

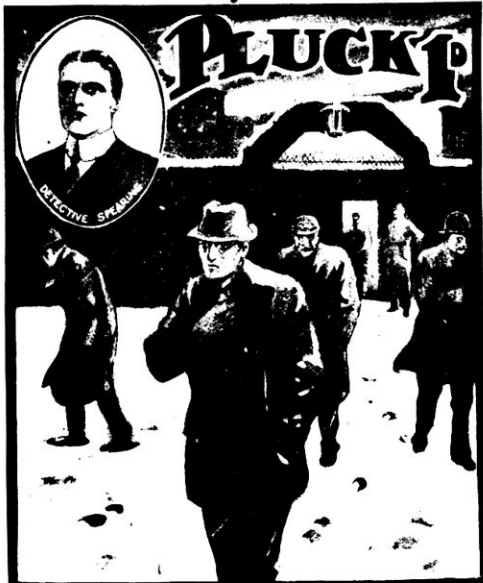
STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

British Stories by British Authors!

Vol.
25

No.
289

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"ON TICKET-OF-LEAVE"

A STIRRING COMPLETE "DETECTIVE SPEARING" NOVEL

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 25

No. 289

JANUARY 1971

Price 2s. 6d.

**A WORD FROM THE
SKIPPER****THE ROAD TO RUIN**

Less than a decade has passed since Charles Hamilton was writing his school stories in which morals were of high standard, discipline was strict, and a boy would be expelled for visiting a pub or bend over if he cheeked a master or was caught smoking. Probably at least half of the Hamilton plots were based on discipline, its cause and effect. It is hard to see what Hamilton would use as a basis for his plots, were he still writing school stories in 1971.

It might be an exaggeration to say that discipline has broken down in all too many of our schools today. It has simply been swept away as a matter of policy. As one who regards discipline of mind and body as an essential part of education, I consider this deplorable,

especially as the major part of the demand for rates sent to me by the local council consists of the giant cost of education. Like so many of the ills under which we groan in this day and age, it has happened, not in spite of the powers-that-be, but because of them.

No doubt school stories of a sort could still be written today, but it is a question whether they could possibly find favour in the eyes of Hamilton's or Brooks's old boys. For some schools today seem to be the home of everything except learning.

SPEND A PENNY AND SAVE A SOVEREIGN

Did you ever have a Blakey in your boot or shoe? Recently, I was browsing over an Edwardian issue of the Boys' Realm. The Hamilton Edwards papers carried a fair number of advertisements, and among them I came on one for Blakey's. Blakey's sold a card of iron tips - one penny a card of a dozen tips - which were knocked into the soles and heels of footwear to make them last longer. The word Blakey touched a distant chord in my memory. The firm used, as an advertising line, the sentence: "Spend a penny and save a sovereign." I never wore Blakeys, but I can well remember my mother threatening me that I would have to if I continued to be so heavy on my shoes.

THE EDITOR

100's Film Funs 1929-40 and Kinema Comics 1929-32, all mint. Exchange for in very good condition Magnets 522, 525, 530, 532, 533, 536, 761, 763, 817, 848, 862, 876, 1117, 1125, 1126, 1169-1174, 1191-1194, also wanted Magnets 557 and 730. Gems 461, 564, 600, 704, 720, 721, 722, 816, 822, 824, 825-27, 829, 839, 844, 845, 847, 920, 923, 924, 935, 936, 952, 953, 970, 973, 974, 1006, 1007, 1016, 1018, 1019, 1020, 1034, 1035.

S. SMYTH, No. 1 BRANDON STREET, CLOVELLY, N.S.W. 2031, AUSTRALIA.

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SALE: Several Collections recently purchased. Union Jacks, 1,000 no's; S.B. Libs., many Plucks, Marvels, Fun & Fiction, Modern Boys, Penny Pictorial, D. Weeklies, 20 original books by W. Le Queux with wrappers - offers; B. Bill Libs., Nelson Lees 200 no's, Magnets 200 no's, Gems 100 no's, Meccano Mags. 1928-40, 45-64; A Photographer 500 no's, G. Holiday Annuals, S.O. Libs., Boys Friend Libs., Greyfriars Heralds, Popular, Film, Railway, Sport, Motor, M/cycle, etc., etc., thousands in stock. S.a.e. state requirements.

RONALD ROUSE

3 ST. LEONARD'S TERRACE, GAS-HILL, NORWICH.

DANNY'S DIARY

JANUARY 1921

In some ways, it has been a tragic month. The airship R34 has been wrecked in Yorkshire, and the submarine K5 has been lost at sea with all on board. And there has been a terrible rail disaster.

Most of the stories in the Gem have been third-rate, but the final week brought one from the old writer, and it looks like the start of a series. First of the month was "Champions of the Cause" which re-introduced a character named Mason who was once in a blue Gem named "Mason's Last Match." Then "The Mystery of the Manor" brought back that tiresome character, Jim Dawlish, in another Talbot tale out of the old jelly mould.

"Talbot's Master Stroke" was a sports story which didn't get far off the ground. In this issue there started a new serial "The Invisible Hand," from the Vitagraph serial featuring Antonio Moreno which is showing in the cinemas. I love it on the screen, and it is interesting to read it in the Gem, which also has plenty of photographs from the film serial. Then came "Redfern's Perilous Mission" which is another about Redfern as a boy journalist.

Finally, the promising story. This was "The Boy From the Wild West." He is named Kit Wildrake, and he is a cowboy who comes from the Boot Leg Ranch in British Columbia. This is not all that original, but I like it quite a lot.

The railway disaster occurred during the morning on January 26th, when two trains met head-on, on a single-line track near Abermule station on the Cambrian Railways. Abermule is half-way between Newtown and Montgomery. After the introduction of the tablet system, it was thought there would never be another accident on single line working. But it happened here. There is to be a big enquiry, but it seems that it may have been due to carelessness on the part of young railway workers. 17 were killed and 36 injured, and the damage was terrific.

I have had the Popular regularly this month, as they are now reprinting the very early Magnet tales as well as the early ones of

Rookwood. There has been a short version of an old Magnet tale named "Wingate's Churn," in which Wingate found the Head's lost daughter, Rosalie, who was appearing in a circus. And there have been two stories (apparently made out of one in an old Magnet) about Herbert Bulstrode who came to Greyfriars and was killed at the finish. The old Rookwood tales are those about the arrival of Mornington's protegee, 'Erbert.

The Boys' Friend, as always, has been top of the bill. In "Gentleman Jim's Christmas Visit," Jimmy Silver and Co. were at the Priory for the Christmas vac, with Captain Digby as their guest. The captain trapped a burglar. Then came four stories in a series where Jimmy & Co. fell foul of Carthew and Knowles, and brought back the Rookwood Secret Society to deal with them. These tales were "Trouble For Four," "Rough Justice," "Borrowed Plumes," and "The Death of the Secret Society." They made a grand series.

At Cedar Creek, in a story about rivalry with Dicky Bird and Co., the Cedar Creek fellows put on "The Cedar Creek Pantomime," which was the Three Bears. Then "The Thousand Dollar Prize" in which Mr. Penrose ran a competition, without having the money to pay the prize money. He wanted Frank Richards to be a fake prize-winner, but Frank would not.

In "Set a Thief to Catch a Thief," Yen Chin agreed to be a fake prize-winner, and then demanded to be a real one, so Mr. Penrose had to bunk from Thompson. The newspaper was put up for auction, in "Frank Richards & Co. - Newspaper Proprietors" in which Bob Lawless ran up the bidding in the auction, and Frank paid for it out of his savings.

Final of the month, "The Schoolboy Editor" was, of course, Frank Richards.

The Prime Minister has taken over a house named Chequers, and it is to be the country home for all future British Prime Ministers.

The stories in the Magnet have been weak, but the paper has been improved by a supplement in the middle. The first supplement was Billy Bunter's Weekly, then several weeks of the Greyfriars' Herald, and in the last week of the month another Billy Bunter's Weekly. (The weekly paper, the Greyfriars' Herald, is now named the Boys' Herald, and it doesn't interest me very much, though it contains some Greyfriars stories which are fairly good.) Of course, though they call the middle of

the Magnet a Supplement, it really doesn't mean we get any extra pages, but I like them very much.

"Ponsonby's Victim" was Vernon-Smith, who ran away from school, and the next week we had "The Runaway's Return." Then it was Bolsover Minor who was "Driven From School." Then in the next story it was Bolsover Major who did "His Blundering Best." This one was a sequel to last month's Magnet tale "Up Against It."

Finally, "Billy Bunter's Smuggler."

An average month at the cinemas. We have seen Wesley Barry in "Dinty." This was good, and I like Wesley, who is a freckled boy; Ethel Clayton in "The Young Mrs. Winthrop;" Harold Lloyd in "Hand to Mouth" - this was very funny indeed; the most spectacular picture was William Farnum in "If I Were King;" and, finally, Matheson Lang and Ivor Novello in "Carnival."

WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Boys Friend (Rookwood), Lees, early numbers especially. I wish all members throughout the world a Happy New Year.

G. BRUTON, 205 LONG ELMES, HARROW WEALD, MIDDLESEX.

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WANTED TO PURCHASE Boys' Friend Lib. L 1024, Aldine Buffalo Bill Novel L 1043. Offers please.

R. W. STORY, 34 ABERDEEN CRESCENT, BRAMALEA,
via BROMPTON, ONTARIO, CANADA.

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OFFERS PLEASE for 2 Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1924 and 1925, V.G.C., also 3 Populars, 264, 265, 266.

MRS. HAIGH, 6 ROMAN DRIVE, KEYWORTH, NOTTS., NG12 5DR.

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Four ADVENTURES 1939, Eight WIZARDS 1939, offered for exchange (or first sensible cash offer secures).

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Crackers Annual 1933, The Jester Annual 1939. 30/- offered per good copy.

WESTWOOD, 9 CHEVLOT CLOSE, CHADDERTON, LANCs.

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SALE: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1921, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1938, 1939. 2 Adventureland Annuals. Every Boys Hobby Annual 1927. Blackie's Boys Annual. Sexton Blakes. Billy Bunter, Tom Merry titles. Magnets, Gems, Greyfriars Prospectus. WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals. - JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVE., ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND. Tel. 491716.

BLAKIANA

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

I would like to say how much I appreciated all the help I have received from so many of you during the last year. I do need quite a lot of material to keep Blakiana going and look forward to some more contributions, especially as I have lost some of my previous regular contributors. So I will be pleased to hear from anyone who can write anything on our favourite detective Sexton Blake. I hope to have news very shortly about the Catalogues and Supplements, the printers have the job in hand, it is just a problem of them being able to produce the work. I understand they have been short of staff and we all know what that entails for the few people remaining.

At the time of writing this introduction I notice there is another series of "Sexton Blake" on I.T.V., unfortunately for many of us, at the early hour of 5.20 p.m. Such an impossible time to view, many of us are still on the way home from work. However, I hope that some of you will have been able to see some of the episodes by the time you read this month's C.D. and will write me a little bit about the series, whether you think they are well done, etc.

Some time ago I wrote to the Gramophone Co. (EMI) Records, to see whether they would be able to re-record the old 78 12" record I have "Murder on the Portsmouth Road," but they replied they were unable to do this, they had apparently disposed of what they called the Master Matrices for this old recording. I thought perhaps it would have interested them especially as Sexton Blake is just as popular as ever, but no, like all these Companies, they only want to do pop records which they say sell in thousands - if you can believe it. However, we can still go on reading our favourite books and papers, so I will leave you all to do just that after reading the current issue of Blakiana.

SEXTON BLAKE IN THE THEATRE

by Josie Packman

An excerpt from "Neath the Mask" by John M. East

In 1893 emerged a fictional superman whose tumultuous career captured the imagination of tens of thousands of avid readers. His name was Sexton Blake. The seemingly endless chronicle of Sexton Blake's assignments appeared in the Union Jack written by a succession of writers, some of whom were well-known authors working under pseudonyms. They had to compete with other authors whose stories of Sexton Blake appeared in various other papers such as the Penny Pictorial and Answers Weekly.

A great new industry had been created, but it was John East who was one of the first to realise the potential reward from a dramatisation of this legendary character. He interested Percy Nash in the project, and Nash negotiated the rights with the Harmsworth Press. Brian Daly commenced work on a freely adapted version of one story called "Five Years After," which originally appeared in 1906 in the Union Jack. He cut out the secondary villain and substituted an unprincipled adventuress with the name of Philadelphia Kate - not Daly's own invention. She came out of another S.B. adventure. This switch was fully approved by the original author William Murray Graydon.

A company called Melodramatic Productions Syndicate Ltd., was floated on 20th February, 1908, a month after a special performance at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith. Four days after the company was formed a revised version of the play opened at the old Crown Theatre, Peckam, S.E. It was still not right, and John East, by then free from his pantomime commitments at the same theatre, took charge of the production. He cast himself as a veritable Bill Sykes of a character called Simon Faggus, who would stoop to anything including murder.

Here is a synopsis, which gives the ingredients for a successful play circa 1908:

Sexton Blake.

Vice

Philadelphia Kate played by Miss East Robertson - a wicked, wicked

woman. She exerts her evil influence on:
Randolph Lovell (Charles Est) a weak spineless ne'er do well

they are contrasted with:

Virtue
in the persons of:

Farmer Blackburn (Brian Daly) pure and philanthropic
Marjorie Lovell (Lily Hammerseely) cousin to Randolph, also as pure as
the driven snow.

Motive

Randolph Lovell will inherit upon the death of the Squire

Action

Randolph hires Simon Faggus (John M. East):

1. To murder the Squire.
2. To testify having seen the Hero, Roger Blackburn (William Felton) run away from the scene of the crime.

Conclusions

The audience were enthralled. The mystery unravelled - but when would the wonderful detective Sexton Blake, his inseparable companion Tinker, and the bloodhound, Pedro, arrive to see that the innocent did not suffer? Why had Roger shouldered a crime that he wrongly thought had been committed by his father? Who killed the old Squire?

The cool methodical Sexton Blake duly came on the scene, within days foiled several attempts on his life and solved a crime which had baffled "Sergeant Widgeon of the Yard" for no less than five years.

This play and several other later ones were very popular, especially the tours which visited many of the Northern towns of England. Apparently 7 touring companies were put out and the original play was still being performed ten years later. Other plays produced during the same period and all by John M. East were:

Hush Money, or the Disappearance
of Sexton Blake.
After Midnight.

Tracked by Wireless.
Master of Mill.
Convict 99.

All these plays were performed in provincial theatres where they were more popular than in London. They were all adapted from various Blake stories originally written for the Union Jack.

The first play, Sexton Blake Detective, was adapted from the story "Five Years After" by W. Murray Graydon, first printed in the Union Jack No. 165, dated December 1906, and reprinted in the Sexton Blake Library No. 105, Christmas 1919, the only story which achieved this distinction in the Library, in this order, i.e. U.J. first, Play second and S.B.L. third.

There was an earlier play than the one Mr. East mentions, but I have no details as to who produced it. The title was "The Case of Coiners" the chief actors being Mr. C. Douglas Carlisle as S. Blake and Mr. Lee Gilbert as Tinker. An advert in the Union Jack Christmas Double number No. 217, dated 7 December, 1907, gives these details. An advert for Mr. East's play appears in U.J. No. 229, dated 29 February, 1908, which was being performed at the Crown Theatre, Peckham. So all this information is authentic. Unfortunately there does not appear to be any trace of the original scripts of any of these plays.

The only other play I know about is "Sexton Blake" a play in four acts by Donald Stuart, presented at the Prince Edward Theatre on September 18th, 1930. This theatre is now the London Casino.

I regret that I do not have a copy of U.J. No. 165, but the S.B.L. is in my possession together with the Union Jacks advertising these plays.



DEATH of MRS. ROBERT MURRAY GRAYDON

by W. O. G. Lofts

It is with deep regret that I have to report the sudden death of Mrs. Victoria Murray Graydon - wife of Robert Murray Graydon who died as far back as 1937. Robert created many wonderful characters in the Sexton Blake saga: The Criminals Confederation, Dr. Satira, Paul Cynos, Mr. Reece and Detective Inspector Coutts of Scotland Yard. He also created the popular Captain Justice stories, which ran

for many years in Modern Boy.

I first met Mrs. Graydon some years ago, in connection with some special research for the I.P.C. group. As a result of this, one of Robert's Blake stories was used in the T.V. Blake series. Mrs. Graydon was cheerful, and very informative about her late husband's work - and as soon as THE MEN BEHIND BOYS FICTION came out, she ordered a copy. I was quite happy to autograph it and to put a message inside on the large part the Graydons had played in the history of juvenile fiction. I am glad that she was to see her husband (and father-in-law William Murray Graydon) in print, where they rightly belonged, in a reference book of this kind.

I have been informed that a grandson of Robert (likewise called Robert) has shown an ability for writing stories. In the future another Graydon may keep up the grand tradition of the Graydon family.

OUR NEW CLASSIC SERIAL. Come back with us to a distant age, long before the First World War, to a time when crusty baronets rode along dusty lanes in dog-carts, and reckless schoolboys went poaching partridges. What was Courtney like before Pentelow bumped him off?

THE ONLY WAY

"Caught, by Jove!"

Bob Cherry uttered that exclamation in dismay.

He was in the prefects' room at Greyfriars. That room was a sacred apartment - only the prefects used it, and juniors found within its walls were pretty certain to leave it "on their necks," as Bob Cherry would have expressed it. Excepting for Bob, the room was empty. Lessons were over for the day, and in the glorious summer weather everybody was out of doors. The Sixth were playing cricket, and Bob Cherry had chosen his moment well for entering the august apartment.

Not that Bob intended any harm there. He had brought a screwdriver and an assortment of screws with him, with the intention of screwing up Loder's desk. That was all. It was merely a little joke, but Loder

was known to have no sense of humour in matters of this sort.

Only one screw had been driven in so far. At the sound of footsteps in the passage, Bob suspended his labours and listened. Visions of Loder coming in and catching him in the act floated before Bob Cherry's mind.

The footsteps stopped at the door and the handle was turned. Bob made a dive behind the desk. It was a large one, and stood in a corner of the room. There was just space for Bob to crouch behind it, drawing up his long legs in a most uncomfortable attitude.

The door opened. Two fellows came in, but Bob could not see them. Fortunately, they could not see him either.

One of the two seniors who had come in was sitting down. The other was pacing

to and fro. But neither of them spoke.

Bob Cherry groaned inwardly, wondering how long they were going to stay.

The fellow who was pacing up and down spoke suddenly.

"What have you got to say, Courtney? You may as well get it over, but if it's another blessed sermon, I don't want to hear it."

It was the voice of Valence of the Sixth Form. And Rupert Valence was a close friend of Loder's. And the other fellow was Courtney - Wingate's chum, and one of the best fellows at Greyfriars.

Bob Cherry felt decidedly uncomfortable. It dawned on him that he was in the position of an eavesdropper - a position that was painful to a fellow of Bob's nature.

"It's not a sermon, Valence," Courtney's voice was low. "I don't take it upon me to give sermons to a fellow of my own age."

"You've done it often enough. You were preaching at me the other day because I was out with Loder."

"You were out after look-up, and you know where you went," said Courtney sharply. "You went to the Green Man in Friardale."

"Well, suppose I did," said Valence defiantly. "It doesn't concern you."

"It concerns all your friends to see you going that way, old man," said Courtney. "And I hope I'm a friend of yours."

Valence gritted his teeth.

"You won't be for long, if I get this sort of thing from you," he said. "But what is it now? It isn't Loder this time, I suppose?"

Courtney sat with his hands in his pockets, and Valence looked at him.

"You make me tired," said Valence. "If you've got something up against me, why can't you tell me what it is?"

"I've nothing against you."

Valence came quickly towards him.

"Has my sister been speaking to you?" he exclaimed. "Is it that? Has Violet been telling you anything?"

Courtney did not reply.

"So that's it!" said Valence savagely. "By Jove, Courtney, if you

keep on like this, you and I will have a row."

"I'd better speak out," said Courtney abruptly. "I know where you are going to-night."

Valence shrugged his shoulders.

"You're going poaching," said Courtney. "You have been out for the same reason two or three times lately."

"I dare say you have never set night-lines in preserved waters," said Valence with a sneer. "Hang it, every chap in the school has done it."

"I'm not speaking of that. You've been after the game."

"Well, supposing I have. I remember you had some of the partridges when I stood a game supper in my study."

"That's not so bad. I don't hold with it, considering that the birds are private property, but poaching a partridge or two for a feed isn't so bad. But --"

"But what?"

"You've done more than that!" said Courtney sternly. "You've been poaching birds to sell. You know you have. You sold a dozen brace in Friardale."

Valence flushed red.

"If you've been spying on me --"

"I haven't," said Courtney angrily, "but you don't even take the trouble to hide what you do. Poaching a bird or two for a lark is one thing - you can call that fun. But taking birds to sell is quite another matter - it's stealing."

Valence clenched his hands.

"I was hard up."

"A man might steal your watch, and say he was hard up," said Courtney with a curl of the lip. "You know that's no excuse."

"Why shouldn't I?" said Valence. "It's great fun to get at the birds, and jolly exciting dodging the keepers. And old Popper is an old cad, anyway, and always down on Greyfriars chaps. It's tit for tat."

"Yes, if it were only poaching. But doing it for money --"

"I don't see much difference."

"Well, anybody else would see a difference," said Courtney. "If it came out, you'd be expelled from Greyfriars, even if you weren't prosecuted."

"You're not thinking of telling the Head, I suppose?" said Valence, with a sneer.

"You know I'm not, but stop it, Valence. It must leak out, if you keep it up," said Courtney. "It's a rotten biznez, anyway, you know that."

"I think it's fun."

"It's a kind of fun that has landed poor men in prison, and may land you there, too, if you're not careful. Valence, you must stop it."

"Must!" exclaimed Valence fiercely. Courtney rose to his feet.

"Yes," he said firmly, "you must! A thing of this sort can't go on. I'm a prefect. If I did my duty, I should report this, now I know it."

"Report it, then, and be hanged!"

"I can't - at least, I don't want to. Can't you see how unfair it is to me?" Courtney exclaimed.

"No, I don't see it. Mind your own business," said Valence savagely. "Leave me alone, and leave my affairs alone. That's all I want you to do."

Courtney clenched his hands.

"I can't do that," he said, "because--"

There was a light cough behind them.

The two seniors swung round with startled exclamations.

Valence and Courtney stared at Bob Cherry's dusty face as it rose over the top of Loder's desk.

"Cherry," exclaimed Courtney, "what have you been doing here?"

"Hiding behind the desk," said Bob cheerfully.

"Don't be a young ass! What else?"

"Getting dusty."

"He has been listening!" exclaimed Valence furiously. "He came here to listen and spy."

Bob Cherry looked at him steadily.

"I came in here to screw up Loder's desk, for a little joke on Loder," he said. "If I had wanted to spy, I shouldn't have shown myself."

"Quite true," said Courtney. "Why did you show yourself, you young rascal?"

"Because I didn't want to listen."

Valence burst into a scoffing laugh.

"You shall jolly well have a good licking for listening so far," he exclaimed,

and he ran straight at the junior.

Bob Cherry dodged out from behind the desk.

"Stop him!" shouted Valence.

Courtney hesitated, and Bob made for the door. He had his fingers on the handle when Valence grasped him by the shoulder.

Bob was swung back, and the next moment Valence was forcing him backwards over the table. Bob Cherry looked up in some alarm at the furious face of the Sixth-Former.

"Valence, what are you up to?" exclaimed Courtney, starting forward.

"He's going to promise not to repeat what he has heard here," said Valence.

"Now, you spying rat --"

"I'm not a spy. And you're a rat," said Bob dauntlessly.

Valence knocked the back of his head down on the table, and Bob gave a cry of pain.

"Valence!" exclaimed Courtney.

"Let me alone!" growled Valence.

"Now, Cherry, promise, on your word of honour, not to repeat to anybody a word you've heard, or I'll give you such a licking you won't get over it for weeks."

Bob looked at him defiantly.

"I won't!" he replied. "If you'd asked me decently I would; but as you choose to bully me instead, I won't. And now you can go ahead with your licking, hang you!"

Valence gritted his teeth.

As a rule, he was not a bully; but he had a weak and passionate nature that was easily moved to fierce anger, and then he could be very cruel.

He twisted Bob backwards over the table till it seemed to the junior that the bones in his back would crack, and he cried out with pain again.

"Now will you promise, you young cad?"

"No, I won't!"

Valence pressed him harder, and Bob's face was white. Courtney ran forward and grasped Valence by the shoulder.

"You're hurting him!"

"I mean to!"

"You fool, you may injure him," exclaimed Courtney. "Let him alone, I say."

"Stand back, Courtney!"

"Let him alone, then!"

"I will not!"

Courtney laid a powerful grasp upon the bully. Valence looked at him savagely, without releasing Bob Cherry.

"If you lay your hands on me, Courtney, it's an end of our friendship. You understand that?"

"You shan't hurt that kid!"

"Let go!"

"Release him, then!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll make you!"

Courtney tore the senior from his grasp, and whirled him away from the table. Valence staggered and crashed against the wall, and stood leaning there, gasping.

Bob dragged himself from the table. He was hurt and aching, and his face was very white.

Courtney pointed to the door.

"Cut!" he said.

Bob Cherry left the prefects' room. Valence was gasping for breath. He faced Courtney with a stare of deadly rage and hatred.

"Hang you!" said Valence, between his teeth. "I don't ever want to speak to you again."

He turned to the door, and Courtney made a hasty step towards him.

"Rupert, old man --"

Valence did not reply. He strode out of the room, slamming the door.

Courtney was left alone with a worried brow. Matters could not have gone more unpleasantly for him. His influence over Rupert Valence was gone now for good; no word of his would ever again check the black sheep of the Sixth. And it was not only that, but there was Valence's sister. Courtney thought a great deal more of her than of Valence. He knew how sorry she would be that the friendship was broken.

The door opened, and Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, came in. He glanced at Courtney, and clapped him on the shoulder in his rough, hearty way.

"Anything up?" he asked.

Courtney nodded.

"Only a row with Valence," he said.

Wingate's brow darkened. Big, rugged Wingate had never been able to pull well with Rupert Valence.

"Oh, that will blow over," he said.

"Not this time, I think."

"It won't be much the worse for you if it doesn't, Courtney."

"It may be the worse for him," said Courtney. "I suppose it can't be helped."

And he tried to dismiss the matter from his mind, without much success.

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT OF
THIS OLD, OLD TALE
NEXT MONTH)

THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S

The Times, for December 14th, contained a long and detailed account of our Midland Club's Christmas meeting. It also contained an obituary notice to John Paddy Carstairs, the film director who died recently.

The obituary provides an intriguing item to the effect that Mr. Carstairs formed Repton's first film society in 1927, and directed its first film - a melodrama of public school life entitled "The Hero of St. Jim's." Probably the film was only privately exhibited, but it is the first time I have heard of it. Presumably it concerned our St. Jim's. Does anybody know?

NELSON LEE COLUMN

THE HANDFORTH IMAGE

by Raymond Curé

To say I am pleased with the caption heading of the Nelson Lee Column in "Collectors' Digest" for December, is to put it mildly. I trust my fellow Lee-ites are equally satisfied.

Not only does the bold print call attention to the section, but the G. Harrison drawing of Handforth's profile sets its seal to this column. Of all the characters born of the imagination of Edwy Searles Brooks, this is the one to represent St. Frank's.

There are those who would disagree with me; but to give it a moment's thought, would be to arrive at the same conclusion. Not that the "Nelson Lee" did not feature, in its time, more outstanding personalities. It did.


Nelson Lee and Nipper, Lord Dorrimore and Ezra Quirke, space fails me to mention a host of others. But it is Handforth that comes to the fore consistently. Many a time he plays a good background part, supplementing the main theme of the story without interfering with the leading characters. On other occasions he took the lead and a Handforth story was always good for a laugh, for sheer muddle-headedness, grim determination and outright honesty you need E. O. Handforth.

As in the case of all prominent people, whether in fact or fiction, by the very act of drawing around themselves supporters and admirerers, they also call forth the negative approach. There are those that dislike them.

Dear old Handforth suffered this - but so did the famous Billy Bunter of Greyfriars - yet in spite of all the critics, of what do we think when we see a picture of our rotund friend - Greyfriars(?) and should it be a profile of Handforth, the answer would be St. Frank's.

Of the many St. Frank's stories, appearing at the rate of 52 a year, Edward Oswald Handforth forged to the top - and stayed there, and our friend G. Harrison has captured the features of Handforth, as most of us would imagine him.

Having mentioned the star turn of the "MAGNET" Billy Bunter, I find it amazing how two so totally different characters have each had



We wish to express our sincere apologies for the unprecedented delay which has occurred in the publication of Howard Baker Magnet Volume 5, "The Courtfield Cracksman."

We would like to assure our regular customers that this delay is due to circumstances completely beyond our executive control and is subject to the complications of a company take-over by a larger concern. Negotiations have been protracted and tortuous and, at the time that this announcement is going to press, are still proceeding.

We have no certain knowledge of what the eventual outcome of these negotiations will be. But, of course, hopefully we look to the early and complete satisfaction of all the orders which our regular customers have placed for this volume.

One thing is quite sure, however.

This is that the unhappy experience we and all of our faithful Magnet readers are currently sharing must not be repeated.

Consequently it is our intention just as soon as the future of Howard Baker Publishers Ltd. is known, to separate the publication of all Magnet and similar reprints from the great mass of general publishing with which the firm has been involved.

We plan to create a new company solely devoted to catering to the needs of the known "hobby" enthusiasts; a company for which a tentative yearly publishing programme has already been scheduled to include:

- i. Six Magnet volumes - one every other month - in hard-cover and soft-cover editions.
 - ii. Facsimile reprints in omnibus volume form of Union Jack, The Gem, Nelson Lee, Detective Weekly, Picture Show, Film Fun, the Holiday Annuals and many other publications of the past.
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(Continued from Page 15)

their appeal.

Bunter, the fat owl - greedy, deceitful, not above stretching the truth - and do I really mean stretching(?) and Edward Oswald Handforth, vigorous, energetic, true-blue, catch Handforth telling a lie? No sir, not even a white one.

Yet they are both loveable schoolboy characters with a tremendous reader appeal.

E.S.B. MUST SHARE THE BLAME

writes JOE CONROY

I was very interested in Len Wormull's comments on the very popular 'Between Ourselves' in the N.L.L. I have just finished reading the School Ship series and of course the weekly 'Between Ourselves' with its dual photographs.

Surely E.S.B. must have been aware of the importance to the readers of this personal column and to pass it off as purely a "space filler" must have shaken quite a few of them. It was their personal contact with Edwy, not available in any other publication. To kill this popular feature off was tantamount to literary suicide and I think E.S.B. must bear quite a share in the blame for this - he must have been in a very strong position and could I feel - if he had wanted to - have insisted on the feature being retained.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Surely Mr. Conroy exaggerates. It doesn't say much for ESB as a writer if the cutting-out of a fill-up column - even a much-loved one - was tantamount to literary suicide.)

IT WAS BIOLOGICALLY IMPOSSIBLE

says A. G. Davidson

Reading a hard-back novel about Norman Conquest I was excited to find that it was a re-write of an old Union Jack "Waldo" story. It was my first discovery of what I call Author's Licence. Actually this was a very badly-written yarn, but as it featured Waldo

(and, later, Conquest) I just sat back and enjoyed it. I wrote to E. S. Brooks, pointing out my discovery, and I also criticised one of his other yarns.

I think the latter was entitled "Rubber Face," and I first read it in the Thriller. The plot was about the male offspring of a secret marriage between an Australian squatter's daughter and an English jackeroo who later became heir to an earldom. When the child was born he was depicted as a throwback to the early aboriginal antecedents of the wife, who, I think, died in giving birth to the child. I pointed out to Mr. Brooks that he had made a boob. It is a proven fact that aboriginal blood does not throw back ever, as does that of the negro races, and I must admit that my esteem for E. S. Brooks slipped a little. I had always thought that what he wrote was gospel, and that he wrote from real knowledge of his subjects, biological or otherwise. At any rate, this goes to prove that, at least, E.S.B. was capable of being humanly wrong.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: All writers slip up on technical details now and then. They get the idea, in fact, that readers are just waiting gleefully for the opportunity to catch them out.)

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 154. WERE THEY EXPENDABLE?

Recently, in our Nelson Lee Column, Mr. R. J. Godsave discussed the expulsion from St. Frank's of a prefect named Walter Starke. Mr. Godsave concluded: "Whether an exciting and dramatic story is worth the loss of a leading and permanent character is a moot point." And I believe it was Mr. R. M. Jenkins who remarked once that Charles Hamilton learned the lesson that good characters should not be discarded.

It was not unknown, especially in earlier Hamiltonia, for a character to prove expendable, but such a thing was very rare. The only reason for making some of the lesser characters indispensable was that sentimental readers might have been upset, even though the saga

could be made more credible by the sacrifice of a character at the shrine of drama.

Carberry, the Loder of the early red Magnet, was expelled. He was a stock character, though a reasonably good one. I don't suppose any regular reader bothered unduly when Loder became the leading resident villain of the Greyfriars Sixth. There would seem to be no obvious reason why Loder, too, should not eventually have taken the long jump to oblivion. Sefton and Prye were expelled from St. Jim's, and I doubt whether it did any harm. Much less understandable was the polishing off of Mr. Bootles, a first-class character study, and his replacement with a stock master from the lower drawer. I shouldn't think Charles Hamilton ever forgave himself for that. Rookwood never fully recovered from it.

The expending, very occasionally, of one of the lesser characters, would have been preferable to one of the shabbiest tricks of contrivance - the introduction of a previously unknown character for use as firewood. One of my favourite blue Gems was "The Prefect's Plot," but it was marred because the prefect, Bingham, was especially created so that he could be expelled at the end of the story. That sort of thing hindered illusion.

The early red, white, and blue Gems are notable for some wonderfully good single stories. One of these was a brilliant little comedy about "leaving sales." Sturgis of the Sixth was leaving, so he held a leaving sale which everybody was expected to support. The only weakness - and in this case it was a very, very minor one - was that Sturgis was created specially to be a leaver. Like Bingham, he had never been heard of before.

It would have helped credibility had some minor character been given his parting hour in the spotlight as he was sacrificed in tales of this type.

Levison, of course, was expelled in the early red Magnet. At Greyfriars he had not been an outstanding study. Goodness knows why Hamilton dug him up again to send him to St. Jim's. At St. Jim's, Levison was above average during his first few years, though he was not exactly a replica of the Greyfriars Levison. And then Levison reformed, and, so far as my personal view went, it was a retrograde

step.

An unusual factor in the early Gem and Magnet was that certain quite prominent characters were, over long periods, conspicuous by their absence. In the halfpenny Gem, Lowther was absent for a while, for no obvious reason except an eccentricity on the part of the author. Tom Merry and Manners became the Terrible Two. Later on, Digby took a long holiday. In the red Magnet, Johnny Bull was away for a time, his place in the Famous Five being filled inexplicably by Squiff. Alonzo Todd had long, long absences, and finally disappeared, long before the Magnet ended. Which was a pity, for, at times, Alonzo was a pleasant and original study. Skinner was another who returned after being absent from Greyfriars for almost a paper's generation. I find it difficult to decide why the author followed this rather strange plan. It reminds me of the man who kept banging his head against a wall because he found it so pleasant when he left off.

I would think that the very occasional sacrifice of a minor character was much less to be deplored than the killing off of fairly prominent characters by neglect. Inexplicable was the dropping of Monteith, so prominent in earlier days. I have always felt it fairly certain that the Kildare-Monteith theme stemmed from Reed's "The Willoughby Captains." If this were so, it is possible that Hamilton dropped Monteith for that very reason. But what a waste. It would have been far better to use him as expendable in a good dramatic tale. Koumi Rao was another good character who was just written off. Lumley-Lumley, outstanding in many strong tales of the blue Gem, was yet another. Far better to have killed them in battle than to let them die from neglect.

Binks was a novel little piece of character work, replaced by the insipid and far from noteworthy Toby Marsh.

In the Magnet, Bulstrode and Bolsover died from neglect. I never cared a lot for either, and Bolsover, like all bullies, was a bore. Bulstrode deserved a better fate. Perhaps if any of those forgotten boys had been bumped off to make a memorable climax to a good series, readers might have protested. But nobody raised a bleat over their being left to perish by the wayside.

It is doubtful whether any of us were reading the Magnet when

Carberry was expelled. We met him much later in reprints, the effect of which is usually blunted. Carberry, at least, went out at the shrine of drama. A far better and more original character was Ionides, the Greek senior. He played a prominent part for a while, and then, suddenly, he was not mentioned any more. That, to my way of thinking, was inexplicable waste. He would have made splendid fuel in the fire of dramatic death.

Which, naturally, brings us to Courtney. His creator buried him and forgot him. Pentelow dug him up, turned him into a very gallant gentleman, and bumped him off. Had it been a good story, the action would have been praiseworthy. As it was, it was cheek for a man to bump off another man's creation, and, unfortunately, "A Very Gallant Gentleman" was not a good story by any standard.

I saw no sense in killing off a character simply to replace him by one of inferior quality. In fact, both the Gem and the Magnet could have benefited from a thinning-out of the cast. I would not have sacrificed the stars. But I could have done without plenty members of the full supporting cast. And if some had gone out in what Mr. Godsave calls "an exciting and dramatic story," then so much the better.

REVIEW

THE HOUSEMASTER'S HOMECOMING — Martin Clifford
(The Museum Press 12/6)

This, the latest offering from the Hamilton Museum Press, is a reprint of a Summer Double Number of the Gem, originally issued during the First World War. It is one of the most popular of all the Gem's Talbot stories, and it is naturally a rare item among collectors' items.

Published in the style of the successful "Strange Secret" and "Boy Without a Name," there is no doubt that this one will earn equal success. It can be obtained direct from Mr. John Wernham, 30 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, for 12/6 which includes postage in this country. A big bargain at the price, and liberally illustrated with the pictures of R. J. Macdonald.

UNDER THE SAME ROOF

(was Les Rowley)

The Trocadero at the Elephant and Castle conjures up similar memories for me. For sixpence (or was it ninepence?) and a couple of hours patient waiting outside the far from opulent side entrance, one could secure a seat in the first four rows of the stalls and enjoy a five-hour entertainment. A halfpenny bag of a solid and enduring confection known as "Gobstoppers" would ensure that any pangs of hunger were subdued as the figures, photographic or live, transported one to another world.

The boy in the two and fourpenny circle seat and the boy in the sixpenny (or was it ninepenny?) one were under the same roof and sharing the same enjoyment. Probably the boy in the circle seat would go home to a tea of toasted crumpets and strawberry jam and think his two and fourpence well spent. The boy from the stalls (if he knew his onions) would make his way from the theatre to those little shops, little more than cubicles, which sold such delicacies as polonies, black puddings, meat pies and fish and chips and from which - for the price of twopence - he could fortify himself with an *al fresco* meal of his choice! In the light of the naphtha flares that stabbed their beams into the encompassing black of the London night, the boy from the stalls would probably enjoy his hurried meal as much as the boy from the circle was enjoying his. I imagine that for both it seemed a wonderful time to be alive!

The audiences at the Troc', varied as they were vast, were wonderful and I daresay that the boy in the circle, like the boy in the stalls, felt that he was a member of a huge, happy family out to enjoy itself. The people of that part of London are amongst the most warm-hearted in the world and their infectious good spirits would have embraced the circle and stalls alike. Going to the Troc' is no longer possible, which is a great pity for one (whether he be an ex-two and fourpenny or an ex-sixpenny - or was it ninepenny?) would have liked to make the pilgrimage.

I too, have been to the State at Kilburn. It is still entertaining but its accommodation has been greatly reduced to make way for a bingo hall. I doubt if it knew the glory of the Trocadero which had a

magic all its own due to the audiences that filled it for those mammoth shows.

To me it was splendid to read about the old Troc'. May the boy who once sat in the sixpenny (or was it ninepenny) seat reach out his hand to the one who sat in the two and fourpenny seat and say how good it is to be under the same roof again?

Eric Fayne adds: Dean Farrar would have commented, sadly: "The sixpennies (or was it ninepennies) only accommodated poor people for the most part, so it could matter but little how hard and uncomfortable the seats were." In fact, the seating was the same in all parts of the Trocadero, and the sixpennies (or ninepennies) were the best part of the house for enjoying the lavish stage shows which comprised much of the Troc programme. The "boy" in the circle was working darned hard for his living in 1936, and he was not unique in being extravagant to impress the fair damsel of his choice. Alas, she refused to be impressed.

In passing, the Troc maintained a large permanent resident orchestra (the conductor was named Van Damm) as well as the giant Wurlitzer organ. Mr. Rowley is right when he says that the State in Kilburn, larger though it was, never remotely captured the magic of the Troc at Elephant and Castle.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 24th November, 1970.

Only eight members attended this meeting presided over by Ian Bennett, who read the minutes which were then confirmed.

Correspondence came from Stan Knight and the anniversary number was Fullwood's Cunning, N.L.L. (O.S.) 129, dated 24/11/1917, and thus 53 years old. Then came the collectors' item The Men Behind Boys' Fiction by Derek Adley and Bill Lofts. Both items aroused much interest.

Now followed a discussion on the form which the Christmas meeting should take, and it was decided to have a "study feed" as so often in previous years.

The only other item apart from the raffle was a game of Consequences, by Ian Bennett. This proved interesting and entertaining. George Chatham was acclaimed winner by unanimous consent.

The raffle was taken during the tea interval - biscuits kindly

provided by Ivan Webster - and the prize winners were Win Partridge, Ian Bennett, George Chatham and Ted Davey.

The next meeting will be on 26th January from 7 p.m. onwards.

TOM PORTER

Correspondent.

+ + +

SYDNEY, (AUSTRALIA)

When members gathered at Cahill's Restaurant on Thursday, 26th November, at 6.30 p.m., there was a warm welcome extended to Stan Nicholls who had had a bad bout of illness followed by a spell in hospital - Stan was in fine form and this set the mood for the evening for his fellow-members.

After a first-class dinner which further enhanced the mood of bonhomie the members settled down to a discussion on the highlight of the evening, namely the amazing reference book produced by Bill Lofts and Derek Adley . . . the chaps agreed that it was a "must" for hobby enthusiasts and a tremendous bonanza for the modest purchase price. Congratulations Bill and Derek for "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" and a sincere vote of thanks from the Aussies for the amazing boost your research work has given their pleasure in our hobby.

Films then took the floor as the subject under discussion - interesting to learn that hobby enthusiast Dan O'Herlihy is currently appearing in Sydney as Marshall Ney in "Waterloo." And in the October issue of "Films in Review" Barre Lyndon (Alfred Edgar) is featured with criticism of his writings both plays and film work.

Members spent an interesting interlude talking of the early days of the hobby contributions of Leslie Charteris and W. Murdoch Duncan when they were writing in "The Thriller."

The evening concluded by remembering old friends.

B. PATE

Hon. Secretary.

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LONDON

The Yuletide Festive Season's meeting at the Cricklewood home of Marjory and Bill Norris was a great success, happiness and jollity in abundance. There were the three librarians busily loaning out ample supplies of reading matter for the Christmas holiday, the President of the club, John Wernham, distributing copies of his latest opus, "The Housemaster's Home-Coming" and a large attendance all engaged in auld acquaintances.

The chairman, Leslie Rowley, opened the meeting proper with some choice remarks of welcome and then informed the gathering, that owing to the fact that he has to undergo hospital treatment, his year of office has to be terminated ere the next A.G.M. He thanked all for their co-operation during his term of office and stressed the point for nominations for the 1971 chairman.

Then the President of the club addressed the meeting. He said that he was pleased to be present and bring along his latest effort from the Museum Press. Another opus would be available next year, but as usual, on the secret list.

Bill Lofts rendered a treatise on his latest piece of research, the origination of the surnames Lofts and Bunter. Quite a good item and enjoyed.

An amusing excerpt from Magnet 1141 issue of the Courtfield Cracksman series read by Roger Jenkins, was another enjoyable item. Following this, Brian Doyle read an article by J. L. Bott about the Amalgamated Press Christmas Numbers, circa 1950 and Bob Blythe read extracts from club newsletter of December 1953 Christmas meeting.

Don Webster conducted a London Knowledge quiz and Messrs. Staples, Peters and Godsave were the one, two, three.

The excellent catering left nothing to be desired and the hosts were suitably thanked. A couple of tape recordings were rendered by Marjory and the advance copy of the C.D. Annual that was on show all helped towards a very happy meeting.

Next meeting on Sunday, 17th January, at Friardale, Ruislip, Middlesex. Kindly inform the hospitable Acramans if you intend to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERNSaturday, 12th December, 1970.

Despite the threat of a power cut our 21st Christmas Party more than upheld the happy traditions of its predecessors. About a score of old and new members and friends sat down to a feast of good things which would have delighted Billy Bunter, Fatty Wynn, Tubby Muffin, Fatty Little and all the lads and lasses of the famous schools. Library business was brisk before tea and during the washing-up, and then, with the tables temporarily cleared, we settled down to a varied programme devised by Jack Allison. First, an appetizer with a Bunter Drive, followed by a jigsaw puzzle in which the puzzle was the cover of the facsimile edition of Magnet No. 1. No doubt fortified by those infuriating 11-plus tests, our young members, Simon and Mandy Wilde, wiped the floor with their elders, completing their picture in quick time - and without an original copy to follow! We then settled down to balloon five-a-side football in which Greyfriars beat St. Frank's 5 - 2, and St. Jim's beat Rookwood 5 - 3. In a gripping final, for the first time(?) outside the Gem, St. Jim's beat Greyfriars by 5 "goals" to 3.

For a quiet interlude, Geoffrey Good read the story of Christmas at Laurel Villa from the December 1931 Gem reprint of St. Jim's for Merry Xmas. An excellent little yarn in Martin Clifford's best style, capturing the real atmosphere of a pre-war Christmas.

Supper was followed by the presentation of prizes to everyone, after which chairman Geoffrey Wilde thanked the ladies for organising the food, and Jack Allison for devising the programme. Exchanges of seasonal good wishes ended the party as we dispersed about 9.30 p.m. Our greetings to all O.B.B.C. members, everywhere.

JACK WOOD

 FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: S.B.L.'s 3rd series. WANTED: S.B.L.'s, Union Jacks, or any mags with Sexton Blake stories; also Dixon Hawke Lib.

D. NEWMAN, 6 THE OLD DRIVE, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, HERTS.

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 WANTED: Magnets; 150 duplicates for disposal including several series.

J. de FREITAS, 29 GILARTH STREET, HICETT, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3190.

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

BILL LOFTS (London): Whilst I am grateful for Harry Dowler's kind remarks about my book *The Men Behind Boys Fiction*, I feel that I should clarify some of his points. The price of the book I agree was high, but it was set by the publisher, and I have no control over it.

As I have almost 10,000 authors of boys' stories in my records, I had the almost impossible task of cutting these down by over two-thirds to a 3,000 acceptable by a publisher for such a book. It was inevitable that some were left out. I feel certain that I did the right thing in including all the A.P. authors. This alone was no mean feat, as I had to go through every Fleetway boys' paper from beginning to end. Edgar Wallace was not, of course, essentially a boys' author, but he made the *Thriller*, a paper widely collected in our hobby. To not include details about him because they already appear in other Biographies simply was not on. This would be unacceptable by Libraries and other institutions as well as my publisher. I am extremely puzzled by the statement 'that most well-known authors could have been omitted because there is no fresh information.' Surely the most well-known authors in our hobby are Charles Hamilton, E. S. Brooks, Teed, Evans, Sayer, Murray Graydon, St. John Cooper and Bayfield. I take personal pride that most of the details gleaned are from my own research, and they won't be found in any other reference book so fully.

An entry such as *Chambers Rex* (Scout) is not time wasting. It gives the information that this author only wrote under that name in this paper - and nowhere else. Probably some other enthusiast may have been searching in vain through other papers to find this author's stories. All the stories that I have seen by Gilbert Gray are credited to John S. Margerison by official records. An editor of one of the papers also confirms it. It's possible that other writers used it at times. It's also inevitable in a book of several million words that some errors in spelling may creep in. It's really up to Mr. Dowler to point them out to me personally, so that they can be rectified in a later edition. But as far as I know there are only one or two.

I think that Bob Blythe is simply splitting hairs on the Westchester and Whitelands stories. There is no question at all that many were almost word for word in chapters of old St. Frank's stories - with of course the characters' names changed. E. S. Brooks also did this to some of his Berkeley Gray stories. This was written up in full in the Digest some years ago.

TONY GLYNN (Manchester): Did anyone hear Hubert Gregg's radio programme "Thanks for the Memory" on Friday, 13th November? In this programme of music-hall, record, radio and film memories, he made some comment on the "Magnet" and the "Holiday Annual," saying he wished he had every copy of the "Magnet" which he devoured in his youth. Mr. Gregg added that the first poem he ever learned by heart was from the "Holiday Annual." It was a parody of "Excelsior" (how appropriate!) and was concerned with Bunter in Mrs. Mumble's tuck-shop.

We might not be able to supply Mr. Gregg with those lost and lamented "Magnets" - but it looks as if he should subscribe to the C.D.

L. WORMULL (Romford): Your mention of the Trocadero cinema in Let's Be Controversial certainly brought memories flooding back. I lived close by as a youngster and visited it regularly. The most memorable film I saw there was Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde, with Fredric March and Miriam Hopkins. Two of the many stage acts which became popular there were Ted Ray (Fiddlin' and Foolin') and Max Wall, the comedian. Max used to have me in fits, and I can still laugh at his antics today. Canadian-born Quentin McClean, who died some years ago, was the resident organist, and one of the true 'greats' of his profession. He always gave a masterly rendering of the classics in between his programme of sing-along. Van Damm and his orchestra was also a fixture. It was the greatest entertainment value for money anywhere. A few years ago I paid a special visit to the Troc to see The Great Escape, which I missed on local release. The vast cinema was almost empty, and a sad relic of the past. By a coincidence, it was the last film to be shown there, and it closed the following week. Soon afterwards it was demolished, and a small but ultra-modern Odeon now stands in its place. The Trocadero was the brain-child of the Hyams brothers, who

followed it with the Troxy in Commercial Road, Stepney. They also gave the luxury treatment to a non-paying cinema called the Super in Tower Bridge Road, Bermondsey, and renamed it Trocette. I was there on opening night - and what a night! Van Dam and his Orchestra were well late for their guest opening, with numerous apologies from the management. Finally they arrived breathlessly down the gangways, amid loud cheers. The wildest scenes I saw there was when Victor McLaglan arrived to judge a beauty contest. This one-time heavyweight boxer was almost 'flooded' by fans, who nearly overturned his car. The cinema still stands, disused and derelict. I believe the State, Kilburn, was the last of the Hyams' cinematic ventures.

THE BOYS OF BRANCASTER SCHOOL

by O. W. Wadham

About the year 1959 the English book publishing firm of Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., turned out a series of half-crown books called the Nelson Juniors. There were 14 non-fiction volumes in the collection, mostly about various hobbies, and the fiction was contributed by such writers as Stephen Mogridge, E. C. Elliot, Rex Dixon and Lorna Hill. There was one school tale called "Abbey on the Warpath." Eric Leyland was the writer, and the story was the only one he contributed to the 50 or so volumes that made up the Nelson Juniors series.

The yarn concerned the boys of Brancaster School, and what transpired when a fire destroyed a rival college, King's, and the boys were billeted at Brancaster. It is really quite a readable story, about the length of an Armada Bunter yarn.

Eric Leyland had plainly been studying the work of Charles Hamilton and E. S. Brooks. There is a King's School character called Corker, who is something like the famous Horace Coker of Greyfriars, but who has more of the characteristics of Handforth of St. Frank's. He is described as a "King's senior in the Lower Fifth, but only because it was impossible to keep him where he rightfully belonged which was in the Lower 1. He was 17, brawny, ugly, half-witted -

and unable to mind his own business."

The yarn opens with the head boy of the Brancaster Newnum House, a burly senior called Paxton discussing a forthcoming football match with King's. Paxton declares: "Myself, I shan't bother about the ball this afternoon. I shall hack every King's chap I come up against, except those I jump on and eat! Who cares about the ball? King's didn't last month."

Bill Forbes, skipper of the Brancaster team gently chides the lad, and the yarn gets into its swing from then on.

There are two lower fourth boys, Poston and Myers, who are continually falling foul of Corker, and both lads are cast in the same mould of the famous Dicky Nugent of Greyfriars. Corker accuses them of setting fire to King's, theft, and various other things, but in the end they are proved to be innocent of those crimes at least. But they are an entertaining pair of scamps, and foil the villain of the piece, Master Corker, every time.

Does any reader of COLLECTORS' DIGEST know if Eric Leyland wrote any further school stories? His "Abbey on the Warpath" was certainly an entertaining start.

WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Populars, S.O.L.'s; private collector.

KELION, 69 FRIERN BARNET LANE, LONDON, N.11.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
FOR SALE: Bound S.O.L.'s: No. 16 The Rebellion at St. Biddy's (very good copy, brand new red binding); No. 70 (Hamilton) Boy Who Found His Father (St. Kitz) brand new red binding, without original covers; Schoolboy Tec (Hamilton, Len Lex) bound in red. 2/- each plus postage. Also, unbound, St. Frank's S.O.L.'s Nos. 402 and 408, Rebels' Victory and Touring School, 10/- each plus postage.

Write ERIC FAYNE.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Top prices paid for complete collections or items surplus to requirements. Very large comprehensive stock of most Old Boys Papers, Hardbacks and Annuals. Your "wants lists" appreciated. I may just have the items you've been after for years! Sorry, no lists, but details sent of specific requirements. W. le Queux titles wanted.

Write or Phone (evenings)

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, S.F. 19.

BILLY BUNTER IN HOLLAND

by Williem ze Luft

Billy Bunter has certainly changed since we last read about him in the MAGNET and Bunter books. Readers are quite familiar with the Billy Bunter comic-strip in the old KNOCKOUT COMIC with his prussian hair cut and drastic changes in school personnel. I believe that Harry Wharton even had a sister, and a Jones Minor featured a great deal, which we as old readers had not heard of before.

Billy Bunter now appears in Dutch children's comics and the translators most certainly have done weird and strange things with the original English text. Billy Bunter is known in the tulip country as BILLY TURF the popular Dutch schoolboy. Mr. Quelch has become MENEER KWEL, and where in England and at Greyfriars he is apt to speak in sharpish tones like "Bunter, you absurd and ridiculous boy!" in Holland he is much more friendly and calls him "Billy."

Charles Hamilton once said "that Billy Bunter was very popular in France" yet I have still to see a copy of a French MAGNET. It would be very interesting to see if any English readers have come across one.

ECHOES OF THE TROCADERO

Our hearts have been warmed at the Digest office by the large numbers of readers who have written to say that our Christmas Number was the best ever. An item which has brought considerable comment from readers - it has roused more interest than anything for quite a long time - was the article which referred to Eric Fayne's visit to the old Trocadero long ago. As a result, in a short series of brief items in forthcoming issues this year, Eric Fayne will comment on other cinemas and theatres he visited in the distant days of his wild youth. We have only been able to print two of the articles from those who wrote on the Trocadero article, but we thank all who wrote.

