

The Powys Society Newsletter

JULY 1988

THE ANNUAL POWYS WEEKEND CONFERENCE

So far we have had an excellent response from members. It should be a particularly happy and enjoyable conference. For those of you intending to come but who have not yet sent in your booking, could you please return it to the Secretary to arrive no later than JULY 31, 1988.

Hope Hall is on the edge of the University of Exeter campus, set in its own pleasant grounds. There is parking outside the building. All meals are taken in the residence. We have been promised (promises! promises!) exclusive use of the Hall's library and licensed lounge.

A leaflet and map explaining how to get there will be sent to conference members in mid-August. If requested, we will also send a rail schedule. A list of those attending will also be sent.

For those of you who wish to stay over Sunday night, accommodation in Hope Hall can be arranged if we let them know before July 31. The cost for bed and breakfast is £15.40. Unfortunately the residence cannot provide a Sunday evening meal but there are a number of pleasant pubs and restaurants in the city centre which is a brisk 10 minute walk away (downhill).

If members wish to display and sell recently published books, would you please make arrangements with the Secretary.

***** DO REMEMBER PLEASE TO PUT A FEW BOOKS
IN YOUR SUITCASE FOR THE BOOK SALE *****

THE ANNUAL SUMMER WEEKEND MEETING
HOPE HALL, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
SEPTEMBER 2 - 4, 1988

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME:


FRIDAY, SEPT. 2	5.45	Welcoming Reception
	6.15-7.30	Dinner
	8.00	<u>GLEN CAVALIERO:</u> <u>John Cowper Powys</u> <u>and the Supernatural</u>
SATURDAY, SEPT. 3	7.30-8.45	Breakfast
	9.15	<u>CHARLES LOCK:</u> <u>Llewelyn in Switzerland</u>
	10.30	<u>Coffee</u>
	11.00	<u>NIKOLAI TOLSTOY:</u> <u>John Cowper Powys</u> <u>and the Quest for</u> <u>Myrddin Wyllt</u>
	12.15-1.30	<u>Lunch</u>
	2.00-3.15	DISCUSSION GROUPS. Leaders are Larry Mitchell, Subi Swift, Peter Foss, and Susan Huxtable-Selly
	3.15	Tea
	3.30-6.15	Free Time (3.30 Advisory Committee Meeting)
	6.15-7.30	Dinner
	8.00	"In Honour of Isobel": Readings by various members of letters to and from A.R. Powys from and to his brothers and sisters

SUNDAY, SEPT. 4	7.30-8.45	Breakfast
	9.15-10.30	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
	10.30	Coffee
	10.45-12.15	BOOK SALE
	12.15-1.30	Lunch
	2.00-3.15	OLIVER WILKINSON: <u>Louis Marlow</u>
	3.15	Tea and departure

COSTS are based on single study bedrooms

Full board (inc. coffee and tea) per day	£23.95
Bed & Breakfast per day	£15.40
Lunch per day	£4.60
Dinner per day	£ 5.75
Coffee and biscuits per day	.50
Tea and biscuits per day	.40
General Charge	£10.00

The total cost for the Conference, based on two days full board and the general charge, is therefore £57.90.

 YOU WILL FIND BOOKING FORM AT THE FOOT OF THE ENCLOSED LETTER. PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN BEFORE 31st JULY.

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COMING OF AGE

The Powys Society will be 21 years old this year. Someone suggested recently that we publish a commemorative history for members both old and new. I have come across a Newsletter for 1973 which outlined the Society's beginnings. It came into being in 1967 and the early meetings were mainly reminiscences by friends and acquaintances of the Powys family. But in 1969 a Committee was elected and established that the aim of the Society "must be the establishment of the true literary status of the Powys family by promoting reading and discussion of their works." Our President, Glen Cavaliero, gave one of the first formal talks and his paper on Wolf Solent was published and sent to members. It came as a surprise to me that in those early days any papers read were published by the Society and distributed to members. Sadly that excellent practice has lapsed, although before he died, Kenneth Hopkins was exploring the possibility of its reinstatement.

A highlight in the Society's history was the 1972 Conference held at Cambridge to commemorate the centenary of the birth of John Cowper Powys. Among those contributing were George Steiner, Angus Wilson, Colin Wilson and G. Wilson Knight. A number of exhibitions lectures and readings were held that year in different parts of the country.

The first number of the Powys Review appeared in the spring of 1977; its editor was, and still is, Belinda Humfrey. The first issues were published under the aegis of the Society but subsequently it was decided that the relationship between the Society and the Review would be an independent one. The editor takes full editorial and financial responsibility. The Society buys the Review for its members.

Perhaps inevitably, the Society may have lost some of its early vigour. But we have survived: each year new members bring fresh enthusiasm and old members sustain us with their deep commitment to the Powyses and their writings. I hope that 1988, the year we come of age, will mark the beginning of a renewed sense of purpose.

M.K.

Back issues of the Powys Review Numbers 1-4 (only) are available from the Secretary. A very few copies of No.1 remain; Nos 2,3,4 are more plentiful. Costs are as follows:

No. 1 - £10 Nos 2,3,4 - £5 each

Please add 50p to cover postage and packing for one single item and £1 for any number of copies up to four. Please send order to the Secretary, Griffin Beale, 39 Church St., Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 5AT. This is a wonderful opportunity for new members and old to obtain these increasingly rare issues.

 PROFILES OF MEMBERS

This Newsletter begins a new "column" which we hope readers will enjoy. As we contact more and more members we realise how many interesting lives there are out there. On the assumption - perhaps incorrect - that Powysians have at least some interests in common, and would like to know a bit more about each other, we propose to run a series of short biographical sketches of members. We thought we should begin with our President and three of the officers but eventually we hope to write a little about many members, past and present. The officers were invited to write about themselves. The varying styles reveal almost as much as the words!

Glen Cavaliero - President

I was born in Sussex in 1927 of mixed Italian and North Country ancestry, and educated at Tonbridge School and at Magdalen College, Oxford, where I read Modern History. Following National Service in the Royal Air Force, I was ordained priest in the Church of England in 1953, working in curacies at Margate and Canterbury, on the staff of Lincoln Theological College, and as Chaplain to Anglican Students in Edinburgh. In 1964 I left the ministry to read for a degree in English at Cambridge, where I have lived ever since. I obtained my Doctorate in 1972, and am a member of the Faculty of English, writing studies of, among others, E.M. Forster, Charles Williams and the Powys brothers. In 1986 I was elected a Fellow Commoner of St. Catherine's College and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. I first became interested in the Powyses on reading, in 1955, a review by Angus Wilson of A Glastonbury Romance.

Morine Krissdottir - Chairman

I was born in Canada in 1939. My father was Icelandic, my mother English. I did a double honours in English Lit. and Psychology, an M.A. at Saskatchewan, and a Ph.D. at Queen's. In the early days I worked as a psychotherapist in the psychiatric department of a teaching hospital. When we moved to Guelph I did a stint as the vice-president's wife which gave me material for several more as-yet-unwritten novels. I lectured in environmental psychology and housing at the University of Guelph and had a design partnership with an architect friend. During that period I wrote Shielding: People and Shelter and John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest. We had a small farm where I raised goats, trained young horses, edited a local newspaper and became very involved in the practical politics of rural planning. We "retired" to England four years ago and I gradually became absorbed again in the mysteries presented by J.C.P. I hope to begin another book on him soon.

A generalist by nature and nurture, I have always sought out new experiences and careers, believing that everything becomes part of a rich pattern.

Susan Rands - Treasurer

Born 1930, New York, daughter of Willard Connely (biographer of Chesterfield, Wycherley, Steele, Beau Brummel, D'Orsay). 1939. Step-daughter of Malcolm Elwin (biographer of Charles Reade, Landor, Stevenson, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byron's family, and Llewelyn Powys: longterm friend and correspondent of John Cowper, Alys Gregory and Louis Wilkinson). Educated Badminton School, Bristol. Somerville College Oxford. 1951 B.A. Hons. English. On staff and contributor to John O' London's Weekly. 1952 married Capt. I.L.E. Rands. Lived in Singapore, Malaysia, Germany and many parts of England. 1972 settled at West Pennard. Contributor to the Powys Review. Children, daughter 1954 Consultant Psychiatrist. Son, 1956 Mathematician. Daughter, 1963 Classics Teacher. 2 grandchildren. Other interests: the Powys Society, the countryside, Local History, Pastel painting.

Griffin Beale - Secretary

Griffin Richard John Hanway Beale was born in Somerset and has lived there for most of his life. He was educated at King's School, Bruton but at that time he was not aware of the Powyses or Littleton Powys's links with the school some sixty odd years before.

At an early age he decided upon a career in the law. He gained an undistinguished Ll.B. in 1975 and began his Articles of Clerkship the following year. He was admitted as a solicitor in 1980 and has practised in Bridgwater ever since, specialising in litigation, particularly family law and divorce. Unmarried. He became interested in the Powyses by accident. Soon after his father's death he came across a copy of the limited edition of Unclay which had been presented to his father by T.F.P. His father had been Theodore's doctor for two years until October 1938. He was struck by the strangeness and originality of the novel and soon became entranced by the whole family. He joined the Powys Society in about 1976 but never participated in its activities until Kenneth Hopkins persuaded him to attend the 1986 Bath Conference

JOHN COWPER POWYS: Verses on the sad occasion of the Death of Tippoo Tib

This 60-line poem is one of two contributions to The Caddisworm, a Montacute miscellany of verse and sketch maintained by Gertrude Mary Powys. It is dated 'Xmas 1897' and reflects on the death of the family's cat, with appropriate solemnity, family references, and Powysian turn of phrase. For this, its first appearance, it has been printed on single sheets folded twice to 7½x5 inches, and is published in an edition of 300 copies by Stephen Powys Marks, Hamilton's, Kilmersdon, near Bath, Somerset. 50p a copy, 3 for £1.20, including postage. (stamps acceptable). P.S.: copies will also be available at the Powys Weekend Conference at Exeter.

ECSTASIES AND ELEGIES: Poems for Elizabeth
 Kenneth Hopkins. Warren House Press, £10.05.

It is hard to imagine a more varied literary output than that of Kenneth Hopkins, and yet throughout his work two major preoccupations emerge: the impulse to write sonnets and the desire to celebrate his love for Elizabeth, his wife for almost fifty years.

Kenneth Hopkins was, from the beginning, a love poet, but it was his meeting with Elizabeth Coward in 1938 which provided a fitting subject for his work and brought together life and art in some two hundred poems. Ecstasies and Elegies brings their story to a close. The idea of Elizabeth's death had cast a subtle shadow upon the love poems from the first and in this collection (published shortly after Kenneth's own death) we see that shadow become reality, for the second half of the book contains fourteen sonnets mourning her loss.

In the earlier work, some of which is published here for the first time, the love was necessary in order to provide a subject for the poetry, though no less real for that. The later poems draw less attention to themselves as poetic creations and gain a deeper strength in doing so. The clever concoctions of wit and verbal facility which the young Hopkins had hoped would mark him out from the crowd as "a poet" have become subdued expressions of everyman's pain and, in its quiet maturity, the genius of Kenneth Hopkins has given birth to a poetry which is at once contemporary and timeless, confessional and universal.

There is an inevitability in fine poetry which, lacking novelty, rarely inspires immediate applause. Fine poems last, as trees and stones last, and though we may not gather in crowds to admire them, without them our elaborate world would be so much desert sand. Quietly and inevitably Kenneth Hopkins' poems for Elizabeth will become part of our poetic landscape.

Paul Roberts

(Ecstasies and Elegies is available from Warren House Press, 12 New Road, North Walsham, Norfolk NR28 9DF at £10.05 casebound. Cheques or postal orders with order please.)

Chaldon Herring: The Powys Circle in a Dorset Village
 JUDITH STINTON, Boydell Press, £14.95.

It was an extraordinary place; extraordinary things happened there and extraordinary people were to be found there

Valentine Ackland, For Sylvia

Judith Stinton's book is the story of a Dorset village and of the circle of writers and artists who were drawn to the place in the first decades of this century.

What is it about a particular place that draws people to it? Why are individuals of widely different temperaments attracted to the same place? What was it about Chaldon Herring that induced Theodore and Llewelyn Powys to live there for many years? Why did that particular landscape - the village, downland and cliffs - permeate their writings? What did it mean to them? Stinton does not ask these questions but her book forces the reader to do so.

A sense of place was important to every member of the Powys family. So many elements are present in the love of a particular place - one is the familiarity that comes of close observation and the months and years spent in one locality. Llewelyn wrote in his essay, 'High Chaldon', "I do not suppose there is an elder tree, thorn tree or gorse bush unknown to me in these fields." The attachment to a place comes also with sheer physical contact, something that most of us living in cities do not understand. But the Powyses responded to the earth with all their senses. Theodore liked "this long white downland grass.... It never gets wet. In summer I often roll in it." Equally, and in the case of Chaldon, above all, the bond between person and place is strengthened by an awareness of its past. Stinton begins her book with a sketch of Chaldon's history, skilfully evoking in the reader a sense that in this place of grave barrows and stone circles "the past lies close to the surface."

"Chaldon is full of ghostly echoes, which the ear strains to catch, echoes from the dreams of childhood, a reaching back away beyond any private memory."
 (p.171).

The village that was Theodore's fictional world was no Eden but a place of brutality and poverty. Stinton observes that to many of the visitors to Chaldon, Theodore and the village were one and the same thing. "His seclusion, his goblin humour, his fatalism, his stony individuality, his passive toleration, were all matched by that of the village." (p.53).

Theodore plays a large role in Stinton's book. Not everyone will agree with her analysis of his writings or of his reputation. But by writing the book in the way she has I am made conscious, for the first time, of the possibility that Theodore's natural melancholy was exacerbated by the place itself. Stinton interweaves her examination of Theodore's preoccupation with death with vivid descriptions of a parish where bones piled on bones lie buried in the chalky bones of the encircling hills, until the village itself seems a kind of death pit. Did the landscape of bones awaken death reveries or was Theodore drawn to the village because he recognised it as a symbol of his self?

Constable once wrote that "we exist but in a landscape and we are creatures of a landscape." We see ourselves reflected in the landscape. And each of us perceives it differently. Katie Powys' Chaldon was not Theodore's and Llewelyn's reflection was his own. For the Powyses who lived there, Chaldon was not a landscape but a cosmos.

In the course of her book Stinton also discusses, albeit briefly, Llewelyn, Gertrude and Katie Powys and the circle that surrounded them - David Garnett, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Valentine Ackland, Stephen Tomlin, Gamel Woolsey, Gerald Brennan.

This is a book that will attract local historians and Powys readers. Inevitably it will also attract criticism that the book covers neither the place nor the people in any depth. Stinton is attempting an extraordinarily difficult task and the technique she uses is sometimes disconcerting. She passes swiftly and without any obvious transition from ancient history to trivia to biography to criticism. For example she begins a chapter with the unhappy history of the vicarage, turns aside to tell the lovely story of Theodore face down in the stubble hoping

the dreaded Mrs Ashburnham and her scottie dogs would pass by without noticing, touches briefly on the political and social activism of Townsend Warner and Ackland, and ends with a detailed retelling of the bizarre story of Llewelyn's libel case.

Despite, or because of, the technique which some readers will find bewildering and others find annoying, Judith Stinton compels us to reassess or reaffirm the importance of a place in the creative life of a writer or an artist. Personally, I found the chaotic juxtaposition revelatory. What she appears to have done is write a book that is a symbol of Chaldon. She layers the chapters like geological strata - place-person-place - piling them up then pushing them down until they finally merge into a bony, bare but believable entity.

M. Krissdottir

ALYSE GREGORY

A friend has just sent us the Antiquarian Book Monthly Review for November 1987. It contains a long and interesting article about Alyse Gregory by George Sims. I hope we can get permission to reproduce it because it would be of great interest to all Powysians.

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

A new book has appeared which might (I haven't read it) expand further our knowledge of "the circle" that gathered around Theodore in East Chaldon. Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland are discussed in Stinton's book, Chaldon Herring. This Narrow Place by WENDY MULFORD focuses on their political activism, their social consciences and the ways in which these affected their writing.

THIS NARROW PLACE: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Life, Letters and Politics 1930-1951, by Wendy Mulford, Pandora £6.95.

A TALK OF INTEREST TO POWYS READERS

Mrs Elizabeth Lawrence will give an illustrated talk on "A Wessex 11: The Magnetic Powys Family", October 15th at the Dorchester Museum for the Dorset Natural History and Archeological Society.

FOR SALE

Chris Hamlett of Thesaurus Books, 5 Plasburton Ave., Pontcarra, Cardiff CF1 9HL (Tel: 0222 372276) is able to offer members copies of the following:

Ebony and Ivory, 1923, Grant Richards
The Art of Growing Old, 2nd Impression
The Art of Happiness, 1940, Bodley Head, with D.W.
In Defence of Sensuality, 3rd Impression
 - reasonably priced

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The Newsletter is produced by Griffin Beale and Morine Krissdottir and put together by the one least busy at the time. M.K. has written it this time (and last time too, come to think of it). The pages are typed and stencilled at a local copiers for about 5p for two sides of A4. Griffin has a source of cheap brown envelopes and together we lovingly lick 260 stamps. Thank goodness for Michael Everest who provides gratis labels which are placed carefully in the middle of said envelope. I wonder if "The Powys" are Somewhere laughing.

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The Powys Society

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