

Letters

May I be permitted to add a short note to the topic covered by Mr. Johnson in a letter to the Journal, no.II. His comments on the membership of the BUF are in need of a small update. Recent work, by Mr. Gerry Webber of Nuffield College, Oxford, has thrown new light on this issue. His revision of the details of BUF membership are of some interest, and I cite here only his conclusion to the article printed in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.19 (1984):

...we concluded that membership peaked at around 50,000 in mid-1934 and fell away to about 5,000 by late 1935 after which it recovered gradually, levelling out at around 16,000 members by late 1936, and holding steady until the end of 1938 (by which time a total of 100,000 people were estimated to have passed through the movement). During 1939 itself, the BUF increased its membership once again and by September of that year had a total strength of about 22,500.

I hope this note will be of some interest.

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A friend of mine passed on the following item:-

'Dutchman's Wreck' Schooners sailing from Gloucester: 'The Phyllis Gray' was wrecked on Saunton Sands in 1908. She was found bottom up in the morning all

her crew being drowned. The Hull became embedded in the sands and still remains there being known to readers of Henry Williamson as the 'Dutchman's Wreck'. Basil Greenhill writing in 'Mariner's Mirror' Vol.27 No.3 July 1941 p.255. 'The Rise and Fall of the British Coasting Schooner'. However in Basil Greenhill's book 'Merchant - Schooners' (1951) he states wrecked at Braunton Sands. She was built in 1878 as the 'Olive Branch' I, personally remember the timbers of a vessel jutting out of the sands in Croyde Bay in the 1060's so I'm wondering if this was the same wreck?

Thank you for your post-card acknowledging receipt of my few brief details about the 'Dutchman's Wreck' passed on by George Heath, I must admit that the details were not my own, but supplied by my friend 'Peter', so, should anyone need further details I will be pleased to pass them on to the 'nautical expert' when a technical reply can be supplied I'm sure.

I enclose a copy of my recent letter to John Homan, which as you will see, I was not too sure if I should have sent it direct to you or not? The details in this latest letter are my own, so I can cope with any questions, although Peter is also one of the new 'Walmsley Society' Committee. You will have gathered by now, that I had a mispent youth i.e. on my knees looking for the 'Williamson' & 'Walmsley' books? Why I didn't choose middle-shelf names I'm beginning to question in my approaching old age.

I do hope this second letter will be of some use to the Journal, I have hesitated before, as most of the worthy contributors have been a little too academic for normal folk to tangle with. So I feel that perhaps, I am in a better position to appreciate all the hard work the Founders and Committee have, and continue to do on behalf of the general membership. I am Founder, Secretary and Editor of this new 'Walmsley Society' so I feel for you and thank you personally for shouldering the Editors post, albeit in a temporary capacity.

I don't know whether I should have sent this as a 'letter to the Editor' or, to you the contributor? Anyway, I was so pleased to read your article in the 'H.W.Journal' Spring 1985, i.e. "Beach-comber Rediscovered" where you referred to Henry's "Sun in the Sands" reference to 'Bevan' and 'Johnny' and their walking tour in the Pyrenees, and, the subsequent inclusion of the escapade in "The Innocent Moon".

I recall in the thirties, that these 'Pyrenees jaunts' were something of a joke in both Fleet Street and, on the London stage: I remember in, I think *French without Tears* someone saying that they were 'going on a cycling tour of the Pyrenees'! This was met with loud laughter in those days, but I'm sure it would no longer be considered funny!

It's interesting to note, I think that it all started with an actual trip through the Pyrenees as far back as 1922! When Leo Walmsley, the author, and his first wife 'Claire' were sponsored by the *Wide World Magazine* to do such a trip, reporting back to London every week or so, so that *Wide World*

Magazine could feature the reports as a serial story in their monthly magazine: It appeared from December 1922, through eight instalments as an eight part serial ending in July 1923 under the title of "Three Asses in the Pyrenees". I still cannot trace if the story was ever published in book form. A condensed version can be found in Leo Walmsley's early autobiography *So Many Loves* : Chapter I, Book 4, pages 191-206 (1st Edn. 1944).

Leo's third wife: Stephanie was before her marriage a 'Gubbins', her father being Nathaniel Gubbins, and her mother too was a journalist; one of the early 'lady journalists'. I wonder if Fr.Brocard Sewell knew or met them?

A further cross-reference: Leo and his wife Claire shared a large house and Studio with Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Jack Skeapings in North London in those heady 'twenties'.

You may use this brief letter in the Journal if you think it merits printing for the benefit of those older members.

Now that alternative (cheaper) accommodation has been published. I'm sure some of the recent O.A.Ps. amongst the membership will take advantage of these economic rates, quite an attractive to those newly on fixed incomes. I wonder if something similar can be done about the alternative accommodation evon please?

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Through the great efforts of committee members and others, after nearly six years, the Society is well established and the arrival of the excellently produced magazine a biannual event. However, a feeling of unease remained with me after the 1984 A.G.M. and this was exacerbated by Journal No.10 and in some ways No.11. This uneasiness stems from a feeling that, if the Society is not to become introverted, there is a need to ponder again, as Richard Russell asks us to do in Journal 8 p.15, the aims - 'To encourage, by all appropriate means, a wider readership and deeper understanding of the literary heritage left to us ...'. It is the point of 'wider readership' we most need to consider.

As a reader of this Journal I have declared my interest in Henry's writing already and many of the articles of personal reminiscence deepen my understanding of the man and hence his writing. However, I begin to wonder after Journal No.10 (pp.23 and 28) whether interest in particular facets of Henry's life is becoming morbid and beginning to distort the wider view. For me, and most of my generation and the subsequent one, pre-war fascism is history and there seems little point in re-iterating that Henry was enticed by that tragic cul-de-sac. What is interesting, and here 'the Chronicle' is a most important document on the Twentieth Century, is the way the books show why such a gifted writer could, like many others, follow such a path.

I feel there is a danger that we are becoming more concerned with Henry's life and idiosyncracies than his writing. Too often we judge our heroes, from literary to sporting, by their private lives and attitudes. Most surely knowledge of the artist can add to our understanding but it is the work that must be judged ultimately.

Many articles in the Journals have concentrated us on the books - Russell's I have mentioned already. One can think of Fred Shepherd's in 10 p.42; the splendid observations of Ronald Walker (4 p.31 and 7 p.10) and the 'problem' of Henry's fascism dealt with, from a literary point of view, by David Hoyle (4 p.6). He should be applauded further for his analysis of *The Golden Virgin* at the Lewisham meeting in 1984 which has been so interesting to read in Journal II. I was pleased to read Stephen Cullen's plea for proper historical perspective in Journal II but he then embroiled us again in the political wrangle, as does Richard Johnson. Also in Journal II, John Millar's letter, calling for a critical view of Journal articles, is welcome - but by doing that we must not avoid the main point which is analysis and assessment of Henry's work.

The A.G.M. 1984 was a most enjoyable, refreshing and sociable weekend. Particularly stimulating were the civilized discussions with people who have different beliefs and ideas - a wide range of opinion held together by a common bond - the appreciation of Henry's writing. But it was on the last point of writing that unease arose - without the kind of detailed criticism as presented by David Hoyle at Lewisham, an opportunity was missed for thought and discussion of that writing.

With the above thoughts in mind I would like to put forward some suggestions for members' consideration:-

- (a) The Society could pursue the closer links that seem to be developing with publishers.
- (b) Can we find out what writers and/or artists etc. have been influenced by Henry? It may be possible for one or more to speak at a meeting.

- (c) We need to discuss, with some urgency, ways to promote further the reading of Henry's work. Also, to decide on the Society's role if the breakthrough occurs and Georgeham becomes the centre of attention for thousands rather than a few hundred.
- (d) That some time be given over at future A.G.Ms, Spring Meetings or at separate local meetings to critical discussions of the writing. The range is too large to tackle as a whole so perhaps some book or section of book could be decided upon in advance to enable members to familiarise themselves with the work and prepare some ideas. From such 'seminars' perhaps the Society could publish critical pamphlets which may be illuminating to readers new and old - perhaps even being a vehicle to promote objective criticism of Henry's work more widely. I would be most interested to hear from members to whom such an approach appeals.

Yes, the above does seem to spell work, and many of us are very busy already, but it seems clear to me that as Society members we should meet our obligations in trying to encourage that wider readership.

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Peter K. Robins should not have taken too seriously the omission of Henry Williamson's name from "the Mosley papers" in the Public Record Office (where I have been spending many boring hours) nor some of the statements therein.

Selection for internment under Defence Regulation 18B (and inclusion in the official papers) was quite arbitrary.. Henry remained a life-long friend and admirer of the Mosleys, and my friend.

The membership of the British Union movement was never recorded centrally and it is difficult to reconcile a movement "in decline" with one which held, in the Earls Court Exhibition Hall in July 1939, *the largest indoor political meeting in the world.*

Much more significant than the released papers are those still withheld, which may well include a file on Henry Williamson. For example, a verbatim report of the 16 hour Mosley appeal against detention carries a note that a secret memorandum to the Chairman of the tribunal from an unnamed MI5 agent is not to be released for 75 years. Who was he? Philby? Blunt?

Members of the Society who know me personally and have read in my autobiography "Action Replay" (reviewed by Father Brocard in No.8 of the "Journal") the story of my ludicrous wartime arrest and detention in the Falkland Islands may be interested in correspondence in which I am currently engaged with the Home Office. In reply to an enquiry as to where and when I might read *my* file I was informed that "the documents concerning your detention are in a category of Home Office papers to be withheld for 75 years"!

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When I used to live in the 'suburbs' of Georgeham at Higher Ham in Incledon Farm house, we used to walk over the hill through the fields to the sea. of this journey. I marvelled at how accurate was Henry's ability at creating the atmosphere and beauty from what was there, rather than embroidering which he could so easily have done.

This walk is graphically described in one of H.W.'s stories about the village area. He describes the walk across the fields in front of Pickwell Manor. The little brook gay with yellow bog irises. The fallen tree, still over the stream, with its branches reaching up to the sky from the horizontal trunk. The final lift of the heart as the view of Baggy and Wollacombe Bay was spread out before one.

As a child I walked to Puttsborough along this route with my father. Only recently did I come across a description

My problem is I cannot remember where I found this description. Did I dream the whole thing? Could some kind reader please inform me if they have read any lines by HW which remotely refer to the above.

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