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### PRESIDENT'S NOTES

When I was first asked to be President of a Society about my own father the idea seemed incongruous, particularly as all patriarchal positions in this family have been firmly held by Dad himself. Then I thought that such a society would really be to do with the books, and not Henry as I knew him. His books are public property, whereas the memories of his life are private. Then I thought how, sooner or later, when I get down to the biography, they too will be public. The idea was startling. Was I really going to talk about his, and indirectly, my own private life with the kind of honesty demanded by a biographer?

The thought began a metamorphosis in my feelings for my own father. Hitherto I had merely been collecting material and facts. Fans and well-wishers peered in through the windows of consciousness and went away again as they had done all through my life. With the formation of the Society, I suddenly felt them all on the inside of the window, looking at the facts themselves, making their own assessments, and wondering whether I was capable of the job I had taken on. It is a healthy situation for myself. It is now nearly three years since I heard over the telephone in the village of Weare Gifford in North Devon, where we were making the film of Tarka the Otter, those three words from my mother,

'Dad is dead',

which have lain like ice on my mind.

Three years have passed during which I have been more concerned with all the problems of probate and property, setting aside all other problems, only to return to find that the ice has never melted. But the 'fans', I have suddenly realised, are friends, wishing me and the family, and particularly H.W., well, and this realisation has given me a boost of confidence in what is going to be a difficult time ahead. For the biography will be difficult, as I discover reasons for his behaviour and compulsion to write. Some people have

suggested that his biography has already been written, believing that many of the novels are semi-autobiographical. They will be in for a surprise. H.W. was not necessarily talking about himself when he chronicled Phillip, Willie, Wilbo, or even H.W. himself, and my discovery of the truth about this talented, sensitive, complicated, evasive, difficult man will be a revelation to myself and perhaps to others as well.

The Henry Williamson Society is an important step forward. For many it will be a medium through which like-minded people can meet, and I do not necessarily mean for the purpose of discussing H.W. himself, for if they like his books they will find much in common as well. Then there will of course be the opportunity to hear at first hand information about new publications on H.W., of new editions of his books, many of which have been out of print for far too long; even of films like that of Salar presently being made in Germany, and of projected broadcasts.

Members of the Society can help to promote this prolific but much under-rated author by lobbying libraries to purchase new editions, and by writing to publishers to reprint, even by recommending H.W.'s books to their friends. Some members may themselves be reviewers or writers, where they would be in a position to reach a wider audience. There is even the faint possibility that a member, like the man who wrote to me last week, might want to help promote a film by becoming an 'Angel'. In this case he had suggested offering a sum of money towards the vast expense of making The Phasian Bird into a film.

Then there is the problem of H.W.'s writing hut at Ox's Cross. Everyone would like to see this maintained and cared for as a museum as H.W. left it, since this one tiny building is central to almost the whole of his writing career. But due to distance and personal commitments, the family are finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil their obligations. Amongst the members there will surely be carpenters, handymen, even polish-

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ers, who under the aegis of a small management committee, could adopt the preservation of the hut and keep it in good repair. One day there may be an opportunity of opening it as a museum to the public, but at least in the meantime the Society could make its preservation a prime objective. It would help many people to feel closer to H.W.

Members may not be aware that the entire collection of H.W.'s manuscripts and typescripts (other than those presented to Exeter University during H.W.'s lifetime) have been presented to the Nation. This was the unanimous wish of the family, who felt this was the only way that the collection could be kept together in this country, and thus be available to the public in due course. The fact that the Nation accepted the H.W. Collection, shows that they now recognise that Henry Williamson has a place as a leading writer of modern times.

So the H.W. Society comes into being at a propitious time. But there is a lot to be done, and I hope members will have suggestions of their own. Lastly, may I record my thanks to all those members who have taken on the time-demanding activities as officers of the Society, and particularly are my thanks directed to George and Mary Heath, of Torridge Books, for their vision and action in bringing this Society into being.

Richard Williamson