Editorial

Readers will have noted that this year's conference programme includes a symposium entitled The Difficulty of Finding Readers, that is of course, readers of the Powys brothers. We are all aware that it is difficult, if not impossible, to find readers if there are no books, or if those available are buried in second-hand bookshops and often very expensive. But for John Cowper that is about to change: Penguin's publication programme (see p.9) will put three of his Wessex novels in the shops, something that has not happened since the halcyon days of Picador in the 70s. When the Overlook Press edition of *Glastonbury* arrived here last September and generated almost unprecedented media interest in JCP, talk of a revival seemed premature, but with Penguin launching two titles for the first time (*Wolf Solent* had already been reissued) and talk of a full-length television documentary we surely have grounds for cautious optimism with regard to him. Unfortunately there are, so far, no crumbs of encouragement for admirers of Theodore and Llewelyn, although I should have thought the latter offers more than most writers of the New-Age and millennial themes, which the broadsheet journalists seem to have detected in JCP's novels.

Readers will also notice that two of this issue's Letters to the Editor contain references to two young women being profoundly affected by John Cowper's philosophical works (*The Meaning of Culture* and *In Defence of Sensuality* in particular). We tend to stress the need to have the novels in print so that new readers may discover him, but it will also be noticed (p.9), that a German

Your subscription may be due: please see page 13.

ON OTHER PAGES

publisher is issuing philosophical titles. Of course, in a perfect world both the fiction and the philosophy would be available.

In the context of availability we are justified, however quietly, in blowing our own trumpet. The Society has for years strenuously endeavoured to foster public awareness and appreciation of the Powyses. The issue of a professionally produced 'talking book', featuring selections from the work of all three brothers and available at a competitive price represents our most ambitious promotional effort so far. I congratulate Chris Wilkinson, Bev Craven, the readers and all concerned.

John Batten

Contemplation in Yaxham Churchyard
(*See note on page 17*)

John Powys wishes to inform members of The Powys Society that he has appointed a new literary agent:
Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson
SINCLAIR-STEVENSON
3, South Terrace, London, SW7 2TB
Henceforth all enquiries concerning publication, copyright, permissions, etc., should be addressed to Mr Sinclair-Stevenson.

In These Delicate Constructions

Peter Powys Grey, the only son of Marian Powys died in 1992. He wrote this article for the August/September 1981 issue of American Craft.

Marian Powys, undoubtedly America's leading 20th-century expert on handmade lace, emigrated to New York City from the West Country of England in 1912. As she later noted, she had become convinced "that America offered a woman far greater opportunity for success than any country in the world." Time would bear out this intuition in her own life. Over the next 40 years she created and operated the nation's principal international lace exchange, wrote *Lace and Lace Making*, the definitive book on the subject, held the position of consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and served as adviser on lace museums throughout the country. A flamboyant lecturer on the art of handmade lace, she communicated widely her conviction that a well-designed, well-executed piece of needle or bobbin lace could be a work of art in its own right, to be exhibited, perhaps to be worn, and to be touched and admired for its uniquely sensuous, monochromatic texture and pattern.

Marian Powys was born in Dorchester, England, in 1882, the 7th of 11 remarkable children of a nature-loving country vicar and his mystically poetic, otherworldly wife. Strongly clerical in antecedents, the family also sustained an active tradition of literary effort, including among earlier generations the poets John Donne and William Cowper. Each of the Powys brothers and sisters possessed a common sensitivity to nature and art, as well as a powerful appetite for life, refusing to live by any formulas. Three brothers, John Cowper, T.F. and Llewelyn became prolific novelists and philosophers; a sister, Gertrude, became one of the finest (if unrecognized) English painters of her generation; the others distinguished themselves in architecture, literature, teaching and farming.

Yet, however emancipated and even permissive the Powys family may have been, it still observed the gender prejudices of Victorian England: while three of the brothers had Cambridge educations, no thought was given to similar privileges for any of the sisters. Against such rigidities Marian Powys quietly rebelled, ultimately with incredible success. With the passionate support and covert financial assistance of a maiden aunt (herself circumscribed by Victorian custom), she obtained typing and shorthand instruction as an adolescent, at a time when such prosaic skills were viewed with considerable disfavor by the gentry to which she belonged. At the same time she resolved to make handmade lace her chosen art form and, if possible, her road to financial independence.

The turn of the century in England saw a marked revival of interest in lace, with new designs often reflecting the dual influences of Art Nouveau and of William Morris's Arts and Crafts Movement. Marian Powys began her participation in this revival by specializing in lace design, fabrication and history while at the Yeovil School of Art. Later studies took her first to Devon and Norfolk, then

across the Channel to Belgium, France, Italy and Switzerland. She spent six months in Hanover, Germany, studying European history and the theory of design. By 1912, she considered herself sufficiently educated to make a genuine bid for freedom. She sailed for New York on the pretext of taking care of her brother John, a writer and lecturer. (The latter was happily taking care of himself in Greenwich Village, but willingly went along with the subterfuge.)

In Manhattan, Marian Powys's secretarial skills served her well. Almost immediately she obtained a position as a stenographer in the famous Singer building at Broadway and Liberty Street. While continuing her lace studies, she backed them up with courses in accounting and business management. At that time the knowledgeable collection of handmade lace was still a subtle signal of "old money," and many were the eager matrons who flocked to a popular series of lectures on lace offered by the young Englishwoman. One of the laces she herself had designed and made won a gold medal at the 1915 United States Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco. Isodora Duncan, who had become a friend, strongly urged her to strike out on her own and re-awaken an ancient art.

Emboldened by such support, Marian Powys in 1916 opened the Devonshire Lace Shop on the south side of Washington Square, "looking right through the Arch all the way up Fifth Avenue to the heart of Manhattan," as she was fond of recalling. Her first visitor was Mrs. J.P. Morgan, Jr. and her first triumphant customer, Isadora Duncan.

By the mid-20's the Devonshire Lace Shop had moved several times to ever more elegant uptown quarters, becoming the leading international lace exchange of the city. Members of the Frick, Flagler, Rockefeller, Harkness, Blumenthal, Morrow, Whitney, Schiff and Bliss families flocked to it. Both Eleanor Roosevelt and her mother-in-law Sara Delano Roosevelt were faithful clients. Theatrical patronage was provided by Katharine Cornell, Rollo Peters, Jane Cowl and Katharine Hepburn. A stream of foreign dignitaries purchased or consigned laces, including emissaries of the Vatican, the defiantly regal Bourbons, English royalty, the former Sultan of Turkey, and Prince Yusupov (one of the slayers of Rasputin), who had escaped from Russia with the finest family laces padding his clothes.

Friends who knew Marian Powys professionally have maintained that she possessed a compelling mixture of qualities which enabled her to attract and sustain her diverse clientele. Among these were an exhaustive knowledge of her field, an almost evangelical fervor in communicating the beauty of lace and its desirability as a possession, and an informal, yet faintly imperial, manner which served her well with social register ladies. A genuine relish for the commercial aspects of buying and selling and bargaining for lace did her no harm either.

Marian Powys provided a variety of advisory services for museums around the country. The era between 1918 and 1930 was the halcyon period for museum

acquisitions, with rival institutions jostling each other to acquire collections of painting, sculpture—and lace. Then and later, the English expert played a role not unlike that of Joseph Duveen in bringing together potential donors of lace with the appropriate museums and academic centers. At the same time she assisted curatorial staffs in assembling what would become a number of distinguished collections.

As a designer and lace maker, Marian Powys had no peer in her generation, on either side of the Atlantic. Few experts on the history and identification of lace knew how to make it themselves; few makers created their own designs; and almost no one could design in more than one style of lace. She was an historian, maker and designer all in one, and regularly incorporated Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Cubist motifs into her own delicate work. Stressing the desirability of leaving behind 19th-century styles, she utilized air-planes in a triangular veil made for Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and was apt to cite Jackson Pollock as a source of inspiration for younger lace designers.

Her own work was also innovative in its frequent use of peculiarly American design themes. Asserting that "the symmetry of immediate surroundings" could be a far more fertile source of designs than any traditional conventions, this artist from Dorset took great pride in being the first lacemaker to depict the flora of New York State and New England. Her own verdant garden along the Hudson River at Sneden's Landing provided subject matter for many of her pieces. The leaves and flowers of the dogwood and the North American tulip tree gave her further themes, as did the beach plum blossom and Rockland County's ubiquitous skunk cabbage.

Through the difficult days of the Depression, the clientele of the Devonshire Lace Shop proved surprisingly faithful. But by the end of World War II, tastes had changed, and the value of lace dropped precipitously. With the majority of her 1500 consignors in a state of panic at the devaluation of their heirlooms, Marian Powys decided to change direction. While many of her colleagues were asserting bleakly that lace had become a dead, dishonored artifact, she insisted that steps must be taken to assure its eventual renaissance after what admittedly would be "a cold winter of inattention." Determined to devote her still formidable energies to the long-term preservation of the art, she closed the Devonshire Lace Shop in 1945 and began to organise a painstaking campaign of "lace survival," as she liked to call it. She lectured to groups large and small, acted with enthusiasm as a consultant to The Metropolitan Museum of Art and as adviser to other museum centers, conducted seminars to teach lace to the young, and wrote and published (at her own expense) the now sought-after *Lace and Lace Making* (1953)

Her indomitable efforts at least partly resulted in a spectacular and well-attended exhibition of lace at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1952, at a time when interest in the medium was supposedly at its nadir. In subsequent years she spent much time with manufacturers of machine lace, taking much delight in flouting

patrician shibboleths by helping to create superior lace designs for a mass audience. Exhibits of her own lace designs were held, though they tended to be small and poorly attended. In her old age, she lavished particular care on the creation of collections containing superb teaching samples which were then donated to academic institutions and art schools of quality.

It is not unlikely that Marian Powys's extraordinary battle plan deserves some of the credit for the revival of interest in handmade lace currently taking place. In any case, few who knew this vivid woman were unaffected by the experience. Not content to carry on in solitude her lifetime love affair with lace, Marian Powys insisted that those around her participate in the romance as well. And her seductive devices were many. Lecturing with verve on the glory and excitement of laces old and new she would alternate technical information with glowing descriptions of the special peace of mind to be enjoyed by the owner of a particular piece of lace. If the attention of her audience began to flag, she was wont to abandon her text and introduce lurid anecdotes about the foibles, fancies and sins of royal patrons of lace and their various lovers. To anyone who considered lace too delicate and frail to be taken seriously, she reacted by bunching up one of her royal flounces and throwing it in a fast pitch across the room, to be caught by the horrified sceptic as best he could.

She had no doubts to the aesthetic standing of lace. With queenly assurance, she asserted that it was nothing less than "the highest art." In these delicate constructions, she averred, resided a flexible integrity of line, form and texture unsurpassed by any conventionally acknowledged masterpiece. Comparing lace with other art forms she would scorn the latter for their lavish use of color, obsession with illustrative "melodrama" and abandonment of the virtues of simple form. It was impossible to oppose such fervor with even the mildest disagreement.

She particularly disliked seeing lace kept in steel boxes, or in vaults or in bottom drawers, asserting that a flounce or mantilla would "die" far more quickly in a bank than if worn over and over at a dinner party or an opera. Her insistence that each piece should be rendered due reverence as an artifact could reach almost eerie extremes: in her hands a Point de France needlepoint bertha seemed almost alive. And when she felt that a proposed method of storing or framing lace would be undesirable, her usual regal comment was, "The lace would not like it."

Marian Powys died in her ramshackle Sneden's Landing home, age 89, in the early spring of 1972, with a piece of Gros Point de Venise in her hand.

Peter Powys Grey

A note on the cover illustrations

The illustrations on the cover of this *Newsletter* are reproduced from Peter Powys Grey's article. They show Marian Powys at her pillow, making Honiton lace, and and a piece of lace made by her, 6 by 9 inches, probably as a demonstration piece.

A Memoir: Peter Powys Grey 1922–1992 and Marian Powys Grey 1882–1972

Peter Powys Grey died in New York city at the age of seventy. Both Peter and his children, Katherine and Christopher spent much of their childhood and youth at Sneden's Landing. Throughout his life Peter returned frequently, sometimes to his mother's house, often to visit friends. He rarely missed the Normans' Christmas caroling or Christina Biaggi's New Year's masquerade.

As was recalled in one of the many tributes during his memorial service at St Clement's Church, in the days of his youth Sneden's Landing was a kind of Camelot – once he danced with Vivien Leigh, he sailed with Laurence Olivier. He wrote poetry, made gardens and for a time considered a career as a puppet master. He was a fine athlete. He played tennis with some heavy competitors and won the Sneden's Trophy at least twice, much to his mother's pride and elation. Marian played a sturdy game of tennis herself, but I should like here to keep her in place, something that was never easy.

Peter went to Exeter and Harvard, but having come from a literary family, the Powyses of Dorset, England, and remotely from William Cowper and John Donne, he brought to his education a predilection for literature – a love of words as was simply said at the memorial. One of his idols was the literary critic, F. O. Mattheissen, whom he followed in life – and in death. I think it is fair to say that all his life Peter was a keeper of the Powys flame. He was especially dedicated to the perpetuation of his uncle's, John Cowper Powys' literary fame. He rejoiced in John's exuberant prose, his wild imagination, the eccentricity of his novels. I have often thought Peter must, in many ways, have resembled his uncle John.

Peter and his first wife, Ty (Tyler) Grey lived in the house to the immediate east of Marian's. Their children grew up there. During these years Peter was special assistant to the President of American Express. Later, he worked for the Chamber of Commerce. It was at this time he initiated a program for gardens in the vacant lots of Harlem, a project in which he himself was a chief gardener. Two years ago when Palisades Church resumed outreach to 127th Street, Peter went along on one of the runs. He was grieved at the abandoned gardens and proposed to revive the program. It did not happen, but for the time he had the dream. Peter always led with his heart. His head was hard put to keep up with it.

His second marriage to Tillie Tompkins, also ended in divorce. Tilly, in a letter read at the memorial, recalled how wonderful he was with her children, especially with Norman. Given Peter's encouragement and with his own courage Norman gained fame of his own, swimming in the Special Olympics. No one around at the time Peter and Normie together discovered the language and music of whales is likely to forget it. It was a kind of communion.

Peter's love of nature and art, his concern for young poets, his work with the

Samaritans are his best tribute. He had a gift for friendship and a genius for awakening in others the curiosity and fervor he himself brought to living.

A few days before Marian Grey died, Bruce Langford, then the pastor across the road, was sitting at her bedside when she discovered her feet to be out from under the blanket. She stared at them for a minute or two and then pronounced a blessing on them. 'Oh, you beautiful feet! All the wonderful places you have taken me!' Her benedictions were legion, her imprecations at least occasional. There could have been only one Marian Grey in real life and fiction could not do her justice.

Emily Marian Powys was born in Dorchester, England to Mary and Charles Francis Powys, a country vicar. She was the seventh of eleven children, all of them of exceptional talent. Marian taught herself typing and short-hand in her mid-teens, but she viewed it even then as an adjunct to a career in lace. In the lore of lace and lace making she found a lifetime work and 'an escape from the homelife.' She studied the laces of England and then of the European continent. As Peter suggests in a memoir of his mother, the Art Nouveau movement no doubt provided a congenial climate in which lace making could flourish as an art.

In 1913 Marian and her brother John, by then a well known author and lecturer in America, together rented an apartment in Greenwich Village. Marian's secretarial skills recommended her to August Heckscher, who encouraged her to teach and lecture on lace (after working hours). He and Theodore Dreiser, a close friend of John's, each loaned her $500 toward the opening, in 1916, of the Devonshire Lace Shop on Washington Square. The shop's first client was Mrs. J.P. Morgan Jr.

In one location after another the shop flourished until Marian retired in 1945, by then one of the foremost authorities on lace. In 1946 she was appointed consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1952 Marian Powys' lace collection was given a spectacular exhibit at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York. In 1953 she published *Lace and Lace Making*, a veritable bible on the subject. In 1982, ten years after his mother's death Peter Grey mounted a lovely exhibit of his mother's collection, *Lace and Pearls*, at a midtown gallery just off Fifth Avenue.

Marian bought the cottage on Washington Spring Road in the early 'twenties'. She was a superb natural gardener. Even in old age, when she was crippled with arthritis, she could do more gardening with the aid of her two canes than most of us can manage on our hands and knees.

She was a casual housekeeper, an ardent conversationalist. To visit her always became an occasion: there might be dust in the glass and dregs in the sherry bottle, but the toast was exuberant and you damn well drank it.

It cannot be said that Marian was the most attentive of mothers. A few distinguished women of Sneden's had a hand in the care and feeding of Peter, but Marian assuredly nourished his soul. She gave him a love of nature, of books, of

music. Besides the conventional holidays, she celebrated now and then, an odd one that popped up in her memory. One May Day she orchestrated a Maypole Dance with Peter and chums hoofing it around the pole. Joe Hyde says the spectacle backed up cars all the way to 9W.

Among favorite 'Marianisms' : When she was charged $30 for the removal of a dead elm tree : 'It's a terrible price to have to pay for the loss of a friend.' Of her callers, late on in life : 'Oh, I have many visitors. The trouble is most of them are under the age of nine.' ... And very late in life, to Donald Tapley, magisterially, 'I appoint you my personal physician.'

Marian died in the early spring of 1972 at the age of 89. She died in the house she loved with Peter reading at her side.

Dorothy Davis

This memoir, taken from a local Sneden's Landing publication and kindly sent to me by Gerald Pollinger, seemed to provide a suitable postscript to Peter Powys Grey's article. Other appreciations of Peter by Glen Cavaliero, Charles Lock and Morine Krissdóttir will be found in Newsletter *17. Ed.*

Members' News and Notes

New editions of JCP's Novels Penguin have announced their intention of issuing the following titles:

A Glastonbury Romance July 1999
Weymouth Sands March 2000
Wolf Solent May 2000 (with a new introduction by A.N. Wilson)

The first two will be published as Penguin Fiction and the last as a Modern Classic.

*****

Publication of JCP's works in Germany Zweitausendeins have published *A Glastonbury Romance* and may follow that with: *Wolf Solent*, *The Art of Growing Old*, *The Art of Happiness* and *In Defence of Sensuality*.

*****

Glen Cavaliero will be lecturing on JCP at this year's Cheltenham Festival – more good publicity.

*****

Members have commented on the power of Adrian Bury's portrait of JCP (reproduced from his book on the cover of our last issue) and have raised the question of the whereabouts of the original painting. Can anyone throw any light on that?

(*continued on page 12*)

The 28th Annual Conference of The Powys Society

Kingston Maurward College of Agriculture, Dorchester
21 to 24 August 1998

LANDSCAPE AND LEGEND

Programme

Saturday, 21 August

4.00 Arrival of Participants
6.00 Dinner
7.00 Coach departs for Dorset County Museum
7.30 **Peter Tolhurst** *Wessex Landscapes and Literature: An Overview*
This will be followed by a Reception at the Dorset County Museum, and the launch of Peter Tolhurst's new book on Wessex and The Powys Society's audio book. **Copies will be for sale.**

Sunday, 22 August

9.15 **Chris Gostick** *Lord Jim and Lady Tim: James Hanley and the Powys Circle*
10.30 Coffee
11.00 **Joe Boulter** *"Crooked Counselling": Why John Cowper Powys Writes As He Does*
12.30 Lunch
2.00 **Patricia Dawson, John Sansom** and **Judith Stinton**
The Difficulties of Finding Readers
A Symposium Chaired by Glen Cavaliero
4.00 **Annual General Meeting**
6.30 Dinner
8.00 **Whispers of the White Death,** A Play for Voices devised by Peter J. Foss from the Clavadel Diaries of Llewelyn Powys

Monday, 23 August

9.15 **Richard Perceval Graves** *John Cowper Powys and Merlin*
10.30 Coffee
11.00 **Glen Cavaliero** *An Interpretation of T. F. Powys*
12.30 Lunch
2.00 **Departure for Visit to Montacute with Eve and John Batten**
This will include visits to various places associated with the Powys Family, including Ham Hill, East Stoke and Pit Pond, together with supper in Montacute, returning to Kingston Maurward in late evening.

Tuesday, 24 August

Breakfast and Departure

The Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society

will be held at Kingston Maurward College of Agriculture, Dorchester at 4.00 pm on Sunday, 22 August 1999

AGENDA

1 Minutes of the last AGM, 24 August 1998 (*see Newsletter, November 1998*)
2 Any Matters Arising from the Minutes
3 The Hon Secretary's Report
4 The Hon Treasurer's Report
5 The Chairman's Remarks
6 To note the appointment of Honorary Officers for 1999/2000
(*no other nominations have been received*)

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

7 To note the appointment of Committee Members for 1999/2000
(*no other nominations have been received*)
John Batten
Bev Craven
Bruce Madge
John Powys
Judith Stinton
Christoher Wilkinson
John Williams

Talking Book *See page 44.*
Have you ordered yours?

8 To note that Dr Morine Krissdóttir has been co-opted to the Committee as *Hon. Curator of the Powys Collection* for a further year.
9 Appointment of Hon. Auditor [Stephen Allen]
10 Development of the Powys Collection
11 Date and Location of the 2000 Conference
12 Any Other Business

Chris Gostick, Hon. Secretary, 15 June 1999

There will be the usual BOOK SALE at the Conference.
PLEASE bring as many books as you can give us,
preferably with Powys connections or associations.

1999 Conference It is still not too late to book for all or part of the 1999 Conference, and some places are still available, although accommodation at Kingston Maurward is limited. Reservations are on a first come-first served basis and application forms are available from the Hon. Secretary, Chris Gostick.

In April Eve and I spent an enjoyable day with Kris Hemensley. Kris keeps the only specialist poetry bookshop in Australia (with a Powys section). Situated not far from the centre of Melbourne, on the second floor of an old warehouse, it perhaps resembles a large study or drawing room rather than a shop. There are thousands of books lining the walls, scattered rugs on the floor and comfortable armchairs for those who want to sit and browse. Kris says any members finding themselves in that part of Australia will receive a warm welcome if they call in.

*****

Jacqueline Peltier has sent me this cutting from British Airways' *Business Life*, December/January 1999.

The Forgotten Writer: John Cowper Powys. Whether it be E. M. Forster, Jane Austen or Henry Fielding, a literary relic is rediscovered to massive acclaim and much talk of movie rights every year. Next up may be John Cowper Powys author of *A Glastonbury Romance* among others. Powys died in 1963. From a marketing point of view Powys has the attraction of having connections throughout the UK (Derbyshire; Hardy-country in Dorset and Wales) as well as in the US – he lived in New York State for a while. He is also largely unknown and unread and thus can be 're-interpreted', modernised and cannibalised at will. Look out for the movie. [Oh dear!]

*****

Llewelyn's Birthday, August 13th In the spirit of Llewelyn's wishes expressed in his will, the customary meeting will be held at East Chaldon on the above date. All will be welcome. We will assemble at The Sailor's Return at noon, where a toast will be drunk to his memory, after which those who wish to do so, will walk to his memorial for the laying of a posy of wild flowers.

*****

Those who enjoyed Peter Tolhurst's *East Anglia – A Literary Pilgrimage* will also be interested in the recently published *Literary Norfolk – An Illustrated Companion*, by Julian Earwaker and Kathleen Becker, available from Chapter 6 Publishing, 134 London Road, Ipswich, IP12 HQ1, at £14.99 including postage and packing. The book is in high quality large format paperback, with a Foreword by Malcolm Bradbury. It has much to say about both Yaxham and Northwold, with excellent photographs of both old rectories, as well as many other wonderful illustrations, and much to catch the interest of both the arm-chair traveller and those who enjoy tramping the highways and byways of literary investigation.

*****

Chris Gostick writes: During the recent East Anglia visit we were able to call at TFP's old home at Whitehouse Farm in Sweffling. The house has now been separated off from the farm and is occupied independently, and has been the home of Jonathan Rendall and his family for the past few years. By a happy chance, Jonathan is also a writer, and has recently left journalism to write full time. On my initial visit he was kind enough to invite me into the house, and it was good to see that in the main room where once Theodore must have attempted his

early writing and where Louis Wilkinson and JCP were such regular visitors, Jonathan is now struggling with his second novel. His first, engagingly entitled *This Bloody Mary* has recently been re-issued in paperback by Faber at £6.99. Whilst novels on boxing may not be the most usual reading for members of The Powys Society, I do think you should seriously consider making an exception for this powerful and hauntingly well-written book, which whilst a very English view of this odd occupation, also has much of the lyrical realism of the American writer Joyce Carol Oates – also a boxing enthusiast. Strongly recommended for packing with your holiday reading – in return Jonathan is now wrestling with *Soliloquies of a Hermit*.

*****

New York Celebrates JCP The Powys Society of North America is organising a conference in New York next year to celebrate John Cowper Powys' long relationship with the city. The conference will be a mixture of both extended papers and short informal interventions on any aspect of JCP or the Powys Family and their Circle, discussion panels, and a variety of other ways of celebrating JCP, including a tour of New York places known to him. The conference will be timed for mid-June 2000, probably Thursday 15 to Sunday 18 June inclusive, and will be based in downtown Manhatten, close to where JCP himself most often lived in New York.

Anyone interested in presenting a paper or leading a discussion should contact Nick Birns, General Secretary of the PSNA and Editor of *Powys Notes* as soon as possible, at: 205 East Tenth Street, New York, NY 10003, USA. e-mail – nicbirns@interport.net

Anyone interested in simply attending the conference should contact either Nick Birns or Chris Gostick. They look forward to hearing from you, but will not proceed unless there is sufficient interest expressed in participating, so do get in touch.

*****

November Newsletter Material for inclusion in the next issue should reach the Editor not later than: **4 October 1999**. Where possible, contributions may be on disk (wp 5, wp 6, or rtf) but material in any form will be welcome.

Subscriptions and reminders

Most members have now paid their subscriptions, many by standing order — thank you! However, there are **still** quite a lot whose subscriptions **are overdue**. If there is a reminder slip in this *Newsletter* for you then your subscription for 1999 **has not been paid**. If your subscription is not received you will not receive a copy of *The Powys Journal* when it is sent our after the Conference.

The annual subscription, covering the calendar year, is £13.50 for UK members and £16 for those overseas, with a student rate of £6. **SPM**

John Cowper Powys's 'great-grandfather from Hamburg'

The last *Newsletter* included a newspaper report of the presentation to John Cowper Powys of the Bronze Plaque of the Free Academy of Arts in Hamburg. In his response JCP stated 'It is a magic circle. My great-grandfather came from Hamburg ...'.

This statement is clearly not true, for his great-grandfathers were as follows:[1] on his father's side, John Lewis Moilliet (1770–1845), who came from Switzerland, and the Revd Littleton Powys (1748–1825), as English as they come; and on his mother's side, the Revd John Johnson (1769–1833), of Norfolk stock, and John Staniforth Patteson (1782–1832), likewise of English parentage, although one of his grandmothers had a Dutch name. We have to go back two more generations to find the Hamburg connection, but one can well imagine that the impact of the idea of the 'magic circle' would have been much diminished if JCP had had to say 'my great-great-great-grandfather from Hamburg', that is, one of sixteen such forebears.

The gentleman to whom JCP refers was Peter Lewis (or Lewin) Livius (1688–1771); he was born in Hamburg, but moved to Lisbon in 1709, where he was a merchant.[2] His youngest son was George Livius (1743–1816), born in Lisbon but settled in Bedford, and George's eldest daughter was Maria Dorothea Livius (1788–1864)[3] who married the Revd John Johnson in 1808. There is a very interesting document written by Peter Livius himself of which there is a twentieth-century copy in a MS book in my possession.[4] In this book it is described as a 'letter', but it doesn't read like a letter, nor is there any indication of the purpose of the document. Perhaps it was a circular to the family of a man who felt his days were near their end: Peter Livius was at least 70 when he wrote it. It gives a brief family history and is printed below. I do not know how accurate this copy is;[5] it should be noted that the very first date, 1734, is a puzzle.[6]

George Livius came to Bedford as a result of his conversion to the Moravian Church in the 1780s; Bedford was one of the two greatest Moravian settlements in England. In 1785, he married Mary Foster-Barham (1762–1837), who came from a strongly Moravian family. George had returned from India with an immense fortune, and had himself helped a Moravian community there.

Mary Foster-Barham's mother was Dorothy Vaughan, daughter of John Vaughan of Trecwm, Pembrokeshire, bringing in another remote Welsh strain. Mary's father, born Joseph Foster, had been adopted by Henry Barham, the second husband of Joseph's mother; Joseph Foster inherited Henry Barham's estates and and added Barham to his surname as a condition of the inheritance. Both Fosters and Barhams had lived in Jamaica and owned estates there. Mary's ancestry on both sides explains the prevalence of Vaughan Johnsons and Barham Johnsons as well as Cowper Johnsons among the many relations on JCP's mother's side of the family.

The MS book contains a family tree which incorporates Peter Livius's information; it sets out, somewhat inaccurately, seven of the eight children of his younger son George Livius.[7] Oddly enough, Mary Barham Johnson's genealogy is also not complete or entirely accurate:[8] she does not show the Revd Henry Livius, although he is mentioned several times in her text.[9] However, accurate genealogical information about the Foster-Barham family and George and Mary Livius's children has been compiled by the former archivist of the Bedford County Record Office, Miss Bell.

I am indebted to Simon Houfe of Ampthill for a copy of part of Miss Bell's genealogy and for other information regarding the Livius family, especially George Livius, and also to Margaret Sharman for other information; Simon Houfe and Margaret Sharman have both been working on aspects of the Livius family. Both replied extremely promptly to my recent questionnaire; this text and my genealogy set out below incorporate material from both sources

Stephen Powys Marks

Text of 'letter' in MS book [5]

Lisbon 21 March 1734 [*sic*]

I, Peter Lewis Livius, am born at Hambro' the 18 August 1688, baptised at Peter's Church. My father was George Livius, my mother, Gertrude Livius, her maiden name was Wölters.

I came to Lisbon in 1709, married Susannah Humphrey of Waterford, Ireland.

My said Father died [abt] 1690–94 and was buried at St Peter's Church, Hambro' in a grave belonging to my family. My mother died in 1727 [1737], and is buried in the same church.

My said Father was born at [in] Hambro', gentleman & served in a post called "Procurator" & [or] Attorney of the High & Low Courts of Justice in Hambro' and was called "Fiscal", lived in great fame & reputation, which he left behind him, and was generally beloved, well-liked and lamented very much. My Grandfather Livius, was Secretary of the Tribunal at Hambro, which they call the Holy Ghost Church, has been often employed by the Government of Hambro, & sent as Deputy to the King of Denmark; his discendants [*did he mean 'ancestors'?*], as I have been told are from Möln a small town near Hambro'.

1729 In June 1729 was born my first son & died soon after.

1730 In May 1730 was born my second child, a daughter called Gertrude, she died Dec 1751 after an illness of four years, buried at [the] Estrella.

1731 In July 1731, was born my third child, a daughter called Susanna. On the 9th Feb 1747 she was married to Mr Samuel Hoissard [Daniel Hoisard], merchant in this place.

1732 In October 1732 was born my 4th child, a daughter called Nancy, died in 1733.

1734 In March 1734, was born my 5th child a daughter called Louisa; in 1739 she died of an illness of about 30 days called hooping-cough.

1739 In July 1739 was born my sixth child & was called Peter.

1743 In 20th March 1743 was born my seventh child & was called George after my Father. His godfathers were Abraham Castres Esq.[10] English Consul and Kinloch Esq: his godmother Mrs Compton, wife of the Envoy Extraordinary at the Court.

George being born with his feet being a little turned his Mother took him to England in Nov 1744 with her son Peter who was left at school & Mrs Livius with her son George returned [in] August 1745 to Lisbon. I went to them on board, & found them in good health and brought them ashore to my house in town and from thence to my place at Rego Treguesia of St Sabastian de Pedrura[?] In 1749 he went to London with his Mother and his sister Guilla [Giully] or Gertrude for to go to 'L'Herondell's Academie' for his education. In April 1758 my said son George arrived here at Lisbon after a passage of 15 days from Torbay, & I placed him with Mr Daniel Hoissard [Hoisard].

[The MS book also contains the following note:]

George Livius died in 1816 Dec 16. he became Commissariat under Warren Hastings. His brother Peter became Chief Justice of Quebec.

Notes

1 See genealogy in *Newsletter* 28 (July 1996), 20–21.

2 Peter Livius is described as merchant in the entry for his son Peter in *Alumni Cantabrigienses.*

3 I can now confirm that she was born in 1788, previously in doubt (*see Newsletter* 28, p.20, note i). She was born on December 20th 1788 and died on February 2nd 1864. She was buried in the churchyard of St Peter's Church, Yaxham, Norfolk. Her tombstone is the second from the right in the photograph of the recent visit to Suffolk and Norfolk on page 2; it is recorded as Memorial A77 in *The Monumental Inscriptions of the Church and Churchyard of St Peter, Yaxham, Norfolk* (The Mid Norfolk Family History Society, 1998).

4 MS book given to Eleanor Powys (1785–1866) in 1820; blank spaces have been used in the early twentieth century for genealogical information (see *Newsletter* 28, 23).

5 Margaret Sharman (née Barham Johnson, great-great-grand-daughter of the Revd John Johnson) owns two other transcripts of this document; one of these is a copy made in 1856, while the other is a copy of a transcript printed in *Genealogy of the Descendants of Roger Foster of Edreston, Northumberland,* compiled by A. H. Foster-Barham (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1897), 130–31, itself derived from an early (?) version formerly owned by Mrs Sharman's grandmother, Catharine B. Johnson. There are minor differences from the version in the MS book; some of them have been adopted here or have been indicated in brackets as variant readings.

6 The date of the letter is given in all versions as 1734, but Livius relates incidents which

took place in 1758; perhaps it should be dated 1764, with one erroneous digit.

[7] In fact there were ten; the first- and last-born (1786, 1801) died within weeks of birth.

[8] Mary Barham Johnson, *Letters and Diaries of the Norfolk Families of Donne and Johnson 1766–1917* (1987), family tree on page 139.

[9] The Revd Henry Livius, Maria Dorothea's youngest brother, was the Rector of Yaxham after the death of John Johnson in 1833 until William Cowper Johnson was of an age and qualified to be installed in 1843. The advowson had been purchased by the Revd John Johnson in 1800, and had passed to his widow Maria Dorothea Johnson. In 1880, William Cowper Johnson's son of the same name succeeded his father as Rector and remained until his death in 1916. Yaxham was thus served by members of one family for well over a century.

[10] Abraham Castres provides another link with the Johnson family: he was the half-brother of the Revd John Johnson's maternal grandmother Harriet Donne.

GENEALOGY OF LIVIUS

'Grandfather' **Livius**, Secretary of Tribunal, Hamburg

George Livius = **Gertrude Wölters**
(d.1690/94) (d.1727 or 1737)

Peter Lewis Livius = **Susannah Humphrey**
merchant (1688–1771) Cousin of Earl of Thanet

son (1729) | Gertrude (1730–51) | Susannah = 1. (1747) Daniel Hoissard, merchant = 2. Sir John Sylvester | Nancy (1732–3) | Louise (1734–9) | Peter (b.1739) Lord Chief Justice of Quebec | **George Livius** (1743–1816) Commissariat General in India under Warren Hastings = (1785) **Mary Foster-Barham** (1757–1837)

Barham John (1787–1854) | **Maria Dorothea Livius** (1788–1864) = (1808) Revd **John Johnson** (1769–1833) Rector of Yaxham with Welborne (1800–33) | Frederick Joseph (1791–1816) | Charlotte Ann (1791–1857) | George Peter (1793–1856) | Revd Henry Samuel (1795–1871) Rector of Yaxham (1834–43) | Caroline Elizabeth (b.1797) | Harriet Martha (b.1799)

Mary Theodora | Catharine Anne | Revd **William Cowper Johnson** (1813–93) Rector of Yaxham (1843–80) father of **Mary Cowper Johnson** mother of **John Cowper Powys** | Caroline Gertrude | John Barham Johnson (1818–94) Rector of Welborne (1845–83) | Henry Vaughan Johnson (1820–99)

Yaxham Churchyard

The photograph on page 2, taken by Andrew Rogers, shows four tombstones. These mark the graves, *left to right*, of: William Frederick Patteson, uncle of Marianne Johnson (née Patteson, wife of William Cowper Johnson snr) (A79 in *Monumental Inscriptions of Yaxham* – see note 3); his wife Eleanor (A78); Maria Dorothea (née Livius), widow of the Revd John Johnson (A77); and Eleanor Gertrude Johnson, a daughter of Marianne (A76).

There are fourteen other Johnsons and Pattesons buried at Yaxham, including the two Revd William Cowper Johnsons, between them Rectors of Yaxham from 1843 till 1916, and Henrietta Cowper Johnson and Maria Theodora Johnson ('Aunt Etta' and 'Aunt Dora').

The Vicarage Libel Trial: A Lawyer's Verdict

The recent publication of the libel report from the *Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette* (*Newsletters* 35 & 36) is a useful supplement to the existing published references to the trial.[1]

All previous accounts of the trial have, quite understandably, concentrated on the events from the viewpoint of the four defendants, leaving the plight of the plaintiffs, Katharine and Joan Stevenson, largely neglected. This article attempts to redress the imbalance. It also attempts to offer an explanation for the verdict which most commentators have considered perverse.

The Stevensons moved into East Chaldon Vicarage at Easter 1930. Their intention was to run a small home for mentally handicapped girls and train them for domestic service, thereby freeing them from an institutionalized life. Although it had begun its steady decline in 1914, domestic service was still a major provider of employment in England at this time.

From the outset the Stevensons encountered hostility, ignorance and prejudice from the inhabitants of East Chaldon, including Theodore Powys. Judith Stinton (at page 109 of her book) quotes from a letter written by Theodore to Llewelyn in October 1930: 'The woman at the Vicarage Miss Stevenson has four mad girls to do her work out of an institution. One ran away – three times. I fear that Miss Stevenson is a very wicked woman, and her mother is worse. Efforts are being made to do something in the matter – Sylvia Warner is the person for that work.'[2] Theodore assumes that the Stevensons are 'wicked' because the girls have been heard crying and have run away from the home. He has failed to consider or appreciate that the girls' actions might equally have been the symptoms of their illness.

The four defendants make the same assumption which leads Llewelyn to make the manifestly libellous statement: 'It is our considered opinion that neither Miss Stevenson nor Mrs. Stevenson are suitable persons to have the care of mental deficient girls, who, we would suggest, should be treated with sympathy and understanding and not be subjected to a too rigid discipline. In view of the numerous complaints which have been made as to the manner in which this 'home' has and is being conducted we would strongly urge that the whole case should be investigated by the Dorset County Council and that persons should be empowered by this body to take full evidence in order to ascertain the facts.'[3] It is clear from the second half of the passage quoted above that the petition was initiated mainly as a result of 'numerous complaints' or gossip in the village and that neither Llewelyn nor the signatories to the petition had any hard evidence to support the libellous statements. At the trial no attempt was made by the defendants to substantiate or prove the allegations.

Having published so serious a libel by sending the petition and correspondence to the vicar, Mr Pugh, and Mr G. H. White, the Accountant to Dorset

County Council, the Stevensons had no alternative than to seek legal advice. The petition had not only libelled both women, it also called for them to be deprived of their home and their means of livelihood. The Stevensons' London solicitors, Goulden Mesquita & Co., promptly demanded a full apology. Both Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner, fearing an expensive legal confrontation, suggested to Llewelyn that a conditional apology should be given. Llewelyn was reluctant to apologize and hesitated in providing an apology. The apology required by the Stevensons was to be approved by their solicitors, as is customary. In view of the threat to their clients' livelihoods the solicitors, quite correctly, insisted that the apology should include provision for the four persons responsible for the libel to make good any loss or damage subsequently suffered by the Stevensons, notwithstanding the apology. The four refused to sign the apology and libel writs were issued against them.

The law can be a dreadful thing and litigation is often a refined form of warfare requiring a fight to the finish. The situation was now very serious. Short of apologizing in the required manner, could the four defendants have done anything to improve their very weak position? One of the most effective weapons in a defendant's armoury is to make a payment into court in satisfaction of the claim. A payment into court can be made at virtually any stage of the action and no statement as to whether liability is admitted or denied is required. The plaintiff then has a period of 21 days within which to decide whether to accept the moneys paid into court. If the plaintiff accepts the payment in the defendant will have to pay the plaintiff's costs to the date on which the moneys were paid into court. A well-judged payment into court by the defendants could have provided them with an ideal escape route without the need for any formal admission of liability. If the Stevensons had rejected the moneys paid into court and pressed ahead to trial, the cost consequences for the Stevensons would have been catastrophic if the jury (which is never told of payments in) had then awarded them the same amount or less than the moneys paid into court. In these circumstances the Stevensons would have been entitled to costs against the defendants only to the date of the payment in. Thereafter the Stevensons would have been responsible for their own costs, as well as the costs of those defendants who had paid moneys into court in excess of the jury's awards. The costs of an action increase dramatically in the run up to trial and the trial itself as by that time barristers are instructed and the brief fees are incurred. The barrister will also charge a daily fee, known as a refresher, for each day or part day spent in court. It is not uncommon for a plaintiff who has unhappily misjudged a payment into court to lose not only the damages awarded by the court, but to be heavily out of pocket as a result of having to foot the bill of the defendant's legal advisers. Why did the four defendants fail to take this potential escape route? They would undoubtedly have been advised of this option. A failure to so advise would have amounted to negligence on the part of their solicitors. Almost certainly this was

'a case of principle' and Llewelyn in particular was not prepared to compromise his principles by paying money to the Stevensons. When a litigant is guided solely by his principles he often has to pay dearly for them. Llewelyn also misguidedly placed his trust in a number of well-meaning but unsuitable lay advisers including John Cowper Powys, Ralph Shirley, Rivers Pollock and Lady Warwick, possibly preferring their advice to the advice of his own lawyers.[4]

The defence to the libel action was one of qualified privilege. This defence provides that a statement cannot be made the subject for defamation because it was made on a privileged occasion and was not made maliciously for an improper motive. Qualified privilege extends to statements made fairly in situations in which there is a legal or moral obligation to give the information, and the person to whom it is given has a corresponding duty or interest to receive it. Mr Justice Finlay ruled, with hesitation, that the occasions were occasions of qualified privilege. He then directed that the case would have to go to the jury for the jury to decide whether the defendants were actuated by malice.

The defendants' allegedly malicious motives are brought out during the hearing of the plaintiffs' evidence. At first glance the alleged motives appear to be somewhat improbable, if not ridiculous. James Cobb is said to have acted maliciously because the Stevensons' great danes had chased his sheep, Llewelyn because the Stevensons had failed to return a social call and Valentine and Sylvia as a result of the dogs having 'handled [Sylvia's] chow rather roughly.' These motives are perhaps an over-simplification of the feelings of the four defendants and the other villagers, but there may be more than a grain of truth in them.

It is generally accepted that farmers have a tendency to become agitated by any threat to their livestock. James Cobb, who was no Mr. Tasker, is clearly very upset and has threatened to shoot one of the great danes. He denies that he signed the petition as a result of the dog incident. Regrettably, we do not have a full transcript of the evidence, but the jury found James Cobb and the other defendants to be actuated by malice.[5]

Llewelyn Powys is often thought of as a free spirit who was not afraid to defy the conventions of the age. In some respects this assessment is true and yet in other respects Llewelyn was as much a captive of his epoch, class and education as many other nineteenth-century public school and university educated members of the upper-middle classes. Llewelyn was intolerant of bad manners, as he was to make clear to Kenneth Hopkins:

> You must understand that even amongst free spirits and poets manners are to be valued highly and the test of good manners is to be more concerned about another person's attitude than your own ... It was indiscreet of you to call on my brother without having given him any warning. You certainly have no reason to say that you will continue to call me Mr. Powys as though by way of concession ...[6]

Mr Tucker may therefore have been correct to suggest that the Stevensons' bad

manners, in not returning a social call made by Llewelyn and his family, rankled with Llewelyn. The reason for this display of bad manners was carefully avoided when Katherine Stevenson gave her evidence in chief. Mr Tucker carefully steered Mrs Stevenson away from giving any reasons. Perhaps Mrs Way had gossiped to the Stevensons about the Powyses and the tales of their eccentric behaviour, including Llewelyn's custom of walking naked over the downs, had made the Stevensons nervous about associating with them. Also, at this time, the occupation of writer was not commonly regarded as a respectable profession by members of the middle classes such as the Stevensons.

In their evidence both Sylvia and Valentine stated that their conversations with Miss Stevenson (on the occasion when Lily Roberts ran away from the home twice in one day) were friendly. Sylvia states 'My attitude was quite friendly.' Valentine then corroborated Sylvia's evidence and added that she had no animosity towards Mrs or Miss Stevenson. The entry in Sylvia's diary for October 11th 1930 suggests that both Sylvia and Valentine were lying when they gave their evidence on oath.[7] The entry in the diary confirms that their attitude was far from friendly and at best was thoroughly threatening and intimidating.

> ... At B.C. we heard that the servant had run away again – twice – that day. Everyone said something had to be done about it, and suddenly Valentine and I were on our feet, setting out to call on the Vicarage. The dog bayed and padded, we saw it moving like water in the dusky house, then the old woman came and tried to get our reason for calling from us, but we were firm and sinister, and would call again. [...] A rapid dinner, cooked with fury, and eaten with loins girded, and we were walking up for a third time, I telling Valentine what a comfort her pistol was. Miss Stevenson opened the door and let us into an empty room. [...] She shook like a blancmange, and kept trying to ingratiate herself into our assistance by laughter and uneasy cryings. She got little from me, and nothing from Valentine, who sat white and motionless like Justice, while this execrable woman gave herself away, saying the girl was sent her for special treatment (the whole housework), and had sex mania (and was left alone with Wallace in the cellar), and had the mentality of a child of six (and was shut up all day long with the old hag and that dog), and had actually been comforted and called Miss by P. C. Wintle. But we frightened her and kept her taken in, and so left her. As we walked to the door, speechless, Valentine shook her stick in the air like a squire. Righteous indignation is a beautiful thing, and lying exhausted on the rug I watched it flame in her with severe geometrical flames.

It is recognised that witnesses begin to lose the ability to recollect facts within a few months of an incident having taken place. It is unlikely that Sylvia or Valentine would have forgotten the events of October 11th 1930 as this day saw the beginning of their sexual relationship.[8] Forty-two years later on October 11th 1972, almost three years after Valentine's death, Sylvia was to record in her diary:

'This anniversary and January 13th [their private 'marriage'] are unknown. Only her death-day is for the world, to be remembered and then forgotten. The other two are mine alone and safe in my memory till I am back in Chaldon with her.'

The jury awarded the Stevensons damages totalling £175, just over £7,600 in today's money.[9] Llewelyn honourably offered to pay James Cobb's share of the damages and his costs. James Cobb, still more honourably, declined Llewelyn's offer. Llewelyn accepted help from Rivers Pollock to the extent of £100. Elwin states that Llewelyn's total liability for damages and costs amounted to £573 8*s* 3*d*, just over £25,000 in today's money. James Cobb's total liability of £177 5*s* 4*d* amounts to just under £8,000 in today's money, while Sylvia and Valentine faced a combined liability of £733 15*s* 3*d*, just over £32,000. The total cost to the defendants was therefore about £65,000 in today's money. This figure appears modest for a three-day trial involving leading and junior counsel for the Stevensons and three junior counsel for the defendants. It is not clear whether those figures included the defendants' own legal fees. If they did not then the true cost of the whole action in today's money is likely to be over £100,000.

After the trial life for the Stevensons in East Chaldon must have remained uncomfortable. The hostility, ignorance and prejudice of the villagers would have remained, though they would have been less inclined to commit their opinions to paper. The Stevensons left East Chaldon in 1937 and they could have taken with them few pleasant memories of the place.

Griffin Beale

Notes

[1] The most comprehensive account of the trial appears in *Chaldon Herring, The Powys Circle in a Dorset Village* by Judith Stinton (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1988), 109–19. The trial is also mentioned in Malcolm Elwin's *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946), 227–33. Elwin's dislike of lawyers results in some amusing outbursts, such as the following on page 229: 'But the wolves of the law were unleashed and their ravening must be appeased.' The trial is also mentioned in R. P. Graves' *The Brothers Powys* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 268–9 and 270–1 and, most recently, in *The Dorset Year* (Kilmersdon, Somerset: The Powys Press, 1998).

[2] Theodore's natural timidity prevented him from becoming involved in the dispute at first-hand, apart from signing the petition. He encouraged Sylvia and then Llewelyn to take up the challenge against the Stevensons. His reluctance to assist Llewelyn by giving evidence on behalf of the defence angered Llewelyn, causing a temporary rift between the two brothers (*The Dorset Year*, 120). Theodore would have made a poor witness.

[3] Defamation is defined as the publication of a statement about a person that tends to lower his reputation in the opinion of right-thinking members of the community or to make them shun or avoid him.

[4] The advice given by this well-intentioned quartet is remarkable for its poor quality. John's advice is ill-informed and inconsistent. In a letter to Gamel Wolsey dated July 22nd 1934 Llewelyn informs Gamel that 'John says I must have an expensive elderly weighty lawyer or the Judge <u>would not so much as listen</u>, so besotted are they by all the inside politics of the profession.' (*So Wild A Thing* (Dulverton, Somerset: The Ark Press, 1973), 61). In November 1934, by which time John is actually dealing with Llewelyn's lawyers direct, he states: 'Said <u>on no account</u> to get a K.C. Mr. Slade and Mr. Pratt will be enough.'

(*The Dorset Year*, Thursday 15 November). When giving evidence Llewelyn stated that when drawing up the petition he took the advice of his cousin, Ralph Shirley, 'who was a man of the world'. Being a man of the world does not necessarily make a person fit to advise on complex and technical legal matters. Llewelyn may have thought that he was on safer ground with Rivers Pollock who was a magistrate. Sadly for Llewelyn, Justices of the Peace have no practical experience of dealing with cases of defamation. Their sphere of experience involves cases of petty crime and minor family matters. Lady Warwick in her letters to Llewelyn expressed confidence that the Stevensons would either withdraw the claim or Llewelyn and his co-defendants would win. I have a copy of *Earth Memories* presented to Lady Warwick by Llewelyn on the occasion of her visit to Chydyok on September 2nd 1934. The inscription reads: 'Lady Warwick from Llewelyn Powys. In appreciation of her generosity and courage – and in gratitude to her for coming over the downs to encourage me in my ill case.'

Frances [Daisy] Brooke, Countess of Warwick (1861–1938) was a remarkable woman with an interesting and colourful past. In her youth she was a beautiful and wealthy woman (an irresistible combination) and by 1883 she had supplanted Lilie Langtry in the affections of the Prince of Wales, becoming his mistress. He is said to have presented her with an ankle bracelet inscribed 'Heaven's Above'. She was later Lord Kitchener's mistress. She inspired the music hall song 'Daisy Daisy'. She also stood for parliament as a Socialist. In 1913, during a period of financial embarrassment, she entered into a plot to blackmail the Royal Family by attempting to sell the letters she had received from the Prince of Wales to his son, George V. She was bought off by the owner of the Dunlop Rubber Company who for his pains received a baronetcy. Her great-grandson (the 8th Earl of Warwick – died in 1996) remembered her as 'a large old lady in mauve chiffon, waddling slightly'.

5 The limited amount of evidence reported in the local newspaper suggests that the Stevensons gave their evidence in an assured, confident manner. At one point old Mrs Stevenson is confident enough to make a joke: 'There may be a lot of feeble-minded and weak-minded people in the court, but they are not certified!' (Laughter) Unhappily this joke coincides with the entrance of JCP. It takes some nerve to make jokes in open court. If they fall flat the effect can be positively painful. By contrast, the evidence of the four defendants is less than convincing. Llewelyn was described as restless when giving his evidence. Of course, he was very ill, but possibly he also sensed that the defence was being cut to ribbons.

6 *Advice to a Young Poet: The Correspondence Between Llewelyn Powys and Kenneth Hopkins*, edited by R. L. Blackmore (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 92. In the same book another unnamed writer comes in for Llewelyn's criticism for a display of bad manners – see the letter of October 20th 1938.

7 Section 1 of the Perjury Act, 1911, provides that a person shall on conviction on indictment be liable to penal servitude for a term not exceeding seven years, or to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding two years, or to a fine, or to both such penal servitude or imprisonment and fine. The Criminal Justice Act of 1948 abolished penal servitude and imprisonment with hard labour and the offence of perjury now carries a maximum sentence of seven years imprisonment or a fine or both. There is no statutory limit on the fine that can be imposed.

8 See *Sylvia Townsend Warner. A Biography*, by Claire Harman (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1989), 99–100.

9 These calculations have been made using information from the Central Statistical Office and by reference to the Retail Price Index. They are not guaranteed to be completely accurate.

Spring In East Anglia

East Anglia and its landscape do not play a major role in the literary fiction of the Powys brothers. John Cowper set his second novel Rodmoor on the East Anglian coast and the first two chapters of *A Glastonbury Romance* are situated in and around the Norfolk village of Northwold, before the story relocates to a more familiar West Country.

However, the region's flat expanses were for most of the nineteenth century the homeland of their mother Mary Cowper Johnson's side of the family. Through her they claimed blood-ties with two English poets – John Donne and William Cowper. Yaxham and Northwold rectories were the successive homes of Mary Cowper's father, the Revd William Cowper Johnson, whose own father, the Revd John Johnson, had passed to him his Yaxham living. This strong-willed patriarch had been the close friend and confidant of William Cowper during the last troubled years of the poet's life. Cowper had affectionately named him 'Johnny of Norfolk'.

During the 1870s and 80s the Powys children were regular visitors to Yaxham and later Northwold. Both John Cowper and his younger brother Littleton wrote

The visit to Northwold Rectory, Norfolk, May 1999
(left to right) Linda Goldsmith, Eileen Mable, Paul Gillingham, Sonia Lewis, Chris Gostick, Glen Cavaliero, Mary Warden, Susan Rands, Stephen Powys Marks, Tordis Marks, Michael Skaife-d'Ingerthorpe, Joan Stevens
(photograph by Andrew Rogers)

warmly of these holidays in their respective autobiographies. And later Theodore was briefly sent to boarding school in Aldeburgh, where he made friends with the headmaster's son Louis Wilkinson. He left this school early and then engaged in a decade's farming in and around Rendham and Sweffling in East Suffolk before 'retiring' to Dorset to write at the age of 26. [*See Littleton's sketch on page 52.*]

These villages became the focus of our two-day expedition. A journey not only into their limited associations with the Powys brothers' literature, but more so into their childhood memories and ancestral lineage. All the villages, particularly Northwold, were exquisite in their English charm and quiet seclusion. But what we saw was not necessarily what we were seeking. Whilst much physical fabric remains such places have largely become bastions of middle-class affluence which would have seemed very alien to the inhabitants of the late nineteenth century. Then they would have been working agricultural villages, in a period when nearly 50% of the population still worked and lived in the countryside. There would have been great disparities of wealth and widespread poverty. Indeed, one of the main responsibilities of a rural vicar would have been to act as a one-man welfare service – tending the sick, giving alms to the poor and suchlike. This whole way of life, the world the Powys children inhabited, is now lost. So the question must arise, since this was the purpose of the visit, how do we reclaim past landscapes? Are such attempts fruitless, even fraudulent? It is an elusive quest, but I believe not a fruitless one in regard to the Powyses. One way through this barrier of time is to evoke an appreciation of our natural environment. This was always a primary source of joy and succour to the Powys family. Through our personal response to nature we may feel some contact with them. The cool meadow-sweet scented riverbank of the Wissey at Northwold, the mature tumbledown cemetery at Yaxham, the sun's sensuous warmth, the wind's urgent chafings. Through time these remain the same, creating an intoxicating balm, a unique space in which the lost laughter of young boys' play may be half-heard, half-glimpsed in the shadows.

But more than this, it is the magic of their words that conjures vanished worlds. And there lies the importance of 'readings' on such a journey. On ours these ranged from the disturbingly baroque opening of *A Glastonbury Romance*, read in the dingy dilapidated surroundings of Brandon Railway Station, through Littleton's euphoric celebration of his fishing expeditions on the River Wissey, to John Cowper's more sombre nostalgic yearning for a lost childhood. But perhaps most evocative of all was a letter of Mary Cowper Johnson written to Charles Francis Powys accepting his proposal of marriage. This gentle self-effacing letter was read in the dining room of Yaxham Rectory with its mock Victorian interior – a portrait of 'Johnny of Norfolk' looking down. The layers of expensive modern artifice were peeled away and an authentic mood of genuine love and sincere devotion revealed.

In all these readings what was most evident was a distinct lack of cynicism.

Rather there was a refreshing honesty and openness to both people and nature. This has always seemed to me a characteristic of the Powys soul. Their importance as writers being that they challenge the sneering, scornful face of much modern English culture.

There were many other stimulating bonuses to this trip: its smooth and apparently effortless organisation by Chris Gostick; two fascinating evening talks by Glen Cavaliero and Stephen Powys Marks on 'Powys and Place' and 'Powys Family Connections in East Anglia'; and accommodation in a magnificent Tudor mansion, surrounded by congenial company. Denied access to T.V. and newspapers, one was able to escape for two brief days the banalities of our media-dominated life.

Andrew Rogers

Singular Figures: *A Footnote*

In his Introduction to that collection of lectures delivered by JCP, Paul Roberts wrote as follows: 'It is however, with Powys' early American career that we are concerned here, and this is a period of his life which, despite the huge number of letters which have been preserved and the vastness of his Autobiography, *remains something of a mystery. No doubt it would be possible to unearth a more complete record here too by consulting newspaper archives, though this would be a tremendously complicated and time-consuming task.'*

That is undoubtedly true, but in the course of researching Powys references in books, newspapers and periodicals Robin Patterson has shed a little light upon both the style and content of, and reactions to, some of John Cowper's 'performances' and I am grateful to him for making what follows available. The extract from The Edge Of The Woods *on page 40 in this issue contains further first-hand comment. Ed.*

John Cowper Powys On War, Margery Curry, *The Little Review*, Nov. 1915.

It was a quite, quite dreadful jolt that shook the John Cowper Powys cult on the night of the debate between the master and Maurice Browne in the Little Theatre. The great one, appearing robed in black, releasing blinding vapour clouds of infallible utterance, was to devastate the suggestion that war is evil, avoidable and should not be prepared for by military methods. Maurice Browne was to defend the suggestion.

Scarce half a moon before had the first murmuring of discontent arisen among the worshippers of the temple, when their idol strode forth in flapping black garments and proclaimed that in this great war of many nations 'the gall and vitriol and wormwood and uncleanness of mankind are burned, purged from the

purified flesh of humanity; that then humanity is transformed, until the passion of hate is hardly distinguishable from the passion of love.'

The master himself was the glorious vulture of war. Looming there on the stage of the Little Theatre, black, huge, alone under a vast orange canopy heavily streaked with black, a violet light from somewhere touching the crimson of his face – and beside him in that great lonely cosmos an iridescent emerald bowl upon a high ivory pedestal. That little, little iridescent bowl, the ivory, the vast peace of a universe, no coagulating clots hanging from the shreds of bodies torn and entangled in the barbed wire meshes of the trenches, no cries – only one big black moving figure there.

'War a great evil and an unmitigated wrong? I cannot see it. A pacifist struggle for existence is only a meaner struggle. They are fools who think it advisable or possible to stamp out war; they are knaves if, thinking this possible or advisable, they still go on a pacifist crusade.'

Followed then the picture of a well-managed nation during war, a regime of exalted socialism – the pooling of all moneys, the raising of the income tax, the rich paying for the needs of the poor; she who was once thought a bedraggled hussy of London's east end now become a saviour of her country, in her potential gift of a son to the recruiting office of her country; the high price now set on flesh and blood, even that of the most humble.

Well, all this heroic joy and thin-ice socialism – it was announced at the end of the evening that the week after the subject would be Walt Whitman. Thank Heaven! Let his people listen to John Cowper Powys on Walt Whitman. Of these he should speak – of Walt Whitman, of Oscar Wilde, of Richepin and Milton and Ficke and Baudelaire and Goethe and Shakespeare. On these he speaks divinely. Peace and war indeed!

And the debate? There stood Maurice Browne in valiant opposition really 'the idealist and fanatic' as his opponent called him, not adding 'the clear thinker,' the rejector of temptations to revel in obvious and facile romanticisms on the sweet decorum of dying for one's country, with all the talk of defending one's beloved from the hand of the ravager. There were even those who understood Mr. Browne when his bravery and his prophetic sight let him say such things as: 'It is better to be killed than to kill. To refrain from a combat of violence when the victims might be your dearest ones is not to put a finger in the cogs of God's orderly universe. It is a question of looking the God that is within you in the face.'

As for the merits of the debate, the matter of war and its avoidableness was not touched on in its practical aspects, except by one who presided over the meeting and in three intelligent moments discussed the economic and proved sides of war. The Little Review is no tract, and we may pass that by as understood.

And after it all, out of an audience of two hundred and twenty – when they overflowed the Little Theatre they trooped to the Fine Arts Assembly Room – eighty-four stood up to announce their conviction that war is not evil, not

avoidable and should be prepared for by military methods, and some sixty others stood up to indicate their opposite conviction! The result was on the merits of the question.

Culture and Crochet, Isabel R. Mayers, *The Masses*, February 1917.

Do you know John Cowper Powys? He's that English lecturer who says 'devil' once in a while and 'sex' sometimes twice, and who uses adjectives by the wholesale without even pausing for breath, honest! He comes to Brooklyn on Saturday mornings and lectures in the Academy to the lady school teachers who think he's 'perfectly great my dear – so original!'

Last Saturday he talked on 'Ibsen – or the Genius of the Scandinavian.' Who says Brooklyn isn't advanced? And the lady teachers came and watched him with delight – you note the verb is 'watched' and not 'listened'. Perhaps Mr. Powys is a poseur – I don't know – but he is a dynamic speaker, he is apparently sincere in his opinions and besides he doesn't care overmuch for Tennyson or Kipling. That's something. So one bears with his strings of adjectives and his dramatic spurts and the little mannerisms that are only incidental in a good lecturer.

But the Brooklyn ladies, bless 'em – they gurgled with delight at his perfectly dear English accent, and his Oxford gown and the way he shakes his head. While he told simply and effectively, the story of Strindborg's 'Father' – that overwhelming indictment of the woman – the lady teacher in my row knitted her brows. Not about 'Father' – dear dear no – but about a knot in the crochet cotton she was working at throughout the lecture. And if you don't believe me, come next Saturday and I dare say you'll see her at it again. These Brooklynites are so industrious.

The lady teachers were delighted with Powys – what if he is a bit odd in his views – as long as he manages to be bizarre and charmingly iconoclastic. They didn't mind about his preference for 'The Wild Duck' if he sprang circus stunts like 'old-fashioned, musty, oleaginous, hopeless, antimacassared, slippered, etc., etc., in characterising what Nora slammed the door on, in 'The Doll's House'

And when it was all over they were perfectly enthusiastic. Some of them said so to their neighbors, when they hadn't even been introduced. But culture can do so much. Brooklyn lady teachers have a way of saying 'it was perfectly great' that would make Mr. Powys madder than it made me. It was a good lecture too.

But the lady with the crochet enjoyed it more than anyone else.

Accustomed As I Am ... 25 Years on the American Lecture Platform, S. K. Ratcliffe, *Survey Graphic*, December 1939. (Ratcliffe was another English lecturer. This, his recollection of John Cowper's style, is an extract from a longer article.)

John Cowper Powys long before he turned to novel writing, made a place for

himself on the platform that no lecturer has since filled. He possessed certain manifest advantages: a striking presence, an individual gift of eloquence with an immense command of language, a most unusual power of aesthetic word-painting and interpretation, and an English university accent which was never toned down. He developed a particular manner of treating the masters of literature which he called 'dithyrambic analysis.'

This was his own invention; it was a method unlike all others I have known. When Powys was in the mood he would let himself go in a storm of rhetoric, and throwing in a 'ladies and gentlemen' into every third or fourth sentence, he would cast his spell over any audience – preferably, I am bound to say, a woman's club. The oration of his that I remember most vividly belonged to a Sunday morning series nearly twenty years ago in New York. His theme was the 'Religion of Walt Whitman.' The address was not reported, but I have no difficulty in recalling its culminating passage:

'The religion of Walt Whitman ladies and gentlemen, I will tell you what it was; I alone know. It was polytheism, ladies and gentlemen, the belief in many gods. Whitman was a polytheist, just as your splendid William James also was. What do those silly Whitmaniacs say about his religion? They tell you that he was an optimist! Do they mean that Whitman was an optimist like that beefy diner-out Robert Browning? Ladies and gentlemen, I will tell you something! I have seen Walt Whitman's notebooks, the notebooks that he kept when nursing the wounded in your Civil War. And those notebooks are stained with blood! Optimism, ladies and gentlemen, optimism? The only optimism that a self-respecting man can tolerate is the optimism that has its body on the rack, its hand in the fire, its notebooks *stained with blood*!'

More accounts of JCP on the lecture circuit will appear in the next issue. Ed.

Letters to the Editor

The Rector of Luck

In one of his last letters to his sister Philippa in September 1960, John Cowper Powys says he has written a story called 'The Rector of Luck', describing it as an adventure involving the whole Powys family, in which all the girls are in one 'airship' captained by Gertrude and all the boys in another captained by Littleton. He refers to what is obviously the same story the following month in a letter to Ichiro Hara, calling it 'the best I have written', but nowhere else in his published correspondence is this story mentioned by name.

In the *Powys to Sea Eagle* letters, I appended a brief note to this reference saying the story in question was 'almost certainly' the one which ended up being

published as 'Abertackle'. It is clear to me now that this is almost certainly a blunder, and there may be Society members who have suspected as much. Exactly what led me to make this association in the first place, I have conveniently forgotten. Possibly I made the simple and unwarranted conclusion that since 'Abertackle' is the only one of John Cowper's late space fantasies not actually mentioned by name anywhere in his published correspondence, and since there was only this one reference by name to 'The Rector of Luck' in a letter written in the same year 'Abertackle' itself was written, they were most likely one and the same. It would not be unusual for JCP to make changes to either the titles of these stories ('Four Wraiths' was his earlier title for what became 'Real Wraiths') or indeed their 'plots', such as they are. The names of some of the characters in 'Abertackle', like Charles and Mary Po, Nelly, and Bob and Letty (Theodore and Violet), were doubtless red herrings too, leading me to suspect that this was indeed the same intended fantasy involving the Powyses and to pass over too casually the fact that the story, whilst it does involve a journey into space, hardly conforms to what little JCP says about 'The Rector of Luck' in the letter. There are no 'air-ships' in 'Abertackle', nor captains Gertrude and Littleton. And this, obviously, is precisely the point. The two stories are not the same, and there must somewhere be a manuscript or typescript, unless lost, of 'The Rector of Luck', a story written in the latter half of 1960, after 'Abertackle'.

If any Society members have any knowledge of, or clues to, the whereabouts of 'The Rector of Luck', I would be grateful to hear from them through this column.

Anthony Head

Received by Paul Roberts in response to a letter he wrote to The Western Mail *asking whether any of its readers had recollections of John Cowper Powys.*

I was around seventeen and living in Yorkshire in 1946 when I first came across John Cowper Powys' *The Meaning of Culture*, which I selected quite by chance from my adoptive father's bookshelves. Whether attracted by the title or his name I don't know, but as I leafed through the pages I felt a sudden surge of excitement, an overpowering sense of recognition – like calling to like. Those words seemed addressed to me personally, reflecting my deepest feelings and thoughts at that time of my life. I was a rather introspective, anti-social loner but idealistic, anarchistic and rebellious, feeling that no one understood how I felt – a common enough condition at that age.

Having left school at fifteen and worked in shops and I was an avid reader and attended W.E.A. classes in philosophy, politics and other subjects, searching for some 'meaning' in life and enjoying discussions with older students, having little in common with my dancing, sporty, gregarious, and as I thought, superficial peer group. I was fortunate enough to have had a brilliant and beautiful English teacher at school, Edna Edmunds, later to marry Denis Healey. She inspired many of her pupils to enjoy poetry and the beauty and magic of words.

The Meaning of Culture, with its validation of solitude and emphasising of the power of the imagination, feeling for nature, the enrichment of everyday life by poetry, literature and 'daydreaming', appealed deeply to me. To enhance 'the pleasure which there is in life itself' by drawing on everyday existence and the elements around us' seemed a fitting basis for day-to-day living. All this I had felt but now it was endorsed by JCP. I devoured the book and it led me to discover Dostoevsky, Whitman, Hardy and other writers whose works have greatly influenced me. Nothing, except falling in love perhaps, can equal the tremendous excitement of youth when encountering writers who speak to the heart, awake the imagination and have a lasting effect on one's life vision, or life-illusion.

I decided to write to the author, care of his publishers, and was delighted to receive a reply and felt inspired to seek a meeting as I longed to see this wonderful writer whose words had offered me the bedrock of a life-philosophy that has remained with me ever since and for which I am eternally grateful.

I had a holiday due from my work in a bookshop but little money, so hitchhiked my way to Corwen. I must have appeared somewhat scruffy, with rucksack and walking boots, having slept in barns along the way, which one could safely do in those days.

I was directed to his house and there he was, reclining on his bed with his amazing aquiline features and high colour, reminding me of a native American chieftain. Almost blind in one eye, he transmitted a welcoming aura of enthusiasm and childlike delight at our meeting, encouraging me to talk about my life and interests, which with the egoism of youth I readily did.

We shared tea and he inscribed my precious book, then more talk about Life, Nature, Poetry, Love etc. He appeared thrilled at my travelling through Wales on foot, hitchhiking and sleeping rough, but I assured him it was 'needs must' and a great adventure. I departed after leaving a few edible gifts as food rationing was still in force then, and I knew he didn't make much money from his books in those hard post-war years.

I felt exhilarated after our encounter. He was all I had imagined and more, full of the joy of life and boundless mental energy in spite of his age and disabilities.

I journeyed on to North Wales, staying in barns and Youth Hostels, climbed the breathtaking Snowdon Horseshoe Ridge and was 'lost' in the mountains for a while which merited a brief news item in the local press. Unfortunately on my travels I had left my autographed book in a car in which I had been given a lift – lost forever I sadly thought. Soon after my return it was amazingly returned to me by the kind driver who had read the news item with my name and address and realised his passenger and the 'lost girl' were one and the same.

I went on to read *In Defence of Sensuality*, *A Philosophy of Solitude* and *The Art of Happiness*, which all served to heighten and deepen the initial living philosophy inspired by *The Meaning of Culture*. A few years later I again visited Corwen, this time by car, taking with me a French friend who had been deeply impressed by

JCP's book on Rabelais. He and John had a lively discussion, during which, on hearing that my friend thought his translations the best he had come across, he clapped his hands in sheer spontaneous delight.

Interestingly, over the years I really did lose my original *Meaning of Culture*, but obtained another copy. It was as heavily underscored as my previous one, with many of the passages the ones I too had marked. I hope someone somewhere finds the same inspiration as I did from that twice-lost book.

Betty Cotton

Sven-Erik Täckmark still suffers some after effects of his recent illness and describes himself as 'not quite as fit as a fiddle'. We hope he soon will be. His letter gave a little more information about the beginnings of the Society.

... By pure chance – I think it was at the end of 1966 – I came across an advertisement in *The Times*, implying that it would be nice to hear from those who had read John Cowper or heard him lecture. The ad. was signed by a Barbara Spencer, a thirty-year old school teacher in Manchester. Somewhat later when I visited England I wrote to Barbara and went to Manchester to see her and discuss the project. She was then full of enthusiasm for John Cowper, and I remember she spoke exhaustively about his *In Defence of Sensuality* that she had read when she was fifteen, a book that had immensely influenced her.

When I met her she had been contacted by about a dozen people, most of whom were she said oldies, born at the turn of the century, or even in the previous century and who had personally heard or seen John Cowper. She told me later, in a letter, that she had met some of these people at a meeting in London. In another letter she was fairly disappointed with the project and was tired-out by the endless and fruitless chatting and reminiscing about John Cowper, which according to her, did not result in anything tangible or concrete when it came to the formation of a Powys Society. Impatient as she probably was, she had hoped for a swifter reaction and I doubt it ever crossed her mind that the Society would grow and develop as it has.

Sven-Erik Täckmark

Bev Craven's letter in the last *Newsletter* contained two interesting suggestions: a list of Powys books currently in print and Powys books for sale by members. The Editor might obtain a list of books in print from the Internet. As for members selling books to other members, that could be very helpful. I foresee a few problems. For example, I have many duplicate copies from my Canadian home, many first editions, which I would like to sell, but have no idea what to ask for them. A second problem might be that we would inadvertently provide free advertising space for second-hand booksellers.

Morine Krissdóttir

If there is a demand for the above service I will be willing to experiment. Ed.

'Paganism is marching towards the millennium'

I found the above article in the April *Newsletter* interesting but somewhat confused and superficial in its thought.

Mr Carter states that 'according to its enthusiasts, paganism is the fastest growing religion in Britain'. But as he himself points out, the name is derived from the Latin 'paganus', which was used by Roman troops to describe civilians or 'country bumpkins'. According to the Shorter O.E.D., it was later used by Christians to describe any nation or community who were not Christians or Jews. Thus it is quite wrong to describe paganism as a religion, when it covers a multitude of religions or beliefs. It would also be interesting to know who calculated that paganism is the fastest growing religion today and where they obtained their statistics.

He also claims that 'To be a pagan is to worship nature, loving and honouring the earth'. This may be true of modern pagans – most of whose roots are in Wordsworthian pantheism – but the idea would have been incomprehensible to real pagans, such as the early Celts, who did not worship nature but the gods of nature.

As Barry Cunliffe points out in his fine book, *The Celtic World* – 'The Celts were a superstitious people. The supernatural pervaded every aspect of life – the spirits were everywhere; in ancient trees, weird rocks, and in rivers and bogs. No part of the daily routine could be carried out without some reminder of the gods. They were responsible for the seasons and they controlled the natural world, of which man was a part. They therefore had to be placated through intermediaries – the druids – who knew the ancient wisdom and could ensure that the correct procedures were at all times followed.'

Cunliffe goes on to say that: 'The Celts believed that if a human life was at risk through serious disease or exposure to danger, it was because the gods were wrathful. The only way to placate their antagonisms, and to save the endangered life was to offer another life in its place. Criminals were preferred as sacrifices, but if the supply of criminals was insufficient, numbers could be made up by substituting innocent men. The method of sacrifice varied, but the most dramatic of the practices described by ancient writers comes from the pen of Caesar. "Some tribes", he says, "have colossal images made of wicker-work, the limbs of which they fill with living men: they are then set on fire, and the victims burned to death.' (*The Celtic World*, 69)

When we remember another branch of the pagan world the Aztecs – had the jolly custom of tearing the hearts from their still living victims, it might be as well to ask modern pagans the name of the particular brand of paganism they follow before we adopt their faith!

Mr Carter states that: 'Pagans believe that moral laws are made by man, not God, but adopt the common principle – Do what you will if it harms none.' This seems a very simple and practical maxim, but it is hardly adequate when dealing

with the moral complexities of GM food, the cloning of animals and other difficult modern ethical problems. He should also bear in mind that moral standards can only be effective if sufficient people share them. When Boswell told Dr Johnson that one of their friends refused to believe there was such a thing as morality, that man of robust common sense recommended that those who entertained him should count their spoons before he left!

I was pleased to read that, since he came close to death from cancer ten years ago, Mr Carter has 'drawn consistent inspiration from the Dorset writer Llewelyn Powys'. I myself owe Llewelyn a great debt, as it is through his writings that I eventually found myself a member of The Powys Society. But it is well to remember that Llewelyn's 'sunny paganism', (as brother John called it) had a down side as well as its positive aspects. We have only to read *The Cry of a Gull*, by his wife Alyse Gregory, to realise what his 'sunny paganism' cost her. His belief that 'our most solemn duty was to savour every experience of our short lives' could so easily drift into an indifference to the sufferings of others.

Llewelyn did undoubtedly possess a real affinity with nature and was often able to express it in fine prose. But he was not unique in this. Richard Jefferies and D. H. Lawrence had the same gift. And the less well known Christian poet and mystic, Thomas Traherne, in his *Centuries*, expresses the glory of existence even better than Llewelyn: 'You never Enjoy the World aright, till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are Clothed with the Heavens and Crowned with the Stars; and perceive yourself to be Sole Heir of the whole World: and more then so, because men are in it who are every one Sole Heirs, as well as you.' (*The First Century* No.29)

As for Llewelyn's belief that – 'The simplest actions should be undertaken with a full realisation of their significance, as uncommon opportunities of natural piety never to come again. To pour out water from a jug, to break bread, to open a bottle of wine, are lordly offices.' This is standard teaching in most Christian and Buddhist devotional works. Two books that express it well are *The Way of Simplicity*, by Esther de Waal, and *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, by Thich Nhat Hanh. It certainly has nothing to do with paganism.

Mr Carter ends his article by quoting part of a sonnet by William Wordsworth, in which the poet proclaims that he would rather be 'A pagan suckled in a creed outworn, ...' Sadly for Mr Carter's argument, Wordsworth must have changed his mind, for he later became a Christian and added to his *oeuvre* forty-seven Ecclesiastical Sonnets.

Leslie Harrison

As was made clear, Paul Carter's article was written for and published in The Express. *I thought it no mean achievement to have drawn attention to Llewelyn through one of the tabloids and asked to reprint it. It was with considerable reluctance that Paul Carter agreed. Ed.*

John Cowper Powys' Ideal Woman

Readers of John Cowper Powys will have noticed his respectful but usually fleeting references to Lady Charlotte Guest who translated the *Mabinogion*, the tales in the Old Welsh which so fascinated and influenced him. His fullest description of Lady Charlotte occurs in a letter to Louis Wilkinson written on 4 February 1956; he calls her: 'the lady who in beauty (from her pictures) and in her writing and her mythological notes and the way she ran alone her husband's huge Steel Business after his death is my ideal lady ... and when she got too old to run the Steel Business she went about Europe collecting China ornaments and cups and saucers. Her father I think was an English Earl and I think her own family name was Lyndsy or Lindsay but I forget – but I've never seen a more beautiful face. One of her sons was MP for some part of Dorset but she was dead when this occurred. Before her marriage to Sir John Guest she had no knowledge of the Welsh language at all. She just took it on ...'

Quite by chance in a secondhand bookshop I came upon the second volume of *Extracts from Her Journal 1833–1852*. I lost no time in ordering the first volume from the library. The lady these revealed was even more remarkable than John Cowper describes so it seemed that *Newsletter* readers might enjoy a summary of her circumstances, character and achievements. The 'Extracts' were edited by one of her many grandsons, the ninth earl of Bessborough after he had been Governor General of Canada.

Lady Charlotte Elizabeth Bertie was born in 1812, the eldest child of Albemarle, the ninth Earl of Lindsey by his second wife, Charlotte, the daughter of the Very Reverend C. P. Layard, Dean of Bristol. Her father was sixty-eight when she was born; she had two younger brothers who were somewhat unusual mentally but just in what way, in modern terms, is not clear. Her father died when she was six and three years later her mother married her first cousin, the Reverend Peter William Pegus, the son of the sister of the Dean of Bristol. Charlotte's step-father was a difficult man who drank, had unreasonable ideas and violent rages; years later she wrote in her journal that 'she wondered how she could have lived through all the sorrow and refined persecution of her young days and that she did not either go mad or run away.'[1] Perhaps it was this journal which she began when she was ten and continued till she was seventy-nine except for a few months around each of her two marriages, that saved her from catastrophe.

During her childhood the family lived mainly at Uffington, the palatial family seat near Stamford in Lancashire. There she learnt French, Italian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Persian with the help of her brother's tutor with whom she fell in love. She also read very widely and was an 'accomplished etcher on copperplate'; she played the harp and the violin, Beethoven being her favourite composer, and enjoyed acting, riding, whist and billiards. Like all young girls of her class she was taken to London to be launched upon Society, but there she felt that her mother's

Lady Charlotte, from the painting by G. F. Watts, 1854

unfortunate second marriage prevented her from making the social connections she would otherwise have made. She met her future husband in the house of his business partner, Wyndham Lewis; at Dowlais in South Wales they managed the largest ironworks in the kingdom. Josiah John Guest was forty-eight when he proposed to Lady Charlotte Bertie and she was twenty-one. He was not merely an ironmaster for he had been an MP for Honiton in Devon from 1826 till the Reform Bill in 1832 when he was returned unopposed for Merthyr Tydfil which he represented till his death twenty years later. His wife always referred to him as 'Merthyr'. The nature of the attraction between this unusual couple can only be surmised but it may well have been similar to that between Margaret Hale and John Thornton in Mrs Gaskell's *North and South* published in 1855 in which the gently nurtured girl is won by the devotion and honourable character of an industrialist. Mrs Gaskell was almost an exact contemporary of Charlotte Guest.

However, in the words of Lady Charlotte's grandson: 'Such a marriage, having regard to the social conventions of that time, was undoubtedly an extraordinary step to take for a girl who described herself as of the best blood in England. That he was a great deal older than herself was a small matter compared to the fact that he was a dissenter and "in trade" in Wales.'[2]

After a brief honeymoon the couple settled at Dowlais where Sir John had a fine house; 'Lady Charlotte soon became enamoured of the place and rapidly developed an intense and intelligent interest in the conduct of the ironworks and the life of South Wales.' An admirer writes: 'In all that he was deficient in she excelled, and while we credit him with founding the greatest ironworks in the world, and giving sustenance and substantial comfort to twenty thousand souls, it is chiefly to her influence we must look for all that was done in the way of moral and mental elevation ...' Before her husband died she had founded six schools ... for which she raised the necessary funds by her own gifts and private subscription.[3]

At the same time she learned Welsh and mastered the early medieval text in which the tales of the *Mabinogion* were written. Her translation took her eight years, and 'was finally published in three sumptuous volumes in 1846. It was the first book that Tennyson bought after his marriage, and thus it came about that the *Idylls of the King* were based upon it. This led to the poet becoming and remaining all his life an intimate friend of the family.'[4] During these years Lady Charlotte also wrote a history of the iron trade and pamphlets on technical processes.

Besides being a founder of schools, writer and translator, Lady Charlotte was often called upon to be her husband's secretary, and a London Society hostess. In this latter role 'it was several years before surprised and even horrified London Society opened its doors to them and accepted their hospitality. The extent to which Lady Charlotte eventually overcame prejudice is proved by the descriptions she gives in her journal of the many brilliant dinners, concerts and balls

which she gave in their house in Spring Gardens, which had been purchased from the Duke of Bedford in 1840.'[5] The liberal, broad-minded, and cultured Lansdownes were some of the first to entertain them. At a party there on 6 June 1838, 'Lady Charlotte plucked up courage to ask her host whether she might consult Lady Lansdowne on the subject of giving parties. He listened very good-naturedly while "she trembled so that she nearly fell to the earth".'[6] Three days later Lady Lansdowne called on her and 'recommended my giving a Concert and promised to introduce me to several of the foreign Ambassadors and some of the first English families ...' On 4 July Lady Charlotte was able to write in her journal: 'Altogether to my surprise my party was brilliant and quite successful. It was a great relief to my mind that affairs had taken this turn. I have striven hard to place myself in the station of life in which I was born, and from which my mother's unfortunate marriage so long excluded me, and now I really believe I have accomplished it, and need not henceforth toil through pleasures for the sake of Society. My children now, I hope and believe, will have none of those struggles to make by which I have felt so humiliated.'[7]

Some idea of the impression Lady Charlotte made on Society at this time may be gathered from Lady Holland's letter to her son on 28 June 1839: 'I have got acquainted with a remarkably clever, distinguished woman, reckoned by many extremely handsome, Ly. C. Guest, nobly born, married to an immensely rich man who wanted what the Spaniards call Sangre Azul, and gave her wealth which she wanted. They seem perfectly happy; his riches are in Wales. She has learnt the Welsh language and translated an ancient poem of romantic chivalry into English. I have only just got it, so cannot, if I ever should, judge of its merits.'[8]

In her journal on 27 April 1839 Lady Charlotte wrote 'I have so schooled myself into the habits of business that it is now more congenial to me to calculate the advantage of half percent commission on a cargo of iron than to go to the finest Ball in the world. But whatever I undertake I must reach eminence in. I cannot endure anything second grade. I am happy to see we are at the head of the iron trade. Otherwise I could not take pride in my house in the City and my works at Dowlais and glory (playfully) in being (in some sort) a tradeswoman. Then again, my blood is of the noblest and most princely in the Kingdom, and if I go into Society, it must be the very best and first. I can brook no other. If I occupy myself in writing, my book must be splendidly got up, and must be, as far as typography and decoration are concerned at the head of literature and I delight in the contrast of the musty antiquarian researches, and the brilliant fêtes and plodding counting house, from all of which I seem to derive almost equal amusement ...'[9] What extraordinary vitality!

To add to all her other occupations Lady Charlotte had at this time four children born at almost yearly intervals since her marriage; within the next nine years she had six more. Could she really have had her children as easily as she describes in her journal? Of the birth of the fifth she writes on 28 March 1839:

'I was all day quite well but woke about 3 o'clock the next morning (Good Friday) in a little pain, and within half an hour had the pleasure of giving birth to my fifth child and third boy, with less suffering than I believed possible. Even with less pain and in a shorter time than with dear little Merthyr last year ...'[10] Of the seventh she writes: 'This morning I woke quite well, and was all but dressed to go down to breakfast as usual, when a few minutes before ten I felt too ill to venture down, and very soon I was no longer able to sit up. So I went to bed again, and by the mercy of Providence, in the course of an hour, viz:– at a quarter before eleven I was safely confined of another little boy – my fifth – and seventh child ...' [11] Of the eighth: 'Dear Ivor [her eldest son, still only eight] had strewed the floor with toys his father had bought for them all at Cardiff and with the acquisition of which he was delighted. I let him stay for a while, and then got him and my dear husband to go down to luncheon without however giving any hint that I was otherwise than quite well. However I went to bed as soon as they had left me, and in a very few minutes Merthyr came up again to see why I had not followed them down. I tranquillised him as well as I could and he again went out of the room but only to be recalled almost immediately to see the eighth child to which, thank God, I had given birth with as little pain as I suppose it is possible to suffer on such occasions ...'[12]

The birth of the tenth child, however was not so happy, being followed by a short spell of intense weakness when Lady Charlotte and her attendants thought she was near to death; however, she seems to have had visions of splendour and loveliness even then. This child, Blanche, married Edward the eighth Earl of Bessborough and it was their son, Vere Brabazon Ponsonby, the ninth Earl, who as a little boy used to listen to his blind grandmother of eighty reciting Chaucer; he grew up to be Governor General of Canada before editing his grandmother's journals to bring this remarkable lady close to the general public.

(*to be continued*)

Susan Rands

References

[1] Lady Charlotte Guest, *Extracts From Her Journal 1833–1852*, edited by the Earl of Bessborough, P.C., G.C.M.G. (London: John Murray, 1950), 2.

[2] Ibid., 7. [3] Ibid., 9. [4] Ibid., 8.

[5] Ibid., 7. [6] Ibid., 69. [7] Ibid., 71.

[8] *Lady Holland to her Son 1821–1845*, edited by the Earl of Ilchester (London: John Murray, 1946), 178.

[9] Lady Charlotte Guest, op.cit., 89.

[10] Ibid., 85 [11] Ibid., 125. [12] Ibid., 154.

What They Said About the Powyses

Paul Roberts wrote recently saying: 'I've just been mooching about on the internet (surfing is far too energetic a word for what I do) and I've come across a reference to a book I had never heard of before. It is: *The Edge Of The Woods*, a memoir by Hildegarde Lasell Watson. The author is the wife of Dr J. S. Watson, who is mentioned briefly on three occasions in JCP's letters to Llewelyn. One of these references mentions that Hildegarde was somewhat put out at being referred to by Llewelyn as a "resplendent lady" in *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* and JCP teasing her about this. Her book is out of print, but the brief mention of it that I found on the internet said that she was a friend of the Powys brothers. This made me wonder whether she wrote about Llewelyn and JCP.'

Paul went on to suggest a note in the *Newsletter* asking for information. However, within a couple of weeks I received from him the enclosed extract, supplied by that inveterate gatherer of Powys references, Robin Patterson. It is taken from a chapter entitled 'Friendships'.

The Edge Of The Woods

When John Cowper Powys first came to tea with me it was at our house on 19th Street New York. As he entered our living room I felt slightly embarrassed. John was tall and impressive, with a mass of dark curls over his large head. (He reminded me, with his exaggerated gestures, of my sketch of John the Baptist, made in Oberammergau at the *Passion Play*.) All the Powys men, he most of all, seemed out of place indoors. We had met many of his family in England where they were born, over the chalk cliffs by the sea in Dorchester. The vast open country was a natural wild background for this learned but simply brought-up family.

I had timidly inquired, 'Mr. Powys, how many lumps of sugar in your tea, one or two?' 'No', he answered, 'four please.'

Marianne Moore, to my delight, once quoted my remark that while conversing with John Cowper Powys I found him so intense that I could not tell whether I was listening or talking to him. I had a sense of being devoured. I mention this because, of all people to come calling that afternoon, it had to be a well-known hunter (better left unnamed) who gave us a description – a horror I thought – of capturing a baby polar bear and dragging him on a rope behind his boat on one of his Arctic expeditions. I was afraid Mr. Powys, with his passion for animals, would rise and kill him.

John was a famous lecturer. No one, ever saw a more fiery delivery on any stage. It is no exaggeration that he had frightened some of his audiences. Brilliant as he was, and picturesque, he could be dangerously lewd. A few ladies had been seen to rise and indignantly depart.

His vocabulary and imagery were incomparable. He was poet, philosopher,

writer and scholar and, as E. E. Cummings had called him, the greatest actor on any stage. Estlin had such respect for him that if they happened to meet on the street, he'd step off the side-walk and let him pass. This would sometimes happen when John Powys and Phyllis Playter were living in the apartment above him on Patchin Place. Of course it was all part of Estlin's superb mimicry, and he would invariably make us laugh.

When I first heard John Powys lecture it was in Aeolian Hall. It was about Thomas Hardy and he found it difficult to begin because of their intimate friendship. We were afraid that in his dramatic way he'd break down. He wore a black gown, given him by Miss Spence, the headmistress of a girls' school in New York. He paced nervously back and forth, his robe flying behind him. At last, pulling himself together, his rush of words filled us with rapture. Suddenly having switched to a word about Thackeray, he shouted at us in his rich English voice, 'I suppose that *Vaa-nity Fa-ar* is the greatest novel ever written – but I don't like it!'

When he came to lecture in Rochester we invited him to dine with us. His talk was about the ten books he would take with him to his Desert Island. His favorite play was *King Lear*, he said, admonishing us in case we had not read it recently or at all!

During the Second World War he left with Miss Playter for Merioneth in Wales. When he wrote me from their small one-room stone house, I felt a desire to communicate with him, and among other packages of food we were all sending our friends I would always include tins of his favorite tea, difficult for them to procure in England. He wrote me in ecstasy of this, his elixir! Just before he died he sent me one of his favorite little books, *The Borrowers*, by Mary Norton, with an inscription in his dashing uphill handwriting on the flyleaf – and a poem:

For Hildegarde and Sibley Watson
from John Cowper Powys
and Phyllis Playter Xmas 1957
'Blow winds and crash your cheeks!
Rage, blow you hurricanes!'
So cried King Lear; more gently murmur I,
While the winds howl
Our little book will fly.

Llewelyn Powys, the eighth of his parents' children, was twelve years younger than John Cowper. He was picturesquely handsome, his head covered with blond curls, not as a rule so closely cropped as his brother's black ones. He carried a thorn walking stick, and the aroma of peat wreathed his well-cut tweeds.

Like John Cowper, he had begun as a lecturer. The one time I heard him talk in public at the Players Club on Gramercy Park; his strong down-country English accent seemed incomprehensible to many in the audience. I remember he consulted my husband, then a senior in medical school, on account, so he said, of

some trouble with his 'yardrums.' Only by pointing did he make us understand that he was talking about his ears. It was about this time that he gave up lectures for a career as a writer.

I used to go for walks with Llewelyn in and about New York. Once at the Bronx Zoo as we faced a monkey cage, one of the monkeys began talking to me. 'He recognises you, he recognises you!' shouted Llewelyn to the amusement of the crowds around us.

His naïveté in certain directions was a delight. On one of his visits to New York he and John Cowper shared an apartment with a parquet floor in the Chelsea section of the West Side. 'What are those strange balls of fluff blowing about the floor?' he asked his sister Marian. She told him they were the natural result of bachelor housekeeping, and obligingly gave him a demonstration of how to sweep and dust.

He used to entertain us with stories of his life as manager of a stock ranch in British East Africa where he was often alone. He had been sent there in the hope that the climate of the high plateau would permanently arrest his tuberculosis. On one occasion a tall, dignified Negro had appeared at his door requesting a place to sleep. Llewelyn handed him a blanket and pointed, not too cordially, to an adjoining barn. The next day his visitor was gone, leaving a folded blanket. But during the night Llewelyn had been horrified to see a panther making its way through his bedroom. He believed magic had been used to rebuke him for his inhospitable treatment.

In the summer of 1924, Llewelyn and my husband went on a camping trip in the Rockies. Before setting out Llewelyn went to see a specialist in diseases of the chest who approved the camping trip but warned against too much exertion at high altitudes. Once in the mountains, however, it was impossible to get him to be prudent. Instead of viewing the rugged country from mule back he insisted on making his excursions on foot. He would leave camp right after breakfast, climbing or descending at a slow but steady shuffle, carrying a stick and a sandwich, and return at dusk to report intimate glimpses he had gained of the family life of badgers and birds.

Llewelyn had a passionate interest in nature, a feeling of kinship with animals that was almost Oriental, though he was by no means a vegetarian. His feeling of kinship did not prevent him from savoring slices of the liver of a freshly killed yearling deer, shot at his request.

He had begun the trip clean-shaven, but ended it with the beginnings of a full beard that he allowed to grow and wore for the rest of his life. Shortly after his return, he suffered severe haemorrhage that kept him in bed for months.

After several months more in New York with his wife Alyse Gregory, also a writer and for a year editor of *The Dial*, he decided to return to England and his old home, a small house situated above the chalk cliffs over the sea in Chydyok, Chaldon Herring, Dorsetshire. Living in the adjoining house were his two

maiden sisters, Kate and Gertrude Powys, and in the town of Dorchester three or four miles away, his other famous brother, Theodore, and his wife.

At last he wrote: 'I often feel inclined to make a dash for Switzerland. I do not like having to lie, lie, lie, like a lion with porcupine quills in my paws. I wish I could live all the years I spent in New York over again! I would prefer a desperate remedy to "Jack Spry, neither live nor die," And yet my mind remains vigorous and the force of life in me unabated.'

Later he wrote from Davos Platz: 'Venus was in the sky and looked wonderful as we came up the mountain, shining over the tops of very slender snow-covered firs. I looked with wonder at the mountaintops as the sun went down. The same, the same as I used to see it when I first got here as a young man. People talk of Platonic eternities but I understand well what the patriarch Jacob meant when he declared that his blessing would last as long as the eternal hills. There is surely a material eternity – the same all the time I was in Africa – it was shining so when I read an article to Sibley and he accepted it for *The Dial* – and all these dozen and a half years when I have been sick.'

On one of my concert tours I stopped off to visit him. I had never happened to meet his wife, Alyse Gregory, and this was an amazing encounter to have happened for the first time in a railroad station at Davos Platz. I am right there again – overwrought with excitement and the charm of her presence. She spoke words as from an inner consciousness, talking immediately of the weirdness, the wildness, the wonder of meeting there, for the first time, in that vast snow-covered hugeness of a winter day, surrounded by forests and high ranges of the Alps. This all might have ended in a few minutes, for while motoring up a winding road in deep snow to the sanatorium above, our reckless driver almost ran his car over the edge – horrible experience. In a second I saw the whole account, in a newspaper, of our death.

But arrive we did at last and I found myself in a so familiar-looking surrounding that I turned to ask Alyse where I had seen that stark long building before, the scattered chalets about us. It was, of course, in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.

Llewelyn met us – so frail but still able to walk about. Alyse and I talked late into the night in my bedroom, she so brilliantly and out of another world, far from her present existence. A full moon was shining in my window.

Switzerland was as if one were suddenly transported to another planet swept bare of all unnecessary conveniences as well as many of the worldly inconveniences of living. One used what there was just to live by. For safety's sake alone the spikes were strong and sharp on shoes and staff, to keep one on the path from some instant death below. The food was elementally pure: goat's cheese, homemade bread, and wild strawberry jam. I missed strong Paris coffee, however, and seasoning accents on our food.

For some, there was life in that transparent, glasslike air. For me, it would have

meant less than that – a kind of decalcomania of shadow and white edges of moon and stars too sharp. Some were exhilarated in these contrasts. Llewelyn loved his great mountains and it was because of this and a long walk he had taken, drawn higher and higher, that this, his last illness, was brought about. He wrote from Davos Platz: 'Oh! I have been disappointed by this relapse. It was caused, I think, by my infatuate walks of last summer. I will show you the top frame of glass of the window. I can see a little square of an Alp with snow turned to gold at sunset.' I came once more and brought my two children, Jeanne and Michael, to meet him and his wife.

In one corner of his chalet room was a great tiled stove, his only source of heat. A window was always kept wide open to a row of snow-covered mountains he never tired of watching day and night. He was sitting in bed wrapped in a beautiful Scottish plaid shawl. It is not the slightest exaggeration to say that Michelangelo's Moses could be an identical portrait of Llewelyn Powys – the great shock of thick hair over his low brow, his deep-set blue eyes, the curling beard over his chest, left long because of his weakened condition.

As I entered, he pointed to a translation of Homer beside him and asked me, please, to read him a few lines from the open book. This broke the stillness of that room with its sweep of comfortless icy air.

We felt sad after a day or two to leave him and his wife. Never have I seen greater selfless devotion than hers – that brilliant woman, shut off from the intellectual world she had known so well. When Marianne Moore was travelling in England with friends I hoped she might see her friend and ours in Devon. It was a marvel that she did. I received a letter from her and one from Alyse, both written the same day of their meeting.

The Society's Publications for 1999

Volume IX of *The Powys Journal* will be ready for issue in August. Those attending the Conference at Kingston Maurward will be given their copies, provided, of course, that they have paid their subscriptions (reminders are enclosed for those who haven't); the rest will get theirs by post soon afterwards. As usual, the *Journal* contains a very interesting collection of articles and reviews, including several talks to the Society at last year's Conference.

Special publication for 1999: Talking Book

Much effort has gone into our special publication for the year, a double cassette audio-book of studio-recorded excerpts from John Cowper Powys, Llewelyn, and Theodore, entitled THE POWYS BROTHERS. The readers are Oliver

Marlow Wilkinson (JCP), Freddie Jones (TFP), and Christopher Kent (LP). The selection was made by Oliver and Chris Wilkinson; Chris also supervised the production work. The tapes run for more than 3 hours.

Unlike our previous tapes, this production has been carried out to the highest professional standards technically and it has a beautiful cover with full explanatory text, designed by Bev Craven. The music is by William Powys, great-grandson of TFP. We are relying on this publication to help to spread the word(s) to a wider audience: 600 copies have been produced.

Talking Book: Special offer

The price in the shops will be £9.99. Our basic charge is £8.50, but shops have to charge VAT in addition to the basic charge. In our publication list the price will be £9 to include p&p, but if you use the order form on the enclosed colourful leaflet you can have as many copies as you like sent to you for only £8.50 each. If you are coming to the Conference please send only £8 for each copy and we will bring them to Dorchester for you.

So, you can save a pound on our list price and almost £2 on the shop price.

(*Members abroad who would like their copies sent by air should add £1 per copy.*)

Buy now and save! Buy for your friends, buy for Christmas.

Stephen Powys Marks

Reviews

Powys (certainly translations of the works of John Cowper and Llewelyn) has for years past been available in France to a much greater extent than in England. I am grateful to Jacqueline Peltier for making the following available to us. Ed.

Llewelyn Powys' Hymn to Love, an 'imaginary autobiography' upheld by a sumptuous style L'AMOUR, LA MORT, by Llewelyn Powys, translated by Patrick Reumaux, Ed. Phébus.

In the midst of the talented Powys tribe, of whom seven members were in close flirtation with literature, Llewelyn is one of the three who made his name illustrious for posterity, with Theodore Francis and above all the great John Cowper, the masterly and disconcerting author of *Les Enchantements de Glastonbury*. Llewelyn, the youngest of the three, was born in 1884; at the age of 25 he caught tuberculosis and from then on he lived with 'this graveyard cough', until his death in 1939. From this stormy co-habitation, this battle against illness, his fever bouts, his temporary remissions, from all this Llewelyn made a book, an enchantment: *Peau pour peau* (1926), published eight years ago in a series which

has since disappeared, 'Terre Etrangère', but which was at that time edited by Patrick Reumaux.

Today it is to the same Patrick Reumaux that we owe the beautiful translation of *Love and Death*, subtitled 'an imaginary autobiography' by its author. By this let us understand that it would assuredly be possible to decipher in this sensitive and sensual narrative, upheld from beginning to end by sumptuous prose, the reflection of experience undergone by the gentle Llewelyn, but transcended by imagination and command of language. The writer is describing himself, during an acute crisis of consumption, bedridden, spitting blood, and it is only by reminiscing an idyll from his youth that he can forget the pain and oncoming death.

From this intensely throbbing amorous episode, Llewelyn Powys engenders an ardent and disillusioned hymn to sensuality, to youth – a hymn coloured with anti-religiosity which can be scathing, as though he had to settle some account with an education of extreme inflexibility. It is also a homage to the inexhaustible luxuriance of the English countryside, as well as to its poets, from whom this magic text offers quotes in abundance.

Nathalie Crom
(translated by Jacqueline Peltier)

Chairman's Report

Once again, the Society has had a busy, productive and immensely enjoyable year. Sometimes we tend to think of the more regular parts of our work as 'routine', but such a word, with its overtones of dull necessity and dutiful exertion, could hardly be used to describe the Society's *Newsletter* and *Journal*. For many members, these publications *are* The Powys Society.

Volume VIII of *The Powys Journal* was issued in August 1998 and was, at 248 pages, our most substantial to date. It included further examples of the kind of penetrating and illuminating critical studies of the three of the main writer brothers that we have come to expect, as well as an invaluable reference guide by the late Robert Kunkel to the names used in *Porius* and a little-known science fiction story by Gamel Woolsey. Hardly a dull or narrow publication.

Volume IX is now almost complete and I can confidently predict that it will live up to expectations. Sadly, however, it will be the last issue to be edited solely by John Williams, although we hope to be able to persuade him to continue working for the *Journal* on an advisory basis. John has been an outstanding editor and has developed the *Journal* in subtle and important ways whilst maintaining the high standards set by his predecessors. Looking back now over the last eight issues of

the *Journal* it is amazing to think that some people actually doubted the wisdom of embarking on such a venture. Now it is as if it had always been there, an essential pillar of the Society's work.

Few societies of our size can boast of anything as impressive as the *Journal*, but newsletters of one sort or another are more common: experience has shown, however, that they rarely rival our own. Once again, John Batten has brought out three issues full of news, information, essays, reviews and archive material. Of particular interest has been the re-publication in issues 35 and 36 of the original newspaper accounts of what has become known as The Llewelyn Libel Trial, which took place in January 1934. We are grateful to John and all of his contributors for their continued efforts on our behalf. Our Society would certainly be a less interesting organisation without them.

In addition to our regular publications, the preservation and development of The Powys Society Collection, housed at the Dorset County Museum, is one of our central activities. Again, this has been a year of substantial advances, thanks to the work of our curator, Morine Krissdóttir. A detailed progress report appears elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter*, but I must refer in particular to the successful completion of the first part of our microfilming programme, which has been focused on our T. F. Powys manuscripts. This is a great achievement and will mean that when the necessary hardware is in place, the material will become available to researchers.

Our collection is constantly growing, both in size and, as more becomes available for study, in importance. This is an enormous source of pride to the Society, but equipping and running such a collection is expensive. The Society has committed itself to funding the collection, but its resources are inevitably inadequate to meet the proper demands of such an enterprise. Therefore, we have submitted a substantial bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable the collection to develop as it should. The bid was written by Bruce Madge of the British Library and we are very grateful for his efforts on behalf of the Society. It is an excellent bid and deserves to succeed, but these things are never certain. We hope to be able to report progress on the bid at this year's Conference.

At the beginning of May this year, Chris Gostick led a party of Powysians to sample the literary delights of East Anglia. A good, but exhausting, time was had by all exploring such places as Northwold, and members very much enjoyed listening to the lectures and readings by Stephen Powys Marks and Glen Cavaliero, as well as getting out into the countryside. Chris reports that the venture was so well received that he hopes to run a similar event next year. Our thanks to all who made the event such as success.

Last year we were delighted to publish *The Dorset Year* at our annual conference. It seemed then that we would probably never be able to match that event for importance or excitement, but I am pleased to be able to announce that this year we will be publishing our first professionally recorded audio book, *The Powys*

Brothers. This twin-cassette collection contains readings from the works of John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn lasting just over three hours. It is yet another fine achievement for the Society and I must express my thanks to all of those who were involved. I would particularly like to thank Christopher Wilkinson for working with his father Oliver in selecting the material and then for directing and producing the final recordings. The project would have been nothing without the way in which our three readers, Oliver Wilkinson, Christopher Kent and Freddie Jones, gave their time and skill so generously. Bev Craven not only produced the remarkable cover design, but also made all of the necessary business arrangements, and it is to Bev that we owe the fact that the project was completed more than a month ahead of schedule and considerably within our original budget. Finally, I must thank the copyright holders who gave their support to the project. *The Powys Brothers* is, as far as we are aware, the first professionally produced recording of the works of the three brothers to be commercially available and I would urge members to buy copies not only for themselves, but also for their families and friends. Another way in which members can support the Society's publication programme is by requesting our publications, including the audio book, at their local libraries. That will have the added benefit of bringing the material into circulation within the library service and will make it available to a wider public.

Sadly, the Society has lost three deeply admired and respected friends this year in James Dawson, Professor Percy Smith and Dame Iris Murdoch. They will all be missed, both as individuals and as supporters of the Society.

Penguin Books have decided to publish three of John Cowper's novels. A new edition of *A Glastonbury Romance* is due to appear in July of this year, followed by *Weymouth Sands* in March 2000. Both of these novels will appear as part of Penguin's standard fiction list, but in May 2000 *Wolf Solent* will be re-issued as part of the Twentieth Century Classics series with a new introduction by A. N. Wilson. Simon Winder of Penguin Books has informed me that negotiations are in progress and that he hopes to be able to issue further titles by John Cowper and Theodore in due course.

On a smaller scale, Cecil Woolf has now launched his Powys Heritage series, under the general editorship of Anthony Head. As a Society we have already expressed our support for this project and we are grateful to Cecil Woolf for publishing information about the Society inside each of the booklets.

Rumours about film projects abound, but there is no firm news as yet. However, we do know that a team of eminent producers at the BBC is currently working on a documentary about John Cowper Powys and we hope to be able to report further progress on this important project in a future issue of the *Newsletter*.

So, an exciting year for all of us, and certainly not routine!

Paul Roberts

Treasurer's Report for 1998

The accounts for 1998 are set out on the next two pages; they have been approved by the Society's Auditor, Stephen Allen. Once again I am most grateful to him for his advice and his work.

Our paid-up membership was 302, only a little short of last year's record of 306. 173 subscriptions were paid by standing order, and over 50 were under covenant. The total subscription income, including tax refunds due, amounted to £4,431 (£4,614); this represents 45% of our total income of £9,693, excluding advance payments for *The Dorset Year* carried over from 1997. Net income from our own publications was £2,116, substantially higher than last year (£823) due to the sale of 132 copies of *The Dorset Year* in addition to 167 copies subscribed for. Donations (£2,176) were also much higher than last year (£324) because we were able to sell very satisfactorily to members of the Society most of the Powys books which Mrs Averil Sykes, a former member, had given the Society (net proceeds £1,884). Part of the donations, £778, including the value of Committee travel expenses not claimed (£327) was transferred to the Wilson Knight benefactors' fund. This year we made a small loss on the Conference. We received the second instalment (£561) of a grant from the British Library for conservation work being carried out on our collection.

As in previous years the largest part of our expenditure has gone on our regular publications, *The Powys Journal* and three issues of the *Newsletter*; the net cost of producing these, including distribution but excluding copies of the *Journal* taken into stock, was £4,078 (£3,502). This represents 92% of our subscription income, just over our target of 90%. Our total expenditure on publication work, comprising *The Powys Journal*, *The Dorset Year*, the *Newsletter*, and preparatory work on the Talking Book project, was £9,570 (£4,796). *The Dorset Year* alone involved a very substantial amount of money in production and initial distribution costs spread over two years, £7,373, but advance subscriptions in 1997 and further sales in 1998 outweighed these costs, and we still have copies for sale.

We had an excess of income over expenditure of £1,218 (£2,871), but as in previous years the value of stock pre-dating the year has been written down by £508 (£555); the resulting excess of income less writing down, £710 (£2,313), has been added to our General Fund. Our net worth at the end of the year was £10,004 (£9,295) of which £3,310 (£2,542) was represented by the value of stock. There has therefore been an increase in our net worth of £709 (£2,314) but a very slight decrease in our cash resources of £59 (£2,562 increase). Thus the Society's finances were, once again, in very good health at the end of 1998, but I should point out that the Society holds funds only in order to carry out its purposes: accumulation of itself is not one of these. We are in a good position, therefore, to continue with the conservation of the collection and other activities.

Stephen Powys Marks

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT OF THE POWYS SOCIETY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 1998

Income [1]			£	£	*1997*
subscriptions	for 1998 (302) [2]		4,226.33		
	tax refund due on covenants, 1998		205.00		
	for 1997 paid in 1998 (0)		–	4,431.33	*4,614*
donations [3]	Conference book sale (donated books)		181.00		
	sale of Mrs Sykes's books (net) [4]		1,883.53		
	other		111.80	2,176.33	*324*
publication sales (excluding postage)	stock publications [5]	3,412.06			
	less cost of publications sold	1,425.00	1,987.06		
	commission on other publishers' books		128.67		
	net income		2,115.73	2,115.73	*823*
The Dorset Year, advance receipts, 1997: £3,788.45 *less* refund £29 [6]				3,759.45	*1,378*
Conference	fees received		4,085.67		
	expenses		4,288.54		
	deficit (4.7%; 1997: *surplus*)		–202.87	–202.87	*780*
grant from British Library for conservation work (2nd instalment)				561.00	*561*
fee for use of collection				100.00	–
interest on bank accounts (paid gross)				511.29	*365*
				£ 13,452.26	£ *8,845*

Expenditure [1]		£	£	*1997*
The Powys Journal VIII (1997),[7] cost of members' (311), complimentary and copyright copies [8]		1,791.49		
cost of distribution		343.49	2,134.98	*1,855*
The Powys Journal VI, cost of supplying to late subscribers			–	*49*
Newsletters (3), including cost of distribution (£432.87) [8]			1,942.92	*1,647*
Powys Checklist, complimentary copies to new members			7.00	*7*
Powys Collection, including work done with BL grant [9]			2,847.08	–
The Dorset Year, part cost of advance and complimentary copies [6]			3,788.45	*1,378*
The Dorset Year, honoraria to editors and designers			311.00	–
Talking Book (in progress) (1997: *The Powys Clowns)*			436.62	*28*
Montacute Vicarage watercolour, laser copies			–	*10*
stationery, leaflets, letterheading			149.51	*281*
constitution, list of members			–	*171*
transport of G. M. Powys picture from USA			–	*30*
bank charge			1.50	–
officers' expenses (£283.35) and committee travel (£331.85) [3]			615.20	*518*
	1997		12,234.26	*5,974*
excess of income over expenditure	*2,871*	1,218.00	1,218.00	*2,871*
less writing down of stock [10]	–555	–508.39	£ 13,452.26	£ *8,845*
excess of income *less* writing down of stock *carried to Statement of Funds*	*2,313*	709.61		

Auditor's Report to the Members of the Powys Society

I have audited the financial statements in accordance with approved Auditing Standards. In my opinion the financial statements give a true and fair view of the charity's affairs at 31st December 1998 and of the surplus for the year then ended and comply with the Companies Act 1985.

J. S. Allen, Chartered Accountant, 5th May 1999

STATEMENT OF FUNDS OF THE POWYS SOCIETY

I *General fund* [11]	£	£	*1997*
funds at January 1st 1998		**5,177.05**	*3,613*
excess of income over expenditure *less* writing down of stock		**709.61**	*2,313*
less part of donations transferred to Wilson Knight benefactors' fund [12]		**–778.41**	*–749*
funds at December 31st 1998		**£ 5,108.25**	*5,177*
represented by:			
stock of *The Powys Journal, The Powys Review,* and books at cost at January 1st 1998		**2,541.94**	*2,790*
add cost of stock publications, including *The Powys Journal* VIII surplus to distribution [13]		**2,707.97**	*576*
less cost of publications sold	1,425.00		
complimentary *Checklist* to new members	7.00		
writing down of stock [10]	508.39	**–1,940.39**	*–824*
value of stock at December 31st 1998		**3,309.52**	*2,542*
cash at bank at December 31st 1998 [14]		**2,038.62**	*7,082*
sums due to the Society [15]		**409.61**	*376*
		5,757.75	*10,000*
less subscriptions received in advance (40, + 3 for 2000; 1997, 30)		**–649.50**	*–430*
provision for expenditure in 1998 on *The Dorset Year* [6]		–	–3,788
creditors			*–605*
		£ 5,108.25	*£ 5,177*

II *The Wilson Knight benefactors' fund (WK)* [11, 16]	£	*1,996*
funds at January 1st 1998	**4,117.77**	*3,369*
transfer from General fund [12]	**778.41**	*749*
funds at December 31st 1998	**£ 4,896.18**	*£ 4,118*
represented by cash in deposit account	**£ 4,896.18**	*£ 4,118*

NOTES

1 Cash turnover: total receipts, £16,408.35; total payments, £20,673.46, of which £2,707.97, relating to the cost of publications (*see* note 13), is carried forward in the General fund. Other adjustments, relating to cost of publications sold etc., subscriptions paid in advance, and sums owing to or owed by the Society, give excess of *Income* over *Expenditure* for the year (before writing down of stock) of £1,218.00 (1997: £2,871), all as shown in the accounts.

2 This figure comprises 272 (173 by standing order) paid in 1998 (£3,796.83) and 30 paid in advance in 1997 (£429.50).

3 In addition, committee travel costs of £327.16 not claimed, regarded as donations + £2,176.33 shown = £2,503.49.

4 Gross receipts from sale of 140 books: £2,075.46; *less* postage £101.63, *less* booklet £90.30 = £1883.53 net.

5 This includes *The Dorset Year* (128 ordinaries, 4 specials, £2,384) and *Newsletters* (£20.75).

6 *The Dorset Year* Total production cost: £6,679.48 (£1,378.03 in 1997, £5,301.45 in 1998). Advance receipts in 1997 for supply of 167 copies (128 ord., 39 specials): £5,166.48. Distribution costs of these and 49 complimentaries: £694.97. Carried forward in 1997 in General fund as provision for expenditure in 1998: £3,788.45 (£5,166.48 less £1,378.03).
Production and distribution costs £7,374.45 (£6,679.48 + £694.97) *less* advance receipts £5,166.48 = £2,207.97, taken as cost of remaining stock (243 ordinaries, 10 specials) before further sales in 1998 (*see* note 5). Net realisable value of stock: more than £4,500. Value of remaining stock taken as lower of cost and net realisable value: £2,207.97.

7 Gross cost £2,321.49, *less* cost of copies taken into stock at run-on cost £500 = £1,821.49, *less* £30 grant = £1,791.49.

8 Total net cost of producing and supplying *The Powys Journal* VIII (£2,134.98) & 3 *Newletters* (£1,942.92): £4,077.90 = 92% of 1998 subscriptions, including tax refund due for 1998 (1997: 77.9%).

9 Powys Coll.: work with BL grant (£2,078.26) + curatorial budget (£333.41) + work to DCM (£435.41) = £2,847.08.

10 This is arrived at by writing down the value of stock at January 1st 1998 by 20%; new stock in 1998 is not affected.

11 General fund £5,108.25 + WK £4,896.18 = **Society's net worth at December 31st 1998, £10,004.43** (1997: £9,295).

12 Donations and unclaimed expenses (£2,503.49, *see* note 3), *less* cost of conservation works not covered by BL grant (£2,847.08 (note 9) *less* £1,122 grant = £1,725.08) = £778.41. In 1997, the transfer to WK was shown as expenditure; this is now shown under Statement of Funds; 1997 comparison figures have been adjusted accordingly.

13 Undistributed copies of *The Powys Journal* VIII, £500; *The Dorset Year*, remainder at £2,207.97 (*see* note 6).

14 Current account £226.90 + deposit account £6,707.90 = £6,934.80, *less* WK £4,896.18 = £2,038.62.

15 Tax refunds due: for 1997, £204.61; for 1998, £205.

16 All interest has been retained in the General fund.

Stephen Powys Marks, Treasurer

Curator's Report

In every *Newsletter*, there is a column, 'Notes from the Collection', intended to keep members up to date with activities connected with the Powys Collection. However, to fulfil our responsibilities to the Charity Commission, a report for the financial year of 1998 has been requested.

A major achievement was the completion of the re-housing of the valuable and fragile manuscripts, letters and typescripts of T. F. Powys which we have in our Feather Gift and Bissell Gift. This was made possible by a British Library Conservation Grant. As well as putting this material into suitable archival sleeves, folders and boxes, all the material has been microfilmed so that handling of the originals can be kept to a minimum. As well as the above material, T.F. books in the Collection have now been put on computer. Thanks to the firm support and commitment to the Collection by The Powys Society's executive Committee, the Curator is now beginning the process of re-housing and inventorying the J. C. Powys material.

Space remains a very difficult problem, but has been eased by the help of volunteers who built a small study/gallery space adjacent to the room where the main collection is kept.

The Collection received a number of gifts in 1998: a drawing of Valentine Ackland by Betty Muntz (donated by Dr Peter Judd); nine photographs (four of Llewelyn) taken by H. E. Randerson in 1936; a photocopy of the diary of Alyse Gregory donated by Judith Stinton; a valuable book from Professor Larry Mitchell; one of JCP's sticks donated by Dr Raymond Garlick. The Curator looks forward to a trip to Wales to retrieve it now that spring has arrived. As always, the Society is very grateful for any such gifts to add to the Collection.

Finally, the Committee asked Bruce Madge to undertake to put together a Lottery bid for the Collection with the assistance of the secretary and the curator. The application has now gone in and we await developments.

Morine Krissdóttir

A sketch by Littleton Powys of Northwold Rectory, half-remembered, on an envelope addressed to Miss H. C. Johnson ('Aunt Etta') at Northwold Rectory and postmarked March 1891.