

Meetings

Woolacombe in Autumn 1990 – A Family Affair

Recreating atmosphere on the page is one of the rarer literary abilities, and it would take, alas, more talent than your reporter possesses to do justice to the atmosphere that prevailed during the Autumn Meeting in Woolacombe last year. It was a family occasion for several reasons. For one thing, all the speakers and performers came from inside the Society – all home-grown, you might say. Even the exhibition in Barnstaple on the Sunday morning, although ostensibly an 'outside' event, and much enhanced by its surroundings in the newly-opened Museum of North Devon, proved to be based very substantially on the work and flair of our own Anne Williamson. Helping the family atmosphere along was *The Family*: Mrs Loetitia Williamson, Bill ('Windles'), over from Canada on a visit, and all the more welcome for that, Margaret, Robert and Mary, and Richard and Anne. And then there were the members themselves. A more good-humoured and warm group of people than the mix of familiar and unfamiliar names and faces assembled for the occasion would be hard to find. Does this all sound too terribly cosy and self-regarding? Perhaps. But it shouldn't, and did not seem to be at the time.

Brian Fullager gave a serious start to the weekend on Friday evening with a talk which was a kind of spiritual Odyssey involving Henry, Jefferies and himself, in which all the material was well and movingly knitted together. Saturday morning was wild enough for the videos to be brought out, and while some people watched 'The Vanishing Hedgerows', others braved the storm-force winds on Baggy Point and got thoroughly soaked in the process. Perhaps this was the reason The Rock Inn was comparatively empty that lunch-time. The Field and Writing Hut were well patronised in contrast.

Only a general impression of the AGM will be expected, and attempted, here. Apart from the usual business (and the consensus seemed to be that Will Harris, conducting his first meeting for the Society, performed with great tact and smoothness), there was a presentation to Mary Heath, who had relinquished the post of Membership Secretary during the year. Mary received a loud and deserved ovation for her hard and devoted work since the foundation of the Society, for which she was primarily responsible. Tribute was also paid to Publicity Manager Tim Osborne, who had resigned after 'ten years hard'. Tim was warmly thanked *in absentia*. Bob Tierney also stood down as Events Secretary, but was at once returned as a second Vice-Chairman. Is it ominous that both these latter, vacant offices, remain unfilled? We shall know more by the time this report appears.

Patrick Garland, who was to have been the chief guest speaker, had had to withdraw at short notice. In his stead we had two families: one fictional, one real. The fictionals were Richard and Hetty Maddison, portrayed by the very real Will and Pam Harris, ably supported by Ronald Walker: the trio presented a slimmed-down version of Will's play 'Without Shadows' in a concert performance. It succeeded as well as a 'play for voices' as it had when fully staged at Colfe's School in May 1989, and since your reporter is privy to the fact that it was edited down from two hours to one, and rehearsed, all in the space of a few hours on Saturday, no praise is too high for all three, but particularly for Will, who had to chair the AGM in the interval between ending rehearsals and starting performance. A sterling effort, well beyond the call of duty!

It seemed that most members found their way to the Barnstaple exhibition already mentioned. This was the Lynton Town Hall display from the Spring '90 Meeting transformed by light – light walls and good illumination – with sympathetic additions

from the Otter Trust and the Tarka Project, a fine three-dimensional display of an otter in a natural setting (created by Jerry Lee, Museums Officer responsible for the whole exhibition, and who also did the taxidermy), and a dozen wonderful photographs of the Devon countryside – not attributed in the room itself, but the work of James Ravilious.

So ended another warmly enjoyable weekend, with members' goodbyes in the crisp October sunshine by the Taw mingling with expressions of thanks to Bob Tierney, whose last meeting organised as Events Secretary this had been.

'AUTOLYCUS'

The Fourth Southern Area Meeting at Redhill, 17th November 1990

Enthusiastic support for this now established annual event at the Harlequin Centre, Redhill, continues to flourish. Thirty-three members attended and the evening's programme began with an entertaining talk given by David Stokes, based on his boyhood memories of life in Georgeham. We were also treated to an amusing Character study in the Devon dialect of 'Arty' (local butcher in the *Village* books). During the interval for wine and coffee, Derek White ran a most successful bookstall. Members having brought with them copies of any HWW books they had 'surplus to requirements'. Purchasers were thereby given the welcome chance to fill some important gaps in their collection. To round off a very enjoyable evening there was a showing of Henry's classic TV documentary 'Vanishing Hedgerows'. This evocative film with tantalising glimpses of Henry on the Norfolk Farm and seated in the Writing Hut at Ox's Cross; at each fresh viewing it brings a constant joy. These happy gatherings at Redhill are over far too soon but plans are already in hand for future meetings next summer and in the autumn. The particular value of such meetings is that they provide members who, for various reasons are unable to attend 'official' functions of the Society, with the opportunity to keep in touch. Congratulations and thanks are due to Margaret Murphy and Margaret White for their splendid organisation.

BRIAN FULLAGER

The Selborne Circle of Rural Writers

Richard and Anne Williamson attended the inaugural meeting of this Society in the summer of 1990. Founded by Anne Mallinson who runs the bookshop in Selborne, this new Society has been formed to provide a focal point for country authors who have a relationship with Selborne either in their writings or by interest. Specific authors are of course Gilbert White, Edward Thomas, George Sturt, W.H. Hudson, and include H.J. Massingham, Flora Thompson, Richard Mabey, Christopher Somerville and many others.

While there is no specific HW connection, there are many by inference, and certainly by like interest. On one of those hot days of last summer we first of all met in the Village Hall at Selborne for an informal formal opening of the Society; adjourned to the pub for lunch; some of us (Richard and I, Richard Mabey, Christopher Somerville and another lady writer) walked the leafy lanes in sweltering heat; others explored Selborne itself – the museum and church; then a picnic tea in the garden of Gilbert White's home/museum with readings. A day HW would have greatly enjoyed.

Anyone interested in joining the SCRW should contact Anne Mallinson at The Selborne Cottage Shop, Selborne, Alton, Hants GU34 3JH. The subscription is currently a very modest £3.

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