

'THE AYLESFORD REVIEW'

Brocard Sewell

MOST OF THE OLDER RELIGIOUS ORDERS in this country publish one or more periodicals, some of them learned journals, some of them 'popular', some in between. The oldest is *The Month*, published by the Society of Jesus, which celebrated its one hundredth anniversary a few years ago. *The Downside Review* and *The Ampleforth Journal* come from the abbeys from which they take their names. *Pax*, a more modest publication, but of considerable merit, comes from the Benedictines of Prinknash Abbey, near Gloucester. In 1921 Fr Bede Jarret founded the Dominican monthly review *Blackfriars*, which in the 1920s and '30s had a host of learned and brilliant contributors, mostly members of the Order, or closely associated with it, as were John Gray and André Raffalovich. All these periodicals are still in being; but *The Month* is very much shrunk, both in size and in the quality of its contents. *Blackfriars* some time ago renamed itself *New Blackfriars*, and seems to have Marxism and Structuralism among its present chief interests. The Jesuits also publish *The Way*, concerned purely with spiritual themes. The Discalced, or Teresian, Carmelites, produce *Mount Carmel*, a popular journal of spirituality, which keeps to a high level of excellence.

In 1952, when I entered the parent Carmelite Order - officially styled Carmelites of the Ancient Observance - it had no publications of any kind apart from two modest Newsletters, edited from the friaries at Aylesford and Faversham by two brothers, the Fathers Elias and Malachy Lynch. Fr Malachy could say nothing, or next to nothing, in melodious periods; but Fr Elias had something to say, was a born writer and raconteur; his Faversham Newsletter was something quite remarkable. The English Carmelites, or White Friars, were completely extinguished by the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, and did not succeed in re-establishing themselves in England until as late as 1926, when a few Irish fathers and laybrothers settled in Sittingbourne and Faversham, Kent. They had a hard struggle to establish themselves; few in number, they had no time for literary or editorial activities. But in 1955 the then Prior-General of the Order decided that it was time for the English Province to produce a periodical of its own. What he had in mind, however, was nothing like an attempt to revive the medieval English Carmelites' reputation for learning, both in divinity and the humanities, but something more practical: a 'devotional' magazine, to be directed primarily at the Order's lay friends and supporters, of whom there was a large number in the country. Suggestions for a title were asked for; thirty or forty were received, but in the end, since none of them seemed satisfactory, *The Aylesford Review* was the title chosen.

It was intended that the magazine should be printed at St Albert's Press, the small printing office then being set up at Aylesford Priory; but the first number was printed, in the Times New Roman typeface, by a

firm of printers in Tonbridge. Its cover we did manage to print ourselves. On it, the magazine's title was set in Berthold Wolpe's Albertus typeface; below it came the first page of an article, explaining the magazine's aims, which was set in Eric Gill's Perpetua, with an uneven right-hand edge, the article opening with a large initial letter in Gill Floriated. The effect was striking and elegant, if a little precious.

Rather to my surprise, the new magazine, of which I had been appointed Editor, seemed to arouse little interest among the Carmelite laity, many of whom perhaps read little beyond Fr Malachy's newsletter and *The Universe*, a weekly Catholic 'tabloid'. After we had published our second and third numbers it became clear that we should have to look elsewhere for support. In this way I became free to manoeuvre the *Review* into a new direction.

I had always greatly admired *The Month* and *Blackfriars*, both of which combined articles on philosophy and theology with contributions on literary and historical subjects. (In the previous century an editor of *The Month* had made the bad mistake of refusing to publish Gerard Manley Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.) I thought that perhaps we could attempt something, as far as our smaller resources would allow, along similar lines, but with special emphasis on mystical theology and the history of the Carmelite Order.

On the literary side it seemed to me that we might do a useful work by publishing articles by writers of outstanding interest and excellence whose work seemed to be little known, or neglected. This idea led us to publish some special literary numbers devoted entirely to articles on some particular writer. The first of these special numbers was on the novelist Elizabeth Myers; the second was on Henry Williamson. Others followed on Arthur Machen, John Gray, M.P. Shiel, E.H. Visiak, and the French writer Joseph Delteil. Further numbers were planned on Radclyffe Hall and the French poet Saint-Pol-Roux; but the collapse of the magazine in 1968 prevented these from being achieved.

The Henry Williamson number appeared in the autumn of 1957. Williamson might have been thought too well known for inclusion in this series. He was, of course, a famous writer; but famous, really, for two books only, *Tarka the Otter* and *Salar the Salmon*; although the *Flax of Dream* series of novels had achieved a certain success. But his later novels, in the *Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* series, which I thought were likely to prove by far his greatest literary achievement, seemed not to be getting the recognition that they merited. The Henry Williamson number sold out quickly. We had printed, I think, one thousand copies, which was our largest print-run. Of most numbers, eight hundred copies were printed; but of the final number, issued in 1968, only five hundred.

The Williamson number, modest effort though it was, having been such a success, it seemed sensible to follow it up with other articles on HW. As successive volumes of the *Chronicle* appeared they were made the subject of long review-articles, by a variety of writers; and his



other new books were reviewed as they came out. There were more general articles on Williamson by Anthony Gower, Colin Wilson* and others. Henry himself contributed to the magazine a number of articles and book reviews, as well as some "Letters to the Editor".

The Aylesford Review appeared quarterly - usually late! - for thirteen years. During that time it received no financial subsidies apart from £100 from the Carmelite Order, in two instalments of £50 each, and a grant of £150 from the Arts Council of Great Britain. At one point the number of paid-up subscribers reached the five hundred mark; but it did not stay there. Mostly it stayed at about four hundred copies, or a little over that figure. It always ran at a financial loss, which was made good out of the money earned by St Albert's Press for 'jobbing' printing. But eventually costs of production had risen so high - and it was impossible to raise the subscription any further - that closure was inevitable. This came in the autumn of 1968. In 1969 I took up a university teaching post in Canada. If the magazine had not already folded, it would have had to do so then, unless the Order had decided to subsidise it handsomely and appoint a new editor. The heavy financial commitments involved in establishing Whitefriars School at Cheltenham and adapting Hazelwood Castle, Yorkshire, for use as a retreat house and conference centre, would hardly have allowed of such assistance.

Complete sets of *The Aylesford Review* seem to be of the last rarity. Even individual numbers are now hard to come by; among the rarest is the Henry Williamson number. In assessing the magazine some thirteen years later I see clearly its many deficiencies, but I feel proud of its consistent advocacy on behalf of Henry Williamson as a writer, and hope that it may have contributed a little towards the wider recognition that he is now beginning to receive.

*See Colin Wilson, Henry Williamson and his Writings - a Personal View, HWS Journal No. 2. Ed.

The photograph on page 25 is of HW with Brocard Sewell outside Aylesford Priory

CHECK-LIST OF ARTICLES ETC. ON OR BY HENRY WILLIAMSON PUBLISHED IN
THE AYLESFORD REVIEW, 1957-1967.

VOLUME II, NUMBER 2 - WINTER 1957-1958

HENRY WILLIAMSON NUMBER

Editorial (by Brocard Sewell)

William Gore Allen, 'Williamson: The London Novels'

John Middleton Murry, 'The Novels of Henry Williamson'

Malcolm Elwin, 'Henry Williamson: An English Proust'

Henry Williamson, 'Some Notes on *The Flax of Dream* and *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*'

VOLUME II, NUMBER 6 - SPRING 1959

George D. Painter, 'The Two Maddisons'. A review-article on Williamson's *Love and the Loveless*.

In art the universal is sometimes, perhaps best, revealed by a profound and minute examination of the particular. Here is an unrolling map of the labyrinth of three generations, our fathers, ourselves and our children, and the thread leading to the mystery - monster or divinity? - at its centre. In my belief Love and the Loveless and its three predecessors constitute the only true English war novel, comparable in vastness and compassion to War and Peace or Zola's La Débâcle: and the whole cycle will ultimately be recognised as the great historical novel of our time, its subject as the total experience of twentieth-century man.

Brocard Sewell, 'Middleton Murry on Henry Williamson'. A review-article on Middleton Murry's *Katherine Mansfield and other Literary Studies*. (Murry's essay on Williamson runs to 65 pages.)

Henry Williamson, a two-page letter to the editor about HW's unpublished autobiographical writings.

The typescripts now lie in boxes 'shut away from moth, "cham-mering worm", and mouse. One of the main reasons for their imposed seclusion is that the autobiographical form is too limited to contain all points of view: and if the "I" in an autobiography dissolves itself in order to justify an antagonist, it is to "the general" a confession of weakness, or spinelessness; and to most vertebrate life self-negation is indistinguishable from "self-pity".'

Henry Williamson, book review, signed H.W., of *In Flanders Fields* by Leon Wolff. Contains some interesting observations on Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, and Lloyd George. The figure of British and Colonial casualties at Passchendaele is given as 318,000. An erratum slip in the next number corrected this to 31,000.

VOLUME II, NUMBER 7 - AUTUMN-SUMMER (sic) 1959

Ruth Tomalin, 'Avons of the Heart'. A review-article on Henry Williamson's *The Children of Shallowford* (new edition) and Richard Calvert Williamson's *The Dawn is my Brother*.

VOLUME II, NUMBER 8 - WINTER 1959-'60

ARTHUR MACHEN NUMBER

Henry Williamson, 'Machen in Fleet Street'.

VOLUME III, NUMBER 1 - SPRING 1960

Anthony Gower, a two-page review of *The Henry Williamson Animal Saga*.

VOLUME IV, NUMBER 1 - WINTER 1960-1961

Brocard Sewell, 'Facing the Spectres of the Mind.' A review-article on Williamson's *A Test to Destruction*.

Anthony Gower, reviews of Henry Williamson's *In the Woods* and Walter Robson's *Letters from a Soldier* (with introduction by HW).

VOLUME IV, NUMBER 3 - SUMMER 1961

An unsigned review - possibly by Brocard Sewell - of *Frederick Rolfe and Others*, essays by divers hands; among them Alexandra Wiggington's 'A Meeting with Henry Williamson'.

VOLUME IV, NUMBER 4 - AUTUMN 1961

Colin Wilson, 'Henry Williamson'.

Anthony Gower, 'Living with Henry Williamson'

Brocard Sewell, a brief note on Henry Williamson apropos of Williamson's *The Beautiful Years*

VOLUME IV, NUMBER 5 - WINTER 1961-'62

Ruth Tomalin, 'Young Man from the War'. A review-article on *The Innocent Moon* by Henry Williamson

VOLUME V, NUMBER 1 - WINTER 1962-'63

Eric Watkins, 'The Maddison Pilgrimage'. A review-article on Williamson's *It Was the Nightingale*

VOLUME V, NUMBER 4 - AUTUMN 1963

Henry Williamson, 'A Visit to Richard Aldington'
Brocard Sewell, 'The Power of the Dead'. A review-article on Williamson's novel of that title.

VOLUME VI, NUMBER 3 - SUMMER-AUTUMN 1964

Trevor Grundy, 'The Aylesford Review Conference'. A report of a literary conference held in May 1964 at Spode House, Staffordshire, with some comment on Henry Williamson's contribution to this occasion.

Henry Williamson, a review of Ann Quin's novel *Berg*: "Superficially a 'sordid' story, but beneath the illusion of its 'reality' one perceives a talent of rarity and grace."

VOLUME VII, NUMBER 2 - SUMMER 1965

Brocard Sewell, 'Some thoughts on *The Flax of Dream*'. The text of an address given at Exeter University on 14 May 1965, at the presentation by Henry Williamson of manuscripts of his books to the University.

VOLUME VIII, NUMBER 1 - SUMMER 1966

Oswald Jones, 'The Phoenix Generation', a review-article on Henry Williamson's novel.

VOLUME VIII, NUMBER 3 - WINTER 1966-'67

Ernest W. Martin, 'A Solitary War', a review-article on HW's novel.

VOLUME IX, NUMBER 1 - AUTUMN 1967

Sylvia Bruce, 'Prince of Darkness, Bringer of Light'. A review-article on Williamson's *Lucifer Before Sunrise*.

'Greenjacket', 'Lucifer or Eosphorus?'. A pseudonymous review-article by Henry Williamson on his *Lucifer Before Sunrise*. Williamson had been shown Sylvia Bruce's article before publication, and had asked permission to comment on it pseudonymously. Such action is not entirely without precedent, and may sometimes serve a useful purpose.

ADDENDUM

Two poems by Sarah Williamson, each without a title, were published in *The Aylesford Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 2 and Vol. IX, No. 1.