

# THE DUST JACKET

The Magazine of the London Old Boys' Book Club



## THOSE WERE THE DAYS! WHY CAN'T WE HAVE THEM NOW?

Mark Taha remembers the *Schoolboys' Annual* for 1969

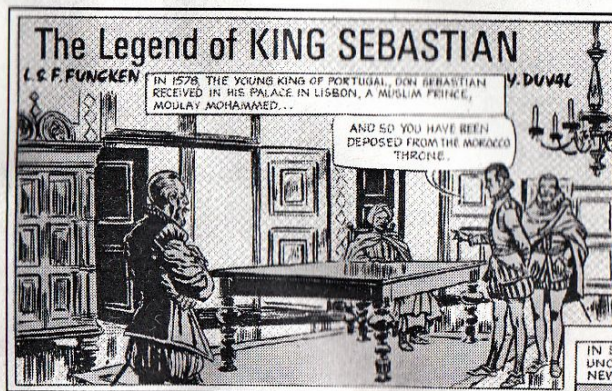
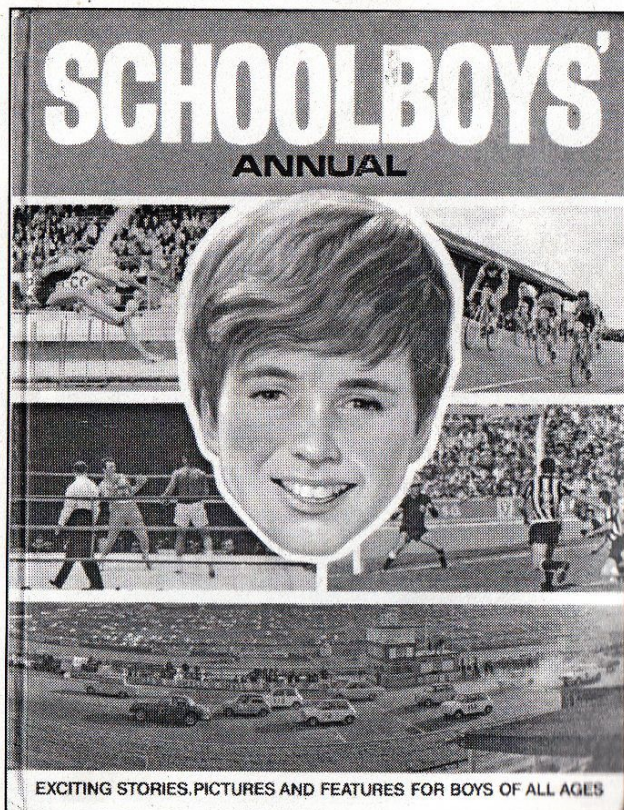
The *Schoolboys' Annual* for 1969 is rather like an old *Eagle Annual*, but without the regular characters. It has everything: text stories and articles, factual picture stories and features. Two of the features gave me an idea for a TV series about people who *might* have survived after their supposed deaths. Both concerned historical figures who would have made good subject matter for such a programme. The first was 'The Legend of King Sebastian'. This feature was about a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portuguese monarch thought to have been killed in Morocco. However, fraudsters, pretending to be him, returned to resist the 60-year-long Spanish occupation. The other feature that made me think was 'The Jesse James Story'. In 1948, long after the legendary outlaw was supposed to have died, a 101-year-old 'Colonel Dalton'

walked into a newspaper office claiming to be Jesse James. I'm surprised his story, surely an interesting one in its own right, was never filmed.

While the *Schoolboys' Annual* came out in time for Christmas 1969, it was obviously written much earlier in the year. 'On the Way Up', a piece about up-and-coming sports stars, included cricketer Colin Milburn, whose career was essentially ended by a car crash that April, and boxer Johnny Pritchett, who retired as a fighter about the same time. It also dealt with table tennis, a sport we never hear of these days.

The other contents were 'Sargasso Sea Mystery', a story about meeting a ghost ship and a pirate in 1969; 'The Way to Wembley', about FA Cup progress when it really meant something; 'White Water Warning', a story about a rescue by scouts, which would have made a good Children's Film Foundation film; lots of unusual facts; 'Man on the Moon', a piece on lunar exploration written well before the landing; and, my favourite, 'Debut for a Winger', a football story obviously set in the past owing to the fact that the lower league side in the story both has reserve players and seems to be playing on a weekday afternoon.

This is followed by 'Model Maker Extraordinary', about one Wallis Rigby who made



and sold models and cut-out books; 'The Graham Hill Story', a piece about the racing driver; and a feature entitled 'Several Bowls of Guru' about the defence of Tibet against China. The *Schoolboys' Annual* crossword took me a long time to solve. A piece about the Peak District, 'A Heritage to Preserve', made me think of the late fell-walker, guide-book author and illustrator AW Wainwright.

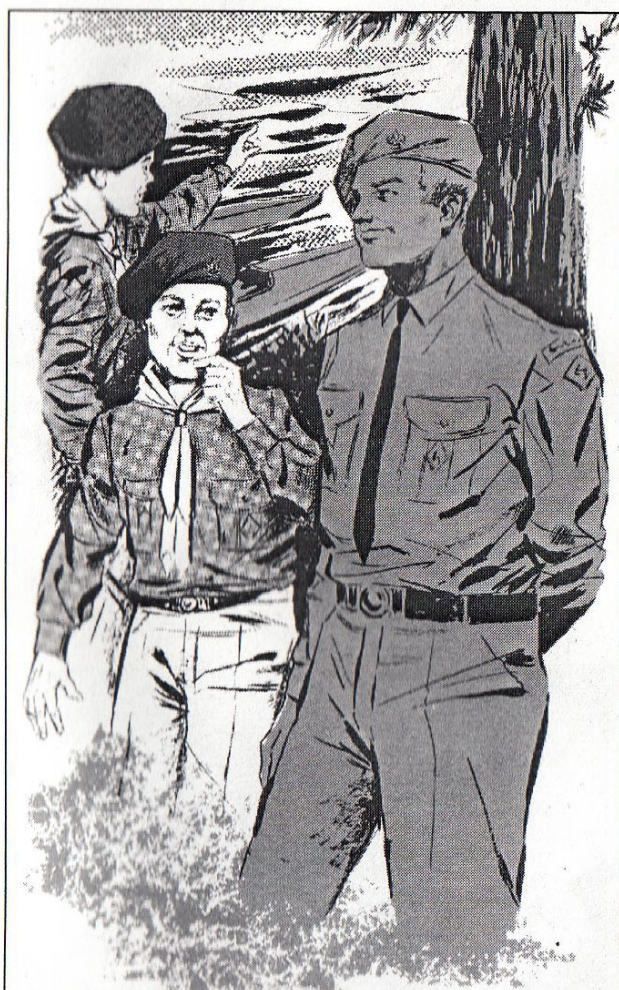
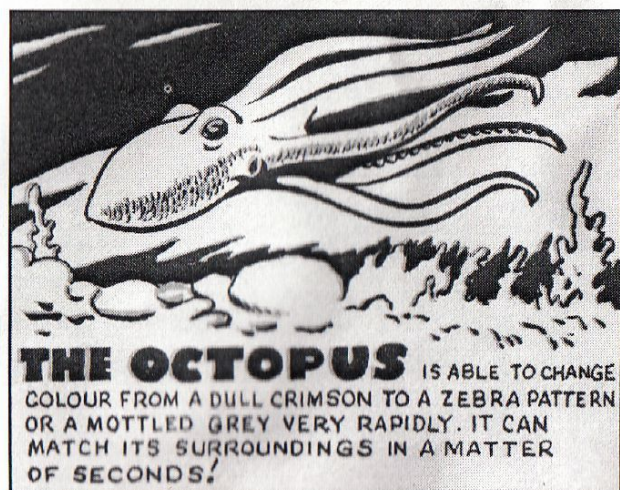
In the story 'Scoop' a reporter discovers an invisible man but his sceptical editor will not believe him! This story considers the practical problems of being invisible—and unable to become visible again. Another sci-fi story, this one set on the moon, 'Operation Point Q', tells a tale of scientists who have discovered how to neutralise the law of gravity.

And still there's more: 'Legends in Their Lifetimes', which are features about outlaws Billy the Kid and Frank James, the immortal bard Shakespeare, Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci and gangster Al Capone. This last piece includes at least one horrible mistake: despite what they say here, Capone did not die in jail!

'Silver Wings' is about learning to fly. 'A Matter of Facts' is a story set in a boarding school in which the 'class brain' is sabotaged by a process known as sleep 'unlearning', an idea I now find rather distasteful. Also included are stirring stories of our fighting regiments, an article about BBC Radio 1 (I recognised one or two of the names men-

tioned—but I never really listened to it) and 'Royal Canadian Mounties', which is a picture story about the beginnings of the Canadian police. 'Pop Go the Weasels' is a story about a Scout Troop pop group *and* about a class newspaper. There's also an article about the television programme *Match of the Day*; a story set in 1944 entitled 'The Phantom Brigade' and still more odd facts. In the last story in the book, 'Spinning the Yarn', a tramp and a conman both get conned. Finally, the book ends with a feature on medals for bravery.

There's something for everyone with a modicum of intelligence or curiosity in the *Schoolboys' Annual* for 1969. So, why can't we have this kind of book now? I'd really like to know.



by MURRAY COLLIER

The water was not really white, just a glassy brown torrent that hurtled along. And the two canoeists were swept along by it, powerless to resist.