

# HASTINGS MAN HAS BIG "BUNTER" COLLECTION

When the news of the death of Charles Hamilton, creator of "Billy Bunter," broke into the Christmas celebrations, few were more disturbed than Mr J. R. Murtagh, of Selwood road, Hastings.

Mr Murtagh has been collecting the writings of Charles Hamilton, better known as Frank Richards, since his boyhood.

As private collections go, it must rank among the most comprehensive to be found in English-speaking countries.

Actually Mr Murtagh's collections do not stop with the works of Frank Richards, for he is a collector in a varied field. His home is a treasure house of books and collectors' items of a wide classification.

Pride of place is given to thousands of copies of *The Magnet* and *The Gem*.

Charles Hamilton wrote under his own name, and the pen names Frank Richards, Martin Clifford and Owen Conquest. Mr Murtagh has them all—paperbacks, hard covers and bound annuals.

## BACK TO 1908

Mr Murtagh's collection of *The Magnet* begins with copy No. 32, dated September 19, 1908, but he has a copy of almost every issue published through until the last issue in 1940. This depicted washing day at Greyfriars, the bespectacled, rotund Billy Bunter occupying the foreground (naturally).

The *Magnet* was first published in 1908. *The Gem* had a publishing life of from 1908 until 1939. Hamilton wrote for these publications—they were weeklies—for the whole period.

He wrote for *The Magnet* under the name of Frank Richards and for *The Gem* under the name of Martin Clifford.

That was a secret of which the most avid readers of the *St Jim's* and *Greyfriars* series were blissfully ignorant. Hamilton wrote 1½ million words a year to perpetuate this duplicity.

Mr Murtagh, like many a schoolboy of the period, was a "Billy Bunter" devotee, reading with the book under the desk at school or in public transport as does any modern boy who has not cultivated the "transistor" habit.

## MODEST LETTER

He once wrote to Mr Hamilton and received a reply which reveals the modesty of the famed author.

"You wouldn't guess how pleased I am to read that my books are displayed in many bookshops in New Zealand," an excerpt from the letter runs.

"I used to dream, in my younger days, of a trip to that wonderful island; but it never came off; so many dreams don't come true.

"But if Frank Richards will never see New Zealand, it is very pleasant to know that Billy Bunter is more fortunate. Although Billy is so disinclined to exertion, he does seem to get about the world as his author never could."

In his letter Mr Hamilton says he had almost forgotten that he had ever been named anything but Frank Richards. The letter was written in 1957 and the writer said Billy Bunter "is going strong on television over here."

"One of these days," he added, "I hope you will see our fat old friend on television in New Zealand."

The letter is signed "Frank Richards" in a bold masculine hand. A thick nib and indelible black ink were used.

## NELSON LEES TOO

Mr Murtagh's library also includes the complete Nelson Lee series, written by Edwy Searles Brooks under his own name. This weekly series was published continuously from 1915 until 1933—948 issues.

Later, Brooks wrote under the pen-names of Berkeley Gray and Victor Gunn—at the age of over 70 he is still writing.

Mr Murtagh has many books written by Brooks under these noms de plume, including a copy of "The Golden Monkey," dedicated "to John Redman Murtagh, of Hastings, New Zealand, who, a glutton for punishment, has read my stories for more years than either of us cares to remember." It is signed "B.G."



CHARLES HAMILTON . . .

On the frontispiece the author has written: "To Jack—with best wishes. Edwy." Elsewhere on the page, the author has inscribed his other two pen-names thus: "Berkeley Gray—April, 1957 (signed) Victor Gunn."

## HIGHLY VALUED

Mr Murtagh values this copy particularly highly, as it must surely be a rarity to own a book inscribed by an author under the three names by which he became known to the public.

It took Mr Murtagh 36 long years to complete the collection of the Nelson Lee series. He has paid high prices for back numbers of this publication. Not until last year did he conclude the search. He began reading the series—the background is an imaginary school, *St Frank's College*—in 1925.

## OTHER INTERESTS

Mr Murtagh's collecting does not end with schoolboy literature. He has more than 1½ million cigarette cards, shoe-box after shoe-box of them, sorted in series, stacked from floor to ceiling.

Mr Murtagh also has a big stamp collection and collects old coins. He has delved and collected in a wide sphere of scientific and abstruse topics.

In his possession there is a mine of information, ranging from sputniks in space to egyptology. He has also made a special study of the working of greenstone by the Maori.

Mr Murtagh's collecting activities have put him in touch with collectors in all parts of the world. Among them are doctors, ministers of religion and a Hollywood film star. All collect old schoolboy paperbacks.

## KEEN ON CARDS

One of the keenest collectors of cigarette cards with whom Mr Murtagh corresponds is the managing director of a diamond firm, Mr Edward C. Wharton-Tigar.

This man, regarded by Mr Murtagh as a personal friend,

cont...

flew out of his way last year on the way to Australia to spend a weekend with Mr Murtagh and discuss his collection.

Mr Murtagh says his collecting will go on. He added that there must still be schoolday papers gathering dust in forgotten cupboards.

A specialist in photography, Mr Murtagh has made and edited a series of documentary films complete with sound track and commentary.

Better known as a hypnotist, he used his second name, Redman, when he toured New Zealand, Australia and the United States some years ago.

### Ginger Meggs and the Potts

SIR. May I offer my congratulations on your bringing my old mate, Ginger Meggs, back to his rightful home after too long a time in another place.

To put the record straight, I draw attention to an error in Bill Peach's interesting background story of the country's best-loved kid.

According to Bill, Ginger is the longest running Australian comic strip, having been created by Jim Bancks in November, 1921. This is not correct. The Potts which I am happy to say is also featured in The Sun-Herald, preceded Ginger Meggs (or, as the strip was known those days, Us Fellers) by eight months, appearing first in Smiths Weekly in March, 1921.

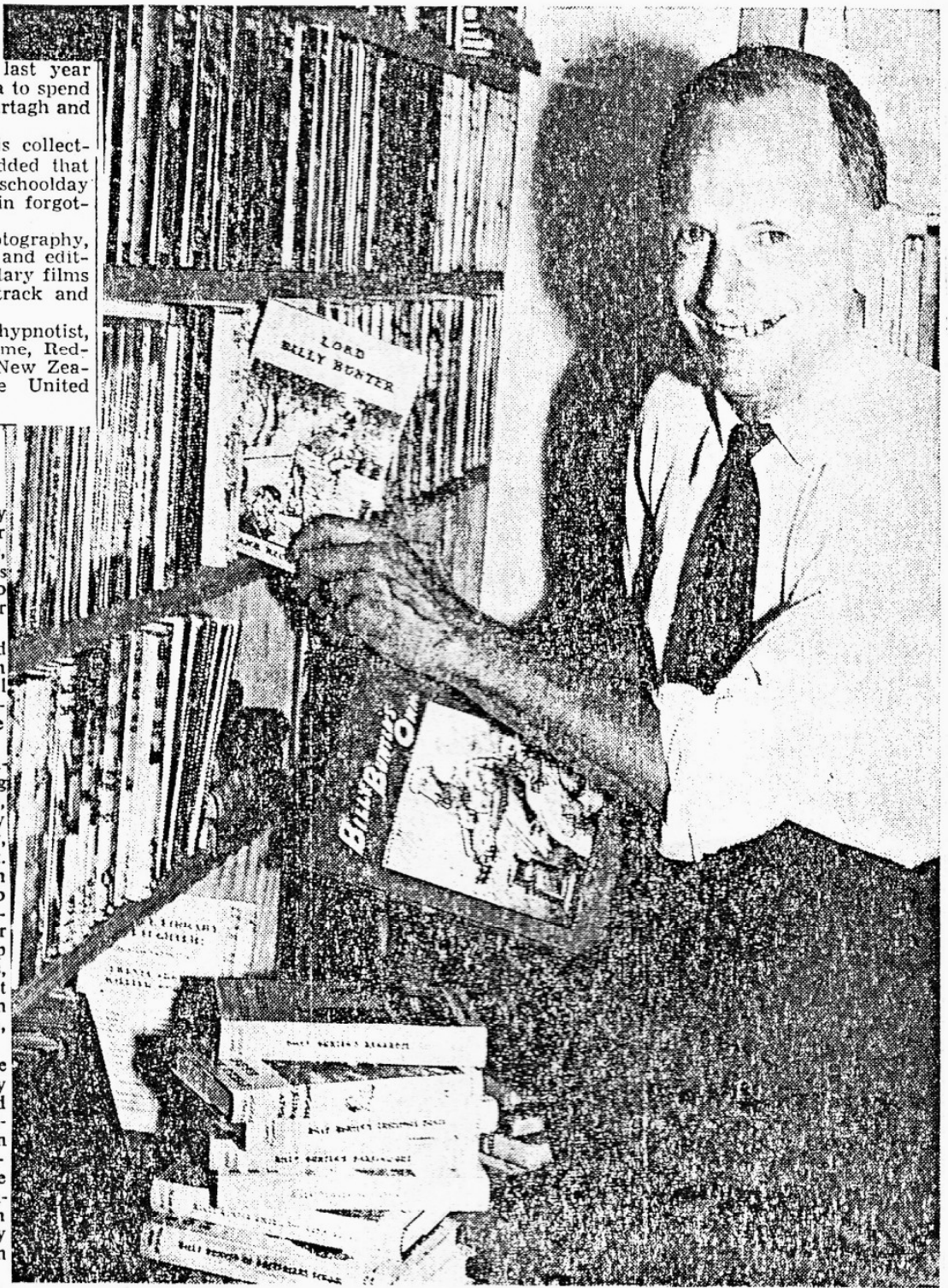
I don't claim to be the creator of The Potts. My great personal friend and mentor, Stan Cross, originated the weekly strip in Smiths in 1921 and carried it on until he left the paper in late 1939. I continued drawing it in Smiths as a weekly feature until 1950, when that paper closed.

Immediately I commenced drawing it as a daily strip in The Sydney Morning Herald and newspapers in all Australian States.

In 1950 The Sun-Herald featured the larger Sunday edition of The Potts in its colour comic section, and 25 years later it is still happily mixing in the fun with its long-time colleague, Ginger Meggs.

I would like to add what a great personal friend Jim Bancks was to me in my early days as a newspaper cartoonist, and what a wonderful influence both he and Stan Cross were in the development of Australian comic art.

**JIM RUSSELL,**  
Sylvania.



HASTINGS COLLECTOR MR J. R. MURTAGH takes down a book from his shelves.



Nearly  
50  
Autographed  
Photos  
of  
Famous  
Stars