

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 29 N^o 345

SEPTEMBER 1975



THE CRIMSON SECRET

A SPLENDID YARN OF THRILLS AND WILD ADVENTURE
By SIDNEY & FRANCIS WARWICK



**THE
BOYS'
FRIEND
LIBRARY**
N^o 754

4^p

18p

THIS MONTH'S SPECIAL

5 bound Volumes Wizards. Rather plain covers (buff) but contents good. All with 28 issues. 253-280 (1927/8), 281-308 (1928), 225-252 (1927), 337-364 (1925), 309-336 (1928/9). £25 each. Large stock of pre-war Skippers, Wizards, Hotspurs, Rovers, Adventures, also post-war. Bound yearly vols. from 1946. £10 each as new, and singles.

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The Man of the Wheel.



UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

An interesting book, recently published by Messrs. Peter Davies, is entitled "Sanditon". It is by Jane Austen and Another Lady. Jane Austen was engaged in writing the book when she died, and now, many years later, "Another Lady" has finished it off. The name of the "Other Lady" has now been disclosed, and there is no doubt that she has tried, as far as she could, to adopt the style of the famous, original authoress. Students of Jane Austen will enjoy themselves, trying to determine just exactly where in the story the new authoress took over.

There are, undoubtedly, plenty of instances of the work of one author being finished off by another writer. The earliest known instance,

probably is that of the Gospel of St. Mark, almost the entire final chapter being written by someone other than St. Mark himself. In this case, it is usually accepted that the original end of the Gospel was lost, and some unknown evangelist wrote the new ending. The change in style here is quite striking, though there has never been any question as to the authenticity of the subject matter.

Charles Hamilton was half-way through "Just Like Bunter" when he died. It is one answer to the tale, the origin of which is not certain, that Hamilton's death "came as a merciful release".

The Hamilton student has no difficulty in detecting just where the new pen took over in "Just Like Bunter". Nobody knows just how Hamilton would have worked out the second half of the book, but I fancy it would have had a less sentimental ending than the one which was given it.

When Richmal Crompton died, she left a number of stories which would have filled about three-quarters of a new William book. I gathered that Miss Crompton's niece hoped to write a couple of William stories herself to make up the volume, but, if she ever set about it, the hybrid never reached the reading public.

SEEING "RED":

The advance publicity of Howard Baker Press Ltd. for the next series of their popular facsimiles contains an item which makes some of us old fogeys lift our eyebrows. It concerns the Red Magnets of beloved memory. We are told that "Officially and editorially the colour of the front cover was described as 'golden'. The passing of years, exposure to light and other factors make it the 'red' we know today."

That, no doubt, is why, in any mention of the Red Magnet in this particular publicity item, the word Red is honoured with quotation marks. Those of us who have lived with the Red Magnet for fifty or sixty years will regard it as a bit of nonsense. We are not likely to accept the humorous suggestion that, when we were children, the Magnet cover was orange, though we called it red, and that the action of the elements down the years has changed it from the orange it was to the red we believed it to be.

I have all the red Magnets in my collection, most of them as mint as when they were first printed. Many readers have seen them and will,

I know, agree with me. The covers have not faded or changed colour in the slightest. They are still as rosy red as Mrs. Bardell's cheeks.

I am ready to agree that an orange tint may have been used in the production of the dye, and that editors may officially have termed it "orange". But I often suspected that some editors were colour-blind. Did not Mr. C. M. Down say of the Magnet in late 1937: "Readers will be delighted to know that from next week the Magnet is reverting to its Original Orange Cover".

And when it turned up it was a washed-out salmon pink, not even remotely like the Magnet of the Red Cover days.

STILL STAGGERING

Only a few months ago we were commenting on the fiendish rise in the cost of postal services. At that time we learned of the millions of pounds being lost by the post office. We learn that, since that recent increase in postal costs, the P.O. has lost an even higher number of millions of pounds. And, even more remarkable, we are told that telephone coin-boxes, which always seem to have a queue waiting whenever I want to use one, are run at a substantial loss.

One can only wonder whether these giant state industries are not paying too much to too many for too little. This further great increase in postal charges, which seems certain, is a very real threat to subscription magazines. And I should think it will kill off the Christmas card trade stone dead, though one can't look ahead in these troubled times.

This month, with hope in our hearts as usual, we are sending you the order form for the 1975 C.D. Annual, due out in mid-December. We hope that the support of the Annual will not be too badly hit, but one cannot bank on it. If you want an Annual, send your order-form along in good time. It will be impossible to print many copies this year beyond those ordered in advance. And if you wish to advertise in the Annual or send your greetings to anyone, please do. It will help to keep the wheels turning.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

ORDER YOUR C.D. ANNUAL NOW

DANNY'S DIARY

SEPTEMBER 1925

Rookwood opened with a great tale in the Boys' Friend. This was "The Secret of the Silver Cloud". Mornington is very suspicious of Ulick Lee, the new passenger on the yacht, who is anxious to bag Lovell's cabin. Lee is the nephew of Griffin Lee, the previous owner of the Silver Cloud, but the diamonds he stole have never been found. Even though there is a reward of £1,000 for anyone who finds them and returns them to their rightful owner.

Then, the next month, the series continued with "The Haunted Yacht", in which strange things were happening on board the Silver Cloud. After this we had the final story in the Silver Cloud series. This was "A Rascal Trapped" which which Lee tried to dispose of Mornington overboard, but finally got trapped and arrested himself. This was one of the most exciting tales I have ever read. The end of a lovely series.

In the last tale of the month, Rookwood was back for the new term. A search of the Silver Cloud had produced the diamonds, and Captain Muffin has claimed the reward. He sends Tubby Muffin a gold watch, and sends his kindest regards to the Fistical Four. Watches are made to go, but Tubby is alarmed when his "goes" in "The Watch That Vanished". And everybody suspects that Putty Grace is playing a bad joke with the watch - but he's innocent this time. But Cuthbert Gower is in a scrape, and urgently needs money.

There's a good variety bill of adventure in the Boys' Friend, as well as Rookwood, for anyone who likes adventure. There is Eric Townsend's pirate story "Skeleton's Treasure"; detective tales by Francis Warwick about the Hon. John Scarlett and his boy assistant, Jimmy West; a lost city features in "The City of Ghosts", a serial by Sidney Drew; a football series by Arthur S. Hardy; and a new serial about the Bombay Castle by Duncan Storm.

Edwy Searles Brooks is at his very best in the holiday series now running in the Nelson Lee. Paradise Island, with its fortune in pearls,

has been taken over by Jonathan Prescott who has so far triumphed over the St. Frank's party. But "The Demon of the Reef" shows him getting just what he deserves at last. The last tale of the series is "The Terror of the Pacific" in which the chums have a seaweed nightmare on their journey home from the South Seas.

Back at St. Frank's the chums find many changes. Two new Houses have been added, and into the picture comes Eustace Carey, a thief, an Oxford undergrad wanted by the police - and he is Fullwood's cousin. Fullwood's reformation makes interesting reading.

Finally "The Rival House Captain" which is novel to say the least. There is a ghost, there is a Mr. Barnaby Goole who is a faddist house-master and a crank over food - and Eustace Carey kidnaps Clavering, a new senior due for St. Frank's. And while Clavering is kept prisoner in a dungeon, Carey sets off for St. Frank's in his name.

Two excellent new Schoolboys' Own Libraries this month. One, "The Duffer of Greyfriars", tells of Alonzo Todd's arrival at the school - a lovely museum piece - and "Expelled" which tells of Mornington's plot against Jimmy Silver.

Very good pictures at our local cinemas this month. Colleen Moore and Wallace Berry in "So Big", a lovely little picture; Rin Tin Tin in "The Lighthouse by the Sea"; Monte Blue and Lew Cody in "In a Monastery Garden"; Norma Shearer in "Excuse Me"; Glen Hunter and Viola Dana in "Merton of the Movies"; Gloria Swanson in "Manhandled"; Ronald Colman and Aileen Pringle in "Thief in Paradise"; Agnes Ayres and Antonio Moreno in "Without Warning"; and Buster Keaton in "The Navigator".

They had novelty pictures on at one of our cinemas. These consisted of some short films in what they call 3-dimension. They gave us green and red spectacles to wear to watch these films, and it seemed as though things came right out into the audience.

It has not been a very good month in the Magnet. However, the opening tale of the month was a winner. It was called "Bunter Caught" and told of Bunter's adventures after he ran away from Combermere Lodge which he had re-named Bunter Court. The end of a grand series.

Then "Rival Oarsmen" in which Major Thresher and his charming daughter presented a challenge cup to be rowed for by eights from

Greyfriars and Highcliffe juniors. After this, another sporting tale, and a very silly one, "Schoolboys versus Pros" in which the Courtfield School boys have a great ambition to play a League club. They meet Tyneside Rovers and beat them - but the Tyneside Rovers team is really Wibley and Co. disguised.

Finally, another slapstick affair. "Fish's Hair-Raising Stunt" in which Fish comes by a formula for a preparation to grow hair. But it is really a formula for a corn core. Awful tale, really. There is an excellent new Portrait Gallery in the Magnet by Mr. Chapman.

The price of bread has gone down from 5d. to 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. a loaf. And a farthing's a farthing, isn't it!

The Gem started off with the two final stories of the series about the summer holiday in the motor-caravan. They were "The Stranded Caravanners" and "The Boy With a Secret". A bit too much plot in it, maybe, and at the end "Nippy from Nowhere" turned out to be Donald Brockways who was running away from his uncle, Colonel Brockways. It didn't appeal to me much. The last tale had a striking picture by Mr. Macdonald showing Nippy on the top of a chimney-stack from which the ladder had broken away.

The next two tales brought back the original writer to the Gem after rather a long absence. They were "Baggy Trimble's Chum" and "Too Much Trimble". Baggy, hiding under the seat of a railway compartment, rescues a new boy, Sidney Troope, from an attack, when a ruffian springs on the boy. And on the strength of that, Baggy claims eternal friendship with Troope. Eventually, Troope manages to shake off Baggy, but there is still a mystery about the new boy. A new series which promises well.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S. O. L. No. 11, "The Duffer of Greyfriars". Comprised two single Magnet tales of the summer of 1910. No. 12, "Expelled", was five Rookwood tales from the late autumn of 1916 in the Boys' Friend. Mornington and Beaumont, the prefect, plotted against Jimmy Silver. Beaumont was expelled as a result of this, but Mornington redeemed himself by rescuing the Head's little daughter in a fire, and was forgiven.)

* * * * *
WANTED URGENTLY: Collectors' Digest Annuals, 1948 and 1949. Collectors' Digest monthly, numbers 1-22, plus 24-27 and 29-30. Good prices paid.

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Another milestone in the Sexton Blake Saga has been reached - the 60th anniversary of the launching of the Sexton Blake Library. So, here in Blakiana we celebrate it by publishing the following articles specially written for the occasion which I hope will meet with your approval. I will not say any more about them, they speak for themselves.

SIXTY GLORIOUS YEARS

by Josie Packman

Yes, sixty Glorious Years where has that title been used before? About one of the most illustrious Queen's we have ever had - Queen Victoria - who gave her name to a period of that length in which this country reached its greatest heights, the mightiest and widest Empire ever known. Out of that great period emerged our most loved detective, Sexton Blake, the greatest detective ever known. So well known and loved that even the Union Jack weekly paper and various other publications were not enough to chronicle all his adventures. So, at a critical time for our Country and Empire, a new book was launched, in September 1915. The Sexton Blake Library. During the worst war known to man this book appeared, in spite of the threatening paper shortage, lack of authors and men to print it - many of them giving their lives for us in the battles raging in France and elsewhere. What a chance the Editor of the time took, to publish a new book at such a time. But it was well justified - an immediate success. Although no new stories of Sexton Blake are being written, the buying and selling of our favourite books by collectors all round the world still goes on and quite justifies, in my opinion, the title of this article.

No. 1 of the Library was, as you all know, called The Yellow Tiger, one of Mr. Teed's Timeless Tales which can still be read today and thoroughly enjoyed. This story was certainly very prophetic with its plot to kidnap the Minister of War. I think the present day kidnapers must have read their Sexton Blake because this tale had all that was necessary for them to copy, even to the extent of using aircraft

and bombs, etc. But there is no need for me to relate any more about No. 1 it has already been very ably done elsewhere.

Never were so many words written about one man, his able assistant Tinker and his dog Pedro. There cannot be any other character in fact or fiction, to have achieved this popularity. As I have said, the Sexton Blake Library was an instant success; owing to paper shortage the Editor kept on reminding readers to order their copies regularly otherwise they were likely to be disappointed to find none in the paper shops for them. At first one story only a month was published, eventually being increased to two a month as the paper situation eased no doubt, also some of our best authors who survived the war returned to the fold and began writing again, so soon, in 1919, four stories were issued each month. By last 1921, because of the demand for more and more Sexton Blake tales, the Amalgamated Press started to issue 5 copies a month. These ran from No. 184 to No. 262 of the first series, but eventually in December 1922, they reverted to four issues and this number continued until 1940 when another devastating war saw the end of many of our favourite books and papers. Happily the Sexton Blake Library survived to live on until 1968.

With the coming of the last war the issues were reduced to two a month until 1963. The last run of all were the larger Penguin type books which appeared once a month. These last tales were more like the old pre-war type of story. The plots were good and well written, so that except for Sexton Blake having his offices in Berekely Square, one could imagine they were back in the good old days in Baker Street.

Although new Sexton Blake stories ceased to be issued never has the demand for them been so great and I for one hope, although I shall never see it, that another Sixty Glorious years will be celebrated, maybe on the Moon, in the far distant future of the Space Age now upon us.

SIXTY GLORIOUS YEARS

W. O. G. Lofts

I've never made any secret of the fact that my first great love in the Hobby is the Sexton Blake Library, and I've often related how I found a copy in a derelict hut in the Burmese jungle, during the War.

Reading this (one of Anthony Parsons' fine yarns of detective work in India) fired my enthusiasm for Blake, and was directly responsible

for me becoming interested in Old Boys' Books in general. In fact, I can honestly say I'm proud of the fact that this year I'll have clocked up a quarter of a century's worth of collecting and research in the Hobby.

During these 25 years I've made numerous discoveries in the field, spent thousands of hours on research on various aspects of the Hobby, and met and become friends with many of the writers, artists and editors who excited our imaginations in those golden days before the War. Probably my favourite Blake author is W. W. Sayer, who, as Pierre Quiroule, wrote all those stirring yarns about Granite Grant of the Secret Service - and pride of place in my own collection must go to a copy of one of the best Grant SBL's of all, "Riders of the Sands", which 'Pierre Quiroule' kindly autographed for me. We still meet for the odd spot of lunch at the Victory Club near Marble Arch.

However, back to the Sexton Blake Library itself, for it was 60 years ago this month that this famous publication first saw the light of day: the brilliant idea of a controlling editor at the Amalgamated Press, W. H. Back.

Back's links with Sexton Blake go back much further than the year 1915, of course, since it was he who had decided, in 1904, to reintroduce the detective into the Union Jack as a weekly feature - and I think it's fair to say that the fact that Blake soon became a household name is directly due to Back's energy and foresight.

It must have seemed good sense, in any case, to the AP to put out a monthly Library of Blake's adventures when the weekly paper was doing so well. However, as a try-out, they published the small-size Nelson Lee Library, to see how the market reacted. Clearly, the market reacted well - so well, indeed, that it was decided to issue the Sexton Blake Library in the same format as the very successful Boys' Friend Library.

And so, on 20th September, 1915, the first issues appeared: 120 pages for 3d., with an Arthur Jones cover, depicting a sinister-looking Chinnee, in sombre colours. The story, "The Yellow Tiger", was anonymous, but was of course by G. H. Teed, generally considered by collectors to have been the best Blake writer of all times. The original print-order for this first issue was for 100,000 copies - yet, 60 years later, only about a dozen are known to be in collectors' hands.

The first editor of the Library (under Back's controlling hand) was W. B. Home-Gall, brother of the more famous E. R. Home-Gall. Unfortunately, WB (who, as far as I know, is still alive) can remember very little about those far-off days. His successor, in 1921, was Len Pratt, who was at the helm for 34 years, guiding it through those vintage decades of the 1920's and '30's. 'Pratty', as he was affectionately known at Fleetway House, retired in 1955, and David Roberts acted as a stop-gap before W. Howard Baker took over and introduced the New Look in 1956.

Bill Baker was its last editor, guiding the then ailing Library through some very difficult times indeed, yet having the courage to keep it going, after Fleetway dropped it in 1963, in a series of paperbacks published by Mayflower Books until 1968, and then even publishing a few hardback Blakes himself.

Most prolific writer for the SBL was undoubtedly W. Murray Graydon with a score of 113 books to his credit. Next came Gilbert Chester (105), Anthony Parsons (99), and then G. H. Teed and W. J. Bayfield. Anthony Parsons actually wrote a 100th story, but by then (1956) the New Look had been introduced, and his style wasn't considered modern enough. Though not so prolific, Pierre Quiroule and Rex Hardinge were very popular with readers.

Popularity, of course, is somewhat difficult to assess (some liking one author, others liking another), but probably the most consistently popular writers of all were Teed, Chester, Gwyn Evans, Anthony Skene and Anthony Parsons. Of the New Look authors, Peter Saxon (who was, of course, W. Howard Baker), Arthur Maclean and Jack Trevour Story were high on the list. And of course we mustn't forget Eric Parker, the brilliant artist who was for so long associated with the SBL.

Over a period of 60 years, it is a little difficult to gauge accurately sales figures of such a magazine, but something like 100 million copies of the SBL were sold between 1915 and 1968, with a potential readership of three times that figure. A stunning record! Years ago, I knew a man (outside the Hobby) who had a complete set of all three series. It would be interesting to know if such a set exists today.

Something like 100 writers contributed to the saga of Sexton Blake

in the SBL, and there's a multitude of curious and fascinating stories about each and all of them. By a strange coincidence, Christopher Lowder, the writer of one of the last Mayflower Blakes ("The Abductors", published under the Desmond Reid byline) was to occupy the very same office that originally housed the SBL in 1915, when he worked for Fleetway/IPC.

60 glorious years! Yet only a year or so after it was launched, the SBL was in danger of extinction, due to the acute paper shortage engendered by the War. What a good job it survived, for apart from the pleasure it has given to so many, it proved to be one of the AP's biggest money-spinners.

So here's a toast to the SBL, and all who contributed to its pages; authors, artists and editors - and last, but not least, the loyal readers who supported it through the years. May its memory never die.

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

"LET THE REST OF THE WORLD GO BY"

by William Lister

Do you like to know the cast of your current programme before the showing or after the showing? I think myself it depends on circumstances. There are times when seeing a character flit across the screen that I think I recognize, I hope to see the cast shown at the close. However, the other night they screened a picture starring William Conrad and his brother. Now William Conrad is "Cannon" the little fat detective I like so much, but I didn't know his brother. I wanted to see this brother, but I didn't want to stop up till 12.30 p.m. I would have to trust that the cast was screened first. I could then see who the brother was in the first 15 minutes and be in bed by 11.15 p.m. I was lucky!

In this case I don't know whether my readers prefer the cast first or last. I'm going to give it first. You can't please everybody!

"The Boy Who Vanished", Monster Library, No. 15, produced by the "Nelson Lee" people, scenery by artist J. H. Valda, story by Edwy Searles Brooks,

By bringing the cast on first I hope to ~~wat~~ whet your appetite for more.

After all, many folk settle for a show because of the cast. So settle down while I draw the curtain aside!

"The Boy Who Vanished" is played by a Lancashire lad, name of Dick Goodwin. (Dick is a knowledgeable chappie when it comes to machinery. He's working on a machine that will put his dad's Mill production way ahead of competition.) Detective work provided by Nelson Lee and Nipper. School-caretaker played by Mr. Josh Cuttle. Schoolboy villains played by Ralph Leslie Fulwood & Co. The Proper Villains - guaranteed to make your flesh creep; played by Mr. Naggs and Mr. Colmore. Comedy relief provided by Handforth, Church and McClure.

With a full cast of teachers, Removites and Seniors.

Locations - St. Frank's School, Bannington Village, Bramley Gap - a place of rugged cliffs against which the waves of the English Channel beat. Scenes include a ruined building, a broken-down light-house, destroyed by a storm ten years previous.

Nature supplies roaring waves, a moon peeing through misty skies, raging winds and cold weather - bitter cold weather.

Now, with a cast like that, location scenery, complete with suitable weather for the occasion and villains of the calibre of Mr. Walter Naggs and Mr. Colmore (boy! how those villains make my flesh creep) you know its bound to be good.

Now for a couple of "trailers" - you know what those are, of course, just a few shots to make you want more.

We have Dick Goodwin tied to hooks, shackled to the Wharf-wall, the roaring tide lapping his ankles and still rising (and you know who is to blame). There is the moment the St. Frank's boys discover a secret panel. The big fight when Edward Oswald Handforth batters the living daylight out of those villains, a few moments before the curtain falls.

By the way, all this for the entrance fee of one shilling. The type of shilling that you got twelve pennies for not the miserable thing I've got in my pocket at the moment which I can't buy a 5½p stamp with.

Anyway, that's it, "The Boy Who Vanished" by Edwy Searles Brooks. If it comes your way, take an easy chair and a spare hour or so and let the rest of the world go by.

EVOLUTION

by R. J. Godsave

Just as the motor car has had to evolve from the horse carriages of the late 19th and early 20th centuries so the same can be said of characters of a weekly paper which was destined to run for a number of years.

The first introduction of the St. Frank's scholars appeared in o.s. No. 112 of the Nelson Lee Library, "Nipper at St. Frank's" and it is interesting to see how Brooks portrayed certain characters in that issue and the same in later Lees.

Naturally, the introduction of so many characters at once had to be made in bulk, which could hardly be otherwise than colourless as a background had yet to be created.

Once Brooks had his characters to his liking it was easy to introduce new ones which were far from colourless, such as Reggie Pitt and Archie Glenthorpe.

It comes a bit of a shock to read in the first St. Frank's Lees that prior to the coming of Nipper, Fullwood & Co. rode roughshod over such stalwarts - as they were to become in the future - as Tregellis West, Watson and Handforth. It appears that no effort had been made to reverse this state of affairs by the boys themselves.

Whether Brooks deliberately gave the impression that these juniors were leaderless in order that Nipper should stand out as the leader of the more decent fellows is open to question.

Brooks did not seem to be able to forget that Nipper was the assistant to the celebrated detective Nelson Lee and found it difficult to portray him as an ordinary schoolboy in his role of Dick Bennett. When he first made his appearance at St. Frank's Nipper gave the impression that he was something of a "know-all" which fortunately, was corrected by Brooks with Nipper presented as a pleasant character.

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FOR EXCHANGE: Thomson's, Inc. Skipper 1 to 6; Ranger, Pilots, Bullseyes, incl. Nos. 1; Boys' Mags., Journals, Lee's, Sols, B/F Libs., U/Jacks, Dandy Monster Comics, Beano Books, early Sunbeams, etc., etc.,

WANTED: Dandy, Beano and Magic Comics from 1937 to 1940. Will buy or give good exchange.

GEORGE HARDAKER, 14 ACREGATE, LITTLE DIGMOOR

SKELMERSDALE, LANCS.

The wisdom of introducing Baggy Trimble into the Gem is one of those points that collectors love to debate. In 1951 I wrote a long letter to Charles Hamilton on this very point, and it seems clear that he himself had serious misgivings. He wrote in reply: "About Baggy, I had an absolutely free hand, of course: but characters were sometimes suggested by the editor." The more I examine this sentence, the more I am struck by its careful wording. Was Trimble suggested by the editor or not? No help on this point was given in a later reference to Trimble, though new information was provided: "Baggy owed his existence to the fact that Bunter was such a draw in the other paper; but though he was the work of my own hands, I never liked him much: the real truth being that an author should never imitate even himself. He had to be differentiated from Billy Bunter, and all the difference somehow seemed to turn out badly for him."

Bagley Trimble arrived at St. Jim's in Gem 414, published in January 1916. He wrote to D'Arcy reminding him of their old friendship, and asking to be placed in Study No. 6. Lowther met him at the station and painted such a glowing picture of the delights of the New House that Trimble decided to ask Mr. Ratcliff if he could board in his house, and the housemaster, unexpectedly flattered, was inclined to agree. The plot was running true to type, but the characterisation of Trimble was proving a problem, as the letter referred to above makes quite clear.

Of course in 1916 Bunter was far from being an attractive character: he certainly did not engage the sympathies of the reader as he was able to in the Whiffles series and later. Nevertheless, even at his worst Bunter was hardly as bad as Trimble in this Gem story: he spent his ticket money on food and, having borrowed nine shillings from Lowther for a first-class fare, proceeded to pay the ticket collector five shillings for a third-class fare. D'Arcy described him as "wathah fat, and dwesses wathah loudly, and has a little wed nose like a wed billiard-ball." Mrs. Taggles saw a podgey face and shifty eyes, and Charles Hamilton himself continually referred to Trimble's piggy eyes. There is no doubt that he was intended to be considerably lower in the scale

than Billy Bunter.

As time went by, Trimble mellowed a little. He was used to good effect in a number of single stories in the early 'twenties where his outrageous plans usually misfired after promising beginnings, but he never really achieved the fame of Bunter, and the readers never really liked him. It is possible to argue that he added very little to the Gem, and as with Grundy, (the St. Jim's version of Coker), the stories would have been better off without him. The debate continues!

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 203. THE SPIRIT OF 1910

In the late teens and twenties a good guide to a sub story in the Magnet was that Mr. Quelch's christian name was given as Horace. Yet it was the genuine Frank Richards who originally landed Quelch with a Horace to lead him. When Miss Primrose went courting, she whispered "Horace". And there were many references to Mr. Horace Quelch in the few years preceding the First World War.

Of course, Hamilton never bothered unduly about names and statistics. It was sub writers with their Who's Who's who tried to pin things down with their lists of christian names to which they added the crowning absurdity of heights, weights, and exact ages. We know, of course, that to some starry-eyed readers, who really liked to live in a world of make-believe, those elastic statistics really meant something, incredible though it *is*.

Just when Hamilton dropped Horace and adopted Henry I cannot say for certain, but it was probably some time during the white cover era.

Of course, when the Cliff House girls were housed and taught at Greyfriars for a time in 1909, Clara Trevlyn persisted in addressing the master as Mr. Squelch. When reprovved and corrected, she insisted that she had seen that named on the notice-board.

"That was S. Quelch," said the gentleman, more or less patiently. "'S' is my initial."

That, of course, may have been the origin of H. S. Quelch. One of the Who's Who gents tried to get over the difficulty by listing

Horace Henry Samuel Quelch.

But he was really Henry all right, was Quelch, as Bob Cherry could tell you. Tom Dutton was Willy Dutton in early days, which was another poser for the Who's Who fanatics.

In passing, one wonders why, when he constructed Cliff House for the School Friend of 1919, Hamilton dropped all but two of his early girl characters at that school, only retaining Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn, to whom he added the indifferent cook, Dolly Jobling to form a secondary Co. It was remarkable - and unexplained - when you come to think of it. He even dropped Miss Locke, the Head's sister, who was a teacher at Cliff House in the earlier Magnets.

Sub-writers often did not keep abreast of these whimsical and inexplicable little changes, and the sub who wrote the Wingate's Love Affair series of 1920, put Miss Locke as the mistress in charge of the Cliff House contingent at the weird and wonderful cinema school of that series.

Much of the charm of reading a Red Magnet or a Blue Gem consists of the little items which carry us back with a vengeance to another world. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on his first visit to Greyfriars in 1910, did some detective work as he sought the missing Bulstrode. Gussy comments on "Rosey-Posey cigarettes", sold at 1½d. for 20. (In one of P. G. Wodehouse's school tales, published at about that time, the author mentions "Girl of My Heart" cigarettes, sold at twopence-halfpenny the packet of 20, including a coloured picture of Lord Kitchener.) It's stunning for anyone who smokes cigarettes today (I don't!) and who really has no idea of what the proper cost is, but passes over a pound note in the hope that, with his 20 fags, he may get a few odd coins in addition in change.

Between the wars, the most popular brands of cigarettes were 20 for 11d. or 6d. for 10. And, when I was very tiny, I believe that Woodbines cost one penny for an open-topped paper packet of five, or twopence for 10 in the normal cardboard packet. Or am I merely having pipe-dreams?

Another fascinating little item in the Magnet of 1910 was the village flower show, in which the Famous Five entered a "Gloire de Dijon" rose. Among the Super Stars, Elizabeth of Glamis, Violet

Carson, Mr. Chips, and other modern roses we have blooming in our own garden, the "Gloire de Dijon" rose which our young friends exhibited in 1910. So not quite all the good things have passed on.

The Red Magnet is more dated than the Blue Gem, partly due to the fact that the Gem stories were mainly set at the school, while so many of the Magnets were played out away from Greyfriars. And partly, perhaps, owing to Greyfriars' large quota of freakish characters like Wun Lung, with his unlikely coolie pidgin English and his pigtail (Alonzo Todd once cut it off, under the influence of Bulstrode); Fishy, the old-fashioned personification of the American; Kipps, the conjuror; Dutton, the deaf; and a few others who often played the lead in those far-off days.

Charles Hamilton, for some reason, gave Bulstrode the chop somewhere about the middle twenties, and few, if any, missed him.

* * * * *

REVIEW

THE SIT-IN STRIKE AT GREYFRIARS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £3.90)

This volume comprises eight consecutive titles from the Magnet of early in the year 1937. Main item on the bill is the 6-story barring-out series in which Mr. Hacker discovered, painfully, that he did not really possess the qualities necessary for the successful headmaster. The opening story "Billy Bunter's House-Warming" is superb, but whether the series maintains the high standard of the opening story is a question which only a reader can decide as he reads on.

Barrings-out were always a sure-fire attraction for boys, and the Magnet's "Judge Jeffries" series of 1917, and the Brander rebellion of 1930, contained much real drama along with the excitement of the barrings-out. Mr. Prout, in 1934, had failed as a headmaster, and in the natural course of events it was inevitable that the author should give "The Acid Drop" a taste of the authority which produces Man, Valn Man. Restraint is necessary on the part of the author if he is to write a really gripping story of this type, and one criticism of this Hacker series is that there was too much slapstick so that it developed into roaring farce. But it has many good sequences, and should make

plenty of readers happy, as it did forty years ago.

Incongruously, the title of one of the stories has been changed from "The Stay-In Strike at Greyfriars" to "The Sit-In Strike at Greyfriars", the overall title of the volume. Still more incongruously, though the cover title of that Magnet is changed, the inside title remains as it was. Probably the publishers are cashing in on modern times by changing a Stay-In to a Sit-In, but it seems a bit absurd to update the Magnet. For most of us the charm is that the Magnet takes us away from Decimalisation, Inflation - and Sit-Ins.

Two single stories complete the volume. "Coker the Kidnapper" tells of the measures adopted by the Fool of the Fifth to obtain a place in the First Eleven. Finally, "The Man With the Glaring Eyes" was a phrase much used in the newspapers in early 1937 concerning an elusive real-life criminal. Frank Richards cashed in on the phrase for this little psychological thriller which holds the interest throughout.

A well-balanced volume which will please the fans.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

BEN WHITER (London): The film "Ben Hur", when first shown at the Tivoli in the Strand, had fine sound effects done by members of the staff. The clanking of the chains that the slave rowers wore on the trireme, and the beating of the drum to time the unfortunate rowers was very good. My seat at the Tivoli cost 1s. 3d. Then a poached egg on toast and a cup of tea at the ABC for about a shilling. Those were the days. "Trader Horn" I saw at the Empire, Leicester Square - a magnificent film, the first safari animal film. "General Crack", too, a fine film, but, like yourself, my memory dims re this one.

Mrs. S. DUMBLE (New Zealand): I very much enjoy reading Collectors' Digest. Alas, I was born too late (1940) to remember the days and papers that most of your contributors remember. However, I have an imagination and a half, and a great love of the history of the past, particularly the first 40 years of this century. I am very sad for my children - as they say "Why was it more fun in your and Grandma's day, Mummy?"

JAMES W. COOK (New Zealand): I wish to make a succinct comment on the article in the Nelson Lee Column (August) headed "Lord Dorrimore and the Decline of Religion". Whataloadofoldrubbish!

JOHN GOCHER (Sudbury): Did you know that W. Murdoch Duncan died on the 19th April, at the age of 65. He wrote nearly 150 books (of which I have everyone to date) under his own name, John Cassells, Peter Malloch, Niell Graham, Lovat Marshall and John Daillas. His books were published in many lands, especially in paper back form. I knew Bill very well - I first got in touch with him in 1944 when he had been invalided out of the army and was teaching at a boarding school. He was a fine chap who never had to resort to doubtful subject matter to sell his books.

Miss MARGO RUDD: I greatly enjoy the Magner, and hope, one day, to pass on my love of it to my children, along with my affection for all the old papers. What a rich inheritance!

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Deal): In the latest C. D. you write of a film called "Titanic" being shown on TV recently, and of a later film on the same subject, "A Night to Remember". I do not know of any film actually called "Titanic". The only earlier film on this subject of which I am aware was called "Atlantic" and was made in 1930, directed by the German, E. A. Dupont, with Franklyn Dyall, Donald Calthrop, Helen Haye, Ellaline Terriss, D. A. Clarke-Smith, Monty Banks, Francis Lister, Sydney Lynn, John Longden, John Stuart and Joan Barry in the cast. Is this the film you had in mind?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "Titanic" was a Twentieth-Century Fox film, starring Barbara Stanwyck and Clifton Webb. It was released in this country in the early fifties.)

HOWARD SHARPE (Melbourne): The maintenance of such a high standard with C. D., for so long, ensures our ever-continuing enjoyment from it. I'm mighty pleased at your reference to Roger Jenkins' article in the next C. D. Annual. Hurry up, Christmas!

* * * * *
FOR SALE: Magnets, Gems, Holiday Annuals, Books, etc. Send s.a.e. for list.

SHREEVE, 25 WILLOW DRIVE, RAYLEIGH, ESSEX.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 18. ALMOST EMMA - AS WE GO TALKIE

When a term opened, I usually had all my bookings completed for the next three months, with just a date or two left open in case I happened to come across something for which I particularly wanted a date.

This term, however, things were different. When term started I had just two programmes booked. The first consisted entirely of short subjects, and for the second week there was a Warner Bros. release, John Barrymore in "General Crack", destined to be our last silent feature.

It looked as though we would have to close down our cinema, or install sound for talkies. And sound equipment, at that time, was very expensive. What grieved me was that it seemed as though the goodwill I had built up with so many renters was to be thrown away.

I inserted an advertisement in the Kine Weekly. I forget the exact wording of that ad, but it ran something like this: "Sound equipment wanted for the smallest cinema in the world. Easy terms of payment essential."

Maybe I didn't expect any reply, but, if so, the unexpected happened. A firm contacted me, and two of their directors came to see me by appointment. Very charming and helpful men they were. They inspected our operating box, and took a great interest in everything. After all, our cinema was unique in those days, and the two visitors were as enthusiastic as I was.

The next day they contacted me again, and suggested that they should install Mihaly

portable projection. I gathered that it was the sort of equipment which was taken around to halls in small towns and villages, where a travelling show provided entertainment on one or two days a week. It seemed a reasonable idea. I forget the cost, though it was high, but they arranged the "very easy terms" which was a condition of the deal. So all promised well.

On the Thursday a couple of engineers were busy, dismantling and taking away the old silent projection equipment, and wiring the small theatre for sound, fitting up and hiding the loud speakers, and so on. Then the projection equipment arrived. It may have been portable, but it looked pretty hefty to me. It all looked a truly splendid job.

In theory, one threaded up the film, started the machine, and then fitted a cover over the entire side of the machine, so the whole thing was completely boxed in as the two thousand feet of film ran through. It looked efficient, but I wasn't too happy about it. It was supposed to be the last word in safety precautions against film fire, but I was not too keen over the boxing-in of everything.

For our opening talking film I had booked, from M. G. M., that superb and glorious battleaxe of an actress, Marie Dressler, in what has always been considered her best film, "Emma".

"Emma" was to be shown twice on the Friday - in the afternoon and again in the evening. The sound firm sent their own engineers to run the programmes for

that opening day. All I had to do was to watch and learn, in the operating box.

For that programme, I recall, we had the silent news reel (I had not yet changed my contract on that), and a two-reel silent educational subject. These ran through perfectly. To show a silent film, one did not pass it over the sound head, and the only difference was that it would be screened a lot faster than on a silent projector.

Then came "Emma". And then the trouble began. The film was started, and the machine boxed in. The M. G. M. lion roared out over the speakers, and the introductory music filled the little theatre. It was a marvellous moment.

Then for no obvious reason, for it was a beautiful new copy of the picture, the film snapped. The engineers rushed to get the side off the machine, during which time the film went on unwinding and snatching at the various revolving sprockets. With a word of apology, they got it started up again. It ran for a few minutes, and then snapped again, and the same palaver as before happened.

I began to get uneasy. I was worried about the damage which was being done to "Emma". During the next fifteen minutes or so, the film snapped another half dozen times or so. Then I called it a day.

I went out and told the audience that, owing to technical trouble, the show would have to be abandoned. Then I told the men that they could take their equipment away - that I was terrified of it - that they might have landed me with a bill for film damage - and that I wouldn't keep it as a gift.

They phoned their head office to report what had happened. As for me, I was busy repairing that first big reel (it was actually Reels One and Two joined together) of "Emma". Later on that day, "Emma" went off by rail - the only time I ever had a film and returned it almost entirely unscreened.

What actually caused the trouble I do not know, but there was clearly some misalignment of the sound head sprockets. But I made it clear that under no circumstances would I keep those "portables" - and they could return and re-install the old silent machines just as soon as they liked.

That evening the directors came again. They were genuinely distressed by what had happened - and I piled it on about the damage done to "Emma". Then they told me what they were going to do. They would have the portables removed at once, and next week they would do the only thing they felt they could do to make up for the fiasco. They proposed to fit us up with full-sized professional Kalee Sevens, with Western Electric Sound. And the terms would be exactly the same. I think they were a pretty wonderful firm.

They were as good as their word. The Kalee Sevens looked marvellous, and ran like a dream.

So, exactly a week later than planned, we went talkie, and the engineers screened the first show. Our first talking picture was Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper in "The Champ". And it was great. The supporting programme was "The Modern Apple" (all talking educational subject) and the Universal Sound News.

The following week we had Marie

Dressler in "Emma", back again, and this time she endeared herself to us all without any mishap. And in the supporting programme there was The Boy Friends in the all-talking "Call a Cop", Mickey Mouse in "The Jazz Fool", and the Pathetone Sound Weekly.

Before installing the new equipment, the firm asked me whether our electric supply was AC or DC. I didn't know, but I enquired and found out from the electricity company that we were on DC, but that a change to AC would take place in about six months time. As a result of this, our firm installed AC equipment, and arranged to loan us a converter, free of any charge, in readiness for when the current would be

changed. The converter was placed, on an enormously thick mat (to deaden the noise) behind a screen in my study. Some nine months later, the firm indicated, reasonably enough, that they felt the converter should now either be returned to them or purchased. I approached the electricity company (it was long before nationalisation, and, in those days, one could see people in authority and put one's case).

The electricity company bought the converter, and let us use it free on loan till the change occurred some months later.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES SOON)

* * * * *

SELLING COMIC NEWS: Aldine Half-Holiday, Snapshots, Scraps, Funny Folks, Young Folks' Tales, Horner's Pocket Library, Harper's Young People (USA), Comrades, (1880 to 1900's), Girls' Own Stories, Girls' Cinema, Peg's Paper, Peg's Companion, Pam's Paper (1920's), Picture Show (1920's), Girls Own Paper (1930's), Boys' Cinema, Scout, Chums (1900's to 1920's), Collectors Digest (1960's), Hobbles Weeklies (1930's), Merriwell and Carter paperbacks (USA, 1920's), Boys Friend, Boys Realm, Boys Herald (1900's), Youth's Instructor And Guardian (1830's, 1840's), Knockout, Tip Top, Radio Fun, Jingles, Thompsons (1940's, 1950's), Little Paper (1910-1914), Fantastic Adventures (1940's, 1950's), Modern Mechanix (1930's, USA), English Machanic (1900). Plus thousands of newspapers and magazines from 1640's to 1940's, including a real cross section of magazines and newspapers for WW1 to WW2 period, namely Answers, Pearsons, Tit Bits, Picture Post, Weekly Illustrated, Illustrated, Passing Show, Picturegoer, Picture Show, Film Weekly, Film Pictorial, Screen Pictorial, Play Pictorial, Theatre World, Strand, Flight, Aeroplane, Aircraft Spotter, Illustrated London News, Sphere, Pictorial Weekly, various women's mags, Daily Mirror, Sketch, Herald, Times, Observer, Telegraph, Dispatch, Express, Liverpool Echo, Lancashire Daily Post, Chronicle, Sunday Pictorial, News Of The World, Sunday Chronicle, People, Guernsey Star, Radio Times, Listener, Radio World, Railway Magazine, American railway timetable/brochures for 1901-1906, and many, many more items.

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

The final meeting of the term on 29 July, 'broke up' (but not in disorder) for dispersal to villa, court, towers, house and lodge, until the last Tuesday in September. The meeting included much amiable conversation upon various aspects of The Hobby and a diversion to the delights of Laurel and Hardy films. Ivan Webster gave a reading of a classical, wonderful confrontation between Hacker and Prout. Chairman Warwick Setford edged open the floodgates of his remarkable memory to recite the opening chapter ('Send Master Harry to me ...') from Magnet No. 1, which he knows by heart, cover to cover.

Meetings are held at Dr. Johnson House, opposite Debenham's, Birmingham, each month except August. Autumn session will begin on Tuesday, 30 September. Other meetings follow on 28 October, 25 November, 16 December.

* * *

LONDON

Two very excellent treatises were the highlights of the August meeting at Courtfield. The first one was given by Thomas Wright who has his own particular views on the three Hamilton Schools. Tom compared St. Sam's with the three and showed where almost similar incidents happened, the former satire and the latter serious to a point. There was a long discussion afterwards and all present expressed their views.

Bill Lofts then took over, started off with a coloured Chapman original which was passed around, together with Sarah Baddfield's two line drawings by the same artist. Bill's talk was on centenaries and anniversaries. Mentioning the diamond jubilee of St. Frank's, Rookwood and the Sexton Blake Library, he went on with the centenary of Edgar Wallace, who wrote in several old boys' books, Edgar Rice Burroughs of Tarzan fame, Arthur S. Hardy who wrote in about fifty papers, Arthur Mee of the Children's Newspaper and the 150th anniversary of

R. M. Ballantyne. Finally Bill expressed a warning of how the number one Magnet Facsimile is being sold as the genuine article.

Graham Bruon selected two chapters from Magnet 1151, "Billy Bunter's Come Back" and it was Roger Jenkins who won the questionnaire that was submitted after the reading.

Next meeting at 35 Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 3NU. Phone 534 1737. Host Reuben and Phyllis Godsave.
Votes of thanks to the five Acramans were accorded.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * *

NORTHERN

Saturday, 9 August, 1975

A delightful feature of our evening was a talk by Ron Hodgson on High Coombe - the school for slackers - regarded by Hamilton as his most polished creation.

Ron painted a picture of the rather picturesque school in Devonshire, a rambling old place with secret passges, its ancient walls overgrown with ivy.

At Greyfriars now and again it is hinted that the revered Dr. Locke is past his best and should go. At High Coombe, however, Dr. Chetwold (referred to by the masters as 'an old dodderer') goes in the first story!

The new headmaster is Jimmy McCann, a young man of quiet manner, yet about him a life and vigour quite alien to the 'school for slackers'. Before McCann arrived life had been so jolly under Ripvan-Winkle, and the Fifth would sing a rather jolly jingle, "A man doesn't come up to High Coombe to learn, he comes 'cause his pater has money to burn'.

The twenty stories of High Coombe are confined to this interim period - one wonders how the school would have evolved had Hamilton continued the saga!

After a break for Library and refreshments Mollie presented us with a quiz which she entitled 'The Net is Spread a Little Wider', and having given us the first part of a book title we had to finish it off and also give the author's name.

WANTED: ROVERS 726, 727, 740, 742, 758, 764, 795, 798, 800, 804, 805, 807, 810, 824,
825, 826, 827, 829, 831, 832, 846, 850, 853, 872, 916.
WIZARD 710, 711, 713, 714, 716, 717, 718, 721, 723, 724, 732, 733.

Some 1936/7 Wizards and Skippers offered in exchange.

PETE HANGER, 10 PARK SQUARE, KING'S HEATH, NORTHAMPTON.

* * * * *

SALE: Young England, 1909, 1910, £2.25 each. Captains, Vols. 24, 25, 26, 28, £2.25 each.
Five Pink Magnets, £3. Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1930 to 1940. Bunter Books, S. O. L's.
WANTED: Monsters, S. O. L's, Magnets.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

* * * * *

WANTED: Captain, vols. 39, 50; Chums, vols. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 23 (1915). In publishers
bindings for preference. Herbert Strang's Annual for 1911, 1912 and 1916. Any Newnes Dick
Turpin Library. Please quote price required.

J. W. DOUPE, 28 KING'S QUAY STREET, HARWICH.

* * * * *

NORTHERN REPORT continued

First came Myra Allison, second Ron Hodgson and third Bill
Williamson,

We were delighted to have with us Father Bruning, Vicar of Sporle,
Swaffham, Norfolk, a member of the London Club, together with his two
children, Tim and Miriam. The children's marks, incidentally,
compared very favourably with the rest of us!

* * * * *

REVIEW

BOB CHERRY'S BIG BARGAIN

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £3.90)

A much more intriguing overall title for this book would surely
have been "The Trail of the Trike" - but no matter.

The summer holiday in 1929 was divided into two magnificent
series, each with the additional charm of being restrained in length so
that neither ever remotely threatened to overstay its welcome.

The story of Methuselah, Bob Cherry's trike, and how the Famous
Five and Bunter used it to aid them in a hiking holiday around Bucks and

other nearby counties provides one of the most delightful summer holiday series ever. In the final tale, Bunter sold the trike to Gunner of Rookwood - and then tactfully disappeared for the remainder of the summer holiday. Tip-top nostalgic reading.

The second part of the book contains the second part of that 1929 holiday - the Ravenspur Grange series. This was, in my view, Frank Richards's greatest thriller series of all time, and I loved every minute of it. Ferrers Locke, with the Greyfriars chums, encounters mystery, thrills, and a fine atmosphere, and, for me at least, it has always been a precious month in the Magnet. Great stuff! The last Magnet series without Bunter - and welcome for it.

Two little golden series from bang in the heart of the Golden Age of the Magnet. Could anything be more tempting?

* * * * *

"SHERWOOD FOR EVER!"

by Norman Wright

After the ending of the "Robin Hood Library" in July 1920, it was thirty-five years before a regular, long running series of the outlaws adventures was published by the Amalgamated Press. Granted he appeared in such papers as "Cheer boys Cheer" and the "Popular", not to mention the eight or so full length stories that appeared in the "Boys Friend Library", but it was not until November 1955 that regular monthly adventures appeared. The paper was "Thriller Comics Library" a 64-page monthly that contained picture strip stories. The paper started in 1951, and in its infancy carried picture stories of famous books such as "Children of the New Forest", "Windsor Castle" and "Westward Ho". Later came stories of Buffalo Bill, Captain Kid and at irregular intervals Robin Hood. The cover of number 80, "Robin Hood Rides Again" shows the outlaw looking very much like Errol Flynn. This was possibly due to the fact that the Flynn film "Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938) was re-released at about this time, prior to its sale to television.

In October 1955, readers were told that there was such a demand for stories of Robin Hood, that only a story every month would satisfy them. Thus from issue 106 a fourth number was on sale every month dealing with the adventures of our hero.

The artwork was very good, though I do not know who the artists were. A wide variety of plots were used. Some of them were taken from pre war stories. The story titled "Robin Hood and the Castle of Fear" for example was a picturization of "With Bow and Blade for England" (D. H. Parry) that had been serialized in "Little Folks" in 1917. The vocabulary used in the Thriller Comics Library was extensive, far more varied than is found in present day comic libraries. Traditional characters were used including Little John, Marian and of course the Sheriff of Nottingham, who was given the title of Roger De Mowbray. From the issues that I have seen it would appear that none of the plots of the "Robin Hood Library", 1919 - 1920 were used.

By late 1956 readers were being urged to buy "Robin Hood Annual" for 1957, the first of four issued up to Christmas 1960. These annuals were well produced containing written stories of Robin and other Saxon heroes such as Hereward The Wake, as well as picture strip stories and other features. One of the best of these features was "In the days of Robin Hood" in which the customs of Medieval England were explained. The 1959 volume contained a story "The Traitor Prince". Film fans who read this will notice that it is the first part of the 1938 Flynn film. Much of the dialogue used by the characters in the story is word for word the same as in the film!

By 1960 the Thriller Comics Library had changed its name to "Thriller Picture Library". It now offered less historical adventures and more war stories. Just when Robin Hood ceased to be a regular, I am not sure, but by early 1963 he was not to be seen. Later that year he cropped up in a couple of issues of "Valiant Picture Library". Three years later "Buster Adventure Library" started and every month it contained a Robin Hood story reprinted from old "Thriller Comics Library". This library only lasted eighteen months and as far as I know Robin Hood seems to have departed for good from the A. P. picture libraries.

Part of the success of Robin Hood stories during the late fifties must be due I am sure to the long running T. V. series produced by Sapphire film Productions and starring Richard Greene in all 165 episodes. Two British feature films also made during this period were "Men of Sherwood Forest" with Don Taylor (1956) and "Son of Robin Hood", 1959.

A RETURN TO COMIC SWOPPING TERRITORY

by David Lazell

Times are so hard that it wouldn't surprise me if Lord Snooty had to live on a council estate ("What's that?" interrupts Grandma. "You have to be really wealthy to live on a council estate now!") Anyway, I popped back to the streets of my childhood not so long ago, to see how the place looked. Cars everywhere, of course - no room for the soap-box on wheels that I used for my comic-swopping expeditions, all those years ago. The newsagents on the corner was now part of a big combine. Bravely, I went within.

"Isn't this the shop that used to belong to Mr. Fusty?" I asked.

The chap behind the counter stopped counting his cigarette coupons, coughed as he inhaled some cigarette smoke, and then wheezed that Mr. Fusty had gone to live in Bournemouth, and was there any message.

"I used to come in here for my "Jingles" and "Tip Top", way back in 1940," I explained. "Three halfpence every other week, they were ..."

A youngster wearing a 'planet of the apes' mask came in, purchased a copy of "Dracula Comics" and went out again, without speaking a word (assuming that he could speak, of course - one isn't so sure with standards of education today). "And I can remember getting a free Popeye mask with 'Knockout'," I added, "complete with a bag of green popcorn that was supposed to be spinach."

"I stock some comics," the newsagent said, waving his hand towards a selection near the naughty nudie magazines and the horoscope journals. "But there's not a lot of money in them."

I was shocked.

"Money?" I retorted. "Mr. Fusty never thought about money. He used to read all the comics as soon as they came in, so that he could tell us the latest news about our comic characters, as soon as we kids came in. He knew more about comics ..."

"... than he knew about making money," added the newsagent drily. "He didn't have to pay the rates I do. I don't mind confessing that if it weren't for cigarettes and the naughty magazines, I'd hardly be able to stay in business. Our firm employs an accountant to cost every thing - and he never reads a comic."

(Note to freelance artists: How about submitting a comic strip, "Arthur,

the Agitated Accountant" to "Accountancy Age" and see what happens?)

I reflected for a moment and thought I would test his knowledge of the old-time comics.

"What about "Tilly of the Tuckshop"?" I enquired, referring to a childhood heroine. "She's opened a transport cafe on the Tilbury by-pass," sniffed the newsagent. "Thereby hangs a tale." I spoke to myself, as the newsagent started to tidy the display of pop star magazines, many of them in the 25p - 30p bracket. "And to think I considered three halfpence a lot of money," I sighed. "Ah, well," the newsagent smiled. "The kids have got to think of something, haven't they. And there's no harm in pop stars is there?"

As manager of a record store, I hesitated to reply. Some of the records I had heard that week had a distinctly mind-boggling effect.

I attempted one last question.

"Do the kids still swop comics around here?"

"They haven't got time for that. Most of them are making quids cleaning cars and running errands for people in the high rise flats. Why, I've even had kids buy comics, read them outside the shop, and then drop them straight into the litter bin. They've got no room for them at home, you see."

"You couldn't do that in the old days," I commented. "There were all those long stories you had to read ... all that small print ..."

A van stopped outside and a parcel of late afternoon editions of the local rag - abundant with spelling mistakes - hurtled through the door.

"You like reading, do you?" The newsagent looked at me and smiled. "I see you're one of the old school."

And I was about to tell him which old school it was when he turned his back on me to signify that the interview was finished.

I hope Mr. Fusty still remembers what it was like. I mean, you don't meet many people who really believe in Rockfist Rogan (RAF, retired), do you?

* * * * *

Will Hay Remembered! Collecting Comics and Children's Books, Country Memories, etc., in Flower Patch Magazine 18. Send 22p for copy to Anne and David,

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№13.
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