

Bruce died on Sunday, 5th May. Our Club was represented at the funeral in Chelford, Cheshire, by our Chairman Joan Colman and Darrell Swift. Our sympathy and love go to Geraldine and her family, and the absence of Bruce at our meetings has left a deep void.

(Editor's Note: I must join in Darrell's tribute to Bruce, whose warmth and kindness I will long remember.)

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY

(A Further "Echo" of
DANNY LOOKS BACK.)

Comments by ERIC FAYNE

Danny, browsing contentedly over the earliest St. Jim's stories in PLUCK, had come on the rivalry between the St. Jim's fellows and Frank Monk & Co. of the newly opened Rylcombe Grammar School.

Readers of Danny's own time were familiar with Gordon Gay & Co. But Gordon Gay was not there at the Grammar School in those early St. Jim's stories. "Just when did Gordon Gay arrive?" enquired Danny. "Was there a St. Jim's tale in the Gem to relate the arrival of Gordon Gay?" queried Danny.

I have not checked to see just when Gordon Gay was first introduced into the Gem. But he was born in the EMPIRE LIBRARY. I find it suprising that there has been but small mention of the Empire Library in our C.D. Down the long years, I have, on isolated occasions, made a passing reference to the paper, but I do not recall that anyone has ever devoted even a short article to it. This is astonishing, for the Empire was very much a Hamilton paper. And there is certain evidence to show that the publishers intended it to be just that!

Consider for a moment. When Hamilton's story "King Cricket" was run as a serial in the Boys' Realm in the year 1906, his name was not quoted. Each week it appeared with the by-line: "By One of Our Most Popular Authors!" Never again was one of his stories to be published without his own name or one of his famous pen-names. But in 1906 he had no famous pen-names. "Martin Clifford" did not come on the scene until No. 3 of the Gem in the year 1907. It was Tom Merry who laid the groundwork for his real fame. At the end of 1906 he started his series about Jack Blake & Co. at St. Jim's, "by Charles Hamilton". In PUCK. In March 1907 the GEM started, launched as "the new halfpenny adventure paper." At the end of that March Tom Merry came on the scene - a new boy at Clavering School - "by Martin Clifford." It was the first time that the pseudonym Martin Clifford - soon to be famous - was used.

In all, 6 adventures stories appeared in that "new adventures paper". Tom Merry appeared every alternate week, and it was soon obvious that he was a striking success. The GEM was a winner - and Martin Clifford and his Tom Merry had made it so.

So much so that in No. 11, Tom Merry, with his Clavering associates, was sent to St. Jim's. And Tom Merry took over St. Jim's in a way that Jack Blake had never been able to do.

Clearly the Gem was thriving in a way which delighted the publishers. Tom Merry was famous. Martin Clifford was famous.

So! In 1908 the Magnet was advertised as a new school story paper on the bookstalls. The writer was Frank Richards, the second of the famous pen-names. As

years passed, Frank Richards was destined to become the most famous of all, a factor almost certainly due to Billy Bunter. It was Bunter who made F.R. famous.

But, way back before the First War, it seemed to be Martin Clifford who was THE ONE!

The Gem has clearly been a startling success. Did someone - the publisher or the author - envisage the plan of repeating the Gem's success with yet another paper?

The first issue of the Empire Library was dated 19th February, 1910, exactly 3 years after Tom Merry had made the Gem something special. The Empire was a halfpenny paper. It ran school stories every week. The writer of these stories was Prosper Howard, the third of Hamilton's pen-names. He became popular for a time.

The Gem had thrived on stories of a school established elsewhere, but made famous when Tom Merry arrived. St. Jim's!

The Empire was expected to thrive on stories of a school established elsewhere - Rylcombe Grammar School - but now a boy, Gordon Gay, arrived and took over. The similarity of the facts are striking. Look, for instance, at the similarity of the names. Tom Merry! Gordon Gay! Surely it cannot all have been mere coincidence. It seems to me that Gordon Gay was intended to be another Tom Merry - and the Empire was to repeat the success of the halfpenny Gem.

Gordon Gay was an Australian. He was often referred to as the Cornstalk - a term which seemed to be lost later on. He was keen on amateur theatricals. He was also a brilliant impersonator, a bit reminiscent of Kerr of St. Jim's. Some of his impersonations were incredible, if youngsters really bothered about credibility, providing the tales were expertly written.

(The Empire had 20 pages, including pink covers. In the last page or two there was a serial, "The Mystery Man" by Laurence Miller, whoever he was. Soon this was replaced by "a wonderful serial of school life 'The Rivals of St. Kit's' by Charles Hamilton." And the latter was a serial which had run in Pluck several years earlier.)

The first Prosper Howard tale was "Gordon Gay's Company". He produced a pantomime, though he had only been at the school for 3 weeks then, so we were told. Frank Monk, the previous leader, became part of the supporting cast, just as Jack Blake had one at St. Jim's

In the third story "Gordon Gay's New Chums" two more Australian boys - the Wootton Brothers - arrived, so we had a new Co. They were called "The Three Wallabies", the title of the tale in No. 5. (Shades of the "Terrible Three" of St. Jim's?)

For 4 months the stories of Gordon Gay carried on week by week. They were mainly light, with a good many concerning impersonations. Tom Merry & Co of St. Jim's were often introduced. There were two girls - Miss Phyllis and Miss Vera - who often looked in, rather reminiscent of Miss Marjorie and Miss Clara in the early Greyfriars tales in the Magnet. Miss Phyllis was the cousin of Frank Monk.

Then came the first shadow of doubt. In No. 16 the school story was missing. We were introduced to Jack Rhodes, in stories of city life. But we were given the welcome news: Next Week, "Ginger!" a story of Gordon Gay & Co. For a while the school tales alternated with Jack Rhodes stories, the latter by Alfred Barnard. (Whoever he was!). Then, with No. 36 came the announcement that the Empire Library was to be ENLARGED. Actually it was a change of format to Boys' Friend size. Same Price - One Halfpenny. Many new features, promised the Editor, including "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays" - a Magnificent New Tale of Tom Merry's Chum. By Martin Clifford.

Soon I will wander through the second and final period of the Empire Library. It was still to be very much "a Hamilton paper."

In passing, - what masses of wonderful facts Charles Hamilton *could* have given us in his Autobiography! How we would all have revelled in the real story of "his writing life!" He never chose to do so. We were not really interested in accounts of his travels. But how we would have loved masses of details of that "writing life".

It is too late now. We can only make assumptions based on, well - The Gem, The Boy's Friend, The Magnet, The Empire, Pluck, The Boys' Realm, The Popular, The Boys' Herald, The Greyfriars Herald, The B.F.L., The S.O.L., Modern Boy - and another side-line or two.

THE "EMPIRE" LIBRARY NEXT WEEK. "THE NEW MASTER."



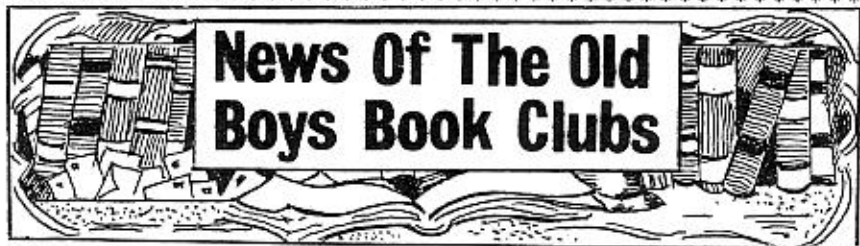
Friday, **One Halfpenny.**

A COMPLETE STORY-BOOK THAT IS READ ALL OVER THE WORLD.

Gordon Gay's Play

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Gordon Gay & Co., at Rylcombe Grammar School.

By
PROSPER HOWARD.



News Of The Old Boys Book Clubs

MIDLAND CLUB

There was another good attendance at the Spring Meeting of the Midland Club with 16 making the journey to Blackheath Library on 6th April. Bill Lofts was guest-speaker and very special guests were Una Hamilton-Wright and her husband, making a return visit after many years absence.

Before business commenced respects were paid to those lost to the hobby since our last meeting - Tom Porter, Maurice Hall, W. Howard Baker and Derek Adley.

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY

(An Echo of "Danny Looks Back".) (Second Half) by Eric Fayne

As a result of comments by our Danny concerning Gordon Gay and his adventures at Rylcombe Grammar School, near St. Jim's - a series which introduced us to the writer Prosper Howard, yet another pen-name of the inimitable Charles Hamilton - I was moved to browse contentedly through my volumes of the Empire Library.

In a previous issue of C.D. I discussed the first 36 issues of this paper which had published its first number in mid-February 1910. As I said then, it was very much a Hamilton paper, and it was obviously intended to cash in on the success of the Gem and the popularity of Tom Merry.

The last long Grammar School story appeared in No. 32, and now we were introduced to "Panther Grayle, Detective", in stories credited to Jack Lancaster. The detective's name is kind of familiar, so he may have been reasonably well-liked, though whether I ever read one of those tales I cannot say. And, running at the same time, was the Charles Hamilton serial "The Rivals of St. Kit's", reprinted from PLUCK. In passing, I have three presentations of this St. Kit's story in my bookcases - one in Pluck, one in the Empire, and the third in the B.F.L.

And so we come to No. 36. In this issue, the Editor made an "Important Announcement". The Empire was to be Enlarged. Possibly with tongue in cheek, the Editor said the "enlargement" was at "the earnest request of thousands of readers", and we were supposed to accept that it was due to the immense popularity of the Empire Library. From now on, right till the end, the paper was re-named The Empire Enlarged Library.

Actually the old Ed. was leading us up the garden path. The format was certainly changed, and, in those days, for those of us who were inclined to be sceptical, a change of format really indicated that the paper was not doing too well. So, hoping for the best, the Editor changed the format. The "enlargement" was rather misleading, too. The Ed. was a wily old fellow. True, the page sizes were doubled. The Empire, originally of Gem and Magnet measurements, now changed to Boys' Friend and Boys' Realm sheet-size. But the original Empire had consisted of 20 pages. The new enlarged Empire consisted of 8 pages (which would have been only 16 in the previous format) and it was printed on white paper throughout.

A New and Interesting Story for All.

(Continued from the front page.)



**COUSIN ETHEL'S
SCHOOLDAYS**

A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S CHUM
BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

Bring a line to
the Editor and
tell him how
you like me.
—Cousin Ethel

So, at the end of October 1910, the Empire started again at No. 1, new series. Panther Grayle was on the cover in a large illustration by the Gem artist, R.J. Macdonald. But the big attraction was, apparently, the start of a wonderful new serial, by Martin Clifford, entitled "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays." It is described, throughout its run, as "a tale of Tom Merry's Chum." This was not really accurate. Ethel was Figgins' chum, if my memory is not playing tricks. Once again it was cashing in on the popularity of Tom Merry.

A thought or two on "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays." Some years later it was re-serialised in the Gem, and then appeared as a complete story in the B.F.L. So, once again, I have 3 versions of a Hamilton story in my bookcases.

With No. 9, the Grammar School stories, by Prosper Howard, were resumed, and these continued till No. 26. In No. 11 there commenced a NEW (the capitals and underlining were those of the Editor) School serial by Charles Hamilton, entitled "The Rivals of St. Wode's." (The Editor placed a comment under the heading to the instalments, viz, "The best school tale I have ever read.")

So now the Empire contained two serials by Charles Hamilton ("Rivals of St. Kit's" was drawing to its close now): a Grammar School story by Prosper Howard, and a serial by Martin Clifford. Very much a Hamilton paper, as I mentioned before.

And other stories made up a full programme. An unusual and rather dubious serial, one would think, was "The Dark Lantern", a story of Charles Peace.

Right across the front cover of No. 23 was the announcement: "Special Message from Tom Merry of St. Jim's!" (see page 187).

That message appeared in the Editor's Chat, named "Shoulder to Shoulder" in the Empire. A grand new serial was announced to appear in the Empire. It would be "Tom Merry's Island" by Martin Clifford - starting very shortly. And the "message from Tom Merry" followed, in an enclosed section:

"My dear Empirites, - Those of you who have not met me already in 'The Gem' will be introduced to me in the Empire soon. I hope my adventures on the island will prove jolly exciting reading; but, of course, Gussy makes an ass of himself as usual!
Your chum,

TOM MERRY."

And the page footnotes throughout that issue read "Look out for Tom Merry in this paper."

But that was the last mention of "Tom Merry's Island" in the Empire. Readers must have been suprised, the following week, that there was no mention of the coming fine new serial.

In fact, just 5 weeks later, the Empire folded with No. 28 (new series), dated May 8th 1911. And "The Boys of Slapton School", tales of Teddy Lester, had just started. I have a vague feeling that, years ago, some C.D. readers had happy memories of Teddy Lester, though I never read of him myself.

The Empire was now amalgamated with THE FOOTBALL & SPORTS LIBRARY, and Teddy Lester was running in that paper.

A mention of that elusive serial "Tom Merry's Island", which was promised to Empire readers but never appeared. This clearly was adapted and appeared, later in 1911, in the Gem in a very fine 3-story series, under the consecutive titles of "The Mysterious Document", "Tom Merry's Treasure Island", and "The Schoolboy Castaways." I loved that series as a youngster (and still do!) never realising that it had a fascinating little history.

And so the Empire passed into history after 64 issues - a run of a few months over a year. And now - there are probably very few who knew that it ever existed. Very definitely a Hamilton paper to charm the youth of 1910 - 1911. Today it is unknown - or merely forgotten - except, maybe, by just a handful who never forget.

I am uncertain whether the Hamilton story "Rivals of St. Wode's" was ever reprinted in some other paper. Anyone know? It probably appeared as a complete novel in the B.F.L., but, if so, I do not seem to have that one in my own collection.

<p>THIS IS THE LAST NUMBER of THE 'EMPIRE' But—</p>	<p>THE FOOTBALL & SPORTS LIBRARY.</p>	<p>No Need to Wait a Week Because—</p>
<p>All the Grand Stories which appear in this Number will be continued in To-morrow's Issue of</p>	<p>WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED THE EMPIRE LIBRARY</p> 	<p>in To-morrow's Grand Issue of "THE 'B.R.' FOOTBALL & SPORTS LIBRARY," all our Grand Stories are Continued.</p>
<p>"THE 'B.R.' FOOTBALL & SPORTS LIBRARY."</p>	<p>ONLY A STABLE LAD A SUPERB NEW SPORTING SERIAL</p>	<p>The Price is One Halfpenny.</p>
<p>BE SURE YOU GET IT!</p>	 <p>The CRUSADERS IN AFRICA A TALE OF FOWKES & CO. ON TOUR</p>	<p>BE SURE YOU GET IT!</p>

WANTED to purchase: H.B. Book Club vol. 1. 'The Worst Boy at Greyfriars' and H.B. Vol. 18 'The Stacey Special'; also The Gem's 'Black Box/Silver Swallow' series (nos. 1625 - 1634 inclusive of 1939) and the Gem's 'Silverson' series (nos. 1647 - 1663 inclusive of September 1939). All postage will be paid. Must be in reasonably good condition. Write with offers, to: Naveed Haque, 152 Spadina Road, Richmond Hill, Ontario, L4B 2V2, Canada.

"Danny" in the July 1991 C.D. raises the interesting point as to why no one has so far written about The Empire Library. The main reason I should think, is that issues have always been extremely scarce. I've only seen a few odd copies in all the time I have been in the hobby. Apart from this, it is difficult to write about a paper that only contains a single story and serial. "Danny", I thought, had missed out a very important feature as I will relate later on.

Indeed, there are far more interesting details behind the scenes of the Empire Library than in it, according to the former Gem and Magnet editor C.M. Down, the old Amalgamated Press official records, as well as Charles Hamilton himself, as I will reveal.

Following the highly successful launch of The Gem and The Magnet related by "Danny", there was no doubt that Percy Griffith now had a star author in his stable. In those days editors got commission on sales, so obviously Griffith was a very happy man. It has been said that Charles Hamilton had actually written an odd full length story featuring Rylcombe Grammar School which, again as "Danny" states, had appeared at odd times in The Gem. He had submitted this to the editor under his real name for him to place somewhere in one of his papers.

Percy Griffith went even one better, as here was a golden opportunity to launch another paper (with more commission) with his star writer (in today's terms Frank Richards would be a megga star writer). The paper would be called The Empire Library to cater for the readers in the Dominions as well as in Great Britain. The school would also feature an Australian boy to give more flavour.

Most unfortunately, and before the first copy had appeared, Charles Hamilton had had some dispute with Percy Griffith, with the outcome that he flatly refused to have anything more to do with it, so consequently the paper was doomed from the start. Mr. C.M. Down who was on the staff related this to me in letters, adding that he and H.A. Hinton (having already penned some substitute tales for the Magnet and Gem) had to write the opening stories.

This was confirmed by the official A.P. records when perused some years ago. Nos. 1-7 were written editorially; 8, 9 and 10 were penned by Alfred Barnard, who had around the same time written Gem No. 120 "The Terrible Three's Committee". "Danny" queries who he was. He had written a lot of stories and serials up to 1911, but then left Amalgamated Press and became editor of several magazines, one of which he owned. He was also at one time a features editor on The Daily Mirror. He had two sons, both writers, one of whom wrote a few substitute yarns in Magnet, and was killed later in the Black and Tans conflict.

The rest of the stories in the 1st series featuring Gordon Gay were seemingly penned by the Hinton/Down combination, but with one exception. No. 32. "The Grammar Schools Great Jape", was the only genuine yarn in the series. The fee for that was paid to Charles Hamilton. One can perhaps assume that this was his original story, which the editor felt he might as well use.



Alfred Barnard had also penned the Jack Rhodes series, about City Life, that was mingled amongst the Gordon Gay tales. "Lawrence Miller" was a pen name of E.W. Alias, whilst "Jack Lancaster" who wrote the Panther Grayne detective stories, was none other than A.M. Burrage the famous Victorian writer.

If ever proof was needed that Charles Hamilton never wrote the Empire Library tales (with one exception) it comes from the great man himself. Readers of the C.D. who have fairly early copies will find a number of references by him denying that he was "Prosper Howard" of the stories. All he knew about the name was that in 1912 H.A. Hinton, who had then taken over the editorship from Percy Griffith, had requested him to write a serial for The Gem featuring Rylcombe Grammar School which would appear under the "Prosper Howard" pen-name to give the real author a leg up! Charles Hamilton had then no idea who he was, but was later surprised to learn that it was Hinton himself. The Gem serial entitled "The School Under Canvas" was reprinted in the Boys Friend Library a year later.

On one occasion I sent my own copy of The Empire Library to Charles Hamilton for his comments about the Rylcombe story. He most kindly commented, and pointed out odd words and phrases that he would never use. Some of the sentence constructions were also far longer than he would have ever used.

One of the best features of The Empire Library was the brilliant of illustrations by Warwick Reynolds, especially in the first issue. Figures seemed drawn from true life, and not a bit overblown like so many obviously hurried pictures in the First World War Gems.

The Empire Library which ran to 36 issues was certainly a hotchpotch affair; according to C.M. Down the staff never knew what would appear until the last minute. Towards the end of its run Hinton had taken over the full editorship, and, giving it a last chance, started a new series in large format with a white cover. This was to avoid it being confused with The Boys Realm. Alas, the mixture was no better than before, and the Gordon Gay tales were reduced to mainly one page efforts. After 28 issues it was amalgamated with Boys Realm Football and Sports Library. Curiously this paper, launched two years earlier, had started off with Pelham School with Jack Noble & Co., a creation of Charles Hamilton, but later tales were written by a host of sub-writers. A case of history repeating itself!

Various pre-war duplicate Boy's Papers: Nelson Lees, S.O.L, B.F.L., S.B.L. (3rd series) - exchanges preferred. Hutchinson's "Animals of all Countries". 50 fortnightly issues. Complete edition. 1923/24. Coloured plates. 2,344 pages. Hitler's "Mein Kampf" 18 weekly parts, 200 full page plates. 584 pages c.1939. Would exchange for pre-war Boys' Papers. K. TOWNSEND, 7 North Close, Willington, Derby, DE6 6EA. Tel. Burton-on-Trent 703305.

WANTED TO PURCHASE: Pink Boys' Realms in good condition, either singly or bound, preferably featuring the complete stories of: "Hal Read, The Running Man", and/or "The Curse of the Curzons", and/or "The Web of the Spider". Please quote price, if available. ROBERT W. STORY, 3733 St. Laurent Court, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada L5 L4T3.
