

Meetings

Richard Jefferies & W.H. Hudson Plaque Ceremony, Broadwater Cemetery 29 April 1989

The old Victorian cemetery at Broadwater near Worthing, Sussex, is famous for containing the graves of two famous nature writers and naturalists, W.H. Hudson and Richard Jefferies. On Saturday 29th April 1989 a plaque was unveiled there by the Mayor of Worthing, Mr John Cotton, honouring the memory of these two eminent naturalists. The ceremony was attended by representatives of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Sussex Wildlife Trust, the Richard Jefferies Society and others. Our President, Richard Williamson, was there with Anne to maintain the 'Williamson connection'. The cost of the plaque and restoration of Hudson's grave was borne jointly by the RSPB and the Sussex Wildlife Trust. (Hudson is held in high regard by the RSPB as his writings did much to expose the horrors of the slaughter of thousands of birds each year to satisfy the whims of the fashionable feather trade.) He was also an early and committed supporter of the RSPB, being for a short time its president, and a long-standing member of the council. After the unveiling ceremony there was a message of welcome read by Mr Frank Penfold, vice-president of the Wildlife Trust. The party then moved across to Hudson's graveside where a short address was given by Ken Smith, public affairs officer of the RSPB, who spoke of the greatest significant tribute to Hudson's crusade on behalf of birds, the fact that now, no longer do young children in their thousands seek each springtime to pillage hedgerow nests for their egg collection. Back then to Jefferies' grave for a moving address given by Mark Daniel, a vice-president of the Richard Jefferies Society. Mark described how Jefferies' deep love of nature gave him not only astonishing powers of observation, but an intense desire that others should see as he saw, and enjoy the natural world as he enjoyed it. Many of his books carry the message: look, see, feel, and enjoy. And he gave us words to express it (how well Henry understood that message and, grasping the sputtering torch, made Jefferies' creed his own!)

The official business of the day now over, we made our way down to Worthing where a small exhibition of Hudson's books and letters was inspected in the Public Library followed by a reception in the Mayor's Parlour.

Since the unveiling ceremony news of some disturbing proposals have come to light: Hudson, like Henry Williamson, was a great admirer of Jefferies and left instructions that he should be buried close to Jefferies' grave. But he outlived Jefferies by some 35 years so that when the time came, the only space that could be found was on the far side of the cemetery, a considerable distance from Jefferies' grave. This plot is close against the cemetery wall and a road beyond, which makes the site most vulnerable to senseless attacks by vandals. The cross has been thrown down and smashed several times recently, and even the marble curb surround has been uprooted and broken. Jefferies' grave is more difficult to locate, tucked away in the middle of the cemetery (as Henry found when he went to Broadwater many years ago). This has until now given the site some protection from violation and the grave is tended and maintained regularly by Mark Daniel. Now we learn that plans are before the Borough Council to consider exhuming the remains of Jefferies and Hudson in order to re-bury them side by side in a special garden of remembrance. This proposal is to make the graves more easy to find for the many hundreds of visitors from Britain and abroad who come to Broadwater each year to honour these two celebrated writers. It is thought that this plan too will help to foil the vandals. Before any such step can be taken it will be necessary for approval to be sought from all the societies and interested parties. In the meantime let us hope that the two old writers

may be left in peace for a while longer, their names at least united and immortalised on a fine plaque.

Brian Fullager

[I must add that Brian himself was present very firmly on behalf of the Henry Williamson Society, his name badge very proudly stating this fact, rather than his equal claim to the Richard Jefferies Society. Ed.]

Lewisham 1989 — a personal view

When asked to write a true and unbiased report of the Spring meeting, I thought how lucky it was that the events covered would be nearest to my heart. The first two novels of *The Chronicle* are my favourites. I have always lived and worked in the area, and have had many a chat with the headmaster at Colfes on parents' evenings.

However, it was an Old Colfeian who started the weekend on Saturday afternoon. Fred Shepherd led 32 members on a walk round Blackheath, starting at the Paragon — an elegant crescent of Georgian houses rather similar to Bath. Fred admitted that Henry had nothing to do with the buildings, but they were too good to miss! After looking at Morden College, we walked across the heath. Tim Morley and Peter Lewis decided it was their duty to test out the local beer at the 'Hare and Billet'. It was not even a hot day. They caught us up while we were walking through the leafy, blossom-covered lanes to the old Colfe's site. This is on a steep slope; only the playground, woodshed, inner wall, outer wall and gates still remain. Fred kept us all entranced by recalling his own encounters with the same masters as in *Dandelion Days* plus Henry's visit to the Old Colfeians Rugby Club dinner.

The highlight of the weekend was an evening meeting at the Beardwood Centre — a very new addition to the present Colfes School. By now, 80 of us were present. The family was represented by Robert and his wife; the school by the head boy, his deputy and the school librarian who had put together a small exhibition of 'Henry' at Colfes, including his first published article in the school magazine. This was followed, in the lecture theatre, by Will Harris's semi-drama 'Without Shadow', a clever blend of highly dramatised events from *Dark Lantern* and *Donkey Boy* starting with the shattering scene of Thomas Turney striking Hetty; intertwined with Will's narrative, sometimes illustrated by slides moving forwards and backwards from 1898 to present day. The superb acting of Will, assisted by Ian Akhurst, Jonathan Harris, Pam Harris and Penny Nisbet, brought the characters alive. Will's summing up explored the idea of cause and effect in the relationship between father and son, how the lack of understanding causes irritation, malaise, etc., but above all — "true love is likeness of thought". "To be like the sun, to see no shadows;" *The Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* will one day be recognised as the greatest 20th century novel. The audience was spellbound. There wasn't a murmur or a cough during the performance; some of us were crying with the emotion of it all. It seemed an anti-climax to drink wine and eat food afterwards.

Next morning we met outside the Clarendon Hotel. A few members had stayed up until the early hours and only just made the coach in time. Bob Tierney conducted the trip round Brockley, showing many of the places mentioned in *Dark Lantern* and *Donkey Boy*. We stopped in Hilly Fields, and aided by Bob's excellent maps were able to trace the former brickworks. This trip gave a very brief glimpse of Brockley. I do hope that members will use Joan Read's leaflets and explore, by foot, in their own time. We then travelled on through Catford and Bromley to Keston, finally returning to Blackheath at 12.30, very reluctant to return home after such an inspiring weekend.

Our thanks must to go Bob Tierney for his unobtrusive but efficient organisation.

Jill Morrison

Young Henry — Saturday 8th July

John Hunt, who has been an admirer of Henry Williamson's writing since he was introduced to the work by a beautiful young lady whilst on holiday in Devon in 1934 at age 18, arranged a Midsummer event for south-east members at his home in Plaistow, West Sussex, in the form of a buffet lunch to be followed by professional readings by some experienced actor friends (John has been very active in the theatre world) from some of Henry's early work, including *The Patriot's Progress*, *The Dream of Fair Women* and *The Pathway* (thus very appropriate to our current concentration of thought). This event coincided with the annual walk and picnic on the following day at Kingley Vale NNR hosted by your President, Richard Williamson, making it a 'Williamson in West Sussex' weekend.

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