Editorial

All members will have been saddened by the death of Isobel Powys Marks who was both a matriarchal figure and living link with that great Powys generation we celebrate. I was fortunate enough to meet Isobel soon after joining the Society. There was an organised walk around East Chaldon, which my wife insisted we attend, although I was reluctant and apprehensive that we would find ourselves in the company of some rather odd and aloof 'literary' people. It turned out that my fears were quite unfounded, everyone seeming quite 'normal' and certainly friendly. As we made our way down the Chydyok track Eve and I fell into conversation, very tentatively at first, with an elderly lady of almost regal bearing who captivated us with her stories of Aunt Gertrude, Alyse (whom we had till then pronounced as Alice), Uncle Littleton and her own father, A. R. Powys. Until then, for us, 'the Powyses' had meant just three brothers, but now we were introduced to that remarkable family by a member of it, and we were hooked. But for that inspiring introduction we would, I am sure, have remained on the fringe of The Powys Society. All the pleasure we have derived from its activities and the many enduring friendships we have made within it, are the outcome of one chance, inspirational meeting, with Isobel Powys Marks.

I would like to share one other treasured recollection. About ten years ago Anthony Head stunned the annual conference by showing – unannounced – his video of newsreel footage of the debate on modern marriage between JCP and Bertrand Russell. I remember the palpable astonishment in the audience as the great man flickered on to the screen, arms pinned to his sides and shoulders gyrating (he had clearly been asked not to gesticulate to the camera) and began to

Your subscription may be due: please see page 2.

ON OTHER PAGES

speak. But what I remember more vividly is Isobel's involuntary interruption as she said in a loud stage-whisper, charged with childlike awe and nostalgic longing; 'That's Uncle Jack's voice!' Thereby, as she sometimes did, conferring her hallmark of authenticity on the matter in hand.

Readers will also be sad to hear that Martin Pollock, son of Rivers Pollock, close friend of Llewelyn, and a familiar figure at conferences, also died in December. We extend our sympathy to Stephen and Tordis Marks and Janet Pollock and their respective families.

John Batten

Isobel at The Glen, Evercreech

Subscriptions

The annual subscription is £13.50 for UK members and £16 for those overseas, with a student rate of £6. If you find a reminder in this *Newsletter*, it means you have not paid your subscription: **please do so now !**

Isobel Powys Marks 1906–1999

Isobel Powys Marks was always a benign and enthusiastic presence at the annual society conference. Justly proud of being a Powys twice over (her father, A. R. Powys, had married his fifth cousin Dorothy), she brought to our proceedings both her family's zest for experience and an alert response to anything that might be said concerning its individual members. A newcomer was even heard to remark that it was as if royalty were present; and more than one academic lecturer has been brought up short by some breezy correction delivered with all the aplomb of someone who had personally known the subject of the discourse. Isobel's insistence that the family name be given its English rather than its Welsh pronunciation may have settled that matter for good and all; but her participation was never merely as an authoritative spokesman for the Powyses. She entered into the Society's activities with infectious enjoyment and was always a centre of lively talk. With her distinguished appearance and beautiful silvery speaking voice she possessed an urbanity particularly her own.

Like her cousin Francis, she delighted in foreign travel, and while more sophisticated in style than were the generality of the Powyses, she shared in their adventurous spirit. One recollection of her that I especially treasure is of a visit paid to Penmon Point in Anglesey. No sooner had I parked the car than she was off and away, hastening down the banks of shingle to the sea's edge in a manner suggestive of her aunt Katie, so Powysianly responsive to the elements.

I first encountered Isobel through the medium of bronze, her sculpted head being on display as part of the Epstein exhibition at the Edinburgh Festival of 1961: twenty years later I was to admire it again, this time in her Dorset cottage while we listened to Mahler's *Resurrection* symphony (a favourite of hers) in the presence of paintings by Renoir, Corot, Chagall and other cherished artists, all hung unpretentiously as the adornments of a friendly home. Isobel was a born hostess, not only giving a dinner party but, as it were, going to it as well. Her pride in her family was always abundantly in evidence, as was her readiness to express decided views; these, however, were tempered with a blithe self-mockery. 'People tell me I am bossy – but, you see, I know I am right!' And so, to shared amusement, she would usually turn out to be. She had the true spirit of largesse and one can but echo the words used by John Cowper in the dedication of his final published novel

'to Isobel Powys Marks to whom so many of us – O so many – Owe so much.'

Glen Cavaliero

We would have been friends, even if I had not become her daughter-in-law. Family and friendship – the two most important things in her life – made her demonstrate love throughout until the very end. She never spoke without uttering kind, appreciative and loving words.

Her love of life, art, architecture, travel, her enthusiasm and knowledge, were inspiring and touched everybody she knew. In everything she did, she let commonsense rule, and modesty. We knew each other first in London, when she always included Stephen and me in her very active social life. She had a great gift for gathering friends regularly, there were dinners, cheese and wine parties, even 'road parties', as many neighbours became friends. Later, in Dorset, she had everybody to stay, and went to their houses in town, but the focus of her life in Mappowder was Aunt Lucy, whom she adored and visited twice a day.

When she was 81 she surprised us by saying 'What would you say if I had one last fling? I give myself five years ...' We thought, what, a journey round the world. No, it was a move to Bath, to be a city woman again, and a fling it was. There were immediately new friends, neighbours of course, and travel. She joined a Literary Society and an Art Society, a painting club, there was even a little job at the Holborne of Menstrie Museum.

She had weekends with us in the country, trips to London, trips to Dorset, even trips to Jordan and Egypt. The five years became a decade of incredible activity, until she felt the need to slow down, then to not live alone any more. So she came to us for a year after one last adventure on her ninetieth birthday, a balloon trip above Bath towards our area. She was still able to climb into the basket!

From then she really moved towards old age until she cheerfully accepted that she had reached the stage when it was necessary to be looked after by nurses, who again responded to her with love and admiration. To them too she was unique in her acceptance of the inevitable uncomplainingly and graciously. In death her face looked again like the Epstein bronze as a young woman.

Tordis Marks

Isobel Powys Marks: A very brief chonology

Born, March 25th 1906, daughter of A. R. Powys & Dorothy Mary Powys, then living in Hammersmith, London; then lived in other parts of London until her father rented 13 Hammersmith Terrace from 1920 till about 1928; neighbours included A. P. Herbert and William Morris's daughter May. During the War, with her father in the Army, her homes included Montacute and Meanwood Vicarages. Schools included Sherborne Girls and St Paul's.

In about 1925–27 she worked in Clough Williams-Ellis's office, in 1928–9 attended the Bartlett School of Architecture for a year and a bit. From September 1927, spent almost a year in America and saw much of Marian, JCP, LP, Alyse, even lived briefly in Patchin Place.

Married, June 13th 1930, Herbert H. Marks, chartered accountant. Lived in London till 1935, in Oxted, Surrey, till 1951, in London again till move to Mappowder, 1965, Bath 1987, Kilmersdon 1995, Evercreech 1996.

Sat for bronze by Epstein, 1930.

Much travelling with HHM, including trip to USSR, 1937; later, French tours with Francis and Sally, with Eleanor, and American journeys.

Attended Chelsea Art School in the 1950s.

Died, December 9th 1999, at The Glen, Evercreech, Somerset.

Memorial service

A memorial service for Isobel is being arranged for June 10th at Winterborne Tomson church, Dorset. Everyone will be welcome, but please write to Stephen Powys Marks for final details, which will be sent out nearer the time.

Martin must have known the Powys family from boyhood because his father was so closely associated with Llewelyn. Certainly, as he tells us himself (*The Powys Journal* ii (1992), 131–41). Llewelyn and often Alyse were always there during his school and student days. He got from Llewelyn, very much as his father had before him, compelling contact with an approach to the world, enlightened by the senses, totally unburdened by any convention, but actually very kind. There is no doubt that Martin regarded this friendship with the older man as of permanent value although his career took him far away in every sense.

The family was quite wealthy and Martin was sent to Winchester where he found little to engage him in its rigid classical syllabus until he began science. He describes how he was filled with delight that learning could, at last, be captivating. He pursued science at Cambridge, reading medicine and qualified just as war broke out. He had recognised that biochemistry, at that time just emerging as a major branch of biology, would become a crucial part of medicine. He did have spells of clinical work during the war, but didn't enjoy it and soon became involved in the research which was to become his greatest scientific interest. In 1949 he became Head of the bacterial physiology division at the Medical Research Council's major research laboratories at Mill Hill. This was the exciting time when biology was making huge strides towards the elucidation of the genetic code and the way genes controlled the life processes of cells. Bacteria were the crucial organisms for such discoveries and Martin's own contributions were recognised by Jaques Monod (subsequently a Nobel Laureate), who invited him over for two spells of work in the latter's Paris laboratories. Martin was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1962 – the highest accolade for a British scientist.

In 1965 he was invited to Edinburgh to found a new Department of Molecular Biology. The new discipline had an exciting feel about it and attracted a number of very bright people – and still continues to do so. This was how I first met him and, although my field was far removed from his, we met often on University business and soon socially. Martin had a very broad interest in science and the arts, always seeking connections between them. Indeed later he organised a conference and edited a book on just such premises.* He enjoyed painting; he loved travel and went with family on two major expeditions – one must call them that – to South America and to Africa. In his intellectual life, he utterly refused to accept boundaries and embraced ideas from widely divergent disciplines. He was the moving force behind the establishment of a 'School of Epistemics'. The nature of knowledge I suppose it means, but the definition is of less importance than the fact that it brought together people working in philosophy, literature, computer science, linguistics, psychology, neuroscience and biology. We all

* Pollock, M. R., ed., *Common Denominators in Art and Science* (Aberdeen University Press 1983).

gained enormously from his initiatives. Epistemics would have diverse visiting speakers and we would talk over dinner with good wine, rounded off with Glenmorangie; this was the time when universities could afford decent hospitality! Some of my enduring memories of Martin are at such gatherings, deep in discussion or roaring with laughter at some absurdity.

I was always so happy in Edinburgh that it saddened me to discover that Martin was not. He used to moan comically about the weather and the hidebound nature of its society; but more seriously he found University politics similarly conservative and he didn't seem to enjoy teaching, although from what I heard he was very good at it. It was around this time that his marriage to Jean Paradise was breaking up and, their children all mature, he took early retirement and moved down to Dorset and the much loved landscape of his childhood. He re-established his relationship with Janet Machen, setting up with her their delightful home at Margaret Marsh with its wonderful garden, made from scratch.

Martin has clearly described his science and how it actually **feels** to be involved in research: 'I don't think anyone who has not experienced the tremendous feeling of awe and wonder which accompanies the sensation (of) having solved a problem that was formerly inexplicable can understand the joy of accomplishment so fulfilled.' It is rare to find such a moving account of the beauty and creativity of science at its best. (I wish Martin could have discussed science with Llewelyn and John Cowper, neither of whom had the least inkling of its nature as a human activity.)

Throughout an autobiographical piece which Martin left he examines himself, his attitudes, his achievements and limitations with frank honesty. This frankness didn't always help him in his behaviour towards others – he could be appallingly rude and seem arrogant at times. Nor did it help him through periods of depression, which following a minor stroke in his late 60s, seemed often to overwhelm him. It was distressing to hear him reiterate that he could see absolutely no point to existence. He would rally himself through this when friends visited and could still be lively, but we may imagine what a toll it sometimes took from Janet.

I shall want to remember his vivid involvement with affairs, scientific, artistic or social which stayed with him to the end when one could get him talking. One glorious July day, a few years back, Martin walked with my wife, young son and me up to Llewelyn's stone. We were all exhilarated by the view and the place and teased, as always, by the inscription. For Martin it must have keyed in to memories of the man himself. For me it will always remind me of Martin, at his best: 'The living, the living, he shall praise thee.'

Aubrey Manning

The 29th Annual Conference of the Powys Society
Kingston Maurward College, Dorchester
Saturday 19th to Tuesday 22nd August 2000

As announced in the November *Newsletter*, the Conference remains at Kingston Maurward for a further year, although once again we are avoiding the Bank Holiday weekend to minimise travelling difficulties. Regrettably the Conference price will probably need to be raised slightly to around £165 for those fully residential for the whole Conference, with the usual pro-rata arrangements for part-attendance and day visitors. This is the first price rise since 1996. The final programme will be published in the July *Newsletter*, but if you would like further details of the Conference please fill in the usual form which is included with this *Newsletter*.

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

Saturday afternoon Arrival
Evening lecture on *Maiden Castle* at Dorset County Museum

Sunday
Rob Timlin on *Wolf Solent*
Dr Greg Bond on *T. F. Powys*
Patrick Couch on *A Glastonbury Romance*
Annual General Meeting
Evening programme to be announced
Monday
Dr John Williams on the *Poetry of Francis Powys*
Professor Constance Harsh (Colgate University) on *John Cowper Powys*
Dr Henning Ahrens — topic to be agreed
A visit to Dorchester and Maiden Castle

Tuesday Breakfast and departure

This is also formal notification that the Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held at Kingston Maurward on Sunday 20th August 2000. The Agenda will appear in the July *Newsletter*.

Nominations for Officers and Committee Members
to take effect from August 2000

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 Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer of the Society are required either to stand down or to stand for re-election annually, whilst each Committee member is elected for a 3-year period, after which they too are required to stand down, or stand for re-election. Sadly, Paul Roberts has indicated that after 3 years as Chairman of the Society, he has reluctantly decided that pressure of work means he can no longer accept re-nomination. The full slate of nominations for Officers and Committee under these rules is set out below:

POSITION	NOMINATION	PROPOSER	SECONDER
Chairman	John Williams	Griffin Beale	John Batten
Vice-Chairman	Griffin Beale	Chris Gostick	S. Powys Marks
Hon. Secretary	Chris Gostick	John Williams	John Batten
Hon. Treasurer	Stephen Powys Marks	Chris Gostick	Bruce Madge
Committee	John Batten	Griffin Beale	John Williams
	Bev Craven	John Batten	Bruce Madge
	Chris Wilkinson	Bruce Madge	S. Powys Marks
	*Sonia Lewis	Chris Gostick	John Batten

Bruce Madge — elected until 2001 and wishes to continue
John Powys, Judith Stinton
— both elected until 2002 and wish to continue

* new nomination to replace John Williams as a Committee Member

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 four 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 9 June 2000.

Chris Gostick, Hon. Secretary 25 February 2000

Conference Questionnaire

Many thanks to all who returned the questionnaire from the last *Newsletter*. I have so far received 45 (13.2% of the membership) – almost all from members in England. Of these, 31 had previously been to a Conference and all but 3 of those expected to come again (and those who didn't only because of age or disability). Of the remaining 14, 4 never expected to attend – because they lived too far away or the Conference clashed with some other important activity – and one was not sure. However, the remaining 9 all said they did hope to come to some future Conference. There was a very strong preference from everyone for an annual Conference, and most people thought the Conference length was about right, with only 8 people wanting a shorter 1- or 2-day event – although a couple of people indicated they would be interested in a shorter event in addition to the normal Conference.

As to the Conference date, 10 people expressed no preference, 25 felt it should continue to be sometime in the summer – preferably August – and 4 suggested September. Of the remainder: 2 suggested April or May; one said NOT winter or June or July; one said anything but July/August; and the final respondent said preferably not August. One additional suggestion was to alternate spring and autumn conferences. Only 3 people felt residential facilities were unnecessary, with the suggestion that the Society provide the venue and programme in some central place and participants then find their own local accommodation to suit their individual needs. All but 7 respondents felt the cost was about right or not too expensive.

14 people thought the Conference should always be held in Dorset, and whilst a number of the remainder indicated a preference for Dorset or the South West, there was a general feeling that we should also explore other places with Powys associations. Indeed a small number suggested even this was not necessary, and any accessible and economic venue should be considered. There were a number of suggestions for alternatives, particularly East Anglia, North Wales, Sussex and Derbyshire, as well as London, Oxford and Cambridge, although there was a strong feeling that Dorset and Somerset were the heart of Powys-land, and we should meet there as often as possible.

Whilst there was no real dissatisfaction with Kingston Maurward, there was a general feeling that standards had recently been slipping and could be improved, but there was a very high level of satisfaction with the Conference programme and organisation, and broadly keeping things as they are. There were a number of suggestions about more opportunities for discussion as a way of getting more passive participants involved, and for more informal activities. There was much support for book-related walks and similar activities, and visits to places of Powysian interest. A few people also expressed interest in shorter one-day events – particularly the possibility of initiating some further London meetings.

The Committee will consider all of these suggestions when planning future Conferences, but if you have any comments on any of the above, or have still not returned your Questionnaire, it is not too late, so do please get in touch. And thanks again.

Chris Gostick

Thomas Hardy — A lecture by Llewelyn Powys

A copy of this lecture in the hand of Llewelyn Powys and dated 1908 was found among the papers of Mr E. E. Bissell after his death and is now retained in the Society's Collection. It has been transcribed for the Newsletter *by Neil Lee. This was no easy task because in addition to the difficulties one can experience with Llewelyn's handwriting it had been heavily edited, individual words crossed out and others inserted, or frequently, large blocks or even a whole page deleted. In order to give an impression of the drafting process the entire text from Llewelyn's first three pages has been reproduced here with deletions included, enclosed in brackets and printed in italics, from that point the lecture is presented as what we take to be the final draft. In his transcription Neil Lee kept faithfully to the original document, which has numerous spelling and grammatical errors and lapses of concentration on the part of the author. Bearing in mind that the draft was never intended for publication and in order to make it more readable some spelling and grammatical mistakes have been corrected. Apart from that the text is unaltered although considerations of space have unfortunately prevented us from following Llewelyn's practice of frequently beginning each new sentence on a new line.*

As we review in our minds the [*greatest*] best modern works in prose and verse, as we recall the names of the greatest present day writers, we are astonished how few of them can detach their art – [*their writing*] – from their own personal convictions how few, can write of life with an unprejudiced hand. Each seems to extract from their philosophy some particular theory, some favourite attitude of mind and to cherish it in all their works.

Most writers have been partisans from the beginning. Shakespeare – indeed from the heights of his majestic intellect observes the thoughts and actions of men with magnanimous impartiality. Jane Austen has hidden her own thoughts and opinions under a delicate web of gossamer like irony, – Matthew Arnold under the cloistral shadows of the Oxford lilacs, has succeeded in maintaining his scholarly impartiality. Others too have followed in the steps of these untravelled geniuses; but the majority of writers, the majority of thinkers do not stand loitering at the parting of the ways, - do not remain as they do, uncommitted to the end. Their predelictions and personal prejudices will out [*willy nilly*] whether they like it or not.

Who could restrain Charles Dickens when once the mood was upon him from

bounding out of Paris all alone, tossing his hat up to the chimney pots, and uttering his strange and boisterous catcalls? [*and resolutely like Christian of old silencing his ears to all whispering insinuations that his wild gaiety and exhuberant joy was iltimed and out of place?*] Could all the Americans in America [*could all the men in the world*] [*all humanity together*] have kept [*old*] Walt Whitman from bawling out his barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world? And as with the optimists so with the pessimists, the happy will not be sad and the sad will not be happy. [*And it may be that to those of us still vacillating between a hopeful and hopeless interpretation of the world – the melancholy of one party, and the hilarity of the other, seem both* [*a somewhat*] *a trifle* [*unnatural*] *overstrained. In* [*the*] *a scene of such grand opposites and gorgeous contradictions, where laughter is ever mingled with tears: – wholesale abandonment to either cause can appear nothing but fanatical.*]

The sound of children at play, the songs of wild birds, must have seemed curiously incongruous to James Thompson as he was composing 'The City of Dreadful Night': Glad voices in the streets, blithe country cries, must have jarred dreadfully upon Leopardi's ears as he wrote that fierce arraignment of the world fantastical, entitled 'The Song of The Great Wild Cock'. When that monstrous melancholy [*fowl*] bird crowing its interrogation to the Sun says, 'Oh! Sun, author of day, and presiding genius of our waking hours, I ask thee, if in the course of all the aeons during which thou hast risen and set, hast thou ever seen a living creature truly happy?'. [*And as with Thompson and Leopardi and other great pessimists – so with Mr. Hardy, he stubbornly, and rigidly clings to the gloomiest reflections.*]

The first essential fact to be understood by a student of Mr. Hardy's work – is his Pessimistic Bias – he too knows the sorrow of the great Wild Cock – like an owl in the impenetrable shades of Pitt Wood – in the heart of his beloved Wessex – he sits sardonically brooding over the misery of the great terrestrial house, hooting in the stillness of the night. [*at the pity of it all*] Mr. Hardy's mood is gloomy, [*his outlook*] his whole attitude towards life is gloomy. [*Some*] Most of us recognising quite well the misery [*the unhappier aspects of life*] and unhappiness abroad in the world - yet hold to the opinion that existence has been justified. [*This is not Mr. Hardy's attitude*] But Mr. Hardy does not think thus, he remains to the end doggedly unreconciled to the system of things. He looks far back into the early ages of the world, he sees earth contract and throw up from her prolific womb many forms of life – he hears the echo of the bloodstained struggle for the valueless jewel of existence – every animal at his brother's throat – he catches a glimpse of the crimson talons of nature's awful claw – and shivers at the horror of the past. Nor is he more satisfied with the present. [*Imagine*] If we now in this hall could hear for one awful moment the shriek of this suffering planet – I wonder how many of us would favour the continuation of consciousness. Such a conviction, of general unhappiness haunts the mind of Mr. Hardy.

He turns his attention to the future – but only to witness the continuation of

the farce, which had better, far better, never to have been put upon the stage. Of all the pains which torture man's body, of all the agonies which torment his soul, there is one particularly upon which Mr. Hardy dwells. This is the tragedy of the relations between men and women, the sad complexities of the sexual question, – thence Hardy looks sorrowfully upon the world but especially upon lovers in the world. He dwells lingeringly upon the amorous troubles of his great women, his hand is on their hearts, he feels the fiery passion of Eustacia and the short quick breathing of his injured Tess. Angry and indignant at their suffering he rises as an avenger of their wrongs. It is those deep sighs and full pleading looks that have prompted him to make his fierce denunciation of the system that accepts such cruelty as legitimate and just. He sets himself to expose the bitterness of love.

Many writers before and since have taken as the background of their works some particular locality – endeared to them from familiarity or association – no one has done this more than Mr. Hardy. All the principal scenes in his incomparable novels are enacted within the borders of the ancient Kingdom of Wessex. Wessex – golden Wessex with her humid atmosphere – heavy with the scents of apple orchards and primaeval woods. Wessex with her thatched cottages, barley mows, and hanging horizons. Wessex with her noble buildings and rich heavy soil, Wessex with her broken coastline, her chalk cliffs, and the island of Portland lying as it does, like some huge amphibious monster stranded forever by the side of Deadman's Bay. Mr. Hardy from his house near Dorchester in the capital of the Roman West, looks out upon the Dorset downs – capped at intervals by those strange round and oblong graves, so significant with their crouched and dusty inmates of the grim futility of human destiny. These grassy tumuli are the primitive mausoleums of other men, of earlier chieftains who with pride of life had loved and fought and fallen to the tune of the same capricious music that governs our footsteps today. In order to view our life in appropriate perspective Thomas Hardy never forgets the men of ancient days. Continually in his books he makes allusions to earlier generations – to the first man who, bare to wind and sun – crossed Egdon Heath. To Roman legions, who with glittering harness – marched along the now dilapidated roads. As Tess wanders across the straight dusty Roman highway – he seems to say, over this very spot have marched the soldiers of Trajan himself! The haughty Norman knights – the proud aristocracy of the Middle Ages are not forgotten by him, he knows them with their chivalry and arrogance, building their elaborate mansions and laying field to field.

Nor does Thomas Hardy let pass by unnoticed that numerous, patient, long suffering people – the immemorial peasantry – who at this distance seem to have followed one another generation after generation – for the purpose only of filling those green enclosures where at each returning spring the Yew tree drops her scarlet berries on the white nettles that bloom over their forgotten bones. Mr. Hardy loves the country people, all his stories deal with them, whenever he leaves them as when he crosses the borderland of his own west country his hand falters.

Wessex itself forms the background to the lives of these simple men and women – and this, it would seem adds an almost biblical grandeur to his stories – man meets woman as at the beginning in a garden.

His characters stand out in relief not against theatres and drawing rooms but against the grass and plough lands. Men and women and the earth is the simple yet dignified impression we gain from these books. Whenever on some stormy evening towards dark you see figures silhouetted against the sky – perhaps a man and woman together – then think of Mr. Hardy's novels. The dark earth grey and virginal as at the first – two human beings and behind them formidable and horrific endless space. From scenes of this kind one becomes acquainted with the Hardy mood – one feels the earth tremble on its diurnal journey – one recognises the grim irremediability of the human destiny. We learn to understand far better the breathless longings, the foolish hopes, the agonies and the ecstacies of the human race when so grimly, so ironically contrasted by the impenetrable silence, the chilling stillness – the inflexibility – the indifference – the blank state of Eternity.

Stretching from Dorchester to Poole lies a barren moorland known by all lovers of Mr. Hardy's work as Egdon Heath.– there it lies covered with heather and furze with here and there a clump of weather beaten pines – a desolate place – bleak and sinister in the winter, scorching and shadeless in the summer. Of all Wessex this is the tract of country dearest to Thomas Hardy – perhaps it is in its unpretentious appearance that its appeal to him lies. Egdon gives little, but Egdon offers little, Egdon at least does not disappoint us. This dreary moorland seems to him more in harmony with the lot of man than happier more fertile districts. But apart from this personal prejudice Mr. Hardy revels in all the rich luxuriousness of the West Country. Read his description of the valley of the great dairies of Talbothays in Tess of the D'urbervilles and you will find yourself transported into a country flowing with milk and honey. I know no writer who can describe the early hours of a summer morning as vividly as Mr. Hardy – the exquisite freshness is there – the delicious coolness of the early mists hangs like incense over those pages – the tinkling of milk pails, the warm flanks of the cows, the bright faces of the milk maids – with the dew glistening on their hair under their white sun bonnets.

But the genius of Thomas Hardy does not consist alone in his descriptions of the country: he knows the people – he has the secret of the ancient inhabitants, he can immortalise these incomparable villagers. We in these days of quick communication, of travel and rapid changes, are hardly able to realise that these old monuments of earlier ages – these stranded relics of former generations – are still with us, watching with surprised and almost suspicious eyes all our boasted progress. But so it is, at this very day every village in Wessex still has its Joseph Poorgrass, its Leaf and William Dewy. Tranters – or country carriers set out from the Phoenix at Dorchester – as they have done for centuries – every Saturday you

can see these jolting conveyances carrying their loadful of Cottagers to their various homes. Yes, the characters of Thomas Hardy's books are to be found still in Wessex – Visit the 'Red Bull' at Ilchester, the Phoenix at Dorchester, the Antelope at Sherborne, the Frampton Arms at Moreton and you will find yourself among peasants as rich and rare as any he has depicted. Yes! Truly great sayings – profound wisdom. Gargantuan drollery rolls slowly from the lips of these bred labourers as they sit nodding over their cups. These men gain an intimacy with the actual earth – with the mould and stones scarcely conceivable to us. They become merged in the landscape like rocks and trees.

Mr. Hardy has considerable architectural knowledge and his novels have something of the stability of buildings about them – resembling immense grey cathedrals designed not to tell us of the joy of the hereafter, but the sorrow of the present. Every word, every sentence, every chapter is essential to the make up of the whole. And it is from the excellence of designs – from this precision in the actual structure – that they derive that appearance of inevitability. As we read we feel that the whole story could not have happened otherwise – we know from the day that Tess in her white frock danced at the club walking what is in store for her. From a country green to the gallows seems a long way – but we feel she has no other way to go. We know from the day that Eustacia Vye stood on the bank by the bonfire how the waters of the Egdon weir are ready for her. A lonely death awaited the Mayor of Casterbridge from the evening that he sold his wife at the fair.

Thomas Hardy's victims are dogged by fate from their first entrance upon life, gradually it approaches with gaunt arm outstretched – they pause and it pauses – they hurry on and it hurries on behind them – escape is impossible everything works towards the end. They themselves – these poor tragic figures – are paralysed by the persistency of their fate – their <u>will</u> fails them and they turn finally for consolation to the old philosophical maxim of the people uttered so often by these patient sufferers – 'Twas to be'. 'Twas to be' is the ultimate reflection of – the last word – of these unfortunates.

Mr. Hardy's books as a rule are divided into three parts – the first brings the protagonists before us – during the second there is a lull – an ominous stillness – as in Tess Talbothays days as in Eustacia's courting days – then finally comes the crash the clouds break at last and the work is completed. His great novels – his monumental tragedies – impress one with the same uneasy premonitions of impending misfortune as are felt by men of sensitive calibre when a bright sultry July afternoon closes with wind and rain and darkness. When we have guessed the worst – we are set shivering as at the reception of bad news – The truth is instantaneously revealed – but so easily apprehended as to make us half suspect that while we were laughing and making merry far down in some remote corner of our consciousness there was a chamber which held already the fatal secret. It has been often remarked that peaceful hours herald the advent of disaster. Mr. Hardy appreciates the dramatic value of such a fancy. It is one of his chief claims as an

artist that he makes such use of these contrasts.

The austere and rigorous being or the ironic demons who regulate the affairs of his unhappy creations – have too an alarming way – a chilling way – of momentarily making visible their mocking fingers pointing to destruction. Do you remember the Cock whose ominous crowing so distressed dairyman Dick – as Angel and Tess drove away after their wedding? Do you remember the rattling of the phantom coach along the road? Do you recall how the old village woman with her incantations and mystic rites cursed Eustacia on that fatal evening? Again and again in these books – one feels Fate to be conscious of human work.

Mr. Hardy takes also an elfish delight in the ironies of fate. He loves to present strange situations – outrageous improbabilities. That such mocking coincidences do occur is well known – but Mr. Hardy exaggerates them for the sake of the dramatic – he bends and twists them for his own purposes he takes a pleasure in so caricaturing these pleasant idiosyncracies of destiny. Who but Hardy would have dared to allow to rivals to travel back to their love – when all the time her corpse unknown to them was being carried to her home for the last time in the very train in which they rode? Who but Mr. Hardy would make a man bury his lover at sea being ignorant of who she was? Who else could have conceived so fantastic a story as 'The Well Beloved'? He also delights in disclosing to our astonished senses how the greatest results depend upon the smallest actions – the slightest mistake – the tiniest misunderstandings. In reading his books we cannot refrain from crying continually if only he had done this or if only she had done that. If only Eustacia had opened the door to Mrs. Yeobright. If only Henchard had obeyed his wife's last wish and had kept the letter sealed till Elizabeth's wedding day. If only, yes if only Tess, the lovely Tess, had told all sooner or Angel Clare had forgiven when he heard.

In the one comedy that appears amongst his work – in 'Under the Greenwood Tree' we could set our finger on the very place where Mr. Hardy resisted the temptation to tell a tale of woe. If Fancy Day had not written to refuse the Clergyman's proffered offer of marriage – tragedy would have ensued. But for once the right thing was done – for once the shadow of determinism seems lifted – and we have before us an ideal picture of village life with its Christmas carol singing its Whitsuntide and holiday making – its summer months and love making – unspoilt by impending trouble. It is a beautiful story, as pleasing to our ears as the sound of the wedding bells – heard by Dick and Fancy as they led the way for the rest of the party among the ferns and bracken of Yalberry woods.

On the whole I believe that Mr. Hardy's heroines are greater creations than his heroes, with the exception possibly of Henchard – who is a vigorous portrait of a self willed man vainly trying to contend with a world which in the words of Mr. Tulliver was 'too many for him'. There is something very touching in Giles Winterbourne's dog like affection for dainty Grace Melbury with her superficial education. But by far the finest and most striking character in 'The Woodlanders'

is Marty South – she is the true sufferer in the story, she who for her father's sake sold her beautiful hair to the barber. She who so silently, so faithfully followed the fortunes of Giles Winterbourne. The book ends with a scene – truly characteristic of Thomas Hardy – A grave in a churchyard – six feet beneath stiff and lowly lies the body of a man finished for ever with this world and its business – by the grave alone stands poor Marty – the man's true lover. There with the throbbing voice of passionate girlhood she utters over his grave her last eulogy. Out from the solitary churchyard – over the decaying leaves and the rank cemetery grass rises the woman's pitiful cry.

'Now, my own, own love' you are mine, and on'y mine, for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died. But I – whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I spit a gad, and whenever I turns a cider wring I'll say none could do it like you. If I ever forget your name let me forget home and heaven! But no my love I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man and did good things.'

Mark the simple dignity of the closing line, what verbose epitaph could rival the encomium contained in those nine words And mark too how, by subtly introducing allusions to the man's daily work Mr. Hardy leaves the reader – with the impression of having witnessed a grand tragedy not in town or city but amongst the cider presses & larch trees of Honeycombe wood.

And what about Jude – Jude the obscure – Jude the unfortunate – here we encounter a man who combines the strength of Henchard with the idealism of Clym. In the scene in the Oxford tavern when Jude in drunken bravado repeats the creed in Latin we seem to catch something of the haughty recklessness of the Mayor of Casterbridge. In this book is found in strange juxtaposition some of the author's best and most inferior writing. In this story Hardy out Hardy's Hardy. Certain scenes in Jude suggest a morbid delight, a diabolic glee, in the ghastly. Here, Thomas Hardy sits at table with the spirits of horror and tragedy – drinking deeply of their black wine – he forgets his former restraint and revels in heartrending sorrow. Parts of the book seem literally clotted with blood – the blood of the pig in the snow – the blood of the strangled children seems splashed over the pages. But even though – the book nauseates us, even though we turn from it with loathing – certain scenes of wonderful beauty will remain in our minds forever. Can anyone who on some afternoon in winter has looked down upon the lights of that enchanted city – can anyone who has seen Oxford at night forget how little Jude sealed the straw rick at evening and with strained and wistful eyes caught his first fleeting, illusive, glimpse, of what to many is the most romantic, the most maternal and most wonderful city in the world?

Mr. Hardy in relating his stories is not as some writers in a breathless hurry to be finished – he does not write with brilliant aphorism or flashing epigram, but deliberately and slowly page by page. Never loitering too long in the woods, in the

sheepfolds or in the dairies – but just long enough to enable us to catch the faint scent of the bark pealed oaks, to remember the structure of the shearing barn, to recall the cool creamy aroma of the snow white dairy.

Mr. Hardy besides fixing in our minds the change of seasons – has the power to bequeath an immortality upon the very days – upon the very hours – making them seem more substantial if it were possible than the moments which we ourselves have experienced. Few writers can do this, few writers can gather the hours in their hands like flowers and with an enchanter's wand charm them into everlasting life. Perhaps Emily Bronte had done it in Wuthering Heights on that dark nightmare night – when the pale ghost of the girlish Cathy cried to be let in at the casement window. Perhaps Charlotte did it when she describes Jane Eyre's walk over the bogs and marshes on that dark rainy afternoon after her flight from Rochester. Perhaps Blackmore succeeded in his description of that spring day when John Ridd rode after Carver Doone – surely all who have read Lorna Doone can recall the bright warmth of that wedding day – when the bride sank into the bridegroom's arms cold, so cold causing him to ask what time of year it was – can recall the balmy freshness of the atmosphere as he rode for his revenge under the white lilacs of his home. But Mr. Hardy is a master magician in this way – his days can never be forgotten. Just so in our own memory, so in his books some days gain a mysterious distinction over their fellows.

In his pages not only do we mark the change of seasons – but the rising and the setting of the sun. These tragic men and women do not go suddenly abruptly down into the pit, but slowly step by step as in real life. Do you remember in 'The Return of the Native' that fatal day when after crossing the scorched moor Mrs. Yeobright found her son's door closed to her? Few people when once those chapters have been read could forget that day – the awful heat of the August sun – the giddy palpitating air – the ponds dried up – the wasps warm and drunken on the apples – the parched and drooping hollyhock leaves – the cat for coolness stretched on the gravel path – the weary chirping of the grasshoppers and the woman walking, walking, walking under the metallic violet sky. And then again who could forget that last night with its tragic issue – that night of wind and rain – a night as Mr. Hardy puts it which led travellers' thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend – the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony in Gethsemane. Who can rid his mind of the impression of that night? The blowing the howling of the wind, the beating rain, and at last appropriate culmination – the drowned bodies of the lovers.

In the same way Mr. Hardy has the power of riveting in our memory certain startling scenes and dramatic episodes. As when Cythesca saw through the window of the concert hall – her father fall from the scaffolding round the church tower. Or when the Melstock Choir men, saw the white figure of Fancy Day – for one dazzling moment – as she drew the curtain of her bedroom to thank them for

their carols. Or when Sergeant Troy fascinated Bathsheba – by his skilful swordplay in the grand pit. Or when St. Swithin sat with his patroness on the tower. Or when Tess sleeps under Stone Henge – and is then taken prisoner – or when Henchard sells his wife to the sailor at the fair.

Then who can resist the half conscious witticisms, the grotesque humour of the country folk – the spectators of the tragedies? How admirable too is Granfer Cautle's theory as to the duty of a good citizen 'In common conscience every man ought either to marry or go for a soldier. 'Tis a scandal to the nation to do neither one nor t'other I did both thank God! Neither to raise men nor to lay 'en low – that shows a poor do nothing spirit indeed.'

Then again the description of Geofrey Day. 'Yes Geofrey Day is a clever man if ever there was one. Never says anything not he. Never, you might live with that man, my sonnies a hundred years and never know there was anything in him. Ay: one of there up country London ink bottle fillers would call Geofrey a fool. You would never find out what's in that man: never: Silent! Ah! He is silent! He can keep silence well. That man's silence is wonderful to listen to.'

One prudent countryman confessing to certain lapses from the strict moral road, is unwilling to go too far saying, 'Your next world is your next world and not to be squandered off hand.' Then how sagaciously Mark Clarke and Coggin in the ripe hazy alcoholic atmosphere of the Buck's Head discuss the comparative advantages of Church & Chapel.

'We churchmen you see must have it all printed aforehand, or, dang it all we should no more know what to say to great person like the Lord than babes unborn.' 'Chapel folks be more hand in glove with them above than we' said Joseph thoughtfully. 'Yes' said Coggin, 'We know very well that if anybody goes to Heaven they will. They've worked hard for it and deserve to have it such as t'is. I'm not such a fool as to pretend that we who stick to the Church have the same chance as they, because we know we've not. But I hate a fellow who'll change his old ancient doctrines for the sake of getting to Heaven. I'd as soon turn King's evidence for the few pounds you get.'

And so these labourers, these furze cutters, woodmen and dairy folk utter their sententious sayings Shakespearean in their uncouth almost pagan dignity. What then is Mr. Hardy's message to us? No very encouraging tribute to the wisdom of the world. Thomas Hardy has weighed the earth in a balance and found it wanting. Better had it been he would say, if this corner of space had never disturbed the universe by consciousness – better if inanimate matter still held sway – better if no intelligent eyes had ever pierced the limitless regions of the astral world. Perhaps, thinks Mr. Hardy the original design of God has been defeated – and the earth is wedded to sorrow for ever. Perhaps this is the reason, perhaps this accounts for the pity of it all – for the unanswered prayers, for the agony of the body and the anguish of the soul. Half the tragedy of the tragedy lies in the deception, in the disappointment. If there had been no alternative we could

have born it. If we had been prepared for misery – it had been easier. But the world looks so beautiful – that by its very beauty, it accentuates the sorrow of the scene. Mr Hardy feels this strongly. He hates behind the loveliness of Aphrodite to discover the grinning visage of Medusa. He cannot bear to stoop for a lily and lay hands on a viper. He believes evil to have been victorious, grief and unhappiness to be finally triumphant.

Thomas Hardy has a large generous sympathy for man's unhappiness – he is heroically indignant defiant rather than resigned. He understands well our natures – he understands love – not only of the ultra refined kind but passionate love – love belonging to our bodies as well as our souls – love that thrills, that ravishes, that kills. The dairymaids sobbing under love's burden in Mr. Crick's long low roofed attic – rouse Mr. Hardy to arms.

'The air of the sleeping chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel nature's law – an emotion they had neither expected nor desired ... The full recognition of the futility of their infatuation, from the social point of view; its purposeless beginning; its self bounded outlook; its lack of anything to justify its existence in the eye of civilisation, (while lacking nothing in the eye of Nature) the one fact that it did exist ecstasising them to a killing joy; all this imparted to them a resignation – a dignity which a practical and sordid expectation of winning him as a husband would have destroyed ...'

Men ask the use of these pessimists, the use of pessimists depends upon the truth of the doctrines they hold. If matter rules everything, if we are indeed mere material bubbles, ephemeral excrescences – destined for eternal absorption by the gigantic maw of of the inorganic world – then let us know it, if there is no hope let us know there is no hope. But to dance on the banks of destruction with blinded eyes is poor fun – let us apprehend the worst – let us draw a vagrant pleasure from contemplating the strange eccentricity of our Destiny – in conjuring us to consciousness on so 'blighted a planet'. What we want to know is not whether theories are useful, but whether they are True. Men are so unsparing, so inexorable in the search for truth. But truth like the witches in the fairy tales is transformed at a touch – it has the colours of a chameleon – and the old question of the Roman Governor 'What is truth?' remains unanswered to this day.

Possibly both optimists and pessimists are in the right. Modern pragmatists seem to suggest that we can mould truth as we will. If we wish Christian doctrines to be true, they can be made true, if we pine for immortality we can have it merely for the willing. But there are others who would contend that a spice of pessimism adds relish to life – that without the possibility of the dreadful being true – the world artistically would be incomplete. Scientists, they complain have destroyed our jewel built Heaven, and red hot Hell – and are our darling ultimate possibilities to fall also into their hands?

But however we regard the sad note that rings through Thomas Hardy's work –

Each of us who has any faculty for literary criticism can not fail to be spell bound by the granite like strengths of Hardy's sentences, the aesthetic unity of his conceptions. When we open his books we are recalled to the contemplation of man and his ways – we no longer dawdle in the world of fashion – or undergo a course of mental gymnastics with the super intellectuals – we are now concerned with man, man with his primitive passions – man with his common emotions – emotions as potent with kings as with paupers – with wise men as with foolish men. In these books we get back to humanity and are dealing with the original forces, that have influenced, are influencing and will influence for ever all his thoughts and actions. Think as we will, do as we may, none of us is safe from the perfervid instinct – the natural preserver of the human race – the love of man for woman or the love of woman for man. This is the one grand irrational force abroad in the world – splendidly irresponsible – sublimely capricious – it marches through our ranks – overturning our ambitions, upsetting our plans, disarranging all. The distressed tangle of love is Mr. Hardy's subject and the background of his stories is not the city or the sea but the soil. Man being created out of the dust appears most dignified when closest to it. Man and woman – the mould – and beyond illimitable space.

Robert Louis Stevenson said of Mr. Hardy's work, 'I have seen sentences of his hardly equalled in any literature.' –This appreciation has been endorsed by a host of critics. His position as an artist is established – how far men will acquiesce in his philosophical attitude remains to be seen. Whether man will find with Mr. James – the world pliable to their will. Whether as Masterlinch indicates – our souls – our astral bodies – will develop undreamt of activity – in revealing vast possibilities of the spiritual world. Or whether the last man – watching the final flickerings of a waning sun – will feel with Thomas Hardy – that sorrow had won the day that the appearance of life was unfortunate – and its extinction happy – are matters that the future alone can solve. Let me close my lecture with the last verse of one of Mr. Hardy's poems where with grim irony he represents the deity – full of penitence & remorse grieving over the earth's corpse.

> As when in Noes days
> I whelmed the plains with sea,
> So at this last, when flesh
> And herb but fossils be
> And, all extinct, their piteous dust
> Revolves obliviously
> That I made Earth and life and man
> I still repenteth me!!

Editorial Note This lecture is dated1908 and begins with a poem dedicated to Hardy which will appear in a future *Newsletter*. Malcolm Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, tells us that Llewelyn spent much of the autumn of 1908 in the

company of his brother John at Burpham and at Montacute, reading and preparing for his lecturing engagements in America. According to Elwin they sailed for New York on 19th December 1908 and Llewelyn began lecturing in the following January. It is therefore likely that this Hardy lecture was written during the period in which he was being 'coached' by John Cowper and it is possible that the editing to which it has been subjected took place under his brother's supervision. Malcolm Elwin comments on the early lectures in New York, but makes no mention of a lecture on Hardy. However, Peter Foss has provided interesting background information from Llewelyn's diaries. He writes: 'Llewelyn was booked for a series of lectures in various odd halls and schools etc. in places around Philadelphia in the early part of 1909; these included lectures on George Eliot, Dickens, Meredith, Hawthorne, Stevenson – and Hardy. The Hardy one was given on Wednesday 20 January at a place, which in one text he calls Oak Lane, in another text he gives as Oakland. It might just be Oakmont, Philadelphia, but more research is required and I haven't got down to the Philadelphia diary in earnest. The lecture was delivered in a church, with snow outside. He goes on to say (text B) "the windows were coloured with cheap glass ... In America I don't think it strikes anyone that God's spirit might frequent a church, so my lectures did not sound blasphemous."'

SIX AFTERNOON LECTURES BY

Llewellyn Powys, B.A.

of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

ON

"Poets of the Romantic Revival"

FEBRUARY 16—Cowper.	MARCH 9—Byron.
FEBRUARY 23—Wordsworth.	MARCH 16—Shelley.
MARCH 2—Coleridge.	MARCH 23—Keats.

Tuesday Afternoons, 4 o'clock, in Witherspoon Hall.

Course Ticket, $1.50. With Reserved Seat, $2.25.
Single Admission, 50 cts. With Reserved Seat, 75 cts.

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This page is reproduced actual size from the 24-page programme of University Extension Lectures to be given in Winter 1909 in the Witherspoon Hall, Walnut and Juniper Streets, Philadelphia.

Anyone going to the Millennium Dome should look carefully at the large mural on the left of the main foyer. This consists of a massive advertising hoarding which shows three 'pictures' in turn: a large oak forest; a piece of complex machinery; and finally a massive shelf of books, turning the wall into a vast library. The whole thing is meant to symbolise 'Work and Learning'. More importantly, one of the most conspicuous of the titles amongst the thousands on the shelves, at sight level rather than high in the air, is a copy of the new Overlook Press edition of JCP's *A Glastonbury Romance*. Well worth a visit to the Dome just for that! And don't be put off by all the media hype – the Dome is terrific in every way, and should not be missed under any circumstances. (Chris Gostick)

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Sven Erik Täckmark, that indefatigable Powysian – John Cowper's 'Erik the Red' tells me that on 27 February a group of enthusiasts gathered in his flat for the purpose of setting up The John Cowper Powys Society of Sweden. Many of the members are also our members, we send our congratulations and wish the newest of the three Powys societies every success in the future.

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Kris Hemensley, who has the only specialist poetry bookshop in Australia has written to tell me that he has moved premises to: Basement, 256 Flinders Street, Melbourne 3000. In talking about the difficulties facing booksellers he says: 'A crucial question will be how we adapt (as a bookshop of poetry and ideas) to the new situation of internet commerce. I am passionately against society extending manifestations of convenience – because I see this internet convenience undermining culture. A bookshop is a cultural entity, commercial convenience is only a part of its service. Our shop will shut, if and when we have to watch a computer screen rather than inter-act with browsers and visitors.' I can hear the Amens to that.

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Patricia Dawson has announced her third collection of poems. It is called Reliquaries, ISBN 1 870653 94 7, and available from her at £4.99, p&pUK 39p. She has added a footnote: 'I hope any prospective buyer will not be put off by the over self-indulgent teen-age effort I sent you in another context. They are sharper and more pared down.'

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A student member, Patrick Couch of Stockholm University, who is preparing a thesis on *A Glastonbury Romance*, wants to trace copies of the following reviews:

J. R. Theobald, *Bookman*, London, LXXXIII 493, p 36, 1932
Archer Winstein, *Bookman*, New York, May 1932
Mary Ross, *New York Herald Tribune* (Books) March 27, 1932
W. R. Brooks, *Outlook*, April, 1932
Gerald Gould, *Observer*, July 16, 1932

H. M. Dowling, *Western Mail*, August10, 1932
G. Wilson Knight, *Yorkshire Post*, June 3, 1932
Boston Transcript, April, 1932
New Republic, April, 1932
Scotsman, July 21, 1955

If you can help please contact him at: Odengaten 47 1tr, 113 51 Stockholm. Email: couchp@engelska.su.se

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I have received a copy of the *William Barnes Society Newsletter* for November. It is edited by Richard Burleigh, who is also a member of our Society. Its 28 pages contain a great deal of interesting information about the great man and what has been going on within an obviously flourishing Society. If you would like to see a copy and obtain further details write to: Richard Burleigh, Alberta Cottage, Higher Sea Lane, Charmouth, Dorset, DT6 6BB.

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Neil Lee writes a monthly article for a local Derbyshire magazine under the pen name Tom Bates. His next is to be about Shirley and although not focused on John Cowper will include photographs and background information about his birthplace. The magazine costs 75p, but members can obtain a copy by sending two first class stamps to Neil at: 6 Chapel Croft, Matlock, DE4 2DB. or to Tom Bates, *Reflections Magazine*, 118 Saltergate, Chesterfield, S40 1NG.

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I have had an appeal for help from Angela Hodges, of Stoke Sub-Hamdon, Somerset. She is researching the life of the Revd W. J. Rowland, who was vicar of that parish when the Powyses were at Montacute. John Cowper in *Autobiography* (p172) mentions visiting the Revd Rowland's son at Downing College and there is evidence that the two families were friendly. If anyone can throw light on this connection Mrs Hodges and I will be very grateful.

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Tony Hallett comments that JCP seems to be keeping strange company nowadays. The February issue of *The Good Book Guide* includes *A Glastonbury Romance* in a feature on Magical Literature where it rubs shoulders with *The Gormenghast Trilogy* and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, etc.

Sleuthing in Davos

During the summer of 1999 I visited Davos Platz, the mountain resort in Graubünden, which was once the centre for the high altitude cure of tuberculosis patients and now a winter sports resort. I was of course on the track of Llewelyn as part of my work on his early diaries, and I had set myself the task of exploring the walks that Llewelyn took in 1909–11, getting inside (if it existed) the Clavadel sanatorium, doing some work at the Davos archives, and, hopefully, having a

holiday as well! On this occasion, fortune favoured the Powysite, it being also the best week for weather last summer in Switzerland.

I took with me a summarised list of Llewelyn's routes and locations as described in the diaries and was able to establish pretty well where they were, even down to individual geographical/geological features – such as the 'great Portland rock' above the Frauenkirch church, or the various tracks he called 'the pedlar's hill', 'the wood path' and so on. I believe I was even able to identify the 'clump of patient fir trees' at the corner of Clavadel and Sertig lanes – surprisingly distinctive. Being there made it all very clear despite the intervening 90 years, and I had the use too of contemporary maps and photographs from about 1910 to help in clarifying changes in the ground.

The sanatorium does still exist – grandly called the Zürcher Hohenklinik, and in the throes of massive redevelopment and expansion (odd when you realise that most of the old sanatoria have been changed into hotels or apartments). The '30s block – an important work of modernist architecture by Gaberel – is undergoing restoration, whilst the old sanatorium of 1903 is being left to deteriorate and may not survive the onward push of renewal that characterises all things Swiss. I enjoyed wonderful hospitality whilst I was in Davos, typified by a memorable drive round with Frau Büchi, wife of the former director of the klinik, who got me into the kitchens, offices, corridors of the old sanatorium. Though little of it looks as it did in Llewelyn's time, an idea can be got from the vestibule area with its arcading and tall windows commanding views of the Alps. Even the Jugendstil clock, that must have been known to Llewelyn, still remained. Unfortunately the sanatorium has little of the ornate splendour of the 'white palace' described in *Skin for Skin* for the chief reason that the roofs have been taken off and the exterior pretty well mutilated. It was once a grand place and even appears resplendent in red and cream in a painting by Kirchner. And yes, 'Queen Victoria in Bed' (known more properly to the locals as Amselflue) is quite distinctive from its windows!

Just below the sanatorium is the old Bauernhaus occupied by Kirchner in the last period of his life. Llewelyns's account of Kirchner, contained in two published articles, is one of the most important descriptions of the artist in his last years and is cited extensively in German books and catalogues on the painter. He met Kirchner through Lise Gujer who helped nurse Llewelyn in the three years prior to his death in 1939. I found it not generally understood that Llewelyn first met Gujer when she was a 17-year-old patient at Clavadel in 1911. The diary records the many encounters between them, sometimes at the 'Olivia', a house which was used by the Clavadel medical director, Ernst Frey. This building again is of sufficient merit to have been saved and transported 200 metres down the hillside during the expansion of the hospital in the early '90s.

One of the remarkable coincidences that came my way at Davos was evident in the large banner displayed outside the Belvedere Hotel in Davos's principal

street, reading 'Exhibition of the textiles of Lise Gujer to the designs of E. L. Kirchner. Opposite the Belvedere is the new Kirchner Museum, of splendid modernist design, purpose built for the collection. Last summer Lise Gujer was centre-stage – a name famous in Graubünden and whose work complements Kirchner's with a startling beauty. I have a little theory that Gujer's tapestry of November 1937, 'Two Figures on a Footpath' shows her and Llewelyn walking together in Clavadel. Interestingly a copy of *Swiss Essays* was on display in the exhibition, and her wooden loom was there too. I had the privilege of being taken to 'Gruoba', the peasant cottage in the Sertig Valley occupied by Gujer from 1940 till her death in 1967, and where she worked on many of the exhibited fabrics. It is a quite beautiful place in a lonely pasture, left much as it was when she was there, with Kirchner wood-carvings inside.

I spent a good deal of time too in the Record Office, situated in the English quarter of Davos, where the director, Dr Timothy Nelson, extended a warm welcome and indispensable help. I am now able to identify many of the characters who appear in Llewelyn's diary as well as his walks and haunts. On one memorable occasion in April 1910, when John was on a visit to his brother, they were obliged to call on the English chaplain, Revd E. S. Woods, but were thwarted 'by heavy hearts and bursting bladders': 'How we were to present ourselves at the vicarage', writes Llewelyn, 'undisturbed by this last inconvenience, seemed as we walked along the windy inhospitable Davos street, an insoluble problem.' By one of those quirks of fate, the vicarage turned out to be a fine turreted structure by Issler, the Villa Montagna, standing high up above my window in the Record Office, a neighbour to the houses of Symonds and Stevenson. (Woods, having entertained John Cowper Powys with tea and toast, went on to higher things – Bishop of Croydon, no less.)

Exploring the Sertig Valley I realised more clearly the importance of this place to Llewelyn, both in 1910–11 and 1936–39 – the 'happy valley' of *Swiss Essays*. Central to the prospect was the Sertig Mill, scene of a significant moment of epiphany in Llewelyn's life (on 5th April 1911). When he was first in Clavadel and making early tentative walks he used the Mill as the destination point to be reached and touched, a sort of marker in a bewildering world. The Mill is illustrated in *Swiss Essays* as it looked in 1938 – but mysteriously unidentified (caption wrong). Some of Llewelyn's biography still proves elusive – no one seems to know the exact date when Llewelyn and John arrived in Clavadel, Elwin and Graves giving it as 10th December, Lock as the 8th. It was in fact the 9th December, a date Llewelyn was hardly likely to forget!

Peter Foss

Further notes provided by Peter Foss

The Diaries

Llewelyn spent 1909 to 1911 at Davos, he was in England in 1911 (Montacute and East Chaldon) before returning to Switzerland in 1912, where he suffered another

relapse. This important, formative period of his life, when he was struggling for survival and finding his vocation as a writer, is covered in the later autobiographical work *Skin for Skin* (1925) However, the diaries which form the basis for that work, detailed, immediate and visceral, have never been published, although they make up one of the most remarkable records in literature of a young aspiring writer fighting against the disease of tuberculosis.

The significant run of diaries from 1909 to 1912 is a detailed description of Llewelyn's life in the sanatorium at Davos Platz, and his convalescence in the West Country. They provide a kaleidoscope of impressions sometimes at a feverish intensity matching the effects of the consumption itself. Llewelyn recorded daily life in the hospital, the characters, their talk and their treatment. He quoted from letters received and sent to his family and friends, conversations he had and passages from his reading. He detailed his erotic exploits with some of the women patients, and his personal spiritual and philosophical struggles. John Cowper Powys considered the diaries masterly in their portrayal of the 'education of a soul', and recommended they should be published in their entirety.

The diaries were utilised by Malcolm Elwin in his *Life of Llewelyn Powys* (1946) and in Louis Wilkinson's *Welsh Ambassadors* (1936), but in distorted and selective ways. The bibliographical history is covered in Peter Foss, 'The Confessions of a Diarist', *Powys Review* xii (spring 1983), and their significance and themes in Peter Foss, 'The Diaries of a Consumptive', a paper delivered to the Fifth International Aubrac Conference, 'The Literature of the Sanatorium' (1998) to be published in *Ecrivains découvreurs de Montagne* Cahiers 3 (scheduled for summer 1999).

Work in Progress – A Bibliography of the Writings of Llewelyn Powys

In 1988 I acquired from Margaret Eaton the working notes and indexes of her bibliography of Llewelyn Powys, which she had been engaged on piecemeal since 1964. After sorting the material I began to put her references on computer disk and substantially add to them myself, with the aid of a university library service. In 1992 the means to acquire further information dried up and lack of funds prevented further work. I am glad to say I have returned to the Bibliography, but work remains slow.

The Bibliography is currently conceived in seven sections, as follows :

A Individual books and pamphlets.
B Selections made from books and collections
C Articles and essays contributed to periodicals, newspapers and magazines
D Reviews contributed to periodicals, newspapers and magazines
E Contributions to books
F Letters, broadcasts and ephemera
G Selected titles containing material on Llewelyn Powys and his work.

(This format is subject to alteration)

Section A will contain a full descriptive catalogue of all first editions (American and English) of Llewelyn Powys's books (31 entries in this section). It will also make mention of other, including foreign, editions, and take account of bibliographical history. This will substantially enlarge the only other descriptive catalogue ever attempted of Llewelyn Powys – Lloyd Emerson Siberell's of 1939. This section is largely complete.

Section C contains so far references for about 380 items of an estimated 500, whilst section D contains references to about 125 items of at present an unknown quantity. The other sections between them account for over 100 further entries. I have in my collection copies of about 310 items from sections C and D. The only other substantial check-list of contributions made is in the Appendix to my own 1991 book on Llewelyn Powys (p 346) where 296 items are listed.

Progress will be slow, but a provisional bibliography of some sections might be attempted. I am of course grateful for offers of any help to locate material through libraries or from individual's private collections. This work receives no funding.

Peter Foss

A Relevant Memory

When the Second World War broke out in 1939 I was fourteen and was evacuated with my school to Bridge House, about five miles from Montacute near to the Ilminster road. Unfortunately I had not heard of the Powys family and their work, but the following two years that I spent in that area allowed me to experience their landscape. Two ponies had been lent to the school by their owners who had been called up. They were ridden by some of us who could ride, so with these and our bicycles we were able to explore.

I had been writing poetry since I was four and I wrote several poems while I was in Somerset. When my daughter Maria gave me a copy of *Wood and Stone* which she found in Dorchester in the '70s, after I had discovered JCP, I was interested to find that his reaction to the local soil crops and trees had been so similar to my own. There are many examples that I could quote but this is a brief one:

> As she ascended the shadowy lane with its crumbly banks of sandy soil and its overhanging trees, she felt once again how this heavy luxuriant landscape dragged her earthward and clogged the wings of her spirit. The tall grasses growing thick by the wayside enlaced themselves with the elder branches and dog-wood which in their turn blended indissolubly with the lower branches of the elms. The lane itself was but a deep shadowy path dividing a flowing sea of foliage, which seemed to pour in a tidal wave of suffocating fertility over the whole valley.

My Poem, 'Summer 1941 Near Bridge House' (Note, capitals are as they were,

not as I would use them now.)

Summer dust lies on the fields
On the leaves, stained, grown, and the full blown
Grass-seed, dreaming till it is sown
In the powdered earth.
The cut hay dies
With only the breath of a blade,
That rejoices in the flies
And the sting of nettles and the sun.
I saw the river as it fell through the weir.
I could hear
The strong thud
Of the foam on the stone.
No soul sings in the stream.
Lawns, trees, perfidious plantations, seas
All dream,
Dead with the heavy sleep of life
And no song wakes them.
At night I dreamt of brushing fields of hay
And waterfalls.
We live in a dream dreamt by eternity.
All that we touch is shadow she has seen.
And that eternity has made will wake.

Patricia Dawson

Bridge House has been demolished to make way for a park for mobile homes. P.D.

Reviews

A Severe Case of Dandruff by Herbert Williams
Aberystwyth: Gomer Press, 1999. Paperback, £5.95. ISBN 1 85902 773 3

This, Herbert Williams' first novel, follows the familiar autobiographical pattern of an author venturing into fiction. There is, however, nothing ordinary or conventional about the story he has to tell. It is a tale of a restricted adolescence, and a retrospective condemnation of the fledgling national health service, told with sensitivity and without rancour. Herbert Williams' formal schooling ended in 1947 at the age of fifteen when he was taken ill with tuberculosis and sent to a sanatorium. Readers know Herbert Williams as a biographer of John Cowper Powys, a poet, *Looking Through Time*, and a writer of drama documentaries for both television and radio. This short novel owes more to his dramatic work than his poetry, which is not to suggest that readers will not empathise with Ralph the

sixteen-year-old shut away for two years in the Brecon Beacons – far from family and friends, with survival added to all the other uncertainties of adolescence.

Williams evokes, as only a former inmate might, the sanatorium of the late forties, wooden huts with ever open windows, visitors between 3 and 5 on Saturdays and Sundays (unless you were dying), the all male environment, the withholding of information, the hierarchical classification of staff and patients and a sub-culture in which sardonic humour was the only expression of despair and mild TB was known as dandruff. Relationships between patients are convincingly, if sometimes brutally conveyed by a series of conversational vignettes punctuated with bad language and sexual innuendo, some of which I have not heard since my own adolescence. Although undoubtedly central to a sixteen–year-old's experience in that hot-house barrack-room atmosphere I found this just a little off-putting. However, to have substituted asterisks, neatly arranged in blocks of four, would hardly have done justice to the situation. In contrast to this we have the tender portrayal of the brief love affair between Ralph and a local schoolgirl and the intervention of normality through letters from one of his pals enjoying his adolescence back home.

Herbert Williams says that his novel is not strictly biographical: perhaps not, but I fell to wondering how far the necessity of escaping from so threatening an environment by taking refuge in books and turning in upon oneself had shaped the poet. I was also struck by the contrast between the experiences, in the same plight, of the son of a well-to-do vicar and a less privileged lad from South Wales. Elsewhere in this *Newsletter* Peter Foss describes what remains of the 'great white palace' of a sanatorium at Davos in which Llewelyn was treated less than a decade earlier. For arcaded halls read wooden huts, for amorous affairs with rich Jewish girls, read endless frustrated sex-laden conversation in the ward and an escape to one daring kiss on the lips.

A Severe Case of Dandruff, read at one sitting, plunges one back into a world starkly real but long gone and leaves one counting blessings. I found it, like the treatment, not always comfortable, but certainly therapeutic and to be recommended to anyone who has never been seriously ill.

J.B.

The Ocean, by James Hanley

London: The Harvill Press, 1999. £9.99 ISBN 1 86046 675 3

It's good news indeed that Harvill have recently re-published *The Ocean*, one of James Hanley's finest novels, in a high quality softback edition, with a fine cover picture by Hanley's son – and John Cowper Powys's godson — Liam Powys Hanley. *The Ocean* was written in the early part of the war, when Hanley was living in London during the worst of the Blitz, and at a time when all writers were struggling to get anything published at all because of war time limitations on paper, and the firm hand of government to prevent anything but the most positive

of propaganda appearing. This was a game well suited to Hanley's sense of anarchy, and he actually managed to get four novels and a book of short stories published during the war. As a result *The Ocean* is a much shorter, much tighter, much more compressed book than much of Hanley's earlier fiction. Originally published in April 1941, and drawing heavily on Hanley's experience at sea during the First World War, it was highly topical at a time when the Battle of the Atlantic was reaching its height, with savage submarine attacks on British shipping threatening to cut the life blood of both military and civilian supplies from the United States.

The plot is simply told. A small passenger ship crossing to Canada is torpedoed at midnight and sinks quickly. All is chaos and confusion in the cold darkness, but some of the lifeboats get away, although not before they are machined gunned by the surfaced submarine. Then all is darkness again. At daybreak one lifeboat drifts alone amidst a grey empty ocean, containing just four passengers and the elderly seaman, Michael Curtain. The body of another seaman lies dead in the bottom of the boat. The novel is the story of these five men, one a teacher and one a priest, and their struggle for survival in the long days and nights that lie ahead. In fact there is no evidence to support the widespread belief that German U-Boat crews machine gunned survivors of their attacks, and its inclusion at the beginning of the story is an example of the way Hanley was able to respond for the national need for such propaganda. That apart, the theme of survival is particularly apt for a nation struggling for its own existence in a largely friendless world, so the novel can also be seen as a metaphor for that larger struggle, although it is only incidentally concerned with the war itself.

Structurally *The Ocean* resembles Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat' (1897), one of the classic accounts of survival at sea written from his own personal experience. And although Hanley was never shipwrecked himself, he sailed with men who were, and his account is grimly realistic. More importantly, however, is the way Hanley structures Michael Curtain's interior monologue, as he struggles to use his long experience to sustain his disparate group of fellow survivors. A narrative which is constantly cut through by the individual preoccupations of these other men; their fragmented memories, dreams and hallucinations. The climax of the story occurs when a whale surfaces near the lifeboat, with the very different way each man responds. Hanley uses this inspiring natural occurrence as a unifying focus for the rapidly disintegrating group of survivors, subtly indicating that human emancipation and sustainability is to be found in nature rather than the tortured confines of contemporary society, in which war and class remain the defining features.

At the end of the story, the viewpoint shifts from the sailor Curtain to that of the elderly priest, Father Michaels, who has barely survived the ordeal. As the boat nears shore at last he has a vision of a man standing alone on a rock, a vision he takes to be that of Christ Himself; and although this finally dissolves into the

physical figure of a fisherman and his boat, it is not sufficient to displace the religious mysticism of the whole experience. So Hanley brings his tale to an end, but it is more in the telling than in the story itself that the novel breaks new ground, and can usefully be paired with another of Hanley's wartime books *Sailor's Song* (1943), in which a similar theme of survival at sea, is examined through the political and social history of the seaman, as an example of working-class struggle and endurance. Hopefully Harvill might soon re-issue this book, which like *The Ocean* has been too long out of print. Both were books that Hanley's friend John Cowper Powys rated highly, and with good reason, for they are not to be missed by anyone interested in literature that seeks to push back the boundaries of structure in an attempt to find new forms and new expressions. With its subtle intermixture of modernism and realism, this is art of a very high order indeed.

Chris Gostick

Obscure roem. Essays on John Cowper Powys, by L.Th. Lehmann
edited by Gerben Wynia, with an introduction by Willem Brakman.
Available from Uitgeverij Flanor, Sibeliusweg 36,
2901 GH Capelle aan den IJssel. £8 or FL.25.

Although the Dutch are reputedly great readers of foreign literature, with English taking pride of place, the readership of the Powys Brothers in the Low Countries is deplorably limited. Of the three, it is only John Cowper who has achieved some recognition at least: one essay (*The Art of Growing Old*) and one novel (*Wolf Solent*) received a translation into Dutch in 1949 and 1984 respectively. The prominent novelist and critic Simon Vestdijk was one of the first to draw attention to Powys's literary genius in the fifties. To be sure, JCP-enthusiasts can be found here and there but there is no substantial Powys readership to speak of. Both Theodore and Llewelyn are virtually unknown in this country.

One of the most active propagandists was, no doubt, Louis Lehmann, a minor and wayward Dutch poet, who wrote for the Dutch literary joumal *Literair Paspoort* (now defunct) about the life and works of John Cowper Powys between 1953 and 1966. *Obscure roem* ('Obscure Fame') has nicely collected his eight articles plus an In Memoriam; they deal respectively with *Porius*, *Atlantis*, *The Brazen Head*, *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, *Homer and the Aether*, *All or Nothing*, *Weymouth Sands*, and *Poems*, edited by Kenneth Hopkins. Willem Brakman, one of today's major Dutch novelists, wrote a high-spirited introduction for the present edition. Among his many publications are the novel *Glubkes oordeel* (1976) which – according to the editor – was strongly inspired by *A Glastonbury Romance*, and an extended essay on *Wolf Solent* in 1985. More recently, he spoke admiringly about *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages*, which he considers one of the most neglected masterpieces of the last century.

One cannot but be grateful for this slim volume of Powys criticism as a

historical document.. However, in the light of more recent Powys scholarship, much of its factual information badly needs to be updated. Thus, we know much more, for instance, about John Cowper's private life, his American lectures, and about Louis Wilkinson than can be found in these pages. It would also need a somewhat more distanced view of JCP's achievements and failures than we are given here. In other words, we need an up-to-date monograph in Dutch on him. In my view, the present volume's editor, Gerben Wynia (who is also a member of The Powys Society) would be the ideal person to fill this gap.

Marius Buning

Growing up in Kilmersdon, Recollections of a Girl 150 years ago,
by C. J. Hamilton, wih an Introduction by Stephen Powys Marks
published by Stephen Powys Marks, Kilmersdon. £4.85, including p&p.

These recollections of a girl who grew up in the Somerset village of Kilmersdon where her father was vicar were first published in serial form in *The Treasury*, an illustrated magazine, and came to light in 1998. This booklet must be a treasure indeed to anyone belonging to Kilmersdon, but its interest extends beyond the village boundary. I grew up in the Somerset village of West Coker, three miles from Montacute, more that 70 years ago, and like Miss Hamilton left it at 18, and I was struck by the similarities between my own experiences, those handed down by my parents, and those recounted by Miss Hamilton. My mother grew up within walking distance of Montacute and was confirmed in its parish church during the incumbency of Charles Francis Powys. I shall restrict my comments to those aspects of the story which relate to the sort of background against which the Powyses, and my own mother grew up.

Montacute Vicarage is on low ground looking out upon Hedgecock and St Michael's hills. The Powys mother always cautioned her children that the vicarage was like a castle set on a hill and that what went on there was known to all. C. J. Hamilton tells how her father succeeded in having a new vicarage built for himself out of the shadow of the church and away from the prying eyes of the village. Something similar had already happened in Montacute before Charles Francis took the living. The old vicarage opposite the church had been abandoned as being no longer economic to repair and a new house built on what were then the outskirts of the parish. Despite which, it is now undoubtedly one of the most desirable residences in the village.

Both Montacute and Kilmersdon were dominated – virtually owned – by great families. There are still people in Montacute who involuntarily touch their forelock as they pronounce the name Phelips (unless of course it is followed by 'Arms'). Both Richard Hamilton and Charles Francis were undoubtedly overshadowed by local gentry, whereas in my village the Rector was to all intents and purposes the Squire, very much his own master and the local figurehead. My mother remembered a new incumbent being met at the village boundary and

carried shoulder high to his church, preceded by a drum and fife band.

Miss Hamilton devotes a chapter of her memoir to Club Day, the occasion, quietly disapproved of by her father, when the members of the club (or guild) dressed-up, marched, made merry and got drunk. Her account of this event closely resembles what A. R. Powys describes as happening in Montacute in his *The English Parish Church*. The Revd Hamilton was always apprehensive about Club Day but allowed a service to be held in church before the eating and drinking got under way. A. R. Powys tells how the officers of the club came to the vicarage to fetch his father to church and 'There for once a year at least he preached to stonemasons from the hill, to carters and to woodmen, whether they were Baptist or Wesleyan, whether they cared for God or no'.

C.J.H. tells how at christenings, when her father asked 'Name this child', the safe bet was to give the infant a scriptural name. The Baptismal Register in my village bulges with evidence of the practice: Corziah, Parthenici, Argalus and even the occasional Love and Temperance. A relative of my grandmother was blessed with the name Onesiphorus, but known in the family as Will.

This little book tells of the fight to have a new vicarage built, the lack of money for a new school and much else which is of interest in its own right, but what it also does, is to augment by implication, the sparse information we have about life at the Powys vicarage. Miss Hamilton's approach is worldly-wise and not without humour and I found myself imagining that this was the kind of account that Marian Powys might have written – what a pity she never did.

Eve Batten

The Church of St Peter and St Paul, Kilmersdon, A Guide

compiled by Stephen Powys Marks for Kilmersdon PCC

available from Stephen Powys Marks, Kilmersdon. £2.85, inc. p&p.

This little book has been produced as part of the village celebration of the second millennium of the Christian era. Very tastefully presented in A5 format with a number of excellent photographs and a clear plan detailing all the main architectural features, it would be a pleasure to take with one on an exploration of the building. The first section is a brief guided tour of the church but it is in the section entitled Building History that the author really gets into his stride as a professional architect, enabling the visitor to accompany him on a journey of detection which reveals how the building has evolved. That was something I looked forward to doing, but arrived at Kilmersdon to find the church locked and shrouded in scaffolding, corrugated iron and plastic. However, I will go back, and any committed church crawler should seize the opportunity when in the area. The guide will give so much more pleasure than the usual duplicated sheet prepared by a well-meaning churchwarden.

J.B.

John Cowper Powys in Germany Today (February 2000)

Increased interest in John Cowper Powys's work at the end of the 1990s led to re-publication of some of his books in Britain and the USA, and it seems that more are intended. This is a welcome development, even more so as commercial success for the publishers is not guaranteed. John Cowper Powys is not a household name, his novels are long and unwieldy, and thus often expensive, and he writes about an eccentric largely by-gone English (upper) middle-class world. All the more surprising then that he has experienced something of a revival in Germany (and Austria) in recent years; in fact there may have been more major John Cowper Powys books in print in German at any given time from 1995 than anywhere else in the world.

It began with a new translation of *The Meaning of Culture* (*Kultur als Lebenskunst*) published by Junius Verlag Hamburg in 1989. *Autobiography* (*Autobiographie*) followed in P. Kirchheim Verlag Munich in 1992. Whilst these two publications were by smaller publishers, the larger literary publisher Hanser Verlag Munich ambitiously presented *A Glastonbury Romance* in 1995, leaving the English title. In 1997 the 1929–1939 Diaries were published by Residenz Verlag Salzburg and Vienna (*Die Tagebücher 1929–1939*). In 1999 Hanser presented its second translation of a Dorset novel, *Weymouth Sands* (*Der Strand von Weymouth*). *Wolf Solent* was issued as a paperback by Rowohlt Hamburg in 1994. This edition is no longer in print, but the mail-order company 2001 has just added *Wolf Solent* to its programme of cheaply priced books, which has also recently included *Autobiography* and *A Glastonbury Romance*. A number of these works are now out of print again – my local bookshop could only offer the Diaries, 2001's *Wolf Solent*, *Weymouth Sands* and Henning Ahrens's book *John Cowper Powys' Elementalismus. Eine Lebensphilosophie* (Vervuert, Frankfurt am Main, 1997). None the less a dedicated reader will have been able to build up a fairly good collection of Powys in German over the 1990s. Amazon.de's online reader-reviewer of *Weymouth Sands* in Germany writes that a Powys revival in Britain is underway; in fact the author was probably 'rediscovered' by German publishers at least at the same time if not before he was in the UK or the USA.

Of course this does not make John Cowper Powys a household name in Germany, either. But there is some interest, and the two novels *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* were fairly widely reviewed on radio and in the press, including reviews in some of Germany's most-respected and largest newspapers, such as *Die Zeit* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Reviewers of largely unknown works refer rightly to names that their readers might know, as a way of placing the new author in context. Among all the writers mentioned one name stands out: the German author Hanns Henny Jahnn, who was apparently influential in 1957 in the decision to present Powys with his only

official award in recognition of his work, the Bronze Plaque of the Free Academy of Arts in Hamburg. Jahnn himself is an early to mid twentieth-century author whose work was not rediscovered until the 1980s and 1990s, and whose long novels retain a cult following. These two writers share a certain unique isolation in the backwaters of mainstream twentieth-century modernism.

Reviewers of Powys's novels in Germany all have mixed feelings. They agree that Powys's work displays eccentric genius, and they note that it is often long-winded and stylistically weak. They agree that Powys is something of a magician, who conjures up a wild, carnivalistic world of desire and clownery beneath a bourgeois exterior. Powys is an 'entfesselter Viktorianer', an unfettered Victorian, one reviewer wrote (Sybille Cramer). This is a lovely phrase, because Powys remains a Victorian. A number of reviewers find Powys's anti-materialism, his free attitude to sexuality, and even his strong female characters refreshing (perhaps a little uncritically). But these are sentiments that one might encounter anywhere. What makes the still relatively sparse German reception of Powys in the 1990s stand out is a debate on modernism.

The need to determine Powys's relationship to modernism is, ultimately, political. The modernism debate in Germany has always centred on the question of aesthetic progress; if a work of art demonstrates progressive formal innovation it may be modernist, or timely, but if it does not it is in danger of being seen as anachronistic and politically suspect. German reviewers do not go so far as to level political criticism at Powys, but they nearly all agree that his work is old-fashioned and anti-modern.

It seems that Hanser-Verlag was prepared for this kind of reaction. Both *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* were advertised as classic modernist works: '*A Glastonbury Romance* is one of those 'total' modernist novels, which create an all-encompassing vision of their characters and their world, and thus it is on a par with *Ulysses*, [Robert Musil's] *Man Without Qualities* or Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.' *Weymouth Sands* was more simply advertised as: 'The masterpiece of the modernist classic, John Cowper Powys, for the first time in German.'

Whilst Hanser had every reason, including commercial ones, to advertise in this way, the reviewers did not agree, and some explicitly took issue. Powys's novels are 'anachronistic' and 'old-fashioned', and only recommended to readers who are on the author's own wayward wavelength. His works lack humour, and his style is inelegant, bloated and careless. Readers who have no interest in the esoteric, or New Age thinking, will not appreciate Powys. *A Glastonbury Romance* is a 'monumental dismissal of modernist thought: In 1200 pages [Powys] steamrollered the odious sobriety of the materialist age with his appeals to mythology' (Friedhelm Rathjen). Reviewers are at pains to show that Powys is not like Joyce; whereas the latter dealt with profane myth and located this in the city, Powys went to the small town and drew on early-Christian and pre-Christian

legend which he allowed to devour the present (Rathjen). The same reviewer notes that Powys's interest in the unconscious was contemporary to Freud, but that Powys saw Freud as a charlatan and preferred to stick to his own archaic notions of consciousness. And the ultimate criticism: Powys ignored modernist techniques of perspective and narrative, and remained imprisoned in a realism which was hardly adequate to his mythological designs. *A Glastonbury Romance* was said to 'narrate its often outrageous plot full of mythical speculation, visions and exaggerations with astonishingly old-fashioned stylistic means that hardly progress further than Dickens' (Michael Treutwein). Powys is an author who is 'against civilisation, close to nature, and writes and thinks badly' (Rolf Vollmann).

Yet, in spite of their reservations all the reviews of *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* I have seen conclude positively. The great design of these two monumental novels is flawed, but it is precisely this which makes them attractive. Powys may be 'anti-Bloomsbury' and 'traditional', but *A Glastonbury Romance* is a 'marvellous work of modern prose', and Powys has created 'a complete cosmos of his own, complete in two ways: independent and perfect' (Fritz J. Raddatz). Powys's creative vision wins out, and he is fascinating because his work is so contradictory. Like the pianist in *Weymouth Sands*, of whom Perdita Wane says he makes so many mistakes, Powys remains captivating (Friedhelm Rathjen). Powys's work never attained the standards of modernism, but 'the specific aesthetic quality' of *A Glastonbury Romance*, its 'imbalance, clumsiness and dissonance' make the author a potential early post-modernist (Rathjen). 'Anyone who accepts the invitation to enter this monumental literary cosmos will learn that the imagination is the starting point to a better life' (Regina Kossek). 'This monster of a novel [*Weymouth Sands*] will be of interest for a long time to come, and so it should be, if we do not wish further to cut ourselves off from our own (supposedly so enlightened) feelings' (Klaus Siblewski). Apparently John Cowper Powys adheres to an ugly, but explosive aesthetic, which may not be to everyone's taste. Anyone willing to take the plunge will be richly rewarded.

Greg Bond

Elizabeth Myers and the man who made the Sex Kitten

You would hardly expect to find Elizabeth Myers, the gentle-souled novelist wife of Littleton Powys, paired with Roger Vadim, the colourful discoverer of Brigitte Bardot, whom he married as the first of five wives, but Vadim's death in February reminded me of the part he played in bringing Elizabeth's work to the screen.

Elizabeth Myers was a film fan of a generation which saw film-craft expand through the coming of sound and rapid advances in technical and production

values. Her published letters reveal her interest in Soviet and French cinema. She mentions actors as varied as Jean Gabin and Charles Chaplin and declares herself a fan of Walt Disney.

Towards the end of her short life she had hopes of seeing Hollywood embrace *Mrs. Christopher*, the last of her three novels, a story of murder which points moral lessons. Efforts were made to place it with Warner Brothers soon after it appeared in 1946 but it was turned down. Writing to John Cowper Powys, Elizabeth said that she felt this was due to reluctance to meet the terms asked by the publishers but she believed they were right to stick to a high price. Optimistically, she adds that Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer, 'the biggest American firm' had also asked for an option.

Eventually, MGM also turned it down and it was not until three years after her death that a film version of *Mrs. Christopher* went into production and then in Elizabeth's own country. Roger Vadim, still years away from giving Brigitte Bardot her 'sex kitten' image, had a significant hand in its creation. The picture was released under the title 'Blackmailed', not to be confused with Alfred Hitchcock's 1929 film, 'Blackmail'.

Now languishing in obscurity, it has its flaws but it is worth seeing not least for its strong cast. The distinguished actress Fay Compton was a perfect choice for Mrs Christopher. James Robertson Justice, not yet typecast in irascible comic roles, was Sine, the blackmailer. In support were the talented Swedish actress and director-to-be Mai Zetterling and the youthful Dirk Bogarde, at the time too often cast as an edgy army deserter in a grubby raincoat and given a similar role here. There were also such dependable personalities as Robert Flemyng, Michael Gough and Wilfred Hyde White while Ballard Berkeley, later familiar as the dotty major in 'Fawlty Towers', played a doctor. Heavy pre-release publicity boosted a young actress, Joan Rice, making her debut and said to have been discovered while working as a waitress.

'Blackmailed' was made by a small production company headed by the British actor producer Harold Huth, teamed with a French director Marc Allegret whose assistant was the 22-year-old Roger Vadim. It was the first of two British films made by the two Frenchmen. The screen play was co-written by Vadim and a British writer, Hugh Mills, and it was the first time Vadim achieved screen credits.

One wishes that Elizabeth Myers, the keen film fan, had been better served by the hands which translated her novel into film for it was not a notable success. *Picturegoer* magazine grumbled: 'The poor quality of the script appears to be reflected in the acting of the principals. None of them looks very happy.' The same journal found it a 'slow and jumbled' offering. While acknowledging that Joan Rice, 'the ex tea-girl', proved there was some justification for the barrage of advance publicity laid down for her screen debut, it complained that the main idea of the film was submerged in trite situations with unconvincing dialogue and loose direction.

The critics at large were generally unenthusiastic, the distinguished C. A. Lejeune of the *Observer*, for instance, called it 'the worst of British'. In more recent years, Robert Tanich, in a book on Dirk Bogarde, said that 'Blackmailed' was dismissed as 'trite, slipshod, slow-moving and resolutely mediocre'.

I became acquainted with the film when it was newly released early in 1951 and I was working for a time as a projectionist for the Rank Organisation. For a week, I saw it through the porthole of the projection box, three times on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and twice nightly on the remaining days. Though I have not seen it since, I recall it had a gloominess quite in keeping with the lingering austerity of the early nineteen-fifties yet it lacked the dark fascination of the true *film noir* genre.

Although the Hollywood version of England was rarely convincing, there were some exceptions – for instance, Alfred Hitchcock's handling of 'Rebecca' at the Selznick Studios – which made for memorable films. So it is tempting to wonder how *Mrs. Christopher* would have emerged from Warner or MGM if those Hollywood options had been taken up.

As it is, for all its shortcomings, 'Blackmailed' remains an interesting product of an era of British filming just before the industry was altered for all time by television, when young Dirk Bogarde was on the threshold of greater things and our guest from France, M. Roger Vadim had yet to meet Mlle Brigitte Bardot.

Anthony Glynn

Letters to the Editor

Dear Mr Batten,

My purpose in writing is to place on record a brief account of the remarks made to me on the subject of John Cowper Powys by the poet Roy Fisher at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in April 1998. Members who seek to keep abreast of contemporary poetry will perhaps have noted with satisfaction (and surprise?) the dedication of Fisher's long poem *A Furnace* (Oxford University Press 1986) 'To the memory of John Cowper Powys 1872–1963'. In his preface to the poem, Fisher elaborates, 'The poem is also a homage, from a temperament very different from his, to the profound, heterodox and consistent vision of John Cowper Powys, to whom I owe thanks for some words of exhortation he gave me in my youth and in his old age. More importantly, I am indebted to his writings for such understanding as I have of the idea that the making of all kinds of identities is a primary impulse which the cosmos itself has; and that those identities and that impulse can be acknowledged only by some form or other of poetic imagination. There is also, in his novel *Atlantis*, a description of a lost poem which gains its

effects by the superimposition of landscape upon landscape rather than rhythm upon rhythm; without having that idea as a scheme I have, indeed, set one landscape to work with another in this poem ...'

As you may imagine, I was intrigued to know a little more about Powys' 'exhortation' to Fisher and to find out more – if I could – about the relationship of *A Furnace* to Powys's fiction. Consequently, I took the liberty of approaching Mr Fisher after his reading in King's College. The context was obviously not conducive to extended conversation, but Mr Fisher told me that he had written to JCP in the late fifties to express his appreciation of the novels that were being issued by Macdonald and his exasperation that they were not being properly edited. I gathered that Fisher had also expressed some sort of doubt or fear concerning his own creative enterprise, and that Powys had replied in the generous perceptive fashion which was characteristic of his response even to uninvited correspondence.

Mr Fisher went on to state (with the suggestion of a smile in his features and voice as if to say, 'Here's a hare to chase if you have the energy') that each of the sections of *A Furnace* (seven, plus an 'introit') has its locus in an episode from one of JCP's novels. (I convey the sense rather than the exact phrasing of Mr Fisher's remarks.) At the moment *A Furnace* has not received the wide recognition that I believe it deserves. However, if the poem is as accomplished (and central) as I think it to be, it may well turn out that John Cowper Powys' creative legacy has given rise to a notable flourishing.

The question begged is – of course – which sections from which novels? I have not the knowledge or the time to provide the answer – and I must confess that I have yet to read *Atlantis*. However, during a recent reading of Ian Hughes' *Maiden Castle*, two candidates offered themselves. The first is signalled by Fisher when he quotes Urien Quirm's words concerning the 'dark-finned fish embedded in ice'[1] and proceeds to write of 'persuading the world's layers apart with means / that perpetually alter and annex'. This seems to me to suggest much about JCP's approach to novel writing, related as it is to Fisher's observations concerning 'the superimposition of landscape upon landscape' quoted above. The second candidate is Dud's epiphany on perceiving the radio towers.[2] This is uncannily similar to Fisher's evocation of apocalyptic 'creatures' in the final section of his poem, 'On Fennel-Stalks.[2]

It is certainly true that Roy Fisher's temperament as a writer is indeed 'very different' from that of John Cowper Powys. All the more remarkable then that the latter should have proved so important to the poet in enabling him to shape what is surely his most accomplished work to date.

Yours sincerely

Peter Brennan

[1] *A Furnace*, 12; *Maiden Castle*, ed. Hughes, 154

[2] *Maiden Castle*, 118–20, *A Furnace*, 45–6

Dear Mr Batten,

Forgive me writing out of the blue. I was given your name by Arthur Uphill, who edited correspondence between John Cowper Powys and a man who happens to be my current interest, Nicholas Ross.

I am writing a book about Robert Stephen Hawker, the Cornish poet and vicar, and am particularly interested in a wreck on the Cornish coast he presided over. Nicholas Ross, who lived in Kilkhampton, near Hawker's parish of Morwenstow, possessed a pair of sand-glasses, brass egg-timers if you will, which were found on the body of the captain of the *Caledonia*, which was wrecked on Hawker's shore in 1842. I am desperate to track down these sand-glasses which did not turn up in Ross's collection of Hawker memorabilia acquired by the Bodleian in 1968.

I am left with long shots and wonder whether it is conceivable that Ross made a gift of these sand-glasses to John Cowper Powys in the late 50s or early 60s. Is there anybody in the Powys community who might know of such arcane things, or a collection of artefacts belonging to Cowper Powys which I might check?

With thanks for your forbearance!

Best wishes

Jeremy Seal

There are no sand-glasses among the JCP memorabilia held in the Powys Collection. If any reader is able to be of help to Mr Seal I will gladly supply his address. Ed.

Dear Editor,

It was a shame in the last *Newsletter* that there was no account given of Oliver's funeral. The appreciation by Morine Krissdóttir was obviously not that. May I record that Powys friends who attended included Chris Gostick, Shelagh Hancox, Kate Kavanagh, Louise de Bruin and Frank Kibblewhite. The church service was simple but moving. One of Oliver's granddaughters beautifully read the poem 'Gentians' by D. H. Lawrence; an old actor friend, Frank Shelley, gave a kind of halting impromptu oration over the coffin, and Chris, his son, to cathartic laughter from the congregation, read from some of Oliver's last letters.

Oliver was working in his last years on the collection of his own and his mother's letters (which he asked me to edit for him). I do hope this sees the light of day, for it is truly speaking a biography of his early life. We all found Oliver a very special and extraordinary man.

Peter Foss

Dear Editor,

First, on the subject of the 'books for sale etc.' issue, I am in sympathy with Joan Stevens and would add my own views. Surely one of the functions of The Powys Society is to provide a forum for its membership; an additional section in the *Newsletter* of 'Books for Sale, Wanted & Exchanged' would, as I see it only

enhance this process.

Secondly, (and if you don't get a flood of letters on this subject I shall be very disappointed) I must take issue with P. J. Kavanagh about his astounding comments made on page 12 of the November *Newsletter* which refer to Llewelyn Powys thus: 'An apostle of free love, Llewelyn's writing seems so far removed from any reality that I can recognise that I cannot read it and therefore cannot talk about him.' From where does Mr Kavanagh derive his opinion that, 'Llewelyn's writing seems so far removed from any reality that I can recognise' if, as he says, he 'cannot read it'? Conversely, how can he form such an opinion without reading the work?

Surely no Powys writer and very few others convey a more readily recognisable portrayal of reality than Llewelyn Powys. Of the three writing brothers that Mr Kavanagh comments upon in his article, Llewelyn employs the least conjecture and not even a minor percentage of the fantasy that the other two employ in their novels. I am concerned at the damage that may have been done to Llewelyn's reputation by this one dismissive sentence in Mr Kavanagh's article.

Neil D. Lee

Readers will recall that P. J. Kavanagh kindly gave permission for me to reprint his article. I personally felt (and remain) confident that Llewelyn's reputation is such that it would withstand an incidental dismissal by even a critic of Mr Kavanagh's stature, and there was so much else in the article to interest and amuse members. I have not received any other correspondence on this subject. Ed.

Pitt Pond, A Labour of Love

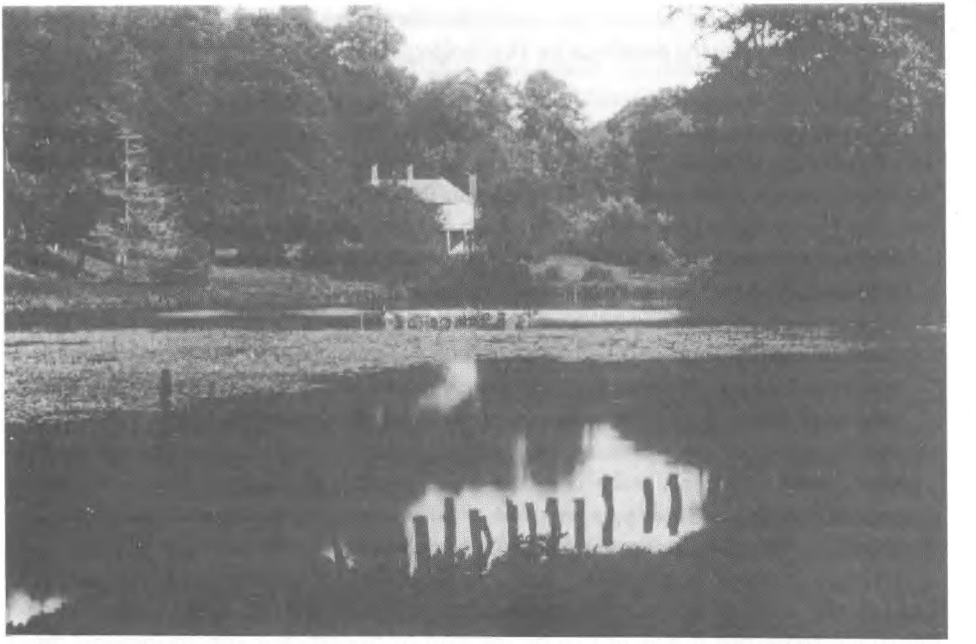
> I have never visited Pitt Pond since the Montacute estate was sold. The trees of the woods after this sad event took place were delivered into the hands of the lumber-men, and the 'unprofitable' pond, no longer valued, has been allowed to relapse into its natural state. In due course the stone-built dam at the deep end, responsible for holding in the water, gave way, and at present, I am told, there is only a muddy morass over-grown with reeds surrounding a central heap of stones. Through this morass a small woodland stream slowly meanders between soft damp banks of mud which are occasionally, when the weather has been exceptionally cold, marked with the chalk of a migratory woodcock.

That is the end of Llewelyn's essay, first published in *The Western Gazette* in February 1937, but it was not to be the end of the story. Eventually, that morass with its stream winding down to the defunct water mills of Little Norton became

part of Woodhouse Farm Montacute, owned by the Parker family. Jack Parker, while still in his teens, was inspired by an old photograph taken at the turn of the century, to set about restoring the 1¾-acre pond to its former glory. The work was begun, with nothing more than a wheel-barrow, a spade, and the idealism of youth, on Good Friday 1963. He began at the dam and after six years of more or less solitary labour had created a small semi-circle of open water.

Llewelyn's description of the state of affairs in 1937 is probably accurate. It takes little imagination to appreciate how much the situation had deteriorated in the intervening thirty years. The morass of fertile silt had nurtured trees 30 or 40 feet tall and neither the island nor the pond's former boundary was visible on the ground. The only existing landmarks were the foundations of the ruined keeper's cottage, the dam and majestic monkey-puzzle trees on its southern shore. Although it is true that Pitt Wood was felled for its timber and a large part of it converted to pasture, the woodland had regenerated to cloak the steep slopes on three sides of the pond, so that its setting at least would have been readily recognisable to the Powyses.

There was no lack of local folk-memory concerning the pond, but discovery of *Somerset Essays* and *Skin for Skin* were important spurs to Jack's lonely endeavours. Briefly, a local fishing club committed themselves to restoring the pond, but



Pitt Pond and the Keeper's Cottage, about 1900

came to the conclusion that it was a hopeless task. Eventually he was to be joined by a group of people, who were fired by his enthusiasm, and the magic of the place. Pitt Pond became an obsession that consumed their free time and their spare cash. A massive dragline was obtained with which the mud and tree stumps could be bucketed from the bed of the pond, the dam was rebuilt, steps were taken to prevent any further silting up and finally in 1974, some 11 years after Jack Parker had dreamed his dream, the pond was flooded again. The number of helpers had fluctuated and peaked at more than a dozen, of whom only John Hamaton has matched Jack's stamina and commitment and remained at the task for thirty years.

Llewelyn's essay emphasises the atmospheric nature of the pond, comparing it in November with one of the 'dark tarns of Edgar Allan Poe's lurid imagination'. John Cowper, in *Wood and Stone*, calls it Auber Lake - the title of one of Poe's poems, and makes it the setting for Gladys Romer's wicked persecution of Lacrima, who is taken there by night to be terrified by the keeper's mad daughter, who would escape from the cottage to the woods around the pond dressed in white and uttering terrifying yells. Llewelyn contrasts the mood of autumn with those of January when the pond froze and summer when the squire would 'row silently absorbed children across his fish filled water' to picnic in the ruined keeper's cottage.

The Keeper (perhaps Mr Lane), near the boathouse

The cottage, set among trees at the eastern end of the lake was really a habitable folly, undoubtedly more elaborate than the cottages of other estate workers and designed to both accommodate the keeper's family and lend enchantment to the squire's view. The site of the boat-house on the opposite bank is marked by the staddle stones on which it was raised and a stone causeway used to launch and recover boats still lies on the bed of the pond. Llewelyn's reference to 'fish filled water' is no less true now than it was when he and Littleton took its roach with a mixture of dough and cotton wool. Since the pond was reclaimed it has yielded a carp of 27½ pounds and a tench of 3½ pounds. Shielded as it is on

Members of The Powys Society at Pitt Pond, August 1999

all sides by high ground and fed by two streams the pond provides the ideal conditions for fish to breed and thrive. We know from Llewelyn how in the colder winters of his childhood, they regularly skated there, but that has not been possible in Jack Parker's time. John Cowper, in *Wood and Stone*, remarks that: 'Mixing curiously with the more indigenous trees in this place were several unusual and alien importations. Some of these, like the huge laurels they were now passing under, belonged more properly to gardens than woods. Others were of a still stranger and more foreign nature, and produced a very bizarre effect where they grew ...' He was probably remembering the monkey-puzzles, ancestors of a surviving group which still tower above Portugal laurels and other unusual and exotic trees and shrubs planted by the present custodians.

I have visited Pitt Pond over many years at all times and in all weathers. For dramatic effect John Cowper presented it as mysterious and hostile. Llewelyn

remembered it as a place for enjoyment – whether fishing, skating, boating or picnicking. For me, in addition to and perhaps even more important than its natural beauty, it has an aura of timelessness and a latent potential for magic, so palpable that it would seem the most natural of coincidences to come upon a certain shock-headed youth baiting his hooks by the dam at its deep end. Be that as it may, it is a place apart, and what I will surely find on any Sunday, come rain or shine, is Jack Parker and John Hamaton hard at work, as they have been for more than thirty years, preserving that unspoilt corner of Powysian Montacute which they have recreated.

John Batten

Note. Pitt Pond is not open to the public, except by arrangement. However, should any member intending to visit Montacute on a Sunday, get in touch with me, it is likely that I could arrange access. Ed.

Letters from Theodore Powys to his sister Philippa

The Powys Collection holds nine letters and two postcards sent by Theodore to Katie from Mappowder between August 1940 and December 1952. Although they are mainly concerned with domestic affairs, health and the weather there are in this selection occasional glimpses of Theodore's humour and his highly individual attitudes.

The Rectory Lodge
Mappowder
Sturminster Newton
August 1940

Private except to you Gertrude and Alyse.
My Dearest Katie,

Many thanks for your letter I was pleased to have it and we all send a great deal of love to you and to Gertrude and Alyse and to Doris who is a member of Alyse's household twice a week. I saw a man today who owns cattle and who was nursed when he was a Baby by Thomas Hardy, he says that Thomas used to beg a dinner from his mother. 'And that is how' said this Gentleman, 'you can get rich'. This worthy also said. That though he could tell a lie as well as another if it was proper, Yet only yesterday he shook a man as a dog does a rat because he wanted to get the Truth out of him. Perhaps that is what we ought to do to God – to get the Truth out of Him. And as the Kingdom of Heaven can only be entered by Violence. (I don't know quite where this Scripture can be found but it's in the Bible.) Anyhow one has to shake the truth out of most things – and even then it's hard to find.

I wonder Herr Hitler did not think of bombing the breweries at first instead of the Churches. I could assure him that he could blow up all the churches and lose the war. But if he once starts to bomb the beer !!! Sometimes the safest place is to

be near the target in this war but not always.

L.C.P. and another old gentleman name Mr. More or Moor came over and spent their time catching little white eggs in our 6 cabbages. They were in excellent spirits and in the best of Health. They seem to be always after the little white eggs and quite enjoy it. 'Bombs' they said had fallen near Sherborne, About in the fields like coconuts. They were quite merry about it. The old man Mr. More never once looked toward The Church Yard.

Yours ever
Theodore

The Lodge, Mappowder
Sturminster Newton
Dorset
February 15 1941

My dearest Katie,

Thank you very much for your letter and these lovely sweets. I have a cold on my chest and a cough that rather torments me at night. So these fine peppermints are the very sweets I needed. How fortunate it was that you do not like them, and its lucky too that Susan does not like peppermints either. And Violet does not very much like this kind. So you see I am fortunate in all ways. We are so very sorry that this indigestion still worries you, I don't like Beemax much it is rather too sweet Francis used to take it. Littleton has his own plan, he just stays in bed and drinks milk until he gets better but you do not like milk and I dare say powdered milk would be better for you than plain milk. I expect it is the rest that makes Littleton get better.

I don't get up until nearly one and I generally sleep pretty well through the early hours. And if I stay awake for an hour or two I generally fall asleep again. But I do get discontented if I am much awake in the middle of the night from eleven to 2 or 3 o'clock. I don't like staying awake at all. That is the worst time for me. If you are wide awake at three some people say eat a biscuit but I don't do that. But anyhow you should sleep again at about 5 or half past 5. Even if you did not sleep till six you would be all right. But if you go right on awake until 8 or 9 that is horrible. I should be very worried indeed if I did that. If one can get in the habit, of lying in a half stupid half senseless state. And just think of any silly thing, of Charlie Blake or Montacute Hill or Mr. Rogers or a hedge or gorse bush. And accustom yourself to think of something outside yourself that might (help?). Perhaps invent a story about the Holy and playful God PAN. But anyhow whatever one says. There one lies in bed unable to sleep and with the very devil in one's brain and no hope of ease. Even pain gives one something to think of. And when it goes you try to sleep and sometimes do.

I wonder how the moles get on with all the plough ground, perhaps they like it. But I don't think they do because the worms must be harder to find. There is a blackbird or two but not many about here and the thrushes are scarce. I have not

heard a blackbird sing at all yet nor a thrush, this is odd. Only a robin I hear sometimes. I don't walk far and the weather has been bad, but still I don't manage badly, I feel pretty much the same as when I was at Chaldon.

Ever so much love to Gertrude and to Alyse. And so much to you.

Yours ever

Theodore

Violet's cough goes on but her cold is on the mend

The Lodge, Mappowder
Sturminster Newton
May 10th 1941

Dearest Katie,

Since Gertrude told us a day or two ago that you had been so very ill and she too, we have all been very anxious about you. How good the Gods were to allow Alyse to be so strong an arm in such a tempest. I believe you are both better now, your letter gives hints that you are and I pray that by the time this reaches you Gertrude's temperature will be quite normal and yourself out of bed. The weather has been extremely cold here. The spring quite two weeks behind. People are only beginning to plant their seeds and potatoes and I don't expect the man will come to plant ours for a week or two. The last week in May will be quite soon enough for this frost bitten spring. One can die very suddenly in this war. Jack has told me that Frances Wilkinson her daughter Betty and her old Mother, who once broke her leg at Saxmundham in Suffolk were all killed by a bomb in Plymouth as by a flash of lightning. Oliver Wilkinson who is in the Navy saw their dead bodies.

Susie has another sore throat and is in bed. Violet is rather over worked and tired and so I hope Susan is not going to be ill again. My head is about the same one day not so well, and another a little easier. I fancy if I had been as ill as you and Gertrude have been, I should have been taken a little way down the road where in the summer ones bones would be dried in a pleasant stony sandy dry soil and in the winter one would be in a fine puddle the dry sand being changed to a very sodden muddy sop. But still no doubt a refreshment to poor bones after the summer heats. Will you tell Gertrude and Alyse how much we have enjoyed Lulu's book. And Gertrude's pictures which we think very good indeed. Please tell Alyse that I liked especially Lulu's quotation from Dr. Johnson that falls in well with my own ideas, and as I do not remember it in Boswell, nor have I heard it quoted before, I read it with great pleasure and very much admire Lulu's wisdom in putting it there. I wish we had not lost by the help of some puck or pixie Lulu's Dorset and Somerset Essays when we moved. It belonged to Violet.

We all send very much love and hope you are both nearly at least out of the wood.

Yours ever

Theodore

The Lodge, Mappowder
Sturminster Newton
November 20th 1946

Dearest Katie,

Very many thanks for your letter which was handed to me by Alyse. I am so glad that you are better. It is most horrid not to be able to go out when ones mind wants to. Which it always does when one is ill. The place I think most about near Rats Barn is the old lime kiln about a hundred yards up the path to the sea. Growing in the pit to the right, near the field there used to be an elder bush. In the midst of which I had a very good hiding place. The Demon of that pit is a friendly Demon and many a time has he contented me with lovely hidden thoughts. But he was not best pleased with the stench of Mr. Tod's dead sheep that old Mr. Critchel cast into the kiln.

With all our love.

Yours Theodore

Birthday Poem
(for John Cowper Powys)

Across rocks, mountains in October weather
From Abergele under sun and rain
Now that sexy summer's up and gone
I send my greetings you-ward like a letter.
Surrounded by my livings usual babble
I make this poem in its intervals
Of vocables that multiply like cells
Simply to wish you all the good I'm able.
'You'll see him in the window,' said the children.
And so we did, that grey, rainpouring day,
That great head full of visions, dreams and wisdom,
That's how I think, this anniversary,
Of you in Blaenau, gazing out, my friend,
Building bright worlds of splendour with a pen.

Roye McCoye October 1957

Roye McCoye, was knocked down by a lorry at the age of six. He suffered apparently minor injuries, but in his teens developed the illness which confined him to a wheel-chair for the rest of his short life. He wrote this poem at a home for cripples in Abergele using an electric typewriter. In doing so the depression of each key was a conscious act undertaken with extreme difficulty. We do not know whether he corresponded with JCP. I am grateful to Gerald Redman for bringing this little tribute to my notice. Editor.