Editorial

Paul Roberts has said in his appreciation of Morine Krissdóttir, 'This year's Annual General Meeting ... was something of a momentous occasion in the history of the Society since it marked the formal end of the Chairmanship of Dr Morine Krissdóttir after ten busy and fruitful years.' If the reader then turns to the report of the A.G.M. it may appear that it has been 'all change' in the management of the Society. It is a further tribute to Morine that what has taken place merely marks the culmination of an evolutionary process, by which experienced people with ideas and proven ability have moved into positions of greater responsibility. So often, a dynamic person leading from the front, either doesn't know when to step down, or in doing so creates a void. However, the transfer of responsibility to Paul Roberts, Griffin Beale and Chris Gostick, with Stephen Powys Marks continuing as a financial sheet-anchor, has been well planned and smoothly conducted. The new team of officers, with their committee, are already drawing up an agenda, and as Paul has said, 'Exploring new avenues along which the Society can develop'.

Paul Roberts will be a great loss to the *Newsletter*, in which I hope any future changes will also come about in an evolutionary way. I am grateful to those contributors who have enabled me to make a beginning, and hope that all members will continue to give positive support to what Paul has made one of the most well-informed and interesting publications of its kind.

John Batten

Subscriptions — please see page 36.

ON OTHER PAGES

Dr Morine Krissdóttir

This year's Annual General Meeting on Monday August 25th was something of a momentous occasion in the history of the Society since it marked the formal end of the chairmanship of Dr Morine Krissdóttir after ten busy and fruitful years.

It is, perhaps, difficult for those who have joined the Society since the beginning of Morine's chairmanship to appreciate the full extent of her influence on the Society but it is no exaggeration to say that, with her fellow Officers, she has transformed it completely. Before she became Chairman we had no constitution and, consequently, were unable to enjoy charitable status. Although, as Secretary, I had issued occasional (and very unofficial) newsletters to the membership, it was only at the instigation of Morine and of Griffin Beale, then Secretary, that the *Newsletter* as we know it began publication. It was Morine's idea that we should establish an annual scholarly *Journal* and at her

urging that we established the Publications Committee, which has since been responsible for the production of ten separate publications. It was also as a result of Morine's skill as a negotiator that we were able to establish our collection and find a permanent home for it in Dorchester. None of these developments has been achieved easily and there have been those who have objected to each of them, yet the Society is stronger as a result of them and its membership is larger now than it has ever been.

There is, of course, still much that needs to be achieved and a new team will identify new challenges and will, I have no doubt, explore new avenues along which the Society can develop. Had it not been for the tireless energy of Morine Krissdóttir we would have begun our task from a far less secure foundation and we must never forget the debt, as members of the Society and as admirers of the Powys family, that we owe to her. It was in recognition of this debt that the Executive Committee bestowed upon Dr Krissdóttir an Honorary Life Membership and offered her the post of Honorary Curator of the Powys Society Collection, which I am delighted to say she accepted.

Paul Roberts

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Kingston Maurward, Dorset, at 4.00 pm on Monday 25 August 1997

Present The President, Honorary Officers, and 36 Members of the Society.

1 **Apologies** were received from Sven-Erik Täckmark, Gerald Pollinger and John Powys.

At this point Paul Roberts read a letter he had received from Sven-Erik Täckmark, regretting not being able to attend the 1997 conference, but extending his greetings and wishing the Society well for the future. Paul went on to acknowledge the profound contribution that Sven-Erik had made to the Society since its earliest years, and the particular contribution he had made to Powysian studies in Scandinavia, as demonstrated by the three papers from Swedish academics at this Conference alone.

2 **Minutes of the 1996 AGM** Proposed by Hilary Henderson and seconded by Eileen Mable, the Minutes of the meeting held at Uppingham on 24 August 1996 as published in the November 1996 *Newsletter* were approved and signed as a correct record.

3 **Matters arising** There were no matters arising.

4 **Secretary's report** John Batten reported that the Committee had met on four occasions since the last meeting, but there had been no meetings of the Publications Committee.

At the meeting in London on 23 November 1996, chaired by Paul Roberts, it was agreed a regional list of members should be published. Members not wishing to be included were asked to inform the Secretary. No-one did, and the list, published with the April *Newsletter*, has been well received. It was also agreed that travelling expenses *not* claimed by Committee members would be regarded as donations to the Society and appear in the accounts. The Committee was informed of two applications for British Library grants for cataloguing and conservation of the Powys Collection. The Committee also considered a draft oublications strategy. This provided a basis for a useful and wide-ranging discussion of all Society publication activities, but it was agreed to defer any decision on future policy whilst *The Dorset Year*, the Society's most ambitious publication project to date, was still on-going. Finally, consideration was given to a detailed report by Tony Hallett on potential Internet activities, and it was agreed that Chris Gostick should take forward the suggestion of establishing a Society Web Site.

At Gloucester on 23 February 1997 the revised Constitution was formally adopted, and the main item was consideration of the best means of safeguarding the long-term future of the Powys Collection. On the basis of his professional advice, Griffin Beale described the legal safeguards protecting the Feather Collection, but pointed out that no such constraints applied to the Bissell Collection, beyond respect for Mr Bissell's wishes, and suggested the best course of action might be to establish a Trust. He explained that this is a simple arrangement whereby nominal ownership of property is passed to Trustees, who in turn would then be responsible to the beneficiaries, who in this case would be the members of the Society, through the Committee. It was unanimously agreed a Trust for the Powys Collection be established, and Griffin Beale was asked to draw up a draft instrument for consideration by the next meeting. A slate of nominations of officers and committee members was also prepared, as required by the new Constitution, and later published in the April *Newsletter*.

On 5 July the committee met at the British Library and gave detailed consideration to a draft Trust instrument prepared by Griffin Beale, Various amendments were suggested, and it was agreed that a revised document be prepared for the next meeting. It was reported that one of the two grant applications had been successful, and that £2,200 would be available for the conservation of some of the most fragile documents in the Collection, of which 50% would be provided from Society funds. The appointment of an Honorary Curator for the Powys Collection was agreed in principle, and that a list of responsibilities should be prepared for consideration by the next meeting. The date and venue for the 1998 Conference was discussed, following confirmation that Uppingham would not now be available due to building work. The Secretary had investigated other possibilities, and it was agreed the Society should return to Kingston Maurward on 22–25 August 1998, and would look in more detail for

possible alternatives in future years. Paul Roberts reported that a Bristol-based company is to make a short TV documentary about John Cowper Powys based on *A Glastonbury Romance*, and also described the publication activities of the Henry Williamson Society, some of which may be relevant to our own activities.

The Committee met at Kingston Maurward on the first day of the 1997 Conference, when it was reported that contracts had now been signed for the proposed TV documentary on J.C.P., and a report of the recent meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Powys Collection was noted. Further consideration was given to a revised document on the Powys Trust, and it was reported that both Mr Feather and Mr Bissell had given their approval to the proposal. It was unanimously agreed that the necessary legal and administrative steps now be taken to establish the Trust, to be known as The Powys Society Collection Trust, as soon as possible. Paul Roberts then chaired a discussion on the proposed role and responsibilities of an Honorary Curator, which were then agreed. Dr Morine Krissdottir was invited to take up this position, and duly appointed. John Batten was appointed Honorary Editor of the *Newsletter*, and it was agreed the *Newsletter* Advisory Committee be reconstituted, with Paul Roberts, Griffin Beale and Morine Krissdóttir as its members.

5 Treasurer's report Stephen Powys Marks indicated that the Treasurer's report and audited Statement of Accounts for 1996 had been published in the July 1997 *Newsletter*, but he went on to draw attention to the substantial benefits to the Society of members paying their subscriptions by Standing Order and Deed of Covenant, and urged that as many as possible do this in future. Membership had increased from 287 paid-up members in 1996 to 310 at present – which is the highest ever total. Just under 90% of the Society's subscription income continued to be spent on publication of the annual *Powys Journal* and 3 *Newsletters* each year. Overall, although there had been a small paper loss for the year, this had been entirely due to the writing down of stock, and overall the balance between income and expenditure remained sound and in the Treasurer's view the Society remained in good financial health. In response to a question from Graham Carey, Stephen Powys Marks indicated that it was likely that there would be money for additional publications in the course of the year. The audited Accounts for 1996 as published were adopted by the meeting.

6 Chairman's remarks Morine Krissdóttir drew attention to the copy of her 1996 Annual Report to the Charity Commissioners published in the July 1997 *Newsletter*, so her remarks related only to the first months of 1997, and those activities not already covered by the Secretary's report. She indicated that much of the year had been taken up with detailed work in collaboration with Roger Peers and other members of the Society on completion of *The Dorset Year*, which will shortly be published. She then went on to outline what she considered the major achievements of her 10 years as Chairman of the Society. These included :

– establishing a constitution for the Society;

- gaining charitable status;
- establishing the Society's own scholarly *Powys Journal*; and
- a number of memorable conferences.

But above all, the establishment of the Powys Collection, which will in time become THE English Centre and focus for studies by Powys scholars from all over the world. The establishment of the Powys Society Collection Trust will ensure that the integrity of the irreplaceable collections donated to the Society, with such generosity, by Mr E. E. Bissell and Mr Francis Feather will be forever assured. All this has been accomplished only through the very strong support of the Honorary Officers and Members of the Committee over those years. In particular she wished to draw attention to the contribution of the two Secretaries, Griffin Beale and John Batten, with whom she had worked over the past decade. With them, frustrations became challenges and the work was often a great joy. In addition she also acknowledged vital and consistent support from Paul Roberts and Stephen Powys Marks. Finally, in handing over the chair of the Society after ten years, she wished to acknowledge the profound debt of gratitude she felt to three men who were now dead, Gilbert Turner, Kenneth Hopkins, and Peter Powys Grey, all of whom had provided irreplaceable support, encouragement and sustenance to her, and whose loss she continued to feel keenly.

7 Appointment of Officers and Committee John Batten reported that as a result of the procedures enshrined in the new Constitution, the following Honorary Officers had been appointed for the next 12 months :

Chairman Paul Roberts
Vice-Chairman Griffin Beale
Secretary Chris Gostick
Treasurer Stephen Powys Marks
Committee members

John Batten	Judith Stinton
Bev Craven	Chris Wilkinson
Timothy Hyman	John Williams
John Powys	

8 Appointment of Auditor It was proposed by Graham Carey, seconded by Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe and unanimously approved that Stephen Allen, a member of the Society, be appointed Honorary Auditor for a further year. It was further agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to Mr Allen for his work for the Society over many years, and that he be invited to attend a future conference.

9 The Powys Society Collection Trust The Secretary reported that the Committee had approved the establishment of this new Trust to safeguard the Society's collections. It was noted that the next step would be to seek approval from the Charity Commission, and that no further action would be taken until this had been received.

10 Time and place of the 1998 Conference Despite the agreement at the

last A.G.M. to return to Uppingham in 1998 this had not proved to be possible, and as a result Kingston Maurward had been secured for the Conference from 22 to 25 August 1998. It was suggested that in future years the Conference be planned some 2 years ahead, and in the meantime Committee will be reviewing the options available, both in terms of timing, duration and location for the 1999 Conference, and for subsequent years.

11 **Any other business** A variety of issues were raised from the floor:

The Chairman particularly welcomed Mr Francis Feather to the meeting.

Charles Lock raised the issue of the role of overseas representatives, and John Batten apologised for the oversight of them not being invited to the Conference Committee meeting. Paul Roberts agreed that the Committee would give early attention to this matter.

Peter Judd asked about developments at the Dorset County Museum and whether it was likely to become a repository for further MSS and documentary material. This led to a more general discussion as to the appropriateness or otherwise of the Dorset County Museum as a repository for the Collections, particularly in respect of access to the material. It was conceded that whilst the independent conservators who had recently been consulted were satisfied with the existing storage conditions for the Powys Collection, working conditions for those consulting the collections were cramped. It was emphasised that the Honorary Officers were working closely with the Museum to improve things, and it was anticipated that the appointment of Morine Krissdóttir as Honorary Curator would assist significantly. In the meantime, requests for access to the Collection should be channelled through her, and she would do everything possible to assist. In closing this discussion, Mr Francis Feather emphasised that he had donated his collection to the Society on the specific understanding that it must be located in the Dorset County Museum, and he continued to be firmly of this view. It was similarly noted that Mr E. E. Bissell had also confirmed that he wished for his collection to remain together, and to be lodged at the Dorset County Museum

Belinda Humphrey acknowledged the significant developments of the Society over its 30 years of existence, but again drew attention to the urgent need to ensure that the major works were brought back into print and become publicly available. She suggested the Committee appoint one of its members to have specific responsibility for this task. In the meantime, she hoped the University of Wales Press would continue to support Powys studies as far as possible, but this required Society members to ensure that individuals and institutions bought copies of the revised version of *Maiden Castle*, which was still in print but selling only very slowly. Finally, it was suggested that ways of getting Powys studies back on to the National Curriculum be examined.

At this point Morine Krissdóttir handed over the chair to Paul Roberts, who indicated how pleased and privileged he felt to be asked to become Chair of the

Society, and acknowledged the strong and solid foundation for future developments which had been created by Morine Krissdóttir. He particularly welcomed the announcement by the President earlier in the Conference that Honorary Life Membership had been bestowed on Dr Krissdóttir in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the Society, and looked forward to being able to build on these achievements in the years to come.

The meetings was closed at 5.30 pm.

Chris Gostick
Hon. Secretary, August 1997

Members' News and Notes

Copies of Janina Nordius' study of John Cowper Powys, *I Am Myself Alone: Solitude and Transcendance in John Cowper Powys*, may be ordered from Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Att: Jan Åhman, Box 5096, S-40222 Göteburg, Sweden.

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Sven-Erik Täckmark published an article celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of The Powys Society in the influential Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* on Friday 22 August 1997.

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Eivor Lindstedt, a Swedish post-graduate student in English literature, tells me that she has recently successfully defended her study of *A Glastonbury Romance* for the Swedish licentiate degree. Her PhD dissertation will also be on Powys.

*****

Night Horizons by Gerard Casey. Frank Kibblewhite writes: The poets Gerard and Mary Casey, during the course of their marriage, developed an interest in and concern with the cultural roots and background of the Christian faith they shared. At times they found themselves separated – he in Africa, she in England – and during these periods they exchanged letters in which they often found themselves discussing the differences in emphasis that arose from their respective points of view. The letters collected in *Night Horizons* reveal the wide range of their reading and concerns. A number of letters written by Gerard to his brother Patrick are also included as essentially preoccupied with the same subjects. The reader will find in the appendix further writings of Gerard Casey that deal with the same general themes found in the letters. In view of the lapse of many years between these disparate writings, and the need for a unifying thread, the editor, James Wetmore, requested that the author provide a supplemental essay, which is

presented in the form of a postscript. Powysians will enjoy the additional pleasure of many references to Will, Theodore and John Cowper Powys. Recently published by Phudd Bottom Press, with a Foreword by Jeremy Hooker, *Night Horizons* is available from Words Etcetera, 2 Cornhill, Dorchester, DT1 1BA, price £14. 95, post free to members of The Powys Society.

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Gerard Casey recently sent Paul Roberts a letter received by James Wetmore, a New York journalist, from one of his friends who says, 'I should also tell you that I picked up *A Glastonbury Romance* (recently republished) and am about a third of the way through. This is an extraordinary novel and quite unlike anything I have ever read. I've yet to read a dull page, or even a dull sentence. It is without doubt the best work of fiction I have read in a very long time. Thanks for the tip; I am sure that without it Powys would have remained more or less unknown to me. I recently mentioned him to two doctoral candidates in English literature and of course they had never heard of him!'

(*A Glastonbury Romance* was recently republished by Overlook Press at $23.95, in what Richard Maxwell [Editor of *Powys Notes*] describes as a sumptuous paperback edition.)

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Patricia Dawson's second collection of poems came out last summer. Entitled *The Forge* it is published by Hub Editions, and is available from her (Flat 1, 3 Albion Villas, Sydenham Road, London SE16 4DB) at £4.99, plus 40p p&p. There will be an exhibition of Patricia's etchings and pastels at The Alchemy Gallery, 157 Farringdon Road, London ECIR 3AD, from 18 to 29 May 1998.

*****

Mrs Cobb, of Beth Car, East Chaldon, has written to say that she is no longer able to entertain casual callers. However, she is still happy to receive members of The Powys Society provided that a mutually convenient time is arranged in advance. If you wish to visit Theodore's former home please write to: Mrs Christine Cobb, Beth Car, East Chaldon, Dorchester, DT2 8DN. I am sure a stamped addressed envelope will be appreciated.

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Mrs Rosemary Johnson has written to tell me that the East Chaldon Church Appeal benefited by £130 as a result of the generosity of members attending the recent conference.

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The Revd Neil Lee is needing more book-space and willing to sell fourteen titles by John Cowper and Theodore at reasonable prices. Members interested are invited to telephone him on 01629 650148, or write for the list.

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Cicely Hill, along with other distinguished writers of haiku, recently read some of her poems on the South Bank. She tells me that it was a wonderful evening, a sell-

out, they could have doubled the room size. Cicely's latest collection of haiku poems, *The Earth Drawn Inwards*, is available from: Waning Moon Press, 10 Gains Road, Southsea, PO4 0PL, price £4.99 plus 38p p&p. Martin Lucas wrote in his review, 'If you'd enjoy wondering at eternity and time, heaven and earth, then let yourself be drawn in – buy it!'

*****

Janet Fouli has edited the correspondence between John Cowper Powys and Dorothy M. Richardson. There are a number of letters missing from both sides of the correspondence. Should any reader be able to offer any information on the subject I am sure she will be very grateful.

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Mark Chapman wishes to sell *New World Review*, July 1950, containing letters from J.C.P. to Clifford Tolchard. If interested 'phone 01235 531722 (evenings).

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Park House, formerly Montacute Vicarage and home of the Powyses, is up for sale. Helen and Ian McNab, the present owners, have always been sensitive to its associations and good friends of the Society. We will be sorry to see them go. The asking price is £425,000, without the stable block which will be sold separately for conversion to a dwelling.

J.B.

Reviews

John Cowper Powys, by Herbert Williams
Bridgend: Seren, 1997, Border Lines Series
hardback £14.95 ISBN 1 85411 196 5; paperback, £7.95 ISBN 1 85411 197 3

So many current biographies are too long and composed of undigested research. It is therefore a pleasure to find one that is well crafted with a gripping narrative style. Tackling such a complex subject as John Cowper Powys and condensing his life into one hundred and sixty-seven pages is a difficult task. How lucky we are to have Herbert Williams, a sensitive and succinct writer and poet, to create this book. A lesser author might have given us a soulless digest, that is often the alternative to the above-mentioned monster.

Williams recreates the family background well. I am in a position to judge this, having for a grandfather a contemporary of John Cowper, born, like him, into the large family of a country parson. As with the Powyses, the boys were educated at prep and public schools, while the girls were kept at home. In spite of this apparent handicap, they also wrote and painted and their work was published and exhibited. My grandfather even shared the same experience that John Cowper had, of a parent, in his case his mother, who fed him on tales of her descent from

Welsh princes and whose forebears lived only a few miles from the Powyses.

Williams, like many Welshmen, questions the Powys claim to Welshness and points out that the family had lived for some generations in Shropshire. Borderlands are ambiguous places and breed poets. Although every other native of Shropshire bears a Welsh name, to be heard speaking Welsh in a pub in those parts could land you with a bloody nose. Perhaps all great artists, being outsiders, share the feelings of an exile and sometimes even put themselves in that position in order to stimulate their muse. Powys experienced this, starting with his eccentricities at Sherborne. Then followed his unsuitable marriage, his enforced domicile in America and his choice of separation from his family in his last years, spent in Corwen and Blaenau Ffestiniog. When at the end of his life he was made a Bard at a Welsh Eisteddfod, his cup must have been full. At last he had been honoured in his 'own country'.

Williams mentions Powys's childhood fears, one of which was incarceration by the Police as the ultimate punishment for naughtiness. Coming two generations after Powys and having similar threats hanging over me, pronounced by the mildest and kindest of adults, I can reassure him that such things were common. Williams conjures up the boy Powys who wove his way through a well regulated structured society, learning how to cajole and entertain potentially hostile forces at school by means of drama and self-mimicry, while treasuring for himself that special inspiration from the natural world which brought him comfort for the whole of his life.

Herbert's narrative carries us through John's marriage and lecturing days in Europe and America. The selection of quotations from the *Autobiography*, correspondence and contemporary sightings are well chosen. The poetry is dealt with kindly but truthfully. Powys's poetic talent went into the writing of his novels. Williams notes the intensity of Powys's affection for Llewelyn. Even allowing for the more flowery writing of an earlier age, we find its expression excessive.

To summarise the novels, without putting off the prospective reader, is not easy. It was well accomplished by Glen Cavaliero in *John Cowper Powys, Novelist* (OUP 1973). Williams neatly sketches in their characters and plots, the circumstances surrounding the writing and publication of them and includes the books of popular philosophy which helped to keep Powys in funds. Williams emphasises Powys's disavowal of Pantheism, which is hard to believe of one who was so soaked in Wordsworth's poetry, but quotes well to prove his point.

Powys's moods of self-criticism and despondency over his reputation as an author are usefully recorded. Williams writes sympathetically of the women in Powys's life who, apart from the passing, anonymous temptresses on Brighton beach, are excluded from the *Autobiography*. The first was his wife, whom he would never have married had it not been that a proposal was forced on him by his mother's sense of what was good form. The second was Frances Gregg, who

married the writer Louis Wilkinson. For her he had a great, and, according to her son, unconsummated passion, chronicled in a correspondence which lasted for her lifetime. The third was Phyllis Playter. She was his companion for the last forty years of his life and the woman alongside whom he did the bulk of his writing. We shall never know the debt that he and we owe her for his novels. Williams choice of anecdotes to illustrate these relationships is masterly and culled from careful research. The photographs are fascinating but not, I regret, dated.

Williams emphasises the stimulus that Powys drew from the landscape of Upstate New York where he wrote *A Glastonbury Romance*. It helped him to give birth to this masterpiece and recreate the Somerset of his youth. The pain and loss of money caused by the subsequent court case is well documented. We follow John and Phyllis from their arrival in England through their year in Dorset, the twenty-six in Corwen, the last years spent in Blaenau Ffestiniog and the contacts with other writers and members of the family who visited.

Dorset as a home was, Williams said, discarded owing to Phyllis finding the nearness of so many Powyses too much to bear. I think that Alyse Gregory, Llewelyn's wife, should be mentioned as a possible exception to this stricture. She, being a fellow American and much loved by Phyllis, must have proved an ally. When Alyse died she left money to Phyllis, making it possible for her to take a trip round the coast of South America which she spoke of with great appreciation. Liking her own company, she told me that she was glad that the other passengers 'did not loom'. As Jim, my husband, and I left 1 Waterloo after our only visit there, we were assailed by a gale laden with drizzle. Any shuddering on our part was pre-empted by Phyllis, who, standing in the doorway, remarked that a south-west wind was Alyse's favourite. Cavaliero in his review of the letters from J.C.P. to Phillipa Powys, *Powys to Sea Eagle*, writes perceptively that Phyllis took with her to the grave the true J.C.P. Powys's letters were a defence against the world and I suspect that this also applied to much of his conversation.

Williams mentions *Owen Glendower* and the mixed reactions that it evokes, quoting Roland Mathias's criticism. I shall remember, however, that Wilson Knight told me that it was his favourite of the novels. The way in which Williams deals with the novels, and their historical and literary provenance is masterly, and remarkable in the confined space allowed to him in this series. *Porius*, the last masterpiece, gets a fair analysis.

The last years, spent at Blaenau, the slow diminution of both the life and the works, are sensitively handled. Powys's final days in hospital are recorded and his singing of John Peel as he approached the end. Though he had fervently hoped that his only son would be a great hunter and sportsman, he was fanatically against cruelty to animals. But then, Powys's appeal to us is his humanness. Show me, if you can, a human being who is consistent.

Patricia V. Dawson

Les Plaisirs De La Litterature
translated by Gérard Joulié. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1995

A review by Michel Crépu in *La Croix L'Evènement*, June 1995, translated for the *Newsletter* by Jacqueline Peltier *

John Cowper Powys, the prophet reader

The wild mystic of English literature proposes his library to us. A great lesson of life.

John Cowper Powys, Cymric and son of a parson, is the sea and the rock all in one. On the one side, the ocean deeps ever stirred in their most secret abysses by some torment: on the other, royal stability, unmoveable granite facing the hurricanes. Both.

One never tires of scanning the physical appearance of this extraordinary man who started writing his books at the age of fifty. He looks like a fairy-tale 'creature'. A man, yes, but a man who would have had access, through his innermost strength, inheritance of an ancestral election, to more than what is usually allotted. The haunts of the gods, made of terror and beauty, unsuitable to those sensitive souls Stendhal spoke of, and in which Powys resides, literally as an habitué. This should not leave the reader unresponsive, as is the case, after an agreeable reading in the company of other modest parishioners, convinced that the universe is somewhat similar to the parish.

Speaking of parish, this book published by 'L'Age d'homme', is very much a Bible. The author of *A Glastonbury Romance* discloses the literary Grail, the Deuteronomy of his masters: first the Bible, then in succession: Homer, Dostoievsky, Rabelais, Dickens, Greek tragedy, St Paul, Dante, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Wordsworth, Milton, Matthew Arnold, Walt Whitman, Cervantes, Melville and Poe, Nietzche, Goethe, Hardy, Proust. What an extraordinary meeting, what a synod of giants!

Candour and simplicity

Powys is not one to sermonise from the pulpit, to fool around in cap and gown before an audience of somnolent ladies. We must remember his career as a lecturer throughout the United States, half prophet, half pedlar, if we are to duly appreciate these texts, launched as so many 'drakkars' towards the eventual

* Jacqueline's letter accompanying this translation explains: 'Michael Crépu is a writer who is also chief Reviewer of the literary section of *La Croix*, a Catholic daily veering slightly to the left. His style is a little bombastic but quite typical in a way of how John Cowper may be perceived by his French readers, smacking of the 'Chateaubriand' tradition, very romantic and dishevelled. Nevertheless, some of the things expressed seem (to me) interesting and it might amuse your readers for its very Gallic Quality. At least, here is some genuine enthusiasm for John Cowper's works. She adds: 'The following text is my – hopefully – faithful rendering of the review.' Ed.

discerning person on the lookout, in the same way as a person would stop at a corner on Fifth Avenue to listen to a lunatic raving on hell and paradise.

One suspects he must have been a little mad to be able to churn up such material so energetically; but with such intelligence! such fervour! 'In any case' he exclaims, 'I am sure that the growing prejudice which so large a segment of our younger generation feels against the Bible is due to the fact that they link it with the disgusting hypocrisy, the sly maliciousness, the half-suppressed goatishness, of so many amongst its official champions. But to hate the Bible because many of its adherents are repulsive is as absurd as to hate Homer because you had an unpleasant teacher at school.

To join Sophocles

There are times in life when things must be said frankly and simply; when we need to be scrubbed in the same way as the sea cleans out foul recesses by a thrust of swelling waves. That is exactly the kind of work Powys does here. For if the books we are supposed to be worshipping are lying on high inaccessible shelves, what is the use of worshipping them? For instance Homer's sea is not only a beautiful faded metaphor, it is truly for Powys 'the sea to which our sailors still go down in ships'; in the same way Greek tragedy evokes African heat and not only themes of philosophical import.

Powys is always seeking a way to link the reading experience to a physical, tellurian experience, not because of a dubious taste for some recondite esotericism, but because he wishes to associate to the world of the word the world of the living in its extreme ruthlessness, as we can see in this admirable passage about Wordsworth's poetry: 'All that we need is a certain ... tendency to share the sub-humanity of rocks and stones and trees, to watch the grass growing until we grow with it, the wayside stones waiting until we wait with them, to walk with the morning as with a companion, with the night as with a friend, to catch the pathos of the human generations from the rain on the roof, and the burden of the mystery that rounds it all from the wind that voyages past the threshold'.

Moreover, he writes about the difficulty of 'hearing' correctly Sophocles' music: 'It is, I am afraid, almost impossible, unless you are at least as good a scholar as Shelley, to savour the peculiar quality of Sophocles' chorus in praise of his native village, which to our Dorsetshire ears is as if the folk of Stinsford or Bockhampton were to chant on Midsummer Eve a musically laconic and completely untranslatable lyric of Thomas Hardy's.'

What are we to do, then, in order to meet Sophocles? Take lessons? No. 'Our only hope if we are not scholars, is a literal word-by-word translation into the baldest prose, leaving the polished perfection to the Muse of the imagination.'

A Celtic Claudel

In fact, Powys is more or less a Celtic Claudel; a man belonging to the sacred but

too wild to accept the strictness of a tridentine catechism, but having an extremely deep sense of the spiritual forces, of which the religious and literature each claims its power of representation.

It is obvious, in any case, that they have a claim over his heart, for Powys devotes the most important chapter of his work to St Paul; a Dostoievskian, surely a Nietzchean St Paul, perhaps not strictly theologically correct, but so much more irrepressible and powerful than what a certain moral would have us believe!

This man who 'walked on the earth with his heroes, ate and slept with the immortal gods', as he writes of Hardy or Melville, invites us to these formidable love-feasts. Let us not dread, however, to take a place at the banquet. 'I am writing for book-lovers of my own kidney, and what we Lollards of Literature want is the direct application of our scriptures to the smallest detail of our domestic lives. We want, as Walt Whitman says, to decoy the Muse to our hearth, till we get her installed "amid the kitchen-ware".'

I have one regret, after having finished this reading: that the publisher has not deemed it necessary to indicate in Powys's trajectory the place of this book, obviously written just before the second World War. There are no notes, and the original title is not even mentioned. One is tempted to think that the publisher shows hardly any interest in his own production. It is shocking and, to say the truth, inadmissible. Some comfort can be found, however, in the thought that Powys passes through these shameful negligences in a glorious manner. For the horizon is easily seen, according to the master's words: 'To go on reading books in which the mystery of life speaks to the children of life'.

The Powys Clowns

One of the most memorable events of the 1997 Conference was an evening's reading entitled 'The Powys Clowns', with extracts from the works of Louis Wilkinson, John Cowper Powys, T. F. Powys, Llewelyn Powys, and others. The reading was devised by Oliver Wilkinson and directed by Christopher Wilkinson, and the reading was most dramaticlly and effectively done by Kate Kavanagh, P. J. Kavanagh, and the Oliver and Chris themselves. Everyone was spellbound.

The whole reading was printed for the occasion in a sixteen-page booklet which has been *sewn by hand* in folded paper covers. Most copies were disposed of to those at the Conference, but a few copies remain. If you would like some marvelous entertainment please send £2 (cheque payable to The Powys Society or stamps) to the Treasurer (see inside front cover).

A Christmas Tale

That Concerneth Lubberlu The Rook boy of Binden Abbey, A Fairy Maid And An Holy Clerk: As Told By ... Llewelyn Powys *

No music in the world is more beautiful than the ringing of church bells heard from a distance over open country. At Christmas especially does this music move the spirit, so deeply associated is it with the pathos of human imaginings, the pathos of human existence. In the past the Christmas bells of Bindon Abbey must have been audible from Marly Wood to Moign Down whenever the north-east wind blew over the waters of Poole.

It is not difficult to understand the indignation of the lay brothers and rustic farmhands who, for so long had worked upon the Abbey grounds when, at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the famous set of Bindon Bells they had heard ringing so often were distributed among the belfries of the churches of the neighbouring parishes. This local Catholic resentment has been eloquently preserved in the following rhyme: 'Wool streams, Coombe Wells, Have a' stole Bindon Bells.'

It was in medieval times, when Bindon Abbey was still prosperously established, that the following strange happening occurred. A regular priest of the Abbey, known as Father de Brian, had interested himself in the welfare of a certain rook-boy who was employed sometimes in herding swine, and sometimes in scaring birds from the village common-field, each strip of which was divided so precisely by balks of grass. The boy was ruddy and comely to look upon, but generally thought to be one of God's innocents. His simplicity appealed to the elderly churchman who for upwards of three years gave much time to teaching the lad to read Latin from the illuminated manuscripts that were kept chained, each in its place, on old oak reading desks in the Abbey Library.

The monk's judgement was fully justified, and the rook-boy, who had been considered little better than an idiot, proved an apt and industrious scholar. And not only was he taught letters, he was also instructed in the mysteries of the Christian Religion, as they were understood within the sacred walls of the Cistercian Abbey whose ruins we now look upon.

All might have gone well had not Lubberlu, for so the boy was called by the villein crofters, one May morning wandered down to the Frome. The cuckoo was

* Llewelyn Powys wrote many Christmas pieces for newspapers and periodicals. In his study of Llewelyn, Peter Foss has recorded the following for December 1936 alone: Christmas Charity (*Dorset Herald*), The Spirit of the Season (*Reynolds News*), Heigh Ho! the Holly (*Dorset Herald*), Christmas the Great Day of Merriment and Charity (*Dorset Daily Echo*) and A Christmas Carol (*New English Weekly*). This tale has not appeared in any of the collections of his work, although having first appeared in the *Dorset Daily Echo* in December 1933 it was reprinted in the *Dorset Evening Echo* in 1968. Ed.

bawling from the trees behind Blacknoll, and the excited river fowl were calling to each other with amorous calls across the floating levels of water-buttercups, that, flat and white as hail, were lying upon the surface of the clear shining stream. Then he saw a girl peering at him through tall rushes. She was unknown to him, a maiden dressed in a coarse gown of woven flax girded with a green girdle. The two made friends. She was beautiful, but there was something fairy about her, and her voice had the same shrill quality that the cry of the snipe has when suddenly flushed.

The two became playmates and before long, lovers. It was the girl's eyes that especially bewitched the rook-boy scholar, wide open liquid eyes that would gaze at him from under arched eyebrows. She would never tell him from what village she came, down land or heath, but always on sunshine mornings when he drove his hogs to water he would find her hidden by the swift flowing river.

The two would play together in bullrush jungles or on the open cowslip banks of the meadows, laughing to see the trout rise, and often the girl, in no Christian mood, would weave with slender fingers the field rushes into meshed cages expert to imprison a hip-frog or a dancing grasshopper. The blue sky and the blue flowing river, the green willows and the green water-flags, together with this wild shy creature, now obsessed the whole being of Lubberlu. His listlessness became manifest; when he should have been tracing the outlines of initial letters, bright as butterflies, he would be looking out of the narrow lancet window in the direction of the water meadows. For many weeks the old priest held his peace, but as the summer drew towards its close and the last loads of the yellow harvest had been stored in the great Abbey Grange, he pressed the boy to make his confession. When he had finished the old man stood up, and with tears running down his cheeks made the sign of the blessed cross over the straw coloured head of his conjured pupil. He suspected the wanton daughter of the river of belonging to a family outside of Middle Earth – at best a river nymph owning no mortal soul.

After that evening of his confession Lubberlu was never able to find his darling again. All through the autumn in the dusk of the late afternoons he would trace the banks of the Frome in its winter desolation, calling and calling from Wool Bridge to Moreton Ford.

At Christmas it fell out that it was the old priest's turn to officiate at the early morning Mass in the small chapel at Ringstead. To reach the village at the appointed hour it was necessary to arouse the porter while it was still night. Lubberlu was to act as acolyte and was already blowing on his fingers outside the gateway of the Abbey. The two started away under the stars – the priest on a grey mule, the boy walking at his side. The roadside grass was crisp with hoar-frost. They left the wide white drove above Belhuish and struck across by Dagger's Gate to the Roman Road that runs above the cliffs. On the downs, in the lew of the furzen, they came across a flock of sheep, the peaceful animals lying on the stiff grass with frosted backs of wool in an enchanted circle about the Merlin thorn.

The venerable clerk did not fail to remind the boy of the scene on the hills of Bethlehem and of the sublime vision that had come to the chatting shepherds.

The homestead dwellers of Ringstead had always been obstinate sons of Belial. Was it for this reason that they and their dwellings were so soon to be destroyed by pirates? They gained a scant livelihood by fishing and it may be that their long hours under the stars sharpened their wits to ask awkward qiestions. How did it come about that Norman priests, like stags in the pride of their grease, knew so much more than ordinary churls? Had they ever spoken with a dead man risen out of the grave?

These jolly libertine lobster catchers had spent their Christmas Eve in feasting behind the doors of their thatched mud houses, that, windowless and chimneyless, resembled so many bee hives set in rows each side of the village stream, that still flows through Ringstead Wood. Much brawn of tusked swine they had devoured, swilling it down with draughts of strong mead. The sound of the small chapel bell, of the Gabriel bell, echoed through the wood sharp as the tinkling of an icicle in the morning air. The fisher folk snored on in their darkened hovels. None came to the small church – the chancel arch of which is to be seen today built about by the wall of the woodland cottage. With my own fingers I have traced its mouldings, the very mouldings which that morning received upon their surfaces the flickering light from the altar candles, a yellow light shining between the beech trees, visible beyond the sea-weed rocks.

The rest of the Ringstead legend is best told in the form of the Christmas ballad which has preserved the sequel of the story in a kind of antiphonal chant taking place between the holy priest and the love-lost son of the earth: –

Boy Green were her eyes – yellow her eyes –
Her eyes were like withered sedge!

Priest This is holy Mass and the hour flies
And there is red in the churchyard hedge.
Raise me aloft my taper's flame,
Light me my candles three,
For I must call on the Baby's name
Who is born to young Mary.

Boy O father I see a blood red streak
In the reeds whee first I caught her –
And I hear a cry makes my heart weak –
And turns my bones to water.
The marsh-bittern and the lone curlew
That cry comes not from them.

Priest Bring me bread and wine my Lubberlu
And hold my vestments' hem!

The candles burn – the oxen kneel.
Boy, bring me my holy book –
Born is the King of Israel !

Boy Oh, father, my father, look !
She is pressing her face 'gainst the window pane,
Where the saints stare in a row
And her lips are red with the morning's stain
And her cheeks are white like snow !

Priest 'Tis Christmas morn and the Mass unsung
For the Baby of young Mary !

* * *

But the idiot boy from his side had sprung,
At the window prone was he.
And the oxen knelt in their frozen shed
And the sheep in the hurdled pen;
But Lubberlu lay stark and dead,
He never will come again.

* * *

They sign his breast and they sign his brow
With the cross to which they pray –
But two lost souls are flying now
Over the reeds and over the snow,
Over the hills and away.

Publications — please see page 36.

'A Writer's Dorset'

A Note on the New Literary Gallery at the Dorset County Museum

With so many museums now redesigning themselves for an imaginary clientele of moronic eight-year olds – going down the dinosaur trail that leads to the everlasting cyberhell – my first reaction to the Dorchester galleries was one of relief. It could have been so much worse. The Powys Brothers are niftily placed where they might be said to belong: just off the Iron Age, close to the Maiden Castle excavations, and not far from Hardy's study.

Of course the display emphasises place above all else; we are asked to recognise how integral this specific Dorset terrain is to all their work, and the atmospheric tinted postcards of bygone Weymouth, or the photo of Frank Edmunds, the Punch-and-Judy man on the beach, are part of this. I'm less sure about the recently commissioned Punch glove-puppet (who looks too squeaky-clean to carry much association). And when we turn to Friar Bacon's *Brazen Head*, we're confronted by a hideous sci-fi sculpture – a kitsch cliché who foretells no future, who must have cost a fortune, and in fact says nothing about anything.

But for the most part, the heaped first editions, the various manuscripts, and the assorted objects (which resemble those 'terrestrial milestones' assembled in a late J.C.P. fantasy – the core of Eve's apple etc.) all these are trusted to speak for themselves. The explanatory panels do deliver the information required, and links are made effectively between the Powys constellation and other parts of the Dorset galaxy. The afternoon I was there, an enthusiastic grey-haired reader who was working her way through 'Valentine' and 'Sylvia' couldn't wait to get stuck into these new discoveries. She was amazed at how the web all joined up (extending sometimes into Bloomsbury, sometimes into American modernism) and I, the fly on the wall, was impressed to see how well the room was serving its

A Powys corner of 'A Writer's Dorset'

function. Her winter, and probably that of her companion also, will be the richer.

I don't think we can expect a room of this kind to convey much of the deeper contents of the authors. Their mythical and religious overtones are mostly absent. The display isn't perfect: the designers have slipped in some silly little red-rimmed 'logos' which are superfluous and distracting; and there are several errors of fact, which have been duly reported. But in general I'd want to congratulate the Museum, and Judith Stinton, on a job well done.

Timothy Hyman

In Spite Of.....

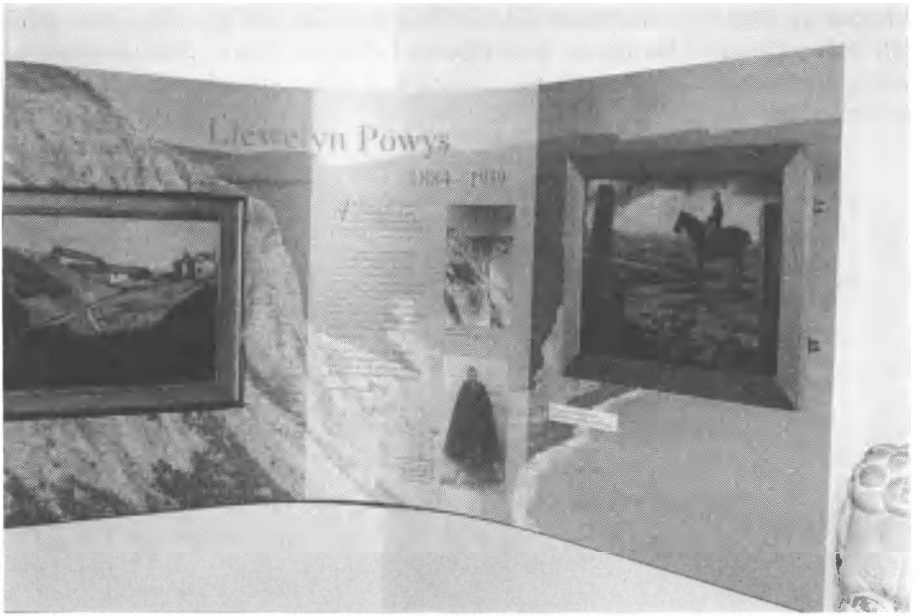
It is easy to dream, to make projects towards perfection. It is far more difficult to project the imperfect, to dream the compromise. So one's hopes for the Literary Gallery in the Dorset County Museum have been, almost inevitably, excessive. How not to feel disappointed, to feel that things ought to have been displayed differently, that certain items should have been more prominent, others less? In registering my own disappointment to both the Museum's Curator, Richard de Peyer, and to the consultant researcher for the Literary Gallery, Judith Stinton, I found myself confronted with practical problems of which I had little knowledge,

and socio-economic imperatives of which one would prefer to have no knowledge at all. It is hard to find any museum today designed for the taste of the museum-goer; such spaces are required to appeal to those who find 'old-fashioned' museums stuffy and dull. Thus museums from the V&A downwards (or upwards) seem conspicuously to neglect, or even mock, those who would form their natural constituencies. One should not judge the Literary Gallery outside the grim context of contemporary museum policy and ideology.

The importance of the Literary Gallery in the Dorset County Museum has been well-defined by the Curator: for the first time, a writer's life, his or her 'remains', are not thought of in terms only of books and manuscripts. As Judith Stinton writes in *The Powys Journal* VII, there are many 'writer's houses' in Britain, in which the work of a single writer is presented in the frame of one of the writer's residences. Exceptionally, Hardy's youngest and last-surviving sister Kate donated to the Dorset County Museum many of Hardy's papers together with his study. Thus the materials were separated from Hardy's house, Max Gate, which was given as an empty shell to the nation.

Kate's bequest of 1940 is a significant moment in the history of 'heritage' and in the history of literary commemoration. Extending the fact and the obligation imposed on the Museum of displaying Hardy's study in perpetuity, the Literary Gallery now presents a display of writers with Dorset associations: not just their pages but their images, paintings, walking-sticks, all the 'trivia' of association.

The dominant display in the first room of 'A Writer's Gallery'– toy shop or museum?



Llewelyn Powys framed by paintings by Gertrude Powys

One would not expect such a display to hold much of interest for Hardy specialists or Powys enthusiasts. It is rather what is left out of sight which is of value for them: a trove of manuscript material, a selection of which will be on rotating display. The Hardy manuscripts have of course been used by countless scholars over the past half-century; it is hoped that the Powys, Warner and Barnes materials will attract commensurate numbers of scholars in the near future. Clearly, the second phase of the Museum's project, to create a library with scholarly facilities adjacent to the Literary Gallery, will be of the greatest interest to specialists and researchers.

Still, one can hope that any one of the items on display will work its magic, that magic of the inaccessible, the uprooted, the salvaged, the displaced; at the same time, the object framed, contained, labelled, displayed. A letter, an image, a stone: each case might hold as much magic as Hardy's study – the sheer wonder of an entire space displaced – has held for thousands of visitors. In the spaces of a museum we are encouraged to notice the neglected, to look for the overlooked.

On reflection I rather like the messiness, the divided aims, the visual and spatial confusions, the juxtaposition of the vulgar and the sublime which is so abundantly present in 'A Writer's Dorset': even the title is symptomatic of not much. In an essay in *The Powys Journal* VII John Hodgson has drawn our attention to the significance John Cowper Powys bestows on 'chance groupings'. At the end of *Wolf Solent* it is, let us not forget, the smell of pig's urine – 'all Dorset seemed

gathered up into it!' – that precipitates Wolf's vision of Saturnian gold. All that Wolf notices 'were only casual groupings of chance-offered objects': museums have perhaps always worked their visionary and all-but-tactile seductions in spite of themselves.

Charles Lock

John Cowper Powys and Weymouth on display

The Authorised Version?

Many readers of the latest *Powys Journal* will have been as surprised as I was to read the following quotation in John Williams' review of James Gibson's *Thomas Hardy: A Literary Life*.

> One is reminded of an occasion in the 1890s when Hardy had been visiting the young and precocious Powys brothers. He listened to them talking abstract literary theory, then they walked through the streets of Montacute and one of the brothers pointed to the local village beauty. 'And so we get back to humanity', said Hardy.
>
> Like me they would have reached for a copy of *Autobiography*.
>
> Having done so it becomes clear that the visit took place shortly after the

publication of *Odes and Other Poems* in 1896. Having dedicated one of his verses to Hardy, John Cowper was invited to Max Gate and the great man and his first wife accepted an invitation to visit Montacute. Gibson says that he listened to the 'precocious Powys brothers talking abstract literary theory', but Powys (*Autobiography*, 229) speaks of his father, on the appointed morning, with the wholewheat brown loaves and the great pat of yellow butter before him, 'filling the nine mouths left to him – one of his progeny no longer needing earthly food, and Littleton and Theodore away'.That being the case, only Albert Reginald, then age 15, Llewelyn age 12 and William age eight were available to indulge in 'abstract literary theory'. John Cowper tells us that Llewelyn, much more appropriately for a twelve-year-old, took Hardy to the Mabelulu.

Of the visit to St Catherine's church we read: (*Autobiography*, 228) 'It was on this occasion that Hardy explained to me how the ancient builders of our church had deliberately left the chancel a little askew in order to represent the manner in which the Redeemer's head sank upon one side as he gave up the ghost; but I well recall how, as we issued forth from these symbolic meditations among the tombs of Mr. Phelip's ancestors, and I pointed out to our visitor the house where the most beautiful girl in our village lived, he gave a curious little start. "We get back to humanity, back, back, to humanity, Powys!" he chuckled.' So, in this account only Hardy and John Cowper visit the church, although the use of 'our' in referring to the church and the village could possibly imply the presence of other members of the family. However, it was only the house where the girl lived that was pointed out, and to point at a pretty girl in the street would surely have been out of character for a young man so surreptitious in his admiration of the 'sylphs' on Brighton beach.

Having drawn attention to these discrepancies it is important to acknowledge that Hardy's comment is essentially the same in both accounts, and it was his reference to 'humanity' which prompted the quotation. I can only assume that James Gibson took his version from a Hardy source.

Two further comments on John Cowper's recollection of the occasion may be of interest. The nave and chancel of Montacute church are out of alignment by approximately 3 degrees. Some Montacute people subscribe to Hardy's explanation, but many disagree. They point out that Christ crucified is invariably depicted with his head falling to the right shoulder, and the nave, added in the fifteenth century, is skewed the opposite way and moreover, runs due east-west. Their explanation is that the builders of the eleventh-century chancel aligned it with the rising sun on St Catherine's day, the patronal festival, 25 November. As to the girl, it may be that John Cowper Powys drew attention to a house just across the street from the church, almost next door to the King's Arms. If so, she was probably Rose Rogers.

J.B.

Two Meetings with John Cowper Powys in Mind

It was when I was in the sixth form, that is in the early sixties, that I discovered John Cowper Powys. He was little known, even to those interested in literature. The book I first laid my hands on was a thick wonderful overwhelming book of more than a thousand pages. It was *A Glastonbury Romance*. There's always something intoxicating about discovering a new author who appeals to you in an uncommon way, one who will 'change the colour of your mind'. What excited and delighted me particularly in the beginning were his nature descriptions and the way he gave the inanimate life.

In 1970–71 my wife and I were living in Chester. Situated as it is on the Welsh–English border, it is convenient for excursions into North Wales. So naturally we thought it would be interesting to look at Corwen and try to find the house where John Cowper had lived. On the outskirts of the village we spotted a café in a disused railway station where we thought we might both refresh ourselves and make some inquiries. On entering we saw two well-dressed men, they were talking in Welsh. The one being served was sipping whisky and on seeing us went over to the juke-box and proceeded to play Welsh choir music. We were served with tea made with powdered milk.

After a while I summoned up enough courage to ask if they knew where Powys had lived. At this they perked up. They didn't know, but told us to go and see Evan Roberts who, they said, had been a great friend of Powys and would tell us everything we wished to know. He lived in a village nearby called Llandderfel. Admittedly he was over 90, a bit deaf and his English rusty, but they assured us, he would enjoy helping us. They gave us precise instructions as to how to get there.

Llandderfel turned out to be a charming village perched above the Dee valley. Evan Roberts was out for his daily walk his daughter informed us when we knocked on the little blue house. She kindly went off to fetch him. He turned out to be a short thin man, somewhat bent and with one of his blue eyes blind. He had no teeth, used a stick, but he was vibrant with life, in no way senile.

We were shown into an immaculately kept sitting-room, where there was a piano with a book of hymns open on it. Evan Roberts told us that Powys was the best of friends and showed us a photo of him. Powys was 70 when they first met. Evan Roberts was to give him Welsh lessons. The daughter knew him as well and said it was a long time before they realised that Miss Playter was not Mrs Powys. Evan Roberts referred to her as Powys's housekeeper. He told us Powys would come by train when he visited him and on their meeting would clap his hands with excitement, like a child. Otherwise he would write to him once a fortnight. He called Evan Roberts the historian of Merioneth.

It was then that Roberts left off telling us about John Cowper and told us about himself. He had not become interested in books until he was 50 when he became

seriously ill and was given some interesting ones to read while he was convalescing. Before that he had just been keen on choirs and singing. His implication was that he now regarded such activities as somewhat frivolous. His interest in Welsh history was general with perhaps a bias towards the eighteenth century when Welsh was more widely written. He showed us the first Welsh–English dictionary compiled in 1688 by Thomas Jones. It was apparently the only existing copy and he was able to help in correcting modern Welsh dictionaries as it gave the earliest definite meaning. He claimed that Llandderfel had the purest Welsh of anywhere. Finally he showed us his autograph book, which of course included John Cowper's signature. When we were asked to sign too, we were rather flattered and felt part of the stream of literary history.

Evan Roberts' daughter had suggested that we visit Phyllis Playter in Blaenau Ffestiniog where she and Powys had moved after Corwen. It took us a good many months before we summoned up courage, or perhaps 'cheek', but I was goaded on by the thought that I had failed to visit Powys while he was alive. Blaenau is a small town that used to be an important centre of the slate industry. The house was near the town centre, but just behind it ran a mountain stream, and the hills rose sharply almost out of the back yard.

The door was opened by a woman of about 75 dressed in a black woollen twin set. She wore a heavy metal necklace and round flat earrings to match. It was Miss Phyllis Playter. She did not seem troubled or irritated by our calling. She invited us in and offered us gin and tonics. We accepted, but were mildly surprised as it was only four in the afternoon. She smoked Woodbines.

I eagerly tried to take in the details of the room: a large chest of drawers, a kitchen cupboard, a bed with a black Welsh cover and a gilded mirror above it. There were paintings and drawings on the walls. I recognised one by Cefn Williams. There were also a good many small ornaments obviously of personal rather than intrinsic value: a Hindu god, Chinese ivory figurines and oddly shaped pieces of wood. We were taken upstairs to the room where Powys used to work and where he had kept all his published books, both English and foreign editions, and all the books written by all the other Powyses.

We returned to our drinks. The conversation ranged over a wide spectrum of topics: Welsh language promotion, Rio Tinto mining projects, unemployment, the problem of lending library payments to authors, the unpleasant big fat books of today compared with the slimmer, neater, several volumed books of yesterday. We were recommended a good book-binder. Needless to say we were interested to hear something about Powys himself. He'd always suffered badly, Miss Playter said, from ulcers. Once he nearly starved to death because he couldn't keep anything down. Finally he discovered something he could keep down – olive oil – which saved his life. Anyhow he gradually devised his own diet, which consisted of dry bread, raw eggs, tea (his great pleasure) and milk. Interestingly, she said, all the other Powys brothers, with the exception of Theodore, had trouble with

ulcers. Llewelyn, in fact, died of ulcers, although most people think it was of TB. The reason for this was their public school diet –Theodore didn't go to Sherborne like the others – where in the evening they drank beer and ate very doughy bread.

Powys would start each day with a long walk, read (usually the Iliad or Odyssey or the Welsh Bible, which he thought especially good), write letters –he answered every letter he received – and then work at his own writing. He never shut himself off and didn't mind being interrupted, simply continuing where he had left off. All the time she referred to him as Mr. Powys.

When we left she refused to let us photograph her but she mentioned to us Eric the Red, Sven-Erik Täckmark. She wondered if we were acquainted with him since my wife is Swedish. We weren't, and it would take us many years before we summoned enough 'cheek' to get in touch with that excellent translator and wonderful Powysian.

Mark Boseley

Subscriptions — please see page 36.

'A Lonely Giant'
Herbert Williams' radio programme about John Cowper Powys, BBC Radio Wales, 29 July 1997

In the July *Newsletter* Paul Roberts referred to this as 'a programme not to be missed'. However, quite apart from the inevitable difficulty that many members would encounter in trying to receive BBC Wales, the *Newsletter* did not arrive until after the broadcast. Having been fortunate enough to know about it in advance, I was able to practise finding the unaccustomed spot on the dial and at 7.33 pm. on the appointed day sat poised to listen to a whole half hour of radio about J.C.P. Instead, I was subjected to an irony of Hardyesque proportions. It was announced that the broadcast would be delayed, for, of all things, cricket! Glamorgan was playing Yorkshire. I could imagine the great man either clapping his hands and roaring with laughter, or as Raymond Garlick was to describe later, throwing back his head and literally foaming at the mouth. Eventually, Glamorgan having won, I was captivated by what was, very definitely, a programme not to be missed.

The opening narration described John Cowper Powys as 'a most unusual man' who gave his walking sticks names, didn't want trees cut down because they had

as much right to life as humans, was a fierce campaigner against vivisection, and in many ways a 'New Ageist' before his time. A magician and a novelist who transcends reality, not by creating some fantastical other world, but by giving the world we all live in, new meaning. This introduction led us into more than a potted biography. The programme was a celebration of the life and work of J.C.P. with emphasis on his Welsh period.

There were short contributions from people who knew John Cowper including: Isobel Powys Marks, Oliver Wilkinson, Gerard Casey, Raymond Garlick and Glen Cavaliero. These respected Powysians touched upon many aspects of the man and his work. Of the interviews with local people, Herbert Williams said, 'They wouldn't say a bad word about him'. The childhood recollections of the lady who had been told by her mother, to put back the stones arranged by Mr Powys, exactly as she had found them, lest he should think something awful was going to happen; went on to say that she wanted to emphasise that he was a lovely man, striking you not as odd, but somehow innocent.

Among several penetrating dramatic vignettes, was the following description from Bryn Jones, of the final crescendo of a Powys lecture on King Lear, which went, 'He was possessed by the work, as though some magic transfusion of King Lear into John Cowper Powys had taken place. He spoke with passion and feeling about the old man; about his daughters, about fate, about human misery, about triumph, about reconciliation, about all of this. And as you know he was a tall and very notable figure, with a wonderful head and a fine voice. The one moment I remember, and I would think everybody who heard this remembers, was when he stepped forward ... and braced himself on his right foot, predominantly, and raised his right hand in the air, clenched his fingers into almost a fist (he had been working up to this) and he described King Lear as, "One, Whole, Vast, Symphony of Pain".'

Those who saw 'The Great Powys' will realise that some of the recollections of people who knew Powys have been re-cycled for the broadcast and readers of the recent biograpy of John Cowper will recognise them cropping up again in print. I see nothing wrong with this. We have reason to be grateful to Herbert Williams for recording the memories of those who knew the great man, and there is probably more that should be recorded for archival purposes while there is still time. Herbert Williams has shown The Powys Society what can be done to promote Powys, but his television and radio contributions have been set in a Welsh context, and it is the Welsh years which are most powerfully portrayed in his biography. John Cowper Powys was much more than a regional writer; what we should now do, is to build on Herbert's sterling work and promote him and his writing nationally, through the media, and (how we all dream of it) the publication of the great novels. But at least a start has been made; as a half-hour introduction to an 'untried author' 'A Lonely Giant' was an undoubted success.

J.B.

The Powys Society Conference 1997

Powys Society conferences have as their nucleus a little club of regular supporters, of which, having attended six or seven of these annual get-togethers, I suppose I can now consider myself a member. We are by no means an exclusive club and although its members come primarily to meet old friends we do genuinely delight in the arrival of new faces. Once arrived, the first thing one does is to scan the list of names in the programme for friends and acquaintances. It always has a strongly international flavour and among the seventy or so attending this year were members from: Zimbabwe, America, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, France and Belgium.

Although people come as much to meet friends and talk Powys as to listen to papers, they are technically what it is all about and cannot be ignored. To attempt to summarise the content of all, or any of them, would be beyond my capability, and would, in one or two instances, reveal either a breakdown in communication on the one hand, or a lack of intellectual rigour on the other. For me, 1995 was the vintage year and what was on offer this time was neither as robust or sustaining as what we heard then. Of course, selected papers are published in *The Powys Journal* and it seems to be the case that what makes the greatest impact on delivery does not always provide the best read a year later. The Society encourages student membership and this year there was a joint contribution from two Swedish students who have just begun their post-graduate Powys studies.

I find that I tend to pinpoint each individual conference in my memory by reference to some incident which is more likely to be trivial than genuinely memorable. As for example, when Professor John Bayley prefaced his discussion of J.C.P. with Dame Iris Murdoch by apologising for having lost one of his dentures in Lake Como; or when Charles Lock abandoned his scheduled paper to engage Harald Fawkner in a debate on, I think 'mineralogy'.

So what is going to stick in my mind about 1997? Almost certainly not the fact that we were celebrating our thirtieth year, although the opening lecture at the Dorset County Museum, shared with fifty members of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society and followed by a tour of the new gallery was enjoyable. It would be satisfying to be able to say that the Powyses had succeeded in making their presence felt in the shadow of Hardy, but it is not the case. They were, for the greater part, consigned to what was effectively a room commemorating the artistic colony that grew up in East Chaldon. The A.G.M. is not generally the stuff that memories are made of, but this one had possibilities, if only because it demonstrated that even the happiest of families has skeletons in the cupboard which may emerge to perform a Danse Macabre that can be entertaining even if imperfectly understood. More probably, and here I surely speak for the majority of those present, the most enduring memory will be the visit to East Chaldon and Chydyok on the last evening. In the morning it poured with rain and those in high

places considered cancellation, but then the sun broke through and we emerged from our coach to find the village and the Five Marys bathed in the soft lemon light of a perfect summer evening, made more perfect by the associations of the place and the readings which brought them to life.

So much for a very personal view of the conference which meant as many things to as many of us as were there. On the last morning, in conversation with a first-time visitor from overseas I asked what he had got from the week-end, he replied, 'The absolute joy of talking about Powys, without first having to explain who he was'. We must keep trying to put that right.

A Supporter

The Hamadryad and the Demon
A Footnote

The Hamadryad and the Demon, the short story written by John Cowper Powys in 1902 which we published in *Newsletter* No. 31 (July 1997), has a distinction rare amongst J.C.P.'s works in having been published three times, the previous occasions being in the 'Victoria' magazine (in an edition of one copy) at Christmas in 1902, and in the *Powys Newsletter* of Colgate University in 1971.

It is interesting to note that the story is more or less contemporary with Murdock's Cottage, which we published in *Newsletter* No. 30, since the two stories are stylistically so different from one another. Both, however, show the influence of what John Cowper Powys called New (or Popular) Paganism, about which he wrote at some length in essays not yet published, as well as in his study of Keats, the first half of which has been published by Cecil Woolf. The influence of Paganism, as understood at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, on Powys is an area yet to be fully explored by critics and one which will undoubtedly prove revealing.

However, The Hamadryad and the Demon prompted me to investigate a number of points which arose during the process of editing *Newsletter* No. 31, but which there was no room to publish at the time.

First, what prompted Powys to write a story set in Lincoln? This is hardly familiar territory for the various incarnations of 'The Powys Hero'. The answer came (as so many answers do) from *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement* by Derek Langridge, in which we learn that Powys delivered a series of twelve lectures in Lincoln during the autumn term of 1902. This would have necessitated him visiting the city over a period of about three months, since the lectures were delivered on a weekly basis, between engagements in the Lake District and the north-west of England. The story clearly demonstrates a personal knowledge of the city, both from the descriptions of the cathedral and its environs and of the

industrial areas, and it seems most likely that the story was actually written there.

Three of Powys's twelve Lincoln lectures were devoted to Walter Scott and during the same season he delivered a series of six lectures elsewhere which were exclusively devoted to the Waverley novels. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the 'hero' of The Hamadryad and the Demon should be called Richard Lovel, since that is the assumed name of the hero in Scott's *The Antiquary*. The Jew's House, in which Richard Lovel's father conducts his antique business is, indeed, a genuine building, one of the oldest in the city. It has a deeply carved archway surrounding the door which, making due allowance for a somewhat fevered imagination, might indeed reveal 'moving amid bats and owls, shapes, forms and lineaments no more human or normal than the abode they lived in was clear to the light of day.' And, as a published photograph found by Stephen Powys Marks shows, the building was actually used as an antique and curio shop, just as Powys described it, with 'a low narrow window full of bric-a-brac and ancient china'.

Powys was also referring to current events when he wrote that the Bishop 'was going to speak on the Education Bill', since this became the 1902 Education Act which resulted in the establishment of Local Education Authorities and was one of this century's most important pieces of educational legislation. What we are to make of Powys's attitude to this Bill from his description of the august cleric as 'The Bishop of Tammany' is open to question. It is hard to imagine that so active a representative of the University Extension movement would have been against the Bill and the Bishop's satirical title, deriving from the American 'Tammany Hall', which had become a by-word for political corruption, probably says more about Powys's attitude to the Church of England than it does about his feelings about the extension of universal public education.

His feelings about the Church of England as opposed to the Roman Catholic Church are also indicated by the attitudes of the priests to whom Richard and Rachel appeal for help. We know that Powys was attracted to Catholicism, probably as a result of, or at least coinciding with, his infatuation with Thomas Henry Lyon, his future brother-in-law. Catholicism also seems to have overlapped in many ways with the Paganism of the time.

The Hamadryad and the Demon can hardly be regarded as one of Powys's masterpieces, but neither does it deserve to be ignored. Indeed, I believe that those critics who choose to ignore Powys's early and largely unpublished works, such as the stories which the *Newsletter* has brought to light, risk missing an important element in the growth of his genius. Would any Joyce scholar who expected to be taken seriously dare to dismiss newly discovered early works in attempting to assess his creative achievement? I think not. The same should apply to Powys if we are really serious in our claims for his worth. The early works must be collected (and reconstructed from disorganized and fragmented manuscripts, where necessary) and properly examined in the context not only of Powys's life,

but of their contemporary literary and philosophical scene, and in this respect I am proud of the pioneering work which the *Newsletter* has been able to undertake.

In publishing this story we did, however, make a number of errors which unaccountably seem to have crept in at a late stage of preparation and to have avoided numerous proof-readings. For these I can only apologise. They were as follows:

page 27, line 12	'tothe' for 'to the'
page 30, line 12	'notadvanced' for 'not advanced'
line 14	'this arms' for 'his arms'
page 32, line 28	'hascome' for 'has come'
page 34, line 2	'thelittle' for 'the little'
page 35, line 5	'rond' for 'round'

Paul Roberts

Déjà–vu

Members will have been delighted by our stop-press news of the oil, or rather the lack of it. We are told that the rig is now in Bordeaux, which must be a more suitable place for it than West Chaldon. At the planning inquiry it was said that there had been some sixty trial borings in Dorset since 1945, of which only a very small number had been successful. I am grateful to John Sanders who sent me the following extract, from a letter written by Sylvia Townsend Warner to Alyse Gregory in December 1954. Ed.

Dearest Alyse,

I will not be so old fashioned as to ask how you weathered the last gales, for since then I have heard of a worse calamity. Valentine read to me from the Western Gazette that there is a proposal to drill for oil near East Chaldon, on land belonging to Mr. Cobb's farm; and that a road is to be made over the downs to the experimental drilling site. Where is this horror to take place? Will it be near you, will you have the road and the wire netting and the cement blocks and all the rest of it in sight? I feel so agitated about it, thinking that it may destroy your peace of prospect and Katie's peace of mind. It seems the height of fortune's malice that living so far away, with none of the amenities of the common lot, walking through mud for your letters and groceries, your telephone snapping in the wind like a vine, only rabbit holes to put old bottles in and all the rest of it, you should now be threatened with the nastiest (except perhaps for the Army) development of science and progress. Even if they don't find any oil – which I sincerely pray – they will make a havoc; and if they do ...

How I Met the Powys Brothers

Hilary Henderson's mother was Florida Scott-Maxwell, dear friend of Alyse Gregory. Hilary was prompted to write this childhood recollection after returning to Beth Car for the first time in almost seventy years.

My mother, younger brothers and I were staying at East Chaldon with Mrs Way. Each day we went to the White Nose to see Llewelyn and Alyse. We used to go for long walks and when the weather was bad and the mist came down, they would worry in case we fell off the cliffs, so we used to play charades, or Llewelyn would tell us stories. We also walked in East Chaldon and I was shown a house called Beth Car, but told not to go near it as the man who lived there was not to be disturbed. I was not told who he was, or why I should not disturb him.

Bertie arrived, we were walking through Chaldon and he made for the gate of Beth Car. I hung back and said, 'I have been told I must not go there'. Bertie picked me up in his arms, opened the gate and the front door, and put me on the lap of another brother, Theodore; he kissed me and said, 'At last I have you!' There was not another day that I did not see him. I was eight years old.

Hilary Henderson

Two Topographical Elucidations

Although it is generally agreed that the topography in John Cowper Powys's Wessex novels is meticulously exact, there are apparent inconsistencies, one in *Wolf Solent*, the other in *Weymouth Sands*, which may have puzzled attentive readers. The first one concerns Wolf's journey from London to Ramsgard, when 'the train that carried him ran past the queer looking tower of Basingstoke church'. Most travellers will look out of the left-hand window towards the town centre, only to see nothing unusual in the squat, sturdy tower of the Parish Church. But if one looks to the right one sees the hexagonal tower of the ruined late Perpendicular Chapel of the Holy Ghost – a real eye catcher. This, I suggest, is the tower that Powys had in mind.

In the opening chapter of *Weymouth Sands* Magnus Muir is waiting to meet Perdita Wane off the channel steamer. Powys tells us that he goes to the landing stage at the pier head; then, unwilling to join the crowd there, 'he paid his sixpence and entered the enclosed portion of the pleasure-pier' and 'advanced along the harbour-side of the pier, passing the desolate closed doors of the summer Theatre, till he reached the end, where, like the wet deck of a ship, under a solitary light the jetty projected itself over the tossing melancholy waters'.

The passage seems topographically confused. Were there two piers? Yes and No. Weymouth Pier forms the northern arm of the harbour entrance and runs

parallel with the promontory of the Nothe, from which the Weymouth breakwater (as Powys calls it) extends to form the southern arm. A large exuberant pavilion, erected in 1909, stood beside this entrance, and the pier was divided longitudinally between a commercial portion and one devoted to promenading: the latter extended well beyond the landing stage on the former, which lay alongside the commercial pier, a short distance beyond the pavilion. It is Powys's use of the words 'pier-head' in connection with this landing stage which causes the confusion.

Visitors today will find the pier greatly altered. It has been rebuilt in concrete and the landward portion widened to accommodate a car park. The pavilion was rebuilt after the war and has lost its air of maritime frivolity. Only the glorious view of Weymouth Bay from the pier-head remains unspoiled.

Glen Cavaliero

The Corpus Connection

John Cowper Powys (admitted 1891), Littleton Charles Powys (1893) and Llewelyn Powys (1903) were undergraduates at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, as also were their father, the Revd C. F. Powys (1862), and their father's father, the Revd L. C. Powys (1809; Fellow of Corpus, 1814–37). So were J.C.P.'s brother-in-law (Harry Lyon), and his son, Littleton Alfred. A Corpus contemporary and friend of C.F.P.'s was the Revd D. N. Llewelyn (1862), who was Llewelyn Powys's godfather and the source of the latter's first name. As if all that were not enough, the brothers' maternal grandfather, Mary Cowper Powys's father, the Revd William Cowper Johnson (1833), was also at Corpus, and I have identified another five (possibly six) of Johnson's relations (families of Patteson, Johnson, Greene) who were also at that college, including another Fellow, the Revd Thomas Greene (an exact contemporary of the Revd L.C.P.), and his great-grandfather who was Master (and Bishop of Ely).

I would like to find out more about the Corpus connection, and have been in touch with their Modern Archivist (there is also an Ancient Archivist), and hope one day to visit Corpus to see what records they have. Perhaps the most intriguing question is how it all started for the Powys clan: what took Littleton Charles Powys to Corpus in 1809? and how was he elected a fellow at the age of 24?

We can learn a lot about the time spent at Cambridge by J.C.P. and L.C.P. (the younger) from Theo Dunnet's 'John Cowper and Littleton Powys: Cambridge and the 'Nineties, and a Wedding' (*The Powys Review* 16 (1985), 4–23). An important source for dates and other factual information is *The College of Corpus Christi and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, A History from 1822 to 1952*, by Patrick Bury (Cambridge, 1952); it includes nearly a page about the Revd L.C.P. I will

need to consult an earlier history by Dr J. Lamb, published in 1831, to give me details of any earlier Powyses or other possible antecedents.

My inquisitiveness was recently boosted by the gift to me by A. R. Powys's daughter Eleanor of a water-colour painting of Corpus by R. B. Harraden, done in 1830-something (the last digit of the date on the painting is not clear); this corresponds with the date (1837) when L.C.P. gave up his fellowship to get married and become Rector of Stalbridge, a living in the gift of Corpus Christi. Harraden and his father were the artists and publishers of lithographed plates of Cambridge. The intriguing question which this picture poses is its provenance: was it a leaving present from other Fellows, or purchased or even commissioned by L.C.P.? I think I must assume that the picture originally belonged to L.C.P.; any other provenance seems extremely unlikely.

If anyone knows of other sources of information about the Corpus connection I would very much like to hear about them, so that I can compile a more detailed account.

Stephen Powys Marks

The Society's Publications

We have prepared a completely new list and order form for publications. Opposite is the list in abbreviated form, from which you can order any items you want. Please note that prices now *include* postage (foreign orders: 10% extra), but for books purchased at the Society's Conference (or elsewhere not incurring postage) an allowance will be made off the stated prices. Also available is a new order form which gives fuller bibliographical details, ISBN numbers, and trade terms: if you would like one, please ask the Treasurer.

One very interesting item not listed is *The Powys Clowns*: please see page 15 for details. There are only a few copies left: first come, first served!

Subscriptions and Covenants

The next annual **subscriptions** are due on January 1st 1998: £13.50 in UK, £16 abroad, £6 for students in full-time study. If you do not have a standing order (more than half do), please get out your cheque books now.

Nearly a fifth of the members have **covenants**. However, several covenants have now expired, and I have written to these members with new forms: if you have not yet done so, please return them to me as soon as you can, before the Christmas rush is upon you! Covenants add to the value of your subscription at no cost to you: please ask for a form.

Stephen Powys Marks