

# The Daily Trident

Peter Lewis

Readers of the *Chronicle* novels will know, of course, of Richard Maddison's favourite (and only) newspaper, the Daily Trident (*Daily Mail*) which he read faithfully all his adult life, with almost slavish devotion, believing every word he read in it, often quoting from it and reading passages from it to his unfortunate family. The paper, he said, was inspired by common sense. (Also, see *Donkey Boy*, p. 46.)

Williamson made no attempt to 'disguise' the paper except by changing its name. We recall the story in *Young Phillip Maddison*, Ch. 3, when at Brighton in 1910 Phillip by chance met Sir William Castleton (Harmsworth), and Uncle Hugh says "Castleton and his Yellow Press! A catchpenny Empire of Money, Bluff and Blarney! I wouldn't touch his dam' Daily Liar with a barge pole." [My Concise Oxford Dictionary thus defines 'the yellow Press': "sensational newspapers, especially of chauvinistic tendencies."]

Richard Maddison was of course drawn from the character of Henry's own father, and I can't help wondering whether Henry was taking a swipe at his father's naive and gullible choice of newspaper as well as at the paper itself (Richard's *only* other reading was Sherlock Holmes stories).

I was most interested to come across recently the passage below taken from *Fields of Praise*, 1980, the Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union, and I give a brief background: in 1905 Wales defeated the All Blacks, the touring New Zealand Rugby team, by 3 points (a try) to nil. This was (and still is) considered to be a tremendous sporting achievement, since repeated only twice. After the Welsh try, one of the All Blacks, Bob Deans, nearly scored a try which would have drawn the match, and Deans (supported incidentally by a Welsh player) claimed that in fact a try had been scored. The Scottish referee decided otherwise, and the issue has been hotly debated in Wales and New Zealand ever since. The occasion prompted the *Daily Mail* to coin the phrase 'a disputed try', which is of course a contradiction in terms.

*The press had, from the 1880s, begun to report rugby more and more fully in the accurate surmise that the game's popularity sold copies. It is, however, quite appropriate that the newspaper that fanned the flames of Dean's grievance was the London Daily Mail. Founded by Alfred Harmsworth in 1896, the half-penny Mail was skilfully designed to appeal to a new mass audience who wanted a paper that looked like the 'quality' papers but, in fact, purveyed sensationalism. Northcliffe insisted that his paper carried 'talking points' on every page; he gave saturation cover to sport, especially both types of football, inaugurating the 'gossip' sports writer as well as straightforward reports; above all he was the master of the 'stunt' story which he depicted to his editors as 'something which astounds' or 'any act which is surprising, theatrically effective'. The invincible All Blacks were, through their unstoppable progress, such a stunt in motion. Mail reporters followed them everywhere. The nature of their winning was used as credence for the proprietor's views on the growing superiority of 'colonial' stock to those left in over-populated, unadventurous Britain.*

It is not of course my intention to stir up the muddy waters of this old controversy in the hallowed pages of the Society journal but merely to allow the baffled reader to read this opinion of the *Daily Mail* (Trident) as it might have been at the turn of the century. I'm sure that in the intervening years the *Mail* has shrugged off the unhappy image of its early life.