
Spring Meeting, 1987

Robert Tierney

Norfolk usually gives us sunny weekends: this year's weather was fine when we most needed it. About thirty members assembled at Old Hall Farm for the first event, the walk round the fields, anecdotally guided by Robert Williamson and Douglas Jordan (who worked there with Henry). Mrs Loetitia Williamson also came, and was with us throughout the weekend. Newcomers quickly discovered two things: just how large a small farm of 240 acres can seem, and that Amanda's line in *Private Lives* 'Very flat, Norfolk!' is only partly true. Every member who can should make this visit at some time, though; seeing and tramping the land one's-self really does bring HW's Norfolk years alive. A welcome pendant to the walk was tea, at the invitation of Lord Buxton, the present owner, in the wonderfully refurbished Old Granary, now transformed into a fully carpeted, softly lit picture gallery-cum-sitting room in which a family of fifty would hardly be noticed. 'Tea' does not begin to suggest the spread of Bunter-ish dreams which met our eyes. Fittingly, it included wheaten scones. Our host very hospitably joined us, and our thanks were warmly conveyed by

Chairman Tim Morley. The sun then withdrew, and gave way to rain as we left the farm.

The meeting moved in convoy the three miles to Blakeney for the next event, which saw the Mayflower Room of the Blakeney Hotel transported in spirit to become the Big Hall of Colham School. Here members assumed the corporate role of Special Slackers, for a rehearsal and performance of William Anderton's cantata *The Wreck of the Hesperus* as in Chapters 23 and 24 of *Dandelion Days*. The architect of this session was June Emerson, who, with the aid of the distinguished Norwich conductor Sidney Twemlow, had re-discovered the piece. Mr Twemlow himself conducted us from the piano, and a number of experienced singers from his regular choir had nobly come along in support, providing a core of vocal line within which any pauper spirits present might hide. After three run-throughs and a brief rest the scene was set by Dr Wheatley Blench with a reading, from Chapter 24, of the affecting passage in which Willie imagines Elsie Roberts as the doomed maiden. The 'Grand Concert Performance' promised

in the programme followed. Others must assess its merits. (Fortunately, posterity is served: it was recorded.) A performer can only note that one of Beecham's basic rules — that the band should all start together and all finish together — was faithfully observed. And we really did enjoy it. Thank you, June.

Conductor and singers joined us for dinner, but unfortunately the intended speaker, Ernest Bradbury, a former music critic of *The Yorkshire Post*, who had known Henry at the Savage Club, had been taken suddenly ill. Into his place, at very short notice, stepped Wheatley Blench, with a talk on the influence of Richard Jefferies on Henry's early work — in particular *The Lone Swallows* and *Dandelion Days* — which was full of the insight and illumination we have come to expect from him.

The chief event of Sunday morning was the showing of a video of the *Tarka* film presented by the producer, David Cobham, again at the Blakeney Hotel. Coffee and relaxed chat followed, after which members gradually dispersed on their separate ways, and another notable weekend was over.