

Woburn 7–8 May 1988

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This year's Spring Meeting began in bright, if not Ancient Sunlight. Desmond Fforde acted as guide on a coach tour round Williamson's Gaultshire, aided as we all were by Tom and Joan Skipper's two Bedfordshire articles for the Journal.

The coach took the thirty or so members present from the Bedford Arms Hotel in Woburn out past the Abbey towards Kempston Barracks, home of the Bedfordshire/Gaultshire Regiment. After Marston Moretaine (Williamson's Marston Conquest) we paused briefly at Brogborough Spinney before leaving the coach behind to visit St James' Church at Husborne Crawley and see the Turney Tombstones. On to No. 134 Mount Pleasant (Williamson's Beau Brickhill) where the original Polly Pickering is still living. Due discretion was observed by the massed ranks of the Society as they trooped inconspicuously past. Rejoining the coach, our next stop was Apsley Guise to see the memorial at St Botolph's Church commemorating among others Jim Holliman, the carter's son and crowstarver whose death on the Somme is recorded by Williamson in *A Clear Water Stream*. The presence of such a large party startled the local rector, who was given a lightning resumé of Williamson's career as a writer and his links with Bedfordshire by Fred Shepherd. Suitably inspired, the rector left to collect a copy of *Tarka the Otter* ordered from the local library.

Back then to the Bedford Arms, where Tim Morley introduced an enthralling and original talk on 'Class in the Novels of Henry Williamson', in which David Hoyle examined Williamson's perception of and response to the class system, particularly as seen through his depiction of individuals who depart from their own class either by transcending it or 'getting on'. Members of the Society who failed to attend will have to wait for the forthcoming article in the Journal.

Dinner was followed by Woburn's (second) traditional Williamson quiz culminating in a duel between two teams led by David Hoyle and Stephen Clarke, with a resounding 7–6 victory for the former. The evening dissolved in champagne amicably shared between the opposing teams.

Regrettably, only two teams participated in the next morning's car treasure hunt devised by Tim Morley. Mel and Jenny Greeves, together with your reporter, formed one and Desmond Fforde made a valiant solo effort as the other. Numerical superiority won the day though if truth were told Tim Morley's fiendishly cunning quiz was the real victor. The participants and Chairman had lunch at M— Stables and then dispersed homewards, much refreshed.

Everyone's thanks go to Tim Morley and Desmond Fforde for their efforts in organising such an enjoyable weekend. Those members unable to attend should make a particular effort to come to this year's Devon AGM and find out what they've been missing.