

DOMINO ISLAND: A HISTORY

There is immense gratification for a researcher when they retrieve from an archive box an item that has not been seen, or thought lost, for many years. Such was the emotion for me when, on the afternoon of Wednesday 17 May 2017, I removed a package marked 'Because Salton Died' from a box which was part of the Desmond Bagley archive, held at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center in Boston, USA.

I, and others, had been aware of the existence of a typescript listed in the collection as a finished but unpublished novel written by Bagley, but no one knew the state of the novel and fate had deigned me the opportunity of actually opening the package. I found inside an original draft large post quarto typescript consisting of 243 pages, typed on a manual typewriter, together with a photocopy of the typescript. The typescript, of approximately 89,000 words, bore on its title page:

NEW NOVEL

BECAUSE SALTON DIED

(if you can think of a better, please do)

I realised that I was the first person to have opened the package since it was sent to the archive by Joan Bagley in late 1997.

Instituted in 1963 as Special Collections and renamed in 2003 to honour its founder, the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center is located in the Mugar Memorial Library at Boston University. It is a repository, with public access, archiving material for individuals in the fields of literature, criticism, journalism, drama, music, film, civil rights, diplomacy and national affairs. In those early days of the archive Howard Gotlieb kept a weather eye on individuals whom he might approach with a view to asking them to donate their papers to the archive in the future. Howard Gotlieb personally wrote to Desmond Bagley on 23 December 1964 requesting just that, which showed great foresight as Bagley had by then only published his first novel *The Golden Keel*.

Following the publication of the author's second novel *High Citadel*, in 1965, a Bagley novel was published every year until *The Freedom Trap* (London: Collins, 1971). Bagley was in the habit of starting novels only to abandon them if he felt they

were not progressing as he wished. He often returned to some of these projects, revising and redrafting them and occasionally borrowing sections for other novels as the years progressed. Although a prolific writer he suffered from brief bouts of writer's block and 1971, as it happened, turned out to be a particularly bad year for the author.

On 22 July 1969 Bagley visited Iceland to conduct research for his novel *Running Blind*. It was Bagley's first espionage novel and the first of his published novels to be researched on location, the consequence of which is a story displaying a detailed authenticity of background. It was to become one of his most popular novels, which was later produced by BBC Scotland as a three-part television series. However following publication in 1970 it was Hollywood that had taken an interest in this novel and the author was approached by film producer Aaron Rosenberg who asked Bagley to visit Los Angeles to write a screenplay for the novel.

Bagley's visit to Hollywood during late 1970, early 1971 turned out to be quite an unpleasant experience, he later recalled:

This was a terrible experience that I would not wish to experience again. Everything you have read about Hollywood is true. I felt it was a great honour when I was informed that a movie would be made from the book and that I should travel to Hollywood to write the script. But my experience of the capital of cinema was a poor experience. I was there three months, and during the whole time we could not agree on a script. I sat there with a good idea in mind whilst around me sat a group of senior men who could not agree.¹

Bagley and his wife returned from the USA and very soon afterwards, during January and February of 1971, went on a month-long tour crossing the Sahara desert. In responding to a personal letter before the visit, the author mentioned that he was considering writing a novel about the desert for publication in 1972.

Returning from the Sahara, Bagley attempted a first draft of a book with the working title *Sahara Novel* but abandoned it quite quickly, and was still faced with the problem of providing Collins with a book for publication in 1971. He decided to revisit *The Freedom Trap*, originally started in 1966 and abandoned, completing it in May that year for publication in June. 1971 was a troublesome year for the author,

¹ 'Út í Óvissuna og Desmond Bagley': *Timinn*, 15 April 1973, pp.13 & 39.

for in that year he started four books, all of which collapsed somewhere between chapters four and six. He attributed this period of writer's block mainly to his Hollywood trip, and during that year Bagley became increasingly frustrated with the movie industry, writing on 18 July:

One thing that frets me about the film industry is that the movie moguls are hypnotised by instancy – a book must be written now, now, now. ²

In fact back in June 1968 Bagley had been asked by Robert Clark of the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) to write on the specific topic of heroin smuggling with the view to a film being produced. The author duly produced the requested novel, delivering *The Spoilers* to his publishers in November of that year. Following publication of the novel ABPC was taken over by EMI and the film project was shelved. This joined a growing list of titles that had seen a similar fate: *The Golden Keel*, *High Citadel*, *Landslide*, and more recently *Running Blind*. Later that year Warner Brothers Productions Ltd, who had by then acquired films rights to *The Freedom Trap*, made a request to change the name of this novel for the publication of the hardback edition in the United States. Bagley thought that *The Freedom Trap* was a good title, and didn't want to change it without a good suggestion.³

Bagley decided that he must break the jinx of 1971 and wrote to his publishers on 2 January 1972 indicating that he would be starting a new novel the next day. The drafts he started, of which there were three, centred around a former ex-long range desert group army colonel, named Fermor in two of the drafts and Col. Andrew Mathieson in the third. Other characters in the drafts bore the names of Major Andy Tozier, and John Follet, characters that had previously appeared in his novel *The Spoilers* written for ABPC.

These drafts were abandoned and on 26 March 1972, Bagley delivered a completed manuscript to his publishers with the working title *Because Salton Died*. He told his editor in an accompanying letter that in an attempt to break his writer's block he changed writing style and started to write a '*classic whodunnit*', which in

² Bagley, Desmond, correspondence to Francis Bennet, Collins publishers, 18 July 1971; from the Desmond Bagley Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

³ Bennet, Francis, Collins publishers, correspondence to Dan Rissner, Warner Brother Productions Ltd, 13 October 1971, op.cit.

the event he didn't achieve because his familiar style kept breaking in. He noted:

*My method of writing is singularly ill-adapted for the writing of a whodunnit. I begin with a situation and let it develop, and the plot follows where the development leads; whereas a whodunnit should be meticulously worked out in a synopsis before a key on the typewriter is touched. My method, however, leads to a certain spontaneity. I tossed in a variety of odd circumstances, characters and situations, and let them work themselves out.*⁴

What resulted was a classic Bagley *tour de force* involving murder and corruption on a Caribbean island and a protagonist in the form of a former army intelligence officer, now working in London as an insurance investigator.

Collins promptly scheduled the book and began selling rights: in less than two weeks the first translation deal (Swedish) was agreed.⁵ However on 11 April 1972 a Collins internal memo stated that Bagley had withdrawn the novel and there would be no novel for 1972, indicating the author would write to the Swedish publishers to explain the reasons for the delay.

It's probable that with Warner Bros due to commence filming of *The Freedom Trap*, which had now been renamed *The Mackintosh Man*, by September, Bagley's US publisher Doubleday had managed to persuade the author to withdraw *Because Salton Died* in favour of writing a novel similar to the impending film, in order that the two might be marketed together.⁶ So the typescript was returned to Bagley and was put aside in favour of other projects.

There is also the possibility that Bagley himself thought the manuscript unworthy of publication. Interviewed in June 1977 he mentioned having withdrawn two (unnamed) novels from his publishers as he was not too happy with them, being more concerned with his reputation than the wasted labour.⁷

The following month Bagley and his wife embarked on a tour of Scandinavia,

4 Bagley, Desmond, correspondence to Robert Knittel, Collins publishers, 26 March 1972, op.cit.

5 Brawn, David, HarperCollins publishers: pers. comm. 14 October 2018.

6 Brawn, David, interview with Jenny Kendall-Tobias, BBC Radio Guernsey 2 November 2018.

7 'Writer who chats up his computer': interview with Joan Stockdale, *Guernsey Press and Star*, 28 June 1977, p.4.

first visiting Strängnäs in Sweden to stay with a close personal friend, Iwan Hedman *aka* Iwan Morelius. Morelius (1931–2012), a captain in the Swedish army, founded the Swedish crime fiction publication *DAST Magazine* in 1967 and had started to correspond with Bagley in 1969. On this particular visit Bagley conducted a book signing at the local bookshop and also visited a publishing house in Stockholm before travelling on to Drammen in Norway where he met Mona Røkke who, then police superintendent for Drammen, later went into local politics and became a Member of the Norwegian Parliament. Drammen was to feature in Bagley's next novel and with the bout of writer's block well and truly behind him he commenced work on his new novel, *The Tightrope Men* (London: Collins, 1973), sending the final draft of the novel to his publishers on 29 September 1972. His close friend Iwan Morelius was to later feature as a character in his 1977 novel *The Enemy*.

Following her husband's death in 1983, Joan Bagley completed and oversaw the posthumous publication of two of his novels – *Night of Error* and *Juggernaut*. In the latter months of 1997 she took up the offer made to her husband by Howard Gotlieb 33 years earlier and donated his papers to Boston University, where they now rest in an archive of unparalleled diversity and richness. Joan had been an integral part of Desmond Bagley's work from the very first novel until the last, faithfully preserving his literary legacy until her own death on 30 June 1999.

Because Salton Died remained set aside and was thought lost until discovered in Bagley's personal papers in May 2017. The author had indicated on his typescript that if the publishers could think of a better title they should go ahead.

Well, they did . . . *Domino Island*.

Philip Eastwood

www.thebagleybrief.com