We wish all members & friends of the Society a Peaceful Christmas and a Prosperous New Year

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Remember: New Subscription Rates from January 2009; see page 7
From the Secretary’s Desk

And so another year rolls round. It seems only a few weeks ago that we were about to have the first annual Anthony Powell Lecture, yet here we are on the eve of the second lecture which will have been and gone by the time you read this. And for those of you who can’t be there we’ll print a report in the next Newsletter.

We have also recently held the AGM at which we had an interesting and entertaining talk from Paul Willetts on Julian Maclaren-Ross, or as he expressed it “the man who was X Trapnel”. Again we hope to print Willetts’ talk in a future issue of the Journal; and the minutes of the AGM will be in the next Newsletter.

Mention of the Journal reminds me that this year’s issue is running well behind schedule and it may well not appear until January. As I keep saying, we are all running the Society in addition to demanding day jobs, and sadly something has to give. Indeed I made it very clear at the AGM that unless somebody(s) step forward to take on the Membership Secretary and the Merchandise roles in the next year, I shall step down as Secretary at the next AGM. I cannot keep trying to do the amount I am, especially as it is beginning to take a toll on my health. We also need someone to take on organising events in the UK; again I cannot do it all; there haven’t been many events this year – despite some good ideas – purely because I have just not had the time organise them.

On a more positive note, Nick Birns is organising what promises to be an outstanding conference for next September. Again we hope to have more details and booking information in the next Newsletter.

So once again at the end of the year it really remains only for me to thank everyone for their support during the year and to wish you all a peaceful and enjoyable Christmas and a prosperous 2009.
Anthony Powell, Gardener

A letter from John Powell

Anthony Powell took to country life and energetic gardening. Also rediscovering Albert’s Grotto and Fum’s Oak.

He lived in Somerset without becoming in the least countrified, venturing out only for a stroll down to the lake or to chop a few logs.

As soon as we moved down to Somerset in 1952 my father sought practical advice about what was worthy and to be encouraged in the garden from his great friend Alick Dru who farmed on the other side of Somerset near Minehead. In reality my father put much work into the gardens which spread out around The Chantry from the word go. Descriptions of the period after we had moved down here when he was commuting to London to literary edit at Punch two nights a week, ignore the fact that AP was always at work in the garden here in much the same way as he was promptly at his typewriter every morning.

When we arrived here in 1952 AP was confronted by various jungles around the house and in other parts of the property particularly by the lake.

The Walled Garden, while in its original state in many ways, was overgrown. Two very large greenhouses were in total collapse. These were dismantled single-handedly by AP; the large number of panes of glass are still piled against the wall of the garden.

Mostly it was laurel, brambles and elder that had to be cleared. Amongst the laurels surrounding the house there was an endless supply of country litter: old bottles, china and earthenware fragments drifting up in the soil as well as enough large stones to be gradually redeployed in low dry stone walls by the front of the house and near the stables; these walls remain to this day, now partly concealed by ivy.

Features of the grotto, completely hidden by laurels and ivy, were really re-discovered by him. We had no full time gardening help, many of the trees around the property AP encouraged as saplings adding to the mixed woodland. The clear wooded stretches by the house with a variety of trees were entirely his creation. However his pruning policy could be severe.

In a grassy alcove just beside the house, there is a curious low stone platform which was deep in laurels when we arrived. This used to be the foundation for an electricity
generator. When cleared of laurels, then surrounding the house, the area with the stone platform was named ‘Albert’s Grotto’ in memory of our cat Albert who came with us from London in 1952; he used to sit there while happily adapting to rural life in old age.

One of four excellent photographs taken in 2007 by Malin & Faik Siddiqi during the AP Society visit to The Chantry shows the head of Apollo resting in a stone flower pot on top of a redundant Georgian chimney in Albert’s Grotto. Further to the left beyond the arcade (originally from the Walled Garden) there is a small but broad oak tree often referred to as Fum’s Oak by AP (after Kingsplay Flixey Fum, the Burmese successor to Albert).

The image of AP not taking exercise but keeping fit by moving between the sofa (for reviewing), cooking cool curries and the various collages is not accurate particularly in terms of the timescale. Initially when we moved here clearing the garden was his main activity away from the literary world. The curries, followed by the boiler room collage, both came later on in the 1960s, the latter a very gradual process over some years.

He always took moderate exercise while he could. He was most conscientious about all aspects of running the property, planting trees (one or two we actually brought from London have survived to this day).

The lake was gradually revitalised and its fishing syndicate made more durable. There was a feeling in the early fifties that the lake would become silted up within 15-20 years; time has disproved this theory due in large part to the syndicate which took over in the 1970s. He wrote an essay describing the fishing at The Chantry. He was a determined fisherman when the opportunity arose and before the dust pollution in the streams disturbed the natural breeding of the brown trout.

In 1972 he was an active supporter of the ACA (the Anglers Co-operative Association) campaign which forced the then Labour government to drop proposals to alter Common Law allowing a riparian owner to proceed for damages against a discharger of effluent or other pollution. There is correspondence up to ministerial level, as well as a thick file of technical correspondence on the new reservoir regulations introduced in the 1980s, in relation to the lake.

He liked and used the traditional names for the fields, roads and lanes. With Lady Violet he was an early supporter of the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservancy. While he was happy to let Lady Violet look after the endless environmental problems with the local quarries, he would write forceful letters on local matters when required.

Part of The Chantry’s treescape
He researched the history of The Chantry. His early energetic clearing activities lead to the discovery of half of a fractured inscribed foundation stone for a new canal in nearby Coleford that would have reached Dorset. This was a project of the Chantry Fussells in the early 1800s. The find was made in an outhouse behind the as yet un-restored Stables. Only thirteen miles of the canal was constructed – the remains of the aqueduct is now a well known local historic site.

The way he would constantly wear out his gardening gloves and Army surplus tropical boots became a family joke. His favourite piece of equipment was the garden shears/clippers, as opposed to the axe; however both were severely tested in his hands. Taking visitors down to the lake he would usually have clippers or a small saw handy.

He was enthusiastic about trees. The poplars, walnuts and maples (one Norwegian) as well as the blossoming cherries and sweet chestnuts (both from the estate nursery of Wyndham Ketton Cremer at Felbrigg in Norfolk) near the house were all planted by AP to the benefit of the landscape. He was conscientious about keeping ivy off walls and trees. The walled garden became a plantation for Christmas trees which grew into conifers, yielding several truck loads of sturdy posts when it was cleared in the early 1990s. Apple trees were successfully planted along the path down to the lake. Now, of course, the Walled Garden has been dramatically restored by Virginia and Tristram Powell with the stone base of the greenhouses transformed into a garden facing a slopping lawn planted with fruit trees and roses round the high walls.
Anthony Powell and Auberon Waugh  

by James Mitchum

Anthony Powell resigned from the *Daily Telegraph* in 1990 after having reviewed books for it for over fifty years. The reason for his resignation was a review of *Miscellaneous Verdicts* by Auberon Waugh.

According to the then editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, Max Hastings, the Literary Editor, Nicholas Shakespeare, asked Hilary Spurling to review the book for the daily paper. But then in

a mad moment, however, [Shakespeare] commissioned Auberon Waugh to review the book for the *Sunday Telegraph*, before disappearing on holiday.

As Hastings recounts in his book *Editor: an Inside Story of Newspapers* (2002),

Bron indulged himself, strewing poisoned apples broadcast in a fashion which reflected his commitment to sustain an undying feud with his father’s old rival.

The piece by Waugh appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 27 May 1990, under the innocuous-seeming headline “Judgment on a Major Man of Letters”.

The review was, as another journalist put it, “a master-class in smoothly paced and comprehensive bitchiness.”

It begins with a “compliment”:

Anthony Powell, who was born in 1905, has justly been described as the doyen of *Daily Telegraph* reviewers. His notices in that newspaper, which form the bulk of this volume, have been appearing for over 50 years. In the last 30 of them, the fortnightly lead review by Anthony Powell has become an institution for which I can think of practically no equivalent in the whole field of British publishing, unless perhaps the excellent “Jennifer’s Diary” in *Queen*, now *Harpers’ and Queen* magazine.

Waugh then goes on to dismiss Powell’s reviewing style, which he says is made up of

the hesitant, qualified commendation … the diffident double-negative – ‘not without all interest’; ‘the Labour peers by no means insignificant in numbers’ – and the ‘elegant’ or dissociative inverted comma: ‘… it was really Maundy Gregory’s party. He certainly may be said to have “brought them in”.’

He then has a splendidly unfair and inaccurate dig at Powell’s literary connections, saying,

It would be unfair to judge him by the stern standards of literary gossip-writing, because in a long career he appears to have known practically no-one, apart from Osbert Lancaster and the early experimental novelist Henry Green, whom he does not mention.

When it comes to *Dance*, Waugh dismisses it as:
an early upmarket soap opera, it undoubtedly gave comfort to a number of people, becoming something of a cult during the 1970s in the London community of expatriate Australians … Perhaps it afforded them the illusion of understanding English society, even a vicarious sense of belonging to it. If so, it was one of the cruellest practical jokes ever played by a Welshman.

The review ends:

From Major in the Intelligence Corps to Establishment’s pet novelist proved an easy step. But it is the major’s sensibility which he brought to his journalistic sundries … Perhaps Powell should have stayed in the Intelligence Corps officers’ mess. That, I feel, is where his heart belongs.

According to Max Hastings, Powell resigned the next day.

A bust of Powell now stands in the Daily Telegraph offices. Hastings explains how it came to be there:

A year or two later, Hilary Spurling contacted me: she had a problem. Having commissioned six casts of a bust of Powell, she could not place one of them, and was stuck with a bill for £5,000. Surely it would be appropriate for the Telegraph to buy one, given Powell’s long association with the paper? I reminded her of the frightful row, but eventually succumbed.

Hastings then says that it came “as a pretty bitter pill” when Powell, in his Journals, not only criticised Hastings for vulgarising the Telegraph, but also “mocked my folly in buying the bust”.

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**Subscription Rate Increases from 1 January 2009**

by Derek Miles, Hon. Treasurer

The note on subscription changes in Newsletter 29 included the statement that subscription rates would need to increase by around 10% from 2009. UK members will be only too aware that inflation has accelerated over the past year, in our case particularly affecting postage and printing costs. The trustees therefore have reluctantly decided to increase annual subscriptions from 1 January 2009 by 10% for ordinary and joint members, and by a little under 10% for student members. The overseas postage supplement must also rise from £5 to £6, an amount which still does not fully cover the additional costs.

This is the first ever increase in subscriptions as the current rates are those set when the Society was formed in June 2000. Whilst we greatly regret these increases, members can be assured that the Society is run exceptionally frugally, and there is no way of making further savings without compromising the quality of the excellent Newsletter and journal, Secret Harmonies.

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* Includes overseas postage supplement

Those UK members who pay by Standing Order are requested to update their instructions with their bank in advance of the payment date.
The Coffee-Stall at Hyde Park Corner

by Stephen Holden

I was recently given a book called *London Night and Day* (“a guide to where the other books don’t take you”), published in 1951 by the Architectural Press at 3/6, and illustrated by Powell’s friend, Osbert Lancaster. The book is a kind of guidebook that takes one through a typical 24 hours in London, and is split into hourly sections. At 2 AM it advises one to visit

The Junior Turf Club, so known to generations of young chaps-about-town, meaning the coffee stall outside Hyde Park Gate at Hyde Park Corner.

This immediately reminded me of the scene in *A Buyer’s Market* when, after Barbara Goring has poured sugar over Widmerpool at the Huntercombes’ ball, Widmerpool and Jenkins walk homewards together via Hyde Park. On the way they bump (literally) into Edgar Deacon and Gypsy Jones and, later at the coffee-stall, Stringham:

Across the road the coffee-stall came into sight, a spot of light round which the scarlet tunics and white equipment of one or two Guardsmen still flickered like the bright wings of moths attracted from nocturnal shadows by a flame. From the park rose the heavy scent of London on a summer night ... We crossed the road at the island and joined the knot of people round the stall, at the side of which, as if killing time while he waited for a friend late in arrival, an elderly person in a dinner-jacket was very slowly practising the Charleston, swaying his weight from one side of his patent leather shoes to the other, while he kept the tips of his fingers delicately in his coat pockets.

I did a bit of searching and came across several more references to this particular coffee-stall in other novels.

In Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage* (1915), the protagonist Philip Carey, after losing all his money in a stock market crash, is homeless and wandering the streets:

At midnight he was so hungry that he could not go without food any more, so he went to a coffee stall at Hyde Park Corner and ate a couple of potatoes and had a cup of coffee.

In Hugh Walpole’s macabre novel *The Killer and the Slain* (1942):

Cheeseman watched and saw him leave his Club off Jermyn Street. He followed him then to a little eating-place at the Knightsbridge end of Sloane Street. Then he met me where we had agreed to meet, at the coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner.
In Sax Rohmer’s *The Hand of Fu-Manchu* (1917) the coffee-stall is mentioned as the hero is prowling around Hyde Park Corner looking for Fu-Manchu. The paragraph contains the splendid aside

taking from my pocket the Browning pistol without which I had never travelled since the return of the dreadful Chinaman to England.

Ed Glinert, in his book *West End Chronicles: 300 Years of Glamour & Excess in the Heart of London*, notes that this particular coffee-stall was also a favourite spot for homosexuals to pick up Guardsmen.

Karen’s [Lancaster’s first wife] mother proved a good butt for her humour. Obsessed with hygiene, Cara Harris always travelled abroad not just with her own sheets but also her bidet, an elaborate Victorian model, decorated with hand-painted floral sprigs. Once Osbert, much to his embarrassment, had to carry this receptacle the length of the Blue Train after it had been mislaid on the Calais quayside.

Karen attempted to ease the situation by explaining: ‘You must realise, darling, that my poor dear mother suffers from a bidet-fixe.’

The Times of Monday 10 March 1941 carried the news of the bombing of the Café de Paris that had occurred on the previous Saturday night. But you would never have known, unless you knew! Relating the report to the actual event was deliberately hard; we must remember that wartime reporting maintained a balance between news, maintaining morale and confusing the enemy, so the story (see opposite) is somewhat confusing.

Described as a bright moonlit Saturday night, the story is almost romantic in style; referring to one of the largest raids during The Blitz as ‘a noisy night’ is an understatement.

Having reported some deaths, the Café de Paris story is introduced disguised as ‘dancers and diners in a restaurant’. The clue to the actual location is in the song title “Oh Johnny” a favourite played by Ken “Snakehips” Johnson and The West Indian Orchestra who were resident at the Café de Paris. So you had to be able to do some detective work to identify the location of the blast.

Describing the aftermath as ‘dust and fumes, which blackened faces and frocks’ is obviously further obfuscation and a deliberately understated version of the reality as later described by eye-witnesses.

Of course there is more romanticism with the ‘many wonderful escapes’ and everyone pulling together to get the injured to hospital. And the ‘spirit of The Blitz’ continues … despite that a nightclub had been destroyed, with over 30 dead and 80 injured, ‘people living nearby made tea, and passers-by contributed handkerchiefs’ while the cabaret girls escaped unharmed as they were off stage and shielded at the time.

The report goes on to describe other incidents that occurred the same night. By 6pm on the evening of Sunday 9 March, the London Civil Defence Regional Report showed that 159 people had been killed and 338 seriously injured in 238 incidents on the Saturday night. One of the other bombings that went unmentioned in Monday’s Times was at Buckingham Palace, where the North Lodge was demolished, resulting in two fatalities.

My thanks to Terry Eccles for pointing me to this story which is based on information about Ken “Snakehips” Johnson at www.swingtime.co.uk

The original report (opposite) is from The Times of Monday 10 March 1941.
In the bright moonlight of Saturday night, London had its heaviest air attack for some weeks. It was a noisy night. For some time the throbbing of aircraft never ceased. Nor did the guns; the biggest barrage for some time was put up.

High-explosive bombs damaged houses, shops, and a block of L.C.C. flats, where repair of damage done in a previous raid was nearing completion. One bomb landed in the middle of the road near a crater caused earlier. Fire watchers again proved their value, and incendiary bombs were quickly treated. Fire watchers, firemen, and policemen were among the killed.

Outstanding gallantry was shown by the diners and dancers in a restaurant which was wrecked by a high-explosive bomb. It was filled with a gay crowd on Saturday evening, many in uniform. The lively band had opened its programme and the floor was crowded with dancers. “Oh, Johnny,” the band was playing, while outside the guns crashed, but here unheard against the accompaniment of cheerful music and chatter.

Then suddenly there was an explosion somewhere above, the ceiling fell in and all but one of the lights went out. The restaurant was filled with dust and fumes, which blackened faces and frocks. Couples dancing had been flung apart; those able to do so struggled to their feet, and many searched amid the confusion with torches and lighted matches for their partners of a second before. Many had been killed; others were seriously hurt.

But accounts by many who were there all agree that there was the utmost coolness and much gallantry. “Don’t bother about me,” people with less serious wounds said over and over again. Rescue work began almost immediately. Civil Defence workers were helped by passing soldiers, who brought out their field dressings. Girls in dance frocks were carried through debris and tended on the pavement or in houses near until motor-ambulances, which travelled quickly to and from hospital, could get all the casualties away.

There were many wonderful escapes, and a fair number of people were able to walk out of the damaged building with no worse hurt than a bruised back or some cuts.

**CABARET GIRLS ESCAPE**

All near by helped to ease the lot of the wounded. People living near made tea, and passers-by contributed handkerchiefs. Prominent among the helpers were a young Dutch member of the Fleet Air Arm and a nurse from Chelsea who was off duty. The nurse was able to get some colleagues quickly to the scene by taxicab. All the girls due to take part in the cabaret escaped unhurt. They were in their make-up room, waiting to be called.

In another district three auxiliary firemen and a caretaker were killed when an A.F.S station was hit. Others were buried, but were rescued. In another area one fireman was killed, another is missing, and others were injured, and elsewhere firemen were injured by explosive incendiaries …
The Top 20 Sportsmen in Dance

by Mike Jay

While I prepare a more concentrated list of sporting references gleaned from Powell’s Dance, I offer a list of 20 sportsmen from the novel. I am afraid there is only one woman included.

1. Ken Widmerpool. Solitary runner; hit golf balls into nets at Barnes; died running.
2. Jean Templer. Seductress through tennis and Russian billiards.
3. LL Le Bas. Oarsman who once won the Diamond Skulls.
4. Budd. Captain of the XI; threw the banana which splatters Widmerpool.
5. Örn. Norwegian who used “sneaks” at tennis to confound Lundquist.
8. Russell Gwinett. Good at racquets, skating and skiing; water-ski instructor.
10. St John Clarke. Forced to play croquet at Dogdene with the 5th Earl of Lonsdale.
11. Jimmy Stripling. Racing driver; lectured troops on early days of motor racing.
14. Sunny Farebrother. Took fishing, cricket, tennis and shooting gear for the weekend.
15. Hugo Warminster. Erridge’s father; fished in Iceland; died big game hunting in Kashmir.
16. Charles Stringham. Played cricket well enough to rub along; avoided football.
17. Captain Biggs. Sports Officer; hangs himself in the cricket pavilion.
18. Eddie Bridgnorth. Owned ‘Yellow Jack’ which won the Derby at 100-7.
19. Private Bracey. Looked like a fox terrier; took Nick to a football match.

Just missing out on the top 20 were: Lt Bithel, who didn’t play rugger for Wales; X Trapnel’s father, another jockey; Mr Templer senior, who watched boxing for 40 years; and Nora Tolland, who swore and dressed like a stable boy.

Which one is Widmerpool?
Letters to the Editor

On Widmerpool

*From Jeff Manley*

In the *Daily Telegraph* online edition they publish a list of the 50 greatest villains in literature but it’s missing Widmerpool. Here’s what they say about qualifications:

These are the best of the worst:
bloodsuckers, pederasts, cannibals,
Old Etonians … the dastardliest
dastards ever to have lashed damsel
to track and waited for a through
train.

Ken meets at least one of those categories. Two of my other favourites are there: Quilty from *Lolita* and Quilp from the *Old Curiosity Shop*. I thought Nabokov must have chosen the name for his villain with Quilp in mind since they are both obsessed by and pursuing young girls but the *Telegraph* doesn’t make the connection. Trollope’s Augustus Melmotte also makes the list as do Milo Minderbinder, Moriarity, Bill Sykes, Captain Hook, Long John Silver and Moby-Dick. They are accepting additional nominations but I wonder if Widmerpool really belongs in this company. In the annals of the banality of evil he is perhaps more banal than evil. Perhaps he should be included if only because his evil stretches over more volumes than any other villain. Was Moriarity an Old Etonian? Moby-Dick must have been a Wykhamist.

*From Nick Hay*

Although I realise that the origins of the name will be well-known to many in the Society, I am currently reading Lucy Hutchinson’s *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* and thought the following actual words might be of interest.

There was one Colonel Widmerpoole, a man of good extraction but reduced to a small fortune, had declined all the splendour of an old house and was more declined into the way of the middle men of the county, yet had a perfect honest heart to God, his country and his friend; he had a good discretion, and though he were older than all the rest, yet was so humble as to be content to come in the rear of them, as having through the declining of his family, the slenderness of his estate and the avarice of his nature, less interest in his county.

I think Powell was a little selective in his selection of the original traits – but perhaps the good ones were lost with the ‘e’.
Dates for Your Diary

5th Biennial Anthony Powell Conference 2009
Thursday 10 to Saturday 12 September 2009
Georgetown University
Washington, DC, USA

Nick Birns has put together a stellar array of speakers including Rick Rylance, Mark Facknitz and Alan Furst.

A visit to see the Powell-related materials in the John Monagan archive in Georgetown University Library is also being arranged.

We hope to have details of the proposed programme and booking arrangements in the next Newsletter Alternatively please contact either Nick Birns or the Hon. Secretary for the latest information.

London Group Pub Meets 2009
Saturday 14 February 2009
Saturday 9 May 2009
Saturday 8 August 2009
Saturday 14 November 2009

The Audley, Mount Street, London, W1
1230 to 1530 hrs

Good beer, good food and informal conversation in a Victorian pub AP would have known. Why not bring something AP-related to interest us? Members & non-members welcome. Further details from the Hon. Secretary.

AGM 2009
The Society’s 2009 AGM will be held on the afternoon of Saturday 24 October 2009. Venue and speaker to be arranged. Details when available from the Hon. Secretary.

London Group Powell Birthday Lunch 2009
The Society’s London Group will be holding its annual Powell Birthday Lunch on Saturday 5 December 2009. Venue to be arranged. Details when available from the Hon. Secretary.
Society Notices

Local Groups

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

New England Group
Area: New England, USA
Contact: Leatrice Fountain
Email: leatrice.fountain@gmail.com

Great Lakes Group
Area: Chicago area, USA
Contact: tba
Email: tba

Baltic Group
Area: Sweden & Finland
Contact: Regina Rehbinder
Email: reginarehbinder@hotmail.com

Toronto Group
Area: Toronto, Canada
Contact: Joan Williams
Email: jwilliamsto@hotmail.com

Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you wish to make contact with a group and don’t have email. If you wish to start a local group the Hon. Secretary can advise on the number of members in your area.

Copy Deadlines

Newsletter #34, Spring 2009
Copy Deadline: 9 February 2009
Publication Date: 6 March 2009

Newsletter #35, Summer 2009
Copy Deadline: 11 May 2009
Publication Date: 5 June 2009

Secret Harmonies #4, 2009
Copy Deadline: 7 September 2009
Publication Date: 23 October 2009

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

Newsletter Editor, Stephen Holden,
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 0JW, UK
Fax: +44 (0)20 8864 6109
Email: editor@anthonzpowell.org

Dates for Your Diary

Exhibition
Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster
The Wallace Collection
Manchester Square, London, W1
Thursday 2 October 2008 to Sunday 11 January 2009
Admission Free

Osbert Lancaster was one of the most famous artistic personalities of his day, renowned as an architectural satirist, illustrator, theatre designer and cartoonist. This exhibition, which marks the centenary of his birth, will celebrate the astonishing range of Lancaster as an artist and as a chronicler of style and fashion, drawing on an unparalleled archive of original designs, illustrations, works on paper, sketchbooks, theatre sets and photographs, none of which have ever been previously exhibited.

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Local Group News

London Group Autumn Pub Meet
by Noreen Marshall

Fourteen of us gathered in the Audley, while the rain sluiced down for most of the afternoon (well, it was Lord Mayor’s Show day – what do we expect?). Over our fish and chips and other British delicacies such as nachos and chicken Kiev, we took a tour round our collective literary enthusiasms and dislikes, discoveries and foibles.

We started with an article which Sandy Morrison had brought along, in which Hilary Spurling demonstrated one of the pitfalls of biography. Reiterating that her next project will be short, she added that it would also be something with no correspondence attached. She evidently trawled through 13,000 letters for her Paul Scott – A Life, only to find that while he was the recipient of his friends’ confidences, he divulged very little about himself.

Other books discussed included Harry Ferguson’s Operation Kronstadt – the true story of concert pianist Paul Dukes, who was also an intelligence agent (and master of disguise) in post-revolution Russia, and the MI6 mission to rescue him, complete with a raid on enemy territory; this led us on to the diversionary tactics of Dazzle Camouflage, and the work of Jasper Maskelyne with General Wavell’s Magic Gang in creating dummy ports and illusory vehicles to decoy the opposition during World War Two. We came a little nearer home with Francis Spufford’s autobiographical account of the lasting effect of one’s childhood reading, The Child that Books Built; Paul Willetts’ Julian Maclaren-Ross: Selected Letters; and Alexander McCall-Smith’s The 2½ Pillars of Wisdom, with its wonderful episode titles ‘Portuguese Irregular Verbs’, ‘The Finer Points of Sausage Dogs’ and ‘At the Villa of Reduced Circumstances’.

We revisited the reputation of authors, feeling that while AP continues much as usual, some of the fairly recent bestsellers of their day seem to be largely out of print now: Alistair MacLean, Dennis Wheatley and Hammond Innes, for example, often survive better in filmed versions of their work. Others, like John Buchan and Stella Gibbons are now best known for a single book despite a sustained output. This led on to Angela Thirkell’s satirisation of village and county life and her use of Anthony Trollope’s Barsetshire as a setting for some of her own novels. Also considered were which books (and authors) get championed by academics; the second hand book trade; libraries and information retrieval. Speaking of which, the Hon. Archivist is still interested in gathering reminiscences of reading A Dance to the Music of Time as it was published, especially from those who read all twelve volumes in this way.

Not unsurprisingly, the Wallace Collection’s acclaimed current exhibition Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster came up, along with the book of the same title by James Knox [reviewed on page 20 – Ed], who curated the exhibition and will be giving the forthcoming Second Annual Anthony Powell Lecture, The Genius of Osbert Lancaster at the Wallace. This looks as if it’s already a sell-out, by the way.
There were an even greater than usual number of very diverting excursions into non-literary matters, beginning with Terry-Thomas, the English comedy actor who appeared in dozens of films, often playing English upper-middle class bounders and cads, and was famous for his horizontal moustache and vertically-gapped front teeth, the one said to balance out the other. Is shopping the new religion? Judging by the crowds of faithful who gather reverently at an out of town Sainsbury’s on a Sunday morning, the answer would seem to be yes. The recent influx of international shoppers (or should that be pilgrims?) to London’s Oxford Street and the new Westfield shopping centre mean that dedication and devotion are certainly needed in order to survive going there, and we heard first-hand evidence that the Primark phenomenon is particularly harrowing, requiring a stiff gin and tonic or few afterwards to reduce the tremors brought on by the experience.

The discussion also managed to range round the homeless; the Baltic, and in particular the island province of Gotland with its intriguing medieval capital Visby; football; the Society’s recent AGM – which was generally agreed to have been a jolly good occasion – and whether some burlesque dancers might make a suitable addition to a future one; recycling, and whether it’s actually effective or just a way of making people feel better about the amount of rubbish they produce; childhood, and children’s clothes in particular (most of the males present remembering the popular snake-clasp belts with some nostalgia); the upcoming London Group’s Anthony Powell Birthday Lunch on 6 December; the banking industry, the creditworthiness of bankers, and the fact that some people are doing quite well out of the current economic situation; the inadvisability of opening old wounds – when you (after the style of Dance) run into an old acquaintance, and one or other of you feels compelled to apologise for some real or imagined slight to the other, thus invariably making it worse. We even touched on what makes the cut in writing up these meetings!

Finally, here’s one to set every reader’s imagination going … If we had a fancy dress event, which AP-related character would you go dressed as?

Present were: David Butler, Graham & Dorothy Davie, Stephen Holden, Noreen Marshall, Pat & Derek Miles, Laura Miller, Sandy Morrison, Prue Raper, Guy Robinson, Victor Spouge, Elwin Taylor, Robert Tresman. ■
Ferdinand Mount was born in 1939, the son of a steeplechase jockey. Mount’s parents belonged to what came to be called “Hobohemia” – a raffish subdivision of the upper class which, like some rare blue butterfly, was to be found only on the Wiltshire Downs.

His mother was Lady Julia Pakenham, daughter of Brigadier-General Lord Longford. Her sister Pansy married the painter Henry Lamb, a friend of Augustus John; and her sister Violet married Anthony Powell. The extensive Pakenham family has continued to provide Mount with celebrity relatives over the years, among them Conservative Party Leader David Cameron, son of his cousin Mary.

After being educated at Eton and Oxford, he made various false starts as a children’s nanny, a gossip columnist, bagman to Selwyn Lloyd and leader-writer on the doomed Daily Sketch. He later surfaced as head of Margaret Thatcher’s Policy Unit and was then editor of the Times Literary Supplement for several years. He has written a six-volume series of novels, A Chronicle of Modern Twilight, which began with The Man Who Rode Ampersand, based on his father’s racing life, and included Of Love and Asthma, which won the Hawthornden Prize in 1992.

Mount was ten or eleven when he first met his “Uncle Tony”. Powell was lying at full length on the Regency chaise longue … a shortish, dapper figure, wearing a bow tie and a jacket which if not actually made of velvet gives the decided impression of being a smoking jacket, a garment which I only know from books.

Mount says he always thinks of him reclining thus like Madame Récamier with a favoured cat strolling impertinently across his cavalry-twill trousers throughout our long conversations over the next fifty years.

The first meeting was occasioned by the young Mount being taken to a Sherlock Holmes exhibition near to Chester Gate where the Powells lived. Mount says:

Something of the cool curiosity, the interest in exact particulars, in getting things right, seems to link the fictional sleuth and the real-life novelist. Holmes not only takes in details that most of us miss, he also
notices people whom we all too often don’t give a second glance to: the boy who delivers a message, the woman who answers the door. Powell too has a marvellous evenness of curiosity. He is always eager to know exactly where someone comes from.

Of Powell’s character, he says:

When it came to willpower – a subject in which he was much interested – he was a curious mixture. My father used to say, not altogether admiringly, ‘Tony has the strongest will of anyone I’ve ever met.’ Yet he felt not the slightest urge to interfere in anyone else’s business. In this he claimed he was utterly unlike the Pakenhams who were always eager to give advice … whereas ‘The Powells won’t tell the people in the same carriage that the train is on fire.’ Vidya Naipaul said that he had never met anyone except himself who was so utterly absorbed in the life of being a writer.

Mount says that those outside the literary life would often find Powell’s company uncompromising, “even chilly”, and adds that it is hard to think of a single good novelist of whom this is not true. The icicle in the heart which Graham Greene said every novelist needed does not improve the ambient temperature.

When Mount came to write novels himself he found Powell’s influence the most difficult of all English novelists to get away from. But he says that although he always has Powell’s shadow behind him, it is a positive presence,

insisting on the importance of dwelling, of giving full value to a place, however superficially unmemorable, to a person, however dim or marginal they might be in the eyes of the world, to a moment which seems so inconsequential.

The book is thronged with famous people and amusing anecdotes: taking cucumber sandwiches with Siegfried Sassoon; Harold Acton in Florence having his aesthetic flourishes swatted by his outspoken mother; being taught German by a dynamic young teacher called David Cornwell, soon to become known as John le Carré; the spy Donald Maclean cavorting in the old Gargoyle Club; accident-prone boating trips with Peter Fleming; encounters with Sir Oswald Mosley; and discovering a fourteen-year-old Miriam Margolyes, “an opulent tumble of dark curls and puppy fat”, reclining on his landlady’s hearthrug, hoping to pose for Augustus John.

He is fascinating on his time as head of Mrs Thatcher’s policy unit, and the various politicians (Sir Keith Joseph, Willie Whitelaw) around at the time. He recounts how his son, Harry, was collecting autographs from Denis Thatcher at a party in Number 10:

“Would it be all right to ask Mark Thatcher for an autograph too?”
“ I wouldn’t bother if I was you,” said Denis. “The boy can scarcely write his own name.”

Mount writes that Powell evokes the remarkable anarchic openness of English life, its quicksands and eddies and backwaters, indeed the ups and downs of life generally a sentiment that could equally be applied to this splendid memoir.
Let’s get one thing straight right at the outset. This book is not a biography, at least not in the conventional sense, although it does open with an extended biographical introduction occupying almost one-third of the volume. So what is it? Well, more a celebration of the life and work of Osbert Lancaster; a retrospective exhibition in a book and as such an excellent adjunct to the Wallace Collection’s exhibition (of the same title) celebrating Lancaster’s centenary.

Although perhaps best known for his Maudie Littlehampton cartoons, which appeared almost daily in the Daily Express over a period of some 40 years from 1939, Lancaster’s work was much wider in scope. This book surveys his range, his skill and the sharpness of his observation over a series of nine sections, each demonstrating a particular aspect of Lancaster’s opus – architecture; theatre; travel; fashion; cartoons; and much more besides. Each of these sections has a one page introduction and reproduces a representative selection of works.

If you don’t know Lancaster’s work, this book (or indeed the Wallace’s exhibition, open until 11 January 2009) is an excellent place to start. If you do know Lancaster’s work then this volume will expand your Lancaster horizons and show you aspects you likely didn’t know, as well as some interesting intersections between them, such as that between his love of architecture and his stage designs.

We should not be surprised at the range and accomplishment of Lancaster’s work. He was a draughtsman and watercolourist of the highest class. His mother was an accomplished artist in her own right, so he grew up in a sympathetic, if not an encouraging, environment as art was not a suitable occupation for a male Lancaster:

“The arts, with the exception of music … ‘were judged to be but enjoyable pastimes, more praiseworthy than bridge but less ennobling than riding’.”

He was supremely well trained, a training which started at public school (Charterhouse) under tutelage of “Purple” Johnson, himself a renowned draughtsman. We should not be surprised at the range and accomplishment of Lancaster’s work. He was a draughtsman and watercolourist of the highest class. His mother was an accomplished artist in her own right, so he grew up in a sympathetic, if not an encouraging, environment as art was not a suitable occupation for a male Lancaster:

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watercolourist who insisted that every watercolour was started with a background wash of yellow ochre.

Lancaster’s four years at Oxford (almost “wasted” as he had to stay the fourth year to scrape a fourth class degree) appear to have been very much the formative period. Instead of studying hard at Oxford he started to develop what was to become his career. He attended art school and contributed many drawings to the University newspapers (sadly none I think reproduced in this book). He inhabited the rackety Oxford world of the Bright Young Things, meeting and making friends with many of the up and coming, including John Betjeman (who became his architectural mentor), Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, Cyril Connolly: in fact all the usual suspects! He also devoted it seems far too much of his time to OUDS, but this theatrical experience was to stand him in good stead later in life.

Soon after coming down from Oxford he was ill and because TB was suspected he was packed off to recuperate in Switzerland. Returning recovered to London the decision was made that he needed a quiet life; consequently his mother was reluctantly persuaded to allow him to attend The Slade and train as an artist. The die was cast.

That training allowed Lancaster to work, both as a writer and an artist, on publications such as the Architectural Review, and to indulge his passion for travel, especially around the eastern edges of the Mediterranean, writing travel books.

After government service during World War II Lancaster became the cartoonist most of us know while also pursuing an independent practice which included book jackets and his stage set and costume designs. He also became a subtle and sharp architectural campaigner who operated right under everyone’s nose, without most people realising, through his cartoons and his books, many of which explore aspects of the “architectural deterioration” of the last 200 years.

This book covers all of this, and a lot, lot more besides.

One so often hears biographical works criticised for containing errors. We should expect them to! There are to my mind three categories of error: errors of fact which the author could reasonably have avoided by checking; errors of opinion and interpretation; and “errors of publishing”.

Errors of fact, while inevitable, are in most people’s view inexcusable, especially as the majority of readers will not be knowledgeable enough about the subject to spot them.

Perceived errors of opinion and interpretation are a way of life. No two people interpret any situation in identical ways, hence the causes and consequences of many aspects of a life will remain open.

Sir Osbert Lancaster in 1960
to the observer’s viewpoint and interpretation. No biographer, however thorough, can hope to “cover off” all these nooks and crannies. And in many ways this is what drives biographical research, making people such interesting subjects for study – something at which both Lancaster and Powell were, in their different ways, past masters.

Thirdly there are errors which I have termed “errors of publishing”: for example poor production; poor indexing; confusing design. These are often driven, regrettably, by commercial considerations.

I am not sufficiently knowledgeable about Lancaster and his milieu to be able to spot either of the first two categories. Sadly, though, I do have to take issue with James Knox and his publishers for “errors of publishing”. This book contains neither an index nor references to any of Knox’s research sources other than in a sparse bibliography, the usual terse acknowledgements, and a list of Lancaster’s own published books. For a book which is an important retrospective of an arguably seminal 20th century Englishman, this is inexcusable.

Notwithstanding this last criticism I found the book both enjoyable and readable. Lancaster was an interesting character and Knox did make me want to keep turning the pages and exploring the selected graphical works. Moreover this is a survey which, with the whole of the Lancaster opus, deserves a place alongside Dance as a social history of England in the 20th century.

Anthony Powell summed up Osbert’s authority as a draughtsman and a cartoonist: ‘He’s a real original, absolutely himself and no one else. He’s got that particular turn for caricature which shows inner knowledge – he knows what it’s like from the inside ... the most astonishing thing about him is the standard he’s kept up with the pocket cartoons over the years. Really there were no pocket cartoons till he invented them. Now they’re so commonplace we tend to forget how original the idea was when he began it.’

[James Knox, Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster]

Two Lancaster drawings of the esplanade at the fictional Pelvis Bay, documenting the progress of civic architecture. Left, 1890. Right, 1930. From Osbert Lancaster’s Progress at Pelvis Bay, 1936.
Plumbing

From the *Daily Telegraph*, 11 October 2008.

A plumber recalls being called out to fix a burst pipe for the novelist Anthony Powell. The plumber rang the doorbell. “An elderly man opened the door and looked at me quizzically. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘How can I help you?’

‘Hello,’ I smiled, thinking that my overalls, the toolbox in my hand and my van behind me would make my quest obvious. ‘Well?’ he said.

‘Mr Powell?’ I asked. (I pronounced the name Pow-well.) ‘There is no one here of that name,’ he intoned.”

The plumber apologises and drives off, imagining that he has come to the wrong house. After driving around in the snow for 20 minutes, he is directed back to the same house. The same man opened the door. “This time I tried a different tack. ‘Does a Mr Powell live here?’ ‘No,’ he said. ‘However, do you mean Pole?’ I nodded. ‘Ah! Then go round to the back door, the leak is in the kitchen.’”

Young Self / Old Self

DJ Taylor in the *Independent on Sunday*, 5 October 2008 talking about David Cameron’s speech to the Conservative Party Conference:

Some of the Cameron speech, on the other hand, reminded me of the Max Beerbohm “Young self/old self” cartoons, whose elderly protagonists reveal that the opinions of their youth have undergone a 180-degree turn. The novelist Anthony Powell used to enjoy “Young self/old self” moments listening to friends with rather rackety pasts complaining about the kind of people they were letting into gentlemen’s clubs these days.

Alan Sillitoe

Bevis Hillier reviewing Richard Bradford’s new book *The Life of a Long-Distance Writer: a Biography of Alan Sillitoe* in *Daily Telegraph*, 1 November 2008, has this to say:

I think it is a pity that, in order to pay tribute to Sillitoe (who, with Anthony Powell and Graham Greene gone, is surely one of the greatest living masters of English prose) Bradford feels it necessary to do down [DH] Lawrence.
Zouch

In Larry McMurtry’s new work, *Books* (New York, 2008), he writes about his large Texas (formerly Washington DC) bookshop:

> Our own store, Booked Up, now contains remnants of the stock of at least 26 bookshops. Most of these purchases are sorted, repriced, and put in their proper section, but, knowing … that some book buyers resent too much organization, we leave a couple of long walls, containing maybe 130,000 books, unsorted, with books that range in price between $10 and $40. When I am at a loss for what to do next, I find that I like to scout my own stock … and I always start with [this] general shelving. Recently … I found, in dust wrapper, a copy of a book never seen by me before. It was called *Mr Zouch: Superman* and was the ill-titled American edition of Anthony Powell’s early novel *From a View to a Death*. It was priced $7.50 and was my all-time best find in our own stock. I repriced it $350 and sold it that afternoon.

*Michael Henle writes: My grandfather, James Henle of Vanguard Press, would read a British novel, take a liking to a character, in this case Zouch, and undertake to publish it. It was he who perpetrated this monstrosity.*

Skelton & Lewis

From a review of Jeremy Lewis’s *Grub Street Irregular* in the *New Statesman*, 28 August 2008:

> There are innumerable walk-on appearances by such marginal figures as Brigadier “Honky” Henniker, a military historian who once embarrassed his publisher by bursting into song at the Athenaeum, and such grand ones as Lord Weidenfeld (“the most glamorous and intelligent of publishers, a worldly, empirurple Renaissance pontiff adrift at a Methodist meeting”). And Lewis devotes a moving chapter to Barbara Skelton [a possible model for Pamela Widmerpool], whom he came to know through researching his biography of Cyril Connolly, who was married to Skelton for a while.

> Once a celebrated grande horizontale, invariably described as “pantherine”, “Skeltie”, by the time Lewis knew her, was vulnerable and isolated, but still sharp. After her death he found in her journals a reference to himself as “extremely jovial and easy to talk to, with a likeable tail-wagging charm”. Anthony Powell also noted a certain dogginess, comparing him to a “floppy Labrador”, while James Lees-Milne thought he resembled a Scoutmaster – which is rather what he looks like in David Hockney’s portrait of him on the dust jacket.
Thinking about Books

Simon Barnes in his column in *The Times*, 10 November 2008:

“I don’t like books that make me think.” This was the view of the narrator’s father in Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*: in fact, Powell continues, he pursued his life with increasing care to avoid anything at all that induced “this disturbing mental effect”. It seems to me that the judges for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year share much of the view.

Powell on Waugh

Member Susan Thomson in an email to the Hon. Secretary comments:

What a delight! Just watched tonight my recording of the BBC4 *The Waugh Trilogy*, Part 1, “The Bright Young Things” that went out last week [1 October]. There were clips of Anthony Powell commenting on Waugh at Oxford. So fascinating to hear and see Powell speaking. Despite possessing the accent of that class and generation, I thought he came across very animated and chatty and fun.

Susan has graciously donated a copy of her recording to the Society’s archive.

George Plimpton

*The New York Times Book Review* of 16 November 2008 opens with a review of a group of writers recalling George Plimpton, the American writer/editor (who wrote many books about professional sports, in which he participated Walter Mitty-style, and who edited the *Paris Review*). The review was written by Graydon Carter, editor of *Vanity Fair*.

It begins, “It can reasonably be said that *A Dance to the Music of Time*, Anthony Powell’s monumental 12-part novel about English manners, society, politics and power, still begs for an American counterpart … But if no novel over here quite tracks Powell’s course, the life of George Ames Plimpton … offers a potential substitute.” Carter proceeds to compare Plimpton – with his literary and social interests – to both Powell and Nick Jenkins, with both humour and affection. “Alas, there is no ambitious, climbing Kenneth Widmerpool in the Plimpton saga, unless it’s Plimpton himself.”

The final paragraph of the long review concludes with the story of where the title of *A Question of Upbringing* comes. The last sentence: “In these crazy, mixed-up times, George is a character to be fondly remembered, a hero of sorts, and a charmed and charming partner in his own spirited dance to the music of time.”
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