

T H E

# Story Paper Collector

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## “THE BOYS’ FRIEND”

A FAMOUS BRITISH BOYS’ JOURNAL—  
1895-1927

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By W. H. G.

ONE of the longest lived and most popular of the boys’ story papers published in Great Britain during the period in which it flourished was the “Boys’ Friend.” From the first number to the last (Jan. 29, 1895 until Dec. 31, 1927) it was issued in the same size—about 14 1/2 x 11 inches—and on the same familiar green paper, with the exception of a change for a few weeks to yellow paper in 1899, during the excitement of the early days of the war in South Africa.

No. 1 was a “double number” of 16 pages at the same price as the 8-page numbers that followed: one halfpenny (1c.) This issue contained about the same quota of serials and completes as is found in succeeding issues,

the extra space being filled with articles and news items, plus a full page of “What the Editor has to say,” which included a portrait of the Editor. Later we learn this gentleman relinquished control of the paper before it actually commenced publication, and that another gentleman whose name was still later revealed to be Hamilton Edwards had charge of the paper from the first number.

Among the articles in No. 1 was a denunciation of the “penny dreadful”—but I am told that some of Mr. Edwards’ writers also contributed to those same penny dreadfuls; maybe their writings became purified when Mr. Edwards used them. In addition to editing his papers, he also wrote serials for some of

them—he eventually controlled a large group of papers, not only for boys, but also for girls and grown-ups too.

No. 47 was the first Christmas Double Number, the first of a long line of them. Among the contributors during the first year were Reginald Wray and Henry St. John, both of whom wrote for Mr. Edwards for many years. Mr. St. John was known in other literary spheres as Henry St. John Cooper, I believe.

The paper continued on what appears to have been an uneventful career, apparently growing in popularity. Then came the war in South Africa, and beginning with No. 250, Nov. 4, 1899, there commenced a series of "war numbers," some on yellow paper, some double numbers. After a few months this war fever subsided and the "B.F." resumed a more normal appearance.

During the halfpenny series several other authors who contributed to the "B.F." for many years made their appearance; among them Sidney Drew, Henry T. Johnson, and A. S. Hardy. "Nelson Lee," popular for many years as a detective rivalling "Sexton Blake," appeared during this period.

The last of the halfpenny series was No. 332, June 8th,

1901. With the next week's issue a new series was started, 16 pages, selling at one penny (2c.). The old series numbering was continued, along with the new, during the first year—the only instance that has come to my notice of this being done among the British boys' story papers of that period.

No. 41, new series, March 22, 1902, was the Oxford and Cambridge Boat-race Number, and was printed in blue ink—prob-

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bly the only time this was done.

Judging by the amount of advertising carried the paper flourished mightily during the next ten years. For some time double numbers carried colored covers, but after about four years these were dropped, not to return until 1915. In 1902 another paper, "Boys' Realm," on pink paper, was started, and in 1903 the "Boys' Herald," on white paper, appeared—all under the same control. While very similar to the "B. F.," the "Realm" later specialized in sport, and the "Herald" in hobbies.

Mr. Edwards came to be an important personage in the publishing company, the Amalgamated Press Ltd., and was made a director. About 1912 he seems to have relinquished personal control of his papers, which were divided between other editors. The "B. F." carried on with little change in appearance, but no longer travelled in company with the "Herald"—which was suspended in that year—and the "Realm." A little later a recent arrival, "Dreadnought," joined up as running mate. It was absorbed in 1915.

By 1914 the paper seems to be not doing so well. No Christmas double number appeared. In February, 1915, control passed into the hands of Mr. H. A. Hinton, who had been very suc-

cessful with the "Magnet," the "Gem," and the "Penny Popular." In No. 715, Feb. 20, was published the first of the very popular series of "Rookwood" school stories, which ran for eleven years. Then followed four "bumper" numbers, enlarged, with colored covers. This must have been one of the biggest "booms" put on for any boys' paper. And it must have been a success, for the good old "B. F." flourished anew for many years more, though now with a slightly changed make-up, and stories that appear a little more juvenile.

In January of 1916 the 21st Anniversary Number was issued with a colored cover; it contained messages from various notable persons, including Hamilton Edwards. War conditions caused a reduction to twelve pages in March, 1916. The Christmas issue for that year was the last with a colored cover. In January 1918 a further cut left only eight pages; in March the price was raised to three-halfpence (3c). Popular authors during this period were "Owen Conquest," "Duncan Storm" and "Maurice Everard," all of whom contributed many serials and series between 1915 and 1925.

Came the end of hostilities, and in June of 1919 the pages were increased to twelve, the

price still three-halfpence. No. 973, Jan. 31st, 1920, was the 25th Birthday Number, and contained the first instalment of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's sporting story, "Rodney Stone." The 1000th No. of the new series was dated August 7th, 1920, but was not celebrated particularly beyond editorial comment.

Late in 1922 the pages were increased to sixteen, the pre-war size, the price raised to twopence. Until this time the paper again seems to have been very popular. At times a lot of advertisements were carried, so that two issues just before Christmas, 1921, were increased in size by four pages to accommodate all of them. The Christmas Number for that year also consisted of sixteen pages; this was the last increased-page special number issued.

Mr. Hinton left the Amalgamated Press in 1921, I believe, but the style of the paper, and that of its companions, "Magnet," "Gem" and "Popular" did not change. In January, 1923, stories by the now world-famous P. G. Wodehouse began to appear.

But in 1922 an event occurred which was no doubt a contributing factor to the decline of not only the "Boys' Friend" but also of the "Boys' Realm," which, suspended in 1916, was revived in 1919 in the same form. This was the launching by the same

publishers of the "Champion," a paper with smaller pages than the "B.F.," and which had a colored front page on every issue. Other papers of similar attractive appearance followed.

The good old "Green 'un" carried on for several years, but looking at the copies for this period it can be seen that all was not well. In 1925 the columns, which from the start had numbered five to the page, were changed to four. Then, after No. 1298, April 24, '26, drastic changes were made. Stories by Owen Conquest, Maurice Everard and Duncan Storm were no longer carried.

The paper was "reconstructed to suit the modern boy." Size of page and color were the same, but there were now three wide columns to the page, volume numbering and the words "New Series" were dropped, and the pages were numbered 1 to 16 in each issue, instead of being carried on through the volume. At this time, for some reason, the apostrophe in "Boys'" was changed from after the "s" to before it; the paper was now the "Boy's Friend."

But this attempt to revive the old paper was not a success; by the end of 1926 the columns were again four to the page, and reprint stories and pages of comics were being used. No. 1384,

December 24, 1927, was the last Christmas Number—the 33rd. In the previous week's issue the Editor, in boosting a "war" story just starting, made reference to the stories run in the paper many years before, predicting the war of 1914-18. Before this time the pages of comics had been dropped.

When the faithful who had stayed with their favorite paper thus far opened their copies for the week after Christmas—No. 1385, December 31st, 1927, they learned that in future the paper would be incorporated with that "really live" boys' weekly, the "Triumph." After a few weeks "Boy's Friend" appeared no more on the cover of "Triumph" and the old paper was now just a

memory. In all a total of 1717 issues were published. During one week in almost 33 years the paper failed to appear; this was in 1926, at the time of the general strike.

It is interesting to note that the "Boys' Realm" was changed to small pages in 1927, and survived the change by only about a year, while the "Girls' Friend," a similar style of paper published by the same company since the late '90's, went through the same change and suffered the same fate not long after.

Twice since then the Amalgamated Press has tried to revive the large-size page story paper. Late in 1934 there appeared "Boys Broadcast," which ran to only 13 or so numbers before

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being changed to smaller page-size. In 1938 "Modern Boy," a very popular paper started in 1928, was changed to the large size. The new series began with a big "splash," but lasted less than six months before reverting to smaller pages.

The day of the large-page "journal" type of story paper seems to be definitely past, and

is not likely to return. But looking through my volumes and loose numbers of the "Boys' Friend," in my opinion an outstanding boys' paper of a past era, I get a thrill that I fear will not be felt thirty years hence by present-day boys when they peruse hoarded copies of their own favorite papers—or so-called "comic" magazines.

## NOTES

¶ The oldest boys' weekly still published in Britain is "Adventure," the 1000th issue being dated December 28, 1940. The next oldest is "Champion," the 1000th number of which is due March 29.



¶ Casualties among British boys' papers have been heavy since

the war started. In order of suspension the following have been stopped:—"Modern Boy," "Gem," "Magnet," "Boys' Cinema," "Thriller," "Triumph," "Detective Weekly" (which replaced "Union Jack" in 1933), and "Skipper." This leaves but five boys' papers still being published in Britain.

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# Introducing : : :

The first issue of any publication, however modest, seems to call for some excuse for its appearance. But I do not propose to offer any excuse. Having the equipment and ability, a legacy from the days when I was a printer (and provided the energy is available) it appears to me a pleasant task to produce a little paper devoted to the collection of the British boys' papers of the past forty years.

Having spent my early years in England it is natural that I am still mainly interested in the British papers, especially the

"Boys' Friend" and the "Magnet Library." But I fully understand how my American contemporaries regard the "novels" of their own youth.

I must here express gratitude to Ralph Cummings' "Dime Novel Round-Up," and the now - suspended "Collector's Miscellany," long published in England by Joseph Parks, for the inspiration necessary to attempt this modest endeavor.

How many more issues there will be, how frequently they will appear, remains to be seen.--  
W. H. G.

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—○—

## **Wm. H. Gander**

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