

performances Fred Shaw put up and on which he built his name. He started in 1920 with a team of imported Gurnays; in all, these birds won £60 during the year, but there was no great sensation. In 1921, with 13 birds of the original team and 12 late-bred cocks, he showed the way the wind was blowing by winning over £310 and being the second highest prize-winner in the 250 strong Manchester Flying Club. His total winnings in that club alone were £198. In all, he won 10 firsts in 11 successive races with various clubs, including 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Guernsey with the Manchester Flying Club, 1st and 2nd Granville with the Hyde Flying Club, also winning 1st Stockport Federation. This latter position was won at a velocity of 1,032 with a north-east wind and against 1,380 competitors. He followed this by sending four of his yearlings to Marennes with the Great Northern, a distance of 529 miles. He got three back from this, winning a special prize in the Hyde Flying Club for first yearling hen. Throughout the whole of this season he did not send more than nine birds to any race.

He followed this in 1922 with an even more successful season. In the South East Section of the Manchester Flying Club he won 1st and 2nd Bath, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Bournemouth, 8th Guernsey, 1st Rennes and 6th Marennes, following this, with his young birds, with 3rd Worcester, 1st and 3rd Bath, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th Bournemouth, and finishing up with the Young Bird Average Prize both for his section and for all sections of the Manchester Flying Club. The most outstanding of these wins was his 1st Rennes, in which he beat all the eight sections. This was a disastrous race with only a few home on the day, but his bird made a velocity of 942, winning by 14 minutes ahead of the nearest bird. This year he first became highest prize-winner in the Manchester Flying Club, Best Young Bird Average, and he won the 50 guinea Challenge Cup for the best average with an average velocity of 1,039, beating his next competitor by 36 yards per minute and the second best by 106. The winner of the Rennes race, "Neaty", was awarded the National Homing Union Gold Medal for this performance and the same bird's performance at Marennes.

In 1923 he dropped from his top position and was again second highest prize-winner with £153, representing 54 separate and distinct Club, Pool and Nomination prizes. He won five firsts in five different races; this, of course, is in the Manchester

FOUR

FRED SHAW

THE METEORIC CAREER OF FRED SHAW WILL ALWAYS BE ONE OF the seven wonders of the pigeon world. His incredible successes between 1921 and 1926 will live long in the annals of the sport. In those years he rose from being almost a nobody to the most successful fancier in Britain. When he had his clearance sale, he was the most highly thought of fancier in Britain. However, I think we would do well to remember one or two things while we consider these great successes of his.

Firstly, he was a showman and a businessman, and when I say showman I mean, of course, he knew how to display his pigeons to the best advantage, not only in the show pen but in advertisement columns. His advertisements in "The Racing Pigeon" during these years are masterpieces, and indeed they well deserve to be, for they were drawn up partly by him and partly by the incomparable Jack Bruce. It is important to remember also that he was a businessman engaged in the business of selling pigeons. It is well known that he flew Gurnays on the Widowhood System; but he called them "Shaw-Gurnays" on the "Shaw-Gurnay System", and indeed once objected to "my" system being called Widowhood. It is probably because he was selling pigeons that he laid such stress on the fact that his successes were not won on any system but on the quality of the pigeons alone, and for one year, 1923, he specifically denies that any pigeons were flown Widowhood. He realised that if, as some of his detractors said, his system was essential to make the Gurnays win, then obviously he would have to sell the system with the pigeons, and he would not or could not do that. The actual Widowhood System used by Fred Shaw was based on that used by his friend and teacher, Renier Gurnay, and further details will be found under that heading. He did make certain modifications to his system, which will be noted further on.

THE SIX YEARS PERFORMANCES

Having said this, let us have a look now at the tremendous

Flying Club alone, and does not include his other clubs, such as Stockport and District H.S., Hyde H.S., Stockport Social Circle, Manchester Saturday F.C., Gee Cross H.S. and Mottram H.S. It was this year that he said he did not use the "Shaw-Gurnay" system at all.

It should not be thought, of course, that this slight drop in success, or that of the following year, 1924, when he was third highest prize-winner, was due to any lack of ability of his birds; he was always trying experiments and looking for new methods, and if some of these experiments caused him to lose a pound or two, he was not the man to worry, especially as he still maintained an unequalled record in pigeon racing. In 1924 his winnings in the Manchester Flying Club totalled £140, representing 70 Club, Pool and Nomination prizes, including three firsts. These birds also made the distance to Marennes, where 17 out of the 18 returned. In 1925 he was again highest prize-winner in the Manchester Flying Club, winning over £197, and also the Young Bird Average. In his final year before his clearance sale, 1926, he was sixth highest prize-winner with over £111.

THE £1,000 CHALLENGE

It was in January 1924 that the famous £1,000 Challenge was made. This was his reply to the anonymous detractors of the Gurnay strain, and, as he well knew, first-class publicity for his birds. This is the actual wording of the challenge:—

"Against any loft within the Manchester Flying Club radius, in their season's programme of 7 races for Old Birds, Worcester to Marennes, 529 miles, 3 Prizes each race, £50, £30, £20, no bird home same day no prize. 1 bird takes the lot.

"In addition, the loft winning most money as above to have a Special Prize of £150, also the loft making the best average over all the 7 races to have a Special Prize of £150 (total time total distance system). In all races 10 birds to be nominated each race on marking day".

There were no takers, not surprisingly, since the shorter races at which he was most successful were best provided for. Nevertheless, it provoked a lively correspondence in "The Racing Pigeon", in which many well-known fanciers joined. The final

letter came from Mr. Shaw and had this footnote by the Editor of "The Racing Pigeon":

"The reason your last letter was in the advertisement columns was because we look upon all challenges simply as advertisements, and saw no reason to classify yours differently as you were the original challenger. As it is quite evident nothing is coming out of this challenge business, the correspondence is closed.—Ed., 'R.P.'"

MOST SUCCESSFUL IN SHORT RACES

Fred Shaw knew as well as anybody, and freely admitted, that Renier Gurnay only raced his pigeons with outstanding success in races up to Angoulême, that is about 450 miles, and he knew, too, that his Gurnays were at their best at distances under 450 miles. He believed that long distances and particularly the two-day races were very difficult for birds flown Widowhood; consequently he never accepted the challenges for the real long-distance races. It is a wise man who knows his limitations.

The Gurnays, however, were unbeatable in the short races. From Bath, for example, he was in 1921 1st and 3rd; 1922 1st and 2nd; 1923 1st; 1924 1st and 3rd; 1925 1st and 2nd; 1926 race point changed to Mangotsfield—nevertheless, 1st, 2nd and 3rd, with 2,011 competing. Similarly, from Bournemouth, 1921 1st and 2nd; 1922 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th; 1923 1st, 2nd and 3rd; 1924 1st and 2nd; 1925 1st, 2nd and 3rd; 1926, the first failure, only 6th. This record is probably unbeaten anywhere in Britain. His success at his peak was such that the members gave up the Stockport Social Circle as hopeless, and pooling in the South East Section of the Manchester Flying Club became less and less.

When he was challenged to fly in a local club, and to race as successfully as he did in the Manchester Flying Club, he showed them what he could do. In the first race he sent five birds and won 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th; in the second race he sent four birds and won 1st, 2nd and 3rd; and from Marennes he won 1st, 3rd and 6th. In the whole of these he only had one of his first team of 20 cocks, "Champion Apollo", and the rest were made up of his second team of 20 yearling cocks and hens.

Although most of his fame came from his cocks, it was by no means these only that gained him his success. The hens "Spotter" and "Dancer" both won first Stockport Federation

against over 3,500 birds. Here, for example, are some of the performances of his better known birds.

"CHAMPION APOLLO": B. Cheq. Cock, 21.98. Untrained as youngster. 1sts (only in Manchester Flying Club), 1st Worcester S.E. section, 1st Worcester, all sections, 1,400 competing; 1st Bath, 1st Bournemouth S.E. section; 1st all sections by 56 yards per minute, East wind, 1,150 competing; Guernsey 1st section, 1st all sections. (With "Champion Picture") Bournemouth 1st section, 1st all sections. Flown: Guernsey, St. Malo, Nantes.

"CHAMPION PICTURE": B. Cheq. Cock, 20.67. 1sts only in Manchester Flying Club, 1st Bath all sections, 1st Bath S.E. Section, 1st Bournemouth S.E. Section, 1st Guernsey all sections, 1st Guernsey S.E. Section, 1st Bournemouth S.E. section. Three races in succession, 1st £5 single Nomination. Flown: Rennes, Guernsey, Marennes, Guernsey, Marennes, Guernsey, Marennes, and won many prizes in other clubs. It was said that "Champion Picture" and "Champion Apollo" smashed the Stockport Social Circle Club.

"CHAMPION BEST QUALITY": B. Cheq. Cock, 21.288. Untrained as youngster. 1st prizes only: 1st Cheltenham, H.H.S., 378 competing; 1st Bournemouth, H.H.S., 359 competing; 1st Bournemouth, Manchester F.C., 1st Mangotsfield S.E. section, 1st Mangotsfield, all sections, Manchester F.C., 2,011 competing. In 1925, competing in four successive races in the Manchester F.C.: Worcester 4th, Bath 6th, Bournemouth 1st, St. Malo 4th (beaten by "Viking"). Channel flights: Guernsey, Nantes, Marennes, St. Malo, Marennes, Nantes in 1926. Won 16th Nantes in Cheshire Nantes Club, only beaten by birds flying shorter distances.

"CHAMPION REPEATER": B. Cheq. Cock, 123.141. Untrained as youngster. 1924 to Guernsey, 2nd bird. 1925 won 1st Worcester, M.S.F.C., 1st Bournemouth, H.H.S., 5th St. Malo Manchester F.C. (beaten by loft mates) and 1st Marennes, 528 miles, in three clubs—Hyde H.S., Gee Cross and Mottram H.S. In pools from Marennes, Hyde H.S. Three Specials and Special for 1st prize-winner lowest velocity of season, 834 yards per minute; 5th Stockport H.S., 6th M.S.F.C. In 1926 sent to Dol in Manchester F.C., pooled for everything possible; returned following day with his claw fastened in the rubber ring through negligent ringing.

Two cocks bred from "Champion Apollo" were also most

successful:—"DANDY": B. Cheq. Cock, 24.44 — 1924 Worcester, 1925 2nd prize H.H.S., St. Malo, 1926 all stages to Marennes M.F.C. open race Marennes, £22 odd. "ALADDIN": Dark Cheq. Cock — 2nd prize Nantes, Manchester F.C., all sections, only beaten by 1 yard, a bird flying 12 miles less, 772 competing. These birds are all based on stock from Renier Gurnay, and for further details of this strain see Chapter Eleven.

HIS METHODS

Fred Shaw claimed, with some justification, that his birds could win under any system, although he raced the Widowhood System extensively. However, in 1923, he dropped this system altogether and raced them all naturally. He gave his birds an open loft and allowed them to fly as they liked, then one toss at 40 miles and into the first race at 86 miles. This, of course, was for his old birds. During the day, when he was away from his loft, his birds received no attention at all, but in the evenings he spent some considerable time sitting by the lofts, just watching them and picking the birds to pool.

He used trapping seed, particularly in the early stages of the training, so that they would enter quickly. This, of course, was particularly applicable to his naturally raced birds, for he rarely found difficulty with those which flew widowed. As a rule, he did not allow the water trough to remain in the loft continuously, but only for an hour or so after feeding.

The normal mixture that he gave his birds was tares and maple peas. He usually gave them the tares first, so that they would eat them and not just have the peas. He sometimes varied this diet by giving them beans before the peas, and followed this on the Wednesdays and Thursdays before racing with maize if he thought they had not eaten enough. The normal diet then was: after morning exercise—tares followed by peas; after evening exercise—tares or beans, followed by peas; and on Wednesdays and Thursdays before race days, maize was added.

During their training period and up to the time they were mated, he fed them a mixture of peas, tares and wheat. He did not believe in giving them beans until racing was at hand. The peas and wheat were frequently left in the loft the whole day, since he found that some of the hens were unable to get near the food at feeding times since they were driven by the cocks.

For the hens, as soon as they laid they were given only peas, with rarely some tares and occasionally small seeds if they had been flying during the day. After the youngsters had hatched and were about a week old, he would restart the beans, mostly for the benefit of the cocks who would now normally be needing them. The youngsters were fed like the hens, on peas and tares, with a little wheat on occasions.

At the beginning of the season, the birds were paired up in the normal way and watched carefully for a day or two to make sure that there was no fighting in the loft. In the week or so before mating, the birds were given plenty of exercise and opportunities made for introducing the birds gradually to each other. It was, of course, even more important than with a natural loft that the cock should only see its destined mate, and of course it should not be allowed to approach too close to the hen and upset the laying timetable.

He attached importance (as do a very large number of Belgians today) to getting the cock used to its nest box before the hen arrived, so that the cock would almost fly to its nest box rather than to the hen, although, of course, he did not carry this to the extremes to which it has been taken in some quarters. On the actual day of mating the hens, recognising by now their cocks, were introduced into the cocks' nest boxes, and were shut in for several hours. When they were first allowed out, all other nest boxes were kept closed, but on the second occasion they might be allowed to mix with a few other couples, and on the third occasion it was possible to let all the birds run together.

When the hen was about to lay, then her exercise would be limited to once a day in the morning, and the cocks would be exercised separately. After she laid, as a rule, the hen only brought up one of the eggs, and the other egg, in the case of a valuable pair, was put out to foster parents if possible. When this youngster was about 10 or 11 days old, the cock was left in sole charge and the hen removed to a distant loft.

This, it will be noticed, is rather similar to the semi-Widowhood System (see Chapter Fifteen) as quite frequently practised by many fanciers, and just as in the semi-Widowhood System a fancier will normally have to assist the cock to feed the youngster, usually when the cock is exercising morning and evening. This, of course, differs slightly from the method used by Gurnay, who used to separate the birds before the egg was

hatched and to allow the cock to sit alone until he deserted the eggs.

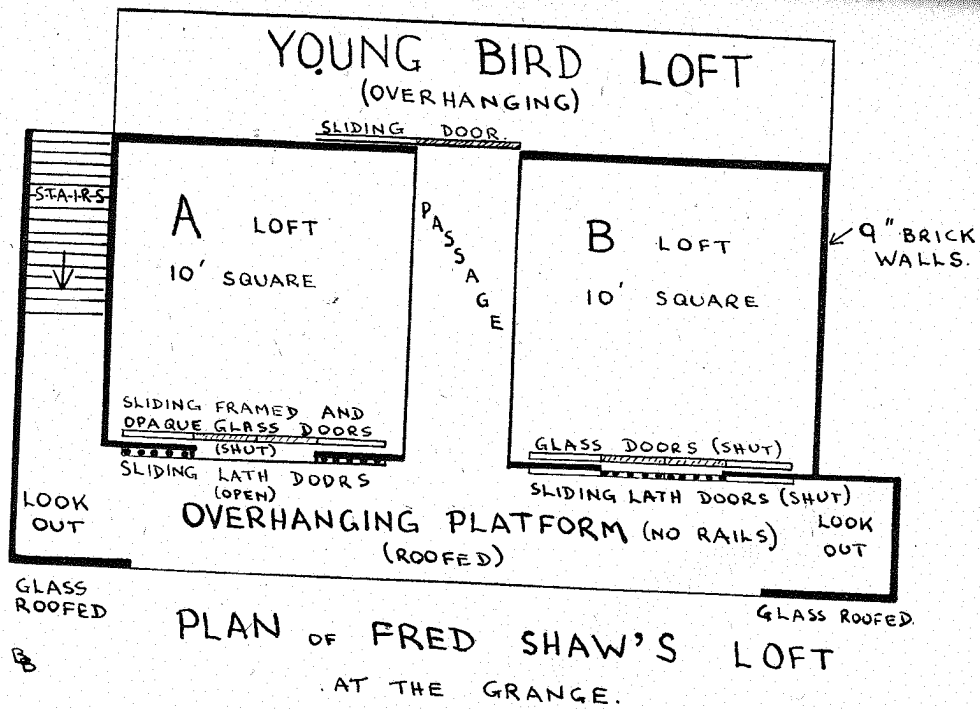
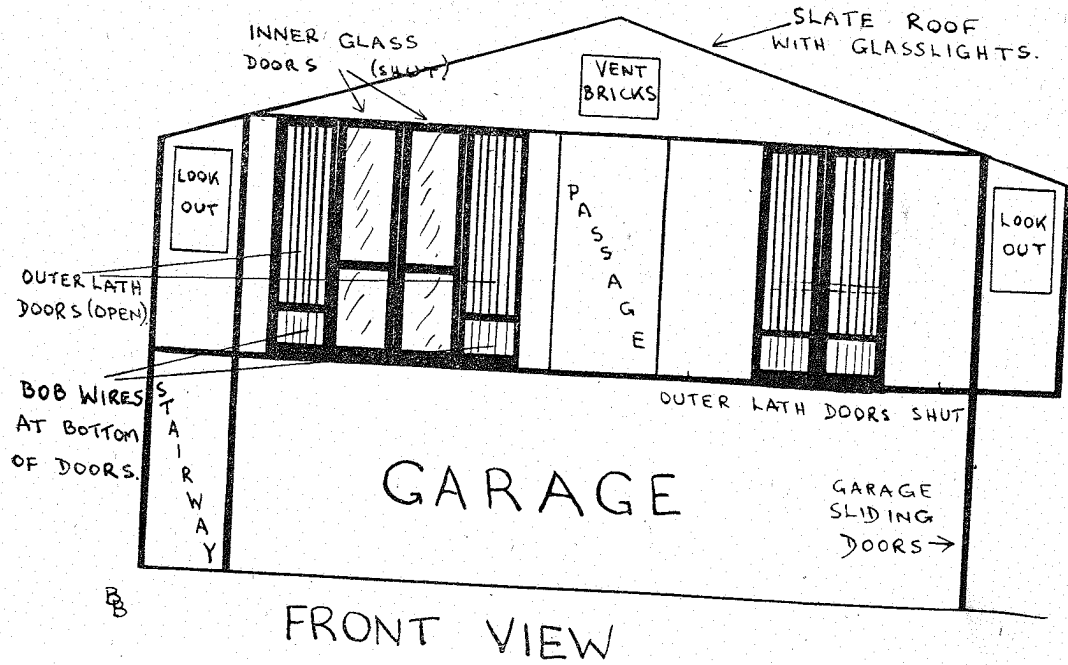
During this period of the hatching of the egg, the cocks were put into serious training. For those without a great deal of experience, they had several short tosses of 15 miles, then several at 30, and one or two at 40. The hens were, as a rule, trained over some of the shorter distances of about 15 miles, to keep them fit. It was arranged that the hen was always on the nest when the cock arrived. When the eggs hatched, the training was halted for a while, and regular exercise commenced. This, as a rule, was for the cocks only, although sometimes the hens were exercised at midday, when it was possible to exercise the cocks morning and evening.

After the hen had been removed, the cocks started training again with the 15 mile toss, and during this period they did not see their hens at all. This continued for about a week, until the youngster was ready to leave. It was then nearly the beginning of the racing season. The final part of this system before racing commenced was the re-introduction of the hens. The youngsters had by now been removed to the young bird loft and the cocks' nest boxes contained only the cock.

The hen was then placed back in the nest box, but great care was taken to see that there was no treading. The cock was then placed in its basket for a training toss. This procedure was repeated on all the tosses until the first race. On returning from each of these training tosses, the hen was, of course, waiting for the cock, and they were allowed to remain together for a short while before being separated again. The hen was well fed before the cock returned, and the cock had near at hand ready supplies of maples or small seeds, which he could pick up as soon as he felt inclined. All food was placed in pots inside the nest box.

During racing, before the cock was basketed, the hen was shown to the cock for a few minutes, but they were not allowed into the same nest box. Later on the hen, of course, was waiting in the nest box when the cock returned, and about half an hour after the cock returned the hen was removed to its loft as usual.

There was nothing special about his loft, but he was a great believer in the value of light for pigeons, and indeed his loft in later years, at Bramhall, was a converted greenhouse, white-washed on the inside. For similar reasons he decried the use of



darkened lofts for Widowhood pigeons, saying that they were unnecessary. His old loft at The Grange, Hyde, was a solid, brick-built affair, with large doors the full height of the loft, open on race days, and with the nestboxes at the other end of each section.

A loft he used in his later years (not the one he raced to in his period of greatest successes) was of steel and asbestos, about 20ft. by 6ft. This had ventilators, a dowel front and glass roof lights to let in the sunlight he believed so important. In one compartment there were box perches and a triangular platform in the centre of the floor, on which the hoppers were kept, and which also served as a table. The young bird section had the usual fittings, except that the floor was raised to allow the accommodation of trays of feeding stuffs underneath. The racing section contained separate nest boxes about 18in. \times 23in. These were the same pattern as he used in his old loft at The Grange, and were closed in the front by bolting wires which would only allow the bird to enter. A door was fitted so that when open it became a perch. It is similar in appearance to that used by W. S. Pearson. There was only a narrow dropping board with a single bolt wire on the entrance. The whole thing was quite simple, as were his earlier lofts, and designed to give a maximum of light and air. It is now owned by R. Clarke in Scotland.