

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

GRAND SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE STORIES
AND SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT!

No.
244

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THE UNPOPULAR NEW BOY PROVES HIS METTLE!
(By his pluck and brave action, Jim Lee rescues Harry Whorton from the ruggers.)

Collectors' Digest

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 21

No. 244

APRIL 1967

Price 2s. 0d.



FORTY YEARS ON!

Forty years on, will you ever be yearning
Once more to visit the school down in Kent?
Will you, in aeroplane swift, be returning
To the old place where your schooldays were spent?
Will you spin yarns to the new generation,
Tell of Life's tussles, and victories won?
May you win honour for self and the nation --
Twenty, and Thirty, and Forty years on!

So, just about forty years ago, wrote the Greyfriars Rhymester - probably Mr. G. R. Samways - in one of the Greyfriars Herald supplements in the Magnet. I have only quoted one verse from what was rather a pleasant little piece, based, of course, on the famous Harrow School song.

Forty years back! It was then 1927. A long time ago. Many of us, with shining morning faces, were creeping like snail, unwillingly to school. If, at that time, we took any notice of the rhymester's verse, did it cause us to wonder whether, after forty years had swept by, we should still be "yearning to visit the school down in Kent."? What would our reply have been if somebody had suggested that we should still be as keen on Greyfriars - or St. Jim's or St.

Frank's - in 1967 as we were in 1927?

Probably we would not have taken it very seriously.

MYSTERIES OF THE TWENTIES

For a considerable period of time, in the early years of the black and yellow cover of the Magnet, while Mr. C. H. Chapman was providing the interior illustrations to the stories, the covers were drawn by some other artist. Who the artist was, or just why this practice was followed, we have never discovered. The artist in question was by no means untalented, and he seems to have contributed a great many pictures to the Greyfriars Herald of the period. We reproduce one of these mystery covers on the front of Collectors' Digest this month.

Every collector of experience knows that, in both the Magnet and the Gem, the copies which appeared between about 1923 and 1926 - that is, the early years of the coloured covers - are the most difficult to obtain. These are in the range of serial numbers between the later 700's and the later 900's. It is really impossible to find the reason just why this should be so. Even when a long-sought copy does happen to turn up, it is seldom in very good condition.

Fairly obviously, it was a period when less retaining of copies took place, but it is difficult to understand. It is true that this was the time when there was a glut of stories from substitute writers, but this would have been balanced, one would have thought, by the fact that there were many lengthy series - and strikingly good ones - from the genuine writer. I wonder sometimes whether the shortage might be due to the fact that, in that period, the papers carried "big supporting programmes," taking them more into the magazine class. But there can hardly be any question that the papers were far more attractive in these days than they were in the era of the white covers, yet they are far more rare.

The copies themselves, by 1923 and onwards, seemed to be more substantial and durable than those of a few years earlier, but, for some reason, they have not lasted so well. It would be interesting to know whether the same phenomenon is present in other papers of the mid-twenties.

AGATHA IN THE THRILLER

Last month I enquired for information concerning the work of famous Agatha Christie in the Thriller. Mr. C. J. Parratt, of Stockport, sends me the following:

"Agatha Christie wrote three short stories in the "Thriller,"

29.9.34. No. 295, The £10 Adventure; 15.12.34. No. 306, Accident;
5.1.35. No. 309, Philomel Cottage.

"The Thriller" was a very good paper but it was aimed at the older members of the family and young people did not find it easy to read. The print was very small, also. This is probably why not many copies exist today. It should be more widely sought for by collectors as the stories are excellent.

The authors included - Ladbroke Black (19), John G. Brandon (63), Leslie Charteris (38), Hugh Clevely (26), L. C. Douthwaite (27), Gwyn Evans (8), E. S. Brooks, Berkeley Gray, Victor Gunn, (34), Sidney Horler (13), John Hunter (32), Barry Perowne (24), Anthony Skene (16), Edmund Snell (44), G. H. Teed (14), Edgar Wallace (35).

It ran for 589 issues, No. 1 dated 9.2.29, No. 589 dated 18.5.40."

Very many thanks to reader Parratt for his kindness in filling our needs so quickly.

THE EDITOR.

THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT

From W. H. Goodhead

Whilst skimming through some back issues of the "Readers Digest" I came upon the following interesting and amusing item:

On the Spur of the Moment

George Richard Mant Hearne used to write a weekly adventure concerning either Sexton Blake or Robin Hood. Once, the artist who illustrated his work forgot which series he was illustrating. The drawing made for next week's Robin Hood instalment showed a group of people sitting in the greenwood dressed in flannels and boaters fashionable in 1910.

Hearne rose to the occasion and inserted a single sentence in his tightly-knit piece: "Swiftly disguising themselves in modern costume, Robin Hood and his Merry Men took counsel."

- Mary Allingham

I can't place the author, and the story itself is too good to be true, but nevertheless I suppose that there is more than a grain of truth in it.

SALE: No. 1 Magnet - bound without red covers. No. 1 Champion.
Offers.

WHITMORE, 55 LOIS DRIVE, SHEPPERTON, MIDDLESEX.

THE STATES IN THE WAR — — JIMMY SILVER IN THE "POP"

Being extracts from DANNY'S DIARY for April 1917

The United States has come into the war at last. On April 6th, to the pleasure of everybody except Kaiser Bill & Co, the United States declared war on Germany. I wonder what Fisher T. Fish thinks of it.

So, the U.S.A. are in the war, and Jimmy Silver is in the Penny Popular. Jack, Sam, & Pete have now left the Pop which they had adorned since the beginning, and the Pop is now an all-school-story paper. The first Rookwood tale in the Pop was "The Rookwood Wax-works." The editor says that they are tales of the early adventures of Jimmy Silver, but nobody I know remembers ever reading these tales in the Boys' Friend. I have had the Boys' Friend ever since Rookwood started, and I am sure these tales in the Pop never appeared before.

And now for a look at the new Rookwood stories in the B.F. All of them were humorous, and a change from too much Mornington. First tale was "Fooled on the First" which was good fun all the way, with the Classics and Moderns trying to score off each other on April the First.

Next came "Van Ryn's Ruse" which was exciting and funny. Mr. Bootles had a cold, so Carthew was put in charge of the Fourth. Van Ryn used his ventriloquism to check Carthew's bullying.

The next tale "The Eccentric Headmaster" was very odd and so very silly. Dr. Chisholm has gone away for health reasons, and his place is taken by a Dr. Howard, who is a fresh-air fiend, and who makes the boys put out their fires and open all their windows. He wears flowing Greek costume, and makes the porter and Jimmy Silver & Co also wear Greek togs. Finally, he makes the boys wear sandals when they play footer. I should think there was just one bigger nut than Dr. Howard - and that was the author.

Last tale of the month was also the best. Called "Greener Than Grass" it told of a new boy named Clarence Cuffy from Ganders Green. He was the son of a friend of Tommy Dodd's father. This tale was a joy, and I hope we get some more about Cuffy.

Summer Time, with the clocks going on by one hour, came in on Easter Sunday, the 8th April, which was just two days after the U.S. came into the war. I love the light evenings, even though it is pretty cold as yet.

There was rather a terrible affair this month in south-east London. There was a panic at a children's show at the Electric Palace, Deptford, and four children were killed and a lot more hurt.

Things in the Magnet look really ommernuss. The stories this month have been "The Rebel," "Colonial Chums," "The Remove Election Campaign," and "Head of the Poll." They continued the affair which started last month about Harry Wharton's leadership being challenged by Peter Todd and Bolsover. Also in it was Delarey, who had a friend named Sorrell, who was a deserter from the army. The series has now ended, but I wonder whether the Magnet is going to carry on with this writer. Maybe the old writer has had to go in the army.

The Greyfriars Gallery this month contained Tom Brown, Alonzo Todd, Penfold, and Fish.

German destroyers shelled Ramsgate this month, and five people were killed. I remember going to Ramsgate once when we had a summer holiday at Margate.

Pearl White is in a new serial at one of our cinemas. It is called "The Shielding Shadow," and it brings back a character who was first in "The Further Exploits of Elaine." We have seen some quite good pictures including Blanche Sweet in "Public Opinion," Bessie Love in "The Flying Torpedo," Mae Murray in "The Big Sister," and June Caprice in "Little Miss Happiness."

There is a big shortage of food, though people with plenty of money and the time to go from shop to shop are supposed to be storing up plenty. There is no butter at all, and the margarine is nasty and dear. Sugar is short, and even Packer's Chocolate Crispets have gone up to only one ounce for a penny. And the best chocolates have reached the gasternommerous price of 6d a quarter. We shall soon need a Gladstone bag to carry our money when we go shopping.

Everybody is asked to grow food in their gardens, and even Sexton Blake is doing it. In a Union Jack story this month, "The Mystery of Fallowside Farm," Blake took over a farm and grew food while the farmer was involved in a lot of trouble with a criminal.

The newspapers seem to think that the government ought to have introduced food rationing by this time, but Mr. Lloyd George says he has the ration books all printed for when the time comes. In the meantime, the war profiteers are building up fortunes.

The Gem has been pretty good this month; far, far better than the Magnet. In "Rough on Railton," the Housemaster has a relative, Cousin Philip, who is a conscientious objector. By an accident, Grundy learns of this, and when the story gets round St. Jim's, Grundy

is blamed for betraying Mr. Railton's awful secret. But it was really Trimble - and Cousin Philip repents and joins the army.

In "Breakers of Bounds," the Head puts a district near the school out of bounds, but gives no reason for doing so. Cardew has been asked to help a friend make up a football team at Woodley, so he and Levison break bounds to go to play football.

Next week, "The Chums of Study No. 9" was once more about Levison, Cardew, and Clive. Mr. Ratcliff has ordered that Figgins' dog shall be destroyed in order to save food. The story gets round that the three chums of No. 9 are going to a cottage to gamble and smoke, but it comes out in the end that they gave the dog to an old soldier blinded in the Boer War, and Cardew has been going to see the dog and read to the blind man.

In "Trimble's Triumph," Trimble becomes self-righteous in demanding that meals should be cut down to save food. But he has found Cutts' stock of prog in the box-room, and is guzzling to his heart's content.

So it has been a fairly neat month in the Gem. The editor of the Gem and Magnet keeps printing abusive letters which he says he has received from readers. They are an awful bore, and such a waste of space.

A new play has started in London. It is called "The Better 'Ole" and it is based on the cartoons by Bruce Bairnsfather. Doug says he might take me to see it some time.

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(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "The Eccentric Headmaster," mentioned this month by Danny, would seem to have been the second substitute Rookwood story to appear in the Boys' Friend.)

FOR SALE: Holiday Annuals 1929, 1932, 1938, £1 each; Nelson Lees (new series) 2/- each; 32 Boys' Heralds 1/- each; 16 Boys' Friends 1/6 each; T. M. Annuals 4/- each; T.M. and Bunter hardbacks 3/6 each; Chatterbox 1926 5/-; Champion Annuals 1936, 1938, 4/- each; Boys' Own Annuals 1921-1922, 15/- each; 11 School Caps 6d each; Chums Annual 1924, £1. Also various school story books.

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(phone after 7 p.m. RIV 4280)

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN,
27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22

THE CASE OF THE IRRESPONSIBLE RECEPTIONIST

By Walter Webb

In its brief and chequered career in paperback form the S.B.L. has already met with a good deal of adverse criticism. Some of the more seasoned readers have been most emphatic in their opinions of what should not be included in its pages. But the reader who rose at the Round Table in January struck a novel note when he drew the line at the use to which Marion Lang put an ice-cream in the Christmas story, "The Snowman Cometh." He referred to it as a silly and unnecessary episode which had nothing at all to do with the plot of the story.

But is an author guilty of producing a silly and unnecessary episode purely by recording the action of one of his characters who commits a breach of etiquette in a spirit of youthful fun at a Christmas party? I do not think so. But why criticise something that we used to accept as a regular ingredient in our feast of old-time reading? One need look no further than the MAGNET to come upon those factors which our fellow contributor has felt compelled to object to in the S.B.L.

Was the author guilty of striking a false note in his description of a little ragging of Tinker by Marion Lang, when, with a few drinks beneath the belt, she slipped an ice-cream down the back of his shirt? Donning the august mantle of Mr. Quelch, and with a portentous gravity which would have surely brought him a benevolent look from that scholarly gentleman, our critic is moved to question the responsibility of the girl. Quelch no doubt would have disapproved of the girl's action with the ice-cream as strongly as he would have condemned the ragging of his most obtuse pupil, Bunter, at the hands of his head boy, Wharton, and his friends. There were times when Quelch's footsteps took him along the Remove passage. There were times when he had stood petrified at what he saw taking place in that noisy thoroughfare. There would be Bunter held fast in the grip of his school-fellows. Bunter wriggling frantically in the vengeful grasp of fellows who had lost their tuck. Bunter gurgling horribly

as remnants of the stolen tuck, such as jam-tarts, cream-puffs, chocolate eclairs and other comestibles, were rammed down the back of his fat neck, with, to cap it all, a jar of jam upended over his head. In such circumstances, Quelch was moved to question the responsibility of his head boy too.

When I read the MAGNET, I never ceased to be amused at these little episodes. They seemed so typical of the fun-loving, high-spirited English schoolboy. That a girl with her schooldays scarcely behind her should incur such a rebuke for doing precisely what the schoolboy heroes of our youth were wont to do week after week seems strange criticism to me. Personally, if any author feels inclined to introduce even the slightest breath of MAGNET humour into his S.B.L. stories he is welcome to do so without the slightest criticism from me.

Tinker's reaction to the ice-cream was also questioned by our critic, who considered it unlikely that even a modern young man would feel the urge to make love with an ice-cream sliding down his back. But Tinker may have experienced an acute desire for warmth, and the pressure of the girl's body against his own would have solved that immediate problem in a pleasantly efficient way. I thought Tinker's behaviour, if not exemplary, a model of forbearance under the circumstances. A fellow with the lesser instincts of a gentleman would have yanked the ebullient Marion across his knees and brought down a heavy hand upon that portion of the anatomy across which the abbreviated skirt of the modern teenager stretches the more tightly.

Blake, Paula and even the reviewers were put under the microscope; but at this point discrepancies and contradictoriness set in. Firstly, our critic affects uncertainty as to what the reviewers mean by their reference to the 'old guard,' and then disproves his unawareness by including himself among them. Then, referring to the author's script, he says, "As verbs of speech 'to gloom' and 'to grit' did not feature in the grammar books of we boys of the Old Guard." He regards these expressions as being of a very modern kind, and under the circumstances would like to know why the reviewer - Ray Norton, in this instance - suggested that the story was of especial interest to the Old Guard. Well, as verbs of speech, 'to gloom' and 'to grit' may not have appeared in the grammar books of our critic, but they were certainly used in the scripts of two earlier Blake writers of the old order. Anthony Parsons was 'glooming' merrily just prior to and during the years of the second world war, whilst Ernest Treeton was 'gritting' effectively before the first one even started.

Paula Dane is not allowed to escape scot-free, and is admonished

for donning "surprisingly little clothing" before starting off in her car in pursuit of the snowman. But, according to my reading of the story, Paula was quite ninety per cent fully dressed. In fact, had she been wearing the diaphanous flimsies which would have comprised the remaining ten per cent of her attire instead of the substantial garments she did put on then the story would have had a different ending. For Paula would have frozen to death before she had completed half the journey, and Blake would have been looking for another secretary.

It is hard to say how Blake could have played other than a passive role during Tinker's and Marion's little byplay. Had the incident occurred in the more conventional atmosphere of Berkeley Square, he would undoubtedly have put his foot down hard on behaviour likely to impair the high reputation of the firm. In allowing Tinker to solve his own problem, Blake emerged without loss of prestige.

Our un-named columnist is also critical of the reviewer's contention that "The Snowman Cometh" would please the majority of old-timers and cannot see why it should be regarded as of especial appeal to them. Since I endorse Mr. Norton's opinion and would have said exactly the same thing, the answer is simple. If, as an old-timer himself, a reviewer finds the modern effort acceptable to his own palate, then, naturally, he assumes that it is going to please the majority of the clan as well. In fact, our critic justifies Mr. Norton's remarks in his own criticism by admitting that he enjoyed the story. Unless he assumed by that fact that nobody else would, his query is rather odd, to say the least. With the bit well between his teeth, he asks the reviewers if they regard members of the old guard as a set of "old fogies." I don't regard anyone as an old fogey simply because he holds a contrary opinion; but, following his remarks on the ice-cream incident, how he does tempt one to make an exception!

To those whose sense of humour is not what it used to be due to the passing of time, there is a tonic which never fails its purpose. Regular doses of rare 1930-35 VINTAGE HAMILTON PORT, specially fermented from the rich vineyards of HAMILTONIA, are guaranteed to restore the flame of youth to the hearts of the old in years and to banish all symptoms of Orwellian tendencies generally. Excellent testimonials and strongly recommended by one who has benefited materially from the treatment.

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HAMILTONIANA

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 110. THE FIRST REBEL SERIES

The great advantage of possessing a large collection of Magnets and Gems is that one is able to study certain periods closely. In the process, one can possibly arrive at conclusions with regard to some of the mysteries of the old papers, even though the accuracy of those conclusions must be accepted with reserve.

It may not be profitable to surmise, but it is, at least, extremely interesting to sift the evidence and weigh up the probabilities.

I have said before that I do not believe, in the earlier years of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, Charles Hamilton ever had the slightest objection to his characters being handled by substitute writers. So far as I can see, he had no reason to. In fact, he gained by the early activities of the substitute writers. If he wished to take a brief holiday from his typewriter, he could do so without the papers grinding to a halt or the continuity of the stories being interrupted. He could, if he felt so inclined, turn aside to other series, as he did in the case of Rookwood. If he was unable to meet the deadline for the Magnet and Gem there was always a story in hand by some other writer to fill the unfortunate gap.

And as nobody knew better than he did that the substitute stories were inferior to his own work, he had no cause for concern - and in my opinion, up till the Spring of 1917, he felt no concern. It was a cosy little arrangement which suited him admirably. His reputation was enhanced by the dreary aspect of the substitute stories compared with his own.

There had been many substitute tales down the years since 1908, but they had been single stories of little moment. Just occasionally there might be a story with a sequel, as happened with the Sylvia Carr - Dick Brooke duo in the Gem. But these were spaced a month apart, and, absurdly enough in this case, the two stories were published in the wrong order. Another instance was the Pentelow couplet "Victims and Victors" and "In Hot Water," the first story and its sequel being separated by a Hamilton tale.

There was never anything at all to indicate that anyone but Hamilton was the main writer. Maybe there was just a hint of a

threat early in 1917 when the two stories about Parker were published in consecutive issues in the Gem, to be followed a week or two later by another tale of the same character.

For the observant reader, there are indications that Charles Hamilton had been guilty of resting on his laurels, particularly in the Magnet, during the war years. To my mind, he seems to have taken his position for granted. There had been nothing particularly outstanding in the Magnet since early 1914, and even the Gem, though very much better, had tended to be in a groove.

Though I feel sure that until 1917 Charles Hamilton had viewed the substitute writers with tolerant amusement as a necessary and even desirable evil, there was one tendency on which he could have and should have stamped when it first occurred. This was the introduction into his schools, by substitute writers, of any newcomers on a permanent basis. But Clifton Dane, Phyllis Howell, and Delarey were introduced, the creations of stand-in writers, and occasionally Charles Hamilton certainly used all three, at any rate up till the Spring of 1917. In accepting and condoning anything of the sort, he was paving the way for the bumping off of Courtney a little later on.

In my view, the system of substitution was a cosy arrangement up till 1917, suiting everybody, not least the creator of the characters. Readers, evidently, were not considered.

But in the Spring of 1917, out of the blue, the crunch came. It was something unprecedented. It was, in fact, the publication in the Magnet of the very first series by a substitute writer, and a long series at that - no less than five consecutive stories.

Anything of the sort had never happened before. Even with the genuine tales, right from the beginning, a series as long as this had been rare.

The main theme of this first substitute series was Harry Wharton's leadership being challenged by the Remove in general and by Peter Todd and Bolsover in particular. There was a secondary plot, starring Delarey, in the series, and Delarey was nicknamed "The Rebel." Pentelow, of course, had created Delarey some time earlier, placing him in the same study as Lord Mauleverer. When Hamilton introduced Sir Jimmy Vivian, he placed Vivian also in the study of his relative, Lord Mauleverer, and as Delarey had been accepted as a fixture, Hamilton could hardly do anything but give Delarey a part to play in his series about Vivian. It may have been that Hamilton was making a rod for his own back, for in this new Rebel series, Pentelow brought Vivian and Delarey into close contact once more.

It is perhaps going too far to see in the theme of this series - Harry Wharton's leadership proving unsatisfactory to a large section of the Remove - anything analagous with the position at Fleetway House at that time, but it is certainly intriguing.

It surely must have seemed to Charles Hamilton that there was a definite threat in the publication of such a series. If he could be excluded from his own paper for five weeks running it might be well on the cards that he could be turned out for good. A convenient little agreement about substitute stories became a danger to his livelihood when the editor was himself a prolific writer.

It is, of course, impossible to say whether the editor had any thought of eventually making the Greyfriars stories his own prerogative, but it is interesting to note what he printed in his editor's chat when referring to "Head of the Poll," the final story of the series, due the following week:

"The yarn is packed with incident, and, as in recent stories, almost all the members of the Remove are brought upon the stage at one time or another in it. I do not believe many readers are tired of the Famous Five, but I can quite understand the wish to hear more of Rake, Squiff, Tom Brown, and others, which has been frequently expressed in letters of late."

Though few readers can have spotted it at the time, these words were a thinly-veiled criticism of the genuine writer. As most of us can see, fifty years later, Pentelow was depicting a failing as a virtue. Some months later he was to write a Greyfriars story in which the Famous Five did not feature at all. He had the courage of his own convictions. As one of our own readers commented recently in C.D., Pentelow's weakness was to cram too many characters into his stories.

At the period of which we are writing, Hamilton himself had the same weakness to a far less extent. Years later, he corrected that weakness, rooted out the dead wood, and, in the golden age of the Magnet, concentrated on his main characters.

There is not much doubt that in Spring 1917 the threat, made so obvious in this Rebel series, became evident to Charles Hamilton. There is evidence that it had marked effect upon him.

In the following months there was a vast upsurge in the quality of his writing. The era of the competent pot-boiler ended. Soon came a smash-hit series featuring the Bounder; then the fine "Judge Jeffries" series which eclipsed everything of its type previously written, and which, even today, stands out as a splendid series with

its plot and counterplot and its gems of characterisation; and then the superb stories about the arrival of Redwing and his impact on the Bounder.

Hamilton, after cruising along rather complacently for several years, suddenly became a great force. He mustered all his gifts of writing, and the cream of those gifts was diverted from the Gem into the Magnet, where the threat had seemed so great. And, maybe to add another string to his bow, he was soon to start the immensely successful Cedar Creek series - possibly with the satisfactory feeling that he could write of his own imaginary schooldays without outside interference.

If my interpretation of this, the very first substitute series, and its effects, is correct, then we owe a good deal to the First Rebel Series. But what was the immediate effect upon the readers of the period? After all, when one is a boy, five weeks is a long time - almost a whole half-term. It must have seemed to many that the man whose work they had loved and grown to know so well was gone for good.

And what of the Rebel, Delarey. There is not much doubt that Pentelow was fond of Delarey and believed that he had sired a winner. But Delarey was merely a flash in Pentelow's pan. The basic idea was sound enough, and if he had been one of the Hamilton boys he would almost certainly have been destined for stardom. With skilful writing, he would have been a great hit, but Hamilton never introduced him again, and the Delarey creator was not able to build the type of character who lasts for ever. I cannot recall whether Pentelow himself ever brought Delarey to the fore again, but, in any case, "the Rebel" was doomed to an earlier extinction than he possibly deserved.

* * * * *

THE FAG MASTERS

By Laurie Sutton

In the March "Chat" the editor wonders when Mr. Twigg first appeared at Greyfriars in the Magnet.

The answer is that he appeared quite early, but as master of the Third Form. The first record I have is in Magnet 201, but he may have appeared earlier, as I still have some earlier Magnets to read and extract details from. Mr. Twigg featured later in Magnets 222, 223, 265, 269, 345, 381, all as master of the Third, but in 318 he was the Second Form master.

Charles Hamilton was evidently completely careless in dealing

with what he regarded as minor characters in those days, and clearly he never kept any tabulated reference file. The Second Form never had a settled master in the first ten years of the Magnet, at least. The "Editor's Chat" mentions Mr. Pyle in Magnet 178. In 144 it was Mr. Kelly, and in 183 we had Mr. Toodle. Mr. Flynn appeared in 294 and 300, but in 345 it was Mr. Blane, who had the spelling changed to Blaine in 381 and 387. In 391 we learned that Mr. Blaine had gone off to the war.

At the moment I can't say when Mr. Twigg took over the Second Form permanently, but he was still taking the Third in the Loder Captaincy series of 1925.

The question we now need to ask is when Mr. Wiggins made his first entry as master of the Third. We know that Mr. Wiggins had the distinction of featuring as the title subject of Magnet 1276, "Who Walloped Wiggins?" in the year 1932. I can't really recall him being mentioned before then, but I haven't checked on this.

Regarding the little changes that were made down the years I hope to be able to give some surprising examples later this year when I have finished reading all the 1683 Magnets published.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Am I merely dreaming when I seem to recall that there was a time when two Twiggs, brothers, took the second and third forms respectively?)

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CARDEW THE CAD

As Danny reminded us last month, it is exactly fifty years since Cardew was introduced into the St. Jim's stories in the Gem.

Recently the famous comedian, Cardew Robinson, finished a pantomime season at the Sheffield Lyceum Theatre. The Morning Telegraph, circulating in Sheffield, stated that Mr. Robinson had once been a hero in a boys' comic. No doubt the newspaper was referring to the paper Radio Fun, but our Sheffield reader, Mr. George Sellars, probably under a misapprehension, wrote to the paper to point out that Tom Merry, not Cardew, was the hero, and to stress that the Gem was not a "comic."

In "The Cardew Robinson Column" of the Morning Telegraph, Mr. Robinson, in mid-February, ended with the following:

"Finally, a word to correspondent George Sellars. Everything

he says about Ralph Rectiness (sic) Cardew of St. Jom's (sic) is correct. Cardew of St. Fanny's, originally created as a take-off of the cads of schoolboy fiction, for radio, eventually became a cartoon character in his own right in a comic paper "Radio Fun," and was indeed the hero. Fatty Gilbert was the villain. This also applied when St. Fanny's was put into the film Fun at St. Fanny's. Incidentally, in this film, Gilbert was played by Gerald Champion who was TV's Bunter of Greyfriars. I played, not surprisingly, Cardew Robinson."

Plenty of C.D. readers will remember the clever and very funny sketches in which Mr. Robinson appeared as "Cardew the Cad" in the music halls of some twenty years and more ago. Mr. Robinson's "cad" became deservedly popular and famous, and there is no doubt that Charles Hamilton heard of it. It seems possible that Mr. Hamilton did not realise that the stage comedian was making good-natured fun of Cardew, for the author took the term 'Cardew the Cad' into his post-war St. Jim's stories. This was a mistake on his part, and, in fact, he never handled Ralph Reckness Cardew well again. The Cardew of the post-war stories was a mere shadow of the Cardew of the twenties.

I always had the impression that Mr. Robinson took the name Cardew from the St. Jim's stories, and that it was not actually one of his baptismal names.

W A N T E D : Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: GEMS: Some issues between 801 and 832, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998.

POPULARS: 452, 455, 466, 472.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

W A N T E D : GEMS: Nos. 1297, 1293, 1286, 1283, 1277, 1198, 1150, 1074, 1072, 1116, 1114, 1035, 1034, 1020, 1019, 1006, 1000 and many before this last number. Your price paid or I have many early Magnet and Gem duplicates for exchange only.

Write: LOFTS, 56, SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LISSON ST., LONDON, N. W. 1.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

(CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD)

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S....

By Jim Cook

There is a part of St. Frank's that is highly secret. Only a select few know exactly where it is for no matter how often you ask about this place the juniors just shake their heads in bewilderment. It isn't that anybody wants to know but I asked just out of curiosity as I would for the booking office at a railway station when travelling.

You see, I wanted to find the editorial office of the St. Frank's Magazine and write a few words about the mag. But nobody would tell me! Not even Nipper, who I expected was the editor-in-chief. But eventually Nipper did invite me to see the magazine in production and he led me to the upper floors in the Ancient House and into one of the box rooms. Here was a miniature newspaper editor's sanctum as depicted by a comic cartoonist; papers of all descriptions covered the long table and some half-dozen waste-paper baskets were full to the brim with discarded copy. But the scene was quite peaceful and I could see Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey deeply absorbed in paper work and Cecil DeValerie busy with a blue pencil.

An old fashioned typewriter was being hammered by Vivian Travers who was busily engaged deciphering one of Handforth's Trackett Grim detective stories. Judging from Handy's awful writing I wondered whether Travers would be able to solve the case exactly as Handforth had inspired Trackett Grim to do it for I looked at a rejected sheet Travers had thrown down and I could see that the client in the story had beaten Grim to it.

Nipper showed me copy that was passed for press and I glanced at a few articles from Timothy Tucker, Bob Christine, Buster Boots, and Fullwood. There were also items and snippets about things in general, a get-rich-quick method expounded by Solomon Levi; how to get fat by Fatty Little; beauty hints by "A Moor View" girl; a guide to happiness by Josh Cuttle and an interesting thesis on crime detection by Nelson Lee.

But I loved those little pieces which I expect Nipper used to fill in odd corners and ends of columns. Here I will search my memory and reproduce those I saw:-

"Don't throw away that food - I will collect all left-overs free.
Apply Study L West House, Fatty Little."

"Boxing lessons: Learn to use your fists. I teach free. E.O.H.
Study D."

"Chinese foods and how to prepare them. Apply Yung Ching, Study R.
West House."

"How to win at cards, horse racing and Roulette by Bernard Forrest."
Since this was signed by Tommy Watson I expect Forrest's "advice"
was superfluous!

"Let me be your tailor. I will show you how to look your best.
Apply Study C."

"Let me be your tailor. It won't take me long. Apply Duke of
Somerton Study G."

"How to eavesdrop in five easy lessons. Terms 2/- a lesson. Contact
Teddy Long."

"Forty winks and how to obtain them. Please bring pillow to Archie
Glenthorne."

I suspect most of these "advertisements" were by "another hand." It's remarkable the number of juniors who wanted their contributions included in the St. Frank's magazine. Nipper tells me he receives copy from almost the entire Lower School not to mention efforts from the domestic staff and budding authors in the senior school. In sorting the wheat from the chaff one has to be jolly careful for you can't please everybody and some of the stuff just isn't suitable. In fact, the law of libel prevents many articles and ideas being published in the mag, and Nipper has a full time job making sure nothing is printed that will imply or infer, threaten or defame a person's character or his office of profit. I was highly amused at Nipper's reply to my question on how some of the copy was passed by him for publication; his answer was "Fair Comment," a good old standby of newspapermen etc.

Claude Gore-Pearce did sue Nipper for damages though and a mock trial was held in the lecture room. Nipper as editor and publisher was sued by Gore-Pearce for libel. An article by Walter Church "imputing Gore-Pearce as a liar and a rogue" in the St. Frank's magazine was deemed by Gore-Pearce's counsel - Enoch Snipe - as actionable for damages. Biggleswade of the sixth acted as judge. It happened one rainy afternoon and Nipper explained how the "trial" finished up by Biggleswade remarking that Church's article was one of Justification - a plea that the words complained of were substantially true. Once the words were shown to be defamatory, it was for the

person who used them to prove their truth - not for the party injured to prove them false.

Since there are records to prove Claude's shady past Biggleswade awarded him a farthing damages.

It will be a long time before Gore-Pearce brings an action for libel again. The law may be an ass but ever since Henry II began to develop the English Legal System in the 12th Century I can't see Gore-Pearce upsetting it today.

* * * * *

"PLEASE LET US BE FAIR"

By C. H. Churchill

In the March C.D. Gerry Allison very rightly gave a word of praise to Jim Cook for the numerous articles he has contributed to the Nelson Lee column. I would like to say that I heartily concur in this and look forward to more from his pen in the future as I always read his articles with the greatest interest.

However, I think one must be fair to the other contributors to the Lee column, so I hardly think it right to say that Jim Cook has to maintain the column almost single handed. It is right to say that he was the only one to have articles in the last two C.Ds. but this does not happen very often.

I have looked through the last twenty four numbers of the C.D. and there were forty-three different articles in the Lee column by thirteen different writers. Of these, Jim Cook and Reuben Godsave wrote seven each. Bill Lister came second with six. Three other people wrote four each and the remaining eleven items were shared by seven writers. In addition to all this, nineteen different people wrote "appreciations" of E.S.B. after the sad announcement of his death.

One can see, therefore, that the most prolific contributors to the Lee column are Messrs. Cook, Godsave and Lister, and I, personally, look forward to further efforts from all three in the near future.

Gerry Allison questions Jim Cook's remark that the St. Frank's boys never again visited such a glorious spot as Lagoon Island in their later adventures. He cites a serial in the Gem in 1934 and I can add - What about the South Seas series in The Nelson Lee in the summer of 1925 which more or less starred Clive Russell?

I think, however, that the important words in the remark were "such a glorious spot." Jim Cook would know about the later series

if not about the one in the Gem. In the Lagoon Island series in 1922 the beauty of the island was heavily stressed, more so than in the 1925 stories. I think, therefore, that this is the explanation and is one with which I heartily agree.

* * * * *

Replies to questions in the March Collectors' Digest
re The Nelson Lee Library

From Jim Cook

To Gerry Allison:

Thank you, Gerry, for that word of praise. It seems such a great pity that you have never been able to read the "Nelson Lee" for you have missed some of the finest stories ever written. It is, as you remark, like your cheek to question my statement about my description of the "South Sea" series (1922) since you have never been able to read a Nelson Lee story, but comparisons are odious and one man's meat may well be another man's poison.

To Len Wormull:

When Edwy Searles Brooks launched his St. Frank's College through the Nelson Lee Library it was on the understanding that the detective element was maintained throughout and this order from the A.P. prevented a preponderance of school life from the form room being given.

There were occasions when the stories centred round the curriculum and the form room scene was high-lighted. But even then Brooks did not dig too deep into lessons except where it was necessary.

One must not confuse the Hamilton schools with that of St. Frank's when making comparisons. Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood were used purely for school stories but St. Frank's was an incidental seat of learning for a background to the detective story. After all, the paper was called The Nelson Lee Library.

W A N T E D : Holiday Annual 1930. MAGNETS: 1161, 1163, 1164,
1165, 1453, 1454, 1455, 1458, 1459, 1460, 1523, 1524, 1525, 1541,
1543. FOR EXCHANGE: S.O.Ls. 361, 364, 383.

J. CONROY,

256, TOWNSEND AVE., LIVERPOOL, 11.

THE POSTMAN CALLED

(Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

BILL LOFTS (London): In answer to W. Lister's article gathering up the threads, most certainly many of the things he mentions have been answered, and fully discussed though not all in the pages of the C.D. I can remember clearly writing in the C.D. that Charles Hamilton created at least 90 schools, and probably over 100 when all research has been completed. Regarding a necktie for O.B.B. enthusiasts this has been discussed many times at London book Club meetings. Indeed many years ago, but it was rejected simply because of lack of support by the majority of members. Ally Sloper was a comic character as famous as Weary Willie and Tired Tim, and The Bruin Boys at the turn of the century. No mystery about him. Lastly, also being an 'L' initial and getting no C.D. for MARCH 1966 but an empty envelope, I have to thank once again our hard working editor for sending me another free of charge. I conclude that he had to bear the cost of the missing ones - as the Post Office most certainly would not reimburse him for things sent by second class mail.

BERT HAMBLETT (Liverpool): In 1949 I used to buy "The Speedway Gazette" which contained school stories, the pupils at the school consisting of speedway riders. After a few weeks I began to notice that the stories were rather like Charles Hamilton's work. I wrote to the editor, a Mr. Basil Storey, pointing this out to him. He replied that he was a great admirer of Charles Hamilton and he was only doing the stories in the magazine as a bit of a tribute to him. The Speedway Gazette stopped the school stories shortly after.

(Some years ago, a periodical named School Cap also featured school stories which seemed to owe a very great deal to Charles Hamilton - ED.)

JOE CONROY (Liverpool): I would like to express my appreciation of the lay-out and presentation of the 1966 Annual. I enjoyed the article "A Study in Acid" by Mr. Rowley. Mr. Hacker is certainly an interesting character. Mention was made of the final story "The Shadow of the Sack," and its unpublished sequel "The Battle of the Beaks." I wonder what happened to the manuscript of this sequel. I suppose that Frank Richards, when he wrote a series, would have the complete story ready for publication when required, and therefore

this last series about Mr. Hacker would be ready for the press, only to be killed by the paper shortage. It would be great if any of these unpublished manuscripts still existed and could be issued. Comparable with Mr. Hacker, I think, is the study of Mr. Ratcliff in the hard-cover book "Tom Merry & Co of St. Jim's." Really enjoyable.

(Charles Hamilton would not, of necessity, finish a long series before publication started of the opening stories. There is clearly something of a mystery about the stories which followed "Shadow of the Sack." It is claimed that several stories were written, and the titles have been given. Nobody, so far as I know, ever learned the themes of these stories, and nobody seems to know what happened to the manuscripts. If they were written, they were presumably paid for, and it is odd that, if they existed, they have never been published in the 27 years which have passed since 1940. The extremely sudden end of the Magnet, unprecedented in the A.P. annals, is something of a mystery in itself. -ED.)

FRANK SHAW (Liverpool): I'd like to refer to the continued excellence of Danny. I well recall going to see "Seven Days Leave," my first play though by no means my first visit to the theatre. I was eight, and my brother home on leave from the trenches. My dad took him and me and my sister to see this play which then thrilled and now gives me a quiet grin. Did the heroine swim out to sink a submarine (very much off-stage) in the last act, while the spectators through the inevitable French window gave a round-by-round commentary? I clearly recall "The Rookwood Paper-Chase" and wanted my pals to organise one through the Liverpool streets.

W A N T E D : MAGNETS 1277, 1283, 1466, 1643-50 etc.
POPULARS (1922); C.D. ANNUAL 1948; S.O.L. 184, 188, 222; UNION
JACKS.

38, ST. THOMAS RD., PRESTON.

SALE: Books by Berkeley Gray, Victor Gunn 1/- & 2/- each. 19 C.Ds.
8/- lot.

65, BENTHAM ST., BELFAST

WHERE ARE THESE ELUSIVE PAPERS ?By W. O. G. Lofts

My recent advertising for GEMS brought me no less than 12 different offers of No. 1511, - a copy which I already have. No. 1512 which I still require (at least at the time of writing this article) seems as elusive to get hold of as Billy Bunter's postal order!

Many readers, when seeking wanted items, must have had the same frustrating experience. Many feasible explanations have been brought forward for this; but all of them, when subject to close investigation, give no weight to the theories in question at all.

Easily the most popular is that more copies were printed of a certain issue, and that by the law of averages more issues were handed down to posterity. For the record there were printed originally 60,000 copies of the GEM each week from roughly 1935 until the end, which includes of course numbers 1511 and 1512.

I can also dispute the theory that only GEMS written by the genuine MARTIN CLIFFORD (Charles Hamilton) are scarce. Personally, I never doubt the superior type of work by the master, but it is a curious fact that GEM 1512 was a substitute story written by E. S. Brooks. It is also amusing to note that it took me over 10 years of extensive advertising before I could get hold of MAGNET 648, also a substitute G. R. Samways story, to complete the set of MAGNETS for Dan O'Herlihy - offering £3 as well! On the other hand, it could be fairly argued, that more genuine CHARLES HAMILTON stories are available to collectors. The simple reason is that they were treasured more greatly and saved for future collectors of St. Jim's and Greyfriars material.

Another popular theory, that MAGNETS and GEMS, which had cut-out coupons are scarcer than others I also dispute. It certainly is reasonable to assume that mutilated copies are not as likely to be saved as whole ones. Yet, I have through the years, been offered hundreds of different types of papers - all with the cut-out coupons missing - but it did not interfere with the main story.

A dozen collectors have been over 20 years trying to get a few elusive numbers to complete their sets. It is a fallacy to assume that the original No. 1. MAGNET is the rarest item. There are at least 20 copies known to exist today - probably half of them minus covers.

If certain MAGNETS are scarce they cannot surely equal the astonishing fact of some of the comics. What collector has ever seen a copy of BO-PEEP - the A.P. comic which ran for 235 issues (1929-34). Hardly any I guess. Jim Swan, that jovial collector at Paddington, told me once that if anything would bring him joy it was to see a copy of BO-PEEP again.

Certainly, the only copy I have ever seen (apart from FLEETWAY and BRITISH MUSEUM files) is half of one - in the collection of Basil Reynolds comic artist - and nephew of the great Warwick Reynolds.

Derek Adley of South Harrow bought as a boy the little known MAGIC COMIC, published by D. C. Thompson, which ran from 1939-41 having a run of 80 issues. Yet, again, what collector has a copy in his collection? I had the facsimile of one only, which our editor excellently reproduced in the 1963 C.D. Annual, with my comic statistics. It seems real 'Magic' would be required to bring one to light today.

Bill Hall in Australia has for more years than I can remember been advertising for copies of YOUNG FOLKS TALES. Those that contain the stories of Betty and Mabel. As far as I know, the only few copies he has been able to obtain, are a few, purely through the generosity of other collectors, who have let their treasured items go. Likewise, early copies of TALES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE our editor has not seen since he was a child, and would like to get hold of again.

It could be argued that papers for the very juvenile were not saved by children, and were easily destroyed. Yet one can get an endless supply of RAINBOWS, TIGER TIMS, CHUCKLES, PLAYBOX, and other fairy story papers. One only has to see the advertisements offering them for sale.

Our editor in his columns has often mentioned the acute shortage of girls papers, and where did they all go to? GIRLS READER, which later went to Magnet size seems almost non-existent.

What happened to the copies of CHEERIO, which appeared in the 1919/20 period? That popular and hardworking librarian of the Northern Club, Gerry Allison, has been after them for years as well as our editor. I did let Gerry have my No. 1 issue a few years ago but only then because I do not class it strictly as a boys' paper.

Those collecting giants of the past Barry Ono, John Medcraft, W. Lawson, etc., used to claim that they had all the ALDINE publications. Yet they and other ALDINE collectors even today don't seem to have heard of the ALDINE DEADWOOD DICK LIBRARY. What happened to all the copies? True that the BRITISH MUSEUM has only one issue,

which I have seen with its excellent cover drawn by Robert Prowse, but it may have possibly run longer.

According to the editor of THE CHAMPION, its sales and circulation in the first five years was greater than any other A.P. paper, yet try and get hold of copies today in this period. Likewise one can quote another well known collectors' quest for ROCKET of the same vintage.

It used to be a great joke amongst my collector friends, of the time S.B.Ls. No. 744 (2nd series) IN THE NIGHT WATCH by E. S. Brooks and No. 153 (1st series) THE SECRET OF THE GLACIER by Andrew Murray were offered to me. It seemed that every Sexton Blake collector already had these issues in duplicate. Yet S.B.L. No. 742 (2nd series) THE HOUSE OF DARKNESS, the only John Hunter story I have not read, still eludes me after 14 years in the hobby.

In the space of this article I have only mentioned a few of these elusive papers - one could, like the brook, go on for ever; though it should be emphasised that very few collectors collect what I call obscure papers anyway. The 1939-45 second world war saw hundreds of thousands of periodicals go to salvage (including Charles Hamilton's own collection of MAGNETS and GEMS) which in all probability would now be available to collectors. One cannot ever be sure if certain copies of boys' papers don't exist - without a search of every home and, excuse the pun, 'lofts' up in the attic.

NEWS FROM THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held February 28th, 1967

Another excellent meeting with the final attendance of 11 members assembled at The Birmingham Theatre Centre. Our chairman was late coming as his wife was in hospital, but managed to put in an appearance before we broke up. There were a number of other apologies.

Interesting letters had been received from postal members during the month. John Mann, Stan Knight and John Bond had all written besides Ian Bennett, our new member who had written to Tom Porter. These letters were passed round and provided a lively discussion on the points that were raised.

Tom Porter's Collectors' Items were this month, "Union Jack" No.

1116 dated 28th February, 1925, entitled "Absolute Authority, a Sexton Blake Story" and No. 1 of the Modern Boy. This last item delighted Ian Bennett, our new member, whose special interest in in "The Modern Boy." Tom rings the changes very well on these items drawing on his vast collection of books to cater if possible for all tastes in the Old Boys' Book world.

Our young member Ian Parish and Ivan Webster were scheduled to take charge of the evening's programme, but Ivan's wife being in hospital upset this arrangement. Ian however carried on with Tom Porter in the chair. He gave us a quiz that was taken orally, questions being passed round to each member in turn. The ladies were to the fore, Win Brown was the winner and Win Partridge also getting points. Ian's quiz was very interestedly compiled.

Then we had a game of "Greyfriars Bingo." This original game was the idea of Tom Porter. Instead of numbers being drawn from the bag the names of characters in the Magnets stories are drawn out. The cards are given out with some of these names on them and are covered up in the same way as ordinary Bingo.

The raffle was drawn and Ian Bennett was the winner receiving a Gem as a prize.

The final item was a reading by Ian Parish from Magnet No. 1646 - "Greyfriars to the Rescue" published on 2nd September, 1939, the day after Hitler's troops had invaded Poland, but the tranquil holiday atmosphere of "The Water Lily Series" was far removed from the clash and alarums of war. Ian said it was a favourite passage which he read and he had always delighted in the humour of it - Billy Bunter getting rid of the Famous Five only to find the lid of locker in "The Water Lily" containing a prime cake screwed down. Bunter did not get the cake after all.

The date of the next meeting should be 28th March (Easter Tuesday) but a number of members have asked to have it brought forward to 21st March. This, however, can only be done with the permission of the Estates Office from whom we hire the room.

At the time of writing no word has been received from the Estates Officer, but members will be informed in good time as to whether a change of date has been possible.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

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NORTHERN

Meeting held 11th March, 1967, Saturday

After the mild spell, March had retreated into winter, and fifteen members came through strong cold winds to the meeting. After Library business, Geoffrey Wilde in the chair, greeted all present this cold night, though noting the absence of one or two regulars, including the Treasurer-Librarian, Gerry Allison and his wife, Myra, both of whom were on the sick list unfortunately.

The minutes were read, and the financial statement also (the latter having been kindly brought by Breeze Bentley from Gerry along with sundry books and records). Jack Wood had an amusing report of a practice contraption to improve a cricketer's bowling, which smacked strongly of an invention by Bernard Glyn in the "Gem" of years ago.

Several members had seen the delightful "Blandings Castle" series now being televised. General discussion then being concluded, the Chairman announced our speaker of the evening, Breeze Bentley, and we were quickly transported into the world of Greyfriars as Breeze started to relate the saga of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

He started with Smithy's first arrival as a new boy, and we saw him weaving his way uncertainly across the Quad - "under the influence!" Dressed to kill, diamond tiepin and rings flashing, he soon earned the nickname "The Bounder" which he was to carry as long as the Magnet lasted.

These early stories, not so familiar to some of us, showed Vernon-Smith completely arrogant and headstrong, contemptuous of authority (secure in the fact that his father had a hold over the Head,) and determined to go his own way. Much more vindictive and crafty than the Smithy of later days. His ruthless plan to have the Famous Four and Mark Linley expelled, leading up to the famous "Bob Cherry's Barring Out" was unfolded for us.

Then Breeze came to the event which was to have such influence on Vernon-Smith - the coming of Tom Redwing. The talk was interspersed with readings, and we were vastly entertained with Smithy leading his father into the idea of endowing a Scholarship so that Tom (too proud to accept charity) could win his way into Greyfriars. And with the establishing of the Study No. 4 friendship the character of Vernon-Smith settled in the pattern we knew to the end.

Breeze concluded with recalling Vernon-Smith's relationship with Harry Wharton, half friend, half foe, which sparked off some of the

finest stories in the Magnet, especially when Harry Wharton, the bit between his teeth, could surpass even the Bounder in reckless daring. A hearty round of applause followed this long and engrossing talk.

After refreshments, Breeze gave us a Quiz of 34 Hamilton questions - the winner was Jack Wood with 29 correct, followed by Elsie Taylor 28, and Ron Hodgson 27. A close finish!

This brought the programme to an end, and members had to leave on their various journeys, after a very interesting evening.

Next meeting Saturday, the 8th April, 1967 - the A.G.M.

M. L. ALLISON

Hon. Sec.

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MERSEYSIDE

Meeting Sunday, 12th March.

The meeting began at 7 p.m. (members please note this new time of commencement) and only one of our regular members was absent. The programme proved so full that one item had to be postponed until the next meeting. Bert Hamblett's talk on the inimitable Will Hay brought back nostalgic memories of his great films, especially of Narkover, and of his wonderful association with Graham Moffatt and Moore Marriott. Sheer tragedy that this brilliant man should die so prematurely, and surely it is high time we saw some of his best films on television, instead of some of the bilge we have to suffer now.

Collecting and discussing the old books is, and always will be, our first love. But there are other collections as well, and one such is the treasured collection of 78 r.p.m. records of the great old artistes of yesteryear. This hobby is much greater than one might suppose, and Frank Unwin was able to disclose that a certain collector in Averley possesses 11,500 vintage records, including many priceless originals, and 1500 of Bing Crosby alone. This led to a fascinating discussion on some of the old genuine artistes and recordings. Not, of course, as fascinating as Hamilton and Brooks, but extremely interesting, nevertheless.

Frank presented a quiz comprising 20 photographs of ancient buildings and landmarks on Merseyside, which members had to identify. Such things as the Robin Hood on Archery Stone, the Boulden (Ice-Age) Stone and Wendy's House in Sefton Park. Alas, out of a maximum mark of 100, the winner obtained a modest 20, which seems to prove

something, fellow-Merseysiders. Bill Windsor won, Pat Laffey was beaten by the odd mark, and Jim Walsh was third.

Please note that the next meeting will be on the first Sunday in April, the 2nd, at 7 p.m.

JOHNNY TODD

LONDON

"Home this Afternoon" signified the well attended meeting at the Cricklewood home of Bill and Marjorie Norris, the latter playing over the now famous recording made about the hobby and the club. Also played over by Marjorie were the two interviews with Harold Lloyd and Donald Crisp. These three recordings were amongst the highlights of a very happy meeting. Prior to the entertainment side, we had been given two excellent reports from our second to none, Charles Hamilton and Nelson Lee libraries, from their respective librarians, Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe. Incidentally the former section of the library now has all the genuine Owen Conquest "Schoolboys' Own Libraries" bar one.

Millicent Lyle gave an excellent reading, in my hurry home, I lost the original notes, so must give details in the newsletter.

Len Packman conducted a very good quiz and it was Bill Hubbard who won the first place.

Immediately afterwards Bill gave another of his talks, subject "Tarzan," and the Edgar Rice Burroughs substitute writers. Up to Bill's usual good standard and along with Millicent's heretofore mentioned reading, a welcome change.

Good library business was done and the feed that Bill and Marjorie put on was simply scrumptious.

Maurice King phoned the meeting from his Langley, Bucks home and hopes to be able to attend the St. Frank's meeting at 40, Ellesmere Road, Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10. on Sunday, April 16th. The host is Bob Blythe and the new phone number is 01-452-8591. Kindly inform if attending.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

REMEMBER - THIS IS COLLECTOR'S
DIGEST 21st BIRTHDAY YEAR.

BILL LOFTS IN SAINT MAGAZINE

Bill Lofts, our own tireless contributor, has a long article on "Witches" in the April issue of the Saint Magazine (3/6). Most of us have a warm spot in our hearts for those old crones who enlivened the fairy stories which we read when we were very young and fairly innocent.

Mr. Lofts' article, however, does not deal with the wicked witches of fiction, though, it would seem, in passing, that there might be scope in such an undertaking, dealing with the old girl who lived in the forest in a gingerbread house or the ancient hag who met a soldier and commissioned him to get a tinder box.

Mr. Lofts' article deals with unfortunate women, long ago, who were assumed by the surrounding populace to possess unearthly powers. He also touches on the males of the species, known not as wizards, as in the old fairy tales, but as warlocks.

I must confess that the article is too sombre to be my cup of tea, but there is no doubt that plenty of readers will find it fascinating reading. It is extremely well written, and the research work involved must have been very great.

One of the most interesting sections of the article recounts the history of "Old Mother Shipton," and her predictions are given in full. As a child I was intrigued by those predictions, often quoted with awe by adults at that time, but I do not recall ever before reading them in full.

The article is enhanced by a clever and amusing drawing by Basil Reynolds, the gifted nephew of Warwick Reynolds.

The magazine also contains a 30-year old story of the Saint, by Leslie Charteris, and this will delight all Saint fans. There are a number of short stories, ideal for the train or coach journey or for reading in bed during that fifteen minutes before you put out the light. It might be advisable to sit down in daylight to Mr. Lofts' article on witches, otherwise you may dream of black cats and broom sticks.

The article is welcome as showing Mr. Lofts in yet another mood.

WANTED URGENTLY MAGNET Nos. 1645, 1647, 1648, 1649, 1650, 1656, 1657, 1658, 1609, 1610, 1611, 1556, 1557, 1558, 1559, Harry Wharton both Rebel Series High Oaks Series SOLs. 334, 340, 203, 369, 393, 342.
Your price paid.

FRANKLIN, 83, UFFINGTON AVENUE, HARTSHOLME ESTATE, LINCOLN.

CHIPS 1½^{D.}

THE CHAMPION COMIC



THE ONLY PEBBLE ON THE BEACH.

WHEN BIG ONES BOOMED

By O. W. Wadham

Recently a reader requested an article on the new comic, The Big One. He declares the cover character, "Smiler," once adorned the old Knockout under the name of "Mike."

Not having seen The Big One I cannot comment on it, but it seems as if that little word "Big" is back in the boys' comic world once again. Sixty years ago it was attracting attention, too.

In 1902 The Big Budget was really a remarkable effort. It is doubtful if any other penny paper provided so much reading, and so

many valuable cash prizes.

C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. were the publishers of The Big Budget, and a new name in the comic world, if not in the newspaper field, is given in the further information that the paper is "copyright in the U.S.A. by William Randolph Hearst."

Hearst was always an enemy of England, and it is rather strange to find he was connected with a typical English comic weekly.

The Big Budget had 16 pages. Front page character was Bouncing Billy, a bloke with a flair for fearsome inventions after the style of Scientific Silas in Comic Life of later years.

The writers and artists of The Big Budget did not hide their names from the world. The front page proclaimed that Arthur Brooke was Editor, and that Yorick was Art Editor. Henry Farmer, Garass Yorke, Herbert Maxwell, Sydney Drew, Raymond Lee and Henry T. Johnson provided the fiction, and T. W. Holmes and "Val" most of the illustrations to the stories.

Biggest of several cash prizes was an offer of £5 a week for life (surely as good as £20 of today's money) and even Colonial readers were catered for in a special competition that offered sixty prizes to a total value of £100.

A further 1,000 prizes were offered in a simple animal jig-saw

picture puzzle. They ranged from £2. 17. 0. gramophones to cameras, watches and literally hundreds of other articles.

There was one comic strip in The Big Budget that is still going strong in various newspapers today: "The Katzen-jammer Kids." The drawing in the copy of The Big Budget I have is signed, but the signature is not readable. It seems hardly likely that the same artist is drawing "The Katzenjammer Kids of today, however. The paper was twelve years old in 1902, and the "Kids" had been a popular feature for some time.

Big Budget was a black and white effort. The Big One is colourful in the modern manner, but it can never offer so much in comparison as that really "big one" of sixty years ago.

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(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Prizes of the £5 a week for life" class were no rarity in periodicals of fifty years and more ago. Were prizes of this nature ever really paid, or was there a catch in it somewhere? Presumably, to assure anything of the sort, the firm offering the prize would need to take out an annuity of some sort with an insurance company on behalf of the prizewinner. I cannot recall any direct evidence that such prizes were ever awarded, but if they were it is curious that some enterprising writer has not winkled out the fact to make the basis for a novel article. The biographer of the late Horatio Bottomley suggested that there was jiggery-pokery over the payments of prizes in the very early competitions.)

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