

## Forty Years in Wild Devon

Noel Beer

This July's North Devon Festival was a reminder of similar events held in the 1950s, and, in particular, of Devon's Festival of the Arts in 1954.

A significant happening in that festival was HW's lecture, at the Palace Theatre in Bideford, on Forty Years in Wild Devon.

I was on leave from the army at the time and, having been exiled from North Devon for many months, it was good to be back there in August. This pleasure was enhanced by the experience of listening to Henry's talk, which I attended with my elder sister.

Whilst straining to revive my memories of the details of the occasion, my recollection is that Henry was following a structure in the early stages of his lecture and that he then chose to digress from this. I could be completely wrong in this belief and it might well be that he was following a plan throughout, but what is certain is that the content was wide-ranging, atmospheric and enchanting.

On occasions he was following familiar territory; some of his reminiscences seemed to echo elements of the Devon Village books and the animal stories. Unlike those many readers of Henry who came to his writings by way of Tarka, my own introduction was through *Tales of a Devon Village*, (from Sydney Harper's, on the corner of Butchers' Row and High Street, Barnstaple), which was read and re-read frequently, along with its companion volume. The animal stories and others flowed, so, with a grounding in Henry's work, I was able to follow the wanderings of his talk whilst wallowing in nostalgia and feeling enveloped in things North Devonian. Although the details of the occasion are elusive, the atmosphere remains strongly with me.

Before we left the theatre my sister was able to get Henry to sign the Festival programme and I enclose a copy of the appropriate page, opposite.

**LECTURE**  
**PALACE THEATRE, BIDEFORD**

FRIDAY, 6th AUGUST, at 3 p.m.

HENRY WILLIAMSON

on

" FORTY YEARS IN WILD DEVON "

Henry Williamson was born in 1896. He joined the Army at the outbreak of the first world war and as a boy of eighteen spent the autumn of 1914 in the trenches. He was present at the Fraternisation between the English and German soldiers on the first Christmas Day of the war. His most famous books are his nature studies, notably "Tarkar the Otter" and "Salar the Salmon." Others that have enjoyed great popularity include "Dandelion Days," "The Pathway," "Life in a Devon Village," "The Golden Falcon," and "The Dark Lantern." His most recent publications have been "Donkey Boy" and "Tales of Moorland and Estuary." He has farmed in Devon and Norfolk. Now he lives at Georgeham, about ten miles from Barnstaple.

**DANCING**

**THE QUEEN'S HALL, BARNSTAPLE**

FRIDAY, 30th JULY, 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.

**GRAND CARNIVAL DANCE**

with

The personal appearance of Britain's Ambassador of Music

**AMBROSE AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

featuring

**ANNETTE SCOTT AND BOB FREEMAN**

supported by

**JACK BROOKS AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

**THE QUEEN'S HALL, BARNSTAPLE**

THURSDAY, 5th AUGUST, 9 p.m. to 2 a.m.

**FESTIVAL BALL**

with

**PETER GRIFFITHS AND HIS COUNTRY CLUB ORCHESTRA**