Conference Report

by Nicholas Birns

Yes, I actually went to this conference. Instead of an air flight from New York followed by a rail trip from Paddington to Slough (which, in reverse, was the first train ride Queen Victoria ever took) the 2003 conference involved the same air flight followed by a somewhat longer, but still very brief, journey from Paddington to Oxford. Upon arriving at Balliol, I found that the “in relative terms” luxury of my room explained why Stringham had consented to spend a year at Oxford before heading down to London, Donners-Brebner, and dissipation. In wandering around the vicinity of Balliol I encountered Keith and Noreen Marshall, already on their way to Keble to help facilitate Sunday night’s dinner at the High Table. Shortly thereafter, we met up with Tony Robinson, a Keble alumnus who did yeoman work in setting up the dinner. Keble, whose architecture was more Gothic and flamboyant, than the understated assemblage of buildings at Balliol, also contains, in its chapel, Holman Hunt’s *Light of the World*, at which we took a brief glance. The dinner drew thirty-five or so people. It was lavish, festive, and, in every sense, fully satisfying.

The conference proper began the following morning. Keith welcomed all of us, and also made a statement of regret on the loss of Lady Violet Powell, whose early support meant so much to the Society, as well as one on the untimely death of Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, who had been scheduled to deliver a keynote speech. (Many of the American delegates agreed that meeting Lord Jenkins would have been a highlight for them.)

We then heard a funny and candid opening keynote from James Tucker, author of one of the pioneering critical studies of Powell in the 1970s. Jeremy Warren followed with a talk on the Poussin painting which gives its name to *Dance*, revealing among other things that the sources of the dance of time motif go back to the late antique author Nonnus. The first session concerned Powell at Oxford as well as the Oxford passages of *Dance*. We then heard from noted critic and biographer DJ Taylor as he revealed new aspects on the Powell-Orwell relationship. The next keynote was by Alan Judd, on the war trilogy. This talk was a particular hit, and the American delegates, who, by and large, were not familiar with Judd’s work, were motivated to seek it out.

After lunch (where I gazed on the portrait of Lord Curzon, mentioned, of course, in *Infants of the Spring* in connection with Oxford), we broke into concurrent sessions where delegates could choose between papers directly on *Dance* itself (including a dissection, though not a simulation, of Widmerpool’s speech in *The Acceptance World*) or those illuminating other aspects of Powell’s life and work; both sessions were pretty much equally attended. A final session on teaching *Dance* and on “manners” in the sequence wrapped things up nicely. After the reception and auction, a group of us found a restaurant which one of our number dubbed “Foppa’s”. And we had, at two separate tables, a splendid meal.

The conference was an incredible success. The next day saw two concurrent workshops, containing both formal presentations and freewheeling contribution from the floor. Obviously, I could only attend one of these, though I heard the workshop on teaching Powell went well. The one I attended, on Powell and Waugh, was very illuminating. As the speakers compared Waugh’s romantic and lyrical view of Oxford with the acerbic and understated tone of Powell’s Oxford scenes, I realized that the opening paragraph of *Brideshead Revisited* is, paradoxically, Arnoldian. It is resonant with appeals to “the best that has been known and thought” in a way that explained why *Brideshead Revisited* was precisely the success in American middletow circles that *Dance*, ultimately for its own literary good, never was. This insight would not have occurred but for the stimulating conversation at this symposium.

The acceptance world
atmosphere of Balliol and the cooperativeness and friendly demeanour of the Balliol staff made a perfect backdrop for the delegates to share their enjoyment of this so frequently-enjoyed author. (Balliol’s hospitality started from the top with the Vice-Master and Archivist of Balliol, Dr John Jones, who arranged a special exhibition of Powell-related manuscripts and memorabilia which showed, for one thing, that Powell’s letters arranging his matriculation at Balliol at the age of 18 had nearly the exact tone of the last Journal entries from the early 1990s.)

Academics and non-academics, American, British, and continental European delegates got along swimmingly. People came from as far away as Budapest on the one hand and Vancouver on the other to attend the conference. Beyond our shared interest in Powell, many of us found other literary interests in common, and this made for stimulating and congenial conversation throughout. The workshops on the second day were excellent in that they allowed non-speakers to participate in the dialogue on equal terms. Another pleasant feature was the auction after the last papers demonstrated mathematically how a complex organism could assemble itself and take action without any master planning in evidence to call the shots, a process known as morphogenesis. This was a startling, enigmatic precedent. It had been assumed till then that someone or something on top was needed to direct the action. But Turing said this kind of cellular change was not dictated from the top down, it could only come from the bottom up. His new hypothesis was quickly taken up by micro-biologists who were studying slime mould, an aggregation of individual cells, acting together by communicating through their own pheromones. This concept was enlarged further to include a study of harvester ants in California, then to the way it was found that the same process could be applied to the growth of city neighbourhoods; simple, pattern-recognition software learns how to recommend new books, which is the system Amazon.com uses. But the conditions for growth must be exactly right before EMERGENCE can happen.

I propose that the Anthony Powell Society is one more example of Emergence in action. This is not in any way to discredit or detract from the heroic labours of our founder and web master, Keith Marshall. On the contrary, Keith so loved Anthony Powell that he devised the ideal conditions for other, like-minded readers to find each other, to communicate freely, and eventually to grow and increase in wisdom and numbers, even to move great distances. Look at us. Here we are! First came the web site, then the ineffable List, followed by the triumphant meeting at Eton College, subsequently spinning off two new groups in America, first in New York, then Chicago. Another may be forming in the Boston area, and there is a possible renewal of a lapsed group in Toronto. [And not to mention the London group. – Ed]

New people appear, topics of conversation shift and change, meetings occur, while Keith remains at the home base holding things together, observing while these individual cells evolve into the familiar, organized chaos we seem to need for our Society to grow. We read aloud, we argue over the characters, their acts and motivations. (We’ve had a splendid time lately with Pamela Flitton Widmerpool). Last winter Tom Wallace arranged two meetings at the Century Club in New York where we saw the BBC video of Dance which has not appeared on US television so far. We’re working on that. So, considering all of the above, one might think of our Society as a patch of activated slime mould moving across a forest floor, or perhaps a thriving colony of harvester ants, or merely a conglomerate of noisy, highly articulate nuts. You may call us what you will, but I suggest we are Emerging, and I think we’re here to stay.

Tony Robinson incanted the Keble College grace before the pre-conference dinner:


This is translated as:

The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord: and you provide their food in due season. You open your hand and fill every living creature with your blessing. Have mercy on us, we beseech you, O Lord. And bless your gifts which we are about to receive from your kindness: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
The Widmerpool Award

As reported in the last Newsletter, the Society decided to inaugurate an annual Widmerpool Award, for the public figure who most embodies the characteristics of Kenneth Widmerpool. The award will take the form of an engraved “wrong kind of overcoat”, purchased by the Society (at no small expense) from some local flea-market or charity shop. Among the nominations received were ones for George W Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Michael Portillo, Neil Hamilton, Lord Radice, and a certain Sheriff Michael Sheahan of Cook County, Illinois.

However, the most popular nominee by far was Lord Irvine, the Lord Chancellor. One nomination referred to his “unabashed exercise of the powers and privileges of his office without care of public opinion.” Therefore, the Society had no hesitation in awarding the first ever “Widmerpool” to Lord Irvine. Coincidentally, the character of Widmerpool is widely believed to have been based upon Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller, known at the bar as “Bullying Manner”, who became Lord Chancellor in Harold Macmillan’s government, having been elevated as Viscount Dilhorne.

The award was reported in the British press, including this article in The Daily Telegraph on 16 April 2003:

Irvine lifts a ‘Widmerpool’

Derry Irvine - Lord Chancellor and Baron of Lairg - hardly needs any further honours, yet still they come rolling in. His latest gong, though, could be seen as something of a mixed blessing. For the Anthony Powell Society has decided to present him with its inaugural Widmerpool Award. Named after Powell’s pompous fictional creation, Kenneth Widmerpool, the award recognises Irvine’s credentials as, to quote one summary of Widmerpool’s character, “a sad, over-ambitious grafter who inexplicably rises to high office”. Irvine’s “victory” was achieved, says the society’s secretary, Keith Marshall, on “the overwhelming recommendation of the members”.

Powell’s Bibliographer Bound for Texas

Dr George Lilley, author of Anthony Powell: A Bibliography and co-editor of the Eton conference proceedings, has been awarded a Research Fellowship (one of only 30 awarded world-wide) to the Harry Ransom Humanities Center at the University of Texas, Austin. George Lilley (Senior Research Fellow of the Department of English at the University of Wales, Lampeter) recently gained his doctorate with a thesis on Powell.

George says, “I must have begun reading Dance when I was about the same age as the central characters at the beginning of the story, and I’ve been hooked ever since by its dry wit, elegance of style and clear-sighted human observation.”

He hopes to visit Texas in the spring of 2004. The Harry Ransom Center is especially rich in research materials relating to 20th century literature and he hopes that the unpublished archival materials at the Center will help him to discover more about Powell’s relations with literary agents and publishers on both sides of the Atlantic.

East US Coast Meeting

by Nicholas Birns

The atmosphere of our March 15 (Ides of March!) meeting at the Silvermine tavern in Connecticut was rife with anticipation of the Oxford conference in April, which nearly everyone there planned to attend. Since we tend to get lost on the way to the Silvermine, I had boasted to Leatrice Fountain that, like the resourceful Captain Gwatkin, I would bring a map to guide us there. However, on the morning of the day I got occupied in reading the Saturday papers and forgot to bring the map, thus more or less replicating the job Gwatkin did with the company under his command. Fortunately, Jonathan Kooperstein, in a moment of Kedwardian inspiration, had brought a map and he guided us to the inn. There, we had a hearty lunch, or, as Powell would want us to say, luncheon, and genial discourse on a variety of topics Powellian and non-Powellian.

The near-impossibility of finding an apt character model for Gwinnett was discussed, and, in general, Temporary Kings emerged as a focus. Gwinnett struck people very differently, some seeing him as, despite his eccentricities, when the chips are down, a good fellow, others viewing him as a far more malevolent, gothic entity.

The extensive discussion of Pamela on the APList was also followed up slightly; interestingly, the emphasis was more on the literary character-models for Cosmo Flitton’s daughter than on Barbara Skelton, et al. The conversation was exhilarating as it is so rare to be in a group of people, each of whom is intelligent, gracious, perceptive, and well-read, and all of whom share common interests.

The attendees were: myself, Leatrice Fountain, Bill and Arete Warren, Jonathan Kooperstein, Keesley Schell, Ed Bock, and John Gould. Our next meeting will be in June in another corner of Connecticut – details to follow on APList.

Meet the Committee:
Prof. Ian Young

Ian Young was born in Belfast in 1961 and grew up in Belfast through the worst of Northern Ireland’s “Troubles”. He graduated in Biochemistry and then Medicine from Queen’s University Belfast, and is now Professor of Medicine at Queen’s and Consultant in Clinical Biochemistry to the Royal Group of Hospitals, Belfast. He has published extensively in scientific journals, mainly in relation to aspects of nutrition and cardiovascular disease, and has lectured widely on these topics.

He was introduced to the writing of Anthony Powell by a fellow-medical student while queuing for lunch in the spring of 1983, and subsequently read Dance for the first time that summer while pretending to work in Edmonton, Canada. The fellow medical student has no recollection of the conversation (or of ever reading any of Anthony Powell’s books!)

When not working, Ian’s main interests are spending time with his family (a wife and two children) and book collecting, with several areas of interest apart from Anthony Powell. If there is any time left, he loves to fish in the many lakes and rivers of Northern Ireland.
Maclaren-Ross Defends Himself

by Tom Miller

The information supplied by Paul Willetts (Newsletter, Spring 2003) about Julian Maclaren-Ross, the original of X Trapnel, sent me up to the attic to refresh my memory.

Sure enough, within the pages of The Pick of Punch 1954, I found two pieces by Julian Maclaren-Ross himself. (It is hard to recommend the book. Though there are contributions from such luminaries as John Betjeman and Noël Coward, it seems that the English of half a century ago were easily amused.)

In one article, Maclaren-Ross makes heavy fun of his failure to get a film script accepted, despite his kind response to appeals from producers to serious writers interested in screenwriting. He was, however, accosted by “a boy of repellent aspect, barely above school age, but wearing nevertheless a green assistant’s badge”, and taken to see the detective; but he was released when his friend confirmed that Maclaren-Ross had indeed borrowed the book.

This unpleasantness did not stop Maclaren-Ross from making further visits to the shop, but I was not surprised to learn that on these excursions he was followed about by “sullen-faced female adolescents”, and watched by “pimpily-faced youths” through “steel spectacles.”

The implication from what we know about him is that Maclaren-Ross was properly interrogated, but that his mother-wit kept him out of trouble …

The second incident took place in the same shop. Maclaren-Ross was carrying a book, identified by a bookplate, that he had borrowed from someone else; he was however accosted by “a boy of repellent aspect, barely above school age, but wearing nevertheless a green assistant’s badge”, and taken to see the detective; but he was released when his friend confirmed that Maclaren-Ross had indeed borrowed the book.

This unpleasantness did not stop Maclaren-Ross from making further visits to the shop, but I was not surprised to learn that on these excursions he was followed about by “sullen-faced female adolescents”, and watched by “pimpily-faced youths” through “steel spectacles.”

The implication from what we know about him is that Maclaren-Ross was properly interrogated, but that his mother-wit kept him out of trouble …

Letters to the Editor

Mortimer Singer

Leatrice Fountain received the following from her friend Roy Herbert of New Scientist (for many years author of their column “Ariadne”) who actually remembers the singing lady on the crutch outside the Mortimer.

This is the further part and you might find it of interest to your Powell chapel. We have discovered little about the singer except that her name was Bridget and she was Irish. My friend Joan Bailey (London Library) who knew the police at the nearest station in Soho, Vine Street, went along there and asked about her. They said that anyone who knew more would be dead by now. She asked in cafés around that that’s how we know those slim facts. A young waiter had heard someone talking about her several years ago. I don’t remember her singing Pale Hands I Loved Beside the Shalimar, but popular arias from opera. Her voice was as powerful as Ethel Merman’s and could cut through traffic noise and any other noise in the streets. I think I recall that she didn’t have a bottler to collect money, but had a bag on her crutch, though I might be entirely wrong about that. She seemed ageless to me.

Anthony Powell on Radio

Sir, I’m interested to establish the details of Anthony Powell’s contribution to radio, whether as the subject of features and interviews or as author of works adapted for the medium. I know of two interviews and three features (but have no transmission dates for them). I know also of adaptations as radio plays of sixteen of the novels, all but Afternoon Men and the two late titles. These I do have dates for – see below.

I have recordings of the interviews and features mentioned and of some of the novels-as-plays. I’m seeking especially to complete my radio Dance and would be very pleased to hear from any Society member who might be able to help. I could perhaps offer a quid pro quo.

Details of the radio plays are as follows:

Venusberg 3 January 1956
Another production? 4 February 1963
What’s Become of Waring? 20 February 1956

From a View to a Death 7 August 1971

A Dance to the Music of Time

Books 1-3 from 21.7.79 (6 episodes)
Books 4-6 from 12.7.80 (6 episodes)
Books 7-9 from 14.6.81 (6 episodes)
Books 10-12 from 18.7.82 (7 episodes)

Agents and Patients 21 December 1985

For anyone interested my contact details are: Barry Pike, 42 Scarborough Road, London E11 4AL. Phone: 020 8556 5243

[Dance was actually 26 episodes and is currently being repeated on BBC7, see page 11. Full details are on the website. – Ed]

Calthorpe

Sir, An article I was reading about Iraq said the man who accepted the armistice from the Ottomans on behalf of the British in 1918 was Admiral Calthorpe. I wonder if this could have been the source for Powell’s use of it in the school scenes of A Question of Upbringing? Since the senior Jenkins was posted in Mesopotamia Powell could have read up on the subject or just have known the name by the way…

Nicholas Birs

Uncle Giles’ untiring gyrations before the altar of the Trust
Anthony Powell Mention

Society member, Prudence Raper, spotted the following mention of Powell in a recent report of the England vs Scotland rugby match by Simon Barnes, chief sports writer for The Times. The report, headlined “Robinson stars in tale of the unexpected”, mentioned that the said Robinson (“a man worth the admission money on his own”) evidently achieves his results by doing unexpected things. This led Barnes to write:

“There is a story about Anthony Powell, when approached about a television series of A Dance to the Music of Time, his great cycle novel. He wanted closer involvement than the television people were keen on. He was asked what he thought he would contribute. He replied: ‘The unexpected.” And so Robinson predictably contributed the unexpected to England’s performance.”

Powell First Editions

Society member, Trevor Winkfield, noticed the following Powell books for sale (at a staggering $50,000 for the set) at James S Jaffe Rare Books, Haverford, PA:

A set of inscribed first editions of Powell’s first four novels:

Afternoon Men … inscribed on the front free endpaper: “For Bobbie Bevan who wears his learning as a guardsman his bear skin, from the author Tony Powell , October 6th 1932.”

Venusberg … inscribed on the front free endpaper: “For Bobbie the author’s warm regard, and in the hope that the new year will prove a good one, from Tony Powell, Dec. 31st 1932. ‘I love little pussy, her coat is so warm.”

From a View to a Death … inscribed on the front flyleaf: “For Bobbie, who covers the water front but isn’t always watching the sea, from Tony Powell, Feb. 13th 1935.”

Agents and Patients … inscribed on the front flyleaf: “For Bobbie, from the author Tony Powell. For purity. April 19th 1936.”

Robert Bevan was, apparently, the scion of a family of painters, and was a legendary advertising executive who for many years ran SH Benson and Hedges (which later merged with Ogilvy and Mather).

Do any Society members know anything further about Robert Bevan and his friendship with Powell?
**Dance Radio Dramatisation on BBC7 Digital Radio**

Many members will have spotted that the BBC’s radio dramatisation of *Dance* from the late-1970s/early-1980s has recently been repeated on BBC7 digital radio. Unfortunately we didn’t know in time to be able to mail everyone with the details!

At 26 episodes there are two episodes per book with *Books Do Furnish a Room* and *Temporary Kings* getting three episodes each. Frederick Bradnum’s dramatisation is excellent – for my money far superior to the Channel 4 films, good though they are. Bradnum really does capture the whole ethos of *Dance* despite the inevitable omission of some good scenes. This is helped by the division of Jenkins’s role into two – Jenkins the protagonist and Jenkins the narrator, played by different actors.

At the time of writing about one third of the 26, one hour, episodes have been broadcast; the plan is that we record them all for the Society’s archive. We are in discussions with the BBC in the hope that we may be able to make a copy of this dramatisation more easily available to members, or perhaps cajole them into releasing the radio plays on tape or CD.

*Please do NOT ask us to send you tapes, CDs, MP3 files, etc. of the plays unless we announce here that they are officially available. Apart from the huge amount of work involved, the dramatisation is subject to UK copyright law and to circulate it in any way without the BBC’s permission would very clearly be illegal.*

**Local Groups**

**NE USA Group**
Area Covered: NY & CT area, USA  
Organiser: Leatrice Fountain  
Email: leatricefountain@aol.com

**Great Lakes Group**
Area Covered: Chicago area, USA  
Organiser: Stephen Pyskoty-Olle  
Email: widmerpool@hotmail.com

**London Group**
Area Covered: London & SE UK  
Organiser: vacant

**Vice-President Monagan**

We are delighted to announce that John S Monagan (“The Congressman” of Powell’s *Journals*) has been appointed the Society’s first Vice-President. This appointment is in appreciation of “The Congressman’s” long-standing support for the Society, his memoir of Powell, *The Master and The Congressman* (available from the Society), and his contribution to the wider understanding of Powell’s life and works.

**From the Secretary’s Desk**

This April was not just a month of sweet Chaucerian showers but also one of sweet successes for the Society. Within a few days at the beginning of the month we achieved three major milestones.

Firstly our first non-conference publication saw the light of day. *The Master and The Congressman* is a short memoir by John S Monagan (“The Congressman” of Powell’s *Journals*) of his several visits to Powell and Lady Violet at the Chantry. Partly in recognition of this John has been appointed as the Society’s first Vice-President.

Secondly the long awaited Oxford Conference, of which there is more elsewhere in this *Newsletter*, was a resounding success.

But thirdly, and most significantly, we had confirmation that our application for charitable status had been approved and that the Society is now a charity registered in England and Wales.

While this does put some administrative burdens on us it should have significant benefits, not least financially, and is recognition of the value of our aims.

This has taken about 18 months hard, and at times dispiriting, work – mostly answering the Charity Commission’s seemingly interminable questions. While none of the committee have been untouched by the work I would particularly like to thank Tony Robinson who patiently and expertly guided us through the application process. I must also thank our Treasurer, Ian Young, whose work on this has now just begun: he has the unenviable task of putting the required accounting and taxation processes in place to ensure we fulfil out legal obligations and reap the benefits.

Members will find a Gift Aid Declaration form enclosed with this *Newsletter*. If you are a UK taxpayer, please complete and return the form as this allows us to reclaim the tax you have already paid on your subscriptions, donations, etc. – at current UK tax rates this is worth an additional 28p for every £1 you give us!

For the record we are Registered Charity No. 1096873.

In addition there have also been a number of minor successes …

Earlier in the year we were asked by *Book & Magazine Collector* (a UK monthly) to submit an article on the history and activities of the Society to kick-off a new series they are running on literary societies. The article, written by the Society’s Hon. Archivist, appeared in the June issue of *Book & Magazine Collector*, which is now in full colour! The article is reprinted elsewhere in this *Newsletter*.

And finally, in March we enrolled our 200th member.

We really have had a good few months!
Members’ Survey

Now that charitable status has been achieved the Executive Committee would welcome members’ and non-members’, thoughts on the development of the Society. Please spend a few minutes completing the questionnaire enclosed with this Newsletter.

This is a good opportunity for you to influence the direction of the Society and the shape of the 2005 Centenary Conference. It is also an opportunity for you to offer to help us. So please tell us what you want!

All questionnaires received by 31 July 2003 will be entered in a draw for a year’s free membership of the Society.

All the information is provided in confidence and your identity will not be disclosed outside the Secretary’s office.

We will aim to report back at the AGM and in a later copy of the Newsletter.

Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome and should be sent to:

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The Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford
Middlesex, UB6 0JW
UK
Fax: 020 8864 6109
Email: sjholden@hotmail.com

Dates for Your Diary

Saturday 2nd August 2003
London Group Pub Lunch Meet
Venue: The Anchor Bankside,
34 Park Street, London, SE1 9EF
Time: 1230 to 1530 hrs
By popular demand a repeat informal lunchtime meet at this historic London riverside hostelry:
good beer, good food, good chat

Saturday 20th September 2003
Society AGM
Venue: The Albert Public House
Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0NP
Time: 1430 hrs
Details elsewhere in this issue

Annual General Meeting 2003

Notice is hereby given that this year’s Annual General Meeting of The Anthony Powell Society will be held on Saturday 20 September 2003 at The Albert Public House, Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0NP commencing at 1430 hrs.

It is hoped that the meeting will be followed by a guest speaker and a short walk to Powell’s birthplace which is nearby. Refreshments will also be provided.

Nominations for the three Executive Officers (Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer) and Executive Committee Members must be received in writing by the Secretary no later than Monday 28 July 2003.

Maggie Noach, our current Chairman, has indicated that due to pressure of work she wishes to stand down. Consequently a vacancy exists for a new Chairman to share and enhance our vision and guide us through this new and exciting phase of the Society’s development.

All nominations must bear the name & signature of two proposers and the signature of the candidate accepting the declaration (shown on the form below). Electronic signatures will be accepted in the form of e-mail(s) from the proposer(s)/candidate to the Secretary. Normal mail and faxes (preferably using the form) will also, of course, be accepted.

Please note: The members of the Executive Committee (the three officers and the committee members) are the Society’s legal trustees. This means those elected must not be barred from being trustees under English law and a majority of the Executive Committee must, in the Charity Commission’s words “be ordinarily resident in England and Wales”.

Motions for discussion at the AGM must also be submitted to the Secretary no later than Monday 28 July 2003. They must be clearly worded, proposed by at least two members and contain a statement in support of the motion which will be published to members.

The agenda for the AGM will include a motion to make a small amendment to the Constitution which has been requested by the Charity Commission. This will clarify the size and composition of the Executive Committee and if passed will mean that up to six committee members (in addition to the three officers) may be elected.

The formal agenda for the meeting, together with proxy voting papers, will be sent to all members in early August. Proxy votes must reach the Secretary no later than Monday 15 September 2003.

Membership Renewal

Second Reminder

Members are reminded that subscriptions were due at the end of March. Those whose subscription has now expired will find a renewal reminder enclosed with this Newsletter.

It would be appreciated if members would renew their subscriptions promptly – it only causes embarrassment, expense and unnecessary work if we have to send out reminders.
The Anthony Powell Society: the History of a Twenty-First Century Organisation

by Noreen Marshall
Hon. Archivist

The Anthony Powell Society was formally founded on 1st June 2000 in the elegant surroundings of 7 Ormonde Gate, London, by a handful of enthusiasts gathered beneath the rather severe gaze of Tsar Peter the Great, whose portrait hung in the room. Its aim is "to advance for the public benefit, education and interest in the life and works of the English author Anthony Dymoke Powell". So far, so traditional. But its roots and much of its working are in the Internet, where for some time it had existed in all but name as an informal group which discussed Anthony Powell (AP) and his work by e-mail. It is not only a modern organisation, but also probably the first literary society to emerge from an Internet discussion list.

It all began when Dr Keith Marshall, now the Society's Hon. Secretary, was recovering from glandular fever back in the early 1980s. A friend suggested that he might enjoy reading Anthony Powell's 12-volume novel *A Dance to the Music of Time* (often referred to by its fans simply as *Dance*). By the time his recovery was complete, he had not only read and enjoyed all twelve books, but Powell was one of his heroes. This was not just the admiration that many of us have for a particular personality, but a recognition that here was someone who was a skilful writer and literary critic – and with a circle of friends and acquaintances which included many of the twentieth century's great writers and characters such as Evelyn Waugh, Osbert Lancaster and George Orwell. So to Keith it seemed only natural to include a section on Powell when he eventually created his web pages, especially as it soon became apparent that there was nothing else Powell-related on the Web. Initial interest in this section of the website was boosted with the 1997 dramatisation of *A Dance to the Music of Time* for Channel 4, starring Simon Russell Beale and Miranda Richardson.

That interest increased when fellow Powell enthusiast Julian Allason contacted Keith Marshall to discuss the possible real life sources for some of Powell's fictional characters. Powell himself detested this sort of thing (although he was a keen user of real life incidents and remarks), but it continues to fascinate his readers. In particular, who can possibly have been the model for the character who is arguably Powell's finest creation, Kenneth Widmerpool? Answers on an e-postcard began to arrive, the website section expanded, and the e-mail discussion list (APLIST) began in mid-1998.

Most people, including many Powell fans, assume that such a very 'English' author will attract readers only in this country. But there are Powell enthusiasts all over the world, and the APLIST meant that a 'virtual' conference was going to be difficult to do well; it would have to be an international conference was needed to celebrate the man and his work. So the Society came into being for a purely practical reason – to organise the first Anthony Powell Conference. Having started on the Internet, one of the first options considered was to have the conference there, too – but it was soon realised that a 'virtual' conference was going to be difficult to do well; it would also have excluded Powell devotees who did not have Internet access. One of the conference team then discovered that Eton College was keen to host the event, and realised that a 'virtual' conference was going to be difficult to do well; it would also have excluded Powell devotees who did not have Internet access. One of the conference team then discovered that Eton College was keen to host the event, and that was an offer no-one wanted to refuse. Eton is not only Powell's old school, but is also the thinly-disguised setting for *A Question of Upbringing*, the first volume of *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

So the Society's first biennial conference, *Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of A Dance to the Music of Time*, took place at Eton College on 23rd April 2001, opening with a message from Powell's widow, the writer Lady Violet Pakenham. Delegates came from all over the world, and listened to a fine variety of papers, among them words 'Gone away' on a returned letter make the narrator think of a fox? Even those who had most detested this kind of exercise in English lessons at school hurried to explain and even to look things up. The appeal of AP's writing lies partly in his accurate ear for dialogue, his characterisation and his wit; he also evokes a setting so convincingly that the reader can, as it were, go and spend a weekend there.

The final catalyst for the founding of the Society was Powell's death in 2000 at the age of 94. The sheer volume of tributes paid to him on both sides of the Atlantic made the APLIST members realise that an international conference was needed to celebrate the man and his work. So the Society came into being for a purely practical reason – to organise the first Anthony Powell Conference. Having started on the Internet, one of the first options considered was to have the conference there, too – but it was soon realised that a 'virtual' conference was going to be difficult to do well; it would also have excluded Powell devotees who did not have Internet access. One of the conference team then discovered that Eton College was keen to host the event, and that was an offer no-one wanted to refuse. Eton is not only Powell’s old school, but is also the thinly-disguised setting for *A Question of Upbringing*, the first volume of *A Dance to the Music of Time*.
one by the intelligence historian Nigel West on Powell’s possible connections with Bletchley Park during World War II, and journalist Simon Barnes’s analysis of the consumption of alcohol in Dance. The Society also welcomed Anthony Powell’s younger son John as its Patron, and the writer and Powell family friend Hugh Massingberd as President. This first major event was much enjoyed by all who came to it, and the proceedings published by the Society. The second conference has just taken place at Balliol College, Oxford, where AP read History in the 1920s. This time the topics included the Poussin painting A Dance to the Music of Time which inspired the title of the sequence; Powell’s acquaintance with George Orwell; and the ‘Oxford effect’ on various writers. The overwhelming verdict from delegates was that they had enjoyed this conference even more than the first. Work has already started on the 2005 conference in London, to tie in with the Wallace Collection’s proposed exhibition to mark the centenary of Powell’s birth. Several venues are already ‘bidding’ to host the 2007 conference.

The APLIST is particularly well suited to those who want to access and take part in discussions about Powell from a distance, and e-mails and telephone conferencing are widely used in the Society’s work, but real events are very much what the members want. One of the earliest was an invitation to a group of Society members to attend the dedication of AP’s memorial, led by Patric Dickinson, Richmond Herald, who also happens to be a member; and dinner and a talk by Hugh Massingberd at his and AP’s London club, The Travellers.

The Society also has three Local Groups organising events for members in their area: the NE USA group, covering New York and Connecticut; the Great Lakes group, based in the Chicago area, and the London group, for London and SE England; other groups seem likely to emerge. The American meetings have done rather better than the English ones at leading structured discussions of various AP-related subjects, such as the prevalence of art in the first three books of Dance, whereas the English members seem to prefer to come along to the pub or bistro for wide-ranging conversations which drop in and out of Powell’s world.

In its three years of existence, the Anthony Powell Society has certainly exceeded its original aim of staging a conference. It has over two hundred members, has been granted charitable status, and is beginning to build up an archive of AP-related material for the use of researchers and enthusiasts. It has also just launched its first non-conference publication, The Master and the Congressman, a monograph by former US Senator John S Monagan (nicknamed ‘The Congressman’ in Powell’s Journals). His account of his friendship with Anthony and Violet Powell spans twenty-five years and is gently humorous. As a member of the Alliance of Literary Societies, the Anthony Powell Society hopes to achieve recognition for AP’s work much as some of the longer established groups have for other authors from Lascelles Abercrombie to Charlotte Yonge. The continued availability of many authors’ books for new readers to buy and to collect will almost certainly depend on interest shown in their work by academics and enthusiasts, and the Anthony Powell Society plans to go on growing and progressing, and providing an enjoyable resource for its members.

A slightly edited version of this article first appeared in Issue 231 of Book and Magazine Collector, published in June 2003. It was commissioned as the first in a series of articles on UK literary societies. The Society is grateful for permission to reprint the article.

### Newsletter Copy Deadlines

The deadlines for receipt of articles and advertisements for the Newsletter are:

**Issue 12, Autumn 2003**
- **Copy Deadline:** 15 August 2003
- **Publication Date:** 5 September 2003

**Issue 13, Winter 2003**
- **Copy Deadline:** 14 November 2003
- **Publication Date:** 5 December 2003

**Issue 14, Spring 2004**
- **Copy Deadline:** 13 February 2004
- **Publication Date:** 5 March 2004

**Issue 15, Summer 2004**
- **Copy Deadline:** 14 May 2004
- **Publication Date:** 4 June 2004
Society Merchandise

The Master and The Congressman
A 40 page monograph by John Monagan describing his meetings with Anthony Powell. A small treasure for all collectors of Powelliana.
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Society Postcard
B&W postcard of Powell with his cat Trelawney. Picture on page 13.
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Wallace Collection Poster
The Wallace Collection’s 48.5 x 67.5 cm (half life-size) poster of the Poussin’s A Dance to the Music of Time. Mailed in a poster tube. As we don’t know how well poster tubes will survive air mail handling, mailing outside the UK is at buyer’s risk. Picture on page 13.
Price: £5.75 (postage rate D)

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Limited edition of 250 numbered copies each signed by the Society’s Patron.
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