

## Editorial

1997 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of The Powys Society. It will, naturally, be a year in which we will want to celebrate both the Society's survival and its achievements and this we plan to do through the publication of *The Dorset Year*, our most ambitious publication to date

A further focus for our celebrations will be the opening of the Literary Gallery at the Dorset County Museum, where there will be an extensive exhibition devoted to the Powys family and their circle. This should, if all goes according to plan, coincide with our thirtieth anniversary conference at Kingston Maurward, which will return to its usual three-night format.

Merely to have survived for thirty years is an achievement in itself but, as this year's conference at Uppingham demonstrated, the Society is not merely surviving but flourishing. Every year brings new members, new Powys scholars and new projects. The Executive Committee, for example, is currently considering the possibility of establishing a site on the internet.

However, the Committee does not have all the ideas and we would be delighted to hear from any member who can think of other ways in which we might celebrate this important anniversary. Perhaps, for example, you might wish to inaugurate a local group. The possibilities, as the inventiveness of our members never ceases to demonstrate, are endless and we must use every means possible, as we enter our fourth decade, to introduce the world at large to the Powys family and their works.

**Paul Roberts**

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## *A personal view of the 1996 Conference*

Having been absent from the previous four or five conferences, I am perhaps in a good position to give a view of the most recent one, held at Uppingham School in Rutland from the 23rd to the 25th August. Indeed, perhaps that is why I have been asked to do so. For me it was one of the most enjoyable, because I felt more than ever welcomed and at home, though whether as a prodigal returned or because of the particularly intimate character of the Conference I am not sure.

That feeling of intimacy may perhaps have been due to what was reportedly a lower attendance than usual, though I see that last year there were 35 members present, and this year 41, according to the list provided at the Conference. The intimacy may, however, have been due to the closeness of our accommodation in one of the residential houses of Uppingham School to the part of the main School where, in adjacent rooms, we had our lectures, our informal gatherings, our bookshop and our meals. The walk down one of the main streets of the town between the two locations reminded us of the world outside and perhaps paradoxically served to bind us together more than if we had been isolated on a campus or other more remote site.

Members will, I hope, have the opportunity of reading the text of the lectures which were given when they appear in *The Powys Journal*. I cannot pretend to evoke or repeat their contents here, but it is the more appropriate that I should mention Timothy Hyman's lecture on the first evening as, even if it is published, it will be impossible to reproduce the many slides which were the backbone of it. As a novice in the visual arts, I was both entranced and illuminated by the cogency of his 'Quest for the Pictorial Equivalent' of J.C.P.'s writings in the paintings he showed, including his own. The emphasis was on the continuing relevance of the practices of representational art in the age of modernism, taking cognisance, as I understood it, of the achievement of modernism whilst not forswearing the methods of earlier practice.

On the second day, Saturday, Paul Roberts gave us an intriguing account of his researches 'In Search of Arnold Shaw', showing how Shaw was by no means the semi-charlatan we may have been led to believe, but a minor heroic and tragic figure in himself to whom we may well owe the gift of J.C.P.'s writing career. I look forward to reading soon Paul's book *The Ideal Ringmaster* which, like many others, I obtained at the Conference and to which his lecture served as an introduction.

As I have already suggested, I cannot reproduce here (even if I were able) the arguments of the ever-provocative Harald Fawcner on affectivity, of the new and welcome young continental Powys scholar Henning Ahrens on Taliesin and of John Hodgson's explorations of ecstasy, but their contributions were equally appreciated and will no doubt also be read in their proper place.

In one of only two contributions not primarily concerned with J.C.P. this year,

Peter Judd came from America to tell us of the letters from Philippa (Katie) Powys to his first cousin once removed Elizabeth Wade White, who died in her nineties in December 1994. The letters were dated from 1938 to 1949 (not 1954 as previously announced) and were illustrated by some slides of contemporary photographs, which well evoked in tandem with his sensitive commentary the background to the letters.

The other non-J.C.P. contribution was Peter Burman's on Albert Reginald Powys, illustrated with many slides of various buildings which explained well the nature of A. R. Powys's achievement and concerns, illustrating his dictum that 'Beauty comes by the way', as a by-product, that is, of truth to materials, environment and the purpose of the building.

It is appropriate to mention here the heroic work with intransigent slide-showing equipment done by Bev Craven and by Sarah Linden, who also deserved the thanks of all for setting up the conference in Uppingham and acting as liaison there with the authorities and staff. Thanks also to John and Eve Batten who, with Sarah, saw to the administrative detail, to Morine Krissdóttir and the Committee as a whole for their organisation of the Conference, and to Stephen Powys Marks for organising the bookshop, manning it during the most available breaks when the rest of us were free to do as we wished, and for handling the sale within the bookshop of the second-hand books which, when I last attended, were the subject of the near-legendary auction.

That auction used to be associated in my mind with the AGM (which I think it usually followed). Along with the decisions of the AGM, which also will be reported in their proper place, I noted that mention was made of a possible weekend visit to North Wales which I hope will take place, as was mooted, in Spring 1997. I for one would like to see Corwen (through which I have only whisked by car at night – on the way back from Blaenau Ffestiniog) as well as revisiting Blaenau itself if possible.

There were two other parts of the Conference, deemed optional on the literature (though I never felt *compelled* to attend the rest). The first was the tour of Uppingham School which, in the event was only attended by two of us, Robert Kunkel and myself. We were entertained by a recent scholar to an *ad hoc* account of the history of the school illustrated by the buildings we saw: we gained however, I think, from the more individual attention we received. The School accounts, I understand, for more than half of the economy of Uppingham, so that it is appropriate perhaps that I remember more Uppingham as a whole rather than specifically the School: the warm yellow brick is of the whole town, as is the attractive atmosphere.

The second optional element was the visit to Shirley, John Cowper Powys's birthplace in Derbyshire and his home for the first six years. I write J.C.P.'s advisedly, since it is he who is mentioned in the publications to be found in the Church, to the exclusion of his siblings who also lived there and (some) wrote of

it. There were about eight or ten of us who went on this trip after the end of the Conference proper on Sunday, thanks to the prior organisation of Jollyon Smith and Chris Gostick. Firstly, we went to the church where we were met by the Vicar (of four parishes) and both the Churchwardens, who kindly showed us around and answered our questions. We saw a very attractive small church with box pews, much as it would have been 120 years ago, though without any specific record of Powys presence except in the literature. We then went by car or on foot to the Old Vicarage where the Powys family lived. We were not able to go inside due to the unexpected absence of the owners, but spent a long time walking around the house and exploring the extensive garden in the company of one of the Churchwardens who was able to tell us more of its background. We then returned to our starting point and went by car as far as possible along the lane towards Osmaston Park and then by foot along a hilly path to the lake into which we each threw a stick in remembrance of J.C.P.'s similar and traumatic exploit recorded in the *Autobiography*. I regretted not being able to stay there a bit longer but it was getting late and people needed to go to other places, even though we had from the outset decided not to go also to Dove Dale as originally planned. So we went back again to the neighbourhood of the church where we had met and said our farewells. I for one am very glad to have been able to see the village of Shirley, a rural backwater which, at least on a fleeting impression, seems to have remained much as it was when about half the Powys family lived there.

**Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe**

### *The 1997 Powys Society Conference*

The 1997 Conference will be held at Kingston Maurward, Dorchester from **August 23rd to August 26th**. This is our thirtieth anniversary and, coinciding with the opening of the new literary gallery at the Dorset County Museum and the close of Morine Krissdóttir's chairmanship, the Conference should be a particularly stimulating and lively one.

**Please mark the dates in your diary now and plan to attend.**

### *A Visit to Shirley and Derbyshire*

At the end of the Uppingham Conference, on the afternoon of Sunday 25th August, undaunted by dark clouds and frequent flurries of rain, 8 intrepid Powysians, led by our Chairman and Secretary, undertook a short visit to Shirley, the village in south Derbyshire where C. F. Powys was vicar from 1872 until 1879, and where John Cowper was born on 8th October 1872, followed by Littleton

(1874), Theodore (1875), Gertrude (1877) and Eleanor (1879). This article is intended as a short report of that visit, as well as a brief gazetteer to some of the more important local places of interest so that others may more easily follow in the future.

Shirley is a tiny Derbyshire village only a few miles from the beauties of Dove Dale and the grandeur of the High Peak itself, and is the established home of the Shirley family headed by the Earls Ferrers. Once there, however, you are suddenly in a totally different world; deep in the very heart of the English countryside, in an area that can barely have changed over the century or more since the Powys family lived there before their move to Dorchester in 1879. As J.C.P. has pointed out, this is just about the very spot at which young Charles Stuart's army of Jacobites turned back from their march on London to begin the long retreat that would eventually lead to the defeat on Culloden Moor in 1745.

The village is a mile south of the main A52 mid-way between Derby and Ashbourne and is signposted to the left shortly after passing through the village of Brailsford. Turn left at this sign and drive south for a further mile along a narrow winding country road which suddenly emerges at a T-junction on to the main street of the village. Immediately opposite the junction is the Saracen's Head public house. The church is to the right, a few yards further along the main street. A limited amount of parking is available in front of the Saracen's Head or outside the church. The Saracen's Head was built in 1791 on the site of earlier inns, and is apparently named from the crest above the Shirley family coat of arms. There is a larger car park to the rear, and the pub serves good bar meals both at lunch time and in the evening, but is normally closed in the afternoons.

Although very firmly played down by J.C.P., the Powys family connection with Shirley and Derbyshire is a good deal stronger than simple coincidence, the Revd C. F. Powys's half-sister, Philippa (1829-1902), who became J.C.P.'s godmother in 1872, was married to the Revd Walter Waddington Shirley, a descendent of the 6th Earl Ferrers, and third cousin to the 10th Earl. Indeed, when the 10th Earl died without issue in 1912 he was succeeded as 11th Earl by Walter Knight Shirley (1864-1937), eldest son of Walter and Philippa Shirley and J.C.P.'s cousin. Walter and Philippa's elder daughter Alice (1857-1911) had married the Revd W. R. Linton in 1887, who in turn was vicar of Shirley from 1887 to 1908. And to complete the circle it is worth recalling that Llewelyn Powys became engaged to their daughter Marion Linton following a visit she made to Montacute in 1914, and she subsequently became the model for Dittany Stone in *Love and Death*.

History apart, the main interest to Powysians is likely to be St Michael and All Angels church itself, and the old vicarage where the family lived, although there are few indications of the seven-year incumbency of the Revd C. F. Powys either in the church or the village. A massive ancient yew tree stands at the churchyard entrance. The parish itself is now one of a group of four parishes supported by a single vicar, who lives in the nearby village of Brailsford, and the old vicarage has

been a private house for many years. As arranged, we were met at the church by the Revd Ian Aldersley and his two churchwardens, Miss Ada Redshaw and Mr John Dowell, the latter having a nice collection of Powysian books assembled by his father. Regrettably, there were few other signs or memories of the family. The church itself is well kept, with a light and airy feel to it, and has been carefully restored in fine A.R.P.-approved style about which we are all now experts following Peter Burman's excellent Uppingham lecture on the subject.

The Revd Aldersley had also kindly arranged for us to visit the Old Vicarage, situated a short distance from the village, now the home of Viscount Tamworth and his family, eldest son of the present Earl Ferrers. This is an easy walk along Hall Lane, and can be reached by continuing through the village past the church. The road then sweeps sharply to the right, and almost immediately the long white façade of the Old Vicarage appears straight ahead across the fields, shaded by an enormous gloomy cedar tree. The entrance to the drive is on the right, a quarter-mile further along the road. The house is a substantial building, apparently built as the vicarage for the Revd W. A. Shirley in 1824. The family were away for the weekend, so we did not have an opportunity to go into the house, but dodging the rain showers we were able to explore at length the extensive gardens so evocatively portrayed by J.C.P., and where Jollyon Smith read a short extract from *Autobiography*.

There is little tangible information on Powys family life in Shirley to be gleaned from J.C.P.: 'Since I was born here, and lived here till I was seven, it is singular that I have absolutely no recollection of the parish church' (*Autobiography*, 4). And later: 'No, I can remember nothing of the church at the foot of the hill; but of the narrow lane between high hedges leading down to the church I recall to this day, and it is one of my vividest memories, the exultation that poured through me like quicksilver, when walking once a little ahead of the perambulator, which carried my brother Littleton, I turned to the nurse-maid who was pushing it and announced triumphantly that I was "the Lord of Hosts"' (*ibid.*, 11-12). Well, the footpath is still there, going diagonally from the junction of Hall Lane and the private lane to the left to Shirley Hall, but it now goes up towards the church across an open field.

Littleton, on the other hand, had more tangible recollections: 'As I think of those days I can see the little village church standing clearly outlined on a hill; I can see a pathway leading to it across the fields; I can see our two cows, Spot and Beauty, (their names come to me at once!) feeding in a paddock divided from the garden by a fence of, I believe, iron railings ...' (*The Joy of It*, 27). Or again: 'Of the inside of the vicarage I can remember little, but that little is all connected with my mother. I remember her tucking me up in bed at night and often singing a hymn to me; and I can remember the first lessons in reading which took place in the anteroom, a room which led into the drawing room; and there, too, I used for the first time the paint-box which she had given me. I can remember going to church,

and sitting near her while she played the organ' (*ibid.*, 29).

Close by is Osmaston Park, which can be reached by returning towards the village, and then turning sharply right along a narrow country lane marked as Park Lane, past Park Lane Farm and the entrance to Shirley House. After about half a mile the road is blocked by a gate, and the rest of the way must be made on foot, but there is parking here for a dozen or so cars along the grass verge under the trees. Follow the footpath at the side of the gate along a stony track by a shady wood. Ignore tracks leading off to left and right which are private, and continue straight ahead down a steep hill, which eventually emerges after a ten minute walk by the side of the lake at the lower end of Osmaston Park, at a tiny bridge opposite a small weir and a remarkable imitation Swiss cottage. This is the lake that was the scene of that 'abyss of humiliating terror' experienced by J.C.P. after flinging into the water 'a considerable-sized' dead branch: 'Oh! How that unfortunate branch—no more really than an old rotten stick—came to torture my mind!' (*Autobiography*, 12). By way of breaking the spell, eight members of The Powys Society followed J.C.P.'s example and flung their own branches into the lake in a somewhat belated attempt at collective spiritual catharsis.

The path continues to Osmaston village through the park itself, but the lake is probably as far as most people will wish to go. A range of alternative paths are clearly marked on the OS Landranger 119 or the Pathfinder 811 (Belper). At this stage, with rain yet again threatening from a lowering sky, we decided to call it a day and headed home in our various different directions, well satisfied by an interesting afternoon in Shirley, which is well worth a visit by anyone interested in the Powys family.

The other important local sites are a few miles further on in Dove Dale, which can be reached by continuing on the road past the vicarage and rejoining the A52 into Ashbourne. Drive straight through the town, which nestles snugly in a deep valley, following A515 Buxton signs. After passing through the Market Place this road (also signed Dove Dale) climbs a steep hill and out of the town. After a mile bear left off the A515 following a sign to Dove Dale, Thorpe and Ilam. This road climbs quickly to the top of a hill from which clear views of Thorpe Cloud (the Mount Cloud of *Autobiography*, a steep conical hill at the entrance to Dove Dale itself) can be seen straight ahead. Continue on this road to the Dog and Partridge Inn where the road turns sharply left into Thorpe village, and through the village for a further half mile or so following signs to Dove Dale and Car Parks. The main car park is clearly signed to the right, just past the famous Isaak Walton Hotel.

A shady path leads from the car park into Dove Dale itself, past the Izaak Walton Gauging Station and its weir, along the banks of the River Dove, with Mount Cloud rearing steeply to the right: 'One of my earliest memories was the dim feeling of *immensity* produced by that grassy hill—to my mind now, for I have not seen it for more than fifty years, resembling a conical tumulus—which rose, and I presume rises still, in the neighbourhood of Dovedale.' (*Autobiography*, 1)

And again: 'Since the overwhelmingly large number of the things that come back to me from those early years are shameful, destructive, and grotesque, I am inclined to make the utmost of the one solitary constructive activity I can remember, which was a passion for erecting, at the edge of the shrubbery by the drive, numerous replicas of "Mount Cloud", composed of damp earth-mould covered over with moss.' (*ibid.*, 2) Well, the shrubbery is still there by the main drive to the Old Vicarage, but none of these replica Mount Clouds appear to have survived!

But you can still experience the reality for yourself, for a hundred yards or so along this track a narrow footbridge crosses the Dove to the right, and from this a footpath leads along the valley and then up the steep side of Mount Cloud to the summit, which can be climbed by those fit enough (or determined enough) in around half an hour. For the more faint-hearted, continue along the track to the left of the river for another 10 minutes or so until you reach the stepping stones. From here you can cross the river, leaving Mount Cloud behind you and on into the steep craggy 'wild and terrific' limestone gorge of Dove Dale itself: 'to the eyes of a small child the rocky valley of the Dove was nothing short of a *Tremendum Mysterium*.' (*ibid.*, 1) Be prepared for rather more people than there are likely to have been on Powysian visits in the Victorian 1870s but the scenery itself can't have change too much.

Most people will want to spend as long as they can spare amidst the wild beauty of Dove Dale, but either on the way in or on the way out a short detour is recommended to visit the little country town of Ashbourne, with its steep shady streets and tiny market place, and to try and identify the old Saracen's Head Hotel, also mentioned by J.C.P. (33). So far we have been unable to track this down, but it may be a mistaken reference to one of the very old established hotels in the town centre, confused with the name of the public house of the same name in Shirley Village.

For those visiting the area it is well worth re-reading Chapter 1 of *Autobiography*, as well as Chapter 2 of Littleton Powys's *The Joy of It* for a rather different perspective. There is also an excellent article on the Powys connection with Shirley by Charles Lock in Volume I of *The Powys Journal* (1991), whilst the more diligent will also want to read up on Llewelyn's 1909 visit to Shirley, and his courtship of (and subsequent engagement to) Marion Linton (daughter of the Revd William Richardson Linton, who was vicar of Shirley from 1887 to 1908), which can be gleaned from Malcolm Elwin's *Life of Llewelyn Powys* (1946) and in Graves' *The Brothers Powys* (1983). Finally, do take a good road atlas with you, and for the area around Shirley the Ordnance Survey Landranger Sheet 119 (Buxton, Matlock and Dove Dale) will stop you getting lost too frequently amongst the many winding country lanes between Shirley and Dove Dale.

**Chris Gostick and Jollyon Smith**



## *Report of the Annual General Meeting* held at Uppingham School on 24th August 1996

**1 Minutes of the last A.G.M. (1995)** These had been published in the Powys Society *Newsletter* and were agreed without amendment.

**2 Matters arising from the minutes** There were no matters arising.

**3 Secretary's report** John Batten reported that the Committee had met four times since the last A.G.M. The Publications Committee had met twice as a sub-committee and there had been two joint meetings with the main Committee.

*Committee meeting of 4th November 1995, held in Odcombe*

**1** A motion was passed authorising the display of material from the Powys Collection in the Literary Gallery at the Dorset County Museum, subject to certain conditions and providing that the situation was kept under review by the Society's Advisory Committee on the Powys Collection.

**2** The Treasurer gave a detailed account of the Society's finances referring particularly to income from the sale of Peter Powys Grey's books (£2,396), expenditure on the restoration of paintings by Gertrude Powys (£1,200) and the cost of mounting the exhibition of her work (less than £800).

**3** It was reported that the following matters had been considered by the publications committee:

a. The revision of the *Powys Checklist* by Alan Howe, to which it was agreed the works of Elizabeth Myers and Alyse Gregory would be added. b. There was further consideration of the technical details of the publication of a book of Powys walks. c. The possibility of publishing an audio book of extracts from the writings of the three brothers. d. It was agreed that an audio tape of *Ghosts on the Roof*, recorded at Conference, should be made available to members.

**4** The theft of a painting from the Gertrude Powys Exhibition was discussed in the context of a letter received from the curator of the Dorset County Museum. It was emphasised that this regrettable and serious incident was almost without precedent and had no implications for the Powys Collection.

**5** Chris Gostick was formally co-opted onto the committee in the role of co-ordinator of local and regional activities.

**6** It was agreed that the 1997 Conference at Kingston Maurward should last for three days, as in previous years.

**7** Stephen Powys Marks spoke about proposed changes to the Society's constitution outlined in a paper which he had prepared for committee. After a good deal of discussion it was unanimously agreed that the proposed changes should be published in *Newsletter* 26.

*The meeting of 24th February 1996, held in London*

**1** Paul Roberts gave details of the work being undertaken by Robin Patterson and Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe in compiling a Powys bibliographical resource based on Robin's collection and information contributed by members of the

Society.

2 The committee returned to earlier discussion of the question of the location of Llewelyn's ashes and stone. It was unanimously agreed that this was a matter for the Powys family.

3 The Treasurer gave a detailed account of the financial situation and estimated that, subject to possible unforeseen fluctuations, between one and a half and two thousand pounds would be available for expenditure on projects.

4 The Society's response to the appeal for the Literary Gallery at the Dorset County Museum was considered. The committee took account of the educational and publicity value of the Powys representation there, and of the fact that both the Barnes and Hardy Societies had already made substantial contributions, and £80,000 was still needed. It was agreed that an appeal should be made to members through the *Newsletter*, and that by one means or another The Powys Society should raise a contribution of £1,000.

5 The Publications Committee reported as follows: a. That the projected book of Powys walks should cover all the main West Country locations. b. That the possibility of the Society publishing John Cowper's 1934/5 Diary, edited by Morine Krissdóttir and Roger Peers, had been discussed. It was recommended, and committee agreed, that advance subscription terms should be offered and a final decision deferred until the June meeting so that Sarah Linden could obtain more information about several production options. c. It was recommended, and committee agreed, that Dr John Williams be appointed Editor of *The Powys Journal* from August 1996, and Paul Roberts Editor of the *Powys Society Newsletter* from the same date. Both appointments for a three-year term. Thanks were expressed to Dr Peter Foss and Paul Roberts for their contribution to the quality of the Society's publications.

6 The Committee returned to the question of the Society's constitution and the ballot of members. The Secretary reported that there had been a small number of ballot papers returned, of which the overwhelming majority were for the proposed changes. While it was clear that the new draft constitution should be implemented there were still unresolved difficulties relating to the detail of its administration. A working party was set up to draft proposals for the implementation of the proposed changes.

*The meeting of 22nd June, held in Gloucester*

1a. It was reported that the revised *Powys Checklist* would be available before the Conference. b. It was agreed that if a decision were taken to publish the 1934/5 Diary the action on the proposed book of walks would be deferred. c. A new format for the Society's publicity pamphlet was discussed. It is likely that the Museum's Literary Gallery will provide an outlet for this type of publicity material.

2 Paul Roberts chaired discussion of the 1934/5 Diary project which began with a presentation by Sarah Linden. She recommended: (i) A printing of 300 soft

back copies and 50 signed hard back copies. (ii) Both editions to have full colour covers and 352 portrait pages with photographs and notes accompanying the text. (iii) The text would be divided into twelve month-long chapters. (iv) A bookmark would list the main characters. (v) Design would be by Bev Craven and typesetting by Stephen Powys Marks.

Pre-publication subscription from the members of the Society promised to amount to £2,500, and a firm order for 50 copies had been received. After further discussion it was unanimously agreed that the Powys Press should publish the 1934/5 Diary of John Cowper Powys, edited by Morine Krissdóttir and Roger Peers, under the title *The Dorset Year*, and that it would be available in August 1997. Paul Roberts commented that the publication would be a fitting way of marking the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Society.

3 It was agreed that the Powys Press would publish a short study of Arnold Shaw by Paul Roberts.

4 Chris Gostick reported on plans for a regional meeting in Wales and the possibility of a visit to Shirley after the Conference.

5 Paul Roberts reported on the meeting of the sub-committee which had drawn up a protocol for the implementation of the proposed constitutional changes. Their recommendations were adopted unanimously as a by-law which will become effective with the new constitution.

6 The Treasurer reported and committee received his audited accounts.

*The meeting of 23rd August, held at Uppingham.*

The following items were discussed:

1 The publication of a list of names and addresses of members, grouped by regions. More information about this will be published in the November *Newsletter*. Care will be taken to ensure that any steps taken conform to the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

2 Correspondence concerning: i. The Powys Collection. ii. The publication of *The Dorset Year*.

3 The Society's publicity leaflet.

4 Expenses claimed by officers and committee members. The figure which appears in the accounts represents only a small proportion of the travel expenses officers and committee might have claimed had they not, in effect, chosen to donate them to the Society. It was agreed that members joining the Committee would be briefed on the matter of claiming expenses.

**4 Treasurer's report** Stephen Powys Marks referred members to his Report and Accounts for 1995 which had been printed in the last *Newsletter*, and did not wish to add anything in relation to our affairs in 1995. He said the accounts had been approved by our Auditor, Stephen Allen, a member of the Society who carries out that job without payment.

With regard to financial matters in 1996 he commented as follows. The most important aspects were that 260 subscriptions had come in so far, and in all about

270 could be expected before the end of the year, which was less than last year's 289. Sales so far had amounted to £600, and by the end of the year would also be less than last year. Our main outgoings were on publications with volume VI of *The Powys Journal* and three *Newsletters* expected to cost about £4,000, and other publications, *The Ideal Ringmaster*, the new edition of the *Powys Checklist*, and the tape of *Ghosts on the Roof*, costing £800. The Society had also handed over £1,000 to the Dorset County Museum for the Literary Gallery which was now under construction; of this £720 had been generously contributed by several members of the Society. Although our income from subscriptions and publications would be less this year than in 1995, the Society had not had the major expenses incurred last year on the G. M. Powys exhibition and on the Society's own collection (only £200 had been spent on the latter earlier this year). The Treasurer considered that our affairs were financially satisfactory.

**5 Chairman's remarks** Morine Krissdóttir outlined the nature of her contribution to the proceedings and continued as follows. I remember when Griffin Beale and I began as Secretary and Chair in what was a rather tumultuous time, we used to discuss who was going to say what. Now we have sailed into calmer waters, I hope, and I can be briefer and more casual. It says something about the growth and maturity of the Society that I can feel such confidence, although being a good Iclander and Lutheran I have a tendency to assume that the light at the end of the tunnel is likely a train bearing down.

As always I would like to thank the Officers with whom I most closely work, Paul Roberts, John Batten and Stephen Powys Marks. We have been working together for several years now and have got to know each others ways, moods and strengths. As busy people with strong personalities, we have our occasional misunderstandings, but they are always resolved with humour and good will. I am constantly grateful to them for their loyalty, their generosity of spirit and their commitment to the Society.

So too with the Executive Committee. As the Society grows and the projects we take on are ever more ambitious, the committee members have to take on more burdens; most of them are professionals with expertise in their own field which they freely volunteer to aid the Society. As is natural and necessary, from time to time members of the committee step down to make room for new people with fresh ideas and energy. This year Peter Foss, Frank Kibblewhite and Louise de Bruin decided not to stand for re-election, but their tremendous efforts, ideas and may I say personalities will not be forgotten.

I sometimes think that we do not do enough to explain to the general membership the various policies and protocols we have developed in order to make the Society both democratic and smooth-running. The Publications Policy is an example. It requires that the Executive Committee appoint a *Newsletter* Editor and a *Journal* Editor every three years. Re-appointment is possible if the Executive Committee feels strongly that the Editor is an excellent one and is

willing to take on another term. In the case of Paul Roberts as Editor of the *Newsletter*, I think the A.G.M. will agree that no better person could possibly be found, and Paul has agreed to take it on for another term.

After two terms Peter Foss and Louise de Bruin felt they had done their stint as Editors of the *Journal*. Our search for a new Editor was not difficult because an obvious person was willing, or fairly willing, to take it on. Dr John Williams has agreed to take over as Editor and I know that the very high standards set by the previous Editors will continue. Charles Lock has heartily agreed to stay on as Contributing Editor and Stephen Powys Marks will continue his superb work as Production Manager. John is speaking at another conference this weekend, but has asked me to ask all the speakers and any one here with an article up his or her sleeve to please submit it to him.

The Officers seem to spend a good deal of their time responding to requests from members and others; that is one of our main functions so none of us mind, indeed are usually pleased if we can assist. If the Society is to prosper and expand we must reach out. It will be the internet next! A request that particularly pleased me was from the BBC. I spent a day with a producer and script writer of one programme in a series of documentaries on Pevsner. This one will concentrate on Dorset, with a literary slant and they wanted to know about the Powyses. I had to confess that none of the dwellings of the Powyses were of outstanding architectural merit, but I took them to Chydyok, Beth Car, Rat's Barn, and then, late in the afternoon in a beautiful light to Winterborne Tomson, the church so closely associated with A.R.P. They fell in love with the place, as well they might. Let us hope that something comes of it.

As to the Collection, cataloguing continues steadily or as steadily as it can without any funds to boost the pace. I try to be there a day a week although it is often more and a museum volunteer has now put almost all the books on card catalogue but feels unqualified to cope with the hundreds if not thousands of individual manuscript items. That will be my project after I finish *The DorsetYear*.

In the meantime although conditions are cramped and will be for several years until the new library and study facilities are completed, we do our best to accommodate any scholar who contacts us with a *bona fide* project and of course, all the material is available to the Editors of the *Journal* and *Newsletter*, giving both publications a veritable cornucopia of material for many years to come.

The Literary Gallery is excitingly close to completion. The building work is now finished and only in the last few weeks have we had the good news that the large sum of money necessary to complete the gallery is available. The Curator has spent many weeks, months, fund-raising and he deserves to be congratulated, so too Judith Stinton, the Gallery Co-ordinator. She has worked closely with me at all points to ensure that the Powyses are fully and fairly represented. Our Society has donated £1,000 toward this project. This is a significant sum for a small society, and I thank all those who contributed generously toward it, and

urge those who have not to have word with Stephen. The total cost of the gallery will be £600,000 and the Powyses will be displayed in one sixth of it, i.e. an approximate cost of our space would be £100,000. The commitment of the Museum to the Collection has been both in word and deed. I would like to make it very clear that we are fortunate, as a society whose brief is to publicise the Powyses, to have the Museum as our repository.

Next year marks the thirtieth year of the Society and my tenth year as Chairman. It seems an appropriate time to hand on the torch to someone new. If it is the will of the A.G.M. I would like to remain as Chairman for one more year, but I will step down in August 1997.

This has been a difficult decision for me to make but I think it is the right one. I have no intention of disappearing beneath a stone, but even the magician Merlin knew when it was time for someone else to take his place.

**6 Election of Officers** (conducted by the President, Glen Cavaliero. There were no names added to the slate published in *Newsletter* 28.) The following were duly elected (proposers and seconders shown in parentheses):

*Chairman* Morine Krissdóttir (*T. Hallett, P. Burman*)

*Vice-Chairman* Paul Roberts (*T. Hyman, C. Wilkinson*)

*Secretary* John Batten (*M. Warden, C. Gostick*)

*Treasurer* Stephen Powys Marks (*B. Humfrey, C. Gostick*)

**7 Election of Committee** (conducted by the President. There were no names added to the slate published in *Newsletter* 28.) The following were duly elected:

Griffin Beale (*B. Craven, M. Warden*)

Bev Craven (*T. Hallett, J. Hodgson*)

Chris Gostick (*H. Williams, R. Wood*)

Timothy Hyman (*B. Humfrey, E. Walton*)

John Powys (*T. Hyman, H. Williams*)

Judith Stinton (*C. Gostick, M. Skaipe d'Ingerthorpe*)

John Williams (*T. Hyman, B. Craven*)

**8 Appointment of Auditor** Stephen Allen (*S. Powys Marks, P. Roberts*)

**9 Future Powys Events** Chris Gostick said that the first of these would be the visit to Shirley planned for the following day. He said he was looking forward to arranging a weekend in North Wales, probably in the Spring of next year, which would include visits to some of the places important to John and Phyllis in their later years. He made reference to possible events to mark Powys family birthdays in the future. Of regional groups, he said that he was hopeful that members in South Wales would be meeting and stressed that he was ready to lend his support to members willing to organise events.

**10 Future Conferences** The Chairman reminded members that next year's conference will be held at Kingston Maurward College, Dorchester, from the evening of Saturday 23rd August until after breakfasts on Tuesday 26th August. The possibility of a return to Uppingham was discussed as were dates and

duration of future conferences. The view was expressed that some members had been put off attending because they thought access by public transport difficult and that others considered the conference too short to justify the journey. Possible alternative venues mentioned included Brighton and Bangor.

**II Any other business** Belinda Humfrey expressed the view that the Society's first priority should be to bring about the publication of John Cowper Powys's major novels. There was no disagreement about the desirability of this but some of the obstacles were highlighted as: (i) The Society does not have the financial resources to undertake such a project and publishes for its members, who, in the main, have the major novels. (ii) The Society could not assume the role of literary agent. (iii) The *Wolf Solent* reprint had been dropped from the Penguin list after about two years because sales did not justify its continuation. The Vice-Chairman added that the Society's Committee has given a great deal of thought to this problem in the past, and will continue to do so. In response to a further comment the Chairman emphasised that the year-on-year publication of John Cowper's Diaries would be a project of enormous proportions.

*There being no other business, the Chairman thanked members for attending and declared the meeting closed.*

**John Batten**

### *List of Members*

As part of the continuing process of encouraging the development of local events and activities, and in response to a number of specific requests from members, the Committee at its last meeting agreed in principle to a proposal that the names and addresses of all Society members should be made available. This was also a view that emerged strongly from the 1994 Membership Survey, when a number of respondents suggested the Society should be doing more to encourage members to get in touch with each other. At this stage it is proposed that we do no more than prepare a simple list of the names and addresses of all existing members, classified on a broad regional basis, as a supplement to the April 1997 *Newsletter*. Almost 90 per cent of those responding to the Membership Survey indicated they were happy to have this information made available, but if for any reason you would prefer not to participate in this way please contact the Honorary Secretary John Batten (01935 824077) as soon as possible, and in any case by 1st January 1997.

**Chris Gostick**

***SUBSCRIPTIONS, STANDING ORDERS, COVENANTS : SEE PAGE 40***

## *Elizabeth Myers: The Background*

On a sunny day about the time of the first world war, a small girl sat on a three-legged stool in the drab backyard of an unprepossessing house in Apollo Street in the Collyhurst district of Manchester. A pot full of dandelions was on the ground before her and she was surrounded by the grimy walls of the houses neighbouring her home in this densely populated warren, crouching on the inner edge of the city. The din of Oldham Road, a main thoroughfare running parallel to Apollo Street, would be audible as well as the clangour of the railway which ran a short distance behind the street. The sunlight would have to struggle through the constant sooty pall which lay over the ugly terraces wherein dwelt the poorest of Manchester's workers. Yet the child's imagination was stimulated and carried away by her little display of wild flowers.

The humble yellow weeds transformed the grim backyard into an imaginary garden filled with beautiful and fragrant blooms. Years later, Elizabeth Myers recalled the experience in a letter to John Cowper Powys:

The joy of it returns in the telling. Had I been born in a rich comfortable home I could never have known joys like that.

Earlier in the letter, she detailed some of the hard facts of her young life, declaring that, for her younger sister and herself, childhood was often spent in quite desperate straits. It was due, she said, to their father's gambling and womanising:

... but I am glad, glad it was like that, glad to have gone down to the very bottom of life. To have been very poor is to be very rich through all time afterwards ...

Elizabeth's imagination became a powerful ingredient in her later life, driving her adventurous spirit and bringing fulfilment of her gifts in an earthly span as relatively short as those of her summer dandelions.

She was born elsewhere in Manchester in 1912 and, by 1914, her father, George Myers, a warehouseman, her heroic mother, also named Elizabeth, and her baby sister, Dorothy, were established at 10, Apollo Street, remaining there for about twelve years. There was another member of the household, Ann Mooney, an old Irish aunt of her father. The old lady doted on Elizabeth in her infancy and Elizabeth described her as 'simply splendid'.

Their home was one of only four houses in the street, forming a short terrace sandwiched between a small shop and a clothing manufacturers at one end and a council school at the other. The Myers and their neighbours looked from their front windows across the narrow cobbled street and saw only the unlovely backs of the houses, shops, pubs and commercial premises of Oldham Road. Their home was typical of the dwellings created in the speculative building boom which accompanied Manchester's rise as the cotton capital of the world and speedily became slums. Apollo Street eventually went nowhere, petering out as a cul-de-



sac at the backs of shops and warehouses.

The names of Collyhurst and Ancoats, the district which stood cheek-by-jowl with it just across Oldham Road, were synonymous with hard knocks and deprived living. Collyhurst had a markedly Irish character while Ancoats had had a large Italian population since the late nineteenth century. Its origins, however, were associated with another set of immigrants. They were the displaced persons from the farmlands of England, who abandoned the land and flooded into Manchester, seeking work in the burgeoning mills and factories of the Industrial Revolution.

Elizabeth Gaskell, in her 1848 novel *Mary Barton*, has Mary and her friends traversing half-built streets to their little Ancoats home after a walk in the countryside then bordering the district. By Elizabeth Myers' time, that countryside had been swamped by a web of small streets in the midst of which Mary Barton's Ancoats was a lost village. Such summer joys as Mrs Gaskell's characters found in hedgerows and lanes might now be only hinted at through a pot of dandelions nurtured by a little girl in a backyard.

Even in Mrs Gaskell's time, the industrial environment stamped its mark on the inhabitants. A character in *Mary Barton* observes:

... them Buckinghamshire people as come to work in Manchester has quite a different look with them to us Manchester folk. You'll not see among the Manchester wenches such fresh rosy cheeks, or such black lashes to grey eyes (making them look almost black) as my wife and Esther had ...

In 1913, the year after Elizabeth Myers' birth, my uncle, a robust young man from County Galway, joined Manchester City Police and had his baptism as a tyro constable on the streets of the force's B Division which covered Ancoats and Collyhurst. He had a fund of tales of life in the district and of lively policing on Saturday nights when the pubs were at their rowdiest. His earliest impression of the folk on his beat was of the grey and ill appearance of the majority. Doubtless, it was in these cramped and crowded mean streets that the tuberculosis which Elizabeth Myers was to develop at 25 had its origin.

Also nurtured in that environment was her desire to write. It provided a sympathy for the strugglers and the deprived and an all too real knowledge of slum life which makes the early part of her initial novel, *A Well Full of Leaves*, so disturbingly brilliant. It provided her, too, with an ear for the vulgar tongue. When Wilson Midgley, the editor of *John o' London's Weekly*, quibbled over her use of 'bloody' in a small boy's dialogue in a short story, she countered:

It is completely in character with a boy of that type to use 'bloody'. His conversation would in fact be peppered with words of which 'bloody' would seem positively 'drawing room' ...

Life in the locality was real and earnest but it had the neighbourliness traditional among the northern industrial poor and it had its colourful aspects.

Elizabeth would be familiar with the costumes of all the regions of Italy, displayed on the Italian colony's special occasions, particularly the festivals of the Church, marked by processions with banners, statues and hymns. She was introduced early to the district's other ethnic strand, Irishness, through the tales of Celtic heroes, giants, saints and fairies told by her loving Ann Mooney. From her, she heard the soft endearments 'mavourneen' and 'macushla', familiar to all Irish infants.

Elizabeth never forgot her father's aunt and her tales. They gave her a special feeling for Ireland and caused her to eventually try her hand at Irish stories. In time, she would know an experience by no means unfamiliar to those of us who love both England and Ireland through our parentage and upbringing; that of sometimes feeling profoundly English and sometimes profoundly Irish!

Littleton Powys recorded a piece of Myers family detail garnered either from Elizabeth or her mother, writing that Ann Mooney would nurse the sleeping Elizabeth, saying: 'The blessings of God on her. She is playing with the fairies and the angels.'

At length, Elizabeth found further stimulus for her imagination in her years at school. As Catholic children, she and Dorothy crossed the busy Oldham Road and walked a little distance through the nucleus of the original Ancoats, passing huddled dwellings which were new in the first years of the Industrial Revolution, to St Michael's School.

There, she came under the wing of one who would open doors for her, lay the foundation of her further education and become a friend for the rest of her life, Miss Ann Lee, head of the girls' section of the school.

Cultured and dignified, Miss Lee devoted her life to the children of this ill-favoured region of Manchester, each one of whom was precious to her. She introduced Elizabeth to vistas of literature, art and music and, in the child's later years at the school, took her to her home for extra tuition.

Elizabeth corresponded with her for the rest of her life, reporting her progress as a writer and much else. In her London days, her only return visits to Manchester were to see Miss Lee and her sister, Mary. Elizabeth's letters opened with a formal 'Dear Miss Lee' after leaving school but her later mode of addressing the two sisters was an affectionate 'Darlings'. In one letter, she told her beloved teacher:

...all the real help and education I received at St Michael's, the guide to reading I received there, the extra assistance and encouragement, the hitching of the wagon to the star, came from Ann Lee ...

Mrs W. M. Hawthornthwaite, who was a pupil at St Michael's twenty years after Elizabeth, explained to me how, in ways closely paralleling Elizabeth's experience, Miss Lee put her on a path leading away from the dreary prospects of dead-end occupation which was the lot of most working-class girls of the time. She won her way to secondary school by scholarship, thence to university

and a Classics degree. Fifty-five years on, Miss Lee's influence was still powerful in her life and she often thought and spoke of her.

Mrs Hawthornthwaite said:

In those days, almost every working-class girl left school and became a machinist or shop assistant or took up some similar lowly occupation. Miss Lee opened up for me a world of the mind and spirit which has been mine throughout my whole life. She had the vision to offer her gifts to us slum children, for that is what we were, supremely confident that we were just as deserving as children from homes with steady incomes, books and educated parents.

She explained how Miss Lee's methods differed radically from the usual trite routines of the elementary school. She taught the girls to make lace and, while they worked at it, read aloud to them from all manner of classical and contemporary literature. She spoke of the world's artists and their works and of the lives of musicians and their compositions. She took them out of the classroom to discover the rich cultural life within their own city: on tours of the art galleries, to performances of Shakespeare, to the concerts of the Hallé Orchestra, conducted by John Barbirolli and to see the youthful Fonteyn and Helpmann dance. Her own books in her office were always available to the children.

How Ann Lee's leadership in going forth to discover cultural delights bore fruit in Elizabeth's later life can be seen from her early letters from London where she arrived at 19 in 1932. In no time at all, she was writing to Miss Lee of attending concerts, of meeting students from the London School of Dramatic Art, of seeing Anton Dolin dance at the Old Vic, of discovering the films of Rene Clair and the Soviet cinema, of receiving gifts of prints of Monet and Van Gogh paintings, of being in love with books and of constantly writing. Through these letters, one feels that the child from Apollo Street was brimming with joy and wonderment at life in London which she loved from the first.

Miss Lee gave special attention to girls preparing for the scholarship examinations arranged by Manchester Education Committee, then the gateway to the limited places at secondary schools. Success in the examinations meant a chance of extended education instead of leaving school at 14 and going to work.

Elizabeth was successful and, at 11, went to Notre Dame Convent High School, some distance from her home. It was in Cheetham, another crowded district and, since the late nineteenth century, heavily populated by Russian and Middle European Jews, originally refugees from Czarist pogroms. Soon after Elizabeth's time at Notre Dame, the district would become famous through *Magnolia Street*, Louis Golding's best-selling novel of life among Manchester's poor Jews.

Notre Dame was a large school, one of several in the British Isles administered by the order of Sisters of Notre Dame, as well as lay teachers. The Notre Dame schools had a good academic reputation and they retained the affection of their

pupils as can be seen today in the widespread association of former Notre Dame girls. Elizabeth never belonged to it. She had an avowed dislike of clubs and associations and, in any case, was not particularly happy at Notre Dame. It was much bigger than St Michael's and had a far greater number of pupils. She would find its atmosphere less intimate and more formal and would certainly encounter girls from more prosperous homes, particularly among those attending on a fee-paying basis.

Littleton Powys recorded that Elizabeth did not mix well with her schoolmates although she made a few friends. At times, her schoolfellows 'showed their disapproval of her independence', as he put it, so we might suspect schoolgirlish differences, doubtless petty but hurtful to a sensitive child. Possibly, earnest, self-improving Elizabeth was considered a 'swot'.

A Sister of Notre Dame, now one of the order's senior members, who was a form-mate of Elizabeth for a short time, told me she found her 'rather withdrawn, perhaps not a very good mixer, but my memory of her might have been different had I known her for a longer period'.

What cannot be discounted as a factor in the demeanour of the growing girl is the effect of her home environment. Her 'quiet little North Country mother', as Eleanor Farjeon called Elizabeth Myers Senior, always struggled against poverty and was plainly the sustaining spirit of the humble home. Years later, however, her daughter threw a chilling light on the behaviour of her father when, in a letter to Eleanor Farjeon, she imparted the information that she and her little sister spent their childhood 'chiefly in endeavouring not to get murdered by our drunk father'.

One who brightened Elizabeth's life at Notre Dame was the English teacher who discovered her love of literature and encouraged it. This was Miss Mollie Kearney, then an enthusiastic young teacher only recently graduated. She went on to have a long and fondly remembered career at Notre Dame.

Littleton Powys wrote that Elizabeth considered English to have been excellently taught at Notre Dame and she learned much of her favourite poetry there, being able to recite it from memory long afterwards.

It was probably under Miss Kearney's influence that she wrote a short poem which appeared in the school magazine. Entitled 'Davy Jones' Locker' and signed 'Elizabeth Myers, Form IV A', it is a two-stanza glimpse of the undersea world of lost vessels and drowned sailors. It might well be Elizabeth's first work to see print.

Poetry always played a large part in Elizabeth's life and from her time at Notre Dame comes the touching story of her attempt to hear her favourite poet at the time, Walter De la Mare, lecture at Manchester Town Hall. She considered that, if she ran all the way after school, she could reach the Town Hall in time for the lecture.

In fancy, I can follow the frail girl, tackling a distance which would tax even an

accomplished athlete, running through the cityscape of a Manchester still markedly Victorian and yet to be ravaged by the blitz and re-shaped by the planners. She would run along noisy Cheetham Hill Road, with its clanging trams and shabby shop-fronts, many with Hebrew characters on their windows; she would cross the wide cobbled bridge which carried the road over Victoria Station where the air would be thick with the smoke and steam of locomotives; she would run into the commercial bustle of Corporation Street, then straight ahead into Cross Street. Her entrance to this street would be flanked by two bastions of Mancunian life. On one hand, the Royal Exchange, the beating heart of its cotton finance and, on the other, the dwelling place of its Liberal conscience, the offices of the *Manchester Guardian*.

If the paper's august editor Charles Prestwich Scott was gazing from his sanctuary on the hallowed 'Corridor' and noted the running child he would little imagine that, not many years later, her work as a writer of short stories would appear in his columns. A Welsh reporter named Howard Spring, yet to find his own literary feet, might have spotted her, all oblivious to the fact that he would one day call the hastening schoolgirl 'an important novelist.'

Elizabeth would run out of Cross Street into the cobbled expanse of Albert Square, with its crush of traffic, arriving and departing trams and statues of Victorian statesmen. The scene was dominated by the vast Gothic Town Hall, soot black as were all older Mancunian buildings in that pre-Clean Air Act era.

On the steps of this symbol of Manchester's culture of muck and money, a humble little citizen met bitter disappointment. For it cost a shilling to hear Walter De la Mare and she had no money. Dejectedly, she went home.

Long afterwards, Elizabeth wrote to De la Mare, telling him of her admiration of his poetry and of that unhappy day in the nineteen-twenties. De la Mare was then an aged and ailing widower and Elizabeth's letter started a long correspondence marked by the affection she so frequently showed in her letters to older men. This trait might well be construed by the psycho-analysts — for whom Elizabeth had only scorn — as reflecting a need for a stable father figure.

De la Mare's biographer, Theresa Whistler, says he almost fell in love with Elizabeth from that first letter. She reminded him of Katherine Mansfield, whom he had known, and he was greatly downcast when he heard of her death. Elizabeth's last published novel, *Mrs Christopher*, is dedicated to De la Mare.

Elizabeth's education at Notre Dame ended abruptly. Though she might have gone on to further education, her father insisted on taking her away at fourteen and a half and sending her to work. This was against the wishes of her mother who ensured that she took commercial training. She eventually passed out of the Gregg Commercial College as a prizewinner, equipped with secretarial skills which ensured future employment.

Somewhere about this time, Mrs Myers obtained a legal separation from her husband and life became easier for the closely-knit trio of mother and daughters.

By 1925, the family was no longer at 10, Apollo Street and, by the beginning of the 'thirties, mother and daughters were living in Ribbleton, Preston, where Elizabeth worked for a petroleum company. The trio moved to London in 1932 when Elizabeth was transferred by her firm.

Apart from some visits to Miss Lee, Elizabeth had cut her ties with her native city. She became a whole-hearted London dweller. She loved the city. From the start, she sought out haunts which had literary associations, particularly Dickensian ones and those echoing the period she called her 'time of times', the early eighteenth century, so lovingly recaptured in her Swiftian novel *The Basilisk of St James's*.

The London of her own time brought its personal dramas. There was her eighteen-month stay in a sanatorium when it was discovered that, at 25, she had tuberculosis. There was the brush with death early in the blitz when the house next door to the one she shared with her mother and Dorothy was bombed. There was her regular work in central London through the blitz years, coupled with her nightly striving through 1941 and 1942 to produce her first novel, *A Well Full of Leaves*.

Many of the incidents of her earlier years bore fruit in later literary form. Her early departure from Notre Dame gave rise to the poignant but hopeful short story, 'The Threshold', about a girl taken away from her studies at secondary school and sent to work in a button factory. The experience of a small child finding wonder in a bunch of dandelions in a miserable backyard is given to Mrs Christopher as one of her childhood memories and told almost word for word as Elizabeth related it to John Cowper Powys in a letter of 1942. Many a touch of the gritty life of Ancoats and Collyhurst finds its way into *A Well Full of Leaves*, wherein the feckless potman father of the Valley children, always hopeful of success in his petty gambling, must surely reflect Elizabeth's own father.

She was never, however, overtly a Manchester writer. The northern city which is the partial backdrop of *A Well Full of Leaves* is never given its name and J. D. Beresford, reviewing the novel for the *Manchester Guardian*, conjectured that it was Liverpool. Elizabeth's experiences on Manchester's seamier side were probably such that she was glad to leave the city and find her happiness elsewhere.

Her correspondence with John Cowper Powys unexpectedly put her on the path to her greatest happiness. She first wrote to him in 1941, expressing admiration of his work, which she had discovered ten years before. She seized the opportunity because, having had one near miss in the blitz, she felt she must eventually die in the constant nightly bombing. It opened another long and affectionate correspondence.

John Cowper Powys often mentioned his brother, Littleton, in his letters and, in 1942, wrote that Littleton had just lost his beloved wife, Mabel, through cancer. Elizabeth, who had never met Littleton, wrote John a letter of sympathy

on his brother's bereavement which John showed to Littleton. Littleton greatly appreciated it and wrote to Elizabeth, thanking her.

Thus began a correspondence between the retired head of Sherborne College's preparatory school and the young woman who was sharing a flat in Hampstead with her mother and sister awaiting publication of her first novel.

They met in the summer of 1943 when Elizabeth accepted Littleton's invitation to visit him in Sherborne. In spite of the gulf of almost forty years between their ages, it was a happy matching of minds and personalities and they quickly found that each was necessary to the other. They were married at Hampstead's Catholic church that autumn.

Their marriage of only three and a half years was filled with mutual devotion. Elizabeth produced her two novels, *The Basilisk of St James's* and *Mrs Christopher* at Sherborne and Littleton took her on her last great adventure. At the end of 1946, they left to spend six months at a sanatorium in Tucson, Arizona, hoping she would find a cure in the desert air.

The stay had its problems, with Elizabeth having an operation for appendicitis, but America thrilled her immensely. They visited Littleton's sister, Marian, long resident in the United States and were feted by a group of American writers in New York where Elizabeth joyously explored the region associated with O. Henry and Damon Runyon, whose works she loved.

In Arizona, she began her fourth novel, to be called *The Governor*, but it was destined to be unfinished. Though she missed the brutal English winter of 1946–1947 and returned to Dorset in a beautiful spring, she became ill and died peacefully in May. She was 34 years of age.

Littleton said she was one of the choicest spirits of the age and Theodore Powys likened her to a bird who sang from the highest branch then soared away.

Elizabeth never lost the Catholicism of her Manchester childhood, though she said she was 'not very holy'. She said the parable of the Prodigal Son was created for her kind: those who would be lovingly welcomed by the Father because He saw them from afar and recognised them. Littleton, whom she described as 'a truly good man' and 'a jolly pagan', was a believer though his belief was not expressed through the orthodox Anglicanism of his father. He understood how her faith guided her life and made her unafraid in the face of her illness.

Elizabeth Myers was a radical Catholic who found fellow-feeling with the controversial French writer Georges Bernanos, who was not afraid to criticise shortcomings in the Church when he saw them. She would fit comfortably into the Roman Catholicism of the post Second Vatican Council era.

Writing to Ann Lee in 1942 while working on *A Well Full of Leaves*, she said that, if published, it would give Catholics something to think about 'for it is based on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas who more or less compels us to be happy in spite of all circumstances'. In the event, there was some suggestion that it would be banned by Rome on a claim that it had a pantheistic basis, but the threat was

lifted just before her marriage. It was, however, banned by the Irish Free State's Board of Censorship — an arm of the government and not the Church — an action which some Irish writers have found flattering and which can create an instant local demand!

*A Well Full of Leaves*, subtitled 'A Story of Happiness', created a stir. Its hopeful mysticism had an impact on those coping with personal crises from whom Elizabeth received many messages of thanks. Among them were a German Jewish refugee suffering from tuberculosis and despondent through losing her family and a man in South America who said the novel brought him back from the brink of suicide. A young woman whom she met at Eleanor Farjeon's home kissed her and thanked her profusely because the novel helped to bring her through a low point.

*Mrs Christopher*, thought by some to be her best published novel, investigates the directions which the expression and the betrayal of love can take, cued by the quotation from Bernanos which is its inscription: that hell is the inability to love.

In a letter to Walter De la Mare, she outlined Bernanos' view that humanity channels love from the source of all love: God. Love was the driving force of her own spirit which remained unembittered by a troubled childhood and a progressive illness.

Sandwiched between those two novels was *The Basilisk of St James's*, dealing with love in its romantic form through the relationship of Jonathan Swift and Hester Vanhomrigh, his 'Vanessa'. It is dedicated to Littleton as well as to John Cowper Powys, 'My True Friends'.

While writing it, she told John Cowper Powys in a letter that she was doing so 'eagerly and lovingly'. If she found few fairies and angels with whom to frolic in her fictional London of Queen Anne's day, she clearly relished the company of the political schemers, the literary luminaries, the brothel keepers, sedan-chairmen, fishwives, masked street women, link-boys and the rest. They surrounded Swift, who had fascinated her for years, in their roistering, dangerous setting all portrayed with great zest. At work here is the young woman who loved the haunted corners of Dickens' London, who easily made friends with down-and-outs and who would happily savour the romance of Damon Runyon's *Broadway* and O. Henry's 'Bagdad-on-the-Subway'.

At her death, she was still finding her way in her love affair with the art of writing and her partially completed novel, *The Governor*, which Littleton Powys felt excelled her other novels, might have marked new steps on her road. It was destroyed after her death by her own wish.

What might later years have settled her into? Would this child of the largely immigrant-rooted, working-class Catholicism of a northern industrial city have brought a voice to the English Catholic novel distinct from the essentially English ones of public school converts such as Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene?

As things are, her body of work, three novels, a crop of short stories, some



articles, essays and reviews, all produced within 15 years, is now totally out of print.

Perhaps, half a century after her death, it is time for a reconsideration of her writings and for new generations to meet Elizabeth Myers, the bright and brave flower who blossomed so briefly out of harsh soil.

**Anthony Glynn**

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*Manchester's Little Italy*, by Anthony Rea (Neil Richardson, Radcliffe, 1988).

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Correspondence and conversations with the Sisters of Notre Dame, Liverpool.

Correspondence and conversations with Mrs W. M. Hawthornthwaite, Whalley, Lancs.

My special thanks are due to Mr Oliver Holt, Sherborne, Dorset; Father Brocard Sewell,

O. Carm.; Miss Eveline Alty, St Albans; Father Michael Walsh, Roman Catholic

Diocese of Salford; Local Studies Unit, Central Library, Manchester; and Miss Hannah

Chapleo, formerly deputy head, St Michael's School Girls' Dpt., Ancoats, Manchester.

## *A Weekend in North Wales*

Following the success of a number of previous weekend meetings, most notably the 1994 Weymouth Weekend and last year's Montacute visit, and in response to a number of requests from members, the Committee is in the process of arranging a weekend in North Wales which will give the opportunity for visiting 7 Cae Coed, where John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter lived from July 1935 until they moved a few miles further west to Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1954, as well as many of the places mentioned in the diary and much of the published correspondence, and fictionalised in *Owen Glendower*, *Porius* and *Morwyn*. There will also be a number of more formal presentations, as well as an opportunity for informal discussion in hospitable surroundings with a congenial group of fellow Powysians. The weekend will be based in Llangollen, close to Corwen, but easily accessible from most parts of the country. Only a limited amount of accommodation is likely to be available, and will be offered on a first-come first-served basis, so if you are interested in attending please complete the form enclosed with this *Newsletter* as soon as possible, and in any case by 1st January 1997, and return to Chris Gostick (01753 578632).

**Chris Gostick**

## *Mary Barham Johnson*

Mary Johnson died on 20th March 1996, seven months after celebrating her hundredth birthday. Almost to the end she continued her lively interest in her family, surrounded quite literally by the hundreds of family letters that told her so much about the people whose portraits hung on her walls. The Johnson, Donne, Kemble and Powys ancestors were living people to her, and she shared their joys and their sorrows. She spent many fruitful years after her retirement writing the biographies of three of her ancestors, using material from these letters. She visited libraries to consult other collections, and corresponded with many distinguished scholars, who remember her with affection and pay tribute to her scholarship. Besides these biographies, Mary wrote for us a remarkable family history, which forms a record of an extended family that must be well-nigh unique in its scope and variety.

But it was not only past members of the family who held Mary's interest. In 1929 she bought a Riley 9 Tourer, and in this remarkably draughty car with removable celluloid windows and a canvas hood she travelled all over England and Wales to visit her relations. A holiday at Shrewsbury, where my family lived, inevitably included a day-trip to Wales to visit John Cowper Powys and Phyllis. I doubt whether we children would have met so many cousins if she had not taken us to visit them all.

After her mother died (at the age of 105), Mary was able to spend more time away from Norwich, and so began her long journeys through Africa, ending in Kenya, where, by this time, I lived with my young family. We drove her through the Great Rift Valley and up to Will Powys's farm at Ngare Ndare, where she spent companionable hours with Will on the farmhouse verandah, sketching the garden and Mt Kenya beyond. She loved painting in watercolours. This part of the visit was predictable – but I was unprepared for her getting up at dawn to accompany Will in a landrover over rough bush tracks as he visited every part of his farm. She wanted to see what was 'on the other side of the hill', and she photographed wildlife and the African children, and took a lively interest in the day-to-day life of a farmer in Kenya.

Mary was a first-rate harpist and harp teacher. At her ninetieth birthday party there was a harp concert in a Norwich church at which seven harpists played. Mary played last, and best. She never lost her touch, and her tone was extraordinary. She won a scholarship when she was 13 at the Royal College of Music in London, and seemed set for a professional career, but such a career seemed very insecure at that time, and instead she decided to go to Oxford and take an English degree. She was at Oxford during the last years of the First World War, and it was just before taking her exams that she heard of her brother Geoffrey's death in France.

For most of her working life Mary taught in Norwich Training College, going

home to her mother's house in The Close every weekend. She remembered vividly the night Norwich was bombed during the Second World War, and how she cycled at dawn through broken glass and over piles of rubble to see if her mother was all right. (And was reprimanded by the Principal on her return, for being late for breakfast!) While at the College she played regularly with the Norwich Philharmonic Orchestre, and took private harp and piano pupils. Her beautiful harp, made in 1830, is now the property of a young relative in Norfolk, who already plays well. And this is as it should be, because continuity meant everything to Mary. Although she is now part of 'the past', her influence and her zest for life remain an inspiration for the future.

**Margaret Sharman (née Barham Johnson)**

### *The Powys Reference Data Base*

May I remind members that information on any aspect of the public reception of the Powyses from magazine articles to radio broadcasts is welcome as a contribution to the Powys Reference Project. Several Powysians have already supplied citations ranging from review articles in *John O'London's Weekly* magazine to mentions in Dorset County Guides. Information on local newspaper and magazine reviews is particularly required, but any out-of-the-way information will be appreciated. Please send any information to Robin Patterson, 2434 Applewood Drive, Oakville, Ontario, Canada L6L 1V9.

**Robin Patterson**

### *Jack and Francis, Volume 2 — A Faulty Page*

The publishers very much regret that a serious error by the printers resulted in all copies of *The Love Letters of John Cowper Powys and Francis Gregg*, volume 2, being printed with page 15 from *Powys to Sea Eagle*. The copies sold at The Powys Society's Conference contained the defective page (all other copies have had a cancel leaf inserted).

If anyone who bought the book at the Conference would like to return their copy, please send it (carefully wrapped) to Cecil Woolf Publishers, 1 Mornington Place, London NW1 7RP, and they will insert the cancel in your copy, return it and refund your postage. If, however, you merely require a cancel leaf, the publishers will be quite ready to supply one.

## Reviews

### *Reflections of a Wayward Walker in Dorset*, by Frank Brown.

Illustrations by Eric Ricketts R.I.B.A.

Weymouth: Ann Axenskold, 1996. Paperback, 143pp. ISBN 0 9528351 0 x.

£5 (plus 90p p&p if ordered directly from the publishers at

'Wayward', 53 Goldcroft Road, Weymouth, Dorset)

In 1935, at the age of 24, Frank Brown moved from industrial Birmingham to settle in Weymouth in order to better pursue his interest in walking and his love of the countryside. The eleven essays collected here were begun in the 1960s. Another three essays were planned but sadly his recent death intervened and prevented their completion for publication.

This is no guidebook of walks but exactly what its straightforward and no-nonsense title proclaims it to be: a series of reflections of the thoughts and observations of a wayward walker who roamed his beloved Dorset far and wide. The essays are written by a man who was highly observant. Like Hardy and the Powyses, his vision ranges from the small single early primrose to the full panorama of coast and hills. People and places are observed together with the effects of weather, seasons, smell, sound, colour and light. To know a landscape well one must see it at different times of day and throughout the year. An early morning stroll along a given path is not the same as an evening one and a cliff-top walk on a pleasant summer's day is far from the same as one in a winter storm. A deep and profound love of Dorset in all her moods comes shining through.

Frank Brown was a member of The Powys Society and plainly well-versed in the writings of the Powyses and Thomas Hardy. Quotations and references to their works are used to good effect within the essays. It is clear he had absorbed their books so deeply that they were ever-present companions on his walks and quite naturally came readily to his mind and were not dug out in any false or contrived way as mere literary affectation. False and affected he is not.

Characteristically, Frank Brown, who clearly had a mind of his own, is not entirely in agreement with everything J.C.P. had to say about walking in *A Philosophy of Solitude*. Yet it is clear from these essays that his mind was 'excited and enlarged' by his own wayward walks, even if he did not believe that to be true for everyone.

The reflections are by no means confined to nature and landscape, but also most particularly to man-made progress and change. Not just the local and immediate, but also changes in the wider world. A walk in Puddleton Forest leads to a contemplation of modern computers and the reverence and awe in which so many people seem to hold them. Shortest shrift, though, is reserved for the Philip Crow-like industrialists and property developers who seek to rape and disfigure any beauty they can get their hands on.

This book is published by Frank Brown's daughter Ann Axenskold as a tribute to her father. It is a good-quality, well-produced paperback with delightful illustrations by Eric Ricketts, five of which are in colour. A joy to look at and a joy to read. A fine tribute to a fine man.

**Tony Hallett**

*East Anglia: A Literary Pilgrimage*, by Peter Tolhurst.  
Bungay: Black Dog Books. 256pp. ISBN 0 9528839 0 2 £16.95

*East Anglia: A Literary Pilgrimage* is a feast of a book. Although its appeal will inevitably be regional it deserves a far wider audience, for there can hardly be an area of literary taste which will not find sustenance in its 256 pages. Simply to look at, the book is a joy, for each generously-margined page contains photographs, drawings or engravings reproduced to an extremely high standard, as well as sixteen full-page colour photographs by Peter Tolhurst himself.

Yet this is more than a coffee-table picture book. Peter Tolhurst has divided his region into nine areas, each with a chapter to itself. Each chapter is then subdivided into a series of short but illuminating essays on the authors associated with the area. Chapter four, 'The Innocence of Youth', for example, which centres around Thetford and includes Northwold, brings together M. R. James, Robert Bloomfield, Thomas Paine, Charles Kingsley, John Cowper Powys, Michael Home, Mary Mann, John Middleton Murry and Virginia Woolf. The essay on Powys relates the beginning of *A Glastonbury Romance* to its East Anglian background in a way which is not only interesting but genuinely informative. I had not realised, for example, that the name Crow is to be found in the Northwold churchyard.

Equally enjoyable is the essay on T. F. Powys at Sweffling, and members of the Society will want to read the sections devoted to Sylvia Townsend Warner (who appears in three of the chapters) and Angus Wilson.

Perhaps the greatest wonder of this marvellous book is that it is so inexpensive. To add to this attraction, signed copies can be obtained by post at no extra cost from the author at: 4 St. John's Road, Bungay, Suffolk NR35 1DY (telephone 01986 894317)

**Paul Roberts**

*Powys Checklist and Readers' Guide*, by Alan Howe.  
Kilmersdon, Somerset: The Powys Society.  
28p. ISBN 1 874559 16 3. £4.50 (£3 to members), p&p 40p.

Although primarily intended as a guide for those new to the works of the Powys family, Alan Howe's *Checklist* has proved an invaluable reference work for all who have used it. First issued in 1991, the *Checklist* has now been fully up-dated and

extended to include the works of Alyse Gregory and Elizabeth Myers, as well as an annotated list of periodicals devoted to Powys studies.

Far more than simply a list of titles and dates, the *Checklist* provides many helpful comments on the books listed, as well as surveys of the available biographical, bibliographical and critical works. Especially helpful to new readers is the section devoted to recommended starting points.

The *Powys Checklist* has proved to be one of our most popular publications and this new edition is to be whole-heartedly welcomed.

**Paul Roberts**

*The Ideal Ringmaster: A Biographical Sketch of Geoffrey Arnold Shaw (1884–1937)*, by Paul Roberts.

Kilmersdon, Somerset: The Powys Society, 1996. ISBN 1 874559 17 1.  
Paperback, 44p. £4.50 (£3 to members), p&p 45p.

Until now Powys enthusiasts have seen G. Arnold Shaw through the eyes of John Cowper himself and, to a lesser extent, those of Louis Wilkinson. He has been the bluff 'Yorkshireman' of *Autobiography*, the ringmaster cracking his whip roguishly at his 'poor Cagliostro,' or the far less attractive figure in *Swan's Milk*, working hard for weeks and then doing nothing at all, 'leaving scores of important letters unanswered and losing thousands of dollars'. Now comes an opportunity to assess him anew, thanks to this closely researched and lucidly written biographical sketch by Paul Roberts.

'Sketch' is a modest but inadequate way of describing an essay which tells us not only a great deal about Shaw but something about John Cowper Powys himself. Roberts shows that the portrait Powys chose to give of the man who was both his lecture-manager and publisher was a deliberately partial one, full of half-truths and evasions. The fact that it erred on the side of generosity is in keeping with Powys's general attitude to Shaw, who was so much more than a mere business associate that he was willing to dig deeply into his pocket when Shaw was down on his luck. By the end of this basically tragic account of a life far more complex than we have been led to expect, it is difficult to tell which of these two men was more indebted to the other. Given the prodigality of their emotional spending, it would be comforting to think that the account was evenly balanced.

It is of small consequence, perhaps, to find that Shaw was not a Yorkshireman after all, though in the context even this is significant. He was born in the West Sussex town of Horsham in 1884, the son of William George Hudson Shaw and his wife Edith. Arnold Shaw can, however, be rated a Yorkshireman at one remove, as the family ties with Yorkshire were strong and he was brought up in the county from infancy. His father, known always as Hudson Shaw, was an Anglican clergyman whose social conscience propelled him into becoming a pioneer of

university extension lecturing in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, which he regarded as 'missionary work.'

It was Arnold Shaw's misfortune to have been born into a family which, even by Victorian standards, appears to have been singled out for more than its fair share of misery. He was only three when his mother died, and his father became prone to intense depressions and breakdowns due to overwork. There was, in fact, a history of insanity on both sides of the family. Hudson Shaw remarried, but his second wife Effie found the birth of her only child, Bernard, so traumatic that, in the words of Paul Roberts, 'she fell into a period of insanity which lasted for two years and ... never entirely recovered.' One can imagine the effect all this had on young Arnold, who was only nine at the time of Bernard's birth.

In 1904, Arnold Shaw followed in his father's footsteps by going up to Balliol College, but in spite of Powys's statement that he spent 'a year at Oxford', Roberts demonstrates that his residence there could not have extended beyond the Michaelmas term. He writes:

Why he left, as with so much else in Arnold Shaw's life before he befriended the all-recording Powys, is unknown, although family tradition has it that 'something occurred' which caused a deep rift between Arnold and his father.

The nature of the 'something' that 'occurred' remains a mystery, but what is quite certain is that on 24th December 1904, Shaw joined the Cunard liner *Ivernia* at Liverpool, sailing for New York, and that it was on this voyage that he met John Cowper Powys.

It is in relation to this meeting that we encounter the first of Powys's evasions. 'It was on this ship, and on this voyage, that I met for the first time, met as a complete stranger, my life-long friend and bosom-crony, Mr G. Arnold Shaw', Powys writes in *Autobiography*. Why the emphasis on their not having met before, and on Shaw's being 'a complete stranger'? asks Paul Roberts. 'Powys seems to throw us off the scent and to give the impression that he knew nothing of Shaw's background', he remarks. This could hardly have been true, as Hudson Shaw, Arnold's father, had an eminent status in the world of university extension lecturing which Powys also inhabited before he set sail for America. Roberts believes that Powys's circumlocutions can be put down to his antipathy towards Hudson Shaw, an antipathy stemming partly from professional rivalry and partly from what he saw as Hudson's desertion of his son in his frequent times of need.

An awareness of the vexed relationship between Arnold Shaw and his father is crucial to our understanding of the man. Whatever the reasons for the original rift, it led to a lifelong alienation which the son, at any rate, bitterly regretted. The pain at the heart of him might explain much: the flamboyance and showmanship can be seen as attempts to over-compensate for the sense of inadequacy brought on by the knowledge that, for his father, he remained a pariah. 'Arnold's wicked father, the Rector of Bishopsgate, said he'd leave England (for good reason) if his

son ever set foot there', John Cowper fulminated in a letter to his brother Llewelyn early in the 1930s. What is most striking, perhaps, is not so much the father's 'wickedness' as the strength of his passion.

It is impossible, at this distance in time, to get to the heart of the matter, nor does our chief interest in this booklet lie in that direction. For readers of John Cowper Powys, it is the relationship between 'ringmaster' and 'Cagliostro' that is most absorbing. Not least, Roberts proves Shaw's importance to Powys not only as publicist supreme for his lectures, with a flair for exactly the kind of advertising copy that would appeal to Americans, but as publisher. When Powys was at a low ebb, after the outbreak of war in 1914, Shaw took him out for a meal and announced that 'overnight' he had decided to become a publisher. Conscious that, at forty-one, he had achieved none of his literary ambitions, Powys 'immediately seized on the idea'. Within a year, Shaw had published three of his books: *The War and Culture*, *Visions and Revisions* and his first novel, *Wood and Stone*. The five that followed up to 1917 included his second novel, *Rodmoor*, and the poetry collections *Wolf's Bane* and *Mandragora*. It is tempting to speculate on what might have happened to John Cowper Powys the novelist had he not found a publisher with outstretched hands.

These two gifted and in many ways bizarre men found each other at exactly the right time. They did not always tread a primrose path together, for Shaw's sporadic descents into hopelessness and mismanagement were vexatious to Powys, who in 1921 was persuaded to leave Shaw and sign a contract with Jessica Colbert. Soon afterwards he was back with Shaw, feeling that he had behaved 'scandalously' towards him, but Shaw, beset by personal problems, slowly faded from the scene. His cause could not have been helped by the fact that Phyllis Playter, who had not known him in his days of success, saw him merely as an obstacle to Powys's career.

Whether inherited or not, mental instability overwhelmed Arnold Shaw in middle life. He was dragged off to a State asylum, where he suffered what he called the 'mad ministrations' of doctors. He and his second wife Hattie (his first had died in childbirth) and their two children were kept alive by handouts from the 'wicked' father, Hudson Shaw. John Cowper Powys also helped out financially, although he felt it was 'like throwing money into the sea'. Two heartrending letters from Shaw to his father, published here as an appendix, show the depth of his remorse. The sometime lecture agent was driven to working as a clerk in a coal-yard and, eventually, to managing a beer garden. He died of pneumonia, aged fifty-two.

Paul Roberts has assiduously rooted out the facts and compiled them into a lively narrative. He is not afraid to speculate but is generally cautious in his judgments. He might have gone further than he does and say that, for the way that Geoffrey Arnold Shaw provided a springboard for the realisation of John Cowper Powys's ambitions as lecturer and author, all admirers of Powys owe him a debt



that can never be repaid; an irony which Shaw himself, in one his of cigar-smoking, wide laughing moments, would surely have appreciated.

**Herbert Williams**

*Powys to Sea Eagle: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to  
Philippa Powys*, edited by Anthony Head.

London: Cecil Woolf. 368 pp. ISBN 0 900821 51 5 £35.

When one considers that this is the fourteenth collection of letters by John Cowper Powys to appear in print, it seems all the more remarkable that it should be only the second to consist of letters to a member of his own family, the other being his letters to Llewelyn. As anyone new to Powys studies will soon discover, they were a family among whom the *itch scribendi epistolorum* was not confined to the eldest son and the family letters alone comprise a vast and fascinating archive of which we have only begun to explore the margins. And yet, if we are to be confined at present to the letters of John Cowper Powys to only one of his brothers and one of his sisters, how fitting that this second collection of family letters should be those to Philippa, who represents in large measure the opposite end of that complex continuum, the Powys psyche. Where Llewelyn strides lustily over downland and city square, confident of his charm and sure of its effect, with his blaze of golden hair and seigniorial beard, Philippa keeps to the seashore with her fisherman friends and 'would rather be with the hills, the wind or my horse Josephine'. They were, indeed, brother Sun and sister Moon. It is surely no small element of the towering genius of John Cowper Powys that he encompasses both extremes, rather than falling into that central realm of relative 'normality' occupied, for example, by his brother Littleton.

This collection, then, provides a fascinating contrast to the letters to Llewelyn, but it also stands alone as an important collection in its own right, for here we have John Cowper Powys at his epistolary best, with none of the rather theatrical exuberance that can make some of the less important collections seem somehow rather thin.

With the energy and expertise that those who know his work have come to expect, Anthony Head has brought together 210 letters dating from 1911 to 1961, letters rich in family anecdote, philosophical speculations, vivid descriptions of people, places and sensations and close examinations of both John Cowper's own books and the, largely unpublished, works of his sister. Here we see Powys as, by turns, teacher, literary adviser, counsellor, friend and buttress against the hurtful winds of the world. As Anthony Head says in his fine introduction, 'In Philippa, Powys had an ideal correspondent, someone open to all avenues of thought, whose responses to the life of the senses and the spirit were, like her brother's, not subject to the restrictions of a certain religious dogma or meta-physical creed.'

I have no doubt that *Powys to Sea Eagle* will become a major source for all future biographers, for there is material here which I have seen nowhere else, and where old tales are re-told, it is always from a new perspective for, like Coleridge and the other great correspondents in whose company Powys belongs, he had the gift of adapting his tale to the needs of his audience.

However, it would be a sad thing if this extraordinary collection of letters were merely to become a sort of biographical reference book. It should be read for itself, as an important work by a great author. The world at large may not know it yet, and may not discover the fact for many years, but as long as letters continue to be read, *Powys to Sea Eagle* will survive. For that, we have to thank Anthony Head.

**Paul Roberts**

*Jack and Frances: The Love Letters of John Cowper Powys and  
Frances Gregg, Volume Two*

edited by Oliver Wilkinson, assisted by Christopher Wilkinson.

London: Cecil Woolf. 251pp. ISBN 0 900821 70 1 £29.95

The more we learn of the life of John Cowper Powys, the more we understand that it was not contained within that coterie of family and friends he called 'the Powys circle'. Nevertheless, whilst we are coming to acknowledge the importance of an ever-growing field of friends and associates and an ever-widening range of literary connections, there remain certain relationships which were central to his life. Among these, his love for Frances Gregg must rank as one of the most important. It is, therefore, a real cause for celebration that Cecil Woolf has now issued the second and final volume of their letters, edited by Oliver Wilkinson with all the skill, insight and knowledge that he brought to Volume One.

Since I have only one complaint to make about the book, it is perhaps better to dispose of it at once. It is that on what ought to be page 15 of the letters we find, instead, page 15 of Anthony Head's introduction to *Powys to Sea Eagle*. It may well be that this error occurs only in the advance copies, but it is too serious a fault to pass without comment since we lose the end of letter 184 and the whole of 185. [see note on page 27]

That apart, the 248 letters contained in this volume cover the period from 1930, when John Cowper was still living in Patchin Place, to the death of Frances Gregg in an air-raid on Plymouth in 1941, and include far more of Frances Gregg's letters than appeared in Volume One, thanks to Phyllis Playter's foresight in preserving them. Gone are the extravagant fantasies which marked the fervid intensity of John Cowper's early passion, extravagances which Frances saw it as part of her mission to focus and channel into the great work of which she always believed him capable. Instead, we have a love of enduring depth whose warmth sustains without threatening to consume. It was, however, never a comfortable

love, for in Frances Gregg Powys had found a spirit equal to his own, one unafraid to challenge when others would merely have been flattered, and as ready to probe his motives as she was to explore her own. Take, for example, the following comment from a letter in which she had praised *The Art of Happiness*: 'What I call your 'infantile fixation' is responsible for much ... and most poignantly that you are not the great poet for which your gifts were destined. There is yet time. But do not think that you can cheat and steal your way to it'.

Little wonder, perhaps, that they had found it impossible to live together, essential as they were to one another. Indeed, it was, during the period covered by Volume Two, a love affair conducted, as Oliver Wilkinson says, 'by post, only by post', as Frances crossed and re-crossed the Southern counties of England in her ancient car in search of the place she never truly found, where she could afford to live with her mother, Oliver and Betty, about whom John Cowper writes with great tenderness and understanding. Their adventures, camping by the roadside, in beach huts and in a gypsy caravan are best told in that strange and wonderful book *The Mystic Leeway*, which John Cowper so persistently urged Frances to write.

Taken together, the two volumes of *Jack and Frances* tell the story of a great love, an extraordinary kind of love whose story has not been told before; by turns physical, intellectual, spiritual, poetic, and in all its manifestations, intensely passionate. For all that they appear the most unwordly couple imaginable, Frances and Jack share an astounding *engagement* with the world in which they live, a world extending from the most mundane and familiar objects, through time and space and the dark intricacies of the inner self. No-one who reads these letters can possibly escape the conclusion that they are in the presence of extraordinary spirits, for whom the tireless and brilliant work of Oliver and Christopher Wilkinson has provided an enduring monument.

**Paul Roberts**

### *Oliver Lodge and Llewelyn Powys*

[The following parody appeared in the 27th July 1933 issue of *The New English Weekly*, page 345. We are grateful, as ever, to Robin Patterson for supplying a photocopy of the original text.]

#### Mr Llewelyn Powys and God Unfortunate Occurrence at Chaldon Herring

The old tramp, Mr Jar, who for so many years had faithfully served Mr T. F. Powys as God, proposed one morning to walk up to Chydyok to visit Mr Llewelyn Powys and see if he could not get a little employment from him as well.

He began rather wearily to climb the hill from Chaldon, for he was an old man, and walked with difficulty, leaning on a stick. At the same time it happened that Mr Llewelyn Powys was leaving Chydyok on a visit to his brother in Chaldon. Half-way, in the narrow foot-path over the downs, they met, beside a grey chalk-pit. Mr Jar touched his hat, 'Were you wanting a character for your new book, Mr Powys?'

'No,' said Mr Powys. 'I don't know that I am. Why?'

'Well, Sir, I thought I might be of use to you. I've worked for your brother, Mr T. F. Powys, now for twenty years.'

'Have you? Who are you?'

'I'm Mr Jar. God, you know.'

'Oh, are you? You are the rascal who forbids me to do all the things I want to do, are you?'

'Oh, no, Sir! Oh, no, no, Sir! I don't forbid nobody nothing nowadays.'

'Well, you used to.'

'I'm not saying as how I used not to do a little in that way at one time ...'

'You are the rascal who forbade me to drink wine, and wear a wool cap, and have girls, are you?'

'Oh, Sir, that was a long time ago. I don't do that now. Now I allow you to drink a hogshead of wine a day, wear a wool cap, and have as many girls as you please.'

'But I don't want them now. I would rather drink water than wine, I wear a fur cap, and I prefer my wife to any number of girls. You give me permission to do things after I've ceased to want to do them. Your confounded permission adds to your other offences, and I'm going to make an end of you.'

'Oh, Sir, Oh, no, Sir, I've been a good friend to your brother, Sir! I've been in his good books for twenty years and more!'

But the formidable ash cudgel came down on the old tramp's head and he fell dead on the chalk.

Mr Powys carried him to the top of Chaldon Down and buried him in the great Barrow there, repeating over the grave an invocation to the Wind, the Sea and the New Moon, and sacrificing a disembowelled rabbit.

That evening a note was brought by messenger to Chydyok.

'Dear Llewelyn,' it read, 'Have you seen anything of old Mr Jar? I want him urgently for my new book. The wicked farmer of Maddar has just raped the innocent young girl from Dodder, and I want Mr Jar to appear carrying a bundle of firewood. I have sent all over Chaldon for him, and am told that he was last seen climbing up towards Chydyok.'

Oliver W. F. Lodge

**SUBSCRIPTIONS, STANDING ORDERS, COVENANTS : SEE PAGE 40**

## *How I discovered John Cowper Powys*

July 1936. I was 20 years old, slaving as a junior journalist at a local paper in a small provincial town in Sweden for £12 a month. Though I was an avid reader of philosophy and belles lettres and liked to write for my own pleasure, I clearly realised as time went on that daily journalism was not my strong point, abnormally critical as I was of all I put down in writing. I never got my texts off my hands in time, madly revising them *ad infinitum*, often to the despair of the extremely forbearing editor. On top of that I was lonely, melancholy, wondering why I was born.

But *MIRABILE DICTU!*

It so happened that on one occasion I entered the town's little bookshop, and there it lay on a shelf right before me: a book with a silver-grey cover, showing the silhouette of an English gentleman in an arm-chair, leisurely smoking a cigarette.

The book that arrested my attention was translated into Swedish by the well-known philosopher, Alf Ahlberg, under the title of *Modern själskultur*. 'This is, no doubt', it was said on the publisher's blurb, 'one of the most remarkable books we have published.'

It is no exaggeration to say that no other book has enchanted me as much at a first perusal. You might already have guessed what book I have in mind: *The Meaning of Culture* by John Cowper Powys, a then, to me, totally unknown name and one which seems to have remained unknown for a long time amongst many of the reading public. It was unlike anything else I had ever read. And, oddly enough, I felt, as though the author spoke *directly to me*, a sort of feeling of close intimacy that was definitely new to me.

How I loved Brother John's profound wisdom, his exceptionally poetic prose, his deep insight into the human psyche, his love of Nature's multifarious manifestations, animate and inanimate, and his unique personal philosophy! So, to make a long story short: the book I discovered by mere chance was to influence and colour my whole future life.

I had, indeed, encountered a philosopher that would be my support, my guiding-star, my solace during my life's vicissitudes, devilries, losses and hardships galore. It goes without saying that I *did* owe him something in return: to spread my idol's name in this small land of ours to the best of my ability.

**Sven-Erik Täckmark**

## **How did you discover the Powyses?**

Prompted by the recollections of Sven-Erik Täckmark, the Newsletter is keen to publish short articles by other members describing their first contact with the Powys family and their works. Please send your contributions to the editor at the address on the inside of the front cover of this newsletter.

**P.R.**

## *Oil Exploration in West Chaldon*

The Development Control Sub-Committee of Dorset County Council, meeting on 1 November, approved, by twelve votes to one, the Amoco application to drill an exploration bore hole at Down Farm, Chaldon Herring. In his presentation, the County Planning Officer stressed that 60 exploratory wells had been drilled in Dorset in the past with a success rate of around 1 in 20. In the event of oil being present in commercial quantities in this case, the question of how the find could be developed in an environmentally acceptable way would be a matter to be tested very vigorously through a separate planning application. He considered that the option of exploratory onshore drilling was a preferable alternative to locating a rig offshore (for which no planning consent was required) as that would have greater visual impact and risk of pollution.

The recent *Observer* article (29.9.96) gave a timely warning about a possible development of which few people were aware, but it was certainly misleading in some respects. For example, it understandably made much of the 150 foot high drilling rig to be erected, but did not report that it would remain in place for no longer than 3 months, although this was made clear in the application and the Amoco publicity material. The company claims that, if oil is found, their compound measuring 100m x 60m will only be visible from the air.

What is certain, is that we all wish the application had been turned down. Many of us did what we could, and are especially grateful to Janet Pollock for her dignified one-woman campaign which gave rise to our chorus of disapproval, of which the Planning Officer reported to his committee as follows:

'The majority (of objections) 89 letters in all, are from outside the County. The last category includes representations from the President and Secretary and other members of the Powys Society, as well as from a number of biographers and historiographers of the Powys brothers, who were part of a circle of writers and artists associated with East Chaldon. Objectors have written from 32 of the 45 traditional English counties, plus Wales, Scotland and further afield – from Powys Society members in New York City, Copenhagen, Budapest and Toronto and two addresses in France.

Before the meeting on 1st November Janet was approached by the young lady from the *Western Gazette*. She told her about the three brothers, after which came the question, 'Will they be here?' Janet assured her that they would — 'In spirit.' The exploration phase will last until about March. We will endeavour to monitor further developments.

**John Batten**

## Book News

The Swedish humanist journal *Fenix*, published by Atlantis and edited by Harry Järv, devoted a large part of its 1994–95 issue to an article about John Cowper Powys by Sven-Erik Täckmark (pages 19–21) and to a translation by Sven-Erik of a long passage from *The Philosophy of Solitude* (pages 23–37). Also included were a portrait photograph of John Cowper Powys and a striking drawing of John Cowper, Llewelyn and Theodore Powys by Jean-Pierre Cagnat.

Copies of this fine publication can be obtained from the editor, Harry Järv, at Fyrverkarbacken 32, 112 60 Stockholm, Sweden.

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The eminent Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* devoted more than half a page of its issue of 15th July 1996 to a review of Janina Nordius's book *'I am Myself Alone': Solitude and Transcendence in John Cowper Powys*, published by Gotëborg's University Press.

We hope to review Janina's book as soon as a copy becomes available.

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Those who have been interested in the various accounts of the Society's recent visit to Shirley in Derbyshire will be pleased to learn that *The Peak Advertiser* published a long article by Neil Lee in its issues of 24th June and 1st July 1996. Neil's fascinating article also included details of The Powys Society, for which we are extremely grateful.

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The London *Evening Standard* of Wednesday 23rd October 1996 published A. N. Wilson's list of '100 books that everyone should read'. Among fewer than twenty English novels included in the list was John Cowper Powys's *Weymouth Sands*.

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As The Powys Society considers the possibility of spreading the word via the internet, we are aware of three internet sites currently in operation. These are: — the Powys Homepage [HTTP://WWW.AEhv.nl/user/tklijn/](http://WWW.AEhv.nl/user/tklijn/) operated by Thieu Klijn of Eindhoven in the Netherlands;

— a Powys page published by *Powys Notes*, the journal of the Powys Society of North America, which can be contacted by E-mail on [nicbirns@interport.net](mailto:nicbirns@interport.net);

— the most interesting coverage of the Powys family we have seen so far on the internet comes from Joe Boulter, a student at Somerville College, Oxford. Joe is currently working on a D.Phil thesis entitled *Questioning Belief: Postmodernist Themes and Techniques in the Novels of John Cowper Powys*. He has also written an article called 'The enemy advances, we retreat: a strategy for successful eccentricity in John Cowper Powys's vision of Welshness', to be published in the on-line journal *Assemblylines*.

Joe Boulter can be contacted by E-mail at [joeboulter@english.ox.ac.uk](mailto:joeboulter@english.ox.ac.uk) or more conventionally at MCR, Somerville College, Oxford OX2 6HD. I am grateful to Tony Hallett for all information concerning internet sites.

*The Good Book Guide* magazine for September 1996 (vol.93) published a double-page spread in which the extremely popular author of the Sharpe novels and the recently published Arthurian novel *Enemy of God* (Michael Joseph), Bernard Cornwell, described the books he would take with him to a desert island. Among these were *Porius* and *Petrushka and the Dancer*. Cornwell ended his essay as follows: 'Indeed, I would choose almost anything by or about John Cowper Powys, who is, to me, the great unrecognized genius of English letters.'

*The Good Book Guide* can be contacted at 24 Seward Street, London EC1V 3GB.

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The French radio programme *France Culture* broadcast a fascinating discussion of Patrick Reumaux's recent translation of *Owen Glendower* on 27th May 1996. The discussion, introduced by M. Bydlowski, also featured Jean Marcale and C. H. Durond.

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*The Financial Times Weekend Review* of 27th April 1996 contained an article by Howard Davies, Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, recollecting his first reading, twenty-five years ago, of *A Glastonbury Romance*, 'the masterpiece of an author whose world view remains challenging and life enhancing'.

P.R.

## *Subscriptions, Standing Orders, Covenants*

About half the members pay by standing order; for a few who joined late this year their subscriptions cover 1997; and a few are Honorary Members who do not pay, but for the rest **subscriptions for 1997 are due on January 1st.**

Enclosed with this *Newsletter* you will find a coloured sheet on which I have put a record of the status of your membership. If payment is shown as due, **please let me have your subscription promptly**, as follows:

**£13.50 (UK), £16 (overseas), £6 (student, with proof of study).**

**Better still** would be to **sign a standing order form**, drawn on a UK bank, to reach me as soon as possible. The loose sheet includes a form.

**Even better**, if you were to **sign a covenant form as well** (also on the loose sheet; UK taxpayers only). If you have a covenant in force now, there is no need to enter into another now, but it would be helpful if you would do so to bring your current covenant up to date, which it would then supersede. It is most important that a **new covenant is dated before (or has the same date as) the payment of the 1997 subscription, whether this is paid by an existing standing order or with a new one.** The new covenant is designed to cover any increase in the subscription, though we have no plans for this at the moment.

**Stephen Powys Marks**