

THE OX IN GAULTSHIRE, May 1986

Tim Morley

Almost forty members attended the Spring Meeting at Woburn on Saturday and Sunday 10th/11th May 1986. Saturday sightseeing over, Dr. Wheatley Blench and Mr. Ronald Walker offered a highly appreciated and skilful presentation 'Bedfordshire in the writings of Henry Williamson.' An impromptu round-the-table quiz wound down a vastly successful supper party, and on Sunday, Dr. David Hoyle conducted a fascinating tour by coach to a selection of H.W. sites. The Society offers most hearty thanks to the three presenters for a stimulating and interesting programme.

Thundering out of North London, and lurch, stagger, baggage bumping into The Bedford Arms from a windblown, drizzle-swept car park. Pretty receptionist arrests me with greeting smile as Wheatley glides across the lobby with smiling greeting.

A bath, and a drink or two later, we dine. A sound choice of the ample rather than the adequate: we congratulate ourselves convincingly with claret.

Morning dash to Milton Keynes, back to do accounts and swallow a quick four hour lunch. Members surge through the doors as the afternoon dissolves into tea. Five o'clock, and Wheatley masterly, orotund, disciplined and fascinating leads: Ronald's words (or rather, Henry's) on cue sway forward like a Greek chorus to lay forty odd years of H.W. experience about us. Ninety minutes passes like ten. A pause for refreshment of the outer and inner personal surfaces and a roar of voices at the huge square of tables. Wine and words, expansive comfort from good food; memories tickled by crafty quiz until thirst and sleep impose a change of scene.

Warm Sunday Gaultshire seen from the bus next day, new leaves glow on trees and hedges: cameras click for posterity at the site of gone-for-ever Brogborough Spinney above the brick pits and amid the Turney graves around the church where Polly married.

Curious horses canter across a paddock - alas, no apples to give them on the plod to Mount Pleasant. A sign shouts 'Boot Fair' at us, voices murmur 'Ah! A pub!' But opposite is Bean Brickhill House inviting a good stare, but discretion wins (and what if Granny 'Thwacker' caught us peeking?): Polly lives there still of course.

Aspley Guise church and Wheatley's notebook flickers yet again. Jim Holloman, restored from Dorset downland is remembered here with those who died in France. Such softly weathered limestone, sturdy brick and handsome ironstone in this place.

David's epigrams speed up the miles of ducal walls to looming luncheon when we part.



The Society's thanks to Tim for organising this weekend. I'm only sorry I, for one, was unable to attend. ED.