

PETER FOSTER & GARETH JONES

Sacking the Editor



T Graham Brown (centre) with Basil Goodfellow (left) and Peter Lloyd (right) at Courmayeur, 1952. (Used with permission of the trustees of the National Library of Scotland.)

‘I have come to the conclusion that the time has arrived to make a change in the editorship of the *Journal*,’ wrote Sir Edwin Herbert^a, president of the Alpine Club, to Prof T Graham Brown, the incumbent editor. He continued: ‘What procedure would you like me to adopt?’¹

If he was expecting Graham Brown to fall on his sword and resign he did not know his man, despite 30 years of friendship. So, at a meeting of the Club’s committee in January 1954, Herbert proposed that Graham Brown should be dismissed to which the Committee agreed with one dissenting voice. What lay behind this action, unique in the annals of the *Alpine Journal*? The charge sheet included the seemingly trivial, such as imposing a house-style that eschewed the use of Christian names and, more irritatingly, that the *Journal* never appeared on time; but the hanging offence was that Graham Brown had upset Geoffrey Winthrop Young.

Graham Brown had been reluctant to accept the editorship. Responding

to a sounding letter from T S Blakeney^b, the Club’s assistant secretary, he wrote in September 1948: ‘Longstaff [President 1947-50] asked me a year ago if I would be willing to edit the *Journal*, and quite a lot of other people have asked me the same thing... In every case I have said “No” emphatically...’² He added: ‘... I do not feel well fitted for the work, which I also dislike.’³

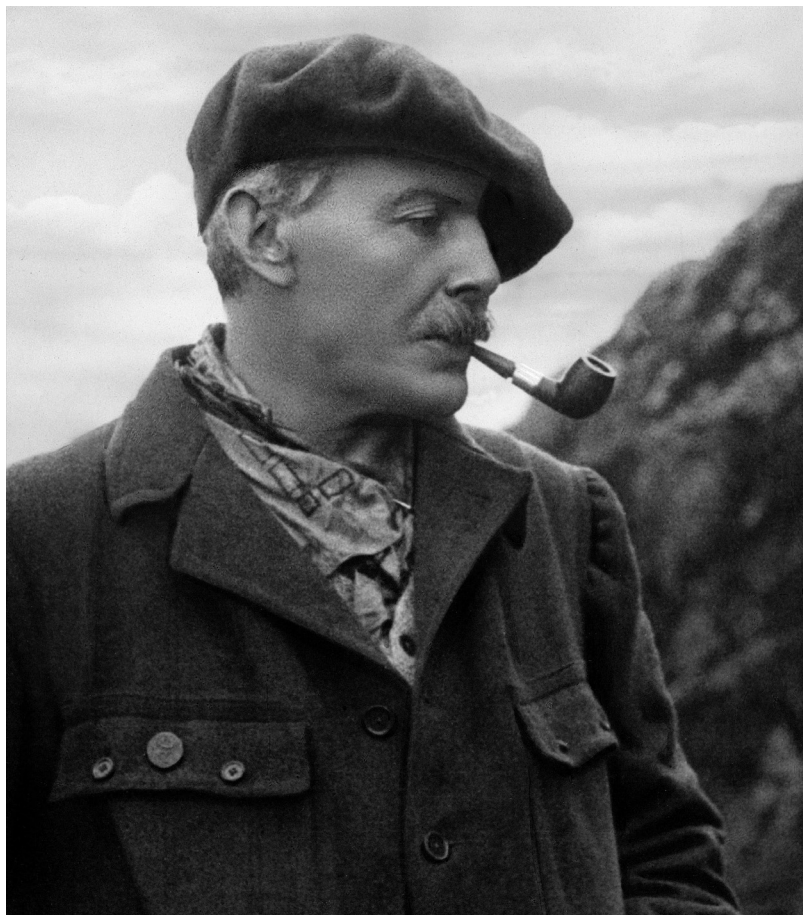
He was aware of his dilatoriness as a correspondent and tendency to procrastinate over tasks that bored him; he was, for example, habitually late with his income tax returns. Furthermore, he was nursing a grievance. He believed that he had been offered the position of vice-president of the Club only for the committee to have second thoughts and propose Raymond Greene^c instead. Slighted, Graham Brown was not inclined to help, but Longstaff continued to press him. At last, having received a formal request from the committee expressing its unanimity, Graham Brown relented: ‘I feel that I can no longer allow my private feelings to sway me, and it is therefore with feelings of inadequacy that I accept.’⁴

Graham Brown seemed well suited to the role. He had wide mountaineering experience and an extensive network of contacts, including foreign mountaineers. He had retired from the chair of physiology at Cardiff and, as a scientist, prized accuracy and truth. But Longstaff, commenting on Graham Brown’s ‘absurd addiction to absolute accuracy’, warned: ‘Speaking – or writing – the exact truth just breeds SWARMS [*sic*] of enemies.’⁵

Graham Brown assumed the role of editor in 1949 and his appointment met with widespread approval. His first number led with an article entitled ‘Alpine Uplift’, written by G E Howard^d, the theme of which was that contemporary mountaineering literature was tending to become too concerned with ‘mystical emotions and elevated thoughts’ rather than climbing action. No names were mentioned but the purveyors of ‘uplift’ recognised themselves. Arnold Lunn^e thought the article was ‘a good-humoured but definite attack on the Schuster-Young-Lunn school of alpine writers, to say nothing of Smythe, and our bunch cannot let our case go by default.’⁶ He riposted with a paper, ‘Alpine Puritanism’, which Graham Brown duly published.

If Graham Brown’s first number ruffled a few feathers, his second contained the seeds of his downfall. Douglas Busk^f had submitted an article in which he had employed the Christian names of his companions. Graham Brown indicated that he did not favour their use but allowed them to appear in the proofs, which were approved by Busk, and then deleted them. Busk was furious and wanted to escalate the matter to the committee. Tom Brocklebank^g was also annoyed that changes had been made to a review he had written. This editorial high-handedness would be used against him in the future.

However, it was an article Graham Brown wrote on the history of climbing on the Innominata Face of Mont Blanc that raised a furor. To a dispassionate reader, this was a detailed and rather tedious account. Even



Geoffrey Winthrop Young, writer and outdoor educator (AC president 1941-1943). (*Alpine Club Photo Library*).

reading between the lines it is difficult to see what caused offence, but Young wrote to the president Claude Elliott^b that: 'from the nature of its assertions and innuendo, [the article] was clearly intended to belittle my mountaineering reputation.' It constituted 'a breach with our Club tradition and a grave discourtesy to a Member of the Club.'⁷

Elliott, who would later recall that his presidency was blighted by having to deal with Graham Brown, whom he found 'abominable', replied to Young that: 'The sooner he [TGB] ceases to be Editor the better.'⁸

Graham Brown claimed not to understand what the fuss was about and replied disingenuously to Elliott: 'You write... as if there was some sort of feud between us [TGB and GWY],' adding 'I have already asked you for the specific points to which GWY objects, because my only aim is accuracy in all matters of history and I shall of course correct any mistakes which I

have made inadvertently...'⁹

However there had been some foul play. A rumour was circulating that Young had removed a page from Sir Edward Davidson's diary because the entry depreciated his performance on the south face of the Täschhorn in 1906. This climb had become a legend of Alpine achievement, not least due to Young's account in his book *On High Hills*. Pasted into the back of Davidson's diary is a letter from Young to Elliott, written at the beginning of 1950, in which he denied having tampered with the notebook and attacked Graham Brown, who he suspected of spreading the rumour, calling him 'base-minded' and a 'liar'.¹⁰

The extent to which Graham Brown propagated the story is unclear but he did have form, exemplified by his long-standing feud with Frank Smythe. [Editor's note: See 'The Brenva Feud', Foster & Jones, Vol 118, pp223-230] From the chronology of the letters to Elliott, it seems it was the discovery of this rumour that enraged Young and subsequently he saw malice in anything Graham Brown wrote concerning him. But, however much he impugned Graham Brown, there remained the inconvenient fact that the page that had previously been present was now missing and that in the interval the notebooks had been in Young's possession for safekeeping during the Second World War.

In the meantime Graham Brown, in common with his predecessors, was faced with the challenges of delivering the *Alpine Journal* within budget and on time. Longstaff had promised assistance to Graham Brown, which was provided by Blakeney and Emlyn Jones, who was appointed as assistant editor. Blakeney soon grew weary of Graham Brown, who often disappeared on climbing and sailing trips in Scotland and was incommunicado while his correspondence accumulated at the Marine Hotel in Mallaig. Blakeney felt that he was being imposed upon. Later he would claim that the fact that the *Journal* appeared at all 'owed little to the Editor's efforts and much to those who assisted him.'¹¹

In October 1950 he wrote to the honorary secretary Basil Goodfellow setting out Graham Brown's 'defects' as editor and suggested 'that it may be necessary to get rid of G-B [*sic*] as editor.' Although Blakeney endeavoured to maintain cordial working relations with Graham Brown, privately he took the opportunity to defame him. In response to a request for information from Lunn, who was preparing an obituary of Smythe, Blakeney wrote at length, disparaging Graham Brown's climbing ability and his contribution to the Brenva Face routes. To Smythe's widow, Nona, he wrote that Graham Brown 'is unreasonable and has a malicious mind' and advised her 'to slaughter him' in her planned biography of Frank.¹²

1951 saw the publication of Young's book, *Mountains with a Difference*. The possibility that Graham Brown would review it for the *Journal* caused panic in the Club. Elliott begged him not to do so. He denied that the request was special pleading for a friend but was rather an attempt to fend off another row; meanwhile he approached Lord Schuster, behind Graham Brown's back, to ask him to write a review. Even Graham Brown's friends,

fearing a split in the Club, urged him not to do it. In the end, C F Meade wrote a generous review.

In February 1952 Graham Brown recorded that the meeting of the Alpine Club committee 'went well' and that the 'atmosphere was much improved,' such that afterwards he could enjoy a 'very pleasant' dinner with Elliott and vice-president Leslie Shadbolt. But on 23 September 1952 the editorship of the *Journal* was once again an item on the agenda for the committee. R W Lloyd wrote to warn Graham Brown that: '... a perfect storm blew up over the journal, your enemies had a first class innings... They want your resignation.'¹³

The first ascent of Everest in May 1953 generated a sense of urgency amongst the senior officers of the Club, who were anxious to capitalise on the success. Sir Edwin Herbert, who had succeeded Elliott as president, exhorted Graham Brown to ensure that the *Journal* reporting the climb appeared at the end of October or, at the latest, the beginning of November and importantly, before the *Geographical Journal* in order to scoop the rival Royal Geographical Society. R W Lloyd, treasurer of the Club, hoped large sales of the *Alpine Journal* would generate some badly needed income.

The required schedule was impractical from the outset. By the beginning of September, Sir John Hunt had just managed to submit an account, written jointly with Mike Westmacott, – 'a terribly rushed job' – with an abridged version of his diary, and added that he had also sent copies of the article to French and Swiss journals, Hunt's action being endorsed by the Alpine Club. Now Graham Brown found himself in an unwanted race with foreign journals to publish first. The October deadline had already been missed and there were more delays, some of which were outside Graham Brown's control. Nevertheless there had been a lack of editorial focus resulting in the late return of proofs and the *Journal* eventually appeared on 15 December, after his continental competitors but still just in advance of the *Geographical Journal*.

Smarting from the loss of priority and reacting to a number of complaints from members of the Club, Herbert wrote to Graham Brown informing him of his intention to remove him from the editorship. The dossier of 'serious complaints' comprised just ten letters, all written in December 1953. Young and his friends, Brocklebank, Busk and Lunn were responsible for eight of the letters; Greene and W H Murray¹ wrote one each. Blakeney, exasperated and disaffected, orchestrated the protest and connived with Busk. The late appearance of the *Journal* was a common theme of the complainants.

Young had found additional reason to take offence. He criticised Graham Brown for publishing a brief article, written by Blakeney, in which it was correctly pointed out that Young had erroneously claimed the first descent of the Schaligrat in his books. Young demanded to know from Herbert whether Graham Brown was to continue as editor and if he were, threatened to take further action.¹⁴ Murray's letter was completely different in tone and content and raised important concerns: 'I am at last compelled to write you despite a very natural reluctance – for I count Graham Brown

as a friend whom I deeply respect...

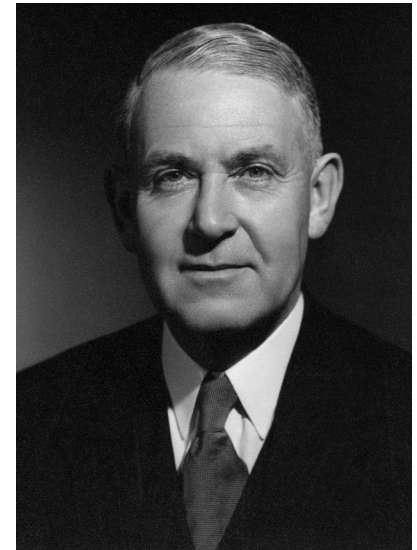
The Editorship of the *Journal* has been too long uncreative and has formed for itself a rut that grows annually deeper. I and several other members of the Club who joined the recently formed Alpine Climbing Group were impelled to do so because it had become no longer possible within the AC to keep ourselves adequately informed about Alpine climbing developments... The AJ has become the last place one looks to get news of routes and reconnaissances.'¹⁵

Here, at least, was some cogent criticism for the committee to consider.

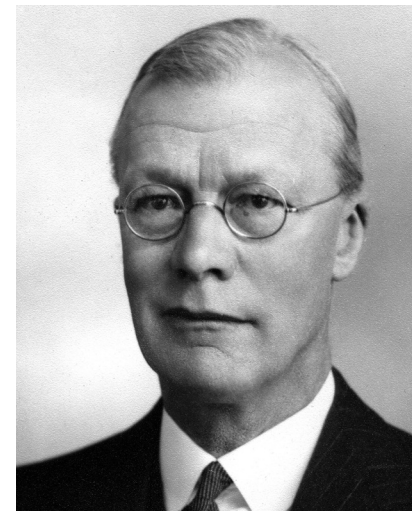
The committee met on 12 January 1954. In anticipation of its decision regarding the editorship, Busk wrote to Herbert from Addis Ababa, where he was serving as ambassador to Ethiopia: 'I have arranged for prayers to be said in all Coptic churches.'¹⁶

Graham Brown had been invited to attend the meeting but, unbeknown to the committee, was in hospital in Fort William recovering from injuries sustained in a fall whilst descending a hillside in Glencoe. At the meeting, the committee, with one dissenting voice, R W Lloyd's, agreed to dismiss Graham Brown and appointed F H Keenlyside as editor in his place. Herbert and the Committee maintained the fiction that the reason for Graham Brown's sacking was the 'impracticability of carrying on the *Journal* with the editor so far away [ie Cardiff] from London.'¹⁷ In fact, he was ousted as a result of an old-fashioned Alpine Club row.

Graham Brown suspected intrigue but recognised that there was no going back. True to form, he examined forensically the evidence against him. He maintained that his published statements concerning Young's climbs were historically accurate and thought it 'absurd' that he should have apologised for them. At the beginning of March 1954, he made a statement defending himself to a General Meeting of the Club. His friend, R W Lloyd, described



Above: Sir Edwin Savory Herbert, later Baron Tangley (President 1953-1956). Below: Sir Claude Aurelius Elliott, headmaster and provost of Eton (President 1950-1953). (Alpine Club Photo Library)



the mood of the evening: ‘...although nothing was said when he sat down, (everybody was too surprised to say anything) when he got up to make a short speech about the paper he was very strongly applauded. It seemed to me that he had the sympathy of the room.’¹⁸

Herbert gained a different impression and wrote to Graham Brown: ‘...the general feeling after your statement was that it was a pity... that it should have been made.’¹⁹ Later, he recalled that Graham Brown took his dismissal ‘very badly’ and ‘for some years refused to speak to me or even to acknowledge my presence... [but] ...suddenly one day out of the blue I had a little note from him saying that we were far too old friends to quarrel, and what about having lunch together? We lunched at the Athenaeum as though nothing had happened and our friendship was thus resumed.’²⁰

Acknowledgement

We thank the Alpine Club and National Library of Scotland for permission to reproduce quotations from material in their possession.

Notes

- a E S Herbert (1899-1973) fatefully introduced Graham Brown to F S Smythe at Montevens in 1927.
 b T S Blakeney (1903-1976) Salaried assistant secretary of the Club. In 1928, at Smythe's invitation, he had joined him and Graham Brown for an attempt on the Route Major.
 c C R Greene (1901-1982) A lifelong friend of Smythe.
 d G E Howard (1877-1956) Known for his wit and vice-president 1952-3.
 e A H Lunn (1888-1974) ‘had an almost mystical apprehension of eternal beauty as he contemplated his beloved mountains.’²¹
 f D L Busk (1906-1990) Old Etonian and diplomat. Together with Smythe, he had formed the ‘Young Shavers’, a ginger group which sought to challenge the ‘Old Stagers’ and reform the Alpine Club.
 g T A Brocklebank (1908-1984) Eton schoolmaster. A celebrated oarsman and a member of the 1933 expedition to Everest.
 h C A Elliott (1888-1973) Headmaster and Provost of Eton – nicknamed ‘The Emperor’. During the First World War he served in the Friends’ Ambulance Unit with Young, who was best man at his wedding.
 i W H Murray (1913-1996) was a passionate believer in ‘Uplift’. His friend, Bill Mackenzie, thought that Murray ‘saw an angel in every pitch’.²²

References

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4. GB to A Malcolm 11 Oct 1948; NLS Acc 4338/8
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KOEN VAN LOOCKE

The Shaping of Nineteenth Century Guiding



The guides at Meiringen. Developing guiding standards was harder in less famous Alpine resorts. (*Meiringen Museum*)

Nowadays mountain tourism is immensely popular. Between 120 to 170 million people visit mountain regions around the world annually, taking up 15 to 20 percent of the global tourism market, and their number continues to grow.¹ Around the world, more than 6000 official mountain guides lead a fraction of these people in the mountains,² allowing people to climb objectives or explore regions they otherwise would not. In a mountain guide they find someone who is capable of leading them safely, hopefully in good company. This article examines how this profession began and developed throughout the nineteenth century, and looks at the influence of mountaineers, and Alpine associations, in particular the Alpine Club and Swiss Alpine Club (SAC). My focus will be on Chamonix in France (before 1792, and between 1815 and 1860 it was part of the kingdom Piedmont-Sardinia), and to a lesser degree Valais (Wallis) and the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland. The most important period is between the 1850s and the