THE HOUSMAN SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Ruth Padel's illuminating insights in 'Name and Nature' Lecture

Andrew Maund reports on the annual Name & Nature of Poetry lecture delivered by Ruth Padel at the 2011 Hay Festival on 1st June.

One of the great delights of the Society's continuing sponsorship of a lecture recalling, in title at least, A.E.H.'s seminal 1933 original is the sheer variety and originality of the lectures to which we are treated year by year. Ruth Padel's thought-provoking and committed treatment of the subject this year was no exception. Throughout the lecture, her wide reading of poets and their theories of poetry, combined with her own insights into the true nature of this most captivating of literary forms, illuminated the experience of poetry for us all.

From a poet whose most recently acclaimed work combines the life of Darwin with the poetic mode, it was no surprise that Ms Padel began with a reference to the importance of the natural world, particularly as portrayed by Housman, in its 'beautiful patient' state, like that of Ted Hughes' canvas. The emotional warmth of such a vision on Housman's part might seem at odds with the incisive mind of the classical scholar and Ms Padel re-enforced this with her dedication of the lecture to two people: the poet and the scholar for whom Charon is waiting beside the Styx at the beginning of Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*. In that play the self-effacing Housman explains diffidently that these two are in fact both him and Ms Padel set out in her lecture to consider the relation of the poet to the scholar, celebrating the 'two-ness' of that one complex psyche and the way in which different aspects of his life and thinking were kept very much apart.

That 'two-ness' is apparent, she reminded us, in the very title of the lecture: the 'name' of anything can be at odds with its 'nature', the outside with its essence. There is a desire to keep things apart in all of us, particularly as readers, seeking order out of chaos. Indeed another dichotomy that emerged through the lecture was that of writer and reader. It was as a 'reader' that Housman delivered his original lecture; as a poet herself, Ms Padel suggested that poets often become 'wriggly' when asked to talk about Poetry – they would much rather talk about poems.

Our speaker went on to suggest that there are many different ways to experience poetry. The name is the same for all, but the nature of the experience is very different. Housman's definition of the function of poetry being to 'transfuse emotion not…transmit thought' was similar to that of Robert Frost, who stressed the primacy of emotion with his description of a poem as starting, 'as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a loneliness'. Poets write poetry to discover thought, not explain it. Ms Padel reminded us that Philip Larkin also stressed the importance of emotion in poetry: the poem is the instrument of transference from writer to reader. But what, our speaker asked, is being transmitted?

For Larkin it is thought – the 'knife' side, cutting and chopping, balancing the 'fork' side of emotion. For Larkin these work together, but Housman wants to keep the knife of thought out of poetry – a knife he was only too ready to use as the scholar. For Housman, poetry is flow and fluidity, against the dryness of his classical scholarship, although, as Ms Padel then reminded us, that very classical scholarship has a 'two-ness' too. Classical scholars are either Hellenists or Latinists; the study of Greek is one of openness, it is powerful at keeping things apart, expressing contrast with the tiniest of changes. Latin, by contrast, is the great condenser, seeking economy and terseness; just as subtle, it is somehow more closed, more secret. It is perhaps no coincidence that Housman worked in Latin, searching after the correct reading of one text from the myriad manuscript versions that litter

Membership cards will be included with the September Newsletter in future to save on the rising costs of postage and to avoid having to raise the subscription more than necessary. Membership continues to run from May to May and those who pay by cheque will have received a reminder.

the centuries of previous scholarship – work 'dry as dust – but diamond, abrasive dust'.

Referring to Richard Perceval Graves' biography (which she declared a delight to read), our speaker next reminded us that the driving force of this life's work of scholarship, also behind the yearning spirit of *A Shropshire Lad,* was, ironically, anything but dry and emotionless: Housman's feelings for Moses Jackson (who never, of course, read a word of Housman's Manilius).

In *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, Housman stresses that poetry needs two things: truth of emotion and natural diction. Most of today's practising poets would agree, as would Frost, who crafted his poetry from natural speech. Housman also often mentions the natural emotional reaction to poetry, tears springing to the eyes in response to the language or the words. Poetry with a message lets both the poem and the message down. Heaney described poetry as its own reality; poetry enhances ideas, but the ideas are separate from the poetry that is transmitting them.

Ms Padel would, however, stand up for the sense of poetry as well as its sound. Using the poetry of Louis Macneice, she explored how poetry can catch, 'the present in the net of lyric form'. Quoting Lowell, she reminded us how Housman seemed in his poetry, influenced by the Boer War, to foresee the Somme and referred to her own father's pocket copy of *A Shropshire Lad*. History, like poetry, is open-ended but, in the intermingled facets of poetry – words, music and emotions - understanding is of crucial importance too. Housman feared that the pleasure of poetry would be obscured by understanding but Ms Padel insisted that there must be 'a point to the mystery – a real secret to the Sphinx'.

That mystery may well be hidden, nevertheless. For Housman poetry was a safe precinct, an inner chamber where the most intimate feelings could rest secure; it was also a physical experience – capable of raising the very bristles of his beard. Ms Padel likened poetry to sculpture – forming the molten metal or clay or exposing the object with the stone.

But poetry provides us with separation in another sense – a sense of distance, something that many may seek. For Housman it was the distance to the mythical Shropshire, glimpsed from afar in his childhood Bromsgrove. The distance of poetry can be that of memory, or the distance between name and nature, that outside and that within. Housman's Shropshire was a distant, imaginary place; the final resting place of his body, to quote Stoppard again, but somewhere where he never lived and into which he seldom set foot. Shropshire was somewhere he could reach and touch in words but could not reach in life.

Ms Padel closed her lecture with a wonderfully sensitive reading of *ASL* XL, with its paradoxical 'air that kills' and evocation of 'the land of lost content'. Throughout she had used the original lecture and an analysis of the same as the basis of her own lecture in a way not so fully or effectively done before. Throughout we were treated to her vision of the many sides of poetry and of Housman, with his belligerent attack on literary criticism, the harm of which Leavis believed would take ten years to undo.

The multiplicities of life, art, literature and poetry were explored and defended throughout her expert exposition, which closed with her description of the relationship of art and society. This, she explained, is always in flux – a 'push-me-pull-you' relationship. When society gets too close, art pushes it away; when it gets too far away, art pulls it nearer. As the audience we too were drawn into a deeper sense of the nature of art in general and poetry in particular; in this way this particular lecture addressed the subject of its title in a way that few previous lectures had done and, in my opinion at least, none so successfully before.

The full text of the lecture will appear in the next Housman Society Journal.

Bromsgrove Commemoration

Guests listening to Sajid Javid reading at the statue

Bromsgrove's new Member of Parliament, Sajid Javid, was the Guest of the Day at the Housman Birthday Commemoration held in Bromsgrove by the statue on Friday 25th March. After the ceremony the many guests gathered at the Council House where Chairman June Griffiths welcomed them for lunch.

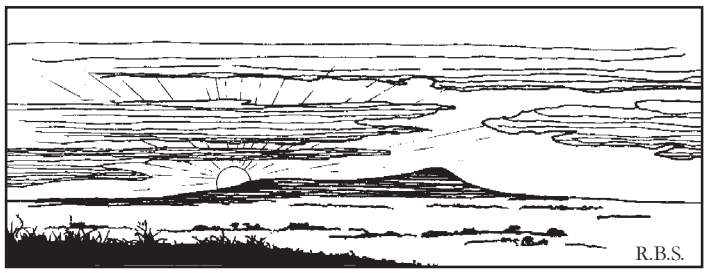
Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of the Society the Chairman reported on another positive year with all the regular events being successful and fairly well attended. Max Hunt reported on a year which had seen the Balance Sheet showing an increase in the Society's net worth of just under £1,300.

After refreshments Elizabeth Oakley gave a fascinating talk entitled 'Down with the Radicals!: The politics of Edward Housman'. She covered ground that was new to many and her interpretation of Edward Housman being what Laurence called a 'hot Tory' was intriguing. As she explained there is still much research still to be done but this was an excellent start and we hope it will lead to an article in a future Journal.

'When summer's end is nighing'

Carol Rumens wrote about* Last Poems *XXXIX in her column in the Guardian on 15th August last and has kindly agreed to its reproduction here.



This week's poem is my favourite of A.E. Housman's superbly melancholy lyrics. The poem beginning 'When summer's end is nighing' is numbered but untitled, like all the others in the 1922 collection, *Last Poems*, Housman compiled and published this collection specifically so it could be read by Moses Jackson, the object of his life-long, probably unrequited love, who, by this time, lay terminally ill in Canada.

The metre is typical of Housman's most sigh-laden style: iambic trimeter, with alternating feminine and masculine endings. His stanza form of choice is often the quatrain, rhyming a/b/c/b or a/b/a/b. But, in the current poem, he expands the a/b/c/b unit to five lines. And his 'b' rhyme gets a further rhyme, so each stanza, in effect, ends on a couplet. This extra rhyme-line gives him scope to widen the thought or heighten the emotion of the particular stanza, and to avoid the patness that a neat quatrain can have. It's the same stanzaic form he uses for the much-loved earlier lyric, *Bredon Hill*.

The fifth line may also signal a new direction, and work against the cadence to look forward to the subsequent stanza. 'When I was young and proud', the first stanza's last line, connects us to the next episode, and a remembered experience of watching the sun go down, sketched in wonderfully compressed images of the weathercock losing 'the slanted ray', and the young speaker climbing the hill for a larger view.

Curious Archaism

Housman is a poet who often seems to be on the verge of saying the conventional poetic thing, and then, in a flash, turns it in a new direction. It may simply be the matter of an unexpected phrase or even a single word. A less original poet would have chosen 'nearing' rather than 'nighing for the first-line end-verb. This is not a choice decided by the need for a rhyme, because the 'a' line in the poem never rhymes. 'Nighing' is a curious archaism: it's not even a particularly melodious word, but perhaps the fact that it rhymes with another present participle that the poem resists, 'sighing', underlies its haunting effect. Finally, the verb reappears in a different tense. This time, 'nighs' meets with its natural word-mate, 'sighs'. It's one small example of an enormous technical skill in the shaping and integration of individual units and whole poem. But this skill is un-showy. It serves something that, for Housman, was all-important to a poem: its emotion.

The device of ending with a couplet serves him particularly well in the last stanza, where the line 'And then the heart replies' suggests a fresh volume of feeling that is left to the reader's imagination. It turns an elegy for lost youth into a near love-poem, and suggests the complexity of the loss, and its difficulty of articulation.

Energy of the verse

One aspect of the art of rhyme is to avoid grammatical monotony by rhyming varied parts of speech. In the first stanza the grammatical pattern of the rhyme is noun ('cloud'), verb ('vowed') and adjective (proud). Such variation is not always followed, but it is always sufficient to create energy in the movement of the verse. In the last stanza, though, Housman rhymes three intransitive verbs – 'nighs', 'sighs', 'replies'. The repetition is deliberate. Such verbs create a strong sense of forward movement halted. This is the end of the poem, but Housman wants to say, in effect, there is more, the emotions are still working silently in my heart, though I cannot tell you what they are.

Adolescent Aspiration

While concerned with the melancholy closure of ageing, the poem conveys in parenthesis the limitlessness of adolescent aspiration. The narrative slows luxuriantly in stanza five, and pauses on the easy confidence of 'the air of other summers'. But then, all at once, it accelerates. Those awaited summers have arrived, and evaporated, remaining somehow unlived: 'They came, and went, and are not …' At this point it's absolutely clear that Housman is not writing in the comfortable afterglow of nostalgia. He is writing about a dark absence of fulfilment, now irredeemably faced in the light of 'the only end of age' – to quote a poet who learned much from him, and seems to have been temperamentally similar, Philip Larkin.

Housman was a great classical scholar, and his intimacy with Latin, in particular, dictates the shape of his poetry. He makes our cumbersome language seem graceful, flexible and swift. His enduring popular reputation over the years is partly because of his ability to express emotions of a certain universally appealing kind (*A Shropshire Lad* has been in print continuously since 1896) but also testifies to a remarkable style, both epigrammatic and musical, which produces lyric poems that are simple to remember – and simply memorable.

'Blue Remembered Hills'

A programme about the life of A.E. Housman, entitled 'Blue Remembered Hills', was performed at the Worcester Festival in August. Two well-known actors, Robert Powell and Michael Maloney, took to centre stage in the town centre's historic Huntingdon Hall. Linda Hart reports.

Robet Powell and Michael Maloney have a string of impressive stage and screen credits, and the readings of poems and letters for the most part reflected their experience and expertise. The script, written by Richard Edmonds, also included several song settings.

Michael Maloney

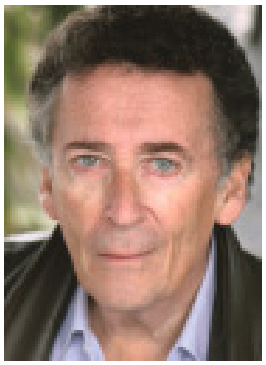
The focus in the beginning was on Ludlow, described as 'the undisputed capital of *A Shropshire Lad*'.' Messrs Powell and Maloney took it in turns to read the poems that showed us lads who plough their fields, get drunk, leave for war or go to Ludlow fair. At times I felt that Maloney's voice and enunciation were too refined (too RSC-ish) for those drunken farming lads, whereas Powell's voice was more earthy.

There were the usual remarks about Housman not knowing Shropshire (but I don't think it's true that 'after changing the title to *A Shropshire Lad* he went to Shropshire to get more local information'). Except for Housman's birth in Fockbury, there was nothing in the script about Bromsgrove. This is surprising because he spent the first eighteen years of his life there, and the Worcester Festival is aimed at a local audience.

In view of the many poems he wrote on enlistment and fighting three of these were read and made an interesting and well-read series: From *A Shropshire Lad*, 'The Recruit' ('Leave your home behind, lad....') and 'The street sounds to the soldiers' tread...' as well as 'Oh stay at home, my lad....' from *Last Poems*.

The letters that were read showed how Housman would get annoyed when his poems were set to music or included in anthologies. Quotations from his prose included the passages in *The Name and Nature of Poetry* where he describes the writing and appreciation of poetry as being more physical than intellectual – 'a shiver down the spine ... a constriction of the throat.'

Richard Edmonds' script was disjointed at times, jumping from one thing to another, without links between successive readings. Often a poem or letter seemed unrelated to the Housman story. For example: There was a reading of 'They say my verse is sad ...' from *More Poems*, published after Housman's death, and directly following this was 'Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?...' from



Robert Powell

Additional Poems also published after his death, and directly following that was 'The Culprit' from *Last Poems* (the second volume Housman put together.) Listeners would have had no idea that 'Oh who is that young sinner' had anything to do with Oscar Wilde, or that it was not published until after Housman's death. Michael Maloney shouted rather than read certain passages in this poem, but I think he should have tried to convey repressed bitterness rather than exploding fury.

The second half of the programme focused on Housman's travels.

Mr Edmonds has a penchant for sexing up the dossier so there was much about Housman's gondolier ('his passion for Andrea') and in the absence of facts there was innuendo (the gondolier 'welcomed Housman's payments which supported a large family'). And 150 people left Huntingdon Hall that night believing that 'a list of prices paid to rent boys in Paris was found among Housman's papers.' As Paul Naiditch's essay shows, nothing definite can be concluded from the 'list' that led Richard Perceval Graves to make this assertion in his biography of Housman.

The musical settings by Butterworth, Gurney, C.W. Orr and John Ireland were sung with a nice sense of style by Russell Painter, with David Gaukroger as his sensitive accompanist. David Gaukroger also composed the idiomatic setting of 'Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town', a song that suited Russell Painter's light tenor voice well. A list in the programme of the composers and the poems they had set would have been useful.

Everyone sitting around me enjoyed the performance a great deal. When I enquired of one couple whether they knew why Housman went to work in the Patent Office, I was told 'not really, but maybe it doesn't matter'. And maybe, with two fine actors on the stage introducing people to A.E. Housman, it doesn't matter. As someone else said to me, 'the readers clearly enjoyed themselves and communicated that to me'.

Members might be wondering why this event was not trailed in the Housman Society Newsletter. This was because the chairman and your reviewer only learned about it long after the deadline. Information about next year's festival can be found at www.worcesterfestival.co.uk – phone 01905 611427.

Housman Lectures at Bromsgrove Summer School

Julian Hunt reports on the first Bromsgrove Summer School, which was held from 19th to 21st of July at Housman Hall, Bromsgrove. Over 70 students enrolled for six courses, including 'Bromsgrove in the Industrial Revolution', 'Churches and Chapels of Worcestershire' and 'Bromsgrove and the Housmans'. The Summer School is a new venture by the Bromsgrove Society in association with Bromsgrove School.

The speakers at the first Bromsgrove Summer School included Chris Dyer, Emeritus Professor of Local History at Leicester University and author of *Bromsgrove: a Small Town in Worcestershire in the Middle Ages*; Alan Petford, a Lecturer in Local History at Leeds University; and Jeremy Bourne, former Editor of the *Housman Society Journal*. Other contributors included Jennie McGregor-Smith, a member of the Housman Society and author of several architectural and historical works on Bromsgrove; Jenny Townshend, Editor of the Bromsgrove Society's *Rousler*; and Julian Hunt, the organiser of the Summer School.

Some of the students and organisers of the Bromsgrove Summer School outside Housman Hall. Left to right: Pat Tansell, Jim Page, Sajid Javid M.P., Chris Nesbitt, Julian Hunt, Jenny Townshend, Jennie McGregor Smith, and Simon Carter

One of the courses on Thursday 21 July was 'Bromsgrove and the Housmans'. The title was deliberately chosen to call to mind the book of the same name written in 1974 by the Housman Society's first Chairman, John Pugh. Knowledge of the Housman family has greatly advanced since the 1970s and Julian Hunt brought us up to date with his research on John Adams of Perry Hall who, it turns out, bank-rolled several generations of the Housman family. Julian focused particularly on John Adams's nephew William Housman, who practised as a solicitor first in London and successively in Bradford-on-Avon, Tetbury, Woodchester, Salisbury and Brighton, leaving behind him a trail of bankruptcies and dissolved partnerships. A.E.H.'s father, Edward Housman, was a solicitor in Bromsgrove and was equally adept at cutting legal corners and keeping one step ahead of the bailiffs. Perhaps it was as well that Bromsgrove's new M.P., Sajid Javid, arrived too late to hear this tale of woe and instead heard Jeremy Bourne give a more scholarly account of the life and works of A.E. Housman. Sajid had lunch with the students, including Housman Society Chairman Jim Page, and Treasurer Max Hunt, before leaving for another engagement. In the afternoon, Jeremy Bourne led a tour of Bromsgrove School and showed the students where the young A.E.H. had studied in the 1870s.

The Bromsgrove Society intends to hold a second Bromsgrove Summer School at Housman Hall in July 2012.

John Adams Memorial

The Society is working with three other Bromsgrove organisations to bring the John Adams memorial cross back to its place in Bromsgrove Cemetery – see Newsletter No 28, September 2008.

The Housman Society is making an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for money to restore the memorial. There will also be a leaflet published describing the historic cemetery where so many important Bromsgrove people are buried, together with display boards at the cemetery entrances.

There are many local people who have never visited it, and have no knowledge of the many headstones for those whose names are well known to local historians. Victorians among them are Dr Collis, Headmaster of Bromsgrove School, who saved the old Hop Pole Inn (now Tudor House) from demolition, John Cotton who was architect of All Saints church, St Godwald's church and the now lost Cottage Hospital and Institute in New Road, and the Crane family who led the Ebenezer Methodist.

Bromsgrove Cemetery was opened in 1858, and amongst the first burials was that of John Adams of Perry Hall, great uncle of A.E.H., and owner of the indigo factory. Dr Collis and the Revd. Thomas Housman of Catshill (A.E.H.'s grandfather) raised funds to build a memorial to John Adams which for 150 years was the striking focal point at the centre of the cemetery. In 2007 the memorial was taken down for safety reasons, and since then has been in store. The costs of rebuilding the memorial could be up to £20,000, but those working on the scheme believe they will be able to raise this sum both from trusts and donations.

Donations are welcome and should be sent to *The Bromsgrove Society (John Adams Memorial Fund)*, c/o The Treasurer, 34 Pine Grove, Lickey, Birmingham B45 8HE.

The Rarest *Shropshire Lad* of All?

In September 2009 in issue number 30 of the Society Newsletter Peter Sisley wrote at length on the Marlborough Press edition of A Shropshire Lad, and thus it was with some hesitation that he agreed to write this review of the talk by Paul Griffin, the printer of that edition, which was given in April at the Ludlow Commemoration Lunch.

My apprehension, of course, was caused by my fear that my second article could end up reading very much like the first, but my fears were allayed upon hearing Paul's entertaining talk, for it was full of new and interesting detail and thus I have been able to put some flesh on the bare bones of my original summary.

The Marlborough College Press was set up as a Guild in 1934 as a co-curricular activity and its founders had the lofty aim of providing an insight into one of the world's most civilising crafts, and many boys went on to careers in printing, publishing and associated trades. A boy would be taken on as an apprentice and, having passed a number of tests, became a printer; after further examinations he could become a master printer with some privileges; and from the master printers were chosen the foreman printers who were responsible for running the press. This hierarchy was headed at Marlborough by a Master of the Chapel.

The Press is renowned for some fine pieces of printing, all set and printed by hand on hand-made paper, including *The Litany or General Supplication* (which His Majesty King George VI saw being printed when he visited Marlborough in 1948), T.S. Eliot's *Portrait of a Lady* and Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.* And, but Paul was too modest to mention it, Housman's *A Shropshire Lad.*

It was Martin Griffin, Paul's older brother and an Old Marlburian, who suggested that Paul might approach Laurence Housman to see if he would be prepared to write a preface to the Marlborough Press edition of *A Shropshire Lad.* Paul wrote and was delighted to receive a reply from Laurence, dated 29th August, 1952, which read:

> I am sufficiently interested and pleased by your proposal to print a special edition of *A Shropshire Lad* with fine paper and binding, to earn a copy by writing at your request the enclosed preface.
>
> I must apologise for sending you a copy with so many corrected mistakes, but my mind no longer works properly when I am writing.
>
> I will carefully correct the proofs when you send them.
>
> Yours faithfully,
>
> Laurence Housman

In 1952 Laurence was 87 years old and Paul Griffin had just celebrated his 16th birthday. I am not aware that Laurence's preface has ever been reprinted and, because it is of more than general interest, it is reproduced page 7.

Negotiations were then conducted with The Richards Press Limited who controlled the publishing rights of *A Shropshire Lad*, and following some assistance from Jonathan Cape Limited and The Society of Authors permission to reprint was finally given upon the payment of a fee comprising fifteen guineas and a free copy of the book. A further fifteen guineas secured 72lbs of unbleached hand-made paper and in October 1952 the real work of the printer could be commenced.

The production of *A Shropshire Lad* took a little matter of two years to complete, all in Paul's 'free time'. The entire process was manual. The type was set, right to left, by hand, with spacing also by hand, comprising fifteen folios of eight pages and it is calculated that the setting and dissing (dissembling) involved about a quarter of a million individual actions. Proofs then had to be read not only for literals but for style and after the necessary corrections the next stage of the production process was the actual printing.

The press work was done on an 1837 Hopkinson Albion flatbed press, eight pages at a time. The first printing was on the virgin hand-made paper, the second on the reverse after the ink had dried but on the flipped, still-damp paper. Not an easy process, and it was discovered by Jonathan Cape at the binding stage that ten copies of a single folio had suffered from mould and were unusable and thus, not withstanding the limitation statement in the book, only thirty of the planned forty copies of the edition could be bound.

The distribution list is not complete but four copies were purchased by members of the Marlborough College Common Room, six copies by the bookshop in Ludlow, three copies by Blackwell's of Oxford, one copy by Heffer's of Cambridge and six copies by J. Charlton, an old Marlburian. One further copy was donated by the Press to the Restoration Fund of St. Laurence's Parish Church, Ludlow, which was ultimately purchased by Sir Adrian Boult for ten guineas, (for comparison the retail price, depending upon binding, was about £3).

The story then moves from 1954 to 2008 when Paul decided that it would be a splendid way to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Housman's birth by attempting to complete the Marlborough Press print-run. The College Press was no longer operational and so Paul approached John Grice, founder of the Evergreen Press at Brailes, to reprint the missing folio to the same specification as the original good folios which he had kept safe for over half a century. The new edition carries the original 1954 limitation page, a note of the history of the edition and a new limitation page – 'Limited to 10 copies'.

As is the way of book collectors I find myself musing on the

Laurence Housman's Preface to the Marlborough Press Edition

When I am told that the author of *A Shropshire Lad* was of more pre-eminent rank as a scholar than as a poet, the information – though I have no doubt that it is true – leaves me unmoved. Exact scholarship is a rare and a high virtue, but to me it is a cold one; while the writing of even a single good poem secures for its author not merely my respect but my warm gratitude. And truly the day when I first opened *A Shropshire Lad*, and found there more than thirty very good poems awaiting me, was one of the great events of my life.

Undoubtedly its title helped to make the book popular; but when my brother was writing it he had a very different title in mind. *Poems of Terence Hearsay* would not have attracted so large a following. It was a bad title, and a wise friend persuaded him to change it for the latter; but there was a reason for it. Alfred had a curious wish not to be personally identified with his poems: he preferred to pretend that he was merely reporting on life in the world as he found it: so Terence Hearsay was to be his mouth-piece. But when he exchanged that figleaf of a fictitious character for the more attractively named character of *A Shropshire Lad* it was still a fictitious one. That Shropshire Lad is a quite impossible combination of light-hearted rustic and deeply feeling highly-trained thinker, on whom the burden of life lies heavy; even in their sharing of grief they are different characters. The lad who tries to fight sorrow by playing football and cricket, is not the same man as the one that wrote:

> Be still, my soul, be still; the arms you bear are brittle,
> Earth and high heaven are fixt of old and founded strong.
> Think rather, – call to thought, if now you grieve a little,
> The days when we had rest, O Soul, for they were long.

And so I would commend to all readers of these poems – for their better understanding – this truth: that wherever they are least like *A Shropshire Lad* they are most deeply and truly like the man he really was who wrote them, and who, (though he enjoyed many of the good things of life) wished that he had never been born.

> Ay, look: high heaven and earth ail from their prime
> foundation:
> All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain:
> Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation –
> Oh, why did I awake? When shall I sleep again?

Some of his later poems were so closely and intimately personal to himself that he refrained from publishing them in his own life-time. But, with his permission, I included them in *More Poems*, which were published in the year following his death. It is quite possible that one or two of these may have been written at the same time as *A Shropshire Lad*; had they been included, they would have been still more out of keeping with that character than the poem which I have here quoted.

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smallest print-runs of *Shropshire Lads* and the only editions strictly smaller than the Marlborough Press forty copies (or do I mean thirty?) is the 1986 Shorthorn Press edition of twenty-five copies and the 1992 Zauberberg Press edition of twenty copies.

Paul Naiditch once warned me of what he called 'manufactured rarities' but, if the 2009 Marlborough edition can properly be described as a separate edition, then it becomes the rarest *Shropshire Lad* of all.

Two copies of the print run remain. They are available in a fine goat skin binding by master craftsman Brian Settle of Ludlow Bookbinders at £250 each or Paul is willing to make the books available in an unbound condition at £125 each so that the new owner of this very special edition can house it in a truly unique binding of their own design. All enquiries, please, through the usual Book Exchange contact points.

Beautiful 'A Shropshire Lad' Calendar

Ludlow publishers Merlin Unwin have produced a 2012 calendar based on their book *A Shropshire Lad* (foreword by Christopher Ricks). Each month is illustrated by a brilliant photo by Gareth Thomas and is accompanied by an appropriate verse. It has space for short entries under each day – and even has key dates in the Society calendar printed, as well as an invitation on the back page to join the Society.

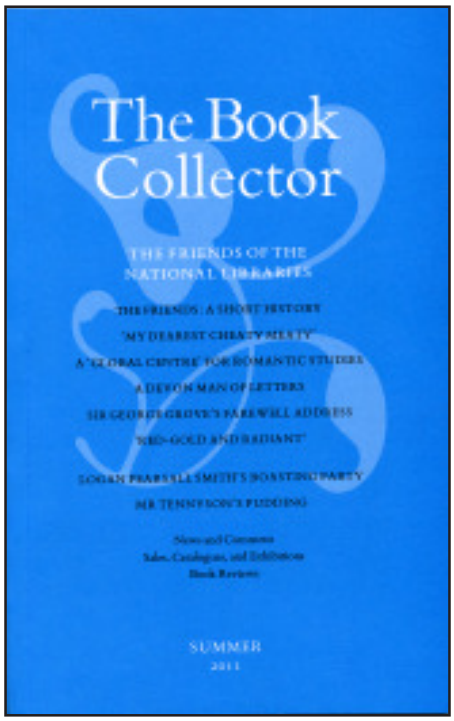
Retailing at £7.99 it is available to members for £8.00 to include postage. Please fill in the enclosed order form, make cheques payable to 'The Housman Society' and send to 80 New Road, Bromsgrove B60 2LA. If you are also ordering cards or the Naxos CD detailed below these can be included in the same cheque. Despatch will not be immediate as arrangements have to be made to collect the calendars from Ludlow when we know how many to order.

Naxos 'A Shropshire Lad' CD

The Naxos label have produced a CD in their Great Poets series of the complete *A Shropshire Lad* read by Samuel West. Samuel West is very experienced at such readings having recorded 'Great Narrative Poems of the Romantic Age', 'Great Speeches in History' and 'John Keats' also in the Great Poets Series. Orders on the enclosed form please at £8.00 to include postage.

‘A.E. Housman professed no great interest in books .....’

The Book Collector publishes occasional pieces on Author Societies and reproduced below (by kind permission) is James Fergusson’s article, which appeared in the Summer 2011 edition.



A. E. Housman professed no great interest in books as objects, but was gruffly obliging to the small army of book collectors who pursued him in his lifetime. He drew the line at signing American piracies, but would put his name in a book for a correspondent, especially if the correspondent deployed a civil pen. From the publication of *A Shropshire Lad* in 1896, he was famous, and many of his correspondents were transatlantic. To Paul Lemperly, a book collector from Ohio, he wrote in 1899, ‘I am much obliged by your letter and bookplate. I think yours is the only letter containing no nonsense that I have ever received from a stranger.’

To Hettie Gray Baker, a film writer and editor from Connecticut, he meekly returned a bookplate in 1923: ‘I have no bookplate of my own. I have written my name on one of yours as you request’. ‘I am not a person of culture,’ he declared in 1925 to the collector Mary Clare Ryan in Los Angeles (the future Clare Talbot), ‘and treat my books badly.’ The most successful of all his ‘stranger’ correspondents was Houston Martin, from Philadelphia, who first wrote to him in 1932 as a teenager and somehow disarmed the formidable Latin professor. ‘One thing I am prepared to do, which might gratify your depraved mind,’ he allowed Martin two years later: ‘if you like to send me *New Year’s Eve* I can make and initial a correction which I was too late to make before it was printed... I congratulate you on your 20th birthday, and your approach, I hope, to years of discretion. I did not realise how frightfully young you were: it explains and perhaps excuses much.’ Two more years later, Housman was dead, and Martin was organizing an exhibition of his autograph collection (other quarries included Robert Frost and George Santayana) at the University of Pennsylvania. His eleven Housman letters are now at Bryn Mawr College Library.

Alfred Edward Housman (1859-1936), the Latin scholar who failed his finals examination at Oxford and became Professor of Latin successively at University College London and Cambridge, the Patent Office clerk who edited Propertius and, later, Manilius and was hailed as one of the finest classicists of his age, has challenged biographers, but his stock, unlike that of many of his contemporaries, has risen in the twenty-first century. His deceptively simple lyrical voice transcends his period; the back-story of his love for Moses Jackson appeals as much to students of the human heart as to historians of gay literature; and his alternative presence as the lead character in Tom Stoppard’s powerful *The Invention of Love* (first staged 1997) has revived the interest of audiences generally in his work.

The slenderness of that distinguished output was apparent from the first ‘check-list’ (leaving out the classical papers) produced by John Carter and John Sparrow, both correspondents of Houston Martin in the 1935, and published in *The Library* for 1940. Twelve years later it was reissued as a ‘hand-list’ in the Soho Bibliographies series. By the time William White (another Martin correspondent) revised the book as *A. E. Housman: a Bibliography* (1982), he was apologising that ‘Housman’s reputation as a poet is not what it was’. He need not have worried.

The Housman Society was formed in A.E.’s home town, Bromsgrove (he was born just outside, in Fockbury), in 1973, by Joe Hunt, a local businesssman, and John Pugh, a solicitor – author of *Bromsgrove and the Housmans* (1974). Its initial activities were largely social and civic; and even now the Bromsgrove District Council sponsors the society’s ‘Housman Trail’ – ending at the statue of Housman erected in the High Street in 1985. But the centenary in 1996 of the publication of *A Shropshire Lad* gave the society larger ambitions; that year, following their campaign, a window was dedicated to the author in Poets’ Corner, Westminster Abbey, with Alan Bennett paying homage and Ian Bostridge singing settings of the poems. The society sponsors a Schools Reading Competition, and a Housman lecture at the Hay Festival of Literature on *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, now in its eleventh year (last year given by Richard Perceval Graves, his 1979 biographer; this year by Ruth Padel).

As well as producing two newsletters a year, each featuring a ‘book exchange’ with lists of books for sale by or about or connected with Housman, the society publishes *The Housman Society Journal,* newly under the editorship of David Butterfield, who has written on his own ‘Housmaniana’ for *The Book Collector* (Contemporary Collectors, LVII, Spring 2010). The

2010 volume mixes notes of delightfully specialist learning with articles of genuine academic value, and pieces that deserve wider general attention. 'A Pivotal Friendship', in particular, is a fascinating account by Moses Jackson's grandson of the relationship between Jackson and Housman. In 2009 Andrew Jackson, son of Moses's youngest son Gerald (Housman's godson), delved into family papers for *A Fine View of the Show,* a book of letters home from his uncle Hector during the First World War. Last year more letters, some from Housman to Moses, some to Gerald, were consigned for sale at Sotheby's New York. Most remarkable was a letter to Housman from Moses, written on 23 November 1922 from the Vancouver hospital in which he died (Laurence Housman returned the letter after his brother's death). The author had sent Moses a copy of *Last Poems,* the book he hastened to press on hearing of his friend's illness. 'My dear old Hous,' begins the letter, a teasing, joshing letter composed over some days, treating of the book and its reviews, talking of old friends, before ending, forlornly, 'Goodbye'.

Moses died before Housman's reply arrived. Andrew Jackson fills in much useful background to this affecting story, and also gives the history of the much-travelled manuscripts, which went from British Columbia to Co. Durham and then Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) before coming to rest in Austin, Texas. Also in the 2010 *Journal* are three letters omitted from Archie Burnett's 2007 *Letters,* from Housman to Mr and Mrs Owen Hugh Smith, Housman's hosts on his only visit to Scotland. P.G. Naiditch dissects Housman's Last Will and Testament, Clive Jenkins investigates the poet's Lancashire ancestry, and Tom Keeline examines the scholar's relationship with the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae. *The Journal's* 180 pages alone are worth the £10 membership subscription.

Regular society events include commemorations of Housman's birth (held at Bromsgrove) and death (held at Ludlow). Last October the society sponsored a double-act talk with Christopher Ricks (the society's President) and Archie Burnett (a Vice-President) at Poets House, New York.

Where librarians, book-collectors and booksellers meet...

The Book Collector was founded in 1952, the brainchild of three men. One was Ian Fleming, not then famous for James Bond, but a great book-collector. The second was Percy Muir, doyen of antiquarian booksellers. And there was John Hayward, author of the great *Rothschild Catalogue*, friend and muse of T.S.Eliot. Hayward was effectively *The Book Collector*'s first editor and set the style that has lasted ever since. Unfamiliar authors, contemporary collectors, book-bindings, the news behind or ahead of book-sales, the ways, good and bad, of libraries, reviews of books and booksellers' catalogues, all these have been its staple, then and since. Nicolas Barker has been editor since 1965, and over forty years has given *The Book Collector* international authority in the world of book-collecting.

Housman and Heine: A Neglected Relationship

The Society is to publish a new book about the close similarities between the verse of A.E. Housman and that of Heinrich Heine. It is planned to distribute this to members with the Housman Society Journal in December, and open it to the retail market at the same time.

The main purpose of the book is to place a selection of the best-known poems of Heine alongside those of Housman which have an echo, a certain reminiscence, a common theme, or a similar personal pretext. Many lovers of Housman will be surprised to discover how many such connections there are. But principally, they will find, as poetry-lovers, a whole new range of delightful reading.

The poems have been selected and especially translated for us by Gaston Hall. The translations reproduce in remarkable fashion the metre, rhyme, and emotional or narrative content of the original German, so they will be equally enjoyable for non-German speakers as for German literature specialists. The original German, the translation, and a selected Housman poem appear side by side on the pages.

There are also, however, articles by Linda Hart, Henry Woudhuysen and Jeremy Bourne explaining the historical background, and in particular the likelihood that Housman would have known and loved German verse from a very early age. Robin Shaw's drawings, and a number of photographs, provide the illustrations.

Housman was adamant that he belonged to no identifiable English School of poets, and did not take his inspiration from the early nineteenth century Romantics. In letters to Seymour Adelmann and Maurice Pollet, however, he admitted to three special influences: Shakespeare, the Scottish Border Ballads, and Heinrich Heine. So it is, on the face of it, remarkable there has not been until now a book for the general reader which examines the relationship with Heine.

But perhaps not so remarkable when one considers that *A Shropshire Lad* was written before the twentieth century World Wars, and at a time when even the rise of Prussian imperialism and the Franco-Prussion War were recent occurrences. Before that time, when Housman was a boy or a young student, German literature, music, art and architecture were at the forefront of the educated Englishman's cultural awareness, and it was hardly surprising that the young Housman should know German poetry. Heine was, after all, a widely popular German poet in the first half of the nineteenth century, and more popular in France and England even than in Germany.

The appearance of *Housman and Heine: A Neglected Relationship* will be an agreeable surprise for many Society members, and for poetry readers generally. It will also be a pleasant and rewarding read.

Radio Four's 'Beacons and Blue Remembered Hills'

Having lived with Housman for so many years one has perhaps become accustomed to fossilised programmes about A.E.H. in which the usual clichés are trotted out to the accompaniment of over-worked music such as Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* Rhapsody. Consequently it was refreshing to discover that the origins of this programme came from the presenter, Elvis McGonagall, being surprised to find in a previous programme he made, 'Doggerell Bard', that a remarkably diverse range of poets had all cited Housman as a primary influence.

Elvis McGonagall and producer Frank Stirling by the BBC televison mast on the top of Housman Hill

So the secret to A.E. Housman's extraordinary appeal was examined in a journey which took the listener through London, Bromsgrove, Bredon Hill, Ludlow and The Wrekin with readings of some of his best-known poems. Andrew Motion was 'astonished by the range of his physical and emotional landscape', Jeremy Bourne, standing by the statue admiring A.E.H.'s 'lean and ascetic face', lucidly explained his Bromsgrove roots, Colin Dexter inimitably marvelled at his mellifluous phrases, and Antiques Roadshow's Henry Sandon told how he went up Bredon Hill with his girl friend and, having viewed the 'coloured counties', came down engaged to be married! Wendy Cope recounted how she had been influenced early in her life and read her classic 'I think I am in love with A.E. Housman...', Jim Page stood on Housman Hill and explained how A.E.H.'s three mile walks to school were so influential in his understanding of the countyryside in all seasons, and Edward Wood told how his firm's *A Shropshire Lad* Ale accounted for 50% of all sales.

Other contributions came from Martin Newell, Jane Allsopp, a Knighton student at Oxford University and Housman lovers from Worcestershire and Shropshire. The presenter explained that *A Shropshire Lad* was written when Housman was in London and how at the heart of the cycle is a real sense of Englishness, unusual in a collection that concerns itself with personal and political themes in such a raw and vulnerable way – loss, grief, suicide, sexuality, nature and joy. This was a gem of a programme, a view reinforced by an extract being included on 'Pick of the Week'.

Laurence Housman and the Street Players

Paul Latcham writes to say that his father, Raymond (1906-1982), who was born in Street, was co-founder with Laurence Housman of the Street Players. He acted in several productions including *Victoria Regina* and was also stage manager, building much of the scenery used in the Crispin Hall where the performances were given. Laurence referred to him as 'my right hand'.

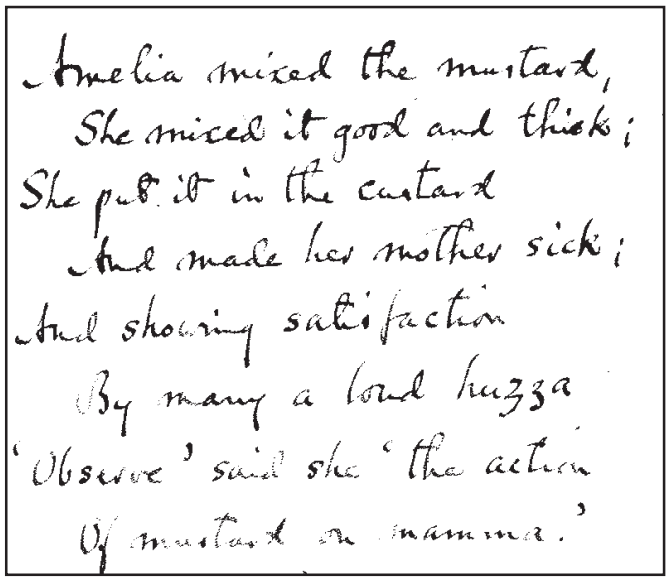
'A Mint o' Money' by Laurence Housman, first performed by the Street Players at the Strode Barn, Street, Somerset in 1927

The photgraph above (reproduced by kind permission of Paul Latcham) was taken at the first performance of the newly formed Street Players. It shows from left to right, Raymond Latcham, Harry Underwood and Ronald Barber. It is interesting to note that the proscenium curtains and chest were properties loaned by Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festival Players. Laurence Housman directed the production.

Society Weekend in 2012

Plans are well advanced for another Society Weekend in Housman Hall in October 2012. The format will be similar to the previous two successful weeekends in 2007 and 2009. All plans are subject to confirmation but speakers will include David Butterfield, Wendy Cope, Linda Hart, and Julian Hunt. There will be a members' reading of *Last Poems* (90th anniversary) and a dramatisation of the letters exchanged between Janet Ashbee and Laurence Housman entitled 'Dear Mrs Ashbee'. The musical content will again be on the Friday when Bromsgrove's arts centre, Artrix, will be the venue for a recital by James Rutherford, the fine British baritone who has been singing in Bayreuth this summer. His programme is likely to be a complete *A Shropshire Lad* in words and music. It is hoped that members will again support this. Full details will appear in the February Newsletter.

'Amelia Mixed the Mustard' at Bonhams Sale


Amelia mixed the mustard,
She mixed it good and thick;
She put it in the custard
And made her mother sick;
And showing satisfaction
By many a loud huzza
'Observe' said she 'the action
Of mustard on manner.'

Lot No: 120 of 29th March Sale

HOUSMAN, ALFRED EDWARD (1859-1936, poet and classicist)

AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT OF HIS HUMOROUS POEM, 'Amelia mixed the mustard...', *8 lines, written on half of an octavo sheet,* no date.

Estimate: £1,200-1,800, •1,400-2,100

In commenting on the Lot Peter Sisley wrote:

'Thanks for alerting me to this sale, although I did spot it a couple of weeks ago. I'm a little unsure about the estimate as it's a lot more money for a lot less text than one would pay for a Housman letter, but, on the other hand, it has a greater rarity value. There is not a lot of material to compare it with although I do recall Phil Brown at Blackwells offering a manuscript copy of 'Aunts and Nieces' for, if my memory serves me, £5,000 some three or four years ago.

The last 'real' poem sold in manuscript was at the Brett-Smith sale at Sotheby's in 2004 when a draft of 'Epitaph on an army of mercenaries' sold for £5,775 including premium and VAT. I went to the viewing day and held it in my hand and, although very desirable, it was a modest little scrap of paper. The collector in me tells me that I should be interested in Amelia, but it is not in Housman's best handwriting.

The auction description of the lot by Bonhams states that it is undated but we learn from a footnote in Burnett's *The Letters of A.E. Housman* Volume 1 Page 438 that it was enclosed in a letter to Kate Symons on 27th April 1920. It is reproduced in facsimile in Kate Symons chapter in the American edition of *Recollections*, Henry Holt, 1937. The lot at Bonhams was estimated at £1200-£1800 and the hammer came down at £1300 plus premium plus VAT, a grand-total of £1612.

Miscellanea

- **Two new Housman settings** by veteran Malvern composer Elaine Hugh-Jones were given their first performance by William Coleman in St Edmunds Hall, Malvern College on 17th July. 'Queen of Air and Darkness' (*Last Poems* III) and 'Eight O'Clock' (*Last Poems* XV) were both strong settings in which the musical language captured the atmosphere of the poetry and a real partnership between word and music was created.

- **Jilly Cooper** recorded recently that when she was twenty-two her parents took her to Lake Como, and as she was mourning a break up with an adored boyfriend, she discovered and devoured the poems of A.E. Housman, totally identifying with their sense of love and loss and revelling in the ravishing descriptions of the Shropshire countryside. She finishes the piece, 'One poem, which contained the lines "Possess, as I possessed a season, / The countries I resign", moved me so much that I copied the entire thing into my notebook. Chancing upon it, my parents assumed I was the author and that they had given birth to a genius. Alas, I had to disillusion them, but I've adored Housman's poems ever since.'

- The prolific **John Williamson** writes to give further information about his Housman settings. There are Four Housman songs: *ASL* LIX, *MP* XLIII, *AP* III and *MP* XIX. Three More Housman songs: *AP* XV, *MP* XLVIII and *AP* XIV. Single Song: *ASL* XLIX. Two Housman Settings, Vol. 1: *MP* XV & *ASL* XVI. Two Housman Settings, Vol. 2: *ASL* XXXVI and *ASL* III. These songs all published by DA CAPO of Manchester, email: colin@dacapomusic.co.uk; all for baritone and piano and available from Forsyths of Manchester, email: info@forsyths.co.uk

- **Nick Earle**, one of our most respected members, who taught at Dulwich College and was Headmaster of Bromsgrove School, has been persuaded to write a piece on the problems new Headmasters are likely to face. The summary (found on the internet) is: 1. Keep fit. 2. Keep solvent. 3. Keep cheerful. 4. Keep in touch – and most important of all – 5. Keep out of the way.

- Radio 4's series of **Great Lives** came to an end with a typically nuanced and insightful examination by Matthew Parris and Colin Dexter of the life of A.E. Housman. A number of issues, such as Housman's classical scholarship, repressed homosexuality and, of course, his poetry were given sympathetic coverage.

- In the Summer issue of *The Oldie* Peter O'Toole quoted, in the **'Poet's Corner'** slot, *Last Poems* XII, 'The laws of God, the laws of man' as one of his favourite poems. Interestingly enough there was no mention of *Last Poems* XII – the poem is just referred to by its first line.

The Housman Society Book Exchange

Elsewhere in this Newsletter I have written about Laurence Housman's preface to the Marlborough Press edition of A Shropshire Lad, writes Peter Sisley, and it is most pleasing to be able to offer two copies of this very special edition on these pages; available in either bound or unbound state.

Laurence also features in a most interesting article to be found in the October 1967 edition of *Encounter* and the Book Exchange is most fortunate to be able to offer four copies of this magazine which have been kindly donated by a Society member. I can do no better than to quote the description of this material direct from the Carter, Sparrow and White bibliography:

De Amicitia, Encounter, Volume XXIX, No.4. October 1967. On pp 33-41 is Laurence Housman's *A.E. Housman's 'De Amicitia'*, annotated by John Carter, consisting of a 20-page article (undated) in Laurence Housman's hand, here first printed, and quotations from A.E. Housman's pocket diary for 1888 and from 14 leaves extracted by LH from those for 1889-1891. The material deals with Housman's relationship with Moses and Adalbert Jackson, which the cover of *Encounter* calls 'A.E. Housman's "Hidden grief".' This is a very difficult periodical to locate and we are fortunate that all four of these donated copies are in a remarkably well-kept condition.

The family connection is continued with a couple of contributions by Housman's sister, Mrs K.E. Symons. *Memories of A.E. Housman* is a difficult to find offprint from the magazine of King Edward's School, Bath, which contains the first printing of seven pieces of light verse, while in the two printings of Bromsgrove School's book of recollections Kate contributes the first chapter entitled *Boyhood*.

Other rarities offered this time include the Branford College Press edition of *Fragment of a Greek Tragedy* and a number of extremely scarce editions of *A Shropshire Lad*. As always this listing is but a small example of our stock and we welcome enquiries for any books for which you are searching.

As always the items offered for sale are on a first-come, first-served basis irrespective of the means of contact used. Members will be interested to know that, following my retirement from gainful employment, I am now able to accept telephone calls other than in the hours of darkness. All enquiries, please, to Peter Sisley at Ladywood Cottage, Baveney Wood, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 8HZ on telephone number 01299 841361 or facsimile 01299 841582 or e-mail at sisley.ladywood@talk21.com

SALES LIST – SEPTEMBER 2011

Postage and Packing are additional to the prices quoted

ADINGTON (Richard). A.E. HOUSMAN & W.B. YEATS. The Peacocks Press, Hurst, Berkshire; 1955. First edition. 8vo. 35 pages. Green cloth missing the tissue jacket. Limited edition. One of 350 copies. These lectures were originally given in New York in 1938. Very Good. £35

BROWNE (Piers). AN ELEGY IN ARCADIA. An Artist's view of Housman's Poetry. Ashford Press, Southampton. 1990. Second Edition. 164 pages. Following Browne's sumptuous limited edition of *A Shropshire Lad* published by The Shorthorn Press in 1986 this book explores the influences on Housman's work from the perspective of the artist. Near fine in a very good dust jacket. Signed by the author. £20

CARTER (John) and SCOTT (Joseph) CATALOGUE ON AN EXHIBITION ON THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH. University College, London, 1959. First edition. 8vo. 35 pages. Green paper covers. Contains a preface by Carter and a Biographical Introduction by Scott. This rare catalogue which details the extraordinary collection of Housmaniana brought together to celebrate the centenary is now much sought after in its own right. Very good. £50

CARTER (John). [editor]. A.E. HOUSMAN. SELECTED PROSE. Cambridge at the University Press, 1962. This second edition was rushed out to correct the many inexcusable errors in the first edition of the previous year. Thirty examples of Housman's prose with a preface by Carter. 12mo. 204 pages. Grey cloth. Very good in a similar but sunned dust jacket. £20

CLUCAS (Humphrey). THROUGH TIME AND PLACE TO ROAM. University of Salzburg, 1995. First edition. 8vo. 67 pages. Softcover. Nine essays on Housman. Mint. £10

GOW (A.S.F.) A.E. Housman – A SKETCH. Cambridge University Press. 1936. First Edition. 8vo.137 pages. Green cloth missing the dust jacket. A delightful sketch of Housman by a fellow professor, together with a comprehensive list of his writings and indexes to his classical papers. Very good. £10

GRAVES (Richard Perceval). A.E. HOUSMAN ; THE SCHOLAR-POET. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. 1979. First Edition, 304 pages. The first comprehensive biography. Price clipped dust jacket otherwise near fine. Signed by the author. £20

HAWKINS (Maude M.). A.E. HOUSMAN: MAN BEHIND A MASK. Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1958. First edition (not published in the U.K.). 292 pages. The author's writing style and tendency to assumption has resulted in this book being regarded as an unreliable biography but Hawkins did spend much time with Laurence Housman in the book's preparation. Very good in a decent dust jacket. £15

HOLDEN (Alan) and BIRCH (Roy). A.E. HOUSMAN. A REASSESSMENT. MacMillan, London, 2000. 8vo. 225 pages. Black cloth with dust jacket. A dozen essays on Housman have been brought together in this book, which although recently published is very difficult to acquire on the second-hand market. With the bookplate of P.B. Morris, otherwise fine. £50

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. Grant Richards, London, 1908. 32mo. 101 pages. With a frontispiece of Clee Hill by William Hyde bound in the rare felt covers. All edges gilt and with the (severed) ribbon bookmark present. Internally very good, the fragile felt covers some show wear at the top and bottom of the spine and there is a little loss and damage to the front cover. Nevertheless a remarkable survival of a rare and fragile edition. £40

HOUSMAN (A.E.). SIX POEMS. City of Birmingham School of Printing, 1937. 17 pages. Beige paper covers. Arranged and printed under the direction of Leonard Jay at the School and containing three wood engravings. A delightful example of the printer's art. With a neat ex-libris plate, otherwise near fine. A most difficult book to acquire. £50

HOUSMAN (A.E.). FRAGMENT OF A GREEK TRAGEDY. Branford College Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1938. First printed in the *Bromsgrovian* of June 1883 this American College Press edition is extremely rare. The blue paper covers show some browning but nevertheless the condition can still be described as very good. £85

HOUSMAN (A.E.). M. ANNAEI LVCANI BELLI CIVILIS LIBRI DECEM. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1950. Reprint of the 1927 corrected edition. 8vo. xxxv. 342 pages. Blue cloth. Very good in similar dust jacket. £45.

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A MORNING WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY. Privately printed at Christmas 1955. 12mo. 16 pages. Cream Paper covers. Near fine but for the rusted staples. £20

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. The Tern Press, Market Drayton, 1990. 4to. Unpaginated. Green cloth covers. A beautiful limited edition of 225 copies with wood engravings by Nicholas Parry of the Press. Fine, with the bookplates of P.B. Morris. £75.

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. The Chantry Press, Leominster, 1991. 8vo. Unpaginated. Quarter leather. With an introduction by Norman Page and illustrations by Alison Dunworth. Number 17 of 50 copies. Fine with the bookplate of P.B. Morris. £50

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. Woodstock Books, Oxford, 1994. 12mo. 96 pages. A facsimile of the Kegan Paul 1896 edition. With an introduction by R.K.R. Thornton. Mint. £25

HOUSMAN (A.E.) A SHROPSHIRE LAD. The College Press, Marlborough, 2009. 12mo. Unpaginated. With a preface by Laurence Housman and an introductory note by Paul Griffin. One of ten copies. Please see my article elsewhere in the newsletter. In full goatskin by Ludlow Bookbinders. £250

or available in unbound sheets £125

HOUSMAN (Laurence). A.E.H. SOME POEMS, SOME LETTERS AND A PERSONAL MEMOIR BY HIS BROTHER. Jonathan Cape, London, 1937. First edition. 8vo. 286 pages. Blue cloth. Laurence's memoir of his brother including the first printing of the additional poems. Very good, missing the dust jacket. £10

HOUSMAN (Laurence) [contributes]. ENCOUNTER MAGAZINE. VOLUME XXIX No.4. Continental Publishers, London, 1967. 96pp. Paper covers. On pages 33-41 is printed *A.E. Housman's 'De Amicitia'*, the text of which was deposited by Laurence at the British Museum in 1942, with the stipulation that it remained unopened for twenty-five years. Annotated by John Carter. Very good indeed. £25

HOUSMAN SOCIETY JOURNAL. VOL. Three. The British Housman Society, 1977. 8vo. 71 pages. Very good. £10

HOUSMAN SOCIETY JOURNAL. VOLUME Four. The British Housman Society, 1978. 8v0. 48 pages. Dedicated by the editor, Richard Perceval Graves, and with the ownership signature of B.E. Barley, first Treasurer of the Society. Very good. £10

KENNEDY (B.H.) and RIDDELL (J.) [editors]. SABRINAE COROLLA. Bell and Dady, London, 1867. 3rd edition. 401 pages. Original brown cloth. "The most delightful of all volumes of translated verse" – Housman's Cambridge Inaugural Lecture, 1911. Very good. £20

MAAS (Henry). THE LETTERS OF A.E. HOUSMAN. Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1971. First edition. 8vo. 458 pages. Red cloth with dust jacket. Very good indeed. With the bookplate of P.B. Morris. £25

RICHARDS (Grant). HOUSMAN 1897-1936. Oxford University Press, London, 1942. Second edition. 8vo. 493 pages. Red cloth in the blue dust jacket. Memories by Housman's long-time publisher and friend over a forty-year association. With an excellent set of appendices by other hands. With the discreet bookplate of A.V. Butcher, author of *A.E. Housman and the English Composer*, 1948. Very good in similar dust jacket. £25

RICKS (Christopher). A.E. HOUSMAN. COLLECTED POEMS AND SELECTED PROSE. Allen Lane, London, 1988. First edition. 8vo. 528 pages. Black cloth with dust jacket. With the bookplate of P.B. Morris otherwise near fine in a very good dust jacket. £20

SYMONS (Katharine E.). MEMORIES OF A.E. HOUSMAN. Grant Mellhuish, Bath, 1936. 8 pages. Paper covers. Pamphlet written by Housman's sister extracted from the magazine of King Edward's School. Bath. Contains the first appearance of seven of Housman's comic verses. Staples rusted as usual ortherwise very good. £20

Book Exchange continued

SYMONS (Katharine E.), POLLARD (A.W.), HOUSMAN (Laurence), CHAMBERS (R.W.), KER (Alan), GOW (A.S.F.), SPARROW (John) and SYMONS (N.V.H.). ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN. Bromsgrove School, 1936. First edition. 4to. 65 pages. The true first edition. Number 211 of 250 copies, (none for sale). Card covers with deckled edges. The Housman Memorial supplement of the 'Bromsgrovian'. Externally very good indeed and internally fine; almost certainly never read. An excellent example of a notoriously fragile publication. £60

SYMONS (Katharine E.), POLLARD (A.W.), HOUSMAN (Laurence), CHAMBERS (R.W.), KER (Alan), GOW (A.S.F.), SPARROW (John) and SYMONS (N.V.H.). ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN. Bromsgrove School, 1936. First (for sale) edition. 4to. 60 pages. Green cloth. Limited to 500 copies. With the discreet bookplate of A.V. Butcher. Very good. £40

WATSON (George). A.E. HOUSMAN – A DIVIDED LIFE. Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1957. First edition. 8vo. 235 pages. The first attempt at a full biography. With the bookplate of P.B. Morris, otherwise near fine in similar dust jacket. £25

WITHERS (Percy). A BURIED LIFE. Jonathan Cape, London, 1940. First edition. 8vo.133 pages. Blue cloth with dust jacket. Withers first met Housman in 1917 at Cambridge and this book is a record of their association over the next twenty years. A notoriously difficult book to acquire, here offered with the very scarce dust jacket. With the discreet bookplate of A.V. Butcher. Very good indeed. £60

ZEITLIN & VER BRUGGE. A.E. HOUSMAN. WINTER CATALOGUE 1983. Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, Los Angeles, 1983. 4to. Unpaginated. Card Covers. This catalogue of 203 items is packed with interest for Housman enthusiasts. A little damage to the top of the front cover but internally very good. Scarce. £20

WANTS LIST

The compiler of the Book Exchange listings is convinced that there are a number of members of the Society who keep meaning to get around to sorting out those Housman rarities. Peter Sisley would be delighted to hear from you on any of the contact points listed above.

The Housman Society Newsletters recommenced in February 1998 with issue number 7 after a gap of 19 years. Does anyone have issues 1 to 6? Name your price.

The Road of Danger, Guilt and Shame – by Carol Efrati.

And we still have a number of members trying to complete broken runs of **Housman Society Journals**. The early years ate particularly elusive. Please contact Peter Sisley if you can help.

Summer Outing to Shelsley Walsh

Although the Society's summer outing to Shelsley Walsh had absolutely no Housman content it could not have been a more enjoyable day.

After a convivial lunch at the ancient Hundred House at Great Witley (now up for sale as a 'Genteel Hotel in a Picturesque Village') the party moved on to Shelsley Walsh, which is set in the Teme Valley and part of an active farming community. The name Shelsley means 'clearing on a slope' from Old English 'scelf' – 'shelf of land' and 'leah' meaning 'wood clearing'. 'Walsh' (meaning 'of the Welsh') was added later. At the time of the 2001 Census its population was just 31.

Inspection of the mill wheel

The watermill, the restoration of which our Treasurer Max Hunt has been deeply involved in, was the main item of interest but the beautiful St Andrews church and the Hill Climb (which started in 1905 and happened to be featured on the BBC's *Countryfile* programme a couple of weeks later) were also both full of interesting features.

Watermill on Site for 800 Years

There has been a watermill on or near this site since 1308, and Max's explanation of the intricacies of the working mechanisms, although lost on some of the party, had most of us riveted in admiration for what has been achieved in this reconstruction. The current mill shows three stages of construction spanning 200 years and it was last used to grind animal feed around 1923. The Watermill Society has restored the mill to a working condition for use as a visitor attraction and educational resource, as well as providing active conservation of wildlife habitat. It has two pairs of millstones with a geared shaft taking power from the waterwheel into the farm buildings where it drives the original Chaff Cutter and Root Chopper.

Tea in the sunshine at bench tables in the courtyard, provided by the hospitable Watermill Society team, concluded this special un-Housmanesque day!

‘Kids with taste’ perform Laurence’s Adaptation of Lysistrata

Elizabeth Oakley writes about a splendidly enterprising production of Laurence Housman’s adaptation of Lysistrata which was performed at the Greenwich Theatre last March.

In his role as Chairman of the Housman Society Jim Page must have received with equanimity many an unexpected email over the years, but I guess that the one entitled ‘Lysistrata’ from Lucy Cuthbertson which he opened on a chilly January morning earlier this year made his jaw drop. For in this email Lucy, a highly enterprising Drama teacher from Kidbrooke School Greenwich, announced her forthcoming production of Aristophanes’ play in the translation of a member of the Housman family. This was not, however, a lost work of the Classical scholar A.E. Housman, but a ‘paraphrase’ (to use his own word) of the younger brother, Laurence, who in his autobiography *The Unexpected Years* had gone out of his way to pour scorn on his own youthful lack of competence in the field in which his brother excelled. Reading on, it became clear that Lucy, not liking the editions the Exam Board had recommended, had tracked down other versions and had chosen Laurence’s as it seemed to her to have a poetry and sensitivity that the others lacked. Not only was this gratifying to a Housman Society member’s ear but even more so was the news that most of her pupils (‘kids with taste’ as she described them) also preferred it over the modern versions.

Four members of the Housman Society, therefore, duly made their way on March 17th via the Docklands Light Railway to Greenwich Theatre to join a teenage audience around 250 strong for a performance in which a cast who appeared to be aged between 11 and 17 gave their interpretation and contemporary twist to the play which Laurence had in 1910 adapted to suit the Actresses’ Franchise League during the height of the Women’s Suffrage campaign. Lucy explained that the anti-war sentiments along with the strongly feminist agenda made the play appealing both to herself and her pupils, some of whom had demonstrated in the students’ protest against the rise in tuition fees a few weeks earlier in central London. As director Lucy’s conception of the play was original and theatrically compelling with touches of sly humour. (Slogans such as ‘Make Sense not War’ being an example). The actors could not lose their way; but within these clear guidelines were opportunities for the cast to develop their roles and make their own contributions. One bold stroke was to reverse the sexes so that boys played girls’ parts and girls took on the male roles. This must have been fun for the actors but also made them think hard about attitudes, prejudices and behaviour of the opposite sex. All the actors were word perfect, projected with conviction and seemed to relish their parts.

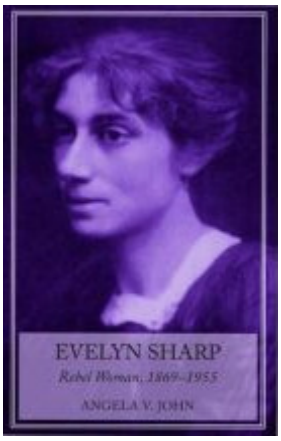
In ‘Lysistrata’ the women of Athens, weary of male enthusiasm for endless war, decide to take their own action to stop the fighting: withdrawal of sexual favours. Other women, such as those from Sparta, are invited to join them. Problems that directors of Aristophanes all face at school level are the sexually explicit language and ever present phallic symbols on stage. Laurence had, of course, been obliged to filter the text while Lucy neatly used guns and cup cakes topped with a cherry to suggest male and female sexuality. Parody of each sex was stressed in the choice of costumes. Women, dressed as if they were on their way to the local Women’s Institute meeting, used their handbags and tea urns as weapons. Lysistrata, in a tweed suit with immaculate hair-do and matching handbag, resembled a young Mrs Thatcher.

The soldiers looked puny in their outsize combat gear or pompous suits and one particularly tiny policemen in a helmet which nearly covered his face was passed with balletic dexterity over the heads of the women, pathetically waving an outsize truncheon. Despite the humour, the opening and end were dark. Carefully selected film clips of bombs falling and slides flashing dictators from Hitler to Gadaffi initially suggested the tragedy of war. The accompanying sound track was stunning (almost literally to ageing ears) and immediately engaged the audience.

Finally Lucy also managed to suggest the impossibility of the women’s actions succeeding by having Lysistrata in the second scene fall into a dream over her computer and then summon up by text and email the other women to her cause. In the final scene she appears to wake up from her illusion that things can change as a bloodied child, clutching a teddy bear, pathetically walks across the stage to remind the audience of the innocent whose lives are ruined by war. Laurence, always keen to work with student groups and young amateurs, would have loved Kidbrooke School’s magnificent production in which his words play a significant role.

Dedicated Suffragist – The Story of Evelyn Sharp

Elizabeth Oakley reviews 'Evelyn Sharp: Rebel Woman, 1869-1955' by Angela V. John (Manchester University Press 2009, £16.99) who was a contemporary of Clemence Housman, and joined her in her fund-raising and tax resistance.



It is one hundred years since Clemence Housman went to Holloway prison for refusal to pay tax: 'No vote no tax' being the chief slogan of the Women's Tax Resistance League (WTRL) which was at its most active in the years leading up to the First World War. Although Clemence and her fellow Tax Resisters are minor figures compared with the Pankhursts, Millicent Fawcett and Emily Davison, they nevertheless contributed significantly to the swelling tide of protest that eventually won women the vote. The publication of the biography of Evelyn Sharp who joined Clemence in her fund raising and tax resistance, and also went to prison in 1911, gives a sobering and detailed insight into the sacrifices made by these dedicated women.

Evelyn (1869-1955) and Clemence (1861-1955) were contemporaries and it is interesting to note the similarities between them. They had much in common: both were born into families in which brothers predominated; one brother in each family, A.E. Housman and Cecil Sharp, achieved a fame which has endured; both families had financial difficulties; neither girl had the full education she deserved yet Evelyn and Clemence became gifted writers; in mid-career both were active members of the WTRL and rattled collecting tins in the Kensington High Street (standing in the road so as not to be arrested for obstruction) for the cause; both suffered considerable financial loss for the sake of principle and their artistic careers were put on hold; neither had children of their own but were devoted aunts; each lived too long they felt – into the 1950s, almost to the dawn of a new Feminism which no doubt they would have loathed.

Yet there the similarities end. It is tempting to think of all Victorian girls as frustrated and undervalued. Evelyn certainly resented the attention given to her nine brothers and only gained a sense of personal identity when she went to a London boarding school for a couple of years in her teens. She adored her time there and is one of the pioneers of school stories for girls. Clemence, on the other hand, did not as far as we know attend any school, though the head of Bromsgrove School evidently knew her and regarded her as very clever. The Housman boys, unlike Evelyn's brothers, were not boarders and the family ties with their sisters remained extremely close for all of their adult lives. Clemence even dedicated her major novel *Sir Aglovale de Galis* to the memory of her recently deceased brother Robert who had so enriched her life and the affectionate relations between brothers or brothers and sisters are a motif running through all her books. Whereas Evelyn left home in her early twenties and lived independently in London, working at what she could get in the way of journalism and teaching to make ends meet, Clemence accompanied Laurence to London and stayed with him for the rest of her life, sharing their resources. By so doing she avoided the exposure and loneliness that Evelyn undoubtedly experienced. There seems not to have been any unfulfilled romance in Clemence's life to cause her heartache and sorrow, but in 1901 Evelyn met and fell passionately in love with the married journalist and Suffrage activist Henry Nevinson who continued to live with his wife for the next thirty years while continuing his relationship with Evelyn and indulging in passing affairs with other women. While their relationship was an open secret amongst close friends, appearances had to be kept up, and it was only after Margaret Nevinson died in the mid 1930s that they were free to marry. One of the sadnesses of Evelyn's life was not having her own children. She writes poignantly: 'I can hardly bear to look at a baby now'. Aunts, however, feature prominently in her work as detached and wise observers. Family ties were always strong for Evelyn but not positive as for Clemence; some of her brothers bothered and exploited her financially. By contrast with the Sharps the Housmans appear to have been a remarkably cohesive family, always ready to support each other despite many clashes in outlook and temperament. It was probably the loss of her nephew, Clement, in the First World War and the injuries to another that crushed Clemence's energy.

The toll that the Suffrage campaign took on those who espoused it is passionately expressed by Evelyn in a letter to a fellow suffragist, the actress Elizabeth Robins:

> Who am I to be doing all these ugly things when I only long for solitude and a fairy tale to write. I don't know, I don't know. I only know I shall go on till I drop, and so will hundreds of others whose names will never be known.

She was more relentlessly pursued even than Clemence by the Inland Revenue who confiscated practically all she owned on one occasion, even her typewriter which was crucial to her livelihood. However, despite exhaustion and impaired health, Evelyn travelled in Europe in the 1920s to report on the sufferings of a defeated nation and the emerging Communist Russia.

Her memoir *Unfinished Adventure*, published in 1933, which may well have inspired Laurence to produce his own autobiography *The Unexpected Years*, testifies to her courage and the range of her abilities. She not only wrote attractive and entertaining books for children but was a keen botanist and helped to establish Cecil Sharp House in Regent's Park after her brother's death; her journalism, especially the reports from abroad, was serious and her thinking compassionate. Like Laurence and Clemence she is not widely remembered today, but the society she lived in was richer for her contribution as it was for theirs.

Nightmare in Tokyo

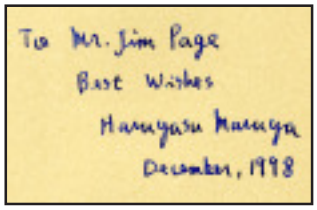
At the time of the earthquake in Japan Robin & Kate Shaw emailed our member, Haruyasu Maruya, to enquire if he was safe. After a few days they received this reply.

14th March, 2011

Dear Robin-san and Kate-san:

Thank you very much for your thoughtful mail inquiring after our safety. Machiko and I are all right and our daughters and grandsons living in Tokyo are all right. The electricity was cut off for a few days and we couldn't use the computer. Today the electricty returned to normal and I am writing this mail sitting in front of the computer in my office. Fortunately the bulidings of our school are safe and almost all students and professors are all right and we are not affected so seriously.

The Japanese edition of 'A Shropshire Lad' given to the Chairman by Haruyasu Maruya



When the earthquake attacked, we were in the midst of graduation ceremony. It was horrible. We felt that we would be crushed to death under a building which collapsed in a quake. Nightmare. The School of Fishery Science, one of our seven schools and located in the coastal area, suffered heavily and was struck by a Tsunami. Contact with about forty students was lost. We are concerned about their safety. The gasoline is in short supply and a lot of cars are snaking along the street to put in gasoline. The use of electricity is also restricted. The water supply is cut off in part of our city. Railway service has been suspended and the road was blocked. It is unclear when things will return to normal. Today we held an emergency meeting to discuss counter measurements but we would be obliged to postpone the start of the new academic year.

We consider ourselves lucky to be alive. More than 10,000 people were killed in this disaster. We cannot believe that the whole city disappered without a trace. Anyway, we are alive. Thank you very much for thinking of us. I hasten to inform you that we are all right.

With best wishes,

Haruyasu Maruya, M.A.

Michael Berkeley for Hay Lecture

We are delighted to announce that Michael Berkeley has accepted our invitation to give *The Name and Nature of Poetry* lecture at Hay on Wednesday 6th June 2012. Although best known as a composer, his radio programme, *Private Passions*, has shown him to be extremely knowledgeable on literary matters.

Private Passions is broadcast on Sunday mornings and is one of the BBC's most successful radio programmes – and being recorded in a spare bedroom in his house, gives it a uniquely intimate quality. The Society commissioned him as part of its programme to celebrate the centenary of *A Shropshire Lad* in 1996 and his setting of *Grenadier* was performed in Ludlow, UCL and Bromsgrove that year. Michael Berkeley has now included the song in a new cycle he has written of poems by Gurney and Housman.

The small market town of Hay is an unlikely setting for one of the world's biggest book festivals but in 2012 it is celebrating its 25th year, having become in that time a literary extravaganza that is now firmly established as the biggest book event in Britain. However the Festival is now international with festivals round the world including Segovia, Belfast, Nairobi, Aarah in the Maldives, Kerala in India, Beirut and Bogota.

Next year's dates are Thursday 31 May to Sunday 10 June 2012.

Norman Marlow's 'Housman' – a correction

Richard Perceval Graves writes: It was incorrectly asserted in Linda Hart's article 'The Influences on Housman's Poetry' that there are no references to Norman Marlow's *A.E.Housman: Scholar and Poet* in my biography. (See page 4 of Newsletter No. 33, February 2011) The work is mentioned both in my bibliography and in the reference notes to four of my twelve chapters.'

Linda Hart writes: 'I am delighted to discover that it was Richard Perceval Graves's biography, which I admire a great deal, that led me to Norman Marlow's book. My error came about because of the arrangement of the backmatter in Richard's book and the fact that Marlow's book was treated differently from his other references. I looked carefully through the "Abbreviations" that precede the notes, and Marlow was not listed there.'

I did not realise (a) that there are three references to Marlow in the notes but they use his *full* name and not an abbreviation; and (b) that a bibliographical essay appears *after* the twenty pages of notes.

Short Stories from Humphrey Clucas

Humphrey Clucas is one of our many distinguished members and is a composer, singer and author. He was a choral scholar and read English at King's College, Cambridge. Having taught English in schools for twenty-seven years, he gave up teaching on his appointment as a Lay Vicar with the choir of Westminster Abbey, from which he retired in 1999.

Death in the Vestry and Other Stories is a witty and skilfully written collection of short stories by Humphrey Clucas. Comprising eight stories and a *Christmas Supplement* of moving and thought-provoking poetry, this attractive volume makes delightful reading in the best traditions of the English short story.

The first three stories, brought together under the title *Elegies*, have as their central figure a retired music teacher, Geoffrey Haygarth. Seeking a quiet retirement in the village of Little Westing, where his services as church organist are welcomed, he soon finds himself drawn into the intrigues of village life with the murder of the newly arrived and unpopular lady team vicar, the arrival of a mysterious bundle of literary references which contain clues to a hidden life and finally a series of poison pen references to the darker secrets of members of the parish community. Of the three stories, the second, *'Lake'*, uses literary reference to weave a subtle narrative with shades of a cryptic crossword, including references to Housman's life and poetry which members will find particularly enjoyable. As a continuing theme, the stories also see Haygarth slipping quietly into ever-greater retirement and contentment in a way that is most moving.

Three *Fables* then follow which, in a delightfully whimsical manner, bring together the Devil and cricket (a natural marriage, some would say), a unicorn and young village virgins and finally a true miracle from a religious relic. The last two stories, *'From a Royal Peculiar'*, take an amusing and lightly irreverent look at the life and work of a cathedral and more specifically its choir and clergy. These are a real delight, written with affectionate humour and understanding of the human foibles of their characters.

The poetic *Christmas Supplement* comprises five short poems that, in true poetic fashion, look at the all too familiar narrative of the nativity from new and moving directions, giving voices to the figures who stand around the manger. The pathos of the last, *Lullaby*, is most powerful as, while it continues the gentle soporific rhythm throughout, it ends with its vision of our Saviour who will, "Live to be real / In a seethe of seeming, / And die, broken/ Mocked, redeeming." The carefully chosen words and careful structure of the poetry is typical of the care and skill that has gone into the collection as a whole. Attractively illustrated by Janet Clucas, the collection is highly recommended for a broad readership and will appeal particular to the membership.

Death in the Vestry (ISBN 978-0-9550470-3-9) is published by the Lewin Press, 19 Norman Road, Sutton, Surrey SM1 2TB at a price of £7.50. Cheques payable to Humphrey Clucas.

A.M.

John Wood Dies

John Wood, the actor who played A.E.H. in the first production of *The Invention of Love* at the National Theatre has died at the age of 81. On reviewing the production in the Journal of 1997 Kate Shaw wrote, 'A 77 year-old A.E.H. emerges from the mists. It is the Dodd portait come to life. The slightly arched moustache, the buttoned-up suit, restricting stiff collar, right down to the small black boots, John Wood *is* A.E.H.'

Some of us who went on the Society trip to the National Theatre met him at the reception after the performance and the strong profile and lean frame that he showed on the stage was even more apparent close to.

Michael Coveney, writing in *The Guardian*, began his review, 'John Wood, who has died aged 81, was one of the greatest stage actors of the past century, especially associated with his roles in the plays of Tom Stoppard. But a combination of his enigmatic privacy and low profile on film – he cropped up a lot without dominating a movie – meant that he remained largely unknown to the wider public.

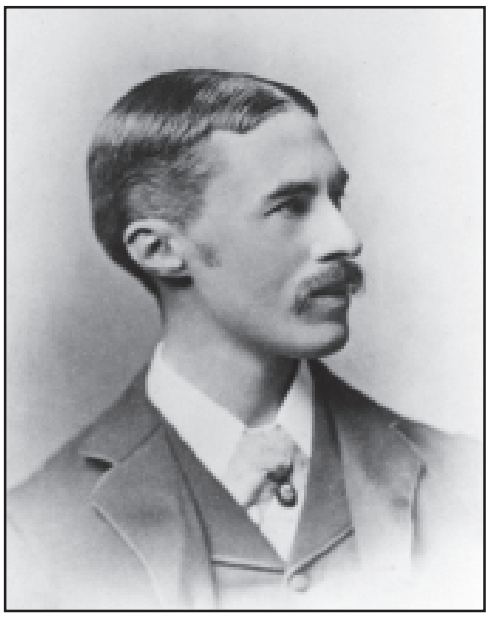
As with all great actors, you always knew what he was thinking, all the time. Wood was especially striking in the brain-box department. Tall, forbidding and aquiline-featured, he was as much the perfect Sherlock Holmes on stage as he was the ideal Brutus. He exuded ferocious intelligence, and the twinkle in his eye could be as merciless as it was invariably amused.'

Other Obituaries

We are sad to record the death last month of two local members. **Philip Turner** lived in Solihull and was enthusiastic and knowledgeable about many areas of the arts and, with his friend **John Hammond**, always supported the Society by coming to the Annual General Meeting. Sadly his friend John, who lived in Bromsgrove, died a few days before Phil. Both were regular supporters of the Society and with their wives, Diana and Margaret, always enjoyed attending the Ludlow Commemoration. Our sympathies go out to their families.

'Deeply Unfashionable' A.E.H. ?

Two Radio 4 programmes, 'Great Lives' and 'Beacons and Blue Remembered Hills', and Carol Rumens' article in The Guardian (reproduced on page 3) have created a considerable amount of 'blogging' on the internet. One correspondent called Housman 'deeply unfashionable' and another asked why he seemed to have fallen out of fashion so badly in recent years. Many of the 'blogs' were downright silly but the views of 'A.L.', who started the corresponence, are worth reproducing.



A.L. Admittedly, A.E.H.'s life doesn't appear to have been a great one. After failing his first degree at Oxford in mysterious circumstances, he became a clerk at the Patent Office before becoming a classical scholar at the age of 33, eventually becoming Professor of Latin at Cambridge in 1911. His classical scholarship – erudite and witheringly dismissive of his rivals – still has its followers, but it is his poetry that reached a far wider audience, beginning with his 1895 collection *A Shropshire Lad*, a title laced with an irony that probably escaped most of its first readers: Housman had never set foot in the county before writing it.

After his death in 1936, a posthumous collection, *More Poems,* was published that alternated between more reveries on the beauties of nature and personal reflections on his unrequited love for his Oxford friend Moses Jackson. Some of this writing, such as XXXI's 'Because I liked you better / Than suits a man to say' is still amazingly suggestive sexually, such as the observation that the two men should part 'stiff and dry'.

Housman's reputation burgeoned in the 20th century, partly because of the support of writers such as Kingsley Amis and Betjeman, and partly because in the poetry of Larkin (who described him as 'the poet of unhappiness'), there were clear echoes of Housman's wry, wistful reflections on a bygone England that probably never had existed in the first place. Seventy years after his death, Tom Stoppard's masterly and underrated play *The Invention of Love* sought to compare the repressed existence of Housman with the fin-de-siècle of Wilde and the Aesthetic movement, giving Housman a sympathetic hearing as a passionate, brilliant man unable to break out against the strictures of society.

This century, Housman's reputation seems to have plummeted. There has been no major biography of him, perhaps on account of the dullness of his life, nor any serious re-evaluation of the poetry. He was unfortunate in that he was neither a flashy aesthete nor a daring modernist, producing old-fashioned verse that used simple forms and unflashy language to evoke time, place and mood with consummate skill. Perhaps surprisingly, it was Alan Hollinghurst who has been his most public advocate of late, writing a well-considered and moving foreword to a recent collection, which made a cogent argument for why Housman should be considered first and foremost a queer writer. In his work, with its subtle themes of disguise, ever-shifting personae and, of course, 'the love that dare not speak its name', Housman now seems to be closer to his decadent and modernist peers than before. Perhaps Stoppard's comparisons with that great dissembler Wilde are more apt than ever.

BM. Isn't it a bit early, just eight years in, to be talking about 'this century' in quite these terms? I wonder just how many writers have had no biographies published in the last eight years? Quite a list, I'd imagine.

FP. In my old Penguin edition, John Sparrow's introduction says 'Poetry was for him, he said, "a morbid secretion", as the pearl is for the oyster. The desire or need to write poetry did not come upon him often, and it came usually when he was ill or depressed ..." ...he was a genuinely unhappy person...'

ZB. His *Fragment Of A Greek Tragedy* gives the lie to any idea he had no sense of humour. It's a terrific spoof of that genre, being a chunk of an imaginary play with, of course, a murder in it, consisting of a continuous run of droll over-the-top verbal conceits and disarming statements of the obvious parodying those to be found in real, extant Greek tragedies. (Maybe, indeed, they were culled from real plays, and set here in incongruous juxtaposition.) Housman wrote this piece in both English and Ancient Greek, in the latter case no doubt following all the rules and conventions of the versification.

CC. In my last year of school, we studied two poets in some detail, one of whom was A.E. Housman. Remarkably, and whatever his place in the pantheon, it was through Housman that a class of cynical teens, half of whom were self-conscious 'rugger buggers', actually engaged with, if not enthused over, poetry.

Forthcoming Events

Thursday 10 November 2011, 4.30pm
Artrix, Slideslow Drive, Bromsgrove
SCHOOLS POETRY SPEAKING COMPETITION FINALS
Competing pupils from Bromsgrove's schools will speak a poem by A.E. Housman and another poem of their own choice. There are categories for Sixth Formers, Juniors and for the Middle School age group. Open to the public and support from members is very welcome.

Wednesday 7 March 2012, 7.30pm
80 New Road, Bromsgrove B60 2LA
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
The meeting will be followed by a talk from James Jones, who is a House Parent at Housman Hall, which will be based on his research on the Victorian Bachelor. He will relate this to the Housman Family. Wine and Refreshments.

Monday 26 March 2012, 12.30pm
The Statue, High Street, Bromsgrove
A.E.H. BIRTHDAY COMMEMORATION
The annual ceremony by the statue will be followed by a buffet lunch in Housman Hall, by kind invitation of the Headmaster of Bromsgrove School. Guest of the Day to be announced.

Monday 30 April 2012, 11.00am
St Laurence's, Ludlow
LUDLOW COMMEMORATION
The ceremony by the plaque on the north wall will be followed by a tour of the Parish Church Full details of timings and lunch to be confirmed.

Wednesday 6 June 2012 (early evening – time tbc)
The Hay Festival of Literature
THE HOUSMAN LECTURE
The Name and Nature of Poetry
Michael Berkeley
We are delighted to welcome Michael Berkeley as our guest. The lecture will be followed by supper in the sponsors' marquee to which members are cordially invited. See page 17.

Saturday 26 May 2012, 7.30pm
St Laurence's, Ludlow
A.E. HOUSMAN – SHROPSHIRE'S POET
An evening in aid of St Laurence's Conservation Trust in which Graham Trew (baritone), Polly Bolton (singer), Frances Page (reader) and Jim Page (narrator) explore the resonances of Housman's poetry with Shropshire.

Friday 26 to Sunday 28 October 2012
Housman Hall
THE HOUSMAN SOCIETY WEEKEND
Plans are well advanced for another Society Weekend in Housman Hall in October 2012. Preliminary details are given on page 10. If you are interested in coming please put the date in your diary.

New Society Cards

Two new greetings cards have been added to the Society's range. One is 'When smoke stood up from Ludlow' with another brilliant photo by Gareth Thomas and the second is 'Loveliest of trees the cherry now'. We have long been looking for the 'right' photograph for this most popular of A.E.H.'s poems and have at last found one taken by David Evans, who lives in Menith Wood.

Included with this mailing is a card order form and as prices in the shops gradually increase these quality cards become excellent value at £1.50 each, or 4 for £5.00 or the complete set for £9.00. For orders sent on the enclosed order form postage will be free.

Housman and his troubles are ashes under the frying pan? (A stall in front of A.E.H.'s plaque at the St Laurence's Conservation Trust Weekend)

Published by The Housman Society, 80 New Road, Bromsgrove. The next Newsletter will be circulated in February 2012 and contributions should be sent to the Editor at the address given on page 1 by 1st February 2012.