Editorial

There are countless people of my own and a younger generation who can remember where they were when news came of President Kennedy's assassination. Perhaps in future there will be many members of The Powys Society who will be able to recall what they were doing when they heard the first mention of Powys on the 'Today' Programme at 7.45 on 13 September 1989, or for that matter, where they were when they missed it. The significance of that broadcast, and a burgeoning of media interest in JCP around that time, has yet to be tested, but dare we ask, as we have in the past: Is this the breakthrough ?

Just in case it turns out to be so, and because there has probably not been a comparable flurry of coverage since John Cowper's death, it should be documented. It all began on Sunday 11th, when Chris Woodhead (H.M. Chief Inspector of Schools), the new high-profile champion of Powys, reviewed *The New Oxford Book of English Prose* in *The Sunday Telegraph*. Before he was into his stride he had written: 'We will all, inevitably, have our particular disappointments and complaints. To focus solely on the twentieth century, I would have liked to have seen something from one at least of the Powys brothers ...' On the Tuesday he was on Radio 4's 'Today' discussing John Cowper Powys with Belinda Humfrey, Mark Tole (?) and Tracy Carns, publishing director of New York based Overlook Press, who have reprinted a paperback version of *A Glastonbury Romance*, which has sold more copies in a year than a hardback edition had in fifteen years. Its British distributors have sold out and re-ordered three times in two months.

That morning's *Guardian* carried a large picture of JCP, along with smaller

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ON OTHER PAGES

photographs of George Steiner and Edith Sitwell – representing the case for and against Powys – and a headline saying 'US revives "forgotten" novelist's reputation'. Tracy Carns is quoted as saying, 'I think if Powys is going to make the transition from cult to mainstream, now could be the time. His books deal with lots of millennial themes.' We are later told that Vintage in the US will publish *Wolf Solent* in November. Before the end of that week JCP took pride of place in another *Guardian* article devoted to a number of 'forgotten' writers. We were told that he has a revival about every ten years.

On the same day, *The Independent* carried an article with the headline, 'Literary Life After Death for Unknown', which quoted George Steiner and Henry Miller before recounting the story of the new paperback, and going on to say that Overlook Press will be publishing *Weymouth Sands* in May. All this was followed by some informative background, provided by the literary editor under the title, 'New Age Began with Cowper Powys'. We were told that, 'Powys managed to pinpoint the central features of New Age beliefs fully half a century before the term came into common use ...' and, 'It is no great surprise, perhaps, that thousands of baby-boomer readers who grew up with J. R. R. Tolkien should now want to spend their mature adulthood with the sprawling chronicles of Powys ...' The piece ends: 'He died in 1963, and the zealous Powys Society has worked hard to rebuild his reputation ever since. At last it looks as if their efforts might be bearing fruit.'

On 23 September *The Daily Telegraph* joined in with an article entitled 'Private passions of obscure authors', in the course of which, by means of journalistic gymnastics, Craig Brown linked JCP with Nicholson Baker, a hitherto obscure author thrust into the limelight because his book *Vox* was read by the President to Monica Lewinsky over the telephone. When he becomes more serious Brown debunks what he describes as 'the millennial craving of the Tolkien generation' adding, 'anyone comforted by Tolkien would be shaken by Powys.' All that apart, his article is really seeking to make a point which is summed up in the following quotation: 'For whatever reason, Powys is now, like Nicholson Baker, in danger of losing that obscurity which has always been to me – I sheepishly admit – a key part of his appeal. Fame is nowadays so prevalent that a special sort of sanctity hangs over those who manage to avoid it.' I suspect that there are members of the Society who share that view.

The buzz-words in the newspaper articles and the broadcast discussion were 'millennial' and 'new age' and a spokesman from Waterstones thought Powys 'may be tapping the interest in mind, body, spirit books'. It all sounds very encouraging, but old hands in the Society have grown wary of false dawns. However, bearing in mind JCP's millennial themes, what are the chances of a Powys Society corner in the Dome? Perhaps not, I don't think domes have corners.

Whilst in a slightly euphoric state I must congratulate Peter Foss who brought

Llewelyn to a wider public at a European conference this summer (page 41). And also mention the new Powys Heritage Series, published by Cecil Woolf. Its General Editor, Anthony Head, gives details on page 28. The first two titles will be reviewed in the April *Newsletter*.

John Batten

Eleanor Walton 1931–1998

Mary Eleanor Cowper, second daughter of A. R. Powys, died at her daughter's home in July, but her spiritual home and final resting place was the beautiful Norman church at Winterborne Tomson which her father had saved from dereliction. On a sombre September afternoon, which might have been instantly brightened by Eleanor's radiant smile, family and friends filled its box pews to remember her before her ashes were interred near her father's grave, where those of her mother and twin brother already lay.

Members of the Society knew Eleanor as the warm, rather diffident person described by Rob Timlin and Glen Cavaliero. Some of us knew that for several years she had carried on a brave battle against cancer. Trained at Corsham Court, Eleanor specialised in oil painting and calligraphy, though she also did etchings and was a fine water colour artist. Some of her early experience was in the Old Vic Theatre Workshop, but she was above all a teacher and taught for many years at St Mary's Convent, Hastings. Active in the affairs of her local church and a supporter of local art groups, she will be as sorely missed by her local community as she is by this Society.

Her son Michael spoke movingly of his mother, the fight she and her husband had waged against her illness, her confident religious belief and her devotion to that beautiful corner of the Dorset countryside which has become a family shrine. It was a privilege to be there in that secluded churchyard among Eleanor's children and grandchildren as she came home.

When her brother Oliver Powys died in 1996, Eleanor sent me a copy of his funeral address, which she herself composed. Towards its end she mentions, among their Yorkshire forebears, 'An old fashioned great aunt called Michael Fairless – her *nom de plume* for she was Margaret Barber, who wrote what was a best seller of the time, called *The Roadmender*.' Eleanor's tribute closed with this quotation from that book, and it clearly meant much to her as an allegory for our departure: 'But beyond the white gate and the trail of woodbine falls the silence greater than speech, darkness greater than light, a pause of 'a little while' and then the touch of that healing garment as we pass to the King in His beauty, in a land from which there is no return ... At the gateway then I cry farewell.'

J.B.

The death of Eleanor Walton will have saddened many of our members. The younger daughter of A. R. Powys, she was a valued participant in our conferences. Her quiet and charming presence invariably induced a feeling of serenity, while her beautiful smile and gently incisive conversation made you want to know her better. She will be greatly missed, not only by her family but by her friends in the Society as well.

Glen Cavaliero

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Kingston Maurward, Dorset at 4 p.m. on Monday 24 August 1998

Present The President, Honorary Officers, and 28 Members of the Society.

1 Apologies were received from Francis and Kathleen Feather, Sven-Erik Täckmark, Hilary Henderson, Marius Buning, Thieu Kljn, Timothy Hyman, Eileen Mable and Charles Lock, all of whom had sent good wishes to the Society for a successful Conference.

2 Minutes of the 1997 AGM Proposed by Graham Carey and Seconded by Glen Cavaliero, the Minutes of the Meeting held at Kingston Maurward on 25 August 1997 as published in the November 1997 *Newsletter* were approved and signed as a correct record.

3 Matters Arising There were no matters arising.

4 Secretary's Report Chris Gostick reported that the Committee had met on four occasions in the course of the year, three times in London, in November, February and June – thanks to Bruce Madge and the British Library providing a free Committee Room – and once at Kingston Maurward. There has also been one meeting of the Publications Sub-Committee.

The meeting in London on 22 November was the first opportunity for the new Committee to begin to work together, and the main item of business was consideration of a Consultation Document prepared by Paul Roberts and circulated in advance, reviewing a range of current and possible future activities. This document had provided a valuable framework for the key priorities pursued by the Committee on behalf of the Society over the past twelve months. Perhaps the most crucial of these had been to put the Powys Collection on to a firm financial and administrative footing. This had been achieved in a number of ways, most particularly by :

appointing Morine Krissdóttir as Honorary Curator, and supporting her in that role;

obtaining a 50 per cent grant spread over two years from the British Library for the conservation of TFP mss in the Bissell Collection;

a commitment to regular and more substantial financial support to the Collection;
a regular review of the priorities of work to be undertaken;
agreement with the Dorset County Museum over additional space and facilities for the Collection;
completing changes to the Powys Room to improve the working environment and to facilitate access for those wishing to consult the Collection;
working closely with the Dorset County Museum in preparing a major National Heritage Lottery Application for conserving and cataloguing the Collection Documents; and
supporting a pilot study to microfilm the more fragile Collection documents.

Much of this work is still in hand, and although more remains to be done, this represents a substantial improvement to the facilities at the Collection over the past twelve months.

In relation to the Collection, the Committee had also reviewed and revised the Terms of Reference of the Powys Collection Advisory Committee, which had also had a first meeting with its new membership; agreed a clear Policy on Gifts and Bequests; and pursued the arrangements for the setting up of the Powys Society Collection Trust, as reported to the last AGM. As a result of complex legal guidance from the Charity Commission it was subsequently determined *not* to establish the Trust. Instead, the Committee had passed a new By-Law, designed to ensure that the Collection is held in perpetuity by the Society for the purpose of promoting and furthering the Society's overall objectives as defined by the Constitution and the Deed of Charity.

Over the year the Committee also supported significant further development of the Powys Society Internet site by Thieu Klijn, with valuable assistance from Max and Jacqueline Peltier, which had led to increased attention and interest in the Society. A number of new members have been attracted in this way, and an increasing proportion of the Society's general business is now conducted by electronic mail, although this will never replace the more traditional methods of communicating with the membership.

Inevitably these matters, together with the routine business of the Society, have taken up a good deal of the Committee's attention, but a number of other activities have also been pursued, some of which were specifically raised by members at the last AGM. These included :

reviewing the role of the Honorary Overseas Representatives;
considering further ways to promote the publication of Powys titles;
considering ways to increase the potential for Powys studies to be included in the National Curriculum; and
agreeing to the production of an audio tape of readings from the works of JCP, TFP and Llewelyn, to be produced by Christopher Wilkinson, which is now in hand.

As reported in the *Newsletter*, the Committee had also been in correspondence with Blaenau Ffestiniog Council over the defacing of the plaque at 1 Waterloo,

and could report that the Council had generously agreed to undertake any necessary restoration work.

The Committee also spent a good deal of time over the year on the other significant activity undertaken by the Society, which involved actively supporting those directly engaged in editing, designing and producing *The Dorset Year*. Inevitably this turned out to be a far bigger and more time-consuming project than originally envisaged, but had proved to be a very substantial achievement for the Society. The main focus is now on an effective Marketing and Distribution Strategy to ensure that as many copies are sold as possible.

The Committee also noted the sad deaths of Eric Bissell, Francis Powys and Eleanor Walton during the course of the year. All had been value members of the Society over many years and will be sadly missed. Some 50 people, mostly members of the Society, were also present at Mappowder Church on 30 May 1998 for a moving Memorial Service to Francis and Sally Powys.

To round off the year on a less sombre note, it was reported that on the initiative of John Batten, and in accordance with Llewelyn's Will, some 13 members of the Society were present at *The Sailor's Return* in Chaldon on 13 August to drink a toast to Llewelyn on the 108th anniversary of his birth. Eight of these members then walked up past Chydyok to the high cliffs to lay a small wreath of Llewelyn and Alyse's wedding flowers – dandelion, yarrow and ground ivy – on the Memorial Stone, before returning to the village by way of Rat's Barn, along the paths so memorably described in *The Dorset Year*.

In response to questions, Griffin Beale outlined the basic legal position regarding the Powys Society Collection Trust, and membership of the Advisory Committee was also clarified. Finally Chris Gostick described the Committee's proposals for the future role of Honorary Overseas Representatives which are currently under discussion. The Hon. Secretary's report was then adopted by the meeting.

5 **Treasurer's Report** Stephen Powys Marks explained that the Treasurer's report and Audited Statement of Accounts for 1997 had been published in the July 1998 *Newsletter*, and then went on to highlight that the Society currently had 308 subscription-paying members, and that only 76 per cent of subscription income was now being spent on the *Newsletter* and *Journal*, allowing a higher proportion to be spent on other activities. This included a substantial sum spent on improving the facilities at the Powys Collection and undertaking the necessary conservation and cataloguing work, which in turn had been assisted by a 50 per cent grant from the British Library. Over the past year the major financial activity had been around *The Dorset Year*, and although the original estimate of the costs of production had been exceeded this had been offset to some extent by additional copies from the printer. All subscription copies had now been distributed, leaving a total of 11 hardbacks and 135 paperbacks in stock, with a deficit of around £150 on the total costs of production, which would clearly show

a comfortable profit if all remaining copies could be sold. In response to a question Sarah Linden outlined the Marketing Strategy adopted by the Committee. The Audited Accounts for 1997 as published were then adopted by the meeting.

6 Chairman's Remarks Paul Roberts drew attention to the copy of his 1997 Annual Report to the Charity Commission published in the July 1998 *Newsletter*, and then went on to pay tribute to the work of the various members of the Committee over the past 12 months, in particular to Timothy Hyman who was now standing down after very many years of active membership of the Committee in a variety of roles. He also noted that with the recent deaths of Eric Bissell, Francis Powys and Eleanor Walton the Society had lost three very great friends and supporters. He went on to report that the two major achievements of the Society over the past year had been the publication of *The Dorset Year* which reflected very great credit on the hard work of all those involved, and the significant improvements to the Powys Collection, and although much still needed to be done, there had been steady progress on storage, conservation and cataloguing of the very wide variety of manuscripts and other important documents by Morine Krissdóttir and a number of other supporters. Finally, he drew attention to the current production of an audio cassette of readings from the works of John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn Powys being produced by Chris Wilkinson, which he hoped would be available for distribution in the New Year.

7 Appointment of Honorary Officers The meeting noted that as a result of the procedures enshrined in the new Constitution, the following Honorary Officers had been re-appointed for the next 12 months :

Chairman	Paul Roberts
Vice-Chairman	Griffin Beale
Hon. Secretary	Chris Gostick
Hon. Treasurer	Stephen Powys Marks

8 Appointment of Committee The meeting noted that as a result of the procedures enshrined in the new Constitution, the following Committee members had been appointed for the next 12 months :

John Batten	Judith Stinton
Bev Craven	Chris Wilkinson
Bruce Madge	John Williams
John Powys	

In response to a question from Louise de Bruin the method for electing Officers and Committee members under the new Constitution adopted in 1996 was explained.

8 Appointment of Honorary Curator The meeting further noted that Morine Krissdóttir had been co-opted to the Committee as Honorary Curator of the Powys Collection for a further year.

9 Appointment of Hon. Auditor It was proposed by Stephen Powys Marks,

seconded by Graham Carey and unanimously approved that Stephen Allen, a member of the Society, be appointed Honorary Auditor for a further year. In response to a question from Leslie Booth it was clarified that Mr Allen received no payment for this office, and it was subsequently proposed by Glen Cavaliero and seconded by Louise de Bruin and unanimously agreed that he should receive a copy of *The Dorset Year* in appreciation of his work for the Society.

10 Development of the Powys Society Collection Paul Roberts and Morine Krissdóttir outlined in more detail the work at the Collection over the past year and the plans for future work, the most important being an agreement with the Dorset Records Office to microfilm the more fragile TFP mss from the Bissell Collection as a pilot study which was scheduled to take place later in the autumn. If this was successful it would lead to further microfilming of Collection materials, and the possibility of exchanges with other archives where corresponding papers were available. The best ways of publishing a catalogue of Collection material when it is completed is currently under review. The possibility of using a graduate student to assist with cataloguing, etc., was suggested and would also be kept under close review.

11 Time and Place of the 1999 Conference This was currently scheduled to be at Kingston Maurward on the Bank Holiday weekend as normal practice, but as considerable reservations about the problems of travelling on a Bank Holiday weekend were expressed by a number of members, and a straw poll indicated no very strong support. [This was subsequently reviewed by the Officers, and consequently the 1999 Annual Conference has been brought forward by one week: **it will now be held at Kingston Maurward from Saturday 21 August to Tuesday 24 August 1999**]. Suggestions for alternative venues to Kingston Maurward would also be welcomed by the Committee for consideration for future years.

12 Any Other Business A variety of issues were raised from the floor, specifically:

— Graham Carey suggested the Committee look at ways in which local public libraries might usefully be used to draw attention to the Society and its activities by the use of a small mobile display, and volunteered to assist with this process. Furthermore, that the Committee consider ways in which reminiscences of those who knew Phyllis Playter might usefully be gathered on audio tape, perhaps by a special feature in the *Newsletter*.

— Paul Roberts drew attention to the earlier disclosure that a valuable book was missing from the Society's bookstall, and asked for advice as to how the Committee might best respond. There was considerable support for a return to using a lockable room for books in future, despite the clear inconvenience of this. Richard Perceval Graves then proposed that those at the Conference each pay £1 by way of compensation to the Society for the loss of the book and this was approved by the meeting, and a total of £22 was raised in this way.

— It was reported that Peter Judd and Melvon Ankeny had both recently made valuable contributions to the Powys Collection, and further information about these would appear in a future Newsletter.
— Paul Roberts reported that Cecil Woolf is about to begin publishing a new Powys Heritage Series of short monographs which should shortly be available, in addition to the 3 new books available at the Conference.
— Finally, it was announced to enthusiastic acclaim that Richard Perceval Graves had most generously arranged to donate the copyright of his valuable book *The Brothers Powys* to the Society.

The meeting was closed at 5.40 pm.

Chris Gostick, *Hon. Secretary*

Subscriptions — please see page 21.

Powysland Expatriates Meet
The 1998 Annual Conference

Although Dorchester probably represents the most appropriate venue for a Powys Society conference, the experience of attending is always in a sense more like making an annual visit to the small independent Republic of Powysland. Or, and this is perhaps a better analogy, it is as if one has joined a gathering of expatriates from this country, who, meeting in exile, attempt through the celebration of what they cherish to maintain their identity and culture in a foreign land.

And celebrate they undoubtedly do – 1998 being no exception. In a year which has seen the Society produce a book of such exquisite quality – both in content and presentation – as *The Dorset Year*, but also the *Journal* and three *Newsletters*, the high standard of which it is tempting to take for granted, the creation of the splendid programme of events which comprised this summer's conference was another magnificent achievement. By saying this I am not simply referring to the pleasure gained from the individual events, but the clever pairing of talks on Elizabeth Myers and Littleton on Sunday afternoon as well as two contrasting lectures on Theodore the following morning. Even skilful planning could not have foreseen David Gervais and Lawrence Mitchell sharing the platform for a fascinating question and answer session prior to Monday lunch. Why is it that discussions about the writings of TFP seem to generate an atmosphere of portentousness ?

Of course individual events must not pass without comment. Once again, the weather favoured those members who took the coach for the Walk-About and readings; as last year in Chaldon, so this time in Weymouth, the excursion

provided a fitting close to the final evening. And, once again, the evening readings by Wilkinson & Son (plus friend) provided a highlight of the conference. By selecting those letters from the correspondence of Llewelyn Powys and Louis Wilkinson for which replies exist it was possible to create an extremely effective dialogue. To point out that the nature of their friendship provoked an uninhibited exchange of wit and strong feelings would be an understatement; what we were presented with was a piece of theatre so engagingly performed it almost suggested the two writers had had such an audience in mind, even if in the end one began to question what sort of relationship it was that could produce so continuous a display of masculine bravado. Nevertheless, it was an unforgettable occasion, which drew warm and grateful applause from all who attended.

Yet, as with all considerations of significance, there has to be a darker side. To the knowledge that E. E. Bissell and Francis Powys had died was added the news of Eleanor Walton's death. This was something I found especially poignant as last year I had accompanied her on the coach to Chaldon and could remember how, on the morning after, when I had breakfasted with her, she read with quiet but obvious pride from one of her father's (A. R. Powys) letters. Her self-effacing manner and delightful smile were much missed at the conference and will be in the future.

When Stephen Powys Marks stood up in the lecture room on Sunday afternoon to announce the disappearance of a book from his stand I am sure I was not the only one to experience a sickening feeling in the stomach as I recalled on learning that the painting by Gertrude Powys had been stolen from the Dorset County Museum in 1995. Almost certainly the book's removal was by a member of the Society gathered for the conference, possibly someone I had sat next to, shared a meal, discussion or joke with. Suddenly everyone became a suspect. The sensation was most uncomfortable and disconcerting, not at all the kind of feeling appropriate to a celebration. By Monday it was clear that the incident had not been an absent-minded action but theft. When the matter was raised at the A.G.M. increased security for 1999 was inevitably mooted. While accepting the necessity, I do not believe I am alone in considering that to lose the trust which enables casual book browsing – such an important part of the conference – would be a severe blow.

However, I have no intention of finishing my response to what I began by describing as a celebration in a mood of gloom. The A.G.M. – never as dull a part of the programme as some might believe – brought forth its own consolations. For this, one person in particular has to be thanked: Richard Perceval Graves. Not only did he offer the Society the copyright of his seminal study *The Brothers Powys* – a splendidly noble gesture in its own right – but he also initiated the idea of refunding the Society's loss of potential income for the missing book by placing a pound coin on the Committee table and inviting others to follow suit. By the time I added my contribution a saucer had been commandeered and coins were

beginning to spill from their pile in the centre. It is actions like these that enable us to celebrate even in adversity. It is the mixture of planning and spontaneity which makes Conferences so memorable. And it is for this reason that I shall be joining the expatriates from Powysland next year.

Rob Timlin

The Llewelyn Libel

The Llewelyn Libel, has been frequently referred to in the literature, most recently in The Dorset Year. *The fullest and probably most reliable contemporary report of the hearing appeared in the* Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette *for 24 January 1934. I hope readers will consider it sufficiently interesting and important to have justified the unusual step of spreading the account over two issues. Ed.*

Damages Against Four People in Dorset Libel Action

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Statements about Women's Village Mental Home for Girls

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MR LLEWELYN POWYS LEAVES SICK BED TO DEFEND HIMSELF AT ASSIZES

Mr. Justice Finlay and a special jury at Dorset Assizes on Friday, Saturday and Monday heard a "village" libel action in which Mr. Llewelyn Powys, the author, two literary women, and a West Chaldon farmer were defendants. Plaintiffs were a widow and her daughter, Mrs. Katherine Stevenson (68) and Miss Joan Inez Drusilla Stevenson (39), of The Vicarage, East Chaldon, who were awarded £175 damages. The Vicarage was leased from the Rector of Winfrith and used as a training home for girls of backward mental development.

The action arose out of a petition signed by Mr. Powys, the farmer, Mr. James Cobb, and 42 others in which the opinion was expressed that neither Mrs. nor Miss Stevenson were suitable persons to have charge of mentally-deficient girls and urging that the case should be investigated by the County Council.

Prominent Dorset people were mentioned during the hearing, which attracted many of the public to the Dorchester Assize Court.

There was an intensely dramatic scene on Saturday morning when Mr. Llewelyn Powys described by his counsel as a dying man, was carried into court to give evidence while lying in a bath chair. Mr. Powys, bearded and thin, gave his story in a whisper, and his words had to be repeated to the jury by a friend. Later in the day a woman juror fainted in the box, and because of this the Judge adjourned the hearing.

It was ruled that although the state-

ments published by the defendants were defamatory, the occasions were privileged occasions. The jury, however, held that each of the four defendants was actuated by malice. Mrs. Stevenson was awarded £100 and Miss Stevenson (organising secretary of the Dorset Voluntary Association for Mental Welfare since 1930) £75.

Damages of £65 were awarded against Mr. Powys, £60 against Mr. Cobb, and £50 against the two women defendants, Miss Sylvia Townsend Warner and Miss Valentine Ackland, both of Frankfort Manor, Norfolk.

The plaintiffs were Katherine Stevenson, widow, and Joan Inez Drusilla Stevenson, of the Vicarage, East Chaldon, and the defendants were Mr. Llewelyn Powys, the author, of East Chaldon, Mr. James Cobb, farmer, of East Chaldon, Miss Sylvia Townsend Warner, the authoress, and Miss Valentine Ackland, who have a cottage in East Chaldon.

Mr. F. J. Tucker K.C. and Mr. Reginald Holt (instructed by Messrs. Goulden Mesquita, and company, of London), appeared for the plaintiffs. Mr. Powys and Mr. Cobb were represented by Mr. J. Lhind Pratt (instructed by Messrs. Symonds and Son of Dorchester, and the Misses Warner and Ackland were represented by Mr. G. O. Slade and Mr. R. Ellis (instructed by Ellis, Peers, and company, of London).

Mr. Holt said that in this case the two plaintiffs, Mrs. and Miss Stevenson, claimed damages for libel contained in a petition and a letter written and published by the four defendants to a large number of persons.

The defence admitted publication to a certain number of people but pleaded privilege. On this defence issue had been joined.

Mr. Tucker, outlining the case for plaintiffs, said that Mrs. Stevenson and her daughter lived at the Vicarage, East Chaldon, which they used as a training place for girls of backward mental development who were taken from undesirable surroundings. In addition they did have for a time a number of actually mentally deficient girls. Miss Stevenson also had the position of organising secretary to the Voluntary Association for Mental Welfare in Dorset at a salary of £200 rising to £250 per annum. That was an association with no official status at all, although the County Council he thought, made certain financial grants to it. But the Vicarage was not a certified institution for mental defectives or under the jurisdiction of the County Council. Mr. Llewelyn Powys was an author who lived in a small farm two miles from East Chaldon, Mr. Cobb was a farmer, and Miss Warner and Miss Ackland were two literary ladies who lived in a cottage at East Chaldon before going to Norfolk in September 1933, but returned to Chaldon in December 1934.

Mrs. and Miss Stevenson, continued Mr. Tucker, carried on this home with this type of girl from some time in 1930 until April or May, 1934, when these libels were published. The number of girls they had at the place was between five and six at a time. They were girls who had been sent them by local authorities, girls with miserable home circumstances, terrible surroundings, and perhaps terrible hereditary traits. It was a perfectly open place; they were not confined as in an asylum or mental home. Mr. Powys and a number of his family lived in or near the village. When these ladies came to the Vicarage the Powys family called upon them. These ladies did not return the call. That was perhaps, naughty of them, but they did not want to and did not. Sometimes little things like that rankled. At the Vicarage were kept some Great Danes and Mr. Cobb was always complaining that one of these dogs chased his sheep. He had threatened to shoot one of them. The Misses Ackland and Warner also got at

loggerheads about these dogs. Miss Warner had a small chow, and on one occasion one of the Great Danes handled the chow rather roughly.

"Caused Quite A Sensation"

In 1930 a girl called Lily Roberts was sent to them as a certified mental deficient. She absconded twice and was immediately sent back to the institution from which she came. When she absconded she was brought back by the police. Shortly afterwards, the Misses Ackland and Warner came to the Vicarage in a great state of mind, and caused quite a sensation about the girl. They said the village was seething with indignation about the girl and there was a serious danger of the villagers coming up and burning down the Vicarage.

Coming to the alleged libel, Mr. Tucker said that the Vicarage was rented by Miss Stevenson from the Vicar of Winfrith (Rev. C. S. Pugh) on a yearly tenancy. Early in May 1934, this document was handed to Mr. Pugh:–

"Dear Mr Pugh, – We the undersigned inhabitants of Chaldon, desire to bring to your notice a matter which has been for some considerable time past a cause of great anxiety to us and a trouble to the peace and happiness of the village. It is our considered opinion that neither Miss Stevenson nor Mrs. Stevenson are suitable persons to have the care of mental deficient girls, who, we would suggest, should be treated with sympathy and understanding and not be subjected to a too rigid discipline. In view of the numerous complaints which have been made as to the manner in which this 'home' has and is being conducted we would strongly urge that the whole case should be investigated by the Dorset County Council and that persons should be empowered by this body to take full evidence in order to ascertain the facts. We feel sure that you will see that pending such investigation it would be inadvisable that any steps should be taken which would involve a renewal of their lease, or a retention of the Vicarage in any other form by its present tenants."

That document in the clearest terms said that Miss Stevenson and Mrs. Stevenson were not suitable persons to have the care of mental deficient girls and carrying on a professional business, a matter which was their very livelihood. It was saying to the landlord of the two ladies that they were not suitable people for tenants at all, and he was invited not to renew their lease pending an investigation by the Dorset County Council. That was highly defamatory of these ladies. That letter was not a letter which was merely signed or privately sent to Mr. Pugh, but it was in the form of a petition, and Mr. Llewelyn Powys was the second signature and Mr. James Cobb the fifth. There were 42 signatures to that petition. It was handed to Mr. Pugh by one of the Miss Powys'. On the same day Mr. Powys not content with having sent the petition to the Vicar, also wrote this letter to Mr. G. H. White (County Accountant to the Dorset County Council):–

"Dear Mr. White, I enclose a copy of a letter that has been sent to Mr. Pugh, in reference to the present tenants of East Chaldon Vicarage. As you will observe, the petition has the signatures of many of the inhabitants of the parish. I write to you personally in the hope that you will see your way to bring this matter to the notice of the Dorset County Council at the earliest possible moment. Should the Council wish to take action in furtherance of the wishes of the petitioners I am sure you will realise the necessity of electing on the committee of inquiry those only who are without any personal interest or concern in the matter to be investigated."

What the matter had to do with the accountant to the County Council he (Mr. Tucker) did not know. He was not a member of the Mental Deficiency Committee or a member of the County Council at all, but the Accountant.

"Another Wretched Little Girl"

With regard to the ladies Miss Ackland and Miss Warner, they were residing at this time in Norfolk and they had disclosed a document which they had received from Mr. Llewelyn Powys not dated and it says:– "Another wretched little girl (of Miss Stevenson's) has spent the day hiding in the hedge like a hare from the hounds. With the help of our cousin who has been staying with Gertrude we have composed a round robin which I am sending to Mr. Pugh and the Clerk of the County Council. I think it must be posted before it can have your signatures, but it would be fine (as Hemingway would say) if you only will write a short letter saying the experience of several years makes you entirely in agreement with the feeling of the parishioners of East Chaldon or something of this kind, and the letters I would append to the paper if they arrive in time and if not send them afterwards." Having received this invitation from Mr. Llewelyn Powys, the Misses Ackland and Warner then wrote this letter from their address in Norfolk:– "Dear Mr. Pugh, – We understand a letter has been sent to you from East Chaldon protesting against Miss Stevenson's method of conducting her home for mental patients. We have received a copy of the letter and wish to endorse it in every particular."

They wrote the same day to the Clerk to Dorset County Council endorsing in every particular the letter sent from East Chaldon and saying "It is our conviction neither Miss Stevenson nor Mrs. Stevenson is a fit person to have charge of mental patients." Reference was also made in the letter to the attempted escapes from the home. They were thus associating themselves with the accusation made in the petition and they were in terms stating that these ladies were unfit persons to have the charge of mental patients. That letter was referred to the County Council and placed before the Mental Deficiency Committee. The petition with those accusations, said Mr. Tucker, was hawked round East Chaldon. Counsel then read correspondence that ensued between the solicitors concerned.

Mrs. Stevenson's Evidence.

In evidence Mrs. Katherine Stevenson, who was dressed in black, said she was a widow of 68 and for many years she had managed a house for the training of girls. She came to Dorset in 1930 and ran an 'open house', for backward girls. While her daughter was at work during the day witness was in charge of the home. The house was open and girls with an absconding tendency could get out. One girl, Lily Roberts, absconded after two days at the home. She was returned to the institution at Winchester from which she came, but they would not take her back.

Mrs. Stevenson said she had a matron, Mrs. Way, who came at various periods to fill up vacancies. She lived in East Chaldon.

Counsel: Does she work for anyone else as well as you? – *Witness*: Yes, she works for the two lady defendants.

Since 1930 the home had been inspected 28 times by visitors and also by 14 doctors.

She and her daughter kept Great Danes and from time to time there had been trouble in the village owing to the dogs.

The villagers were very much afraid of the dogs, but the children were never afraid.

Mr. Cobb visited the house and said that a dog was chasing his sheep, and he threatened to shoot it. She then kept the dog in as much as possible; she had three complaints from Mr. Cobb altogether. On one occasion Mr. Cobb had a man with him who threatened to shoot the dog. When she first went to the Vicarage Mr. Ll. Powys and his family called on them.

Counsel: We need not give reasons but I think you did not return the call? – No.

Mrs. Stevenson said there were usually four to six girls at the home. Her average

payment was £1 a week, which included the girls' training and food.

Cross-examined by Mr. Pratt, Mrs. Stevenson said that after 1932 she did not take certified girls. After about April 1932, witness was in charge of the home. From March 1933, her daughter had no interest in the home, although she wrote letters at witness' dictation and witness signed the letters.

Mrs. Stevenson said that the only way her daughter assisted was to perhaps take girls to the station in her car and write letters. She did not relieve Mrs. Stevenson of any of the work.

When being questioned about mental defectives and feeble-minded people, Mrs. Stevenson retorted 'There may be a lot of feeble-minded and weak-minded people in this court, but they are not certified !' (Laughter)

During Mrs. Stevenson's evidence Mr. Ll. Powys' brother, Mr. J. Cowper Powys, who is also an author, entered the court.

Mr. Pratt referred to a report written nine months after her daughter had ceased to have anything to do with the home and commented that in the report the word 'we' was written. Mr. Pratt suggested that 'we' meant Mrs. Stevenson and her daughter.

Referring to one girl at the home Mr. Pratt asked, 'She was a girl certified by Doctor Turner as a mental defective?'

Mrs Stevenson replied, 'Notified, not certified.'

[*At this point a section of the above text is repeated and a similar type-setting error occurs later. Those sections have been omitted.*]

Mr. Pratt questioned Mrs. Stevenson at length about reports on girls at the Vicarage.

Mr. Pratt:– These five girls you had at your home were difficult to control?

Witness: They had flaws in their characters.

Flaws in their characters which made them difficult to control? – Exactly.

You being in charge of them would find it necessary to exercise proper discipline? – Certainly.

You appreciate that other people might honestly, mistakenly think that the discipline you knew to be necessary was harsh?

Mrs. Stevenson replied: I have never been harsh in any sense. I was too lenient with them. Personally I did not trouble with them if they quarrelled among themselves.

Mr. Pratt: How many of them escaped from the Vicarage? – Not more than two. They got away in the morning when I was not down; they quarrelled among themselves and off they went.

When a girl did get away did you send other girls to bring them back? – They went on their own accord.

And were the girls absent for several hours? – No, not for half an hour.

Witness denied that any girl was away for a night. She said that girls who had escaped had never been away for more than two hours.

Did you engage the girls in the garden? – I put them in the garden every afternoon so that they could have plenty of fresh air.

When questioned if this might not strike people as being hard work, Mrs. Stevenson said that only one girl could do hard work. The girls did weeding.

Mr. Pratt: If the petition had gone forward there would have been an independent investigation. There would have been nothing to fear? – Oh, no. We would have taken no notice of village gossips, but when they sent it to the Clerk of the County Council (Mr. Torr) it was time to stop it.

Mr. Pratt: If there had been an investigation made it would have shown them there was no truth in the belief? – I cannot say.

You know that Mr. Cobb and Mr. Powys offered to sign an apology expressing their regret for the statements which had been so misconstrued and were tendering to you and Miss Stevenson an unqualified apology and withdrawal of the statement. Didn't you feel that you could accept that? – No, it

had gone too far.

It had gone to the County Council and Mr. Pugh? – Yes.

And the County Council would have found nothing?– It was pure malice, I don't want to answer that question.

Are you asking the Jury to believe that Mr. Powys sent it because he believed it or because you did not return his visit? – I am not going to allege that.

Mr. Slade: Do you think that Miss Ackland and Miss Warner are so petty as to attempt to get their revenge upon you after your Great Dane had bitten their Chow by signing the petition, and that they knew it to be untrue? – I can't tell you that.

Witness agreed that the incident between the Great Dane and the Chow happened before the petition.

Re-examined by Mr. Tucker, Mrs. Stevenson said that she did not consider herself capable of judging anyone as a mental deficient. She was content to rely on doctors' examination. Most of the girls were sent to her from local authorities. She agreed that most of the girls were retarded and required attention; they wanted moral supervision.

Undertaking to Association.

Miss Stevenson, who was next called, is a tall well-built woman, dressed in brown. She said she was 39. She was the actual tenant of the house, which was held on a yearly tenancy. She came to the Vicarage East Chaldon, with her mother in 1930, to take up a post of organising secretary for the Dorset Voluntary Association for Mental Welfare. She explained her duties and said the association for which she worked received a grant from the County Council. She was trained by the Central Association for Mental Welfare. During the first two years she had received some certified cases as mental deficients, and for that they had to have the consent of the Board of Control. These cases were committed to her special charge. After March or April 1933, she had no cases committed to her definite charge. She gave an undertaking to her association not to do so. There was no suggestion that she was not a proper person to have them; it was a private arrangement with her association.

Pots and Pans.

From that time she did not have much to do with the girls. Her mother had always been in charge of the house. She recalled Miss Warner and Miss Ackland visiting the house when the girl Roberts absconded. They spoke of the feeling in the village and showed her a cutting of an incident in another village, where to show disapproval, the villagers beat pots and pans. She understood it was a country custom called 'rough music'. The girls at the Vicarage required attention and care, she said, but she would not be prepared to say whether the girls were mental deficients within the meaning of the Act or not. She relied on the doctors.

Cross-examined by Mr. Pratt, witness said she knew of the proposed withdrawal of the letter and the proposed apology, but was not prepared to accept it.

Mr. Pratt: You wanted to clear your reputation. Do you appreciate that with the inquiry these gentlemen asked for you would have no difficulty in clearing your reputation? – There was no guarantee.

Witness said she was not at all satisfied with the terms of the apology. It was very qualified and did not fulfill conditions which they asked.

Mr. Slade quoted correspondence from Miss Colfox, hon. secretary of the Dorset Voluntary Association, to Miss Stevenson referring to the view of the members of the association. Among those Miss Colfox referred to were Mrs. Balfour, Mrs. Torr, Mrs. Castleman-Smith and General Sir Reginald Pinney.

Mr. Slade: Did Miss Colfox write letter after letter acquainting you with what transpired at the meetings of the association of which you were the paid secretary? Yes.

Witness in a reply to Mr. Slade said she did not think the dogs had anything to do with the petition. She was cross-examined regarding a conversation she had with Miss Ackland and Miss Warner in 1930.

Mr. Slade: Did you say that these girls must never be allowed to speak to a man? – I don't think it was put quite like that.

Rector in the Box.

The Rev. C. S. Pugh (rector of Winfrith-cum-Chaldon) said that since 1930 he had leased the Vicarage to Miss Stevenson. The petition (he said) was handed to him by Miss Gertrude Powys and he also received the letter from Miss Warner and Miss Ackland. He received them on May 2nd. 1934. When Mr. Pratt asked a question about the letting of the Vicarage, Mr. Pugh remarked, 'That is a hypothetical question, and like a Minister of State, I should like notice of it.'

Mr. Pratt: How long notice?

Mr. Justice Finlay smiled and said that it was really a question for him. He would require considerable notice before he answered.

Assistant Matron

Mrs. H. K. Way, of East Chaldon, who appeared on sub-poena, said that she had acted as assistant matron at the Vicarage. She was now doing work for Miss Ackland and Miss Warner. Neither of the last named had asked her how the place was conducted and how the girls were treated. She went to the Vicarage five days a week between nine a.m. and five or six p.m.

Witness told Mr. Slade that she told Miss Warner and Miss Ackland of a girl escaping from the Vicarage in October 1930. She did not recall telling them about two years later, of a girl escaping by means of sheets from a bedroom and walking ten miles to Weymouth and then getting a lift to Wareham and eventually being brought back by Wareham police.

Mr. G. H. White, the Dorset County Accountant, told of receiving a letter from Mr. Powys on May 3rd. 1934, and handing it to Mr. Torr, Clerk to the County Council. He agreed that the County Council gave a substantial contribution to the Voluntary Association of which Miss Stevenson is organising secretary.

Miss Alice Colfox, of West Mead, Bridport, the hon. secretary of the Dorset Voluntary Association for Mental Welfare since 1917, was the next witness. Questions were put to her through a woman companion. Miss Colfox said that in 1933 the association offered Miss Stevenson the alternative of resigning the post of secretary or giving up taking mental patients.

No Reflection

After two months – which time she was given to decide – Miss Stevenson wrote that neither she nor her mother had any mental patients, or patients of any kind. Miss Colfox said that in asking Miss Stevenson not to take mental patients it was in no way a reflection on her ability to look after mental people. The reason was that there might possibly be complications with some cases.

Replying to Mr. Slade, Miss Colfox said that Miss Stevenson was given the choice in January 1933, and wrote the letter in April 1933. Later it came to witness' knowledge that Miss Stevenson had some patients, but they were not certified.

The hearing was adjourned until Saturday.

To Be Continued

With the second part there will be reproduced a photograph of Llewelyn Powys arriving at the Court.

Spring in East Anglia

In response to a number of suggestions from members, a mid-week visit of two or three days to East Anglia is currently being arranged for early May 1999, which will give an opportunity to visit Northwold, and other local areas where various members of the Powys family stayed regularly as children. In fictionalised form the area appears in the two opening chapters of *A Glastonbury Romance*, whilst the coastal area just beyond is the setting for *Rodmoor*. The region also has many other associations with the Powys family – Theodore went to school at Aldeburgh, only a few miles away, where Louis Wilkinson's father (Revd W. C. Wilkinson) was headmaster, and he later farmed close by at Sweffling, before moving to Studland in 1901. Valentine Ackland lived in the area as a child, and she and Sylvia Townsend Warner later became regular visitors. Frances Gregg also lived in a variety of places in the area, where she was visited on a number of occasions by John Cowper Powys during his regular summer visits to England in the 1920s.

The visit is designed to provide plenty of opportunity for informal discussion in hospitable surroundings with a congenial group of fellow Powysians, as well as visits to at least some of these places. There will also be a number of more formal presentations and readings.

The visit will be based in a fine Tudor Manor House set in spacious grounds just outside Bury St Edmunds, that has recently been restored to provide simple accommodation and meeting facilities. Only a limited amount of accommodation is available, so must be offered on a first come first served basis. Because the amount of accommodation is so limited it has been necessary to make this a mid-week visit, but if you would still like to come but can only manage a weekend then do please fill in the form to give an idea of the interest if a future weekend visit can be arranged. If you are interested in attending please complete the form enclosed with this *Newsletter* as soon as possible, and in any case by 1 January 1999, and return to:

Chris Gostick, Old School House, George Green Road,
George Green, Wexham, Bucks SL3 6BJ . Telephone 01753 578632.

A comprehensive programme and further information will be sent out early in the New Year *only to those returning the form*.

The Dorset Year

We still have a very small number of the limited Special Edition of *The Dorset Year* available for sale, but of course it costs more than the original subscription price. This is the hardback, with endpapers, dustjacket in glorious colour, and silk book marker. The price is £60, plus £4 postage. Please send your cheque, payable to The Powys Society, to Stephen Powys Marks.

'Oasis'

In The Letters of Elizabeth Myers *(Chapman and Hall 1951) she speaks of an impending visit to one of the Cecil Houses, founded by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton O.B.E., sister in-law of G. K. Chesterton. After that visit she contributed this piece to their 17th* Annual Report *1944–5. (Bissell Collection)*

One of the Cecil Houses stands surrounded by a vast sea of sawn-off buildings, toppled homes and comical pitiful derangements – a sea left from the larger lunacy left with the tender compliments of the German airmen. This crazy destruction of safe and familiar things is symbolic of the desolation which overtakes many a human being in war or peace when, through a combination of hostile circumstances, all that has made for security is gradually blasted away, till not even the haven of a little home is left. And this Cecil House, standing in the midst of fantastic wreckage, is typical of the oasis provided by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton through so many years, for the benefit of homeless women.

There is something so intolerably cynical and poignant in the thought of a woman the home maker being homeless, that when that calamity overtakes one of our sex very special treatment of the unfortunate is called for. It seems to me that this special consideration, enabling a woman to hold on to that decent pride in being alive at all which is so tremendous a weapon against despair, is given by Mrs. Chesterton at her Cecil Houses to all who apply there for a bed, having nowhere else to sleep.

When a woman arriving suddenly out of the night, asks for accommodation at Cecil House, she is not humiliated and offended by a questionnaire ranging from what her father and persuasions are, to a detailed summary of her present plight. If she is able to pay the modest sum of one shilling for her bed she is expected to do so; if not, she has her bed just the same, plus a hot bath if she wants one (towel included), and facilities for washing her clothes.

Whether she can or cannot pay, she is not made to feel that she is being treated as one of the 'deserving poor'. There is, in any case, no such thing as the 'deserving poor' one way or the other. In a properly organised State there should be no poverty: where it exists it is not a condition of 'deserts' but an abuse of humanity.

Having got her bed in a Cecil House, what does the guest find when she arrives at her dormitory? During a recent visit to a Cecil House I was able to see the accommodation for myself. It would be greatly rewarding to the matrons of many a hospital, infirmary and hostel, to say nothing of the managers of any number of hotels, to make a tour of a Cecil House where many valuable lessons can be learnt upon the following heads: cheerfulness of communal bedrooms and sitting-rooms as the result of gaily painted walls, attractive bedspreads, curtains and linoleum; restfulness due to simplicity of furnishing; health as a result of proper ventilation and shining cleanliness.

Besides being scrupulously clean, Cecil House beds are warm and comfortable; and a mother may have a roomy cot for her child for the small additional charge of three pence – no questions being asked as to whether the mother is an illegitimate parent or not.

Every guest has a spacious locker at the side of her bed, and the dormitories are not overcrowded. The tiled bathrooms, hand and foot basins, and wash-house are up-to-date, ample and gleaming clean. The sitting room is an inviting place with tables, chairs, gay poster-pictures on the walls, and a piano.

I noticed that the guests themselves were merry, good-mannered and kind. The oldest inhabitant of the house I visited likes the place so very well she has been there six years. By day she does kitchen work and in the evening her recreation is reading novels. Another guest, well into middle age, had just come off duty as a portress at one of the great London stations. This is strenuous work for her to be doing, but she was in good spirits, and not too tired to waltz when another of the ladies sat at the piano and rattlingly entertained us.

Other guests worked as hospital cleaners, cooks, and mobile chars, and some left it to the ready imagination to deduce how they got together a few shillings a week. But whatever they did, whoever they were, no matter their age or private misfortune, they were all very good company, gracious in their ways and heartily ready to help one another. I saw an instance of this immediate sympathy when one of the babies was taken ill.

Several women came in to apply for a bed while I was there, and it was good to see the relief on their anxious faces as they came into an atmosphere of such friendliness and goodwill.

The matrons of the Houses, with Mrs. Gordon Phillips, the very able organiser, greatly help to maintain this happy informality. Cecil House matrons are not starched and uniformed horrors with institutional minds: they are hostesses, there to receive guests, and make them feel especially welcome and at home since these guests have arrived simply because they have no home.

Mrs. Cecil Chesterton does not produce these good things out of a hat. She has nothing up her sleeve. Her splendid results come from solid hard work, infinite tact, much anxiety, and masterly planning. The long years of war have not helped her in her noble work. She is now faced with carrying out an extensive post-war programme. Every Cecil House needs many replacements and redecorations, bomb damages have to be made good, and there are many other urgent demands on a treasury which never has enough to keep pace with the urgent needs. It is true that once a Cecil House is established it can pay its own way on the modest charges made to the guests, but money is vitally need for capital funds to found other Houses, make reconstructions and increase the amenities of Houses already in existence.

Let us then, at this time of our delivery from the worst tyranny the world has ever known, give a thought to those less fortunate than ourselves, and towards her

vast liabilities let us send Mrs. Chesterton a gift no matter how small, not to indulge the complacency of 'feeling kind', but inspired by reality – that only a little something called luck separates us from the homeless; the reality that these particular homeless are women with all that sex's physiological peculiarities and delicacies, and intricacies of mind that lay women open to such a searching capacity for suffering; and the final unescapable reality of those not merely sentimental but formidably responsible and lovely words – Love One Another.

Elizabeth Myers

Subscriptions, Standing Orders and Covenants

The next **annual subscriptions** are due on January 1st 1999: £13.50 in the UK, £16 abroad, £6 for students in full-time study. If you do not have a standing order, please get your cheque books out now.

Please read <u>now</u> the enclosed letter, which is addressed to you. I have shown how your subscription stands and how it is paid.

Standing orders help **us** greatly and save **you** having to remember your subscription each year. **Covenants** increase the value of your subscription because we can claim back the basic-rate tax you have paid. More than half the members have standing orders, and about a fifth have signed covenants, so you would be in good company ! *Forms for both are attached to my letter.*

Please sign a standing order form and deed of covenant <u>now</u>.

Reviews

Looking Through Time, by Herbert Williams

Ruthin: Headland Publications, 1998. £5.95, ISBN 1 902096 25 8

A poetic view of life being at the heart of John Cowper Powys's philosophy, it is appropriate that more than one poet should be numbered among his biographers. Of these Kenneth Hopkins was steeped in the work of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sonneteers and lyricists; his love of poetry was couched accordingly in a formal style which, for all its musicality, elegance and wit, consigned it to the sidelines where contemporary critical evaluations were concerned, much as John Cowper's novels were to be. The poetry of Herbert Williams, on the other hand, is clearly of its own time. It is crisp, sharply focussed and, with its cleanly honed lines, metres based on colloquial speech, and

avoidance of linguistic ambiguity, most pleasurably accessible. Williams, however, is not afraid to use formal rhymed stanzas at need, and like Kenneth Hopkins is a master of the quizzical turn of phrase: the work of both poets is as directly personal in its approach as is Powys's own.

William's concerns range from the relation between external and internal space (and thus by implication with differing modes of consciousness) through poems of fantasy and dream to social satire, a satire at its most successful when least emotional. Protest is a difficult quality to incorporate in a poem : here the oblique thrust of 'Dragons' is more effective than the frontal attack of 'Big Issue'. The author's Welsh origins are tellingly present in 'Miners' Gala' with its evocative use of proper names, and in 'The Good Old Hymns', a touching tribute to his mother. His skill with the short, sometimes monosyllabic, line is displayed in 'Consequently', a characteristic piece of rueful humour. But the poems that resonate most powerfully are those which voice anguish and bewilderment that belie the brittle tone this poet has so readily at his command. There is genuine complexity in 'The Place I Am', which

> ... is not where I would be,
> It travels round the earth and far from time,
> A miracle is just ahead of me
> If I could move away from dusty rhyme.

Elsewhere we find that 'I wept / for myself / my wrongdoing / the state of my / soul', to end with 'the blackfaced sheep chomping / the greyfleeced lamb / its neck stained bright / with farmer's blood'. It seems right that this poem, 'Mount Cloud', should be dedicated to John Cowper Powys, for it reflects his own personal vulnerability. But Williams can also respond to the world of Porius, as in 'Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber', where 'Shivering, we turn / aside. The shadows / move.' He is a poet who looks through things as well as casting his eyes about him to good purpose.

Glen Cavaliero

The Chalice, by Phil Rickman
Pan Books, 1998. £5.99, ISBN 0 330 34267 3

Subtitled a 'A Glastonbury ghost story', *The Chalice* fits snugly into the contemporary ghost/horror (paperback bestseller) genre. Rickman has already made a name for himself with *Candlenight*, *Crybbe*, *The Man in the Moss* and *December*, but what is of interest to Powysians is not only the presence of JCP in heroic cameo role, but the positive, almost reverential treatment of the man and his works. This is the difference between cynical, trend-followers and genuine readers!

Joe Powys, the male protagonist who also appeared previously in *Crybbe*, is the disillusioned author of a best-selling book about earth mysteries entitled *The Old Golden Land*, itself a title *crybbed* from a song by The Incredible String Band, the

psychedelic folk-rock outfit of the late 60s. Joe's dubious kinship to JCP is 'just a possibility they'd hinted at in publicity for *The Old Golden Land*'. However, Joe Powys eventually winds up in Glastonbury where he meets the female protagonist, Juanita Carey, an attractive 'aging hippy', also disillusioned with all things New Age and reluctant proprietor of a New Age bookshop on Glastonbury High Street. Nasty things begin to occur in the town, leading to even nastier things, leading the 'good guys' to the conclusion that they are up against the Powers of Darkness and so the inevitable band of raggle-taggle heroes prepares to defend and cleanse the sacred Isle of Avalon – or die fighting.

Research into Glastonbury's mystical history is put to serviceable use, creating a colourful tapestry woven of fact and fiction. If you enjoy the odd supernatural thriller, you will find this a satisfying read, written to a higher standard than most of its peers, with well-enough-rounded characters and a pleasing evocation of today's Glastonbury, complete with New Age Travellers, weird cults and curmudgeonly hippy-hating locals. Although there is no shortage of supernatural evil here, what I found most chilling by far is the threat of a new motorway cutting up the nearby countryside.

The Butcher of Glastonbury, by David Bowker (Vista, 1998, ISBN 0 575 60203 1), is another well-written chiller set in the same time and place as *The Chalice*. JCP also gets a mention in here, albeit a brief one. Of the two books I would say this one is ever so slightly more stylish, but at a mere 224 pages leaves you hungry for more. Not a bad thing, some would say. Interesting snippet: apparently the author considered an alternative title as homage to JCP. What a shame *A Glastonbury Necromance* didn't make it: I feel sure JCP would've laughed his socks off!

Bev Craven

We have received the following from Cecil Woolf: *The Diary of John Cowper Powys for 1929*, edited by Anthony Head, and *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Frank Warren*, edited by Frank Warren. Both will be reviewed in the April *Newsletter*.

Glastonbury in America

The current response to the new Overlook Press paperback edition of *A Glastonbury Romance*, sold out we are told and reprinting, is, I understand, unprecedented for one of John Cowper's novels and in ironic contrast to the reception of its first edition, published in America by Simon and Schuster in 1932. We learn from *Petrushka and the Dancer* (p.109), that on Sunday 7 August 1932, JCP acknowledged a statement from the publisher and wrote, '*Glastonbury* is a failure. Only 4,000 copies sold. And $500 to pay for typing & in Nov. to

receive only Seven hundred and eighty dollars – when three thousand was what we hoped for. This is a Serious Blow to which I must adjust myself when I had been secretly hoping for I know not what terrific Kudos including the Noble Prize & being knighted by my Sovereign & receiving the acclamation of Europe & seeing the book translated into all languages – and best of all sold at the entrance to the Ruins of Glastonbury itself! Well I must resign myself to its being a failure.'

The following extracts from reviews that the book had received in the American press (for which I am indebted to Robin Patterson) perhaps go some way to explain its disappointing sales:

***Saturday Review of Literature*, 26 March 1932. The Life of a Town.**

'... Mr. Powys has tried to depict the entire life of the town, as that of a place in which all the inhabitants are more or less influenced by the psychic lines of force that come from it. ...And with all this one must say that the author has given us both too little and too much. Too little because the action does not after all seem to justify all the supernatural "machinery" as Dr. Johnson would have called it. ...When Geard stays in the haunted chamber where Merlin killed King Mark, the event is not great enough for our forebodings. Even the murder (committed by a lunatic) is not sufficiently important to bring in the interference of so many of the Company of Heaven and Hell.

But we are also given too much, for it is hard to sustain our interest in the sordid threads, through the twelve hundred pages of this volume. One has the feeling that the book is filled with things that are of intense interest to the author but fail to interest us.

A Glastonbury Romance must be put down as a magnificent failure, a failure of more interest than many successes upon a lower plane, one that is worth reading and interesting to discuss, one modified by many splendid adjectives; but that must be the noun.

***The New York Times Book Review* March 27 1932.**

John Cowper Powys's Fictional Carry-All His New Novel Offers a Teeming Mélange of Mysticism, Melodrama, Legend and Reality.

'Although *A Glastonbury Romance*, by the author of *Wolf Solent* is printed as a single volume, it is really a two volume novel bound as one. In the first part Mr. Powys is engaged in his task of assembling his cast of some forty men women and children, in setting his stage, in invoking to his aid the subtle psychological forces and exterior compulsions that are to operate in the playing out of the piece, and, most of all acquainting his reader with his own personal philosophic point of view that is to govern the whole story ...

On the vastness of his canvas, on the complication of his pattern, on that pattern as picturing Somersetshire pastoral scenes, rich in its flavouring, Mr. Powys can receive only commendation. The flood which at the end sweeps in from the sea to engulf the Glastonbury of his imagination is as full and stirring a

flood as fiction has yet produced. The book is also to be commended for its humour – scattered here and there is much humour. The march of the characters through the pages – this also is no mean feat on the part of the author. Why then, when John Cowper Powys can, when he wishes, show such prowess solely as a teller of tales, does he feel himself under compulsion to exhibit himself so persistently as a psychologist and philosopher? His admixture of vibrations, nerves, ultra refinements in impulses and so on, detracts from rather than augments the real achievement of this book. And so insistent is the sex-motif that one feels that while Powys started as a Dostoievsky he ended merely as a D. H. Lawrence.

***The Sewanee Review* Jan.–Mar. 1933. Powys in Glastonbury.**

'... Powys shrinks from nothing that is earthy; he is unashamed of the fleshly vestiture; he renounces in literature the reticences that he recognises are of value in the conversation of men: "Reserve in social relations has undoubtedly its place ... but when an attempt is made to carry this social weapon into the sphere of literature and art, the result is only a general paralysis." Whatever universal order may be found in the Romance (if order can be said to exist in the vast that is torn between the forces of good and evil) is distinctly amoral; certainly it is indifferent to the standards of 1932 governing the relations of men and women.

... The subordination of individual character, or the use of characters as symbol is accompanied by a certain disregard of, or negligence toward, continuity of plot. Time and again the action is dropped in favour of speculation concerning mystic relations with the unknown and unknowable, and the conviction grows upon one that the author in this novel is more interested in talking than in telling a story.

... In style the *Romance* is deplorable. Occasional passages arise to something approaching excellence, but the general run of the prose is either merely competent, or is clumsy, laden with alliteration, rhetorical questions, useless repetitions, or even crude (though perhaps unsuspected) plays on words: e.g. "The son was he of the man who refused to worship the sun!"

Despite these, which may seem hypercritical comments, the novel displays distinguished abilities. So vast and soaring an imagination is seldom found in a modern novel; so great a sensitivity to the subconscious influences that play upon man's spirit, is given to few other writers; and so amazing a tapestry of many figures intricately interrelated is a splendid achievement.

Yet the tone of the novel is decadent, the thesis – carefully and prosaically expounded at the close – is tiresome, the characters do not quite come to life, the tale is mangled by psuedo-philosophic speculations, the style is lumbering, and the great scenes lack vitality because Powys does not manage crowds in action. The novel fails brilliantly, but it fails!'

J.B.

Francis Feather has recently celebrated his ninetieth birthday. He and Kathleen were unable to make the long journey to the conference this year, but at the opening reception the President spoke warmly of them and the assembled company drank a toast to their continued health and happiness. I have since had a letter from Francis and Kathleen in which they said, 'We are glad that the conference was a good one – we thought of nothing else that week-end.'

*****

Peter Judd has sent me, from New York, an unreservedly enthusiastic review of *Bonnard*, by Timothy Hyman (Thames and Hudson World of Art Series), which appeared in the September edition of *The New Republic*. It begins : 'And now there is a very impressive monograph on Bonnard by Timothy Hyman, an English painter who infuses his own impressions of modern life with an edge of haywire expressionist fantasy, and also frequently contributes criticism to the *TLS*, *Burlington Magazine* and other British periodicals. What Hyman brings to his new book is an exact understanding of the world in which Bonnard lived, and a gift for communicating an expansive visual experience to a sophisticated general audience. Like Lawrence Gowing's classic study of Vermeer, Hyman's Bonnard is a book for rereading and passing along to friends. ...

I can't think of another recent book about a painter that has struck me as so heart-felt, so lucid, so wise.'

*****

JCP Plaque at Blaenau Ffestiniog, which had been vandalised. As reported elsewhere, Chris Gostick got in touch with Cyngor Gwynedd Council on this matter and has received an assurance that they will see that the damage is made good and will keep an eye on the situation in future.

*****

A new edition of Gamel Woolsey's *Death's Other Kingdom* has been published, under the title *Malagar Burning*, by Pythia Press in the United States (ISBN 0 9648736 1 3. Hardback $22). The introduction is by Zalin Grant, who is fiercely critical of the original introduction by JCP.

*****

I have received the current issue of the *Journal* of the Henry Williamson Society, entitled *Reality in War Literature*. It commemorates the eightieth anniversary of the ending of the First World War and is described as 'virtually a supplement' to a new book, *A Patriot's Progress: Henry Williamson and the First World War*. Details are available from:

Mrs Margaret Murphy, 16 Doran Drive, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 6AX.

*****

During his appreciation of his mother, delivered at her memorial service, Michael Walton made what seemed to me a very perceptive comment on his

Aunt Lucy. He said he had been to Mappowder and seen on her gravestone the simple words, 'ThankYou'. Was this, he asked, Aunt Lucy saying thank you to the world; or the world saying thank you to Aunt Lucy? Those who knew the youngest Powys sister will probably say - 'Both'.

*****

Louise de Bruin came across, in a book belonging to Lucy, a newspaper cutting with the following small advertisement: **Cowper Powys** Sir – In 1972 will occur the 100th anniversary of the birth of John Cowper Powys who is regarded by some as one of the greatest novelists of this century. A Society has been formed by those who have recognised his genius and Mr. Angus Wilson is the President. I will be glad to hear from any readers who are interested in this society.
Barbara Spencer Sec., Powys Soc.

We know neither which newspaper, nor the date. Do we have any members who joined in response to that early publicity ?

We have just received the following Press Release.

Dorset County Museum
Museum of the Year Award for Dorchester

Dorset County Museum is winner of this year's prestigious Unilever award for Best Museum of Social History in the Museum of the Year Competition 1998. The award was presented by Lord Rothschild at a ceremony at the Museum of London on Monday October 5th.

In the Judges' citation "The Social History of Dorchester and Dorset is brilliantly covered in the Dorset County Museum to which has been added a new gallery 'A Writer's Dorset' in an area previously used for offices. Captions are excellent and informative for all ages. There is a good supply of well written leaflets and an excellent audio bookshelf on Thomas Hardy. Attention to detail is remarkable and the displays appeal to both children and adults."

In a forthright retirement speech John Letts, founder chairman of National Heritage, the Museum Action Movement, for the past 26 years, blamed 'bad fairies' at the Treasury for imposing an injurious policy of matching funding on Lottery distributors. In John Letts' words the scale of the grants had 'sucked dry' the sponsorship bore-holes of British business and left arts organisations bereft of traditional match-fund sources. In Dorset the position applies with equal force to local government sources as well.

Congratulations to Richard de Peyer, Judith Stinton, and all concerned.

The Powys Heritage Series

Since 1994 the publisher Cecil Woolf has been producing a series of attractive, and attractively priced, booklets under the general title *Bloomsbury Heritage*, consisting of essays and memoirs by various writers on a wide range of topics relating to the Bloomsbury group and including some previously unpublished writings by Virginia Woolf. These have been sold mainly at Bloomsbury conferences in both Britain and the United States, and at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Given the success of these booklets, and not withstanding the fact that the general appetite for Bloomsbury is obviously greater than that for the Powys circle, it was suggested that a similar series of booklets be published under the title *Powys Heritage*. With the support of the Society's Committee, this venture is now under way and the first two titles in the series are now available – Paul Roberts' penetrating essay on some of John Cowper's early unpublished works and his relationship with his wife and a London prostitute called Lily, and an overview of the Powys brothers' school days compiled by the late Arthur Gourlay, historian of Sherborne School.

It is intended to produce three or four booklets each year, with a print-run of about 500 for sale not only at the annual Conference but also at the national Portrait Gallery, the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester and certain selected bookshops. The series therefore aims to be promotional in nature, quite apart from the intrinsic value of each booklet, and to complement *The Powys Journal* and other Society publications by reaching a wider readership through a commercial publisher than the Society, for obvious reasons, is able to do. Each booklet will carry a note on The Powys Society and its aims and activities.

The ideal essay would be between 6,000 and 10,000 words (exceptions can be made for longer or shorter pieces of merit) on any topic relating to the Powys family and their circle. It should preferably be discursive and anecdotal rather than 'academic', and based on personal associations or impressions rather than pure literary criticism. Anyone interested in contributing to the series should contact the general editor, Anthony Head, at his Japan address (Higasho-Nakano 5-23-6-1102, Nakano-ku, Tokyo 164, Japan; e-mail: ahead@gol.com) or at his UK address, whence mail will be forwarded (1 Woodfield Gardens, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4QA).

Anthony Head

The **Powys Heritage** Booklets now available from Cecil Woolf, 1 Mornington Place, London NW1 7RP, at £3.50 each, including post and packing, are:

John Cowper Powys, Margaret and Lily: The Evidence of the Syracuse Manuscripts, Paul Roberts. ISBN 1-897967-37-3

The Powys Brothers at Sherborne School, A. B. Gourlay. ISBN 1-897967-42-X

The Spirit of Shirley

My Great Great Grandfather, Thomas Edward Bates was born in the village of Wyaston near Ashbourne in Derbyshire in July 1849, and in 1861 became apprenticed to a firm of Ashbourne undertakers. The family Bible, which once also served as a family journal records his first 'professional' attendance as a funeral 'bearer' in October 1864 when he was paid ninepence for 'professional services' at the funeral of Honora Catherina Michell who was the vicar's daughter in the nearby village of Shirley.

My genealogical research began when the old family Bible came into my possession following my grandfather's death in 1982. Since then I have followed my ancestral trail all the way back to the graveside of the perennially twenty-two year old daughter of the Reverend Eardley Wilmot Michell in Shirley churchyard, and made some interesting discoveries along the way.

The village of Shirley lies about a mile to the west of the A52, which runs between Derby and Ashbourne, and about a mile and a half from my ancestor's birthplace at Wyaston, which I finally visited a couple of years ago. It was during this ancestral pilgrimage that I visited the churchyard at Shirley, and was intrigued by the sun-faded notice beneath the fly-blown glass of the Parish Notice Board which proclaimed that 'The famous novelist, John Cowper Powys was born in Shirley Vicarage on October 8th 1872, the first son of the Vicar of Shirley, Rev. Charles Francis Powys'; beneath this information there was a stained photo-copied likeness of John Cowper Powys, the original of which I have seen several times since in literature relating to the Powys family.

The 'little grey church' referred to by John Cowper Powys which I later read about in his *Autobiography*, was locked when I arrived and I stood awhile admiring the astounding girth of the giant yew tree which had stood like a sentinel down the centuries beside the churchyard entrance. My presence was soon noted and shortly the churchwarden arrived and unlocked the large oak door into the old building. Inside the dimly lit church I found a framed list of the 'Vicars of Shirley' and immediately noted with some interest that the Rev. Charles Francis Powys had succeeded the Rev. Eardley Wilmot Michell in 1872. Outside in the churchyard at the back of the church I found the grave of the Rev. Michell's daughter which my grandfather had 'attended' here at Shirley in October 1864, almost eight years to the very day, before John Cowper was born.

There has been a church in the village of Shirley since early in the eleventh century. This small and ancient village in the south of the county of Derbyshire lent its name to the old Derbyshire family of Shirley, and the Roll of Ministers displayed inside the old church confirms that James de Shirley was the first Rector appointed under the patronage of the Abbot of Darley in 1260.

Shirley church enjoyed the patronage of the Abbot and was nurtured beneath the sheltering and benevolent wings and administration of Darley Abbey until the

Reformation, and then following the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII it enjoyed the royal patronage of Elizabeth I.

In 1662, on the appointment of Rev. Edmund Shepherd, the patronage passed to the Shirley family in the shape of Katherine Shirley. When Sir Robert Shirley was created Baronet in 1674, the patronage is first recorded in the name of Earl Ferrers, and continues to the present day under the thirteenth Earl Ferrers. In almost 800 years of its history, the church has had no less than four vicars provided by the Shirley family.

James de Shirley was the first of these from 1260 to 1300; the second was Henry de Shirley who was vicar from 1349 to 1351, and then a gap of almost 500 years before Walter Shirley became vicar in 1815.

He was succeeded by his son the Rev. Walter Augustus Shirley in 1828, under the patronage of the eighth Earl Ferrers, and this last of the Rev. Shirley's ministered to his congregation for 25 years until 1847 when the patronage again enjoyed the beneficence of royalty for Queen Victoria was patron for the following 25 years during the incumbency of the Rev. Eardley Wilmot Michell.

The patronage then reverted back to Earl Ferrers and the tenth Earl following the demise of Rev. Michell, appointed a Dorset clergyman to the living at Shirley. In 1872 the Rev. Charles Francis Powys became the vicar of Shirley, and during the seven years of his ministry in this small Derbyshire village two sons were sired by him, who were destined to become famous literary figures. John Cowper was born in the first year of his father's ministry and by the time that Charles Francis left Shirley to take up the duties of curate at St Peter's Dorchester on November 1st 1879, four other children had been born: Littleton Charles in 1874, Theodore Francis in 1875, Gertrude Mary in 1877 and Eleanor in 1879.

The month of August 1879 was very significant for Charles Francis Powys for on 7th he learned of his elder brother Littleton's death in India from cholera, on 9th he accepted the curacy offered by Rev. T.W. Knipe at St Peter's, and on 20th his wife Mary gave birth to Eleanor.

When Rev. C. F. Powys said his final goodbyes to the parish of Shirley and moved to Dorchester in 1879 it did not signal the end of the Powys connection with Derbyshire.

Malcolm Elwin records in his book *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* (p.68) that in the year 1909 when the family were resident at Montacute, Somerset, where Rev. C. F. Powys was now vicar, 'Only Willie remained when Llewelyn left on September 1st to stay a week at Shirley in Derbyshire, where the Rev. William Richardson Linton had succeeded Mr. Powys as vicar.' This link with Derbyshire remained because Ralph Shirley was a cousin of the Powyses', and Rev. Linton had married Ralph Shirley's sister Alice and they had a daughter, Marion, born in 1890.

It was during Llewelyn's visit in September 1909 that Marion Linton came into his life. She was 19 when she met Llewelyn who was then 25 years old and

they began a love affair at a distance, which eventually led to an engagement following her visit to Montacute on 8th June 1914.

The physical distance between the engaged couple was extended further when Llewelyn, at the outbreak of the First World War went to Africa to help his brother Willie manage a stock farm, and Marion eventually broke off the engagement in July 1915, and decided to enter a nunnery. This ended any direct Powys connection with Derbyshire, except of course it was, is and ever will be, known as the birthplace of two of the three Powys brothers who became famous literary figures, John Cowper and Theodore Francis.

To put the record straight it is worth recording that Mr Elwin's description of events in his *Life of Llewelyn Powys* is slightly misinformed, for Rev. Linton did not succeed Rev. Powys – when Llewelyn visited Shirley in 1909, the vicar was Rev. Charles Harry Owen. In 1879 Rev. Frederick Corfield succeeded Rev. Powys as vicar of Shirley and was in turn succeeded by his son Claud in 1883. Rev Linton did not become vicar of Shirley until he succeeded the younger Corfield in 1887 and his incumbency had ended in 1908, the year before Llewelyn's visit. In fact, by the time Marion Linton visited Montacute and became engaged to Llewelyn in June 1914 she was an orphan, for by that time both her parents were dead.

More than a century has passed since the birth of the three famous Powys brothers, and it is over a hundred years since the Rev. Charles Francis Powys last brushed past the giant yew tree which marks the entrance to the churchyard at Shirley on his way to his church. Almost a hundred years since Llewelyn and Marion Linton stood beneath this ancient yew with its massive girth at the portal of the domain of their respective patriarchs, canoodling in the September twilight of 1909 on their way back to the vicarage from a walk to Bowbridge wishing well. The scene at Shirley remains much as it was then.

The tiny Derbyshire village seems almost untouched by time, and yet much has happened. The Powys Brothers are all dead and their lives and works have been duly recorded for posterity, but the link with Derbyshire can never be severed.

Neil D. Lee

Letters To The Editor

The President writes: May I recommend to Society members some previously uncollected essays and reviews by E. M. Forster, edited by his biographer P. N. Furbank and published by Andre Deutsch under the title *The Prince's Tale*? Forster's witty, humane and plain-speaking voice is a real tonic in the present media-dominated world, for he champions the integrity of individual thought and judgement. He is also discerning. Commenting on the Honours List for 1934

he remarks that among 'recipients I would also like to honour' is A. R. Powys. Unfortunately the name is spelled 'Powis', but in view of the current low standards of proof-reading one may as well give Forster the benefit of the doubt.

Glen Cavaliero

This letter accompanied an order for a copy of The Dorset Year. *It was of such interest that we have asked permission to publish it:*

... The book would seem to be of absorbing interest, not least for Mr Roger Peers' comments on Dorset.

Dorset became my favourite County after I had encountered *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* in the Public Library in my last year at school. This wonderful book has been my constant companion ever since. I did much walking in Dorset, first with my H.Q. at Corfe Castle (Sheasby's Tea Rooms, long since gone I fear) and afterwards in Dorchester itself. I was there when J.C.P. and P.P. were there in 1935! What a pity I didn't know.

A little later I wrote to J.C.P. and, to my astonishment, received a long and friendly letter in reply, treating me as an equal and making me feel about ten feet high. I believe a number of others have had the same experience. By then he was in Corwen, but he said that he would mention the fact that I was so near to T.F.P. and suggested I call on him

A day or two later I walked in pouring rain from the Wareham bus stop until I found East Chaldon. I was so nervous and strung up that I nearly turned back. But the postmistress told me where he lived and so I timidly knocked on the door, I need not have worried. He received me with the quiet kindness and courtesy for which I believe he was famous.

We talked for over two hours and I made a careful note of our conversation. Unfortunately my parents' house received the attentions of Field Marshal Goering, and my notebooks and books were among the casualties. All that was over sixty years ago, and all that I can really remember is that we discussed Matthew Arnold and he expressed great admiration for Swift – 'A much more honest writer than Shakespeare' he said. But the man himself I shall never forget – he had the noblest head I have ever seen on a human being.

But this rambling has gone on too long – I do beg your pardon.

A.J.K.Green

Mr Green says he thinks his visit to Theodore must have taken place during the first week in November 1937. Ed.

Dandelions, Ground-ivy and Yarrow
Llewelyn's Birthday

It was arranged that Morine Krisdóttir would read a passage from *The Cry of a Gull* in which Alyse describes placing the flowers mentioned in my title, upon Llewelyn's stone, on his birthday. We were to do the same, 'But where', asked Morine, 'shall we find dandelions in the middle of August?' I assured her that dandelions are always with us, and undertook to provide the floral tribute. I knew where to find yarrow and ground-ivy and soon noticed two or three dandelions, showing more resilience than most people's wedding flower by growing in the track (which my mother-in-law insisted on calling a drive) which leads to our cottage. Two days later I gathered my yarrow and ground-ivy, only to find that those dandelion flowers were now 'clocks'. There must be others, but search as I would, further and further afield none was found and I thought the flower-laying ceremony would have to be abandoned. Next morning, as is my daily custom, I took the other 'Lulu', my Labrador out to the field, and found, to my utter astonishment, that the patch of grass beside the garden gate, unbroken green the night before, was now spangled with golden dandelions. I felt myself, and Llewelyn, to be the beneficiaries of a minor miracle, but I knew he wouldn't have subscribed to the idea.

August thirteenth was a bright interval in a spell of indifferent weather and

From left to right: John Batten (with the other Lulu), Mr & Mrs Branford, Frank Kibblewhite, Chris Gostick, Richard Burleigh, Gerald Redman. Morine Krissdóttir was taking the photograph.

thirteen of us assembled at *The Sailor's Return*, where we sat outside and after brief preliminaries, drank a toast to Llewelyn Powys. From there nine of us walked to the stone, on just such a day as Alyse describes on page 143 of her edited journal. On the way we looked in at Chydyok, with its pond, its inscription by the porch, the shelter and so many reminders of the subject of our little pilgrimage. At the stone Morine laid the flowers; and with gulls overhead and the wind-ruffled sea behind her read the following: 'I went to Llewelyn's grave with the wind blowing but the sea calm. I put yarrow (my wedding flower) dandelions (his wedding flower) and ground-ivy (he loved to crush and smell in his hand) on his grave. All is gone – a tale told – with a sad ending and I still love him.'

We made our way back to Chaldon by way of Rat's Barn, which retains a strong 'presence' in spite of its dereliction. This was a new experience for several of us, made all the more evocative, by John Cowper's descriptions of life there, which we had recently read in *The Dorset Year*. I think we all felt refreshed at the end of our day.

John Batten

A Gift of The Brothers Powys

When it was announced at the AGM that Richard Perceval Graves had generously made over the copyright of his book to the Society, he popped up in front of the platform and read the following verses, which he had scribbled on the back of an envelope.

Re: *The Brothers Powys*

Though almost never quoted,
Outranked, outclassed, outvoted
By academic men,
They come and shyly tell me,
They sidle up and tell me
They use me – now and then.

I therefore thank them clearly :
I warm to them most dearly
And, not being avaricious,
I think it most propitious
With feelings of propriety
To give to the Society
(That others new to Powys
Should come to know what woe is)
The copyright to use
Exactly as you choose.

I rest secure – their sister,
Their lovely youngest sister
Asked how I knew these men?
She said 'Within your pages
My brothers live again.'

Richard Perceval Graves 24. 8. 98

Subsequently, another member, who understandably prefers to remain anonymous, responded with the following. Members may not condone the

manner in which it is expressed, but they will share the sentiment.

I wish to say sincerely,
That we hold your book most dearly
Of all the books about the Powys Brothers,
And speaking for myself, it is often off the shelf,
Though I seldom dip in any of the others.

Never mind the academics
With their penchant for polemics
And personal axes always sharply ground,
If there is a question Powys
Be it when, or why, or how is?
It is in Graves the answer will probably be found.

What an accommodating word Powys is. What other word could be made to rhyme with both 'woe is' and 'how is'? Ed.

The Comic Vision of T. F. Powys *

T. F. Powys has suffered not only from neglect but, where attention has been given, from a twofold misapprehension. Since early hints from Scrutiny critics, his art has been labelled as 'folk' and as 'tragic'. Thus he is taken by those who may feel no obligation to read him as a gloomy, modern equivalent of Bunyan. I wish to argue that in terms of both structure and vision, Powys is a profoundly comic writer. I do not mean simply that his work contains humorous observations and incidents, but that the movement of his art is both pagan and positive.

Q. D. Leavis did some damage, in her early writings: linking Powys with George Sturt, she spoke simply of the traditional culture of rural England, his debt to an 'organic community', and so on (*Fiction and the Reading Public*, 1932). But only recently, Raymond Williams felt able to dismiss him under the category of 'regional novelist' (*The Country and the City*, 1973). William Hunter's booklet *The Novels and Stories of T. F. Powys* (1930), tells us that 'we must take account of Powys's preoccupation with Death'. Thirty years later without any evidence of any general interest in the writer in between, appeared H. Coombes's *T. F. Powys* (1960), the first full-length account of his fiction, only to conclude that 'he was ultimately a tragic writer'.

The one critical comment on Powys which comes close to apprehending his

* This article first appeared in *New Humanist*, Journal of the Rationalist Press Association, Summer 1984. We are grateful for editorial permission to reprint it here.

true spirit is brief and parenthetical, made by William Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935): 'His object in writing about country people is to get simple enough material for his purpose, which one might sum up as a play with Christian imagery backed only by a Buddhist union of God and death.' Here we are at least beyond folk wisdom; and it would be a strange Buddhist who saw anything as tragic other than man's attempt to resist the fact of mortality.

It is obvious where the title of Powys's best known novel, *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (1927) comes from: *Emma* by Jane Austen. Let us remind ourselves of the specific context. It is Chapter 15, where Emma is forced to sit in a two-seater carriage with the odious Mr. Elton, as they bid farewell to their evening's host, Mr. Weston. Emma's interest in the clergyman has hitherto amounted to her plotting his marriage to her young protégée Harriet Smith; otherwise she finds him simply tiresome, and now she is rightly apprehensive: 'She believed he had been drinking too much of Mr. Weston's good wine, and felt sure that he would want to be talking nonsense.' Far worse than this occurs, though: Mr. Elton seizes her by the hand and begins making violent protestations of love to Emma.

Emma, of course, belongs to the mode which we call comedy, not because of the author's sense of humour, but because of its structure. From the Romans Terence and Plautus and from Shakespeare, we know that structure to be based on a move from ignorance to knowledge, frustration to fulfilment, hatred to love. Emma, once she has understood the error of her presumption, may marry Mr. Knightley. The episode to which we have referred offers only one illustration of that period of sexual confusion which precedes triumph and harmony.

Powys, who knew the anthropology of Frazer well, would have understood that ultimate comedy – Jane Austen's included – derives from fertility myth and ritual. It is essentially about the tension between winter and spring, death and life. Just as in tragedy the fertility god disappears and in a sense dies, so in comedy he revives and reappears to be restored to the fertility goddess. Whether we know that god as Dionysus, Adonis or Tammuz, we may say the original power is that of Eros.

Someone else whose work Powys knew well was Freud. On the psychoanalytical level also, the structure of comedy is clearly erotic: the drive towards the reduction of tension. Hence nothing – not even the author – is allowed to prevent the sexual realisation at the end, no matter how deep and intractable the period of confusion at the centre of the play or novel. Unlike normal life, art may present us with the victory of the pleasure principle over the reality principle.

But Freud in his later work came to see the two principles as complementary rather than antagonistic. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he suggested that all behaviour is an attempt to reduce tension – a reduction which may seem full in sexual terms but is only final in death. In that sense Thanatos comprehends Eros.

All this may seem a long way from the fiction which has seemed to most critics a folksy by-product of English literature. Let us consider *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*

in more detail. Mr. Weston, the benevolent old wine merchant is God; his assistant Michael is the archangel of the same name. They come in their Ford car to the village of Folly Down with a list of potential customers. In order to sell their product they stop all the clocks at seven in the evening – Time gives way to Eternity. There are two wines; or rather the wine is of two strengths; the lighter is that of love, the darker that of death. As Mr. Weston himself says, his wine is 'as strong as death and as sweet as love'. Love and death, Eros and Thanatos are described by Powys elsewhere as 'the two great realities'.

The central symbol of the book, then, is wine. But an attendant one is that of the spreading oak tree and its mossy bed beneath. Here various virgins, procured by the evil Mr. Vosper, are seduced by the sons of Squire Mumby, Martin and John. One such has been Ada Kiddle, who subsequently drowned herself: she drank the dark wine of Thanatos. The blame for all such sin is attributed to the sexton Mr. Grunter: he is Adam, still attempting to act as if he were still in Eden, seeing no shame in his reputation (which he rather enjoys).

Customers for the light wine include Luke Bird and Jenny Bunce, who are given to each other in marriage, and so testify to the power of Eros. 'To be happy with another, in all the excitement and glamour of spring, is the proper thing to do. Luke longed in his heart to commit, to rejoice in the committal of, the most wanton excesses of love.' But there are others who yearn to succumb to Thanatos – notably the vicar, Mr. Grobe, who lost his faith after the death of his wife. His daughter Tamar, who is obsessed with the possibility of an angelic lover, is finally carried off into the skies by Michael himself: in her fulfilment Eros and Thanatos are shown to be one.

An important part of Mr. Weston's task is to bring the Mumby sons to repentance. Having revealed his true identity to Mr. Grunter, he leads John and Martin to the graveyard where they expect to find his good wine, but where the sexton has unearthed Ada Kiddle:

> 'My good wine gentlemen,' said Mr. Weston.
>
> Though the worms had destroyed Ada's beauty, her shape was still there, and Mr. Grunter regarded her compassionately. He saw Ada as if she were a picture, which is the way that all wise countrymen regard the world or anything in it that seems a little curious or out of the common ...
>
> 'You are a liar and a cheat', Martin shouted at the wine merchant. 'You promised us wine and you show us the rotted corpse of a whore. Is this your wine?'
>
> Mr. Weston said nothing.

Powys may easily be dismissed as having a morbid even a sadistic streak (consider his short story *The Baked Mole*). But to do so is to miss his real thematic interest: not a passing attention to sexual life as a sort of spice by which to relish all the more the fear of death, but a realisation of the final identity of the two great realities.

At the close of the novel, Mr. Weston himself is ready to drink the strong wine of death: he orders Michael to set fire to the Ford car:

> Michael did as he was told. In a moment a fierce tongue of flame leaped up from the car; a pillar of smoke rose above the flame and ascended into the heavens. The fire died down, smouldered and went out.
>
> Mr. Weston was gone.

The Biblical associations are hard to ignore. Yet throughout the novel their persistence has not overridden the profane, rural idiom which gives the book its colloquial life. No other modern writer except D. H. Lawrence writes so immediately and directly in accord with his own characters. Consider the moment at which Mr. Grunter (Adam) recognises Mr. Weston (God). Here the spiritual dimension is substantiated, not contradicted, by the 'folk' elements:

> 'I have work for you to do John Grunter,' he said.
>
> 'And who be thee to command folk?' asked the clerk.
>
> Mr. Weston uncovered his head and looked at him. Until that moment he had kept on his hat.
>
> 'Who be thee?' asked Mr. Grunter in a lower tone ... 'I know thee now,' said Mr. Grunter.
>
> 'Then tell no man,' said Mr. Weston.
>
> Mr. Grunter looked happy; he even grinned. 'I did fancy at first,' he said, in a familiar tone, 'that thee was the devil, and so I did walk down church aisle behind 'ee to see if thee's tail did show.

Mr. Weston's disappearance at the end of the novel is clearly not a touch of homely whimsy: God enters into the death which he has created; or, following Empson, God and death are seen to be identical. We may be reminded of an earlier tale by Powys, *The Only Penitent*, in which Tinker Jar (God) asks Mr. Hayhoe (Adam) for forgiveness for creating all the evils in the world, and for allowing his only son to be crucified. Mr. Hayhoe is able to grant it only because his effort to counter Jar's confession with a reminder of the good things in this world – love included – fails in the face of Jar's reminder of the fact of individual annihilation. That is why Mr. Hayhoe has finally, to forgive God: he invented death. It is God we must thank for death.

Mr. Weston's Good Wine, then, is not a tragedy in any acceptable sense. True, it concentrates to a large extent on the aftermath of the death of Ada Kiddle – though that death has taken place before the story begins. True, Mr. Grobe and his daughter accept the dark wine – but there is no sense of protest or loss. Where death is presented as not the terrible contradiction of life and love but as their realisation, 'tragedy' is not an appropriate term. This book, as with all Powys's fiction, is a comedy in the same sense as the Bible is a comedy.

In traditional Christian theology there is an inexorable link between sex and death, Eros and Thanatos. Put simply, angels do not breed they are immortal and immaterial. Only fallen man, with the animals, must reproduce his kind and so

attempt an immortality of generation. According to Augustine Adam and Eve enjoyed a sexless joy in Eden, but after the fall they entered into a world of individual death and birth, death and birth – and so a world of sex. Thus Powys presents us with the image of the mossy oak-tree bed, on which both wines are drunk. The possibility of such identity – sex and death as one – gives his language a paradoxical force. This brings him close not so much to Bunyan as to Shakespeare (Lear's 'I will die like a smug bridegroom') and Donne ('A bracelet of bright haire about the bone').

Again in *Unclay* (1931) John Death is sent by God to gather up Joseph Bridle and Susie Dawe, but loses his parchment of names and so spends the whole summer resting from his usual labour of 'scything' and finds delight in love. As he explains to the parson's wife:

> 'When a deathly numbness overcomes a body, when the flesh corrupts and the colour of the face is changed in the grave, then I have done for a man more than love can do, for I have changed a foolish and unnatural craving into everlasting content.'
>
> 'In all the love feats, I take my proper part. When a new life begins to form in the womb, my seeds are there as well as Love's. We are bound together in the same knot. I could be happy lying with you now, and one day you will be glad to lie with me ...'

It is to miss the point, as Coombes does, to protest that there is too little distinction drawn between the erotic and the morbid intrigues of the protagonist.

In the later Freud also, we find identity where others – the earlier Freud included – have seen conflict. Eros and Thanatos have a common end; or rather, the final fulfilment of Eros is in Thanatos. Hence Powys's fiction which owes as much to Freud as to Augustine, amounts to an interrogation of the comic structure, and in doing so offers us a new comic vision. In the major novels, *Mr. Weston* and *Unclay* – as in *Fables* (1929) and the more 'realistic' stories such as 'Lie Thee Down, Oddity!' the final victory is not over death but over the fear of death. Death is truly a consummation devoutly to be wished. Meanwhile there are less devout wishes and consummations.

Hence Powys is no disciple of Nietzsche: he sees the recurrence of individual birth, experience and death as acceptable only because the recurrence is not eternal for the individual. He is closer to Swift: nothing strikes him as worse than the fate of the deathless Struldbruggs. Life is only possible given death; death is the very form of life. But for Powys, unlike Swift, a positive emerges: we begin to live when we know we will die.

But to return to the Christian perspective: Coombes's book contains page after page of conjecture whether Powys was an orthodox believer. Such efforts seem to me largely futile: what matters more is to see how he adapts the language of orthodox belief to his own ends. The good wine that Mr. Weston brings to Folly Down must surely remind us of that drunk at the last supper by Jesus. The early

Christians, conscious of that event, understood that their communion, their affirmation of community in the person of the risen Christ, must involve the sharing of wine. The term for such an occasion was Agape or 'love feast' (from the Greek for 'spiritual love'). Scriptural commentators often suggest that Agape is something opposed to Eros, but strictly speaking it comprehends it. It also comprehends Thanatos, since what makes the love feast possible is the conviction that death, the last enemy, is no longer a threat (given the resurrection of Christ).

What Powys does is to work within the language of orthodox Christian belief, but without subscribing to its premises. It is not so much that he agrees with Nietzsche that God is dead but that he agrees with Schopenhauer (and so with the Buddhism of Empson's aside) that God is death. When Luke Bird and Jenny Bunce drink the lighter wine, and find fulfilment in Eros, they enjoy a foretaste of the darker wine of Thanatos, of the final acknowledgement of being born to die. The comedy of Powys is Freudian in form, Christian in content, and neither in theme.

With most writers it is difficult or impossible to deduce a vision from a structure. The author of *King Lear* is not necessarily a cosmic pessimist; after all, he is also the author of *The Winter's Tale*. But Powys is the exception that proves the rule. We wince when we come across gift books containing the 'wit and wisdom' of Shakespeare, Johnson, and so on. But Powys is one of the few writers who does seem to insist that we consider the beauty of his art to be its truth. Thus we can imagine a gift book – not one admittedly, that everyone would find congenial – in which we find this from Unclay: 'When the sun of love rises, and man walks in its glory, he may be sure that a shadow approaches him – Death.' Or from the same novel: 'Life and death do not quarrel in the fields. They are always changing places in the slow dance. So the evening is devoured by the night and the dawn by the day.' Or this from the early dramatic dialogue *An Interpretation of Genesis* (1908): 'Man's folly is that he loves himself before heaven and the earth.'

With the recent publication of Richard Grave's triple biography, *The Brothers Powys* (Routledge, 1983), we may expect a T. F. Powys revival. This article is written in the hope that that revival will necessitate a serious revaluation, not another passing invitation to savour the rustic gloom of a literary eccentric. For Powys's art, like Mr. Weston's wine, is truly, 'as strong as death and as sweet as love'.

Laurence Coupe

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Can any reader comment on Laurence Coupe's assertion that the title of 'Mr. Weston' was taken from *Emma*? My only reason for doubting it is that in an early draft of the novel (Bissell Collection) Theodore called it 'Mr. Western's Good Wine'. Ed.

Llewelyn Powys – A Platform in Europe
The Aubrac Conference

On the 29th and 30th of August 1998 a major conference was held on the 'literature of the sanatorium' at Aubrac in Aveyron, southern France, and which featured amongst other writers, Llewelyn Powys. This was the fifth such event held at Aubrac, the brain-child of Francis Cransac of Rodez, who in 1994 devised the idea of bringing people together under the umbrella theme of writers and mountains in the strange and magnificent landscape of the Mont d'Aubrac, using as a venue a nineteenth-century sanatorium complex now used as a Village de Vacances.

Beginning first, in 1994, by concentrating on specific writers (all French, some local – Giono, Pourrat, Vialatte), it soon gained a considerable reputation for organisation and hospitality, and in 1998 was able, with the theme of tuberculosis as its lynch-pin, to broaden out into an ambitious international forum. This was made possible by securing the patronage and financial support of the French government and the EU, as well as, for this subject, both literary and medical associations. Talks were given by a distinguished company of scholars from France, Germany and Italy on writers such as Thomas Mann, Knut Hamsun, Marcel Proust, Thomas Bernhard and, representing the English writer-consumptives, Llewelyn Powys. I was asked to deliver a paper on Llewelyn and chose as my subject the unpublished 'Diaries of a Consumptive'.

The conference was a remarkable success, with attendance of over 300, including representatives from the French media, literary magazines and publishing houses, as well as from the French Ministry of Culture and the Council of Europe. Speakers included Professor Regis Boyer of the Sorbonne, a world authority on Scandinavian literature, and the French writer Alphonse Boudard, who received much coverage in the press. Most of the attendees were housed in the sanatorium building (called Centre Le Royal), whilst speakers were given rooms in Aubrac's 'highly recommended' Hotel de la Domerie. Much eating was done and entertainments put on. These included a theatrical *mise-en-scène* staged in the twelfth-century church of Aubrac, of scenes taken from consumptive writers. It started with a vast back projection of Llewelyn Powys among the Swiss Alps, and re-enacted sections of his *Confessions of Two Brothers*. There was also a film-show at Espalion, a town down the mountain, of archive footage of medical treatment of tuberculosis from the '20s and '30s. The 'liegerkur' was much in evidence.

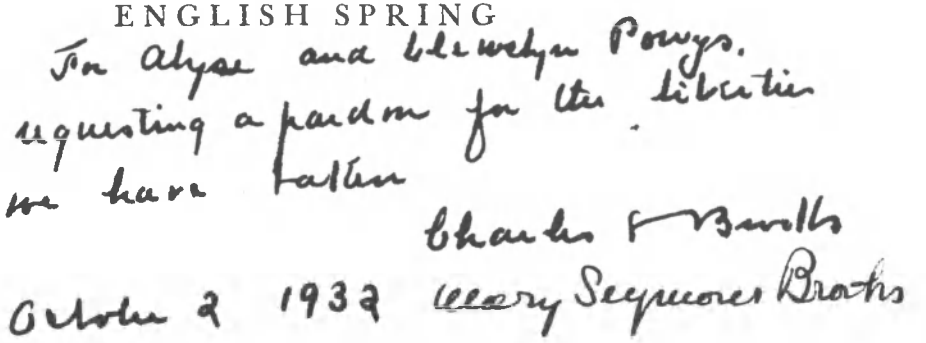
Aubrac itself was a strange and startling place. Set 1,400 metres up on a mountain plateau, the village was formed out of the remains of a medieval monastic hospital built for the pilgrims to the shrine of St James of Compostella. All there was were two tall towers, the church, the hotel and a few other buildings around a sleepy sloping square; stretching away on all sides was a bare, rocky

upland criss-crossed with dry-stone walls made of huge boulders left by the Ice Age. The grassland supported mountain ash and bilberry bushes and grazed hardy mountain cattle. Scattered here and there in the desolation were dairy farms (called burons), to one of which we were taken on the Saturday noon to partake of the local dish aligot (a sort of potato cheese), paté and 'fruits de montagne'.

Most of those attending the conference with whom I spoke had heard of John Cowper Powys and regarded him as a major writer, but no one knew about his background or of Llewelyn Powys. The conference was therefore a rare opportunity to show Llewelyn as a writer on his own terms. This was brought home to me in discussion with one of the speakers, Didier Sarrou, who thought there were many similarities between Llewelyn's philosophy as influenced by his experience of consumption, and that of his subject, Paul Gadenne, author of the novel *Siloé*. Awareness of Llewelyn, and of the Powys family in general, was helped enormously by a very fine exhibition which stretched the whole length of Le Royal, and which incorporated displays about Llewelyn and books and material which I was able to supply from my own collection. There was also a bookshop where Powys Society publications could be (and were) bought. Both the exhibition and the bookstall went to the main library and bookshop in Rodez for another month.

All agreed that the conference had been a rich experience – perhaps too rich, as so much was packed into such a short space of time. Francis Cransac himself, master-of-ceremonies extraordinary, now goes off to plan the next Aubrac conference before he takes a sabbatical in the year 2000. For Llewelyn Powys it was invaluable exposure. Interest has already been generated in re-publication, and in translating him into French, in which it may be that his particular brand of literature will be more sympathetically received.

Peter Foss



Inscription on half-title of English Spring

What They Said About The Powyses

Reprinted from English Spring, *by Charles S. Brooks, with pictures drawn in pen and ink by Mary Seymour Brooks (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932).* (Stephen Powys Marks writes, 'Dear John, here is a photocopy of pages of a book I have had for thirty years and only looked at for the first time just a few weeks ago. It belonged to Alyse. Would this be a good piece for the Newsletter?')

A Visit To A Pair Of Novelists

Any reader of current books will know Llewelyn Powys, the author of "Black Laughter," and it is almost as likely that he will know, also, his wife, Alyse Gregory and her several novels. Mary had been a friend of Miss Gregory in her old home of Norwalk, Connecticut, and I met her once or twice in Greenwich Village. I recall a dinner at a foreign restaurant on a narrow street at which our host was Tinckom-Fernandez, then a writer on the old *Nation*. Each winter it was his habit to gather together a strange company picked from here and there among the writing slaveys of the city, and to set them down to dinner at a charge of eighty five cents a plate, including tip. The restaurant for this particular dinner had descended from the orient, for I remember the bread was unleavened and was baked in flat discs like chair pads. I have no doubt but that the bad wine was scooped up from the sacred Ganges.

I had not seen Miss Gregory since that night of the Pentateuch, and now it seemed that she and her husband, Llewelyn Powys, were living on the Dorset coast just to the west of Lulworth Cove. It was Mary's suggestion that we pay them a visit on our way back to Dorchester.

"They live at White Nose," she said to the driver, "Can you find it?"

The Coastguard Cottages at White Nose
Sketch by Mary Seymour Brookes

The driver scratched his head until an idea sprouted in the furrow. "It's rather a wiggly way," he said.

We left the highroad at Watercombe and turned south on a lane that presently dwindled to little more than a path across the meadows, with here and there a gate to be opened and sign boards informing us that we were trespassing. And now, after several miles, we came to high land that bordered the cliffs where there were meadows without a tree. To the south was the waste of the Channel, flecked with white and swept with changing patterns. There was a moment when it seemed likely that our motor would be bogged in the soft grass; and then ahead of us there stood a lonely house in bare outline like a man's finger held up to judge the wind.

It proved to be a series of attached houses for several families—almost a city dwelling—with a broad front facing the ocean. Our driver informed us that it had once been the station of the coast-guard. As this service is now performed largely by the use of telephones, the several apartments of the house are let to summer residents. There were no doors in front as I recall but a general path led along the back of the building and offered entrance to the kitchens. Little plots of grass here were sheltered from the wind.

The Powys family popped in sight.

"Do you recall sitting on a loaf of—" I started.

"Well, of all the people," Miss Gregory cried, "if it isn't Mary!"

We were at once in Norwalk and Sheridan Square. Miss Gregory was kind enough to recall the chair-pads at Tinck's dinner.

Llewelyn and Alyse Gregory had just returned from a long tramp across the cliffs. He was dressed in corduroy and flannel and was a man of handsome and intelligent face. Wind-blown, he seemed a creature of the wind and storm. There was something of Pan in his composition, as if on search I might have found a reed in the pocket of his coat. She wore tweeds and heavy boots.

Powys is a native of Dorset. This surprised me, for his name suggests Wales and a more fanciful and Celtic tradition than we attribute to this south of England. He was born in Dorchester, and he told me that since boyhood he had been familiar with the White Nose and all this coast. He and his wife live part of the year in America, but his health is delicate and he finds improvement on these wind-swept cliffs. The bedlam of New York has left no mark on him. He seemed like a man who would look beyond tall buildings to the stars.

The four of us walked out of the cottage for the view—white headlands to Portland Bill, the smoke of distant steamers, the ocean ribbed by April breeze and covered with a broken roof of running clouds. For twenty miles, east and west, there was no tree—only green meadows, the cliffs and a floor of water that was streaked with sunlight.

Llewelyn and Alyse Powys had spent the winter here at White Nose, and their house had been the target of gales that had rattled their windows and eddied beneath their doors. One might think that storms would be content upon these

windy cliffs of Dorset, yet all through the blustering months they had come tapping on the casements, moaning dismally for shelter. As a studio for writing the Powyses use an old coast-guard's lookout at the edge of the cliffs. It seems that in some previous storm the roof of this building had been blown away and that the damage had been repaired by laying a smuggler's boat upside down across the top and anchoring it so securely to the walls that the tiny structure was tight against the rain.

Alyse Gregory had just published a novel and Llewelyn Powys was at that time editing selections from Anthony à Wood. I fumbled in my memory to find this man, made a guess and was wrong. It seems that he was a seventeenth-century antiquary of Oxford. Mr. Powys then asked me if I had ever seen samphire growing. Here I was better for I quoted Lear :

Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!

Mr. Powys leaned forward and plucked a tiny plant that grew on the facing of the cliff just underneath its dizzy edge. The ocean was five hundred feet below; yet I had no fear for him. It seemed impossible that Pan could fall from rocks that were his home.

... the murmuring surge
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high.

I have looked up samphire since to learn why men gather it in such danger. "The young leaves," I find, "are highly esteemed for making pickles." It seems a bit of a let-down. Having now seen it growing on the Dorset cliffs, I shall in future confine myself to Heinz and watermelon rind.

We went indoors and sat in a pleasant confusion of books and papers. Miss Gregory and Mary went back to Norwalk; while Mr. Powys and I discussed publishers and royalty, the poor taste of a public that neglects us for the *movie* and the wireless. I had always thought of him as an author of prodigious sales. He informed me, however, that as his thoughts grew more serious with the advancing years and turned from the writing of lighter fiction, in that degree his sales were falling off.

"In the communistic state that is surely coming," he said, "I wonder if there will be any place for books and writers."

"And is the soviet sure to come?" I asked.

He paused.

"I have heard in gossip," he replied, "that the director of the Bank of England said lately that the country would look back on this bad year as a prosperous one."

Mr. Powys' face suggests poetry—not any raw product that is turned outward with a crank to please the masses—but the face of one who should have lived in the first dawning of an era, of one who should have known Keats or have talked with Shakespeare—a face of rare beauty, with eyes that are gentle and invite confession and the truth.

I reminded Mr. Powys that he had once reviewed a book of mine, and that he had scored me for neglecting a just description of Westmoreland. This he had forgotten. He had allotted me a half page in the New York *Times*. For all practical purposes of sale, a half page of somewhat unfavourable notice is better than a paragraph of unstinted praise, so doubtless I am in his debt. For the public judges us by the bulk of our advertisement, the inches of space we fill, and the size of the type. A friendly little light under a bushel sells fewer books than a destructive conflagration that is sprawled across a page.

"How about this book of Maugham's," I asked, " 'Cakes and Ale'? How much of it is truth? And how about the barmaid?"

"I knew the first Mrs. Hardy," Mr. Powys answered. "She was of excellent western family, a woman of good education, a woman in no wise like the person in the novel. All that part is fiction. Nor is the second Mrs. Hardy at all the kind of woman that Maugham describes in the person of the second Mrs. Drifield. She is a direct unaffected person who would never dream of distorting the truth of her husband's life. We know her very well. We were in America when 'Cakes and Ale' was published; but Maugham as I recall, issued a statement that its characters were fictitious."

"A statement very few would see," I answered.

"Of course," he replied. "The book must have done a bit of mischief."

The sun was now almost level over Portland Bill, so we took our leave. Few tourists can have the privilege of seeing White Nose, for it is far from the highroad and guarded by many gates and signboards not to trespass.

Notes from the Collection

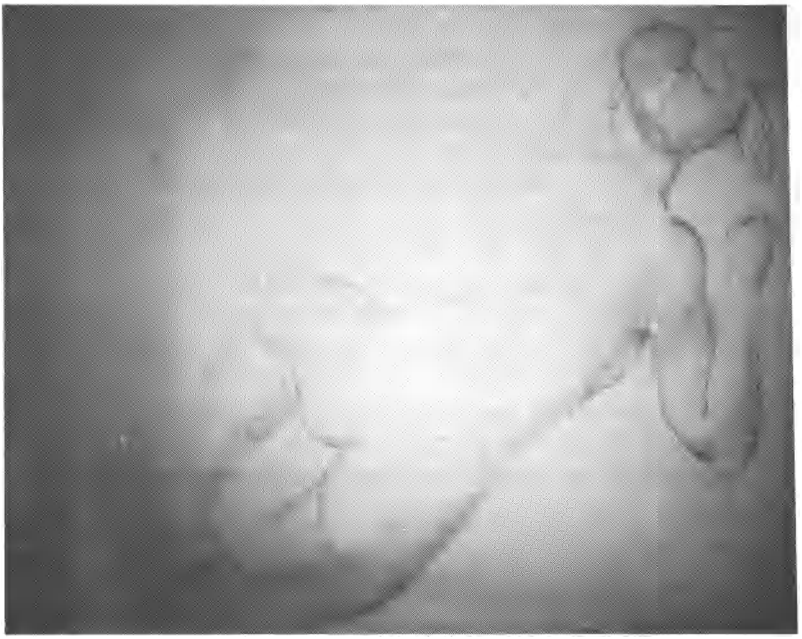
The work for the British Library Manuscripts Conservation Grant is almost complete. This has been a very time-consuming project but a list of the T. F. Powys materials received from Mr Bissell and Mr Feather is now on computer; the letters, manuscripts, etc., sorted and re-housed in archivally acceptable sleeves, clams and boxes. T.F. manuscripts given to us by Mr Feather and Mr Bissell, and the T.F. letters are presently being microfilmed on the advice of professional conservators, so that handling of the originals can be kept to a minimum.

Conference-goers were invited to view the new space built by volunteers, John Batten, Chris Gostick and Roger Pagery, this spring. It now houses most of the Gertrude paintings in our possession and we mounted a small display of various items of special interest from the Collection (*see back cover*).

The Collection has received four gifts in the past few months.

At the 1997 Conference, Peter Judd announced his intention to give to the Collection a drawing of Valentine Ackland by Betty Muntz, and this has now arrived safely. Peter has given me the background information of this lovely, simple line-drawing done in the late 1930s.

> This drawing of a nude female figure hung above the desk of Elizabeth Wade White (1906–94), my cousin and godmother. It was in an upstairs room in the house she occupied in Middlebury, Connecticut from 1945 until her death. A few months before her death ... Elizabeth told me as her future executor, that 'the picture above my desk [is] by Betty Muntz.' ... There was a reserve in her tone and expression that did not encourage me to ask any questions. It was clear that it was an important matter to her, but why I did not know ...
>
> The study itself was poorly lit and had for many years been used by Elizabeth to store old papers. When it came time to clean it out, I found years of cancelled checks, bank statements, automobile insurance forms. In the desk, however, beneath the clutter of recent years, were letters from the 1940s, some from Valentine (most of those from Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine were in trunks in a storeroom). In the cubbyholes were several objects, including a small box with a sliding cover that contained an affectionate note from Valentine. The drawing itself was



The Betty Muntz drawing of Valentine Ackland

somewhat faded, sun-streaked from the past. It had been exposed to the light for almost 50 years. ... I was still not certain of the subject, but shortly thereafter I found a diary entry from late 1940 in which Elizabeth referred to having framed what could only be this drawing of Valentine. ... It is appropriate that this drawing, kept for so many years and unacknowledged, should return to Dorset. Its association with Chaldon both by Betty Muntz' hand and Elizabeth and Valentine's relationship makes it appropriate that it should now belong to the Powys Society.

Peter Haring Judd, August 1998

We have also received from a member of the society who wishes to be anonymous, nine photographs – four of Llewelyn – taken by H. E. Randerson when he visited Llewelyn in 1936, a few months before he and Alyse left for Switzerland. Also included in the gift are six holograph letters referring to the photographs. In his first letter Llewelyn expresses his 'shock to see how time and my many struggles had worn me down and to my eye the sensitive shadows on my face suggest a certain weakness if not defeat.' However, while the 'one in the Panama hat is friendly and shy – I am not sure if I do not prefer the odd side-face small one best of all.'

A third gift is from Judith Stinton who has presented the Collection with a photocopy of the Diary of Alyse Gregory, the original of which is at Yale. This is an important addition to the Collection, which is not as complete as we would like in our Alyse Gregory holdings.

When Professor Lawrence Mitchell was working on the T.F. manuscripts this past August, his learned eye noted that while we had a superb collection of various editions of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, we lacked one and this he has now given us from his own collection with the following e-mail: 'I am sending a copy of the Viking edition of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* in [dust jacket]. ... Remember, this is the TRUE 5RST, preceding publication of the limited edition of Chatto and Windus edition.'

We have been very fortunate to receive these gifts, and many thanks to the donors. All bequests and donations, however large or small, are welcomed by the Advisory Committee to the Collection. Memorabilia is especially welcomed because it is very useful for displays and exhibitions. We think we have tracked down Llewelyn's large Ankh, but we still lack one of JCP's sticks. His sticks were numerous and almost as much a part of him as his dog, and it would be very good to have one. Please contact me if you have, or know who has, one.

Morine Krissdóttir, Curator