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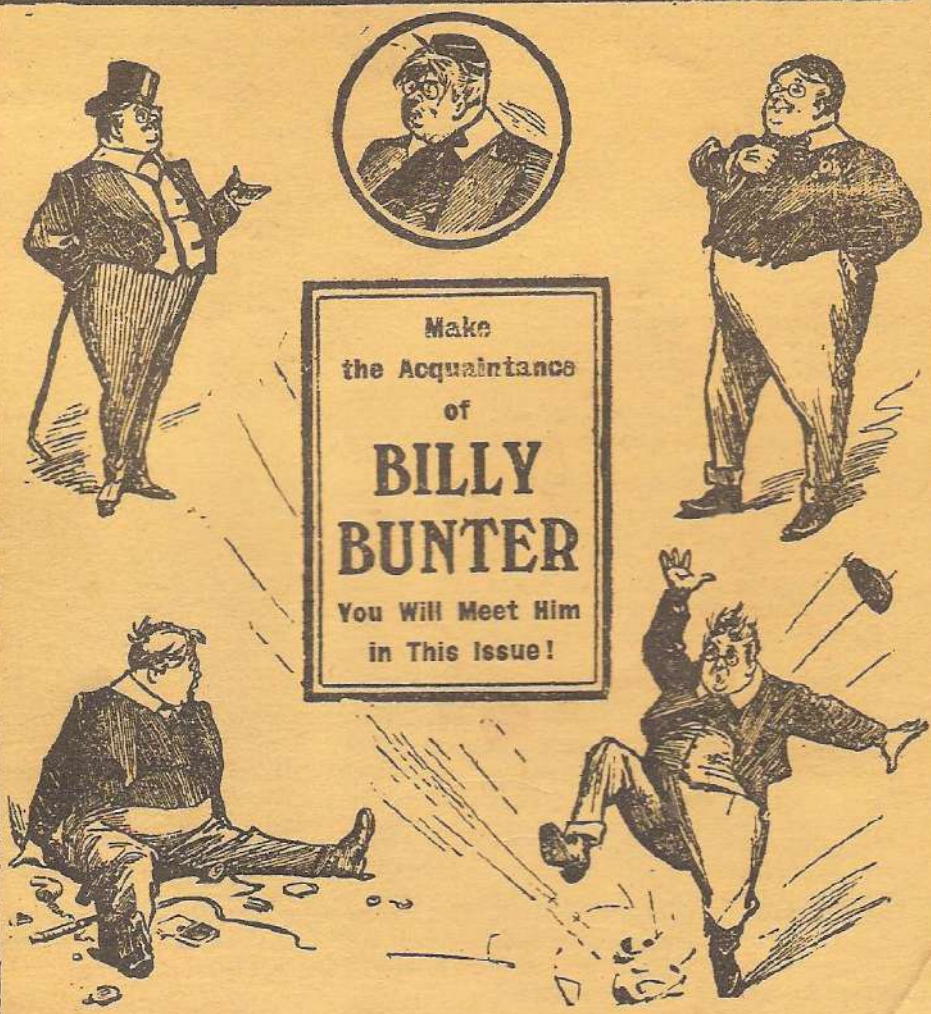
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The Penny Popular

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Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



Make
the Acquaintance
of
**BILLY
BUNTER**
You Will Meet Him
in This Issue!

The stories take the team on to becoming an under-13 team and describe their various ins and outs of league and cup competitions. They do not win all their matches, but on the whole are a successful combination. There are a variety of players, including an efficient girl all-rounder named Erica. The teacher - known as Kiddo - sees to their coaching and one of the players' sisters acts as organiser and scorer - and is autocratic enough to keep them well in hand. One point of interest is the fact that loyalty comes to the fore frequently. The original players all take part, in the main, in the progress of the stories. There are a few 'characters' - a cumbersome but at times useful individual known as Ohbert. There is a fifth-rate wicket keeper, whose speciality is telling corny jokes ("Doctor, I feel like a cricket bat". "How's that?") As, however, they are part of the original founders, they (improbably!) retain their place. Hooker, the skipper, has a tricky job at times conducting his group, but on the whole manages well. Cal, a tall spin bowler, has the greatest knowledge of the game and is often consulted earnestly by the Captain. When, though, at a later stage, Cal assumes the captaincy, he soon finds it 'quite a task' and goes back to being chief adviser. The last story ends up with a tour of Barbados, with the final remark that the Barbadians will see them shortly in England for a further match.

The stories are very readable and the technical illustrations of players in the team very informative. Whether readers will take to such a lot of cricket is not yet apparent. I tried the first book, enjoyed it and now possess the six so far published. (Incidentally, the same publishers have at least a dozen Biggles stories at £3.50 each.) W.H. Smith has them all on the shelves in my area, in the section which includes Enid Blyton, Anthony Buckeridge and Richmal Crompton.

Two books have been published each year so far - 1995 to 1997 inclusive. Nothing yet is out for 1998 but I am hoping the present autumn book season will include further exploits of the Glory Gardens Cricket Club.

REVIEWS FROM MARK TAHA

The Finest Years: British Cinema of the 1940s - Charles Drazin (Andre Deutsch, 1998)

British cinema in its greatest era (in the author's opinion, at least) - from A - Anthony 'Puffin' Asquith, a Prime Minister's son who specialised in filming Terence Rattigan's plays - to W - Herbert Wilcox, Anna Neagle's husband and top film producer. Never favoured by the critics - but the public thought differently and he had Hollywood-like flamboyance and style!

The problem faced by British film-makers in the 1940s was that the public preferred Hollywood - and who could blame them? Let's face it, even the colour looked better! J. Arthur Rank's rash pledge to fill the gap when Hollywood cut off supplies over a 75% tariff in 1948 could never have succeeded for this reason; while John Davis, the hard-headed businessman who ran the Rank organisation, has been bitterly criticised for his penny-pinching and lack of artistic soul, he had little choice. Rank had been paying out Hollywood sums with no guarantee of access to Hollywood markets. Davis himself admitted that Rank films were "not made for critics" and insisted that they be of "broad appeal" - as a frequent sufferer from critically-acclaimed boredom, I'd like to thank him for that! Certainly, when the Board of Trade insisted on a circuit release for the film "Chance of a Lifetime", it flopped.

You can read about many interesting people in this book - I may cite Robert Hamer, cynic, drunk - and director of perhaps Britain's greatest film, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. Harry Watt, director of *Target for Tonight*, who admitted that he "went into the film business because I wanted to eat. I had no artistic bent whatsoever." As a documentary maker, he went on military operations but "found reality dull too much waiting around". Sydney Box, whose *The Seventh Veil* was a low-budget movie that started without a leading man - until James Mason expressed an interest! Gabriel Pascal, a fanatical admirer of George Bernard Shaw who filmed his plays, spent money like water, but at least had style. And Jack Beddington, third Director of the wartime Ministry of Information film unit. The first, Sir Joseph Ball, had favoured closing down the film industry for the duration. The second, Sir Kenneth Clark, was appointed because he was an "authority in pictures" - as Director of the National Gallery!

Reader - I hope that's whetted your appetite!

The Unknown 30s - edited by Jeffrey Richards (I.B. Tauris, 1998)

Subtitle - the quota quickies weren't so bad! The argument is made that the quota of British films to be shown in every cinema imposed by the 1928 Act saved the British film industry from extinction and that the quickies should be seen as British B-movies. Certainly, there weren't many films being made in Britain before the quota came in and its imposition was followed by a short-lived boom in investment in the British film industry. Nor can one really argue with the view that the quota provided a lot of job opportunities for Britons, even with American companies setting up British subsidiaries to get round it. However, film fans still preferred Hollywood!

The book is certainly well-titled; it taught me a lot of things I hadn't known. For instance, the most popular British star of the years 1932-37 was Tom Walls, star of Ben Travers farces, and the most popular British film of the time *Jack's The Boy*, a 1932 farce starring Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge. British musicals were big at the time - for instance, *Me and My Girl*, filmed as *The Lambeth Walk* but with some vandal having cut most of the songs! There was also Britain's first "H" film - *Dark Eyes of London* starring Bela Lugosi.

Several individuals get chapters to themselves - actor Conrad Veidt, directors Bernard Vorhaus, Berthold Viertel (*Rhodes of Africa*) and Robert Stevenson - in the 60s, Disney's top director. In the 30s, he directed such films as *King Solomon's Mines* and *Tudor Rose*. The best chapter in the book, however, is by Richards himself and on the legendary Tod Slaughter. It seems that Slaughter actually took his films seriously - which is probably more than the audience did! I must admit that I'd like to see more of them. Also - he died in the same year that Hammer revived the Frankenstein films. Tod Slaughter as Dr Frankenstein

The book ends with a chapter by Tony Aldgate on films that dodged the censor in an all-too-short period of confusion; unfortunately, the BBFC were soon interfering again, even banning the naming of foreign countries if the film was criticising them!

I heartily recommend this well-written and informative book.
