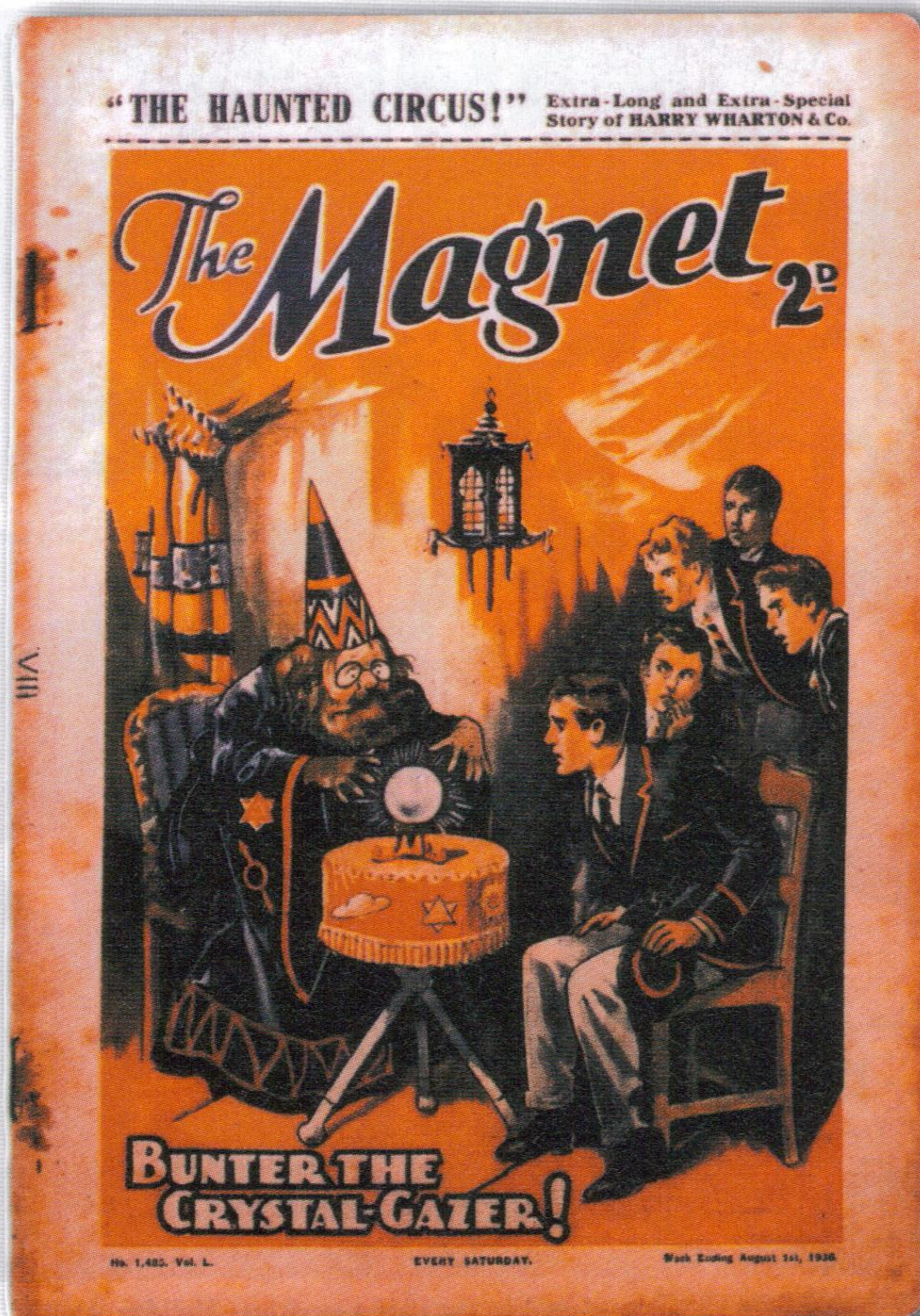
Colour plate by Chapman painted for the 1939 *Greyfriars Holiday Annual*.

and Alexander Mitchell. Their father...was Bunter's first illustrator and the boys later recalled stuffing pillows into their trousers to achieve a satisfactory rotundity".

Despite his minor role in the early stories, it was not long before Bunter began to make a visual impact on *The Magnet*. The very first depiction of the 'Owl of the Remove' was on the cover of issue number 7, dated 28th March 1908. (Purists will no doubt point out that the cover had actually been pre-viewed on the inside back cover of the previous week's issue.) Here, while appearing rather stouter than average he was not the heavyweight he was to become. A couple of months later he was on the cover again: this time with saucepan in hand, labouring over a hot stove (*Magnet* number 18). Seven issues later the 'Owl' was once more on the cover, this time engaged in his favourite occupation of eating. As with most of the early *Magnet* issues, the character sharing this particular cover illustration with Bunter had few distinctive features to distinguishing him from the common herd and could have been almost any other Greyfriars boy. But Bunter is unmistakably depicted. His features are already beginning to develop that look of low cunning that became such an essential part of his character and his figure is already becoming comfortably rotund. Here was a character with great pictorial potential.

Perhaps *The Magnet* editor realised Mitchell's shortcomings and the artist's tenure at Greyfriars was short-lived. He was succeeded by Arthur Clarke, an artist with a long career illustrating for the Amalgamated Press, stemming from the 1890s. He took over illustrating *The Magnet* with number 40 and almost immediately began to develop the depiction of each of the Greyfriars characters.

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Bunter the Crystal Gazer! A splendid Shields Magnet cover from 1936.

Under his brush, Bunter's girth expanded and he was depicted in a more humorous manner. Clarke was a better artist than Mitchell and in his hands the quality of the artwork in *The Magnet* improved dramatically. There can be little doubt that Clarke's work was popular with readers but his apparent sudden death in 1911 forced *The Magnet* editor to hurriedly find a replacement artist and the man he chose was C.H. Chapman, whose involvement with Billy Bunter was to last more than fifty years.

Charles Henry Chapman was born in Thetford, Norfolk in 1879 but the Chapman family moved to Reading in Berkshire while



A Leonard Shields colour plate from the 1936 *Greyfriars Holiday Annual*.

Charles was still a schoolboy. After leaving school Charles served a five-year apprenticeship with an architect in Basingstoke but his great love was drawing and, with the idea of eventually pursuing this as a career, he studied art at evening school. Despite the pressure on his time, the young Chapman still found time to indulge in his passion for cycling. This remained a keen interest throughout his life and he could even be seen pushing the pedals when in his eighties. While cycling he enjoyed exploring the byways of rural England and this love of the countryside is very evident in his work. His drawing is never more attractive than when depicting Bunter and the Greyfriars boys on a hiking holiday or rowing on the river.

The turn of the century was a time of great activity in the publishing industry with masses of illustrated periodicals pouring from the presses and these offered great opportunities for young artists. Chapman began sending in work to editors and was rewarded, in April 1900, when his first illustration was accepted. He quickly established himself in the field and soon his illustrations were appearing in many weekly boys' papers including *Big Budget*, *Jester*, *Boys' Herald*, and *Chums*, to name but a few. In 1911 he joined the staff of the Amalgamated Press and almost immediately was assigned to *The Magnet* to replace Arthur Clarke as illustrator of the Greyfriars stories. According to Chapman, recalling the events decades later, Clarke died suddenly while actually working on a *Magnet* illustration and his brief was to imitate Clarke's style. This he successfully accomplished.

There is, perhaps, a small mystery surrounding these events, for some *Magnet* illustrations published after Chapman's tenure began look suspiciously like the work of Clarke. Some enthusiast with time on their hands could perform a useful service by tracking down precise details of Arthur Clarke's death.

For a time Chapman drew the characters very much in Clarke's style before gradually reverting to his own style. Chapman was responsible for giving Bunter his hallmark checked trousers and bow-tie. Initially the artists' figures tended to be rather angular and this was accentuated by the stiff look of their clothes – as if his characters were all wearing overly starched uniforms! A more relaxed look developed during the 1930s when Greyfriars relinquished the Eton collar in favour of

school blazers. Almost from the moment he took over as artist, Chapman began to develop the characters visually and, by the early 1920s, not only were many of Chapman's characters instantly recognisable but his style had matured and his line-work had developed a robust vitality.

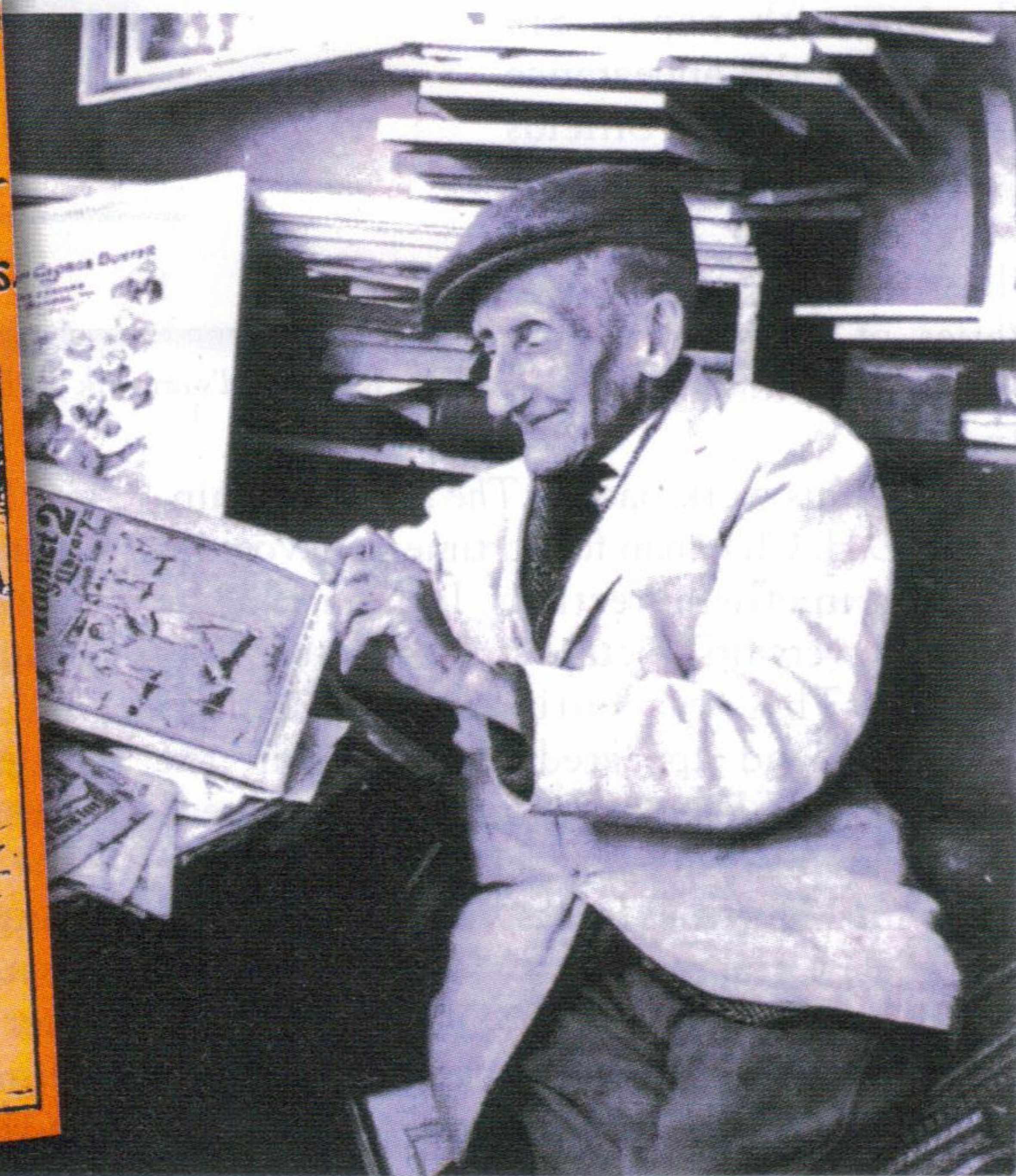
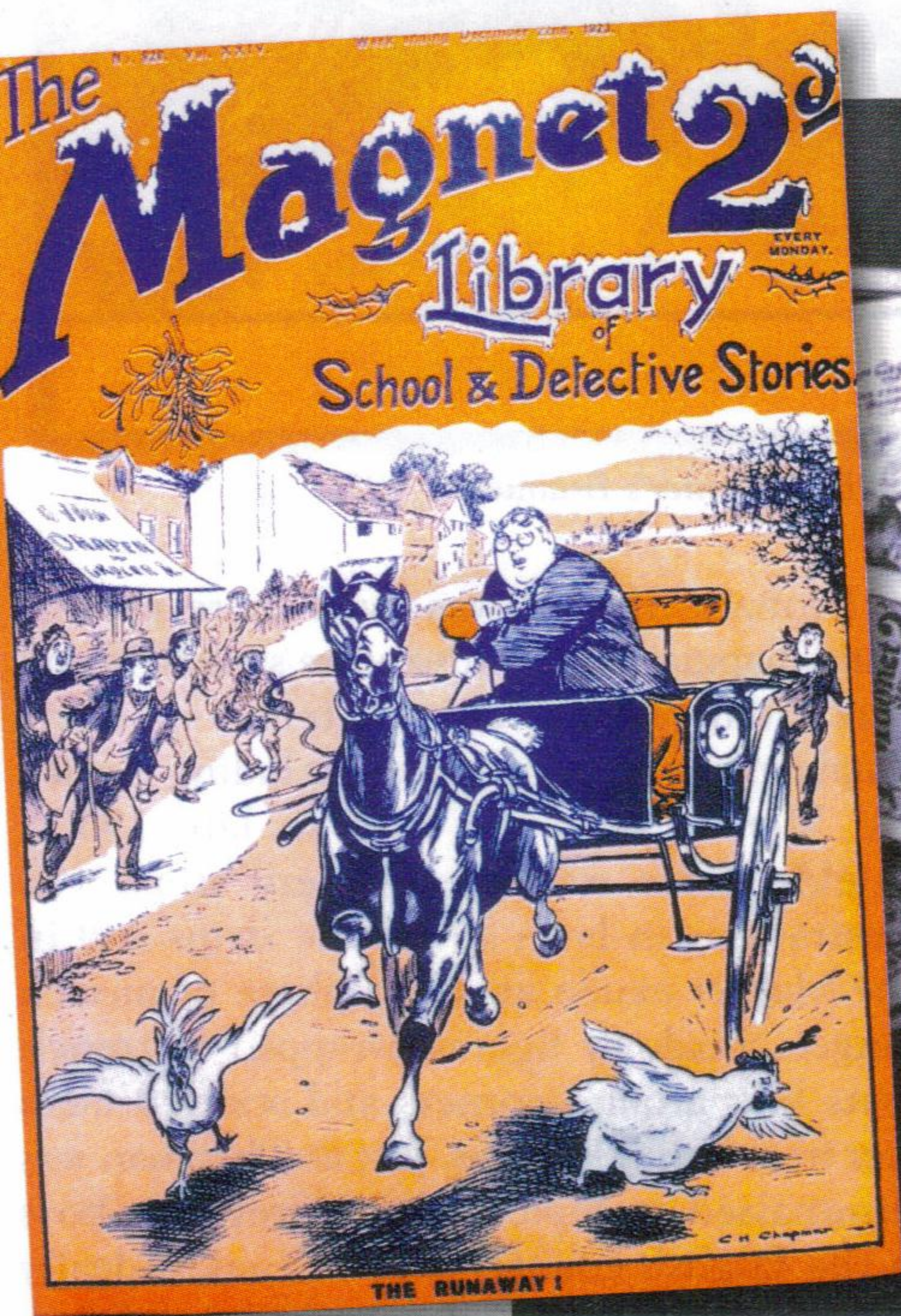
Many of the Greyfriars stories had humorous themes and these were particularly well depicted by Chapman: bursting with life, his action scenes of merry japes, car chases and characters falling from horses or bicycles were all depicted with a great sense of movement and panache. His work unerringly captured the feel of a situation as described by Frank Richards and his illustrations always complimented the text perfectly.

As the success of the Greyfriars stories grew, so both writer and illustrator found their workload increased. In the Autumn of 1919 the Amalgamated Press launched *The Holiday Annual* (later *The Greyfriars Holiday Annual*)

It was Charles H. Chapman who was responsible for giving Bunter his hallmark checked trousers and bow-tie

as a vehicle for showcasing Charles Hamilton's three popular schools: Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. The annual was a great success, running for twenty-two years. In addition to stories, the *Holiday Annual* also included numerous features on Bunter and the Greyfriars boys, mostly illustrated by Chapman. Greyfriars stories were frequently reprinted in other Amalgamated Press weeklies and, when the original artwork was deemed too old-fashioned to be included, Chapman was called upon to provide fresh illustrations.

In 1926, another artist was assigned to *The Magnet*: Leonard Shields. Born in 1876,

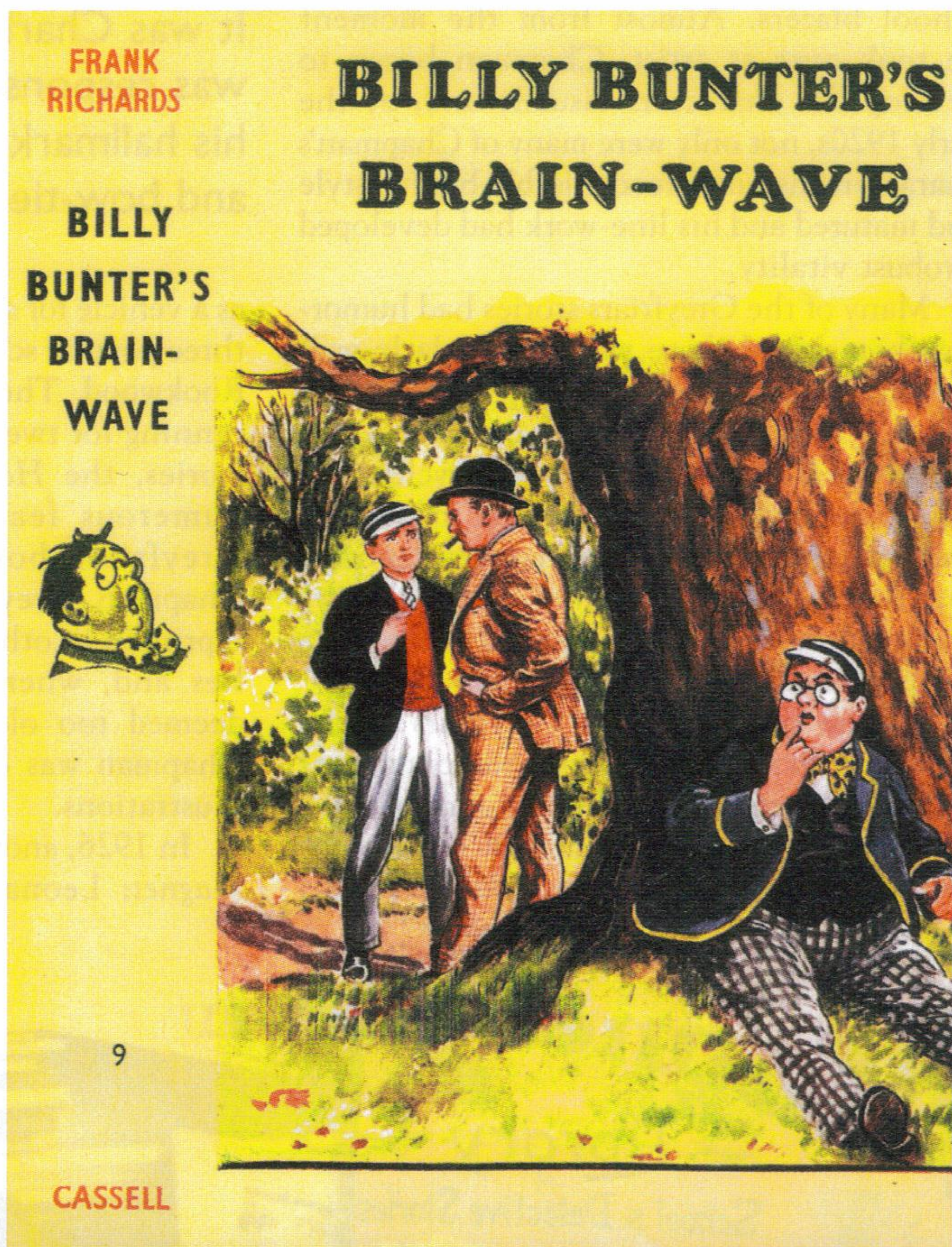


Charles H. Chapman in his studio shortly before his death, and (left) one of his *Magnet* covers from 1923.

Shields had studied at Sheffield University with the expectation of following in his father's footsteps as a chemist but, like Chapman, his love for drawing took over and he decided to make it his career.

Shields' first depiction of Bunter and the other Greyfriars boys had, in fact, been in the *Holiday Annual* for 1920, for which he produced a wash drawing entitled "Press Day in the Office of 'The Greyfriars Herald'". This meticulously produced drawing, overflowing with detail, depicted a dozen juniors, including Bunter, preparing the weekly "Greyfriars Herald" in a room overflowing with paper. Six years after the appearance of this drawing, Shields began working on *The Magnet* itself, his first illustrations appearing in a series of stories featuring Harry Wharton and Co. in India.

With his workload on *The Magnet* diminished, C.H. Chapman found time to devote his energies in other directions. In June 1928 he drew the very first picture strip to feature Billy Bunter. This was entitled "The Bunter Brothers" and appeared irregularly in the pages of *The Popular* for more than a year. Chapman also drew a series of adventure strips for *Merry and Bright*, the first of which being "The Happy Hikers" (1932), concerning the exploits of a group of friends hiking round the world. A year later, for the same comic, Chapman drew a science fiction strip, "The Cruise of the Polar King", and an historical adventure, "Antony of the Gladiators".



R.J. Macdonald's artwork for *Billy Bunter's Brainwave*, 1953.

Leonard Shields was even more prolific than Chapman in the adventure strip field and work from his pen can be found in many Amalgamated Press comics, including *Golden* and *Wonder* from the mid to late 1930s. Shields' forte was the mystery story. His illustrations in both adventure strips and in *The Magnet* exude an atmosphere of unseen danger. Shadowy figures, wrapped in trench coats lurk around corners and startled faces peer from behind bushes. Just as Chapman was unsurpassed at depicting the Greyfriars boys in the English countryside so Shields ideally captured the ghostly atmosphere of Frank Richards' Christmas and mystery stories in his

By the late 1930s Frank Richards was consistently producing excellent tales while Chapman and Shields were producing artwork worthy of them

drawings. During the 1930s both artists worked on *The Magnet* with Shields usually producing the cover and Chapman working on the internal illustrations. Under this regime *The Magnet* reached its artistic zenith. Week after week readers could revel in the superb stories written by Frank Richards, all complimented beautifully by the artwork of Chapman and Shields.

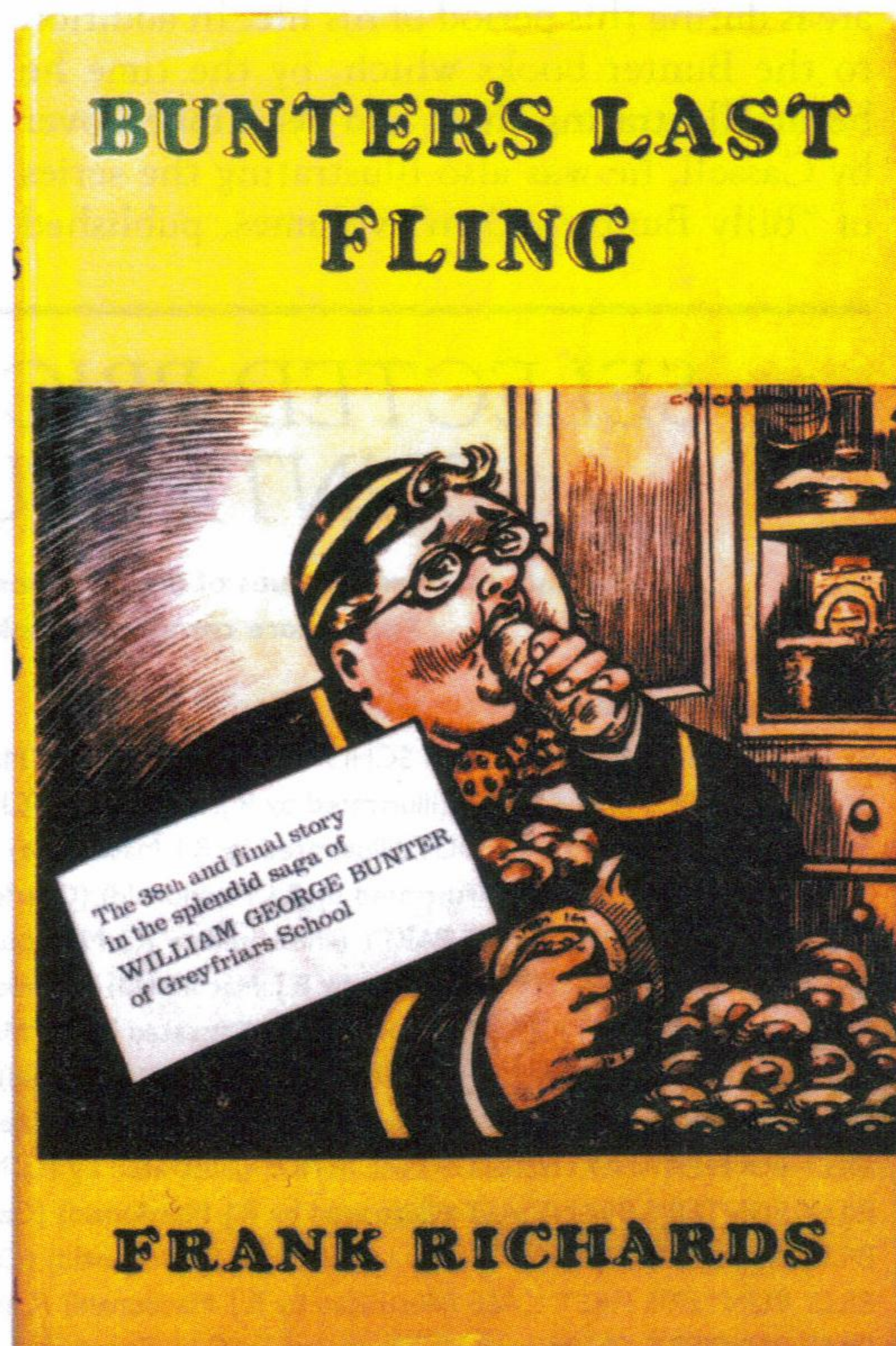
When, in 1939, the editor of the newly launched *Knock-Out Comic* decided to include Bunter as a weekly adventure strip in his new comic, it was only natural that he should turn to Chapman to provide the artwork. The artist turned up trumps with strips that had all the polish and drama of his *Magnet* work. After producing an excellent strip for each of the first five issues, Chapman had a one-week break before returning to draw Bunter for the last time in the comic in issues 7, 8 and 9. We will probably never know why Chapman ceased to draw Bunter for *Knock-Out*. It may have been that the editor wanted a more slapstick approach to the character or, perhaps, Chapman found the twelve panels of detailed strip-work he was required to produce each week too arduous a task on top of other commitments.

With issue number 12 the *Knock-Out* editor finally found an artist who would make Bunter's figure as familiar to readers of *Knock-Out* as Chapman and Shields had to *Magnet* readers. The new man's name was Frank Minnitt and he continued to draw Bunter for *Knock-Out* until his death in 1958. A detailed study of Minnitt and all his work will appear in a future article in our 'Great British Comic Artists' series.

Greyfriars enthusiasts will argue as to when *The Magnet* was at its peak but, whatever the preference, there is no doubt that,

during the late 1930s, Frank Richards was consistently producing excellent tales and Chapman and Shields were producing artwork worthy of them. With the outbreak of war, like many another periodical, *The Magnet* ceased publication. Without any editorial warning, issue number 1683, dated May 18th 1940, entitled "The Shadow of the Sack", proved to be the final issue. Bunter was to continue as a strip character in *Knock-Out Comic* but, for enthusiasts of Frank Richard's superlative stories, there followed more than half a decade barren of Greyfriars.

In 1946 a young publisher named Charles Skilton persuaded Charles Hamilton to write new Billy Bunter stories for hardback publication and, in 1947, the first book in the series, appropriately entitled "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School", appeared to much



Cover art by Chapman for the final Bunter book, issued in 1965.

enthusiasm. Hamilton suggested to Skilton that he use Robert J. Macdonald, for many years illustrator of the Tom Merry stories in *The Gem*, to illustrate the books.

Robert Macdonald was a very accomplished artist, whose work was highly regarded by fans of Charles Hamilton, but many enthusiasts were disappointed not to see Chapman's work gracing the books. Macdonald provided full colour wrapper designs, colour frontispieces and black and white internal illustrations for the first sixteen Bunter titles between 1947 and his death in 1955. Chapman then took over and, from the seventeenth book, "Backing Up Billy Bunter" (1955), he continued to provide all the illustrations for the rest of the series up to and including the thirty-eighth and final book in the series, "Bunter's Last Fling" (1965).

Chapman was busy with Bunter in other areas during this period of his life. In addition to the Bunter books which, by the time he began illustrating them had been taken over by Cassell, he was also illustrating the series of "Billy Bunter's Own" volumes, published

Charles Hamilton died on Christmas Eve 1961, leaving a legacy of stories that are still captivating readers over 40 years after his death

between 1953 and 1961 by Mandeville (later the Oxenhoath Press). For *Comet* comic he drew a fine series of dramatic Billy Bunter adventure strips based on old *Magnet* stories, which ran for almost seventeen months.

Charles Hamilton died on Christmas Eve 1961, leaving a legacy of stories that are still captivating new readers over forty years after his death. Leonard Shields had died in 1949 but Charles Chapman lived on until 1972, dying at the ripe old age of 93. Until very near the end of his life he was still cycling and – if he is to be believed – still taking a daily cold bath. There is no doubt that Frank Richards as well as all his readers owe a great debt to C.H. Chapman, Leonard Shields and to all the other artists who depicted this most memorable character and helped to consolidate the distinctive, enduring image of Billy Bunter..

SELECTED PRICE GUIDE TO BILLY BUNTER PUBLICATIONS

A guide to current values of first editions in VG condition without (and with) dustjackets.

For a more complete Frank Richards bibliography see issue 248

'Billy Bunter' Books

BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1947)	£15-£20 (£60-£80)
BILLY BUNTER'S BANKNOTE (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1948)	£10-£15 (£40-£60)
BILLY BUNTER'S BARRING-OUT (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1948)	£10-£15 (£40-£60)
BILLY BUNTER IN BRAZIL (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1949)	£10-£15 (£40-£60)
BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1949)	£10-£15 (£40-£60)
BILLY BUNTER'S BENEFIT (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1950)	£8-£10 (£40-£50)
BILLY BUNTER AMONG THE CANNIBALS (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1950)	£8-£10 (£40-£50)
BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL ORDER (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1951)	£8-£10 (£40-£50)
BILLY BUNTER BUTTS IN (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1951)	£8-£10 (£40-£50)
BILLY BUNTER AND THE BLUE MAURITIUS (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1952)	£10-£15 (£50-£60)
BILLY BUNTER'S BEANFEAST (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1952)	£8-£10 (£40-£50)
BILLY BUNTER'S BRAINWAVE (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1953)	£8-£10 (£35-£45)
BILLY BUNTER'S FIRST CASE (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1953)	£8-£10 (£35-£45)
BILLY BUNTER'S OWN (annual) (illustrated by C.H. Chapman)	

(Mandeville/Oxenhoath Press, [1953-61])	each £10-£15 (note: for those issued with wrappers, add 50%)
BILLY BUNTER THE BOLD (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1954)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BUNTER DOES HIS BEST (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1954)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER'S DOUBLE (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1955)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BACKING UP BILLY BUNTER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1955)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
LORD BILLY BUNTER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1956)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
THE BANISHING OF BILLY BUNTER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1956)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1957)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER AFLOAT (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1957)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER'S BARGAIN (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1958)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
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BUNTER OUT OF BOUNDS (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1959)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
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BUNTER THE BAD LAD (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1960)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BUNTER KEEPS IT DARK (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1960)	£6-£8 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER'S TREASURE-HUNT (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1961)	£4-£6 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER AT BUTLINS (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1961)	£4-£6 (£25-£35)
BILLY BUNTER AT BUTLINS (Butlin's 'Beaver Club' edition; issued with TV tie-in dustjacket) (Cassell, 1961)	£4-£6 (£10-£15)
BUNTER THE VENTRILOQUIST (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1961)	£4-£6 (£25-£35)
BUNTER THE CARAVANNER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1962)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
BILLY BUNTER'S BODYGUARD (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1962)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
BIG CHIEF BUNTER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1963)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
JUST LIKE BUNTER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1963)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
BUNTER THE STOWAWAY (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1964)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
THANKS TO BUNTER (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1964)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
BUNTER THE SPORTSMAN (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1965)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)
BUNTER'S LAST FLING (illustrated by C.H. Chapman) (Cassell, 1965)	£4-£6 (£20-£25)

'THE MAGNET'

Number 1	£200-£300
Number 1 (facsimile):	£4-£6
Number 2	£40-£60
Number 3	£30-£40
Issues published between 1908 and 1915 (in red covers; excluding double numbers)	each: £6-£8
Double numbers published between 1908 and 1915	each: £15-£20
Issues published between 1915 and 1922 (in blue and white covers)	each: £6-£8
Issues published between 1922 and 1926 (in blue and orange covers)	each: £6-£8
Issues published between 1927 and 1933 (in blue and orange covers)	each: £8-£12
Issues published between 1934 and 1937 (in blue and orange covers)	each: £6-£8
Issues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers)	each: £4-£6
Final number (1,683)	£8-£12

'THE GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL'

(note: issues retaining their tissue wrappers sell for 25%-35% more)

1920 issue (published September 1919)	£30-£40
1921-1928 issues	each: £15-£20
1929-1940 issues	each: £15-£20
1941 (final issue)	£30-£40

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