

No. 1. THE ALL-FOOTBALL STORY PAPER. No. 1.



Charles Hamilton created many fine schools apart from the world-famous Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood. My main regret is that he never had a weekly paper devoted to his minor school Highcliffe. Mr. Hamilton thought that his rare Boys' Friend Library stories centred at Highcliffe were the best work that he ever did.

Probably Cliff House, with Bessie Bunter, could be termed his fourth most famous school. Though other writers wrote hundreds of tales of Cliff House, it was a Hamilton creation, for the school and the characters appeared in the Magnet long before the School Friend was thought of.

Charles Hamilton was the creator of Gordon Gay & Co of Rylcombe Grammar School, stories which appeared in the Empire

Library in 1910. Although Mr. Hamilton admitted writing a B.F.L. featuring the school, he strongly denied being the author of the weekly yarns. Maybe he did not like to dwell on unpleasant subjects of the past, but the fact was that he had a dispute with the first editor of the Gem and Magnet (Percy Griffith) about the stories, and after the first few, the series was written by H. A. Hinton and C. M. Down. It is worth noting that No. 32 "The Grammar School's Great Jape" was a genuine Hamilton tale, so he may have changed his attitude after a while, unless it was an early tale held in reserve.

It is, then, a fact that Mr. Hamilton was a brilliant creator of

schools, not forgetting other features like Herlock Sholmes (later written by Stanton Hope and Will Gibbons); the Ferrers Locke yarns (later taken over by Hedley O'Mant under his Hedley Scott pen-name; the Will Hay stories in the Ranger, and the Rio Kid stories.

Recently I have been puzzled by an anonymous series of school tales in THE BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LIBRARY, which first appeared in 1909 (illustrated by Leonard Shields). Priced at $\frac{1}{2}$ d, it was about three-quarters the size of the Gem, and had 18 pages. The stories featured Jack Noble & Co of the Third Form at Pelham School, the theme being football. The only other yarn was a serial "The Blue Crusaders" by Arthur S. Hardy.

As in later yarns Jack Noble joined the Blue Crusaders, the late Herbert Leckenby assumed that Hardy wrote the Pelham School yarns also.

I have the first issue, and I was puzzled that the main tale seemed like vintage Hamilton, with his weakness for the repetition of names. As well as Noble there were Russell and Clifford. I was not surprised to find, from official sources, that the opening story was indeed written by Charles Hamilton, which meant yet another creation of his to start a weekly paper for the Amalgamated Press.

I could not find the authorship of the second story, but the third was by Andrew Murray, so it looked as though Mr. Hamilton just started yet another series to oblige the editor.

I have never been more astonished in my collecting career than when I found that further stories of Pelham School were written by a number of Sexton Blake authors - and famous ones, at that. Here are a few of them listed:

4. Clifford's Capture, by Andrew Murray.
5. Jack Noble's Strike, by J. G. Jones.
6. The Phantom Team, by Norman Goddard.
9. The Football Poachers, by H. Clarke Hook.
11. The Unseen Enemy, by A. C. Murray.
12. Jack Noble's Double, by Charles Hamilton.
17. Capped for his School, by T. C. Bridges.
21. Jack Noble's Uncle Ned, by S. Gordon Shaw.
30. Clifford, the Road Hog, by Ernest Protheroe.
39. Those Bounders Binks, by E. J. Murray (Sydney Drew).
46. The Brothers Bunce, by A. S. Hardy.

More than ten authors to write a series of short school football tales! It sounds incredible for such renowned authors as Andrew Murray (creator of Kew); Norman Goddard (Mark Darran, and probably one of the best-ever Blake writers); and the others, to carry on another writer's creation when they were top writers in their own

field. H. Clarke Hook, of course, was an early Gem substitute writer, while Ernest Protheroe wrote school yarns in the Boys' Friend, later issued in the S.O.L.

A. C. Murray (not to be confused with the other A. Murray) had the distinction of writing the first Nelson Lee Library. J. G. Jones, who also wrote girls' stories, went blind, but continued as an author, his daughter typing his tales.

The editor must have got tired of priming new authors on the set-up of Pelham School, and it is beyond my reasoning why a whole band of famous authors should have written of Pelham.

After No. 57, dated 15th October, 1910, Jack Noble joined the Blue Crusaders in a tale named "The New Crusaders," written of course by Arthur S. Hardy, and so the series and the serial were amalgamated, Jack Noble gradually fading out.

Charles Hamilton started a new series, under his own name, with the title "Captain of Clyffe" in the Xmas Number that year, and later on contributed "The Rollicking Schooldays of Sidney Redfern." The Boys' Realm Football Library was later renamed The Boys' Realm Football and Sports Library - and after No. 299 became the famous Nelson Lee Library.

Maybe the real story behind the Jack Noble series will never now be known - but you never can tell.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Mr. Lofts' discovery is indeed an astonishing one, and of great interest to hobby students. It seems evident that the opening story must have been written some time before it was published, otherwise the succeeding writers could not have continued the series. I think it likely that Mr. Hamilton may have written it for Pluck - it is about the length of the tales he wrote over a number of years for that journal.

Charles Hamilton did not, of course, deny creating Rylcombe Grammar School. He denied writing under the pen-names of Prosper Howard. He expected "The School Under Canvas" to be published under the name of Martin Clifford, as had been "Tom Merry & Co" and "Tom Merry's Conquest," which introduced the Grammar School, in the early B.F.L.)