

Secretary's Notes

DIARY NOTE - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1982

Arranged for Saturday 16 October, in Georgeham. It is hoped, as last year, that there will be a supplementary programme for Sunday morning. Full details will be circulated to members during September.

The last General Meeting invited proposals for alternative future venues. Several were proposed and discussed but were countered by a very strong belief that the major event of the Society's year must, for a number of reasons, not least that the Society lacks a headquarters proper, be held at a place strongly associated with its subject. That Georgeham be retained as the venue received an overwhelming vote of approval.

At the same time a date earlier than November was proposed that would allow longer daylight for outside activity and reduce the risk of encountering wintry weather. A date of any Saturday in October before the ending of British Summer Time was approved by vote.

THE WRITERS' AND ARTISTS' YEAR BOOK

Having acted on a kind hint from Mr Cyril Wright of the Richard Jefferies Society, the HW Society will now be listed under "Societies and Clubs" in this famous annual from 1983 onwards.

THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

We are now happy to be associated with the Alliance formed some eight years ago by Mrs Kathleen Adams of the George Eliot Fellowship. This Association is a volunteer band of many important and senior literary societies in this country pledged to provide mutual aid to any member society faced with a threat to Britain's literary heritage with which they might be connected. For example, if a building or its environs lived in or written about by their author were likely to be destroyed or developed, the concerted voice of the Alliance would support and protest alongside the threatened member. There are no fees, committee or meetings; just a sharing of postal costs.

NEW BOOKS TO BE PUBLISHED, SUMMER 1982

Daniel Farson's new book on Henry Williamson, previewed in the last issue of the HWS journal by Mr Farson himself, has now had its publication date put back to June 1982. We hope to include a review of the book in our next issue.

A slip enclosed with the last journal drew attention to a new work in preparation by Fr Brocard Sewell. For those who may have overlooked obtaining a prospectus, publication details are as follows:

Like Black Swans - Some People and themes, by Brocard Sewell, with an introduction by Colin Wilson. Tabb House. Limited Edition of 500 signed copies and numbered copies. Illustrated, 256 pp. Publication date: 30 July 1982. Price: £11.95 (post free on pre-publication orders, or add £1 on single copies thereafter) from the publishers at 11 Church St., Padstow, Cornwall, PL28 8BG.

This publication has been arranged to celebrate the seventieth birthday of Brocard Sewell, and will consist of a selection of essays and memoirs, some previously printed but now revised and extended, and others that will appear for the first time. Included are essays on men and women Fr Brocard feels have lacked recognition, and two considering religious matters. Among figures considered are Philip Howard, 'The Cardinal of Norfolk', Hawker of Morwenstow, Thomas Hardy and G.K. Chesterton, Montague Summers, Ann Quin, and a new essay on Henry Williamson.

GEORGEHAM 1981

I hope that the seventy and more members, guests and friends who went to Devon last November left satisfied rather than satiated. A feast of rich dishes served too close together can dull the distinction and pleasure the individual course deserves, and leave one turning to the soda-mints rather than a reflective brandy. This metaphor is perhaps extreme, as each course was a distinct delight to me, and, I think, to many others. For this success warm thanks are due to the speakers, Richard Williamson and David Hoyle, to the BBC and David Way for the loan of the film, and to Henry Williamson himself for the vocal record that he left.

On a dry but blustery and grey afternoon many members visited Ox's Cross and made their way to the Writing Hut now clearly showing the effects of half a century's battle with the elements. (By next November it should be fit to withstand another hundred years of buffeting.) After a cup of tea in the new house, back to the village and a last chance to enjoy a panoramic view of Georgeham from the top of the church tower before dusk set in. A small tribute from all of us was left on HW's grave just beyond the western end of the church.

After extending a warm welcome to our President, his sister Margaret Bream, and brother Robert with Robert's daughter Sarah, our Chairman opened the General Meeting, the business of which passed smoothly and quickly.

The fear expressed by David Hoyle that having offered to speak on the literary humour of HW he could find little to talk about, was soon dispelled. Before the end of this 'hors d'oeuvre' as he called it, hardly a dry eye remained. If occasionally it was the teller rather than the tale that drew the mirth, I think he would readily have been forgiven had HW been in the audience.

The mysterious working of a slide projector divined, and a refractory reading light taped into submission on the microphone stand, Richard Williamson proceeded with his talk. After well over an hour there was a refreshment break, then on again, until a failing voice determined that that was enough. Yet even this marathon seemed to have passed all too quickly. If this presentation were considered but the bare bones of a biography, which nevertheless increased our knowledge and insight so dramatically, it will take a great deal of patience to wait for the bones to be clothed in sinew and flesh and put before us on the printed page. But it will be a revelation well worth waiting for. It is a little sad to think that, for reasons of economy, only a fraction of the pictures chosen to illustrate the talk can be used in the book.

To attempt to quote even a few anecdotes would not really be satisfactory out of context and would, in any case, take up more space than I am allowed. I am afraid that those who missed the talk will have to wait for the book.

Confined to a running time of thirty minutes, the film made by David Way for BBC South West's series 'Mightier than the Sword...' on Henry Williamson was almost bound to be something of a compromise, at least for those not entirely new to the subject. Thus we hopped from Devon to Norfolk, then back to Devon. From Georgeham visitors to Ronald Duncan, to Richard Williamson, to Lady Mosley, with almost breathtaking speed. There was some fine photography and it seemed clear that the advice and knowledge of his family had ensured accuracy. The film at least did something to redress the omission by the BBC of failing to broadcast a tribute in 1977. So far only broadcast in the south-west, this film may enjoy a repeat showing on the national network. The film ended just before 11 a.m. on Remembrance Sunday, a day very important for Henry Williamson, as we recalled in a short silence of respect.

And so to the last item of recordings of varied length and on a number of subjects, ranging in time from the very first broadcast made in 1935 to one made in the late '60s. These held a still intent audience, until all too soon it was afternoon and time to pack away the things and say Goodbye until next year.

A BIZARRE NOTE

One becomes used to finding slight references to HW in many contexts and in a variety of works. Few are significant, often referring to some fact or work well known, and so pass from memory. Occasionally one of these scraps - perhaps just a few words - may be likened to the sudden finding of an awkward piece in a jigsaw puzzle fitting a niggling blank that has frustrated one for hours. A very tiny triumph. More rarely a new facet is exposed, and more rarely still, far from an answer being supplied, a new question is raised.

Recently I came upon one such provocateur in a really quite unlikely book. Here is the relevant paragraph:

*I remember the terror we felt at the stories about Crowley told by my mother in an old isolated house in England, where we later lived. I was eight when I determined to hunt Crowley down and kill him for the fear he caused my mother, and the evil he brought into the world. The writer, Henry Williamson, once told me that he, too, as a grown man, had felt the same way, that he had travelled to Paris with a revolver to shoot Crowley, but had found him away from home. It was difficult to find Crowley, who so often was out of his home, when wanted, and sometimes, by transcendental meditation, out of his own body.**

The subject of the piece, Aleister Crowley, is remembered only as an evil, vile man, The Great Beast and 'the wickedest man in the world', who, among his other talents, was an accomplished mountaineer and, I believe, climbed twice in the Himalayas. The author's father, Louis Wilkinson, was such a staunch disciple and admirer of Crowley that rather than end his association he allowed his wife to leave and later divorce him, taking their children with her. It was Crowley's threat that he or his evil would follow her wherever she went, and the dread that he might harm her children explains the author's desire to kill Crowley, although there is no clue that he ever attempted this. On the contrary, in later life, at his father's request admittedly, he went so far as to find a flat in Hastings, where he lived, for the aged Crowley to end his days. That he had an enduring fear of the man is certain, for having settled Crowley in Hastings he uprooted his own family and took them to a Christian community in Scotland.

But what caused Williamson to make the statement that he did, assuming it is an accurate report? Only two explanations seem likely.

1. That having listened to Wilkinson's unhappy story he concocted one as a sympathetic gesture, but nothing more.

2. That for some strong reason or feeling, it was the truth - though whether the recorded attempt actually took place, or was but an imagined plan translated into a fictitious act, I do not know.

Abundant proof of Williamson the Nature Mystic may be found in his writings, but I cannot recall anything that would support his deep interest in Black Magic, the Occult, or the sinister. Perhaps if *Tales of Moorland and Estuary* had contained more pieces in the vein of 'The Crake', 'Where the Bright Waters Meet', and perhaps 'The Yellow Boots', it could have been re-titled *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. There was a haunted story, 'Unknown', printed - its only appearance, I think, - in one of the Sunday supplements years ago, but this hardly establishes a deep involvement with the supernatural. Of course Crowley also wrote over eighty books, and his name was at the centre of many sensational news stories, any of which Williamson could have read; but would these have been sufficient to provoke the planning and attempted execution of such a violent deed? Can anyone provide an answer to this Bizarre Note?

*'Aleister Crowley Rest In?' by Oliver Marlow Wilkinson. From *Men of Mystery* edited by Colin Wilson, W.H. Allen, 1977.

Aleister Crowley and I have common ancestors. Sorry, but there it is. Ed.