

Spring in Devon

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It was a new venture for the Society, to bring the Spring Meeting to Devon, and the weekend began on a high note, the threat of cloud and rain soon diminishing, and for the next three days we were blessed with heavenly weather.

After a pleasant meal, the first official event of the weekend began with our discussion on 'Whither the Society?', ably introduced by our new chairman, Will Harris. It prompted much response, and much debate, although in the end very little conclusion. One point was clear, though, that members felt much pride in what has been achieved over the past ten years. The discussion continued, (for some into the early hours) as the meeting broke up and shifted location to the bar.

Saturday morning meant decisions, with a choice between a walk along the sands to Baggly or a trip into Lynton to see the Society's exhibition as part of the local Arts Festival. Many members chose the latter, myself included. It was a really first class and professional display, and much credit and thanks should go to Anne Williamson who organised it. The photographs on offer covered the whole of Henry's life, but two in particular caught my eye — a studio portrait of HWW's parents showing a very beautiful young mother, with sensitive face and eyes not unlike Henry's, and a very serious and austere father; and a photograph of Henry taken in France during one of his Battlefields trips in the 1920s; standing amongst row upon row of wooden crosses, he stood uneasily, wearing his old Corduroy breeches, army boots and holding a smashed British helmet in his hand. A copy of each of Henry's books were on display, as well as a number of artefacts relating to *Tarka*.

After lunch in Lynmouth, the walk round Shallowford proved most welcome. A good crowd attended, and with the guidance of Robert Williamson and his mother Loetitia, the whole place was brought alive for us by their memories.

The evening's events began with a talk by the Barn Owl Trust, a most fitting body to address the Society and a fascinating speech; how many of us realised just how under threat the species is, or that over half die in their first year?

Another splendid meal followed, and we must thank the staff of the Devon Beach Hotel for their courtesy, and the very high standard of their service. The meal drew to a close with our President proposing a toast to Henry, and also to Loetitia who once again blessed us with her presence.

The after-dinner speaker was Betty Alsop, widow of Kenneth and both great friends of Henry, who gave a most fascinating insight into Henry. This was something quite special — to listen to someone talk of Williamson who really did know him, and was not just one of his many passing acquaintances. A short discussion followed, to which members of the Williamson family contributed.

Once again the bar drew large numbers, and few members must realise how much detailed analysis of Williamson's books and writing goes on over a pint!

I woke with some sadness knowing that the weekend was almost over. Our final time-tabled event was a guided walk round Georgeham by the eloquent David Stokes. His knowledge of the ground, and of Henry was quite obvious to us all, and I particularly appreciated his ability to switch into the rich Devon accent so characterised in Williamson's books. It was only a short walk, and certainly a very relaxed one, giving us time to ponder.

But it was soon lunchtime and all too soon time to say goodbye to friends and to the quiet lanes of North Devon, to reflect on the weekend's proceedings, to recall many wonderful conversations and remember with some relief that the next meeting wasn't really that far off. . .