

The

Friars'

Chronicles

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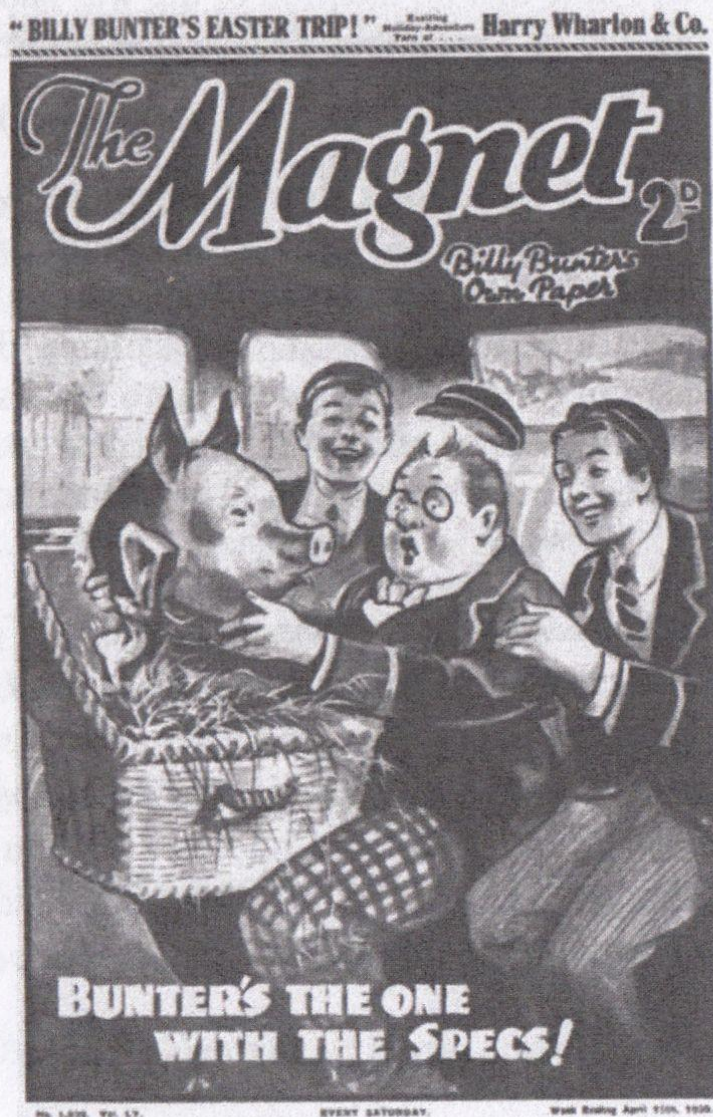




## The Friars' Chronicles

### How Much Did Orwell Know? – Mark Taha

I just bought *Decline of the English Murder*, an anthology of George Orwell articles including his "Boys' Weeklies" one of 1940. I got the impression that Orwell had read some *Magnets* from 1939 but only then – he quotes from an issue with Bunter in Extra French (summer 1939 – Vernon series) and refers to Jack Blake's column in the *Gem*, Harry Wharton editing the Greyfriars Herald, and "another page in which one or other character is written up every week" – an obvious reference to the 1938-39 "My Own Page" feature in the *Magnet*. This would account for his referring to Loder as a "highbrow" – he expressed views about compulsory games, "tradition" and the glorification of sportsmen over scientists in that feature but nowhere else. I know he read novels – seen as somehow disreputable by Hamilton.





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However, Orwell was not a Hamiltonian expert - he classes Frank Nugent with Tom Merry and Jack Blake and Tom Redwing as a "scholarship boy" – which he'd ceased to be in the late 20s – but not the actual ones: Mark Linley and Dick Penfold. Wun Lung, who did appear in the 1938 Carter series, was dressed like other Remove chaps then. Orwell's claim that Greyfriars had no school uniform or compulsory games is just ludicrous. There were two mentions of a Greyfriars OTC – in the 1925 *Holiday Annual* and a 1930s 'Greyfriars Herald' – but as sub items I suppose they can be discounted.

There was, pace Orwell, brief mention of unemployment – affecting Linley's father in the late 20s and Colonel Wharton's chauffeur in 1932. And surely Orwell's note that no mention of the war had appeared in the *Magnet* before the end of September 1939 was due to the stories being written several weeks in advance!

As for his description of Hamilton's view of foreigners – my own school had at least two French teachers. They both spoke like Mossoo and the male one had a beard! I must admit to quite liking the "mental world" described by Orwell – a strong, secure, unassailable Britain! And my reply to his criticism of Hamilton's not going into details of working life – how many of the schoolboys and young workers who formed most of the Companion Papers' readership would have wanted to read them?\*

*[Hamilton hinted as much in his response. One copy of the Magnet Orwell seems certain to have read is issue 1626 (April 15<sup>th</sup> 1939) where Bunter has opened a hamper in a car and finds himself staring at a pig's head. 'Bunter's the one with the specs' the caption informs. Owen Dudley Edwards, in his British Children's Fiction in the Second World War suggests that this picture may have influenced Animal Farm, especially the end when it is hard to distinguish people from pigs. Ed.]*