

Meetings

DEVON MEETING 1988

An AGM Weekend begins long before the start of the first scheduled event. There is the receipt of the programme, bookings of hotel rooms and perhaps of places for some event, followed by rising anticipation until the time arrives for packing, then anxious study of weather forecasts and, finally, setting off for Devon. As one gets into the lonelier lanes around Braunton and Woolacombe one quizzes other cars — do they hold other members making for the same place? Then, at long last, arrival — same room as last year, different room, better view, worse view, or what? Then to the lounge, the bar, meetings with old or new friends, and the weekend is under way. And all too soon, of course, it is over.

Almost from the first moment, rumour had it that 1988 would be the last time we should be able to foregather at the Putsborough Sands Hotel, due to its intended sale and change of use. Sadly, confirmation came at the AGM on Saturday that rumour was correct.

The theme for the weekend, 'The First World War', deriving from the 70th anniversary of the Armistice, was enshrined in the three evening talks and the exhibition. In the first talk, on Friday, Peter Lewis gave his resumé of events of WW1 as depicted in the *Chronicle* and *The Patriot's Progress*, and alluded to in *The Flax of Dream*. As with most concordances, this revealed interesting variations and developments in the different fictional treatments of the same actual event. During the questions and discussion session which followed, there emerged a vein of enquiry which became something of a sub-theme throughout the weekend, concerning the workings and operation of the creative imagination, and the eclecticism arbitrarily practised by many authors in building character and shaping (or re-shaping) events to suit the purposes of their story. This is a fascinating and legitimate subject of enquiry, and one very much 'in the air' at time of writing in other arts also — c.f. a National Gallery exhibition 'Rembrandt Revealed' and a realisation from the notebooks of Beethoven of a never-composed Tenth Symphony. Perhaps it is a little early to say so, but one hopes that in Henry's case the enquiry will not be too relentless: the usual morbid results of overmuch dissection and anatomising are the reverse of living works of literature.

On Saturday morning our luck with the weather finally ran out, and the coach tour to Appledore, Landcross and Canal Bridge took place in unremitting rain, but was still counted a success by the tourists. An over-run of an hour meant a late luncheon; consequently, in the continuing rain, only some half-dozen hardy souls visited Ox's Cross and the Writing Hut this year. After the AGM came the weekend's 'still centre', Brian Sanders and Robert Williamson reading their own selection of poetry and prose, aptly titled 'The Spirit of Reality' (which we take to be an allusion to Henry's own essay 'Reality in War Literature'). This was beautifully done and very warmly received.

All this time, Tim Osborne, aided by Vicky, had been performing his annual miracle of creating in the foyer ante-room a lively and coherent exhibition out of an assortment of disparate articles, most of which he had never previously clapped eyes on. This year's show included a uniform of Henry's, and a special constable's tunic and truncheon. That truncheon! Schliemann himself did not look on what he took to be the face of Agamemnon with more awe than one felt gazing at the night-stick that possibly (here we go again) may have felled the father of Mona Monk.

After dinner (and in its final performance the hotel excelled itself) our distinguished guest speaker, John Terraine, spoke about Earl Haig, as Field Marshal Sir Douglas later

became. For many, this was very much a re-assessment: a refutation of the 'Haig the butcher' school, a clear-eyed analysis of what it meant to be a C-in-C in a conflict of such magnitude, and an insight into the real loneliness of command. Henry once said in a radio interview (much, one senses, to the questioner's surprise), 'Well, of course, I'm a Haig man.' After hearing this talk one could begin to see why.

The final event, next morning, was a 'Brains Trust', the brains being those of Robert Williamson, Wheatley Blench, John Homan and Tim Morley, who chaired the session. A good range of questions brought much of interest and enlightenment, with the sub-theme already mentioned never far from the surface.

We believe the meeting was continued in various hostelries long after the official break-up. Our old comrade and friend Margaret Clarke was much mourned and missed throughout the weekend. Where shall we meet in 1989? A problem left in the lap of the gods and the hands of the Society Committee.

Autolytus

AN EVENING WITH HENRY WILLIAMSON IN REDHILL

(The Southern Area Meeting at the Harlequin Centre, Redhill, on 19th November 1988)

How would four very different elements combine to make one cohesive evening? This seemed a challenge, with the programme containing examples of Henry's Devon humour selected by Peter Lewis; a serious study of Henry's and Phillip's connections with the BUF and T. E. Lawrence by Paul Reed; a perceptive character study of Richard Maddison by Pat Murphy; and a reading by Brian Fullager of *The Last Summer*, written to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Great War. Amazingly such diverse elements built up into a satisfying and stimulating evening at the Redhill local HW Society meeting on 19th November. This is our 'do-it-yourself' part of the Society, when we hope to draw on local talent and get everyone talking. About forty old and new members and friends came, and under Brian Fullager's gentle direction we emerged with new insights into the writings of Henry Williamson.

MW

MEMBERS ANNUAL WALK AND PICNIC — SUNDAY 9th JULY 1988
KINGLEY VALE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE
(Nr Chichester, West Sussex)

Your President, Richard Williamson, Warden of Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (the finest yew forest in Europe), and his wife Anne, cordially invite members and their families and friends to join them on this already traditional annual event to walk around the woodland and chalk grassland of the reserve.

Good plants, butterflies and conversation.

Meet: Approx. 11.30 a.m. **Venue:** West Stoke Car Park

Food: Bring your own picnic/drinks. NO FACILITIES on site

Clothing: Ordinary if fine; boots recommended if recent rain

Dogs: Permitted on leash

Directions: If required a MAP is obtainable from the Secretary, John Homan (address inside Journal cover), enclosing a return SAE