

Editorial

The evening of 8th December 1988 found Richard and I waiting, along with a small crowd, on the pavement outside the National Portrait Gallery. Exactly as the clock on St Martin-in-the-Fields struck six chimes, the doors opened and we all politely jostled inside. The occasion was the preview of the T.E. Lawrence exhibition to mark the centenary of his birth.

Some many months before the National Portrait Gallery had written to ask us (as Managers of the Henry Williamson Literary Estate) if we would be willing to loan the telegram that was sent by T.E. Lawrence to Henry Williamson on Monday 13th May 1935. Whilst travelling back after sending this telegram, Lawrence met with a fatal accident and died a few days later.

Later an official photograph was requested for use in the proposed catalogue, the NPG organising and paying for same to be executed with great care and expertise. (Those of you who have bought the Society's reprint of *Genius of Friendship* will have benefited by this.)

In November I personally transported the telegram to London feeling that was the safest way, and thus the 8th December found us eagerly looking forward to seeing the telegram displayed on public view.

A few chaotic minutes ensued whilst all present collected their free catalogues — as they cost nearly £15, this was a courtesy much appreciated by us — which had to be signed for and was time-consuming, and further, a glass of wine which then had to be gulped down as no wine was allowed within the exhibition proper. This private preview was for two hours only and time was passing.

After one gulp I decided to forego same and instead looked for 'our' catalogue entry, reading it aloud to Richard whilst he drank both glasses.

The entry immediately before also directly concerns HW, being a pen and ink drawing of him by Powys Evans inscribed (in HW's hand) 'Henry Williamson correcting proofs of *The Pathway* at Georgeham, August 1928' followed by the owl device inscribed HW. This entry discusses briefly the relationship between HW and fascism and infers connection with Lawrence.

As Henry had no actual connection with fascism until he had moved to Norfolk in 1937, two years after Lawrence had died, and did not join the British Union until late 1937, this makes for rather misleading copy but of course the connection is entirely Henry's own fault in that he himself changed in print the content of his last letter to Lawrence, and thereafter perpetuated this as fact.

The correspondence between these two men covers the years 1928–1935. They wrote regularly (there are 30 letters from Lawrence) but actually met only twice. The story of how Edward Garnett sent T.E. Lawrence a copy of *Tarka* and his ensuing enthusiastic critique is well known. If handwriting is as revealing as it is supposed to be then they had much of common character for it cannot escape anyone how similar the two hands are.

The exhibition was superb and the catalogue is totally worth its cost. Every aspect of Lawrence's life is portrayed. Nearly at the end is the small telegraph form printed on rough yellowy-buff paper and completed in pencil. Creased from over fifty years storage it is in its physical appearance a small insignificant scrap, but such is its intrinsic power that it has become immortal.

Lunch Tuesday wet fine cottage 1 mile
North Bovington camp

Shaw

AW