

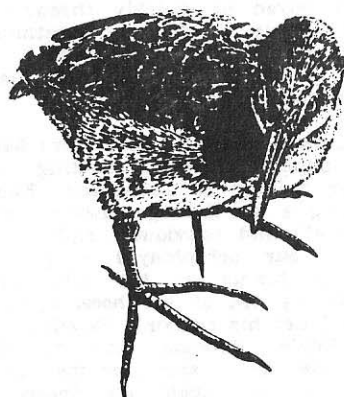
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## Letters

All members of the Society must surely be aware that we are actively engaged in writing Henry's biography. It has occurred to us that many of you have material which could be of great use to us, either in the form of letters, papers or information, and we would be very grateful if you would allow us to make copies for our research files. It is of the utmost importance that our files are as detailed as possible. It is like a jigsaw puzzle - five thousand individual pieces are almost meaningless; carefully pieced together a whole and intricate picture emerges - but how irritating if one vital piece is missing.

We would of course, take the greatest care of any papers entrusted temporarily to our care, and reimburse copying charges if you prefer to do this yourselves.

*Richard and Anne Williamson,  
Keepers,  
West Dean Woods,  
Chichester,  
West Sussex. PO18 0RU*



1.

On a recent brief visit to Appledore, a school-friend of my daughter, (Mrs) Dariel Raven, made the acquaintance of Barbara Rogers of Bradbourne House. Conversation (inevitably!) turned to Henry Williamson, culminating in the production of a few sheets from the latest issue of the Society's Journal, which contained two letters from H.R. Lyle Sutton.

Mr. Sutton speculated that he might be the sole survivor of H.W.'s school contemporaries - a not unlikely conjecture at his age of 90! Nevertheless, Dariel expressed doubts and, on her return to South London, passed the pages to me.

I am not quite so venerable, being a mere 88, but I was at Colfe's from 1907 to 1913 and also shared a twin desk with Henry - not in the 'Specials', but in 'Bunny's' (Mr. Benett's) Form 4a. This would be about 1910 or 1911.

In addition to a few anecdotes about H.W., I am able, I think, to identify masters and most boys figuring in *Dandelion Days*. As for me, the (tall, scholarly Swann), I got off lightly, even if portrayed - in the language of the period - as a bit soppy. Incidentally, I repudiate that 'scholarly': it is true I moved up quickly through the school and was accordingly something of a teacher's pet, but my reputation owed far more to an above-average parrot memory than to true scholarship!

Contacts outside school were limited to a quite unexpected meeting on a summer holiday at Tankerton, Kent - including a sea-fishing episode (details available!) and (obviously right at the end of our schooldays) a game of atrocious tennis on the Hilly Fields followed by tea at his home opposite, where I met his mother. Finally, at an Old Boy's Reunion Dinner, H.W. approached me to announce that he was writing a book about the School and was putting me in it in a not unkindly light. I fear I shrugged this off in the belief that he was exercising that well-known power of imagination which later served him in such good stead!

I do not know how much information the Society has about incidents and places described in *Dandelion Days*; for instance, that *Rookhurst* is almost certainly Holwood Park, Keston, where Henry claimed to have obtained a permit to visit areas not open to the public, ostensibly to study wild life. Although he was, I think, truthful in boasting of his birds'-nesting exploits there, it seems likely that, whether or not it began that way, the experiences could well have stimulated what became his supremacy in the field of nature writing.

I have hardly any relics now of Colfe's: a picture postcard of the School before Hitler destroyed it; and one small photograph of the 1913 Rifle Club including the master Benett above referred to - (and me!). It was taken and inscribed by Leland L. Duncan, author of the 'History of Colfe Grammar Schools' and famed in the book as Sir Heland Donkin - he of lantern-slide triumphs!

They say old folk are garrulous. This is nothing to what I could do if I tried! My apologies!

2.

Thank you for your cordial letter of 6th June.

To turn to the elaborations you have asked for;

The Fishy Story. I discovered that Henry was in lodgings in the same road as that in which I was staying with an aunt. Recalling that he had spoken of a passion for fishing, I hired a row-boat and acquired hand-lines and bait. On a reasonably calm day we made for an area deemed promising for plaice or dabs, dropped anchor and lowered our baited tackle. Now, anchored craft will always swing to align themselves with any waves, however slight, and begin to roll. I noticed that Henry's normal pallor was deepening and sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought; so, before any fish were butchered, it was up anchor and pull for the shore - just in time! I

conjecture that Henry's future references to the joys of fishing included a limitation to freshwater angling.

End of saga, I fear.

Frank A. Swann  
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Sanderstead,  
South Croydon,  
Surrey CR2 0AA

The Tennis Tea-Party. Well, hardly a party. After our game of pat-ball, Henry asked me to step across the road for tea and cakes. My impression of Mrs. W. senior is not vivid. I see a slightly-built person with the thin, pale face befitting a parent of Henry's. I do not doubt she consulted my taste in milk and sugar, but do not recall any contribution to the table-talk. Possibly she was inordinately shy - or maybe thought it proper to leave chatter to the youngsters. Also, schoolboys were - probably still are - embarrassed by the notion of having mothers at all: sentiment which could raise a barrier!

The announcement in the Henry Williamson Society Journal of the interest of June Emerson in musical references in the novels of HW stimulated me into looking again at a letter which HW sent me in 1974. I enclose a copy which you may care to consider for publication in the Journal.

I had written to Henry Williamson for two reasons. Firstly I had just finished reading the 'Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight' and had had great difficulty in obtaining copies of many of the books - even through the inter-library loan system. Since they were virtually all out of print I had written to the hardback and paperback publishers in an attempt to persuade them to reprint. I had even written to Penguin Books in a naive attempt to suggest they take over the paperback rights from Granada. I wished to let HW know that I had done that. Secondly, I have a longstanding interest in the music of Elgar and am a collector of recordings of the music. I asked HW whether the description in *Young Phillip Maddison* of Phillip's reaction to hearing a recording of Elgar's Enigma Variations was based on a recollection of actually hearing such a thing before the First World War. I was unaware of any recording which predated the composer's own in the early 1920s. The reply which I received astonished me. At the time I assumed that HW must write in such an intimate way to all the complete strangers who wrote to him. Since now I am not so sure I am sending a copy of it to the Henry Williamson Society Journal to see if they are interested in publishing it. Incidentally HW clearly misread my Christian name from my manuscript letter.

David C. H. McBrien  
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Holyport,  
Maidenhead,  
Berkshire SL6 2YJ

A School Incident. (In the category of 'warts and all') Bunny (Mr. Bennett) set as homework an essay on the exciting theme of 'A Town I Have Visited'. I spread myself on Canterbury - my mother's birthplace and home (until the move to Tankerton) of her family - often visited by me. Came the morning, and a woeful Henry confessing he hadn't written a word - could I 'lend' him my essay to give him 'a few ideas'? With the strict injunction that he should not copy slavishly, I passed my masterpiece over, with misgivings. Unhappily, H. was carried away - not so much, I imagine, by admiration for my literary skill as by terror of not being able to fill the statutory two pages in time for collection, and was so indiscreet as to reproduce large chunks of my essay, which shouted aloud 'plagiarism' to the dimmest intelligence. Bunny was not dim. 'Swann, did you copy from Williamson?' 'No, sir'. 'Williamson, did you copy from Swann?' 'No, sir'. 'What guide-book did you take it from, Swann?' 'None, sir'. 'You, Williamson?' 'None, sir'. A pause, while B. was clearly making up his mind whether to pursue the matter further. Finally: 'All right, then. No marks.' (Sighs of relief).

4 Capstone Place, Teapacombe, N.  
Dum

Dear Mr Donald McBrien

(One is listening to Act III of  
Parsifal on the Radio: what a  
most marvellous and indeed divine  
work that is!) ...

You are of course right about  
the misplacement in time - and in  
my 'Young Phillips' - of Elgar's  
Enigma Variations. (When I was  
writing the novel, I stayed often  
at a friend's house in Malvern, and  
Elgar was much in one's mind,  
from the historical association with his  
birthplace.)

(One can hardly write this  
letter: against the pulse and  
beauty of Parsifal - the motifs  
on the woodland path to immortality -  
via the noble mind / spirit of  
Wagner.)

A Chronicle had some 'bad' reviews.

Many papers ignored it. I hoped  
that the ultimate volume - The  
Gate of the World - would

move some critics to review it:  
but no. So it lost money for the  
publisher; also the paperback company.  
(I look into the Gale now & then, &  
wonder how it was written. Much of  
the detail was happening as in the storm:  
I was on the Chain of Linnear when the  
storm broke: red silent "fireballs" (electric  
discharges) shot past me and vanished:  
while the electric ripples of St Elmo's

Fire; & 17" of rain in 9 hours. The  
later scenes moved me much: drawing of  
'Miranda', after the abortive cricket match  
in the Valley of Rocks, Lynton: etc etc.  
Signs are appearing of the Series' authenticity:  
BAC3 regard party for serialisation.

Tarka is to be filmed for "cinema  
Circuits": "angels" are donating sums of  
money. The script won't be mine; but  
the book-writing (under some stress)  
will be included - I wrote night after night  
for months, nursing my first-born, whose  
Mamma was ill with cystitis, & baby  
never thrived. (Please keep these little  
details to yourself). But all turned out  
well.

I miss the writing of A Chronicle: but  
c'est la vie! One has luck entirely  
alone since 1962: but help may be  
forthcoming! Yours sincerely, Henry Williamson