

Secretary's Notes

Much water has run off the two Moors to fill tributary, runner and stream and swell the rivers of Taw and Torridge since the wanderer of those waters — Tarka — first saw the light of day in print sixty years ago. Sixty winters with thunderous and awesome spates marked for all to marvel upon later by detritus of dead roots, grass and branches lodged high-up in the bankside trees. Sixty summers with water fallen silent and turgid; fish lying torpid and still in stale pools; dry grey shillets where before there was chatter and ripple. These, and the other seasons were part of Tarka's life, as was Braunton Great Field, the Burrows, the sands, and beyond the Estuary the open sea and wild sea-coast. Each scene was faithfully re-created for the book, each phase of an otter's life set down lovingly but without sentiment. It is more than sixty years since Tarka fought his last fight and drifted down on the lapsing tide to the great luminous caverns beneath the sea where all is forever peace, and ten since his creator quietly joined him.

Go today and visit all the places Tarka knew; as others have commented after sixty years, it is remarkable how little has changed. Blink as you pass the ice-cream hotels; shut your eyes as they range past an obsolete power station across the Estuary; go when the tangled ribbons of cars have finally unbound themselves for another year, and the sixty years is almost swept away.

That this wonderful book will survive on and on seems certain; may we hope too that not only our children, but their children, and their children's children will in turn be able to enjoy in equal measure these scenes as we can still look upon them today.

Cover picture — Mick Loates

As you will know from the Raffle details included in this mailing, the original of this beautiful picture has been donated by its creator, artist and Society member, Mick Loates. On behalf of the committee, and indeed I am sure, all of us, may I express our warm thanks for this generous gift, and for the delightful vignettes that appeared in our Spring issue this year.

Tarka—A.G.M.—Weekend: Exhibition

Work is in progress to assemble what I am sure will turn out to be a most interesting and varied exhibition related to *Tarka* to be mounted at the Putsborough Sands Hotel over our long weekend. There will be security precautions for valuable items. If you would like to add something to this memorable occasion, do please bring it along.

Recent editions of *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*

A number of members have enquired about the new paperback edition that commenced publication by Zenith Publications late in 1984, and continued with the first four books of the sequence, into 1985. An option existed to take-up the remaining eleven titles, but, I am sad to report, sales were such that the publishers declined their option. Therefore

this new edition comprises only the first four books, i.e. closing with *How Dear is Life*. This will be a disappointment to many who were intending to collect a uniform edition at modest price, and it can only be hoped a change of climate — or heart — will occur eventually and allow the remainder to be published.

Members may also recall that a new hard-back edition, for the London and Home Counties branch of the Library Association, was due out via Cedric Chivers 1984–6. In fact, the books were published direct by MacDonald and, although not on sale in retail shops, could be purchased direct from the publisher. Advice filtered through too late to be of any use, that by late last year unsold stock was being remaindered. This is an extremely sad state of affairs, although one must at least hope that many libraries do hold a set of the new edition and that they will be taken-up by new readers.

Late but appropriate — *The Illustrated Tarka the Otter*

(New) Introduction by Richard Williamson. With photographs by Simon McBride and Illustrations by C. F. Tunnicliffe A.R.A.: 208pp. 115 coloured and b&w photos, 14 vignette scraperboards; map. Webb and Bower, 1985. £14.95.

Published in their 'Classics of the British Countryside' series, this is a most handsome volume discreetly bound in dark green with matching endpapers. Richard Williamson has managed another completely new Introduction; after his masterpiece for the 1978 Bodley Head edition one would wonder how this was possible. Additional to the illustrations listed above, are a total of eight family photographs, and three pages of facsimile pages of MS, TS, and Galley-proof, included in the Introduction.

Possibly a few purists will murmur 'coffee-table' — but the core of this edition, the illustrations, and especially the photographs by Simon McBride, complement the text in a way that I believe would have met with the author's genuine approval. All are evocative, some are breath-taking and a tribute to the artistic ability and integrity of their creator. The Tunnicliffe illustrations used here comprise fourteen — one used as map cartouche — of the 20 vignette scraperboards done for the first Puffin edition (1949).

The reproduction of these is generally not good and it would seem they were done from copies, not the original scraperboards, with variable results. There are some careless errors in the page titles paired with the running titles, and the photograph on p.93 entitled 'The Sharshook' — the dreaded mid-estuary ridge — actually shows the Burrows looking to Aery Point from Crow Point, with the gap forced through it in the winter of 1983–4, making it (again) Crow Island. Carping criticisms possibly, but a pity when clearly much trouble has been taken to produce a superior product. Certainly very well worth putting beside the choicer editions in your bookcase.

New Editions

The Illustrated Salar the Salmon is to be published as a companion volume to their *Illustrated Tarka the Otter* by Webb and Bower on 26 October 1987, with an Introduction by Richard Williamson, and 31 colour paintings and 17 pencil illustrations by Michael Loates, whose work adorns the cover of this Issue and who is, of course, a member of this Society. Price £14.95.

The Wet Flanders Plain. A new edition, the first since the original edition of 1929, will contain an Introduction by Richard Williamson, two articles by HW on a return trip that he made to France and Belgium in 1964, and black and white photographs taken by Mrs Williamson in 1925 when on their honeymoon, when the material for the book was being prepared. It is hoped that publication will be mid-September, price approx. £10 including postage, available from Gliddon Books Publishers, Skeetshill Farmhouse, Shotesham St Mary, Norwich NR15 1UR.

Review

'Restoring a Farm' by Dr J. W. Blench. A review of HWW's *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* in *Lodestar* No. 5, Spring 1987.

West Country Writers Association

Annual Conference: May 1987

Toast to the West Country

In the toast the names of Thomas Hardy and Henry Williamson were linked. It was pointed out that if Hardy had lived a little longer or the Association had been formed a little earlier then Hardy might well have been the first President. The link with HWW would then have been even stronger. Here were two writers who took the countryside around them and used it to create their own world peopled by their own characters. In both cases the novelist used a 'real' place — Henchard's house in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the lime-washed mill in *Tarka* — but only as a starting point for that imaginative leap which made them novelists and not writers on the topography of Dorset or North Devon. Both men were creators — and that creative activity could be best seen in what lay beneath the surface of the finished novel: the manuscripts. Williamson and Hardy realized the value of revision. The manuscripts of both writers showed their almost obsessive concern to find the best word or phrase, the most evocative name, the precise description: the first title of *The Woodlanders* was *Fitzpiers at Hintock*; *Salar the Salmon* was called *Salar the Leaper*. In the *Mayor* Hardy first called Henchard 'James', then 'Giles' before settling on 'Michael'; in *Salar* 'The Island' was first called 'Lundy'. There were innumerable other examples of such revisions which showed clearly that 'True ease in writing comes by Art not Chance'.

Dr Terence Jones