

Editorial

An anthology of contributions from members old and new, including welcome first-timers. Conference notes, some of which may be extended in the next *Journal*. Various views of the Llangollen weekend (happy as ever) with excursions to Blaenau Ffestiniog (by charabanc) and the Corwen hill (on foot), also first-hand reminiscences by a neighbour at Cae Coed, Corwen. Back in Dorset, the Llewelyn walk was exceptionally sunny and festive. Llewelyn essays in French; Powys nursery days in Shirley, Derbyshire; productions from older children in Stephen Marks's family collection; JCP challenging a new reader with *Religion of a Sceptic* (1925) – Tim Hyman's subject at our December meeting; and more on Dorothy Cheston by Susan Rands. Thanks to all.

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Conference Notes

This year's talks (summaries below), apart from the last on Llewelyn and religion, approached the Powyses chiefly from peripheral angles, all interesting in different ways. Gamel Woolsey stands at one side of the Powys stage with Alyse Gregory at the other; early 20th century interest in Arthurian mythology compares JCP with other writers of his time; and JCP's hopes for his life-philosophy as a helpful food for hungry readers was demonstrated by a devotee for whom he is an inspiring presence. We ended with personal memories from David Jones, a Powys neighbour in Cae Coed, Corwen.

The excursion to Blaenau Ffestiniog gave a reality to the landscape around JCP's last home and his view from it 'as on his couch he lay' (see CT on p.19).

On Saturday evening, readings with different voices from Homer and the Aether, JCP's witty old-age retelling of The Iliad (1959) was greatly enjoyed by those taking part and it is hoped this was conveyed to the audience. John Hodgson was a decided Homer with Kate K as his instructress the Aether; Richard Graves and Tim Hyman took on the elder statesmen, Kevin Taylor a tricky Achilles, with Janice Gregory, Susan Huxtable-Selly, Chris Michaelides, Jacqueline Peltier, Dawn Collins, Sonia Lewis and Charles Lock as various men and women human and divine. Many thanks to all, organisers and participants.

KK

Friday 18th August, 8.30 pm

David Goodway: Gerald Brenan: Bloomsbury, Gamel Woolsey and Spain

Introduced by John Hodgson, who reminded us that David Goodway goes back to the start of the Powys Society in the late 1960s. He is an anarchist and historian of the Left: His *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (2006) has a chapter on JCP.

A helpful factual account of two unusual people and their creative response to their adopted country. DG outlined Brenan's (1894-1987) connections both in England with members of 'Bloomsbury' high culture (who visited him in Spain), and with Spanish cultural, political and agrarian life (he settled in a village near Granada in 1920, later moving near Malaga), resulting in his two best-known books, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (1943) and *Literature of the Spanish People* (1951).

Gamel Woolsey (1895-1968), often seen as a fairylike figure from her association and shared fantasies with Llewelyn Powys, appears in a more active role as Brenan's typist and author in her own right (her *One Way of Love* (1931) was suppressed); she translated Spanish writers (Perez Galdós, the Spanish Dickens)

and wrote two books about the Civil War, sharing Brennan's radical-liberal ideals and his sympathy with the anarchists they met in Spain.

Brenan admired Llewelyn and grew to like him; Llewelyn included portraits of Gamel and Brennan in *Love and Death*. Gerald Brennan wrote many books on Spain. He always wanted to write novels, and published several under assumed names (Phyllis and JCP were reading *Jack Robinson* by 'George Beaton' in 1933); most were unsuccessful or destroyed by him, but his historical books were written with a novelist's skill. He was Anglo-Irish, travelled East as a young man, a hero in WW1. His self-analytical poems were eventually published in 1978.

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Saturday 19th August, 9.30 am

David Stimpson: *John Cowper Powys in America – a Personal View*
Introduced by Chris Thomas

David Stimpson, like others (including Jeff Kwintner, to our great benefit) has found in JCP a personal inspiration, life-guide and companion, to the extent of 'seeing' the great man, with Phyllis, as co-existent with his own life – sitting in the audience, as it were. We can see this as a tribute to the exceptionally detailed private insights provided by JCP's diaries and letters, as well as in the novels and 'philosophical' books (and of course *Autobiography*), that enable us to visualise him so clearly, in upstate New York and in his Welsh homes. We can see how he was, or is, not just what he says.

DS focused on the theme of what he called JCP's 'awakening' in America which he related to his own spiritual and intellectual journey as an American. America, DS feels, as a richly diverse territory, unencumbered for JCP by family and the English class system, must have helped to liberate his psychic energy and heightened his awareness of the magic of life, encouraging his teaching of secular spirituality and 'pan-psychicism' (consciousness in everything). His new life with Phyllis Playter was an inspiration. Whitman, arch-American, was his ally as was English Wordsworth (who stayed in the Hand Hotel).

DS thinks of JCP as a spiritual psychologist (a modern example is Steve Taylor of Birmingham). JCP's practical ideas about self-sufficiency, his advocacy of the simple life, of being unaffected by praise or blame or social status, and his love of solitude, all lead to his central ideal, the ability to calm your mind, to promote kindness and to create one's own 'religion'. (Blake: *I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's.*)

DS regrets that Powys is not more widely known in America now, despite widespread interest in spiritual states. For himself, he singles out *A Philosophy of Solitude* and *The Art of Happiness* as aids to calmness; also, (remembering JCP's own insistence that his novels were vehicles for his philosophy) key passages such as the well-known end to *Wolf Solent*, the vision of the buttercup field.

A salute to JCP and Phyllis seated at the back of the hall put things in perspective. JCP wrote for personal contact, and we need readers with emotional connection as well as history and interpretation.

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Saturday 19th August, 11.15 am

Grevel Lindop: *Saving Mid-Century Britain: Arthurian themes in the work of John Cowper Powys and Charles Williams*

Introduced by David Goodway

This was a densely packed and revealing talk, on how two different imaginations worked on the same mythical material: for Williams God-centred, for Powys a multifarious myth.

GL reminded us that the 'Matter of Britain' is still alive and well: Merlin perhaps more than King Arthur (thanks to TV serials) but Arthurian sites are still locally rooted (as in Ireland).

Writers of the 1930s and after, David Jones (the poet-painter), C.S. Lewis, T.H. White among others, all re-interpret Arthurian themes, as do Charles Williams's novels and poems, and JCP in *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius*, with the condition of Britain in WW2 woven in. There are many stories of the Grail, easily detached from Arthur himself. They are myths, according to Williams, not legends.

Williams's *War in Heaven* deals with factions and attitudes to the discovery of the Holy Grail, both evil and romantic, of power and destruction, involving Prester John (the legendary isolated Christian) and a boy-familiar spirit, all relating to God and the Way, with stream-of consciousness *à la* Woolf.

JCP's *A Glastonbury Romance*, published two years after CW's book, is profoundly different. *AGR* is elusive, unlocated, unverbaised, unsystematic, dealing with other levels much older than Arthur, with hints of alternative consciousness, described with disarming naturalism.

The Grail takes different guises. For Owen Evens, 'a crack in the laws of nature' (was there something fracturing in the air in 1933 – nazism?) Its symbols – cauldron, fish – are optional. Both authors differ from the medieval versions

of it. For CW it is a nucleus of eternity. CW's poems are dense with symbols: alchemy, the kabbala, Age of Aquarius, Christian transposed suffering. Also the War (even the name of General MacArthur!). JCP is intent on the synthesis of different elements that make up Britain, from domestic to visionary – a richly human myth.

Both CW and JCP translate Taliesin. Both are portraits, externalised elements of themselves. They show how the myths were still bubbling in the 20th-century cauldron, and continue to fascinate.

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Sunday 20th August, 9.30 am

Patrick Quigley: *The Making of a Pagan: Llewelyn Powys and Palestine*
Introduced by Kate Kavanagh

Originally titled 'The Making of a *Prophet*', this was a revealing and coherent talk, chronicling the change in LIP's public image at the time of the journey to Palestine in October 1928, from earlier days in America as worldly-wise commentator on social life, tweed-suited with flower in buttonhole, to the Sage of Dorset and Switzerland with beard, cloak, staff and Ankh. This change was not only owing to his illness but to his development as a public atheist, his 'settling of accounts with Christianity' (not entirely carried through in sentiment or language – 'I who have lived for 20 years only by the grace of God ...' – 'I cannot see how an atheist can have written this', comments PQ).

The tone of LIP's writing echoes this development with the 'Palestine trilogy', from the poetically imagined Old Testament in *Cradle of God* (1929) to his increasing hostility to organised religion in *The Pathetic Fallacy* (1930). Always, though, with sympathetic understanding of the individuals involved, and the spirit of his parents hovers – his father's morning prayers at Montacute vicarage, his mother returning from a church meeting ...

A Pagan's Pilgrimage (1931) was commissioned as a travel book, hoping to build on the success of the African essays. It says little about modern Palestine and was written from notes. Llewelyn and Alyse visited the traditional sites but avoided towns – his Christ was a countryman like himself. They sat on sunny hillsides and left their lodgings by night to look at stars. However, it was hot, and there were several interruptions from illness.

As Peter Foss has said, LIP can be quoted against himself on almost every subject. His rational self teases his poetic self. Henceforth, poetry was his religion. An

inveterate mythologiser, at Galilee he communes with earth and water that could have passed through the hands of Christ.

KK

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Sunday 20th August, 12 noon

David Jones: *Memories of JCP and Phyllis Playter*

Introduced by Pat Quigley

Introducing David Jones, Pat Quigley said it was a rare privilege to meet someone who had known JCP personally. On a visit to Llangollen in 2011 Pat met David for the first time. We are indebted to David as he was responsible for arranging the erection of a plaque dedicated to the memory of JCP which is attached to the wall outside the Information Centre in Corwen.

David and his family were neighbours of JCP at Cae Coed in Corwen in the 1940s and early 1950s. David's father, John Evan Jones, was a monumental mason. He made the gravestone for JCP's dog, The Black, still in their garden. David was born in 1939 and has strong memories of both JCP and Phyllis. David later took up a career in nursing and went to London for training. JCP wrote to him (a copy of one of his letters is reproduced in this issue). JCP also inscribed books for David and his grandparents. The inscription in Welsh in a book, *Yn Y Wlad* (In the Country) by Owen Edwards, presented to David's grandparents Mr and Mrs Edwardes on the occasion of their wedding anniversary in 1944, is by 'Mr and Mrs Powys'. In 1982 Francis Powys presented David with JCP's personal copy of the first edition of *Porius* – no.1 of the limited edition of 200 copies – which is inscribed 'To JCP from Eric Harvey' (i.e. managing director of his publishers Macdonald) dated 21 April 1954.

David described his memories of JCP and Phyllis and his growing up in Corwen in the 1940s and 1950s. Phyllis, always dressed in black, walked into Corwen on most days. Both JCP and Phyllis were well respected in Corwen and known as Mr and Mrs Powys. JCP loved the town and its people, he always wanted to know about everyone. He was generous: tramps often came to Cae Coed as they knew they would be well received by JCP. David often helped Phyllis and JCP, he did shopping and went to the Post Office for them, and took a cooked lunch to Phyllis. Phyllis often had meals on her own in the Owen Glendower hotel. He remembered JCP setting out for regular walks carrying a heavy stick. He didn't realise at the time how difficult circumstances were for JCP and Phyllis in Corwen, and said he thought they were well off financially. In later life, he helped Phyllis to deal with her accounts and was glad to learn that things were easier.

CT

*from l. to r. Chris Thomas,
David Goodway and
Grevel Lindop*



*Patrick Quigley with
David Jones*



David Stimpson

Transcription of letter from JCP to David Jones, 30th July 1959

1 Waterloo
Blaenau Ffestiniog
Merionethshire
North Wales
Thursday July 30th 1959

My dear David

Phyllis and I have so liked getting this letter from you and we are very interested in all you say. I am glad you brought in the exact date of your Birthday, *Monday July 27th* for tho' I remember such a lot of things about you when you were little I am very bad at remembering exact dates. No child since Miss Playter & I have lived together has left so many, O so many! happy memories in our minds as you. I've taken a fancy to a little Toddler of *about* two and a half I think whom I watch out of this window and always think of your Little Boy Blue who "blew his horn when the Sheep were in the meadow and the Cows in the Corn."

O my dear David how I do love your quoting that poem of Keats who after Wordsworth is far my favourite poet of modern times. I prefer him to Shelley, tho' I confess I find myself often repeating "O World, O Life, O Time, on whose last steps I climb"—

O my dear David, but I do and so does Phyllis, so greatly like that sentence of yours in this letter where you say that Autumn has an air of *Mysticism* and an air of *Suspense*. Where you have beaten me, my dear, is with your "calm of mind, all passion spent" for although I know those lines very well & love them I cannot for the life of me remember whether they are by Milton or Shakespeare and Phyllis also is not sure. She leans to thinking they are by Shakespeare whereas I lean to thinking they are by Milton but neither of us are sure. I keep repeating to myself when I think of Winter Milton's Nativity Poem "The Shepherds on the lawn or ere the break of dawn sat simply chatting in a rustic row – Full little thought they then that the mighty Pan had kindly come to live with them below—Perhaps their loves or else their Sheep was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep."

No in spite of Visitors I have just had a new book of mine *accepted* by Macdonalds but when it'll be published I have no idea. It is called "All or Nothing". They have paid me the advance Royalty for it – I have also got another book called "*you and me*" typed and ready. And *now* I am a *little way thro'* yet another entitled "*Two and Two*" but when this will be finished and typed I doubt if even Heaven knows!

My only surviving brother William E. Powys of Kenya East Africa arrived here yesterday – I *mean in this country* but I have not yet heard from my sister Katie Philippa, our Poetess, or my sister Lucy, the youngest of us all, whether he has arrived safely in Dorset where both those sisters live.

I've been reading aloud to Phyllis lately the Everyman edition of Chaucer – a splendidly edited book.

With our true love my dear
always your old J C Powys and his Phyllis Playter.

Thanks to Paul Cheshire for providing this transcription.

'O World ...' from Shelley's 'A Lament'.

JCP was right: 'And calm of mind, all passion spent' is the final line of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.

Conference DVDs, 2017

A set of four DVDs is available of talks from the 2017 Conference, containing:

Disc One

Grevel Lindop: 'Saving Mid-Century Britain: Arthurian Themes in the Work of John Cowper Powys and Charles Williams'. *Introduced by David Goodway. 62min.*

Disc Two

David Stimpson: 'John Cowper Powys in America – A Personal View'. *Introduced by Chris Thomas. 72min.*

Disc Three

Patrick Quigley: 'The Making of a Pagan – Llewelyn Powys and Palestine'. *Introduced by Kate Kavanagh. 57min.*

A dramatised reading of passages from JCP's *Homer and the Aether*, Part One. **62min.**

Disc Four

A dramatised reading of passages from JCP's *Homer and the Aether*, Part Two. **16min.**
David Goodway: 'Gerald Brenan: Bloomsbury, Gamel Woolsey and Spain'. *Introduced by John Hodgson. 78min.*

If you would like a copy please send a cheque for £8 to:
Raymond Cox, 4 Lulworth Close, Halesowen, B63 2UJ.
(Cheque to R.E. Cox, please, **not The Powys Society**.)

Information about the speakers may be found in the March 2017 Newsletter (No 90)
Copies of the Conference DVDs are deposited in the Powys Society collection.

Obituary

Roy Fisher (11 June 1930 - 21 March 2017)

A tribute by Charles Lock

The last volume of poetry published by Roy Fisher in his lifetime, *Slakki* (2016), is subtitled 'New and Neglected Poems'. Neglect had become his familiar, the very characteristic of his reputation. Never a name for household utterance, as Larkin or Hughes or Heaney, Roy Fisher's has made for an audible whisper and a lurking presence in English poetry over six decades. In *Slakki* is a note by Fisher 'on the nature of neglect': 'I describe my poems in sections two and three as neglected. I must emphasise that these poems have not been passed over or slighted by publishers, editors or reviewers: indeed my work always seems to me to have had as much attention as it deserved or was likely to get. The neglect has been entirely mine.' Not only the neglect of these poems, but of all the devices that would have drawn attention to them. As Michael Caines wrote in an obituary in the *Guardian* (26 May 2017), Fisher 'did everything wrong – from a careerist perspective.' Yet his work found admirers, and may be all the more powerful for not having been distracted or vitiated by any concessions to readers. Nor are any blandishments offered to critics for the exercise of cleverness. In this respect Fisher is not unlike the writer who had been important, even instrumental in shaping his sense of himself as a poet: John Cowper Powys, whose name is invoked in the preface to *A Furnace* (1986: among the densest and brightest of Fisher's works):

The poem is also a homage, from a temperament very different from his, to the profound, heterodox and consistent vision of John Cowper Powys, to whom I owe thanks for some words of exhortation that he gave me in my youth and in his old age.



On two occasions the Powys Society was honoured by Roy Fisher's presence: in 1986, when he gave a lecture at the conference held at the University of East Anglia, and in 2007 at Llangollen where he and Penelope Shuttle shared a memorable reading of their poems. The following year Fisher offered, for the *Powys Journal* to publish with his comments, the full texts of the long letter and shorter card that he had received from JCP in 1956 (*PJ* XVIII, 30-7). This has been reprinted in a collection of Fisher's essays, memoirs and tributes, *An Easily Bewildered Child: Occasional Prose 1963-2014* (Shearsman 2014), a most valuable guide to Fisher's sensibilities and occupations.

Among the new poems in *Slakki*, not one of those he'd neglected, is an elegy written by Fisher for himself, an elegy whose swinging exuberance and defiant wit – invoking jazz and the urban, his enduring modes and themes – rejoices in its certainty that posterity will bring many more admirers than those fortunate enough to have found him during his lifetime. Let this elegy be put about:

While There's Still Time

While there's still time to make dispositions
I want it put about that when I come back
it won't be, as you might have been supposing,
as a cat or a capybara. No: I shall return
in the form of a nut-brown silver-banded
bassoon. If I'm in the care
of a woman with good lungs and long smooth arms
so much the better. I'm certain she'll let nothing
stand in the way of her playing me
for a series of solo recitals on the tarmac triangle
at the crook of Kentish Road where the lorries
used to wait for the great gates of the Carriage Works
to open and let them through. Make no mistake:
my voice will be heard once again,
and as never before.

The Powys Society Annual General Meeting

The Hand Hotel Llangollen

August 20th, 2017

Present: Timothy Hyman (*Chairman*), David Goodway (*Vice-Chairman*), Chris Thomas (*Secretary*), Robin Hickey (*Treasurer*), Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter editor*), Louise de Bruin (*Conference organiser and publications manager*), Charles Lock (*ex-officio, editor Powys Journal*), John Hodgson, Dawn Collins, Jacqueline Peltier, Kevin Taylor – and some 35 members of the Powys Society

Apologies: Michael Kowalewski (*Collection Liaison Officer*)

Chairman welcomed members to the AGM and read an excerpt from *A Glastonbury Romance*, selecting one of the missing passages from Chapter 8, ‘Wookey Hole’, quoted by Paul Cheshire in his article, *A Glastonbury Romance: Cuts and Alterations to the UK Printed Texts 1932-1955*, published in the *Powys Journal*, Vol. XXVII, 2017.

Minutes of 2016 AGM

The minutes of the 2016 AGM, as published in *Newsletter* 89, November 2016, were approved.

Nomination of Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society Committee for 2017-2018

Nominations to the Powys Society committee as published in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017, were approved. The **Secretary** said that there was still one vacancy to be filled on the committee and called for nominations.

Richard Graves nominated **Kevin Taylor**. The nomination was seconded by **Louise de Bruin**. Kevin’s nomination was approved by members. Kevin agreed to serve as a member on the committee.

Chairman’s Report

The Chairman referred members to his annual report as published in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017, p.3.

Treasurer’s Report and presentation of annual accounts

The Treasurer thanked **Anna Rosic** for providing help and support in compiling accounts for the year ending 31 December 2016. The Treasurer said that the accounts had been successfully audited and approved by accountants Hills and Burgess, and referred members to publication of full accounts in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017, p.4. A surplus of £432.00 had been achieved during 2016 and the state of the Society’s

accounts are in good order. The Treasurer said that our records indicate that 122 members make payment of their membership fee by direct debit or standing order which is the most efficient way of maintaining annual membership and saves time and costs pursuing lapsed subscriptions.

Collection Liaison Officer's Report

The Secretary passed on apologies from Michael Kowalewski for absence and read out information about the Powys Society Collection. Secretary said that a copy of a Swedish translation of *Autobiography* made by JCP's correspondent and friend, Sven Erik Täckmark, (JCP's 'Erik the Red'), had been donated to the Society by Jacqueline Peltier, and has now been accepted for deposit in the Collection by Christine Fauch at Exeter University. Jacqueline Peltier said that Sven Erik Täckmark was a devoted admirer of JCP's works; he organised an exhibition of JCP books in Sweden in 1993 and had also translated *The Meaning of Culture* into Swedish. Jacqueline said that Sven did not manage to finish his translation before his death but this had been completed by a colleague, Mikael Nydhal, who subsequently found a publisher and presented a copy of the translation to Jacqueline.

Secretary said that the *Welsh Bible*, owned by JCP, which is frequently mentioned in his letters and diary, has also been donated to the Society by John Hughes, a retired Headmaster. The book, which is in very good physical condition, will be added to the Collection at Exeter University. This Bible includes many quotations in Welsh and a single quotation from Homer in Greek inscribed by JCP, as well as a dedication by Phyllis Playter. Secretary referred members to a summary of the gift and details of the inscriptions published in *Newsletter* 90, March 2017. Secretary said that the benefactor, John Hughes, was given the bible by the Welsh scholar, Iowerth C. Peate, another of JCP's published correspondents, who had received it as a gift from Phyllis after the death of JCP.

Secretary informed members that the inventory of the Collection has now been posted on the homepage of the Society's website and encouraged everyone to consult this very useful reference and research tool which is clearly organised, labelled and laid out. Secretary thanked Morine Krissdóttir for developing and revising the inventory of the Collection.

Secretary's Report

The total membership of the Society is now 242. Since the previous AGM in 2016 we have added 8 new members and 2 members were reinstated, but since August 2016 we have lost, overall, 22 members. Of these 2 members were deceased (Richard Burleigh and Roy Fisher). The remainder either actively resigned or were removed

from the membership list for non-response to letters and e-mails reminding them to renew their membership.

Outside UK, membership of the Society is evenly divided with around 35 members in Europe and 34 in USA and the rest of the world. Although there seems to be an identifiable downward trend in membership it is encouraging that we are still attracting new members through the website and through personal recommendation. There is strong interest in the Powyses from USA. However, there is more we can do to help increase membership. It is possible that new initiatives, such as engaging with readers on social media like Facebook, might stimulate new membership. I hope members will come forward with any suggestions to the committee.

Powys Symposium at Exeter University:

This all-day event, held on Thursday 15th June 2017, was very well organised by Christine Faunch and her staff in the Heritage Collections at Exeter University. The event was well attended by Exeter University staff and students as well as members of the Society. Members of Exeter University seemed to be especially interested in the possibilities for new research offered by the Powys Collection. Items from the Collection were displayed with great care and generated a lot of attention.

Michael Kowalewski gave an introductory talk, summarised contents of Collection and provided information about the Powyses for new readers. Other talks were on **TFP and Jack Clemo** by **Luke Thompson**, who teaches at Falmouth University; on **Sylvia Townsend Warner** by **Teresa Sanders**, a Ph.D candidate at Exeter, and on *Weymouth Sands* by **Chris Campbell**, senior lecturer at Exeter University, who has accepted an invitation to speak at the Powys Society Conference in 2019.

Christine Faunch and her team were thanked for their hard work organising the Symposium. The success of the event suggests the Society has fulfilled the aim of moving the Collection to a professional archives centre and therefore making the contents more widely available.

Renewal of Copyright Agreement:

John Powys, copyright owner of the estate of JCP, and his literary agent, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, were thanked for renewing the Agreement that allows the Powys Society free use of copyright material without seeking further permission for another 25 years beginning 1 September, 2019. This was reported in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017, p.2.

JSTOR:

An Agreement has been signed with JSTOR which enables all current and back

issues of the *Powys Journal* to be transferred to an on-line digital platform. The product will become live in about two years' time in the new Modern Literature Collection of JSTOR. Members will be allowed free access to JSTOR to consult the *Powys Journal*. The Agreement will also provide the Society with a new source of regular income. This was reported in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017, p.16.

Llewelyn's memorial stone:

Concerns have been raised by **Neil Lee** following a visit to the memorial stone during the annual Llewelyn Powys Birthday Walk (*see pp.29-32*). Neil Lee reports that the stone has been moved to a different position in the field since the last visit; the stone is unstable on its foundations and it is also now obscured from view from the South Coast footpath. Neil requested that the committee should send a letter to the Weld Estate registering concerns and ask if it would be possible to conduct a geophysical survey of the field to help identify the original location of the zinc metal box containing Llewelyn's ashes. Neil believes that the disturbance and relocation of the memorial stone, which was intended to mark the grave site of Llewelyn, could be considered an act of desecration. He is aware that this controversy has been raised in earlier issues of the *Newsletter* but the matter has never been satisfactorily resolved. A letter to the managers of the Weld Estate will be sent raising these issues and requesting them to conduct an investigation.

Charles Lock said that he was surprised that the Society does not issue e-mail contact details of members which would facilitate members' exchange of latest news and information. Secretary said we do retain a record of everyone who has freely submitted their e-mail address but we should be cautious about making this information public without first obtaining consent of members. This is in line with data protection rules. **Secretary** said that a notice could be inserted in the *Newsletter* informing members of the intention to include e-mail addresses in the next release of the membership list which is circulated to all members. **Janice Gregory**, and other members, urged the committee to produce a new updated membership list, with e-mail contact details, as soon as possible.

Facebook

Dawn Collins updated members with information about the development of the Society's new Facebook page and said that about 80 people are regularly following the posts on the page. Dawn reassured members that only relevant Powys-related comments and photos are used to develop the site. Dawn said she fully expected use of the page by both members and non-members to grow over time, but that it was already noticeable that visitors found the page a very useful way of engaging in a discussion about the Powyses. Dawn said she had also set up a Powys Reading

Group which has attracted 20 participants. The subject of the first discussion was *Porius*. Members are able to continue posting comments after the discussion in a closed group. Dawn said that the Powys Society Facebook page is linked to similar pages hosted by the Alliance of Literary Societies. Dawn mentioned she had offered members a short tutorial illustrating the benefits of accessing the site and encouraged other members to contribute comments and other illustrative material.

E-books

Kevin Taylor explained work he has been doing with the committee to look into unresolved issues on publication rights, to do with the possibility of publishing JCP's major novels in e-book format. Kevin said that the literary agent of the JCP estate, Christopher Sinclair Stevenson, had been asked by the committee to liaise with **Overlook Press** to find out actual sales figures of JCP's books, details of remaining stock, the possibility of reprinting books currently out of print, and, crucially, whether they might be interested in publishing JCP's books in electronic editions. Kevin explained that unfortunately we cannot go any further on this project until we know more from Overlook Press about publication rights, licence costs and sales figures.

Progress has been delayed by staff at Overlook Press, who are currently on leave, and who also claim it is hard to locate information quickly. Kevin said the rights issue has been complicated by the recent discovery of another agent in USA, Glen Hartley, known to Overlook Press as the 'Agent of Record'. Kevin said that Mr Sinclair-Stevenson believes he alone possesses the sole rights having been appointed by John Powys. This will need clarifying by Mr Sinclair-Stevenson, who will have to liaise with the American agent and declare exactly what rights he thinks he actually controls. Kevin said that before making further progress we must await further news from Mr Sinclair-Stevenson and Overlook Press.

Date and Venue of 2018 conference

Louise de Bruin said that the 2018 conference will take place at the Wessex Hotel in Street, on 10-12 August.

AOB

Dawn Collins said that she would be available until the end of the conference to provide Facebook clinics and explain opportunities.

Richard Graves proposed that the films made by Ray Cox of conference proceedings could be posted on YouTube. In addition short films could be made featuring interviews with Officers and members discussing the Society and the works of the Powyses. **Raymond Cox** agreed to check technical details and find

out if this would be feasible. He also reminded the Meeting of his gift to the Society of the copyright of his book, *The Brothers Powys* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). **Belinda Humfrey** then said she would also like to give the Society the copyright of her book, *Recollections of the Powys Brothers* (Peter Owen, 1980). In the discussion following the possibility was raised of publishing the two books as e-books. **Secretary** thanked both and said that the committee would investigate ways of taking this forward.

Janice Gregory said that some members experienced difficulties hearing conference talks and asked the committee to consider the acquisition of a microphone for speakers. Secretary said that the committee would investigate costs of suitable equipment.

Sonia Lewis wondered if conference organisers had considered the option of a different placement of seating at conference talks which might encourage a more informal arrangement.

Stephen Powys Marks referred to the article in *Newsletter* 91, July, 2017, p.22, *The Beginning of the Powys Society*, and said he disagreed with the assertion that the Society commenced in 1969. He pointed out that there were documents showing that the official view of successive Secretaries was that (quoting from a letter from Barbara Spencer to members dated 22nd November 1969): ‘*Since 1967 the following meetings of the Powys Society have been held, (6 listed including December 1967, ‘a meeting to discuss plans’)*’ and, quoting from the *Newsletter* dated February 1973, that the Society ‘had been in existence since December 1967’. Stephen said that, while he agreed the first Committee was elected after a meeting in 1969, it seemed to him to be an exercise in academic pedantry to curtail the Society’s history by two years. Stephen then called on the meeting to celebrate now the fifty years of the Society’s existence; this was met with general applause.

David Goodway said that he was present at meetings held between 1967 and 1969. He recalled that plans were still being discussed during this period regarding the formation of a Powys Society.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

An Appeal to Powys Society Members

Do you have special interests, skills or talents that you think might be useful to the Society? Would you like to give a talk about a member of the Powys family to the Society at an annual conference or at one of our interim meetings? Is there a particular writer or scholar from outside the Society who you would especially like to hear give a presentation at our annual conference? The committee is always looking for new subjects and speakers. We would be very pleased to hear from you.

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New Members

We are delighted to be able to welcome two new members, in London and Cornwall, who have joined the Society since the last announcement published in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017. This brings our current total membership of the Society to **245**, allowing for other members who have either resigned or not renewed their membership. Full details of current membership trends and membership numbers are included in the AGM report above.

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Powys Society membership list

We are planning to publish a new updated edition of the **list of members' names and postal addresses**. This time we would like also to include members' **e-mail addresses**. If you are unsure whether we already have your e-mail address, or if you do **not** wish your e-mail address to be included, please contact Hon. Secretary.

MEETING IN LONDON

Saturday 2 December
at 2pm for 2.30 start
The Friends Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, Hampstead

Our Chairman Timothy Hyman, will give a talk on JCP's booklet *The Religion of a Sceptic* (1925), followed by open discussion.

The event is free – Refreshments provided – All are welcome

(See p.37 where Richard Simonds writes on the book.)

Up and Out! A Visit to Blaenau Ffestiniog

On Saturday afternoon conference members made a journey by coach from the Hand Hotel to Blaenau Ffestiniog to view JCP's last home. We passed through the dramatic scenery of the Vale of Llangollen dominated on one side by the Berwyn mountains and Ceiriog forest, and on the other side by Llantysilio and the Clwydian range of mountains. The hillsides were already turning an autumnal shade of golden brown. At Corwen we crossed the river Dee and headed for Betwys Y Coed. Now the landscape changed. We followed the course of the river Conwy as it cuts through deep gorges and flows furiously over fallen trees, jagged rocks and boulders. The distant, dark, interior of Gwydyr forest looked mysterious and primeval. The towering peaks of the Snowdonian range which suddenly appeared, directly in front of us, sharply outlined against the sky, reminded me of tall rocky sentinels guarding a hidden land. I thought of Julius Caesar's description of the coastal approaches to Britain: *muratos mirificis molibus* – 'guarded with wondrous walls of massive rock'. Our driver missed the signpost to Blaenau Ffestiniog and we had to turn back after Betwys Y Coed, but we were soon on schedule again, passing the 13th-century castle of Dolwyddelan perched on a hill in a farmer's field. Again the terrain changed – we were surrounded by a desolate and empty landscape. At the summit of a steep incline we had our first view of Blaenau Ffestiniog. Everywhere there were great piles of grey slate. The town seemed strangely deserted. JCP called the place *mad and terrifying*.

The coach stopped, conveniently, opposite the little lane that leads to JCP's house. We were greeted by Roland Tree, current owner of No.1 Waterloo, who lets out the house for holiday rentals. Somehow we all managed to squeeze into the tiny downstairs room which seemed much smaller than I remembered it when I made my first visit to see Phyllis in the 1970s. Although later owners had clearly modernised the interior and made some structural changes, the flight of stairs with its eleven steps, counted by JCP, and leading to his study, remained unaltered.

We entered JCP's tiny writing room. I sat on the ledge near where JCP used to lie on his couch writing or looking out of the window to see approaching visitors, stare at the mountains and observe the construction of the hydro-electric power station at Tanygrisiau.

In *Up and Out* (1957), written in this very room, JCP refers to his character Gor Goginog who he says *became seized with a desperate mania for words* ... Words, of course, continued to spill out of this tiny room almost to the very end of JCP's life. The space fantasies of his last years have a sense of naive and childish awe as he imagines journeys in cosmic space and an *expanding universe*. In his old age

JCP said, *my disposition is childish and clownish*. He wrote to his new friend Ron Hall: *When I write my stories I exploit my dotage and senility and enter my second childhood or Boyhood*. He confessed: *My object now is to make my second childhood a flight of steps to a real vision of reality that shall be both new and old. Why don't more old writers use their dotage as a medium of Vision in their inspiration?*

Outside Waterloo we followed a grassy track past a stream behind the house that led to Melin Pant y Ynn, an old slate-quarry mill, which in JCP's time had been turned into a woollen mill. The adjacent waterfall, which JCP loved to visit, descends from Llyn du Bach high above Blaenau Ffestiniog. The view of the slate town from the mill provided an insight into JCP's decision to move there – the town looks remote, hidden and isolated. In 1954 JCP wrote to Iowerth C. Peate: *this is the real secret reason of our move to Blaenau the most difficult place to reach within 50 miles! Once there I shall become an absolute Hermit*. There were of course practical reasons for the move (it was actually Gerard Casey who found No.1 Waterloo and helped him move there), but JCP also believed that in moving to the heart of Snowdonia he would be living in a mythological landscape close to some of the places named in the *Mabinogion*, where events associated with Math, Lleu, Pryderi and Gwydion occurred.

It also seemed that in moving to Blaenau Ffestiniog JCP was following the Roman theme that inspired *Porius*, for south of the town, near Trawsfynydd, are the remains of an important Roman road, Sarn Helen, a well preserved Roman fort, Tomen y Mur, and in the middle of a field, Bedd Porius, stands the replica of the original Porius stone, now to be found in the National Museum of Wales.

On our return to Llangollen we approached Corwen from the opposite direction, crossed Pont Corwen, and glimpsed, above us, through a mass of trees, JCP's other Welsh home at Cae Coed overlooking the Dee. I wondered if JCP knew that around 1910 workers excavating a site in the centre of the town recovered a Roman bust, sculpted in stone, of a priest of Isis. He would have been fascinated to know that this mystery cult, widespread in late antiquity, was once practised here, connecting the northern frontiers of the Roman world with the Mediterranean. It's a great pity that the object has since been lost.



*Jacqueline Peltier with grandson Remi
in front of 1 Waterloo*

Corwen, 21 August 2017: A Meeting with Roger Jones

The handful of conference participants who stayed on in the Hand Hotel for an extra night fell into the kind of social ease that comes on a small group as they gather in the closing stages of a good party. Chatting at the bar four of us (Marcel Bradbury, Joe and Tina Sentence, and I) decided to go to Corwen together the next day to take a look at JCP's home and retrace his customary walking route up the hill to Liberty Hall, his place of inspiration where he began writing *Porius*.

When we wandered round the small housing estate in search of 7 Cae Coed, we couldn't identify the house where I had expected it to be, and we wondered if the houses had been renumbered. We hailed a passing postwoman, but she was new to this round and couldn't help us. It seemed that the trail had gone cold, and after this inconclusive start we walked westward to the footpath that led up to Liberty Hall.

Just as we found the start of the footpath, we passed a dog walker who greeted us warmly, asked us where we were walking to, and advised us on the route to the top. We asked him if he was local, and – if so – whether he might have heard which of these houses had been the home of one John Cowper Powys. He replied that he certainly *should* know, given that as a boy he used to take him his dinner every Sunday! (He clarified later that the dinners were actually for Phyllis – known to him as Mrs Powys – rather than JCP himself). He led us up the narrow lane (not marked on the OS Map but to the west of the footpath that is on the OS) where we had to duck down some steps into his back garden to avoid the cars that were manoeuvring up and down that steep lane, sometimes in reverse. He continued telling stories of JCP which were familiar to us from the talk given by David Jones at the conference the day before. As I looked at him more closely, I could see that although he seemed a stone or so lighter, there was some similarity to David in the shape of his ears and the distinctive appearance of his hearing aids. Given the similarity of his tale I wondered if I had failed to recognise him.

‘Aren't you David Jones?’

‘No, I'm his brother.’

And thus we came to meet Roger Jones. We explained that his brother David had been sharing his reminiscences with us the previous day. This amused him enormously: he characterised his brother as a great talker (‘I bet you couldn't get him to stop ...’), but we quickly formed the view that he was as genial and unstoppable a raconteur as his brother. The time available for our hill walk was getting dangerously curtailed and we were torn between staying to hear more and setting off. He pointed out the correct house, confirming that the current owner valued her privacy. He told us many

of the stories that we had heard from David at the conference the day before (see p.6) Marcel and I have pooled our memories of those recollections of Roger's that add to David's account. Roger believed that JCP's main reason for moving away from Corwen was the new houses built near his home, particularly because he was getting disturbed by the noisy children living in them who would play outside his house. (This may be a child's perception, but it agrees with JCP's account in his letter to his brother Littleton (see *Descents of Memory*, 407).

Although we saw JCP's house in Corwen only briefly, this fleeting view seemed a fitting conclusion to a very memorable pilgrimage and a satisfying end to a highly rewarding journey.

My Conference

Sonia Lewis

Llangollen and the Hand Hotel with its spectacular view across the Dee and up to Dinas Brân always delivers. This time my room overlooked the church. I entered to the sound of mower and strimmer. However, despite the noise I was heartened to see an elderly couple tending the cemetery; the man with the mower in need of a hip replacement and the lady suitably clad in flowery summer frock wielding the strimmer – a Powysian moment.

I go to Powys conferences to meet old friends and reminisce but also in the hope that something will challenge and kick-start my sluggish clay-filled brain.

This happened with Grevel Lindop's paper 'Saving Mid-Century Britain: Arthurian themes in the Work of John Cowper Powys and Charles Williams'. I have not read Charles Williams for years and will now go back to him. Grevel highlighted the many instances in *A Glastonbury Romance* where JCP's grail imagery has such importance: e.g. the moment when John Crow holds Mary while she fills with emotion – one of the most erotic of images. Also Penny Pitches with her cauldron filled with the *gorlas* while Weatherwax asks her '*Do 'ee know Penny what be the pivot of life upon earth?*'. Throughout, Grevel 'kept to the text' – so important. His paper left me stimulated with ideas.

Perhaps we should consider for the future a follow-up to such a lecture with smaller groups for further discussion. After all there is such a body of knowledge at the conference which is scarcely tapped into.

On the Sunday Patrick Quigley took us, in the footsteps of Llewelyn, on a quizzical and informative journey to Palestine. He later brought us back to Corwen with the delightful David Jones who had lived in his boyhood next door but one to JCP and

Phyllis, or rather, as he knew her, Mrs Powys. It was significant that it was Patrick with his Irish warmth who had ‘discovered’ David Jones. David’s memories were never over-dramatised nor romanticised. When he told the story of helping Phyllis to access an old building society account when she was short of money, it was kindly told with no self-aggrandisement. His pleasure in telling of JCP as a real person shone through and we were all pleased to be told that he had been given no 1 of the first edition of *Porius* – yet to be read!

Thank you Llangollen, Louise and Anna for bringing this conference to fruition.

*

Marcel Bradbury

Is it by nature or by an error of the imagination that the site of the places that we know were frequented and inhabited by people whose memory is held in honour somehow stirs us more than ... reading their works? (Montaigne). This question was on my mind as a group from the 2017 conference took a coach from Llangollen to JCP’s last home.

Why is it so exciting to visit the homes of authors we admire? The question takes a particularly acute form in the case of Blaenau Ffestiniog, where there are none of the incidental pleasures obtained in visiting a picturesque site such as Hardy’s birthplace or Dove Cottage, or indeed JCP’s earlier home at Court House on the Sussex downs near my own home.

No doubt everyone would have a different answer. Montaigne offers the following; *Of things [persons] that are in some part great and admirable I admire even the common parts ... I like to reflect on their faces, their bearing and their clothes*; and he could no doubt have added *their homes*. This is part of the answer but there is I think more. A point that was frequently made when talking to other conference attendees is that JCP’s works speak to them very personally; that he says things that they have felt but didn’t realise others had. This is surely also a part of why we want to see where he lived, to build on that close connection. Looking out at the view of the Moelwyn mountains that must have been so familiar to him from the upper room does give a closer link to the writings that have inspired or helped us.

Often of course there are more straightforward reasons for this type of visit. Where a writer’s work is steeped in a particular location, visiting his home and that location can, in a very practical way, aid understanding and increase enjoyment. Four of us at the end of the conference resolved for this reason to visit JCP’s other Welsh home at Corwen and to walk from it on his ‘purgatorial route’ up to Liberty Hall in the hills behind, taking time to reflect on the geography of *Porius* on the way.

As we set off on the track behind the house, by an extraordinary piece of luck we met Roger Jones who, when he was a child, had known JCP and who still lives in a neighbouring property. With his memories of seeing JCP setting off on his daily walk ‘in a long coat and with a huge stick’, we ourselves set off up the same footpath. A perfect end to a very enjoyable, well-organised and well-run conference.

*

Raymond Cox

The Hand Hotel’s website, much modified since I last looked at it, used to have a note about its resident ghost, perhaps thinking of it as an attraction! I recalled the number of the room which it inhabited. There’s no mention of the ghost now, though. Has it gone?

The Society’s Conference itself was not without forays into the ‘Other Side’ – no Powys conference is, one way or another, but with this one there seemed some more open and serendipitous correlations by the speakers. David Stimpson, in an entertaining and somewhat beguiling presentation, suggested that he could feel the super-sensible presence of John Cowper Powys, Phyllis Playter and William Wordsworth. (Wordsworth once stayed at the Hand.) ‘They’re here!’ said David. ‘Do you sense them?’ There were half smiles, as a hint of tongue in cheek was a possibility. JCP would have been delighted, and the direction of the talk led towards JCP’s philosophy, his psychic-sensuality, spiritual companions, and spiritual energies – to all of which the speaker claimed to be attuned. He also emphasised JCP’s ‘secular spirituality’, prophetic of the later ‘New Age’ disciplines which have evolved right up to the present time. As the title of the talk had suggested an outline of JCP’s life as an itinerant lecturer in America, I noticed during the coffee break a slightly negative reception from a few members, perhaps suggestive of disappointment? Or was this because of some perceived eccentricities of David’s personal presentation? Most probably it was the former, for the pervasive psychic element in the Powyses and their writings is surely one of the attractions for members.

When Patrick Quigley reviewed Llewelyn Powys’s visit to Palestine with Alyse Gregory in 1928, setting the scenes of their travels, he spoke of the crystallisation of Llewelyn’s attitudes to the religious and supernatural dimensions. At the end of his talk Patrick mentioned the ambiguity in Llewelyn’s views, which were at odds with those of his brother John when they were discussing other-worldly connotations. Grevel Lindop’s talk had led to more psychic assimilations, with the Arthurian themes of myth and legend. Novelist and poet Charles Williams (1886-1945) was the link here. His novels were described by his friend T.S. Eliot as ‘supernatural thrillers’ exploring the link between the physical and the spiritual. (Williams

also edited the first English language edition of the works of the existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard). Grevel mentioned the curious story of Williams recalling that his Arthurian poetry of earlier times appeared to coincide with the 1939/45 war, in that what he was writing seemed to be influencing its course in some way! (Shades of something similar with ‘automatic writing’ perhaps, but not so immediately manifest; as with the manner of Glastonbury’s Bligh Bond, perhaps?)

The occult connotations are strong in the beliefs and writings of JCP, with his elemental and persistent attention to mythic and mystical associations, from the descriptions of the spiritual extensions of the wills of characters existing outside their bodies and moving about the environment, to the anthropomorphism of inanimate objects. From the pastoral landscapes of Dorset and Somerset to the more dramatic and remote regions of North Wales his strong personal relationship with the land was dominant, and was expressed by unusual occult imaginative power.

As always, conversation and camaraderie were the usual attraction at the conference, the established causality of congregating together itself derivative of a psychical nature, if one thinks about it. At one point during the weekend I sat outside for a while by the wall in the hotel’s colourful garden, directly overlooking the fast-flowing Dee, watching and listening up and down the river, but also more closely through a frame of trees directly to the swift flow over the river bed, wondering about the mysteries of the watery element, and flow-forms – and perhaps those other liminal elemental beings, the Undines who are said to share our world.

Back upstairs in the old hotel with its nooks and crannies I walked quietly past room number ...

*

Anthony Green

It is always a pleasure to attend the Powys Conferences, and meet like-minded people who know what one is talking about when one mentions the name Powys – so often have I spoken about JCP to friends and received a blank ‘*Who is he?*’ in return. At this year’s conference, on Saturday evening, the dramatised reading of JCP’s *Homer and the Aether* was performed with great gusto by the participants eliciting much amusement in places. Altogether this was a very enjoyable weekend, an additional factor being the discovery of writings by JCP which I was unaware of – in particular his views on other writers, in *Visions and Revisions*.

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Chris Michaelides

One day, 50 years ago, I chose a book from the shelves of my local library with a beautiful deep green cover, a small square field lit by the sun, the hedgerows in shadow and above a chalk cut hill figure. I'd always been interested in landscapes, iron-age hill forts, and hill figures – this book was for me – I had discovered the writing of John Cowper Powys.

Many years later (and far too late for me to take heed) I read the warning given by Margaret Drabble ('The English degenerate'; *Guardian* review 12.08.06): 'The realm of John Cowper Powys is dangerous. The reader may wander for years in this parallel universe, entrapped and bewitched and never reach its end.' I have to say that I have been happily entrapped since first reading *Maiden Castle*, reading and re-reading all the Powys novels in the intervening years, always finding in them the peculiar excitement that comes from the recognition of the elemental in the everyday, the cosmic in the banal, the transcendence of the mundane and a belief in the power of the small intimacies of a landscape known. When I now read John Cowper Powys invariably I feel a sense of release – a 'letting go' of a breath that has been held in and, curiously, a feeling of not being alone in a world charged with meaning. So, in many ways, it is in returning to the reading of Powys that I find myself in places 'where the spirit breathes' – the theme of this year's conference.

The theme implies the need to travel in some way towards this elusive place. In the search for what we intimate, perceive, hope may lie beyond the surface of life or the restrictions of our culture, such journeys can be to places external and physical or internal and psychological; the journey can be taken alone or with others, shared in sympathy of spirit or not shared at all. Always the journeys described in the talks at this year's conference illustrated the interdependence of place, personal experience and the individual's reaction to these in both the journey and the arrival.

David Goodway's fascinatingly detailed and intimate account of writers Gerald Brenan and Gamel Woolsey's travels to the remote and austere Andalucian Alpujarra gave us a physical journey in search of an authentic way to live and write. I was left with a sense of the brilliant light of the Alpujarra shadowed by the respective past relationships they inevitably carried with them – Gerald's with Dora Carrington and with Juliana, the Andalucian girl with whom he had a daughter, and Gamel's with Llewelyn Powys.

David Stimpson journeyed inwards, sharing his intensely felt emotions on reading John Cowper Powys and also his sincere personal exploration of early childhood experiences of place, describing these as 'spirituality without religion', considering what exactly is the nature of such experiences and what is needed in order to be awake to them. David's talk led me to consider why these elusive experiences, often

occurring at an early age, remain with us so powerfully yet can evade adequate description when we become adults. Is it because these experiences come from a time before we have a fully developed language that they affect us in this way and that they are the more immediate for being unmediated by language?

Grevel Lindop's journey gave us a quest for the Grail, or Graal, and its many manifestations, whether as an inherent element of the Arthurian tradition or as a separate (though not entirely unrelated) entity, as encountered in the writing of Charles Williams or in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*. Often deceptive – the unremarkable, plain and slightly dented chalice, nevertheless transcendent, found in a remote country church in Charles Williams's *War in Heaven*, or the stove-top cauldron in a vicarage kitchen in *A Glastonbury Romance* – the Grail is both holy and unholy, Christian and older than Christianity.

Patrick Quigley took us to Palestine in both an account of his own journey retracing the footsteps of Llewelyn Powys and a wryly observant account of Llewelyn's visit there in 1928 – again a physical journey in search of meaning and for a philosophy of 'spirituality without religion', testing out the strength of influence of the Christian faith of his parents. Llewelyn observed that this was the happiest time he and Alyse had spent together – however, we learn from Alyse's diary that the prospect of Llewelyn's and Gamel Woolsey's baby made this one of her unhappiest times: two journeys externally alike but two very different experiences.

Our visit to Blaenau Ffestiniog and 1 Waterloo on Saturday afternoon (how very small that house in Blaenau was!) together with a fascinating account from David Jones on Sunday morning of John and Phyllis at Corwen, showed us the physical surroundings of where the spirit breathed for John. The description of Phyllis regularly walking down to the Owain Glyndwr Hotel for lunch with a cigarette in her mouth, and John frequently welcoming tramps to the house at Corwen, were delightful additions to my Powys knowledge.

The Saturday night entertainment, a reading of JCP's *Homer and the Aether* skilfully adapted by Kate Kavanagh, was delivered by a cast of many, who, despite there being no time for a rehearsal, blended their interpretations together in an equally skilful performance.

Of course we all make our own personal journeys to the conference. For me each conference is an annual point of return to that dangerous, entrapping and bewitching realm of John Cowper Powys where I can once more 'breathe out'. I love the freedom to talk of things Powys in the knowledge of the common bond which draws together such a wonderful mix of the scholarly, the academic, the artistic – always underpinned by the plain enthusiasm of Powys readers. I particularly enjoy lectures that are focused on the texts – teasing out the underlying themes and techniques that can elucidate (again in the words of Margaret Drabble) 'how the peculiar thrill of

this work is generated.’ When I come to the conference I want to learn – and I always hope to find stimulating textual analysis in the lectures – some ‘meat’ to get my teeth into! My primary interest is still in the work of John Cowper Powys but I now also know much more about Theodore and Llewelyn, and I become increasingly interested in exploring the influence of the Powys parents on the later development of all the children – the daughters included.

So, for me, the journey to where the spirit breathes began with a visit to my local public library – transcendence found in the everyday indeed.



NEIL LEE

Llewelyn's 133rd Birthday Party

In almost direct contrast to the previous two weeks when this little corner of West Dorset was lashed by the wind and rain of some rather unseasonal early August weather, Llewelyn's birthday on Sunday 13th dawned bright and clear, and by lunch time the seventeen celebrants who had gathered at the Sailor's Return in East Chaldon were bathed in glorious sunshine to enjoy what turned out to be the perfect August day.

My son Jason Lee and I were the first to arrive, accompanied by two new members of the Dandelion Fellowship, writer and broadcaster Steph Bradley and Ben Chadwick, who had driven up from Totnes in Devon and were suitably impressed by the bucolic scene which greeted our arrival; the village cloaked in a peaceful blanket of calm with a slight cooling breeze from the south carrying the sound of birdsong and the distant hum of tractors raising dust clouds in their wake as they gathered in the golden harvest high up on Chaldon Down. Jed Redman and Jenny Mortimore soon joined the gathering throng, followed by Chris Gostick and Linda Goldsmith who brought greetings from former regular walkers Bruce and Vikki Madge, recently removed to the warmer climes of Cyprus – and apologies from Rob and Honour Timlin who sadly couldn't be with us on this occasion.

Apologies were also received from Byron & Eirlys Ashton, and also from new member Steve White who was prevented from attending by a recent family bereavement, whilst Sean & Debbie Lowe joined us to raise a glass to Llewelyn before leaving to continue their annual holiday. John and Jayne Sanders interrupted their annual holiday to join us once again, and when Rosemary Dickens and Dennis White arrived, followed by Paul and Pam Gillingham and Dawn Collins, who has recently launched the Powys Society Facebook page, we had our full complement & Chris Gostick opened proceedings at 1pm.

Chris welcomed everyone and invited those assembled to raise their glasses to Llewelyn's memory on the 133rd occasion of his birthday (Llewelyn's NOT Chris's!) and we then raised a traditional toast to 'absent friends' specifically remembering Janet Pollock (Machen) and the founder of the Birthday Walk John Batten, before paying a special tribute to fellow Dandelion Richard Burleigh who sadly left us earlier this year.

After an excellent lunch provided by Tom Brachi and his staff, ten walkers – six of them over pensionable age – set off across the dandelion carpeted village green

towards the Chydyok Road, and began the long arduous climb up the familiar flint strewn track which crawls snake-like and ever steepening towards Chalky Knapp, pausing regularly for breath in the warm sunshine to wipe sweat from brows, and afford some temporary relief to aching, ageing calf muscles!

As many who have trodden this way before will doubtless agree, there is always a sense of achievement and a mixture of exhilaration and satisfaction having conquered Chalky Knapp, followed almost immediately when cresting the ridge by a strong sense of anticipation of the view southwards to Chydyok and beyond.

The track, now more chalk than flint, levels off as Chydyok and the huddle of farm buildings comes into view tucked into a fold of the Downs, and then twists and turns sharply before plunging steeply down into the emerald green ‘sea valley’ beloved of both Llewelyn and Theodore, before crossing a cattle grid in the valley bottom and climbing once again up to Chydyok Farm.

At the house which was once ‘home’ to Llewelyn and Alyse and to the Powys sisters Gertrude and Katie, we were greeted by Rosemary Dickens and Dennis White who, along with Jed Redman and Jenny Mortimore had driven up from the village, and we paused a while to drink in the atmosphere redolent with the unmistakable essence of Llewelyn Powys, and rich with age and memories of former times.

We noted that although the terrace walk constructed by Llewelyn 83 years previously had acquired a new wooden seat, the garden below looked overgrown and neglected; the grass was high and weeds encroached over the path from the gate to the front door, completely obscuring the well by the front gate in which Llewelyn had etched the words ‘Good hope lies at the bottom’ during the long hot summer of 1933.

Fourteen of us continued onwards and upwards along the narrower footpath over Tumbledown to the field gate above Bat’s Head, standing for a few minutes to admire the astonishing view eastward along the cliffs, with the familiar promontory of St Aldhem’s Head in the far distance, a vista which never fails to overwhelm the senses by its magnificence, before continuing westward along the old Gypsy Track to Llewelyn’s Memorial Stone high on the Downs overlooking Portland and the English Channel.

It’s Official: Llewelyn’s Stone Rocks!

The sun continued to beat down and a gentle breeze off the shimmering sea kept us cool as we walked along the coastal path, beyond the shell sculptures set in niches

of the dry stone wall which forms the southern boundary of the Obelisk Field until we reached the corner where Llewelyn's Stone always comes into view – but it didn't! However, consternation soon turned to relief as we approached closer and saw that the Stone had simply been obscured from view by a large patch of encroaching nettles, which defying the hungry mouths of both bovine and ovine, had the temerity to grow there!

Rosemary had thoughtfully gathered together a posy of wild flowers and these were traditionally placed on the Stone, which appeared to have been moved slightly off its original base, perhaps a few inches toward the field boundary fence – which caused it to rock slightly when I sat upon it as we gathered around this place of pilgrimage and I read a passage from *Glory of Life* (pp.22/23):

Alive in a Godless Universe, and with our minds unfalsified by enervating beliefs, how can we still be religious? Nothing is more natural. Religious emotion has from the first been erroneously associated with feelings of personal security. It is more sincere and more honourable when under no suspicion of gain. The natural worship is the detached worship of animal life, of bird life, of fish life. It is the worship of the belted stallion making the farmyard echo with his nostril voice; it is the worship of the wheatear advancing along a cart rut with flashing intermittent flights; it is the worship of the lubberly chub at the bottom of the River Yeo. It belongs to the glory of life, to the unuttered sense of glory in the chance of existence, in the chance that called us up out of the dead dust to mirror for a period with glassy retinas the mysteries of matter. An adoration of life is our religion. It is a worship of the moment's duration, inviolate, detached, and passionate.

And so it proved.

We lingered longer than usual, a fellowship of friends, each perhaps drinking in the atmosphere and feeling that special 'sense of place'; taking photographs to prove that we were actually here on this perfect August day, and chatting about Llewelyn's *Glory of Life*, and how his words seemed to reflect our shared experience, our 'adoration of life' in those captured moments that we worshipped here, which were 'inviolable, detached, and passionate'.

We left with some reluctance and retraced our steps back eastwards along the old Gypsy Track and over Tumbledown to Chydyok, where we once again paused a while to listen as Chris Gostick eloquently read a passage from *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* (ed. Claire Harman, Chatto & Windus, London 1994,

pp.273/4) which told of a visit here with Janet Pollock (Machen) shortly after Janet's fifty-year tenancy had begun following Alyse's departure to Devon.

It was downhill all the way back, save for the even more gruelling climb up and over Chalky Knapp, but spurred on by thoughts of tea awaiting us down in the village by courtesy of Paul & Pam Gillingham's kind invitation, we made it!

In a fitting finale to a perfect day, a day in which we celebrated Llewelyn's 133rd birthday in full sunshine in this glorious landscape, nothing could have been better in this rural idyll than – a Garden Party!

Thus on behalf of my fellow Dandelions I would like to record my sincere gratitude to the Gillinghams for their wonderful hospitality, for we ended the day languishing in the very pleasant and peaceful surroundings of our hosts' garden and were treated to a veritable feast, with a freshly laid out buffet and lashings of tea, coffee, squash, cakes, buns, pies – and all in the genial company of friends; thank you Paul and Pam – a perfect ending to a perfect day.



News and Notes

from Frank Kibblewhite

The revised inventory of the Powys Society Collection, compiled by Morine Krisdóttir has now been posted on the home page of the Society's website.

from Jacqueline Peltier

A copy of JCP's *Autobiography*, translated into Swedish by Sven Erik Tackmark, 'Eric the Red' has been donated to the Society by Jacqueline and has been accepted for deposit in the Collection at Exeter University.

from Chris Thomas

In Minoo Dinshaw's excellent and detailed biography of the Byzantine historian, Sir Steven Runciman, *Outlandish Knight* (Allen Lane, 2016; Penguin, 2017), there is an unexpected reference to TFP. Whilst describing Sir Steven Runciman's childhood in Northumberland he also mentions his governess and mentor, Rebecca Forbes, who, he says *had tried her luck in the south, teaching English and classics for some years at a preparatory school in Aldeburgh, where her pupils included the future novelist Theodore Powys*. (For information about TFP's schooldays at Aldeburgh see 'The Education of T.F. Powys', by J. Lawrence Mitchell, in *The Powys Review*, No.19, 1986).

Auction sales

On September 16th International Autograph Auctions Ltd in Nottingham offered for sale, by auction, 5 holograph letters from JCP to the poet, novelist, biographer, literary critic and editor, Neville Braybrooke (1923-2001). The letters cover the period 1958-1961 and have remained in Neville Braybrooke's family until now. The letters mostly deal with an invitation from Braybrooke to JCP to submit examples of his juvenilia to a literary magazine, which he edited, called *The Wind and the Rain*. JCP subsequently submitted his early poem *Corfe Castle*. According to Derek Langridge the version of *Corfe Castle* printed in the magazine in 1961 is different to the version to be found in *Autobiography*. Neville Braybrooke also published a tribute to JCP which appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* under the title 'Fine Performer' on 7 October 1962. The letters from JCP to Neville Braybrooke, in Lot 21 of the sale, were reproduced in the on-line catalogue.

In May 2017 the autograph mss of JCP's essay 'Detachment' was sold at auction in New York. The essay was originally published as 'The Magic of Detachment' in *The Aryan Path* in October 1933, and reprinted in *The Powys Review* no. 15, 1984/5; also in NL 51 (2005).

ALS

The 2017 annual *ALS Journal* (the *Journal of the Alliance of Literary Societies*) is now available. There are articles on the theme of 'Lost, Found or Faked' covering Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Samuel Johnson, Wyndham Lewis, Jerome K. Jerome, Arnold Bennett and Anthony Trollope. If you would like to receive a copy of the *ALS Journal* please notify Hon Secretary who will send a FREE pdf file attached to an e-mail. Paper copies are available at extra cost. All members are welcome to contribute articles to the *ALS Journal*. The theme for 2018 will be 'The Unreliable Narrator'. Please send contributions direct to the editor Linda Curry at lgc1049@gmail.com or by post to 59 Bryony Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4BY by 1 February 2018.

from Timothy Hyman

Following *Brief Encounters* in Newsletter 91 it should also be noted that Saul Bellow was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1976. JCP refers, admiringly, to Saul Bellow in a letter to Louis Wilkinson, September 29th 1948, where he says *The best to my mind of modern American writers is a certain Saul Bellow who has only written two books – 1. 'Dangling Man' (1944) (a title almost worthy of the author of Forth Beast [by Louis Marlow (1946)]. 2. 'The Victim', dealing with this sort of funk I suffer from. 'The Victim' is a Jew and the sod he is scared of is a New England semi-aristocratic Bum.*

from Tim Blanchard

The Sundial Press plan to publish my book, *Powysland*, and will also bring out a new edition of JCP's *A Philosophy of Solitude* later this year.

from Kevin Taylor

Philip Larkin's admiration of the Powyses was the subject of Kingsley Amis's mocking disapprobation, as I learned from Angelika Reichmann's talk at the 2016 Conference. On a recent visit to the exhibition of Larkin's personal book collection at Hull University Library (*Larkin: New Eyes Each Year*) I had a chance to gauge the extent of the poet's interest in Powysiana. Among the c.3,700 books salvaged from Larkin's home I spotted the following:

Autobiography, John Cowper Powys

The Art of Growing Old, John Cowper Powys

The Art of Happiness, John Cowper Powys

Apples be Ripe, Llewelyn Powys (2 copies)

The Pathetic Fallacy, Llewelyn Powys

Rats in the Sacristy, Llewelyn Powys

Damnable Opinions, Llewelyn Powys

The Life and Times of Anthony à Wood, Llewelyn Powys

Essays, Llewelyn Powys

Mr Weston's Good Wine, T.F. Powys

Bottle's Path, T.F. Powys
Mockery Gap, T.F. Powys
No Painted Plumage, T.F. Powys
Welsh Ambassadors: Powys Lives and Letters, Louis Marlow
The Letters of Llewelyn Powys, Louis Wilkinson & Alyse Gregory
Recollections of the Brothers Powys, Belinda Humfrey (in pride of place between *The Odyssey* and *Holy Bible*)

from Jerry Bird

Suitable contributions for the annual *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* (published by the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester) are currently being sought, especially on literary subjects. Papers should have direct relevance to the county of Dorset and not previously have been published elsewhere. For further information, please visit:

<http://research.dorsetcountymuseum.org/NotesForContributors.pdf>

BOOKS FOR SALE

Tony Glynn has a small selection of books for sale by Elizabeth Myers, Littleton Charles Powys and Morine Krissdóttir. If you would like to purchase any of these, please contact Tony direct at: The Glade Rest Home, 32 Lancaster Road, Birkdale, Southport, Merseyside, PR48 2LE.

Peter Redmond, at Books on Sea, in Norfolk, has recently acquired a large collection of items by JCP, including some artefacts, as well as JCP's personal copy of *The Books in My Life*, signed by Henry Miller, nine original holograph letters from Alyse Gregory to Wilson Knight and associated Powys Society publications, *Newsletters*, *The Powys Journal*, transcripts of conference talks and photocopies of articles. If you would like more information about these items, please contact Peter direct by e-mail at: pjfredmond@gmail.com or write to: Books on Sea, 22, Middle Street, Trimingham, Norfolk, NR11 8EA

Fountayne Editions, dealers in music manuscripts and original scores, are offering for sale the score of *Octet for Strings*, *Winterreise*, Opus 55 (2015), composed by Douglas Weiland. The work includes movements with titles such as Didlington Bridge, On the Banks of the Wissey, and Harrod's Mill Pond. *A Glastonbury Romance* is mentioned on the front page of the manuscript. For more details please visit:

<http://www.fountayneeditions.co.uk/shop/weiland-octet-op-55-2015/>

Thanks to Tim Blanchard for the last two items. (CT)

Review

JACQUELINE PELTIER

Llewelyn Powys: *Que les noix brunissent*, tr. P. Reumaux (Klincksieck, 2017)

Among the Powys tribe of writers, Llewelyn Powys is probably less well-known in France than his elder illustrious brothers. However quite a few books of his have been translated over the years, such as *Love and Death* in 1998, published by Phebus, who had already published John Cowper's *Owen Glendower* in 1996. *Skin for Skin*, *Glory of Life*, and *Rats in the Sacristy* followed, also translated by Reumaux, thanks to Isolato, a young and ambitious independent publishing house, intent on publishing the best in literature. Apart from *Black Laughter*, whose translation we owe to Christiane Poussier and Anne Bruneau, published in 2012 by Les Perséides in Brittany, most of Llewelyn's books are the result of the work of Patrick Reumaux, prolific translator of the three Powys brothers, as well as being himself novelist, poet and mycologist. He also has a keen interest in other 'Celtic' works, such as ancient French manuscripts and *lais* concerned with King Arthur, as well as books by Sheridan Le Fanu, Liam O'Flaherty, and Flann O'Brien. He also produced praiseworthy translations of Edgar Lee Masters, Emily Dickinson and Mervyn Peake. Commenting on the hard task of the translator, Patrick Reumaux confided that translating is like setting a trap: 'To trap an animal, one must become the animal itself. In order to translate, you must become the other party.'

Que les noix brunissent is a handsome volume of 180 pages, belonging to the collection 'De Natura Rerum', published by Klincksieck, with a superb illustration on the cover showing Durdle Door. It is difficult to understand why such a curious title was chosen. The verse is quoted by John Cowper Powys in 'The Recruit', from *Wolf's Bane*, and is borrowed from an old bawdy ditty, 'Apples be ripe and nuts be brown, Petticoats up and trousers down'. It might refer to the robust behaviour supposed to be prevalent in country life, similar to that described by Theodore in his novels. It is not, however, obvious to see the connexion with the carefully chosen essays which all have a link with the natural world, most especially sea birds, lovingly and closely observed by Llewelyn along the coast near his coast-guard cottage and later when he was living in Chydyok: a world enlivened with foxes, bats, ravens and all the wildlife of the Downs. The different chapters are graced with inspiring representations of the Dorset landscape which remind one of Gertrude's paintings, and with pictures of birds amongst those described by Llewelyn. The illustrations are the work of Bernard Duhem who, like Reumaux, was a talented mycologist, but they were unfortunately the last he executed, for he died at the untimely age of 52. After Reumaux's introduction, a homage to the

Powys family's amazing knowledge of plants, the book contains fifteen essays, many taken from *Dorset* and *Somerset Essays*, and a few from *A Baker's Dozen*, *The Twelve Months* and *Earth Memories*. The last chapter, the longest, is a translation of the long essay *Now That the Gods are Dead* which he wrote at the instigation of Lynd Ward, an American artist. These essays all show forcefully Llewelyn's deep-rooted belief in the miracle of being alive, and his imperative exhortation to be at every moment conscious of the fact.

Reading these essays will provide great delight to a French reader, for Reumaux succeeds in faithfully transcribing Llewelyn's unique style, so precise and at the same time so poetic. Here is an instance of what I mean:

It is, of course, the herring-gulls which through spring, summer, autumn and winter, make up the real bird-populations of these cliffs. It is their hungry call that first breaks the religious stillness of the winter dawn, vexing the waking dreams of the countrymen with their wild insistent crying, before even the red glow is to be seen through the lowest branches of the naked hedge.

Dorset Essays, 'Bats Head'

Que ce soit hiver, printemps, été ou automne, les goélands argentés sont la principale population de ces falaises. Leur cri affamé est le premier à rompre le silence religieux de l'aube d'hiver, brisant, d'un appel insistant et sauvage, le rêve du paysan qui s'éveille avant même que le rouge embrase les basses branches de la haie dénudée.

'La Tête de Chauve-souris' (pp.43-4)

We cannot but marvel that such gems issuing from Llewelyn's pen can now be accessible to the French world, and I personally think that they will be treasured by enlightened readers. Llewelyn once said: *If I were to be asked by any young person the best way to acquire a style, I would tell him to live intensely. The style of a man is the direct result of his passion for life.*

RICHARD SIMONDS

JCP's Religion of a Sceptic (1925)

This odd, short (only 51 pages), but very well written and insightful book, is essentially a summary of JCPs' religious experience, which he describes as occurring in four stages: emotional belief, metaphysical belief, absolute disillusionment, and finally, aesthetic understanding. He places an enormous value on the aesthetic value and beauty of the

Christ figure and Christ story. While difficult to summarise his 'argument', his central point is essentially that Christianity has a tremendous value in this regard, and while the stories, beliefs and practices of Christianity may seem 'absurd', there is a profound beauty to them.

I think what the book is fundamentally grappling with for Powys is what I call the 'Dostoevsky problem'. It is very difficult to read Dostoevsky's masterpieces, especially *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, without coming away with a powerful religious and specifically Christian sense. Powys recognizes the value of the Christian aesthetic, even if, as it seems, he cannot truly believe in its 'truth'. He is disturbed by what he calls 'Fundamentalism' (which I think is better described in contemporary terms as 'Orthodoxy'), but he is even more disturbed by what he calls 'Modernism', which I believe is both anti-Christian agnosticism and atheism, but also some of the more aggressive evangelical Christianity, focusing on whether or not you are 'saved'. He finds both of these approaches destructive which fail to acknowledge Christianity's essential aesthetic value.

This was JCP's last book before his first masterpiece, *Wolf Solent*. It was dedicated to his Catholic friend of many years, William John Williams. JCP had flirted with Catholicism (as well as many other of the world religions) but as the son of an Anglican rector, stayed loyal to his original faith, in spirit it seems, or at least in appreciation. *The Religion of a Sceptic* is not mentioned by Morine Krisdóttir in *Descents of Memory*. Given the 'nature-religion' that fills his novels, this book does not seem to point to his use of themes in his later books. I don't even recall the particular religious struggle described in this book filling the minds of his fictional characters. This book seems to relate to his personal life rather than making some kind of artistic statement.

I have written a lot about a very short book. To conclude, first, I'm not sure how essential this book is to understanding Powys's writings, but it may be informative about his struggles as an individual. Second, on a stand-alone basis, while the book is very well-written and makes its arguments forcefully, Powys's experience of religion is so utterly foreign to my own I'm hesitant to say much in the way of making a recommendation, as I believe whatever value it would have would be on a very personal level. Personally, I do largely agree with him – Christianity has tremendous cultural value and its decline in the West, regardless of what we may call its 'truth value', is really quite terrible, particularly its substitution. The need for 'religion' seems to be an intrinsic part of human nature. But I also think that a 'faith' based on beauty or aesthetics is very weak; either the Holy Spirit and the 'born-again' experience is real, and the bodily Resurrection of Jesus is real, or you don't have much more than a warm feeling at Mass and some beautiful art. This is a conversation that could go on all day (and has been going on for two thousand years). At least *The Religion of a Sceptic* will restart the conversation for you, if you have been sleeping.

Solstice at Shirley: Re-encountering John Cowper Powys

I pressed my spine to the coils of the beech roots. I hoped none of the villagers would come by. They'd probably think I was crazy like John Cowper Powys's neighbours at Phudd Bottom, New York State, 1930 who used to watch with concern when they saw the writer tap his head ritually on trees and stones in the local hills. How did I get to be in Shirley anyway? I was not entirely sure of the truth of it. I'd felt I needed some heft to get me out of a creative rut into which I had fallen. I'd become lethargic, and writing had become a chore and decided to visit Shirley on the longest day of the year.

I'd recently read Powys's *Autobiography* (1934) and been guided back to Powys's work because I'd been drawn to the village of Shirley over the years and had walked its boundaries many times before recently discovering that it was JCP.'s birthplace 145 years ago.

The place-name 'Shirley' means *the clearing or glade where the hundred meet* (*English Place-names*, Kenneth Cameron, 1988). It's from the 7th century when men would meet and muster here for war. To my eyes, the village seemed hidden under a covering of trees as if wanting to escape its past. I began moving through the place, trying to sense its essence as the Powys couple might have done when arriving in 1872, his father taking up the post of vicar, his shy mother (whom he never mentions in his *Autobiography*) already pregnant with JCP, destined to be the first of eleven children.

Shirley was the fount and origin of JCP's developing consciousness. He is clear about that in the *Autobiography*. He and his clan might have been rooted in Dorset and Somerset and JCP would later take on a Welsh identity but it was Shirley, Derbyshire, where he first truly began to sense and create his symbolic world. There is a road heading north-west out of the village, deep-channelled, fern-covered and overarched by beech and oak. This is surely the same track that Powys describes in *Autobiography* as

the narrow lane between high hedges leading down to the church I recall to this day, and it is one of my vividest memories, the exultation that poured through me like quicksilver, when walking once a little ahead of the perambulator, which carried my brother Littleton, I turned to the nurse-maid who was pushing it and announced triumphantly that I was "The Lord of Hosts."

The way has now become tarmac-covered and it forms a route out the village for motor traffic, but it still gave off an immemorial thrill to walk there where the three- or four-year-old Johnny Powys's strong mind first apprehended that the world was there to be moulded and fabulated. He further explained in his *Autobiography*:



when I was suddenly transported with rapture in that little lane ... as I stumbled along in the muddy ruts in front of Littleton's perambulator pretending to be "the Lord of Hosts" it was a desire for some obscure magical power that inspired me. Powys elsewhere explained in his Shirley chapter of the Autobiography: the desire to be a Magician ... is (the wish) ... to exercise a certain supernatural control over my destiny.

The power of an imaginative mind over its destiny and the power of the consciousness to mould the living world, these are key Powysian themes. There is a loneliness to that vision which finds an answering echo in souls like me. JCP speaks to our isolated selves, burdened with all our foibles and failings and grappling with the external world.

Still in Lord of Hosts lane and beginning to walk towards the vicarage, I was startled by the screaming and screaming of a magpie chasing off a marauding jay. The invading sound as the birds battered each other through the foliage made my chest pound with sudden fright. It was the same in JCP's world. The kingly mind-set that believed that the world was mind-matter and could be shaped by the effort of will went hand-in-hand with a sense of constant terror and unease. JCP traces his sense of lurking terror to the moment when as a child he threw a log into the lake at Osmaston Park (two miles west of Shirley), and he was warned by an adult that the police would be called. Powys remained terrified thereafter

by the neurotic fear that he could be dragged away at any moment and punished. The psychoanalytically-minded would see Powys's *wordless hearts-pulse cry of a human soul cherishing in its bosom a fear that it cannot reveal* (*Autobiography*) as an internalisation of a child's terror of his strange and dominating father who looms like a titan in the account of John Powys's early life. Perhaps Powys's lifelong sadistic impulses were also a form of defence against terror, an urge to find control in a world that swarmed with rival siblings and where the family were forced to bend to the enormous ego of their father.

As I walked up the lane, I wondered if these were the same fields that Powys used to scour for froglings which he would then torture on the gravelled driveway to the vicarage. His father once caught him red-handed in these sadistic acts and beat him over the head and dragged him away from his cruel pastime. That also was OK. I too spent a childhood under the hard hands of adults and I accept cruelty as part of nature, including my own. It resides in every fold of animate life. I like the way that JCP discerns the occult horror lurking in everyday, seemingly innocent acts. For example, the sight of a mother stooping to caress her child used to fill him with disgust. To him, the mother's intervention was a cruel invasion of a child's free self. That horror could also be sensed preternaturally from within the womb. His character, Wolf Solent, describes being nauseated by taking tea with his mother because that seemed to him *an obscure reversion to those forgotten diurnal nourishments which he must have shared with her long before his flesh was separated from hers* (*Wolf Solent*, 1929).

JCP's father with his *volcanic intensity of earth-feeling* (*Autobiography*) dominated the early part of the writer's life. In fact, Powys acknowledged he did not really begin to live until he was freed by his father's death in 1923. I imagined the vasty shape of vicar Powys crunching down Lord of Hosts lane with his great boots *with enormously thick soles* (*Autobiography*) as he went striding out on his long botanizing walks. The hay fields that Powys describes are still there on the east side of the lane. These were the glebelands which the Reverend Powys used to reap personally.

The old vicarage could be seen from a distance situated on a rise, looking very like the 1870s photo of it in Morine Krissdóttir's biography (*Descents of Memory* 2007). Powys described the building as an – *absurdly big place for a man with five children ...and a village ...that never exceeded two hundred souls*. (*Autobiography*). The old photo of the house shows a large cedar of Lebanon on the western side. The tree has doubled in size over 140 years and now dominates the house. It is the last sentient survivor from JCP's day. Maybe it holds deep within its furrowed trunk a memory of the cries and footfalls of the Powys children.

The couple moved into the vicarage on 31st January 1872 along with the foetal JCP, no doubt already hypersensitive and resentfully trying to scope his new



environs from within the amniotic dark. The house is now a private residence as there are no longer any gentlemen vicars these days. I peered up the drive thinking of the dwarf hydrocephalic postman called Heber Dale who used to come scurrying with the morning post for the Powyses across the gravel and I tried to discern where JCP told us he had pursued his brother Littleton with a bell rope in an attempt to symbolically hang him.

The house is now surrounded by hedges of clipped holly and hornbeam. Gone are the laurel shrubberies that the vicar used to hack at to the distress of his precocious son.

There was a rattling of buckets and the clank of scaffolding poles from the rear of the old vicarage. Some new incumbent must have been undertaking improvements. One workman in plaster-spattered overalls emerged to stare back at me. I wondered if Powysians appear at the place every day like pilgrims and have become a nuisance. If so, there are only the books to guide them, there are no blue plaques here.

Grey suffused cloud eclipsed the day, the earth seemed parched. No frogflings at all, the ponds had probably been grubbed out. A tractor growled somewhere north. I looked for but could not find Powys's favourite wild plant, the cuckoo flower. Perhaps I was a few weeks too late for its flowering. Cars flicked past, faces of locals peering at me wondering what I was about. I had to keep pressing myself into the

roadside nettles in order to avoid being run over. It seemed as if I was surrounded by nature but it was hiding itself from me. Powys tells us that we snatch our *life illusion* from the inchoate rush of events in our lives. He says that we imprint our own order on reality. If so, I was no good at it. I had tried to create my own mythopoesis by coming to Shirley but I'd lost the way. I told myself that the day was a fable that should create its own order from chaos but nothing was coming forth.

A butterfly guided me at the moment I was beginning to feel most cast down. Nature lent a hand as ever. I generally get my direction from the earthy and the under-earthly chthonian depths. As JCP wrote, *the earth is actually and literally the mother of us all* (*A Glastonbury Romance*, 1932). My eye caught the coppery spiral flight of a comma butterfly and followed it until it came to rest, flicking its scalloped wings by the edge of a tyre rut in the turf outside the old Powys residence. All of sudden, I remembered reading where JCP described his only memory of childhood creativity – *one solitary constructive activity ... a passion for erecting at the edge of the shrubbery by the drive numerous replicas of Mount Cloud composed of damp earth-mould covered with moss*. The comma butterfly must have shown me the very spot where JCP once obsessively shaped his mud simulacra of the hill that I also love. He calls it 'Mount Cloud' in his autobiography but it is now known as Thorpe Cloud.

Thorpe Cloud is seven miles north of Shirley. You can probably glimpse its distinctive sugar-loaf hump from the upper windows of the old vicarage. It sits in Dovedale, a southern outlier of the Peak District. It is an upthrust ridge of carboniferous limestone that once formed a reef in an ancient sea. It's barely a thousand foot high and traversed by thousands of hikers every year, yet retains an air of mystery. I wonder if Powys slightly misremembered the name of the high place when he wrote of it in faraway New York State. 'Thorpe' is an old Scandinavian name for farm and there is a small farmstead tucked into the slopes of the high ground. A nearby village also carries the same name 'Thorpe'. 'Cloud' is a word of old English origin meaning 'stony' or 'rocky'. Powys describes the peak as the very *omphalos of England*. He says it is a hub *like the boss of a shield* around which is arrayed all the villages of south Derbyshire. To him, the hill possessed a node of mysterious power that symbolised all the magical potential of the world and so it does to me.

That's why it was such a thrill to discover JCP writing of the *feeling of immensity produced by that grassy hill...a conical tumulus...it will always remain to me synonymous with sublimity* (*Autobiography*). How wonderful to discover that my own *entelechy* (favourite Powysian word) my own self-determining life principle has tracked back by secret roots to self-actualise and merge with Powys's own reverence for Thorpe Cloud. All this came back to me when I saw the comma butterfly alight on the moulding soil next to the vicarage drive. It somehow encouraged me that perhaps I was on the right track after all.

Renewed, I strode into the village looking for what survived of Powysian Shirley. There were a good few cottages from JCP's day interspersed with modern interloping bungalows. No one was about. No shapes behind windows far less the vision of an old woman strangling a maid, a startling sight that JCP once discerned through the window of a *stuccoed cottage* on the Ashbourne road. House sparrows set up a tremendous quarrelling in the wisteria that covered the old National School that had become a private residence. That's where the village kids would have gone for schooling in the 1870s while the young Powys read *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* to himself in the vicarage dining room.

I entered *the little grey church* described in the *Autobiography*. I sensed hush and shadow, smell of dusty carpeting and old wood. Sunlight on the trees beyond the windows made me think of JCP watching the same pagan oak foliage beyond the glass while his father preached his long sermons. There was a list of vicars framed on the wall going back to the 13th century including Powys, Charles Francis, rector 1872 to 1879. His patron was listed as the 10th Ferrers, one of the Shirleys, the local aristocracy and kin to the Powys clan.

A wind was rising, the wheat brisking in the neighbouring fields with an answering roar in the leaves overhead. I pressed my back to the bank-side beech roots trying to feel the tree flex deep down in its entrails. I fear my own inarticulacy and am comforted by Powys's dogged constant struggle with failure. He shows us we are all terrified children abiding within our changeling adult selves. By acknowledging this weakness, it helps us see more clearly. If you read Powys, you are a recusant, at odds with a world that is destroying nature and turning away from serious concerns.

Sinking into the forgiving bank of Lord of Hosts lane, I tried to suck in the warm loamy air more deeply. I wanted to feel my *earth-bulk burying itself deeper and deeper within this living mass* (*A Glastonbury Romance*). I also wanted Powys to pull his protective wings around me. I might have seemed strange to any passers-by but I was happy let them wonder. *Every artist is a fanatic*, JCP says in his autobiography. The planet seemed to tilt under me that solstice tide and I could feel us going back into the dark but I was not afraid. I called out, 'I too can be the Lord of Hosts!'

Photographs of 'Lord of Hosts Lane' and Shirley Vicarage courtesy of Rod Madocks

STEPHEN POWYS MARKS

Family Memorabilia

A short list of items from my Powys family collection displayed at the 2017 conference.

Littleton Albert Powys (d 1879), who called himself ‘PUT’ (i.e. a child’s attempt at pronouncing the name Albert):

1. photo album, compiled by his mother Amelia Powys, with a list of contents
2. framed travelling photo
3. watercolour of Littleton’s tomb in Afghanistan
4. slim book, *Heavy Charges and Big Game*, written by ‘PUT’, and published posthumously by his mother in 1887
5. article: ‘My Rich Bearded Uncle from India’, *PS Newsletter* No.45, April, 2002

Dorothy Mary Powys (1882-1956), editor, etc

1. 2 issues out of an unknown number of *The Victoria*, a manuscript family magazine (1897-1905), with hand-painted covers
2. photo of covers in colour
3. article: *The ‘Victoria’*, *PS Newsletter*, No.31, July 1997

Gertrude Mary Powys (1877-1952), editor, etc

1. *The Caddis Worm*, Montacute family miscellany, from 1897
2. list of contents

It is a nice coincidence that both *The Victoria* and *The Caddis Worm* started in 1897, though DMP was the much younger editor.



Stephen Powys Marks

Dorothy Cheston and John Cowper Powys, Part 2

[Part 1 of this article by Susan Rands about Dorothy Cheston and JCP appeared in Newsletter 91, July 2017]

There is a further interesting reference to Dorothy Cheston in JCP's diary for 1929 when he was staying in London on his last summer visit before returning to UK permanently in 1934. On June 19th 1929 he writes: *Went to lunch with Dorothy Cheston. Arnold Bennett was in excellent spirits & very decent to me ... nice as he could be – he looked much younger & less worried than when I saw him last. Showed them the page proof of my book [1] & he rallied me on its length. Their little girl [2] is exactly like her father; very independent but under her father's control she becomes obedient but just plays the rogue with Dorothy. Dorothy looked beautiful in summer hat & frilled gown ... Arnold Bennett gave me excellent whisky but drank nothing himself. Talked with D about him while he listened amiably shrugging his shoulders & chuckling benevolently. He denies writing potboilers.*

Later that day JCP was taken in their car to Peter Jones's great shop (on the corner of Sloane Square) where I called for Frances [3]. After visiting an exhibition of paintings by D.H. Lawrence which they thought *repulsive* [4] John took Frances to tea with Isobel's friend Naomi Mitchison [5], then living with her husband and the first four of their five children at Rivercourt [6], a fine big house by the river staffed by a household of servants. There she read her poems to John and Frances *most beautifully*. Although Llewelyn's relationship with Naomi Mitchison is well established I had not previously realised that she knew John as well. They were brought together again, as it were, by the late Richard Maxwell when he compared them as historical novelists in a talk to the Society which was published in the *Powys Journal*, Vol VI, 1996 [7].

In 1944 JCP wrote to Malcolm Elwin to thank him for two books Elwin had sent him – his biography of Landor (*Savage Landor*, 1941) and *Old Gods Falling* (1939). JCP gives several pages of reasons why he is not much interested in Landor and much preferred *Old Gods Falling* [8] which has a section on Bennett. *We were brought up*, he says, *in an atmosphere of debate and discussion about Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy etc etc and might even have seen them as I did see Bennett and even got into his diary by reason of having been an intimate friend of Dorothy Cheston [9], his second wife. I went to see him once in Cadogan Square and again in Amberley near Arundel [10].*

Notes by Chris Thomas

- [1] He is probably referring to *The Meaning of Culture*, later published by W.W. Norton in USA, in September 1929.
- [2] Arnold and Dorothy's daughter was born in 1926 and named Virginia Mary.
- [3] Chris Wilkinson said in an e-mail to me (dated 29/9/17) that Frances [Frances Gregg (Wilkinson), 1885-1941] worked for a time as editor of the in-house magazine, the '*Gazette*', at Peter Jones in Sloane Square. She later went to work for the children's section of the *Daily Chronicle*. This job finished in 1930 when the *Daily Chronicle* closed down. According to Chris Frances must have had a 'bolt hole' somewhere in London in 1929 but he doesn't know exactly where this might have been although it is known that she did live for a while at an address in Westbourne Street, W2 and for a time at Powis Gardens in Kensington. Frances's letters to her mother and JCP's letters to Frances in 1927 and 1928 provide some idea of the poor condition of her health as well as her work at Peter Jones at this time.
- [4] The exhibition of D.H. Lawrence's oil paintings and watercolours, which JCP visited with Frances, was held at the Dorothy Warren Gallery in Mayfair and opened on 14 June 1929. Almost 13,000 people visited the exhibition between June and October. However there were complaints about the explicit nature of the subject-matter of the paintings and critical reviews appeared in the newspapers. Lawrence's paintings were defended by, amongst others, Roger Fry, Gwen John, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf and Clive Bell. On 5 July the gallery was raided by 6 policemen who confiscated 13 paintings. The paintings were eventually returned to the gallery. The police also confiscated and destroyed copies of a book with 26 colour reproductions of Lawrence's paintings, published, in a limited edition, by the Mandrake Press, in conjunction with the exhibition, which also included an introduction by the artist. Although JCP disliked Lawrence's paintings he didn't think they were obscene – he made a distinction between indecency and obscenity much as D.H. Lawrence himself did in his treatise *Pornography and Obscenity* (Criterion Miscellany No 5, Faber and Faber) published later in 1929. JCP read Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which had been privately printed in Florence in 1928, but was unimpressed. However his view of Lawrence was not completely negative. In a letter to James Hanley dated 19th April 1933, JCP referred to Lawrence's *eloquent and wonderful lyric psychology*. In *Autobiography* he refers, sympathetically, to Lawrence's *dark Gods* and says he admires his attack on *spiritual love*, but adds that Lawrence lacked profound insight into the meaning of the *psychic mystery of Agape*. Many years later JCP told Louis Wilkinson he had a *terrific affection and devotion to D.H. Lawrence*. On D.H. Lawrence's paintings see: *The Paintings of D.H. Lawrence* (Mandrake Press, 1929); *The Vultures and the Phoenix* by Robert Millett (Art Alliance Press, 1983) and *D.H. Lawrence's Paintings* by Keith Sagar (Chaucer Press, 2003). For a study of the relationship between Lawrence and JCP see *Phoenix and Serpent: D.H. Lawrence and John Cowper Powys* by Glen Cavaliero (Powys Review, No 2, Winter 1977). For Charles Lahr's privately printed edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* mentioned by JCP in his diary, 12th August 1929, see: *T.F. Powys's Favourite Bookseller, the story of Charles Lahr* by Chris Gostick (Powys Heritage Series, Cecil Woolf, 2009).
- [5] See note on Naomi Mitchison in *Newsletter* 88, July 2016, p.11. Naomi Mitchison died in 1999 at her home in Carradale in Kintyre in Scotland. Susan Rands remembers attending a Powys Society meeting on 13th May 1989 at Liddon House, South Audley Street, in London, when Naomi Mitchison gave a talk to the Powys Society about her recollections of Llewelyn Powys (the event was advertised in the March 1989 *Newsletter*, p.11).
- [6] Rivercourt house, Mall Road, Hammersmith, was Naomi Mitchison's family home between 1923 and 1939 where she lived with her husband, the lawyer and labour MP, Gilbert Richard Mitchison. The house was built in 1808 on the site of two earlier eighteenth-century houses. Some eighteenth-century features have been preserved in the present building. In the 1920s Naomi Mitchison and her husband frequently hosted parties and gatherings at Rivercourt for their friends, as well as other artists and writers, including Wyndham Lewis, Aldous Huxley and E.M. Forster rivalling meetings of the Bloomsbury Group. Today the house can be easily viewed from the Thames Path. The acacia trees

opposite the house, bordering the river, were planted by Naomi Mitchison. The house is currently occupied by Latymer Prep School.

- [7] 'Porius, Mitchison and the Period Character of Historical Fiction between the Wars'. Richard Maxwell originally delivered a talk to the Powys Society at the 1994 conference at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester called: 'Abridgements: Powys, Naomi Mitchison and Historical Fiction in the Twentieth Century'.
- [8] Malcom Elwin's *Old Gods Falling* is a survey of English literature from 1887 to 1914 and is notable for the author's revaluation of past literary reputations.
- [9] JCP's reference to his long-term intimate friendship with Dorothy Cheston provides conclusive evidence of their close relationship, discussed in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017, pp.28-33.
- [10] On JCP's visit to Bennett at his flat in Cadogan Square see: *John Cowper Powys and Arnold Bennett* by R.L. Blackmore, *Powys Newsletter* 5, 1977-1978 (Colgate University Press) For JCP's visit to Bennett in Amberley, which took place in 1926, see *JCP's Letters to Llewelyn*, Vol.2, pp. 45-7.



*Reading JCP's
Homer and the Aether (see p.2.)*