

***Boys of England* and Edwin J. Brett, 1866-99**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations Used in Text and Footnotes

<i>BOE</i>	<i>Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction</i>
<i>BOM</i>	<i>Boy's Own Magazine</i>
<i>BOP</i>	<i>Boy's Own Paper</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Collector's Miscellany</i>
'JHS'	'Jack Harkaway's Schooldays'
<i>TBS</i>	<i>Tom Brown's Schooldays</i>
<i>VF</i>	<i>Vanity Fair</i>
<i>YEJ</i>	<i>Young Englishman's Journal: Devoted to the Youth of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales</i>
<i>YMOGB</i>	<i>Young Men of Great Britain: a Journal of Amusing and Instructive Literature</i>

Abbreviations Used in Footnotes

<i>DNR</i>	<i>Dime Novel Roundup / Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup</i>
<i>EcHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>HOE</i>	<i>History of Education</i>
<i>HOS</i>	<i>History of Science</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>JOL</i>	<i>Journal of Librarianship</i>
<i>NTQ</i>	<i>New Theatre Quarterly</i>
<i>SPC</i>	<i>Story Paper Collector</i>
<i>TQ</i>	<i>Theatre Quarterly</i>
<i>VLAC</i>	<i>Victorian Literature and Culture</i>

VPR *Victorian Periodicals Review*

VS *Victorian Studies*

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Abstract

Boys of England was a Victorian boys' periodical. It was published weekly by Edwin J. Brett from 1866 to 1899, initially from the Fleet Street offices of the Newsagents' Publishing Company, and later from Brett's own '*Boys of England* Office'. It was the first periodical of its kind, and achieved a large sale amongst eager youngsters.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a general history of *BOE* and Brett, neither of which has yet been attempted. More specifically, the thesis is intended to address misconceptions regarding Brett and his work. Historians of boys' periodical literature have tended to portray Brett's papers as largely supportive of middle class hegemony. They argue that they failed to connect with the lives of their upper working and lower middle class readers. However, this thesis contends that in actual fact *BOE* engaged closely with the lives of its readership, comprised mainly of boys from the 'respectable' working classes. Therefore, *BOE* should rightly be considered an important, indigenous component of working class society and culture in mid to late Victorian Britain.

To provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible, the thesis is divided into three sections: 'Paper and Proprietor'; 'Content'; 'Response'. These sections are divided into further chapters, each exploring a salient facet of *BOE* and Brett. Some of these engage with, and challenge, the existing historiography of boys' periodical literature. Others introduce historiographies previously remote from the study of boys' papers, widening the remit of this relatively self-contained field. Some examine entirely unstudied, or largely understudied, subject matter.

Ultimately, this thesis is intended to make a valuable contribution not only to the historiography of boys' papers specifically, and children's literature in general, but also to the wider historiographies of Victorian social and cultural history and the Victorian working class.

Introduction

I

Boys of England was a weekly boys' magazine. It was launched in 1866 by Edwin J. Brett from the Fleet Street offices of the Newsagents' Publishing Company. It was the first boys' periodical of its kind. It boasted a heady mix of exciting fiction, informative non-fiction, vivid illustrations and free gifts and competitions, all delivered with refreshing conviviality. The paper was large, and a full sixteen pages long, yet cost only one penny. It proved enormously popular. Fellow publisher John Allingham later recalled that "when [*BOE*] first made its appearance in 1866, it went with such a rush that it was difficult for newsagents to get their supplies".¹ Within a few short weeks of its debut *BOE* had achieved a weekly sale of 150,000. This increased to a substantial 250,000 during the 1870s.

BOE had evolved from cheap, sensational children's weekly story papers, now commonly known as 'penny dreadfuls'.² These high-circulation periodicals had flourished since the early 1860s, when publishers first began to tailor the adult 'penny bloods' of the 1830s and 1840s for the juvenile market. Foremost amongst these publishers was Brett himself, who issued many of the best-known dreadfuls of the period through the NPC. Stories such as *The Boy Brigand, or, the Dark King of the Mountains* (1865-66), *The Skeleton Horseman, or, the Shadow of Death* (1865-66) and *The Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866) were typical of the company's output. Their titles give a feel for their criminal, gothic and macabre content. They differed starkly from the didactic religious publications which had previously dominated the children's periodical market.

BOE was launched into a booming periodical industry. Newspapers and magazines had begun to proliferate in recent years thanks to advantageous publishing conditions. The

¹ R. Rollington, *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (Leicester, 1913), p.28.

² The term 'penny dreadful' first came into common usage around 1874. It now has a variety of meanings. In this thesis, 'penny dreadful' refers solely to the single story, eight page weekly instalment stories issued by the NPC and their rivals, predominantly in the 1860s. For a discussion of the definition of 'penny dreadful' see J. O. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.39-44.

1850s and 1860s had seen the repeal of each of the ‘taxes on knowledge’, which had previously kept the cost of periodicals artificially high; advertisement duty had been abolished in 1853, stamp duty in 1855, and paper duty in 1861. Periodical production had also become cheaper with the advent of new, technologically advanced machinery, such as the Hoe cylinder press, and the discovery of better methods of paper manufacture. Distribution, too, had become simpler, as the growth of the railway permitted easier and faster shipping.

Many of the new periodicals spawned by the publishing boom were aimed at young people. Publishers began to appreciate just how large the potential market was, and how lucrative the potential returns. In the 1860s as much as forty-five percent of the population of England and Wales was aged between five and twenty. Although the majority of these youngsters were already literate, Forster’s 1870 Education Act, which aimed to bring all children under the age of ten into full time education, raised and enhanced levels of literacy further still. Most of these children, especially the elder ones, were in full or part time employment, and penny periodicals were well within their budget.³

The launch of *BOE* instigated a period of feverish activity in the boys’ periodical publishing industry. A flurry of competitors began to issue new weekly journals based upon *BOE*’s format. Dozens upon dozens appeared. Brett’s closest rivals throughout the 1860s and 1870s were the Emmett brothers. Their first periodical, *The Young Englishman’s Journal*, was launched just a few short months after *BOE* itself. A long and bitter war was fought between the two publishing houses. Brett’s closest rival in the 1880s was *The Boy’s Own Paper*, published by the Religious Tract Society. Despite their superficial similarities,

³ R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957), pp.318-64; L. Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford, 1985), pp.7-53; P. A. Dunae, ‘New Grub Street for Boys’, in J. Richards, ed. *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), pp.13-15; J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), pp.12-19; J. O. Springhall, ‘Disseminating Impure Literature’: the ‘Penny Dreadful’ Publishing Business Since 1860’, *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3 (1994), pp.567-70; D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989); R. K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader, 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension* (1955), pp.13-35.

the *BOP* was much more moralistic than *BOE*. The RTS deliberately mimicked *BOE*'s format, bloody fiction and all, in order to covertly spread its Christian message.

BOE led the boys' weekly market until around 1890. However, the paper struggled in the 1890s due to Brett's illness and death, deficiencies in second generation management, and the popularity of Alfred Harmsworth's new halfpenny boys' papers. *BOE* was finally discontinued in 1899 after thirty-three years, having outlasted virtually every one of its rivals.

II

Although *BOE* was amongst the most significant publications of the nineteenth century, the history of the paper has yet to be written. This thesis is intended to provide a critical history of *BOE*. It does not simply retell its story through narrative. Rather, it connects with the historiography of boys' literature, contributes to existing debate, challenges current thought, instigates new discussion, and forges links with other, previously remote historiographies. Although the thesis is intended to provide a rounded history of the paper, there is a single central strand to its argument: it contends that *BOE* engaged closely with the society and culture of its working class readership in mid to late Victorian Britain.

Boys' weeklies were widely read throughout the mid to late Victorian era. They were a remarkable phenomenon. Yet the historiography of Victorian boys' weeklies is not large. Only comparatively recently did they become the subject of serious historical attention. Even now, new books and articles appear only occasionally. Most are the work of a small number of historians. Although there is no comprehensive history of *BOE* specifically, several historians have examined aspects of Brett and his periodicals as part of their wider research.

The first full-length study of boys' papers was E. S. Turner's *Boys Will be Boys, the Story of Sweeney Todd, Deadwood Dick, Sexton Blake, Billy Bunter, Dick Barton, et al.* (1948). Although enlightening, Taylor's book was a simply a leisurely overview of the genre. It made little attempt to assess its worldly importance. In the 1970s, however, historians began to investigate the social and cultural significance of boys' papers. Louis James' article 'Tom Brown's Imperialist Sons' (1973-74), and two unpublished theses.

Patricia Barnett's *English Boys' Weeklies, 1866-1899* (1974) and Patrick Dunae's *British Juvenile Literature in an Age of Empire* (1975), were amongst the first studies to appear. These works made inroads into identifying the type of boy who read periodicals, and the ideologies which the literature encapsulated. In the 1980s a number of new studies built upon these foundations. They firmly established empire and masculinity as the focal points of the field. Foremost amongst them were J. S. Bratton's *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (1981), Kirsten Drotner's *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (1988), and Jeffrey Richards' edited collection *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (1989). In the late 1980s and early 1990s John Springhall became a central figure in the study of boys' weeklies. He published several articles during this period, including "A Life Story for the People?" Edwin J. Brett and the London 'Low-Life' Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s' (1990), the only existing study dedicated solely to Brett and his journals. The relationship between boys' papers and crime was a key theme of Springhall's work. The most recently published study of boys' periodical literature is Kelly Boyd's *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (2003). The book, which examines the representation of gender in boys' weeklies, is probably the most robust assessment of their social and cultural relevance thus far.

These historians have all argued that *BOE* was aimed at, and read by, upwardly mobile upper working and lower middle class youths. Louis James was the first to propose this. He contended that *BOE* displayed "strong middle class aspirations", and appealed to "the upwardly mobile lower middle classes". He supported his assertion with quotations from editorials and non-fiction.⁴ "The paper did indeed have the greatest following amongst lower middle class and working class adolescents", concurred Kirsten Drotner in *English Children and Their Magazines*, adding that readers were "upwardly mobile". She aptly noted that the paper's editorials can provide clues as to the class of the average reader.⁵ More recently, John Springhall reinforced the belief that *BOE* was read by boys of this class band. *BOE*, Springhall commented, "made its primary appeal to the upwardly mobile: young office boys, shop assistants, apprentices, and junior clerks".⁶ Kelly Boyd is the most

⁴ L. James, 'Tom Brown's Imperialist Sons', *Victorian Studies*, Vol.17 (1973-74), p.89.

⁵ K. Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven, 1988), pp.75, 105.

⁶ Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, p.575.

recent historian to argue that *BOE*, and papers of its kind, were read mainly by the lower middle and upper working classes. She mentions that a large readership amongst clerks was evident through the paper's correspondence columns, which featured many letters regarding the quality of handwriting.⁷

Who exactly were the Victorian upper working and lower middle classes? The mid to late Victorian class system was extraordinarily complex. It comprised a multitude of strata. Class boundaries were often hazy, as were the myriad status boundaries within each class. Class history is hotly contested area of academic enquiry. Contemporary historians diverge considerably regarding the precise composition of each class, and the distinguishing characteristics of their members. This is particularly the case with comparatively indistinct or borderline groups like the 'upper working class' and 'lower middle class'.

The upper working class was comprised chiefly of skilled manual workers and artisans. They were better paid than their unskilled counterparts. They made up around ten per cent of the working class as a whole. However, historians have begun to question the usefulness of terms such as 'upper working class', 'skilled working class' and 'labour aristocracy'. The remaining ninety percent of the working class, it has been argued, were not all equally unrefined. Rather, most achieved some degree of respectability. They did so not through their income, which was low, but by fulfilling a wide range of other social, cultural and economic criteria.⁸ Only a small proportion, perhaps one tenth, was wholly rough. It has also been argued that the 'respectable' working classes aspired towards respectability not because of pressure from the middle class, but because they themselves held respectable values in esteem.⁹

As for the children of the working class, schooling played an important part in their lives, especially following the introduction of Forster's Education Act in 1870. Most youths, especially the elder ones, also contributed to the family coffers; the shift from

⁷ K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), p.21.

⁸ K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1888* (Oxford, 1998), pp.56-90; H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (1989), pp.107-09; G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford, 2004), pp.91-100; F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (1988), pp.199-203, 353-54, 360-61.

⁹ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp.68-69.

school to part time work, and eventually full time work, usually took place between ages ten and fourteen. Both boys and girls were also expected to assist with domestic chores. Despite the demands of school and home, most children had a little time left for leisure. Notwithstanding a lack of money, their recreational habits were quite diffuse. Reading, of course, was a popular hobby.

The lower middle class was a growing social band. It was comprised of traditional petit bourgeois professionals, such as foremen, shopkeepers, teachers, and general small businessman and managers, and newly emerging professionals, most notably clerks. Often, members of the lower middle class had only emerged from working class families in recent generations. Indeed, lower middle class people were strikingly similar to upper working class people in many ways. They lived in the same areas, in communities long deserted by the middle class proper, in similar types of housing. They shared similar incomes; indeed, skilled labourers and artisans sometimes earned more than white-collar workers. However, the lower middle class separated themselves from the upper working class through their beliefs and values. They thought themselves above the upper working class because they were better educated, and paid for mental rather than manual labour. They perceived manual workers to be rather vulgar, and defined themselves by a sense of refinement and propriety. Unlike the working class, they strongly aspired towards middle class respectability. Often, their aspirations exceeded their means. Their limited incomes meant that they sometimes struggled to maintain appearances. In particular, many could scarcely afford the domestic help which their status demanded they enlist, despite the fact that wealthier members of the working class could now afford servants of their own.¹⁰

Although historians believe that *BOE* was aimed at, and read by, working class children, they do not believe that the paper actually engaged with the society and culture of

¹⁰ G. Crossick, ed. *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (1977); Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp.31-55; H. Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.78-101; Searle, *A New England?*, pp.91-100; Thompson, *Respectable Society*, pp.173-74, 260, 360-61. Historians have traditionally viewed the lower middle class as a rather downtrodden section of society; however, there have recently been attempts to readdress this view: see P. Bailey, 'White Collars, Grey Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), pp.273-90, and J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), pp.393-438.

these readers. Rather, they argue that the paper tended to reinforce middle class hegemony. Patricia Barnett and Patrick Dunae pioneered this theory. Each contended that boys' periodical literature was "inherently conservative and middle class in opinion and content", and that "penny dreadful writers of the 1870s were scarcely committed to popularising radical ideas or raising social consciousness".¹¹ This line of reasoning was later reinforced by John Springhall, probably the strongest proponent of the argument. "Their 'point of view' was consistently aligned with that of hegemonic middle class cultural values", stated Springhall.¹² "Penny dreadfuls' aimed primarily at juveniles did not reflect or create a dissident working class culture", he claimed. "[They] were a form of popular entertainment written *for* rather than created *by* or emerging (directly) out of the people. Little real attempt was made by their bohemian *déclassé* authors to explore the realities of working class life and culture." "They offer", Springhall continued, "little real challenge to middle class norms [and] no real challenge to the political and social order."¹³ Kelly Boyd has lately added more weight to the argument. "The boys' story paper", Boyd contends, "played a crucial role in the reinforcement of ideas of elite strength, the necessity of hierarchy and middle class hegemony."¹⁴ The stories only found favour amongst working class readers because, Boyd argues, "their humdrum lives were brightened by the rousing tales which in many ways had no connection to [their] daily lives".¹⁵

No historian has seriously considered the possibility that *BOE* may have been more closely attuned to working class life.¹⁶ This is surprising. There is little evidence to suggest

¹¹ P. M. Barnett, *English Boys' Weeklies, 1866-1899* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Minnesota, 1974), p.4; P. A. Dunae, 'Penny Dreadfuls: Late Nineteenth-Century Boys' Literature and Crime', *VS*, Vol.22 (1978-79), p.142.

¹² J. O. Springhall, 'A Life Story for the People?' Edwin J. Brett and the London 'Low-Life' Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s', *VS*, Vol.33 (1989-90), p.246.

¹³ Springhall, *Youth*, pp.69-70.

¹⁴ Boyd, *Manliness*, pp.67-69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.47.

¹⁶ Indeed, the same is true of all Victorian working class boys' periodicals. However, change may be afoot. Historians are now beginning to re-evaluate the social and cultural significance of the NPC's penny dreadful fiction. Sally Powell has recently argued that the NPC serial *Wild Boys of London* actually "spoke of a profound anxiety relating to the working class experience of an increasingly complex and threatening

that Brett would have deliberately reinforced middle class hegemony, other than the fact that he was from a fairly affluent background and probably wished to be considered respectable.¹⁷ However, there is a good deal of evidence which suggests that he sympathised with the working class. Brett had been involved with radical politics in his youth. He had attended, and had even spoken at, Chartist gatherings, including the 1848 rally at Kennington Common. He had associated with Fergus O'Connor, Charles Cochrane and G. W. M. Reynolds, all key figures in the Chartist movement.¹⁸ Historians have speculated that Brett willingly gave up his Chartist connections, perhaps having mellowed after marriage.¹⁹ However, although Brett did indeed cease his Chartist activities, and was later critical of the movement's leaders, bemoaning "how easily the people can be led by a few unprincipled men who have more eloquence than the people they address", this is only insubstantial evidence of a shift in his fundamental political inclinations.²⁰ It is more likely that Brett's political activity ceased only because of the waning of Chartism in the 1850s. Indeed, Brett probably renounced radicalism only because he could not be seen to condone it. Had the numerous critics of boys' periodical literature thought it possible that Brett was promoting radical ideologies his papers may have become subject to severe censure.

Furthermore, Brett was by no means the only man working in the juvenile publishing industry who harboured radical sympathies. He recruited his staff from a close-knit contingent of London authors and illustrators. Little biographical information about them

urbanisation": see S. Powell, 'Black Markets and Cadaverous Pies: the Corpse, Urban Trade and Industrial Consumption in the Penny Blood', in A. Maunder and G. Moore, eds. *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* (Aldershot, 2004), pp.45-58. It is worth noting that historians of Victorian melodramatic theatre, which shared many similarities with the juvenile press, have been considerably swifter in recognising how sensitive popular entertainment could be towards its working class audience: see L. James, 'Taking Melodrama Seriously: Theatre and Nineteenth-Century Studies', *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1977), pp.151-58, and R. McWilliam, 'Melodrama and the Historians', *Radical History Review*, 78 (2000), pp.57-84.

¹⁷ Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, p.571.

¹⁸ Anon., 'Edwin J. Brett', *The Biograph and Review*, 4 (1880), pp.456-60.

¹⁹ T. Hopperton, 'Victorian King-Pin', *Story Paper Collector*, Vol.4, No.78 (1962), p.32; Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, pp.228-29; E. S. Turner, *Boys Will be Boys, the Story of Sweeney Todd, Deadwood Dick, Sexton Blake, Billy Bunter, Dick Barton, et al.*, 3rd Edition (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp.74-75.

²⁰ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, p.457.

exists. However, it is thought that most of them came from fairly lowly backgrounds. Only a few were well educated. The majority lived a poor existence, residing in cheap lodgings near the newspaper offices. They spent their sporadic pay rather heedlessly, and were frequently bankrupted. Many were alcoholics, or at least rather too fond of drink; they congregated in Fleet Street taverns, most notably the Cheshire Cheese. Far from adhering to hegemonic values, these men were actually renowned for shunning middle class conventions. In keeping with their unconventional lifestyles, many of Brett's contributors were associated with political radicalism. Thomas Frost, for example, was a noted Chartist author and journalist, whilst Percy B. St. John and Vane St. John were the sons of James Augustus St. John, former editor of radical newspaper *The Republican*.²¹ Many of Brett's staff had written extensively for London periodicals of the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, including: *The London Journal*; *Reynolds' Miscellany*; *The London Reader*; *The Parlour Journal*; *The Guide to Literature, Science, Art, and General Information*; *The London Herald*; *The Welcome Guest*; *The Halfpenny Journal*; and *The Penny Miscellany*. These papers typified a new brand of popular literature tailored to suit the tastes of the recently literate masses. Some, like *Reynolds' Miscellany*, were avowedly radical.²²

Chartism was amongst the most significant political movements of the nineteenth century. Although its primary objective was constitutional reform, the campaign was extraordinarily multi-faceted, encompassing a wide range of working class causes. Chartism was dealt a serious blow by the disastrous conclusion to the Kennington Common gathering in April 1848. It staggered on, but by 1866 was all but extinct. Although

²¹ J. Adcock, 'The Bohemians', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/725>, accessed 11 September 2002; J. Adcock, 'Re. Jack Sheppard is Hatched', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/3208>, accessed 11 April 2005; E. H. Burrage, *The Ruin of Fleet Street* (1885); N. Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.90-125; F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21); Rollington, *Brief History*; G. R. Sims, *My Life: Sixty Years' Recollections of Bohemian London* (1917); A. Trollope, *The Spotted Dog and Other Stories* (Gloucester, 1983), pp.1-49.

²² Altick, *English Common Reader*, pp.318-64; L. James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: a Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (1963), pp.14-50; Jay, *Peeps*; J. S. North, ed. *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900, Vols.1-6* (Waterloo, 1997).

historians have tended to argue that most Chartists became Liberals in later life, revisionist studies now suggest that they actually travelled a variety of paths. Many actually upheld their radical beliefs.²³ Indeed, it has been argued that radicalism remained strong, and politically effective, even despite the defeat of Chartism in 1848, and that any support for Liberalism which existed amongst former Chartists did so only because Liberalism encompassed many elements of radicalism.²⁴ This considered, it is not improbable that Brett and his staff, though their radical activities may have ceased long before 1866, at the very least remained sympathetic to working class causes.

The ethos of *BOE* strongly suggests that this was indeed the case. *BOE* was not a Chartist journal, nor any type of radical political journal. However, it was a staunchly working class journal. Brett and his contributors expressly intended the paper to engage with the preoccupations of their young working class readership. Moreover, they meant the paper not simply to entertain its readers, but to fortify and enrich their lives. This approach was eagerly received by the paper's working class audience, and was a positive influence upon them.

Indeed, it was the 'respectable' working classes to whom *BOE* was chiefly addressed. Although the paper probably attracted a sizable readership from the upper working class, it sought to speak to all adroit working class boys, not just the most affluent. Conversely, whilst some lower middle class boys may have read *BOE*, the paper was not intended to cater for them.

In short, this thesis contends that *BOE* did not fail to engage with the society and culture of its readers. Nor did it reinforce middle class hegemony. Rather, the paper reflected, and inspired, the lives of hundreds of thousands of members of the Victorian working class.

²³ D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (1975), pp.169-90; M. Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford, 1995), pp.99-123.

²⁴ E. F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992), pp.10-11; E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, 'Currents of Radicalism', in E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, eds. *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.1-19; M. C. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993).

III

Children's literature is a valuable historical tool. It has a tendency to connect with a wide range of social and cultural phenomena. This is especially the case with periodical literature, which can be highly sensitive to current concerns. Accordingly, Victorian boys' literature is not worthy of historians' attention simply because of its literary qualities. Rather, it merits attention because it is a useful aid to the study of social and cultural history. It reflected, and sometimes even influenced, the society and culture in which it flourished. Thus, it can reveal a great deal about the time in which it existed. This is a key justification for it being the subject of academic study. In this sense, *BOE* is particularly deserving of attention. As the leading working class boys' paper, with a readership of hundreds of thousands, it has the potential to shed important new light upon the nature of Victorian working class society and culture.

A second justification arises from the fact that the historiography of boys' papers is, as yet, rather limited in scope. The social and cultural ramifications of boys' papers were more extensive than historians have yet recognised. *BOE* is worthy of individual study because its depth allows for the pursuit of unstudied and understudied facets of boys' literature. Consequently, it permits the integration of several new historiographies which have hitherto been remote from the study of boys' papers. This can only have two significant, and positive, consequences. Firstly, it will widen the remit of study of historians working within the field. Secondly, it will bring boys' papers under the radar of social and cultural historians outside of the field who might otherwise have remained unaware of their usefulness.

Indeed, it is important that historians of boys' papers are now allowed to shift their attention towards new themes. The traditional areas of focus have become rather well-trodden. The historiography of boys' papers has for decades been preoccupied with empire. This is largely due to the 'Studies in Imperialism' series, which examines the impact of empire upon British culture and society. The series contends that boys' papers engaged with growing public enthusiasm for imperialism in the late nineteenth century. The fact that the study of boys' papers has been so empire-focussed has had some adverse consequences. Empire-minded periodicals, most notably the *BOP*, have received too much scholarly

attention, whilst less empire-minded papers like *BOE* have scarcely received any attention at all. Historians have made little effort to understand why *BOE* neglected empire, or to identify and explore the themes which dominated its pages in its stead. Empire is but one of many themes which merits the attention of historians of boys' periodicals. It is right that it should be studied – and now reappraised – but not at the expense of all other subject matter.

Similarly, the study of boys' papers has become rather too preoccupied with gender theories. Historians of the 'Studies in Imperialism' school have suggested that boys' papers promoted a masculine code of behaviour through their empire stories.²⁵ Imperialist editors and authors believed that their readers would emulate this manly behaviour; once adults, their manliness would help to secure Britain's world position. This theory is certainly true of the *BOP* and other higher class periodicals; however, its relevance to working class periodicals is questionable. Naturally, gender issues will always figure in any study of gender-specific literature. It is important that historians consider them. However, manliness is a relatively subordinate issue for historians of working class boys' papers. *BOE* did promote manliness; however, it was but a subsidiary component of the paper's broader outlook. A manly disposition was encouraged, for example, because it was perceived as a prerequisite to successful self improvement.

A further justification is that the existing historiography of boys' weeklies has tended to neglect reader response. There has been no comprehensive study of how boy readers related to their periodicals. Indeed, few historians have examined the issue at all. Often, historians simply assume that the papers' messages were accepted unquestioningly by a passive readership. That historians have focussed too closely upon the literature itself, and not closely enough upon its effects, partly explains why the social and cultural significance of boys' weeklies has been somewhat misinterpreted. Critical response is also sorely understudied. Excepting the work of Patrick Dunae and John Springhall, historians have made scant attempt to understand the extensive campaign against 'penny dreadfuls' which was conducted throughout the mid to late Victorian era. Again, this understudied aspect of

²⁵ Few academics have considered the wider social and cultural relevance, i.e. beyond empire, of the brand of masculinity endorsed by boys' papers: see Boyd, *Manliness*, pp.45-69, and K. Reynolds, *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910* (1990), pp.49-62.

boys' periodical history has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the wider impact of the literature.

One final deficiency of the historiography of boys' periodicals is that there has been no comprehensive, academic study of a single paper. Instead, historians have tended to examine them as a whole. This means that most existing studies have a propensity to speak in rather general terms. However, boys' papers were not identical, any more than Victorian newspapers were identical. Each had its own individual characteristics and traits. The study of a single periodical can be more revealing than the study of several together because it evades problematic generalisations and the confusion which they cause. Moreover, it permits a deeper understanding of the subtleties of each paper than general overview will allow. It is fitting that *BOE* is the first paper to be the subject of serious individual study because it was more significant than the plethora of successors it inspired. The paper's importance has gone unnoticed because historians have judged it amongst a mass of lesser rivals.

IV

A comprehensive historical enquiry into any piece of periodical literature must research its editor and authors, the text itself, and the readers of the text. Accordingly, this thesis is divided into three sections. The first section examines Brett and his editorial policy. Section two examines the content of the paper. The third section examines reader and critical response.

Section one, 'Paper and Proprietor', is divided into two chapters. Chapter one details the life of Brett and the history of *BOE*. It explains how, through Brett's editorial skill, the paper made a substantial impact upon the Victorian publishing industry, and became the most popular juvenile publication of the Victorian era. Chapter two examines four significant controversies which characterised the paper's early history: the departure of the paper's first editor, Charles Stevens; Brett's long-running feud with his great rivals, the Emmett brothers; the defection of *BOE* author Bracebridge Hemyng to rival publisher Frank Leslie; and Brett's policy of author and illustrator anonymity. The chapter argues that early twentieth-century boys' paper collectors' journals, which have discussed these issues

in depth, have treated Brett rather harshly. Although Brett was rather more professional than many of his colleagues and associates, he was less ruthless a businessman than has been suggested.

Section two, 'Content', is split into five thematic chapters. Chapter three considers adventure stories set in empire and the wider world. It argues that historians have underestimated *BOE*'s sensitivity towards empire. However, it also contends that it was America, not empire, with which the paper was preoccupied. Chapter four examines *BOE*'s public school stories. It investigates how the paper became the leading proponent of public school fiction in the 1870s, and how its stories reflected the elementary schooling experiences of its working class readership following the implementation of Forster's Education Act. Historical fiction is the focus of chapter five. The chapter explains how *BOE* used history to educate its working class readers, and to nurture rudimentary political consciousness amongst them. The chapter also demonstrates how *BOE*'s 'street Arab' stories, set in contemporary London, promoted a self help ethos, and were used in counterpoint alongside historical fiction to highlight problems within modern society. Chapter six analyses the paper's non-fiction. It argues that *BOE* connected with working class appetites for self help and science, particularly natural history. It also offers compelling evidence that *BOE* was aimed at the 'respectable' working classes, and not the lower middle class. The final chapter of the section assesses *BOE*'s numerous free gifts, competitions and schemes. It argues that together these promotions, which complimented the paper's ethos, made *BOE* uniquely engaging, and accounted for much of its popularity.

Section three, 'Response', is separated into two final chapters. The first explores reader response. Using the paper's correspondence columns, and autobiographies of former readers, the chapter argues that *BOE* did indeed draw most of its readers from its target audience, the 'respectable' working classes, and that these boys responded positively to the paper's content. The chapter also utilises a previously unused source to identify where the paper's readers lived. The second chapter of section three tackles critical response. The chapter centres around the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls', a movement which sought to stamp out supposedly pernicious juvenile literature. It identifies, and scrutinises, four major components of the campaign: critical essays; reader surveys; the courts; and Parliament. It argues that although the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls' failed to achieve

many tangible successes, it did create an atmosphere of suspicion regarding boys' papers in general and *BOE* in particular. However, the chapter also explains how favourable newspaper reviews may have helped to offset some of this concern.

Chapter One – Edwin J. Brett and *Boys of England*

Introduction

Boys of England was the leading boys' periodical of the mid to late Victorian era. Its success was in no small part attributable to its editor, or 'conductor', Edwin J. Brett. Brett was a talented Victorian entrepreneur. He was also a fascinating personality. It has rightly been said that an account of his life could itself fill a book.¹ However, historians have as yet paid little attention to Brett, or his pioneering periodicals.

Regrettably, Brett did not bequeath an autobiography. Nor did he keep company records.² Indeed, primary sources on the subject of Victorian boys' publishing are few. Yet authoritative sources do exist. Foremost amongst them are two early studies of boys' papers, Frank Jay's *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21) and Ralph Rollington's *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (1913). Jay was a devotee of Victorian boys' periodicals literature, and an associate of many of the men who worked in the industry. Rollington, real name John Allingham, was a leading figure in the boys' publishing community, and proprietor of *The Boy's World*, *Our Boys' Paper* and *The New Boys' Paper*. Jay and Allingham's books both provide a vivid insight into the world of Victorian boys' publishing. The boys' paper collectors' journals *Vanity Fair* and *Collector's Miscellany* are another good source. These private circulation periodicals, published from 1917 until the 1950s, featured articles penned by enthusiastic amateurs. Most of these men had read boys' papers in their youth, and had become avid collectors of the extinct literature in later life. Some of the elder contributors had even worked in the boys' publishing industry. Further collectors' journals, such as *Story Paper Collector*, *Collectors' Digest*, and *Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup* (also known as *Dime Novel Roundup*), were launched in later years. A host of additional sources are also available to historians, including biographical essays, contemporary newspaper articles,

¹ W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley, *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction* (1970), pp.71-72.

² The records of the Newsagents' Publishing Company, and of Edwin J. Brett Ltd., the limited liability company formed after Brett's death, are held at the Public Records Office. However, they are not particularly enlightening.

and, of course, boys' weeklies themselves.³ Using these sources, a reliable history of Brett and *BOE* can be pieced together.

This chapter examines several of the most significant facets of Brett's life, periodicals, and editorial policy, and the publishing climate which he dominated. These include: Brett's early life and career; the appearance, content and style of *BOE*; the periodicals from which Brett drew inspiration; the sale of *BOE*; Brett's authors and illustrators; *BOE*'s companion periodicals and rival periodicals; Brett's later life, death, and the demise of *BOE*. Because this chapter has a wide thematic and chronological range, it introduces many subjects which will be returned to in greater detail later in the thesis.

Brett's Early Life and Career

Edwin J. Brett was born in 1828 in White Horse Lane, Canterbury, into a family of good, middle class standing. His father, Thomas Brett (c.1777-1867), was an army officer. He had served in the Peninsular War, at Waterloo, and in the suppression of the Irish rebellion. His mother, Mary, was the cousin of Lady Mary Small, a minor aristocrat. Several of Brett's distant relations had also been involved in notable events in history. The Brett name first appeared amongst the battle-roll of Hastings. It then re-emerged in the twelfth century with the slaying of Thomas a' Beckett; the then head of the family, Richard Le Brett, was one of the knights involved. The next notable Brett was Captain Brett of the Trained City Bands, who fought with Sir Thomas Wyatt in the favour of Princess Elizabeth against Queen Mary. Brett's own grandfather, Lieutenant Small, served in the Preventive Service.⁴

³ A range of secondary sources have also been utilised within this chapter, most notably J. O. Springhall, "Disseminating Impure Literature": the 'Penny Dreadful' Publishing Business Since 1860', *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3 (1994), pp.567-84, and J. O. Springhall, "A Life Story for the People?" Edwin J. Brett and the London 'Low-Life' Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s', *Victorian Studies*, Vol.33 (1989-90), pp.223-46.

⁴ Anon., 'Edwin J. Brett', *The Biograph and Review*, 4 (1880), p.456; F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21), 22 March 1919; Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, pp.227-28; M. Sweet, 'Brett, Edwin John', in H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison, eds. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, Vol.7 (Oxford, 2004), p.494.

Aged fourteen, Brett's father ushered him into a watchmaking apprenticeship, under the tutelage of a notable horologist. However, Brett found the career unsatisfying. Before long he became restless, and decided to become an illustrator. He persuaded his parents to allow him to leave his apprenticeship, and departed for London. Upon his arrival in the capital Brett set about establishing himself as an artist-engraver. At age sixteen he earned his first wage, half a guinea, when a sketch he had made of Canonbury Tower was accepted for publication in Henry Vizitelly's *Pictorial Times*. Soon, Brett formed a partnership with engraver Ebenezer Landells, one of the creators of *Punch*, which lasted until Landell's death in 1860. During this time he provided illustrations for several publishers. He also taught art to several pupils; amongst them was Charles Bennett, a future *BOE* illustrator and *Punch* stalwart.⁵

In the late 1840s Brett began to associate with leading figures in the Chartist movement, such as Fergus O'Connor, Charles Cochrane and G. W. M Reynolds. He became increasingly involved with Chartist causes. He attended, and even spoke at, several Chartist gatherings, including the infamous Kennington Common rally of April 1848. In the 1850s, he began to forge links with many of the artists, illustrators and journalists who lived and worked in London. Amongst their number were Henry Mayhew, the social explorer, Herbert Ingram, the Liberal MP and founder of *Illustrated London News*, *Punch* editor Mark Lemon, playwright Douglas Jerrold, and Alfred Bunn, manager of the Theatre Royal.⁶

Brett married on 4 January 1849.⁷ Little is known about his wife, except that she was named Eliza and was the daughter of Henry Archer, a Clerkenwell butcher. She died on 30 May 1893.⁸ Brett fathered nine children. His elder son was named Edwin Charles, his younger Edgar Percy. The remaining seven children were daughters. Their names,

⁵ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, pp.457-58; T. Hopperton, 'Victorian King-Pin', *Story Paper Collector*, Vol.4, No.78 (1962), p.32; Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919; Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, pp.228-29.

⁶ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, pp.457-58; Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919; Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, pp.228-29.

⁷ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, p.457.

⁸ Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919; Sweet, 'Brett', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol.7, p.494.

including surnames by marriage, were Helen Robey, Florence Selina Brewell, Emily Eliza Swain, Alice Maud Harris, Edith Mary Dance, Ethel Dance and Emma Martha Welshman.⁹

Brett was ambitious. He longed to manage his own publication. He had intended to take over the editorship of *The Illustrated Inventor* in 1860 until its proprietor, Herbert Ingram, drowned in Lake Michigan. In 1864 Brett embarked upon his first publishing venture, taking control of *The English Girl's Journal and Ladies Magazine* from Edward Harrison alongside colleagues William Lawrence Emmett and Joseph Hardiman. However, the venture was short-lived, and the partnership was dissolved amidst acrimony in 1865.¹⁰

Before long Brett joined the Newsagents' Publishing Company. The company had been established in 1862. Its primary business was the purchase, sale, and publication of printed matter, and the acquirement and sale of copyrights.¹¹ The year in which Brett joined the NPC, and his post, are not known. What is clear is that Brett did not found the company himself; it had been set up whilst he was working elsewhere. Nor was he its manager; this position was occupied by Alfred William Hockett.¹² Brett was, however, employed in a prominent position. Indeed, a feature in an 1868 number of Brett's *Young Men of Great Britain* strongly suggests that he headed the organisation, above both Hockett and a secretary named Thomas Durrant.¹³ Brett's official role may have been chairman.¹⁴

Although the NPC published a range of literature, it is best remembered for its penny dreadfuls. These children's periodicals were the successors of adult penny bloods, which

⁹ 'Wills and Bequests', *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1896, p.186. It is thought that Charles Stevens, the first editor of *BOE*, became part of Brett's extended family by marrying Brett's cousin, and that prolific *BOE* illustrator Esmond Hebblethwaite married Brett's eldest sister: see Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919.

¹⁰ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, pp.457-58; Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.32; Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919, 23 October 1920 – 30 October 1920; Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, p.229; Sweet, 'Brett', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol.7, p.494.

¹¹ Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, p.572; PRO, Board of Trade: Companies Registration Office: Files of Dissolved Companies, BT31/631/2644.

¹² *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.1, No.22, 20 April 1867, p.352; PRO, BT31/631/2644.

¹³ *Young Men of Great Britain: a Journal of Amusing and Instructive Literature*, Vol.2, No.32, 1 September 1868, p.484.

¹⁴ J. Medcraft, 'The Newsagents' Publishing Co.', *CM*, 5th Series, No.2 (1945), p.24.

had been popular in the 1830s and 1840s. Each penny dreadful featured a single story, published in eight-page weekly instalments. The stories were always published anonymously; many were also undated. They were bloody, violent and criminal. Some, such as *The Skeleton Horseman, or, the Shadow of Death* (1865-66), *The Dance of Death, or, the Hangman's Plot* (1866), and *The Skeleton Crew, or, Wildfire Ned* (1867), were gothic. Others, such as *The Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866) and *The Jolly Dogs of London* (1866), contained social commentary. Several, including *The Boy Brigand, or, the Dark King of the Mountains* (1865-66), *The Boy Detective, or, the Crimes of London* (1865-66), and *The Boy Soldier, or, Garibaldi's Young Captain* (1867), featured a youngster as the lead protagonist.¹⁵

It is thought that Brett's duties included overseeing the NPC's juvenile fiction.¹⁶ Under his supervision the company's output grew considerably – indeed, penny dreadfuls became its main business. Brett marketed the NPC's dreadfuls skilfully and with flair. He adorned them with colourful jackets and vivid illustrations. He gave the first number of each new serial away free with the last number of an existing serial. Young consumers found penny dreadfuls hard to refuse. Although all estimates of sale, both contemporary and current, are purely speculative, it is believed that many NPC serial stories had a high circulation. They were particularly popular in London. Many newsagents chose to stock them because they could be bought on a sale or return basis. Before long, the NPC became the UK's foremost publisher of cheap juvenile periodical fiction.¹⁷ However, penny dreadfuls were not popular with all. There was a sizeable movement against the supposedly corrupt literature, which persisted for several decades.

In 1865 Brett made his first attempt at launching a boys' weekly miscellany. Although such papers had existed before they were certainly not common, and none had ever achieved any real success or longevity. Brett's first weekly, published by the NPC,

¹⁵ For a comprehensive bibliography of NPC titles see A. E. Waite, *The Quest for Bloods: a Study of the Victorian Penny Dreadful* by A. E. Waite: Edited and with Additional Notes on the Literature of the Byways by Ayresome Johns (1997).

¹⁶ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.32.

¹⁷ Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, pp.572-74.



Fig.1: Plate celebrating the life of Edwin J. Brett

was *The Boys' Companion and British Traveller*. The magazine contained “tales of life and adventure [and] perils and dangers by sea and land”, “amusing and instructive articles on general science such as astronomy, chemistry, natural magic &c.”, and “original biographies, historical sketches, [and] articles on summer and winter sports”.¹⁸ The paper did not survive for long; it commenced in May 1865 and ceased the following December after only thirty-three numbers.¹⁹ Undeterred, Brett launched *The Boys' Own Reader and Companion* in 1866, enlisting the Rev. G. D'Arcy Irvine as editor. The paper was quite similar to *The Boys' Companion and British Traveller*. It featured serial stories, such as ‘The Spectral Drama’, ‘Don Vincenzo, or, the Brothers of the Black Cross’ and ‘The Disinherited, or, the Boy Slave’, articles on topics as diverse as eclipses, alcohol and electric eels, and even French lessons. The first number of the paper was accompanied by a free plate depicting an equestrian scene.²⁰ To Brett's disappointment, *The Boys' Own Reader and Companion* fared worse than its predecessor, lasting only sixteen numbers.²¹

Boys of England

Unfazed by his previous failures, Brett set about launching another boys' weekly in late 1866. The first number of *BOE* was duly published, via the NPC, on 24 November 1866. It was edited by Charles Stevens, an NPC penny dreadful author.

BOE was revolutionary. It eclipsed every boys' periodical which had preceded it. It was lavish and striking. It was printed on large, good quality paper. It boasted sixteen full pages. It featured numerous free gifts. Its sheer physical presence must have made it exceptionally visible amongst less extravagant journals on newsagents' and booksellers' shelves. So impressive was the new format that it remained the industry standard for

¹⁸ *The Boys' Companion and British Traveller*, Vol.1, No.1, 13 May 1865, p.16.

¹⁹ R. Rollington, *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (Leicester, 1913), p.65.

²⁰ *The Boys' Own Reader and Companion: a Magazine of Instruction and Recreation for the Young*, Vol.1 (1866).

²¹ Rollington, *Brief History*, p.65.

decades afterwards. Launching *BOE* must have proven costly. Some sources even suggest that Brett had to borrow money, perhaps as much as £300, from fellow publishers.²²

The front cover of each issue was headed by a large banner bearing the title of the publication, and a near full page illustration. A few paragraphs of the lead story ran along the foot of the page. Inside the journal, each page was divided into three columns of text, broken only to accommodate illustrations. These illustrations, produced using traditional woodcuts, were numerous, and of a high standard. They were often gory; indeed, Brett is known to have advised one illustrator to “make your scimitars more curly and your drops of blood bigger”.²³ The majority of the paper was devoted to fiction, both serial stories and complete tales. These stories were written by several of the leading boys’ authors of the day. Favoured subject matter included adventure, travel, history, crime, the supernatural, romance, warfare, the military, and the public schools. Non-fiction made up most of the remaining pages of the paper. Self help, science, nature, sports, hobbies, biography, history and humour were all common topics. The final two pages of *BOE* featured a correspondence column, an occasional exchange and mart section, editorials, advertisements for future stories and features, and general notices. The paper was often accompanied by free gifts, such as illustrated plates and folding models. Early volumes also featured a lavish prize distribution competition, offering ponies as the star attraction. The paper’s format remained largely unaltered until the 1890s.

BOE had a refreshing new outlook. It was friendly and convivial. Brett regularly wrote editorial columns which spoke directly to boy readers.²⁴ In them, he referred to himself as ‘your dear friend’, and to his readers as ‘my dear boys’. Brett’s welcoming demeanour was a world away from the rather stuffy dispositions of the editors of the numerous didactic religious periodicals which existed at the time. Indeed, even many

²² ‘Edwin J. Brett’, *Illustrated London News*, 21 December 1895, p.758; ‘Town Notes’, *Kent Coast Times*, 19 December 1895, p.6; Springhall, ‘Life Story’, *VS*, Vol.33, p.232.

²³ G. Dalziel, ‘The Old ‘Boys’ Books’’, *Publishers’ Circular*, 4 December 1920, p.670.

²⁴ Examples can be found in: *BOE*, Vol.1, No.13, 18 February 1867, p.127; *BOE*, Vol.2, No.49, 26 October 1867, p.364; *BOE*, Vol.3, No.60, 11 January 1868, p.127; *BOE*, Vol.25, No.634, 10 January 1879, p.143; and at the beginning of most bound editions.

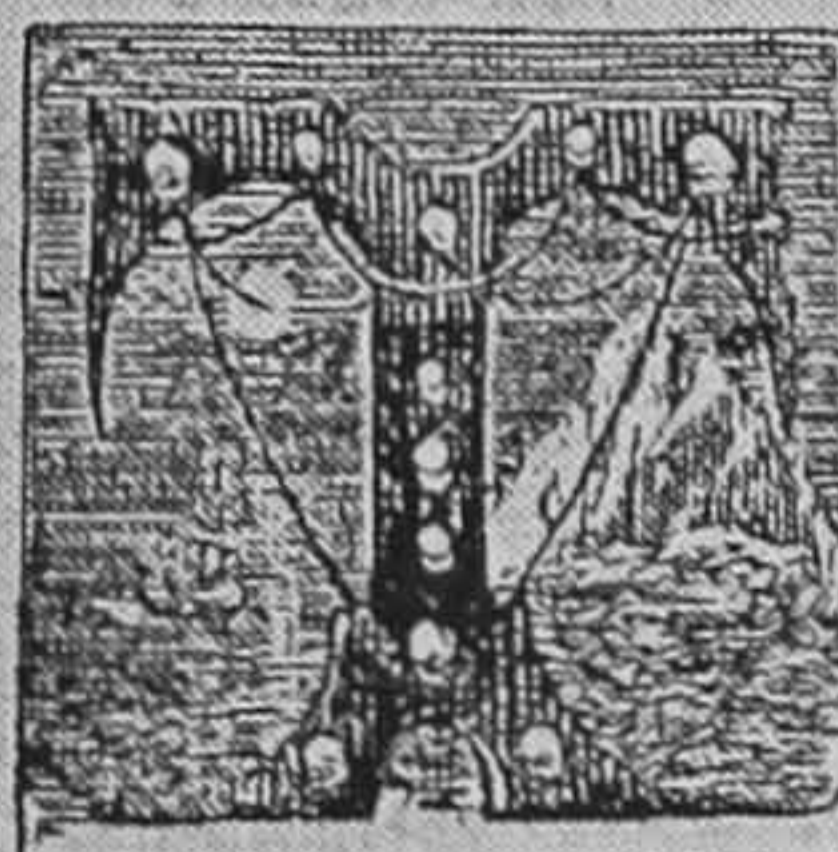


"HIS FINGERS TOUCH THE PISTOL—THE PIRATE EMITS A DEEP, FIERCE GROWL."

ALONE IN THE PIRATES' LAIR
By THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

HOMeward BOUND.



THE good ship 'Titania', homeward bound from Canton, and laden with a costly cargo, lies at anchor off the Ladrones.

Leaning lightly against the taffrail, a young midshipman gazed, dreamingly, through the glowing, limitless expanse of blending sky and sea.

"Aha! here it comes at last!"
The boy started, and looked round inquiringly. The first-mate, who had stepped to his side unobserved by him, uttered this exclamation in a tone of intense satisfaction.
"Aye, sir; in yonder cloud to starboard?"
"Yes, Mr. Rushton, that little cloud, not bigger than a man's hand, and soon we shall have it in right earnest; be so good as to call the captain."
"Aye, sir," returned the mid, touching his cap, respectfully.
He stepped nimbly from the quarter-deck, went below, and tapped at the captain's door.
"Come in."
The boy entered.
"Wind, Mr. Rushton?"
"Aye, sir."

"Which way?"
"North-west and by north, sir."
"Good! tell Mr. Dale to heave anchor at once; I'll be on deck in a few moments."
"Aye, sir."
Soon the boatswain's whistle rung shrilly along the quiet deck.
The crew came tumbling up the hatchways, or sprung from the fore-castle and from under the bulwarks.
"All hands up anchor, ahoy!" was the boatswain's gruff shout.
The fifer struck up a jaunty air.
"Man the bars!"
And then came the order, "Heave around!"
Forty sturdy tars tramp, tramp, tramped around, their broad, brawny shoulders bearing hard against the capstan-bars, and their bare, light-tripping

[SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1866.]

Fig.2: The first number of BOE

secular publications remained comparatively formal until decades later.²⁵ Brett was keen for his readers to become actively involved in producing the periodical. He frequently spoke of *BOE* as ‘your journal’, and asked them for their opinions on how it could be improved. He also invited them to submit their own articles and stories. In return, he requested that they gave *BOE* their wholehearted support. Brett also went to great lengths to inspire a sense of community amongst *BOE* subscribers. Not only did his editorials evoke a spirit of solidarity and kinship, but the paper’s pen-pal columns actually brought boys from across Britain, and the globe, into contact.

Through *BOE* Brett hoped to establish a “new track” of literature, which boys would find both amusing and instructive, and which parents would approve of.²⁶ Indeed, the paper’s subtitle was *a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*. Brett was aware that in recent years two previously disparate strands of children’s literature had begun to merge. Boys’ publishers were now combining popular fiction, such as historical romance, with more instructive, educative and moralistic material which had existed in periodicals since the eighteenth century (but which most children found rather unpalatable and preachy).²⁷ Although Samuel Beeton’s *Boy’s Own Magazine*, launched in 1855, had pioneered this new format, *BOE* was the first paper to unite the two strands to such great effect.²⁸ Brett excited and informed boys in just the right measures. His outlook regarding popular fiction, and its potential effect upon juvenile readers, was advanced for its time. Brett believed that literature which stimulated the imagination was as important to a boys’ intellectual development as explicitly educative material, if not more important. He argued this point in several of his editorials.²⁹

²⁵ D. Dixon, *English Juvenile Periodical Literature, 1870-1914* (unpublished M.Phil dissertation, The University of Leicester, 1978), p.56.

²⁶ *YMOGB*, Vol.2, No.32, 1 September 1868, p.484.

²⁷ A good survey of the latter is J. Dawson, ‘The Origins of Nineteenth-Century Juvenile Periodicals: *The Young Gentleman’s and Ladies Magazine* (1799-1800) and its Predecessors’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 29 (1996), pp.216-41.

²⁸ K. Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven, 1988), p.73.

²⁹ For example, see *The Boys’ Companion and British Traveller*, Vol.1, No.1, 13 May 1865, p.16, and *BOE*, Vol.1, No.13, 18 February 1867, p.127.

However, Brett was adamant that the public should not confuse *BOE* with penny dreadfuls, which had begun to come under fire from the moralistic press. Brett cast aside stories which glorified highwaymen, pirates, and other criminals, and stressed the moral virtues of his new paper in his editorials and correspondence columns. Indeed, he claimed that *BOE* would actually help to put a stop to pernicious literature. In later years Brett recalled his motivation for launching the paper:

It was at the time when *Jack Sheppard* and books of that character were being published. I had an idea that it was possible to counteract the effects of such publications by giving a journal which should have as its distinguishing features good drawings, good paper, healthy stories of a sensational order, but always making the villain the most despicable of characters, and giving plenty for money. The *Boys of England* led the way in this crusade against pernicious literature, and was successful in dealing it a death blow.³⁰

Of course, Brett himself had published much literature of the type he condemned. It is probable that he actually believed penny dreadfuls to be innocuous, but could not be seen to condone them for fear of censure.

Brett left the NPC in August 1869, and moved into new offices at 173 Fleet Street.³¹ The building, from where he continued to publish *BOE* until the 1890s, became known as 'The *BOE* Office'. The NPC ceased trading, probably with immediate effect.³² It has been suggested that the company was raided and closed by the police, although there appears to be no evidence of this.³³ Brett's reasons for leaving the NPC are a matter for speculation. Tellingly, following the move he continued to employ the same manager, A. W. Hockett, the same authors and illustrators, and even the same printer. The most probable explanation is that Brett was worried that the increasingly poor reputation of the NPC might have harmed the sale of *BOE*. In 1868 *BOE* had become embroiled in a widely reported court case alongside NPC penny dreadful *Tales of Highwaymen, or, Life on the Road* (1865-66).

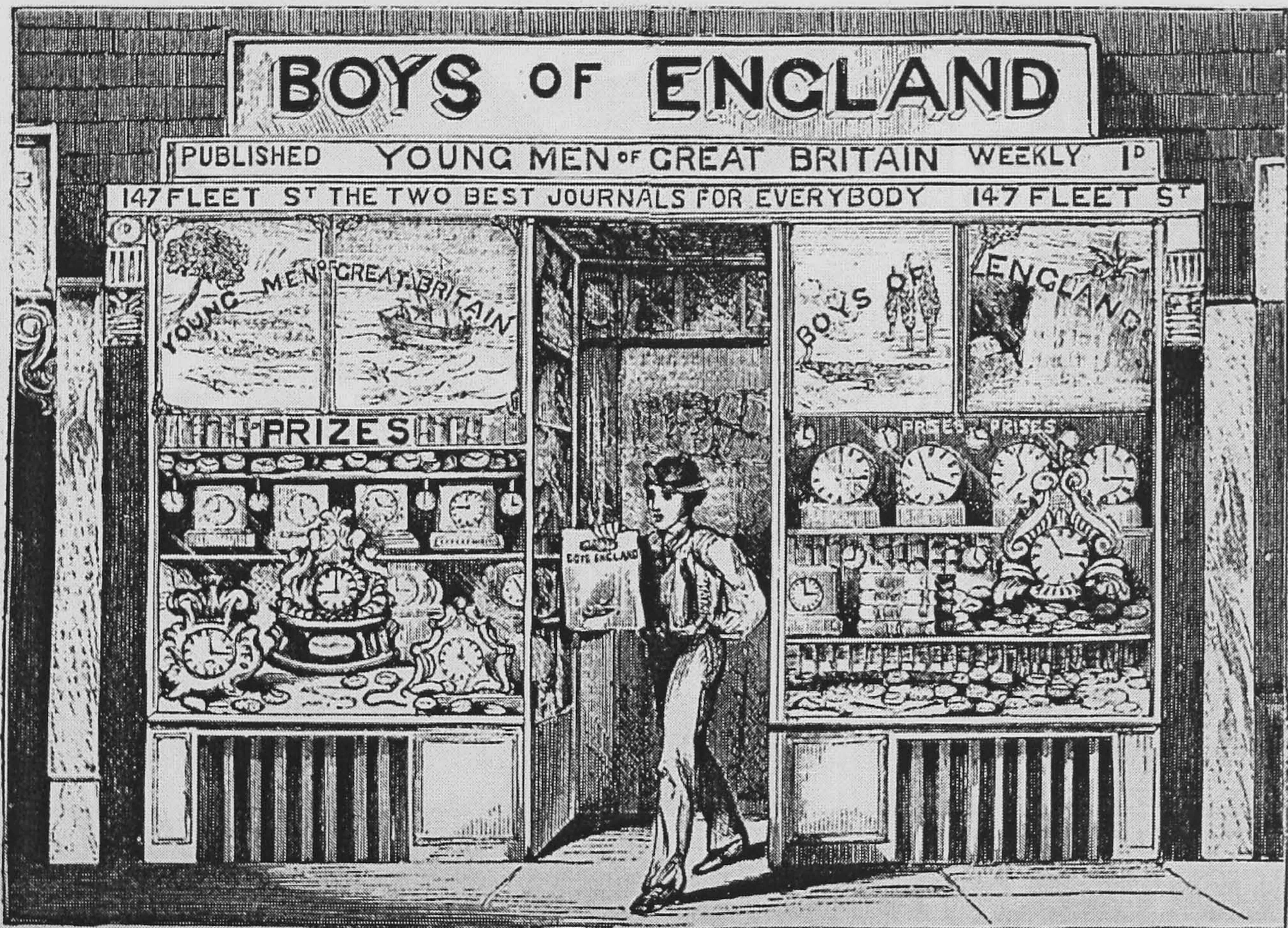
³⁰ Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919 – 29 March 1919.

³¹ *BOE*, Vol.6, No.147, 6 September 1869. This was the first number published from the new offices.

³² Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, p.572.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.575; J. B. Twitchell, *Preposterous Violence: Aggression in Modern Culture* (Oxford, 1989), pp.169-70.

YOUNG MEN OF GREAT BRITAIN.



THIS PICTURE REPRESENTS OUR PUBLISHING OFFICE, 147, FLEET STREET, WITH SOME OF THE PRIZES ON VIEW IN THE WINDOWS.

Fig.3: The Newsagents' Publishing Company Office, 147 Fleet Street

The case had caused Brett much anguish. Disreputable papers ran the risk of being embargoed by parents. By ditching the NPC brand, thereby distancing *BOE* from its origins, Brett probably hoped that the paper's reputation would remain safe.³⁴ Nevertheless, it appears that Brett secretly retained the rights to several NPC penny dreadfuls serials. He is known to have later sold these rights to fellow publishers.³⁵

The *BOE* Office was packed with huge quantities of boys' periodicals. Numerous men and boys worked there alongside the proprietor.³⁶ The office acted both as a sales outlet and a distribution centre.³⁷ From here *BOE* was shipped to stockists in London, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the Channel Islands. The paper's correspondence columns suggest that *BOE* was even read in Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand. *BOE*, like most boys' papers, was probably sold to stockists as unfolded sets of sheets, known as quires, which were subsequently folded and cut by the newsagent themselves prior to sale.³⁸ The paper was mainly sold by newsagents' shops and stands on streets, railway stations and market places. These businesses boasted well-stocked racks of boys' periodicals alongside tobacco, stationary, toys and confectionary.³⁹ Readers in the countryside with no local newsagent could subscribe to *BOE* by post at a cost of 6s per year, 3s 2d per half year, or 1s 7d per quarter year. The paper was also sold as a monthly edition and a bi-annual bound volume. Boys who wished to bind their own weekly editions into a bi-annual volume could purchase handsome purple and gold *BOE* covers at a cost of

³⁴ The fact that the Emmett brothers, Brett's bitter rivals, had recently moved to 145 Fleet Street, adjacent to the NPC's offices, would hardly have encouraged him remain at the NPC either: see S. Holland, 'Young Englishman's Journal Vol.2', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/977>, accessed 7 December 2002.

³⁵ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.36.

³⁶ One later edition of *BOE* even advertised for boys available to work in Brett's offices: see *BOE*, Vol.66, No.1679, 20 January 1899, p.160.

³⁷ B. Winkill, 'The Penny Dreadful Offices', *Vanity Fair*, Vol.2, No.17 (December 1925), pp.47-48.

³⁸ J. Parks, 'Bookshops and Bookstalls', *CM*, 5th Series, No.1 (October 1945), pp.3-4; J. J. Wilson, 'Some of the Old 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2 (June 1928), pp.13-16.

³⁹ J. O. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.55-56; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.13-17.

one shilling. *BOE* was printed initially by Kelly and Co, Gate Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and later by Vincent Brooks, Day and Son, Gate Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Financially, *BOE* struggled in “troubled waters” in its earliest months. This was probably due to the considerable cost of its launch. However, these costs were soon recouped through the paper's high sale, plus the sale of reprinted material (which was relatively cheap to issue).⁴⁰ It is not known precisely how much *BOE* cost to produce. No account of Brett's business expenditure has survived.⁴¹ Historians are also hampered by varying estimates of the production costs of NPC penny dreadfuls.⁴² The only existing source detailing the cost of *BOE* claims that Brett “paid his authors fifty shillings an instalment, which was ‘set up’ in type for fifty shillings, and printed for five shillings a thousand. The sale price to the trade was fifty shillings a thousand, and though paper was dear then—within a fraction of fourpence a pound even if bought by the ton—there was a big profit.”⁴³ The reliability of these figures is relatively unimportant. What is important is the undisputable fact that *BOE* was very profitable. It is thought that in the early 1870s Brett was earning as much as £8000 per year, largely accrued from the sale of his flagship periodical.⁴⁴

Influences

BOE was highly original. However, this is not to say that Brett was not inspired by existing publications. In fact, he had adapted several elements of *BOE* from other periodicals. Most notably, *BOE*'s format and content were influenced by a succession of earlier, pioneering boys' papers.

⁴⁰ *YMOGB*, Vol.2, No.32, 1 September 1868, p.484; T. M. Ford, *Memoirs of a Poor Devil* (1926), p.97.

⁴¹ Ford, *Memoirs*, pp.97-101.

⁴² See J. Greenwood, *The Wilds of London* (1874), pp.159-60; Hopperton, ‘King-Pin’, *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, pp.32-33; F. Jay, ‘The Personalia of the Penny Dreadful’, *VF*, Vol.2, No.20 (March 1926), pp.121-22; and Springhall, ‘Life Story’, *VS*, Vol.33, pp.232-33.

⁴³ Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919.

⁴⁴ Drotner, *English Children*, p.76; Greenwood, *Wilds*, pp.159-60; Hopperton, ‘King-Pin’, *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, pp.32-33; Springhall, ‘Life Story’, *VS*, Vol.33, pp.232-33.

One periodical from which Brett drew inspiration was Samuel Beeton's *BOM*. The *BOM* had been the leading boys' paper since 1855. Each monthly number boasted thirty-two pages in octavo size and a bright coloured cover. The *BOM* was ostensibly a religious publication, yet it was entertaining rather than dry. It featured an abundance of adventure stories, particularly historical and naval tales, the first time such material had dominated a religious magazine. It also featured a plethora of non-fiction, incorporating science and nature, puzzles, sports, biographies and a correspondence column. Each issue cost twopence per month, rising to sixpence in 1863. *BOM* was a commercial success; it sold 40,000 copies every month, mainly to middle class households. However, in later years Beeton struggled to compete with Brett and the Emmett brothers, and the *BOM* was discontinued in 1874.⁴⁵ Brett was also influenced by *Vickers' Boys' Journal*, published by Henry Vickers between 1863 and 1871. Vickers' contributors included future *BOE* authors Captain Mayne Reid, Percy B. St. John and W. Stephens Hayward, and *BOE* artist Robert Prowse. The paper featured more fiction, and less non-fiction, than the *BOM*. At threepence per month, later rising to sixpence, it was quite costly, and was also mainly read by middle class boys.⁴⁶

However, the paper which had the greatest bearing upon *BOE*, aside from Brett's own *Boys' Companion and British Traveller* and *Boys' Own Reader and Companion*, was Edward Harrison's *Boys' Miscellany*. The paper, which commenced in March 1863, was commercially unsuccessful yet pioneering. It was larger and more profusely illustrated than any periodical before it. It was also more stimulating; stirring tales, such as 'Sixteen-String Jack, the Daring Highwayman' and 'The Horrors of the Wild', were accompanied by scientific articles, correspondence columns, and even illustrated supplements.⁴⁷ It was aimed at a lower class of reader than the *BOM* and *Vickers' Boys' Journal*, and cost only one penny per weekly number. Brett had worked with Harrison on several publications in

⁴⁵ *The Boy's Own Magazine*, Vol.1 (1855); Jay, *Peeps*, 2 October 1920 – 9 October 1920; Drotner, *English Children*, pp.66-68.

⁴⁶ Jay, *Peeps*, 11 January 1919; Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.62-63.

⁴⁷ *The Boys' Miscellany*, Vol.1 (1863); *The Boys' Miscellany, or Boys' Own Weekly Paper: a Journal of Light Literature and Entertaining Knowledge*, New Series, Vol.1, No.1, 6 August 1864; F. Jay, 'Early Boys' Periodicals', *CM*, No.15 (January – February 1932), p.3.

the early 1860s; it was here where he must have encountered the short-lived weekly.⁴⁸ Brett admired Harrison's work so much that several of the earliest serials he issued via the NPC were reprints of *Boys' Miscellany* stories.⁴⁹

Brett was also inspired by adult periodicals. *Reynolds' Miscellany* is the most notable example. G. W. M. Reynolds, the proprietor, was a leading Victorian publisher. His *Miscellany* was first published in 1846. It was itself inspired by George Stiff's *London Journal*, a high-circulation penny paper which Reynolds had edited for a time. *Reynolds' Miscellany* combined various types of fiction and non-fiction. Sensational fiction was its main draw. The paper's first serial, 'Wagner, the Wehr Wolf', is regarded as one of the finest ever penny blood stories. Much of Brett's editorial policy was adapted from *Reynolds' Miscellany*. For example, Reynolds, like Brett, was friendly and attentive towards his readership, and aimed to inspire a sense of community amongst them. Staunchly working class, *Reynolds' Miscellany* was promoted as popular reading for the masses. Brett also drew inspiration from Reynolds' numerous other periodicals, especially *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper*. Because of Reynolds' radical inclinations his publications were highly politicised, championed working class causes, and adapted many features of the traditional radical press.⁵⁰ It is known that Brett himself occasionally worked alongside Reynolds, providing illustrations for serial stories.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.32.

⁴⁹ Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, p.231.

⁵⁰ I. Haywood, 'George W. M. Reynolds and the Radicalisation of Victorian Serial Fiction', *Media History*, Vol.4, No.2 (1998), pp.121-39; A. Humpherys, 'G. W. M. Reynolds: Popular Literature and Popular Politics', in J. H. Wiener, ed. *Innovators and Preachers: the Role of the Editor in Victorian England* (Westport, 1985), pp.3-21; Jay, *Peeps*, 26 October 1918 – 2 November 1918, 23 November 1918; R. McWilliam, 'The Mysteries of G. W. M. Reynolds: Radicalism and Melodrama in Victorian Britain', in M. Chase and I. Dyck, eds. *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp.182-98; J. S. North, ed. *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900*, Vol.4 (Waterloo, 1997), pp.2998-3000; North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.5, pp.4110-13. The most comprehensive study the of political content of Reynolds' periodicals is V. S. Berridge, *Popular Journals and Working Class Attitudes, 1854-1886* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of London, 1976).

⁵¹ Jay, *Peeps*, 30 November 1918.

Sale

It is difficult to assess the sale of Victorian boys' periodicals. Circulation figures were not officially recorded at the time. The only sales figures which existed were those claimed by the publishers themselves. However, these cannot always be relied upon. For example, *The Boy's Own Paper* claimed a sale of 200,000 per week in its first year, rising to 500,000 in the late 1880s, 650,000 in the 1890s, and even 400,000 during its Edwardian decline.⁵² However, recent scholarship has brought these figures into question, suggesting that its true sale was considerably lower, possibly only around the 150,000 mark in 1888.⁵³

BOE claimed a large readership from its earliest issues. Indeed, not nearly enough copies of early numbers of the paper were printed. "We have the greatest reason for believing that some thousands of intending purchasers of numbers one and two have been unable to obtain copies", wrote Charles Stevens in number three, "but the fact is that largely as we thought we had provided for our friends, our supply fell far short of the demand."⁵⁴ Regular notices in volumes one and two boasted that sales totalled 150,000 per week. It appears that this figure rose steadily over time; by May 1868 Brett claimed a readership of 170,000 for both *BOE* and *YMOGB*.⁵⁵ Despite the absence of official sales figures there is evidence to corroborate these numbers. Each ticket given away in the paper's prize distributions was individually numbered, beginning at one. A glance at the lists of winners reveals that tickets numbered over 100,000 were commonly drawn. Furthermore, with no real rivals in the marketplace, Brett had little need to exaggerate his periodical's success. Moreover, when competitors such as the Emmett brothers did launch their own boys' weeklies, they too enjoyed sales above the 100,000 mark.⁵⁶

⁵² P. A. Dunae, 'Boy's Own Paper: Origins and Editorial Policies', *The Private Library*, 2nd Series, Vol.9, No.4 (1976), pp.133-34.

⁵³ D. Reed, *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States of America, 1880-1960* (1997), p.86; J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), pp.215, 219.

⁵⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.3, 11 December 1866, p.48.

⁵⁵ *YMOGB*, Vol.1, No.15, 5 May 1868, p.211.

⁵⁶ S. Holland, 'The Emmett Story and the Emmett Story Papers', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/835>, accessed 29 October 2002.

It has long been thought that the circulation of *BOE* rose to 250,000 in the early 1870s, largely due to the popularity of a series of tales starring the headstrong schoolboy Jack Harkaway. It is not clear from where this claim originated.⁵⁷ It does not appear that the figure was ever acknowledged by Brett himself. How can we be certain that this high figure is to be believed? Anecdotal evidence is probably the most important source. A remarkable number of boy readers later named Harkaway as their favourite character, describing the fever which Hemyng's stories inspired within them and their fellows. Evidence also suggests that the success of the 'Jack Harkaway' series was common knowledge within the boys' publishing industry; 'Harkaway' author Bracebridge Hemyng was poached from Brett by US-based rival Frank Leslie, who was keen to secure exclusive rights to the much-admired tales, whilst William Watkins, editor of *Lads of the Village* (a boys' periodical which was influenced by *BOE*), noted in an 1874 editorial that the most successful boys' periodicals were capable of selling up to 250,000 copies weekly.⁵⁸

Firm evidence that *BOE* achieved a sale of 250,000 may never be discovered. However, precise sales figures are relatively unimportant. What is more significant is the fact that, regardless of numbers, the paper sold very well indeed, and considerably better than its rivals. This is a certainty. *BOE* managed to survive in a volatile market for thirty-three years. Had its sales flagged it would have been discontinued, much as Brett's earlier journals, *The Boys' Companion and British Traveller* and *The Boys' Own Reader and Companion*, had been. In fact, *BOE* was unique in the boys' periodical market. It was so profitable that it supported not only itself but also a host of other papers. Just like any other periodical publisher, many of Brett's periodicals failed within a few short weeks. Without the financial security which *BOE* brought, bankruptcy would have been a possibility, as less successful or experimental periodicals, especially the halfpenny *Boys of the World* and the full colour *Boys of the Empire*, drained the company coffers. Indeed, such was the financial assurance brought by *BOE* that Brett was even able to issue the hastily conceived *Rovers of the Sea* for no other reason than to scupper the prospects of the Emmetts' *Rover's Log* in 1872.

⁵⁷ The usually reliable Frank Jay may have been the original source: see F. Jay, 'The Personalities of the Penny Dreadful', *VF*, Vol.2, No.20 (March 1926), pp.121-22.

⁵⁸ *Lads of the Village*, Vol.1, No.1, 18 July 1874, p.14.

It is probable that *BOE* enjoyed a high sale throughout the 1870s. During this era Brett dominated the boys' weekly publishing industry. In contrast, many of his rivals struggled. W. L. Emmett, his leading rival, became bankrupt around 1870 and died a few years later.⁵⁹ His brother George, despite having published some successful periodicals, became bankrupt in 1879.⁶⁰ Other rivals emerged; although many were relatively successful, none challenged *BOE*'s supremacy. For example, Charles Fox's *Boys' Standard*, first published in 1875, achieved a sale of only 75,000, and John Allingham's *Boy's World*, which began in 1879, achieved just 70,000, both considerably lower than the figure claimed by *BOE*.⁶¹ Some papers, like *Lads of the Village*, failed to muster even 30,000 sales per week.⁶² Brett remained largely unchallenged throughout the 1880s. Indeed, even in the early 1890s he still sold as many as 600,000 journals per week in total.⁶³ However, the mid 1890s witnessed the rapid erosion of *BOE*'s readership as boys flocked to Alfred Harmsworth's new halfpenny papers.

Authors and Illustrators

In *BOE*'s earliest years Brett employed many of the leading authors of boys' periodical fiction. Most of these men had worked in Fleet Street for many years, writing prolifically for a variety of adult and juvenile periodicals. Several had written for early boys' papers, such as Beeton's *BOM* and *Vickers' Boys' Journal*, whilst others had written penny bloods and penny dreadfuls. Many went on to write for other periodical publishers, such as the

⁵⁹ Holland, 'Emmett Story'.

⁶⁰ 'Bankruptcies', *The Times*, 6 December 1879, p.8; Holland, 'Emmett Story'; Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.22, 70.

⁶¹ A. Harris, 'Brett and Fox: Outstanding Publishers', *CM*, 5th Series, No.1 (October 1945), pp.5-6; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.5.

⁶² Watkins believed that a sale of 30,000 copies per week would cover publication costs, thereby ensuring the longevity of the paper. As the periodical ran to only two volumes, it can be assumed that this figure was not realised: see Dixon, *Periodical Literature*, p.28. Indeed, the industry generally worked under the assumption that a sale of 30,000 was necessary to meet the cost of issuing a penny weekly. Presumably, any long-running periodical must have at least met this figure: see Humpherys, 'G. W. M. Reynolds', in *Innovators and Preachers*, p.7.

⁶³ *BOE*, Vol.52, No.1315, 29 January 1892, p.140.

Emmett brothers, in the late 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. Although little is known about these early *BOE* authors, enough biographical information exists to permit short accounts of their lives and careers. However, because all of *BOE* stories were published anonymously from the early 1870s onwards, virtually nothing is known about the authors who joined Brett's staff after this period.

One of *BOE*'s most significant, and popular, authors was Charles Stevens. Stevens was born around 1839. He had previously written penny dreadfuls for the NPC, including *Roving Jack, the Pirate Hunter* (1867). His first *BOE* tale, 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair', was the lead story in the first number. It was a hit, a fact which probably accounted for some of the paper's early success. Stevens was also *BOE*'s first editor, overseeing numbers one to nine. After leaving *BOE*, Stevens wrote extensively for several of Brett's rivals, and edited many more juvenile periodicals.⁶⁴

Bracebridge Hemyng was arguably *BOE*'s star author. Born in 1841, Hemyng had trained as a barrister, but instead chose a career as a journalist and author. In the 1860s he wrote for numerous Fleet Street periodicals, penned several successful novels, and also contributed to Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861). In the mid to late 1860s he joined the NPC. It is not known whether he wrote any of the NPC's penny dreadfuls, but it is a distinct possibility; he is often mooted as the author of the infamous *Wild Boys of London*. Hemyng became a boyhood idol in the early 1870s following the serialisation of 'Jack Harkaway's Schooldays' (vol.10) and its sequels, which proved incredibly popular. An prolific author, he also contributed the popular 'Scapegrace' series to Brett's *YMOGB* at around the same time. In 1873 Hemyng left *BOE* in acrimonious circumstances, moving to America to write 'Jack Harkaway' stories for British expatriate Frank Leslie. He also wrote for several other English boys' periodicals publishers, such as the Emmett brothers and John Allingham, throughout the 1870s and 1880s. He returned to

⁶⁴ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, p.1723; S. Holland, 'Making it up to Charlie Stevens', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/1562>, accessed 12 June 2003; Jay, *Peeps*.

write for Brett once again in 1893. Hemyng was a likable character, and highly regarded by his fellows. He died in poverty in Fulham in 1901.⁶⁵

BOE was graced for many years by the stories of the St. John brothers, Percy Bollingbroke and Vane. Percy B. St. John was born in 1821 in Camden, London. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s he edited several Fleet Street periodicals and wrote for many others. In the 1860s he began to contribute stories to *Vickers' Boys' Journal*, and probably wrote some of the NPC's penny dreadfuls. After leaving *BOE* he went on to write for other boys' publishers, including the Emmetts and John Allingham; he also contributed to W. H. G. Kingston and G. A. Henty's *Union Jack*. After losing money on a failed periodical he was forced to live in poor lodgings; there he died of psoriasis on 15 March 1889.⁶⁶ Vane Ireton St. John was born in 1839. Like his brother, he was a prolific editor and author, contributing to numerous papers, including *Reynolds' Miscellany*, throughout the 1860s. Although most of Vane's most popular stories appeared in *BOE* he also wrote extensively for Brett's *YMOGB*, and even edited the paper for a time. After leaving Brett he penned tales for the Emmett brothers and John Allingham, and edited *Pals* for Charles Shurey in 1895. Vane St. John was declared bankrupt shortly before he joined *BOE* in 1866. Indeed, he was forever in debt. At one time he and Walter Viles, a fellow author, were forced to dress in sheets after pawning all of their clothes. Despite his troubles Vane St. John was high-spirited and likeable. He died in 1911. It is believed that Percy, Vane, and third sibling Bayle, all harboured radical sympathies.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ J. Adcock, 'Wild Boys of London', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/3184>, accessed 12 March 2005; Anon., 'Jack Harkaway', *The Bookseller*, 11 January 1901, p.777; Jay, *Peeps*; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.7; J. O. Springhall, 'Boys of Bircham School': the Penny Dreadful Origins of the English School Story, 1867-1900', *History of Education*, Vol.20 (Newton Abbott, 1991), pp.85-86.

⁶⁶ J. Adcock, 'Re. Jack Sheppard is Hatched', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/3208>, accessed 11 April 2005; *Percy B. St. John*, http://www.niulib.niu.edu/badndp/st.john_percy.html, accessed 4 May 2005; Jay, *Peeps*; J. J. Wilson, 'Percy B. St. John', *CM*, Vol.1, No.6 (February 1929) pp.77-79; J. J. Wilson, 'Percy B. St. John', *CM*, Vol.2, No.1 (April 1929), pp.1-2.

⁶⁷ Adcock, 'Jack Sheppard'; 'Bankruptcies', *The Times*, 24 January 1866, p.7; Jay, *Peeps*; Lofts and Adley, *Boys' Fiction*, p.297; Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.29-36, 107; Wilson, 'Percy B. St. John', *CM*, Vol.2, No.1, pp.1-2; H. R. Smith, *A Feast of Blood: Bloods and Penny Dreadfuls* (2002), cat.no.808.

James Greenwood was perhaps *BOE*'s best respected author. He was a celebrated social explorer, having written extensively about social depravation in London for several Fleet Street periodicals. Indeed, he had earned the nickname 'The Amateur Casual' after spending the night researching conditions in Lambeth workhouse. As well as writing for *BOE* Greenwood also wrote for Brett's *YMOGB* and *Wedding Bells*, Beeton's *BOM*, and several of John Allingham's periodicals. Unlike many of his fellows he did not write for the Emmett brothers. Greenwood was unique amongst his peers in that he survived well into the twentieth century, dying aged ninety-seven in 1929.⁶⁸

Thomas Frost was *BOE*'s most radical author. He was actively involved in the Chartist movement, writing journalism and fiction in support of a variety of working class causes. Before joining *BOE* Frost had written several penny bloods and penny dreadfuls for a number of Fleet Street publishers; his work was similar to the politically charged fiction of G. W. M. Reynolds. Frost was the only *BOE* author to leave an autobiography. In fact, he left two: *Forty Years of Recollections: Literary and Political* (1880) and *Reminiscences of a Country Journalist* (1886).⁶⁹ Curiously, one of Frost's autobiographies mentions another, unknown, *BOE* author. Frost refers to him as "the mad author", and describes his unkempt appearance and bizarre military clothing.⁷⁰

Captain Mayne Reid was, and remains, the most famous of all *BOE*'s authors. Mayne Reid was born on 4 April 1818 in Ballyroney, Ireland. He emigrated to America in 1840, and journeyed between England, Ireland and the States for the rest of his career. By the time Mayne Reid joined *BOE* he had authored dozens of books for adults and children, and

⁶⁸ T. Frost, *Reminiscences of a Country Journalist* (1886), p.180; Jay, *Peeps*; J. Richards, 'Introduction', in J. Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London: Introduction by Jeffrey Richards* (Oxford, 1981), pp.v-xxi; J. W. R. Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette, of its First Editor Frederick Greenwood and of its Founder George Murray Smith* (1950), pp.166-71.

⁶⁹ S. Devereux, 'Chartism and Popular Fiction', in J. Lucas, ed. *Writing and Radicalism* (1996), pp.128-49; T. Frost, *Forty Years of Recollections: Literary and Political* (1880); Frost, *Reminiscences*; I. Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge, 2004), pp.144, 146, 159-60, 165, 232; L. James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: a Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (1963), pp.77, 143; M. Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: a Study of Nineteenth Century British Working Class Literature* (1974), pp.113, 123-25.

⁷⁰ Frost, *Reminiscences*, pp.185-86.

was well respected on both sides of the Atlantic. Mayne Reid probably struck a publishing deal with Brett following his bankruptcy; it was reported at the time that Brett had paid “a handsome price” for his services. Several of Mayne Reid’s *BOE* stories had previously been published elsewhere; others were original. Mayne Reid mailed instalments of his new stories to Brett from his home in Newport, Rhode Island. Most of Mayne Reid’s tales were set in America. He had travelled widely across the States, both as a journalist and as a soldier. His experience and knowledge made his stories of American life extraordinarily vivid. He was particularly attentive towards the natural world. Mayne Reid contributed to a myriad of other boys’ papers throughout his career, including *Vickers’ Boys’ Journal*, several Emmett brothers papers, the *BOP*, and an Irish boys’ periodical named *Young Ireland*, and *The Boys’ Illustrated News*, the first illustrated juvenile newspaper. He also published his own boys’ periodical, entitled *Onwards*, in America. He died in 1883.⁷¹

Charles Henry Ross was one of the most talented members of Brett’s staff. He was a prolific journalist and author, and a skilled illustrator to boot. Ross was born in around 1842. He contributed regularly to numerous Fleet Street periodicals, including *Reynolds’ Miscellany*, and launched the satirical periodical *Judy* in 1867. Aside from his *BOE* stories, Ross penned tales for Brett’s *YMOGB* and *Wedding Bells*. He also published a series of juvenile penny volumes, entitled ‘C. H. Ross’ Penny Library’, in conjunction with Henry Vickers. Curiously, Ross co-authored ‘Philip’s Perils, by Land and Sea’ in volume six of *BOE* alongside an author named Quentyn Richards, about whom nothing is known. Ross died in 1897.⁷²

Robert Justin Lambe, also known as Justyn Lambe, probably joined *BOE* in the 1870s. By this stage Brett had instigated a policy of author anonymity; thus, Lambe was never openly credited for his work. ‘Tom Floremall’s Schooldays’ (vol.19) was amongst Lambe’s earliest, and best known, stories; indeed, for several years he actually wrote under the pseudonym of ‘Tom Floremall’. It is believed that Lambe’s historical romances were very popular, and boosted the sale of Brett’s periodicals considerably. It is also believed

⁷¹ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.51, 9 November 1867, p.400; *BOE*, Vol.3, No.57, 21 December 1867, p.80; Jay, *Peeps*; E. Reid, *Captain Mayne Reid, His Life and Adventures* (1900); J. Steele, *Captain Mayne Reid* (Boston, 1978).

⁷² Frost, *Reminiscences*, p.180; Jay, *Peeps*; Lofts and Adley, *Boys’ Fiction*, p.293.

that Lambe may have written ‘Jack Harkaway’ stories for Brett after the departure of Bracebridge Hemyng. Lambe later edited his own publication, *The Boy’s Guide, Philosopher, and Friend*, which commenced in 1888.⁷³

William Thompson Townsend, who wrote prolifically for early volumes of *BOE*, was a dramatist who had found success with ‘The Orange Girl’ and ‘The Seas of Ice’. He was born around 1806 and died around 1870.⁷⁴ John Cecil Stagg was also connected with the theatre. It is thought that he edited, as well as wrote for, *BOE* for some time.⁷⁵ Another author, William Stephens Hayward, also known as Stephen Hayward, had previously written for numerous Fleet Street periodicals, including *Vickers’ Boys’ Journal*. It is thought that alcoholism was responsible for his early death; one of his last actions was to submit a rambling, incoherent story to W. L. Emmett’s *Young Briton*.⁷⁶ William Hillyard, who wrote for *BOE* and, more usually, *YMOGB*, was often credited as ‘the author of Allan Lyndock’, whilst Walter Parke was almost certainly the pseudonymous ‘Lindley Murray’, who wrote a long series of comical tales for *BOE*, including ‘The Comic History of London’.⁷⁷ It is also possible that R. A. H. Goodyear, author of many popular school stories in the twentieth century, wrote some serials for later volumes of *BOE*. He definitely wrote novelettes for Brett.⁷⁸

Whilst little is known about *BOE*’s authors, even less is known about its illustrators. In fact, their work was rarely credited. *BOE*’s best known illustrator was Hablot Knight Browne, better known as Phiz. Phiz was born in 1815, and famously illustrated for Dickens

⁷³ R. Adimari, ‘A Partial History of Brett Publications’, *Dime Novel Roundup*, 31 (1963), p.42; B. Doyle, *The Who’s Who of Boys’ Writers and Illustrators* (1964), p.45; M. M. Hunter, ‘The Man of Mystery’, *CM*, New Series, No.2 (January – February 1933), pp.27-29; M. M. Hunter, ‘The Personalia of the Penny Dreadful’, *VF*, Vol.2, No.16 (November 1925), pp.37-39; Smith, *Feast*, cat.no.518; H. Steele, ‘Boyish Prejudices’, *CM*, No.10 (March – April 1931), p.7.

⁷⁴ Frost, *Reminiscences*, p.180; Smith, *Feast*, cat.no.835.

⁷⁵ Frost, *Reminiscences*, p.180.

⁷⁶ E. H. Burrage, *The Ruin of Fleet Street* (1885), pp.41-42; Jay, *Peeps*; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.29.

⁷⁷ E. Blair, ‘Correspondence’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.5 (December 1928), p.68; Frost, *Reminiscences*, p.180; Jay, *Peeps*.

⁷⁸ R. A. H. Goodyear, ‘Early Struggles of a Boys’ Author’, *CM*, 5th Series, No.10 (September 1947), pp.149-51.

and Thackeray. His work appeared in dozens of Victorian periodicals. He illustrated for the Emmett brothers as well as for Brett. Another notable *BOE* illustrator was Robert Prowse. Before joining the NPC Prowse had worked on numerous Fleet Street publications. Although his illustrations appeared both in NPC penny dreadfuls and *BOE*, he is more commonly associated with the Emmett brothers. Esmond Hebblethwaite is thought to have been the most prolific illustrator of early volumes of *BOE*. He was highly regarded in his day, and was as skilled with his left hand as he was with his right. Other known *BOE* illustrators include Charles H. Bennett, Brett's former pupil (who died in 1867), and John Proctor.⁷⁹

Brett Publications and Rival Publications

BOE's success prompted a flurry of activity in the boys' periodical publishing industry. Dozens of new papers were devised by publishers keen to grasp a share of the newly discovered market. Although estimates vary, it is thought that as many as seventy juvenile periodicals existed simultaneously in 1870, rising to over 100 in 1880 and over 150 in 1900.⁸⁰ The vast majority were closely based upon *BOE*'s format.

Brett himself launched several periodicals over a number of decades. His second successful boys' periodical was *YMOGB*. The paper, a companion to *BOE*, was intended to quell demand for *BOE* to be issued twice weekly.⁸¹ Number one of *YMOGB* was published on 28 January 1868. It was nearly identical to *BOE*, although it was slightly shorter at first and carried a higher proportion of serial fiction. Its stories were all penned by leading *BOE* authors. Many of these tales rivalled *BOE*'s in popularity, especially the

⁷⁹ Anon., 'Charles H. Bennett', *Punch, or, the London Charivari*, Vol.LII, No.1344, 13 April 1864, p.151; E. Blair, 'Correspondence', *CM*, Vol.1, No.3 (August 1928), p.34; Blair, 'Correspondence', *CM* Vol.1, No.5, pp.67-69; A. Harris, 'Correspondence', *CM*, Vol.1, No.4 (October 1928), pp.52-53; Jay, *Peeps*; F. N. Wearing, 'The Artists of the Old Boys' Papers', *CM*, 5th Series, No.3 (February 1946), pp.41-42; F. N. Wearing, 'Old Boys' Journals', *CM*, Vol.2, No.4 (October 1929), pp.51-52; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.13-17.

⁸⁰ Dixon, *Periodical Literature*, p.16; P. A. Dunae, 'New Grub Street for Boys', in J. Richards, ed. *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), p.17.

⁸¹ *BOE*, Vol.3, No.60, 11 January 1868, p.127.

‘Scapegrace’ series, published between 1872 and 1873, and the ‘Ned Nimble’ series, published between 1879 and 1882. As we have seen, the circulation of the paper reached impressive levels in its earliest years. *YMOGB* was eventually merged with Brett’s *Boys of the Empire* after forty-two volumes in 1888.⁸²

Brett’s next paper was *Boys of the World*, a halfpenny weekly, which commenced on 21 September 1869. It was just eight pages long, half the length of *BOE*. After ten numbers a halfpenny supplement, entitled *Boys of the World Story Teller*, was sold alongside the paper, and its price was raised to a penny. Despite its low cost the paper did not sell well; it was merged with *The Boys’ Favourite* after sixty-two numbers. *The Boys’ Favourite*, too, was unsuccessful, despite its halfpenny price point. It only reached forty-one numbers. Next came the nautical periodical *Rovers of the Sea*. It arrived on 11 March 1872, and ran for seventy-two numbers.

In 1874 a weekly reissue of *BOE* commenced, beginning with the very first volume. The reissue was practically identical to the original issue; only correspondence and general notices differed. A weekly reissue of *YMOGB* also began around this time. In 1874 Brett also began to issue *BOE* in America and Canada under the title of *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youths*. The paper was only slightly altered from the British edition. The *BOE* reissue was also sold in America.⁸³ Numerous other Brett periodicals and stories were also reprinted, or pirated, in the States.⁸⁴

Brett’s next offering, *Our Boys’ Journal*, debuted on 30 August 1876. The paper reprinted a great deal of material from early volumes of *BOE*. It ran until 1882.⁸⁵ It was followed by *The Boys’ Sunday Reader*, which commenced on 8 January 1879. The paper was exceptional amongst Brett’s output in that it was overtly Christian. Although it has been suggested that it was issued to trade on the popularity of visiting American preachers,

⁸² Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919.

⁸³ Ibid; J. Medcraft, ‘The *Boys of England*’, *CM*, 4th Series, No.3 (February 1942), pp.6-7; E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra, ‘The Anglo-American Pulp Wars: Edwin Brett vs. Frank Leslie’, in L. E. Sullivan and L. C. Schurman, eds. *Pioneers, Passionate Ladies and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks* (Binghampton, 1996), pp.108-09.

⁸⁴ Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.108-09.

⁸⁵ Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919 – 25 January 1919.

or to counter the success of a periodical entitled *Kind Words*, it is more probable that Brett launched the paper to rival the *BOP*, which arrived ten days later. However, *The Boys' Sunday Reader* proved unpopular, and was soon transformed into *The Boys' Weekly Reader*, which itself lasted only a few volumes.⁸⁶ *Boys of the British Empire* followed. It ran from 9 May 1881 for nearly two years. Next came *The Boys' Comic Journal*, Brett's third most successful boys' paper behind *BOE* and *YMOGB*. It sold well, and was long-lived; it commenced on 17 March 1883 and concluded in 1896. Despite the paper's title, it did not resemble a modern-day comic; rather, it was similar in style to *BOE*.⁸⁷ On 6 February 1888 Brett launched *Boys of the Empire*. It was the first full-colour boys' paper. At one and a half pence per issue it cost a little more than its monochrome counterparts. Although it proved popular, the cost of colour printing was not met by profit. Thus, the colour feature ceased after fifty-one numbers, and the paper dropped in price to one penny.⁸⁸

Brett also published a range of periodicals aimed at a wider audience. Many of these were aimed at the young ladies market, including: *Wedding Bells*, which ran from 1871 to 1879; the successful *Princesses Novelette*, which commenced in 1886 and ran for one hundred numbers; and the less successful *English Ladies' Novelette*, which commenced in 1891. *Something to Read* was perhaps Brett's most successful venture outside of boys' publishing. The family miscellany began in 1881 and ran for thirty-three volumes. It was a quality periodical, and good value for money at only one penny.⁸⁹

Brett's closest rivals in the boys' publishing industry were the Emmett brothers, William Laurence Emmett and George Emmett. The brothers' first periodical, the *YEJ*, commenced on 13 April 1867. It was established to compete directly with Brett's *BOE*. It was very similar to Brett's papers in both style and content. The paper was initially successful. However, after four volumes it began to struggle, and was rechristened *Sons of Britannia*. It continued in this guise until 1877. The Emmett brothers, like Brett, also issued a companion paper alongside their flagship title; *Young Gentlemen of Britain* began on 24

⁸⁶ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.35; Jay, *Peeps*, 25 January 1919.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 January 1919.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 January 1919, 6 November 1920.

October 1868. However, after only seventy-eight numbers the paper was incorporated with another Emmett paper, the halfpenny *Young Briton*, which had commenced on 18 September 1869. In addition, the Emmetts published a nautical periodical, *The Rover's Log*, which ran for fifty-seven numbers from 11 March 1873. It was subsequently remoulded into *Young Englishman*, which ran until 1879.⁹⁰

Numerous other boys' publishers also operated in Fleet Street. One, Charles Fox, issued several of his own papers throughout the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, most notably *The Boys' Standard* and *The Boys' Champion Journal*, and was also involved with many of the Emmett publications.⁹¹ Another rival was John Allingham, also known as Ralph Rollington. Allingham's most successful venture, *The Boy's World*, began in 1879 and ran for nine volumes. Allingham also published *Our Boys' Paper*, which ran from 1880 to 1883.⁹² Other rivals included E. Harcourt Burrage, Samuel Dacre Clarke (also known as Guy Rayner), James Henderson, Charles Shurey, and the Aldine Publishing Company.

Another major rival was the *BOP*. Begun by the Religious Tract Society in 1879, the paper was published in an attempt to provide a wholesome alternative to bloody boys' weeklies like *BOE*, which the middle class believed were corrupting Victorian youth. Superficially, the paper resembled any other boys' weekly. However, it was much more moralistic. The *BOP* was unique amongst boys' weeklies in that it was financially secure, backed by the considerable financial reserves of the RTS.⁹³

Brett's Later Life, and the Death of Brett and *Boys of England*

In 1877, after achieving success and prosperity with *BOE*, the Brett family moved from London into Oaklands, St Peter's, Broadstairs, Kent.⁹⁴ Oaklands was large and palatial. It

⁹⁰ Ibid., 18 January 1919, 1 February 1919 – 15 February 1919; Holland, 'Emmett Story'.

⁹¹ Jay, *Peeps*, 22 February 1919; Holland, 'Emmett Story'.

⁹² Jay, *Peeps*, 1 March 1919; Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.71-77.

⁹³ J. Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir! The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (1982); Dunae, 'Boy's Own Paper', *Private Library*, 2nd Series, Vol.9, No.4, pp.121-58.

⁹⁴ Brett's earliest known London residence was 22 Brunswick Place, Finsbury, where he lived in 1861: see PRO, 1861 Census Returns, RG9/129. By the early 1870s he had relocated to 311 Camden Road, Holloway: see PRO, 1871 Census Returns, RG10/271.

was lavishly decorated, and set in six acres of beautiful gardens. Brett was well respected by his friends and neighbours, and was offered the captaincy of the 3rd Kent Artillery and the position of Justice of the Peace for the county. Brett retained a London townhouse, where he resided when working.⁹⁵ In 1881 his London home was 98 Camden Road; he later moved to number 342, known as Burleigh House.⁹⁶ Brett's not inconsiderable income allowed him to pursue several hobbies. His main passion was collecting ancient arms and armour. He was also keen on the theatre, fencing (he belonged to the London Fencing School), horses, dogs, fishing and shooting.⁹⁷

In the 1890s Brett suffered increasingly from a painful illness.⁹⁸ For weeks on end he remained housebound, on the advice of his doctors.⁹⁹ Consequently, he became less and less involved with the day-to-day running of his publications. Brett died on 15 December 1895. He was buried in a family vault in Highgate Cemetery. A fond tribute appeared in *BOE* the following month. "He has gone to his rest beloved and honoured not only by the members of his family, and a large circle of personal friends, but by hundreds and thousands of the British public", eulogised the author. "We are sure that our readers, whilst thinking of the good man who is gone, say with us – rest in peace."¹⁰⁰ Despite his death, the tag 'Conducted by Edwin J. Brett' continued to appear on the front cover of every number of *BOE*.

Brett's obituary appeared in several local and national newspapers, including *The Times*.¹⁰¹ Details of his £76,538 9s. 6d. will were published shortly afterwards. Brett had made his will on 29 September 1895, only shortly before his death, and had added codicils right up until 6 December. The will was proved on 28 January 1896 by Brett's eldest son, Edwin Charles, and by Thomas Joseph Tee and James Herbert Tee, the executors. It

⁹⁵ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, p.460; Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919 – 29 March 1919.

⁹⁶ PRO, 1881 Census Returns, RG11/0242.

⁹⁷ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, pp.456-57; Anon., 'Days with Celebrities, No.518: Mr Edwin J. Brett', *Moonshine*, 5 December 1891, p.265.

⁹⁸ 'The Late Mr Edwin J. Brett', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 21 December 1895, p.566.

⁹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.52, No.1315, 29 January 1892, p.140.

¹⁰⁰ *BOE*, Vol.60, No.1521, 1 October 1896, p.116.

¹⁰¹ 'Deaths', *The Times*, 18 December 1895, p.10.

generously bestowed “many gifts of freehold and leasehold properties, and specific bequests of plate, furniture, etc., to children, and pecuniary legacies to children, grandchildren, sisters, executors, persons in him employment at 173 Fleet Street, and servants”. Eldest son Edwin Charles Brett received six-eighteenths of his father’s business interests, whilst younger son Edgar Percy received four-eighteenths. The remainder was divided between Brett’s other seven children. Brett’s real and personal estate was divided into smaller parts between each of the nine children.¹⁰²

By 1895 Brett’s publications were subject to many new threats. The greatest challenge came from Alfred Harmsworth’s new boys’ papers, launched between 1890 and 1895: *Comic Cuts*; *Illustrated Chips*; *The Halfpenny Marvel*; *The Union Jack*; *Pluck*; and *The Boys’ Friend*. Each of Harmsworth’s papers cost just halfpence. They were colourful, profusely illustrated, and modern in appearance, thanks to new printing technologies.¹⁰³ They engaged with topics and themes of contemporary relevance, most notably empire.¹⁰⁴ They were fast-paced and exhilarating, and were backed by aggressive advertising and promotional policies. Because of the diversity of Harmsworth’s business interests, which included several popular adult newspapers, his juvenile periodicals enjoyed strong financial support. The papers proved popular. “Well do I recollect walking down Fleet Street with Alfred on the day when *Comic Cuts* was published and witnessing the speed with which the hawkers were selling it”, later wrote publisher Max Pemberton.¹⁰⁵ Inevitably, the popularity of Harmsworth’s papers had a negative impact upon Brett’s sales.

Brett’s successors found it difficult to compete with Harmsworth. However, they did put up a fight. In 1893 *Jack Harkaway’s Journal for Boys* was launched. The paper was intended to restore Brett’s fortunes by bringing back his most famous protagonist, and original author Bracebridge Hemyng.¹⁰⁶ They also launched their own halfpenny periodical, *The Halfpenny Surprise*, in 1894. The popular periodical lasted for a full twenty-three

¹⁰² ‘Wills and Bequests’, *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1896, p.186.

¹⁰³ Dixon, *Periodical Literature*, pp.88-103.

¹⁰⁴ J. O. Springhall, ‘“Healthy Papers for Manly Boys’: Imperialism and Race in the Harmsworths’ Halfpenny Boys’ Papers of the 1890s and 1900s’, in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, pp.107-25.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, p.110.

¹⁰⁶ Jay, *Peeps*, 25 January 1919.

volumes. Furthermore, they also harnessed new printing techniques, modernising the appearance of *BOE*. Indeed, later volumes of *BOE* differed quite markedly in appearance from earlier ones. Lively fonts, superlatives and exclamation marks began to feature heavily. Illustrations became more plentiful, and more cartoon-like and youthful, and high-quality but expensive traditional woodcut illustrations were phased out. Yet *BOE*'s new look lacked the freshness and zest of Harmsworth's papers. Moreover, whereas Brett's periodicals had previously been pioneering, they themselves were now mere imitations of more successful alternatives.

In 1899, after sixty-six bi-annual volumes, *BOE* came to the end of its existence. It was merged with a brand new Brett periodical, *Up-to-Date Boys*. The transition was unceremonious and unsentimental. However, the shift was hardly seismic in its effects. The new periodical barely differed from *BOE* either in appearance or format. It ran for only two years. An attempt to revive *BOE* in 1906 failed after but thirteen numbers.

Little is known about how Brett's business empire operated after his death. However, it is known that Brett's eldest son, Edwin Charles, became chief shareholder, manager, and director.¹⁰⁷ Edwin Charles failed to emulate his father's success. He lacked any talent for the publishing industry. Moreover, he was a gambler and a drinker. It is thought that he squandered his share of his father's fortune, possibly amounting to as much as £50,000. He was forced to sell his family home and effectively became a beggar, living on handouts from acquaintances and fellow publishers.¹⁰⁸

Facing financial doom, Brett's company was incorporated on 11 January 1900. Now known as Edwin J. Brett Ltd., the business moved to West Harding Street. Journalist T. Murray Ford was enlisted as manager, in the hope that his experience and knowledge could

¹⁰⁷ Ford, *Memoirs*, pp.97-101. Edwin Charles, like his father, had begun his career as an artist: see PRO, RG11/0245.

¹⁰⁸ 'Wills and Bequests', *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1896; E. Brett, 'Brett – EJB to EAB', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/2230>, accessed 15 March 2004; E. Brett, 'Brett Things', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/2234>, accessed 16 March 2004; F. Jay, 'The Personalia of the Penny Dreadful', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19 (February 1926), p.91; Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, pp.577-78. That Edwin Charles squandered his fortune is a fact corroborated by his surviving family.

help save the company. However, the company board, led by Edwin C. Brett, refused to follow many of his suggestions. After a seemingly generous buyout from Alfred Harmsworth was refused by the board, Ford himself left to work for Harmsworth. The Brett brand struggled on in various guises until 1909, at which point it collapsed in dire financial circumstances.¹⁰⁹

Brett's stock was sold at waste paper prices. Many of the classics of the penny dreadful era could be found on costermonger's barrows for as little as a penny per volume.¹¹⁰ There was a great surplus of Brett and Emmett titles in London newsagents around this time. Many stockists were crammed full of old penny dreadfuls and boys' weeklies.¹¹¹ A great many copies were destroyed. Ironically, only a decade later the cost of these periodicals soared due to growing interest from collectors and enthusiasts.

Conclusion

Neither Brett nor *BOE* has been afforded much attention by historians. This chapter has sought to rectify this neglect by providing a brief history of both. It has outlined Brett's life and career, the characteristics of his periodicals, and the publishing climate in which they flourished. It has identified, and explored, several important facets of both paper and proprietor which historians have only hinted at, or have yet to consider. Together, they illustrate that Brett, in the words of his contemporary John Allingham, "must be given the credit of revolutionising boys' papers".¹¹² The impact of this revolution was considerable.

Brett was a skilled proprietor. Through *BOE* he introduced a style of editorship never before seen in a boys' journal. The formula which he fashioned had a substantial impact upon the periodical publishing market. It was swiftly copied by a host of competitors. Indeed, Brett's rivals continued to mimic *BOE* for much of the remainder of

¹⁰⁹ Ford, *Memoirs*, pp.97-101. A detailed account of the collapse of Edwin J. Brett Ltd., from an economic perspective, can be found in Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *ECHR*, XLVII, 3, pp.577-78. The records of Edwin J. Brett Ltd. can be found in PRO BT31/8824/64753 and PRO BT31/18215/94947.

¹¹⁰ F. Jay, 'Penny Dreadful Values', *CM*, New Series, No.5 (August – September 1933), pp.93-94.

¹¹¹ Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.15-16.

¹¹² Rollington, *Brief History*, p.65.

the century. Thus, *BOE*'s effect upon the periodical publishing industry was considerable, immediate, and lasting.

BOE's readership was large, perhaps as large as a quarter of a million per week. Its numerous companion papers also achieved a good sale, as did the efforts of its rivals. It can therefore be said with certainty that in the mid to late Victorian era *BOE*, and the successors it inspired, must together have been read by millions of boys. Thus, there can be no doubt that the branch of literature begun by *BOE* made a considerable impact upon the leisure habits of Victorian juveniles.

Yet *BOE* was not important simply because of its influence upon publishers, or because it changed what boys were reading. Its effects were considerably greater – and more profound. And despite its many facsimiles, no periodical eclipsed *BOE* in importance during Brett's lifetime. The true extent of the impact *BOE* made upon Victorian society and culture will be explained in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two – Four Controversies

Introduction

Historians of boys' papers identify Edwin J. Brett as the leading figure of the Victorian boys' publishing community. However, Brett's reputation has been somewhat tarnished by derogatory remarks made in articles such as John Medcraft's 'The Rivalry of Brett and Emmett' (1947), Tom Hopperton's 'Victorian King-Pin' (1962), and Ralph Adimari's 'A Partial History of Brett Publications' (1963), published in private circulation boys' paper collectors' journals like *Vanity Fair*, *Collector's Miscellany*, *Story Paper Collector*, *Collectors' Digest* and *Dime Novel Roundup*. These articles have spoken rather disparagingly about Brett's conduct as editor of *Boys of England*.

This chapter focuses upon four areas of contention, each debated in the collectors' journals, which modern historians have yet to successfully resolve. It is important that these cases are here addressed, because they may shed new light upon Brett's editorial policy specifically, and about the nature of the boys' publishing industry in general. The first case concerns the dispute between Brett and Charles Stevens, the paper's first editor. The second involves the long-running feud between Brett and his leading competitors, the Emmett brothers. The third relates to the acrimony between Brett, author Bracebridge Hemyng, and American publisher Frank Leslie. The final area of contention concerns Brett's policy of author and illustrator anonymity, which he imposed from the early 1870s onwards. This chapter contends that in each case Brett has been treated rather harshly by the collectors' journals.

Charles Stevens

Charles Stevens was the first editor of *BOE*. However, after just nine numbers Brett installed himself as editor of the paper. A period of acrimony followed. The correspondence columns of W. L. Emmett's *Young Englishman's Journal* inferred that Stevens, not Brett, had conceived *BOE*'s winning formula, and that Brett had ousted Stevens from the Newsagents' Publishing Company in order to unjustly claim responsibility for the paper's success. Tom Hopperton's 'Victorian King-Pin', which

praises Brett's skill but condemns his methods, later perpetuated this view, suggesting that Stevens was "pushed out" of the NPC.¹ However, evidence suggests that there is little truth behind these claims. Indeed, it appears that the entire controversy was actually invented by the Emmett brothers.

Charles Stevens had worked alongside Brett at the NPC for a number of years. He had authored several penny dreadful serials, including *Roving Jack, the Pirate Hunter* (1867).² Because he was invested as editor of *BOE*, he was probably well respected within the company. From the first number of *BOE* to the ninth the front cover bore the heading 'Conducted by Charles Stevens'. No mention of Edwin Brett was made in any of these issues. As well as editing the paper, Stevens also wrote its popular lead story, 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair', and contributed original poetry. He also wrote two editorial columns; the first appeared in number one, the second, entitled 'Our Christmas Greeting', in number five. A second Stevens-penned yarn, 'Wild Charley, the Link Boy of Old London', commenced in number thirteen.

However, Stevens soon left the NPC. For the next decade he wrote prolifically for the Emmett brothers and other boys' publishers. His stories appeared in *Sons of Britannia*, *Young Englishman*, *Young Gentleman of Britain*, *Young Briton*, and a host of other papers.³ Because of the role 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' had played in launching *BOE*, Stevens was first choice for any editor who wished to give his new periodical a good start. For example, Stevens' tales appeared in the first issues of George Emmett's *Rover's Log* and Joseph Bruton's *Sons of Albion*.

Soon after Stevens' departure from *BOE* a bitter feud erupted between Brett and W. L. Emmett. It was conducted through the pages of the correspondence columns of their periodicals. It began in June 1867 with a reply to a boy named 'White Squall' in the correspondence columns of the *YEJ*:

¹ T. Hopperton, 'Victorian King-Pin', *Story Paper Collector*, Vol.4, No.78 (1962), pp.33-35.

² S. Holland, 'Making it up to Charlie Stevens', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/1562>, accessed 12 June 2003.

³ F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21), 25 January 1919 – 22 February 1919.

We are unable to discover any justification for such ridiculous pretensions for the self-styled ‘conductor’ of the work you name, never established the least claim to warrant his pretensions to literary honours – a very poor hand at his own craft – and is still less fitted to shine in the paths of literature. He is not, and never was, either author or editor, sub or otherwise; and then the question of the title. It may be sharp practice to carry on an insidious opposition to a fellow publisher – a case of dog rob dog – but to rob a poor author of his brains, to speculate upon his ideas, and then filch him out of a just share in the profit and fame of their success, this is the basest and meanest infamy, and should unhesitatingly be branded with its detestable stigma. We shall probably recur to the subject by-and-by, and state more clearly the hard facts of the case.⁴

Reprising, as promised, Emmett added:

We never asked or expected our artists and authors to work for us gratuitously for a month or six weeks. We should have been ashamed to rob them of the fruits of their labour. Perhaps, however, the proprietor of the work you name rightly estimated the value of his staff when he gave them nothing for their pains.⁵

Emmett was insinuating, amongst other things, that Brett had poached some, or all, of *BOE*’s formula from Stevens, claiming it as his own.

However, it is probable that there was little truth behind W. L. Emmett’s outburst. He chose his words as much to injure Brett’s reputation as to champion a just cause. Brett had recently made several disparaging comments about the *YEJ* in the correspondence pages of *BOE*. No doubt Emmett wanted revenge. Moreover, there is no other evidence to suggest that Stevens left the NPC in acrimony. In fact, it appears that Stevens was still involved with *BOE* even after his editorship had ended; a reply to a correspondent in number twenty-five of *BOE* stated “Mr Stevens is still connected with our journal”, and a Stevens-credited tale, ‘Mark Rushton, or, the Three Merry Mids’, appeared in volume three.⁶

Stevens probably left the NPC to develop his career, not because of any disagreement. Indeed, it appears that he aspired to leave the world of boys’ publishing altogether. In early 1867 he became editor of *The Empire: a National Magazine for the Million*, a family miscellany containing tales, short stories and sketches, published by

⁴ *The Young Englishman’s Journal: Devoted to the Youth of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales*, Vol.1, No.10, 22 June 1867, p.160.

⁵ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.15, 27 June 1867, p.240.

⁶ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.1, No.25, 11 May 1867, p.400.

William Barrett. The first issue of *Empire* was dated 16 March 1867; the period of time between Stevens' leaving *BOE* and joining *Empire* was so short that he almost certainly went directly from the first editorship to the next. The prospect of editing *Empire*, an adult paper, may well have been more attractive to Stevens than the editorship of a boys' paper, and the remuneration may well have been better. With hindsight, however, the decision was a poor one, as the journal was short-lived.⁷

That the Emmetts compassionately provided refuge for the supposedly ousted Stevens is a myth. In fact, Stevens did not join the Emmetts for some time. The first Stevens serial published in the *YEJ*, 'King Charles' Oak', did not appear until number forty-eight in March 1868, over a year after he left the editorship of *BOE*.⁸ Nor was Stevens entirely satisfied at his new home. In 1868 he began his own rival periodical, *The Boys' Book of Romance*. Unfortunately, the journal failed after only twenty-four numbers.⁹ Another myth is that the shortness of Stevens' tenure as *BOE* editor was something out of the ordinary. In the world of boys' publishing short periods of editorship were common, and papers frequently changed their editors. Indeed, Stevens was also employed as editor of the Emmett brothers' *Young Briton* for just eleven numbers.¹⁰

Regardless of all this, there can be no doubt that *BOE* was of Brett's creation, not Stevens'. The paper was the product of a protracted evolutionary process which Brett had begun long before Charles Stevens became involved. Brett's earlier boys' weeklies, *The*

⁷ Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919; J. S. North, ed. *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900*, Vol.3 (Waterloo, 1997), p.1723.

⁸ Jay, *Peeps*, 25 January 1919; S. Holland, 'Young Englishman's Journal Vol.2', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/977>, accessed 7 December 2002. An earlier *YEJ* tale, 'The Student Cavalier', is no longer thought to have been written by Stevens: see S. Holland, 'Young Englishman's Journal Vol.1', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/971>, accessed 5 December 2002.

⁹ Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919; J. Medcraft, 'Rare Journals of Brief Duration', *Collector's Miscellany*, 5th Series, No.3 (February 1946), pp.37-40; R. Rollington, *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (Leicester, 1913), pp.68-69; 'Empire', <http://www.philsp.com/data/data097.html#EMPIRE>, accessed 5 May 2005.

¹⁰ S. Holland, 'The Emmett Story and the Emmett Story Papers', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/835>, accessed 29 October 2002; Jay, *Peeps*, 15 February 1919.

Boys' Companion and British Traveller and *The Boys' Own Reader and Companion*, prove this. These short-lived papers contained many prototypical ideas which Brett later perfected in *BOE*. They began to carefully align sensational fiction with educative non-fiction. They attempted to encourage boys to communicate with the editor, and with each other. They featured promotional items and schemes, such as engravings and prize draws, which became more frequent and more lavish. Moreover, Brett himself claimed that *BOE* only came to fruition after several years of experimentation and toil in an editorial column in number thirteen of *BOE*:

Most works of the day have had to struggle through a sickly infancy; but not so with your journal. [...] The time as come to inform you that your work, the *Boys of England*, is not a journal hastily conceived, but a work that the proprietor has had in hand for three years, and many an anxious hour it has cost him; but, at last, thinking the general arrangements were made as perfect as possible for a start, he came boldly forward.¹¹

Why, therefore, was Stevens, and not Brett, credited as editor in early numbers of *BOE*? The most probable explanation is that Brett found it necessary to delegate some of his duties at the NPC. It is thought that Brett, as chairman of the NPC, oversaw the company's entire penny dreadful output.¹² This was a heavy workload. Brett would have had to supervise several periodicals at any one time. No doubt his position became even more difficult after he began to launch boys' weeklies. Editing a weekly, like *BOE*, was a more time-consuming task than editing a penny dreadful. Dozens of stories and features needed to be arranged and coordinated, and a host of authors supervised, as opposed to one story and one author. So, although Brett remained in overall charge, it is likely that he delegated editorial positions to skilled and experienced authors. And by no means was Stevens the only one. Brett installed the Rev. G. D'Arcy Irvine as editor of *The Boys' Own Reader and Companion*, John Cecil Stagg as editor of *BOE*, and Vane St. John as editor of *Young Men of Great Britain*.¹³ These editors all worked under Brett's supervision.

¹¹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.13, 18 February 1867, p.127.

¹² J. Medcraft, 'The Newsagents' Publishing Co.', *CM*, 5th Series, No.2 (1945), p.24.

¹³ T. Frost, *Reminiscences of a Country Journalist* (1886), p.180; W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley, *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction* (1970), p.293; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.68; J. J. Wilson, 'Percy B. St. John', *CM*, Vol.2, No.1 (April 1929), pp.1-2.

However, a cautious Brett no longer credited his editors after the controversy surrounding Stevens' departure.

The Emmett Brothers

Brett's greatest rivals were the Emmett brothers, William Laurence Emmett and George Emmett. In the 1860s and 1870s the Emmett brothers' papers were second only in popularity to Brett's. They provided boys with some of the most memorable stories of the era. Collectors' journals have tended to look upon the Emmetts, and their papers, rather fondly. Both John Medcraft and Tom Hopperton argue that the Emmett journals were in many ways superior to Brett's, boasting a broader repertoire and better standard of fiction by better authors and illustrators.¹⁴ The collectors' journals generally view Brett as the aggressor in the heated feud which raged between he and the Emmetts. However, although the Emmetts' periodicals did indeed boast some meritorious stories and features, Brett's periodicals were usually of a higher quality in almost every respect, a fact which accounted for much of his success. They were certainly more original; indeed, although Brett was equally guilty of fuelling the tense atmosphere which existed between he and the brothers, his actions were somewhat legitimised by W. L. Emmett's plagiarism of *BOE*'s format.

A total of six Emmett siblings worked within the Victorian publishing community. William Lawrence and George are the best remembered.¹⁵ W. L. Emmett was born around 1830. He entered the publishing trade at a young age. His first paper, the *English Girls' Journal*, launched in 1864, was a joint venture with colleagues Joseph Hardiman and Brett. The latter pair soon withdrew their support from the project, leaving Emmett to struggle alone; it was from this incident that the feud between Brett and the Emmetts originated. Younger sibling George, who was born around 1835, claimed an illustrious military background, fighting both at Balaclava in 1854 and Lucknow in 1857. In the mid 1860s the

¹⁴ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, pp.36-37; J. Medcraft, 'The Rivalry of Brett and Emmett', *CM*, 5th Series, No.7 (1947), pp.103-05.

¹⁵ The names of the remaining four were Henry, Thomas, Robert and Sophie: see Holland, 'Emmett Story'.

brothers formed the Temple Publishing Company, which issued penny dreadfuls in direct competition with the NPC.¹⁶

In 1867, in the wake of the successful launch of *BOE*, W. L. Emmett swiftly made arrangements to issue his own boys' weekly. The first number of the *YEJ* duly appeared on 13 April 1867. His brother George was a prolific contributor; his stories included 'Captain Jack, or, One of the Light Brigade', the first instalment of the popular 'Shot and Shell' series, and the influential 'The Boys of Bircham School'. The paper incorporated sensational fiction, non-fiction, and a rear page of correspondence and communications. Free engravings were given away with several of the first numbers, and a prize lottery system was begun.¹⁷

Even at a glance, it was undeniable that Emmett had copied, wholesale, the format of *BOE*. So similar was the *YEJ* to *BOE* that Emmett's effort appeared little short of plagiarism. Boys were clearly confused by the similarities between the two papers. Within a few short weeks Brett's correspondence columns began reassuring baffled readers that the *YEJ* was not published by the NPC. Brett was angered. Before long he began to square insults directly at the Emmetts. In number twenty-three of *BOE* a response to a correspondent named 'Doubtful Dick' stated: "We have nothing to do with the publication you mention. It is conducted by a party of unprincipled, uneducated men, in whom no dependence can be placed."¹⁸ More was to come. In number twenty-seven of *BOE* Brett

¹⁶ Anon., 'Edwin J. Brett', *The Biograph and Review*, 4 (1880), pp.457-58; Holland, 'Emmett Story'; Holland, '*YEJ* Vol.1'; Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, pp.31-37; Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919, 23 October 1920 – 30 October 1920; J. Medcraft, 'The Temple Publishing Company', *CM*, New Series, No.21 (January – July 1938), pp.49-51; J. O. Springhall, "'A Life Story for the People?' Edwin J. Brett and the London 'Low-Life' Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s", *Victorian Studies*, Vol.33 (1989-90), p.229. An Emmett and Temple Publishing Company bibliography can be found in A. E. Waite, *The Quest for Bloods: a Study of the Victorian Penny Dreadful by A. E. Waite: Edited and with Additional Notes on the Literature of the Byways by Ayresome Johns* (1997), pp.92-94.

¹⁷ The two siblings collaborated closely on every periodical they issued. In fact, the precise contribution each brother made to each periodical is difficult to assess, especially following William Laurence's bankruptcy in 1870, after which he could no longer officially hold an editorship. Holland, 'Emmett Story'; Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919 – 15 February 1919.

¹⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.23, 27 April 1867, p.368.

made sure that his readers knew innovator from impostor. “We have had letters on the subject you name, and now repeat we have nothing to do with the publication you mention”, read a response to ‘Black Dwarf’. “We should be, indeed, sorry to be connected with what you rightly call a low imitation of our journal.” To another boy, R. Germain, Brett also commented that “the gross imitations you speak of are very contemptible. We have not the slightest intention of altering the title of our work: it is built upon a rock, and cannot fall.”¹⁹

Over the following weeks Brett’s insults became more frequent, and more harshly worded. W. L. Emmett was forced to retaliate. In number ten of the *YEJ* a reply to correspondent T. D. Dales asserted that “a conductor, whether of a paper or an omnibus, may be a gentleman, or what is vulgarly termed a ‘cad’, and the individual in question certainly takes his pains to establish his claim to the honour of the latter with enviable distinction”.²⁰ In other responses Emmett strongly protested that he was acting in the spirit of fair competition:

Hector Annabel says, “I and my friends have a good mind to start a journal in opposition to yours”, but we suppose if we did you would abuse us viscosly, and proclaim our journal an imitation. Really we do not see why we should do anything of the kind. You and your friends are perfectly welcome to “start” a journal if you so please – and possess the means; if you fail, you will, of course, get poor reward for your pains: in any case your project would not concern us in the least. Why should it? Let there be free trade and fair play even in journalistic enterprises. For the field of literature is a wide one, and is open to all. For ourselves we fear no rivalry.

Julius – What would you think if the editor of *Punch* indulged in wild abuse of *Fun* – designating it an imitator and the like? Such an acrimonious display of ignorance and intolerance would only be regarded as the vehement utterances of imbecilic fear. It is monstrous in these days of advanced technology to prattle about imitations.²¹

For several months the argument raged across the correspondence columns. The most contentious aspect of the prolonged debate concerned Emmett’s lottery system. The draw ran concurrently with Brett’s, and offered a yacht as its main prize. A suspicious Brett was

¹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.27, 25 May 1867, p.16.

²⁰ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.10, 22 June 1867, p.160.

²¹ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.17, 10 August 1867, p.272.

quick to cast doubt upon the existence of the vessel, accusing Emmett of deception in an onslaught in number thirty-three of *BOE*:

H. Wilson – If, as you say, you have taken in our journal since the commencement, you must have observed that we always keep faith with our readers. Our prize distributions have always been duly announced and the drawings have taken place on the days published. It would be an easy matter to keep on promising week by week as the journal you name is now doing, but we always endeavour to perform our promises, and not lead readers on, by the unfair means of only promising, in pursuit of some phantom gift or prize.

A Lucky Fellow – What, promise to give a sea-going yacht as a prize? Have you any idea of the cost of such an article? – first, as to the purchase, and then as to its maintenance? We should think not. It would be like keeping a stud of white elephants, who would quickly eat their heads off. A yacht has broken the back of many a young Englishman, and it is not unsafe to say that it will be the ruin of many more. All our prizes are bona fide, fairly drawn and fairly delivered, as you will see by our publishing the names and addresses of the winners; and were we unscrupulous enough to advertise such a prize as you mention, it would be misleading our readers, for we could never seriously contemplate the carrying of it out.²²

As it transpired, Brett had good grounds for suspicion. Emmett's prize draw was much less open than *BOE*'s. Only the winning ticket numbers were printed in the *YEJ*, whereas Brett printed the name and address of every winner. Emmett's response came in number eighteen of the *YEJ*:

Clever Child – We do not think it advisable to offer ponies as prizes. Have our readers any idea of the expense not only of a pony's "maintenance", but of the conveyance of a pony from part of England or the United Kingdom to another? Besides, to continue in the happy strain of our contemporary, a pony has broken the neck of many a British boy, and might be likely to do the same for many another. We repeat, too, a pony possesses the power of eating, if a yacht does not; and to some of our young friends in the towns its visits would be as welcome as the visit of the renowned white elephant elsewhere alluded to.

Accompanying this was a lengthy, taunting critique of Brett's reply to 'A Lucky Fellow', in which his language was minutely examined:

Let us consider next the succeeding sentence: "A yacht" – poor culprit – "has broken the back of many a young Englishman, and it is not unsafe to "say" that it will be the ruin of many more!! – more what? – backs or yachts? We pause – breathless – appalled! Young Englishmen,

²² *BOE*, Vol.2, No.33, 6 July 1867, p.112.

beware! – beware of broken backs! “A yacht has broken the back of many a young Englishman.” But how? – when? – where? Can the date and particulars of such an occurrence be given? – we should much like to publish the circumstances of so curious an occurrence. Observe, too, how speedily the hapless “yacht” has become transformed from an eater of its own head to a breaker of the backs of young Englishmen. Such a power of imagery is rare indeed!²³

Evidence suggests that Brett also taunted Emmett in more devious ways. Emmett claimed that Brett had played all manner of practical jokes upon him in the hope of sabotaging his operations.

Tom Cox (Regent’s Park) – Thanks. If you have received such a letter from the people connected with that work we shall esteem it a special favour if you will forward it to us, that we may take legal proceedings against the unprincipled parties who have been guilty of such meanness. The very fact alone of their being capable of such a cowardly act at stabbing in the dark to convince our fairplay-loving British boys of the malice and fear which can only dictate so detestable a course.

H. Goodman – The plate was sent out with the journal, but we have reason to believe that the plates and prize cheques are maliciously torn out by certain newsagents, and that the copies of the journal are in many cases soiled before being given to the customer. With respect to such paltry proceedings on the part of those who are bribed to attempt to do us injury, we can only ask our subscribers to examine well their journals.²⁴

A Preston Boy – is neither a boy of Preston nor any other place, but a sneak and a cheat, who, under the guise of a lad of England, endeavours to play off a very scurvey trick at our expense. Attempts of this kind, from similar quarters, have made us very cautious; and he will have to be a good deal more clever before he can make us the victim of his intended hoax.²⁵

It is to be lamented that the particulars of these pranks were not recorded.

In one final, and rather amusing, retort, Brett described Emmett’s prize competitions as a “shallow deception”, and their winners as “imaginary”. “We verily believe some editors would give the moon as a prize”, he quipped. “In all events they give plenty of *moonshine*.” Lamprooning Emmett’s prize lists, which were indeed suspiciously lavish,

²³ The full response continued in much the same manner for over half a column. *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.18, 17 August 1867, p.288.

²⁴ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.17, 10 August 1867, p.272.

²⁵ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.18, 17 August 1867, p.288.

Brett drew up his own spoof version, offering 100 large ocean steamers, 100 cabs with horse and driver, 100 iron plated men-of-war (plus 300 crew), £50 diamond rings, £500 notes, and twenty carriages with horses, “fat coachman found if required”.²⁶

From 1868 the correspondence columns of *BOE* and the *YEJ* became more subdued. However, the battle was far from over. Over the next few years Brett and the Emmett brothers issued a series of papers designed to take the wind out of the sails of their rival. Brett’s *YMOGB* was followed by the Emmetts’ *Young Gentlemen of Britain*, sister paper to the *YEJ*, on 24 October 1868. Both parties launched halfpenny journals; the Emmett brothers’ *Young Briton* and Brett’s *Boys of the World* appeared within days of each other in September 1869. On 11 March 1872 the Emmetts and Brett each issued near-identical papers, *The Rover’s Log* and *Rovers of the Sea*, on the very same day.²⁷

W.L. Emmett was declared bankrupt in 1870.²⁸ He is thought to have died around 1873 following the publication of his last serialised story, ‘The Lads of Englewood’, in *Young Englishman*.²⁹ George continued to issue periodicals and single volume stories from the Emmett office, now known as Hogarth House, throughout the 1870s. He also wrote prolifically for other boys’ publishers, such as Charles Fox. The feud between George Emmett and Brett was resuscitated when Emmett secured the rights to publish ‘Jack Harkaway’ stories, which had previously been Brett exclusives. In the debate which ensued, Emmett described Brett as “a mean, snivelling little cad, who smokes bad tobacco, haunts music-halls, dresses gaudily, wears flash jewellery, and is under the impression that the six hairs on his upper lip have an immense influence over the fair sex”.³⁰ The feud was revived once again in 1879 when Emmett branded Brett a “mealy-mouthed hypocrite”

²⁶ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.51, 9 November 1867, p.400.

²⁷ It is impossible to say for certain who devised the original idea. However, evidence suggests that Brett had been told of the Emmett brothers’ plans to issue *Rover’s Log* and intended to scupper its launch. Whereas Brett’s journals were usually cosmetically superior to the Emmetts’, *Rovers of the Sea* appeared more hastily assembled than *Rover’s Log*.

²⁸ Holland, ‘Emmett Story’; Jay, *Peeps*, 15 February 1919.

²⁹ Holland, ‘Emmett Story’.

³⁰ E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra, ‘The Anglo-American Pulp Wars: Edwin Brett vs. Frank Leslie’, in L. E. Sullivan and L. C. Schurman, eds. *Pioneers, Passionate Ladies and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks* (Binghampton, 1996), p.109.

when his supposedly pious *Boys' Sunday Reader* reprinted NPC penny dreadful serial *The Skeleton Horseman, or, the Shadow of Death* (1865-66), disguised as 'The Secrets of Glendore Castle'.³¹ In one further incident in the early 1880s Emmett penned the salacious 'Wiggles: a School Story' for John Allingham's *Boy's World*. The story mocked Brett's collection of arms and armour, poked fun at his ancestry, and accused him of being a failure and a "nobody". The story was abruptly halted by Allingham, who was on good terms with Brett.³² George Emmett became bankrupt in 1879, and fell on "evil times".³³ There is uncertainty about what he wrote and published in the 1880s; historians are not helped by the fact that his son, also called George, was by now working closely alongside him. However, none of the works he was involved in were particularly successful.³⁴ Although George lived until 1897, by then the Emmett name had long ceased to be a significant challenge to Brett's superiority.³⁵

There can be little doubt that the Emmett brothers' periodicals entertained their young readers just as Brett's did. However, notwithstanding their qualities, the Emmetts' papers were undeniably hastily-conceived imitations of *BOE*, as a cursory glance will verify. Indeed, the *YEJ* was so similar to *BOE* that many boys mistook it for a bona-fide Brett periodical. By imitating *BOE*, the Emmetts sought to trade upon Brett's success. Initially, the tactic worked in their favour. By volume two the *YEJ* enjoyed a weekly sale of 125,000, just a few thousand short of *BOE*'s total.³⁶ However, the paper failed to secure long term success, and failed after only four volumes. Most of the Emmett brothers' subsequent publications met a similar fate.

Why did the Emmett's papers fail when they were copying a proven formula? Whilst the brothers were both capable editors, they lacked Brett's entrepreneurial skill.

³¹ Medcraft, 'Rivalry', *CM*, 5th Series, No.7, p.105.

³² *The Boy's World*, Vol.2, No.92, 8 January 1881, pp.738-39; Springhall, 'Life Story', *VS*, Vol.33, p.228; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.25.

³³ 'Bankruptcies', *The Times*, 6 December 1879, p.8; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.22.

³⁴ Holland, 'Emmett Story'; Jay, *Peeps*, 8 February 1919.

³⁵ S. Holland, 'Emmett Update', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/859>, accessed 8 November 2002.

³⁶ Holland, 'YEJ Vol.2'.

Accordingly, their periodicals were not simply imitations of *BOE*, but unadventurous imitations. Whilst Brett was always willing to embark upon ambitious, untested projects, and even admit when a scheme had ended in failure, the Emmetts tended to imitate projects with which Brett had already succeeded, claiming that they were “anxious not to imitate dreary failures elsewhere”.³⁷ Furthermore, the Emmett papers were not only unadventurous imitations, but also superficial imitations. They mimicked only the outward appearance of *BOE*. The Emmetts failed to realise that the superficial elements of *BOE* were not the only elements which accounted for its success. They were unable to appreciate its most subtle qualities, the qualities upon which its long term success was based. For example, W. L. Emmett’s editorials were noticeably less rousing than Brett’s, and failed to convey the same warmth and empathy. His free gifts were less frequent, less lavish, and often rather shabby. Indeed, they often failed to materialise at all. And despite the fact that the Emmetts’ periodicals imitated Brett’s, they were considerably less polished; boys could be quite sensitive as to which journals were the best ‘got up’. Because the Emmett brothers’ strategy relied on imitation rather than innovation, their periodicals were less original than *BOE*. As there was nothing unique about their papers, boys had little incentive to choose Emmett over Brett.

Bracebridge Hemyng and Frank Leslie

Bracebridge Hemyng is one of the most important characters in the history of *BOE*. He was the author of the popular ‘Jack Harkaway’ series, which appeared in the paper in the 1870s. The exciting adventures of the schoolboy hero have been credited with single-handedly propelling the sale of *BOE* to 250,000 copies weekly. Indeed, so high was demand for *BOE* during this era that newsagents battled with each other outside Brett’s Fleet Street offices to secure their copies.³⁸ However, the extent to which Hemyng was responsible for *BOE*’s ‘Jack Harkaway’ stories has been questioned. In the late 1920s Frank Jay argued that Hemyng may have played a less crucial role in the creation of the schoolboy hero than is

³⁷ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.10, 22 June 1867, p.160.

³⁸ P. Haining, *The Penny Dreadful, or, Strange, Horrid and Sensational Tales* (1975), p.342.

commonly thought.³⁹ In the lengthy debate which subsequently raged in the pages of *VF* and *CM* Jay's suggestion was generally derided. However, it appears that Hemyng may indeed have been less instrumental in the success of *BOE* than has often been suggested, and, conversely, that Brett himself may have played a significant role in the creation of Jack Harkaway.

In its earliest numbers *BOE* published few school stories. Indeed, it was a full thirty-five numbers before Brett published a tale set entirely in a school. Meanwhile, 'The Boys of Bircham School', written by George Emmett, had firmly established the Emmett brothers' *YEJ* as the leading organ of serial school fiction. In the early 1870s the Emmetts consolidated their position when they published the most ground-breaking popular school story thus far. Entitled 'Tom Wildrake's Schooldays', the *Sons of Britannia* serial was written jointly by George Emmett and E. H. Burrage. 'Tom Wildrake's Schooldays' was wild and anarchic. It proved popular, and has been credited with raising the sale of *Sons of Britannia* substantially.⁴⁰

Brett was swift to respond. *BOE* author Bracebridge Hemyng was allotted the task of providing Brett with a tale to rival 'Tom Wildrake's Schooldays'.⁴¹ 'Jack Harkaway's Schooldays' (vol.10) duly appeared in July 1871. Harkaway was even more outrageous than Wildrake. Moreover, the story was superbly written.⁴² Harkaway's popularity became evident immediately, as flurries of boys wrote to Brett to express their delight. Following the success of Harkaway's debut several equally popular sequels appeared in quick

³⁹ F. Jay, 'The Personalities of the Penny Dreadful', *Vanity Fair*, Vol.2, No.24 (July 1926), pp.166-68.

⁴⁰ Holland, 'Emmett Story'; Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.22-23; J. O. Springhall, 'Boys of Bircham School: the Penny Dreadful Origins of the English School Story, 1867-1900', *History of Education*, Vol.20, No.2 (1991), pp.81-85. It has long been thought that Burrage wrote all but the first few chapters of 'Wildrake', which were written by George Emmett. However, this is now coming under question: see S. Holland, 'Re. Young Tom's Schooldays', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/2800>, accessed 4 July 2004, and S. Holland, 'Re. Young Tom's Schooldays', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/2807>, accessed 4 July 2004.

⁴¹ Springhall, 'Bircham School', *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.85-86.

⁴² The superior literary quality of Hemyng's story meant that few boys preferred Tom Wildrake to Jack Harkaway: see Anon., 'Of Boys' Books', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 April 1918, p.166.

succession: ‘Jack Harkaway’s After Schooldays’ (vol.11); ‘Jack Harkaway at Oxford’ (vol.12); and ‘Jack Harkaway Among the Brigands’ (vol.14).⁴³

The success of the ‘Jack Harkaway’ series brought Hemyng to the attention of Frank Leslie. Leslie was an English-born publisher, and proprietor of several American journals. In the late 1860s and early 1870s Leslie, taking advantage of lax transatlantic copyright laws, pirated several serials from Brett’s *BOE*. Although Brett was initially displeased, the pair soon struck an official agreement in which Leslie acquired official and exclusive rights to publish material from *BOE* in America.⁴⁴ Amongst the stories he republished were Hemyng’s ‘Jack Harkaway’ tales. American boys responded to them positively. In 1873 Leslie, without Brett’s knowledge, asked Hemyng to work directly for him, offering a \$10,000 per year salary. This sum was far greater than what Hemyng earned under Brett – just £2/15/0 for each weekly instalment. The offer was duly accepted. Soon Hemyng arrived in America, where he was greeted by crowds of eager boys. He began to write stories for *Frank Leslie’s Boys’ and Girls’ Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Boys of America* at a prolific rate. His output included several new ‘Jack Harkaway’ tales.⁴⁵

Relations between Brett and Leslie soured. Leslie severed ties with Brett and struck a new agreement with George Emmett. The deal gave Emmett the right to publish Hemyng’s ‘Harkaway’ tales in his *Young Briton*, a major coup.⁴⁶ In retaliation, Brett commissioned new authors to anonymously pen rival ‘Jack Harkaway’ tales for *BOE*. Accordingly, ‘Jack Harkaway and His Son’s Adventures Around the World’ (vol.15) appeared in *BOE* in 1874,

⁴³ Springhall, ‘Bircham School’, *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.85-90.

⁴⁴ Brett also fell into dispute with Irwin P. Beadle, an American publisher, over the rights to publish stories by Captain Mayne Reid: see R. Adimari, ‘A Partial History of Brett Publications’, *Dime Novel Roundup*, 31 (1963), pp.42-45.

⁴⁵ These stories were reissued by Leslie, his wife, and numerous other publishers, for decades afterwards. Hopperton, ‘King-Pin’, *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.35; F. Jay, ‘The Personalia of the Penny Dreadful’, *VF*, Vol.2, No.20 (March 1926), p.122; Sanchez-Saavedra, ‘Pulp Wars’, in *Pioneers*, pp.103-17; E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra, ‘Bracebridge Hemyng: Man or Myth?’, *DNR*, 61 (April 1992), pp.32-38; Springhall, ‘Bircham School’, *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.88-90.

⁴⁶ Adimari, ‘Partial History’, *DNR*, 31, pp.42-44; Springhall, ‘Bircham School’, *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.86-88.

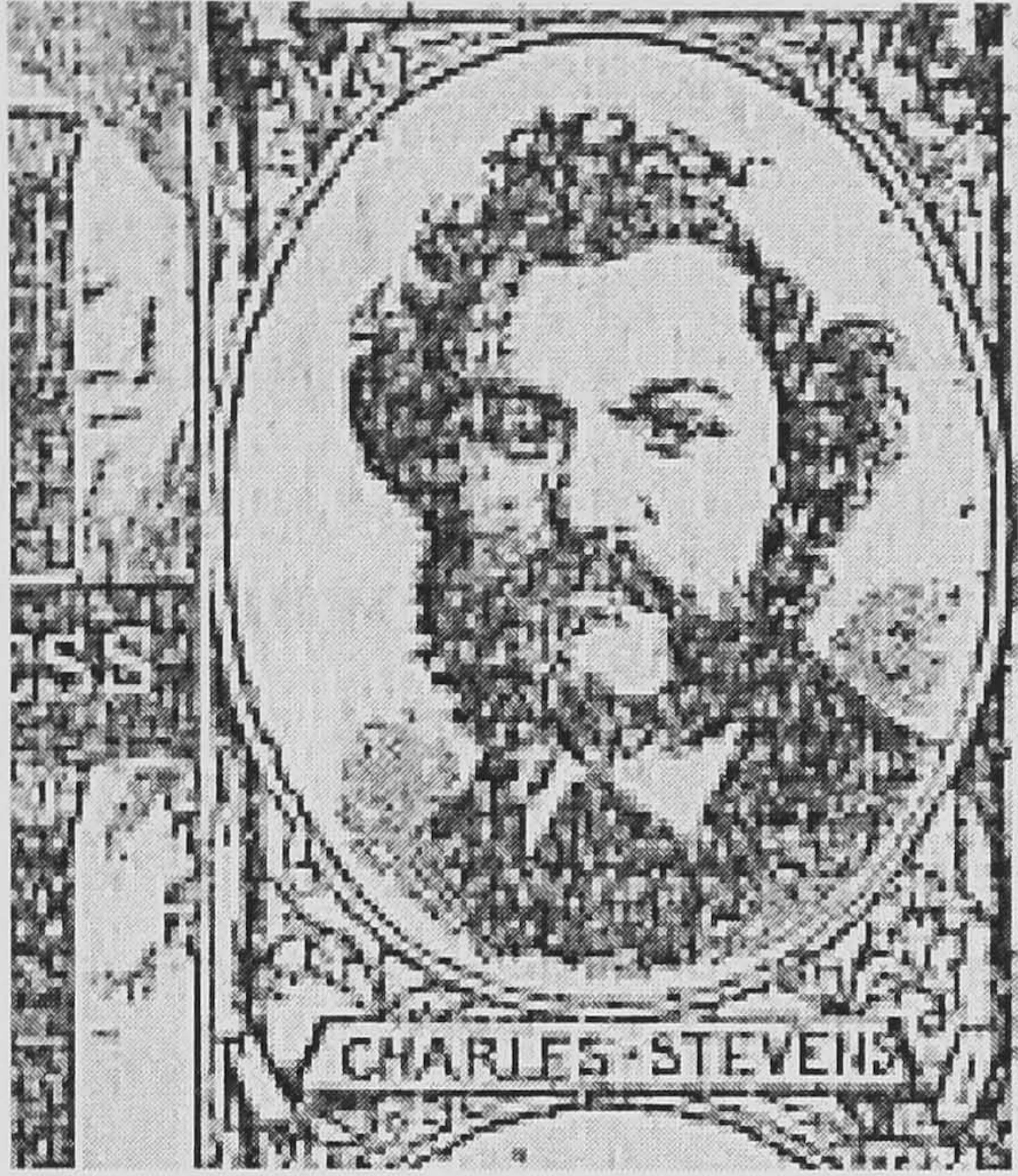


Fig.4: Charles Stevens



Fig.5: George Emmett



Fig.6: Bracebridge Hemyng

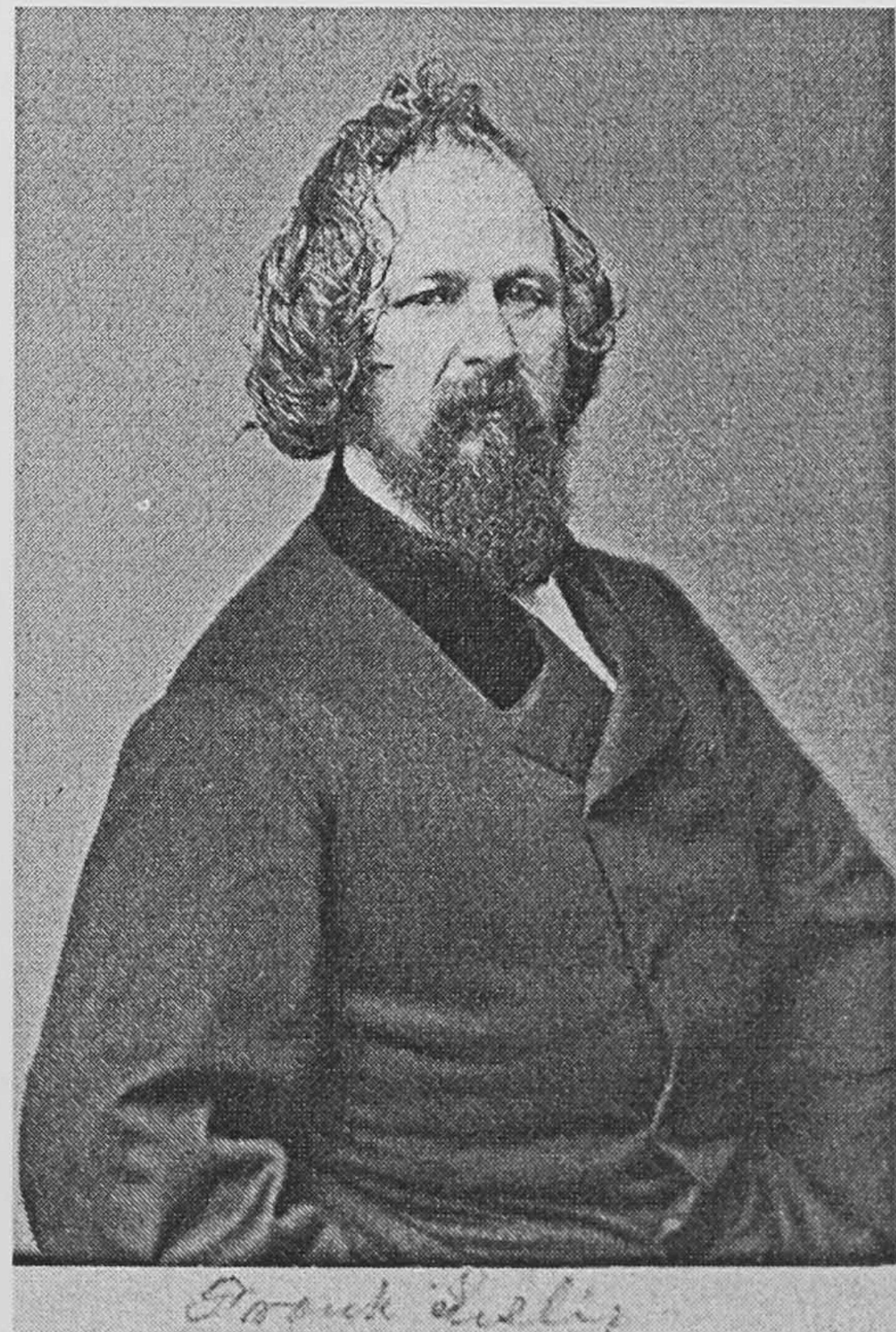


Fig.7: Frank Leslie

followed by ‘Young Jack Harkaway and His Boy Tinker’ (vol.19) in 1876. Brett also began to issue *BOE* in America. Entitled *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youths*, the American issue also featured the rival ‘Jack Harkaway’ tales.

Tension was inevitable. Each party swiftly and harshly condemned their rival via the correspondence columns of their papers. Brett strenuously denied any involvement with the ‘impostors’ who, he claimed, were imitating his stories. On one notable occasion in March 1874 he inferred that all of Frank Leslie’s ‘Jack Harkaway’ tales had been pirated from *BOE*:

The stories [...] in Frank Leslie’s paper are all copied from the *Boys of England*. Therefore you, with other lovers of fair play, should buy the *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youth*, and read the stories in their original form. We are pleased to hear you like our journal, and shall be glad if you will introduce it to your companions. Your good sense will tell you that original productions are more valuable than copies.⁴⁷

In turn, an April edition of Emmett’s *Young Englishman* published a letter from Bracebridge Hemyng, warning readers to “beware of imitations of my story”. Hemyng’s letter told readers that he was the only true author of the ‘Jack Harkaway’ stories, and that his work was published exclusively by George Emmett in the UK and Frank Leslie in America. All other ‘Jack Harkaway’ stories, claimed Hemyng, were written by impostors. Printed alongside the letter was a notarised statement to this effect.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in America, *Frank Leslie’s Boys’ and Girls’ Weekly* also began to make disparaging remarks about Brett’s ‘Harkaway’ tales. A concerned Brett hastily printed inserts condemning Leslie, which accompanied monthly and weekly American editions of *BOE* in June 1874:

At the last moments of going to press, it has come under Mr E. J. Brett’s notice that some American publishers are trying to impose upon and deceive his readers by false announcements in regard to the *Boys of England and America* Harkaway series of stories. Mr E. J. Brett, therefore, expressly wishes that his numerous friends and readers in America will not be deceived by any such announcement, but will reserve their opinion until he replies in full to the untruthful notices that have appeared in certain struggling American journals.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *BOE*, Vol.15, No.383, 14 March 1874, p.239.

⁴⁸ Sanchez-Saavedra, ‘Pulp Wars’, in *Pioneers*, p.110.

⁴⁹ Insert with *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youths*, Vol.15, Part 90, No.389-93, 25 April 1874 – 23 May 1874.

The three parties persisted in a similar fashion until the row finally subsided. The debate was later revived in an 1877 issue of Brett's *Our Boys' Journal*, where the editor asserted that "the whole of the incidents of the Harkaway series of stories was invented by the proprietor of the *Boys of England*, and that five or six writers were engaged in describing them in words". A similar claim appeared in the 1875 single volume edition of *Jack Harkaway and His Son's Adventures in China* and the 1876 single volume edition of *Young Jack Harkaway and His Boy Tinker*.⁵⁰

There can be little doubt that all of the 'Jack Harkaway' tales published in *BOE* between 1871 and 1873 were penned by Hemyng. These stories are very much alike in style to the American tales which were indisputably his.⁵¹ It is also probable that Hemyng created the character of Harkaway himself, if the testament of close friend John Allingham is to be relied upon:

[Hemyng] and I were standing outside the offices of the *Boys of England*, which was published by Edwin J. Brett, when I asked him what caused him to create the character of Jack Harkaway. Was he a real or imaginary character? "Well, old boy", he replied, with a knowing wink and a pleasant smile, "I think you can put it down to a bit of both. Reminiscences of one of my dear old college chums, a dare-devil sort of a fellow, who was always up to some kind of mischief, had much to do with it. It was really he who gave me the first idea of the character. Then when I christened him – metaphorically speaking – I began to write him up – new ideas flashed across my mind so quickly that what was then a mere shadow, gradually blossomed into a reality."⁵²

However, it is also probable that Brett's claims were not without foundation. He did play a crucial role in the creation of the 'Jack Harkaway' stories, and should be partly credited for the subsequent increase in the sale of *BOE*. The majority of Victorian boys' periodical literature, although written by authors, was commissioned and tailored by editors

⁵⁰ *Our Boys' Journal: a Weekly Magazine for Every Home*, Vol.2, No.42, 13 June 1877, p.255; S. Holland, 'Hemyng and Brett', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/1507>, accessed 20 May 2003; Jay, 'Personalalia', *VF*, Vol.2, No.24, pp.166-68; P. Mulhall, 'More About Jack Harkaway', *VF*, Vol.3, No.29 (January – February 1927), pp.56-59; Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Pulp Wars', in *Pioneers*, pp.109-11; Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Hemyng', *DNR*, 61, pp.35-36; H. R. Smith, *A Feast of Blood: Bloods and Penny Dreadfuls* (2002), cat.no.683.

⁵¹ J. P. Quaine, 'More About Jack Harkaway', *VF*, Vol.3, No.27 (November 1926), pp.29-31.

⁵² Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.15-16.

to suit their periodicals.⁵³ Accordingly, it is certain that Brett commissioned Hemyng's 'Jack Harkaway' tales, and very probable that the series was produced under his close supervision.⁵⁴ Indeed, Brett frequently stated that he himself arranged plots and characters for most of his papers' serials, not just the 'Jack Harkaway' stories.⁵⁵

What became of Hemyng after this period is not certain. It has been suggested that he returned to England in the late 1870s or early 1880s, following the death of his first wife, where he rekindled his legal career and wrote prolifically.⁵⁶ It has also been said that he wrote the 'Ned Nimble' series, published in *YMOGB* between 1879 and 1882, and *BOE*'s 'Left Handed Jack' series in the 1890s.⁵⁷ What is certain is that Hemyng was residing in Battersea in 1881.⁵⁸ Perhaps he, like Mayne Reid, simply travelled between the USA and Britain at regular intervals as and when he was required to.⁵⁹

Curiously, a Hemyng-credited tale did appear in *BOE* in 1879: 'Hal Harkforth and Tom Tallyho's Schooldays' (vol.27). It was followed shortly afterwards by 'British Jack and Yankee-Doodle, or, School Life in the Far West' (vol.28); although this story was attributed only to 'one of the most admired authors of the day', the American subject matter, title, and timing of the story suggest that it too may have been Hemyng's work. If these stories were indeed penned by Hemyng it is possible that he wrote others at around

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁵⁴ Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Pulp Wars', in *Pioneers*, pp.110-11; Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Hemyng', *DNR*, 61, pp.35-36; Springhall, 'Bircham School', *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.85-86.

⁵⁵ *Our Boys' Journal*, Vol.1, No.16, 13 December 1876, p.256. On one occasion Brett claimed to have actually penned stories of his own at some stage in his career, although he gave no specific details: see 'A Famous Armoury: Mr Edwin J. Brett Shows Us His Treasures', *The Sketch*, 7 March 1894, pp.311-12.

⁵⁶ F. Jay, 'More Light on Bracebridge Hemyng', *CM*, New Series, No.7 (December 1933 – January 1934), p.11; Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Hemyng', *DNR*, 61, p.37; J. J. Wilson, 'Penny Dreadfuls and Penny Bloods', *Connoisseur*, Vol.89 (1932), pp.226-33. Claims that Hemyng returned to write the 'Scapegrace' series for Brett's *Our Boys' Journal* in the late 1870s are incorrect. In fact, the stories were merely reprints of Hemyng tales which had earlier been published in Brett's *YMOGB*: see Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919; Rollington, *Brief History*, p.18; Springhall, 'Bircham School', *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.89-90.

⁵⁷ Jay, *Peeps*, 18 January 1919; Mulhall, 'Harkaway', *VF*, Vol.3, No.29, pp.56-59; J. P. Quaine, 'The Australian Bushranger in the Old Boys' Books', *VF*, Vol.3, No.28 (December 1926), pp.43-45.

⁵⁸ PRO, 1881 Census Returns, RG11/1043.

⁵⁹ Jay, 'Personalialia', *VF*, Vol.2, No.20, p.122.

the same time. Considering their recent dispute it is surprising that these Hemyng stories appeared in a Brett paper. It is also surprising, as we will shortly see, that Brett broke his own protocol by printing Hemyng's name. It is regrettable that the circumstances behind their acquisition and publication are not known.⁶⁰

It is also known that Hemyng returned to Brett in 1893 to write new 'Harkaway' stories for *Jack Harkaway's Journal for Boys*. These tales actually starred the grandson of the original Jack. After the paper failed, three further sequels were published in *BOE*: 'The Bandits of Tatagona' (vol.56), 'The Naval Cadets, or, Adventures in the Royal Navy' (vol.56), and 'The Slave Dealer's Revenge, or, the Naval Cadets in Turkey' (vol.57).⁶¹ Considering Hemyng's usually prolific work-rate it is probable that he also contributed other tales to Brett periodicals. Why did Hemyng return to the Brett camp despite the previous acrimony between the pair? By 1893 the fortune Hemyng had earned in America was long gone. He was again struggling to earn a living from freelance writing. The chance to resurrect his most profitable creation must have proved irresistible. Furthermore, Brett was becoming increasingly ill at this time, and had relented the day-to-day running of his periodicals. It is therefore possible that Hemyng had struck a deal with a member of Brett's staff, not Brett himself, to pen the new stories, thereby avoiding any awkwardness.⁶² A final set of Harkaway tales, which saw the grandson of the original Jack pitted against the Boers, appeared in Brett's short-lived *Up-to-Date Boys*, although it is not certain whether these were Hemyng's work.

It therefore appears that Bracebridge Hemyng's role in the success of *BOE* may have been overstated. Although his authorship of the early 'Jack Harkaway' tales is indisputable, Brett must also be partially credited with their creation. Moreover, although Hemyng certainly had a hand in raising the sale of *BOE*, it should not be thought that he could make or break a paper. His departure did not harm *BOE*, as Brett's anonymous 'Jack Harkaway' stories proved no less popular than the original tales. Conversely, the bona-fide Hemyng stories did not bring George Emmett's *Young Briton* any long-term success – the paper

⁶⁰ It has been said that Hemyng broke his contract and wrote for a variety of publishers in the late 1870s: see Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Pulp Wars', in *Pioneers*, p.111.

⁶¹ B. Ono, 'The Last of Jack Harkaway', *VF*, Vol.2, No.24 (July 1926), pp.158-59.

⁶² Holland, 'Hemyng and Brett'; Sanchez-Saavedra, 'Hemyng', *DNR*, 61, p.37.

ceased in the late 1870s – and Hemyng’s later tales failed to keep *Jack Harkaway’s Journal for Boys* afloat for more than a few numbers.

Author and Illustrator Anonymity

In the earliest volumes of *BOE* Brett boasted that his serial fiction was written by some of the leading boys’ authors of the era, and proudly displayed their names alongside their stories. However, by the mid 1870s he no longer credited either author or illustrator. Rather, all work was printed anonymously, or attributed only to ‘the author of’ a previous tale. The general opinion amongst contributors to *VF* and *CM* is that Brett implemented this policy because he was unpopular amongst his employees.⁶³ As writers became disgruntled and left *BOE* he needed some means by which he could disguise their absence. In actual fact, however, it is by no means certain that Brett was unpopular amongst his fellows. In addition, it appears that his reasons for disguising author’s names were less devious than has been suggested.

It has been argued that Brett was unpopular amongst his staff and Fleet Street associates because he was too ruthless a businessman. There is some evidence to support this claim. For example, Brett offended many of his Fleet Street colleagues by scrimping on payments owed to the widow of deceased *BOE* author W. Thompson Townsend, a fact which the Emmetts reported in their journals.⁶⁴ Brett’s businesslike conduct was at odds with the vivacious spirit which prevailed amongst boys’ authors, where camaraderie, goodwill and drinking aptitude were valued above entrepreneurial prowess. Indeed, Brett is known to have frowned upon this behaviour. After reading E. H. Burrage’s *The Ruin of Fleet Street* (1885), an account of the drinking exploits of boys’ authors, he remarked: “Ah, Burrage, you have only touched on the fringe of the evil of Fleet Street.”⁶⁵ One can appreciate how some authors may have found working for the Emmett brothers, whose

⁶³ Adimari, ‘Partial History’, *DNR*, 31, p.42; Hopperton, ‘King-Pin’, *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, pp.36-37; Medcraft, ‘Rivalry’, *CM*, 5th Series, No.7, p.104.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ E. H. Burrage, *The Ruin of Fleet Street* (1885), p.96.

outlook was harmonious with their own, a more attractive prospect than working for Brett.⁶⁶

On the other hand, there is also some evidence, albeit limited, which suggests that Brett was actually quite well liked, especially amongst his co-workers. In 1868, for example, Brett's NPC staff arranged a testimonial dinner to celebrate the success of *BOE* and *YMOBG*, at which Brett was roundly toasted and presented with an engraved silver epergne. The head of the banquet, paper merchant William Spicer, remarked how highly Brett was esteemed by his staff.⁶⁷ A further banquet, held in November 1891, honoured Brett's services to literature and art. Many of Brett's Fleet Street associates were present, including former NPC manager A. W. Hockett and journalist and friend G. A. Sala (who occupied the chair). Brett's reception was very favourable. Sala's glowing eulogy, which described Brett as "a phenomenal and unwavering success", was met by enthusiastic applause and rounds of "hear hear".⁶⁸ In addition, a former Brett associate later described the editor as "like an old country farmer – good natured and always ready with his purse".⁶⁹

It has been said that Brett's benevolence, in particular, was admired by his contemporaries. He was believed to have rescued at least three boys from the streets of London between 1865 and 1880. Although one subsequently died serving in Afghanistan, two led successful careers. One of these boys was named Hilton. A homeless orphan, he was offered a home and education by the *BOE* editor. It has even been suggested that Hilton later edited *BOE*.⁷⁰ One friend of Brett's remarked that he "has a big purse, [and] likewise a most charitable disposition", adding that "at St. Peter's, Ramsgate, and also in London there are many indigent persons who [...] can say, "He was very good to me, he was.""⁷¹

⁶⁶ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, p.32; Medcraft, 'Rivalry', *CM*, 5th Series, No.7, p.104.

⁶⁷ *Young Men of Great Britain: a Journal of Amusing and Instructive Literature*, Vol.2, No.32, 1 September 1868, p.484.

⁶⁸ *BOE*, Vol.52, No.1315, 29 January 1892, p.140.

⁶⁹ J. J. Darby, 'E. J. Brett, etc', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19 (February 1926), p.80.

⁷⁰ Anon., 'Brett', *Biograph*, 4, p.458; J. Medcraft, 'The Boys of England', *CM*, 4th Series, No.3 (February 1942), pp.7-8.

⁷¹ Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919 – 29 March 1919.

However, whether or not Brett was popular is a moot point. Although it cannot be denied that numerous authors left *BOE* to write for rival periodicals, their parting probably had little to do with their relationship with Brett. The collectors' journals have rather misrepresented Brett by suggesting that he was the only proprietor whose staff departed in this manner. This was not the case. In actual fact the phenomenon was widespread, affecting virtually every publisher. Most boys' authors were transient, shifting from paper to paper throughout their career.⁷² Indeed, several authors actually left the Emmetts to write for Brett; for example, 'Dick Dareall's Schooldays', which appeared in Brett's *Our Boys' Journal* from 1876 to 1877, has been attributed to Emmett stalwart E. H. Burrage. Even George Emmett spent some time as a *BOE* contributor.⁷³ Authors who did leave Brett for the Emmetts may have done so for any number of reasons. One possibility is simply that the brothers paid more; Brett was not known for being particularly generous in his payments schedules.⁷⁴

It is true that Brett began a strict policy of author anonymity in the mid 1870s. However, his motives were probably less covert than the collectors' journals have suggested. He did not wish to disguise the fact that authors were deserting his paper for the Emmetts. This would have been common knowledge, as the names of these authors featured prominently on the Emmetts' front covers. Nor did he wish to prevent his authors from leaving in the first instance; this would have been impossible.⁷⁵ Rather, because the policy, which had previously been lax, became rigorously enforced following the departure of Bracebridge Hemyng, it is probable that Brett ceased to print the names of his authors to prevent rivals trading upon their names when the time came for them to leave. Brett had clearly become wary of the naturally transient nature of boys' writers, and the potential harm they could cause to sale and reputation.

⁷² D. Dixon, *English Juvenile Periodical Literature, 1870-1914* (unpublished M.Phil dissertation, The University of Leicester, 1978), pp.69-70.

⁷³ Rollington, *Brief History*, p.22; Springhall, 'Bircham School', *HOE*, Vol.20, No.2, p.91.

⁷⁴ Hopperton, 'King-Pin', *SPC*, Vol.4, No.78, pp.32-33. A printer who worked for Brett later revealed that he may have paid his authors as little as £2/6 per page: see R. A. H. Goodyear, 'Early Struggles of a Boys' Author', *CM*, 5th Series, No.10 (September 1947), pp.149-51. However, Brett maintained that he paid each of his authors "a large sum": see *Our Boys' Journal*, Vol.2, No.29, 14 March 1877, p.48.

⁷⁵ Darby, 'Brett', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, p.80.

Furthermore, by no means was Brett the only editor who concealed his authors' names. This was a common practice amongst Victorian editors.⁷⁶ Traditionally, authors of cheap literature had rarely been credited with their work. Because their wares were considered ephemeral it was not thought necessary.⁷⁷ Likewise, the penny bloods and penny dreadfuls of the early and mid 1800s had usually been published anonymously. Indeed, few authors would have wished to have been credited for fear of prosecution. Many future boys' paper proprietors, such as Samuel Dacre Clarke and John Allingham, also published their stories anonymously. Anonymity disguised instances where editors had penned stories themselves, where authors had contributed more than one story to a single issue, and where old material, possibly by deceased authors, was re-used.⁷⁸ Brett may well have taken any number of these additional factors into consideration when he decided to pursue his policy of author anonymity.

It is difficult to establish just how popular Brett was amongst his Fleet Street colleagues. However, what is certain is that Brett did not inspire, or attempt to conceal, an exodus from his paper. The simple truth is that boys' paper authors were naturally transient. Brett devised a scheme to combat a problem common to all editors.

Conclusion

The Victorian boys' publishing community was exceptionally genial. For example, John Allingham wrote fondly of an occasion when many of their number enjoyed a boat trip to Margate, followed by a lavish dinner party, speeches, singing, and general high spirits. Amongst the party were Allingham, Hemyng, the Emmett brothers, James Greenwood and Robert Prowse. Brett was absent, yet sent his best wishes. "I can offer you a very choice cigar from a box which Mr. Brett, the good old proprietor of the *Boys of England* presented me with yesterday", spoke Hemyng upon the occasion. "He knew I was coming to Rollington's party, so he very considerately told me to give them to my friends. I may add

⁷⁶ C. Kent, 'The Editor and the Law', in J. H. Wiener, ed. *Innovators and Preachers: the Role of the Editor in Victorian England* (Westport, 1985), pp.99-119.

⁷⁷ N. Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge, 1985), p.126.

⁷⁸ Dixon, *Periodical Literature*, pp.69-70.

that the gift was accompanied with a sincere wish that we might all spend a very jolly week-end.”⁷⁹

It appears that Brett, although effectively its figurehead, sat slightly uncomfortably within the boys’ publishing community. He was rather more businesslike than many of his colleagues. He enjoyed his comfortable home and family life more than the company of fellow boys’ authors. He must have appeared rather uncompromising in the eyes of some members of the community. However, it was through dedication and diligence that Brett earned his success. In contrast, more carefree publishers like the Emmetts and John Allingham, and authors such as Hemyng, Percy B. and Vane St. John, all met financial ruin.

However, this is the worst that can truthfully be said of Brett. It appears that he has been rather misrepresented by the collectors’ journals. They have tended to base their opinions of Brett upon disparaging reports which appeared in the Emmett papers during the 1860s and 1870s, which made him appear considerably more villainous than was deserved. Although Brett generally had the better of each argument at the time, his long-term reputation has certainly suffered.

⁷⁹ Rollington, *Brief History*, pp.49-54.

Chapter Three – Empire and the Wider World

Introduction

Recent decades have seen a sharp increase in interest over how the possession of an empire impacted upon the culture of Britain itself. It is now thought that empire had as profound an effect upon British culture as it did upon the cultures of its subordinate societies. Historians believe that children's literature was one of the fields in which the impact of empire upon British culture was most evident. Consequently, the British empire has become the single most developed topic of study in the historiography of boys' papers. Indeed, it has been its defining theme over the last thirty years. Into this flourishing field, debate has recently begun to emerge over the way *Boys of England* in particular represented the empire.

The traditional view of how boys' papers represented empire has been largely the creation of the 'Studies in Imperialism' series. Key texts within the series are John MacKenzie's *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (1985), the MacKenzie-edited *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (1986), and Jeffrey Richards' *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (1989). Historians associated with the 'Studies in Imperialism' series have examined how boys' papers portrayed numerous facets of empire, such as race, hunting, and patriotism. Their studies focus upon *The Boy's Own Paper*, published by the Religious Tract Society, whose authors and readers, they argue, embraced empire from the outset. Conversely, 'Studies in Imperialism' has made little mention of *BOE*. The series contends that boys' papers from the 1860s to the 1880s cared little for empire. For these periodicals empire was "simply a bizarre backdrop for [...] quixotic escapades" and "never really more than a colourful backcloth to the tales of ethnocentric adventure produced by hack writers".¹ The series has argued that it was not until the 1890s that new publishers, most notably Alfred Harmsworth, began to launch periodicals which were preoccupied with empire. These papers offered wild adventure,

¹ P. A. Dunae, 'Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire', *Victorian Studies*, Vol.24 (1980-81), p.107; J. O. Springhall, "'Healthy Papers for Manly Boys': Imperialism and Race in the Harmsworths' Halfpenny Boys' Papers of the 1890s and 1900s', in J. Richards, ed. *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), p.123.

staunch patriotism and strong racism. They were timed to exploit growing popular enthusiasm for empire. Consequently, they sold in huge numbers to boys “acutely aware of their imperial heritage” and eager to read thrilling tales from Britain’s overseas territories.² In the wake of these new periodicals the popularity of *BOE* began to wane, and soon the paper was discontinued.

More recent studies of boys’ papers have begun to challenge some of these traditional ideas. Kelly Boyd’s *Manliness and the Boys Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (2003) has criticised the ‘Studies in Imperialism’ series for focussing too closely upon the *BOP*. Her study dedicates more attention to papers like *BOE*. She believes that *BOE*’s attitude towards imperialism was actually quite complex. Far from trivialising empire, Boyd claims, “publishers like Edwin J. Brett celebrated empire with characters who roamed the globe carrying British ideas and arrogance in their baggage”. The unrestricted wandering of these characters, Boyd argues, reflected Britain’s favour for free trade imperialism.³ Jonathan Rose’s *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001) has also contributed to this debate. Rose argues that although periodicals like the *BOP* were indeed saturated with imperial propaganda, they did not make much of an impression upon the working class. He suggests that the propaganda was filtered out by a readership ignorant, and often deeply cynical, of empire.⁴

In the wider scheme of empire studies two concepts are becoming increasingly important: the ‘British world’ and the ‘Anglo world’. Each offers an alternative to traditional interpretations of the manner in which empire impacted upon British culture. Whereas previous studies have focussed mainly upon how Britons perceived Africa and India, these new concepts draw attention towards British attitudes regarding the white settler colonies. The concept of the British world, championed by Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, stresses the importance of the formal white settler colonies – especially Australia, Canada and New Zealand – to nineteenth century Britain. As a consequence of

² Dunae, ‘Boys’ Literature’, *V/S*, Vol.24, p.105.

³ K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys’ Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), p.124.

⁴ J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), pp.321-64. Rose’s argument has recently been echoed in T. Boone, *Youth of Darkest England: Working Class Children at the Heart of Victorian Empire* (2005), especially pp.1-18, 65-84.

extensive migration, they argue, close bonds of kinship were formed between metropolitan and colonial Britons.⁵ The concept of the Anglo world, supported by James Belich, runs along similar lines, but adds that these bonds extended to territories beyond the formal empire, most notably America. Americans and Britons were closely allied through a common “pan-Anglo identity”, despite the absence of any formal links.⁶ Studies of how the white settler colonies, and America, were perceived in Victorian English literature are few.⁷ As yet, the topic has not been examined specifically by historians of the British or Anglo worlds.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between *BOE* and the British empire, particularly in the light of recent debate. This chapter contends that although *BOE* was less preoccupied with empire than many of its rivals, what it did feature was more sensitive to contemporary trends than has previously been suggested. Furthermore, empire played only a small part in the demise of the paper. Most significantly, this chapter also contends that empire has proved too constraining a concept for historians of boys’ papers. The concepts of the British world and Anglo world both have the potential to shed new light on how boys’ periodicals perceived the wider world. In the case of *BOE*, the Anglo world is particularly relevant. It proves that Anglo-American relations were more important to the paper than any sense of ascendancy over a formal empire.

⁵ C. Bridge and K. Fedorowich, eds. *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (2003).

⁶ J. Belich, ‘The Rise of the Angloworld: Settlement in North America and Australasia, 1784-1918’ (unpublished conference paper). A version of this paper is soon to be published in P. A. Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds. *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, forthcoming).

⁷ Notable exceptions include: B. Niall, *Australia Through the Looking Glass: Children’s Fiction: 1830-1980* (Ashford, 1984); C. Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: the Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Victoria, 1970); and N. Taylor, et al., *America in English Literature: a Symposium Organised by the English Department of the Roehampton Institute in February 1980* (1980).

How far did *Boys of England* feature empire?

Empire was by no means the central theme of *BOE*. In serial fiction it was dwarfed by Brett's preferred subject matter: history; rebels; crime; romance; the paranormal; and the public schools.⁸ In non-fiction, too, empire played a comparatively minor role.

The theme of empire was, for most of the Victorian era, restricted to middle class boys' periodical literature. Indeed, papers aimed at middle class boys became preoccupied with empire as early as the 1850s. Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine*, *Kingston's Magazine for Boys*, and the *BOP*, were amongst empire's strongest proponents. These papers regularly published stories and articles by authors who had experienced empire first-hand in the military, the merchant navy, or as journalists. Their editors, and contributors, strongly believed in the imperial cause. They saw their literature as a way of strengthening British authority overseas. An empire setting allowed fictional boys to demonstrate strength of body and character. These desirable British character traits, it was hoped, would subsequently be imitated by their real-life middle class readers. These boys were considered to be the potential imperialists of the future, destined for careers as officers or colonial civil servants. As the guardians of Britain's world position, it was important that they developed a strong backbone.⁹

Only in the 1890s was empire fully embraced by publishers targeting working class audiences. The most notable of these publishers was Alfred Harmsworth. Harmsworth promoted empire for different reasons to the *BOP* and its kind. He was less concerned with nurturing character amongst his readers. Unlike their middle class contemporaries, Harmsworth's working class readers were unlikely to provide Britain with future colonial administrators; instead, they were destined for manual or basic non-manual work. Rather,

⁸ Also see A. S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid Nineteenth Century to the Present Day* (Harlow, 2005), pp.102-03.

⁹ J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (1981), pp.105-06; J. M. MacKenzie, 'Hunting and the Natural World in Juvenile Literature', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, pp.146-47; J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1985), pp.199-226. Kelly Boyd has aptly described this phenomenon as "the fictional equivalent of Gentlemanly Capitalism": see K. Boyd, 'Exemplars and Ingrates: Imperialism and the Boys' Story Paper, 1880-1930', *Historical Research*, 67 (1994), p.145.

Harmsworth believed that there was money to be made from empire. He believed that working class boys were developing a taste for exciting stories set in exotic lands. Thus, Harmsworth's papers focussed upon the aspects of empire which he believed were particularly effective in enticing a working class audience, such as militarism, patriotism, and xenophobia, in the hope of coaxing more and more boys to part with their halfpennies.

Why did *BOE* neglect empire in comparison to its rivals? Brett probably believed that his readers were not interested in it. Prior to 1890 this was a fairly safe assumption. *BOE* had sold consistently well since 1866, despite having never carried much imperialistic content. Evidence suggests that whilst Brett recognised the growing commercial appeal of empire he was sceptical about its potential. In the 1880s he launched two new papers, *Boys of the British Empire* (1882) and *Boys of the Empire* (1888). Despite their titles, each had relatively little to do with empire. Indeed, the latter ran several twenty-year-old *BOE* stories in its earliest numbers, and was sold largely on the strength of it being the first boys' paper to be printed in full colour.

Brett's papers were also less empire-minded because he had no known motivation to promote the maintenance and growth of empire. In stark contrast, both the RTS and Alfred Harmsworth had vested interests in empire. The RTS supported empire because a strong British presence overseas gave it greater opportunity to carry out missionary activity. Indeed, through religious organisations like the RTS, the spread of Christianity, the 'civilising mission', became a key component of imperialism. The *BOP* offered the RTS an invaluable opportunity to promote the ideologies of imperialism amongst potential empire-builders, thereby paving the way for the future spread of Christianity worldwide. Moreover, in return for nothing more than a few real-life reports of exciting stories from exotic countries, RTS missionaries could enjoy some of the considerable revenue the *BOP* attracted while it remained profitable.¹⁰ Alfred Harmsworth supported empire for not for ideological reasons, but for his own financial benefit. He had strong monetary links to empire. He owned 500 shares in the British South African Chartered Company. It has also been suggested that funds provided by Cecil Rhodes allowed him to launch the *Daily Mail*

¹⁰ P. A. Dunae, 'Boy's Own Paper: Origins and Editorial Policies', *The Private Library*, 2nd Series, Vol.9, No.4 (1976), p.125.

in 1896.¹¹ Thus, the *BOP* and Alfred Harmsworth's papers did not simply reflect empire; rather, they were active components of imperial expansion.

How was empire represented in *Boys of England*?

Militaristic Adventure Stories

Empire was not an overriding concern of *BOE*. However, the paper was certainly more conscious of empire than the 'Studies in Imperialism' series has suggested. Indeed, *BOE* was more sensitive to imperial trends than even recent studies contend. *BOE* did not simply offer casual support to free trade imperialism. Rather, it published a succession of stories which reflected how Britain found it increasingly necessary to protect her foreign interests through military intervention. Consequently, the paper mirrored the gradual transition from free trade to direct rule in British imperial policy.

The heroes who embodied the spirit of free trade imperialism, such as Jack Harkaway, have been the subject of recent scholarly attention.¹² They were upper class, arrogant, and manly. They adventured freely across the globe, usually after completing a public school education. Rarely did they fight for their country. However, the boys who embodied militaristic imperialism are as yet unstudied, despite the fact that they appeared in *BOE* just as often as boys like Harkaway – if not more often. These boys did not adventure freely. Rather, most joined the armed forces, and actively fought for Britain's overseas territories. The remainder were adolescent sons of British officers or civil servants posted in empire.

The majority of *BOE*'s militaristic empire stories were published in the late 1870s and early 1880s, during a period of heightened British imperial activity. The Afghan War inspired 'English Jack Amongst the Afghans, or, the British Flag - Touch it Who Dare!' (vol.25) in 1878, 'Christmas Amongst the Afghans' (vol.27) in the 1879 festive issue, and 'Tom, Pat and Sandy in Afghanistan' (vol.29) in 1881. The Zulu Wars spawned 'The White Tiger Chief of the Zulus' (vol.25), 'Jack of the Naval Brigade, or, the Zulu's Daughter'

¹¹ Springhall, 'Healthy Papers', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p.122.

¹² Boyd, *Manliness*, pp.45-69.

(vol.26), and ‘Out with the Cetewayo, or, the Adventures of the Middy, the Drummer, and the Fifer’ (vol.27), all in or around 1879. ‘Sam Sprightly, or, the Mystery of the Pyramids’ (vol.34) and a sequel, ‘Sam Sprightly Among the Wild Mountaineers’ (vol.34), both published in 1883, followed the occupation of Egypt. ‘English Jack Amongst the Boers’ (vol.39) followed the first Anglo-Boer War in 1885.

BOE’s militaristic stories featured a great deal of actual conflict, from full scale battles to street skirmishes. They were violent and bloody. The British were consistently represented as peerless warriors. For example, in ‘English Jack Amongst the Afghans’, the lead protagonist performs a task of the utmost heroism, holding off thirteen natives rebels single-handedly. “Jack does not flinch – not he”, exclaims the narrator. “He is every inch an Englishman. He is ready to die at his post, if Heaven wills it so – die in the performance of his duty, which is the highest privilege and most glorious fate that can befall a British officer.”¹³ Although the British always triumphed in the final instalment, they rarely did so without suffering heavy casualties. For example, in ‘English Jack Amongst the Afghans’, several British officers are assassinated. In one grisly scene, which takes place in only the second instalment of the tale, an English captain and his family are brutally murdered:

At the top [of the stairs] lay a British officer, hacked and hewed out of all semblance of humanity. [...] In one [room] lay a lady murdered in her bed, and in another three young children and a black nurse also weltering in their gore. The woman’s head lay in quite a different part of the room to her body, but the children, who ranged from two to six years of age, look as though they had been held up in the air by the feet and then cleft in twain with a hefty sword. [...] It was a truly hideous spectacle.¹⁴

Similarly, in ‘Jack of the Naval Brigade’, the British are set upon by a native tribe. Those who are not slaughtered outright are captured as a feast for the tribal chief.

The stories, although graphic and sensational, strived to achieve realism. They featured actual events from each conflict. For example, ‘Jack of the Naval Brigade’ dedicates a full chapter to the relief of Ekowe, led by Lord Chelmsford. One of the chief

¹³ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.25, No.626, 22 November 1878, p.3.

¹⁴ *BOE*, Vol.25, No.627, 22 November 1878, p.19.



ENGLISH JACK AMONGST THE AFGHANS; OR, THE BRITISH FLAG—TOUCH IT WHO DARE!



"JACK CLUTCHED THE AFGHAN'S WRIST, AND SMOTE HARD."

For the Week ending NOVEMBER 15, 1878.

Fig.8: 'English Jack Amongst the Afghans, or, the British Flag – Touch It Who Dare!'

protagonists, Bill Mallet, is injured in the relief. More often than not, one or two highly informative short passages began and concluded each story. They summarised the British position, placing the narrative into a real-life context. For example, ‘English Jack Amongst the Afghans’, inspired by the contemporary Anglo-Afghan War but set during the 1840s conflict, ended with this stirring, yet largely factual, passage:

On the 1 October 1842, Lord Ellenborough, the Viceroy of India, issued a proclamation in which he stated that the disasters in Afghanistan having been avenged upon every scene of past misfortune, the British army would be withdrawn: and accordingly, on the 12th of October, they began their march homeward. A British army now occupies much of the territory which was the scene of our tale; three roads into the heart of the country are in the hands of our soldiers – there floats the British flag – touch it who dare!¹⁵

Therefore, although empire was a relatively minor feature of *BOE*, the significance of what coverage did exist has been underestimated. The paper was far better attuned to the contemporary spirit of empire than has previously been thought. Its stories reflected the transition from free trade to direct rule imperialism. They were militaristic, topical, bloodthirsty, and realistic, qualities not thought to have become prevalent in boys’ literature until the end of the century following the emergence of Alfred Harmsworth’s *Pluck*.

Race

Attitudes towards non-white races are a crucial component of the representation of empire in boys’ papers. The manner in which coloured protagonists are portrayed is indicative of contemporary attitudes towards Britain’s overseas territories and their populations. Historians have tended to believe that *BOE* was rather ignorant of race. It considered non-white characters to be nothing more than curiosities; never was a coloured character endowed with individual characteristics or a genuine personality.¹⁶ It is true that *BOE* featured few coloured characters, and that those which did appear were often stereotyped.¹⁷

¹⁵ *BOE*, Vol.26, No.653, 23 May 1879, p.31.

¹⁶ Boyd, *Manliness*, p.141.

¹⁷ Of course, many widely held views about various racial groups were guided by misconception, ignorance and prejudice; these were not exclusively the preserve of boys’ papers: see C. Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (1971).

However, the importance of these characters should not be underestimated. Under close scrutiny they reveal that *BOE* was more sensitive to contemporary attitudes towards race than has been thought previously.

For example, it has been suggested that all black African characters in *BOE* were uniformly ‘savage’, inhuman, and untrustworthy. Racism towards them was never tempered by paternalistic thought. This attitude, it is said, reflected opinions commonly held in British society until around 1890. Only in the 1890s, as Britons became concerned that racism could destabilise the empire, did paternalism become an increasingly dominant ideology.¹⁸ It is indeed correct that *BOE* often treated black Africans as ‘savages’. However, the paper did display early signs of the shift towards paternalism. Pomp, a negro servant in Charles Stevens’ ‘Alone in the Pirate’s Lair’ (vol.1), and January, an interpreter in ‘Jack of the Naval Brigade’, illustrate this fact. Each servant is a valued member of their respective crew. Far from being untrustworthy, both Pomp and January are extraordinarily loyal. Their loyalty is rewarded when they are granted privileged positions; Pomp is entrusted with the care of the captain’s daughter, whom he protects from marauding pirates, whilst January is given effective command of a ship when Jack, the English boy hero, is too ill to fulfil his duties. These negro servants were treated with paternalism because they aspired to behave like white Britons. For example, January tries hard to emulate his British companions. “Of course, you can’t help your nature, January”, says his ‘master’, Bill Mallet, “but as long as you keep your principles of tryin’ to be like a white man I’ll be a father to you.”¹⁹ Both Pomp and January are portrayed as contented under their white ‘masters’; Pomp, for example, describes himself as “de boy” and “dis child”.²⁰ Far from being ‘savages’, Pomp and January’s behaviour contrasts starkly with that of their ‘uncivilised’ brethren. For example, in ‘Alone in the Pirates’ Lair’, a Papuan pirate, sporting a gold ring through his nose, is described as both a “black savage” and a “black ruffian”.²¹

¹⁸ Boyd, *Manliness*, pp.138-46.

¹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.26, No.652, 23 May 1879, p.10.

²⁰ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

BOE also reflected the evolution of contemporary attitudes towards the Chinese. Towards the end of the nineteenth century worries about Chinese power grew. Britons became increasingly suspicious of the so-called ‘yellow peril’.²² Accordingly, *BOE* treated Orientals with caution. They were portrayed as wily and money-motivated. “Everything is done in the Celestial empire by bribery”, mentions the narrator of ‘Hokey Pokey and Wankey Fum, or, the Celestials in England’ (vol.39).²³ They were often the subject of ferocious insult. One protagonist in ‘Sam Sprightly, or, the Mystery of the Pyramids’ yells at the Chinese cook, Wang-Gee, “shut up, yer yellow-faced son of a Mandarin! Why didn’t they put you in a grocer’s shop window? You’d be a pretty ornament, you would, you pig-tailed mummy!”²⁴ Chinese characters often occupied comic roles. Their foolishness and incompetence nullified any potential threat to British superiority. This comedy was usually slapstick. Almost every Chinese character in *BOE* found himself unwittingly caught up in some frenetic scene. For example, in ‘Hokey Pokey and Wankey Fum’, the two Orientals travel to England to meet the father of their English wives, Mr Dobbs. Chaos ensues as soon as they set foot past his door. Dobbs thumps Hokey Pokey who, thinking it an English custom, thumps Dobbs’ adopted son, Harry Jarvis. Jarvis then proceeds to pull Hokey Pokey around the room by his pigtail. Indeed, the obligatory Chinese pigtail offered limitless potential for farce. Almost every instalment of ‘Sam Sprightly, or, the Mystery of the Pyramids’ was accompanied by an illustration of Wang-Gee being jostled by his hair. In one absurd episode Sam’s companion, Billy, secretly ties the mounted Oriental’s hair to the tail of a donkey travelling in the opposite direction; Wang-Gee is subsequently dragged around a Bazaar in “a scene of indescribable confusion”.²⁵ China itself was portrayed as alien and peculiar. Few authors possessed a good knowledge of the country, which somewhat limited the potential of their stories.²⁶ For example, in ‘Hokey Pokey and Wankey Fum’ the action never leaves the trading post at which the Chinese merchants

²² K. Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism Through Children's Books and Magazines* (Manchester, 1996), pp.122-60.

²³ *BOE*, Vol.39, No.979, 21 August 1885, p.25.

²⁴ *BOE*, Vol.34, No.857, 20 April 1883, p.115.

²⁵ *BOE*, Vol.34, No.856, 13 April 1883, p.99.

²⁶ Castle, *Britannia's Children*, p.134.

reside. Indeed, the protagonists depart for England at the first opportunity. Nor did *BOE* make any attempt to understand Chinese custom. Most notably, Chinese cuisine, such as “fricasseed rat” and “stewed puppy-dog”, was frequently condemned by British heroes.²⁷

Popular attitudes towards India were also mirrored by *BOE*. India, and its people, was held in greater esteem by Britons than either Africa or China. This was because India represented the ‘official’ empire. It was formal, structured, and organised, and hosted British institutions.²⁸ Accordingly, stories in *BOE* were far less likely to be set in India than Africa. As a civilised nation, India offered only limited potential for adventure; it would have been unacceptable for India to host the same violent rampages that *BOE*’s boy heroes undertook in Africa. This made India a less attractive proposition for *BOE* authors keen to garnish their tales with blood and gore. This was all the more so because by 1866 Britain was experiencing a mood of complacency over India, as the fever which followed the 1857 Mutiny subsided.²⁹ Indian characters were less common than African or Chinese characters. As Indians were generally better respected than black Africans or Chinese, it was difficult for *BOE* to portray them as docile servants or comic fools. When Indian characters did appear they were usually rich kings or princes.³⁰

BOE was also sensitive to the Victorian idea of a racial hierarchy. The paper ranked races according to which were perceived to be the most civilised. The British headed this hierarchy. The very first number of the paper spoke of “England’s moral as well as physical supremacy over the other nations of the earth”.³¹ Other white races, particularly Europeans, followed the British. They were civilised, but lacked the superior character traits of Britons. They also held some (stereotyped) character flaws. The rule of thumb was that the merit of

²⁷ *BOE*, Vol.39, No.978, 14 August 1885, pp.9-11; *BOE*, Vol.34, No.857, 20 April 1883, p.115.

²⁸ Castle, *Britannia's Children*, p.57.

²⁹ P. A. Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature in an Age of Empire* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Manchester, 1975), p.435.

³⁰ The representation of India in boys’ papers is also explored in K. Boyd, ‘Half-Caste Bob’, or, Race and Caste in the Late-Victorian Boys’ Story Paper’, in D. Finkelstein and D. M. Peers, eds. *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp.63-83.

³¹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.4. Stories rarely specified whether the lead boy hero was English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh. Distinguishing quirks, such as an accent or national dress, were uncommon.

each European nation was determined by its geographical proximity to Britain.³² Next came Indians, and then the Chinese. Although coloured, their appearance was relatively close to that of whites, and their intelligence and enterprise made them beneficial to empire. Black Africans resided at the foot of the hierarchy. Notwithstanding the growth of paternalism, Negroes were commonly portrayed as savage, uncivilised, cannibalistic, and physically hideous.³³

‘Alone in the Pirate’s Lair’ provides a concise example of how *BOE* replicated the Victorian racial hierarchy.³⁴ The story features a pirate band, comprised of villains “in almost every variety of race and colour”.³⁵ An Englishman, Mark Ambrose, heads the racial structure. He had joined the band after being pressed into the King’s service, where he was treated barbarically; these mitigating circumstances justify his piracy. As a civilised Briton he is excused from waging war on his fellow countrymen, unless called upon to defend the band. Don Pablo, the Spanish leader of the mob, follows Ambrose. He is a white European in a position of authority. Despite his despicable nature he is admired both for his character and appearance. Lower down the hierarchy appear an Arab sentry and a pig-tailed Oriental. The list is completed by two black pirates, the aforementioned Papuan and a Corimante. They are bloodthirsty, barbaric and grotesque. Their ‘betters’, particularly Ambrose, command the pair through insults such as “avast, you black beast!”³⁶ Even boy hero Jack Rushton, held captive by the pirates, asserts his authority over one Negro by calling him “darkie” and by disobeying his orders.³⁷

Patriotism

BOE was more in tune with contemporary attitudes towards empire than has previously been suggested. However, this is not to say that the paper represented empire in an

³² P. M. Barnett, *English Boys’ Weeklies, 1866-1899* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Minnesota, 1974), p.243.

³³ Boyd, *Manliness*, p.137.

³⁴ For further analysis of this tale see J. Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man’s World* (1991), pp.34-37.

³⁵ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.2, 4 December 1866, p.18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.3, 11 December 1866, p.35.

identical, or even similar, way to the *BOP* or Alfred Harmsworth's periodicals. Whilst these papers were to unwavering supporters of overseas expansion, *BOE* was subtly unsupportive, and sometimes even critical, of British imperial policy.

The imperialistic boys' authors who wrote for empire-minded boys' periodicals were staunchly patriotic. They spoke fondly of the British people and of Britain itself. This was because the love of nation was an integral part of the ideology of imperialism. Patriotism was used to justify the growth of empire; the British national character was considered to be meritorious and praiseworthy, and it was thought right that the values and beliefs which made Britain great should be disseminated overseas.³⁸ This love of nation, the 'Studies in Imperialism' series has argued, was shared by British boys, who were themselves becoming increasingly empire-minded towards the end of the century.

However, the nature of patriotism amongst the British working class has recently been brought into question. It has been argued that although patriotism did exist amongst the working class, it was not fostered by an unquestioning love of empire. Many working people were ignorant of empire. Some were even hostile, complaining that overseas expansion diverted attention away from important domestic concerns, or that they were excluded from the rewards which empire supposedly brought. Any patriotism that did exist amongst the working class reflected support for their local communities, not Britain's imperial mission. For example, working class communities would greet soldiers with a raucous welcome upon their return from empire, but to celebrate their safe arrival, not British military success. Similarly, the working class were often reluctant to criticise British military policy, not because of any sense of nationhood, but because they might harm the reputation of local troops.³⁹

³⁸ J. S. Bratton, 'Of England, Home and Duty', in J. M. Mackenzie, ed. *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), p.78.

³⁹ Boone, *Darkest England*, pp.1-18; H. Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism', *History Workshop*, 12 (1981), pp.8-33; S. Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (1999), pp.205-12; H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (1968), pp.82-100; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.336-37; R. Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902* (1972); G. Steadman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.179-

BOE's attitude towards empire reflected how working class patriotism was inspired by the impact of empire upon working class communities, and not by a love of empire for its own sake. Accordingly, the strongest element of patriotism in *BOE*'s empire stories was its praise for the character of Britons fighting overseas. The mettle of these heroes was never questioned. Indeed, it was their strength of character which allowed them to overcome the dangers of empire. So obvious was their superiority that it went largely unspoken, but was borne out in their heroic actions.

However, the paper's heroes were subtly disassociated from British imperial policy. Compare *BOE* to the *BOP*. National pride was fostered by the *BOP* through, amongst other means, a love of the land. England was represented as a rural idyll; emblems and motifs of Englishness, such as meadows, gardens, dogs and food, were spoken of warmly. The *BOP*'s heroes would, as a rule, begin and end their tales in this patriotically envisaged England. The paper sought to justify imperial expansion by presenting this glorified image of England as the inspiration, and the prize, of these boy imperialists. Therefore, a hero's journey to, and subsequent return from, empire was highly symbolic.⁴⁰ Conversely, *BOE*'s stories carried no such patriotic symbolism. Very few of its empire tales attempted to invoke images of idealised rural idylls. The city, with its danger, violence and crime, was a more common backdrop than the countryside.⁴¹ For example, the eponymous boy hero of W. Thompson Townsend's 'Frank Freeland' (vol.5), who served in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny, left behind him an impoverished community. Furthermore, although many of *BOE*'s protagonists began and ended their adventures in Britain, many more did not. In numerous serial stories the action began with the hero already located in empire. For example, 'English Jack Among the Afghans' begins with Bobby and Jack walking the streets of Kabul, whilst, 'Jack of the Naval Brigade' begins with Jack already stationed and

81; A. S. Thompson, 'Publicity, Philanthropy and Commemoration: British Society and the War', in D. Omissi and A. S. Thompson, eds. *The Impact of the South African War* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.99-123.

⁴⁰ Bratton, 'Of England', in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, pp.78, 87-88.

⁴¹ Many of Brett's earlier NPC publications had also been critical of British society. For example, *The Jolly Dogs of London* (1866) followed the exploits of a group of wife-beating alcoholics in the capital, and the infamous *Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866) offered a gritty depiction of a gang of London city boys. The authors of these penny dreadfuls were probably influenced by the work of G. W. M. Reynolds, which carried a similarly bleak opinion of the capital.

awaiting orders. The absence of patriotic symbolism meant that *BOE*'s support for its heroes existed independently from support for nation. Conversely, whilst *BOE*'s stories rejected nation, they supported local communities. Community ties were championed regardless of whether a hero's story commenced in Britain or in empire. For example, the opening instalments of 'Frank Freeland' sees Frank and his parents wave a tearful goodbye, and 'Jack of the Naval Brigade' begins with Jack penning a letter to his mother.

On occasions, *BOE* was even bold enough to directly criticise British imperial policy. For example, in 'Jack of the Naval Brigade', boy hero Jack appears to hold a negative view of some aspects of British imperial policy: "'More bloodshed", sighed Mr Wilson. "Ah, Jack, how sad it is to reflect that even the peerless blessings of civilisation and Christianity can only be spread by rapine and slaughter." Jack was not so fond of argument, especially theological argument, so he wisely held his tongue."⁴² In other instances, *BOE* used empire to highlight the need for domestic social reform. For example, 'Sam Sprightly Among the Wild Mountaineers' sees a young hero, Billy, lament the number of elderly people in British workhouses. In contrast, he praises Chinese tradition, where families are expected to provide for their elderly. "I feel the heathen Chinee is as much above us in some things as heaven from earth", says Billy.⁴³ The paper was also known to criticise British militarism. For example, in Vane St. John's 'Who Shall be Leader? The Story of Two Boys' Lives' (vol.1), the narrator lavishes praise upon the British soldiers who had fought in the Peninsula War, yet criticises official policy: "The soldiers themselves were brave and true, and fully persuaded of the justice of their cause, I firmly believe. It is the leaders, or rather the government, who I blame, for interfering where interference was not justice, but a boastful impertinence."⁴⁴ Of course, passages such as these were infrequent, subtle and restrained. Regular, explicit or aggressive condemnation would have been considered excessively unpatriotic by readers. They were also balanced out by numerous hearty cheers for England. However, these passages would doubtless have struck a chord amongst the considerable number of working class readers who were wary of imperialism.

⁴² *BOE*, Vol.26, No.664, 8 August 1879, p.198.

⁴³ *BOE*, Vol.34, No.869, 13 July 1883, p.314.

⁴⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.16, 11 March 1867, p.247; Barnett, *Boys' Weeklies*, pp.170-71.

Post-1890

1890 is seen as a turning point in the relationship between empire and boys' periodicals. It was during the 1890s that Alfred Harmsworth began to publish a series of halfpenny papers: *Comic Cuts*; *Illustrated Chips*; *The Halfpenny Marvel*; *The Union Jack*; *Pluck*; and *The Boys' Friend*. They were highly supportive of Britain's world position.⁴⁵ As these empire-minded periodicals became increasingly popular amongst working class boys, historians have argued, the sale of older papers like *BOE* began to dwindle.

The most empire-minded of Harmsworth's publications was *Pluck*, also known as *Stories of Pluck*. Each week the paper ran a complete story – virtually every one was set in empire. Amongst the stories published in volume one were: 'A Soldier's Promise – a Tale of General Gordon and the Siege of Khartoum'; 'Heroes of the Matabele War – a Romance in the Recent Campaign in South Africa'; and 'Saving the Colours – a Romance of the Zulu War'. The stories were fiercely militaristic, invariably patriotic, and frequently xenophobic. With the scramble for Africa in progress, anti-French sentiment was particularly prominent. The paper boasted that its tales reflected the realities of the British imperial experience. "Real heroes will figure in these books", claimed an editorial, "plucky Britons who have fought for their country on land and sea."⁴⁶

In stark contrast, volume fifty-eight of *BOE*, which was available at the same time as volume one of *Pluck*, featured empire only fleetingly. 'In the Secret of the Room of Glass', included an Indian servant amongst its cast, 'The Prince of the Isles, or, the Pirate of the Pacific' was set on an east-Indiaman ship, and 'The Sole Survivors: a Tale of the Mountain Meadows Tragedy' incorporated minor characters who had served in the Indian Mutiny. Instead, domestic adventures such as 'Fortune's Fool, or, Run Down at Last', historical fiction such as 'The Doge's Treasures', and pirate stories such as 'The Cruise of the Swiftsure, or, the Buccaneers of the Spanish Main', dominated the volume. The following year, only two of the first twenty-six *Boys of England Prince of Novelettes* (short story papers given away free with the paper) were set in empire.

⁴⁵ Springhall, 'Healthy Papers', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p.123.

⁴⁶ *Stories of Pluck: a High-Class Weekly Library of Adventure at Home and Abroad, on Land and Sea*, Vol.1 (1895), p.1.

It is therefore correct that between 1890 and 1899 empire remained a relatively minor theme in *BOE*. Moreover, what little empire the paper did feature became increasingly remote from contemporary trends. During the late 1890s, as war in South Africa loomed, only one story, 'White Jack, or, the Glory of England' (vol.66), was overtly topical. It featured some material relating to the Fashoda Crisis of 1898.

It has long been thought that *BOE*'s neglect of empire was the single cause of its demise. The jingoism of Harmsworth's halfpenny papers, it has been argued, struck a chord with working class boys as their interest in empire grew.⁴⁷ Indeed, it is correct that these papers found a large and appreciative audience, which gradually increased in size. However, it would be a mistake to say that empire was the sole factor, or even the greatest factor, behind the success of Alfred Harmsworth and the demise of *BOE*. Evidence suggests that it may have played only a minor part.

It is probable that a combination of other factors, alongside empire, were responsible for the success of Harmsworth's weeklies. The first was price. At one halfpenny each, half the price of *BOE*, they offered exceptional value for money; even the poorest working class youngsters could afford them. The second was presentation. Whilst *BOE* was still predominantly monochrome, Harmsworth's weeklies were brightly coloured. They featured lively fonts, eye-grabbing illustrations, exciting competitions and punchy advertisements. Thirdly, they were fast-moving. A new serial story began each week, unlike in *BOE*, where a story could last for many months. Fourthly, they were more modern in subject matter. Early science fiction tales, often involving fantastical inventions and contraptions, were beginning to appear, as were exciting new genres like detective fiction. In contrast, *BOE* still borrowed themes from centuries-old broadsides and chapbooks.

Furthermore, Harmsworth's papers were not all dominated by empire. Those which were not were no less popular than those which were. *Marvel*, for example, which was preoccupied with nautical adventure, and *The Union Jack*, which focussed upon pirates,

⁴⁷ K. Carpenter, *Penny Dreadfuls and Comics: English Periodicals for Children from Victorian Times to the Present Day* (1983) pp.51-52; Springhall, 'Healthy Papers', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p.123.

redskins and desert islands, both sold consistently well.⁴⁸ Indeed, evidence suggests that Harmsworth's most popular styles of fiction were the new, pioneering types, especially detective fiction. For example, Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee are thought to have been responsible for sending the sale of Harmsworth's periodicals soaring soon after the turn of the century.⁴⁹

Moreover, the popularity of empire amongst Victorian working class boys has by no means been proven. Although the 'Studies in Imperialism' series has succeeded in describing how boys' papers represented empire, it had failed to explain how these messages were interpreted. Rather, the series has merely assumed they were accepted unquestioningly. As we have seen, it is now thought that many members of the working class may have been indifferent, even hostile, towards empire. If this was so, it is questionable whether empire would have attracted enormous numbers of working class readers to any paper. Recent research has suggested that, at the very least, many boys filtered out imperialistic messages in their reading matter.⁵⁰

It is perhaps a mistake to attribute *BOE*'s failure to Harmsworth at all. The paper probably would have folded even without his interference. Brett's empire was consistently mismanaged following his death. Consequently, his papers lost their former qualities and became uninspired and lacklustre. It could be argued that Harmsworth simply arrived at the right time to cater for readers who would have deserted *BOE* anyway. In actual fact, had *BOE* maintained its quality, its chances of survival would have been good, even against such strong opposition. The boys' weeklies of the Aldine Publishing Company, which championed traditional penny dreadful fare, sold in respectable numbers well into the twentieth century, thereby proving that quality literature of this type could still find a market in the Harmsworth era.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Carpenter, *Penny Dreadfuls*, p.52; Springhall, 'Healthy Papers', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p.113.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Boone, *Darkest England*, pp.1-18; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.332-33.

⁵¹ Carpenter, *Penny Dreadfuls*, pp.35-37; J. O. Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature': the 'Penny Dreadful' Publishing Business Since 1860', *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3 (1994), pp.578-81.

It is also worth noting that no single Harmsworth periodical matched the might of *BOE*. In 1894 *The Halfpenny Marvel* sold just 144,000 copies weekly, and *The Union Jack* just 132,000.⁵² Indeed, the sale of Harmsworth's periodicals generally fluctuated between 125,000 and 150,000, far short of the sale of *BOE* in its heyday.⁵³ Only *Comic Cuts* and *Illustrated Chips* enjoyed a consistently large sale, yet these papers appealed to a wider audience, not just boys.⁵⁴ It is also true that the 1890s was a fiercely competitive decade in the boys' publishing trade, spawning dozens upon dozens of new periodicals.⁵⁵ It is perfectly possible that the cumulative effect of these together caused *BOE*'s demise, not the efforts of a single publisher.

The British World and the Anglo World

In recent years imperial historians have begun to examine two new concepts, the 'British world' and the 'Anglo world'. The first is seen as a more flexible and less formal way of looking at the British empire. Key to this field is the study of British migration to white settler colonies, notably Australia, Canada and New Zealand. These Anglophone societies formed what are known as the neo-Britains. It is argued that a close network of culture and identity existed between Britain and the neo-Britains.⁵⁶ The Anglo world is a similar concept, the main difference being that historians propose that bonds of kinship extended beyond the formal boundaries of empire. Accordingly, English-speaking nations outside of the formal empire, most notably America, are included within the Anglo world.⁵⁷ The concepts of the British world and Anglo world have the potential to shed new light on the manner in which Victorian boys' papers represented Britain's overseas dominions.

How do the two theories impact upon *BOE* specifically? On the whole, *BOE*'s attitude towards the formal white settler colonies was fairly nonchalant. Few of its stories were set within their borders. Those which were treated the settler colonies in a fairly

⁵² J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), p.218.

⁵³ Springhall, 'Healthy Papers', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, p.113.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.123.

⁵⁵ W. Dexter, 'Boys' Periodicals of the Nineties', *Chambers' Journal*, Vol.12 (1943), pp.641-44.

⁵⁶ C. Bridge and K. Fedorowich, 'Mapping the British World', in *The British World*, pp.1-11.

⁵⁷ Belich, 'Angloworld'; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.321-64.

exploitative manner – as little more than a convenient location for the thrilling escapades of British born boys. The British heroes who travelled there did so with an air of superiority, notwithstanding the fact that the white settlers over which they exerted their supremacy were but a few generations removed from Britain themselves. Conversely, white settler boys were frequently portrayed as lacking the pluck which allowed their British counterparts to survive daring escapades. Although *BOE*'s British heroes were frequently sent to the settler colonies to stay with members of their family who had migrated, the paper rarely seized the opportunity to suggest that a close bond existed between metropolitan and colonial Britons. Notably, *BOE*'s support for emigration was rather casual. It did little to actively promote it, as many other working class journals, such as those of G. W. M. Reynolds, were known to do.⁵⁸ Only infrequently did *BOE* speak positively of the settler colonies. One notable story, 'Through Wild Australia' (vol.54), extolled Australia as an Arcadian society, the solution to Britain's social ills:

“Oh, it's a glorious country. [...] There's no doubt about that; and it's where any amount of us will have to go one of these days. England is growing too small for us, or rather, we are growing too big for it; there's not enough work for us here. All the professions and all the businesses are overcrowded, and clerks earning starvation wages. Mankind must return to the ways of Adam once more and make his income out of mother earth, and the new Eden will be Australia.”⁵⁹

However, this sentiment is not maintained throughout the tale. The colony is generally portrayed as barren and overrun with criminals. These trends persisted throughout the paper's history, although stories set in the white settler colonies became somewhat more common, and more enthusiastic, towards the end of the century.⁶⁰

In contrast, throughout its entire lifespan *BOE* was preoccupied with America. Stories set in America outnumbered those set in all the formal white dominions combined.

⁵⁸ See V. S. Berridge, *Popular Journals and Working Class Attitudes, 1854-1886* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of London, 1976), p.223. Nevertheless, questions about emigration appeared quite frequently in *BOE*'s correspondence columns. It has also been claimed that at one stage Brett offered readers paid emigration to Canada: see Boyd, *Manliness*, p.40.

⁵⁹ *BOE*, Vol.54, No.1359, 2 November 1892, pp.3-4.

⁶⁰ See Kelly Boyd's analysis of Brett's 1888 *Boys of the Empire* tale 'Canadian Jack, or, the Mystery of the Old Log Hut', in Boyd, *Manliness*, pp.63-67.

They were also at least as common as stories set in Africa, India and China. The quantity, and more importantly the outlook, of these stories reveals that informal links with America were more significant to *BOE* than any sense of governance over both white and non-white territories.

BOE existed at a time when trans-Atlantic links were becoming ever sturdier.⁶¹ British trade with the USA was greater than with any other single country, emigration to America was stronger than to any formal white colony, and transatlantic links of marriage were as sturdy as they had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶² The two nations also exchanged a great deal of intellectual and cultural thought.⁶³ Most importantly, a strong ideological link existed between the two countries. Many people subscribed to the doctrines of Anglo-Saxonism, that English-speaking races, descended from the ancient invaders of Britain, held common traits which made them the highest of the world's racial orders. Consequently, the British imperialists who believed in this idea sought to strengthen links with America. The Imperial Federationists, for example, wished to unite all the English races of the world into a close-knit community, in which it was hoped America would play a major role. Several successful books, such as W. Dilke's *Greater Britain* (1868), J. R. Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1883) and J. A. Froude's *Oceana* (1886), propagated this cause.⁶⁴

The British working class were especially fond of America. Notably, radicals were known to admire the USA as a model of freedom, affluence, and democracy. For example,

⁶¹ The historiography of the Anglo-American relationship is extensive: see D. A. Lincove and G. R. Treadway, *The Anglo-American Relationship: an Annotated Bibliography of Scholarship, 1945-1985* (1988).

⁶² C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, 2003), pp.234-35, 470; E. Richards, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600* (2004), pp.151-205; R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: the Official Mind of Imperialism*, 2nd Edition (Hampshire, 1981), pp.6-7.

⁶³ H. C. Allen, *The Anglo-American Relationship Since 1783* (1959), pp.129-73; G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford, 2004), pp.26-28.

⁶⁴ S. Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895-1904* (1981), pp.11-12, 46-47.

the Chartists had praised American writers for addressing plebeian audiences.⁶⁵ Indeed, many Chartists actually relocated across the Atlantic.⁶⁶ Recent scholarship has suggested that admiration for America was particularly strong amongst working class children. Youngsters working in monotonous or even dangerous occupations in overcrowded and unsanitary towns and cities frequently looked towards the States to relieve their drudgery.⁶⁷ Accordingly, books such as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), all of which depicted America as a spatial utopia, were popular amongst late Victorian working class youths.⁶⁸

BOE's portrayal of America was attuned to the attitudes of its working class readership. Accordingly, Anglo-Saxonism was a dominant doctrine within its pages. The paper believed that a strong bond existed between the youths of Britain and America, a bond which it openly eulogised. Consequently, stories such as 'British Dick and Sam the Yank, or, England and America Against the World' (vol.66) and 'British Jack and Yankee-Doodle, or, School Life in the Far West' (vol.28) portrayed British and American boys living and adventuring side by side. The heroes of these stories frequently demonstrated their collective superiority over other nations. For example, the opening chapter of 'British Dick and Sam the Yank', set at a British naval college, sees the American hero being beaten by a Russian boy while French, Spanish and German youths hold him down. "Yes, by gosh, do what you will, Paul Kirschhoff, and you other furrin cowards, I will say it again: England and America will whip the whole world! [...] Hurrah for the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, and confusion to all foreigners!" announces Sam defiantly. Soon, an English boy, Dick, comes to his rescue, and together they defeat their foes. "You shall

⁶⁵ W. L. Arnstein, 'Queen Victoria and the United States', in F. M. Leventhal and R. Quinault, eds. *Anglo-American Attitudes: from Revolution to Partnership* (Aldershot, 2000), p.92; J. L. Bronstein, 'From the Land of Liberty to Land Monopoly: the United States in a Chartist Context', in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts, eds. *The Chartist Legacy* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp.147-70; J. Epstein, "'America' in the Victorian Cultural Imagination', in *Anglo-American Attitudes*, pp.108, 113-16; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p.354; F. Thistlethwaite, *The Anglo-American Connection in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1959), pp.39-75.

⁶⁶ R. Boston, *British Chartists in America, 1839-1900* (Manchester, 1971).

⁶⁷ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.353-58.

⁶⁸ Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature*, p.435; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.354-55.

never acquire the quality that has made England great”, announces Dick, “for that quality is pluck, which has never yet been found in any of your nations. [...] I reckon John Bull can do more than boast, [...] and when the States backs him up he is doubly strong.”⁶⁹ Similar stories could be found in all of Brett’s publications. For example, ‘John and Jonathan, or, an English and an American Boy Against the World’ appeared in volume thirteen of *Young Men of Great Britain*.

This pro-American sentiment echoed throughout a variety of articles and features. For example, ‘Young England and Young America: a Duologue’ (vol.15) featured a rhyming interchange between Young John Bull, flying the Union Jack, and Young America, Jonathan, flying the Stars and Stripes. The two boys enter into a lengthy conversation of mutual praise and gratitude. As they depart they shake hands, cementing their camaraderie.⁷⁰ Another feature, ‘Scenes from American History’, named Americans as “cousins” and “kinsmen” of the British. “They have risen to greatness with unparalleled rapidity”, wrote the author, “and we have no doubt that the rulers who now hold the destiny of the country in their hands will devote themselves to the consolidation and strengthening of the gigantic edifice their forefathers founded. In which we, and doubtless all our readers, wish them success, peace, and prosperity.”⁷¹

In accordance with the doctrines of Anglo-Saxonism, Americans were seen to share praiseworthy characteristics with the British. Consequently, it was inappropriate for a British hero to adventure in America in the same manner as he would in either the white or non-white dominions. Such adventuring, thick with connotations of superiority and conquest, would be demeaning to Britain’s closest ally. Therefore, American stories commonly featured Americans themselves as heroes. Their intrepidity and pluck could be every bit as strong as a Briton’s. Most notably, *BOE* was the first English paper to carry the adventures of Buffalo Bill, one of the greatest American heroes, beginning with ‘Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men’ (vol.7), a story first published in America in *The New York*

⁶⁹ *BOE*, Vol.66, No.1692, 21 April 1899, p.354.

⁷⁰ *BOE*, Vol.15, No.369, 6 December 1873, p.16.

⁷¹ *BOE*, Vol.23, No.576, 30 November 1977, pp.20-21.

I expostulated, threatened to serve me the same.

Now, I was determined not to come to open war at sea, but to leave it till we arrived at Havannah, and then state my intention of going ashore.

We arrived in Havannah, and I stated my intention, upon which the skipper produced a revolver, and threatened to blow my brains out.

He was mad drunk, and the vessel was piloted in by the mate.

Next day I demanded permission to go ashore to see the consul.

This was abruptly refused.

The skipper called me a mutinous scoundrel, and said he would disrate me and send me before the mast; whereupon I told him I would go before the mast, and did not intend to serve as second mate.

He said—

"A good thing too; I was not fit for the post."

Accordingly I took my chest forward in the fore-castle—not, be it understood, with the intention of serving as a seaman, or indeed at all, but to see how the land lay there, and whether I could get any, and if so, how many, to join me in taking a boat by force, and leaving this infernal brig.

I found seven of the crew willing to act with me.

The other seven, however, were not to be trusted.

Most of them were incorrigible ruffians; liked the nature of the voyage—"blackbirding," as they called it, and looked forward to the rich booty on their return in two or three months' time.

In the fore-castle, then, we were eight against seven; that is, including myself.

But there were the captain, the mate, the boatswain, the steward and cook, all powerful, determined men, on the other side, in addition to the rest of the crew.

This brought the odds very heavily against us.

Nevertheless, I laid my plans, and proceeded to unfold them to those who were going into the affair with me.

I proposed to watch an opportunity, and secure the captain and as many as we could when they happened to be in the cabin together.

I hoped thus to cage mate, steward, cook, and Black Jack himself.

This I intended to effect by putting the companion-hatch on and blocking it up by water-casks, etc.

Thus taking them unawares, I judged we could easily overpower the rest.

I would ensure that the long boat should be towing alongside, and we could toss our things in and quietly run her ashore.

"But," objected someone, "it will be mutiny, won't it?"

"Of course it will; but who cares if it were high treason? Not I, for one."

This plan was agreed on, and that very evening fixed for carrying it out.

No sign was given, but all remained orderly and quiet.

Doubtless the captain thought that his fury and his oaths had frightened us into submission.

He was slightly mistaken.

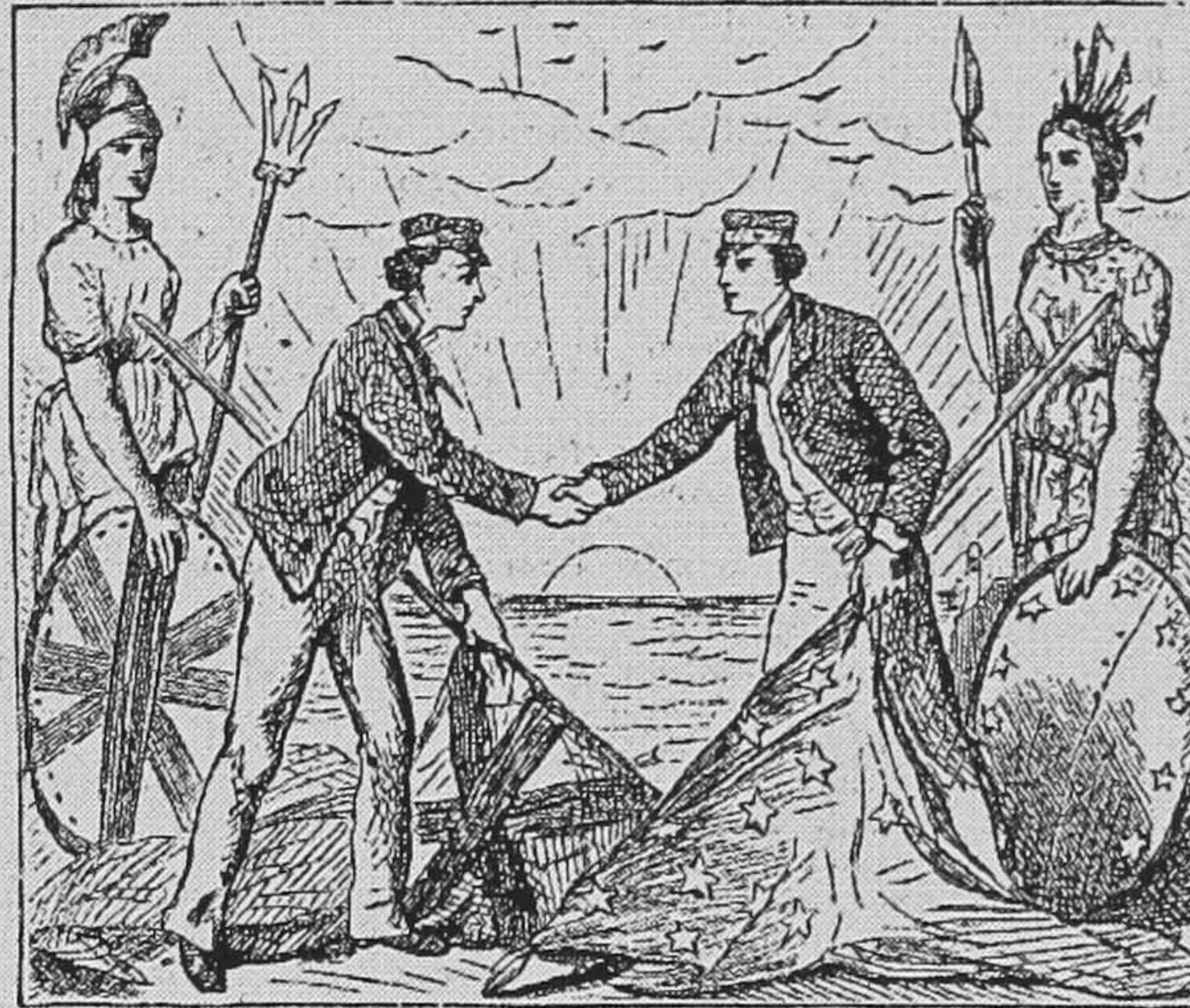
Evening came.

The sun went down, and the anchor watches were set at eight bells.

At nine o'clock (two bells) the attempt was to be made.

I had arranged everything, and stationed my men in readiness.

(To be continued. Commenced in No. 357.)



YOUNG ENGLAND AND YOUNG AMERICA.

A DUOLOGUE.

Enter J. YOUNG JOHN BULL, with the Union Jack.
Enter L. YOUNG AMERICA (JONATHAN), flying the Stars and Stripes.

John. Wal, Master Bull, I calculate that's you?

John. Your calculation, Jonathan, is true.

'Tis I. You see England's eldest son;
A Boy of England called by everyone.

John. Give me your hand. Columbia is my mother.

I'm Young America; take me as brother.

[They shake hands.]

John. That's as it should be; let's no more be nettled,

I think all "claims" are amicably settled.

John. All right, old boss; and now let's liquor up—

"Gin-sling," "Cocktail," or "Lightning"—

name your cup.

John. Thanks, but those drinks to the head do fly.

John. Wal, we're for going a-head, that you can't deny;

But, come, young John, I think you're sober getting.

John. E'en so; 'tis time example to be setting.

John. All right, my boy. Still, liquoring up's my style;

We'll have a glass of negus, and a chat the while.

John. I'm with you there; also a pipe or two.

I s'pose you smoke?

John. And "chaw" a bit, I reckon; here, have a bit.

John. No, that's a practice I don't think is right.

John. You're right about that ar—none can doubt it;

But 'tis our habit—we scarce can do without it.

Let's cut the question.

John. Sorry now I spoke.

John. Oh, that's no matter; let it end in smoke.

John. All right. Let's plant our colours side by side,

And o'er a glass, to other matters glide.

John. That's as it should be. In calm or stormy weather,

Let's hope our flags will always float together.

John. Amen to that!—and there's my hand upon it;

Your friendship, from this hour, I'll reckon on it.

John. Well, that you may, in every latitude

We're both indebted—

John. Eh?

In debts of gratitude.

John. Ha! ha! you had me there—I understand.

When civil war was raging through your land,

With loss and ruin wrecking all things dear,

You still remembered starving Lancashire.

John. You, while Chicago was a raging fire,

Soon promised aid by telegraphic wire.

John. You'd do the same, on that I will not yield.

We wired our promise—thanks to Cyrus Field,

Who did so much to lay that cable down.

John. While you in costs most handsomely came down.

John. No matter that; all obligation's paid

By profits, since the cable has been laid.

Aye, more than profits, we must freely own—

You wired your Stanley'd found our Livingstone.

John. We'll take a chalk for that, though you may freely bet,

That how you welcomed Stanley, we shall not forget.

Since then you have done more, cementing bonds anew—

You saved from bitter fate our hapless Arctic crew.

So, here's your health, and in such acts as these,

Long may both our colours float upon the seas.

John. But now let's change the subject. What say now to sport?

John. Wal, on that subject, perhaps, you give the best report.

You licked us well at cricketing, and won the rowing match;

But in the ocean yacht race, you found it was no catch.

John. Right. And now on policy let us opinions share.

John. I go in for President, and soon I shall be there.

John. At nothing short of Admiral do I intend to stay.

John. Wal, you deserve it fairly—for years you've held the sway.

John. And when your big balloon comes o'er,

'bout which there's such a breeze,

You shall be ruler of the air, while I still rule the seas.

[Exit—shaking hands.]

NOW READY.

OUR GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER

Containing the following Complete Stories:—

THE SPECTRE SCHOOLBOY OF SHADOW-GLIDE HALL, with Full-Page Illustration.

THE COINERS' HAUNT: A TALE OF NEW YEAR'S EVE. Illustrated.

THE GREAT GRIMWOOD GHOST. Illustrated.

THE ADVENTURES OF TWO ANCIENT INNOCENTS. A Comic Sketch, with Ten Illustrations.

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Etc., etc.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL.

A Splendid Original Story, entitled,

THE BRAZEN MASK,

OR,

THE FREE FORESTERS OF DARTMOOR,

Commences in No. 308 of the

YOUNG MEN OF GREAT BRITAIN,

With which is published a

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Fig.9: 'Young England and Young America – a Duologue'

Weekly.⁷² The adventures of *BOE*'s American heroes were nearly identical to those of their British cousins. For example, in 'Dick Rayner, a Tale of American School Life' (vol.21), the lead protagonist attends an American public school indistinguishable from its British equivalent. He then proceeds, like his British counterparts, to adventure around the world, in a sequel entitled 'Dick Rayner in South America' (vol.22). Americans, like Britons, were believed to be superior to other racial groups. Just as Britons conquered and ruled over Africans and Indians, so white Americans suppressed native Americans. Captain Mayne Reid's 'The White Squaw: a Tale of Florida' (vol.4), for example, was set during the Seminole War, and depicted "eight years of bloodshed and horror, in which the white man and the Indian struggled for supremacy".⁷³

Captain Mayne Reid was *BOE*'s premiere author of American stories. He contributed several tales to early volumes, including 'The Fatal Cord: a Tale of Backwoods Retribution' (vol.3), 'The White Squaw', and 'The Yellow Chief' (vol.5). Mayne Reid was a well respected author. Indeed, Brett valued him so highly that he printed his portrait on the front cover of one number of *BOE*, an accolade never repeated for any other author.⁷⁴ Although born in Ireland, Mayne Reid had lived in America for most of his adult life. He had travelled, and fought, extensively within the country, and had accumulated a great body of knowledge which he drew upon within his stories.⁷⁵ His tales were full of realistic and vivid portrayals of American landscapes and peoples, replete with vast plains, prairies, rivers and mountains. His writing style had more in common with American than British authors.⁷⁶ Indeed, his stories were as popular in America as they were in the UK; US boys' publishers Beadle and Adams published 'The White Squaw' and 'The Yellow Chief' in the USA almost simultaneously with their UK appearances, and Frank Leslie paid as much as \$8000 to secure his services.⁷⁷

⁷² *BOE*, Vol.7, No.171, 21 February 1870, p.221.

⁷³ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.92, 21 August 1868, p.221.

⁷⁴ *BOE*, Vol.3, No.61, 18 January 1868, p.129.

⁷⁵ E. Reid, *Captain Mayne Reid, His Life and Adventures* (1900); J. Steele, *Captain Mayne Reid* (Boston, 1978).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.101.

⁷⁷ Reid, *Mayne Reid*, pp.174-75; Steele, *Mayne Reid*, p.106.

Brett himself worked tirelessly to promote Anglo-American bonds. He was convinced that a strong market for his product existed in America. As we have seen, he and Frank Leslie, himself a British expatriate publisher, struck an agreement in 1871 which allowed stories from *BOE* to be published in Leslie's American periodicals. When their agreement ended in acrimony in 1873 Brett went on to publish *BOE* in America himself, under the title of *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youths*. The American version of the paper was distributed by the Willmer and Rogers News Company, later known as the International News Company. It is thought that the paper was a success, and that the 'Jack Harkaway' series proved particularly popular. Each number was virtually unchanged from the British edition, suggesting that Brett believed British and American boys shared common tastes.⁷⁸ Brett was also keen to promote real-life interaction between readers on either side of the Atlantic. He published many letters, sometimes dozens in a single week, from American boys requesting British pen pals. In stark contrast, it is worth mentioning, the *BOP*'s editors were rather snobbish towards America. They expressed distaste for American publishing practices; it was common for high-brow periodicals to do so. Indeed, the educated British middle classes could often be rather standoffish towards the USA; they believed that Americans were boorish and unrefined, lacking English decorum.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The 'Studies in Imperialism' series is correct in its assumption that empire was never a defining factor for *BOE*. Although its boys sometimes adventured in Africa, India, or

⁷⁸ J. Adcock, 'Re. New File Uploaded to BloodsandDimeNovels', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/2762>, accessed 21 June 2004; J. Medcraft, 'The *Boys of England*', *Collector's Miscellany*, 4th Series, No.3 (February 1942), p.7; E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra, 'The Anglo-American Pulp Wars: Edwin Brett vs. Frank Leslie', in L. E. Sullivan and L. C. Schurman, eds. *Pioneers, Passionate Ladies and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks* (Binghamton, 1996), pp.103-17.

⁷⁹ Allen, *Anglo-American Relationship*, pp.129-73; Barnett, *Boys' Weeklies*, p.49; Epstein, 'America', in *Anglo-American Attitudes*, pp.108-13, 118-20; S. Hannabus, 'Information Clinic: the Correspondence Columns of the *Boy's Own Paper* in 1894-95', *Library Review*, 26 (1977), pp.279-85; P. Langford, 'Manners and Character in Anglo-American Perceptions, 1750-1850', in *Anglo-American Attitudes*, pp.76-90.

China, they did not do so as often as their counterparts in middle class periodicals. However, when empire did feature within *BOE* it was markedly more sensitive to current trends than the series has suggested. It is also correct that *BOE*'s attitude towards empire barely changed after 1890. However, the idea that the neglect of empire was responsible for the demise of the paper is questionable. It was probably only one of several causes, perhaps not even amongst the most significant.

Furthermore, *BOE* proves that the extent to which boys' periodicals were preoccupied by empire has been overestimated. Bonds with America, a nation outside the formal empire, were portrayed by *BOE* as stronger than bonds with the formal empire, even the white settler colonies. This reflected the beliefs of the paper's working class readership, whose admiration of the USA contrasted with indifference, even hostility, towards empire. This considered, debate over the how the wider world was portrayed in boys' periodicals should now be extended to consider territories beyond Britain's formal control.

Chapter Four – The Public School Story

Introduction

The public school story was one of the most popular genres of boys' literature in the Victorian era. It was a defining element of *Boys of England*. The paper featured upwards of fifty school stories in its history, from the first volume to the last. Yet despite this, the role which boys' papers played in the development of the school story genre has been widely underestimated.

Until recently, the historiography of public school stories centred around three books: Isabel Quigley's *The Heirs of Tom Brown: the English School Story* (1984), P. W. Musgrave's *From Brown to Bunter: the Life and Death of the School Story* (1985), and Jeffrey Richards' *Happiest Days: the Public Schools in English Fiction* (1988). These historians share a common view of how the school story evolved. It was born in 1857 with Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, closely followed by Dean Farrar's *Eric, or, Little by Little* (1858). There were no further developments of any significance until Talbot Baines Reed began to write for *The Boy's Own Paper* in 1879, producing classic works such as 'The Adventures of a Three Guinea Watch' and 'The Fifth Form at St Dominic's'. Their amiable style, coupled with their commercial success, made them the first 'popular' school stories.¹ All other school stories, until the arrival of Frank Richards' 'Greyfriars' tales, were relatively unimportant. Neither Quigley, Musgrave or Richards has devoted any attention at all to the school stories featured in boys' weeklies like *BOE*.

However, scholars are now beginning to challenge this traditional view. Their studies fall into two main groups. The first focuses upon the hitherto ignored girls' school story genre. Key works include Kimberley Reynolds' *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910* (1990), Beverley Clark's *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tattling Tomboys* (1996), and Sue Sims and Hilary Clare's *Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories* (2000). The second group, the most relevant to this chapter, appraises the wider school story genre, shifting attention away from Hughes,

¹ I. Quigley, *The Heirs of Tom Brown: the English School Story* (Oxford, 1984), p.255; J. Richards, *Happiest Days: the Public Schools in English Fiction* (Manchester, 1988), p.113.

Farrar and Reed. The group is keen to explore the school stories found in boys' weeklies like *BOE*, arguing that these tales were an important element of the wider school story genre. Key studies include Robert Kirkpatrick's *Bullies, Beaks and Flannelled Fools: an Annotated Bibliography of Boys' School Fiction* (1990) and *Encyclopaedia of Boys' School Stories* (2000), John Springhall's 'Boys of Bircham School': the Penny Dreadful Origins of the English School Story' (1991), and Kelly Boyd's *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (2003).

The aim of this chapter is to assess how far *BOE*'s school stories contributed to the development of the wider school story genre in the light of this recent debate. This chapter contends that the paper has been unfairly neglected by historians. For several years its school stories were actually the genre's dominant component. Furthermore, *BOE* did not simply imitate the trends established by major authors such as Hughes, Farrar and Reed. Rather, it played a crucial part in shaping the genre. Moreover, *BOE*'s school stories, led by the seminal 'Jack Harkaway's Schooldays' were socially significant. They engaged closely with the schooling experiences of their working class readership.

1866-1870 – Boys of England's First School Stories

When *BOE* was launched in 1866 the school story genre was dominated by two texts. The first was Thomas Hughes' *TBS*.² The book was an account of the life of a schoolboy under Dr Arnold at Rugby. It focussed closely upon the workings of schoolboy society, such as friendships, factions and rivalries. Crucial to this society was a code of behaviour, which promoted certain actions and frowned upon others. Loyalty, bravery and honesty were all encouraged, whereas 'sneaking', bullying and cheating were abhorred. Famously, the book advocated the idea of 'muscular Christianity'. Tom's fight with a bully, Slogger Williams, undertaken in defence of a smaller boy, demonstrated how physical strength could be used to support moral causes. Hughes, a staunch Christian, believed that this schoolboy code

² Although historians now acknowledge that *TBS* was preceded by at least forty boys' school stories, it is still considered to be the book which began the school story genre, establishing its common themes, plots and characters: see R. J. Kirkpatrick, *Bullies, Beaks and Flannelled Fools: an Annotated Bibliography of Boys' School Fiction* (1990), p.1.

was an excellent form of moral socialisation. By following the code, Tom Brown matures successfully into an admirable grown man. Hughes hoped his readers would follow Tom's example. Yet despite its moralistic content, *TBS* was often lighthearted. It revelled in many of the more enjoyable and leisurely aspects of school life.³

The second major school story which dominated the genre was Farrar's *Eric*. Although *Eric*, like *TBS*, was a thoroughly Christian book, Farrar's approach was more heavy-handed than Hughes'. The story recounted the fall of a schoolboy into bad habits and vice, and his eventual death. Farrar's book was strongly influenced by the didactic tradition of children's literature; it was a bleak moral sermon, and was much less optimistic than *TBS*.⁴

Although Hughes' *TBS* received the most acclaim, from boys and from the press, both books proved popular. Yet despite their success, others writers were slow to contribute to the new genre. Only a handful of school stories appeared in their wake. Those which did included W. H. G. Kingston's *Digby Heathcote, or, the Early Days of a Country Gentleman's Son and Heir* (1860) and *Ernest Bracebridge* (1860), and *Schoolboy Honour: a Tale of Halminister College* (1861) by the Rev. Henry Cadwalller Adams. Although these books borrowed many elements of *TBS* and *Eric* they failed to arouse much interest.⁵

Thus it was a sparse genre, still dominated by two decade-old novels, that *BOE* began to contribute to in 1866. *BOE*'s first school story was Vane St. John's 'Who Shall Be Leader? The Story of Two Boy's Lives', which commenced in the very first number. However, only the first few chapters of the tale were set within school. *BOE*'s first story set entirely in a school was 'The Captain of the School' by W. Thompson Townsend, which commenced in volume two. Others soon followed, such as Townsend's 'Unlucky Bob, or,

³ T. Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857); P. W. Musgrave, *From Brown to Bunter: the Life and Death of the School Story* (1985), pp.47-82; Quigley, *Tom Brown*, pp.42-76; Richards, *Happiest Days*, pp.23-69.

⁴ F. W. Farrar, *Eric, or, Little by Little: a Tale of Roslyn School, with an Introduction by John Rowe Townsend* (1971); Musgrave, *Brown to Bunter*, pp.47-82; Quigley, *Tom Brown*, pp.42-76; Richards, *Happiest Days*, pp.70-102.

⁵ Musgrave, *Brown to Bunter*, pp.92-99; Kirkpatrick, *Bullies*, pp.5-18.

Our Boys at School' (vol.4), 'The King of the School, or, Who Will Win?' (vol.7) by John Cecil Stagg, and 'At School, or, Our English Boys in France' (vol.8) by Percy B. St. John.⁶

TBS was a greater influence upon *BOE*'s earliest school stories than *Eric*. Farrar's story was too didactic for *BOE* to imitate to any great extent. All of the earliest school stories published in *BOE* borrowed elements from Hughes' book. In particular, *BOE* emulated Hughes' schoolboy code of behaviour. 'Sneaking' was despised, bullying abhorred, and the use of 'cribs' frowned upon, whereas honesty, bravery and courage were admired. Although each story usually featured several heroic boys, a single boy was always held up as an exemplar of this code. For example, in 'The King of the School' boy hero Frank Egerton is lauded as "a wise and strong king – wise in encouraging those younger than himself to act in an honest, brave and manly manner – strong to protect them from bullies and evil associates".⁷ Rupert Ingleby, in 'The Captain of the School', is likewise described as "a brave-hearted boy who scorns and detests a mean or shabby action, [...] who, up to his present history, we have seen exercise such patient bearing, manly courage, and protection of the weak against the tyranny and oppression of the strong".⁸

Because Tom Brown's fight with Slogger Williams had been such a defining moment in Hughes' novel, and in Tom's moral development, *BOE* sought to emulate the fight at every opportunity. Usually, *BOE*'s fights featured the hero, a new boy, conquering a previously undefeated bully. For example, in 'The King of the School' Frank Egerton battles and triumphs over the school bully, Baynes. Frank's motto is: "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just."⁹ Similarly, in 'Who Shall be Leader?', Harry Graham defeats Harrison, his senior by some years. "Harrison could not contrive to equal, in his outward courage", exclaims the narrator, "the calm, pale boy who, though his junior, was there to give blow for blow."¹⁰

⁶ Further insightful commentary regarding these tales can be found in T. Hopperton, 'Digging Around the Roots', *Story Paper Collector*, Vol.4, No.79-82 (1962), pp.51-56, 71-76, 91-97, 114-20.

⁷ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.7, No.179, 18 April 1870, p.348.

⁸ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.35, 3 August 1867, p.163.

⁹ *BOE*, Vol.7, No.167, 24 January 1870, p.145.

¹⁰ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.2, 4 December 1866, p.22.

In many ways *TBS* had been as much about Dr Arnold as it had been about Tom himself, so much so that the closing chapters saw Tom, now a man, weeping over Arnold's tomb. Hughes depicted Arnold as Rugby's strongest proponent of the schoolboy code. Accordingly, the wise and pious headmaster was frequently replicated in *BOE*. Like Arnold, each master was more concerned about his boys' moral education than their intellectual and sporting prowess.¹¹ They were kindly and encouraging, and only wielded the cane when absolutely necessary. Dr Royston in 'Unlucky Bob' is one example of an Arnoldian headmaster:

Firm and unbending in his character, the doctor had long been known and highly respected in the position which he held. He mingles with his determination to have things well and properly done so much kindness of manner, that his pupils, when they began to understand the character of the 'man', redoubled their exertions to please and gain approval. He was an enemy to all cant, lying and hypocrisy in a boy; but he was as ready to reward the truth-teller as he was to punish any one whom he found to be guilty of a wilful lie.¹²

These headmasters were revered and respected for their educational methods. However, like Arnold, they believed in allowing schoolboys to manage their own affairs wherever possible. In many cases, therefore, they played only a minor role in the narrative.

There is no doubt that *BOE*'s authors imitated many elements of *TBS* to capitalise on the popularity of Hughes' book. However, *TBS* was too moralistic to be copied to the letter. It was scattered with passages of preaching which would have sat uneasily within *BOE*. Therefore, *BOE*'s authors imitated *TBS* just enough to make their stories appeal to boys who had read and enjoyed Hughes' famous tale. In many other respects *BOE*'s school stories actually had more in common with traditional boys' periodical literature than they did with *TBS*. Indeed, many of the sensational and melodramatic elements of *BOE*'s stories would have been unthinkable in Hughes' work.

For example, whilst *TBS* featured no female characters they were common in *BOE*'s school stories. Moreover, females usually occupied a romantic role. Virtually every schoolboy hero had a sweetheart. In 'Who Shall Be Leader?' Harry Graham's sweetheart is Lucy Western. In 'The King of the School' Frank Egerton falls in love with Kate Conway,

¹¹ Quigley, *Tom Brown*, p.61.

¹² *BOE*, Vol.4, No.87, 17 July 1868, p.132.

a milliner, and marries her in the closing chapter; his schoolfellow, the Earl of Pembroke, marries her sister, Lizzie. Frank Meredith, in 'At School', ends the story married to a princess. 'Unlucky Bob' featured the theme of romance most strongly. The tale is set in two adjacent schools, one for boys and the other for girls. After one holiday, when several boys and girls are seen walking hand in hand, the two schools are strictly segregated. A wall separates the schools; however, Dr Royston's boys frequently scale it, undeterred by the threat of chastisement. The two boy heroes, Charlie Lightly and Philip Aubrey, each have a romantic interest at the girls' school, namely Bertha Sharpe and Charlotte Chatterbox.

Hughes portrayed Rugby as microcosmic, self-contained society. He focussed closely upon schoolboy interaction, and rarely took the narrative beyond the school gates. Conversely, in early *BOE* school stories much of the action actually took place outside of school. This allowed for a greater variety of plot. Many stories featured elaborate sub-plots involving crime, mystery and intrigue. For example, in 'The Captain of the School', hero Rupert Ingleby and his friend Ned are abducted by a gang intent upon stealing his aunt's fortune. The events which follow, which see the two boys escape from a burning house, take up several chapters of the story. Similarly, in 'Unlucky Bob' the main plot concerning a rivalry between two boys, Aubrey and Wilder, runs in parallel with a sub-plot of rivalry between their fathers; whole chapters are dedicated to the lawyers Ferrett and Weazle, through whom Aubrey's father communicates whilst in hiding disguised as a gipsy. In 'The King of the School' the narrator spends a great deal of time describing an ongoing dispute between 'town and gown'. In one chapter an enormous fight takes place between the Lexicon College boys and young local men. Sticks, bats and missiles are used by both sides. The police are called in to break up the riot, and the boys are fined four shillings each by the magistrate.

Unlike Tom Brown, who was born into an affluent family, the heroes of *BOE*'s school stories were often orphans. Only at the end of each story were they eventually revealed to be of noble parentage. This was a common plot in popular Victorian melodrama. In 'Who Shall Be Leader?' Harry Graham is abandoned as a baby and raised by a foster family. The concluding chapter reveals Harry's father to be Sir Percival Glanville. Similarly, Rupert Ingleby in 'The Captain of the School' transpires to be heir to the Earl of Denmore, and Philip Aubrey in 'Unlucky Bob' finds he is the son of the wealthy

owner of Wildgorse Hall. The related issue of ‘stolen paternity’, the theft of a deceased father’s legacy, also appears in some stories. In ‘At School’, Frank Meredith falls victim to his uncle’s plot to steal the inheritance left to him by his father. The scheme is foiled when Frank’s father is found to be alive. ‘The King of the School’ features a similar episode, in which Baynes’ father attempts to swindle Frank Egerton of his deceased father’s estate. The plot is finally exposed when Baynes senior confesses to the crime on his death bed.¹³

Feats of heroism were also more common in *BOE*’s school stories than they had been in *TBS*. For example, Frank Egerton in ‘The King of the School’ saves Kate Conway and her father from drowning in a river, and later saves her again when she is kidnapped by Baynes. Many of these fearless rescues closely resembled those found in boys’ adventure stories. ‘Unlucky Bob’ featured the most daring, and absurd, rescue of the era. The story sees Philip Aubrey protect Minnie Lawson, a lame girl, from an escaped Bengal tiger – in the middle of the English countryside.

BOE’s earliest school stories were a successful fusion of *TBS*, the archetypal traditional school story, and the new, exciting fiction found in boys’ weeklies. The popularity of the paper’s school stories helped *BOE* to attract 150,000 readers per week. This was a much higher sale than any hardcover school story could hope to achieve; indeed, even *TBS* had only sold 28,000 copies by 1862.¹⁴ *BOE*’s only true competitors were the Emmett bothers, who had recently published some fine school stories in their own high-circulation weekly papers. Foremost amongst these was George Emmett’s ‘The Boys of Bircham School’, which had been serialised in *The Young Englishman’s Journal* in 1867. However, *BOE*’s stories were only one sub-genre of an emerging wider genre of school stories. None of them had any significant effect upon the wider genre. They were certainly less influential than *TBS* and *Eric*. They were more important in that they paved the way for the publication of ‘JHS’ in 1870. It was this story which would prove to be *BOE*’s most important contribution to the evolution of the school story genre.

¹³ The issue of ‘stolen paternity’ in Vane St. John’s *BOE* story ‘Wait till I’m a Man! or, the Play Ground and the Battle Field’ (vol.2) is explored in K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys’ Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp.51-52.

¹⁴ W. H. G. Armytage and E. C. Mack, *Thomas Hughes: the Life of the Author of Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1952) pp.294-95, cited in Richards, *Happiest Days*, p.103.

1870 – ‘Jack Harkaway’s Schooldays’

In 1870 Brett enlisted *BOE* author Bracebridge Hemyng to pen a school story to counter the much-acclaimed ‘Tom Wildrake’s Schooldays’, which had recently been serialised in the Emmett brothers’ *Sons of Britannia*.¹⁵ Accordingly, volumes ten and eleven of *BOE* saw the serialisation of Hemyng’s ‘JHS’. The story, set in a small public school named Pomona House, followed the fortunes of Jack Harkaway, sent to Pomona by his adoptive parents. ‘JHS’ was nothing less than revolutionary. It broke away from the conventions established by *TBS* and *Eric*. It offered boys an energetic school story full of high spirits and rebellion, with Harkaway as the very antithesis of Hughes’ hero.¹⁶

Whereas Tom Brown had been the exemplar of the schoolboy code of behaviour, Harkaway defied the code whenever possible. For example, in an opening scene a small boy, Fisher, is teased for praying before bed, just as Arthur had been teased for praying in *TBS*. Jack, like Tom, is angered, and seeks to defend the boy. However, whilst Tom Brown set an example by quietly joining Arthur in prayer, Jack behaves in an entirely different manner: “Jumping over his bed, he came face to face with the bully, and, without any further parley, dealt him a blow in the face, that sent him reeling backwards several yards.”¹⁷

Whereas *TBS* had promoted conformity, ‘JHS’ glorified rebellion. Upon arriving at Pomona House Jack makes little effort to get on with his schoolfellows. “I generally contrive to do pretty well as I like wherever I am”, he remarks coolly to his associate, Harvey.¹⁸ He deliberately dodges the schoolboy initiation rites, which are traditionally taken with good grace, and in doing so makes an instant enemy of the school bully,

¹⁵ F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21), 1 February 1919; J. O. Springhall, ‘Disseminating Impure Literature’: the ‘Penny Dreadful’ Publishing Business Since 1860’, *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3 (1994), p.87.

¹⁶ P. A. Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature in an Age of Empire* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Manchester, 1975), p.60.

¹⁷ *BOE* (reissue), Vol.10, No.251, 4 February 1879 (reissue date), p.227.

¹⁸ *BOE* (reissue), Vol.10, No.250, 28 January 1879 (reissue date), p.211.

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BOYS OF ENGLAND

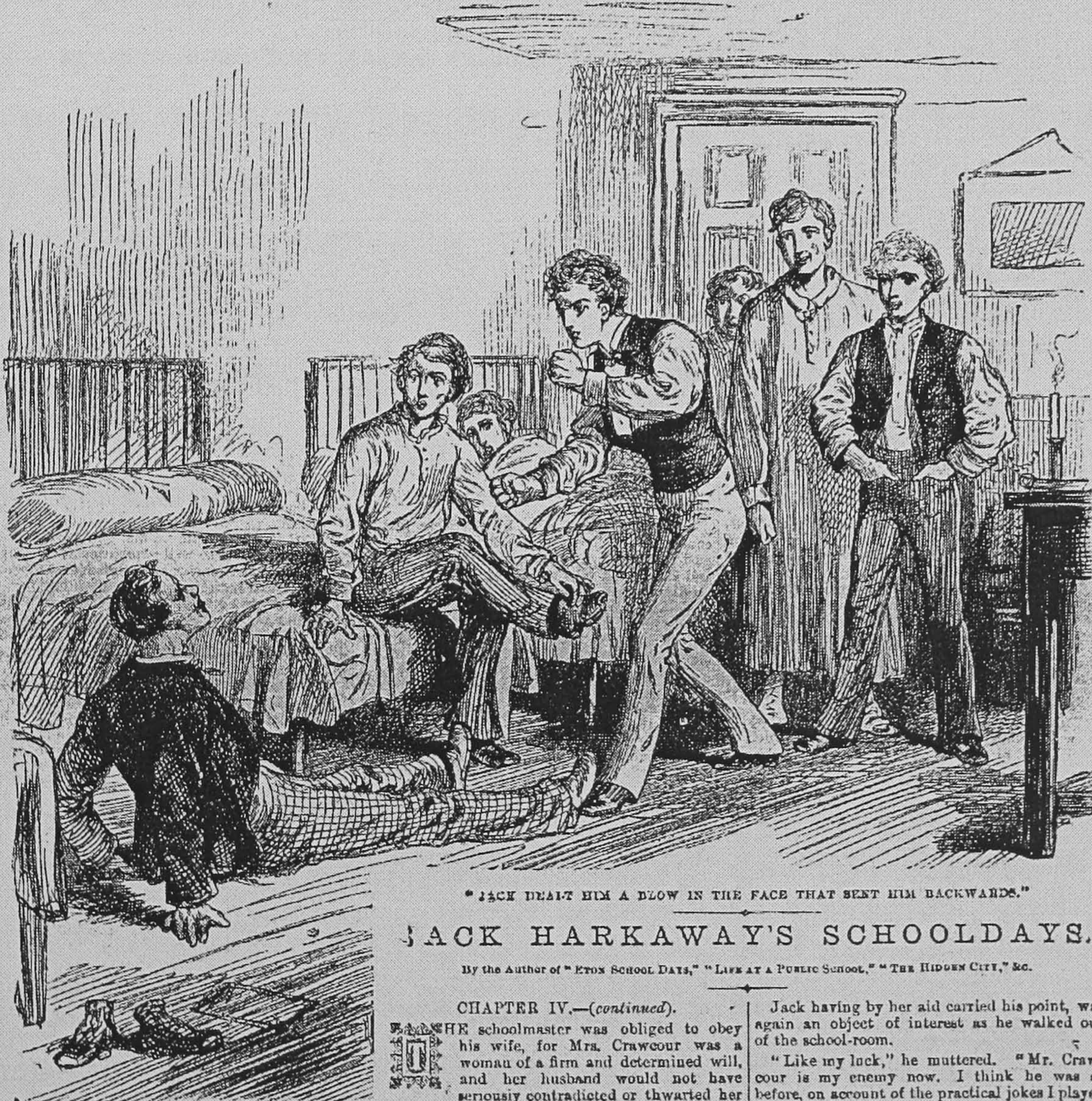
A Journal of Sport, Travel, Fun and Instruction
FOR THE YOUTHS OF ALL NATIONS

SUBSCRIBED TO BY H.R.H. PRINCE ARTHUR, THE PRINCE IMPERIAL OF FRANCE, AND COUNT WILLIAM BERNSTORFF.

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EDITED BY EDWIN J. BRETT.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



" JACK DEALT HIM A BLOW IN THE FACE THAT SENT HIM BACKWARDS."

JACK HARKAWAY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

By the Author of "ETON SCHOOL DAYS," "LIFE AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL," "THE HIDDEN CITY," &c.

CHAPTER IV.—(continued).

THE schoolmaster was obliged to obey his wife, for Mrs. Crawcour was a woman of a firm and determined will, and her husband would not have seriously contradicted or thwarted her in the world.

Jack having by her aid carried his point, was again an object of interest as he walked out of the school-room.

"Like my luck," he muttered. "Mr. Crawcour is my enemy now. I think he was so before, on account of the practical jokes I played him; but there is no mistake about it now. It

For the week ending, FEBRUARY 4, 1879.

Fig.10: 'Jack Harkaway's Schooldays'

Hunston. He often avoids the company of other schoolboys, preferring to wander alone. He finds difficulty in being accepted by his fellows, and is taunted for being an orphan. Jack shuns the regulations of the school, sometimes spectacularly; he drinks the headmaster's wine cellar dry, and later sets the school on fire.

Jack's rebellious spirit manifests itself most strongly through his pranks and practical jokes, which he plays at every possible opportunity. These tricks would have been unthinkable in *TBS*; Hughes only ever used a moderate amount of humour to temper his preaching. The first chapter of the story sees Jack shearing, or 'half-poodling', his adoptive mother's cat, and stuffing his adoptive father's pipe with explosive powder. In chapter two Jack shifts his attention towards the headmaster of Pomona House, Mr Crawcour. Jack places a packing needle on his seat, swaps his handkerchief for a blackened lamp-rag, shakes his hand with a tarred glove, puts black beetles in his soup, fills his hat with flour, and pins a sign reading 'please kick me' to the rear of his jacket. Nor do the other masters escape Jack's antics. He deliberately moves Mr Mole's pigeon loft ladder, causing him to fall into liquid manure. He also convinces Mr Pumbleton to throw stones at Mr Crawcour's greenhouse, on the pretence that Mrs Crawcour's escaped parrot is hiding in a nearby tree; Pumbleton subsequently falls through the glass and lands painfully astride a wooden post. In another incident Jack puts his ventriloquism skills into practice. He throws his voice around the classroom, making Mr Mole appear to taunt the French master, M. Bolivant, with shouts of 'frogs!' and 'Waterloo!' Jack's mischief is sometimes directed towards his fellow pupils. On one occasion he and his friends empty the school fish tank into the bed of Maple, a 'sneak', and force him to eat a soot-covered carp. Later, after a scuffle with pupils from a rival school, Dr Begbie's Oxford House, Jack seizes one of their number, cuts off his coat tails and paints him black and blue.

Jack's arrogance makes him many enemies. Accordingly, he fights more frequently than Tom Brown. Indeed, Jack is highly aggressive, and relishes the prospect of combat. He has several bouts with the school bully, Hunston, and later with his brother, Hunston senior. However, the fight scenes in 'JHS' share little in common with Tom Brown's epic clash against Slogger Williams. Jack knowingly defies the laws of fair fighting, a crucial part of the schoolboy code of behaviour. Jack usually fights because his anger is raised. Indeed,

only one of his fights is in defence of a smaller boy. Furthermore, he resorts to using disallowed moves:

Jack knew the value of the first blow and, seeing that his enemy meant business, he dashed out his right and rolled Hunston over like an ox. He was standing over him in an instant and as soon as he got to his knees, hit him again. "You coward!" said Hunston, lying on the grass. "It isn't fair to hit a man when he's down." "I don't mean to fight fairly with you", Jack rejoined. "I shall take every advantage I can." Hunston, senior, tried to get up; but he was knocked over again, his nose and mouth streaming with blood. In fact, Jack had it all his own way. He was not fighting fairly, and he knew it; but with such an opponent, he thought any means justifiable.¹⁹

'JHS' also marked a sharp departure from the traditional representation of the public school headmaster. Unlike Dr Arnold, and his many clones, the masters of Pomona house are not revered by the pupils of the school, least of all Jack Harkaway. In fact, Mr Crawcour and he are constantly at war. Crawcour frequently reprimands Jack for his unruly behaviour. His methods of punishment are often cruel, not to say sadistic; on one occasion, Jack is hung from a wall and beaten senseless. Not to be outdone, Jack later inspires a rebellion against the masters. He and his fellows stage a 'barring out', barricading themselves into the schoolroom, after Jack is forced to wear heavy iron chains as punishment for running away from Pomona. The revolt is led by Collinson, the 'cock' of the school. The boys defy the masters for several days, and even tar and feather Mr Mole when he breaches their fortifications. The episode is only brought to an end by the tragic death of a schoolfellow, who is crushed underneath a heavy press.

'JHS' also differed from *TBS* because it amplified many of the more melodramatic elements of early *BOE* school stories. In particular, the story features a strong romantic theme. Jack's sweetheart is Emily, the daughter of his adoptive parents. Whereas *TBS* stressed the importance of schoolboy bonds, Jack's loyalty towards Emily is stronger than his loyalty towards any of his schoolfellows. In one episode Jack is found to be in possession of a sum of money, and is accused of stealing it from another boy. He refuses to admit that it was sent by Emily for fear of putting her in trouble with her father, and chooses to take a public birching instead. Eventually, Jack discovers that he has been set up

¹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.11, No.265, 9 December 1871, p.39.

by Hunston senior, who he fights and defeats. However, Emily is not Jack's only romantic interest. He also declares his love for Mrs Crawcour, the wife of the headmaster:

She put her arms around his neck, and kissed his forehead, while she smoothed back his curly chestnut hair from his temples. "How would you like to have me for a mamma?" she asked. "I would rather have you for – for –". He hesitated. "Well, dear, for what? Speak out", said Mrs Crawcour, in an encouraging tone. "I was going to say for a sweetheart, ma'am." "But you have one. That little girl who sent you the money, is your sweetheart, is she not?" "I like her very much, but not nearly so much as I do you, ma'am. You are so lovely", replied Jack. "Am I lovely?" Mrs Crawcour repeated, looking at her handsome and majestic figure in the glass with some satisfaction. The hot blood mounted in Jack's face and made it burn. "How you blush. Why do you blush so?" she asked. "I don't know ma'am. It's because I'm talking to you, I think." "But you can't have me for a sweetheart. I am your schoolmistress, and your master's wife." "Still I may love you quietly and at a distance, ma'am. You can not help people loving you."²⁰

It has been suggested that Brett asked Hemyng to curtail the blossoming romance for fear of causing offence.²¹

Jack Harkaway, like many of his boys' weekly predecessors, is an orphan. In an elaborate twist in the story Jack makes the acquaintance of Lady Mordenfield, mother of the young Lord Mordenfield, a fellow pupil at Pomona House, after foiling a burglary at her estate. Soon, it transpires that Lady Mordenfield's first husband, Mr Bedington, thought dead in India, is yet alive. Bedington urges Lady Mordenfield to help him trace their son, who was given up for adoption. The trail leads to Jack's adoptive parents, and Jack is revealed to be the missing son. Jack embraces his new identity, and becomes known as Jack Harkaway Bedington.

Jack is also heroic. He dives into a river to save Fisher after his boat capsizes. Later, he bravely foils a burglary at the estate of Lady Mordenfield. Jack's final act of bravery comes in the somewhat absurd closing chapters of the story. He convinces the owner of a travelling show to bring several large animals to the school. As a prank, Jack releases them from their cages. The escaped lions, elephants, snakes and bears proceed to cause havoc around the school grounds. Jack rescues Mrs Crawcour from a marauding tiger by

²⁰ *BOE*, Vol.11, No.267, 23 December 1871, p.72.

²¹ Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *EcHR*, XLVII, 3, p.87.

beheading it with a razor; he then raises the severed head aloft in triumph, whilst basking in the delight of his schoolfellows.

Whereas previous *BOE* school stories all owed a debt to *TBS*, ‘JHS’ was the first school story to announce its autonomy from the mould set by Hughes in 1857. It subverted many of the ideas of *TBS*, and fully embraced boys’ weekly plots and themes. Jack’s rebellious spirit was, on the whole, what separated the story from *TBS*. Unlike Tom, who matures throughout his time at school, Jack continues to brawl and play pranks. He follows his own course and refuses to be shaped by disciplinary measures – or the schoolboy code. The story proved immensely popular. It has been credited with raising the sale of the paper from 150,000 to 250,000.²² Thus, although Talbot Baines Reed has been attributed with the invention of “popular school fiction”, ‘JHS’ can be considered the first truly popular school story.²³

1870-1879 – Jack Harkaway’s Successors

Brett was keen to capitalise upon the success of ‘JHS’. He published several sequels, mostly written by Hemyng, between 1872 and 1876. Most of these saw Jack adventuring around the world. The popularity of the ‘Harkaway’ series inspired Brett to commission a flurry of imitations throughout the 1870s. These stories fell into two groups, which shall be known here as the ‘scapecrime schoolboy’ tale and the ‘roving schoolboy’ tale.

Scapecrime schoolboy tales were defined by schoolboy hi-jinx and rebellion. Their authors took Hemyng’s formula and exaggerated its most sensational elements. This led to absurdly comical, outrageously violent and highly anarchic storylines. Titles included ‘A Split in the School, or, Undaunted by Perils’ (vol.13), ‘Schoolboys of Old London, or, Fun, Fighting and Learning,’ (vol.14), ‘Rob Rodney, a Story of School and the Sea’ (vol.14), ‘Wildcap Will, or, Schoolboy, Lover and Sailor’ (vol.16), ‘Tom Floremall’s Schooldays’ (vol.19) by Robert Justin Lambe, ‘Rattlin’ Tom’s Schooldays’ (vol.23) and ‘Young Pickwick’s Schooldays’ (vol.26).

²² F. Jay, ‘The Personalities of the Penny Dreadful’, *Vanity Fair*, Vol.2, No.20 (March 1926) pp.121-22.

²³ Quigley, *Tom Brown*, p.255.

Each of these stories featured a lead character, the scapegrace. He, though usually a “handsome, active, and better than that, a thoroughly good natured, generous, genuine English boy”, was inclined towards “larkish propensities”.²⁴ Their scholarly and athletic talents were always obscured by their predisposition for fun and mischief. The boisterous activities of the scapegrace schoolboys made Jack Harkaway seem subdued in comparison. For example, ‘A Split in the School’ opens with a chaotic scene in the school kitchen. The boys, led by Wraxhall, assist the cook in her duties, but are only doing so as an excuse to fight. They do battle using toasting forks and carrots as weapons and pans as armour. The narrator remarks that “really anything more grotesque could not possibly be conceived”.²⁵

Much of the mischief of the scapegrace and his schoolfellows was directed against the masters. In ‘A Split in the School’ the headmaster, Mr Turkington, is tricked into eating a red hot curry, which makes him scream and run about the dining hall. ‘Wildcap Will’ sees Will and his friend Jerry shake bottles of fizzy drink and fire the contents, including corks, at their teacher. Later, Will’s pet owl attacks the German master, who is also the victim of a gunpowder-laced pipe. Tom Floremall replaces his headmaster’s snuff with cayenne pepper, douses him with ink, and, when finished, throws the empty glass bottle at him. Missiles are also thrown at the headmaster in ‘Rattlin’ Tom’s Schooldays’, although a heavy dictionary is Tom’s weapon of choice.

The masters of the scapegrace stories were presented as the very antithesis of Dr Arnold. Each was overly strict, unjust, and sadistic. For example, in ‘A Split in the School’ the boys nickname their academy ‘Hoistem School’, “because of the birch being in constant requisition for the slightest offence, and, at times, no offence at all”.²⁶ The boys and the master are in a permanent state of attrition. “Anything that caused the master or ushers annoyance gave the boy’s pleasure”, remarks the narrator. “Not a particle of sympathy was felt by either party for the other. The master, assisted by his subordinates, determined to

²⁴ *BOE*, Vol.16, No.413, 10 October 1874, p.290.

²⁵ *BOE*, Vol.13, No.316, 30 November 1872, p.2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*



BOYS OF ENGLAND
A Young Gentleman's Journal
OF SPORT, TRAVEL, FUN AND INSTRUCTION.
SUBSCRIBED TO BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE ARTHUR.

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A SPLIT IN THE SCHOOL.



NOVEMBER 30, 1872.

Fig.11: 'A Split in the School, or, Undaunted by Perils'

rule by the influence of fear, instead of by love and kindness.”²⁷ The appropriately-named Dr Jonas Spankster in ‘Wildcap Will’, Mr Lashem in ‘Tom Floremall’s Schooldays’, and Mr Samuel Crusher in ‘Rattlin’ Tom’s Schooldays’, are all of the same disposition.

With such high spirited boys, and such uncompromising masters, conflict was never far away. Indeed, many scapegrace stories were based around full-scale school rebellions. The trigger for each rebellion was usually an undeserved or excessive caning. For example, in ‘A Split in the School’ Mr Turkington canes a boy violently across the head and shoulders. The school is soon engulfed in anarchy. Turkington is bound and gagged, whilst the rest of the masters and domestic servants are locked in their rooms. The masters can do nothing to quell the riot. The police are called in, but are repelled by a peashooter barrage. The standoff ends with Wraxhall, the ringleader, and Turkington, engaged in a thrilling pistol shootout. Tom Floremall inspires a similar rebellion when he and his friend Jack are severely caned by Mr Lashem, who is fond of using elaborate whips to administer punishment.

The second group of stories, roving schoolboy tales, were imitations of the adventure sequels which followed ‘JHS’. As Jack left school to travel the world, so other schoolboys were inspired to follow in his footsteps. These boys boldly wandered the globe, often in outrageous and absurd circumstances. Their travels were perilous, violent and bloody, yet the heroic schoolboys always triumphed in the final chapters.

Roving schoolboy tales were not all identical. They came in three main forms. Firstly, there were scapegrace school stories containing a roving element. Their boy heroes first attended school, where they behaved like typical scapegraces, and subsequently embarked upon their travels. Many we have already encountered: ‘A Split in the School’, ‘Wildcap Will’ and ‘Rob Rodney’. These boys were prompted to travel for various reasons. Some simply finished school and chose to adventure before attending university. Others were forced to leave school early; Rob Rodney, for example, runs away to sea after absconding through a schoolroom window in escape of an unjust flogging. Many left school to seek their fortune, or to embark upon a specific quest. For example, Wraxhall and his companions in ‘A Split in the School’ travel to India in search of hidden treasure.

²⁷ Ibid.

The second type of roving schoolboy tales were self-contained adventure sequels to earlier school stories. ‘Tom Floremall in Search of His Father’ (vol.22) by Robert Justin Lambe, ‘Dick Rayner in South America’ (vol.22) and ‘Young Pickwick and Diddler’s Adventures Abroad’ (vol.28) are three examples of this type of tale. Again, each former schoolboy was compelled to travel to exotic locations for a variety of purposes, such as family loyalties, military service, or wealth and riches. Some were accompanied by their former schoolboy companions, just as Jack Harkaway had been accompanied on his adventures by his friend Harvey.

The third type of roving schoolboy story featured travelling schools. Boys, accompanied by their masters, learned and travelled simultaneously. Titles included ‘The Travelling Schoolboys’ (vol.22), ‘Nautical Nat, or, the Travelling Schoolboys Afloat’ (vol.23) and ‘Jack of Greenwich, or, the School and the Sea’ (vol.26). The travelling school was a quite implausible and impractical concept; it must have been devised purely for convenience of plot.

Both the scapegrace schoolboy story and the roving schoolboy story unashamedly imitated the ‘Jack Harkaway’ series. They each took a single element of the formula and exaggerated it to its extremes. With their anarchic plots and implausible storylines, both the scapegrace and roving schoolboy stories offered undiluted excitement and adventure. The typical hero showed even less concern for the schoolboy code of behaviour than even Jack Harkaway. From 1870 onwards it was these Harkaway-inspired sensational school stories which were by far the most thriving component of the entire school story genre. In contrast, production of hardcover, moralistic schoolboy fiction, a sub-genre now led by the Rev. H. C. Adams and Ascot R. Hope, was barely growing.²⁸ There can be little doubt that scapegrace and roving schoolboy tales contributed to the popularity of *BOE*, as it maintained its high sale throughout the 1870s. However, they also attracted less welcome attention. Their rebellious boy heroes made *BOE* a prime target for moral criticism. Indeed, although scapegrace and roving schoolboys dominated the 1870s, by the early 1880s they were virtually extinct, their demise brought about by an altogether new type of school story created specifically to counter the alleged immorality of Harkaway and his kind.

²⁸ Kirkpatrick, *Bullies*, pp.5-18.

1879-1882 – Talbot Baines Reed and *The Boy's Own Paper*

The *BOP*, launched in 1879, printed a great many public school stories. The paper's publisher, the Religious Tract Society, admired the public school system for the moral lessons it taught its charges. The RTS believed that public school stories were capable of extending the moral ethos fostered by the schools themselves to ordinary boys who did not have the chance to attend such prestigious institutions.²⁹

The very first number of the *BOP* featured a short school story, 'My First Football Match', on its cover. It was written by author, journalist and typefounder Talbot Baines Reed. In subsequent years Reed wrote prolifically for the *BOP*. He authored many full length school stories, shorter stories set in the fictional Parkhurst School, and articles like 'Boys of English History' and 'Boys We Have Known'.³⁰

Reed's most significant school stories were 'Three Guinea Watch' and 'St Dominic's'. The former, serialised in 1880, was written from the perspective of a timepiece given to hero Charlie Newcome by his father prior to his departure for Randlebury School. The narrative follows Charlie's time at school, and beyond, and his relationship with his wayward contemporary Tom Drift. The tale develops as the watch passes from owner to owner. It eventually returns to Charlie as he fights to suppress the Indian Mutiny. 'St Dominic's', serialised in 1881, is now widely recognised as Reed's magnum opus. It differs from 'Three Guinea Watch' in that it is set entirely in school. The story follows the fortunes of Horace Wraysford and Oliver Greenfield, two of the most promising boys in the fifth form, the arrival of new boy Stephen Greenfield, and the downfall of Edward Loman. These two stories secured Reed the status of Britain's leading author of public school fiction.

Historians have tended to view Reed's work as a fusion of Hughes' *TBS* and Farrar's *Eric*.³¹ This is because Reed's stories have two strands. On the one hand they offer stern moral lessons, like *Eric*. The downfalls of Tom Drift and Edward Loman demonstrate the

²⁹ Only around 0.7 percent of all Victorian boys actually attended public school: see Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature*, pp.222-23.

³⁰ Richards, *Happiest Days*, p.106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.103.

perils of sin and vice. On the other hand, Reed's stories were also lively and optimistic, like *TBS*. Reed detested the undiluted preaching of Farrar. He believed that Christianity should be cheery, and never doom-laden.³² This mixture, historians have argued, proved exceptionally appealing to boy readers.³³

Academics have tended to believe that *TBS* and *Eric* were the only books which influenced Reed's works. They do not believe that the school stories of the 1860s and 1870s, including those published in boys' weeklies, had any effect upon his writings. Consequently, these stories are considered insignificant to the evolution of the school story genre, and have been neglected. Yet in actual fact, Reed's writings were very much influenced by the school stories published in boys' weeklies, particularly *BOE*. Reed had studied them closely before writing 'Three Guinea Watch' and 'St. Dominic's'. We know this because he penned a lengthy tirade against sensational schoolboy fiction for an 1884 edition of the *Leeds Mercury Supplement*:

The 'penny dreadful' lays no claim to literary excellence. As long as the paragraphs are short, the incidents sensational, the conversation high-flown [...], the grammar may be bad, the plot preposterous, the characters wooden, and the anti-climax persistent. Those that appeal chiefly to youth dwell mainly on bloody adventures at home and abroad – detailing generally the heroic exploits of some precocious youth who, after running away from school, breaking several of the commandments, and bringing his parents grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, becomes the captain of a man-of-war or commander of a regiment, in which capacity he slays the enemy single-handed, secures treasures beside which those of Monte Christo are as dross, marries whomsoever he likes (generally a governor's or nobleman's daughter), and finally returns home to shed a tear on the parental grave.³⁴

This article clearly demonstrates that Reed possessed an excellent understanding of all the major facets of the serial school stories pioneered by *BOE*. Reading these stories inspired him not to copy, but to challenge them. Thus, Hughes and Farrar were not Reed's only influences. Rather, the content of his books suggests that he deliberately targeted his material at the very worst excesses of boys' weekly school stories in a bid to undermine their popularity and return the genre to within moral acceptability.

³² S. Morisson, *Talbot Baines Reed: Author, Bibliographer, Typefounder* (Cambridge, 1960), p.65.

³³ Richards, *Happiest Days*, p.103.

³⁴ T. B. Reed, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *Leeds Mercury Supplement*, 16 August 1884, p.1.

Reed's worries centred around the disintegration of the schoolboy code of behaviour, the moral framework of the school. With their morally ambiguous characters like Jack Harkaway, *BOE*-style school stories gave "nothing to distinguish hero from villain, angel from harlot, mountain from sky".³⁵ This explains why Reed was so keen to adopt both the heroes of *TBS* and the fallen boys of *Eric*. Using these two types of boys allowed him to demonstrate clearly the difference between good and bad behaviour. Reed's heroes always act according to strict principle. They are unquestionably honest, loyal and brave. Their conduct is rewarded by success. Conversely, characters who fail to conform to the moral framework of the school, such as Tom Drift and Edward Loman, fare less well. Their lives become problematic and they fall into debt and dishonour.

To make the process of recognising good and bad characters as simple as possible, Reed promoted the idea that moral character was reflected in the physical form. His heroes, like Charlie Newcome, are all extraordinary physical specimens:

Picture yourself a curly-haired, bright-eyed boy of thirteen with honest, open face, good features, and winning smile. He is big for his age, and strongly built. At present his form is arrayed in a brand new suit of grey; his collar is new and his tie is new, his boots are new and his socks are new; everything is new about him, down to the very guard of his hat, and he himself is the newest and purest of all. Was ever such a radiant hero let loose into the world?³⁶

Charlie's appearance contrasts starkly with Tom Drift's, after Tom's descent into low pastimes like billiards and music halls:

One day [...] there entered into the office a youth, haggard and reckless-looking, whom, I thought, surely I had seen before. I looked again. Was it possible? Yes! This was none other than Tom Drift! But oh, how changed! A year ago, erring and wayward as he had been, he was yet respectable; his dress was the dress of a gentleman; his bearing was that of a gentleman too; his face had been naturally intelligent and pleasant; and his voice was clear and cheerful. But now! There was a wild, restless roll about his eyes, a bright flush on his hollow cheeks, a dullness about his mouth, a hoarseness in his voice, which seemed to belong to another being. He was dissipated and seedy in appearance, and hung his head, as though ashamed to meet a

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ T. B. Reed, *The Adventures of a Three Guinea Watch* (1881), p.24.

fellow-being's look, and, instead of one, looked at least ten years older than he had. Such a wreck will evil ways make of a youth!³⁷

The patterns of correct and incorrect behaviour filtered down into every part of school life. Reed was particularly keen to apply them to schoolboy fighting, an iconic element of the school story. Whereas their *BOE* predecessors had lost their tempers quickly and resorted to using unfair moves, Reed's schoolboy heroes tried to avoid fighting altogether. In fact, Oliver Greenfield even walks away from a fight after Loman hits him in the face. Even though "the blow had been a cowardly one, and certainly unmerited, and by all schoolboy tradition one fairly demanding a return", Oliver refuses Loman's challenge. He is branded a coward, but later explains: "I was greatly tempted to let out, [but] I've been trying feebly to turn over a new leaf this term [...] and one of the things I wanted to keep out of was losing my temper, which you know is not a good one."³⁸

It troubled Reed that precocious heroes, such as Jack Harkaway, were becoming adulated for their nonconformity.³⁹ He believed that group loyalties and friendships were the key to maintaining the school code of behaviour. Therefore, Reed placed a great deal of emphasis upon schoolboy society and relationships, more than even Hughes had done. Boys were no longer lone heroes; instead, it became the norm for them to pair up with like companions. Charlie Newsome and Jim Halliday strike up a friendship almost immediately, as do Oliver Greenfield and Horace Wraysford. Conversely, Tom Drift and Edward Loman do not have companions; this is a major factor in their downfall. Boyhood camaraderie was also a wholesome replacement for romantic encounters.

Reed was also concerned about the heroic exploits of scapegrace and roving schoolboys, whose intrepidity had become increasingly absurd and self-glorifying.⁴⁰ He was insistent that his boys' courageous deeds should convey a clear moral message, in line with the code of school behaviour. For example, in 'St Dominic's', Oliver Greenfield saves the life of the Loman, who had absconded after running up a debt with Cripps, a local innkeeper. After scouring the countryside for the runaway, Oliver finds him and persuades

³⁷ Ibid., pp.201-02.

³⁸ Ibid., pp.78-88.

³⁹ Reed, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *Leeds Mercury Supplement*, p.1.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

him to return to St Dominic's. On their journey home they become lost in a fierce storm, and Loman begins to lose consciousness. Oliver doggedly saves his life by dragging him to safety, despite the fact that Loman had crossed him several times during the school year, and had even framed him with stealing exam papers. Through his selfless heroism, Oliver is shown to be an exemplar of moral behaviour.

Reed was aware that the headmasters of *BOE*'s school stories were as much at fault as their pupils. He believed that a good headmaster was an essential component of school life. Reed replaced brutal headmasters with men even more kindly and encouraging than Dr Arnold had been. Dr Weldon in 'Three Guinea Watch' is particularly welcoming. When Charlie arrives at school he tells the boy: "Whenever you are in trouble come to me, I shall always be glad to see you."⁴¹ Reed's headmasters were active in day-to-day matters, and took a keen interest in the welfare of each and every boy. Not only did Reed's stories banish the painfully excessive canings administered by *BOE*'s headmasters, they rejected corporal punishment altogether. Boys were only punished for genuine misdemeanours, and the type of punishment was always less severe. Accordingly, boys respected the authority of the headmaster and never shirked punishment. Furthermore, the violent rebellions of the scapegrace stories were also culled. They were replaced by innocuous forms of rebellion directed against unjust schoolboy authority. For example, 'St. Dominic's' features a strike amongst fourth form boys, known as the Tadpoles and the Guinea Pigs. They refuse to fag for the older boys because they consider their demands to be excessive.

There can be no doubt that Reed's school stories amalgamated elements of Hughes' *TBS* and Farrar's *Eric*. However, his stories, and his journalism, prove that he was also well aware that the school story had developed into a form barely recognisable from its origins. Reed believed that serial school stories of the 1870s had disregarded the moral elements of the genre in favour of anarchy and adventure. He therefore wrote his school stories in a manner intended to combat these trends. Because his tales were lively and enjoyable, readers were not put off by his moralising. Indeed, his stories proved popular.⁴² A high sale

⁴¹ Reed, *Three Guinea Watch*, p.66.

⁴² In 1899 Reed was voted the ninth most popular *BOP* author, despite the fact that his work had not appeared in the journal for six years: see Richards, *Happiest Days*, p.116.

in both serialised and hardcover form made Reed's school stories the first outside of the working class boys' weeklies to reach a truly mass audience.

1879-1899 – The Post-Reed Era

It had been argued that the public school story, though conceived by Thomas Hughes, was born through Talbot Baines Reed.⁴³ Indeed, Reed had a greater impact upon the school story genre than Hughes. He inspired dozens of authors, including Harold Avery, Richard Bird and Gunby Hadath, to write school stories based closely upon the formula he had devised. Nor was Reed's influence restricted to hardcover fiction. The impact of his tales could also be seen in serialised school fiction. Ironically, whereas *BOE*'s school stories had once influenced Reed's writing, *BOE* itself became forever influenced by Reed's model.⁴⁴ This change occurred as early as 1879, when Reed's short school stories and articles first began to appear in the *BOP*, a year before the publication of 'Three Guinea Watch' and a full two years before the publication of 'St. Dominic's'.

Ironically, it was a story by 'JHS' author Bracebridge Hemyng which marked the turning of the tide. Hemyng's 'Hal Harkforth and Tom Tallyho's Schooldays' (vol.27) was serialised in *BOE* in 1879. The similarities between Harkforth and Harkaway, aside from their names, are striking and consistent. Like Harkaway, Harkforth is a prankster. The first few chapters of his story detail an elaborate joke he plays upon his visiting Irish cousin, Tom Tallyho. Hal dresses up as a coachman and transports Tom to his father's grand estate. He leads Tom to believe that the house is in fact a hostelry, and his uncle the innkeeper, with comical consequences. Later, Hal causes further trouble by pinning an amusing notice to his father's back as they walk along the seafront. Like Harkaway, Harkforth is extremely cocky. Upon being sent to school he makes an immediate enemy of the captain, Collington. He defies a group of boys who mock he and Tom for praying before bed, as Harkaway had done. Later, he holds a boy's head under a water pump to punish him for 'sneaking'. 'Hal Harkforth' represented a return to the values of Harkaway which, although outrageous in 1870, appeared relatively subdued by 1879 when compared to the some of the more

⁴³ Kirkpatrick, *Bullies*, p.2.

⁴⁴ Quigley, *Tom Brown*, pp.94-99.

anarchic scapegrace and roving schoolboy tales. It was the first step towards a general toning down of *BOE*'s school stories.

In the early 1880s *BOE*'s school stories became even tamer. Far-fetched stories of rebellion and travel were replaced more restrained portraits of school life. Although boys continued to play pranks and be jovial, their tricks were milder than before. Romance, for so long a central theme, was now entirely omitted. Boys were less likely to be orphans. Boys and masters no longer quarrelled, and names such as Dr Murray ('The Fag of the School, or, the Cave of Aladdin' (vol.55)) and Dr Prichard ('The Boys of Kingswood: a Story of School and Sea Life' (vol.55)) replaced the Dr Spanksters and Mr Lashems of yesteryear. The fostering of school friendships and communities became dominant themes. Most of *BOE*'s school stories were now set entirely within school. Dark sub-plots of crime, mystery and intrigue became almost extinct.⁴⁵ These trends persisted throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

There were two later developments in *BOE*'s school stories. The first was a lessening in the number of roving schoolboy stories. After 1881's 'Hal and Rue's Schooldays and After' (vol.30), no more were published for some considerable time. As we have seen, in the late 1870s and early 1880s Britain increasingly resorted to military action to protect her overseas interests. These imperial conflicts inspired a whole host of *BOE* stories. It was these stories which effectively brought the roving schoolboy story to an end. Imperial war offered *BOE*'s heroes the opportunity to travel for far more plausible reasons than ever before, legitimising their global wandering and bloody fighting. These stories had no time for the education of their heroes; they jumped quickly into the thick of the action. However, roving schoolboy tales underwent a revival in later years. 'Jack Bracy, the Light Dragoon, or, Companions in Arms', a sequel to 'Jack Bracy, or, the Boys of Lashley Hall', commenced in volume forty-three, followed by 'The Boys of Kingswood, a Story of School and Sea Life' (vol.55), 'Frank, the Schoolboy Rover' (vol.57), 'Jack Grant: His Adventures at School, Afloat, and in Cuba' (vol.62), and the 'Left-Handed Jack' series of stories,

⁴⁵ A few school stories broke this rule, such as 'The Schoolboy Poacher' (vol.25), 'The Gipsy Schoolboy, or, the Mystery of a Dark Night' (vol.33) and 'A Schoolboy's Folly' (vol.47). One particularly gothic tale, 'Jack Bracy, or, the Boys of Lashley Hall' (vol.42), opened with the hero masquerading as Satan.

published between volume forty-eight and volume fifty-one. However, roving schoolboy tales were still less common than they had been in the 1870s.

The second development was the coming of the games ethic. Towards the end of the nineteenth century athleticism and organised games became a core part of the public school ethos. The games ethic had developed from the idea of muscular Christianity. It stressed the importance of physical fitness, camaraderie and sportsmanship, to the maintenance of British national strength and superiority.⁴⁶ In the 1890s almost every school story featured an epic sporting match of some description. For example, 'Frank Fearnought, or, True as Steel' (vol.56) and 'Harry Holdfast, or, the Boys of St Dunstan's School' (vol.60) both begin with lengthy accounts of a rugby matches, whilst 'Jack Grant: His Adventures at School, Afloat, and in Cuba' (vol.62) features a cricket match within its earliest chapters. When boys were not asserting their physical dominance in games, they were doing so in fights. The fight, which had become less prominent post-Reed, enjoyed a renaissance in the 1890s. 'The Fag of the School, or, the Cave of Aladdin' (vol.55), 'The Boys of Kingswood: a Story of School and Sea Life' (vol.55), and 'Frank, the Schoolboy Rover' (vol.57), all commence with a fight, the significance of which is stressed with an illustration.

Several reasons may be offered to explain why *BOE* was so keen to follow Reed's blueprint and tone down its school stories. Firstly, Reed's stories had proved popular amongst boys, both in the *BOP* and in hardcover format. By imitating Reed's style Brett hoped to profit from the heightened interest in school stories which he had inspired. Secondly, the scapegrace and roving schoolboy stories had, by 1879, ran their course, and were becoming tiresome.⁴⁷ It is probable that *BOE*'s authors embraced the changes Reed brought because they breathed new life into the school story formula. Thirdly, Reed's wholesome school stories revealed, as they were intended to do, just how morally low *BOE*'s stories had become. Brett was probably worried that his anarchic school stories might begin to attract criticism to his papers, especially so soon after the 1877 suppression

⁴⁶ J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: the Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge, 1981); J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (Harmondsworth, 1986).

⁴⁷ Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature', *ECHR*, XLVII, 3, p.92.

of the Newsagent's Publishing Company serial *The Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866).

The impact of Talbot Baines Reed's school stories upon *BOE* was considerable. Over a few short years he single-handedly transformed the paper's once pioneering school story formula. This is not to say that *BOE*'s heroes emulated the behaviour of Charlie Newcome and Oliver Greenfield to the letter. Brett's paper was never likely to be as moralistic as the *BOP*. Yet their escapades were certainly drastically moderated from their rebellious heyday of the 1870s. As the 1880s progressed, the influence of boys' weekly school stories waned. The public school story genre, in both book and periodical form, became dominated by Reed and the many followers of the formula he had invented.

The Significance of *Boys of England's* School Stories

Victorian public school stories were not merely pieces of literature. They were socially significant.⁴⁸ Historians have argued that the authors of public school stories deliberately sought to reflect real school life. They did so to outstretch the rigorous moral education instilled by the public school system to boys who did not attend public schools.⁴⁹ Although few would argue that this was not the aim of the *BOP*'s authors, it is equally evident that *BOE*'s school stories did not operate in the same manner. Brett, and his authors, did not share the same moral convictions as the RTS. Therefore, *BOE*'s school stories did not seek to disseminate the same moral ethos. Indeed, they differentiated themselves from the moral norms of the genre from the very start, and by 1870 had broken free entirely. Their autonomy was only curtailed by the success of Talbot Baines Reed. Yet despite their shunning of the public school ethos, and notwithstanding the anarchic nature of the stories, *BOE*'s school stories were not written to simply entertain. Rather, the tales, replete with larkishness, rebellions and floggings, were actually intended to engage with the schooling experiences of working class boys.

⁴⁸ Indeed, it is often said that *TBS* had more of a bearing upon Victorian public school reform than Rugby's Dr Arnold himself.

⁴⁹ Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature*, pp.222-23.

The schooldays of Harkaway and his successors closely mirrored the trends which developed in actual elementary schools following the implementation of Forster's Education Act in 1870. Indeed, it can be no coincidence that 'JHS' and the Act both debuted in the same year. Forster's Act, designed to ensure that all young children received a full time education, brought an increasing number of working class youngsters into the schooling system. Some children embraced schooling.⁵⁰ However, the Act was not entirely well received; it was met in many quarters with considerable suspicion and resistance.⁵¹ Parents complained that school fees, and lost earnings, detracted from the family coffers. Many children experienced difficulty integrating into the school system; some made it their business to be disruptive. As a consequence, many classrooms became chaotic. Classroom pranks grew ever more common. Corporal punishment became increasingly feared.⁵² A high proportion of working class children believed that punishment in their school was too severe.⁵³ Unjust punishment was particularly resented.⁵⁴ Yet teachers needed to be strict disciplinarians; those who were too lenient risked losing all authority in the classroom. Resentment grew among pupils throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Instances of boys rising

⁵⁰ J. Rose, 'Willingly to School: the Working Class Response to Elementary Education in Britain, 1875-1918', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.32 (1993), pp.114-38; F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (1988), pp.135-51.

⁵¹ S. Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth, 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1981), pp.29-61; J. S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes, 1860-1918* (1979), pp.188-213; E. E. Rich, *The Education Act 1870: a Study of Public Opinion* (1970), pp.101-03; R. Schnell, 'Childhood as Ideology: a Reinterpretation of the Common School', *British Journal of Education Studies*, 27 (1979), pp.7-28; K. P. Stannard, 'Ideology, Education, and Social Structure: Elementary Schooling in Mid-Victorian England', *History of Education*, Vol.19, No.2 (1990), pp.105-22; G. Steadman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900', *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974), pp.488-89; Thompson, *Respectable Society*, pp.135-51.

⁵² Humphries, *Hooligans*, pp.62-89; L. Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain, 1860-1918* (1991), pp.172-88.

⁵³ Jonathan Rose estimates a figure of 30.6 percent based upon autobiographical accounts. This figure represents the opinions of both boys and girls. Taking only boys' responses into account would presumably raise the figure higher still: see J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), pp.146-86, and Rose, 'Willingly to School', *JBS*, Vol.32 (1993), pp.123, 129-31.

⁵⁴ Humphries, *Hooligans*, p.72.

up against their overbearing masters were common. Boys who rebelled against teachers were considered heroes amongst their peers.⁵⁵ Pupil-teacher attrition was considered to be amongst the key factors behind the nationwide school strikes of 1889.⁵⁶

It was not only the disenchanteds who were dissatisfied with Forster's Act. Even keen schoolboys found it to be unsettling. Many working class parents, particularly skilled workers, had been sending their children to school long before 1870; as many as half of all working class children may have been regular attendees. These parents were well aware of the value of a good education. Some even paid extra to allow their sons to take special lessons which might give them a head start in certain trades. They were very concerned about the advent of compulsory education. They became annoyed by the increasing disruption it caused to their own sons' schooling. Indeed, responding to their fears, the London School Board even introduced a layered fees system, which effectively segregated troublesome pupils.⁵⁷

BOE's public school stories were intended to appeal to working class youths who had found the advent of compulsory education problematic. It is likely that they appreciated the paper's public school stories, despite the class boundary between reader and protagonist, because they engaged with their own experiences of schooling in the volatile 1870s.⁵⁸ This was equally true of boys who did, and did not, wish to attend school. The impact of *BOE's* school stories can only be guessed at. It is fair to assume that a good number of boys would have found some solace in them. Thus, Reed may have unknowingly severed a valuable channel of support when he tamed the anarchic tendencies of Jack Harkaway and his successors.

Why did *BOE* use public school rebellion as a metaphor for working class school rebellion, with public schoolboys representing elementary schoolboys? It did so for one reason. It would have been out of the question to publish stories which were openly about

⁵⁵ Rose, *Erosion of Childhood*, pp.175-76, 181.

⁵⁶ Humphries, *Hooligans*, pp.90-120.

⁵⁷ Thompson, *Respectable Society*, pp.135-51.

⁵⁸ Also see J. O. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (Basingstoke, 1998), p.93.

working class school uprisings. Schoolboy dissenters were considered to be anti-social delinquents.⁵⁹ To publish stories about them would have brought *BOE* into considerable disrepute. As the comments of Reed and other critics demonstrated only too well, boys' weeklies were already believed to be treading tenuous moral ground. Staging rebellions in public schools made *BOE*'s school stories appear, to the casual observer, to have much in common with reputable stories such as *TBS* and *Eric*. The fact that their heroes were of a high social status, and commonly credited with innate intelligence and superiority, would have quelled many concerns. What was anti-social behaviour in a working class hero was simply hi-jinx in an upper class hero. Furthermore, pitting these pupils against unjust teachers further neutralised much of the anarchic content.

The assertion that *BOE*'s school stories were intended to reflect the elementary schooling experience, rather than propagate the public school ethos, is strengthened by the fact that they reflected the public school system so poorly. True, *BOE*'s school stories did mirror the growth of smaller, mainly middle class, public schools, and the overall growth in middle class public school attendance. Most of its school stories were set in new, small-scale academies; only one story, 'The Schooldays of Jack at Eton, or, the Adventures of Two College Chums' (vol.30), was set in a major public school. However, *BOE* generally painted an inaccurate picture of the public schools. *BOE* despised caning, yet it was still supported, or at least tolerated, by most headmasters, teachers, parents, and even boys, within the public school system. It was viewed as a necessary component of socialisation. Rarely was it questioned by reformers; the Clarendon Commission of 1864 and the Headmasters conference of 1869 made very little mention of it. Outcries over caning were largely restricted to Liberal periodicals, such as *Edinburgh Review*. Furthermore, *BOE*'s pupils frequently rebelled against their masters, yet public school reforms were actually in the process of removing the last traces of the rebellions which had plagued schools in the eighteenth century. In addition, *BOE*'s headmasters were oppressive tyrants, whereas in

⁵⁹ However, it is now believed that many of the most active classroom rebels actually operated with a level of sophistication, mimicking the tactics of their elders in the Labour movement: see Humphries, *Hooligans*, pp.97-104.

real public schools such characters were now rare. Indeed, the pastoral role of the headmaster was becoming ever more important.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Historians have argued that between 1857 and 1879 there was little activity in the public school story genre. However, this is far from correct. In fact, the boys' weeklies which flourished in this era carried school stories in almost every number. Indeed, between 1870 and 1879 *BOE* was the genre's strongest champion, the leading organ of public school fiction. Moreover, *BOE*'s school stories did not merely imitate their predecessors. Rather, they possessed their own individual style, which evolved over time. Indeed, in 1870 'JHS' severed links with *TBS* altogether. So influential was Hemyng's story that rebellious and adventurous schoolboy heroes followed in Jack's footsteps throughout the following decade.

The formula proved popular amongst boys. The 'Jack Harkaway' series alone is said to have raised the sale of *BOE* to 250,000. Indeed, it can justifiably be argued that historians have wrongly attributed the creation of the 'popular' school story to Talbot Baines Reed. This accolade should surely be awarded to Bracebridge Hemyng. Reed did not invent the 'popular' public school story. By 1879 it was already flourishing. Indeed, Reed himself was inspired by the numerous tales that were already in existence. His effort to counter the supposedly pernicious content of the boys' weekly school stories was as much a defining element of his tales as his blending of *TBS* and *Eric*. Once Reed had successfully restored morality to the popular school stories, *BOE* was forced to temper its own tales. This effectively killed their rebellious spirit. They became merely one

⁶⁰ J. Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools, 1800-1864* (1984), pp.167-95, 221-46, 320-51; Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature*, pp.222-319; J. R. de S. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: the Development of the Victorian Public School* (1977), pp.196-203; J. R. de S. Honey, 'Tom Brown's Universe: the Nature and Limits of the Victorian Public Schools Community', in B. Simon and I. Bradley, eds. *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of an Educational Institution: a Symposium* (Dublin, 1975), pp.19-33; E. C. Mack, *Public Schools and British Opinion Since 1860: the Relationship Between Contemporary Ideas and the Evolution of an English Institution* (New York, 1941), pp.3-49; C. Nelson, *Invisible Men: Fatherhood in Victorian Periodicals, 1850-1910* (Athens, 1995), pp.139-70.

component of an increasingly homogenous genre. From 1879 onwards Reed's formula, championed by the *BOP*, dictated the path of the school story genre. Indeed, it did so until the 'Greyfriars' stories of Charles Hamilton, also known as Frank Richards, revitalised the genre in the early 1900s.⁶¹

Moreover, Reed's impact went beyond the printed page. Evidence suggests that *BOE*'s school stories were designed to engage with reader's experiences of Forster's 1870 Education Act. Reed's stories may have unwittingly denied pupils in the elementary schooling system a valve through which they could defuse their worries and concerns.

⁶¹ Curiously, it has been suggested that some of Hamilton's earliest works actually appeared anonymously in Brett's papers: see R. J. Kirkpatrick, *The Encyclopaedia of Boys' School Stories* (Aldershot, 2000), p.151.

Chapter Five – Historical Fiction

Introduction

Historical fiction was amongst *BOE*'s principal types of fiction. At least one historical story was usually in progress at any given time. The stories varied considerably in their chronological settings. However, their themes and subject matter were typical boys' weekly fare: warfare, crime, murder and romance. Often, the story was told through the eyes of a boy hero.

BOE's historical fiction was inspired by two literary forces. The first of these was the historical novel. The Victorian era witnessed rapid growth in the popularity of the historical novel. Sir Walter Scott was its first, and most valued, proponent.¹ Yet historical novels were read largely by the intellectual elite. They had little direct impact upon working class readers. The second, and much more significant, literary force which inspired *BOE*'s historical fiction was seventeenth and eighteenth century chapbooks. Chapbooks were small printed storybooks, the successors of the widely sold broadside ballads of preceding centuries. Most chapbooks were printed on cheap rag paper, measured around six inches by four, and were around twenty-four pages long. Many featured crude woodcut illustrations. They were sold by travelling peddlers, known as chapmen, typically for a penny each. They were published by hundreds of companies, both in London and the provinces. Few chapbooks contained original stories. Rather, most retold centuries-old folk tales; indeed, even contemporary tales were infused with elements of traditional storytelling. Their content varied. Common subject matter included: crime; folklore; the supernatural; travel; verse; and humour.² Of course, history was amongst the most popular themes; indeed,

¹ “‘Sixty Years Since’: Victorian Historical Fiction from Dickens to Eliot”, in S. Onega, ed. *Telling Histories: Narrativising History, Historicising Narrative* (Amsterdam, 1995), pp.21-30; H. Orel, *The Historical Novel from Scott to Sabatini: Changing Attitudes Towards a Literary Genre, 1814-1920* (Basingstoke, 1995); A. Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel, 1840-1880* (1978), pp.1-31.

² R. Collison, *The Story of Street Literature: the Forerunner of the Popular Press* (1973); F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England; Five Centuries of Social Life*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge, 1982), pp.68-84; V. E. Neuburg, *The Penny Histories: a Study of Chapbooks for Young Readers Over Two Centuries* (1968); L. Shepard, *The History of Street Literature: the Story of Broadside Ballads, Chapbooks, Proclamations,*

historical tales had always held an important place in popular narrative.³ Crucially, chapbooks were not simply stories. Rather, they were part of a complex system of popular lore which both reflected and shaped the lives of their working class readers.

Despite the commonness of historical fiction in *BOE*, historians of boys' papers have failed to give it much consideration. Instead, they have tended to focus upon stories set within empire or school. The historians who have examined its historical fiction differ in their opinions as to its significance. E. S. Turner has argued that it was nothing more than rather unsophisticated escapist fantasy.⁴ Kirsten Drotner has contended that the stories allowed boys to identify with the role of the historical hero, thus venting their own frustrations and easing their passage into manhood.⁵ Kelly Boyd believes that it was used to convey images of correct manly behaviour to boy readers.⁶ Overall, their views do not deviate from their common argument: that *BOE*, and papers of its kind, did not connect with the interests of their working class readership, but instead reinforced middle class hegemony. However, as we have seen, adventure stories and school stories both demonstrate that *BOE* was more in tune with working class thought than historians have previously recognised. It would appear possible, therefore, that the same could be said about historical fiction too.

This chapter examines *BOE*'s historical fiction. It argues that, like adventure stories and school stories, *BOE*'s historical fiction actively engaged with the beliefs and lifestyles of the paper's working class readers. The chapter focuses upon three facets of *BOE*'s historical fiction: its educative qualities; medievalism; and historical rebels. The chapter concludes by examining the 'street Arab' story. The 'street Arab' story, unlike the paper's historical tales, was a contemporary Victorian invention. The example of 'street Arab'

News-Sheets, Election Bills, Tracts, Pamphlets, Cocks, Catchpennies and Other Ephemera (1973), pp.53-77; H. B. Weiss, *A Book About Chapbooks; the People's Literature of Bygone Times* (Hatboro, 1969).

³ Collison, *Street Literature*, pp.52-65; Weiss, *Chapbooks*, pp.38-41.

⁴ E. S. Turner, *Boys Will be Boys, the Story of Sweeney Todd, Deadwood Dick, Sexton Blake, Billy Bunter, Dick Barton, et al.*, 3rd Edition (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp.77-78.

⁵ K. Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven, 1988), p.100.

⁶ K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp.54-58.

stories is offered here to illustrate the remarkable continuity of the paper's commitment to working class interests, no matter how different the type of literature. Indeed, the two modes of story, one set in ancient Britain and the other in the present day, were actually used in counterpoint to allow *BOE* to address a variety of contemporary social and political issues.

The Educative Qualities of *Boys of England's* Historical Fiction

BOE featured an abundance of historical fiction. Although Brett did publish stories about European and world history, stories about British history were considerably more common. The chronological setting of these stories varied from tale to tale. Many related to specific historical incidents. For example, taking the first ten volumes as a sample, 'Edgar, the Young Knight of Warwick' (vol.4) was set during the Norman invasion. 'The King's Jester, or, the Fortunes of Reginald Raby' (vol.8) took place in late twelfth-century London. John Cecil Stagg's 'Chevy Chase, or, the Battle on the Border' (vol.1) and 'Prince Hal, the Armourer's Apprentice' (vol.5) were set in 1375 and the early 1400s respectively, whilst William Hillyard's 'Jack Cade, the Rebel of London' (vol.3) was set in the mid 1400s. Stories set in the seventeenth century were Percy B. St. John's 'The Miser's Son: a Tale of the Plague and Great Fire of London' (vol.6), Stagg's 'The Hidden Crime, or, Baffled by Fate' (vol.6), 'Disowned, or, a Mis-Spent Life' (vol.7) by Vane St. John, 'Monmouth, or, the Axe and the Crown' (vol.8) by W. Thompson Townsend, and 'Rob the Rover, or, the Mid Amongst the Pirates' (vol.10). The eighteenth century hosted Charles Stevens' 'Wild Charley, the Link Boy of Old London' (vol.1) and Vane St. John's 'Red Snow, or, the Murder on the Thames: a Story of the Great Frost of 1709' (vol.6).

Why did *BOE* feature so much historical fiction? And why did it focus so closely upon British history? The educative qualities of the material is one likely explanation. In the nineteenth century the study of history became increasingly popular amongst the working class, no more so than amongst men of the left, such as Chartists. They saw history, particularly British history, as a profoundly useful aid to education and self help.⁷

⁷ D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.187-88; R. K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader, 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension* (1955), pp.83, 94-97.

Working class boys appeared keen to learn, too. However, the teaching of history in elementary schools was poor. Many schools did not teach history at all; instead, they tended to focus upon the three Rs.⁸ Indeed, history only became a compulsory subject in elementary schools in 1900.⁹ Where it was taught, it was delivered as a dry lists of dates, names and events.¹⁰ Consequently, pupils considered it to be a boring subject.¹¹ Thus, children's historical fiction was very much admired amongst, and demanded by, the working class. It allowed children to teach themselves, filling in the gaps from their scant and uninspiring education, yet within an exciting and palatable context.¹²

Brett sought to engage with this growing intellectual demand for history amongst his working class readership. *BOE's* historical tales were not merely flights of escapist fantasy. Rather, they were strongly grounded within historical actuality. Each story was saturated with educative material in the form of basic historical information. It came in various guises: politics; geography; custom; belief; costume; speech; and behaviour. Through this material, each story built up a basic image of the period in question. In line with the needs of working class improvers, British history was always favoured over European or world history. Of course, this educative material was always embellished with sensational fiction. After all, *BOE's* stories had to entertain as well as educate, so it was important that they never became dry.

The educative qualities of *BOE's* historical fiction are best illustrated through dedicated paragraphs into which the paper's authors condensed all of the key facts about any given historical period. Delivered either by a protagonist or by the narrator, these paragraphs could appear at any point within a story, although they were always found in the opening and concluding instalments. Their function was to firmly locate the sensational narrative within a real historical context. For example, in 'Jack Cade', the author conveys

⁸ P. Gordon and D. Lawton, *Curriculum Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1978), p.12.

⁹ R. Aldrich, 'Imperialism in the Study and Teaching of History', in J. A. Mangan, ed. *'Benefits Bestowed': Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998), pp.23-38.

¹⁰ Vincent, *Literacy*, pp.186-87.

¹¹ S. Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (1999), pp.39-40.

¹² J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), pp.348-49.

the historical background to Cade's rebellion, with remarkable accuracy, through Alexander Iden, a wealthy Kent Landowner (and major figure in the suppression of the rebellion), in dialogue in the opening chapter:

"I grant thee, sister, that, as a man, King Henry is a spotless monarch, but far fitter to rule a cloister than a kingdom. The mortal feuds of the King's uncles – Gloucester and the Cardinal – have scandalized the country, the sole government of which is in the hands of the revengeful Margaret, and her minion, the upstart Duke of Suffolk, who has ground the commons, by unjust levies and exactions, to a state bordering on rebellion, while the pride of the kingdom has been stabbed to the heart by the loss of Anjou, Maine, Normandy and Guienne, given as the purchase money of a worthless queen."

"Alack! Alack! What pictures these of feud and misrule!"

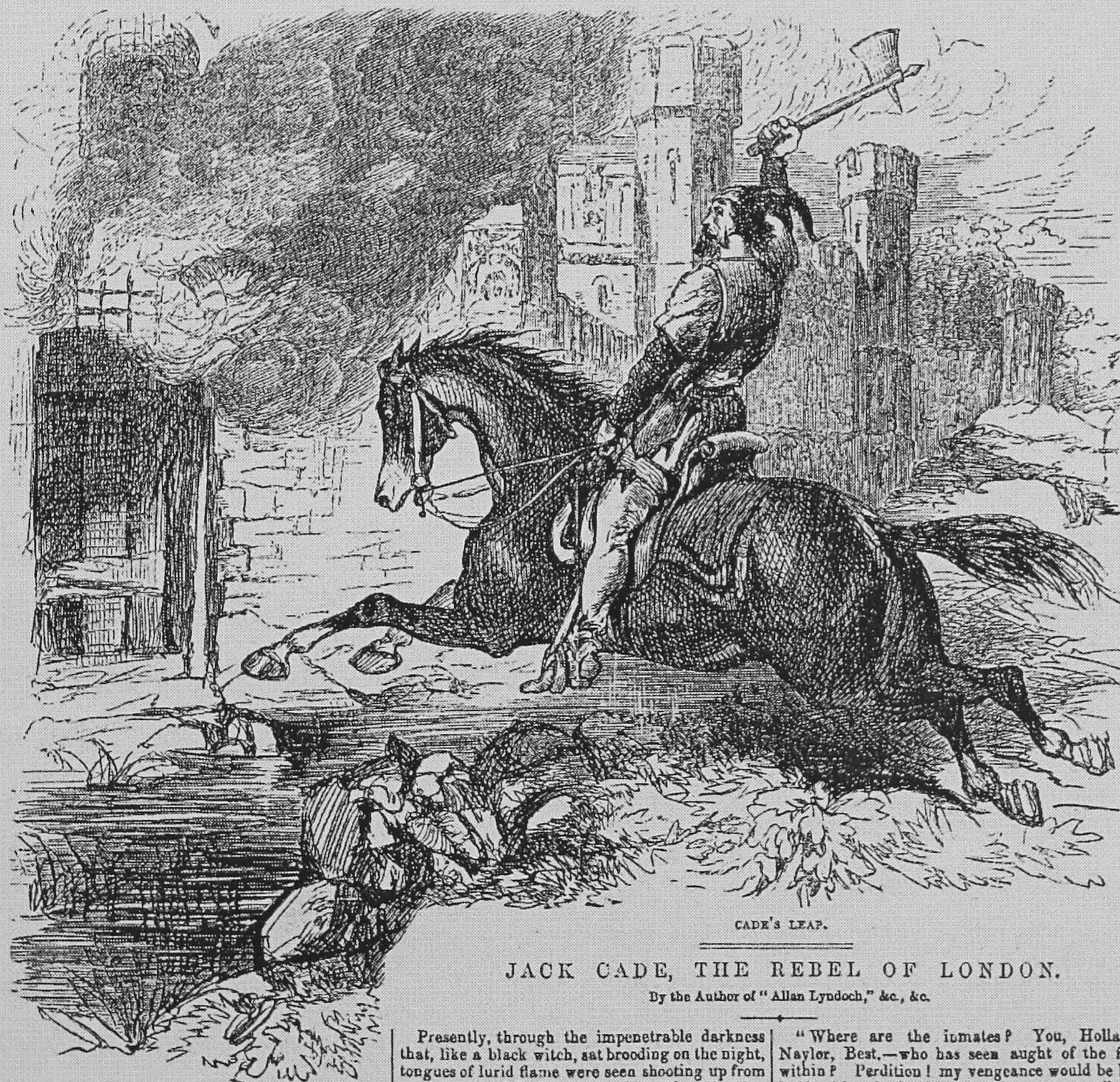
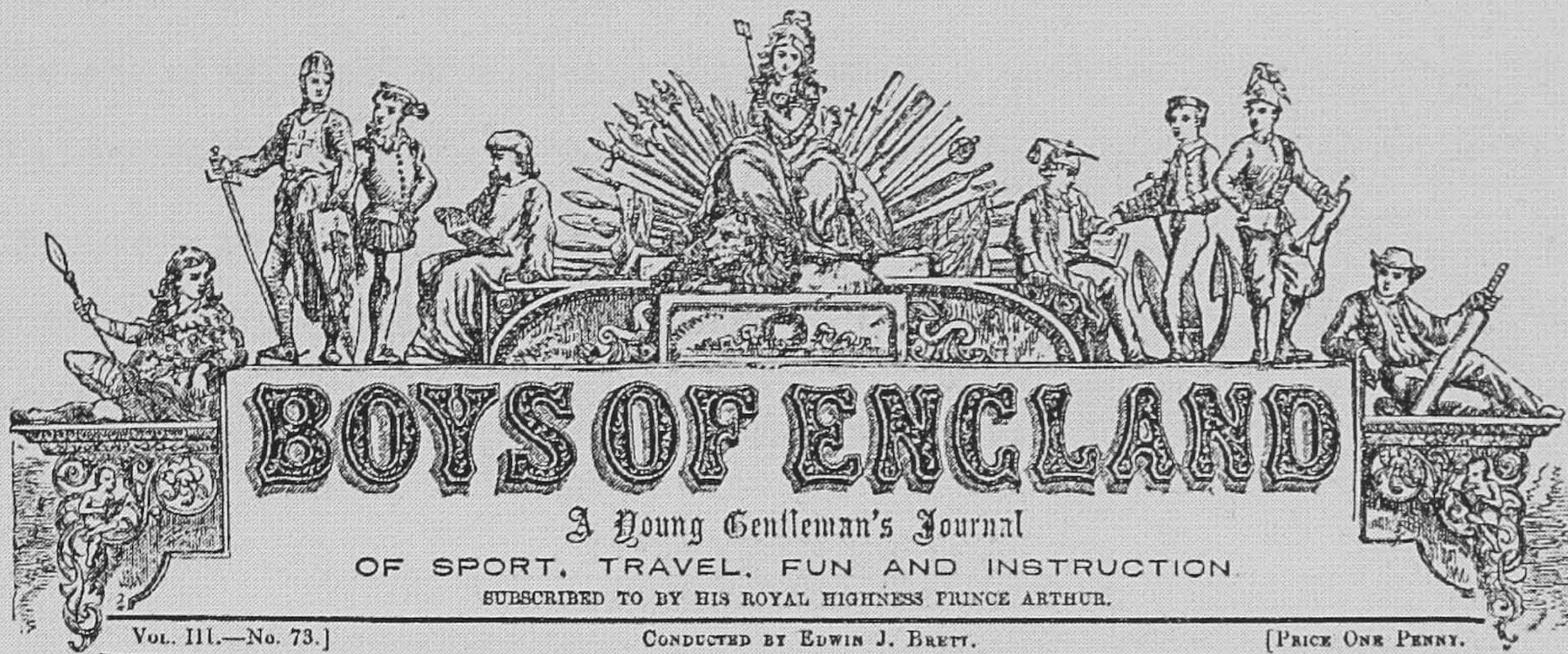
"Alas, my gentle Kate, this is but half the mischief. The barons are at open strife. Somerset, and York, the Nevills, Salisbury, Warwick, and Buckingham, with the Cliffords, all at deadly enmity. The Irish have flown to arms, and rebellion sweeps over the fertile island; while in England, the men of Cornwall and Devon have met riotous assembly, and here in Kent, about Dover, Canterbury, and by Wingham, the unruly commons have been up these three days, every hour adding to their number. A disbanded soldier, one Cade, said to be a tool of the ambitious Duke of York, has been sent from Ireland to head the insurrection, and the ignorant commonalty follow this self-made leader like a sovereign ordained to lead them to victory, and a redresser of all their wrongs."¹³

This technique was later taken to new levels by famed boys' author G. A. Henty, who mastered interweaving large sections of informative, educative text within exciting narrative in his historical tales. Indeed, it has recently been argued that Henty's works were much prized by the working class, especially radicals, for this reason, even despite his tendencies towards jingoism.¹⁴

Although historical fiction was a dominant feature of periodicals aimed at working class boys, it was largely absent from higher class papers. This was because their affluent readers had little use for educative fiction; they were already taught well at school. For example, compare the first volume of *The Boy's Own Paper*, which appeared in 1879, to

¹³ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.3, No.71, 27 March 1868, p.290.

¹⁴ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.348-49.



CADE'S LEAP.

JACK CADE, THE REBEL OF LONDON.

By the Author of "Allan Lyndoch," &c., &c.

CHAPTER IV.—(continued.)

Lashing his horse over the hawthorn fence, Cade was soon lost to sight in the gloom that invested the landscape.

Presently, through the impenetrable darkness that, like a black witch, sat brooding on the night, tongues of lurid flame were seen shooting up from every corner of the long moated dwelling, lighting up the darkness with their waving fires, as they circled round the doomed building, and hedged it in by a wall of glowing flame; while, rising white and spectral from the raging volcano, the square stone keep rose up, towering and defiant.

"Where are the inmates? You, Holland, Naylor, Best,—who has seen aught of the folk within? Perdition! my vengeance would be but half achieved, should she again escape me!" demanded Cade, galloping round the burning building, eagerly questioning of those whom he had placed to surround and watch the burning house, so as to intercept all who might quit the flaming pile.

Fig.12: 'Jack Cade, the Rebel of London'

concurrent volumes of *BOE*. Whilst historical fiction abounded in *BOE* during this period, volume one of the *BOP* was devoid of pre-industrial historical fiction. Indeed, this was a trend which persisted for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, it is notable that the author perhaps most strongly associated with boys' historical fiction, G. A. Henty, often thought of as a defining character in the history of the *BOP*, actually only wrote six stories for the paper, none of which was set in pre-industrial Britain.¹⁵

Medievalism

BOE's historical fiction was remarkable not only for its educative qualities. It also carried subtle political messages. *BOE*'s attitude towards the past was defined by a profound medievalist ideology. Medievalism was a prominent mode of thought in the Victorian era. The middle ages were commonly used as a point of reference in contemporary discourse. Because the image of medieval England was rather flexible, and open to a wide range of interpretations, it became used by numerous different individuals and groups for several different purposes.¹⁶

One of the groups who harnessed medievalism was radicals, including Chartists (towards the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century) and socialists (towards the end). Indeed, medievalist discourse had been a characteristic of radical movements for centuries. Nineteenth-century radicals used idealised images of medieval England to criticise what they perceived to be the ills of industrial Britain. Holding the middle ages aloft as a utopian age, they argued that cooperative production and skilled craftsmanship,

¹⁵ P. Newbolt, *G. A. Henty, 1832-1902: a Bibliographical Study of His British Editions, with Short Accounts of His Publishers, Illustrators and Designers, and Notes on Production Methods Used for His Books* (Brookfield, 1996), pp.551-52.

¹⁶ C. Waters, 'Marxism, Medievalism and Popular Culture', in F. S. Boos, ed. *History and Community: Essays in Victorian Medievalism* (1992), pp.137-68; A. Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', in A. Briggs, *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, Vol.2 (Brighton, 1985), pp.215-35; C. A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (1990). Indeed, even in the world of boys' fiction interpretations of the Middle Ages varied considerably. For example, authors of hardcover fiction, in stark contrast to Brett's approach, used the medieval world to propagate conservative ideals: see V. B. Richmond, 'Historical Novels to Teach Anglo-Saxonism', in A. J. Frantzen and J. D. Niles, eds. *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* (Florida, 1997), pp.173-201.

supposedly common medieval practice, were preferable to the labour divisions and factory production brought by the industrial revolution. A key component of radical medievalism was the ‘Norman yoke’ theory; radicals argued that the Norman Conquest had eroded the political freedoms and rights of the ancient Anglo-Saxons.¹⁷ Radical medievalism manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, many workers’ groups integrated medieval themes and symbols into their holidays and festivals, arguing that industrialisation had severed previously harmonious patterns of work and leisure.¹⁸

Just as *BOE* engaged with radical usage of history as an educative tool, so did it engage with radical medievalism. Throughout its history the paper warmed to the pre-industrial age. *BOE*’s preoccupation with the pre-industrial era was evident from its very first number; ‘Chevy Chase’, a medieval tale based upon a common chapbook yarn, was amongst its lead stories. A poem by editor Charles Stevens, tellingly entitled ‘Merrie England’, which was also published in number one, betrayed a strong medievalist sentiment too. In the poem Stevens drew heavily upon mythical representations of pre-industrial England, referring to King Arthur, Robin Hood and Druidism.¹⁹

BOE’s medievalism manifested itself in various forms. Ruralism was probably its strongest element. Practically every story set in the seventeenth century or earlier was enacted within idyllic forests, woods, fields, and rural villages. Illustrations depicting skirmishing combatants were invariably accompanied by backdrops of leafy glades. The beauty of an idealised, pre-industrial rural Britain was intended to contrast strongly with the ugliness of the urban, industrial environment. This was because ruralism was an important part of radical medievalism. Industrialisation threatened the livelihood of many members of

¹⁷ Waters, ‘Marxism’, in *History and Community*, pp.137-49. For an overview of the ‘Norman yoke’ theory see C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (1958), pp.50-122.

¹⁸ Waters, ‘Marxism’, in *History and Community*, pp.149-63. Also see W. Stafford, ‘‘This Once Happy Country’: Nostalgia for Pre-Modern Society’, in C. Shaw and M. Chase, eds. *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester, 1989), pp.33-46.

¹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.15.

the skilled working classes; hence radicals advocated a return to the land. Chartists had actually attempted to establish utopian rural villages in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁰

The second key element of *BOE*'s medievalism was the 'Norman yoke' theory. Taking its cues from radical discourse, the paper looked wistfully upon the supposed social and political fairness of the pre-industrial era. In contrast, it lamented the arrival of the Norman 'oppressors' of Saxon Britain. This was evident from its earliest volumes. For example, in 'Edgar, the Young Knight of Warwick', the boy protagonist is idealised as "a young and handsome Saxon peasant, with bright blue eyes and flowing flaxen hair". The opening chapter of the tale sees the captive Edgar being forced by barbaric Normans to lead the way to Warwick Castle. "Vile French Invaders! [...] Vengeance! Vengeance! How long will it be delayed?" the hero muses. Tellingly, in line with ruralist belief, the Saxon is shown to exist harmoniously with the English landscape, unlike the Normans, one of whom exclaims: "Curses to the forest!"²¹

Arthurianism was a third important element of *BOE*'s medievalism. It has often been remarked that the Victorian era witnessed remarkable growth in interest in chivalry and the Arthurian legends. This is true as far as the literature of the elite was concerned: Arthurianism had fallen very much out of favour in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but returned into vogue in the nineteenth. For this reason, Arthur is generally believed to have held his greatest appeal in Victorian Britain amongst the ruling classes; they saw Arthur as the embodiment of the chivalric qualities to which they themselves aspired.²² However, Arthur's appeal was not restricted to the elite. He was a popular figure in working class literature too. His legend could boast remarkable continuity in popular

²⁰ M. Chase, *The People's Farm': English Radical Agrarianism, 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988); M. Havinden, 'The Model Village', in G. E. Mingay, ed. *The Rural Idyll* (1989), pp.26-27; J. Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England Since 1800* (2002), pp.42-44; J. Marsh, *Back to the Land: the Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (1982), p.6; K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (1983), pp.243-54.

²¹ *BOE* (reissue), Vol.4, No.101, 21 March 1876 (reissue date), pp.353-54.

²² S. L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: the Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000); M. Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981).

lore; in broadsides and chapbooks, for example, the popularity of Arthurian mythology had never waned. Arthur was particularly admired by working class children. As the personification of chivalry, he epitomised the estimable British character traits which boys from across the class spectrum tried to emulate, not just the affluent.²³ Although Arthurian stories were common in other Brett periodicals, it appears that a dedicated tale was never published in *BOE*. However, Arthur regularly appeared in other articles and features. The paper often spoke of the kinship between the King and modern day Britons. One article described Arthur as a “Young Man of Great Britain” and a “Boy of England”, both puns on Brett’s periodical titles.²⁴ Numerous *BOE* historical serials praised the chivalric qualities of its heroes, one example being ‘The Seven Champions of Christendom’ (vol.4), a popular chapbook tale rewritten for *BOE* by William Hillyard.

One final element of *BOE*’s medievalism was arms and armour. The paper’s historical stories were invariably peppered with vivid illustrations of knights sporting weaponry and battle dress. No doubt this was at Brett’s behest. He himself was passionate about medieval Britain, and collecting ancient arms and armour was his greatest love. Even as a youngster, Brett had hidden under the pews of a local church in order that he might examine the examples which adorned the walls; although he believed he was alone, his scheme was thwarted when a pew-opener arrived.²⁵ “From youth onwards”, he wrote in 1894, “I have had a passionate admiration for the marvellous skill of the armourer of the dark and middle ages. [...] Most men have a hobby; this has been mine, [and it] has engaged my unremitting attention.”²⁶ Brett’s London and provincial homes were profusely ornamented with many of his finest acquisitions.²⁷ Much of his armour was bought from a

²³ J. L. Curry, ‘Children’s Reading and the Arthurian Tales’, in V. M. Lagorio and A. L. Day, eds. *King Arthur Through the Ages*, Vol.2 (1990), pp.149-64; S. Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society* (1983), pp.149-53.

²⁴ *BOE*, Vol.19, No.482, 11 February 1876, p.176.

²⁵ F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21), 22 March 1919.

²⁶ E. J. Brett, *A Pictorial and Descriptive Record of the Origin and Development of Arms and Armour* (1894), p.7.

²⁷ ‘A Famous Armoury: Mr Edwin J. Brett Shows Us His Treasures’, *The Sketch*, 7 March 1894, pp.311-12; Jay, *Peeps*, 22 March 1919 – 29 March 1919.

fellow collector, Count Geyeski; Brett travelled to the castle of Migowo in Prussian Poland to purchase the Count's entire collection.²⁸ He also bought specimens from Sir Samuel Ruch Meyrivk, Lord Londesborough, Sir Coutts Lindsay, and from collectors in France, Italy, Germany, Russia and Spain.²⁹ Brett was proud of his armour and regularly placed it on public display, most notably at the Tudor Exhibition.³⁰ His entire collection was sold shortly before his death.³¹ He issued a large volume, entitled *A Pictorial and Descriptive Record of the Origin and Development of Arms and Armour* (1894), shortly before the auction. As an astute *Times* columnist noted, the book was as much "an ingenious form of advertisement" as a serious study.³² Both book and auction were well publicised, not least of all by Brett himself. Indeed, he encouraged his publishing acquaintances to review the lengthy tome.³³ The auction, held at Christies, realised an impressive £11,773.³⁴ As a lover of arms and armour since youth, Brett knew that medieval imagery had the power to enthrall boys. By including so many illustrations of medieval Britain in *BOE*, he probably believed that they would encourage boys to warm to the ideologies which the stories that carried them encapsulated.

The story which perhaps featured radical medievalism most strongly was 'England of Old, or, Saxons and Normans' (vol.28). The tale was one of three about the Conquest which appeared around 1880, the other two being 'Hugh Fitzwalter' (vol.27) and 'Stephen the Fierce, Fourth Baron of Chesterton' (vol.28). The story centres around Richard le Brett, an eighteen-year-old recently returned from Italy, shortly after the Norman invasion. His father, Baron Reginald le Brett, has been assassinated; Fitzurse, a favourite of the Conqueror, now occupies Bretton Castle. The story follows Richard, assisted by his cousin

²⁸ 'Deaths', *The Times*, 18 December 1895, p.10.

²⁹ 'A Famous Armoury', *The Sketch*, 7 March 1894, pp.311-12.

³⁰ 'The Tudor Exhibition; Mr E. J. Brett's Collection of Arms and Armour', *Illustrated London News*, 25 January 1890, pp.114-15.

³¹ E. J. Brett, *Catalogue of the Important Collection of Armour and Arms, Many of Which Have Been Exhibited at the Tudor, Armada and Venetian Exhibitions, of Edwin J. Brett, Esq.* (1895).

³² 'Ancient Arms and Armour', *The Times*, 12 January 1894, p.13.

³³ Letter from E. J. Brett to G. A. Sala, 17 January 1894, Correspondence of George Augustus Sala, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

³⁴ 'Sale of the Brett Collection of Armour', *The Times*, 25 March 1895, p.3.

John le Brett and a forester named Edric, as he fights to claim his seat as the rightful Lord of Bretton. ‘England of Old’ carries a strong ruralist sentiment. Much of the action is set within idyllic forests. There are parallels with legend of Robin Hood, perhaps the most famous Saxon hero, whose very name is synonymous with the English landscape; Edric, in his foresters’ garb, looks very much like Robin himself, whilst a monk, Friar John, provides much of the comic relief. ‘England of Old’ is saturated with anti-Norman sentiment. The Conqueror is portrayed as the suppressor of the rightful liberties of Saxon Britain, and is spoken of as the “Norman robber” and “Norman oppressor”.³⁵ In contrast, Richard le Brett is represented as a defender of old customs and values; “Then live Old England!” exclaims Friar John upon le Brett’s return from Italy, as the two swear to recapture his seat.³⁶ Of course, the author of the tale was somewhat restricted in his narrative. Richard le Brett could not overthrow the Conqueror, for obvious reasons. The situation is resolved when Fitzurse is proven to be a traitor, having plotted with the King of France to assassinate the Conqueror. Richard le Brett is then returned to his rightful status, though within the existing order. The narrator remarks that the eventual intermingling of Saxons and Normans allowed the British to “become one great people”.³⁷

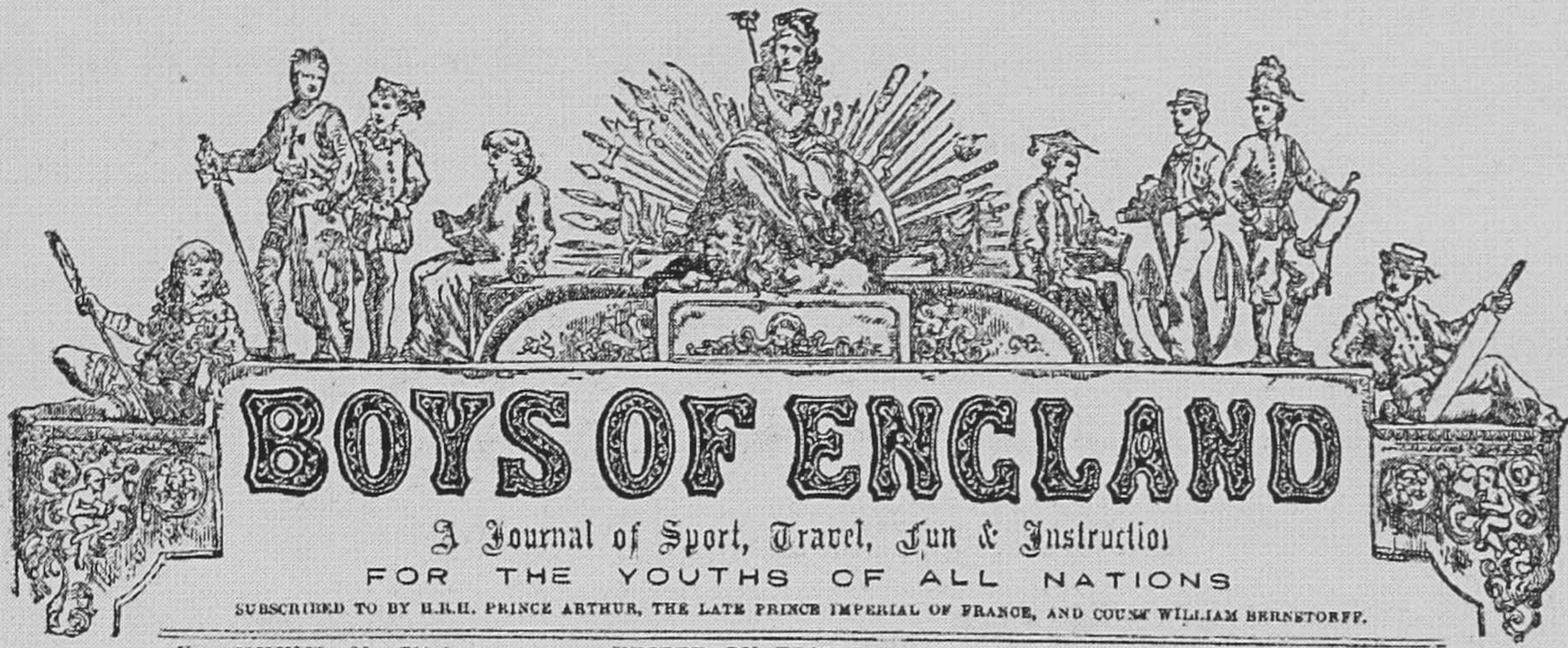
Perhaps the most remarkable element of ‘England of Old’ was the name of its hero. As we have seen, one of Brett’s distant relatives was named Richard le Brett. Furthermore, Brett claimed that his family had first arrived in Britain alongside the Conqueror, and that the Brett name could be found on the battle-roll of Hastings.³⁸ In ‘England of Old’ Richard le Brett is indeed said to be Norman, not true Saxon; however, his family had arrived and settled before the Conquest, and his father had been a favourite of Edward the Confessor. Though a Norman, Richard’s sympathies lie with the old order, not the new. It is unfortunate that the circumstances behind the writing of this story are not known. It is fascinating, however, to think that the plot and characters of one of the most radically politicised stories in the paper’s history betray strong signs of having been orchestrated by

³⁵ *BOE*, Vol.28, No.716, 6 August 1880, pp.209-10.

³⁶ *BOE*, Vol.28, No.715, 30 July 1880, p.196.

³⁷ *BOE*, Vol.29, No.728, 29 October 1880, p.15.

³⁸ Anon., ‘Edwin J. Brett’, *The Biograph and Review*, 4 (1880), p.456.



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EDITED BY EDWIN J. BRETT.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



“HOLD, SIR PAGE! THIS FIERY VALOUR MUST BE COOLED,” CRIED BEAUCLEEK.”

**ENGLAND OF OLD;
OR, SAXONS AND NORMANS.**

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

“THE labyrinths of this forest are so many and so intricate that I despair in finding an outlet. It is all your fault, Robert.”
 “Yes, yes; it is sure to be my fault.”
 This was said with great bitterness.
 “Bah!” continued Robert; “I have been

the scapegoat for all your escapades during my little life, but—”

Here he muttered under his breath—
 “Please the saints my time will come, when I shall exact full and most usurious interest for all the provocations I have received from—well, I will still call him, though reluctantly, my brother.”

For the week ending JULY 30, 1889.

Fig.13: 'England of Old, or, Saxons and Normans'

Brett himself. One can only conclude that Brett was attempting to identify himself with Richard, not to mention the radical ideologies he represented.

Historical Rebels

Criminals, especially highwaymen and pirates, had been common in the Newsagents' Publishing Company's penny dreadfuls. The tales in which they starred were numerous: *Black Hawke the Highwayman* (1866); *May Turpin, or, the Queen of the Road* (1864); *Moonlight Jack, the King of the Road* (1866); *The Nighthawks of London, or, the Noble Highwayman and the Miser's Daughter* (1865); *Tales of Highwaymen, or, Life on the Road* (1865-66); *Black Rollo, the Pirate King* (1866-67); *Wild Will, or, the Pirates of the Thames* (1865); and *The Boy Pirate, or, Life on the Ocean* (1866-67).³⁹ However, *BOE* shunned much of the traditional output of the NPC. In a bid for greater respectability it featured no highwaymen, and cast pirates only as villainous foes.

However, this presented a problem. The end of highwaymen and pirate fiction could potentially have detracted from the appeal of Brett's periodicals. Criminals, and their contests with the law, were an inexhaustible source of exciting storylines. These heroes were greatly admired by young working class readers, who warmed to their anti-establishment antics. Indeed, highwaymen and pirate stories were amongst the most popular of the NPC's output. For example, *Black Rollo, the Pirate King* ran to an impressive one hundred and twenty-three weekly numbers, a sure sign of a large weekly sale.⁴⁰

Part of Brett's solution to this problem was to replace highwaymen and pirates with criminals of a different kind. To this end, the paper became filled with historical rebels. The characters were numerous: Guy Fawkes, key figure in the gunpowder plot; Wat Tyler, leader of a violent popular uprising in 1381; Jack Cade, leader of a popular revolt against King Henry VI in 1450; The Duke of Monmouth, head of a popular uprising against James II; and Taffy ap Morgan, Welsh outlaw and supporter of Monmouth. These men, though

³⁹ A. E. Waite, *The Quest for Bloods: a Study of the Victorian Penny Dreadful by A. E. Waite: Edited and with Additional Notes on the Literature of the Byways by Ayresome Johns* (1997), pp.87-88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

criminals, were less offensive to the critics of boys' weekly literature. They were figures from the distant past, now passed into common folklore, their actions having become romanticised over time. They were certainly less contentious than Dick Turpin and his kind. Yet these new rebel heroes, despite appearances, were far from innocuous. Rather, their actions and beliefs were intended to actively promote rudimentary political consciousness amongst working class readers.

This point is best illustrated by *BOE*'s most famed rebel, Robin Hood. Robin starred in several *BOE* tales. His first outing was entitled 'Robin Hood and His Merry Men, and the Larks They Played in the Greenwood Shade' (vol.7). This was followed by 'Richard and Robin, or, the Knight and the Forrester' (vol.25) and 'The Prince of Archers, or, the Boyhood Days of Robin Hood' (vol.34). Several tales retold the Robin Hood story in all but name. These included 'Walter's Secret, or, the Outlaws of Berkley Forest' (vol.21) and 'Adam Bell, or, the Archers of Inglewood Forest' (vol.22).

The nineteenth century witnessed two major developments in the Robin Hood legend. The first was the growth of stories written specifically for children. The brave and rebellious Robin had understandably been a popular figure amongst youths for many centuries. As the children's publishing industry grew it became inevitable that writers would seek to retell the outlaw's story in print. Most of these stories were written in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were common in both book and periodical form. Many appeared in boys' weeklies; one of the first, a George Emmett penned tale entitled 'Robin Hood and the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest', was published in *The Young Englishman's Journal* in 1869.⁴¹ Robin Hood stories were well received by boy readers. In particular, working class children admired Robin for robbing the rich to give to the poor.⁴²

⁴¹ K. Carpenter, 'Robin Hood in Boys' Weeklies to 1914' (unpublished conference paper); S. Knight, *Robin Hood: a Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford, 1994), pp.201-02; A. W. Wright, 'Changes to the Legend: Children's Stories and Comic Operas', www.boldoutlaw.com/robages/robages8.html, accessed 3 February 2005. A version of Kevin Carpenter's paper is soon to be published in D. Alderson, J. Briggs and D. Butts, eds. *A History of Popular Children's Literature* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

⁴² See, for example, Rev. J. H. Howard, *Winding Lanes: a Book of Impressions and Recollections* (Caernarvon, 1938), p.27, and A. B. Iles, 'The Log of a Sea-Going Pioneer',

Indeed, some boys from poor backgrounds even considered Hood to be something of a patron saint.⁴³

The second development was the politicisation of the legend. Robin Hood had for centuries been considered a hero of working class folklore. His story, told through broadside ballads, chapbooks, poetry and theatre, had remained consistently popular. In previous centuries, Robin Hood had been much lauded for his subversive behaviour. At May Games festivals from the fifteenth century onwards, for example, he was celebrated as a “Lord of Misrule” who reversed the normal social order.⁴⁴ However, whereas earlier generations had cheered Robin Hood simply for his general spirit of nonconformity, the nineteenth century saw the outlaw become an explicitly politicised, anti-establishment icon. He was adopted by working people, and their political movements, as a symbol of freedom and independence, the embodiment of the equality of Saxon England. His belief in wealth redistribution strongly appealed to those who wished for greater class equality. Hood was held in great esteem by workers groups and friendly societies, who integrated much of his legend into their meetings through language, readings, motifs, even the décor of their meeting places.⁴⁵ In literature, too, the nineteenth century witnessed the politicisation of the Robin Hood Legend. Most notably, the folklorist Joseph Ritson published a new collection of Robin Hood texts, characterised by radical sympathies.⁴⁶

BOE was affected by, and became an active component of, both of these developments. On the one hand, it provided boy readers with the standard characteristics of the new children’s Robin Hood tales: rescues; fierce battles; archery; romance; rebelliousness; and anti-authoritarian behaviour. On the other hand, the paper’s Robin Hood stories also featured underlying rudimentary political content.

This political undercurrent was particularly prominent in ‘Richard and Robin’. In this 1879 tale Robin is praised for his political views and activities. He is said to be “an ardent

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~jcrislip/Log%20of%20a%20Sea%20Going%20Pioneer.doc>, p.4, accessed 21 November 2003.

⁴³ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p.368.

⁴⁴ Barczewski, *Myth*, pp.19-20; C. Hole, *English Folk-Heroes* (1948), p.91.

⁴⁵ Barczewski, *Myth*, pp.77-80.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.42-43; Knight, *Robin Hood*, pp.153-56.

lover of liberty”, and is eulogised as “the free and generous hearted yeoman, who stands out from the history of all times and nations, as the gallant outlaw, the bravest champion of the poor, the most magnanimous foe of the tyrant rich, that ever lived”.⁴⁷ Robin is praised for battling vigilantly against his nemesis, Prince John, the key authority figure of the story. His policy of robbing the rich to give to the poor is wholeheartedly endorsed. To heighten the political sentiment of the story, ‘Richard and Robin’ differs from the traditional legend in one, particularly crucial, way. Robin Hood is not a ‘distressed nobleman’, an aristocrat temporarily estranged from his true status by circumstances beyond his control. Rather, he is a commoner; his parents are a humble forester and the daughter of a yeoman.⁴⁸

Once again, the *BOP* can be used to demonstrate how *BOE* differed from higher class papers. The *BOP* tended to steer clear of the Robin Hood legend. Likewise, key *BOP* authors, such as R. M. Ballantyne and W. H. G. Kingston, despite their prolific outputs, never wrote Robin Hood novels. The Religious Tract Society probably considered the rebel to be a poor role model. Moreover, it had no cause to support the political values he represented. Equally, although affluent middle class readers must have admired Hood’s heroism, they were probably less enamoured by his politics than working class readers.⁴⁹ Evidently, Robin Hood was a character uniquely suited to working class children’s literature.

BOE’s sympathy for anti-authoritarian figures, and their anti-establishment activities, echoed throughout its fiction. For example, in ‘Wat Tyler, or, Who’s Your Hatter?’ (vol.8), Tyler is glorified for his persistent tax evasion. His gory death is omitted from the story; instead, he rises to the office of Lord Mayor of London. ‘Monmouth’, which charts the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth against James II, is particularly supportive of the dissenter. A scene depicting his execution, as well as being highly graphic, is sincerely mournful, describing the late rebel as “universally mourned by the people”.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *BOE*, Vol.25, No.643, 14 March 1879, p.286; *BOE*, Vol.25, No.634, 10 January 1879, p.134.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Carpenter, ‘Robin Hood’.

⁵⁰ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.199, 5 September 1870, p.255.

In contrast, figures of authority were roundly condemned. In ‘Monmouth’, for example, James II is criticised from the outset. The strongest complaints originate, unsurprisingly, from working class characters. The story opens with a discussion between Joe Norman, a gamekeeper, and John Broadbent, a yeoman, in which they speak disparagingly of the King. The narrator describes the whole nation as being “in a state of the greatest excitement respecting the rebellion”.⁵¹ James’ supporters are portrayed in a poor light. The daughter of a Monmouth sympathiser is set upon by a band of the King’s men, who threaten to kill her if she fails to divulge information about her father. The girl is eventually rescued by her cousin, Arthur Kingsley, the hero of the story.

Yet *BOE* did not side with rebels indiscriminately. It was only supportive where the rebel was shown to be acting in working class interests. Again, ‘Jack Cade’ illustrates this point well. The story is actually rather critical of the rebel leader. Chapter three, which sees Cade muster his army of peasant rebels, is particularly condemnatory. Cade rules over his new band with strict authority. He is portrayed as autocratic, a poor representative of working people. At one stage he uses a peasant as a footstool to mount a makeshift throne, before sending the man flying with a swift kick. Cade’s beliefs are frowned upon for being at odds with the values of working class improvement. For example, when Cade and his ignorant rebel gang lynch a schoolteacher for being able to read and write, the narrator’s sympathies lay with the teacher, not the rebel. At the end of the tale Cade is killed in combat by Alexander Iden, the true hero of the story. *BOE*’s portrayal of Cade was strongly rooted in fact. Cade’s rebellion was actually only supported by a limited section of the peasantry, and lost a good deal of support in London because of the violent conduct of his rebel army.⁵²

‘Street Arab’ Stories

BOE printed a great deal of historical fiction. These stories appropriated elements of traditional storytelling for a contemporary audience. However, the paper printed relatively

⁵¹ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.184, 1 October 1870, p.2.

⁵² I. M. W. Harvey, *Jack Cade’s Rebellion of 1450* (Oxford, 1991), especially p.95; H. M. Lyle, *The Rebellion of Jack Cade, 1450* (1950).

new types of stories just as often. Two examples are the adventure story (set in empire and America) and the public school story. A third type was the ‘street Arab’, or ‘London Arab’, story. Set in the gritty environment of urban London, these tales followed the fortunes of destitute boys. These fictional protagonists were based upon real-life homeless youngsters, dubbed ‘street Arabs’ by reformers such as Lord Ashley and Thomas Guthrie because of the supposed similarities between their ‘savagery’ and that of the Arab race.⁵³

In the mid-Victorian period concerns grew over the growing number of child vagrants living in London. These children, often orphans, wandered the streets in search of casual employment, honest or dishonest, and slept under impromptu outdoor shelter. Because of their lifestyles they were dirty, ragged and haggard in appearance.⁵⁴ The exact number of these vagrants is not known. Contemporary estimates suggest that shelterless children numbered around 30,000 in 1848, and that this figure remained static for around thirty years. However, this did not include children living in communal lodgings, workhouses, or other temporary accommodation, so the true total was probably much larger.⁵⁵ At around this time Victorians began to believe more than ever that children should be protected and sheltered.⁵⁶ Consequently, efforts to rescue these youngsters soon commenced. Early attempts, like the Ragged School movement, were mostly of an evangelical nature. However, the mid 1860s saw the beginning of more robust rescue strategies, which led to the formation of charitable organisations such as the Waifs and Strays Society in 1881 and the NSPCC in 1889.⁵⁷

By the middle of the century, ‘street Arabs’ had begun to feature in contemporary literature.⁵⁸ Most notably, of course, they appeared in the works of Charles Dickens. They

⁵³ H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood Since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), p.106.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.97-132; L. Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain, 1860-1918* (1991), pp.66-100; L. Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds: Vagrant Underworld in Britain, 1815-1985* (1988), pp.37-44.

⁵⁵ Rose, *Erosion*, p.80. James Greenwood estimated the true total at 100,000: see J. Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London: Introduction by Jeffrey Richards* (Oxford, 1981), pp.3-10.

⁵⁶ Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp.134, 151-63.

⁵⁷ G. K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870-1908* (Stanford, 1982); Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp.136-37, 143-46; H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872-1989* (1994), pp.41-128.

⁵⁸ L. C. Berry, *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville, 1999), pp.1-27.

could also be found in *Punch*, where they were portrayed as loveable comical urchins.⁵⁹ Both Dickens and *Punch* possessed a good grasp of the nature of working class slums. Their renderings were realistic and humanised, showing the light-hearted side of the slums as well as the downcast. Before long, ‘street Arabs’ began to figure in boys’ periodical literature too. The first debuted in NPC serials, most notably *The Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866). However, it was not until the 1880s that English authors began to regularly portray the urban slum within their novels. These renderings tended to be rather more serious than those of Dickens and *Punch*. They concentrated upon the squalor and misery of the lives of slum dwellers, thereby reflecting contemporary worries.⁶⁰

BOE featured ‘street Arab’ stories from its very first numbers. The first was ‘Wild Charley’ by Charles Stevens. Although ‘Wild Charley’ was set in the recent past, most ‘street Arab’ stories were set in contemporary London. They tended to be rather formulaic. They typically began with a baby being abandoned, usually at the workhouse door, on an inclement night. Often, the occasion was a snowy Christmas Eve. Alternatively, the child was already grown when deserted by his secretive and troubled lone mother. The orphan then struggled to survive on the streets before being taken under the wing of a criminal or gang. Despite his hardship, and the encouragement of his underworld companions, the boy never sank into crime. Eventually, through honesty and pluck, he foiled an elaborate criminal plot. The final chapter saw the boy, now an affluent and successful adult, reminiscing upon his former life.

It has been suggested that these stories, although ostensibly about the poor, actually confirmed elite superiority.⁶¹ The street boys who managed to better themselves were always revealed, in the final analysis, to be of noble birth. They had succeeded not because of their diligence, but because of the innately superior qualities of their ancestry. Indeed, many stories did follow this format. Wild Charley, who earns a living as a London guide, is unknowingly the son of an aristocrat. In ‘Poor Ray, the Drummer Boy’ (vol.4), a story attributed to “a contributor to the Army and Navy Gazette”, the hero pursues a military

⁵⁹ Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp.108, 114-19.

⁶⁰ P. J. Keating, *The Working Class in Victorian Fiction* (1971), pp.1-30.

⁶¹ Boyd, *Manliness*, pp.45-69.

career, working his way up to the rank of ensign, before hearing of his wealthy bloodline.⁶² In John Cecil Stagg's 'Homeless Harry, or Lost in London' (vol.3), Harry emerges from his London squalor when he discovers that he is actually a wealthy heir. Phil Rayleigh, the lead protagonist in 'The Story of a London Arab' (vol.9), transpires to be the son of a wealthy nobleman, the Viscount D'Estcourt. Often, telling signs hinted towards each boy's true background. Their physical features were said to display traces of intelligence, or the potential for achievement. Because each boy's capacity to triumph over adversity was dependent upon inborn characteristics, not effort and determination, such stories have been described as the antithesis of the self help ethos.⁶³

However, these stories were not necessarily typical of *BOE*'s 'street Arab' formula. The paper published just as many stories, if not more, in which the lead protagonist did not transpire to be of noble birth. Such was the case in all of James Greenwood's stories. Greenwood was *BOE*'s leading author of 'street Arab' literature. A prolific and respected mid nineteenth-century journalist and author, he wrote extensively about social deprivation in newspapers, books and periodicals. He was famously nicknamed the 'Amateur Casual', after an overnight research visit to Lambeth workhouse; so great was interest in his findings that he was credited with inspiring Poor Law reforms.⁶⁴ Of all of the many causes supported by Greenwood, child welfare was his most pressing concern. He was heavily involved with children's philanthropic movements.⁶⁵ He worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the plight of poor city children. He began charitable initiatives, such as the *Daily Telegraph* Children's Country Outings Fund.⁶⁶ Greenwood's research into the slums of London made his literary portrayals of poverty uniquely vivid. They were detailed and accurate in terms of dialect, geography, clothing, attitude and character. His 1866 novel, *The True History of a Little Ragamuffin*, was particularly highly regarded. Because of his

⁶² *BOE*, Vol.4, No.92, 21 August 1868, p.210.

⁶³ Boyd, *Manliness*, p.68.

⁶⁴ J. W. R. Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette, of its First Editor Frederick Greenwood and of its Founder George Murray Smith* (1950), p.169.

⁶⁵ J. Richards, 'Introduction', in *Seven Curses*, pp.v-xxi.

⁶⁶ Scott, *Pall Mall Gazette*, p.170.

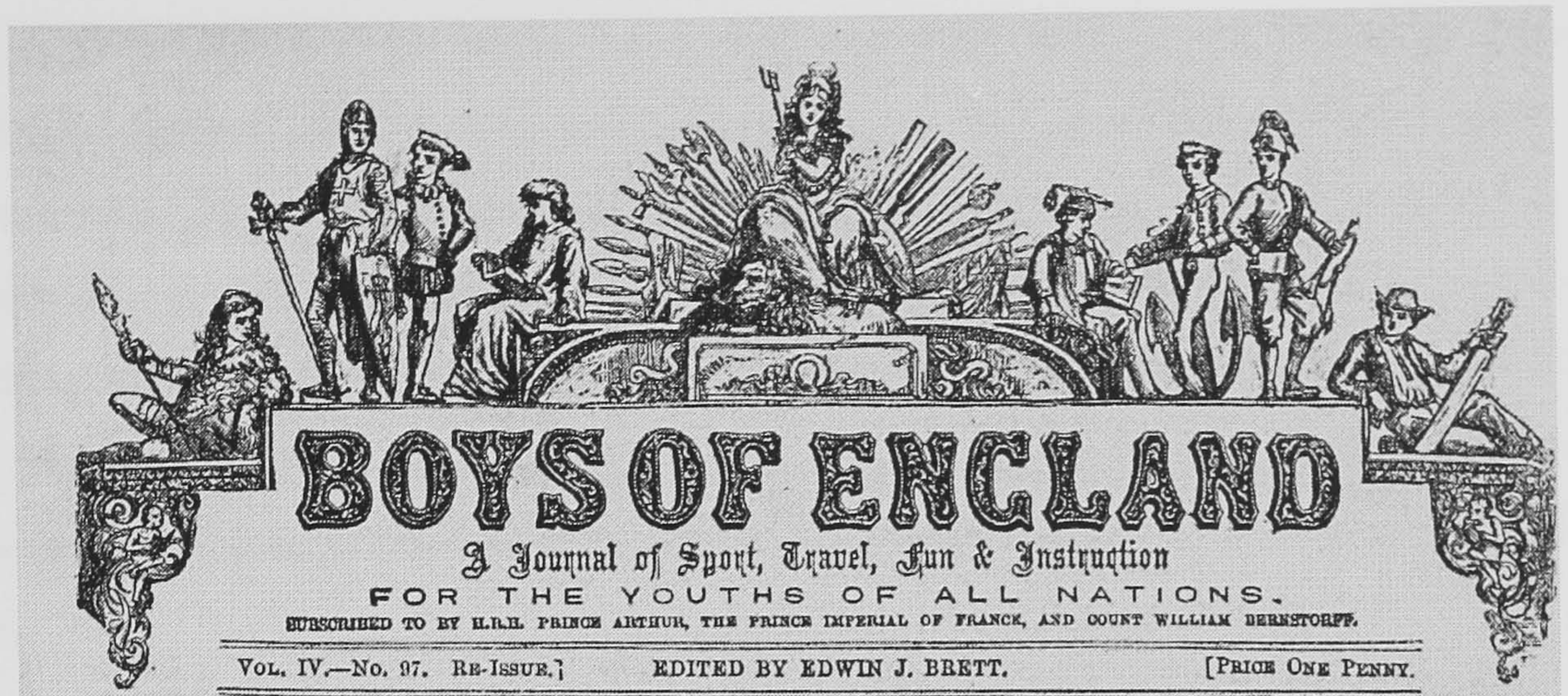
considerable pedigree Brett was pleased to acquire his services, and billed his stories with great pride.⁶⁷

James Greenwood's first story for *BOE* was 'Jack Steadfast, or, Wreck and Rescue' (vol.4). The story begins in Shadwell, London. Jack and his parents live in poor housing known as Rickett's Rents. Jack's father is a violent criminal, who forges currency in a locked room in their apartment. His mother is an alcoholic, one of many gin-addicted women in the Rents. One day Jack discovers his father's secret after peering through the keyhole of his workshop. He accidentally reveals the truth to a friend. Word spreads, and soon the police arrest Jack's father. He is tried, and is sentenced to a long jail term. Jack's mother blames the boy for bringing ruin upon the family, and abandons him outside the courthouse. Jack, now homeless, sleeps in an abandoned house until he is taken in by a criminal gang. Despite the influence of his new associates he remains honest, and eventually foils a jewel thieving ring. The end of the story sees Jack healthy, prosperous and educated, thanks to the father of Lucy Heath, a girl Jack rescued from the streets.

The story illustrates how Greenwood's stories differed from some other *BOE* 'street Arab' tales. Jack is not revealed to be of high birth; his jailed father and absent mother are his true parents. He succeeds despite his lowly birth and problematic parentage. His success is not dependent upon inborn noble characteristics, but upon his own endeavour. Jack Steadfast, as his name suggests, is lauded by Greenwood as an example of honesty, bravery and fortitude. Rather than being the antithesis of self help, he is in fact its archetype. Nor was Jack alone. Greenwood's second 'street Arab' story, 'Joe Sterling, or, a Ragged Fortune' (vol.8), begins with the poor boy wandering the streets of the capital at Christmas, the snow penetrating his worn-out boots. Like Jack, Joe manages to rescue himself from the slums through his own diligence. Not only does Joe lack the advantage of an aristocratic birth, he actually transpires to be the son of the villain of the story. His redemption is therefore all the more remarkable.

What is surprising about Greenwood's stories is that they make no mention of charitable organisations. As a staunch supporter of children's philanthropic movements,

⁶⁷ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.90, 7 August 1868, p.192; *BOE*, Vol.4, No.91, 14 August 1868, p.205.



"IT'S NO USE, JACK," CRIED THE BURLY POLICEMAN WITH THE SLEDGE HAMMER.

JACK STEADFAST; OR, WRECK AND RESCUE.
 BY JAMES GREENWOOD.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.
 WHICH TELLS OF MY PARENTAGE; THE LOSS OF MY PARENTS, AND HOW I BECAME FRIENDLESS. I WAS BORN—

For the Week ending FEBRUARY 23, 1876.

And there I halt; and mighty ridiculous it must appear that an individual ambitious enough to attempt the narrative of his life as far as it has progressed, should stumble and stop ere he has written half a dozen words of it. The difficulty is one I did not dream of. Since the words are written, there they may stand, for undoubtedly I was born, though, when it becomes a question of when and where, I am as ignorant as the most perfect stranger.
 Nor is this so singular as the polite reader at first may imagine. I will venture to say that even at the present day there are thousands of youthful gutter prowlars—of which disreputable fraternity I was once upon a time a member—who have no more idea of when their next birthday

Fig.14: 'Jack Steadfast, or, Wreck and Rescue'

one might expect that he would have promoted them through his literature. They were probably ignored for several reasons. Firstly, a life amongst criminals gave many opportunities for exciting scenarios with which to entertain boy readers, whereas a life in charitable care did not. Secondly, such messages would have had only limited impact upon working class boys; they were better reserved for Greenwood's adult audiences. Thirdly, and most importantly, charity denied the boy protagonist the opportunity to demonstrate his own resolve. Greenwood's message of self help was, after all, the defining element of his tales.

It is highly unlikely that a sizable proportion of *BOE*'s readership was made up of real London vagrants. However, many of the paper's readers would have been working class and relatively poor. A large proportion lived in London. It is probable that Greenwood intended his stories to appeal chiefly to them. These readers, Greenwood hoped, would recognise their own hardships within his stories, empathise with his lead protagonists, and revel in their eventual rescue. One would imagine that Greenwood's stories, which taught that poor boys could better themselves despite their lowly circumstance, were a more satisfying, and inspiring, read than those which taught that only those of high birth could achieve worldly success. Therefore, as with adventure stories and public school stories, the extent to which 'street Arab' literature reinforced elite values can be questioned. The work of James Greenwood in particular proves that many of *BOE*'s 'street Arab' tales were actually tailored to stimulate improving tendencies in its working class readership.

Conclusion

Historians of boys' papers have tended to concentrate upon just two narrative themes, empire and the public schools, at the expense of all others. However, *BOE* featured numerous other types of serial fiction. These understudied types are just as relevant to our understanding of how *BOE* addressed its readership. One of the most important is historical fiction, a dominant feature of *BOE*. No doubt historical fiction has been neglected because it was largely absent from the *BOP*, the favoured source of boys' paper historians.

BOE's historical fiction was the product of centuries old popular narrative. The paper successfully appropriated traditional tales for a young, contemporary audience. Crucially, it

appears that in doing so these stories, traditionally reflective of popular belief, lost none of their sensitivity. In fact, if anything they became more sensitive. Pre-industrial British history was an important, and ideologically loaded, point of reference for *BOE*. The paper portrayed the medieval world as profoundly relevant to the working class of contemporary Britain. Through its educative qualities, its medievalist doctrines, and its rebels, the paper's historical fiction satisfied working class demand for education and knowledge, and propagated a subtly politicised ethos of freedom and equality.

Moreover, *BOE* used this idealised image of pre-industrial Britain in counterpoint with stories carrying a strongly contrasting, pessimistic outlook on contemporary industrial society – notably 'street Arab' stories. True, *BOE* believed Victorian England to be highly advanced. However, the two divergent images of Britain illustrate that the paper recognised problems within industrial society, especially those affecting its working class readers, which it sought to draw attention to, even remedy.

Chapter Six – Non-Fiction: Self Help and Science

Introduction

Most Victorian boys' periodicals contained large quantities of material other than fiction. The subject matter of these non-fictional articles varied considerably. Common topics, to name but a few, included: biography; employment; geography; history; nature; poetry; puzzles; and sport. *Boys of England* carried more non-fiction than most of its contemporaries.

Yet historians of boys' periodicals have paid little attention to non-fiction. Most have ignored it entirely, whilst even those who have examined it have done so only to a limited extent. Kirsten Drotner's *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (1988) boasts the most rigorous enquiry. Drotner investigates factual articles in a range of boy' periodicals, including Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine*, *The Boy's Own Paper* and *BOE*. Jack Cox also dedicates a chapter to non-fiction in *Take a Cold Tub, Sir! The History of the Boy's Own Paper* (1982). Historians have correctly observed that middle class periodicals like the *BOM* and the *BOP* tended to feature more non-fiction than working class equivalents like *BOE*. This was because publishers like Beeton and the Religious Tract Society were keen to steer their readers into worthwhile pastimes and interests as part of their wider ethos of religious instruction.

However, a new historiography of non-fiction in Victorian boys' periodicals has recently begun to emerge. It centres around how science was represented within the papers. Key articles within this historiography are Diana Dixon's 'Children's Magazines and Science in the Nineteenth Century' (2001), Richard Noakes' 'The *Boy's Own Paper* and Late-Victorian Juvenile Magazines' (2004), and Jonathan Topham's 'Periodicals and the Making of Reading Audiences for Science in Early Nineteenth Century Britain: *The Youth's Magazine, 1829-37*' (2004). These historians argue that children's periodicals were a significant component of a burgeoning popular science movement which existed in the nineteenth century. Yet their studies still focus largely upon middle class periodicals. Only Diana Dixon examines *BOE*; she concludes that it contained less science than its higher

class rivals because its ill-educated audience were effectively excluded from scientific study.

This chapter contends that historians have underestimated the significance of non-fiction within boys' papers in general, and within *BOE* specifically. Non-fiction, although less common than in the *BOM* and the *BOP*, was actually a crucial component of *BOE*'s overall identity. Moreover, the paper's non-fiction was specially tailored to suit a working class readership. *BOE*'s non-fiction came in many forms. Two of these in particular epitomised its content. The first was working class self improvement in general; the second was one significant component of improving study, science and nature.

Self Help

The Victorian era witnessed a swell of interest in the self help movement. Its best known proponent was Samuel Smiles. Smiles' *Self Help*, published in 1859, sold in great numbers both in Britain and worldwide. The book was something of a lifestyle manual.¹ It argued that individuals could improve themselves through hard work and education, and that good qualities of character, such as industriousness, determination and vitality, were the keys to success. Smiles emphasised that the individual should take responsibility for his own improvement, rather than relying upon the help or charity of others. Crucially, he believed that a low birth was no barrier to betterment. To illustrate this point, *Self Help* was full of examples of men from all walks of life who had achieved greatness by following an improving lifestyle.²

Smiles' teachings were not necessarily his own. Rather, his aim was to reflect and codify the mode of self improvement which had been thriving amongst the working class for a number of generations.³ Self improvement had, by the 1860s, become a way of life for

¹ A. H. Thornton, 'The Smilesian Philosophy', in M. D. Stephens and G. W. Roderick, eds. *Samuel Smiles and Nineteenth Century Self-Help in Education* (Nottingham, 1983), p.7.

² S. Smiles, *Self Help: with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance: with a Centenary Introduction by Asa Briggs* (1958).

³ A. B. Rodrick, 'The Importance of Being an Ernest Improver: Class, Caste, and Self-Help in Mid-Victorian England', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol.29, Pt.1 (2001), p.39.

large sections of the working class intent upon bettering themselves. Education was a primary objective; working people believed that knowledge could potentially improve their lives, whilst radicals, particularly Chartists, also believed that it could increase working class political clout. Self improvement sometimes took the form of private study. However, working class people usually practiced self help within mutual improvement groups. These communities of likeminded improvers met regularly for discussion, debate, and the sharing of knowledge. The self help movement was an autonomous, self-determined movement, created, managed and utilised by the working class themselves. It was distinct from, and more successful than, the more coercive programmes of improvement which the middle class attempted usher the working class into as a means of social control, such as the 'rational recreation' movement.⁴

Numerous historians have studied self help. However, few have considered children's involvement in the movement. Historians have found it difficult to imagine that the same working class youths who whiled away their time reading sensational literature also practiced self improvement.⁵ However, there is little doubt that many children were improvers. They became involved in the movement through various avenues: Sunday schools; mutual improvement and debating societies; parents or older siblings; and communal reading in public or amongst the family.⁶ This exposure must have been quite

⁴ P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (1978), pp.35-55, 80-105; B. Beavan, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005), pp.16-43; J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England, 1750-1900* (1984), pp.88-110; E. Hopkins, *Working-Class Self-Help in Nineteenth Century England: Responses to Industrialization* (1995); K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1888* (Oxford, 1998), pp.68-71; J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), pp.58-91; J. O. Springhall, 'Rotten to the Very Core: Leisure and Youth 1830-1914', *Youth and Policy*, 14 (1985), pp.28-33; J. O. Springhall, 'Rotten to the Very Core: Leisure and Youth 1830-1914', *Youth and Policy*, 15 (1985-86), pp.32-41; F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (1988), pp.140-41; F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, XXXIV, 2 (1981), pp.189-208.

⁵ R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957), p.240.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.240-59; S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.22, 232-42; T. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday*

effective; working class males just out of boyhood are known to have been amongst the most enthusiastic self-improvers.⁷

It is probable, therefore, that a good deal of *BOE*'s audience would have been actively involved in some form of self improvement. Brett clearly recognised their growing enthusiasm for betterment. He was only too keen to support these boys and their praiseworthy cause. Brett ensured that from its very beginnings *BOE* featured a wealth of self help material and a strong ideology of improvement. Although, as we have seen, the paper's fiction also carried improving messages, most of *BOE*'s self help was found within its non-fiction. *BOE*'s improving ethos was similar to that which the paper's readers would have encountered in their schools and societies. Indeed, with a readership of between 150,000 and 250,000, it could be said that *BOE* acted like a vast mutual improvement group.

The paper's improving intentions were outlined in Charles Stevens' first editorial:

Our aim is [...] to amuse and instruct you by interesting papers on history and science; to inform you on all matters belonging to your manly out-door sports and games, and to your home pastimes. [...] You must never forget that you are intelligent beings, born in this age of advanced progress, and that even your amusements should be [...] in good taste. [...] It is your own fault if you do not grow up wise and strong young men. Scorn aping 'mannishness'; revel in your boyhood, and enjoy it while it lasts; but, above all, cultivate true manliness of mind and body, learn to think, speak and write, learn to swim, jump and run. Despise skulking laziness, and face hard study and hard-hand labour.⁸

This improving ethos resonated throughout Stevens' and Brett's subsequent editorials.

Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850 (1976); F. K. Prochaska, *Woman and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980), pp.73-94; J. Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.58-91; D. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: a Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (1981), pp.87-195.

⁷ R. Q. Gray, 'Religion, Culture and Social Class in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Edinburgh', in G. Crossick, ed. *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (1977), p.139; Green, *Religion*, pp.22, 232-42; Rodrick, 'Importance', *VLAC*, Vol.29, Pt.1, p.40; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.393-438; Vincent, *Bread*, pp.123-30.

⁸ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.16.

Because most of their contributions were published anonymously, very little is known about the men who wrote improving non-fiction for *BOE*. It is impossible to tell what motivated them to write this material. We may never know how deeply they were involved in the self help movement. However, it is likely that Brett, as editor, played a greater role in shaping the paper's non-fictional content than any individual contributor. Indeed, he probably exercised even more control over *BOE*'s non-fiction than he did its fiction. *BOE* was the first working class boys' paper to offer material so closely engaged with the self help movement. Therefore, Brett probably orchestrated the paper's non-fictional contributions very carefully to maintain a level of consistency in its improving message. Indeed, much of the early material was written by Brett and Charles Stevens themselves.

Yet *BOE* did manage to entice several noted individuals to submit articles. Amongst their number were noted horticulturalist George M. F. Glenny, famed rower Henry Kelly, cricketer 'Lillywhite', conjurer David Prince Miller, and Mr A. Williamson, president of the London Swimming Club. Other famous authors were identified simply as, for example, "a celebrated dramatic author", as was the case with the writer of 'Illustrated Tales of the Pantomimes' (vol.1).⁹ Celebrity columnists brought numerous benefits. Boys were doubtless attracted towards articles written by their heroes, and the periodicals which featured them. The articles were effectively a form of celebrity endorsement. Furthermore, the names of professionals and respected amateurs gave the paper an air of authority, not to mention respectability. *BOE* was the first popular periodical to attract contributions from such a variety of well known personalities. It was not until the arrival of the *BOP* that any of Brett's rivals sought to utilise celebrity to any serious extent.

The greatest problem faced by Brett was how best to address improving material to the paper's audience. He would not have wished his self help message to be mistaken for the didacticism of religious children's periodicals, or the more complex educative material of middle class papers such as Beeton's *BOM*. Readers may have become wary of *BOE* had they thought it too preachy or serious; although these boys were familiar with self improvement, they had not encountered such material in their periodicals before. It was therefore important that Brett set *BOE*'s improving material within a context palatable to

⁹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.7, 9 January 1867, p.112. The author was probably Colin Henry Hazlewood.

the paper's audience. Accordingly, all of *BOE*'s improving articles were delivered in a manner designed to appeal to readers' tastes. They stuck closely to known hobbies and interests, they recognised capabilities and limitations, they were written in convivial language, and they were peppered with trivia and humour.

In what forms was *BOE*'s improving non-fiction delivered? Much of it came in the guise of history. This was a logical choice; as we have seen, historical literature was keenly embraced by young self improvers. The paper's first historical series, 'The Progress of the British Boy' (vol.1), charted the evolution of British youth from pre-Roman times to the present day. Like the paper's historical fiction, the series carried a great deal of detailed factual information. In addition, 'The Progress of the British Boy' carried a pronounced motivational message. The series suggested that the self help ethos was to be admired, and pursued, because it had made Britain the strongest nation in the world:

Boys have in times past done much towards the mighty movement [towards civilisation]: let not the boys of the present day look back with slothful eyes at the deeds of their predecessors, but join heart and hand in the great movement, not with overbearing confidence in their own abilities, but with the calm self-reliance which is the offspring of conscious rectitude. The ways of life are many, and in all of them may boys aspire to eminence, whether it be in the field of battle or the field of learning. Nor is any path to fame closed to the boy who, with true British energy and pluck, thrusts himself forwards into the war of life to aid the cause of progress and improvement.¹⁰

Boys were also encouraged to undertake their own practical historical research. For example, the 'Ancient British Coins' series (vol.3) advocated the study of bygone currency. "As an aid to knowledge of ancient history", read the first instalment, "the study of coins is most useful."¹¹ Each article featured numerous illustrations, accompanied by an educative commentary.

Improving non-fiction also came in the form of biographies. Admirable men were held aloft by *BOE* as examples for boys to emulate. Notably, Smiles himself had used the very same technique. The paper's first biographical series was entitled 'How to Become Great Men' (vol.1). The series featured heroic Britons of past centuries, such as Captain

¹⁰ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, pp.5-6.

¹¹ *BOE*, Vol.3, No.66, 22 February 1868, p.224.

Cook and John Harrison, and suggested that their hard work had allowed them to achieve greatness despite a lowly start in life:

A knowledge of the struggles which a great many men have had to encounter before they could rise into renown must at all times afford us good examples, and hold out an instructive encouragement to those who, though humbly born, feel within them the anxious longings which have prompted heroes of every age and land. [...] The humble birth of this seaman was no bar to his advancement in life.¹²

Many of the foremost men in the ranks of science, arts, and commerce have risen from humble life by their own exertions, strength of mind, and skill of hand. [...] It should be the constant aim of young Britons to imitate the examples of these men – to follow in their footsteps.¹³

Similarly, in the lengthy ‘True Stories of Boyish Bravery’ series (vol.7), famous figures from history, mostly British history, were praised for acts of heroism epitomising boyish pluck. Personalities featured in the series included King Arthur, Richard II, William Wallace and Sir Walter Raleigh. Nor was it only renowned Britons who were hailed by *BOE*. The ‘Stories of Boyhood Heroes’ series (vol.1) praised the heroic deeds of readers’ own peers. The first article told of a nine year old boy who had saved a grown man from drowning.

Because physical endeavour was a vital component of the ideology of improvement, *BOE* devoted a great deal of attention to sport. A regular column, ‘Our Sporting Page’ (vol.1), provided boys with instruction in a variety of sports, such as boating, rowing, skating, football, gymnastics and cricket, all of which were popular amongst the Victorian working class. Brett himself contributed a series on fencing. Many of *BOE*’s sporting articles drew upon historical events, thereby setting the sport within an exciting context; for example, Brett’s fencing series told readers anecdotes about famous duels of past centuries. Boys were advised to participate in sports wherever possible, and to join clubs or take lessons. On one notable occasion Brett managed to enlist the services of Mr A. Williamson, president of the London Swimming Club, who kindly consented to provide subscribers with free swimming lessons. They ran twice-weekly at two London venues, Endell Street Baths

¹² *BOE*, Vol.1, No.23, 20 April 1867, p.350.

¹³ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.24, 4 May 1867, p.374.

and the Metropolitan baths.¹⁴ Williamson also contributed a series on swimming technique, which ran for several numbers in volume two. Brett recognised, too, that many of his readers followed competitive sports. Reports from cricket matches, and the University Boat Race, all featured in the paper's earliest numbers.

Brett believed that youthful self-improvers stood an increased chance of pursuing a successful career in adulthood. Therefore, *BOE* encouraged boys to take up industrious, worthwhile hobbies, particularly where the hobby might blossom into a trade. This was perhaps most evident in the 'Young Mechanic' series (vol.1). The series offered practical guidelines for constructing various models and devices, usually from wood and other easily available materials. The series aimed to develop practical skills and talents amongst boys who wished to pursue skilled handicrafts as a hobby, and later as a career:

Most boys and youths have an ambition to be making something, but many of them feel at a loss how to begin their experiments or manufactures. In order to set at rest the minds of those who thus find themselves in a fix, we have resolved to give our readers a first lesson in carpenter's work.¹⁵

Each project in the series tied in with a current boyish hobby. Projects included: a stage; a model cart; a rabbit hutch; a model steam engine; a kaleidoscope; a printing press; a musical automaton; a galvanic battery; a telescope; a microscope; an air pump; a canoe; a model windmill; and a model water mill. Judging by this list, boys would have enjoyed playing with the fruit of their labour as much as they enjoyed making it.

Another element of *BOE*'s improving non-fiction was the arts. A keen interest in the arts was often the mark of a self improver. Boys were encouraged to develop their artistic talents through the 'Young Artist' series (vol.1), which offered lessons in painting and sketching:

"Why don't you give us a lesson in painting", is the question put to us by many hundreds of our youthful readers, and, as we are ever anxious to encourage them in all laudable objects, we have determined to comply at once with a wish that has been so generally expressed. [...] Many who

¹⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.23, 27 April 1867, p.368.

¹⁵ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.21, 13 April 1867, p.334.

have written to us on the subject are evidently boys who are hereafter to become the working men of England.¹⁶

The series extolled the role which artistic talent could play in an improving lifestyle:

Boys, as well as men, take a pride in the work they have accomplished, whether it be in art or mechanics, and those achieve the most who, when young, devote their leisure hours to self improvement; and many a lad in days gone by, with far scantier materials to work with than we shall supply, has afterwards made a name in the world that lives to the present day.¹⁷

Boys were also encouraged to submit their art to the paper; many did so. Although a large number submitted prose, most boys' contributions came in the form of poetry. No doubt boys were inspired by Charles Stevens' own original works, which featured in the paper's earliest issues. Stevens' poetry was always written with the self help ethos at its forefront, as this example illustrates:

Don't tell me of tomorrow;
Give me the boy who'll say
That when a good deed's to be done,
"Let's do the deed today."
We may all commend the present
If we act and never wait;
But repentance is the phantom
Of a past that comes too late.
Don't tell me of tomorrow;
There is much to do today
That can never be accomplished
If we throw the hours away.
Every moment has its duty;
Who the future can foretell?
Then why put off till tomorrow
What to-day can do as well?¹⁸

One final example of *BOE*'s improving non-fiction was its mental challenges. Mental stimulation was a characteristic of many of the paper's features, the most popular being the

¹⁶ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.22, 20 April 1867, p.351.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.4, 18 December 1860, p.62.

‘Crackers for the Ingenious’ series. ‘Crackers’ began in volume one, and ran for many years. The column was comprised of quizzes, trivia, word puzzles, number puzzles, charades and conundrums, all contributed by readers themselves. The answers were revealed to readers the week after the questions were printed. The names of boys who had submitted correct solutions to Brett were also printed, providing readers with an extra incentive to solve the puzzles. Each ‘cracker’ would probably have posed a genuine challenge for most boys; many of the puzzles were fairly difficult, whilst some were positively abstract.

It is correct that *BOE* did not publish as much non-fiction as the *BOM* and the *BOP*. However, the point is that it did not aim to. Brett did not want the paper to carry too much non-fiction; otherwise, readers might have been put off. Rather, he simply aimed to strike a balance between exciting fiction and educative non-fiction. Nor did he want his non-fiction to be too educative. Rather, he fashioned it to be simple and understandable, and to engage with boyish interests. Most importantly, Brett crafted *BOE*’s non-fiction to connect with the flourishing self help movement, which he did with considerable success. This considered, future scholars of children’s participation in the self help movement should certainly consider examining Brett’s papers within their studies.

Improvement and Employment

The greatest proof that *BOE* was aimed squarely at the ‘respectable’ working classes is that its ethos and theirs were so closely intertwined. In contrast, the paper’s ethos was often at odds with that of the lower middle class. This is demonstrated in almost every facet of the paper’s content. For example, *BOE*’s attitude towards imperialism contrasted starkly with the beliefs of the lower middle class, who are thought to have been the most jingoistic social group.¹⁹ However, the argument that *BOE* was intended for working class boys is perhaps most strongly illustrated by the paper’s self help articles. The paper’s improving

¹⁹ P. Bailey, ‘White Collars, Grey Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited’, *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), pp.273-90; C. Hughes, ‘Imperialism, Illustration and the *Daily Mail*, 1896-1904’, in M. Harris and A. Lee, eds. *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (1986), pp.187-200; R. N. Price, ‘Society, Status and Jingoism: the Social Roots of Lower Middle Class Patriotism, 1870-1900’, in *Lower Middle Class*, pp.89-112.

non-fiction catered well for the ‘respectable’ working classes, yet poorly for the lower middle class.

Historians have argued that *BOE* was aimed predominantly at upper working and lower middle class boys. Indeed, the debut editorial of the paper’s first editor, Charles Stevens, which spoke directly to boys employed, or intending to become employed, in upper working and lower middle class professions, appears to give credence to their convictions. “It gives us great satisfaction”, wrote Stevens, “to imagine you returning from school, the office, the workroom, or the shop, and taking up your copy of the *Boys*.”²⁰ In number five, too, Stevens spoke of a readership comprising “the young folks employed in counting-houses, in telegraph and in printing offices, at bookstalls, in factories, shops, &c.”²¹

The fact that *BOE* was partly aimed at working class boys is treated by historians, rightly, as a given. They argue that paper was packed with the type of exciting fiction which publishers, Brett included, had traditionally sought to entice them with. Historians have based their argument that *BOE* was also aimed partly at the lower middle class around two further facts: firstly, that the paper sported an ethos of self improvement in its non-fiction; secondly, that the paper contained non-fictitious material aimed at clerks.

However, historians have misinterpreted this evidence; consequently, they have overestimated the extent to which *BOE* sought to cater for the lower middle class. In the case of the paper’s improving message, this misinterpretation may be explained quite simply. It is true that large sections of the Victorian lower middle class practiced self help. However, so did large sections of the working class. Each class did so for different purposes. As we have seen, *BOE*’s self help message was intended to address working class improvers, content within their own social strata. It was not meant for lower middle class improvers, doggedly striving towards bona-fide middle class status. Historians have probably misread this material due to the superficial similarities between indigenous

²⁰ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.16.

²¹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.5, 22 December 1866, p.79.

working class respectability and the middle class brand of respectability to which the lower middle class aspired.²²

The second misinterpretation requires a lengthier explanation. In the mid to late nineteenth century an ever increasing number of young men entered clerkships, particularly in London. A large number, and a wide range, of positions were available.²³ As cerebral rather than manual workers, these young men were considered members of a burgeoning administrative subdivision within the lower middle class. There is no doubt that many *BOE* readers wished to become clerks. As historians have pointed out, the paper's correspondence columns were inundated with letters from boys enquiring about office employment, or requesting appraisal of their handwriting. Nor is there any doubt that Brett wanted *BOE*'s non-fiction to cater for these youngsters. He was clearly aware of a growing desire amongst boys to improve their literacy standards, thereby enabling them to secure a clerkship. He commissioned several articles, including literacy aids like 'The *BOE* Letter Writer' (vol.8) and 'Our Comic Lindley Murray, or, Grammar Made Easy and Pleasant for all Parties' (vol.21), to help them fulfil their ambitions.²⁴

Yet this material was not intended for lower middle class boys. To satisfy the high demand for clerks which existed in the Victorian era, many boys were recruited from the ranks of the working class.²⁵ The aspiring clerks who Brett sought to support were more likely to have been working class than lower middle class. The very fact these boys were insecure about their prospects as clerks, finding it necessary to solicit Brett's opinion, indicates that few of them were the sons of lower middle class fathers, for whom entering non-manual work would have been more of a given. Moreover, even if these boys did eventually become clerks (which many may not have done), it is debatable whether they

²² Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp.68-71; T. R. Tholfsen, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (1976), pp.243-67.

²³ G. L. Anderson, 'The Social Economy of Late-Victorian Clerks', in *Lower Middle Class*, pp.113-15; G. Crossick, 'The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: a Discussion' in *Lower Middle Class*, pp.18-19.

²⁴ In 1912 young clerks were awarded their own dedicated periodical. *Boy Clerk*, published by the Boy Clerk's Association, ran for five numbers.

²⁵ G. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, 1976); Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p.407.

should be thought of as lower middle class. Although working class applicants who successfully secured a clerkship did indeed join a lower middle class profession, this may not have significantly altered their class identity, and certainly not until they had left the family home. Rather, their social, cultural and economic status would, to a large extent, have still been governed by the standing of their family.²⁶ Thus, *BOE*-reading clerks may have had more in common with the working class than the lower middle class.²⁷

Furthermore, although it is true that some of *BOE*'s non-fiction was targeted at working class boys who wished to join lower middle class professions, the paper more frequently addressed youngsters destined for traditional working class vocations. The key example is 'My Son – What Shall I do with Him?', a series of articles which spanned volumes five and six. The series detailed numerous professions and trades suitable for boys to follow upon leaving school: woollen manufacture; gold and silverwork; mines and mining; designing; agriculture; ship building; carving and sculpture; printing; silk manufacture; earthenware manufacture; engineering; clothing trades; watchmaking; electric telegraphy; leather industries; furniture and decoration; and musical instrument manufacture. Virtually every article spoke to 'respectable' working class readers intent upon learning a skilled manual trade.

Conversely, the series ignored typical lower middle class careers. Indeed, *BOE*'s non-fiction in general catered rather poorly for most boys from lower middle class backgrounds. For example, boys from traditional petit-bourgeoisie families, who aspired to follow their fathers by becoming schoolteachers, shopkeepers, businessmen, professionals or managers, were barely provided for. Moreover, although 'My Son – What Shall I do with Him?' did dedicate an article to clerks, it was highly critical of the profession. Boys were warned of overcrowding, low pay, and monotony. The author frowned upon the growing trend of lower middle class snobbery which was rife amongst clerks. In contrast, he praised the practical, and ideological, virtues of skilled manual workers:

²⁶ In Victorian Britain, the family was a boy's "primary source of identity": see M. J. Childs, *Labour's Apprentices: Working-Class Lads in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (1992), p.3.

²⁷ Indeed, the pay and prospects of these boy clerks could be rather poor: see Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, pp.52-56.

There is a false idea of gentility which turns up a contemptuous nose at honest handicraft, and affects the so-called more gentlemanly avocation of the clerk. This is a great mistake, as there are thousands of intelligent and well-educated men now in England who are clerks, and envy, as well they may, the rough but free and independent skilled mechanic, who at once earns more money, and has not to make the appearance out of it.²⁸

On this evidence, historians are right to argue that *BOE* was aimed at working class boys. In fact, it probably appealed to a wider working class audience than they have yet credited; a skilled trade was the aspiration of all ‘respectable’ working class boys, not just the sons of skilled labourers. However, that Brett intended to cater for a lower middle class readership too is doubtful.

Science and Nature

Until recently, historians believed that there was no real Victorian popular science. The general public played no part in the production of science themselves. Rather, people outside of the scientific elite, at least those few who took an interest, were merely passive consumers of elite science, simplified and filtered down to the masses by ‘popularisers’, often via newspapers and magazines. This process is known as the ‘positivist diffusion model’. However, historians such as Geoffrey Cantor and Bernard Lightman have recently begun to challenge this view as part of an emerging discourse of Victorian popular science. They argue that “popular culture can actively produce its own science, or can transform the products of elite culture in the process of appropriating them, or can substantially affect the nature of elite science”.²⁹ Recent studies of, for example, artisan botany, have demonstrated how individuals outside of the formal scientific community became actively and independently involved in the advancement of scientific thought.³⁰ Although the ‘positivist

²⁸ *BOE*, Vol.5, No.131, 15 May 1869, p.421.

²⁹ B. Lightman, “‘The Voices of Nature’: Popularising Victorian Science’, in B. Lightman, ed. *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago, 1997), p.189. Also see R. Cooter and S. Pumfrey, ‘Separate Spheres and Public Places: Reflections on the History of Science Popularisation and Science in Popular Culture’, *History of Science*, 32 (1994), pp.237-67.

³⁰ See A. Secord, ‘Artisan Botany’, in N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary, eds. *The Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.378-93; A. Secord, ‘Corresponding Interests: Artisans and Gentlemen in Natural History Exchange Networks’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 27 (1994), pp.383-408; and

diffusion model' is now questioned, the role that periodicals played in the growth of popular science is still recognised as an important one. It is argued that "readers outside the relatively small and elite intellectual community depended largely on magazines, periodicals and newspaper for their understanding of contemporary cultural issues", and that "the general periodical press was perhaps the most influential medium for spreading views and information about sciences".³¹

Several historians working within this emerging field, namely Diana Dixon, Richard Noakes and Jonathan Topham, have acknowledged that children's periodicals were a key component of the Victorian popular science movement. They argue that boys' papers specifically played a crucial role in encouraging scientific study amongst young people.³² Dixon and Noakes claim that from the 1850s there was a general increase in the amount of scientific material found in boys' periodical literature. However, they believe that it was restricted to middle class periodicals, led by Beeton's *BOM* and the *BOP*. Magazines like *BOE* featured less scientific material, they say, because their readership was effectively excluded from scientific study, and therefore had little use for it. They illustrate their argument using two main points. Firstly, they note that less affluent boys were less likely to have had access to sufficient space, and funds, to allow them to pursue scientific hobbies. Secondly, they say that *BOE* readers were likely to have received only a very basic schooling, lacking even rudimentary instruction in science. Without this basic education, virtually all scientific thought would have been beyond their reach. In contrast, an increase in the number of scientific articles in the *BOM* and *BOP* can be linked to the growth of

A. Secord, 'Science in the Pub: Artisan Botanists in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire', *HOS*, 32 (1994), pp.269-315.

³¹ G. Cantor, et al., 'Introduction', in L. Henson, et al., eds. *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media* (Aldershot, 2004), p.xvii; G. Cantor and S. Shuttleworth, 'Introduction', in G. Cantor and S. Shuttleworth, eds. *Science Serialized: Representations of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (2004), p.2.

³² D. Dixon, 'Children's Magazines and Science in the Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 34 (2001), pp.228-38; R. Noakes, 'The *Boy's Own Paper* and Late-Victorian Juvenile Magazines', in G. N. Cantor, ed. *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature* (Oxford, 2004), pp.151-71; J. Topham, 'Periodicals and the Making of Reading Audiences for Science in Early Nineteenth Century Britain: *The Youth's Magazine*, 1829-37', in *Culture and Science*, pp.57-69.

science as part of the curriculum at public schools and other good schools.³³ Dixon and Noakes imply that publishers like Brett recognised that their readership had little experience of science, and chose to cram their periodicals with serial fiction instead.³⁴

However, this argument, if correct, only proves that working class boys faced impediments if they wished to pursue scientific study. It does not prove that they were prevented from scientific study altogether. Moreover, the fact that working class boys lacked the finance, and schooling, to enable them to pursue scientific study does not mean that they lacked the desire. Indeed, evidence suggests that many less privileged boys were deeply interested in what little science which was within their reach. Accordingly, natural history was a popular pastime amongst these boys; indeed, it was the strongest branch of scientific study amongst the working class in general.³⁵ Because no specialist equipment was needed, the study of natural history could be supported with relatively little money, or indeed none at all.³⁶ Moreover, because it was relatively simple to study, it mattered not that boys had received no scientific education at school. If necessary, their knowledge could always be supplemented through private reading, and through lectures in mutual improvement meetings.³⁷

Working class boys' interest in natural history stemmed from their high levels of interaction with the countryside. Boys living in rural areas spent a great deal of their time both working and playing outdoors, as did boys from small industrial towns, who

³³ Noakes, 'Boy's Own Paper', in *Nineteenth-Century Periodical*, pp.158-60. Historians also argue that whilst the *BOM* and *BOP* were able to attract a high calibre of scientific contributor, such as scientists, technicians, doctors and explorers, *BOE* was more restricted its choices. However, as we have seen, Brett was still able to entice relatively well-respected contributors.

³⁴ Dixon, 'Children's Magazines', *VPR*, 34, pp.228-38; Noakes, 'Boy's Own Paper', in *Nineteenth-Century Periodical*, p.156.

³⁵ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp.70-72; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 3rd Edition (1991), p.322.

³⁶ J. Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England Since 1800* (2002), pp.122-23.

³⁷ Natural history was a popular topic of study amongst many self improvement groups. For example, lectures delivered to the Sheffield YMCA in 1858 included 'Geology – What it Embraces', 'Philosophy of Animal Life', 'Laws of Nature – Are They Forces or Effects?' and 'Botany': see Anon., *Young Men's Christian Association: Circular Listing Officers of the Association and Classes Available to Members* (Sheffield, 1858).

frequently made the short walk to the country.³⁸ Even boys from the largest towns and cities were known to walk for miles to enjoy the rural environment. Urban working class communities commonly held profound affinities with the countryside; it provided an ideal antidote to town and city life.³⁹ For many boys, this interaction developed into an intellectual, or semi-intellectual, form. Their play became transformed and structured into study, in the form of wandering, rambling, hunting, fishing, collecting and examining.⁴⁰ Their interest was sustained by the study of collected specimens upon their return home, and by gardening, the tending of allotments, and the keeping of pets, all of which were popular working class pastimes in the nineteenth century.⁴¹

Accordingly, it is not true that *BOE* was ignorant of science. Rather, whilst the paper recognised the limitations of its readers, it aimed to speak to boys about the scientific

³⁸ Anon., *Boys and Their Ways: by One Who Knows Them* (1880), pp.137-98; H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.83-84; E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working Class Children in Nineteenth Century England* (Manchester, 1994), p.292; P. Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild* (Gloucester, 1989), p.140; P. Horn, *The Victorian Country Child* (Kington, 1974), pp.173-74; B. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.97-132, 226-33; J. Walvin, *A Child's World: a Social History of English Childhood, 1800-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp.91-93; J. Walvin, 'Children's Pleasures', in J. K. Walton and J. Walvin, eds. *Leisure in Britain, 1780-1939* (Manchester, 1983), pp.227-41.

³⁹ M. Chase, *'The People's Farm': English Radical Agrarianism, 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988), pp.11-15; P. Horn, *The Victorian Town Child* (Stroud, 1997), p.158. "Even London's popular culture was long reminiscent of rusticity", claims D. A. Reid in 'Playing and Praying', in M. Daunton, ed. *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Vol.3 (Cambridge, 2000), p.758.

⁴⁰ Anon., *Boys and Their Ways*, pp.91-102; Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, pp.125-26; J. Gutteridge, *Lights and Shadows in the Life of an Artisan* (1969), pp.87, 90, cited in D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.57, 160-61; Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed*, p.292; Horn, *Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild*, p.140; Horn, *Victorian Country Child*, pp.173-74; Walvin, *A Child's World*, pp.91-93; Walvin, 'Children's Pleasures', in *Leisure in Britain*, pp.227-41. A particularly compelling account of one Victorian boy's blossoming obsession with the study of the natural world is F. Smith, *The Boyhood of a Naturalist* (1900).

⁴¹ Chase, *'The People's Farm'*, pp.14-15; R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp.142-46; G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford, 2004), p.568; K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (1983), pp.100-20.

interests which did thrive amongst them. Thus, in the field of natural history *BOE* was very much active. *BOE*'s naturalistic content differed from that found in other children's literature. Throughout the 1800s a wealth of children's books were published on the subject. These were mainly instructional dialogues, staunchly Christian and aimed at a middle class audience.⁴² *BOE* differed in that it was strictly non-didactic and contained no religious elements. It was not part of a bourgeois programme designed to usher boys into scientific study to promote moral improvement. Rather, *BOE* reflected and supported an indigenous working class interest in nature which was already flourishing as part of the wider self help movement.

BOE engaged with working class interest in natural history through a wide variety of features. The paper always focussed upon the most simple, accessible and affordable aspects of natural world, to ensure that all boys were catered for regardless of location, education, or wealth. For the benefit of boys with limited access to the countryside, the study of nature in the home was strongly supported. Many of *BOE*'s articles required boys to make but a single trip to the countryside to collect specimens. For example, the paper ran several articles about fern collecting, a Victorian obsession and an easy hobby to pursue in the home.⁴³ A lengthy and fully illustrated article entitled 'British Ferns' appeared in volume four, followed by instructions for making a mammoth combined aviary and fernery. Instructions on how to construct a cheaper fernery also appeared in a volume three edition of the 'Young Mechanic'. Another home-study project from the 'Young Mechanic' series was a vivarium for reptiles. "For inhabitants of this case we should choose lizards, frogs, newts, tortoises, tritons, British snakes, toads, salamanders, and green tree frogs", read the feature.⁴⁴ One further instalment in the series told boys how to make a botanical press. "If the specimens are tastefully arranged and carefully dried and mounted", read the piece, "nothing exceeds the beauty of the botanical album."⁴⁵

⁴² G. Myers, 'Science for Woman and Children: the Dialogues of Popular Science in the Nineteenth Century', in J. Christie and S. Shuttleworth, eds. *Nature Transfigured: Science and Literature, 1700-1900* (Manchester, 1989), pp.171-200.

⁴³ D. Allen, *The Fern Craze* (1969); D. Allen, 'Tastes and Crazes', in *Cultures of Natural History*, pp.400-04.

⁴⁴ *BOE*, Vol.3, No.76, 1 May 1868, p.380.

⁴⁵ *BOE*, Vol.5, No.120, 5 March 1869, p.252.

For boys lucky enough to have access to a family garden or allotment there was the ‘Simple Gardening’ series (vol.1). The author, George M. F. Glenny, generously promised “to present to all who forward us a stamped directed envelope, care of the editor of this magazine, a packet of antirrhinum seed, one of the prettiest perennial plants in cultivation”.⁴⁶ Bird-watching, which could be practiced as easily in the garden as the country, was supported through the ‘Birds – Their Nests and Eggs’ series (vol.2). “What true boy does not love the country?” read the feature. “Freed from the restraints of the school-room, on some half-holiday, what young student has not felt the rush of quick, warm blood to his fresh cheek, and the swell of buoyant glee in his lightened heart, as he bounces fourth into the pure air to rove at liberty?”⁴⁷ Birds covered by the series included the robin, thrush, blackbird, common sparrow, skylark, canary, goldfinch, ring ouzel, swallow and chaffinch. For keen animal lovers there was the ‘Pets of the Household and Garden’ series (vol.11), which dealt with all manner of domestic creatures.

For those boys who did have regular access to the countryside there were articles like the profusely illustrated ‘British Butterflies’ (vol.4), which offered advice to budding collectors:

The best places for butterfly hunting are open places, pathways, and banks in and about woods, chalk-downs, sandy heaths, damp meadows, marshes, and lanes divided by hedgerows. Who is there with a knowledge of country life who does not remember some quite pathway, hedge, meadow or lane, which was, and is the particular resort of these dainty beauties of insect life.⁴⁸

Angling was a particularly common focus of these articles. Anglers were catered for by two dedicated series, ‘Angling’ (vol.2) and ‘Sea Fishing’ (vol.6), and by many other occasional features. Angling was a popular Victorian pastime, especially amongst *BOE*’s target readership.⁴⁹ Most of the papers’ articles offered readers useful practical guidance:

The sight of water naturally suggests fishing; but, though nearly every schoolboy known how to whip for dace, the art of taking mackerel, whiting, mullet, bass, and other sea fish, is not so well

⁴⁶ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.15.

⁴⁷ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.32, 29 June 1867, p.92.

⁴⁸ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.85, 26 June 1868, p.96.

⁴⁹ J. Lowerson, ‘Angling’, in T. Mason, ed. *Sport in Britain: a Social History* (Cambridge, 1989), p.17.

known. Our object in the present article is to give our readers some plain and practical instructions how to catch the fish most commonly found on our coast.⁵⁰

Yet it was not simply the practical elements of angling which appealed to the working class. Angling was a key component of popular arcadianism; it was viewed as a particularly good way to escape the urban environment.⁵¹ *BOE* was aware of the ideological appeal of angling. “We promised our readers an angling excursion, which is one of the most pleasing of rural sports, for whilst the angler is sauntering by the banks of rivers and brooks, he fosters in his mind an ardent love for the beauties of external nature”, read one wistful edition of a series entitled ‘Summer Rambles’ (vol.4).⁵²

BOE was adamant that its scientific articles should be neither dry nor overly complicated, so as not to dissuade or confuse its readership. “A few words thrown hastily together in a pleasing manner, no matter what the subject be”, read George Glenny’s ‘Simple Gardening’, “are frequently appreciated much more than an overstudied introduction fraught with language, the meaning of which few, if any – the younger branches especially – care to understand or fathom out.”⁵³ Accordingly, the paper often linked natural history with other areas of boyish interests. Most notably, nature was sometimes presented within a historical or legendary context. It was recurrently suggested that nature played a key part in Britain’s ascent to world superiority. “A good bow was the archer’s pride, as how our forefathers used them at the battles of Cressy, Poitiers, and Agincourt can well bear witness”, read one article on British trees, adding that “Robin Hood, the greatest of all England’s archers, is always represented as using a bow of yew”.⁵⁴

BOE’s approach towards science made a significant impact upon the world of juvenile publishing. Soon the Emmett brothers, who emulated much of Brett’s self help

⁵⁰ *BOE*, Vol.6, No.138, 7 July 1869, p.104.

⁵¹ Lowerson, ‘Angling’, in *Sport in Britain*, p.12.

⁵² *BOE*, Vol.4, No.82, 12 June 1868, p.60.

⁵³ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.15.

⁵⁴ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.89, 31 July 1868, p.172. For a discussion of idyllic and mythical images in Victorian children’s natural history see J. Drouin and B. Bensaude-Vincent, ‘Nature for the People’, in *Cultures of Natural History*, p.410.

OUR PAGE OF BRITISH SPORTS.

ANGLING.—By AN OLD ANGLEE.

In commencing our work upon angling for the Boys of ENGLAND, we must go back to the year 1693, when the great master of the "gentle craft" was born, Izaak Walton, who entered this breathing world at Stafford, August 9th, in the year above mentioned. It will not be necessary to give any very lengthened account of this good man's life; blameless and kind to all, he has left behind him a name that will endure for ages, for there are few when engaged in the "gentle art" but what the name of Izaak Walton—the "Complete Angler"—will not occur, and that with pleasurable feelings and gratification.

The young angler, who sets out with tidy prospects, will have many little annoyances to contend against. We may here be allowed to mention some that occurred to young Tom Jones, who went a fishing.

In the middle of a stream stood an old worn-out pile. A weary old fisherman, one John Pike, had marked out Tom Jones, and made up his mind to haul him into his net altogether; therefore, one day when Tom came down to fish, John Pike said, "This is just the day that the fish swarm round that 'ere pile, and as fast as you can pull them up they will be there."

The eyes of the boy Jones glistened, and he said, "How can I get there?"

"I will row you there," replied John Pike, "as soon as you like; and when you have done fishing, I will bring you back."

No sooner said than done; the boy Jones jumped into Pike's boat, and was soon afloat towards the pile, in the centre of the stream.

The morning was sunny, the air balmy, and soon at the pile they arrived, and quickly at the top sat the boy—buoyed up with the hope of a splendid basket of fish to take home to aunt Jemima.



ISAAK WALTON.

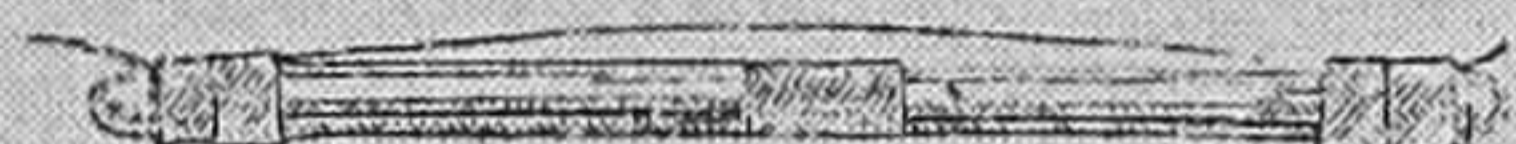
it he had brought as bait, he clutched the pile and was saved.

After a desperate struggle, he brought his prize up in the shape of a pork pie hat that had found its way into the river.

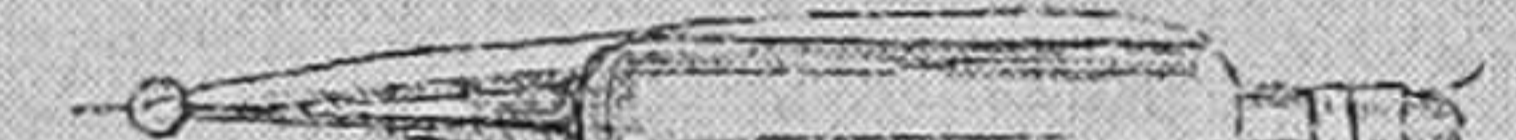
It was nearly dark when John Pike rowed up to



Float 1.



Float 2.



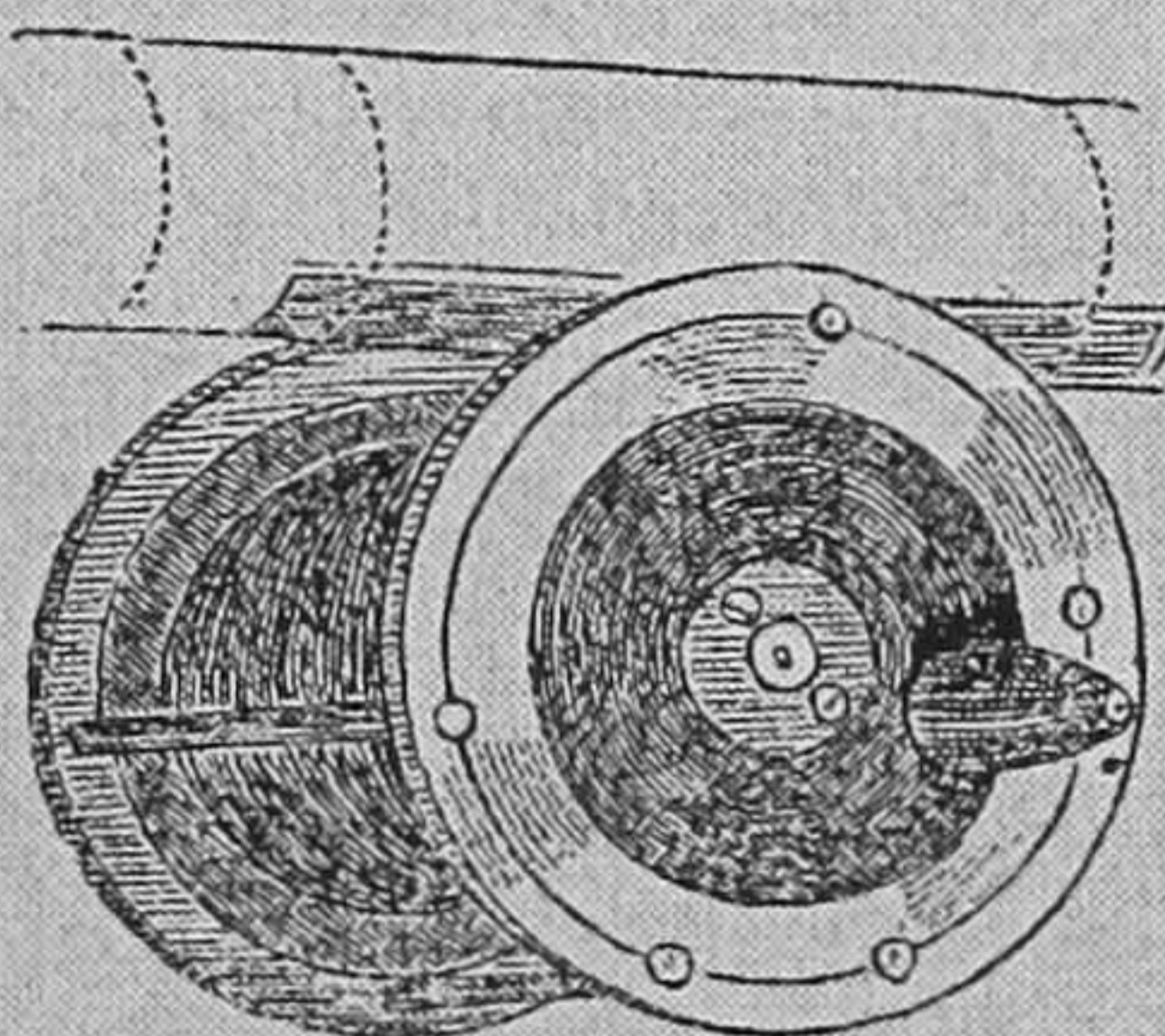
Float 3.

QUILL FLOATS [DESCRIBED IN OUR NEXT NUMBER.]

the pile, and called out to his jolly young angler that he thought it was time to shut up.

Twice nearly did Jones make ground bait for the fish; but at last, safe in the boat, he was put ashore, shivering and shaking, while John Pike, looking up at him with a fishy eye, said, "I'm afeard you're wet."

At another time, our friend Tom Jones took his station near a water wheel.



REELS.

By the side of the water wheel, our friend Jones on a fine day for angling, seated himself; there was a simplicity in the face of this almost "complete

angler" that attracted the notice of a great many persons.

He had been watched for a long time by a number of mischievous urchins, who, not being very partial to fishing themselves, thought it was excessively proper to prevent any one else recreating themselves in the "gentle art."

Upon Jones, therefore, these wicked wags determined to exercise their fun.

The rod—a very superior one—is firmly fixed in its several joints, the depth plummed, line adjusted, bait on hook, and all prepared to ensnare the floating "denizens of the deep."

But a knocking behind him disturbs the "patient angler;" he takes no heed of it.

The fish are beginning to bite.

And the eyes of Jones expand with delight, spite of the knocking behind him.

The day slowly wanes, and a well-filled basket has rewarded the exertions of Jones, his rod and line; he tries to spring up full of joy.

Alas! he finds he cannot.

Another attempt—

He is minus his coat tails.

The wicked boys had nailed his coat to a seat behind him.

Jones went home with plenty of fish, but minus the "tails of his coat."

THE ROD.—For bottom fishing the most useful rod is one usually denominated the bag rod, and is made of either bamboo or cane; the latter is preferable for roach fishing, as it is both light and stiff, but not strong enough for the many purposes to which the former can be applied, such as trolling, &c.

The rod usually consists of nine joints, about two feet four inches long, eight of which form a roach rod about eighteen feet long, fit for all the purposes for which the bag rod is mentioned; the other is a strong top that fits into the sixth joint,



THE VICTIM OF TREACHERY.



THE ANGLER CAUGHT.

An hour elapsed—

Not a bite.

Another went by—

One nibble!

Dark clouds came across; the rain began slowly to fall, but, gradually increasing, came down in torrents; it got cold, and the hands of Jones became cold and powerless.

It was as much as he could grasp the rod.

Round his poor head he pulled up the collar of his coat, but round his poor feet there was no covering, and his shoes and socks were, as the old women say in ancient lore, "soaps."

In vain he called for John Pike, no John Pike answered to his call. In one hand the rod and line, the other firmly clutched the can that was to hold the spoil.

While down the face and nose of poor Jones the pitiless water ran in furious streams.

At last he thought he had a "bite."

It was nearly a fatal one.

Down went the float, and down went Jones nearly after it; but letting the can go, with a few fish in

and forms a trolling rod about fifteen feet long, which is quite sufficient for that purpose, although it is advantageous at times to have a whalebone top about ten inches long to fit into the small joint (instead of the roach top) to use for perch, or occasionally for spinning a minnow; this top is stiffer than the roach top.

For general purposes a rod of about twelve feet in length is the most convenient; but, in wide rivers, fifteen or eighteen feet rods are required. A bamboo rod with several tops of different degrees of strength is exceedingly well adapted for general purposes, but a cane rod surpasses all others for fine fishing.

The reel, or winch, must be always looked upon as an important accessory to the angler; and its great characteristics are lightness, strength, and plainness.

There are many descriptions of reels—plain, stop, and multiplying ones. The plain reel is the best, because of its simplicity, and the noiseless manner with which it acts; it seldom gets out of order, and if an accident occurs to it it is easily put to rights; it costs little. The best reels are those in which the handle is fixed in the side-plate of the reel-drum, as by this method a very ugly crank may be dispensed with.

(To be continued.)

Fig.15: 'Angling'

material, began to run articles about natural history in their own papers, including features on pets, angling, and a series entitled ‘Curiosities of Natural History’.⁵⁵ It was not long before a periodical dedicated to natural history appeared. Entitled *Lads of the Village*, the paper was launched by William Watkins in 1874. Aimed at the working class, *Lads of the Village* was influenced by *BOE* in both format and content. However, it featured much less serial fiction. Instead, it was dominated by articles about horses, dogs, aviaries, pigeons, angling and gardening, a regular miscellaneous column entitled ‘The Naturalist’, as well as information about naturalist events, meetings and clubs. It also featured articles about extinct mammals, such as mammoths and giant sloth, which is remarkable considering that prehistory would have been unfamiliar territory for almost every one of the paper’s readers.

In 1885 a further noteworthy periodical, *The Natural History Teacher: a Monthly Illustrated Magazine for Young Lovers of Nature*, was launched. The modest publication was edited by S. L. Mosley, lecturer on Natural History in the Huddersfield board schools. *The Natural History Teacher* acted as an organ for young naturalist societies in Huddersfield. It featured lectures, studies, observation diaries, notes taken on rambles, and detailed minutes of naturalist meetings. *The Natural History Teacher* was remarkable because, although well-to-do schools had issued such periodicals before, it was probably the first naturalist paper catering specifically for board school boys. Although only two volumes were published, the paper suggests that the study of nature was thriving amongst sections of working class youngsters.⁵⁶

With time, natural history in middle class boys’ literature also became more convivial and less didactic. Of course, the *BOP* led the way following its 1879 launch. The paper’s most notable contributor was the Rev. J. G. Wood; he also authored several stand-alone volumes, including *The Boy’s Own Natural History* (1882). However, the *BOP*’s naturalistic content was still strictly Christian in tone, unsurprisingly in an era in which the RTS would have been increasingly worried about the tensions between science and religion. It is difficult to say how much of a bearing *BOE* had upon the scientific content of

⁵⁵ S. Holland, ‘*Young Englishman’s Journal* Vol.1’, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/971>, accessed 5 December 2002.

⁵⁶ *The Natural History Teacher: a Monthly Illustrated Magazine for Young Lovers of Nature*, Vol.1 (1885).

the *BOP*. However, because science had proved such a hit in *BOE*, and because the *BOP* is known to have deliberately imitated a good deal of *BOE*'s format, it is probably fair to say that it was quite influential.

It would therefore appear that both the traditional and revisionist approach to understanding non-fiction in Victorian boys' periodicals have rather underestimated the importance of science to *BOE*. It is correct that *BOE* featured less science than both the *BOM* and *BOP*. However, what science it did feature was minutely customised to suit the tastes and circumstances of the paper's readership. Natural history should be thought of as one of the most successful components of *BOE*'s wider repertoire of improving non-fiction.

Conclusion

Non-fiction has been rather neglected by historians of boy's periodical literature. Consequently, working class papers such as *BOE* have been misrepresented. It has long been argued that these papers featured less non-fiction than their middle class counterparts. However, although there is little doubt that non-fiction in the *BOP* and *BOM* was more abundant, this is not to say that *BOE*'s non-fiction was insignificant or irrelevant. Rather, it was an integral part of the paper's overall identity, particularly in its formative years.

Improving non-fiction was a characterising component of *BOE*. The paper was a strong supporter, not to mention an active part, of the working class self help movement. It was keen to promote rewarding, educational pastimes, perhaps the most notable being natural history. Its non-fiction was painstakingly tailored to suit an audience of 'respectable' working class improvers. *BOE*'s non-fiction was inspired by, and delivered as part of, an indigenous body of working class improvement. It did not cater for lower middle class boys, intent upon joining the ranks of the middle class proper. It was distinct from the largely unsuccessful programmes of improvement which the middle class attempted to usher working class children into. Indeed, a direct parallel may be drawn between the manner in which working class boys embraced *BOE* yet – as we will see – rejected the *BOP*, and the manner in which the working class embraced their own improvement ethic yet rejected middle class social control.

Chapter Seven - Promotions

Introduction

Early numbers of *Boys of England* were garnished with a plethora of promotional items and schemes. The paper continued to issue free gifts and run competitions throughout its existence. These promotional articles and attractions varied considerably in nature, ranging from small self-assembly models to huge national exhibitions.

Several historians have commented upon *BOE*'s promotional activity. Their observations have focussed upon the paper's prize distributions. Patrick Dunae has noted that "the paper [...] specialised in extravagant prize competitions", Kirsten Drotner has described the first distribution as "a prize competition of unrivalled dimensions", while E. S. Turner has insisted that "the prizes [Brett] offered put Beeton in the shade".¹ However, no historian has yet looked beyond these prize distributions towards the many fascinating gifts, products and campaigns which the paper could also boast of. Moreover, historians have generally portrayed *BOE*'s promotional strategy as something of a gimmick. No historian has yet linked the paper's various promotions to its considerable popularity. Nor has *BOE*'s promotional strategy been linked to its wider support for working class concerns.

This chapter examines the most prominent of *BOE*'s promotions. It argues that they were responsible for much of the paper's success. *BOE*'s promotions gave the paper a unique depth of engagement, which contributed to its considerable popularity. However, Brett's aggressive promotional strategy was not simply designed to increase sales. Rather, it was very much in line with the paper's general attentiveness towards its working class readership. The chapter also shows how *BOE*'s promotional strategy remained unchanged for decades until new management took over in the 1890s. The subsequent decline in the quality and quantity of the paper's promotions contributed greatly to its demise.

¹ K. Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven, 1988), p.73; P. A. Dunae, 'New Grub Street for Boys', in J. Richards, ed. *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), p.25; E. S. Turner, *Boys Will be Boys, the Story of Sweeney Todd, Deadwood Dick, Sexton Blake, Billy Bunter, Dick Barton, et al.*, 3rd Edition (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.75.

Promotional Activity Under Brett

Brett was not the first juvenile publisher to issue free gifts and run competitions. Purchasers of John Newbery's eighteenth-century children's periodicals, such as the *Lilliputian Magazine*, had been entitled, for a small charge, to gifts such as balls (for boys) and pincushions (for girls).² More recently, Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine* had run various modest prize competitions and distributions, whilst readers of Newsagent's Publishing Company penny dreadfuls had often been given free engravings, or possibly even two issues for the price of one. However, the proportions of *BOE*'s promotional campaigns were like nothing the world of boys' publishing had experienced before. This unique emphasis upon promotional activity distinguished *BOE* from its competitors throughout almost its entire lifespan.

It is evident that Brett personally controlled *BOE*'s promotional activity. The paper's promotions frequently reflected his own interests – most notably the theatre. Brett was obviously keen to share his passions with his audience. However, he also took great steps to tailor his gifts and schemes to suit his readers. He asked their opinion before the commencement of any major promotion. If an idea proved popular the scheme would go ahead, whilst unpopular promotions were ditched.

Brett believed that promotions had the potential to attract and retain readers. He therefore devoted a considerable portion of the rear or inside rear page of each issue of *BOE* to advertising future promotions. The particulars of forthcoming promotions were usually published some weeks in advance. Each advert began with a bold title, such as 'Given Away!!!' or 'Important Notice!!!' The convivial and colloquial style of Brett's editorial columns permeated these notices; exclamation marks and superlatives were employed liberally. When a notice told of an imminent free gift, Brett would urge boys to 'order early from your bookseller'. In addition to the advertisements found within the paper, bound numbers of *BOE* usually featured a full page list of all Brett's merchandise on the rear cover. A four page list, and later an eight page list, became available as stock grew. Brett, unlike many of his rivals, never inserted advertisements for other companies. The

² M. V. Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief and Magic: Children's Literature in English from its Beginnings to 1839* (Aldershot, 1989), p.81.

fact that he rejected this lucrative source of revenue is yet more proof that the paper enjoyed a high sale and considerable profitability. Only briefly did *BOE* feature an exchange and mart column, the mainstay of so many boys' papers. The first column appeared in volume three, and the last followed but a few volumes later. After a few weeks the exchange of books and magazines was prohibited. Comments made in the paper's correspondence columns suggest that Brett probably curtailed the mart columns because he was concerned about the possibility of deception.³ No doubt he was also reluctant to divert boys' money into the second-hand market when he himself had so many new goods for sale.

The *Boys of England* Grand Prize Distribution

BOE's Grand Prize Distribution began in its very first number. It was essentially a prize lottery system. Historians have often remarked upon *BOE*'s prize distribution, probably because of the sheer quantity, and unusual nature, of its prizes. The scheme was indeed outlandish. However, it was not simply a hastily-conceived sales-boosting gimmick. Rather, it was cleverly calculated to secure long-term subscribers.

The prizes on offer in *BOE*'s Grand Prize Distribution were impressive, surpassing any previously offered by a juvenile periodical. Amongst the 1400 prizes were: two Shetland ponies; six Newfoundland dogs; fifty spaniels and other dogs; fifty pairs of pigeons; fifty pairs of ducks and fowls; fifty pairs of pet rabbits; fifty cricket sets; fifty watches; fifty volumes of Shakespeare; 100 concertinas; fifty boxes of water colours; fifty bows and arrows; fifty foils and fencing sticks; fifty sets of boxing gloves; fifty sets of fishing tackle; and fifty sets of quoits.⁴ The distribution was launched in number one. Brett advertised it by giving away a free engraving. The engraving, which showed the most desirable prizes, was intended "to serve as a reminder of the future gifts".⁵ Its central illustration depicted one of the two Shetland ponies being led by a boy, whilst outer illustrations featured the dogs, rabbits and ducks.

³ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.15, No.388, 18 April 1874, p.319.

⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.16.

⁵ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.2, 4 December 1866, p.32.

The format of the distribution was intended to maintain the sale of *BOE* over the longer term. To enter the draw readers were required to collect a ticket, which was given away free with each copy of number one. Several additional vouchers were then issued in subsequent weeks, which readers were told to attach to the original ticket. The completed ticket was then to be submitted to the *BOE* office. Boys were not allowed to submit an incomplete ticket. This policy was strictly enforced; a special notice in number three, which noted that some boys had prematurely returned their tickets, stipulated that “no parties will be allowed to participate in the ballot who did not return the proper number of vouchers with his ticket”.⁶ Brett clearly hoped that boys would become constant subscribers in order to stand a chance of securing one of the enticing prizes. He also hoped that boys would develop a taste for the paper and continue to subscribe once the promotion had ended.

Brett also sought to secure long term sales by dividing the prizes between several draws. Accordingly, a second draw commenced as soon as the first draw had been completed. A new ticket, and a new set of vouchers, needed to be collected. The first draw included only 610 out of the proposed 1400 prizes, and omitted many of the most desirable, including the ponies. Given away were: ten silver watches; fifty concertinas; fifty pairs of pet rabbits; 100 complete works of Shakespeare; 100 flutes; 100 sets of dominoes; 100 engravings; and 100 scarf pins.⁷ The second draw boasted 635 prizes, bringing the total to 1245, and included: two Shetland ponies; thirty silver watches; fifty cricket bats; fifty fishing rods; thirty foils and fencing sticks; 200 bound volumes of Sir Walter Scott’s novels; 200 large boxes of water colours; 100 large engravings; and three Newfoundland dogs.⁸ Number twenty-seven advertised a third draw, which boasted a further four ponies alongside bound copies of volume one of *BOE*, plus a “handsome pleasure boat”, to be presented to the winner by champion rower Henry Kelly.⁹ Such was the success of the scheme that Brett extended the total number of prizes beyond the initial 1400. Indeed, many more distributions were held over a period of several years, adding hundreds more prizes. On each occasion Brett offered some of the most popular prizes from past draws alongside

⁶ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.3, 11 December 1866, p.48.

⁷ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.5, 22 December 1866, p.80.

⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.13, 18 February 1867, p.208.

⁹ Wrapper of *BOE* Vol.2.

new attractions. For example, in the sixth distribution Brett gave away two more ponies, plus four “splendid velocipedes” and a three mast man-of-war measuring three feet by two.¹⁰

BOE was the first juvenile periodical to feature a prize lottery. However, they were common in adult periodicals. Unfortunately, they had a reputation for dishonesty. Indeed, Brett’s own *Boys’ Own Reader and Companion* had described prize lotteries as “repugnant to all healthy tastes” in an advertisement for one of its earlier, merit-based competitions.¹¹ The trickery used by disreputable publishers was often condemned in the intellectual press, as the comments of critic J. P. Harrison illustrate:

A prize lottery is a scheme frequently resorted to by publishers to increase the attraction of criminal romances. At the best, it is a ‘dodge’; in many cases it deserves the more severe definition of a swindle. These prizes, painted in language that an enthusiastic jeweller would scruple to use in describing the most elaborate and valuable articles in his list, usually consist of inferior clocks, brummagem watches, and sham jewellery. We say ‘usually’, because, in many instances, they do not exist anywhere but upon the sheet in which they are announced in glowing terms. Two stamps are required to be sent in with the ticket. These furnish the funds for ‘the prizes’, and leave a trifling bonus for the inauspicious publisher for his trouble.¹²

These commonly held views impacted upon *BOE*. At the time of the paper’s launch an article published in trade journal *The Bookseller* railed against its lavish draws, describing them as a low tactic to “keep up the interest of their readers”.¹³ However, there is no evidence to suggest that *BOE*’s prize distributions were fraudulent. Unlike most lottery scheme proprietors, who only announced winning ticket numbers, Brett took the step of printing the name and address of each winner from the first draw in an eight page supplement to *BOE*. He invited anybody who doubted his integrity to write to any of the winning boys. “By doing so”, wrote the editor, “they will find that we have kept our word

¹⁰ *BOE*, Vol.6, No.136, 23 June 1869, p.80.

¹¹ *The Boys’ Own Reader and Companion: a Magazine of Instruction and Recreation for the Young*, Vol.1, No.13, 27 March 1866, pp.207-08.

¹² J. P. Harrison, ‘Cheap literature – Past and Present’, *Companion to the Almanac of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge or Year Book of General Information for 1873* (1872), p.71.

¹³ Anon., ‘The Literature of Vice’, *The Bookseller*, CX, 28 February 1867, p.123.

to the fullest extent.”¹⁴ The invitation was repeated when each subsequent draw was in progress.

Accusations of profiteering were again levelled at *BOE* when a halfpence charge was made for the list of prize winners. Several of the paper’s readers became disgruntled, and wrote to the editor to express their displeasure. Brett protested his honesty, stating: “We have not received one farthing’s worth of pecuniary advantage, but, on the contrary, have incurred a very heavy loss.”¹⁵ The decision to publish the winners in a supplement was one made “in consequence”, Brett claimed, “to numerous letters from our correspondents, begging us not to interfere with the pages of the journal”.¹⁶ Evidently, some boys were concerned that the competition results would annex a large portion of a future issue of their magazine, and appear ugly in a bound volume. Again, it appears that Brett simply tried to act in the interests of the majority of subscribers. However, the ever attentive Brett eventually capitulated under pressure, and the results of all future prize draws were published within the pages of *BOE* itself.

BOE’s prize distributions also came under fire from Brett’s great rivals, the Emmett brothers. From the start the Emmetts cast doubt upon the legitimacy of Brett’s distributions, suggesting that he would be unable to deliver several of the prizes, most notably the ponies.¹⁷ However, it is likely that every prize was received by its winner. The distribution system was actually quite simple. Winners in London were required to collect their prizes at 3 Warwick Court, Holborn; winners from the country were sent their prizes through their newsagents.¹⁸ True, the live animals, particularly the ponies, would have been more difficult to deliver than the cricket bats and fishing rods. However, evidence suggests that the ponies did reach their new owners. The winners of the first two ponies, W. M. Harland of Westminster and Duncan Martin of Glasgow, both notified Brett that they had received

¹⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.18, 25 March 1867, p.288.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.16, 11 March 1867, p.256.

¹⁷ *The Young Englishman’s Journal: Devoted to the Youth of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales*, Vol.1, No.18, 17 August 1867, p.288.

¹⁸ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.83, 19 June 1868, p.80.

their prizes.¹⁹ Indeed, Brett's decision to add four more ponies in the third draw, and more again in the fourth and beyond, was probably intended to impress upon readers and rivals his ability to secure and deliver the animals. Nevertheless, quite how Brett arranged for the transportation of the ponies, or how these two city boys kept their new pets, must yet remain a matter for speculation.

BOE's prize draws proved successful in attracting and retaining readers. Brett announced in number eighteen that "on advertising for the return of the prize-cheques, out of our 150,000 subscribers, only 10,000 took the trouble to send them; this fact showing that 140,000 of our readers were perfectly satisfied with the book itself, without prizes".²⁰ Although the abstention of these 140,000 did indeed testify that *BOE* would have sold well regardless of prizes, Brett's sober statement undervalued the true success of the draw. It must be remembered that the figure of 10,000 only appeared small in comparison to the paper's large total sale. In fact, a response on this scale would have been the envy of other publishers. Brett certainly believed that the scheme was successful enough to justify running draw after draw in *BOE*, as well as similar schemes in *Young Men of Great Britain*, where the largest prize was a purse of ten guineas.²¹ And although the prizes in the first two draws had cost a total of three hundred pounds, this price was small when one considers the number of subscribers the draws attracted.²²

Following its success, Brett's prize distribution was immediately imitated by rival publishers. It became accepted as a sure-fire method of raising circulation, especially during the lean holiday months.²³ The launch issue of W. L. Emmett's *Young Englishman's Journal* offered "a beautiful outrigger, 'The Oxford'" and "the exquisite yacht, 'Young Englishman'" as its main prizes, alongside suits of armour, model men-of-war, model yachts, silver cups, rifles, bows and arrows, games, tools and steam engines.²⁴ However,

¹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.31, 22 June 1867, p.79.

²⁰ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.18, 25 March 1867, p.288.

²¹ *Young Men of Great Britain: a Journal of Amusing and Instructive Literature*, Vol.1, No.1, 29 January 1868, p.12.

²² *BOE*, Vol.1, No.36, 27 July 1867, p.160.

²³ R. Rollington, *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (Leicester, 1913), pp.81-82.

²⁴ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.1, 13 April 1867, p.16.

unlike Brett, the Emmett brothers found great difficulty in delivering many of their prizes. Even the list of prize winners failed to reach many subscribers.²⁵ Over time, the prizes offered by boys' publishers became more and more outrageous. For example, John Allingham's *Boy's World* offered a live monkey as the lead attraction in a draw in the late 1870s. Upon placing an advert in *Exchange and Mart* to find a suitable creature, Allingham's offices were besieged by Italian organ grinders; their monkeys proceeded to hurl inkstands at one another and attack the office junior.²⁶ Prize lotteries were also a key feature of Alfred Harmsworth's halfpenny boys' weeklies in the 1890s.

The *Boys of England* Juvenile Theatre

Juvenile toy theatres, and plays to perform in them, had been popular ever since the first sets were sold by William West in 1811.²⁷ From its very first number *BOE* regularly gave away plays for boys to perform in their toy theatres. The plays were all based upon popular Brett serials. Each one was comprised of several sheets of characters, scenery and scripts. These components were issued in a partwork format. Like its prize distributions, the *BOE* juvenile theatre represented a long-term sales strategy. Boys were encouraged to buy *BOE* continually in order to secure every component of each serialised play. And whilst the theatre sets issued by Brett were less lavish than West's, they proved popular amongst *BOE* readers. Indeed, so successful were they that Brett has been described as "the last great toy theatre publisher".²⁸

BOE's first play was an adaptation of Charles Stevens' story 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' (vol.1). The complete set, issued over a number of weeks, consisted of eight scenes, seven sheets of characters, six wings and foot-pieces, and a large stage front.²⁹ The first sheet came free with number one, and further sheets appeared regularly. Each sheet of

²⁵ S. Holland, 'Young Englishman's Journal Vol.1', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/971>, accessed 5 December 2002.

²⁶ *The Boy's World*, Vol.1, No.1, 12 April 1879, p.16; Rollington, pp.81-85.

²⁷ F. Jay, 'The Juvenile Theatre: its History and Development', *Collector's Miscellany*, Vol.1, No.3 (August 1928), p.48; G. Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: the History of the English Toy Theatre* (1946), p.46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.162.

²⁹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.16.

characters or scenery needed to be mounted upon card and cut out. After the character and scenery sheets had all been issued, sections of the script itself were given away as small, eight-page booklets. Characters, scenes and scripts all followed Stevens' story closely.

'Alone in the Pirate's Lair' proved popular enough to warrant a successor. Accordingly, Brett serialised 'Jack Cade, or, the Rebel of London' in volume two. Several other plays followed. 'The Giant of the Black Mountains, or, Jack and his Eleven Brothers', 'The Roadside Inn', 'King Arthur, or, the Knights of the Round Table', 'The Skeleton Horseman, or, the Shadow of Death' and 'Tom Daring, or, Far from Home' all appeared in the same sixteen-sheet format as the first two plays. Larger, twenty-four sheet plays appeared later, namely 'The Forth Thieves', 'Bluebeard', 'The Miller and his Men', 'Mazeppa, or, the Wild Horse of Tartary', 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Jack Harkaway Amongst the Brigands'.

From volume two onwards a small charge was introduced to help cover costs. The plays were now sold as giant sheets, four times the size of regular sheets, five of which were available at a halfpenny each. This meant that *BOE* subscribers could still secure the complete series for only two and a half pence, which represented excellent value for money.³⁰ Brett's play kits were devised with an emphasis upon cost-effectiveness. Although the plays were well illustrated, they were merely sheets of paper printed on one side only. Each sheet cost just one hundred pounds to produce.³¹ This expense must surely have been recouped by the small charge, plus the extra sales of *BOE* that the partworks attracted, and by subsequent sales of complete editions of the plays, which cost 4d (8d coloured / 2s 6d ready-to-use) for the sixteen sheet plays, or 6d (1s / 3s 6d) for the larger plays.

BOE's plays were designed to be performed upon the paper's own wooden stage. 50,000 of these were manufactured for Brett by a leading London stage manufacturer. They were made of study wood, and featured two sliding traps, lamp fittings, a roller for a curtain, and grooves for scenery, yet cost only 1s 6d.³² It has been suggested that the

³⁰ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.43, 14 September 1867, p.272.

³¹ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.36, 27 July 1867, p.160.

³² *BOE*, Vol.1, No.10, 29 January 1867, p.160; *BOE*, Vol.1, No.13, 18 February 1867, p.208.

manufacturing of the stages was delayed considerably.³³ However, evidence suggests that the stage did arrive within a matter of weeks; a notice in number nineteen instructed boys to procure the stage from their news vendor, whilst a reply to a correspondent, named ‘Admiral of the Blue’, in number twenty-five suggested that he had done so (he had written to tell Brett that some components were missing).³⁴ The standard stage was later superseded by a folding model. *BOE* stage fronts, for boys who already possessed a toy stage, could also be purchased at 1d, as could lamps for 3d and slides for 4d per dozen. Each stage and stage front sported the names of Brett and *BOE*; boys were cautioned “to purchase no stage that does not bear the proprietor’s signature”.³⁵

It is difficult to judge precisely how far the serialised plays attracted or retained readers. Brett was aware that the hobby would not suit the tastes of some of the paper’s older subscribers; the plays were advertised as being “specially designed for our younger readers”.³⁶ However, the sheer number of plays that were issued suggests that the products must have been well received – otherwise, they would have been discontinued.

The greatest achievement of Brett’s plays was that they sparked a revival in the toy theatre industry.³⁷ Brett’s cost-effective production techniques, his emphasis on salesmanship, and his original stories, all reinvigorated interest in the art. Imitations of Brett’s plays could soon be found in rival journals, and also in specialist publications like *The Boy’s Halfpenny Weekly Budget of Plays, Stories, Characters and Scenes*, *Clark’s Juvenile Drama* and *Champion Parlour Dramas*. Many of these plays were of poor quality. However, they were so cheap that boys snapped them up. Consequently, many purveyors of high quality plays were eventually forced out of business.³⁸

³³ Jay, ‘Juvenile Theatre’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.3, p.48; Speaight, *Juvenile Drama*, p.160.

³⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.19, 1 April 1867, p.304; *BOE*, Vol.1, No.25, 11 May 1867, p.400.

³⁵ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.15, 4 March 1867, p.240.

³⁶ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.16.

³⁷ Brett was the first boys’ publisher to serialise plays in this way. W. L. Emmett’s play ‘The Red Rover’, which accompanied the Temple Publishing Co. penny dreadful *Black Eyed Susan* (1868), was not issued in 1865, as Speaight suggests, but three years later: see Speaight, *Juvenile Drama*, p.59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.160-62.

Boys of England and the Britannia Theatre

Brett loved the theatre, a passion he had inherited from his mother. As a boy, he had been a budding actor; he took to the stage in Covent Garden in a speaking role aged just eight. In adult life he became a regular theatregoer. He made many friends in the theatrical community; for example, he became a good friend of Sir Augustus Harris, a leading thespian and fellow arms and armour enthusiast.³⁹ Some stories published in Brett's papers were based upon popular plays. For example, 'The Rightful Heir', which was published in an early volume of *YMOGB*, was founded on a play which had lately been performed at London's Royal Lyceum Theatre. Brett received personal permission to publish the adaptation by Lord Lytton, "distinguished author of *Rienzi*, *Earnest Maltravers*, and *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*".⁴⁰ After Brett's death, *BOE* also ran a dramatics club for boys.⁴¹

Brett was keen to forge links between popular literature and popular theatre. Accordingly, from the mid 1860s to the mid 1870s he made arrangements for dozens of *BOE* and Newsagents' Publishing Company stories to be performed at London's Britannia Theatre. The list of resulting plays was extensive: 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair'; 'Black Rollo'; 'Bob Lumley's Secret'; 'Fred Frolic'; 'Jack Steadfast'; 'The Jolly Dogs of London'; 'Mazeppa'; 'Poor Ray, the Drummer Boy'; 'Roving Jack, the Pirate Hunter'; 'The Skeleton Horseman'; 'Spring-Heeled Jack'; 'Unlucky Bob'; 'Wait till I'm a Man'; 'The White Squaw'; 'Wildfire Ned'; 'Wild Boys of London'; 'Wild Charley, the Link Boy of Old London'; 'Wild Will, or, the Pirate of the Thames'; and 'The Young Apprentice'.⁴² The plays proved popular. Indeed, the theatre's second longest running drama was 'The Work Girls of London', an early NPC tale, which ran for sixty-seven performances.⁴³

³⁹ Anon., 'Days with Celebrities, No.518: Mr Edwin J. Brett', *Moonshine*, 5 December 1891, p.265; Anon., 'Edwin J. Brett', *The Biograph and Review*, 4 (1880), pp.456-57.

⁴⁰ *BOE*, Vol.5, No.111, 1 January 1869, p.111.

⁴¹ *BOE*, Vol.64, No.1630, 11 February 1898, p.197.

⁴² J. Davis, ed. *The Britannia Diaries, 1863-1875; Selections from the Diaries of Frederick C. Wilton* (1992), pp.247-63.

⁴³ J. Davis, 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol.7, No.28 (November 1991), pp.369-89.

The Britannia was situated in Hoxton, near Shoreditch. At its capacity it could hold around four thousand people. It was patronised mainly by the working class inhabitants of the East End. It was a popular haunt of local children; at some performances as many as nine tenths of the audience were boys. The theatre was bustling and lively, yet well managed and well kept.⁴⁴ The Britannia's most popular production was its pantomime, which ran from Boxing Day each year. Several other popular revivals also attracted huge audiences, notably an annual production of 'Guy Fawkes' which incorporated a fireworks display. However, the Britannia's speciality was sensational melodrama. The majority of its productions were adaptations of sensational serials taken from popular periodicals such as *Bow Bells*, *The Family Herald*, *The London Journal* and *BOE*.⁴⁵

Most of the *BOE* and NPC tales which ran at the Britannia were adapted for the stage by Colin Henry Hazlewood, the theatre's resident dramatist.⁴⁶ The stories were officially licensed by Brett himself (although unlicensed adaptations were also staged elsewhere).⁴⁷ Brett also loaned the theatre numerous woodcuts, although it is not known whether they were used as a guide for scenery or costume, or for printing handbills and programmes.⁴⁸ The plays were performed by the Britannia's famously loyal company of actors. It is unsurprising that so many *BOE* and NPC serials found a home at the Britannia. Both publisher and theatre shared a sensational and melodramatic style. Interestingly, the theatre was the first to use 'Pepper's Ghost', an optical illusion which made a spectral figure

⁴⁴ C. Barker, 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.34 (1979), pp.27-41; Davis, 'Gospel of Rags', *NTQ*, Vol.7, No.28, pp.384-89; C. Dickens, 'On the People's Theatres', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.4 (1971), pp.12-14.

⁴⁵ Davis, 'Gospel of Rags', *NTQ*, Vol.7, No.28, pp.369-74.

⁴⁶ Davis, ed. *Britannia Diaries*, pp.247-63. It has been tentatively suggested that Hazlewood may have actually authored the NPC serial *The Jolly Dogs of London* (1866): see J. Adcock, 'Author of *Jolly Dogs*?', <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/3232>, accessed 24 May 2005.

⁴⁷ Most of Brett's periodicals printed notices indicating that the right to dramatise his stories was strictly reserved: see T. Hopperton, 'Two-Way Blood Transfusion!', *Story Paper Collector*, Vol.4, No.77 (1962), pp.25-27.

⁴⁸ Davis, ed. *Britannia Diaries*, pp.116, 133.

appear to cross the stage, a technique which must have been employed to great effect in adaptations of *BOE*'s supernatural yarns.⁴⁹

However, *BOE* and NPC serials were not simply suited to the Britannia because of their shared inclination towards sensational melodrama. Rather, like *BOE*, the Britannia too was a passionate supporter of working class issues. Popular theatre had been associated with radical politics since the 1820s. Several leading Chartists from this era had been playwrights by profession, and numerous illegal Chartist publications were either dedicated to the theatre or gave it substantial coverage.⁵⁰ The Britannia itself was linked to this movement. During the 1830s and 1840s, whilst the theatre was known as the Britannia Saloon, the proprietors Sam and Sara Lane had reputedly been involved in Chartist protests.⁵¹ By the 1860s the Britannia's productions, although principally entertaining, were laden with elements of social commentary. They frequently tackled current social concerns, such as poverty, disease, starvation, unemployment, drink, gambling, prostitution and crime. They encouraged their working class audience to challenge class inequalities; the division between rich and poor was a defining theme of many plays, and working class heroes were often pitted against upper class villains. They advocated a strong ethos of self improvement; to be poor and yet struggle with diligence against misfortune was depicted as a badge of honour.⁵² So politically charged were some of the theatre's productions that they were withdrawn on the advice of censors, known as 'Examiners of Plays', who reported directly to the Lord Chamberlain.⁵³ Evidence suggests that this material was strongly appreciated by the Britannia crowd.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Davis, 'Gospel of Rags', *NTQ*, Vol.7, No.28, pp.369-74.

⁵⁰ C. Barker, 'A Theatre for the People', in K. Richards and P. Thomson, eds. *Essays of Nineteenth Century British Theatre: the Proceedings of a Symposium, Sponsored by the Manchester University Department of Drama* (1971), pp.16-23.

⁵¹ The precise nature, and extent, of their involvement is a matter of contention: see Barker, 'Britannia Theatre', *TQ*, Vol.9, No.34, p.28, and Barker, 'Theatre for the People', in *British Theatre*, pp.5-7.

⁵² Davis, ed. *Britannia Diaries*, p.21; Davis, 'Gospel of Rags', *NTQ*, Vol.7, No.28, pp.375-85.

⁵³ J. R. Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1828-1901* (Cambridge, 1980), pp.11, 56, 58, 69, 105.

⁵⁴ Davis, ed. *Britannia Diaries*, p.18; Davis, 'Gospel of Rags', *NTQ*, Vol.7, No.28, pp.375-85.

The Britannia plays were unusual amongst Brett's promotions in that they were never publicised in *BOE*. In turn, the theatre's handbills and programmes never mentioned *BOE*, although they did thank Brett for permitting dramatisation.⁵⁵ One can only speculate as to why this was. Thus, it is unlikely that the productions raised the sale of *BOE* substantially. However, it is therefore quite probable that Brett benefited from the relationship through some form of financial settlement.

The *Boys of England* Football Association

The *BOE* Football Association was a national network of football clubs which the paper organised and sponsored. It was *BOE*'s last major promotion, and one of the most popular in its history. Its purpose was to engage with the increasing popularity of football amongst the late Victorian working class.⁵⁶ The Association was founded in October 1893. It was not a brand new league system; establishing and managing a new league would have been an enormous task. Rather, the Association shrewdly exploited the existing infrastructures of regional youths' football league systems. Participants were required to form teams called 'The *Boys of England* Football Club', or change the name of their existing team, and compete within their local league, arranging matches through the league system as any other team would. Any boy under the age of eighteen was allowed to participate. Captains were required to submit a match report for each fixture. Weekly articles in *BOE*'s 'Manly Sports of Britain' (vol.55) column detailed results and scorers, and provided a brief match analysis. As an incentive to join the scheme, a quality football was given away to every team. Prizes, such as medals, were also presented to successful team captains.⁵⁷

The Association was an immediate triumph. Hundreds of applications were received each week from boys eager to participate. Indeed, so high was demand that *BOE* had to apologetically announce that not every applicant could receive a ball; instead, only a select

⁵⁵ Playbills and Programmes from the London Theatres, 1801-1900, in the Theatre Museum, London, microform edition (Cambridge, 1983).

⁵⁶ B. Beavan, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005), pp.107-09; J. Walvin, *The People's Game: the History of Football Revisited* (Edinburgh, 2000).

⁵⁷ *BOE*, Vol.55, No.1401, 22 October 1893, p.271.

number of teams would be eligible.⁵⁸ The names of successful applicants were printed in *BOE* every week. By the end of the season, the Association's popularity was described by *BOE* as "phenomenal".⁵⁹ "Where in the United Kingdom, or, indeed, in all the world, can a proprietor of a journal boast of [...] upwards of two thousand sturdy young fellows playing under the proud title of *Boys of England?*", the paper enthused.⁶⁰

A total of sixty-one teams were accepted to participate in the scheme.⁶¹ Their combined end of season record stood at 316 games won out of 446 games played, with only sixty-seven losses and sixty-three draws.⁶² The most successful teams were Launceston (played fifteen, won thirteen, lost nil, drawn two, goals for fifty-two, goals against fifteen), and London New Cross (played twenty-four, won twenty, lost two, drawn two, goals for seventy-four, goals against thirty-two).⁶³ Only one team was disqualified from the Association.⁶⁴

Whilst the scheme may have been popular, it was certainly not financially rewarding. Rather, Brett claimed to have incurred a considerable loss; in addition to the cost of the footballs and prizes, he was forced to hire extra staff to cope with demand.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, he must have been pleased with the benefits the Association brought. Sixty-one youth leagues nationwide now featured a '*Boys of England Football Club*', thrusting the journal into the public consciousness. Further publicity was gleaned through match reports printed in specialist and regional publications such as *Sport and Play*, *The Cornish and Devon Post* and *The Launceston Weekly Review*. "The reports we have received from week to week were supplied by local newspapers", boasted *BOE* on one occasion. "From north, south,

⁵⁸ *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1432, 27 April 1894, p.348.

⁵⁹ *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1429, 6 April 1894, p.303.

⁶⁰ *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1432, 27 April 1894, p.349.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1433, 4 May 1894, p.365.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.364. Remarkably, the Launceston '*Boys of England Football Club*' survived well into the twentieth century, outliving the paper itself: see 'Club History', <http://www.launcestonfc.org.uk>, accessed 12 December 2005.

⁶⁴ *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1432, 27 April 1894, p.348.

⁶⁵ *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1433, 4 May 1894, p.365.

W. UMBALE. W. HARRIS. S. TYSALL. E. BALDWIN. J. W. BAKER. S. HEYNES. G. SANDERS. A. TYSALL.



I. HARRIS. J. MARTLOW. W. TYSALL. J. BAKER. D. BENHAM.

THE BIRMINGHAM "BOYS OF ENGLAND" FOOTBALL TEAM.

Record—Played, 26. Won, 19. Lost, 3. Drawn, 4. Goals for, 96. Against, 32.

Fig.16: The Birmingham BOE Football Team

A "BOYS OF ENGLAND" UNBEATEN TEAM. LAUNCESTON (No. 16.)

Record—Played, 15. Won, 13. Lost, 0. Drawn, 2. Goals for, 52. Against, 15.



CHARLES ATKINS (<i>Linceman.</i>)	T. DOWNING (<i>Goal.</i>)	H. C. F. PEAKE (<i>Hon. Sec. and Promoter.</i>)
	<i>Backs—</i>	
	G. SAUNDERS.	J. KING.
	<i>Half-backs—</i>	
T. BAILEY.	W. BAKER.	A. SPETTIGER (<i>Captain.</i>)
	<i>Forwards—</i>	
P. JASPER, H. DUFF (<i>Right wing.</i>)	G. GILBERT (<i>Centre.</i>)	E. HODGE, F. THORNE (<i>Left wing.</i>)

Fig.17: The Launceston BOE Football Team

east, and west, cuttings, describing the feats performed by the *Boys of England* footballers, poured in.”⁶⁶ At a time when the Brett faced ever increasing pressure from Alfred Harmsworth’s halfpenny weeklies, the initial cost of the association must have been trifling compared to the value of this publicity, equal to a small fortune in advertising costs.

The *Boys of England* Lifeboat Appeal

The *BOE* lifeboat appeal was the paper’s longest-running promotion. It commenced in volume one and did not cease until volume twenty seven, some twelve years later. The lifeboat appeal offers perhaps the strongest proof that *BOE*’s promotions were not simply dedicated to raising and securing sales. Rather, they could be charitable and benevolent.

Brett was a keen supporter of the National Lifeboat Association. The association had been the subject of much interest, and had attracted many new donors, following the deaths of twenty lifeboat crew in South Shields in 1849.⁶⁷ In number sixteen of *BOE* Brett invited boys to express their approval or disapproval of a scheme whereby money would be collected to pay for the launch of a new lifeboat. His language was exceptionally rousing. “And when the storm had ceased they may have seen the deep gloom of despair in some poor house-hold – they may have seen the now smiling sea give up its dead – they may have seen the pale, wave-washed form borne homeward to the sorrowing widow and her wailing orphans!”, exclaimed the editor after relating a tragic maritime scenario.⁶⁸ One can hardly imagine that many boys wrote to condemn Brett’s proposals.

Support was soon confirmed, and donations began to flood in. The first youngster to donate his “mite”, sixpence, was lauded by Brett as “noble-hearted boy”.⁶⁹ In each subsequent week a list of subscribers, and the value of their contribution, was published in a brief column, along with the total sum raised. By the end of volume two this amounted to £117 -2s 2½d.⁷⁰ The donations were lodged in an account held at the London and

⁶⁶ Ibid; *BOE*, Vol.56, No.1432, 27 April 1894, p.348.

⁶⁷ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (1964), pp.176-78.

⁶⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.16, 11 March 1867, p.245.

⁶⁹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.18, 25 March 1867, p.286.

⁷⁰ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.52, 16 November 1867, p.414.

Westminster Bank.⁷¹ However, after a time contributions began to slow. An 1874 edition of *BOE* stated that only two subscriptions had been received in recent months.⁷² Brett threatened to abandon the appeal altogether when subscriptions had all but dried up.⁷³ Even by 1877 only three quarters of the total had been raised.⁷⁴ This considered, it is likely that Brett himself contributed substantially to the £350 cost of the lifeboat.⁷⁵

The '*Boys of England* and Edwin J. Brett' lifeboat was finally launched at Southend on 13 November 1879. The boat measured twenty-four feet long by seven and a quarter feet across. It sported eight oars and two lugg sails, and was double banked and self righting.⁷⁶ A large crowd assembled to watch the launch ceremony. Brett was introduced to those assembled by the Rev. F. Thackeray, the chairman of the local lifeboat committee. Brett's speech was met with applause and cheers from the crowd, many of whom were sprayed with the wine used to christen the boat. The crew, led by coxswain George Myall, then boarded the new boat, and proceeded to sail it a little out to sea, from where it was rowed along the coast. Notable dignitaries then attended a reception, hosted by Brett, at the Royal Hotel. The occasion was celebrated with a lengthy article in *BOE*, and a free engraving depicting the new lifeboat.⁷⁷ The '*Boys of England* and Edwin J. Brett' lifeboat saved the lives of twenty-three men during its ten years of service.⁷⁸ Reports of these daring rescues appeared in *BOE* and other Brett periodicals. The reports were often based upon letters sent

⁷¹ *Our Boys' Journal: a Weekly Magazine for Every Home*, Vol.1, No.21, 17 January 1877, p.336.

⁷² *BOE*, Vol.16, No.418, 14 November 1874, p.384.

⁷³ *BOE*, Vol.25, No.626, 15 November 1878, p.15.

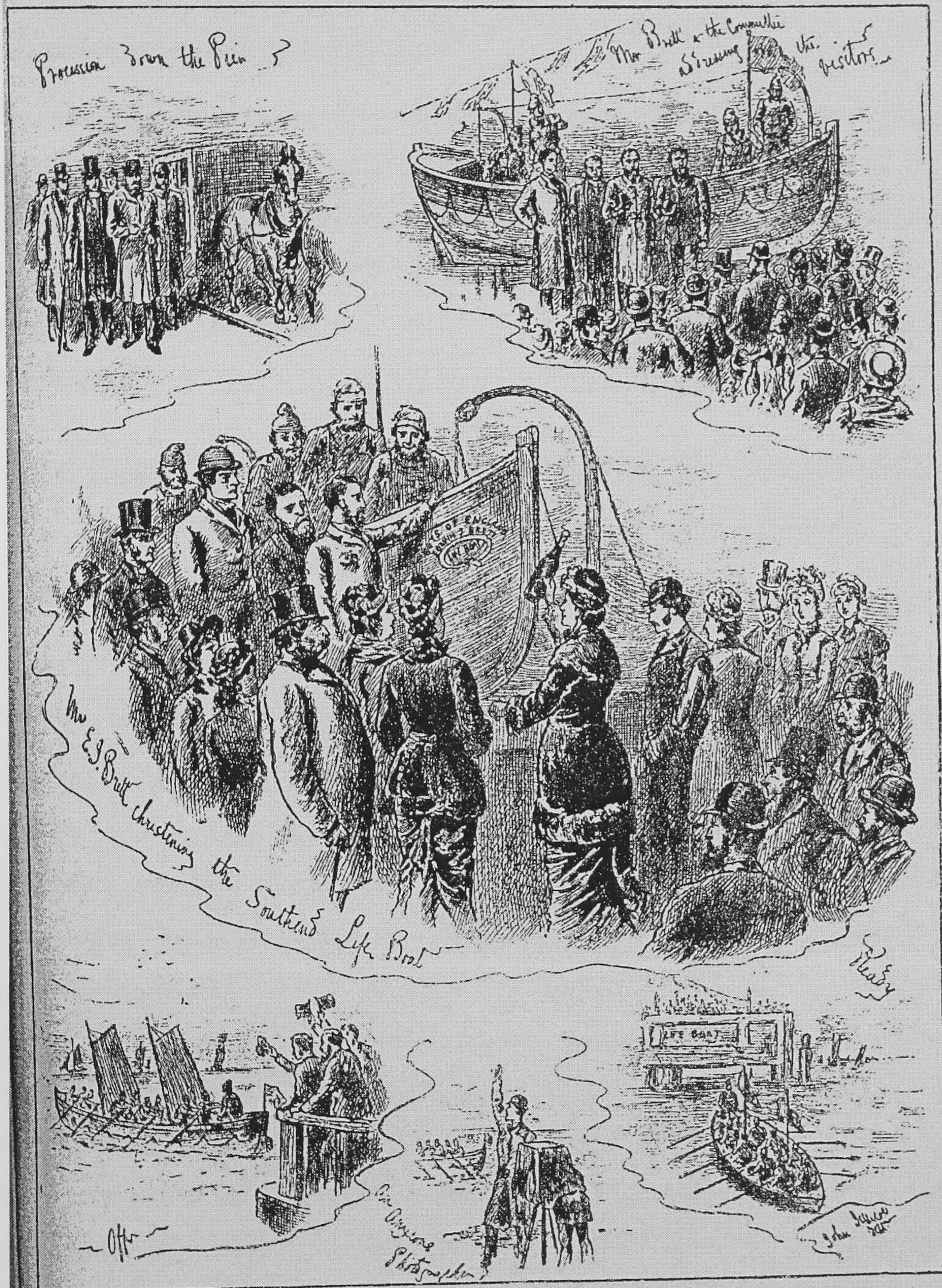
⁷⁴ *Our Boys' Journal*, Vol.1, No.21, 17 January 1877, p.336.

⁷⁵ K. Best, 'Three Cheers for the Lifeboat Heroes', <http://www.thisissessex.co.uk/essex/archive/1999/01/12/NEWS78.2ZM.html>, accessed 12 January 2003.

⁷⁶ J. Froom, *The Story of the Southend Lifeboat* (Clacton-on-Sea, 1975), pp.3-4. Brett was later presented with a scale model of the boat, which he kept in the smoking room of his London townhouse: see 'A Famous Armoury: Mr Edwin J. Brett Shows Us His Treasures', *The Sketch*, 7 March 1894, pp.311-12.

⁷⁷ *BOE*, Vol.27, No.681, 5 December 1879, pp.60-61; *BOE*, Vol.27, No.682, 12 December 1879, p.69.

⁷⁸ Best, 'Three Cheers'.



LAUNCH AT SOUTHEND
OF THE
BOYS OF ENGLAND AND EDWIN J. BRETT, LIFEBOAT.

Fig.18: Plate Commemorating the Launch of the BOE Lifeboat at Southend

by the crew, who were keen to maintain links with the lifeboat donor.⁷⁹ Indeed, Southend remembered Brett fondly upon his death over a decade and a half later when his obituary was published in the *Kent Coast Times*.⁸⁰

So influential was Brett's example that W. L. Emmetts' *YEJ* began its own lifeboat appeal almost immediately, as did *The Boy's Own Paper* soon after its 1879 launch. Emmett had, at first, decided against running his own lifeboat project. However, reader pressure compelled him to reverse his decision. This was a mistake. Before long, an angry Emmett declared the project a disaster. Only 100 boys had donated any money, totalling a paltry £26 6d.⁸¹

Two Unsuccessful Promotions – the *Boys of England* Club and the *Boys of England* National Exhibition

Brett was at his creative and imaginative peak in the earliest volumes of *BOE*. He launched a plethora of new and exciting promotions in quick succession. Most were successful. However, two of the paper's most ambitious promotional projects ended in failure.

The first unsuccessful promotion was the *BOE* Club. The project was not of Brett's creation, but was proposed by a correspondent, known by the pseudonym 'Amicus Amico', via a letter published in number twenty. Judging by the tone of Amico's letters, and the consideration Brett gave them, it is likely that Amico was an adult, possibly a teacher. Amico proposed that a *BOE* Club should be organised as a means of bringing the paper's readership together socially. The club, Amico suggested, should operate like a cadet corps (as Baden Powell's Boy Scouts would decades later). It should also organise musical and literary events, publish an annual volume collating member's contributions, such as tales and riddles, and award prizes for the best. Amico's proposals were strikingly detailed, and even considered managerial infrastructure.⁸² Brett invited readers to express their opinions

⁷⁹ For example, see *BOE*, Vol.31, No.781, 4 November 1881, p.84, and *BOE*, Vol.31, No.782, 11 November 1881, p.112.

⁸⁰ 'Town Notes', *Kent Coast Times*, 19 December 1895, p.6.

⁸¹ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.15, 27 July 1867, p.240.

⁸² *BOE*, Vol.1, No.20, 6 April 1867, p.320.

regarding the scheme. At first, Amico received a great deal of support. In one instance a teacher from a school where *BOE* was “highly appreciated” wrote to Brett to commend his proposals.⁸³ However, by number thirty-six Brett had decided that although support was high it was impractical to press ahead with such a demanding project.⁸⁴

BOE's second unsuccessful promotion was the *BOE* National Exhibition. Inspired by the Great Exhibition of 1851, its purpose was to demonstrate, and nurture, the talents of the paper's subscribers. Readers were invited to contribute all manner of items of their own creation: “a pencil drawing, a model ship, model boat, water-colour drawing, model steam engine, specimens of handwriting, model toy village, church, in fact, any scientific, artistic, or useful article”.⁸⁵ It was intended that their efforts would later be exhibited at a London venue. The scheme was first proposed in number forty-eight, and was launched by several lengthy articles. Self help was the dominant theme of the scheme, as demonstrated by a full-page article which appeared in number forty-nine. Two columns of the article were aimed solely at parents, guardians, and schoolmasters; the emotive piece called upon families and schools to assist their boys in “a task so well calculated to encourage and promote habits of industry and self-reliance”, and suggested that Britain's future prosperity relied upon nurturing the skills of its youth. Turning to his boy readers, Brett recalled the names of Arkwright, Stevenson and Watt, men who had risen from humble beginnings, and insisted that all contributions would be judged upon their own merits, regardless of the contributor's station in life. “In after life”, spoke Brett to his readers, “surrounded by your children, you may proudly say, “I date my rise in life from belonging to the *Boys of England* National Exhibition.””⁸⁶ At first boys responded positively to the scheme. Volumes three and four of *BOE* featured regular updates detailing every contribution received. These columns also suggest that Brett had begun to make arrangements for the actual hosting of the exhibition. However, after the fifth volume the scheme was quietly dropped. It was later revealed a lack of exhibits was to blame.⁸⁷

⁸³ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.23, 27 April 1867, p.368.

⁸⁴ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.36, 27 July 1867, p.160.

⁸⁵ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.49, 26 October 1867, p.364.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.204, 10 October 1870, p.336.

The *BOE* Club and the *BOE* National Exhibition were simply too large and too impractical. Both projects were far beyond the organisational capabilities of the small *BOE* office. Yet although both schemes ended in failure they prove how attentive Brett was towards his readership. He was willing to listen to the suggestions and demands of his readership, to embark upon difficult projects, and to maintain a scheme for as long support remained. Moreover, they also show how Brett's promotional strategy was not simply driven by sales and profits. It is unlikely that either of these schemes would have earned him any money – probably quite the opposite. Rather, promoting camaraderie and self help were his motivations.

Free Gifts

BOE issued a wide variety of free gifts throughout its history. The most common of these were monochrome engravings, later superseded by more lavish colour plates. Each one, about the size of two regular pages, usually depicted a scene from a current serial story. The first monochrome engraving, given away with number one, featured “the encounter between Earl Percy of Northumberland and the Douglas at the celebrated conflict of Chevy Chase”.⁸⁸ The first colour plate, ‘St. George of England, or, Champions of Christendom’, accompanied number seventy-nine. The paper's most lavish colour print, a gigantic, detailed plate entitled ‘England, from the Norman Conquest to the Reign of Queen Victoria in a Series of Graphical Views’, was issued with number 1594, to celebrate the 1897 Jubilee. It is likely that, in the long term, these engravings cost Brett more to produce than any other gift. The cost of printing such large sheets, especially in colour, must have been considerable. Furthermore, old stock and reprints were rarely sold to recoup this initial expenditure. However, Brett certainly sought to minimise his costs. He sometimes issued the same free plate on more than one occasion, thus saving on illustrator's fees. For example, a full colour plate depicting a Rugby match between England and Scotland, issued with a volume sixty number of *BOE*, had been recycled from the 1893 launch issue of *Jack Harkaway's Journal for Boys*. Imitations of Brett's plates appeared regularly in the Emmett brothers' papers. However, the Emmetts' plates were often small, poorly drawn,

⁸⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 November 1866, p.16.

and printed on thin, cheap paper.⁸⁹ In one instance a large plate depicting the 1867 boat race, which had been announced boastfully by W. L. Emmett, was first delayed considerably, and then printed incorrectly.⁹⁰ Much amused, Brett declared the print “a most hideous reproduction” and “a disgrace”.⁹¹

BOE also issued numerous free ‘Models for Home Amusement’. Like Brett’s plays, the models were printed on a single sheet of paper, which readers were required to mount upon card and cut out. Each model depicted a famous landmark. The first model issued was of “Old London Bridge, as it existed in the seventeenth century, the pride of our proud city and wonder of the world”.⁹² Other models included ‘Temple Bar, with Lord Mayor’s Procession’, ‘Cleopatra’s Needle’, ‘Kenilworth Castle Maypole’ and ‘Thames Embankment’. Although each model was first given away free with *BOE*, they were later sold separately for 1d (3d coloured). The models were simple to construct, although boys were “advised to seek elder brother or father’s help if stuck”.⁹³ Like Brett’s plays, the models were well illustrated yet inexpensive to produce. For example, Brett’s ‘Tower of London’ model cost but one hundred and fifty pounds in total to manufacture.⁹⁴ Any loss incurred was probably recouped through the extra sales which the gift attracted, and by later sales of excess stock and reprints.

Many of Brett’s gifts, whilst amusing, were also educative. For example, he published two large illustrated sheets, entitled ‘Graphic View of the World’ and ‘History of England’. However, Brett’s most lavish educative gift was a giant kit entitled ‘*Boys of England* Panorama of the River Thames’. The kit, which measured a huge fifty-one feet in length, included twenty-six sheets of scenes and characters, a stage front and a lecture book. In total, the panorama cost Brett £1000 to produce, yet it was given away free in weekly instalments in *BOE* from volume eight onwards. The first scene, Greenwich

⁸⁹ One excellent exception was ‘The Four Conquests of England, No.1: the Last Stand Made by Caractacus Against the Romans’, by Harry Maguire, which appeared with No.1 of the *YEJ*.

⁹⁰ *YEJ*, Vol.1, No.11, 29 June 1867, p.176.

⁹¹ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.33, 6 July 1867; *BOE*, Vol.2, No.35, 20 July 1867, p.144.

⁹² *BOE*, Vol.1, No.12, 11 February 1867, p.192.

⁹³ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.14, 25 February 1867, p.224.

⁹⁴ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.36, 27 July 1867, p.160.

Hospital, featured “moveable ships, boats, and the man-of-war ‘Victory’, bearing the body of Nelson”.⁹⁵ Brett’s advertisements for the panorama stated that it was intended for the amusement of both fathers and sons. It was later sold as a complete set, priced 10d (1s 8d coloured). A ‘Panorama Stage’, presumably a modified version of Brett’s toy theatre stage, was also issued, priced 1s 3d.

Literary Promotions

BOE’s serial fiction was immensely popular amongst its readership, a fact which Brett was keen to exploit. Accordingly, the most popular *BOE* serials were reissued soon after their serialisation as ‘complete story volumes’, meaning that boys could purchase their favourite tales in their entirety. Many dozens of different stories were issued. The majority were sold in a single volume, whilst some spanned two. Each volume cost 1s. Reprinted stories were one of the most profitable of Brett’s interests. Because many of the volumes preserved much of the original format of the serialised versions, typographic costs would have been insubstantial. Moreover, authors received no second remuneration.

Non-fiction, too, was reissued as complete volumes. Much of it was educative or improving. For example, many of the paper’s sporting guides were sold as 2d books. The first volume issued was the *Boys of England Cricket Guide* (1867), the arrival of which was announced in number twenty-four.⁹⁶ Complete guides for swimming, fencing, angling, conjuring, football, training for health, walking, running and jumping, rowing and gymnastics, boxing and wrestling, and the rearing and keeping dogs, poultry, and pigeons followed. The *BOE* series ‘My Son – What Shall I do with Him?’ (vol.5) also appeared soon after its serialisation as a 6d volume. Alongside reprinted material, a wide range of brand new non-fictional volumes were also issued by Brett; many were advertised in the rear pages of *BOE*. One example was the self-explanatory *Boys of England Stories of Shakespeare* series, which commenced in 1881; each tale cost 1d, whilst a complete volume of twelve could be bought for a shilling. In 1871 two new factual, and militaristic, Brett periodicals appeared, entitled *Brett’s Naval History of Great Britain* and *The War*

⁹⁵ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.186, 1 July 1870, p.31.

⁹⁶ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.24, 4 May 1867, p.384.

Journal, both of which were advertised extensively in volume eight. Although all of these non-fictional volumes were educative or improving, *Brett's Useful Knowledge on all Subjects* (1871), also known as *Brett's Useful Knowledge Within*, was perhaps the most so.⁹⁷

Brett also issued an annual seasonal number of *BOE* to mark Christmas and New Year. Seasonal issues were usually twice the size of a usual number, and featured a full colour front and rear cover. Costing twopence, the special issues comprised both regular features and additional material. Ghost stories were a popular attraction; the first Christmas special featured tales entitled 'The Footstep on the Ghost's Walk' and 'The Twin Spectors of Twigton'. The lavish yet inexpensive holiday double issue may well have been bought by occasional *BOE* readers as well as regulars. A large sale would have helped to offset some of the extra costs involved with colour printing. Summer and Easter specials also appeared intermittently.

Occasionally, Brett gave away free fiction with *BOE*. The first came in the form of three four-page supplements accompanying volume five. Each contained a single short story; the first was 'Among the Breakers, or, the Secret Under the Waves' by Percy B. St. John. The paper's next free literature was *The Boys of England Pocket Novelette*. Novelettes – short, individually-bound complete stories – were a thriving component of the boys' publishing industry. Brett began to publish the thirty-two page *BOE Pocket Novelettes* in 1880. The tales maintained the typical *BOE* style, as did the few accompanying illustrations. The first three stories were 'The Old Tower, or, the Imprisoned School', 'The Secret Grave, or, the Schoolboy's Dream', and 'Two Boys at Sea, or, The Twin Captains'. Brett usually issued a free colour portrait to accompany each novelette. It is believed that *The BOE Pocket Novelette* ran to nearly two hundred editions, although only the first few were free. Subsequent novelettes were sold at a cost of 1d each, or 1s for ten in a bound volume with accompanying colour cover. Several years later Brett issued *The Boy's Weekly Reader Novelette* at the same price point. It is thought that this series also

⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the British Library copies of many of these works were destroyed in the Second World War, and no other copies are known to exist.

enjoyed a substantial run.⁹⁸ In 1886 Brett also commenced a long-lived 1d series, *The Princesses Novelette*, to cater for female customers. Advertisements appeared in *BOE* at the time urging boy readers to alert their female friends.⁹⁹

Promotional Activity after 1890

As Brett became increasingly ill in the 1890s he became less involved with the management of his papers. The promotional style of *BOE* changed significantly during this time, as part of a wider stylistic revamp instigated by second-generation management. Advertisements, which increased dramatically in number, were permanently reinstated to the rear page of the paper, alongside eye-catching cartoons and short articles. In addition, nearly every page now featured both a header and a footer promoting Brett's periodicals and stories, the first time advertising had been spread so widely throughout the paper. Many of these headers and footers advertised Brett's other journals, such as the recently launched *Halfpenny Surprise*. Yet this bombardment of advertising was not matched by a similar upturn in promotional items and schemes. In fact, *BOE*'s promotional strategy floundered. Moreover, not only was there a general lessening in the number of gifts and competitions, most of the newly devised promotions which did appear were lazy and thoughtless. It became apparent that Brett's successors lacked his flair for promotion. In the face of rising opposition from rival publishing houses, the demise of *BOE*'s promotional strategy was an important factor in the paper's decline.

BOE's promotional strategy in the mid to late 1890s relied upon giveaways and competitions. These were inspired by Brett's earlier prize distributions, and by new schemes run by Alfred Harmsworth, many of which had proved quite popular. Two such competitions, the 'Question Target Competition' and 'Money Prize Distribution', were held in volumes sixty-five and sixty-six respectively. The premise was simple: boys had to answer a single question and send the answer to the *BOE* office. The answers were either common knowledge or could easily be researched. For example, boys were asked the

⁹⁸ Robert Kirkpatrick cites runs of 183 and 130 numbers respectively: see R. J. Kirkpatrick, *The Encyclopaedia of Boys' School Stories* (Aldershot, 2000), pp.377-78.

⁹⁹ See, for example, *BOE*, Vol.40, No.1008, 12 March 1886, p.320.

distance between the sun and the earth, and the date of Queen Victoria's coronation. Despite their simplicity, the competitions lacked the charm of Brett's earlier distributions. The prize, five pounds in cash, was insignificant when compared to the 1400 lavish prizes offered in Brett's 1866 distribution. Moreover, these competitions, unlike Brett earlier prize distributions, failed to encourage long-term sales.

Brett's successors also relied upon promotional fiction to a far greater extent than Brett himself had done. Most notably, an eight-page *Boys of England Prince of Novelettes* was issued with every number of *BOE* from volume fifty-seven onwards. The first story was 'The Bullet-Proof Captain, or, the Last of the Bushrangers'. As *BOE*'s serial fiction had always been its biggest draw, the idea of offering more fiction for the same price must have appeared sensible. However, the nature of boys' fiction was evolving rapidly in the 1890s. Staple features of *BOE*, such as pirate yarns and ghost stories, were becoming increasingly passé. New types of fiction, such as the empire tales and detective stories found in the Harmsworth's halfpenny papers, were beginning to taking their place. Instead of issuing free fiction, it would probably have been wiser for *BOE* to adapt its existing fiction to these new trends. This would also have avoided the considerable costs involved in printing an eight page supplement every week. As *BOE*'s popularity slumped towards 1899 it is unlikely that this expense was ever recouped through sales.

Perhaps *BOE*'s most ill-conceived sideline project was *Jack Harkaway's Journal for Boys*, a weekly spin-off magazine. The first number of the new paper appeared on 24 April 1893. Considering Harkaway's immense popularity in the 1870s, Brett's staff probably believed that a new tale featuring the popular hero, penned by original author Bracebridge Hemyng, could help improve the company's failing fortunes. However, like the *BOE Prince of Novelettes*, the new magazine clung to the old style of fiction with which boys were becoming disenchanted. In addition, the paper ran several crass promotions. One, entitled 'Why are My Publications the Most Popular?' promised readers "answering this question in the best and most witty style, in either prose or verse, not exceeding forty words, prizes in money varying from £1 0s to 5s". Another promotion was positively macabre:

I will pay £20 to the legal representative of any youth killed by an accident whilst cycling, or playing in football or cricket matches, providing that the deceased was the owner of this coupon

with his usual signature written underneath, and also providing that his claim be accompanied with a doctor's certificate stating the cause of death.¹⁰⁰

With its outmoded fiction and inane promotions, *Jack Harkaway's Journal for Boys* bombed; it was incorporated into *BOE* after but a few weekly numbers.

The Success of *Boys of England's* Promotional Strategy

BOE's promotions varied considerably in nature. Likewise, they also varied considerably in their aims and outcomes. The *BOE* lifeboat appeal was mainly benevolent. The *BOE's* Britannia plays connected with the paper's support for working class causes. The *BOE* National Exhibition attempted to engage with the working class self help movement. The *BOE* Football Association sought to develop camaraderie and promote good health amongst readers. The *BOE* Club was designed to unite likeminded readers in a social setting. The *BOE* toy theatre was intended to encourage creativity. The *BOE* prize distributions appealed largely on a materialistic level. Exciting yet worthwhile, and working class in character, *BOE's* promotions perfectly complement the paper's overall ethos.

BOE's promotional campaign encompassed many successful components. Each contributed to the success of the paper in a different way. However, no single one was significantly more successful than any other. Rather, *BOE's* promotional strategy appears to have been so effective because, when all its elements were combined, the paper became a highly involving experience offering a unique depth of engagement. Unlike other periodicals, *BOE* motivated its readers beyond the printed page.

It did so in three key ways. Firstly, it promoted physical activity. Reading *BOE* involved more than just reading. Rather, boys were encouraged, for example, to construct models, play football, and visit the theatre. Secondly, the paper advocated interaction with others. Reading *BOE* was not a solitary hobby. Rather, boys were advised to involve friends and family in their projects, and to join clubs and societies. Furthermore, reading the paper also implied membership of an informal community of *BOE* subscribers. Thirdly, *BOE* sought to engage not only with a subscriber's reading habits, but with every aspect of

¹⁰⁰ *Jack Harkaway's Journal for Boys*, Vol.1, No.1, 24 April 1893, p.16.

his lifestyle. For example, Brett issued plates to be displayed on walls and mantelpieces, and published Christmas numbers which became as important a part of the season as long-established traditions. In motivating its readers beyond the page in these three ways, *BOE* offered far more involving an experience than any other contemporary boys' periodical. Moreover, the incentives for boys to interact with *BOE* in these ways were considerable. They could secure fame and glory by winning a pony, by having their artistic creations exhibited, or by scoring a winning goal. For boys who would have been satisfied to simply see their name in print such enticements must have been highly attractive.

There can be little doubt that these effects were fashioned intentionally by Brett. Indeed, his editorials frequently boasted that *BOE* was intended to compel boys into action, not detain them within imaginary literary worlds. Brett had become an experienced promoter during his time at the NPC. The company's shrewd promotional strategy, which made its penny dreadfuls the most popular in the country, was largely of his design. Brett would have known what type of promotions were popular amongst boy readers, known that different promotions could provoke different responses, and known that several promotions combined could achieve a greater effect than each could on its own. It was this experience which allowed Brett to guide *BOE*'s promotional strategy towards success.

Conclusion

BOE was backed by an extensive promotional strategy. Its numerous components varied in both nature and aim. Whilst each element of *BOE*'s promotional campaign was successful individually, their collective influence was particularly significant. Inspiring and motivating its subscribers into a heightened level of engagement, *BOE* transcended mere reading matter.

BOE's promotional strategy was a key factor behind its dominance of the boys' publishing market. It distinguished the paper from its imitators, and gave boys an extra reason to favour it over its rivals. Evidently, the Emmetts, and indeed many other competitors, did not understand Brett's promotional techniques. Although their promotions mimicked Brett's, they failed to inspire and motivate boys in the same manner. It was to *BOE*'s detriment that Brett's promotional skills were lost in the 1890s. There can be little

doubt that the impoverishment of the paper's promotional strategy following his illness and death was one of the causes of the paper's demise.

Chapter Eight – Reader Response

Introduction

Boys' weeklies were amongst the most widely read types of popular literature in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet their readers left comparatively few clues as to what they thought of them. The historian's task of gauging response to boys' weeklies is therefore a difficult one. However, it is important that reader response is investigated, alongside editorial policy and content, as part of a comprehensive study into the history of any periodical. This is because examining reader response invariably reveals telling patterns and trends. It can show which elements of a periodical struck a chord with its readership, and which did not. Ultimately, this can account for a high sale and longevity, or conversely, a low sale and failure.

Historians of Victorian boys' weeklies have been rather negligent towards response. The 'Studies in Imperialism' series in particular has almost wholly ignored the issue; instead, it has simply assumed that a high sale of certain periodicals, like *The Boy's Own Paper*, meant that their empire-minded messages were absorbed passively and unquestioningly by their readers. Only a few studies have made inroads into the question of response. J. S. Bratton's *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (1981), Jack Cox's *Take a Cold Tub, Sir! The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (1982), and Stuart Hannabus' 'Information Clinic: the Correspondence Columns of the *Boy's Own Paper* in 1894-95' (1977), have all examined how boys reacted to the *BOP*. As far as *Boys of England* is concerned, Patricia Barnett's *English Boys' Weeklies, 1866-1899* (1974), Kirsten Drotner's *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (1988) and John Springhall's *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (1998) have all considered response, but only briefly and in fairly general terms.

Considering that *BOE* was read by hundreds of thousands of boys over its thirty-three year history, there is a relative shortage of sources through which reader response may be assessed. Thankfully, those which do exist are enlightening. Firstly, there is the paper itself. Its correspondence columns, which were dedicated entirely to response, are very useful, and comparatively straightforward to interpret. Other, more subtle, evidence may be found

elsewhere within the paper. Secondly, several autobiographies offer retrospective opinions of the paper. Thirdly, the collectors' journals *Vanity Fair* and *Collector's Miscellany*, which were published from the late 1910s to the 1950s, also feature an abundance of reminiscences from former readers.

This chapter identifies what kind of boys read *BOE*, and assesses how these readers responded to its content. It is divided into five sections; each addresses an important issue relating to reader response. The first section uses a hitherto-ignored source, the *BOE* prize distribution winners' lists, to provide an accurate breakdown of where *BOE* readers lived. The second section examines the paper's correspondence columns, whilst the third studies retrospective autobiographical accounts, including those found in *VF* and *CM*. The fourth and fifth sections use correspondence, autobiography, and other evidence, to identify the class of the average *BOE* reader, and to adjudge whether or not swapping periodicals was commonplace amongst readers. Within each section the advantages and limitations of the sources used will be noted. The chapter contends that *BOE* was read largely by boys from the 'respectable' working classes. These youngsters reacted positively to the paper's content. Their enthusiasm, and loyalty, accounted for much of the paper's popularity and longevity.

Dispersal of Readers

Historians have long assumed that the majority of boys' weekly readers lived in London, and that the remainder lived in major English industrial cities. Indeed, it has been argued that Brett himself "lacked large scale distribution networks", which meant that only boys living in certain areas were able to procure *BOE* and its companion publications.¹ However, this assumption is based on fairly insubstantial evidence.² A robust study of where the readers of boys' weeklies lived has never before been attempted. This is because it was thought impossible to gauge. During *BOE*'s time official circulation figures did not exist,

¹ J. O. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (Basingstoke, 1998), p.95.

² *Ibid.*, pp.55-56; A. E. Waite, 'By-Ways of Periodical Literature', *Walford's Antiquarian*, XII (1887), pp.65-70.

let alone geographical breakdowns of circulation figures. Sources such as autobiographies and correspondence columns are too few to base a persuasive study of reader dispersal upon. Furthermore, if publishers ever had a rough idea of how their papers sold in individual regions, no record has survived.

However, the geographical dispersal of *BOE* readers can actually be assessed with some accuracy. As we have seen, in its earliest volumes the paper ran several prize distributions. To avoid accusations of corruption, Brett published not only the winning ticket numbers but also the name and full address of each winner. The first distribution results were published as a separate, halfpenny supplement, of which there appears to be no surviving copy. However, the results of the second, third and fourth prize distribution were published in *BOE* itself. The three lists provide the names and addresses of precisely 650, 330 and 574 *BOE* readers respectively. From these lists of winners an evaluation of where *BOE* readers lived may be attempted.³

It is probable that the results of *BOE*'s prize distributions reflect the actual dispersal of its readers with a good level of accuracy. This is because so many boys embraced the competition, and so many prizes were given away. Around 10,000 boys entered each distribution, one-fifteenth of the total readership.⁴ Hundreds of boys were allotted a prize on each occasion. Each sample was large, certainly large enough to represent the paper's readers in more or less their true proportions. Encouragingly, there are consistent patterns running between the distribution results, and few inexplicable erratic swings, both signs of reliability. It is also worth mentioning that it is unlikely that boys from one geographical location were proportionally more likely to enter the draw than those from another.

The geographical dispersal of winners in each of the three prize distributions is shown in Fig.19. The number of winners living in each location is expressed both as a plain figure and as a percentage of the total number of winners. Some useful totals are added at the foot of the table.

³ The lists were printed in: *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.2, No.31, 22 June 1867, pp.79-80; *BOE*, Vol.3, No.53, 23 November 1867, p.15; and *BOE*, Vol.4, No.83, 19 June 1868, pp.79-80.

⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.18, 25 March 1867, p.288.

	Distribution two (650 winners in total)		Distribution three (330 winners in total)		Distribution four (574 winners in total)	
	Number of winners	% of total	Number of winners	% of total	Number of winners	% of total
London	269	41.38	119	36.06	231	40.24
Birmingham	11	1.69	6	1.82	3	0.52
Leeds	10	1.54	2	0.61	8	1.39
Liverpool	21	3.23	4	1.21	5	0.87
Manchester	24	3.69	3	0.91	10	1.74
Newcastle	10	1.54	2	0.61	4	0.7
Sheffield	5	0.77	2	0.61	3	0.52
Other England	235	36.15	111	33.66	260	45.3
Edinburgh	10	1.54	7	2.12	3	0.52
Glasgow	6	0.92	8	2.42	3	0.52
Other Scotland	17	2.62	26	7.88	15	2.61
Belfast	2	0.31	5	1.52	1	0.17
Dublin	3	0.46	7	2.12	4	0.7
Other Ireland	0	0	7	2.12	3	0.52
Wales	10	1.54	8	2.42	8	1.39
Other	3	0.46	5	1.52	8	1.39
Cannot say	14	1.23	8	2.42	5	0.87

Total major industrial - England	81	12.46	19	5.76	33	5.75
Total non-London England	316	48.6	130	39.39	293	51.05
Total England	585	90	249	75.45	524	91.29
Total Scotland	33	5.08	41	12.42	21	5.75
Total Ireland	5	0.77	19	5.76	8	1.39
Total non-England	51	7.85	73	22.12	45	7.84

Fig.19: Geographical dispersal of BOE prize distribution winners

The distribution results show that the vast majority of prize winners, over 90% in two of the three draws, lived in England. Expressed as a projected proportion of *BOE*'s total readership, in distribution four 136,935 out of 150,000 *BOE* readers were English. Even in distribution three, their poorest showing, English winners comprised more than three quarters of the total. The single greatest location of winners, English or otherwise, by a large margin, was London. The capital was home to 41.38%, 36.06% and 40.24% of winners in the three draws respectively. In comparison, the second highest number of winners from any individual location, twenty-four in Manchester in distribution two, represented around only 3.69% of the total sample in that distribution.

The total number of winners from major English industrial cities was surprisingly few. Only 12.46% of distribution two winners lived in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield combined; this figure dropped considerably in the third and fourth distributions, levelling at around 5.75%. The number of winners from each individual industrial city fluctuated considerably. For example, winners from Manchester numbered twenty four in distribution two, 3.69% of the total, yet dropped to just three winners, or 0.91%, in distribution three.

However, the number of English winners who resided outside of London and major industrial cities, here known as 'other England', was surprisingly high. In distributions two and three the total number of 'other England' winners nearly matched the number of London winners. In distribution four 'other England' winners actually outnumbered London winners, 45.3% to 40.24%. 'Other England' winners lived in wide variety of locations. Many came from medium sized industrial towns, such as Preston and Bradford; others came from smaller towns, villages, and even from rural locations. They were dispersed across the length and breadth of the country. Notably, never did winners from London outweigh winners from elsewhere in England (inclusive of major industrial cities) combined.

The number of Scottish winners fluctuated. Winners from Edinburgh and Glasgow were, in distribution two, slightly fewer in number than winners from major English industrial cities. However, their numbers rose noticeably in distribution three, where together they achieved the impressive figure of 4.54% of the total sample. In this draw

more winners came from each of the two Scottish cities than any single English city outside of London – seven from Edinburgh and eight from Glasgow compared to six from Birmingham, four from Liverpool, three from Manchester and only two each from Leeds, Newcastle and Sheffield. Similarly, winners from other Scottish territories were fairly few in the second distribution, but rose to a considerable 7.88% in the third. However, this upward trend did not persist. Winner from ‘other Scotland’ fell to a lowly 2.61% in distribution four, whilst Edinburgh and Glasgow also recorded a poor 0.52% each. The majority of winners from ‘other Scotland’ tended to live in relatively populous areas, such as Aberdeen and Dundee, as opposed to rural locations.

The number of winners from Ireland also varied. Distribution three was their most successful showing. Winners from Belfast and Dublin combined rose from 0.77% to 3.64%; however, the most noticeable rise was amongst ‘other Ireland’ winners, whose numbers increased from zero to seven, 2.12% of the total sample. Most of these winners lived in Cork. Like the Scottish, the Irish fared badly in the fourth distribution.

Welsh winners comprised a fairly stable one or two percent of each distribution. No single Welsh city or town could boast a noticeably larger number of winners than any other. There were no overseas winners in any of the three distributions. However, there were a handful of winners from the Channel Islands, the Isle of Wight and the Isle of Man. Their numbers improved steadily from the second draw to the fourth.

What do these figures tell historians about where *BOE* readers lived? Overall, it is clear that the vast majority of *BOE* readers lived in England. Roughly half of these English readers lived in London. Indeed, no other single city must have come even close to matching the number of London readers. However, the paper was evidently well distributed around the whole of England. Moreover, English readers were not congregated exclusively within large industrial cities. Rather, they could be found in cities, towns and villages of all sizes. Sales in Scotland were probably fairly strong overall, both in Edinburgh and Glasgow and in the country as a whole. Sales in Ireland were likely to have been slight, although southern newsagents in particular may have begun to stock the paper more widely after the second distribution judging by the sharp increase in winners from Cork. Sales in Wales were also probably insubstantial, but steady. Overseas sales were probably negligible;

however, UK readers living off the mainland may have been surprisingly numerous. All in all, it appears that, even as early as 1867, Brett's periodicals were noticeably more widely distributed than has been thought previously.

BOE's prize distributions results are not a foolproof source. They cannot provide a minute breakdown of the geographical dispersal of the paper's readers, nor accurately reflect fluctuations in readership patterns. The distributions only appeared in the paper's earliest years; it cannot be assumed that the trends they reveal persisted unchanged for three decades. However, they are the only trustworthy resource known to exist. There is much to say in support of them, and little to say against. It is therefore probable that they can be trusted as a rough guide to the whereabouts of *BOE* readers until the early 1870s. It is unfortunate that it is impossible to say whether a high, or low, readership in certain geographical locations was due to distribution and logistical issues, the relative size of the population, localised literary tastes, or to a myriad of other factors.

Correspondence

Most boys' weeklies carried correspondence columns. They were usually printed on the rear or inside rear page of each issue. *BOE* printed correspondence columns virtually every week from its very first numbers. Correspondence in *BOE* usually occupied between half of one column and nearly a full page. The columns were at their largest in the paper's earliest years.

Historians recognise that correspondence columns are a valuable resource. They can reveal a great deal about a paper's readership. There are only minor drawbacks to the material. Firstly, the correspondents' original questions were rarely printed, only the editor's response. Secondly, it is a possibility that some letters may have been fabricated to allow editors to advertise their products, or to surreptitiously criticise their rivals. However, neither of these problems affects *BOE* to any great extent. Firstly, the context of Brett's replies reveals, in the majority of cases, the nature of the original question. Secondly, it is unlikely that Brett ever fabricated any letters. Rarely did his responses carry any information which could be construed as advertising. In fact, Brett was reluctant to openly promote his wares via correspondence columns; in replying to boys who had asked about

the availability of *BOE* stories in complete volumes, for example, he usually spoke only of ‘the title to which you refer’. Indeed, Brett had no need to advertise through his correspondence columns; genuine advertisements for his wares could routinely be found alongside them. Nor did he need to fabricate letters to criticise the Emmetts. He received more than enough genuine letters to satisfy this purpose. Besides, as time went on his correspondence columns became rather less vocal on the subject than they had been.

BOE’s earliest correspondence columns were characterised by a sense of excitement. Readers appeared to be fully aware of the ground-breaking nature of their new periodical. Numerous boys lavished praise upon Brett and *BOE*, and many others wrote to wish both well. Boys were keen to support the new journal as much as possible; it was reported that one boy regularly walked twenty miles to procure his copy.⁵ Many boys wrote to tell the editor that they had secured new subscribers; indeed, one boy claimed to have single-handedly enlisted over twenty new purchasers.⁶ Others wrote to tell Brett of *BOE*’s growing popularity amongst their peer group. For example, a response to Henry Richmond of Coventry read: “We are glad to hear that our journal has pleased the lads and men of Coventry so well, and that eighty-four out of a hundred employed in your factory purchase it.”⁷ There were also plenty of letters criticising the opposition, specifically the Emmett brothers. However, some boys from Scotland, Ireland and Wales were more wary of *BOE*. Several wrote to Brett to discuss the paper’s title, which they believed excluded non-English boys. However, they were assured by the editor that the periodical was intended for the enjoyment of youths of all nations, not just those of England.

Boys seemed to respond positively to the communal atmosphere which Brett sought to inspire. Many correspondents lavished praise upon the manner in which *BOE* fostered camaraderie and encouraged interaction between readers. For example, one particularly perceptive boy lauded the paper as “a medium of intercourse between the boys of Britain”.⁸ Many boys asked whether they themselves were permitted to contribute articles to the

⁵ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.187, 13 June 1870, p.63.

⁶ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.79, 22 May 1868, p.15.

⁷ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.41, 31 August 1867, p.240.

⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.13, 18 February 1867, p.208.

paper. Others wished to know whether Brett had made any plans for articles relating to their interests.

Scores of correspondents requested more information about the paper's prize distributions and juvenile theatre. However, fiction was a less common topic of enquiry. Evidently, there were few questions which could not be answered by the stories themselves. However, correspondents did write to tell Brett which was their favourite tale, to find out whether a sequel was to be published, or to enquire whether a tale was to be reissued as a single volume. The most popular story amongst volume one correspondents was Vane St. John's 'Who Shall be Leader? The Story of Two Boy's Lives' (vol.1). Many boys adopted the names of the favourite *BOE* heroes, such as Jack Rushton and Harry Graham, as pseudonyms. Indeed, Brett was so inundated by such letters that in his responses he was forced to distinguish boys by town, and implored readers to choose more individualistic monikers. Boys also adopted the names of famous figures from history and legend. 'Robin Hood', for example, was a popular pseudonym, even before the outlaw had made his *BOE* debut.

After a volume or two this initial fever began to subside. Letters began to fall into recognisable categories, which persisted throughout the paper's history. Broadly speaking, boys asked two types of question. Firstly, there were questions about *BOE* and other Brett products. Boys asked about forthcoming articles and stories, whether they could purchase their favourites as a single volume, how they could procure promotional items like toy theatres and coloured plates, and the cost of these various articles. The second, and largest, group of questions covered matters not related to merchandising. These questions are the more significant. A high proportion of them related to issues with specific relevance to boys from working class families. Two important conclusions may be drawn from this. Firstly, that the paper was being read largely by the working class. Secondly, that the elements of the paper which were expressly tailored to suit their palate were being met appreciatively.

For example, correspondence proves that British boys warmed to the paper's American subject matter. The paper's American stories were unquestionably popular. "The excellent tale, Strongbow, excites among the readers of our journal the greatest interest".

read a response to a correspondent shortly after the publication of the paper's very first American story, 'Strongbow, the Boy Chief of the Delawares' (vol.2) by John Cecil Stagg.⁹ So enamoured were British readers with American life that many asked Brett to provide them with information regarding emigration to the States. Correspondence columns clearly demonstrated that a strong affinity did indeed exist between the paper's British readers and their American fellows. Boys on both sides of the Atlantic were keen to strike up correspondence with their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. "Many of those who write to us from the land of the Stars and Stripes would like to open correspondence with some of our English readers", announced Brett in an 1874 number of *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youths*. "We shall be happy to facilitate their intercourse, and accordingly give insertion to their wishes."¹⁰ Subsequent correspondence columns contained dozens of these pen-pal requests. Brett advised English boys, such as 'Nitram Sewel', who were eager to respond, that "the very best thing you can do is to write at once to one of the American boys. [...] The postage of a letter not exceeding half an ounce in weight, is threepence, and mails are sent out every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday."¹¹ After a time, the paper began to feature a dedicated Anglo-American pen-pal column.

BOE's readership was motivated by its militaristic fiction too, especially at the height of its popularity in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Brett received a plethora of letters requesting information about entry into the army and Royal Navy, as well as the merchant navy. The minimum age, height, and chest measurement requirements were repeated time and time again. Indeed, in volume twenty-eight, 1880, Brett printed a large notice addressed to every readers which contained all the information they needed to know about becoming a sailor.¹²

Letters regarding educative matters were also common, proving that *BOE*'s readership had a thirst for improvement as well as entertainment. So high was demand, and so varied were boys' questions, that at times the paper resembled an encyclopaedia. Most boys asked questions about history, a mainstay of the paper's fiction and non-fiction.

⁹ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.46, 5 October 1867, p.320.

¹⁰ *Boys of England, a Journal for British and American Youths*, Vol.15, No.392, 16 May 1874, p.383.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *BOE*, Vol.28, No.715, 30 June 1880, p.207.

Responses to historical questions were often rather lengthy and detailed. Nevertheless, the paper recommended that boys further pursued a historical education via private study, beginning with Hume, Hallam, Alinson, Macauley, Froude, Bancroft and Motley.¹³ Boys' historical interests varied considerably. One single number, for example, answered questions about Egbert, "the first king of all England and the last of the Saxon heptarchy", Robert Bruce, "the king of that great and glorious kingdom of Scotland", the Elgin Marbles, the Battle of Copenhagen, the charge of the Light Brigade, and Alexander the Great.¹⁴ Other educational pursuits supported by *BOE* included anthropology, art, geography, language, literature, music and religion.

It is evident that *BOE*'s philosophy attracted a great many boys who were active, or wished to become active, self improvers. Mutual improvement societies were a common topic of discussion in the paper's correspondence columns. "It is entirely a matter of taste what subjects you may choose for debating in your mutual improvement society", read a reply to one correspondent, T. Odin.¹⁵ Readers warmed to the paper's motivational message. One boy, who had adopted the pseudonym 'Nil Desperandum', was told: "Quite right, and we admire you for it. Despair is only for cowards. Brave men fight against all obstacles until they are surmounted and conquered. It is a glorious sight to see the courageous man fighting against a sea of troubles, and ultimately becoming victorious. Keep your motto through life."¹⁶ Another, aptly named 'Excelsior', was advised: "Persevere in your onwards course. From very humble beginnings many boys have risen to great renown, so let this cheer your heart as you work on your way. [...] Learn to think and act for yourself, and face without shrinking hard study, and hard bodily toil."¹⁷

As a key component of an improving lifestyle, science and nature too met a very favourable response. Boys often wrote to the paper with questions regarding their own natural history projects. Some boys even sought publication of their work. One response, to a letter from 'Young Rustic', read: "Many thanks for your promised paper on the natural

¹³ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.198, 29 August 1870, p.240.

¹⁴ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.24, 4 May 1867, p.384.

¹⁵ *BOE*, Vol.5, No.117, 12 February 1869, p.207.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.43, 14 September 1867, p.272.

history of your rural home. We shall always be glad to receive communications on such subjects from our readers in the country.”¹⁸ The keeping of pets was amongst the most common topics of query; boys frequently asked about how to feed and house their animals. Questions about angling and birdwatching also appeared regularly. In fact, when considering scientific matters alone, questions concerning animals were outnumbered only by questions about health. Moving from fauna to flora, George M. F. Glenny’s ‘Simple Gardening’ series proved so popular that it was awarded its own correspondence column. Several boys wrote to Glenny complaining of greenfly, and were advised to fumigate with tobacco. Others wrote requesting a seed list, which Glenny duly provided. Another correspondent, ‘An English Boy’, was advised that “the best work on the subject is *The Garden Manual*, priced 1s 6d”.¹⁹

Readers also viewed Brett as someone who could answer their queries regarding jobs and employment, thereby assisting their fledgling careers. Boys often asked what a particular job involved, how one should enter a career, and what the promotion prospects were. As we have seen, correspondence reveals that a sizeable number of boys wished to secure clerkships; each week the paper printed letters from boys wishing to know whether or not their handwriting was suitable for office employment. Some even specified the type of office they wished to work in. However, just as many boys, if not more, wrote to ask about apprenticeships in skilled trades.

BOE’s correspondence columns also show that boys who were interested in politics recognised that the paper was touching upon politicised subject matter. Several readers wrote to the paper to ask about the editor’s political persuasion, or about submitting political articles. Brett was understandably reluctant to openly discuss so contentious an issue. “We certainly do not intend to make the *Boys of England* a journal of *party* politics, therefore your article is declined”, read one reply.²⁰ “We take no offence from your well meant suggestion; in fact, we like to gather opinion and suggestions from all our boys. [But] the *Boys of England* is not a political paper”, read another.²¹ A third response stated:

¹⁸ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.2, 4 December 1866, p.32.

¹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.22, 20 April 1867, p.350.

²⁰ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.3, 11 December 1866, p.48.

²¹ *BOE*, Vol.1, No.6, 1 January 1867, p.96.

“We never dabble in politics. There is a place as well as a time for everything.”²² One final reply, to W. M. Austin, read: “We, as a rule, carefully abstain from entering into political questions of any description; imagine the disputation we should be led into if we did”.²³ Political questions were also a feature of Brett’s *Young Men of Great Britain*. “Radical signifies, in politics, one who strikes boldly at the root of evils”, was the telling spin given to one response.²⁴

It appears that *BOE*’s working class readership adopted the paper as something of a guidebook, using it to answer a wide variety of questions relating to their lives. It is notable that this function grew organically from the demands of the paper’s readership. It was never a service explicitly promoted or advertised by the paper in any way (at least until volume sixty-four, from which point it began sport the boast “Ask what you like and we will answer it.”) *BOE*’s earliest readers must have realised that the paper addressed matters affecting them, and concluded that it might be able to answer their questions – they themselves effectively launched the service. Nevertheless, it was a role which *BOE* adopted good-naturedly. Brett offered his assistance and advice in a friendly manner. Rarely were his responses scathing or critical, a common trait of the *BOP*’s correspondence columns.²⁵

It is perhaps curious that readers solicited Brett’s advice instead of consulting more formal sources of knowledge. The fact that boys were willing to write to Brett, and wait several weeks for a response, may indicate that some of the recognised institutions where working class boys might expect to find answers to their queries, such as schools, libraries, other municipal services, and even the family, were failing to satisfy their needs. It also proves that Brett had succeeded in fostering a spirit of friendship between he and his readers, as he had hoped to do. In accepting the role of advisor Brett undertook a considerable amount of social responsibility. This fact is proved rather compellingly by several rather serious letters received by the paper. For example, in 1870 a twenty-four year old man wrote to Brett on a matter of some importance. He wished to gain a good

²² Ibid.

²³ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.79, 22 May 1868, p.15.

²⁴ *Young Men of Great Britain: a Journal of Amusing and Instructive Literature*, Vol.2, No.32, 1 September 1868, p.484.

²⁵ J. Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir! The Story of the Boy’s Own Paper* (1982), p.67.

education, but felt hampered by the loss of his right arm. “I see that you give some good answers to correspondents”, the man explained.²⁶ In the same volume, an opium addict wrote to Brett for advice on how to quit the drug.²⁷

Autobiography

Relatively few *BOE* readers bequeathed accounts of their lives. However, enough exist to permit a fairly accurate qualitative assessment of how readers responded to the paper. Readers’ memoirs fall into two groups. The first is full-length autobiography. Some of these autobiographies were left by individuals who found fame in adult life. Others were left by little known men. Several of the latter type have been located through the extensive *Autobiography of the Working Class: an Annotated Critical Bibliography* (1984), edited by John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall; the remainder have been found independently. Some were privately published, or even hand written. The second group of reminiscences exists within collectors’ journals, especially *VF* and *CM*. These are not full autobiographies; rather, they are only brief, selective recollections, specifically on the topic of boys’ papers. Little is known about their authors, aside from their reading habits. Collectively, the majority of these autobiographies were left by readers from working class backgrounds. Working class autobiographies are generally thought of by historians as reliable sources.²⁸

What common themes arise from these reminiscences? The most consistent observation is that *BOE* was much loved by its readers. Indeed, memoirists often remark that the paper engrossed them absolutely. One of the boys most affected was Havelock Ellis:

I was introduced by a schoolfellow to the *Boys of England*, a penny weekly, full of extravagantly sensational and romantic adventures in wild and remote lands. The fascination with which this literature held me was like a kind of fever. It was an excitement which

²⁶ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.191, 4 July 1870, p.111.

²⁷ *BOE*, Vol.8, No.198, 29 August 1870, p.240.

²⁸ J. Burnett, D. Vincent and D. Mayall, ‘Introduction’, in J. Burnett, D. Vincent and D. Mayall, eds. *The Autobiography of the Working Class: an Annotated Critical Bibliography*, Vol.1 (Brighton, 1984), p.xxi.

overwhelmed my ordinary considerations. [...] During solitary rambles I read it as I walked; every spare moment, when alone, it was in my hands.²⁹

J. J. Wilson observes that boys' papers were, to him also, an all-engrossing lifestyle. Brett's *BOE* headed his list of favourites:

I was an omnivorous reader of 'penny dreadfuls' and each week subscribed to the *Boys of England* [...]. These books were the sunshine of my young life. I lost myself in the realms of romance with such stories as [...] 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' [and] 'Jack Harkaway'.³⁰

R. A. H. Goodyear, a regular *BOE* reader, also developed an unquenchable thirst for the literature:

I see myself again as a boy of eight or nine, getting up in the chilly darkness of the winter mornings, sitting by candlelight, at the table where the fire was kindled for breakfast, reading every word of every chapter of every serial of every boys' paper that I could buy, beg or borrow.³¹

H. G. Wells, and his friends, shared Goodyear's early literary tastes:

We spent our rare pennies in the uncensored reading matter of the village dame's shop, on the *Boys of England* and honest penny dreadfuls – ripping stuff, stuff that anticipated Haggard and Stevenson, badly printed and queerly illustrated, and very very good for us.³²

A. E. Waite's first encounter with *BOE* marked the beginning of a lifelong obsession. It prompted him to scour the newsagents of London for similar fodder:

It was a red letter day [...] when I saw on the first page of the *Boys of England* the beginning of a new serial story, bearing no less a title than 'Harry Chester, or, the King and the Apprentice', described further in the sub-title as 'a Tale of Court and City Life in the Days of Bluff King Hal'. Not only did I read that story from first to last in its six and twenty numbers, less or more, and devoured all things in the said issues, but I became very learned on the periodical press for

²⁹ H. H. Ellis, *My Life* (1967), p.60.

³⁰ J. J. Wilson, 'Some of the Old 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *Collector's Miscellany*, Vol.1, No.2 (June 1928), p.14.

³¹ R. A. H. Goodyear, 'An Old Boy's Periodicals', *Vanity Fair*, Vol.2, No.19 (February 1926), pp.83-85.

³² H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1911), p.30.

boys by walking to and fro in the district and gluing my eyes on the contents of newspaper shops. O ever and continually, world without end it seemed, and always joy therein.³³

The testimonies of Ellis, Wilson, Goodyear, Wells and Waite suggest that the leisure habits of some young Victorian boys must have more or less revolved around periodical literature. And although they embraced the genre as a whole, it was *BOE* in particular which fascinated them.

These memoirs also demonstrate how the discovery of *BOE* could prove to be a life changing experience. Of the five, only Ellis eventually shook the habit of reading boys' papers.³⁴ In contrast, the spirit of their juvenile reading remained a strong influence upon the remaining four for the rest of their lives. R. A. H. Goodyear later wrote serial stories for Brett, and became an established author of hardcover fiction, especially school stories, in the twentieth century. H. G. Wells, of course, found fame with his own thrilling fiction, whilst J. J. Wilson became a noted collector of boys' papers. A. E. Waite became a famed scholar of the occult, a passion which he later admitted was entirely inspired by his youthful reading matter.³⁵ He also penned several penny dreadful serials, one of which was published in *The Idler*.³⁶ Other *BOE* readers also followed similar paths. Edgar Jepson became a writer, specialising in tales of the supernatural, whilst Desmond Coke became a boys' author, his works including the renowned school story *The Bending of a Twig* (1906).³⁷

Each memoirist had his favourite *BOE* stories. J. J. Wilson favoured Charles Stevens' 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' (vol.1).³⁸ Red Indian stories were relished by George Sturt and

³³ A. E. Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought: a Retrospective View in the Form of Memoirs, etc, Including Portraits* (1938), pp.34-35.

³⁴ Ellis, *My Life*, p.60. In adult life Ellis became a doctor, specialising in the psychology of sex.

³⁵ Waite, *Shadows*, p.36.

³⁶ R. A. Gilbert, *A. E. Waite, Magician of Many Parts* (1987), p.27.

³⁷ It is also known that Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island* (1883), admired the stories of *BOE* authors W. Stephens Hayward and Bracebridge Hemyng in his boyhood, although it is not known whether he actually read *BOE*: see R. L. Stevenson, 'Popular Authors', *Scribner's Magazine*, 4 (1888), pp.122-28.

³⁸ Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.14.

Edgar Jepson, who also loved bloodthirsty pirate yarns.³⁹ J. J. Darby was particularly struck by the ‘Left-Handed Jack’ series, which ran in the early 1890s.⁴⁰ Adventure tales, such as ‘Strongbow’, made the greatest impression upon R. A. H. Goodyear.⁴¹ Henry Steele preferred darkly gothic stories, whilst Desmond Coke was particularly fond of ‘The Schooldays of Jack at Eton, or, the Adventures of Two College Chums’ (vol.30).⁴² John Medcraft embraced the *BOE* holiday specials above all. “The Christmas number was a thing of seasonable joy – a mysterious castle, a lonely manor, or a snow-bound inn – a belated traveller – a murder or two, and the inevitable ghosts”, enthuses Medcraft, “all explained in the last chapter, and ending happily for the majority of the characters.”⁴³

However, *BOE*’s most popular stories, by some considerable margin, were the ‘Jack Harkaway’ tales. Memoirists award the series with some extraordinary accolades. For example, according to J. J. Wilson, “to read ‘Jack Harkaway’ [...] was viewed on the same footing as reading the classics”.⁴⁴ Each boy cherished his own favourite Harkaway story or moment. Edgar Jepson, for example, favoured an incident from Bracebridge Hemyng’s ‘Jack Harkaway Among the Brigands’ (vol.14):

There was one truly Victorian incident in the life of that famous boy which has always seemed to me, as we Moderns phrase it, priceless. Jack Harkaway was walking along the bank of an Italian river, the Arno probably, when a Brigand stepped out of a thicket with an *indiarubber ring* in his hand. Before Jack became aware of his arrival, he slipped the ring over his head and shoulders and pinioned his arms to his sides and kicked him into the turbulent flood.⁴⁵

³⁹ E. A. Jepson, *Memories of a Victorian* (1933), pp.43-45; G. Sturt, *A Small Boy in the Sixties* (Cambridge, 1927), p.3. Following in his father’s footsteps, Sturt became a wheelwright. He is best remembered for his books about rural life and handicrafts.

⁴⁰ J. J. Darby, ‘Old Boys’ Journals, etc’, *VF*, Vol.2, No.18 (January 1926), pp.63-64.

⁴¹ Goodyear, ‘Old Boy’s Periodicals’, *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, pp.83-85.

⁴² D. Coke, *Confessions of an Incurable Collector* (1928), p.75; H. Steele, ‘Boyish Prejudices’, *CM*, Vol.4, No.10 (March – April 1931), p.7.

⁴³ J. Medcraft, ‘The Boys of England’, *CM*, 4th Series, No.3 (February 1942), p.6.

⁴⁴ Wilson, ‘“Penny Dreadful” Newsvendors’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.15.

⁴⁵ Jepson, *Memories*, pp.43-45.

J. J. Darby and George Sampson too profess a fondness for the popular *BOE* stories.⁴⁶

Autobiographical accounts add weight to the belief that Harkaway raised the sale of *BOE* by a considerable margin. Allen Clark remarks upon how Harkaway instilled within him an eagerness to purchase the journal. “There was a weekly paper called the *Boys of England*, with fine school yarns about Jack Harkaway”, says Clarke. “On the publication day of these papers I was up early and at the newsagent’s shop door before he opened.”⁴⁷ Max Pemberton also recalls how he began to subscribe to *BOE* to read Hemyng’s stories. Nor was he the only member of his family who eagerly anticipated each new instalment. “When I bought the *Boys of England* to follow the exciting history of a certain Jack Harkaway”, says Pemberton, “the aged grandfather had a nasty habit of getting it first and reading the story himself.”⁴⁸ The ‘Harkaway’ series, according to F. Gordon Roe, was popular because it provided the perfect antidote to the dry moralising of parentally approved literature:

Such productions, some far more reputable than others, were eagerly seized upon by boys in general, and not least by boys whose home reading had been too strictly supervised. The contrast between Dean Farrar’s mawkish school story *Eric, or, Little by Little* [...] and the dashing adventures of Jack Harkaway in the *Boys of England* was too strong for resistance. Old men, my father among them, were to cherish the liveliest boyhood memories of Jack’s unbelievable exploits.⁴⁹

It seems likely that many boys who were prescribed morally upright literature would have shared the sentiments of Roe’s father.

Although most memoirists focus closely upon their recollections of *BOE*’s literature, some also speak of their passion for other facets of the paper. In particular, several former readers recall a fondness for *BOE*’s toy theatre. Frank Jay’s *CM* series ‘The Juvenile Theatre’ was amongst that journal’s longest running features. Jay reminisces:

⁴⁶ J. J. Darby, ‘Correspondence’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.3 (August 1928), pp.34-35; G. Sampson, *Seven Essays* (Cambridge, 1947), p.39.

⁴⁷ B. Adhem, ‘Sad End to Works of Youthful Poet’, *Liverpool Weekly Post*, 28 April 1934, p.2.

⁴⁸ M. Pemberton, *Sixty Years Ago and After* (1936), pp.36-37.

⁴⁹ F. G. Roe, *The Victorian Child* (1959), p.100.

The mere writing about them recalls many pleasant (and unpleasant) incidents, when busy colouring and cutting out the various characters, mounting the scenes, trying to induce the lamps to burn with colza oil, which was not always a success, and gave more unpleasant smoke than flame, and then after going through the performance, finishing off the last scene with blue or red fire. What glorious fun we all had, and how we enjoyed it, often inviting our friends, mates, and neighbours to “come and see the performance”, and then, when we got tired of the plays, we used to “swop” or exchange them for a cricket bat, ball and stumps, or anything useful in the exchange and mart column of the boys periodicals of the time, as a glance at them will testify.⁵⁰

Crucially, existing autobiographies suggest that *BOE* was not simply popular because it provided exhilaration and excitement. Rather, its improving content was met by a receptive audience. R. A. H. Goodyear claims that *BOE* inspired within in him a lifetime’s love of reading. The paper, he recalls, “encouraged in me a love of romance that has ever been an abiding consolation to me, and I can say now that the literature of my boyhood, libelled by the scurrilous epithet of ‘penny blood’ did me no vestige of harm at any time”. It also nurtured in Goodyear a sound system of values and beliefs, implanting in him “a spirit of true sportsmanship and an admiration for all that was manly and above-board”. Of particular benefit to Goodyear, and many of his fellows, was the paper’s motivational ethos. “Fine lessons could be taken from the old boys’ stories, too, [...] which may have spurred many a lowly-born lad on to greater success in life.”⁵¹

Goodyear also benefited from the paper's educative content, notably its historical material. “In historical interest, these racy serials had an educative standard; their educational writers went to Green, Froude, and Macauley for dates and facts, and I know that I, for one, learned more from [boys’ papers] than the dry-as-dust schoolbooks which formed the basis of my far-too-long and tedious homework.”⁵² J. J. Wilson, who echoes Goodyear’s sentiments, also recalls that:

These interesting stories [...] were to a great measure educational, for I am sure I learned more of English history and customs and costumes of the various periods from the historical

⁵⁰ F. Jay, ‘The Juvenile Theatre: its History and Development’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.3 (August 1928), p.50.

⁵¹ Goodyear, ‘Old Boy’s Periodicals’, *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, pp.83-85.

⁵² *Ibid.*

romances and the splendid woodcuts by that great artist Prowse that appeared in Brett's journals, than I ever did at schools.⁵³

Nor were Goodyear and Wilson alone. Barry Ono also admired "the fine historical tales of Brett in the *Boys of England* [and] *Young Men of Great Britain*", as did Henry Steele.⁵⁴

Although most memoirists suggest that *BOE* was their favourite periodical, many actually read a number of journals. Some, like J. J. Wilson, subscribed to several concurrently. Others, like Henry Steele, were too poor to be able to afford more than one, and so bought different periodicals at different times:

I also occasionally patronised the *Boys of England* [...] but my pocket money being limited to two pence weekly I was often in a quandary as to how to manage three or four penny journals a week on this modest stipend. By dint of dropping one for a time and taking on another journal I managed to get an insight into several.⁵⁵

Steele's periodical of preference was Brett's full colour *Boys of the Empire*.⁵⁶ It should come as no surprise that *Boys of the Empire* was popular amongst *BOE* readers. Many of its stories were actually reprinted from earlier editions of *BOE*. R. A. H. Goodyear, another subscriber, regularly sacrificed both his *Boys' Comic Journal* and his weekly halfpenny of sweets to purchase the one-and-a-half pence paper.⁵⁷ He, like most boys, was attracted by *Boys of the Empire*'s full colour print:

I have for all my life been fascinated by the coloured pictures in the old *Boys of the Empire*. They were finely done. I bought the first number of that paper with a hard-come-by 1½d, only to find that the colours had missed the press and were ¼ inch out of alignment. I was a bit disappointed then, but I know now that such mistakes are much-prized by collectors. [...] The greatest drawback to my prized volume of *Boys of the Empire* is that the coloured illustrations have lost their exquisite bouquet. I loved the smell of oil-colours used in printing.⁵⁸

⁵³ Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.14.

⁵⁴ Steele, 'Boyish Prejudices', *CM*, Vol.4, No.10, p.7; B. Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7 (December 1933 – January 1934), pp.9-10.

⁵⁵ H. Steele, 'Memories: a Retrospect of Old Boys' Journals', *VF*, Vol.2, No.15 (October 1925), pp.27-30.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ R. A. H. Goodyear, 'Heart-Winning Old Boys' Books', *CM*, 5th Series, No.9 (June 1947), pp.131-33.

⁵⁸ R. A. H. Goodyear, 'An Early Coloured Boys' Periodical', *CM*, Vol.4, No.8 (November 1930), p.7.

Eventually, however, Goodyear tired of *Boys of the Empire*. The coloured pictures, he claims, were no match for the generally superior tales found in concurrent numbers of *BOE*.

Other Brett periodicals were also held in esteem amongst boys. Both R. A. H. Goodyear and Henry Steele were occasional subscribers to *The Boys' Comic Journal*.⁵⁹ Barry Ono read *BOE*'s companion paper *YMOGB*, as did Alfred Bennet Iles, J. J. Darby and J. J. Wilson.⁶⁰ George Sturt actually preferred the companion periodical to the flagship.⁶¹ J. G. Rowe read both *YMOGB* and *Boys of the Empire*.⁶² Newsagents' Publishing Company penny dreadfuls were read by some, including Edward Herdman, who owned a run of the notorious *Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866).⁶³

Some *BOE* readers also subscribed to rival publications. Because they emulated Brett's paper, the Emmett brothers' periodicals were a natural alternative. Edward Herdman was a reader of *Young Briton*, as was J. J. Wilson, who also took *The Young Englishman's Journal* and *Sons of Britannia*.⁶⁴ Tom Wildrake was the most popular of the Emmetts' protagonists. Victor Cocayne remarks wistfully that "we can never recapture the fine rapture that was experienced when first reading 'Tom Wildrake's Schooldays'", whilst J. J. Wilson rates the tale as a classic to rival the 'Harkaway' series.⁶⁵ Other boys preferred Charles Fox's papers, including J. G. Rowe, who subscribed to his *Boys' Standard*, *Boys' Leisure Hour* and *Boys' Champion Journal*.⁶⁶ Traditional penny dreadful serial stories were

⁵⁹ Goodyear, 'Old Boy's Periodicals', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, pp.83-85; Steele, 'Memories', *VF*, Vol.2, No.15, pp.27-30.

⁶⁰ Darby, 'Correspondence', *CM*, Vol.1, No.3, pp.34-35; A. B. Iles, 'The Log of a Sea-Going Pioneer', <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~jcrislip/Log%20of%20a%20Sea%20Going%20Pioneer.doc>, p.6, accessed 21 November 2003; Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7, pp.9-10; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.14.

⁶¹ Sturt, *Small Boy*, p.3.

⁶² J. G. Rowe, 'The Penny Dreadful of the Victorian Era', *Chambers' Journal*, Vol.11 (1942), pp.508-11.

⁶³ F. Herdman, 'An Early Penny Dreadful Circulating Library', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19 (February 1926), pp.81-82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.14.

⁶⁵ V. Cocayne, 'Boys' Books of Sixty Years Ago', *CM*, Vol.2, No.6 (April 1930), pp.93-94; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.15.

⁶⁶ Rowe, 'Penny Dreadful', *Chambers' Journal*, Vol.11, pp.508-11.

also popular amongst *BOE* readers, including Barry Ono, George Sampson and J. J. Wilson.⁶⁷

In contrast, *The Boy's Own Paper* was read by none. It was considered by Barry Ono, and most *BOE* subscribers, to be 'goody-goody' literature, the high-brow reading of "boys of the better classes".⁶⁸ "As a boy I never could finish a story by Jules Verne or G. A. Henty", protests R. A. H. Goodyear. "I turned with relief to 'The Slapcrash Boys', 'Handsome Harry', and 'Tom Tartar at School', because they were merry and bright and tinged with natural humour throughout."⁶⁹ Goodyear's tastes were shared by M. M. Hunter, who much preferred Brett's exciting American 'Buffalo Bill' stories to G. A. Henty and his fellow *BOP* authors.⁷⁰

Autobiographical accounts are packed with recollections telling of how parents responded to *BOE*. Most reacted with dread. J. J. Wilson remarks that his mother and father, "like most other mid-Victorian parents, viewed the so-called 'penny dreadfuls' with horror. All were dubbed pernicious literature, and any boy found guilty of reading them was looked upon as 'going to the dogs'."⁷¹ A. E. Waite's "careful mother" too "put an end to my reading of the alleged 'dangerous rubbish'."⁷² Havelock Ellis' habit also fell foul of his mother's authority. "My mother forbade me to read these things," he recalls, "but, although I usually obeyed her, in this matter I was disobedient without compunction."⁷³ Edgar Jepson suggests that it was *BOE*'s fiction, "so full of blood indeed that it was not allowed in the house", which his parents objected to.⁷⁴ Barry Ono notes that many papers were unjustly blacklisted because of hearsay and media hysteria. "Everything but the good

⁶⁷ Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7, pp.9-10; Sampson, *Seven Essays*, p.39; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.14-15.

⁶⁸ Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7, pp.9-10; Rowe, 'Penny Dreadful', *Chambers' Journal*, Vol.11, pp.508-11.

⁶⁹ R. A. H. Goodyear, 'Stories I Liked Most – and Least', *CM*, New Series, No.3 (March – April 1933), pp.45-46.

⁷⁰ M. M. Hunter, 'The Man of Mystery', *CM*, New Series, No.2 (January – February 1933), pp.27-29.

⁷¹ Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.14.

⁷² Waite, *Shadows*, pp.34-35.

⁷³ Ellis, *My Life*, p.60.

⁷⁴ Jepson, *Memories*, pp.43-45.

little boys' *Boy's Own Paper* was sweepingly designated a 'penny dreadful' or 'pernicious literature'", Ono remarks, by "intolerant schoolmasters and parents without troubling to read them."⁷⁵

Yet not all parents banned *BOE*. Some were foresighted enough to see the benefits of the periodical, or at least pragmatic enough to recognise that it did no harm. R. A. H. Goodyear's father was particularly lenient:

It never occurred to my broadminded parent that this was the sort of literature called 'pernicious' by pompous magistrates; he never considered that [boys' weeklies] were poisoning my mind and teaching me every kind of badness. Far from that, he would often spend his spare pence on copies of the *Boys of England* and *The Boys' Comic Journal* making his homecoming from work doubly delightful to me.⁷⁶

Indeed, there was little consistency amongst parents regarding what constituted suitable, and unsuitable, reading. Some were considerably stricter than others. For example, future arch-Satanist Aleister Crowley was "absolutely cut off from literature" by his devout parents. Even authors considered respectable by most parents, such as G. A. Henty, fell foul of their prohibition.⁷⁷ The wealth of journals available, and their superficial similarity, proved somewhat confusing to concerned mothers and fathers. For example, George Sturt's cherished *YMOGB*, "a journal for some reason frowned upon", was exchanged for *BOE* by "the seniors", who must not have known that the two were companion papers.⁷⁸ Many parents chose to substitute supposedly pernicious periodicals for more wholesome reading; the *BOP* was the most common choice.⁷⁹ Bizarrely, there were even instances of the respectable *BOP* being confiscated by over-zealous parents, who must have confused it with its disreputable rivals.⁸⁰ These prejudices remained unchanged over time, and even across generations. For example, the father of Maurice Willson Disher forbade his young

⁷⁵ Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7, pp.9-10.

⁷⁶ Goodyear, 'Old Boy's Periodicals', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, pp.83-85.

⁷⁷ A. Crowley, *The Spirit of Solitude: an Autohagiography: Subsequently Re-Antichristened The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (1929), p.78.

⁷⁸ Sturt, *Small Boy*, p.3.

⁷⁹ Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7, pp.9-10.

⁸⁰ E. Salmon, *Juvenile Literature As It Is* (1888), p.239.

son to read comparatively innocuous early twentieth-century Dick Turpin and Robin Hood serials, despite the fact that he himself had been a Brett devotee in his youth.⁸¹

BOE was also frowned upon by teachers. Autobiographies recall that the paper was often the subject of classroom witch-hunts. One such incident occurred at the school of J. J. Wilson:

In those far off days a boy was publicly branded according to the class of literature he read. I well remember my good old schoolmaster sending for me to his study. Said he, "I am told that you read the *Boys of England*, is this true?" Of course I owned up to it. "Burn all the trash", said he, "never read it. Do you know the publisher of these journals rides in his carriage and lives in a beautiful house, all kept up by the pennies of silly boys like you?" I did not know this at the time but failed to see the drift of his argument then – or do I see it even now.⁸²

J. J. Darby, whose friend was cautioned in a similar manner, tells of how both *BOE* and Brett were taboo in his classroom:

I remember as a boy going to a Baptist Sunday School in Upper Kensington Lane, when one of the other boys brought in a copy of the *Boys of England*. The teacher was horrified. I asked him why and he replied, because the proprietor was E. J. Brett, but *The Boy's Own Paper* was good.⁸³

This phenomenon extended to schools of all types. Quintin Hogg, a notable figure in the ragged school movement, was forever confiscating *YMOGB* and other "bits of blood" from underneath the mattresses of his underprivileged charges.⁸⁴ Although some teachers were obviously concerned about the content of boys' weeklies, others were probably more worried that the papers distracted boys from their work. Indeed, Havelock Ellis' tutor, Mr De Chastelain, once caught the young boy devouring *BOE* during lessons.⁸⁵

However, it appears that some working class institutions actually appreciated the true qualities of Brett's papers, and the positive impact which they could make upon young

⁸¹ M. Willson Disher, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *Pilot Papers*, Vol.2, No.1 (1947), pp.47-48. Willson Disher became a renowned theatre critic.

⁸² Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.15-16.

⁸³ Darby, 'Correspondence', *CM*, Vol.1, No.3, pp.34-35.

⁸⁴ E. M. Hogg, *Quintin Hogg: a Biography* (1904), pp.60-61.

⁸⁵ Ellis, *My Life*, p.60.

readers. For example, the Mechanics Institute of Rotherham, Yorkshire, held copies of both *BOE* and *YMOGB*, alongside numerous other popular periodicals, in its reading room. No doubt younger members perused these volumes, taking advantage of both their entertaining and educative merits, between classes and lectures.⁸⁶

Bans imposed by parents and teachers were met with a unanimous spirit of defiance. Readers devised elaborate and amusing dodges to allow them to continue their reading clandestinely. For example, although it was difficult for J. J. Wilson to hide his large collection, it remained secret for some time:

Of course my reading had to be done surreptitiously and my library kept in hiding. The greater part of my reading was done in candle-light and I remember how the wretched candles used to flicker until the type seemed to dance to it. I had various hiding places for my treasures, under a loose board under a rug answered well for a time [...]. I used to miss odd numbers at times and one night I discovered Kate reading *Bicycle Bob* so that settled it, and I found a new hiding place that answered splendidly for a year or so. This was an old guard's side drum that was kept on the top of a cupboard. This I used as my bookcase. On Sunday morning while at church my father went to my room – what he expected to find goodness knows, but he found it all right. Seeing the drum, he tried to lift it down. It was no light affair like most drums, but as heavy as lead. At last he got it on the floor and lifting off the head he saw before him a carefully packed mass of 'penny bloods' with candles and matches on top. On arrival home I found my father burning the last remaining batch in the garden.⁸⁷

Like Wilson, Edgar Jepson also devised ingenious plans to accrue issues of *BOE*, and to keep them secret from watchful parents:

I must have been, when my passions were aroused, a pertinacious child, for I ransacked the countryside for the *Boys of England*. [...] I kept them in the corner of the hay-loft, which my mother never entered, that was seldom emptied, and when the loft had been refilled, there was a laborious mining operation before I again reached my treasure.⁸⁸

Barry Ono cunningly persisted in reading his favoured weeklies under the noses of parents and teachers:

⁸⁶ G. Gummer, *Reminiscences of Rotherham* (Rotherham, 1927), pp.46-47.

⁸⁷ Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.14-15.

⁸⁸ Jepson, *Memories*, pp.43-45.

I used to buy *The Boy's Own Paper* and with the title very ostentatiously displayed outside, would be reading my current number of *Sweeney Todd*, *Handsome Harry* or *Spring Heeled Jack* inside. I thought I created the dodge, but in real fact I hadn't.⁸⁹

There is some evidence to suggest that the worries of parents and teachers were not entirely without foundation. Some boys were indeed led astray by their weekly literature. For example, *BOE* inspired one reader, Alfred Bennet Iles, to abscond and pursue a dangerous nautical career:

In my leisure hours I was absorbed in the *Boys of England* and *Young Men of Great Britain*. [...] My longing for life on the oceans grew, until one spring morning in 1869 I appeared at the naval office with my Uncle Ephraim and was accepted as a prospective admiral on Her Majesty's seventy-four gun ship, the 'Boscawen'. [...] The arrival of a package at the home of my parents containing my civilian clothes, accompanied by a short note of farewell, was the first intimation my family had of my departure.⁹⁰

The youthful Iles had also been led astray by highwayman penny dreadfuls; so greatly did he and his friends idolise Dick Turpin that they had set out to Epsom Downs one morning intending to ambush their first victim, only for their plans to be thwarted by a malfunctioning pistol.⁹¹ Additionally, Edgar Jepson recalls meeting a distressed mother whose son, like Iles, had been driven to the ocean by *BOE*. Indeed, the paper had a similar impact upon Jepson himself: "I was a boy in the days of the empire-builders, and my ambition was to go to sea and be a pirate."⁹²

However, the majority of *BOE* readers were not inspired to pursue dangerous or criminal interests beyond the page. Indeed, J. H. Howard, an avid reader of boys' periodical literature, later joined the church. Even in retrospect he spoke highly of his youthful reading, extolling the virtues of its unique brand of criminality:

Personally I cannot disparage [this] sort of literature. It introduced me to a romantic world where pennies were scarce, and libraries seemed far beyond my reach. We read the badly printed booklets in all sorts of places, even in church; they gave us glimpse of freedom,

⁸⁹ Ono, 'Camouflaged 'Blood' Titles', *CM*, New Series, No.7, pp.9-10.

⁹⁰ Iles, 'Sea-Going Pioneer', p.6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁹² Jepson, *Memories*, pp.43-45.



Fig.20: Alfred Bennet Iles, c.1870

abandon and romance, heroism and defiance of fate, whilst we chafed at restrictions and shut doors. True, our heroes, apart from the Bible, were outlaws. But what boy is not a bandit, a rebel, a pirate at heart! As a corrective to natural law-breaking propensities, the 'penny dreadful' always ended with the punishment of crime.⁹³

A. E. Waite, too, argues that his parents' worries were absurd. Despite his love of sensational reading matter he had "no inclination towards running away to sea; no chance of taking to the road without a horse or of entering the Lists of Chivalry".⁹⁴

Class of Readership

BOE was aimed predominantly at 'respectable' working class boys. However, was the paper's intended audience its actual audience? It is difficult to identify the class of the average *BOE* reader. There is a dearth of suitable evidence. In particular, autobiographical accounts left by *BOE* readers are rather few in number, and memoirists often neglect to specify, or leave clues to, their class status. Furthermore, there are methodological difficulties concerning the autobiographies which do exist. Members of the middle and upper classes were more likely to write a memoir than their working class counterparts.⁹⁵ This means that affluent *BOE* readers may be overrepresented in the pool of autobiographies. Moreover, members of the working class who did bequeath memoirs were more likely than many of their peers to have been upwardly mobile and autodidactic. Hence, it could be argued that they are not fully representative of their class as a whole.

Potentially, any class of boy could have read *BOE*. Unlike earlier boys' periodicals, which were too expensive for the less well off, *BOE* was within the budget of virtually every youth. The paper's high sale suggests that it is entirely possible that boys outside of its target readership bought it. At the lowest end of the class structure, for example, even very poor, ill educated boys were known to devour penny fiction, fathoming words and scenarios they did not understand through context and illustrations.⁹⁶ Nor was there

⁹³ Rev. J. H. Howard, *Winding Lanes: a Book of Impressions and Recollections* (Caernarvon, 1938), p.30.

⁹⁴ Waite, *Shadows*, pp.34-35.

⁹⁵ J. Burnett, ed. *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s* (1974), p.11.

⁹⁶ M. Anglo, *Penny Dreadfuls and Other Victorian Horrors* (1977), p.118; K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper: a Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), p.48.

anything to exclude middle class boys from reading *BOE*. For these boys the paper's chief appeal must have lay in its fiction; they probably missed, filtered out or appropriated material aimed specifically at working class readers. The fact that *BOE* was sold as relatively costly bound bi-annual volumes suggests that it did indeed attract some affluent readers. *BOE* even enticed upper class customers. For many years its cover proudly boasted that H. R. H. Prince Arthur, the later Prince Imperial of France, and Count William Bernstorff, were both subscribers. Indeed, Prince Arthur wrote to Brett personally to subscribe, and Bernstorff once paid a visit to Brett's offices, complementing the proprietor that *BOE* had taught him more of the English language than his tutor. Brett made a great fuss over their patronage in the pages of his journals.⁹⁷

However, as we have already seen, both correspondence and autobiography strongly suggest that the majority of *BOE*'s readers did indeed come from the working class, the paper's target audience. In fact, judging by existing autobiographical evidence, it is remarkable how so many of the paper's readers personified the 'respectable' working class ideologies which it was trying to promote. They were self-educating, industrious, enterprising, adventurous, and politically inclined. They rose from humble beginnings to achieve success and renown.

For example, Allen Clarke, who serialised his autobiography under the pseudonym Ben Adhem in the *Liverpool Weekly Post*, was born into a poor working class family in Bolton in 1863. He read *BOE* in its heyday, the early to mid 1870s. After leaving school aged thirteen he began work in a cotton mill. He then became an errand boy, and then a piecer, before later becoming a publisher, editor and author. Clarke had been educated in political matters by his father, and later became a member of the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party. He also stood for Parliament in 1900. He

⁹⁷ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.52, 16 November 1867, p.416; *BOE*, Vol.13, No.335, 5 April 1873, p.303; *BOE*, Vol.17, No.438, 3 April 1875, pp.287-88; F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21), 29 March 1919.

wrote prolifically on political subjects. His first novel, *The Knobstick* (1893), was set amongst the Bolton engineers' strike of 1887.⁹⁸

Similarly, the life of the Rev. J. H. Howard was defined by lowly beginnings and eventual success. Howard's father was an aristocrat, but had been ostracised by his family for marrying beneath his station. Born in 1875, Howard was soon orphaned, and spent his childhood living with his mother's poor relations. Having left school aged thirteen, Howard worked in a coal pit until age twenty three, at which point he joined the church and pursued an education. Howard was also politically minded. He wrote his MA thesis on poor law administration in Wales, was a member of the Christian Industrial Fellowship, and stood as a parliamentary Labour candidate in 1931.⁹⁹

Perhaps most famously, *BOE* reader H. G. Wells rose to become a renowned author despite his relatively low birth in 1866. His father Joseph, a former gardener, and mother, previously a domestic servant, were the proprietors of a china shop. When Joseph Wells' cricketering career took off he was able to send his son to a private school. However, the young Wells complained that Morley's Commercial Academy provided him with scant education, despite his willingness to learn; this was a common complaint amongst *BOE* readers. The family descended into poverty when an injury prevented Joseph Wells from playing cricket. Upon leaving school the young H. G. Wells took up a range of modest jobs, such as cashier, handyman, chemist's assistant and draper's assistant. However, he showed little aptitude for these trades; an autodidact, he preferred to read and study. Eventually, through drive and ambition, Wells secured a teaching position, and, of course, published extensively.¹⁰⁰

Likewise, Barry Ono, real name Frederick Valentine Harrison, was born into a lowly family in 1876. Because his father was a commercial traveller, he spent much of his youth living with his mother in various London apartments. As a young man Ono embarked upon

⁹⁸ Adhem, 'Sad End', *Liverpool Weekly Post*, 28 April 1934, p.2; Burnett, Vincent and Mayall, eds. *Autobiography of the Working Class*, p.70.

⁹⁹ Burnett, Vincent and Mayall, eds. *Autobiography of the Working Class*, pp.158-59; Howard, *Winding Lanes*.

¹⁰⁰ J. Kagarlitski, *The Life and Thought of H. G. Wells* (1966); Wells, *Tono-Bungay*.

a successful stage career. He later became renowned for his political activities. He was a committed trade unionist, a member of the Variety Artistes Federation, an active campaigner for the abolishment of entertainment tax, and a member of the charitable theatrical association, 'Water Rats'.¹⁰¹

Remarkably, Alfred Bennet Iles' early life strongly echoed the often elaborate plots of *BOE*'s serial fiction. His grandfather had been a wealthy landowner, but had lost his fortune gambling; his father, a renowned cricketer, was also something of a gambler. Born in 1855, Iles attended a local village school in Cheshire, before a series of moves took him to Exeter, London, and Dundee. He worked in a succession of lowly jobs; his first employment in Dundee was as a salesman in a linen draper's shop, his second as an apprentice stonecutter. Upon relocating to London, Iles worked for eleven hours a day in a coffee shop – his wage was eighteen pence, of which seventeen was dutifully given up to his mother. A position as a chemists' assistant, at three shillings per week, proved more lucrative, though the eventual closure of the business led Iles into a short stint as a Fleet Street crossing sweeper. Iles was fiercely independent, and eschewed parental authority. After absconding to join the navy he journeyed around Africa, Asia, and America. His wild adventures almost make Jack Harkaway's seem subdued. When Iles finally settled in America, the dream of many *BOE* readers, he became a successful business proprietor.¹⁰²

Conversely, there is little proof that a considerable number of middle class boys read *BOE*. Very few memoirists speak of domestic servants or public school attendance, sure benchmarks of affluence. J. J. Wilson is one of but a handful of public school boys recorded as *BOE* readers. He attended the progressive City of London public school at Milk Street. Memoirists seldom explicitly link their youthful reading habits to their class status. However, in this fascinating source, J. J. Wilson suggests that amongst his peers *BOE* headed a hierarchy of boys' papers:

In my young days 'penny dreadfuls' were read by boys of different social castes as follows: High School boys read the *Boys of England* and *Young Folks Budget*, boys of a lower social position would read the *Young Men of Great Britain*. This seemed strange, and I could never

¹⁰¹ E. James and H. R. Smith, *Penny Dreadfuls and Boys' Adventures: the Barry Ono Collection* (1998), pp.vii-viii.

¹⁰² Iles, 'Sea-Going Pioneer'.

fathom the reason, for one journal is just as good as the other. The *Young Englishman* was read by another lower social caste, the *Young Briton* by a still lower class. The *Sons of Britannia* was relegated to young shop assistants and errand boys. One boy would say to another, “You know that bounder Smith? Well, he reads the *Sons of Britannia*”, and poor Smith would be ‘cut’ and ostracised accordingly by his fellows. [...] *Black Bess*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Spring Heeled Jack*, and similar publications were looked upon as the reading of cabmen, cat’s meat men, bus conductors and the lower class of the masses generally. Any boy found reading or in possession of a copy of the *Boys of London and New York* was considered as depraved beyond amendment.¹⁰³

However, judging by the absence of corroborating evidence, it is unlikely that *BOE* was generally considered to be a ‘high school boys’ paper. Wilson’s account probably only reveals localised trends.

Some schoolfellows of Rudyard Kipling were also avid readers, although according to one of their number, G. C. Beresford, boys of their status were just as likely to condemn the literature as devour it:

Though his attitude to the swarming mass of little boys seemed rather aloof, he was sometimes moved to take their mental state in hand. It really got on his nerves that they should keep on reading *Jack Harkaway* and the cheap paper-backed novels that were to be had in such plenty in those days, and which Gigger [Kipling] seemed to take as an infliction aimed especially at himself. The sight of a number of small boys, wet day after wet day – and there were plenty of wet days in Devonshire, sitting there reading what to Gigger was the veriest trash had a strange effect upon his brain. It was like the dropping-water torture; it could not be endured indefinitely; and he inveighed against this type of literary pabulum, protesting that it led to softening of the brain. But he met the fate of those idealists who do not quite understand the material with which they are dealing. Rage he never so wildly, the students of contemporary fiction continued their investigations with much the same assiduity as before the outburst.¹⁰⁴

It is therefore probable that *BOE*’s serial fiction alone was enough to attract some readers from across the class spectrum. However, there can be little doubt that the paper was read predominantly by the ‘respectable’ working classes, its intended audience.

¹⁰³ Wilson, ‘‘Penny Dreadful’ Newsvendors’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.15.

¹⁰⁴ G. C. Beresford, *Schooldays with Kipling* (1936), p.33.

Number of Readers

The overall readership of *BOE*, as opposed to sale, is a contentious issue. Historians, most notably John Springhall, have frequently argued that boys' papers were actually read by an average of two or three readers per copy sold.¹⁰⁵ Apparently, this was an assumption made by the trade itself.¹⁰⁶ Patrick Dunae suggests that this was because their readers were rather fickle. With so many periodicals on offer, boys tended to flit from one to another, always in search of a newer and more exciting fix. Exchanging periodicals amongst one another allowed boys to sustain their voracious appetites.¹⁰⁷ If boys' papers were indeed read by an average of two or three boys per copy, as historians believe, the true readership of *BOE*, in its 1870s heyday, may have numbered around three quarters of a million.

There is some anecdotal evidence to support the assertion that boys swapped their papers. In one recorded instance, for example, six local boys each agreed to purchase different weekly periodicals, which they then swapped between themselves throughout the following week.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, George Rowles, in his autobiography *Chaps Among the Caps* (1968), states that amongst his peer group periodicals were "exchanged till the small print was obliterated by constant folding into small size and held securely in trouser pockets".¹⁰⁹

However, although there can be little doubt that some boys did exchange papers, the experiences of *BOE* readers suggests that this was not a common occurrence. Of all recorded *BOE* readers only R. A. H. Goodyear explicitly confesses that his papers were sometimes borrowed, not bought.¹¹⁰ In most autobiographical accounts the author either

¹⁰⁵ J. O. Springhall, 'Disseminating Impure Literature': the 'Penny Dreadful' Publishing Business Since 1860', *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3 (1994), p.575.

¹⁰⁶ P. A. Dunae, 'Boy's Own Paper: Origins and Editorial Policies', *The Private Library*, 2nd Series, Vol.9, No.4 (1976), p.134.

¹⁰⁷ P. A. Dunae, 'New Grub Street for Boys', in J. Richards, ed. *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), pp.26-27.

¹⁰⁸ National Social Purity Crusade, ed. *The Cleansing of a City* (1908), pp.64-66, cited in B. Beavan, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005), pp.106-07.

¹⁰⁹ G. Rowles, *Chaps Among the Caps* (1968), p.13.

¹¹⁰ Goodyear, 'Old Boy's Periodicals', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, pp.83-85.

does not mention swapping or clearly states that his weeklies were bought, not borrowed. Some firmly declare that they never exchanged or borrowed their papers.

Evidence suggests that boy readers were not, as historians have argued, transient – quite the opposite. Autobiographies tell of patterns of readership which positively precluded changeability. Boys did not shift allegiance from one paper to another; nor did they heedlessly exchange journals once devoured. In fact, they were highly selective, sticking loyally to their preferred paper or publisher. Even the most omnivorous of readers usually took a constant favourite alongside his more impulsive purchases. Their tastes seldom changed. Most readers were reluctant to exchange their cherished favourites with other boys. Indeed, many kept back copies containing their favourite stories, which they enjoyed over and over again. Some treated their papers rather sentimentally. Indeed, numerous boys, especially Edgar Jepson and J. J. Wilson, jealously guarded their hoards, and took pride in accruing a large collection.¹¹¹ In *BOE*'s correspondence columns, communicants rarely mentioned that they had loaned the paper to their friends. However, boys frequently wrote to tell Brett that they had convinced a number of friends to purchase the journal themselves.

When readers did share their treasured periodicals they did so only when coaxed by a suitably enticing incentive. For example, twelve-year-old Edward Herdman established a penny dreadful lending library for his friends in 1873. The library comprised numerous volumes from several publishers, including a run of *BOE*, copies of *NPC* serials *Roving Jack, the Pirate Hunter* (1867) and *Wild Boys of London*, and Brett's *Rovers of the Sea*. At half a penny per loan the venture must have been fairly lucrative.¹¹² Barry Ono also established a similar library, with rates of 1d per loan plus a 6d joining fee. So popular was the library, Ono claims, that the police were forced to disperse queues of eager boys.¹¹³ It is doubtful that Herdman or Ono would have parted with their beloved storybooks, risking damage and loss, had the pickings been less profitable.

¹¹¹ Jepson, *Memories*, pp.43-45; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.13-17.

¹¹² Herdman, 'Circulating Library', *VF*, Vol.2, No.19, pp.81-82.

¹¹³ James and Smith, *Barry Ono*, p.viii.

It is also unlikely that many boys borrowed their *BOE* from formal libraries. A small minority may have loaned periodicals from their newsagent, some of whom ran modest circulating libraries. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this was a common practice, or that *BOE* was a frequently loaned title.¹¹⁴ A further minority may have borrowed *BOE* from mutual improvement societies and other small groups.¹¹⁵ *BOE* was probably not available for loan from school libraries. In the 1860s and 1870s school libraries were few; indeed, even in 1900 only forty percent of schools possessed one. Moreover, school libraries would have been unlikely to stock periodicals which were believed to be morally dubious, especially since many of them were supported by religious organisations like the Religious Tract Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Sunday schools were rather more likely to possess a library, and usually a better standard one, but the same moral objections probably omitted *BOE* from their collections.¹¹⁶ The public libraries may have stocked volumes of *BOE*. They were patronised mostly by the paper's target readership.¹¹⁷ There is even a little evidence indicating that boys visited libraries to consume periodical fiction.¹¹⁸ However, the library system was inadequate.¹¹⁹ In 1870 only Birkenhead, Birmingham and Manchester public libraries could boast a children's collection; even by the end of the nineteenth century only one third of public libraries nationwide catered for the young.¹²⁰ Thus, it is again unlikely that many boys accessed their *BOE* in this manner.

Therefore, the claim that boys' papers were read by two or three readers per copy is questionable. Many boys remained loyal to a favoured paper or publisher, and retained their back issues. Why was this so? As correspondence and autobiography illustrate, boys did

¹¹⁴ Springhall, *Youth*, pp.55-56; Wilson, 'Penny Dreadful' Newsvendors', *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, pp.14-15.

¹¹⁵ A. Ellis, 'Influences on the Availability of Recreational Reading for Victorian Working Class Children', *Journal of Librarianship*, 8:3 (July 1976), pp.189-92; A. Ellis, *Library Services for Young People in England and Wales, 1830-1970* (Oxford, 1971), p.1; Gummer, *Reminiscences*, pp.46-47.

¹¹⁶ Ellis, 'Recreational Reading', *JOL*, 8:3, pp.189-92; Ellis, *Library Services*, pp.5-6.

¹¹⁷ R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957), p.236; Ellis, 'Recreational Reading', *JOL*, 8:3, pp.189-92.

¹¹⁸ Altick, *English Common Reader*, pp.232-33.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.213-39.

¹²⁰ Ellis, 'Recreational Reading', *JOL*, 8:3, pp.189-92; Ellis, *Library Services*, p.1.

not view their papers as mere reading matter. For many boys their favourite periodicals, in the words of J. J. Wilson, “supplied the place of a pleasant companion”.¹²¹ Boys built up close relationships with their preferred papers. They fulfilled a variety of complex roles, such as entertainer, educator, and advisor, which supported every aspect of their readers’ lives. Boys saw them as friends, and their editors as father figures. The very idea of severing bonds with one’s favourite journal, and all it had to offer, was probably unthinkable. “How we whole-heartedly identify ourselves with the characteristics and aims of our favourite journals!”, aptly wrote one former boy reader, A. G. Cheverton.¹²² Yes, some boys were fickle readers, flocking to a paper one week and deserting it the next. However, these boys were probably the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, the papers which they patronised tended to be relatively weak, short-lived offerings by opportunist publishers, which gave sensational fiction to entice readers but little of substance to retain them.¹²³ The successful, high-sale periodicals which dominated the market, most notably Brett’s, were more closely attuned to their readership, and consequently inspired greater devotion. No periodical was more effective in this way than *BOE*, which helps to explain why it, in particular, was a constant favourite of so many loyal boys.

Conclusion

Reader response has hitherto been amongst the most neglected aspects of the history of boys’ papers. This has been to the detriment of the field. There exists a reasonable amount of evidence on the subject. Although there are limitations to each source, together they allow historians to build up a good overall picture of how readers responded to their literature.

Reader response reveals that *BOE* was read predominantly by its target readership: able, ‘respectable’, working class boys. These boys reacted positively to the content of the paper. They realised that it delivered much more than sensational fiction. They stuck to it

¹²¹ Wilson, ‘Penny Dreadful’ Newsvendors’, *CM*, Vol.1, No.2, p.14.

¹²² A. G. Cheverton, ‘The Old ‘Boys’ Books’’, *Publishers’ Circular*, 20 November 1920, pp.609-11.

¹²³ The periodicals of Samuel Dacre Clarke, a.k.a. Guy Rayner, are classic examples. With titles like *The Bad Boys’ Paper*, they were exhilarating yet short lived. After an initial ‘high’ boys probably found them to be rather shallow.

loyally. Most importantly of all, many of *BOE*'s readers personified the self-improving ethos which the paper propagated. It is difficult to say whether *BOE*'s ideology inspired boys to become self-improving, or attracted existing improvers who shared its views. Its impact probably varied from boy to boy.

Reader response also robustly dispels the idea that *BOE* reinforced middle class hegemony. Indeed, it proves that working class boys rejected literature which did so. Several memoirists speak disparagingly of the propaganda found within the *BOP*, the true champion of bourgeois values.

It is regrettable that relatively few *BOE* readers left accounts of their lives. Existing evidence strongly suggests that *BOE* was a considerable motivational force. One can only guess at the paper's true impact, and how many boys' lives it enhanced, perhaps significantly.

Chapter Nine – Critical Response

Introduction

Boys of England received a good deal of criticism throughout its thirty-three year history. It came from a variety of sources. The paper was dubbed a ‘penny dreadful’; there was no contemporary distinction between the bloodiest weekly serials, such as those published by the Newsagents’ Publishing Company, and the newer boys’ miscellanies like *BOE*.¹ *BOE* was not the only periodical to come under attack. Rather, there existed a much wider campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’.² The campaign was motivated by the widely-held belief that boys’ periodical literature was having a destructive influence upon Victorian youth, inspiring a wave of juvenile crime and delinquency.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the effectiveness of several major elements of the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’.³ The chapter focuses closely upon how each part of the campaign impacted specifically upon *BOE*, Brett, and the NPC. Most of these facets of the campaign are little studied. The chapter begins by examining the sizeable body of critical essays written to confront the supposedly pernicious influence of boys’ literature. Secondly, it considers the impact of reader surveys, particularly those of Edward Salmon. The chapter then proceeds to study several instances in which *BOE*, Brett, and the NPC were implicated in proceedings in the criminal courts. One final element of the campaign

¹ This generic usage of the term, as employed by the campaign, is denoted within this chapter by single inverted commas, i.e. ‘penny dreadful’.

² The movement, comprised of numerous, diffuse components, had no official all-encompassing name. However, ‘the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’’, an expression used by, amongst others, Patrick Dunae and John Springhall, seems an appropriate title: see P. A. Dunae, ‘Penny Dreadfuls: Late Nineteenth-Century Boys’ Literature and Crime’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol.22 (1978-79), p.136, and J. O. Springhall, ‘Disreputable Adolescent Reading: Low-Life, Women-in-Peril and School Sport ‘Penny Dreadfuls’ from the 1860s to the 1890s’, in M. Huggins and J. A. Mangan, eds. *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play* (2004), p.122.

³ Although this chapter deals with four of the main sources of ‘penny dreadful’ criticism, there were others: campaigners like the Earl of Shaftsbury; guidance books like Anon., *Boys and Their Ways: by One Who Knows Them* (1880); and organisations like the Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Pure Literature Society.

against ‘penny dreadfuls’, Parliamentary debates, is then scrutinised. The chapter contends that the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’ in general, and *BOE* in particular, was largely unsuccessful, and offers reasons to account for its failure. The chapter concludes by examining how contemporary newspapers responded to *BOE*. Many newspapers were not part of the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’; rather, they actually supported *BOE*. Indeed, it is possible that newspaper backing may have diluted the effects of the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’.

Critical Essays

The strongest and most relentless condemnation of ‘penny dreadfuls’ came from critical essays.⁴ Some of these fearsome diatribes were targeted specifically at juvenile literature, whilst others were aimed more generally at the cheap reading of the working class. Their aim was to attract attention to the problems that this literature was supposedly causing, and to propose possible solutions. The essays were not intended to be read by boy readers themselves, or by their working class parents. Rather, the majority of them appeared in high-brow, intellectual periodicals, written exclusively for the middle and upper classes, such as *Contemporary Review*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, *Nineteenth Century*, *St. James’ Magazine* and *St. Paul’s Magazine*. These periodicals cost around half a crown, a high price point, and had small sales, only a few thousand per number.⁵ A few essays also featured in trade journals, like *The Bookseller* and *Publishers’ Circular*.

These periodicals varied in their preoccupations. Some were staunchly Christian. For example, *Contemporary Review*, perhaps the most active journal in the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’, was a theological and philosophical periodical which examined current

⁴ Many of these have recently been collated in A. King and J. Plunkett, eds. *Popular Print Media*, Vols.1-3 (2004).

⁵ R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957), pp.358-60; R. G. Cox, ‘The Reviews and Magazines’, in B. Ford, ed. *From Dickens to Hardy* (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp.182-97.

issues affecting Christianity.⁶ *Nineteenth Century*, which published several more essays, also began as a theological periodical before it shifted its focus towards politics.⁷ Others were secular. For example, *Fortnightly Review* was geared towards public affairs, both domestic and international.⁸ Literature was the focus for some, including *St. Paul's Magazine*, which ran short stories, essays and poetry.⁹ Politics was the remit of several of the periodicals. *Quarterly Review*, for example, was the highest selling political and literary magazine, whilst *Edinburgh Review* was a political periodical with an economic slant.¹⁰ Another, *Macmillan's Magazine*, also began as a non-partisan political monthly, but later switched its focus to literature.¹¹

The party political and ideological affiliations of these periodicals also varied. *Fortnightly Review* was Liberal, although it professed to have no explicit political policy.¹² *Edinburgh Review*, although it preferred to avoid party politics, was Whig.¹³ The *Quarterly Review*, on the other hand, was staunchly conservative, and actively promoted the Conservative party.¹⁴ The editorial policies of each periodical differed substantially too. *Quarterly Review* was rather controlling, and insisted upon a clear editorial voice and author anonymity, whereas *Fortnightly Review* was keen to preserve the freedom of its writers and exercised only limited editorial control.¹⁵

The authors of the critical essays included Joseph Ackland, Helen Bosanquet, Hugh Chisholm, Walter Gattie, J. P. Harrison, George Humphrey, B. G. Johns, Anthony Trollope and Thomas Wright. The three most prolific were Alexander Strahan, Francis Hitchman

⁶ J. S. North, ed. *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900*, Vol.2 (Waterloo, 1997), pp.1251-52.

⁷ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.5, pp.3515-14.

⁸ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, pp.1955-57.

⁹ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.6, pp.4230-31.

¹⁰ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, pp.1697-99; North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.5, pp.4013-15.

¹¹ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.4, pp.3065-66.

¹² Cox, 'Reviews and Magazines', in *From Dickens to Hardy*, pp.186-87; North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, pp.1955-57.

¹³ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, pp.1697-99.

¹⁴ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.5, pp.4013-15.

¹⁵ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, pp.1955-57; North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.5, pp.4013-15.

and James Greenwood. Alexander Strahan, a key author for the *Contemporary Review*, was an evangelical publisher. He was also responsible for the Christian periodical *Good Words*.¹⁶ Francis Hitchman, who wrote for *Quarterly Review* and *Macmillan's Magazine*, was a prolific journalist, a respected author, and one time assistant editor of *The Standard*.¹⁷ James Greenwood, as we have seen, was a prolific journalist and social explorer, as well as a *BOE* author.

Most of the critical essayists understood that the working class were the chief consumers of cheap literature. Sensational fiction, they argued, was used by working people as an antidote to the harshness of their lifestyles. "The public for which these stories are written is for the most part a tired public, craving to forget its weariness, and eagerly seizing upon any mental distraction which will help", claimed Helen Bosanquet in a *Contemporary Review* article entitled 'Cheap Literature' (1901). "The cashier-boy relieves the monotony of counting out other people's change by snatches of breathless excitement."¹⁸ The essayists suggested that the lower strata of society were particularly susceptible to this type of unintelligent reading because their literary habits were rather undiscerning. This was all the more so after the impact of Forster's 1870 Education Act had begun to be assessed. Essayists, notably Thomas Wright, complained that the Act had only taught the masses how to read, and not how to discriminate between good and bad literature. This had left the working class educated but uncultured.¹⁹ The essayists' arguments reflected the fact that the middle class were often rather fearful of the prospect of universal literacy.

The NPC was the most heavily criticised of all 'penny dreadful' publishers. J. P. Harrison was one of the company's most vocal detractors. Harrison's 'Cheap literature – Past and Present' (1872), written for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, identified the NPC, alongside Edward Harrison and Henry Vickers, at the leading suppliers of 'penny dreadful' fiction. Ironically, by the time Harrison's essay had been printed the NPC no longer existed, although reprints of their old tales could still be found in

¹⁶ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.3, pp.1955-57.

¹⁷ Anon., 'Francis Hitchman', *Boase's Modern English Biography*, 2nd Impression, Vol.1 (1965), pp.1484-85.

¹⁸ H. Bosanquet, 'Cheap Literature', *Contemporary Review*, 79 (1901), p.674.

¹⁹ T. Wright, 'On a Possible Popular Culture', *Contemporary Review*, 40 (1881), pp.25-26.

abundance. Harrison singled out several NPC serials which he believed were particularly pernicious, including *The Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night* (1866). He criticised the criminality of these periodicals, arguing that:

They make heroes of the lowest criminals, and exalt offences against the law, and deeds of daring in the evasion of the law, into heroic exploits; and by enlisting the sympathies of their youthful readers with the individual and his career, thus blind the moral sense to a true perception of the iniquity and consequences of criminal offending.

Harrison also expressed his disapproval of the prose, appearance, and lottery schemes of NPC serials.²⁰

However, the staunchest critic of the NPC was James Greenwood. Greenwood wrote numerous anti-‘dreadful’ diatribes, including an essay entitled ‘Penny Awfuls’ (1873), published in *St. Paul’s Magazine*, and two books, *The Seven Curses of London* (1869) and *The Wilds of London* (1874). It was in the latter book that Greenwood’s harshest tirade appeared, under the chapter heading ‘A Short Way to Newgate’. As part of Greenwood’s remit as a social explorer he had visited a London newsagent and bought a dozen ‘dreadfuls’. Amongst them were the NPC’s *The Skeleton Crew, or, Wildfire Ned* (1867) and *Roving Jack, the Pirate Hunter* (1867). Greenwood expressed shock at what he found therein:

There is a plague that is striking its upas roots deeper and deeper into English soil – chiefly metropolitan – week by week, and flourishing broader and higher, yielding great crops of fruit that quickly fall, rotten-ripe, strewing highway and by-way, tempting the ignorant and unwary, and breeding death and misery unspeakable. Were it possible to keep a record of the wreck and ruin the plague in question engenders, and to officially publish it as the cholera and cattle plague returns were published, a very considerable sensation would undoubtedly be the result.²¹

Greenwood’s relationship with the NPC is something of a puzzle. He was critical of the company, and yet wrote for *BOE* during its earliest years. How could he occupy these apparently contrary roles? It is impossible that Greenwood did not know that *BOE* was published by the NPC. Indeed, he was a close associate of several other authors from the

²⁰ J. P. Harrison, ‘Cheap literature – Past and Present’, *Companion to the Almanac of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge or Year Book of General Information for 1873* (1872), pp.68-71.

²¹ J. Greenwood, *The Wilds of London* (1874), p.158.

company, and spent hours in their company at the Cheshire Cheese tavern.²² It is also improbable that Greenwood was a hack journalist, producing both moral sermons and sensational fiction to order.²³ He was openly credited for both his journalism and his juvenile fiction; this incongruity would surely not have gone unnoticed. In fact, Greenwood was able to criticise ‘penny dreadfuls’ whilst writing for *BOE* because there was no contradiction between the two strands of his work. His *BOE* stories were never gratuitously bloody or criminal, unlike the literature he condemned. Rather, as we have seen, they were socially astute, and advocated a strong and sincere ethos of improvement. Greenwood chose to write for *BOE* because he believed it to be a morally worthy periodical. This is proven by a letter he wrote to Brett in 1868:

Your proposition that I should write a story for the *Boys of England* has occasioned me anxious consideration – to which, however, I am glad to say, the character of your magazine has not at all contributed. I regard it as a credible periodical, and the more so, that from small beginnings it has, by legitimate and wholesome means, raised itself to its present satisfactory eminence.²⁴

Brett’s papers were the only boys’ weeklies to receive Greenwood’s endorsement in the late 1860s and early 1870s. However, before joining *BOE* Greenwood was a regular contributor to Samuel Beeton’s high-brow *Boy’s Own Magazine*.²⁵ Evidently, Greenwood was no hack; rather, he was quite discriminating as to which periodicals he wrote for.

Although *BOE* was never condemned as strongly as the full-blooded NPC serials, it was subject to some denigration. Its most committed critic was Francis Hitchman. Hitchman’s style was less sensational than Greenwood’s. He believed that ‘penny dreadfuls’ deserved to be condemned because of their poor quality, not because of they

²² J. W. R. Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette, of its First Editor Frederick Greenwood and of its Founder George Murray Smith* (1950), p.171.

²³ Several sources have argued that Greenwood was merely a Fleet Street hack: see S. Holland, ‘Re. Penny Awfuls’, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BloodsandDimeNovels/message/2032>, accessed 28 January 2004; Scott, *Pall Mall Gazette*, pp.166-71, and M. Sweet, ‘Sin City’, <http://www.rarebookreview.com/index.php?nav=features&featureID=47>, accessed 25 January 2005.

²⁴ *Boys of England: a Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction*, Vol.4, No.90, 7 August 1868, p.192.

²⁵ F. Jay, *Peeps Into the Past, etc: Extracts from The London Journal, Oct. 26, 1918 to Feb. 19, 1921* (1918-21), 2 October 1920 – 9 October 1920.

were malicious or offensive. It was this tone which characterised his *Macmillan's Magazine* article 'The Penny Press' (1881), which slated several Brett periodicals:

With few exceptions, these papers are silly and vulgar in the extreme. [...] Two or three are positively vicious. [...] *Our Boys' Journal* is as unlike anything that a prudent father would care to place in the hands of a boy as can well be imagined. [...] The *Boys of England* [and] *Young Men of Great Britain* are equally distinguished by sensationalism and silliness.²⁶

Hitchman's *Quarterly Review* article, 'Penny Fiction' (1890), continued in a similar vein:

Boys of England [is] now in the fourteenth year of its existence. The editor and proprietor announces somewhat conspicuously that this "journal of travel, sport, fun and instruction" is 'subscribed to by H. R. H. Prince Arthur and Count William Bernstorff'. Why those distinguished persons should honour the paper it is not easy to see. There is certainly nothing in its contents to induce tutors and governors to recommend it, though it may be admitted that there is nothing flagrantly offensive. The chief failings of the paper are its weakness and curiously 'second-hand' air. The American reprinted matter is especially thin and poor. Much the same thing may be said of two other publications of the same class which are issued by the same publisher – *Boys of the Empire* and *The Boys' Comic Journal*.²⁷

Only one essayist had stronger words to say of *BOE*. The anonymous author of 'The Literature of Vice', published in *The Bookseller* in early 1867, placed *BOE* on a moral par with full-blooded penny dreadfuls such as *Spring Heel'd Jack, the Terror of London* (1867). The author was particularly critical of *BOE*'s prize distribution, claiming that "amongst the modes adopted by some proprietors of penny numbers to keep up the interest of their readers, we may mention the fact, that they offer ponies, dogs, watches and chains, cricket bats, fencing sticks, fishing rods and pairs of rabbits".²⁸

Yet despite their abundance, and the troubling messages they delivered to their high-brow readership, these critical essays failed to achieve a great deal. There is no evidence linking them directly to criminal prosecutions, or to successful suppressions of 'penny dreadfuls'. They failed to secure any changes in the law which could have outlawed or regulated the literature. They certainly failed to stem its proliferation; boys' papers became all the more numerous as the nineteenth century progressed.

²⁶ F. Hitchman, 'The Penny Press', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 43 (1881), pp.396-97.

²⁷ F. Hitchman, 'Penny Fiction', *Quarterly Review*, 171 (1890), pp.155-56.

²⁸ Anon., 'The Literature of Vice', *The Bookseller*, CX, 28 February 1867, p.123.

Several explanations can be offered to account for the ineffectiveness of the essays. One of the main problems was that the essayists' complaints were rather uncoordinated. Each essayist had his own opinions regarding 'penny dreadful' question, which sometimes contrasted strongly with those of his fellows. Most notably, there was no agreement amongst the critics as to whether or not 'penny dreadfuls' actually caused juvenile crime. James Greenwood championed the theory that boys were compelled to follow their literary heroes into a life of crime. His writings frequently spoke of such fallen youths. For example, 'Penny Awfuls' told the story of a thirteen year old boy who had stolen a school inkwell to pay for his 'penny dreadful' habit. Naming several NPC serials amongst his favourites, the boy explained that these papers appeared to justify his crime. "It seemed a mere nothing to nail a paltry pen'orth or so", he spoke, "after reading of the wholesale robbery of jewels, and diamond necklaces, and that, that Tyburn Dick did every night of his life."²⁹

However, other essayists strongly disputed Greenwood's claims. Thomas Wright, for example, believed that the link between 'penny dreadfuls' and juvenile crime had been dramatically overstated:

The evil commonly attributed to the dreadfuls is that they tend to corrupt boys morally, and in particular make them dishonest. But this we venture to think is a mistaken idea. It often happens, we are aware, that some juvenile till-robber is found to be a reader of penny dreadfuls. Nevertheless we cannot agree with the conclusion usually taken for granted in these cases, that the reading and robbery stand in the relation of cause and effect. [...] Boys who do not read dreadfuls sometimes rob tills. [...] There were robberies by errand boys when penny dreadfuls were not, and there would still be robberies if the dreadfuls ceased to be.³⁰

Alexander Strahan, too, thought that juvenile crime was rarely inspired by 'penny dreadfuls', estimating that only "one in ten thousand of the shop-boys who read penny dreadfuls is thus incited to robbery or worse".³¹ Hugh Chisholm held similar views,

²⁹ J. Greenwood, 'Penny Awfuls', *St Paul's Magazine*, XII (1873), pp.161-68.

³⁰ Wright, 'Popular Culture', *Contemporary Review*, 40, p.35.

³¹ A. Strahan, 'Bad Literature for the Young', *Contemporary Review*, 26 (1875), p.982.

arguing: “It must remain uncertain how far exactly this pernicious literature is itself directly a cause of crime.”³²

A second major weakness of the critical essayists was that their complaints against ‘penny dreadfuls’ were often comparatively minor; in fact, it was often difficult to see exactly what their grievances were. Some merely criticised the writing style of boys’ authors. For example, Helen Bosanquet bemoaned the fact that boys’ literature was heavy on sensational incident yet shallow of plot:

I do not wish to suggest that, as a rule, there is anything immoral, or even deleterious about them, though no doubt some might be found against which very serious complaint might be made. But they are so overloaded with incident that the adult mind is bewildered in the attempt to trace the story, while no absurdity or exaggeration seems too gross.³³

Others, like Francis Hitchman, believed that boys’ time and money would simply be better spent on more improving pastimes:

The best that can be said of them is, that they are comparatively harmless; the worst, that no boy is likely to be the better for them. He will derive neither information nor instruction from them, and it may be doubted whether the time spent over them would not be infinitely usefully employed in cricket and football or some lighter games. Boys cannot, of course, be invariably engaged in athletic exercise, but they would certainly be far wiser, if they devoted themselves to chess or draughts, or even dominoes, than if they indulged in the intellectual debauchery which a constant study of books of this class implies.³⁴

Furthermore, several essayists freely admitted that much of the content of boys’ serial fiction was not objectionable at all. They noted that it was similar in many ways to better respected stories. “Tales of adventure are all very well in their way”, stated Hugh Chisholm. “No one wants to suppress Mr Rider Haggard’s most sanguinary stories.”³⁵ “There is far more actual killing in *King Solomon’s Mines* or *Treasure Island*, but no one objects to it there”, agreed Helen Bosanquet, adding that “boys do not go out and kill a man

³² H. Chisholm, ‘How to Counteract the Penny Dreadful’, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol.58 (1895), p.765.

³³ Bosanquet, ‘Cheap Literature’, *Contemporary Review*, 79, p.678.

³⁴ Hitchman, ‘Penny Fiction’, *Quarterly Review*, 171, pp.155-56.

³⁵ Chisholm, ‘Penny Dreadful’, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol.58, p.765.

because they have read of a man's being killed; if it were so, Sir Walter Scott would be amongst the misguiders of youth".³⁶

Nor was there any consensus over possible solutions to the problem. Some essayists believed that educational reforms were needed to stem the growth of cheap literature. If children were taught to read at a higher level they might reject trashy periodicals.³⁷ Others called upon schools and municipal services to improve free library access for the working class.³⁸ George Humphrey implored his readers to speak at working men's clubs once per month, and to donate unwanted books to schools, thereby raising intellectual interest amongst the masses. He also asked librarians to invite the working class to attend lectures on books and reading.³⁹ Some essayists, most notably James Greenwood, failed to suggest any solutions at all.

Moreover, many of the solutions which were proposed were flawed. For example, several essayists argued that the market should be flooded with high quality literature at the low price of one penny. When the price of good and bad literature was equal, the bad would be forced into extinction.⁴⁰ They believed that working class readers bought cheap literature partly because it was the only reading matter they could afford. "When the schoolboy can get *The Prisoner of Zenda* for a penny", claimed Hugh Chisholm, "he will not be obliged to buy the only thing which that modest sum will now procure in the market, some choice morsel like *Sweeney Todd*."⁴¹ Helen Bosanquet agreed, adding: "They read what they can get; and if Anthony Hope would publish in halfpenny form he might rival *The Phantom*

³⁶ Bosanquet, 'Cheap Literature', *Contemporary Review*, 79, pp.679-81.

³⁷ J. Ackland, 'Elementary Education and the Decay of Literature', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol.35 (1894) pp.412-23; Chisholm, 'Penny Dreadful', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol.58, pp.770-73; Harrison, 'Cheap Literature', *Companion*, p.80; Wright, 'Popular Culture', *Contemporary Review*, 40, pp.30-31, 40-41.

³⁸ Harrison, 'Cheap Literature', *Companion*, p.80. Wright, 'Popular Culture', *Contemporary Review*, 40, pp.41-42.

³⁹ G. Humphrey, 'The Reading of the Working Classes', *Nineteenth Century*, 33 (1893), p.701.

⁴⁰ B. G. Johns, 'The Literature of the Streets', *Edinburgh Review*, CLXV (1887), p.63.

⁴¹ Chisholm, 'Penny Dreadful', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol.58, pp.773-75.

Boatman".⁴² Francis Hitchman believed that working class readers eagerly anticipated a higher form of affordable literature:

Today the audience is gathered; the demand exists, it awaits only supply. [...] The extent of the sale of the trash, upon which we have spent so much space, proves the existence of a public who may be reached by a little courage and enterprise, and from whom a large profit can be drawn.⁴³

This quality literature, they envisaged, would be comprised firstly of cheap editions of classic tales, and secondly of healthy periodical literature. Alexander Strahan even went as far as to propose a blueprint of a healthy juvenile periodical:

Literature for boys and girls [...] must be forward-looking, and full of spirit and enterprise, and quick with the warm blood of youth. It must be full of incident and picture, its motif must be will and feeling, rather than ideas. It must not be goody-goody, and it must certainly not be prudish. Perfectly pure and modest, of course it must be, but it must be gay and fresh. And the spirit of divine obligation and human service must be everywhere present, though nowhere obtruded.⁴⁴

However, these essayists were unduly optimistic. In fact, healthy boys' periodicals were notoriously unsuccessful. W. H. G. Kingston's *Magazine for Boys* had failed after four years in 1863, and Beeton's *BOM* had struggled to compete with Brett and the Emmett brothers. This situation appeared to worsen over time. W. H. G. Kingston and G. A. Henty's *Union Jack*, launched in 1880, lasted but a few short years, whilst a series of morally upright publications launched by W. T. Stead in the 1890s were met with indifference.⁴⁵ The only healthy periodical to achieve notable success was *The Boy's Own Paper*, yet its longevity was only secured through financial support from the Religious Tract Society. It is now thought that the *BOP* was profitable for less than a decade in the Victorian era. Indeed, between the late 1880s and the First World War (when it enjoyed an upturn in its fortunes) it was actually subsidised by the RTS.⁴⁶

⁴² Bosanquet, 'Cheap Literature', *Contemporary Review*, 79, p.671.

⁴³ Hitchman, 'Penny Fiction', *Quarterly Review*, 171, p.171.

⁴⁴ Strahan, 'Bad Literature', *Contemporary Review*, 26, p.991.

⁴⁵ Dunae, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *VS*, Vol.22, p.150.

⁴⁶ J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), pp.215-19.

Despite their raucous complaints, it was evident that several essayists actually knew very little about boys' weekly literature. Although both James Greenwood and Francis Hitchman had clearly researched their articles, and were able to comment on individual periodicals, most essayists had only a limited grasp of the fiction which they condemned. Many spoke in terms so general, and so devoid of example, that it was obvious that their research had been very shallow. Several essayists freely admitted that they had not undertaken any research of their own. Rather, they had merely repeated information printed in the daily press, the essays of James Greenwood, and the reports of Mr. John Francis, editor of the *Athenaeum*, whose quantitative study of newspaper circulations had been drawn upon in a parliamentary debate.⁴⁷ Some essayists attempted to justify this approach. For example, Thomas Wright claimed that he was reluctant to identify offending periodicals for fear of raising their circulation. However, this reasoning was dubious; the readers of the respectable *Nineteenth Century* were unlikely have to have include many potential 'penny dreadful' customers amongst their number.⁴⁸

Because of the paucity of their research, the essayists were often in disarray as to what they were actually complaining of. They were preoccupied with the term 'penny dreadful', a phrase intended to arouse fear and misgivings amongst middle class readers. However, their usage of the term was often rather confusing. It varied from essayist to essayist. For example, Thomas Wright ranked juvenile 'penny dreadfuls' alongside adult criminal literature, describing the sensational *Illustrated Police News* as "that dreadful of dreadfuls".⁴⁹ As Alexander Strahan observed, "it is very easy to say that legislature ought to put down bad literature for the young; but [...] it still remains to ask who the young are, and what bad literature is".⁵⁰ Failure to identify the target of their complaints meant that the essayists' attacks were rather imprecise. They were unable to accurately assess the problem, or offer tailored solutions.

⁴⁷ Anon., 'Literary Intelligence', *Publishers' Circular*, Vol.27, No.640, 16 May 1864, pp.267-69; Harrison, 'Cheap Literature', *Companion*, pp.69-70; Strahan, 'Bad Literature', *Contemporary Review*, 26, p.984; *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1864, CLXXV, 294-97.

⁴⁸ Humphrey, 'Working Classes', *Nineteenth Century*, 33, pp.692-93.

⁴⁹ Wright, 'Popular Culture', *Contemporary Review*, 40, p.36.

⁵⁰ Strahan, 'Bad Literature', *Contemporary Review*, 26, p.981.

Finally, there were even occasional backlashes against the critics of boys' literature. They began as early as 1868, when the anonymous author of an essay entitled 'Immoral Literature', published within a collection of religious essays, jumped to the defence of 'penny dreadfuls', even those featuring "boy pirates" and "female highwaymen". "These books may not be so harmful", protested the author. "The literature of the Anglo-Saxon race has always had a lingering sympathy with the outlaw and the buccaneer. [...] Perhaps there is not much more harm in tales about Dick Turpin and Black Bess than in the ballads – which once formed the whole literature of the English peasant."⁵¹ Some years later, the author of the 1874 article 'Trashy Literature', published in *The Bookseller*, exonerated Brett's publications specifically. "In neither [*BOE* nor *YMOGB*] do we find anything which can be fairly designated 'trashy'", read the article. "They are distinguished by no literary merit; but they are quite harmless."⁵²

A further backlash, perhaps the most forceful, occurred in 1894. In that year an article by Frances Low, entitled 'Favourite Books of Childhood', had been published in *Strand Magazine*. The piece was rather critical of the reading habits of Victorian boys. Low suggested that young boys should follow the example of great men such as Gladstone, whose youthful reading was remarkably high-brow. Low was roundly criticised for the piece by journalist, scholar and children's author, Andrew Lang. Writing in *Publishers' Circular* and *Longman's Magazine*, Lang argued that not all boys could be expected to read at this very high level, and that recreational reading was perfectly appropriate for boys of the working class.⁵³ Others came out in support of Lang's opinions. For example, an anonymous *Publishers' Circular* subscriber argued that there was no harm in most boys' literature. "I have read every book that an example of boyish depravity has brought to

⁵¹ Anon., 'Immoral Literature', in Rev. O. Shipley, ed. *The Church and the World: Essays on Questions of the Day* (1868), pp.285-86.

⁵² Anon., 'Trashy Literature', *The Bookseller*, CCI, 8 April 1874, pp.632-33.

⁵³ P. A. Dunae, *British Juvenile Literature in an Age of Empire* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Manchester, 1975), pp.40-44; A. Lang, 'Mr Andrew Lang on Boys' Reading', *Publishers' Circular*, Vol.61, No.1474, 29 September 1894, pp.344-45; F. Low, 'Favourite Books of Childhood', *Strand Magazine*, VIII, 18 August 1894, pp.128-36.

notice”, claimed the correspondent, “and so far I have been unable to find any incentive to matricide, to dishonesty, or vice of any description.”⁵⁴

The disarray of the essayists meant that their success was only ever likely to be limited. Yes, they inspired an atmosphere of suspicion regarding juvenile periodical literature, including *BOE*, amongst their small body of readers, and were therefore a valuable part of the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’. However, had their crusade been better conducted they may well have achieved more tangible victories, such as prosecutions and suppressions.

Reader Surveys

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a range of reader surveys were published. They appeared in the same journals which hosted critical essays. The aim of the reader surveys was to identify precisely what the working class read in their leisure time, and to investigate moral problems their literature might be causing, so that appropriate steps might be taken. They were commissioned because the rapid growth of cheap literature in the mid nineteenth century had raised concerns amongst the educated classes that the reading of the masses might be immoral. It was argued that the newly literate needed guidance in their reading habits. Like critical essays, reader surveys were particularly concerned with the moral corruption of the young.

The leading surveyor of children’s literature in the late Victorian era was Edward Salmon. He was an enthusiastic young journalist who was interested in the reading habits of children. He produced three main surveys: ‘What Boys Read’, ‘What Girls Read’, and ‘What the Working Classes Read’. The first was published in the *Fortnightly Review*, the second and third in the *Nineteenth Century*, all in 1886. Salmon also published a book, *Juvenile Literature As It Is* (1888).

Salmon firmly believed that a youth’s reading matter influenced his behaviour. “Mind, equally with body, will develop according to what it feeds on”, he contended. “The strength or weakness of his moral sense largely depend upon whether he reads in his youth

⁵⁴ Anon., ‘St. Dunstan’s House, E. C.’, *Publishers’ Circular*, Vol.63, No.1527, 5 October 1895, p.383.

that which is pure or that which is foul.” In particular, Salmon maintained that young boys were in the habit of emulating their literary heroes. “To the young, the dramatis personae of a story become living entities. Their actions, their thoughts, their ideas of right and wrong, are moulded as much by their reading as by contact with the world.” “The whole body of successful boys’ literature”, Salmon proposed, “cannot be more concisely described than as a vast system of hero-worship.”⁵⁵

For this reason, Salmon was critical of boys’ magazines: “Boys’ books are, on the whole, morally unimpeachable; boys’ magazines, with a few notable exceptions, are in every way objectionable.” He identified a class divide between the readers of books and periodicals: “Books are purchased chiefly by the sons of the well-to-do. Magazines, on the other hand, are patronised almost exclusively by the lads of the working classes.”⁵⁶ Salmon was convinced that working class boys were being led into bad ways by their periodical literature. Like James Greenwood, Salmon was keen to relay press reports of ‘penny dreadful’-inspired wrongdoings. One boy, Salmon attested, “maddened by reading one of the tales”, shot dead his father and brother. Another injured himself making fireworks, following a recipe found in his weekly magazine. Another had stolen a horse under cover of night. Upon mounting his steed the youth commenced a reckless bareback gallop through the streets of Clapham, in emulation of his hero, Ned Kelly.⁵⁷

Salmon, like many of his fellows, did not generally identify any of the periodicals to which he objected. Thus, it is not known whether he approved or disapproved of *BOE*. However, he was rather critical of one of *BOE*’s most popular authors, Captain Mayne Reid. “When Captain Mayne Reid died he was hailed as the prince of boys’ authors. A more mistaken verdict was never delivered”, read the damning critique of the author’s work (which lasted a full seven pages).⁵⁸

Whilst Salmon was heavily critical of boys’ weeklies in general, he was enamoured with the *BOP*. He saw it as the saviour of boys’ journals:

⁵⁵ E. Salmon, ‘What Boys Read’, *Fortnightly Review*, 39 (1886), pp.248-50.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.251.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.256.

⁵⁸ E. Salmon, *Juvenile Literature As It Is*, pp.35-41.

The majority of the periodicals which are supplied to the children of the working classes are devoid of every element of sweetness and light. They are filled with stories of blood and revenge, of passion and cruelty, as improbable and almost impossible in plot as they are contemptible in literary execution. The only real antidote to the pernicious influence of these journals [...] is *The Boy's Own Paper*.

Salmon identified W. H. G. Kingston as the greatest boys' writer who ever lived, followed by R. M. Ballantyne and G. A. Henty. He also lauded Talbot Baines Reed, Dr Gordon Stables and George Manville Fenn. All of these men were prolific *BOP* contributors.⁵⁹

Unlike most of the critical essayists, Salmon believed that direct state intervention was the best way to stem the rise of 'penny dreadfuls'. "The matter seems of such vital moment in the social economy of the masses as to justify high-handed action on the part of the State", he contended. "A man has no more right to publish a story exulting in crime than to commit crime itself." "It is no argument", continued Salmon, "to say that it would be impossible to tell where the line ought to be drawn."⁶⁰ However, Salmon also recognised the need to educate children. He believed that it was the duty of parents, encouraged by the clergy and philanthropic and religious groups, to steer their offspring towards healthy literature.⁶¹

Salmon's most robust reader survey was *Juvenile Literature As It Is*. Large sections of the book were based upon research undertaken by Charles Welsh. In 1884 Welsh had distributed questionnaires to a range of schools, targeting boys and girls of all classes aged between eleven and nineteen. About two thousand were returned, and separate results were compiled for boys and girls. Although the questionnaire comprised several questions, Salmon's book focussed upon the responses to just three: 'Favourite Author'; 'Favourite Book'; and 'Favourite Paper or Magazine'.⁶²

None of Welsh's respondents admitted to a love of bona-fide penny dreadfuls. However, many were boys' weekly readers. The *BOP* headed the list of popular magazines, receiving four hundred and four votes. W. H. G. Kingston and G. A. Henty's *Union Jack*,

⁵⁹ Salmon, 'What Boys Read', *Fortnightly Review*, 39, pp.251-55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.257.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.259.

⁶² Salmon, *Juvenile Literature*, pp.11-31.

which had actually folded by the time the survey was published, came fourth with sixteen votes. *Young England* and *Young Folks*, both relatively well-to-do journals, achieved eleven and ten votes respectively. Surprisingly, John Allingham's *Boy's World* realised an impressive sixteen votes. *Boys of England* mustered but six votes, and Brett's *Boys' Comic Journal* five.⁶³

The most popular boys' author was Charles Dickens, who received 223 votes. Second was W. H. G. Kingston with 179, third Sir Walter Scott with 128. Alongside Kingston, several other *BOP* authors were found in the list, namely R. M. Ballantyne, the Rev. J. G. Wood, A. R. Hope, Dr Gordon Stables and G. A. Henty. Captain Mayne Reid was the only author associated with *BOE* to feature. He achieved thirty three votes, more than Defoe, Kingsley and Fenimore Cooper.⁶⁴ Mayne Reid was also the only *BOE* author whose work featured in the 'Favourite Book' category. *The Scalp Hunters* (1851) came twenty-second with six votes. The most popular book was Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which gained forty-three votes.⁶⁵

What do Welsh's findings say about the popularity of *BOE*? Firstly, it must be noted that *BOE* was only eligible for inclusion in one single category, 'Favourite Paper or Magazine'. 'Favourite Author' effectively excluded *BOE* writers, whose work had appeared uncredited since the early 1870s. *BOE* was also excluded from the 'Favourite Book' category. Although it was issued in complete, bound editions, it was thought of as a periodical, not a book. The fact that the *BOP*, which was also published both bound and unbound, achieved four hundred and four votes as best magazine and yet only seventeen as best book, is proof of the point. Yet despite this, it must be said that *BOE* and its authors, aside from Mayne Reid, fared rather poorly.

However, Welsh's findings were never likely to reflect the true popularity of boys' weeklies. This is because his sample probably did not contain many boys' weekly readers.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.15-16. The success of Allingham's *Boy's World* was probably a statistical blip. Evidence suggests that its circulation was small compared to *BOE*'s: see R. Rollington, *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (Leicester, 1913), p.5.

⁶⁴ Salmon, *Juvenile Literature*, p.14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.15.

Welsh's study encompassed boys of all classes aged eleven to nineteen. However, most boys' weekly readers were working class. Therefore, these boys must have comprised only a limited proportion of the sample. Indeed, virtually every interviewee over the age of fourteen would have been from the affluent middle classes; most working class boys would have left school by this age. The higher class boys who comprised the majority of Welsh's sample were unlikely to have read papers like Brett's. The periodical of choice for the affluent boy reader was the *BOP*. Had Welsh's survey concentrated upon younger and lowlier boys his findings may have been altogether different.

Moreover, it could be argued that Welsh's survey did not accurately reflect juvenile reading habits at all. His methodology suffered from a major flaw. Because the surveys were conducted under the supervision of schoolmasters, pupils were probably under pressure to claim that they read only the most wholesome of literature. They provided the answers which were expected of them, not the ones which reflected their actual reading. This was a problem conceded by Salmon himself.⁶⁶ This may explain why the *BOP* and *The Bible* were so emphatically endorsed whilst *BOE*, and its kind, received only a handful of votes.

Edward Salmon's reader surveys were largely ineffective; again, there is no evidence linking them to any concrete triumphs over 'penny dreadfuls'. This was probably because the evidence they relied upon actually made the supposed 'penny dreadful' problem appear rather insignificant. It is somewhat ironic that Welsh's survey painted so a rosy picture of children's reading habits. Salmon would probably have preferred the survey to have offered a more accurate reflection of juvenile reading, in order that the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls' might be redoubled. As for *BOE*, if anything the paper probably benefited from being ranked alongside more reputable books and periodicals.

The Courts

Concerns about the pernicious influence of 'penny dreadfuls' were caused in part by a number of instances in which boys' papers became implicated in criminal trials. From the late 1860s onwards national and local newspapers began to report courtroom proceedings

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.27-31.

concerning boys who had supposedly been inspired to commit crimes in emulation of their literary heroes. These young criminals were invariably apprehended with their pockets stuffed with cheap literature; later, secret stashes were found in their homes. On several occasions *BOE*, and other NPC titles, were amongst their illicit collections.

John Springhall's *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (1998) is the most authoritative study of the relationship between boys' periodical literature and crime. The book examines a range of court cases in which 'penny dreadfuls', including those published by Brett, became embroiled. Springhall argues that boys' papers were unjustly accused of inciting juvenile crime: "Misrepresentation of the dangerous effects of such highly stylised and melodramatic fiction on the young suggests that Victorian reporters, magistrates, policemen and watch committees preferred to target a convenient cultural scapegoat for outbreaks of delinquency, rather than lend credence to more fundamental social and economic explanations."⁶⁷ Springhall's argument echoes that of Patrick Dunae in his article 'Penny Dreadfuls: Late Nineteenth-Century Boys' Literature and Crime' (1979). Their conclusions are surely correct; but, how does this impact upon *BOE* specifically?

The NPC was the leading proponent of penny dreadful fiction in the 1860s. Although the company ceased trading in 1870, many of its most popular titles were reissued by other publishers throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Considering the proliferation of the NPC's literature, and its bloody, sensational nature, it is unsurprising that the company occasionally became entangled in court proceedings.

The first instance in which the NPC's juvenile periodicals became involved in court proceedings occurred in 1868. A fourteen year old boy, George Pascall, was brought before the magistrate, Mr Ellison, at Worship Street courts, London. Pascall had been apprehended the previous evening by a policeman of G Division. The policeman had witnessed the boy leaving the premises of Borwick and Sons, a well known baking powder manufacturer.

⁶⁷ Springhall, *Youth*, p.72. Also see Springhall, 'Disreputable Adolescent Reading' in *Disreputable Pleasures*, pp.103-23, and G. Stutter, 'Penny Dreadfuls and Perverse Domains: Victorian and Modern Moral Panics', in J. Rowbotham and K. Stevenson, eds. *Behaving Badly: Visible Crime, Social Panics and Legal Responses – Victorian and Modern Parallels* (Aldershot, 2003), pp.159-68.

Upon being searched, two sacks belonging to his employers were discovered underneath his waistcoat. A copy of *BOE* was also found upon his person, along with two numbers of the NPC serial *Tales of Highwaymen, or, Life on the Road* (1865-66). Mr Ellison remarked upon “the mischievous and corrupting effects which the reading of such periodicals produced upon the youth of this country”.⁶⁸ “As the prisoner appeared anxious to see the inside of a prison”, said Ellison in sentencing, “he should sentence him to fourteen days’ imprisonment, and as he would be kept to bread and water during that time it was to be hoped that he would come out a wiser and better boy.”⁶⁹

However, the magistrate appeared less concerned with the pernicious content of the periodicals than he was with publishing law violations. Upon inspection of *Tales of Highwaymen* Mr Ellison noted that the name and address of the printer was absent from both numbers. Only the address of the publishing office, 147 Fleet Street, was visible. “By the 2d and 3d Victoria Cap.12 Sec.2”, read a report of the case in *The Times*, “it was enacted that any printer neglecting to append his name and address on publications issuing from his hands should be rendered liable to a penalty”. Inspector Fyfe of G Division was instructed by the magistrate to draw the matter to the attention of the Commissioner of Police, who was then to instigate proceedings against the printer.⁷⁰

Brett was alarmed by the case. He had only recently launched *BOE* on a platform of moral virtue. Moreover, he had specifically disowned, and condemned, highwayman literature. Following the case Brett wrote to the magistrate, Mr Ellison. In his letter Brett claimed that the report published in *The Times* had misrepresented *BOE*. The magistrate duly made an announcement in court, which was later printed in *The Times*. Ellison’s correction made it clear that he believed only *Tales of Highwaymen* to be pernicious; *BOE* itself was adjudged to be “innocuous”.⁷¹ It was not long after this case that Brett left the NPC altogether. As we have seen, it is probable that this factor more than any other convinced him that he could no longer publish *BOE* through the disreputable company.

⁶⁸ ‘Police’, *The Times*, 13 November 1868, p.11.

⁶⁹ ‘Police’, *The Times*, 14 September 1868, p.11.

⁷⁰ Ibid; ‘Police’, *The Times*, 13 November 1868, p.11.

⁷¹ Ibid.



Fig.21: *The Wild Boys of London, or, the Children of Night*



Fig.22: *The Skeleton Crew, or, Wildfire Ned*

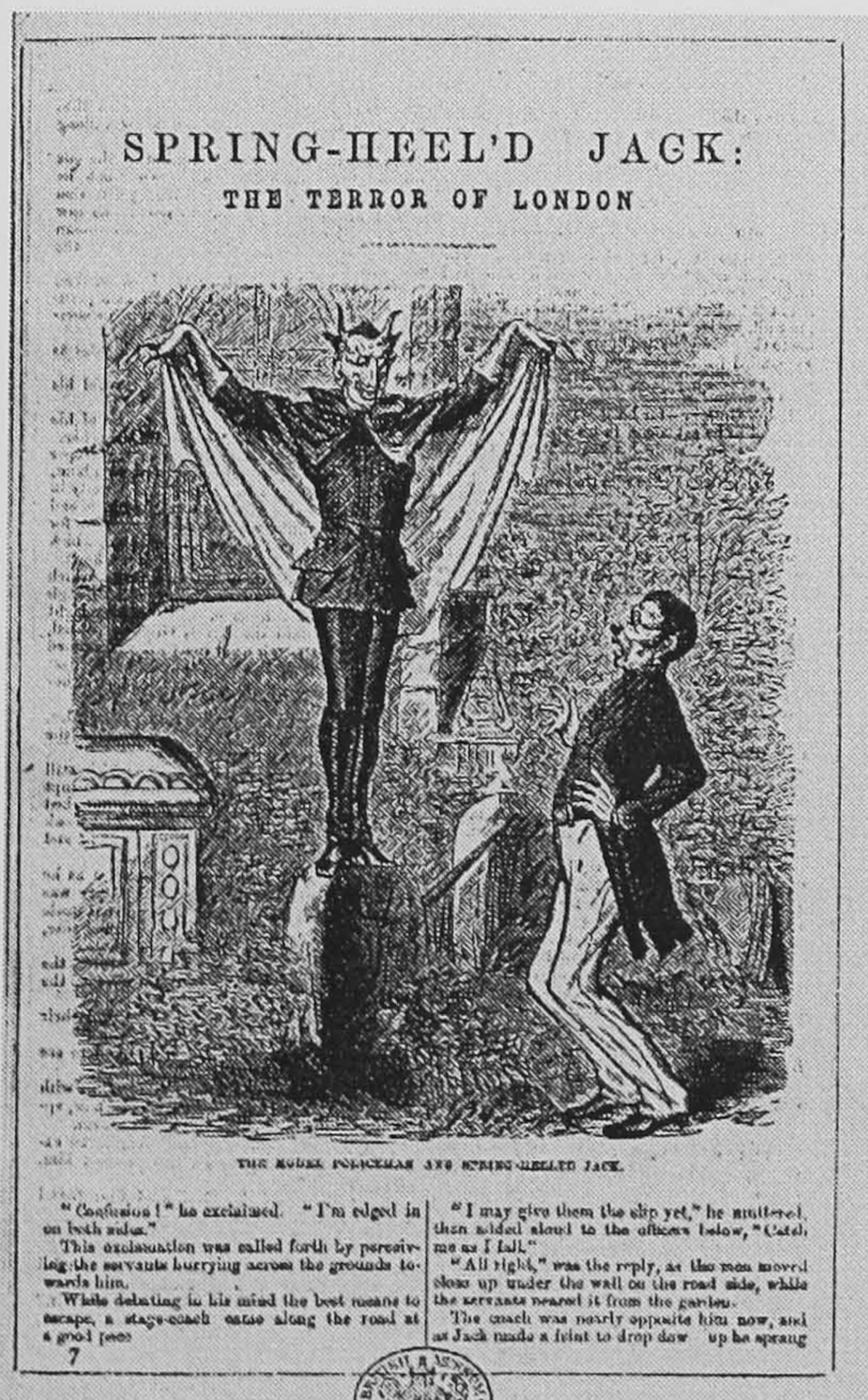


Fig.23: *Spring Heel'd Jack, the Terror of London*



Fig.24: *Tales of Highwaymen, or, Life on the Road*

In 1876 a second court case involving *BOE* took place. At the Hampstead courts an errand boy, named Alfred Saunders, was brought before magistrates Messrs. Marshall and Smith. The boy was charged with stealing £7 4s from his father. The stolen money had paid for expensive meals, a toy pistol, a lantern, and a cigar holder, along with numerous ‘penny dreadfuls’, including Brett’s *BOE* and George Emmett’s *Young Briton* and *Sons of Britannia*. The court heard how the boy’s father disapproved of the periodicals, and how his grandmother had previously burned his collection. The unrepentant prisoner pleaded guilty to stealing the seven pounds, but not the four shillings, which had been subtracted from his own wages by his father to buy him clothing. He was sent to Feltham Industrial School for three years.⁷²

There were two further high-profile court cases involving periodicals linked to, but not issued by, Brett. In the first case, an 1872 reissue of *Tales of Highwaymen* was implicated in the trial of two boy thieves, Joseph Bennett and George Constable, who were accused of stealing five pounds and ten shillings. Constable, the younger boy, confessed that he had “been tempted to do this by reading the tales”. Despite his confession, and the accusations of the police and prosecution, it appeared that the paper had little to do with the crime. Constable was actually coerced into participation by the threats of the elder boy.⁷³ Nevertheless, the reissue of *Tales of Highwaymen* was consequently suppressed.⁷⁴ The second case is the most notorious instance of a ‘penny dreadful’ prosecution. In 1877 a reprint of the NPC serial *Wild Boys of London*, published by George Farrar, fell foul of Lord Campbell’s 1857 Obscene Publications Act, the main, all-encompassing mechanism through which supposedly criminal publications could be prosecuted. Over four thousand weekly parts of the reissue were seized by the police after the Society for the Suppression of Vice successfully applied to the police court to issue a summons against the printer. One

⁷² ‘Petty Sessions’, *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 1 January 1876, p.8; ‘Petty Sessions’, *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 8 January 1876, p.8; ‘Police’, *The Times*, 6 January 1876, p.11; ‘Police Courts’, *The Daily News*, 6 January 1876, p.6; ‘Police Intelligence: Pernicious Literature’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 January 1876, p.6; ‘Police Intelligence: Pernicious Literature’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 1876, p.6; Springhall, *Youth*, p.85.

⁷³ Harrison, ‘Cheap Literature’, *Companion*, pp.75-76; Springhall, *Youth*, pp.78-79.

⁷⁴ A. E. Waite, ‘By-Ways of Periodical Literature’, *Walford’s Antiquarian*, XII (1887), p.67.

newsagent was called before the magistrates after he continued to sell the publication, but ultimately he too capitulated.⁷⁵

Judging by existing evidence, boys' periodical literature was implicated in juvenile criminality on comparatively few occasions. Fears about the pernicious influence of the literature were rather unfounded, and claims that the majority of juvenile offenders were influenced by penny papers were exaggerations. Presumably, the number of juvenile crimes in which boys' literature was not implicated outnumbered the number in which it was by a ratio of thousands. It is unlikely that cheap literature coaxed many boys into a life of crime. It is also notable that in the late Victorian era juvenile crime actually went down, not up.⁷⁶ The link which the police and legal system endeavoured to make between periodical literature and juvenile crime was quite tenuous. The fact that some juvenile criminals were found to be 'penny dreadful' readers can probably be put down, in the majority of cases, to simple coincidence. The total weekly readership of boys' periodical literature numbered hundreds of thousands; it is hardly surprising that a number of juvenile criminals were included amongst their number. Moreover, it is thought that the moral hysteria over 'penny dreadfuls' actually led many wily boys to blame the papers for their crimes. In doing so they believed that they would be given more lenient sentences. Even at the time both Thomas Wright and James Greenwood believed that this phenomenon was distorting estimates of the impact of the literature.⁷⁷ Having said this, the courts were perhaps the most successful element of the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls'. Court proceedings were widely reported in high-circulation national newspapers; there can be little doubt that

⁷⁵ 'Boys' Literature', *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 1876, p.2; 'Boys' Literature', *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 December 1876, p.6; 'Literature for Boys', *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 1877, p.6; 'Police', *The Times*, 13 December 1877, p.11; J. O. Springhall, "A Life Story for the People?" Edwin J. Brett and the London 'Low-Life' Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s', *VS*, Vol.33 (1989-90), pp.238-40; Springhall, *Youth*, pp.81-84.

⁷⁶ Dunae, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *VS*, Vol.22, p.150; Springhall, *Youth*, p.72; J. J. Tobias, *Urban Crime in Victorian England* (New York, 1972), pp.41-42, 127-28. In addition, it has recently been argued that supposedly harmful media like 'penny dreadfuls' may actually reduce levels of antisocial behaviour amongst boys: see H. Schechter, *Savage Pastimes: a Cultural History of Violent Entertainment* (New York, 2005), especially pp.27-42.

⁷⁷ Dunae, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *VS*, Vol.22, pp.140-41.

these reports fuelled the commonly-held notion that boys' papers were responsible for juvenile crime.

Yet although *BOE* and Brett did, on occasions, become entangled in court proceedings, both emerged relatively untarnished. Neither was implicated in the suppressions of *Tales of Highwaymen* and *Wild Boys of London*, despite the fact that Brett had probably sold each publisher the rights to the stories. In the case of George Pascal, the magistrate appeared preoccupied with the violation of printing regulations rather than the literature itself. Moreover, the Mr Ellison's apparent criticism of *BOE* was subsequently rectified in *The Times*, a dignified coup. The case of Alfred Saunders also raised few problems for Brett. In fact, George Emmett fared far worse. So detrimental were subsequent press reports regarding the standard of his papers that Emmett was compelled to enlist James Mortimer, editor of the *London Figaro*, to vouch for his moral credibility.⁷⁸

Parliament

'Penny dreadfuls', for all the commotion they caused, were rarely discussed in Parliament. They were spoken of in Commons proceedings upon but a few occasions. Nevertheless, these few scant mentions reveal a great deal about why the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls' achieved so little.

'Penny dreadfuls' first became the subject of parliamentary debate in May 1888. On this occasion Mr Samuel Smith, Member of Parliament for Flintshire, proposed "that this House deplores the rapid spread of demoralizing literature in this country, and is of the opinion that the law against obscene publications and indecent pictures and prints should be vigorously enforced, and, if necessary, strengthened".⁷⁹ Mr Smith proceeded to deliver an emotive, and lengthy, speech on the subject of 'corrupt literature'. A summary of Smith's observations was recorded in *Hansard*:

There had of late years been an immense increase of vile literature in London and throughout the country, and that this literature was working terrible effects upon the morals of the young. Such havoc was it making that he could only look upon it as a gigantic national danger; indeed,

⁷⁸ See J. Mortimer, 'Pernicious Literature', *London Figaro*, No.681, 5 February 1876, pp.7-8.

⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1888, CCCXXV, 1707-08.

he questioned whether at the present time the people of this country were suffering more from the effect of an excessive use of strong drink than they were from the more subtle poison of vile and obscene literature. There was nothing that so corroded the human character, or so sapped the vitality of a nation, as the spread of this noxious and licentious literature, and he believed that it was at the bottom of that shocking state of the streets of London.⁸⁰

Smith blamed the 1870 Elementary Education Act for neglecting to safeguard newly literate youngsters against cheap literature. He also reported the existence of a structured network of ‘dreadful’ sellers, who visited schools persuading children to buy their demoralising wares.⁸¹

Smith bemoaned several other varieties of ‘corrupt literature’. He believed that French novels were particularly pernicious; Henry Vizetelly, a former associate of Brett, was identified as the chief disseminator of this type of fiction.⁸² Smith also complained of the quality of girl’s literature. He recounted how “it had become the rule with a class of low booksellers in London to provide indecent literature for young girls, to offer them every inducement to come into the shops and read the books, to provide them with private rooms stocked with the vilest class of literature”. Smith noted that “in many cases these shops were in league with houses of the worst class, to which the girls when their minds were sufficiently polluted and depraved were consigned”.⁸³ “Indelicate photographs of nude females” and “quack advertisements of a filthy kind” also came under Smith’s fire, as did a newspaper entitled *Town Talk*, an issue of which had been subject to prosecution.⁸⁴

The Home Secretary, Mr Henry Matthews, gave a mixed response to Smith’s speech. He agreed that the publications “were pernicious in the extreme, and they ought to be brought within the reach of the law in every civilised country”. However, he also believed that the law, in its current state, was already “a tolerably effective weapon”. Lord Campbell’s Act, the Metropolitan Police Courts Act and the Vagrants Act could all be used against the publishers, printers and sellers of pernicious literature. The only reason that

⁸⁰ Ibid.,1708.

⁸¹ Ibid.,1710-12.

⁸² Ibid.,1708-10.

⁸³ Ibid.,1712.

⁸⁴ Ibid.,1713-14

more prosecutions were not made against such literature, Matthews argued, was that it was hard for juries to agree upon precisely what constituted pernicious literature. The Home Secretary rejected the suggestion that the Public Prosecutor should be the arbiter of what was “criminal” and what was “merely indelicate and coarse”. Rather, he believed that public morals would indicate where prosecutions were necessary. “It would be most unwise and dangerous”, suggested Matthews, “to direct public attention to certain obscure publications of a filthy character known only to a few by instituting a State prosecution.”⁸⁵

Nor was Mr Smith’s proposal welcomed unquestioningly by other members of the Commons. Mr Anthony John Mundella, member for Sheffield Brightside, who had been instrumental in introducing educational reforms in the 1870s and 1880s, agreed that “all were anxious to put a stop to this abominable literature”. However, he also stated that “the people had been educated to think, and some literature must be provided to meet the intellectual craving”. Mundella saw poor literature as a by-product of the recent growth of quality literature: “It was not surprising that in this prolific soil some weeds grew up.” He believed that Sunday schools and libraries, not prosecutions, were “the real antidote” to harmful literature.⁸⁶ Mr Mark Stewart, MP for Kirkcudbright, agreed with Mundella, adding that certain agencies and societies associated with the spread of healthy literature (presumably the Religious Tract Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) could also help the situation.⁸⁷

Mr Smith’s motion was put, and agreed to, by the Commons. However, the significance of this endorsement should not be overstated. In reality, it meant little. The wording of Smith’s motion was rather weak-willed. It simply required members to express their disapproval of supposedly harmful literature. The House was not required to commit to any specific actions, other than to ensure that existing legislation was enforced.

Boys’ periodical literature became the topic of parliamentary proceedings once again in 1895. The occasion was prompted by murder case which had been given a great deal of

⁸⁵ Ibid.,1719-21.

⁸⁶ M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament*, Vol.2 (Sussex, 1978), p.261; *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1888, CCCXXV, 1721.

⁸⁷ Ibid.,1723.

coverage in the press. Twelve year old Robert Coombes, who had a history of mental illness, had stabbed his mother to death. Following his arrest a stash of ‘penny dreadfuls’ were found in his room. The incident had led to a fresh public outcry regarding the moral influence of boys’ literature.⁸⁸

With the case in mind, the following question was put to the Home Secretary, Sir Matthew White Ridley, by Mr J. F. Hogan, *Contemporary Review* contributor, founder of the Victorian Catholic Young Men’s Society, and MP for Tipperary:⁸⁹

I beg to ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department: whether his attention has been directed to recent revelations as to the pernicious consequences of the unrestricted circulation of cheap literature of a grossly demoralising and corrupting character amongst the young; whether he is aware that coroner’s juries have appended to their verdicts of recent tragedies riders affirming the urgent necessity of legislative and administrative action, with a view to the correction or the checking of the evil; and whether any official machinery exists by which effect might be given to this recommendation; and, if not, will he arm some responsible authority with the supervising powers in this connection similar to those that have been exercised for many years to prevent the dissemination of unwholesome and objectionable literature from the stage?

The Home Secretary was clearly familiar with the earlier debate of 1888. His response was not promising:

My attention has naturally been called to statements in the press with regard to the matter referred to, and representations have been made to me and to my predecessors at the Home Office on the subject of this undoubted evil. These representations have included riders to verdicts of coroners’ juries. Inquiries, however, directed by the Home Secretary in 1888, have shown the difficulty of establishing a direct connection between juvenile crime and the reading of such literature. Under the existing law no means exist of stopping such publications unless they be of an obscene, blasphemous or seditious character, and I have no authority to establish any such censorship as it suggests in the last paragraph of the question. The difficulties of legislation with respect to quasi-criminal literature not coming within the above descriptions have been, I am sorry to say, in my judgement rightly regarded as almost prohibitive.⁹⁰

There was scant evidence linking ‘penny dreadfuls’ to juvenile crime, Ridley believed, and therefore further legislation could not be justified.

⁸⁸ Springhall, *Youth*, pp.90-92.

⁸⁹ Stenton and Lees, *British Members of Parliament*, Vol.2, pp.175-76.

⁹⁰ *Hansard*, 4th Series, 1895, XXXVI, 167-68.

Parliament was probably the single least effective facet of the campaign against ‘penny dreadfuls’. It opposed the literature, yet did very little to combat it. This was mainly because many members doubted that ‘penny dreadfuls’ were actually a pernicious influence upon young boys. Sir M. W. Ridley could find no firm proof that the literature inspired criminal activity; indeed, both he and Mr Matthews appeared unconvinced by press reports linking cheap literature to juvenile crime. Judging from the responses of Mr Mundella and Mr Stewart, many MPs also believed that ‘penny dreadfuls’ posed only a minor threat to juvenile morality. They believed that the solution to the problem was good education and healthy literature, not laws and prosecution; and if prosecutions became necessary, they believed that existing legislation was already adequate. Parliament’s attitude towards the ‘penny dreadful’ question had wide-ranging ramifications for the campaign against them as a whole. Without the backing of Parliament, new legislation to combat the literature was never likely to materialise.

Newspapers

In 1867 and 1868 *BOE* was reviewed by several leading daily, weekly and monthly newspapers: *Bow Bells*; *The Era*; *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*; *The Morning Advertiser*; *The Morning Herald*; *The Standard*; and *The Sun*. Newspapers flourished in the 1860s as their prices plummeted following the repeal of the ‘taxes on knowledge’. Although official circulation figures were not recorded at the time, it is certain that these papers sold in large numbers, many over 100,000 copies every day, and some as high as 300,000.⁹¹ Most cost only one penny, a sure sign of a high sale; a low price point was only feasible alongside mass production and distribution. Some enjoyed even higher circulations; for example, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* had a circulation of half a million in 1865 (rising to one million in 1896).⁹² Although these newspapers were read mainly in London, they also enjoyed a good sale in industrial towns.⁹³

⁹¹ Altick, *English Common Reader*, pp.354-57, 394-96; A. P. Wadsworth, *Newspaper Circulations, 1880-1954* (Manchester, 1955), pp.18-23.

⁹² North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.4, pp.2970-71; Wadsworth, *Newspaper Circulations*, p.23.

⁹³ Altick, *English Common Reader*, p.356.

The newspapers which reviewed *BOE* varied in character. Most contained standard fare, such as news, politics, law and advertising. Others were more specialised. *The Morning Advertiser*, as suggested by its title, carried a high proportion of advertising. *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* combined news, amusement and opinion.⁹⁴ *Bow Bells* was a family miscellany; published weekly, it featured articles about handicrafts, fashion, pastimes and music.⁹⁵ The papers also varied in their political allegiances. *The Standard* was Conservative, as was *The Morning Herald*.⁹⁶ *The Era* was borderline Liberal / Conservative. *The Sun* was Liberal, as was *The Morning Advertiser*, although the latter also had radical leanings.⁹⁷ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* was notorious for its radicalism. Some of the papers attracted a middle class audience, some a working class audience. Again, *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* was particularly popular amongst the working class.⁹⁸

Most of these newspapers were probably provided with a review copy of *BOE* by Brett. In fact, *The Morning Advertiser* stated as much in their review.⁹⁹ This is yet another example of the editor's promotional flair. It is not known if any of the authors or editors gave a favourable account of the paper because they knew Brett personally. It seems unlikely that he could have been on personal terms with every reviewer. In fact, he was especially pleased to receive positive reviews from newspapers with a reputation for honesty. "In these days of stern criticism, when reviewers are so inflexible in the performance of their duties", wrote Brett on one occasion, "we feel honoured by being spoken of in such terms by a paper so noted for impartiality as *The Morning Advertiser*."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.4, pp.2970-71.

⁹⁵ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.2, pp.564-65.

⁹⁶ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.4, pp.3309-10; North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.6, pp.4486-87.

⁹⁷ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.4, pp.3307-08; North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.6, pp.4527-28.

⁹⁸ North, ed. *Waterloo Directory*, Vol.4, pp.2970-71; V. S. Berridge, *Popular Journals and Working Class Attitudes, 1854-1886* (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of London, 1976).

⁹⁹ *BOE*, Vol.4, No.100, 16 October 1868, p.352.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

BOE's newspaper reviews were overwhelmingly favourable. In fact, Brett proudly published excerpts from them on the rear pages of his periodicals, and on separate colour wrappers which accompanied bound monthly and half-yearly volumes.¹⁰¹

The general high standard of *BOE* attracted much kudos. *The Era* claimed that "enduring prosperity can only be achieved by internal merit, and in this respect the *Boys of England* is eminently fortunate". *The Morning Advertiser* exclaimed that "we must confess the *Boys of England* is a careful, well-edited miscellany". *The Standard* also described the paper as "a thorough boys' miscellany in the best sense of the term", commenting that it was "a very credible publication, [...] which is in excellent contrast with most of the boy literature of the day". *The Sun* described *BOE* and other Brett periodicals as "the best works of their class", a sentiment echoed by *Bow Bells*, which stated that "the best periodical we know of for boys is the *Boys of England*". Brett was given credit for the achievements of the paper. *The Morning Advertiser* enthused that "the getting-up of the periodical generally reflects credit on the editor", whilst *The Sun* believed that the paper's success was due "to the very excellent manner in which it is conducted by Edwin J. Brett".

The climate of competitiveness which defined the boys' periodical publishing industry was common knowledge amongst reviewers. Several reviews recognised, and praised, *BOE*'s remarkable success. "In these days of literary competition", spoke *The Era*, "when rival publications start up like mushrooms, it is a real pleasure to find one that immediately makes its mark on the public, and proved both a mercantile hit and a pecuniary success. In the light we must regard the above work, which has already acquired a circulation that few of our most successful serials can boast of." *The Sun* noted that "this excellent book for the amusement and instruction of boys still continues a prosperous career", adding later that *BOE* was "fully established in the public favour". Of *BOE* and its companion, *Young Men of Great Britain*, *The Sun* also commented that they "have for a long time stood forward as candidates for public appreciation, which, we are happy to say, they have secured". Reviewers were keen to encourage Brett to continue his successful

¹⁰¹ See *ibid.*, and wrapper of *BOE* Vol.2, from where all relevant quotations are taken. A selection of samples has been independently verified to confirm existence and accuracy.

work. “We wish Mr Brett every further success in the pursuit of his excellent and hitherto prosperous undertaking”, wrote *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*.

Crucially, the moral and instructive content of *BOE* was praised by most of the journalists. It was said that parents should be assured that the paper was suitable for their sons. *The Era* enthusiastically noted that *BOE*, “while of a style peculiarly adapted to and appreciated by boys, is, at the same time, of that wholesome and elevating character that must recommend it to every parent who desires to see his son’s moral and manly feelings inculcated”. *The Standard* contrasted *BOE* with sensational ‘penny dreadfuls’, stating that the paper had “established itself as a favourite, not among boys merely, but also with their parents. The editor, Mr Edwin Brett, [...] gives them nothing in the shape of romantic pirates or heroic highwaymen, or burglars made virtuous or prison life *couleur de rose*.” *The Standard* also noted that “the management is conducted upon such principles that no parents could object to seeing the work in the hands of their sons”. Concurring, *The Sun* described the paper as “one of the most amusing, at the same time moral works that can be placed in the hands of youth and on the family library table”, later adding that “the tales, though sensational, are free from any taint of mischief, and the contents are varied, amusing, and highly instructive”.

The papers lauded *BOE*’s fiction. Most reviewers singled out particularly meritorious stories. *The Era* favoured Vane St. John’s ‘Who Shall be Leader? The Story of Two Boys’ Lives’ (vol.1) and ‘Wait till I’m a Man! or, the Play Ground and the Battle Field’ (vol.2), W. Thompson Townsend’s ‘Giles Evergreen, or, Fresh from the Country’ (vol.1) and ‘The Captain of the School’ (vol.2), and John Cecil Stagg’s ‘Strongbow, the Boy Chief of the Delawares’ (vol.2), describing them as “all excellent as exciting to courage, resolution, friendship, and honourable emulation”. *The Standard* favoured Stagg’s ‘Chevy Chase, or, the Battle on the Border’ (vol.1), plus ‘Giles Evergreen’ and ‘Who Shall be Leader?’, “all redolent”, said the paper, “of the adventure and fun which youth knows how to relish”. *The Sun* stated that “‘The White Squaw’, by Captain Mayne Reid, merits attention”, and that ‘The Captain of the School’ and ‘Strongbow’ were “two excellent tales”, whilst *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* believed that “the story that deserves the most favourable recommendation is ‘Nobody’s Dog’”.

Non-fiction was commended even more highly. *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* commented that "there is an excellent series of papers on the 'Progress of the British Boy in the Past and Present'. We cannot say too much in favour of these rambles through English history, enlivened as they are by sketches of costume, of important events, of great battles, &c." *The Sun* observed that "the 'Progress of the British Boy', 'British Sports', &c., are full of interest, and well calculated to amuse as well as instruct the youths of the United Kingdom", and that articles concerning "sports, lion, rhinoceros, and alligator hunting, are full of the most absorbing interest". *The Standard* praised *BOE*'s "essays, historical sketches, pictures of sport, columns of anecdote, and really instructive answers to correspondents". *The Era* stated that *BOE* contained "a mass of most instructive and interesting reading under the various heads of sports, pastimes, episodes of history, &c."

BOE's newspaper reviews were devoid of the hysteria which characterised the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls'. Most tellingly of all, they recognised that *BOE* was improving and educative, as well as entertaining. With their high circulations, favourable newspaper reviews may well have been a greater influence upon the working class parents of *BOE* readers, and middle class detractors wary of 'penny dreadful' fiction, than critical diatribes and reader surveys published in high-brow periodicals.

Conclusion

Boys' papers, ubiquitously dubbed 'penny dreadfuls', were the subject of prolonged and severe criticism throughout the mid to late Victorian era. However, the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls' achieved little. It failed to stem the growth of the literature, and failed to introduce new legislation to combat it. Just two notable prosecutions arose from the campaign, the suppressions of *Tales of Highwaymen* and *Wild Boys of London*. *BOE* itself emerged from the campaign relatively unscathed. There is no proof that the campaign had any drastic or lasting effect upon the paper's sale. Moreover, the likelihood is that *BOE*'s favourable newspaper reviews were more influential than any negative publicity. They

were read by many more people, and by a wider variety of people, albeit only in the late 1860s.¹⁰²

Yet *BOE*, and indeed all Victorian boys' periodicals, undoubtedly suffered in some measure as a result of the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls'. Although the campaign failed to achieve many of its specific goals, such as legislation and prosecutions, it certainly succeeded in inspiring widespread mistrust. Indeed, public opinion, according to contemporary sources, actually became less tolerant of boys' periodical literature as time went on, peaking in the late 1880s to mid 1890s.¹⁰³ The subtle, intangible effects of the public mood inspired by the campaign are difficult to judge. However, *BOE* was certainly caught up within a general air of intolerance. Autobiographical accounts describing the attitudes of parents and teachers, as we have seen, illustrate this point well. Despite the fact that Brett claimed that he had received hundreds of approving letters from parents and guardians, the likelihood is that many more were deeply suspicious of his papers.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² These newspapers were not Brett's only supporters. Over his career he received several messages of support from noteworthy figures, such as the Earl of Beaconsfield, Earl Derby, Viscount Cranbrook, Lady St. Vincent and Lord Sandon: see Anon., 'Edwin J. Brett', *The Biograph and Review*, 4 (1880), p.459.

¹⁰³ Chisholm, 'Penny Dreadfuls', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol.58, p.767; Waite, 'By-Ways', *Walford's Antiquarian*, XII, p.67.

¹⁰⁴ *BOE*, Vol.2, No.36, 27 July 1867, p.160.

Conclusion

Boys of England is a fascinating periodical. Edwin J. Brett himself was an extraordinary Victorian, ably fulfilling a wide variety of roles: publisher; entertainer; educator; companion; entrepreneur; and philanthropist. Although this thesis has covered dozens of facets of both paper and proprietor, there were many more avenues which could have been explored. To fully examine every aspect of Brett and *BOE* would require more space than is here available.

The purpose of this thesis has been to provide a critical history of Brett and *BOE*. Historians have hitherto argued that *BOE* failed to engage with its readership. It simply reinforced middle class hegemony. Yet the idea that Brett and his contributors created a publication which made no attempt to connect with the lives of its readers, and that this bourgeois propaganda was eagerly digested by hundreds of thousands of ignorant boys for over three decades, seem dubious.

It is regrettable that Brett, and most of his staff, did not bequeath any memoirs or papers which might have shed more light upon their personal beliefs. As it is, little is known about their motivations. Yet historians do know that some of these men had been active in radical circles. It is improbable that they all underwent a change of heart and became staunch supporters of establishment values and causes. As for Brett himself, although he later distanced himself from the Chartist movement this does necessarily signify that he rejected their ambitions. The most that can be said with any certainty is that he had become disenchanted with the movement's leadership. Of course, this does not mean that Brett and all of his authors were committed radicals. Nor does it mean that they sought to inculcate radical beliefs in their young readers. However, what it does mean is that they were unlikely to have championed bourgeois ideals. The beliefs they espoused were far more likely to have engaged with working class attitudes.

Indeed, they did. Brett, assisted by the paper's authors, purposefully aligned *BOE* with the preoccupations of its working class readership. The paper's adventure stories connected with working class attitudes towards empire and America. Its school stories mirrored anxiety surrounding Forster's Education Act. Its historical fiction sought to satisfy intellectual curiosity, compensate for deficiencies in elementary schooling, honour heroic

rebels for their nonconformity, and foster rudimentary political thinking. Its 'street Arab' stories promoted a self help ethic. Its non-fiction also carried a strong ideology of improvement; most notably, it supported working class enthusiasm for natural history. Its promotions reflected working class interests and pastimes, and were improving – even benevolent.

BOE did not merely seek to reflect the lifestyles and beliefs of its readership. It actually intended to inspire boys to engage with a range of working class activities and principles. Autobiographies and correspondence both suggest that readers responded keenly to this approach. Boys flocked in droves to read the paper's fiction. They empathised with their favourite heroes, adopting their names as pseudonyms. They praised the educative qualities of the paper, claiming that its stories were better educators than their schoolmasters. They wrote to Brett to satisfy their growing intellectual curiosities. Boys on both sides of the Atlantic communicated with each other, whilst British readers forged an informal community amongst themselves, and even met socially on occasions. Boys participated in improving pastimes, hobbies, sports and entertainments, from football to natural history. They donated money to good causes. They expressed an interest in politics. For several readers, the lessons which *BOE* taught them characterised not just their youth, but their adult lives too. The number of sources by which we can measure response to *BOE* is fairly limited. It is therefore difficult to assess just how the paper changed the behaviour and mentalities of its readers. Nonetheless, existing evidence suggests that it may well have had a considerable impact upon working class society and culture.

Historians have long contended that *BOE* was aimed at, and read by, the upper working and lower middle classes. However, it appears that this too is questionable. There is little evidence to suggest that *BOE* was meant for lower middle class boys; quite the opposite. In fact, the paper's ethos was largely incompatible with the lower middle class mindset. And although the paper may well have spoken to boys from the upper working class, it was not designed for them exclusively. Rather, *BOE* was intended to appeal to any astute, 'respectable', working class boy. Indeed, it was the 'respectable' working classes who comprised the majority of Brett's audience.

BOE's marked class allegiance set it apart from other periodicals. It made the paper attractive to young, working class readers. This, more than anything else, accounted for its high sale and longevity. So profound was the paper's appeal that its readers obstinately disobeyed parents and teachers intent upon confiscating their collections. They looked disdainfully upon the campaign against 'penny dreadfuls', which had failed to comprehend the qualities of their literature. They remained loyal to Brett, seldom defecting to his rivals. Although rival publishers, most notably the Emmett brothers, were also more sympathetic to working class concerns than historians have credited, they failed to achieve the same degree of affinity with their readers. At the other end of the spectrum, *The Boy's Own Paper* was poorly received by working class youths, despite the fact that it mimicked the outward appearance of *BOE*. Working class boys were strongly suspicious of its bourgeois messages. Its fiction, although often bloody, was too 'goody-goody'; its non-fiction, though educative, was not tailored to suit their tastes.

Yet the possibility remains that there were occasional slippages in the paper's message. For example, although the majority of *BOE*'s boy heroes were, like its readers, from working class backgrounds, some of its lead protagonists were of a higher social status. It has frequently been argued that the superiority demonstrated by these boys reinforced the idea of social hierarchy. However, these inconsistencies can be explained. The fact that some of *BOE*'s heroes were upper or middle class did not mean that the paper was seeking to reinforce the social status quo.

Firstly, having a lead hero from the upper or middle classes was, in the case of some stories, simply meaningless acquiescence to the conventions of a particular genre. The elements of these stories which were intended to address working class readers were subtle, embedded within the text, and had nothing to do with the class of the hero. This was so in many of *BOE*'s 'street Arab' stories, which even when headed by an elite protagonist took every opportunity to draw attention to social depravation – and promote a self help ethos. Secondly, in some stories it was absolutely necessary for the hero to be of a high class to allow the paper's messages to function correctly. For example, the heroes of *BOE*'s historical fiction needed to be of a suitably high rank in the military, royalty or aristocracy to allow them a privileged position in the historical event in question. Having a protagonist in the thick of the action made educative historical information, which boys craved, easier

to deliver. Thirdly, upper and middle class boys were sometimes employed as metaphors for working class boys. In the case of *BOE*'s school stories, as we have seen, Brett had no alternative but to portray his heroes as being of a high class. Had the paper's school stories been set in elementary schools rather than public schools, the riotous antics of their heroes would have provided ammunition for *BOE*'s moralistic critics. It has recently been argued that boys were more than able to filter out propaganda in even the most conservative of fiction, appropriating books for their own enjoyment and interest whilst remaining unaffected by the bourgeois ideals they espoused.¹ This considered, there can be little doubt that boys were more than capable of interpreting the messages which *BOE* carried whilst ignoring the class status of some of its heroes – indeed, reader response reflects this well.

BOE's significance has been widely misinterpreted. Consequently, its importance has been overlooked. This thesis has sought to address this issue. The paper should now be considered an important, indigenous component of working class society and culture in mid to late Victorian Britain.

¹ J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), pp.322-35.

Bibliography

Notes on Sources, Footnotes and Bibliography

Although *Boys of England* sold a quarter of a million copies per week in its heyday, few volumes of the paper have survived to this day. This thesis was researched using the two significant runs of bound bi-annual volumes of *BOE* held in UK libraries. These belong to the British Library and the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. The British Library run is near complete, wanting only volumes five to ten (plus part of volume four). It boasts, along with the magazine itself, virtually every free gift which accompanied it. Although the Brotherton Library run does omit around a dozen volumes, it does include the crucial early volumes missing from the British Library run.

Some volumes in each run are of the *BOE* reissue, a weekly reprint of the paper which commenced in 1874. The *BOE* reissue was virtually identical to the original issue. Nevertheless, very effort has been made to consult the original issue of each volume. All footnotes refer to the original issue, except where the quoted material appears only in the reissue, or where the reissue has been used because the original volume does not exist in either run. Footnotes which refer to the reissue are clearly indicated. Where appropriate, footnotes referring to the reissue specify the original date upon which the material was issued instead of the date upon which it was reissued; again, footnotes clearly indicate whether the original or reissue date is specified.

Because most of *BOE*'s stories were published anonymously, it has often been difficult – and in many cases impossible – to attribute authorship. Where the author of a *BOE* story discussed within this thesis is known, his authorship is acknowledged within the body of the text. For ease of reference, the volume number in which each story or article commenced is also noted immediately following its first mention within any given chapter.

The majority of boys' publications, aside from *BOE*, were consulted in the British Library. Although they are now exceedingly rare, the British Library holds a copy of virtually every Newsagents' Publishing Company penny dreadful, and full or partial runs of

virtually every boys' weekly, including those published by Brett, the Emmett brothers, Alfred Harmsworth and the Religious Tract Society. It also houses the collection of renowned fanatic, Barry Ono. The bibliography of Victorian boys' periodical fiction is complex. For those wishing to investigate further, perhaps the best bibliographical studies of the genre are Diana Dixon's unpublished M.Phil dissertation *English Juvenile Periodical Literature, 1870-1914* (1978) and Arthur Waite's *The Quest for Bloods: a Study of the Victorian Penny Dreadful* (1997), though neither are infallible.

Place of publication, unless otherwise stated, is London. Websites, excluding online articles, are listed in the bibliography as homepage address and website name only. This is because numerous pages within each website have been utilised. Footnotes citing material from these websites specify individual page addresses, authors (wherever possible) and dates accessed.

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