

## Secretary's Notes

DEVON - 1983

The promise of a fine autumn weekend - for our journey started in bright sunshine - gradually faded as we drove west and the afternoon drew on. It was almost dimmy-light when we called in briefly at Ox's Cross to find Richard Williamson cosily ensconced by a roaring stove in the Studio. The luxury cabinet gramophone, purchased in Shallowford days, was wound and part of the *Liebestod* from *Tristan* filled the darkening room as a wind-torn vanguard of dark clouds quenched the setting sun.

Overflowing gutters and rain lashing the windows - driven almost horizontally by the gale - forestalled any thought of a Saturday morning walk up to the Cross. Arriving by car even the final twenty yard dash to the Hut was quite enough to make us uncomfortably wet. Inside, the fine rebuilding work was immediately apparent. The rain, driven as by a giant hose, lashed the windows, until recently in sad decay. Now, only a tiny drop of water could force a way through the snug-fitting casement of oak. Richard and I set to with polish and rags on the chairs, the bookcase, the writing-table, with its blotting-pad upon which rested Henry's steel-rimmed glasses, and on the cabinet gramophone with the 1929 Bayreuth records, carried down from the Studio. Once more I admired the famous Seago portrait and the lesser known one by Tunncliffe hung especially for the occasion; then we were off for a (working) lunch at the Rock Inn.

A brave band assembled slowly at the Cross for the Hut re-opening ceremony, and, praise be, as three o'clock drew near, the rain eased and the east side of the Hut became a welcome lee for the gathering of faces old and new. Particularly welcome were Mrs Rose-Marie Duncan and Kerstin Hegarty. Back from the rigours of Blackpool, Tony Speller M.P. gave a speech that was thoughtful and well informed, and he hinted that perhaps Devon might follow the lead of Henry's family and the Society in ensuring that there was a memorial in the county to one of its greatest writers. In reply, and formally opening the Hut, Richard Williamson endorsed the enormous importance of the Hut and all that it represented. (A transcript of his speech appears elsewhere in this issue.) A vote of thanks was then most worthily accorded to Tony Evans for his truly splendid rebuilding and conservation work. At last the Hut was as Henry had always dreamed it would be: a building exhibiting the very best of rural English craftsmanship. Thanks were also offered to Jack Whithead for his splendid otter carving, a gift recorded in more detail elsewhere.

Once again the Village Hall in Georgeham provided the setting for Saturday evening, where the AGM re-elected those committee members standing for re-election.

With sadness our Chairman, John Glanfield, reported the death on October 2 of Frances Horovitz, and recalled the first meeting in 1980, and her memorable readings as part of Fr Brocard Sewell's paper *Henry Williamson: Old Soldier*. Her loss was deeply felt by a great many people all over the country. Also recorded was the death earlier in the year

of the poet and writer J.H.B. Peel, who had spoken so engagingly and memorably to the gathering of 1982. Fr Brocard provided a brief and moving tribute to Frances Horovitz, followed by a prayer and short silence in memory of two remarkable people.

Before another most excellent buffet from Irene Jones and her helpers, Ronald Walker gave a series of readings from Henry Williamson's works, which were, he stressed, a personal choice, but which in their variety of source, mood, and subject, succeeded marvellously in capturing the breadth and depth of Henry's writing ability. From quiet reflection - Christmas 1937 on the Norfolk Farm - to accusing bitterness in *The Power of the Dead*. From the absurdity and hilarity of a fancy-dress dance - *The Innocent Moon* - to searching and compassionate observations on war in *The Wet Flanders Plain*, and on to the vivid realisation of his minor characters such as Mr Garside in *The Pathway* and Twinkle at Christmas in *A Fox Under My Cloak*. Indeed, a selection which might hardly be bettered, and beautifully read as well.

Nigel Jones's thought-provoking talk provided a sharp contrast. So much that he said begged further consideration and examination that there was a unanimous wish that his text might be published at an early date, to which request he most kindly agreed. It is printed in this issue.

To end the evening, and following the gift made just prior to the weekend, last-minute arrangements allowed a showing of *The Vanishing Hedgerows*, a never-failing visual delight with Henry's message, the urgency and importance of which (sadly) is no less relevant today than it was more than a decade ago when the film was made.

Getting members to read short extracts illustrating her theme was a good move by Valerie Belsey towards general participation at the Nature seminar on Sunday morning. Sadly, travel arrangement had thinned the opening high attendance when Bryan Wake came to speak. This was a great pity, as he described so well his own coming to the works of Henry Williamson as a boy, his attitudes then, and his feelings and views today from a mature standpoint. Surely he struck many chords among his listeners that begged discussion at the close of the talk. This did not, alas, happen; perhaps we were all too contentedly full with the events of the weekend, but more participation - these are the occasions for all to have their say, 'off the cuff' - would have been welcome.

There was much to think about on the way home; much indeed. Happy thoughts of new friends, the varied talents freely given in a common aim, the splendid little Hut now fit to brave all weathers for many years to come, and sadness too for those who will never join us again in Ham St George.

#### DAVID COBHAM - A NEW VICE-PRESIDENT

It is with great pleasure that we welcome David Cobham to the Society as a logical conclusion to the rather more peripheral association enjoyed in

recent years during which his ready help and interest in the Society has been much appreciated.

It is hardly necessary to recount David's association and friendship with Henry Williamson which culminated in the film version of *Tarka...*, a project long in Henry's mind but frustrated for so many years through the lack of any proposal that he felt would adequately reflect his own unsentimental and objective treatment in the book. The result, which alas Henry never saw in completion, has received much justified acclaim. It is perhaps not so well known that Henry was at least indirectly responsible for David and his wife Janet leaving their home in Sussex and moving quite close to Henry's old farm on the Norfolk coast, having fallen in love with the area after working up there with Henry on their co-production of the film *The Vanishing Hedgerows*.

David's own interest and love of wildlife goes back to his boyhood, but his film career started in directing industrial documentaries. His first nature film, *Goshawk*, won awards in America and Australia (David is himself a former falconer). Other notable early films, made for the BBC, were one on the British Antarctic Survey, and *The Private Life of the Barn Owl*, a bird he loves dearly. Other films, all with a strong outdoor flavour, include the successful adaptation for television of 'BB's' splendid adventure story, *Brendon Chase*, and a co-production with CBC and other sponsors of some of Jack London's *Tales from the Klondike*, screened on Channel 4 last year. His most recent production was the series *Secrets of the Coast* made for TSW and networked by ITV late last summer.

We wish David, and his wife Janet, a long and happy association with the Society.

#### A GIFT TO THE SOCIETY

In my notes DEVON - 1983, above, I mentioned the hastily arranged showing of the film *The Vanishing Hedgerows*. A print of this unique film, without doubt the best in which Henry ever appeared, has been donated to the Society by David Cobham. This is a priceless acquisition and one in which Henry tells us face to face of his love and respect for the Earth and the countryside which were so much a part of his life. (Members may remember that the film was awarded the Silver Nymph at Monte Carlo in 1973.) Our sincere thanks to David Cobham for this exceptional gift.

#### ...AND ANOTHER GIFT

Handed over at the Hut ceremony was a very fine wood-carving of an otter as a gift to the Society and in memory of Henry Williamson. The donor and artist is Jack Whitehead, who now lives in a most picturesque spot on the edge of Wootton Creek on the Isle of Wight. At the end of the last war, Jack moved with his family to North Devon, a decision much in-

fluenced by his reading of Henry's books. He spent three happy years in Croyde being employed in the summer as Beach master of Croyde beach, then just opened to the public. For many years Jack has specialised in the restoration and carving of ship's figureheads. Among other commissions, he restored the figurehead of the *Cutty Sark*, and, as a long term project is restoring a collection of figureheads for the Cutty Sark Trust. He spent three years in the seventies on the carving for a new schooner being fitted out in Honolulu. Last year he completed (with his partner Norman Gaches) a major commission: the carving of a new figurehead - over 13 feet long - for H.M.S. *Warrior*, the first Ironclad in the Royal Navy, currently being restored in West Hartlepool. This was featured in a film made about Jack by the BBC in 1981, also seen on *Blue Peter*, and was on display at the 1983 Boat Show.

Jack last met Henry Williamson on the occasion of the launching of the replica *Golden Hind* at Appledore (for which he did some of the carving), an occasion he remembers with pleasure.

The otter presented by Jack is carved in teak from a mast used in early (1903) wireless experiments conducted by Marconi at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, and the base is a scale from a giant redwood picked up by Jack in California. It is particularly appropriate, giving the impression of peaty moorland water running over the shillets of a Devon river. The carving will be on permanent display in the Writing Hut, which until now, rather surprisingly, perhaps, contained no representation of an otter. *Photograph on page 44 © John Millar.*

#### NEW EDITIONS OF *A CHRONICLE OF ANCIENT SUNLIGHT*

As reported in the last issue, a new edition, in hardback, of the fifteen books will be published during this year and 1985. The edition will not, however, be generally available via bookshops, having been commissioned by the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association, and will be printed and published by Cedric Chivers in their New Portway series, priced at £9.95 each. (Members might note that it was not impossible to acquire past similar editions, e.g. *The Star Born*, reprint of 1933 edition, and *A Test to Destruction*. That these books will once again be available to an enormous public readership is, however, to be welcomed.) Good news for those on a budget wishing to put together, or complete, the sequent novels. It has been confirmed that all fifteen books will be published in a new paperback edition by ARROW BOOKS. Details of the proposed publishing schedule over 1984-85 will be given in due course.

#### DID YOU HEAR...

Richard Williamson interviewed by Brian Matthew on Radio 2's 'Round Midnight' broadcast on 21 December? The interview centred on the new edition of *Life in a Devon Village* (Breslich and Foss, £3.95, reported in Journal No. 8), although of course Richard was able to fit in a lot of other background detail as well. Brian Matthew seemed well briefed

and keen, and the whole, quite lengthy interview went with a swing. This is a very popular programme and must have reached a large audience including, I hope, many members. Advance notice was, I regret, too short to let everyone know.

#### ANOTHER LOOK AT C.F. TUNNICLIFFE

*Tunncliffe's Countryside* (Clive Holloway, £16.95). Introduction by Ian Niall.

This is Mr Niall's third book to commemorate the master wildlife artist and book illustrator, Charles Tunncliffe, who died in 1979.

After *A Sketchbook of Birds* (Gollancz, 1979, £7.95) published, alas, shortly after Tunncliffe's death, Mr Niall followed in 1980 with *Portrait of a Country Artist: C.F. Tunncliffe* (Gollancz, £10), a biography reviewed by Alan Dinot in Journal No. 2, with its somewhat contentious section on the relationship between Williamson and Tunncliffe, the latter's illustrations for *Tarka the Otter* being, of course, his first venture into the world of book illustrating.

It is this aspect of his varied artistic output that is covered in the present book which consists principally of extracts from some of the many books he illustrated over a period of almost fifty years, amply illustrated with examples of his wood engravings, scraperboards (these largely replaced wood engravings from the early Forties onward, the enormous strain placed on his eyesight by engraving having taken its toll), and some of his water-colours. From being a master etcher, he changed to wood engraving when the former fell out of favour, and soon gained a reputation second to none on this difficult and exacting medium. Williamson was indeed lucky that almost all the illustrations for his books were in this medium, including the exceptional work he produced for *The Star Born* (1933), surely the most difficult commission he ever undertook. His later scraperboard work also achieved the highest level of excellence and could be incredibly detailed. His ventures into colour work have always seemed to me less happy, often being over-rich and vivid, particularly so, for example, in the English 1936 De Luxe illustrated edition of *Salar the Salmon*, which included seventeen full-page water-colours, and which, according to Williamson, sold only 140 copies. Certainly a handful of the illustrations which were re-done as engravings for the illustrated American edition (also 1936) seem more effective in this medium. It is worth noting, though, that when some of these plates were reproduced in Mr Niall's biography, the colours were much more pleasing. Perhaps the fault lay in the colour-printing process used originally?

Among the many other authors Tunncliffe illustrated for were H.E. Bates, Negley Farson, Fraser Darling, Grant Watson, Richard Church, Rachel Carson, Ernest Hemingway, for Alison Uttley, with whom he was clearly in much accord, no less than seventeen books, and for Mr Niall himself, four books.

#### ALSO OF INTEREST

Is the entry for Tunncliffe in the *Dictionary of British Book Illustrators - The Twentieth Century* by Brigid Peppin and Lucy Micklethwait (John Murray, £30). Obviously some artists are left out, but this is nonetheless a most comprehensive work, each artist listed being well documented and often with an example of their work with the text the picture illustrated alongside.

#### SAMUEL JOHNSON BI-CENTENARY 1984

Received from the Johnson Society is a copy of their Diary of Events arranged to commemorate the bi-centenary of his death. These range from performances of *The Beggar's Opera* to be given at Johnson's old school, King Edward VI, Lichfield, in April; a cricket match on 28 June, to be played at Lichfield in costume and to the rules of Johnson's day; an International Conference from 7-15 July, to be held in London, Oxford and Lichfield; to a Johnson exhibition at 105 Piccadilly, put on by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and to run from July to September.

Those requiring a copy of the Diary may obtain it from the General Secretary, the Johnson Society, Johnson Birthplace Museum, Breadmarket Street, Lichfield, Staffs., WS13 6LG. Please enclose 9 X 4 s.a.e.

#### ENTRIES IN LITERARY REFERENCE BOOKS

Details of the Henry Williamson Society are now an established entry in *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book*, and as from this year the Society is also listed in the *The World Guide to Scientific Associations and Learned Societies*.

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 1984

This will be held over the weekend 13-14 October.

The change from Barnstaple to Putsborough for hotel accommodation in 1982 and again last year has proved logical and popular, while retaining the Village Hall in the centre of Georgeham for our Saturday evening function. There have, however, been some problems with the hotel on its use for social and other events over the remainder of the weekend, not least sharing with other parties. Since the hotel has re-opened for our use (it closes officially at the end of September) and really only to provide bed and breakfast, it is understandable that they would offer their other facilities, for which we have had no use elsewhere, which has resulted in some inconvenience to Society members. Clearly the solution (if we did not want to lose the benefits of the only large hotel) was to move the whole of our indoor events to the hotel. This does mean losing the village hall which in a few short years has become part of the atmosphere and enjoyment of our weeks in Devon, with the splendid treatment we have received from Irene Jones and her lady

helpers from the village. However, the comfort, convenience and value for money for members is our first priority, and we, the committee, have agreed our whole weekend will be based at the Putsborough Sands Hotel from this year onwards. The hotel will offer a range of options on accommodation to suit various requirements (these will be detailed in the AGM booking papers later in the year), and guarantees the Society *exclusive use* of the hotel over the whole weekend. The hotel will, of course, be open to all non-resident members, a non-residents licence having recently been obtained.

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#### HENRY WILLIAMSON SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS SERVICE

The publications service of the Henry Williamson Society makes available to members an exclusive catalogue of Henry Williamson material. It is a world-wide service and therefore forges a valuable link with Society members overseas.

Publications include photographs of HW's Lewisham and Ladywell environs, together with maps, a tour itinerary and informative notes. Back copies of the Society's Journal are also available (whilst stocks last), and these constitute a unique repository of HW pieces, comment and criticism. They are fast becoming collectors' items.

But we also aim, from time to time, to publish selections of Henry's fugitive work, as exemplified in the collection of journalistic pieces garnered from *The Weekly Despatch*, and published by the Society in 1983. Also in the course of production is *The Novels of Henry Williamson* by H. Middleton Murry, with a foreword by Dr Wheatley Blench.

In addition to these publications there are a number of tape recordings, the first of which, *Henry Williamson: Old Soldier* by Fr Brocard Sewell, is already a sell-out and is now in the course of being re-issued.

Perhaps the most ambitious Society production is the first of a two-part edition of *The Broadcasts of Henry Williamson*. The production of this cassette recording has been undertaken by John Homan by arrangement with BBC Records and with the kind permission of the Henry Williamson Literary Trust. Quality is variable owing to the age and condition of the original tapes. Small runs mean high production costs, and members are asked, therefore, to support the publications service. Volume sales mean that money can be invested in additional publications and cassettes, which otherwise it would not be possible to produce.

BRYAN HOLDEN  
PUBLICATIONS MANAGER