Contents
Editorials ............................................... 2
The Purpose of Literature....................... 3-5
Dance? I’d Rather have Luncheon.......... 6-8
AP & MIL – Further Insights III......... 9-11
AP and Richard Cobb........................ 12-16
My First Time................................... 17-18
Footnote: Charles I Statue............... 19
Dates for Your Diary ......................... 20-21
Society News & Notices ................... 22-26
Dance – For a Second Time.............. 27-28
REVIEW: Renishaw Hall..................... 29-31
REVIEW: Berenson-Clark Letters.... 32-33
Uncle Giles’ Corner ......................... 34
Letters to the Editor......................... 35
Cuttings ........................................ 36-38
Merchandise & Membership .......... 39-40

Annual General Meeting
Saturday 24 October
See enclosed papers
If you can’t attend,
please use your proxy vote

London Group
AP Birthday Lunch
Saturday 5 December
Details on page 20

40 years since Dance was completed ...
Hearing Secret Harmonies was published
on 8 September 1975
**A Letter from the Editor**

This edition has an Oxonian flavour. First we have a piece about the purpose of literature by Robin Bynoe (Hertford) inspired by a quotation from John Bayley, Wharton Professor of English Literature at Oxford, 1974-1992.

Secondly we have Jeff Manley's review of *My Dear Hugh* – correspondence between Richard Cobb, (Professor of Modern History at Oxford, 1973-1984) and Hugh Trevor-Roper, (Regius Professor of History at Oxford, 1957-1980). Cobb was also a Fellow at Bailliol, AP's old college and John Bayley went to Eton as, of course, did AP. Bayley also wrote an illuminating introduction to Lady Violet's *The Album of Anthony Powell's Dance to the Music of Time*.

Bayley is now chiefly remembered for being the husband of Iris Murdoch and wrote three books about his life with her and her decline with dementia. Trevor-Roper is chiefly remembered for his part in the *The Hitler Diaries* fiasco. Cobb is, sadly, not really remembered at all.

Bayley’s quotation from issue 58 was to the effect that literature teaches us how to live. Robin asks if it does. He appears to equivocate. Here is an invitation to readers to respond with any illustrations of lessons learned from their reading of literature and in particular from their reading of *Dance*.

Prue Raper gives an informative account of Ivan Hutnik's 2015 AP walk. In the past 15 years the Society has organised a good number of AP related walks. Another one will take place in Rye on 5 September. Members clearly like them. Suggestions for walks will be gratefully received.

Remember: *solvitur ambulando*.

Stephen Walker, editor@anthonypowell.org

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**From the Secretary’s Desk**

As our august Editor points out (opposite) this edition of *Newsletter* has a very Oxfordian focus, although there is plenty else as well.

This is also a well packed issue – so well packed in fact that it is our largest ever (if you discount issue 21, the special for AP’s centenary). Never before have we produced 40 pages – and even that was, at times, a squeeze.

40 pages for 40 years … for we should note another milestone: 40 years since the completion of *Dance*. *Hearing Secret Harmonies* was published on 8 September 1975. Although we have not arranged a specific celebration, I’m sure that those of us who are going on the Rye Explorer Day on Saturday 5 September will raise our glasses to AP and *Dance* – just as I feel certain many of us will on 8 September too.

It goes deeper than that, though, for next January sees the 65th birthday of *Dance*: *A Question of Upbringing* was published on 22 January 1951. The London Group will be celebrating this at the Secretary’s New Year Brunch on Saturday 23 January and doubtless also at the February Pub Meet (see page 21).

Finally a reminder that there is still time to submit your long dreamt-of paper for the April 2016 conference in York (see the enclosed “Call for Papers”). Paper proposals need to reach us by the end of September. John Roe is building a superb event so do mark the dates in your diary. We should have full booking information with the next *Newsletter*. You really don’t want to miss it, now do you?

Keith Marshall
secretary@anthonypowell.org
The Purpose of Literature: a Personal View

By Robin Bynoe

For the last issue but one, Management sold some advertising space. A Miss Rusty offered Members discounts on ‘French Lessons’. At the last minute, just as the magazine was about to be ‘put to bed’, as we say in the trade, the Editor noticed the advertisement for the first time. It triggered a doubt in the back of his mind. He consulted Google and as a result told Management that such an advertisement might have overtones that would be improper in an august publication such as this.

“But what can we do?” said Management, abhorring above all things white space (as we call it in the trade).

“You’ll have to give me a Saying”, said the Editor. “Make it similar in length to Miss Rusty’s, but different in content.” Management obliged. You may have noticed it:

**The purpose of literature is to teach one how to live.**

John Bayley

Everyone was happy at first (except Miss Rusty, who said that she would put the matter of her cancelled ad in ‘Other Hands’). Then however came the backlash. “Can that be true?” said the Editor. “Surely not.” He asked me again to consult Google. Google didn’t know what the purpose of literature was, but was shy of admitting it.

I am old enough to have been taught English by a man who had been taught by IA Richards. I was never persuaded actually to read IA Richards, and I am undoubtedly traducing him, but the great man’s thought as filtered through my English teacher was that literature had to provide ‘meaning’. That seemed to me to amount to teaching one how to live.

Indeed when, decades later, business people started burbling about ‘adding value’ I immediately thought of IA Richards and his Benthamite optimism. Books were to provide the added value required if one was to make a profitable assault on life and its issues.

(My English teacher had also sat at the feet of Dr Leavis. Pederasty is as nothing to the risks inherent in being exposed to the influence – albeit indirect – of such a person at an impressionable age.)

Some books undoubtedly do teach one how to live. Two examples spring at once to mind.

Nearly all the *Nero Wolfe* novels by Rex Stout contain recipes. They tell us how to cook, and cooking is an essential part of life. The recipes are performable: no
murders are allowed to interrupt the
delicate progress from egg to soufflé. The
dishes are a bit rich though, and, although
well intended, like the murders are best not
attempted at home.

Then there is the Holy Qu’ran. It is full of
direct instructions on how to live. That
was no doubt the ‘purpose’ of the
Archangel Gabriel when he dictated it.
The Bible is the same (although the
Archangel Gabriel had apparently no part
in that work). They are probably not what
Bayley meant, by ‘literature’. Nor are all
the spiritual how-to books that have
replaced the fiction shelves in WH Smith.
He meant novels; he meant poems.

Well, now: poems. I have never felt that a
poem helped me to make a profitable
assault on life and its issues, but then I
have always tried to avoid them if
possible. But Bayley has powerful support
from Keats (or Shelley), who memorably
wrote that poets are the unacknowledged
legislators of the world. And, then,
Ozymandias, you can see what Keats (or
Shelley) meant – don’t get up yourself –
but most poems, honestly, no: Daffodils,
Nature, Love, but not how to live. Hail to
Thee, Blithe Spirit: where’s the added
value in that?

There seem to me to be two strands to this
question.

The first is the word ‘purpose’. Whose
purpose? If I were a creator of literature I
would be tempted to seize him by the
figurative lapels and say, “Oi, Bayley, you
may be a so-called Critic, but this is my
literature, not yours, and I will be the
judge of what its purpose is”. Different
books are written with different purposes.
Firbank wrote to create filigree
confections, feather-light but tough, and to
amuse. Wilde wrote to educate under the

Anthony Powell Resides Here

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IA Richards
pretence of amusing. Johnson, not being a fool, wrote for money.

Some novelists undoubtedly want to tell us how to live. A wonderful recent example is *What You Want* by Constantine Phipps, which is, incidentally, both a novel and a poem. Then there are the overtly politically or religiously motivated novels, of which the Marxists have written the best, not to mention *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *The Color Purple*, *Animal Farm* and most contemporary fiction for children. But there’s often something unconvincing about committed novels, something added that damages the whole, like a virus. When Tolstoi gets onto his high horse about agrarian reform or something it’s a sign to skip the next hundred pages. I remember as a child loving *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* until the point where it dawned on me that Jesus was being sneaked in in the hairy form of Aslan. I felt got at, and I stopped right there. I certainly didn’t feel that CS Lewis’ job was to tell me how to live, even if his ‘purpose’ was.

Some, probably most, novelists want to tell us how things are or might be and what we might not have noticed, and let us draw our own conclusions. I suspect that most novelists are also more concerned by the structure of their book, and whether it ‘works’, than what it is ‘about’. Certainly Evelyn Waugh says that very trenchantly – and perhaps surprisingly – somewhere in the *Letters*.

The second strand is whether AP would have thought that the purpose of *Dance* was to teach one how to live. I believe that the answer is clear. He relentlessly mocked committed, and particularly Marxist, fiction. I can’t believe that he would have had much patience with the hygienic ruminations of IA Richards and his friends, which seem to me to derive from the same thought-processes as those of the committed novelists. Trapnel tells us somewhere that fiction tells us how things are – in a way that autobiography can’t. That is profoundly true, and part of the genius of *Dance* is that over and over again it shows us how things are, in ways that we had never suspected – but it doesn’t tell us how to live: how to do things differently. In the unlikely – indeed impossible – event of Widmerpool’s reading *Dance* it would not have affected his behaviour in any way; nor was it AP’s ‘purpose’ that it should.

This seems so typical of a lot of criticism that one wonders whether it does not derive from what is basically a dislike for reading novels at all ... A moment’s thought never seems to be spared for what the author is trying to do.

Anthony Powell in *Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 1971

[With thanks to Peter Kislinger]
During a recent refurbishment of Brooke’s club in St James, a forgotten volume of memoirs was unearthed at the back of a cupboard in the Secretary’s office. These were the work of a member – The Hon. Archibald Buxton (1864-1940) – a stalwart of the Diplomatic Corps with postings as various as Cairo, Nairobi and Buenos Aires under his not inconsiderable belt, who spent much of his retirement at the club playing cards and dining extravagantly. For many years he held the record for both the longest and the most expensive luncheons eaten by a lone diner throughout clubland.

Whilst the majority of the memoirs are of interest only to members, dealing largely with character studies of his contemporaries, records of dishes consumed, and outlines of disagreements with occasional club servants, the Secretary was kind enough to forward the following entry to the Anthony Powell Society for possible inclusion in its own archives.

Sunday 14th January 1934

Don’t know what the club is coming to. Having taken five guineas off Buffy Emsworth this morning I decided to celebrate with a little light luncheon. Buffy wouldn’t join me – still sore about having bid ‘three no trumps’ in that last hand when any fool could see that he and his partner were far too light in diamonds to make it. Have to get to the dining room early to secure a window table these days. Managed to get that oafish stand-in waiter, Grimes, to understand in the end but found that, two tables along, there were a couple of jaundiced foreigners already installed – in full flow, and talking far too loudly. Very off-putting. Hitler and his foreign policy is not what one wants as an aperitif. Especially in French.

Had intended to just have a glass of the club white with my starter but the sight of these two made me order a half-bottle of the Riesling. Mind you – it goes well with the crab, which I always have dressed. Can’t abide all that fiddling about with tiny forks trying to tease out meat from the claw. Anyway, I was settling into this course and counting my blessings that the Frenchies weren’t at the table next to me when in came that blighter Widmerpool. I tend to notice him quickly anyway so as to give him a wide berth but on this occasion I heard him even before his ample frame swam into view as I heard him mention my old friend Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson, who I have always felt had been harshly treated over that South American business. Not his fault that damn fool Foreign Secretary had dropped his long-standing support for General Gomez in favour of that other fellow and not informed half his staff.

An unctuous specimen, this Widmerpool. Only wheedled his way into the club by dint of putting some lucrative share offers in the way of several of the committee
members. If I hadn’t been sleeping off a
decent luncheon in the smoking room that
day I’d have blackballed him. Bossy so-
and-so too. Grimes always fawns over
him though and steered him straight to a
window table. The one next to me.

Widmerpool had a guest. Studious
looking chap – not W’s usual class of
companion at all. Probably too polite to
say no. By the sound of it he was
something in films.

Tried to give myself over to the food and
drink in the face of these twin barrages of
unwanted conversation – but to no avail.
Fragments kept breaking in on my repast.

Seems that Widmerpool was engaged to a
Mildred Blaides. Wonder if she’s any
relation to old ‘Chimp’ Vowchurch, whom
I remember at this club years ago. Chimp
famously brought a little monkey into the
club one Christmas Eve and tried to teach
it to hold a hand of cards. That’s how he
acquired his nickname. Said it would
probably play better than some of the
members (must remember to tell this to
Buffy). There was a hell of a row and he
was almost asked to leave. It was only
because the monkey found the king of
clubs hidden up Arthur Frogham’s sleeve
that it was old Arthur who had to leave and
not Chimp.

Anyway, Widmerpool was eating
practically nothing and drinking
water. I ask you. What’s the point of
dining here at all if that’s the line
you’re going to take? I remember
old Chimp was pretty keen on his
browsing and sluicing so if
Widmerpool wants to marry into that
family he’d better buck up his ideas.

The steak and kidney pudding at the
club is an old favourite. Add a pile
of mashed Jersey Royals and some
leeks and you have the foundations of a
solid lunch. (I added a green salad as my
doctor has advised me to eat more
healthily.) But it might as well have been
corned beef and hash given the nature of
the conversation that floated across from
Widmerpool’s table.

Firstly, it seems Widmerpool has a past.
From what I could glean he seems to have
had at least two affairs that he wanted
hushed up. Barbara Goring for one. I
couldn’t believe my ears. Such a sweet
girl and married to old Pardoe’s boy in the
Guards. I remember the wedding
reception at his Jacobean manor house in
Wales. Can’t imagine what Barbara saw in
this lump. And then some gypsy
apparently. Well, he certainly has seen life
I suppose, but the thought of Widmerpool
having an intimate liaison is enough to
turn any man’s stomach. Even mine.

Next, he began disparaging poor Molly
Sleaford, or Jeavons as she is now. It’s
years since I’ve see her – probably not
since she left Dogdene and then married
that fellow from the car show – but
everyone has a soft spot for her and one
dislikes hearing old acquaintances
pompously discussed.

Then however, he started asking his poor
guest for advice as to when he could start
sleeping with his fiancée. I was on the
point of ringing for the steward and asking to have him removed but fortunately my apple pie with cream arrived. In my agitation I emptied rather too much brown sugar on it but it was a good palliative for my disturbed luncheon. Also by now the Frenchies had resumed their high-pitched analysis of foreign affairs, as though I hadn’t enough to deal with.

And then the final straw: Widmerpool, it transpired, is a raving socialist. He even launched into a diatribe defending the Nazi party on the basis that they are part ‘socialist’. Naive fool. Quite churned my stomach. It was a blessed relief when they left for coffee downstairs.

I myself never take coffee after luncheon. Interferes too much with the post-prandial nap. And I need to be on top form this evening to give Buffy his revenge.

I am beginning to miss the old “MOST WASKI” signs.

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Anthony Powell and MIL – Further Insights III

John Powell concludes his look at some of the background to Nigel West’s article “Anthony Powell and MI(L): The Baron Mystery” in Newsletter 51.

Allies of UK have vital Middle East contacts

In December 1939 John Shelley, former head of station in Jerusalem, was sent out to strengthen SIS presence in the Middle East region. Part of Shelly’s mission, the MI6 History states, was to build up links with Allied Intelligence Agencies including the French, based in French-administered Syria, the Poles who were currently running their organisation from an HQ in Paris (but forced in 1941 to move to London) who were tres bien installées in Iran, and the Czechs who were also finding Iran offered “a very fruitful recruiting ground for agents”.

Crossing from Russia to Iran leads Polish troops to Palestine and the 8th Army

The fate of the troops under General Anders which Jenkins hears have begun to cross from Russia into Iran is described in more detail by Norman Davies in the early pages of Rising ’44: The Battle for Warsaw (Macmillan, 2003) [hereinafter Rising]. Six weeks after the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 would indicate the MIL teleprinter message would have come through around 1 April 1942 using the information given by Jenkins in The Military Philosophers.

In Rising Davies refers to

*endless organisational difficulties in Russia [for General Anders troops] supposed to number 96,000 men received rations for only 44,000. The NKVD was obstructing recruitment* … Anders moved his troops from the Volga to Uzbekistan. [Rising, 42]

As indicated by Jenkins in April 1942 General Anders began what became an evacuation en masse into Iran; he was convinced that the Russians would not honour their obligations. In August Anders’ troops were moved to Palestine, where they were assigned to the reserves of the British 8th Army. Davies writes that

*tens of thousands of civilians accompanied the evacuation of the Anders Army. Most of them were former deportees, victims of the Gulag or forced labour.* [Rising, 42]

They were, says Davies, on the point of death from exhaustion, starvation and disease. They included 40,000 orphans. Norman Davies comments surprisingly that these refugees’

*first-hand knowledge of Soviet realities conflicted starkly with the rosy Anglo-American picture of Uncle Joe’s heroic paradise.* [Rising, 42]

Davis goes on to assert that they were told in no uncertain terms to keep their mouths shut.

AP on Muggeridge and pre-war Russia (Not a Rosy Paradise)

Well informed journalists in the 1930s on both sides of the Atlantic had an anything but rosy picture of Communism, the methods of the Soviet Union and Stalin’s murderous activities. In Faces AP describes his personal and professional friendship with Malcolm Muggeridge. He writes:
[T]he force of Muggeridge’s virtually one man onslaught [against Communism and the methods of the Soviet Union] in the 1930s is hard to grasp for those who did not experience those years. The Muggeridge impact, for its cogency to be appreciated, must be understood in relation to the intellectual atmosphere of the period. At that time many people were apt to think of what was happening in Russia as no worse than a few rich people being relieved of their surplus cash … Muggeridge has some claim to be the first writer of his sort to disturb this left wing complacency in a lively manner … Muggeridge, informed, readable, witty, convincing, was also an authority on the vulnerable side of Left Wing intellectuals themselves. Not only had his father been a Labour MP, Kitty Muggeridge was niece of the Sidney Webbs, main British apologists for what Muggeridge denounced as a ghastly tyranny, an evil way of life, deserving abhorrence as much from the Left as from the Right. [Faces, 84-5]

The unfortunate evacuees crossing the border from Russia into Iran with General Anders’ Polish troops in April 1942 were doing so at the moment the massacre of Polish Officers by the Russians at Katyn was becoming known.

Churchill had no illusions about new alliance with Soviets

Ten months earlier in June 1941 when Russia was suddenly attacked by its erstwhile ally Nazi Germany, Churchill, as reported in the Daily Telegraph on 23 June 1941, said in his broadcast while offering aid to Russia:

No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have in the last 25 years. I will unsay not a word that I have spoken about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. The past, with its crimes, even follies, and its tragedies, flashes away. I see the Russian soldiers standing on the threshold of their native land guarding the fields which their fathers have tilled from time immemorial.

After General Anders’ Polish Troops reached Palestine they were assigned as reserves to the British 8th Army. In January 1943 there was an inconclusive conference in Casablanca between Roosevelt and Churchill; Stalin was unable to attend. In place of a second front it was agreed that Western Allied forces would be transferred from North Africa to Italy. This, Norman Davies says, gave a sense of purpose to the Anders Army in Palestine which as the reformed Polish 2nd Corps joined the ‘Desert Rats’ of the 8th Army. The 2nd Corps made the fourth assault up the slopes of the monastery hill at Monte Cassino in May 1944 taking the fortified hill, ending five months of resistance from the German Army (in a text book fighting retreat), with heavy casualties. This opened the road to Rome which was reached within three weeks. Two years after the teleprinter bell (in The Military Philosophers) had woken liaison officer Nick Jenkins on night duty at the War Office announcing that Polish troops were being evacuated across the Russian-Iranian border, these same troops were involved in one of the most significant battles of WWII. Norman Davies, in Rising, describes the British 8th Army in Italy as:
a wonderful microcosm of the Allied cause. Fighting alongside the US Fifth Army and commanded by Gen. Oliver Leese, it was composed of three British army corps, containing two Indian and two Canadian divisions, Gen. Juin’s French Expeditionary Corps, Gen. Freyberg’s New Zealand Corps and Gen. Anders’ 2nd (Polish) Corps. [Rising, 45]

Among the British Army Corps were the King’s/Queen’s Own Hussars who wear a Polish Red shield or flash on their battle dress bestowed by the Poles as brothers in arms in the Italian campaign – troops whose exploits were brilliantly caricatured by the cartoonist ‘Jon’ as the Two Types (a favourite of AP) with such accuracy that the most recent edition (1991) required a guide to the lingo for the army terms and slang in the captions.

The New Zealand commander General Sir Bernard Freyberg maintained that “the Two Types were worth by themselves a division of troops to the Allied forces in Italy”. True to form there are at least two cartoons involving Polish subjects: one is based on the extravagant Two Types adaption of Army battle dress in which the moustachioed pair are passed by two similar characters in a Polish interpretation of their uniform with the words “Well, well, wellski” as caption (see page 18). The other cartoon is more subtle showing the two types approaching a rickety looking bridge with a huge mountain range in the background in their Jeep which had taken them through the Western Desert and now up Italy. The caption is “I am beginning to miss the old ‘MOST WASKI’ signs”; Most Waski being Polish for Bailey Bridge – more solid when crossed (see page 8).

‘Jon’ himself took part in the invasion of Italy on the Anzio beaches being there under heavy bombardment for many weeks until the breakthrough at Monte Cassino. The drawing of the pair under heavy fire has the words “I’ll bet when this is over some bloody General will ask for a reunion” has the authentic ring of one who has experienced being under heavy fire.
Richard Cobb wrote widely about French history (often in French) and was Professor of Modern History at Oxford from 1973-84. Although AP had no particular interest in French history and Cobb had relatively little interest in contemporary novels, the two began corresponding in the early 1970s. This was after AP wrote to Cobb to offer unsolicited congratulations on a book of his essays (probably A Second Identity). Powell mentions their having corresponded “from time to time” in his Journals for 18 September 1982.

They met each other in person as the result of the appearance in the Daily Telegraph for 5 February 1976 of a review of two of Cobb’s books by AP: A Sense of Place (1975) and Tour de France (1976), both published by Duckworth. In a letter to his friend Hugh Trevor-Roper, dated 10 February 1976, Cobb reports that he is “still basking in the rays emitted by Anthony Powell on my Duckworth books”. [My Dear Hugh: Letters from Richard Cobb to Hugh Trevor-Roper and Others, ed. Tim Heald, London 2011, 54. (Hereafter “Letters”)]

In that review (entitled “Individual Historian”) AP commented on Cobb’s original presentation in both books, combining autobiography followed by essays on historical subjects:

The virtue of this method is that the reader is thereby prepared, by the time the historical parts of the particular book are reached, for the unusual personality of Oxford’s Professor of Modern History.

The portions of Sense of Place relating to Cobb’s school days at Shrewsbury are described by Powell as “splendid stuff” and his views on history as “refreshing”. In Tour de France where Cobb recounts his years in Paris after the war, AP finds his writing is “wonderfully vivid”. No wonder Cobb was basking.

Later that year Cobb told Trevor-Roper that he was going to have lunch with AP. “I have never met him, but hope he lives up both to Widmerpool and Venusburg”. [Letters, 6 July 1976, 57]. A few months
after their lunch, Cobb tells Trevor-Roper that he has been asked to review *Infants of the Spring* for the *Daily Telegraph* and that “this I think I’ll enjoy doing” [Letters, 15 September 1976, 59]. This review appeared a few days later: “Counterpoint to Music of Time” [*Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1976]. In that review Cobb emitted some rather glowing rays of his own on AP’s work (both fiction and memoirs) that he summarizes as

*firmly and convincingly situated in time and place, lend[ing] a particular appeal to the historian.*

Cobb finds AP’s keen awareness of place “sharpened by frequent moves imposed by service obligations” of his father’s military career. The memories of his parents’ servants “are an early example of the author’s extremely sharp social obligations” also reflected in his fiction. As in the novels, AP is more interested in persons around him than in himself (or Nick Jenkins), especially after he moves on from childhood to school life at Eton. Although appreciating AP’s self-effacement, Cobb sometimes feels that a little more “fire and anger” might have been usefully applied when dealing with people “as quirky, unpleasant, self-centred and arrogant as Orwell and Connolly”. Cobb also notes how the memoirs confirm the most consistent thread that runs through the novels – “the fortuity of encounters over the years, and often in the most unlikely places”, from which there is no “escape save death”.

After this initial round of mutual back-scratching (or perhaps log-rolling), Cobb records his pleasure at having found a copy of his book, *A Sense of Place*, on the shelves at the Eton College Library in the course of a 1979 visit. It was a copy presented by Powell, but Cobb does not indicate whether it might have been the review copy Powell used in 1976 [Letters, 70]. Cobb was not an Old Etonian but was, as noted earlier, educated at Shrewsbury. By 1979 the writers seem to have become closer. Cobb mentions to Trevor-Roper (14 September 1979) that he had recently spent half-a-day near Frome at AP’s house and that this was “becoming an annual fixture” [Letters, 77]. Powell first mentions Cobb in his *Journals* as appearing at a dinner at Balliol College in 1982 to which both were invited. They sat next to each other at high table. The occasion was the Dervorguilla banquet to commemorate the founding of Balliol College in 1282 by Lady Dervorguilla Balliol (according to Powell, ever the genealogist, “perhaps more correctly Dervorguilla, Lady Balliol, tho’ she was a considerable heiress in her own right” [J82-86, 37]). Powell describes Cobb as *an authority on the French Revolution … formerly a don at Balliol, now at Worcester. He writes very funny letters about his life but must now be over 60.*
Cobb was born in 1917 and would at the time of this meeting have been 65 – twelve years Powell’s junior.

At the dinner, Powell and Cobb discussed the latter’s review of Graham Greene’s recent book *J’accuse* for the *Sunday Times*. The subject of the book was Greene’s exposé of corruption in the Côte d’Azur. After writing a draft of the review from proofs, Cobb was told not to bother finishing it because the book would not be printed due to fear of libel. This was based on the subject matter of Greene’s book, not Cobb’s review. Cobb sent in the review anyway (whether he was paid is unstated) just to record what he would have written. This draft was apparently sent on to Greene who immediately sent back two letters on the same day complaining about Cobb’s review. Cobb explained to Powell that the girl who was the focus of the book and married to a Mafioso was in fact the daughter of Greene’s then live-in mistress. Cobb expressed the thought that Greene was rather looking forward to meeting death at the hands of a Nicoise Mafioso, and Powell commented that this seemed simply another example of Greene trying to make his life sound more exciting that it was.

(AP thought Greene’s book had not yet been published at the time of the Balliol dinner in September. A slightly abridged version of the book was published by the *Sunday Times* in May 1982 and The Bodley Head published the book in the UK later that year when a review by Auberon Waugh appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph*. There had, however, been a considerable amount of controversy and litigation concerning the book which may have caused the *Sunday Times* not to publish Cobb’s review.)

AP then engaged in a discussion with Labour politician and former Cabinet Minister Denis Healey, sitting across the table, in which Healey (also a Balliol man) recounted a criminal investigation in which an inflatable rubber woman was one of the articles used by the police. AP thought this an excellent opportunity to raise this amusing topic with Cobb as recalled from an anecdote of Constant Lambert’s about a painting, allegedly entitled *Blowing up the Rubber Woman.* Unfortunately, just as he turned to Cobb to run with the subject passed to him by Healey, he found Cobb was fast asleep [J82-86, 37]. The following year, the two again met at a Balliol dinner for the King of Norway (another Balliol alumnus) where AP recalled an earlier occasion when the King (then Crown Prince) recited the tale of Peter Quennell crossing the Balliol Quad carrying a lily [J82-86, 89].
What fun these high table dinners must have been!

In 1984 Cobb wrote about a party for AP at the US Embassy in London to which he was invited. This must have been the party on 25 October 1984 where Powell received an award from the *Hudson Review* [Letters, 125]. Cobb also wrote (apparently to AP in 1988) to congratulate him on receipt of the Companionship of Honour but felt it would more appropriately have been the Order of Merit. Cobb thought that Powell would have been a more deserving recipient of the latter award “than that truly miserabilist [Balliol novelist], Graham Grin” [Letters, 161].

In 1987, AP reviewed in the *Daily Telegraph* Cobb’s book about the French Revolution entitled *The People’s Armies* [“The Terror’s Tools”, 24 October 1987]. This book had been written and published in French 25 years earlier and only much later translated into English. Powell describes it as Cobb’s

> major work, the most characteristic example of his famous fossicking around in documents, often quite obscure ones, to discover what really happened in the past. This is not history filtered through the opinion of the historian, but a patchwork of fact, over which the reader is guided to make a personal decision, under the expert, often humorous, eye of Professor Cobb.

As a lover of military minutiae, Powell found much to interest him in Cobb’s fact-laden text. The People’s Army was assigned to defend and enforce the revolutionary regime’s policies domestically, unlike the regular army which defended the country’s borders. In addition, the People’s Army troops were paid four times as much as the regulars, creating much dissatisfaction. A lot of the People’s Army consisted of exotic professionals such as wigmakers and actors, and their officers were elected. This caused problems, because if the officers became too strict in their discipline, they could be sent back to the ranks by voting among those same ranks. Although the book weighs in at a door-stopping 800 pages, Powell doesn’t mention wishing it were shorter.

In a letter to Blair Worden, Oxford don and later professor at the University of London, Cobb wrote in 1988 a brief assessment of Powell’s writing [Letters, 174]:

> Anthony Powell even told me that … I wrote History like a novelist! I do get a bit lost in all his characters. X Trapnel was someone I used to know, Julian Maclaren-Ross, who wrote some rather good things but drank too much and used to beat his wife with a silver-topped cane. Julian, when on his uppers, which he often was, used, in desperation, to come to Oxford and sponge off the Davins. They were rather proud to be sponged off by a writer. I suppose everyone was happy. The Davins are provincial New Zealanders who STILL think Oxford is important. Julian was healthily ungrateful. Tony Powell is very nice, though a bit of a snob, all that Dymoke stuff.

Here, Cobb appears to be referring to Powell’s interest in genealogy, an interest Cobb, although a historian, apparently did not share. As Cobb remarked about a year later, he was too old by that time “to develop an active interest in genealogy”. This wasn’t so much snobbery on Powell’s part as it was his almost obsessional
pursuit of family histories, his own and any others who crossed his path.

Cobb’s remark about his disinterest in genealogy was made in his review of *Miscellaneous Verdicts* in the *Spectator* [4 August 1990]. In that review, Cobb concluded that Powell was a “kind” reviewer and

\[
\text{it is only when confronted with an extreme degree of awfulness, as displayed both in a novel and by its creator, that he allows himself the luxury of a still mild asperity.}
\]

As examples of such mild asperities, Cobb cites Powell’s even-handed treatment of Hemingway and Thomas Hardy, as well as Evelyn Waugh. Cobb knew Julian Maclaren-Ross to be

\[
\text{the most frightful bully and quite deliberately provocative, [but in Powell’s reviews he] gets off lightly: ‘a trifle absurd, yet in his way impressive’.}
\]

Cobb also enjoys Powell’s practice of including an “embarrras de richesses of miscellaneous, often bizarre, and sometimes highly comical information”. He cites, for example, Powell’s descriptions of how the vicissitudes of army life are displayed in the books of Barbara Skelton and Christopher Isherwood. And it was only when he read one of Powell’s reviews, that Cobb realized Nancy Mitford had had a prolonged affair with Gaston Palewski (at the same time, in a typical Powellian manner, noting Powell’s misspelling of the latter’s name with a “v” instead of a “w”). Cobb missed the opportunity to make his correction all the more pointed by citing Powell’s service in the wartime intelligence unit assigned to the Polish Army in Exile. Cobb knew Palewski from his association with Worcester College where Palewski had spent some time as a student:

\[
\text{we made [him] an Honorary Fellow of Worcester, in the belief that he might give his old College some money (we were mistaken).}
\]

Their correspondence continued until February 1994, two years before Cobb’s death. John Powell says that the file for Cobb’s letters in the Powell archive is a thick one. Cobb’s papers are archived at Merton College, Oxford, but contain no correspondence from Powell. Based on their mutual respect for and interest in each other’s work as displayed in these reviews, their correspondence must also contain a good deal which may be worth reading. One day it can only be hoped that this intriguing friendship can be further explored by publication of their letters.
It was August and hot and I was nineteen and keen to show off my erudition. I had vaguely heard of Powell and knew that he was a contemporary of Waugh and Greene, which seemed enough for me. Was it that or the fey Marc illustration of Pamela Widmerpool that made her look a bit like Brian Eno that convinced me? Whichever, when I came across a copy of Temporary Kings in Shrewsbury’s leading and, it has to be said, then only bookshop, I snapped it up. What was I thinking?

Needless to say, it was a disaster; I could make neither head nor tail of what was going on – who were these people and why were they behaving so oddly? From memory I did not get much further than the encounter with Pamela and Glober beneath Tiepolo’s Candaules and Gyges before giving it up as a bad job.

However, I knew that I was missing out on something but just could not quite make the commitment to twelve volumes. In a fit of displacement, I read Powell’s memoirs, I think, Messengers of Day, and recall being impressed by his account of meeting Fitzgerald in a canteen in Hollywood; it seemed so serendipitous that two of the best known writers of the century should meet like that. Although I did not know it at the time, it was an early example of a very Powellian motif.

Anyway, there the matter rested for many years despite regular promptings from a friend and AP Society member whose views on literature and many other things are always pungent and compelling. I finally took the plunge in 1992 when I was in my early thirties and working in London. This time, I took the rather quotidian approach of starting at the beginning, which as that great penseuse Julie Andrews would have it, is a very good place to start. This proved to be the case and I was soon rueing my earlier procrastination; quite why had I left it so long?

I spent the next few weeks completely absorbed. I found myself spending lunch hours at my desk reading, almost missing stops on the tube and ducking social engagements in a headlong dash to finish the cycle. I am not sure that this was the best way to do things and subsequent readings have added considerable depth of understanding as well as a far better appreciation of Powell’s wit; the jokes so often, as it were, lying in the gaps between narration, rather like the austerely ironic footnotes that sometimes appear in otherwise scholarly histories. What has stuck in my mind are some of the images that seemed to chime with my life at that time; the Lucozade advertisement on A4 into London at Brentford became associated with the girl eternally diving into the glass in The Acceptance World, the Russian Billiards metaphor in A Buyer’s Market and the recognition that mine was not the only family to have its own Uncle Giles.
I have never really been that interested in the roman à clef side of things; the characters stand for themselves and it is not really that important whether Erridge was based on Lord Longford or Pamela Widmerpool on Barbara Skelton or whoever. What relevance there might have been has largely passed with the years and half of them were not in the public eye anyway. There is however a Zelig like quality in Powell and Jenkins’ parallel lives – practically everyone of any cultural importance seems to float by, something very consciously echoed by William Boyd in Any Human Heart.

It has always struck me that although Powell’s world was very distant from mine, not only in time but also social milieu, nonetheless there is a certain universality, that certain features continue to replicate themselves across the classes and generations. In this way, we have all met a Bill Truscott whose youthful promise had him marked as “next Prime Minister but three” but ended up as something at the Coal Board or even someone so singular as Dr Trelawney who nonetheless seems like any number of mystical charlatans with a whiff of sulphur about them. It surely must only be a matter of time before Russell Brand informs us that “the vision of visions heals the blindness of sight”.

Well, well, wellski!
When a statue of the Prince of Wales, carved in butter, was exhibited at the Wembley Exhibition, Bernard Shaw expressed a wish that many of London’s statues might have been made of the same material so that they would have perished in a summer sun. It is remarkable that the more powerful bombs have harried very few of our heroes.

The statue of Queen Elizabeth, outside the Church of St Dunstan-in-the-West, Fleet Street (its date is 1586) was bricked up. The conjectural statue of Alfred the Great in Trinity Square, Southwark (c.1395) was left unprotected. Some statues were evacuated. Charles I’s went to Lord Rosebery’s estate at Mentmore (Bucks.), though not until the middle of 1941, when the worst of the raids were over. Stuart loyalists must have had some misgivings when the statue of the King who

Nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable scene
was hauled away on a common lorry past the scene of his execution. The plinth, carved by Joshua Marshall, was left surrounded by a faked information bureau bearing the inscription ‘Closed on Sundays – not open all the week’. The statue of the King returned to London early in 1946. ■

Charles I returns to Whitehall. The statue was sent to Lord Rosebery’s country home for safety and a strong-point, disguised as an information bureau, built round its plinth in preparation for invasion. [From The Lost Treasures of London by William Kent]

Body Parts – a Warning
Footnotes block headlines from showing our eyes and brains the heart of the matter.
That is why they are banned.
Annual General Meeting
The 15th Annual General Meeting of the Anthony Powell Society will be held on Saturday 24 October 2015 at 1400 hrs in the Conference Room of St James’s Church, Piccadilly, London W1.

The formal AGM business will be followed by refreshments and a talk:

**Bohemian Exhibits: Anthony Powell and the ‘rackety’ world of the British inter-war avant garde**
by Dr Jonathan Black
(this is an opportunity to hear a reprise of Jonathan’s talk from the 2014 Venice Conference)

The AGM agenda and voting papers are included with this Newsletter. Proxy votes must reach the Secretary by Monday 19 October 2015.

Members only at the formal AGM; non-members welcome for the talk shortly after 1500 hrs.

London AP Birthday Lunch

**Saturday 5 December 2015**

1200 for 1230 hrs

For this year’s AP Birthday Lunch we are going back to one of our favourite haunts:

**Da Corradi**
20-22 Shepherd Market, London, W1

Join us at this small, friendly, family-run Italian restaurant which is just round the corner from Powell’s 1920s lodgings.

Afterwards visit the boutiques of Shepherd Market or Heywood Hill bookshop for those Christmas presents. Or take a stroll up Piccadilly to Fortnum & Mason.

This is a pay on the day event, but please book with the Secretary so we can ensure we have reserved a large enough table!

As always non-members are welcome.

The thing that happens to senior novelists as they speed towards their threescore years and ten (and the rule applies to Iris Murdoch and Anthony Powell as much to Frederick Forsyth and Jack Higgins) is that they start becoming even more like themselves as writers than they were to begin with. Graham Greene, famously, once won a prize in a *New Statesman* competition that invited a pastiched opening paragraph from one of his own books.

From a review of John Le Carré’s *The Constant Gardener* in *Private Eye*, 12 January 2001

[With thanks to John Potter]
Dates for Your Diary

Secretary’s New Year Brunch
A Question of Upbringing at 65
Saturday 23 January 2016
1000 to 1200 hrs
Central London venue tbc
Join the Secretary for brunch to celebrate the 65th anniversary of A Question of Upbringing (on the previous day) and liven up the dull days of winter.
This is a pay on the day event but please tell the Secretary if you intend to come so we can ensure we reserve a large enough table.
Non-members always welcome.

London Group Pub Meets
Saturday 7 November 2015
Saturday 6 February 2016
Saturday 7 May 2016
Saturday 6 August 2016
Saturday 5 November 2016
The Audley
41-43 Mount Street, London W1
1230 to 1530 hrs
Good beer, good pub food and informal conversation in a Victorian pub AP would have known.
Why not bring something AP-related to interest us?
Non-members always welcome.
Further details from Secretary.

2016 Conference
Anthony Powell, Shakespeare and Other Literary Influences
Friday 8 to Sunday 10 April 2016
King’s Manor, York
King’s Manor, part of the University of York, is a glorious medieval house in the centre of one of the jewel cities of the UK and very close to York Minster.
Travel to York couldn’t be easier with trans-continental flights to Manchester and a direct train connection, or a regular fast train service from central London. York has abundant accommodation to suit all pockets.
The revised “Call for Papers” (and early information) is included with this Newsletter.
Note: we have extended the date for the submission of papers to the end of September.
So how about submitting that paper you’ve always dreamt of writing?
We expect to issue full booking details with the next Newsletter (due out early December).

Newsletter Copy Deadlines
Newsletter #61, Winter 2015
Copy Deadline: 11 November 2015
Publication Date: 4 December 2015
Newsletter #62, Spring 2016
Copy Deadline: 12 February 2016
Publication Date: 4 March 2016
Welcome to New Members
We extend a warm welcome to the following new members:
Judge BA Gibson, Auckland, NZ
Stephen & Pauline Hoare, London
Richard Kirby, Long Compton
Marleen Lekens, Ghent, Belgium
David Robinson, Antrim
John Rowe, Matlock

Con dolences
We regret that since the last Newsletter we have learnt of the death of member Guy Braithwaite of Enfield. We send our condolences to Guy’s family and friends.

Local Group Contacts

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Subscriptions
Subscriptions are due annually on 1 April
(for rates see back page)
Reminders are sent during March to those whose membership is about to expire.

Please help us to keep costs down by renewing promptly
Anyone whose membership is expired will be removed from the membership list at the end of June.

To keep costs down we will be using email wherever possible so please look out for emails from the Society.
Subscriptions should be sent to the Secretary, at the usual address.

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

Newsletter & Journal Editor,
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford, UB6 0JW, UK
editor@anthonypowell.org

We are always especially grateful for reports or notices of Powell-related events and relevant photographs.
A good number of us, including some most welcome new participants, gathered for lunch at the Audley on a cheeringly sunny 1 August. Fortunately, given the Audley’s very large plates and very small tables, most people turned up singly and at intervals, so that, as John Roe observed, we were able to practise the lunching equivalent of hot desking, and everyone could eat their food in relative comfort.

As often at an August pub meet, there was a good deal of discussion of recent and forthcoming events, including Ivan’s greenest Summer Saturday Stroll so far, through three of London’s parks (see page 24); more ideas for walks, also leading to requests for a re-run of the 2011 London coach tour; the 2016 Conference in York; and the forthcoming Rye Explorer trip.

Discussion also included Dance as social history and Dance characters. The ‘literary influences on AP’ theme of the next Conference was exercising minds: who might credibly be added to Shakespeare and Aubrey, and how would such an influence show itself?

Language had a good airing with some extended talk on dictionaries including the Oxford Dictionary of London Place Names and Nathan Bailey's An Universal Etymological English Dictionary (first published in 1721 and thus pre-dating Samuel Johnson’s A Dictionary of the English Language by some 30 years).

John McWhorter’s book Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English was mentioned for its musings on some of the peculiarities of English grammar, notably in the present tense with the constructions ‘Mary is singing’ and ‘Do you need anything?’ (rather than the ‘Mary sings’ and ‘Need you anything?’ of other European languages).

Thus conversation migrated to considering the learning of languages, and the idea that English might be considered easy to begin but hard to improve at, German as remaining hard after being hard to begin, and Italian and Spanish being among the easier tongues to learn and improve in – although Spanish, like Maltese, contains elements of Arabic.

Other topics included pigeons, psychology, the Welsh Marches, and Saxon surnames. As always there were two, three or even four overlapping conversations happening at any one time; they were continuous, extensive, varied and interesting, with only momentary pauses even for food and the refilling of glasses. So absorbing was it that not everybody noticed when a man at the next table, having spotted the AP Society placard on the table and looked us up on the internet, came over and put a quite unexpected donation in the Secretary’s top hat!

Local Group News

A Saturday Stroll in the Sun

By Prue Raper

A lovely sunny day, despite a cautious forecast, made a perfect background to Ivan Hutnik’s “Summer Stroll” on Saturday 27 June.

The walk took in three of London’s Royal Parks; and though originally billed as “further meanderings in the footsteps of Milly Andriadis and Charles Stringham”, Ivan suggested that a more accurate title might have been “a stroll through the Royal Parks in search of the Duke of Wellington and in the shadow of war”.

A dozen of us met at St James’s Park tube station and set off in good order at 11am. Eclectic as ever in his choice of subjects, Ivan first brought us to a halt at the blue plaque in Carteret Street celebrating the philosopher, jurist and social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). Bentham was renowned for advocating the separation of church and state as well as economic and individual freedom, together with the abolition of slavery, the death penalty and physical punishment. This was a good start to a stimulating and informative journey.

Pausing at Queen Anne’s Gate, we were invited to admire the high concentration of Grade 1 listed Georgian buildings before crossing over into St James’s Park. Henry VIII purchased the land – an area of marshland through which the river Tyburn flowed – from Eton College, but it was not until James I came to the throne that the land was drained and landscaped and became a home for exotic animals and birds, including camels, crocodiles and an elephant. Perhaps today’s pelicans are a reminder of this. Later, in Charles II’s time it became notorious for “impromptu acts of lechery”, and later still, as a grazing ground for cows whose fresh milk could be bought on the spot. It wasn’t until the 1820s that it was converted to its present form, when Buckingham House was extended and The Mall turned into a grand processional route.

It was this grand processional route that became something of a hurdle for our walk: our arrival coincided with that of the regimental band of whichever Guards regiment was marching to the Palace – followed by a teeming throng of hysterical tourists, with police holding back the traffic. This presumably happens every day during the tourist season. Keep well away. We eventually were able to cross the road, and miraculously our party kept together in order to reconvene in Green Park, where we took a glance to one side at St James’s Palace, built by Henry VIII on the site of a leper hospital dedicated to St James the Less.

Green Park, in fact, was originally a swampy burial ground for the unfortunate lepers. Charles II enclosed most of it with a brick wall and made it into a Royal Park, though eventually it became known as a haunt of highwaymen and thieves and as a duelling ground. Handel’s “Music for the Royal Fireworks” was composed for a more genteel celebration there in 1749. Perhaps some of its more sinister undertones remained, however, when it
became the scene, on 10 June 1840, of Edward Oxford’s assassination attempt on Queen Victoria on Constitution Hill.

We continued our walk through the park in the direction of Hyde Park Corner, pausing to admire the important monuments gathered there: the impressive, recently erected memorial to Bomber Command; the Royal Artillery memorial; and, most impressive of all, the Wellington Arch. This originally stood in front of Buckingham Palace, but is now more appropriately in a direct line with the Duke’s own London home, Apsley House – known as No. 1, London.

Excitement mounted as we approached the coffee stall, such a feature of one of the most memorable passages in A Buyer’s Market: the meeting place of Jenkins and Widmerpool (walking home from the Huntercombes’ ball), Mr Deacon and Gypsy Jones, and then with Stringham. However, we were dissuaded from buying coffee there by Ivan: realising that the traffic noise there would make conversation impossible, he led us into Hyde Park in order to give us the appropriate readings from BM. More readings followed, from The Acceptance World, when we paused at the Achilles statue. Ivan pointed out that AP used the Royal Parks as a useful background to many of the coincidental meetings that happen throughout the London-based books of Dance – a location where people of all classes and persuasions might run into one another.

Lunch beckoned, and it was only a short walk from Hyde Park, across Park Lane and through Mayfair into Shepherd Market and our ultimate destination, the welcoming Da Corradi family-run restaurant. We were certainly ready for sustenance by then, and enjoyed an excellent meal and much lively conversation.

Thank you, Ivan, for another enthralling, thought-provoking and beautifully organised event. ■
Collectors of Powell-related items have recently had two major opportunities to add to their holdings, even if the catalogue estimates revealed that for many this would remain the stuff of dreams.

First, on 10 June at Christie's South Kensington, was the Personal Collection of Anthony Hobson (1921-2014) – some of the books that he had kept after selling off part of his library in the 1990s. Hobson was a literary scholar, author and former Head of Books at Sotheby’s: those who attended the AP Society Centenary Conference in 2005 may remember his keynote speech on Anthony Powell and Cyril Connolly. The 250 lots on offer at this sale ranged alphabetically from Harold Acton to Virginia Woolf, and included letters and manuscripts as well as books. Among the 15 lots with Powell connections were a group of books by Lady Violet, copies of AP’s Caledonia and Barnard Letters, and a typescript of an essay on George Orwell.

Bidding was enthusiastic, but as the Antiques Trade Gazette of 11 July reported in faintly astonished tones, the undoubted surprise was a set of first edition signed presentation copies of A Dance to the Music of Time (pictured below). Estimated at £5,000-8,000, this went for a staggering £25,000 (that’s £31,650 with premiums). Hobson’s inscribed first edition copy of What's Become of Waring (estimate £1,200 -1,800) also achieved a record hammer price of £6,500.

This was followed, on 24 June at Bonham’s, by Books and Letters from the Library of Anthony Powell. Advance publicity suggested that the Waugh items would be the likely stars, but on the day the Orwell lots seemed to make the greater impression.

The sixteen Waugh books intriguingly included a first edition presentation copy of Scott-King’s Modern Europe which had been drawn on by its author, together with another apologising for “defacing” this copy. Members may prefer the inscription in the copy of Officers and Gentlemen: “Tony, a murmur[?] from the Refusal World from Evelyn”.

The smallest Orwell item, a postcard of the Isle of Jura (where Orwell lived), sent to AP in 1948, talked of visiting London “when I get my book finished”, and underlines the precarious state of his health – his long history of chest complaints having culminated in tuberculosis. This un-named work was to be Nineteen Eighty-Four, the title of which was broached in a letter of February 1949, also in the sale:

It’s a Utopia written in the form of a novel, & I think the title will be “1984” though we haven’t fixed that with complete firmness.

The two Orwell books in the sale included a presentation copy first edition of Animal Farm, which went for a five-figure sum, but the letters, perhaps because of their poignancy, were the more memorable. 

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Books Do Furnish a Saleroom

By Our Arts Correspondent
Funny how you go off people.
For a long time they used to live in a
darkly shiny bookcase on the landing
outside my parents’ bedroom – the
hardback volumes of *Dance*, increasing in
number as each addition to the sequence
came out and was purchased by my
mother. I saw the spines of their
dustjackets every time I went up or
downstairs but I was put off by the
subdued design and was not tempted to
read them.

My first time with *Dance*, when it did
happen, seemed to be true lurv. Having
long left home, I started QU on publication
of the paperback edition. Immediately
smitten, I bought and galloped through the
other eleven volumes. I was seduced by
the unhurried elegance of the writing; by
the level, pensive voice, by the unemphatic
humour. I was in love with Stringham,
and his regretful, romantically depressed
intelligence; loathed but was fascinated by
Widmerpool; and was enjoyably tantalised
by the intermittence of the other
characters, a few of whom merited whole
books to themselves (for example General
Conyers with his many esoteric interests,
and the charming Colonel Flores who
later, very off stage, becomes a dictator). I
had no criticisms.

So here is a strange thing. I am a sucker
for a *roman fleuve*, and indeed any group
of novels which feature the same
characters, and usually cannot resist
reading them several times. However,
despite the fact that since my mother’s
death over a decade ago her complete
*Dance*, dustjackets intact, has lived in a
bookshelf in my house, it was crowding
forty years before I thought of reading it
again.

My second time, undertaken over the last
few months, was a failure as an attempt to
repeat the past. I was irritated and bored,
pretty much exactly by what had so
appealed the first time. The style now
seemed self-conscious and contrived, the
method of humour repetitive, and the
popping up of the same people wherever
the narrator happens to find himself
increasingly manipulated and
unconvincing. I kept seeing in my mind
one of those toy theatres made of
cardboard, with an ornate proscenium
arch, scenery in the style of an 18th
century landscape painting and AP
looming over the whole thing as he pushes
the tiny cut-out characters on and off
stage. The grand climax, Widmerpool’s
destruction, lacked the power it should
have had because there was insufficient
connection between the Widmerpool who
is smug, pompous and overbearing, and
the Widmerpool who pitifully disintegrates
under the influence of Scorp Murtlock.
And I wanted to throw whichever volume
I was reading out of the window every
time NJ quoted a not specially
illuminating comment on life by Barnby,
Moreland or one of the other men whose
opinions he respects.

Which leads to another area of criticism,
namely that AP has a couple of attitude
problems which I had failed to notice
before but which I now found impossible
to ignore. Firstly, like many male writers
of his period and earlier, AP often uses
phrases which indicate that in his mind he
is addressing a male audience. Don’t get
me wrong. The choice of audience is
AP’s right, whether it be men, women, yet, whatever. But the choice he does make is not calculated to charm the female reader, implying as it does that she is trespassing in a gentlemen’s club. Secondly, there is more than a hint of snobbery, the view that anyone who is not a member of the British upper class, or at any rate the upper middle class, is a different species, quaintly interesting but fundamentally negligible.

It was during TK that I understood the killer problem, which explains the persistence in my mind of the cardboard theatre image. As first-person narrator, Nick Jenkins is the only character directly knowable by the reader. Usually, if not invariably, where this device is used the narrator is the main protagonist, bang in the centre of the action, so their feelings, thoughts etc. are fully known to the reader. The device also means, necessarily, that of the thoughts, feelings and actions of the other characters, the reader can know only what the narrator knows. In Dance, AP deliberately keeps NJ unknown, merely a device by which the tableaux containing the other characters are successively presented, added to which NJ emphasises, with clumsy frequency, that anything he tells us about the other characters is unreliable and incomplete. So the centre of the work is occupied by a cypher, and around this circulate a troupe of shadows. To use another metaphor, like candyfloss it looks substantial but touch it and it’s gone. All very unsatisfying.

And yet.

Second only to the fun of reading a book which one loves and which is undeniably great is the fun of reading a book which excites criticism like a spark excites gunpowder. And I have to admit I rather miss Widmerpool.

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**UK Members …**

**Do you Shop Online?**

If so, did you know that every time you buy something you could be raising money for the Society?

The Society earns cash donations when you register with Easyfundraising and shop online through the site. It’s really simple, just

- Register at [www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk)
- When you’re asked to choose your cause, select Anthony Powell Society
- Then go shopping at your favourite stores by accessing their sites through the Easyfundraising page.

There are over 2700 online retailers taking part, including M&S, John Lewis, Vodafone, Virgin Atlantic and Tesco. All will give a small percentage of what you spend back to the Society. It doesn’t cost you a penny and if you’re registered with us for GiftAid we can claim the tax back as well!

So why wait? Head off to [www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk) and boost the Society’s income.
When Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell launched themselves upon the artistic establishment after the Great War not everyone was thrilled. They still aren’t. The Sunday Times’s review of an important new book about them was recently published under the headline, ‘Those Ghastly Sitwells’. What unsettled the Bloomsburys then, and still infuriates sub-Marxian academics, was the siblings’ combination of patrician hauteur and original talent. Sir Osbert’s writing attracted the approbation of Waugh, Edith’s poetry the admiration of Yeats and Connolly, while Sacheverell’s Southern Baroque Art triggered a Vesuvian reconsideration of the subject (although it is today considered a museum piece).

Their base was the family home in Derbyshire, the nominal subject of Renishaw Hall: The Story of the Sitwells by Desmond Seward. This was to become the English literary salon to end all salons, hosting and encouraging everyone from Aldous Huxley, Siegfried Sassoon and Dylan Thomas, to Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. Only TS Elliott refused whilst Virginia Woolf was never invited. Through its gardens and chilly corridors Anthony Powell would stroll, a wry observer of jinks high and low amongst the literati – and the equally eccentric domestic staff. The visual arts and music were also beneficiaries of Sitwell largesse: William Walton was maintained in the family’s Chelsea attic for fifteen years as a sort of ornamental hermit with melodic interludes.

_The great thing about the Sitwells was that they believed, however idiosyncratically, that the arts were to be enjoyed, not doled out like medicine_

Powell would write perceptively in Messengers of Day. And the family were nothing if not generous: Osbert provided discreet support to struggling artists even when doing so meant Renishaw might go unheated. Powell had come to know the Trio when working at Duckworths, where, as Michael Barber observed in Anthony Powell: A Life, they were the publishing firm’s only young modern authors of note. The first encounter was with Edith, of whom Dylan Thomas confided, “If poetry was taken away from Edith she mightn’t die, but she would be bloody sick”, a gnomic assessment with which Powell could not disagree.

Easier to get along with was the gregarious Osbert. A first edition of Afternoon Men in the library at Renishaw is inscribed,
To Osbert Sitwell (chere maître). In admiration, and because he has always done his best to protect me from the ungodnernable tantrums of my employers.

Even Gerald Duckworth quailed before the Sitwell force field. Dining with Powell at the ‘Travellers’ Club Osbert witnessed his host’s will, recording his profession as ‘Poet and Justice of the Peace’.

It is the family and their milieu that the historian Desmond Seward captures so convincingly in this sparkling volume. Its author has the advantage of having been a regular guest at Renishaw for over forty years, hoovering up literary lore and salacious anecdotes. Like Powell, with whom he intersected there and in St James’s clubland, Seward possesses the art historian’s eye for evolutionary movements. “The Trio lived as much for the extreme avant-garde as they did for the neglected past”, he concludes.

The artistic tension arising from this was bound to result in conflict, occasionally sublimated by good manners as with Virginia Woolf, a friend – of sorts – of Edith’s. With the other Bloomsbury relations more closely resembled an armed truce, occasionally spilling over into psychological warfare. Osbert’s response to being parodied by the writer and Vorticist painter, Wyndham Lewis, was to send a letter, supposedly from the organiser of an exhibition of Jewish art, to the rabidly anti-Semitic painter, inviting him to submit a picture. As Lewis was so paranoid that he habitually carried a revolver the resulting row with the Jewish artists almost ended in bloodshed.

The carnival was too good to last, the emergence to prominence of newer writers like Joyce, Greene and Powell causing many to lose interest. The influential critic FR Leavis sneered that “the Sitwells belong to the history of publicity rather than literature”. Osbert nonetheless remained a significant figure in the literary world. Powell’s rather unexpected view was that this was because he was essentially “a personal appearance artist”.

The same might have been said of Edith’s mannered recitation of her poems through a megaphone to a musical setting by Walton entitled Façade. While the performance enchanted Arnold Bennett, Lytton Strachey and Harold Acton, public opinion proved less advanced and Edith was assaulted by an enraged crone with an umbrella. She was subsequently satirised by Noel Coward in his review London Calling as the poetess ‘Hernia Whittlebot’. Seward notes that the parodic poem that drew most applause from the assembled philistines was Poor Shakespeare, the opening lines of which made crude references to the noise coming from ‘a
goat’s behind’. It was decades before they forgave Coward.

Some scholars judge that Renishaw contributed as much as Madresfield to Waugh’s conception of Brideshead: if so he was restrained in his portrayal, perhaps because staying with the Sitwells afforded so much entertainment. During the Second World War Renishaw escaped military requisition, probably on account of the house’s dilapidated condition rather than from respect for its fragile contents – and inhabitants. Powell and Lady Violet visited twice during his periods of army leave, accumulating detail, much of it too exotic to draw upon. In the memoirs he recalls a shopping expedition to Sheffield when, wearing a high cylindrical hat “between an archimandrite’s and that of a Tartar horseman in Sohrab and Rustum”, Edith contrived to buy an entire salmon, which was sent home by train in time for dinner [Messengers, 167].

Interestingly it is Powell’s critique that has best stood the test of time.

In [AP’s] view the weakness of Osbert’s novels and stories was that while full of good ideas, he simply could not write well enough. Powell believed that his real role was as a leader of literary fashion, a writer of lively letters to the newspapers, someone who kept the arts before the public eye – ‘by no means a useless function’.

This highly entertaining and admirably researched book performs precisely the same service for the Sitwells and their world which so amused Powell.
Kenneth Clark (1903-1983) described his life as ‘one long, harmless confidence trick’, a reference to the way in which, from an early age, he had laid down the law about paintings. His friend and mentor, Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), ‘the sage of I Tatti’, was equally cocksure, but not, in the opinion of many, harmless. Indeed Clark himself, writing long after Berenson’s death, described him as ‘perched on the pinnacle of a mountain of corruption’, a reference to the profitable collusion between dealers like Duveen and ‘experts’ like Berenson during the heyday of American collecting. And yet Clark summed up his debt to Berenson as ‘difficult to describe and impossible to repay’. In a letter saluting Berenson on his 90th birthday he related how often his children, after meeting Berenson,

*tell me that they have discovered the origin of this or that turn of thought or behaviour which I had supposed to be my own. In all these ways I am truly your son.*

Although their origins could not have been more different – one a poor boy from the shtetl made good, the other a scion of the Edwardian idle rich – Clark and Berenson were united by their love of painting, particularly Italian Renaissance painting, and the need to communicate this in a lucid manner. They first met in 1925 when Clark, fresh out of Oxford, was introduced to Berenson by Charles Bell, Keeper of Fine Arts at the Ashmolean. Although Berenson’s mistress, Nicky Mariano, thought him stand-offish and conceited (a view shared by many, including AP), Berenson recognised a kindred spirit. He invited Clark to serve a sort of apprenticeship in ‘conoscing’, his term for connoisseurship, thus establishing a bond that would last for almost 40 years.

Berenson was an autocrat, but Clark was not your typical courtier. Wealthy and well connected he would defer to Berenson on Art but not on Life. In 1927 he annoyed his patron by getting married instead of having lots of affairs (sexual gossip rivalled art as a staple of conversation at I Tatti); and then annoyed him even more by helping to mount an exhibition of Italian paintings in London, to which Berenson objected on the
grounds that it would showcase Mussolini’s Fascist regime. They might well have become estranged because Clark’s star was rising of its own accord: in 1933, aged only 30, he was made Director of the National Gallery. But he had come to value ‘BB’ as a friend and the warmth was reciprocated. They didn’t meet very often – ‘The Great Clark Boom’ saw to that – but they corresponded. What did they discuss? Art and artists, obviously, and the machinations of the world they inhabited. Here I must invoke the exemplary editor, Robert Cumming, whose scholarly footnotes constitute a book of their own. Noting ‘how intricately’ the people mentioned were connected he was reminded of Powell’s Dance. I wouldn’t go that far myself, but his copious ‘Dramatis Personae’ is as informative as Hilary Spurling’s Handbook. Along with the shop talk there is also a good deal of domestic trivia and occasional hints of the social success enjoyed by the Clarks. Jane Clark, whose letters are included here, describes

*a beano for the Clark family as the King and Queen came to lunch … The King gazed at the large early Matisse but was too polite to say anything. He would not be interesting unless he were king.*

With the war, which Berenson was lucky to survive, came an interregnum, but not before Clark had admitted that he ‘hated writing letters more than anything else in the world’, which was probably why Berenson thought he was holding something back. It might also explain why the reader will search in vain for the comic interludes that adorn his memoirs, which can profitably be read as a companion volume to this.

After the war Clark ceased to be an administrator and took to the podium, becoming one of the greatest lecturers on art we have ever had. He now addressed Berenson as an equal, and the affection he felt was at last apparent.

*Thank you* [wrote Berenson in September 1949] *for one of the few most heartening letters ever addressed to me. You encourage me to believe that I have earned my passage on the ship of life.*

But what you would never guess from these letters is that by now, to borrow another nautical metaphor, the Clarks’ marriage was on the rocks. He turned into a serial adulterer and she became a drunk who kept gin in the bathroom and keeled over, it was said, at most of the embassies in London. Berenson and his entourage must have known about this and it says much for their discretion that they never uttered what Gore Vidal has described as the most satisfying phrase in the English language: ‘I told you so’.

Kenneth Clark
Q. How should I respond to a surprise, good or bad?

That Friday morning my landlady Mrs East woke me as usual with kedgeree, Darjeeling and the Times.

“Never mind the bloody Times”, I said. “Who won?”

“David bloody Cameron”, she said. “Overall majority.”

I am known as a bit of a radical and this was the worst possible news.

“Bugger me!” I said, spitting Darjeeling into my kedgeree. “I shall have to emigrate.”

In short, I failed to respond to a surprise with dignity or wit. But there are rules: how to deal with surprises, both good and bad:

- A gentleman is never surprised. Ideally, Treat the same those impostors twain (Kipling).
- A stoical silence should be your aspiration. If this is not feasible:

Say “Harrumph!”.

Caution: do not say “Harrumph!” if under fifty, or in the company of Muslims, who may confuse it with the word haram, a word denoting matters contrary to sharia law, such as general elections and Mrs E seeing me in my pyjamas. This can lead to endless complications.

- Play for time by ejaculating. “Bugger!” is acceptable but should be avoided in the company of ladies. (Mrs E is not a lady.) The other ejaculations are common.
- Finally, turn the tables. Surprise them back.

Eg., I took my tray to Mrs E’s parlour. She was dusting, muttering “Tory filth!” to herself.

“I rather like the little fellow they have in Thanet South”, I said – to tease.

“Farage? Lost too”.

And she tossed her head. ■
Powell and Historic York

From Mr John Powell

Further to John Roe’s piece about Historic York and the 2016 Conference, my parents visited York in 1981 on a cruise around Britain between 22 July and 5 August. There are photographs and four pages in my mother’s illustrated travel diary with drawings both of Clifford’s Tower and also All Saint’s Tower with plenty of comment by VP. AP’s two later novels were yet to come out, *Oh! How the Wheel becomes it* in 1983 and *The Fisher King* in 1986. The latter has a cruise as background.

Artificial Manure

From Dr Keith Marshall

When in Norwich for my mother’s funeral in June of this year, Noreen and I stayed at the Maid’s Head Hotel – the oldest, and generally acclaimed best, hotel in the City. One evening, perusing a shelf of old books in a small private dining room next to the back bar (a room which was formerly “the snug”) Noreen happened across a most Widmerpudlian volume:

M Georges Ville (translated by Sir William Crookes)

*Artificial Manures: Their Chemical Selection and Scientific Application to Agriculture*  
(Longmans, Green & Co, 1909)

It included a fold-out diagram-cum-advertisement for Ville and Crookes’ “Artificial Manure” but regrettably no obvious reference to Widmerpool père.

Robert Conquest

1917-2015

Anthony Powell’s good friend, Robert Conquest, has died at the great age of 98. Conquest was the historian of Soviet Russia who is credited by many as the first to reveal the extent and horror of Joseph Stalin’s regime.

Born in England, Conquest was a poet, novelist and literary critic who turned to Russian history because of what he saw as shortcomings in the intelligence within the British Foreign Office where he worked following military service in WWII. He was Literary Editor of *The Spectator* in the early 1960s before moving to the USA.

Nothing is interesting unless you are interested, and conversely.

Anthony Powell, *A Writer’s Notebook*
Michael Barber alerted us to a feature by Stephen Moss (Guardian, 16 June 2015) about becoming posh. Moss writes of AP:

I’ve been rereading Anthony Powell’s great novel sequence A Dance to the Music of Time recently. Powell (he pronounced it “Pole”) is the archetypal posh Englishman: Etonian, military family, steeped in art and literature from a very early age, certain in his judgments, critical of error and fuzzy thinking, alert to the many shades of social class, preoccupied by lineages and hierarchies, and – in the character of his narrator Nicholas Jenkins – all-seeing, all-knowing and in complete control.

The sympathetic characters in Dance are doomed posh romantics – Charles Stringham and Hugh Moreland, especially. The arch-villain is Widmerpool, another Etonian, but one whose father made his money selling liquid manure. Widmerpool is a parvenu who devotes his life to climbing the greasy pole, imposing his will. Powell dislikes the imposition of will, the out-and-out triers. He admires easy talent and selfless service; he identifies with people who punt their way through life.

Being unposh, I have spent my life trying to be Stringham – to have his style and ease, his contempt for the worldly and workaday – but I know that my autodidactical destiny is to be Widmerpool. The dance is an ungainly one.

Michael Barber comments in an email to us:

I pointed out to Moss, himself a Welshman, that in fact AP considered himself Welsh – hence “Pole” – and got very cross if people said he wasn’t.

Also spotted by Julian Miller and Jeff Manley.

Member Henk van Linde writes to us:

Visiting London as a Dutchman one of my first ports of call usually is Hatchard’s. On entering the shop yesterday [15 June] I was greeted by a number of tables with “our favourite novels of the last 200 years” (they have been in business for over two centuries). On one of the tables: A Question of Upbringing!
Niall Ferguson, writing in *The Spectator* in June 2015 suggests another Widmerpoolesque character, economist Jonathan Portes:

> *Portes’s career recalls that of the character Kenneth Widmerpool in Anthony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time*. Widmerpool is charmless, pompous and mediocre, yet inexorably ascends the greasy pole by aligning himself with the Labour party.

The article is further dotted with Widmerpool references.

Spotted by Derek Pasquill and Stephen Eggins.

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Julian Allason points us to the following extract from the *Daily Telegraph*’s old obituary (8 October 2003) for former intelligence officer John Colvin:

> Colvin was for many years a member of the St James’s Club, a distinction he shared with Denis Cuthbert Capel-Dunn, one of the supposed models for Kenneth Widmerpool, the anti-hero of Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Powell would say only that he knew Capel-Dunn for nine weeks in 1943 in the Cabinet Office, but Colvin was adamant that the two were one.

> Like Widmerpool, Capel-Dunn was a very fat, extremely boring, overweeningly ambitious arriviste”, said Colvin, who knew him by the nickname “Young Bloody”. “His conversations were hideously detailed and humourless. We all disliked him very much indeed.”

> Had he lived [Capel-Dunn died in an air crash in 1945] he would doubtless have become under-secretary in some ghastly government department. He was Widmerpool through and through.”

---

DJ Taylor mentions Powell in a piece under the banner “There is a point (of sorts) to the futile gesture … but, whether in politics or poetry, it’s more about the person making it than about achieving an aim” for the *Independent on Sunday* (14 June 2015) about the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. He says:

> For there comes a point where principle, or rather the chance of that principle being put into practice, becomes less important than what might be termed the satisfactions of maintaining it, when one decides to continue with a struggle not because there is any chance of victory but because it bolsters and glorifies what Anthony Powell would have called the struggler’s personal myth.”
DJ Taylor (again) has written and narrated an essay about the impact of Mrs Thatcher on the literature of the 1980s and beyond. This was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on Thursday 18 June 2015. A slightly different version appeared in the Guardian the following day. In both versions AP’s adulatory descriptions of Mrs Thatcher were quoted and, on radio, read out by an actor at some length. Other contemporary descriptions, such as those of Hugh Trevor-Roper were also featured as well as interviews with living writers, including novelists Alan Hollinghurst, Ian McEwan and, most notably, Hilary Mantel. Taylor includes a description of the literary soirées attended by writers including AP in the early 1980’s as well as appearances of Mrs Thatcher in novels and stories both then and subsequently. He summarizes his findings as follows:

Naturally, British writers had been taking an interest in practical politics long before the arrival at No. 10 of the grocer’s daughter from Grantham. The 1880s and 1890s had been awash with literary liberalism just as the 1930s had danced to the tune of leftwing “commitment”. But there are two factors that combine to separate the 1980s from, say, the inter-war age of Auden and Spender. One was their focus on a single politician. The other was the ability of the right to make much of the running.

Powell, of course, writes about these two dinner parties with Mrs Thatcher in his Journals for 26 October 1982 [J82-86, 38-41] and 27-28 March 1985 [J82-86, 139-144].

With thanks to Jeff Manley.

Osbert Lancaster was a great cartoonist who entertained the nation with over 10,000 pocket cartoons, who lampooned architectural styles and who designed for the theatre. For us, of course, he is memorable for the cartoons he drew for the covers of the Penguin edition of the first seven volumes of Dance. And now he has been honoured with an English Heritage Blue Plaque on 79 Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill where he was born.
### Society Merchandise

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<td>Set of four colour postcards from photos by John Blaxter of the Powell ancestral lands on the Welsh borders.</td>
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<td>40-page monograph by John Monagan describing his meetings with Powell.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fascinating letters between Powell and his friend and first American publisher Robert Vanderbilt.</td>
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