

The Anna Cash Collection

WHEN I MET ANNA BROOK (her married name) in Norfolk during the Society's visit to Old Hall Farm in 1981, I knew already that she had enjoyed a friendship with Henry Williamson in 1969-70 when he was living in Ilfracombe. What was not evident then was that Anna had a substantial collection of letters, postcards and ephemera addressed to her by Henry over a period of many months and it was a pleasant surprise when she wrote offering these very personal mementoes to the Society, together with a number of letters which Henry wrote to her mother and father.

It falls to me formally to express the Society's gratitude for a gift made in a most generous spirit. The collection has been arranged into chronological order, and it may be viewed in the Society's Archive at Exeter University by prior arrangement with the deputy librarian.

BARRY BUFTON

WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN I'd had enough of formal education, and in time I found work in the West Country on a small dairy farm. I lived in a caravan, worked long hours, and read Henry Williamson's books from Chepstow Library. I discovered a vague address on the cover of one of the books, and wrote to Henry in appreciation. I described to him my work, how I loved to be out early in the wild fields overlooking the Severn Estuary, and how I enjoyed his writing. To my delight, he replied. His letters and cards never ceased from then on.

I visited him for a couple of days; and he drove me to Cornwall to meet my parents. In October I left the farm and went to be Henry's 'Secretary'. 'Companion' would be a better description, for I could more easily milk a cow than squeeze an order of words from a typewriter.

Henry told me that we were of like thought - and so we were, a man of seventy-four, and a seventeen year old girl. Time had a dream-like quality. He was tired, having just completed the *Chronicle*, and he needed company, and help. We lived half out of reality.

We brewed tea in the hut, with its particular smoky smell. We tried to do some proof-reading (*The Scandaroon*). Most of all we walked, on Exmoor, on Braunton Burrows, and out to Baggy Point.

Henry stood in the wind and said, "When I die, I'm going over here finish." And I was too young to help him recover his peace of mind.

Anna Brook