



London Old Boys' Book Club Newsletter No. 745– November 2014

Eighteen members and one guest attended the November meeting at the Red Cross Hall in Kingston Upon Thames as follows: Val and Malcolm Barrow, Graham Bruton, Roger Coombes, Nigel and Myra Gardner, Christine Garnham, Phil Griffiths, Jessie Hinrich, John Lester, Alan and Vic Pratt, Roger Sansom, Barbara Stanley-Hunt, Marc Taha and David Wickes Norman and Sandra Wright.

The guest was Stuart Smith.

Apologies were received from: Dave Marcus and Deborah Marcus (also for December and January – they'll be in New Zealand), Marie and Colin Scofield, Chris Harper, Emrys Evans, and Len Cooper.

Re. Newsletter 744, Deborah Marcus joined during the meeting and the minute's silence that was observed was for Ray Hopkins and Win Morss as well as Mary Cadogan.

Arising from the newsletter:

- 1) It was noted that there were twenty-one members present at Mary's funeral and the service, which included readings from *The Magnet* and *Alice in Wonderland*, befitted the occasion.
- 2) AGM in January will be at Len Cooper's in Newport Pagnell.
- 3) Christmas Lunch – confined to members and filling up fast. Please book a.s.a.p. to avoid disappointment. There is a change to the menu: - substitute Christmas pudding for blackcurrant crumble and add "Val's surprise" pudding. Arrive at 12.30 for 1 p.m. After the meal we disperse around the book rooms while the room is cleared of tables in preparation for the meeting, which, it was agreed, should be short. Good prizes for the raffle are needed.

Mark Taha has sent the following tribute: I remember Win Morss very well – she was a feisty lady and quite a character. As a lifelong monarchist, her reasons for not wishing to live to be 100 still made me laugh out loud! I remember the Walthamstow meetings very well and was sorry when we lost the venue.

In the 1980s, I did try ordering Howard Baker reprints through my local library but they refused to buy any more of them after a few months.

As for Mary Cadogan – what more can I say? She was beautiful, warm, friendly, charming, talented, great company, intelligent, one of the best friends I ever had and finest people I ever knew.

Meetings

December – Loughton (Norman to chair); January (AGM) – Newport Pagnell (Len to chair). The December meeting will be the Christmas Lunch; the revised menu is: Ham, Beef, Chicken, Corned Beef, Bacon & Egg Flan, Mushroom Flan (no cheese & Gluten free), Baked Potatoes, Cucumber & Carrot Salad, Lettuce, tomatoes, beetroot, celery; French Bread & Cheese;

Gooseberry Crumble, Christmas Pudding, Trifle, 'Val's Surprise';

Wine, Elderflower cordial, Apple juice, Orange juice;

Coffee, tea & mints.

Tea Time: Tea, coffee, Mince Pies & Chocolate Stuff.

Cost £8. Maximum of 24 people – club members only.

The Treasurer reported a balance of £1943.90. We have received a thank you letter from the charities donated to on behalf of Ray Hopkins and Win Morss.

Items

Alan Pratt spoke about Gerald Verner, who often recycled material, having a number of different publishers. Bill Bradford produced a bibliography of his works. Verner's titles, such as *The Clue of the Green Candle* bore some resemblance to those of Edgar Wallace (*The Clue of the Twisted Candle*) and Verner's stories are comparable with those of Wallace. He wrote Sexton Blake stories, usually under the name Donald Stuart, for *Thriller* and *Detective Weekly*. He was born John Robert Stuart Pringle but changed his name to Gerald Verner by deed poll. In August 1927 *The Clue of the Second Tooth* (later *The Embankment Murder*) was published. He had other pen names and different formats for different publishers. Wright and Brown brought out many of his books. His main character was Superintendent Budd ('Rosebud') who was a stout man with a passion for roses and had a melancholy assistant in Sergeant Leak (also similar to Wallace). He was a pulp writer but good at doing it and Alan feels he is more exciting than Wallace. He is fond of mystery villains and we often don't know till the end who the villain is. There are many 'locked door' situations but the solutions are plausible. His tales for Wright and Brown were less thriller and more who-dun-it and he also wrote some of the Sexton Blake radio stories. Alan finished with a reading in which Robert Harcourt comes to visit Mr Omah and is shown into a strange room. He becomes drowsy and hears disembodied voices and is questioned. He wishes to be able to foretell the future. Omah enters in long flowing robes, wearing a mask. Verner died in 1980 but Chris Verner, his son, has been instrumental in having his novels published again in large print editions.

Vic Pratt handed out another picture quiz of stars and artists (34 marks in total). Roger Coombes with 27 was first with Alan Pratt (26), Marc Taha (23) and Roger Sansom (22) also scoring well.

Our mounting appetites were now rewarded by a delicious tea.

Resuming, our host, **Graham Bruton** spoke about Rookwood 25.4.25 'Ructions Ahead' and what a bumper year it was for *The Magnet* with the 'Bunter Court' series. This quality spilled over into Rookwood where Horace Greely is hit on the nose by a punch ball. Jimmy Silver and Co. have lines for Mr. Greely but instead of Virgil have copied out a line from Shakespeare appropriate to the condition of his nose. Graham read from 'On the Carpet' where Dr. Chisholm visits Greely's study to lecture him about his appearance. Expecting Jimmy Silver, Greely adopts his majestic stare, which he has to hastily adapt for his headmaster. Dr. C. says Greely's appearance is ludicrous and is surprised when Jimmy Silver and Co. arrive with lines for Mr. Greely instead of their form master, Mr. Dalton. Dr. C. studies the lines 'And Marian's nose looked red and raw,' and hands them to Mr. Greely. Greely dismisses the boys and says he will speak to Dalton but Dr. Chisholm says Greely has provoked this impertinence and that accidents should be avoided. He leaves and an exasperated Greely plans to resign. Graham finished by mentioning a child star of 1925 who is still alive, the last of her time.

After a suggestion that instead of buying Christmas cards for each other we should donate the money to charity, **Mark Taha** gave a quiz which involved film star heartthrobs and their wives. There were 25 marks for this and Norman Wright (14) was most successful with Vic Pratt (13) in second place and John Lester (12) third.

John Lester began by referring to his earlier talk on 'The Rivals of St. Winifred's' in *Marvel* in February 1905 (Newsletter 743) and revealed that a St. Winifred's is named in 'The Corsair of the Clouds', a serial in *World's Comic* December 1899-Jan 1900. Its head boy is Jim Talbot (cf. George Talbot at the 1905 St Winifred's). This earlier St. Winifred's pre-dates the accepted first Hamilton school – Kenyon's Academy in the same publication two months later – but can't really be said to count, since it is only mentioned and not seen. The 1905 tale begins when Dick Esmond, a new boy, is met at the gates by Knowles and his friends and ragged when it is discovered that he is in Ratcliff's House whilst Knowles and co. are in Duff's House. Compare this with what follows.

John then gave a reading from *Pluck* 106, December 1906 which introduces a new school, St. Jim's, and records the arrival of Jack Blake to its portals. Blake is met by a trio of schoolboys who shut the gate on him when he reveals he will be in School House, whilst they are in New House. Their names are revealed as Figgins, Wynn and Kerr. Blake adapts quickly and calls out to another group of students who he correctly assumes to be School House fellows. They rescue him but Herries, their leader, thinks Blake should be more respectful to him and a fight between the two is scheduled.

Unlike 'The Rivals of St Winifred's', which was a supporting tale, Jack Blake is the cover story (though still appearing second in the paper, 'Phantom Gold – A Tale of Dr Nevada' taking precedence inside).

Just as Dick Esmond becomes leader of the Rats after defeating Knowles the Duffer in a boxing bout, Blake proves too much for Herries when it comes to a similar contest and soon becomes popular. The main rivalry here is between Kildare, school captain and captain of Kidd's House, and Monteith, captain of New House (cf. Talbot and Goring at St Winifred's). Just as when Goring attacks Esmond he is restrained by Talbot so Kildare restrains Monteith when he starts laying into Blake.

Monteith tries to lure Kildare away from St. Jim's on the day of the house football match with a hoax telegram reporting that Kildare's father is dangerously ill so that New

House will win and it can be put about that Kildare has funk'd it. Blake gets wind of this plot and puts Kildare wise. School House triumphs 5-1 with Kildare the star but Montieth stays on. The previous year a hoax telegram was used at an earlier St. Jim's (in the Trapps Holmes paper *Halfpenny Comic*) when Frank Blake receives a similar one, again reporting a dangerously ill relative, to keep him from playing in the team. He, too, is able to thwart his adversaries. Head boy here is Bulkeley (cf. Rookwood).

The St. Winifred's tale ends: 'Of the rivals of St. Winifred's - of their fun, feuds and frolics - we would fain write more, but space forbids.' The St. Jim's story finishes: 'But of the rival houses, and of their fun, feuds and frolics, we hope to say more when we write of the further adventures of Jack Blake of St. Jim's.' Desire - 'we would fain' - becomes intent - 'we hope' - and Hamilton was still saying more fifty years' later. The editor who at the beginning of the tale wrote 'This is the opening story of a series which will, without doubt, become most popular' knew what he was about.

Unfortunately there was no time for Norman's own item. Grateful thanks were conveyed to Graham Bruton and Sandra Wright for the venue and the lovely tea.

The Christmas meeting is scheduled for Sunday 14 December at the home of Chris and Suzanne Harper, Sydney House, 23 Algers Road, Loughton, Essex IG10 4NG. (12.30 for 1 p.m. start). Please ring 0208 508 4770 as soon as possible if you plan to attend as there are very few places left.

Len Cooper's suggested format for future meetings - for discussion at the December meeting and the AGM:

| | | | |
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| December: | | JAN | |
| Xmas lunch, AGM and Meeting 1* | DEC | | FEB |
| March: | NOV | | MAR |
| Meeting 2 | OCT | | APR |
| June: | SEP | | MAY |
| Meeting 3 | AUG | | JUN |
| September: | | JUL | |
| Meeting 4 | | | |
| | | OR | |

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| | | JAN | |
| Extended Meeting format: | DEC | | FEB |
| Assemble from 14:00 | NOV | | MAR |
| Start meeting at 14:30 | OCT | | APR |
| Tea 16:00 - 17:00 | SEP | | MAY |
| Re-start meeting at 17:00 | AUG | | JUN |
| End meeting at 18:30 | | JUL | |
| Total meeting time 3 hours (instead of current 2 hours) | | | |
| * If agreed, start Xmas meeting at 13:00 | | | |