

Meetings

The Folkestone Weekend

The first sign I saw bearing the words *The Leys* assured me that I could leave behind, at least for the weekend, images of a vast anonymity of workings for the Channel Tunnel, with an apparently redundant boring machine standing by the roadside. What I saw of Folkestone town did not revive memories of my former cross-Channel sailings to visit places on the 1914-1918 Western front; nor did the shop fronts familiar in all English towns speak to me of those days when young men took to the ferries en route for the trenches. But when I came upon The Leys, with its crescent of imposing and handsome hotels, something spoke to me of an Edwardian elegance and orderliness that had been pulled apart as the steamers left the harbour below. It must be, I felt, and other Society members agreed, very much as it had been then. The hotel in which the Spring Meeting 1992 was held, itself possessed an atmosphere of days gone by, and I was not alone in musing that in the very room in which we held our meetings, Phillip Maddison himself might have stood.

It was, stated simply, a good weekend, made special by being a new experience for the Society. It was, as ever, a time to renew old friendships, and to make new ones, and to be treated to some fine moments of erudition and personal insight. The weekend got off to a fine start with Ronald Walker's masterly presentation about 'The Folkestone Connection' in which he explored the various episodes in *The Flax of Dream* and the *Chronicle* centring on the town, much of his exposition dealing with the celebrated Eveleyn Fairfax. There was a satisfying partnership between Ron's careful analysis and his beautiful reading of the relevant portions of Henry's work, and the presentation was at once informative and entertaining.

Saturday morning saw most of us taking a coach trip to Aylesford Priory. I had not realised it was quite so readily accessible to the public, and I had to exercise my imagination a little to picture Henry finding peace there. It was difficult to think of solitude and spiritual refreshment as I mingled with the numerous other visitors, or queued for my lunch in the beautiful old barn. But there were uplifting moments, notably in the chapel wherein were mounted on the plain walls striking ceramic representations of the stations of the cross. Our return to Folkestone was by the pretty route, winding our way through a succession of neat Kent villages, with Fred Shepherd pointing out features of interest. Then back to the hotel, and, for those who wished, pots of tea in the lounge, and a chance for more conversation and reverie before dinner.

Dinner was highlighted by the presentation to the Society of a large collection of letters written by Henry Williamson to Kathleen Watkins and her late husband. Mrs Watkins, who was a guest of the Society throughout the weekend, formally handed over the letters to Wheatly Blench for safe keeping in the Williamson archive at Exeter University, and then spoke most movingly on some of her memories of Henry.

The presentation after dinner focused our attention on the Great War with four members reading extracts from the *Chronicle*, and one member reading from his own journal written during visits to the Western Front. Although Henry's war experiences were absolutely crucial to his development as a writer, we have not spent a great deal of time at our meetings exploring this aspect of his life, and I was again brought up short by the power of Henry's prose.

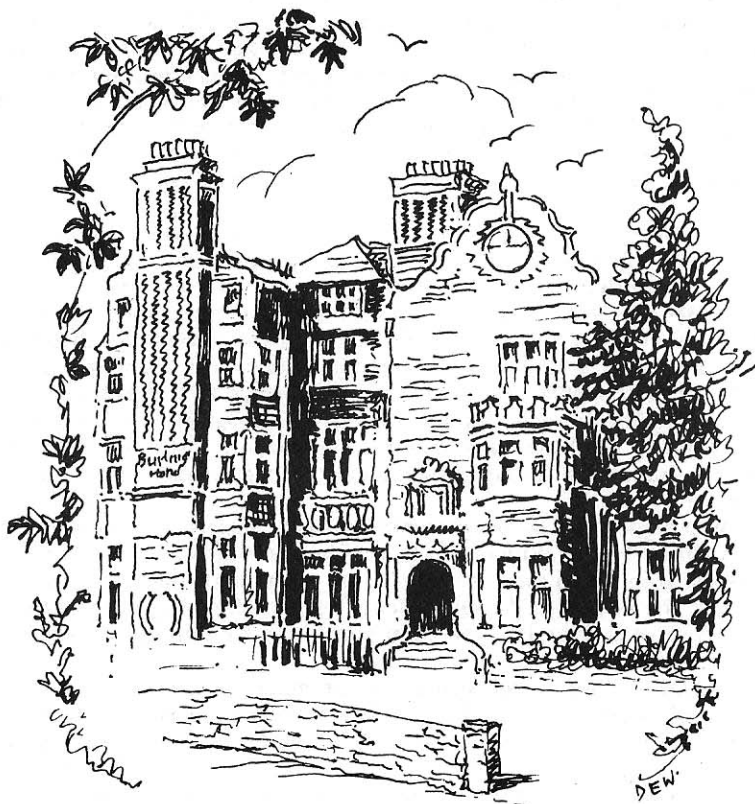
Sunday morning, before breakfast, found me walking along the Leys and looking

back again at the magnificent hotels. Across the grass from those opulent frontages hobbled the wounded soldiers convalescing in Blighty. Here bath chairs had trundled, and men in various states of injury and shock managed to get to the promenade for some bracing sea air. France seemed very near, and I listened out for the rumblings of distant gunfire.

The morning presentation was given by Robert Williamson and Brian Sanders, whose double act provided a perfect conclusion to the weekend. The topic was Henry and education, another mine largely untapped, I realised. Extracts from *Dandelion Days* were read and there was appreciative laughter as we were reminded of young Maddison's antics at school, and the wonderfully drawn characters of the schoolmasters. It was some time since I had last read those splendid passages. How could I have forgotten Mr Rore and his catch-phrase 'What boys agree??' It was fascinating to have Robert reading about himself as a very young boy in extracts from *The Children of Shallowford*.

And so the gathering came to an end. By any standards, it had been an excellent weekend, and Fred Shepherd was warmly thanked for his work in organising it.

Michael Pelmet.



Burlington Hotel, Folkestone — A Sketch by Doris Walker

One of our Sussex members, Terry Whippy who is a well-known militaria collector and WW1 battlefields researcher; was recently interviewed by Ian Collington on BBC Radio Sussex about his interest in the Great War. Terry paid tribute to Henry Williamson and John Giles, both of whom first inspired his enthusiasm and interest in the history of WW1.

B.F.

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Paul Reed gave a lecture on June 5th in Exeter to members of the Devon branch of the Western Front Association. The subject of his talk was 'The Great War novels and writings of Henry Williamson.'

B.F.

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The Genius of Friendship

Richard Williamson was invited to address members of the T.E. Lawrence Society's London branch at their Spring 1992 Meeting at Hendon, Air Museum on the outskirts of north-west London on the relationship between HW and TEL. It is hoped that the text of this talk will be printed in the next issue of the *Journal*.

A.W.

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**Solution to
Ox's Cross
Word**

Herewith the Solution to Don's 'Ox's Cross Word'. It was obviously too difficult for you all as the number of replies was nil (which seemed rather a pity) until a last minute entry from John Homan (prompted by my plaintive note accompanying the editorial package of material) saved the day. All correct, John and thankyou for making the effort.

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So in the hope of a bigger response, we return to a 'Mystery Quotation'.

Where does the quotation in Mick Loates' letter (see p 60) come from?

Please show your enthusiasm and interest by flooding your Editor's mailbox with your answers.