

## The Dreamer of Devon

As part of the North Devon Festival to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Beaford Arts Centre, Richard Williamson gave his illustrated lecture on his father to a capacity audience (over 70 in all) at the Henry Williamson Room in Barnstaple Library on Tuesday 16 July. Apart from the Festival's own brochure and newspaper coverage, George and Mary Heath (with additional help from Nicola Oliver) had done sterling work in distributing posters to advertise the event. We would also like to express our gratitude to Barnstaple Library for providing the venue, which (along with other events held there) was their contribution to the Arts Week.

In recent years this lecture, with slides made from archive photographs, which made its debut at a Society AGM in the early years and then took half the night to get through, has been greatly modified to make it suitable for a public audience. Enhanced by readings from HW's books at appropriate points and further enhanced by Richard's enactment of characters, gestures, deportment and attempts at both Devon and Norfolk accents, it was received with great appreciation by those present.

Arriving late Monday evening from our Sussex home, I spent most of Tuesday and Wednesday putting up the exhibition in the Studio, whilst Richard cut the grass, lopped branches to let more light into the Studio, moved furniture to clear the downstairs of all extraneous matter and generally cleaned and polished, being particularly generous with 'Zebo' on the stove, as anyone who touched it discovered! The Hut had had a splendid springclean on our May visit, in readiness for the Tarka Trail opening, all the hearth implements having been removed, shot-blasted, painted with rust retardant, and polished, over the winter.

Thursday morning saw us ready to receive our first visitors who arrived promptly at 10am and from then on there was a steady stream until well gone 6pm on the Sunday, about 150 altogether. Many had seen the mention that the Editor of *The Daily Telegraph* so kindly placed at the end of Christopher Somerville's excellent (and most fortuitously timed!) 'Walk of the Month' (see previous mention) and had made special journeys from far afield. Other visitors were local people who were pleased to be able to learn a little more about the man who dominated their landscape for so many years.

Every visitor spent a great deal of time with us, first at The Studio with the actual exhibition and then strolling down to the Writing Hut to imbibe its very special atmosphere, which everyone remarked upon. Enthusiasm was rampant: many people went away firmly intending to become members but what was possibly more important was that everyone was interested in what they saw and were uplifted and moved by this intimate contact with a great writer.

We would like to thank George and Mary Heath who came over and held the fort on the Friday morning, to enable us to have a break and to do some shopping for food for the weekend, and Janet and Tony Evans for their support in a different but equally important way, who gave us supper on Friday night and then ran us down to the Burrows for a refreshing walk around Crow Point in the rising moon, and who further arrived on Sunday morning with large pasties and a can of beer each.

The new leaflet was, of course, handed out to everyone. Also, a small display has been provided for the Braunton Countryside Centre, The Henry Williamson Room at Barnstaple Library, and for Nicola Oliver to display alongside the Tarka Project panels which go to all big events, plus a supply of 500 leaflets to each of these. The display consists of the six panels of the leaflet blown back up to A4 size and encapsulated in plastic with a larger 'title' panel with HW's name and dates on it.

The weather was kind and although our Alvis TA14 blew its head gasket on the way down, with the kind help of another Alvis owner from Spreacombe Richard was able after much hard work to repair same, so altogether it was a successful venture. AW