

School & Detective Stories

There will be Blood
UPTON SINCLAIR
Great US Novelist

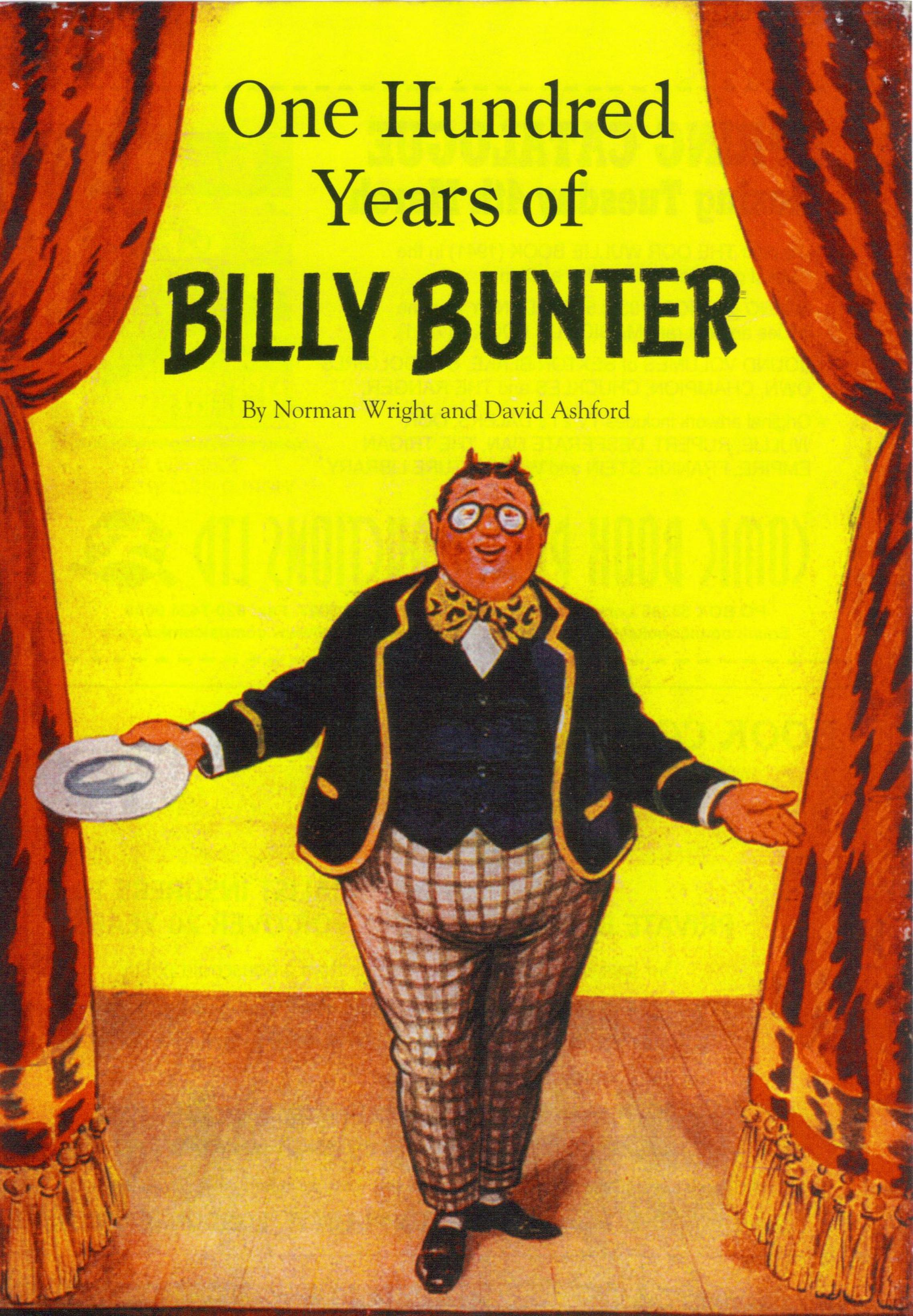
OLIVIA MANNING
The Balkan Trilogy

THEODORE STURGEON
Thrilling US Fantasy

PATRICIA MOYES
Popular crime

MIKE HUBBARD
The man who drew 'Jane'





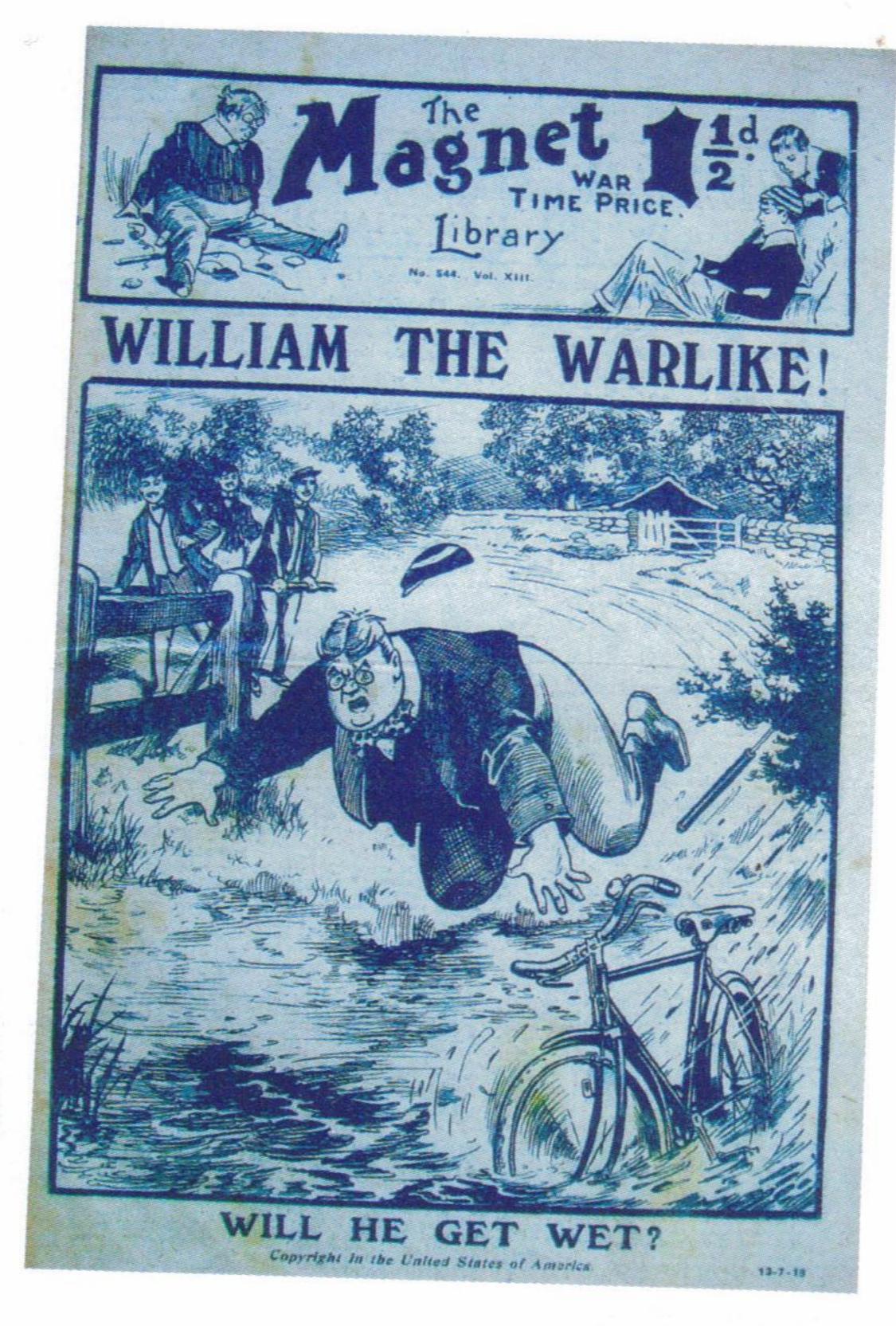
here are few who would dispute the claim that Charles Harold St. John Hamilton, better known under his pen name of Frank Richards, deserves to be placed high in the roster of great children's writers. Indeed, many would say that the word genius could well be applied to a man who was not only one of the most prolific writers of all time, but who also exerted such an immense influence for good over generations of impressionable schoolboys and girls. And, without doubt, his crowning achievement was his creation of one of the most memorable characters in 20th-century fiction, an iconic anti-hero who is still universally recognised and cherished one hundred years after his first appearance in print: Billy Bunter.

The 'fat and fatuous owl' of the remove form at Greyfriars School first appeared, blinking through his large spectacles, in the inaugural issue of the weekly story paper, The Magnet Library, on Saturday 15 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 words and that catch phrase, "I say you fellows", was to become as familiar to generations of schoolboys who avidly followed his exploits as any quote from Shakespeare or Dickens. Bunter remains one of the best-known characters in juvenile fiction, ranking alongside Alice, Toad of Toad Hall and Biggles in the children's literary hall of fame. Bunter 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 when his name is mentioned, and their mind's eye conjures up an image of a well-filled figure constantly

Bunter and the other boys and masters of Greyfriars School were the creations of Charles Hamilton under his best-known pen name of Frank Richards. From the inception of The Magnet until the early 1920s Hamilton filled out and developed his cast of characters. They were never mere twodimensional figures, for Hamilton had that rare knack of being able to lift them off the printed page and breathe life into his creations giving them

on the lookout for tuck and always expecting a

postal order that never arrives.



During the Great War the Magnet sported a white and blue cover, but Bunter still featured prominently (1918).

believable personalities with human frailties and failings and these Hamilton exploited to the full in his often quite complex stories.

Initially Billy Bunter was just a plump and bespectacled member of the remove form at Greyfriars. However, from the very beginning he had a voracious appetite and the very first visualisation of the character, on the cover of Magnet No. 7, depicted him intent on eating a plateful of jam tarts, oblivious to the calls of one of his classmates from a study window. In those early years of The Magnet Bunter was a minor character, more obtuse than objectionable, who came in useful from time to time to add a spot of light relief. A decade later he had developed into quite an unpleasant character, snobbish, hypocritical and totally selfish. Bunter would lie without compunction and use any devious means his cunning brain could devise to obtain a feed or an



Bunter was at his most obnoxious during the mid 1920's as here in the 'Bunter Court' series (1925).

easy life. This unpleasant metamorphosis of the character reached its peak in the mid-1920s.

Throughout the stories Bunter had always boasted of his home, in reality a small suburban villa but in his imagination "Bunter Court", a stately home resplendent with liveried servants. In a famous series of eight Magnet issues published over the summer of 1925 Bunter was able to fulfil this dream. Using cunning and barefaced deceit he procured for himself a mansion complete with Rolls Royce and staff of servants. Week on week his resourcefulness was tested to the limit, as one by one his deceptions were gradually uncovered and he was eventually forced to use utter ruthlessness to deal with those who discovered his subterfuge. Needless to say his schemes eventually all unravelled and retribution followed swiftly! This series saw Bunter at his most obnoxious and over the following few years, possibly due to reader reaction, Hamilton gradually softened Bunter's character.

The ear that overhears – frequently from under a railway carriage seat! (1928)

Consequently, by the time Magnet entered what are considered to be its golden years - a period stretching from about 1928 until the late 1930s -Bunter had developed into the character who is so fondly remembered today.

Hamilton may have removed the worse aspects of his creation's character but Bunter nevertheless remained a fairly despicable character to all right-minded boys. Despite Hamilton's mellowing of the character, Bunter had few, if any, redeeming features. No plate of jam tarts was safe from his insatiable appetite and his usual lack of cash dictated that these dainty comestibles could only be obtained by unscrupulous means. He would cheat, lie or steal with equal abandon - even though it would never again be on the scale of his Bunter Court caper - if it would procure him a feast. Despite an ignorance of history, geography, Latin and all the other disciplines that his long-suffering form-master, Henry Quelch, tried to instil into him, he had a

gift of low cunning that remained throughout his chronicled adventures. His eyes and ears were always open for scandal and he had an ability to turn to his advantage almost any situation or piece of knowledge that came his way.

However irritating the reader at times found Billy Bunter, the character was often of the utmost importance to the development of the complex Greyfriars stories: his was the ear that overheard plots being hatched and his the eye at the keyhole that saw the bribe being taken. Bunter invariably avoided paying train fares - he was a 'bilk' in the parlance of the day - and to this end he could successfully accomplish that most difficult of tasks: hiding under a railway carriage seat. It was from such lowly vantage points that he would inevitably pick up juicy pieces of titletattle that would later save the day.

The average Greyfriars story in an issue of the Magnet was around 25,000 words in length and, as the stories were usually written as 'series'

that stretched over eight or so issues, it can be seen that Hamilton was used to working on a large canvas with plenty of space for character and plot development. Nevertheless, Hamilton's stories invariably dovetailed together perfectly, bringing

Below: The ever hungry Bunter! (1931)

Right: Detail.

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR! ME SOUTH VIEW SERVE.

all the plot elements together for a flawless and satisfying ending. It is a measure of his craftsmanship that he could plot so accurately that seemingly unimportant trifles encountered at the start of a series were so seamlessly incorporated into the plot eight weeks later. This is even more remarkable when it is remembered that Hamilton was not only writing 25,000 words a week for the Magnet but also a similar length story for its companion paper, The Gem, featuring the adventures of Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's School. In addition to these two massive commitments he was also regularly writing stories and series for other Amalgamated Press story papers.

There were times when pressure of work and postal delays made it impossible for the 'genuine' Frank Richards to get his copy to the Amalgamated Press on time and, on those rare occasions, substitute writers would pen the weekly Greyfriars or St. Jims story. These, usually inferior, writers often tried to imitate Hamilton's





Bunter was always expecting a Postal Order that rarely turned up. In 1937 he had one of his rare periods of fleeting prosperity! (1937)

style but none could emulate that special Charles Hamilton magic. Of the 1683 Greyfriars stories published in Magnet, over 1300 were written by the 'genuine' Frank Richards.

The Greyfriars cast was extensive, built up from a hard core of characters mentioned in the first issue and enlarged over the paper's first ten years. Many of the Removites were as familiar and as popular as Bunter to the enthusiastic young readers of the Magnet. Harry Wharton, the captain of the form, was a masterpiece of character study: loyal, honest and upright but with a stubborn streak that was frequently his downfall. In two splendid long Magnet series, the first published over the winter of 1924/25 and the second towards the end of 1932, Wharton fell out with his friends and the stubborn side of his nature led him on a downward path that saw him kicking over the traces and almost being expelled from Greyfriars. The prevailing sense of tension and high drama that Hamilton engendered in these two series was never bettered in any school story.



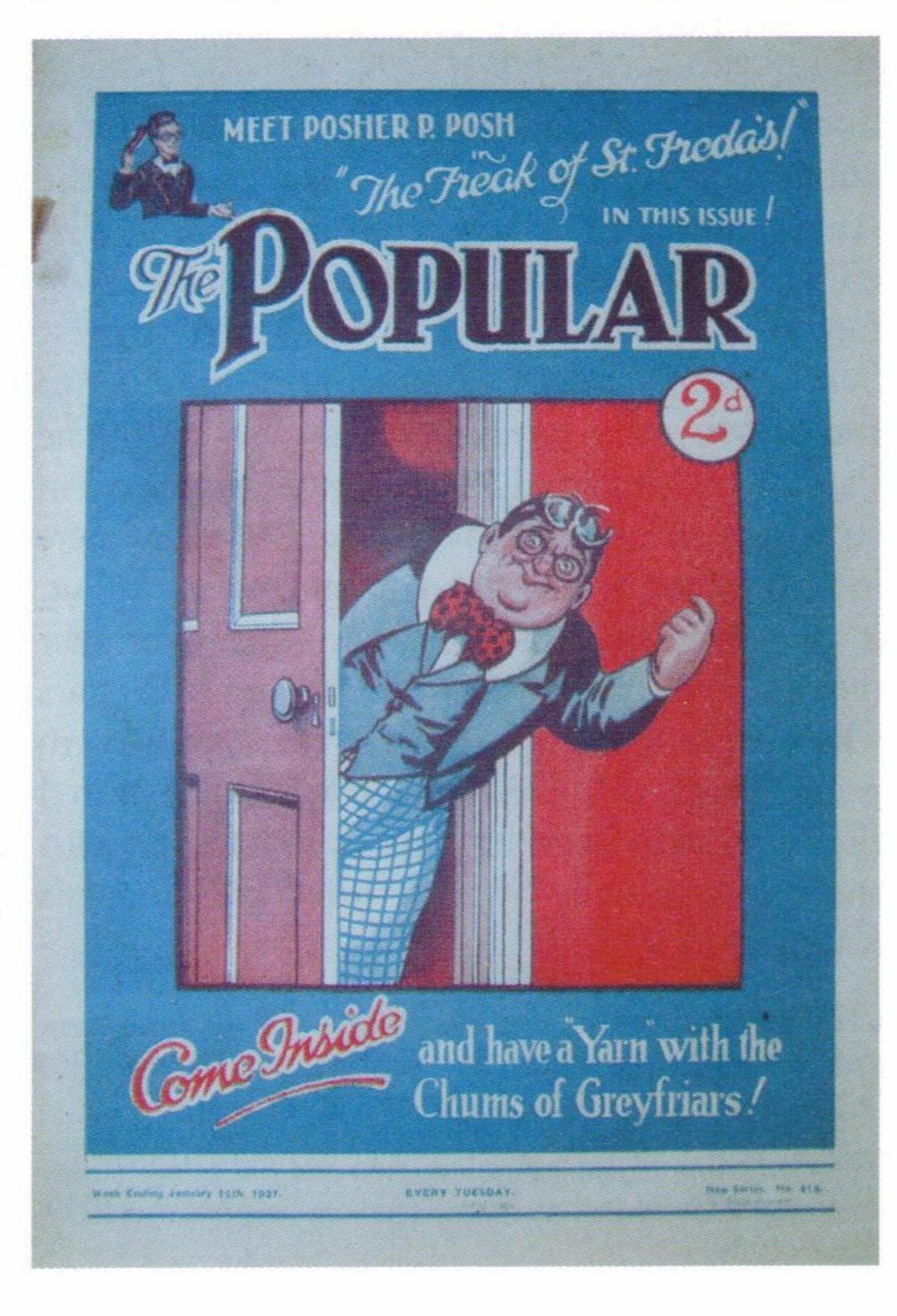
Harry Wharton was the hero of many Greyfriars stories. (1935).

Wharton, together with his friends Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull, were frequently the heroes of the Magnet adventures. Another skilfully drawn character was the multi-faceted Herbert Vernon Smith, the 'Bounder' of Greyfriars, whose disregard for rules and regulations often brought him into conflict with authority. The Bounder's cynicism and sharp eye for spotting upstarts and impostors perfectly balanced the trusting natures of Harry Wharton and Co.

The stories became so popular in The Magnet that the exploits of Wharton, Bunter and the rest of the Greyfriars boys soon began to appear regularly in other periodicals. One of the most popular of these was the Schoolboy's Own Library, a small format publication, issued at the rate of two or three titles per month. The Schoolboy's Own Library ran from 1925 until 1940. Within its pages - 64 for the first 166 issues and 96 for virtually the rest of its run -- were reprinted school stories that had previously appeared in

Amalgamated Press' weekly story papers. Such was the popularity of the Greyfriars stories that one issue every month was devoted to them. Through its pages readers could catch up on some of the past glories of the Greyfriars chronicles that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. Another long-running weekly to reprint Greyfriars stories was The Popular.

The Greyfriars Holiday Annual, resplendent in its yellow boards, became one of the best loved Christmas annuals to be published between the wars and this bumper book, published every autumn between 1919 and 1940, added yet another dimension to the Bunter phenomenon. Within its pages could be found a mass of material related to the many schools created by Charles Hamilton under his various pen names. Apart from stories – both new and reprinted – the Holiday Annual contained a wealth of 'extras' that helped to build up the Greyfriars myth. There were picture maps of the districts around the school, features on the studies and character profiles of pupils and masters. Early issues fea-

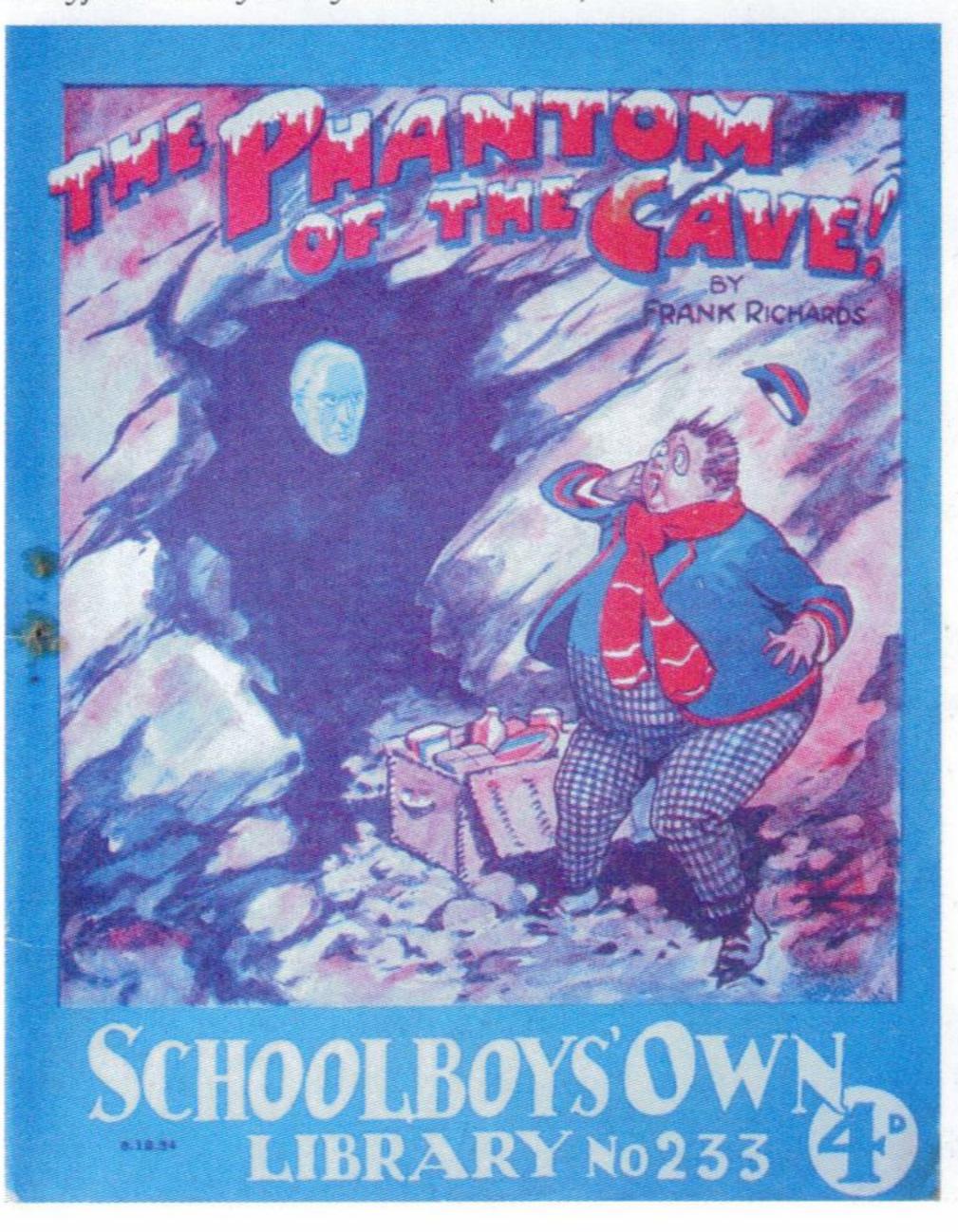


tured many rhymes and short fictional pieces about Greyfriars by other writers, which, love them or loathe them, served to build a sense of reality around Greyfriars, encouraging readers to suspend their disbelief and become convinced that Bunter, Harry Wharton and the rest of Hamilton's creations were real live characters.

Initially the Magnet sported red covers. Early on during the Great War, when the red dye became impossible to obtain, the cover changed to white with blue printing. During the paper's heyday, from 1922 until 1937, the cover was printed in yellow and blue, while in its last three years the cover was salmon pink. It was during this final stage of its run that the Magnet was subtitled Billy Bunter's Own Paper and the weekly story became longer and longer.

With such a long-running series of stories featuring the same characters week after week, it was inevitable that some repetition of themes would take place, but Hamilton was such a master of his craft that, even when a basic premise was re-used, it invariably had some new

The Popular was another weekly to reprint Greyfriars stories. This issue from 1927 has Bunter beckoning readers in. (1927) For 15 years the Schoolboys Own Library reprinted a classic Greyfriars story every month. (1934)



twist. Every year the boys would go holidaying during the summer months but the locations and situations were always different: sometimes a river trip, at other times a hiking holiday. Hamilton was a master at depicting the quintessential English countryside. To read the 1933 'Hiking Series' or the 1939 'Thames Boating Series' is to be transported back to a mythical golden age when the summers were warm and the landscape idyllic. Things were never allowed to become too tranquil, however, for Bunter & Co. and they would invariably encounter some unpleasant individual, such as an angry farmer on whose land they had inadvertently trespassed!

When they weren't holidaying in the United Kingdom the Removites spent their summers in exotic foreign locations. At one time or another in the course of its fifty plus years of adventuring the Greyfriars' Brigade visited almost every corner of the globe, from France and India to Egypt and Hollywood.

Summer holidays may have been popular but the highlight of the Greyfriars year was always Christmas. December in the real world may have brought fog and drizzle but in the alternative uni-



verse of Billy Bunter and Co. the festive season inevitably meant thick snow, frozen lakes plus a phantom or two for good measure. However hard Wharton, Cherry and the rest of the Greyfriars' chums tried to leave him behind, Billy Bunter nearly always got in on the act before Christmas Day dawned (see BMC 276).

Bunter's popularity seems to have known no bounds in those halcyon days of the 1930s and plans were afoot to form a Billy Bunter Club when the dark shadow of war loomed. Paper supplies all but dried up after a shipment of woodpulp was torpedoed and, without warning, after a run of thirty two years, the *Magnet* ceased publication with issue No. 1683, dated 18 May 1940, with a story ominously entitled "The Shadow of the Sack".

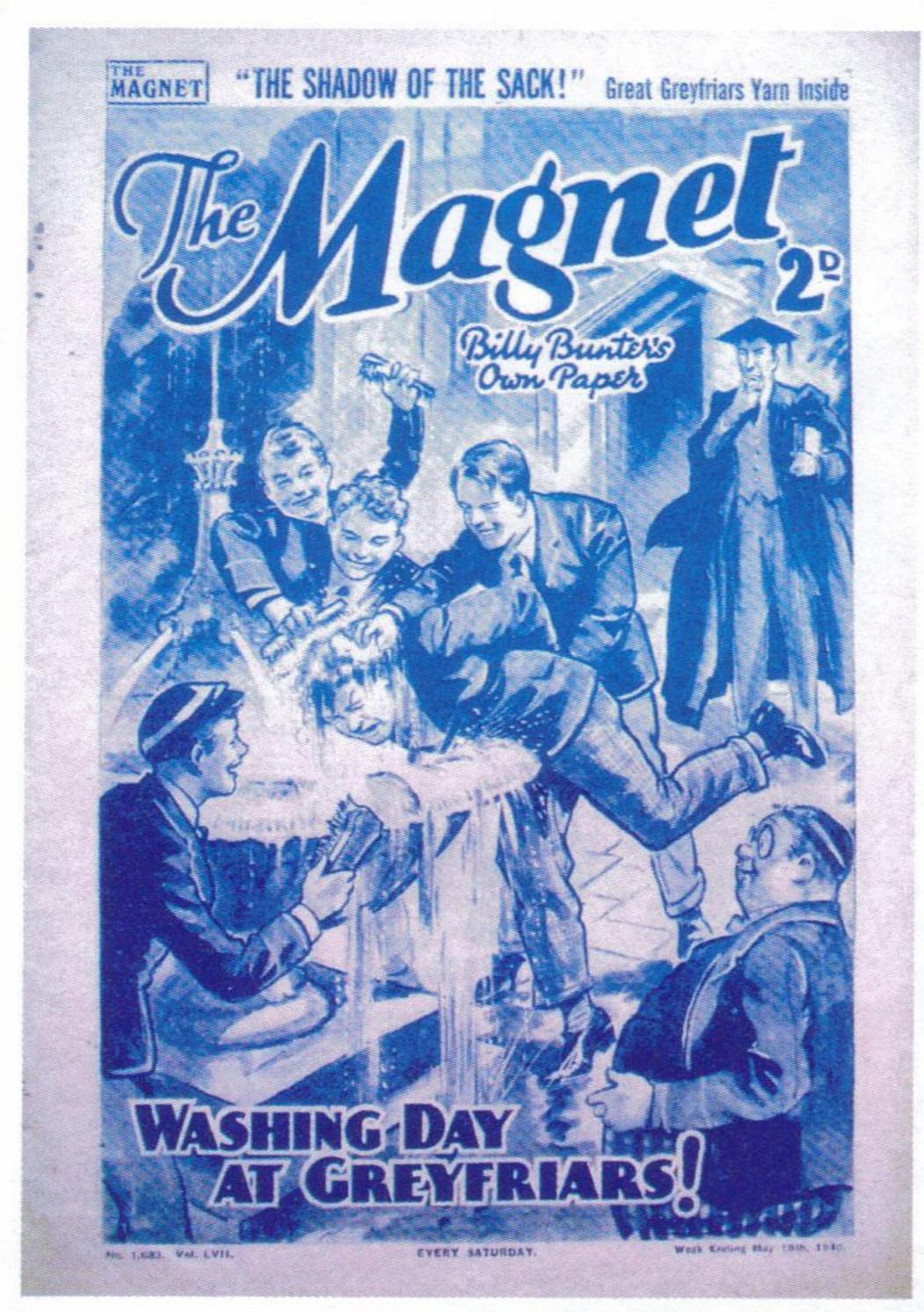
Magnet was not the only casualty of the wartime paper shortage. Gem, Schoolboys Own Library and dozens of other titles all ceased publication during 1939 and 1940. It was a blow to Charles Hamilton who suddenly found himself with no market for his work.

Billy Bunter, however, being such a resilient character, was not killed off by the war. Indeed, from 4 March 1939, he had already found a new publication for his exploits in the pages of the Amalgamated Press comic Knock-Out where he enjoyed knock-about adventures in picture strip format under the title, "Billy Bunter the Fattest Schoolboy on Earth". Bunter was no stranger to the picture strip format. As early as 1928 The Popular had featured "The Bunter Brothers" in strip form and, although die-hard Magnet readers looked aghast at Bunter's exploits in Knock-Out, it nevertheless ensured that the character remained in the public eye during the lean years when his text adventures were not appearing in print. The Knock-Out (later Knockout) featured Bunter in strip form throughout its long run with the comic actually being re-titled Billy Bunter's Knockout in 1961.

Charles Hamilton was a master at depicting the rural scene and never was this better demonstrated than in the 1933 'Hiking Series'. (1933)

The Greyfriars Holiday Annual often had full colour plates depicting a Greyfriars incident. This one is from the 1939 issue. (1939)



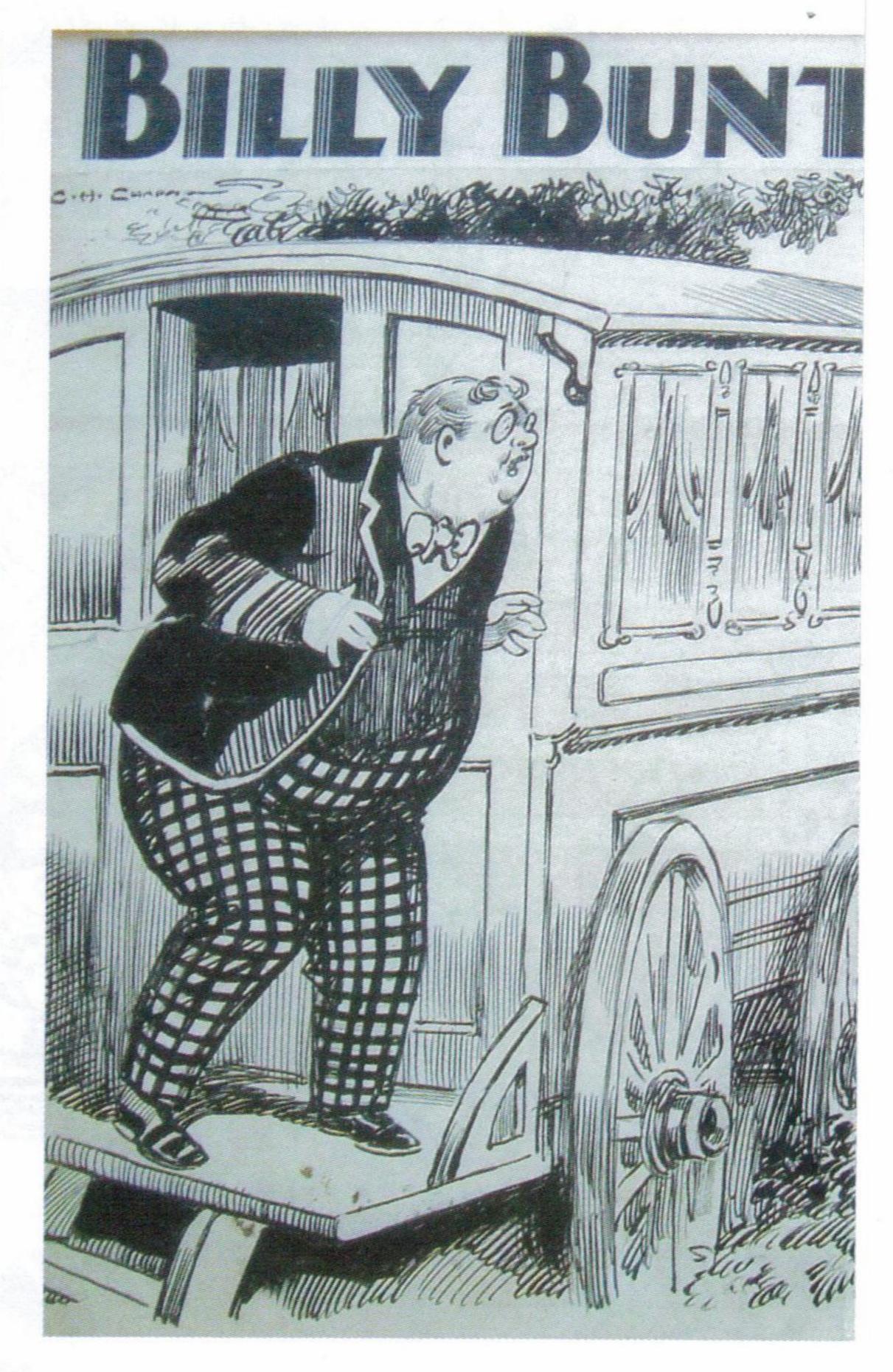


The Magnet ceased publication on 18 May 1940 with issue number 1683. (1940)

The original artwork for the title page of a 1936 Magnet. (1936)

Due to wrangling over copyright the Amalgamated Press would, at first, not allow Hamilton to write Greyfriars stories for other publishers and for seven years after the cessation of Magnet, the writer had to be content with creating other, less successful, schools and characters. But old readers remembered the 'Fat Owl' of Greyfriars and a number of newspaper and magazine articles appeared featuring Hamilton and his characters.

One of these articles, in Picture Post, came to the attention of Charles Skilton, just setting himself up as a publisher. Writing in 1958 Skilton said: "It at once struck me that a series of books about Bunter and Greyfriars would be a very safe bet for a publisher only comparatively recently established." Skilton wrote to Hamilton and the idea was soon bearing fruit. Skilton continued: "Within a month everything had been settled, the Amalgamated Press who at one time were



cavilling at the idea of Bunter being published elsewhere, having withdrawn their objection. I see from my files that the contract was signed on October 4th, 1946 and on December 4th I had the manuscript in my hands, had chuckled with laughter over it and knew that I had a winner of a book in Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School."

That first volume was published in September 1947 and Skilton sold every copy he could print. The 'Billy Bunter Series' of hardbacked books, standing out on the bookshelves in their bright yellow jackets, were welcomed by both old-timers who fondly remembered the Magnet stories and by a new generation of younger readers who enthusiastically took Bunter and the rest of the Greyfriars characters to their hearts. Skilton published new titles in the series at the rate of two a year.



In 1952 the BBC launched a Billy Bunter TV series written by Charles Hamilton and featuring Gerald Campion as Bunter. Campion, despite being an adult, was excellent in the role, capturing the character to perfection. The TV series proved immensely popular with both young and old viewers and ran until 1961.

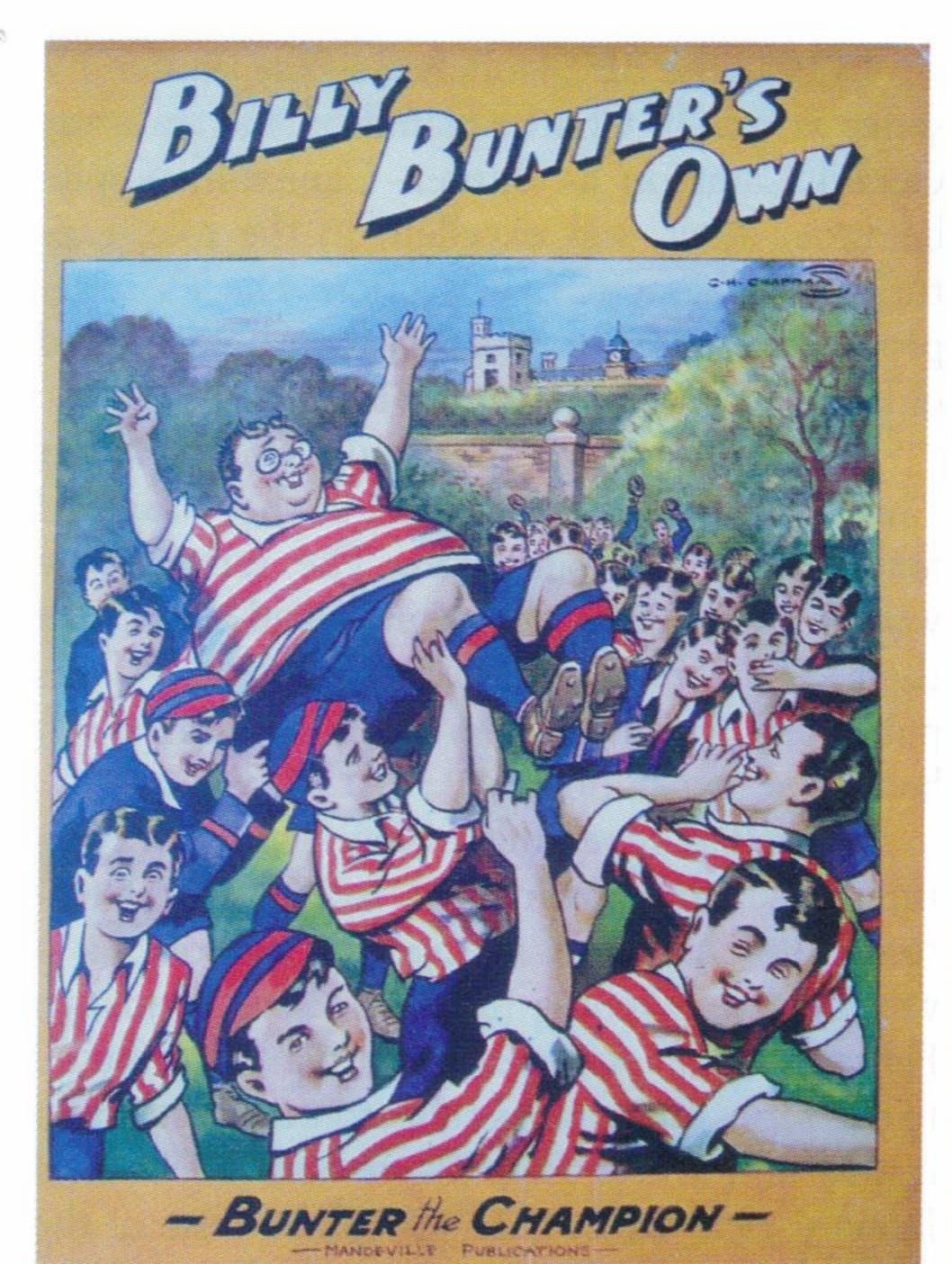
There was also an annual Billy Bunter Christmas stage show that ran in the West End for six seasons from 1958. The scripts were written by Maurice McLoughlin and the first of them, "Billy Bunter's Mystery Christmas", was published by Samuel French in 1960 as a soft backed acting edition.

As well as appearing in Knockout Bunter featured in several other comics. In 1950 Comet featured the characters in short text stories for a year before switching to picture strip format in February 1952. A number of artists contributed to this series but as far as collectors are concerned it was at its best from September 1956 until January 1958 when C.H. Chapman, one of the original Magnet illustrators, was drawing the strip. The Comet Bunter strip, drawn by a number of highly individual artists, ran until the summer of 1958. When Knockout amalgamated with

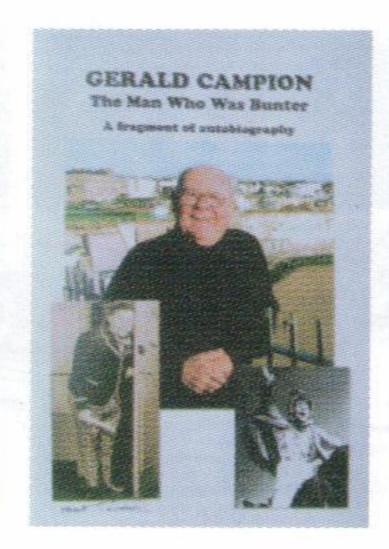
> Detail from a Bunter strip from Knockout No. 3 from 1939. (1939)

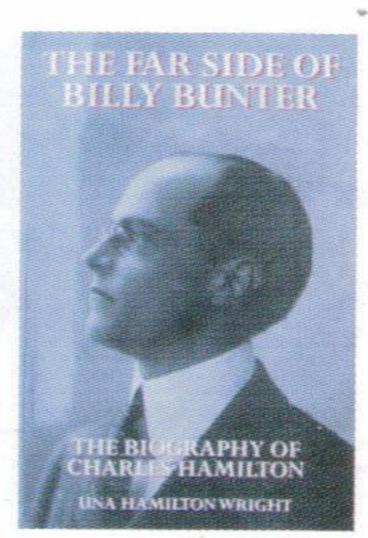


and satisfied snores shook his study.











Wrapper for the first issue of "Billy Bunter's Own". (1953) "Bunter's Last Fling", the final Bunter book published in 1965.

Gerald Campion, star of the BBC TV series was Bunter to millions of children during the 1950s.

Biography of Charles Hamilton by his niece, Una Hamilton Wright, published in 2006, offered many fresh insights into the man.

Flyer for one of the 1960s Bunter Christmas stage shows put on at the Victoria Palace, London.



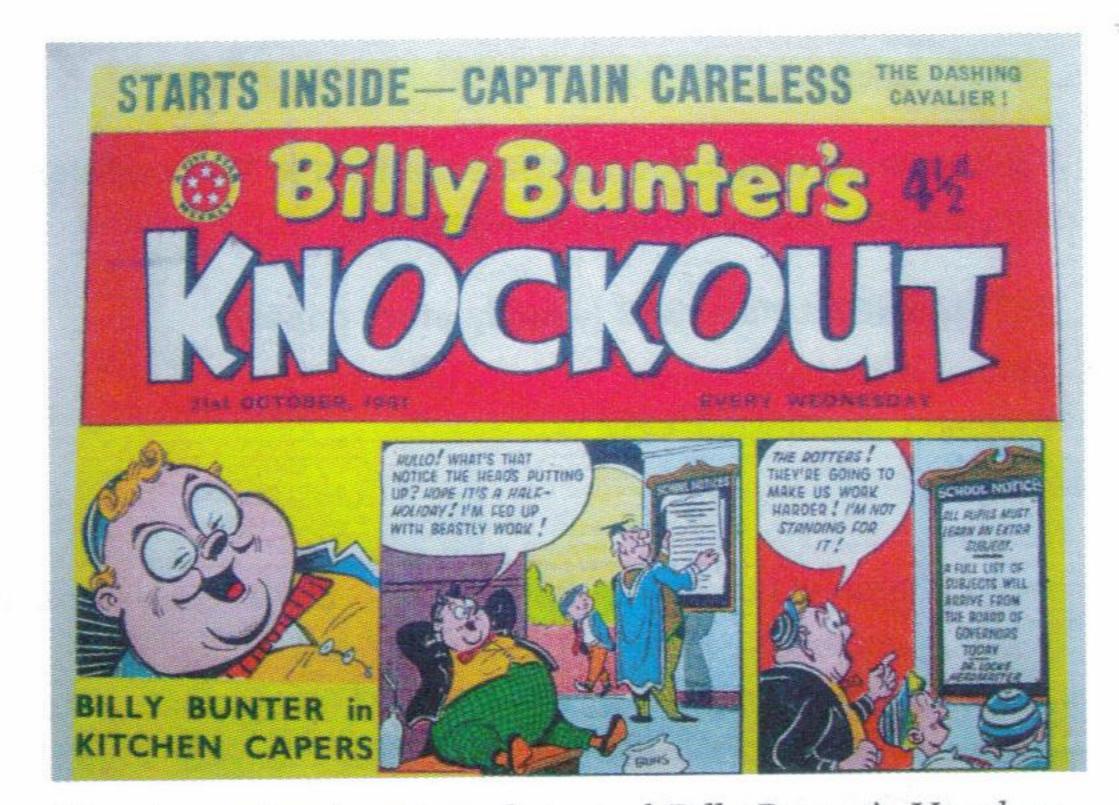
Valiant, in 1963, Bunter was one of the few characters who made the transition to the new comic.

Despite the high quality of some of the picture strips, for most enthusiasts Bunter is essentially a character of the written word and, once the Amalgamated Press had relented regarding their refusal to allow Bunter to be published elsewhere, Charles Hamilton was soon busy tapping out new stories of the Greyfriars characters for a variety of publications. In 1947 Mandeville Publications began a series of Tom Merry Annuals and Hamilton invariably wrote a Bunter story for each volume. In 1953 the same publisher brought out the first of what became a series of eight Billy Bunter's Own volumes, each of them containing one or more stories of Greyfriars School. The character also surfaced in a number of 'one off' stories in several other annuals during the 1950s and '60s including: Big Parade for Boys, New Target Book for Boys and Wonder Book of Comics.

After publishing ten titles, Charles Skilton relinquished the Billy Bunter Series to Cassell who continued them in the same uniform series, still retaining their distinctive yellow jackets. Eventually the series comprised 38 titles - plus one adventure of Bessie Bunter - including eight volumes published posthumously after Hamilton's death (on Christmas Eve, 1961). The last title in the series: Billy Bunter's Last Fling appeared in September 1965.

Despite Hamilton's death, interest in his creations continued unabated. In 1965, the same year as the final Bunter book was published, Armada published four Bunter titles in paperback format. These were reprints of old Magnet stories and were well received by enthusiasts young and old. That same year Fleetway Publications issued a facsimile edition of Magnet No. 1 that enjoyed huge sales.

A few years later, in 1969, Howard Baker issued the first of his Magnet facsimile volumes. This was a high quality, hardbound volume, comprising the eight issues of Magnet that made up the 1932 'Egypt Series'. The book was a great success and over the next twenty years Baker published almost 250 such volumes comprising



Knockout after it was re-christened Billy Bunter's Knockout in 1961. (1961)

facsimiles of not only Magnet but also of Gem and other pre-war favourites. It is thanks to these splendid facsimile volumes that collectors today have relatively easy access to the Magnet stories, which most true aficionados believe contain the very best of Charles Hamilton's Greyfriars output.

Billy Bunter has appeared on the printed page, in comics, on TV, on stage and on radio; some of the Bunter books and Magnet stories have been reprinted as paperbacks, serialised in magazines and newspaper; a few have been updated for a 'modern audience' and recently some of the titles have been issued as talking books.

A recent biography, The Far Side of Billy Bunter, The Biography of Charles Hamilton, by his niece, Una Hamilton Wright, has served to rekindle interest in Hamilton and his characters. Not that interest over the decades has ever really waned and three other biographies of Hamilton (not to mention his own rather uninformative autobiography) have been published. His characters currently enjoy a huge following with enthusiast groups and internet sites devoted to Bunter and the rest of his vast output.

Charles Hamilton's output for The Magnet and the Bunter books, written over more than half a century, totalled some 28 million words, making the mythical world of Greyfriars and its environs one of the most extensive in literature. By comparison Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings is a mere short story!

SELECTED FRANK RICHARDS GREYFRIARS BIBLIOGRAPHY

A guide to current values of first editions in VG condition (with) and without dustjackets Note: weekly/monthly storypapers issues without dustjackets)

THE MAGNET 1908-1940 (weekly story paper)
Number 1 (facsimile 1965): Number 2 (facsimile 1965): Number 3 (facsimile 1905): Double numbers published between 1908 and 1915 (in red covers; excluding double numbers) Leach £15-£20 (lessues published between 1915 and 1922 (in blue and white covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1922 and 1926 (in blue and orange covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1927 and 1933 (in blue and orange covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1934 and 1937 (in blue and orange covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1934 and 1937 (in blue and orange covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers) Leach £6-£8 (lessues published between 1937 and 1940 (in salmon-coloured covers)
SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY 1925-1940 (Monthly story paper)
Number 1: 'The Greyfriars Players'
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
BILLY BUNTER BOOKS
BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1947). £15-£20 (£60-£80) BILLY BUNTER'S BANKNOTE (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 (Charles Skilton, 1949). £10-£15 (£40-£60) BESSIE BUNTER OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1949). £15-£20 (£60-£80) 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-£60) BILLY BUNTER AMONG THE CANNIBALS (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1950). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL ORDER (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1951). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER BUTTS IN (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1951). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER AND THE BLUE MAURITIUS (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Charles Skilton, 1952). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER'S BEANFEAST (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1952). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER'S BRAINWAVE (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1953). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER'S FIRST CASE (illustrated by R.J. Macdonald) (Cassell, 1953). £8-£10 (£40-£60) BILLY BUNTER'S OWN (annual) (Mandeville/Oxenhoath Press, [1953-61]) note: Some issued with jackets,
where thus add 50%