

Morcove was always my favourite
Tommy Keen

Cliff House / Cliff House / Cliff House - and Morcove

by TOMMY KEEN

Perhaps this article is a waste of time. Are any readers interested in Cliff House and Morcove? Mary Cadogan - yes, Ray Hopkins - yes, Esmond Kadish - yes, but who else? Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, St. Frank's, through the years they have all had their legions of admirers, and in their time, so had Cliff House ... and Morcove. But the interest in the boys' papers of our youth seems to have remained, whereas the interest in the girls' papers has, maybe, waned.

When I first became aware of the girls of Cliff House School, I had never seen a copy of the Magnet, and although I was young enough to still be enjoying Tiger Tim's Weekly, and the Rainbow, I became intensely fascinated by two weekly magazines which my sister, who was several years my senior, decided to buy weekly. These were the Schoolgirls' Own, and the School Friend. The stories of Betty Barton & Co. in the Schoolgirls' Own were, I must admit, my favourites, but I also enjoyed greatly the adventures of Barbara Redfern & Co. in the School Friend.

Way back in 1922, there appeared in the School Friend for ten consecutive issues, stories featuring the most popular girls in the Fourth Form at Cliff House, each story, concerning one of the girls, complete in itself. Also, and this was the great thrill of those days, a charming coloured picture, by the famous Cliff House artist, G. M. Dodshon, was given free. I remember, even now, the order in which the girls were featured:- Peggy Preston, Clara Trevlyn, Philippa Derwent, Mabel Lynn, Bessie Bunter, Marjorie Hazeldene, Barbara Redfern, Dolly Jobling, Phyllis Howell and Augusta Anstruther Browne. These, therefore, to me were the girls of Cliff House School.

However, two elder brothers, even older than my sister, thought it was time I read the Magnet and the Gem, periodicals which they had read a decade before (and which, I was to learn, they wanted to read again), and so I became acquainted with, and enraptured by, the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. These books did not however, lessen my interest in the School Friend and the Schoolgirls' Own, and so, to my utter amazement, in an issue I bought of the Magnet, Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn, and Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School were featured. This was during the Levison brothers' return to Greyfriars series. I was astounded, but delighted to read of Marjorie & Co., and was absolutely enthralled by the strange drawings of the Cliff House girls, by Mr. C. H. Chapman, Clara and Marjorie with flowing ringlets, and tiny straw boaters, whereas in the School Friend, as depicted by G. M. Dodshon, both these young ladies wore bobbed hair, in the style of the period. Naturally, I assumed, like many other readers, that Frank and Hilda Richards were brother and sister. How wrong we were.

Of more recent times, I discovered that Marjorie Hazeldene first appeared in the Magnet in 1908. Bessie Bunter was introduced in Magnet No. 582, dated 5th April, 1919, in "The Artful Dodger", and by the time she appeared again in issue No. 595, 5th July, 1919, "Bessie versus Betty", the School Friend had made its

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A SHOCK FOR PAULA!

An amusing incident from this week's long complete tale of the girls of Morgue and their rivals.

appearance on the bookstalls, the first issue dated 17th May, 1919, and Bessie was installed in Cliff House.

I became increasingly puzzled by the Magnet Cliff House characters, hardly any mention was made of Barbara and Mabel, the leading lights in the School Friend, and especially when I read some early Schoolboys' Own Libraries, reading for the first time in the Greyfriars stories of Phyllis Howell, and Philippa Derwent, and of a plump young lady called Wilhelmina Limburger. At the time, I did not realise I was reading the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co.

Right - so far, so good. I knew nothing about substitute writers, and that Phyllis and Philippa were figments of a Mr. Pentelow's imagination, nor that the first five or six issues of the School Friend Cliff House stories were written by Frank Richards, (Charles Hamilton), but recently, reading an issue of a Magnet from May 1925, "The Feud with Cliff House", and having been given to understand that Wilhelmina Limburger vanished from the Greyfriars stories during the Great War (owing to her German origin), to my amazement, her name cropped up again, in the same sentence as Bessie Bunter's. This story featured Phyllis, rather more than Marjorie and Clara, and still, in 1925, Clara was sporting her ringlets. I therefore wonder who wrote this story, was it Frank Richards, or was it Pentelow? Evidently there was little or no co-operation with the School Friend.

Referring to another Magnet, dated 17th January, 1920, on the Editor's page, a girl reader writes suggesting that a paper should be issued about the Cliff House girls, and the Editor, making a few remarks, wanted other readers' opinions as to whether this would be a popular idea. As the School Friend, had by that time, been on sale for eight months, it seemed a most peculiar remark. Neither, as I can trace, was any mention made in the Magnet in the month of May 1919, of the new publication for girls. Curiouser and curiouser, Alice would have said.

In March 1925, a new series of the School Friend began. Instead of the old size, like the Magnet and the Gem, it was now nearer the size of the Schoolgirls' Own. Marjorie and Clara were the leading characters in the first issue, but who was 'Hilda Richards' now? Horace Phillips? L. E. Ransome? (This may have been explained in past articles by Mary Cadogan, or other writers.) The characters in the School Friend from 1919 to 1925 remained almost the same, various new girls came, and went, and until the end of 1925, the Fourth Form were as follows:-

Barbara Redfern	Katie Smith
Mabel Lynn	Cissy Clare
Bessie Bunter	Gwen Cook
Clara Trevlyn	Freda Foote
Marjorie Hazeldene	Nancy Bell
Dolly Jobling	Marcia Loftus
Phyllis Howell	Agnes White
Philippa Derwent	Annabel Hitchens
Peggy Preston	Hetty Hendon
Augusta Anstruther-Browne	Vivienne Leigh
Lucy Morgan	Bridget O'Toole

One other girl, called Meg Lennox, left Cliff House in 1924, but strangely enough was mentioned in the hard-back, published after the last war, 'Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School'. In January 1926, Jemima Carstairs commenced her career at Cliff House, but more of Jemima later on.

Regarding the characters in the School Friend, apart from enjoying stories of Phyllis and Philippa, to me, the most interesting girl was Augusta Anstruther-Browne, the female equivalent of Herbert Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, who, when she was bad, was very bad, and when she was good, was very friendly with Peggy Preston, the scholarship girl. Rich girl, poor girl, as Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing were rich boy, poor boy.

In 1925, as Greyfriars and Highcliffe had been completely ignored in the School Friend, (although in an issue late 1924, at Friardale Station the announcement is made "Alight here for Cliff House and Greyfriars"), a Boys' School nearby was introduced, Lanchester College, and the first story featuring Jack Tolhurst & Co. in 1925, was called "Barbara's Boy Friend" (or "Chum" - I forget which). In the early days of the School Friend, there was also another Girls' School in the Friardale/Courtfield locality, Danesford Hall, but the girls of Danesford Hall did not appear too often in the stories. However, this means, that in this small rural Kentish district, there was Greyfriars, Highcliffe, Cliff House, Danesford Hall, Lanchester College, and when Cliff House appeared in The Schoolgirl in the 1930's, yet another Boys' School cropped up. On a half day, the bun shop in Courtfield must have been crowded!

Now, back to Jemima Carstairs. In the Christmas issue of the School Friend in 1925, when Barbara & Co. were staying at the home of Clara Trevlyn's parents, Jemima arrived as a guest of the Trevlyns', who became a popular favourite immediately. But the introduction of Jemima Carstairs to the Cliff House girls was rather intriguing, as for the previous four weeks, she had appeared as a new scholar at Morcove School, the famous scholastic establishment of Betty Barton & Co. in the Schoolgirls' Own. For the first time, in the history of the two papers, there appeared almost an involvement, but Jemima, after the Christmas vacation, joined Babs & Co. at Cliff House, with never a mention or reference being made that Jemima had spent a brief sojourn at Morcove. This was a great pity, it would have been a chance for the Morcove and Cliff House girls to meet, but evidently Jemima was not an invention of Horace Phillips, but was introduced into the Morcove stories by L. E. Ransome. This, however, has all been explained before in various earlier articles by Mary Cadogan.

Of one thing I feel certain, Jemima's arrival at Morcove School altered the appearance of the Morcove girls. Within a few weeks of Jemima's departure, the long tresses of the Morcove girls were bobbed and shingled at an alarming rate. The illustrations of Jemima in the Schoolgirls' Own, by Leonard Shields, were magnificent, and therefore, seeing her first in the Schoolgirls' Own, I was not so impressed with G. M. Dodshon's drawings of this very modern schoolgirl in the School Friend.

The School Friend ran to a close at the end of the 1920's, but by now, although

still an avid reader of the Magnet and Gem, I was becoming interested in the film magazines, but after the School Friend, another paper soon appeared, "The Schoolgirl", which included a long story each week of Barbara Redfern & Co. of Cliff House School. Naturally, I bought the new paper to see how Babs & Co. fared in different dress.

I was shattered, and after a few issues, I read or saw the Schoolgirl no more. This was not the Cliff House I knew, and although realising the stories had to more or less keep up with the times, the girls weren't the same. Where was Dolly Jobling? Vivienne Leigh? Augusta? And how did such girls as Janet Jordan and Leila Carroll materialise? No explanation was given, and although I am certain these stories and fresh characters must have appealed to new readers, they were not for me. Even though the girls, illustrated by T. E. Laidler, were much prettier, I resented that Barbara, Marjorie, and of course Bessie Bunter, did not even faintly resemble the (I must admit) rather strange Cliff House girls as portrayed by G. M. Dodshon over the previous decade.

So, at long last, for me, three different Cliff House Schools were over, C. H. Chapman's (whose very early illustrations of the girls, prior to the School Friend, still absolutely fascinate me), G. M. Dodshon's and T. E. Laidler's. As by this time, the stories in the Magnet were being illustrated by Leonard Shields, whenever Marjorie and Clara were depicted in the 1930's (as in "The Feud With Cliff House" in 1937), they appeared to me as if they were two Morcove girls, escaped from the Schoolgirls' Own. So, good-bye Cliff House.

MORCOVE SCHOOL

Why did I like Morcove School? Perhaps, because they were the first school stories I ever read. Certainly, with the exception of Betty Barton, and Cora and Judith Grandways, the early characters were not too clearly defined. There was little, or no humour in the stories, but maybe that appealed to me, for in later years I was to become an addict of the Talbot, Levison, Cardew, Vernon-Smith, Tom Redwing, etc., emotional stories in the Magnet and the Gem. So called humorous characters, Billy and Bessie Bunter, Horace Coker, Fisher T. Fish and even Naomer Nakara (later to appear in the Schoolgirls' Own as the imp), left me quite cold. The appalling way in which poor Betty Barton was treated by the vicious and snobbish girls of Morcove School upon her arrival, gave one little cause to chuckle. Then, as the weeks went by, and Betty, by proving her worth in all kinds of difficult situations, found a few good friends in girls such as Polly Linton, Madge Minden, Trixie-Hope, Dolly Delane and Tess Telawney. By the fourteenth issue, Betty was Captain of the Fourth Form.

Madge Minden, the Morcove musician, became (and remained) my favourite character right from the time she was introduced. At first she was rather a complex character, very handsome, but moody and temperamental, but as time passed, she became known as staid, clever Madge, a great favourite of all the members of Betty Barton's coterie (and, I always suspected a favourite character of 'Marjorie Stanton's). Also, she was a special chum of Polly Linton's brother, Jack.

There was depth and mystery too, in many of the Morcove series, especially

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with the introduction of unwelcome, and (way back in 1921) rather frightening visitors from Morocco, which included the beautiful Rose of the Desert, but the many series of Betty & Co's adventures in Morocco, have been described before in full by Ray Hopkins, (Collectors' Digest Annual 1974).

Evidently the Marjorie Stanton stories in the Schoolgirls' Own were not all written by Horace Phillips, an example of a substitute author being the Jemima Carstairs series (as mentioned in the Cliff House chapter). These stories appeared in December 1925, but there were also two other series which appeared in the autumn of 1924, which, I am almost certain were not written by Horace Phillips, and maybe could even also be the work of L. E. Ransome. These were Nos. 191-195, "The Mysterious Three", and 196-199, "Stolen Honours". Even when I read those stories many years ago, they seemed different from the usual Morcove tales. Two or three leading characters of Betty's group were not mentioned - Naomer Nakara, Helen Craig and Dolly Delane - not even Batty's arch enemy, Cora Grandways, but as soon as the two series were over, back came Naomer, Helen and Cora. Strangely enough, Naomer and Helen were also ignored again in the Jemima stories. Was the author writing about characters who were in the stories a year or so earlier, before Naomer and Helen had arrived, and whilst Cora was away from Morcove?

The accepted Fourth Form at Morcove from 1921 to the end of 1927 were:-

Betty Barton	Polly Linton	Diana Forbes
Madge Minden	Paula Creel	Mabel Rivers
Tess Trelawney	Trixie Hope	Kathleen Murray
Dolly Delane	Helen Craig	Stella Munro
Grace Garfield	Etta Hargrove	Jess Lingaird
Norah Nugent	Elsie Drew	Monica Holden
Ella Elgood	Eva Merrick	Cora Grandways
Ursula Wade	Sybil Farlow	Judith Grandways (later to become Judy Cardew)

Beginning with the first term in 1928, a new girl arrived, one who was to become one of the most popular characters in the Morcove saga, and who, after the first early misunderstandings, became the final member of the little band known as Betty Barton & Co. This girl's name was Pamela Willoughby.

Betty's intimate circle consisted of Betty herself, Polly Linton, Paula Creel, Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney, Dolly Delane, Trixie Hope, Helen Craig, Naomer Nakara and then Pam. Unfortunately, a character I always had a soft spot for, Trixie Hope, vanished from the stories soon after Pam arrived.

Betty Barton was a finely drawn character, she had far more appeal (to me, at least) than Barbara Redfern of Cliff House. After the many trials during her first few terms at Morcove, Betty did not appear as the featured lead in too many stories. Series starring Polly Linton or Pam Willoughby cropped up all the time, and even Madge Minden was featured regularly in various series. Betty, I suppose, could be almost the female counterpart of Tom Merry of St. Jim's. An excellent leader, but never pushing, loyal, pretty (as Tom was handsome), and adored by Polly and the rest of the girls.

Now - back to an earlier paragraph regarding Jemima Carstairs in the Cliff House review, and the idea of a meeting between the Morcove and the Cliff House girls.

Morcove School was in North Devon and Cliff House, of course, was in Kent, and it seemed as if 'never the twain would meet'. Then, just before the Schoolgirls' Own Annual for 1926 was due to be on sale on the bookstalls (approx. 1st Sept. 1925), large announcements were made in both the Schoolgirls' Own, and the School Friend, for readers to ensure that they quickly bought their copies of the new Annual, to read of the great and historic meeting between the girls of Morcove and Cliff House Schools. Absolute excitement ... but disillusionment followed. Many a hard earned six shillings was spent on buying the Annual to read of this momentous occasion, but alas, I, for one, was terribly disappointed. It was merely a one-act play, not even a story, with Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn calling at Morcove to arrange a hockey match with Betty & Co. With such a distance between the two schools, even the idea of a hockey match was ridiculous. The play was called "The Biter Bit", written by Marjorie Stanton AND Hilda Richards, but it was very weak, and must have been a great let-down for the readers. Never again did the idea of a meeting crop up.

Now, I often think back to those far away days when I lived in Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire, and how, with two or three other schoolmasters, we often imagined meetings with Harry Wharton, Reginald Talbot, Madge Minden, Phyllis Howell, Cardew, Clive and Levison and though we have now learned of substitute writers, nom de plumes, etc., I can only thank Charles Hamilton/Frank Richards/Hilda Richards/Martin Clifford/Marjorie Stanton/Horace Phillips/L. E. Ransome and Uncle Tom Cobby and ALL, not forgetting C. H. Chapman, G. M. Dodshon, and Leonard Shields for all the pleasure they have given us for so many years.

With regret, one can only say "Farewell Cliff House, Cliff House, Cliff House AND Morcove".

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