



NEWSLETTER

September 2015

No. 42 Editor: Andrew Maund, 57 Marlborough Avenue, Bromsgrove B60 2PH
E-mail Address: amaund167@sky.com Website: www.housman-society.co.uk

Thought-provoking and masterly Hay Lecture from Anthony Holden

Andrew Maund reports on Anthony Holden's 'Name and Nature of Poetry' lecture given at this year's Hay Festival of Literature on 26th May.

As is very well known to us all, in describing his reaction to recalling a line of poetry, as recorded in the original Leslie Stephen Lecture "On the Name and Nature of Poetry", Housman affirmed its physical symptoms. His skin would bristle so that his razor ceased to act; he also mentioned the accompanying symptoms of:

"...a shiver down the spine;...a constriction of the throat and a precipitation of water to the eyes..."



It was therefore particularly appropriate that the editor of the extremely popular *Poems that Make Grown Men Cry*, Anthony Holden, delivered this year's lecture. Indeed, in the introduction to his collection of tear-jerking poems, he refers not only to the poetry of A.E.H., but also to the original lecture and the "brouhaha provoked at the time by Housman's emphasis on the emotional power of poetry". It was a personal, thought-provoking and thoroughly enjoyable event.

A packed Oxford Moot pavilion saw our speaker introduced by the mastermind and leading figure of the Hay Festival, Peter Florence. Mr Holden entitled his lecture *Dirty Postcards in a drawer*, a reference to the W.H. Auden's sonnet, first published in 1939, in which he writes of Housman, "Heart-injured in North London" as one who "Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer". Holden described that line as "crude, almost brutal", but the idea behind it became a central tenet of the lecture.

First of all, he countered Auden's description of Housman by a reference to the original *Name and Nature* lecture, exploring its ideas and importance in subsequent academic exploration of the appreciation of poetry. One of the most

trenchant critics of A.E.H.'s focus on the emotional was Frank Kermode, later to be a close friend of our speaker and someone who, by a wonderful turn of irony, was an important part of the inspiration for *Poems that make Grown Men Cry*. For, our speaker explained, it was over Sunday lunch at Kermode's Cambridge home that the discussion of this very effect upon mutual friends began. The ending of Hardy's *The Darkling Thrush* was the first quoted example of such a lachrymose response, to which Kermode

himself then responded by reading Larkin's *Unfinished Poem*, although he couldn't bring himself to complete the reading, so moved was he then and there by the words and their effect.

That initial seed having been sown, it was some years before the work began in earnest, with the help of Holden's son Ben. In the final edition, first published in 2014, Housman and Hardy scored highly amongst the poems chosen, with three each. Only Larkin and, in another ironic twist, Auden have more, with five.

In the next part of the lecture, we were intrigued to hear of the pairs of contributors – four in all – who, while very different in character and background, happened quite independently to choose the same poems. Middle East war correspondent Robert Fisk and Julian Fellowes, the creator of *Downton Abbey*, both chose *Remember* by Christina Rossetti; David Puttnam, the film producer, and Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International both chose Tagore's *Let My Country Awake*. Historian Simon Schama and the actor Simon Callow both opted for Auden's



Lullaby which – again ironically – first appeared in that same slim 1940 volume as that mean-spirited sonnet with its reference to Housman and the Dirty Postcards. Perhaps the most striking contrast of all came with the renowned biologist Richard Dawkins and the former poet laureate Andrew Motion, who both chose A.E.H.’s *LP XL*. At this point in the lecture, Holden read that poem (“Tell me not here, it needs not saying...”) and did so quite beautifully. The reference to “heartless, witless nature” had a particular effect on Dawkins who, in his explanation of his choice (and such explanations are a major source of delight in the anthology) commented, “DNA neither cares nor knows. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.”

With an appropriate focus on Housman, our speaker then explored the choice by Andrew Motion, who suggested that the tendency of an audience to cry in response to poetry increased with age, “because we feel the sadness of the creatures (and our fellow human beings) more keenly. And because we can see the dark at the end of the tunnel more clearly.” Housman had also been chosen by the American journalist Joe Klein, who, as the anonymous author of *Primary Colors*, wrote about Bill Clinton’s 1992 primary campaign. He chose *MP XVI*, recalling a particularly poignant moment around the time of his parents’ death when, watching the instalment of the TV series “Morse” entitled *The Remorseful Day*, he heard John Thaw reciting Housman; a triply poignant moment, since the character of Morse and the actor Thaw were both near death and Klein’s parents had just passed away. In his explanation, Klein writes, “I miss Morse, Thaw, and of course my parents. But the poem remains, a reminder of grief so pure that it can also cleanse.”

While intimations of mortality are one of the most common themes of the anthology other motifs range from pain and loss to the beauty and variety of nature – as well as love, in all its many guises. Three of the contributors have suffered the ultimate pain of losing a child; others are moved to tears by the sheer beauty of the way a poet captures, in Alexander Pope’s famous phrase, ‘what oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d.’ That sense of familiarity, of the idea that someone else has seen, heard or felt what we have, is surely part of the appeal of poetry for us all. Housman, of course, explored this with the sense of the “vibration” set up in the reader corresponding to what is felt by the writer and transmitted by poetry. This “transmission of emotion” is what it is in any poem that moves us, sometimes to tears.

Music, of course, is another art form that has a similar power and Holden then recalled hearing a performance, in which his first wife was the accompanist, of the Vaughan Williams’ setting of *ASL XXVII*, “Is my team ploughing”; this he described as “a rare example of a song in which the words overpower the music.” The words of the poem, he believes, call out not only to the generation of Butterworth and Gurney, blighted by war, but also to Holden himself – had he contributed a choice to his own anthology, it would have been this poem.

Our speaker then explored further, with scholarly and precise references to Housman, Wilfred Owen and Freud, among others, exactly how poetry and its effects might be recognised, exploring too how events in one’s life might prompt an unconscious reference to poetry to appear as the way of expressing what was felt. For poetry has the power to explore and expose the emotions which lie beneath a situation in the associations of a few words and their context.

In summary, Holden opined that the predominant themes of the anthology were the overwhelming experience of pain and loss and an elusive sense of yearning, often at missed opportunities; both of these feelings grow more common as one grows older. He quoted Melvyn Bragg’s response to a Shakespearean sonnet: “All great poems are about each one of us.” Like Housman himself, he encouraged us in the audience to surrender to our deepest feelings in response to poetry, confirming that this would make life more liveable, as it tapped into our innermost reserves. Like Mithridates in *ASL LXII*, regular, small exposures to the poison of painful experience will inure us against all that life can throw at us. He closed his thought-provoking and masterful lecture by quoting Philip Larkin’s observation that the difference between novels and poetry is that novels are about other people and poetry is about ourselves.

Bromsgrove Commemoration



The new Headmaster of Bromsgrove School, Peter Clague, was the Guest of the Day at this year’s Commemoration.

From the Secretary's Desk

It is most pleasing to report that the Society has now filled the position of a volunteer to set future editions of the Newsletter.

Julian Hunt, younger brother of Treasurer Max Hunt, has some considerable experience in these matters and has agreed to take on this job in the future. The Society is most appreciative of this kind offer and has breathed a collective sigh of relief.

But there are other changes afoot and it is only proper that I should bring you up to date with the current state of play. In the last Newsletter I mentioned that Jim Page was looking to reduce his workload after thirty-five years on the Committee, the vast bulk of them as Chairman. Well, Jim now thinks that the time is approaching when it is appropriate for him to step down as Chairman and has suggested that he makes the formal announcement at next year's Annual General Meeting.

Thus there need to be further revisions to the way that the Society is managed and the reason is simply that the title of Chairman gives no indication of the workload that Jim has taken on over the years. When I was appointed as Secretary last year it was the first time the position had been filled for over twenty years because Jim had performed all of those duties, unacknowledged, in his spare time. And he set the Newsletter and provided much of the content. And organised the commemorations and liaised with Bromsgrove Council, Ludlow Clergy and the bigwigs at the Hay Festival. And organised the trips, the events, the catering, controlled the publishing of a succession of Society books and.... but I could go on like this for some time without hesitation or repetition. Suffice to say that his contribution to the Society has been immense.

This Society is no different from most Literary Societies in that it comprises, in the main, an ageing membership and an ageing Committee and it is inevitable that Jim's imminent retirement, coming close behind that of other Society stalwarts Val Richardson and Kate and Robin Shaw, will put a strain on

things in the short term. But the Committee is determined that the show will go on and, in this regard, we are making some changes in the way we do things. I will therefore, with immediate effect, take over the duties of Treasurer from Max Hunt who will become Secretary of the Society. I will remain the first point of contact for all Society enquiries and continue with the routine Secretarial jobs, take over the Membership rolls and deal with home and overseas Journal Sales while Max will attend to all other Secretarial duties, take control of driving the Society forward and deal with the events and activities. David Butterfield is continuing as Journal Editor and Julian Hunt is taking over the production of the Newsletter with Andrew Maund remaining Editor.. An enthusiastic Committee will do the rest while the position of a new Chairman will be resolved in due course.

But it would be remiss of me if I did not put out an appeal to any member local to Housman's South Shropshire who would be prepared to take on the marketing duties for the Society's book publications. Sonia French will continue to attend to all telephone and internet orders for books and merchandise as she has for a number of years but the marketing duties would involve liaising with, and restocking, our existing group of booksellers, retailers and local authority venues, and locating new outlets for our material. This is a position which has been left to run itself for some time and would now really benefit from a hand on the tiller. This job can be done in a very flexible manner and the Society would really benefit from reducing much of its stock levels. Committee membership is offered but is not obligatory. If anyone could help in this regard I would be delighted to hear from them.

I may be contacted on <info@housman-society.co.uk> or any of the contact points given on the Book Exchange pages.

Confessions of a Newsletter Setter

Since the Newsletter was resurrected in 1998 Jim Page has been responsible for its production and in this his last issue – the 36th – he tells of some of the challenges that always have to be tackled.

When I first undertook the setting of the Newsletter I was a complete novice at computers but I had inherited a desktop publishing programme called Pagemaker (now very out of date) and learnt the basics from our son Christopher. My skills have gradually improved and I like to think that the format that has developed is easy to read and by keeping to regular deadlines members know when to expect their twice yearly news bulletin.

Undoubtedly the hardest part is determining the number of pages that an edition will run to. So often the material will not fit into twelve pages (or sixteen or twenty) so one adds in

another four, only to find that you are then struggling to fill them. By this time deadlines are looming and the pressures mount. This issue is a case in point as I forgot that there was this third of a page blank! (I often wonder how many readers identify which are the "fillers"! Of course one could hold over some articles till the next issue but I find that very hard to do, especially when one has spent hours setting it. There is much more I could say but as I have filled the space I can finish with thanks to our proof readers (after all "accuracy is a duty"! and thanks to our two editors Stephen de Winton and Andrew Maund, and our excellent printers, Lonsdale Print of Wellingborough.

Centenary of Lieut. Clement Symons' death in September 1916

Clement Symons was the third son of Kate and Edward Symons and we are very grateful to King Edward's School, Bath for permission to reprint the account published in an inserted four page leaflet in 'The Edwardian' a hundred years ago.

**Lieutenant Clement Aubrey Symons
10th Battn. Gloucestershire Regt.
Killed in action near La Basse,
September 25th, 1915, Aged 22**

HIS LAST LETTER

The following extracts are taken from the last letter received from Lieut. C. A. Symons, third son of Mr. E. W. Symons, headmaster of King Edward's School, Bath. The letter was written on September 23rd to a friend in Bath, and was received on September 30th:

"A very few lines before the fun starts. I have been up in the trenches since the 14th, bringing up all sorts of things to the firing line. We were a fatigue party, and have had about 12 hours' sleep the last three days. We moved back last night to join up with the rest of our battalion. We are now on the march for either death or victory. All are in good spirits. We are taking things easy for an hour in a wood, near the large town that we were in on leaving the trenches the first time (Bethune). We feel so happy, everything points to great success. The Huns are being strafed terribly, and will be for a day or two longer. We went up to do certain 'fatigue work' and reached a badly shelled village about 9.40 pm., and were working from then until 1 pm. next day, without any food and no rest. We had appallingly heavy burdens to carry, which were very difficult to get round the traverses. I know now the part of the trenches which we are about to hold. We bivouacked for nights in some trenches which have been dug by French miners as the last line trenches – fine dug-outs and good trenches. It was bitterly cold. I shall be able to tell you full details in a few days, I hope. Look out for good news in four or five days from now."



LETTER FROM THE ADJUTANT

The following is a letter received by the parents of Lieutenant Symons from the Adjutant of the 10th Gloucester Regiment:

France; October 4th, 1915.

It is my painful duty to have to write to tell you what great loss the Battalion has sustained in the death of your son, Lieutenant C. A. Symons, of No. 2 Company 10th Gloucester Regiment. As you will know from the papers, the Army carried out an assault on the 25th September, and to the 10th was assigned a line of front in the very van of the battle, No. 2 Company being on the first line. Gloriously they performed, and the ultimate success that was obtained was in no little measure due to the heroic and magnificent way in which the officers led their men. This was particularly the case with your son, I saw and so I know. When with Headquarter party I came across the awful, shell-strewn ground, I found your son at the head of his platoon. He had managed to get through the wire entanglements, only to pay the great price on the other side. He was shot through the head, so death must have been instantaneous. Behind him were the men of his platoon, hung on the wire, nobly following his splendid example and leadership. How great this loss is we do not yet fully realise. We have lost a great number of fine brave officers we could ill spare, but we honour his deed, and are proud of the sacrifice he made. Will you please understand what I feel it is impossible to write, and that is, how very sorry we all are for such irreparable loss? Our grief is yours, and yours is ours. Will you please inform his fiancée, as I do not know her address? I wish with all my heart to convey to you our sincerest sympathy and our appreciation of his efforts. May you be comforted and sustained in such a loss.

STORY OF THE BRITISH ADVANCE 25th September 1915

Sergeant H. A. Vale, of the 19th Gloucesters, writing home, says:

"As you know there has been a great battle, and we have come out top. We had been in the trenches three days waiting for the attack, but on Friday night we were told that in the morning we should go over the parapet, so you can tell we were feeling just about wound up. When Saturday morning came our guns started telling them a few tales; it was just like thunder. But our fellows did not go on for long before the Bosches started giving us 'gip', and unfortunately a good few of our chaps got hit. At half past six we went over the top. It was a grand sight to see them how they did it. You may say that the good old 10th maintained the Gloucesters reputation. Our battalion find the 8th Berks led the attack of the first brigade, and did it splendidly. Our orders were to take three lines of trenches, two more battalions would then come through and go on. I think this is the beginning of the

end and it wont last much longer now. The Germans must have lost terribly.”

A sergeant describes the commencement of the great advance as follows:

“It was a fine sight. Two battalions had been added to the brigade. They were composed of West Countrymen. They’d seen work in the trenches but had never had a real chance until now. When the advance began they moved across the ground, erect, marching just as though they were on parade! They even had their rifles sloped. It was a splendid sight those fellows made, and I shall never forget it.”

What greatly impressed another soldier, a private, was the quietness with which the advance began.

“The guns had all stopped, and the men set off so quietly that we in the reserves actually didn’t know they had gone. We had expected cheering, but there was absolute silence. When we set out, in our turn, we found they had advanced a couple of miles an hour!”

It may be here noted that the 10th Gloucesters went out to the front on August 8, and after inspection by a staff general they were drafted with the 8th Berkshire Regiment into the 1st Brigade of the 1st Division of the 1st Army. Each company was then attached to some regiment for trench work, and No. 2 Company, in which Lieut. Symons was, was attached to the 1st Cameron Highlanders, and worked with them until they went back for divisional rest.

THE CONFLICT

Her strong enchantments broken,
Her towers of fear in wreck.
Her lembicks dried of poison,
And his foot on her neck.

The queen of air and darkness,
Begins to shrill and cry,
O young man, O my slayer,
To-morrow you shall die.

O queen of air and darkness,
I think ’tis truth you say,
And I shall die to-morrow
But you will die to-day.

The above fine lines, pourtraying (*sic*) the triumph of a man over the onslaught of cowardice or fear, were copied by Lieutenant Symons into an autograph book just before leaving for the front, 8th August, 1915.

Editor’s Note: There was no title to the poem when it was included in *Last Poems*. Archie Burnett has much interesting background on pages 373-4 of his *Poems of A.E. Housman*.

Committee Member Roy Birch Dies

We are sad to report the death last April of Roy Birch, who after a lifetime in teaching concluded his career as Head of English at Haybridge High School in Hagley. Roy joined the committee in 1990 and lost no time in establishing himself as a highly intelligent and proactive member. He was one of the tightly-knit 1996 sub-committee and the first task he took on was to select and edit a collection of Housman’s comic verse, which he suggested calling *Unkind to Unicorns*. He commissioned the drawings from David Harris, who although still a student, proved an excellent choice with illustrations that brilliantly captured the wit of A.E.H.’s verse. The book was published in time for the *Shropshire Lad* Centenary and sold so well that a second edition followed three years later.



Roy Birch (second from right) outside Westminster Abbey in September 1996 with Robin Shaw, Jim Page and Jennie McGregor-Smith

His next assignment was to edit with Alan Holden *A.E. Housman - a Reassessment*, a volume which Macmillan agreed to publish as a centenary year tribute. Delays in the process meant that it did not appear for several years but the finished result was a testimony to Roy’s and Alan’s perseverance. Articles from a dozen top academics really did contribute to boosting A.E.H.’s standing. He also co-edited the *Society Journal* with Alan Holden for a number of years but in 1998 that came to an end when Roy decided to move to Wales to further his studies of all things Welsh at Aberystwyth University. His wife Pauline pre-deceased Roy by a year.

Roy was not a believer and requested that there should be no gathering of any sort after his death, but he will be remembered by his friends and fellow members of the Society for his fierce intelligence his scholarship and his wit.

Catshill Conservation

It is twenty years since Robin Shaw's "Housman's Places" chose Christ Church, Catshill as the place to begin the family's story. From 1838 until his retirement in 1864 AEH's grandfather, Thomas Housman, was first curate and then vicar of Catshill. Here the infant Alfred Edward was brought to be christened on Easter Sunday 1859. Eleven years later Thomas was buried at the southern end of the small churchyard where he would eventually be joined by his wife Ann and A.E.H.'s father, mother, and stepmother.

The last of these family funerals was in 1907 but it is assumed that Alfred would have returned from time to time during his occasional visits to Bromsgrove. However, there was clearly little solace to be found here:-

There's empty acres west and east,
But aye 'tis God's that bears the least:
This hopeless garden that they sow
With the seeds that never grow.



In more recent time, followers of our Housman Trail have been dismayed at the neglect of the family graves. While stone was beginning to flake and inscriptions disappear under green mould, the "seeds that never grow" had been overwhelmed by those that most certainly did. With little prospect of any intervention by the District Council or the dwindling band of parishioners, your Secretary and Treasurer decided that direct action was called for.

Since the early Spring Peter Sisley and Max Hunt have spent several half-days in the churchyard clearing weed growth and restoring collapsed edging. Following professional advice, flaking stonework has been tidied and Victorian inscriptions revealed by judicious use of simple scrubbing brushes and



clean water. The results of this conservation activity can be seen in the accompanying photographs.

Your Committee will now consider what might be done to better signpost the graves from the churchyard entrance. Meanwhile it

would be good to hear from any members (living closer perhaps than Peter or Max) who would be willing to give the occasional hour to tending the graves by clearing fallen twigs and leaves. In that way we might again help visitors to feel that someone cares about this significant piece of Housman heritage. Offers to Jim or Peter?

M.K.J.H.



Knobbly Knees

With apologies to ASL II

Knobbiest of knees, arthritis now
Has bent my back-bone like a bow;
Sapped my youthful puissance lithe
And worn my joints from side to side.

Now, of the Marathons I've run,
Sadly, none I'll run again.
Feet, that fleet my body bore,
Crippled, carry me no more.

Ceramic hips, my scheduled doom;
My knees, a metal sheathing soon.
Pilgrim; bounding limbs must grow
To ancient sockets, leaden, slow.

John Burman

Perfect summer's day for Blue Plaque unveiling on Laurence's 'Longmeadow'

A perfect summer's day in a Somerset garden was the idyllic setting on Saturday 18 July, for a gathering of members of the Housman Society, the Street Society and guests, *writes Elizabeth Oakley*. At Longmeadow, Burleigh Lane, Street, by kind permission of Mr & Mrs John and Rita Millener, a Blue Plaque was unveiled to commemorate the life and work of playwright, author and illustrator, Laurence Housman (18 July 1865 – 20 February 1959). Laurence's play-writing took him in his earlier years to London and Broadway

before he and his sister Clemence made their home at Longmeadow, in Street from 1924 until his death 35 years later. There they cherished an abiding friendship with Roger and Sarah Clark at nearby Whitenights.

After the unveiling of the plaque and a pleasant buffet lunch in the sunlit garden of Longmeadow, at 2 pm in Street Library, Elizabeth Oakley gave a talk on the work of Laurence Housman and his sister Clemence, to whom the author always paid homage for her talents as an engraver and lauded her considerable literary prowess. He had, however, been wont to retreat to his writing room in the Longmeadow garden, known as "The Elbow Room" to escape from Clemence's penchant for frequent vacuuming cleaning. From earliest childhood he and his six siblings had escaped into the garden

of their home at Bromsgrove into the world of their own literary imaginings.

Some of the Housman books which were the result of those imaginings, available to see and handle at the talk, were beautiful examples of engraving and embellishment which were reminiscent of the artistry found in a medieval manuscript.

Laurence Housman's greatest success was in his short playlets, some of which were controversial at a time of stricter theatrical censorship due to depictions of biblical

characters and living members of the Royal Family. Indeed, his *Victoria Regina* could not be staged until 1937, 100 years



after the accession of Queen Victoria. Laurence's works covered all kinds of literature from socialist and pacifist pamphlets to children's stories. His interests were not confined to literature, he was also a pacifist and socialist as well as espousing the cause of women's suffrage. During the First World War he took a pacifist stance and interested himself in helping Belgian refugees, a cause which was also aided by the Clark family.

He also edited the poems of his more celebrated older brother, A.E. (Alfred) Housman. Alfred sent a copy of his

most famous collection *A Shropshire Lad* to Oscar Wilde who then, in error, wrote a letter of appreciation to Laurence. How apt it is that Alfred had written to Laurence that "I had far, far rather have my poems mistaken for yours, than your poems mistaken for mine." Laurence, more than once was asked to autograph a copy of 'A Shropshire Lad', but "conscientiously refrained".



Rita and John Millener, Joyce Smith (Chairman of Street Parish Council), Elizabeth Oakley, Jim Page and Barbara Cowell (Chairman of The Street Society)

During Laurence's years at Longmeadow, whilst in retreat in "The Elbow Room" he wrote an autobiography, *The Unexpected Years* (1937), in which he said his life had been "so unexpected, so extraordinarily unlike anything I had ever imagined". Even today his writing still retains a freshness, a wit, a pathos which make it important to keep the name of Laurence Housman alive and to preserve the Housman collection for others.



Liz Oakley introducing the proceedings

Problems galore in refurbishment of Bromsgrove's Housman Statue

As part of the scheme to regenerate Bromsgrove High Street the Housman Statue was moved from its original position a small distance to a more central location. However a series of what might be called 'mishaps' resulted in the finished product looking very different from that envisaged. Chairman Jim Page reports.

Some five years ago Bromsgrove District Council embarked on a plan to upgrade the High Street and to get the views and support of the local community formed what was rather clumsily called "Townscape Heritage Initiative Partnership Steering Group". I represented the Housman Society and committee member Jennie McGregor-Smith represented the Victorian Society. We used to meet every quarter and when the Lottery granted us £1.2 million pounds and Worcestershire County Council backed it with £400,000 things began moving and initiatives of all sorts were put forward. There was much talk of public art and, in view of Bromsgrove's importance in the nailing industry, there was a real opportunity to commission a sculpture paying homage to this side of town's heritage. Our Society committee was keen to see quotations from Housman included in the complete repaving of the High Street, but although there was token agreement and a subcommittee (which never met!) was formed there was little real enthusiasm from those in power who tended to see these as "arty" projects and not good use of the money.



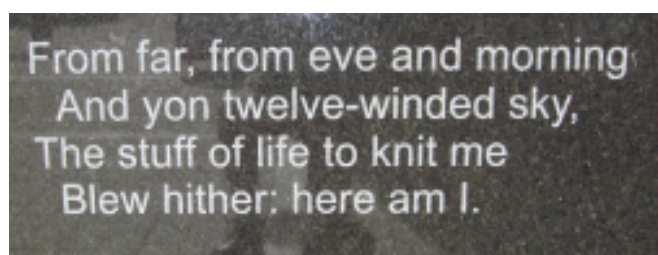
postponed it was felt that we should wait till the March Birthday Commemoration. Imagine my frustration when I was told three days before 26th March that the wrong side of the stone had been engraved so there could be no unveiling - which the new Headmaster of Bromsgrove School had specifically been invited to carry out.

The next stage of the saga came some months later when workmen arrived to glue the new cladding to the concrete plinth. However to our great surprise it was not of stone to match that used in the High Street as planned, but polished granite, a material much more suited to a cemetery. Further, these four pieces of granite cladding highlighted that the concrete plinth was not vertical so there were gaps of different sizes at each corner and no provision had been made for filling in the corners - or indeed the top where there was a gap of several centimetres which would allow the rain in, and in due course the frost. The man in charge at the Council assured us that we would get used to it, but

it was so obviously wrong that some solution had to be found.

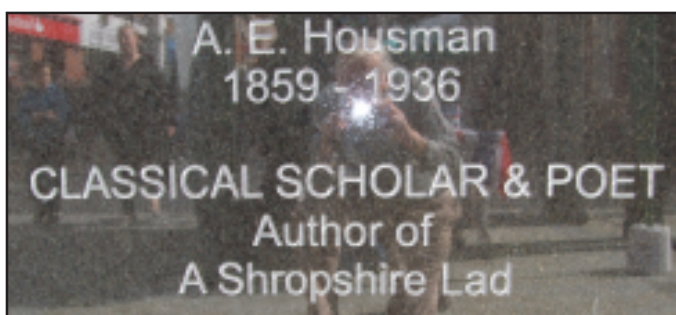
Our salvation came when Dennis Norton, whose local fame extends beyond his amazing Museum Collection, knocked on my front door one day and asked if I was happy with the state of the statue! He duly volunteered to find a solution and, in the course of ten days, with remarkable energy, skill and enterprise he obtained black steel tubing for the corners and finials to finish them off. His filling of the gaps ensured the frost could not get behind the cladding and he completed the job by finding a paint to match.

To meet the redoubtable Dennis Norton and see his work come to the Bromsgrove Commemoration on 29th March when he will be our Guest of the Day.



Quotations from 'A Shropshire Lad' are now on two sides of the plinth, complemented by the original wording on the north and south faces

The repaving of the High Street however has turned out to be an excellent job with tasteful use of natural stone including Yorkstone and Granite, but when it was officially opened last August the Housman Statue stood on a bare concrete plinth. It transpired that the original cladding had been damaged in moving the statue and the stone for its replacement, which had been ordered from China, had not yet arrived. A provisional unveiling of the refurbished statue was fixed for November, but when this had to be



Jim Page to retire at 2016 AGM

For a Society to have had only two Chairmen in its first 43 years must be quite unusual but with Jim Page due to announce his retirement at next year's AGM he reminds members of the circumstances of his taking over the post from John Pugh in 1987 and recalls a few highlights during his time as Chairman.

1987 seems a long time ago and one's memory fades, so quoting my Chairman's Notes from that year's Journal is a good way to be reminded of the circumstances which led to me becoming Chairman.

Since the last issue of the Journal there seems to have been a jinx on the officers and committee of the Society, and more changes have resulted than at any other time in the Society's history. John Pugh, the co-founder of the Society and moving spirit for so many years, set in motion an unhappy sequence of events when he retired as a result of his taking on being Traffic Commissioner for the West Midlands. He had guided the Society for so long that it was with some trepidation that I agreed to succeed him as Chairman. Our Membership Secretary, Kathleen Braithwaite, had a very serious motor accident in November from which she is slowly recovering, and Betty Barley, the Treasurer from the beginning, died most unexpectedly just before Christmas after a short illness. Philip Darby resigned as Secretary because of pressure of work and the final blow came when our irreplaceable President Joe Hunt was involved in an accident when he broke his thigh.

So with only two members of the committee remaining it was essential that we gather some new blood, and we have indeed been fortunate in our choices as over the years Robin and Kate Shaw, Alan Holden, Jeremy Bourne, Tom and Sonia French, Jennie McGregor-Smith, Stephen de Winton, Andrew Maund, Valerie Richardson, Elizabeth Oakley and Roy Birch have all brought much to the Society.

The finances of the Society were not in a healthy state and membership numbers had dropped since the initial enthusiasm engendered by the founding of the Society. One of the big problems we inherited was that there were only 85 paying members in 1987 as the remaining 60 were Life Members who had joined for the princely sum of £10! Something of a boost was clearly needed to increase the income of the Society and as well as having a membership drive, as early as 1990, we identified the centenary of the publication of *A Shropshire Lad* in 1996 as an occasion for making a real impact on the literary world. A small sub-committee was formed



Jim Page at this year's Bromsgrove Commemoration

and with regular meetings we planned a succession of high profile events that would hopefully capture the imagination of the public and raise the Society's and A.E.H.'s profile.

Its success exceeded our wildest dreams and the memorialisation of Housman in Westminster Abbey followed by a reception in the House of Commons, attended by over half our members, was probably the highlight of the year and here one has to pay tribute to all the groundwork that Jack Bates did for this. Other events such as the concert by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Simon Rattle in St Laurence's Ludlow and the Weekends in Ludlow and Bromsgrove were occasions of the highest quality. Three of the four educational establishments closely associated with A.E.H, Bromsgrove School, St John's College Oxford and University College London, all put on special events that sold out and involved prestigious participants. Encouraging new work was always one of our aims and I think we

certainly achieved this, particularly with the Poetry Competition and the commissions of musical settings.

Membership almost doubled and a sound financial base for the Society was established. One might have expected the feverish activity of that year would die down, but next year Tom Stoppard's amazing play about A.E.H., *The Invention of Love*, ensured that interest continued. Certainly our visit to the National Theatre and meeting Tom Stoppard was one of the many highlights of my Chairmanship.

Walks used to feature regularly on the Society's summer calendar and the Wenlock Edge, Bredon and Clun walks have all taken us on new explorations. Library visits too have taken us to places I would have never gone to otherwise, and seeing the wonderful collections at Eton, the Wren Library at Trinity and UCL will always remain in the memory.

So I retire with a multitude of treasured memories and wish the Society every success in finding a successor who will lead the Society into new adventures for several more decades.

Brooke and Housman:

What's the connection?

Linda Hart writes: It is probably not at the top of everyone's list of unusual literary links. So in case you've forgotten (as I had, until I read the new book described below): Rupert Brooke greatly admired the poetry of A.E. Housman.

I must have read, a long time ago, the two poems Brooke wrote 'about' (or in homage to) Housman. But earlier this year I unexpectedly came across real evidence of Brooke's passion for Housman's poetry.

There is a bit of a 'back story'. In March 2000 the British Library opened a parcel whose contents had been embargoed for 50 years. When the time came to open the parcel, it was overlooked (for two years) during the move to the new Euston Road premises. When finally opened, it contained a bombshell for Brooke enthusiasts. Inside the brown paper parcel were over one hundred letters between Brooke (1887-1915) and Phyllis Gardner (1890-1939), and a 90-page memoir she wrote in 1918 about the relationship they had from 1912 to 1915. In 1948, after Phyllis's death, the embargoed parcel had been given to the Library by her sister.

A 208-page book containing everything in the parcel was published last April by The British Library, with an introduction, detailed notes and explanatory text by the chairman of the Rupert Brooke Society, Lorna Beckett. *The Second I Saw You: The True Love Story of Rupert Brooke and Phyllis Gardner* (British Library, 208pp, £16.99) charts the course of their intense (and previously unknown) relationship, and their disagreement over whether sex should be preceded by marriage. (No need to guess who was arguing yes and who was saying no.) Ann Payne, head of the British Library manuscripts department, said that the letters and memoir were 'without a doubt the most exciting documents I have ever de-reserved.'

So let us fast forward to Phyllis, in her memoir, recalling Brooke's visit to her family's home in Tadworth, Surrey in September 1912. She was an artist, so not surprisingly she showed him her studio in the attic of the house. '....Then he sat on the cushion and I began to draw him. He took out of his pocket a little book he had brought up with him from downstairs — A.E. Housman's poems — and read a few things to me. ... I went on drawing, but got on no better: and at last I got rather cross over it, and then had an interval during which I did not try to draw, but listened to him reading poems. He read "The quietest places under the sun", till the tears stood in my eyes: his voice was such an exquisite instrument, and his feeling for the poetry so exact: I have never heard anyone read as he read. He read "When I was one-and-twenty", and "Are the horses ploughing", and a lot of other things. And then I tried again at the drawing, but with not much better success.' (page 43)

Before he met Phyllis, Brooke had quoted or parodied Housman in letters to Geoffrey Keynes, Cathleen Nesbitt and Violet Asquith. In 1911, however, he expressed his admiration for Housman not in letters but in poems. *The Saturday Westminster*, which frequently ran poetry competitions, announced at the start of 1911 a competition for 'the best new and original letters to live poets.' Brooke submitted two poems, both about Housman.

He was living abroad in 1911 and read in *The Times* that Housman had been appointed Professor of Latin at Cambridge. The resulting poem, 'Letter to a Live Poet', won the *Saturday Westminster* competition and was published in the newspaper's February 4th issue. Brooke's second submission, 'A Letter to a Shropshire Lad', was published on 13 May. It has been described as 'a gently witty parody, suggesting that as Housman had been appointed to teach Latin he should give up writing poetry.*' As these poems are probably the least known of Brooke's *oeuvre*, we publish them here.

A LETTER TO A LIVE POET

Sir, since the last Elizabethan died,
Or, rather, that more Paradisal muse,
Blind with much light, passed to the light more glorious
Or deeper blindness, no man's hand, as thine,
Has, on the world's most noblest chord of song,
Struck certain magic strains. Ears satiate
With the clamorous, timorous whisperings of to-day,
Thrilled to perceive once more the spacious voice
And serene utterance of old. We heard
— With rapturous breath half-held, as a dreamer dreams
Who dares not know it dreaming, lest he wake—
The odorous, amorous style of poetry,
The melancholy knocking of those lines,
The long, low soughing of pentameters,
— Or the sharp of rhyme as a bird's cry —
And the innumerable truant polysyllables
Multitudinously twittering like a bee.
Fulfilled our hearts were with that music then,
And all the evenings sighed it to the dawn,
And all lovers heard it from all the trees.
All of the accents upon all the norms!
— And ah! the stress on the penultimate!
We never knew blank verse could have such feet.

A LETTER TO A SHROPSHIRE LAD

(Apropos, more or less, of a recent appointment)

Emmanuel, and Magdalene,
And St Catharine's, and St John's,
Are the dreariest places,
And full of dons.

Latin? so slow, so dull an end, lad?

Oh, that was noble, that was strong!

For you'd a better wit to friend, lad,

Than many a man who's sung his song.

You'd many a singer's tale to show it,
Who could not end as he began,
That thirty years eat up a poet,
And the muse dies before the man.

Such gave the world their best—and quickly
Poured out that watered best again,
— and age has found them tired and sickly,
Mouthing youth's flabby dead refrain;—

Or lived on lads whose song's long ended,
Who will not blush for all they say;
Or damned the younger songs and splendid;
— Oh, lad, you choose the better way!

Let fools so end! Leave many a lesser
To blot his easy bettered page!
But play the man, become Professor
When your ailment is your age!

You turned where no tune yet is clinging,
Where never a living song was sung;
E'en Greek might tempt a man to singing,
But Latin is the lifeless tongue.

You may stir that dust to laughter
The lonely wreath that once you made,
— Unsmirched by feeble song born after —
We have it where it will not fade.

Those who don't care for song now hear you
In curious, some in languid, rows.
Undishonoured, clean and clear, you
Teach and lecture, safe in prose.

For, lads of harsher voice or sweeter,
They'll all together find one crown,
And hold their tongues from wagging metre
In this — or in a dustier town.

No lad has made a song-book
To please the young folks there,
No living tongue is spoken,
And it's little one will care.

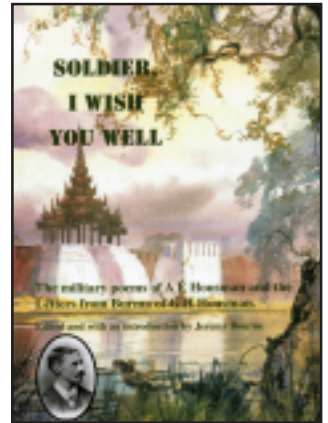
And there's time enough to dawdle in,
And there, there's plenty o' dons
And its drearier than Magdalene,
And a long way duller than John's.

Housman has only the briefest of walk-on parts in *The Second I Saw You* (the book's title comes from Phyllis remarking that she was smitten with Brooke the second she saw him). Still, I can recommend this book to anyone interested in the first decades of the last century; to anyone interested in two young, intelligent, artistic, creative people's ideas and actions regarding love, sex, desire, marriage, beauty (Brooke's poem titled 'Beauty and Beauty', written for Phyllis, recalls their moonlit tryst at Byron's Pool in Grantchester). The outbreak of war and Brooke's death at Gallipoli hangs like a dark cloud over these letters and the memoir.

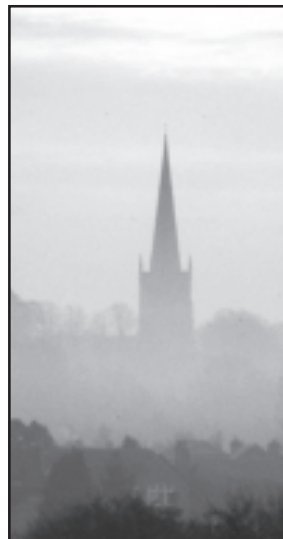
* In *The Irregular Verses of Rupert Brooke*, arranged with commentary by Peter Miller, Green Branch Press 1997.

War and Peace at Bromsgrove Society Summer School

Once again, a study of the Housman family formed part of the highly successful Bromsgrove Society Summer School, held in early July. This year, the theme of the day was ***The Housman family in Peace and War***. The first presentation of the day was given by Jeremy Bourne, author of what is believed by many to be the finest biography of A.E.H., *The Westerly Wanderer*, and editor of *Soldier, I Wish You Well*, which brings together the military poems of A.E.H. and the letters from active service in Burma of his younger brother, George Herbert.



Jeremy provided remarkable insight into the background of the conflicts at this time as well as exploring the inspiration that this provided for many of Housman's finest poems. After coffee, Andrew Maund explored those poems in greater detail, considering their place and importance in literature and the way in which many shades of conflict form the subject matter of Housman's writing.



The morning's presentations were delivered at Bromsgrove School but, after a fine lunch in the Old Chapel, lecturers and audience moved to the recently refurbished Housman Hall (the former Perry Hall) for a most scholarly, thought-provoking and moving presentation by Liz Oakley on the role of Laurence Housman in the pacifist movement in the early 20th century. This served as a fine counterpoint to the morning's ideas and included reference to some fascinating material from Laurence's own writing. The day concluded with a visit to St John's

Church, just across the Kidderminster Road from Housman Hall, in particular to see the memorials there.

A shortened version of the day's presentations will be given at the Ludlow Commemoration on 30th April 2016 and details are given on the back page.

The Housman Society Book Exchange

Regular readers of these pages will be familiar with me appealing for new material to advertise on these pages and I therefore offer my thanks to those who have answered the call since the last Newsletter and I believe that the following listing is as good as we have seen for some time. My introductory remarks need to be restricted in order to contain the Book Exchange text to the two pages allocated to me but I look forward to your enquiries for this catalogue or for more general material.

I must however point out that over the last few years we have offered full sets of the Society Journal to the membership at prices greatly discounted to the market. The set currently advertised is the last in our possession and so, if you are interested, I suggest you get in touch promptly.

As always the items offered for sale on these pages are on a first-come, first-served basis irrespective of the means of contact used. 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 2015

Postage and Packing are additional to the prices quoted.

ALDINGTON (Richard). A.E. HOUSMAN & W.B. YEATS. The Peacocks Press, Hurst, Berkshire; 1955. First edition. 8vo. 35 pages. Green cloth with the original tissue jacket. Limited edition. One of 350 copies. These lectures were originally given in New York in 1938. Fine. £40

ASQUITH (Cyril). VERSIONS FROM 'A SHROPSHIRE LAD'. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1929. First edition. 12mo. 31 pages. Translations into Latin of twelve lyrics from 'A Shropshire Lad' with Housman's original on the opposite page. The tan paper wrappers are dusty and show a little wear. Internally very good indeed. Extremely rare. £100

BAYLEY (John). HOUSMAN'S POEMS. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992. 8vo. First edition. 202 pages. A critical appraisal of Housman's Poetry. The first free endpaper has a withdrawal stamp from a University Library, but there are no other indications of library ownership. A difficult title to acquire. Very good in similar dust jacket. £40

BELL (Alan) [editor]. FIFTEEN LETTERS TO WALTER ASHBURNER. The Tragara Press, Edinburgh, 1976. First edition. 8vo. 24 pages. Blue paper wrappers. Ashburner was an academic lawyer, a Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford, a book collector and, like Housman, a gourmet. These letters were not featured in Maas. Number 73 of 125 copies. In fine condition. £60

BURNETT (Archie) [editor]. THE POEMS OF A.E. HOUSMAN. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997. First edition. 60 pages of technical notes are followed by 580 pages of text. Professor Burnett's massive edition of Housman took fourteen years to complete and is an essential work for Housman students. In fine condition in the original protective wrapper. £85

BURNETT (Archie) [editor]. THE LETTERS OF A.E. HOUSMAN. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007. 8vo. First edition. Two volumes in slipcase. 8vo. Volume 1 - 1872-1926. liv. 643 pages. Volume 2 - 1927-1936. 585 pages. Over 2200 letters are here listed and the notes and commentary are simply superb. A remarkable production. Fine condition in similar slipcase. £145

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. Very good but for small blemish on cover. A rare catalogue. £40

CARTER (John). A.E. HOUSMAN. SELECTED PROSE. Cambridge at the University Press, 1961. First edition. 12mo. 204 pages. Black cloth with a spine-sunned dust jacket. Very good. £20

CARTER (John). THE JOHN CARTER COLLECTION OF A.E. HOUSMAN. Lilly Library, Indiana University, 1965. First edition. 8vo.8 pages. Paper wrappers. 500 copies were printed for the bookmen of Indiana and 100 copies for John Carter. Fine. £40

CARTER (John), SPARROW (John) and WHITE (William). A.E. HOUSMAN - A BIBLIOGRAPHY. St. Paul's Bibliographies, Godalming, 1982. 8vo. 94 pages. An updated, revised and considerably enlarged version of the 1952 handlist. Fine. £20

CLEMENS (Cyril) [editor]. THE MARK TWAIN QUARTERLY. A.E. HOUSMAN MEMORIAL NUMBER. 4to. 24pp. Grey paper covers. The International Mark Twain Society, St Louis, Missouri, 1936. This edition is devoted to Housman, a Vice-President of the Society. Paper covers browned to edges, internally fine. A scarce publication. £35

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

HAMILTON (Robert). HOUSMAN THE POET. Sydney Lee, Exeter, 1953. First edition. 8vo. 74 pages. Paper covers. One of the earliest books to concentrate on an evaluation of Housman's poetry. Scarce. Very good. £45

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. Grant Richards, London, 1903. 16mo. 96 pages. The two-tone grey and blue covers show some wear and rubbing but the book remains tight and square. Internally very good. A rare survivor. £25

HOUSMAN (A.E.). D. IVNII IVVENALIS SATVRAE. E. Grant Richards, London, 1905. First edition. The 36 page preface famously concludes with the words, "The work, as I said before, is not meant for a model: it is an enterprise undertaken in haste and in humane concern for the relief of a people sitting in darkness". It is followed by 146 pages of text. The book has been rebound from the original boards

and now shows some discolouration but it is not a library binding. Bears the ownership signature of H.J. Thurston of Trinity College and is heavily annotated in pencil in a fine hand. Extremely rare. £125

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. Grant Richards Ltd., London, 1908. 32mo. 101 pages. Soft brown suede with all edges gilt. Contains a frontispiece of Clee Hill by William Hyde. The suede is quite worn especially to front cover but the gilt spine titling remains bright and internally the book is very good. Notwithstanding its shortcomings this book is listed because of its undoubted rarity. £25

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A SHROPSHIRE LAD. Mitchell Kennerley, New York, 1908. 32mo. 101 pages. Red cloth, top edge gilt. Printed in England and furnished with a cancel title page. The first Kennerley pocket edition. A clean fresh copy. Very good indeed. Extremely rare. £50

HOUSMAN (A.E.). M. MANILII ASTRONOMICON LIBER QVINTVS. The Richards Press, London, 1930. First edition. 8vo. 46 pages of introduction followed by 199 pages of text. Original blue boards with paper spine label. Extremely rare. Very good. Reduced to sell. £75

HOUSMAN (A.E.). THE COLLECTED POEMS OF A.E. HOUSMAN. First edition. 8vo. 256pp. Blue cloth, stamped in gilt within red frame. Grey dust jacket. New York, Henry Holt, 1940. Fine in a very good dust jacket. The true American first edition with both the book and the dust jacket marked 'first printing'. £40

HOUSMAN (A.E.). A MORNING WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY. Privately printed at Christmas 1955. 12mo. 16 pages. Cream Paper covers. In a prefatory note Laurence Housman notes that AEH always granted permission to reprint this piece of fiction provided that it was not ascribed to him. The author's name on the title page therefore appears as A.E. H**sn*n. Fine. £20

HOUSMAN (Laurence) [contributes]. ENCOUNTER MAGAZINE. VOLUME XXIX No.4. Continental Publishers, London, 1967. 8vo. 96pp. Paper covers. On pages 33-41 is printed for the first time *A.E. Housman's 'De Amicitia'*, annotated by John Carter. Very good indeed. £25

HOUSMAN SOCIETY JOURNALS. A FULL SET. 1974 – 2014. The Society is pleased to offer a full set of Journals to the membership at a fraction of the cost that would be charged on the open market. Forty issues. The condition varies from Very Good to Mint. £180

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. Reduced to sell. £15

NAIDITCH (P.G.). A.E. HOUSMAN AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE. THE ELECTION OF 1892. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1988. First edition. 261 pages. Soft covers. A monumental work. Essential reading and now very scarce. A fine copy. £60

PLATT (Arthur). NINE ESSAYS. Cambridge at the University Press, 1927. First edition. 220 pages. Red cloth. Housman not only supplied the seven page preface but also managed the progress of the book through the press. Very good indeed, missing the dust jacket. Bookplate. £35

PUGH (John). BROMSGROVE AND THE HOUSMANS. The Housman Society, Bromsgrove, 1974. 178 pages plus 84 pages of appendix. First edition. The Limited Edition of 100 numbered copies signed by the author. Mint condition in similar dust jacket. £75

RICKS (Christopher) [editor]. A.E. HOUSMAN. A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS. First edition. 8vo. 182 pages. Paperback. Three poems about Housman by Auden, Pound and Amis are followed by a dozen essays by various hands including John Wain, J.P. Sullivan and John Sparrow. Fine. £10

ROWE (Antony) [editor]. FOR LUCASTA, WITH RUE. Arrow Press, London, 1967. First edition. 8vo. 89 pages. An interesting exercise in intertextuality – the influence on one text on the mind of a reader who is grappling with another. Alternate poems in Latin by various authors and in English by A.E. Housman. One of 100 copies. Very good but missing the dust jacket. Very rare. £30

SHAW (Robin). HOUSMAN'S PLACES. The Housman Society, Bromsgrove, 1995. The Limited Edition Hardback. With the *Housman Places* bookplate of John Pugh, joint-founder of the Society. Signed by the author. Fine. £25

SKUTSCH (Otto). ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN 1859 – 1936. The University of London, The Athlone Press, 1960. First edition. 14pp. Blue paper wrappers. The text of an address delivered at University College to celebrate the anniversary of Housman's birth. Very good. £15

SYMONS (Katharine). MEMORIES OF A.E. HOUSMAN. Grant Mellhuish, Bath, 1936. 8vo. 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. Very good. £20

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. 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. £50

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 it is here offered in the very scarce dust jacket and with a manuscript dedication from the author dated 8th October 1940. Fine in a very good dust jacket. £75

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. Very good indeed. Scarce. £20

Raise a Glass to Six Flawed Greats

Kate Kellaway reviews 'Six Poets: Hardy to Larkin' by Alan Bennett published by Faber.

In Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys*, there is a point at which the schoolmaster, Hector, discusses Hardy's poem *Drummer Hodge* and movingly reflects on how important it is that Hodge has a name. Hector observes "The best moments in reading are when you come across something (a thought a feeling, a way of looking at things) that you'd thought special, particular to you and here it is, set down by someone else, a person you've never met."

Hodge resurfaces in Alan Bennett's anthology but what is absent is anything to equal Hector's emotional response. If Bennett feels any sense of wonder, it is undeclared. If moved, he tends not to mention it. This anthology is entertaining but deflationary. The chosen half-dozen are: Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman, John Betjeman, W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice and Philip Larkin and each poem comes with a commentary. Housman was a pallbearer at Hardy's funeral. What's more, there is a tightness in having a neighbourly Hardy and Housman here - Housman is Hardy's poetic pallbearer too. What most detains Bennett is human faultiness. His is a down-to-earth take on the lives of poets: "Hardy and his wife hadn't got on. She was vague, fey and, some people said, mad." He is on curmudgeon watch. He tells an anecdote about Larkin standing at a Hull bus stop in the rain, saying to a student inching in his direction: "Don't think you are coming under my umbrella." He suggests that this attitude extends to Larkin's poetic stance. Housman also preferred admirers not to advance upon him: "Anyone who took the poems to be messages in code or flags of distress and, on the strength of them, plucked up courage to address what they took to be the real man found themselves sharply rebuffed."

It is easy to see how his admirers might have got the wrong end of the stick — one has only to read the charming *Shake Hands*. Bennett also wants us to know it is unlikely that Housman's life was all ascetic misery, introducing the idea of a gourmand on the quiet: "...he would go on gastronomic tours of France, nosing out in unsuspected corners the

remnants of great cellars. None of these poets has anywhere to hide with Bennett about; there is an unsavoury story concerning a chocolate pudding, chez Auden, waiting to be served up in the pot he used to piss in. And when writing about Philip Larkin's over-quoted, "They fuck you up, your mum and dad", Bennett points out that Larkin's parents were an innocuous pair who did not deserve this write-up. He then adds, convincingly, that for most writers, it is having parents who fail to fuck them up that is the real disaster.

It is perhaps inevitable that it is Bennett more than the poets themselves that this absorbing anthology reveals. His selection is accessible, clear and inclines to the light. It is no surprise that, with his unerring ear, he should approve of Betjeman's pitch-perfect satire 'How to Get On in Society', a poem written as if with a perfectly wielded butter knife. And he goes way over the top about Louis MacNeice's modest elegy 'Death of an Actress', which begins: "I see from the paper that Florrie Forde is dead..." It is a touching poem but by no stretch of the imagination MacNeice's masterpiece, as Bennett would have it. He undersells MacNeice, suggesting his poetry was diminished by common sense. But I relish the way that, elsewhere, he employs his own literary common sense, stating at one point: "Half the job of learning to write is getting to know the sound of your own voice."

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Housman Settings at the Oxford Lieder Festival

A day at the prestigious Oxford Lieder Festival will be devoted to Housman and Hardy settings with Master Classes, talks and a complete performance of Somervell's 'A Shropshire Lad' cycle on 29th October. Gavin Plumley writes in the brochure:

The Industrial Revolution changed the face of Britain forever. Once captured by the likes of Constable and Turner, this landscape had been ravaged by ostensible progress. Many mourned the loss. In his novels, Thomas Hardy charted the fates and fortunes of a population facing rural decline. His poetry, on the other hand, celebrated the transient world in which it had lived, and was set by songsman Gerald Finzi during the 1920s and 30s. More acutely painful is A.E. Housman's longing for a pre-industrial 'land of lost content'. His separation from its 'blue remembered hills' is further complicated by an unspoken attachment to the youths depicted in his 1896 publication *A Shropshire Lad*.

A poetic talisman for those facing the modern age, the volume was the result of what Housman described as a 'morbid secretion'. For beneath the blithe lyricism and finely wrought rhymes, metres and structures of its 63 poems, there lurks an incurable homoerotic tension that would not find its resolution until long after Housman's death. Bax, Gurney, Ireland and Vaughan Williams were drawn to the unmistakable melancholy and bucolic simplicity of these verses, as was Vaughan Williams's friend and Oxford alumnus George Butterworth, whose death on the Somme in 1916 sadly mirrored the lot of many of Housman's scarlet-coated soldiers.

Brilliant reading of Housman in Ludlow English Song Weekend

One of the highlights of the 2015 Ludlow Weekend of English Song was the programme entitled *One who kept his word: the world of A.E. Housman* and although Alex Jennings was originally billed as reader his replacement, Philip Franks, was so good that any disappointment the audience might have had was soon forgotten. Reading with impeccable diction and dry understatement he perfectly captured the waspish sarcasm that shines through A.E.H.'s letters.

These readings were interspersed between settings mostly by composers not well known. So new to many were Moeran's *Far in a western brookland*, Benjamin Burrows' *From far from eve and morning* and Morfydd Owen's *When I came last to Ludlow*. Martin Bussey (who is Chairman of Finzi Friends who promoted the weekend) was the composer for the final song



Marcus Farnsworth with Martin Bussey

in the recital, an unaccompanied setting of *Into my heart an air that kills* and his distinctive style made a very poignant conclusion to a concert recorded by the BBC for transmission in June.

Janet Hamilton was of special interest as, even if not the first woman to set Housman, she was certainly the second. During the First World War she worked in airship rigging construction at Chatham Dockyard but in 1917 was forced to leave after suffering from appendicitis. She rented a cottage at Eton and composed *With rue my heart is laden* and *By Wenlock town* during her convalescence. Two of her settings were included in the programme and both revealed that here was a composer deserving greater exposure.

17th Century Translation of Manilius

The commissioned work was of special interest to Housman devotees as Judith Bingham's *Zodiack* was a 17th Century translation of Manilius. The singers in this recital were Anna Huntley, Alexander Sprague and Marcus Farnsworth, all accompanied by Iain Burnside, the imaginative artistic director of the whole weekend.

The Immortal Hour Revived

Laurence Housman had a lively relationship with the Glastonbury Festival and in 1924, the first year of his involvement, Rutland Boughton wrote a complete score for his 'Seraphic Vision'. The article by Rupert Christiansen reprinted below followed a performance of 'The Immortal Hour' last year at the Finborough Theatre, Earls Court, London.

I am old enough to have learnt 'How beautiful they are the lordly ones' in class singing – the hit tune of Rutland Boughton's 'music-drama', *The Immortal Hour*, and surely one of the most seductively graceful melodies of pre-First World War music. Now it has popped up again in this intriguing revival, and I just can't get the earworm out of my head.

Boughton himself is a fascinating, if marginal, figure in our cultural history. An autodidact from a working-class background in the Midlands, he subscribed to the socialistic doctrines of Ruskin and Morris alongside a Wagnerism which led him to establish a town-hall festival of indigenous music-drama at Glastonbury, modestly inspired by Bayreuth. It lasted from 1914 until 1926, focused on Boughton's own Arthurian creations.

The first festival saw the premiere, with piano accompaniment, of *The Immortal Hour* – a Celtic Revival tale of misty faeryland written by William Sharp, in which the immortal Etain is tricked by the shadowy Dalua into marrying the mortal Eochaidh, only to be reclaimed a year later by her spirit lover Midir.

It soon became a runaway success, regularly performed all over Britain until the early Fifties, by which time it had come to seem merely fey and dainty. But Vaughan Williams had called it 'a work of genius', and Shaw, Elgar and Beecham all lent support to Boughton's dream of building a temple theatre in Glastonbury – a project which perished after Boughton was exposed as a crypto-communist, with free love tendencies to boot.

Boughton went forgotten to his grave in 1960, but his equally popular community opera, *Bethlehem*, might have been at the back of Britten's mind when he composed *Noyes Fludde*, and *The Immortal Hour* has its significant place in the annals of English opera.

This brave, pocket-sized, pub-theatre revival, heavily cut and reduced in orchestration, is tantalising. Perhaps because the youthful cast, directed by Benji Sperring, largely comes from a musical theatre rather than operatic background, some Lloyd Webber-ish frissons emerge from its lush, upfront idiom – but the choral writing is evidently very fine, and there's more to it than that one good tune.

There's certainly enough here to whet one's appetite for an imaginatively staged, full-scale revival – perhaps at the Buxton Festival?

Forthcoming Events

Tuesday 20 October 2015, 4.45-6.30pm

Artrix, Slideslow Drive (off A38), Bromsgrove B60 1AX
SCHOOLS POETRY SPEAKING COMPETITION FINALS

Competing pupils from Bromsgrove's schools will speak a poem by A.E. Housman and another of their own choice. There are categories for Sixth Formers, Seniors and for the Middle School age group. The winner of the Housman Cup will read at the Bromsgrove Commemoration on 29 March 2016. Support from members and participants' families is welcome. *Free entry.*

Wednesday 2 March 2016, 7.30pm

Housman Hall, Kidderminster Road, Bromsgrove

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The meeting will be followed by wine and refreshments. The evening will conclude with a talk to be arranged.

Tuesday 29 March 2016, 12.30pm

By the Statue in Bromsgrove High Street

A.E.H. BIRTHDAY COMMEMORATION

Because A.E.H.'s birthday falls this year on Easter Saturday the annual ceremony is being held after Easter. It will be followed by a buffet lunch at Housman Hall, by kind invitation of the Headmaster of Bromsgrove School. The Guest of the Day will be Dennis Norton, creator of Bromsgrove's Norton Collection.

Saturday 30 April 2016, 11.00am

St Laurence's, Ludlow

LUDLOW COMMEMORATION

The ceremony by the plaque on the north wall will be followed by coffee in St Laurence's. Lunch will be held in the Charlton Arms, preceded at 12 noon by a presentation from Elizabeth Oakley and Andrew Maund on *The Housman Family in Peace and War* - see item on page 11.

Tuesday 24 May 2016, 5.30pm - Date and time tbc

The Hay Festival of Literature

THE HOUSMAN LECTURE

The Name and Nature of Poetry

We are delighted that Peter Parker, whose book on Housman and Landscape will be published next year, has accepted our invitation to give the 2016 Housman Lecture. See adjacent column for further details.

Saturday 23 July 2016

SUMMER OUTING TO WOODCHESTER

Full details will be given in the February Newsletter.

A.E.H.'s mother came from Woodchester and he visited it as a child and found friendship with the Wise family, who moved into Woodchester House after William and Mary Housman had left.

Peter Parker to give the 2016 'Name and Nature of Poetry' lecture

Peter Parker was born in Herefordshire and educated in the Malverns, Dorset and London. He is the author of 'The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos' (1987) and



Peter Parker with John Bridcut at the Ludlow English Song Weekend

biographies of J.R. Ackerley (1989) and Christopher Isherwood (2004). He edited 'The Reader's Companion to the Twentieth-Century Novel' (1994) and 'The Reader's Companion to Twentieth-Century Writers' (1995), and was an associate editor of The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004). He writes about books for a wide variety of newspapers and magazines and lives in London's East End.

He is currently working on a book about

Housman and Landscape and in this summer's Ludlow English Song Weekend he discussed with Judith Bingham how real and imagined landscapes overlap in the works of A.E. Housman and how Housman's presence resonates through *Zodiack*, her song cycle which received its world premiere at the Assembly Rooms on 30th May.

Ten Years Ago

- The Right Honorable Chris Smith delivered the *Name and Nature of Poetry* Lecture at the Hay Festival.
- The British Library published Professor Ian Rogerson's *The Wood Engravings of Agnes Miller Parker* which brought together almost all her published illustrations.. Ian said it was the result of 50 years of interest and three years of very hard work.
- The Book Exchange was offering the five volumes of Housman's *M. Manillii Astronomicon* for sale at £750.

Published by The Housman Society, 2 College Walk, Bromsgrove B60 2ND. The next Newsletter will be circulated in February 2016 and contributions should be sent to the Editor at the address given on page 1 by 1st February 2016.