

THE 'MODERN BOY' COMIC

MANY OF THE EARLY
BIGGLES STORIES
FIRST APPEARED IN
THIS COMIC
BY NORMAN WRIGHT

When the first issue of 'Modern Boy' was published on 11 February 1928 the cover carried a bold message: "No. 1 of the book every boy has been waiting for". The cover was printed in yellow and blue and depicted a steam locomotive, thus setting a trend it was to follow closely over the ensuing years. Trains, ships and cars were a regular sight hurtling across the cover of 'Modern Boy', but perhaps the most significant machine depicted was the aeroplane. It was in 'Modern Boy' that many of the earliest Biggles stories of W.E. Johns were first serialised.

Unlike the majority of boys' papers, though, 'Modern Boy' carried many non-fiction articles. In the earliest issues there was a wireless column for the technically-minded by Norman Edwards, editor of 'Popular Wireless', and boys were shown how to construct and improve crystal sets — "A Crystal Set for 2/-" was the subject dealt with in issue No. 12, for instance. There was also a regular feature called "The Car X-rayed". Week by week each component was explained with the help of a sectional drawing. Later this feature was

replaced by "What Car Was That?", which showed readers how to identify different models.

If these series were intended to cater for boys' interests and hobbies, their future well-being was also dealt with. A feature about careers entitled "Careers in the Making" began in the first issue with "If You Want To Be a Journalist", and along similar lines there was "A Day in the Life of a Racing Motorist". Neither series lasted a year. More successful, though, was "Our Pictorial News Page" which began in the first issue and ran for five years, presenting readers with an insight into all manner of modern wonders, usually of a mechanical variety. This was later replaced by an irregular series entitled "Modern Boys' News Reel" which featured, among other things, a report on the Speaking Clock when it was introduced in 1936.

FICTION

Only sixteen on the first issue's thirty-six pages were devoted to fiction. These were two serials and two complete short stories. "Touch and Go" was a complete story by Gunby Hadath, a popular school story writer whose work had been appearing in boys' papers since 1909.

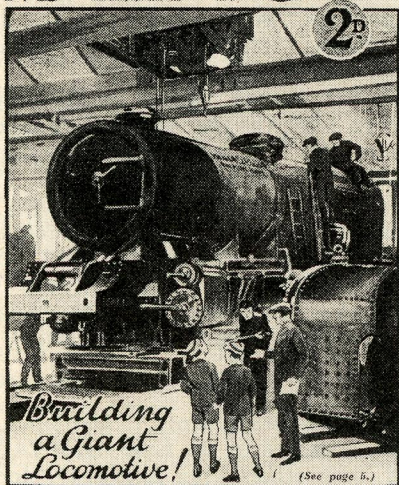
But 'Modern Boy' gave little space to school stories — its staple diet was to be the adventure story. The second story in the first issue, "The Skid Merchant", was typical of the type of fiction 'Modern Boy' regularly published. It was written by Alfred Edgar, an author who figured prominently in the paper's history, writing innumerable stories about motor cars and motor cycle racing, many of which were eventually reprinted in book form. Edgar later became a successful playwright and made a name for himself writing scripts in Hollywood.

"Round the World On Half a Crown" by Tom Rogers was one of the two serials beginning in the first issue of 'Modern Boy'. It was an uninspired tale written in the present tense, purporting to be autobiographical. But of much greater interest to collectors was the other serial, "King of the Islands", written by the King of the boys' papers, Charles Hamilton.

Before the Second World War, Hamilton was the star writer of the Amalgamated

The MODERN BOY

EVERY MONDAY
10th Edition, Price 10d. (1938)
No. 12
Vol. 1



Aeroplane-Adventure Series Commencing This Week!

This early issue of 'Modern Boy' was published when steam still ruled. Very Good copies of these early issues sell for around £3 each.

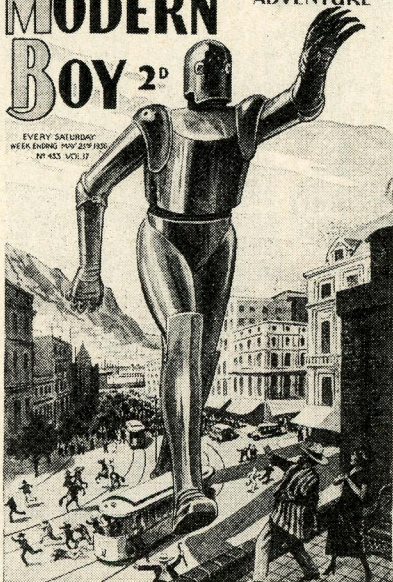
Press, and under a variety of pen-names he contributed a vast number of stories to virtually all the boys' papers. As Frank Richards he wrote the weekly tales of Greyfriars School in 'The Magnet', and as Martin Clifford he wrote stories about Tom Merry of St Jim's for 'The Gem'. For 'Modern Boy', though, he created Ken King of the islands, a youthful hero who traded in the South Seas in his ketch, "The Dawn".

The first serial was actually credited to

The MODERN BOY 2^D

Great New CAPT JUSTICE ADVENTURE

EVERY SATURDAY
WEEK ENDING NOV 20th 1938
No. 433, 10d. 12



'Modern Boy' No. 433 featured this superb robot illustration on the front cover. It was for a new Captain Justice adventure starting inside.

Sir Alan Cobham and C. Hamilton, but as it was the fashion for boys' papers to credit stories to famous personalities in an attempt to lure readers, it's highly likely that Sir Alan never even saw the stories, let alone wrote them, but he was undoubtedly paid for the use of his name. The first Ken King serial ended in issue No. 20. After that all the "King of the Islands" tales were credited to Charles Hamilton alone.

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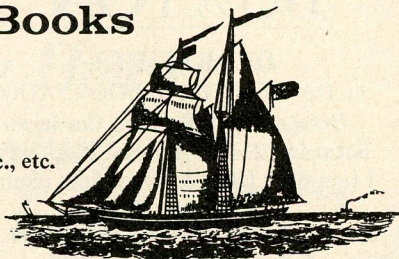
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BIG NEWS FOR YOU! *See inside*

The MODERN BOY ^{2p}

EVERY SATURDAY
- WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 12th 1938

NO. 523
5p. 31

This
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48
PAGE

PHOTOGRAPHURE

ALBUM

(8x10 1/2 inches)

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NEXT

WEEK

with the

BIG NEW

MODERN BOY

Full Particulars on Centre Pages



'Modern Boy' No. 523 was the last issue of the first series. As well as informing its readers of the new series starting next week, it also advertised its Film Star Album featuring Will Hay on the cover.

King stories, Hamilton wrote a multitude of other tales for 'Modern Boy'. In 1930, for example, there was a short series about a character called Bunny, and in the mid-1930s he contributed stories under the general heading "School for Slackers", the last of which appeared in issue No. 394. Another character he created especially for

'Modern Boy' was Len Lex, a schoolboy detective who featured in thirty-six stories during 1936. Incidentally, many of the "School for Slackers" stories were reprinted in the "Schoolboys' Own Library", and practically all the Ken King tales were reprinted in "Boys' Friend Library", both of which were fourpenny monthly publications.

Science Fiction figured prominently in 'Modern Boy', the first sci-fi cover appearing on issue No. 7. Painted by Arthur Jones and entitled "All Aboard for the Moon", it accompanied an article inside the paper describing the attempts being made to reach the moon. Readers were told of a 'shell rocket' being developed which would be fired from a cannon — they were not told, however, how the return journey would be made!

SCI-FI

The first sci-fi story, "Marooned on Mars", appeared in the issue dated 24 July 1928, and others soon followed. 'Modern Boy's most successful sci-fi character was Captain Justice, created by Murray Roberts, the pen-name of Robert Murray Graydon. The first Captain Justice story appeared in issue No. 146, late in 1930. Justice, together with his friends Len Connor, Midge and Dr O'Mally, had a succession of fantastic adventures throughout the 1930s, and they were all well-written fast-moving stories. The earliest Captain Justice tales were illustrated by D.C. Eyles, but the majority were drawn by Ernest Ibbetson, whose lively imaginative style lent itself to the monsters and robots encountered by Justice in his adventures on land, in space, or under the sea. Ibbetson's cover paintings for an adventure about robots published in 1936 were amongst the best that the paper ever had. Murray Graydon died in 1937, and other authors took over the character. The very last 'Modern Boy' cover featured an illustration depicting an incident in a Captain Justice story. Many of these stories were reprinted in the "Boys' Friend Library".

During the inter-war years many people's minds were preoccupied with aviation, and this was not overlooked by the paper's editor. Before long 'Modern Boy' was devoting a substantial amount of space to the subject. The first air adventure appeared

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in issue No. 12. "Toll of the Silent Wastes" by George E. Rochester was described by the editor as "The first of a series of air adventure yarns", and there were certainly numerous other air tales to come. Rochester was a prolific contributor to virtually every boys' paper published during the 1930s and 1940s, and it was not unusual for him to have two serials running concurrently in 'Modern Boy' under different pen-names. Sadly his work is hardly collected today despite its popularity at the time.

Without a doubt the most famous author to write for 'Modern Boy' was W.E. Johns, who began contributing cover paintings and illustrations during the late 1920s. He became 'Modern Boy's' 'air expert', writing a miscellany of short articles such as that appearing in issue No. 59 entitled "Planes Without Pilots". His first regular signed column was "What Plane Was That?" which commenced on 27 December 1930. This series, which began with the Westland Wessex, gave a description of each plane and its performance, together with an illustration. It was not long before Johns was writing regular articles for the paper on all

manner of aeronautical topics. In late 1931 he contributed to, and edited, the "Modern Boy's Book of Aircraft".

It was in the last issue of 1932 that the editor announced the imminent arrival of a new series of stories by Flying Officer W.E. Johns. "He has written a series of complete flying stories that will thrill you to the marrow", the editor wrote. "The first of them will appear in next week's 'Modern Boy'. They concern the exciting war-time adventures of one Captain James Bigglesworth, an amazing flying man known to his comrades as Biggles." In the editorial readers were told that the first story would be entitled "Biggles and the White Fokker".

SERIES

The first series of tales, beginning with "The White Fokker", ran from issue Nos. 257 to 271. They were not completely new, however, having previously appeared in 'Popular Flying' during 1932, and in a book entitled "The Camels Are Coming" published by John Hamilton in August that same year. They are very collectable, though, because collectors with the stories in both book and

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magazine format will notice the innumerable textual changes that were made for 'Modern Boy'. Originally the stories had been intended for adult readers, and as such the characters drank whisky and used mild expletives. These had to be deleted before the stories could appear in 'Modern Boy', and further changes were made when the stories were reprinted again in more recent years.

Three months later 'Modern Boy' began another series of ten new Biggles adventures, which later became part of "Biggles of the Camel Squadron", published by John Hamilton in March 1934. Another series of Biggles adventures began in issue No. 323. These are of particular interest as they were never republished in their original form as a hardback book, although some were reprinted in "Boys' Friend Library" No. 469 under the title "Biggles Learns to Fly". A revised edition, omitting two of the stories, was published as a hardback book by the Brockhampton Press in 1951 under the same title, and other stories in the series appeared in another "Boys' Friend Library" (No. 501) entitled "Biggles in France". Most of those stories were reprinted by Thames Publishing

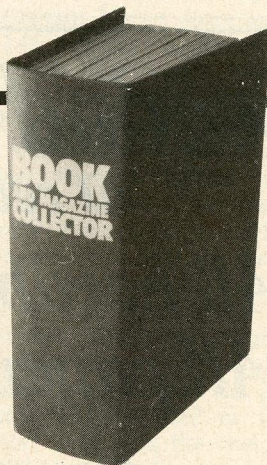
Company in 1955 as "Biggles of 266".

During the summer of 1934 (and in the midst of the short stories), the first full-length Biggles novel, "The Cruise of the Condor" was serialised. Some collectors consider the early short stories set during the First World War to be John's best work — they certainly had a freshness and vitality not always present in the later full-length books. Yet there is no doubting the popularity of the Biggles adventure novels that followed, all of which were published in book form either just before or just after serialisation in 'Modern Boy'. Biggles was of the paper's strongest selling points and he was seldom absent from its pages for more than a few months.

BIGGLES

The early Biggles tales were illustrated in part by Johns himself, but later ones carried artwork by H. Radcliffe Wilson. None of Wilson's 'Modern Boy' illustrations were ever used for the book editions, though, but he did provide drawings for the first and later editions of "Spitfire Parade", a series of Second World War Biggles adventures that

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did not appear in 'Modern Boy'.

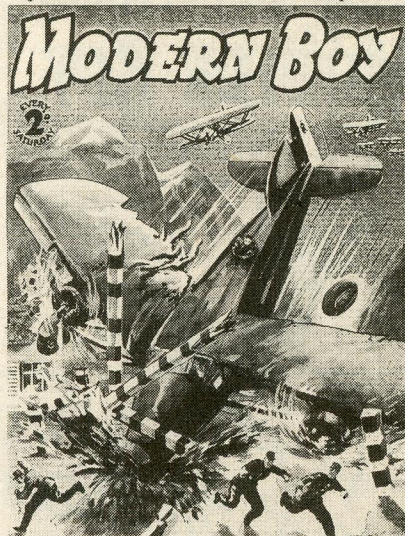
Several of the Biggles serials had their titles changed when republished as books, and this has caused some confusion amongst some collectors who have been misled into thinking they have discovered a new story. This is particularly likely to happen where the two titles bear little resemblance to each other. "The Mountain of Light" in 'Modern Boy' (issue Nos. 385-394) became "Biggles Hits the Trail", "The Gold Flyers" (413-422) was published in book form as "Biggles and Co.", and "Castle Sinister" became "Biggles, Secret Agent". Several other serials underwent similar changes on book publication.

Several of the short World War One tales were never reprinted and these are of particular interest to collectors. They are "Biggles' Xmas Box" which appeared in issue No. 358, "Biggles' Christmas Truce" in No. 359, "Biggles and the Joker" in No. 365, and "Biggles' Night Out" is issue No. 395. The last was probably overlooked for book publication as it appeared out of sequence as a 'one off' the week after the concluding episode of "The Mountain of Light" was published. Another story called "Biggles' Fledgling" in issue No. 47 of the new series is also interesting as its only other appearance was in "The New Book of the Air", a scarce volume published by Oxford in 1937.

WESTERN

In 1933, a picture strip adventure was introduced into the paper. The first was "The Rio Kid", a western based on a character created in 1928 for another boys' paper, 'The Popular'. The author of the original stories was, once again, Charles Hamilton, writing under the pen name Ralph Redway. 'Modern Boy's' pictorial version ran from July to November 1933, occupying a central portion of the middle pages. "The Rio Kid" was followed by "Mickey Mouse" in an American reprint, and later still came "Felix the Cat". His adventures appeared on the back page and ran from 1 February 1936 and, like Mickey Mouse, his adventures were also reprinted from an American publications. Later on original strips started to appear on the back page, including "Jim Solo the Birdman", "Texas Rangers", "Captains Courageous" and several Hop-

Captain Justice versus The Insect Army! Great Story Inside



Biggles Crashes to Safety—see WINGS OVER SPAIN!

This issue featured the start of a new Biggles story, "Wings Over Spain". This was published in book form as "Biggles in Spain" in 1939.

along Cassidy adventures based on the innumerable films starring William Boyd.

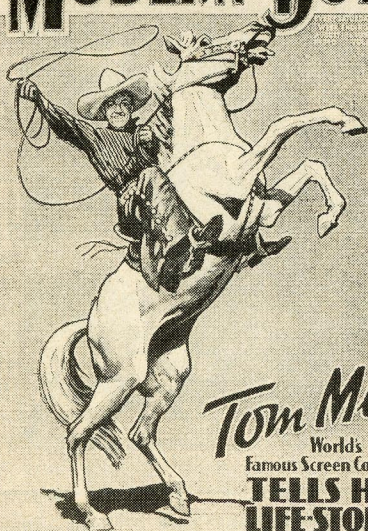
During the course of its run 'Modern Boy' underwent several format changes. For a short period from January 1934 a blue background was used for the cover, but this tended to make the illustrations rather dark and brooding and by late 1935 it had reverted back to its original colours of blue, yellow and white.

CHANGE

A more radical change occurred in February 1938. Readers were told that the paper was to be larger in size — "24 large pages 15" by 10" " proclaimed the double page advert in issue No. 525, and with the first of this new series the numbering reverted to 1 again. The covers of the new series, as it was called, were printed in orange and black on white, and more space was given to fiction than before. But it did have several factual articles by W.E. Johns, including "Let's Look Around", a weekly look at topical affairs that continued until

SPECIAL FREE GIFT INSIDE!

The MODERN BOY 2



Tom Mix
World's Most
Famous Screen Cowboy
**TELLS HIS
LIFE-STORY!**

Tom Mix, the "World's Most Famous Screen Cowboy", told his life story in 'Modern Boy' No. 340, dated August 1934.

the final issue. "True Tales of Treasure" was shorter-lived and preceded another series of pirate articles entitled "They Flew the Jolly Roger". Material from both these series was incorporated into "Modern Boy's Book of Pirates", written by Johns and published late in 1939. Incidentally, "Champion of the Main", John's only pirate novel, was serialised in 'Modern Boy' during 1938.

The new format proved to be cumbersome and unpopular with readers, and with No. 25 the paper was reduced to a more manageable size, a little larger than the original series. The paper's final format change took place on 12 August 1939 when it was again reduced in size and the cover became blue printed on white. At the same time the artistic credits for the stories, a feature which had been introduced at the start of the new series, were dropped.

The final issue of 'Modern Boy' was No. 87, published on 14 October 1939. It carried no editorial explanation for its demise, only

an advert telling readers that 'Modern Boy' would be incorporated into 'Boys' Cinema'. A note at the end of the final instalment of "Castle Sinister" informed readers that "Biggles' South Sea Adventure" would appear in 'Gem'.

'Modern Boy' was a successful boys' paper, attracting many of the top boys' writers of the day. In the immediate post-war years it was collected mainly for its wealth of stories by Charles Hamilton, and for the fantastic adventures of Captain Justice. Today it is of particular interest to the rapidly growing collectors of W.E. Johns. Within its pages it is possible to trace the early, most formative years of his writing career. Apart from the serialisation of the early Biggles novels, it also contains a wealth of his articles and illustrations unobtainable elsewhere.

DEALERS

Copies of 'Modern Boy' are becoming increasingly difficult to find. A decade ago they were fairly plentiful and far cheaper than their contemporaries like 'Magnet' and 'Gem'. Now they are turning up less frequently and even specialist dealers are not

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able to replenish their stocks to the extent they could a few years ago. The copies most frequently available are those offering little of interest — the issues with uncollected Biggles stories and other desirable items are snapped up almost as soon as they become available.

Early issues of the new series are particularly difficult to obtain in Very Good condition, mainly because their larger size made them less durable than the smaller issues. And only a few of the "Modern Boy Annuals" are of any real interest to the collector. The annual, which was published every autumn from 1930 to 1940, consisted

mainly of factual articles with only a handful of stories. The volumes for 1937 and 1938, though, are sought-after — both contain an uncollected Biggles story.

As well as the annuals there were also a number of companion volumes issued, some of which are quite collectable today. Of most interest are "The Modern Boy's Book of Aircraft" (1931), "The Modern Boy's Book of Adventure Stories" (1936), and "The Modern Boy's Book of Pirates". This last title in particular is rather interesting, as it was the last book credited to Flying Officer W.E. Johns before he adopted the more familiar byline, Captain W.E. Johns.

PRICE GUIDE TO VALUES OF THE 'MODERN BOY' COMIC

A guide to current values in Very Good condition

'MODERN BOY' — ORIGINAL SERIES

ISSUE NO. 1 (11 Feb, 1928)	6-10
ISSUE NO. 358 (Xmas issue with uncollected Biggles story)	10-12
ISSUE NO. 359 (with uncollected Biggles story)	10-12
ISSUE NO. 365 (with uncollected Biggles story)	10-12
ISSUE NO. 395 (with uncollected Biggles story)	10-12
ISSUES NO. 2 to 523 (except those listed above)	2.75-3

'MODERN BOY' — NEW SERIES

ISSUE NO. 1 (Feb, 1938)	3-5
ISSUES NO. 2 to 24 (large format issues)	3-4
ISSUE NO. 47 (with uncollected Biggles story)	10-12
ISSUES NO. 25 to 87 (last issue 14 Oct 1939)	2.75-3

'MODERN BOY' ANNUALS

1931	7-10
1932	7-10
1933	7-10
1934	7-10
1935	7-10
1936	7-10
1937 (with uncollected Biggles story)	10-20
1938 (with uncollected Biggles story)	10-20
1939	7-10
1940	7-10
1941	7-10

OTHERS

MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF AIRCRAFT (1931)	40-50
MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF MOTORS, SHIPS AND ENGINES (1936)	4-5
MODERN BOY'S NEW BOOK OF AIRCRAFT (1936)	10-15
MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF ADVENTURE STORIES (1936)	15-25
MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF TRUE ADVENTURE (1937)	5-10
MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF RACING CARS (1938)	4-5
MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF PIRATES (1939)	40-50
MODERN BOY'S BOOK OF FIRE FIGHTING (1939)	5-10

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