Editorial

Some years ago when the Society mounted its 'Writers in a Landscape' exhibition at the Dorset County Museum I got in touch with Sherborne School to ask whether we might borrow the bust of John Cowper Powys which had once graced their library. The response was willing, but slightly embarrassed because they didn't know where it was. However, he was eventually located, dusted off and handed over to become a focus of attention for a few weeks before returning to obscurity. It seemed like a Powysian allegory, and so it was with great pleasure that I recently received a critical appreciation of JCP, written for *The Annual Record* of the Old Shirburnian Society by someone recently at the school.

I feared when I wrote my heady editorial for the November issue that the furore created by the publication of *A Glastonbury Romance* would be followed by a deafening silence, the bust having, so to speak, been put back in the cupboard. Well not quite so. The News and Notes section carries reference to two new editions of *Wolf Solent* and readers of *The Daily Telegraph* will be aware that in the column entitled Book of the Century, Margaret Drabble nominated *A Glastonbury Romance*. I suppose that of all the choices made in that feature, none requires more serious attention than that of the editor of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*

This seems a suitable moment to mention a Powys Society publication with a difference. An audio-book, consisting of two ninety minute tapes containing extracts from the works of the three Powys brothers is nearing completion. The readers are: Oliver Wilkinson – JCP, Freddie Jones – TFP and Christopher Kent – LLP. The project has been directed by Christopher Wilkinson. More information will be available in the next *Newsletter*.

ON OTHER PAGES

On a more sombre note, this *Newsletter* acknowledges the passing of two valued members of the Society. James Dawson was an active member until his recent illness and had many friends among those of us who attend conferences. Professor Percy Smith was less well known, but over many years his wise counsel and administrative experience was placed at the disposal of the Society. Dame Iris Murdoch we can hardly claim as one of our own, although she was an enthusiastic admirer of the work of John Cowper Powys and a good friend of our Society. Glen Cavaliero contributes a personal appreciation.

Having now edited four *Newsletters* it is almost inevitable that some pattern or trend will have begun to emerge. 'Inclusive' and 'chatty' are two comments which have reached me, significantly each of them is capable of a pejorative interpretation. That sort of style comes easily to me, because I feel I know many of the readers, at least through correspondence. However, it is to some extent deliberate and it seems sensible to invite members to express any views they may have on the *Newsletter* as it is, and as they would like to see it. For some reason the 'Letters to the Editor' column has never been quite the forum of Society opinion that it might be. Please write in. I would also like to receive more of those opinions about the Powyses which litter the byways of English literature for publication in 'What They Said About the Powyses'.

John Batten

Obituaries

James N. Dawson

James Dawson who has died at the age of 84 was, from its early days, an active member of this Society. I met him at conferences in his later years and two recollections come vividly to mind. Husbands and wives together at Powys Conferences are a comparative rarity, but James and Patricia were always there, and seemingly inseparable. He was a man of imposing bearing, likened in his *Daily Telegraph* obituary to 'the traditional schoolmaster' a view that was perhaps shared by members of the Society, for any comment he chose to make in the lecture room was always heard with a particularly rapt and respectful attention, not always accorded to others.

James Dawson spent his life in journalism, working for the *Wimbledon Borough News*, the London *Evening Star* and *The Daily Telegraph*, where he served as education correspondent for many years. There, he is remembered for his rigid reporting of facts, his excellent memory and his generosity to colleagues when out on a story.

We know Patricia to be an accomplished poet, capable of sharp and amusing verse, but it may come as a surprise to some that James Dawson also wrote in a

similar vein. The following lines, later anthologised, were written in 1989 when the dictator Ceaucescu fell, and were prompted by a recollection of Queen Mary's remark at the time of the abdication, that 'We might as well be living in Romania':

A dodgy ally, bad example,
The symptoms of a tyrant's mania
Concourse of a nation's damaged sample,
A kind of botched-up Ruritania

Time's elbow gives us all a nudge,
And sends us hurrying back to school as
We learn that we must never judge
A gallant people by its rulers.

I wish I had got to know James better. Our sympathies are with Patricia and their children.

J.B.

Professor Percy Smith

Professor Percy J. Smith, a long-time member of The Powys Society, and husband of former Chairman, Morine Krissdóttir, died at his home in Canada after a long illness. He was an inspired teacher, a respected scholar, a fine poet, a skilled administrator and arbitrator, but it is perhaps for another quality that he will be best remembered. Shortly before his death a close colleague wrote, 'As a matter of fact it is only a part of you that is on the verge of surrendering. The essential part of your being: the one that caters to friendship, to love and unselfish dedication to fellow human beings will remain unstained in the vicissitudes of events ... Whatever there is in the obscure realm of "after biological life", there will be a place where friendship and love keep on living.' Our sympathies are with Morine and the family in Canada.

J.B.

Dame Iris Murdoch

Those who attended the Bath conference in 1986 and the one held at Cirencester in 1992 will remember the 'double act' discussion of John Cowper Powys delivered by Dame Iris and her husband John Bayley as occasions of heart-warming mental stimulation. The news of her death has been met with a singular display of popular affection, no doubt encouraged by John Bayley's *Iris*, a moving account of her decline into Alzheimer's disease. The Powys Society has good reason to remember her with gratitude, not only for her novels, so congruous in many ways with John Cowper's own, but also for her championship of his work, not least in her penultimate one, *The Green Knight*, in the course of which one of the characters is repeatedly portrayed as reading *A Glastonbury Romance*. And I remember being told in a letter from John Bayley that she was currently re-reading the book 'and enjoying every page'. Our sympathies go out to him – and our gratitude for his own support of John Cowper's reputation.

Glen Cavaliero

Nominations for Officers and Committee Members to take effect from 23 August 1999

In accordance with Rule 4.6 of the Constitution, the following Slate of Nominations of Officers and Committee Members has been prepared by the Hon. Secretary in consultation with the Committee, to take effect from the end of the next Annual General Meeting. In particular, the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Society are required either to stand down or stand for re-election annually, whilst each Committee member is elected for a 3-year period, with the two longest serving Committee members required to stand down, or stand for re-election, each year. The table below sets out the position of all Officers and Committee under these rules.

POSITION	CURRENT HOLDER	STAND AGAIN	PROPOSER	SECONDER
Chairman	Paul Roberts	Yes	Griffin Beale	John Batten
Vice-Chairman	Griffin Beale	Yes	Paul Roberts	Stephen Powys Marks
Hon Secretary	Chris Gostick	Yes	Paul Roberts	Griffin Beale
Hon Treasurer	S. Powys Marks	Yes	Chris Gostick	Bruce Madge
Committee	John Powys	Yes	Paul Roberts	Morine Krissdóttir
	Judith Stinton	Yes	Chris Gostick	Stephen Powys Marks
	John Batten, Bev Craven, Chris Wilkinson — All elected until 2000 and wish to continue			
	Bruce Madge, John Williams — Both elected until 2001 and wish to continue			

The Committee consists of four Officers and seven Committee Members, thus a full slate has been nominated. However, the Constitution also provides for members to make further nominations for the four Officer and two Committee Member vacancies if they so wish, in which case a postal ballot will be held. In the event of such a ballot, brief statements of appropriate information will be required, including details of involvement in the Society and reasons for wishing to take up the position. Initially, any additional nominations must be made by post, indicating which of the vacant positions each nomination is for, and must include both the names and signatures of:

[a] the proposer,
[b] the seconder, and
[c] the nominee's signature and agreement to stand.

Proposers, seconders and nominees must all be fully paid-up (or honorary) members of the Society at the time the nominations are received.

All additional nominations must be received by the special Nominations Secretary appointed by the Committee: Bruce Madge, 20 Linden Avenue, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 7DU, no later than Friday 11 June 1999.

Chris Gostick, Hon. Secretary 22 February 1999

The 28th Annual Conference of The Powys Society Kingston Maurward College of Agriculture Dorchester 21st–24th August 1999

As announced in the November *Newsletter* the conference remains at Kingston Maurward this year and it was decided by Committee that the Bank Holiday week-end should be avoided. For the third year in succession prices have been held and the cost for delegates attending the whole conference will be £150, with the usual pro-rata arrangements available for part-conference and day visitors.

The final details of the conference programme will be published in the July *Newsletter*.

Arrival: Saturday afternoon, 21st **Departure**: Tuesday morning, 24th August

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Saturday evening

Peter Tolhurst Speaking on the influence of landscape on the work of Theodore and Llewelyn Powys. This lecture will take place **at the Dorset County Museum** and will coincide with the launch of his book on literary Wessex.

Sunday

Chris Gostick Speaking on JCP and James Hanley (9.15)

Joe Boulter Speaking on J. C. Powys, Myrddin/Merlin, Cronos and 'crooked counselling'. (11.00)

Phil Rickman, novelist, author of *The Chalice: A Glastonbury Ghost Story* In conversation about the Glastonbury mythology, its attraction for Powys, and its contemporary relevance. Signed copies of *The Chalice* will be on sale. (2.00)

A Symposium After brief introductions referring to JCP, TFP and Llewelyn, there will be a discussion on why it is so difficult to get the Powys brothers into print and read. (4.00)

Richard Perceval Graves Merlin: An entertainment. (8.00)

Monday

Glen Cavaliero An Interpretation of T. F. Powys. (9.15)

Talk to be arranged. (11.00)

Free Afternoon.

Annual General Meeting. (4.00)

A Powys walk — probably around Dorchester. (7.00)

Tuesday . Breakfast and departure.

Subscriptions

The annual subscription is £13.50 for UK members and £16 for those overseas, with a student rate of £6. If you have not paid yet, please do so. Reminders will go out in the July *Newsletter*, but if you are not paid-up (nor an honorary member) you cannot vote in elections, nor will you receive your copy of *The Powys Journal*.

Damages Against Four People in Dorset Libel Action

The East Chaldon Vicarage Case as reported in The Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette *24 January 1934. (Continued from* Newsletter *34.)*

Saturday's Hearing

There was a large public attendance when the hearing was resumed on Saturday.

Before the defence was opened Miss Stevenson was recalled to produce letters received from the Dorset Mental Welfare Association. She provided a letter which she sent to Miss Colfox on April 22nd. 1933, in which she said 'All the girls who have been sent to us for observation have left and we now have no certified or observation cases in the house.' She told the jury that at that time there were three girls at the Vicarage, none of whom were certified or observation cases. She explained that observation cases were doubtful cases requiring observation.

Replying to Mr. Slade, witness declared, 'The words 'mental' or 'mental deficient' can be used to apply to anyone from a homicidal lunatic to the greatest genius in the world. It was too loose a term.'

Mr. Slade quoted a minute of the Dorset Association of a meeting in 1932 stating that as Miss Stevenson was a whole-time officer the association could not approve of her being associated with the home either directly or indirectly. A year later, said Mr. Slade, the association was stating that this ruling had not been fully carried out.

Miss Stevenson stated that she had always indicated that they would take cases of retarded development.

Mr. Slade opening the defence, submitted that the occasion on which the alleged libel was published was privileged, and he quoted legal authorities in support of this view. He pointed out that the alleged libel was published in a letter to Mr. Pugh and observed, 'Mr. Pugh was not only the landlord of the house, but he was also the rector of the parish, a Clerk in Holy Orders, who might be expected to have a corresponding interest in humanity as my clients. It was perfectly proper for them to write the letter.'

The Judge: 'You say that all the people in the village had an interest in the management of the home and that Mr Pugh had a double interest as landlord and rector of the parish ?

Mr. Slade agreed. He said that in this case the matter had been published to the Rev. C.S. Pugh and the Clerk of the County Council. Mr. Slade pointed out that the County Council paid a large amount of money to the voluntary organisation, of which the younger plaintiff was the paid organising secretary. Mr. Pugh was not only the landlord of the premises occupied by the plaintiffs, but was also the rector of the parish and, as such was expected to have a corresponding interest in humanity and solicitude for the welfare of mental defectives. Mr. Pratt contended that the action was privileged so far as his clients – Mr. Powys and Mr. Cobb – were concerned. Dealing with the publication by Mr. Powys to Mr. White, Mr. Pratt said that Mr. Powys knew nothing of the strict procedure and sent the letter to Mr. White instead of the Clerk to the County Council.

Mr. Tucker replied that, unless it could be established that in the case of social duty the law really went to the extent that it mattered not to whom the communication was made provided this was somebody who could help in the matter, privilege could not be established.

Case For The Jury

Mr. Tucker submitted that the publication to the Rev. C. Pugh was not privileged, because he had no legal interest, nor had the County Council. He considered that the defence submissions were so wide that

one did not know where they would lead. Regarding the County Council the submission would mean that any communication would be privileged, if made to the County Council, which affected any employee or associate of any voluntary body to which the Council made a grant. Many people busied themselves with the welfare of others, but this did not place them in the position that communications such as these could be sent to them with greater impunity than to other persons. Mr. Tucker submitted that there was sufficient evidence from the signatures on the petition to show that it had been published and that privilege could not cover such publication.

Mr. Justice Finlay then dealt with what he described as the troublesome question of 'qualified privilege,' and ruled that each occasion was privileged. 'I have on the whole – I frankly admit with hesitation – come to the conclusion that the occasions were occasions of qualified privilege,' said Mr. Justice Finlay. He pointed out that in fact no attempt had been to show what was said in the alleged libel was true. 'It seems to me (he said) that a suggestion that a home in a village is being conducted in an improper manner is a matter in which the defendants resident in the village have an interest and an interest to communicate to the Rector of the parish, not perhaps solely because he was the Vicar, but because being Vicar he had let the Vicarage to persons who, it was said, were conducting the home in a highly undesirable way, which was quite erroneously alleged. The case would have to go to the jury, the Judge added, on the question of whether any of the various defendants were actuated by malice and of damage if any.

Mr. Pratt for Messrs. Powys and Cobb, then told the jury that in no sense were they trying the character or ability of the plaintiffs. It would have been grossly improper to have suggested that anything written by the two defendants was justified or true. That had never been contended. All they contended was that they believed what they said and that, believing this, it was their duty to bring attention to it. The jury had to decide whether Mr. Powys and Mr. Cobb were actuated by malice or a sense of duty. Mr. Cobb would say in evidence that he knew of girls trying to run away and of crying being heard from the home. He was asked by his Parish Council to go into the question of the home and formed the erroneous but honest opinion that it was time that somebody enquired into the matter of whether the girls were being ill-treated.

Mr. Pratt then announced that he would call Mr. Powys, but added, 'He is in bed at a local hotel; he is suffering from tuberculosis, and he is a dying man.'

Parish Council Discussion

Mr. Pratt first called Mr. Cobb, who said there were four or five girls kept at the Vicarage.

Mr. Pratt: Did you ever see any of these girls running away from the Vicarage ?

Mr. Cobb: 'Yes; on four occasions. At about 6.15 one spring morning in 1933 I saw a girl go past my house. She looked like a lot of them do at the house – as though she was crazy or different from other girls. She ran past my dairy. She had a very scanty dress on – just a pullover, no hat, a pair of shoes but no stockings. Later some other girls came in search of her and I told them she had gone over the downs.'

Mr. Pratt: And was that the way she had gone? – 'No,' replied the witness, amid laughter.

Mr. Pratt: In the end did you tell them where she had gone ? – They went on the downs, could not see her, and came back to ask me if I had really seen her. Then I told them she had gone to my dairy.

Mr. Pratt: Apart from the escape, did you hear girls crying at the Vicarage ?

'On two occasions in particular. It seemed to me that there was something going on out of the ordinary. I stood out in the road ten minutes and then went home.

The crying was still going on.'

Mr. Cobb said that the matter had been discussed by the Parish Council, and he had been asked to bring it forward in Dorchester to someone who would make an investigation. When he signed the petition he believed what was on it.

Mr. Cobb was examined in regard to the dog incidents, but he denied that it was for this reason that he signed the petition.

Counsel: Do you feel any ill-will towards these ladies ? – Never.

Mr. Tucker: What was the object of the petition? – An investigation, sir.

Who by? – The petition was signed and sent to Mr. Pugh so that it might be brought to some person or persons who were in authority to investigate the matter.

Witness said that a man named Lucas came to his place and said 'The Vicar has let a nice party into the Vicarage now.' (Laughter) That was because of the conduct of the girls and how it was carried on.

Mr. Tucker pressed Cobb to say what the conditions were.

Witness: On one occasion a man came up and asked me if I ever heard the noise which was going on at night time at the Vicarage.

Cobb further declared that, in his opinion, there was not sufficient staff to look after the girls as they should be looked after. 'Somebody more capable (said Cobb) than the old lady.' The main object of the petition, he declared, was to have an inquiry and that the Vicar should not renew the lease.

Mr. Tucker: The village, like other villages was full of gossip? – Yes. Did you believe every bit of gossip? – Not in the first place. Not until I was convinced.

Did you ever ask either of these two ladies to show you over the home? – No, sir.

Are you aware that this place was inspected from time to time by doctors? – No I was not.

Mr. Powys In Court

There was a dramatic scene in court when Mr. Llewelyn Powys was carried in to give evidence. Mr. Powys, who looked thin and ill, had been staying for two days at the Antelope Hotel Dorchester, and had not

Llewelyn Powys arriving at the Dorchester Assize Court

left his sick bed until about half an hour before he was summoned to give evidence. He was conveyed to the Assize Court in a car and he waited in the car for some time while Mr. Cobb was giving evidence. Mr. Powys was accompanied by two women relatives. A wide brimmed hat shrouded his striking bearded face. A daffodil was in his buttonhole. Mr Powys was carried into court in an invalid chair and he was well wrapped up. He lay back in his chair in the well of the court and his whispered replies could not be heard more than a few feet away. They were repeated to the jury by Mr. Rivers Pollock, a Wiltshire man who is an old college friend of the author.

He said in August, 1930, he left England to spend the winter in America, and returned in April, 1931. Miss Warner and Miss Ackland gave him information about girls at the Vicarage. He had information about a girl who was caught running away from the home. She was so terrified of the house apparently that she ran out at once. He was told that Miss Stevenson was supported by a rich woman and had the County Council behind her. 'I thought then that I need not worry any more about it,' he added.

Mr. Pratt: Did you hear any report of the girls at the home crying? – I have heard continually reports of them crying. I heard from servants and from Mr. Cobb.

Field Glasses Incident

One day his brother, 'with the quick eye of a South African settler,' was crossing a field behind the Vicarage where he had seen a man trimming a hedge, and he noticed the man had field glasses. Mr. William Powys asked the man why he had the field glasses, and the man said he wanted them because he was watching one of the maidens from the Vicarage who was hiding in the hedge. 'I was horrified by this story – the idea of this man watching the girl perhaps for hours,' declared Mr. Powys.

Mr. Pratt: Did you feel that it was your duty to do anything? – *Witness* – I was very worried. I could not sleep that night. I was in my open air shelter. My Cousin, Ralph Shirley, was staying with me, and we had been studying Homer together. Mr. Powys said that at that time he wrote down the reason why he was troubled and he drew up the petition. He took the advice of his cousin who was a man of the world. At this point Mr. Powys showed signs of restlessness, and the judge advised him not to bother about anything apart from the question put to him.

Mr. Pratt: When you drew up the petition did you believe everything that was in it? – Certainly. When asked why he did not ask the Vicar to call on him, Mr. Powys said, 'I am on very good terms with the Vicar, but he did not call on me. I have every admiration for Mr. Pugh, but I do not think he is a strong man.'

Mr. Powys, cross-examined by Mr. Tucker, admitted that the petition was a method that gave great publicity to the allegations.

Later Mr. Powys stated, 'I heard a good deal afterwards and that was what made me so indignant.'

Mr. Powys gave evidence for about twenty minutes. When asked if he could leave, the Judge said, 'Certainly; he can be released at once.'

Women Defendants

Mr. Slade said that the two women defendants had gone back to East Chaldon in a cottage rented at 6s. a week because owing to the expense of the case they could no longer remain at Norfolk.

Miss Warner, in the box, said that before leaving Chaldon she was living in a Tudor cottage, but now, on her return, she was living in a six room cottage. She had come from Norfolk because she could no longer afford to live there.

Witness said that Mrs. T. F. Powys first spoke to her about the girls. Witness was told on another occasion that there was

feeling in the village against Miss Stevenson, particularly among the married women. There were many rumours about what made the girls so persistent in their attempts to escape. Someone in the village told her that the girl who absconded twice was heard to declare when taken back to the Vicarage a second time that she would kill herself if she was taken there again. Mr. Theodore Powys said that someone should go to the Vicarage to find Miss Stevenson's point of view, and witness and Miss Ackland volunteered to do so. The girls were described as doing work in the house all day and in the evening and never spoke to anyone in the village.

Miss Warner told of a conversation she had in October 1930 with Miss Stevenson. Miss Stevenson, she alleged, said that practically all the girls had sexual mania and it was impossible to let them go anywhere unattended. The girls were said to have extraordinary physical strength. One of the runaway girls was said to have arrived downstairs to breakfast in light coloured stockings, and she had been ordered to change them. The girl had escaped from the house and gone to the local policeman's house in Winfrith. At this house she had spent the day. The constable took her back to the home in the evening and the next day she ran away again.

Miss Warner had heard from Mrs. Paine, the wife of a shepherd, who lived next door to the Vicarage, that cries of distress came from the Vicarage on several occasions early in the morning and in the evening.

The postwoman (Mrs. Lucas) had told her that one of the girls implored her to post a letter to her parents, but Mrs. Lucas had been forbidden by Mrs. Stevenson to deliver letters to the girls or to take letters from them. 'As time went I thought all these stories pointed to the same sort of thing,' added witness.

Mrs. Hardy Mentioned

Miss Warner went on to say that another woman told her that Mrs. Thomas Hardy of Dorchester questioned her about the home. Mrs. Hardy said 'What are these stories we hear about the Vicarage at Chaldon?' Mr. Weld, of Lulworth Castle, also made enquiries.

Miss Warner said the conversation with Miss Stevenson was two months after the dog-biting incident. 'My attitude was quite friendly,' she added.

Mr. Slade: You were not smarting under the bite? – Not at all, Miss Stevenson had done up the bite quite kindly.

Miss Warner, answering another question, said the Winfrith constable had told her that Lily Roberts – the girl who escaped – was a Roman Catholic. She said she was unhappy at the Vicarage because she had no time for prayers and devotion.

'Not Ideal Place'

The fourth defendant, Miss Ackland, corroborated Miss Warner's evidence. She said she had no animosity towards Mrs. or Miss Stevenson. She said she was of the opinion that the home was not an ideal house in which to keep girls of the type concerned, and she was not impressed by Miss Stevenson's description of the girls. She said, in cross-examination, that she took it for granted that the home was under the County Council. She thought it necessary that Mr. Pugh, as Vicar of the village, should be informed. This concluded the evidence and counsel then addressed the jury.

'Cannot Cut It Short'

Before Mr. Pratt rose to speak for the two men defendants the Judge said, 'This is quite obviously a serious case and I cannot cut it short. No one must attempt to cut it short.'

Mr. Pratt and Mr. Slade both argued that there was no malice shown by defendants. Mr. Slade asked, 'If you do come to grant damages do you think this is a case for heavy damages? The characters of the

women have never been impeached so far as these proceedings are concerned.'

Mr. Tucker in addressing the jury, said that the village had obviously been teeming with gossip. The place was seething. He suggested that the inhabitants had got into a frame of mind when they were willing to believe anything against Mrs. and Miss Stevenson. Excellent and honest man as Mr. Powys was, he was a good example of what happened. Lying on his sick bed he got into the frame of mind when he would believe anything of the home.

Mr. Tucker, referring to the petition, said 'There are names obviously signed in one and the same writing. That was the kind of document being sent round the village. Was that the proper manner in which to make a privileged communication ?' asked Mr. Tucker. 'One might as well get the B.B.C. to broadcast it as to use such a method.' If people broadcast things which should be whispered confidentially, that was evidence that they intended to do more damage to these people than was really necessary. Referring to the evidence about the relationship of Miss Stevenson with the Voluntary Association, he said 'I think that was brought in for the express purpose of making sure that, whatever happens in this case, Miss Stevenson shall secure re-employment by the Association.' Commenting on the dog incident, Mr. Tucker said there was nothing in the world – apart from the children– which would affect people in a small community more than a quarrel over dogs, although it might seem ridiculous in a law court. During Mr. Tucker's evidence a jury woman collapsed in the box and was revived with smelling salts and water by another jury woman. In view of this the Judge, after Mr. Tucker had completed his speech, stated that he would not go any further with the case that day, and it was adjourned until Monday.

Judge Sums Up

The court was again well filled when the Judge summed up on Monday. Among those present were Mrs. Thomas Hardy (widow of the great Wessex novelist), who sat with Lady Pinney, and Miss Colfox and members of the Powys family, including Mr. J. C. Powys.

The Judge in his summing up to the jury, said that the defendants had published about the Plaintiffs a matter which was admitted to be defamatory. It was (he said) wrong to publish a libel just as it was wrong to knock anybody down. Here the defendants had published about the plaintiffs matter which was now admitted by the defendants to be injurious to their reputation, and they had not sought to justify that. When an action for libel was brought, a question of privilege might arise, and the sort of privilege they were dealing with there was what was called qualified privilege, and the question for the jury was – was there malice? What this really meant was this. Malice was any wrong or crooked motive of any sort. It was really the abuse of, instead of the use of, an occasion. Was this an occasion fairly and honestly used by the defendants, believing what they said and doing what they conceived to be their duty? Allowing fair and reasonable license in these matters, what the jury had to do was to make up their minds, surveying the whole of the facts, and decide whether they considered it had been shown that the defendants or any of them, in doing the things which they had, acted with malice, that was to say with wrong or crooked motives. The question of malice, said his lordship, was absolutely vital in this case because if his judgement was right (on the question of privilege) the plaintiffs could not succeed unless they established to the jury's satisfaction that the defendants, or some one or more of them, were malicious. The Judge said he would hand questions to the jury with regard to damages apart from the question of malice. The fundamental principle was that damages had to be a reasonable solatium for the wrong done. What harm had been

done and what was a reasonable sum to award them? It was not suggested that a very large sum should be awarded. His lordship then reviewed the evidence. They had heard a great deal in the course of the action about questions which might be of very great concern to the Dorset Voluntary Association for Mental Welfare but which had only a very indirect bearing on anything with which they were concerned. As to the undertaking which was given to the association with regard to the home kept by the two plaintiffs, there were no grounds for the suggestion of either cruelty or incompetence, but it was not difficult to see how this trouble might have arisen. It was not a nice thing for a village to have five weak minded girls planted down on it by reason of their unfortunate conditions, and having probably to be looked after rather strictly they were apt to get hysterical and crying and sometimes became obstinate and troublesome and tried to run away. That being so, trouble was almost certain to arise among the neighbours, and the jury might think that they had real cause for dissatisfaction. There was apparently a lot of gossip and talk in the village, and the Judge referred to the interview between Miss Ackland and Miss Warner and Miss Stevenson. He passed over briefly the incident in regard to the dogs. Coming to the actual libel, he read the petition which was taken round the village and signed, in respect of which Mr. Powys and Mr. Cobb were sued for libel. Then there was the letter which Mr. Powys wrote to Mr. White and the letters which the two female defendants wrote to the Vicar and the Clerk to the County Council. All this was followed by considerable correspondence. The plaintiffs demanded a full apology and an indemnity in respect of any expenses to which they had been put or might be put in vindicating their characters.

Mr. Powys and Mr. Cobb offered an apology, but not an apology in the exact form required by the plaintiffs. The two ladies did offer an apology in the exact form required, and it was certainly a very unhappy thing that they should have been on for over two days investigating a matter as to which apologies had been offered. But the thing went off on a question of finance, and everybody he supposed, had spent infinitely more money than the sum in dispute. He repeated that he thought it was a most unhappy thing that the case should have had to come there and that all these matters, some of them insignificant in themselves, should have had to be investigated. It was also unfortunate that people with no connection with the thing at all might have got mentioned in the matter. Were the defendants actuated by crooked or extraneous motives, or were they doing it honestly in pursuance of what they conceived to be their duty? Mr. Powys was very ill, and it might be that the incident of that girl that was said to be hiding in the hedge would dwell more unpleasantly in the mind of a man unhappily very ill and confined to bed than a man who was able to be about and attend to his business. It was for the jury to say whether they thought he was influenced by some crooked motive or whether Mr. Cobb was a malicious person or not. There were the two other defendants. Were they actuated by some crooked motive or were they acting in pursuance of a genuine desire to do their duty? As to the damages, it was for the jury, applying its own commonsense to the matter, to award such reasonable sums as they conceived to be fair compensation. What was the proper solatium for the injury which had been done to them by the publication of this libel?

Questions To The Jury

The Judge then put the following questions to the jury:– (1) Were any, and if so which, of the defendants actuated by malice. (2) What damages? (a) to Mrs. Stevenson, and (b) Miss Stevenson against (1) Powys and Cobb in respect of their signing of the libel; (2) against Powys in

respect of the letter to White, and (3) against Miss Warner and Miss Ackland in respect of the letter to Mr. Pugh approving of the libel and to the Clerk of the Dorset County Council approving of the libel and saying that in their opinion an inquiry ought to be made.

Damages £175

The jury were absent an hour and a half. On their return the Foreman handed up to the Judge their findings, which the Judge read out as follows:–

All the defendants were actuated by malice.

Damages (a) to Mrs. Stevenson, £100; (b) to Miss Stevenson, £75; against Powys and Cobb, £120; against Powys in respect of the letter to White, £5; against Miss Warner and Miss Ackland, £50.

The Judge told counsel for plaintiffs he was entitled to judgement for these amounts, and with regard to costs he said counsel on both sides would be given an opportunity to make submissions at some later time on the circuit.

Reviews

The Diary of John Cowper Powys for 1929, ed. Anthony Head
London: Cecil Woolf, 1998. Hbk, 170pp, £24.95. ISBN 1 897967 32 2

In a perfect world John Cowper Powys would have begun his first diary on the 1 January 1929 and it would have been published ahead of those for 1930, 1931 and *Petrushka and the Dancer*, and would not have been upstaged by the incomparable *Dorset Year*. As it was JCP started it on 1 June, so it is only the record of seven months, and the manuscript was mislaid until after the publication of his later diaries was under way. However, despite the fact that I am opposed to the slavish publication of year-on-year diaries, and this one is both short, late and already dipped into for the ten-year selections, I think its publication entirely justified. If for no other reason, because it was the first, and the reader is able to sense John Cowper slipping effortlessly into the style and format of later diaries. However, there are differences. Although his devotion to Phyllis intrudes frequently there is not that obsessive concern about her every mood that broods over later years. Worries about JCP's own health are interspersed with optimistic expectations that the dyspepsia was on the mend, and fortunately, we are largely spared the tedious repetition of daily routines which mar the later diaries.

This volume begins by recording a visit to England and the early entries throw interesting light on his family relationships, particularly with Margaret and Littleton Alfred. Although this was apparently cordial and they spent a good deal of time together there is a palpable tension underlying what is written, which, just occasionally, breaks the surface; as when he records the scolding he received for addressing a parlour maid incorrectly, or his unease when out with Margaret and Littleton who 'can remain in one spot like Red Indians for hours & hours: partly because they always carry sketch-books ...'. He adds, 'I find that I myself get

restless and really require the motion of walking to get really satisfactory feelings for the earth.' Nonetheless JCP clearly revelled in the opportunity to be with his son, to see him at his work and observe his tender caring for his mother. The entry for 17 July ends: 'My son is a perfectly angelic character. How can a son of mine be like *this*?

The English entries are as rich a commentary on the countryside, particularly flowers and birds, as any to be found in the later diaries. But on his return to America, even when on a trial visit to what became Phudd Bottom, the natural descriptions are never as vibrant and uncontrived as those penned in his native element. The ailanthus tree in Patchin Place is mentioned with the frequency with which people used to tap barometers. It seems to have been an indispensable pressure valve and symbol of normality in an alien landscape.

The main interest of the American section of the diary is the light it sheds on John Cowper's waning career as a lecturer, and contractual problems with his books. Strangely, although we are given an insight into his life on the circuit with descriptions of his journeys, his hosts and hotels etc., we are told nothing about the actual lectures; not even their titles. We do however come close to it when he goes to Plainsfield, where he lectured in a High School and the experience is recorded in an uncharacteristic and almost apoplectic purple-passage: 'a ridiculous lad in a jersey jumped up and down on the platform making them all repeat a silly jingle composed of the letters of P-L-A-I-N-S-F-I-E-L-D repeated one by one. For unimaginative uninspiring *perfect silliness* nothing could have been worse. It was a typical 'College Yell' of the epoch & as a symbol of American life a positive disgrace – devoid of freedom, spontaneity, dignity, decency. *Comic* & yet not mock-heroic but woodenly sham-heroic – a sort of pinchbeck athleticism, dull, stupid, fatuous and forced – devoid of all life – like working up an un-natural esprit-de-*corpse* among mechanised robots.' No one but JCP could follow that.

This is a pleasant book to hold and to read with the entries attractively set out. There is a biographical glossary, but the problem, even for someone familiar with Powys, is the unknown characters who flit across the American entries. As someone who dislikes constantly turning to the back of a book it would be churlish to suggest more notes. They are sparse, but I would have appreciated some editorial guidance as to the drift of events, set within the text. Having enjoyed Anthony Head's introduction to *Powys to Sea Eagle* I was disappointed that this one was so brief. I wonder whether, in view of what has gone before, he felt this *Diary* should be low-key. Be that as it may, it certainly deserves a place on our shelves beside all the others.

John Batten

The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Frank Warren
London: Cecil Woolf. Hard back, £15.95. ISBN 1 897967 22 5.

Frank Warren is one of those fortunate people, who as a young man, discovered

John Cowper, summoned enough courage to write to him, and is now the proud owner of 17 letters from the great man. I envy him that; but doubt whether he should have published them.

JCP wrote thousands of letters, probably none he received went unanswered. Always in the course of what may have been the umpteenth reply to a person he had never met, that kindly humble man, as A. J. K. Green commented in the last newsletter, endeavoured to make them feel 'about ten feet tall'. This was often achieved by elaborating upon what they had written to him. Mr Warren's letters are so rich in examples of this that, and here is the nub of my criticism, the reader learns a good deal about Frank Warren and very little that is new about John Cowper Powys.

At a rough count we have already had at least a dozen edited volumes of JCP's letters. Those to members of his family, Frances Gregg, Louis Wilkinson, Henry Miller and perhaps when they appear, Dorothy Richardson, are an important part of the literary canon, some of the others were as unnecessary as this collection. There must still be countless treasured bundles of correspondence in that familiar scrawl just waiting to get between hard covers – but to what purpose? For how long will editors and Cecil Woolf spend their time, and members of this Society (even avid collectors) their money, on such undistinguished material?

The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Frank Warren is a slim volume of 68 pages containing 17 letters sandwiched between an introduction, a chronology of JCP, notes on the letters, and most interesting of all Frederick Davies' recollections of John and Phyllis. Unfortunately, not 'new' recollections, but an abridged version of those already published in *The Powys Review*.

John Batten

A Tree with Many Branches: The Powys Heritage Series
Cecil Woolf, 1 Mornington Place, London NW1. £3.50 each.

John Cowper Powys, Margaret and Lily: The Evidence of the Syracuse Manuscripts, by Paul Roberts, ISBN 1 897976 37 3.

The Powys Brothers at Sherborne School, by A. B. Gourlay, ISBN 1 897976 42 X.

For so-called neglected writers, over the years the Powys brothers between them have managed to inspire what might be termed a small cottage industry of literary criticism, social and family history and anecdotal reminiscence. A good deal of this can be found in the Society's publications, the *Newsletter*, the *Journal* and other spin-offs – but the problem there (if it is a problem) is that the Society might carry a charge of preaching to the converted; to win over new admirers – not 'convert' them, I might add! – perhaps what was needed was a series of publications, on all aspects of the Powys world, issued independent of the

Society and made readily available for the interested reader to pick up on, enjoy, and hopefully explore further.

This, in the shape of the Powys Heritage Series from publisher Cecil Woolf, has now arrived. A parallel series from this source (see page 28 of *Newsletter* 35) goes under the heading 'Bloomsbury Heritage'. I've seen nothing of that series but I imagine next to the rarefied hothouse atmosphere of Virginia Woolf and her friends (who aren't exactly lacking in commentators anyway), this concentration on the Powyses should come as a breath of fresh air – almost literally, for a love of the open air, a deep veneration of the earth's natural processes, from sunrise to sunset and the changing of the seasons, is something all the Powyses share, and is something alien to the Bloomsbury Group's view on life, to their loss.

Paul Roberts, the author of the first booklet in the series, and a familiar name to Society members, is surely one of the most indefatigable researchers and collaters one could ever wish to meet, his work having not only its own merit but proving indispensable for future students and commentators of John Cowper Powys.

By sheer number of words, if nothing else, John Cowper Powys must by now rank as one of the most prolific authors of this century: added to the many, often very big books published in his lifetime, there has been a steady flow since his death of shorter fiction, drama, verse, and a seemingly endless supply of diaries, journals and letters. And now Paul Roberts has discovered 'a vast amount of unpublished material, at least as much again as [he] published in his lifetime'. This is news both heartening and dismaying: heartening, for fans of the great man, because of the further evidence it supplies, if any more were needed, of his tireless dedication to his craft; dismaying, at least from the point of view of any would-be official biographer – considering the amount of material he or she would have to wade through, such a book might be more profitably written by a committee rather than just one person.

Drawing on some of this unpublished material, Paul Roberts begins his essay looking at Powys's marriage, to Margaret Alice Lyon, and lives a little dangerously, I think, by extracting from an early and stylistically uncharacteristic short story a partial proof as to why Powys and his wife were essentially incompatible. I say this is a dangerous game to play because not all an author writes is autobiographical, even when it most appears to be so; still, Roberts plays the game with aplomb, keeping his reader interested and up to the mark.

Roberts considers further evidence, so to speak, in the play *With Love Away*, and concludes by saying he thinks the piece worthy of belated publication. Looking only at what we are shown here, it's hard to agree: the title is hopeless, the plot mind-boggling, and the excerpts quoted pretty hard going. Let's face it, John Cowper Powys was no playwright; he was rather more of a poet and polemicist, but even these roles were secondary for him: what he was, above all, was a fiction writer (not just a novelist, for how does the word novel cover

something like *The Mountains of the Moon*?) a writer of fiction of the first order, and any fiction of his, published or unpublished, from any period, is worthy of consideration.

Paul Roberts chooses to look closely at the short story Murdock's Cottage – though in doing so he fails to mention anywhere that this story is in fact no longer unpublished: it appeared in the Society's *Newsletter* 30, April 1997. The story is an enjoyable read in its own right, as well as being fascinating for pre-echoing themes from later stories. The heroine's behaviour, for example, with her aptly named cousin Bob Runter, in spurring her hero lover into action, prefigures Wolf Solent's triangular predicament in the novel of that name. Powys and cuckoldism, I would suggest, is a field yet to be fully explored.

John Cowper Powys clearly chafed at being tied to a respectable (with all that that word might pejoratively entail) and hidebound woman as Margaret; but his fascination with the prostitute Lily, described at some length by Roberts, was surely a step too far: Powys's soulmate was the woman he eventually found – Phyllis Playter, a woman of forceful and vibrant personality herself. And let no one be in any doubt that Powys was the idealising type, the type that needed a soulmate: even if this takes off a little of the gloss for some of his admirers (because quite a few of us, including myself, idealise the idealiser!), it has to be seen as an essential part of his make-up; any dip into *Petrushka and the Dancer* or *The Dorset Year* will throw up countless examples of Powys not being able to get through the day without prostrating himself mentally, emotionally and physically at the feet of his idol.

Roberts is right, at the beginning of his conclusion, when he says: 'In his youth ... the choice [for Powys] seemed to be to submit to his desires and destroy his unique identity or retain his identity and suffer the pains of unfulfilled desire.' Powys didn't know it at the time, but there was a third way: find, or have the luck to find, a partner as strong in spirit, in her own way, as oneself; a partner who will love and be loved, but never be swamped or submerged. As Roberts says: 'marriage seems to have been regarded by Powys as a battle.' Powys thrived on tensions, emotional rather than domestic, that are inevitably thrown up in a close relationship – indeed, he seems to have deliberately created some of those tensions, consciously or otherwise, knowing they were essential.

The late A. B. Gourlay, author of *A History of Sherborne School*, and a former master, was ideally placed to offer reminiscences and recollections of the various Powys brothers times at the famous school. In this second booklet , he recounts tales, some familiar, some (to me at least) less so – of JCP's hatred of cricket, for instance, and of gym and of practically any physical activity, the loathing of which stayed with him all his life; and of his country rambles with Littleton, and the two brothers 'running home' (physical activity when it suited!), a twenty mile round trip timed to arrive back at school for tea.

There are some nice observations of Llewelyn, who because of the illness he so

long bore, and that finally killed him, might be thought of as somehow weak, frail, consumptive - not a bit of it! His adventures, recounted in books like Black Laughter, of a sheepman's life in Africa; where one day he might be hiding up a tree from a rampaging elephant and another day be fending off threatening natives, tally with stories recounted here of his keenness (unlike his brother John) for rugby and football, and his taking part in a cross-country run two days after recovering from mumps. His nature writings, for want of a better phrase, were never merely literary affectation, though sometimes they strayed that way, but were as much part of his outer as his inner life.

This second essay in the series, less speculative and critical than Paul Roberts' effort, is not exactly as conceived by Gourlay, being extracted from a talk written by him, read by Kenneth Hopkins at a meeting of the Society in 1974, and edited by Anthony Head for this series. Nevertheless, it is well worth having in this form and makes for an enjoyable read.

A word or two on the booklets themselves. Quite simply, they look and feel splendid, from the super cover design to the attractive cream pages within, and notes, and illustrations – and for just £3.50 each! There are one or two things one might change – a series number on the front cover, the price on the back cover, a short note on each author, and perhaps the puff for the Society, welcome though it is, placed at the back – but these are all minor points against what is a delightful start to a hopefully long-lived series.

One final word, for I think I'd better explain my title. It was inspired by that cover design, by Faith Binckes. Whether the same thought was in the artist's mind as in mine, I cannot say, but it struck me that the tree might symbolise the Powys family, more specifically, the three famed writing brothers; while the branches, not too fancifully, might be seen as offshoots like these booklets – and just as a tree might have countless branches, so there are countless themes for appreciation and speculation where this astonishing writing family is concerned.

Barry Cronin

Sherborne's Forgotten Literary Heavyweight John Cowper Powys

This article first appeared in the 102nd edition of The Annual Record *of the Old Shirburnian Society, November 1998, and is reprinted with the author's permission.*

It is hard for a child of the technological generation to appreciate how the 'public meeting' was so important to the cultural education of his forebears. In an era when famous figures make their contribution to society via satellite link-up, the news soundbite or conference call, immediacy is everything. Lecture tours are rare because few people have the concentration or the inclination to sit for hours at a time in public rooms listening to one individual. Only the university student

– if he can be bothered to attend – has the opportunity regularly open to him.

And yet the great literary and political figures of the past would not have flourished without this type of dissemination of their ability and art. How might Dickens have fared as an author without the chance to give readings of his novels? Would Lloyd George have dominated early twentieth-century politics without the sway that his oratory held over packed conference halls ? Impossible to say, but it is important to recall this largely-lost aspect of life when considering arguably the most eminent literary figure that Sherborne has produced.

John Cowper Powys, who died 35 years ago, was one of the great lecturers of his time. For over 30 years, he travelled throughout Britain, Europe and the United States giving talks and seminars. A 'performer' in every sense, Powys first lectured in the US in 1905 and settled there in 1918 until his return to this country some 16 years later. Not that his travelling prevented him from living past his ninetieth birthday, by which time he had retired to Wales.

One of Powys's five brothers, and the one who stayed most in touch with his Dorset roots, was Littleton Charles, who was born only two years after John. Littleton became a real Sherborne character, whose contribution to the momentous Sherborne Pageant of 1905 was particularly treasured by those who were present. Although Littleton was very much a 'Sherborne figure', his contribution to the world at large was limited to influencing the course of those whom he taught over his long and distinguished career that culminated in his headmastership of the Preparatory School.

It was originally the intention of this essay to give a survey of the lives of both John and Littleton, but in the course of research it became clear that an injustice would be done to both if I were to gloss over their respective careers with breakneck speed. So it is that I would refer readers who wish to know more about Littleton's life and times after leaving the School to his autobiography *The Joy of It*, which – as the title suggests – is full of happy reminiscence.

The brothers grew up in Montacute, Somerset (although John was born in Shirley, Derbyshire, in 1872) where his father, C. F. Powys, was appointed vicar in 1886. Powys Senior hailed from Stalbridge and was much attached to Dorset, which may account for his sending his sons to Sherborne for their education – although it should be noted that not all the Powys boys attended the School.

Sherborne School in the latter years of the nineteenth century, in common with all public schools, was an institution that was far less tolerant of non-robust boys than today. Sport was king, academic pursuits fairly incidental to future career prospects, bullying commonplace. Both brothers speak kindly in their autobiographies of the masters of that era, but it is patently clear that John suffered, while Littleton thrived.

It can safely be understood that when John finally arrived at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge in the early 1890s, he had reached a place more in tune with his sensibilities. Littleton followed him to Corpus, where his interests remained

more on the games fields, becoming college captain of both cricket and rugby; he later represented Somerset at rugby. Revealingly, Littleton remembers a conversation that he and his brother had during the one year at Cambridge that they overlapped – which was a rarity since their paths did not often cross. John asked him: 'You never think Littleton, why don't you think? You must think.'

The Powys brothers undoubtedly had differing recollections of Sherborne, Littleton's tinged by the rosier hue of later experience, but it should not be gainsaid that formative years spent in the shadow of some of Dorset's most attractive stone buildings and with the attractions of the rolling countryside all around (then largely untainted by the brash modern developments that are to be found across the county) provided the inspiration for a literary career of lasting resonance and a schoolmastering vocation of some impact.

Early biographers of John Cowper Powys suggested that there might well have been Jewish and African blood running through the family. Undeniably, given the family surname, there was also a streak of Welshness somewhere in the background. Whatever Powys's precise genetic make-up, his writings draw on a number of literary traditions. In addition scholars have noticed that one of the abiding pre-occupations within his *oeuvre* is the idea of mixed blood in one's ancestry.

And his *oeuvre* was prodigious. More recently Powys has been given the label of an 'anti-novelist', that his works are not so much concerned with real life, but with, as it has been said, 'with itself, the artefact ... the realisation that linear narrative is a falsification of experience'. It can surely be argued that Powys falls into a similar category to that of James Joyce (a literary contemporary), although thankfully Powys rarely slips into the impenetrability of *Ulysses*.

Indeed it can be claimed that Powys's approach to writing works of fiction comes far closer than many modern novelists to that of the ancients. The brilliant novel written in Latin by Apuleius, popularly known in English as *The Golden Ass*, synthesises philosophy, religion and literature in a dramatic way that engages the reader on several levels. This is the tradition in which Powys is working, it would seem. Scholars have noted Powys's wide literary grounding – for example, Porius contains references to Ovid and Aristophanes, whilst the naming of a character in one of his poems as 'Teiresias' summons up awareness of the famed blind Greek prophet who appears in countless myths of antiquity.

Powys himself, who unquestionably had the vivid imagination that characterises the most talented storytellers, was confident enough in his own powers to describe himself in *Autobiography* as a 'terrifyingly formidable genius', but in a private letter he contented himself with the tag of 'Inventor of Fairy Tales' which is possibly closer to the truth, although the concept of 'fairy tales' might, erroneously, lead the unwary reader into thinking of Powys's work as shallow and trivial.

What is undoubtedly truth when considering the literary output of John

Cowper Powys is the clear unwillingness of the writer to be tied down by labels, or pigeon holed into a generic category. Philosophy sits alongside fantasy, romance with objectivity. He was an immensely well-read man, a point that comes across vividly in his works; but at the same time his learning is fused with his own observations, imaginations and concepts. One Powys scholar has aptly written that 'He overcrowds his large novels with experience, almost as if he is in rivalry with, or must absorb, all the great, romantic, universal writers of the past.' The only sure way of drawing one's own conclusions is to read the novels themselves.

It is rare now, as the twentieth century rages against the dying of the light, to hear about J. C. Powys – unlike the novels of Joyce or Virginia Woolf (another contemporary author), his works do not seem to have maintained the appeal they once had. This may be result of the tendency towards the 'instant gratification' which readers desire from books now, snatching at them on short haul flights, two-hour train journeys and holiday-time on tropical beaches, although that is perhaps too sweeping a generalisation. More likely is that Powys's work has never been considered in the front rank of British literature, possibly because of years spent 'in exile' in the US.

And yet there may be some clue in what Powys himself wrote when describing his work: 'My writings – novels and all – are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life.' It is perhaps because of the simple truth that Powys's philosophy of life belongs to another era, another time, that his works are less popular. But despite all of that, he remains one of the finest literary products that has scurried through the Courts as a schoolboy, and one whose talent surely merits rediscovery.

Robert Hands

A bust of JCP used to grace the library of his old school. Some years ago, when the Society asked to borrow it for an exhibition, there was a willing but slightly confused response, because it could not, at first, be found. Robert Hands left Sherborne in 1992; I felt that members would be heartened by the outspoken and perceptive appreciation of so young an Old Shirburnian. *Ed.*

Members' News and Notes

We send all good wishes to Sven-Erik Täckmark who, we were sorry to learn, was admitted to hospital in Stockholm just before Christmas, but are pleased to hear that he is now convalescing and making a good recovery.

*****

Theodora Scutt, adopted daughter of T. F. Powys, responded to my query as to whether Laurence Coupe (*Newsletter* No 35) was right to assert that the title of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* was inspired by Jane Austen's *Emma*. She writes: 'Yes, he

is right, Daddy did name *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* from Jane Austen's *Emma*. How I know this, is because Daddy told me so.' So we have the answer, as nearly as possible from the author's mouth.

*****

Neil Lee has never been one to miss an opportunity to trumpet the Powys cause in JCP's native Derbyshire and he was not slow to take advantage of the media interest in the latest *Glastonbury* reprint. His article in the *Matlock Mercury* was headed: **Fame at last for a Derbyshire author – 35 years after death**. We have few enough opportunities to jump up and down in celebration, and I think that when we can – we should.

*****

Admirers of the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner will not be surprised to learn, that like John Cowper, she has a book in *The Daily Telegraph* Books of the Century. Michael Holroyd nominated *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*. An astonishing book that, were it not set in the South Seas, might almost have been inspired by TFP.

*****

Somehow, *Country Living* Magazine has heard of our Llewelyn's Birthday celebration and want to send a literary journalist along next year. All are welcome.

*****

I recently walked the footpath from West Chaldon to Ringstead and so am able to report on the current state of affairs at the site of the Amoco oil-rig. I was pleasantly surprised to find that apart from a metalled road (stripped of its security paraphernalia and barred by a new farm gate) and what appears to be a somewhat restored Down Barn, there was nothing to suggest that the rural peace of the place had ever been violated. However, I fear that when the price of oil rises Amoco or some other multi-national giant will want to get its oily hands on what we hold dear. JB.

*****

A new high quality paperback version of *Wolf Solent* has recently been issued by Vintage Books in the United States and Canada at $15 and $21 respectively – roughly £9.50. It is a version of the 1961 Macdonald edition using the Introduction by Robertson Davies from the 1984 Harper Collins edition, and is well produced, with a reproduction of Stanley Spencer's *Bellrope Meadow, Cookham* as a cover picture. Copies should be available by special import from major booksellers or via one of the growing number of internet bookstores.

*****

Arjen Mulder has recently written from Holland about a new translation of *Wolf Solent* to be published in Dutch later this year.

*****

The late Mr E. E. Bissell, apart from his interest in the Powyses, W. H. Davies, Swinburne and many others, also collected childrens' books. At Sothebys

recently, his first edition of *The Wind in the Willows*, inscribed by Kenneth Grahame for his son, fetched £44,000, a world record for a children's book.

*****

The December/January issue of *London Magazine* (Vol. 38, Nos 9 & 10) contains an interesting item by Elizabeth Berridge (wife of the writer Reginald Moore) on the correspondence between Moore and JCP from the early 1940s until 1952. It was Moore who originally commissioned the long article which eventually became *Rabelais*, and who published JCP's essay on Finnegans Wake in *Modern Reading* in 1943. Interestingly, the same issue also has a very interesting short article by Timothy Hyman on the contemporary Japanese painter Jiro Osuga.

*****

We are pleased to welcome the following new members who have joined the Society since the last Conference and AGM:

Michael Allen, Railway Cottage, Black Mountain, NSW 2365, Australia
Ruth Armstrong, 8 Lyndhurst Road, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 7QR
John Bell, 5 Dongola Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 9HQ
Keith Bradford, Flat 12, Hays Park, Sedgehill, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 9JR
Mrs Rosemary Dickens, 2 Clearbury Close, Odstock, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 4NX
Jean Michel Dubè, le Grand Beauvais, 72700 St Georges du Bois, France
David Gervais, High Timbers, Petersfield Road, Monkwood, Alresford, Hants SO24 0HB
Paul Gillingham, Springfield Cottage, East Chaldon, Dorset DT2 8DN
Nigel Haines, 22 The Village, Old Eastwick, York YO3 9SL
Norman Jones, 29 Digby Mansions, Bridge Road, Hammersmith, London W6 9DE
Michael Kowalewski, 14 Grange Road, London SW13 9RE
Adrian Lake, 243 Martin Street, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S6 9DR
Stephen Mottram, 4 Merrylees Drive, Barnstaple, Devon EX32 9DQ
Barry & Lisa Russell, 04-219 Adelaide Street, Kingston, Ontario K7K 1Y7, Canada

Notes from the Collection

The Collection has received a most welcome response to our November *Newsletter* request to hear from anyone who might have one of JCP's walking sticks. Dr Raymond Garlick has offered us one that was given him 'either by Mr. Powys or by Phyllis after his death'. Dr Garlick goes on to describe it: 'it is 38″ in length, of a very heavy red-brown wood (possibly mahogany?) Completely straight, tapering from the metal ferrule to an "ethnic" carved top.' It is a fine addition to the growing Collection and we are very grateful to Raymond Garlick.

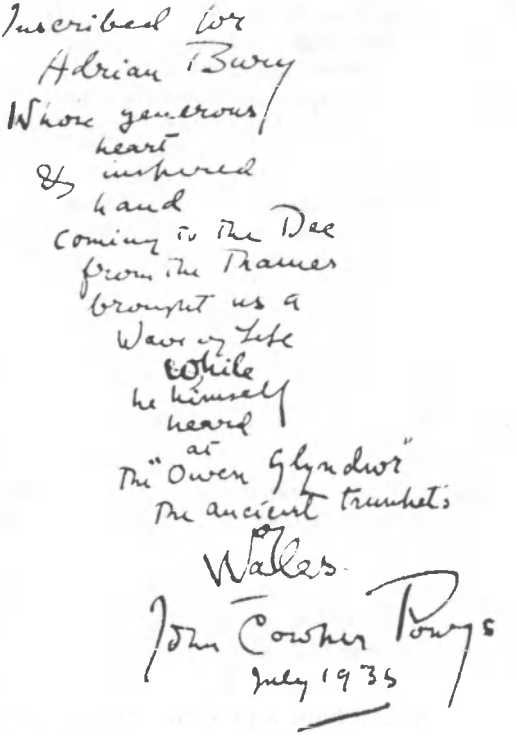
I must apologise for inadvertently misleading readers in my November report. It suggested that we did not have a Viking edition of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. We do indeed have a pristine copy in the Feather Gift. Professor Mitchell added further to the completeness of the collection by giving us a copy *with a dust jacket*. Bibliophiles like Francis Feather, Larry Mitchell and Griffin Beale will appreciate the distinction. We treasure both copies. **Morine Krissdóttir, Curator**

Hearing the Ancient Trumpets
John Cowper Powys and Adrian Bury

A brief account of a meeting in 1935 of two very dissimilar writers; one in his 60s, novelist, lecturer, sage, recently returned from the United States to an almost reclusive life in his Welsh hideaway; the other, younger man an admirer from the world of Fleet Street journalism. I would like to thank Dr Krissdóttir for her kindness in providing me with unpublished material from JCP's diaries.

In the 1970s when the Charing Cross Road bookstalls were still in their heyday I came across, for a few shillings, a well-worn 1935 copy of *A Glastonbury Romance*. My pleasure was compounded by finding on the fly-leaf an extremely elegant inscription from the author dated July 1935, reproduced below.

There could be no doubt about the authenticity of this inscription and it will be evident that this is no ordinary dedication; elegant and glowing, it resounds with JCP's impassioned language. It cries out for elucidation. Who is Adrian Bury? Why has JCP written in quite these terms? The sparse Powys literature then available to me afforded no clues.


Inscribed for
Adrian Bury
Whose generous
heart
& inspired
hand
coming to the Dee
from the Thames
brought us a
Wave of Life
while
he himself
heard
at
the "Owen Glyndwr"
the ancient trumpets
Wales.
John Cowper Powys
July 1935

But, at last in 1995 in Dr Krissdóttir's *Petrushka and the Dancer*, I found two references to an Adrian Bury. The first occurs in the entry for Tuesday 9 July 1935 – the same month as the date of the inscription: 'we have had such a nice letter from that critic of the *Argosy* called Adrian Bury.' The second entry, almost a year later, Wednesday 3 June 1936: 'When TT woke up ... I stood at the foot of the bed and I shall ever recall the look of the Beech-branches & emerald leaves against the grey rainy valley & the look of her face with eyes rather swollen & blurred & expression rather like the portrait of her by Mr. Adrian [Bury] over her head.'

There could be no doubt surely that this had to be 'my' Adrian Bury. The Diary entries confirmed that Bury had corresponded with, and then, met JCP and Phyllis Playter in their Welsh retreat and had known them sufficiently well to paint the latter's portrait. I felt impelled to write to Dr Krissdóttir c/o The Carcanet Press to ask if anything more was known about

Adrian Bury. Her kind reply – in addition to introducing me to The Powys Society! – shed considerable light on matters. She generously reproduced for me an unpublished diary entry for 27 July 1935:

> Up at 7.30. For we had Mr. Bury here till eleven when I took him nigh back to the town. He is staying at the 'Owen Glyndwyr' [*sic*]. He is a reviewer and journalist and also a painter, a landscape painter in water-colours and an admirer of old Crome and Constable & Cotman & Wilson. He is also a poet and one who has lived free and easy in Italy. I went to the town where I bought butter and bread at Humphreys. Back by the Gorsedd Stones but not the Lane. At Eleven Mr. A. Bury came and stayed all day for he is very genial and human and sociable gregarious friendly. The extreme opposite of the way Providence has made the T.T. and Me! But he is warm hearted and seems to have no idea what it is to be 'funny' and withdrawn & secretive & lonely as we both are – no idea what it is to be Introverted & crazy and hermit-like as we are. He is warm, affectionate and lies back with aplomb on himself and life. He is very hostile to the Russian Revolution as it has come to be. He has a lot of sentiment and warm humanity & a certain emotional way of speaking of Beauty of which he is an advocate. He detests all Modern Art – there is no 'Beauty' in Airplanes, and denies that 'beauty' must have a use; and asks what is the use of Michelangelo's pictures in the Sistine Chapel? The T.T. gave him lunch and he made a coloured sketch of me lying on the couch & then I took him and the Old and Bessy the bitch to the wooden bridge where we saw the swan. We saw a lovely sight like an old picture – a Hay wagon with men and women in it crossing the River Alwen. It was a most poetic sight. Left the bridge so as not to tantalise the swan who came to be fed. It rained – He, A. Bury, painted me in grim humour. He brought us Sonnets for us to see.

Dr Krissdóttir added that the diaries also recorded that later that year – 19 December – the Burys came to tea: 'He gave us a picture and Adrian told us he was a nephew of the great artist who made the Picadilly Eros.'

Thereafter Mr Bury drops out of the Powys world leaving us with JCP's vivid word portrait of an outgoing, enthusiastic, strongly-opinionated admirer who, in a sense burst upon the reclusive JCP and TT momentarily sharing their interests, leaving behind portraits of them both and taking with him the signed copy of *A Glastonbury Romance* which I was to unearth in the Charing Cross Road forty-odd years later.

Dr Krissdóttir suggested that further research might be of interest to Society members as nothing else was known of Adrian Bury. However, my searches in the London Library and British Library, while leading me to an extensive bibliography of an Adrian Bury consistent with the interests of JCP's visitor, nevertheless established no definitive link with him.

Frustratingly there the matter rested until recently, when still haunting the same bookstalls, I found a remaindered copy of a work entitled *Just a Moment, Time* and sub-titled 'Some Recollections of a Versatile Life in Art, Literature and Journalism' by none other than Adrian Bury, RWS. A quick perusal showed that the early chapters dealt with the author's relationship with his uncle Sir Alfred Gilbert of Eros fame! So here at last was what I had been looking for. This had to be 'my' Adrian Bury! Then astonishingly, hurriedly turning the pages, staring at me was the clinching evidence. Among chapters on such as Russell Flint, Alfred Munnings and Annigoni was – incredibly – Chapter 17 'John Cowper Powys' with its accompanying black-and-white reproduction of a portrait of JCP captioned 'Water-colour by Adrian Bury (1935)'.

Here quite remarkably, we have Bury's own account of his meeting to set alongside that of JCP and what is so striking is how the two quite separate accounts corroborate one another and explain the wording of the inscription. According to Bury he was a journalist with the *Sunday Mirror* and the *Sunday Pictorial*, in his early 40s, when having read *Autobiography* and *In Defence of Sensuality*, he wrote 'out of the blue' in the spring of 1935 to JCP tentatively asking if he might call on the author while in the area. It cannot have been completely out of the blue as JCP records in his diary for 12 December 1934, writing a number of letters including 'one to Mr. Adrian Bury especially who has written the best Review I have had in the Argosy' (see *The Dorset Year*, 138). Long since defunct, the *Argosy* was a monthly magazine featuring short stories and review articles. JCP must have had an advance copy because Bury's review – of *Autobiography* – actually appeared in the January 1935 issue. One can understand why JCP wanted to contact Bury; the review was indeed profusely enthusiastic. Bury was clearly a sympathetic reader and his review does indeed capture the spirit of Powys's life and works.

> Mr. Powys ... a sort of Scholar Gypsy ... has acted as the interpreter of human genius bringing light into dark and groping minds ... Here is an Autobiography that must be among the few immortal books of our time.

Little wonder that, in response to Bury's request to visit, Powys 'returned a cordial invitation'.

As we know from JCP's journal the visit to Corwen duly took place and was a great success despite the fact that JCP and TT can hardly have settled into their new home having only been there a matter of a few weeks. In Bury's account he stayed at the local inn – 'an antiquary's delight ... with undulating oak floors and crooked walls'. In the morning he called on JCP.

> He made me very welcome and took me up to the room that afforded a study and library. Along the window, which opened upon a splendid view of the Welsh countryside, was a couch and it was the author's habit to write lying down on the couch. We discussed those books by him that I had read...and I enjoyed being allowed to enter the mind of a great writer

and one of the most widely read students of literature. His knowledge, like his memory, was universal. A profound humanist with a passion for nature and the gift of illuminating every point ... with poetic eloquence, it was exciting to listen to what he had to say about the great masters of literature, past and present, or about anything.

Bury goes on to say that he particularly recalled JCP's reading of Walt Whitman's elegy on the death of Lincoln. His account of the day agrees with JCP's even to the time of departure – 11 p.m. – although Powys recalls taking him back 'nigh to the town' whereas Bury's memory was of his 'waving me farewell from his doorstep and asking me to come again on the morrow'. The following day confirmed the rapport between these two who might have seemed to be poles apart. Bury even relates some recollections of their walk together; of the scene like an old master with the hay cart and the peasant family and the splendid sky with fast travelling clouds; 'Like a Gainsborough picture. How true the old masters of landscape were ...' he recalled JCP remarking.

In the evening after the meal, Powys having had his customary eggs and milk, Bury did a water colour portrait of JCP with which, even if it 'showed him in a grim humour', the sitter expressed himself delighted. We may imagine JCP later reclining on his couch writing up his diary for the day. Perhaps back at the ancient village inn, Bury was similarly occupied; his account of his meeting in his memoir of over 30 years later so accords with his host's that it must have been based on notes made at the time.

Returning to JCP's inscription, we can see now why JCP might refer to the younger man's 'generous Heart & inspired hand' and bringing with him a 'Wave of Life'. What makes Bury's chapter such a revelation however is when he tells us of how he told JCP of his experience on the first night at the inn :

> After dinner, and feeling travel-tired I went to bed at ten o'clock and fell asleep. I awoke, and while assembling my unfamiliar bearings, I heard trumpet music as if blown far away in the distance. And then a deep, dark silence. Had I been dreaming ? No, I was wide awake ...The time was midnight. I was mystified ...

On hearing this, JCP's reaction was remarkable:

> Never [says Bury] have I seen anybody so excited over a piece of information. He got up from his couch and jigged about in ecstasy, put out his hand and shook mine warmly, releasing it and then taking it again.
>
> It was truth. They were indeed the trumpets of Owen Glyndwyr. They are heard only once in a hundred years, and you were chosen to hear them. Most fortunate, most privileged man!

Here then, the final jigsaw piece of that unique inscription. I visualise the excited novelist snatching up a new copy of his recently reprinted novel, eagerly inscribing it in his inimitable manner to the uncomprehending younger man who, unwittingly, had heard 'the ancient trumpets of Wales', and thrusting it into

his new friend's hands as he departed into the night. Bury was catching the London train in the morning. They were to meet again later that year when Bury presented them with TT's portrait, but thereafter their paths separated.

Both men were to live into great old age. Bury continued to produce a stream of sonnets, odes and works on English artists such as Rowlandson, Wilson, Towne, as well as an account of his experiences as an air-raid warden in the Blitz; in all, the British Library catalogue lists nearly thirty items. Some of his watercolours hang in the Royal Watercolour Society's permanent collection. He died in his hundredth year, in 1991.

His copy of *A Glastonbury Romance*, grubby now and without its dust jacket, but bearing JCP's inspired inscription, survives on my bookshelf as a tangible relic of that first meeting.

Patrick L. Rennison

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bury, A., *Just a Moment, Time: Some Recollections of a Versatile Life in Art, Literature and Journalism* (London: Charles Skilton Ltd, 1967)

—, 'Books of Moment', *Argosy* January 1935, 85–7

Krissdóttir, M., ed., *Petrushka and the Dancer: The Diaries of John Cowper Powys 1929–1939* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995)

— & Peers, R., ed., *The Dorset Year: The Diary of John Cowper Powys June 1934–July 1935* (Kilmersdon, Somerset: The Powys Press, 1998)

Paganism is marching towards the millennium

This article first appeared in The Express *of 28 September 1998 and is reprinted with permission. Paul Carter is a member of the Society.*

Nearly 2,000 years after the birth of Christ, some of his oldest rivals appear to be making a comeback. According to its enthusiasts, paganism is the fastest-growing religion in Britain today, with more than 120,000 practising adherents.

Hospitals and universities are appointing pagan chaplains and in Manchester a follower of the pagan Wiccan faith has been made a magistrate. In the West Country, pagans suddenly seem to outnumber retired majors as a succession of druids and witches emerges to announce plans for celebrating the Cornish eclipse next summer.

To some this is deeply disturbing. *Express* columnist Peter Hitchens recently blamed 'the rebirth of paganism' for the wild behaviour of young Britons in Ibiza.

For once, he was missing the point. The yobs who vomit their way through Ibiza's streets, pausing only to wave their private parts at the locals, are unlikely to have ever had a spiritual thought in their heads. Their priorities are relentlessly crass and unimaginative: more beer, more drugs, more sex. Anyone who goes to the trouble of calling themselves a pagan is taking life far more seriously.

Pagans have always had a bad press. Their name comes from the Latin

'paganus', a country bumpkin, the dismissive tag that Roman troops used for civilians. Early Christians called themselves 'soldiers of Christ' and copied military usage to describe those who clung to the old religions. Today's pagans are a disparate bunch – including witches, druids, shamans and Odinists (followers of the old Norse myths) – but there are some common threads. To be a pagan is to worship nature, loving and honouring the earth. Great attention is paid to passing cycles of the year, starting at Samhain, the pagan New Year, on Hallowe'en.

Pagans believe that moral laws are made by man, not God, but adopt one common principal: 'Do what you will if it harms none.' Although they draw on religious traditions that long pre-date Christianity, it is left to individual believers to fashion their own idea of the divine.

Some pagans, no doubt, are nutcases. Others are charlatans, setting themselves up as seers to feed off the gullible for money or prestige. Most are honourable seekers after truth.

Whether they will find what they seek is arguable. Paganism's all-inclusiveness, its lack of any central creed, denies it the spiritual and intellectual rigour of Christianity, Judaism or Islam. It lacks the moral complexity of those great faiths and has no concept of judgement or redemption. There also seems to be an inherent absurdity in a religion that seeks to draw strength from ancient traditions but says anything goes by way of ritual or belief (a point some would make about the modern Church of England).

For all that, it should not be dismissed. Since I came close to death from cancer 10 years ago, I have drawn constant inspiration from the Dorset writer Llewelyn Powys, who was proud to call himself a pagan. But this is a paganism without gods or goddesses, or any other supernatural ingredient.

Powys found his religion in nothing more or less than the adoration of life – 'the detached worship of animal life, of bird life, of fish life ... the unuttered sense of glory in the chance of existence'. This, he wrote, was the religion below all religions. He called it 'natural worship', a constantly heightened awareness of the intricate, unstable world of which we are so fleetingly part. For Powys, who died in 1939 after years of fighting tuberculosis, there was nothing stranger or more worthy of celebration than the cosmic accident of being alive: 'How heart-piercing, how shocking, how supremely beautiful is this unexplained wavering movement that troubles all that is.'

Rejecting any idea of divine stewardship or immortality, Powys believed that our most solemn duty was to savour every experience of our short lives. 'The simplest actions should be undertaken with a full realisation of their significance, as uncommon opportunities of natural piety never to come again. To pour out water from a jug, to break bread, to open a bottle of wine, are lordly offices.'

This is surely the true essence of paganism. Though Powys would have scoffed at computer programmers who dress up as druids after work, or aromatherapists

who fancy themselves as white witches, they would have had his sympathy. In their sometimes silly ways, these are people trying to overcome what Powys called 'our congenital apathy, our lumpish disposition to take for granted the deep mystery of existence'. Today's pagans may be misguided or ridiculous, or both, but they are brave souls who treat life with due reverence and refuse to believe, like so many, that there is nothing more to it than material acquisition.

As Wordsworth says in one of his greatest sonnets, the world is too much with us. By devoting our lives to the dreary business of 'getting and spending', we deaden ourselves and 'lay waste our powers'.

To all the profligate beauties of nature – 'the sea that bares her bosom to the moon; the winds that will be howling at all hours' – we are indifferent, out of tune.

> Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Paul Carter

Letters to the Editor

In response to the request, in the last Newsletter, for information about the an early advertisement for The Powys Society Sven-Erik Täckmark and Joan Stevens have supplied interesting information about the beginnings of the Society and Barbara Spencer who began it.

20 Lyndhurst Gardens, London N.W.3.
November 24th 1969

Dear Mr. Täckmark,

I was very interested to get your postcard. You are right. Few people read J. C. Powys, though his death a few years ago roused some interest and *Wolf Solent* is now available in paperback. My own interest was roused some sixteen years ago, when my first novel was published, and I was astounded to find that several critics spoke of its likeness to the work of T. F. Powys, and suggested (kindly) that I had been influenced by him. I had never read a word of any Powys at the time, but I was born and brought up in Dorset, and now have a small house there. I at once read some TF and saw, indeed, that there was some similarity.

It set me reading Llewelyn next, and I found that his widow was still living on the Dorset coast. I wrote to her and we became very close friends. She made me her literary executor. She was as you probably know, once editor of the American literary magazine, *The Dial*. She died two years ago, and I then took over boxes of letters, and thirty volumes of her journals, dating from 1923 onwards. I had

already read some portions of them, and felt very strongly that they ought to be published. I wrote an introduction, and made some selections, and I then tried an English and an American publisher. They were interested, but quite certain such a book would never sell.

I then let matters slide rather. I thought it might be best to try to arouse some interest in the literary world, so I am preparing a much shorter version of what I did, and am hoping that *The Atlantic Monthly* in USA and the *London Magazine* here, may take these. Alyse's diaries are fascinating and those who have heard or read even a little of them are most insistent that they should be published.

Barbara Spencer is a young teacher in the north of England. She read *Wolf Solent*, and was so overcome by it that she decided to form a Powys Society. This she did, and it met for about two years, rather sporadically. However, a few months ago, she managed to get it on a more official basis, and persuaded Angus Wilson to be the President. She admires my novels, and knows of my great interest in the Powys family, and asked me to give the first lecture to the Society. I thought this was a golden opportunity, and gave a paper on Alyse with some extracts from the journals. That is the story so far.

Now a most interesting American professor has come over here for a sabbatical year, and we have met, and discussed the Powyses, for he is researching on them and hopes to write a definitive critical biography of TF I think he may be helpful in getting something done about the journals at least in USA.

I hope all this is of some interest to you. If there is any Swedish literary periodical that would be interested to take and translate an article on some aspect of the Powys brothers, do tell me, but I fear it would not raise enough interest. Oddly enough, John Cowper Powys is held in the highest esteem in France. I would never have thought the French would read his great sprawling novels.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Manning

Joan Stevens *remembered seeing the advertisement in question, and at first thought it had been placed in the* Times Literary Supplement, *in which she thought Barbara Spencer had advertised. However, a few days later she found the actual press cutting, taken from* The Daily Telegraph *of 12 August 1969. Joan was present at Rosemary Manning's lecture which was given in the Friends Meeting House in Hampstead. I imagine that the article in* The Powys Review *3 contains the substance of that talk. Readers of* The Cry of a Gull *will have noted that Michael Adam dedicated it to Rosemary Manning. Ed.*

Paul Carter writes: Could there be a connection between the current Hollywood film 'Meet Joe Black' and Theodore's *Unclay*? The film – starring Brad Pitt and Anthony Hopkins, I think – apparently tells the story of Death taking human form and treating himself to a holiday on earth in the company of his next

intended victim. Familiar, eh? One of the newspaper reviews (all of which are scathing, but that's not the point) says the film is a remake of one from 1934 called 'Death Takes a Holiday'. This, according to my Halliwell video guide, was taken from 'a popular play' of the 1920s – *Unclay* was published in 1931 – is it totally idiotic to wonder whether Theodore might have been inspired by this same 'popular play' that spawned a cinema blockbuster?

It is hard to imagine Theodore being inspired by anything beyond the Bible, local villagers and his own weird internal world. And my cultural ignorance is so vast that for all I know the 'death takes a holiday' storyline could be one of the great staples of world literature, making my excitement at finding a modern echo in this film rather fatuous. However, I'd rather raise the point and look stupid than not have it raised at all.

Bev Craven writes: I have a suggestion for the Powys *Newsletter*. Knowing that many Society members have duplicate Powys and related books and others have very few, especially new members, Sarah and I thought it would be helpful to include a list, with ISBN etc., of books currently in print. The books in print need not be exhaustive – that could delay it indefinitely – but new members will want to get their hands on whatever is available. To save space, members with books for sale could be listed by name and telephone number in a column headed **Phone for Lists**.

I will be interested to know how members react to this suggestion Ed.

The Hunchback *

It was while waiting for the little steamer that plies between the mainland and Cape Ferret that I first saw the creature who was to project me, by a single glance, into a new plane of consciousness.

The usual people were drifting past. All these French watering-places have the same barber-pole gaiety. Sashed and tam-o'-shanterred boatmen were soliciting trade. Women too. Then some young girls passed, looking like figures out of a Greek frieze: sleeveless tunics, bare feet in sandals, and filleted short hair. They walked against the wind, with that stiff archaic grace that is authentic youth. It was when they had passed that I caught sight of the dwarf, and in his eyes was a look of creative appreciation such as one catches occasionally from some passer before the Elgin marbles, or before the entrance blocks of some Egyptian tomb.

The whole process of art was in his glance – the immediate creation of a spiritual equivalent: the making of them symbolic; a re-creation of them in the

* *I am grateful to Jacqueline Peltier for discovering this short story by Frances Gregg in* The Dial *of July 1925. So far as she can ascertain it has not appeared in any collection. I am also grateful to Oliver Wilkinson for kindly approving its publication in the* Newsletter. *Ed.*

abstract relating them to that mysterious and infinite something we call Beauty. But it was an approach to Beauty of a specific and peculiar kind.

There is, in a certain type of the art of all civilizations, but perhaps more especially in all primitives, an immediate preoccupation with the reluctant and hidden beauty of existence: a beauty that has no relation to the actual material world, to what is known as 'reality'; that is like the sound that lies in the air from the inadvertent touching of a stringed instrument, or like a flame that leaps into the air and is gone – a promise, a hope, a myth. From age to age there are artists whose work gives out this haunting note, who make the same gesture, a gesture at once exultant and exhausted. Botticelli, perhaps, most nearly made the thing finite and tangible in the tranquil ecstasy of his Venus rising from the waves, and in his Primavera. Dante breathes his credo doubly shrouded from the lips of Beatrice. And Leonardo, in treacherous fealty, like one who kissed a blood-drained cheek, speaks from the smiling eyes and lips of his St John and his Mona Lisa, oddly combining both love and betrayal.

This dwarf was such as these. He knew that ecstasy. He knew too that melancholy, that blight, that withdrawn, rejected yearning, that proud, unbitter, loss of hope. There was in him a mad purity of receptivity, and a stark loneliness that were best hidden. He had so much that I did not dare to pity him, though his body was so extraordinarily hunched and broken.

He strode about, seeming to flaunt his deformity as though he had achieved it in some monstrous rites. His head was beautiful, as is often the case with hunchbacks, and wonderfully fair. So far south, where there is swarthiness shadowing the people, it was odd to see a coppery head and lancing blue eyes. I was pondering upon this when suddenly he looked toward me. For an instant our eyes met in an appalling intimacy.

There is a strange and miraculous thing that can happen with the meeting of eyes, as though some ethereal fluid went from brain to brain, bathing them in a sure and sudden comprehension. Our eyes had fled from the encounter almost as I realised that I had started back with an obvious and vulgar recoil, with some swift repulsion.

It would be hard to say what had happened. There are certain decencies, certain reserves that one has even with one's own spirit, certain hurts that must be dissembled, certain laments too pitiful to be acknowledged. This all-knowing face had peered in upon my solitude.

If a mummy had spoken out of its glass show-case, if eyes that had gone to dust had raised their parchment lids, if the stretched lips of death had spoken, I should not have been more startled, nor more outraged. Sometimes one seems to fly back upon oneself in wild disorder, hurtling back through aeons to some fastness of innocence. But I found no refuge.

So worlds hurled themselves down through steep darkness.

The season was over when I saw him next on the jetty where the fishing smacks

come in. Fish are always to be had cheap there. People come with newspapers and carry away great packages for fifty centimes or a franc.

The dwarf was there, swaggering in his hip-boots, making overlong steps that lurched his ridiculous body. A little leering smile flickered upon the firm and sensual lips, but he looked thin and pinched with hunger. He had no newspaper and took what they gave him without money, headless trodden scraps, in bare hands.

That he had brought no newspaper was like a cry to me. If no one should choose to give to him, well, he had not come prepared. Thus he kept ahead of humiliation. A sailor, with a jerk of his shoulders, indicated a heap of scraps that he might have. The hunch-back gave a single, quick, calculating stare, then gathered them together, and began scooping the entrails out with his fingers. All the while he kept me in surveillance.

We made each other uncomfortable. So I left and drifted on to the next town, and then further. I thought to evade his gaze, but all the world is not space enough.

Frances Gregg

John Cowper Powys in New York

John Cowper Powys first visited America in early 1905 and although his early lecturing trips were often quite brief he spent increasing amounts of time there until he was virtually fully resident with only occasional holiday trips back to Europe to visit his family. During this period his lecturing took him to virtually every state in the Union, and although he stayed regularly in many major cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco, it was New York that he increasingly made his base, and to New York that he inevitably returned from his long lecture tours, and where he lived for many years with Phyllis Playter until they retired to Hillsdale in early 1930, finally leaving the United States to return to England in 1934 after almost 30 years of American experience. Having a little time to spare in New York myself during recent visits, I was pleased to find that much of JCPs New York is still to be seen, and that his trail may still be followed.

Cities like New York or London can be vast and intimidating, so those who live in them often tend to concentrate themselves in small areas which they then come to know well. JCP was no exception to this general rule, and although he did occasionally live outside this area, his New York can largely be characterised as a small south-pointing triangle, with its base on West 12th Street and its apex at Washington Square, with Fifth Avenue and Greenwich Avenue as its east and west sides respectively. This is the quintessential centre of Greenwich Village, the traditionally bohemian and artistic quarter of Lower Manhattan, where the clear

geometric grid pattern of the streets of the newer City to the north breaks down into a less coherent pattern of much older streets and houses, particularly on the west side, towards the old abandoned steamship landings on the Hudson River. The streets and houses in this whole area are still much as John Cowper would have known them in the early decades of the century. Tall stately houses of fine clean brick, with a distinctive Dutch flavour to their architecture, in broad streets lined with mature shady trees.

According to *Autobiography* (512),

> In my first American visits I used to stay with my most hospitable American friend, Mr Robert S. Bright, the eloquent Philadelphian lawyer ... Later, however, I lived, along with an ideal companion of my own blood, in very tall but very tiny rooms, looking out across the grassy lawn of the First Presbyterian Church, upon the lower portion of Fifth Avenue.

This 'ideal companion' is, of course, Marian Powys who arrived in New York in late 1913. The First Presbyterian Church of New York is at the north-east corner of the junction between Fifth Avenue and West 12th Street, so the apartment is most likely to have been in the building on the south-east corner overlooking the church. Marian later moved to 82 West 12th Street, on the opposite side of the road, and then back to 12 West 12th Street, almost next to the church – a building since demolished to make way for Church House, which according to a plaque on the wall was rebuilt in 1958. The remaining houses, particularly on the north (even numbered) side are all tall, distinguished, full-fronted buildings, many now designated National Heritage Monuments.

A few blocks further to the south, Fifth Avenue comes to an end under the triumphal Washington Arch at the entrance to shady Washington Square, where Marian opened her first New York lace shop. Down Fifth Avenue, through the archway and into the square where a vast fountain now stands, were the terminus and turnabout for the Fifth Avenue omnibuses. JCP regularly walked in the vast open space of Washington Square, which is still as full of wonderful eccentric characters as in the 1920s (*Autobiography*, 570), and Llewelyn frequently came here to write. Another easy walk from 12th Street was to the old Jefferson Market (572), which is a fine red brick building in the gothic style that later became a Womens Courthouse and is now a branch of the New York Public Library. More importantly, immediately across the road from this building is the entrance to the small shady cul-de-sac of Patchin Place. This is a tiny alley of plain 3-storey flat-fronted yellow brick houses, fronted by the characteristic New York iron fire escapes, facing each other across a narrow courtyard, but secluded from the bustle of the 10th Street shops by its own wrought-iron gates. The original noisy overhead railway on its iron supports running along nearby Sixth Avenue has long been demolished, but otherwise the area can have seen little change.

Alyse Gregory was living in the 'ground floor back' of 4 Patchin Place when Llewelyn first met her in 1921, and later they shared the whole of the ground floor

together. Before this Llewelyn had been living with JCP and Marian a few blocks to the north at 439 West 21st Street in the area now known as Chelsea, before moving to a tiny attic flat at 148 Waverly Place, a short street running westwards from the northern end of Washington Square, very close to Patchin Place, and so began the long Powys association with this little street. Later John and Phyllis Playter were to live in the 'top floor front' at No 4 until they moved to Hillsdale. Later still this room was used by Rex Hunter, Gamel Woolsey's former husband. Gamel herself was living immediately opposite at No 5 Patchin Place in 1928 when Phyllis found a room there for Llewelyn and Alyse on their return to New York from Dorset – and the rest, as they say, is history. Patchin Place itself can have altered very little since those days, although presumably the apartments now all have bathrooms, and are larger than the single room with alcove that JCP refers to so lovingly in the 1929 *Diary*. The tall ailanthus trees lining both sides of the court still tap lightly on the top floor windows, and although there is a plaque on the front of No 4 it is to commemorate the popular poet E. E. Cummings, who also lived there during this period (on the first floor), and not John Cowper Powys. It remains a wonderfully quiet backwater, yet only yards from the local bustle of shops, bars and restaurants in fashionable Greenwich Village, and with easy access to the whole of New York.

In *Autobiography* JCP comments:

> I used to go to Washington Square from Patchin Place, either by way of Tenth Street, where I made a fetish – or even a totem – of a poplar tree that grew by the pavements edge, or by way of Eleventh Street, where I always stopped to talk to Rachel Phillips, who about the time I was being born at Shirley was being buried in this little Portuguese-Hebrew burying-ground and to whose gentle bones I acquired by degrees a faithful and almost romantic attachment. (569)

Well, it has to be said that neither route is the most direct way to Washington Square, and whilst it is now far too late to be able to identify the poplar tree, certainly on the right of West 11th Street the tiny Second Cemetery of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, in use from 1805–29, can still be visited.

The New York of JCPs imagination, as depicted in the second part of *After My Fashion*, is set just a few blocks to the south of Patchin Place, but 1 Charlton Street, at the junction with Varick Street – itself a continuation of Seventh Avenue - where Richard Storm and Nelly Moreton had their ill-fated home, can still be visited, and although new developments mean it is no longer possible to see down the full length of Varick Street to the magnificent 60-storey Woolworth Building (completed in 1913) at 233 Broadway, as it almost certainly was in the early 1920s (*AMF*, 170), much else in the area is still recognisably the same – including all the Subway stations mentioned by JCP. The published letters and diaries give many more clues to other nearby Manhattan buildings known by John Cowper, but as our time is limited we must now follow him out into the country.

In September 1929 John and Phyllis first visited Hillsdale 100 miles north of New York along the Hudson River, deep in the Up-State countryside and the following year they sub-let the Patchin Place room and went to live in the tiny timber-frame cottage they called Phudd Bottom. Last autumn I was fortunate to be able to make this journey myself together with Marian Powys's granddaughter Katey Powys Grey, who herself lives only a few miles to the east in the rolling Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. This is still a comparatively open landscape of low wooded hills and cultivated valleys, with infrequent farms and cottages still showing the influence of the original Dutch and later German settlers. Close by was the home of the poet Arthur Ficke and his wife Gladys, who originally advanced John and Phyllis the money to purchase Phudd Bottom (*Diary*, 5 January 1930), whilst in the nearby village of Austerlitz the poet Edna St Vincent Millay lived with her husband Eugene Boissevain.

Phudd Bottom itself stands near the junction of three very minor roads and can still be difficult to find as it is neither near Philmont nor Hillsdale as indicated in the postal address used by JCP, but is close to the tiny hamlet of Harlemville. It is best approached from the Taconic State Highway, the main north-south route to the east of the Hudson River. Leave at the Philmont exit then head east towards North Hillsdale for about a mile to Harlemville. Continue through the village, past the new Rudolph Steiner School, and follow the road which curves sharply to the right at the top of the village. After the corner, at the small cemetery on the left, take the first road to the right, and the tiny white-painted cottage of Phudd Bottom is still distinctively recognisable about a 100 yards further along on the right. A few yards further along the road forks again, with the tiny German Cemetery located between the two branches of the road.

The cottage is built on the side of the hill and separated from the road by a small garden and a white picket fence. The stream to the front of the house has now gone, as has the Krick's chicken farm immediately opposite, to be replaced by a smarter timber-framed house, but the area is still clearly recognisable from the letters and diaries of the period. The hillside above the house is now probably far more wooded than it was in JCPs time, and has largely been left to grow wild, but it is still possible to find a way up to the top from a few yards beyond the cottage, but it is a good half hour scramble. We went on a wonderful bright fall day, and the contrast between the gold bracken and the dark spruce firs was wonderful. Towards the top of the hill are some of the scattered heaps of stone that JCP dubiously considered ancient Indian burial mounds, but just beyond the crest of the hill the small deep pond mentioned in the *Diary* (30 June 1930) is real enough.

After returning to the road and taking the left fork of the road at the tranquil German Cemetery (which contains the graves of a number of local people mentioned by JCP in the early diaries) for about a quarter of a mile brings you to what JCP called the Naiad's Grotto and waterfall (*Diary*, 24 September 1929),

well hidden amongst the trees to the right of the road, a few yards before some light metal railings also on the side of the road. This is a quiet secluded contemplative place, where the essential spirit of JCP still seems to sparkle in the sunlight on the hurrying water and with the wind sighing gently in the high trees. Glastonbury and Montacute, Weymouth and Shirley, though so far away, must also have seemed very close and immediate in this quiet secluded space.

Chris Gostick

JCP Honoured

Despite the efforts of George Steiner, John Cowper Powys was not honoured by either his college or university and the only academic recognition he received was an Honorary Litt. D. conferred by the University of Wales, and the 1957 Bronze Plaque of the Free Academy of Arts, Hamburg, in recognition of his outstanding services to literature and philosophy. The plaque is owned by the Society within the Bissell Collection.

A newspaper cutting, for which I am grateful to Robert Hands, gives some background to Rolf Italiaander who made the presentation and an account of the ceremony under this headline:

Plaque for Novelist

We are told that as a young man Italiaander studied for a short period at Oxford and was a friend of John Galsworthy and Lawrence of Arabia. He had the previous year completed a solo journey through Central Africa on a motor-cycle, acting on a suggestion made to him by Lawrence during the First World War, and had just finished a book, in two languages, on the history of Africa.

In his address Rolf Italiaander said, 'We are out to make contact with creative artists of other countries who live in the shadow of modern propaganda. We have been so impressed by Cowper Powys' books that we felt bound to record recognition of the work of a great artist in this way.' Mr. Italiaander described John Cowper Powys as the father of all angry young men and added, 'Despite his years he is still young in all his ideas. Writers who have passed eighty are generally more conservative than he is. He is broad minded and maintains a broad outlook on world problems. The Academy is confident that this award will make Powys' work known to a wider circle of readers in Germany.'

In a message to Mr. Powys, Hans Henry Jahnn (President of the Academy, prevented by illness from making the presentation) said: 'Before you Thomas Mann and the composer Frau Ilse Fromme Michaels have received this plaque.' His message added that: 'Powys's very being was contained in all his writings. The work he invented was stamped by his intention and by his inflexible attitude. It really lived and did not merely communicate.'

In response John Cowper said, 'It is a magic circle. My great-grandfather came

from Hamburg, and I delivered my first public lecture there on Shakespeare as a young man of twenty-two. I had the time of my life and they gave me a cup from which to drink which had belonged to Hans Anderson. The presentation links me to some of my earliest and happiest memories.'

Does anyone know of any connection that JCP's great-grandfather might have had with Hamburg? Ed. [*Yes: answer in the next* Newsletter — *SPM.*]

What They Said About The Powyses

MONICA HUTCHINGS *wrote about Dorset and Somerset. She got to know Littleton Powys through correspondence in* The Western Gazette *about the persecution of badgers. This piece is taken from her* The Walnut Tree, An Autobiography of Kindness *(1951).*

Of Littleton Powys, his friend H. J. Massingham might well have written:

> "In our own lives here in England, we do meet with people who love beauty and peace and the face of nature, who do not walk in the ways of the world, who have no professed religion, but whose presence is a benediction.
>
> Free in mind themselves, they seek in no way to restrict the liberty of others, while their only form of criticism is to follow their own grassy paths, serene and undismayed. They are like quiet places through which city pavements do not run."

How strange, how unpredictable are life's compensations when the cruel death of a badger could be the means of bringing me such a friend; a friend whose unfailing encouragement and support had something reminiscent of Mr. Gort. Yet, high as I place his friendship, and great source of happiness that it has been, I would still rather it had not come my way than that a badger should have met such a barbaric end.

Of the Powys family so much has already been said and written, especially in the decades between the wars, that little can be added by me. Mr. Massingham's writings had prepared me for Llewelyn's gallant fight against ill-health, had told of his boundless zest for living, and his understanding of our Wessex countryside. But I was not prepared for the sweetness, the quiet understanding and the deep spirit of Alyse Gregory, his widow. Nor was I prepared for the poet, the independent spirit that was Philippa, his sister.

Nor, in my wildest dreams of a free, untrammelled life such as I had lived at "Romany Cottage", could I have pictured a house like the cottage on the downs between East Chaldon and the sea. There, high in a dry valley running towards the shore, cupped deep in the topmost downs, and almost within sound of the breakers so far below, I found Alyse, and Philippa and the eldest sister Gertrude. Gertrude looked exactly like the clergyman's daughter that she was, gentle

and grey-haired, serene and blue-eyed, softly spoken, a real "gentlewoman" in country woollens. But that same Gertrude had studied art and held exhibitions of her work, had illustrated her brother's books and hung the walls of their homes with her portrait paintings of themselves and their families. That same, frail looking person walked the lonely primeval track from the village to the house above Bat's Head, heavily laden, in all the wild weather this coastline can know.

This house, hidden in the downs, unapproached by any hard road, out of sight of any other human habitation, made my "isolated" cottage at Silverlake positively metropolitan in comparison.

The brother and sister, Littleton and Gertrude, I found to be alike physically and temperamentally. A close friend had written of Littleton something that equally well applied to Gertrude:

> "You have the secret of happiness in yourself beyond anyone I have ever known. It is an open secret, for it can hardly help being shared by anyone who consorts with you."

I found the house near East Chaldon permeated with Gertrude's spirit which Massingham might have called a "benediction", and which brought an atmosphere of sheer goodness, kindness and right-thinking which envelopes the stranger almost immediately, leaving them no longer a stranger.

The badger had also led me to the gentle, courteous wisdom of Theodore Powys whose Dorset "Fables" have a style entirely their own. No other West-Country author approaches Theodore, he stands alone. Littleton said it was one of the happiest moments of his life when the Government awarded a pension to his brother for his services to literature. Theodore surrounded by the countryside he has immortalised, loves to "bide and stud" beneath his central Dorset hills – the frowning Bulbarrow, the shaggy heights of Milton Abbas, the prehistoric Rawlsbury, or meditate in his ancient church at Mappowder.

The eldest of this amazing family, John Cowper Powys, has settled in North Wales, delving day by day, deeper into his Celtic forbears' history to the days of the Mabinogion and of Owen Glendywr [*sic*]. Close on eighty years of age he has just published a very well-received translation of Rabelais, from the original, mediæval French. Many young authors and poets have owed him a great deal for his selfless advice and encouragement. He still strides his "ancient mountains" with an unflagging appetite for life and letters.

Arthur Mee in his Dorset Book in *The King's England* series, has paid tribute to yet another of the Powys brothers – A.R. Powys, to whom we owe the preservation of so many fine West-Country buildings. ...

To all these wide sympathies, these tolerant understandings, these brave personalities, was the martyred badger responsible for introducing me. ... It is still a great joy to hear Littleton say : "This is my friend, Mrs. Monica Hutchings – I have the greatest possible admiration for her, her work and her way of life – and how do you think we met? It was a badger that introduced us!"