

Secretary's Notes

REFLECTIONS

This October will see the fifth Autumn and General Meeting to be held in Devon, and next May will mark the fifth anniversary of our foundation. This will be a small landmark and I believe the Society may, by and large, be justly satisfied with its achievements. I do not intend to repeat my comments of a year ago beyond noting the achievement of the plaque-unveiling in Brockley last May (and the successful weekend that followed) reported elsewhere in this issue.

One thing does worry me, though. Last year I asked, "And what of the future? This will depend greatly on your continued support..."; I should have added, "and not only financial." By this I mean not only attending meetings or buying publications, but being willing to participate in the running of the Society: to contribute to the Journal and the programme content of our meetings. For example, I was rather surprised that no nominations at all were received for any of the committee offices last year, although this was perhaps understandable in the light of our knowing that most retiring members were willing to stand again. Perhaps it was also a tacit vote of approval for the past work done by these members.

However, in March I issued a virtual "S.O.S." for a new Treasurer; there was not a single response, not even an enquiry. Had not Robin Mayes generously filled the breach at the last moment, I make no bones of the fact that the Society would have been in dire trouble. In fact, without a Treasurer it could not, I believe, have legally continued to function.

While I hardly think that any of us joined the Society principally to become involved in administration, paperwork, and other matters that already bedevil our daily lives, equally I am sure I need not spell out the necessity for such organisation within the Society. We should remember that for any of a host of reasons one, perhaps more, fairly vital offices could fall vacant at any time and, unless quickly filled, could jeopardise the continued existence of the Society. Even to contemplate this is a sickening thought. As will be clear, therefore, at present there does not exist even a short list of members who might consider committee office in extremis, upon whom a call might be made. If you are at least willing to have your name placed upon such a reserve list, please do contact either John Glanfield or myself. The knowledge that such a list existed would be a great assurance to us all.

The Journal, too, needs continued support. We have already printed a number of excellent and wide-ranging contributions, but there must surely be many members we have not yet heard from. Williamson's effect upon his readers is notoriously personal and, either through reticence or a fear of looking foolishly subjective, perhaps, many people may feel unequal to the task of putting their thoughts and views on paper. Not the least difficulty is the matter of finding the right words - so fluent

in the mind, but so hard for the hand to record - to express their feelings, and for the deeper and more profound matters, such as literary evaluation and comparison, the academic approach and background may be felt to be necessary. Clearly those engaged in an academic life may produce a fluidity of writing envied by those outside such circles whose daily life is more prosaic, but the simple statement, the personal viewpoint and appreciation, unaccompanied by footnotes and references, can be just as valuable, telling and relevant.

May we hope to see new names putting pen to paper in the future, and perhaps not least in the area of the evaluation of the literary worth of Henry's writing? More than almost any other modern writer in English he has suffered a lack of critical assessment of his work; indeed, since the mid 1930s at least, it has invariably been the man behind the writings, with often his so-called politics thrown in, who has obsessed critic after critic, reviewer after reviewer, often to the almost total exclusion of all else, when the supposed aim has been to 'evaluate' his work. Surely from its position as the *public* hub and central repository of knowledge the Society should lead the way in redressing the balance in respect of literary assessment and judgement of Henry's works? If the Society, by example, is to show a lead in the matters of appraisal and assessment, that, to a considerable extent, will have to come from within. Excellent things will, no doubt, come from outside, but it is up to us to set the task of redress in motion, thus prompting a new attitude and awareness outside our ranks.

As a final wish for 1984, I do hope that more members will come forward with proposals and propositions to be included in the programme of future meetings. In Journal No. 7 I threw open the door for members to come forward. Bryan Wake and Davis Hoyle have since entertained us, and given much food for thought. May we hear from *you* as well?

WILLIAMSON IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Many members will be familiar with the work of the late Edward Seago, perhaps mainly for his landscape work, pictures of circus life, or even his work as a war artist in the last war. In his lifetime he had a select following, his most famous patron being King George VI. Since his death prices for his work have steadily risen. How unusual for an artist!

A number of members will also be familiar with the portrait painted by Seago (during the last war) of Williamson on the Norfolk farm, and reproduced in Seago's book *Peace in War* (Collins, 1943). Seago caught the feverish man of those hard years, all bony face and dark eyes, haunted, little old cutty pipe in mouth, and trout rod in hand, both (I suspect) unused since Devon days. The portrait hung until recently at Ox's Cross. It has now been acquired by the National Portrait Gallery - the first example of Seago's portrait work to be hung there. Cleaning and other work has been done most satisfactorily. When known, details of when the

portrait will go on view will be included in these Notes.

WILLIAMSON BY C.F. TUNNICLIFFE

Little known, and so far unreproduced, this is a striking three-quarter length portrait of Williamson, also until recently hung at Ox's Cross. Almost austere, it combines a vague militaristic feeling - Williamson clad in long leather motor-coat of black - with the plainly realistic style echoing the work of many artists in the Thirties. A severe Williamson fixes his gaze upon the viewer, and, on a gloved fist - symbolically for both artist and sitter - is a peregrine falcon. I do not think the portrait has a date, but it must have been done either during Tunnicliffe's visit to Shallowford to work on the *Salar* illustrations or following (from sketches) in 1935.

It is the decision of the Williamson family to donate this portrait to the new North Devon Library in Barnstaple.

AN OLD SOLDIER REMEMBERS

An article concerning Henry and the forthcoming plaque unveiling which appeared in the April issue of the *Lewisham Outlook* caught the notice and interest of an old soldier of the Great War - Douglas Draycott of Sydenham, a Past President of the Queen's Own Regimental Association. Six months younger than Henry, he served in 1914 in the 20th Battalion, London Regiment, i.e. The Queen's Own, as a machine gunner, and, realising the proximity of Colfe's to their HQ at Blackheath, wondered whether Henry had joined that regiment. As he was neither a member of the Society nor a reader of Williamson, I gave Mr Draycott a summary of Henry's war service including, of course, his joining the London Rifle Brigade in the autumn of 1913, and pointing out the smokescreen laid in *How Dear Is Life* where the young Phillip Maddison, and therefore (we assume) the young Williamson, joined the London Highlanders, otherwise The London Scottish - 14th Battalion of the London Regiment. I recalled the cry from Phillip, when he found the Highlanders full of ex-school fellows who (he felt) thought him a coward: 'O, why had he not joined the Twentieth County of London at Blackheath?'

In a reply Mr Draycott noted: 'As it happens, my first experience of the Territorial Force was in 1911, at the HQ's of the London Rifle Brigade in the City, attending an Assault at Arms.

"Living in Lewisham, not long afterwards I joined the 20th London Regiment, little thinking of war in those far-off days, but unfortunately it was soon to overtake us. I served for five full years, 1914-1919, in France, Macedonia, Palestine and Egypt."

A long time ago indeed - a whole world away. I have passed our good wishes to Mr Draycott, with an added salute of respect due to an old soldier from those of us who served in later years.

THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

Still with the Great War in mind, I would draw the attention of those interested in the period, and who have not already become members, to The Western Front Association.

The Association was founded by Society member John Giles in 1980, and it already boasts in excess of 1500 members worldwide. The principal aim is to perpetuate the memory, courage and comradeship of those, of both sides, who served their countries in France and Flanders during 1914-1918. It does not seek to glorify war, is not a re-enactment society, nor is it commercially motivated; but it is entirely non-political and welcomes people of all ages as members.

As John recalls, the seed for the Association was planted with the stories told to him by his father - a regular soldier who was at Mons and was wounded at Le Cateau. His own service, a war later, in the Royal Fusiliers and the K.A.R., endorsed his feelings of courage and comradeship, and a first visit to the old battlefields in 1960 (he has been every year since), followed by two books, *The Ypres Salient* and *The Somme Then and Now*, finally brought him to write to General Sir John Glubb, and the Association was founded, with Sir John as Patron. Already the Association runs its own tours of pilgrimage to the old battlefields, has a Journal and Bulletin, published thrice-yearly, and holds bi-monthly meetings at the National Army Museum, London. Meetings are arranged at regional level for those who cannot reach London.

Membership runs from 11 November to 10 November, and the normal subscription is £8.50 in the U.K., or £10 for a joint membership. There are special rates for overseas members, and a specially reduced rate for U.K. and overseas veterans of World War I. For a membership form write to: The Membership Secretary (Mrs Kim Dopheide), 47 Hawthorn Avenue, Liverpool, L26 9XB.

BOOKS

VILLAGE TALES by HW. Breslich and Foss. £3.95. (Paperback)

No, I am afraid this is not a previously unpublished work, but a re-arranged title for *Tales of a Devon Village* (Faber, 1945). Published in April, it is a mixture of tales and stories re-arranged from the much earlier *The Village Book* and *The Labouring Life* (1930 and 1932).

A CHRONICLE OF ANCIENT SUNLIGHT

<i>The Dark Lantern</i>	Cedric Chivers, 'New Portway' edition.
<i>Donkey Boy</i>	All November, 1984. Hardback.
<i>Young Phillip Maddison</i>	£9.95 each.

As previously noted, these hardback editions are being published by Chivers, by arrangement with Macdonald and Jane's, for the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association, and thus will not be

generally available in the bookshops. However, these can usually be ordered through your usual bookseller, or, if you prefer, can be ordered direct from Cedric Chivers when postage will be additional.

<i>The Dark Lantern</i>	Publication: 23 August 1984	All published by
<i>Donkey Boy</i>	Publication: 11 October 1984	Zenith Books,
<i>Young Phillip Maddison</i>	Publication: January 1985	£3.95. Paperback.

Further publication dates will be listed as known.

The Phasian Bird by HW. Published by Boyd and Brewer. £3.95. Paperback
Publication: 25 October 1985

The first new edition since the book was published by Faber in 1948. Frankly, the book was not a success with the general reading public. It has been said that its relative failure was due to Williamson having 'lost' his reading public of pre-war days because of his political ideas. At best, this can only be partly true. *Norfolk Farm*, the *Devon Village* books, and *Sun in the Sands* had all sold well during and after the war. I believe it more likely that the faithful readers waiting for a follow-up to *Salar* were puzzled and perhaps mystified by this story of a game bird being mixed up with the tale of a strange farming artist and all set on a not unfamiliar farm in Norfolk between 1937 and 1944, and a brief appearance, too, in the guise of a pilot in the 8th USAF, of the English poet-flier, James Farrar. It should be remembered too that the book said a lot of things, not always palatable, that had to be left out of *Norfolk Farm*, a book familiar to many readers of the later novel; and, of course, this book preceded by many years the 'Norfolk' novels of the *Chronicle*. It is a sensitive and often compelling book, and if you do not have it, I urge you to obtain this new edition. It is hoped that the splendid golden pheasant painting done for the first edition wrapper by Mildred E. Eldridge will be used on the cover.

Tarka Country by Trevor Beer. Badger Books, Bideford, Devon, 1983. Photos and drawings (mostly by the author). Softback. £1.95.

North Devon artist, writer, naturalist and conservationist Trevor Beer felt that many people of today might wonder how what became known as 'Tarka Country', made famous almost sixty years ago, has fared in those years; what may still be seen by those wishing to follow Williamson's original description of Tarka's travels; and, not least, how accurate geographically was the original writing. This nicely-produced little book of 80 pages will be found to be not only a useful up-to-date guide, in which Trevor Beer confirms the meticulous description in the original work as being totally accurate, but it includes many useful and expert notes on the other mammals and birds of the area and their status today compared with that which they enjoyed in the early part of this century. There are one or two biographical errors, which Trevor deeply regrets, but he was relying on information supplied; and a few of the photographs, some of which are by Sandra Yeo, lack captions; but otherwise this is an excellent book.

Tunncliffe's Countryside. Introduced (and with notes) by Ian Niall. Clive Holloway Books. £16.95.

This was noted in Journal No. 9, but I literally had only ten minutes to view the book at that time, and it does deserve a further note. Essentially the book covers, by way of illustration, the corpus of work done by Tunncliffe as a book illustrator. Justifiably, a good deal of space is allotted to Tunncliffe's own books, especially *My Country Book*, *Mereside Chronicle* and the classic *Shorelands Summer Diary*. For all too many of Tunncliffe's admirers this may well be their only chance of ever seeing at least some of the illustrations from these books. His work for Williamson is quite well represented from *Tarka* onward, and under the main (but not vignettèd) illustrations, in every case is a relevant quotation from the text. Although Chapter Four is entitled 'Dreams and Wonderland', which, one might think, would have fitted the bill, there is no example from *The Star Born*. This is a pity, because some people have said that Tunncliffe could *only* illustrate the country scene or wildlife and that he only illustrated that with which he was in sympathy. Certainly in later, more established years, he may have picked his writers, and perhaps he was in no position to refuse *The Star Born*, but he made a magnificent job of what must have been the most difficult commission of his life, and which he especially (as a down-to-earth farmer's son) must have found almost baffling. His success is a mark of the artist of intuitive genius.

If his intuition for other writers was less of a strain to realise it is nonetheless marvellous that so often the authors whose work he illustrated claimed that he had captured, in essence or spirit, exactly what they had sought to achieve. Alison Uttley, for example, would have no other illustrator for her books.

The quality of reproduction, on art-paper throughout, including the colour-plates, seems to be uniformly excellent when compared with the originals of the books illustrated. This is a handsome book and well worthy of consideration by all those who admire Tunncliffe's book illustrations, but who cannot afford the time and expense trying to acquire the originals.

A Celebration of and for Frances Horovitz (1938-1983) Assembled and designed by Michael Horovitz. New Departures, 16 Piedmont, Bisley, Stroud, Glos. Illustrated by photographs. £2.00 (plus 50p postage in U.K.; as appropriate, abroad).

In addition to 29 of Frances's own poems, many previously unpublished, and including the last she wrote, there are photographs, from family snapshots to posed portraits; poems by her son Adam and as tributes from her friends of long standing; and some prose pieces. The preface is by Michael Horovitz.

In her review of the book (*Times Educational Supplement* 23 December, 1983), Anne Stevenson quotes from John Papworth's contribution: "She was a poet to the core, a veritable princess of the blood royal of

poets, and her poetry had about it a strange power to arouse spiritual awareness of matters far removed from what the words themselves might appear to encompass." Quite simply, she ennobled those who knew her, and, as John Papworth concluded, "may the inspiration of her memory be a beacon to us all as long as we tread our own paths and are able to use it".

HENRY WILLIAMSON: The Man, The Writings; a Symposium. Ed. Brocard Sewell. 1980. Tabb House, 11 Church Street, Padstow, Cornwall. £8.95, £1 postage.

Although this book was reviewed by Ronald Walker in Journal No. 2, October, 1980, many members have joined the Society since then, and may not have learned of the book from other sources. It consists of a collection of essays, many by people who knew Henry personally, and by those who have written critical and analytical studies on certain of his works. In addition, there are two important articles by Henry himself reprinted from magazines of small circulation, and, finally, the text of Ted Hughes's address at the Memorial Service of 1 December 1977, held at St Martin-in-the-Fields. The late Ronald Duncan, Ruth Tomalin, Hugh Cecil, Brocard Sewell, David Hoyle, Sylvia Bruce, and Kerstin Hegarty are among the contributors.

THE GEORGE ELIOT FELLOWSHIP: GEORGE ELIOT STATUE

As members will recall, the Society is one of the many literary societies conjoined with the Fellowship to fight, where necessary, for the benefit of all members, for such things as the retention of important sites, properties or other features, central to a particular figure, but threatened in some way. I am advised by Mrs K. Adams, Secretary, that a key site in the centre of Nuneaton, George Eliot's native town, and now being redeveloped, is available for a statue of the Victorian novelist. An international appeal for funds has therefore been launched to raise £10 000, the cost of raising such a statue in Nuneaton.

Would any members wishing to send a donation towards the appeal please forward to Mrs A. Reader, 20 Swift Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 6TS. Donations should be sent to GEORGE ELIOT STATUE APPEAL, and please make cheques etc. payable to: 'George Eliot Fellowship (Statue)'.

'WHY I THINK HENRY WILLIAMSON IS STILL WORTH READING'

It is intended to reprint the text of this most important paper, presented by its author, David Hoyle, during the weekend of the Plaque Unveiling. The paper will appear in pamphlet form as soon as possible. This will make it available to a wider readership than if reprinted in the Journal.

David's theme, highly subjective as he himself stresses, is why *he* still finds Henry Williamson worth reading, or, indeed, any writer whose novels might only be an escape from reality; in which case he - and we - might better channel his - and our - efforts towards averting real disasters which threaten us today. If, on the other hand, a writer can provide us with a 'moral dimension', a way of exploring the most subtle and complex workings of social life, then he or she is worth reading. David believes this criterion is met by Williamson and that he is not wanting when subjected to this ultimate test of value in his literature, at least in the best of his work. Thus he *can* be approached critically and without the prejudices of enthusiasm or hostility and still survive. David believes that it is in this way that Williamson will *eventually* be judged, and not by the stale orthodoxies that have attended his name for almost fifty years.

To illustrate his thesis, David chooses *The Golden Virgin* with its theme of lovelessness *and* love, and the subtle way even simple words and phrases, if considered carefully, convey complex ideas and something beyond character and event, something hardly ever attributed to Williamson who is seen almost wholly as a writer for whom words, and their complexities, exist only to record facts and re-creations.

A number of examples from the book vividly and convincingly endorse these views.

J.H.
