

COLLECTING 'CHUMS' BOYS PAPER

NORMAN WRIGHT ON THE
HISTORY OF A POPULAR
EARLY BOYS' PAPER

'Chums' enjoyed that rare distinction of not only being loved by the boys for whom it was written, but also of being approved of by their parents, an accolade which puts it on a par with 'Boys' Own Paper' and a few others. This approval was a contributing factor to its long and successful run and, more importantly to collectors, resulted in the preservation of large numbers of the early volumes.

The first issue of Cassell's new magazine for boys was dated September 14th 1892. The sixteen pages cost one penny and contained a mix of fact and fiction. The cover illustration for the first issue, drawn by Gordon Browne, depicted an incident from "The Glory and Renown", the paper's first serial story, and that illustration was later incorporated into the cover design for the first annual volume.

"For Glory and Renown", an adventure story set in the late eighteenth century, was written by D.H. Parry, a prolific writer of historical romances whose work appeared in

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No 26—Vol. 1.

MARCH 8, 1893.

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The first issue of 'Chums' appeared in September 1892. This issue is from the following year.

a multitude of boys' weekly and monthly papers from the 1890s through to the 1930s. Parry was a regular contributor to 'Chums' and by the time his last story, "The Tiger of Tangier", appeared in 1935 he had become one of their most popular writers. Several of his pieces were written under his pen name of Morton Pike and he enjoyed the rare distinction of writing the opening serial for both 'Chums' and George Newnes' 'The Captain'. Such was Parry's popularity that eight of his swashbuckling adventure stories for boys were published in book form by Cassell.

Apart from its serial story, the first issue contained such diverse items as articles on "In a Torpedo Boat", "How to Train for the Football Season" and "Some of the Doings of Julius Caesar Whilst in Britain"! The only other fictional piece was a short story by Max Pemberton, the paper's first editor, called "The Man in the Black Sheet". The same issue also had a piece called "A Chat About Harrow School" written by 'A

Harrow Boy'. This was the first of a series on public schools. It makes fascinating reading today and gives a revealing insight into the kind of readership the publication was aimed at.

The editor was in no doubt at all about his market. In his first editorial he wrote: "There is no reading public so little catered for as the boy. I don't mean the schoolboy only, but the young man who is just passing from boyhood to manhood. Such a boy, with his younger brother, I intend to write for" Indeed, this policy was borne out in the paper's many competitions, all of which had age categories from under 12, to 21 years old. It would be hard to imagine a boys' paper being able to hold such a diversely aged audience today!

SERIALS

Pemberton wrote four serials for the paper, but his most memorable work was "The Iron Pirate", a pirate story set in the twentieth century, which began its serialisation on 1st March 1893. The story was so popular that it was reprinted in book form many times and serialised once again in the paper in 1927.

The first volume of 'Chums' contained fifty weekly parts – a total of eight hundred pages. The publisher's crimson binding aptly captured the feel of the paper, depicting as it did sports, swords, a soldier defending his wounded comrade, and a line of horsemen fighting off starving wolves. This design remained unchanged until 1911 – indeed, in its entire run of forty-eight annual volumes, only two binding designs were ever used.

'Chums' was issued not only weekly and annually, but also monthly, and these parts were advertised at the end of each volume. They cost 6d each and contained a full colour plate, but readers unable to afford the monthly issues could buy the twelve plates separately, together with a four-page index and title page, for 1/6d. These could then be bound in with the weekly parts to make them virtually undistinguishable from those volumes made up of monthly parts.

From the 1920s, the monthly parts not only contained a coloured plate but also had superb full-coloured covers. These monthly parts turn up far less frequently than the bound volumes, but they often

contain the eight-page supplements not included in the weekly issues or the bound volumes. These are particularly appealing and collectable as they contain fiction by such notable authors as Sax Rohmer.

During the 1890s, 'Chums' offered its readers a mixture of adventure and school stories. Volume three, for instance, contained a reprint of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic pirate tale, "Treasure Island". Writers in those early volumes included G.A. Henty, James Fenimore Cooper, G. Manville Fenn, Harry Collingwood and a host of others, many of whom are now long forgotten.

One author whose name is almost inseparable from that of 'Chums' is Samuel Walkey. His first serial for the paper, entitled "In Quest of Sheba's Treasure", appeared in volume four and he continued to write for the paper until the penultimate volume of 1940. Walkey's stories were always full of action – more often than not they were tales of pirates and the Spanish Main and they included such titles as "Rogues of the Fiery Cross" (his first pirate serial), "King of the Seas" and "Yo Ho For the Spanish Main", his best remembered buccaneering

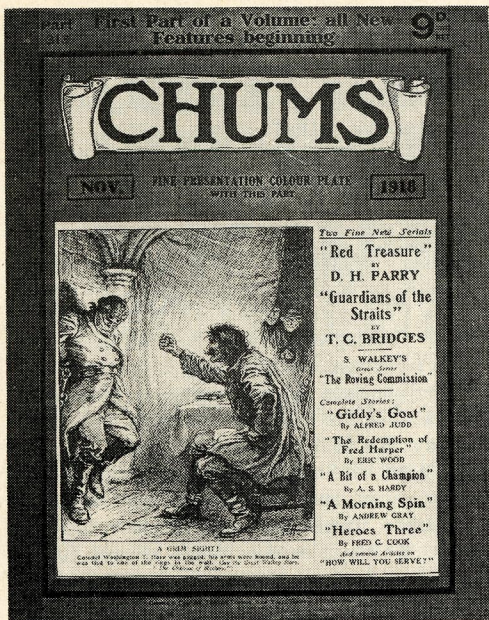
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'Chums' was issued monthly as well as weekly. This particular issue, from November 1918, featured stories by D.H. Parry, T.C. Bridges and S. Walkey.

tale that was serialised in 1909, and re-printed in book form by Cassell the following year. When Walkey was not writing of pirates, he often wrote of the French Revolution, and one of his most memorable characters was 'Jack-a-Lantern', a rescuer of French aristocrats. This serial appeared in 1921, and was later published as a book by the Sheldon Press. It was still being re-printed in the 1950s, and in 1958 the story turned up as a full colour picture strip in D.C. Thomson's comic 'Topper'!

'Chums' volumes from the 1890s may seem rather dated, but the same cannot be said of issues from the Edwardian era and after. Ernest Foster succeeded Pemberton as editor in 1894, having been editor of 'Little Folks', Cassell's magazine for younger children.

During his stint as editor, the magazine used several rather novel publicity ideas. On August 14th 1904, twenty thousand envelopes, each containing one penny, were distributed to boys in the streets of London and some large provincial towns – the idea being that the lucky recipients should use

their unexpected gift to purchase the latest weekly issue of the paper. Whether or not the sales of 'Chums' went up in that week is not recorded, but such a stunt probably resulted in much publicity for the magazine at the relatively modest cost of just over £20! The idea must have been quite successful because exactly two years later, fifty thousand nickel-plated pencil cases were given away. Later, during the 1920s, more conventional free gifts were given away with the paper, when readers could collect cards of cricketers, footballers and football teams. Sets of these cards turn up frequently in the catalogues of cigarette and trade card dealers.

FLOURISH

By 1908 a new generation of boys' papers was beginning to flourish. Titles like 'Gem' and 'Magnet', though only in their infancy, were an indication of the type of papers that were finding a ready market. If one compares 'Chums' with these other Edwardian papers, it is difficult to believe that they were published at the same time. 'Chums' was far ahead in the quality of its artwork, fiction and printing. 'Magnet' and 'Gem' may have had the talents of Charles Hamilton, but in those early days his great powers of storytelling were not fully developed and 'Chums' readers could relish the stories of Frank Shaw, Walkey, Maxwell Scott and the like.

The 1908/9 volume of 'Chums' is of particular interest to collectors of P.G. Wodehouse as it contains a serial called "The Luck Stone" which was written by Wodehouse, under the pseudonym of Basil Windham, in collaboration with W. Townsend. It was serialised in 'Chums' at the same time as his Psmith novel, "The New

—TILLEYS—

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Fold" (published in book form as "Psmith in the City") was being serialised in 'The Captain'. "The Luck Stone" ran in volume 17 from issue number 836 on 16th September 1908 until issue 854 on 20th January 1909. Described as 'A story of fun and adventure at school', it had a typical Wodehouse opening:

"It is not always pleasant to have mumps. There are several drawbacks to the malady. It can be painful, and it does not tend to improve one's personal appearance. But it has this great advantage, that, if it attacks you towards the end of the holidays, you are pretty certain to be enjoying yourself at home when the rest of the world has gone back to school."

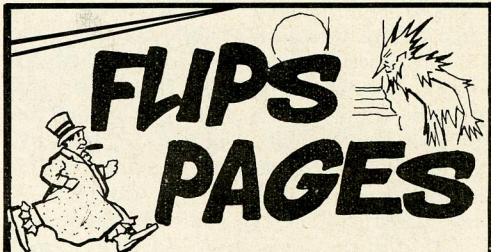
The tale concerned the misadventures of a valuable blue stone whilst in the care of the 'hero', Jimmy Stewart. Unfortunately, the quality of the writing was not sustained throughout the serial. Nevertheless, the volume of 'Chums' containing the story commands a premium price on account of its appeal to Wodehouse enthusiasts, particularly as the story was never reprinted in book form.

VOLUMES

In 1911, the pictorial decoration used for the yearly volumes was changed. Gordon Browne's striking original design, used since the first volume, was probably considered too old-fashioned, and a new front board design based on an illustration by Stanley L. Wood depicting a cowboy on horseback with a lasso in hand, was adopted. The spine bore the picture of a goalkeeper stretching up to clasp a ball. Despite these changes, the background colour for the bindings remained scarlet and the title lettering gold. This binding remained unchanged until the final volume of 1941.

'Chums' volumes for the years 1914 to 1920 are almost as difficult to find as those from the 1890s. Wartime constraints resulted in poor quality paper being used, and all too often volumes that do turn up from the war years have very yellowed, crumbly pages. Sometimes, paper that was almost tinted was used, and I have seen volumes with pages varying in colour from light green to grey.

Early in 1927 'Chums' was taken over by the Amalgamated Press and the dating of the



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volumes was changed. This has resulted in some confusion amongst collectors. Volume 34, the last volume to be published by Cassell, comprised the issues from mid 1925 to mid 1926 and is dated 1926 on the spine and title page. Volume 35, the first Amalgamated Press volume, was dated 1927-28 so it looks as if the volume for 1926-27 was missed. In fact, the 1927-28 volume was made up of the issues from mid 1926 to mid 1927 so the sets are complete. Presumably, the change was made in order to persuade purchasers that the volumes were bang up to date!

On 2nd July 1932, 'Chums' ceased as a weekly publication after 2077 issues. Monthly issues continued for a further two years, ceasing in 1934, and it continued as an annual until 1941, but by then it was a mere shadow of its former self with its page count reduced from nearly 1000 to just 348.

WEEKLY

During its run as a weekly and monthly, readers had always been able to acquire the publisher's bindings. In 1923, the cost had been 3/- for the binders and threepence for the index and title page, and when the Amalgamated Press took over, they offered ready bound volumes for sale alongside their other annuals at a price of 12/6d, which was less than buying the monthly parts and bindings separately.

These early annuals were excellent value for money — not only did they contain over 800 pages, but they also had a handsome full colour dust-wrapper depicting some exciting episode from one of the stories. The dust-wrapper on the volume for 1931, for instance, showed a large racing car hurtling



Later issues of 'Chums' had vivid and adventurous pictorial covers which conveyed the nature of the stories inside. This issue was for September 1926.

dangerously round a precipitous bend. Two years later, it depicted a bi-plane observing some fierce looking tribesmen on the North West Frontier. Volumes in their original dust-wrappers are extremely scarce now. One collector I know with a complete set of 'Chums' has only one volume with its dust-wrapper. It seems that the larger the book, the more likely it is that the dust-wrapper has become damaged or lost. Because of their scarcity, volumes of 'Chums' with a dust-wrapper will usually cost at least fifty percent more than a similar volume without.

REGULARS

Probably the most collected volumes of the paper are those published between about 1920 and 1935. During those years the paper carried stories by many of the day's top boys' writers. As well as the long-standing 'regulars' like Walkey and Parry, were school story writers Michael Poole, Hylton Cleaver and Gunby Hadath. George E. Rochester contributed several fine air adventure serials and Sydney Horler, remembered today for his adult thrillers,

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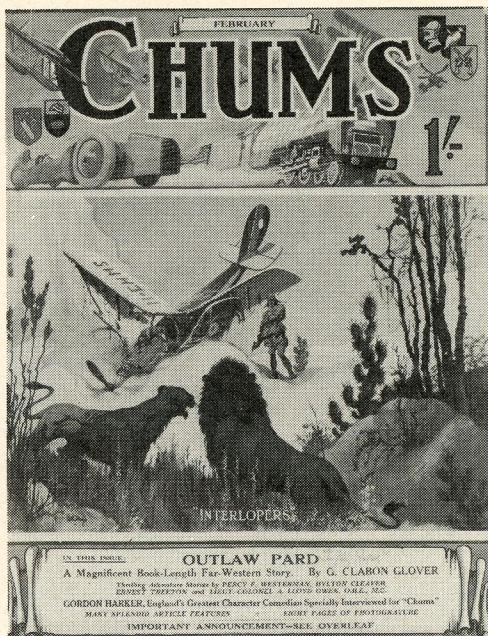
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'NO SMOKING' FAIRS

wrote four serials for 'Chums' between 1920 and 1927. Another contributor equally at home writing for boys or adults was John Hunter.

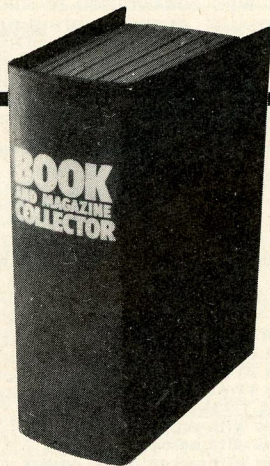
Part of the paper's great appeal to collectors is the high quality and variety of its artwork. The very first 'Chums' serial was illustrated by Gordon Browne and his work appeared in the paper right up to the last volume, in which, appropriately, he illustrated a short story entitled "A Truant in the Forty Five" written by D.H. Parry, the author of the first serial, also illustrated by Browne back in 1892. Another very regular illustrator was Paul Hardy, whose heavily cross-hatched style is instantly recognisable. His wide-eyed, angular villains added a touch of mystery to many of the serials. More often than not, he illustrated Walkey's pirate yarns. His work on historical serials, always adding an extra touch of authenticity, was often used when 'Chums' serials were re-printed as books.

Fred Bennett's usually humorous work appeared in many volumes throughout the first three decades of this century, and another humorous and much collected



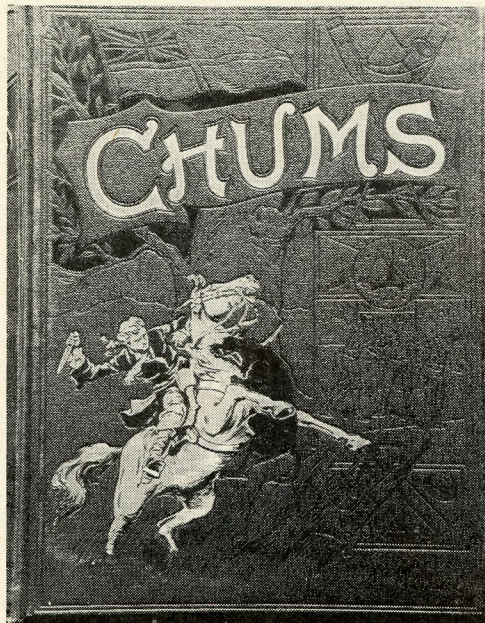
By the time this issue appeared in February 1933, 'Chums' had ceased as a weekly publication. It continued as a monthly for a further two years.

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In 1911, this new binding, designed by Stanley L. Wood, was used for the 'Chums' annuals. It remained unchanged until the final volume in 1941.

illustrator who contributed to the paper was Thomas Henry, the famous 'William' artist. His contributions, while not as prolific as Bennett's, were full of slapstick appeal.

During the 1920s and 1930s the paper

was enlivened by the work of H.M. Brock, Eric Parker and Cecil Glossop, three artists whose lively illustrations contrasted markedly with the more static work of Hardy. Thomas Somerfield, T.H. Robinson and Serge Drigin were just some of the other artists who produced excellent work for 'Chums', and who helped to make it perhaps the best illustrated boys' paper of the period.

An invaluable guide to anyone interested in 'Chums' is "Through the Years With Chums" by Brian Doyle, published in the "Collector's Digest Annual" for 1961. Doyle's twenty-one page index lists every 'Chums' serial together with its author and illustrator. The index also gives brief details of many of the authors and illustrators who contributed to the paper.

Proof of the paper's continuing popularity is evident from the number of volumes that keep appearing on dealers' lists. Many of its most ardent collectors first read it as boys and, in addition, there is a new generation of enthusiasts who have been attracted by the quality of its fiction and art work. As a result, volumes from the 1890s are becoming increasingly difficult to find. The prices of those from the 'golden years' are increasing all the time and it is becoming quite difficult for collectors to track down all forty-eight volumes of the magazine.

PRICE GUIDE TO 'CHUMS'

A guide to current values of bound volumes, monthly and weekly issues in Very Good condition

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