

Secretary's Notes

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 1985

This will be held over the weekend of 13-14 October and, as last year, will be based at the Putsborough Sands Hotel which proved a successful new venue.

I am sure that many of us regretted losing our Saturday evening function in Georgeham Village Hall but, as I pointed out in these Notes last year, there is no other hotel in the vicinity, on the edge of Georgeham, and thus conveniently located, and offering reasonable terms - a major consideration - and with the amount of accommodation available that we need. It should also be remembered that the hotel opens especially for our weekend, and to be open for accommodation only is not really viable. Further, there was always a problem of where to go for a chat and drink in comfort when the business of the evening finished, and the long trail - for many - back to Barnstable for accommodation was obviated.

Under the new arrangement the hotel guarantees us exclusive use for the whole weekend. I think there is no doubt that if we wished to return to the Village Hall we would lose the hotel accommodation and that this would be a retrograde step but for the few who make their own accommodation arrangements elsewhere in the vicinity of Georgeham.

Full details of the weekend, with the usual booking forms, will be sent to you not later than the beginning of September.

QUESTIONNAIRE - NEW VENUES FOR MEETINGS - PROGRAMMES

The response to the questionnaire, prepared by Brian Fullagar and included in last Autumn's Journal mailing, was just over twenty replies. Not a very large number out of the total membership, but perhaps it indicates that you are generally satisfied with the venues chosen for the Spring Meeting which alternate between Norfolk - Lewisham. As you will have noted from the forms enclosed with this Journal, the majority vote for this year was for Norfolk.

However, for 1986, plans are going forward for a weekend to explore the 'Bedfordshire Connection' and I feel sure that this will be an event many members will wish to attend.

A number of very useful suggestions for programme content was received and more are wanted at any time, including offers to speak at meetings. Please contact me or any other committee member you may know.

HELPING YOUR SOCIETY

In the past members have been exceptionally generous in supporting the Society financially, for example, making donations to the Hut Fund, buying raffle tickets, and supporting the Plaque Appeal and this support has achieved marvellous results. However, in the last Journal I drew attention to the lack of any back-up should any committee member have to vacate an office, for whatever reason, during a term, or not wish to stand for re-election on completion of a term. I noted, I hope not too bleakly, that the sudden loss of one or two offices could place the Society in a very difficult if not impossible position, and that to at least have a short 'reserve' list of names would be welcomed by the present committee.

I regret to say that only TWO members contacted me; one firm, one tentative, the latter simply because she lacked experience in committee work. Clearly a few offices are made easier with some relevant experience. For example, Editor, Treasurer; but most are simply a matter of common sense and most importantly, a willingness to dedicate a few hours from time to time to Society work.

As a Registered Charity the Society cannot pay its committee members, but may pay legitimate expenses incurred on Society business - a normal procedure with many different Societies - and one that it was suggested we consider by the accountant who handled negotiations with H.M. Inland Revenue and the Charity Commission on our behalf.

It has always been committee policy to reimburse members for postal and other associated expenses and, at the last committee meeting, it was noted that travel expenses to attend committee meetings would be reimbursed in full upon application, all costs hitherto having been borne in full by committee members.

If you would like, or be prepared to help, but have been hesitating for any of the above reasons, please reconsider now and contact either our Chairman, John Glanfield, or myself.

Remember that next year the current term of office for most of the present committee terminates, and that not necessarily all of us will be prepared to consider a THIRD term of office, and in any case an injection of 'new blood' might be no bad thing.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The fame of classical authors is originally made and it is maintained, by a passionate few. Even when a first-class author has enjoyed immense success during his lifetime, the majority have never appreciated him so sincerely as they have appreciated second-rate men. He has always been reinforced by the ardour of the passionate few. And in the case of an author who has emerged into glory after his death the happy sequel has been due solely to the obstinate perseverance of the few. They could not leave him alone; they would not. They kept on savouring him, and talking about him, and

about him, and buying him, and they generally behaved with such eager zeal, and they were so authoritative and sure of themselves, that at last the majority grew accustomed to the sound of his name and placidly agreed to the proposition that he was a genius; the majority really did not care very much either way.

Arnold Bennett
Literary Taste, How to Form It.
J.H.

BOOKS

OUR VILLAGE: Alison Uttley's Cromford. Selected by Jacqueline Mitchell. Scarthin Books, Cromford, Derbyshire. pp.72. Stiff covers. Ills. by C.F.Tunncliffe. ISBN 0-907758-08-8 £2.85 + 65p for p & p.

Knowing several members who collect Alison Uttley, I feel sure there are many others I do not know, and that all will be interested in this book, published to celebrate the centenary of her birth on 17 December 1884.

Many of the essays in her 15 or so country books cover her childhood days at Castle Top Farm near Cromford, (I was at Prep School a scant three miles away) and nine have been selected for this tribute. All are illustrated with appropriate scraper boards done by C.F.Tunncliffe for the original books. There is also a map done by Jacqueline Mitchell.

This is a delightful tribute to a writer of exceptional sensitivity and the ability to re-create, as did Henry Williamson, the world of long ago, that is totally believable to the modern reader.

THE "AYLESFORD REVIEW", 1955 - 1968 : AN INDEX. Compiled by Colin Stanley, with a Preface by Brocard Sewell. Nottingham Pauper's Press. 90pp. 21x15cm. Paper Covers. I.S.B.N. 0-946650-03-9 £5.50 post paid. Overseas plus 10% if not Sterling, and drawn on London Bank. Cheques payable to: COLIN STANLEY.

For those who are collecting, may wish to collect or research the *Aylesford Review* to which Henry Williamson contributed as one of a galaxy of writers, this will be a most useful publication.

The index is, in fact, three indices in one. First, an alphabetical listing of over 350 authors and 600 essays, articles, poems, reviews, etc. Second, is a name index listing articles about others, e.g. Belloc, Eliot, Gill, Graves, D.H.Lawrence, Osborne, Wilde, Williamson, Wilson (Colin) and many more. Third, an alphabetical listing of over 400 books reviewed during the life of this literary magazine.

Colin Stanley, born in Devon, is currently a library assistant at Nottingham University Library - one of the few libraries in this country to hold a complete set of the *Aylesford Review*. He has also recently completed a bibliographical guide to the works of Colin Wilson - soon to be published in the U.S. by Borgo Press.

Ordering. Please order direct from: Colin Stanley, Nottingham Pauper's Press, 9 St.Bartholemew's Road, Nottingham NG3 3EH.

The publication of new editions of Henry's works continues apace and is very gratifying.

Anne Williamson has kindly provided details of current and forthcoming publications and of some other books that I am sure will be of interest to members.

HOW DEAR IS LIFE)
THE GOLDEN VIRGIN) 8th November 1984
LOVE AND THE LOVELESS)

(It is rather sad that they have missed out *A FOX UNDER MY CLOAK* because it has already been reprinted by Cedric Chivers, New Portway Ed. for London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association, and will thus not be a part of this 'uniform' set.)

And a further volume in the paperback edition by Arrow/Hutchinson.
DONKEY BOY 11th October 1984

We are very pleased to announce new editions of the two following early titles.

THE LONE SWALLOWS)
THE LINHAY ON THE DOWNS) Alan Sutton p/b £4.95 October 1984

And also

THE PHASIAN BIRD Boydel & Brewer £4.95 October? 1984

Although we are not happy with the horrendous crime committed on the cover, this may make this volume a 'curiosity' collectors' item!!

TARKA THE OTTER A further edition of *Tarka* will be available later this year from Webb & Bower. This will be illustrated with photographs by Simon McBride (who has done Winston Graham's *Cornwall* etc. also for Webb & Bower) of places in Tarka's travels and with a new introduction by Richard Williamson.

BRITAIN: A WORLD BY ITSELF

Reflections on the landscape by eminent British writers.

Arrum Press £14.95 October 1984

This beautifully produced book contains poems and lyrical passages celebrating and lamenting the British landscape with a commentary by Dr. Frank Perring (Gen. Sec. of The Royal Society for Nature Conservation) pointing out the conservation value of each area described. Each piece is illustrated with photographs by Paul Wakefield which are outstanding in capturing an unusual artistic quality of our varied countryside.

The point in reviewing this book in your journal is that your President, Richard Williamson, has contributed a piece on Chichester Harbour. Among other contributors are Ted Hughes (*A Devon River*), Jan Morris (*The Black Mountains*), Melvyn Bragg (*The Lakes*), John Fowles (*The Chesil Bank*) to mention just a selection.

THE UNRETURNING SPRING James Farrar

Christopher Palmer has worked hard to produce a new edition of this book which will be published by Thames Publishing in late May 1985.

I understand from Christopher that the new edition will contain much new material, especially drawings by James. James Farrar's mother has donated her share of Royalties to the RAF Benevolent Fund and the beneficiaries of the Henry Williamson Estate have done likewise.

ANNE WILLIAMSON

OWL COTTAGE Stiffkey

Sleeps 4 + cot

A grade II listed cottage, (centre of photograph facing) just off the coastal road at Stiffkey, two other cottages bounding each side of Owl Cottage. H. Williamson, author of 'Tarka the Otter', once lived here, his 'Owl' insignia shown at the back of his books, is noticeably visible on the exterior of the cottage. The salt marshes and sea are approximately 4 minutes away and Blakeney and Wells with their fishing, wind-surfing and water-skiing pursuits are about 4 miles away. The cottage is cosy and prettily furnished and at the rear is a high walled courtyard with garden furniture and portable barbecue. Entrance into close-carpeted living room with dining area and open fireplace. Small fitted galley kitchen and separate walk-in larder. Bathroom/W.C. First floor, by steepish winding staircase to two twin-bedded rooms.

* Elec by slot meter *Elec heaters *Open fire, coal may be purchased at shop * Parking * Shop close by * Col TV * Spin-drier * Elec blankets on all beds * Duvets with linen * Well trained pet.

This advertisement comes from English County Cottages; of Fakenham, Norfolk. Apparently 'Owl Cottage' is available for £192 per week in July and August. I think Henry might haunt occupants if he gets to hear about it!! Ed.



546 *A Phoenix in England*

The Phasian Bird, by Henry Williamson. (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 276 pp. \$4.)

By T. Morris Longstrech

Few beginning writers have enjoyed such distinguished recognition as was accorded Henry Williamson's earliest nature novels a generation ago. Thomas Hardy praised them, and with him Walter de la Mare, Arnold Bennett, and T. E. Lawrence. John Galsworthy brought them to America. "Tarika the Otter" and "Salar the Salmon" are acknowledged classics of their kind. Now, after a wait of fifteen years, for Mr. Williamson is as deliberate as nature, we have the life story of Chee-kai the pheasant, and the noblest narrative of them all.

"The Phasian Bird" presents the maturity of the art evidenced in the stories of the stag and the falcon. The fidelity of observation which captivated Hardy is here in all but overwhelming measure. Mr. Williamson watches with such intentness and patience and that sympathetic union with nature which made a Wordsworth but is almost unknown to city man, that his eye notes everything and stores it in his heart. The reader feels exquisite arisings from the long-forgotten twilight of the subliminal. The sentences are successions of little miracles of perception of things we should perceive for ourselves but miss. Owl light is as good as sunlight for this naturalist, and his veracity permits no falsification of the bird's consciousness into human sentimentality.

In addition to fidelity there is fullness. Mr. Williamson manages to have nature move down his page en masse. The ght of colors, shapes, sounds, movements is all there. No other nature writing achieves so detailed and simultaneous a richness. The man seems undervived from any of his great predecessors; unechoing, singular. One moves with the otter or the pheasant seeing, hearing, and being startled by all that surrounds them, not tiresomely catalogued but poetically focused down to a phrase, a word.

This poet's gift ransoms "The Phasian Bird" from temporal entertainment or instruction for

lasting pleasure. The story is in its effect a tone poem, not of a simple melodic line but closely woven, voices deep, like a string quartet. The accuracy of poet epithets pitched to a musician's ear for tone and rhythm, and the detached insight of a sensitive, but almost hidden, sage, is the measure of its poignant depth.

The life of Chee-kai, the hybrid pheasant, is the story's major theme. But presently we hear echoes of Shakespeare's language from Norfolk, "nearly gone forever, the old English harvest scene, the Constable immortality of everlasting England." The downfall of the land and its way to its resurrection is the second theme. Finally the young aviators in the latest of "Midas wars" fly their bomb loads over Chee-kai's woods to the enemy, and the validity of the phoenix as symbol of life comes plain in the tragic end. East Anglia and Asia find shelter in counsel from Nazareth and the beauty of this parable lives after the book is closed.

Why, then, with such a start and so much virtue, has this author failed to move from the few to the many? Because most readers today must have an onrush story and have no taste for pastoral experience. Others are irritated by Mr. Williamson's audacity in preferring the right word, however strange. Still others resent the limited stage, the absence of sensationalism, and will not forgive the occasional overburdened description or the odd gleam of preciousness. Nothing in these pages is falsely sweetened to entice the consumer.

Nor is "The Phasian Bird," for all its maze of nature, a book of escape. There are high joys and incessant beauty, but tooth and claw were never redder and human moods are grim. Yet Henry Williamson's darkness of key is no final pessimism. He feels that the resolution of struggle within a man is possible "through fidelity to the remote inner voice" and his hope is buoyantly expressed when his young son comes to him with a soldier, at once a stranger and a friend, and the boy exclaims, "breathless with the immensity of his tidings: 'Dad! Dad! We have found the Phasian bird.'"

Extract from
Christian Science Monitor,
Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

4 November 1950