

The Powys Society



THEODORE



JOHN COWPER



LLEWELYN

Newsletter No. 2 1982

THE POWYS SOCIETY

President: Professor G. R. Wilson-Knight
Chairman: Dr. Glen Cavaliero
Vice Chairman: Timothy Hyman
Secretary: T. Derrick Stephens
Treasurer: Peter J. Birtles
Committee: Margaret Eaton
Cicely Hill
Belinda Humfrey
Susan Selly
Gerard Casey
James Dawson
Francis Feather
Peter Foss
Cedric Hentschel
Kenneth Hopkins

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

It is now ten years since the John Cowper Powys Centenary Conference took place at Churchill College, Cambridge. That happy and (for the organisers) surprisingly successful occasion has heralded a remarkable up-turn in the literary fortunes of the Powys brothers, of John Cowper especially; and perhaps the Society may claim some credit for this being so. Certainly the succession of weekend conferences at Swansea, Norwich, Weymouth and elsewhere, have served to bring Powys enthusiasts together and to generate ideas; and the, to date, nine numbers of the Powys Review have demonstrated through a wide variety of articles that the writings of the Powyses and their circle repay thorough investigations. We owe much in this respect to the Editor and to the Welsh Arts Council, whose support has made such an ambitious venture possible.

A great deal of dedicated and selfless work has gone into promoting the Society's aims; and I could also write at length about the achievements of Jeff Kwintner's Village Press of Mike Petty at Picador, and of Roger Shepperd at the National Portrait Gallery and at the Trigon Press. But details of their reprints will occupy other parts of the Newsletter. Instead 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.

The Summer meeting of the Society was held at Dorset Institute for Further Education Weymouth between 4th and 7th September, 1981.

At the Annual General Meeting the Secretary made the following report and Mr Francis Feather (in the absence of the then Treasurer, Mr Martyn Braford) presented the accounts set out on the following page.

Secretary's Report.

There was some discussion about the present arrangements for the annual weekend meeting. Kenneth Hopkins suggested a change to a Spring weekend. A number of people thought the weekend before August Bank Holiday might be better but it was eventually decided to leave the date as it always had been which had proved most convenient to members.

Winchester was suggested for the 1983 meeting if it could be arranged. Sherborne and Bath were other venues mentioned. Timothy Hyman proposed and Rosemary Manning seconded a motion that we return to Weymouth every other year. Gerald Pollinger suggested that the meeting might consider holding the weekend at Hotels which had conference facilities.

In the absence of the Treasurer, Francis Feather read the Treasurer's report and analysed the present position. He suggested that the subscription be raised to £10.00 but this was defeated and the matter left to the Committee to decide whether this was necessary.

It was suggested that the functions of Treasurer and Membership Secretary be united for a trial period since this would be administratively sensible and a saving in postage. Timothy Hyman proposed Peter Birtles for this task and Gerard Casey seconded.

The Officers and Committee were re-elected. Belinda Humfrey proposed that Peter Foss be added to the Committee and Timothy Hyman seconded.

There was a general discussion under Any Other Business about speakers for the 1982 meeting but nothing positive came out of this. It would be prudent for some thought to be given to this matter since it is usually left to the Secretary and Chairman. Since some members had taken part in a B.B.C. programme on John Cowper Powys it was hoped that this would be broadcast sometime in 1982. Up to the present nothing has happened.

The meeting closed at 3.38 p.m.

Balance brought forward	1303.22
Current Account	1048.97
Deposit Account	254.25
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	1303.22

Income

Subscriptions (163) @ £7.50 = 1222.50	1223.27
Sales Review 1 - 4	117.15
Donations	10.00
Book Sale UEA	64.42
Wales Arts Council Grant (Review/6)	150.00
Interest on Deposit	39.74
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	1604.55
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Expenditure

Postage, Stationery & Sundry expenses of Committee members	211.98
Printing letterheads	28.17
Hire of Rooms for 3 meetings	17.50
Distributions Review/6	650.25
Review/7	<u>713.40</u>
Refund of subscription paid twice	7.50
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	1628.80
	<hr/>

Excess of expenditure over Income	<u>24.25</u>
	1278.97
Deposit to Dorset 1HE for 1981 Conference	<u>130.00</u>
	1148.97

Current Account	783.06
Deposit Account	<u>365.91</u>
	1148.97

The reports on the speakers at the Summer meeting are as follows:

Martin Pollock on Llewelyn Powys

The talk given by Dr. Martin Pollock was, as he, himself, described it "a fragment of memory" and fascinating for those of us meeting, talking and listening for the first time to members of that "dwindling band" who had personally known Llewelyn Powys.

The speaker made no apologies for the egocentricity of his talk, it was, he said, "... my memories, my impressions, of a personality, scattered and fractured and sometimes rather dim and confused, neither an analysis nor a biographical sketch." But the easy flowing conversational style of his delivery and the timelessness of the aspects of life upon which he touched made one easily identify with the speaker so that the listener felt that he, too, had known Llewelyn Powys.

It was interesting to trace the speaker's changing views on Llewelyn from the first meeting - when the speaker was perhaps 11 or 12 years old - to his last meeting with him at Clavadel in Switzerland when he was 23 years old and suffering the misery of the end of his first real love affair. The speaker readily admitted that what Llewelyn said to him at the time was of less importance then than now. "This is due" said Dr. Pollock "to my attaching more importance now to the things and ideas he valued than I did 40 odd years ago, rather than to the lapse of time or to the nostalgic sadness of his no longer being alive".

The conversations of the speaker with Llewelyn Powys were concerned with the latter's sensual love of life and with sexual love. Much has been said and written of both these aspects of Llewelyn's nature. As to the latter, the speaker could only puzzle uncertainly at Alyse Gregory's "...dry silence, her expression of patient affectionate scepticism... as if it ought to be saying a great deal" when Llewelyn had said in a remark made for her rather than for him "... I knew that Alyse was the right person, the only person for me ...". As to the former, at the conclusion of his talk the speaker drew a delightful picture of Llewelyn at his best when he said, "... the image I like especially to recall of Llewelyn is one that I can remember as clearly in my mind's eye as if it were a photograph held in my hand:- of when I was only about 14 years old and he still in his early forties, unbearded and very good-looking, sitting on that large flat sloping pebbly brown rock at the foot of White Nose (the same as it was a half-century ago) completely

surrounded by quite deep water at high tide, clasping his knees in his hands and beaming with benevolence out to sea, blessing the world and occasionally turning to smile at me on the shore with a sort of conspiratorial delight at sharing the joys of being alive:- loving life I suppose, just that...."

The talk was a delightful personal reminiscence gentle, affectionate and again particularly interesting when the speaker readily admitted that Llewelyn's counsel is of more value to him now than at the time it was given.

For those not fortunate enough to be a member of Dr. Pollock's audience, a cassette of the talk is available for hire.

Stephen Powys Marks on A.R. Powys

The talk by Stephen Powys marks on "ARP" was timely in its coincidence with the republication of "The Repair of Ancient Buildings" by the SPAB Society, the Society for which A.R.P. had for many distinguished years been secretary. The amount of preparation which had so obviously gone into the talk was remarkable not only for the extensive display of photographs, booklets, letters from John Cowper and a wooden chess table made by ARP himself but also for the technical intricacies through which the speaker - himself an architect - led his audience so expertly. A transcript of the talk will be published in Powys Review No. 10.

Oliver Holt on Littleton Powys

Oliver Holt's talk on Littleton is best described in the words of Dr. Glen Cavaliero in his vote of thanks at the conclusion of the talk. Dr. Cavaliero said that we, the audience, now knew very much more about a brother who had tended to be overlooked and Mr. Holt had given us a perfect model of the neglected art of literary portraiture. It was extremely moving to have been present at Mr. Holt's talk. The paper is shortly to be published in the Review but the transcript alone does not convey either the eloquence of the speaker or the overwhelming loss which he so obviously still felt for a man for whom he had the greatest respect and affection. The audience was privileged to have heard Mr. Oliver Holt and the Society owes him a debt of gratitude.

James TURNER:

John Cowper Powys and Charlantanism

Ingemar ALGULIN:

John Cowper Powys and the Sceptical Tradition

Coming at the beginning and end of the conference, these two entirely independent papers turned out to be surprisingly inter-related. Both showed how consciously John Cowper placed himself, as a type of the intellect, and as a representative of a discredited but significant philosophic ancestry. What links "Charlantan" and "Sceptic", is the concept of the "empiric", Powys was aware how easily the Dictionary Definition shades from "acting on observation and experiment, not on theory" to "relying solely on experiment" and so to that crushing monosyllable, "Quack".

These ambiguities were meat and drink to John Cowper; he loved to conceive himself as, on the one hand, a wandering medicine-man, dispensing miraculous cures just as the fancy took him; he willingly embodied a challenge to all the citadels of entrenched logic, but he reveled also in the charge of Charlantanry, that he knew would result. Charlantanism consists, in John Cowper's definition of "the impulsive communication of your feelings without waiting to get the details correct". This indiscretion of the intellect was partly a strategy, adopted as a corrective to the increasingly restrictive disciplines of modern scholarship. In this respect it has nothing at all in common with that "empiricism" of English tradition, which explicitly set out to combat those wide imponderables to which Powys, two centuries later, was attempting to give new currency.

And similarly, with his "scepticism", it is of the inclusive rather than the exclusive variety, and one recalls Blake's "Proverb of Hell":

"Everything that is possible to be believed is an Image of the Truth".

Powys's fiction exists partly to group such "Images". As Dr. Algulin pointed out, Wolf Solent is about scepticism, both its fruit-fulness, and its problems. It shows Wolf's belief in its cyclic ebb and flow, the process by which a man's intellectual bearings are first destroyed, and, at the eleventh hour, re-constituted. It is because of his scepticism that Powys' form had to be fiction, not philosophy. The Complex Vision was too abstract, and, willy-nilly, presented a system; it distorted his voice. In his fiction John Cowper can say, with Nietzsche, "Believe me when I speak in Images".

In A Glastonbury Romance the sceptical structure is complicated by more and more religious and metaphysical "possibilities"; and the crowding of these images seems part of their essential meaning. The separation that occurs here between the "sceptical" John Crow, and the "empiric" or "charlantan" Geard - (both miracle worker and Quack)- will provide the central relationship in all the subsequent fiction. But it is never in question who is master. Geard, Uryen, Owen, Myrddin, Cronos..... Their life, and death, and not the sceptical servant's doubts, provide the mainspring of each book. But it's the sceptic, even so, who survives to tell the tale.

Peter Foss was the speaker at the autumn meeting of the Powys Society held at Liddon House, 24, South Audley Street, Mayfair on November 14, 1981.

Over the last decade members of the Society have heard and read a great deal about Llewelyn Powys, his personal life and characteristics, his intimate, autobiographical writing and his African experiences and impressions.

For this reason, Peter Foss's talk on "The Topography of the Dorset and Somerset Essays of Llewelyn Powys" was particularly welcome. It put the finishing touches, or at least made a welcome addition, to a rich tapestry.

Anyone over 60 will be familiar with some of the names of a great number of books which appeared between the wars from E.V. Lucas, H.V. Morton and others. But Peter Foss placed his subject in an older tradition of country writers, deriving from Richard Jefferies, W.H. Hudson, Izaak Walton and Gilbert White of Selborne.

Peter Foss showed that Llewelyn Powys's essays on these themes were not simply, belles lettres-ist, but were firmly rooted in his own past. Of 37 pieces in Somerset Essays, nine were devoted to Montacute where he spent his childhood.

Country ancients, "the melancholy of English vicarages", and the fate of Monmouth's rebellion linked with early memories of Sedgemoor fens, sometimes worked together to provide what the speaker called "an antidote to exile" in Africa or Switzerland.

Peter Foss saw a link between Llewelyn Powys's writings on these country matters with his brother John's early work, especially "Wood and Stone" and "Ducdame". But he pointed out that many of Llewelyn's country essays appeared first as newspaper articles - a format which imposed limits on the author's writing.

Certainly some particularly unhappy headlines which the speaker quoted give the pieces an air of "tweeness".

Members of the Powys Society much enjoyed this talk, which bridged a gap between the purely reminiscent and the literary-philosophical.

J.N.D.

The spring meeting of the Powys Society, which was held at Liddon House, South Audley Street, Mayfair, on March 13th, started sadly with an announcement by Glen Cavaliero, the Chairman, of the death of Phyllis Playter earlier the same week. Since then an appreciation of her, written by the Chairman has appeared in The Times on the 30th March.

Members of the Society who had visited Phyllis over the years at Blaenau Festiniog, felt a sense of shock that they would not do so again. Although her later years were overshadowed by loneliness and the death of friends, Phyllis Playter's welcoming interest in her visitors was unflagging.

The main item of the meeting was a talk by Kenneth Hopkins on Rex Hunter, a New Zealand writer and the first husband of Gamel Woolsey, some of whose letters to Alyse Gregory, edited by Kenneth, were published in the eighth number of The Powys Review.

Hunter, who was born in New Zealand in 1889, and died there 22 years ago, was a poet, playwright and journalist. We would like to have heard more of his poems had that been possible: from their titles they sound very much of their period.

In the United States Hunter met John Cowper Powys and appreciated his unique quality as a lecturer, besides being, at one time, J.C.P.'s neighbour in New York.

The high point of Kenneth Hopkins' talk was his reading from a letter to Hunter dated October 1954. John Cowper writes of the move from Corwen to Blaenau Festiniog, of his correspondence with Professor Ichiro Hara, and of reading the Bible in Welsh. He details the doings of his relations in Dorset, and greets Rex Hunter himself with that enthusiastic ebullience he seems to have shown to all the visitors and correspondents of whom a record remains.

During the talk Kenneth speculated a little about Hunter's attitude to Gamel Woolsey and vice versa. The fact emerged that Hunter called her Elsa: much else remains a mystery.

J. N. Dawson

"The Times" of 30th March 1982 carried the following obituary:-

MISS PHYLLIS PLAYTER

Glen Cavaliero writes:

Phyllis Playter, who died on March 10, was for over forty years the companion of John Cowper Powys,

A woman of unusual charm and intellectual distinction, she came from Kansas, where she acted as reader for Haldeman-Julius, publishers of the Little Blue Books, to which Powys was a contributor.

She combined an adventurous, pioneering spirit with a perceptive appreciation of literature and the arts, and accompanied Powys back to England in 1934, following their five years together in up-state New York, where 'A Glastonbury Romance', 'Weymouth Sands' and 'Autobiography' were all written.

After Powy's death in 1963 she continued to live in their tiny house at Blaenau Ffestiniog, North Wales, offering warm hospitality to the many scholars and devoted readers of his work who came to see her there.

Those who had the privilege of her friendship will mourn someone to whose devoted companionship of a great writer we are probably indebted for the achievement of his finest work. and who in her own right was a person it was both a pleasure and an education to have known.

John Sansom of Redcliffe Press Ltd has indicated that they, in the Autumn of this year, will reprint a number of Llewelyn Powys's books:

Earth Memories (with an introduction by Philip Larkin)
Black Laughter and Skin for Skin

These will be followed in the Spring by:

Somerset & Dorset Essays and a new illustrated edition of
A Baker's Dozen

In a letter from Gerald Pollinger he gave the following information:-

Amongst Phyllis Playter's effects was the nearly complete typescript of the long-missing Life of Keats by John Cowper Powys, which is now being evaluated.

Dr. H. W. Fawcner, a Swedish Professor, is preparing a critical work on the fiction of J.C.P. to be published by Associated Universities Press, the American publishers of Advice to A Young Poet by Robert Blackmore and Kenneth Hopkins.

A contract is being concluded with the French publishers, Christian Bourgois, for a new (French) edition of Weymouth Sands influenced probably by the interest of French television in Les Sables de la Mer, as it is called in Paris.

The Brothers Powys by R. P. Graves will probably be published in February 1983 by Routledge & Kegan.

The long delayed letters Powys to Knight are still not ready for publication by Cecil Woolf.

Colgate University Press will be publishing Vol. II of John Cowper Powys' Letters to Llewelyn Powys, in conjunction with Jeffrey Kwintner.

Three publishers are interested in reprinting the work of Theodore Powys, though the next books to appear will be by or about Gamel Woolsey or Rex Hunter.

Confessions of two brothers, John Cowper Powys & Llewelyn Powys published by Sinclair Browne Ltd 1982, price paperback £3.50, hardback £7.95 with an Introduction by Malcolm Elwin. First published in New York by the Manas Press of Rochester, this is the first English edition. If there is any difficulty in obtaining a copy at your local bookseller the address of Sinclair Browne Ltd is 10 Archway Close, London, N19 3TD. Books which were formerly published by The Village Press, sadly no longer with us, can be obtained from Greymitre Ltd., White Ladies, The Warren, Radlett, Herts.

Kenneth Hopkins reports that he has now almost completed the copying and editing of Gamel Woolsey's Letters to Llewelyn Powys, and hopes these may soon be in production. He also has in preparation the letters of John Cowper Powys to Hal Trovillion, the American publisher of Llewelyn's A Baker's Dozen. Shortly after the Summer Conference Kenneth Hopkins went off for several weeks to New Zealand to study the Rex Hunter papers in the National Library, and he is now gathering material for a memoir to be prefixed, perhaps, to Hunter's Collected Poems in due course. In Christchurch, N.Z., he met a nephew of Hunter's and learned some interesting family details. Mr. Allan Hunter will be in England next summer and may perhaps be able to attend the Society's September meeting.

The Treasurer has the following tapes available for hire.

1. Dr. Martin Pollock - "Llewelyn Powys - a fragment of memory from 50 years ago".
2. Mr. Kenneth Hopkins - "Rex Hunter and the Powys Circle"

The cost of hire is 55p per tape plus post and packing (approx. 25p) and the tape may be kept for any period up to 2 weeks.

There is also available for purchase two different studies of the head of John Cowper by Oloff de Wet. The reproductions have been made by Heredities Ltd in cold cast bronze. Any member interested in purchasing either or both of these sculptures should apply to the Treasurer, P. J. Birtles, "Lammasett", Winton, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, CA17 4HL for further details.

Also available for purchase are reproductions from a number of original photographs. The photographs available are:

- (i) An informal picture of Sir Angus Wilson, Professor G. R. Wilson Knight and Colin Wilson at the 1972 Centenary Conference.
- (ii) Several studies of Llewelyn from pictures in the private collection of Mr. E. E. Bissell.
- (iii) A study of Theodore from the National Gallery.

Further details on request, again, from the Treasurer.

The Society also has for sale a number of postcard pictures of John Cowper produced by the National Gallery. The cost of each is 10p and any member who would like a copy should send stamps to that value to either the Secretary or the Treasurer with a stamped addressed envelope at least 4" x 6".

Finally

It would be deeply appreciated if every member would please check to make sure that his or her subscriptions have been paid for 1982 and previous years. Postal costs are increasing at an alarming rate and the present subscription level is just sufficient to meet postal, paper and copying costs. If any member wishes to pay by standing order please contact the Treasurer.

Since late 1981, the Society's banker's have changed to Barclays Bank Ltd., Market Street, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria - Account No.71442457. Payments under standing order's, therefore, in favour of the Society's previous bankers, National Westminster, Bridgend, Glamorgan, are being returned. Would all member's who have made arrangements to pay their subscriptions by banker's order please check with their banker's that the 1982 S.T.O. has been paid and, if not, amend the order in favour of the new Account.