**Hail the Lord of the Dance**

by Colin Donald

According to Edith Sitwell in her dotage, “It’s wonderful being able to make people so angry when one is so old”. Anthony Powell does better; he can still induce apoplexy from beyond the grave.

For a teller of comic stories, Powell has always been strangely prone to violent attacks. Malcolm Muggeridge and Auberon Waugh are amongst the many who have taken the flimsy excuse of a book review to launch jeremiads against him and all his works, as if his high reputation and enthusiastic following were an affront to them personally.

Now, just when Powell was slipping into the post-mortem limbo of neglect, where even Nobel laureates must spend some time (Samuel Beckett and William Golding are there now – hang in there, gents!), along comes a reminder that Anthony Powell does better; he can still induce apoplexy from beyond the grave.

The chance of reviewing the first biography of Powell by Michael Barber has allowed Powell-lovers and Powell-haters to get things off their chests. The proper answer to the most hysterical of the hatchet jobs is to recommend tablets and a darkened room, but that did not quite apply to Sir Max Hastings in the word.

Sunday Telegraph. Interestingly, he sublimated consideration of the merits and demerits of the book under consideration to the higher purpose of performing posthumous assassination of a writer he knew quite well and once greatly admired.

Why such bile? His own well documented admiration for Powell’s achievement counts for nothing with Sir Max against the fact that Powell was very mildly disparaging about the Great Editor in his published Journals. Now that Powell is dead, the time has come for Hastings to cut himself a whacking great slice of cold revenge pie, and exercise the journalist’s God-given right to the last word.

From the Secretary’s Desk

The Secretary Towers Workhouse has been even busier than normal in the last couple of months. July and August are always busy months for the Hon. Secretary: we have to put together the Annual Report, the papers for the AGM and the Autumn Newsletter, which all have to be mailed to you in early September. And let’s not forget the Hon. Treasurer’s toils turning a multitude of small transactions into meaningful accounts which will pass professional scrutiny.

But this year has been manic, even by my normally busy standards. In addition to the usual work we have been burning the midnight oil at both ends to get the proceedings of the Oxford Conference to the printer and to prepare the “Call for Papers” for next year’s Conference.

Preparing the Oxford Proceedings for publication has taken much longer than expected – but then they are 50% larger than the Eton Proceedings and the text is more densely academic, meaning the editorial team had an especially tough job. As I write this – in an hotel room in Newcastle upon Tyne on yet another business trip (it’s surprising how that eats into time too!) – the printer is busy creating the final product on paper.

The Centenary Conference “Call for Papers” will be sent out during October, so the text for this is in the process of being honed to squeeze all the key messages into the available space.

Oh!, and between all this and their full time jobs, the officers usually want some family holiday! But then as my colleagues always remind me: if you want a job done give it to a busy man.
In last judgement tones, and apparently more in sorrow than in anger, Sir Max called Powell “priggish, pretentious and pompous”, consigned him to the “second rank” of 20th century English literature, and dismissed him as a vain and deluded snob, who lived a “pretty arid life”. Jocular remarks of Powell’s – he once told a friend that his only ambitions in life were a “wife with a title and a house with a drive” – are used mirthlessly against him, his many attractive aspects unmentioned.

But Hastings did land one punch that might momentarily unnerve Powell fans, not least those concerned with sustaining the longevity of the Anthony Powell Society. He said that Powell’s readers were dying off and not being replaced, that his magnum opus A Dance to the Music of Time portrays a world in which the under-40s “possess little interest, from a perspective they find unsympathetic.”

Time rather than Sir Max will arbitrate on that one, though it is easy to imagine the same being said about many authors who fell out of fashion but have since come back for good; from Trollope to Proust to James Burnham’s The Managerial Revolution, a now forgotten Russophile tract as trendy then as The End of History was in more recent times.

Barber does not take himself or his subject too solemnly

Barber does not take himself or his subject too solemnly, is not fastidious about clichés, and includes his own hit-or-miss pleasurabilities. AN Wilson has, wickedly but justifiably, compared his style to an amiable bore holding court in the saloon-bar. It was exceptionally generous-minded of Barber to undertake the labour of the biography on behalf of a man who has slighted him in his Journals as “uninspired to say the least”, a judgement that Barber is disarmingly happy to quote in the book.

Sourced mostly from Powell’s memoirs and Journals as well as newspaper interviews and others’ letters and diaries, his book is full of good stories and widens our knowledge of the real sources of the various characters who make up the Bohemian ambience of Dance. He makes a load of shrewd and illuminating points about Powell’s life and work, while never getting under the skin of either. He does not get to grips with Powell’s style or techniques though he credibly asserts that the elaborate sentences might be the result of his immersion in 17th century literature.

If anyone is going to write the definitive book it will be Hilary Spurling, whose affinity with Powell and with his work is very well documented, and whose key work A Handbook to Anthony Powell’s Music of Time (1977) remains the essential starting point of Powell studies. She is said to be writing the ‘access all areas’ official biography though the time frame remains vague.

Without declaring this interest, Spurling wrote a surprisingly snippy review of Barber’s book for the Daily Telegraph which can only increase expectations about her own much-discussed effort. We fans hope for something along the lines of Andrew Motion on Philip Larkin, Richard Ellmann on Oscar Wilde or Claire Tomalin on Pepys; not hagiography but a clearing away the litter of received opinions and journalistic error that reveals the achievement afresh.

In Powell’s case this will not be easy. His technique was to synthesise complicated patterns and bold modernist and post-modernist devices beneath a voice as understated and urbane as Sergeant Wilson on Dad’s Army. Aiming to be lifelike, his books are multifaceted and slippery, and he revelled in the fact that they were read in totally different orders to do so.

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So far critics have been reluctant to grapple with Powell because he is hard to categorise and comes with off-putting class associations. That should matter less in time, and alongside the acknowledged value as a chronicler of his times, his technical innovation will get its due. Barber’s diligent digging turns up forgotten critical insights from others, for example the 1968 New Statesman critic in praise of Powell’s powerful indirect evocation of the power of sex by a “process of indirection … by dwelling on its social consequences – people not only go to bed, but forgo money, abandon careers and leave homes in order to do so.”

Conveying sex, in all its myriad forms and moods – some of them extreme – is one of Powell’s chief fictional achievements, more interesting than the snobbery issue. While we are pausing to enjoy the spectacle of Max H levelling accusations of pomposity and snobbery, it could also be noted that he exemplifies another big theme; the contorting effects of power-pursuit. The electrical force of power in its myriad forms is a theme stamped throughout the sequence, giving
it its heady blend of the comic and the grotesque.

In any book about Powell you would expect good gossip, and the book is full of good stuff, some of it new, about who slept with who, who was modelled on who. Readers of the memoirs will know the cast: Constant Lambert, Cyril Connolly, Nina Hamnett, Malcolm Muggeridge, George Orwell, Julian Maclaren-Ross and many other fading ghosts. Having never provided any commentary on his work, refusing to ‘descant’ on it, Powell has in fact said quite a lot about his life and this is an efficient summary of those writings, with added indiscretions. It is also laced with illuminating asides like Jilly Cooper saying, “Tony was always very nice to waiters”. If there is a big revelation it is that Powell’s father, a bad-tempered military man (perhaps the closest reality-fiction parallel in Dance), to everyone’s amazement left him the equivalent of a million pounds. So now we know how he could live in style on the proceeds of uncommercial novels and book reviews.

The media attention that the silly-season release of this book has attracted has to be appreciated by the Powell-head community, intensely irritating though some of it has been. The closing pages of To Keep The Ball Rolling give the best advice on how best to react to these unpleasant and hypocritical abuses of journalistic influence.

If you believe Powell’s own ‘ars longa’ message, such score-settling and bitchiness is eternal and does not mean much in the end. One of the motifs in the book is a drawing by Modigliani, first seen in the first volume of Dance, set in the 1920s, which passes – sometimes due to cataclysmic upheavals – through the hands of charlatans, no hopers and philistine monsters. It is casually mentioned as still being in existence in the last volume, set fifty years later, still the same imperturbable, mesmerising artwork, still good.

A version of this article first appeared in The Herald (Glasgow).

Understanding Anthony Powell

Reviewed by John Gould

I have spent a hugely enjoyable Friday and Saturday reading Nick Birn’s Understanding Anthony Powell. It is very rich, and I’m not going to go over what he says in any detail, since everyone in this Society needs to get it and read it and get your libraries to get it as well. But I feel the need to make some observations.

First, I cannot imagine a more perfect reader for Powell’s work than Nick. His own reading is wonderfully broad, catholic and eclectic. He draws fascinating lines between Powell’s work and American, European, and British writers, both contemporary and classical. Relations between The Great Gatsby and The Acceptance World (remember TJ Eckelberg and the diving woman at Maidenhead?) grow crystal clear. Joyce, Proust, Faulkner, Hardy: the list goes on. The book, like Dance itself, as Nick himself says at one point, provides an outline for a university-level education.

Generally speaking, it’s well written (although there are too many typos; Nick should shoot his copy editor). In Nick’s own prose little springs of lines from TS Eliot and others come bubbling up. “Farebrother, as reencountered, is a fragment shored against the ruins of Jenkins’s world.” Powell himself would love this language, which grows out of Nick’s love for literature, for reading.

Powell would also, I think, love the sensibility that Nick brings to his task. He is generous and perceptive but reasonably unflinching. He does a superb job of stilling the adenoidal grumpings of those who whine about Powell’s snobbery (a complaint I’m very tired of hearing, by the way. I think the Society members should all ignore this issue from now on – or maybe send a copy of Understanding Anthony Powell to anyone who raises it).

Finally, the last section, about the Journals, is absolutely brilliant. It uses these last works as keys to help evaluate the whole oeuvre, in a persuasive and comprehensive way. One great point is that Powell, as a reader, was remarkably generous, even if he didn’t like some aspects of a writer. Nick writes, “Despite his pronounced lack of respect for Woolf and Forster, Powell would not want to see them shoved to the side for political reasons.” He, for instance, would never, ever, have written something like Professor Carey’s review of Michael Barber’s biography.

So those out there who haven’t yet read Understanding Anthony Powell for the first time, I envy you. There’s great pleasure lying ahead.


The proper answer to the most hysterical of the hatchet jobs is to recommend tablets and a darkened room
A Weekend Invitation

by Julian Allason

Key scenes in the *Dance* are set in stately homes, and Powell assumes a familiarity with the rhythm of country house life that may now be fading.

Victor Hervey cut a figure sharp enough to warrant a place in the dramatic personae of Waugh’s satires. Aristocratic gunrunner, partygiver, gentleman burglar, convict and floggee, the sixth Marquess of Bristol was perhaps too colourful a figure to provide character inspiration to a serious novelist, although acquainted with several. His seat, Ickworth in Suffolk, was the venue for numerous country house parties even beyond its scaleable downwards to more modest houses, but varying little even in ducal palaces.

Marquess, known as John Jermyn, maintained the family tradition of wild partying. Having retained a lease on Ickworth’s residential east wing he terrorised National Trust visitors to the rest of the estate by racing vintage cars through it.

By the time of his death from drug addiction in 1997 aged 44 little of Jermyn’s £30 million inheritance survived. Sotheby’s were called in by the executors to auction off what remained. The director, a glamorous American blonde, was accommodated in one of the principal guestrooms, where she discovered in the bedside table several capsules of amyl nitrate – ‘poppers’ supposed to confer aphrodisial powers – and a French maid’s outfit. Mentioning this to colleagues over dinner served by the Smith-like Bristol butler, she was subsequently amused to find the drawer empty when she retired.

A recent visit to Ickworth to inspect a curiously under-catalogued Titian and some Chinese porcelain worthy of Pamela’s attention set me to reflect upon some Chinese porcelain worthy of Pamela’s attention set me to reflect upon the country house parties in the *Dance*. Each tableau intrigues by the manner in which it both conforms to, and departs from what was – and to some extent remains – a rigid social prescription. What then was the format for the country house weekend during the decades of the *Dance*?

Convention demanded arrival upon a Friday afternoon in time for tea, at which a gift would be presented to the hostess. Meanwhile suitcases would be carried up to bedrooms and unpacked by servants. At the statelier homes cars were driven round to the stable block, washed and with luck refuelled. Guests were then expected to disappear until seven or so when cocktails were served prior to dining. In the Midlands it was usual to sound the gong not for dinner – that would be announced by the butler – but twenty minutes earlier to winkle any latecomers out of the bathroom. (En-suite facilities were not widely adopted until the 1980s, and are still rare in Scottish country houses and castles.)

The ‘placement’ at dinner was automatic, being protocol driven, unless one of the lady guests was possessed of exceptional beauty, wit, or embonpoint, in which case promotion to the host’s left (but rarely right) hand might be gazetted. After cheese the ladies would retire, leaving the men to port and cigars, and perhaps to ‘water the lawn’. It is still considered poor form to keep your host up late on a Friday evening, particularly in the winter when an early rise for shooting might be on the cards.

Whatever the season a hearty breakfast could be anticipated, to include such dishes as devilled kidneys, kippers and cold cuts. Shooting brakes and Land Rovers stood by to take the ‘guns’, never more than eight in number, off to the first drive. Some of the ladies might follow to pick up downed birds, or join the ‘guns’ for lunch.

Outside the shooting season Saturday afternoons were usually devoted to cultural affairs – or just affairs. Options could include a tour of the property, its pictures and dungeons, a game of bridge, or expeditions to nearby churches or archaeological remains. Planchette and bezique seem to have been reserved to the unromantic upon rainy afternoons.

Until the Second World War white tie and tails were the norm for Saturday dinner. By the 1960s these had almost entirely given way to dinner jackets (tuxedos) worn with black bow tie, long dresses remaining usual for all but the youngest and prettiest women. If there was no ball to attend a neighbouring houseparty might join the dinner, swelling numbers to two dozen or more, and providing occasion to deploy the best porcelain and silver. Minor domestic staff would join butler and footmen to serve, and it was not unusual for servants from the visiting house to assist. Billiards, charades and party games might follow at the less stuffy houses. Photographic tableaux enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1920s: Sir Magnus seems to have been a late starter – or a tenacious promoter of the practice.

Appearance at breakfast on Sunday morning was no more obligatory than attendance at Church from the Great War on. Luncheon was another matter; at it gossip from the night before would be exchanged and loose ends tied. Guests’ departure would take place no later than 3pm, after the servants had been tipped. Such was the model to which all but the most bohemian subscribed, a model scaleable downwards to more modest houses, but varying little even in ducal palaces.

To the contemporaneous reader of the *Dance* such a pattern might have been second nature, even if experienced only through the mediation of farceur or detective novelist. Today it seems the social minuet of a lost age. Yet any guest invited to stay at a Stourwater or even a Thrubworth today would still be well advised to enquire, “Shall we be dressing for dinner?” But not, alas, at Ickworth, now an hotel decorated in Festival of Britain style. And certainly not in a French maid’s outfit.

*Anthony Powell Society Newsletter #16*
Notes from our Patron

A recent letter from the Society’s Patron, John Powell, to the Hon. Secretary brings two pieces of news.

“The London Library was a haven for research for both my parents throughout their lives, where they never had an unhappy moment. In recognition of this Tristram has arranged for the family to present the Library with the new edition of the Dictionary of National Biography [and for it] to be placed in the Reading Room in [Anthony and Lady Violet’s] memory. Nine feet of shelves have been cleared for the new volumes. Information from the DNB will be available to members of the Library through [their] Website.”

Secondly John reports:

“For more information on the Powell murders (Newsletter 10, p. 15 & Newsletter 15, p. 17) see The Departure Platform by Violet Powell where there is a description on page 87 of a visit to Venice in 1956, and a meeting with Tony Bower.”

The relevant passage in The Departure Platform reads:

“An old friend of mine, Tony Bower, had invited us for drinks in a flat at the top of the Palazzo Polignac … One of the guests was Esther Murphy, who had been the first wife of the politician John Strachey, and who was an admirer of Powell’s novels. I think it was only later that we discovered that this quiet, pleasant, but unstriking American lady was a sister of Gerald Murphy, who, with his wife Sara, had been an important influence in the early careers of Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway … Tony Bower, who had brought us to the party, told me how much he enjoyed watching his hosts on the telephone, angling for invitations to parties in which he, Bower, felt no interest. The end of Tony Bower’s story was a sad one. He met his death at the hands of a criminal boy-friend in New York City, an incident that might have come out of Tender Is the Night.”

The Quotable Powell – I

“I began to brood on the complexity of writing a novel about English life, a subject difficult enough to handle with authenticity even of a cruelly naturalistic sort, even more to convey the inner truth of the things observed … Intricacies of social life make English habits unyielding to simplification, while understatement and irony – in which all classes of this island converse – upset the normal emphasis of reported speech … Even the bare facts had an unreal, almost satirical ring when committed to paper, say in the manner of innumerable Russian stories of the nineteenth century: “I was born in the city of L-, the son of an infantry officer…” To convey much that was relevant to the reader’s mind by such phrases was in this country hardly possible. Too many factors had to be taken into consideration.”

– Anthony Powell, The Acceptance World

“Atwater … began to bite the apple. It was green and tasted of absolutely nothing. It was like eating material in the abstract.”

– Anthony Powell, Afternoon Men

Widmerpool Award 2004

Among the nominations received for the 2004 Widmerpool Award were ones for Lords Falconer, Hutton, and Butler; King Carl Gustav XVI of Sweden; Peter Mandelson; the Australian politician Alexander Downer; “the sublimely self-centered Greg Dyke and Andrew Gilligan”; and Alistair Campbell (for “having achieved power without responsibility”).

However, the most popular nominee, and 2004 winner of the Widmerpool Award, is Sir Max Hastings. The nominations were “on the grounds, not only of physical traits (thick specks, booming manner) but for petty abuse of power” in using the medium of a review of a new biography of Powell as an excuse for personal score-settling (Powell was very mildly disparaging about Sir Max in his published Journals.) Hastings certainly reveals a Widmerpudlian lack of self-knowledge in referring to Powell as “priggish, pretentious and pompous” and a “snob”.

Carey, The Don Who “Reviews”

by Douglas Russell

Carey, the don who “reviews” with a cat in his lap while he’s nude, thought it parochially droll to score cheap points off Powell, but instead bit off more than he chewed.

The myope’s strabismic view of the subject evinced that he knew more hearsay than fact – the true sign of a hack like a parrot’s taught to be rude.

Those with two eyes and two ears know that his Reckoning nears – like that cat in his lap it will suddenly snap and droll Carey will wind up in tears.

The Quotable Powell – II

“People think because a novel’s invented, it isn’t true. Exactly the reverse is the case. Because a novel’s invented, it is true. Biography and memoirs can never be wholly true, since they can’t include every conceivable circumstance of what happened. The novel can do that. The novelist himself lays it down. His decision is binding. The biographer, even at his highest and best, can be only tentative, empirical. The autobiographer, for his part, is imprisoned in his own egotism. He must always be suspect. In contrast with the other two, the novelist is a god, creating his man, making him breathe and walk.”

– Anthony Powell; Hearing Secret Harmonies
Papers and discussions during the conference might include, but are by no means limited to:

- the influence of London on Powell’s writing about the London social scene in Powell’s time
- Powell’s literary friendships
- Powell and biography
- the importance of the publishing industry to Powell and his friends
- the influence of art on Powell and his literary contemporaries

The organisers are proud to announce that Hilary Spurling and Ian Rankin have agreed to be among the 2005 conference keynote speakers.

Prospective speakers are invited to submit for review abstracts of not more than 300 words for 20-minute papers. Submissions, which may be made electronically, must arrive with the Hon. Secretary by 31 January 2005. Papers which have been rejected for previous Anthony Powell Conferences will not be reconsidered.

Authors will be advised in April 2005 whether their abstracts have been accepted. Completed papers will be required by 28 October 2005 to ensure their inclusion in the Conference and the Proceedings.

Papers will be accepted on the basis that authors pay the appropriate delegate fee and attend the conference.

Abstracts of the accepted papers will be issued to delegates at the conference. The conference proceedings, including the full text of presented papers, will be published after the event and will be sent to all participants.

The Frederick Ashton centenary celebrations are in full stride here (actually, according to Clive Barnes in the July 2004 issue of Dance magazine, a more concerted observation of the Ashton centenary is taking place in New York than in London) and Jonathan Kooperstein and Ed Bock thought it appropriate to organize a local group meeting to see the Joffrey Ballet perform three of Ashton’s works at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. We had arranged what promised to be a splendid dinner at Cafe Mozart on West 70th St.

By 6.30, Ed, Jonathan, myself, Leatrice Fountain, Aretre and William Warren, Eileen Kaufman and her daughter Erin, and John Gould – whose researches into Constant Lambert made him an especially interested student of the evening’s performance – had all arrived. (John and Jonathan have contributed some details to this report.) We had just sat down when a waiter at the restaurant turned out to be one of John’s former students – a truly Powellian coincidence! Dinner began promisingly with asparagus soup and tuna tartare, which we consumed enthusiastically as the Warrens circulated John Carey’s splenetic review of Michael Barber’s Powell biography in the Sunday Times. We agreed the dark-haired woman in the picture accompanying the review was likelier to be the model for Barbara Goring than for Jean Temple. Eileen also had the Barber book itself, which most of us had not yet seen, so we spent time getting a first glimpse at what looks to be an invaluable volume and noting Jonathan’s mention in the acknowledgments. But soon enough we noticed that the curtain was drawing nigh and dinner was not arriving. I had ordered something called “Viennese Schnitzel” which was chicken, not veal, and I was interested in exploring actually what this meant. After repeated assurances that the food would arrive in just a couple of minutes, we finally realized that we had to decamp, dinnerless, in order to make the ballet, and the staff at Cafe Mozart graciously let us depart only having paid for the drinks and appetizers we had actually consumed. The entire effect was that of a one-act farce, where the dinner guests sit down, make some amusing conversation and just as some climax is about to develop are told that there won’t be any dinner and are hustled out of the restaurant/theatre. In fact, this could have been Anthony Powell’s third play, with an additional dollop of self-referentiality at the principal topic of conversation being a hostile review of a biography of the play’s author!

The second act, as it were, of the evening went much more smoothly. We arrived at the opera house about ten minutes prior to curtain, and of course several of us thought of that final performance in Temporary Kings, after which Widmerpool and Pamela have their big
dustup and during which the second violinist is identified as Carolo. John continued to entertain us with fascinating observations about Moreland and his similarities and differences from Lambert (who, as arranger of the Meyerbeer music for the first ballet, Les Patineurs, was on the program – though listed as ‘Constance Lambert,’ something which would no doubt have made Powell chortle). Les Patineurs was entertaining, with its fairly realistic if robust representation of dancers as skaters. The vivid sets and costumes were by Powell’s friend William Chappell, who is, of course, mentioned in the Journals. The second ballet, Monotones, was actually two separate if structurally aligned pieces, both set to music by Erik Satie and both featuring three performers. These later dancers were restrained and striking and gained the attention of everyone in the audience. At the second intermission, we regrouped and Leatrice, who had not eaten all day, had a smoked salmon sandwich, a kind of pocket version of the full salmon entree she had ordered at Café Mozart.

The highlight of the evening, though, was the third ballet, Wedding Bouquet, with music and set design by Lord Berners (as Powell might have wanted us to clarify, the 20th century Lord Berners, not the 15th century translator of Froissart). This was an alert and uplifting spectacle, and its combination of classicism and modernity, of frivolity and technical accomplishment, brought to mind aesthetic and stylistic elements that Ashton, Powell, and their musical contemporaries such as Lambert had in common. The way the tableau depicted was both celebration and fiasco reminded one of many of the parties in Powell’s novels written in the 1930s or those books of Dance depicting London bohemian life in that decade and the one immediately previous. Constant Lambert, incidentally, was the original narrator for the ballet – an important role, performed here by former Joffrey dancer Christian Holder.

We left better educated and in higher spirits than we came in. Though I still had vistas of the chicken schnitzel I had missed, I remembered the wise quotation so often uttered by that eminent diplomat, Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson: “For lust of knowing what we should not know, we take the Golden Road to Samarkand.” Consoled that I had, metaphorically speaking, stayed on this side of the Oxus River, and with the additional consolation of having a reasonably sized lunch earlier in the afternoon, I gladly continued to spend on the day.

London AP Birthday Lunch

The London Group will be holding this year’s AP Birthday Lunch at 12 noon on Saturday 4 December 2004 at Zia Teresa, 6 Hans Road, London, SW3 1RX. Members, supporters and their guests will all be very welcome.

Zia Teresa is an excellent and reasonably priced Italian restaurant. As well as good Italian food they boast some excellent house wine. The Hon. Secretary and Hon. Archivist have known this restaurant for almost 30 years(!) and have even been known to entertain visiting dignitaries there.

As before, the lunch is being organised on a “pay as you go” basis, so you can choose whatever you wish to eat and drink on the day and pay accordingly. There is something on the menu for everyone!

All we ask is that if you wish to attend please return the form opposite to the Hon. Secretary no later than Friday 26 November so we can advise the restaurant of exact numbers. In order to secure your booking a £5 deposit is payable; this will be deducted from your spending on the day.

Hans Road runs off Brompton Road along the western side (nearest the Victoria & Albert Museum) of Harrod’s; Zia Teresa is just a few doors from the corner.

After celebrating Powell’s 99th birthday, those still capable will be well placed for a little light Christmas shopping in Harrod’s, Harvey Nichols or the Victoria & Albert Museum; alternatively why not sample the other delights of South Kensington: The Oratory, Natural History Museum, a walk through Brompton Village to Rutland Gate, Ennismore Gardens and the Albert Memorial or perhaps afternoon tea at Patisserie Valerie, 215 Brompton Road.
Centenary Corner

Anthony Powell Centenary Conference

is to be held on
Friday 2 & Saturday 3 December 2005
at
The Wallace Collection
London, W1

Things are beginning to move now with preparations for Centenary Year.

Centenary Conference
We are delighted to announce the four invited keynote speakers for the conference. They are:
• Hilary Spurling, author of the
  Handbook to Dance
• Crime writer, Ian Rankin
• Novelist Alan Judd, fresh from his
  triumph at the Oxford Conference,
  who will consider how Powell might
  approach writing Dance were he
  starting today, and
• John Saumarez-Smith of booksellers G
  Hayward Hill who will talk about
  “Anthony Powell as Bibliophile”

In addition we expect to timetable around a dozen delegate papers over the two days. As always, though, this will depend on both the quantity and quality

of the responses to the “Call for Papers” which will be distributed in October. A preliminary version of the “Call for Papers” is included on page 11.

If any member has useful contacts to whom we should mail conference information, then please would they send the names and addresses to the Hon. Secretary, who is gradually building up a mailing database for the Society – the more people we can mail the more likely we are to succeed.

Our aim is to make the two days a little less densely packed than the Eton and Oxford Conferences. The start times will be a little later, and we must finish promptly as we are constrained by The Wallace Collection’s opening hours. We are also planning slightly extended lunch breaks so that there is time for delegates to view the Wallace’s Powell Centenary Exhibition. In consequence we will have to be much stricter in keeping speakers to their allotted time.

Further details will, of course, be announced in the fullness of time. Meanwhile we are also working on the traditional pre-conference dinner and a number of other possible events.

Our wish is to keep the cost of the Centenary Conference comparable with the cost of the Oxford Conference – although with 15 months to go there are still a large number of imponderables to take into account.

Anyone who wishes to book a provisional place at the conference or who wishes to make an initial payment towards their delegate fee may also do so now by contacting the Hon. Secretary.

Powell Centenary Exhibition
The Society’s exhibitions team has now suggested to The Wallace Collection what we consider the most appropriate objects to be included in their exhibition of Powell’s life and work. Arranging the loan of objects and putting together the exhibition is now in the very capable hands of The Wallace’s exhibitions team. The exhibition is scheduled for mid-October 2005 to early-January 2006.

Other Events
Not so much news here, however rest assured that a number of other Society events are being planned for 2005. Nick Birns’s team is also working to ensure there is awareness of the centenary, and coverage at other events. We will publish a timetable of events starting in the next Newsletter.

London Group Meetings
Two for the Price of One?

By Noreen Marshall

The London and SE England group held its summer meeting on 3 July at the Anchor pub on London’s Bankside. That week had seen the publication of Anthony Powell: a Life, Michael Barber’s long-awaited (unauthorised) biography of AP, shortly followed by our President Hugh Massingberd’s review of the book in The Spectator. Larger news retailers having failed miserably in their duty to provide that month’s Spectator, two copies were

found at the newsagent’s just up the road from the pub: thus armed with the book and several of the most recent reviews, it was for once almost a single topic discussion, though we still managed to touch on clothing and that traditional British topic of conversation, the weather, along the way. In conclusion we felt that the biography was eminently readable, good value and a very welcome addition to our bookshelves.

Much to everyone’s delight, another excuse to meet at the Anchor for drinks and chat presented itself on 9 August with the presence in London of not only John Gould of Andover, USA, but Malin Saddiqi and her husband Faik on holiday from Stockholm. Malin and Faik were gathering more AP-related places to add to their itinerary; John is currently researching links between AP’s character Hugh Moreland and the composer Constant Lambert, upon whom Moreland is said to have been modelled. A lengthy and many-sided discussion followed, touching upon (among other things) Lambert’s relationships with his son Kit (former manager of the rock group The Who) and the dancer Margot Fonteyn; English/British composers from Ludford and Carver to Purcell and Maxwell Davies (and his recent appointment as Master of the Queen’s Music); and British abstract art, notably sculpture. Once more, Anthony Powell: a Life came up for discussion, again to general acclaim. Other biographers also figured in the discussion, notably Fiona McCarthy for her fearless work on Eric Gill, when we reached the fact that with AP there had by contrast been nothing startling to unearth. Heaven knows what those at the neighbouring tables made of half of this …
Oxford Conference Proceedings
by Keith Marshall

We are delighted to announce that the Proceedings of the Second Biennial Anthony Powell Conference 2003, held at Balliol College, Oxford in April 2003 are now available.

The editorial team – Dr George Lilley, Stephen Holden and the Hon Secretary – apoligise for the time it has taken to produce the proceedings. At 250 pages the proceedings are some 50% larger than the Eton Conference Proceedings. Additionally many of the papers are of a more academic nature. Both these have naturally added to the amount of editorial work to be done.

The “academic editing” – the work on the content – and some especially diligent proofreading was undertaken by George and Stephen, and I must thank them for leaving me with just the relatively easy job, as publisher, of organising the text for the printer. I would also like to thank the Hon. Archivist for proofreading several of the drafts.

Copies of the Oxford Proceedings were mailed to all delegates in mid-August, so if you were at the conference in Balliol College and have not received your copy please contact the Hon. Secretary. Additional copies are now available to both members and non-members at a cost of £7.50 each (post free to members) See page 27 for ordering details.

Looking at the papers again, in the cold light after a break from them, I am greatly impressed by both their quality and their interest – and I know that both George and Stephen feel the same. Rereading them I think I found every paper interesting and thought-provoking. I believe this is a publication of which the Society should be truly proud.

New Editions of Powell Works
In October

There are two new, American, editions of Powell’s works on the horizon.

Firstly, the University of Chicago’s “Phoenix” series is republishing The Fisher King on 1 October.

And a couple of weeks later, on 15 October, Green Integer (who have previously published pocket-sized versions of Venusberg and Oh how the wheel becomes it) are republishing What’s Become of Warling.

Both editions may be pre-ordered through www.amazon.com and www.amazon.co.uk. And remember that if you have internet access by using the links to Amazon from the AP website homepage you will be benefiting the Society.

Society News & Notices

Automatic Subscription Payments

We are pleased to announce that the Society can now accept recurring credit card transactions. This means that we can, for those who give their written authorisation, automatically debit their subscription from their credit card each year, thus relieving members of the need to send us an annual payment.

In order to be able to process a recurring transaction we do have to have a specific authorisation from you, the member. The wording appears on the membership form on the back page of this Newsletter, and we will be updating the Membership Leaflet and website as soon as possible.

We are still required to write to those with recurring transactions each year to ensure you are informed of the amount you will be debited (currently £20). This will be done in March each year.

Members wishing to take advantage of this facility may do so now by returning the membership form on the back page (photocopies of the form are fine). Alternatively you may wait until you receive your next subscription reminder.

Membership Renewal

At the time of writing, around 30 members whose subscriptions expired in March still have not renewed their membership. Although many have renewed after receiving a second reminder, this remains a much higher proportion of the Society’s membership than is sustainable – both in terms of lost revenue and the cost of reminders.

Final reminders are being mailed to those who have not yet renewed their subscriptions. Please send your payment to the Hon. Secretary (at the address on page 2) urgently.

Anyone who has not renewed by 30 September will be removed from the Society’s membership list – which means you will not be able to vote at the AGM and this will be the last Newsletter you receive.

Remember that you can pay by credit card as well as sterling cheque or cash. Members who wish to may now give the Society authorisation to debit their subscription from their credit card each year automatically (see opposite).

And if you are a UK member, don’t forget you can Gift Aid your subscription thus increasing its value to the Society by 28%. Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you need a Gift Aid declaration form (or use the form on the back page).
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Area: NY & CT area, USA
Contact: Leatrice Fountain
Email: leatricefountain@aol.com

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

Swedish Group
Area: Sweden
Contact: Regina Rehbinder
Email: reginarehbinder@hotmail.com

London Group
Area: London & SE England
Contact: Keith Marshall
Email: kcm@cix.co.uk

Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you wish to make contact with a group and don’t have email.

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

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The Anthony Powell Society
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Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 0JW, UK

Fax: +44 (0)20 8864 6109
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The Audley (41-43 Mount Street, London, W1), the new venue for London Local Group meetings.

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Dates for Your Diary

Friday 24 September 2004
Great Lakes Group Meeting
Venue: Chicago
Time: Afternoon
Topic: The Parties in Dance
Venue and time to be confirmed
Details from Stephen Pyskoty-Olle (widmerpool@hotmail.com)

Saturday 9 or Saturday 30 October
East Coast USA Group Meeting
Venue: Silvermine Tavern, Norwalk, CT
Time: 1230 hrs
Date to be confirmed
Details from Leatrice Fountain (leatricefountain@aol.com)

Saturday 23 October 2004
Society AGM
Time: 1400 hrs
Venue: New Cavendish Club
44 Great Cumberland Place, London W1
to be followed at 1500 hrs by
Writing about Anthony Powell
Speakers: Michael Barber, Dr George Lilley and Dr Nicholas Birns

** NEW VENUE **
Saturday 6 November 2004
London Group Pub Meet
Venue: The Audley
41-43 Mount Street, London, W1K 2RX
Time: 1230 to 1530 hrs
Regular 4-monthly informal meet for
drinks, food and AP discussions

Saturday 4 December 2004
AP Birthday Lunch
Venue: Zia Teresa
6 Hans Road, London, SW3 1RX
Time: 1200 hrs
Join the London Group to celebrate
Powell’s 99th birthday
Details on page 14

** NEW VENUE **
Saturday 5 March 2005
London Group Pub Meet
Venue: The Audley
41-43 Mount Street, London, W1K 2RX
Time: 1230 to 1530 hrs
Regular 4-monthly informal meet for
drinks, food and AP discussions

Friday 2 & Saturday 3 December 2005
Anthony Powell Centenary Conference
Venue: The Wallace Collection
Manchester Square, London, W1
Details to follow

** NEW VENUE **
for London Group

The London Group organisers have decided to move group meetings from
the Anchor Bankside to the Audley, 41-43 Mount Street, London, W1.

While it is regretted that the Audley will be less convenient for some, it promises
better beer, easier access to food and a
less noisy environment. In addition the
pub is in a more AP-ish area: very close to
Shepherd Market, Hill Street and the
Grosvenor Chapel where AP’s memorial
service was held.

The Audley is on the corner of Mount
Street and South Audley Street just a
short walk from both Marble Arch and
Hyde Park Corner underground stations.
Dance mentioned earlier her objection to the movie version of the Dance. Her objection was that Jenkins should never have declared his love for Isobel openly as he was such a private person.

I have not seen the movie, but I agree with Malin. I don’t remember the location of the passage, but at one point Jean Flores (perhaps still Duport) comes up in conversation and Isobel says, “You used to know her, I think?” or words to that effect. At the time I thought that there were hints of wifely intuition guessing at the truth, although this is, no doubt, my imagination taking over. I think it is significant that after many years of marriage Jenkins still did not mention his earlier affair with Jean, even to his wife, despite the fact that he was no longer in love and so mentioning it would probably not cause discord. Isobel hardly seems likely to have been a prude on the subject either.

It is very rare (as I think Jenkins says at some point, perhaps in Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant about Moreland) for men not to boast about their sexual conquests. This is especially amazing considering that Jean’s daughter became a movie star and Jean herself the wife of a president – by the end of the series Jean seems likely to have been a prude on the subject either.

From Malin Siddiqi
Oh, but I don’t think that he is “telling the world and his wife all about himself” – far from it! He tells us a lot about the people surrounding him and a lot about certain aspects of his life but next to nothing about some areas of his life. Therefore I stick to my opinion that Jenkins is indeed a “private person”!

Although I have not been married more than two years (soon), I venture to say that I don’t see why Jenkins couldn’t have told his wife about his affair with Jean. Unless there’s some unknown “time factor” involved here (meaning that a marriage entered into in the thirties wasn’t the same as a marriage entered into in 2002), I don’t see why a wife would mind knowing about her husband’s past love affairs, provided, of course, that she doesn’t suspect that there’s something still going on! Come to think of it now, after having recently read Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant, I very strongly believe in the “time factor”, since the depictions of marriage there presented don’t resemble anything I recognize, although I don’t doubt their validity at the time in the least.

From David Christie
You know, Nick is no more a “private person” than dear old Samuel Pepys. He has spent some 3000 pages telling the world and his wife all about himself – rather like one Anthony Powell, now I come to think about it!

From Nick Hay
Jenkins comments, “Moreland possessed that quality, rather rare among men, of not divulging names”. It is made in the context of Moreland’s question to Jenkins as to which women he would choose if he were legally allowed three wives: Jenkins who is at the time in his relationship with Jean instead of revealing this “offered three names from the group of female acquaintances we enjoyed in common”. In itself I find this a little strange in that my guess is many men would choose notable public beauties? – however Jenkins is very clearly himself not “divulging names”.

Again, not divulging names is different from not boasting of sexual conquests – Byron (one of the characters mentioned along with Casanova and Don Juan in the discussion at Casanova’s a little later) may be accused of boasting of his sexual conquests but rarely mentions names unless they were of special importance to him.

From Adam Bohnet
“Conquest” was probably the wrong word. I suppose I wasn’t really thinking in terms of locker-room boasting, (or of the rambling tale of seduction described in The Fisher King) although I can see why the phrasing of my posting gave that impression.

I think it does suggest something about Jenkins that he did not hint to anybody at some sort of a romantic connection with Jean. Sexual conquests of famous women aside, people often like to remind the rest of the world of their connections with famous people. Jenkins resists even hinting (I think) at anything more than a vague acquaintance with Jean. This makes him quite a bit more discreet than a good many people I know.

Also, while it is unwise, no doubt, to talk at length about past lovers with one’s wife, with most married couples I know the subject does occasionally come up in conversation.

As for Jenkins telling us all about his love-affairs in detail in twelve volumes and therefore showing himself to be a very un-private person indeed, I don’t think it is ever made very clear what sort of a work Jenkins is writing or who he is writing for. He never tells us what he is doing. It certainly does not seem like a memoir, as many have pointed out. Frankly, it doesn’t usually seem much like an oral narrative either.

By the way, to my knowledge Pepys’ diary was not published until quite a while after his death. Didn’t it have to be decoded? I don’t think that it was written for the public so Powell and Jenkins may have been indiscreet, but it is probably unfair to accuse Pepys of the same sin.

From Peter Kissinger
Let me put it that way: Jenkins does not tell that he didn’t tell anybody. Lots of other events are not narrated. A sojourn in New York, for example, is hinted at etc. And what about Jenkins playing with his children? “It would be a different novel”, was Powell’s reaction to a psychoanalytical reading of Proust’s Recherche – it made much of the point that the narrator of the Recherche has no brother while its author did have one. Jealousy, Oedipus, Cain and Abel, the
whole lot.

Jenkins is not at all telling us “all” about his love affairs, let alone in detail. There certainly aren’t any details about “this charming love affair” with Jean Templer. What is provoking interpretation, though, is why Jenkins does decide to include the exchange between Isobel and himself. The couple may, or may not, some time after have talked about their pre-marital, or even ex-marital, affairs. In the first four volumes Jenkins often uses the phrases that seem to foreground the process of writing (such as “I write” or “what I have written so far” etc.), I cannot remember any such phrase in a volume later than 5 or 6. It may be one of the few inconsistencies due to the manner of roman-fleuve kind of publication.

I think Jenkins is indeed indiscreet. But who’s “reading” or “listening”? As in many other instances, Jenkins (both the experiencing self and the narrating self) parallels Widmerpool. He too is giving away secrets (see Temporary Kings for spying and novel writing and betraying).

From James Doyle
There’s a post-war party at the Flores home, where Lady Isobel, after what must have been a very brief conversation with Jean, invites Jean and the Colonel to dinner.

It seems to me that nothing we’ve learned about Jean to that point suggests that she is much interested in other women in general, or has any interests that would recommend her to Lady Isobel as a dinner companion. Doesn’t it seem that Lady Isobel issued the invitation just because she would like a further look at one of her husband’s former loves? So, either Nick has shared the story, or (as seems more likely) Lady Isobel has deduced it from his demure comments. Less candour expected at that period because less candour was needed? Anyway, when dealing with Lady Isobel. Rather a nice Powellian moment.

Without saying so, he somehow conveys that Nick is somewhat shocked to learn of the invitation; relieved to learn that Jean has declined it.

From Nick Hay
But keeping to the point what seems to be suggested is that Jenkins’ remark that “Moreland possessed that quality, rather rare among men, of not divulging names” does not in fact apply to list members’ empirical experience? This would suggest that far from ‘candour in general’ becoming more widespread it would seem to have retreated? Were in fact male friends more open, less private in the inter-war years than they are now? Who in Dance displays the opposite characteristic to Moreland? Duport and Brent spring to mind probably merely because of the connection to Jean. They also broaden the social spectrum from the artistic/musical world which forms the back-drop to the conversation in Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant.

From Steve Pyskoty-Olle
Let’s not forget that Jean was *married* at the time of their romance. That, certainly, would be a major factor for me in deciding whether to tell my spouse (and others) about a past love. If Jenkins displayed so little regard for Jean’s marriage, that could indicate a willingness to be cavalier about his own marriage vows.

Nick was fairly sure she [Lady Isobel] had deduced it. From The Kindly Ones: “Wasn’t he [Templer] the brother of that girl you used to know?” said Isobel. She spoke as if finally confirming a fact of which she had always been a little uncertain, at the same time smiling as if she hardly thought the pretence worth keeping up.”

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Hunt the papers?
Powell Typescripts go to the BL

By Our Arts Correspondent

Members may recall that in the aftermath of the Society's first Conference at Eton College in 2001, the Powell family deposited AP’s papers with the College, where they formed part of a collection of work by old Etonian writers. The papers included the typescripts of most of the novels, and A Dance to the Music of Time in its entirety, from which Eton College Librarian Michael Meredith, with his colleague Nick Baker, gave a fascinating presentation on AP’s methods of working and revision to those who were lucky enough to be at Eton for the AGM in September 2002.

When the Powell family became liable for a substantial sum in death duties they offered the papers to the nation as part of the payment. Acceptance and eventual custody of such material in the UK can be a lengthy process, and involve a good many consultations of a rather baroque nature between government and various cultural institutions. So it wasn’t a huge surprise that nothing more was heard for about a year, beyond the fact that the papers were said to have moved to the British Library pending a decision about their future.

In the end Tessa Jowell, the UK’s Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, considered the matter important enough to take a hand in the decision-making, The Guardian’s Westminster Correspondent, David Hencke, reports (26/08/2004). The official advisers recommended that the Library at Eton should acquire the papers, but Ms Jowell has ruled that the British Library should have custody of them, citing government policy on access.

Whether the papers will be more accessible this way will remain to be seen. The British Library is a public institution dependant upon government funding; it has extensive opening hours, but access on a long term basis will depend on the researcher having a reader’s ticket, which is difficult to come by; and has to be justified for renewal every few years. Eton College is a private institution, free to raise and spend money as it chooses; public access by appointment is generous but could in theory be withdrawn.

Fortunately for all of us, the papers are apparently still available for inclusion in the Anthony Powell centenary exhibition at the Wallace Collection next year.
Letters to the Editor

From Julian Allason

No sooner had Stephen Holden warned of the curse of Powell than the haunting began. Carey’s evaluation [his review of Michael Barber’s biography in the Sunday Times] was the subject of a comprehensive demolition job - and a magisterial rebuke for a review that “oozes malevolence” - by the editor of Burke’s Landed Gentry in the Sunday Times.

I lunched today with a publisher who told me that the reviews of Barber’s biography and Anthony Blond’s recent autobiography were widely considered to have crossed the frontier between academic point scoring into personal score settling. Many in the literary world felt that the viciousness of these reviews diminished their authors, and would be regretted by them.

Dr Carey may think it is safe to come out from beneath the high table but I doubt the shades of Scorp, Trelawney and Mrs Erdleigh have finished with him yet. Or the others.

From Patric Dickinson

Back in July 2002, on the APLIST [email discussion list], Seamus Sweeney raised the interesting question of whether Powell’s use of the name Stringham owed anything to Saki’s short story The Jesting of Arlington Stringham. This aroused no further comment at the time but it seems to me that some credence is lent to the suggestion by the fact that Stringham is a remarkably uncommon name.

In the 1881 census for England and Wales there were a mere eighteen persons named Stringham – eleven in Surrey, four in Durham and one each in Herefordshire, Middlesex and Yorkshire. According to the 1997 edition of UK-INFO DISK (a CD that pools information from telephone directories and electoral registers and therefore contains almost everyone aged eighteen and upwards), there were at that time twelve adult Stringhams living in the United Kingdom, seven in Lancashire, two each in Cheshire and Surrey and one in East Sussex (none of them, alas, called Charles). By comparison, there were 164 Templers and 137 individuals named Sillery.

It is therefore extremely unlikely that Powell would have encountered the name in real life. On the other hand, he must surely have read Saki’s wonderful short stories (late in life he reviewed a biography of the writer) – Michael Barber, in his new book, suggests that echoes of Saki can be heard in asides by Dicky Umfraville and Peter Templer. A Writer’s Notebook indicates that Stringham was one of the names that Powell jotted down for possible use, but no indication is given of where he came across it.

Incidentally, The Jesting of Arlington Stringham is only four pages long but it also includes references to an offstage character named Lady Isobel.

From Julian Allason

While I share certain readers’ affection for Canon Fenneau, the character does ring slightly false, although I quite like him anyway. It is largely because he does seem slightly bogus, dropping titbits of bats-tongue to intrigue Nick in a man-to-man sort of way, whilst metaphorically tightening his Roman collar. This makes him multidimensional in comparison to van Helsing, the Exorcist, and the other “stock gothic characters” to whom Society members have alluded.

I used to know a Benedictine who was a diocesan exorcist. His demeanour was entirely pragmatic, and generally skeptical of most disturbances forwarded for his attention. In a recent book the Exorcist of the city of Rome recalled that he could count upon his hand the number of possessions he had encountered in his exorcising career. The malignant influence of evil spirits he had found very much more common, frequently associated with narcotic addiction (less commonly alcoholism). Both had responded to exorcism.

While I cannot recall a single patient who could remotely have been thought to be possessed, psychiatric colleagues working with the insane have occasionally experienced episodes close to Biblical, and even gothic, accounts of possession, complete with multiple voices and apparent special knowledge. One would have thought that many mature clergy would have experienced similar encounters and been more alarmed than enticed.

The unworthy thought had occurred to me that Powell was using Fenneau to pull the rug out from under some of Waugh’s infallible priests.
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B&W postcard of Powell with his cat Trelawney. Picture on page 10.
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