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Collectors'
Digest

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BOB WHITER '95.

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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WHAT DID YOU READ IN THE WAR, DADDY (AND MUMMY TOO!)?

Answers are coming in to Mark Taha's recent query about what we read after the Second World War demise of favourite papers such as the *Magnet* and *Schoolgirl*. These recollections elsewhere in this issue make intriguing reading. It seems hardly possible that Hitler's invasion of Norway, which cut off paper supplies for so many weeklies, took place 55 years ago!

SUNNY MEMORIES

Many of us will recall with affection the little magazine *Sunny Stories* for which the phenomenal Enid Blyton wrote over a long period. Its pages were always warm, colourful, well illustrated and overflowing with excitements and satisfactions for the younger reader. To open an issue from

Much of what I can remember of my reading as a child falls into the period which is of interest to Mark Taha. I would have joined the Darlington library in 1939 and it saw me a regular weekly visitor into adulthood. My move from the children's to the adults' library was an event that occurred in 1943 or 1944.

In the early years I can remember searching and better searching for William and for Biggles. The W.E. Johns books were much harder to come by. Friends swore by the Westerman's but their adventures never appealed - I was happier with Arthur Ransome's Lakeland stories, "The Big Six", "Peter Duck" and "Swallows and Amazons" the best remembered. I used to spend a lot of time in the library with Arthur Mee's detailed and interesting Encyclopaedias, eschewing the wild life items for the details of "the way things worked".

Perhaps the strongest influence on me were Herbert Strang's historical adventures. Three stand out. "The Adventures of Dick Trevanion", "Young Jack" and - best of all - "True as Steel" which was a set of linked stories illustrated by one of the Brocks. It was the Brock illustrations, together with the line drawings in Radio Times, that sent me constantly looking for new and different illustrators. The interest in line drawings stays with me all these years later.

By the end of the war it was the "big" library that I frequented on a regular basis. My historical predilections were now satisfied by the likes of Jean Plaidy. The delight in adventure now satisfied by detective and two-fisted hero tales - Berkeley Gray's Norman Conquest for one. The detecting was initially satisfied by Victor Gunn. Little did I know that they were the same writer - spilling out, as it were - from schoolboy stories. The switch to the American "hardboiled" school was quickly effected (via Bulldog Drummond and Denis Wheatley and Peter Cheyney's droll Lemmy Caution). Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler were top of my lists.

What I find interesting now is the quality and the quantity of the reading materials sucked up by one so tender and young. No adaptations, no novelisations, no books of the filmisations here. Just books - written without compromise.

Switching to earlier influences. "The Dandy" and "The Beano" - it almost goes without saying! I must also have taken Thomson's "The Magic" comic because I distinctly remember the joy of reading (and seeing) Peter Piper and his statue enlivening pan pipes. The pictures were by the great Dudley D. Watkins.

Later it was "The Wizard" and "The Hotspur" (just about the time of the switch to the main library). "The Rover" and "The Adventure" were less regularly consumed. From the Thomson papers was built up a further interest in line drawings and I was particularly fascinated by the sporting drawings of Fred Sturrock.

When I started taking "The Wizard" I think that the only "Amalgamated/Fleetway" comics available were "The Champion" and "The Girl's Crystal".

The boys' paper did not appeal somehow. On the other hand "The Girls' Crystal" hit the spot. Perhaps it was the alien worlds of "The Hooded Four", or Five, or Six that did appeal. Maybe it was "The Secret Societies" that seemed to populate schools for girls that gave me a frisson of excitement not to be found elsewhere. Who knows?

From whither or where I actually got the "Girls' Crystal" I know not - but get it I did on an irregular basis.

Going further back I can remember (even more vividly) the joy I got from The Daily Express Books for Boys and Girls. 1936 was the only year that I did not have this

annual. Too young? Then - a little later - probably 1941 - I was introduced to "The Favourite Wonder Book" from Odhams. What a treasure, still kept by my side even into old age! It was this book that most informed and formed me, both then and later. Thank you Auntie Mim - for it was she who bought it for me.

From Leslie Laskey:

In the January C.D. Mark Taha raised the question of what "MAGNET" readers took to reading when the paper closed down in May 1940. I found no real substitute for the "MAGNET". I took the "HOTSPUR" for, perhaps, eighteen months. Even at that time I did not find the stories of Red Circle School even approaching the standard of Frank Richards' stories. While they were entertaining, they were not memorable. The Greyfriars stories were both entertaining and memorable. I occasionally bought the "CHAMPION" or one of the other D.C. Thomson papers - depending on current cash resources! When I eventually stopped the "HOTSPUR" I switched my attentions to Penguin books which then cost six (old) pence per volume.

I also read most of my "MAGNETS" and "GEMS" for the second time.

From Clarice Harding:

I was interested in the question "What did we read after our storypapers ceased to exist?" Surprisingly, I took a great interest in the classics! Dickens mainly and Sir Walter Scott, and then needing lighter reading, Jeffrey Farnol and then back to any of the main Schoolgirl writers: Angela Brazil, Ethel Talbot, Elsie J. Oxenham, etc. As a magazine I liked *Weldon's Home Journal*. What an assortment, but nothing really took the place of our weekly papers until the wonderful Collectors' Digest opened it all up again, thereby earning our eternal thanks.

YESTERYEAR

by Ted Baldock

Memory, the warder of the brain.

Macbeth

When Charles Hamilton laid down his pen - or rather - when he ceased to tap the keys of his Remington, something occurred in the world of the school story. It was the ending of an era, the termination of a way of life for countless readers and admirers.

For those of us who cared about such things it was little short of catastrophic. It was our carefully constructed world which was passing and we saw, with dismay, the possibility of many ideals being shattered. Such sentiments were, I imagine, reflected in several far corners of the world.

For the greater part of half a century his writings had become established as a way of life depicting for us a world in which we could, and did, happily participate week by week. Greyfriars, St. Jim's and, to a lesser degree, Rookwood were very real educational establishments in the minds of countless young people in the pre-war era.

Time, that elusive element which wreaks such havoc with mankind is not applicable to the mythical world of Greyfriars, the occupants of which are oblivious to the rumblings and upheavals in the outer world. Their particular forte to exist in limbo would, it seems, be no unhappy destiny. Eternal youth, the dream of the sages throughout the centuries is theirs and we are able to share this happy fate.

Our world was a quiet and tranquil place. In reality crises *did* occur frequently. Regimes and governments *did* fall, in fact they appeared to be toppling at an alarming



From John Geal, Hampton: Further to Mark Taha, in Jan. C.D., wondering whether C. Hamilton had a grudge against solicitors, in most of his stories, solicitors were depicted as seedy, shifty individuals. The same prejudice was woven into stories. I quote - From Magnet No. 958:-

'Bunter was prattling on, whilst P. Todd was trying to study his Legal Books.

"Dry up and let me get to work."

"Oh, chuck that rot!" said Bunter contemptuously. "I don't believe the Head would let you, if he knew. Learning how to make out that black's white, and white's black. Yah!"

Peter Todd glared. Peter, as the son of a solicitor, intended to follow some day in the parental footsteps. But Bunter's description of legal practice was not Peter's idea of it at all. Peter was young yet.'

From Donald Campbell, Apperley Bridge, Yorks: Loved Brian Doyle's Paul Temple piece in CD Annual - it put all kinds of things into a fresh perspective for me. Perhaps the most rewarding item was the confirmation that my memory of Rimsky-Korsakov as Paul and Steve's signature tune was not false - even though I must have been listening to the episodes at age 5 to 6! Solved the problem of Marjorie Westbury NOT being Steve to the Carl Bernard Paul - even though she personally claimed continuity of playing the character from 1938 onwards. Thank you Brian.

From Bill Lofts, London: In answer to Derek Hinrich, Dr. Fu Manchu, first appeared in a series in Story Teller in October 1912, and in 1913 in book form. As Wu Ling did not appear in U.J. till 1913 the former must be the first. I would venture to suggest that the greatest detective of disguise was Hamilton Cleek in 1910 in a series of books by Thomas W. Hanshew with such titles as 'The Man with 40 faces' etc. I hope to deal with this in the other detective series.

NEWS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BIGGLES ASSOCIATION

From Mrs. Marvel M. Wagenaar-Wilm, vice president. Johan Wagenaarstraat 61, 1443 LR Pumerend, The Netherlands.

British Biggles enthusiasts will be familiar with the 1993 Picture-Strip Novel "Spitfire Parade" by Random House Children's Books, London. It was originally published in Brussels by Claude Lefrancq Emissions in Dutch as well as in French. The picture-strips by Lefrancq, six up to now, are very beautifully drawn by Francis Bergése (1-4, 6) and Eric Loutte (5). They are in Dutch and French:

1 De gele zwann/Le cygne jaune - 1990

GB: based on the book Sgt. Bigglesworth CID

2 Piraten van de Zuidpool/Les pirates du Pôle Sud - 1991

GB: based on the book Biggles' second case