

The Westerman Typescripts at the University of Worcester Research Collections

The Westerman Collection was originally deposited with the University Research Collections in December 2007 by Dennis Butts and a history of the collection up to this point, written by Dennis, is available on the Collections website¹. The typescripts which are the focus of the article were given to Dennis by John Westerman.

Since that time a number of published works by Percy Westerman and his son, JFC Westerman, have been added and the collection now holds 79 titles (83 Volumes) and 16 short or serialised stories by Percy Westerman together with six titles by JFC Westerman.

The Typescripts

The Collections hold seven typescripts in all, six of which were returned to Mrs. Westerman by Blackie & Son following her husband's death, the accompanying letter suggesting that they were never published by Blackie. The titles of the typescripts are: *Delivered by Air*, *Dual Control*, *The Gates of Kwei-Nan*, *A Mystery of the Java Sea*, *The Peril of the Air*, *The Stamford [Bridge] Mystery*

The final typescript is a dramatisation of *Captain Blundell's Treasure* one of two of his stories that Percy Westerman dramatised for a local amateur dramatic society, *King for a Month* being the other.

While talking of dramatised adaptations of Percy's work we also have, on DVD, a copy of *'Haunted Harbour'*. This one and a quarter hour a black & white silent film made in 1936 by Kinescout Productions, is an amateur drama featuring Walsall Sea Scouts investigating an espionage plot on Anglesey. A re-edited 'sound' version also exists "*where Inter-titles have been removed and a commentary and music track added. Some new model sequences have also been added*"² Originals of both versions are held at the Media Archive for Central England³

This article looks at the publication histories of the stories in the typescripts to the extent that I am aware of them, and any additional information that readers of this newsletter could supply would be very welcome.

¹ <http://libguides.worc.ac.uk/research-collections/our-collections/childrens-literature>

² <http://www.macearchive.org/Archive/Title/haunted-harbour-sound-version/MediaEntry/50418.html>

³ <http://www.macearchive.org/Results.html?&Keywords=westerman>

Delivered by Air (52,670 words) According to a note on the cover dated Jan. 1939 it tells “A ‘Far Eastern Airways’ story of air adventure, mostly in China.” The story features the hero Roy Croxley on a mission to return a Chinese statue to a ruined temple from where it was removed by a businessman Mr. Ottery Venn (a name taken from ‘Venn Ottery’ some 65 miles to the west of Wareham perhaps?) who believes it has brought him bad luck ever since. At present we know nothing further about this title including if, or where and when, it may have been published.

Dual Control (20,000 words) is a self-contained adventure featuring Midshipman Kenneth Raxworthy RN, the hero of the novel bearing his name, published by Blackie in 1936. In this tale Raxworthy dives into the sea from the liner *Polyanthus* to help a young lady, Fiona McAlastair, who has fallen overboard. The two then overcome numerous difficulties before finally reaching safety in the Palestine Mandated Territory. The cover has typed “*Dual Control by Percy F. Westerman*” and a hand written addition in blue pencil “*Midshipman Raxworthy Part IV*”, suggesting that *Dual Control* maybe an episode cut from the novel.

In *Dual Control* Raxworthy is on the *Polyanthus* having left the light-cruiser *Kirkham* and is in transit to join a new ship, the light-cruiser *Ripon*, on the East Indies Station. As in the novel we leave Raxworthy at the end of part I on the *Kirkham* and join him at the start of part II on the *Ripon* it seems probable that, despite the blue pencilled note, that this episode was intended as part II in an earlier draft of the book.

The Gates of Kwei-Nan (22,500 words) was published in *Chums*, and the Collections have a copy of the *Chums Annual* for 1933-34 in which it appears (p 323). The story follows the exploits of ‘Midshipman Vereker’ in a “*stirring tale of work by British ... against bandits in China*”⁴

A Mystery of the Java Sea (85,000 words in 2 vols.) A version of this story was published in *Boy’s Own Paper* in 1941 and we have one of the issues in which it was serialised⁵. The May issue contains chapters VII to XII, and a comparison with the typescript indicates that the story was either edited, mainly by removing episodes that were peripheral to the main storyline or our typescript represents an expanded version of the story submitted to Blackie.

While considering the story a good one, the editors at Blackie had expressed concern that as it had been “*written between the Wars, [it was] depicting Malaya in a way quite out of date.*”⁶ Other comments being that a “*Better title [was] wanted*”, possibly to differentiate it from the previously serialised version, and “*could the first part be rewritten*” The comments are dated April 1952, so it is possible that the editorial team were concerned that the story

⁴ From a handwritten note on the flyleaf dated Feb. 1933

⁵ *Boy’s own paper*, v63, n8 May 1941 p177.

⁶ The comments are from notes stuck to the original green card covers of the typescripts.

did not reflect the events and consequences of the Malayan Emergency which had flared up in 1948.

The Peril of the Air (144,500 words in 2 vols.) comprises two typescripts which deal with the scenario of war breaking out between Britain and Russia. There are, however, editorial doubts expressed about Westerman's depiction of Russia as illustrated by pencilled notes on both volumes:

"before the book is put on the [list?] the situation must be considered: Russia is here shown as the villain of the piece" Oct 1933⁷ and "Passed for press save for the consideration of the Russian question..." Nov 1933⁸

One passage singled out for attention, perhaps also indicates an unspoken worry about the depiction of Germany:

"Germany, by allowing a certain train to leave Switzerland and proceed through her country to Russia during the Great War, had paved the way for the revolution that had overthrown, first Czarism and then the Kerensky regime. By doing so she had sown dragons' teeth that, springing up as armed men, had threatened to overwhelm her until the Nazis took bold and effective steps to crush Bolshevism from their midst."⁹

A subsequent note dated June 1935 says that – *"the author agreed that it would be best to keep this in cold storage"*¹⁰

It is interesting to contrast this concern on the part of the editorial team at Blackie with that of the editor of *'Chums'* as the serialised story *'The Red Pirate'* that appears in the *'Chums Annual'* for 1933-34. In this tale the Russians are clearly the *'villains of the piece'*, breaking an international treaty on the banning of submarines:

"...a story of foreign intrigue against Britain, and how a party of British Citizens were swept up in this net of intrigue, and underwent amazing adventures in the hands of Soviet plotters."¹¹

A further twist is then added in that about a year later, around the same time as the comment above was being written on the cover of the typescript of *'Peril'*, Blackie were publishing the book version of *'The Red Pirate'*.

⁷ On the flyleaf to vol.1

⁸ On the cover of vol.2

⁹ *The Peril of the Air* [typescript], p239

¹⁰ On the flyleaf to vol.1

¹¹ *Chums Annual* 1933-34, p711.

The Stamford Bridge Mystery (65,780 words) May have been serialised in '*The Scout*' circa 1933, otherwise nothing known. The story is one of a group of sea scouts solving a murder mystery in Yorkshire.

The editorial team at Blackie obviously had some concerns about this story as there is a pencilled note on the cover '*Postponed sine die...see Readers Report*', unfortunately we don't know what that reader had to say! There also seems to have been a question over the title at some point as the title on the cover has the word 'Bridge' crossed out in red.

Please feel free to contact me regarding the Westerman Collection or the Research collections in general.

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