The Anthony Powell Society

The Anthony Powell Society was founded in June 2000 by a group of scholars and enthusiasts following Powell's death at the age of 94. The Society emerged from the Anthony Powell Resources website (begun in 1994 by Dr Keith Marshall) and its associated e-mail discussion list. The Society's stated charitable aim is to advance, for the public benefit, education and interest in the life and works of the English author Anthony Dymoke Powell.

The Society's first major project was a Conference in April 2001 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of A Question of Upbringing, volume one of Dance. This has been followed by a series of biennial conferences, including the Powell Centenary Conference in London in December 2005. In addition to the conferences the Society organises events for members, publishes a quarterly Newsletter, the academic journal Secret Harmonies, conference proceedings and Powell-related monographs; it also maintains the Anthony Powell Resources website and the email discussion list. The Society has members worldwide and a number of local groups.

Through the e-mail discussion list members have provided assistance with the translation of the initial volumes of Dance into Dutch. The Society is regularly asked for advice by individuals and media organisations around the world.

The Society – which is actively supported by the Powell family – was granted charitable status in April 2003 and is a Member of the Alliance of Literary Societies.

What the Papers Say ...

“A storyteller of immense integrity.”
Colin Donald, The Scotsman

“Dance ... one of the great fictional works of this century.”
New York Times

“A towering force of literature and a man of enormous sensitivity and generosity.”
Daily Telegraph

“An absolutely major figure ... in the top two or three English writers of the 20th century.”
Daily Telegraph

“He gave lots of pleasure to lots of people.”
Auberon Waugh, The Times

“A captivating friend, generous, affectionate, forbearing and consoling, immoderately funny.”
Hilary Spurling, The Independent

“We need novelists on the heroic scale of Anthony Powell.”
Daniel Johnson, Daily Telegraph

“Capable of writing about high emotion with extraordinary deftness.”
DJ Taylor, The Independent

“Scope and majesty – not too strong words for The Music of Time – make it a far more durable and formidably proportioned achievement than any mere cult book could possibly be.”
John Bayley, Sunday Times

“His fictions contain dozens of superb moments of social comedy ... they are full of delightful characters.”
Anthony Curtis, Financial Times

“As English as tea and crumpets.”
Robert McCrum, Observer

“Powell’s fascination was ... with the remarkable anarchic openness of English life, its quirks and eddies.”
Ferdinand Mount, New York Times Book Review

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Anthony Powell – Man of Letters

The English author Anthony Dymoke Powell (the name is pronounced Po-ell, by the way) was born in London on 21 December 1905. He was educated at Eton, where he took the Oppidan Prize, and Balliol College, Oxford where he read History. At Eton and Oxford Powell met many of those who became the leading writers of his generation including Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Henry Yorke, Harold Acton, Cyril Connolly and John Betjeman.

After leaving Oxford Powell worked in London as an editor for the publishing firm of Duckworth and then as a film-script writer for Warner Bros where he worked on “quota quickie” productions. In 1937 he left Warner Bros and after spending some time in the USA became a full-time novelist and literary critic.

During World War II Powell served as an officer with the Welch Regiment and in Military Intelligence (Liaison) where he worked with the European Allies’ representatives in London. In recognition of his liaison work with the Allies he received military honours from Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg.

However Powell is best known for his twelve-volume novel *A Dance to the Music of Time* (usually just known as *Dance*), published between 1951 and 1975. Many scholars and readers consider it to be one of the finest works of English literature ever written, and certainly one of the great works of the twentieth century; it may also be the longest English-language novel written to date. Inspired by Nicolas Poussin’s painting with the same title which hangs in The Wallace Collection, London, *Dance* follows the intertwining lives of several hundred characters from the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 to around 1971. As such *Dance* is a valuable resource in British 20th century social history as well as great literature.

Powell’s other works include two plays, seven further novels (five written before World War II; the other two written after *Dance*) and a biography of the 17th century diarist John Aubrey as well as four volumes of memoirs and three volumes of journals. Most of Powell’s fictional works, including *Dance*, have at one time or another been adapted for radio and/or television.

A prolific literary critic and book reviewer, Powell worked for a number of periodicals including the *Daily Telegraph* (for which he reviewed for almost 50 years), *Times Literary Supplement*, *Punch* (where he was Literary Editor in the 1950s) and *The Spectator*. He published three volumes (the last posthumously) of his erudite and incisive literary and art criticism selected from his work as a reviewer and critic.

Aside from the literary world, Powell was passionately interested in all things genealogical and actively researched the Welsh roots of his family. He published a number of articles on genealogical matters relating to Radnorshire. He was also a highly knowledgeable art historian and art critic; something of which may be found in the volumes of his selected criticism.

From 1962 to 1976 Powell was a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery, London and in 1997 he was honoured as a Vice-President of the Society of Genealogists. He was awarded the CBE in 1956 and, having declined a knighthood in 1973, he was made a Companion of Honour in 1988.

Anthony Powell was married to the author Lady Violet Pakenham from 1934 until his death on 28 March 2000. Lady Violet Powell died in January 2002.