

NORFOLK WEEKEND

According to schedule about twenty of us met at Old Hall Farm at two o'clock.

It was not until George and Mary Heath remarked on how disappointingly few people had arrived at the hotel on the previous night that I realised the essential difference between the Norfolk and Devon meetings. For Devon one sacrifices everything to get there as early as possible, to have the maximum length of time in that magical landscape. The Society's activities are a secondary matter! At Norfolk one arrives (and leaves) according to the timetable. Why? I suppose the answer lies in the books. How That Man continues to influence one's personal movements!

The walk round the farm was bracing ("Nothing between here and the North Pole.") It was good to see the fields looking well tended, and the excellent and tasteful conversion of the old granary into living quarters. (Or wasn't it always 'living quarters' anyway, to us?)

Douglas Jordan, who still works at the farm, kindly came round with us again but, assuming that most of us had been before, his comments and explanations were kept brief. This was a great pity for the first-timers. Perhaps we need a little sketch-map with notes, we can't really expect poor Douglas to say it all again every time.

An excellent buffet supper at the hotel followed, marred for me by horror of the ordeal to come and the consequent inadvisability of getting tanked-up. Then I gave my talk, all the time conscious of the physical discomfort of the audience on those awful creaky upright chairs.

The hotel manager looked in nervously as 'Mars the Bringer of War' rattled the chandeliers. This, coupled with some loud political talk from a small group in the bar later on will probably prevent us ever being admitted to the Blakeney Hotel again!

The late-night gossip session was much more diluted than in Devon. Many people had arranged to stay at cheaper places away from the hotel, so the family-reunion feeling was not so strong.

On the Sunday morning an excellent 'Any Questions' session was held in the armchair-comfort of the upper lounge, with its sweeping view across the marshes to the sea. The speakers were lucid and informative and I felt that there were more contributions from the audience than on previous similar occasions.

As we left, at the timetabled moment, the same phrase was on many lips: 'A lovely weekend, but roll on Devon.'

J.E.

Because June could hardly review her own most splendid talk - John Millar has supplied us with the following:

The smooth professionalism that marked the musical presentation by June Emerson in the Blakeney Hotel, a mixture of recorded music and helpful commentary, made for a rewarding evening. Entitled 'Reflections in the Water', the session was directly linked to HW's musical preferences since almost all the recordings were of the music he requested during a former broadcast of 'Desert Island Discs'. This was augmented by selections from HW's work and other sources, the readings by Ronald Walker having the consummate vocal excellence that members have come to appreciate. Praise too for the care taken technically. The sound reproduction was of a high order and was the work of Jeremy Brettingham-Smith from Wells.

We began with a mood-setting song by Delius, then the superb Tallis Fantasia of Vaughan Williams, then evocative pieces of Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky and Rachmaninov. Mars, the Bringer of War, was the choice from Holst's 'Planets suite piled-up harshnesses on full orchestra that HW was not omitting from his desert island. Holst completed the 'Mars' sketch before the First World War; an audience that heard it in the later years of that catastrophe found it well-nigh unbearable in effect. At another pole was the heartfelt fullness of Wagner's 'Lieberstod' which was given a commentary that stood out; a Wagnerite would have recognised the sentences from Newman's 'Wagner Nights', the theme of unattainable ideal love, the extremist yearning. We were transported to the heart of HW's own art, with June noting that he chose to take a cor anglais as his one extra item for his island, for which no instrument is more expressive of ultimate longing.

Her finale lay with the music of Sibelius, 'The Swan of Tuonela'; a bold stroke in that it wasn't on HW's list; but it seemed emotionally right, though I could have done with the whole piece put over. In it, the voice of the cor anglais is raised in haunting beauty, with the harmonies of long horizons and a whispering harp ostinato - the swan gliding mysteriously, eternally, over the black waters of legend. Thank you, June. I came away feeling that we had come closer to HW's visionary side, that evening, than is conveyed in most commentaries of a solely literary kind.

1. HW's eight records: 'Cynara' (Delius), 'Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis' (Vaughan Williams), 'La Mer' (Debussy), 'Daphnis and Chloe: Suite No.2 (Ravel)', 'The Planets' (Holst), 'The Nightingale' (Stravinsky), 'Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini' (Rachmaninov), 'Lieberstod' from Tristan and Isolde (Wagner).