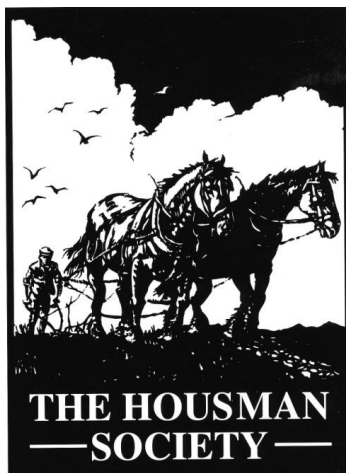


The Housman Society Journal

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Housman Society Journal

Volume Forty-Six

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Chairman's Notes, 2020

By Peter Waine

No doubt up and down the land and regardless of the purpose of the organization, the chairman's statement this time around will refer to Covid-19 and to the disruption this wretched virus has caused. Alas, our Society was no exception as events were either cancelled or postponed, thereby depriving our members of opportunities to reflect on AEH in the company of kindred spirits.

But all was not gloom during these seemingly interminable months of lockdown. On what started as a normal day in July our Secretary, Max Hunt, as he browsed through the usual array of emails, received one from a Mr Robert Semple. He informed us that while sorting through papers belonging to his recently deceased father, he had found a bundle of 30 letters from AEH to his grandfather, W.H. Semple. If the Society would like to have these letters, Robert was happy to donate them. With a bit of research, Max discovered that Robert's grandfather was the only student Housman is known to have supervised (Housman had made it clear to all that he did not regard supervision as part of his CV!). The said grandfather later became Hulme Professor of Latin at Manchester University from 1937 to 1967.

Although many of the letters cover fairly routine matters, others are of more than passing interest. Dr Christopher Stray has written about their classical content and significance in this edition of the Journal. Some of the letters are amusing; Housman approves of Semple's "rejection of Harvard" and his "application for Aberystwyth." The last letter is written in pencil in a weak hand – the fine signature remained strong – a mere five weeks before AEH's death.

Robert Semple, new to Housman studies, read Jeremy Bourne's biography that Max gave him by way of a 'thank you.' He was surprised to learn of Housman's reputation for being grumpy and

unsociable, as he thought the letters to his grandfather showed a much warmer and kinder man than this.

In early September Max, Linda Hart and myself deposited the Housman letters at the Wren Library at Trinity College, Cambridge, which we felt was their true home, and where they will join other Housman items in their important archive. They will be conserved and accessible to future scholars. Before we left, the librarian, Dr Nicolas Bell, a Society member, showed us a 1909 edition of ASL, signed by a 19-year-old Ivor Gurney as a gift to Rudyard Kipling. (“Rudyard Kipling / from his greatest admirer / Ivor Gurney / August 1909”). Ten years after writing this inscription to Kipling in a copy of *A Shropshire Lad*, Gurney set many of the ASL poems to music in a song cycle that he titled *Ludlow and Teme*.

I asked Nicolas whether the lift installed in the Great Gate for Housman’s benefit, was still operational. It was – and the current occupant of the rooms uses it once a week to take up his shopping. In fact Housman never took advantage of it, moving instead to ground-floor rooms in Great Court.

Nicolas wrote to me on 15 September as Librarian of Trinity College:

... this letter is simply to say how delighted I am, on behalf of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, to accept the Housman Society’s kind donation of letters from Housman to his only research student, William Semple. A decade ago, I think there was a general consensus that Archie Burnett’s *Letters of A.E. Housman* was as near to being comprehensive as we could ever hope, and that any future discoveries of letters were likely to be of only minor importance. Then the large collection of letters to Gerald Jackson came to light, which show the human side of Housman in a way we hadn’t seen before, and now this wonderful collection has appeared out of the blue. These letters show Housman at his highest level of scholarly sophistication, the master of the most obscure astronomical and

astrological terminology, with an evident delight in being able to pass on his wonderfully specific expertise to a keen disciple

The Society also took advantage during lockdown to update and reissue the 1992 edition of our brochure, *Housman's Shropshire*, which, as the subtitle informs, is 'A trail by car to the places, spiritual and actual, associated with the poetry of A.E. Housman.' Wisely phrased as we don't know whether those who complete the trail will have visited places that Housman never did!

In addition, we have been busy contemplating how best to celebrate the centenary of *Last Poems* in 2022. It is rather rare for LP to be published as a separate collection, but that is what we have decided to do. Surely the best poems in LP are better than the weaker ones in ASL. After all, LP contains such gems as 'When summer's end is nighing' (LP 39) and the meaningful, heart-rending poem 'The laws of God, the laws of man.' (LP 12). And all 4,000 copies of the first edition of LP were sold on the day of publication! It's surprising, therefore, that the poems have not attracted so many composers.

The format for our Centenary Edition of *Last Poems* is taking shape. Edgar Vincent, who wrote a highly regarded 2018 biography (*A.E. Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life*) will write an Introduction. Dr John Cartwright will write a literary commentary on individual poems. Sir Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate from 1999-2009 and a vice-president of our Society, will write the Foreword. There will be original pen and ink illustrations in a traditional style but with a modern twist.

Events cancelled but rearranged for 2021 include old favourites such as the birthday celebrations, the Ludlow Commemoration, and a repeat of our presence at the Evesham Festival of Words (our replacement for the former Hay lecture on The Name and Nature of Poetry) where Peter Parker, author of *Housman Country*, will give his postponed talk on 'Bredon and Other Hills'. We are also planning to visit Lyme Regis which, thanks to the investigative skills of Julian Hunt, we now know has a link with the Housman family which lasted for over 50

years! This will take place in July 2021, and include morning coffee with a poetry reading by Linda Hart and Max Hunt.

So plenty is going on and is being planned despite the virus. And who knows what might pop up one day via our website which will make our Secretary's day (but pray not too soon as I am not sure he can take such excitement on a regular basis). Meanwhile, we can all enjoy Housman's poetry, which offers great meaning and comfort in equal measure, both in normal and in exceptional times, as it did to previous generations, even in times of conflict.

A.E. Housman and W.H. Semple: a newly-discovered correspondence

By Christopher Stray

There can be little more exciting than the sudden emergence of hitherto unknown Housman letters.¹ Admittedly, nothing can compare with the publication of the letters in which his love for Moses Jackson was laid bare.² I was lucky enough to be present at the launch of their publication at Quaritch's bookshop in London in 2006, when some of them were given a dramatised reading. Even without this, however, they were dramatic enough, revealing as they did emotions which Housman had long kept concealed.

The recent emergence of thirty letters from Housman to his pupil William Semple cannot compete with those. Yet they add significantly to what we know of Housman: they show him to have been a thoughtful and dutiful supervisor of a graduate student, ready to meet to discuss work, and to send relevant information, both on the texts being studied and on useful secondary literature. They also illustrate what had already been known from other sources, his profound knowledge of ancient astrology.³

¹ The letters were given to the Housman Society by Semple's grandson Robert Semple; the Society has presented them to Trinity College Library, where they have been assigned the classmark Add.Ms.a.614.

² H.R. Woudhuysen (ed.), *A.E.H., A.W.P.: A Classical Friendship* (London, 2006). The two sets of letters are linked by the fact that each has been released by the grandson of Housman's correspondent: Woudhuysen's grandfather was the bibliographer A.W. Pollard.

³ My thanks to Julian Hunt for inviting me to write about the letters; to Linda Hart and Max Hunt for making an initial transcription; and for help of various kinds, to Archie Burnett (Boston), Nicolas Bell, David Butterfield, Boyd Hilton, Neil Hopkinson. Michael Reeve and Jonathan Smith (Cambridge), Jim Zetzel (Columbia), Roy Gibson (Durham), Richard Talbert (North Carolina), Bob Kaster (Princeton), Ursula Mitchel (Belfast), and Chris Kraus (Yale).

William Hugh Semple was born in Belfast in 1900; he went to school there and graduated from Queen's University in 1921. He was employed as a teaching assistant in the Classics department in 1921-2, then in the department of English Literature until 1925. In that year he registered as a PhD student at St John's College, Cambridge, his subject being the poems of the late Imperial writer Sidonius Apollinaris, a bishop and diplomat who belonged to one of the leading families of Gaul in the fifth century AD. Housman evidently agreed to supervise him, and the two men corresponded, and met in Housman's room in Trinity, from 1925 to 1927, when Semple gained a PhD.⁴ Semple was the only research student Housman ever supervised, but the whole idea of postgraduate study was then quite new: the first Cambridge PhDs had been awarded only in 1921, though honorary doctorates (LittD) had been given since 1883.⁵ By 1927 he had been appointed Lecturer in Classics at Reading University.

The letters show that Housman was a supportive and conscientious supervisor. A Manchester colleague was presumably relying on conversation with Semple when he stated that 'as he handed in the

⁴ Semple's thesis was published by the *Cambridge Philological Society* in 1930, under the title *Quaestiones Exegeticae Sidoniana, Being New Interpretations of Difficult Passages in the Works of Apollinaris Sidonius*. On Semple, see I. Rogerson, 'W. H. Semple: a research student of A.E. Housman', *Housman Society Journal* 25 (1999), 70-2. Cf. the entry on Semple in A. Burnett, *The Letters of A.E. Housman* (OUP, 2007), 1.xlviii., correcting a date in Rogerson's article. Like several other deserving candidates, Semple did not receive an entry in R.B. Todd (ed.), *Dictionary of British Classicists* (3 vols, Bristol, 2004).

⁵ R. Simpson, *How the PhD Came to Britain: A Century of Struggle for Postgraduate Education* (Guildford, 1983). Four PhDs were awarded by Cambridge University in 1921; in 1917-18, 1200. In the 100 years since 1921, more than 39,000 have been awarded. Reports on successful applications for LittD degrees can be found in the Cambridge University archives, CUR 28.25: see E.S. Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1996), 169-70, who quotes a nicely nuanced report on the work of Arthur Verrall by his teacher Richard Jebb.

various chapters, the most he ever received in the way of encouragement was a microscopic tick in the margin.’⁶ To Housman’s publisher Grant Richards, however, Semple told a different story:

I was Housman’s pupil during the years 1925-7, and later I often consulted him about points of Latinity which puzzled me and, when in Cambridge, I always went to see him. To his direction and criticism and support I owe more than I could ever express.⁷

One of Housman’s letters combines conscientiousness with characteristic wit:

19 Jan. 1927

Trinity College

Dear Semple,

I am sorry you have been out of sorts and glad you are so no longer. The check to your studies does not fall out inconveniently for me personally, as I am and shall be molested by the University Scholarships down to the middle of next month, and not anxious to see you or anyone unless it is required. If you do require an interview, of course write, and I will arrange one; but otherwise I will not at present make regular appointments with you. I understand from other directors of studies that this is not shabby conduct on my part and that they sometimes see their victims only once or twice a term.

Yours sincerely,

A.E. Housman

Semple’s thesis was devoted to difficult passages in Sidonius’ poems. A major source of difficulty was his use of astrological terminology, and here Housman was the best person Semple could have consulted. The year in which he began to supervise Semple was also the year in

⁶ W.J. N. Rudd, *It Seems Like Yesterday* (London, 2003), 13.

⁷ Semple to Grant Richards, in Richards, *Housman 1897-1936* (London, 1941), 327.

which the first part of the ninth edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English lexicon was published. In his preface the editor, Henry Stuart Jones, thanked Housman for his help with astronomical and astrological vocabulary:

...in this thorny subject difficulties frequently arise, for which Professor A.E. Housman, when appealed to, never fails to provide a solution.⁸

By 1925 Housman's edition of Manilius' *Astronomica* was well under way, and his knowledge of ancient astrology unequalled.⁹

Housman's first letter, written on 21 October 1925, shows that he and Semple had already made a preliminary arrangement about teaching:

Dear Mr Semple,
Perhaps you would let me have the translations by Saturday the 31st.
Yours sincerely
A.E. Housman

His second letter offers advice on reading the letters of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a Gallo-Roman writer of an earlier generation:

⁸ Preface, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th edition, Oxford, 1925-40), p.vii; this first appeared in the first part of the lexicon, published in 1925. For the history of the Lexicon, see C.A. Stray, 'Liddell and Scott in historical context: Victorian beginnings, twentieth-century developments', in C.A. Stray, M. Clarke and J.T. Katz (eds), *Liddell & Scott: The History, Methodology, and Languages of the World's Leading Lexicon of Ancient Greek* (Oxford, 2019), 3-24.

⁹ A.E. Housman (ed.), *M. Manilii Astronomica*, 1 (1903), 2 (1912), 3 (1916), 4 (1920), 5 (1930). For Housman's interest in astrology, see R.P. Graves, *A.E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (Oxford, 1979), 215-17.

3 Dec. 1925

Trinity College

Dear Mr Semple,

The text in which to read Symmachus would be Seeck's, Mon. Germ. Auct. Ant. VI.i.¹⁰ I don't know of any commentary; you might look to see if Lectius, 1604, starred by J.E.B. Mayor, would be of use.¹¹

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Housman helped Semple not only by recommending books, but also by enabling him to borrow them. In July 1926 he wrote to the university librarian, A.F. Scholfield, to ask if Semple could be allowed to exceed the standard allowance of five books out on loan at any one time for those 'in statu pupillari'. Scholfield consulted the members of the Library syndicate, who agreed to allow him to borrow ten books at a time.¹² The regulations had been made when the University had no graduate students, and Semple's case showed that they needed to be treated differently.

Housman's reference to the 'starring' of book titles was curiously apt, though surely not consciously so, since much of the advice he gave to Semple concerned the stars and other heavenly bodies. Sidonius' knowledge of astrology has long puzzled scholars. Astrology was officially rejected by the Christian church, yet was widely practised,

¹⁰ Otto Seeck, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi Quae Supersunt* (1883), vol. 6 part 1 of the series *Monumenta Germaniae historica, Auctores antiquissimi*.

¹¹ Jacob Lectius, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi ... ad diversos libri decem* (Paris, 1604). J. E. B. Mayor, *Bibliographical Clue to Latin Literature* (London, 1875), 186. Mayor had been the previous holder of the Latin chair, named for Benjamin Kennedy after Housman's election in 1911; in his *Clue* he marked recommended works with an asterisk.

¹² Scholfield to Housman, 22 July 1926; to Semple 4 August 1926. These letters complete the picture drawn by those published in Burnett's *Letters of A.E. Housman*, 1.623, 1.625: Housman to Scholfield, 21 July and 21 August 1926.

even at the (Christianised) imperial court. Sidonius himself (who was a bishop) seems keen both to explore and to denounce it.¹³ Housman's mastery of astrological terminology is evident in the longest letter in the group:

5 Feb. 1927

Trinity College

Dear Sample

It will probably be most convenient for you if I put down in writing what there is to say about Sidonius ep. VIII 11 9. It is the case that he is making a show of knowledge which he does not possess, and using terms which he does not quite understand.

thema is the position of the heavens and all the heavenly bodies at the instant of the birth. geniturae schema is the same thing; schema itself is a more general term, though sometimes used for thema, as also genitura sometimes is. constellatio properly means only the relative position of the seven planets, but practically comes to the same thing.

diastemata zodiaca are properly not the 12 signs of the zodiac but the 12 τόποι into which it was divided at the birth, of which I give an account in my 2nd book of Manilius pp. xxix – xxxi.¹⁴ asyndetus is rightly explained by Sirmond, and has the same sense in the passage you cite from Rufinus.¹⁵ It is not inconsistent with super diametro, because a planet might be in

¹³ See the section on Sidonius and astrology in M. Zoeter, 'Reading the future, writing the present. A literary and interpretive commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris Letter 8.11' (MA thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen, 2019), 30-2. Readers keen to explore this topic can access this thesis at <https://sidonapol.org/tag/zoeter-matthijs/>.

¹⁴ The reference to Manilius is to Housman's celebrated edition of his *Astronomica*: the second volume (*Liber secundus*) was published by CUP in 1912.

¹⁵ 'Sirmond' is the edition of Sidonius by Jacques Sirmond (Paris, 1652). Rufinus was the translator of the Ps.-Clementine *Recognitiones*, ed. E. G. Gersdorf (Leipzig, 1838); 'asyndetus' occurs at p. 226.

the diametrically opposite τόπος (or sign) and might nevertheless be asyndetus because not at the diametrically opposite point; in technical language not μοιρικῶς or partiliter opposite.

retrogradus you explain correctly, but it is not only the outer planets which retrograde: Venus and Mercury do, though to a less extent.

apocatastaticus in itself is a vague term, applicable to anything moving in a circle and so arriving at a spot where it has been before. If it has a precise meaning, it probably is that Mars was in the middle of Scorpius, which is the position he occupied at the creation of the world.

super centro, ἐπίκεντρος, is the opposite of asyndetus, and means configured, whether by diameter or trigon or tetragon or possibly hexagon. A planet thus placed is thus best able to exert its influence, and the influence of Mars is malefic. Sidonius apparently supposed the sense of the word to be something more special than it is.

amici nascentis anno and erexerat and in occasu taken together seem to be mere gabble, for of course planets have no annual rising or setting. Inrubescentes is another piece of nonsense, Saturn being dull white in fact and black in astrological fiction. I am nearing the end of my troubles and shall be able to see you at 6 o'clock on Tuesday the 15th if you like to come.¹⁶

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Like most postgraduate students, Semple at some point began to look ahead to his chances of employment. Several possibilities are mentioned in the letters – at one point, Aberystwyth apparently being preferred to Harvard. In July 1927 Semple sent Housman the news that

¹⁶ 'My troubles' were Housman's duties in examining for university scholarships, which had earlier led him to change the dates of meetings with Semple.

he had been appointed to a classical lectureship at Reading. Housman responded warmly:

9 July 1927

Trinity College

Dear Semple,

Well, this is very satisfactory, and I congratulate you heartily. I only hope that you will not find too few books at Reading and begin to hanker after Manchester.

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

The University of Reading, founded as a university college in 1892, received a charter enabling it to award degrees in 1926. Housman's reference to Manchester suggests that Semple had been thinking of applying there; in the event he transferred there in 1937. The University of Manchester, founded in 1850, had its own library, but its staff could also use the John Rylands Library, a richly endowed private library opened in 1900, which became part of the university library in 1972. Semple seems to have settled in well at Reading: on 12 March 1928, Housman told him that 'Neville was here some months ago, and I was glad to hear from him that you seemed to like Reading'. Eric Harold Neville had been elected a fellow of Trinity in the same year as Housman, 1911; he was Professor of Mathematics at Reading from 1919 to 1954.¹⁷ After a few years at Reading, Semple began to look for

¹⁷ His classical colleague E.R. Dodds referred in his memoirs to 'Neville, whom Cambridge had rejected because of his pacifism', and it has been suggested that it was because of his views, and in the wake of Bertrand Russell's sacking from his Trinity lectureship, that Neville's fellowship had not been renewed: E.R. Dodds, *Missing Persons. An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1977), 73; A. Rice, 'Eric Harold Neville', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. In fact his fellowship, which had a fixed term of six years, lapsed in September 1917. In 1914 Neville had travelled to India, and there persuaded the mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan to come back to Cambridge with him. The story is told in David Leavitt's 2007 novel *The Indian Clerk* (2007).

chairs. In 1929 the chair of Latin at the University of Cape Town became vacant, and he asked Housman for advice:

28 Jan. 1930

Trinity College

Dear Semple,

I do not know anything about the Capetown professorship except that they have asked me to be one of the electors. I suppose there will be fewer applicants than for a post of the same emolument in England; and I should think that Cape Colony is quite one of our Sovereign's most agreeable dominions. But I shrink from giving advice, and I think your own judgment likely to be good.

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

In the event, the chair went to an internal candidate, the Irishman Benjamin Farrington, who migrated back to Britain in 1935 in search of a larger academic community and better-stocked libraries, and was Professor of Classics at University College Swansea from 1936 until his retirement in 1956. Farrington was known in particular for his work on ancient science, and was one of the very few British classical scholars with left-wing views: one could hardly imagine anyone more different from Semple.

In the spring of 1933, Housman wrote to Semple as follows:

11 May 1933

Trinity College

Dear Semple,

Thanks for your letter. I had no idea that you were there.

Yours sincerely

Servius Augurinus

Almost all of Housman's letters were signed 'A. E. Housman', with or without a final stop, or simply 'A.E.H.' In a few youthful letters we find variants: 'Alfred E. Housman' or just 'Alfred', and in a playful letter

written in French, ‘Alfred Edouard Maisonhomme’ (to Elizabeth Wise, 5 April 1877: Burnett 1.17-18). The signature on his letter of 11 May 1933 thus appears to be unique. Why did Housman sign in this way? A possible clue lies in the fact that Sidonius Apollinaris, the subject of Semple’s research, had explicitly modelled his epistulae on those of Pliny.¹⁸ The name Housman used to sign his letters was that of a friend of Pliny, a young poet who wrote rather in the style of Catullus; some of his hendecasyllables were quoted approvingly by Pliny (Epistles 4.27; he is also mentioned in Epp. 9.8). Housman was being playful, and casting himself as the younger man, Augurinus, with Semple as the older one, Pliny.¹⁹ Part of the point lies in the reversal of roles. Why did Housman identify himself with Augurinus just at this point? The text of this brief and allusive letter gives little purchase, but the previous letter in this group reads: ‘I am glad you are trying again, and very willing to be a referee’ (13 April 1933). At this point Semple was continuing his search for a post outside Reading, and Housman was ready to support his applications. This is very much the kind of relationship that was being playfully reversed, if the interpretation above is correct.²⁰ Housman’s playful signature may have been prompted by the place he referred to as ‘there’, but we have no way of knowing what that was: Rome, perhaps?

In 1935 Semple applied for the chair of Classics at Bedford College, a women’s college of the University of London. He had presumably obtained Housman’s support, but was defeated by another ex-Trinity

¹⁸ The relationship has recently been explored by Roy Gibson: ‘Reading Sidonius by the book’, in J. A. van Waarden and G. Kelly (eds), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris* (Leuven, 2013), 195-219.

¹⁹ Augurinus’ family name was in fact not Servius but Sentius: he was probably Quintus Gellius Sentius Augurinus, a proconsul under Hadrian. The mistake is understandable, since Servius was a much more common name. The manuscript tradition of Sidonius is consistent in naming Augurinus as Sentius, not Servius.

²⁰ For discussion of this point I owe thanks in particular to Archie Burnett, David Butterfield and Roy Gibson.

man, Richard Broxton Onians. Housman responded to the news on 22 November:

Dear Semple,

Your letter found me in a nursing home, whence I issued forth three or four days ago. My heart can no longer sustain the 44 steps to my rooms in Whewell's Court, and I have had to descend to the ground floor of the Great Court. Ever since June I have been very weak. I have lectured however all this term, motoring in from the Home.

I was sorry that you had missed the award, though the ladies will probably be smitten with Onians.²¹ I have no distinct idea of his work and am afraid that I had never been conscious of Williamson's existence.²²

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

²¹ Richard Broxton Onians spent 1922 to 1925 as a research student at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was supervised by the newly appointed Regius Professor of Greek, Arthur Pearson, under whom he had studied at Liverpool, and was also advised by Francis Cornford, the leading authority on Greek philosophy in the University, and from 1931 its first Professor of Ancient Philosophy. He had been Professor of Classics at University College Swansea from 1933 to 1935, where he was succeeded by Benjamin Farrington; he held the Bedford chair till his retirement in 1966. His book *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate*, was his life's work. It began from an essay on Homeric concepts awarded the University's Hare prize in 1926. The book was first typeset in 1934, but then delayed by wartime and by Onians' determination to add more and more information (a process reflected in the title); it had a mixed reception when it finally appeared in 1951. At least one of 'the ladies' at Bedford College was smitten with Onians: his pupil Rosalind Lathbury, whom he married in 1937 and with whom he had six children.

²² Harold Williamson was head of the Latin department at Bedford College from 1920 to 1935. His name was probably known to Housman only through a mention by Semple; he had not been a member of Trinity College.

Housman's last letter to Semple was written on 24 March from the Evelyn Nursing Home:

Dear Semple,

Alas, I am back here, though not nearly so bad as I was at Christmas. I got through the term quite well, and lecturing was hardly any effort.

Housman died at the Home on 30 April. In the following year, Semple moved from Reading to the Hulme chair of Latin at Manchester, which he held until his retirement in 1967. At Manchester he succeeded William Blair Anderson, who had moved to Cambridge to succeed Housman after the latter's death in 1936. Anderson produced an edition of Sidonius' work in the Loeb Classical Library in which he acknowledged helpful advice from Semple.²³ Semple himself published relatively little; as a head of department he was described as being a 'dominating personality', and as having 'little interest in scholarship'.²⁴ A more human figure is revealed in the memoirs of a junior colleague in the Manchester Latin department, Niall Rudd:

... Semple ... seems to have felt that nothing he could produce would ever measure up to Housman's standards, and so, for the most part, he channelled his energies and abilities into administration, playing an important part in the running and development, not only of the University but also of Manchester's hospitals. When I arrived, Semple had the reputation of being something of a martinet, but now he seemed to be mellowing. At any rate he showed me nothing but kindness. In fact on one occasion his paternal solicitude seemed

²³ W. B Anderson (ed.), *Sidonius Apollinaris, Poems and Letters*, vol. 1 (1936), vol. 2 (1965).

²⁴ See R.J.A. Talbert, 'Westlake, Henry Dickinson', in R.B. Todd (ed.), *Dictionary of British Classical Scholars* (Bristol, 2004), 1048-9. Talbert's source was a letter to *The Times* by H.H. Huxley, 22 August 1992, which refers to Semple without naming him.

a little excessive: ‘I hope, Rudd, you never have sexual intercourse merely for the sake of pleasure.’ I was so flabbergasted that I can’t remember my reply.²⁵

Even in retirement Semple made his presence felt, telling his successor but one, Harry Jocelyn, that as a Manchester professor he should buy a hat and waistcoat. When Jocelyn offered him an offprint of an article he had published on the Roman epic poet Ennius, Semple told him ‘there will be no time for that sort of thing henceforth’.²⁶ Manchester had separate departments of Latin and Greek, and Semple made it impossible for Henry Westlake, the gentle and courteous professor of Greek, to organise collaboration between the departments.

When Semple applied for the lectureship at Reading in 1927, Housman sent him a supporting letter in which he wrote:

...I have formed a high opinion of his knowledge and ability, and have been struck by the maturity of his judgment and by the method and thoroughness which he has brought to the pursuit of his studies. I feel sure that he is well qualified for his duties as Lecturer in Classics at the University of Reading, and that he may be expected to produce original work redounding to its credit.²⁷

It is hardly to be wondered at that Semple was appointed, after securing this glowing testimony from the greatest living Latinist. But we might wonder what Housman would have thought of his ex-pupil’s apparent lack of interest in scholarship during his time at Manchester.

²⁵ Rudd, *It Seems Like Yesterday*, 14. Rudd was at Manchester from 1956 to 1958.

²⁶ J. N. Adams, ‘Henry David Jocelyn 1933-2000’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 120 (2003), 277-99, at p.287. Jocelyn usually wore a suit and tie, but I never saw him in hat or waistcoat.

²⁷ Housman to Semple, 2 June 1927: Burnett, *Letters*, 2.27-8.

Editor's note:

Despite efforts made by Christopher Stray, W.H. Semple's grandson Robert Semple, and David Langslow, the current Professor of Latin at Manchester University, no portrait of W.H. Semple has come to hand to illustrate this article. Perhaps a reader of the *Housman Society Journal* will be able to locate a photograph.

A.E. Housman: an aeronautical pioneer

By Max Hunt

In late December 1920, towards the end of a long letter to his publisher Grant Richards, A.E. Housman declared “I am much more celebrated in Cambridge for having flown to France and back last September than for anything else I have done.” It is hard for us nowadays to see the reclusive Kennedy Professor of Latin as an intrepid aeronautical pioneer; yet this was the reality of his experience in the autumn of 1920 and in his correspondence from then onwards we can find sporadic glimpses into the early development of commercial flying.

We know, of course, that before the First World War Housman had been a regular traveller to Europe and that from 1909 he had visited Paris each autumn. The outbreak of war seems not to have dented his enthusiasm for France and its culinary delights. He crossed the Channel to Dieppe with Grant Richards in March 1915 and travelled down to Nice, writing to a friend, Mrs Ralph Thicknesse: “Hitherto I have always refused to go to the Riviera, but now is my chance when the worst classes who infest it are away.”

This was to be his only war-time visit as practical difficulties conspired to prevent cross-channel passages until after the Armistice. However, at the earliest opportunity in 1919 Grant Richards helped fix up visas and permits; by September AEH was back in France combining a motor tour of the Limousin with a return to his favourite restaurants in Paris. He would visit France at least once in each of the next fifteen years and in preparation for his next journey he must have surprised Grant Richards by writing on 1 July 1920:

My dear Richards,

.... I may attempt Paris by the aeroplane route in September so any information about it which you may possess or acquire would be welcome

Richards obviously did as he was asked because, writing again on 15 August, Housman thanked him for “the leaflets”, declaring that he was: most attracted by the Aircraft Transport people because theirs is more explicit, and by mentioning a charge for Passengers’ Excess Baggage they give me hope of disappointing your malevolent expectation about difficulty arising from the weight of my bag. You should not always insist on carrying it...

Aircraft Transport and Travel Limited (A.T. &T.) had been established in October 1916. It was one of the first companies to begin passenger flights using converted bombers when the war-time ban on non-military flying was lifted in May of 1919. After a proving flight from RAF Hendon to Paris Le Bourget in July a regular service was inaugurated on 25 August flying from Hounslow Heath Aerodrome. The following day’s *Times* reported the departure of the first aircraft, a Handley Page at 8.40 am with eleven passengers. A second plane, a de Havilland DH 4 left just 30 minutes later arriving at Le Bourget at 11.40.

When, in March 1920, the Croydon Aerodrome became the ‘approved’ airport for London, A.T. &T. transferred to this new base, operating a twice daily service to Paris at 15 guineas per passenger. It was this service, now using the later de Havilland DH 16 and described as the AIR EXPRESS in contemporary advertisements, that so attracted AEH for his September channel crossing. Undaunted by reports of an Air Express crash on 16 August Housman wrote to Richards that his

.... inclination to go by the Air Express is confirmed by the crash they had yesterday, which will make them careful in the immediate future.



A De Havilland 16 Aircraft, about to take off from Croydon Airport, 1920

Housman was also persuaded by the convenience of a dedicated taxi service from central London:

Their cars start from your neighbourhood, the Victory Hotel, Leicester Square; so I shall try to get a bed there for the night unless you warn me against it.

Obviously all went well, because on 3 October Housman wrote to his sister:

My dear Kate

Well I flew there and back all right, and am never going by any other route in future. Surrey from overhead is delightful, Kent and France less interesting, the Channel disappointing, because on both days there was too much mist to let both shores be seen at once. It was rather windy, and the machine sometimes imitated a ship at sea ... the noise is great, and I alighted rather deaf, not having stuffed my ears with the cotton-wool provided. Nor did I put on the life-belt which they oblige one to take. To

avoid crossing 60 miles of sea which a straight flight would involve, they go from Croydon to Hythe, Hythe to Boulogne, Boulogne to Paris. You are in the air 2 ½ hours; from Leicester Square to your hotel in Paris you take little more than 4; though on the return journey we were two hours late in starting because the machine required repairs, having been damaged on the previous day by a passenger who butted his head through the window to be sick. My chief trouble is that what I now want is no longer a motor and a chauffeur but an aeroplane and a tame pilot, which I suppose are more expensive.

So it was that by Christmas of 1920, Housman's flying adventures had become the talk of Cambridge college high tables. In the following September he told Grant Richards that he would again be travelling by air, having "secured passage to Paris by Messageries Aeriennes on the morning of the 8th." He took at least one flight annually for the next fifteen years and in 1923, having written in July to Grant Richards "I shall come to Paris on the 31st by the Handley Page from Croydon at 4.30," he found himself attracting press attention. He wrote to Kate on 18 August from the Hotel Continental in Paris:

... Together with your letter I have one from some photographers, who say they are taking 'for press purposes' photographs of ladies and gentlemen who are in the habit of flying between London and Paris, and they want to take mine, as they 'understand that I have also had that distinction'. I was delayed a day because July 31st was too dangerous for the aeroplane to start; but on August 1st I had the best voyage I have ever had. We crossed the Channel 7,000 feet high, higher than the piles of clouds which lay over both shores and both coasts were visible at once, which I have not found before ...

As on other occasions Housman spent part of his 1923 holiday exploring France, this time taking a two-week motor tour of Brittany. He reported to his sister:

...The churches and cathedrals are better than I had any idea of, and extraordinarily numerous ... The coast scenery in general is extraordinarily superior to the English in its mixture of land and water, and the islands and rocks.

In the following year most of the small companies that had been operating cross-channel services were merged to form Imperial Airways based at the Croydon airport. The new company enjoyed financial support from the government on the basis that it would be required to open up long-distance routes around the Empire. Housman would have noticed early improvements to passenger facilities at Croydon and more advanced aircraft such as the de Havilland DH 34 and the Handley Page W. 10 in which the Prince of Wales flew for the first time from Paris to London in May 1926. As a result of the 1925 Croydon Aerodrome Extension Act, over £260,000 (£16m in today's currency) was being invested at Croydon to provide a new terminal building and the first proper control tower. The advertised return fare from London to Paris had by 1926 reduced to just £12. 0. 0.

The next major change Housman and fellow passengers on the Paris route would have experienced came with the introduction of the Armstrong Whitworth Argosy aircraft in 1927. In a letter to Kate dated September 20th he described the new luxury service although he was evidently not able to enjoy all of its benefits:

... I flew home by the new 'Silver Wing' aeroplane, which is more roomy and steadier and contains an attendant to supply you with cheese and biscuits and various liquors, and to point out objects of interest on the route: also an emergency door in the roof, which ought to be very tranquillising. But I did not enjoy it as I had got ptomaine poisoning in Paris from stale fish, for the third time in my experience, and I am still rather out of sorts.



IMPERIAL AIRWAYS PASSENGER AEROPLANE, SILVER WING DE LUXE

Imperial Airways passenger aeroplane 'Silver Wing'



IMPERIAL AIRWAYS PASSENGER SALOON, SILVER WING SERVICE DE LUXE

Imperial Airways Passenger Aeroplane 'Silver Wing' Service de luxe

A cheaper, second-class option was available without the cabin service and using a slower Handley Page aircraft, but one doubts this would have had any appeal for the Cambridge Professor of Latin.

In May 1928 the new passenger terminal at Croydon was officially opened by Lady Maude Hoare and it became 'The Airport of London'. In the following month an Imperial Airways Argosy aircraft with eighteen passengers demonstrated its performance by beating the Flying Scotsman to Edinburgh by 15 minutes. But cross-channel flying was not without significant risk in the days before radar. One remarkable accident had occurred over the French village of Thieuloy in April 1922 when English and French machines flying in opposite directions collided head-on in mist with the loss of all passengers. In December 1924 a de Havilland DH 24 had plunged to the ground and burst into flames only a mile-and-a-half from Croydon, killing all on board.



Wreckage of the Handley Page W 10 aircraft *City of Ottawa*, which ditched in the English Channel, 17 June 1929.

AEH was not entirely oblivious to the risk. In planning his autumn trip in 1929 he wrote to Grant Richards on 19 August:

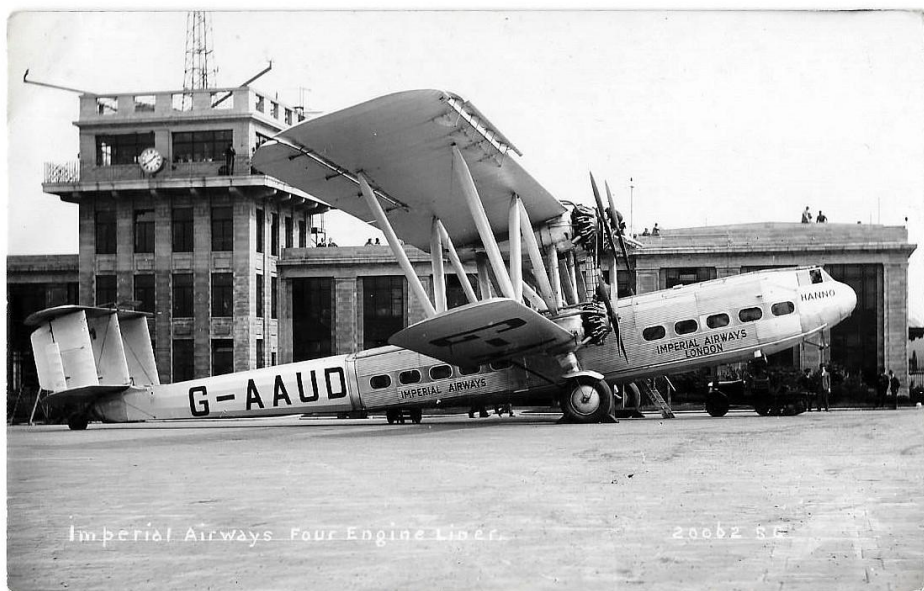
... I am deserting the air on this occasion because my life, until my *Manilius* is quite finished, is too precious to be exposed to a 1/186,000 risk of destruction; even though they have already killed their proper quota for this year.

Housman would almost certainly have had in mind the widely reported 'disaster' on 17 June. A Handley Page W 10 *City of Ottawa* en route for Paris had suffered catastrophic engine failure fifteen miles out from Dungeness, causing it to ditch in the Channel killing seven of the thirteen people on board. In the days following, newspapers had carried photographs of the rescue operation by a Belgian trawler and of the wreckage being towed to Dungeness for investigation. On 1 August, *Flight* magazine had printed a summary of the Air Ministry Report which led, amongst other things, to the fitting of seat belts in aeroplane passenger compartments.

Whatever the mode of transport, it is clear that AEH continued to make the best of his holidays in France. On his return to Cambridge in July 1928 he wrote to Kate:

... I have been staying a fortnight at St Germain, which is to Paris something what Richmond is to London, in a luxurious hotel with a magnificent view and just on the edge of the forest ... Also I had a motor car and saw a great deal of places within a moderate distance of Paris. The country is pretty in many parts, and the roads often run through forests.

Returning to the air in following years, the real game-changer for Housman and other seasoned travellers came with the introduction of the much larger Handley Page HP 42 bi-plane, with its four engines, in the summer of 1931.



A Handley Page HP 42 Aircraft at Croydon Airport, 1932

With two passenger cabins and a full catering service it transformed the cross-channel flight experience as AEH discovered in June 1932. Again after returning to Cambridge, he wrote to Kate on 15 June:

...The chief novelty was the great improvement that has been made in the aeroplanes in the last twelvemonth, in size, steadiness, freedom from noise, and even to some extent in speed. The science also seems to have progressed: when I began, pilots had to fly below the clouds, because if they flew above them they lost their way; but now they fly through them and keep their bearings all right. In leaving England we could see nothing but mist for the last quarter of an hour or more: then at the coast, this cleared, and there was the blue channel under a blue sky: on the opposite side, instead of the land of France, a huge forest of white trees towering to all sorts of heights, over which, being at 6,000 feet, we proceeded to fly. Neither cotton

wool for the ears, nor things to be sick in are provided or needed, any more than in railway trains. And on the ‘silver wing’, the most expensive machine – though the fare is only £5. 10. 0 – you can have a large lunch served if you want it...

In little over twelve years, A.E. Housman had witnessed the transformation of commercial aircraft from crude and fragile bomber conversions, carrying no more than four passengers, to the first airliners of the Imperial Air Service, capable of crossing continents. The in-flight experience had changed out of all recognition to provide rapid and luxurious travel for growing numbers of customers. And a total travel time from central London to one’s hotel in Paris of just over four hours would be hard to beat nearly a century later.

Surely the surprise is that none of this experience found its way into verse. Why was the creator of such unforgettable images as the ‘coloured counties’ or ‘blue remembered hills’ not inspired by those aerial views of the Surrey countryside or the Kent coast? Or, redolent perhaps of the more doom-laden verses of *A Shropshire Lad*, might he not have offered some reflection on the fate of the pilot killed instantly when his Handley Page W 8 flew into high ground in fog near Paris on 30 October 1930?

The more one learns about Housman’s life, the more of a mystery he becomes.

An A to Z of A.E. Housman

By Linda Hart

This article provides a personal and somewhat quirky look at Housman's life, using the 26 letters of the alphabet to organise (with two minutes for each letter) thoughts that would otherwise appear random, haphazard and disorganised. The text here (with a few minor changes) was a lecture delivered at a Housman Society conference on 26-28 October 2012. There was a 'buzz' to the weekend as it took place in Housman Hall which is now part of Bromsgrove School. But as Perry Hall, this was the Housman family home where AEH and his six siblings spent much of their childhood in the 1860s.

A A Shropshire Lad

How lucky that it is A *Shropshire Lad* (not *The Shropshire Lad*), enabling me to begin this A to Z with the small volume of 63 poems for which Housman is known around the world. I have here my father's American Cameo Classics edition from 1932. *A Shropshire Lad* is indeed a classic, and has never been out of print. In the covers of this book we find a world of gallows and graveyards, of sundered friendships and aching loneliness, of lads who have lost their sweethearts or their lives. Michael Tait, in the *Housman Society Journal*, has succinctly summarised its themes: 'the transience of youth and its follies; the inevitability of death; the faithlessness of lovers; the oppressions of society; the malevolence of fate.' (HSJ 2005)

Housman Society members must all be dejected, disheartened, depressed and despondent. But we aren't, and that's because the poems are also comforting and consoling. How does Housman achieve this? In two ways. One: most of the poems are in the first person, thus drawing us into a conversation. We are flattered that the speaker hides nothing from us. Because we too know a bit about defeat and despair, about the trials and tribulations of life, we feel a camaraderie with him and his lads. We return to these poems for 'the fellow feeling', for

company on the long lonely journey. Two: the lilting cadences of the poems also console us. The laments for the lads are spoken in comforting rhythms. For musical effect Housman relies much upon assonance, alliteration, vowel play and those skilful rhymes. The world is awry and will never be fixed, but the music that conveys this message is comforting and consoling. The writing is sheer pleasure to the ear, and thus it is a tonic to the heart.

B ‘Bredon Hill’

From my house on the Malvern Hills I look across the Severn valley to Bredon Hill. ASL XXI (‘Bredon Hill’) is one of Housman's earliest and most popular poems. The theme is typical Housman: a young lover's desire for a permanent earthly union with another is thwarted by death. The story is told with intense but restrained emotion, against the backdrop of a comforting English landscape – larks, steeples, springing thyme and those famous ‘coloured counties’. The seasons and the chiming bells signal the change from love to death, from union to separation.

I find the poem mysterious. Did she have an accident, or contract a fatal illness, or commit suicide? After admonishing the noisy bells, will he go to church, or has he resolved to commit suicide? Housman sometimes struggled to find the right word. When Laurence told him that ‘the coloured counties’ was perfect, Housman replied that in a dream he thought of the word ‘painted’ to go with ‘counties’. On waking he realised this was wrong, but that ‘coloured’ was exactly right.

Housman's stanzaic form in this poem is unusual for him in having five lines not four. The 2nd, 4th and 5th lines rhyme, thus producing a couplet at the end of each five-line stanza. With the extra line Housman provides a striking ending to each stanza, such as: ‘And went to church alone.’

There have been over thirty song settings of ‘Bredon Hill’. Perhaps composers are attracted by the melodramatic story, and by the change

from a peaceful pastoral summer to a desolate winter as the hopes of youth are extinguished.

C Countryside

The move in 1873 from the Housman family home where we are now, to Fockbury House on the edge of town, meant that the Housman children were surrounded by woods and fields, streams and pools, farms and orchards. Housman's sister, Kate Symons, in her memoir says 'The whole of this countryside delighted AEH. He made walking for the love of it his chief occupation.' 'He absorbed the look and scent of flowers with a vivid perception that visibly moved him.' [Recollections 12, 29] Those vivid perceptions were a storehouse that Housman dipped into in the 1890s when writing so many poems:

... the poplars stand and tremble/ By pools I used to know;
... [I] saw the purple crocus pale/ Flower about the autumn dale;
... littering far the fields of May/ Lady-smocks a-bleaching lay;
... under thorn and bramble/ About the hollow ground/ The primroses
are found.

Housman shares with Robert Frost a delight in the natural world. But they both know that the most we can expect is a fleeting revelation of beauty, and that nature knows and cares nothing about man. Terence, in London, remembers the alluring countryside of that western brookland, but it does not remember him.

Housman is explicit about this in *Last Poems* 40. The poet-narrator has been enchanted and beguiled by the countryside, and for a season he has possessed her – but no longer. A stranger will trespass there and nature will 'neither care nor know' who it is.

D Death

Housman's poems are littered with dead soldiers and shepherds, dead brides and bridegrooms, dead lads and athletes, dead prisoners and Romans. There can be few literary works so full of metaphors and euphemisms for death and the grave. For example:

the land where all's forgot; the stiller town; the bed of mould;
the far dwelling; to lie flat and know nothing and be still; to be stiff and
cold; to lie with earth above; to sleep with clover clad.

An American scholar, Oliver Robinson, has calculated that death in some manner enters at least three-quarters of the *Shropshire Lad* poems. J.B. Priestley said no other poet 'has been more concerned with death than [Housman].' But Housman's view of death is not consistent. On the one hand he saw life as lovely but short, with death as its 'enemy'; death brings a final end to life's enjoyments. On the other hand, he saw life as a misery from which death was 'the deliverer', or even a gift, a cause for rejoicing because it brings rest and sleep.

We know that Housman's obsession with death began after his mother died here in this building in 1871. About two years later he devised a game for his siblings – they had to write a poem on a theme that he chose. His sister Kate remembered that the first theme he chose was 'death'. One year later his poem titled 'The Death of Socrates' won the Bromsgrove School poetry prize. Virginia Woolf said: 'I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual.' Perhaps Housman meant to write about life, but death came breaking in as usual.

E Emotion

By the time he was in his mid-20s Housman had suffered three emotional traumas. He had been separated from two people with whom he felt an inseparable bond – his mother and Moses Jackson. And his sense of identity as a scholar had been shattered when he failed his Oxford Finals. His coping mechanism was to use his formidable intellect to suppress his unhappiness. He was not unique in this, as most Victorians prized self-restraint over self-expression. But Housman seemed to relish the idea that he could use reason to control emotions.

In *Additional Poems* 17 he pinpoints the source of his unhappiness. There are, he says, two things that rob him of rest: 'The brains in my head and the heart in my breast.' One hundred years earlier Thomas Jefferson had made the same point. He sent a 4,000-word love letter to

a married woman and called it a dialogue ‘between my head and my heart’. W.H. Auden said that most intellectuals were aware of the warring head and heart ‘though few exhibit the symptoms in so pure a form [as Housman].’

Housman's head controlled his heart until that outpouring of poetry in the mid-1890s – ‘a transfusion of emotion’ he called it. Kate Symons realised that ‘In [his poetry] we see and hear a deep-seated emotion demanding expression.’ John Sparrow said that Housman was ‘disburdening himself ... of a weight of emotion which he had carried ... from his earliest days.’ Housman could be reticent, restrained and remote. But he was hiding depths of feeling that emerged in the poetry. In the mid-1890s especially, he was a literary Jekyll and Hyde, the Latin scholar by day who became a poet at night, journeying into his imagination to write about lost love, malevolent fate and inevitable death.

F Family

Alfred was born shortly before his parents moved here in 1859. Sarah Jane's six other children were born in this house during the next nine years. Domestic chores were done by a nurse, cook and housemaid, later joined by a governess. Presiding over all was paterfamilias Edward Housman – a weak, eccentric, irresponsible but lovable rogue.

The children grew up reading books, writing poems, inventing games and playing in the large garden. But Laurence Housman describes a darker side to family life: prohibitions, paranoia and prudery about bodily functions. The children couldn't be seen going to or returning from the lavatory. Laurence remembers that he would make ‘a frightened bolt’ across the landing, ‘[hating] that Victorian code of concealment which made certain aspects of life a terror to sensitive minds.’ You survived family life by concealing what you felt and what you did. When Laurence was punished for something he was asked if he was sorry. He always lied and said ‘Yes’.

It's curious that not one of the five brothers had children. Was this because Edward had them all circumcised in 1873? Housman's sister Kate said this 'was severe treatment, mentally and physically, and a great mystery to the younger ones who made complaint of the ill-treatment which had befallen them.'

As for Laurence and Clemence, the notion of male/female role reversal ran like a leitmotif through their long relationship, which verged on the incestuous. Was there, then, something strange and abnormal about the Housman family? I don't know. But I must accept Laurence's conclusion that 'in spite of fears, the house was in the main friendly, and so also were those in it.'

G God

Housman grew up in a strictly observant Church of England household with an intensely religious mother. The spire of St John's Church, just across the road from Perry Hall, 'was a presiding presence' when the children grew up here. But when Alfred's prayers failed to prevent his mother's death, he began to question his Christian faith. Within a year he concluded that God had created the universe, but then abandoned it and had no control over earthly events.

Oxford's intellectually stimulating atmosphere led to more questioning. Two poems from 1881 indirectly express a loss of faith in the church. Housman once told his sister Kate that he went on believing in God until he was 21. And after that? Carole Efrati says he definitely rejected the authoritarian God of traditional Christianity, together with concepts like Hell and damnation. But he later described himself as 'a High-Church atheist'.

We mustn't forget that the Bible provides the greatest source of images and allusions in Housman's poetry – titles such as *The Carpenter's Son*, *Easter Hymn*, *God's Acre*, and *Hell Gate* are only the most obvious examples. And the poem he wrote for his funeral does centre on a Christian model of eternity. I think that just as Housman remained

emotionally attached to the view of Shropshire on his western horizon, so he remained emotionally attached to his early religious upbringing.

H Homosexual

When I fell in love with A.E. Housman fifty years ago, I knew nothing about him. But his pessimistic view of life expressed in carefully polished rhyming stanzas attracted me. There's a lesson here. You can drink and enjoy Housman's poems 'neat' without any biographical information. But biographers and critics, in the past few decades, have spilled much ink over Housman's homosexuality. The subject spices up a quiet orthodox life spent reading, writing, deciphering, emending, thinking and lecturing.

But is it helpful to use the word 'homosexual' when discussing him or his poetry? Alan Hollinghurst's preface to his Faber edition of the poems refers to 'the homosexual foundations' of *A Shropshire Lad*; Keith Jebb's short biography has a chapter titled 'Sexuality' because, he says, 'the issue is central to the poetry'; Michael Tait, in the Housman Society journal, claims 'It would be difficult to overstate the impact on his work of Housman's homosexuality.'

I instinctively groan at these approaches. It's little use to speculate on how Housman behaved sexually, or if he behaved sexually at all. I want to propose that Housman's inability to act on his homosexual predisposition deprived him of love, and this is what influenced his poetry. Housman was conservative by nature and upbringing; he voluntarily subjected himself to Victorian codes of conduct. His church told him his inclinations were sinful; society told him he could be sent to jail for them. But his repressed emotions and his love for Moses Jackson were transformed by poetic inspiration in the mid-1890s. What's central to the poetry is not his homosexuality, but his inability to love openly because it was socially unacceptable, and in fact dangerous, to do so. He concluded that disappointment, discontent and disillusionment are the common lot of mankind; that most things good, beautiful or pleasurable are transitory; that mankind's same sad stories will be re-enacted down the generations. You can commit suicide or

follow the advice in *Last Poems* IX: ‘shoulder the sky ... and drink your ale.’

I Insults and Invective

Housman was notorious for harsh insults and invective, accusing other scholars of editing Latin authors inadequately and inaccurately. But the alphabetical ‘I’ could also stand for intemperate, because his scorn, sarcasm, and ridicule sometimes went beyond the bounds of reasonable behaviour. Professor Goold says that Housman became ‘pathologically hostile to colleagues’, and the severity of his criticisms of Manilius scholars ‘has few parallels in the history of learning’.

The classical scholar Robinson Ellis, who knew from personal experience what it was like to be criticised by Housman, said that ‘Housman deals his blows indiscriminately; no one is exempted; the field is strewn with the corpses of the slain.’ After Housman's 1905 attack on Ellis's edition of *Catullus* there was an outcry in the *Oxford Magazine*: ‘[Professor Ellis] is not a fair target for the ridicule of an *enfant terrible*.... We do not complain of the substance of Mr Housman's critique, but of its *tone*.... It has given deep offence in Oxford’

But here is something puzzling. In his scholarship Housman didn't care about giving offence, about causing pain or distress. But in his poetry he was full of sympathy for ‘all ill-treated fellows’ who had been defeated by life's struggles. Perhaps academic invective was the only way this repressed but essentially nice man could express anger. There was a lot to be angry about: his mother's death when he was 12, his failure in his Oxford Finals, the death of Adalbert Jackson in 1892, the death of his father in 1894, ‘the great and real troubles of my early manhood’, and living with ‘the laws of God, the laws of man’. Some of that anger went into his poems, but there was an awful lot left to go into his invective.

J Jackson, Moses

What if Moses Jackson had written a memoir about his friendship with Housman? Here are some possible excerpts.

We often talked, before Finals, about Hous obtaining a Fellowship with his first-class degree. Oxford would do, Cambridge might be better. When he failed the exam, it was terrible. Pollard and I wouldn't think of celebrating our Firsts. Everyone was embarrassed.

I never expected Hous to follow me to the Patent Office. When he shared lodgings with Ad and me in Bayswater, we enjoyed walking and talking together, just as we had at Oxford. But as time went by Hous began to cling to me. He spoke often about Theseus and Pirithous, how they loved each other, as men loved each other in Greece's heroic age. Sometimes, while I was reading, he would stand and gaze at me, then apologise and walk away while blaming 'this cursed trouble'.

I began to realise that there was something wrong here. I finally told Hous he was getting into deep water; I couldn't help him but I didn't want him to drown. Soon after that, he left Talbot Road. We shook hands – stiff and formal. 'Goodbye,' I said, 'forget me.' 'I will, no fear,' he replied.

How strange, almost ridiculous, that he dedicated his book on Manilius to me. It is his life's work, his bid for lasting fame. Fame never concerned me. After some moderate success as a college principal in India I migrated here, to Canada's western wilderness. Oh, perhaps I too wanted a monument, built with my muscles not my mind, built from the cold stony earth of Vancouver.

I shall ask Rosa to send Housman my letter opener if I die before he does. I never could hide from Rosa the unbreakable

bond between Hous and me. My request will displease Rosa.
But I know that the letter opener will please my old friend.

K Knowledge

Exactly 120 years ago this month Housman began two decades of teaching at University College London by delivering the annual lecture that launched each new academic session. It was a *tour de force*, exciting and relevant to staff from all the different faculties. He argued that all men possess a craving for knowledge and that the desire for knowledge is good because it brings happiness. 'Let a man acquire knowledge ... for itself ... because it is knowledge, and therefore good for men to acquire.'

He refused to suggest that knowledge is useful. It is not a coin to be used to purchase happiness – no, '[it] has happiness indissolubly bound up with it.' Even painful knowledge is worth having: 'it must in the long run be better for a man to see things as they are than to be ignorant of them.' But he admitted that there are times when knowledge can be 'injurious to happiness, because it compels us to take leave of delusions which were pleasant while they lasted.'

He conceded that many people will prefer these delusions, but knowledge is 'the least perishable of pleasures; the least subject to external things, and the play of change, and the wear of time.' Housman practised what he preached. In his 74th year he wrote to Percy Withers to say that he was not well, but he was reading 'Lecky's *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, from which I learn much that I did not know.'

L Love

For this letter in the alphabet I rejected Latin, London, Ludlow, Laurence, *Last Poems* – and chose Love. Housman chose love. With Moses Jackson he chose the love in Shakespeare's sonnet 116: The love that 'looks on tempests and is never shaken' ... that 'alters not' with Time but continues 'even to the edge of doom.' He chose love for many *Shropshire Lad* poems. The love lyrics in the first half depict a

progressive awareness that love is painful, transient, one-sided. In the earliest love poem, ASL 5, the courting lad wonders ‘Why must true lovers sigh?’ In ASL 10 there is hope that love won’t be in vain: ‘For lovers should be loved again.’ In ASL 13 the wise man is correct: love brings only sighs and ‘endless rue’.

The images darken when five poems deal with unrequited love. In ASL 14 the speaker loiters alone by the road, feeling drowned, having ‘lost for everlasting/ The heart out of his breast.’ ASL 16 is about ‘the lover/ That hanged himself for love.’ In ASL 17 the speaker is ‘the son of grief’. In ASL 18 he is no longer in love and therefore quite himself again – as if love is an illness. ASL 21 (‘Bredon Hill’), and ALS 25, 26 and 27, are about the impossibility of lasting love in a world blighted by death.

As for Housman and real love in the real world with real people, we know little – and perhaps there is little to know beyond a dedicatory poem in Latin to Moses Jackson, described as ‘a brave and brief companion’. This brings me nicely to Marcus Manilius, author of the text in which the dedication appeared.

M Marcus Manilius

Housman’s greatest single textual work was his five-volume edition of the *Astronomica* by Marcus Manilius, a first-century Latin poet. This long poem is about astrology and Manilius’s Stoic beliefs. The five books of the *Astronomica* had been lost for 1,000 years. When they were discovered the manuscripts were barely intelligible. What a challenge for a textual critic – to find out precisely what Manilius had written. Like Sherlock Holmes, who needs impossible cases in order to show off his skills at detection, Housman needed a very corrupt manuscript to show off his skills. Despite editions by Scaliger and Bentley, the *Astronomica* provided the best chance for Housman to establish an unassailable reputation. Elucidating Manilius became his consuming passion. Between 1903 and 1930 he published, at his own expense, 400 copies of each book.

Two things surprised readers of Book I. First, a 28-line poem in Latin dedicating the volume to an M. J. Jackson, described as ‘my comrade’ who has no respect for books like this. Second, 75 pages of sustained abuse and savage criticism of Latin scholars. Housman came to see the *Astronomica* as a monument to his intellect and skills. I had never seen the work, until I made a recent visit to the Bodleian Library. I piled the five volumes up, one above the other. There it was – Housman’s monument. Manilius’s star is on the rise today. Oxford University Press recently published not only the first edition in English of the *Astronomica*, but also two academic books about Manilius and his work.

N The Name and Nature of Poetry

The year: 1933. The Kennedy Professor of Latin has just delivered the prestigious Leslie Stephen Lecture at Cambridge University’s Senate House. Writing it had caused him ‘anxiety and depression’ (his words, not mine). Afterwards he claimed ‘I don’t like the lecture’. But the rest of the world did. Cambridge University Press printed 3,000 copies of *The Name and Nature of Poetry* and soon had to print another 7,000. It was praised by literary critics and editors in both America and Britain.

There are several reasons for its success. First, its stylistic clarity and simplicity. T.S. Eliot noted in his review that ‘Housman is one of the few living masters of English prose.’ Second, the surprise for listeners and readers when a man known for his shyness, reticence and remoteness unburdened himself almost intimately. Third, a vigorous and provocative analysis of the subject accompanied by sound-bites such as:

The peculiar function of poetry was not to transmit thought, but to transfuse emotion.

Poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it.

Poetry has little or nothing to do with intellect; it is more physical than intellectual.

Here were definite ideas that poets and professors, students and literary critics, could latch onto and discuss. Fourth, when he proclaimed that his poems began with a sensation in the pit of the stomach, Housman was mocking the literary critics who tested poems by their intellectual content. His poems ‘would flow into my mind’ in the afternoon, ‘the least intellectual portion of my life’ after I had ‘drunk a pint of beer at luncheon’ and while ‘thinking of nothing in particular.’

O Oh (or O)

The best place to learn about a writer’s vocabulary is in a concordance – a book that indexes the principal words, or sometimes all the words, in a literary work. We are lucky to have *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Poems of A.E. Housman**, listing every word Housman used, how many times he used it, and where he used it. Housman was extremely fond of Oh and O. In the *Concordance*, Oh and O take up a total of 14.5 inches. The words are used 34 times in the 63 poems that make up *A Shropshire Lad*. In Housman’s total output of approximately 175 poems, 24 of them begin with Oh – that’s 15 percent. For example:

Oh, when I was in love with you ...

Oh were he and I together ...

Oh hard is the bed they have made him ...

Oh, sick am I to see you, will you never let me be?

Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers ...

Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?

What effect might Housman be trying to achieve with this word? It’s colloquial, it’s conversational. We all hear sentences starting with Oh when talking to friends, family, colleagues. When a poem starts that way it makes us feel that the poet is talking directly to us, or perhaps we are overhearing a conversation that is taking place.

Oh is used to express strong emotion, such as anger, fear, sorrow or pain, sometimes with an element of exaggeration or mock exaggeration. It is also used as an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. Oh makes the words that follow it sound spontaneous, as if they are tumbling out of

the speaker. Finally, Oh can solve a poet's metrical problem by providing the unstressed syllable before the stressed syllable of an iamb.

*(Tokyo 1971, compiled by Yutaka Takeuchi)

P Pollard, Alfred W.

In 1877 Pollard and Housman won Classics scholarships at St John's College. As well as sharing lectures and a staircase, they went for walks, played tennis, wrote for the undergraduate magazine, and in their final year took lodgings together (along with Moses Jackson) outside of the college. It should have been a close and lifelong friendship. But when Pollard received a First in Greats he stopped seeing Housman, fearing that his presence would remind Housman of his own failure.

After Oxford, Pollard became a well-known and respected editor, bibliographer and librarian, enjoying his job as the successful Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum. He only had infrequent contact with his old friend but, in two particular instances, this was extremely important for Housman's academic and poetic success. In 1890 Pollard asked Housman (then a Patent Office clerk) to contribute to a book he was editing, titled *Odes from the Greek Dramatists*. Housman produced three brilliant and much praised translations. These translations, as well as the glowing testimonial that Pollard wrote about Housman as part of his job application, landed him a professorship at University College London two years later. Then, in 1895, when Housman was thinking about publishing his poems, he asked Pollard to find out if his own publisher, Kegan Paul, would produce *The Poems of Terence Hearsay* at Housman's expense. Pollard read the manuscript and agreed to the plan, but suggested a new title – *A Shropshire Lad*.

Pollard, Housman and Moses Jackson were re-united only once after their time at Oxford. In 1898 they dined together and stayed overnight at Pollard's house; on retiring, one or possibly two of them found an apple-pie bed.* In 1923 Housman opened his heart to Pollard for the first time, in a letter saying: 'Jackson died peacefully on Sunday night

... Now I can die myself: I could not have borne to leave him behind me in a world where anything might happen to him.'

* Wiktionary: 'A short-sheeted bed in which a sheet is folded back on itself halfway down as a practical joke so that the victim cannot get into it.'

Q Quatrain

Housman loved the quatrain poem. The word comes from Latin and French – meaning four. A quatrain is a stanza of four lines. This stanzaic form was used in ancient Greece and Rome, and is still popular today. In *A Shropshire Lad*, 48 of the 63 poems are comprised of quatrains. That's about three-quarters. And three-quarters of the poems in *Last Poems* and *More Poems* also use quatrains.

Quatrains rhyme! Sometimes two rhyming couplets – aabb – are combined to create a quatrain. Sometimes alternate lines rhyme: – abab. This was Housman's favourite rhyme scheme. For example, here is the first quatrain of 'Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries':

These, in the day when heaven was falling,
The hour when earth's foundations fled,
Followed their mercenary calling
And took their wages and are dead. [LP XXXVII]

In some of his quatrains, Housman used an abcb rhyme scheme (which, by the way, Wendy Cope seems to prefer).

If truth in hearts that perish
Could move the powers on high,
I think the love I bear you
Should make you not to die. [ASL XXXIII]

A majority of Housman's quatrain poems are written in tetrameter or trimeter lines that alternate. This means that lines of four metrical feet, or stresses, alternate with lines of three metrical feet, or stresses. Here is

an example, from ASL XVIII, in which I'll stress the stressed syllables as I read it:

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles a-round the won-der grew
How well did I be-have.

R Richards, Grant

Grant Richards was Housman's publisher. He was also one of the few people Housman enjoyed being idle with. The friendship survived Housman's occasional outbursts: 'At the present moment my feelings towards you are much embittered by the discovery that your last small edition of *A Shropshire Lad* contains 15 errors, some of them filthy.' Richards was born in 1872, possibly with printers' ink on his fingers. His father was an Oxford don and his uncle was one of the examiners who had failed Housman in Greats. After leaving school Richards worked for a wholesale bookseller and then for a literary journal. He started his own publishing company when he was only 24.

As a publisher he had a real flair for finding new authors. He was the first publisher of John Masefield, G.K. Chesterton and Alfred Noyes. He published *The Dubliners* by James Joyce when no one else would. He was also innovative – publishing travel guides and books for children. But his publishing fame rests on a series called World's Classics – inexpensive hardbacks of reprinted fiction, history and philosophy. His editorial genius, however, was not matched by his business acumen. He was twice declared bankrupt and had to sell the entire World's Classics series to Oxford University Press. When he delayed paying authors their royalties, many of them found another publisher. But Housman stuck by him and even lent him money. Richards says in his autobiography that 'the greatest moment in my life as a publisher was when I opened the manuscript [of] *Last Poems*.... I will go further and say that no publisher alive has had a greater thrill.'

S Shropshire

The title that Alfred Pollard chose for his friend's small volume of poems has had big repercussions: Housman's name is permanently linked with the county of Shropshire. He is remembered today primarily for a book of poems that refer to Ludlow, Wenlock, Shrewsbury, Hughley, Clun. The memorable title probably increased the popularity of the volume – making First World War soldiers nostalgic for their own counties. It brought visitors to a western county that, until 30 years ago, was well off the beaten track. The title also set biographers on a chase: how well did Housman know Shropshire? He gave away very little: 'I do not know the county well, except in parts.'

Strictly speaking, only one quarter of the poems refer to Shropshire towns, hills, rivers or historical events. Some of these references are inaccurate; because he refers to the Hughley church steeple we all know it never had one. Where his descriptions are accurate, the information probably comes from Housman's 1879 edition of Murray's *Handbook for Shropshire and Cheshire*.

The human landscape of Housman's Shropshire is certainly not an accurate portrayal. How could there be a county peopled only with murderers, soldiers, criminals, jilted lovers, and suicide victims? His Shropshire is a stage set on which characters act out their tragic fates, and where he explores themes of lost love and early death. He believed that the function of poetry is to transfuse emotion – not to transmit topographical or sociological information about a real English county.

T Textual critic

For Housman, the emendation of classical texts was an intellectual search for truth, and his life's work. He spent long hours of concentrated study, correcting errors passed down by scribes hundreds of years ago when they were making copies of even older manuscripts. Housman peeled away centuries of error, to reconstruct the original text. In Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*, the young Housman sees himself as a scientist, just like Moses Jackson. Textual criticism may not be useful like electricity is useful, the fictional Housman tells Moses, 'but it's

exciting, really and truly, to spot something – to be the first person for thousands of years to read the verse as it was written.’ Immense skill and knowledge were required, but Housman played this down in his lecture on ‘The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism.’ ‘Knowledge is good, method is good, but one thing beyond all others is necessary [to be a textual critic]; and that is to have a head, not a pumpkin, on your shoulders, and brains, not pudding, in your head.’

Housman's output as a textual critic was substantial. His classical papers cover 1,300 pages. His reputation is awesome. According to classics scholar Colin Leach, writing in the Housman Society journal: ‘As an emendator of corrupt texts, Housman had ... no twentieth-century rival.’ But let’s leave the final word to a student of Housman's, in the UCL *Union Magazine*:

There was a Professor of Latin,
Who honoured the chair which he sat in.
In preparing a text
He was never perplexed,
When to strike this word out and put that in.

U University College London

Here are three surprising things. First, Housman’s inaugural lecture at UCL is still very relevant today, and could be usefully read by all those involved in educating the nation's children. What is the good of learning, he asked? He demolished the claims traditionally made that knowledge is useful for advancing science and for promoting the arts. Then, with confident superiority, he argued that learning is good in itself, and there is pleasure in exercising one’s natural faculties.

The second surprise is Housman’s wide-ranging administrative activities at UCL. He served on several Senate committees concerned with a multiplicity of subjects, and he wrote reports for quite a few of them. He became a Life Governor in 1897. Two years later he was elected to a seat on the Council and began regularly attending three

standing committees. He was vice-dean of the Faculty of Arts and Laws and then he became its dean.

The third surprise: Housman was again ragged by one of the UCL students. A poem titled 'The Emendation' appeared in the March 1906 *Union Magazine*. A student, boasting about his own emendation, seeks praise from his betters:

Where were Scaliger, Porson and Bentley?
And Housman – ah! where wandered he?
(Yet with him I should wish to deal gently,
That he may deal gently with me.)
Has he ever in his books or his lectures
Once chanced on a comment so fine?
(But I'm ready to praise his conjectures
If he will do justice to mine.)

V Vocabulary

I want to highlight Housman's inventive, original, unusual use of words. First, his choice of adjectives: the labouring highway, the glancing showers, the springing thyme, yonder heaving hill. Second, his use of unexpected verbs: the beech trees 'stain the wind with leaves' [LP 40]; the hawthorn will 'charge the land with snow' [ASL 39]; the gale on Wenlock Edge 'plies the saplings double' [ASL 31]. Third, his invention of compound epithets: the sky-pavilioned land; the still-defended challenge cup; yon twelve-winded sky; the high-reared head of Clee; steeple-shadowed slumber.

What were his favourite words? Again, by using the *Concordance*, we know that top of the list is die, dies, died, dead and death. But there is also a frequent occurrence of the word love and its variants: loved, loves, lover, lovers. Also frequently used are friend, friends, friendless, friendly, friendship. There are many a heart and hearts, and many a lad and lads. The words men and man recur very often while woman and women rarely appear (the ratio is 14 to 1). Finally, it was a surprise to

discover that he was so fond of negatives, with no, not and never appearing more often than I would have guessed.

W Wilde, Oscar

Wilde and Housman both read Classics at Oxford University. Housman arrived one year before Wilde left. But Wilde, unlike Housman, left with a rare double First and the prestigious Newdigate Prize for Poetry. And Wilde was flamboyant, mercurial, irreverent, supremely self-assured – very unlike Housman. Their paths crossed at Oxford, but only through their poetry. In Tom Stoppard's play Wilde asks AEH: 'Did we meet at Oxford?' 'No,' replies Housman, 'but we once had a poem in the same magazine. Mine was for my dead mother. Yours was about the recent atrocities in Bulgaria.'

Fourteen years after Oxford their poetic paths may have crossed again. Most biographers believe that the emotions aroused by the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895 inspired some of the poems Housman wrote at this time. Their poetic paths definitely crossed a year later when Robbie Ross recited some *Shropshire Lad* poems to an imprisoned Wilde, soon after it was published. When Wilde was released, Housman sent him a copy of the book.

There was another crossing of paths when Wilde sent a letter to Laurence Housman: 'I have lately been reading your brother's lovely lyrical poems, so you see you have both given me that rare thing, happiness.' In a second letter to Laurence, again praising *A Shropshire Lad*, Wilde said he was working on 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol'. Richard Perceval Graves speculates that Wilde's famous poem was inspired by some of the *Shropshire Lad* poems. A copy of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* was found in Housman's library after his death. Their final meeting, a permanent one, is in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. On the window above Chaucer's monument, the Wilde and Housman memorial panels are adjacent to each other.

X Xaminations

Housman read the four-year Classics course at Oxford. In the first two years ('Honour Moderations') the focus was on Latin and Greek. Housman excelled at this, and got a First in the Moderations exam in 1879. The second half of the course ('Greats') was about ancient history, and moral and political philosophy. Housman had no interest in such matters. He failed the Greats exam. Why did he fail? Even the omniscient Paul Naiditch admits defeat over the great Greats puzzle. Here are some possibilities. Greats encompassed a challenging range of classical authors and intellectual disciplines but, according to Professor Gow, Housman didn't like abstract thought such as moral philosophy. Pollard said 'it was psychologically impossible' for Housman to deal with subjects that didn't interest him. He virtually ignored the Greats syllabus because he became increasingly interested in the problem of restoring ancient texts which had been corrupted through the centuries. He spent his time studying and analysing the writings of the Latin author Propertius.

Just before Greats, the Corpus Professor of Latin, Henry Nettleship, gave some lectures on Housman's passion, textual criticism. Did these lectures, and his own work on emending Propertius, divert Housman's attention? Housman could be intellectually arrogant; did he think studying was unnecessary? If so, he made a mistake. Oscar Wilde set aside six weeks for intensive reading and purchased a book with advice to students on how to answer exam questions.

Pollard recalled being told that Housman wrote practically nothing on some of the papers. Was this petulance? Was he thinking that if he could not get a First he would rather fail? Pollard thought Housman must have written enough for a Pass. Did the examiners know Housman was scornful of them, and failed him to teach him a lesson?

No time to study? Pollard and Jackson went home during Easter vac that year. Housman did not. He stayed in college, almost alone and undisturbed, with plenty of time to study. His infatuation with Moses? Yes, he admired Moses, enjoyed his company, perhaps was falling in

love. Did that make him incapable of thinking and writing? Remember Paul Valery's advice to biographers: you must pretend not to know the things that would happen but haven't yet happened. Six days before Greats, Housman learned that his father had a stroke and was desperately ill.

Y Youth

Perhaps through fiction we can imagine how the death of Housman's mother when he was 12, and then his father's re-marriage two years later, affected his youth. Worcestershire's great novelist Francis Brett Young wrote about similar experiences in his autobiographical novel, *The Young Physician*. He describes Edwin Ingleby, 13 years old, arriving home from boarding school, desperate to see his very ill mother. But his mother's sister Laura won't allow him to see his mother until tomorrow. He has to sleep at a neighbour's house and when he returns next morning this is what happens:

Aunt Laura sat at his mother's desk writing letters.

'Edwin, my poor dear,' she said, holding out her hands to him. He took no notice of her hands. 'She's gone,' he said, 'in the night?'

'Yes. In the night. She passed away quietly. It's a dreadful blow for us, Edwin, we must be brave.'

He hadn't time for sentiments of that kind. 'She was alive when I came yesterday. And you wouldn't let me see her. You, of all people. She hated you. She told me so. She always hated you, and she'd hate you for this more than anything.'

'Edwin,' she cried, 'don't say these terrible things.'

'They're true. I wish it were you who were dead. It was you who stopped me from seeing her. Damn you.'

'Edwin, you don't know what you're saying. You're cruel.'

'Cruel. I like that. Cruel. You talk about cruelty.'

Three years later Edwin's father announces that he is getting married.

[Edwin] ran upstairs to his room, where he flung himself on his bed in the dark. In a little while he found himself sobbing. He could not define the passionate mixture of resentment, jealousy, shame and even hatred, that overwhelmed him. He made a valiant attempt to think rationally. It wasn't his business to decide whether his father should marry again.... [But] the thought of a strange woman in the house, treading in the places where his mother's steps had once moved, swept him off his feet again.

Z Zoological Housman

Housman's comic poems are often about animals. As zoology is the science that deals with animals, this A to Z ends with Zoological Housman. In his imaginary menagerie you will find a crocodile, elephant, tiger, grizzly bear and African lion; smaller animals include a cat, a toucan, spider, oyster, ant, midge, gnat and bumblebee. Three mythical creatures also appear – the unicorn, cockatrice and amphisbaena.

The amphisbaena was referred to by the Roman poet Lucan, and mentioned in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. Dr Johnson's *Dictionary* described the amphisbaena as 'a serpent supposed to have two heads, and by consequence to move with either end foremost.' Housman wrote 'The Amphisbaena' in 1906. It was originally published in the UCL *Union Magazine*.

The Amphisbaena

'In the back back garden Thomasina
Did you recently vociferate a squeal?'
'Oh! I trod upon an amphisbaena,
And it bit me on the toe and on the heel.
Yes it bit me (do you know)
With its tail upon the toe,
While it bit me with its head upon the heel.'

‘How excessively distracting and confusing,
Pray what, Thomasina, did you do?’
‘Oh! I took the garden scissors I was using
And I snipped it irretrievably in two.
And it split with such a scrunch
That I shall not want my lunch;
And if you had heard the noise no more would you.’

‘And where, Thomasina, are the sections
Of the foe that you courageously suppressed?’
‘Oh! they ran away in opposite directions,
And they vanished in the east and in the west.
And the way they made me squint
It would move a heart of flint.
And I think that I will go upstairs and rest.’

E.M. Forster and A.E. Housman

By Richard Malone

E.M. Forster wanted to get to know A.E. Housman. No doubt he detected a kindred spirit in the author of *A Shropshire Lad* and *Last Poems*. Unfortunately for Forster, the hoped-for friendship was not to be. Housman was 20 years his senior and had a formidable reputation. Some managed to get through his ring of reticence but Forster was not one of the lucky ones.

One attempt by Forster to reach out to Housman was made during one of the Clark Lectures he delivered in Cambridge in early 1927, subsequently published that year as *Aspects of the Novel*. These lectures were delivered at Trinity where Housman had been Kennedy Professor of Latin since 1911. In the second lecture, called 'The Story,' Forster said:

Neither memory nor anticipation is much interested in Father Time, and all dreamers, artists and lovers are partially delivered from his tyranny; he can kill them, but he cannot secure their attention, and at the very moment of doom, when the clock collected in the tower its strength and struck, they may be looking the other way.¹

When I read this years ago I was mildly surprised and slightly indignant for Housman's sake that there were no inverted commas around, nor any attribution of, the words "the clock collected in the tower its strength and struck," which readers of this Journal will instantly recognise as being taken from Housman's poem 'Eight O'Clock' (*Last Poems* 15). At the time I put this down to the fact that *Aspects of the Novel* was published in 1927, well before the adoption of what is now the usual practice of documenting such books with a full apparatus of comprehensive footnotes, endnotes, acknowledgements and cross references.

¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Edward Arnold, 1927

Recently, though, I was reading a book by Sir Frank Kermode called *Concerning E.M. Forster* in which he writes about these lectures and the book in which they were published, and here I came across the following:

The book [*Aspects of the Novel*], though short, is curiously dilute; Forster had no intention of boring his audience. If he could not please Dr Leavis [F.R. Leavis had expressed reservations about Forster's reputation and work] he could be happy that A.E. Housman was among his auditors; he paid him the graceful compliment of an unheralded quotation, as if to say that his other hearers ought also to recognise the lines from his poem 'Eight O'Clock'...²

This of course immediately struck me as entirely plausible: the words in the lecture can indeed be read not as a purloined, unattributed turn of phrase but as 'a graceful compliment' to Housman who was listening. Let us hope he took it that way. One can perhaps imagine Forster glancing in Housman's direction as he spoke, but if he hoped the compliment might lead to a friendship between the two men, he was to be disappointed. No such relationship ever developed or flourished. Kermode writes:

If he [Forster] felt he would enjoy or profit by knowing someone, or if he enjoyed a book and wanted to thank the author, he would sometimes make the first move himself... He did not always prosper; one notable failure was his approach to A.E. Housman. Indeed, he felt so hurt and rebuffed by Housman's response to one of his letters that he said he "destroyed it after one rapid perusal."

Kermode goes on to say more about the awkwardness of the contact between these two men and relates the occasion when Forster found himself "sitting uneasily" next to Housman at dinner in Trinity. The

² Sir Frank Kermode, *Concerning E.M. Forster*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2009

conversation did not go well and in Kermode's words, "...they never spoke again, even when meeting by chance in a Cambridge street."

The lives and predilections of these two men might have led one to suppose that they had enough in common to develop a rewarding friendship, but perhaps it was the very things they had in common beyond literature, which they may well have sensed even if they had been unable to discuss them openly, which made that impossible. Soon after reading *Concerning E.M. Forster*, I happened to turn to Bill Goldstein's book *The World Broke in Two*, about literary events in 1922. In this book Goldstein writes that:

Nineteen twenty-two is a dividing line in literary history. *The World Broke in Two* tells the story of 1922 by focusing on four legendary writers, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence, who were all similar and serendipitously moved during that remarkable year to invent the language of the future.³

Goldstein cites four books, namely *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Waste Land*, *A Passage to India*, and *Kangaroo*. This is not the place to go into the momentous literary developments so well covered by *The World Broke in Two*, but it did occur to me that it might have contained more than a very brief passing reference to another noteworthy if rather different literary event that year. That was the arrival of the keenly awaited second and last book of poems published in his lifetime by A.E. Housman, some 26 years after *A Shropshire Lad*. Housman, of course, was never motivated 'to invent the language of the future.' For him, writing poetry was not a mission to change anything; it was what he described as a personal secretion which could not be denied. *Last Poems* did not challenge the literary world nor did it intend to. But it did something surely at least as important in adding a number of abiding poems to the priceless treasury of lyric poetry in English.

³ Bill Goldstein, *The World Broke in Two*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

Finally, the mention above of Virginia Woolf tempts me to add the following footnote. Woolf may not have liked Housman's poetry but the esteem in which he and his work were held by the time of his death is clear from the following extract from her letter to Julian Bell from Monks House, Rodmell, on 2 May 1936 [Woolf's spellings and grammar]:

I get the most astonishing elaborate letters from poet Eliot; who is now the titular head of English-American letters since the death yesterday [it was actually on 30 April] of Housman. Did you know him? Do you like his Muse? I dont altogether; why, I cant say. Always too laden with a peculiar scent for my taste. May, death, lads, Shropshire. But they say he was a great scholar..."⁴

They do indeed.

Editor's Note:

The Housman Society is publishing a Centenary Edition of *Last Poems* in 2022. There will be an Introductory essay by Edgar Vincent, commentary on the poems by John Cartwright, and a Foreword by Sir Andrew Motion.

⁴ *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead. The letters of Virginia Woolf Volume VI: 1936 – 1941*, The Hogarth Press, 1980

Thule and Juvenal xv 112

By Andrew Breeze

Editorum in usum. With this expression from AEH's edition of Juvenal in mind, we discuss the island of Thule mentioned in its fifteenth satire. Like Atlantis or El Dorado, Thule is an old mystery, despite references by many writers: Pytheas, Vergil, Strabo, the Elder Pliny, Tacitus, Claudian. But only the first of these, a courageous navigator of the fourth century BCE, knew the place at first hand. That has not stopped commentators ever since from locating the island somewhere or other in the North Atlantic or beyond. It has been a long wild-goose-chase, yet what follows is an attempt to prove that Thule existed and that its name has an explanation.

The reasoning is this. Writing on (one hopes) the masculine principles set out in Housman's 'On the Application of Thought to Textual Criticism', we try to show that 'Thule' was Iceland and that the name is a corrupt form of Greek θυμέλη or *thymele*, meaning 'altar; raised stage or platform'. The term was suggested by the island's south coast, with high and level cliffs of volcanic rock, taken as resembling a Greek temple's *thymele* or altar; perhaps the one in the temple (excavated after World War II) at Marseille, where Pytheas came from. His name *Thymele* early on lost a syllable through scribal error, and by the time of Vergil (d. 19 BCE) and Strabo (active after 21 CE) had become 'Thyle' or 'Thule'. Hence, in Juvenal's fifteenth satire, the line *De conducendo loquitur iam rhetore Thyle* (112). Crazy by rhetoric, people talk of a school for it in Thyle or the world's end.

Now for the evidence. The earliest surviving mention of Thule is in book one of Vergil's *Georgics*, where the poet flattered Augustus with the words *Tibi serviat ultima Thule* (30). May even Thule, at the ends of the earth, obey you. An early editor here quoted Strabo, who (despite calling Pytheas a liar) relayed his comments on Thule as an island,

close to a frozen sea and taking six days to reach from Britain.¹ Thanks to Vergil, Thule was known to Juvenal, who used its name to ridicule a mania for rhetoric.²

The standard account of that name is still that of Rivet and Smith, who say this. Strabo has the forms Θούλης and Θούλην. Greek initial *Th-* and a Greek-style declension were followed by most Latin writers, with *Thyle* or *Thule* as the usual spellings. The name is ‘obviously very ancient; no origin or meaning can be suggested for it’. Nor was the island a British one. When Tacitus or Ptolemy used it of the Shetlands, they did so merely because ‘any hitherto unknown land beyond the Orkneys’ would naturally be called *Thule*. When the Shetlands were seen in the distance by Roman navigators, Tacitus called them ‘Thule’.³ But that should not mislead us.

Since then, Thule has been defined as ‘perhaps Iceland, and proverbial for the northernmost point of Ocean’.⁴ It is noted too that ‘many facts clearly appropriate to Britain itself’ (such as an absence of ‘some cultivated crops’ due to lack of ‘clear sunshine’) were misapplied to Thule.⁵ On what the name means, however, philology remains silent.⁶ In contrast is research on the reception of Ptolemy (including maps showing Thule) by ancient and medieval scholars.⁷

So various things are certain. Thule was a northern island; it took six days to reach from Britain; near it, the sea froze. Iceland being 570

¹ *P. Virgilii Maronis Opera*, ed. Phineas Pett, rev. edn (Oxonii, 1820), 30.

² *D. Iunii Iuvenalis Saturae*, ed. A. E. Housman, 2nd edn (Cantabrigiae, 1931), 139.

³ A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (Princeton, 1979), 42, 473.

⁴ Virgil, *Georgics: Books I-II*, ed. Richard F. Thomas (Cambridge, 1988), 74.

⁵ S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*, 2nd edn (London, 1996), 16-17.

⁶ Patrick Sims-Williams, *Ancient Celtic Place-Names in Europe and Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2006), 178.

⁷ Patrick Gautier Dalché, *La Géographie de Ptolémée en Occident* (Turnhout, 2009).

miles from Cape Wrath (in north-west Scotland), this accords well with the six days needed to reach Thule. We can say more. Iceland had no inhabitants until Vikings came in the ninth century. It was anonymous until Pytheas and his men arrived. Its ancient name is therefore due to him, and must be Greek. Yet 'Thule' (although declined as a feminine noun) corresponds to nothing in Greek vocabulary. Implication: the form has suffered scribal corruption and become unintelligible. If, then, we seek a Greek feminine noun declined like *Thule* and resembling it, our troubles may end.

There is one word only that makes sense here and it is *thymele*, meaning 'a place for sacrifice, an altar'; also (in the Athenian theatre) an altar-shaped 'platform' in the orchestra, or 'raised seat or stage'. In the first sense (what matters here) it occurs often in the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides, the latter once using it in a transferred sense (*Iphigenia in Aulis*, 152) of the Cyclopean walls of Mycenae, taken as altars built by giants.⁸ If Euripides could use it of a stronghold, Pytheas could use it of an island.

Yet why should Pytheas think of Iceland as *thymele*, '(island called) altar'? It may be said that the word was well known. There is even a study of Greek altars with this as its title.⁹ It was also a personal name. In his first satire, Juvenal mentions a dancer called Thymele whose quaking husband made a gift of her (36) to some Roman power-broker.¹⁰ The case is strengthened on learning that ancient altars could be 'immense'. The one at Pergamum was forty feet high; others at Parium (near the Hellespont) and Syracuse were said to be two hundred yards long.¹¹

⁸ *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1889), 370-1.

⁹ Fernand Robert, *Thymélè* (Paris, 1939).

¹⁰ Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*, tr. Peter Green (Harmondsworth, 1967), 62, 66.

¹¹ F. N. Pryce and John Boardman, 'Altar', in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn, ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford, 1970), 48-9.

Such information helps us envisage Pytheas on his first sight of Iceland. The dark volcanic cliffs of the south coast (above beaches of black sand) would have an altar's slab-like appearance; and the resemblance would be the greater if mist and clouds rising from the island (to say nothing of plumes from its volcanoes, several in its southern part) reminded Pytheas of an altar's reeking sacrifices. If he called the island 'altar, the altar' or *thymele*, no surprise. Unfortunately, his wonder (and perhaps awe) on coming across land previously unknown was lost on his scribes. Hence, it seems, the corruption over three centuries from *Thymele* to *Thoule* and *Thyle* and *Thule*.

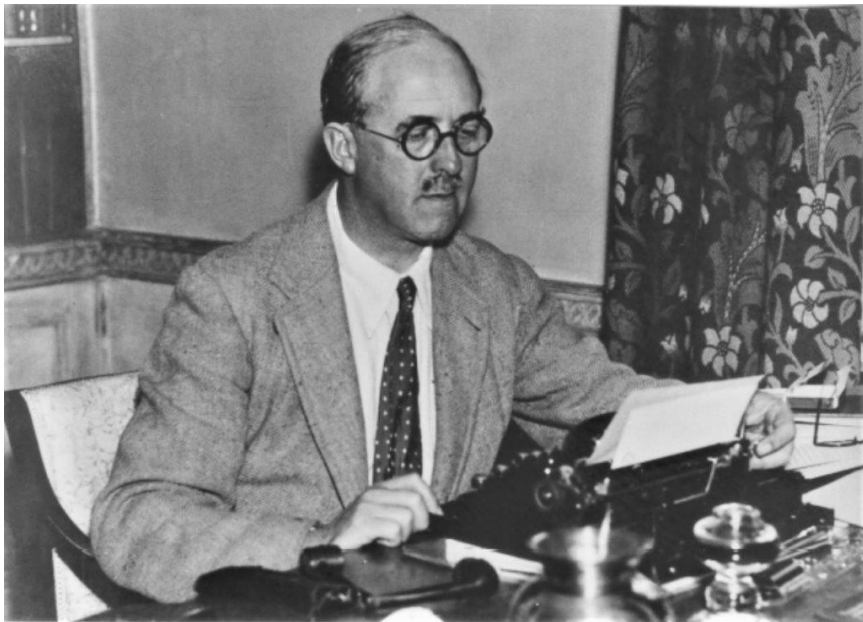
If these arguments are sound, they allow two conclusions. There can be no doubt that the place discovered by Pytheas was Iceland. An impressive achievement. Other candidates can be dismissed. He apparently called it Θυμέλη or *Thymele* 'altar (island)' from its resemblance to a temple's sacrificial altar. Erroneous and meaningless 'Thule' can be dismissed as the result of scribal corruption. There is no justification for it, any more than for 'Boadicea' in Tacitus, a queen rightly called Boudica 'victorious one, she who is triumphant'.¹² Nevertheless, anyone familiar with the ways of scholarship can be sure that, just as we still hear of 'Boadica', so also we shall hear of 'Thule' for years to come. It will be one of the many scribal monsters which disfigure editions of classical texts, histories of the ancient world, and reference books published by famous universities.

¹² Graham Webster, *Boudica: The British Revolt Against Rome AD 60* (London, 1978), 15.

A.E. Housman Meets Francis Brett Young

By Linda Hart

If there is one novelist who can be closely associated with the life and landscape of Worcestershire, it is Francis Brett Young. He was born in Halesowen in 1884. When he died in Cape Town in 1954 his ashes were brought to England and interred in Worcester Cathedral. Many of the novels that he wrote – from just before the First World War until just after the Second – were set in the West Midlands, the Black Country, and the borderlands of Wales. These are often called his ‘Mercian novels’, and as with Thomas Hardy’s Wessex novels the setting is both realistic and fictionalised. Although characters, places and events from one novel reappear in others, there is no chronological sequence; the books can be read independently and in no particular order.



Francis Brett Young

Francis Brett Young was not only an extremely prolific novelist, but also a successful one, especially during the 1930s and 1940s when regional novels were a popular genre. As his biographer Michael Hall notes, the Mercian novels introduced Worcestershire to the reading public. Brett Young was “a romantic and a realist, [and] his novels provided impressive and intimate insights into the habits, outlook, lifestyle and social conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” Brett Young’s readers learned about agricultural depression, the lives of landowners, the work of ironmasters, the coal mining and nail-making industries, increasing urbanisation, and the Worcestershire countryside. (See Michael Hall’s *Francis Brett Young*, 1997, chapter one.)

I have read approximately two dozen Francis Brett Young novels, almost all of them inexpensive copies that I found at Hay-on-Wye bookshops in the 1990s. But recently a friend showed me his copy of a book by Brett Young that I’d never heard of: *The Iron Age*. As I thumbed some pages, I realised this was not a history book about the five centuries that came after the Stone and Bronze Ages – the 500 years when our ancestors increasingly used iron for making tools. No; it was a novel set in the heart of England’s Black Country, a story about an industrial conglomerate making iron and steel in the Stour Valley.

Imagine my surprise on reading the novel properly to come across A.E. Housman and his poetry – not once but several times – in the unlikely setting of blast furnaces, gun-barrel works, collieries, heaps of slag, pit refuse, pig iron, smoke stacks, railway sidings and the largest steam hammer in England. This article introduces Housman Society members to *The Iron Age*, and shows how the author expresses some of his own feelings, and his fictional hero’s feelings, through Housman’s poetry.

Brett Young was smitten with Housman’s poetry from a young age and the poems became a significant literary influence in his life. He wrote an appreciation of Housman in 1936 – the year of Housman’s death – noting that the poet had become “a part of England’s literary consciousness.” But on a personal level:

A.E. Housman and I were born, at an interval of twenty-five years, in the same hilly corner of North Worcestershire. His 'blue remembered hills' were mine; our boyish aspirations turned towards the same green hinterland, and Severn was the frontier of our dreams. It is hardly surprising that I should have seen that countryside through his eyes and that even today his words invest it for me with a limpid and magical light.¹

Brett Young, whose father was a doctor, had himself qualified in medicine at the University of Birmingham in 1906, and then had a practice at Brixham in Devon. His long writing career began in 1913 with the publication of a novel he co-authored with his brother. He worked on *The Iron Age* (only the second book he wrote on his own) while based at two World War One training camps on Salisbury Plain. It was published by Martin Secker in 1916. This was the time when *A Shropshire Lad* was increasing in popularity, especially among soldiers heading overseas who found that a copy would fit conveniently in a knapsack or pocket.

The Mawne Works are at the heart of the novel. This is a large industrial conglomerate that had developed from various ironworks, brickworks and a colliery. Walter Willis runs Mawne and takes credit for its growth and success during his many years there. It is situated in the heart of the Black Country, in the Stour Valley. But Mr Willis tells anyone who disparages the sight and smell of soot and smoke in the Black Country that the Mawne Works are on the edge of

¹ An appreciation of A.E. Housman by Francis Brett Young in the *Mark Twain Quarterly*, Winter 1936. Readers who already know Brett Young's work may recall that there are references to Housman in some other novels. For example, in the first chapter of *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, while Mr Lucton is daydreaming about Shropshire some words come into his head:

In valleys of springs of rivers,
By Ony and Teme and Clun,
The country for easy livers,
The quietist under the sun

Part three of *Mr Lucton's Freedom* is titled "Quietist Under the Sun".

Worcestershire. He explains that Worcestershire is “just beyond the Stour. The green fringe of the Black Country.” There you will find “rolling country, thickly curtained by what is left of the Mercian forest.”²

This green fringe plays a central role in the novel; it brings together Edward Willis and Celia Stafford whose illicit love affair propels the story forward. Walter Willis’s son Edward, in his mid 30s, has spent the last two decades working at Mawne and is expected to take over from his father in due course. Celia is married to a brilliant young engineer who recently began working at Mawne. Their relationship begins when a bored Celia Stafford decides to go home at the end of a Mawne dinner party while her husband goes to his laboratory with one of the firm’s shareholders; and an equally bored Edward Willis offers to walk Celia to the Staffords’ house on a hillside above the Works.

Edward had grown up as a shy, serious, quiet, solitary boy, who walked alone every day to and from school in Halesby.³ His mother had died when he was about 9, and his father had re-married. But Edward saw little of Walter Willis, who devoted his life to the growing prosperity of the Mawne Works and viewed the company’s success as his personal triumph. From an early age Edward had an instinctive love for the “sweet enveloping countryside, smooth hills and wooded dingles which stand waiting upon the edge of that parched and blackened shell of a country.”

As a schoolboy he cycled to the summit of Uffdown,

² In G.M. Trevelyan’s 1943 review of Brett Young’s book-length poem that is a history of England (titled *The Island*) he spoke of Brett Young’s interest in England’s history, its countryside, its countryfolk, “but in particular of his love of Worcestershire and the Welsh borders where his own roots lay.” (See Michael Hall’s biography of Francis Brett Young, page 71.)

³ Halesby is the real Halesowen, a small town in north Worcestershire, where Brett Young was born in 1884. It’s now part of the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley, and is nine miles from Birmingham city centre.

a great gorse-covered dome, where in the summer the air smelt of sweet almonds and dry pods popped all day. Beneath him stretched a country dim with heat, till, in the cool of evening, when the pines sighed as with relief, at the far rim of the land, mountains appeared. Malvern, blue-black and thundery; two breaking waves of Clee; beyond them and between, hills blue and unsubstantial as cloud, pale uplands of Wales that seemed to catch the dying light when Edward had begun to shiver.

His headmaster thought Edward should go to Oxford but Edward's father rejected the idea; "when I'm old he must take my place." So Edward starts working at Mawne when he leaves school. By now he had become aware of poetry. "Keats in particular seemed to reflect ... his own adolescent sensuality." As time goes by he becomes less and less interested in the "numbing routine" at work, and the fact that making and spending money are the only things the people at Mawne care about. In brief sketches Brett Young has set up a potential conflict between Edward, the poetry-loving countryside-loving son, and his philistine father.

As for Celia, she grew up in the parsonage at Aston-by-Lesswardine, in the Welsh marches to the west of Ludlow, where she was acutely aware of her family's poverty and her own loneliness. She longed to escape, and when Charles Stafford came to Lesswardine to spend time with his cousin, the local schoolmaster, she saw an opportunity. They were married within a month.⁴ Before long he began working at the Mawne Works for Mr Willis, both of them excited about the new things Stafford was going to make out of steel. Celia, who was left alone all

⁴ Lesswardine was based on Leintwardine, a large village in north Herefordshire and close to the Shropshire border. Michael Hall's biography says that inspiration for *The Iron Age* came from Brett Young's walking holiday in 1911 when he passed the vicarage at Leintwardine. He had the idea to write a book about a girl who lived there, who would have red hair and be called Celia Stafford. Five years later a character named Celia Malpas appears in *The Iron Age*. She has thick chestnut hair, and she leaves her brother behind at the vicarage at Aston-by-Lesswardine when she moves with her new husband Charles Stafford to the industrial Midlands.

day, found that “Mawne was a backwater more remote from the stream of civilized life even than her brother’s parsonage.” She hated Mr and Mrs Willis and their friends: “These industrial people struck her as uncouth....”

As the novel progresses, so too does Edward’s disillusionment with the Mawne Works, with industrial growth, with money-making and with his father. Housman makes his first (though anonymous) appearance approximately one-third of the way through the novel, in a chapter significantly titled ‘The Cherry Orchard’. We learn that Edward and Celia develop their “companionship in discontent. For even though the springs of their discontent so widely differed, its objects were common. Mawne, its remote and stultifying isolation; the tyranny of iron that reigned under its smoky flag. These were the things which ... they both abhorred.”

One evening, after his usual walk, Edward “came down from the hills ... in a fit of severe depression.” He continued walking into the outskirts of Halesby.

Here, built high upon the bank above the Stour, stood Mawne Grange, a square manor house of brick long since degraded into miners’ tenements: and all around the house, in their foamy whiteness, the trees of the cherry orchard tossed their dusty bloom. ...A sad song of cherry blossom came quickly to his mind, the song of the Shropshire trees wearing white for Eastertide. He spoke softly the second stanza:

Now of my threescore years and ten
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look on things in bloom
Fifty springs were little room....

The melancholy simplicity of the verse overcame him. It was strange, he thought, that these weak, everyday words could be so poignant. And when, from the blindly accepted sound, he passed to their meaning, it came to him suddenly that his was a sorer case than that of the melancholy Shropshire lad. For of his seventy years more than thirty were already gone. ... With the sense of spring and its lovely transitoriness, as of wind-tossed blossom, there had swept into his mind a terror of years relentlessly passing, of life slipping away.

A few paragraphs further on, Edward hears the beam-engine “coughing and choking like a wheezy giant” as it pumps water from the Mawne pit. Continuing “on his homeward journey, from the mood of cherry blossom to others in that small book of melancholy verse, he realized, with a smile, how Celia Stafford had told him that she had lived in that country of springing rivers. Lesswardine: he even remembered the name.” He remembers Celia talking about “a swift river, flowing out of Wales; a Norman bridge, with angular embrasures; a sounding weir, and by the weir tall poplars placidly piercing a night sky; black alders and the aspens heaving their ‘rainy sounding silver leaves’.”

Edward falls ever more deeply in love with Celia; he lays awake all night thinking of her.

The passion that was within him denied him sleep ... He loved her very name. He loved her in her cruelty as in her kindness. He even loved the image of her which he had never known, the picture of her girlhood in that lonely parsonage in the valleys of springs of rivers. ‘I should have loved her then,’ he said. ‘Why didn’t I know her then?’

In the passage above Brett Young has borrowed, without attribution, “valleys of springs and rivers”. But as the novel is drawing to a close *A Shropshire Lad* appears by name for the first time. Edward and Celia have decided to run away. They plan to take a train to the Teme valley line, and eventually reach Salop, a place “in which they could so easily

hide themselves.” As Michael Hall points out in his biography of FBY, the English-Wales border was Brett Young’s Arcadia, “a retreat to which both Brett Young and his characters would regularly make their escape....” His characters often sought spiritual renewal in the Herefordshire/ Shropshire borderlands; they sought inspiration west of the Severn.⁵ Edward goes to his room to prepare for an immediate departure.

He looked round the room to see if he had missed anything in his packing. On a sudden impulse he picked from the bookcase at his bedside the slim volume of *A Shropshire Lad*, remembering that it had been with him on the night when first he realized his love, and thinking that there were things in it which he would read to Celia in their hiding-place, over in the mountains behind the pale hills of those hallucinated Marches.

Those of you who have read some of Brett Young’s Mercian novels will know how movingly and accurately he can describe the landscape – both natural and industrial. As Edward leaves Mawne to catch the train that Celia will be on, for their journey to Llangollen, “The day was of a peerless beauty, heavy cumulus in the sky and under the trees a dapple of summer sunshine...” But Edward was leaving behind a “blighted landscape” where “the stacks of collieries pierced the sky.” There were “heaps of slag and cinder [and] mounds of refuse.”

Due to an error made by the guard, Edward and Celia are sitting at the very end of the last coach of the train (hence the chapter title, ‘The Last Coach’). At Ludlow this coach is disconnected from the train because it is being used for a wartime funeral (the lovers had not noticed a coffin at the other end of the coach). Edward and Celia are forced to

⁵ In his preface to another novel, *The Black Diamond*, Brett Young wrote that “In the summer of 1911, I had brooded and walked much about the upper waters of the Teme – perhaps with a great deal of *A Shropshire Lad* in mind, and not unnaturally, for A.E. Housman, born, as I was, under the shadow of the Clents, had found a westward escape by the same paths.”

spend a night in Ludlow as there are no more trains that night. They find accommodation at an inn where some recruits are preparing to enlist and go to war. Celia is extremely nervous because she grew up in nearby Lesswardine, and someone working at the inn might recognise her. She decides that running away with Edward was a mistake. So after dinner, while he is in the lounge, she packs her belongings, leaves her luggage in their room, and walks out of the inn. She plans to make her way to Lesswardine and stay with her brother at the parsonage.

Edward comes upstairs and finds that she has gone. He tries to explain the situation to the landlord, who tells him to leave immediately. “Saddled now with Celia’s luggage as well as his own, he made his way to the more fashionable ‘Feathers’.” There he took a room and had a drink with two businessmen discussing the impending war with Germany. Then he went to bed and tried to sleep, but he was worrying about Celia – where had she gone? He heard

the gentle tune of the Ludlow bells; and these again reminded him of the poems which at the last moment he had slipped into his pocket. Line after line came into his head, and ran there automatically, endlessly repeated. It seemed to him that their maddening jingles took a prophetic turn. Even though the idea sounded so much like nonsense it was curious how certain words which had never before meant much to him flamed at him through the darkness. ... He wished that he had never known the poems; for he couldn’t think, and the memory of them swarmed into the void spaces of his mind.

As soon as it was light Edward went out for a walk,

for he felt that exercise might help him to see his case more clearly. He crossed the Teme by Ludford bridge, and climbed the hill beyond. He saw the smoke stand up from Ludlow and mist blow off from Teme, and the lovely wistfulness of that small town with its slender tower rising above the castle steep against the comb of Cleve made him see the worrying verses in

perspective. ... Indeed the words had the same effect of distance and of tender melancholy as the Ludlow chimes, like still sweet voices coming from distances filmed with azure, full of regret for nothing in particular. He remembered one of the more courageous, for it had a marching rhythm which tempted his steps returning:

Leave your home behind, lad,
And reach your friends your hand,
And go, and luck go with you
While Ludlow tower shall stand.

And it came to him that this, like some of the others, was a soldiering song. Of course. That was the reason why so many of them had twisted themselves into his night thoughts. For today it seemed as if all the world were rushing into war. Like the Shropshire Lad, on his idle hill in summer, he heard distant drum-taps – ‘drumming like a noise in dreams.’ ... He found himself responding to the thrill, and again the poet helped him:

Far the calling bugles hollo,
High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow:
Woman bore me ... I will rise.

Edward heard people around him talking of impending war. He realised that a “universal catastrophe” had effaced for him “the memory of the day before; for nothing smaller could have been of any use. It was the feeling that he ought really to be in the thick of it which made him book [a ticket] to London.”

There he joined the crowds in Fleet Street who knew that war had just been declared. He welcomed it. “He didn’t really mind whether he lived or died so long as life or death offered him a chance of escape from his own misfortune.” He was conscious that “one of the grand catastrophes of history should have come to help him in the solution of his small

personal troubles.” He wasn’t thinking of patriotism or national honour when he “walked into the recruiting office at the Horse Guards....”

This is the last we hear about Edward and whether he survives the war.

Brett Young ties up the loose ends in a final chapter cleverly titled ‘Mars Ex Machina’. Edward’s father and sister Lilian realise that he has run away with Celia Stafford. Charles Stafford has been in London for a few days, looking for a new job after learning about his wife’s love affair. On his return he receives a letter from Celia saying she has gone to Lesswardine and will never be coming back to him. In the novel’s final scene Walter Willis learns that war has been declared. He pours himself a glass of champagne, “thankful” at the news. In this “iron age”, as Brett Young calls it, the Mawne Works can provide almost everything needed to fight a war.

Francis Brett Young isn’t the first or last novelist to use the words of other poets to express his own feelings or the those of a fictional character. But he probably does this more frequently than other novelists. The length and frequency of his quotes from Housman in *The Iron Age* make Edward Willis a character I admired and understood.

From Michael Hall’s biography one learns that Brett Young was also a musician and enjoyed setting poetry to music, a way of expressing emotions through the words of another writer. He set poems by Housman as well as Shelley, Tennyson, Robert Bridges and William Watson, among others. One reason he enjoyed doing this was that his wife Jessie, a professional singer, could sing the words to his accompaniment. Hall reminds us of Shakespeare’s vision of the lover singing the ballads of others in order to declare his passion. He says that “other people’s poetry remained a dominant means of expression for Brett Young’s fervour and declaration of his feelings.” As evidence he quotes Brett Young himself saying that on his way home to Halesowen, after visiting his wife-to-be in Alvechurch, he had:

trudged along with my head full of love and hope and anxieties
– till the steady swing of my walk resolved itself into the metre
of a poem by Housman, and I mentally repeated it a hundred
times:

White in the moon the long road lies
That leads me from my love.⁶

⁶ Michael Hall, page 79, quoting *Francis Brett Young: A Biography* by J. Brett Young, page 162. Hall also notes that “Brett Young frequently sang his settings of Watson or Bridges or Housman, his hearers knowing most of *A Shropshire Lad* by heart.”

Book titles borrowed from Housman's poetry

By Peter Sisley.

In my Housman collection I have a 1966 letter from Tom Burns Haber, the Housman scholar, to another academic, Henry Darcy Curwen, where he remarks, "I note that there has been no falling-off in the number of books named by phrases chosen from his poetry. There are eighty at this date; one has to go back to the Bible and Shakespeare to find a more productive source."

Twenty years later in words written by the great Housman collector, Seymour Adelman, in the catalogue of the Housman Exhibition at Bryn Mawr College Library, he makes a similar observation. "Housman has my thanks for the five decades of quiet fun it has been to spot Housman phrases become part of the language. And to watch for newly-published books that bear titles filched from his lines."

And since Adelman wrote those words the 'filching' has continued apace these last thirty years with instances being noted occasionally in the *Housman Society Newsletter* and *Housman Society Journal*. Earlier this year, in the Shropshire monsoon season, I spent three wet afternoons compiling a lengthy, though not comprehensive, list of these titles. This listing has not been produced scientifically nor with any of the knowledge, tools or special facilities available to professional researchers. Put simply I have merely used my extensive knowledge of Housman's poetry to select memorable lines and phrases which I have then searched on the *Abebooks* website and recorded the results. The flaw in this technique is clear to see, for if the site is not advertising a particular book on the day of the search no entry can be made.

Thus, while what follows can be viewed as a bit of harmless fun I have nevertheless attempted to prepare it in a careful fashion and I have not listed titles which predate the Housman poem from which a borrowing could be assumed, or which, in my opinion, are more coincidental than

actual. Likewise I have rejected titles which have appeared in previous Society listings such as Simon Evans' *At Abdon Burf* [Heath Cranton, 1932] because Housman never used those exact words and cannot claim copyright on place names. I have used the usual abbreviations for the source of the poems. The publication date shown is the earliest displayed on the website on the day.

If anyone would care to join the fun and add titles to this list I can be reached at <sisley.ladywood@talk21.com>

Against the fall of night. [MP45]
Frederic P. Miller, Alphascript 2010.

Air of Other Summers. [LP39]
John H. Rubel, Key Say Publications 2001.

An Air that Kills. [ASL40]
Andrew Taylor, Hodder and Stoughton 1995.

Anger in the Sky. [LP19]
Susan Ertz, Hodder and Stoughton 1943.

Angry Dust. [LP9].
Eric Maschwitz, Constable 1926.

Angry Dust: An Autobiography. [LP9].
Nikolai Gubskii, William Heinemann 1937.

Angry Dust. [LP9].
Manjeri S. Isvaran, Shakti Karyalayam 1944.

Angry Dust. [LP9].
Dorothy Stockbridge, Doubleday 1946.

Angry Dust. [LP9].
Norbert Coulehan, National Press 1948.

Angry Dust: The Poetry of A.E. Housman. [LP9].
Oliver Robinson, Bruce Humphries 1950.

Angry Dust. [LP9].
Clement R. Hoopes, Devin-Adair 1967.

Proud and Angry Dust. [LP9]
Kathryn Mitchell, University of Colorado Press 2001.

Ashes under Uricon. [ASL31]
Audrey R. Langer, Saga Publications 1989.

And Beacons Burn Again: Letters from an English Soldier. [ASL1]
Henry Jesson, Appleton-Century 1940.

The Beguiling Shore. [LP1]
D.F. Gardiner, Constable 1930.

Ben-Oni: Son of Sorrow. [ASL44]
Agnes Scott Kent, Thomas Nelson 2007.

The Blue Remembered Hills. [ASL40]
Ivy Deane, Robert Hale 1965.

The Blue Remembered Hills. [ASL40]
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Perry Hall, Bromsgrove: the history of a house

By Julian Hunt

Whilst Perry Hall was not the birthplace of A.E. Housman, it was the home at which he spent his formative years and where his adored mother, Sarah Jane Housman, died on his twelfth birthday. After a brief residence at the Clock House, some five miles north of Bromsgrove, his family returned to Perry Hall and remained there until his father's death in 1894. Given that he spent his adult life in London and Cambridge, his 'happy highways' surely led to Bromsgrove and his famous weather-vane was not at Hughley but on the steeple of St. John's Church, Bromsgrove, which he could see from the garden of Perry Hall.

Bromsgrove's most revered family was that of the Talbots of Grafton Manor, situated just two miles west of Perry Hall. In 1617, its owner, George Talbot, a Catholic priest, inherited the title of Earl of Shrewsbury from a distant cousin. His great nephew Francis, the 11th Earl, died in 1667 after his famous duel with the Duke of Buckingham over Anna Maria, Countess of Shrewsbury. Although Perry Hall was not in the same league as Grafton Manor, its occupants always enjoyed a superior status in Bromsgrove. The earliest resident we can identify with Perry Hall is George Lowe of Bromsgrove, yeoman, who made his will 29 March 1602, providing for 16 grandchildren, offspring of his four daughters: Jane wife of John Partridge, Marjory wife of William Cole, Joan wife of Martin Cottrell and Anne wife of Paul Darby. His will was proved in London 2 May 1602 by his son Roger Lowe. We know a little of Roger Lowe as he was aged 50 in 1621 when he gave evidence in a court case regarding the ownership of Bromsgrove's corn mill.¹ Roger Lowe is mentioned in the will of George Talbot, 9th Earl of Shrewsbury, as one of the gentlemen who were to distribute the five pounds which he left to the poor of Bromsgrove. Roger Lowe supported the King in 1642. He was said to have had the bells rung to raise the town against Parliament, and helped to raise horses and money, giving £400 himself for the

¹ Worcestershire Record Office (WRO) BA 9135 Ref:850 Box 20

King.² At the close of the Civil War, his property was sequestrated by Parliament, but later restored to his widow Frances Lowe. Roger Lowe made a will before his death in 1646 appointing his wife Frances and his brother Humphrey Lowe as executors. The will was contested by ‘Jane Tilt alias Partridge niece by the sister of the said deceased.’³

Perry Hall descended to a cousin, Humphrey Lowe of Cakemore, Halesowen, whose family had the management of the Lyttelton family iron works there. Humphrey Lowe had married Alice, sister of Sir Richard Shelton, who was Solicitor General 1625-34 and M.P. for Bridgnorth in 1626 and 1628. Lowe was Shelton’s executor in 1648. Lowe’s son Humphrey matriculated at Hart Hall, Oxford, in 1637, aged 17, and was a student at the Inner Temple in 1639. Humphrey Lowe died in 1655 and was buried at Halesowen, 17 April 1655. Administration of his estate was granted to his son Humphrey Lowe,⁴ who had married Katherine Jenkinson at Bromsgrove in 1654. Their son Thomas Lowe was baptised at Bromsgrove 18 April 1657. This Humphrey Lowe was sheriff of Worcestershire in 1657.

In 1662, John Barnesley of Barnesley Hall, Bromsgrove, died leaving his heavily mortgaged property to two executors, his friends Humphrey Lowe of Bromsgrove and Leonard Simpson of Bewdley. The Barnesley Hall lands were absorbed into Humphrey Lowe’s estate in Bromsgrove. Lowe went to live in Coventry, leaving his friend Leonard Simpson as the tenant of Perry Hall. William son of Leonard Simpson matriculated at Pembroke College, Oxford in 1664 aged 13; John his younger son entered the same college in 1676 aged 16. Leonard Simpson paid tax on seven hearths in the Bromsgrove’s Town Yield in 1666. Both Leonard Simpson and Humphrey Lowe were prominent in the dispute with John Grobham Howe, Lord of the Manor of Bromsgrove, in 1674. Howe had sought to curtail his tenants’ common rights on the Lickey, a 1,000 acre

² Committee for Compounding, 18 February 1651

³ P.C.C. Wills 2 December 1646

⁴ P.C.C. 19 November 1655

tract of moorland in the north of the parish.⁵ In 1675, Humphrey Lowe paid chief rents on 22 properties in the Manor of Bromsgrove, including those described as ‘Mr Barnesleys Land.’ Leonard Simpson of Bromsgrove Esq. made his will 3 January 1683 making bequests to his wife Elizabeth and sons Leonard, William, Humphrey, Joseph, Benjamin and James. He left to his son Leonard £300 still owing to him by Henry son of John Barnsley and he cancelled a debt of £2,000 owed by his son William. He left to his daughter Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Lowe, the nominal sum of 20s. and to his unmarried daughter Sarah £400. Humphrey Lowe of Coventry Esq., in his will of 26 September 1684, left his daughter Margaret £2,000 on condition that she did not marry William Simpson son of Leonard Simpson; if she did then she was to receive only £100. This clause does not necessarily mean that his daughter would displease him by marrying Simpson, only that her doing so would reduce his need to support her. As we will see, William Simpson, as a successful lawyer in London, remained in close contact with the Lowe family.

The new occupant of Perry Hall after the deaths of Leonard Simpson and Humphrey Lowe was Humphrey’s son Thomas Lowe. He was High Sheriff of Worcestershire in 1686. In the 1690 assessment, Thomas Lowe headed the list for Town Yield, paying the large sum of £5 1s. 0d. His wife Elizabeth and four children Elizabeth, Katherine, Mary and Thomas were rated together at 5s. 0d.; Sarah Simpson (probably his sister in law) was rated at 1s. 0d. and his servant Jo Palmer also at 1s. 0d. A monument to the Simpsons in Bromsgrove Church was recorded by Nash:

Elizabeth widow of Leonard Simpson Esq., died February 6th 1718 aged 89. Sarah Simpson their daughter died August 31st, 1729 aged 63.

In 1700, Thomas Lowe leased the manor of Chadwich in the north of the parish from the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, Oxford. He

⁵ Howe v Simpson, TNA C 8/207/87; Howe v Lowe, TNA C 8/207/87

moved to a newly-built house at Chadwich in 1706,⁶ vacating Perry Hall in favour of his newly married son, Humphrey Lowe.

Thomas Lowe's son and heir was Humphrey Lowe who matriculated at Queen's College, Oxford, in 1695 aged 17. In 1706, Humphrey Lowe married Rebecca, eldest daughter of Benjamin Jolliffe of Coften Hall. The marriage settlement involved the whole of the Lowe family holdings in Bromsgrove, including Barnsley Hall and Perry Hall, the latter being described as:

All that Capital Messuage or mansion house wherein the said Thomas Lowe now dwells with the appurtenances together with all houses outhouses edifices barns stables cowhouses coach houses buildings gardens orchards curtilages courtyards foldyards backsides lands meadows leasowes closes and pastures thereunto belonging

Benjamin Jolliffe contributed £3,500 in cash to the settlement and Sir William Simpson of the Inner Temple, as a party to the transaction, ensured that the Lowe family got a good deal.⁷ Humphrey and Rebecca had seven children, including Humphrey (1706-56) who inherited Chadwich Manor from his grandfather; Margaret (1712-1810) who married Rev Other Philpott, Rector of Pedmore; Thomas (1713-64) who was Chaplain of Chelsea Hospital; and Ann (1719-95) who married Henry Vaughan Jefferys of Worcester, surgeon.

Humphrey Lowe died at Bromsgrove in 1727. An inventory of his household goods reveals the full extent of Perry Hall at that time. On the ground floor there was a hall, best parlour, little parlour, study, kitchen, scullery, pantries, servants' buttery, brewhouse, lower brewhouse and a dairy. Below there was a cellar and a small beer cellar. On the first floor were the great chamber, hall chamber, parlour chamber, study chamber, room over the kitchen, pantry chamber, little

⁶ Drainwater-head at Chadwich Manor, now lost.

⁷ WRO BA 10470/62

chamber, cheese chamber, nursery, a little room and Mr Haiden's room (possibly for a steward) and a room over the brewhouse. On the second floor were the garrets (with two beds, probably for the servants). Separate from the house were the stable, coach house, cart house and granary with a room over the stable and a groom's chamber. In the best parlour were 12 pictures and frames valued at £15. The books in the study were valued at £20. The room with the most expensive furnishings was the Great Chamber, where the bed and window curtains alone were valued at £15. There were also five chairs, a japanned cabinet, dressing table, looking glass, a picture, fire shovel, tongs and fender, valued together at a further £9 8s. In the coach house was a coach, a chariot and harness for four horses valued at £40. There were five horses for the team and three colts, valued along with the traces and gears at £25. There were three more saddle horses and a suckling colt, plus various saddles valued at £20. Humphrey Low's clothing and money in his purse amounted to £30. To protect all this wealth, Lowe had a pair of pistols, six fowling pieces, and a blunderbuss. Lowe's appraisers estimated that he was owed the very large sum of £1,000.⁸

Humphrey Lowe's widow Rebecca moved to Worcester where she died in 1764. In 1738, their eldest son, also named Humphrey Lowe, inherited the lease of the Manor of Chadwich from his grandfather Thomas Lowe. Although he renewed the lease on the more modern house at Chadwich, he appears to have lived at Perry Hall. He was High Sheriff of Worcestershire in 1749. About that time, a very detailed valuation of his freehold estates was compiled. It described Perry Hall and a newly built home farm adjoining the town of Bromsgrove:⁹

Humphry Low Esq Rents of his mother Mrs Rebecca Low of the City of Worcester the Mansion House Stables Coach House Dove House gardens Orchard with 2 pieces of Land one called the Oak Close one called Lamsey Stones Meadow with 4 Fish Ponds and a large Granary at £30 0 0

⁸ Inventory of Humphrey Lowe of Bromsgrove Esq WRO BA 3835 17 June 1727

⁹ WRO BA 11768/9 iv

The Homestall Farm Rented by George Dorlton upon Lease upon which there is a new built brick house, a strong brick stable 6 Large bay of Barning and the land undermentioned adjoins close to the town of Bromsgrove £46 0 0



Perry Hall, 1953

The valuation was akin to an estate agent's particulars of a property for sale. In 1752, Perry Hall was sold, along with the rest of Humphrey Lowe's estate, to Edward Knight of Wolverley, ironmaster. The new tenant of Perry Hall was Benjamin Humphreys, linen manufacturer, who had a cloth mill where the Spadesbourne Brook passes under Hanover Street. Benjamin Humphreys insured Perry Hall with the Sun Insurance Company in June 1786:

Benjamin Humphrys near the Church in Bromsgrove in the County of Worcester manufacturer & dealer in flax & hemp

On his house and offices adjoining near the Church in Bromsgrove aforesaid in his own tenure brick timber & tiled	£200
Stable & coach house only adjoining near	50
Stable & granary adjoining near	<u>50</u>
All brick & tiled except as above and hazardous goods in the above ¹⁰	300

Benjamin Humphreys died in 1789, leaving the residue of his property to his son Henry Dowler Humphreys.¹¹ Henry Humphreys was listed as a manufacturer of flaxen cloth in the *Universal British Directory* of 1792. Henry Dowler Humphreys died in 1806, leaving a widow, Susannah Humphreys, who lived at Perry Hall until her death in 1817.¹² There was a four-day sale of her household furniture and effects on 11 March 1818:

All the neat and genteel Household Furniture, valuable China and Glass, capital home-made Bed and Table linen, Books, Brewing and Dairy Utensils, handsome strong-built Gig, Set plated Harness, two narrow-wheel Carts, Implements in Husbandry, large quantity of seasoned Timber, and other valuable Effects, the property of the late Mr. Humphries of Perry Hall, Bromsgrove, in the county of Worcester. Particulars will appear in next Journal.¹³

John Knight of Wolverley may have taken the death of Mrs Humphreys as an opportunity to put his Bromsgrove estate on the market. The sale included Lickey Farm, 80a 2r 30p; Crab Mill Farm, 131a 1r 33p; Sheepcote Lauds, 69a 1r 22p; Burcot Farm, 192a 2r 34p; Red Cross Farm, 97a 1r 23p; and Perry Hall, 5a 0r 0p late Mrs Humphries tenant.¹⁴

¹⁰ LMA Mss 11936/336/518820

¹¹ Will of Benjamin Humphreys of Bromsgrove, manufacturer of linen cloth, proved P.C.C. 15 June 1789

¹² Will of Susannah Humphreys of Bromsgrove, widow, proved P.C.C. 29 Nov 1817

¹³ *Worcester Journal*, 5 March 1818

¹⁴ *Worcester Journal*, 28 January 1819

Few of these properties were sold in 1819, and the bulk of the estate remained in the hands of the Knight family until 1853. Perry Hall, however, was purchased by Isaac Burton of Loughborough on behalf of John Adams, the proprietor of Bromsgrove's worsted spinning mill. Buxton and Adams paid £1,258 for:

All that parcel of ground whereon a messuage or mansion called Perry Hall then lately stood together with the gardens orchard or paddock adjoining thereto and the ground and soil whereon the stables offices and cottages formerly belonging to Perry Hall then stood situate in the Parish of Bromsgrove County of Worcester and lying on the west side of the public highway leading from Bromsgrove aforesaid to Kidderminster and then late in the occupation of Mr Humpreys deceased

The conveyance had a further description of the property which distinguished between the site of the former Perry Hall and an existing building called the Homestall Farm:

All that site of a certain capital messuage or mansion house called Perry Hall lately taken down with the outbuildings foldyard and garden formerly occupied by Mr Lowe with a messuage or tenement late the Homestall and also part of the garden adjoining the same and likewise part of a certain close of land commonly called Wat Close or Wet Close belonging to a certain farm called the Homestall Farm formerly in the occupation of George Dorrington.

Fortunately, this highly confusing deed has a plan of the land conveyed. It shows a driveway sweeping round to a square building marked as 'House.' Between the house and the Kidderminster road is a structure running south to north, divided into compartments numbered 1-6. A key to the plan indicates that 1 and 2 are kitchens, 3 is a passageway, 4 is a stable and 5 and 6 are cottages.¹⁵ The footprint of the buildings shown is

¹⁵ Library of Birmingham Ms 3375/523



The plan on the 1819 conveyance of Perry Hall

exactly similar to that of the present-day Perry Hall (now renamed Housman Hall). It seems therefore that Mrs Humphreys had been living in the former home farm and that this humbler dwelling had taken the name of Perry Hall when the Lowe family mansion was demolished. John Adams therefore bought the 'Homestall Farm' in 1819 and made little

alteration to it. Nikolaus Pevsner, in his architectural survey of Worcestershire, published in 1968, correctly ascribed this Perry Hall to the 18th century. John Pugh, a local author who had not seen the plan on the 1819 conveyance, suggested in *Bromsgrove and the Housmans*, 1973, p. 82, that John Adams rebuilt Perry Hall c. 1824. This date came from a conveyance from Buxton to Adams, acknowledging that the 1819 purchase money came from John Adams. Pugh's error was unfortunately copied by Alan Brooks in his revised edition of Pevsner's *Worcestershire*, published in 2007.

John Adams was originally from Leicestershire where his uncle, John Coltman, was engaged in the hosiery business. Coltman was alarmed by riots in Leicester following his introduction of Arkwright's water frames to spin worsted yarn. In the hope that he had found somewhere more peaceful, he sent John Adams to Bromsgrove to set up a worsted spinning operation at the former manorial corn mill there. Adams perfected the spinning of worsted yarn and became one of the biggest employers and respected citizens in Bromsgrove. It was only natural that he should purchase Perry Hall, one of the largest and most prestigious houses in the town, especially as it was only a few hundred yards from his spinning mill.

Adams was a widower – his wife Dorothy, whom he had married in 1792, died in childbirth in 1796. Without children of his own, he took it upon himself to further the careers of his three nephews, sons of his sister Jane and the Rev. Robert Housman. He found the eldest son, John (born 1792) a position as a woolstapler in Bromsgrove. The second son, William (born 1793) was articled to a London solicitor and married Mary, daughter of John Shrawley Vernon, the heir to Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire. The third son, Thomas (born 1795) was sent to St John's College, Cambridge, and became a curate at Kinver in Staffordshire. He married Ann, daughter of Joseph Brettell, Bromsgrove's leading attorney. The Housmans were therefore regular visitors to Bromsgrove and must have enjoyed the pleasures of Perry Hall and its extensive gardens after its purchase by John Adams in 1819. Rather late in life, John Adams married again. His bride in 1835

was Keziah, widow of the Rev. Richard Ramsden, Rector of Grundisburgh, Suffolk, from 1817 until his death in 1831. Keziah was the sister of Isaac Burton, who had been party to the conveyance of Perry Hall in 1819. She too must have been familiar with the delights of Perry Hall.

John Adams had given up spinning worsted yarn at Bromsgrove by 1824 when the mill and its machinery were put up for auction.¹⁶ He did, however, continue in business as a manufacturer of extract of indigo, a valuable dye used in the woollen industry. The dye was produced in a manufactory adjacent to Perry Hall and it appears that this structure was later adapted as a garden building. Nikolaus Pevsner mentioned the ‘picturesque ruinous wall of a 17th century house with mullioned windows.’



The ‘picturesque ruinous wall’ at Perry Hall, recently restored by Bromsgrove School.

Brooks follows Pevsner and remarks upon the round-arched doorways. These openings are very broad and their positioning side by side can hardly represent the entrance to a domestic building.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 25 December 1824.

If this building did include a wall of the ancient Perry Hall, then it is curious that there was no sign of it on the 1819 plan. The indigo manufactory is mentioned in John Adams's will of 1854:

I declare that it shall be lawful for my present clerk Thomas White if he shall think proper to purchase the whole of the stock in trade implements utensils and other articles used by me in my business as a manufacturer of the Extract of Indigo at a valuation thereof to be made ... and occupy the said building called the Long Building and the yard and shedding belonging thereto and shall pay to my trustees and executors the yearly rent of £30 his servants and workmen shall be at liberty to go and pass through the passage and gateway next the stone steps when and as often as there shall be occasion.

Thomas White did not continue production of extract of indigo at Perry Hall, preferring premises on Worcester Street, nearer to the Spadesbourne Brook.

John Adams died at Perry Hall in 1858 at the advanced age of 91. His widow Keziah died the following year, aged 75. The Worcester Journal, 1 October 1859, carried an advertisement for the sale of their furniture and effects at Perry Hall.

Bromsgrove

Important and unreserved sale of valuable household furniture, comprising Dining, Drawing Room and Chamber Suites, viz: handsome Mahogany Telescope, Centre, Pembroke, Card and other Tables; handsome Cheffioneers, Lounging and other chairs, Cabinet Pianoforte, Mahogany Couches, handsome Chimney, Toilet and other Glasses; handsome Silk, Damask and other Window Curtains; Brussels and other Carpets; handsome Mahogany Four-post and other bedsteads; Feather beds, Mattresses, Blankets, Counterpains, Books, China, Glass, Choice Cellar of Wines and Spirits, Casks, Brewing Utensils, and a general assortment of Culinary Articles and Effects, late the

property of J. Adams Esq., deceased; will be sold by auction on the premises by C. Steedman, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, Oct. 12th, 13th, and 14th, 1859. The sale to commence each morning at twelve o'clock precisely.

The Worcester Journal of 22 October 1859 reported that the effects of the late Mr John Adams, sold by auction by Mr Steedman, fetched good prices, especially the antique china, for which there was a great competition.

John Adams left Perry Hall in trust for the Housman family. His trustees laid out a new road called Perry Lane, leading south out of Kidderminster Road. Building plots on this road and on the other side of Kidderminster Road were auctioned in May 1860.¹⁷ There were few purchasers, but a local postman, Henry Brooke, paid £52 for a plot at the end of the new road on which he built a cottage, now 15 Perry Lane.¹⁸ The local builders, Thomas and Edwin Grey, later bought several plots next to the churchyard and built some larger houses, including The Hollies and The Limes.

John Adam's great nephew, Edward Housman, brought his wife Sarah Jane and their newly born son, Alfred Edward, to live at Perry Hall in 1859. Their other children Robert (1860), Clemence (1861), Katherine (1862), Basil (1864), Laurence (1865) and George (1868) were all born there. Edward Housman was a solicitor, but he preferred the life of a country gentleman. As early as 1863, he found it necessary to borrow £1,000 from a local farmer, Daniel Weaver, on security of Perry Hall:

All that messuage or dwelling house known as Perry Hall situate at or near the Town of Bromsgrove in the County of Worcester together with the offices and cottage adjoining the same and the gardens belonging thereto wherein is now included the site of a large building formerly used as a manufactory but now pulled

¹⁷ *Bromsgrove Messenger*, 5 May 1860

¹⁸ Deed to 15 Perry Lane, 26 November 1860 courtesy Rebecca Kenahan.

down which messuage cottage and gardens contain in the whole 1 acre 2 roods 6 perches or thereabouts¹⁹

One of Edward Housman's passions was growing grapes and in 1872 he patented an improved method of heating churches and hot-houses.²⁰ On the site of his great uncle's indigo factory, he built a vinery in which he could make his experiments. It would be entirely consistent with the character of Edward Housman that he should embellish his hot-house with antique-style masonry, whether it survived from the original Perry Hall or was brought to the site for decorative effect. The vinery can be clearly seen on the 120 inch to one mile Ordnance Survey map of Bromsgrove published in 1883. Its northern wall is close to and at right angles to the house, and its roof is hatched to indicate glass.

Edward Housman's first wife, Sarah Jane, died at Perry Hall on 26 March 1871. When Housman married for a second time in 1873, he moved his family to the Clock House, near Catshill, using Perry Hall only as his office in Bromsgrove. When Housman failed to pay the interest on the Perry Hall mortgage, Daniel Weaver foreclosed and advertised the property for sale:

Perry Hall, Bromsgrove to be sold by auction by Mr Cotton at the Golden Cross Hotel, Bromsgrove, on Tuesday, the 30th day of November, 1875, at Five o'clock in the Afternoon, this Commodious Residence standing in its own grounds of about two Acres. The house contains Dining and Drawing-rooms, each 22 feet by 16 feet, and 12 feet high; Library, School-room, 25 feet by 12 feet; Kitchens, Offices, and Dry Cellarage, and 8 Bed-rooms. Under the same roof, and communicating with the Dwelling-house, are 3 Rooms now used as Offices. The Premises also comprise a Vinery, 90 feet by 18 feet. Vines in full bearing; Cottage, 2-stall Stable, and Coach-house, with other commodious

¹⁹ Mortgage, Edward Housman to Daniel Weaver, 1 October 1863 Library of Birmingham Ms 3375/523

²⁰ *London Gazette*, 28 June 1872

Outbuildings. The Water supply is excellent, and the Drainage has been formed in perfect order without regard to expense. To view apply to Joseph Duffill, on the spot; and for further particulars to John Holyoake Esq., Solicitor, Droitwich; Edward Housman Esq., Solicitor, and the Auctioneer, both of Bromsgrove.²¹

The *Worcester Journal* of 4 December 1875 contains a brief report of the sale of Perry Hall at which Edward Housman bought back his own house.

Property Sale

Mr Cotton sold by auction on Tuesday, at the Golden Cross Hotel, a commodious residence known as Perry Hall, standing in its own grounds of about two acres, together with a vinery, cottage, and outbuildings belonging. There was a respectable company present. The biddings started at £1,000, eventually reaching £1,275, at which the hammer fell to Mr Edward Housman. Mr Holyoake, of Droitwich, was solicitor.

Housman was technically both vendor and purchaser in this transaction, which was a highly dubious course of action for a solicitor. He claimed to be bidding on behalf of a family friend, Edward Tuppen Wise, a clothier from Woodchester in Gloucestershire. Wise was himself in financial difficulty at the time and lacked the means to complete the purchase. The mortgagee, Daniel Weaver, was forced to offer Wise a mortgage so that the sale could go through.²² An opportunity to sell Perry Hall arose in 1876 when a committee was formed in Bromsgrove to establish a cottage hospital. Perry Hall was seriously considered as the location:

Bromsgrove. The Cottage Hospital.

The Executive Committee for establishing a cottage hospital in Bromsgrove have received an offer of Perry Hall, a residence on the Kidderminster Road, with office, cottage, outbuildings, and about two acres of land, situated very close the town, for the

²¹ *Bromsgrove Messenger*, 20 November 1875

²² Conveyance, 18 February 1876 Library of Birmingham Ms 3375/523

hospital, and they have resolved to recommend this to the General Committee.²³

As the hospital project fell through, the Housman family became embroiled in a court case known as Housman v. Housman. To resolve the family dispute, the Clock House was sold and Edward Housman's younger brother, the Rev. Joseph Brettell Housman, bought Perry Hall from Edward Tuppen Wise. Edward Housman was allowed to stay on as the tenant.²⁴ The Housman family remained at Perry Hall until Edward Housman's death on 27 November 1894:

We regret to have to record the death of Mr Edward Housman of Perry Hall which took place on Tuesday night. The deceased, who was sixty-three years of age, was the third son of the late Rev. Thomas Housman, first incumbent of Catshill, and grandson of the Rev. Robert Housman of Lancaster. Mr Housman had been for many years a trustee of the Bromsgrove Consolidated Charities and a member of the School of Art Committee. He was also prominently associated with the choral and philharmonic societies. Mr Housman held an ensign's commission in the Bromsgrove Company of Volunteers on its formation, and he was a very good shot.²⁵

Edward Housman's second wife, Lucy Agnes Housman, moved to Herefordshire and Perry Hall came on the market in 1895:

All that exceptionally good old-fashioned family residence known as Perry Hall, situate in one of the best and healthiest parts of Bromsgrove. The house contains handsome entrance hall, dining and drawing, breakfast and smoking rooms, 7 bedrooms and dressing room, with capital kitchen and other domestic offices. The outbuildings comprise coachman's cottage, stabling, coach

²³ *Bromsgrove Messenger*, 23 September 1876

²⁴ Conveyance, 11 Feb 1879 WRO BA 2379/2

²⁵ *Bromsgrove Messenger*, 1 December 1894

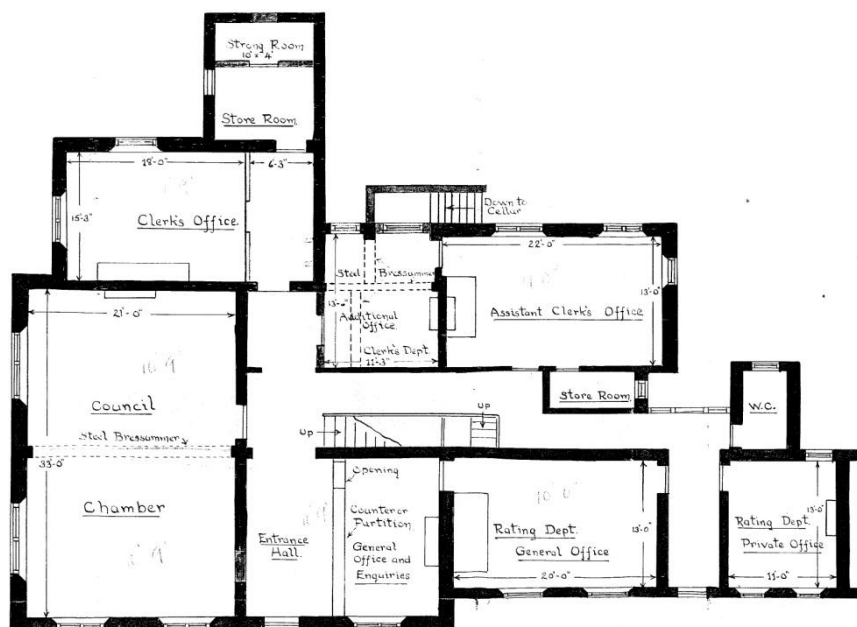
house, groom's room, harness room &c. The house stands in its own grounds of about 2 ½ acres, is near the parish church, and its distance from the station is about 1 ¼ miles. The garden is nicely planted with shrubs and trees and affords a good carriage approach to the house. A conservatory and vinery forming one range is well built and supplied with heating apparatus. There is an abundant supply of pure water and the sanitary arrangements are good. For price and particulars apply Cotton and Chappell land and estate agents Bromsgrove.²⁶

The next occupant of Perry Hall was Herbert Mander Goodman, a solicitor from Birmingham. His son, George Herbert Goodman, was born at Perry Hall, 25 November 1900. By 1908, the house was occupied by Dr Julius Henry Beilby, who had previously lived at 39 High Street, Bromsgrove, later to become Boots the Chemists. The cottage on the north side of the house was occupied by Beilby's chauffeur. During the First World War, Beilby was a Captain in the R.A.M.C. and died in Egypt in 1916. His widow Catherine lived on at Perry Hall until the late 1930s.

In 1935, plans were drawn up to convert Perry Hall into offices for Bromsgrove Rural District Council. The large room on the south side of the entrance hall was to be the council chamber, with the clerk's office beyond. The lower range of buildings to the north of the house was to be the rating department. The bedrooms were to be offices for the engineer and surveyor and the building surveyor and inspector.²⁷ The plans were not carried through and Mrs Beilby continued to live at Perry Hall until her death in 1942. Perry Hall was then sold to Charles L. Wood who ran it as a private hotel and country club.

²⁶ *Bromsgrove Messenger*, 27 April 1895

²⁷ WRO 8008/44 xxiii



Plan of Perry Hall, for Bromsgrove Rural District Council, 1935

Perry Hall Residential Hotel and Country Club was auctioned on 18 February 1953 on the retirement of the owner. The accommodation comprised entrance hall, 19ft. x 16ft.; lounge, 21ft. x 16ft.; dining room, 37ft. x 13ft.; billiard room, 22ft. x 15ft.; games room, 25ft. x 13 ft.; eight bedrooms and two bathrooms. There was a cottage adjoining the house and a garage for three cars. In 1969, Perry Hall was bought by Ind Coupe Hotels. A new wing was built, bringing the number of bedrooms up to 55.

In 2003, the Perry Hall Hotel was bought by Bromsgrove School and opened as 'Housman Hall' in March 2006, with accommodation for 70 A-level students. The Housman Society has maintained a very cordial relationship with Bromsgrove School and in 2009 a highly successful Housman weekend was held at Housman Hall to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth.

The Collector

By Peter Sisley.

I first came across the poetry of A E Housman over 50 years ago. I was in my late teens, which is the time I have learnt that one is susceptible to this sort of material and I can remember exactly the circumstances of that discovery. I was at work, in the general office of a small firm of Black Country chartered accountants and the time was 5 minutes to 1pm. About a dozen people were standing adjacent to the door, many with hats and coats at the ready. The time that one was permitted to go for lunch was 1pm and woe-betide the miserable audit clerk who attempted to sneak off before the appointed hour. He would be caught by one of the partners and propelled back into the office. The ear was the usual means that was favoured for the transportation and, standing before his colleagues, he would receive a lecture upon theft – stealing his employer's time. And so we stood waiting for the big hand to come up to the twelve.

To pass the time, more than anything else, one of the assembled company said, "O.K. you chaps who can tell me where these lines come from?" and he quoted four lines of poetry:

Oh I have been to Ludlow fair
And left my necktie God knows where,
And carried half-way home, or near,
Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer:

Nobody knew the answer to that question but I hazarded a guess. "Is it from *A Shropshire Lad*?" I said. It was only a guess but there were a couple of clues to go on. Drinking beer in quantity has always been laddish behaviour and, of course, there is the geographical clue of Ludlow. Anyway, I was correct and I won the prize which has remained with me for over half-a-century. And off we went to lunch.

Those Housman lines however stayed with me over the afternoon and when they were still in my head the next morning I deduced that I was probably being told something important, and I decided that I needed to know what came before those lines, and what came after, and how they fitted into the whole. Now in those far distant days I was even more impecunious than I am today and so that evening I visited Kidderminster Public Library and took out a copy of *A Shropshire Lad*. The edition that I came away with was a 1960's George Harrap edition, the one with the bright yellow dust jacket and the woodcut engravings by Agnes Miller Parker. That evening I read it from cover to cover which I imagine might be the way that Housman had meant it to be read. From the first lines of *1887* to the final lines on page 96, one followed the imprecise storyline and learnt a little about the moods and fancies of the Shropshire Lad. In due course I discovered that Housman had written more poetry than was contained in that volume and in due course I acquired, this time by purchase, the *Collected Poems*, the 1971 Jonathan Cape Edition with the dust jacket illustration by Joan Hassell which shows the Shropshire Lad sitting at the head of a Shropshire valley looking contemplative and wistful, perhaps wondering what's to pay.

And that might have been that perhaps, the entire poetical works covering perhaps one inch of bookshelf. Over the years that followed however, in a totally random and haphazard fashion I picked up other bits and pieces of what was to become my Housman library. There were the early Housman memories – I cannot call them biographies – by Gow, Withers, Richards and his brother Laurence, and the first editions of *More Poems* and *Last Poems*. Sometimes I obtained a new book as opposed to a second-hand one and it must have been in 1979 that I was in Mark and Moody's bookshop in Stourbridge where I discovered Richard Perceval Graves' biography *The Scholar Poet*. I took it down from the shelf and thought "yes, I'll enjoy this", and indeed I did. It was many years later after reading Paul Naiditch's review of the book that I realised that I should not have enjoyed it at all; but one can only speak as one finds. In a Ludlow bookshop in the mid 1980's I spotted a copy of the 1981 *Housman Society Journal*, the only

one of the early journals to state its identity on the spine. At this point I didn't even know that a Housman Society existed. On opening the book, I discovered the asking price of 50p written in pencil on the inside cover. Collectors, however, are used to getting stung in pursuit of their hobby.

The event that changed my Housman collecting from casual and haphazard to something of a crusade occurred absolutely by chance. It was in November 1994 that I found myself at a book fair in Birmingham – at the Medical Institute on the Harborne Road at Edgbaston. I had gone there specifically to see the organiser of the fair, Christopher Saunders from Newnham-on-Severn in Gloucestershire, who was, and remains, one of the world's principal sellers of cricket books. I had gone there to look at a couple of items of Victorian cricket literature that had taken my fancy. After I had finished my business with Christopher I thought that I would spend a few minutes wandering round the book fair. It was no different from dozens of others that I had attended. The booksellers had arrived early that morning and had assembled their musty wares on rickety shelves and had then placed themselves upon plastic chairs conveniently adjacent to their stock, all of them drinking coffee from thermos flasks and attempting the *Daily Telegraph* crossword. (That, of course, was in the old days – everything is now much changed – these days they all do Sudoko).

But as I rounded a corner of the room a different sight met my eye. The bookseller was indeed sitting on a plastic chair and was reading the *Telegraph*, but, located by his right knee was a small round table on which was placed a bookstand on which was balanced a book. Next to this was placed a manuscript note, in the bookseller's hand, which read simply "A *Shropshire Lad*, A.E. Housman, Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Company, London, 1896, the First Edition. £750". I looked at this book and I knew that I wanted it. My body told me that I needed this book. It was a totally involuntary turn of events for I had walked into that room thinking only of W.G. Grace, Gilbert Jessop and Ranjitsinji but I now realised that I had been mistaken. I needed this Housman first edition.

Most readers of this summary will know exactly how booksellers work. The price that they ask for a book is not the price that they desire for the commodity. The price had been inflated in order to allow for the haggle. This is a process whereby the potential purchaser beats the seller down from their asking price to the lower price to which the seller is prepared to sell the book. This means that the vendor gets the price he wants and the purchaser has a warm feeling that he has saved a good sum, usually between 10% and 20% on the original asking price of the book. In this instance the haggle between an experienced buyer and an experienced seller took no more than 30 seconds at which point I walked away with my first edition of *A Shropshire Lad* while the bookseller trousered his £650.

Driving back to work that Friday afternoon with my acquisition safely on the front passenger seat beside me an idle thought began to formulate in what I am pleased to call my brain. It would be rather nice, I thought, if I could get together something of a comprehensive Housman library. I had got a few bits and pieces and now I had got a first edition of his primary poetic work and so it was now only a question of filling in the gaps. Or so I thought.

That weekend I spent an hour in my library and collected together the Housman items that I had randomly acquired over the previous twenty years and placed them together on the shelves. In addition to the early lives and the biographies from the 50's, 70's and 80's there were about twenty different editions of *A Shropshire Lad*, a few secondary works containing some Housman interest and a 1981 *Housman Society Journal*. Well, I thought, it shouldn't be too difficult to fill in the missings.

More serious thought on this matter, however, showed up the obvious areas of difficulty. To have acquired forty books in twenty years meant that I would obviously have to devote more time and effort to the search. In the mid 90's there were only four standard ways that one could acquire this material. There was the local second-hand bookshop,

bookseller's catalogues, book fairs and public auctions. All of these methods had their shortcomings but there was no other way. Every town in those days had a second-hand bookshop but if one went in every couple of weeks or so it seemed that there was not a lot of variation in their stock and consequently this was a very inefficient method of acquisition. In order to try and increase my chances of success I would always engage the bookseller in conversation and hand over my business card with the manuscript addition '*A.E. Housman*' which was left with him as an aide memoir. I guess that about 2% of the business cards that I left with booksellers ultimately assisted my collecting but, this 2% I comforted myself, was 2% more than where I was before. And one or two booksellers certainly took to heart my enthusiasm for my topic.

Steven Bainbridge at Offa's Dyke Books at Ludlow was a regular call and, unlike many of my booksellers, he remembered who I was and what I was searching for. His premises were in the Bull Ring at Ludlow and you walked off the street into what appeared to be a single roomed bookshop. In the one wall, however, was a doorway which led to a tiny twisted wooden staircase which gave access to a room of a similar size above. And it was through this aperture that I would make my way every several weeks, usually on a Saturday morning. As I rounded the last corner of the staircase I would first see Steven's feet and then the rest of him would slowly come into view. The kettle would be switched on, the cigarettes would be offered and accepted, and we would talk about books.

Steven's opinion on book values was certain and absolute. I immediately realized that it was not to my advantage to question his judgment in this area because for every book that I purchased from him that I felt might have been a little expensive the next two would always seem to be ridiculously cheap. Steven was one of the few booksellers who refused to accept my business card for the simple, and honest, reason that he would only lose it. But as I have said, he would remember the brief and occasionally a Housman rarity would come my way. I remember one particular Saturday morning when I got the

subject away from books in general to Housman books in particular that he mentioned that he had been unable to find anything recently. Then his faced changed and he reconsidered matters and he thought that perhaps he had picked up something that previous evening. Off he went to the car to check. He returned five minutes later carrying an unbound copy of the Tern Press *Shropshire Lad*, number 7 of 10 copies with Nicholas Parry's hand-painted watercolours. He thought for a moment and proclaimed that this was worth £100 – and how could I possibly maintain that that was an excessive price to pay for one of the rarest of all the *Lads*.

It has always been a pleasure to receive unsolicited letters from booksellers for it gets the blood coursing in my veins and one day I received a letter from a bookseller in Birmingham. Prompted by my business card, wrote to say that he had picked up a collection of early 20th-century photographs, one of which was the Spicer Simpson 1922 photograph of Housman which was used for the medallion, the reproduction of which was ultimately published in *Men of Letters of the British Isles* in 1924. He was looking for £10 but, he said, if I was not interested then I shouldn't bother going to the trouble of replying and he would dispose of it elsewhere. This photograph, when it arrived, had a manuscript inscription on the rear "for Professor Richmond from S.A.". I knew full well who Professor Richmond was but, for the life of me, I couldn't put a name to the initials S.A. and neither could I until many years later when, loosely inserted into a book which I had purchased from Oliffe Richmond's library, was a letter from Seymour Adelman, the great Housman collector, to Richmond enclosing Housman's, now missing, photograph. The letter and the photograph are now reunited and it is little triumphs like this which make collecting such a rewarding pastime.

The next task was to set about getting my name on the mailing lists of every bookseller I could find who supplied catalogues and exactly the same letter went out to dozens of them over the next couple of weeks, and then they started arriving. The easiest ones to handle were those that listed the authors in alphabetical order because here I could quickly

establish if the catalogue had anything of interest. Without this aid the catalogue had to be scrutinized thoroughly and many a Sunday afternoon was spent upon this pleasant chore. I guess that, rather like the business cards, perhaps 2% of these catalogues proved rewarding but what joy they supplied, on those rare occasions. I recall one particular instance probably in the late 1990's when I returned home from work at about 8pm. It was midsummer and my wife was sitting outside in the garden under the umbrella which gave welcome shade from a burning sun. That day's post was on the garden table and I immediately noted the bookseller's catalogue which I purposely left until last to be opened. Within, in alphabetical order, I saw the words *Housman* and the description of the first edition set of his edition of *Manilius*. It was probably getting on for 9pm that evening that I rang the bookseller hoping that his address, which looked residential, was indeed so, and, as luck would have it, he was in. I tackled the haggle completely in the wrong fashion. I told him that I had been looking for this set of books for years, that I never thought that I would ever find a set and that I must have it – and, by the way, could he help me out with the price. I think the bookseller must have been not quite on his toes at that time of the evening because, most surprisingly given what I had told him, he allowed me a £50 discount and the deal was done.

Obtaining material from catalogues, however, has its own set of disadvantages. Not only is one's success rate low but many booksellers will cross you off the list if you don't purchase regularly, which, of course, is likely to happen if their catalogues do not contain your speciality subject. And then one always fears that the next catalogue after your elimination from their lists will contain that rarity for which one lusts. Meanwhile other booksellers who do not even deal in what you are looking for continue to send their offerings for the rest of time. One bookseller, who I shall allow anonymity, continues to send me his catalogues on Archaeology and English History which is not what AEH stands for.

Perhaps the most unsatisfactory of all my chosen methods was the book fairs. Living as I do in the wilds of Housman's rural South Shropshire I

have a distance to travel for even a daily newspaper. Towns that would attract a decent sized book fair mean a considerable expenditure of time and motoring costs. The ones nearest to me were along the A49. Hereford, Leominster, Ludlow, Church Stretton and Shrewsbury all held regular fairs but my 2% success rate elsewhere slumped dramatically in this category.

Sunday was my only day off from work but that day coincides with the usual book fairs and so at about 9am I would set off to somewhere like Monmouth and reach there shortly after opening time at 10am. For some strange reason one has to pay to enter a book fair. I have noticed that this doesn't happen at *Marks and Spencer's* or *Tesco*. They, quite reasonably, do not demand a fee for you to enter only for you to later discover that the product that you are looking for is not in stock. Then followed an hour or so walking round the book fair engaging those I could in Housman conversation and leaving a suitably-endorsed business card from my rapidly diminishing stock with people who probably binned them as soon as it was reasonable to do so. Back in the car and a 75-minute return drive home meant that one had written off a morning, racked up further motoring costs and further spoilt one's carbon footprint. And on the day that I was caught in a speed trap you can imagine that I was well-miffed with the course of events.

Auctions presented another set of problems in those days, primarily because there was no way of discovering which auction houses had got any interesting stock without subscribing for the catalogues, which was not a feasible route to follow with literally hundreds of auction houses. The big boys like Sotheby's, Bonhams and the like would often manage to get word on to the street with some of their big sales but an individual Housman lot in a general sale invariably came and went unnoticed. And therefore, not surprisingly, auctions were my least successful method of acquiring the material I was looking for.

And then I had a stroke of luck. The word processor which I had used for business purposes for the last few years suddenly ceased to function. Although I am certainly not a gadget man I decided that I would try one

of these new personal computers that various young folk I knew had acquired and were always talking about. They had far superior word processing capabilities than the old machine that I had worn out and no doubt it was the way forward. This would be in the year 2000 and although I knew absolutely nothing about the process I decided to try and discover something of this new internet fad that was seemingly all the rage.

After a couple of days on the internet and having discovered the antiquarian-book websites I decided that I had been a non-gadget man for far too long. I discovered *Abebooks* at about 8pm one evening and put the word *Housman* into the column designated for author and pressed the 'find' button and there I discovered more books than I even knew existed. If one put the name *Housman* into the keyword box one doubled the hits, as I believe they are called. With thousands of books to look at one could refine the search simply in those early days by listing the most expensive items first which filtered out some of the more mundane stuff at the bottom of the heap. I started making a list and it got longer and longer until at 3am, when my eyes would no longer function, I decided that I had better go to bed. I looked forward to picking up the thread again in the morning. I was back online by 10am refining my most urgent requirement list that I had prepared the previous night and by noon I was ready to spring into action. Now as I said I am not a gadget man and I have never pressed the button which says "add to basket". I always ring up the bookseller, no matter where he is in the world, and speak to him direct. Not only is it the only way to beat down the price but I can also talk to him about Housman, and it is surprising how often I have discovered further material that has not yet been advertised. And so, with joy in my heart, I commenced my on-line career with a telephone call to New York City. After a few seconds a voice with a typical American accent answered the phone. I told him my name and that I was ringing him from England and that I was a keen Housman collector and that he was advertising a book which greatly interested me. He told me that it was 7am in New York, and I have to admit that given the excitement concerning this Housman treasure in a far-off land I had not for the tiniest moment considered things like

international time zones. However, it was fortunate that here was a bookseller who traded from home and was there to take my call and he took my order in good spirit. I don't know whether New York booksellers wear night caps and gowns but that is the way I pictured him punching in my credit card details on his handheld ATM. One down, many, many to go but I had to leave it another five hours before I tried to ring the United States again.

Since that first experience I have religiously searched Housman on at least a daily basis with a number of second-hand book websites, and the only real difficulty that I have experienced with this policy has been trying to beat down the price on an item which has only been up for sale for ten minutes while adopting the stance of a casual take-it or leave-it buyer.

As I have said I do not understand technical matters and therefore it probably took me about two years to stumble upon internet auction alerts, but this discovery has again opened up access to a whole new area to enhance my collection. Back in those days there was a monthly fee of £5.95 to register for this service which is now totally free and I am notified of any Housman or Houseman material (I estimate a 90:10 split) for sale anywhere in the country and in selected overseas territories. And so, without paying for or searching through catalogues this desirable material is placed before me for my consideration and I can then telephone-bid to *Tenants* in Carlisle or *Beales* in Exeter without even moving from my desk.

The final piece in the online jigsaw has been the *Ebay* auction which a late-starter like me discovered at about the same time as the auction alerts. I have heard that *Ebay* is much despised by serious booksellers but as a means of obtaining material it has been invaluable to this collector. In simple terms, in the early days, it created a market place for material of very little financial value, selling books so cheaply that it could only ever be a cottage industry. But for the collector, someone who feels that he needs a copy of every pocket edition of *A Shropshire Lad* that has ever been issued, this has been the best method of bringing

the product to the purchaser. In any other area of the sales process it just would not be worth a professional seller's time to accurately describe a book which is only ever going to be sold for a pound or two. But the early *Ebay* sellers were not professionals; they were, as *Ebay* intended, the man or woman at home making a little pocket-money by selling items that were beneath the dignity of booksellers. And, it must be said, that many vendors on *Ebay* knew not what they were selling and thus I have picked up some priceless material for really no price at all. But that was in the early days and things are not what they were on the site which has been taken over by commercial undertakings selling on a *Buy it Now* model rather than the auction model and the number of private sellers, perhaps now realizing the work/return ratio is poor, (I am obviously only talking about Housman material) is now much diminished.

And, before leaving *Ebay*, which has contributed over 200 items to my Housman collection, I should perhaps explain that unlike a conventional auction where the bidding continues until it is unchallenged, on *Ebay* a strict time limit is set for the conclusion of bidding. And, I must tell you, this is where the fun, or sometimes despair, comes in. Either you have to leave your final killer-bid to within one-second of the deadline and hope that no one overbids you with half-a-second to go, or you adopt the 'Sisley Method' by bidding a sum that will never be overtaken. To explain: the *Ebay* bidding system works on the same basis as a conventional auction's 'commission bid' and *Ebay* will accept that portion of your bid that will acquire the lot at the lowest cost. Thus, if I am bidding on a lot that I might consider would make £30 or £40, perhaps £50 I have always been reluctant to bid £60 or whatever in case some other bidder might have selected £67.39p as their top bid. And so I have always selected a sum such as £278.45 as my killer bid. Of course, I realize that if someone else is also using their version of the 'Sisley Method' one of us will pay a high price for our acquisition – but it's not happened yet.

As I write these few words in the autumn of 2020 it is over a quarter-of-a-century since I purchased the 1896 *A Shropshire Lad* that started this

adventure, and much, very much indeed, has changed in the world of book collecting. I recall my old pal Steven from Offa's Dyke Books telling me that when he started business in Ludlow in the 1970's there were over twenty shops in the town that sold second-hand books. When he closed his shop about 15 years ago to concentrate on trading from home via the internet there was just one second-hand book shop left. Now that *Swifts* in Mill Street has closed there are none, and what has happened in Ludlow is mirrored across the country. For specialist book collectors like me, however, there are now more opportunities than ever before to obtain material. But for the chap (also like me) who likes to browse in a bookshop, well, things will never be the same again.

Editor's note

The above is an extract from *A.E. Housman: A Collection and a Commentary*, compiled by Peter Sisley which it is hoped will be published in 2021.

Biographies of Contributors

Andrew Breeze PhD, FSA, FRHistS, was born in 1954 and has taught at the University of Navarre since 1987. He is the author of *The Mary of the Celts* (2008) and *The origins of the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi'* (2009), as well as numerous academic papers and reviews. His latest book, *British Battles 493-937: Mount Badon to Brunanburh*, was published by Anthem Press earlier this year.

Linda Hart left her native New York City in 1969 to do a postgraduate degree at Somerville College, Oxford. After teaching political science at an American university for a few years, she moved permanently to England. She has worked as an environmental campaigner and a freelance writer and editor. She founded and chaired the Friends of the Dymock Poets in 1993. Throughout it all she has read almost everything about A.E. Housman, and been a frequent contributor to the Society's newsletters and journal.

Julian Hunt is the younger son of Joseph Hunt, co-founder of the Housman Society. He was educated at King Edward's Five Ways School, Birmingham, and joined the staff of Birmingham Reference Library in 1968. His first book, *Arriving at Dinas Mawddwy*, dealing with the impact of an English landlord on a Welsh village, was published in 1973. In 1976, he became Local Studies Librarian for Oldham in Lancashire. He moved to Buckinghamshire County Library in 1988 and has written several histories of Buckinghamshire towns. He published his first Worcestershire book, a *History of Halesowen*, in 2004 and is now working on a history of Bromsgrove.

Max Hunt is the elder son of Joseph Hunt, co-founder of the Housman Society. He was educated at King Edward's Five Ways School, Birmingham, and at Christ Church, Oxford. After university he taught for ten years, becoming Head of History at Newcastle under Lyme High School. In 1978 he moved into educational administration holding posts in Derbyshire, Doncaster and Berkshire before ending his career as

Chief Education Officer for Stockport. In retirement he has been Treasurer and latterly General Secretary of the Housman Society.

Richard Malone is now retired from a career in pension fund management. He has been a member of the Housman Society since a chance meeting with John Pugh (one of the Society's founders) on a train in the Canadian Rockies in 2001.

Peter Sisley is a retired self-employed accountant who lives in South Shropshire. A life-long Housman enthusiast, he has over the last twenty-six years built up a fine collection of Housman books, manuscripts and ephemera which he is keen to expand. He can be contacted at sisley.ladyood@talk21.com

Christopher Stray has been an honorary research fellow in the Department of Classics at Swansea University since 1988. He has also held visiting fellowships at the universities of Cambridge, London and Yale, and at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. He has published on the history and sociology of classical teaching and scholarship, examinations, textbooks and institutional slang. His books include *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England 1830-1960* (1998) and *A. E. Housman: Classical Scholar*, edited with David Butterfield (2009). He is currently working on chapters for a 3-volume history of Trinity College, Cambridge.

The Housman Society and Journal

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The *Housman Society Journal*, 2021, will be published in December of that year. Articles intended for publication, or books for review, should be sent to the Editor, Julian Hunt, 58 Beamish Way, Winslow, Bucks. MK18 3EU or e-mail julianmhunt@btinternet.com

The *Housman Society Journal* is on sale to the public at £15.00 in the UK and £20.00 overseas. All these prices include postage and packing, surface mail in the case of overseas orders. For copies please contact the Secretary, Max Hunt, 7 Dowles Road, Bewdley, Worcs. DY12 2EJ or e-mail maxhunt468@gmail.com