

Editorial

Stephen Powys Marks, grandson of ARP and our chief link with the Powys family, died on 8th June, just over a year after his wife Tordis. He had suffered a stroke. It is hard to imagine the Powys Society without him. He was a mine of information about his family, and contributed many articles to our publications, while his expertise with printing them was for many years invaluable.

* * *

John Cowper Powys, inevitably, has been the most written-about of the brothers, so it's appropriate to celebrate our 100th Newsletter with likenesses of him, fifty years apart.

Gertrude Powys's portrait of her older brother in his early twenties has a look of waiting for something, as if he were not often sitting so still. Hard to guess what he really looks like – you want him to turn round. The long "Draft Autobiography" reprinted on page 45 would have been written at about this age. Many years later, the image of JCP in Corwen was taken by Arnold Lewis, a friend of Redwood Anderson who lived there. It may not be brilliantly focussed but gives a nicely informal impression of a calmly intelligent person of 75, somewhat different from most of the photographs we know.

For this centenary number we are repeating contributions from Editors over the earlier years (including this one on an appropriate subject): from no. 27 (1996) with Paul Roberts presenting a long Wordsworthian poem by JCP on his early life, interesting to compare with *Autobiography*; and from John Batten his account in no.

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21 (1994) of friendship with Peter Powys Grey, with PPG's recollection of visiting Corwen with his new bride, and what seemed a supernatural appearance of his uncle at the Owain Glyndwr hotel. Tributes to John Batten, who died in February, are on pages 20-25.

A short history of the *Newsletters* is followed by a personal record of the substantial *Powys Review* from its creator and editor Belinda Humfrey, with an appreciation by John Hodgson. Other interesting topics: the Zoom meeting on *Maiden Castle*; news of letters 1936 to 1958 from JCP to the American novelist Evangeline Walton (1907-1996); a report from Kenya; renewed interest in JCP's possible epilepsy; the Powyses' varied treatments of the Bible, with an attempt by Llewelyn to analyse the different ultimate world-views from himself and his brother; a wartime secret code based on TFP's *Kindness in a Corner*; and the Corwen library taking notice of its one-time celebrity resident JCP.

KK

from Chris Thomas:

It has been a great privilege to examine and report for our website on some of the items in our past President, Glen Cavaliero's personal Powys collection – a generous gift to the Society from Glen's friend and colleague Paul Hartle. Glen retained all the letters which he received from JCP, beginning in 1957, and we are pleased to publish in this issue JCP's first letter to Glen.

During the coronavirus pandemic we have started to experiment with meetings hosted by Zoom video link. This has been a new challenge for many of us but guided by the professional skills and expertise of Kevin Taylor we have continued to conduct our committee business on-line as well as organise virtual discussion meetings allowing members to see and meet each other on screen. More meetings are planned in the future and we have published in this issue invitations to all members to participate in video linked discussions of *A Glastonbury Romance* in August as well as the Annual General Meeting which will replace our cancelled conference for this year (postponed until 2021).

It is with great sadness felt by all who knew Stephen Powys Marks to record his death. However the tributes to his life and to his dedicated contribution to the Powys Society which appear in this issue of the Newsletter provide testimony of his lasting legacy.

* * *

Chairman's Report 2019-2020

With Britain still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, about to enter our fourteenth week of lockdown and “self-isolation”, the Powys Society can nevertheless look back on a year of surprising achievement. A relatively “new” and slightly younger cast have come to the fore, distinct from the Powysian veterans of the Twentieth Century, now into our seventies. Providentially, these new activists are fully computer-savvy, and the Society's continuing functioning throughout this present weird episode has depended mostly on their resourcefulness. Even if we have had to cancel our August conference (the same programme and venue now scheduled for 2021) yet Zoom has opened up entirely new possibilities of worldwide participation in discussion by video link.

The death of Glen Cavaliero last October, at 92, together with several other recent sad losses – Jacqueline and Max Peltier, John Batten – and now Stephen Powys Marks – all point to a time of change. Our new website is being brilliantly expanded and updated by Paul Cheshire; Dawn Collins has been energetic in building up a Readers Group on Facebook. Kevin Taylor's masterly piloting of the e-book publication of John Cowper Powys's major fiction has proved extraordinarily successful and timely. (With sales averaging at least 40 books each month, the Society has already retrieved its investment, and is likely to accrue substantial future income.) The availability of *The Powys Journal* on JSTOR has also guaranteed a steady sum each year. Taken together, this means we should have funds to bring several long-cherished projects to fulfilment over the next decade. Suggestions and ideas will be welcome.

I'm hoping all this activity may eventually be reflected in a growth of new membership, but in this apocalyptic time, with so many confined to their homes, almost everything has inevitably been put on hold. Glen's gift of Powys Books has been accepted by the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; while his relevant Papers will be deposited at Exeter University. Chris Thomas continues to bring his unrivalled knowledge and administrative experience to every aspect of the day-to-day running of the Society, as well as editing (with Kate Kavanagh) the always interesting *Newsletter*. Meanwhile, the long-standing dual editing of *The Powys Journal*, by Charles Lock (stricken with eye trouble) and Louise de Bruin (at present stranded in her native Holland) has passed into the very capable hands of Kevin Taylor.

Timothy Hyman

Annual General Meeting 2020

The Annual General Meeting of the Powys Society will be held by **Zoom video link** at **15.00 BST on Sunday 16 August 2020**, and will last for approximately one hour. All paid-up members of the Powys Society are welcome to participate in the AGM.

If any member wishes to join the AGM on that day, please e-mail Kevin Taylor at ksjer.taylor@btinternet.com. Kevin will be hosting the Zoom meeting on 16 August and will send you joining details in due course, if you let him know that you'd like to take part.

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of AGM 2019 as published in *Newsletter* 98 November 2019, and matters arising
- 2 Nomination of Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society Committee for the year 2020-2021
- 3 Chairman's Report as published in *Newsletter* 100, July 2020
- 4 Hon. Treasurer's Report and presentation of annual accounts for year ended 31 December 2019
5. Collection Liaison Manager's Report
6. Hon. Secretary's Report
7. Powys Journal
8. Publication of e-books
9. Powys Society and social media
10. Development of Powys Society website and matters relating to *Powys Journal* on JSTOR
11. Date and venue of conference 2021
12. AOB

**Chris Thomas,
Hon Secretary**

Invitation to a discussion meeting by Zoom video link Saturday 15 August 2020 *A Glastonbury Romance*, Chapter 19, The Pageant

Due to coronavirus we have now postponed this year's annual conference until 2021. In place of the conference in 2020 we would like to offer members the opportunity of participating in a discussion by **Zoom video link** of *A Glastonbury Romance*, Chapter 19, "The Pageant".

This discussion will enable us to examine how JCP develops through the medium of *Mr Geard's religious circus* important themes that weave their way through the

whole book: the Passion of Christ, Nature, Cymric mythology, self-sacrifice, the endurance of pain, and the conflict of good and evil.

The Zoom call will be opened at 15.00 BST on **Saturday 15 August 2020** and will last for max. 1.5 hours up to 16.30.

If any member wishes to join the discussion of *A Glastonbury Romance* on that day, please e-mail Kevin Taylor at ksjer.taylor@btinternet.com. Kevin will be hosting the Zoom meeting on 15 August and will send you joining details in due course, if you let him know that you'd like to take part.

Chris Thomas,
Hon Secretary

Committee Nominations 2020-2021

The following Honorary Officers have been nominated and have agreed to stand:

	<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Secunder</i>
Chairman	Timothy Hyman	Peter Lazare	Sonia Lewis
Vice-Chairman	David Goodway	Kevin Taylor	John Hodgson
Treasurer	Paul Cheshire	Joe Sentance	Marcel Bradbury
Secretary	Chris Thomas	Susan Rands	Pat Quigley

For the committee the following have been nominated and have agreed to stand:

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Secunder</i>
Marcel Bradbury	Chris Thomas	Joe Sentance
Robin Hickey	Louise de Bruin	Anna Rosic
Michael Kowalewski	Anna Rosic	Chris Thomas

(Collection Liaison Officer)

If these nominations are approved by members at the AGM, the committee, from August 2020, will consist of those above as well as **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter editor*) and **Dawn Collins** (*Social media manager*) who have 1 year left to run of their three-year term of office, and **Louise de Bruin** (*Conference organiser*) (who has two years left to run of her three year term of office). **Anna Rosic** serves as co-opted member, **Marcella Henderson-Peal** serves as honorary committee member. **Charles Lock** (*Contributing editor, Powys Journal*) and **Kevin Taylor** (*Editor Powys Journal*) serve as *ex-officio* members.

Chris Thomas,
Hon Secretary

New Members

We are very pleased to welcome five new members to *The Powys Society* who have joined since the last announcement published in *Newsletter 99*, March 2020. New members are located in Sherborne, Dover, Michigan USA, in Oxford and Australia. This brings the current total membership of the Society to **225**, including Honorary members, and allowing for other members who are deceased, or who have either resigned or not renewed their membership.

Chris Thomas,
Hon Secretary

Paul Cheshire

Online access for members to all back issues of The Powys Journal

We are arranging with the online service JSTOR for Powys Society members to have free access to all back issues of *The Powys Journal* online. This is a very exciting step which makes thirty years of Powys scholarship available to all members no matter how recently they have joined. This will be a boon for recent members who would not otherwise have access to back issues, and will be an added incentive for anyone considering joining the Society.

How this will work:

All members wishing to have access should email me at powysjournal@icloud.com and I will issue you with your individual username and password. The *Powys Journal* home page on our website <https://www.powys-society.org/Powys-Journal.html> will have a button ‘**Members’ Online Access**’. On clicking this you will be offered a prompt to enter your username and password followed by a link to the *Powys Journal*’s landing page at JSTOR.

I look forward to hearing from members wanting to take advantage of this new development.

Treasurer’s Report

Statement of income and expenditure for the year ending 31st December 2019

	£	£
INCOME	2019	2018
Subscriptions	4,503.68	4,779.02
Bank Interest	23.72	26.26
Books	1,698.92	1,331.87
Conference	8,305.60	7,376.83
Gift Aid	976.76	385.79

Donations towards the e-book project	106.00	2,000.00
TOTAL	<u>15,614.68</u>	<u>15,899.77</u>

EXPENDITURE

Printing of NLs and Journal	4,629.13	4,798.80
E-book Project (inc. under books)		3,505.00
Alliance of Literary Societies (inc. in subscriptions)		15.00
Committee and Officers' Expenses	2,122.78	2,365.20
Conference Expenses	8,073.90	6,812.00
Venues	75.00
Accountants	120.00	120.00
PayPal Charges	160.31
TOTAL	<u>15,106.12</u>	<u>17,691.00</u>

PayPal charges

EXCESS OF EXPENDITURE OVER INCOME **1,791.00**

EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE **508.56**

Opening Bank balances:

Community Account :	3,666.00	971.20
Everyday Saver:	1,248.78	1,755.14
Business Saver:	6,205.39	10,185.06

Closing Bank balances:

Community Account:	529.18	3,666.00
Everyday Saver	624.17	1,248.78
Business Saver:	9,223.28	6,205.39
PayPal	275.34	

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 2019

Hills and Burgess returned all the paperwork I sent in February with approval.

At the end of December 2018, the three Barclays accounts held funds for the Society amounting to £11,120.17.

The overspend in 2018 amounted to £1,791.00.

At the end of 2019, the accounts held.

At the end of 2019 there was an excess of £508.56.

Printing costs have been reduced as the postage and packaging costs have been included by the printers at a reasonable cost. This has also released the burden on Chris and Kate who have dealt with the packaging and postage for many years.

Income from the sales of books and bags increased in 2019 to £1,698.92. This figure includes the E-Book sales (Cf Kevin's report) while sales at the Glastonbury conference amounted to £515.00.

Thank you to the members who completed the U K gift aid forms two years ago. HMRC returned £976.76 after checking the entries for the subscriptions and donations that were gifted in 2018 and 2019.

This year's report also includes the PayPal account figures held by Paul Cheshire.

Mrs Robin Florence Hickey
Hon. Treasurer of the Powys Society

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Llewelyn Powys Birthday Walk

Neil Atkin at the Dandelion Fellowship has announced that the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Llewelyn Powys Birthday Walk which had been planned for August 13th this year will have to be postponed until August 2021 due to the coronavirus. Neil says that he hopes a double celebration will be organised in 2021.

* * *

Stephen Powys Marks **24 April 1932 - 8 June 2020**

Stephen's funeral, a service of thanksgiving and celebration, took place on Wednesday 24 June at Haycombe Crematorium in Bath attended by immediate members of the family. Stephen's son Edward arranged a live webcast of the service and a DVD of the event will be released in due course. The service was led by the Rev. Joan Rowe who was a close friend of Stephen and his wife Tordis. Music included the Prelude for Unaccompanied Cello Suite No.1 by J S Bach, Allegro, Violin Sonata No.5 by Beethoven, "My Peace" sung by the Taize Community Choir. A memoir of Stephen by his sister Antonia-Tamar was read by her daughter Chloë. The service included prayers and bible readings and concluded with the commendation, committal and a blessing. Edward says that a memorial event to celebrate Stephen's life, with a ceremony for scattering of ashes will be organised at a later date.

* * *

Tributes

To Edward Marks

Dear Edward,

I have just heard the very sad news that your excellent father is no longer with us. Sad for us, since we are the ones who have now been left behind, but not for him: I never thought he would want to stay around for very long once his beloved Tordis was gone, and I hope and believe that he is now reunited with her in a better place. You will be deluged with condolences from all those who loved and admired your father so I will be very brief.

Not only does the Powys Society in general owe Stephen a huge debt for all his valuable work over the years, but also his decision to stay on as Treasurer at a time when I was trying to put the Society back together again after the debacle of 2000/2001 made all the difference in the world to me personally, and I will never forget him or cease to be grateful to him for as long as I live.

With every sympathy and good wish to you and yours at this most unhappy time.

Richard Perceval Graves

The news saddens me. We spent a great deal of time together when I was Chairman and I was always grateful to him for “watching my back” when things became unpleasant. There were many happy times as well when Tordis would give us grand luncheons and when we would gather at the Battens for a “stuffing” of the *Newsletter*. And I don’t think *The Dorset Year* would have ever been published without his practical help.

Stephen always stuck to his principles and while occasionally somewhat outré, it was eccentricity in the true Powys fashion. I expect I could not give him a greater compliment.

With regards and sympathy to Edward and Dorothy.

Morine Krissdóttir

Stephen was our own personal Powys, he was as near as we could get to that ancient original mould that had carved his bones, hewn his highly intelligent mind; and he was also the keeper of the Powys family flame with his wonderful collection of letters and memorabilia he was so generous with. I always looked forward to any article of his which were always treasure troves. I looked forward to seeing him at conferences, the special way he stooped, the way he carried his books with reverence, the unique way his voice would sound in the room when he wished to comment on what the speaker had just said, usually to correct some detail.

He was our Powysian Encyclopaedia, a human library and great and interesting company, a company we would each seek at one point during the conferences and he would make time for each of us. Ailino!

Marcella Henderson-Peal

I am desolate to hear about Stephen's passing. He was an absolute treasure chest of the family history, always ready with a letter or document or personal reminiscence. He gave a human face to a literary clan and anchored it in the real world. He was wise and very human and ever-enthusiastic. We shall miss him terribly. With deepest condolences.

Michael Kowalewski

Until recently I visited Stephen regularly, three times a year, carrying each edition of the Newsletter, about half of this century of numbers, for him to prepare for the printer. They were very pleasant occasions for me, first at Kilmersdon with its wonderful view, then at Cleveland Walk with its if anything more wonderful view across Bath. Lunch with Tordis, admiring the art works and the garden, learning more about Powyses... He was very modest about his other work, trying to save Bath from the Vandals, and concealed his inevitable disappointments. It seemed to me that he had created a world for himself and operated excellently within it. We shared many a joke and I looked forward to his wailing protests at the naughtiness of his computer. He was one of the first I knew who dealt with this invading monster and succeeded in taming it to his wishes. I admired him greatly.

Kate Kavanagh

I met Stephen when I first joined the committee in 2008. He was always very kind, supportive and helpful as I began to work out the dynamics of committee life as well as the history of the Powys Society and its luminaries past and present. He could be critical when he spotted factual errors which I had made (he had a very careful and precise sense of detail and mot juste) but I learnt well from him. I collaborated with Stephen on the production of *Newsletter* No.83, November 2014 when I also learnt much about the effort that goes into the compilation and making of each issue. As a young boy Stephen clearly won the admiration, respect and affection of his great uncle John Cowper Powys who wrote about him in a letter to Louis Wilkinson in 1946: I like Stephen Marks very much though I've only seen him once since he's grown into a boy at school. But I can see I'd get on top notch with him without any shyness or embarrassment, and it isn't always so with young boys'

Chris Thomas

I didn't know Stephen at all well but I lived in Bath and visited him at home twice, once to buy a full run of the *Powys Review* and once (last December) just to visit him in post-stroke isolation at home. He was a very sweet and welcoming presence, was happiest when talking about his collections, and was soon pottering precariously from his nest in the kitchen round the corner to his study which barely had access room for his zimmer-frame. I was simultaneously nervous he would fall over and enchanted by his undimmed enthusiasm.

Paul Cheshire

I was sorry to hear about Stephen's death. Stephen was a familiar, friendly figure in the Powys Society meetings I was able to attend in earlier years. I did not know him well, however. One memory: on a visit to his home, he showed me his wonderful collection of Batsford books. Somehow those books, about traditional country pursuits, and with coloured landscapes on their covers, harmonised with my host's kindly, gentle character.

Jeremy Hooker

I first met Stephen in the 1980s when he visited his mother Isobel in Mappowder. In those days he was a very quiet and shy man, I suppose a bit overwhelmed by his powerful mother, but we liked each other immediately. At the time he never talked about the Powyses, leaving that family interest to his mother, but more about his work in the field of architecture. But after his retirement, in 1990, we started to work together with Peter Foss on the first *Powys Journal*. Stephen and I chose the cover (afterwards professionalised by Bev Craven), the font, the lay-out, etc., Stephen having mastered by then the necessary software on his brand-new computer and I having a past in publishing. Pete Foss became the editor. For three issues we worked in harmony and with much pleasure together. All three of us taking the task very seriously and all three perfectionists. I have very happy memories of hours spent in Kilmersdon before and after lunch prepared by Tordis on trying to avoid orphans in the text and other such technical questions, followed by a round in the garden and a look into the stables.

During the period of turbulence in the Society Stephen came to visit me in Mappowder one day wondering if he should step down as publications manager. He loved his work and did not really want to give it up and resign, so I gave him the advice to stay on, which he fortunately for the Society and us all did, only giving up when physically and mentally he just found it all becoming too much. His passion for beautiful print did not end there though: when I visited him in October last and he was already very weak and sorrowing for Tordis he all the same showed me a book in fine print in a catalogue that he would love to buy.

Louise de Bruin

from Charles Lock to Edward Marks

... Stephen embodied the family's traditions, respected its myths, insisted on its dignities (not least the correct pronunciation of the name as Poe-is). But he would stand for no nonsense nor would he tolerate any indulgence in the patently false. At conferences his was an intimidating presence for any speaker whose assumptions about any member of the family lacked warrant and evidence.

As editor of the *Journal* I was always honoured to receive a submission from Stephen. Meticulously annotated, his scholarship was utterly dependable; all who

work on the Powys family rely on the family trees and genealogical tables that he drew up. His last contribution concerned the wedding party of your great-grandfather ARP in 1905, held at the Prospect of Whitby, that curious ancient structure suspended above the Wapping shoreline. On that article, I particularly enjoyed discussing with Stephen questions topographical and photographic.

I inherited from Stephen the beautiful layout of the Journal with its most appropriate format and design. In thirty years only the cover colour has been changed, and that just once. His eye was extraordinary, whether for typography or architectural detail.

Most memorably, when the Powys Society of North America was gathered in New York, c. 1990, Isobel hosted (as it seemed) an unofficial reception at the Metropolitan Museum. I think Antonia must have conspired to bring this off. Stephen was not there, but thereafter, as Isobel ceased to attend Society events, Stephen assumed the informal responsibilities of the senior figure of the family.

Shortly after the Metropolitan reception, on a visit to England, I attended a Powysian meeting hosted by Stephen and Tordis at Kilmersdon. The memory of that house remains as an enchantment, both for its precariously perched situation (suggestive rather of the Rhineland than of Somerset) and for the treasures it contained.

Stephen was a magnificent custodian of family papers—as conscientious as the most scrupulous librarian could wish—and it is of course our hope that those papers will find a home, so that the work that Stephen undertook over decades in preserving and protecting the family records will continue to the benefit of scholars far into the future. With my profound condolences,

Charles

* * *

Kate Kavanagh
The Newsletters

The Newsletters as we know them (with cover illustrations) evolved from typewritten sheets of news and announcements in the 1970s, often including reports of talks at meetings. Early numbers were usually edited by Secretaries (Derrick Stephens, Bill Dagenhardt, Peter Birtles, Griffin Beale) until on the back of March 1989 (number 6 in Stephen’s index in NL45, which starts in March 87), Chairman Morine Krissdóttir announces that Paul Roberts has agreed to “assume the burden” of official Newsletter Editor, a task recently done by Chairman with the current Secretary.

So the familiar coloured covers begin. Paul R. reigned from July 1989 to July 1997 – 25 Newsletters (nos. 7 to 31), handing on to John Batten for the next 12, November 1997 to July 2001 (32 to 43), when a crisis in the Society led to general

change. Both these editors were superlative. Powys portraits by Gertrude, and family photographs (many from the archive of Stephen Powys Marks, essential printing editor and valued contributor) adorn the covers packed with contributions from members and previously unknown treasures from archives and books. Fortunately for their successor, help from all sides continued; with Chris Thomas as official joint editor from 88 (July 2016) onwards, having been sole editor for no.83 and chief assistant before that.

Looking through the 100 it's hard not to be detained by such delights as catch the eye (some reproduced in no.100): John Batten on Peter Powys Grey's misunderstanding of (and possible apparition of) his uncle (see p. 25) – Peter Foss on Llewelyn's choice of epitaph (both in 21) – JCP's very early “blank verse autobiography”, c.1896 (see p. 44) -- Theodore on Bunyan (33) – mixed reviews on publication of *Glastonbury* (35) and *Mr Weston* (43) – Francis Feather's “Girl in the Green Hat” (42) – a story by Elizabeth Myers – Sylvia TW on TFP (43) –Theodora Scutt in her unmistakable style (44) commenting on the account of the “Vicarage trial” in 38 and the long review in 42 of her *Cuckoo in the Powys Nest* – JCP's hopes in 1943 for a better postwar world (41) ... Contents-lists only came in no. 26, so indexes are essential. These (by SPM and KK) are or will be on the Website.

A near-half century ... Celebrity supporters: Wilson Knight, Steiner, Miller, A.N.Wilson, Drabble, Larkin ... Kwintner's Village Press working publishing miracles; Cecil Woolf's Powys Heritage arrives ... Internet addresses creep in. A constitution is formalised (risky territory). The Collection at Dorchester (now at Exeter) grows. The LIP Birthday walk is established. The Powys readership rises and falls and rises. Meetings and Conferences (or Summer Meetings as they used to be called – formerly 4 days, now of 3 days only) are held in London, Dorchester, Weymouth, Winchester, Exeter, Bangor, Bath, East Anglia, Sussex, New York, Cirencester, Cheltenham, Chichester, Uppingham, Kingston Maurward, Millfield, Sherborne, Llangollen, Street. Familiar names now sadly gone: among them Oliver Wilkinson, Kenneth Hopkins, Gerard Casey, Isobel Marks, David Gervais, Patricia Dawson, Chris Wilkinson, Jeff Kwintner, Bill Keith, Jacqueline Peltier and Max, Glen Cavaliero, John Batten ... and now Stephen Marks. Correspondents from abroad widen the picture with news and reviews of translations, among them Nicholas Birns and Larry Mitchell in USA, Bill Keith and Robin Wood in Canada and especially Jacqueline Peltier and Marcella Henderson-Peal in France and Elmar Schenkel in Germany. *Powys Notes* from Colgate University, and reports from the PSNA, were another bridge we'd like to reopen. And, of course, the Newsletter was home-base supporter of the *Review* (1977-97) and then *Journal* (1991 on) with their wider range.

Ten years after the crucial 1972 Conference, in the 1982 typed sheet (the one with drawings of heads on the cover), Glen as Chairman introduced the Newsletter-to-be, ending:

... I want to emphasise here what for me, after ten years as Chairman, stands out about the Society, which is quite simply that it is a society, a group of people who very speedily become friends. The essentially benign influence of the Powys family seems to have an enlivening effect. There is little or no sentimental reverence about the Society, nothing narrowly or excludingly academic. The cross-section of ages, backgrounds, occupations and perspectives at any given meeting is remarkable; and as a result it is possible for people to be completely natural. The common ground is as much personal as professional, and it is hoped that the appearance of a Newsletter will extend this friendliness to every member.

Nearly 20 years later, in no.44 (November 2001), the new Chairman Richard Graves quoted John Cowper (sounding almost as grandiloquent as his brother Llewelyn) from *Suspended Judgments* (1916):

... From the graves of the darlings of our souls there comes a voice and a cry. A voice bidding us sink into our own true selves before we too are numbered with the dead; a cry bidding us sacrifice everything before we sacrifice the prerogative of our inmost identity, the right to feel and think and dream as persons born into a high inheritance, the inheritance of the mind that has a right to question all things and to hold fast what pleases it in defiance of opinion and probability and argument. For it is only when we suspend our judgments and leave arguing and criticising, that the quiet gods of the moonlit shores of the world murmur their secrets in our ears.

And now, more than half a century since its first meetings, the Society has entered the Internet Age of Zoom, E-books, JSTOR, research from home and instant communication. This is something one cannot imagine any Powys enjoying, but written words still rule, and the Newsletter so far resists electric replacement. Our website, under successive managers (Richard Graves, Frank Kibblewhite, and currently Paul Cheshire) provides guidance and information new and old, and a near half-century of *Newsletters* take their place in company with *The Powys Review*, *Powys Notes*, *The Powys Journal*, and *la lettre powysienne*. Complete *Newsletters* (currently from no.88 on) are there, with indexes ongoing. This is the year the world changed, and with future uncertain the wisdom and interest of past writing are ever more valuable.

KK

Belinda Humfrey
The Powys Review

The Powys Review commenced in 1977 and was initiated (though not conceived then) by that first meeting of readers of JCP at Hampstead in 1967, of which I believe I'm the only survivor; then by my wish to increase reading of JCP, especially in universities, by the publication of *Essays on John Cowper Powys* by the University of Wales Press in 1972. This, all 376pp., was rushed out to coincide with the first Powys Society Conference in Cambridge – from which I took the several good lectures for *Review* No.1.

In my Introduction to *Essays on JCP*, I indicated the paucity of critical studies of JCP, such had previously been lamented by Angus Wilson in 1963, with, before my 1972 *Essays*, only two complete books on JCP: those by Wilson Knight (1964) and H.P. Collins (1966). I can well remember my planning of the 1972 Conference speakers at Glen Cavaliero's Portugal Place, together with that champion of JCP, Angus Wilson, for we thought it funny that we'd have three eminent Wilsons at the Conference, the third being Colin Wilson.

This back-up, with my other stress of the importance of Welsh Writing in English for the University of Wales, helped me obtain the Welsh Arts Council finance for the *Review* – for which I had to apply yearly – from Number 2 using the excellent Gomer Press. This finance of course allowed members of the Society to receive two numbers a year very cheaply: it kept the Society going. Also, with a lot of hard work plus use of agencies, it got world-wide reading about JCP, the largest distribution being in American universities.

There followed from me the *Recollections* (1980), using & adding to the contacts I was building up through the *Review* (though Peter Owen asked me to do this as a follow-up to their *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*) and *John Cowper Powys's Wolf Solent: Critical Studies* (1990). I did of course run the *Review* as a first class refereed academic periodical – having problems in that some of the talks at conferences were not up to standard, and searching for good contributors outside the Society.

Having now whizzed through the great pile of *The Powys Review* from 1977, I feel quite proud of it. I still like the font I chose, thinking of mid-Wars, the black & white photographs on the cover and within – an excellent collection from the Powys family and specialist collectors – and the crown octavo size (the larger size of Number 1 having been the Society's committee's choice). And a mere glance at each number's Notes on Contributors reveals the large number of distinguished academics from universities throughout the world & a great variety of other interesting people who are gathered there.

As a referred periodical using world-distributing agents, as said, it had world-wide sales. The latter fact came in useful when in 1987 the Director of the Welsh Arts Council discovered how comparatively small were sales in Wales. I've often been

asked why *PR* is not continuing. Few readers will have noticed that PR20 (1987) is the last to carry the words, “The Powys Review is published with the support of the Welsh Arts Council.” At this time, the WAC put an end to its support of *The Anglo-Welsh Review* and advertised for a replacement, for which I obtained the franchise: this time a quarterly, *The New Welsh Review*. The NWR I managed to sustain for four years (1988 to 1991) while running a large university department. The WAC had expected me to drop *The Powys Review* but I was able to keep it going with existing sales. It met its end for the Society when its committee decided that it should have only its very own *Journal*, and I, in a very heavy working life, then reluctantly reduced PR’s numbers, the last being Numbers 31 & 32 (1997).

I congratulate the Society on having produced *The Powys Journal* for its members since 1991 and so continued the critical study of the works of the Powyses started by a group of enthusiasts in 1967. Wow! What a body of work!

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Editorial note: Details of all copies of *The Powys Review* including a list of the contents of each issue can be found at: <http://www.powyslannion.net/Powys/PowysRev/Contents.htm>.

Plans have been proposed to digitise the complete run of *The Powys Review* which we hope will be undertaken soon. In the meantime some single issues of the Powys Review can be obtained from Belinda (bhumfrey@hotmail.co.uk) or from the Powys Society. Copies are usually also available for sale at our annual conference.

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from **John Hodgson**

The Powys Review, edited by Belinda Humfrey, was an extraordinary spur to the Powys revival in the 1970s. This was a time when there were many first generation Powys readers, who read the books as they came out, and some who had met and known the Powyses, who inspired a whole cohort of new readers and postgraduate students. The pages of the Review are redolent of the Powys Society conferences of those days, which brought together academics and enthusiastic readers from all walks of life, many of us highly eccentric. A Powys Society conference was a challenging and demanding platform for any speaker faced with such a diverse audience, and in a similar way the *Powys Review* was, slightly on the sly, an academic journal of a very high standard but also a highly readable forum for contributions of all kinds related to the Powyses and cultural life beyond. Its layout was attractive, lavishly illustrated with photographs and work by artists attracted to the Powyses, and its generous review section opened up wider prospects of cultural engagement, as offered by reviewers who had been nourished by their Powys reading. The literary milieu created by the *Review*, expansive, open to the mystical, ecological, and rooted in places, was truly memorable and distinctive.

Saturday 9th May 2020:
Powys Society “meeting” on *Maiden Castle*, chapter 6,
organised by Kevin Taylor.
(notes by KK)

‘ZOOM’ meetings may be jungle country to us aged folk, but on the evidence of this one must be admitted a good idea, even without the Coronavirus incentive. Editor managed a brief appearance but failed the vital test of UNMUTE; nevertheless inaudibly present, following the proceedings with interest and pleasure at seeing old friends. Kevin Taylor tactfully orchestrated no less than 22 faces and voices, including 4 from USA and others from Europe.

Chapter 6 of *Maiden Castle* is in effect two chapters: the first 30 pages, carrying on from the previous chapter, ‘Scummy Pond’, describe Dud’s walk to the hillfort with his newly-revealed father, Enoch/ Urien Quirm. The ambiguous father-son relationship is intensified, with Urien becoming more occult, provoking Dud into the role of matter-of-fact onlooker. A further 20 pages continue with *our friend* ‘s ongoing encounters with the various women in his life – Jenny (scolding), Nance (amorous) and Wizzie (disagreeable as usual), ending with the revelation of Wizzie’s



child Lovie, who will inhabit if not dominate the action for the rest of the book.

Maiden Castle was unusual in having several false starts and gaps in its writing between leaving America, moving from Rats Barn to the flat in Dorchester, and then settling in Wales. Like other books by JCP, it was first published in abridged form (in America, in 1936, followed by the English edition in 1937).

For **Tim Hyman** the chapter is filled with psychological acuteness: as **Kevin** agreed, chapters 5 and 6 together are the core of the book and very memorable. **Chris Thomas** noted that this linking is unusual for JCP, whose chapters are usually self-contained (in some cases practically separate books, and can usefully be read as such). The sequence of chapters in *MC* have been assigned to festivals in the year – both Christian and Celtic (see Angela Blaen in *Powys Review* 15, 1984). **Sonia Lewis** sees the characters of Urien and his wife Nance as bookends. But what about Nance's poor dead son, never explained. (The post-WWI influenza epidemic is held responsible for a lot). **Tim** recalled JCP's diary saying that Phyllis found the book close to *Wolf Solent*, with the hero's inner reality threatened by the "real" town. **Nick Birns** spoke about the role of Dorchester. **Pat Quigley** noted circular action in the book (not only in the Castle) – Dud ending as he began. Recurring themes were noted: people and places whistling, the wind – natural and unnatural ... Biblical texts? Humour (Urien undressing). Revulsion (dog mess, decomposed rabbit).

Nick Birns emphasised the theme of pain, physical and mental, a conflict between Dud and his father, violent on Dud's side ("*Physical pain's a hundred times worse*", he shouted). **Tim** spotted the *altar / alter* Freudian slip (p.250). Significance (for JCP as well as for Dud) of the various names for his father (including French), both from Dud and the author (*the fellow, Mr Quirm, his father, the man, his mother's man, the Glymes man, "monsieur bien croupé"*). For **Louise de Bruin** these can be irritating, like 'our friend' for Dud (in case we wondered – JCP's friend, anyway). Rhys, JCP's source for Welsh legends, is quoted by Urien as his own source. *MC* spans JCP's move from Dorset to Wales. How much did JCP care about his diminishing popularity? He is called an 'outsider' – **Tim** prefers 'outlyer' – one who avoids the centre, the obvious.

Charles Lock examined the ancient (?Welsh) term *semi-mortuous*, a theme of Sir John Rhys whose book JCP knew so well (*Studies in the Arthurian Legend*), showing a replica of the figures fused with or (for JCP) impaled, on the horns of a bull. Reality may be *four-square*, but one side must always be turned away. Was JCP interested in Boundaries? The role of Mary Channing, subject of Dud's book, recurs throughout. **John Hodgson** sees much repulsiveness in the book – the dead wife, decomposition, the impaled figures, Mary Channing's revolting fate. **Louise** reminded us of Harald Fawkner's book (*JCP and the Elements*) rejecting this. There are many dead people in the book (**Sonia**), and (unlike the previous chapter with its panegyric on cuckoo flowers) not so much Nature in chapter 6 (apart from the daisy sat on by Urien). Hardy is always present, with *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

set in Dorchester (**Hilary Bedder**). The book is really about Dorchester town – the hillfort an adjunct (**Pat Q**). But the chapters set there are the essence of the book. The prehistoric life of the ‘castle’, a town, is seen by Urien as a Golden Age (**Tim H**). H.J.Massingham’s books are a strong influence here.

Other thoughts and queries: **Tim H** finds this book is more *savage* than others. Because of Dud’s battle with the ‘real’ (modern) world, and Wizzie’s battle with him? Is the end *sad*? -- back where he started, or is he. We moved on to **Iris Murdoch**’s admiration for the book and its possible influence on her own later novels, which many prefer (**Anthony Swindell**). **Marcella Henderson-Peal** recalled Murdoch’s essay on JCP in *Paris Review*. **Chris** noted the aeroplanes dragged in to illustrate socialist Claudius’s belief in progress, though as always they are examples of modern life for JCP; also the famous remark ‘*Somebody must have made all this*’ made by ‘energetic’ Napoleon at the Pyramids, applied to the huge hillfort (followed by a typical Powys biblical quotation ‘*...and not we ourselves*’). Finally, **Pat Q** reminded us of Theodore’s adopted daughter ‘Susie’ (Theodora Scutt, still living in Ireland), at the time of the book the same age as Lovie, who is doubtless based on her.

This was our third (recorded) meeting devoted to ‘this controversial and sometimes unloved novel’, *Maiden Castle*. At Little Gidding, on 16th June 2007, arranged by Sonia Lewis our representative in the East Country, we also celebrated Glen’s birthday. Tony Atmore describes this occasion in *NL* 61 (July 07): conducted by Glen, ‘the predominant theme of *MC* is death... JCP illumines this gloomy subject with his masterful insights into human and earth life.’ Dud’s character is ‘put through the wringer’: is this a self-portrait as seen through Phyllis’s eyes? a revealing of his hidden depths? or a self-parody?

On 23rd April 2016, at Ely (see *NL* 88, July 016), Glen was also with us, as was Kevin Taylor for the first time. Sonia (who lives near Ely, and exhibits in the excellent Fire Engine restaurant, our favorite *venue*) introduced her chosen chapter 5, ‘The Scummy Pond’ – conveniently central in this ‘sometimes baffling’ novel, containing almost all the characters, and with the best title. Dud stumbles through various encounters, relieved by his vision of the cuckoo flowers (mostly omitted in the original edition), ‘the talisman that lifted the sluice gate’ of his ‘intimations’ – not of Wordsworth’s ‘immortality’, but of ‘the emanation of things’. This is followed by his ‘cerebral’ (but erotic) communion with Thuella at the pond, and the awkward lunch party with the newspaper tycoon where he is disturbed by Thuella and Wizzie seeming happy to exclude him, and escapes to walk with Urien to the ancient fortress. This report (in *NL* 88) was followed by extracts on *Maiden Castle* from Glen Cavaliero’s *John Cowper Powys, novelist*; from G.Wilson Knight’s *The Saturnian Quest*; from Malcolm Elwin’s introduction to the 1979 Picador edition; and from Harald Fawkner’s *John Cowper Powys and the Elements*.

Chris Gostick
John Batten 1930 - 2020

I had been a member of the Society for quite some years before I became involved in any way, but when John Batten, then the Hon. Secretary, suggested a weekend *Walking Weymouth Sands* in 1993 I signed up with great alacrity. As it turned out the meeting had to be postponed until June 1994, as John needed to have a heart pacemaker fitted. But the event was all the better for the delay, as the 30-odd members who eventually turned up enjoyed a spectacularly sunny few days in Weymouth. This was the first time I had met John and his wife Eve, who together led the party with great skill and enthusiasm. We toured many of the places referred to in the book, even crossing the harbour on the ferry boat, stopping for short readings on the way. A select few of us even got to stay in Penn House in Brunswick Terrace, then a small hotel, where JCP himself had so often stayed with his grandmother as a child. Shepherding such a large and disparate group around the narrow, crowded streets of Weymouth and Portland on a busy summer weekend, without any apparent stress, was entirely due to John & Eve's profound organizational skills, honed over many years as schoolteachers together. John's uncanny ability to involve everyone was just as soon in evidence, as after a quietly whispered aside I suddenly found myself charged with writing up the visit for the next Society Newsletter! (*A Walk on the Sands*. NL 23 November 1994 pp 44-48.)

Largely as a result of this Weymouth meeting, and a subsequent one in Montacute, I found myself at my first Society Conference at Kingston Maurward in Dorchester. Here John & Eve's apparently effortless abilities to welcome, involve and organise were again on full display. And before I knew quite what had happened I was joining the Committee myself as the event's organiser! I eventually took over from John as Secretary when he became the Newsletter Editor. It was in this latter role that I came to know him better – not least as he was able to give me endless advice from his own years as Secretary. Then as now the Newsletter was published three times a year, and a small group of us would meet at John & Eve's home, an idyllic cottage with astonishing views just outside the village of Montacute, to 'stuff' the freshly printed Newsletters into crisp brown envelopes, label and stamp them ready for posting out to members. This was always followed by a large glass of dry sherry, and then a long leisurely lunch, cooked and presided over by Eve, who took particular pride in seeing so many replete and glowing faces round her table. They were certainly events long to be remembered.

Around this time, while helping catalogue the Powys Society Collection then held at the Dorset County Museum, John came across a copy of Llewelyn Powys's Will from October 1933. This indicated that £100 should be put in trust and the interest paid each year on his birthday, 13 August, to the landlord of The Sailor's Return at East Chaldon (this being the nearest public house to Llewelyn's home at Chydyok), to provide a free drink for any customer to drink his health that day. In the event, Llewelyn died virtually penniless in Switzerland in 1939, and no such bequest took place. Nothing daunted, John still thought it a good idea for a few to meet at Chaldon to fulfil Llewelyn's wish each year, and so was born the Llewelyn Birthday Walk – now in its 25th year! The full story can be read in Neil Lee's excellent little book *Dandelions, Ground-Ivy & Yarrow* (New Age Poetry Press 2015). Both John & Eve were regulars at this event in the early years, and after Eve's untimely death in December 2006, John continued to attend to propose the ritual toast to Llewelyn, and to absent friends, until he too found the steep climb up Chalky Knapp rather too much. Even so, he was able to attend the 20th anniversary meeting in August 2015, where he met up with many old friends. A small plaque was also unveiled that day, outside the Sailor's Return, by Janice



John Batten with Janice Gregory and the Llewelyn Powys Plaque.

Gregory, Llewelyn's wife Alyse's great-niece, to commemorate John's central role in establishing and supporting the popular annual walk and meeting.

Together with a few others, I continued to visit John as often as possible at Keeper's Cottage, where he remained active and cheerful throughout his final years, always ready to welcome old friends, despite his increasing deafness. There was one final celebratory party in July 2016, organized by his son and daughter to commemorate his and Eve's contribution to teaching, attended by many of their old school colleagues, and a few Powys Society friends. After this John very gradually declined, although still greeting old friends cheerfully when they visited, until his own peaceful death at home earlier this year. He was just a week or so short of his 90th birthday. His funeral was held at St Catherine's, Montacute, the church where C. F. Powys had ministered for so many years, and John Cowper regularly read the lesson as a young man, and where John himself had for some years been Church Warden. Sadly, the beginning of the Corona virus epidemic precluded many of us from being able to attend his funeral to say a last farewell. Nonetheless, John will always be remembered by many in the Society for his years of friendship and devotion to the Powys cause. Most of all he will be remembered for his ready wit, quiet good humour and boundless generosity. He was a remarkable teacher, seemingly able to impart knowledge with effortless enthusiasm. He and Eve will both be greatly missed.



*John Batten outside Chydyok.
Photo by Chris Gostick*

Chris Thomas

My Memories of John Batten

In the early 1990s, some years before I became actively engaged in the work of the Powys Society, I planned a tour by bicycle of Somerset, Dorset and Wales, with the aim of visiting all the places associated with JCP. I decided to make Montacute the centre of my travels because it was the Powys family home and closely connected to so many childhood memories of the Powyses. I had also noticed that the Secretary of the Powys Society at this time, John Batten, lived in Montacute at Keeper's Cottage. I sent a letter to John asking for some information about the village. I was astonished to receive by return post not only all the information I had requested but also a generous invitation to spend the day with John and his wife, Eve, on a guided tour of Montacute and the surrounding area. I was so delighted with this kind and friendly gesture that I immediately packed my bags, loaded my luggage on the bike and instantly set off to meet my Montacute hosts.

Once arrived in Montacute I easily located Keeper's Cottage. John was waiting for me and greeted me with a firm handshake, a warm smile and welcomed me to his home. We sat down to coffee and home-made cake and talked with enthusiasm about our shared interest in the Powyses. We then got into John's car and drove into the village for lunch at a local pub where John described the itinerary he had devised. At each place we planned to visit John proposed reading a passage from JCP's *Wood and Stone*, Littleton's *The Joy of It*, or from one of Llewelyn's essays.

What a memorable day it was! The weather was bright and sunny. The air was vibrant and alive with the sound of birdsong. A soft breeze carried the fragrant scent of freshly mown grass. John and his wife were perfect guides to the history of Montacute and showed me places associated with the Powyses I had only ever read about. We visited in succession the church of St Catherine and the Powys family graves, the Borough, Bishopston, Middle Street, Wash Lane, the vicarage (noting the Wellingtonias which Llewelyn describes vividly in *Skin for Skin* and *Confessions of Two Brothers*), Montacute House, St Michael's Hill, Hedgecock, the Abbey Farmhouse (the remains of the old Cluniac priory), the church at Stoke sub Hamdon where we studied the extraordinary tympanum over the entrance (described so well in *Wood and Stone*), Ham Hill, Witcombe Bottom, Five Ashes, the non-conformist cemetery and the burial place of the poet and composer of psalm tunes, Thomas Shoel (who is the subject of an essay by Llewelyn in *Somerset Essays*).

After our walk around Montacute and its environs we returned to Keeper's Cottage for tea and cakes. John later escorted me down through Pitt Wood to Pitt Pond. As we tramped around the edge of the lake and looked into its dark and mysterious waters John explained how Pitt Pond and the surrounding landscape had recently

been reclaimed. By now my head was buzzing with all sorts of Powysian stories and anecdotes. I felt breathless and struggled to absorb everything John had told me during my visit.

At the end of the day as I cycled down the driveway I looked back towards Keeper's Cottage and saw John waving. I waved back, turned into Hollow Lane and headed for Yeovil where I would spend the night reflecting on my experience and the memory of one perfect day. Afterwards I was sorry I never kept up my acquaintance with John and Eve although I think I did write to him one more time and thanked him profusely for his great hospitality.

Most recently memories of my meeting with John came back to me whilst sorting through Glen's collection of correspondence and literary papers, amongst which he had kept letters addressed to him from John dated between 1993 and 1996. The letters are full of John's enthusiasm, knowledge and wisdom which I recall very well – his letters to Glen are usually several pages long, typewritten and mostly deal with the Society's affairs, meetings and conferences, although he also discusses attending various funerals as well as his love of gardening and reading.

Morine Krissdóttir

John Batten

I know that Chris Gostick has written a fine tribute to John and his words brought back good memories. In these terrible days of uncertainty when no one knows what the future holds, it is often memories that sustain. I have been thinking back to the time I first met John and Eve in 1989. At the time my husband and I were living temporarily in the cottage kindly lent us by Rose Powys which was across the Downs from Chaldon.

Fortunately, I have kept most of my early Newsletters and note the following: '*The walk around Chaldon Herring on January 15th [1989] was a happy success, attracting nineteen intrepid souls. Many new members came and were delighted to meet Francis and Sally Powys and Isobel Powys Marks.*'

On that walk we met for the first time two new members – John and Eve Batten. John had had a long career in the education service as headmaster but they had recently retired to Keeper's Cottage above Montacute. John told us in his blunt fashion that 'his main interest was Llewelyn and he didn't take to the other two authors in that family'. My first impression of them was that John was astute and very competent. Eve was – well, just lovely Eve – gracious, caring, a hostess par excellence. Always on the look-out for new blood, I knew almost immediately that I wanted to involve them in the Powys Society. So began a long and close friendship through good times and bad.

The plan that day was to meet at the Sailors Return pub, walk to the church, hence to Chydyok and then to our place for tea. My husband took Sally and Francis back to the house as Francis by then was frail, but Isobel insisted on walking with us on the rutted dusty track to Chydyok. Halfway there I realized that Isobel had veered off across the downs. Worried, I asked Frank Kibblewhite to catch her up and walk with her to our cottage. In later years this gave us a happily absurd memory of Frank trying valiantly to overtake this elderly indomitable lady who beat him back to the cottage.

In the 1989 Newsletter I wrote: ‘Perhaps the Society should plan more walks in the future. One member has proposed several walks around Glastonbury and Montacute.’ That member was John and the subsequent walks in November 1990 around Montacute was the beginning of several walks they organized. For many years after that both John and Eve contributed greatly to the Society.

I miss them both very much.

* * *

John Batten

No Tea! No Tea! A Memory of Peter Powys Grey

(from *NL21*, April 1994)

Peter Powys Grey, only son of Marian Powys, died in New York in October 1992. Tributes to his memory from Glen Cavaliero, Morine Krissdottir and Charles Lock are to be found in Newsletter No. 17. While I would not presume to add anything to the poignant recollections of those friends who knew him so much better than I, the brief time which he spent with my family, just weeks before his death, remains a treasured memory. His warmth, his gratitude for even the smallest kindness, his sensitivity and charm, but above all, his talk I shall never forget. But while I can never forget it, I can never quite remember it to my satisfaction. Never quite recapture every modulation of his booming voice, the eloquent gestures of his enormous hands and the pauses and digressions of a natural raconteur.

Our conversation was as ceaseless as it was Powysian, but not, I think, without purpose. I am prompted to attempt to retell one of Peter’s stories because, after a long period of reflection, I feel convinced that Peter was aware before we met, that his life was drawing to a close and was, in at least one instance, recounting events that he wished to have placed on record.

Inevitably, much of our talk was about his mother, whom he loved dearly, and his Uncle Jack, with whom the relationship was more ambivalent. Peter felt that the bond between Marian and her oldest brother was so close as to make him, in John Cowper’s eyes, an unwanted intruder. What he described to me as their “love-hate relationship” can be glimpsed in the entry for June 4th 1930 in John Cowper’s Diary.

It describes an encounter between them after Peter, out of childish curiosity, had shadowed his uncle, who was seeking some quiet spot in which to relieve himself. It ended with him being carried screaming, kicking and biting to be reported to his mother. That incident, vividly remembered by Peter almost seventy years later, may have some bearing on the story I am about to tell.

Many years afterwards Peter fell in love with a beautiful young woman and they decided to marry. As his wife-to-be was a lapsed Roman Catholic, they thought it would ease matters if they were not married in America. Peter wrote to his Uncle Jack and asked whether they might be married in Wales. J.C.P.'s reply was not encouraging. It began with a dozen reasons why a young man should not get married and concluded with the words "But if you must get married, for God's sake don't do it in Corwen." However, all was not lost because Aunt Gertrude came to the rescue and invited them to stay at Chydyok and be married at East Chaldon, after which they were to make their way to Corwen.

Peter's account of the bizarre events associated with the wedding arrangements, the ceremony and the reception at Chydyok would double the length of this piece. Among other things, Uncle Littleton, who had come to give the bride away, was allotted Katie's room and became almost apoplectic when he awoke to the realization that there was a large hammer and sickle flag draped above his bed. Then there was the Reverend Ezra Ramm, who was to officiate. He seems always to have been accompanied by a young man, whom he introduced to all and sundry with the words, "This is my son, who failed."

Despite the various alarms and excursions, they were duly married and eventually set off for Corwen, where they arrived earlier than anticipated. Peter could not wait for the tea-time appointment to introduce his bride to John and Phyllis. Although unexpected, they were made very welcome and the new Mrs Powys Grey made an even greater impression on his uncle than Peter had imagined, for he seemed quite unable to take his eyes off the girl; so much so that conversation became stilted. In this embarrassing situation Peter cast frantically around for some diversion and launched into an account of their wedding, laying particular emphasis on the eccentricities of the Reverend Ramm. No sooner had he committed himself to this light-hearted approach than he realised from his uncle's grim expression that he had made a mistake, but there was no going back. Eventually his now faltering description was cut short by J.C.P., who burst out, "How dare you make fun of a man of the cloth!" Peter, having profited from that childhood confrontation, made a hasty retreat, thanking Phyllis and saying that they looked forward to returning for tea as arranged.

Peter described their hotel as being situated at the foot of a steep hill-side, immediately below Cae Coed, which was most easily approached by a zig-zag road

which lay across the gradient like a strung bow. There was, however, an alternative, direct but precipitous, path down the escarpment, fit only for the reckless and nimble of foot. It was this they took, slipping and sliding, hand-in-hand, coming to rest in the foyer of the hotel, breathless but filled with relief at their escape. At that moment, and before they had uttered a word, the swing-doors burst open, framing J.C.P., towering like a thunder-cloud, and shouting “No tea! No tea!” – and then they closed and he was gone.

The only detail Peter could recall afterwards was that John was wearing boots which were unlaced. It was his absolute conviction that no man of seventy, even with his boots laced, could have taken that track down the hill, and he could not possibly have arrived that quickly by road. Years later, after John Cowper’s death, Peter spent several days with Phyllis in London. For reasons he never understood, he did not ask her about the events of that day or the apparition at the hotel.

During the first Powys Society Conference, at Churchill College, Peter told this story to Professor G. Wilson Knight, who was fascinated by it and strongly urged him to write it down, but he never did so. Almost as soon as Peter Powys Grey left for New York after the 1992 Conference, I wrote thanking him for the pleasure of his company. My letter ended: “Wilson Knight was absolutely right, you must write up No Tea!” News came of his death before the letter was posted.

The Theodore Dreiser story of John Cowper “appearing” is well known. I am sure this one had to be placed on record and confident that Peter was too kind a man to disparage my clumsy attempt to do so.

* * *

News & Notes

from Paul Roberts:

I am about to reach the end of the first draft of my biography of John Redwood Anderson (1883-1964), an important and now neglected poet. He was a great friend of all the Powys family and many members of their circle, especially John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter, Alyse Gregory, Littleton Charles Powys, Lucy Penny and Mary and Gerard Casey, all of whom he deeply admired. While I have been able to unearth an enormous amount of new information about his life and work with the help of friends and librarians around the world, including several members of The Powys Society, I want to make this first biography as complete as possible. Therefore, I would be extremely grateful for any information or recollections, however slight, about John Redwood Anderson and his third wife Gwyneth, who died in 1985. Please feel free to contact me by email at pswtoberts@btinternet.com.

As part of my research into the life of John Redwood Anderson I have come across a previously unpublished photograph of JCP (see the front cover of this *Newsletter*), which I thought the Society might like to have. It was taken by Arnold Lewis, a friend of John Redwood Anderson in about 1947/48. Lewis was a Unitarian minister in Hull and later in Shrewsbury. Like Redwood Anderson he was an active member of the Hull Literary Club and left Hull in 1943, at the same time as Anderson. The two visited one another in Corwen and Shrewsbury quite often and Lewis also got to know JCP. The photograph came from Roger Lewis, Arnold Lewis's grandson.



Arnold Lewis

Chris Thomas adds: During the mid 1940s and early 1950s John Redwood Anderson lived in Corwen in a small flat over a shop in the main square opposite the Owen Glendower hotel. He frequently visited JCP and Phyllis at Cae Coed where he read or recited his latest poems. Iowerth C. Peate recalled that JCP told him Anderson *read his own poetry beautifully, a rare thing with poets*. Anderson dedicated a poem, entitled *Anima Mundi*, to Arnold Lewis in his book *Pillars to Remembrance* (1948). *Pillars to Remembrance* also includes poems dedicated to JCP and Phyllis, Lucy Penny, Alyse Gregory, and Gerard and Mary Casey, as well as JCP's friends and acquaintances such as Gilbert Turner, Meum Stewart, Peggy Goodman (who also lived in Corwen) and James Norbury.

* * *

New Powys Society member **Alex Wright** is Senior Executive Publisher at Cambridge University Press and a lifelong fan of JCP. He is author of several books, the latest of which, *Exploring Doubt: Landscapes of Loss and Longing* (Darton Longman Todd, 2016) contains references to *Rodmoor*, *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands*. It includes the observation (pp. 41-2) that 'perhaps the extraordinary, concentrated lyricism [of these books] would have been impossible to realise if [their composition] had taken shape within the landscapes they describe. It was the fact of distance, separation – of melancholy, deeply felt ennui – which enabled his imagination to take full flight.'

* * *

from Pat Quigley:

Corwen Museum

Corwen museum has organised an exhibition called *Artists and Writers with a connection in Edeyrnion* which features a display covering the life and work of JCP in Corwen. It's a big step to have the Corwen Museum honour JCP & Phyllis in this way. Hopefully some people in Corwen will realize they have literary treasure in having had a world-class writer in their town. The museum is currently closed during coronavirus but will reopen in due course.

* * *

from Chris Thomas:

A review of *Powys and Lord Jim: correspondence between John Cowper Powys and James Hanley, 1929-1965*, ed. Chris Gostick (2018)

Tony Brown, Emeritus Professor in the School of English Literature at Bangor University has reviewed *Powys and Lord Jim* in the *International Journal for Welsh Writing in English*, 7(1), 2020. The review is available on-line at <https://ijwwe.uwp.co.uk/article/id/1939/>

* * *

George Steiner and JCP

Since compiling a bibliography of George Steiner's references to JCP (published in *Newsletter* No.99, March 2020) I have located two more citations. The full bibliography has been updated on our website at: https://powys-society.org/steiner_biblio.html

The additions are:

The Spectator, 27 November 1964, *Aged Eagle*, a review of JCP's *Selected Poems*, edited by Kenneth Hopkins, Macdonald, 1964. Steiner says that *John Cowper Powys was not a poet. That is, he did not find in verse that which gives a man's use of it necessary force...There is almost nothing in the poems which Powys wrote and published as such that comes near the power of the verse attributed to Jason Otter in Wolf Solent*. Steiner declares that JCP's body of work in prose is *equal to or surpassing that of Hardy and Lawrence*.

Encounter, March 1966, *Pornography and the Consequences*, includes a reference to *the sexual audacity of John Cowper Powys's Wolf Solent and A Glastonbury Romance*, and compares JCP with the monotonous cliché of "the great liberation" associated with Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press.

* * *

JCP in Germany & France

Professor Elmar Schenkel (Professor of English literature at Leipzig University) who helped us to obtain a copy of Max Brod's 1930 review of *Wolf Solent* (see *Newsletter* No.93, March 2018 and *PJ*, Vol. XXIX, 2019) has continued to write about JCP in German. Recent publications are:

Die elektrische Himmelsleiter, Visionäre und Exzentriker in den Wissenschaften (The Electric Stairway to Heaven: Visionaries and Eccentrics in the Sciences), München, C.H.Beck, 2005. Includes a chapter on Gustav Theodore Fechner who is mentioned by JCP in *Autobiography*; Fechner was also admired by Henry Miller and William James, and was an influence on *A Glastonbury Romance*. This chapter includes a reference to JCP.

Keplers Dämon, Begegnungen zwischen Literatur, Traum und Wissenschaft (Kepler's Demon: Encounters Between Literature, Dream, and Science), Frankfurt am Main, S.Fischer Verlag, 2016. Includes a chapter on JCP.

Le vaisseau inépuisable: La mémoire des mythes celtiques dans la littérature anglaise (The Inexhaustible Vessel: The Memory of Celtic Myths in English Literature), *Amis des études Celtiques, Bulletin de liaison* No. 75, April 2020. The article includes references to JCP.

In 2019 Professor Schenkel was made a Director of the *Arbeitskreis Vergleichende Mythologie* (Research Group for Comparative Mythology) and is a warden of the Nietzsche birthplace museum in Röcken near Leipzig.

* * *

from Louise de Bruin:

Evangeline Walton and JCP

A friend of mine sent me information about the correspondence between JCP and the American novelist **Evangeline Walton** (1907-1996). The letters cover the period 1936 to 1958 and can be found at the Special Collections of the University of Arizona. The collection includes 23 letters and a photograph of JCP. Evangeline Walton was a fantasy writer who published four novels based on the tales in the *Mabinogion*, beginning with *The Virgin and The Swine* (1936) which was praised by JCP. The other three novels in Walton's tetralogy were not published until the 1970s. Walton also wrote on Greek mythology including a trilogy about Theseus of which only part 1 was published. A link to the Walton papers and JCP's letters has been added to



Evangeline Walton

the webliography on our website under University of Arizona at:
<http://www.azarchivesonline.org/xtf/view?docId=ead/uoal/UAMS384.xml>

* * *

from Ray Crozier:

Fludd and Mr Weston's Good Wine

I have been reading some excellent pre-Wolf Hall novels by Hilary Mantel and was instantly struck by the similarities between *Fludd* (first published in 1989) and *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. Her novel is set in 1956. A mysterious visitor arrives unannounced at a small, isolated village surrounded by moors. At first he is assumed to be a curate whom the bishop was due to send to 'modernise' the parish, but doubts arise about his true identity when strange and dramatic events begin to happen in the church, presbytery, convent, school and the wider community. Wine does feature in the book. I wondered if anyone else had noticed this resemblance and I came upon an anonymous comment on the book on the website Bookwitch.co.uk, March 16, 2010: 'This book reminded me of *Mr Weston's Good Wine* by T.F. Powys, largely forgotten now, but worth reading for its strangeness, which must have been even more marked at the time of publication'.

Ray isn't the first to notice this interesting resemblance! I seem to recall Hilary M. when her book first came out, saying she had never read Mr W. But it has been a well-used story (immortals visiting human life) for ever, in various forms? Michael Kowalewski also spotted the resemblance to Fludd, in 2012. KK found another connection made by a reviewer, this one with the TV drama series Messiah (see 'News and Notes' in the last Newsletter, 99). KK

* * *

from Rachel Hassall (archivist at Sherborne School):

The Old Shirburnian Society

I have updated the Powys pages on the Old Shirburnian Society website at: <https://oldshirburnian.org.uk/the-powys-family-at-sherborne-school/>

* * *

from Kate Kavanagh

I was thrilled this year, as never before in 45 years, to see one of our grass patches starred with pale mauve **Cuckoo flowers**, 'Nature's shyest, purest secret' as JCP called them in his panegyric in *Maiden Castle* (page 187 – one of the passages cut in the original edition). They are indeed amazing, both more delicate and somehow more complete than their wide-ranging exuberant contemporary Buttercups, let alone forceful Dandelions and humble daisies. They are nicely spaced and spread in their chosen space: a delicious visitation, well timed for our discussion of the novel.

Chris Thomas

JCP's first letter to Glen Cavaliero

Glen informs us, in his memoir of the members of the Powys family with whom he was personally acquainted [1], that he first began reading JCP's books in 1955 beginning with *A Glastonbury Romance*, followed by *Wolf Solent*; but he admits he could not at that stage work out whether he really liked them. It was only when he read *Jobber Skald* that he says he really *broke through into an appreciation and enjoyment of Powys's fiction* [2]. He then proceeded to read all of JCP's published books up to 1957. It was at this point that he decided to write a fan letter to JCP. In his memoir Glen describes his feelings of astonishment when he received an immediate reply to his letter, and how disconcerted he felt when he glanced at JCP's *enormous sprawling script, the underlinings, the marginalising and the exclamation marks* [3].

This first letter which Glen received from JCP is published here. The letter marks an important moment in Powys scholarship for it led directly to Glen's personal meetings with JCP between 1958 and 1960. Between 1956 and 1961 Glen was a staff member of Lincoln Theological College and a resident of the Bishop's Hostel in Lincoln. In his correspondence JCP addresses him as either *My dear Friend* or the *Reverend Cavaliero*, and once as *Father Cavaliero*. Glen's correspondence and meetings with JCP also led to his later friendships and encounters with the remaining living members of the Powys family and their acquaintances -- Lucy Amelia Penny, Philippa (Katie) Powys, Marian Powys Grey, as well as Louis Wilkinson, Alyse Gregory, and of course Phyllis Playter with whom he continued to correspond after JCP's death until 1981. This introduction to the world of the Powyses provided Glen with a connection and direct link to their fund of family memories and anecdotes: *I can see and hear them still so clearly*, says Glen, *their movements and gestures, the cadences of their voices* [4]. JCP's first letter is significant as well because it laid the foundation for Glen's later literary studies and his ground-breaking critical work on JCP's life and writings [5].

I plan to transcribe all of JCP's letters to Glen at a later date and these I hope will appear in a future volume of *The Powys Journal* [6]. Although, as Glen remarks in his memoir, JCP's letters to him resemble letters sent to other correspondents at this time *they do not read as though undertaken automatically* [7]. This makes the letters particularly valuable to all students of JCP helping to illustrate JCP's life-enhancing effect. What Glen has to say of the members of the Powys family with whom he was acquainted might also be easily applied solely to JCP himself: *the Powyses were phenomenal...they were first and foremost alive, elementally alive... they liberated you from the emotional dominion of prescriptive beliefs...*[8]

JCP's original letters to Glen (twelve letters covering a period of four years dated

between 23 November 1957 and 1 October 1961) are contained in Glen's archive of papers and documents which have been donated to the Powys Society by Dr Paul Hartle, and will in due course be transferred to the Powys Society Collection at Exeter University.

Notes

1. *The Powys Family: Some Records of a Friendship*, Cecil Woolf, 1999
2. *The Powys Family*, p.12
3. *The Powys Family*, p.12
4. *The Powys Family*, p.3
5. Glen read English at St Catharine's College, Cambridge in 1965 and obtained his Ph.D in 1972. Glen's study of JCP's novels was published by OUP in 1973. See also the bibliography of his contributions to *Powys Review*, *Powys Journal* and *Powys Society Newsletter*, in *Newsletter* No.99, March 2020, pages 22-23.
6. Some passages from these letters were originally transcribed by Glen and appear in his memoir, *The Powys Family*, on pages 16-17.
7. *The Powys Family*, p.16
8. *The Powys Family*, p.26

* * *

The Letter

1 Waterloo
Blaenau-Ffestiniog
Merionethshire
North Wales

November 23 1957

My dear Friend

For a friend indeed you are to encourage an eccentric old gent like me on the verge of or in the beginning of his 'Second Childhood'.

I love this word because I have of late been proving its truth; I've found that there really is a commonly close bond between elderly men like me, and I was 85 on the 8th of October, and children between 1 and 4. My desk in this tiny little house is the wonderfully broad window sill by which I lie on a couch and read and write with a board propt-up on my knees.

My favourite book now, and I read it over and over and over and over and over is a very short book in a good print necessary to me as I have only got one eye, is called 'Atlantis and the Giants' by Denis Saurat and published by Faber & Faber [1]. I've discovered as an odd and quaint thing that my own favourite of all my own books is a book called Atlantis published by my present most kind, considerate, and helpful Publishers Macdonald & Co, 16 Maddox Street, London W1.

But no doubt my Glastonbury book must be my best book but not necessarily because of that my own favourite! The great danger for writers in this country is the danger of being sued for libel. A danger from which in the United States writers are quite free!

I have just been having an exciting correspondence with a very nice French lady who lives in Paris but whose dad was born in Corsica & I warrant Corsican blood is an asset for any worker with a pen as well as with a sword! She has just translated with a preface by an older correspondent of mine a Professor on [*sic*] the Sorbonne – a word that always makes me think of Rabelais – my book about Weymouth & Portland called by me over here in fear of libel Jobber Skald but published in America under the name of Weymouth Sands [2], and it is soon to be published in French by a Paris Publishing House called Plon.

If you yourself my dear friend associate at all with children of a very very youthful age do let me recommend to your attention – but you probably know it – a couple of delicious books that I call real classics like *Alice in Wonderland* & *Through the Looking Glass* – namely *The Borrowers* and *The Borrowers Afield* [3] by Mary Norton published by Dent.

Do please, my dear friend, tell me a little about your parents. Your name does intrigue me so! What a splendid name. You might be a character in Ivanhoe! [4] Glen I know is Welsh so you must have Welsh on your mothers side. But what a grand name Cavaliero! My father was a clergyman of the Low church evangelical way of thought. He was the bravest, calmest, most formidable man and far O far the most simple minded man I have ever met. We were eleven, with your J.C.P. as the eldest, but of all my 5 brothers and 5 sisters only [two] sisters in Dorset and one brother in Kenya E.Africa and one sister, now a grandmother & coming here for a visit in March who lives in New York State in the country & is a great authority on lace and has written a book called 'Lace and how to make it' [5] are still alive.

My mother's grandfather was John Johnson to whom Cowper wrote the sonnet beginning 'Kinsman beloved and as a son by me.' [6] The first five of us were born in Derbyshire: old Littleton my companion in the nursery, at school & in College only died a year ago. I never met his second wife [7] tho' we corresponded a lot. When my Dad's brother Littleton died in the Afghan war in 1879 he chucked his vicarage to live near his mother in Weymouth and became a curate in Dorchester. This was lucky for me as a boy for Thomas Hardy used to tell me what books to read. Above all he told me to read Edgar Allen Poe which indeed I did! [8]

Just think of your having read 10 of my books! O that does so encourage me to work hard at my present book which is on The Iliad.

Yrs O so gratefully

J.C. Powys

Notes

1. *Atlantis and the Giants*, Faber & Faber, 1957 (originally published in French in 1954). JCP also praised the book in a letter dated 26 December 1957 to his friend Benson Roberts: *It will intoxicate you with absorbed interest I know as it does me* (*Letters to C Benson Roberts*, Village Press, 1975, p.106). Denis Saurat, 1890-1958, was an Anglo French scholar, writer and critic and the author of books on Milton and Blake. He was especially interested in the western esoteric and occult tradition, the Cabbala and the ideas of G. I.Gurdjieff. Denis Saurat was a member of the Department of French at Kings College London between 1920 and 1950 and also Director of the Institut Français du Royaume Uni in the 1940s.
2. *Les Sables de la mer*, translated by Marie Canavaggia, preface by Jean Wahl, 1958 (reviewed by Marcel Brion in *Le Monde* 1 July 1958. Marie Canavaggia (1896-1978) was a translator and secretary of the French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline. JCP's correspondence with Jean Wahl was published in the *Powys Journal*, Vol. XXIV, 2014; JCP's correspondence with Marie Canavaggia was published in the *Powys Journal*, Vol. XXV, 2015; Marie Canavaggia's original letters to JCP can be found at the National Library of Wales.
3. *The Borrowers*, 1952; *The Borrowers Afield*, 1955.
4. *Ivanhoe: A Romance*, by Sir Walter Scott was first published in 1819. In *Autobiography* JCP describes how as a boy he read all of Scott's novels. He says Scott's works have since remained *the most powerful literary influence of my life*. In a letter to Glyn Hughes in 1957 JCP said that *As a boy I used to read all the Waverley novels of Scott & I love them still*. In the early 1900s JCP included Scott in his syllabuses of English novelists (see *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement* by Derek Langridge, 1966. One of these lectures on Scott was published in *Singular Figures, Six Lectures*, edited by Paul Roberts, 1989).
5. *Lace and Lace Making* by Marian Powys, Boston, 1953.
6. Cowper's poem is entitled: "To John Johnson, On his Presenting Me With An Antique Bust of Homer" (c.1793).
7. Elizabeth Myers (1912-1947), novelist and short story writer, author of *A Well Full of Leaves* (1943) and *The Basilisk of St James* (1945).
8. In *Autobiography* JCP describes how Hardy introduced him to Poe - *he called my attention to Edgar Allen Poe's Ulalume as a powerful and extraordinary poem...I soon drew from it a formidable influence in the direction of the romantically bizarre*.

John Peake

Will and Gilfrid Powys in Kenya

John Peake manages a farm at Corscombe near Dorchester in Dorset. After reading the tributes to Gilfrid Powys published in Newsletter 93, March 2018, John was inspired to record his connection with the Powys family in Kenya. CT

On our visits to Kenya some years ago now we saw quite a lot of Gilfrid and his sister Rose as well as their father Will. Gilfrid flew us a number of times and once, seeing a herd of elephants, flew down for a closer look. How sad that, knowing so much about elephants, he should have been killed by one.

My connection with the Powys family started much earlier, in 1959. Between leaving one farm and going to another I went round the world seeing farming in Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. A young farmer told me about Will Powys's sister [Lucy Penny] living in Dorset and I had an introduction to Will on his farm at Ngare Nare. The day after I arrived was a big gathering of his sheep and goats. I was interested to see the mutual respect Will had between himself and his herdsmen.

I married Venetia in 1964 and we have both been a number of times to Kenya and seen Will. He has been to my farm at Corscombe near Beaminster. Once when we were going to see Will for the weekend he said: "*We can talk about Dorset and Somerset.*" He had the *Western Gazette* sent out by boat – so it arrived six weeks later!

But a plane arrived with Richard St Barbe Baker who did so much to encourage planting and looking after trees in Africa. Trees are important here, but even more important in Africa. The four of us were going round the farm and Will said "*I must show you my goats*". (I think he had some new billy goats from South Africa.) At this Richard demurred as uncontrolled goats ate his young trees but Will's goats were well looked after and all was well.

Gilfrid, as the second son, was a bit of a wild one growing up but sadly his elder brother Charles put away a loaded gun and shot himself by mistake. Gilfrid then stepped into his shoes and took over running the farms.

We have happy memories of Will and his family. I regard him as Abraham with a twinkle in his eye.

Chris Thomas

A Footnote to Four Poems by Ioan Powys

In *Newsletter* No.98, November 2019, we reprinted four poems by JCP under his bardic name of Ioan Powys that had first appeared in a local Corwen newspaper, *Yr Adsain*, in 1936 and 1941. Note 16 to the fourth of these poems, *Sacrifice*, *In memory of Ceurwen E. Williams*, records the great importance JCP attached to an old collection of ancient Welsh texts, poems and manuscripts called *The Myvyrian Archaiology* (1801/1807) which he had acquired in 1939 and which he described in a letter to C.Benson Roberts. A fuller account of the significance of this volume for JCP, and an indication of its influence on for instance *Porius*, can also be found in a letter to Gerard Casey dated 6 May 1939 (reproduced in *Powys Journal*, Vol.V,1995, p.170). JCP says that he was able to buy the book thanks to a gift of some money sent to him by his sister Marian from New York: *It's a huge heavy book as big as a family bible and it's got all in it! It has as a motto Ammau Pob Anwybol "Everything unknown is doubted" and it says this is an Adage! It has notes on the Gododin which has some Brythonic words in it...This book is an Encyclopaedia of all that you & I Gerard my friend are most drawn to in Literature!...This book is a wonder and a Treasure-trove. It's like that book of Michael Scott in Sir Walter's Lay of the Last Minstrel... It's like a folio I've invented ere I saw this one to place in Owen Glyndwr's hands.*

It is very unlikely that JCP considered the four poems published in *Yr Adsain* as if they constituted a self-contained sequence. However he might still have made a note to himself about the significance of the number four associated with his poems and the *Mabinogion*. In a letter dated 11 January 1940 (*Powys to Sea-Eagle*, 1996, p.119) to his sister Katie, JCP praised the compositions of her *Four Poems** and said to her: *'I must tell you how highly I think of 4 Poems. I like the title & think highly of the 4 for it is the real original title of the four first Mabinogion tales called the 4 Branches 'pedwair ceine'...*

* The imprint and date of publication of Katie's *4 Poems* is not recorded but on the evidence of JCP's letter it was probably published in 1939. This date was also originally proposed by Stephen Powys Marks. I located a photocopy of Katie's pamphlet entitled *4 Poems* amongst Glen Cavaliero's papers. The four poems are 'On Awakening', 'Tangible Life', 'Shadows', and 'Birds of Space', which are all included in the reprint of Katie's main collection of poems, *Driftwood*, reissued by the Powys Society in 1992. JCP particularly liked 'Tangible Life' which he thought a *masterpiece* and called 'Shadows' *the most purely original of all...This is an amazing poem to me*. He told her: *...you are the poet of this family.*

Chris Thomas
JCP and Epilepsy

Professor Simon Shorvon of the Institute of Neurology at University College London is currently engaged in writing a scholarly history of twentieth century epilepsy in which he plans to include information about novelists who have written about epilepsy. In his research Professor Shorvon came across a reference to JCP in a very short article entitled *Neurology in literature: epilepsy*, in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, 1 May 1994. On reading a quotation from *Wolf Solent* and JCP's description of certain scents and memories (the article quotes a passage from Chapter 14, 'Crooked Smoke'), Professor Shorvon realised that JCP himself must have had some personal experience of the symptoms of epilepsy. He therefore contacted me requesting copies of two articles about JCP and epilepsy previously published in *The Powys Review*. As I did not have immediate access to photocopying facilities Paul Cheshire kindly volunteered to scan and e-mail these articles to Professor Shorvon. He had requested: Robin Wood's article, *Queer attacks and fits: epilepsy and ecstatic experience in the novels of John Cowper Powys*, *Powys Review*, Nos. 31-32, (n.d), pages 22-29; and Frederick Davies's article, *Recollections of John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter*, Part 1, *Powys Review* 1986, No. 19, pages 58-66. I also referred him to Ernst Verbeek's article covering similar subject matter: *Tempting the Gods*, published in *The Powys Review* No. 26, 1991.

Having read these articles Professor Shorvon sent me this e-mail message: 'Thank you again for the articles, which are absolutely fascinating and extremely well researched and written. The articles point to a number of references in JCP's work which could (and do) relate to epilepsy, and indeed there are also others. I have followed these up.

'It does seem very likely that John Cowper Powys did have epilepsy and his descriptions of the 'visions', blackouts, hallucinations etc are highly characteristic of focal seizures. He also demonstrates what I have always thought to be the case and that is the more intelligent and creative the person, the more complex are the seizure phenomena. The association of seizures with vision and mysticism is a literary thread which several great novelists have addressed (perhaps most obviously Dostoevsky, but also others, for instance Thomas Mann). Powys's descriptions though are especially poetic. It's interesting too that Powys wrote about Dostoevsky and the view that "weakness and disease and suffering can become organs of vision".

There is a contrary view – recently re-emphasised – that epilepsy destroys creativity, but I feel this is wrong, and Powys is a good example of why this is not the case. This idea possibly dates back to the idea of inherited degeneration and the association of epilepsy with insanity and criminality which was very prominent

in the field of epilepsy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – it is present in Dostoevsky, Zola, Mann and many others, and it is good to see Powys avoiding this theory (which anyway has been shown to be pseudo-scientific nonsense).

‘Epilepsy was a highly stigmatised condition (because of the idea of inherited degeneration) and most intelligent persons with epilepsy hid the condition – which seems also to have been exactly what Powys did too.

‘I am very grateful for the articles which were excellent and very instructive.’

Simon Shorvon, MA, MD, FRCP, is Professor of Clinical Neurology at UCL Institute of Neurology, University College London. He has specialised in epilepsy in his clinical practice and research, and is interested too in the historical aspects of neurology. Readers may also wish to consult David Goodway’s Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow which refers to JCP’s possible epilepsy and Neurological Disorders in Famous Artists, Part 3, Karger, 2010 in which the authors cite Wolf Solent.

CT

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Kate Kavanagh
Powyses and the Bible

Anthony Swindell is an editor in the literature department of the Encyclopedia of Bible References (EBR), in which we hope a reference to the Powyses may appear.

None of the Three Powyses precisely *retold* the Bible, though as children of the vicarage, the language of the Authorised Version, and the earlier English of Anglican church services, underlies and often surfaces in all their writing. We know that JCP had many religious discussions with his friend ‘the Catholic’, and says that as a young man he was fascinated by priests – such as his son became. Legends about TF (perhaps not allowing for his teasing) include the one about about a friend hiding in a bush calling to him, with TF answering Moses-like, ‘Yes, God?’ LLP, strongly anti-religion, recreated the Bible and its messages in human terms, his style wittily echoing its early 17th-century English.

None of them are put off by the objections and disagreements of modern scholarship. JCP sees the continuing force of the Bible precisely in its contradictions: *No! the power of the Bible does not lie in its doctrine, does not lie in its spirituality, does not even lie in its righteousness. It lies in its supreme emotional contradictions, each carried to its uttermost extreme, and each representing, finally and for all time, some unchanging aspect of human life upon earth.* His essay on the Bible in *Pleasures of Literature* places the Book up there with Homer and Shakespeare. His equally powerful even longer essay in the same book on St Paul, ‘this gladiator of eternity’, is a masterpiece of sympathy and subtlety.

Theodore's Bible is more like the diary of an admired but unpredictable friend. Its views as represented by Mr Weston, are that God has his favorites, and a sense of humour, aware of his role but also of the rules of the game. He views his creations with tolerance, up to a point, after which point he has no compunction in sweeping them off the board. God, in various guises, appears in most of TF's novels and stories. He is the Only Penitent, and the omniscient Mr Jar.

It is Llewelyn the Unbeliever who takes on the actual bloodthirsty Bible narrative and its oriental blackbearded characters – so different from the hymns and harvest festivals of Anglican Dorset that it ultimately gave rise to. His wonderfully visual recreations of the Bible story in its human happenings are as good as a film – Abraham *this great, potent cattleman, with long black hairs under his armpits* – the *passionate monotheists of the desert, who daily see the sun rise naked from the sand, who in the cool nights walk behind the branded tails of their camels* – the awful end of King Herod, *a stricken lion with gangrened paws*, tormented by the memory of the wife and sons he murdered. The violent events and passions of the last four thousand years unroll inexorably. He charts the Yahweh/Moses double act, ruthless Jeremiah, the tangled egos of the prophets. The powerful character of Jesus, self-created, goes to its allotted end with the cry *lama sabacthami*, to be resurrected by the (to Llewelyn) equally self-created St Paul.

Llewelyn Powys

from chapter 2 of A Pagan's Pilgrimage (1931)

Objects of Matter

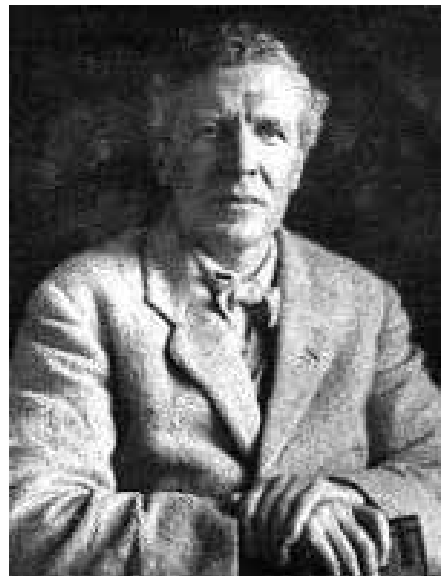
Sitting with my brother John in the early part of the year on the downs above Ringstead, I had reopened with him a lifelong controversy. We had come through a grove of elder trees. The mould under their grey, unreliable branches lay naked and exposed, except for the little white fallen flowers which like morsels of elfland hail covered the ground in that blackbird-haunted sanctuary. Already the sun was approaching the horizon near Hardy's monument, when our desultory and happy discourse turned toward our familiar dispute.

My brother has always held that the basis of the universe is spiritual. The stout ramparts of matter about us to him seem insubstantial. Life is not, he declares, as it seems. The rude reality that meets our senses has only the appearance of reality. In actual fact it is in its essence an erratic projection of each individual mind. At every turn the obviously apparent is invalidated. This objective astronomical universe is porous, is susceptible of a thousand other influences. The nature of things is wilder than most of us suspect. It

is likely that the grossest superstitions hit nearer to ultimate truth than the most matter-of-fact explanations. There are whispers of veracity in every religion. The wind, the sea, the sod, afford harbourage for a thousand mysteries. There is more in this visible world than ever meets the eye. All is permeated with the essence of mind; the very grass blades, nay, the very stones outside a rabbit hole, are each of them clamorous with an immaterial but urgent identity. Nothing, in short, is less real than reality.

Lying by the side of his beloved form with his deluded cat-head skull silhouetted against a flock of sheep I listened to his perverse talk with amazement. The short turf under me was concrete enough. I could count the days of my life. I carried in my head a record of my progenitors. I could myself go to the grave of my father at Montacute, of my grandfather at Stalbridge, of my great-grandfathers at Achurch. Was not this in itself proof of the ordered sequence of matter ? How was it possible for life to be as unreal as a dream when it could be checked up in every direction! I made him look at the rounded downland opposite. There it stood with its chalk pit, stolid in the light of the evening sun. His evasions appeared to me utterly wilful. It became clear that he had never rid his mind of Plato's canting deceptions, that mouth of mischief! I reminded him of the written records of history. I pointed out how the fragment of time, subject to human cognition, had been testified to again and again on stone and on parchment. With my thoughts full of my last book, I referred to William Barents' wintering in Ice Haven at the end of the sixteenth century and to the fact that the rude furniture of his famous shelter had remained in its nest of atomic matter until its discovery practically in our own lifetime. It was but a single apposite proof of an assumption which is confirmed every hour. In practical life all human beings act upon it. The common conclusions current in any market town are correct conclusions. This consensus of opinion evoked by the evidence of the senses cannot fall very short of what is absolute reality. For all intents and purposes the world is what it appears to be. The rational sequence of its mysteries is re-established each year by science. The claims of supernatural interference are more and more discredited.

The sun sank, taking from the moment that its rim touched the horizon exactly three and a half minutes to disappear. Neither of us had been convinced by the words of the other ...



Llewelyn Powys c. 1928

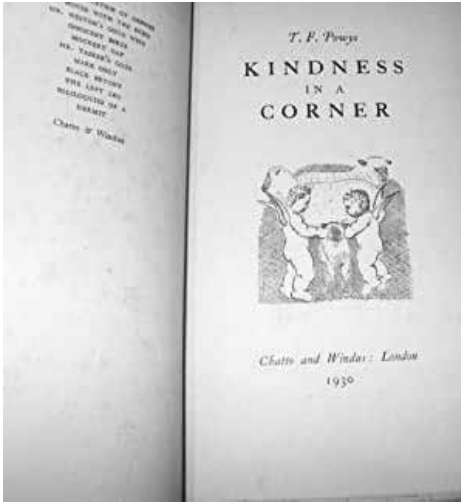
Patrick Quigley
T.F.Powys & the Secret War

Cold Warriors: Writers who Waged the Literary Cold War by Duncan White (Little, Brown, 2019) is a wide-ranging study of twentieth-century writers who participated in the epic struggle for political and cultural supremacy between the West and the Soviet Union. We don't usually view the Powys family in the context of power politics so I was intrigued to find a reference to an unnamed novel by T.F.Powys. Apparently one of his books played an important part in the espionage career of one of the Twentieth Century's most prominent novelists, Graham Greene. During the Second World War many English writers were recruited into the Intelligence services. In 1941 as a new recruit to the Secret Intelligence Service/MI6, Graham Greene (secret agent 59200), received a posting to Freetown in Liberia. His first task was to report on the activities of German agents in West African ports.

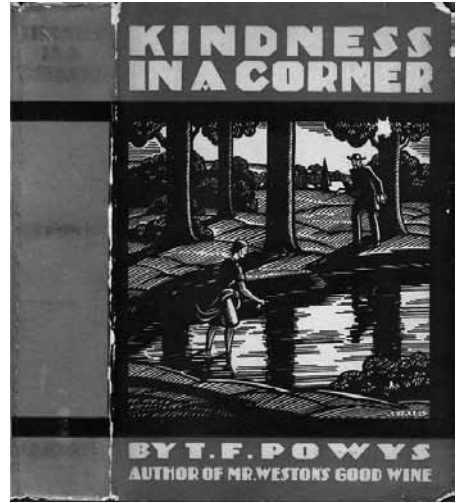
Greene began by using a book code to communicate with London his safe arrival in Liberia. The account in *Cold Warriors* is based on Greene's essay, *The Soupsweet Land*: "I had chosen a novel of T.F.Powys from which I could detach sufficiently lubricious phrases for my own amusement, and a large safe came in the next convoy with a leaflet of instructions and my codes." One searches the text in vain for "lubricious phrases" unless Greene was fantasizing about the servant-girl Lottie, described by her grandfather as being "plump and saucy, and be worth looking at wi' only she's chemise to cover up all her prettiness."

Unfortunately the novice agent was not very good at practical things and accidentally locked the safe with the keys inside. "Laboriously with the help of T.F.Powys I lied to London that the safe had been damaged in transit; they must send another by the next convoy." Greene did not specify which Powys novel was used, but according to Christopher Hull in *Our Man Down in Havana* (2019): "He (Greene) travelled with *Kindness in a Corner* (1930) by Dorset-based author T.F. Powys (1875-1953) after leaving a copy of the novel at London headquarters. Following the arrival of his codebooks, however, the impractical Greene misread technical instructions for the safe and locked the books inside... Pretending it had suffered damage in transit, and while awaiting a replacement by convoy, he temporarily reverted to his laborious *Kindness in a Corner* book code."

It is doubtful if TF was aware to what use his novel was put; the gentle tale of the Reverend Mr Dottery in rural Tadnol was a most unlikely text to be "weaponized" in the espionage struggle against Nazi Germany. *Kindness in a Corner* appears an unusual choice for such a task; perhaps Greene was gambling that German codebreakers were unlikely to be familiar with this innocuous story. *Cold Warriors* cites scores of writers and hundreds of books that were employed by all sides in the ideological struggles of



UK first edition 1930 Chatto & Windus



USA first edition 1930 Viking Press

the Twentieth Century, but *Kindness in a Corner* has the unique status of being the only one whose text was transformed into a code. Did MI6 feel obliged to inform the author that one of his works was employed in war work? Doubtful as well.

Greene may have been interested in Powys as a religious writer, a description often applied to his own literary concerns. Although very different in their spiritual beliefs, Powys and Greene were united in their concentration on what W.J.Keith, in his study of Powysian spiritual inclinations, terms the “ultimate things.”

In Vol 1 of *The Life of Graham Greene*, his biographer Norman Sherry mentions another connection between the writers. Greene & Powys had stories published in limited editions by Grayson Books in 1935. *The Bell Fell Free* by Greene was No.11 in the series followed by Powys’s *Make Thyself Many*. The series also included the novella *At Bay* by James Hanley, which was dedicated to John Cowper Powys “with Affection and Esteem.” Could it be a coincidence that Greene’s literary agent was Laurence Pollinger of Hearn, Pollinger & Highham, the same agency that represented John Cowper from 1934 and later the Powys estate?

Duncan White does not include John Cowper among writers whose work was influenced by the challenge of Marxism, although his work is more concerned with politics than his brothers’. The reverberations of the Bolshevik Revolution can be traced in John Cowper’s major novels – especially *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands* and *Maiden Castle*. Powys’s initial enthusiasm for the Bolsheviks and eventual disillusionment with Soviet Communism is a topic worthy of study, reflecting the trajectory of many intellectuals covered by White such as Koestler, Camus and Orwell.

Other references in *Cold Warriors* of interest to Powys readers include an acerbic comment by George Orwell on Sylvia Townsend Warner's support for Stalinism during the Spanish Civil War. The late Cecil Woolf merits a mention for editing the anthology, *Authors Take Sides on Viet-Nam* in 1967.

In the years after World War Two Greene became a widely-read author, writing about serious themes and enjoying popular success. It was a combination the financially straightened John Cowper must have envied, although Greene's novels were favourite reading for himself and Phyllis Playter. He wrote to Louis Wilkinson in 1945 about a section of *The Power and the Glory* which "represents my own deepest secretest feelings as to what is Right & Good (and Heroic too in a funny sort of way!)."...

* * *

Paul Roberts

An Early Autobiography

from The Powys Society Newsletter No 27 April 1996

The National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth holds in its Powys Collection a fascinating piece by John Cowper Powys (NLW MSS 2I930E) entitled A Blank Verse Autobiography. Clearly inspired by Wordsworth's The Prelude, this 33-page manuscript is dedicated to Littleton Charles Powys and addressed to John Cowper's brother-in-law Thomas Henry Lyon. Although undated, it seems to belong to the period immediately before Powys's marriage to Margaret Lyon in 1896, a time when John Cowper wrote many poems dedicated to his Cambridge friend.

The manuscript falls into three parts: a first draft, heavily corrected, of the first 171 lines; a second draft, only lightly amended, of these same lines (from which the first 55 lines have been deleted with a single vertical and one horizontal stroke) and a further 478 heavily corrected but unredrafted lines. Therefore, including the deleted introductory section, without which the rest makes little sense, we are left with an incomplete poem of 649 lines covering the first nine years of Powys's life, from his earliest memories of Shirley, Derbyshire, to the second year of his life in Dorchester, where the family moved in 1879.

Considered as poetry, A Blank Verse Autobiography has, perhaps, little to offer beyond the occasional bright passage. Powys had a great facility for blank verse and was steeped in the language of his literary predecessors, factors which enabled him to produce such material by the yard: often, to judge from the handwriting, at high speed. Biographically, however, the poem is of great interest, although one must never forget to whom it was addressed. Powys's relationship with Harry Lyon deserves investigation and A Blank Verse Autobiography, read in conjunction with the other poems of this

period, reveals not only their closeness but also a need on Powys's part both to impress his friend and, simultaneously, to assert his independence. Lyon is addressed as a hero, as "Harry of the flame-burnt lips," and as the "fierce friend" whose "bravery" had stimulated Powys's own courage and given him a "sacred freedom". Yet Powys feels his new-found freedom and strength

... must from thee be kept
Inviolatè, all the more lest that wild thing
Of bitter poisons and rich maddening wines,
Thy parched and fevered heart that still remains
A desert and a palm tree and a well,
Should vex my scarce-won, treasured, solitude.
A desert is thy soul where on the sands
The great sun glares all day and evermore
The bitter-smiling Sphinx glares at the sun.
Thy soul a palm-tree is, beneath whose shade
A nightingale sings gently, but its trunk
Writhes in the close coils of a monstrous snake.
Thy soul is like a well whose waters still
Are of sweet taste but he who looks therein,
His foot may slip and he be seen no more!

What significance should we give to Powys's decision to delete the word 'heart' from these lines, a word which had survived into the second draft, and to substitute it with "soul"? To understand all that is happening here we must await the results of Susan Rands' research into the relationship between Powys and Lyon. [John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W.E.Lutyens, by Susan Rands, was published in the Cecil Woolf Powys Heritage series in 2000].

Having introduced and dedicated his poem, Powys now recalls his infancy in Derbyshire, which he seems to regard, in apparent contradiction to his Autobiography, as an idyllic period, but one from which certain troubling images emerge which were to recur throughout his work: a lake, a withered bough, an iron bar.

Of early childhood I remember less
Than is the lot of many. Certain forms,
People and creatures stand, however, there
In the far background of my brain, distinct
Yet unconnected. Such are fallen trees,
Several together – lying on their side –
Huge trunks; and wearing in their overthrow
An almost human impotence of death.

Such are clear water spaces in deep woods,
Smooth lustrous levels broken by no wind
Where the tall rushes, clustered near the bank,
Shelter wild water-fowl, that with shrill screams
At the approach of human foot rise up
And sail away into the smiling clouds.
Beside this lake I seem to see strange plants
Under the roots of old broad spreading trees.
Sinister orchids, spotted like the skins
Of poisonous snakes, nightshade and hellebore
And, strewn among them on the damp brown mould,
Bright coloured fungi of a hundred shapes
Wondrous to see! Like fairy goblets some,
And some like tables set for fairy feasts.

I can remember how one summer's day
Looking upon the whiteness of that flood
Unruffled in the sunshine, I picked up
With eager hands a long, dry, withered bough
And threw it in the water. The dark thing
Lay like a strange defacement on the mere,
Sombre, forbidding; and it seemed to me
That the bright water shuddered visibly.
Vainly I stretched my arms and strove once more
To draw it back. Far, far beyond my reach
The black thing floated – a disfigurement
And foul intruder on the placid flood.
Long in my thoughts I could not leave the place
And in my dreams for many nights I saw
That smooth white lake and that black withered bough.

Another vision as I search the past
Rises before me. Lo! Methinks I stand
In some great garden – rhododendron shrubs,
Each a huge blaze of colour, hem me round
And I have lost my friends and, struck with fear,
Run headlong through the bushes, pushing back
The great flower-bunches with their weight of dew
From my hot cheeks, wetting my neck and hair.
Sudden an iron railing bars my way.
This obstacle surmounted (on my sense

Even as I write the wild delight returns)
The smell of hay was carried – whether blown
From new-cut meadow or from piled-up stack
Long-standing or from neighbouring cattle-shed
I cannot tell, but with the scent of hay
I saw a group of dark-eyed children. Young
They were, some girls, some boys, but all of them
It seemed to me had waving hair that danced
As they danced, hand in hand and foot to foot.
And ever since, from that time unto this
The scent of hay brings those young children back.

The incident of Powys throwing the branch into the lake had taken place during a picnic at Osmaston Park and he was to recall in Autobiography that it was the origin of many of his fears, fears then manifested in the form of the local policeman, for “One of the grown-up persons of our small picnic party uttered ... the senseless remark that Johnny had better look out. The police would have him for throwing things into the pretty lake!”

Powys’s childhood years in Dorchester are described in Autobiography as certainly [the] most happy of my whole life. Just as Shirley is portrayed in this poem as being closer to Eden than the picture given in Autobiography, so Dorchester appears here as a much gloomier place, one from which he could not wait to escape. Had Powys’s memory of Dorchester mellowed in the more than thirty years between the composition of his autobiographical poem and the writing of Autobiography, or is there some more complex reason for his apparently contradictory portrayal of the place and its influence on him, something connected with the impression he wished to give Harry Lyon? Such things stand for discussion but, as the following lines show, Powys as a man in his twenties did not recall the Dorchester years as the happiest of his life.

So seven summers passed.
But with the eighth there came a change. Our home
Was moved from those high Midland solitudes
To a fair country city in the South.
Here, amid growing boyhood’s noisier claims,
‘Mid rougher sports and louder pleasures, ‘mid
The pains and joys of learning’s first ascents,
The nearer presence of humanity,
Not always gentle, slowly by degrees
Stole the first glory from the Universe.
Yet, in despite of many influences
Harmful and all unlovely, in despite
Of cold Religion’s dullest interdicts,

The youthful spirit stirred and from itself
Drew out imaginary worlds, bright realms
Of fairy beauty where no feet profane
Might ever tread, no dull cold insolence
Of age or custom enter, no grey rites
Of impious piety make black and drear
The divine temple of the Universe.
Most sure the very throne of Commonplace
Was in that town. Dull, narrow, sordid lives
Lived its fat burghers ...

Taking a refuge inward from the life
(Call it not life!) of those dull Wessex folk
I peopled the wild fields and Roman mounds,
Peopled the great corn-reaches, the slow streams,
Peopled the dusty roads, the pasture tracks,
Peopled the very streets of the dull town,
The very church and its detested pews
With fairy beings, a celestial train!
Each flower, each tree I met with, was to me
A mansion for a spirit. The deep air
Was thick with them; they haunted me all day
And sat upon my pillow in my dreams.
Oft did I hold my brothers with strange tales
Of wild invented beings, evil some
And prone to evil, to be warded off
With charms and incantations, which I knew
And I alone: others benignant things
Apt to perform all ministries of good.

The games that mostly children love for me
Had little charm, the world of living things
I cared for little, less than when they shone
With an unearthly light in earlier days.
For then each creature was a thing new found,
A miracle that had no past or present
Perhaps no likeness in the whole wide world,
But now the weight of dull humanity
Had pressed so heavy on me it appeared
As though these dogs and cats, horses and cows,
That people loved and lived with, were like them,
Tedious and sordid.

What happiness there was to be found in Dorchester came from the time spent walking and exploring with Littleton, to whom the poem is dedicated.

But happy days I had. My brother, he,
Whom thou, O friend, lov'st hardly less than I,
In boyish passion hunted field and grove
Garden and railway-bank and stunted wood,
Ran desperate up and down the Roman camps
For that light-winged gorgeous summer brood
The ah! too short-lived butterflies he caught.
Red Admirals, Peacocks, Clouded Yellows, Whites
Of every species and those Roman camps,
That Roman amphitheatre supplied
Instead of rusty arms and trophies old,
Chalk Blues and Azure Blues and Coppers bright
And sometimes, flitting high above our heads,
In agonized excitement we pursued
The gorgeous Painted Lady.

Weymouth, of course, had always been a special, a magical place, one which offered respite and healing.

Here we had come from that more northern home
In earliest infancy – and all the place,
The harbour and the cliffs and the broad sands,
Were dear to us both for themselves and all
The undefined memories that entwine
Round early youth. On one side of the bay
A dark and bleak peninsula stretched out,
A mass of solid rock and on this beat
The huge waves coming from the Atlantic sea;
A wall of shingle on the further side
Baffled the wave: a beach more giant-like
Has never by the angry sea been flung
To thwart his own revenges. Here the stones
Made round and smooth by the in-flowing tide
Took wondrous tints and colours. People said
That rich cornelians, agate-stones and jet
Might on this beach be found. At least I know
I have held many pebbles to the light
But only on that beach have the sun's beams
Shown through the solid texture of the stone.

Between the town and this majestic beach
An ancient castle stood whose empty walls,
The haunt of screaming seagulls, fixed their gaze
Across the bay to where in shelter found
Under that rocky, dark peninsula
The great ships gathered safe from stormy seas.
Beneath this castle's foot the sands were smooth
And when the salt tide left the shore, long lines
Of blackening seaweed mixed with broken shells
And all the strange sea-tangle of the deep,
Old spars and ropes and corks and stranded fish,
Offered to children's eyes a constant feast,
To children's hands an unexhausted treasure.
Many the strange and lovely denizens
Of the wild sea have I collected there....
Well did we love when morning smote the waves
With dazzling paths of splendour to push out
Our light-oared boat and rowing till the land
With all its men and houses seemed a thing
Left far behind us, lost from memory,
Uncared for, undesired, and we alone,
Alone with the green waves and the blue sky
Drank in deep draughts of freedom and of joy ...

The poem as we have it ends with a declaration of intent, a declaration by one just down from Cambridge which the old man of Blaenau Ffestiniog might not have repudiated.

Not in the gains by active knowledge won,
Not in the strident growth of mental power,
Not in the strengthening of our human wills,
The bettering of our natures or the strife
In action's whirlwind betwixt man and man,
Far less in piling up of virtuous deeds,
Far less in contemplative subtleties
Of the abstract reason is our true life found.
'Tis in the broadening of life's hidden base,
The deepening of those unconscious springs
From which our being issues, those far flames
Of silent intuition by the light
Of which we read the ever changing face
Of everlasting Nature, bound to her,
Bound to the Earth from which we sprung by bonds

Of strongest love, a deep affinity
Betwixt the movements of her life and ours.
So must the trees upon whose foreheads rest
The winds when they are weary, so the hills
That catch the floating clouds, so the swift brooks,
The gloomy forests and the lonely moors
Communicate to us their life and joy.

And for myself, in calm sincerity,
This may I say, that of all other paths
Whereby I've sought the happy realm where peace
Weds passion in large moments of full life,
No other way hath proved effectual
Than this of nature with her woods and hills.
And yet the deepest pleasures seem to start
Unbidden – from dim, far-off shores they come,
Memories and recollections, wandering airs
Blown on stray winds from flowers we have forgotten,
Waftings from groves unrecognisable,
Glimpses and intuitions showing us
Visions of sealed-up things and powers that come
And go uncalled for, neither of the mind
Nor of the senses wholly, but built up
From gossamer-fibres, those thin threads,
Those linked associations of past joy,
Vague, undefined and bodiless, but of strength
To make the blood rush to a strong man's cheek,
To make the tears start to a strong man's eye.

Unfixed and carried on unruly winds
Are life's great moments. Sometimes as I pass
A single roadside tree, a bank of grass
O'er grown with ivy, a moss-covered gate,
A broken branch lying across the road,
An iron railing over which the smooth
Level expanses of some Park appear
Dotted with bracken, a sequestered pond
Waving with reeds, a bed of cottage flowers,
The sound of rooks, the flickering of the lights
First seen at evening from a public road
Entering a village, even a swarm of gnats
Murmuring and dancing on a summer's noon,
A flock of sheep met in a dusty lane,

The mud-stained wheels of some great wagon drawn
By tinkling horses through the cart-ruts deep,
As I pass these sometimes, there comes to me,
I know not whence, strange motions of keen joy
So that for very pleasure I could shout
Like any shepherd-boy that down the hill
Pursues his dogs.

Such visitations

Sometimes call up with vague uncertain power
Scenes, places, people that appear like dreams
Far-off beheld. And must we say with him,
The mighty bard of Nature, that such dreams
Of former times attest our present joys,
Of stern necessity less beautiful,
Less happy, less divine, than in those days
When childhood wore Heaven's own peculiar grace?
Or rather shall we say that such vague dreams
Are the best product of experience,
Can only come when after toil and storm,
Childhood's sweet pleasures put so far away
Win deeper meanings, win and take to them
Significance beyond their former worth?
Or rather, shall we say that what on Earth
Is precious, valuable beyond the sway
Of rescued passion and mere animal joy
Grows, strengthens, deepens, broadens to the end
And the old man whose mortal senses fade
Has this – that by his longer life on earth
The threads of delicate affinity
Between his mind, his body and the mind
And bodily forms of Nature are drawn close,
Are made at once more complex and more near,
So when he comes to die what in him holds
Of Nature and the natural elements
Sinks back, dissolves and with no shock or pain
Blends with the wholesome dust from which it rose?

My transcription of A Blank Verse Autobiography, together with a photocopy of the manuscript will be lodged with the Powys Society collection at the Dorset County Museum where, in due course, it will be available for more detailed study. Meanwhile, this note is intended merely to draw attention to a further small fraction of the wealth of material which, even now, remains to be explored.

Kate Kavanagh

(from NL 49, July 2003)

The Art of Growing Old (how inviting his titles are!) seems to be one of the least read of JCP's books, judging by the lack of comment on it. It might appear more dated than most, written during darkest World War Two and knowing that much of JCP's experience of English "ordinary people" dates from forty years earlier, when he travelled around as an extension lecturer, often put up in the homes of the organisers – a world of footstools and painted coal-scuttles, kettles on the fire, lifetime jobs and lifetime marriages, duty-bound unmarried daughters, lending libraries, and Latin Primers (for boys). But JCP's "self-help" books do their job. He doesn't go into what might be called "negative ageing" (disappointment, regret), still less into "staying young", but the book does fulfil its stated intention to help elderly readers to enjoy and endure. Reading *The Art of Growing Old* at about the age JCP wrote it (pushing 70), sixty years later, it is surprisingly convincing.

The Art of Growing Old is JCP at his most unbuttoned: repetitive, conversational, revolving his slow spirals of thought like a cow chewing – "self-indulgent", that creepy word often used of him ("*invented by the most cunningly and craftily wicked of all human emotions, the emotion of envy masquerading as virtue!*" – *In Spite Of*, p.57) tells more about the critic using it than about the book itself.

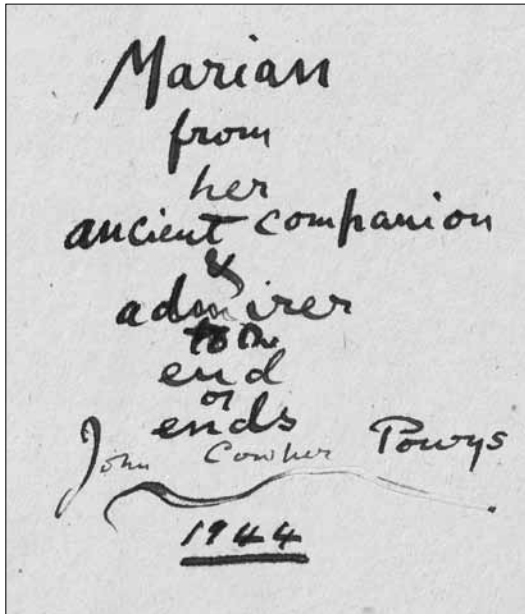
There are nice glimpses of his own old-age life: the heavy Greek dictionary; the pattern on bathroom lino provoking worry about prostate trouble; the consolations of twilight. He allows himself a lot of space for long quotations (from Cranmer and Sir Thomas Browne) and disquisitions (on the evil of vivisection), but takes trouble to give them relevance in their contexts. As with all his books, he's better taken a chapter at a time.

And his advice is undoubtedly good. The well-known Powysian watchwords (as in *Mortal Strife* written shortly before) – Kindness, Humour, Humility – are given extra point as realistic goals, and not always for want of better ones, for old (at least for older) people. He argues convincingly for the philosophical humanist world-view (human creative mind-power *versus* the tyranny of 'the Absolute' – making restrained analogies to Democracy *vs.* Hitler) as being one that the old, with more time and the advantage of *second thoughts*, are especially suited to serve.

He recommends crafty and practical tricks (reading *universal* books, taking books slowly) to combat the lesser gods of Chance and Pain for whom the old provide easy prey; also to counteract the isolation of old age from the young (cultivate listening, make yourself a Character, encourage their curiosity about what you know and they don't).

Even his observations on male/female differences, though in some ways obsolete, are (at least to this reader) still recognisable; and, of course, *reading* is offered “to both the sexes indiscriminately, the grand modern escape of the bi-sexual soul of *homo sapiens* ... “ The more obviously dated subjects such as ‘Science’ can often transfer to later times: on totalitarianism, for instance, or on scientific *vs.* human morality.

JCP’s helpfulness – his Pelagian *optimism* (if these are effectively the same?) – his belief in *goodness* as the supreme product of Evolution - lies in his conviction that (1) it is possible, within the small-scale limits of one human fate, for the mind to take charge and make the best of what is possible; (2) we can share human experiences (through books) and so enlarge our own (evolved with the help of “those immemorial guides, Religion and Philosophy”); and (3) there is always an element of mystery beyond what we know we know. He ends as an agnostic/sceptic, but always as a believer in the power and variousness of *life*. Whatever is (except cruelty) is right – because it *is*, and our special task as humans is to notice it – everyone’s task, but the old may be better at it.



JCP's inscription to his sister Marian in her copy of The Art of Growing Old.

* * *

Chris Thomas

Reading Owen Glendower

One of the most striking features of *Owen Glendower* is JCP's remarkable ability to convey a sense of the historical past or more particularly his ability to evoke a vivid picture of a particular historical period and physical place as well as project the sense of a 'psychic aura' and realize the mental atmosphere of a past era. In *Owen Glendower* the reader gets a real sense of sensory life, of the colours and smells of everyday life, the violent effects of medieval warfare and the inner subjective world of his characters.

There is no doubt that JCP aimed to recreate the world of the fifteenth century with great historical accuracy and exactitude. He was able to do this by the very convincing way in which he combines real and fictional worlds. No wonder therefore that Wilson Knight called JCP the finest historical novelist in English literature. You only have to compare *Owen Glendower* with books by other twentieth century historical novelists (worthy though they certainly are) like Mary Renault, Margaret Yourcenar, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Joan Grant or Alfred Duggan, to see what Wilson Knight means. *Owen Glendower* is replete with detailed historical learning as well as imaginative insight into metaphysics and cosmology. Partly this must be down to JCP's research for the novel such as his background reading in historians such as J.E.Lloyd, A.G.Bradley and J.H.Wylie.

But something else is going on here – in an article about his recollections of Phyllis and JCP, published in *Powys Review* in 1986, Frederick Davies says that Phyllis once told him that she believed that JCP *had been able to visualise places where he had never been* and that he therefore wondered whether JCP *was able to acquire such knowledge by out of body experiences and whether he himself knew this*. That's a fascinating possibility and could also explain George Steiner's observation that *Owen Glendower* represents the power of a writer to "dream backwards", to make the past present and allow remote experience to become tangible. Moreover Davies also says that "*tapping*" *his unconscious is the only feasible explanation of John Cowper's method of writing*. That's also very interesting in relation to JCP's historical novels and why he was so brilliantly able to evoke the historic past. In a letter to Norman Denny in December 1949 (included in the American Powys Notes in 1992, vol.7, no.2), writing about the publication of *Porius*, JCP said: *in these things I really am a "Medium" and that my autumn of the year 499AD is my version of what reality really was then to the people of that Age... I am a Medium and I was there... Porius is a very ambitious attempt to project myself into that actual Age... to write as if I was really there*.

Is he also here perhaps referring to the writing of *Owen Glendower*? In the 10th volume of *A Study of History: the Inspirations of Historians*, Arnold Toynbee refers to the origin of historical consciousness arising *from the depths of a Subconscious Psychic Abyss* – JCP might well have sympathised with this approach to history. Toynbee goes on to describe the personal experience of various historians and the sense of reality they achieve when contemplating the past, including his own personal experiences in which he felt strangely *transported in a flash across the gulf of Time and Space* to find himself witnessing a scene from the historic past as if, like JCP, he was really there in person – he had gone through a kind of time-slip. Toynbee says of these experiences that he felt he *was directly aware of the passage of History gently flowing through him in a mighty current and of his own life welling like a wave in the flow of this vast tide*. I'm inclined to think this is exactly what happened to JCP during the writing of *Owen Glendower*.

* * *

KK adds: *Owen Glendower* was the theme of another Zoom meeting on 7th July, again directed by Kevin Taylor, with Dawn Collins whose discussion group had also dealt with this amazing book.

After revisiting young JCP in his early Wordsworthian style, we are ending with him as prose poet, as five riders wait for the dawn before *Glendower's* battle of Bryn Glas (p.547 in 1941 edition).

Irregular blood-red streaks appeared now in the eastern quarter. One second and there were none of these; another second and there they were! And with the coming of these blood-red streaks the air that cooled their faces suddenly lost a certain damp chill that characterized it before; and though it didn't grow warm it carried with it a perceptible quality of livingness, as if those red streaks in the sky, wild and sad as they were, like a reflection from battle-fields of long ago, brought with them something familiar, something steeped in old earth-memories, that drove back the mortal death-chill of the empty night.

By degrees, as they watched, they perceived that these dark-red streaks had changed their character... they were now contemplating rose-coloured clouds! Nor was it long as they watched — and even the five horses seemed to be expanding their nostrils towards the east — before that rose-tinge had spread over the whole sky till it reached the zenith, while in the quarter where the blood-streaks had first appeared it was as if some vast magic gates had opened, leading into an infinity of glorified distance, into a receding perspective of golden space.