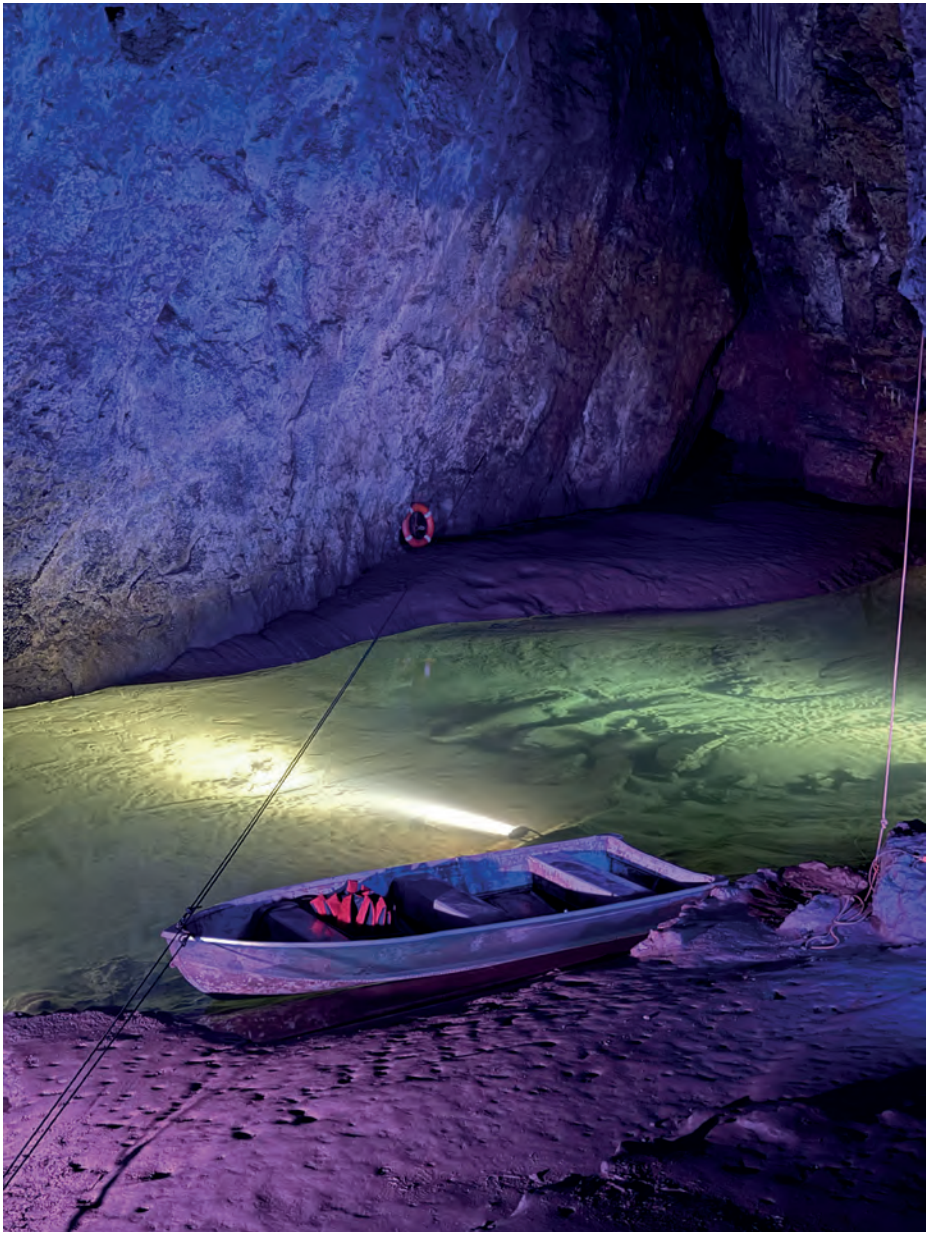
The Powys Society



Newsletter No. 119

November 2026

President: John Gray

Chair & Acting Treasurer: Paul Cheshire
74 Wells Road, Bath, BA2 3AR (email: paulchesh@powys-society.org)

Vice-Chairman: David Goodway
York House, Laurel Grove, Keighley, W. Yorks, BD21 2HW
(email: david@goodway.go-plus.net)

Hon. Secretary: Marcel Bradbury,
11 Fellowes Rise, Winchester, SO22 5SY, UK
(tel: 0044 7798 615727; email: PowysSec@btinternet.com)

Committee:
Dawn Collins (Social Media Manager),
Marcella Henderson-Peal (Official representative of the Powys Society in France and Hon. Committee Member), Kevin Taylor (Ex-Officio, Editor Powys Journal),
Nicholas Birns (Official representative of Powys Society in North America and Hon. Committee Member), Louise de Bruin (Conference Organiser),
Anthony Head, Kim Wheatley, Mick Wood, Patrick Quigley.
NB: Paul Cheshire continues in role of Web Editor and JSTOR Manager.

The Powys Society Newsletter

Editor: Patrick Quigley with Kate Kavanagh
(tel: 00353 857133106; email: patquig2002@yahoo.com)

Production: Jane Wade

The *Newsletter* is published three times a year: in March, July and November.

The Editors (while reserving the right to select and edit) welcome suggestions and contributions from all members.
Letters of general concern to the Society will be shared with the Committee as a whole, who will act as advisers. Will anyone writing to the Editors and Committee and not wishing for publication, please make this clear.
Contributors must accept that *Newsletters* or extracts from them are published on the Powys Society website.
The views expressed by contributors to the Newsletter are their own, and should not be regarded as the official view The Powys Society.

© 2026: Copyright is retained by contributors; all other material is copyright of The Powys Society except where otherwise stated.

The Powys Society is a registered charity, number 801332.
Visit the Society's Website: www.powys-society.org
Follow us on Facebook.

Subscriptions: £25 p.a. in UK; £30 p.a. ex-UK.

FRONT COVER: "Yes, that's *my boat*, said Philip." *(A Glastonbury Romance).* Photo by David Williamson.
BACK COVER: *An anarchist Christmas card from Arthur Moyse (see page 52).*

Printed in 2026 by Willows Magic, London.

Contents: Newsletter 119

Editorial	1	Wookey Hole images	26-27
AGM 2026	3	la lettre powysienne: Pierre Vilar	28
Exeter Archive	5	*Apologie Des Sens*	30
A Glastonbury Romance Launch	6	JCP & *Ulysse*	31
Conference 2026 Notes	7	*Don't You Hear the Sea?*	32
Conference Speakers	10	Robin Kingsland & Will Powys	33
Mabelulu Visitors Book	12	News and Notes	36
Impressions of a First-timer: A Llewelyn	13	Will Durant's Report on *Wolf Solent*	40
Conference Reflection: Courtney Welu	15	Alliance of Literary Societies	44
My Conference: David Williamson	17	Mappowder Collection Inventory	44
Ray Cox's Glastonbury Walk	19	Wildflowers and the Powys Family	46
Llewelyn Powys Birthday Walk	21	Reading Powyses: *Summer will Show*	47
Llewelyn's Flower	22	Review: *Imperial Dreams (1959-64)*	49
Ely meeting on *AGR*	22	The Weather in Street	51
Charles Lock Farewell Symposium	24	Arthur Moyse	52
AGR Revisited	25	Powys Chronology	inside back cover

Editorial

'Bookish people are in general not social animals', writes Christopher Priest in *The Illuminated Man: Life, Death and the Worlds of J.G. Ballard*. Happily, this is not the situation at a Powys Society Annual Conference. Powysians have mastered the art of combining the joy of solitary reading with the pleasure of public conversation; an abiding memory of conference is pausing on the stairway to savour the hum of animated voices.

The conference experience is not just the quality of the lectures or the depth of discussion over the dining table, but in the sense of connecting to something bigger. There is an aura, an atmosphere about a Powys conference that is different from other gatherings. Some linger in the vicinity before and after the weekend to follow paths of their own as Angharad Llewelyn and David Williamson describe so well in their Newsletter debuts.

Glastonbury is a sacred spring that doesn't run dry even in the hottest summers. No matter how often you visit there are always new places to discover, new people to meet, new experiences to enjoy. The Powys Society is a community that comes together annually to renew itself. There are deep undercurrents beneath the conversations and gossip, the lectures and shared meals. There is always the danger of wandering in a dream through two short days before we pack our bags and return to the busy highways of the world. The time seems to accelerate each year and it is only in repose that we can unpack the memories and record them before they slip away.

We were pleased to see new faces at conference resulting in new names in the Newsletter. In this issue we have conference reports from Angharad Llewelyn, Courtney Welu and David Williamson and hope they will honour us with more of their writing in the future. We were happy to have Chris Thomas and Kate Kavanagh among us. Chris had to resign editorship of the Newsletter and his many other duties last year for health reasons and it was a privilege to hear him talk on all aspects of the Powyses.

The November newsletter is almost always shaped by conference, but many other activities indicate the vitality and wide range of the Powys Society and its members. Tony Head has been working to create a new range of Powys stationary, especially bookmarks, leaflets and booklets. He has produced two booklets containing the writings of John Cowper and Llewelyn on Thomas Hardy as well as a leaflet for new members and one on the Powyses in Montacute.

By the time you read this, the conference in Bayonne will be over as well as the Hardy-Powys study day in Dorchester. Conference 2027 appears in the distance although Kim Wheatley has already recruited a significant line-up for Llangollen in August. Meanwhile we have our conference report and first impressions while Peter Birtles and Ray Cox report on the Glastonbury walking tour. Sonia Lewis describes a pleasant discussion day in Ely in May on the chapter, Nature Seems Dead, more appropriate for this time of year maybe. Our report on the Llewelyn birthday walk on 13 August contains a report of a new development, the creation of a local history museum in East Chaldon. Dawn Collins provides a very appropriate poem on the Dandelion which complements the occasion.

In this issue we have a special French section, headed ‘la lettre powysienne’, in honour of the late Jacqueline and Max Peltier. The continued French interest in JCP continues with the Bayonne conference and the publication of a new translation of *In Defence of Sensuality*. Also of note is JCP’s essay on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, available only in English in the rare Village Press booklet. We are grateful to our French comrades for their continual activity on behalf of the Powyses. While the interest is mainly focussed on JCP, it may gradually extend to the writer brothers and the wider family background.

The aim of the Newsletter is to provide a stimulating and varied collection of writings that throw light on the Powys world. Surprises are always welcome such as Robin Kingsland’s account of his father’s encounters with Will Powys in Africa during World War 2. Another new name is the Devon author, Bob Mann who writes of memories aroused by the publication of the restored *A Glastonbury Romance*. Richard Stone follows up on his debut in NL118 with a fascinating piece on the flower yarrow and its significance for the Powyses.

Kim Wheatley provides an account of the great American educationalist, Will Durant’s, report on *Wolf Solent.* Durant also appears in our Powys Chronology

for late 1926. News and Notes include some interesting items while Marcella Henderson-Peal reports on the retirement seminar of veteran Powysian, Charles Lock. Peter Foss gives an inventory on a tranche of materials from Mappowder which Louise de Bruin donated to the National Library of Wales.

A report from Marcel Bradbury on the Association of Literary Societies highlights the importance of co-operation with other literary groupings. We complete the issue with Dawn Collins's account of a Reading Powys session on Sylvia Townsend Warner's novel, *Summer Will Show* followed by Kate Kavanagh's review of the third volume in the memoirs by the indefatigable Richard Perceval Graves's – *Empire Dreams*. Last, but definitely not least, we close the issue with a poem inspired by the 2012 conference in Street by Geoffrey Winch and a note on the anarchist artist and author, Arthur Moyse.

Promoting the Powyses can be a difficult undertaking, but the rewards are great. The interest shown in all members of this remarkable family and the stream of activities shows that their relevance is still strong in the 21st century. John Cowper continues to dominate the discussion, but we hope to correct the balance in 2027 as we celebrate the centenary of the publication of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*.

The Newsletter belongs to every member of the Powys Society and its success is a reflection of the interest and dedication of the members. It depends on your contributions. So, keep the news and articles coming and Happy Christmas to you all. On that note we reproduce on the back cover a Christmas card sent from Arthur Moyse to the family of Francis Powys, the image kindly donated by Amanda and Will Powys.

Patrick Quigley

Marcel Bradbury, Hon. Secretary

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Powys Society held at the Wessex Hotel, Street, on the 16th August 2026

Present; Paul Cheshire (PC), Kim Wheatley (KW), Marcel Bradbury (MB), Kevin Taylor (KT) Louise de Bruin, Pat Quigley (PQ) Dawn Collins (DC) Anthony Head, Peter Crow and 29 members.

1. The minutes of the 2025 AGM as published in *Newsletter 116* were approved.

2. The nominations of Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society Committee for the year 2026-27 as set out in *Newsletter 118* were approved.

3. The Chair's report as published in Newsletter 118 was noted by the meeting. PC said he planned to stand down as Chair of the Society from the 2027 AGM. He will continue to oversee the Society's accounts and has indicated to the committee his willingness to be nominated for the vacant role of Treasurer for the year 2027-2028

and to therefore remain on the committee where, if approved by the membership, he will continue to be responsible for the Society's website. He was pleased to report to the meeting that the committee had approached KW who had indicated her willingness to be nominated for the position of Chair of the Society a year from now at the 2027 AGM.

4. PC as Acting Treasurer drew the meeting's attention to the **Treasurer's Report** published in *Newsletter 118*. The financial position of the Society is reviewed at each committee meeting and PC confirmed our reserves remain in a healthy condition.

5. MB as Hon. Secretary reported that membership of the Society was holding steady at 243. The Annual Return for this financial year had been made in good time to the Charity Commission. Members were reminded of the joint study day with the Thomas Hardy Society on the weekend of 24/25th October 2026. Spaces were limited so early booking was recommended.

6. KT said he had notified the committee that he would stand down as editor of the Society's *Journal* in 2027 having completed 9 editions. The committee had therefore approached KW and he was pleased to announce that KW had agreed to take on the role of editor a year from now and to be responsible for the *Journal* from volume 38 (2028) onwards although she was also willing to provide assistance to KT on volume 37. KT reported the continued success of the Society's e-books with total profit to date of around £10,300. He noted that monthly sales of the Society's e-book of *A Glastonbury Romance* has increased threefold in July of this year, almost certainly as a result of the new Penguin edition of that work being issued on the 16th and the resultant publicity.

KT said he now wished to focus his time on his role as literary agent for the estate of John Cowper Powys and he informed the meeting of several licences he had recently issued for the publication of JCP's works in France.

7. PQ said he had received positive comments on the format and content of recent *Newsletters*, and was grateful for the suggested contributions he was continuing to receive from the membership. Work on the *Newsletter* was therefore progressing well.

8. DC reported that the Society's social media was ticking over but urged the membership to look at the Substack account and to engage with this and the Reading Powys Group.

9. PC confirmed last year's overhaul of the Society's website had been running well and he had received positive comments on it. If any members had Powys-related news he would be happy to hear from them to add to the site. The facility on the new site allowing visitors to sign up for information about future events and new postings on the website was not well used. As so few members had signed up by late January, he added all members with email addresses to the mailing list,

on the understanding that they could unsubscribe later if they wished. The low uptake made him hesitant about how often to email these updates, but the meeting approved his proposal to increase their frequency.

10. The 2027 conference and AGM will be held at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, on the 20th to 22nd August 2027.

11. AOB. PC reported that **Louise de Bruin** has decided to step down as one of the joint conference organisers. PC thanked her for her hard work on 25 years of events and a presentation was made to Louise. Thanks were also given to **Anna Rosic** for her continued work organising the conference. **Marcella Henderson-Peal** confirmed she will take on Louise's role and work with Anna on future conferences.

Powys Society Committee

Marcel Bradbury Hon. Secretary
The Powys Society archive at Exeter University

The Society has received a request from Exeter University to transfer the archive, currently on loan, to the University as a permanent gift. Funders are increasingly refusing to support collections held on loan meaning the Powys papers may miss out on conservation, cataloguing and digitisation.

The committee felt that the most important point was to secure the archive's long-term future and to ensure that, in addition to being professionally looked after, the archive is readily accessible to scholars. They have therefore agreed in principle

to the request. In addition to the funding point, a transfer will give the Society a clear and simple legal position and will relieve future committees from the current patchwork of agreements that govern the archive.

Large parts of the archive were gifted to the Society and it is important that any conditions imposed on these gifts are honoured. These checks are ongoing, and we will proceed with the transfer once these are completed. Any new agreement with the University will contain a provision that ownership of the archive be transferred back to the Society, or our nominee, if Exeter University can no longer care for it. Any questions or comments about this should be sent in the first instance to me at PowysSec@btinternet.com

---

Kevin Taylor
A Glastonbury Romance launched, with guest Norman Parker

We raised a glass on Friday 14 August 2026 to Penguin's brand-new edition of *A Glastonbury Romance*, published on 16 July with the restored text of the 'Wookey Hole' chapter and other sections deleted in all other printings since 1934. The celebration was part of the opening reception of our annual conference in The Wessex Hotel, Street, a handy venue for guest-of-honour Norman Parker, who lives just up the road. Norman (91) painted the picture Penguin chose to use on the cover of the new edition. Dating from 2003, his oil painting 'The Riddle of the Moon' was one of many representations of Glastonbury Tor produced by Norman as part of his '100 Views of the Tor' project – emulating Hokusai's 'One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji' (1834-1840s).

Kevin Taylor with artist Norman Parker and 'The Riddle of the Moon'.

Norman's career was as a biology teacher at Millfield School, which first brought him to Somerset, having undertaken national service and studied at Cambridge. He can see the Tor from his house – a daily inspiration in the pursuit of his other occupation as an artist, in which surrealism has been a major influence. We noted the irony that the 'Moon' featured in the title of the painting is omitted in the cropped version Penguin have used; but agreed that this powerful and entirely apt image will serve the book very well.

Copies were to be found in the bookshops along Glastonbury High Street and in local Waterstones stores, Penguin having already sold close to 1,500 copies. I sold a further 20 at the specially discounted price of £15 to conference-goers and will be taking more to sell at the Bayonne event in late-September and the Hardy-Powys weekend in Dorchester in late-October. As noted on the Powys Society website, they may also be purchased at discount by emailing me on kjt8422@gmail.com.

Conference Note 2026

When people hear I'm going to Glastonbury they assume I'm headed for the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts (to give the full title). But there's a lot more to Glastonbury than the famous festival. After two decades of irregular visiting I've only scratched the surface of this elusive place. So I came two days early to absorb the atmosphere; I had a meeting on Thursday morning with Ray Cox outside the Abbey Ruins to collect a bundle of newsletters, NL 118 the Glastonbury issue, which we distributed to information centres, bookshops and even St John's Church. Ray has become an expert on the hidden beauties of Glastonbury and showed me inside the church dedicated to St Patrick and St Margaret's Chapel & Royal Mary Magdalene Almshouses — havens of tranquillity a short distance from the busy Magdalene Street. He would have revealed more but the intense heat drove us into another haven – the shady arbour of The Becket's beer garden.

Despite the heat a visit to Glastonbury cannot be complete without a visit to Courtyard Books on High Street. No matter how I strive to be early I nearly always encounter a conference-goer who gleefully displays a precious volume with the remark 'Look at this bargain. It's the last one'. This year I was delighted to find a copy of *The Letters of Elizabeth Myers* with an inscription by her husband, Littleton Powys. Elizabeth was a remarkable writer, whose work we covered in a Reading Powyses session earlier this year. However, I was trumped by our sharp-eyed Secretary, Marcel Bradbury, who

Taliesin Gore, Ollie Rimmer and John Gray.

picked up a first edition, signed and numbered of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. Gallant fellow that he is, he offered the rarity for auction towards Society funds.

Louise de Bruin, Kate Kavanagh and Kevin Taylor.

The conference opened with Chair Paul Cheshire presiding over the launch of the Penguin Modern Classic edition of *A Glastonbury Romance*, the first since 1934 with the excised Wookey Hole sections and other parts restored. We were delighted that the cover artist, Norman Parker who lives in Street, was able to attend along with his son, Ant. After we saluted him with our wine glasses, Committee Member, Tony Head, distributed questionnaires on preferences for events and conferences. Ray Cox also circulated copies of his Glastonbury Powys guide with a promise to lead a walk the following day. This was to be a busy conference.

It was the first conference organised by Kim Wheatley who continued the tradition of an eclectic mix of speakers. The opening speaker, President John Gray of the Society, spoke of the three Powys brothers and their use of contemplation as a restorative to the pressures of living in a post-Christian society. His talk was punctuated by emergency phone calls from the government warning of the danger of drought-induced fires. I was informed this was the first time such a system was deployed. John proved to be a genial and approachable philosopher who engaged in many conversations with attendees over the weekend. Julie Lasky began Saturday with a fascinating talk on Marian Powys's lace shops in New York with samples of her merchandise. Marian has been neglected by Powys scholars, a situation hopefully improved by the new informative Wikipedia page created by our member Robin Wood. Julie was also in possession of the Mabelulu Visitors Book, a rare artefact created by three Powys children − Marian, Bertie and Llewelyn. The book had travelled across the Atlantic and was now returning to Dorchester Museum and the Peter Powys Grey collection. This was not a literary relic, but a link with the past and the imaginative world of the Powys children. Even in their youth they were literally shaping the world around them.

It was appropriate that Thomas Hardy's signature adorned the Visitors Book as his name recurred over the weekend. At our pre-conference committee meeting Tony

Head presented samples of beautifully-designed booklets of the writings by John Cowper and Llewelyn on Hardy. These were to be available for the Powys-Hardy study day in Dorchester in October. The Sunday morning speaker was the effervescent Mark Chutter, Chairman of the Hardy Society, who was to lead a tour of East Chaldon after the Dorchester conference. Not to forget the presence of long-term Powys Society member, Peter Tait, who has authored three books on Hardy and the women in his life and work.

Kate Kavanagh in pensive mood.

It could also be designated the 'American conference' with the attendance of the Welu family from the US. Courtney Welu, her mother, Erica and aunt Janna Emmel, were on a pilgrimage to places associated with the American student of JCP, Darrell Emmel. On Saturday, Courtney gave a moving tribute to her great-uncle and his long immersion in the life and work of John Cowper Powys. (See NL 117 for Courtney's account of her uncle's life and work.) She brought copies of Darrell Emmel's newly-published book, *The Stars Move*, a 750-page exegesis of *Porius* which we will explore in a future issue.

Richard Stone, David Williamson, Chris Uren, Peter Crow, Louise de Bruin & Ollie Rimmer.

For some the highlight was outside the conference room; it was the visit to Wookey Hole, immortalised in the seduction scene in *A Glastonbury Romance.* There are reports of the visit in this issue, but words or photographs cannot express the grandeur of those rock caverns and enormous empty spaces beneath the ground. I was reminded of another classic novel, *Land*

Conference Speakers

Julie Lasky with Janice Gregory.

Courtney Welu with Kim Wheatley.

Paul Cheshire and John Gray.

Paul Chutter with Tony Head.

Under England by Joseph O'Neill, where the hero encounters a strange world beneath the earth's crust. The peculiar rock shapes and hidden caverns may have inspired John Cowper when writing *Morwyn* to locate Hell in the depths of the earth. The readings of the sections excised from *A Glastonbury Romance* in this dramatic setting was an unforgettable experience. While the temperature soared to over 30 degrees Centigrade outside the caves were a cool 11 degrees.

Our group was guided through the labyrinthine passages by Neil Morgan who was happy to accommodate our requests for readings and photographs. He also provided information on Captain Gerard William Hodgkinson, who opened Wookey Hole to the public in 1926-7 and considered himself defamed in Philip Crow's character. The caves now belong to Madame Tussaud's and John Cowper would have been appalled at the garish lights and amusement arcades, but all the vivid lighting could not diminish the strange and surreal rock shapes. I hoped to print a double-page photograph of the Powys group in Wookey Hole, but the ghostly illuminations give the members a garish look. Perhaps Wookey Hole guards itself against too much familiarity.

The last issue of the Newsletter mentioned changing the Book Room. There were fewer familiar books this time. Kevin Taylor brought stacks of the Penguin *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Jack and the Abject* while Richard Perceval Graves donated copies of the books in his autobiographical sequence. (The most recent, *Imperial Dreams*, is reviewed in this issue.) After the excitement of the day, Saturday night's entertainment was an informal panel discussion on early encounters with the Powyses and favourite passages. The conference concluded on Sunday with the AGM where Paul Cheshire and Kevin Taylor announced retirement from their posts in 2027, although Paul will remain on the committee as Treasurer and Kevin will focus on his work as literary agent to achieve more Powys publications. The role of Chair and *Journal* Editor will be taken over by Kim Wheatley. In another change of role, Marcella Henderson-Peal takes over from Louise de Bruin as joint-conference organiser with Anna Rosic. On behalf of the Society, Paul presented Louise with a bottle of champagne in thanks for fifty years active membership and twenty-five as conference organiser. Peter Crow was introduced to members as the new Membership Secretary.

Many thanks to Anna Rosic, Marcella Henderson-Peal, Kevin Taylor, Gail Campbell, David Williamson, Julie Lasky and Courtney Welu for supplying conference photographs for this issue.

Patrick Quigley

Julie Lasky

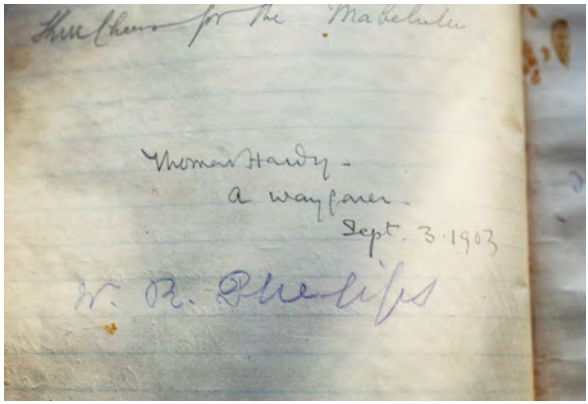
The Mabelulu Visitors Book returns

The Mabelulu Visitors Book (that's the official name) was sent by Alyse Gregory to Marian Powys after Llewelyn's death. In a letter dated May 25,1940, Alyse wrote, "Katie [Powys] had been given the Mabelulu Visitors Book to guard by Lulu but had forgotten it and has only just discovered it. It is a risk to send it — but all life is a risk, and things are to be enjoyed when one is alive to enjoy them. And so I am going to register it and send it."

The book made it safely across the Atlantic during World War II. With both Bertie and Lulu no longer alive, May — the third in the Mabelulu triumvirate — was the proper custodian. After her death, the book passed to her son, Peter Grey, and then to his daughter, Katey Grey. Katey recently decided to donate it to the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester, which holds the Peter Powys Grey collection of Powys-related materials. She entrusted me with the job of courier and enthusiastically approved of the idea of first sharing it with Powys Society Conference attendees. I dropped it off yesterday. (**Ed:** Thursday, 20 August)

MaBeLuLu book cover.

MaBeLuLu Visitors Book.



Thomas Hardy signature.

Angharad Llewelyn

A First-Timer's Reflection on the Powys Society Conference

This year's conference theme, 'Threads of delicate affinity', was perfect. I have been drawn to the story of Ariadne's thread from the age of seven. Horrified at the idea of young girls being sacrificed to a minotaur, I remember making a mental note of the importance of having plenty of thread if I was ever going to venture inside a labyrinth. Arriving at my first Powys Conference, I felt that I needed as many threads as possible to help me negotiate the challenging and intellectual world of the Powysian imagination. I needn't have worried, though, because everyone was incredibly friendly and welcoming. I wasn't going into this adventure on my own.

John Hodgson, Angharad Llewelyn & Gail Campbell.

Contemplation Over Action

John Gray's talk about the three very different Powys brothers—framed by the idea of contemplation rather than action as the chief end in life—was truly timely. It feels so welcome in this age of information overload and short attention spans. I had been thinking in my own work about why young people especially feel so anxious, unhappy, and lost, and what society can do about it. John's discussion touched on the Powyses being great walkers—walking, of course, often creating the perfect conditions for contemplation and probably providing one of the best antidotes for anxiety.

This thread took me back to my pilgrimage the day before, to Montacute. I sat in the pews of the church and contemplated. How could such atheist brothers come from such a religious and nurturing background? But then it came to me that the very fact that the Reverend Charles and Mary Cowper Powys had produced eleven talented but vastly different children demonstrated the scaffolding, support, and security they provided. They gave them the confidence to go off, be different, and be rebellious. Those 'detested pews' paradoxically encouraged them to go out and find 'spirit' however that manifested for them individually.

Montacute was stunning. Bathed in sunshine, the beautiful hamstone buildings hummed with warmth. I've always liked rocks; as a little girl, I was never without torn, dusty Tesco bags full of them. I took a drive up to Ham Hill to find the source of the stone. Finding a shady tree, I looked out. The Powys children may have grown up in a small community but they had a huge expanse of nature as their playground. It teaches you to notice.

Tangible Connections

Coming from a long line of dressmakers and having flirted with costume design myself, I really enjoyed Julie Lasky's exploration into Marian Powys's life and her lace-making business in New York. It struck me how lace-making is a deeply contemplative act—winding threads around a cushion of pins to create something fine and beautiful. It was fascinating to follow Julie's extensive research and the revelations that she had uncovered. I really look forward to the forthcoming book, *Her Light Materials: Marian Powys and the Drama of Lace*.

Next came Courtney Welu's beautiful tribute to her great-uncle, Darrell Emmel, a lifelong scholar and admirer of JCP. Her talk brought him alive and I was moved to learn of his passion to explore something that had touched his soul. When his photo appeared on screen—standing long-haired in all his 1970s glory and wearing a Pink Floyd t-shirt—I smiled. We live a stone's throw from David Gilmour's studio *Astoria*, moored on the Thames, and a huge giclée print of *The Division Bell* artwork hangs on our dining room wall. The threads kept coming.

It struck me just how important people like Courtney and Darrell are in this world, especially now when AI companies are buying up rare books, scraping the content, and then recklessly destroying them page by page. More than ever, communities of interest, societies, and archives need to hold their treasures close because there is nothing like a primary source encountered physically and 'in real life'. As Owen Evans exclaimed in *A Glastonbury Romance*: "Corpus!" he cried, leaping to his feet, "do you mean Corpus, Cambridge?... you Corpus people have got a library… that would madden Paracelsus himself."

Scaling the Tor

After Saturday's session, Glastonbury Tor was calling me. As it was so hot, I waited until evening, which meant missing the panel session on Society members' first encounters with the Powysian world. I felt some regret about that but I also felt I was wildly in catch-up mode. There is so much to delve into, and never enough time. I wanted to see and experience Gwyn ap Nudd's domain within Ynys Wydryn—to climb the steep hill up to St Michael's and sit and wonder at how Mr Geard, of the wide girth, managed to run down the Tor to calm the baying townspeople at his Pageant. As I reached the summit, a cool wind surrounded me and suddenly I was looking down at the levels all around, seeing what countless people have seen and experienced for centuries:

'At a higher altitude with flag unfurled
We reached the dizzy heights of that dreamed of world'

— (High Hopes, Pink Floyd)

And I thought of Darrell, with the world at his feet and his new life beyond.

The following day brought Mark Chutter's talk. As a teenager, I could never get enough of Hardy. I read him constantly during my school holidays in between serving bacon butties to lorry drivers on the A4 near Brentford. In the quiet moments between customers, it was just me, Hardy, and the wide expanses of Wessex. Listening to Mark talk about the bohemian community at East Chaldon was joyful. I had very little knowledge about it but last year a friend pointed me in the direction of *Lolly Willowes*, so how wonderful it was to learn about Sylvia Townsend Warner and the connections with the Powys Circle. I enjoyed Mark's reading of Townsend Warner's 'The Neighbour's Clock' and his exquisite delivery of "Drawing you, heavy with sleep…", which Sylvia wrote for her lifelong partner and lover, Valentine Ackland.

It seems a very long time to wait until next year's conference, so the Hardy/Powys joint society meet-up in October is beckoning me.

Courtney Welu
Powys Conference Reflections

I've known about the Powys family for most of my life by way of my great-uncle, Darrell Emmel, who adored John Cowper Powys. I only started reading JCP's books after Darrell died, and when I first read *Porius* and *Autobiography*, I experienced them through Darrell as an intermediary. I focused on JCP as an instrumental figure in Darrell's life and philosophy.

This conference gave me the chance to see John Cowper Powys through the eyes of dozens of people who love his work with the same intensity Darrell had. I enjoyed witnessing everyone's passion, enthusiasm, and participating in the community that you all have built together. Though I am saddened that Darrell never got to experience it for himself, his death is what pushed me into the Powys world. I'm grateful that I could be there in his stead.

Being granted the chance to speak about Darrell's life and work means more to me than I can say. Darrell was an old hermit who didn't use the Internet, and his connections outside of our family are few. I loved introducing him and his love of JCP to you. Thank you to everyone who attended my talk, and especially those of you who asked questions about who Darrell was as a person. He was, like JCP, a singular human being.

I so enjoyed the other speakers' presentations, especially Julie Lasky's work on Marian Powys. I read most of JCP's correspondence held at the Harry Ransom Center, but the HRC does not hold any letters to or from Marian. She was a blank spot in my knowledge of the Powys family. The research Julie did at Colgate University is fascinating, and makes me want to visit their reading room. I appreciated that

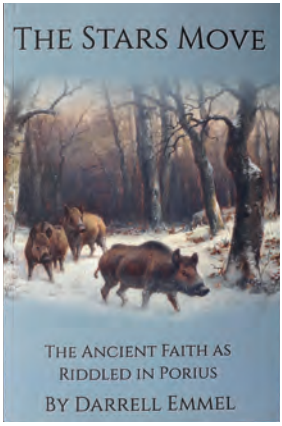
both Julie's and Mark Chutter's presentations centered on the women whose lives intersected with the Powys brothers, whose work often goes unsung. John Gray's talk was also illuminating and intersected nicely with my own discussion of JCP's changing opinions on the afterlife.

I attended the conference with my mother and aunt, both of whom had a wonderful time despite very little knowledge of the Powyses. When we left Street, we headed to Llangollen, where Darrell lived in the 1970s. We had the chance to visit Darrell's friend Katrina, who was a little girl when Darrell rented a room from her parents at Dinbren Hall. Katrina has her own papers on the Powys family, including letters that Phyllis Playter wrote to her mother. I encouraged her to donate them to one of the local repositories that houses Powys material. My family then visited Norway and met distant cousins near Trondheim, a trip that Darrell had also taken almost 50 years ago.

I came to the conference in part to honor my uncle and to discuss the papers he left behind. However, I can speak for the three of us when I say that we were all so charmed by the people who put this event on year after year, out of adoration and excitement for an obscure family of

Erica Welu, Courtney Welu & Janna Emmel.

Darrell Emmel at Dinas Bran in 1970s.



The Stars Move by Darrell Emmel.

Courtney Welu and Darrell Emmel.

writers in danger of fading into the background of history. Thank you for your work bringing the Powys family to life and continuing their legacy. As Darrell was dying, the most important thing on his mind was the future of John Cowper Powys's work. He would have been delighted to know how the Powys Society keeps JCP's legacy alive.

David Williamson
My Conference

This was my third visit to Wookey Hole. My first was as a child, in the late 1950s, when my father took me. All I can remember is the Witch of Wookey and the empty rowing boat by the underground lake in the first chamber. At that time, I believe the cave still belonged to the Hodgkinson family (of course, in no way bearing any resemblance whatsoever to Philip Crow) and they had sold the adjoining paper mill to the Inveresk Paper Company. I don't recall the electrification status, but the witch and the stalactites in the great chamber were illuminated by the guide with a torch (flashlight).

I next returned, alone, sometime in the late 1970s, by which time the cave and, separately, the paper mill had been sold to Madame Tussauds, who reduced the mill to a museum of small-scale production of high-quality, niche writing paper – I bought some in the shop. It was maybe on this same trip that I first encountered the Powys brothers in a bookshop in Glastonbury; my memory is a little hazy. I was in search of the legends of Glastonbury, in particular the Holy Grail, and *A Glastonbury Romance* (*AGR*) caught my eye on the bookshelf – it was prominently displayed.

This time, in the mid-2020s, I returned as part of a friendly and helpful group of Powys scholars. Having read *AGR* back in those dismal 1970s, as well as recent re-additions of happenings in Wookey Hole, I felt somewhat more knowledgeable as we made our way through what seemed to be a much longer tour than I remember, with more steps, more uneven and slippery ground, and multicolour LEDs illuminating the stalactites. The witch was still there, passed by rather too quickly by our guide, though no doubt grown drip-by-drip by a few mm, maybe even a cm, during my lifetime. Inevitably, after reading JCP for many years, this prompted thoughts of the vast difference between human and geological lifespans and consciousness!

I often get those thoughts in Arizona, too – the clear skies and naked-eye view of our Milky Way and neighbouring Andromeda galaxy (which will soon, in cosmic time, pass through each other) extend beyond the lifetime of the Witch of Wookey to even vaster Universal lifespans and Consciousness. Perhaps even beyond 10 to the power of 500 Multiverses (the estimated number in some Quantum many-worlds hypotheses).

The return to the light from our own star at the end of the tour was rather sudden, and then we made our way into Dinosaur Valley, past modern cave explorers and animatronic dinosaurs, to the paper mill, now further reduced to static machines and a lame video. No paper, but cave-aged cheese, for sale in the shop.

What would Red Robinson think about what Philip Crow has done to Wookey Hole? (even though, of course, they exist only in JCP's imagination). He would probably be pleased if no noxious gases or minerals have been or will be fracked or otherwise extracted from Mother Earth, and glad that no workers are being exploited in the Paper Mill. As a visitor from the United States, it seems to me to be more a microcosm of England's industrial decline that I witnessed back in the 1970s and escaped from in the 1980s. What does the economy now run on, if not manufacturing and innovation?

Chris Thomas, Ray Cox & David Williamson.

Oh, well!

The Saturday afternoon group pilgrimage is always my favourite part of the Annual Conference. That and my more customary solitary walks, which I did this year after the Sunday lunch, armed with Ray Cox's helpful guide and memory of his earlier tour, years ago, back when it rained. So to the White Spring and Chalice Well Gardens, before they closed, to meditate and fill my bottle with White water and a splash of Red, as recommended by Wellesley Tudor Pole. Then, after a pleasant night in a Glastonbury B&B, called – of course! – Avalon, with a meditation room full of crystals and pictures of Indian Gurus (though not mine), to a cooler Monday morning walk around town, stopping at a bookshop (not the same one that I vaguely remember) to check out their Powys collection – not bad, including the new AGR Penguin edition, but not prominently displayed, on the same shelf as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, my second-favourite Glastonbury book, in spite of the author's since-discovered dubious background. Then, stopping at St Margaret's Chapel Garden, on the way up to the Tor (the Tor bus wasn't running, as some roads were closed).

Breathing more consciously, to compensate for ageing lungs, I made it to the top – I always feel more at home on top of a hill, or, better still, above one, rather than in the darkness of caves. But the contrast is the Glastonbury experience, and indeed

our whole Grail Quest. So, then returning reluctantly to town for a Somerset cream tea at the Abbey Tea Rooms – still there from the 1970s. Then back to the Malvern Hills, where the water percolating through 680-million-year-old Precambrian granite, compared to a relatively youthful 200-million-year-old Tor limestone, is "famous for containing nothing at all" – Dr John Wall.

Of the Conference talks, my favourite ones this year were those of how people discovered the Powys brothers. Many of these seem to have been from that same period of the 1970s. Always when people read JCP aloud I am reminded of why he resonates with me, more than any other writer – "pervading his pilgrim-soul with the most exquisite pleasure of all, the unutterable symphonies of the music of nothingness" – JCP in *The Brazen Head*

The Witch of Wookey is what is called a **pareidolia.** The mind imagines something from the shape, more often clouds, but it can be any natural shape. So, it's not obviously a witch, but previous guides suggested this to me, so I knew what to look for. As I say, our guide didn't dwell on her so much. In my picture it is the dark blob, suggesting a side view of the face and upper body - actually doesn't look like a witch at all!

My camera is an iPhone 16 Pro – it is remarkably good in the dark.

Ed: See centre pages for the Witch of Wookey and other amazing images taken by David with his iPhone 16 Pro.

Raymond Cox
A Powys Glastonbury Walk

As an alternative to the Wookey Hole trip a few members gathered outside Glastonbury Town Hall for a walk around the streets of Glastonbury, to view about fifteen sites and streets mentioned and described in *A Glastonbury Romance,* some with numerous references.

Essentially it was a walk around the outside of the ancient walls of the abbey precinct, mostly a square, using Magdelene Street, Chilkwell Street and Bere Lane, from which views of the Tor and Chalice Hill, with their commanding positions over the town, are spectacular. (In the book, Chalice Hill actually has more references by name than any other place; however, ironically today it does not have public access.) Along the way we passed Benedict Street and Northload Street, and walked up High Street to see the George and Pilgrims (the Pilgrims' Inn), and the Tribunal, both 15th century buildings, and then St. John the Baptist's Church. At the top of High Street, we saw Bove Town ahead and Wells Road to the left. Turning right there was Silver Street to pass, then Abbey House. At the junction with Bere Lane there was a view of The Rifleman's Arms (St. Michael's Inn), and the Abbey Barn (Tithe Barn).

At the west end of Bere Lane, Hill Head, which leads to Wearyall Hill (Wirral Hill), and the site of the *Terre Gastée* (waste land) was seen straight ahead. The right turn is Fisher's Hill which becomes Magdelene Street at the junction with Street Road. Finally, there was St. Margaret's Chapel and Almshouses. The chapel and garden, located in a small haven of peace along a short alley off Magdelene Street, had closed for the day, but we were able to view the chapel's *bell cot* which JCP would have had to make a specific intention to see, as it is not easily visible from the street. As in many instances in the novels it is the effect upon a character, John Crow, which he describes here so perceptively. *"As he surveyed this old bell-cot… out of whose stones grew intermittent stone-crop and green moss, the thought of how long this little tower, with its two bells and its statue of the saint, had been mingled with the thoughts of the generations of life-broken, life-weary, life-sated, life-hungry old men, going in and out of these almshouses, gave the selfish John a thrilling rapture of delight."*

Ray Cox at Magdalene Almshouses.

It was a hot afternoon, but enjoyable even with the heat and the busy activity of the High Street.

Peter Birtles adds:

We were not the most disciplined tour group, straggling up High Street, jostled by shoppers and gawkers, ourselves peering in shop windows, chatting amongst ourselves and stopping at every lamppost to read the flyers plastered on them. But we were willing and keen to hear (sometimes for our leader's second time of asking) what Raymond had to tell us about the sites referenced in AGR.

I was very satisfied to see Mr Evan's' shop, the Dekkers' Vicarage, Mad Bets' cottage and St Margaret's Chapel. Raymond was patient with us, knowledgeable on the AGR sites he (and JCP) had chosen and happy to engage in discussions with those of us who wanted more information or had turned up late to hear the first delivery of his insights. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and informative traipse around Glastonbury on one of the hottest days of the year. Raymond was charming and led us with skill and certainty.

Ed: Ray has an encyclopedic knowledge of historic Glastonbury's many fascinating places that can't be encompassed in a short tour. As a footnote to his Glastonbury Guide in Newsletter 118 he has compiled a list of Glastonbury places referenced in the novel. Chalice Hill tops the list with forty-five references, followed closely by the Abbey Ruins with forty-two and the Tor with thirty-eight. Space does not permit a complete list which can be received from Ray. The sites with the fewest references were Stonedown and St Margaret's Chapel (three each).

Anthony Head
Llewelyn Powys Birthday Walk, 2026

Fourteen hardy souls gathered at The Sailor's Return in East Chaldon on August 13 for the Llewelyn Powys Birthday Walk, the largest turnout for several years, and it was good to have Neil Lee Atkin with us again to give the traditional post-prandial toast to Llewelyn's memory. The sweltering heat was an understandable cause of concern for some, given the lack of tree-cover, and cloud-cover too, on the long steep walk up past Chydyok to Llewelyn's Stone, and only seven mad dogs (four of them women) decided to go out in the midday sun. But a gentle breeze made the trek less arduous than imagined, and we were rewarded with delightful views of the coastline, from Durdle Door and Bat's Head to the east to the White Nose to the west, with Portland resplendent in the distance.

Llewelyn walk group.

At Llewelyn's Stone, which was in reassuringly bright and legible condition, Paul Cheshire, Richard Stone, Kim Wheatley, and I all gave readings from Llewelyn's writings, before we began our descent – this time not by simply retracing our steps but by continuing on past the Upper Obelisk and then heading down the other side of Dead Horse Valley past Rat's Barn and so into East Chaldon again, passing Beth Car as we did so. At the Village

Rat's barn.

Hall, by the entrance to St. Nicholas's Church, Paul, Pam Gillingham, and I took advantage of tea and scones kindly provided for us by Rosie Johnson and Philip Beale, who explained their plans to reform the hall partly into a museum that will house exhibits relating to the village's history, as well as to the writers and artists associated with it. One section of this would be dedicated to the Powys family, an exciting development of which more details will be forthcoming as plans progress.

Dawn Collins
Llewelyn's flower… life is but a beautiful weed

sea of seeds that tears apart in the slightest breeze
caught in filaments of spider silk. there it waits
in between the stones splitting roots
tear-white milk. and we hold our breath for next year
when I will gouge cracks. attack with a foul mind
of death to yellow heads that track the sun. hundreds together
a crowd worthy of a poem. they determined to grow
on stunted stalk. wound low in short grass denying the mower.

their yellow the yellow of a lion's mane. they live in unison.
become ethereal pom-poms. blow as one. a murmuration.
an agreement. a Mexican wave in the garden stadium.

Sonia Lewis
'Nature seems dead': Powys Society Meeting in Ely, 30 May 2026

On Saturday 30 May eight members of the Powys Society met in the upstairs sitting-room of the Old Fire Engine House in Ely. The room holds a special atmosphere of a long-cared for home with sofas and comfortable chairs. There is a "natural selection" for any group coming in as to where to sit. The window looks out on St. Mary's Church just below the great Cathedral. Groups all seem to respond to this special environment. John Hodgson led us with thought-provoking thoroughness through the chapter entitled 'Nature seems Dead'. This title is taken from Macbeth just before the murder, giving the reader a warning of what is in store. John pointed out that it started on a happy note with the birth of Nell's little boy and Tossie's lusty twin girls as 'subjects of the king'. John asked if this wording had jarred. Perhaps, like me, some of us were prepared to overlook this detail; our regard for JCP or just not noticing? Others did find it difficult, ranging from offensive to just odd.

We then came to the enemies of the Grail. Philip Crow is the first to be considered who is 'guileless in maliciousness of his inhumanity' as he looks into

John Hodgson & Dawn Collins

the fire and imagines killing many of the inhabitants of Glastonbury – Red Robinson, Dave Spear, Paul Trent, Tom Barter, Lawyer Beere, Stilly, Weatherwax, Will Zoyland and finally John Crow, all sleeping but joining with Philip Crow's destructive willpower. Paul pointed out that these characters appear as if in a hologram, revealing more and more. Chris Thomas mentioned taking the Grail as a fragment of the absolute. Gail pointed out that those who hold the grail (vessel) are women−Nell in Matt Dekker's dream and Mother Legge with the silver bowl.

The dream sequence is most unusual and all agreed how accurate it is to state that 'whoever began a dream? People always find themselves immersed in the middle'. Kevin said that it is in Matt Dekker's dream that JCP comes the nearest he ever got to explicit sexuality with the 'spasm'.

There are however two who are wide awake. They are Nancy Stickles and Elphin Cantle. They create a welcome interlude before we step into the abyss with the arrival of Finn Toller.

Now we are left in no doubt that something evil is about to occur. 'It was one of those moments when the pre-birth stirrings of a ghastly idea are huddled and swaddled in an ominous silence'.

Ben pointed out that when confronted with the effect of his 'ate, Red Robinson is almost hypocritical: 'never again would he boast of heroic bloodshed to his admiring Sally'. Another series of linked personalities is drawn. This time the link is fear in descending social order. Lord P. of Zoyland; Zoyland of Philip; Philip of Tom Barter; Tom of Red; Red of Toller and finally Toller of Mad Bet. The question is posed "was Mr

Sonia Lewis & Paul Cheshire outside Ely Cathedral.

Toller a homicidal maniac?" All this night of 10 December there is a wind which envelopes the town. We are told it comes from South Wales and ends in Salisbury Plain on the very spot where these 'foreign stones are deposited'.

After lunch John Hodgson decided to change the focus and read the section on Pomparles Bridge where John Crow has his vision of Arthur's sword. John leaves his stuffy office and walks into the April sunshine. While on the bridge he sees amongst various detritus in the mud a bloated dead cat. He stares down at the 'abominable despair in the hollow eye sockets'. At this moment he sees in a blaze of cosmic dust 'something resembling a sword'. John Crow, the non-believer, enemy of the Grail shows how he can be in both camps. Ben commented on the death and life imagery here represented by the cat and the sword.

The discussion now continued in a rambling way, everyone contributing with the kind of direction that a river might take on a meandering course. At 4pm, our time to finish, the bells of St. Mary's church pealed out and our stimulating and enjoyable day came to an end.

Marcella Henderson-Peal
Charles Lock Farewell Symposium

The University of Copenhagen describes Charles Lock as a 'Professor of English Literature whose vast expertise spans across multiple centuries of global literature, critical theory, and the history of the novel. He specialises in textual criticism, Russian formalism, the works of John Cowper Powys, Thomas Hardy among many other famous and lesser-known authors. He is also interested in the intersection of literature with theology and visual culture. Charles Lock is widely recognized for his deep, philosophically driven literary critique'.

Charles Lock in Moscow: Feb 2018.

On 19 June 2026 the University of Copenhagen held a symposium to honour Charles Lock's retirement after thirty years as Professor of English at the University. Celebrating Professor Charles Lock's career as stimulating and inspiring, no less than fourteen guest speakers, colleagues, friends, academic collaborators and former students rallied to share their experience of working alongside Charles or benefitting from his masterly but understanding supervision.

I would describe the symposium speeches as both very affectionate and full of admiration for Charles's extraordinarily unlimited talent for research work and his keen and informed interest in so many different areas. Two of the lady speakers, Lene Østermark-Johansen and Line Henriksen, had been academic collaborators, writing papers with Charles and benefitting from his editorial skills. During the symposium talks one could feel to what extent Charles Lock's colleagues and fellow researchers were thankful for having crossed academic paths with such a wonderful eclectic mind and an amusing and stimulating friend.

Nigel Ramsay reminisced about exploring Dorset with Charles when they were schoolboys, looking for sculptors « signatures » on funerary monuments in churches with the help of a stepladder they would cart around with them and also about Charles's days at Oxford and his English tutor at Keble, Malcolm Parkes, a fascinating character.[1]

Tabish Khair spoke about Charles's vast love for reading, and his openness to junior colleagues. To listen to each guest speaker was to inevitably share their joy and pride to have this opportunity to express their deeply felt appreciation of a unique and quite extraordinary friend and colleague. One of them, Christian Benne, had composed a clerihew in honour of Charles.[2]:

On the occasion of his retirement

Charles Lock
Loves his books and his hock
A Victorian, but not a Fagin
He brought Oxford to Copenhagen

Never was a symposium so worthy of its recipient!

---

[1] Professor Malcolm Parkes (1930–2013) was a renowned palaeographer and tutor in Old and Middle English at Keble College, Oxford.

[2] Courtesy of Charles Lock.

Bob Mann
A response to the new edition of A Glastonbury Romance

Finally picking up my long-delayed new copy of *A Glastonbury Romance*, I knew I would have to read the whole thing. I first read it fifty years ago, at the age of seventeen, in the Picador edition, inspired by the book's size, the mystique of the place and the enthusiastic plug by one of my favourite writers, Colin Wilson. (Actually, though, my first encounter with it was the quotation in John Lawlor's introduction to the Penguin English Library edition of Malory, which convinced me I had to find the book it came from). Since then I have read it at least five

Descent into the Underworld.

Inside the Earth.

WOOKEY HOLE

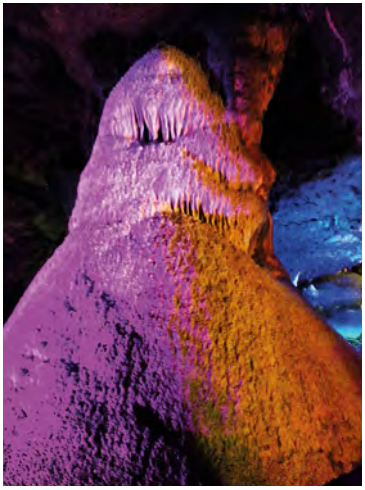
Powys Society group photo.

The Witch of Wookey (left).

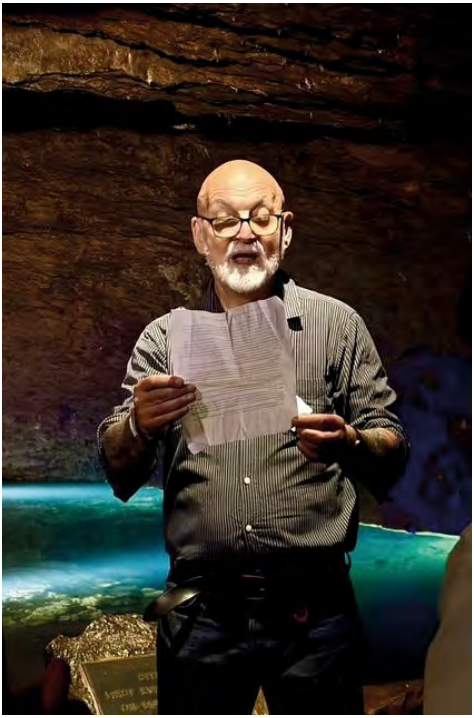
Shadows on the cave wall.

Paul Cheshire in Wookey Hole.

Dawn Collins reading from AGR.



The Blob, a study for a B-movie monster.



John Hodgson in Wookey Hole.

The Inner Landscape.

times, two of them aloud to partners who had never heard of it, but soon became as hooked as I was.

In the summer of 1981, with one of them, an English teacher, I spent a couple of days travelling around the literary sites of Somerset and Dorset, sleeping in the car. We were stopped by the police whilst driving, very slowly and suspiciously, through Glastonbury's Northload Street, late at night, looking (quite innocently) for John Crow's address. Reading it again for the sixth time, I found it as compelling as ever; it took only the first few lines to convince me it is still my favourite novel. Of course, I have always been aware of its 'faults' as enumerated by the critical establishment. You only have to read Powys's 1955 preface, in which he lists some of his favourite writers, to see how steeped he is in Scott, Dickens, Hardy, James, Poe, Lamb, Pater and the rest, and draws on them constantly, often at their worst.

So, it did not take me long to sink into the strange life of this prosperous English town in the 1930s where hardly anyone has a car, or electric lights (despite the impressive illuminations in Wookey Hole), and nobody has a gramophone or wireless, or has ever seen a film. If the ostler at a pub in the county town sings at his work, he can only have picked up the song at a fairground. Can we really be in the 1930s? Do they really have only one elderly doctor, and an even more elderly policeman? Well, he does say himself that the book 'is not the work in any sense of "an observer of real life."' We just have to let all these anachronisms go, and live with, or rather in, the stories, because they can clearly be lived in, and revisited, for a lifetime.

Ed: Bob Mann is a Totnes author, publisher, speaker and leader of guided walks. Among his books is a forthcoming G*uide to Literary Devon*. He can be contacted on longmarshpress.co.uk

---

la lettre powysienne
Pierre Vilar: Discovering the Powyses

Ed: The text is based on an email to Marcella Henderson-Peal from Pierre Vilar, co-organiser with Florence Marie, of the Bayonne symposium around the Powys brothers: *Ecocritical Readings of the Works of the Powys Brothers*.

Personally speaking, this symposium is indeed the result of a long-standing passion for John Cowper Powys, Theodore Francis, and subsequently the Powys family as a whole. It was in a Parisian municipal library on Rue Buffon, near Jardin des Plantes, that I discovered the French translation of *Ducdame*, followed by *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands* and subsequently all of his books. I was 13 so this was circa 1978.

The first book I read in English, at around the age of 15, was the *Autobiography,* followed by TFP's *Innocent Birds*. The same library stocked three of Theodore

Francis Powys's works, which, as I can still recall to this day, filled me with a sort of highly pleasurable dread. Theodore puts his reader in a state of anxious vigilance, something which was quite astonishing for a teenager. I lived with my family between Paris—where my parents worked—and holidays in my grandmother's very old village house. I used to read my Powys books perched up in the trees—oaks and a very tall Scot pines − and it was there, in a secluded gazebo in the garden, that I began to organise my collection. The latter was completed towards the end of my sixth-form year by an extraordinary gift from a friend returning from Amsterdam. This was the almost complete collection of the 'Village Press' reissues he'd found in a Dutch bookshop. They are still standing on my bookshelves and I have never stopped re-reading those books.

Pierre Vilar : photo courtesy of Marcella Henderson-Peal.

I was also most fortunate to have an uncle who lived in North London. Every year, my trips across the Channel would also include the fruitful raiding of second-hand bookshops for the writings of Littleton and the essays of Cavaliero, Collins, Louis Marlow or Belinda Humphrey.

As part of my studies, JCP, TFP and LLP were the authors I loved most. I read them alongside my academic studies and the challenges of university life, which particularly delighted me on the one hand because hardly anyone in 1980s and 1990s France seemed to appreciate their significance and secondly mainly to read Powys, Joyce, Beckett, Thomas Hardy and Stevenson though I wasn't majoring in English literature. As a result, I nonetheless completed ten years of English studies offered to me as from Year 7 through to « agrégation[1] » though I did gradually move towards history of art and contemporary French literature studies.

The only teacher I ever met who not only had the knowledge but also a genuine appreciation of these authors was the marvellous Monsieur Marette, the English literature teacher who taught us at khâgne[2] at Lycée Henri IV. He was Françoise Dolto's brother and the uncle of eccentric French singer Carlos. Marette was quite fond of JCP and had slipped a translation into our set of assignments, between Milton and Rupert Brooke…

My English teacher at the ENS in Rue d'Ulm, Pierre-Yves Pétillon, a leading luminary in American littérature studies, was an excellent translator whom I held

in high regard. He told me, much to my surprise, how utterly amazed he was by my passion for authors whom he thought had all faded into darkness and oblivion. Many years later, whilst I was serving on the Poetry Committee of the Centre National des Lettres, I had the good fortune to meet Patrick Reumaux, with whom over the years, I was able to share conversations about the authors he held in the highest regard, and for whom, through his translations, he played a major part in making their books available to French-speaking readers.

So, when I learnt from my wife that Florence – whom I didn't know yet as I was teaching in Bayonne rather than Pau – was a JCP specialist, I immediately seized the opportunity to propose what I believe to be the first Franco-British symposium at a French university, and to make the most of the beautiful September weather in Bayonne to discuss the Powyses more in depth.

We are also attempting, as far as possible, to pay tribute to authors who, whilst now quite extensively translated into French, are certainly not read or celebrated as much as they deserve to be. I am delighted that such eminent French academics as Michel Collot (my tutor since 1985, and I was thrilled to learn he was working on Powys!) and Christian Doumet will be taking part in these meetings within the ecocritical framework we have established, alongside yourself, Charles Lock and our English-speaking colleagues. Do please convey my warm greetings to the members gathered in Street with the Powys family. I have wonderful memories of driving through the town on my way to the Mendip Hills.

---

[1] A highly selective, postgraduate civil service examination for teaching. France's notoriously difficult, ultra-selective postgraduate civil service national competitive examination for public education. Fewer than 10% of applicants pass each year, earning the elite status of 'agrégé', which grants higher pay, reduced teaching hours, and immediate lifetime tenure within the state school and universities.

[2] Khâgne is an elite, highly competitive two-year prep school program in the humanities that pushes France's brightest students through what one could describe as an academic boot camp. Lycée Henri IV is one of the best high schools to prepare for khâgne and ENS (Ecole Normale Supérieure) entrance competitive exam.

Goulven Le Brech
A new French translation of *In Defence of Sensuality* by John Cowper Powys, translated by Michelle-Viviane Tran Van Khai, afterword by Goulven Le Brech

Ed: From the French publisher:

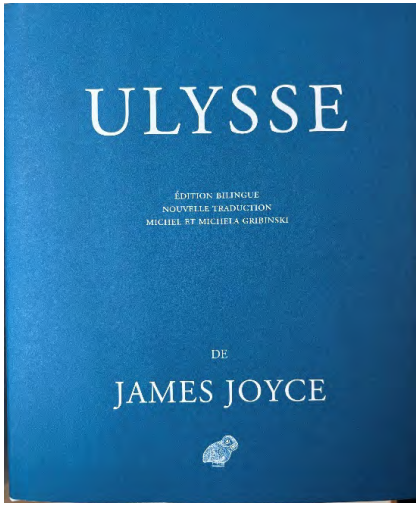
'Modern man has lost the meaning of happiness. Saturated with the counterfeit products of big industry, numbed by the cult of thrills, consumed by a fever of activity, he has come to believe that pleasure and joy can arise from the possession

of abundant goods, or from the satisfaction of his unhealthy need for success and fame. Contrary to this trend in our civilization, John Cowper Powys proposes a new conception of happiness as an act of will: an exercise of the mind by which attention is focused on the senses, in a receptive attitude towards the world. It is about setting aside our troubles and worries to focus our consciousness on what connects us to nature, to animals, plants, clouds, even rocks, to the calm and repetitive movements of the elements, until we reach a state of plenitude, a pure, ecstatic, and dreamlike sensuality. In this essay with lyrical and rebellious overtones, Powys offers not only a critique of our mechanized, artificial and dehumanized world, but also the outline of a new culture, a new hierarchy of values where contemplation would take precedence over action, where the autonomy of the individual would prevail over the gregarious instinct'.

Apologie Des Sens (In Defence of Sensuality) | L'échappée Publishing, September 2026.

From Kevin Taylor
Ulysse de James Joyce : Une Appréciation

In further evidence of John Cowper Powys' current popularity in France, his 1923 essay *James Joyce's 'Ulysses': An Appreciation* is reproduced in French as part of a major new bilingual edition of Joyce's novel (Éditions Les Belles Lettres, 2026). This is the third French translation of *Ulysses*, following those by Auguste Morel in 1929 and a team led by Jacques Aubert in 2004. The new translators, Michel and Michela Gribinski, have chosen JCP's piece as a prominent *Afterword* occupying 20 pages of this monumental 1,686-page hardback tome which also features, in addition to their facing-page translation of the entire novel, a substantial introduction and glossary. Appearing in Emanuel Halderman-Julius' journal *Life and Letters* a year after *Ulysses*' 1922 publication, JCP's contemporary



perspective provides 'une critique "à chaud"'. It appears here in Philippe Blanchon's 2013 French translation (previously published in the series *La Petite Classique*, Éditions La Nerthe, 2013), and Blanchon has added explanatory footnotes to help the French reader with JCP's references.

Ulysse de James Joyce: Édition Bilingue; Nouvelle Traduction de Michel & Michela Gribinski, Les Belles Lettres, 2026. JCP's *James Joyce's 'Ulysses': An Appreciation* is reproduced in Philippe Blanchon's translation and begins on p.1,627.

Goulven Le Brech
Don't You Hear the Sea?

Ed: In Newsletter 118 we featured an interview with our French colleague Goulven Le Brech on his forthcoming book of essays, *N'entends pas la Mer* (*Don't you hear the sea?*). Goulven has sent us details of the book launch in May 2006 and information on two reviews. The launch took place during a book fair organised by Les Perséides (his publisher for this title) at the Château de Vassy (Manche). The photo shows Pierrick Hamelin, who previously worked with Goulven on a Powys essay, interviewing the author on 31 May, 2026.

The first review is by Patrick Corneau, a literary critic who runs a well-regarded French blog called "Le Lorgnon mélancolique":

'*Don't You Hear the Sea?* belongs to the fine lineage of books where literature becomes gesture—walking, attentiveness, fidelity to a place and to endearing literary figures. It will be read with all the more pleasure if one knows these coasts, but it is not necessary to know them: the book creates them, or rather recreates them, like those landscapes of Grenier that Camus described as offering '*a kind of land, forests or moors, with well-defined paths, and others more secret*'. https://www.patrickcorneau.fr/2026/03/de-tout-un-peu-49/

Goulven's book launch.

The other review comes from Dominique Panchèvre, an avid reader who for many years directed a Normandy book agency; his review appeared on his blog.

He praises the way Le Brech sets his essays in coastal landscapes along the English Channel. Locations include Dinard, Saint-Malo, Guernsey, Weymouth and Portland. 'These places are explored through both personal experience and the writings of numerous authors who lived in or wrote about them'. Authors referenced include John Cowper Powys, Chateaubriand, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Kenneth White and others. Kenneth White, who wrote an introduction to John Cowper, is central for his concept of the geopoetic – the intertwining of intellectual nomadism, travel and deep sensory engagement with landscape.

Goulven's book will be reviewed in the *Powys Journal* XXXV11 in 2027.

Robin Kingsland
Wolf Solent, William Powys and Robin Kingsland: a story eighty years in the making

Over a fortnight in August 2024, I had the privilege (and challenge) of being tasked to read John Cowper Powys' *Wolf Solent* for the RNIB audio-book library, and in my prep I stumbled on a connection between myself and the author of which I was previously completely unaware. My late father – John Edward 'Ted' Shepherd – was a quiet, modest man, but he had, over the years, shared with us a very few snippets about his wartime service with the RAF as a 19-year-old *"Aircraftsman G.D Shepherd, J. E. Number 1316606"*. One year I made him a "memoir kit" for Christmas – complete with jotter, pen, pencil, rubber and photo-corners - in the hope that it would provide a little autobiographical inspiration. However, when we checked the kit after he'd passed away, nary a word had he committed to paper.

Or so we thought... Years later, when our mother passed away, and we had to clear out their little council house, we stumbled on a treasure trove of "savings" that they had squirrelled away, most of which we assumed had gone forever: old school reports for all of us, Bristol Baptist Eisteddfod certificates, photos of my brother with his school football team, programmes and photos from every school play I was ever in... And, among all our memorabilia, a binder, full of notes written in my dad's rather fine handwriting - the tentative first steps towards a brief memoir! As I am more of a writer than my siblings, I put these notes together, collating and transcribing them and occasionally trying to capture my father's "voice" to add details from my own research, and rendering the whole as a document to share with the family. As a result,

William Powys with my father, Ted Shepherd.

I came to know the details − names of troopships, names of stopover ports, his various stations - quite well.

Fast forward to summer 2024. As an experienced actor and voice artist, I was invited by the RNIB to narrate an audio-book – *Wolf Solent*. I was not at the time familiar with either the book or the author, and I was, I think, a relatively random choice. It was pure coincidence that I happen to have been born and raised in the West Country (not Dorset, but Somerset − I have always loathed the administrative area known as "Avon" as much as Wolf Solent loathed motor-trucks and aero-planes!), though it helped a lot that I grew up with the dialect of Lobbie Torp and Bob Weevil!

Kisima Farmhouse 1942.

To prep the book, knowing that JCP had based some characteristics of his cast upon family members, I did some research. I already knew a little of the family from Cowper Powys's own preface, printed in the Penguin Classics edition, including discovering something about his brothers - Littleton, Theodore, Bertie, Llewelyn... And William – 'Willie' – 'who was our youngest brother and who had a farm in our neighbourhood before he set out to East Africa.'

It was here that I happened on the Powys Society website. I found the family photo, I read the copy, I reached the charming passage from Elspeth Huxley's *"Out in the Midday Sun"* about Willie's talent as an artist and how he would offer to paint, as presents for the family children, any view they liked of his farm in Kenya.… Kenya? I thought. He farmed in *Kenya*? Then I saw the picture labelled 'Will Powys — Ngare Ndare Farm' and the further reference in the Elspeth Huxley quote to 'his properties: *Kisima, Ngare Ndare* and Il Pinguan'.

And it was here that the hairs stood up on the back of my neck. Because I recognised the first two of those three names! I had a little thrill – a rush of "butterflies" – and I rushed to open the document I'd created from my dad's memoir notes. Sure enough, there, as if it had been waiting patiently for me to join these extraordinary dots, was this passage:

"*Some of my happiest times were the "leaves" – or time-off periods – that I spent at a farm called "Kisima", in Timau District, on the Meru Road North-West of Mount Kenya. The farm was owned and run by a Mr. William Powys, and in conversation with him, I quickly discovered that before moving to Kenya he had farmed at Redhill – just outside Bristol. This gave us a very special bond, and after that, Mr Powys treated me almost as a son. I was always given a warm welcome at Kisima, and I even learnt to ride a horse, taking a trip all around the extensive farm property with Mr. Powys on horseback."*

Gilfrid Powys, son of Willie, 1942.

And then, later, this: *"I was privileged to spend several other holidays at Kisima, earning my keep by doing work around the farm – milking, driving mule carts, fixing aerials on the farmhouse – and I came to love it. At one point, I was asked if I would like to return to Kenya after the war, settle there and work full time on the farm, and I confess I was tempted. But with the future so uncertain in so many ways, it was not the time for such far-reaching decisions, and fate took me elsewhere."*

"Elsewhere" in this case meant a return to Bristol, courting and marrying my mother and having his five children. He never left the UK again – not even a day-trip to France!

In 1942, *Wolf Solent* had been published for thirteen years and "Powys Major" would have been, I think, at the height of his success. Meanwhile, over in the Timau District of Kenya, in the shadow of Mount Kenya, his youngest brother William, farmer and gifted amateur artist, took under his wing a young Bristolian aircraftsman, gave him a sense of family when he was a young, scared stranger in a strange land. And eighty-two years later, by a quirk of fate, the middle-aged son of that same young aircraftsman, who had been shown such kindness by Will Powys, was chosen to record his eldest brother's novel. The odds against such a happenstance still seem astronomical, but I consider it a twist of West Country Kismet worthy of John Cowper Powys's beloved Thomas Hardy (albeit not on the same scale, nor freighted with such tragic consequences) that it happened at all. Here is my father's own photograph of the Kisima Farmhouse in 1942, along with other pictures of his from that time, including one he took of William's then 4-year-old son Gilfrid, who went on to run the farm until his own death in late 2017.

In a further twist of fate, when contacting Kevin Taylor of the Powys Society to recount my story, we discovered that Kevin and I have close mutual friends and probably met at parties in Diss, Norfolk many years ago. Kevin encouraged me to write up the above for your Newsletter. Robin Kingsland is my stage name. My legal name is – like my father's – Shepherd. www.robinkingsland.co.uk

News and Notes

From Chris Gostick

JCP & Shell Oil

I came across a reference to JCP recently, which I thought might possibly be of interest to Newsletter readers: 'When the Shell petrol company commissioned posters to encourage drivers to "See Britain First on Shell" in 1931, American-born artist Edward McKnight Kauffer contributed a depiction of Stonehenge. It was now a fixed part of the tourist map of the country. Forty miles to the west, John Cowper Powys's novel *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933) told of a place sacred to Joseph of Arimathea, to King Arthur, Merlin and the Druids, to "the religion of the people who lived before the Ancient Britons; perhaps even before the Neolithic Men". Glastonbury here embodies the pagan and Christian soul of England, attracting cranks, obsessives and mono-maniacs, from mystics to anarchists and communists. At the centre of it all is John Geard, who becomes mayor of the town and sets about constructing a new religious cult, worshipping the Holy Grail'.

Alwyn Turner. *A Shellshocked Nation: Britain Between the Wars*. Profile Books. 2026 pp 39/40.

From Chris Thomas:

The New *AGR*

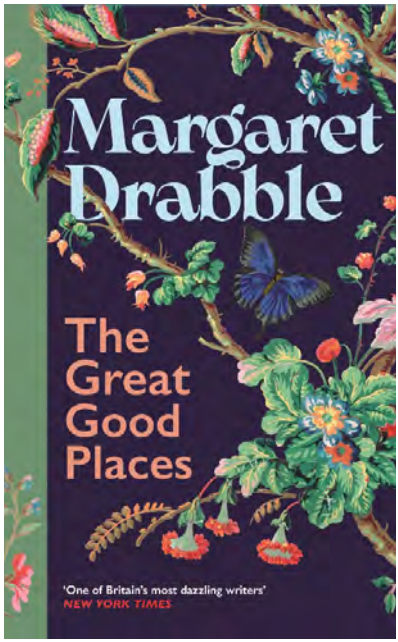
Last night (23/07/26) I listened to a review programme on Radio 4 called Front Row. One of the contributors selected *AGR* for his 'cultural pick of the week'. He referred to *AGR* as a cult novel and quoted someone who said *AGR* was like a combination of Jane Austen and Tolkien! Not sure if he had been reading the new Penguin edition but he probably had. The presenter was intrigued and said he would try and read *AGR* for himself.

From Chris Gostick

Margaret Drabble on 'this batty old werewolf of Wales'.

I have just come across another recent reference to JCP in Margaret Drabble's *The Great Good Places* (2026) p.118, which I thought might be of interest to Newsletter readers: 'Reading [*The Fixed Period*] depressed me, but impelled me to remind myself of more cheering examples of old age. Trollope died shortly after publishing *The*

Fixed Period, as though he had written from sinking health or a darkling premonition, but a writer who without any hint of *mauvaise foi* relished old age was the extraordinary genius John Cowper Powys (1872-1963)



It lifts the heart to think of this batty old werewolf of Wales, this ancient ichthyosaur, dwelling crazily with his beloved in the slate quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog, and striding on, full of joy, into his nineties, on a regime of bread and butter and elective enemas. Unlike Wordsworth, with whom he had affinities, he never lost his sense of the splendour in the grass, and in *The Art of Growing Old* (1944) wrote ecstatically of the daily pleasures of old people: "Returning home past familiar landmarks, they greet each gnarled and twisted tree-root ... as if it were a secret signal from old age to old age". This was a hack work, a wartime "how to age" book, but it is full of energy and delight. He'd had a hard life, ill-paid, itinerant, often exhausted, but his last years were charged with a jubilant intensity'.

From Tony Head

James Marriott: Notebook in *The Times*, 6 August, 2026 on *Wolf Solent*

'I am reading what must be one of the most eccentric novels of the 20th century, *Wolf Solent* by John Cowper Powys. I first read this book in my early twenties and had an abiding memory of weirdness. I was right. The sensibility of the author is unlike anything else I have encountered. How to describe it? His world is erotic, gothic and grotesque, full of incestuous booksellers, depraved country squires and innocent maidens. And (the best feature of his writing) he has a visionary and mystical sense of the Dorset countryside. This is mixed with an almost twee appreciation of the cosy comforts of English life. Slightly against my better judgment, I find myself swept up by all this.

It also means Powys regularly produces unexpected sentences like this one: "It was the memory of [the old bookseller's] obsessed expression – that expression of concentrated erotic insanity, directed towards universal matter, as he had caught it from under the man's wrinkled forehead across the blue tea-cosy". In the age of AI we hear a lot about the importance of "originality" in human intelligence. JCP passes with flying colours. You could run a large language model for centuries before it produced a phrase like that".

From Kim Wheatley:

My 2025 book ***John Cowper Powys and the Afterlife of Romanticism*** has just been published in paperback. For members of the Powys Society, Bloomsbury Publishing is offering a 20% discount on this edition. To order, visit https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/john-cowper-powys-and-the-afterlife-of-romanticism-9798765119426/ and use the discount code GLR BD8.

Ed: Kim Wheatley's book has been the subject of two major reviews outside Powys publications to date. Dewey W. Hall reviews the book in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 65, No.2, Summer 2026 (p.197-220). Hall has doubts about Powys's eco-critical credentials while praising the author's meticulous research and skillfull writing which has produced 'a treasure trove for academics'. And also a rich resource for anyone interested in Powys, we might add. The full review is available at Project Muse.

Another review comes from Haris Fazlić in the *Journal of the Midwest Language Association*, Vol.58, No.1, Spring 2025, pp. 257-260, who submits that 'Wheatley's true brilliance lies in how she depicts Powys's deep engagement with Romanticism, specifically the underlying drive to recognize, in myriad ways, the relevance of the nonhuman to the human: a cornerstone to Powys's grand ecological vision'.

From Ollie Rimmer

Anarchist Seeds

On 29 August 2026 I gave a talk at the Anarchist Studies Network Conference in Manchester on the role of the 'multiverse' in JCP's philosophy.

The theme of the conference was 'More-Than-Human Anarchisms,' so I thought that Powys's attentiveness towards the non-human in his philosophy and representation of non-human perspectives in his fictions provided an apt topic for discussion, particularly as they converge with his libertarian political sympathies. I also discussed the influence of William James.

I have posted a transcript of the talk to my Substack, which you can access here: https://seedsbeneaththesnow.substack.com/p/wuther-quotle-glug-the-more-than?utm_id=97757 SEEDSBENEATHTHESNOWSUBSTACK.COM
"Wuther-Quotle-Glug": The More-Than-Human Multiverse of John Cowper Powys

Ed: Ollie Rimmer will review David Goodway's new collection of essays, *Left-Libertarian Currents: Anarchism, Libertarianism and Histography in Modern Britain*, in NL 120.

From Patrick Quigley:

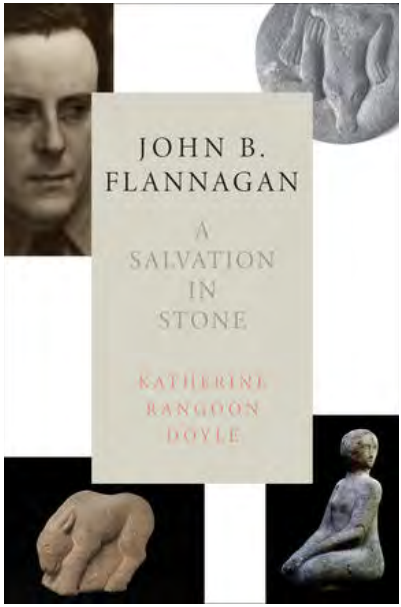
The Illuminated Man: Life, Death and the Worlds of J.G. Ballard by Christopher Priest and Nina Allan, Bloomsbury, 2026

I cannot resist sharing news of the most moving literary biography I've read in many years. The genesis of the book with Priest's attempt to chronicle Ballard's

life and work before succumbing to cancer and the completion of the work by his wife, Nina Allan, is fairly well known. I suggest there are many similarities between Ballard (the seer of Shepperton) and John Cowper (the sage of Corwen). Both were literary outsiders who preferred to live outside literary circles, yet could not avoid admirers attracted by the intensity of their writings. Both created personal mythologies that enabled them to overcome mental trauma. They were sceptical of traditional religions, yet were attracted to the numinous and wrote in extra-realist modes that made them suspect to traditionalists and modernists. In their different ways they mapped out what Ballard called 'inner space' – the life of the mind. Their fictions emphasised the influence of environment on psychology, John Cowper on the dominance of the natural world while Ballard's urban symbols – motorways, drained swimming pools etc., produced the adjective 'Ballardian'. (Powysian has yet to catch on). You could play this sort of literary game with many writers, but the similarities are striking. Both are possibly more critically regarded in France than in Britain. I could go on... Whether the reader agrees or not, reading *The Illuminated Man* is an unforgettable experience.

From Katherine Rangoon Doyle:

John B. Flannagan, A Salvation in Stone



Years ago, Cecil Woolf helped direct me to sources for my book, *John B. Flannagan: A Salvation in Stone,* recently published by the State University of New York Press. I later corresponded with his widow, Jean, regarding permission to use a quotation from Llewelyn's *Verdict of Bridlegoose.* Flannagan lived for several years at Patchin Place, where he knew Llewelyn and John Cowper Powys; Boyne Grainger (author of *We Lived at Patchin Place*); and very likely, Alyse Gregory.

I am writing to ask whether the Society might consider mentioning my book in any of its outreach. It is now out in hardcover and will be available in softcover in January.

There is also a Kindle version.

Thank you for your time and consideration –

Hardcover: 9798855807929, 346 pages, July 2026

Paperback: 9798855807936, 346 pages, January 2027

Ed: One more reaction to the Penguin edition of *A Glastonbury Romance*

Chris Power writes in the Paperback of the Week column in The Observer on 27

July: 'Long books can prompt resentment, especially among those who are paid to read them but not by the hour… After all, most of us will probably only read a handful of books of this size in our lifetimes… I can't recommend it wholeheartedly – it's too obviously idiosyncratic and potentially maddening for that. But it does contain amazing things, and its oddities are of the sort that, for the right people, it will become one of the great experiences of their reading lives'.

Ed: Auction News: The set of Walter Savage Landor volumes inscribed by John Cowper advertised in NL 118 has been sold to a Powys Society member for £300. The painting of Evil Wood Lane by Vera Wainright along with a batch of letters from Theodora Scutt was sold at auction for £460. We can also confirm that the letters from John Cowper and sold to Edward H Jones (see NL 118, p 37) on eBay for £395 went to a member of the Powys Society to add to his collection.

Kim Wheatley
Will Durant's report on Wolf Solent

In my 2024 *Powys Journal* article on the early reception of *Wolf Solent*, I mentioned the role of JCP's friend Will Durant (a historian and philosopher) in helping to persuade the publishers Simon and Schuster to publish *Wolf Solent* (p. 112, n. 16). In 'Missing the Middle', Morine Krissdóttir's introduction to her edition of the deleted chapters of *Wolf Solent*, Krissdóttir called Durant an 'unofficial reader' for Simon and Schuster (p. 21). Will Durant's report on *Wolf Solent* is held at the National Library of Wales, along with a letter from Durant to John Cowper Powys dated 25 May 1928, commenting on his initial reading of the manuscript, and a cover letter to JCP that Durant enclosed with his report. These enthusiastic reactions on the part of Durant are integral to the story of the success of *Wolf Solent*. These documents from the National Library of Wales Collection are published here for the first time, with the kind permission of the Estate of John Cowper Powys and the Estate of William James Durant.

Letter from Will Durant to John Cowper Powys dated 25 May 1928:

WILL DURANT
5 WEST SIXTY-NINTH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

5-25-28

Dear Powys, -

Thank you. By next Tuesday evening you shall have either the book, or a letter of acceptance; and if I have my way, it will be a letter of acceptance. I have reached page 240, and it becomes more beautiful and magnificent at

every chapter. The pages describing the first outing (the "rat-swimming") of Gerda and Wolf are perfect pages. I hail the resurrection of style in contemporary literature, and the return to the Greek notion that art must make beauty instead of merely mirroring "reality." I can hardly believe that this pace will keep up for 1350 pages; if anything like it happens, you have written one of the greatest novels ever. And it is unique; nothing like it in the world.

Don't bother to answer; I will write again later, enclosing a copy of my report to Mr Schuster.

Sincerely,

Will Durant

Cover letter from Will Durant to John Cowper Powys dated 26 May 1928:

WILL DURANT
44 North Drive
Great Neck, L.I. [Long Island]

5-26-28

Dear Powys, -

I am enclosing a copy of my report to Simon and Schuster on WOLF SOLENT. I am in a transport of enthusiasm about your book.

Somethings [sic] in it rub my fur the wrong way; I'm going to mention them, not with a view to having you change them, for I may be exceptional in disliking them, and it is better that you should let your own taste and judgment decide everything. I felt that Wolf's announcement to Christie that he intends to "seduce" her friend is too abrupt and blunt; I doubt if a gentleman like Wolf would speak in a way that might quite likely offend a woman. It hurts the smooth delicacy of the style. So, with Wolf going out to "make water" [(] p. 350); it jars with the rest of the book, which is not Zola but Keats. Finally, I think the embracing of Christie at the fair was not sufficiently prepared for; not enough basis laid for it in the thoughts and feelings of Wolf.

These are specks. The whole is to me indescribably fine. At last you will take your place where you belong – at the top. How I have believed in you all along; see, e.g. a line about you in my article in the June issue of PLAIN TALK. Let me know if I can help you in any way.

Sincerely,

Will Durant

Durant's report:

REPORT ON JOHN COWPER POWYS' "WOLF SOLENT"

I have read, so far, 386 pages. I thought, some 200 pages back, that after getting this far I would skip to the last chapter. But I find I can't; I want to read every word.

Why? Because every sentence is beautiful; and I feel like shouting acclaim to a man who feels that the function of art is to create beauty, not (not primarily, at least) to write social tracts, or describe disease. I have not read any book so well written since Anatole France and Thomas Hardy. Powys is a master of the English language. Even his verbal mannerisms – like the frequent use of such words as "susurration," "verdurous," etc., – get to be charming, like the little faults of one we have come to love.

Will Durant (left) with Max Schuster.

The book is a poem as well as a novel. After reading the first eight pages I wrote: "These eight pages have a quiet beauty and depth and subtlety of understanding that make me feel that I am in the presence of genius."

Only those with poetical minds will enjoy the book; i.e., those who believe that happiness lies not so much in pursuing a goal, but in absorbing all the experience, all the sensations, that come on the way. Powys feels intensely and profoundly, and wishes to suck in the whole scene as it passes. That way he suffers more than others, but he takes in more, lives a deeper, juicier life.

Some irrelevant description, but not more than in Hardy. (Powys combines Hardy and Proust – a certain tragic mysticism with psychological minuteness of insight and analysis.) The book will seem to Americans to linger too fondly over English scenery and English smells; but to me even these descriptions were things of moving beauty; I swear I haven't skipped a word of the book so far.

Certain pages, e.g., 146-156, are especially beautiful.

So much for style. As to content: there is a real story, the inward history of a man's mind at the turning point of life; to me it is absorbing. The love interest is

there, strongly. And the characters are real; even though Powys sets himself the hard task of describing rather the soul than the body or clothing or mannerisms of his characters, they become so vivid that now it seems to me that by reading any sentence of conversation in later parts of the books [sic] (still unread) I would be able to say what character had pronounced it.

Every now and then comes philosophical aperçu that delights me; e.g., "those two gross vulgar parodies of life, ennui and pleasure." Powys is, to my mind, immeasurably more profound than the most famous of contemporary American and English writers. He lacks the cumulative power of Dreiser, and the dramatic quality of O'Neill; but they are children beside him in understanding life and man.

Above all, the book is unique. Fresh, unhackneyed, in everything; in language, similes, method, content, and philosophy; poet and philosopher, pagan and saint have come together to make it. I feel, so far, that it will be almost as good as Jean Christophe, though utterly different.

Would the book sell? Probably not in any considerable amount; but enough, I think, to pay its expenses. The publisher who prints it will acquire some credit and prestige for giving it to the world. Personally I will undertake to write a long and enthusiastic review (I am confident the remainder will be good!), and to give the book a boost in ads, etc.; and I will recommend it at every opportunity. If you ask me for a definite recommendation, I should say: YES, by all means. Two volumes will do it; there are about 370,000 words. Remember that 100,000 people have heard Powys lecture. And 500 will take a chance on my hearty recommendation.

Kim Wheatley writes:
Will Durant's article, "Will Aristocracy Return?" appeared in *Plain Talk* (New York), Volume 2, number 6 (June, 1928), pages 641-52. In the article, Durant refers to John Cowper Powys as "the finest scholar and the most eloquent orator on the American platform today" (p. 646). Durant later included an enthusiastic chapter about JCP in *Adventures in Genius* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931).

Jean-Christophe (1904-1912) is a ten-volume novel by Romain Rolland, a French writer who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915.

Sentences from Durant's report were quoted on the back jacket of the first edition of *Wolf Solent*, along with quotations from other luminaries. Durant's prediction that *Wolf Solent* would not sell well was inaccurate: the first edition of the novel was reprinted four times in the summer of 1929, and made a large profit.

Durant's claim that 100,000 people had heard Powys lecture, though a pleasingly round number, is thought to be an exaggeration.

Marcel Bradbury
Alliance of Literary Societies Annual Gathering

It was a pleasure to represent the Powys Society at the recent AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies. The event was very efficiently run by the Edward Thomas Fellowship and was held at the beautiful Arts and Crafts buildings of Bedales School just down the road from Thomas's home in Steep, Hampshire.

There were 80 attendees and it was heartening to hear that the ALS membership has grown since last year. James Naughtie in his presidential address stressed how important even the smallest of societies were in a climate where some sections of society both here and abroad are seeking to limit access to literature and the arts generally. Laura Greenfield, Director of the Royal Society of Literature, in an interesting talk pointed out that literature has the lowest level of funding of any art form and she outlined her plans for changing this.

Many societies had stalls and in addition to the big names it was good to talk to thriving societies promoting the work of less prominent writers such as Richard Jefferies, John Clare and R.S. Thomas. All literary societies face the same challenges and exchanging ideas is something I am keen we should do more often; it benefits us all.

Next year's AGM is hosted by the Norman Nicholson Society in Cumbria and the following year it will be held in Dorset, hosted by the Thomas Hardy Society. Perhaps an opportunity for us to have a stand to promote the other great Dorset writers!

Bedales Library.

From Peter Foss
A Mappowder Collection Inventory

Ed: Peter Foss assisted Louise de Bruin in assembling Powys material in her possession for donation to the National Library of Wales. This was extra material not included in the recent auction of material from Mappowder. Louise is currently relocating from Mappowder to Holland, ending a connection of 40 years in the

Powys house. The donation will be of massive benefit to researchers of the wider Powys family, most notably Mary, daughter of Lucy Powys and Hounsel Penny, and her husband Gerard Casey. Both were unique writers with remarkable insight whose work and lives have not been fully appreciated.

Peter Foss writes: this is a rough summary of the material given to the National Library of Wales in August 2026.

The collection in 7 large boxes containing:
4 large family photograph albums;
a pile of Powys family commonplace books (going back to the 1870s);
a box we call the 'Nellie box', with items (including diaries) relating to the young Powys sister, Eleanor, who died in 1893;
Katie's pocket diaries and written-up diaries in exercise books
Lucy's notebooks;
and several large mounted family photographs.

There were also 4 Mary Casey box files containing MSS of her novels;
another box containing MS of her novel *Egbert of England*;
a box file of Casey photograph albums;
2 box files of miscellaneous Powys family material, with photos;
a ring-bound folder of loose Casey photographs;
11 MS notebooks of Mary Casey poems;
Mary Casey's MS translations of the Iliad, the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*;
3 MS notebooks of prose;
Casey ephemera including wills;
Penny family material, e.g. deeds to Horsebridge Mill;
34 diaries of Mary Casey.

Most intriguingly are caches of JCP and Peter Powys Grey letters etc. newly turned up.

Lucy Powys feeding the birds at Mappowder c.1950.

Richard Stone

Wildflowers and the Powys Family (2): Yarrow

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Alyse Gregory's wedding flower, is a plant in the family *Asteraceae* (daisy). The plant is native to Britain, growing to 1 metre tall between June and November. This common wildflower is characterized by small whitish flowers, a tall stem of fernlike leaves, and a pungent odour.

On 28 September 1947, with Gertrude and Katie, Alyse placed yarrow onto Llewelyn's box of ashes before burying it in his grave 'three feet deep in chalk'. Then on 13 August 1948 Alyse 'went to Llewelyn's grave with the wind blowing but the sea calm. I put yarrow (my wedding flower)… on his grave'.

Llewelyn and Alyse must have known the meaning of the Latin term *Achillea millefolium*. The genus name, *Achillea* is said to have been attributed to the plant as Achilles, the legendary Greek warrior-hero, was said to have applied yarrow to heal his soldiers's wounds in the Trojan War. The species name *millefolium*, meaning 'thousand leaf', refers to the plant's numerous feathery leaves. And it was supposedly Chiron the Centaur, so much admired by JCP, who taught Achilles to use this herb.

Flowers and leaves are edible, though overpowering so used sparingly, but it will give your body a boost of Vitamins A, C, E and K as well as potassium among many other essential minerals. Brewed into a beer, it is said to have mildly euphoric effect and even psychotropic effects. Scientific studies have concluded that *A. millefolium* can play a significant role as a strong antioxidant and antibacterial source, as well as positively affecting gastrointestinal inflammations.

Found in the burial grounds of Neanderthals in Iraq 60,000 years ago, it's difficult to think of a wildflower with more folklore behind it. In ancient China the dried stalks were used as a poor person's way of casting the I Ching. Since then, cultures have used yarrow for fortune-telling, casting love charms, and charms against bad luck and illness. In Europe, it was known as a potent herb of protection. Gaelic and Celtic traditions often used it as an amulet to ward off negative energy or evil spirits.

In the British Isles a tradition for finding a partner was to put some yarrow under a pillow and recite the following verse to induce dreams of future spouses:

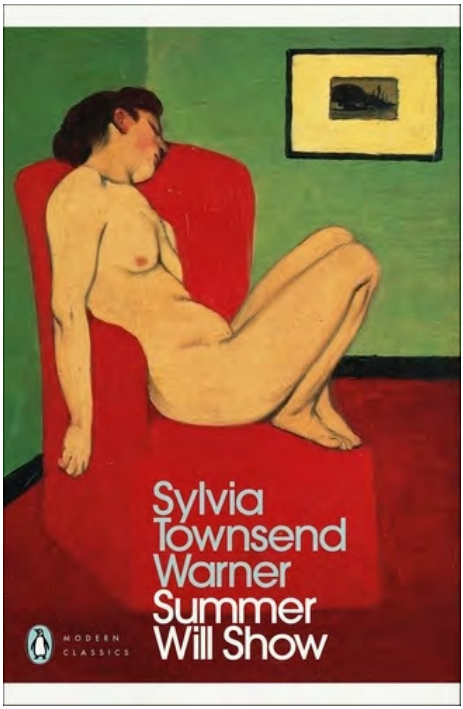
"Thou pretty herb of Venus' tree,
Thy true name it is Yarrow;
Now who my bosom friend must be,
Pray tell thou me to-morrow."
On a personal note, yarrow has special meaning for me as my grandson's name is Yarrow!

My grandson Yarrow.

Dawn Collins

Reading Powyses: Summer Will Show by Sylvia Townsend Warner

The series 'Women of the Powys Circle' opened and ended with works by Sylvia Townsend Warner (STW). We began with her collection of essays *English Climate* and finished on Tuesday 21 July 2026 with *Summer Will Show* — an historical novel, which makes it a rather unusual book for STW. The book was finished in 1936, a year after she and her lover Valentine had joined the communist party. We gathered over Zoom to discuss this intriguing novel. Tony first read SWS at least 30 years ago and thought that it deserved to be read several times to fully grasp its subtlety and nuances. For a straightforward synopsis, Paul recommended Wikipedia.



Summer Will Show.

Set in a period immediately preceding the French Revolution of 1848, *Summer Will Show* follows the life of Sophia Willoughby of Blandamer House, Dorset. The book opens with Sophia as a rather stiff child being taken to see the Duke of Wellington. The substantial 310 pages cover issues of female subjugation, class inequality and opportunity, colonialism, racial prejudice, Jewish pogroms, lesbianism, revolution, political cynicism and communism.

We felt that STW had caught the damaged sense of entitlement and learnt disdain of Sophia. The detached distancing

style reflects her social background and restricted life. Her marriage to opportunist (Frederick) had failed; he was living in Paris, spending her money and living with his mistress, Minna. Later, Sophia develops a relationship with Minna, and discovers a (temporary) freedom and purpose in life. The narrative flips between styles as each character is revealed. The group agreed this device works to emphasise the freedom of revolutionary life in Paris compared to that of an English country estate, although we found this confusing at first.

Sophia's children contract smallpox from a lime-kiln worker after a cruel cure for whooping cough. STW describes the kiln workers' sores. The children die, and Sophia's mourning is perfunctory; she is never maternal. Her husband appears for the funeral but returns to Paris soon after. She decides that she needs to have more children and approaches the kiln worker with the hare-brained idea that he can make her pregnant. We were bemused by her thinking, but in retrospect this reads as a traumatised woman seeking an unstable solution to a life that was unfulfilled and empty.

STW had lived in Paris, and was familiar with the streets, but the description of poverty in Paris was not convincing. We noted she used the words 'Bohemian' and 'Communism' which in 1848 were relatively new terms. At the end of the book, it is unclear if Minna is dead. There is a vivid description of Minna being stabbed by Casper, who provides a critique of colonialism, and the perils of being mixed race and the presumption of the white slave owners to have sex with their plantation slaves. We are left with the image on the final page of Sophia reading the opening lines of the Communist manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, although the words here are attributed to a dead 'comrade' Ingelbrecht.

We noticed that long periods were often conveyed in a single sentence — not a successful device in this case. We all agreed there was some wonderful prose and many memorable lines. Sophia decides to visit her husband in Paris; he could make her pregnant. She travels to Paris in mourning black satin and bonnet and stays with a great-aunt. Paul thought the world-building in the Paris section was successful. Certainly, there is a step change in style. Section II (p91) drops the reader straight into a performance by Minna. The reader is not given any clues. Minna's narrative is of her personal story, in a very different style to the first section of the book. It is only later that we realised that we were reading a verbatim performance that Sophia is watching. Paul was also struck by the politics and description of devious manoeuvres used to provoke retaliation. He described it as the dark face of revolutionaries, and class war.

Tony noted the irony that Sophia's class and ladylike demeanour saved her. He felt there was little sense of revolutionary Paris, but Kim was impressed by the description of slums and impoverished Left Bank life. She saw an exposé

and discussion of the middle-class involvement in political revolutions, creating tension. We agreed with Kim that the arc of Sophia's character, as it developed, was convincing. The charismatic character of Minna was well handled. Their physical relationship is implied rather than explicit. We ran out of time to discuss three pivotal characters that were vital to the plot, but underdeveloped−Frederick, the husband; Casper, the mixed-race nephew who Sophia shoots; and the great-aunt with whom she stays in Paris.

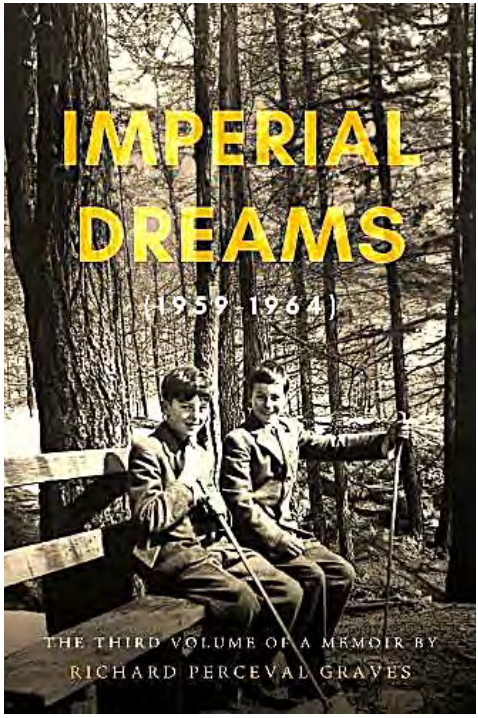
Following STW, it is suitable that for our next reading series we turn to Theodore Powys. They became great friends who supported each other's work and in the garden at Beth Car, Sylvia first met Valentine Ackland. Our first Zoom discussion will be of *Mark Only* on Tuesday 13 October 2026 at 7 pm BST.

Kate Kavanagh

Imperial Dreams (1959 - 1964) by Richard Perceval Graves: the Third Volume of a Memoir, (Troubador Publishing, 2026)

We have now reached the third part of RPG's joint biography of himself and the mid-twentieth century. A good idea. And a good read, in RPG's confiding and illuminating style. After the peculiar otherworld of a boys' Prep school in childhood, comes its older brother the Public School, an all-male institution (often passed from father to sons without question) − in this case the venerable Charterhouse. Or rather, Gownboys, largest and most traditional of the school's ten competitive "houses", whose members are not supposed to make friends or talk to one another.

Gownboys is named from the original monks who started the school eliminated by King Henry VIII, its headmaster unpleasantly murdered on Glastonbury Tor. The 20th century school has its own language, which a new boy like Graves is examined on — a teacher explodes with anger (PACE the name of his house) at a boy saying "boys" instead of the correct "fellows" — "There are no boys in this establishment…."



Imperial Dreams (1959-1964).

RPG is of course already trained by his Prep, so accepts the traditions which are recognisably military and hence still "imperial" in the increasingly empire-free world. Everyone in the school, and most objects, has a nickname. (Oddly, he himself seems to be an exception). He doesn't grow tall, and his voice doesn't break till he is about 15, which lets him off most physical competition apart from football, at which he is nifty, and tennis where he defeats superior players with his Lobs just over the net.

He is however in a superior league with intellectual work (except science) and holds his own in what to this reader sounds a high level of teaching and research. Exams of course play vital roles in one's future - RPG eventually achieves St John's college, Oxford, but not without craft and effort. We leave him enjoying the privileges of the top of the school — a better room, no more "fagging".

Meanwhile, tracing the "living past" proceeds: Graves depicts family life with encouraging letters, illnesses, excursions across the Channel (including a nasty storm). RPG is hospitalised from a testing mountain march with cadets. School is dominated by choices of subjects and the peculiarities of generally excellent teachers. But his ever-beloved brother Simon, following to the same school, is bullied into a destructive nervous breakdown.

Girls appear more often, admired adoringly but not approached. He has finally grown taller, with more sharing in sport. Radio programmes are enjoyably, newly irreverent (notably "TW3"). There are school concerts and theatricals (he is Macbeth's First Murderer). The outside world is newly disturbing with atomic threats and the Cuban crisis, above all the murder of President Kennedy. At home the Liberal Party is the most sympathetic. At school, exams rule, and the upper layers of college life are enjoyed.

Nevertheless, the ill-treatment and lasting damage to his brother has left RPG with a considerable distrust of institutions (shared by this writer – tolerated bullying has sadly not died out). We are left with his deeply ambivalent view of Charterhouse, despite its having (after a shaky start) treated himself extremely well.

Ed: Richard Perceval Graves brought copies of his memoir to the Bookroom in Street and generously donated the proceeds to the Powys Society. He informs me that his projected memoir sequence will stop with volume six, although who knows… Anyone purchasing his books online should first approach his publisher, Troubador Publishing, as he gains little, if anything, from sales on sites such as Amazon.

The Weather in Street

(The Powys Society Conference, 2012)

The open window
lets the summer heat drift out
into the still night air, but lets in
the racket of boys racing their machines –
high revs screaming and ricocheting off
buildings that line this small town's narrow street.

In this hotel room I'm trying to decide whether
I'd prefer the window open or closed
when the telephone rings:
I lift the receiver
but the ringing doesn't cease.
I replace it and lift it again since the ringing
continues while nobody speaks and the boys
are still racing up and down the street
while the phone, I now think, is just trying
to irritate me.

I switch on the bedside light and scramble
from the bed to the floor searching for
the telephone's cable hidden behind
the bedside table hard against the wall.
As I haul the table out everything on it
tumbles to the floor, but this I ignore
as I yank the cable from its socket
and the telephone stops ringing
and the boys stop racing,

yet in my head I still hear that telephone ringing
and the racket of those boys' high-revving
while outside it's now beginning to rain
and cool night air is blowing-in bringing with it
its damp-dust odour to convey the message
that this is now a change in weather which is
the best of reasons for me to close the window.

Geoffrey Winch

(first published Reach Poetry, July 2025)

The Abbey Barn (Somerset Rural Life Museum), Chilkwell St, Glastonbury.

Arthur Moyse (1914 – 2003)

Arthur Moyse (1914-2003) was an artist, a writer, a bus conductor and an advocate of Anarchism. He was born in County Wexford, but lived most of his life in London. When he died at age 88, the Guardian suggested he had attended every street protest in the city since 1930. He knew Francis Powys in the 1960s when the latter worked in Better Books bookshop, Charing Cross Road, the London equivalent of San Francisco's City Lights Bookstore. Francis impressed him with his helpfulness and love of literature. The pair continued corresponding when Francis moved to Hastings. Moyse would send his handmade and 'alternative' Christmas cards such as the one depicted on our back cover. On hearing of Francis's death in 1998, Moyse wrote to his son John and family:

'Your father would show me the country photographs he took and I was impressed by the natural beauty of the subject matter and the technical ability… I miss your father's dignity and friendly (sic) and in truth I know of no one in 1998 to replace it and the loss is ours.'

The connection is an interesting sidelight on the association between the Powyses and Anarchism. Although they came from a religious background and espoused various causes, the children of Charles and Mary Powys did not fit into any of the usual political or literary categories. The most thorough analysis of John Cowper's political beliefs can be found in chapters 5 and 7 of David Goodway's *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*, (Liverpool University Press, 2006).

Ed: A parting thought for November from TF Powys:
'The dull air of a November night, when one steps into it from a lit room, is often breathed with fear, as if it hides odd things in the darkness. The heavy clouds … press upon the heads of the folk who are abroad, like the soft damp clay upon the coffins of the shrouded dead'.
Mr Weston's Good Wine.

Powys chronology: September-December 1926

Llewelyn revels in his rural abode at the White Nose where Reginald Marsh sketches him in the pose of a confident literary figure in his wooden hut. He and Alyse stay in London from 7 October to 11 November where he labours almost daily at his biography of the explorer Henry Hudson. He finds the research tedious and is eager to finish the job. He informs John: 'We got to know every beggar and every pavement artist on our way to and from the Museum.' They socialise with Louis Wilkinson and his wife, Anna Reid, also a novelist. On 22 October they visit Arnold Bennett, who has already met John and Bertie. Bennett writes in his *Journal*: 'All the Powyses I have seen have almost exactly the same manner. They are enthusiastic in pleasure. … But they are a highly brainly lot.'

Theodore revels in praise after decades of obscurity. The US edition of his 1926 novel, *Innocent Birds*, devotes the back cover to exultant reviews of his earlier work, notably from The Nation on *Mr Tasker's Gods*: 'The time has surely come for Mr Powys' gifts to be more widely recognised. There is prophecy in him and high indignation and a knotted ugly wisdom. Genius travels many strange roads. Mr Powys, bearing his own light with him, treads a unique and fascinating path.' He is becoming the literary face of the Powys family and the focus of a literary cult with Gertrude and Katie living at Chydyok, Llewelyn and Alyse at White Nose and Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland in East Chaldon, the centre of what commentators are beginning to call 'Powysland.'

After three months holiday in England and a month-long lecture tour, John is back living with Phylis in Patchin Place. He works on *Wolf Solent* during September and October, but the pair are beset by worry about their lack of money. He is saved by 'the secular saint', Will Durant, who books him for a series of lectures in his New York Labour Temple. In early November he engages in a short tour of North and South Carolina, returning on the 11th.

In order to improve their finances, Phyllis looks for work as a waitress in Childs' restaurant, a move opposed by John, but she insists on appearing for interview at 33rd Street and Broadway. John has breakfast at 10.15 as Phyllis is interviewed upstairs. He opens his post and finds a cheque for $100 from Durant. When Phyllis returns, she informs him she has failed the interview. John gleefully writes to Llewelyn: 'But the Childs people rejected Phyllis – and I daresay we felt … very much as Violet and Theodore may have felt when he came down the Police Station steps as unfit for the war … So I daresay we felt … leaving behind 33rd St and Broadway to fuck themselves!'

Alyse's first novel, *She Shall have Music*, is published by Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, in 1926. Partly based on her childhood and life in New York, it contains vivid descriptions of life in Patchin Place with references to the beloved ailanthus tree and the less-loved women's prison across the street. Reviews are mixed. 'Do tell Alyse not to put much weight upon criticism,' John advises Llewelyn in a letter. 'All good writers have to endure it.'

Louis Wilkinson and Anna Reid spend Christmas with Llewelyn and Alyse at White Nose where Louis criticises his hosts choice of wine. Despite Louis's written instructions that one should only imbibe choice Burgundies, Llewelyn sticks to his preference for a bottle of sugary Bordeaux.

A
HAPPY
XMAS
DIEU ET
MON DROIT