

Secretary's Notes

The Richard Jefferies Society Journal

Received Number 1 of this Journal, which is to be published annual each Spring. (The Newsletter will now be issued in the Autumn only).

This seems an excellent move as it will readily allow the Society to print new and fugitive material for the benefit of many. In this issue for example, is the new piece, *Alone in London ...*, from an untitled and unpublished MS in the British Library, and T.T.T., which was first published in the North Wilts Herald in 1867, under the pseudonym 'Geoffrey'. Two other rare pieces, not reprinted since 1877 follow, and modern comment is supplied by such as Andrew Rossabi with *Edward Thomas on the Country of Richard Jefferies*. All in all a most impressive new publication, and available to non-members of the RJ Society at £2 post paid. by application to: Brian Rich (tel. 0538 384713) 11 Adams Grove Leek, Staffs. ST13 8NX.

Tarka Trail News

George and Mary Heath represented the Society at the opening of the completed 'Tarka Trail' in mid-May, which took place near Marland Jimmy's pit south-east Torrington. This event which celebrated the opening of all 180 miles of the Tarka Trail was followed by the 'Tarka Country Festival' which lasted for two weeks and included much ritual walking of the Trail itself.

'Tarka Country News' which gives details of all that the Tarka Project is involved in can be obtained from Nicola Oliver, Tarka Project Officer, Eric Palmer Community Centre, Bailey Grove, Torrington, Devon, EX38 8EZ.

The Thomas Hardy Society

The Society welcomes anyone interested in Hardy's writing, his life and his times and it takes pride in the way in which at its meetings non-academics and academics and people from many different countries have met together in a harmony which would have delighted Hardy himself. Among its members are many distinguished literary and academic figures, and many more who love and enjoy Hardy's work sufficiently to wish to meet fellow enthusiasts and develop their appreciation of it. Every other year the Society organises a Conference. *The Thomas Hardy Journal* contains items of academic and general interest, and is sent free to members three times a year. Applications for membership should be made to the Hon. Secretary, P.O. Box 1438, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1YH

Correcting a Misconception

The Independent of 5 October 1991 carried an article entitled 'The Green Shirts', written by Francis Wheen. It traced the history of 'The Kindred of the Kobbo Kift', (meaning 'proof of great strength'), founded in 1920 by John Hargrave as a breakaway movement from Baden Powell's Boy Scouts offering a pacifist alternative to the militarism he felt Baden-Powell was fomenting into his Scouts. Initially the movement wanted 'healthy, attractive and graceful women, and well set-up and vital men in sound sexual contrast.' Their costume was medieval-like of cloaks, jerkins and tabards, and in green and brown, 'the healing hue.' Woodcraft, one of Hargrave's boyhood loves was important, and each 'Kinsman' given a 'woodcraft name', often Red Indian in inspiration.

However, by 1924 Hargrave became worried by lack of purpose in the movement

beyond rather elitist camping and hiking, and without warning via the Kift Journal *Nomad*, ordered his members to read the works of Major C.H. Douglas on the theory of Social Credit devised by him. Briefly, Douglas argued that all citizens be given a regular hand-out, the National Dividend, which would be enough to live on and encourage the purchase of more goods at 'scientifically adjusted', i.e. reduced prices. When asked if this was not merely a something for nothing scheme, he argued that what was wrong with such a scheme? When the sun shines upon the Earth there was no charge for the stream of Solar Energy, it was God's Gift to Man to be used — in the form of goods and services — by everyone.

This radical change of tack called for a different type of membership, away from middle-class ruralists to urban working class. Uniform was simplified to green military shirts and shorts, kobbo Kift disappeared to be replaced with the 'Green Shirt Movement for Social Credit'.

It is at this point that Francis Wheen suggests a similarity between Mosley's Blackshirts, 'another Movement of the Thirties with a charismatic leader and silly uniforms', and the Green Shirts and John Hargrave, whose voice rang out with the accent of authority, and the *assumption* that they (*too*) were anti-semitic. 'Especially as their supporters included the poet Ezra Pound and Henry Williamson, the author of *Tarka the Otter*, who certainly were fascists.'

Since it seems that Hargrave was strongly against anti-Semitism, and argued that the troubles of the period had nothing to do 'with any particular race', the assumption of anti-Semitism is odd. Further, and this is of course of interest to us, is the statement that Williamson, a 'known fascist', was a supporter of the Green Shirts? Nothing springs to mind in his writings to endorse this. Indeed, in 1937, when the Government worried by violence in London and elsewhere passed the Public Order Act, forbidding political uniforms, and which effectively ended the Green Shirts, I do not think that Williamson had even been to one of Mosley's BUF rallies, much less become a member of the party, and therefore a 'known' fascist.

Survivor

As I lay my Secretary's pen away it is difficult not to reflect where and when it all started. A May evening in Barnstaple and a small group, unknown to each other, gathered round their 'hosts', Mary and George Heath, all fired with the idea of forming a society to the memory of a great but un-honoured English writer. We soon got to know each other and some sort of natural selection produced a committee, and an idea of mine evolved into the reason for our existence.

The first effort at a Journal followed, a simple duplicated thing but containing a valuable and stimulating piece by our new President, Richard Williamson. (How valuable was that early support considering we were a total unknown to Henry's family).

Our first A.G.M., a case of all hands helping with organisation of Hotel, Hall where we were to meet, and more. Spies said that two of our first Vice-Presidents, Fr. Brocard Sewell, and Frances Horovitz were giving a paper on Henry at the Cheltenham Festival shortly before our weekend. It needed no great persuasion on my part for them to agree to a repeat for us, and then quite suddenly it seemed, there we were in the Barnstaple Hotel, and I had just decided that the small man of fresh complexion and close-cut hair, in a clerical suiting must be Fr. Sewell, when he was joined by the most striking and beautiful Frances Horovitz. We introduced and talked, and Frances made little of her journey from the North of England, and there was no question of her professional fee, a gesture much appreciated, but I doubt enough, at the time.

The Writing Hut was visited for the first time, and the new house that Henry never lived in; tea was taken in the Village Hall after a visit to see Henry's grave in Georgeham churchyard, so close to his first home with the bubbling stream nearby.

With the AGM over we could relax and enjoy a wonderfully hilarious talk by David Hoyle, then a splendid supper laid-on by Irene Jones and her team. How did they do it for just £2 each?

Then came, *Henry Williamson: Old Soldier*, Fr. Sewell's paper, and even now I am struck by how lucky we were to be able to record this, despite the problems of setting up Harry Williamson's studio equipment brought down from Ox's Cross, and finding the right tape just in time. I draw no whiff of detraction from all the good and enthralling speakers we have had since that night, but to me it was, and will remain, quite magical. Two people who really understood Henry, and not a little poignant that the readings given by Frances are the sole prose pieces she has left to us.

Well, a lot more has happened since those early days; the little Hut made safe; the memorial plaque in London; Norfolk; the *Tarka* jubilee are but a few, and now we look forward to the Centenary...

But perhaps the best think of all is that '... the underground army ...' of Williamson readers *does* exist. Our membership list proves this, and there are many more who are not moved or inclined to belong to a society. This was made plain last year when, after exposure of Williamson and the Society in National papers, I received over a period of months a large mail from enquirers and well wishers and those wanting his books.

Finally, my thanks to all I have worked with in committee. It has mostly been fun, and I am humbled by the true dedication of most that goes on unsung from year to year. I do hope that you, the membership, appreciate just how much we owe to what is now a splendid committee!

John Homan



An A.G.M. View from the Devon Beach Hotel by Margaret White.