© 1986 The Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 14 (Sept 1986): 43-49

Secretary's Notes

John Homan

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984 - PLEASE READ THIS NOTICE.

As many of you will know, this Act - concerned with personal information used in computer systems - required most users, and the bureaux processing or holding information about individuals, to register this fact with all relevent details by 11 May 1986.

A major purpose of the Act conveys a right upon an individual (known as the Data Subject) to be given a copy of all personal data relating to him or her wherever it may be held on computer on demand, and with effect from 11 November 1987.

The Society is a computer 'User', employing a computer bureau to produce the following data:

a. Address labels for use with mailing of Journals and other papers.

b. An alphabetical list of members as at each January. This is sent to each member in the Spring Mailing as a guide as to those other members (if any) residing within the general area of the recipient.

The Act does, however, allow for exemptions from Registration in certain cases, and it was established that the Society could claim exemption under the heading of 'Unincorporated Clubs', whose data use consists only of membership records or lists basically used for mailing purposes. However, it is still a requirement that this fact be made known to each member of the Society.

You are further advised that should you object to your name and address being held on computer as shown at a. or b. above, or both, you must address your objection to me, the General Secretary, in writing on receipt of which your records will be processed manually thereafter, or your name and address struck off the alphabetical list, or both, as may be appropriate.

Please understand that unless you respond in writing it will be assumed that you have no objection to your name and address remaining on computer as defined above, for as long as you remain a member of the Society.

This Notice is issued to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984, in respect of computer users exempt from Registration under the Act.

SOLD - AN INTERESTING WILLIAMSON COLLECTION

Earlier this year an interesting collection of Williamson's works, and books by other authors of a sympathetic nature, were offered at auction by Taviner's of Bristol, from the estate of the late Anthony Gower, I believe by the beneficiaries of the estate of his widow.

Sadly the catalogue only arrived a day or two before the sale and it was quite impossible to travel to view, but George and Mary Heath, just returned

© 1986 The Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 14 (Sept 1986): 43-49

from a holiday, did make the effort - of which more anon.

The catalogue listed some interesting items although among the many first and limited editions the first three 'Flax' novels were all missing in the Collins issues. Included was the Girvan Bibliography, Herb Wests, *The Dreamer of Devon; Scribbling Lark* and the St. Albert's Press *In the Woods*. The latter being one of the 50 signed copies. Here must be at least a short tale that Fr. Brocard Sewell could tell in another issue as Anthony Gower was an occasional contributor to *The Aylesford Review*. Indeed in the issue for WINTER 1960-61 he reviewed *In the Woods* - which might explain the signed copy with TLS from Brocard Sewell - and also Walter Robson's *Letters from a Soldier*, (Intro. by H.W.).

Other items included some proof 'Chronicle' novels, and a complete set all with the essential jackets. Other writers included a good selection of Richard Jefferies, with all the books which Williamson had some connection in pre-war editions, and a copy of H.S. Salts's, *Richard Jefferies: A Study*, 1st edition, 1894.

Of great interest, however, was a Collection of Correspondence offered as a lot consisting of letters etc., and ranging from Georgeham in the (early) Thirties, to Old Hall Farm during the last war, Botesdale, then back to Ham and finally Ilfracombe and terminating in May 1967, with a letter of condolence to Margaret Gower on the death of her husband. Within the limited space of the catalogue only brief summaries of some letters could be given, but it seemed clear that among the more mundane matters covered were a number of pearls; encouraging Gower's own writing, the problems of *The Phasian Bird*, trying to run *The Adelphi*, family life in Suffolk after the war, a long essay about the (then) forthcoming film of T.E. Lawrence, notes on V.M. Yeates, Malcolm Elwin, Ewart, Middleton Murry, and much on the plot and characters of various of the 'Chronicle' novels.

As noted above, the Heath's were present and reported prices generally very steep. After addition of buyer's premium and VAT, the set of 'Chronicle' (bought by a dealer) would have to go out at not less than £500. As to the Correspondence, this was withdrawn at £800, it subsequently being revealed that a reserve of £1,000 had been placed on this lot.

BOOK REVIEW

Twelve Literary Walks (With Ordnance Survey Maps) By Christopher Somerville.
(W.H. Allen, London. Hardback, with photos, Pub. Dec.1985. £8-95)
(Also available in paperback by COMET BOOKS)

Briefly previewed in Journal No.13 which drew attention to the 'Tarka' walk, I feel having read the book that it will certainly interest many other members, and is worthy of a short review.

By chance no doubt Walk Number 1 is titled *Tarka's Last Hunt*, and starts and ends at Town Mills in Torrington and is about four miles easy walk beside or above the Torridge river. Although concentrating largely upon the last dramatic act in Tarka's life, the remainder of the book is sketched in, and there is a good accurate and succinct sketch of Henry and his life and work to head the chapter; pleasant to find in a book for the general reader. This walk will reveal much to those whose forays into 'Tarka' Country in the past have been confined to the more obviously accessible parts such as Braunton

© 1986 The Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 14 (Sept 1986): 43-49

Burrows and environs, and the relevent parts of Dartmoor and Exmoor.

The remaining walks range widely in time and place - from *A Walk in Kilvert Country* to *Cider with Rosie and Young Laurie Lee, To Wuthering Heights with Emily Bronte* and *On the Track of the Rabitts of Watership Down*. The whole makes varied and interesting reading and it is difficult to think that at least several of the walks would not appeal to most readers or be within reasonable reach as they are spread far and wide. The book is illustrated with numerous half page photographs, and each 'walk' or chapter is headed by a full page photograph of the subject author. That for Henry is a reproduction of the Edward Seago portrait, formerly at Ox's Cross, and now on view at the National Portrait Gallery. Sadly this reproduction is excessively dark in tone and a very great deal of detail is lost. Photo-setting onto the text paper may be cheaper than other methods of reproduction, but too often it fails so badly one could wish that illustrations were omitted totally. The maps, extracted from the relevent O.S. sheets, and marked with the various walks are useful, but check which scales are used where as some are 1:25 000, others 1:50 000.

I ANSWER MY OWN QUESTION ON 'A SMALL DISCOVERY'.

In the last Journal (No.13) I wrote of the memorial carving of a rose and a sickle to one Saccarissa Hibbert in Exeter Cathedral, as mentioned in S.P.B. Mais's book *See England First* and the use by HW of the same device the headstone to Phillip Maddison's first wife Barley, in *It was the Nightingale*. I asked the question, since HW married into the Hibbert family, if he knew of the cathedral memorial?

I should have known better; of course he did, but, since his comments are to be found in one of his least regarded works they are worth recording I think.

The book is *On Foot in Devon* (or Guidance and Gossip being a Monologue in Two Reels) and was published by Alexander Maclehose in 1933 - at 2/6d - in the publishers 'On Foot' Series.

Here is Henry writing on visiting Exeter cathedral, (pp.102-3)

> *Wander round by the walls, by the tombs with their effigies of Crusaders - who was it who said that an effigy with one leg crossed over the other indicated that the dead warrior went twice to the Holy Land? - the memorials and mural tablets to writers, divines, lords temporal and spiritual, soldiers and sailors who were killed in old wars and battles long ago. For myself, the memorial I always look for first is a small wall tablet of white marble, in Memory of Saccarissa Hibbert, who died the 2nd December, 1828, in the 27th year of her age: there is the reaping hook carved from the white marble, cutting the rose which is in its first fragrence. An unusual name, Saccarissa - the Sweetest One - especially in a family which at the end of the eighteenth century owned sugar plantations in Jamaica. It is a beautiful symbol, the sickle and the young rose; firmly and proudly done - the work of what artist? My attempt to buy a photograph of it was unsuccessful, for none was on sale; indeed, the verger by the west door did not appear to know of its existence.*

© 1986 The Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 14 (Sept 1986): 43-49

Well, the little memorial made a lasting impression on Henry, sufficient to use it in a book written nearly thirty years later. My question as to when the young lady died is also answered, but I wonder why Mais gave her age as 21 when she died in her '27th year'?

A LASTING FRIENDSHIP

Among the criticisms levelled at Henry it has been said that he finally fell out with all his friends no matter how long or short the acquaintance. Having now mentioned Mr. S.P.B. Mais several times it is worth telling - for those who do not already know - that he and HWW enjoyed a friendship, if somewhat sporadic, that started in 1923 and was only dissolved by death. The link that bound them most closely was perhaps the mutual love of that part of north Devon known to us best as 'Williamson country', from Dartmoor to the Chains of Exmoor and the coast from Lynton to certainly the estuary of the Two Rivers, and perhaps as far as Hartland, and inland to a line running north and south through South Molton. But for both, the focal point was from Braunton to Ilfracombe, native homeland for Mais, adopted one for Williamson, and yet by residence the latter qualified in years by a ratio of over 4 : 1, and was mostly securely settled, while Mais was forever the exile returning.

For those unfamiliar with this friendship, which was strong enough for Williamson to become devoted god-father to the Mais's daughter Imogen, their own record of how first they met, over sixty years ago, may be timely.

Torn from his native Devon at the age of eleven and settled in the North, Petre Mais for many years took every opportunity to return and holiday with one of his numerous relatives at Croyde, Woolacombe and other local villages. And yet, when he came down from Oxford into teaching it was to Rodden near Blackpool that he went, not his native Devon. And later, when the choice must have been open he chose Sussex. It seems he was one of those happy people who could fit almost anywhere and, having discovered just how much there was to see and learn about our native islands, that draw became as strong as the desire to return to the land of his forebears - at least on a permanent basis. Indeed it was his keen delight to travel throughout Britain that caused him to set down on paper accounts of his travels and which culminated in the many books, articles and broadcasts by which he is best remembered.

But Mais was a novelist too, and, just as he appeared, sometimes plain, sometimes disguised in some of Henry's books, Henry appears - somewhat irreverantly - in *Orange Street* - published in 1926 - as a West country writer Brian Stucley, forever reading his latest work, dragged from an inner pocket, to anyone who will listen. Stucley also has a young raven-haired, brown-eyed wife, Lydia .....

But this anticipates their first proper meeting, and this is described by Mais in his book, *See England First* (The Richards Press, 1927). In the Chapter 'Devonshire' Mais has been describing his longing for Devon and all that awaits discovery and delight for the discerning eye. He continues:

> *But it was my meeting with the young naturalist, Henry Williamson, that first made me begin to take notice of the countryside. This young man with enviable courage cut the knot which bound him to Fleet Street, and retired on no money to Georgeham to develop that wise passivity by which alone it is possible for man to wrest Nature's secrets*

© 1986 The Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 14 (Sept 1986): 43-49

from her. I met the author of 'The Old Stag' first on the 'Daily Express'. The next occasion was in the valley of the Torridge, otter-hunting on a day so full of sweet scents and songs that no one paid any attention to the portly pole-carriers or the howling mob of runners up and down the waters. It was a festal occasion, for followers of the Culmstock, Cheriton, Crowhurst and Courtenay Tracey packs were all out to test the North Devon waters. In Williamson's company I was taken to see the wild flowers growing on the Braunton Burrows, the skeletons of old wrecks on the endless sands, and to watch the flight of herons and wild duck, oyster-catchers and ring-plover, with which the estuary abounded.

It was only then that I began to lament a wasted childhood. Why had I in childhood never heard the golden trill of the curlew in Spring, or watched the terrific speed of a peregrine falling from the sky, or stopped to watch the playing, tumbling and rolling of buzzards high above the trees? The very little that I now know of birds and flowers I owe entirely to Williamson's tuition. I had walked further than he had and knew more placed. I had hunted the stag down every stream and over every bit of the moor, but until he taught me I had mistaken speed for knowledge, and proved that he who runs is unlikely to read at any rate the book of Nature. I knew Swimbridge screen and he didn't. He had failed to explore the wonders of South Molton Church and the strange monument to the young plague-stricken Puritans of Marwood, but while I knew the churches and houses he knew the woods and revealed to me mysteries that I had never imagined. In spite of the fact that my father had spent his boyhood in the village and an aunt or two of mine were born there, I had never discovered Georgeham until Williamson revealed its beauties to me. It happens to be just far enough out of the beaten track to have retained its individuality. It is a long mile and a half up from the sea at the head of a valley, which is incredibly hot in summer and none too warm in winter. A bus runs to Braunton and Barnstaple at rare intervals, but it is more pleasant to walk over the top of the ridge which overlooks the Great Field of Braunton and the Estuary, in addition to the fact that by walking you come out near Braunton Church, which, after Hartland, is to me the most lovely of all Devon churches, both for its old oak pews, with the carved ends, and for the golden sow with her litter high up in the roof. Of late years I have spent nearly all my holidays in Georgeham for reasons that are not altogether clear. It is a long way from Exmoor, it is not one-tenth as picturesque as Chagford, it is a wearisome pull up from the sea, and bathing before breakfast is the sort of thing one discontinues after the second day. In wet weather it is as depressing as Lundy, and even more depressing than Barnstaple, which does contain a cinema and a multitude of antique shops. I imagine it to be Williamson's personality that always drags me back there, for under his tutelage I have learnt to appreciate the Burrow and the Estuary even when it has meant leaving most of the county unexplored.

© 1986 The Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 14 (Sept 1986): 43-49

If the view expressed about Georgeham is somewhat ambivalent, Mr. Mais does seem to be duly appreciate of all that Henry had to tell and show him of the local flora and fauna.

A Note on how Henry saw, and recorded his first meeting with Petre Mais will appear in the next issue.

LODESTAR - A NEW MAGAZINE

Your attention is drawn to Fr. Brocard Sewell's 'Henry Williamson's *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*' which is included in No.2, Spring 1986, of this magazine. Copies are available at £1.20 post free from Sanctuary Press, Nash House, Fishponds Road, London S.W.17.

SEVENTY YEARS ON

On the idle hill of summer,
Sleepy with the sound of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
Drumming like a noise in dreams.

Far and near and low and louder,
On the roads of earth go by,
Dear to friends and food for powder,
Soldiers marching, all to die.

The Shropshire Lad, XXXV.

June 1, 0411 hours BST. The quiet night is broken by a lone blackbird's song, first notes of the Dawn Chorus. It is a clear still morning, the sky above the sunglow in the east shading from eggshell blue to midnight shadow in the west. On such a morning a month from now it will be seventy years ago since a quarter of a million men from Britain and her Commonwealth disposed in trenches along many miles of the Western Front were waking, or had been long awake, and were moving about doing a thousand things but all waiting for the great offensive - the Great Adventure for which they had trained so hard and long - to begin in a few hours time. Part of the greatest civilian army these islands had ever produced they were confident in themselves and their comrades and chums, and for once, in their leaders who, it seemed, had learnt from past mistakes. For weeks the guns lined almost wheel to wheel had pounded the enemy lines until it seemed nothing could remain alive there. This time, under the cover of those same guns, they would rise from the ground and move forward in confident and ordered ranks; steady and formidable IF there were any enemy eyes left to watch their advance.

How many old, old men will wake on 1 July this year and relive again with glassy clarity the reality of what they and their comrades went through that day? First the song of larks arising from the sweeping grasslands, to be drowned by a last furious thunder of the guns. Then ladders against parapets, scramble, and up and into the open, moving forward weighed down with home upon their backs and death in their hands and slung about their bodies. Thoughtless, joyful even, void, jubilent, tremulous, parched with fear or exhaultation, each life reacting to individual thought, or negation of thought soundlessly crying to survive.

Suddenly the air was filled with vicious wasps buzzing and whining in many keys, running up and down the lines of trudging men, and many of the wasps bit ferociously and so powerfully that men fell in lines and swathes, almost silently at first but for a long-drawn A r r r r - gh, a sibilent hiss as the great reaper took his harvest. Later, the cries and screams were drowned as great down-rushings ended in gouts of earth, chalk and shattered steel, bringing yet more death and dereliction, the more obscene for the random and quite impartial way more living were turned into dead, and the already dead into nothing.

I see a spare elderly man, with shock of white hair, sitting beneath a sandhill by the sea, driftwood stick in hand graphically marking in the sand the trench lines, the bombardment - jab, jab, jab - but not touching the German soldiers safe in refuges cut thirty feet down in the chalk. How they emerged to fire upon the ordered ranks approaching them until they almost cried because it was too easy.

When that day was ended at long last, and tallies made and roll-calls read the greatest civilian army had suffered the greatest loss ever known in a single day. What could those who came through that day (tallied at almost 60,000 down in an hour or so) have thought and done had they known that this was but a prelude, the losses but a fraction of those to come, of the most vain struggle that lay ahead? What if they had known that yet another battle was to duplicate this in another place a year hence; could they, would they have gone on?

If they had been granted foresight, IF; who can tell? Perhaps the answer lies in the knowledge that they did go on after 1 July 1916, even when life became so intolerable that some finally welcomed the most disgusting death in preference to life. They went on, not for high-flown ideals - even for God, King or country, but for their comrades - Kamaraden -, and thus loyalty to each other. There was a bond forged between these men - friend and foe -, that those who were not there could never be privy to.

Alas, this note will be read retrospective to the anniversary of 1 July 1916, just as I am writing it in anticipation on a June morning. But as a tribute at any time you cannot do better than read Henry in *The Golden Virgin*; it is all there.

Now the chorus has died away to solitary voices here and there. The rising sun vividly lights the late blossom on an apple tree where, on an upper branch a blackbird sits facing the East, and sings surrounded by pink-white foam of blossom sprays. It is a scene of perfection; grass glinting from rain of last evening. I hear a distant cuckoo announce seven hours - and the clock says he is right. Away with sad thoughts; it is time to be out and about.